

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

ARCHAEOLOGICAL

S E R V I C E S

**St Edburg's Church, Church Street,
Bicester, Oxfordshire**

Archaeological Watching Brief

**by Andrew Muddin and
James McNicoll-Norbury**

Site Code: SED13/175b

(SP 5831 2227)

**St Edburg's Church , Church Street,
Bicester, Oxfordshire**

**An Archaeological Watching Brief
for The Incumbent and Church Wardens**

By Andrew MUNDIN and

James McNICOLL-NORBURY

Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code SED 13/175b

September 2015

Summary

Site name: St Edburg's Church, Church Street, Bicester, Oxfordshire

Grid reference: SP 5831 2227

Site activity: Archaeological Watching Brief

Date and duration of project: 11th March 2014 – 24th June 2014

Site supervisor: James McNicoll-Norbury

Site code: SED 13/175

Summary of results: Disarticulated bones were recovered from the continuation of the new exterior service trench, and observations were made on the excavation of it to the north and south. Two brick crypts were encountered and a grave, thought to be Post-Medieval in date.

Location and reference of archive: The written archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited at Oxfordshire County Museums Service in due course with accession code OXCMS:2014.66. All finds were retained at the church.

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St Edburg's Church, Church Street, Bicester, Oxfordshire

An Archaeological Watching Brief

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Report 13/175b

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out at St Edburg's Church, Church Street, Bicester, Oxfordshire (SP 5831 2227) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Ms Camilla Finlay, of Acanthus Clews, Acanthus House, 57 Hightown Road, Banbury, Oxfordshire, OX16 9BE on behalf of the Incumbent and Church Wardens.

A faculty has been gained from the Archdeaconry of Oxfordshire to allow works to commence at locations where possible archaeological remains could exist and for which archaeological monitoring was therefore required. This covers the continuation of new pipe trench within the graveyard, link the previously dug section with the boundary wall and the exterior church wall. These works have been carried out in accordance with a specification following a brief previously prepared for other works at the church by the Diocesan Archaeological Adviser, Dr Julian Munby (Munby 2012).

The fieldwork was undertaken by James McNicoll-Norbury on the 23rd June and 24th June 2014, after an initial site meeting with Andrew Mundin on the 11th March 2014. The site code is SED 13/175, and is the second report to be issued, and the third overall associated with drainage improvements at the church. The written archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited with Oxfordshire County Museums Service in due course. All finds were retained at the church at the time of excavation.

Location, topography and geology

The site is located on the southern edge of the historic market town of Bicester (Figs 1 and 2). It is located at the junction of Church Street, The Causeway and Church Lane. The underlying geology consists of cornbrash formation limestone, with alluvial deposits left by the River Bure to the north and east (BGS 2002). Natural geology was not reached by this phase of the works but consisted of cornbrash where it was encountered previously. The ground level is approximately 72m above Ordnance Datum (aOD).

Archaeological background

The church is a Grade I Listed Building. It is thought that a church has been on this site, from indirect documentary evidence, since the mid 7th century, then was (re-)founded as a Minster which existed by the Norman Conquest (Munby *et al.* 1975; VCH 1959). An Augustinian Priory is known to have been founded adjacent to the church, in the 12th century (Munby *et al.* 1975; Blair 2003). Several small archaeological investigations have identified enough of the Priory structure to suggest its form and locate elements such as the Priory Church, Cloister and other ancillary buildings. Other works to the south examined the precinct boundaries (Hull and Preston 2003). To the north, part of a Middle Saxon graveyard has been uncovered in the car park of the (modern) Catholic Church on the other side of Church Street (Lewis *et al.* 2014)

The nave's north wall is part of the oldest surviving remnant of the church which originally followed an aisle-less, cruciform shape, mostly of 12th-century date. During the 13th century the chancel was rebuilt and the southern aisle was added (Munby 2012). The north aisle is originally of 14th-century construction with the choir vestry, originally built as a chapel, and sacristy added later. Significant refurbishment during the 15th and the 18th centuries, added the tower in the west, raised and rebuilt the roof and retraced the windows (Munby 2012). More recently, archaeological monitoring was carried out during works associated with the modernization of the church's flooring and exterior drainage (Crabb and Munding 2012; Munding 2013) (Fig. 2).

Objectives and methodology

The purpose of the watching brief was to excavate and record any archaeological deposits affected by the excavation of the pipe trench. All human remains that were disturbed by the works were to be examined and retained on site for reburial; human remains that were uncovered but would not be further affected were to be recorded *in situ* and not further disturbed. The exterior pipe trench was excavated to the requirement depth of the drainage using a 360° type mini-digger under archaeological supervision. Care was taken where possible to identify individual burials, separately from disarticulated bone. The maximum depth of the pipe trench was 1.15m in the north, but 0.7m in the south.

Results (Fig. 3)

The route of the service trench which had been excavated the previous year was reopened to lay the pipework. In order to link this trench with first the mains on Church Street, and then the church itself, new trenches were

required and observed. Only disarticulated bone was recovered from the northern pipe trench extension (Fig. 3) and no further burials were encountered here.

The crypts previously encountered were avoided and a parallel length of trench was excavated from in front of the casket tomb within the Tarmac access (Grave 5). An additional grave was encountered towards the turn in the trench (Grave 17), though the human bone remains contained within the grave cut were only fragmentary. This grave was no deeper than 0.6m deep, with its eastern end mostly within the excavated trench but the western end extending further beyond the trench.

Just after the trench turned to the south, a brick crypt (16) (Fig. 3; Pl. 1), with a flat stone cover was recorded 0.6m below ground level. This uncovered the central part of the tomb and a small hole was made in the brickwork to note that the casket inside was intact. The void here was approximately 0.7m deep. No further disturbance of this grave was necessary, so no further detail could be recorded.

Towards the church's exterior another brick crypt was encountered (15) (Fig. 3; Pl. 2). The eastern end of the structure was disturbed by the excavator which allowed a view into the tomb. This contained metal struts tied into its structure. This would have originally housed two stacked coffins but the upper one had completely decayed and was mixed with the lower burial. The void for this was 0.9m deep and the top was 0.43m below ground level. The edge of the northern end was only seen in the southern section. No further disturbance of this grave was necessary; again no further detail could be recorded.

The pipe trench was continued along in front of the church to the east following the edge of the path. Here it was 0.50m wide and up to 0.70m deep with stratigraphy comprising 0.23m topsoil overlying brown sandy subsoil containing fragments of brick and disarticulated bone. No additional grave cuts or crypts were identified.

Finds

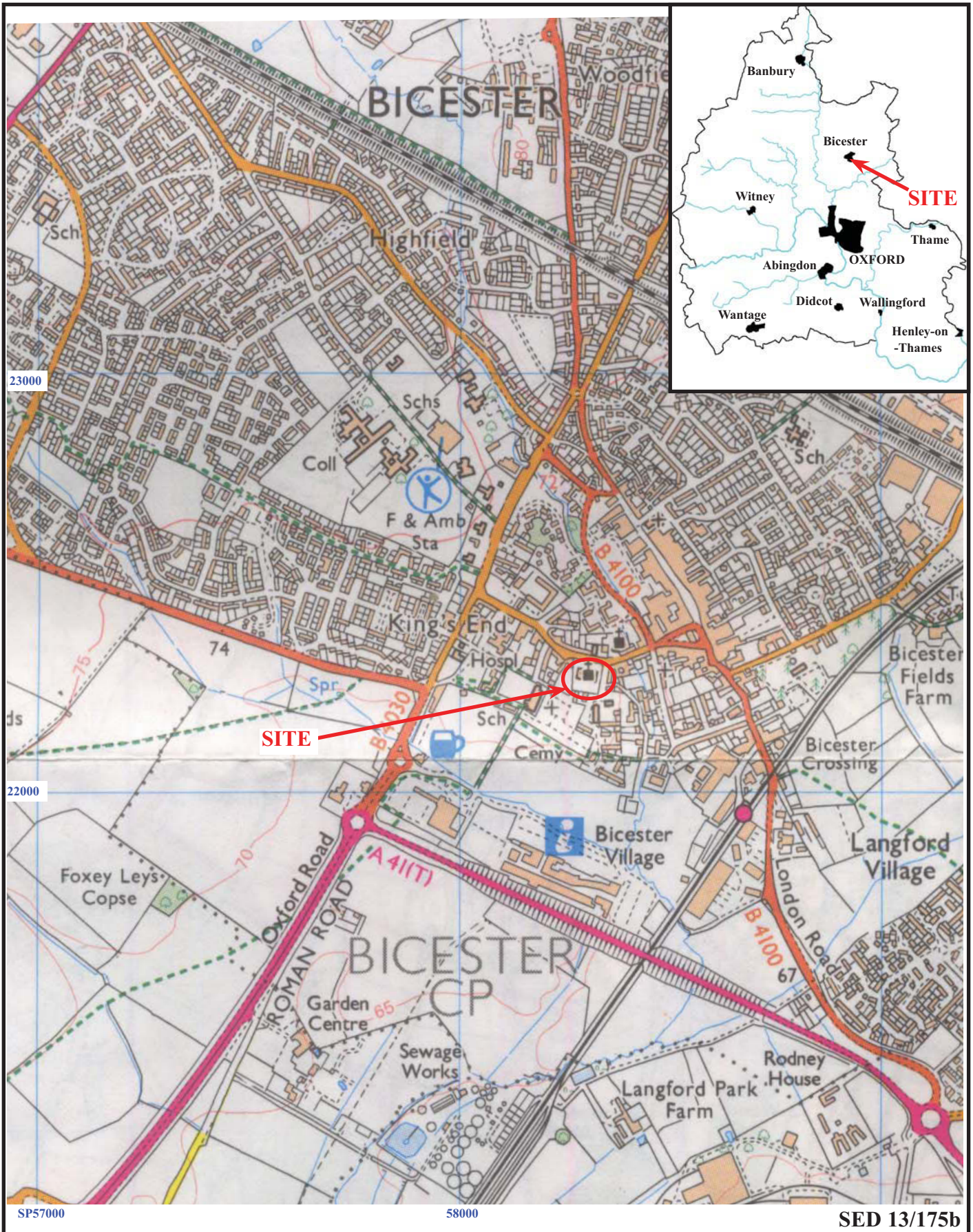
The only finds were very fragmented and disarticulated human remains, which could not be closely identified and were retained at the site for re-interment.

Conclusion

The works uncovered human burial within the graveyard, in the form of interment and crypt burial. Both types can only broadly be dated as Post-Medieval, possibly 18th century, contemporary with the previously discovered graves. No other archaeological deposits, features or finds were encountered.

References

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Figure 1. Location of site within Bicester and Oxfordshire.

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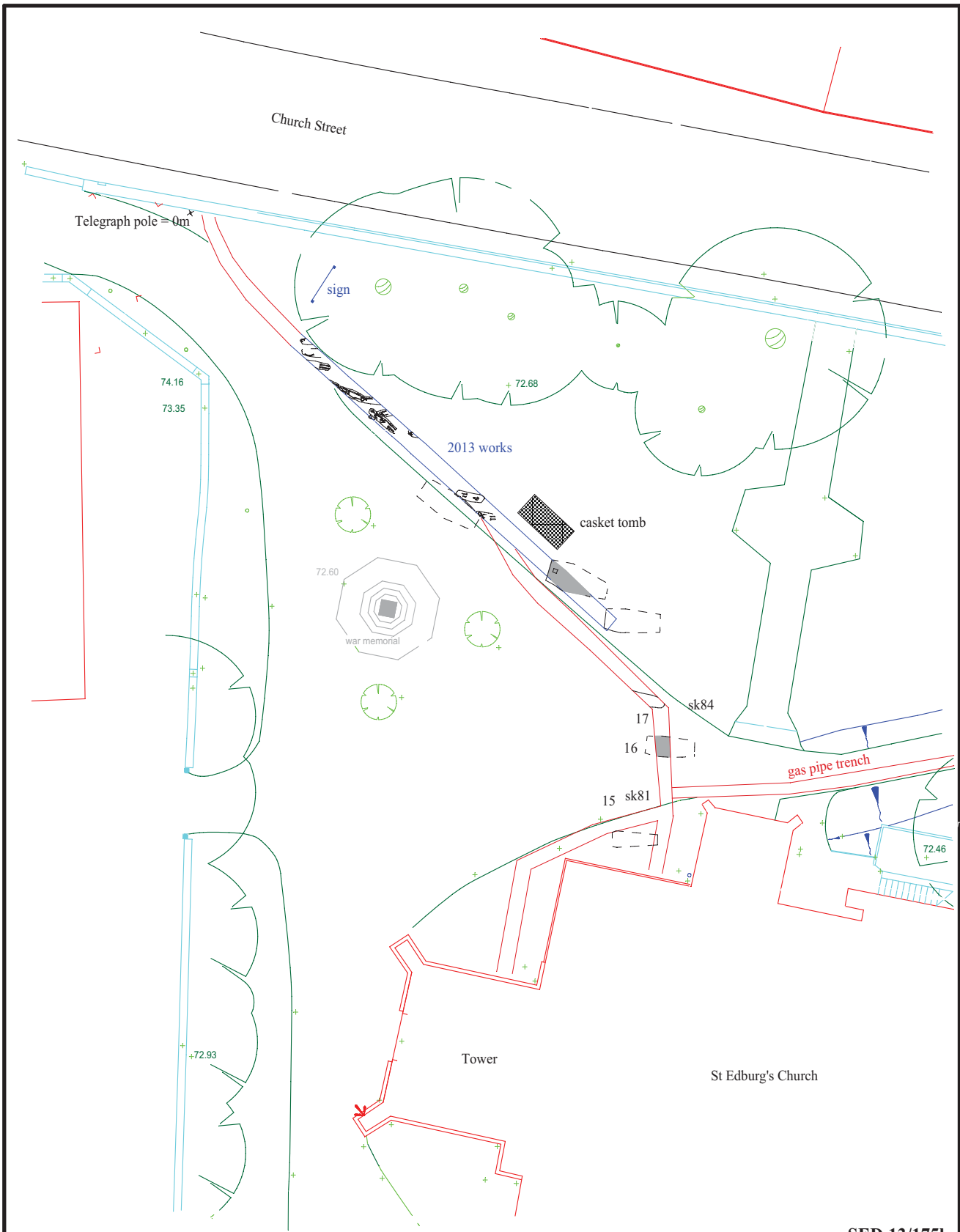
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 Figure 2. Detailed location of site off The Causeway.

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Figure 3. Location of 2014 works in relation to 2013 works.



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25m

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Plate 1. Crypt 15, looking west, Scales: 0.5m x 2.



Plate 2. Top of Crypt 16, looking east, Scales: 0.5m x 2.

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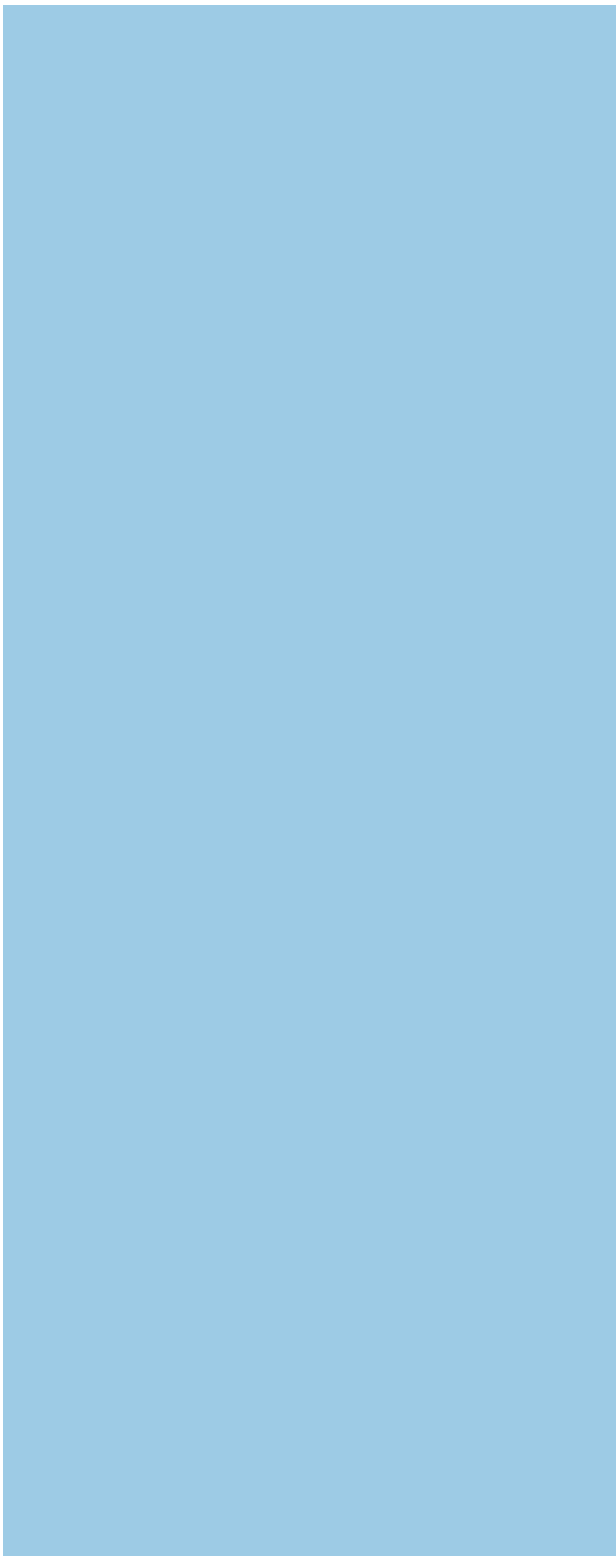
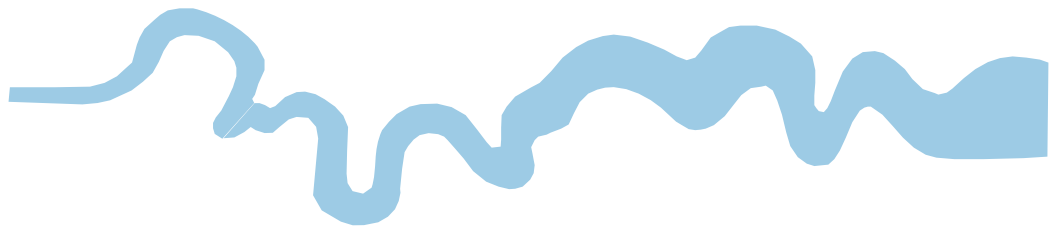
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Plates 1 - 2.

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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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