

T H A M E S V A L L E Y

ARCHAEOLOGICAL

S E R V I C E S

**New Statue Base, Forbury Gardens, Abbot's Walk,
Reading, Berkshire**

Archaeological Watching Brief

by Andy Munda

Site Code: FGR15/75

(SU 7196 7361)

New Statue base, Forbury Gardens, Abbot's Walk, Reading, Berkshire

**An Archaeological Watching Brief
For Reading Borough Council**

by Andrew Munding

Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code FGR 15/75

April 2015

Summary

Site name: New Statue Base, Forbury Gardens, Abbot's Walk, Reading, Berkshire

Grid reference: SU 7196 7361

Site activity: Watching Brief

Date and duration of project: 9th April 2015

Project manager: Steve Ford

Site supervisor: Andrew Munding

Site code: FGR 15/75

Area of site: 1.2 sq m

Summary of results: Due to the relocation of a Spanish Civil Memorial War statue from the former Civic Centre to Forbury Gardens, observations were required on the new location of the statues base within the Registered Garden and Scheduled Monument. No *in situ* remains were uncovered, but fragments of residual Medieval tile were recovered from a thick layer of relatively recent made ground.

Location and reference of archive: The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited at Reading Museum in due course.

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Report edited/checked by: Steve Ford✓ 16.04.15 Steve Preston✓ 16.04.15

New Statue Base, Forbury Gardens, Abbot's Walk, Reading, Berkshire An Archaeological Watching Brief

by Andrew Munding

Report 15/75

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out on the eastern side of Forbury Gardens, Abbot's Walk, Reading, Berkshire (SU 7196 7361) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Ms Christelle Beaupoux, for Reading Borough Council, Civic Offices, Bridge Street, Reading, RG1 2LU.

Planning permission (150035/FUL) has been gained from Reading Borough Council and Scheduled Monument Consent gained from English Heritage to relocate a Spanish Civil War Memorial Statue from its current location at Reading Civic Centre to the Forbury Gardens. English Heritage have recommended that a watching brief be undertaken during hand excavation for the statue's concrete base located within a flower bed in the gardens. As well as being a Registered Park and Garden, the Forbury Gardens are within the Scheduled Ancient Monument of the Benedictine Abbey (SAM 19019), of which standing remains survive close to the new statue location. A prominent mound (Forbury Hill) which was a probable motte and bailey castle subsequently used during the English Civil War also lies just to the north-west.

Conditions were attached to the Scheduled Monument Consent, in accordance with the *Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979*, requiring that a competent archaeological contractor was to view the excavation and record any significant remains. Further mitigation would be required should *in situ* remains be uncovered. The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Ms Fiona MacDonald, of Berkshire Archaeology, archaeological adviser to the local planning authority acting on behalf of English Heritage. The fieldwork was undertaken by Andrew Munding on 9th April 2015 and the site code is FGR 15/75.

The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited at Reading Museum in due course.

Location, topography and geology

Forbury Gardens are situated on the northern side of Reading town centre, just off the A329 (Fig. 1). The excavation was to occur in the flower bed on the eastern side of the park, just in front of the eastern boundary wall (Fig. 2). The underlying geology is recorded as Valley Gravels (BGS 1946), but no natural geology was encountered in the excavated area.

Archaeological background

Forbury Gardens and the surrounding area contain elements of the remains of the Benedictine Abbey, of which standing remains survive to the south-east. The Abbey, commissioned by Henry I, was founded in 1121 and consecrated in 1164, housing over 100 monks and was a substantial and wealthy foundation before its dissolution in 1539. Henry himself was buried within the Abbey grounds. Parts of the complex were subsequently used as a royal palace but after 1549, the remains were repeatedly robbed for stone until the 19th century. Much of the complex now survives only as below ground remains, a considerable proportion of which lies within the Forbury. However, there is evidence to suggest that these remains have been subject of many disturbances, including the erection of English Civil War defences (Astill 1978). In certain areas post-medieval building including a 19th-century school and the County Gaol just to the east, were built on or using existing remains of the Abbey. The complex itself has witnessed a variety of archaeological excavations which have examined both the religious, domestic, industrial and funerary components of the complex (Slade 2001). When remains have been located they have displayed good survival, and date to the Medieval period (e.g., Fasham and Stewart 1991; Hawkes 1991; Preston 2006). Some finds of prehistoric and Saxon date are also known; though more recent fieldwork has not uncovered medieval deposits (Hammond 2003, McNicoll-Norbury 2009).

Objectives and methodology

The purpose of the watching brief was to observe excavation of the hole dug for the statue, identify and avoid any features of significance associated with the Abbey complex. Provision was made to alter the precise location of the statue if such remains were discovered. Archaeological deposits of lesser importance which would be affected by the groundworks were to be excavated and recorded. This was to involve examination of all areas of intrusive groundworks, in this instance the digging of the new base for the statue.

Results

The excavation was undertaken by hand and the base excavated was rectangular, 1.3m by 0.9m and 0.92m deep (Pl. 1). Under topsoil (50) that was 0.45m deep were many roots, derived from a hawthorn that had been cut down at this location. Most of the root had been left in and needed removing during the excavation. The north section was available to view (Fig. 3; Pl. 2) which showed the topsoil overlying a disturbed made ground (51) which reached the base of excavation at 0.92m deep. Blue and white transfer printed 'china' was recovered from

the topsoil, but the made ground layer contained more ceramic building material than pottery. A sample of material was retained and partial splashes of glaze were noted. No *in situ* remains were recorded in the excavation of the statue base.

Finds

Pottery

Two sherds of pottery were recovered, both of mass production and no earlier than 16th century date, more likely 19th. One sherd of 'china' was recovered from the topsoil (50) though more fragments of a similar type of fabric were retained on site, and one sherd of plain red earthenware (which has a long currency from the 16th to 19th century) was recovered from the made ground (51).

Tile and Brick by Danielle Milbank

A modest quantity of ceramic building material was recovered during the watching brief, with a total of 18 pieces (1238g), which were examined under x10 magnification. There were no complete pieces.

The majority of these were tile fragments, with two fabric types present. The first of these is a medium-hard, evenly fired clay fabric with sparse coarse sand and fine groggy inclusions. An example of this fabric is a piece of 14mm thick, fairly uneven, with some edge-thickening, and an orange-red colour.

A second fabric is a hard clay with occasional fine sandy inclusions. The colour is light red, with a grey core indicating reducing conditions during firing. The fragments are 16mm thick and fairly even in form, with slight striations on the upper surface. Two of these have a small amount of dark brown glaze on the edge, and the pieces are fairly abraded.

The deposit also contained two pieces of a thin brick, in a hard clay with occasional fine sandy inclusions and a grey core with a red surface colour. There is green-brown glaze on one side and on the upper face and the piece is 38mm thick and fairly even in form.

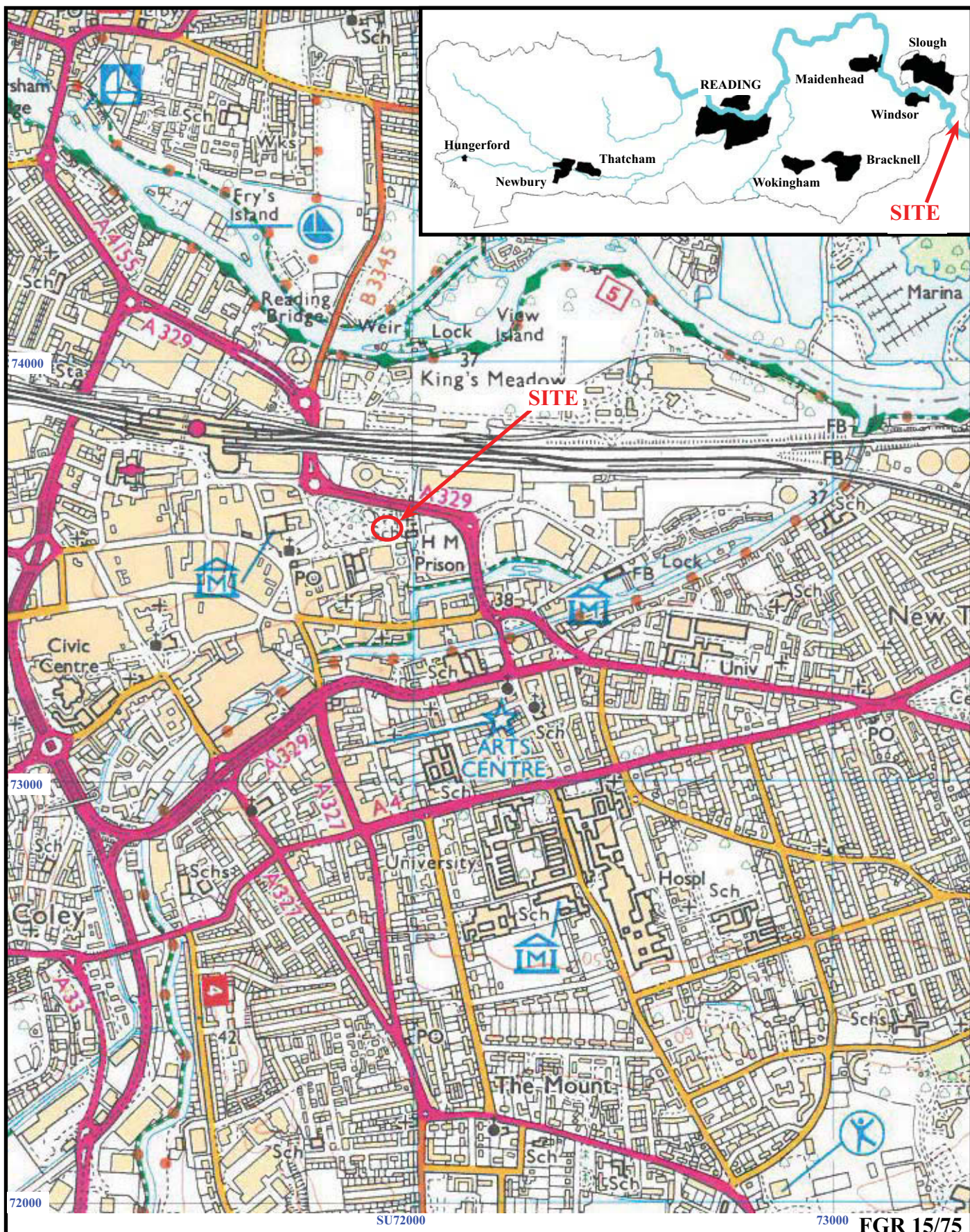
The assemblage of brick and tile recovered in the watching brief is modest, and the tile pieces could only be dated broadly to the medieval period, with one a likely early medieval example. The brick fragment can be tentatively dated to the 13th or 14th century based on dimensions, form and finish (Harley 1974).

Conclusion

Though ceramic building material was recovered from the excavation of the statue base, this layer was thought to date from the establishment of the gardens. No archaeological features were encountered. The finds were all thought to be from an imported or previously disturbed context. This was wholly or partly caused by the location of the substantial root structure from a recently cut down hawthorn.

References

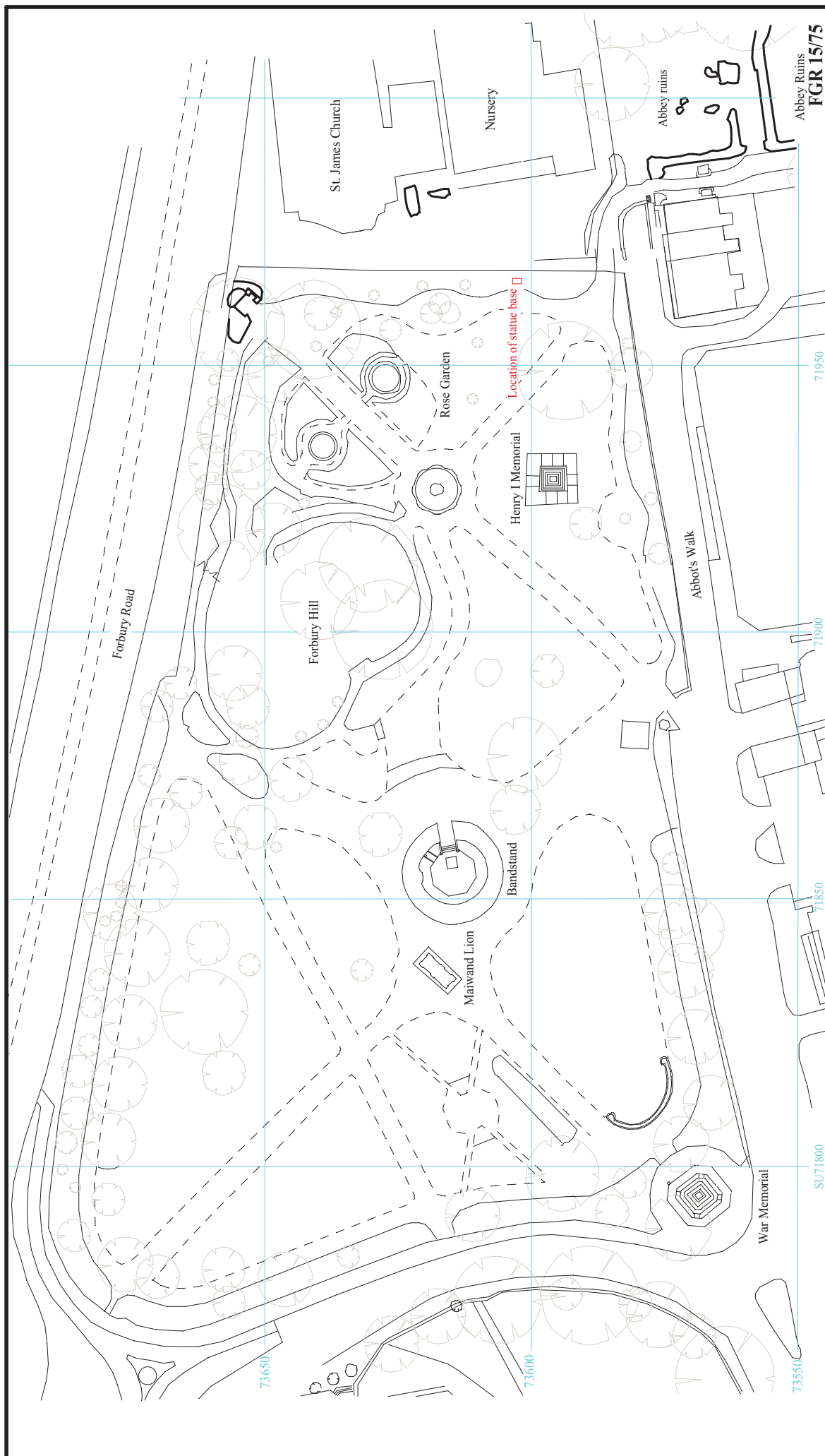
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Figure 1. Location of site within Reading and Berkshire.

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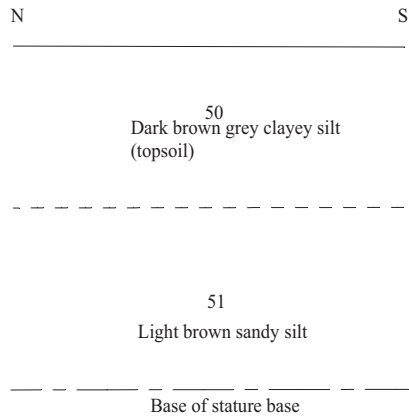
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Figure 2. Plan of Forbury Gardens and location of statue base.



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Figure 3. Section.



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Plate 1. Statue base under excavation, looking south-east.



Plate 2. Statue base section, looking north-east.

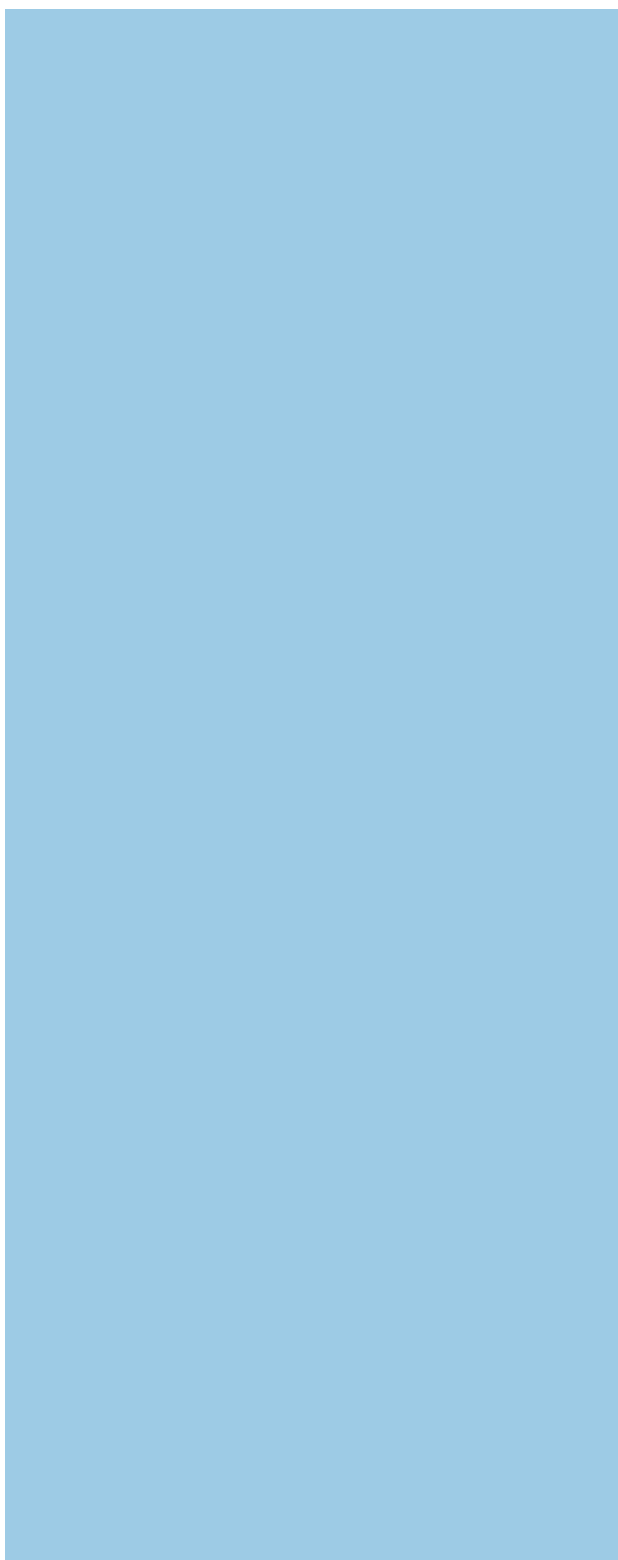
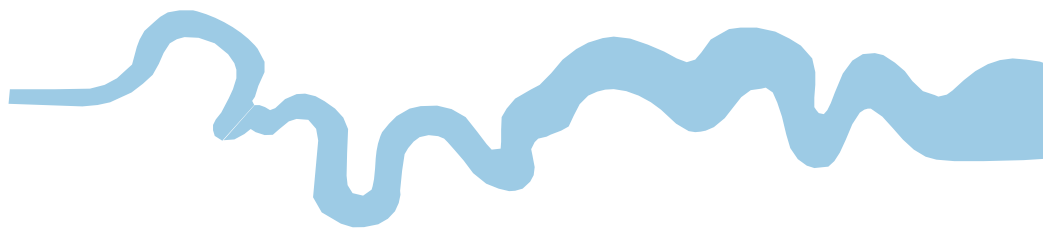
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Plates 1 and 2.**

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TIME CHART

	Calendar Years
Modern _____	AD 1901
Victorian _____	AD 1837
Post Medieval _____	AD 1500
Medieval _____	AD 1066
Saxon _____	AD 410
Roman _____	AD 43
Iron Age _____	BC/AD 750 BC
Bronze Age: Late -----	1300 BC
Bronze Age: Middle -----	1700 BC
Bronze Age: Early -----	2100 BC
Neolithic: Late	3300 BC
Neolithic: Early	4300 BC
Mesolithic: Late	6000 BC
Mesolithic: Early	10000 BC
Palaeolithic: Upper	30000 BC
Palaeolithic: Middle	70000 BC
Palaeolithic: Lower	2,000,000 BC
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