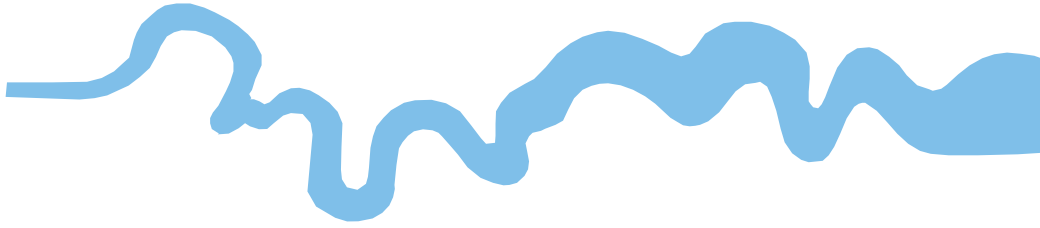


**T V A S**



**EAST MIDLANDS**

**74 Icknield Way and Icknield House,  
Baldock, Hertfordshire**

**Archaeological Watching Brief**

**by Anne-Michelle Huvig and  
Pierre-Damien Manisse**

**Site Code: IWB20/39**

**(TL 2425 3413)**

**74 Icknield Way and Icknield House,  
Baldock, Hertfordshire**

**An Archaeological Watching Brief  
for McCarthy & Stone**

by Anne-Michelle Huvig and Pierre-Damien Manisse  
Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code IWB 20/39

**February 2021**

## Summary

**Site name:** 74 Icknield Way and Icknield House, Baldock, Hertfordshire

**Grid reference:** TL 2425 3413

**Site activity:** Watching Brief

**Date and duration of project:** 23rd September 2020 to 5th January 2021

**Project coordinator:** Tim Dawson

**Site supervisor:** David Sanchez, Will Attard, John Tierney, Maisie Foster and Pierre Manisse

**Site code:** IWB 20/39

**Area of site:** 0.53 Ha

**Summary of results:** The watching brief monitored several components of the initial stage of the project namely the dismantling of some former buildings, the removal of slabs and Tarmac, some ground reduction and the digging of new foundation trenches. Only traces of activity during the Victorian era or later were observed and they mainly related to the gasworks (gasholders and tar well). No archaeological finds nor any deposits of archaeological interest were revealed.

**Location and reference of archive:** The archive is presently held at TVAS East Midlands, Wellingborough and will be deposited at North Hertfordshire Museum or Archaeology Data Service

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[www.tvas.co.uk/reports/reports.asp](http://www.tvas.co.uk/reports/reports.asp).*

Report edited/checked by: Steve Ford ✓ 16.02.21 Steve Preston ✓ 16.02.21
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# 74 Icknield Way and Icknield House, Baldock, Hertfordshire An Archaeological Watching Brief

by Anne-Michelle Huvig and Pierre-Damien Manisse

**Report 20/39**

## **Introduction**

This report documents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out at 74 Icknield Way and Icknield House, Baldock, Hertfordshire (centred on TL 2425 3413) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned for McCarty & Stone, Prospect Place, 85 Great North Road, Hatfield, Hertfordshire, AL9 5DA as advised by Ms Helen Martin-Bacon of Avalon Heritage Limited.

Planning permission (19/00970/FP) has been granted by North Hertfordshire District Council to redevelop the site with the erection of retirement dwellings, associated amenities and landscaping. The consent is subject to conditions (21-23) relating to archaeology. This is in accordance with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government's *National Planning Policy Framework* (NPPF 2019), and the District Council's policies on archaeology. A programme of archaeological monitoring during groundworks was to be implemented to fulfil the conditions. The field investigation was carried out to a written scheme of investigation (WSI) prepared by Ms Helen Martin Bacon of Avalon Heritage Ltd (Martin-Bacon 2020).

The fieldwork was undertaken by David Sanchez, Will Attard, John Tierney, Maisie Foster and Pierre-Damien Manisse, between 23rd September 2020 to 5th January 2021. The site code is IWB 20/39.

The archive is presently held at TVAS East Midlands, Wellingborough and will be deposited at North Hertfordshire Museum or the Archaeology Data Service in due course.

## **Location, topography and geology**

The site is located on the north side of Icknield Way, on the north fringe of the town of Baldock (Fig.1). It is bordered to the west by industrial/commercial units, to the east by residential properties and to the north by the railway line between London and Cambridge (Fig. 2). Land further north remains agricultural open field. The site, an approximately rectangular plot, was previously occupied by a garage and derelict storage sheds/warehouses (Fig. 2).

According to maps (BGS 1995), the underlying geology is mapped as Middle Chalk. This is a white chalk with some flints and marl seams. The site, flat, lies at a height of *c.* 59m above Ordnance Datum (aOD).

## **Archaeological background**

The archaeological potential of the site has been summarized in the WSI. In the vicinity of the site there is only limited evidence for settlement that predated the more substantial Roman town: Neolithic flint tools and a pit from excavation at Walls Field in the 1920s; and cropmarks of three ring-ditches (barrows) to the north-east. More barrows were revealed during the construction of the bypass in 2003-2004. Late Iron Age cremations were also found nearby and testified of the proximity of an important Iron Age settlement. It was superseded by a Roman urban centre, flourishing from the mid 1st century onwards due to its position at a junction on Icknield Way, an important trade route of prehistoric origin, with two other Roman roads. Later a medieval planned market was developed here.

An archaeological impact assessment and evaluation conducted in 2008 (AS 2008) produced limited results, except for a Roman pit or well and two ditches, each with just one sherd of post-medieval pottery. Much evidence of modern truncation were observed.

## **Objectives and methodology**

The purpose of the watching brief was to excavate and record any archaeological deposits affected by the works. This archaeological monitoring was intended to determine the presence or absence of buried archaeological remains, their character and extent. The work was to take into consideration local or regional research priorities (Brown and Glazebrook 2000) and to follow the guidelines of the CIfA (2020). A sufficient percentage of any archaeological features revealed was to be sampled so as to characterize and date them (typically 10% of linear features, 50% of pits and 100% of smaller discrete features).

## **Results (Figs 3-6)**

The archaeological monitoring comprised three components which happened sequentially area by area. The remediation work consisted mostly of concrete slab removal; followed by ground reduction; and then the creation of foundation trenches.

### *Slab removal*

Either concrete slabs or Tarmac covered an extensive part of the site. Some of the buildings had not yet been fully demolished, especially their foundations, which were observed occasionally. A substantial part of the site

saw the presence of modern backfill or ground intrusive features. Prior to any re-development, the slabs had to be removed (Pls 1 and 2). They were about 0.20-0.25m thick, overlying bedding layers, usually a light yellowish brown sand or a dark grey to black gravel at west under Tarmacadam. Below this was a mixed made ground (0.22-0.27m thick) with common construction debris but also redeposited chalk also yielding some modern waste. The brick foundations of former (now demolished) buildings and some modern concrete or brick floors were also mechanically removed. Modern backfill or intrusive features reached to between 0.50-1.10m below actual surface.

### *Ground reduction (Fig. 3)*

Following the concrete clearance, there was a limited ground reduction, initially up to 0.33-0.47m below the original level, which either reached the natural geology (chalk and chalk nodules) or some remnant modern made ground (mostly mid brownish grey silty clay with chalk lumps, sand, concrete and other modern construction debris). The natural geology appeared at a depth about 0.40-0.70m, depending on the intrusive modern levelling.

Amidst multiple recent truncations, ranging from a pit 1m in diameter to large scale deposits (30m<sup>2</sup>), a few features could be distinguished. Three large circular features were observed in the north-west, one with diameter of c. 8.80m, and two c. 10.5m. They were built of concrete and bricks (Pl. 3) and easily identified as Victorian underground gas tanks, visible on the 1898 Ordnance Survey (OS) map, one disappearing on the 1922 OS map and only one was left on the 1937 OS map edition. Another observed feature was a tar well (Pl. 4), about 4m in diameter and 2m deep. The ground reduction went deeper in these areas to complete the decontamination.

In the western half of the site (Figs 3 and 4), close to Ickniel Way, the ground reduction was limited to 0.50m while at north it reached 1.40m. A large (14 x 6 x 2.5m) concrete foundation observed not far from the gasholders and tar well was the remains of a tower according to contractors. Several footings of Victorian era buildings were spotted.

The eastern part of the site (Fig. 5) was also heavily truncated by modern deposits but a clearer view of the stratigraphy emerged. Below the slabs was a 0.10-0.15m thick made ground, a dark grey to black clayey silt with frequent modern brick/tile fragments, pipe fragments, plastic, etc. It overlay 0.25-0.55m of chalk, a thick made ground deposit of the redeposited natural, which could be related to the previous development of the site, or from the construction of the bank for the railway immediately to the north. The latter is perhaps suggested as this deposit was more substantial towards the north. In place this covered a 0.10-0.15m dark greyish brown clay silt, which could be interpreted as a buried topsoil or a subsoil (Pl. 5). The geological horizon was then reached

between 0.70m and 1m below the modern surface. In other parts the overburden directly overlay the natural geology (Pl. 8) or modern truncation.

### *Foundation trenches (Fig.5)*

The footings for the new buildings were excavated with a ditching bucket at a varying depth around 0.80-1.20m and 0.70m wide. No archaeological features or deposits were observed and only modern truncation and services were noted (Pl. 6).

### **Finds**

No finds of archaeological interest were encountered.

### **Conclusion**

The site had been massively truncated since the Victorian era. Traces of industrial activity related to gasworks were observed in the western half, in the form of three gasholders and a tar well. The few older brick foundations could be linked to buildings associated with the gasworks compound. This activity is documented in the historical records as well as on cartographic sources. The works began to supply gas in 1837, with production ceasing pre-1956 (Thomas 2020). No earlier evidence was found, in particular related to the Roman pit seen during the evaluation phase. The remodelling of the site with deposits of made ground or redeposited chalk during recent times will have erased all possible earlier remains.

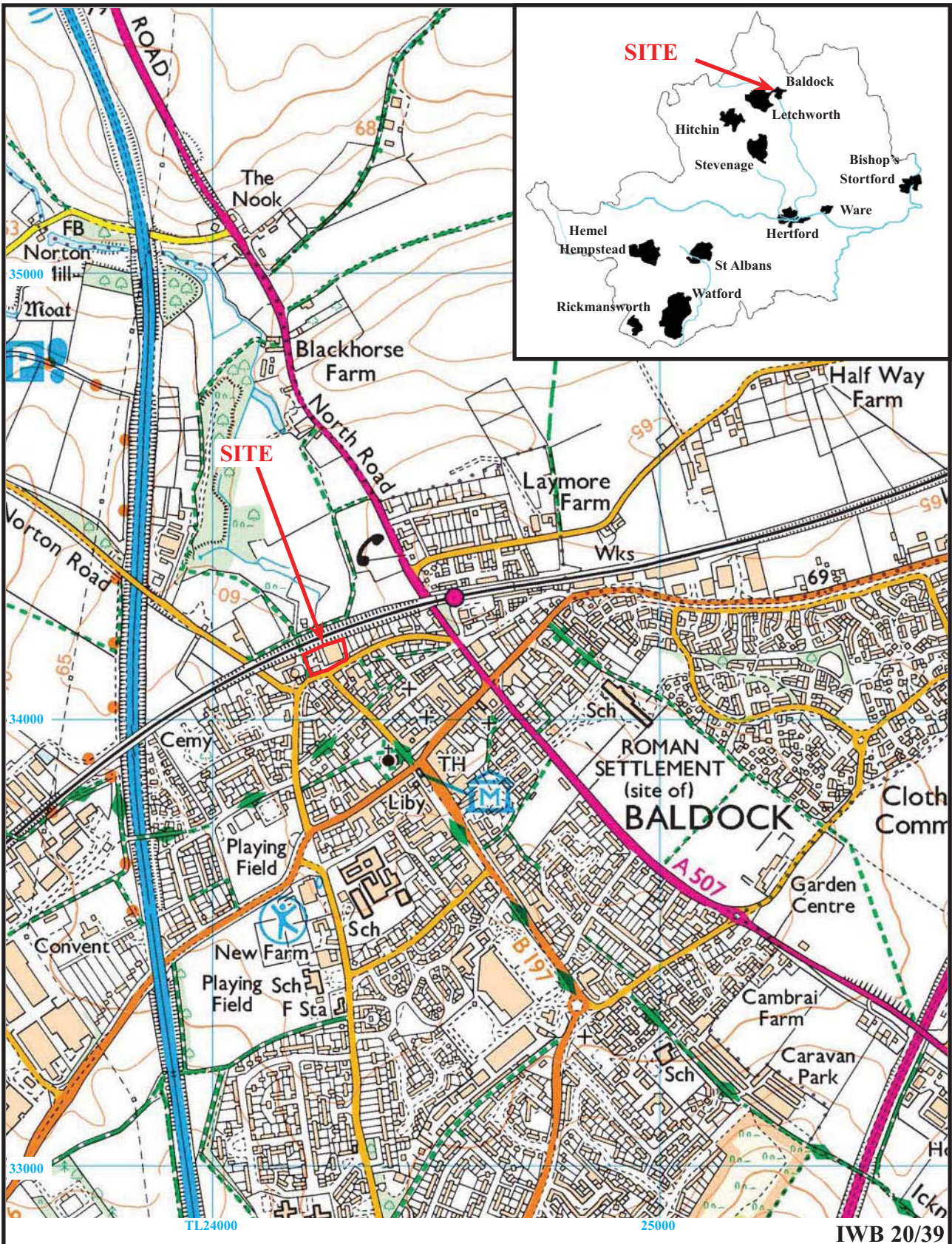
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**APPENDIX 2: HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT RECORD SUMMARY SHEET**

<b>Site name and address:</b> 74 Icknield Way and Icknield House, Baldock, Hertfordshire		
<b>County:</b> Hertfordshire	<b>District:</b> Baldock	
<b>Village/Town:</b>	<b>Parish:</b> Baldock	
<b>Planning application reference:</b> 19/00970/FP		
<b>Client name, address, and tel. no.:</b> McCarty & Stone, Prospect Place, 85 Great North Road, Hatfield, Hertfordshire, AL9 5DA.		
<b>Nature of application:</b> Residential		
<b>Present land use:</b> Industrial- gas works		
<b>Size of application area:</b> 0.53ha	<b>Size of area investigated:</b> 0.53ha	
<b>NGR (to 8 figures):</b> TL 2425 3413		
<b>Site code (if applicable):</b> IWB20/39		
<b>Site director/Organization:</b> various/ TVAS East Midlands		
<b>Type of work:</b> Watching Brief		
<b>Date of work:</b>	Start: 23/9/30	Finish: 5/1/21
<b>Location of finds &amp; site archive/Curating museum:</b> To go to North Herts or ADS		
<b>Related HER Nos:</b>	<b>Periods represented:</b> None	
<b>Relevant previous summaries/reports:</b> AS, 2008, Icknield House & 74, Icknield Way, Baldock, Hertfordshire – An Archaeological Impact Assessment and Evaluation, Archaeological Solutions Ltd unpubl. rep. 3186		
Summary of fieldwork results: The watching brief investigated removal of the old facilities. Much of the area was heavily truncated. No deposits of archaeological interest were observed		
<b>Author of summary:</b> Pierre Manisse	<b>Date of summary:</b> 26/2/21	



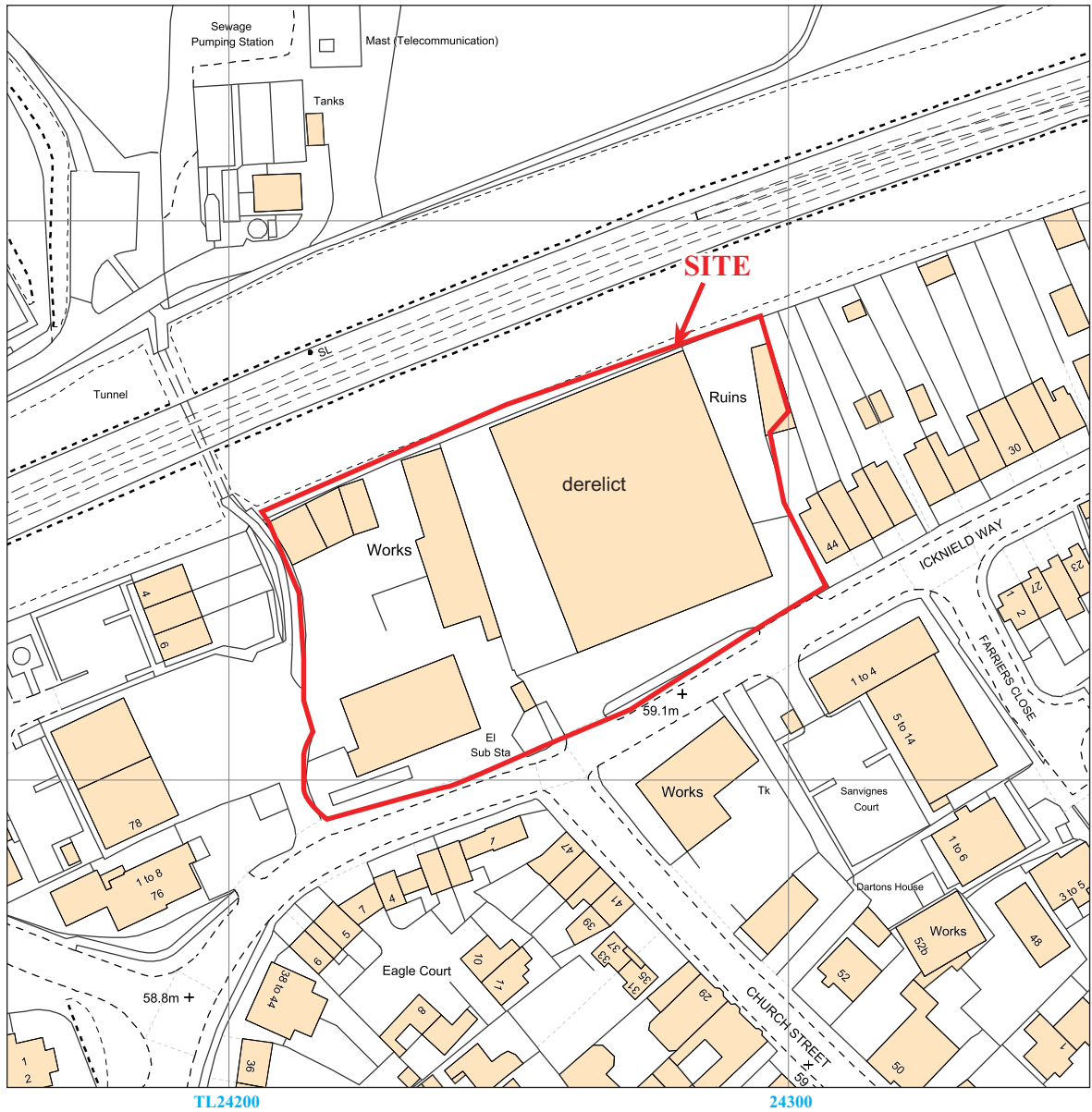


**74 Icknield Way, Baldock, Hertfordshire  
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Figure 1. Location of site within Baldock and Hertfordshire.

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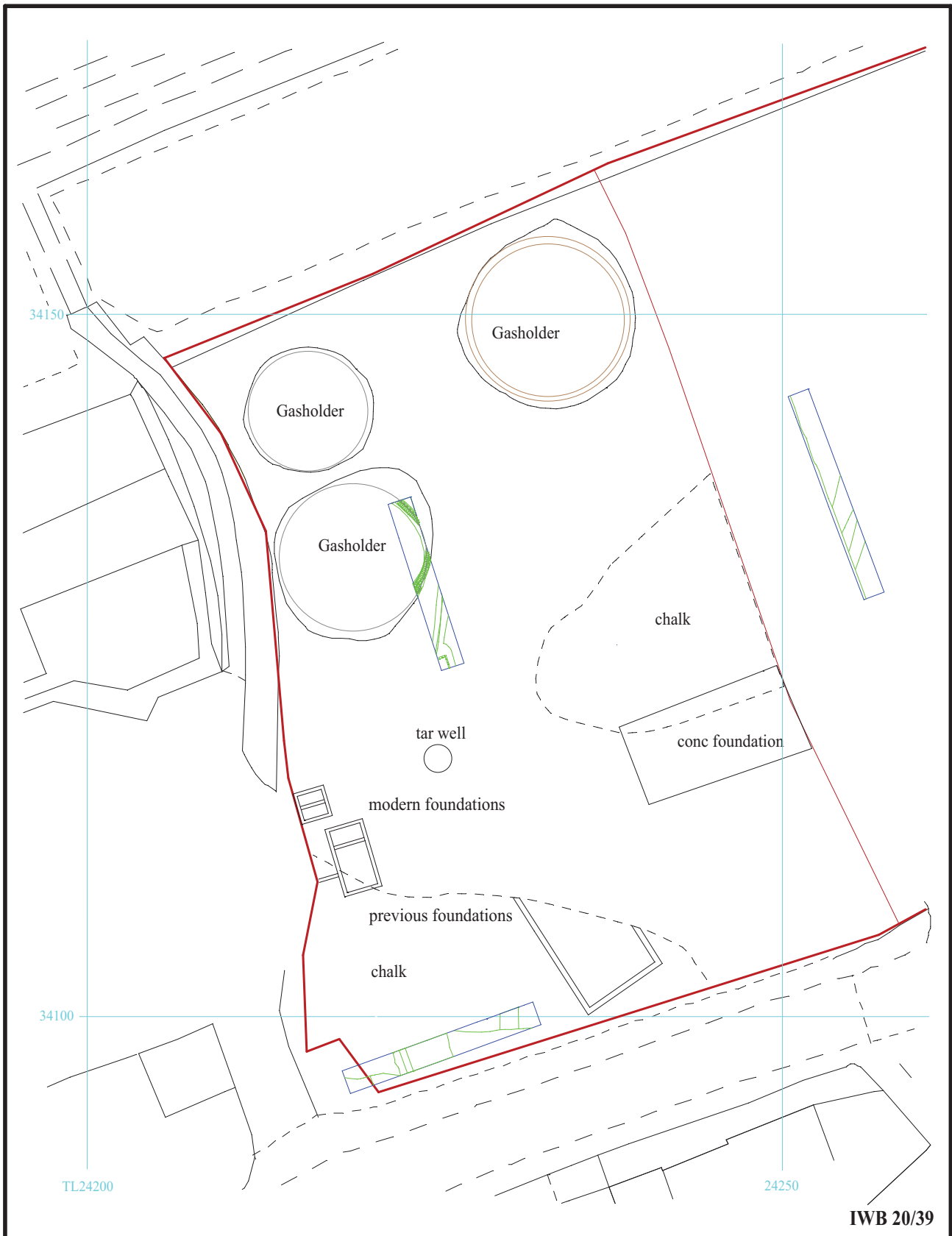
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Figure 2. Detailed location of site off Icknield Way,  
prior to demolition.  
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Figure 3. Location of features uncovered in remediation works under concrete slabs.

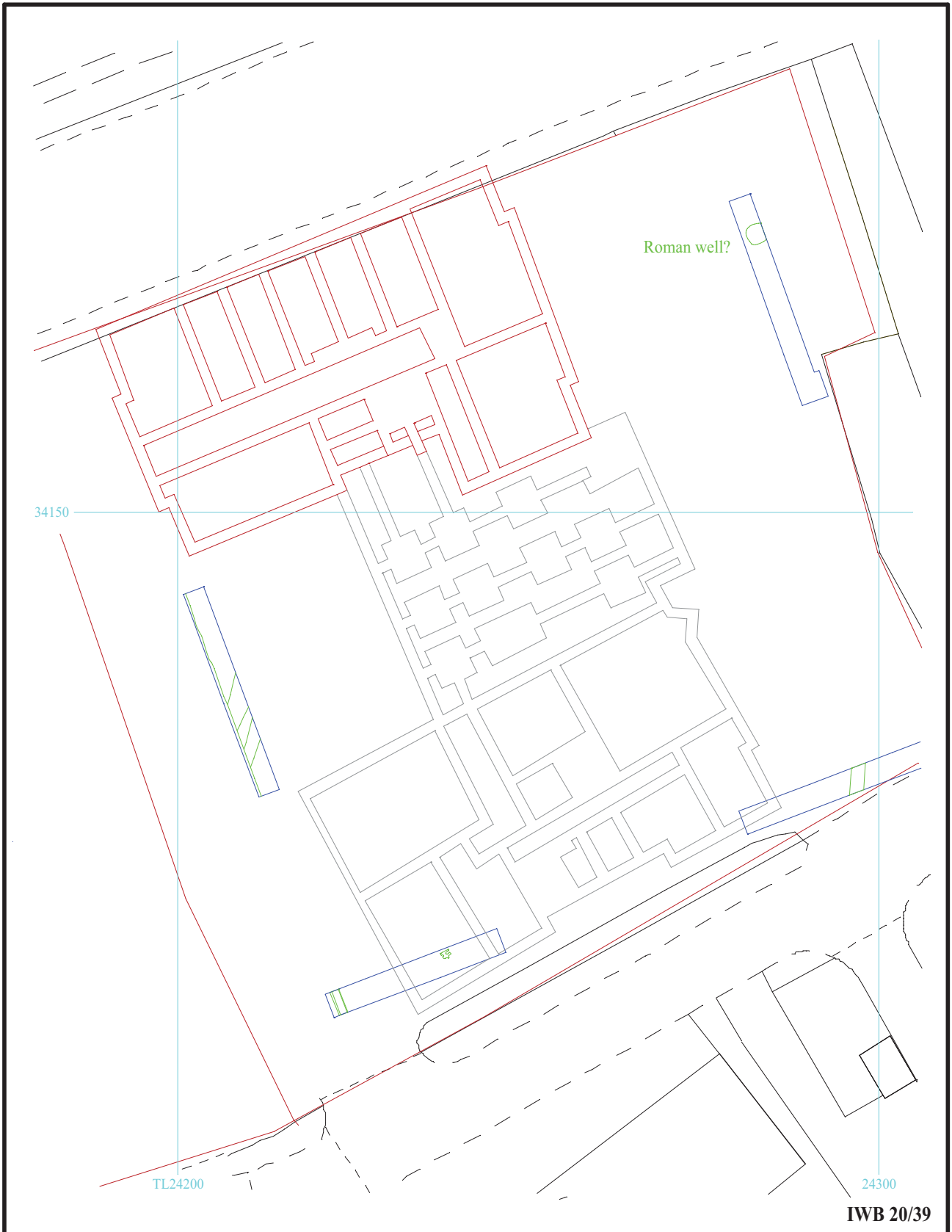




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Figure 4. Detail of groundworks observed, with truncations.





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Figure 5. Detail of groundworks observed in East Building.



WSW

ENE

59.1maOD

Concrete slab (removed in remediation works)

Modern made ground (dark grey brown clayey silt with frequent construction debris)

Redeposited chalk

Greyish brown clay silt (subsoil)

Natural chalk

RGP 20/130

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Figure 6. Representative section



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Plate 1. Remediation, excavated level under concrete slab



Plate 1. Remediation, working progress.



Plate 3. Remediation, interior base of gas holder.



Plate 4. Remediation, tar well.

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Plates 1 - 4.

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Plate 5. Groundwork, representative section of E building, Scales: horizontal 2m, vertical 1m



Plate 6. Groundworks, variety of modern fill exposed in section during groundworks.



Plate 7. Groundworks, concreted lift base of E building, Scale: 1m.



Plate 8. View of new footings, showing the varying depth of made ground overlaying geology.

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Plates 5 - 8.

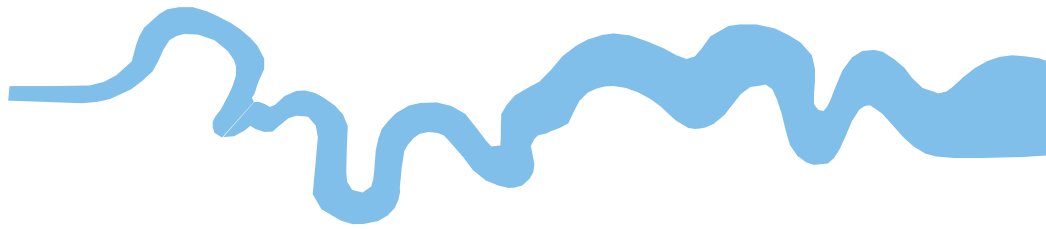
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## TIME CHART

	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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