

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

ARCHAEOLOGICAL

S E R V I C E S

**Gibbs Yard, Didcot Road,
Harwell, Oxfordshire**

Archaeological Evaluation

by David Sánchez

Site Code: GYH20/108

(SU 5029 8949)

**Gibbs Yard, Didcot Road,
Harwell, Oxfordshire**

**An Archaeological Evaluation
for County Construction Limited**

by David Sánchez

Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code GYH 20/108

October 2020

Summary

Site name: Gibbs Yard, Didcot Road, Harwell, Oxfordshire.

Grid reference: SU 5029 8949

Site activity: Archaeological Evaluation

Date and duration of project: 15th October 2020

Project coordinator: Tim Dawson

Site supervisor: David Sánchez

Site code: GYH 20/108

Area of site: c. 0.41 ha

Summary of results: Four trenches were dug as intended during the course of this archaeological evaluation but revealing no features nor finds of archaeological significance. The site is therefore considered to have no archaeological potential.

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

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Report edited/checked by:	Steve Ford ✓ 22.10.20
	Steve Preston ✓ 22.10.20

Gibbs Yard, Didcot Road, Harwell, Oxfordshire

An Archaeological Evaluation

by David Sánchez

Report 20/108

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological field evaluation carried out at Didcot Road, Harwell, Oxfordshire (SU 5029 8949) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr. Ken Whiting of Matthew T. Young Architects, 25 Hunts Mill, Goldsmiths Lane, Wallingford, Oxfordshire OX10 0DN, on behalf of County Construction Ltd., Gibbs Yard, Didcot Road, Harwell, Oxfordshire OX11 6DW.

Planning permission (App P19/V0104/FUL) has been gained from Vale of White Horse District Council for the construction of a new builder's yard offices and storage warehouse, conversion of an existing yard and storage to a fabrication workshop, erection of a new storage building and demolition of an existing storage shed. Due to the potential disturbance of below ground archaeological features, the results of an archaeological evaluation are required to inform the planning process of the potential of the site. The consent is therefore subject to conditions (4 and 5) relating to archaeology.

As a consequence of the possibility of archaeological deposits on the site which may be damaged or destroyed by groundworks, a field evaluation has been requested by the county archaeological officer. This is in accordance with the *National Planning Policy Framework* (NPPF 2019), and the District Council's Local Plan policies on archaeology. The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Richard Oram, Lead Archaeologist of Oxfordshire County Archaeological Service. The fieldwork was undertaken by David Sánchez and Emily Gibson, on 15th October 2020 and the site code is GYH 20/108. The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited with Oxfordshire Museum Service in due course.

Location, topography and geology

The site is located to the east of the village of Harwell, close to the western margins of Didcot, Oxfordshire (Fig. 1). The site itself is located just to the east of the A34 on the south side of Didcot Road with farming land to the west and south and a residential property to the east (Fig. 2). It occupies a relatively flat parcel of land at a height of approximately c. 80m above Ordnance Datum with a gentle slope towards the south with a storage warehouse

and office with associated yard covering most of its central area. The underlying geology is mapped as upper greensand (<https://www.bgs.ac.uk/>) and the geology observed in the trenches consisted of sandy clay with frequent small to medium size sandstones in sand matrix patches.

Archaeological background

The archaeological potential of the site has been highlighted in a brief for the project prepared by Richard Oram, Lead Archaeologist of Oxfordshire County Archaeological Service. In summary this potential stems from its location with a rich record of finds and sites in nearby areas recorded within the county historic environment record. Most notably, recent fieldwork to the east lies a substantial Iron Age settlement enclosure with unenclosed Iron Age settlement to the south with both linked by a trackway. Fieldwork to the west at Blenheim Hill on the outskirts of Harwell have revealed Roman settlement and a small Saxon cemetery (Taylor 2017; Taylor and Preston 2017).

Objectives and methodology

The purpose of the evaluation was to determine the presence/absence, extent, condition, character, quality and date of any archaeological or paleoenvironmental deposits within the area of development.

The specific research aims of this project were;

- a) To determine if archaeological deposits of any period were present.
- b) To determine if any prehistoric (Iron Age) or Roman deposits were present on the site.
- c) To provide information to allow the preparation of a mitigation strategy if necessary.

The potential and significance of any such deposits located was to be assessed according to the research priorities such as set out in Historic England Research Agenda (HE 2017) or any more local or thematic research priorities as necessary such as the Solent Thames Research Agenda (Hey and Hind 2014).

Four trenches were to be dug, each 10m long and 1.6-1.8m wide. A contingency for the equivalent of an additional 15m length of trenching was included within the proposal should this be required to clarify any deposits found in the initial trenching, but this was not required. Topsoil and any other overburden was to be removed by a 360-type digger machine fitted with a toothless ditching bucket under constant archaeological supervision. The excavation had to be undertaken in spits, to enable the recovery of artefactual and ecofactual remains from individual layers and spoilheaps were to be searched for finds. Where archaeological features were certainly or probably exposed the stripped areas were to be cleaned using appropriate hand tools.

Sufficient of the archaeological features and deposits exposed were to be excavated or sampled by hand to satisfy the aims of the brief. A single context recording system was to be used in accordance with the TVAS Field Recording Manual (8th edition 2018). Descriptions of individual deposits and features were to be recorded on pro-forma context recording sheets. All archaeological deposits exposed were to be planned at a scale of 1:20 and sections drawn at a scale of 1:10.

Results

Four trenches were excavated as intended during the course of the archaeological evaluation ranging in length between 10m and 11.80m and with depths between 0.40m and 0.80m. A complete list of trenches giving lengths, breadths, depths and a description of sections and geology is given in Appendix 1.

Trench 1 (Fig 3, Pl 1)

Trench 1 was aligned W - E and was 11.80m long with a depth between 0.40m and 0.58m. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.28m of topsoil and between 0.07m and 0.22m of subsoil overlying light green grey sandy clay with patches of small to medium size sandstone in sand matrix natural geology. At 6m from the east end of the trench one drainage pipe for the existing building on site was uncovered with a NNE – SSW alignment and therefore an area with a length of 1m was left at a higher level avoid any damage to the pipe. No features of archaeological interest were uncovered and no finds were recovered from this trench.

Trench 2 (Figs 3 and 4, Pl 2)

Trench 2 was aligned WSW - ENE and was 10.60m long and 0.60m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.30m of topsoil and 0.19m subsoil overlying light green grey sandy clay natural geology. Two areas at the WSW and ENE of the trench were hand cleaned and investigated to clarify the presence of possible features of archaeological interest but these showed to be heavily rooted areas. No features of archaeological significance were uncovered and no finds were recovered from this trench.

Trench 3 (Fig 3, Pl. 3)

Trench 3 was aligned SSW - NNE and was 10.00m long and 0.80m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.40m of topsoil and 0.20m subsoil overlying light green grey sandy clay natural geology. No features of archaeological interest were uncovered and no finds were recovered from this trench.

Trench 4 (Figs 3 and 4, Pl. 4)

Trench 4 was aligned NW - SE and was 10.80m long and between 0.60 and 0.80m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.25m of topsoil and between 0.15m and 0.45m of subsoil overlying light green grey sandy clay with patches of small to medium size sandstone in sand matrix natural geology. At the southwest half of the

trench a thin made ground deposit of 0.10m of redeposit light green grey sandy clay similar to the natural geology was uncovered below topsoil and overlying the subsoil. At the southwest side of the trench along most of its extension one possible feature was investigated showing to be a slight variation in the colour of the natural clay. No features of archaeological interest were uncovered and no finds were recovered from this trench.

Finds

No finds of archaeological significance were recovered during the course of the field evaluation.

Conclusion

The archaeological evaluation at Gibbs Yard, Harwell, was undertaken as intended with the excavation of four trenches which revealed no features of archaeological significance. No finds or interest were recovered and the site is therefore considered to have no archaeological potential.

References

BGS, <https://www.bgs.ac.uk/>

HE 2017, *Research Agenda*, Historic England, London

Hey, G and Hind, J, 2014, *Solent-Thames Research Framework for the Historic Environment: Resource Assessments and Research Agendas*, Oxford Wessex Monogr **6**, Oxford

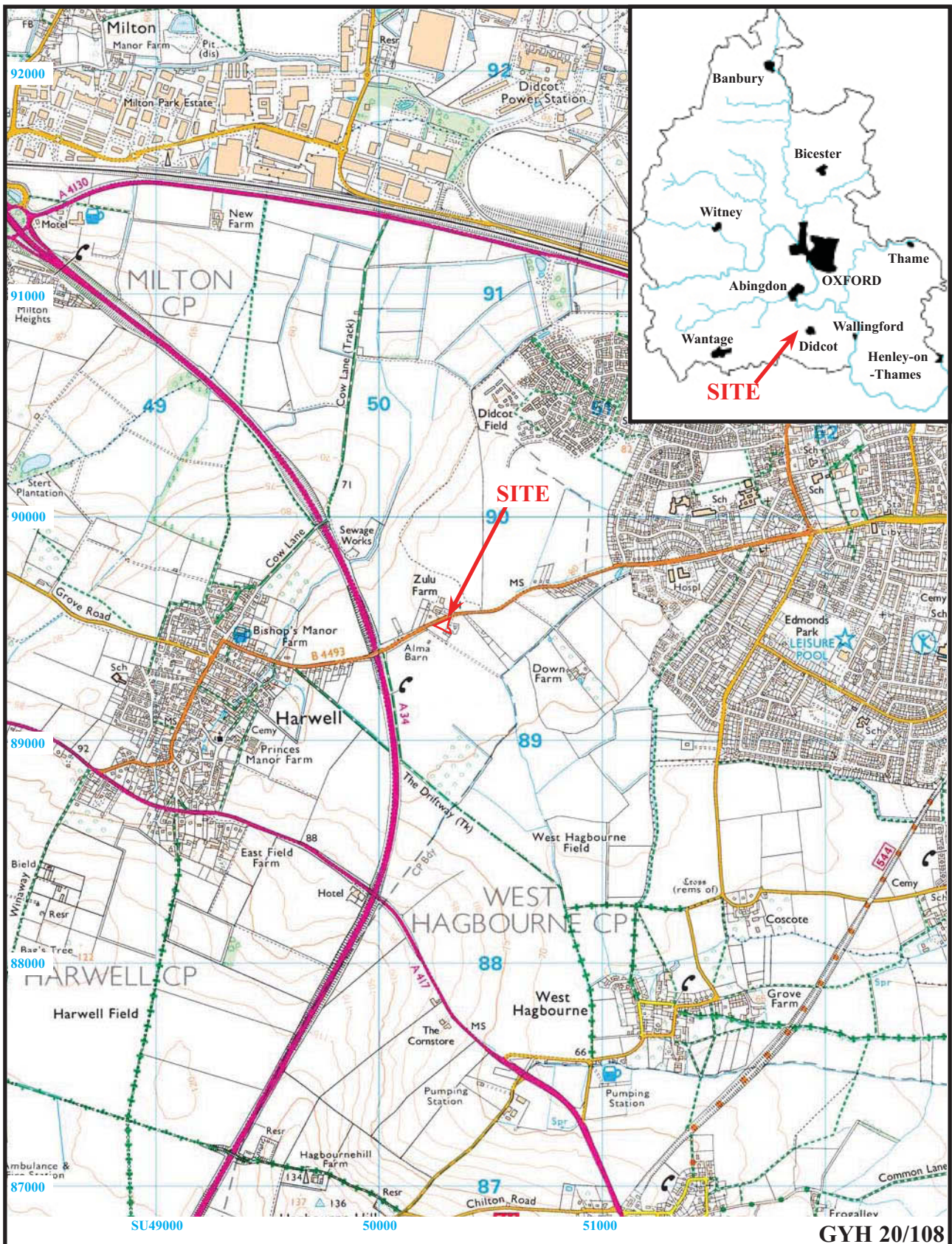
NPPF, 2019, *National Planning Policy Framework*, Dept Communities and Local Govt, London

Taylor, A, 2017, 'More Roman enclosures and Saxon burials at Kilnwood, Blenheim Hill, Harwell, Oxfordshire', in J Pine, S Preston and A Taylor, *Archaeological Excavation on Roman, Saxon and Medieval sites in Harwell and Longcot, Oxfordshire*, TVAS Occas Pap **26**, Reading 61-85

Taylor, A and Preston, S 2017, 'Roman enclosures at Blenheim Hill, Harwell, Oxfordshire' in J Pine, S Preston, and A Taylor, *Archaeological Excavation on Roman, Saxon and Medieval sites in Harwell and Longcot, Oxfordshire*, TVAS Occas Pap **26**, Reading 1-60

APPENDIX 1: Trench details

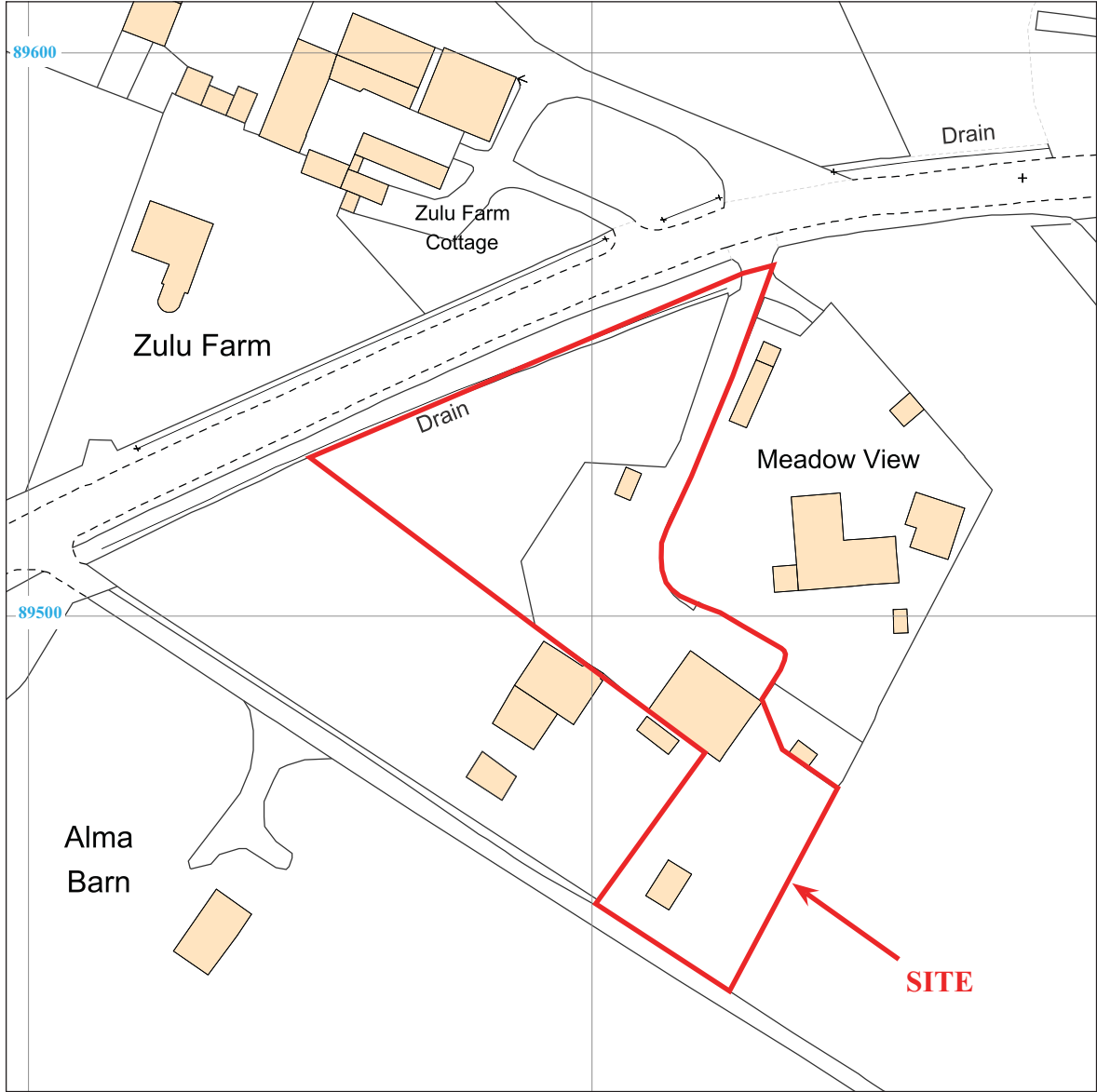
<i>Trench</i>	<i>Length (m)</i>	<i>Breadth (m)</i>	<i>Depth (m)</i>	<i>Comment</i>
1	11.80	1.60	0.40-0.58	0-0.28m topsoil, 0.28-0.35/0.50m subsoil, 0.35/0.50m+ light green grey sandy clay with patches of sandstone in sand matrix natural geology [PI 1] .
2	10.60	1.60	0.60	0-0.30m topsoil, 0.30-0.49m subsoil, 0.49m+ light green grey sandy clay natural geology [PI 2] .
3	10.00	1.60	0.80	0-0.40m topsoil, 0.40-0.60m subsoil, 0.40m+ light green grey sandy clay natural geology [PI 3] .
4	10.80	1.60	0.60-0.80	0-0.25m topsoil, 0.25-0.35m light green grey sandy clay made ground, 0.35-0.50/0.70m subsoil, 0.50/0.70m+ light green grey sandy clay with patches of sandstone in sand matrix natural geology [PI 4] .



**Land at Gibbs Yard, Didcot Road,
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Figure 1. Location of site in relation to Harwell and within Oxfordshire.

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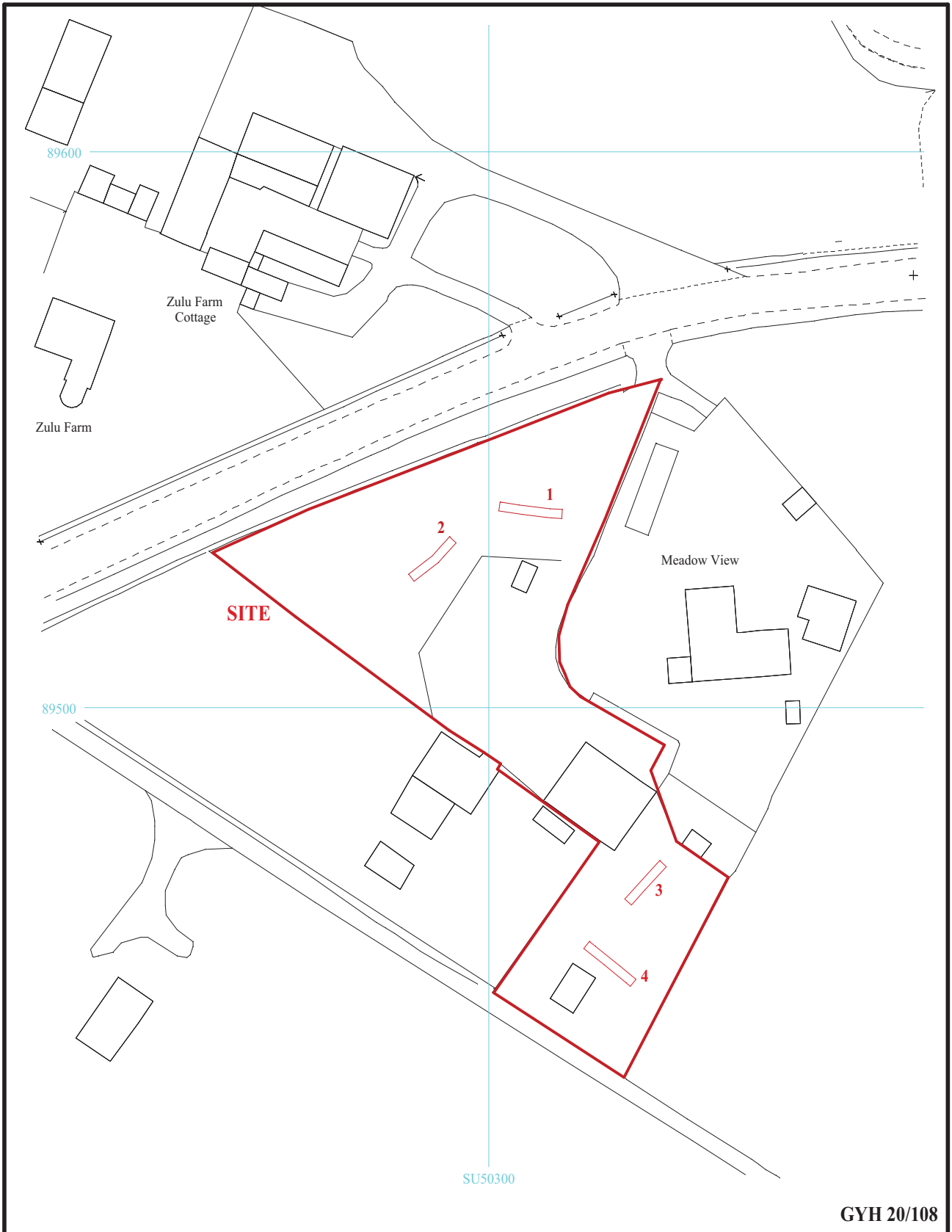
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Figure 2. Detailed location of site off Didcot Road.

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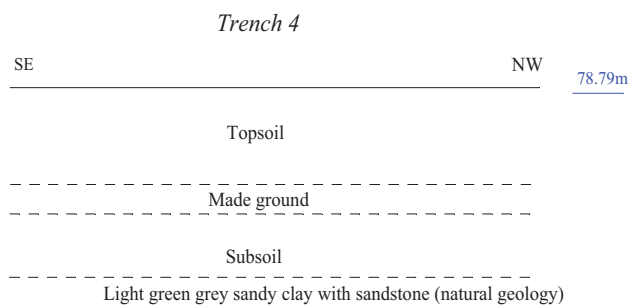
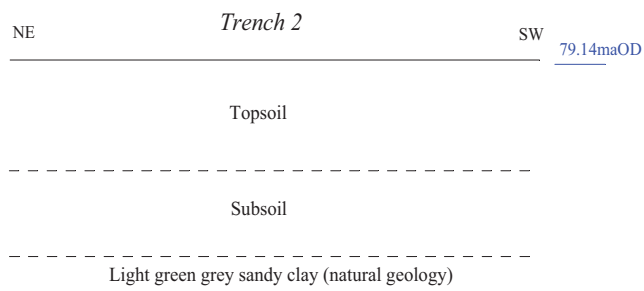
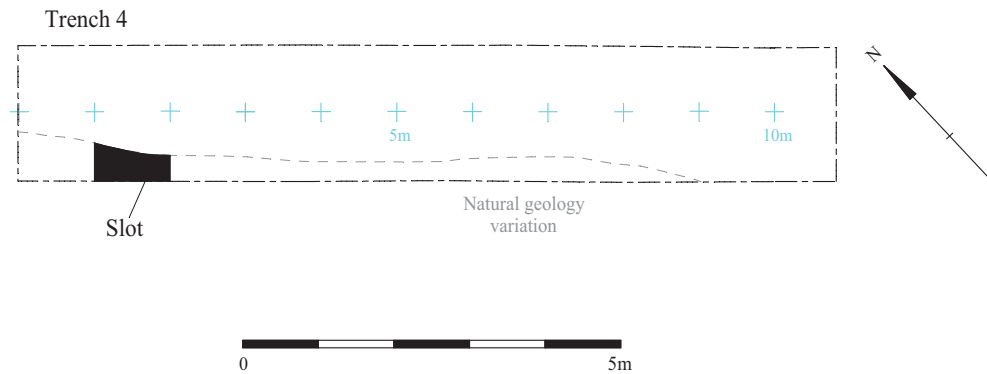
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Figure 3. Location of trenches.



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Slot tion

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Figure 4. Plan of trench 4 showing investigation slot and representative sections



Plate 1. Trench 1, looking West, Scales: 2m, 1m and 0.5m.



Plate 2. Trench 2, looking South West, Scales: 2m, 1m and 0.5m.

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**Gibbs Yard, Didcot Road,
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Plates 1 and 2.**

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Plate 3. Trench 3, looking South West, Scales: 2m, 1m and 0.5m.



Plate 4. Trench 4, looking South East, Scales: 2m, 1m and 0.5m.

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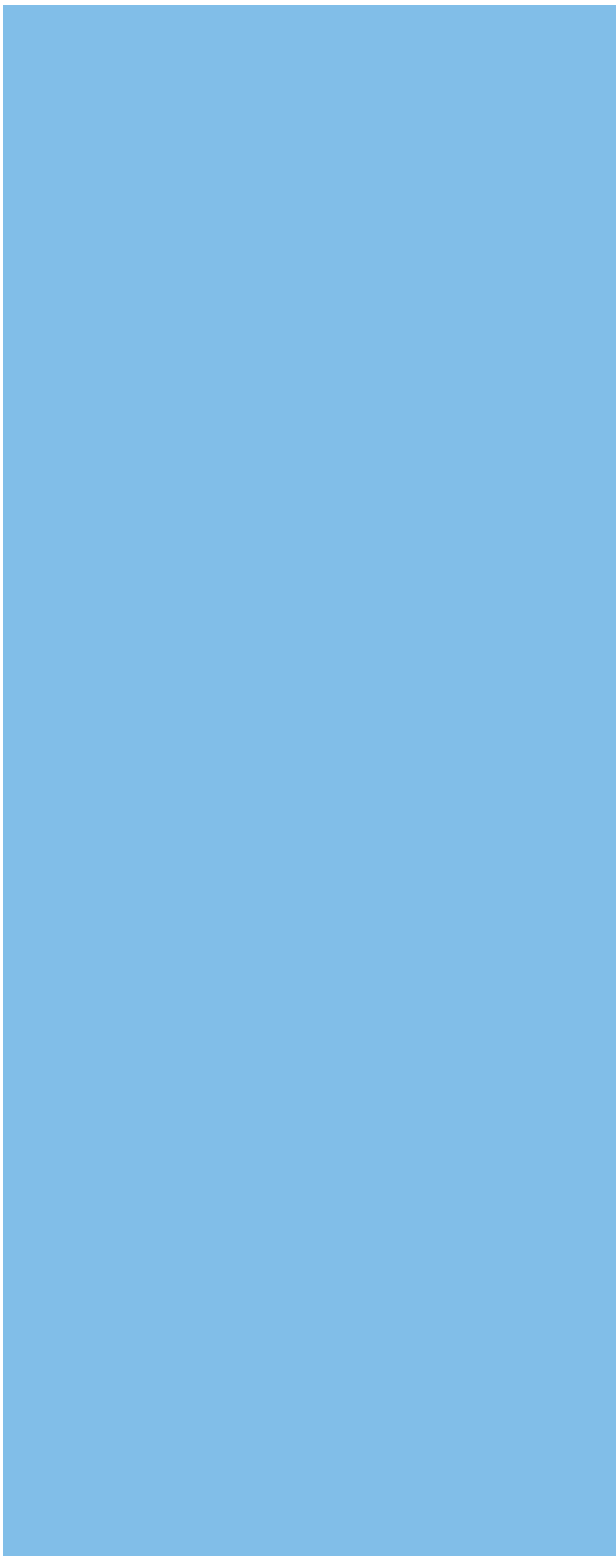
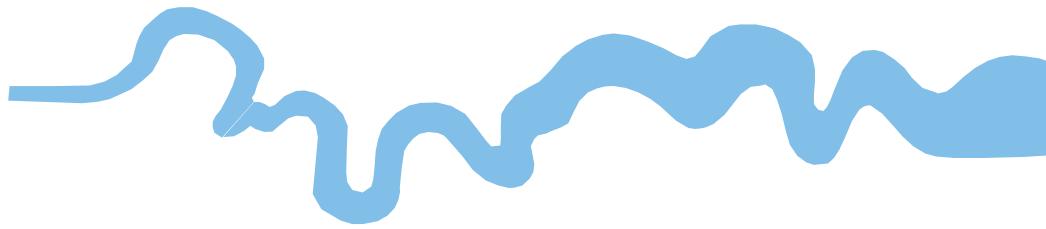
**Gibbs Yard, Didcot Road,
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Plates 3 and 4.**

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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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