

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

ARCHAEOLOGICAL

S E R V I C E S

**Land off Bedford Road, Holwell,
Hitchin, Hertfordshire**

Archaeological Watching Brief

by Luís Esteves

Site Code: BRH15/115

(TL 1688 3240)

**Land off Bedford Road, Holwell,
Hitchin, Hertfordshire**

An Archaeological Watching Brief

For Memoria Ltd

by Luís Esteves

Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code BRH 15/115

January 2017

Summary

Site name: Land off Bedford Road, Holwell, Hitchin, Hertfordshire

Grid reference: TL 1688 3240

Site activity: Watching Brief

Date and duration of project: 16th – 18th August 2016; 5th – 10th January 2017

Project manager: Steve Ford

Site supervisor: Luís Esteves

Site code: BRH 15/115

Area of site: c. 3ha

Summary of results: The stripping for the access road and the digging for the pond area and foundations for the crematorium building were observed and recorded. No archaeological features were observed during the course of the watching brief.

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

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Report edited/checked by: Steve Ford✓ 13.01.17 Steve Preston✓ 12.01.17

Land off Bedford Road, Holwell, Hitchin, Hertfordshire An Archaeological Watching Brief

by Luís Esteves

Report 15/115d

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out on land off Bedford Road, Holwell, Hitchin, Hertfordshire (TL 1688 3234) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Michael Hackney of Memoria Ltd, The Pool House, Bicester Road, Stratton Audley, Oxfordshire, OX27 9BS.

Planning permission (15/01486/1) has been gained from North Hertfordshire District Council to construct a crematorium with associated parking, access road and gardens. The consent is subject to a condition (14) which requires a watching brief to be maintained during the groundworks.

This is in accordance with the Department for Communities and Local Government's *National Planning Policy Framework* (NPPF 2012) and the District Council's policies on archaeology. A preliminary geophysical survey (Beaverstock and Dawson 2015) and archaeological evaluation (Beaverstock and Bray 2015) had already been undertaken as part of this process. The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Mr Andy Instone, Historic Environment Advisor for Hertfordshire County Council. The fieldwork was undertaken by Luís Esteves and Ellen McManus-Fry between 16th August 2016 and 10th January 2017. The site code is BRH15/115.

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

Location, topography and geology

The site is located *c.* 900m to the south of Holwell and *c.* 1.5km to the north-west of Ickleford (Fig. 1). The area to be developed covers approximately 3ha and is situated at a height of 65m above Ordnance Datum. It is bordered to the west and east by farmland, to the north by a private road and to the south by Holwell Quarry. The site sits on a relatively flat parcel of land which was being used for agriculture. The underlying geology is mapped as Anglian Glacial Till, a salty chalky clay (BGS 1995) and this was observed on site.

Archaeological background

A desktop study (Birmingham 2015) highlighted that, while there are no known heritage assets within the boundaries of the site, it lies within a wider area with known periods of occupation including Prehistoric, Iron Age, Roman and Medieval. Observations and subsequent excavations at Holwell Quarry to the south-west of the site recorded the presence of Iron Age and Roman occupation and burial deposits as well as evidence for medieval ridge and furrow. A geophysical (magnetic) survey (Beaverstock and Dawson 2015) was conducted on the site which revealed a number of anomalies including a ditch tentatively dated to the Roman period on the basis of three sherds of pottery. A single sherd of prehistoric pottery was also recovered.

Objectives and methodology

The purpose of the watching brief was to excavate and record any archaeological deposits affected by the groundworks. This was to involve examination of all the areas of intrusive groundworks, in particular the stripping of overburden and the digging of foundation trenches and the pond area. Any archaeological deposits threatened by the groundworks were to be excavated and recorded with sufficient time allowed within the groundworks schedule without causing undue delay.

Results

Building foundations trenches.

The foundations for the new building (crematorium) were observed and recorded (Fig 2; Pl 1). They were typically 0.6m wide with a depth between 0.85m in the east and 1.25m in the west. The stratigraphy revealed was variable with 0.15–0.2m of topsoil overlying a 0.2m–0.3m mid yellow silty clay subsoil overlying a light yellow/brown silty clay with occasional chalk inclusions (natural geology) (Pl. 2). No archaeological features or finds were observed.

Car Park (Pls 3 and 4)

Topsoil was stripped over an area for an access road and two carparks (Fig. 2). This work did not penetrate below topsoil level and thus the archaeologically relevant horizon was not exposed here.

Pond (Pls 5 and 6)

In the north-east of the site construction of a small pond related to the garden area was observed and recorded again by monitoring the initial topsoil and overburden removal (Fig. 2). The pond had an area of 0.07ha and was 1.25m deep. The pond excavation showed a stratigraphy similar to the rest of the site, 0.1m–0.15m of topsoil overlying a 0.38m mid yellow brown silty clay subsoil overlying a light yellow brown silty clay with occasional chalk inclusions natural geology. No archaeological features or finds were observed.

Finds

No finds of archaeological interest were observed during the watching brief.

Conclusion

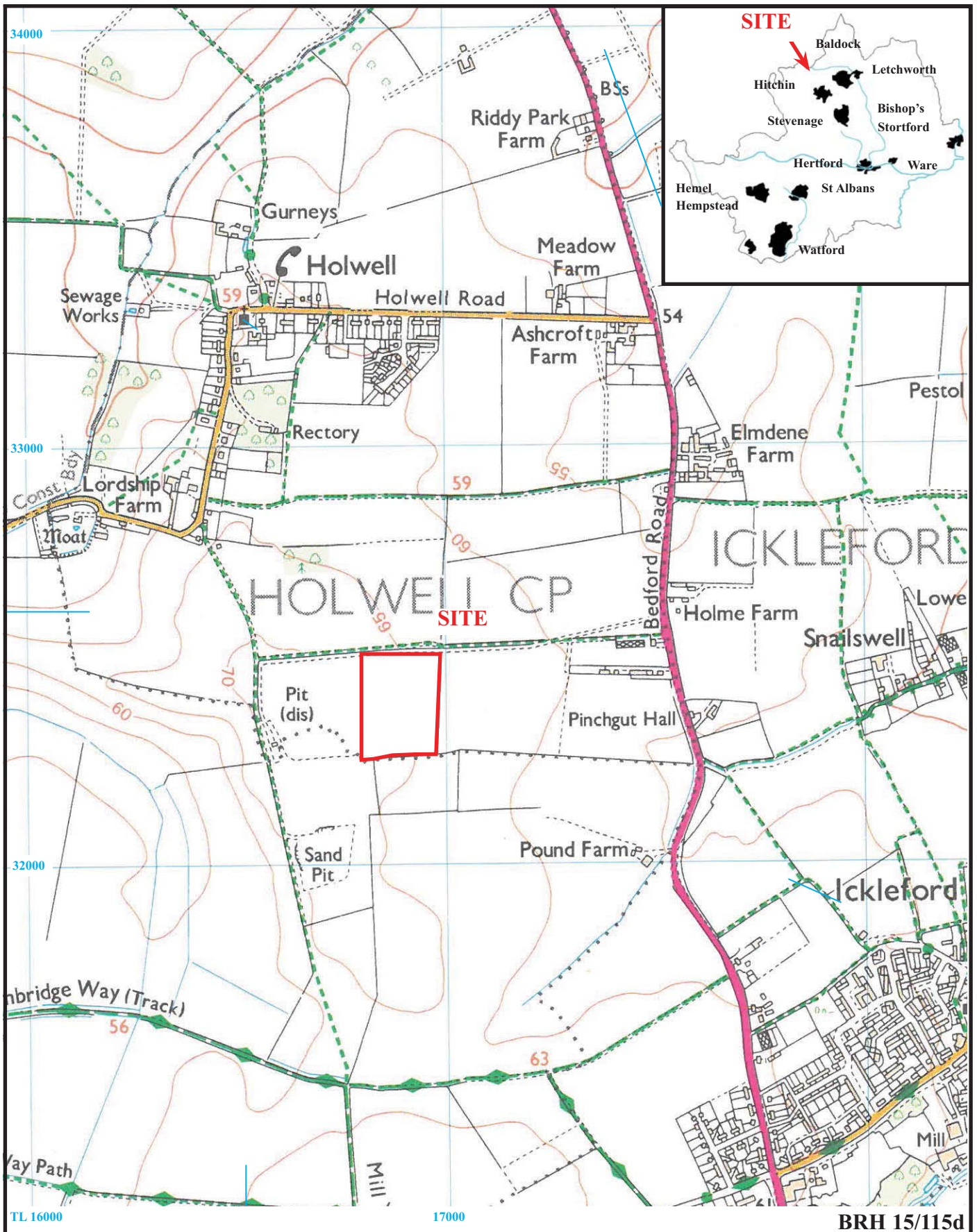
The previous archaeological evaluation and geophysical survey undertaken before these groundworks commenced identified some linear features (a Roman ditch and undated gullies) in the northern and eastern parts of the site). However, these were not revealed during the watching brief as the access road and car park zones which may have encountered them were only stripped of a shallow depth of overburden (topsoil only). Areas of deeper groundworks, namely the location of the crematorium and the pond revealed no archaeological deposits.

References

- Beaverstock, K 2015, 'Land off Bedford Road, Holwell, Hitchin, Hertfordshire, Archaeological Evaluation', Thames Valley Archaeological Services report **15/115c**, Reading
- Beaverstock, K and Dawson, T, 2015, 'Land off Bedford Road, Holwell, Hitchin, Hertfordshire, geophysical survey (magnetic)', Thames Valley Archaeological Services report **15/115b**, Reading
- Birmingham, N, 2015, 'Land off Bedford Road, Holwell, Hitchin, Hertfordshire: An archaeological desk-based assessment', Thames Valley Archaeological Services report **15/115**, Reading
- BGS, 1995, *British Geological Survey*, 1:50,000, Sheet 221, Solid and Drift Edition, Keyworth
- NPPF, 2012, *National Planning Policy Framework*, Dept Communities and Local Govt, London

APPENDIX 1: HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT RECORD SUMMARY SHEET

Site name and address: Land off Bedford Road, Holwell, Hitchin, Hertfordshire		
County: Hertfordshire	District: North Hertfordshire District	
Village/Town: Holwell	Parish: Holwell	
Planning application reference: 15/01486/1		
Client name, address, and tel. no.: Mr Michael Hackney, Memoria Ltd, The Pool House, Bicester Road, Stratton Audley, Oxfordshire OX27 9BS. 01869278780		
Nature of application: Construction of a crematorium with associated gardens and parking.		
Present land use: Agricultural (barley)		
Size of application area: 4.62ha	Size of area investigated: 3ha	
NGR (to 8 figures): TL 1688 3239		
Site code (if applicable): BRH 15/115		
Site director/Organization: Luís Esteves / Thames Valley Archaeological Services		
Type of work: Archaeological Watching Brief		
Date of work:	Start: 16/08/16	Finish: 10/01/17
Location of finds & site archive/Curating museum: TVAS, 47-49 De Beauvoir Road, Reading, RG1 5NR / North Hertfordshire Museums Resource Centre		
Related HER Nos: n/a	Periods represented: n/a	
<p>Relevant previous summaries/reports</p> <p>Birmingham, N, 2015, 'Land off Bedford Road, Holwell, Hitchin, Hertfordshire: An archaeological desk-based assessment', Thames Valley Archaeological Services report 15/115, Reading</p> <p>Beaverstock, K and Dawson, T 2015, Land off Bedford Road, Holwell, Hitchin, Hertfordshire, geophysical (magnetic) survey, Thames Valley Archaeological Services report 15/115b, Reading</p> <p>Beaverstock, K 2015, 'Land off Bedford Road, Holwell, Hitchin, Hertfordshire, Archaeological Evaluation', Thames Valley Archaeological Services report 15/115c, Reading</p>		
<p>Summary of fieldwork results:</p> <p>Looking to the archaeological evaluation and geophysical survey undertaken before the groundworks some linear features were identified (a Roman ditch at southeast and undated gullies in the northern and eastern parts of the site), but that was not revealed during the watching brief due to the low depth of the access road and car park (just topsoil stripped) and the location of the crematorium building (almost in the centre of the site where no features were revealed).</p>		
Author of summary: Luís Esteves		Date of summary: 12/01/17

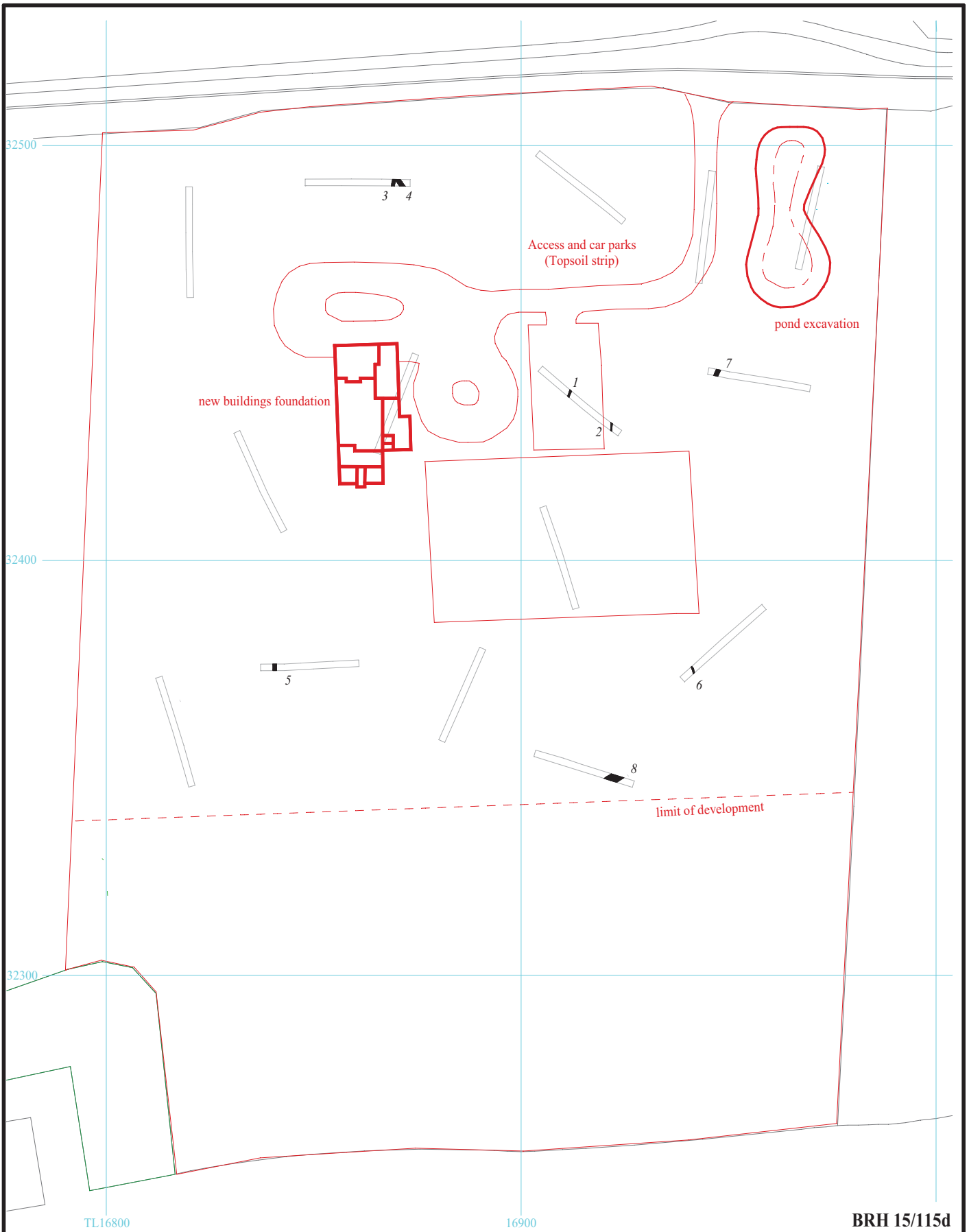


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Figure 1. Location of site within Hertfordshire and Holwell.

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Figure 2. Location of observed areas in relation to evaluation trenches.





Plate 1. Footing trenches, looking north east, Scales: 2m and 1m.



Plate 2. Representative section in footing trench, looking east, Scales: 2m and 1m.

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Plates 1 - 2.

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Plate 3. Topsoil strip for car parking area, looking east, Scales: 2m and 1m.



Plate 4. Topsoil strip over overflow car park, looking south west, Scales: 2m and 1m.

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Plates 3 - 4.

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Plate 5. Full depth excavation of pond with visible section, looking west.



Plate 4. Grading of pond edges, looking north west.

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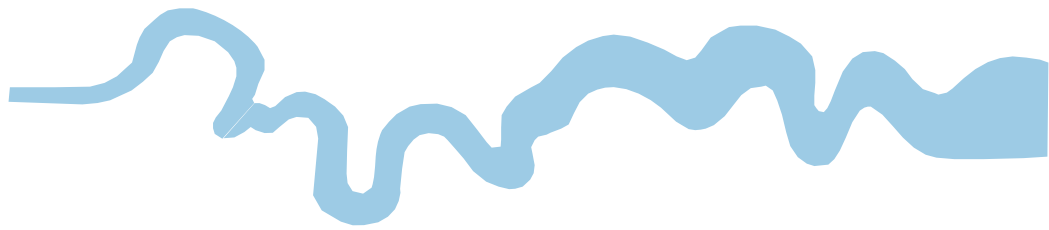
Land off Bedford Road, Holwell, Hitchin,
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Plates 5 - 6.

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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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