

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

ARCHAEOLOGICAL

S E R V I C E S

**Witches Folly, Church Lane, Wickham,
Newbury, West Berkshire**

Archaeological Watching Brief

by Andy Taylor

Site Code: WFW14/218

(SU 3936 7153)

**Witches Folly, Church Lane, Wickham,
Newbury, West Berkshire**

An Archaeological Watching Brief

For Mr and Mrs G Tardi

by Andy Taylor

Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code WFW 14/218

May 2015

Summary

Site name: Witches Folly, Church Lane, Wickham, Newbury, West Berkshire

Grid reference: SU 3936 7153

Site activity: Watching Brief

Date and duration of project: 6th-7th May 2015

Project manager: Steve Ford

Site supervisor: Andy Taylor

Site code: WFW 14/218

Area of site: c. 140 sqm

Summary of results: 3rd-4th century Roman archaeology (a ditch and a pit) was observed. A large sheet of lead was recovered from the top of a ditch

Monuments identified: A Roman ditch and pit.

Location and reference of archive: The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services and will be deposited with the West Berkshire Museum in due course.

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Report edited/checked by: Steve Ford ✓ 05.08.15 Steve Preston ✓ 05.08.15

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Report 14/218

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out at Witches Folly, Church Lane, Wickham, Newbury, West Berkshire (SU 3936 7153) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr and Mrs G. Tardi of Witches Folly, Church Lane, Wickham, West Berkshire.

A planning consent (app 14/02381/HOUSE) has been gained for another application (15/00212/HOUSE) made to West Berkshire Council for an extension to the rear of the existing house, an entrance porch to the front, a terrace and new garage. The consent includes a condition (4) relating to archaeology which requires a watching brief to be carried out during groundworks.

This is in accordance with the Department for Communities and Local Government's National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF 2012) and West Berkshire Council's policies on archaeology. The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Mr Alex Godden, Archaeology Officer with West Berkshire Council. The fieldwork was undertaken by Andy Taylor between the 6th and 7th May 2015 and the site code is WFW 14/218. The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited at the West Berkshire Museum in due course.

Location, topography and geology

The site is located on the western side of Church Lane, Wickham, West Berkshire directly opposite St Swithun's Church (Figs 1 and 2). It is a flat parcel of land located on the garden to the rear and side of the property. Church Lane lies to the east with fields to the west, north and south. The underlying geology is mapped as Reading Beds (mottled clay and sand) (BGS 1947) which, along with a band of gravel, was observed across the area. The site lies at a height of c. 162m above Ordnance Datum.

Archaeological background

The archaeological potential for the site stems from its location within the environs of Wickham. It lies relatively close to Ermin Street, the Roman road between Silchester and Cirencester (Margary 1973, route 41; see Fig. 1)).

The place name 'Wickham' is of Saxon origin, but often indicates the presence of an existing Roman settlement (Cameron 1996). There are a number of Roman pottery finds, coins and a building recorded to the north of the proposal site and it is clear that a Roman settlement is present in the vicinity (Mundin and Pine 2010). A nearby evaluation at Rectory Cottages did not reveal any archaeological deposits (Taylor 2004). The site lies to the south of the current core of the village but is opposite the church (Richards 1978), which is often considered to lie close to the historic (medieval) core of a settlement, which may be present here with the post-medieval and current settlement having drifted northwards over time.

Objectives and methodology

The purpose of the watching brief was to excavate and record any archaeological deposits or finds affected by the new construction work. In general the watching brief was to involve examination of any areas of ground reduction, the digging of foundation trenches for the new structure and the digging of any deep trenches for services as necessary.

All foundation trenches for the extension were observed, which were dug by a small 360° type machine fitted with a toothless bucket (Pl. 1), and all spoilheaps were monitored for finds. The excavated features are summarized in Appendix 1.

Results

The foundation trenches measured 0.70m wide and were dug to a depth of *c.* 1m (Fig. 3). The stratigraphy observed consisted of 0.30m of topsoil, which had already been graded off prior to the site visits, above 0.20m of subsoil overlying 0.15m of gravel natural, overlying clayey sand natural.

A pit (1) observed in the central foundation trench was 1.56m wide and 0.68m deep (Fig. 4). Its dark grey sandy clay fill (52) produced four sherds of later Roman pottery, a piece of animal bone and two pieces of tile.

A ditch aligned approximately NW–SE was observed in the two southernmost trenches (Pl. 2). It was not possible to measure the feature's width accurately in the trench, due to its diagonal alignment, but it was approximately 0.8m wide, and between 0.50m and 0.67m deep and contained two fills. The southernmost part (2) produced three sherds of Roman pottery, 10 pieces of animal bone, a piece of tile and two pieces of iron slag from its secondary fill (53), which was a dark grey silty sandy clay. Its primary fill (54) was a mid yellow grey gravelly silt but this did not produce any finds. The other part of the ditch (3) again had two fills (55 and 56) with 55 containing a large flat sheet of lead.

Finds

Pottery by Jane Timby

The archaeological watching brief resulted in the recovery of a small assemblage of 19 sherds of pottery, weighing 362g, dating to the later Roman period. Pottery was recovered from two cuts; a pit and a ditch, and from the subsoil. The material is of variable condition with several larger well preserved sherds. The overall average sherd weight is high at 19g.

The assemblage was scanned to assess its likely chronology and quantified by sherd count and weight for each recorded context (Appendix 2). Where relevant the codes used in the National Roman fabric reference collection are used (Tomber and Dore 1998).

All the assemblage is Roman, with the emphasis being towards the later Roman period. The assemblage comprises a mixture of regional imports and local grey wares most notably from the Alice Holt industry (ALHRE) on the Surrey–Hampshire border. The regional imports include Oxfordshire colour-coated ware (OXF RS); New Forest ware (NFO RS; NFO WH and possibly a sherd of NFO RE) and Dorset black burnished ware (DOR BB1). The only sherd which cannot be sourced is a rim from a cornice rim beaker in a fine sandy grey ware. A variety of forms are present including a curved-wall dish in ALH RE with diagonal burnished line decoration on the interior and exterior surface; a flanged wall bowl (Young 1977, form C51) in OXF RS; a conical flanged-rim bowl in DOR BB1 and further jars and a dish in ALH RE (Lyne and Jefferies 1979, type 6B).

The small groups associated with pit 1 and ditch 2, suggest a 4th century date of abandonment. The material from the subsoil appears to include material spanning the 2nd through to the later 3rd-4th centuries.

Animal Bone by Ceri Falys

A small assemblage of animal bone was recovered from two contexts within the investigated area. A total of 11 fragments, weighing 92g were present for analysis (Appendix 3). The overall preservation of the remains was good, although a moderate degree of fragmentation was present. All elements identified originated from a large sized animal(s) (cattle or horse). The single fragment from pit 1 (52) was a piece of scapula from an unidentified large animal. Midshaft fragments of large animal unsided tibia and rib were also present in ditch 2 (53). A single diagonal cut mark is present on the visceral surface of the rib shaft. The remaining seven pieces of bone from ditch (53) were cranial in origin, with all but one identified as pieces of cattle horn core. No further information could be retrieved from this small assemblage of animal bone.

Ceramic Building Materials by Danielle Milbank

A total of 3 fragments of ceramic building material (a total of 560g) were recovered during the evaluation (Appendix 4). These were all tile pieces of Roman date. The condition of the majority of the fragments was fair, slightly abraded but not highly fragmented. The pieces were examined under x10 magnification.

Deposit 52 (fill of pit 1) contained 2 fragments of tile of a medium soft fine clay fabric with moderate coarse and fine sandy and occasional fine groggy inclusions and an orange red colour. One piece is uneven in form and is 25mm thick. The second piece is of a similar but slightly harder fabric, and has a flange on one side indicating that it is a *tegula* (roof tile) fragment. The flange profile is square, and the thickness is 24mm. These forms were common throughout the Roman period and are not closely dateable.

The fragment from ditch 2 (deposit 53) comprises a medium hard, sandy fabric, 15mm thick but with broken upper and lower surfaces, so the form could not be determined. The piece is not closely dateable.

The tegula is suggestive of a tiled-roof building having existed on or near the site. However, such material was often reused in walls or wall foundations before eventually being discarded.

Slag by Steve Crabb

Two pieces of undiagnostic iron slag were recovered from the fill of ditch 2 weighing 114g.

Fired Clay by Andy Taylor

Five pieces of fired clay were recovered from the site weighing a total of 12g. None of these showed any diagnostic traits.

Metalwork by Andy Taylor

A large sheet of lead was recovered from the top of the ditch (3). This is a large flat piece measuring 1.08m in length, 0.65m wide and 0.01m thick, with a weight well in excess of 50kg. No discernible markings were visible on the surface, although a possible curved edge was visible at one end. This may originally have been from a coffin or possible tank (such as a baptismal font) that had been flattened in antiquity, although this is difficult to determine.

Conclusion

The watching brief identified has identified a small amount of archaeological deposits of 3rd-4th Century Roman date, probably indicating that there must be an occupation site in the near vicinity. The deposits are slightly later than those identified at the nearby Wickham House, some 200m to the east (Mundin and Pine 2010). This may be from two separate periods of activity or a shifting continual occupation, but as so little of either site was excavated, the chronological difference may be more apparent than real. In either case, this could possibly indicate a focus of activity beneath the present church with outlying deposits identified in these two sites (Fig. 5). The ditch alignment here would be parallel to the Roman road to the north, although at some 160m distant that may be too far for it to be marking the rear edge of an occupation plot alongside the road.

The lead sheet is most probably from a coffin, which are moderately common finds in later Roman Britain (Toller 1977; Jones and Mattingley 2002, map 8.34) and may suggest a Christian burial rite, and although this is by no means certain, it would also tally with the late Roman date for the ditch. The other possibility, that it came from a lead tank or baptismal font, also tends towards the same conclusion. A lead tank with a Christian Chi-Rho symbol is known from a late Roman well at Dean's Farm, near Reading, not far to the east of Wickham (Pike 1989, 50). There is no apparent connection with the present church adjacent to the site, which, although it has a pre-Norman tower, is unlikely to be earlier than 11th century (VCH 1924, 116–25), but coupled with the place name evidence, which suggests the early Saxons knew they were settling on the location of a Roman settlement, the possibility of continuity not only of settlement but also of Christianity, becomes intriguing.

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APPENDIX 1: Catalogue of Features

<i>Cut</i>	<i>Fill(s)</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Dating Evidence</i>
1	52	Pit	Roman	Pottery
2	53, 54	Ditch	Roman	Pottery
3	55, 56	Ditch	Roman	Same as 2

APPENDIX 2: Catalogue of Pottery

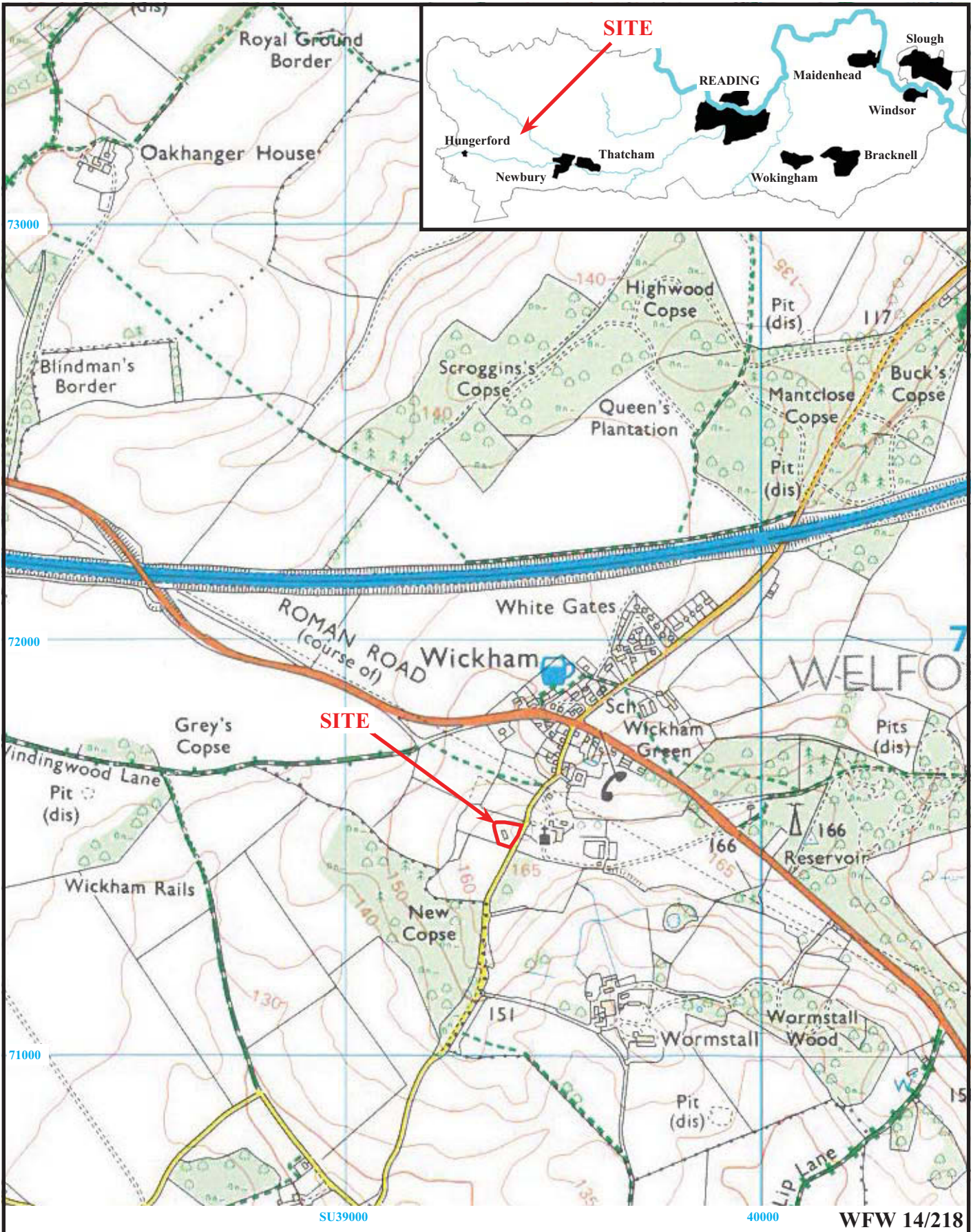
<i>Cut</i>	<i>Cxt</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Fabric</i>	<i>Form</i>	<i>Wt</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Date (century AD)</i>
0	51	subsoil	NFORS		6	1	late 3rd-4th
0	51	subsoil	DORBB1	flanged rim bowl	13	1	late 3rd-4th
0	51	subsoil	ALHRE	DISH	130	9	late 2nd-3rd
0	51	subsoil	OXFRS	Young 1977, C51	29	1	late 3rd-4th
1	52	pit	NFOWH	base	58	1	late 3rd-4th
1	52	pit	GYFSY	beaker	16	1	2nd
1	52	pit	NFORE?		25	1	late 3rd-4th
1	52	pit	ALHRE	jar	18	1	3rd-4th
2	53	ditch	ALHRE	dish	67	3	late 3rd-4th
Total					362	19	

APPENDIX 3: Catalogue of Animal Bone

<i>Cut</i>	<i>Deposit</i>	<i>No frags</i>	<i>Wt (g)</i>	<i>LAR</i>
1	52	1	9	1
2	53	10	83	10
Total / MNI		11	92	1 cow

APPENDIX 4: Catalogue of Ceramic Building Material

<i>Cut</i>	<i>Fill</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>Wt (g)</i>
1	52	Tile	2	454
2	53	Tile	1	94



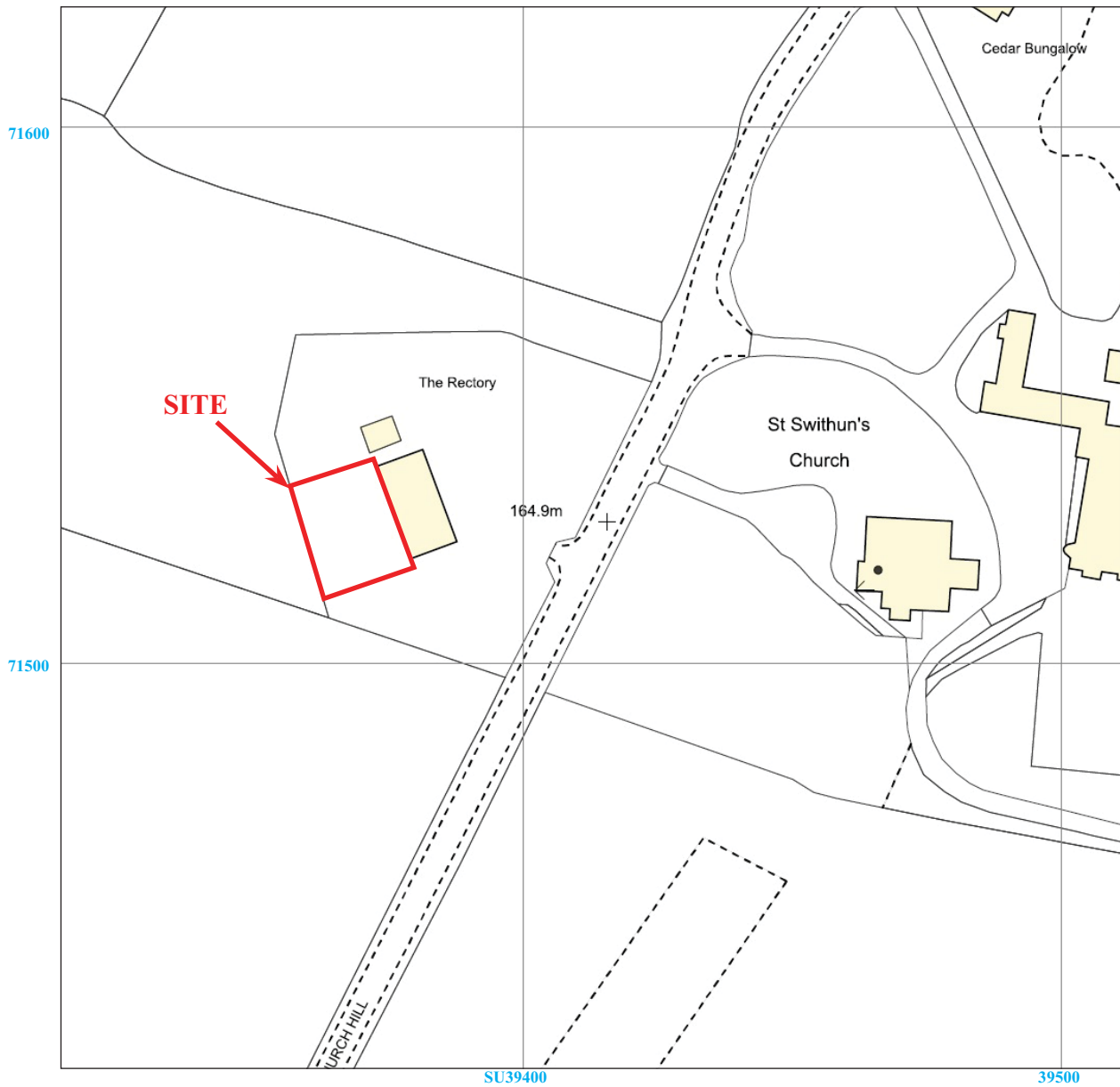
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Figure 1. Location of site within Wickham and Berkshire.

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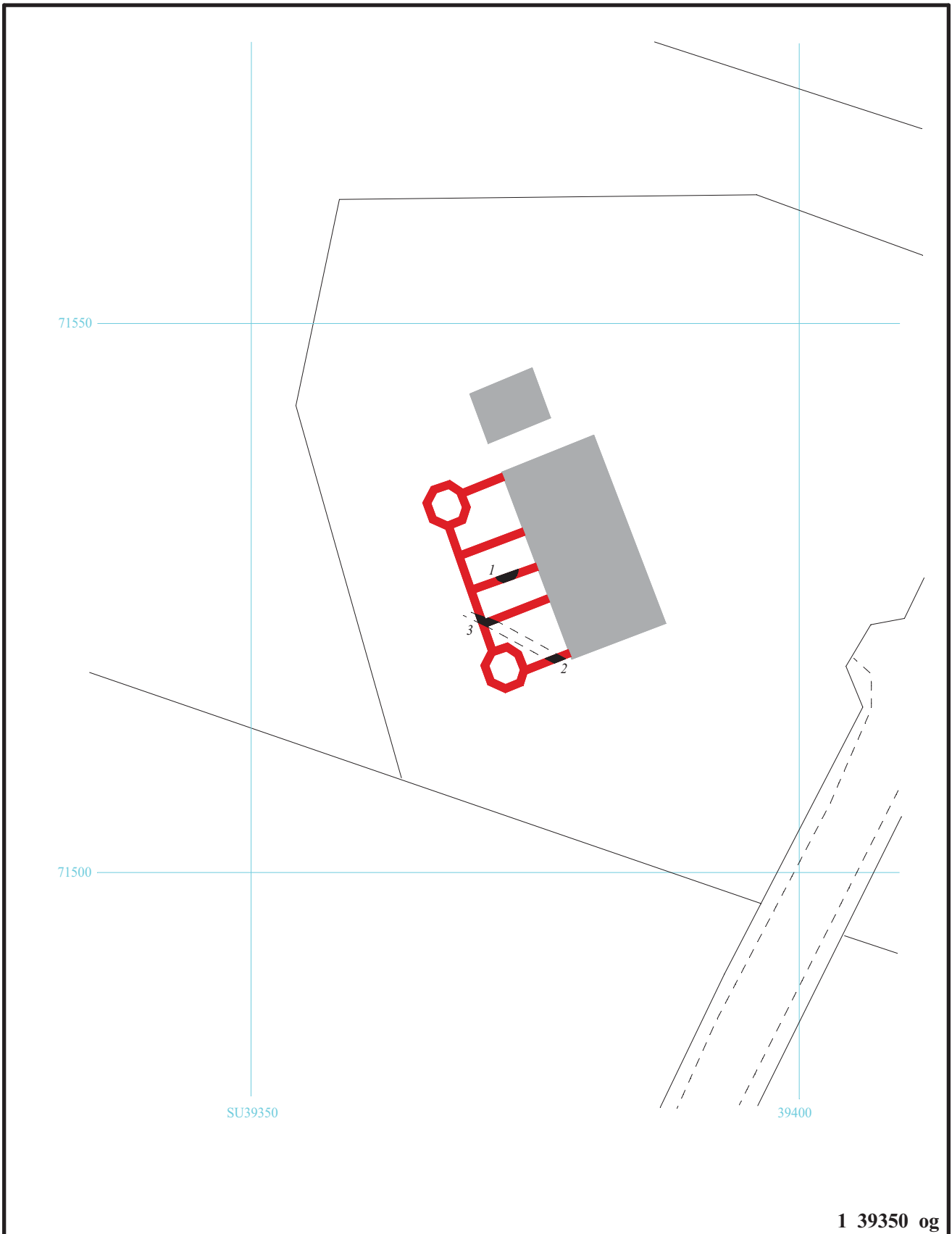
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Figure 2. Detailed location of site.

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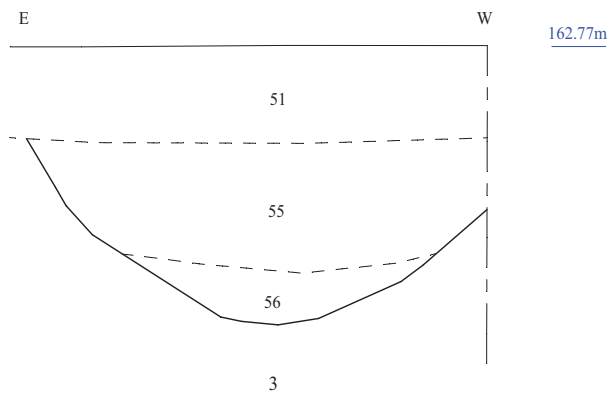
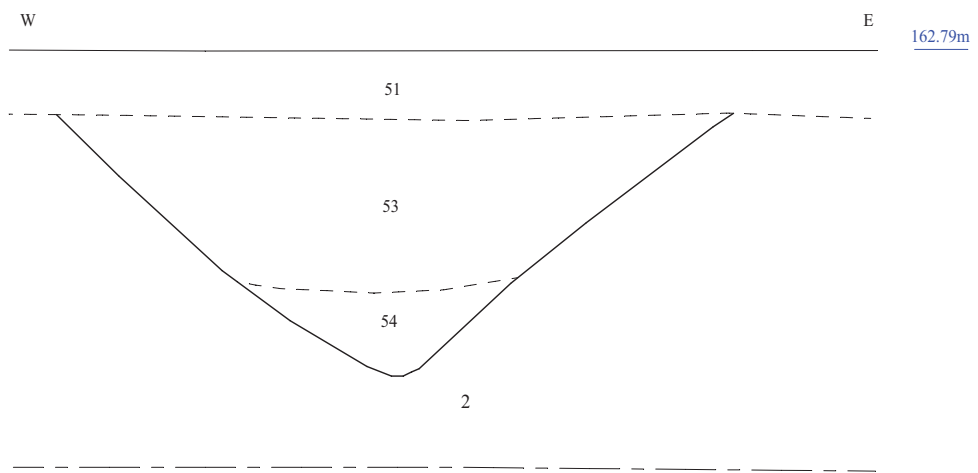
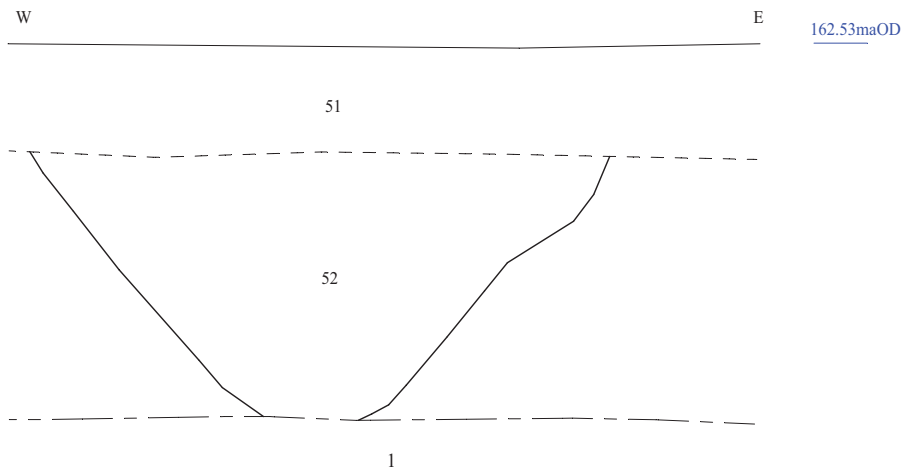
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Figure 3. Location of observed area.





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Figure 4. Sections.





Plate 1. View over footings, looking south east, Scales: 2m and 1m.



Plate 2. Ditch 2, looking north, Scales: 2m and 1m.

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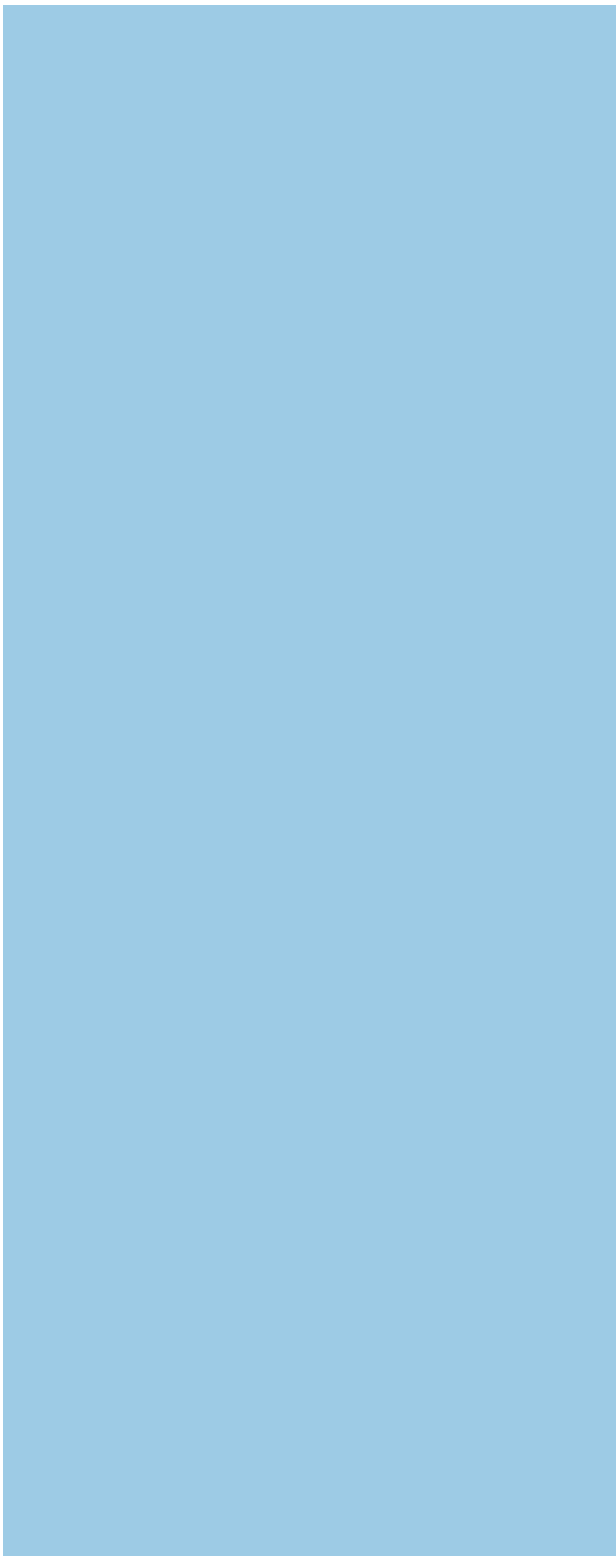
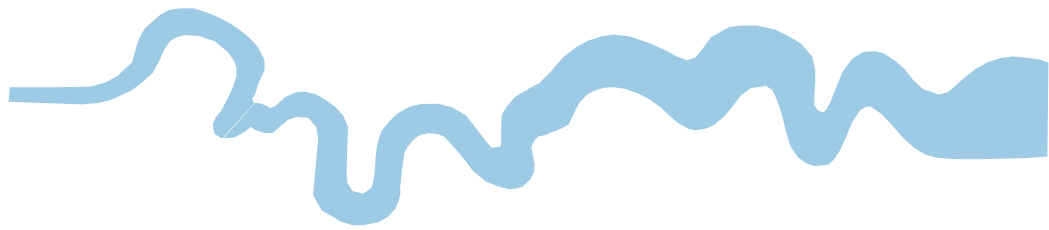
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Plates 1 - 2.**

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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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