

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

ARCHAEOLOGICAL

S E R V I C E S

**New Parish Rooms, Church of Immaculate Conception,
The Causeway, Bicester, Oxfordshire**

Archaeological Evaluation

by James McNicoll-Norbury

Site Code: ICB09/105

(SP 5830 2230)

**New Parish Rooms, Church of the Immaculate
Conception, The Causeway, Bicester, Oxfordshire**

An Archaeological Evaluation

for CgMs Consulting

by James McNicoll-Norbury
Thames Valley Archaeological Services
Ltd

Site Code ICB09/105

January 2010

Summary

Site name: New Parish Rooms, Church of the Immaculate Conception, The Causeway, Bicester, Oxfordshire

Grid reference: SP 5835 2237

Site activity: Evaluation

Date and duration of project: 26th–28th January 2010

Project manager: Steve Ford

Site supervisor: James McNicoll-Norbury

Site code: ICB 09/105

Summary of results: Three shallow linear features were investigated. One is considered to be of natural origin with the other two of uncertain origin. No human burial deposits were observed. A single sherd of Early/Middle Saxon pottery and some animal bone was recorded. The site is 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 at Oxfordshire Museum Services in due course.

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Report edited/checked by: Steve Ford ✓ 04.02.10 Jo Pine ✓ 04.02.10

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Report 09/105

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological field evaluation carried out at The Church of Immaculate Conception, The Causeway, Bicester, Oxfordshire, OX26 6AW (SP 5835 2237) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Matthew Smith of CgMs Consulting, Morley House, 26 Holborn Viaduct, London, EC12 2AT.

Planning consent (app no 08/00605/F) has been gained from Cherwell District Council for the construction of new parish rooms on the site. The consent is subject to a condition (10) relating to archaeology.

This is in accordance with the Department of the Environment's Planning Policy Guidance, Archaeology and Planning (PPG16 1990), and the Council's policies on archaeology. The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Mr Richard Oram of Oxfordshire County Council Archaeological Service. The fieldwork was undertaken by James McNicoll-Norbury and Arak Gnaz between 26th and 28th January 2010 and site code is ICB 09/105. The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited at Oxfordshire Museums Service in due course.

Location, topography and geology

The site is located in the historic core of Bicester 50m to the north-east of St Edburg's Church. The site is currently in use as a car park for the Church of Immaculate Conception (Fig. 2). The underlying geology is described as cornbrash formation with forest marble formation in the east of the site (BGS 2002). The site lies at a height of 69.8m in the south rising to 71.5m AOD in the north.

Archaeological background

The archaeological potential of the site area has been highlighted in a brief for the project prepared by Richard Oram of Oxfordshire County Archaeological Service drawing on information in a desk-based assessment prepared by Mr. Matthew Smith of CgMs Consulting (Smith 2009). In summary, this potential stems from its position within the historic core of the town. The town has Anglo Saxon origins and the church of St Edburg,

which lies to the southwest is thought to lie on the site of an earlier Saxon minster and be the focus of this early settlement (Blair 2003). Several excavation sites in the town centre have revealed Roman, Saxon and medieval occupation. Saxon occupation has been recorded to the east (Harding and Andrews 2003). For the site itself, human burials probably of Saxon date were uncovered during the construction of the car park in 2000 but were reburied without further excavation (Smith 2009). A stone wall and a possible well were also noted along with an unstratified sherd of Saxon pottery. A watching brief in November 2009 during the digging of a geotechnical test pit adjacent to the church wall did not reveal any archaeology.

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. The specific aims of the project were to:

- to determine if archaeologically relevant levels have survived on the site;
- to determine if archaeological deposits of any period are present;
- to determine the nature of any prehistoric, Roman or Saxon occupation on the site; and
- to determine if any Saxon cemetery remains are present on the site.

Three trenches were proposed to be dug, two at 15m long and one at 10m that are located to examine the footprint of the proposed new building. They were to be dug using a JCB-type machine using a ditching bucket to expose archaeologically sensitive levels under constant archaeological supervision. Spoilheaps were to be searched for finds including use of a metal detector.

Discovery of any human remains was to be reported to the coroner but no further action will be taken as part of the evaluation exercise, unless requested as additional work by the client in consultation with the project consultant and Oxfordshire County Archaeological Service. Sufficient excavation of any grave-shaped features located was to take place to confirm the presence of human burial on the site after which excavation would then cease.

Results

The trenches were dug as intended and ranged from 10.0m to 14.9m in length (Fig. 3) but access restrictions required a small relocation of trench 3. The top of trenches 2 and 3 were dug using a toothed bucket to remove the Tarmac surface. Subsequent layers were excavated using a ditching bucket. Due to the presence of two drains in Trench 1, natural geology was not exposed along its entire length.

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

Trench 1 (Fig. 4)

Trench 1 was aligned W-E and was 10.3m long and 0.74m deep. The stratigraphy comprised 0.16m topsoil overlaying 0.51m subsoil which in turn overlay natural geology consisting of brown gravels and clay. Linear feature 3 was identified in the centre of the trench, however, due to the presence of an active drain nearby one of the edges could not be established. The feature was at least 1.3m wide but only 0.17m deep with a single fill (52) of grey silty clay with some gravel. Some animal bone was recovered but no dating evidence.

Trench 2 (Figs 4 and 5; Plate 1 and 3)

Trench 2 was aligned SW-NE and was 12.1m long and sloped from 0.59m to 0.67m deep at the NE end. The stratigraphy comprised 0.07m of Tarmac and 0.23m of hoggin overlying 0.26m of made ground which in turn overlay natural chalky clay. Linear feature 1 was identified at the NE end of the trench which was 2.1m wide and 0.25m deep, with a single fill (54) of grey/brown silty clay with some gravel. A single sherd of Early/Middle Saxon pottery was recovered along with fragments of animal bone.

Trench 3 (Figs 4 and 5; Plates 2 and 4)

Trench 3 was aligned SE-NW and was 14.9m long and 0.44m deep. The stratigraphy comprised 0.07m Tarmac over 0.12m of hoggin overlying 0.17m of made ground which in turn overlay natural chalky clay. Linear feature 2 was identified at the SE end of the trench which was 1.25m wide and 0.22m deep with a single fill (55) of orange/brown silty clay. No finds were recovered. The nature of the fill suggests that this feature may be of natural origin.

Finds

Pottery by Paul Blinkhorn

A single sherd of pottery weighing 11g occurred in Ditch 1 (54). It is a plain bodysherd of early/middle Saxon date (c AD450 – 850). The fabric comprises moderate to dense temper of finely crushed calcite-cemented sandstone up to 1mm, and rare black iron ore of the same size.

The sherd is typical of the early/middle Saxon tradition in the region, and has parallels with the pottery from the Anglo-Saxon settlement at nearby Chapel Street in Bicester (Mephram 2003). It is in fairly good

condition, with only minimal wear, and is unlikely to have been transported far from its original point of deposition.

Animal Bone by Danielle Milbank

A small assemblage of animal bone was recovered during the evaluation, from 2 contexts (Appendix 3). A total of 27 fragments were recovered, weighing 723g.

The remains were fragmented in most cases but generally fairly well preserved. There was evidence of butchery cut marks on several of the larger fragments. Overall, species identification was poor due to the fragmented nature of the bone.

Excluding the very small pieces, each fragment was initially separated into one of three size categories: “large mammal”, “medium mammal”, and “small mammal”. Horse and cow are represented by the large size category, sheep/goat, deer and pigs are represented in the medium size category, and any smaller animal (e.g. dog, cat etc.) were designated to the “small mammal” category. If possible, each fragment was subsequently given a more specific identification to species, and side of origin.

The majority of fragments were identified as medium animal (17), including a tibia/fibula end, sheep/goat rib fragments and piece of pig lower mandible.

Large animals were represented by two unidentified fragments and three horse bones (a right talus, right calcaneus and right distal fibula end). A single small animal (rib) bone was identified.

Due to the lack of duplicated skeletal elements, the minimum number of individuals present in the assemblage was found to be 5: 1 horse, 1 sheep/goat, 1 pig and 1 small mammal. The assemblage overall appears to be domestic in nature, however no further information could be obtained from these skeletal remains.

Conclusion

The evaluation has revealed that the archaeologically relevant levels are still present on the site and have not been truncated. However, it is less certain if the three linear features identified in the trenches are of archaeological significance. The linear feature (2) identified in trench 3 is of doubtful archaeological origin and no evidence of a continuation of it was seen in trench 2. The other two features, one of which dates from the Early/middle Saxon period or later may be of archaeological nature but their origin is uncertain. Despite the known presence of a possible Saxon cemetery in the western portion of the site boundary no graves were

identified in any of the trenches. The presence of Saxon pottery, animal bone and the proximity of the cemetery indicates that the site retains some archaeological potential.

References

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- Smith, M 2009, The Church of the Immaculate Conception, archaeological desk-based assessment, CgMs Consulting, report MS 11365, London

APPENDIX 1: Trench details
0m at S or W end

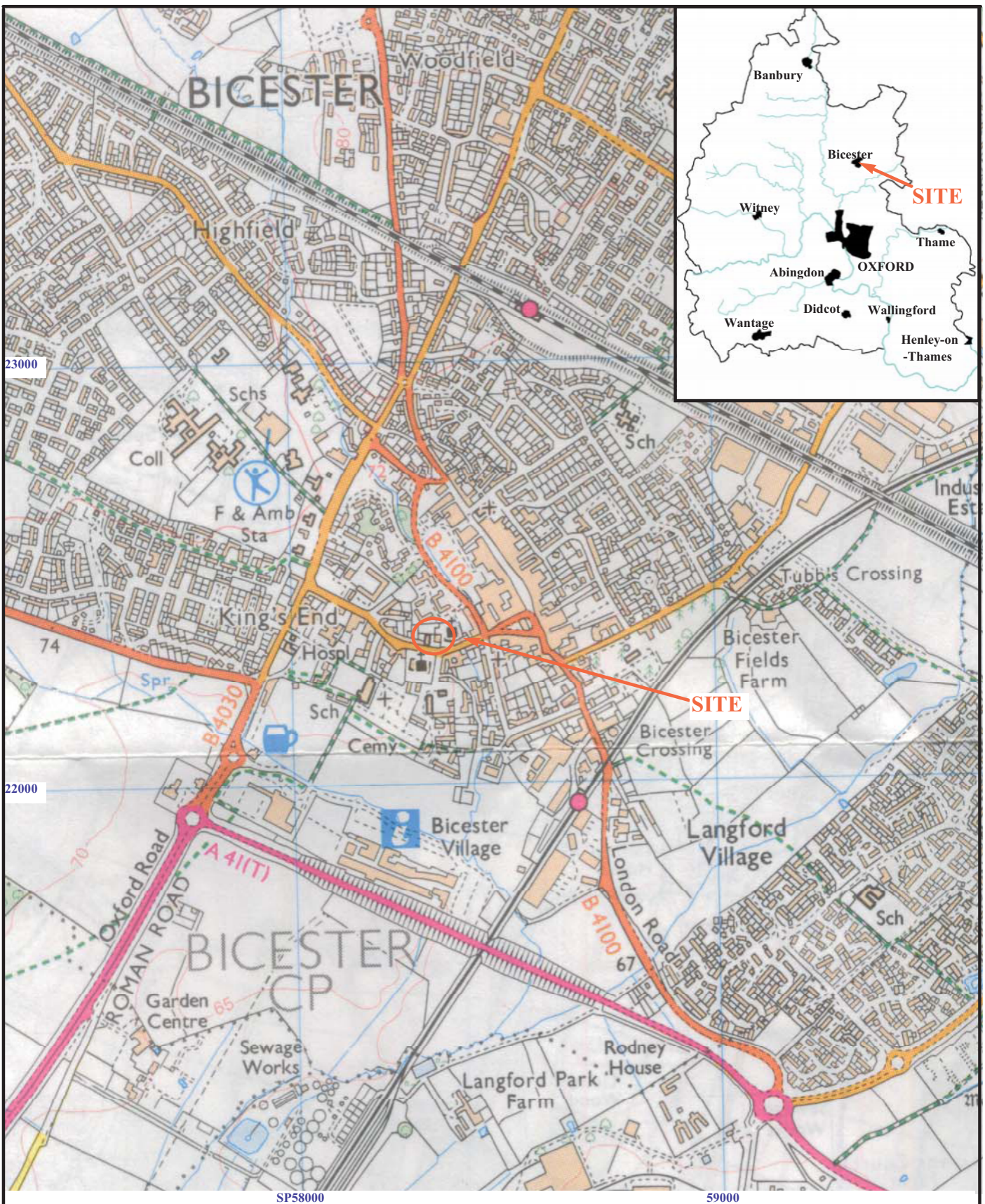
Trench	Length (m)	Breadth (m)	Depth (m)	Comment
1	10.3	1.6	0.74	0-0.16m topsoil; 0.16-0.67m subsoil; 0.67m+ natural geology consisting of brown gravel and clay. Linear feature 3.
2	12.1	1.6	0.67	0-0.07m Tarmac; 0.07-0.30m hoggin; 0.30-0.56m made ground consisting of grey silty clay and rubble; 0.56m+ natural geology consisting of yellow brown chalky clay. Linear feature 1, [Plates 1 and 3]
3	14.9	1.6	0.44	0-0.07m Tarmac; 0.07-0.19m hoggin; 0.19-0.36m made ground; 0.36m+ natural chalky clay geology. Linear or natural feature 2, [Plates 2 and 4]

APPENDIX 2: Feature details

Trench	Cut	Fill (s)	Type	Date	Dating evidence
1	3	52	Linear feature	Unphased	None
2	1	54	Linear feature	Saxon or later	Pottery
3	2	55	Linear/natural feature	Unphased	None

APPENDIX 3: Animal bone by context

Context	Weight (g)	Sheep/Goat	Horse	Pig	Unidentified (fragmented)	Total
3 (52)	93	2	-	-	1	3
1 (54)	630	2	3	1	18	24
Total	723	4	3	1	19	27



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Figure 1. Location of site within Bicester and Oxfordshire.

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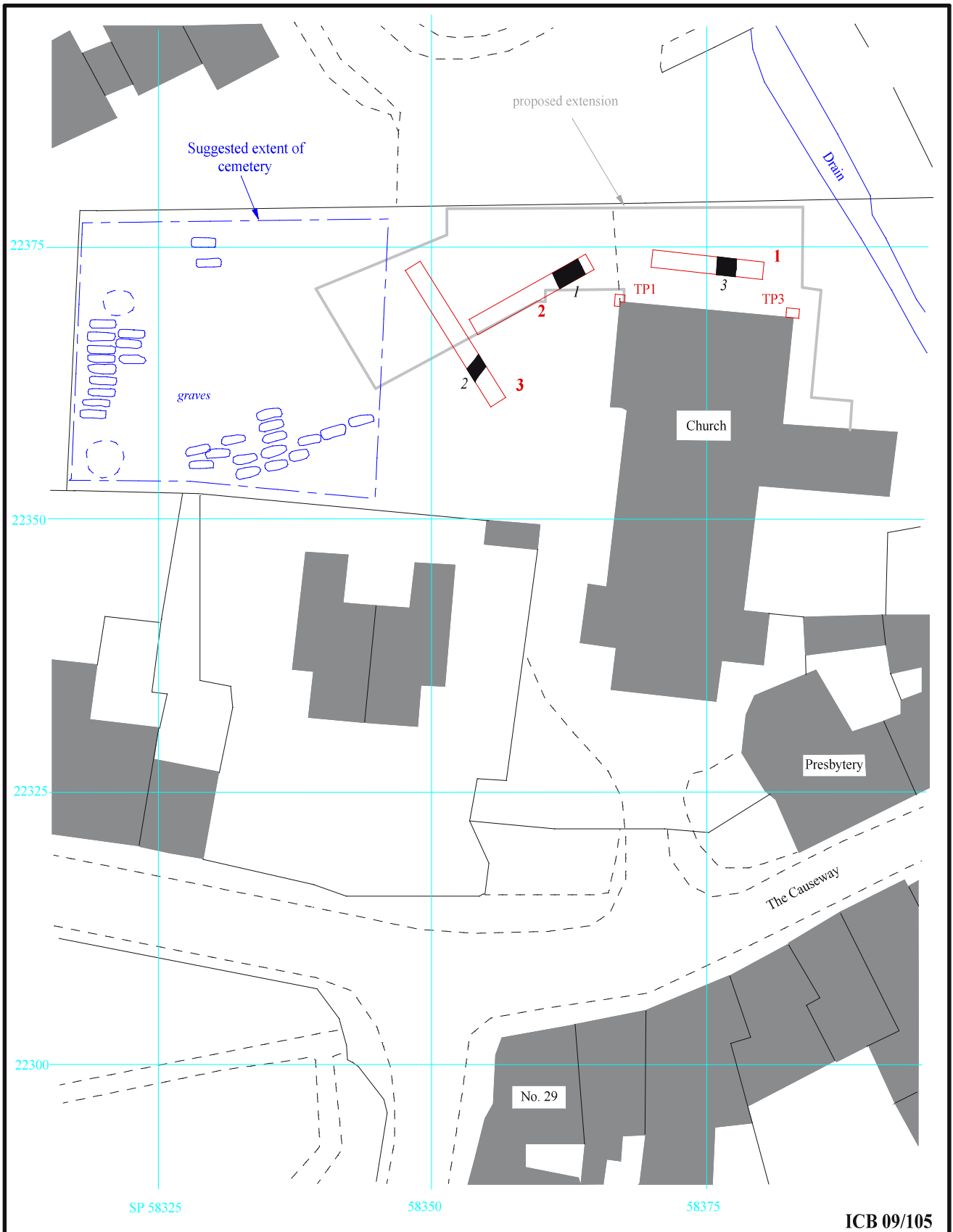
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Figure 2. Location of site off The Causeway.

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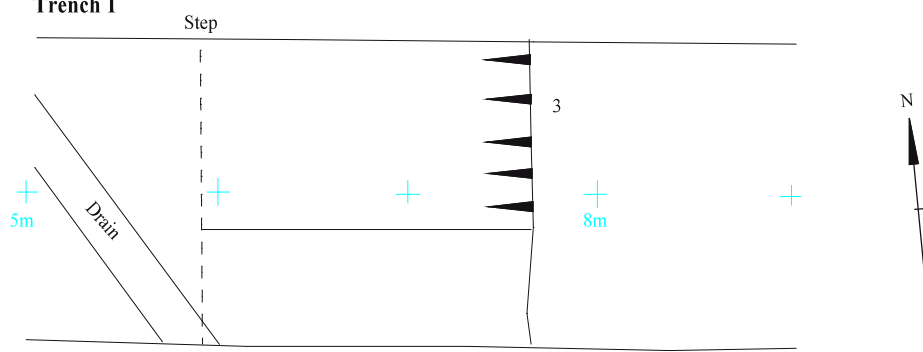
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Figure 3. Location of Trenches

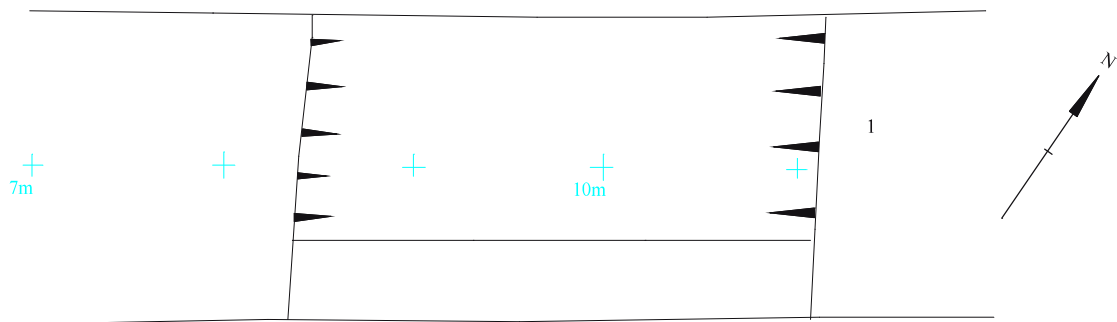


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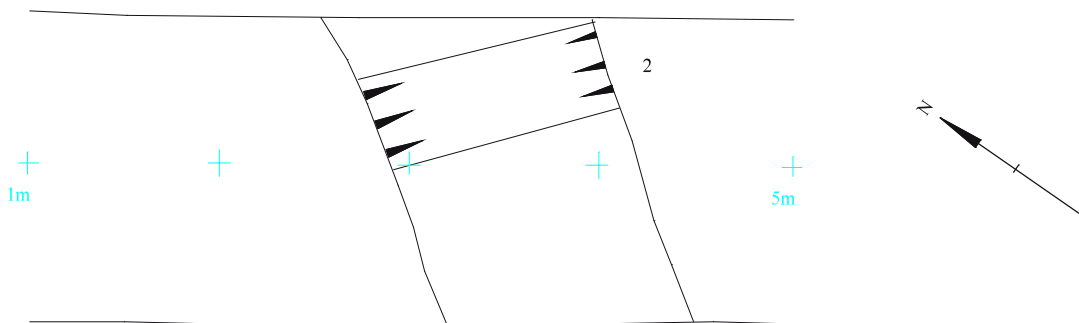
Trench 1



Trench 2



Trench 3



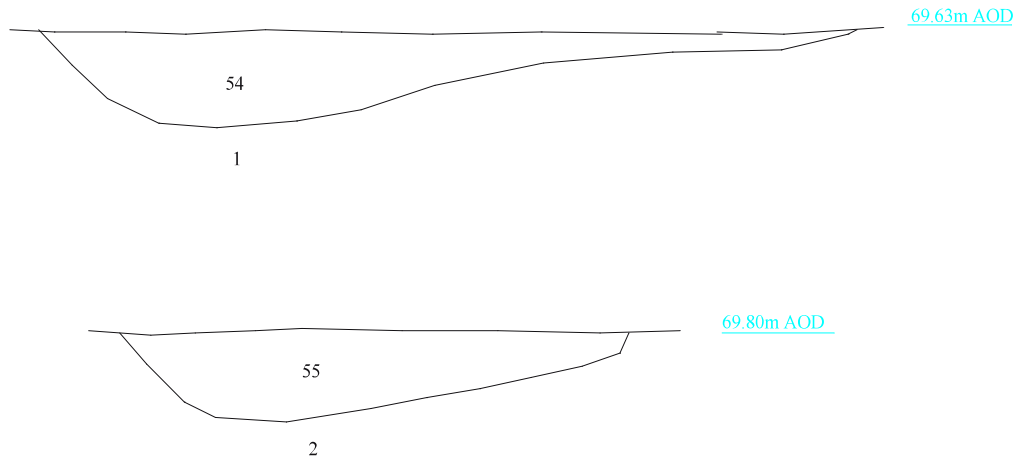
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Figure 4. Trench Details



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Figure 5. Sections



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Plate 1. Trench 2, looking south-west, scales: 2m, 1m and 0.5m



Plate 2. Trench 3, looking north-west, scales: 2m, 1m and 0.5m.

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 Plates 1 and 2.

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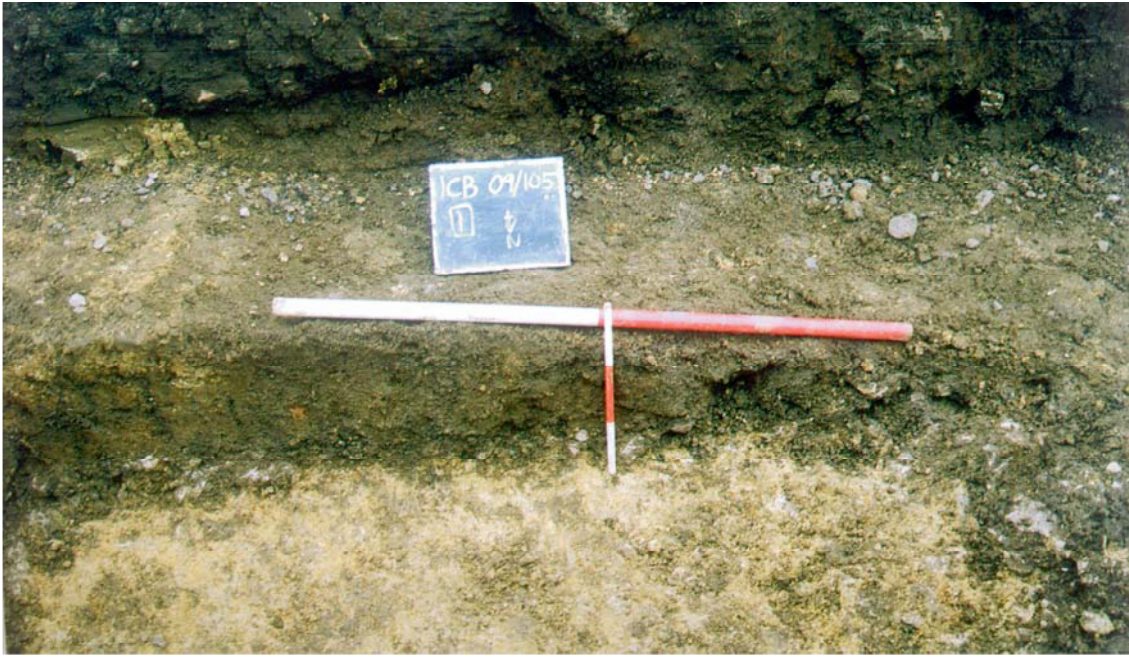


Plate 3. Trench 2, linear 1, looking south, scales: 1m and 0.3m



Plate 4. Trench 3, linear 2, looking south-west, scales: 1m and 0.3m.

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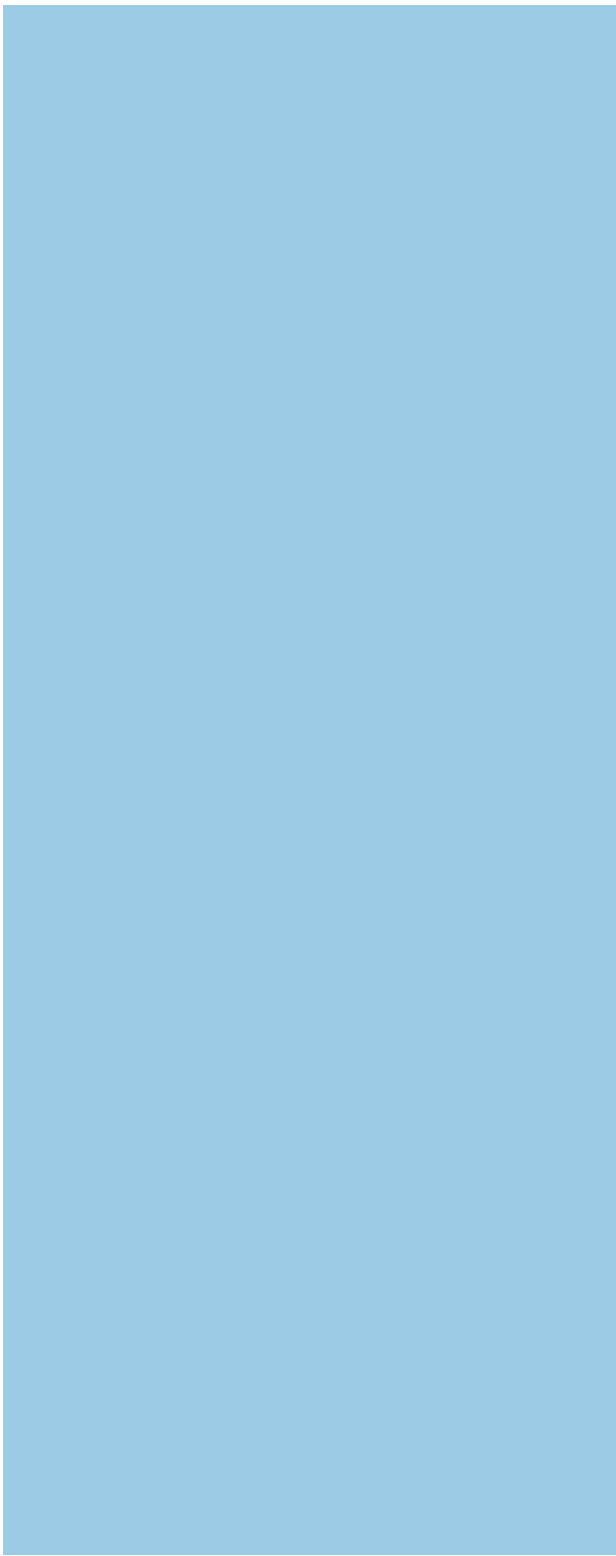
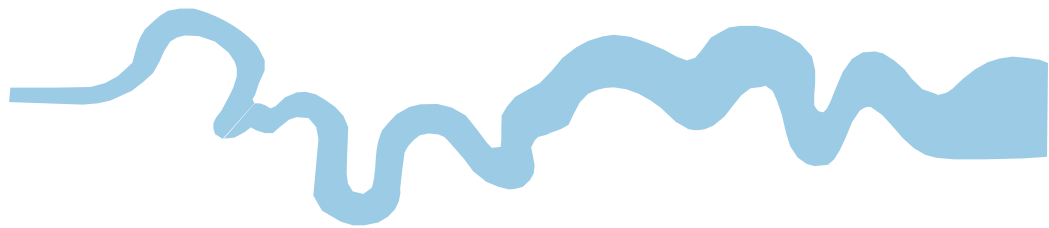
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Plates 3 and 4**

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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
Iron Age _____	BC/AD 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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