

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

ARCHAEOLOGICAL

S E R V I C E S

**Flood Compensation Area, Riverside Park,
Wallingford, Oxfordshire**

Archaeological Watching Brief

**by
Jacqueline Pitt**

Site Code: RPW10/72

(SU 6112 8934)

Flood Compensation Area, Riverside Park, Wallingford, Oxfordshire

**An Archaeological Watching Brief
For South Oxfordshire District Council**

by Jacqueline Pitt
Thames Valley Archaeological Services
Ltd

Site Code RPW 10/72

July 2010

Summary

Site name: Flood Compensation Area, Riverside Park, Wallingford, Oxfordshire

Grid reference: SU 6112 8934

Site activity: Watching Brief

Date and duration of project: 19th–22nd July 2010

Project manager: Steve Ford

Site supervisor: Jacqueline Pitt

Site code: RPW 10/72

Area of site: 116 sq metres

Summary of results: A ditch was partially exposed in the base of the southern part of the flood compensation area. The remaining area exposed comprised sterile ground.

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

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Report edited/checked by:	Steve Ford ✓ 30.07.10
	Steve Preston ✓ 30.07.10

Flood Compensation Area, Riverside Park, Wallingford, Oxfordshire An Archaeological Watching Brief

by Jacqueline Pitt

Report 10/72

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out at Riverside Park, Wallingford, Oxfordshire (SU 6112 8934) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Graham Hawkins of Economy, Leisure and Property, South Oxfordshire District Council, Benson Lane, Crowmarsh Gifford, Oxfordshire OX10 8ED.

Planning consent (P10/W0584/DC) has been granted by South Oxfordshire District Council to extract 116 cubic metres of soil at Riverside Park, east of the river and to the south of Wallingford Bridge. This is to compensate for the new riverbank short-stay mooring on the east side of the River Thames, north of the bridge. The consent is subject to a condition relating to archaeology which requires a watching brief to be carried out during the groundworks, on account of the possibility of damage or destruction of archaeological deposits.

This is in accordance with the Department for Communities and Local Government's Planning Policy Statement, *Planning for the Historic Environment* (PPS5 2010), and the District's policies on archaeology. The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Mr Richard Oram, Planning Archaeologist for Oxfordshire County Council, advisers to the District on archaeological matters. The fieldwork was undertaken by Jacqueline Pitt between 19th and 22nd July 2010 and the site code is RPW 10/72.

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 on the east bank of the River Thames, c.80m east of the river and c.60m south of Wallingford Bridge (the A4130) which links the town of Wallingford on the west bank with the village of Crowmarsh Gifford on the east. The site is within an area of meadow with a drainage ditch immediately to the south and an area of public riverside parkland to the west (Fig. 2). The site lies opposite medieval Wallingford Castle on the line of the parish boundary between Crowmarsh and Wallingford. The land to the north-east of the site is flat river floodplain with a gentle rise towards Crowmarsh Gifford. The floodplain continues north and south while

on the west bank of the river the ground rises rapidly towards Wallingford. The underlying geology is recorded as alluvium (BGS 1980). The site is at a height of 43.80m above Ordnance Datum.

Archaeological background

The archaeological potential of the area has been highlighted by a brief for earlier riverbank work and a subsequent briefing note prepared by Mr Richard Oram of Oxfordshire County Archaeological Service. In summary the site lies within the archaeologically rich Thames Valley (Briggs *et al.* 1986) immediately opposite the town of Wallingford and just to the south of the Wallingford Bridge (a Scheduled Monument). The bridge is of medieval date but is likely to have a Saxon origin and may mark a crossing point (bridge or ford) of much earlier date.

A number of finds of various periods have been recovered by dredging of the river south of the bridge including a Saxon sword and a Bronze Age bronze hoard. A Saxon spearhead and medieval finds have also been recorded north of the bridge. The presence of the Bronze Age metalwork raises the possibility of a rich riverside site, such as present at White Cross Farm, *c.* 1km to the south (Cromarty *et al.* 2006), although this material may have been carried by the river for some distance.

The site lies opposite medieval Wallingford Castle on the parish boundary between Crowmarsh and Wallingford, the line of which is thought to reflect the remains of a Saxon and/or medieval defensive bridgehead for the town, although such a deviation was also often used to assign toll rights (and maintenance costs) for river crossings. During the civil war between Stephen and Matilda, two siege castles were built at Crowmarsh and used repeatedly in unsuccessful attempts to besiege Wallingford (held by Matilda). The locations of these are unknown but they would have been close to the river, and the fact that there were two suggests that one faced the castle and one the bridge, so that components of the latter may lie on or near the site. A recent geophysical survey revealed an anomaly that may suggest the site of one of these forts (Christie *et al.* 2004), but this tentative interpretation has yet to be confirmed by invasive fieldwork .

A recent watching brief carried out on the dredging to create the new moorings led to the discovery of a Saxon spearhead, Medieval pottery and other, more recent objects (Dawson 2010).

Objectives and methodology

The purpose of the watching brief was to excavate and record any archaeological deposits affected by the works. This involved examination of all areas of intrusive groundworks, in particular the digging of the flood

compensation trench. Archaeological deposits exposed by the groundworks were to be recorded but not further excavated unless threatened by the groundworks.

Results

The area was stripped mechanically under continuous archaeological supervision (Fig. 3). The material excavated comprised a topsoil of c.0.40m depth, followed by a sterile alluvium subsoil of c.0.50m depth. A natural clay/sand or coarse natural gravel formed the base of the majority of the exposed area (pl. 1).

The only exception to this was a 7.1m wide linear feature on an east-west orientation towards the southern end of the site. It was identified as a band of red-brown sand with grey clay within the base of the excavated area. Due to the position of this feature within the site and the fact that it was not further threatened by the groundworks only a small slot (1) of 0.80m x 0.50m was hand-dug to establish the profile of the side to determine whether it was of natural or archaeological origin (Pl. 2). The profile (Fig. 4) is steep sides to a flat base, consistent with a ditch. Four fills were noted: at the top, an orange brown sand with pockets of clay (50), above a deeper fill of grey-brown sandy silty clay (51), overlying grey-brown gravelly loam (52), with the bottom fill being a blue-grey sandy clay (54). Bulk soil samples were taken from all of these fills but revealed no dating evidence and no carbonized or waterlogged remains. A deviation in a substantial ditch marking the historic borough boundary is observed just to the north-east of the site (Creighton *et al* 2009, 74).

Finds

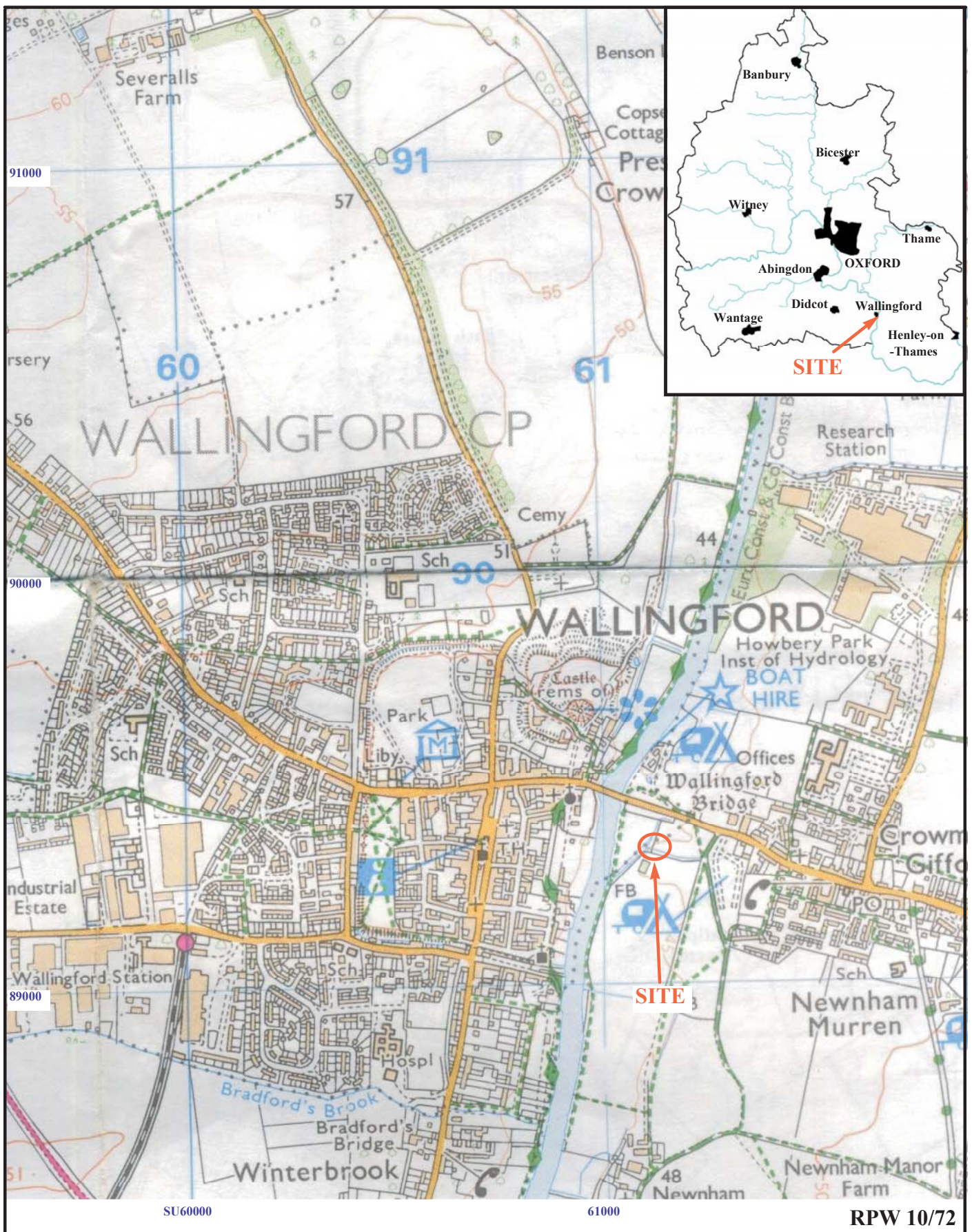
A small fragment of unidentified animal bone was found in the upper most fill of the feature (retained on site).

Conclusion

Despite the limited extent of the works, the site has produced potentially significant results. The ditch that was uncovered is very close to the line of the parish boundary, which is thought to reflect the historic borough's defences. Although it appears to be on a slightly different alignment, the ditch may be close enough to be part of earthworks on which the boundary was based. Its width is great enough to suggest it served a defensive purpose, and although the portion excavated was shallow, and the lowest fill recorded does appear likely to be a primary fill, the ditch may have been much deeper at its centre. Unfortunately no dating evidence was retrieved. However, this does point the way for future research in this area.

References

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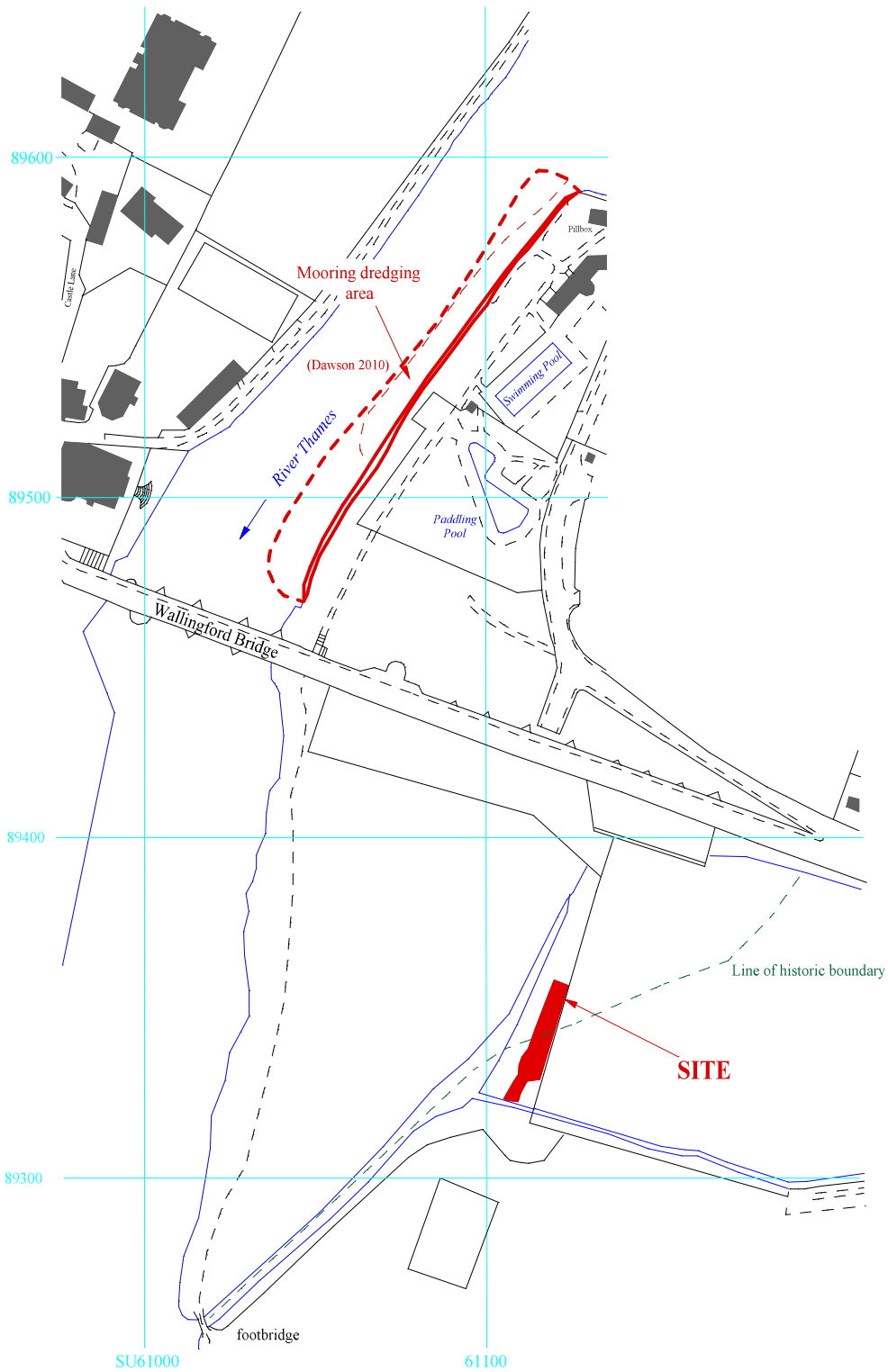


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Figure 1. Location of site within Wallingford and Oxfordshire.

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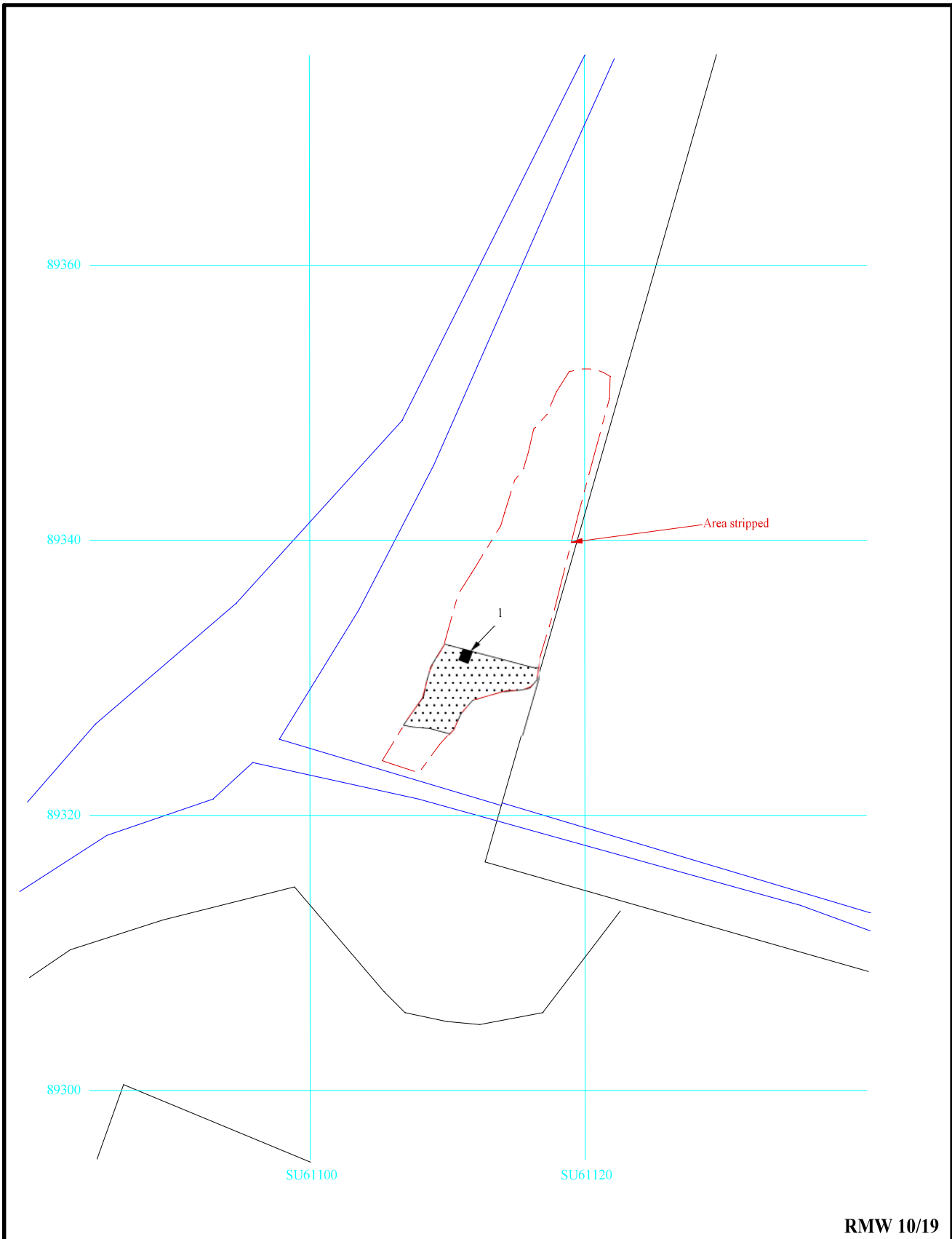


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Figure 2. Plan of the site showing location of the flood compensation and the recent dredging works (Dawson 2010).



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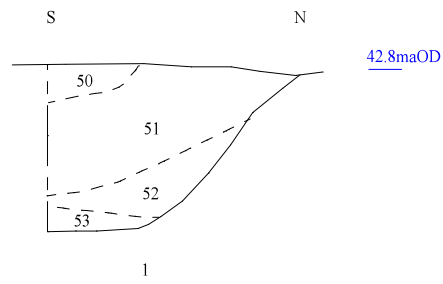


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Figure 3. Detailed plan of site showing Feature 1.



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Figure 4. Section of slot partially dug across linear feature 1.



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Plate 1. Ditch 1 at south of area, looking south-east; scales 2m and 1m.



Plate 2. Partial section of ditch 1, looking west, scale 1m.

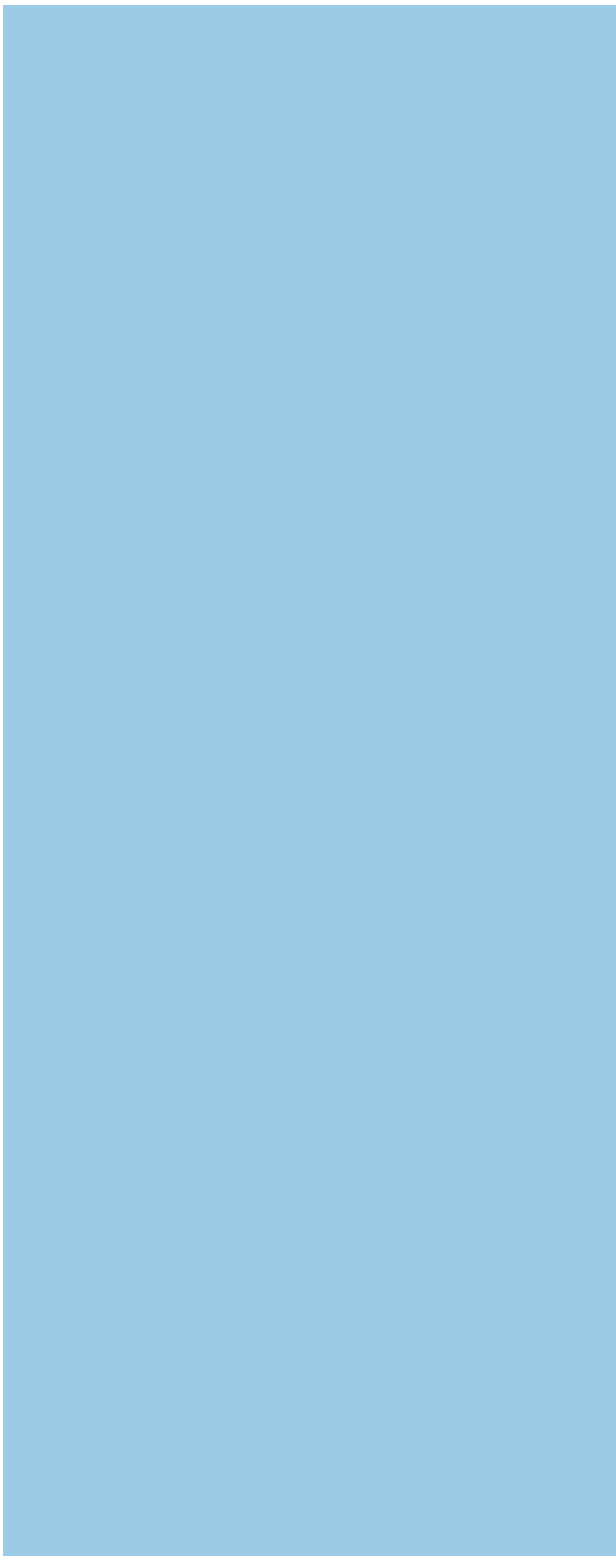
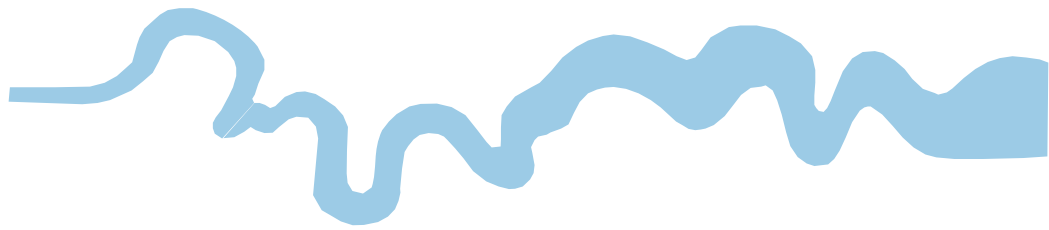
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Flood Compensation Area, Riverside Park, Wallingford,
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Plates 1 and 2

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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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**Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd,
47-49 De Beauvoir Road, Reading,
Berkshire, RG1 5NR**

**Tel: 0118 9260552
Fax: 0118 9260553
Email: tvas@tvas.co.uk
Web: www.tvas.co.uk**