

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

ARCHAEOLOGICAL

S E R V I C E S

**Former Elvian School, Southcote Lane, Southcote,
Reading, Berkshire**

Archaeological Evaluation

by Andy Taylor

Site Code: ESR16/68

(SU 6961 7231)

**Former Elvian School, Southcote Lane,
Southcote, Reading, Berkshire**

**An Archaeological Evaluation
for Taylor Wimpey West London**

by Andy Taylor

Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code ESR 16/68

April 2016

Summary

Site name: Former Elvian School, Southcote Lane, Southcote, Reading, Berkshire

Grid reference: SU 6961 7231

Site activity: Evaluation

Date and duration of project: 12th-13th April 2016

Project manager: Steve Ford

Site supervisor: Andy Taylor

Site code: ESR 16/68

Summary of results: The evaluation revealed a cluster of archaeological deposits on the western side of the proposal site which are considered to represent an occupation site of Middle-Late Iron Age date. This area of the site has high archaeological potential. Trenches elsewhere on the site revealed nothing of archaeological interest.

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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www.tvas.co.uk/reports/reports.asp.*

Report edited/checked by: Steve Ford✓26.04.16 Steve Preston✓ 26.04.16
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Former Elvian School, Southcote Lane, Southcote, Reading, Berkshire An Archaeological Evaluation

by Andy Taylor

Report 16/68

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological field evaluation carried out at the former Elvian School, Southcote Lane, Southcote, Reading, Berkshire (SU 6961 7231) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Jason Allan of Taylor Wimpey West London, Stratfield House, Station Road, Hook, Hampshire, RG27 9PQ.

Planning consent has been sought from Reading Borough Council to construct new housing on land at the former Elvian School. The consent is expected to be subject to an archaeological condition.

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 Kathelen Leary, Archaeology Officer with Berkshire Archaeology, advisers to the Borough on matters relating to archaeology. The fieldwork was undertaken by Andy Taylor and Tom Stewart on 12th and 13th April 2016 and the site code is ESR 16/68. 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

The site is located on a relatively flat parcel of land on the southern portion of the former Elvian School, Southcote Lane, Southcote, Reading, Berkshire. The western portion of the site is on grassland from the playing field of the school with the remainder laid to Tarmac. It is bounded by Southcote Lane to the south, further redundant school buildings to the north, playing fields for the Blessed Hugh Farringdon School to the west and residential properties to the east. The underlying geology is mapped as Lynch Hill Gravel (BGS 2000), which was observed across the site and it lies at a height of c.58m above Ordnance Datum in the north with a gentle drop to c.56m AOD along Southcote Lane.

Archaeological background

The archaeological potential of the site has been highlighted in a desk-based assessment (Ford 2011). In summary, this potential stems from its location just to the west of Iron Age deposits found during early 20th-century quarrying. A modest range of other sites and finds are present in nearby areas but in general the site lies within the archaeologically rich Thames/Lower Kennet Valley with a wealth of sites and finds from both prehistoric and later periods. The gravel terraces of the Thames Valley are particularly noteworthy for the presence of Palaeolithic flint and stone tools, representing the earliest known human occupation in the British Isles (Wymer 1968) and a few hand axes findspots are recorded in the vicinity. However, very rare *in-situ* Palaeolithic deposits are only likely to be present beneath or within the lower levels of gravel unaffected by the relatively shallow foundations of the development proposal.

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.

Specific aims of the 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 collect information with which to prepare a mitigation strategy if necessary.

It was proposed that 10 trenches were to be dug, each measuring 1.60m wide and 15m long by a JCB type machine fitted with a toothless ditching bucket. This was done under constant archaeological supervision and all spoilheaps were monitored for finds. Where archaeological features are certainly or probably present, the stripped areas were cleaned using appropriate hand tools. Sufficient of the archaeological features and deposits exposed were then 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 better be investigated under the conditions pertaining to full excavation.

Results

Nine trenches were dug as planned (Fig. 3), but one trench in the north-eastern corner of the site could not be dug due to access issues and its area being used by an adjacent school. This change was agreed in consultation with Berkshire Archaeology. All trenches were dug as close as possible to their intended positions measuring

between 10m and 17.20m long and between 0.38m and 2.20m deep. Trench 5 collapsed and could not be excavated to its full length.

A complete list of trenches giving lengths, breadths, depths and a description of sections and geology is given in Appendix 1. The excavated features are summarized in Appendix 2.

Trench 1 (Figs 4 and 5; Pls 1 and 8)

This trench was aligned approximately N-S and measured 15.10m long and 0.50m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.30m of topsoil overlying 0.20m of subsoil overlying gravel natural geology. A ditch was noted at the southern end of the trench into which a slot (10) was dug measuring 1.16m wide and 0.48m deep. Its mid red brown sandy gravelly silt (54) did not produce any dating evidence.

Trench 2 (Figs 4 and 5; Pls 2, 5 and 6)

This trench was aligned approximately ENE-WSW and measured 15.40m long and 0.38m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.28m of topsoil overlying 0.10m of subsoil overlying gravel natural geology. Two ditches were noted at either end of this trench. At the west end, ditch 2 measured 1m wide and 0.32m deep. Its dark brown grey silty sand fill (53) did not produce any finds. Ditch 1 was between 8.30m and 13m and measured 0.90m wide and 0.30m deep. Its dark brown grey silty sand fill (52) contained three sherds of Iron Age pottery and a piece of burnt flint. Two further sherds of pottery came from the subsoil in this Trench.

Trench 3 (Figs 4 and 5; Pls 3 and 7)

This trench was aligned NE-SW and measured 14.40m long and 0.88m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.38m of topsoil overlying 0.10m of a light red brown sandy silt. This overlay 0.25m of a dark brown grey sandy silt overlying 0.15m of dark brown grey silty sand overlying gravel natural geology. Features were observed along the length of this trench.

At the SW end, three postholes (11, 12 and 13) were observed but not excavated. Four sherds of Iron Age pottery were recovered from the surface of posthole 13. A ditch (14) was noted between 2m and 5m and again this was not excavated (this may be the same ditch noted in trench 1) but three sherds of Iron Age pottery were recovered from its surface. A further unexcavated posthole (15) was noted at 5.30m.

An inter-cutting pit and posthole were noted between 5.50m and 7m into which a slot was dug. Posthole 6 measured 0.40m in diameter and 0.17m deep but its dark brown grey sandy silt fill (58) did not contain any finds. Pit 7 measured 1.10m in diameter, 0.70m deep and its dark brown grey sandy silt fill (59) contained three sherds of Iron Age pottery and three pieces of burnt flint. No relationship was evident between these features.

Two inter-cutting postholes (4 and 5) were noted at 8.50m. Posthole 5 cut posthole 4. Posthole 4 was 0.25m wide, 0.12m deep and its light brown grey sandy silt fill (56) did not contain any finds. Posthole 5 measured 0.35m wide and 0.38m deep and its dark brown grey contained a small sherd of late Iron Age pottery. The terminal ends of two linear features were noted between 9m and 11.60m into which a slot was dug to determine the relationship, which showed ditch 9 cutting 8. Terminal 8 measured 0.30m deep and its dark brown grey sandy silt fill (60) contained two small sherds of Late Iron Age pottery. Terminal 9 measured 0.99m wide, 0.20m deep and its light brown grey sandy silt fill (61) contained 98 sherds of middle-to-late Iron Age pottery. Another posthole (3) was noted at 12.40m, which measured 0.35m in diameter and 0.23m deep but its dark brown grey sandy silt fill (55) did not contain any finds.

Trench 4

This trench was aligned E-W and measured 15.20m long and 1.22m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.30m of topsoil overlying 0.20m of gravel made ground. This overlay 0.35m of a light red brown silty sand made ground overlying 0.38m of buried subsoil overlying gravel natural geology.

Trench 5

This trench was aligned approximately NE-SW and measured 10m long and 2.20m deep. Its loose nature and depth resulted in the trench collapsing and so could not be dug to its full length. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.20m of topsoil overlying 1.20m of light red brown silty sand made ground. This overlay 0.10m of dark brown grey silty clay overlying 0.70m of light brown grey silty clay overlying sandy gravel natural geology.

Trench 6

This trench was aligned NE-SW and measured 15.10m long and 0.60m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.07m of Tarmac overlying 0.08m of gravel made ground. This overlay 0.21m of brick rubble made ground overlying 0.11m of dark brown grey silty clay overlying 0.07m of dark red brown sandy silt overlying gravel natural geology.

Trench 7

This trench was aligned approximately E-W and measured 16.20m long and 0.46m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.22m of topsoil overlying 0.24m of subsoil overlying gravel natural geology.

Trench 8 (Pl. 4)

This trench was aligned approximately N-S and measured 17.20m long and 0.60m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.14m of Tarmac overlying 0.06m of gravel made ground. This overlay 0.11m of brick rubble overlying 0.26m of mid red brown sandy silt overlying gravel natural geology.

Trench 9

This trench was aligned approximately N-S and measured 15.50m long and 0.49m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.13m of Tarmac overlying 0.07m of gravel made ground. This overlay 0.10m of brick rubble overlying 0.15m of mid grey brown sandy silt overlying gravel natural geology.

Finds

Pottery by Jane Timby

The evaluation resulted in the recovery of a small assemblage of 116 sherds of pottery, weighing 528g, dating to the mid-later Iron Age. Pottery was recovered from seven cuts including a pit, ditches and postholes (Appendix 3). Two sherds were recovered from the subsoil. The material is of variable condition with several larger well-preserved sherds but mainly small well-fragmented pieces. The overall average sherd weight is quite low at 4.5g.

The assemblage was sorted into fabrics as recommended by PCRG (1997) where letters denote the main aplastic inclusions in the fabrics. The material was quantified by sherd count and weight for each recorded context. Freshly broken sherds were counted as single pieces.

Description

The assemblage appears to belong to a single phase of occupation. Whilst it is possible that there is some distinction between some of the cuts in terms of earlier or later most of the groups are too small to allow a more definitive date. Most of the assemblage, some 98 sherds came from ditch 9; thus the distribution of material is very uneven.

The assemblage comprises a mixture of sandy wares and flint-tempered wares. The sandy wares can be sub-divided into five groups; fine sandy (SA1); glauconitic sandy (SA2); fine sandy with organic material (SAAOR); fine sandy with rare fine flint (SAFL) and iron-rich sandy (SAFE). The flint wares can be divided into a coarse, calcined, flint-tempered, as Silchester ware, and a finer flint-tempered variant.

There are five fragmentary rims present, some, or all, of which appear to come from saucepan-style vessels. One sherd is burnished but otherwise there are no decorated or other sherds showing a surface finish.

Chronology

The range of fabrics is completely typical of those found from other mid-later Iron Age sites in the area, for example, earlier work at Southcote (Piggott and Seaby 1937); Riseley Farm (Morris 1993), Larkwhistle Farm, Brimpton (Timby 1999) and Aldermaston Wharf (Cowell *et al.* 1980). It is generally accepted that sandy wares predate the flint-tempered wares which might suggest that ditch 9 with exclusively sandy wares may be earlier than, for example, pit 7. The other groups are too small to seriate with confidence.

Burnt Flint by Andy Taylor

Four unworked pieces of burnt flint were recovered from two separate features weighing a total of 182g (Appendix 4).

Conclusion

A moderate amount of archaeological deposits of Middle-Late Iron Age date were identified during the evaluation concentrated in Trenches 1, 2 and 3. It is probable that these are all broadly contemporary, comprising one phase of activity representing an occupation site of this date. This area of the site has clear archaeological potential. Other parts of the site closer to the old school buildings revealed nothing of interest.

References

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APPENDIX 1: Trench details

0m at S or W end (except trench 1, 0m at north end)

<i>Trench</i>	<i>Length (m)</i>	<i>Breadth (m)</i>	<i>Depth (m)</i>	<i>Comment</i>
1	15.10	1.60	0.50	0-0.30m topsoil; 0.30m-0.50m subsoil; 0.50m+ gravel natural geology. Ditch 10. [Pls 1 and 8]
2	15.40	1.60	0.38	0-0.28m topsoil; 0.28m-0.38m subsoil; 0.38m+ gravel natural geology. Ditches 1 and 2. [Pls 2, 5 and 6]
3	14.40	1.60	0.88	0-0.38m topsoil; 0.38m-0.48m light red brown sandy silt; 0.48m-0.73m dark brown grey sandy silt; 0.73m-0.88m dark brown grey silty sand; 0.88m+ gravel natural geology. Postholes 4-6, 11-13, 15, pit 7, ditch 14, ditch terminals 8 and 9. [Pls 3 and 7]
4	15.20	1.60	1.22	0-0.30m topsoil; 0.30m-0.50m dark brown grey gravel; 0.50m-0.85m light red brown silty sand; 0.85m-1.22m dark brown grey silty sand; 1.22m+ gravel natural geology.
5	10.00	1.60	2.20	0-0.20m topsoil; 0.20m-1.40m light red brown silty sand made ground; 1.40m-1.50m dark brown grey silty clay; 1.50m-2.20m light brown grey silty clay; 2.20m+ sandy gravel natural geology.
6	15.10	1.60	0.60	0-0.07m Tarmac; 0.07m-0.15m gravel made ground; 0.15m-0.36m brick rubble made ground; 0.36m-0.47m dark brown grey silty clay; 0.47m-0.54m dark red brown sandy silt; 0.54m-0.60m+ gravel natural geology.
7	16.20	1.60	0.46	0-0.22m topsoil; 0.22m-0.46m subsoil; 0.46m+ gravel natural geology.
8	17.20	1.60	0.60	0-0.14m Tarmac; 0.14m-0.20m gravel made ground; 0.20m-0.31m brick rubble made ground; 0.31m-0.56m mid red brown sandy silt; 0.56m-0.60m+ gravel natural geology. [Pl. 4]
9	15.50	1.60	0.49	0-0.13m Tarmac; 0.13m-0.20m gravel made ground; 0.20m-0.30m brick rubble made ground; 0.30m-0.45m mid grey brown sandy silt; 0.45m-0.49m+ gravel natural geology.

APPENDIX 2: Feature details

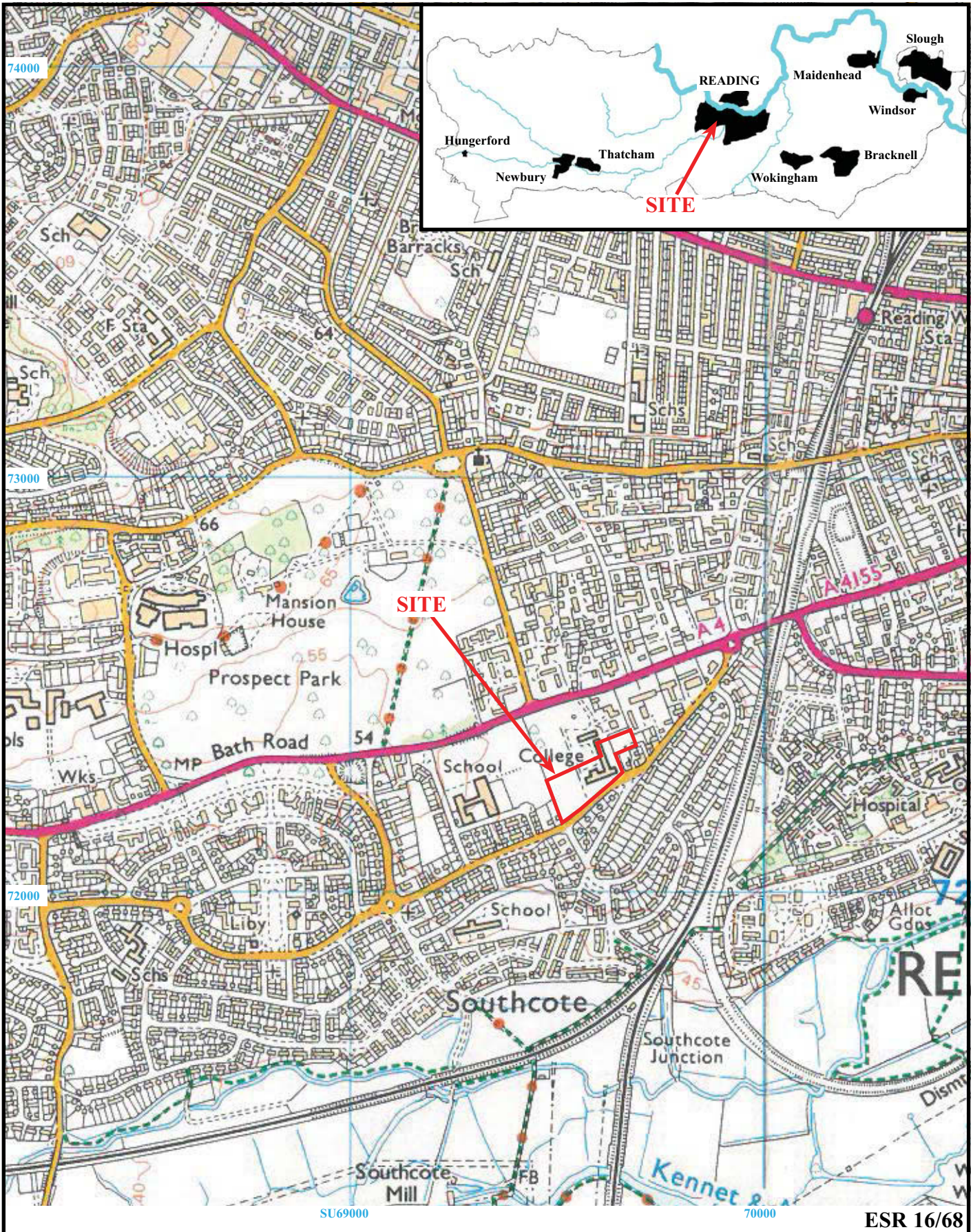
<i>Trench</i>	<i>Cut</i>	<i>Fill (s)</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Dating evidence</i>
1	10	54	Ditch	Middle-Late Iron Age	Same as 14?
2	1	52	Ditch	Middle-Late Iron Age	Pottery
2	2	53	Ditch	-	Unknown
3	3	55	Posthole	-	Unknown
3	4	56	Posthole	Middle-Late Iron Age	Pottery
3	5	57	Posthole	Middle-Late Iron Age	Stratigraphy
3	6	58	Posthole	-	-
3	7	59	Pit	Middle-Late Iron Age	Pottery
3	8	60	Ditch Terminus	Middle-Late Iron Age	Pottery
3	9	61	Ditch Terminus	Middle-Late Iron Age	Pottery
3	11	62	Posthole	-	-
3	12	63	Posthole	-	-
3	13	64	Posthole	Middle-Late Iron Age	Pottery
3	14	65	Ditch	Middle-Late Iron Age	Pottery
3	15	66	Posthole	-	-

APPENDIX 3: Catalogue of Pottery

<i>Trench</i>	<i>Cut</i>	<i>Deposit</i>	<i>FL</i>	<i>SAI</i>	<i>SA2</i>	<i>SAOR</i>	<i>SAFE</i>	<i>SAFL</i>	<i>CRUMBS</i>	<i>Tot No</i>	<i>Tot Wt</i>	<i>Date</i>
2		51	2							2	25	LIA
2	1	52				3				3	6	M-LIA
3	5	57						1		1	5	LIA
3	7	59	1		1	1				3	19	M-LIA
3	8	60				2				2	35	M-LIA
3	9	61		25		62		2	9	98	418	MIA
3	13	64					4			4	15	M-LIA
3	14	65			3					3	5	M-LIA
	TOTAL		3	25	4	68	4	3	9	116	528	

APPENDIX 4: Catalogue of Burnt Flint

<i>Trench</i>	<i>Cut</i>	<i>Deposit</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Wt (g)</i>
2	1	52	Ditch	1	14
3	7	59	Pit	3	168

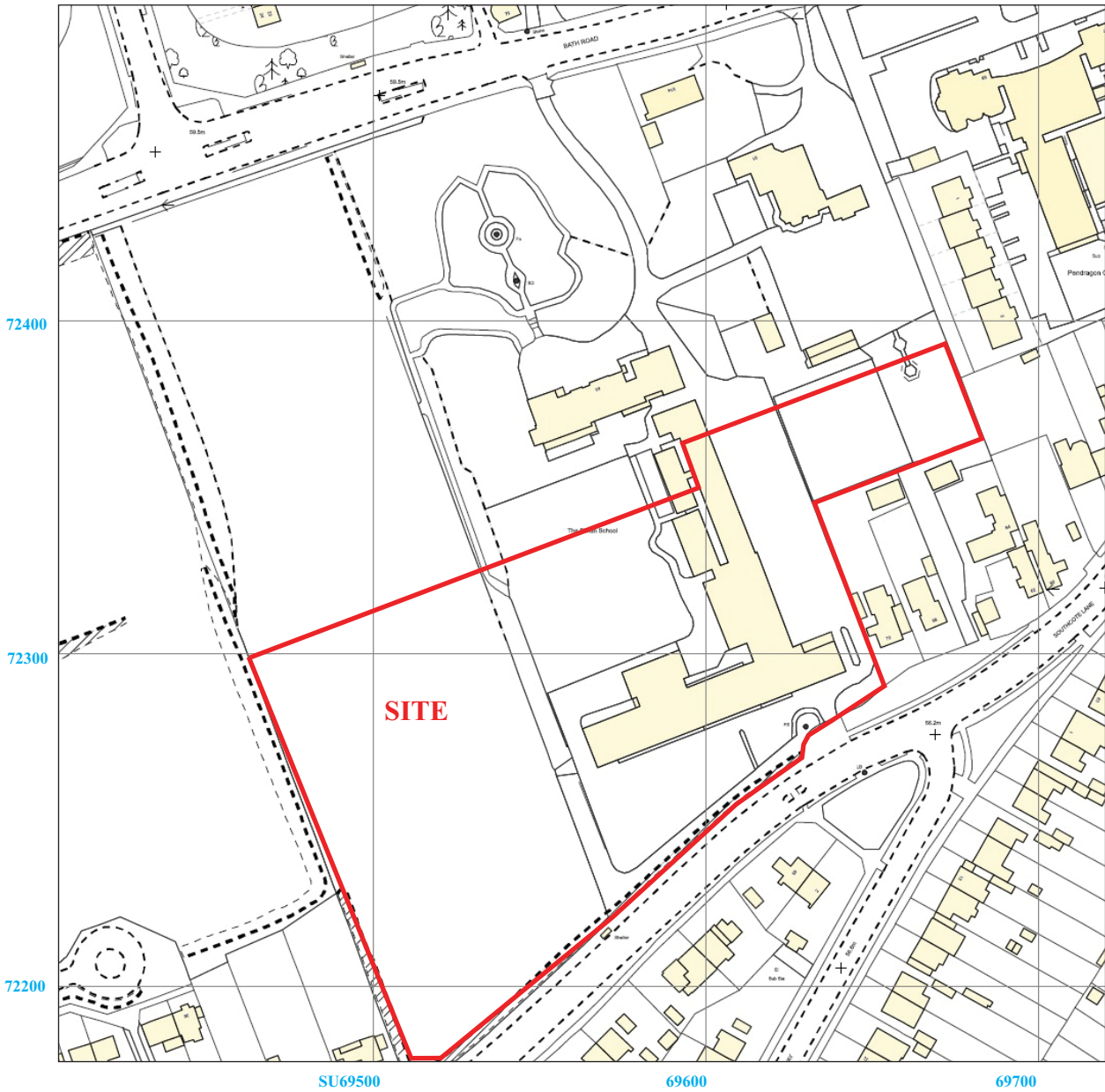


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Figure 1. Location of site within Reading and Berkshire.

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Figure 2. Detailed location of site.

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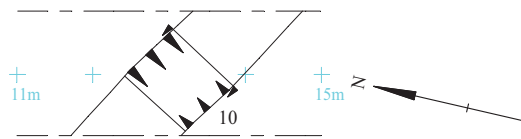
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Figure 3. Location of trenches.

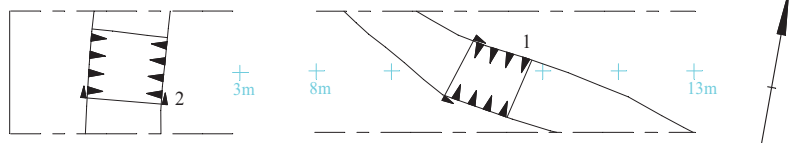
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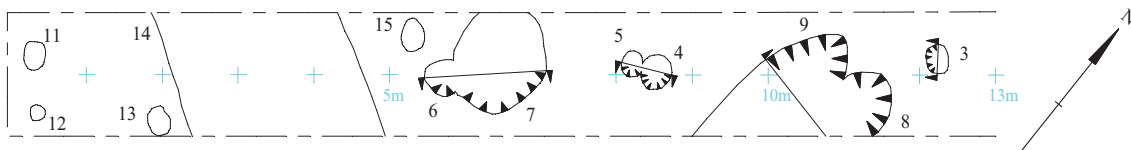
Trench 1



Trench 2



Trench 3



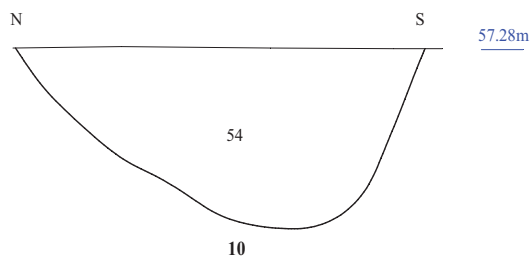
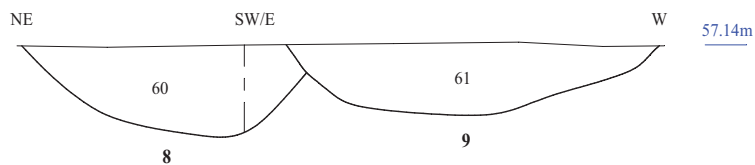
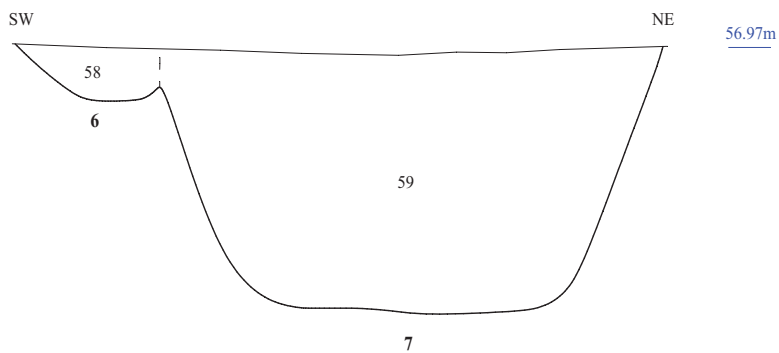
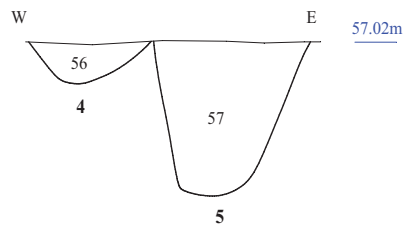
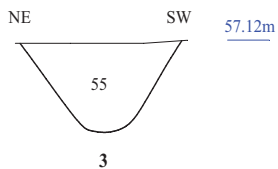
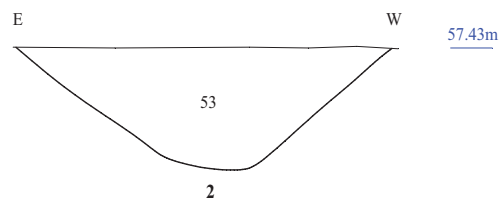
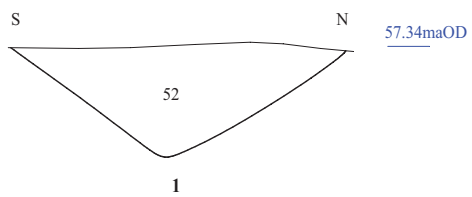
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Figure 4. Detail of trenches.



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Figure 5. Sections





Plate 1. Trench 1, looking North, Scales: 2m, 1m and 0.3m.



Plate 2. Trench 2, looking North East, Scales: 2m, 1m and 0.3m.

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Plates 1 - 2.**

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Plate 3. Trench 3, looking North East, Scales: 2m, 1m and 0.5m.



Plate 4. Trench 8, looking South, Scales: 2m, 1m and 0.3m.

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Plates 3 - 4.**

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Plate 5. Trench 2, Ditch 1, looking West, Scales: 1m and 0.3m.



Plate 6. Trench 2, Ditch 2, looking South, Scales: 1m and 0.3m.

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Plates 5 - 6.**

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Plate 7. Trench 3, Posthole 6 and Pit 7, looking North West, Scales: 1m, 0.5m and 0.1m.

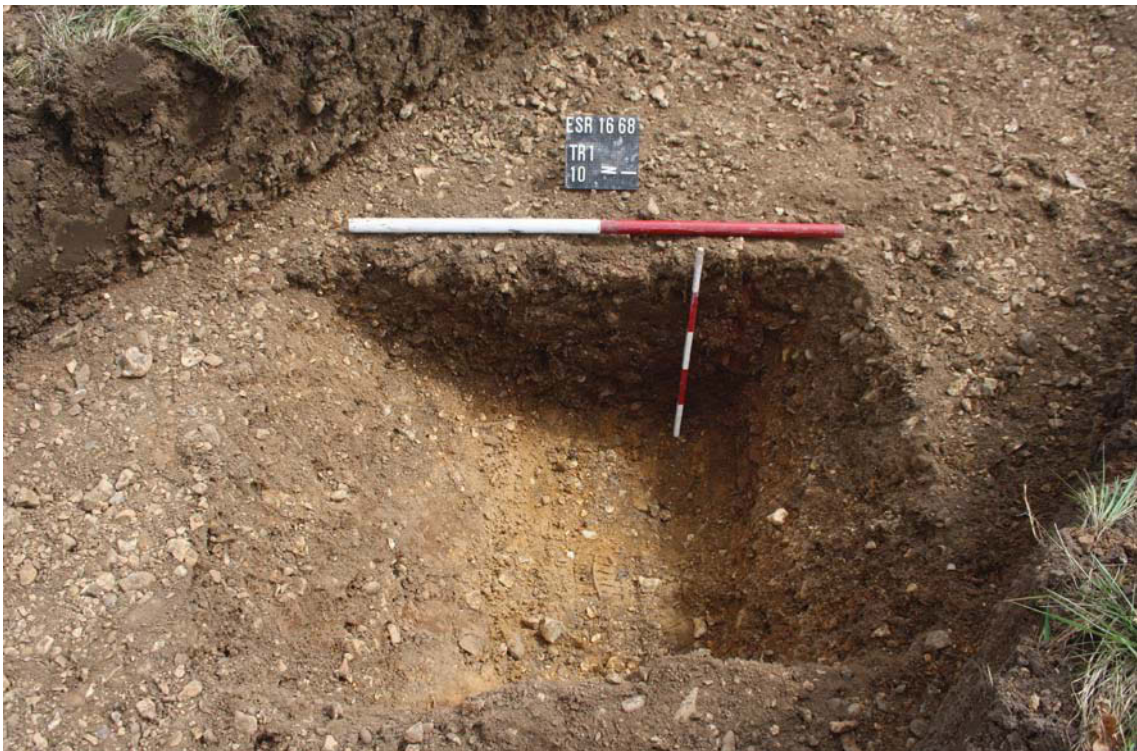


Plate 8. Trench 1, Ditch 10, looking East, Scales: 1m and 0.5m.

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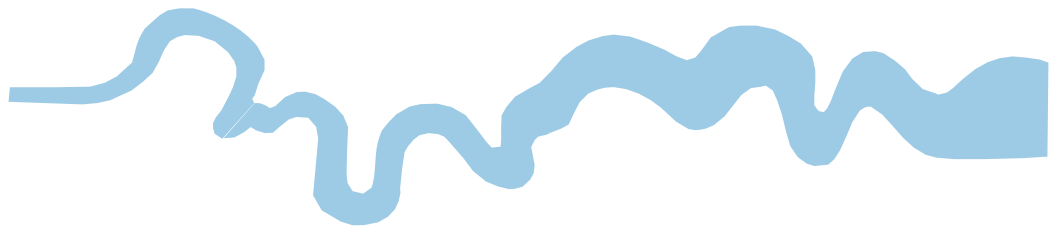
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Plates 7 - 8.**

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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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