

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

ARCHAEOLOGICAL

S E R V I C E S

**23 Parkside Road,
Tilehurst, Berkshire**

Archaeological Evaluation

by Steve Ford

Site Code: PRR10/60

(SU 6952 7282)

**23 Parkside Road,
Reading, Berkshire**

**An Archaeological Evaluation
for Mr S Saunders**

by Steve Ford
Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code PRR10/60

July 2010

Summary

Site name: 23 Parkside Road, Reading, Berkshire

Grid reference: SU 6952 7282

Site activity: Evaluation

Date and duration of project: 9th July 2010

Project manager: Steve Ford

Site supervisor: Steve Ford

Site code: PRR10/60

Area of site: c. 1200 sq m

Summary of results: This evaluation comprised two components of study combining both post-glacial and Palaeolithic archaeology. However, neither component of study revealed positive results with just a few Neolithic or Bronze Age struck flints recorded from topsoil contexts. The site is considered to have no archaeological potential.

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

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Report edited/checked by: Steve Preston ✓ 16.07.10
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23 Parkside Road, Reading, Berkshire An Archaeological Evaluation

by Steve Ford

Report 10/60

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological field evaluation carried out on land to the rear of number 23 Parkside Road, Reading (SU 6952 7282)(Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Chris Keen of Keen Partnership, The Courtyard, Edinburgh Road, Reading, RG30 2UA on behalf of Mr S Saunders 23 Parkside Road, Reading.

Planning permission has been granted (App no 07/01483/FUL) by Reading Borough Council to construct a new block of flats with a basement and associated landscaping and access. The consent is subject to a condition (4) relating to archaeology, requiring archaeological works in advance of the development. In this case this was to take the form of an evaluation, based on the results of which, further work might be required.

This is in accordance with the Council's policies and national guidance on archaeology. The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Ms Fiona Macdonald of Berkshire Archaeology, archaeological advisers to the Council. The fieldwork was undertaken by Steve Ford and Danielle Milbank on 9th June 2010 and the site code is PRR10/60. 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 on the west side of Parkside Road to the rear of number 23. It is accessed from Shireshead Close which forms the north-eastern boundary. The site comprises a rectangular area of *c.* 1200 sq m used as garden. The ground is level and lies at a height of *c.* 60m above Ordnance Datum. (Fig. 2). The site lies on a plateau formed by an old gravel terrace of the River Thames. The underlying geology is depicted on the geology map as plateau gravel (BGS 1947) but this outcrop is now known as the Lynch Hill terrace (Wymer 1968, 155). The geology encountered was mostly a sandy clay (brickearth) with few gravel pieces overlying clayey gravel at depth.

Archaeological background

The archaeological potential of the site stems from its location within the archaeologically rich Thames Valley 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 relevant to the site itself. Stray finds and reports of occupation and burial sites of various periods have been recorded, especially from the many quarry sites in the area (Ford 2005). At Grovelands Pit, 400m to the north, for example, Middle and Late Bronze Age deposits were encountered in the north-west corner, and at the west of the site Roman deposits were encountered. The higher gravel terraces of the Thames Valley are particularly noteworthy for the presence of Palaeolithic flint and stone tools, representing the earliest known human occupation in the British Isles. Many flint finds and some rare faunal remains from the Palaeolithic period were also found at Grovelands Pit at the base of the gravel deposit (Wymer 1968, 155). The proposal site lies on the same gravel terrace. However, fieldwork on site to the north such as at the new YMCA building and number 57 Parkside Road did not reveal any deposits of archaeological interest (Cass 2006; Wallis 2008).

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.

Specific aims of the project were:

- to determine if archaeologically relevant levels have survived on this site;
- to determine if archaeological deposits of any period are present;
- to determine if there are later prehistoric, Roman, Saxon or medieval deposits present on the site;
- and
- to determine if any Palaeolithic finds are present within the gravel on the site in the area of the proposed basement.

A total of 4 trenches were to be dug, each 10m in length and 1.6m wide. The trenches were located randomly across the site. These would all be dug using a JCB-type machine fitted with a toothless ditching bucket under constant archaeological supervision. One trench, to be located within the footprint of the proposed new basement was to be deepened and widened (to facilitate safe access) so as to examine the gravel strata of the site and assess its potential for Palaeolithic remains.

Results

All four trenches and test were dug as intended, The trenches all measured 1.60m wide and were between 9.3m and 10.7m in length (Fig. 3). A complete list of trenches and test pits giving lengths, breadths, depths and a description of sections and geology is given in Appendix 1.

Trench 1 (Figs 3 and 4, Pl. 1)

This trench measured 9.3m in length and was dug to a depth of 0.4m. The stratigraphy revealed comprised 0.22m of topsoil/turf over 0.08m of subsoil comprising brown sandy clay with some gravel. In turn this overlay the natural geology which was an orange/brown sandy clay (brickearth). A modern pit containing modern brick, was recorded. A single flint flake was recovered from the topsoil. No deposits of archaeological interest were present.

Trench 2 (Fig. 3)

This trench measured 9.4m in length and was dug to a depth of 0.5m. The stratigraphy comprised 0.32m of topsoil (with a grass/scrub cover) over 0.18m of subsoil. In turn this overlay the natural geology (brickearth). A single flint flake was recovered from the topsoil. No deposits of archaeological interest were present.

Trench 3 (Fig. 3, Pl. 2)

This trench measured 10.4m in length and was dug to a depth of 0.54m. The stratigraphy comprised 0.24m of topsoil (with a grass/scrub cover) over 0.2m of subsoil. In turn this overlay the natural geology (brickearth). A single flint flake was recovered from the topsoil. No deposits of archaeological interest were present.

Trench 4 (Fig. 3, Pls 3 and 4)

This trench measured 10.7m in length and was dug to a depth of 0.48m. The stratigraphy revealed comprised 0.24m of topsoil (with a grass/scrub cover) over 0.2m of subsoil which overlay the natural geology (brickearth). No deposits or finds of archaeological interest were present.

The southern end of this trench was widened to 2.8m for a distance of 4m and the top of the natural geology inspected for archaeological deposits which were not observed. The geological test pit was then dug in this area in a series of c. 0.6m wide steps down to 3.05m depth to facilitate examination of the full sequence of terrace gravel deposits above the natural solid, tertiary geology (Bagshot/Reading Beds) by Dr. Simon Colcutt. This examination was to provide information on the possible context for the survival of deposits of lower Palaeolithic date. The test pit was dug to 3.05m and the results are presented in Appendix 2.

FINDS

Struck flint by Steve Ford

A small collection 3 struck flints was recovered during the evaluation from Trenches 1, 2 and 3. All three pieces were flakes and moderately edge damaged consistent with their recovery from topsoil contexts. None of the pieces are closely dated but are likely to be of Neolithic or Bronze Age date.

Conclusion

This small evaluation, unusually, had two components of study combining that of both post-glacial and Palaeolithic archaeology. However, neither component of study produced positive results. Material of interest for the post-glacial period comprised just a few prehistoric struck flints - ubiquitous finds for the flint-rich geological outcrops of southern England and when, as here, not within defined features, representing no more than casual loss or discard, or manuring of farmland within a wider landscape context.

Examination of the deep test pit did not reveal any artefacts of Palaeolithic date. However, the study of the grave strata also showed that the sediments formed rapidly with high energy water flow such that there is no prospect for *in-situ* survival of Palaeolithic sites in the vicinity.

On the basis of these results therefore, the site is considered to have no archaeological potential.

References

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- Wymer, J, 1968 *Lower Palaeolithic Archaeology in Britain*, London

APPENDIX 1: Trench details

0m at S or W end

Trench	Length (m)	Breadth (m)	Depth (m)	Comment
1	9.3	1.60	0.40	0-0.22m; Topsoil; 0.22-0.3m brown sandy clay with some gravel (subsoil); 0.3m+ Orange/brown sandy clay (brickearth) with some gravel (natural geology) [Plate 1] .
2	9.4	1.60	0.5	0-0.32m; Topsoil; 0.32-0.4m brown sandy clay with some gravel (subsoil); 0.4m+ Orange/brown sandy clay (brickearth) with some gravel (natural geology).
3	10.4	1.60	0.54	0-0.24m; Topsoil; 0.24-0.44m brown sandy clay with some gravel (subsoil); 0.44m+ Orange/brown sandy clay (brickearth) with some gravel (natural geology). [Plate 2]
4	10.7	1.60	0.48 3.05m (Test pit)	0-0.24m; Topsoil; 0.24-0.4m brown sandy clay with some gravel (subsoil); 0.4m+ Orange/brown sandy clay (brickearth) with some gravel (natural geology). Test pit (see appendix 2) [Plates 3 and 4]

APPENDIX 2: Assessment of Pleistocene Strata observed in test pit



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**23 PARKSIDE ROAD
READING**

(Site Ref. PRR 10 60)

PLEISTOCENE ISSUES

Produced by Oxford Archaeological Associates Limited
under the direction of

S.N. Collcutt
MA(Hons) DEA DPhil FSA

Commissioned by
Thames Valley Archaeological Services Limited

July 2010

1. Introduction

- 1.1 On the 8th. July, 2010, Dr. S. Ford (Thames Valley Archaeological Services Limited) commissioned Oxford archaeological Associates Limited to provide technical support on Pleistocene issues arising at a housing development site at 23 Parkside Road, Reading. Accordingly, on the 9th. July, Dr. S.N. Collcutt (OAA) supervised the cutting of a test pit (some 3 m deep, by 4 m long in the trend 155°-335° magnetic, vertical study face exposed on the southwestern side of the pit, stepped in the width to the northeast for safe access) in a location (SU 69508 72814 ± 5 m, Fig.1) intended for the future construction of a basement; other trenches were opened to assess the potential for Holocene archaeology, such that the deep test pit was numbered '4' in the overall sequence. The present report documents the Pleistocene geological contexts and geoarchaeological implications.

2. Background

- 2.1 The underlying geology was mapped as "plateau gravel" (BGS 1946) but was subsequently reclassified as part of the Lynch Hill Terrace of the Middle Thames (cf. Wymer 1968, 1999), possibly dating from MIS 8 (which would be consistent with the interpretation of the Lynch Hill Member in Gibbard 1999). The underlying (soft) basement is composed of Tertiary (assumed Reading Beds) shallow marine strata. The site lies more or less at a slight col between the current Thames and Kennet valleys.
- 2.2 The formerly extensive Grovelands Sand & Gravel Pit lay some 200 m to the north (Tilehurst Road, centred at SU 694 732) of the present development site. The stratigraphy of this pit was never reported in detail (cf. Stevens 1881; Evans 1897; Treacher 1904; Peake 1931); Roe (1981) noted that there was some suggestion that reworked Lynch Hill gravels had slumped over younger Taplow Terrace material. The important point in the present context was that a relatively large number of Lower Palaeolithic flint artefacts were recovered, mostly during the late nineteenth century, some in sharp condition and others in rolled condition (with a possibility that there might be some typological/technological difference in the assemblages with differing preservation states). This was also the only site in the area to produce significant quantities of large mammal fauna. It would appear that at least most of the finds were made low in the sequence; a depth below the contemporary surface (this being at "75 feet" above the Thames at this point, that is, at c.60 m AOD) of "13 feet" (c.4 m) was reported. Wymer (1968) noted that some of the bone and artifact finds were reported as being 'associated', lying in sand about two feet from the base of the gravel.
- 2.3 Ford (2010) has reported a nearby site at 13–25 Kent Road (SU 6957 7310 and thus definitely on the current Thames valley-side), at which reddish brown sand, with extremely small frequent rounded or subangular gravels, was observed in a shallow west-east channel-form at the base of the Pleistocene material (cut into Tertiary yellow fine sands) down to an altitude of 58.8 m AOD or slightly lower.

3. Lithostratigraphy

- 3.1 The sequence in T4 is described below (from the top downwards), first with reference to the heights (zero downwards) showing on the staff in Figs. 2-3, and then in reduced altitudes AOD:

305-270 (58.80-58.45 m AOD)

Topsoil, silty loam with floating flint clasts, nodules and pebbles; common brick/tile debris, charcoal; rare recent pottery sherds; colour, very dark to dark greyish brown 10YR 3-4/2.

270-260 (58.45-58.35 m AOD)

Subsoil; slightly lighter colour (brown 10YR 4-5/2) but with very diffuse boundaries. Note that root-channels, with topsoil-like fill, penetrate down to a level of 200, with a few major tree roots reaching down to the base of the gravels at a depth of 70.

260-200 (58.35-57.75 m AOD)

Dense to very dense loam, with significant clay and fine sand; generally massive but with some bioturbate microstructure (rooting and infauna) overprinted; fine grit and small stones, with rare medium flint clasts, all floating in the matrix at various angles; colour, brown 9YR 5/4 with fine speckling.

200-150 (57.75-57.25 m AOD)

Fine to medium gravel in abundant clayey silt matrix; only marginal clast support; stone content dominated by marine-chattered pebbles, nodular flint in more or less natural form (only the softest outer cortex missing) and very well rounded flint clasts; only very rare angular clasts >16 mm; flint mostly blue/black but some caramel-coloured examples as well; rare quartzite pebbles; extremely rare and decomposing sandstone elements; much sharper fine grit and coarse sand, still mostly floating in the finer matrix; some mud clasts up to 5 mm diameter and a general impression that much of the fine matrix was deposited quasi-contemporaneously with the coarse fraction (although the upper band was welded by later infiltration); overall fabric rather chaotic, with clasts at all angles; top of unit quite sharp but irregular (lacking any sign of a gradational or waning sequence); lower boundary relatively diffuse and not always easy to follow; speckled colours, matrix strong brown c.8YR 5/6, with slightly redder blotches in places.

150-70 (57.25-56.45 m AOD)

Cycles of clayey sandy gravel, quite similar to the 200-150 interval but with much more coarse sand and flint grit and individual larger medium (up to 10 cm) clasts; more common quartzites, sometimes somewhat rotted; fabric still very poor, possibly with traces of festoons (implying minor channel migration) but with absolutely no laminated intervals; clast orientation more commonly horizontal; irregular base, with potholes (up to 15 cm diameter, 30 cm depth) into soft basement; minor manganese spotting on stones but no banding or other signs of waterlogging/reduction; colour, strong brown c.8YR 5/6.

70-20 (56.45-55.95 m AOD) (northwards)

Channel-form, very roughly west-east; much more sand, including a couple of true clayey sand lenses (5 cm thick, 25 cm wide in exposure); nearer the top of this fill, stones almost all oriented vertically (ground-ice; cf. Fig.4) but no wedge-casts or veining; colours as above; large contorted lithorelics derived from the basement; some channel-marginal postdepositional bulging (plastic deformation) of basement.

BASEMENT

Extremely uniform, over-compacted clayey silt, massive (assumed Tertiary marine); slowly permeable; colour, light yellowish brown 10YR 6/4, with pinker and lighter grey large-scale mottles; no visible lamination but fissile in horizontal plane; increasing finest sand downwards, with decreasing plasticity but no decrease in density.

4. Discussion

- 4.1 The gravel body (the 200-20 interval) represents generally fast deposition, in a relatively high-energy, aggressive fluvial context: the 200-150 interval could have been deposited in only a few seasons, and the remainder below in only a few decades. There is no obvious bank collapse material, suggesting that there were no stable surfaces close-by. There are no ice-wedge casts but the verticality of stones in parts of the lowest interval (channel-fill) suggests contemporary seasonal ground ice (freeze-thaw cycles leading to re-orientation).
- 4.2 The 260-200 interval appears to represent relatively gentle slope wash. There are no signs of significant mass movement events or of cryoturbation, suggesting that this is

probably a Holocene body, lying unconformably upon the Middle Pleistocene fluvial deposits below.

- 4.3 Both the exposed sections and the spoil tip were examined for material of interest. No struck flint whatsoever was noted. No bone or shell material was present, nor were there any chalk 'ghosts'. There were no 'soft' organic residues (fibrous or amorphous) and no mineralised replacement features, nor were there any penecontemporaneous bioturbation structures in the gravels.
- 4.4 It is concluded that this gravel body is likely to represent a very short incision event in the Middle Pleistocene, after which the river shifted laterally and never returned. The fluvial conditions evidenced would not be conducive to the preservation of secondary artefact assemblages (i.e. material eroded from a nearby primary site) or to the concentration of artefactual material in tertiary context; were sparse artefacts to be present in this body, they would likely represent a geographic and temporal mixture. The long-term burial context seems to have been reasonably well aerated and mildly acidic, such that bones and shell would not easily survive (unless highly mineralised). There are no occurrences of reduced (fine) sediment in which 'soft' organic structures might have survived; furthermore, there are no mineralised traces, suggesting that organics were never abundant in the first place. The lack of well-sorted sand bodies means that techniques such as OSL (optically stimulated luminescence) dating would be most unlikely to give reliable results; the same is true with respect to the lack of finer-grained material for palaeomagnetic analysis.
- 4.5 This having been said, it is reiterated that the Parkside Road site is close to the former Grovelands Pit and lies at approximately the same altitude. Pleistocene fluvial contexts are extremely variable laterally, such that a low energy 'pocket' (perhaps representing a backwater or even a sheltered strand area) might survive only a few tens of metres away. Given the possibility of a rare archaeological site, perhaps of national significance, rapid assessment of other similar locations in the vicinity, where and if the opportunity should arise, would appear to be a proportional response.

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Figure 1

23 Parkside Road, Reading - Development Site and approximate test pit T4 location (asterisk).
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Figure 2

23 Parkside Road, Reading - Test pit T4, full sequence (observer looking southwest).



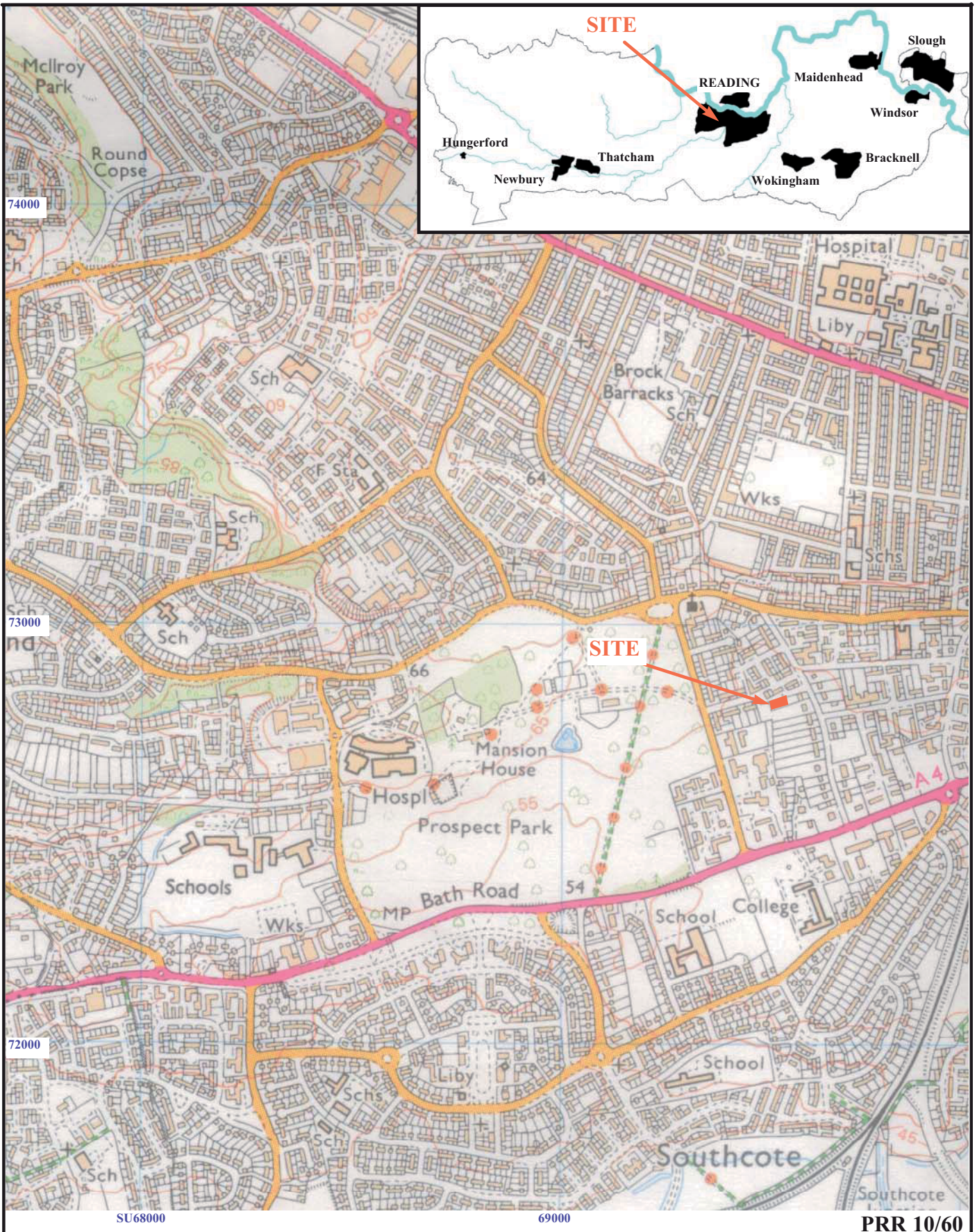
Figure 3

23 Parkside Road, Reading - Test pit T4, full sequence (observer looking south).



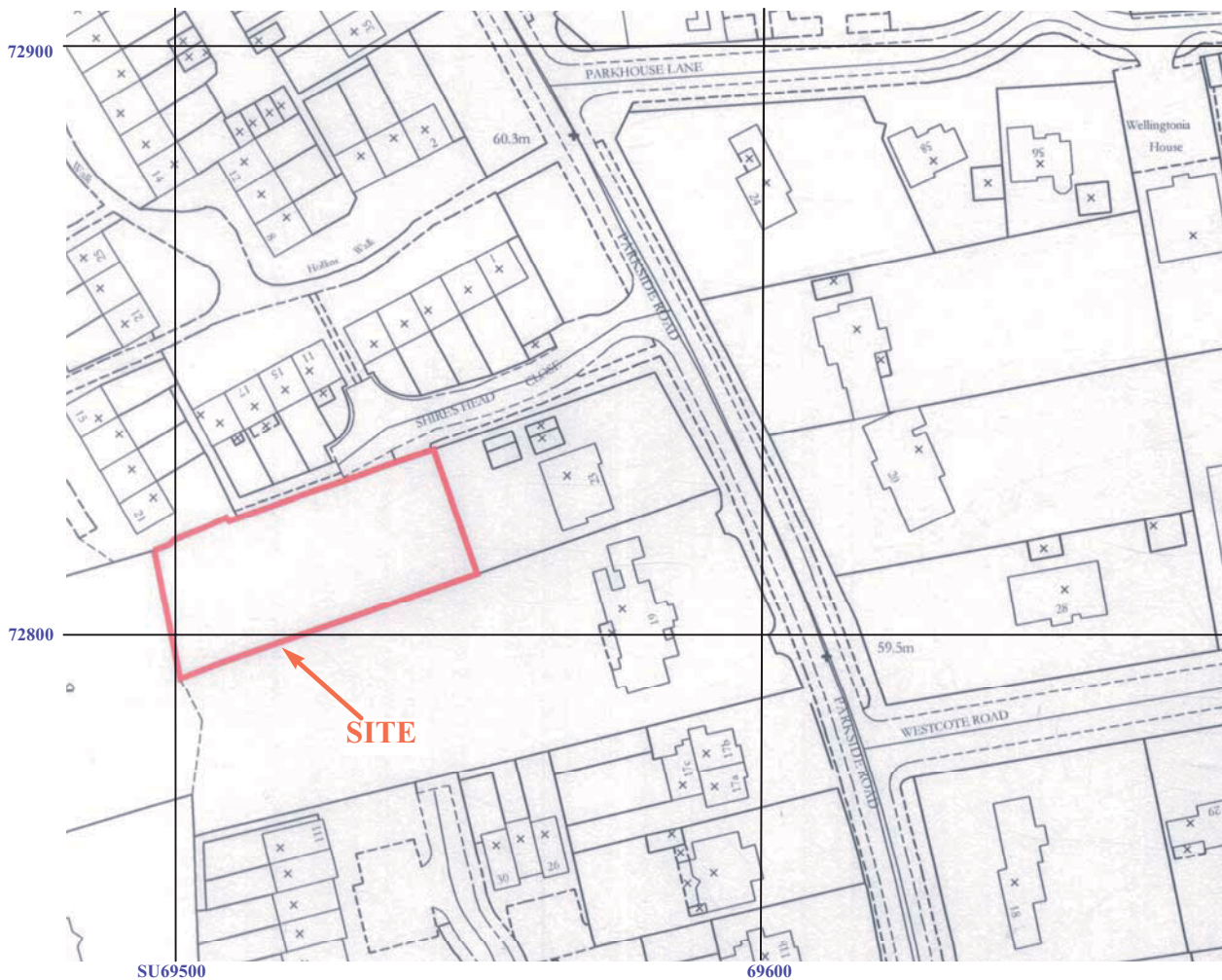
Figure 4

23 Parkside Road, Reading - Test pit T4, gravel fabric detail in vertical face (see text; scale in cms).



**Land to the rear of 23 Parkside Road, Tilehurst,
Reading, Berkshire, 2010
Archaeological Evaluation**
Figure 1. Location of site within Reading and Berkshire.

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PRR 10/60

**Land to the rear of 23 Parkside Road, Tilehurst, Reading,
Berkshire, 2010**

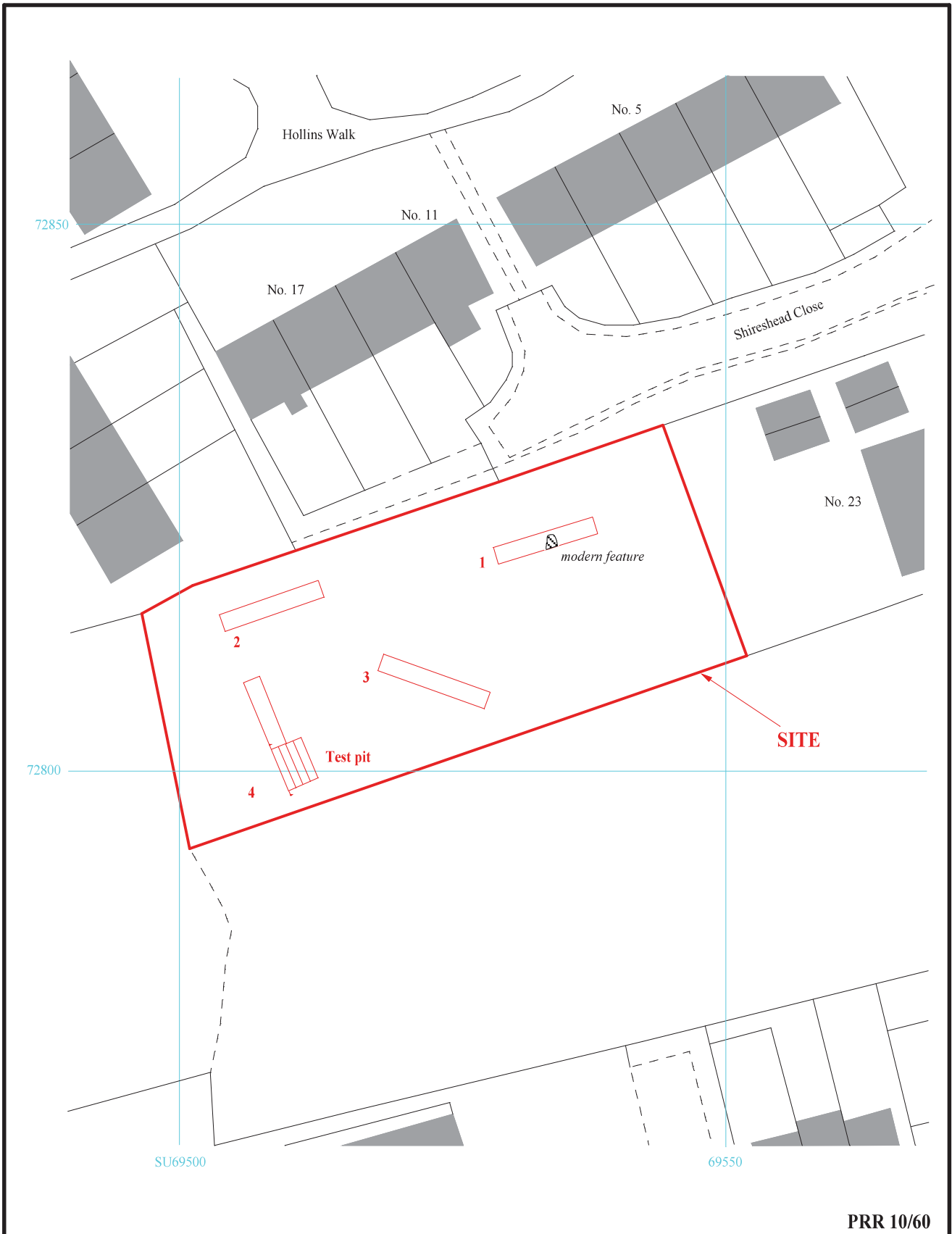
Archaeological Evaluation

Figure 2. Detailed location of site.

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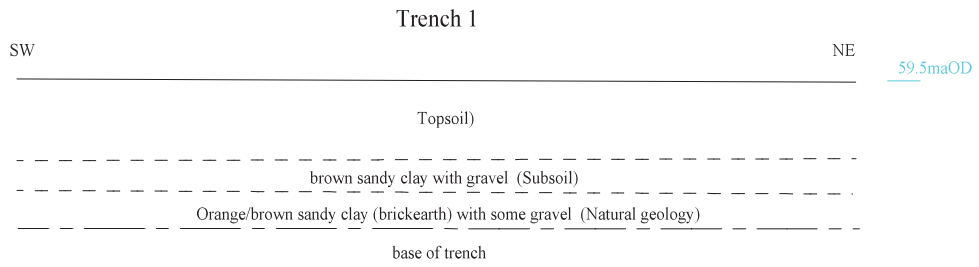
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**Land to the rear of 23 Parkside Road, Tilehurst,
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Figure 3. Location of trenches.



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**Land to the rear of 23 Parkside Road, Tilehurst,
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Figure 4. Representative section.





Plate 1. Trench 1, looking east, scales: 1m and 2m.



Plate 2. Trench 3, looking east.

**Land to the rear of 23 Parkside Road, Tilehurst, Reading, Berkshire, 2010
Archaeological Evaluation**

Plates 1 and 2

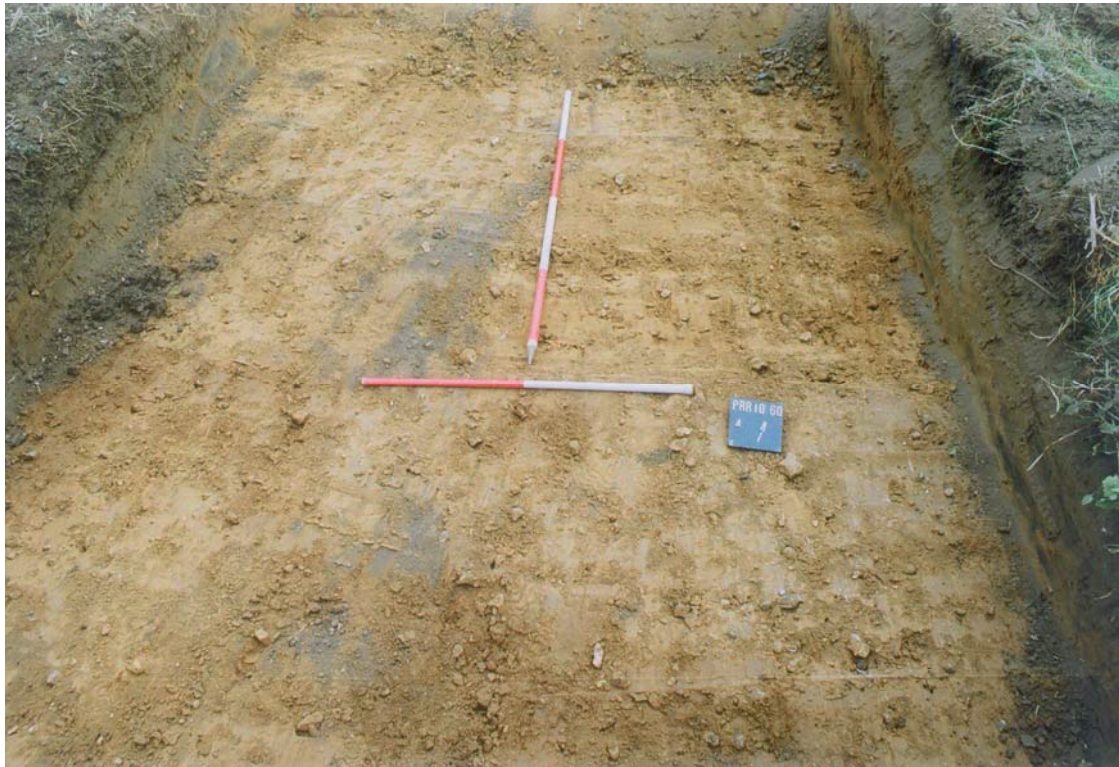


Plate 3. Base of Trench 4, prior to digging of test pit, scales 1 and 2m.



Plate 4. Geological test pit in south end of Trench 4, looking south west, scales: 4m, 2m and 1m.

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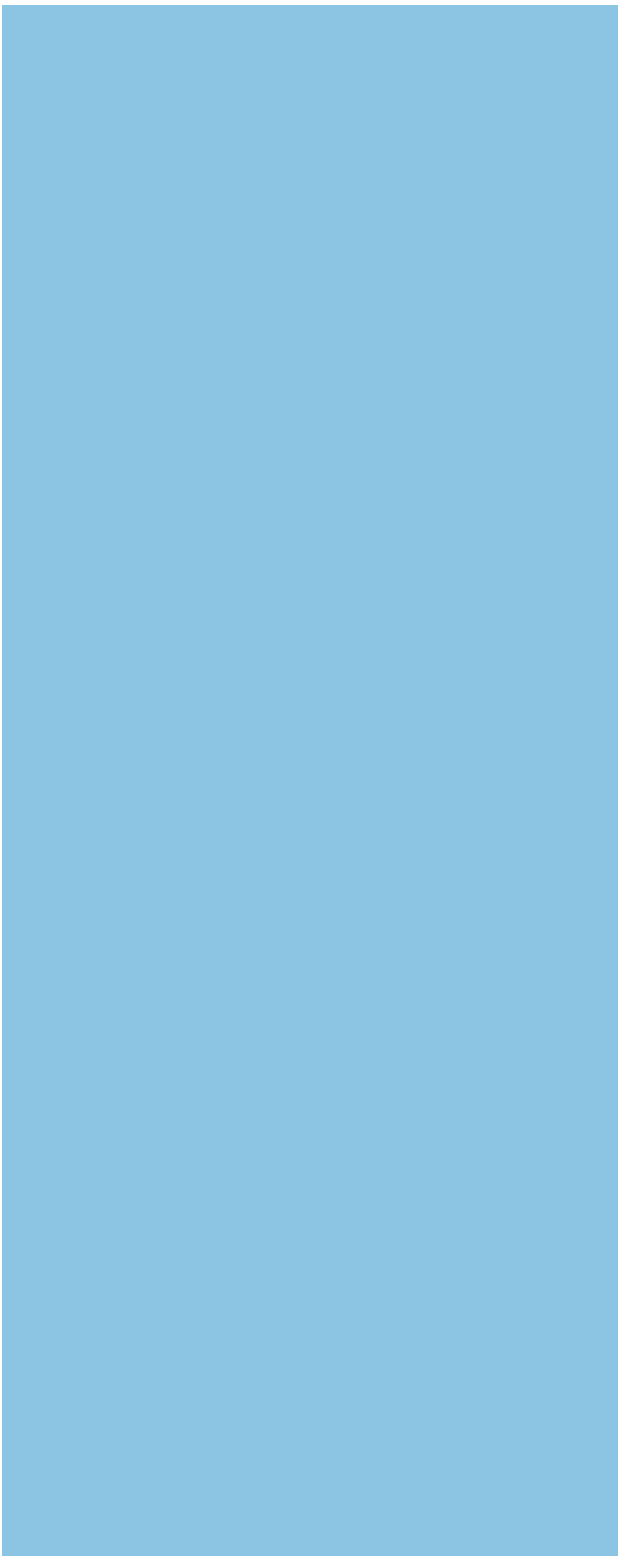
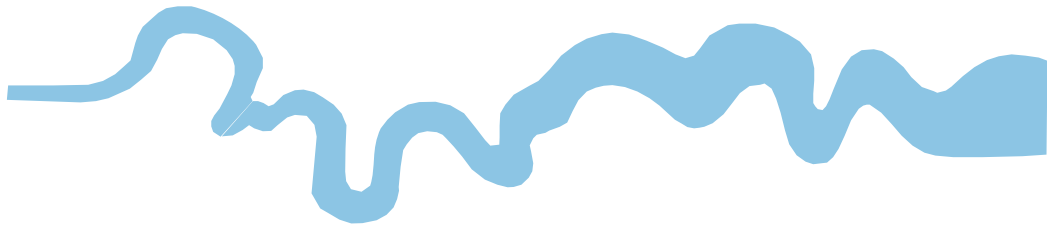
Land to the rear of 23 Parkside Road, Tilehurst,
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Archeological Evaluation
Plates 3 and 4.

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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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