

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

ARCHAEOLOGICAL

S E R V I C E S

**Bronze Age occupation at 74 Northcourt Avenue,
Reading, Berkshire**

Archaeological Excavation

by Steve Ford

**Site Code: NAR17/123
(SU 7298 7115)**

Bronze Age occupation at 74 Northcourt Avenue, Reading, Berkshire

An Archaeological Evaluation

for Dr Tom Abram

by Steve Ford

Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code NAR17/123

January 2018

Summary

Site name: 74 Northcourt Avenue, Reading, Berkshire

Grid reference: SU 7298 7115

Site activity: Excavation

Date and duration of project: 28th November- 1st December 2017

Project management: Tim Dawson

Site supervisor: Steve Ford

Site code: NAR17/123

Area of site: c. 270 sq m

Summary of results: The excavation uncovered a small number of features of Bronze Age date despite a large proportion of the site having been truncated by modern activity.

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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Report edited/checked by:

Steve Preston ✓ 18.01.18

74 Northcourt Avenue, Reading, Berkshire An Archaeological Excavation

by Steve Ford

Report 17/123b

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological excavation at 74 Northcourt Avenue, Reading, Berkshire (SU 7298 7115) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Tom Abram of 74 Northcourt Avenue, Reading, RG2 7HQ.

Planning consent (app 160255) has been gained from Reading Borough Council to construct a new house on land to the rear of 74 Northcourt Avenue. The consent is subject to a condition (6) requiring a phased programme of archaeological investigation prior to the development.

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. It was determined that the investigation should take the form, initially, of a field evaluation by means of trial trenches, based on the results of which further mitigation measures might be required. The evaluation revealed some deposits of Middle Bronze Age date. This report documents the results of follow-up excavation designed to mitigate the effects of development by preserving these features by record.

The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Ms Ellie Leary, Archaeology Officer for Berkshire Archaeology, advisers to the Borough on archaeological matters. The fieldwork was undertaken by Steve Ford and Benedikt Tebbit between 28th November and 1st December 2017 and the site code is NAR17/123. 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 the western side of Northcourt Avenue in southern Reading (Fig. 1). The site is bounded by residential properties on all sides with fencing to the north, west and south and open garden to the east and is currently used as a garden (Fig. 2). This relatively flat parcel of land is approximately 81m above Ordnance Datum and the underlying geology is mapped as sixth terrace gravel (BGS 2000) which was encountered during the fieldwork.

Archaeological background

The archaeological potential of the site had been highlighted in a briefing document produced by Ms Ellie Leary of Berkshire Archaeology. In summary this potential stems from the location of the site on the plateau margin overlooking the valley of the Kennet/Foudry Brook. This is a location from which several sites and finds have now been recorded. In particular, field evaluation on an adjacent site to the west located residual finds of Roman pottery, a medieval ditch and undated postholes (Ford and Pine 1998) and excavation to the north-west (next door) at 68-72 Northcourt Avenue revealed an early Roman occupation site (Milbank 2010). Iron Age pottery and Roman ditches were also recorded at Cressingham Road not far to the south (Carlsson 2010) and a Roman cremation burial to the north-west, although evaluation at Windermere Road to the north revealed nothing of interest (Ford 2010). Recent excavation at Ridgeway School around 750m to the south has also revealed Middle/Late Bronze Age, Early Iron Age and Early Roman occupation (Ford 2017). Finds included a hoard of Roman coins placed within a pot. The unexplained monument known (in the archaeological literature) as Marshall's Hill, which also lies nearby, is possibly a Late Bronze Age ring-fort (Bradley 1984). Fieldwork at Reading Girls School on the lower ground to the west revealed a Middle/Late Bronze Age roundhouse and some Iron Age and Roman features (HA 2016).

Evaluation of the site itself (Beaverstock 2017) confirmed this site's potential, and revealed shallow gullies and pits of Middle Bronze Age date along with modern features and areas of modern truncation.

Objectives and methodology

As a result of the evaluation findings, the effects of the development required mitigation, which was to take the form of 'preservation by record', i.e., archaeological excavation and recording, to be targeted at two areas threatened by the development: Trench A on the new house footprint and Trench B in the location for a soakaway.

General objectives of the project were to:

- excavate and record all archaeological deposits and features within the areas threatened by the proposed development;
- produce relative and absolute dating and phasing for deposits and features recorded on the site;
- establish the character of these deposits in 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 for the project aimed to address the following questions:

What is the date, nature and extent of the any Bronze Age activity on the site?
Are there additional archaeological deposits of Iron Age, early Roman or other dates present on the site?

It was proposed to dig two trenches, one to cover the main house footprint of c.240 sq m and the second for a soakaway of 29 sq m. The trenches were to be dug using a JCB-type machine fitted with a toothless ditching bucket and under constant archaeological supervision. Any features were to be cleaned, excavated and recorded using the appropriate tools to an agreed sampling fraction based on the nature and significance of the feature.

Results

Both trenches were dug as intended (Fig. 3). The excavated features are summarized in Appendix 1.

Trench A House footprint (Figs 4 and 5; Pl. 1)

Trench A was stripped of turf/ topsoil and subsoil to a depth of c. 0.5m to expose the natural geology of brownish-red sandy gravel. The main feature revealed was a large rectangular area (c. 85 sq m) of modern disturbance which had truncated the natural geology to a depth of c. 0.90m. It is considered that this feature perhaps represents a backfilled swimming pool though map regression recorded no such features on the site.

Some 21 features were investigated (including those found in the earlier evaluation) four of which either contained modern items or were found to be tree root-holes: these are listed in Appendix 1 but not described.

Linear features

On the northern extreme of the stripped area of trench A and continuing beyond the baulk was a pair of intercutting gullies (10, 11). Gully 10 was 0.58m across and 0.32m deep with a deep rounded profile. It had a single fill of brown-grey silty sand (63) with some gravel pieces. Its relationship with gully 11 was unclear though it seems likely that it terminated and did not turn like gully 11. It contained no dating evidence though it seems to be associated with gully 11.

Gully 11 was 0.6m across and 0.38m deep with a v-shaped profile. It was fully excavated within the trench and had a single fill of brown-grey silty sand (64) with some gravel pieces and contained a single rim sherd of Bronze Age pottery. It curved to the north west through a right angle and shallowed out. It may have formed a terminal just inside the trench. At the point where it turned it also deepened by another 0.2m, possibly representing a post setting, but within the same cut and with the same fill.

At the western side of the trench, gully (13/15) was originally found during the evaluation (as 9). It was aligned almost due east–west. It was truncated to the east and lay beneath the baulk to the west. It was between 0.39m and 1.04m wide and 0.22m deep overall, with a slightly irregular profile. It contained a single fill of a single fill of brown-grey silty sand (62, 66, 68) with some gravel pieces. It was cut by posthole 14.

Located 3.8m south of gully 13/15, and broadly parallel to it, gully 6 was 0.88m wide and 0.21m, and contained a single dark brown-grey sandy gravel fill (59). It had also been recorded in the evaluation but the excavation showed that it terminated at its eastern end and continued out of the trench to the west. It contained 5 sherds of Middle Bronze Age pottery.

South again from gully 6, gully 16 was also found in the evaluation (as 4). The excavation showed it, like gully 6, also terminated to the east and continued beyond the trench to the west. It was 0.6m wide 0.2 - 0.37m deep with a single fill of brown-grey silty sand (69) with some gravel pieces. The terminal appeared slightly bifurcated in plan, and may have been recut, or it may have contained a post setting, but there was no difference in the fill and no separate cut was evident.

Feature 5 was identified during the evaluation as another gully, between gullies 6 and 16. However, excavation suggests that this feature was a small shallow but elongated pit. It was 0.56m wide and 0.38m deep with a dark brown-grey sandy gravel fill (58). It also contained a small sherd of Bronze Age pottery

Pits

Pit 1 was revealed in the evaluation at the eastern edge of the trench. It was 0.48m long and 0.44m wide and 0.13m deep and filled with a loose mid greyish brown sandy silt (52). One soil sample was processed for finds and environmental evidence, but none were recovered.

Pit 17 was a large pit with a shallow bowl-shaped profile, on the southern edge of the site (Pl. 2). Its plan form is unknown as it was sandwiched between the baulk and the large truncation but the slight curvature of the edges suggest a pit rather than a ditch. It had four fills; an upper charcoal rich- silty sand fill (70) containing 8 pieces (82g) of fired clay loomweight, 36g of burnt flint and 4 fragments (500g) of greensand quernstone; a middle fill (71) of brown silty sand, mostly stone free; a lower middle fill (72) similar to 71 but containing a dense lens of gravel pieces; and a lower fill (73) of brown sand. No pottery was recovered and the feature could be of Bronze Age or Roman date.

Postholes

Post hole 7 was also located in the evaluation, just north of gully 6. It was 0.3m in diameter and 0.11m deep. A single fill of dark brown-grey silty sand (60) produced 6 sherds of pottery dated to the later Bronze Age.

Post hole 12, next to gully 11 in the north of the site, was 0.2m in diameter and 0.21m deep with a single fill of dark brown-grey silty sand (65) which contained no finds.

Post hole 14 was c.0.3m in diameter and 0.28m deep with a single fill of dark brown-grey silty sand (67). It appears to have been cut through gully 13 though the relationship was not clear. It contained no finds.

Trench B Soakaway footprint

Trench B was also tripped of turf/ topsoil and subsoil to a depth of c. 0.7m to expose the natural geology. Features (pits and a posthole) were only exposed in the north end of the trench (Pl. 3).

Pits

Pit 20 was oval in plan up to 0.6m long and 0.12m deep. It contained a brown silty sand fill (76) with a little gravel but no dating evidence. Its relationship with posthole 19 was unclear (Pl. 4).

Pits 21-25 lay in a group at the northern end of the soakaway trench and continued beyond the baulk . The group was all intercut but the only clear stratigraphic relationship that could be established was that pit 21 cut pit 25. If pit 24 is real, then it too has been cut by pit 21.

Pit 21 was 1.9m wide and 0.22m deep with a bowl-shaped profile. It contained a grey brown silty sand with gravel fill (77) but no dating evidence. Its relationships with pits 22, 23 and 24 were unclear but it seemed to cut pit 25.

Pit 22 was of uncertain validity. It was only recognizable as a lobe on the edge of pit 23. Its profile merged with that of pit 23 and its fill (78) of grey brown silty sand with a little gravel was identical to the lower fill of pit 23. Pit 23 was 1.8m across and 0.5m deep with a bowl-shaped profile. It had two fills. The upper fill (79) comprised a brown silty sand with gravel and contained two struck flints, a sherd of Roman pottery, a sherd of 19th-century or later plant pot and a sherd of brown-glazed post-medieval red ware. The lower fill (80) was a grey brown silty sand with gravel but no artefacts. It is possible that the artefacts in the upper fill are intrusive items from the subsoil rather than being securely stratified within the feature.

Pit 24 is also of uncertain validity. It lay beneath pit 21 but without a clear separation of the fills between the two and may merely be a deeper component of pit 21. It was up to 0.4m across and survived to a depth of 0.15m with a bowl-shaped profile. It contained a grey brown silty sand with gravel fill (81) similar to the other features in this group.

Pit 25 was at least 0.3m across and 0.08m deep with a bowl shaped profile. It contained a grey brown silty sand with gravel fill (82).

Posthole

Posthole 19 was 0.24m in diameter and 0.12m deep. It contained a brown silty sand (75) with gravel fill but no dating evidence. It lay adjacent to small pit 20 but with no clear relationship.

Finds

Pottery by Richard Tabor

The prehistoric assemblage comprised 15 sherds weighing 213g (Appendix 2). The pottery appears to belong to a Middle Bronze Age phase, with a single sherd possibly of later date. All but the latter sherd included a combination of grog and flint temper.

Middle Bronze Age: Grog and flint

GF1 (medium). Friable, buff pink fabric with buff pink exterior and pale pink to pale grey interior surfaces including poorly-sorted common fine (<1mm), moderate medium (<2mm) and sparse coarse (<6mm) burnt angular flint and moderate fine to medium (<2mm) and sparse coarse (<5mm) sub-angular and sub-rounded grog.

GF2 (medium/coarse). Friable, dark grey to buff pink fabric with buff pink exterior and pink to dark grey interior surfaces including poorly-sorted moderate fine (<1mm), sparse medium (<2mm) and sparse coarse (<6mm) burnt angular flint and moderate fine to medium (<2mm) and sparse coarse (<8mm) sub-angular and sub-rounded grog and rare dark brown rounded iron stones (<3mm).

Bronze Age / Early Iron Age: flint

F1 (medium). Moderately hard, dark grey fabric with buff brown surfaces including moderately well-sorted common fine (<1mm), sparse medium (<2mm) and rare to sparse medium / coarse (<3mm) burnt angular flint.

The mixing of flint and grog temper is more characteristic of the earlier Bronze Age in the middle and lower Thames Valley, although it has been noted as possible in coarse Deverel-Rimbury vessels which typically have thick walls, comparable with the dominant range of 12mm to 15mm in the present assemblage (Raymond 2013, 76; Machling 1999, 4). The base from posthole 7 is of a bucket form typical of that tradition (Ellison 1981, fig. 177, D/E1). On balance an earlier Deverel-Rimbury date seems most likely.

The vessel form associated with the single rim sherd in fabric F1 from pit 11 cannot be fully determined as it may derive from either a shouldered jar or from a bucket form vessel. Its firing technology, slightly thinner

wall thickness of 11mm and relatively fine flint inclusions would be consistent with a Late Bronze Age or Early Iron Age date in much of the Thames Valley. The flint inclusions are prolific in comparison to those in sandy Middle Iron Age fabrics from Three Mile Cross, Reading (Timby 2013, 50).

Roman and later pottery

A small collection of 3 sherds were recovered from the top fill of pit 23 (79). These comprised 20th century plant pot, a fragment of brown-glazed post-medieval redware and a small body sherd of Roman greyware.

Struck flint

The fieldwork produced three struck flints, all flakes. One was unstratified and two came from the upper fill of pit 23 (79) where they are clearly residual. They are not closely datable and only a broad Neolithic-Bronze Age date can be suggested.

Burnt flint

Unworked, burnt flint was recovered from gully 10 (5g), pit 17 (fill 70, 36g) and pit 23 (79) (188g).

Fired clay

Six fragments of fired clay (70g) were recovered from pit 17 (upper fill 70). Some of the fragments were fired red/brown throughout and are probably daub but others have a reduced interior suggesting that they might be fragments of loomweight.

Quern

Four fragments of greensand (500g) were recovered from pit 17 (upper fill 70). These come from a rotary quern with three fragments showing a smoothed and striated surface. The source of the greensand is not known but is not immediately local to the site. It does not, however, display the distinctive characteristics of Lodsworth greensand.

Conclusion

The excavation has confirmed the presence of several archaeological deposits as suggested by the earlier evaluation. The features comprised shallow linear features, pits and postholes, though none were well dated.

Much of the excavation area was occupied by a large modern truncation. The dated features all contain prehistoric (Middle Bronze Age) pottery and it seems probable that most other (undated) features also belong to this period. It is perhaps noteworthy that only a single sherd of Roman pottery was found despite the excavated Roman site just to the north-west.

The density of features (despite the paucity of artefacts) suggests the presence of Middle Bronze Age occupation either on or near the site. The Middle Bronze Age is considered to be a period of change in settlement patterns from earlier transhumant societies to those with more permanent settlement and a consequent investment in land holding. Thus there is a wide variety of occupation remains recorded from artefact scatters and isolated pits, through dispersed low density and seemingly unstructured occupation sites, to those with well defined buildings, enclosures and field systems. Whether this reflects a simple chronological progression or more complex and diverse subsistence strategies is unclear.

The evidence of occupation recorded here is clearly partial, with deposits extending beyond the excavation limits and it is possible that these features are peripheral to a densely settled area. Otherwise the features are typical of low-density dispersed sites. The recently excavated site at Ridgeway School, Whitley, just under 1km to the south, revealed a Middle/Late Bronze Age component (Ford 2017) within a larger excavated area. There the earliest elements comprised a dispersed spread of low density of pits and postholes and such a pattern may be comparable here. How such a pattern relates to the overall use of the landscape in this period can be better explored in much larger investigations, such as at Reading Business Park, about 4km further south up the valley (Moore and Jennings 1992; Brossler *et al.* 2004; Brossler *et al.* 2013).

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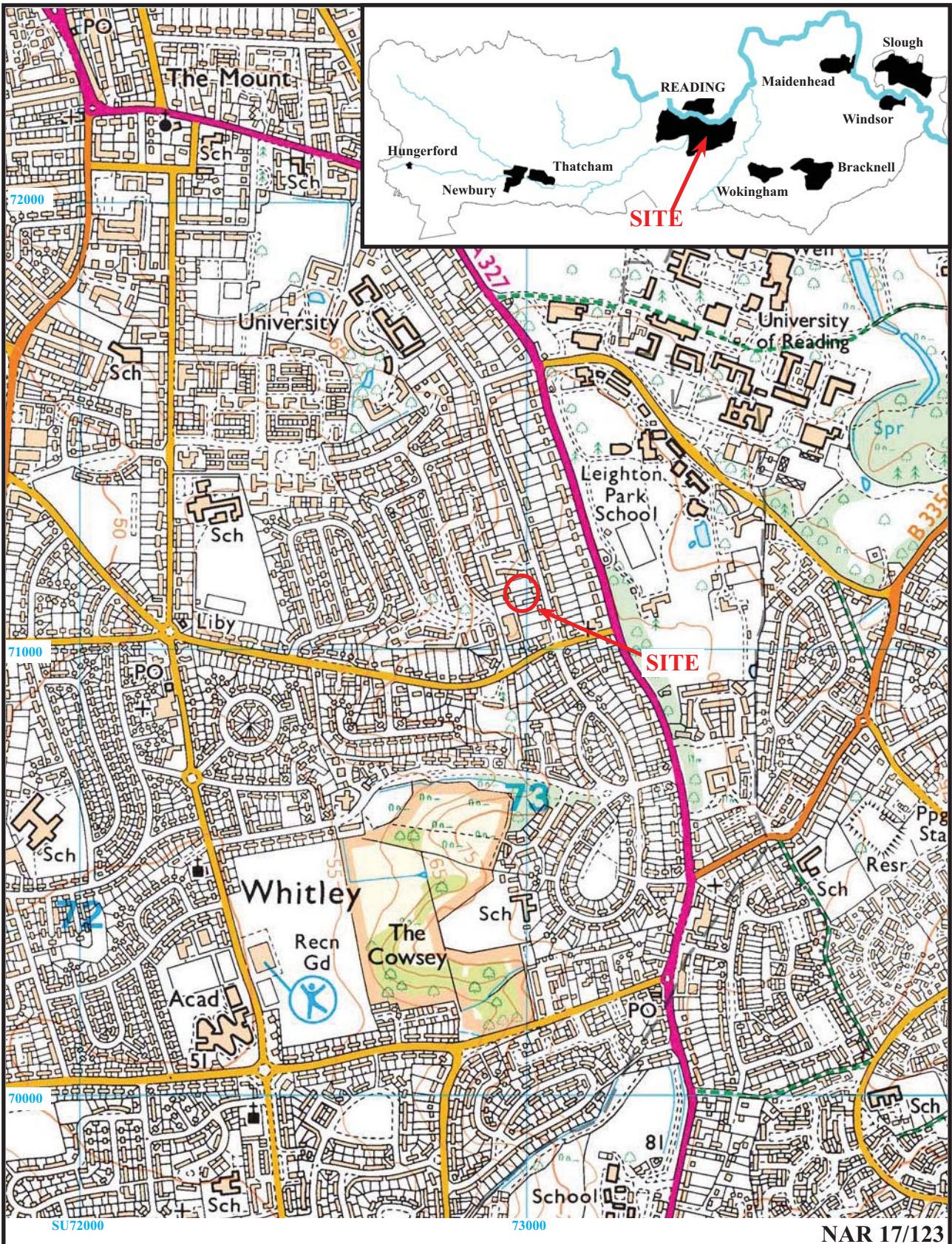
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APPENDIX 1: Feature details

<i>Trench</i>	<i>Cut</i>	<i>Fill (s)</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Dating evidence</i>
A/Ev2	1	52	Pit	Bronze Age	Pottery
A/Ev1	2	53-5	Truncation	19th Century+	Pottery, Brick/tile
A/Ev1	3	56	Truncation	19th Century+	Brick/tile
A/Ev1	4	57	Gully	Same as 16	-Earlier than cut [5]
A/Ev1	5	58	Gully	Earlier than cut [6]	Pottery
A/Ev1	6	59	Gully	Bronze Age	Pottery
A/Ev1	7	60	Posthole	Bronze Age	Pottery
A/Ev1	8	61	Truncation	19th century +	Pottery, Brick/tile
A/Ev1	9	62	Gully	Same as 13/15	-
A	10	63	Gully	Bronze Age?	By association
A	11	64	Gully	Bronze Age	Pottery
A	12	65	Posthole	-	
A	13	66	Gully	Same as 9/15	
A	14	67	Posthole	Cuts gully 9/13/15	
A	15	68	Gully		
A	16	69	Gully	Same as 4	
A	17	70-73	Pit	Bronze Age?	Quern, loomweight
B	18	74	roothole		
B	19	75	Posthole		
B	20	76	Posthole		
B	21	77	Spread		
A	22	78	Pit		
A	23	79-80	Pit		
A	24	81	Pit		
B	25	82	Pit		

APPENDIX 2. Distribution of pottery fabrics by cut and deposit

		GF1		GF2		F1		Total	
<i>Cut</i>	<i>Deposit</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Wt(g)</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Wt(g)</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Wt(g)</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Wt(g)</i>
5	58	3	2	-	-	-	-	3	2
6	59	1	3	4	48	-	-	5	51
7	60	-	-	6	142	-	-	6	142
11	64	-	-	-	-	1	18	1	18
Total		4	5	10	190	1	18	15	213



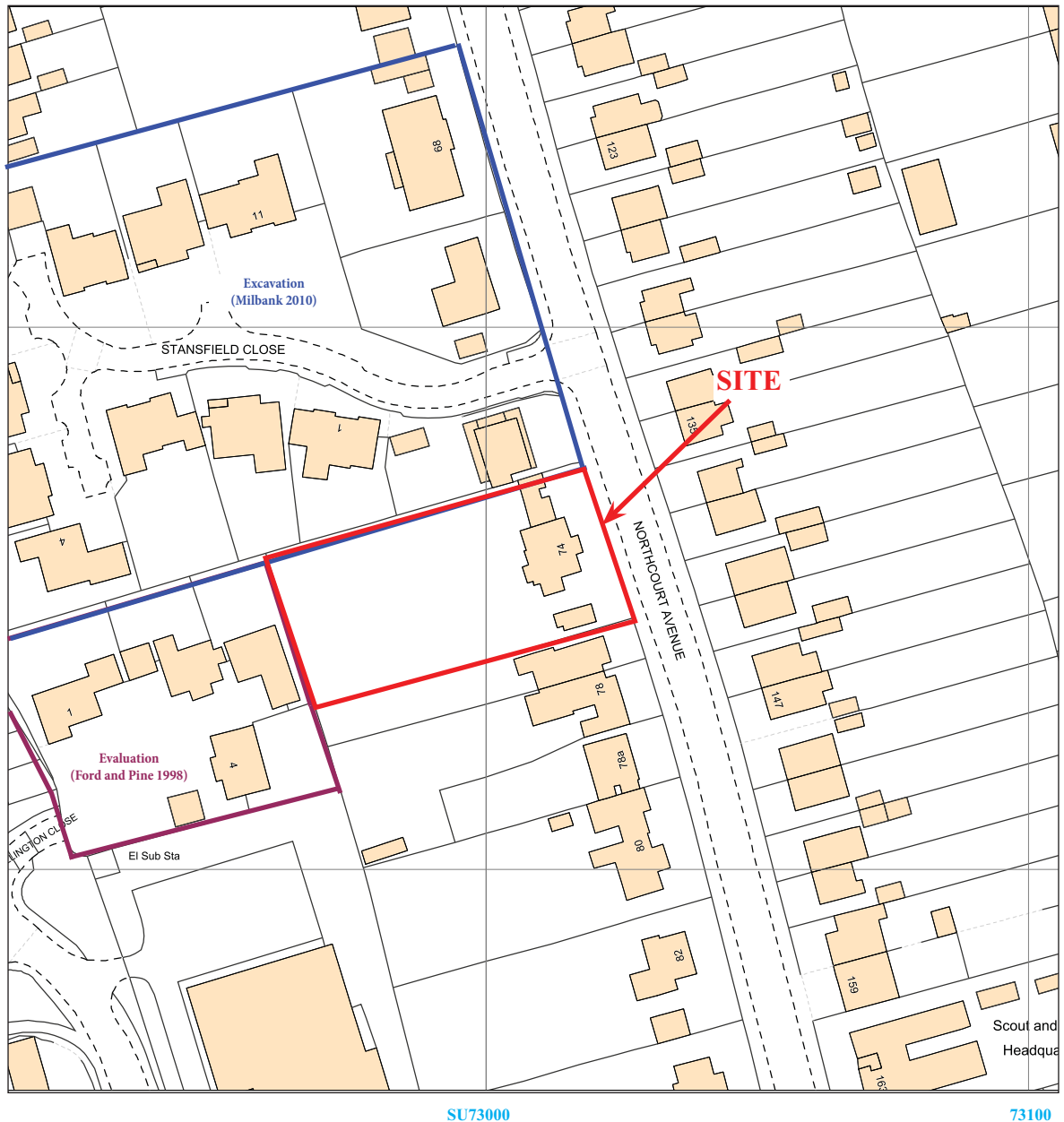
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Figure 1. Location of site within Reading and Berkshire.

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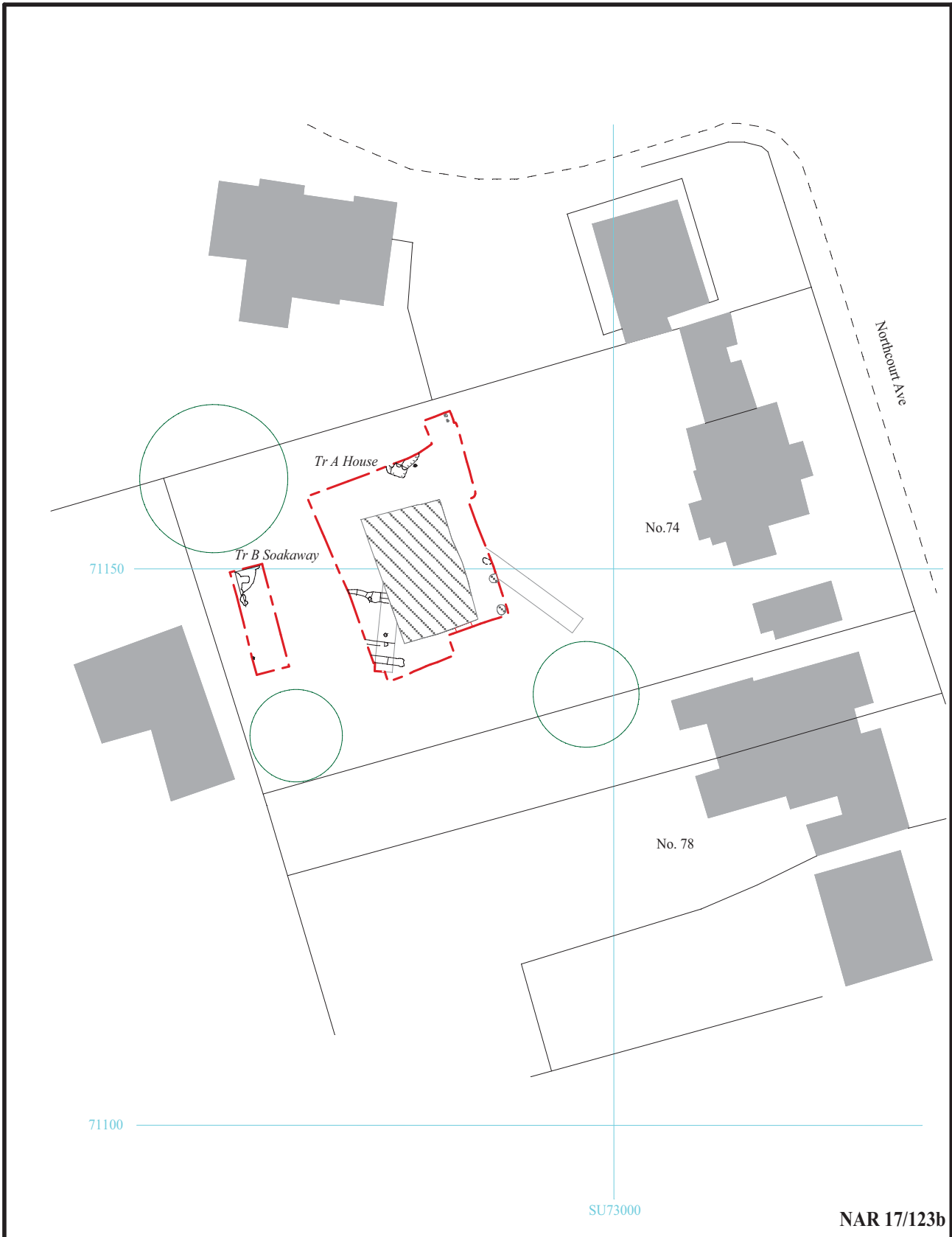
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Figure 2. Detailed location of site off Northcourt Avenue.

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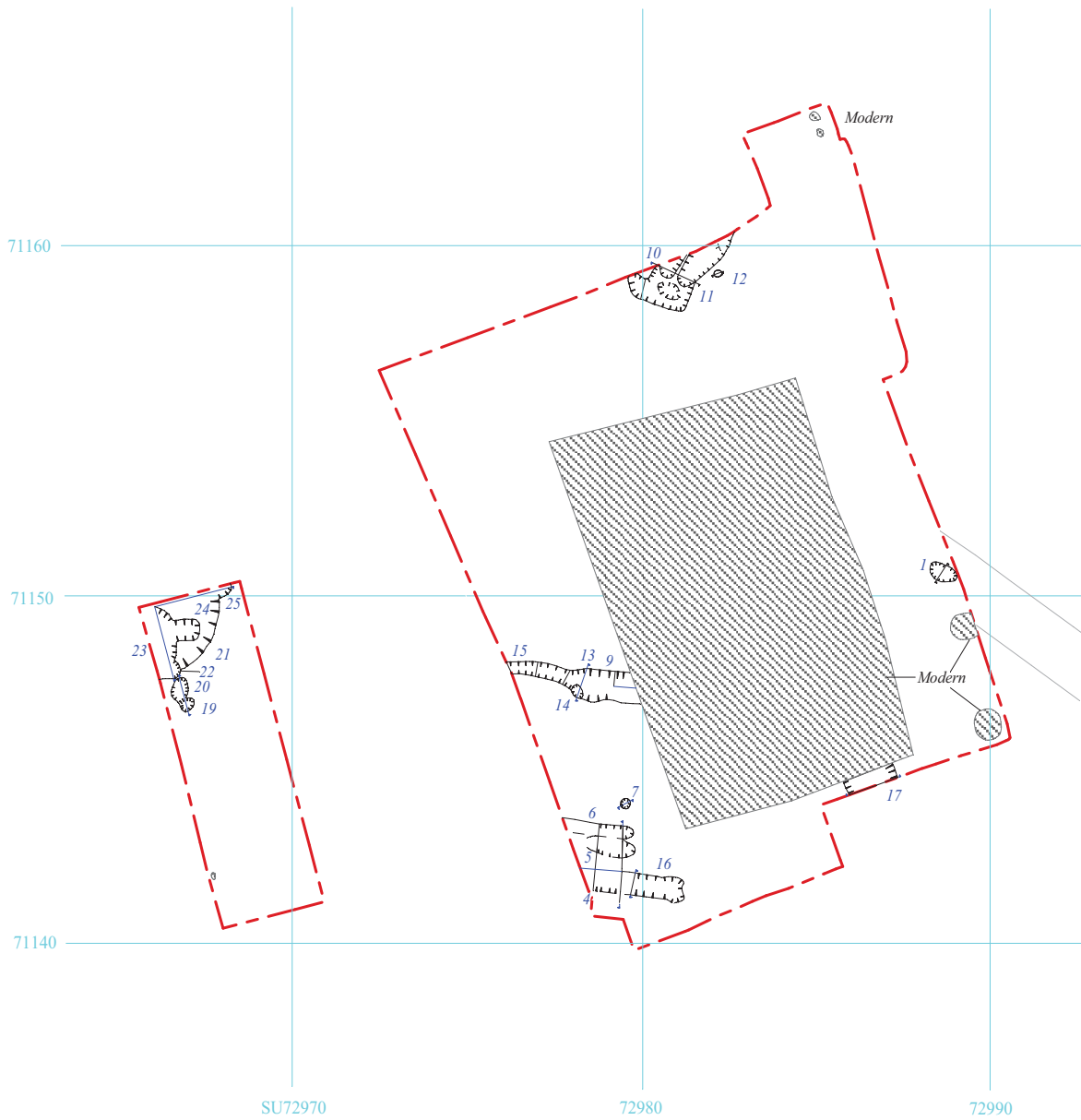
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Figure 3. Location of trenches.

0 25m

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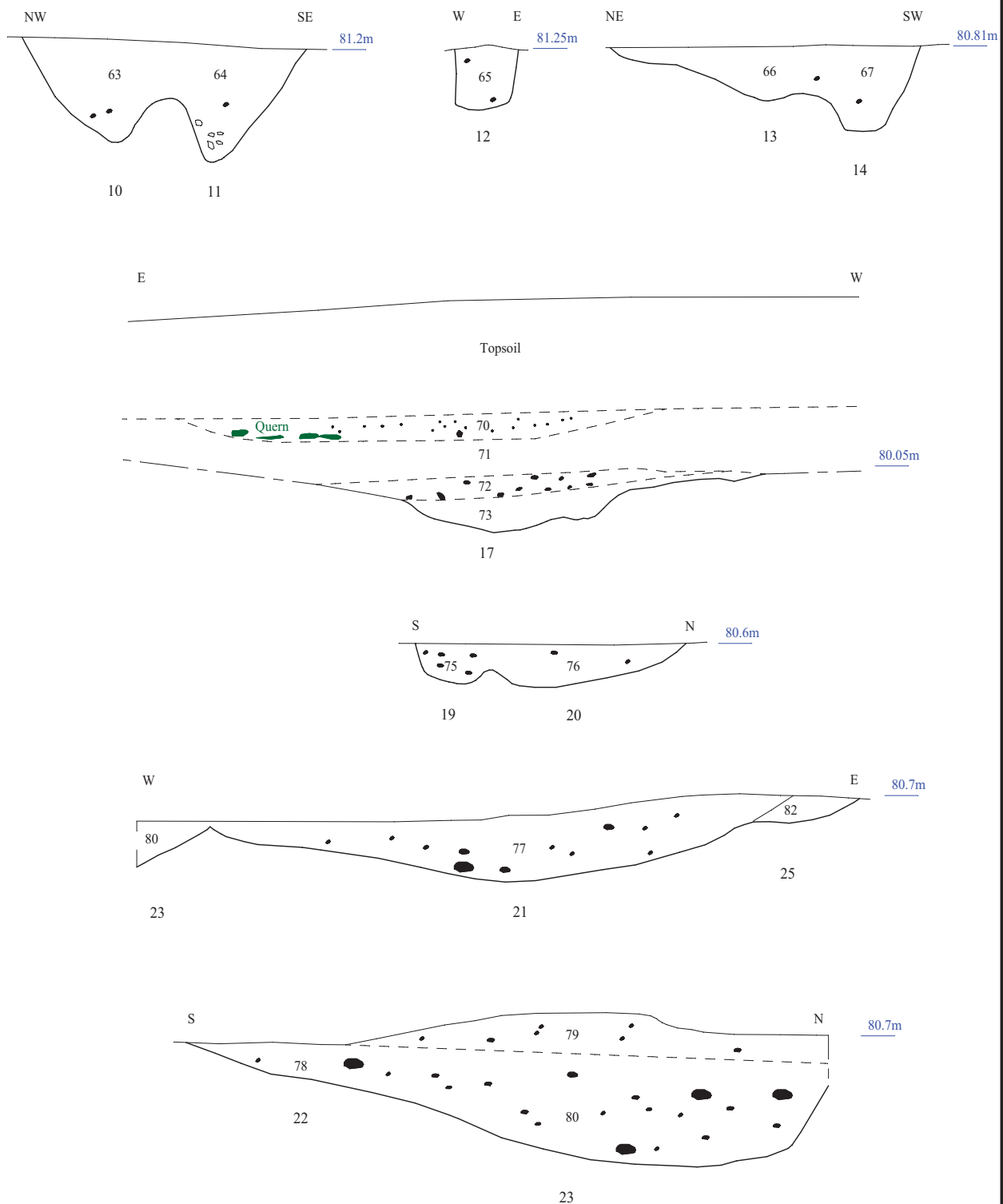
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Figure 4. Detail of features.



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74 Northcourth Avenue, Reading,
 Berkshire, 2017
 Archaeological Recording Action



Figure 5. Sections.





Plate 1. Site, looking north west, Scales: horizontal 2m and 1m, vertical 0.5m



Plate 2. Pit 17, looking south east, Scales: horizontal 1m, vertical 0.5m.

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**74 Northcourt Avenue, Reading,
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Plates 1 and 2.

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Plate 3. Soakaway area, looking north west, Scales: 2m and 1m.



Plate 4. Soakaway area, posthole 19 and pit 20, looking west,
Scales: 0.5m and 0.1m.

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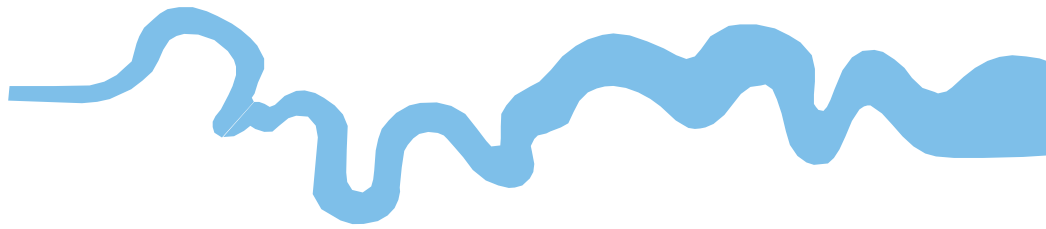
74 Northcourt Avenue, Reading,
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Plates 3 and 4.

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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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