

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

ARCHAEOLOGICAL

S E R V I C E S

**Iris Court, Tilehurst,
Reading, Berkshire**

Archaeological Evaluation

by Danielle Milbank

Site Code: ICT10/14

(SU 6730 7300)

Iris Court, Tilehurst, Reading, Berkshire

**An Archaeological Evaluation
for CgMs Consulting**

by Danielle Milbank
Thames Valley Archaeological Services
Ltd

Site Code ICT 10/14

March 2010

Summary

Site name: Iris Court, Tilehurst, Reading, Berkshire

Grid reference: SU 6730 7300

Site activity: Evaluation

Date and duration of project: 2nd–4th March 2010

Project manager: Steve Ford

Site supervisor: Danielle Milbank

Site code: ICT 10/14

Area of site: 9000 sq m

Summary of results: A gully of Early Bronze Age date, an undated posthole and a post-Medieval ditch.

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

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	Steve Preston✓ 15.03.10

Iris Court, Tilehurst, Reading, Berkshire An Archaeological Evaluation

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Report 10/14

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological field evaluation carried out at Iris Court, Tilehurst, Reading, Berkshire (SU 6730 7300) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Ms Sally Dicks of CgMs Consulting, Morley House, 26 Holborn Viaduct, London, EC1A 2AT.

Planning permission (06/01319/FUL) has been granted by Reading Borough Council for the construction of 43 sheltered care units and ancillary accommodation following the demolition of buildings flanking a 19th-century Grade II Listed rectory. As a consequence of the potential for archaeological remains to have survived on the site, the planning permission included a condition (19) which requires field evaluation by means of trial trenching.

This is in accordance with the Department of the Environment's Planning Policy Guidance, Archaeology and Planning (PPG16 1990), and the Borough Council's policies on archaeology. The field investigation was carried out to a specification prepared by Ms Sally Dicks of CgMs submitted to Reading Borough Council. The fieldwork was monitored by Ms Mary O'Donoghue of Berkshire Archaeology.

The fieldwork was undertaken by the author, with Aiji Castle and Paulina Pankiewicz from 2nd - 4th March 2010 and the site code is ICT 10/14. The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited at Reading Museum in due course.

Location, topography and geology

The site is located to the west of Reading, on the east side of New Hill Lane, on a high plateau, with the valleys of the River Thames to the north and the River Kennet to the south (Fig. 1). The area of the site is fairly flat, and lies at approximately 93m above Ordnance Datum. The underlying geology is described as comprising Winter Hill Gravels overlying Upper Chalk (BGS 1946). The geology observed in the trenches was orange grey sandy clay with gravel. The site is bordered to the north by houses on The Meadway, with New Hall Lane on the west side and a residential block and the modern rectory to the east. To the immediate south of the site is the churchyard of St Michael's Church, with the church itself less than 20m to the south of the site boundary (Fig. 2).

Archaeological background

The archaeological potential of the site stems from its location on the higher gravel terraces of the Thames Valley in Reading, where prolific numbers of finds of Palaeolithic worked flint have been recorded. Specifically, a moderate number of Palaeolithic flints have been recovered from the Tilehurst Plateau on which the site lies. More broadly, the area is rich in sites of all periods (Gates 1975; Lobb and Rose 1996). There have also been a modest number of Roman finds, including a coin, from the area to the south of the site including the churchyard of St Michael's Church, and further evidence of Roman activity encountered to the west of the site. St Michael's Church is Medieval, with the earliest part (the Lady Chapel) *c.*1300 in date, however the main body of the church is much later, and was restored in 1855 and in the 1950s. Although the exact location of the Medieval Rectory of St Michael's is not recorded in the cartographic evidence, it is likely that it stood within the site boundary. An archaeological watching brief carried out at 313, The Meadway (to the north-west of the site) did not reveal any archaeological deposits or features (Mundin 2008). Similarly, a watching brief to the north at 297, The Meadway (Ford 1998) and an evaluation to the east at Meadway School (Taylor 2006) did not identify any deposits of an archaeological nature (Fig. 2).

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 clarify the impact of 19th and 20th century development and hence assess the degree of survival of archaeological buried deposits;
- to determine the presence or absence of a Medieval rectory;
- to determine the presence or absence of Roman or Medieval occupation or activity; and
- to determine the potential for significant environmental deposits.

Six trenches were proposed, which were located in order to target the footprint of the proposed development. Four of these were to be excavated by JCB-type machine fitted with a toothless ditching bucket, and were excavated under continuous archaeological supervision. The remaining two trenches (5 and 6) were within the building courtyard and were excavated by hand. All spoilheaps were monitored for finds, and a metal detector was used to aid the retrieval of metal finds.

Results

All but one of the trenches were excavated in the position intended, and where three of the trenches were slightly shorter, other trenches were lengthened slightly to compensate for this (Fig. 3). The position of Trench 2 was moved slightly to the south to avoid a buried service. An extra trench (1b) which was 2m long, was excavated alongside Trench 1 in order to clarify the initial findings. The trenches were 1.7m in width and ranged from 1.8m to 21.2m in length and from 0.40m to 0.58m in depth. A complete list of trenches giving lengths, breadths, depths and a description of sections and geology is given in Appendix 1. A list of all excavated features forms Appendix 2.

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

Trench 1a was aligned north-south, and was 1.7m wide, 21.2m long and 0.56m deep. The stratigraphy comprised turf and topsoil (50) 0.27m thick, which overlay subsoil (dark grey sandy clay silt with occasional gravel, 51). This in turn overlay a slightly mottled brown orange clay sand with frequent small and medium sub-rounded flint gravel, which comprised the underlying geology. A gully/ditch (1) was recorded, which was aligned east-west, with steep sides and a concave base. A slot was excavated through the gully/ditch, across the full width of the trench. It was 0.42m deep and 0.70m wide, and was infilled with a light orange grey sandy silty clay deposit (52) with no inclusions, which contained 30 fragments of pottery. The pottery sherds were grog-tempered and likely to represent an Early Bronze Age biconical urn. A sample of this deposit (1) was floated and wet-sieved for finds and environmental evidence, but none was obtained.

A single posthole was also recorded in this trench, which was oval, 0.46m long, 0.36m wide and 0.22m deep, with fairly steep sides and a concave base. It was infilled with a grey brown silty sandy clay deposit (53) and though a sample was processed for finds and environmental evidence, none was obtained.

Trench 1b (Fig. 3)

An additional short (2m long) trench was excavated on the west of and parallel with Trench 1a, in order to more accurately define the alignment of the gully/ditch observed in Trench 1a. This trench was 1.7m wide and 0.58m deep. Here, the stratigraphy was turf and topsoil 0.26m thick, which overlay subsoil (as above) which was 0.22m thick. This in turn overlay the orange clay sand and gravel geology. The alignment of the gully/ditch in Trench 1a appeared to be east-west, however, a small slot was excavated (3) but the gully/ditch was not confidently identified. Its edges were not clear in this trench.

Trench 2 (Fig. 3)

Trench 2 was aligned SE-NW, was 1.7m wide, 6.8m long and 0.42m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of turf and topsoil 0.20m thick, which overlay the dark grey clay silt subsoil, which was 0.21m thick. This in turn overlay the mottled grey brown and orange clay and gravel geology. A buried service was encountered at the NW end, and was left on a plinth. No archaeological finds or features were observed.

Trench 3a (Fig. 3)

Trench 3a was 1.7m wide, 7.5m long and 0.52m deep. It was aligned SSE–NNW, and the stratigraphy comprised topsoil 0.24m thick, which overlay the subsoil, which was 0.19m thick. This in turn overlay the mottled grey brown and orange clay and gravel geology. A small part of the northern end of the trench was left high to avoid a buried service. No archaeological finds or features were encountered.

Trench 3b (Fig. 3)

Trench 3b was aligned WSW–ENE, and was 1.7m wide, 8.20m long and 0.58m deep. Here, topsoil 0.25m thick overlay a mixed chalk rubble and subsoil layer which was 0.09m thick. This overlay subsoil which was 0.16m thick, which in turn overlay the mottled grey orange clay and gravel geology. At the WSW end of the trench, a small portion was left high to avoid the buried service observed in Trench 3a. Along the south side of the trench at the WSW end, a Post-Medieval truncation containing brick fragments and metal wire (not retained) was identified. No archaeological deposits or features were observed.

Trench 4 (Fig. 3)

Trench 4 was aligned SW–NE, and was 1.7 wide, 2m long and 0.50m deep. Topsoil 0.25m thick overlay a mixed garden soil and modern brick rubble layer which was observed in the base of the trench. The trench was not excavated below this level, as an electric service was encountered. As a result of limited space, there was no opportunity to extend the trench or alter its location. No finds or features were encountered in this trench.

Trench 5 (Fig. 3 and Plate 2)

Trench 5 measured 1.8m square, and was 0.48m deep. Here, paving slabs 0.05m thick overlay a hard sand and cement layer which was 0.07m thick. This overlay a disturbed subsoil layer with frequent plant roots (0.15m

thick), which overlay subsoil which was 0.21m thick. This in turn overlay the natural geology, which comprised slightly mottled orange clay sand with flint gravel inclusions. No archaeological finds or features were observed.

Trench 6 (Figs 3, 4 and 5; Pl. 3)

Trench 6 measured 1.8m by 1.8m, and was 0.40m deep. Paving slabs 0.05m thick overlay a hard sand and cement layer which was 0.05m thick. This overlay a pinkish grey hardcore layer (0.13m thick), which overlay subsoil which was 0.11m thick. This in turn overlay the natural geology, which comprised slightly mottled orange clay sand with flint gravel inclusions. A feature, probably a ditch, was partially exposed in the north-east corner of this trench. It appeared to be aligned SW–NE, and a slot (4) was excavated through it. Here, the ditch was 0.57m deep and 0.82m wide, though approximately half its width was exposed within the trench. The southwest side of the ditch was fairly steep and sloped down to a flattish base. It was infilled with a single deposit (54) which comprised soft orange-brown clay sand with occasional to moderate small and medium flint gravel inclusions. Two sherds of pottery and three brick and tile fragments were recovered from deposit 54, and indicate that the feature is broadly Post-Medieval in date.

Finds

Prehistoric Pottery by Frances Raymond

Thirty sherds (weighing 266g) from approximately half of a miniature early Bronze Age biconical urn came from a gully/ditch in Trench 1a (gully/ditch 1). These include 12 refitting fragments from the rim and walls and four from the base. The vessel has a bevelled rim with a diameter of 11cm, stands to a height of approximately 11cm and has a base diameter of 9cm. It is undecorated with a reddish brown to light reddish brown smoothed exterior and is made from a soft medium grade grog-tempered ware. Although some surface erosion is evident, the sherds are in good condition with crisp refits along ancient fracture lines. Miniature biconical urns are not particularly common and ultimately a more detailed illustrated report setting the vessel in its local and regional context is recommended.

Post-Medieval Pottery by Danielle Milbank

Two sherds of pottery weighing 13g were recovered from context 54. These were both small sherds of post-Medieval domestic redware, and date broadly to the post-Medieval period.

Brick and tile by Danielle Milbank

Three pieces of tile were recovered from deposit 54. These weighed a total of 69g, and were fairly small pieces with no notable features (for example peg holes). The fabric of two of the pieces was fine and slightly soft, with occasional inclusions and a rough base indicating a sandy mould, and the colour of both was pale pinkish red. The third fragment was thin and rough, and also of fine-grained slightly soft fabric, suggesting the top and bottom surfaces had broken off, and it was abraded, with a grey core and light orange red surfaces. These pieces were not closely datable, but are broadly Medieval or Post-Medieval.

Conclusion

The evaluation has shown that the potential for archaeological remains to have survived on the site was good, particularly in the lawn areas of the site and in the garden area enclosed by the current buildings. Modern and post-Medieval truncation was encountered in some trenches, but this appears to be limited to a small part of the area evaluated. The stratigraphy largely showed fairly undisturbed topsoil and subsoil, with made ground overlying the subsoil observed in the paved area enclosed by the buildings. As a result of the presence of modern buried services, it remains unclear if archaeological potential exists in the area adjacent to the car park where trench 4 was excavated.

The gully/ditch and posthole encountered in trench 1 represent an area of prehistoric activity, specifically Early Bronze Age, and is the only known instance of archaeology of that period recorded in the area. Pottery of this period is generally uncommon and its recovery from non-funerary contexts is very rare. Tentatively, the presence of the posthole might be indicative of the presence of structural remains within an occupation site. Again this is a rarely encountered event for this period. Alternatively, it is possible that the vessel derives from an urned cremation cemetery deposit.

There was no evidence in any of the trenches for the Medieval rectory thought to have stood within the site boundary, and no evidence of any other Medieval deposits. Similarly there was no evidence of Roman activity or occupation. Post-Medieval activity was represented by a probable ditch in Trench 6.

References

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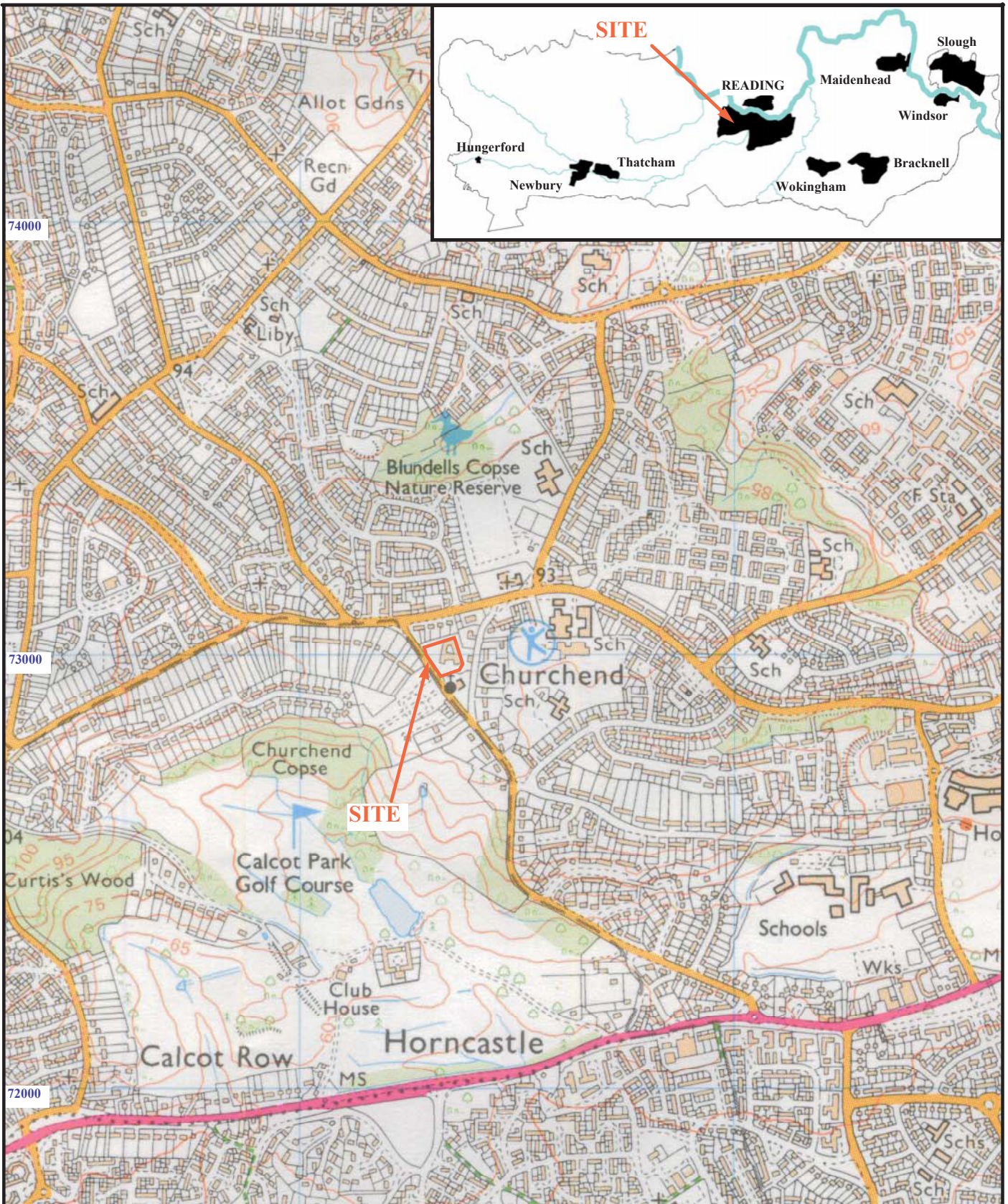
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APPENDIX 1: Trench details
 0m at south, southeast or west end

Trench	Length (m)	Breadth (m)	Depth (m)	Comment
1a	21.20	1.7	0.56	0–0.27m turf and topsoil; 0.27m-0.48m subsoil; 0.48m+ brown orange clay sand and gravel geology. Ditch 1, post hole 2 [PL 1]
1b	2.00	1.7	0.58	0–0.26m turf and topsoil; 0.26m-0.48m subsoil; 0.48m+ brown orange clay sand and gravel geology. Ditch 3. [PL 2]
2	6.80	1.7	0.42	0–0.20m turf and topsoil; 0.20m-0.41m subsoil; 0.41m+ mottled grey brown orange clay sand and gravel geology.
3a	7.50	1.7	0.52	0–0.24m turf and topsoil; 0.24m-0.43m subsoil; 0.43m+ mottled grey brown orange clay sand and gravel geology.
3b	8.20	1.7	0.58	0–0.25m turf and topsoil; 0.25m-0.34m topsoil and chalk rubble; 0.34m-0.50m subsoil; 0.50m+ brown mottled grey orange clay sand and gravel geology.
4	2.00	1.7	0.50	0–0.25m topsoil; 0.25m+ garden soil with brick rubble.
5	1.8	1.8	0.48	0–0.05m paving; 0.05m-0.12m sand and cement; 0.12m-0.27m disturbed topsoil; 0.27m-0.48m subsoil; 0.48m+ orange clay sand and gravel geology.
6	1.8	1.8	0.40	0–0.05m paving; 0.05m-0.10m sand and cement; 0.10m-0.23m pinkish hardcore; 0.23m-0.34m subsoil; 0.34m+ orange clay sand and gravel geology. Ditch 4 [PL 3]

APPENDIX 2: Feature details

<i>Trench</i>	<i>Cut</i>	<i>Fill (s)</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Dating evidence</i>
1a	1	52	Ditch	Late Bronze Age	Pottery
1a	2	53	Posthole	Undated	None
1b	3	-	Ditch	Late Bronze Age	Same as 1
6	4	54	Ditch	Post-Medieval	Pottery, tile



SU67000

68000

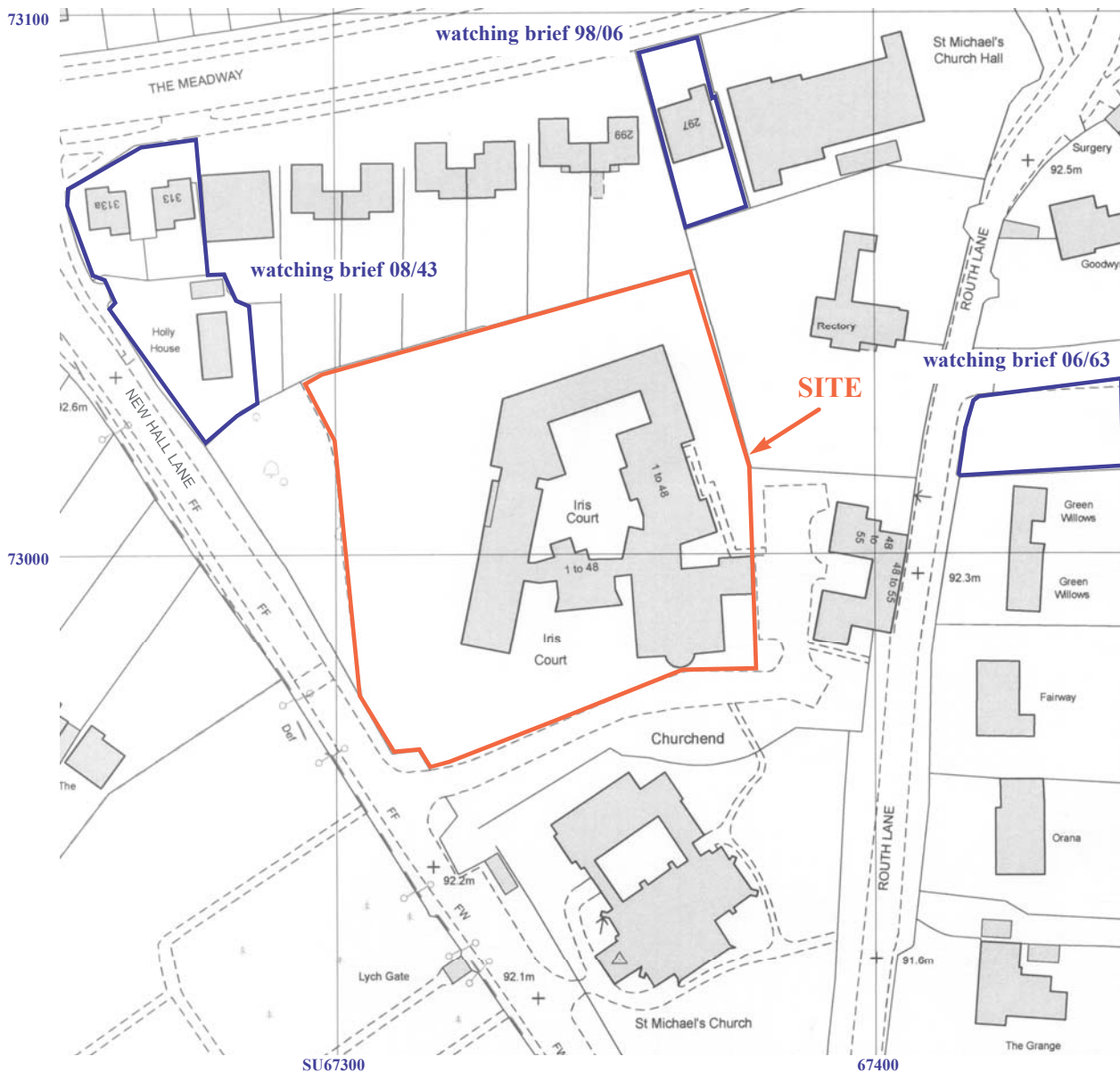
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Figure 1. Location of site within Tilehurst, in Reading and Berkshire.

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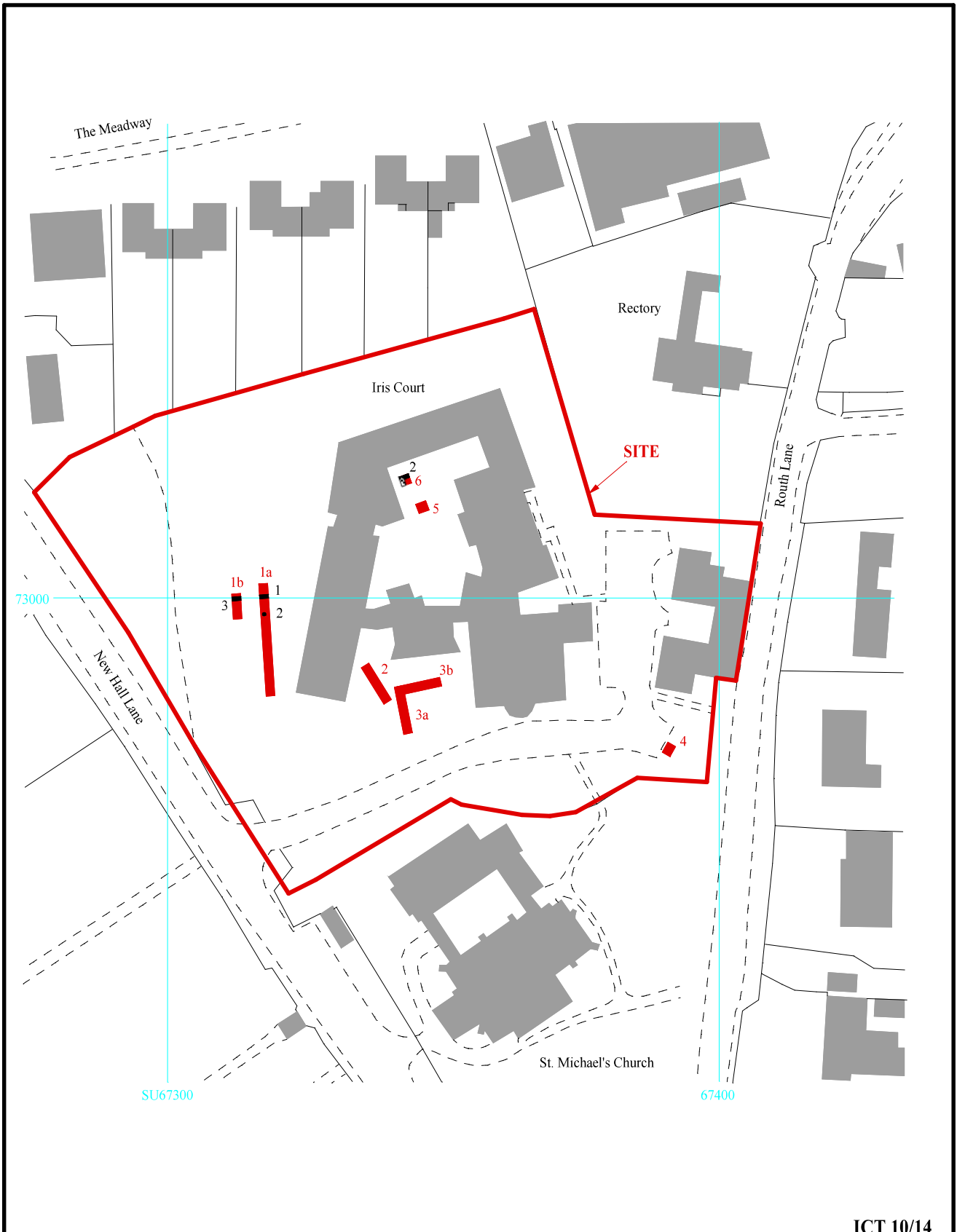
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Figure 2. Detailed location of site and other fieldwork in the area.

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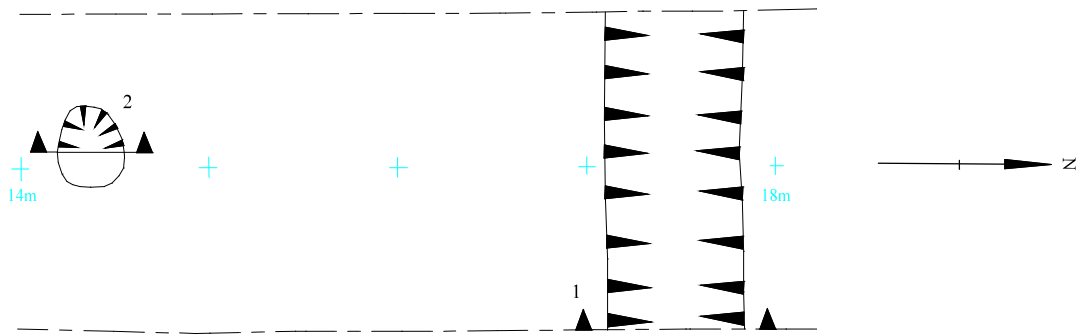
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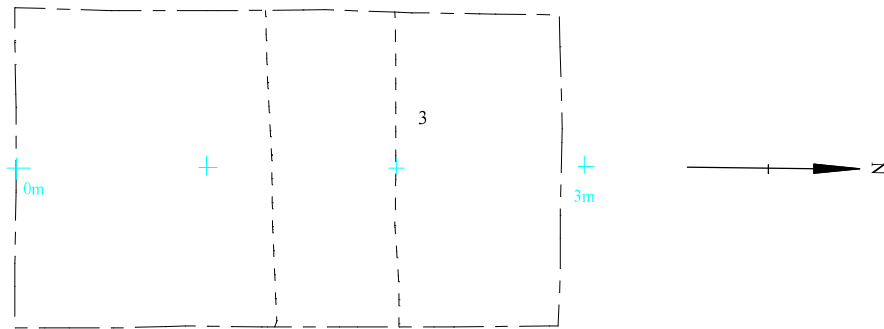
Figure 3. Location of trenches (red) and features (black).



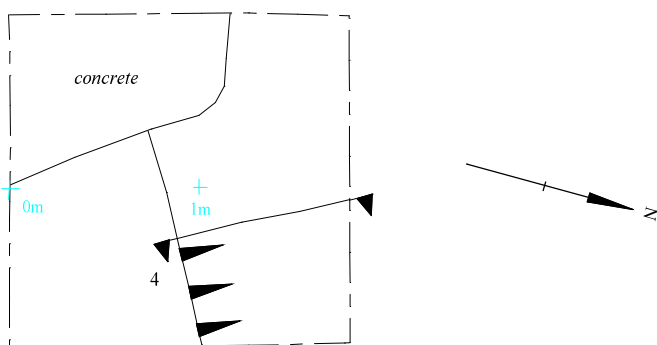
Trench 1a



Trench 1b



Trench 6

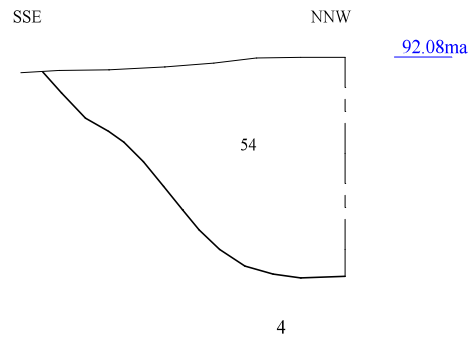
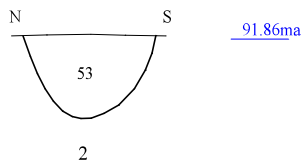
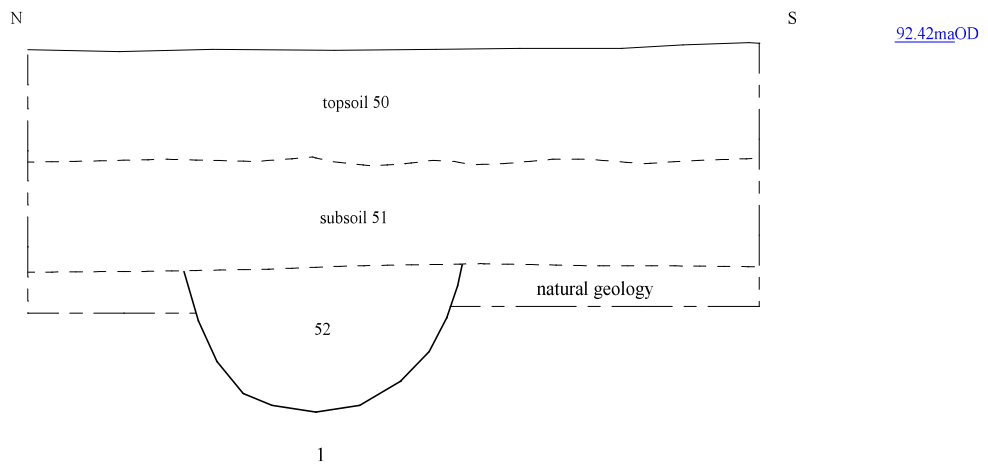


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Figure 4. Plan of trenches showing features





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Figure 5. Sections through features





Plate 1. Trench 5, looking north, scales 2m and 1m

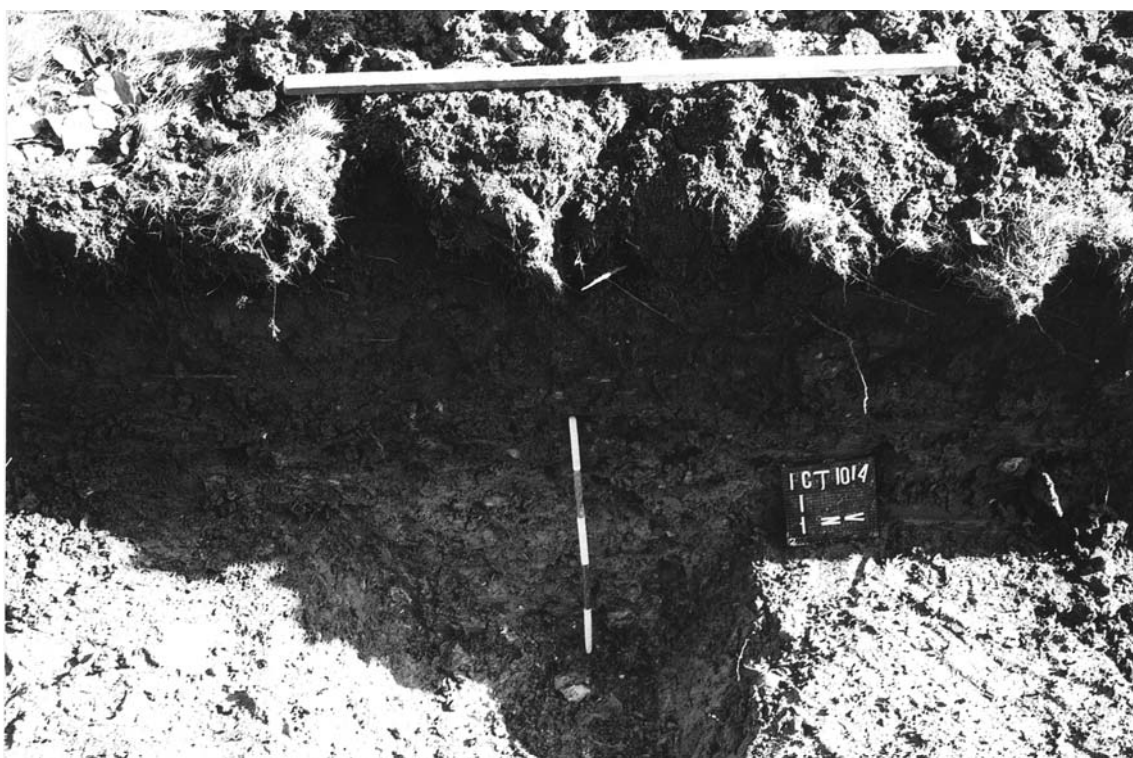


Plate 2. Trench 1, linear gully 1, looking east, scales 1m and 0.5m.

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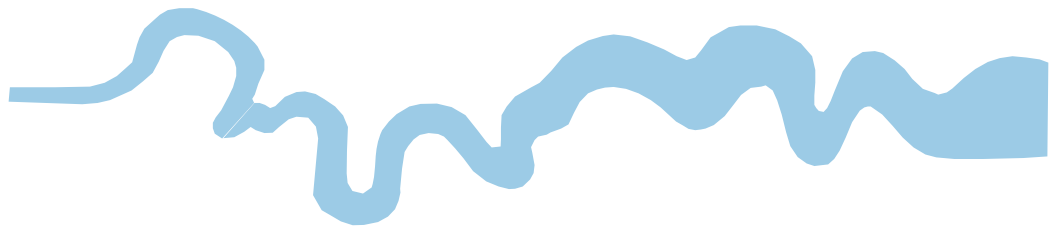
Plates 1 and 2

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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
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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