

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 Andrew Taylor

Site Code: ICT10/14

(SU 6735 7300)

Iris Court, Tilehurst, Reading, Berkshire

**An Archaeological Excavation
for CgMs Consulting**

By Andy Taylor
Thames Valley Archaeological Services
Ltd

Site Code ICT 10/14

May 2010

Summary

Site name: Iris Court, Tilehurst, Reading, Berkshire

Grid reference: SU 6735 7300

Site activity: Excavation

Date and duration of project: 5th–10th May 2010

Project manager: Steve Ford

Site supervisor: Andy Taylor

Site code: ICT 10/14

Area of site: 500 sq m

Summary of results: A gully of Early Bronze Age date, early post-medieval and late post-medieval pits (or tree clearance) were recorded.

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.

This report may be copied for bona fide research or planning purposes without the explicit permission of the copyright holder

Report edited/checked by:	Steve Ford ✓ 21.05.10
	Steve Preston ✓ 20.05.10

Iris Court, Tilehurst, Reading, Berkshire An Archaeological Excavation

by Andy Taylor

Report 10/14b

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological field evaluation carried out at Iris Court, Tilehurst, Reading, Berkshire (SU 6735 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. After an earlier field evaluation (Milbank 2010) demonstrated the presence of Bronze Age and post-medieval features, a further programme of work was required in order to mitigate the effects of development on archaeological features.

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 excavation was carried out to a specification prepared by Ms Sally Dicks of CgMs and approved by Reading Borough Council. The fieldwork was monitored by Ms Mary O'Donoghue of Berkshire Archaeology on behalf of the Borough.

The fieldwork was undertaken by the Andy Taylor assisted by Steve Crabb and Jo Pine between 5th and 10th May 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 Lane Hill, 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 both of the stripped areas comprised orange grey sandy clay with gravel. The site is bordered to the north by houses on The Meadway, with New Lane Hill 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, being mentioned in a charter of the late 12th century, 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 again in the 1950s. Although the exact location of the medieval rectory of St Michael's is not recorded, it is considered 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). An earlier phase of work on the site, in the form of field evaluation, had identified a small amount of archaeological deposits. These consisted of a linear gully containing approximately half of an early Bronze Age biconical urn, an undated posthole and a post-medieval ditch (Milbank 2010).

Objectives and methodology

The purpose of the excavation and watching brief was to excavate and record any archaeological deposits within the area of development. The specific aims of the project's several components were:

- to further define the nature, extent, character and chronology of the Bronze Age activity on the site;

- to further define the nature, extent, character and chronology of the medieval and post-medieval activity on the site;

- to determine the types of activity being undertaken on the site; and

- in particular, to determine whether specific agricultural, industrial or ritual activities were being undertaken on the site.

Two excavation areas were to be stripped using a JCB-type machine fitted with a toothless ditching bucket under constant archaeological supervision, targeting the archaeological deposits identified during the evaluation. All spoilheaps were monitored for finds. All archaeological deposits were to be hand cleaned and excavated.

Results

The excavation comprised two small stripped areas (A and B), which revealed a small number of archaeological deposits comprising pits and postholes and probably treeboles. Only a small stretch of the gully identified during the evaluation continued either side of where the trench was located with no further Bronze Age deposits or finds identified. During the evaluation this gully was found to contain 30 sherds of a small Biconical urn of early-middle Bronze Age date but no further finds were recovered from this feature in excavation. Appendix 1 provides a catalogue of all excavated features from all phases of the work.

Area A (Figs 3 and 4)

This area was located on the western side of the site and concentrated on the area surrounding evaluation Trenches 1a and 1b. Some truncation was evident close to the existing building from sewers and electricity cables.

Gully 100 measured 1.07m in length, 0.58m wide and 0.06m deep. It contained three pieces of post-medieval tile. This terminated to the west but was truncated by a modern drainage pipe and continued eastwards outside the excavation area under the adjacent building.

Gully 101 was also truncated by modern service runs and as such only a small slot could be dug into it. This measured 0.65m in length, 1.10m wide and 0.07m deep and was approximately parallel to 100. It contained a single iron nail stem. Due to its shallow nature this 'feature' may just be further truncation from the surrounding drainage services.

Pit 104 measured 0.46m wide and 0.08m deep. It did not contain any dating evidence and cut through the fill of gully 1/105. This irregular feature may be a treebole.

Gully 105 measured 0.30m wide and just 0.09m deep. This was the same gully as identified in the evaluation (1). It terminated to the west and was truncated by pit 104 to the east, but did not appear to continue beyond pit 104 in any case. No further dating evidence was recovered to add to the 30 fragments of grog-tempered Early Bronze Age biconical urn found in the evaluation.

Pit 106 measured 0.61m wide and 0.15m deep (Pl. 1). It contained a single sherd of late medieval pottery and one piece of tile. Like pit 104, this is likely to have been a treebole.

Pit 107 measured 0.70m wide and 0.24m deep (Pl. 2). It contained one piece of late medieval pottery and three pieces of tile.

Treebole 108 measured 1.70m wide and 0.08m deep. It contained 10 pieces of post-medieval tile. Likewise, treebole 109 measured 0.80m wide and 0.08m deep and contained one piece of post-medieval tile.

Three post holes (in addition to one recorded in the evaluation) may have formed a fence line; none contained any dating evidence. Posthole 102 measured 0.36m wide and 0.18m deep. Posthole 103 measured 0.37m wide and 0.04m deep. Posthole 110 measured 0.25m in diameter and 0.15m deep.

Area B

This area was located on the southern side of the site and concentrated on the areas around evaluation Trenches 2, 3a and 3b. Truncation was evident from a gas pipe as well as an area in the centre of the site found to contain a 1909 penny.

Pit 111 measured 1.70m wide and 0.69m deep. It contained two fills (161 and 162) with 161 containing one piece of late 15th- to early 16th-century pottery, 16 pieces of brick and tile, an iron nail and three fragments of animal bone. Fill 162 contained three pieces of tile.

Pit 112 measured 2.95m in length, 1.60m wide and 0.20m deep and continued outside of the excavation area. It contained four pieces of post-medieval pottery, the latest of which is no earlier than the late 17th century, two pieces of animal bone, three pieces of glass, one iron nail, a piece of slag, an oyster shell, 18 pieces of post-medieval brick and tile and two pieces of clay tobacco pipe stem.

Finds

Prehistoric Pottery by Frances Raymond

Thirty sherds (weighing 266g) from approximately half of a miniature early Bronze Age biconical urn came from gully 1 in evaluation Trench 1a. 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 common.

Medieval and Post-Medieval Pottery by Paul Blinkhorn

The later pottery assemblage comprised just 9 sherds with a total weight of 95g in a range of late medieval and post-medieval wares which indicate that there was activity at the site from the 15th to 17th centuries. The following fabric types were noted:

LMT: Late Medieval Transitional earthenware, 15th–mid 16th century. Hard, slightly sandy fabric, glazed and unglazed, in a variety of late medieval vessel forms. Common in contemporary sites in the Thames Valley, such as Reading Oracle, and probably produced at a number of local centres. Replaced rapidly by ‘true’ post-medieval Redwares in the mid-late 16th century. 2 sherds, 17g.

Glazed Red Earthenware, 16th–19th century. Fine sandy earthenware, usually with a brown or green glaze, occurring in a range of utilitarian forms. Such ‘country pottery’ was first made in the 16th century, and in some areas continued in use until the 19th century. 3 sherds, 40g.

Border Ware, 1550–1700. A generic term for the late 15th/early 16th century pottery industry of the Hampshire/Surrey border area (Pearce 1992). The range of fabrics comprised fine, sandy whitewares with an off-white to buff fabric and with yellow, green olive or brown glaze, and fine redwares with clear green to olive or brown glaze. The manufacture of whitewares ceased during the 18th century. The industry produced a wide range of late medieval and early post-medieval vessel types. 3 sherds, 31g.

English Stoneware. 1680 onwards. Hard, grey fabric, often with a brown, iron-rich exterior wash in a range of utilitarian vessels, particularly mugs. 1 sherd, 7g.

The pottery occurrence by number and weight of sherds per context by fabric type is shown in Appendix 2. The range of fabric types is fairly typical of sites of the period in the area. The Border Ware assemblage included both green and brown-glazed types. All the sherds were in fairly good condition, and appear reliably stratified.

Animal Bone by Andy Taylor

A total of five pieces of animal bone were recovered, three from pit 111 and two from pit 112, weighing a total of 92g (Appendix 3). None of these is diagnostic but they are from small domestic mammal-sized animal(s) (sheep/goat and/or pig) and represent what would be expected to be found in domestic refuse.

Brick and tile by Danielle Milbank and Andy Taylor

The evaluation phase of works recovered three pieces of tile from deposit 54 (Appendix 4). These weighed a total of 69g, and were fairly small pieces with no notable features. 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.

The excavation phase recovered a further 55 pieces of brick and tile weighing a total of 7826g. These incorporate both brick and tile fragments. The tile is most likely of post-medieval date, many showing holes for pegs. Some of the brick fragments recovered are relatively thin by modern standards and may be early post-medieval in date, reflecting the pottery dating for pits 111 and 112. One brick from pit 112 showed evidence of vitrification on its surfaces, most likely as a result of the firing process.

Clay Tobacco Pipe by Andy Taylor

Two small undiagnostic pieces of clay pipe stem were recovered from pit 112 weighing a total of 4g (Appendix 5). These cannot be accurately dated but would be compatible with the date of the latest pottery in pit 112 (late 17th century or later).

Glass by Andy Taylor

Three pieces of post-medieval dark green bottle glass were recovered from pit 112 weighing a total of 47g (Appendix 6). A 'flaky' residue was evident on the surface of these pieces caused by the soil conditions in which they were buried.

Shell by Andy Taylor

One piece of oyster shell was recovered from pit 112 weighing 5g (Appendix 7).

Metalwork by Andy Taylor

Four iron nails were recovered from the excavation, one from gully 101, two from pit 111 and one from pit 112 (Appendix 8). All of these were highly corroded with pieces of gravel concreted to the surface.

Slag by Steve Crabb

One piece of slag weighing 190g was recovered from post-medieval pit 112 (Appendix 9). It is a piece of probable smithing slag with burnt flint inclusions. It is dense and black in colour and has iron present. As there is no indication of smithing on site, it may point to this activity having taken place in close proximity.

Conclusion

Despite the presence of a small Bronze Age gully, identified during the evaluation, no further finds or deposits from this period were observed during the excavation. It is possible that further evidence of this feature had been removed in antiquity or by ploughing in more recent times. It may be possible that this represented a small burial with any evidence of bone remains having disappeared due to the acidity of the geology. Early Bronze Age material culture is not especially common, particularly so when not associated with burial deposits, and pottery does not survive ploughing well, which may have occurred on the site prior to construction of the rectory and subsequent buildings. The cartographic evidence for the site showed more extensive tree coverage on the site than is currently present, for example in 1879, but most of which had been removed by 1912, which may account for some of the features observed that appear to be the remains of treeboles. No evidence of a rectory was observed. If this building was located where the modern buildings stand, any evidence of this may have been removed.

References

- BGS, 1946, *British Geological Survey*, Sheet 268,1:63,360, Drift Edition, Keyworth
- Gates, T, 1975, *The Thames Valley, An archaeological Survey of the River Gravels*, Berkshire Archaeol Comm Pubn 1
- Ford, A, 1998, 'Land at 297, The Meadway; An Archaeological Watching Brief', Thames Valley Archaeological Services report 06/63, Reading
- Lobb, S J and Rose, P G, 1996, *Archaeological Survey of the Lower Kennet Valley, Berkshire*, Wessex Archaeol Rep 9, Salisbury
- Milbank, D, 2010, Iris Court, Tilehurst, Reading Berkshire, an archaeological evaluation, Thames Valley Archaeological Services report 10/14, Reading
- Mundin, A, 2008, '313, The Meadway, Tilehurst, Reading, Berkshire; An Archaeological Watching Brief', Thames Valley Archaeological Services report 08/43, Reading
- Pearce, J, 1992, *Border Wares*, London
- PPG16, 1990, *Archaeology and Planning*, Dept of the Environment Planning Policy Guidance 16, HMSO
- Taylor, A, 2006, 'Meadway School, The Meadway, Tilehurst, Reading, Berkshire; An Archaeological Evaluation', Thames Valley Archaeological Services report 06/63, Reading

APPENDIX 1: Catalogue of excavated features

<i>Cut</i>	<i>Deposit</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Area</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Dating evidence</i>
	50	Topsoil		-	-
	51	Subsoil		-	-
1	52	Gully	Tr 1	Early Bronze Age	Pottery
2	53	Posthole	Tr 1	-	-
6	54	Ditch	Tr 6	Post-Medieval	Pottery, tile
100	150	Gully	A	-	-
101	151	Gully	A	-	-
102	152	Posthole	A	-	-
103	153	Posthole	A	-	-
104	154	Pit/Treebole	A	-	-
105	155	Gully	A	Early Bronze Age	same as 1
106	156	Pit/Treebole	A	Early Post-Medieval?	Pottery
107	157	Pit	A	Early Post-Medieval?	Pottery
108	158	Pit/Treebole	A	-	-
109	159	Pit/Treebole	A	-	-
110	160	Posthole	A	-	-
111	161, 162	Pit	B	Post-Medieval	Pottery
112	163	Pit	B	Post-Medieval	Pottery, clay pipe

APPENDIX 2: Pottery occurrence by number and weight (in g) of sherds per context by fabric type

<i>F</i>	<i>Ctxt</i>	<i>LMT</i>		<i>GRE</i>		<i>BW</i>		<i>EST</i>	
		<i>No</i>	<i>Wt</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Wt</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Wt</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Wt</i>
6	54			2	13				
106	156	1	4						
107	157	1	13						
111	161					1	7		
112	163			1	27	2	24	1	7
	Total	2	17	3	40	3	31	1	7

APPENDIX 3: Catalogue of Animal Bone

<i>Cut</i>	<i>Deposit</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Area</i>	<i>No Frags</i>	<i>Wt (g)</i>
111	161	Pit	B	3	48
112	163	Pit	B	2	44

APPENDIX 4: Catalogue of Brick and Tile

<i>Cut</i>	<i>Deposit</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Area</i>	<i>B-T</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Wt (g)</i>
100	150	Gully Slot	A	tile	3	80
106	156	Pit/Posthole	A	tile	1	34
107	157	Pit	A	tile	3	91
108	158	Pit/Treebole	A	tile	10	301
109	159	Pit/Treebole	A	tile	1	36
111	162	Pit	B		3	167
111	161	Pit	B	tile+brick	16	3266
112	163	Pit	B	tile+brick	18	3851

APPENDIX 5: Catalogue of Clay Pipe

<i>Cut</i>	<i>Deposit</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Area</i>	<i>No Stems</i>	<i>Wt (g)</i>
112	163	Pit	B	2	4

APPENDIX 6: Catalogue of Glass

<i>Cut</i>	<i>Deposit</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Colour</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Wt (g)</i>
112	163	Pit	glazed green	3	47

APPENDIX 7: Catalogue of Shell

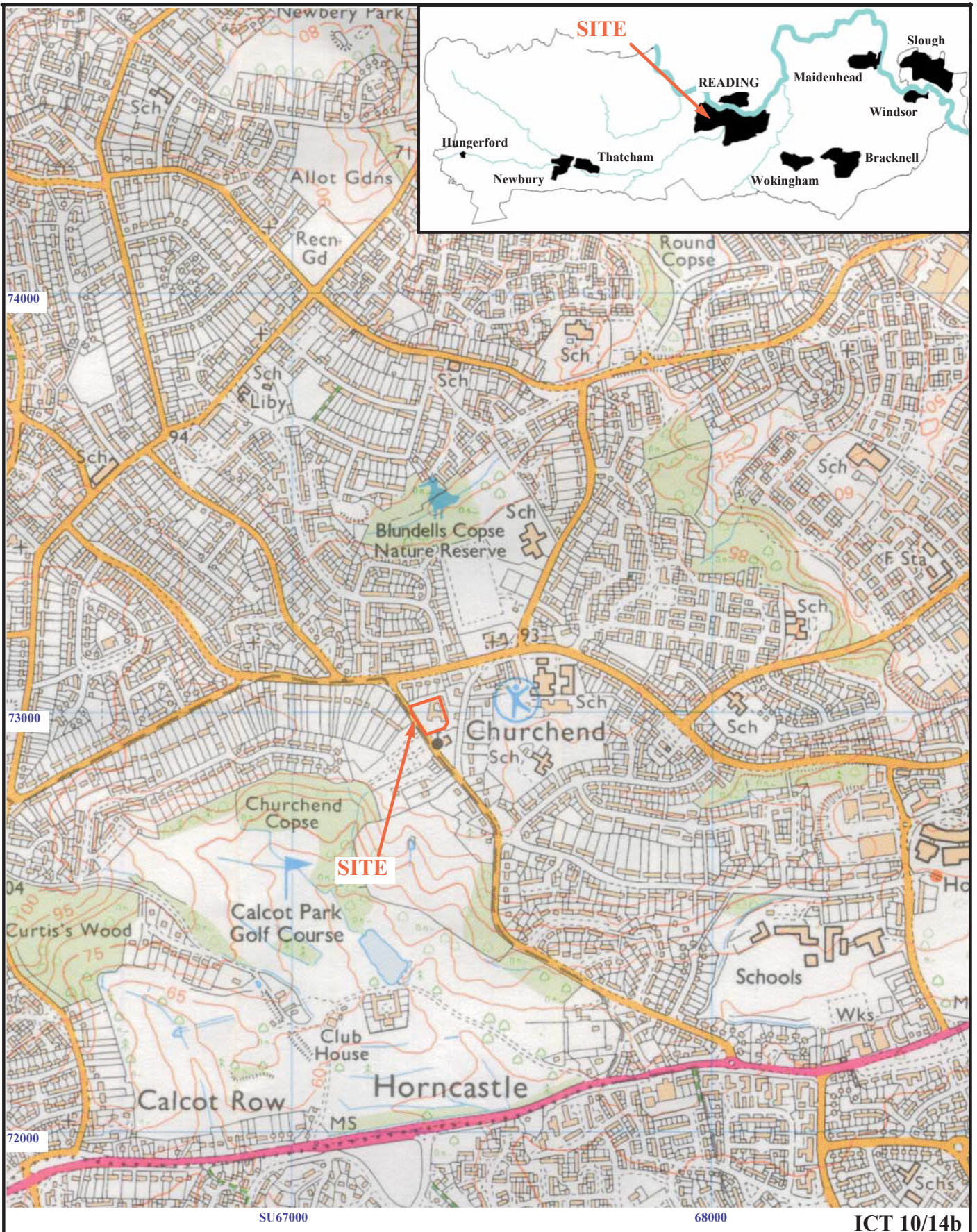
<i>Cut</i>	<i>Deposit</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Area</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Wt (g)</i>
112	163	Pit	B	1	5

APPENDIX 8: Catalogue of Metalwork

<i>Cut</i>	<i>Deposit</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Area</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Wt (g)</i>
101	151	Nail	A	1	17
111	161	Nail	B	2	11
112	163	Nail	B	1	12

APPENDIX 9: Catalogue of Slag

<i>Cut</i>	<i>Deposit</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Area</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Wt (g)</i>
112	163	Pit	B	1	191



**Iris Court, Tilehurst, Reading, Berkshire, 2010
Archaeological Excavation**

Figure 1. Location of site within Tilehurst and Berkshire.

Reproduced from Ordnance Survey Explorer 159 at 1:12500
Ordnance Survey Licence 100025880

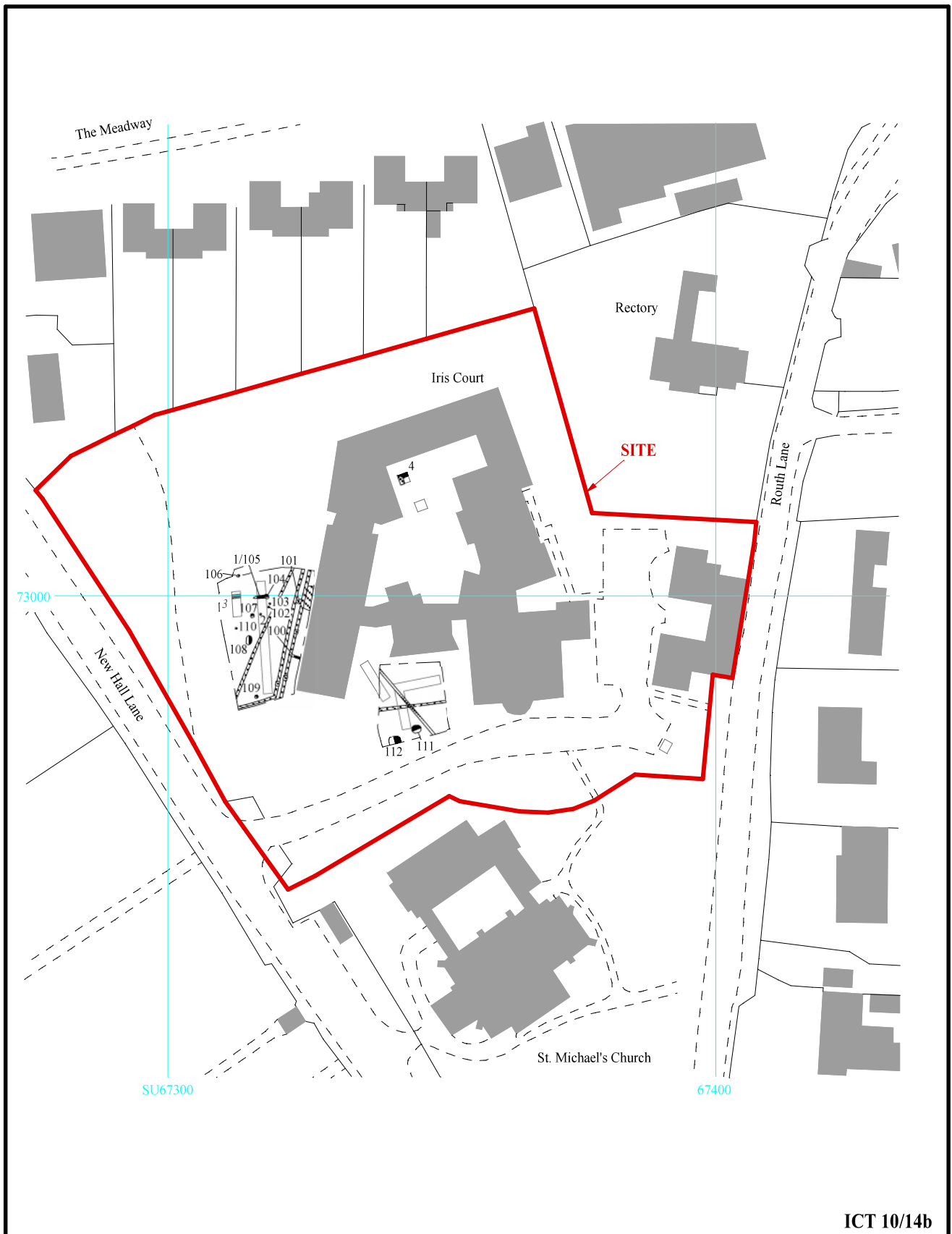


ICT 10/14b

**Iris Court, Tilehurst, Reading, Berkshire, 2010,
Archaeological Excavation**

Figure 2. Detail of surrounding fieldwork in relation to excavation area.

Reproduced from Ordnance Survey digital mapping under licence.
Crown copyright reserved. Scale: 1:1250



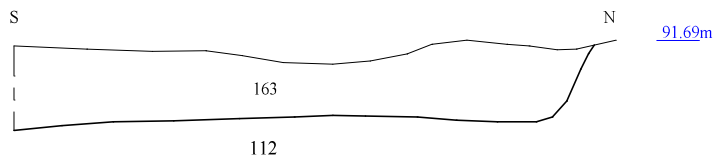
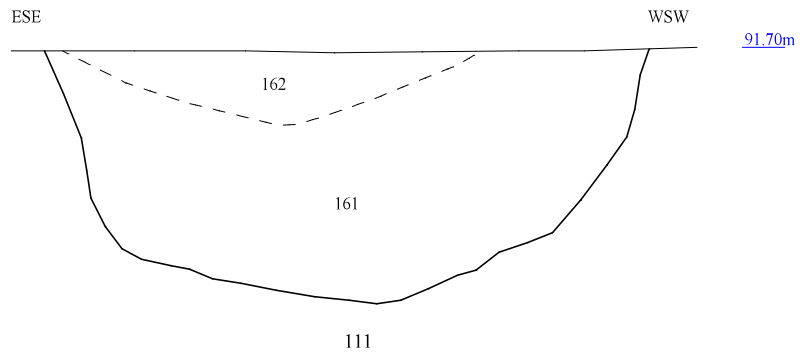
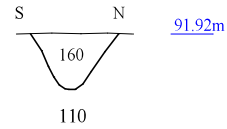
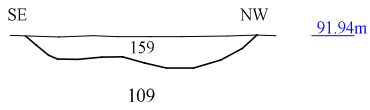
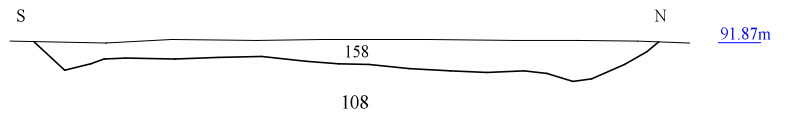
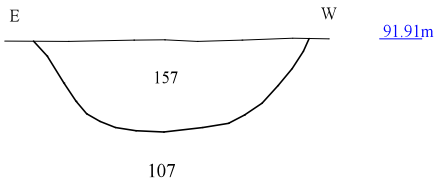
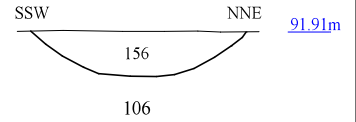
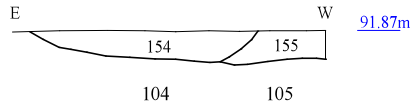
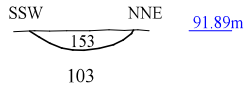
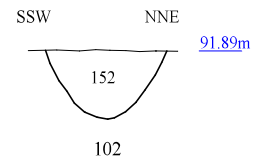
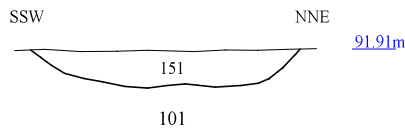
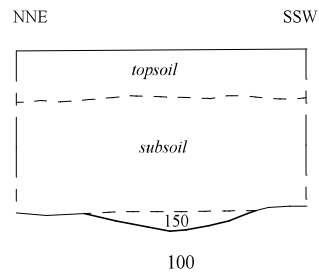
ICT 10/14b

**Iris Court, Tilehurst, Reading,
Berkshire, 2010
Archaeological Excavation**

Figure 3. Location of excavation, evaluation in grey.



THAMES VALLEY
ARCHAEOLOGICAL
SERVICES



ICT 10/14b

Iris Court, Tilehurst, Reading, Berkshire, 2010
Archaeological Excavation

Figure 4. Sections.



THAMES VALLEY
ARCHAEOLOGICAL
SERVICES



Plate 1. Pit 106, looking west, vertical scale 0.5m, horizontal 0.1m.



Plate 2. Pit 107, looking south, vertical scale 0.5m, horizontal 0.1m.

ICT 10/14b

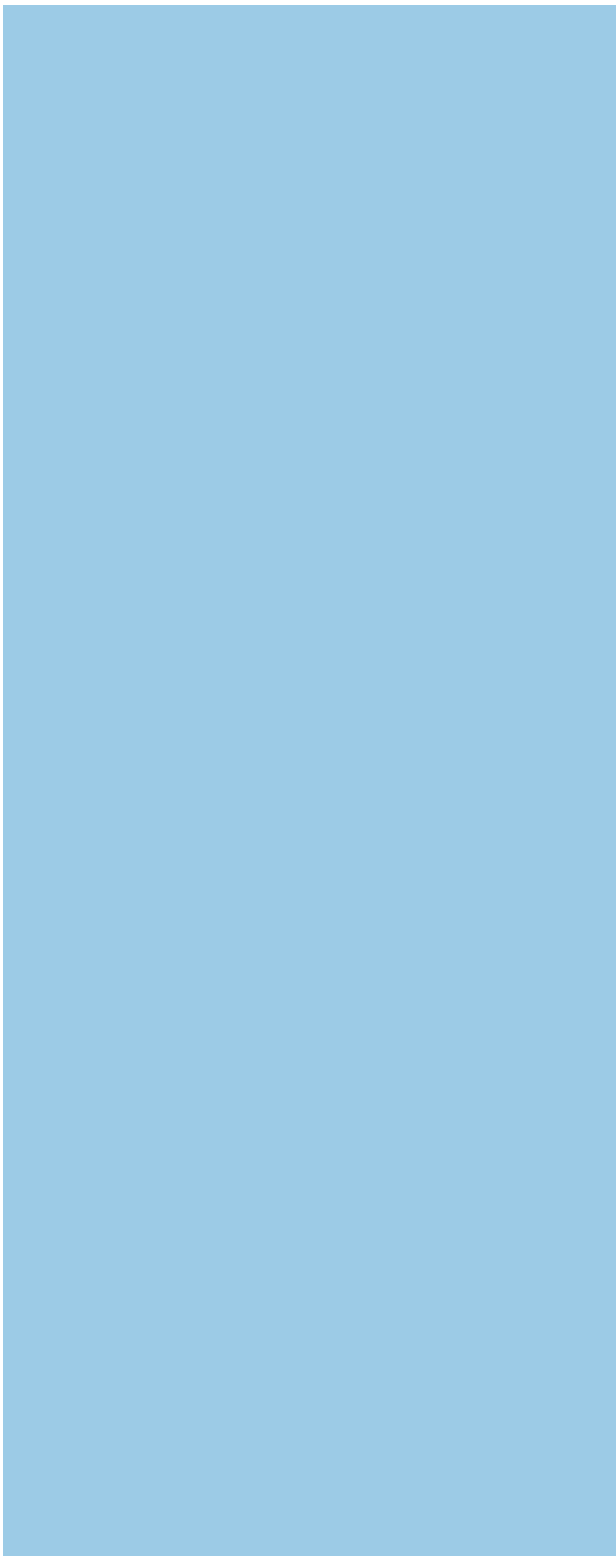
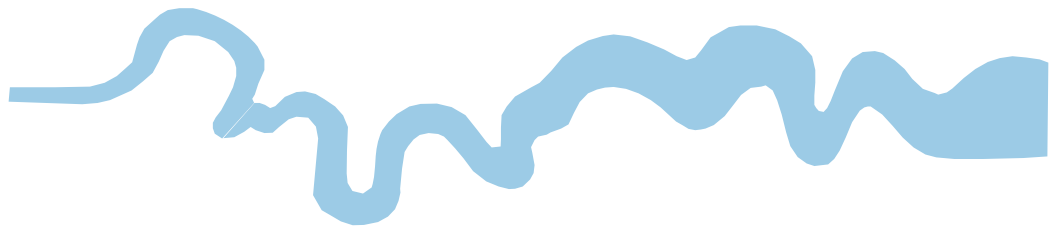
**Iris Court, Tilehurst, Reading,
Berkshire, 2010**
Archaeological Excavation
Plates 1 and 2

THAMES VALLEY
ARCHAEOLOGICAL
SERVICES

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





**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**