

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

ARCHAEOLOGICAL

S E R V I C E S

**70-72 High Street, Maidenhead,
Berkshire**

Archaeological Evaluation

by David Sánchez

Site Code: 72HSM20/208

(SU 8880 8124)

**70-72 High Street, Maidenhead,
Berkshire**

**An Archaeological Evaluation
for Valore Capital Partners**

by David Sánchez

Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code 72HSM 20/208

February 2021

Summary

Site name: 70-72 High Street, Maidenhead, Berkshire

Grid reference: SU 8880 8124

Site activity: Archaeological Evaluation

Date and duration of project: 19th – 22nd February 2021

Project coordinator: Tim Dawson

Site supervisor: David Sánchez

Site code: 72HSM 20/208

Area of site: c. 770 sq m.

Summary of results: The field evaluation revealed a series of made ground and levelling deposits of modern date as evidence of previous developments of the site. The potential archaeological horizon of the site seems to have been truncated in large areas of plot 70 and especially plot 72 though at least one of the trenches revealed an area of relatively untouched natural geology where two features of possible Medieval date were recorded. This part of the site is therefore considered to have some archaeological potential.

Location and reference of archive: The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited in an appropriate designated museum prepared to accept the material in due course.

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70-72 High Street, Maidenhead, Berkshire An Archaeological Evaluation

by David Sánchez

Report 20/208

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological field evaluation carried out at 70-72 High Street, Maidenhead, Berkshire (SU 8880 8124) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr. Ben Nicholas, of Valore Capital Partners, 50 Grosvenor Hill Mayfair, London, W1K 3QT.

Planning permission (19/00942/FULL) has been gained from the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead for the extension to the rear of the existing retail units and conversion and extension of the upper floors for residential use. The consent is subject to a condition (10) relating to archaeology. As a consequence of the possibility of archaeological deposits on the site, a field evaluation has been requested by Berkshire Archaeology. This is in accordance with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government's *National Planning Policy Framework* (NPPF 2019), and the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead policies on archaeology.

The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Ms. Fiona Macdonald, Principal Archaeologist of Berkshire Archaeology. The fieldwork was undertaken by David Sánchez and Emily Gibson between 19th and 22nd February 2021 and the site code is 72HSM 20/208. The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited in an appropriate designated museum prepared to accept the material in due course.

Location, topography and geology

The site is located in the town of Maidenhead, on the south-western bank of the River Thames in eastern Berkshire (Fig. 1). The site is in the town centre, between High Street to the south and West Street to the north with retail units to the east and west (Fig. 2). The southern half of the site facing High Street comprises retail units with a backyard area occupying roughly the northern half of the properties. The site lies at a height of c. 28.50m above Ordnance Datum at West Street with plot 70 showing a gentle slope from the street towards the back of the retail units. Plot 72 shows a relatively flat concrete slab from West Street, following the demolition of an existing building in this area, with a lower patio immediately to the north of the existing retail unit 0.95m

below the ground level of the rest of the backyard. The underlying geology is mapped as sand and gravel (Taplow Gravel Member) (BGS 2021) which was the geology observed in the trenches.

Archaeological background

The archaeological potential of the site stems from its location within the archaeologically rich Thames Valley with a wealth of prehistoric and later archaeological finds recorded for the area (Gates 1975; Dils 2013). Recent discoveries of early Saxon structures at Braywick Leisure Centre to the south (Taylor 2018) with additional Neolithic pits, Bronze Age ring ditches and more Saxon buildings discovered during follow-up fieldwork, indicated the potential of the environs of the site (Colyer 2019).

More specific potential comes from the site's location within the town centre. Maidenhead has late Saxon origins but developed further once a new crossing of the Thames was made (Astill 1978) The pre-modern topography of Maidenhead is complex as it lies on the lower terrace of the Thames and comprised elements of a braided river, system, now alluviated with several channels having areas of higher ground (islands) in between. These islands of higher, drier land were favoured for initial settlement with some land reclamation of the lower, wetter, land. The latter riparian locations can, if deposits become waterlogged, have good preservation of organic remains.

Recent investigations 100m to the west at 100-102 High Street recovered only a single residual sherd of medieval pottery. However, the ground was found to have been heavily disturbed during the late post-medieval or modern periods with *in situ* natural geology being encountered at depths of over 2m below modern floor level (Beaverstock 2020).

Objectives and methodology

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

The specific research aims of this project were:

- to determine if archaeologically relevant levels had survived on this site;
- to determine if archaeological deposits of any period were present;
- to determine if there were any deposits of prehistoric or medieval date on the site;
- to determine, if possible, the palaeotopography of the site with regards to areas of higher, drier land (gravel islands) more suitable for occupation;

to determine if alluvium or peat deposits were present on the site and if so the relationship of archaeological deposits to them; and

to determine the palaeoenvironmental potential of the site.

The potential and significance of any such deposits located was to be assessed according to the research priorities such as set out in *English Heritage Research Agenda* (EH 2015) or any more local or thematic research priorities such as the Solent Thames Research Agenda (Hey and Hind 2014) as necessary.

Two trenches were intended to be dug, one in plot 70 and one in plot 72, each 10m long and 1.6m to 2m wide. Trenches were to be located at the rear of the site where the proposed extensions are to be situated. A contingency of 5m of additional trenching were included should this be required to clarify the results of the initial trenches but this was not required. Topsoil and any other overburden was to be removed by a JCB-type 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 outlined above.

Results

As a consequence of the presence of several unexpected buried services, the location and alignment of the trenches had to be modified and each trench was split into two. Trench 1 was dug as trenches 1A and 1B measuring 2.80m and 9m long respectively, and trench 2 was dug as trenches 2A and 2B measuring 3.50m and 6.20m respectively. A complete list of trenches giving lengths, breadths, depths and a description of sections and geology is given in Appendix 1. The excavated features, with dating evidence, are summarized in Appendix 2.

Trench 1A (Fig. 3; Pl. 1)

Trench 1A was aligned SSE - NNW and was 2.80m long and 0.78m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.10m of dark grey/black construction gravel comprising the ground level of the backyard of property and 0.20m of a bedding layer consisting of mid orange brown silty sand overlying a 0.30m thick layer of modern concrete. Below the concrete 0.13m of a dark grey silty clay levelling deposit with frequent modern construction debris such as brick or concrete fragments overlay mid orange brown gravel natural geology.

On the west side of the trench and along its whole extent a large linear truncation following the alignment of the trench cut the stratigraphy described above as well as the natural, and was filled with bricks rubble in light

orange brown silty sand matrix. This truncation was overlain only by the gravel layer comprising the ground surface of the backyard of the plot and 0.10m of a concrete slab making a narrow path on the western side of the property.

On the east side of the trench a modern well was partially uncovered with a diameter of 1.75m and its structure consisting of a single row of bricks, each measuring typically 220x100x63mm. It was filled with a mixed deposit with modern brick fragments, plastics and glass bottles.

No features of archaeological interest were uncovered in this trench and no finds were recovered from the deposits described above. The bricks of the structure of the well were measured for recording purposes and retained on site.

Trench 1B (Figs 3 and 4; Pls 2 and 6)

Trench 1B was aligned SSE - NNW and was 9m long and 0.76m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.05m of the same dark grey/black construction gravel comprising the ground level of trench 1A, 0.12m of mixed made ground mostly light greyish brown silty clay and mid orange brown silty sand with frequent small, modern brick fragments, 0.08m of light yellowish brown construction sand overlying an irregular deposit of chalk with frequent small size brick and tile fragments with a thickness between 0.02m and 0.24m. Below this layer of chalk 0.27m of mid brownish grey sandy silt made ground with occasional modern date brick and tile fragments overlaid mid orange brown gravel natural geology. On the west side of the trench 0.10m of a concrete slab path overlaid the gravel ground level of the rest of the trench.

At 3m from the NNW end of the trench one possible feature was investigated showing to be one roughly circular shaped pit (2) with a diameter of 1m and a depth of 0.22m, cut by a second feature (1), either a pit or a ditch terminus, measuring 0.86x0.70m with a depth of 0.75m. Pit 2 was filled with a single deposit (57) of mid greyish brown sandy silt with moderate small gravel inclusions which did not contain any finds. Feature 1 was filled with 5 deposits (52 to 56) consisting of 0.14m of dark greyish brown sandy silt with moderate small gravels (52), 0.25m of redeposited natural gravel (53), 0.35m of mid greyish brown sandy silt with frequent small gravel inclusions (54), a thin lens of 0.06m of redeposited natural sand and gravel (55) and up to 0.33m of dark brownish grey sandy silt with occasional small gravel and natural flint inclusions. A small assemblage of tile fragments of Medieval date was recovered from deposit 54 but no other finds of archaeological interest were recovered from the rest of the trench.

Trench 2A (Fig. 3; Pl. 3)

Trench 2A was aligned SSE - NNW and was 3.50m long and 0.60m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.10m of concrete slab and between 0.20 and 0.25m of mixed dark grey/mid brown silty sand with occasional modern brick and tile fragments overlying 0.10m of a previous concrete slab. Below the second concrete slab a bedding layer of light greyish brown sandy silt with occasional small brick and tile fragments and a thickness between 0.08 and 0.10m overlay 0.14m of disturbed mid orange brown sand natural geology above the actual untouched natural sand. No features of archaeological interest were uncovered in this trench and no finds were recovered.

Trench 2B (Figs 3; Pl. 4 and 5)

Trench 1B was aligned SSE - NNW and was 6.20m long and 0.1.65m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.07m of modern concrete slab above up to 0.45m of steel-reinforced concrete, 0.16m of light orange brown redeposit natural sand and gravel with occasional construction debris and 0.72m of mixed made ground consisting mostly of dark brownish grey silty sand with frequent chalk, modern brick and tile fragments, small concrete fragments and other construction debris, overlying a thin previous concrete slab with a thickness of 0.10m. Below this earlier concrete slab 0.17m of disturbed mid orange brown sand and gravel natural geology overlay the undisturbed natural geology. No features of archaeological interest were uncovered in this trench and no finds were recovered.

Finds

Ceramic Building Material by Cristina Mateos

Seven fragments of ceramic building material (weighing 409g) were recovered during the course of the evaluation, all from deposit 54. Among these five fragments of roof tiles have been identified. The first one is a hand-made fabric with a fine to medium clay, with sparse to moderate quartz sand inclusions and a peg hole. The other four have hand-made fabrics with a coarse clay and slightly laminated texture, and moderate to sparse poorly sorted quartz sand inclusions. The colour varied from slightly orange red to darker red, with occasional examples of a grey core. These ranged in thickness between 14mm to 10mm. The fragments have a rough underside, indicating that they were made using a sanded mould.

Two pieces of building material were small fragments which could not be identified.

The building material is broadly datable to the Medieval period based on form, fabric and thickness.

Environmental remains by Elspeth St. John-Brooks

One bulk soil sample were taken from deposit 54 in pit 1. The sample was floated and wet sieved using a 0.5cm sieve and 0.1mm mesh and air dried, the flots were retained and examined under low magnification 8x to 20x. This sample produced no environmental remains.

Conclusion

The evaluation of plots 70 and 72 High Street in Maidenhead was successfully concluded though the alignment of the trenches was modified and each trench was split in two to avoid existing services in use. The stratigraphy uncovered in the trenches showed the presence of much truncated ground in some areas with series of made ground and levelling deposits as evidence of previous modern developments of the site. The ground level of most of plot 72 seems to have been made up for the construction of a recently demolished building, overlying a previous patio area identified by a buried concrete slab uncovered in trenches 2A and 2B. This slab and its thin make up layer overlay most likely truncated natural geology. A similar stratigraphy was uncovered in the southern area of the backyard of plot 70 where the natural geology was heavily truncated by a modern trench and well though in the northern area of this plot the whole extent of trench 1B revealed a relatively untouched natural geology. In this area one pit and one possible ditch terminus or pit were investigated with a small assemblage of finds suggesting a possible Medieval date.

Although most of the site is therefore considered to have low archaeological potential due to the damage to the potential archaeological level by previous developments some areas of the site seems to remain relatively untouched with two features of archaeological interest identified in one of the trenches.

References

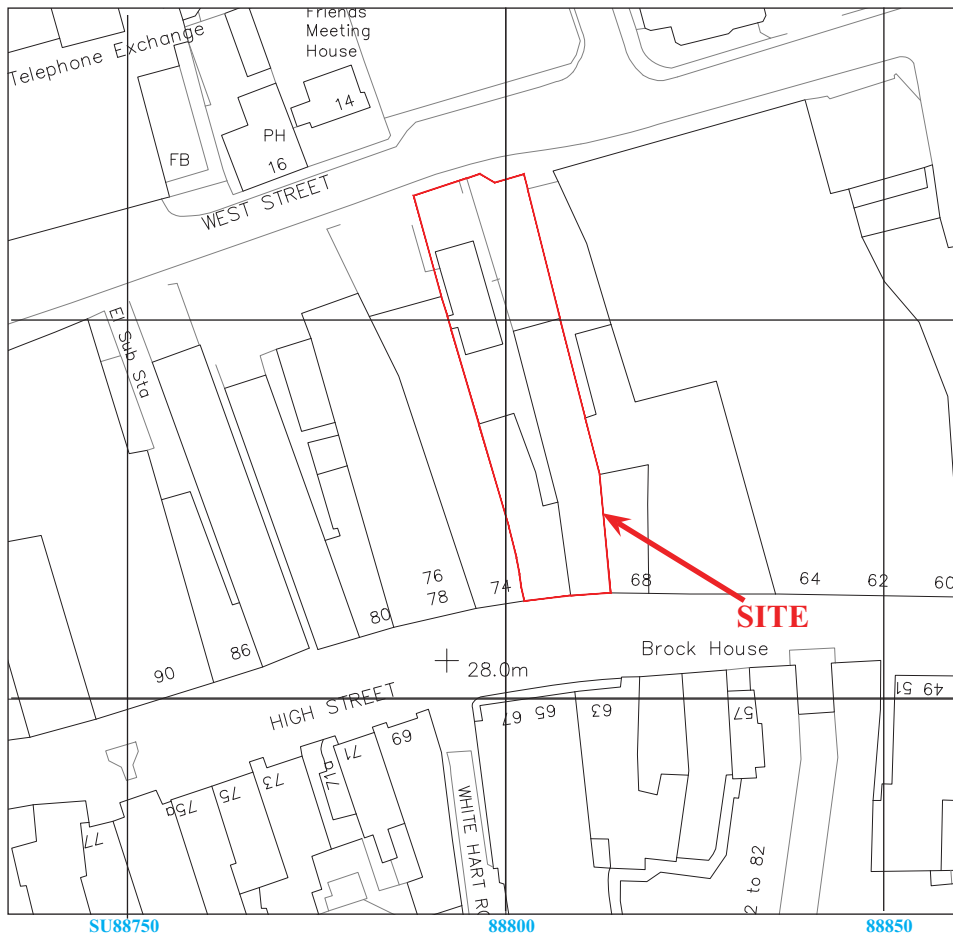
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APPENDIX 1: Trench details
0m at SSE end

<i>Trench</i>	<i>Length (m)</i>	<i>Breadth (m)</i>	<i>Depth (m)</i>	<i>Comment</i>
1A	2.80	1.80	0.78	0–0.10m dark grey/black construction gravel (ground level), 0.10-0.30m mid orange ground silty sand, 0.30-0.60m modern concrete, 0.60-0.73m dark grey silty clay, 0.73m+ mid orange brown gravel natural geology [PI. 1] .
1B	9.00	1.80	0.76	0–0.05m dark grey/black construction gravel (ground level), 0.05-0.17m mixed made ground, 0.17-0.25m light yellowish brown construction sand, 0.25-0.27/0.49m chalk made ground, 0.27/0.49-0.76m mid brownish grey sandy silt made ground, 0.76m+ mid orange brown gravel natural geology. Pit/ditch terminus 1 and pit 2 [PI. 2 and 6] .
2A	3.50	1.80	0.60	0–0.10m concrete slab, 0.10-0.30m mixed dark grey/mid brown silty sand made ground, 0.30-0.45m buried concrete slab, 0.45-0.50m light greyish brown sandy silt bedding layer, 0.50-0.60m disturbed natural sand, 0.60m+ mid orange brown sand natural geology [PI. 3] .
2B	6.20	1.80	1.65	0–0.07m concrete slab, 0.07-0.52m steel reinforced concrete, 0.52-0.68m light orange brown redeposit natural sand and gravel, 0.68-1.40m mixed made ground, 1.40-1.50m buried concrete slab, 1.50-1.65m disturbed sand and gravel natural geology, 1.65m+mid orange brown sand and gravel natural geology [PI. 4 and 5] .

APPENDIX 2: Feature details

<i>Trench</i>	<i>Cut</i>	<i>Fill (s)</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Dating evidence</i>
1B	1	52- 56	Pit/ditch terminus	Medieval	Brick/tile
1B	2	57	Pit	Medieval or earlier	Stratigraphy



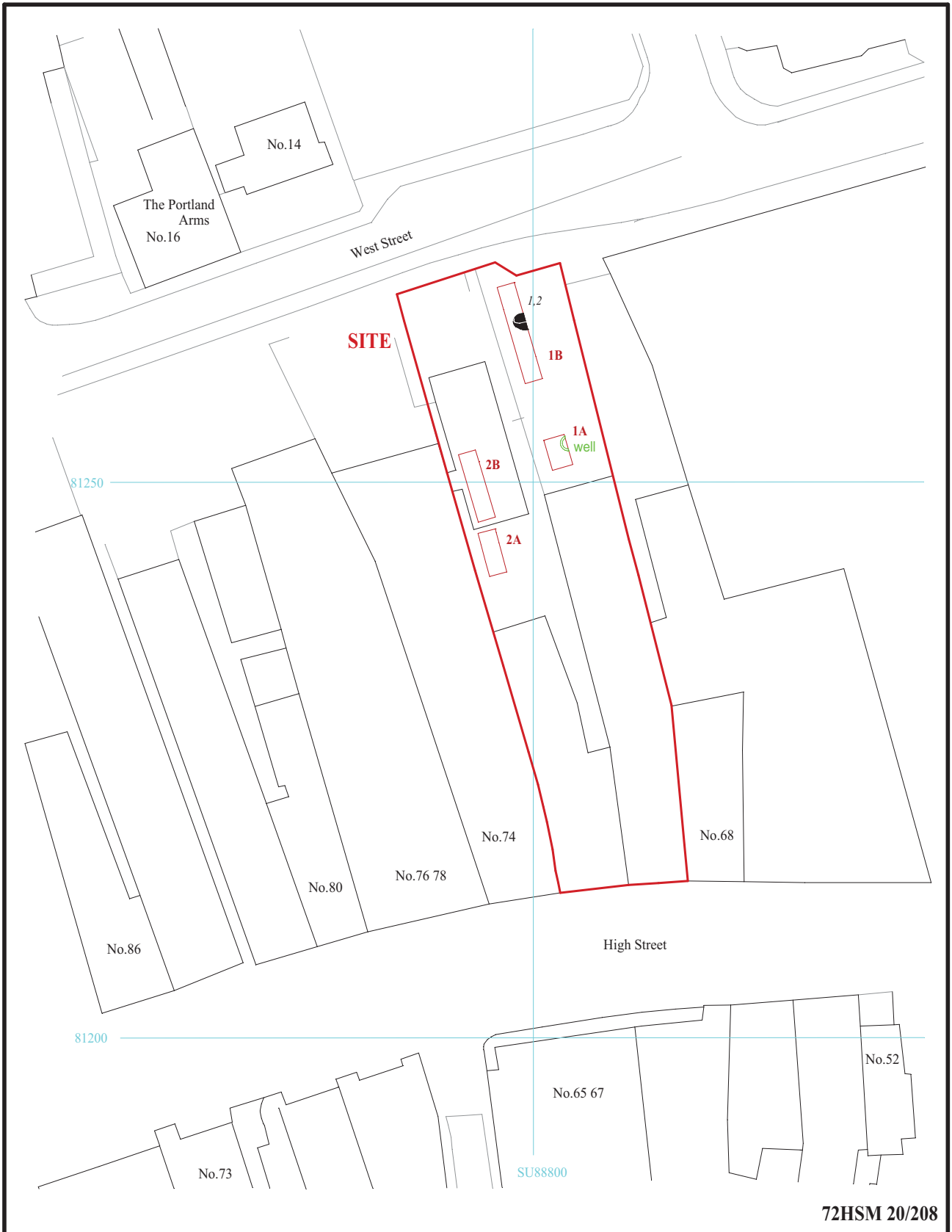
72HSM 20/208



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Figure 2. Detailed location of site, north of High Street.

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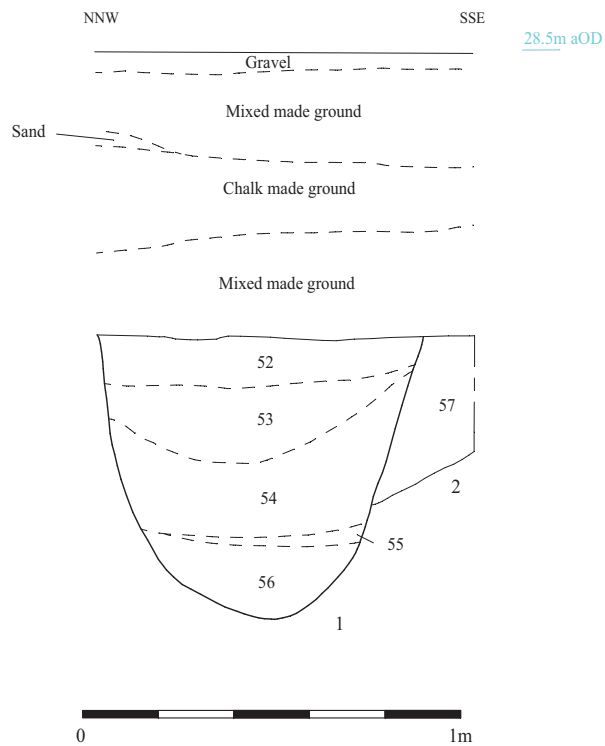
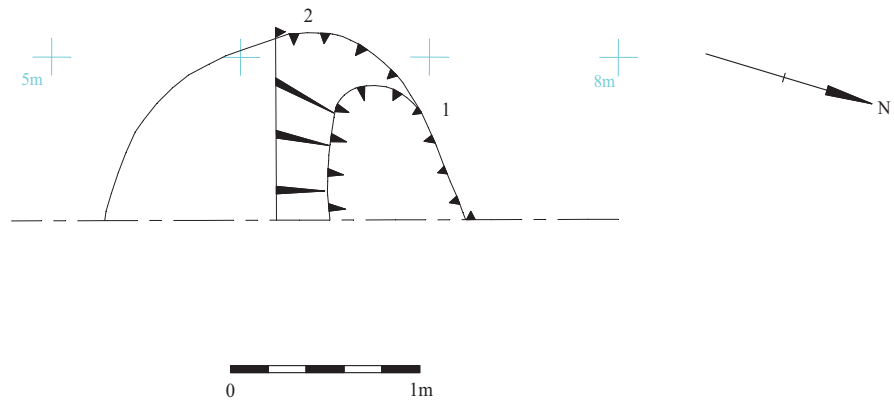
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Figure 3. Location of trenches.



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Trench 1B



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Berkshire, 2021
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Figure 4. Detail of trenches and sections



Plate 1. Trench 1A, looking south east, Scales: 2m, 1m and 0.50m.



Plate 2. Trench 1B, looking south east, Scales: 2m, 1m and 0.50m.

72HSM 20/208

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Berkshire, 2021
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Plates 1 and 2.

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Plate 3. Trench 2A, looking north west,
Scales: 2m, 1m and 0.50m.



Plate 4. Trench 2B, looking south west, Scales: 2m, 1m and 0.50m.

72HSM 20/208

**70-72 High Street, Maidenhead
Berkshire, 2021
Archaeological Evaluation
Plates 3 and 4.**

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Plate 5. Trench 2B section, looking west, Scales: 2m and 1m.



Plate 6. Pit/ditch terminus 1 and pit 2, looking east, Scales: 1m and 0.50m.

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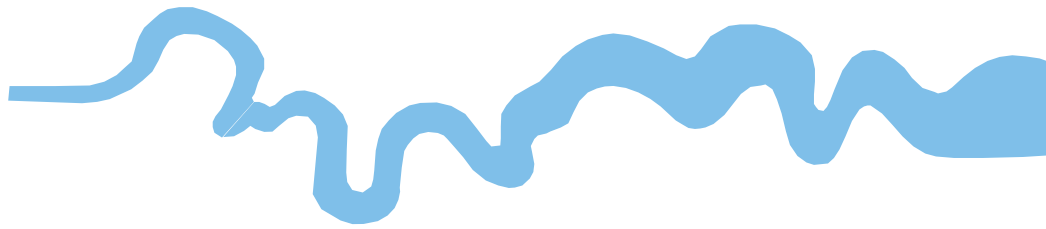
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Plates 5 and 6.

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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 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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