

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

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S E R V I C E S

**Thatcham - Ashford Hill 132kV Cable,
West Berkshire**

Archaeological Watching Brief

by Sophie Peng

Site Code: TAH 22/161

(SU 52927 66273 to SU 54097 63046)

Thatcham – Ashford Hill 132kV Cable, West Berkshire

**An Archaeological Watching Brief
for ADAS**

by Sophie Peng

Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code TAH22/161

March 2023

Summary

Site name: Thatcham – Ashford Hill 132kV Cable, West Berkshire

Grid reference: SU 52927 66273 to SU 54097 63046

Site activity: Watching Brief

Date and duration of project: 1st August 2022-18th January 2023

Project coordinator: David Sanchez

Site supervisor: Sophie Peng

Site code: TAH 22/161

Area of site: c. 6km long

Summary of results: A 6km cable trench yielded minimal archaeological features despite running in close proximity to a scheduled monument (Moated site) and potential Bronze Age cemetery. The majority of possible features identified were ditches likely to be modern or undated. One of these contained probably medieval peg tile. Of more note, however, were two possible pits and a gully which contained Mesolithic struck flints, all in a tight cluster at NGR SU54017 66001.

Location and reference of archive: The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited at West Berkshire Museum and the Archaeology Data Service in due course.

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Thatcham – Ashford Hill 132kV Cable, West Berkshire An Archaeological Watching Brief

by Sophie Peng

Report 22/161

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out on the route of a cable trench from Thatcham Primary Substation (SU 52927 66273) and ending at Ashford Hill Substation (SU 54097 63046) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Diarmuid O’Seaneachain of RSK ADAS Limited, 11D Park House, Milton Park, Abingdon, OX14 4RS on behalf of Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks.

The works carried out are under the client’s permitted development rights and thus are not subject to a planning application. Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks, its agents and contractors, however, have clearly defined archaeological obligations under Section 38 of the Electricity Act 1989 (Schedule 9 Paragraph 1) to mitigate the impact of any permitted works to the historic environment. The fieldwork was carried out in accordance with a written scheme of investigation prepared by RSK ADAS (Bowen 2022). The fieldwork was undertaken by Luciano Cicu, Emily Gibson, Pierre Manisse, Sophie Peng, Andy Taylor and Jonathan Tierney, from 1st August 2022 to 18th January 2023 and the site code is TAH 22/161.

The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited at West Berkshire Museum and the Archaeology Data Service in due course.

Location, topography and geology

The pipeline starts at Thatcham Primary Substation and runs roughly east along the river Kennet then turns south-east towards the Ashford Hill Substation, passing between Brimpton and Hyde End. The route is approximately 6km in length and passes through agricultural fields and occasional small areas of woodland (Fig. 2). Due to the length of the pipeline the height ranged above Ordnance Datum from 67m (at the northern end of the route) and 72m (at the southern end). The underlying geology along the northern part of the pipeline is clay, silt, sand and gravel of the Lambeth Group with superficial deposits of sand and gravel (BGS 2000) and along the southern part is clay, silt, sand, and gravel of the Thames Group with superficial deposits of sand and gravel (BGS 2000).

Archaeological background

The archaeological background for the route has been detailed in an Archaeological Constraints Report by ADAS (2019). In summary, the cable route runs immediately adjacent to a Scheduled Moated Manorial Site, that is likely to be Medieval in date, and through a possible Bronze Age cemetery comprised of two ring ditches and a Bronze Age burial urn. The wider study area contains a number of Grade II listed buildings as well as 32 recorded findspots of archaeological artefacts dating from the Palaeolithic to the late 19th century. Previous archaeological works comprised mainly of aerial photography surveys and archaeological desk-based assessments, however, an archaeological rescue excavation was carried out in 2001 recording a Bronze Age burial urn at Hyde End Farm, Brimpton (BAS 2001). Trial trenching in 2001 at Colthrop Mill, Thatcham just to the north of the north end of the trench line, also revealed a section of Roman road (Mathews 2001). This consisted of a single compacted layer which may have formed the foundation construction layer of the road which was on the alignment of Ermin Street to the north of the study area.

Objectives and methodology

The purpose of the watching brief as stated in the WSI (Bowen 2022) was:

- to ensure that any archaeological features/deposits exposed during ground works associated with the development are identified, recorded and interpreted to an acceptable standard;
- to ensure that any significant discoveries of artefactual evidence are recorded and analysed to an acceptable standard; and
- to inform a strategy to avoid or mitigate the impacts of the proposed development on any surviving archaeological remains identified.

The specific aims of the project were:

- to identify and record any unknown buried archaeological remains, artefacts, or earthworks associated with the Moated Manorial Site 200 m north-west of East Field Copse Scheduled Monument; and
- to identify and record any unknown buried archaeological remains, artefacts or earthworks associated with the Bronze Age cemetery.

The cable trench was excavated by machine fitted with a ditching bucket within a 20m wide topsoil easement strip (where possible depending on space). The trench was 1.6m wide and approximately 1.3m deep. A controlled machine strip was conducted in the area adjacent to the Moated Manorial Site Scheduled Monument.

This required the stripping of top and subsoil to the depth of the natural before being excavated to the depth required for the cable. Where possible, archaeological features were hand-cleaned and excavated by hand otherwise archaeological features were observed and recorded. Spoil heaps were monitored for finds.

Results

The stratigraphy observed varied minimally throughout the 6km of trenching. The topsoil varied between 0.15m-0.40m deep, overlying 0.15-0.25m of subsoil, however, in some areas there was no subsoil observed. This overlay two main types of natural geology seen along the length of the trench. Predominantly the underlying natural geology was various bands of silty sand gravel that were between 0.14m-0.49m in thickness (Pl. 1). A silt clay natural that was between 0.50m-1.61m in thickness was also seen and was mainly mid brown orange in colour with few gravel inclusions (Pl. 2).

All of the potential archaeological features observed are summarised in Appendix 1.

A total of seven possible ditches were found.

Ditch 1 (Fig. 3) was NE – SW aligned and was 2.53m in width and 0.96m deep, containing a single fill (50) which consisted of a mid grey brown silty clay with few gravel inclusions. Ditch 1 was only seen in section. A single shard of modern glass was seen.

Ditches 3 and 4 (Fig.4) were both E – W aligned. Ditch 3 (Pl. 3) was 10m wide and 2.1m in depth and contained fills (52) and (53) which were dark grey black silty clay with frequent gravel and few chalk inclusions and light blue grey silty clay with few gravel inclusions respectively. Ditch 4 was 5m wide, 0.70m deep and contained three fills (54, 55 and 56). Fill 54 was a light blue grey silty clay with frequent gravel inclusions. Fill 55 was a mid blue grey silty clay with few gravel inclusions. Fill 56 was a dark grey silty clay with few gravel inclusions. No finds were recovered from either Ditch 3 or 4. Both ditches were only seen in section and more likely to be hill wash rather than ditches.

Ditch 5 (Fig. 4) was aligned E – W and was 3.5m wide and 0.8m deep. It contained fill 57 which was a dark brown silty clay with frequent gravel. Ditch 5 was seen to contain a modern land drain in section. It also contained eight pieces of peg tile, likely to be medieval. As it was close to the Scheduled Area (NGR SU54248 65280), the presence of several fragments of tile is unsurprising, but the ditch itself is modern.

Ditch 6 (Figs 5, 7 and 8, Pl. 4) was aligned E – W and was 2.5m wide and 0.84m deep, containing fill 58 which was a mid grey sandy clay with frequent gravel inclusions. No finds were recovered.

Ditches 7 and 8 (Figs 5, 7 and 8, Pl. 5) were aligned NNE – SSW. Ditch 7 was 3.14m wide and 0.74m deep and contained fill 59; this was cut by ditch 8. Fill 59 was a mid grey sandy clay with frequent gravel inclusions. Ditch 8 was 5.9m wide and 0.9m deep, containing fills 60, 61, 62 and 63. Top fill 60 was a dark brown grey sandy clay with frequent gravel inclusions. Fill 61 was a light grey brown sandy clay with frequent gravel inclusions. Fill 62 was a dark black grey sandy clay with frequent gravel and charcoal inclusions. Bottom fill 63 was a mid grey sandy clay with frequent gravel inclusions. No finds were recovered from Ditch 7 and 8.

A single gully, 2 was observed aligned N – S (Fig. 4) with a width of 0.5m and contained fill 51. This was not excavated as it was seen in plan to cut a modern water pipe. Fill (51) was a mid to dark orange brown silty clay with frequent gravel inclusions. No finds were recovered.

Two possible intercutting pits and a possible gully (9–11) were also seen after top soil stripping and before the pipe trench was dug, therefore, it was possible to hand excavate and record these features in full (Figs 6, 7 and 8, Pl. 6). They were located at NGR SU54017 66001. Possible pits 9 and 10 were both sub circular in shape. Pit 9 was 0.82m in length, at least 1.50m in width and 0.24m deep. It contained two fills (64 and 65). Fill 64 was a mid-dark brown grey clay sand with no inclusions. Six flints were found in this fill. Fill 65 was a light brown grey clay sand with few sandstone and gravel inclusions. No finds were recovered from this fill. Pit 10 was at least 0.74m in length and 0.30m in width, with a depth of 0.19m. It also contained two fills (66 and 67) which were nearly identical to fills 64 and 65 respectively. One flint was found in fill 66 and no finds were recovered from fill 67. Possible gully 11 was irregular in shape and measured 3m in length, 0.40m in width and 0.18m deep. Gully 11 contained two fills (68 and 69) which again were nearly identical to fills 64 and 65 respectively. From fill 68 two fragments of animal bone were recovered but no finds were recovered from fill 69. The relationships between these three features were uncertain.

Finds

Struck flint by Steve Ford

The fieldwork recovered a modest collection of just seven struck flints. However, they were all of Mesolithic date. Six pieces came from possible pit 9 (64) and one (a blade) from possible pit 10 (66).

Five of the pieces were narrow flakes (blades) made using a soft hammer, two of which were broken. All five pieces were lightly patinated light bluish grey but were otherwise in good condition. One piece was a dihedral burin made on a narrow flake but wider and thicker than the other blades. The working edge was

formed on the bulbar end of the piece. The final piece was an unpatinated blade core made from the local gravel.

Ceramic Building Materials by Danielle Milbank

A total of eight pieces of tile weighing 1214g was recovered, all from ditch 5 (57). They comprise pieces of tile in a medium to slightly soft clay, evenly-fired, with moderate to sparse fine and coarse sand inclusions, and a bright orange colour. The tile fragments are fairly unevenly formed, with a thickness of 13mm to 16mm, and no examples intact across the width or length. Three of the pieces have peg holes, of which two are square and one circular, though on all three examples, a shallow circular depression surrounds each peg hole. This characteristic, and the similarity in fabric and form, suggests they are from the same maker. They represent roof tile of medieval date, of likely local manufacture.

Tile was recovered for dating purposes and discarded following recording in post-excavation.

Animal bone by Danielle Milbank

Two pieces of animal bone (14g) were recovered from gully 11 (68) and represent a small unidentified fragment, and a fragment from a medium-sized or large animal, most likely from a long bone or scapula. No other characteristics such as butchery marks were present and the species of origin cannot be specified.

Conclusion

The watching brief was successfully carried out on the route for laying the 132kV cable from Thatcham to Ashford Hill. Despite the potential for archaeology in the length of the cable trench, especially where it ran adjacent to the Scheduled Monument, only a single modern gully was observed in this area. All the possible ditches observed were either undated or modern, however, as most were only seen in section once the machine had excavated the trench it is uncertain if they were all cut features. From the ditch closest to the Scheduled moated site, fragments of medieval tile were recovered, but the ditch also carried a modern land drain.

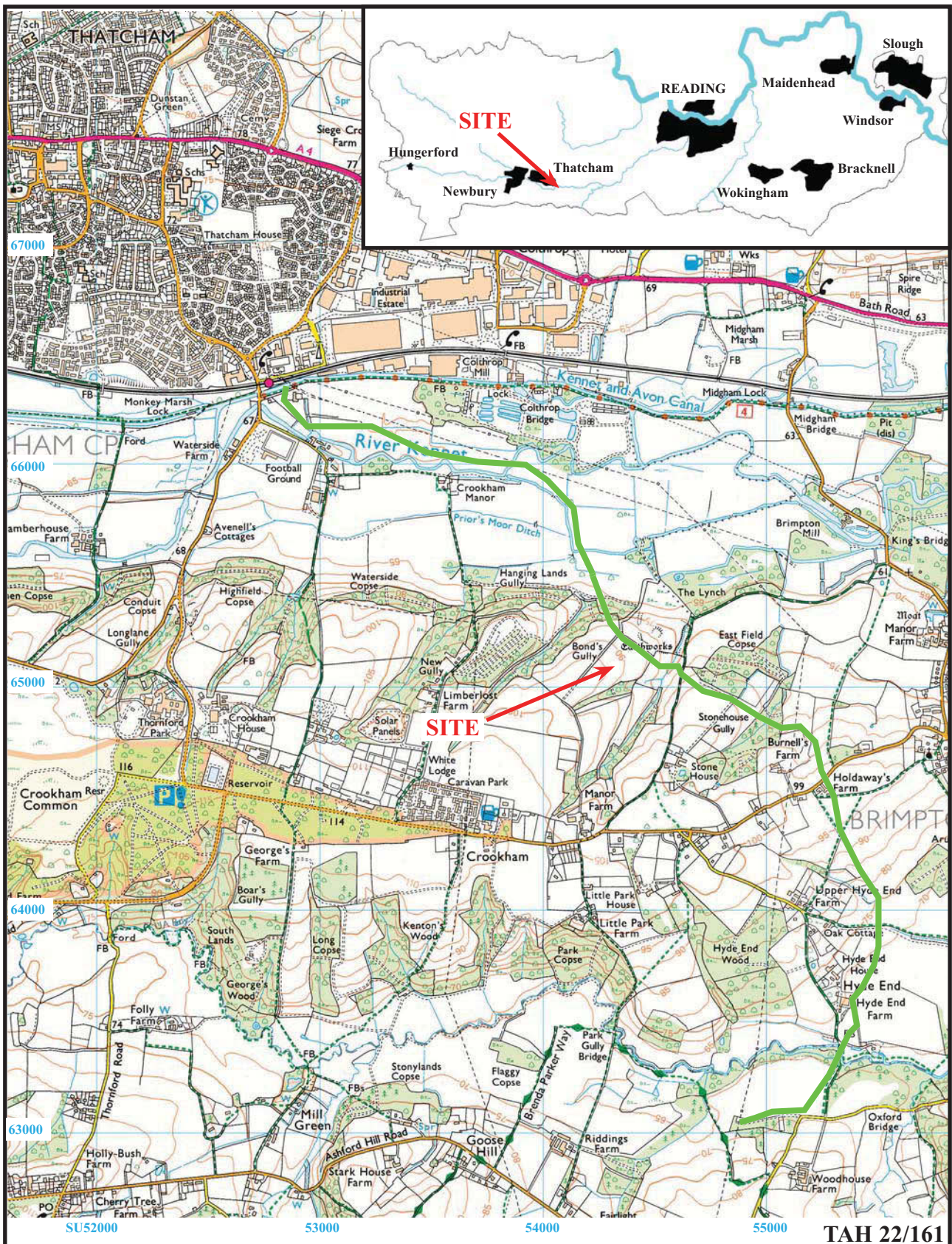
The possible pits, 9 and 10, and possible gully, 11, containing the Mesolithic struck flints may form part of a new Mesolithic site. Given the location of these finds on the floor of the Kennet Valley, which is renowned for its Mesolithic settlement (Froom, 2012), and more specifically to Thatcham, where exceptional Mesolithic sites have been excavated (Wymer, 1962; Hey and Robinson, 2011), it is perhaps an unsurprising find. The modest finds here may suggest a wider extent of Mesolithic activity along the Kennet Valley than hitherto recorded.

References

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APPENDIX 1: Catalogue of Features

<i>Cut</i>	<i>Fill(s)</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Dating evidence</i>
1	50	Ditch	Modern	Glass
2	51	Gully	Modern	Stratigraphy/form
3	52, 53	Ditch (possible natural hill wash)	Undated	
4	54, 55, 56	Ditch (possible natural hill wash)	Undated	
5	57	Ditch	Modern	Modern field drain (medieval tile residual)
6	58	Ditch	Undated	
7	59	Ditch	Undated	
8	60, 61, 62, 63	Ditch (possible furrow)	Undated	
9	64, 65	Pit	Mesolithic	Struck flint
10	66, 67	Pit	Mesolithic	Struck flint
11	68, 69	Gully	Undated	

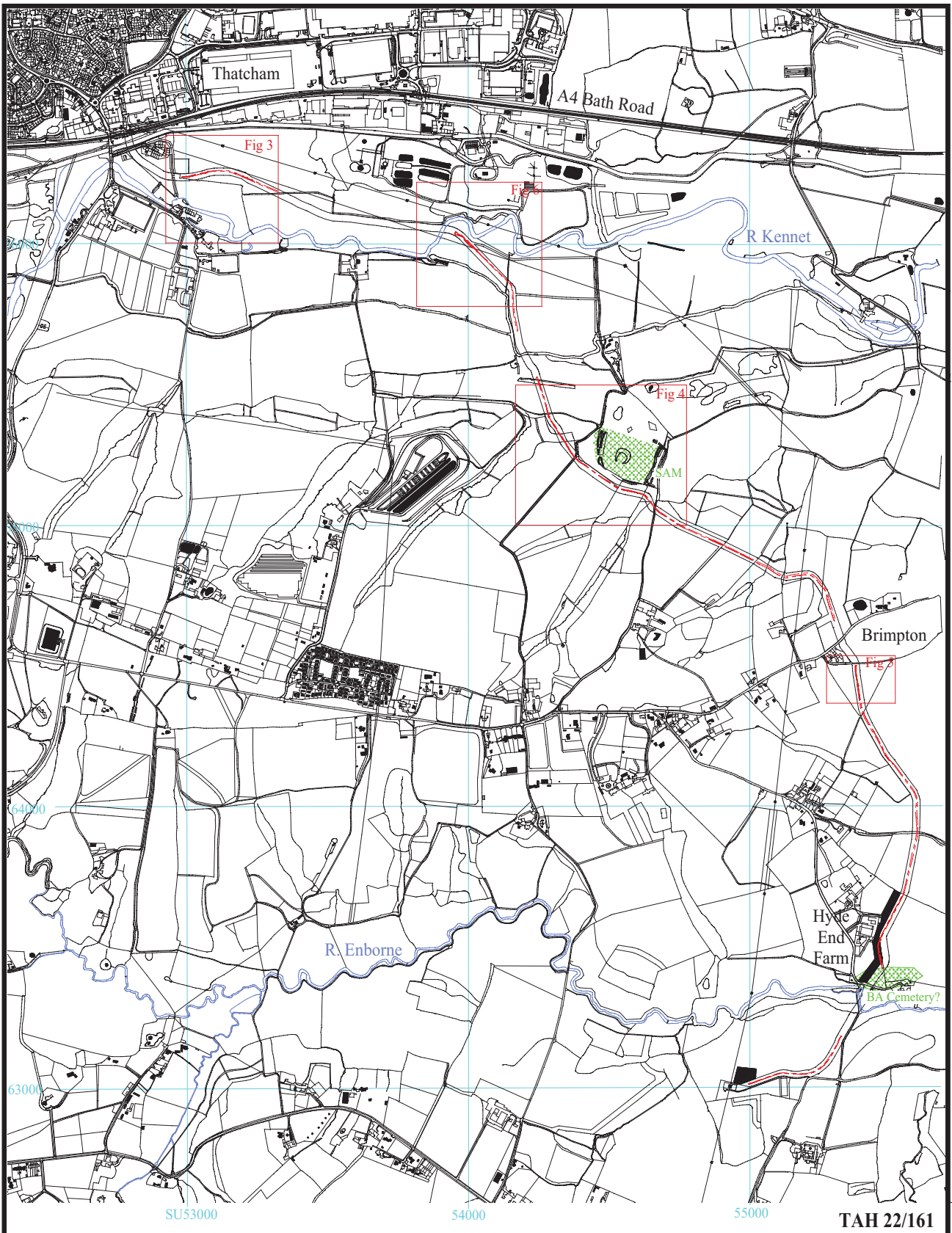


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Figure 1. Location of cable trench route within West Berkshire.

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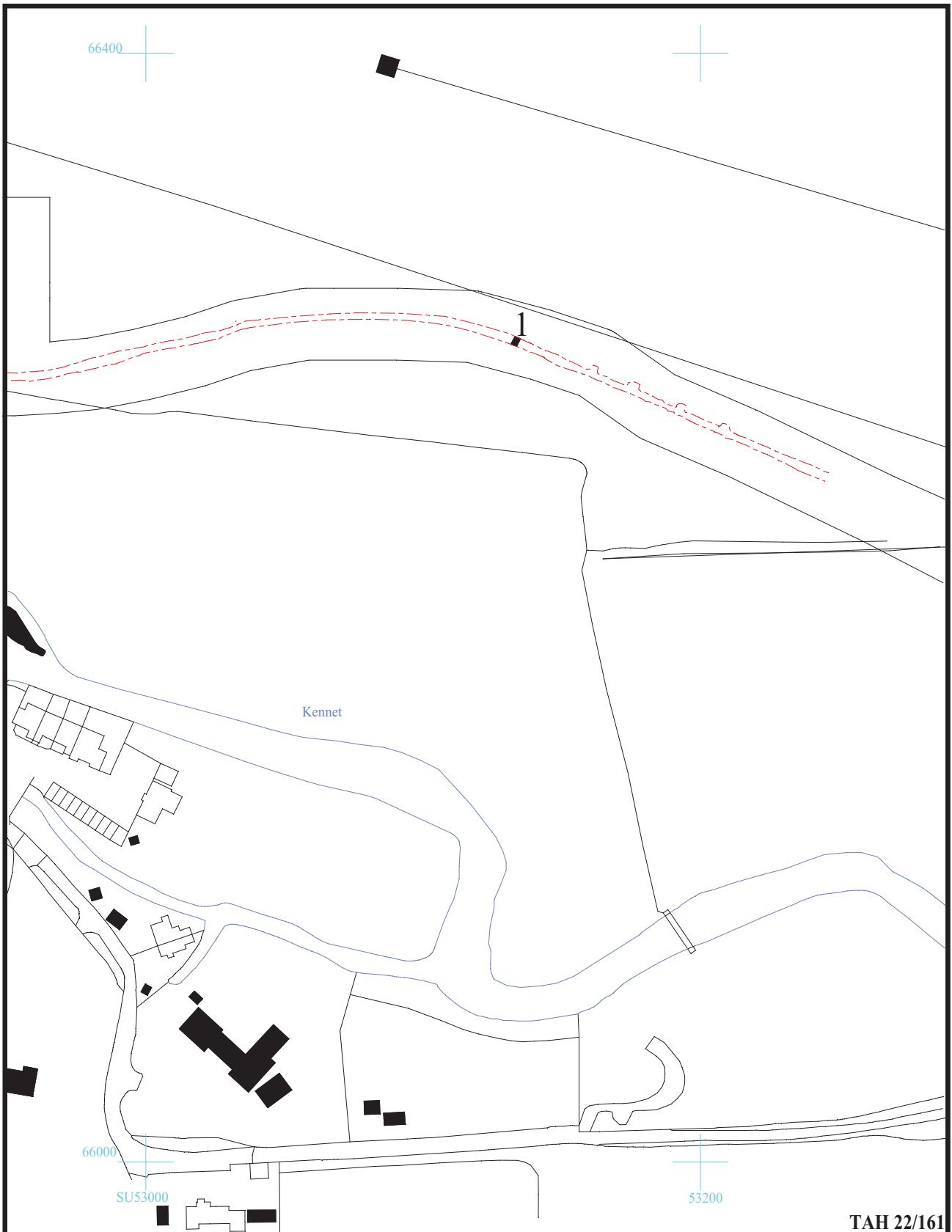
Figure 2. Site plan.

0 1km

N



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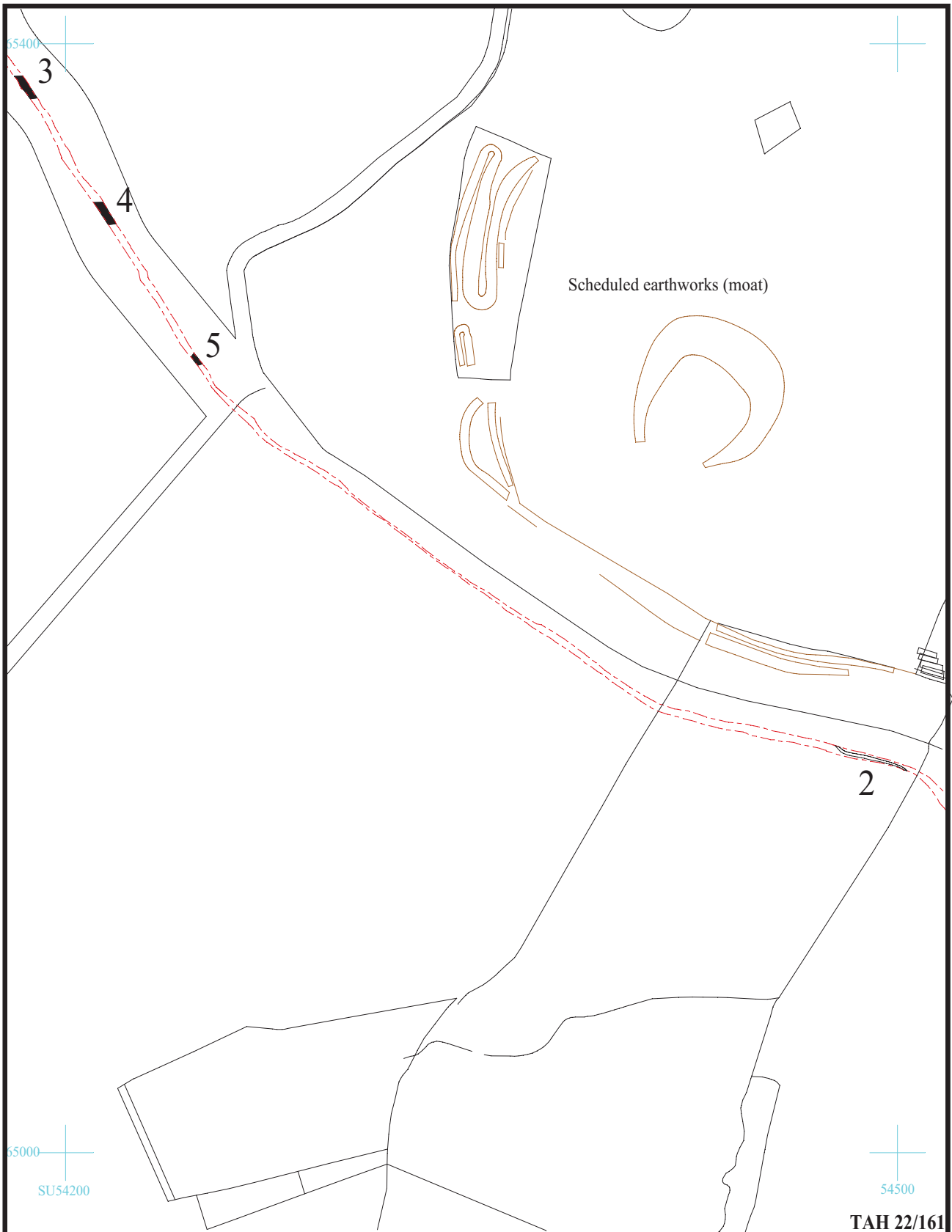


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Figure 3. Site plan showing location of feature 1.



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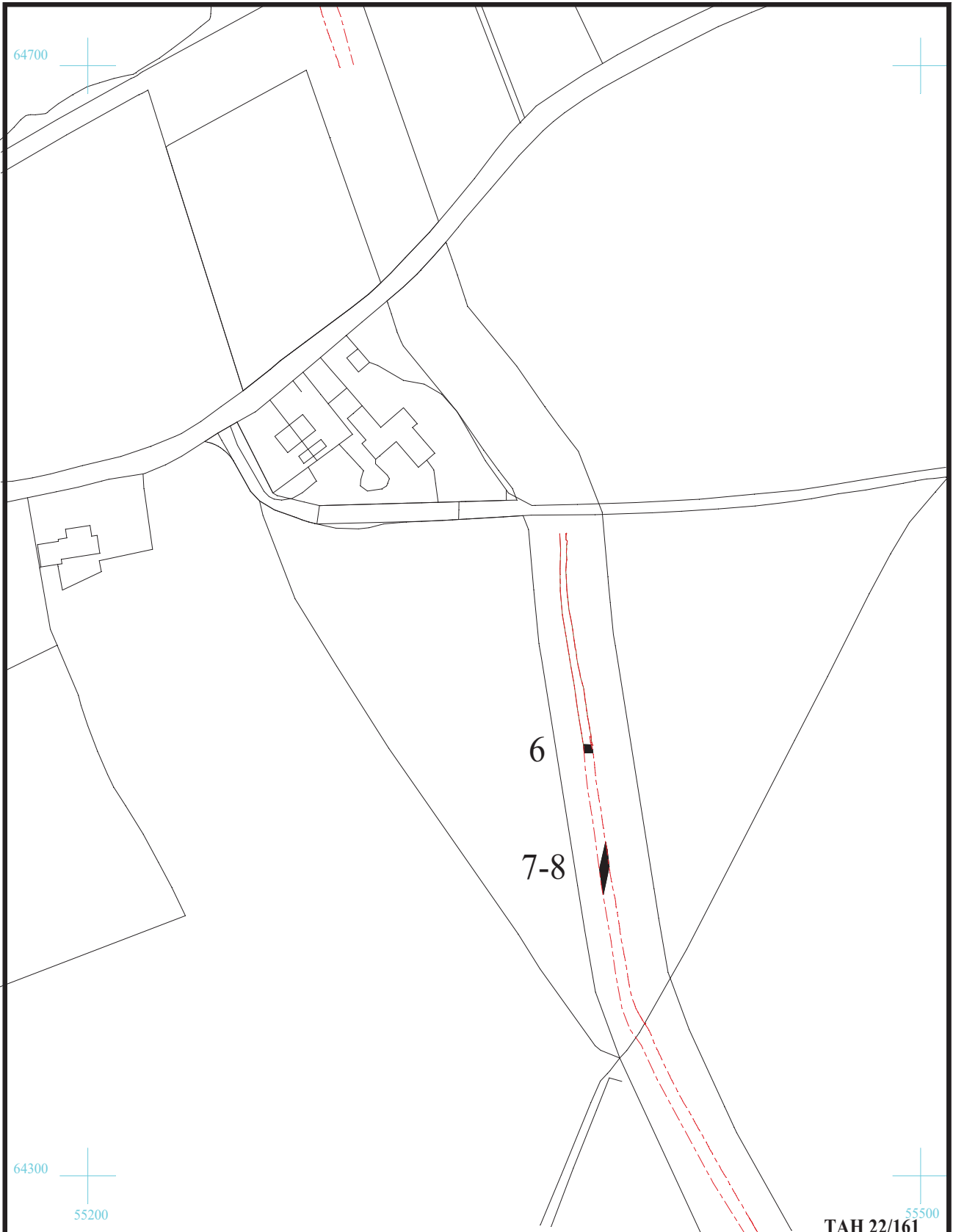


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Figure 4. Site plan showing locations features 2, 3, 4 and 5.



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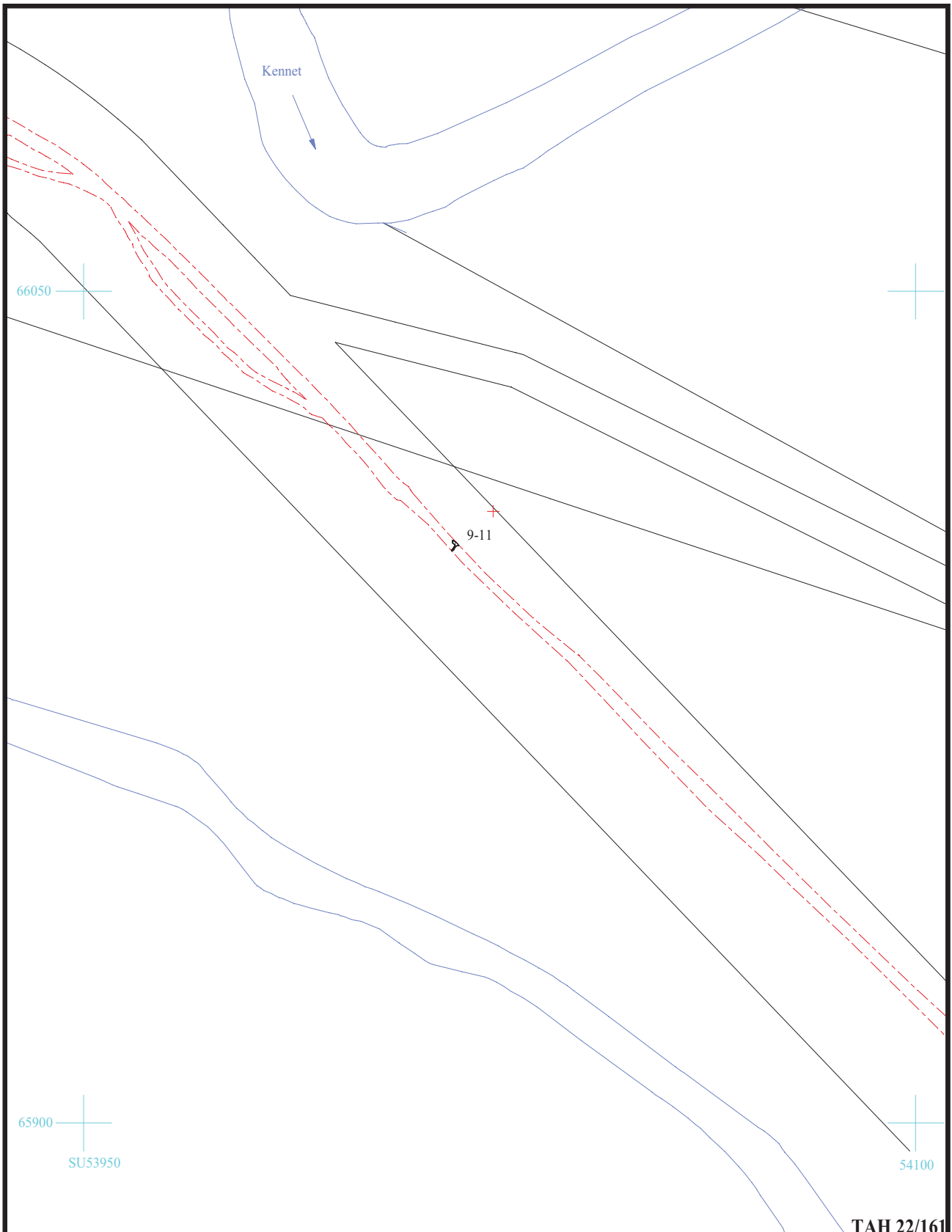
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Figure 5. Site plan showing location of features 6, 7 and 8.



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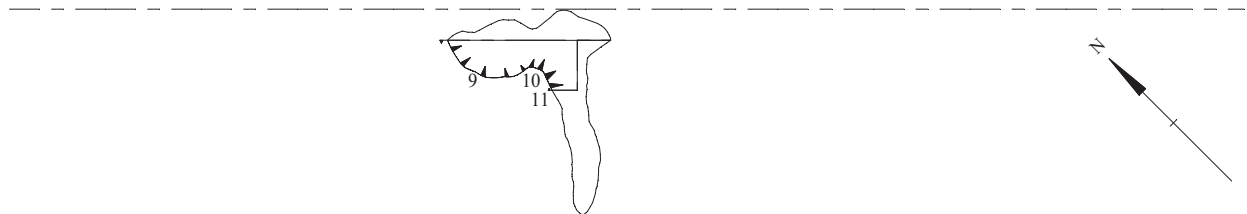
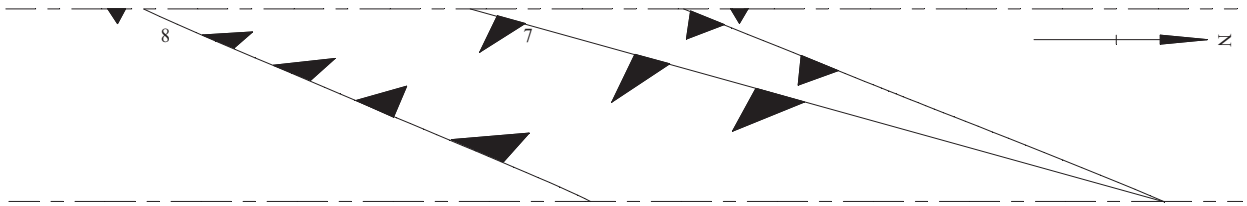


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Figure 6. Site plan showing location of features 9, 10 and 11.



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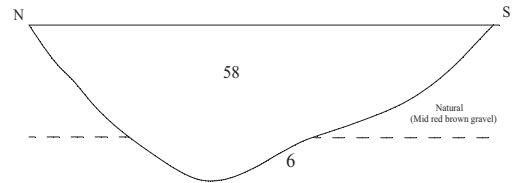
Figure 7. Detail plans.



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NW SE
Sub Soil

Natural geology (Mid red brown clay)

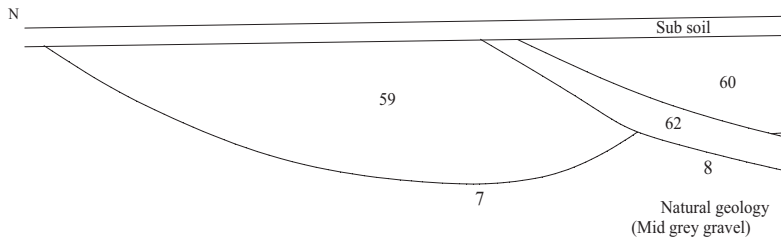


Natural geology (Light brown yellow gravel)

Natural geology
(Light brown yellow clay with gravel)

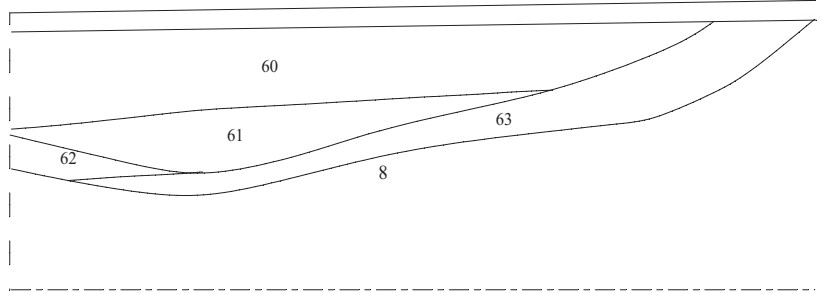
Base of trench

Base of trench

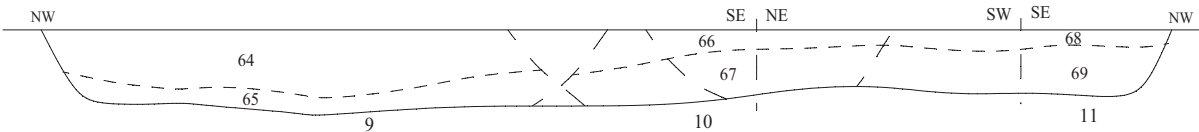


Natural geology
(Mid grey gravel)

Base of trench



Base of trench



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Figure 8. Sections.

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Plate 1. Pipe trench, looking east, Scales: 2m and 1m.



Plate 2. Controlled strip trench, looking east, Scales: 2m, 1m and 0.30m.



Plate 3. Possible ditch 3, looking East, Scales: 2m and 1m.



Plate 4. Possible ditch 6, looking east, Scales: 2m and 1m.



Plate 5. Possible ditches 7 and 8, looking east, Scales: 2m and 1m.



Plate 6. Possible pits 9 and 10, and gully 11, looking north east, Scales: 2m and 0.20m, 0.30m and 0.10m.

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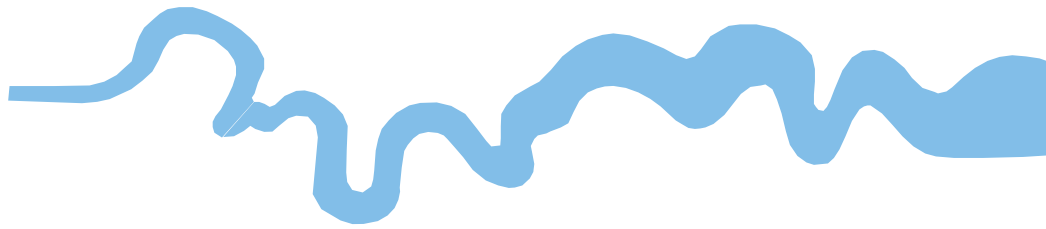
Plates 1 - 6.

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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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