

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

ARCHAEOLOGICAL

S E R V I C E S

**Land at The Willows, Hexham Road,
Reading, Berkshire**

Archaeological Evaluation

by Pierre-Damien Manisse

Site Code: HRR22/190

(SU 7225 7143)

Land at The Willows, Hexham Road, Reading, Berkshire

**An Archaeological Evaluation
for Hampshire County Council Property Services**

by Pierre-Damien Manisse
Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code HRR 22/190

January 2023

Summary

Site name: Land at The Willows, Hexham Road, Reading, Berkshire

Grid reference: SU 7225 7143

Site activity: Archaeological Evaluation

Date and duration of project: 6th January 2023

Project coordinator: David Sanchez

Site supervisor: Pierre-Damien Manisse

Site code: HRR 22/190

Area of site: 0.45 ha

Summary of results: A single trench was successfully opened but failed to provide any evidence earlier than the 20th century. Despite the rich archaeological evidence in the vicinity of the site, based on the result of this evaluation, the archaeological potential of the site is considered to be low.

Location and reference of archive: The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited with the Archaeology Data Service.

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| Report edited/checked by: | Steve Ford ✓ 09.01.23 Steve Preston ✓ 09.01.23 |
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Land at the Willows, Hexham Road, Reading, Berkshire An Archaeological Evaluation

by Pierre-Damien Manisse

Report 22/190

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological field evaluation carried out on land at The Willows, Hexham Road, Reading (centred on SU 72250 7143) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Steve Mathews on behalf of Hampshire County Council Property Services, Three Minsters House, 76 Jigh Street, Winchester, SO23 8UL

The programme of archaeological work was requested prior to submission of a planning application to Reading Borough Council, to inform the planning process with regard to the archaeological potential of the site and provide information on which to base a mitigation strategy if necessary. This was done considering that a heritage statement (Hayes 2022) had highlighted the likelihood of finding prehistoric or Roman remains, in particular an extension of the Bronze Age and Roman occupation observed at Reading Girls School nearby.

This is in accordance with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government's *National Planning Policy Framework* (NPPF 2021) and the Borough Council's policies on archaeology. The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Dr Edward Peveler, archaeology officer at Berkshire Archaeology, the archaeological advisers to the Borough. The fieldwork was undertaken by Pierre-Damien Manisse on 6th January 2023 and the site code is HRR 22/190. The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited with the Archaeology Data Service in due course.

Location, topography and geology

The site is located on the southern side of Reading, in the Whitley suburb (Fig. 1). It is located on the south-eastern side of the junction of Hexham Road and Northumberland Avenue (Fig. 2). It is a rectangular parcel of flat land, covering about 0.45ha. The former buildings of a residential care home had been demolished at the time of the fieldwork. The site is bordered by residential properties to the east and by Northumberland Training Academy and the grounds of Reading Girls School to the south (Fig. 2). It lies at about 52-53m above Ordnance Datum. According to maps (BGS 2000), the underlying geology is London Clay Formation, consisting of clay, variably silty, with beds of sand and silt and flint pebble seams.

Archaeological background

The archaeological potential of the site stems from its location within the archaeologically rich Thames and Kennet Valleys with a wealth of sites and finds from both prehistoric and later periods. There are several entries of archaeological interest in the Berkshire Historic Environment Record relating to the surrounding area, though there are none recorded within the site itself. Several Roman sites are recorded to the north with a range of findspots of prehistoric and Roman date noted. More detailed investigations have taken place to the south and east. In particular on Northcourt Avenue, field evaluation located residual finds of Roman pottery, a medieval ditch and undated postholes (Ford and Pine 1998) with a nearby excavation (Milbank 2010) revealing an early Roman occupation site. Recent fieldwork revealed further Middle Bronze Age occupation (Ford 2018). Iron Age pottery and Roman ditches were also recorded to the south-east (Carlsson 2010) and a Roman cremation burial to the south, but evaluation at Windermere Road to the south-east (Ford 2010) and a recording a tion on Cressingham Road (Milbank and Tebbit 2018) revealed nothing of interest. Recent excavation at Ridgeway School to the south-east has also revealed Middle/Late Bronze Age, Early Iron Age and Early Roman occupation (Ford 2017) with further Late Bronze Age, Middle Iron Age and Roman occupation to the south at Crosfield School (Ford 2019; Williams 2021). The unexplained monument known (in the archaeological literature) as Marshall's Hill to the south-east was possibly a Late Bronze Age ringfort (high status enclosure?) (Bradley 1984). Evidence of particular relevance for the present site comes from an excavation immediately to the south at Reading Girls School which revealed Bronze Age and Roman occupation (Hoffman and Tierney 2019).

Objectives and methodology

The purpose of the evaluation was to determine the presence/absence, extent, condition, character, quality and date of any archaeological deposits within the area of development. In particular the specific research aims are:

- to determine if archaeologically relevant levels have survived on this site;
- to determine if archaeological deposits of any period are present; and
- to collect information with which to prepare a mitigation strategy if necessary

Any find or deposits were to be assessed in regards to the general research priorities such as those set out by Historic England (HE 2017) or in more local and thematic agendas (Hey and Hind 2014). Work was to follow

the recommendations by the CIfA (CIfA 2020) and those described in Berkshire Archaeology's *General standards for archaeological fieldwork projects* (April 2019).

It was proposed to open a single trench, 20m long and 1.60-2m wide, using a machine fitted with a toothless bucket, under constant archaeological supervision. A contingency for an extra 10m of trench length was provided if necessary. Topsoil and subsoil were to be stored separately and monitored for artefacts. Where archaeological features were certainly or probably present, the stripped area was to be cleaned using appropriate hand tools. Sufficient of the archaeological features and deposits exposed would be excavated or sampled by hand to satisfy the aims outlined above. This work was to be carried out in such a fashion as not to disturb any remains which might merit preservation *in situ* or might better be investigated under conditions pertaining to full excavation.

Results

A single trench was successfully opened as intended, by a 360°-type 30 tonne excavator equipped with a graded bucket, 2.45m wide. Spoil heaps were visually checked for finds. Though the groundwater only started to slowly appear at 2.30m deep after a few minutes, the trench sides were quite soft and quickly collapsed in the deeper half of the trench (the north-east end).

A complete list of trenches giving lengths, breadths, depths and a description of sections and geology is given in Appendix 1.

Trench 1 (Figs 3 and 4; Pl. 1-2)

Trench 1 was aligned SW - NE and was 21m long. It was 2.30m deep at the NE end but rose up to 1.20m deep at the SW end. At the NE end, the stratigraphy (Fig. 4) consisted of 0.25m topsoil (a dark brown to black silty loam) overlying 0.75m of a first made ground (brownish yellow clay with very rare gravels). Then there was a 0.10m thick band of a soft dark brown sandy silt, only seen in the last 2.5m of the trench. It contained rare brick fragments. Below this was a 0.30m brownish yellow clay with very rare gravels, similar to the previous made ground. This overlay a 0.25m thick soft dark grey clay followed again by a 0.15m compact greyish yellow clay. At the base was a 0.35m deep soft dark grey clayey sand, with an organic odour. This deposit was anthropogenic, with a few pieces of modern pottery (probably all from one vessel, not retained). The natural geology appeared below it at 2.15m below ground level and was a greenish grey clay.

The section at the SW end was a simpler version of similar stratigraphy as the same layers that simply thinned out towards south-west. Four metres from that end it can be described as 0.35m topsoil on top of 0.35m

made ground (brownish yellow clay with very rare gravels) over 0.15m of the previous lowest deposit with the humic odour. The natural geology started at 0.85m below ground level and was a brownish yellow sand.

Finds

Only modern pottery and brick fragments were noted. No finds were considered for retention.

Conclusion

A single trench was successfully opened but failed to provide any evidence earlier than the 20th century. There was no indication at the trench location of any continuity of what had been observed to the south. Even in the part of the land supposedly free of modern disturbance, the soil layers encountered proved to be made-ground or recent deposits directly above the natural geology. Despite the rich archaeological evidence in the vicinity of the site, based on the result of this evaluation, its potential is considered to be low.

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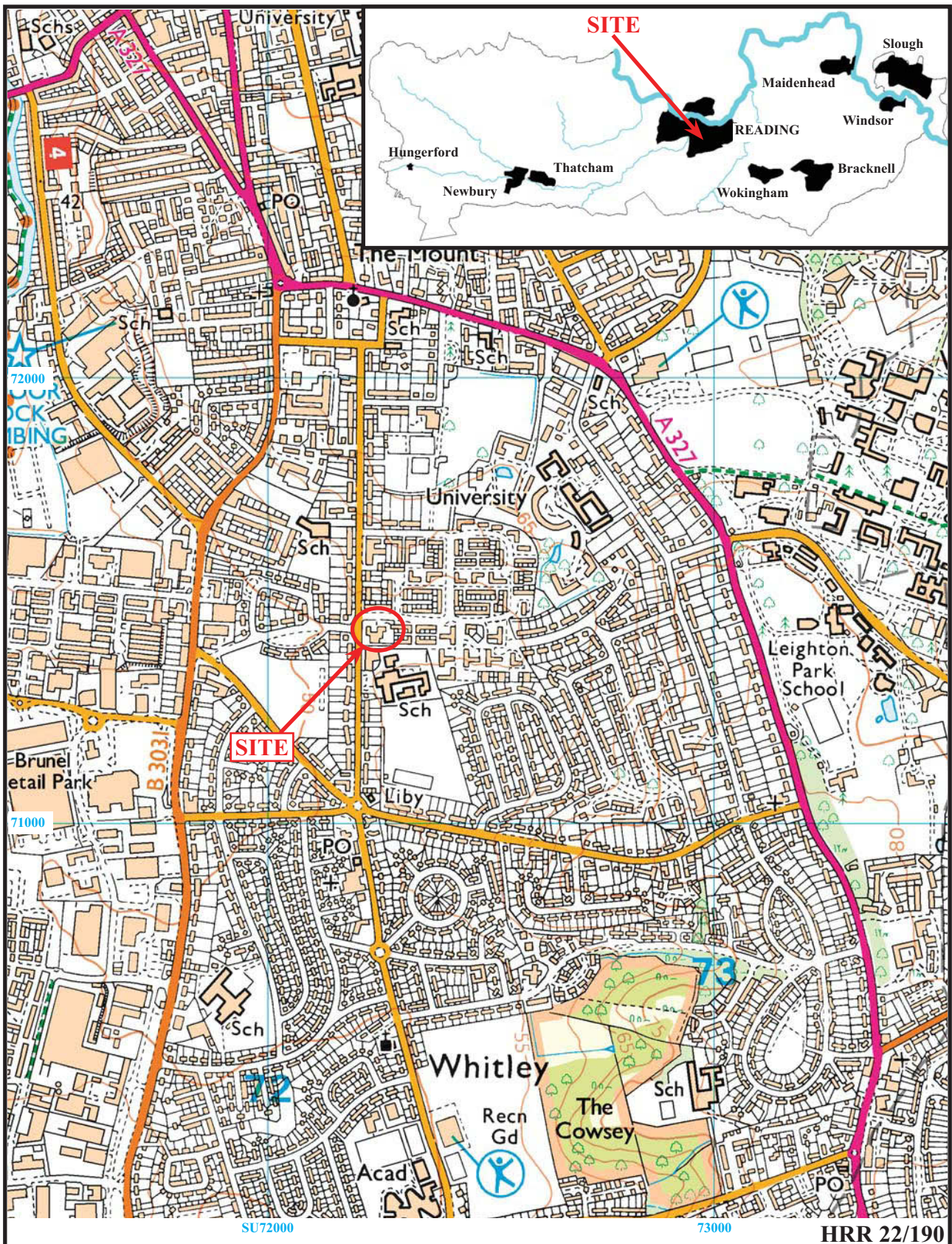
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APPENDIX 1: Trench details

0m at SW end

| <i>Trench</i> | <i>Length (m)</i> | <i>Breadth (m)</i> | <i>Depth (m)</i> | <i>Comment</i> |
|---------------|-------------------|--------------------|------------------------|---|
| 1 | 21 | 2.45 | SW: 1.20m NE: 2.30m | At NE end: 0–0.25m topsoil (dark brown to black silty loam); 0.25-1m made ground (brownish yellow clay with very rare gravels); 1-1.10m soft dark brown sandy silt; 1.10-1.40m brownish yellow clay with very rare gravels; 1.40-1.65m soft dark grey clay; 1.65-1.80m compact greyish yellow clay; 1.80-2.15m soft dark grey clayey sand; 2.15-2.30m+ natural geology (greenish grey clay) 4m from SW end: 0–0.35m topsoil (dark brown to black loam); 0.35-70m made ground (brownish yellow clay with very rare gravels); 0.70-0.85m soft dark grey clayey sand; 0.85-1.30m+ natural geology (brownish yellow sand) [Pls 1-2] |



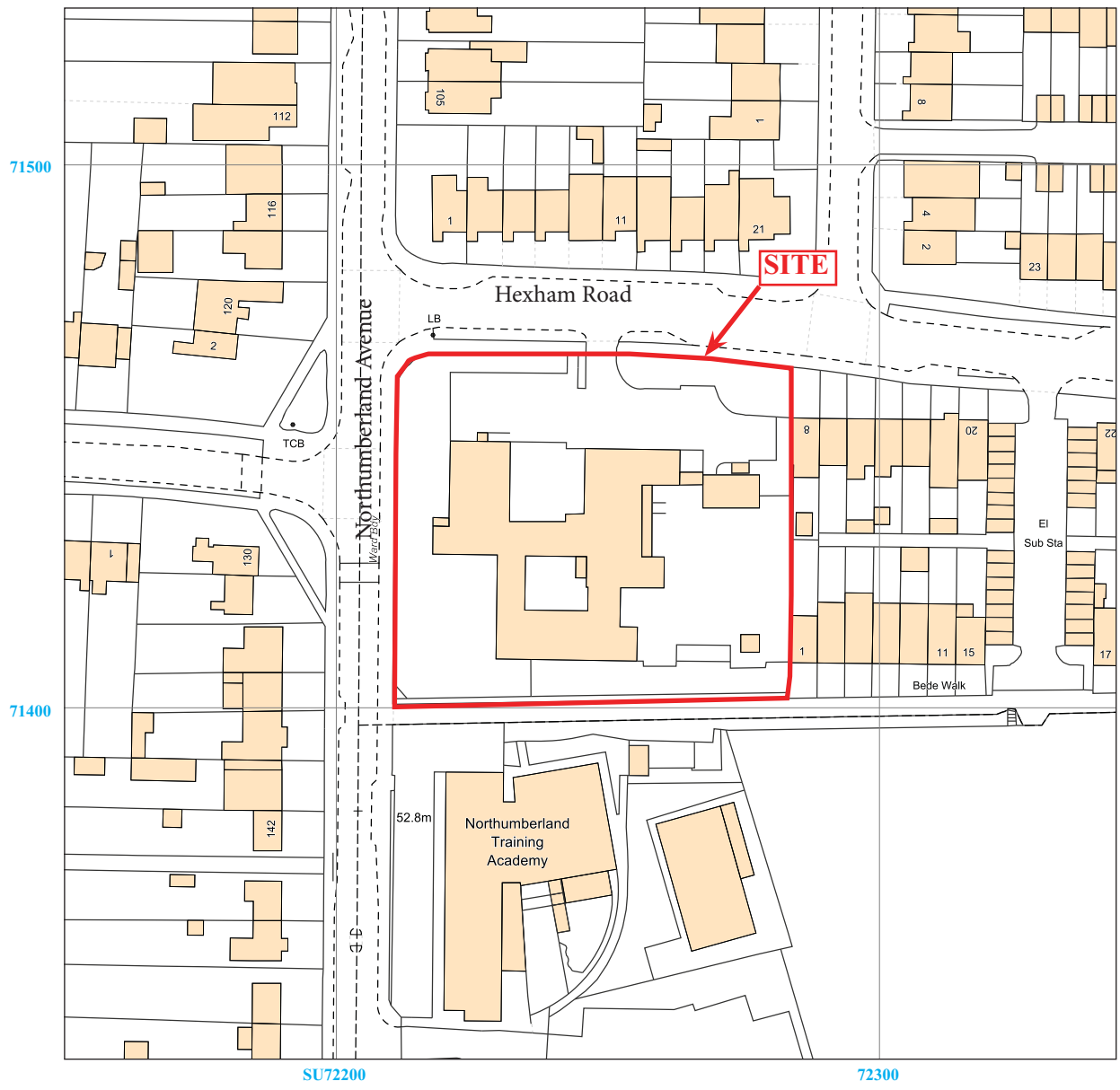
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Figure 1. Location of site within Reading and Berkshire.

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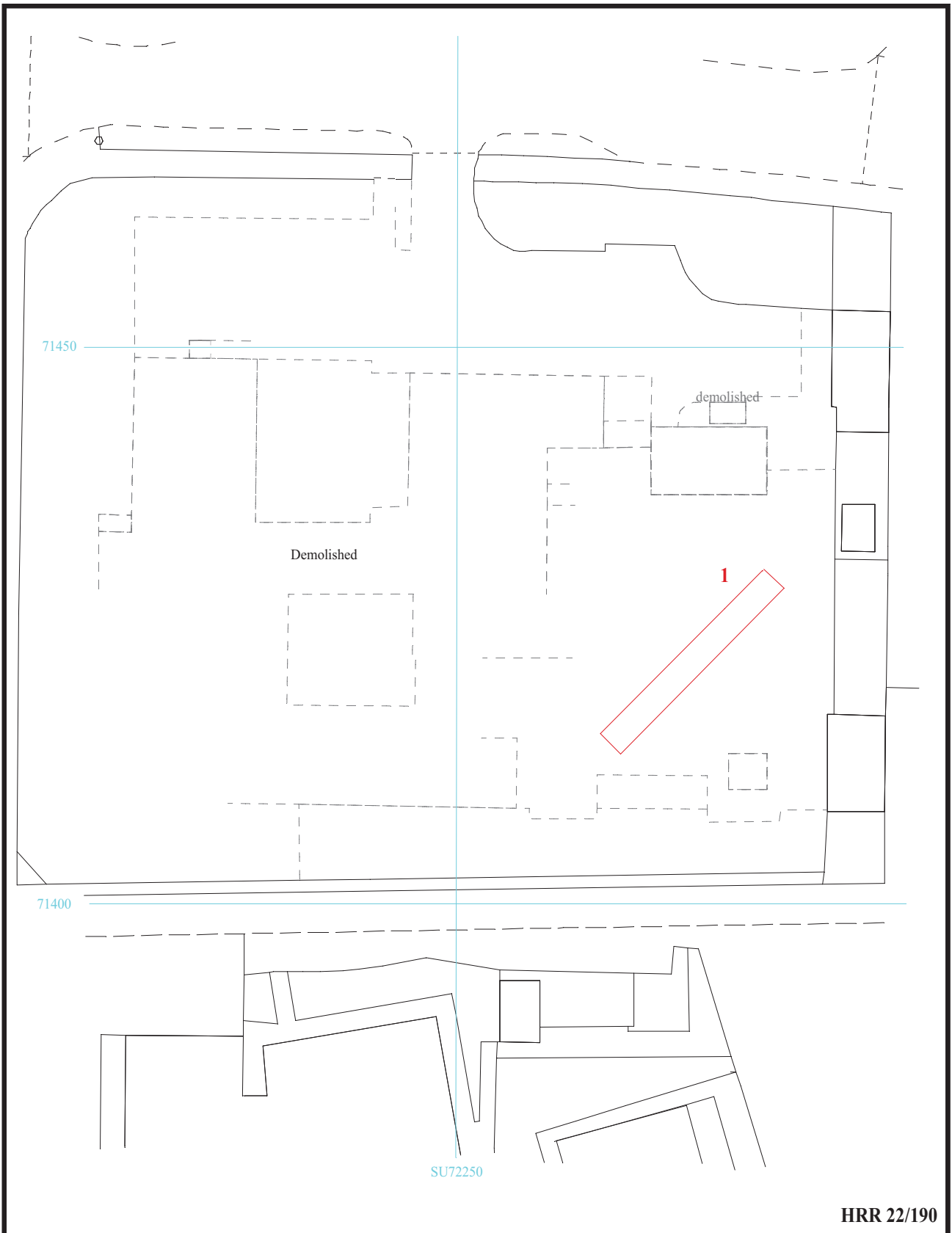
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 Figure 2. Detailed location of site.

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Figure 3. Location of Trench 1.



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Trench 1

SW

NE



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Figure 4. Representative section of Trench 1.



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Plate 1. Representative section of trench 1, looking north-west; scales: 2x1m.



Plate 2. General view of trench 1, looking north-east; scales: 2x1m.

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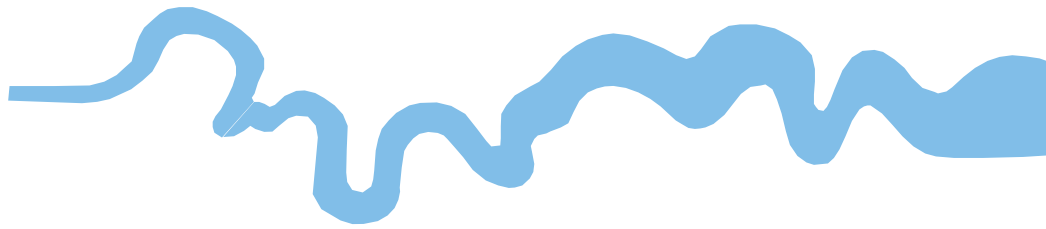
Land at the Willows, Hexham Road, Reading
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Plates 1 and 2.

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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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