

**473 West Wycombe Road, High Wycombe,
Buckinghamshire**

An Archaeological Recording Action

For Ardgowan Homes Limited

by Simon Cass

Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code
WWW07/154

January 2008

Summary

Site name: 473 West Wycombe Road, High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire

Grid reference: SU 8350 9457

Site activity: Recording Action

Date and duration of project: 7th–9th January 2008

Site supervisor: Simon Cass

Site code: WWW 07/154

Area of Site: c. 0.17 ha

Summary of results: Three postholes of uncertain date and a Roman well were found.

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

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| Report edited/checked by: | Steve Ford✓ 23.01.08 Steve Preston✓ 21.01.08 |
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473 West Wycombe Road, High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire An Archaeological Recording Action

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Report 07/154

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological recording action carried out at 473 West Wycombe Road, High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire (SU 8350 9457) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Steve Watt of Ardgowan Homes Limited, Ardgowan, Drift Road, Winkfield, Windsor, Berkshire SL4 4RL.

Planning consent (06/7177) has been granted by Wycombe District Council to develop the site for flats and associated parking areas following demolition of existing structures on site. This is subject to a condition relating to archaeology, which requires the implementation of a programme of archaeological work, in this case taking the form of a recording action (strip and record), prior to groundworks.

This is in accordance with the Department of the Environment's Planning Policy Guidance, *Archaeology and Planning* (PPG16 1990), and the District Council's policies on archaeology. The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Mr David Radford, Archaeological Officer with Buckinghamshire County Archaeological Service, and following a brief prepared by him (Radford 2007). The fieldwork was undertaken by Simon Cass and Heather Hopkins between 7th and 9th January 2008.

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

Location, topography and geology

The site comprises an approximately triangular parcel of land, situated between West Wycombe Road to the north and the River Wye to the south, by the junction of the A4010 and the A40 on the western margins of High Wycombe (Fig. 2). Prior to the current development the site was occupied by a single detached house and garage/ outbuilding. According to the British Geological Survey, the site lies on the border between alluvium and hard white chalk natural geology (BGS 1990). The natural geology observed during the course of this work was clay and chalk with flints, with chalk outcroppings. The site lies at a height of approximately 89.5m above Ordnance Datum.

Archaeological background

The archaeological potential of the site has been detailed in a brief for the project drawing on information within the county sites and monuments record (Radford 2007). In summary this potential stems from its location in an area known to contain evidence of Roman occupation. A range of deposits and finds are recorded from several locations in the vicinity. Finds of coins, 2nd-century pottery, tile and metalwork have been recorded from a location a few hundred metres to the west, close to the northern end of the ornamental lake of West Wycombe House. A number of small gullies also of 2nd century date are recorded in the same area. To the south of the site dredging of the river Wye produced further Roman pottery and tile, etc. Approximately 130m to the south-east, thirteen Roman inhumation burials are recorded, initially thought to be of 2nd century date, but subsequently redated to the 4th century (Farley and Wright 1979; 1981).

From the varied locations that these finds have been made it is surmised that a substantial site exists within the vicinity, possibly a villa complex.

Methodology

The purpose of the recording action was to expose the extent of the site affected by the proposed groundworks and to excavate and record any archaeological deposits found. This was to involve examination of all areas of ground disturbance, in particular those relating to the footprint of the new building and the areas of associated parking.

Results

Two areas were stripped of overburden, consisting of the footprint of the new building and parking for flats 1–4 to the east and parking for flats 5–15 to the west of the site. The stripping was carried out under constant archaeological supervision using a 360° machine fitted with ditching bucket. Material was removed to a depth of approximately 0.6m along the southern edge (the downslope edge of the site) in the eastern area. For much of this area it was apparent that there had been significant truncation of the ground relatively recently, possibly for construction of the previous buildings on the site. The stratigraphy encountered in this area mainly consisted of modern disturbed ground and demolition debris directly above natural geology, though in places a subsoil was still present (up to 0.3m thick). Outside the areas affected by modern truncation, the stratigraphy encountered varied – along the southern edge it consisted of 0.3m of topsoil above 0.3m of subsoil sealing the natural clay and chalk whilst on the northern side it consisted of *c.* 0.2m of demolition debris above natural clay and chalk. It

is possible that this disparity is as a result of previous terracing of the plot, certainly after the recent demolition but possibly also previous to that.

Four features of archaeological interest were recorded (Appendix 1). In the eastern area three postholes were discovered, in an area otherwise significantly truncated by modern activity. Posthole 1 was shallow and undated, posthole 2 produced three pieces of Roman pottery but posthole 3 (Plate 1) contained a single piece of modern brick and mortar. It is possible that this modern artefact is intrusive, due to the amount of modern disturbance in the immediate vicinity of the postholes. While an arc could be inferred from the placement of the postholes, the truncations were such that it is impossible to say if they formed a post-built structure.

A single circular feature (4) was found, also in the eastern area, just to the south of the three postholes. This feature was 1.2m wide and at least 2.0m deep, with near vertical sides (Plate 2). It has been interpreted as a well, and pottery finds from the central fill (54) suggest that it was backfilled during the 2nd century AD. It was cut through the natural chalk, with no definite indication of any lining, such as barrels though the near vertical nature of the outer fill (55) may perhaps indicate the former presence of some form of retaining structure. The central fill was quite loosely compacted, and included several large flint nodules.

The well was hand-dug for the first metre but after that, and in consultation with the monitor, it was decided to use a machine to excavate further in an attempt to locate the base of the feature or confirm its nature as a well. After another metre of excavation, the base of the feature was not reached and no further excavation took place as the surviving deposits lay below the formation level of the planned building and thus would be preserved *in situ*.

A bulk sample of the fill from a depth of c. 1m revealed that the deposits were not waterlogged but contained charred plant remains, mainly wood charcoal with a few unidentified cereal grains.

Finds

Pottery by Jane Timby

The archaeological work resulted in the recovery of a small assemblage of 75 sherds of pottery, weighing 762g, from just two features, a posthole and a well. In addition a very small chip of ceramic building material and a small fragment of fired clay are present. The assemblage includes material exclusively of Roman date.

The pottery was fairly well fragmented considering it has come from negative features and that generally Roman pottery is quite robust. The overall average weight size is 10g. The preservation of surface finishes is variable. Only six rims are present all from standard coarseware jar forms.

For the purposes of the assessment the assemblage was scanned to determine the form and fabrics and the likely date of the pieces. These were quantified by sherd count and weight for each context. The resulting data are summarized in Appendix 2.

With the exception of just three sherds from posthole 2 all the pottery came from well 4. The fragmentary sherd size might suggest the assemblage derives from levelling up deposits.

With the exception of two joining Central Gaulish samian sherds from a dish decorated with a rouletted ring the pottery mainly comprises local coarse and finer wares. Although there are no clearly recognizable named traded wares present, two small sherds of white-slipped greyware may be from the Highgate kilns, London. Sherds come from both handmade and wheel made vessels with a preponderance of jar sherds. Fabrics include a few sherds with grog, organic material, or shell but mainly sandy wares.

The only decorated sherd is a small piece from a fine greyware beaker decorated with a panel of barbotine dots. A handle from a brown white-slipped flagon is also present and possibly an oxidized sherd that once had a mica-slip. Collectively the group suggests a date in the earlier half of the 2nd century.

Bone by Ceri Falys

A small assemblage of animal bone was recovered from two contexts. A total of 34 fragments were retrieved, weighing 442g (Appendix 3). The surface preservation of the remains was fair, although occasionally demonstrated damage due to root activity. All pieces were highly fragmented. The single bone found in context 52 was a non-descript long bone shaft fragment, while context 54 contained both cattle and sheep/goat remains. Cattle were represented by mandibular and rib pieces, in addition to a distal phalanx. A greater number of sheep/goat elements were present, primarily mandibular fragments and loose teeth. Two sheep/goat ribs and a left distal tibia were also identified. Due to the lack of element duplication, the minimum number of individuals (MNI) represented in the assemblage was found to be two: a cow and a sheep/goat. No evidence of butchery practices was observed. No further information could be retrieved from the remains.

Metalwork by Simon Cass

Two small pieces of ironwork were found in the soil sample taken from the well 4. They appear to be square/flat nails and one of the pieces is possibly a corroded head.

Charred Plant Remains by Steve Ford

A single bulk sample of 40L from well 4 (54) was wet sieved using a 0.25mm mesh. This revealed a modest quantity of wood charcoal but included four unidentified cereal grains.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this small scale fieldwork has revealed a modest amount of certain and probable Roman deposits on the site indicative of Roman activity in the 2nd century AD. These findings have two implications: firstly, the presence of a well and other features suggests that this location is within or close to an occupied location and that further deposits should be anticipated in adjacent areas, where they might have survived modern activity. Secondly, the findings add to the extensive spread of artefacts and deposits already recorded for this part of the Wye Valley in West Wycombe, reinforcing the interpretation that a substantial Roman settlement is present.

References

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- PPG 16, 1990, *Archaeology and Planning*, Dept of the Environment Planning Policy Guidance 16, HMSO
- Radford, D, 2007, 'Brief for an archaeological watching brief, Project: 473 West Wycombe Road, High Wycombe', Buckinghamshire County Archaeological Service

APPENDIX 1: Catalogue of excavated features

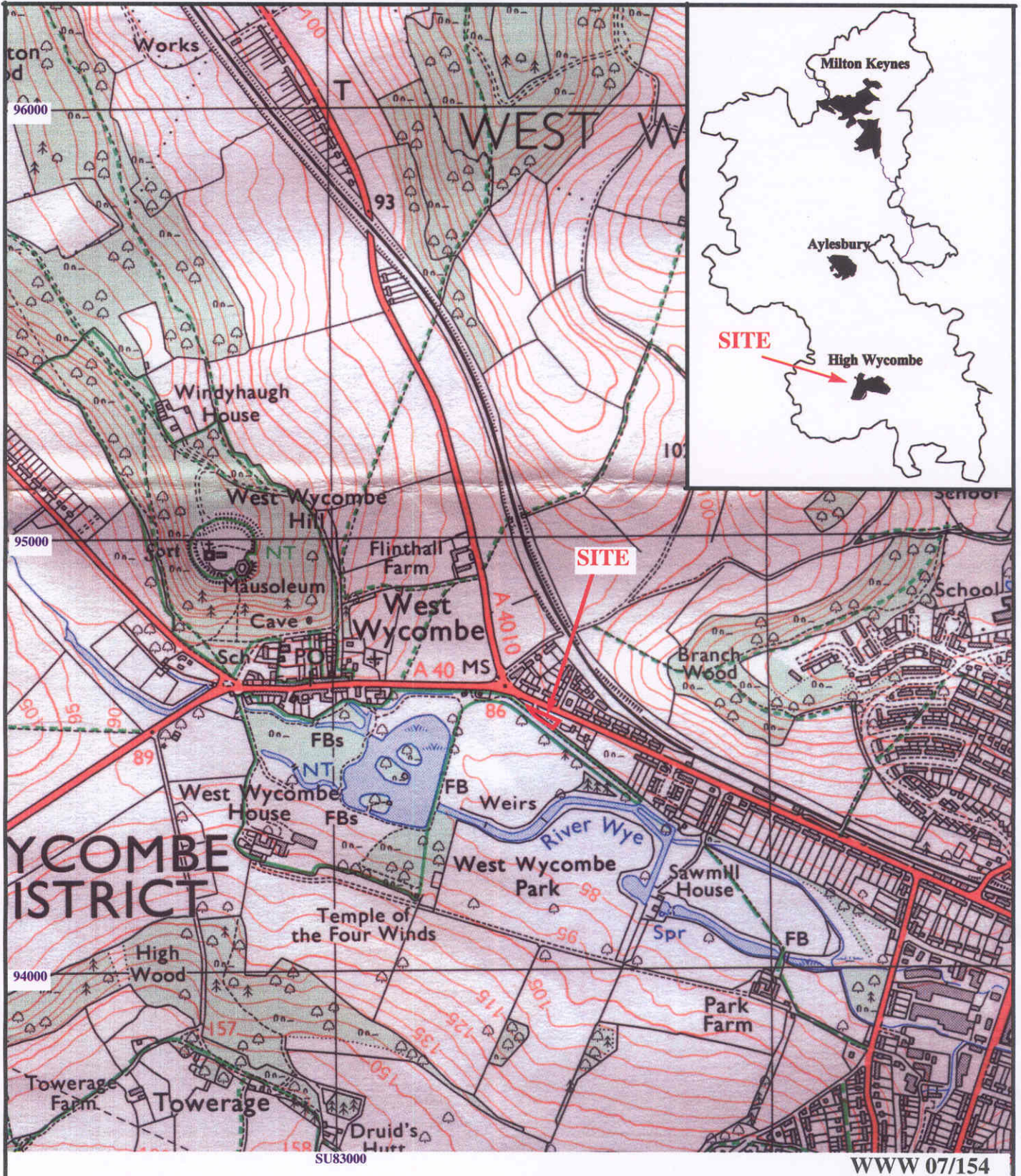
| <i>Cut</i> | <i>Deposit</i> | <i>Type</i> |
|------------|----------------|-------------|
| 1 | 51 | Posthole |
| 2 | 52 | Posthole |
| 3 | 53 | Posthole |
| 4 | 54 | Well |
| 4 | 55 | Well |

APPENDIX 2: Catalogue of Pottery

| <i>Context</i> | <i>Cut</i> | <i>samian</i> | <i>cw</i> | <i>fc/cbm</i> | <i>Tot no</i> | <i>Wt</i> | <i>Date</i> |
|----------------|------------|---------------|-----------|---------------|---------------|-----------|-------------|
| 52 | 2 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 3 | 8 | Roman |
| 54 | 4 | 2 | 70 | 2 | 74 | 759.5 | C2 |
| TOTAL | | 2 | 73 | 2 | 77 | 767.5 | |

APPENDIX 3: Catalogue of Animal Bone

| <i>Cut</i> | <i>Fill</i> | <i>Weight (g)</i> | <i>Number of Frags.</i> | <i>Horse</i> | <i>Cattle</i> | <i>Sheep/Goat</i> | <i>Pig</i> | <i>Comments</i> |
|------------|-------------|-------------------|-------------------------|--------------|---------------|-------------------|------------|-----------------|
| 2 | 52 | | | - | - | - | - | Unidentified |
| 4 | 54 | 433 | 33 | - | 4 | 16 | - | - |
| | Total | 442 | 34 | 0 | 4 | 16 | 0 | MNI = 2 |

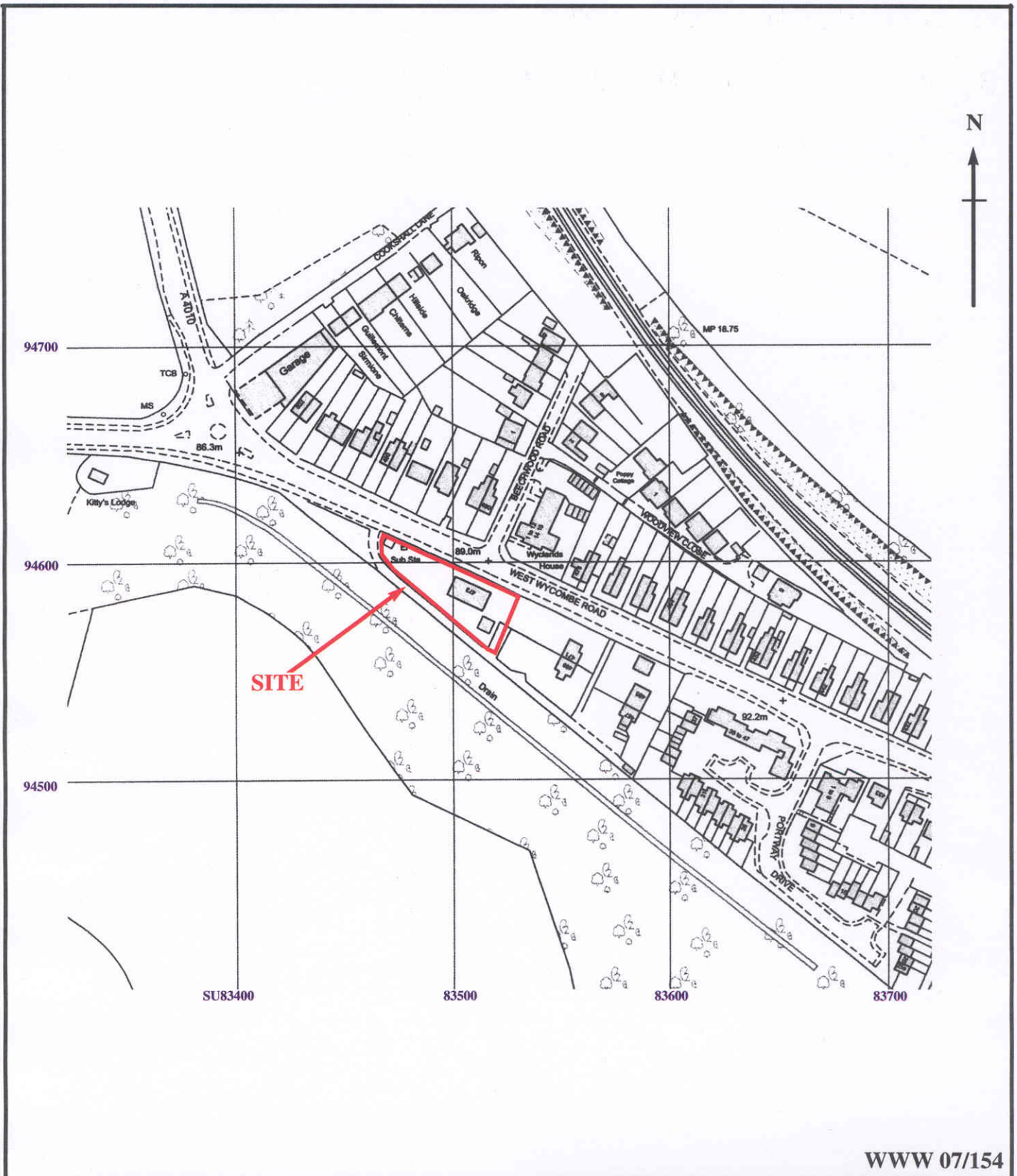


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Figure 1. Location of site within West Wycombe and Buckinghamshire.

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Figure 2. Detailed location of site off West Wycombe Road.

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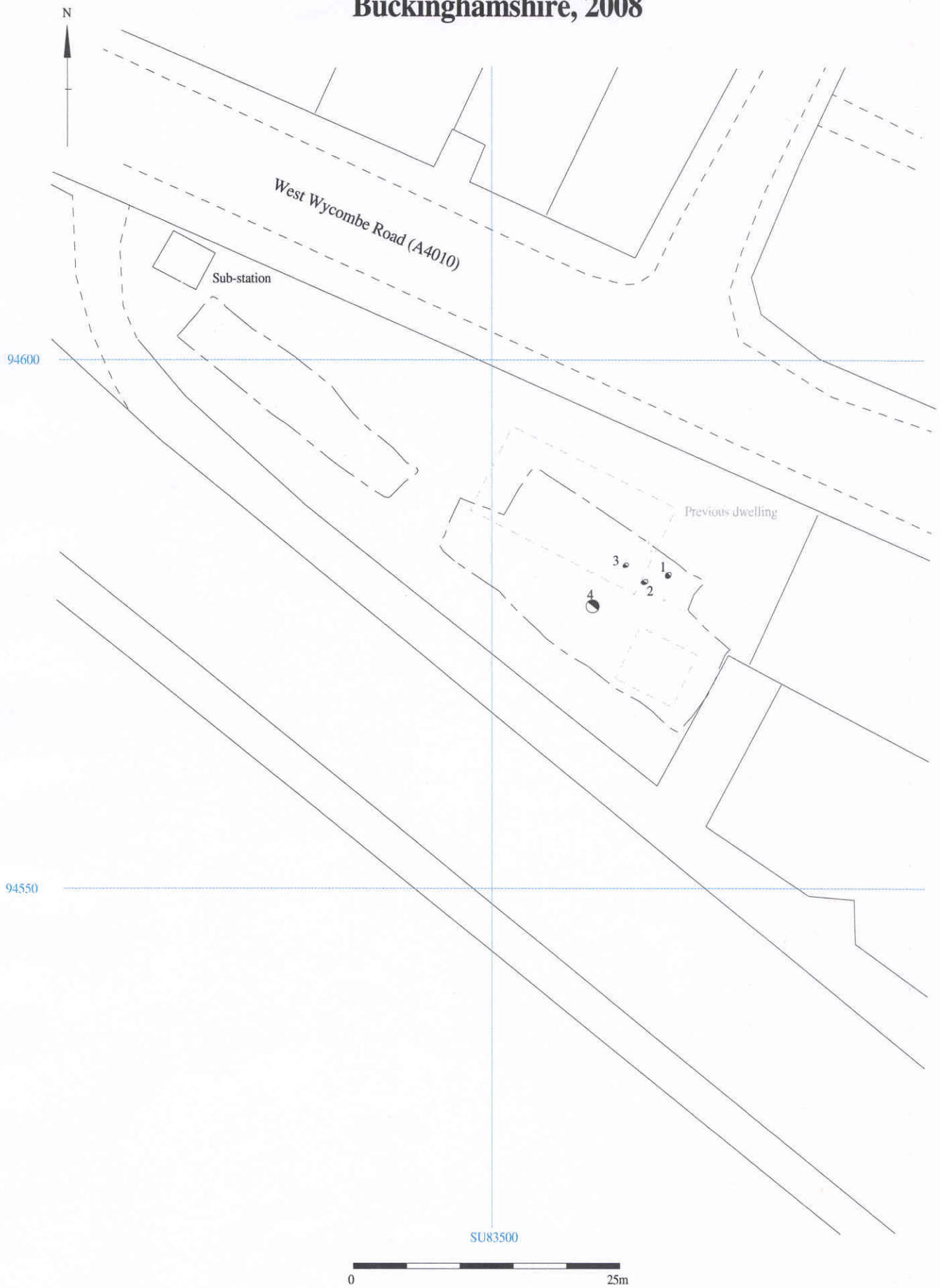


Figure 3. Area of excavation.

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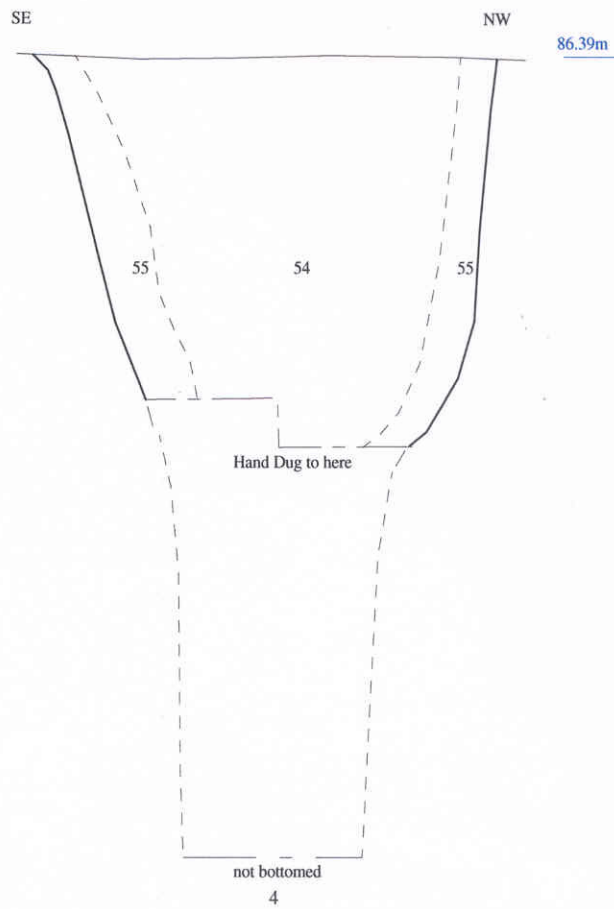
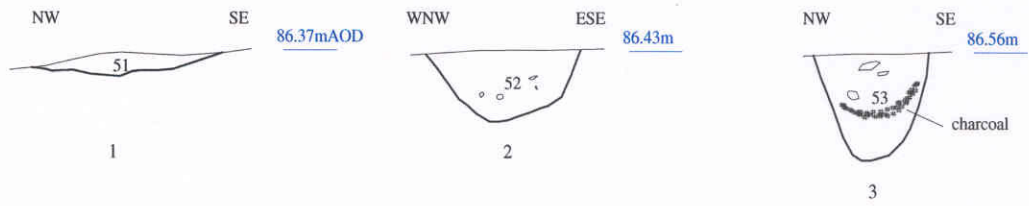


Figure 4. Sections

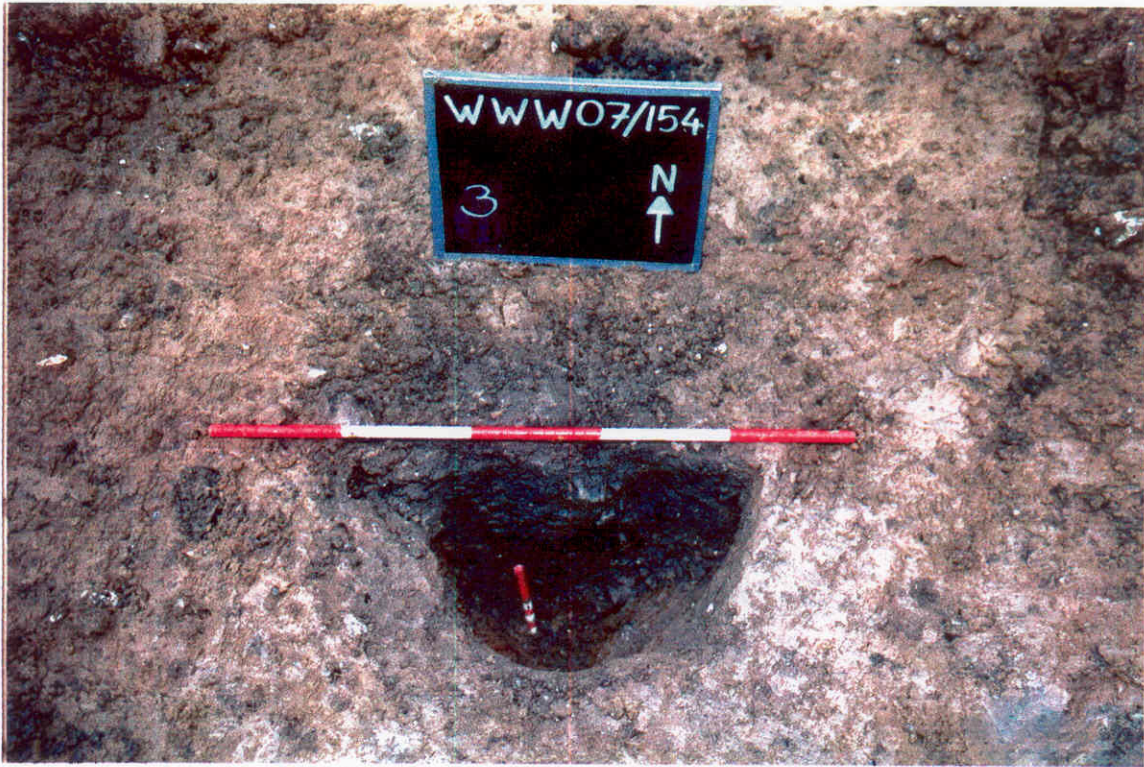


Plate 1. Posthole 3, looking north, 0.1m and 0.5m scales.

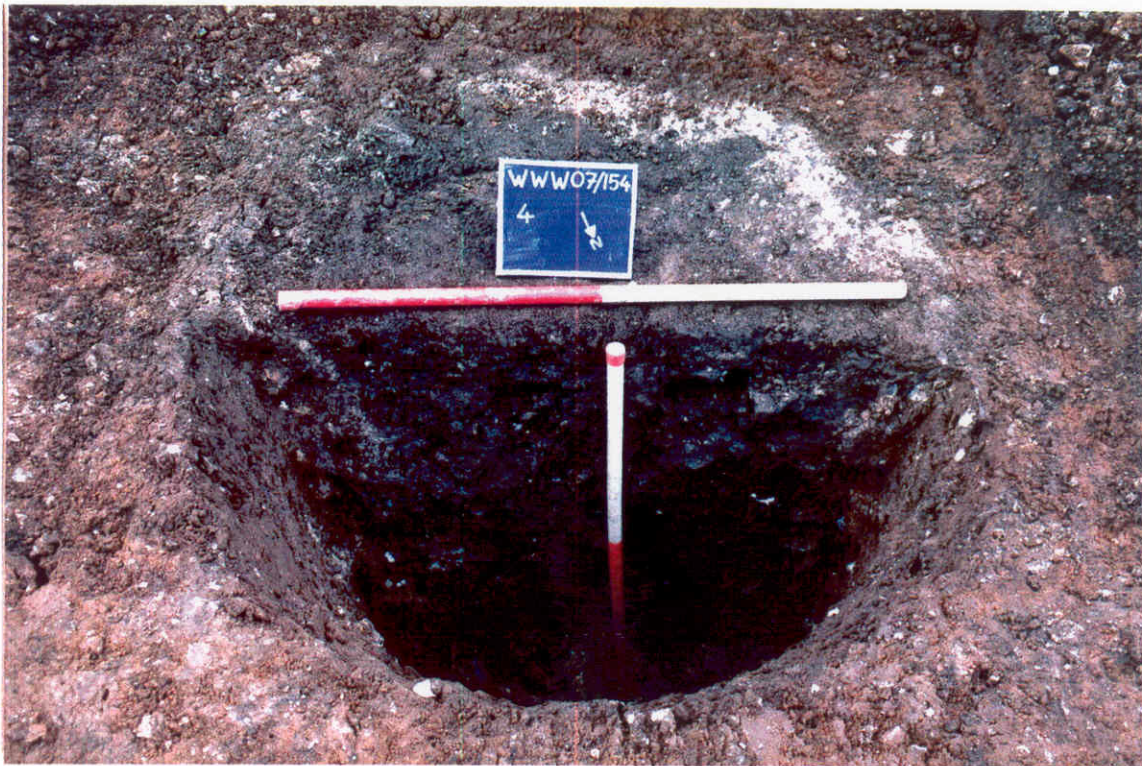


Plate 2. Well? 4, looking southwest, 1m and 1mscales.