

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

ARCHAEOLOGICAL

S E R V I C E S

**Birchley, Old Bath Road,
Sonning, Berkshire**

Archaeological Evaluation

by Luis Esteves and Lizzi Lewins

Site Code: BOB16/27

(SU 7637 7494)

**Birchley, Old Bath Road, Sonning,
Berkshire**

**An Archaeological Evaluation
for Millgate Homes**

by Luis Esteves and Lizzi Lewins

Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code BOB16/27

March 2016

Summary

Site name: Birchley, Old Bath Road, Sonning, Berkshire

Grid reference: SU 7637 7494

Site activity: Evaluation

Date and duration of project: 10th March 2016

Project manager: Steve Ford

Site supervisor: Luis Esteves

Site code: BOB 16/27

Area of site: c. 0.6ha

Summary of results: No archaeological features or finds were encountered.

Location and reference of archive: The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited at an appropriate designated museum or repository (to be decided by the local planning authority) in due course.

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Report edited/checked by: Steve Ford ✓ 07.04.16 Steve Preston ✓ 07.04.16

Birchley, Old Bath Road, Sonning, Berkshire An Archaeological Evaluation

by Luis Esteves and Lizzi Lewins

Report 16/27

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological field evaluation carried out on the south side of Old Bath Road, Sonning, Berkshire (SU 7637 7494) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Jon Furneaux of Millgate Homes, Millgate House, Ruscombe Lane, Ruscombe, Twyford, Berkshire, RG10 9JT.

Planning consent (152701) has been granted by Wokingham Borough Council for the demolition of existing buildings on the site followed by construction of four new houses with car parking and associated landscaping. The consent is subject to a condition (12) relating to archaeology, requiring a programme of archaeological investigation prior to the development. It was determined that this should take the form, initially, of field evaluation by means of trial trenching, based on the results of which, further work might be required in order to mitigate the impact of the development on any archaeological remains present.

This is in accordance with the Department for Communities and Local Government's *National Planning Policy Framework* (NPPF 2012), and the Borough Council's policies on archaeology. The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Ms Ellie Leary, Archaeological Officer for Berkshire Archaeology, the archaeological advisers to the Borough. The fieldwork was undertaken by Luis Esteves and Danielle Milbank on 10th March 2016 and the site code is BOB 16/27. The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited at an appropriate designated museum or repository (to be decided by the local planning authority) in due course.

Location, topography and geology

The site is located on the south side of Old Bath Road (an approximately rectangular plot of land of c. 0.6ha), in Sonning parish, to the north-east of Reading (Fig. 1). The site comprises a flat parcel of land formerly occupied by a house, which had been demolished before commencement of the evaluation and lies at a height of 50m above Ordnance Datum (aOD). The underlying geology is mapped as fourth river terrace deposits (BGS 2000) which was observed across site as a reddish brown clayey sand with frequent gravel inclusions.

Archaeological background

The archaeological potential of the site stems from its location within the archaeologically rich Thames Valley with important prehistoric and Roman remains visible from the air not far to the north-east (Ford 1987; Gates 1975; Slade 1964). These include a Neolithic ceremonial complex with a *cursus* monument (processional way?) a mortuary enclosure and ring ditches (levelled round barrows), which is a Scheduled monument. Geophysical survey recently revealed additional features in this area (Dawson 2012). A Roman enclosure is also recorded with a variety of undated but probably Roman field boundaries known closer to the site (to the north). Sonning village, which lies some way to the north, was an important administrative and ecclesiastical centre in Saxon and medieval times and includes the site of the Bishop's Palace, which dates from as early as the 13th century (Milbank 2010). These remains were partly excavated during the First World War and revealed a complex of medieval buildings (Brakspear 1916). Evaluation to the north-east of the present site did not reveal any deposits of interest (Taylor 2004) nor did a small watching brief on the sports ground also to the north-east (Bray 2014).

Objectives and methodology

The purpose of the evaluation was to determine the presence/absence, extent, condition, character, quality and date of any archaeological deposits within the area of development.

The specific research aims of this project are:

- to determine if archaeologically relevant levels have survived on this site;
- to determine if archaeological deposits of any period are present; and
- to provide sufficient information to construct an archaeological mitigation stratigraphy.

It was proposed that four trenches, each 20m long and 1.6-2m wide, were to be dug within the footprint of the new buildings where possible. These were to be excavated with a mechanical excavator under constant archaeological supervision. Where archaeological features were certainly or probably present, the stripped areas were to be cleaned using appropriate hand tools, and sufficient of the archaeological features and deposits exposed were to be excavated or sampled by hand to satisfy the aims of the brief, without compromising the integrity of any features that might warrant preservation *in situ* or might be better investigated under the conditions pertaining to full excavation.

Results

The four trenches were dug as intended (Fig. 3). They ranged in length from 19.5m to 20.0m and in depth from 0.50–0.70m; all were 1.8m wide. A complete list of trenches giving lengths, breadths, depths and a description of sections and geology is given in Appendix 1.

Trench 1 (Pl 1)

Trench 1 was aligned W - E and was 19.5m long and 0.51m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.26m of topsoil overlying 0.22m of subsoil overlying natural geology (Fig. 4). The footings of the recently demolished house were seen between 0m - 6.2m. No archaeological features were recorded and no finds were recovered.

Trench 2 (Pl. 2)

Trench 2 was aligned SSE - NNW and was 20m long and 0.58m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.22m of topsoil overlying 0.28m of subsoil overlying natural geology. A modern drain was recorded between 13m - 20m. No archaeological features were recorded and no finds were recovered.

Trench 3 (Pl. 3)

Trench 3 was aligned SE - NW and was 20m long and 0.5m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.15m of topsoil overlying 0.35m of subsoil overlying natural geology (Fig. 4). No archaeological features were recorded and no finds were recovered.

Trench 4 (Pl. 4)

Trench 4 was aligned SW - NE and was 20m long and was 0.7m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.15m of topsoil overlying 0.55m of subsoil overlying natural geology. No archaeological features were recorded and no finds were recovered.

Conclusion

Despite the site's potential for archaeology no archaeological features or finds were encountered. On the basis of these results, the site can be considered to have no archaeological potential.

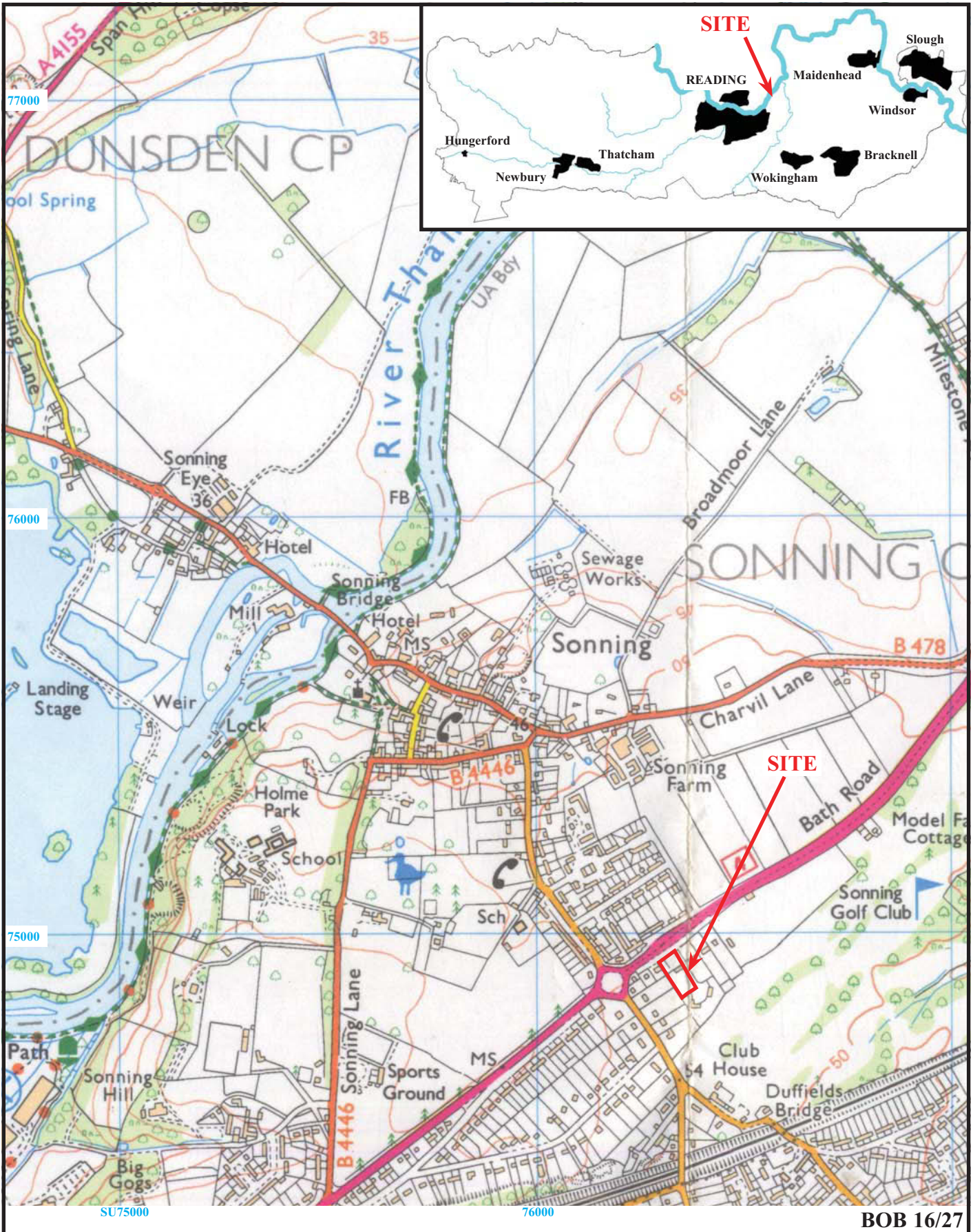
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APPENDIX 1: Trench details

<i>Trench</i>	<i>Length (m)</i>	<i>Breadth (m)</i>	<i>Depth (m)</i>	<i>Comment</i>
1	19.5	1.8	0.51	0–0.26m topsoil; 0.26m-0.48m light reddish brown sandy silt subsoil; 0.48m+ reddish brown clayey sand natural geology with frequent gravel inclusions. [PI. 1]
2	20	1.8	0.58	0-0.22m topsoil; 0.22m-0.50m subsoil; 0.50m+ reddish brown clayey sand natural geology with frequent gravel inclusions. [PI. 2]
	20	1.8	0.50	0-0.15m topsoil; 0.15m-0.50m subsoil; 0.50m+ reddish brown clayey sand natural geology with infrequent silt patches and frequent gravel inclusions. [PI. 3]
4	20	1.8	0.70	0-0.15m topsoil; 0.15m-0.70m subsoil; 0.70m+ reddish brown clayey sand natural geology with frequent gravel inclusions. [PI. 4]



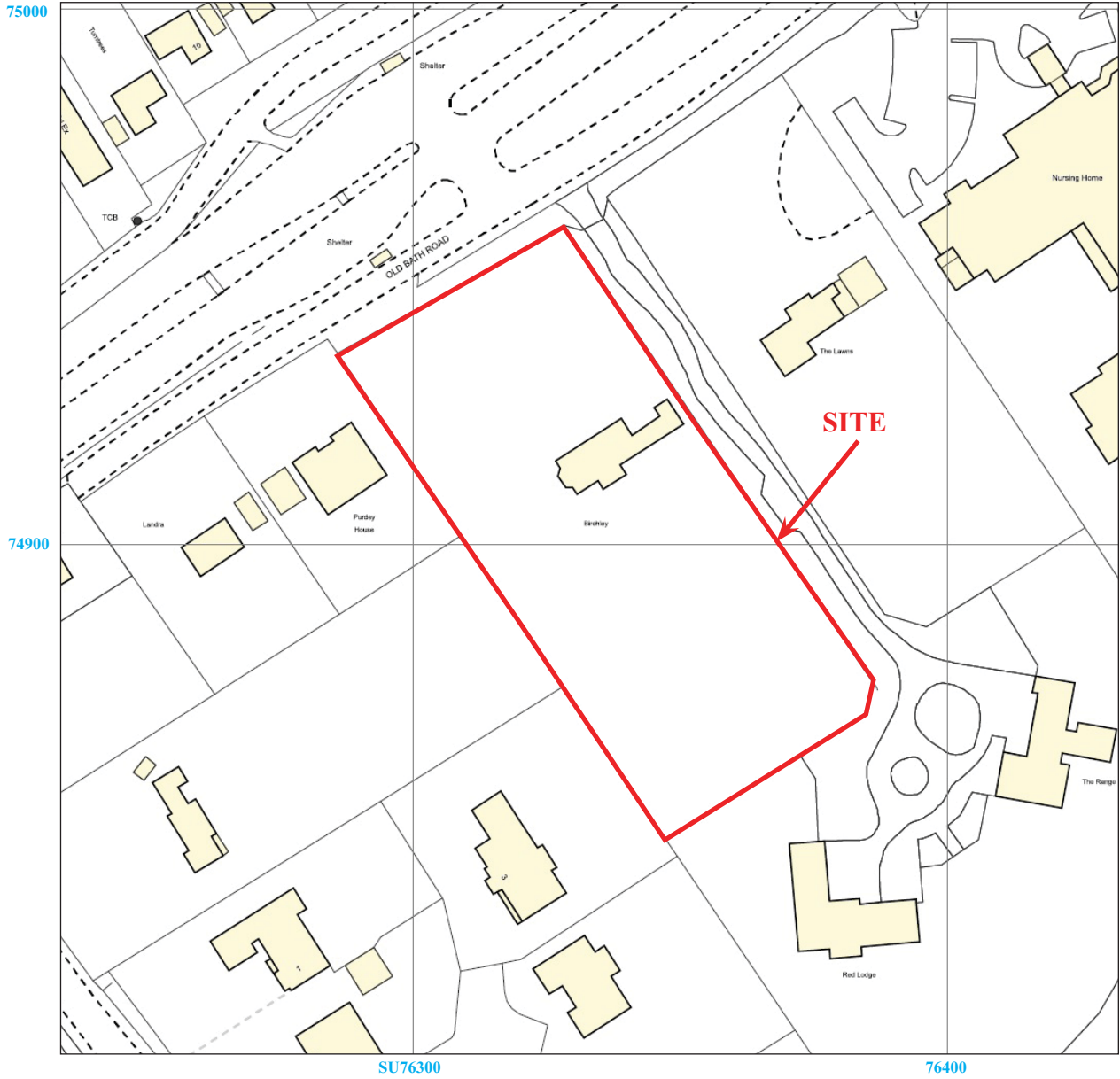
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Figure 1. Location of site within Sonning and Berkshire.

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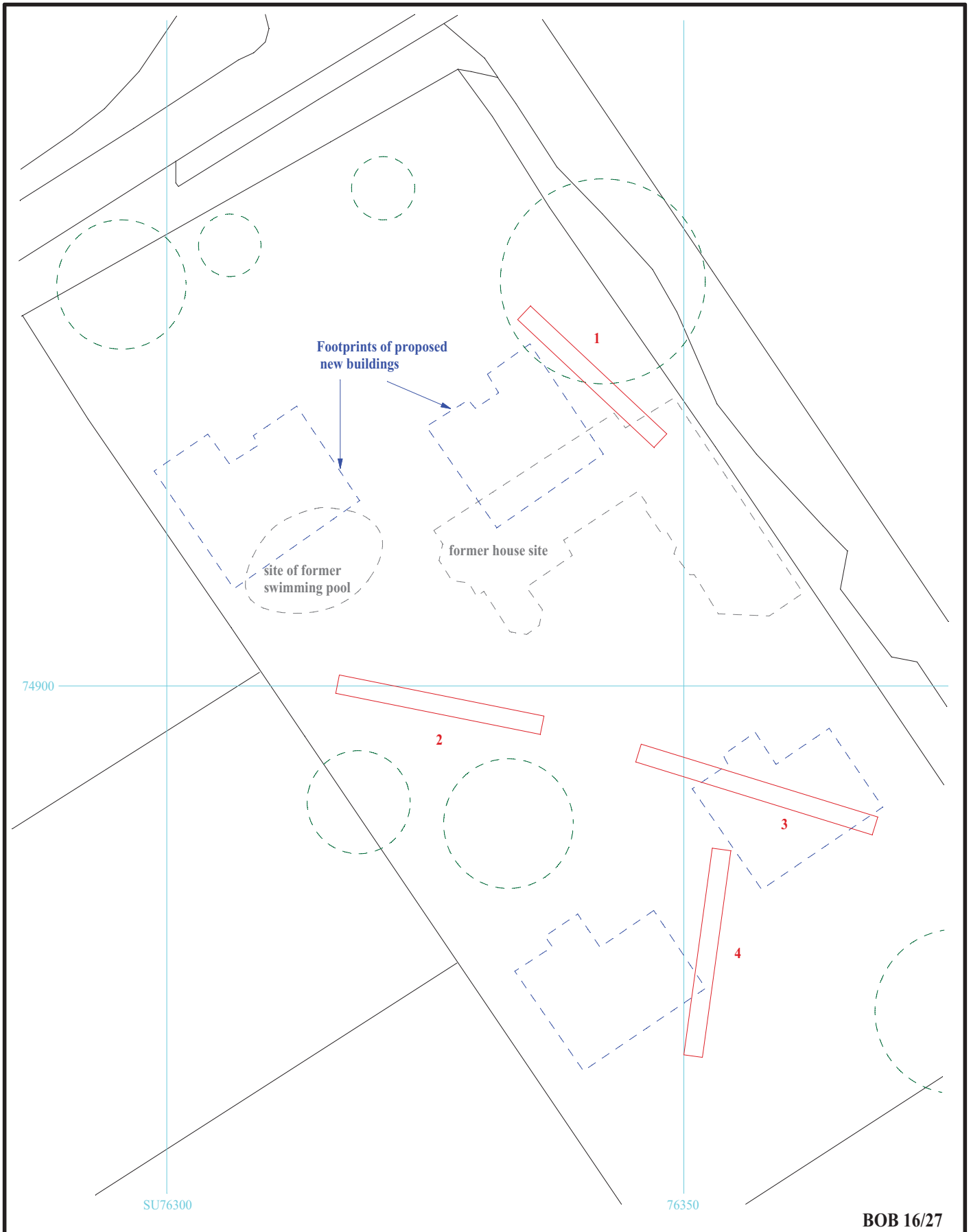


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Figure 2. Detailed location of site off Old Bath Road.

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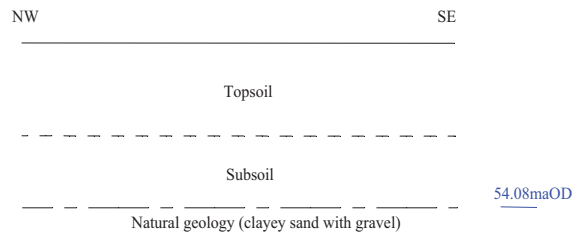
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Figure 3. Location of trenches

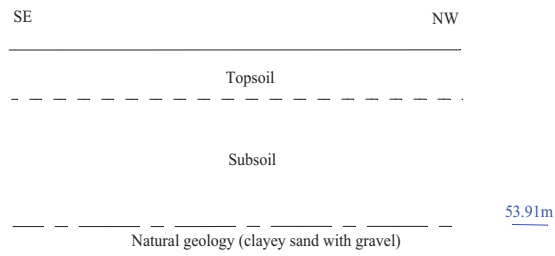


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Trench 1



Trench 3



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Figure 4. Representative sections.



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Plate 1. Trench 1, looking south east,
Scales: horizontal 2m and 0.5m, vertical 0.3m.



Plate 2. Trench 2, looking south east,
Scales: 2m and 0.5m, vertical 0.3m.



Plate 3. Trench 3, looking north west, Scales: horizontal
2m and 1m, vertical 0.3m.



Plate 4. Trench 4, looking north east,
Scales: horizontal 2m and 0.5m, vertical 0.3m.

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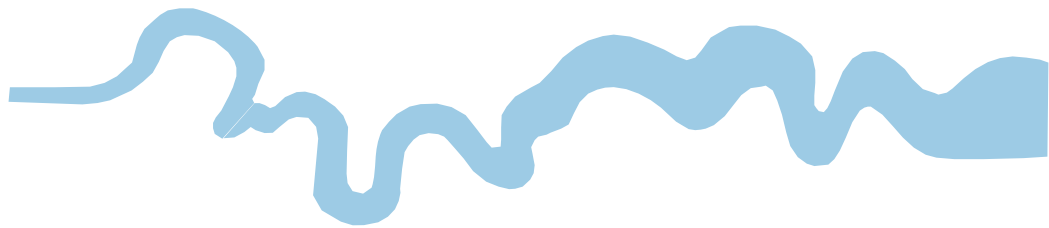
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Archaeological Evaluation**
Plates 1 - 4.

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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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