

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

ARCHAEOLOGICAL

S E R V I C E S

**Land at Aylesbury Road,
Aston Clinton, Buckinghamshire**

Archaeological Excavation

by Luis Esteves

Site Code: ACB17/224

(SP 8735 1220 and SP 8725 1234)

Land at Aylesbury Road, Aston Clinton, Buckinghamshire

An Archaeological Excavation

For Shanly Homes Ltd

by Luís Esteves
Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code ACB 17/224

January 2018

Summary

Site name: Land at Aylesbury Road, Aston Clinton, Buckinghamshire

Grid reference: Overall site SP 8698 1223 (Area A: SP 8735 1220; Area B SP 8725 1234)

Site activity: Excavation

Date and duration of project: 16th to 27th November 2017

Project coordinator: Tim Dawson

Site supervisor: Luís Esteves

Site code: ACB 17/224

Area of site: Area A 430 sq m; Area B 790 sq m.

Summary of results: The fieldwork comprised excavation of two areas on the site. One area revealed two ditches, one of Middle Bronze Age date and one with Early Roman pottery. The other revealed only late post-medieval features.

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

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Land at Aylesbury Road, Aston Clinton, Buckinghamshire An Archaeological Excavation

by Luís Esteves

with contributions by Paul Blinkhorn, Jo Pine and Lizzie Lewins

Report 17/224

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological excavation carried out at Land at Aylesbury Road, Aston Clinton, Buckinghamshire (SP 8698 1223, Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Ben Stephenson of ACD Environmental Ltd, on behalf of Shanly Homes Ltd, Sorbon, Aylesbury End, Beaconsfield, Buckinghamshire HP9 1LW.

Outline planning permission (15/03786/AOP) has been gained from Aylesbury Vale District Council to erect new houses on a c.3ha parcel of land. The archaeological potential of the site has recently been assessed by geophysical survey and evaluation trenching and revealed a small volume of archaeological deposits of Middle Bronze Age and possibly Roman date along with various post-medieval features (Michaels 2017). As a result, two small areas were required for excavation. This is in accordance with the Department for Communities and Local Government's National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF 2012), and the District's policies on archaeology.

The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Mr Phil Markham, Senior Archaeology Officer for Buckinghamshire County Council, the archaeological adviser to the District. The fieldwork was undertaken by Luís Esteves, Cosmo Bacon and Ashley Kruger between 16th and 27th November 2017 and the site code is ACB 17/224.

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

Location, topography and geology

The site lies to the west of the village of Aston Clinton approximately 3km south-east of Aylesbury (Fig. 1). The northern boundary of the site fronts onto Aylesbury Road, which follows the course of a section of the Roman Akeman Street. This road linked *Corinium Dobunorum* (Cirencester) with *Verulamium* (St Albans). Residential property boundaries and fields lie to the south, west and east. The underlying geology is recorded as Gault and

Upper Greensand with no superficial deposits recorded (BGS 1990). The land is fairly flat at an elevation of 90–92m above Ordnance Datum (aOD).

Archaeological background

The archaeological potential of the site has been highlighted in a desk-based assessment (ACD 2015). In summary, the site lies within the Vale of Aylesbury, a topographic zone whose archaeology was relatively poorly understood until recently, at least for pre-medieval periods, when compared to the chalk uplands of the Chilterns to the south (e.g., Farley 1995; Kidd 2007). Archaeological monitoring of large scale infra-structure projects (e.g., Ford *et al.* 2004) has shown that a lack of opportunity for survey was perhaps the main reason for this gap in knowledge and more recent projects have revealed a high density of Iron Age and Roman sites.

Evidence for the early prehistoric periods is sparse in the area around Aston Clinton although artefact scatters have been found during systematic fieldwalking surveys, such as in advance of the construction of the Aston Clinton bypass to the north of the site. Recent archaeological fieldwork in Aston Clinton and along the A41 has demonstrated that the area was extensively settled during the Iron Age and Roman periods. The archaeological investigations associated with the construction of the by-pass revealed evidence for Bronze Age, Iron Age, Roman and Saxon occupation. The three main sites identified comprised a late Bronze Age to early Iron Age settlement at Woodlands Roundabout to the north-west of the site; middle/late Bronze Age cremations and Iron Age to Roman settlement at Lower Icknield Way near Buckland to the north-east; and late Iron Age settlement and an early Saxon cemetery at Tring Hill to the south-east (RPS 2005). Archaeological investigations at the Arla Diary site to the north identified a further late Iron Age to Roman settlement some 500m from the site. Other investigations nearby have also produced Roman evidence (eg Holt 2009; Simmonds and Walker 2014; Simmonds 2015; CA 2016).

Excavation at Stratford Close (Stansbie 2016), immediately east of the southern end of the current site, provided evidence of a Middle Bronze Age enclosure ditch, along with several pits. By the Late Bronze Age or (more likely early Iron Age) this enclosure had been replaced by a field system, orientated north-west/south-east. By the Middle Iron Age the area was again occupied, with a small sub-circular ditched enclosure, pits and postholes.

The villages of Aston Clinton and Buckland can be traced to the late Saxon period, having been recorded in Domesday Book of 1086. The only substantial discovery within the area dated to the Saxon period, however, is the mid-7th century cemetery at Tring Hill (RPS 2005). Several medieval moats are present in the local area, the

closest is the scheduled moated site to the north-west of Moat Farm, 700m north-west of the site. Occasional medieval features have also been recorded in archaeological investigations in the area (eg Chinock 2013).

The evaluation

Within the site itself, evaluation by geophysical survey and trial trenching (thirteen 30m-trenches) identified activity from the Middle Bronze Age, Roman and Post-medieval periods (GSB 2016; Michaels 2017). Most of the features in the trenches had not been identified by the geophysical survey. The Middle Bronze Age deposits and finds were interpreted as evidence for a probable settlement while the other periods were represented only by field boundaries.

Objectives and methodology

As a result of the evaluation, excavation was required in two parcels of land (A and B) within the overall development site (Fig. 3). These areas corresponded with the most important features found in the evaluation, particularly the Middle Bronze Age ditch in Area B. The purpose of the excavation was to excavate and record all archaeological deposits and features in these areas.

The general research aims of this project were:

- To produce relative and absolute dating and phasing for deposits and features recorded on the site;
- To establish the character of these deposits in an attempt to define functional areas on the site such as industrial, domestic, etc; and
- To produce information on the economy and local environment and compare and contrast this with the results of other excavations in the region.

Specific research objectives were to gather data to address the following questions:

- When was the site first utilised and when was it abandoned?
- What is the nature and extent of Middle Bronze activity within the site?
- Is the Middle Bronze Age ditch part of an enclosure, boundary feature or part of a field system?
- If the deposits reflect settlement is this enclosed or unenclosed? (or part enclosed?)
- What is the nature and extent of Roman activity on the site?
- Does the linear feature reflect the presence of a settlement or is it a boundary or field ditch? and
- What is the palaeoenvironmental setting of the area?

The two areas intended for excavation covered *c.*430 sq m (Area A) and *c.*790 sq m (Area B - Fig. 3; Pls. 1 and 2). The areas were stripped of topsoil and overburden using a 360° type machine fitted with a toothless ditching bucket and under constant archaeological supervision.

Results

The two areas were stripped as intended but with Area B slightly smaller than the original plan due to the presence of an overhead power cable to the southern end. The archaeological deposits observed were mainly

concentrated in Area B, with just six narrow modern gullies in Area A. No Roman deposits were observed in this area as the prior evaluation had suggested (Fig. 3). Based on artefacts recovered, Middle Bronze Age activity was identified in one ditch in Area B (based on nine sherds), confirming the evaluation results in this area. A second ditch was observed in this area; this was not identified in the evaluation and produced 57 sherds of 1st-2nd century Roman pottery.

The excavated features are summarized in Appendix 1.

Area A (Fig. 3; Pl. 1)

Six gullies were identified in this area, all aligned on a NW-SE axis, and three slots (7, 8 and 9) were excavated to confirm the interpretation from the evaluation, in which late Post-medieval dating evidence was present (Michaels 2017). Cut 8 in the east of the area was 0.6m wide and 0.2m deep, filled with a dark brown silty clay from which two pieces of modern concrete were collected. Cut 9 was excavated next to gully 1110 from the prior evaluation, was 0.25m wide and 0.12m deep, filled with the same silty clay producing pieces of modern glass and metal. All six gullies were parallel, not matching the line of Akeman Street to the north but sharing an alignment with modern boundaries further to the south-east. This along with the finds, suggest that these features are all modern.

In the evaluation trench (observed during the stripping of the area) one Roman sherd and two fragments of probably Roman building material were collected. However, no Roman deposits or finds were observed during the excavation of Area A and these Roman finds were probably residual.

Area B (Fig. 3 and 4; Pls 2, 3 and 4)

Two ditches and one posthole were observed and investigated in this area (Fig. 3). Ditch 101 was 11m long, 1.16m wide and 0.3m deep (Pl. 4). Two slots were excavated, a terminus (3) filled with a yellowish brown silty clay and no finds, and slot (5) with the same fill, producing nine sherds of Middle Bronze Age pottery. This slot was dug next to slot 803 from the evaluation that had produced 40 sherds from the same period (Michaels 2017).

Ditch 100 was 17m long, 1.05m wide and 0.36m deep (Pl. 3). Three slots were excavated (1, 2 and 6) but only slot 6 produced dating evidence. This was filled with a yellowish brown silty clay from which two sherds of Middle Bronze Age and 57 sherds of 1st-2nd century (Roman) pottery were recovered.

Posthole (4) in the centre of the area was 0.54m in diameter and 0.08m deep, filled with a yellowish grey silty clay. This feature was undated.

Finds

Pottery by Paul Blinkhorn

The pottery assemblage comprised 68 sherds with a total weight of 857g. It was all middle Bronze Age or early Roman. The pottery occurrence by number and weight of sherds per context by fabric type is shown in Appendix 2. Each date should be regarded as a *terminus post quem*.

Prehistoric

The following fabric was noted:

FP1: Flint. Moderate to dense calcined flint fragments up to 3mm. Middle Bronze Age. 11 sherds, 136g.

Flint-tempered fabrics are very typical of the middle Bronze Age ceramic tradition of the area, and were noted during excavations at nearby Walton (Evans 1989, 155) as well as in the evaluation at this site. One of the sherds (from context 56) has a finger-tipped applied strip which is typical of the “bucket urns” of the Deverel-Rimbury tradition of the middle Bronze Age (e.g. Knight 2002, fig. 12 no. 3). The sherds from that context all appear to be from the same vessel, so it is probably a primary deposit. One of the sherds from context 57 is from a fairly heavy rim with an upright profile and slashed decoration on the outer edge of the bead. It seems likely to be of a similar date.

Roman

The Roman assemblage was recorded using the coding system of the Milton Keynes Archaeological Unit type-series (Marney 1989), as follows:

F46: ‘Belgic’ and Later Grogged Wares, 1st – 2nd century. 57 sherds, 721g

All the sherds are from context 57 and all came from a single vessel, a jar with a simple everted rim which is typical of the tradition (eg. Marney 1989, fig. 35, no. 28). A few re-fits were noted, but most of the sherds did not join, and the vessel is not complete, with much of the rim and base not present.

Macrobotanical plant material and charcoal by Jo Pine

Six samples were processed from features excavated during the excavation. The samples were wet-sieved to 0.25mm and air dried and the resultant flots examined under a low-power binocular microscope at a magnification of x10. No cereal, charred seeds or charcoal were present in any of the samples.

Animal Bone by Lizzi Lewins

A small assemblage of animal bone (29 fragments), weighing a total of 224g was recovered during the course of the excavation. The bone was fragmented with some erosion noted. Much of the assemblage was unidentifiable with the exception of 4 fragments recovered from ditch slot 5 (deposit 56) which consisted of a partial radius shaft from a large mammal, a cattle molar and 2 refitted fragments of cattle molar. No further analysis was possible.

Conclusion

The excavation has revealed a small number of Post-medieval/modern linear features in Area A, and two ditches and a posthole in Area B, much of which was not identified by geophysical survey, but was revealed in the earlier evaluation trenches.

Ditch 101 produced Middle Bronze Age pottery, confirming the dating from the evaluation trench. However, it was not possible to confirm if it is part of an enclosure or a boundary feature. The quantity of pottery from this ditch - just nine sherds from the excavation, but with a further 40 from the evaluation, as well as two more sherds in Roman ditch 100, all in the same coarse flint-tempered ware) suggests occupation nearby. Although ditch 101 terminates close to ditch 100, this quantity of pottery seems sufficient to provide secure dating and so it seems most unlikely that the ditches were contemporary features.

Ditch 100 revealed a moderately large number of sherds dating from the 1st-2nd century confirming Roman activity on site, presumably as a part of an organised landscape. It seems less likely that this was related to the course of the major Roman road that passed right next to the site as the ditch is not closely aligned on the road.

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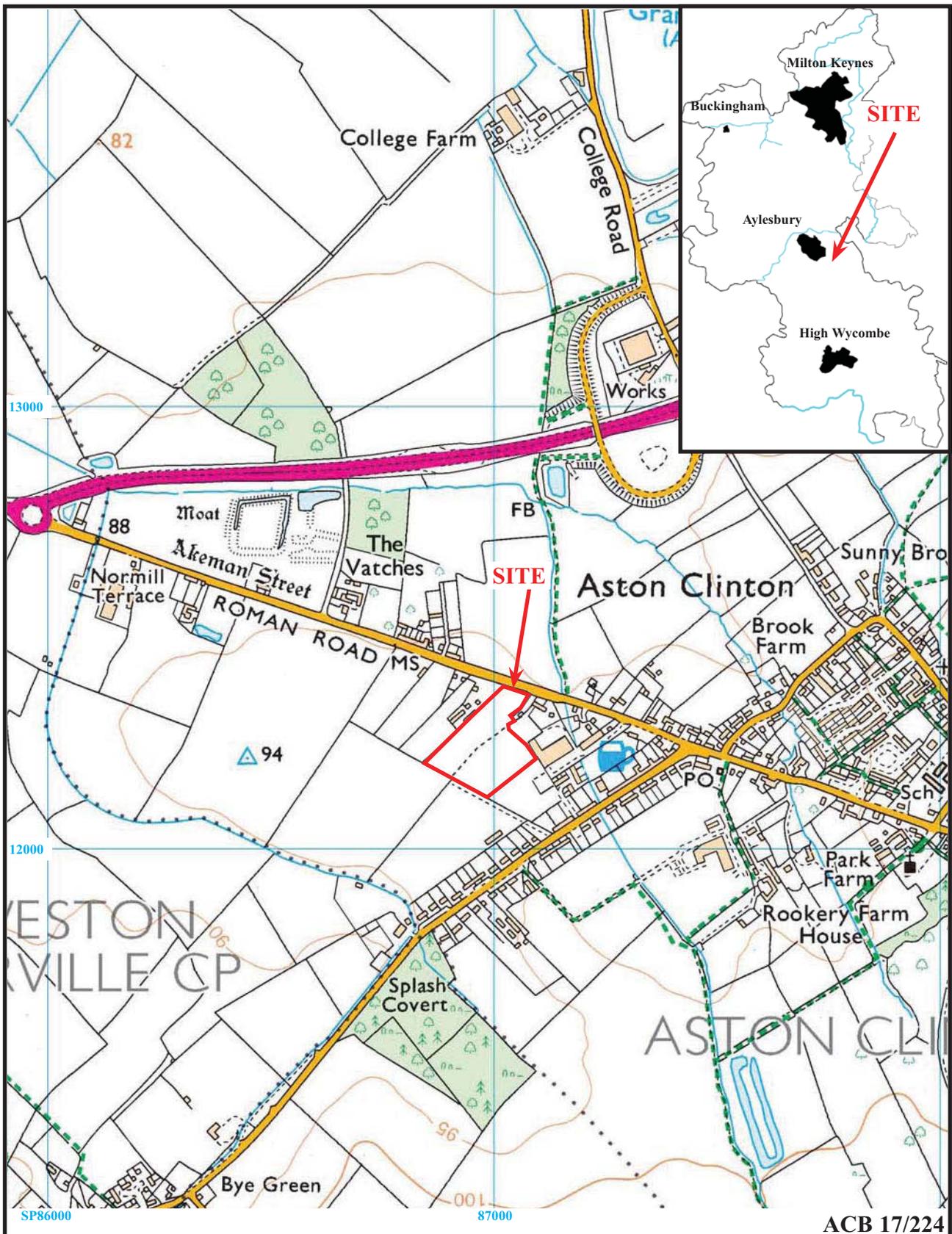
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APPENDIX 1: Catalogue of Excavated Features

<i>Group</i>	<i>Cut</i>	<i>Deposit</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Dating evidence</i>
100	1	52	Ditch	1st Century	Association
100	2	53	Ditch	1st Century	Association
101	3	54	Ditch terminus	Middle Bronze Age	Association
	4	55	Post hole		
101	5	56	Ditch	Middle Bronze Age	Pottery
100	6	57	Ditch	1st Century	Pottery
	7	58	Gully	Modern	
	8	59	Gully	Modern	
	9	60	Gully	Modern	

APPENDIX 2: Pottery occurrence by number and weight (in g) of sherds per context by fabric type

<i>Cut</i>	<i>Deposit</i>	F46		F46	
		<i>No</i>	<i>Wt</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Wt</i>
5	56	9	116	-	-
6	57	2	20	57	721
	Total	11	136	57	721



**Land at Aylesbury Road, Aston Clinton,
Buckinghamshire, 2017**

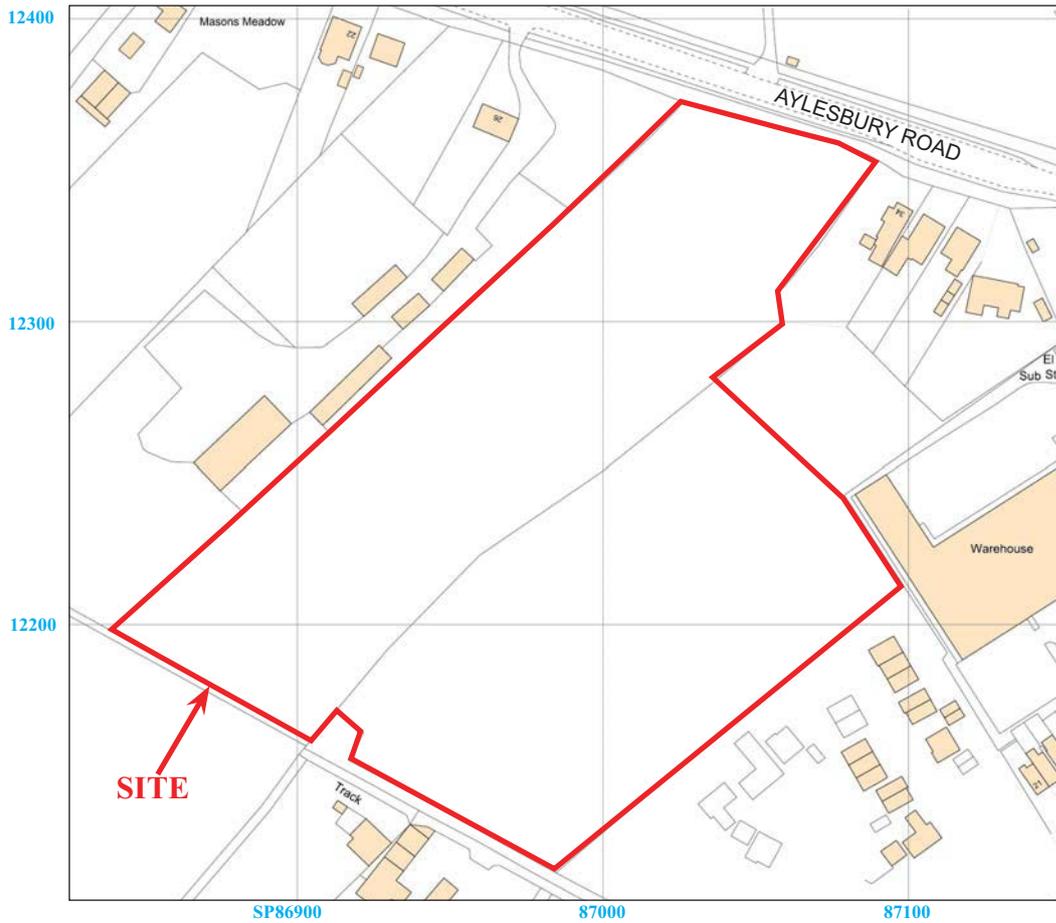
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Figure 1. Location of site within Aston Clinton and Buckinghamshire.

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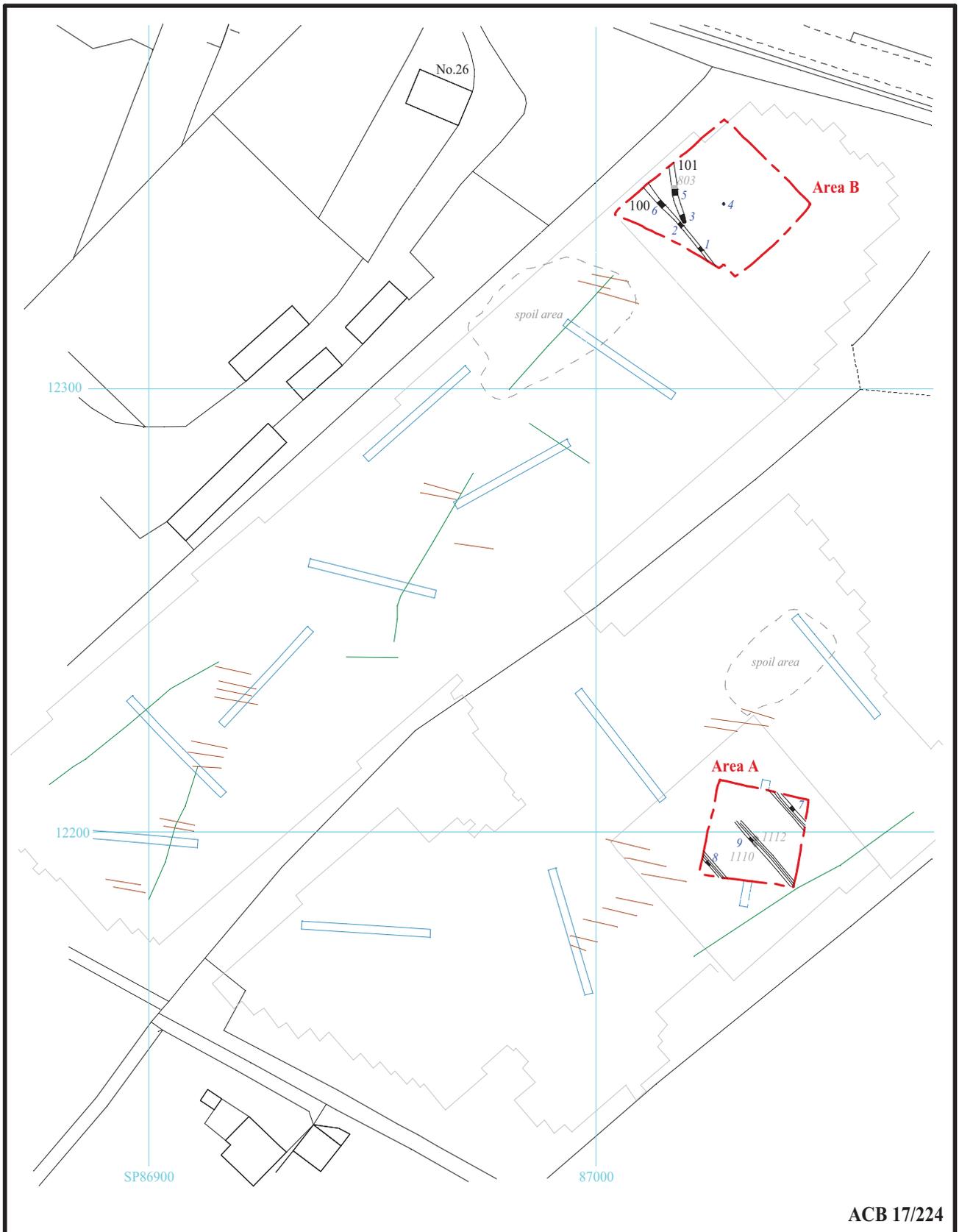
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**Land at Aylesbury Road, Aston Clinton,
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Figure 2. Detailed location of site off Aylesbury Road.

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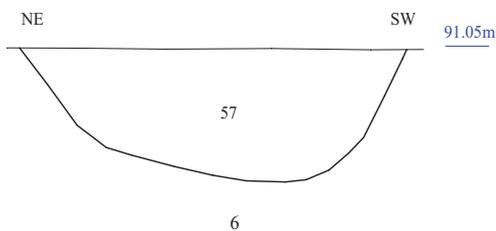
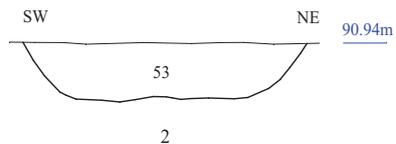
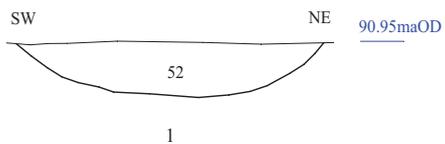
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Figure 3. Location of observed areas, in relation to evaluation, and recent work nearby.

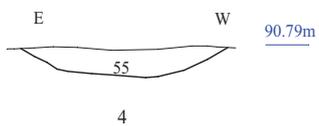
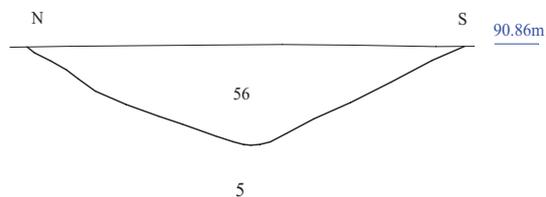
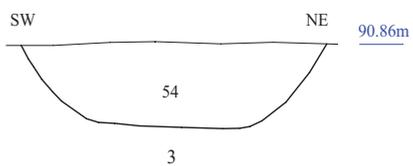


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Group 100



Group 101



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Figure 4. Area B Feature Sections.



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Plate 1. Area A, looking south-east.



Plate 2. Area B, looking north-east.

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**Land at Aylesbury Road, Aston Clinton,
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Plates 1 and 2.**

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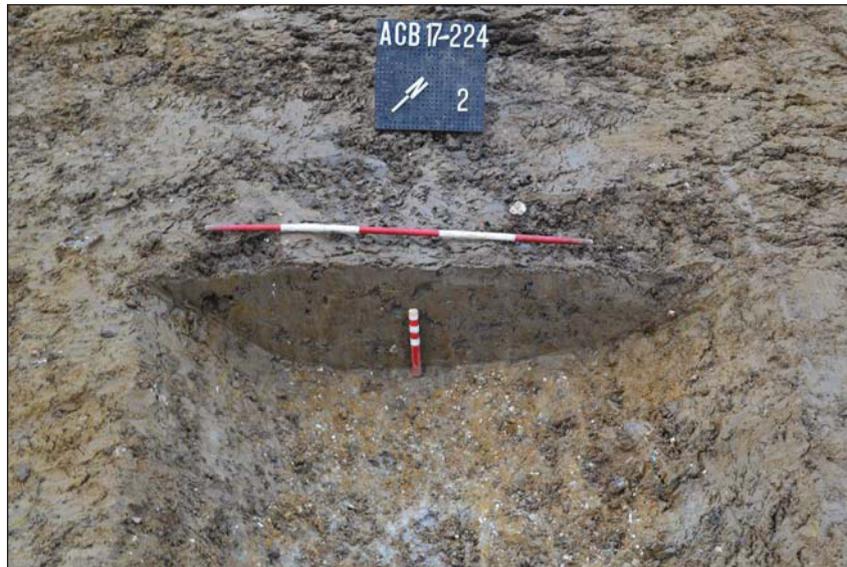


Plate 3. Area B, Ditch 100, slot 2, looking north-west. Scales: horizontal 0.5m, vertical 0.1m.



Plate 4. Area B, Ditch 101, slot 5, looking north. Scales: horizontal 1m, vertical 0.1m.

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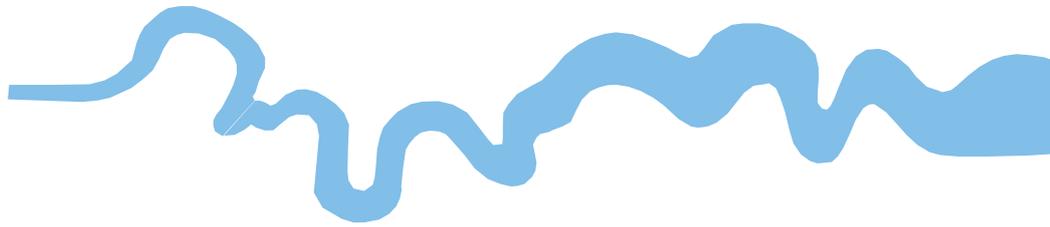
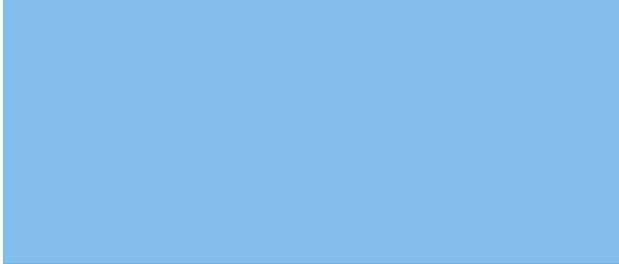
Land at Aylesbury Road, Aston Clinton,
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Archaeological Excavation
Plates 3 and 4.

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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 AD 0 BC
Iron Age _____	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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