

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

ARCHAEOLOGICAL

S E R V I C E S

**New Leisure Centre, Palmer, Park,
Reading, Berkshire**

Archaeological Evaluation

by Beth Tucker and Steve Ford

Site Code: PPR21/53

(SU 7389 7304)

**New Leisure Centre, Palmer Park,
Reading, Berkshire**

**An Archaeological Evaluation
for Reading Borough Council**

by Bethany Tucker and Steve Ford
Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code PPR 21/53

March 2021

Summary

Site name: New Leisure Centre, Palmer, Park, Reading, Berkshire

Grid reference: SU 7389 7304

Site activity: Archaeological Evaluation

Date and duration of project: 16th-18th March 2021

Project coordinator: Tim Dawson

Site supervisor: Steve Ford

Site code: PPR 20/53

Area of site: 1430 sq m

Summary of results: The evaluation was carried out as intended and all six trenches were successfully excavated with minor adjustments to trenches 1-3, no deposits of archaeological interest were encountered. The site is considered to have very low archaeological potential.

Location and reference of archive: The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited digitally with OASIS/Archaeological Data Service.

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www.tvas.co.uk/reports/reports.asp.*

Report edited/checked by:	Steve Ford✓ 07.01.21 Steve Preston✓ 23.03.21
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New Leisure Centre, Palmer Park, Reading, Berkshire An Archaeological Evaluation

by Bethany Tucker and Steve Ford

Report 21/53

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological field evaluation carried out at Palmer Park, Reading, Berkshire (SU 7389 7304) (Fig. 1.) The work was commissioned by Mr Gert-Jan Peeters of Pellikaan Construction Ltd, 38 Graemesdyke Avenue, East Sheen, London, SW14 7BJ on behalf of Reading Borough Council, Civic Offices, Bridge Street Plaza West, Bridge Street, Reading, RG1 2LU.

Planning permission (201735) has been sought from Reading Borough Council to construct a new leisure centre extension, including swimming pool, parking spaces and landscaping, and refurbishment of the existing grandstand at Palmer Park, Reading. Comments on the application from Berkshire Archaeology suggest that any planning consent would be subject to a condition requiring a programme of archaeological work.

This is in accordance with the Department for Communities and Local Government's *National Planning Policy Framework* (NPPF 2019) and the Borough Council's policies on archaeology. The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Ms Fiona Macdonald, Principal Archaeologist for Berkshire Archaeology, the advisers to the Borough on matters relating to archaeology. The fieldwork was undertaken by Bethany Tucker and Steve Ford between 16th and 18th March 2021. The TVAS site code is PPR 21/53 and the archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited with the Archaeology Data Service in due course.

Location, topography and geology

The site is located to the east of Reading town centre, with the River Thames 1km to the north and the River Kennet 1km to the north-west (Fig. 1.) The current site is used as a car park for Palmer Park Stadium (the location of trenches 1-3) and a public park (trenches 4-6) The trenches were excavated in a relatively flat area at around 46m above Ordnance Datum, although there was a gentle slope at the west end of the park. The underlying geology is mapped as Thatcham Gravel (BGS 2000) and this was confirmed during the excavation of the trenches.

Archaeological background

The archaeological potential of the site was noted by Mr Matt Saywood of Berkshire Archaeology in the consultee comments. Although the Historic Environment Record notes few finds or sites of archaeological interest for the area of the site, the location falls within the Thames Valley which has proven to be an area rich in archaeological finds and sites in the past (Booth *et al.* 2007; Lambrick *et al.* 2009). Stray Roman coins have been found in the immediate area surrounding Palmer Park including one coin which was found within the grounds of the park. Mase-holes - a feature of an unknown date and function - are also within the grounds of Palmer Park, these features probably date to the 18th to 20th centuries and can be 5–7m deep. Lastly 350m west of Palmer Park Stadium lies Cemetery Junction (the location of Reading Old Cemetery), an area in which medieval pottery has been found along with components of a Medieval cemetery (and possibly a leper hospital).

An archaeological evaluation 400m west of Palmer Park recorded a single prehistoric struck flint and an undated posthole (Ford 2005). Other evaluations and watching briefs in the area have generally found nothing of archaeological interest (Beaverstock and Dawson 2014; Lowe 2008; Taylor 2015).

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 research aims of this 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 any Mase-hole features within the site;
- to collect information with which to prepare a mitigation strategy if necessary; and
- to assess the potential and significance of any such deposits located according to the research priorities such as set out in Historic England Research Agenda (HE 2017) or any more local or thematic research priorities such as identified in the Solent Thames Research Agenda (Hey and Hind 2014) as necessary.

Six trenches were to be dug using a JCB-type machine, fitted with a toothless ditching bucket to expose archaeologically sensitive levels, under constant archaeological supervision. The trenches were to be five at 15m long and one 10m long, all 1.6m wide. Topsoil and any other overburden was to be removed to expose archaeologically sensitive levels. Where archaeological features were certainly or probably present, the stripped

areas were to be cleaned using appropriate hand tools and sufficient of the archaeological features and deposits exposed would be excavated or sampled by hand to satisfy the aims outlined above, without compromising the integrity of any feature that might warrant preservation *in situ* or be better investigated under the conditions pertaining to full excavation. Spoil heaps were to be monitored for finds.

Results

All six trenches were excavated with trenches 4, 5 and 6 excavated as intended (Fig. 3). Trenches 1, 2 and 3 however, were reduced in length and repositioned (Fig. 3) due to the proximity of live services. The trenches ranged from 8.8m to 15.7m in length and 0.32m to 0.72m in depth. A complete list of trenches giving lengths, breadth, depths and a description of sections and geology is given in Appendix 1.

Trench 1 (Fig. 3; Pl. 1)

Trench 1 was aligned WNW-ESE and was 9.3m long and 0.48m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.17m of tarmac, 0.16m of made ground and 0.15m of sub-soil which was overlying the natural silty-sandy gravel geology. No finds or features of archaeological interest were recovered or observed.

Trench 2 (Fig. 3; Pls 2 and 7)

Trench 2 was aligned NW - SE and was 12.6m long and 0.55m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.2m of Tarmac, above 0.12m of made ground and 0.23m of sub-soil which was overlying the natural silty-sandy gravel geology. No features of archaeological interest were observed nor finds recovered.

Trench 3 (Figs 3 and 4; Pl. 3)

Trench 3 was aligned SSW-NNE and was 8.8m long and 0.72m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.16m of Tarmac, 0.11m of made ground and modern wall rubble and 0.41m of sub-soil which was overlying the natural silty-sandy gravel geology. No features of archaeological interest were observed nor finds recovered.

Trench 4 (Fig. 3; Pls 4 and 8)

Trench 4 was aligned N-S and was 15.7m long and 0.32m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.26m of top-soil which was overlying the natural silty-sand gravel geology. One sherd of brown glazed post-medieval red ware was found in the spoil heap, however, no other finds or features of archaeological interest were recovered or observed.

Trench 5 (Fig. 3; Pl. 5)

Trench 5 was aligned W-E and was 14.8m long and 0.35m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.29m of top-soil which was overlying the natural silty-sand gravel geology. No features of archaeological interest were observed nor finds recovered.

Trench 6 (Fig. 3; Pl. 6)

Trench 6 was aligned NW-SE and was 15.2m long and 0.35m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.29m of top-soil which was overlying the natural silty-sand gravel geology. Two potential features were noted in this trench, however, following investigation these features were deemed to be of natural origin due to their irregular shapes, fill, and lack of cultural material.

Finds

One sherd of brown glazed post-medieval red ware was found in the spoilheap of trench 4. All other finds recovered were of modern date. All finds were retained on site.

Conclusion

Despite the potential for archaeological remains to be present on this site, no deposits of any archaeological interest were observed during the course of the evaluation, although, one sherd of post-medieval pottery was found in a spoil heap. On the basis of these results, the site is considered to have very low archaeological potential.

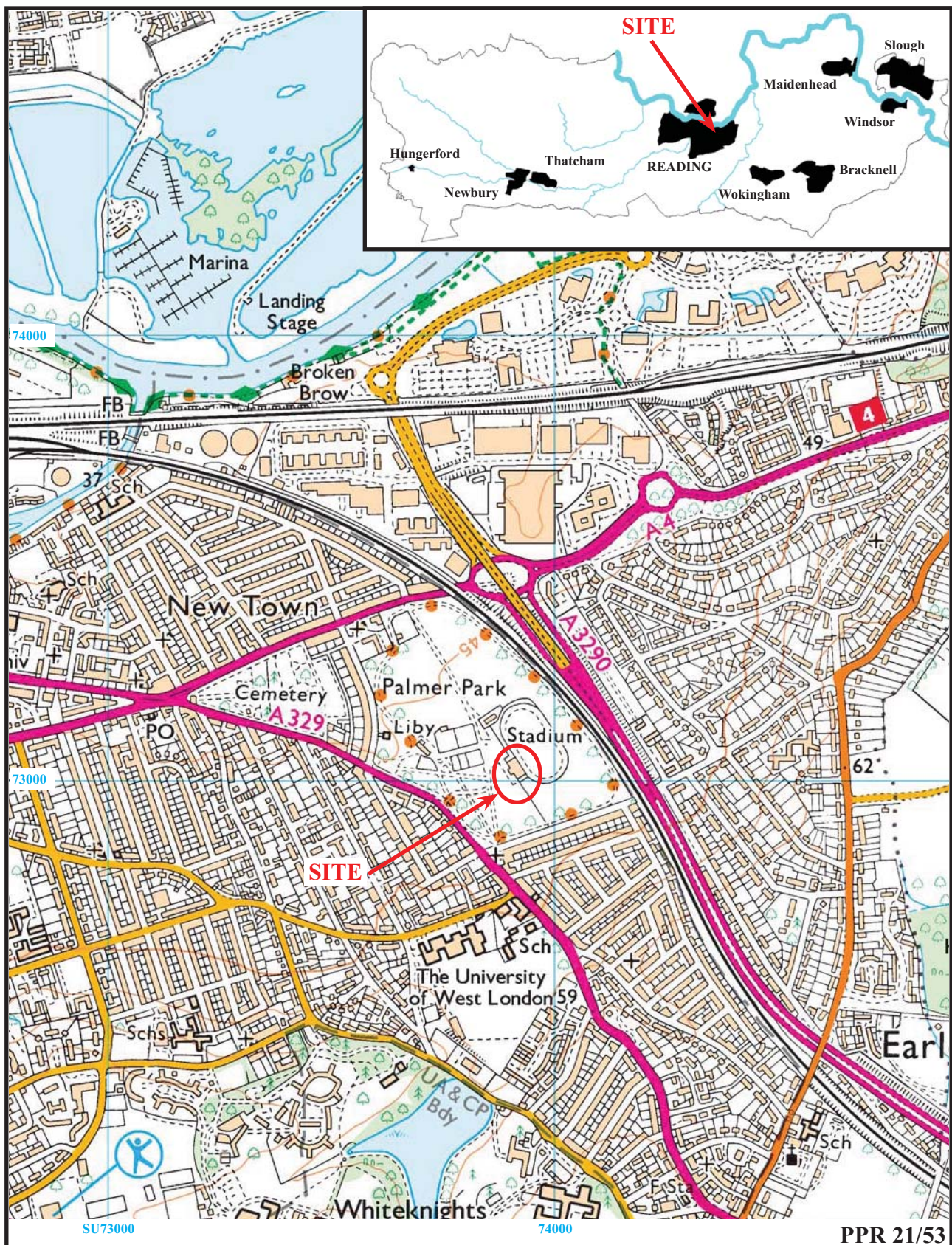
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APPENDIX 1: Trench details

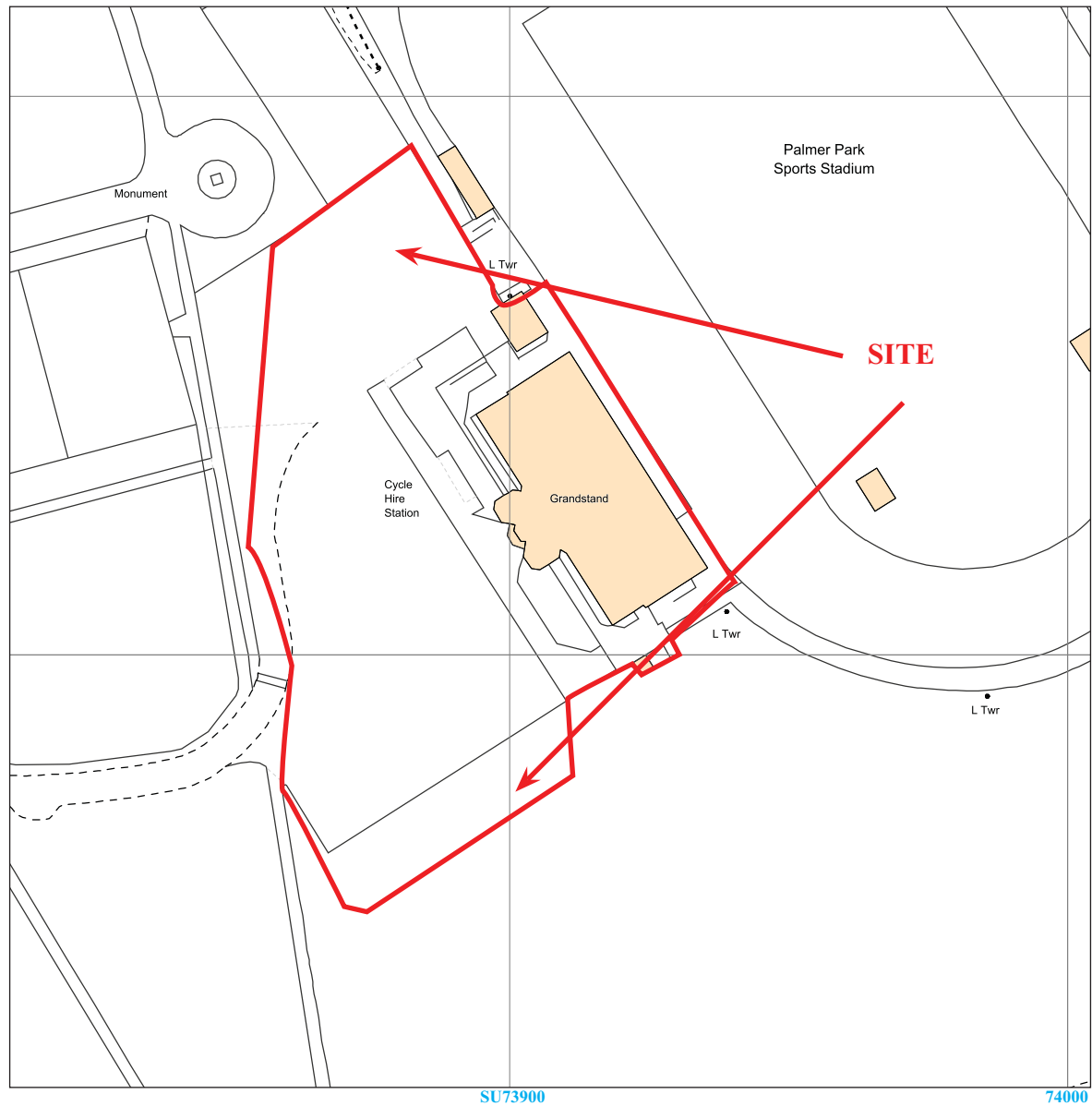
<i>Trench</i>	<i>Length (m)</i>	<i>Breadth (m)</i>	<i>Depth (m)</i>	<i>Comment</i>
1	9.3	1.6	0.48	0–0.17m tarmac; 0.17–0.33m dark greenish-greyish-brown silty-sand made ground with gravel inclusions; 0.33–0.48m mid reddish-brown sandy-silt sub-soil; 0.48m+ mid reddish-brown silty-sand gravel with silt patches (natural geology).
2	12.6	1.6	0.55	0–0.2m tarmac; 0.2–0.32 made ground; 0.32–0.55m sub-soil; 0.55m+ mid reddish-brown silty-sand gravel with tree bowls/root action (natural geology).
3	8.8	1.6	0.72	0–0.16m tarmac; 0.16–0.27m made ground with rubble and the wall from the old stadium; 0.27–0.68m sub-soil; 0.68m+ mid reddish-brown silty-sand gravel with silt patches (natural geology).
4	15.7	1.6	0.32	0–0.26 mid reddish-brown silty-sand top-soil; 0.26m+ light yellowish-brown silty-sand gravel with silt patches (natural geology).
5	14.8	1.6	0.35	0–0.29 top-soil; 0.29m+ mid reddish-brown silty-sand gravel with silt patches (natural geology).
6	15.2	1.6	0.35	0–0.29 top-soil; 0.29m+ mid reddish-brown silty-sand gravel with silt patches and tree bowls (natural geology).



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Archaeological Desk-based Assessment
 Figure 1. Location of site within Reading and Berkshire.

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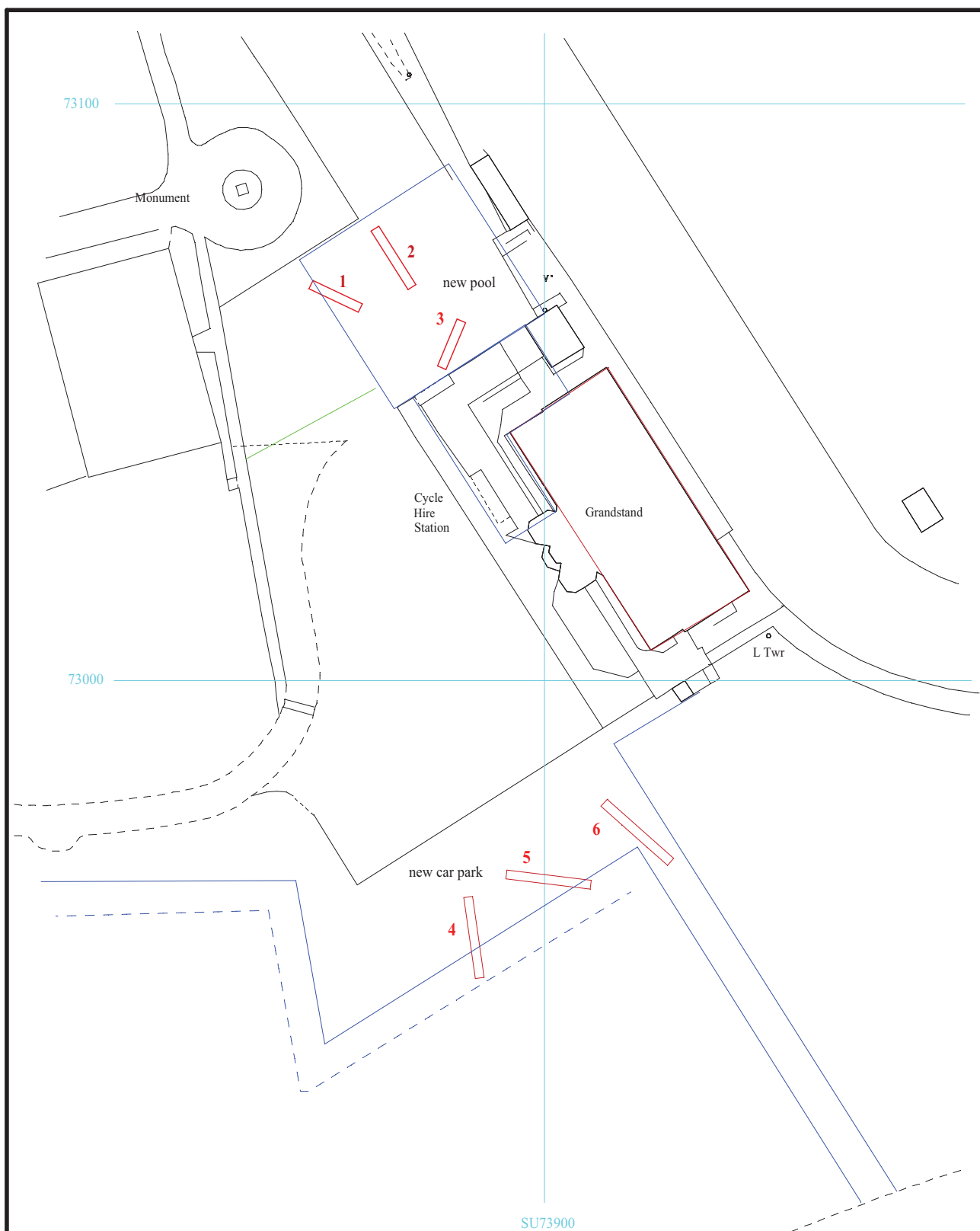
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Figure 2. Detailed location of site

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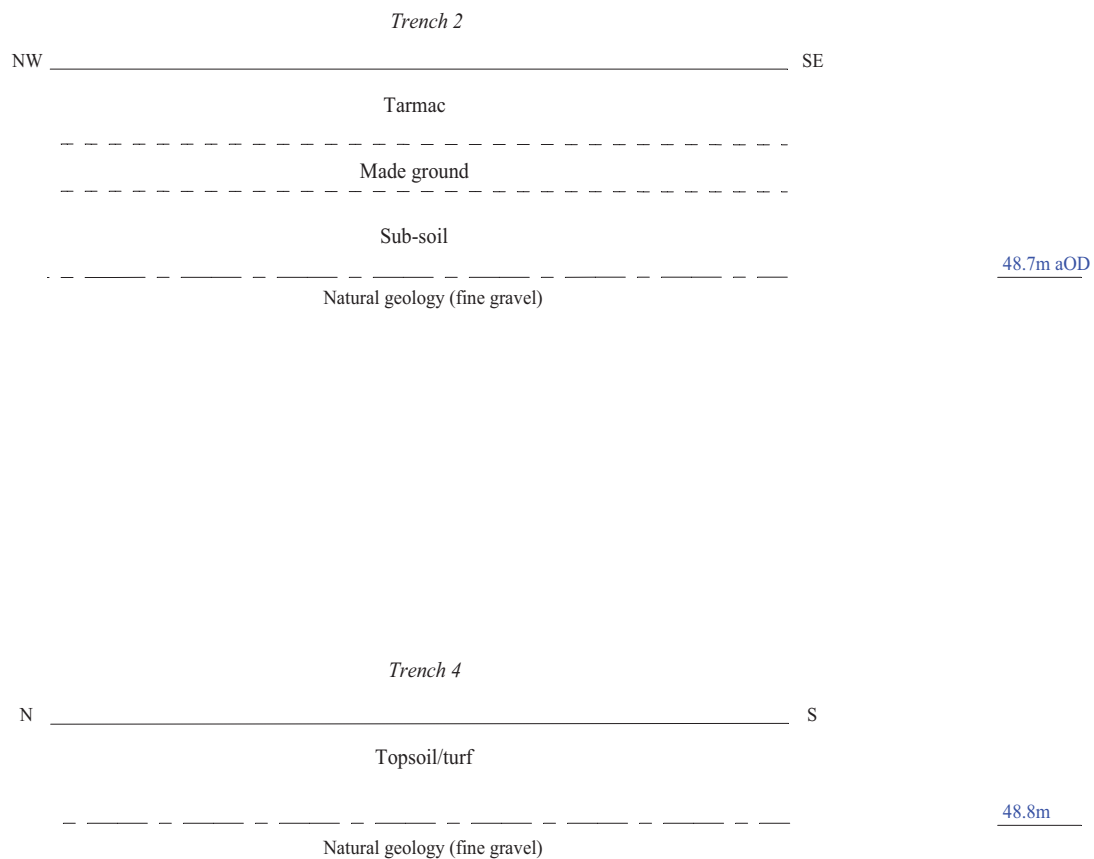


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Figure 3. Location of trenches.



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Figure 4. Representative sections

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Plate 1. Trench 1, looking South-East,
Scales: 2m and 0.5m.



Plate 2. Trench 2, looking south-east,
Scales: 2m and 0.5m.



Plate 3. Trench 3, looking North, Scales: 2m and 0.5m.



Plate 4. Trench 4, looking south, Scales: 2m and 0.5m.

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Plates 1 to 4.**

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Plate 5. Trench 5, looking east, Scales: 2m and 0.5m.



Plate 6. Trench 6, looking south-east, Scales: 2m and 0.5m.



Plate 7. Trench 2, looking south-west, Scale: 0.3m.



Plate 8. Trench 4, looking west, Scale: 0.3m.

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Plates 5 to 8.**

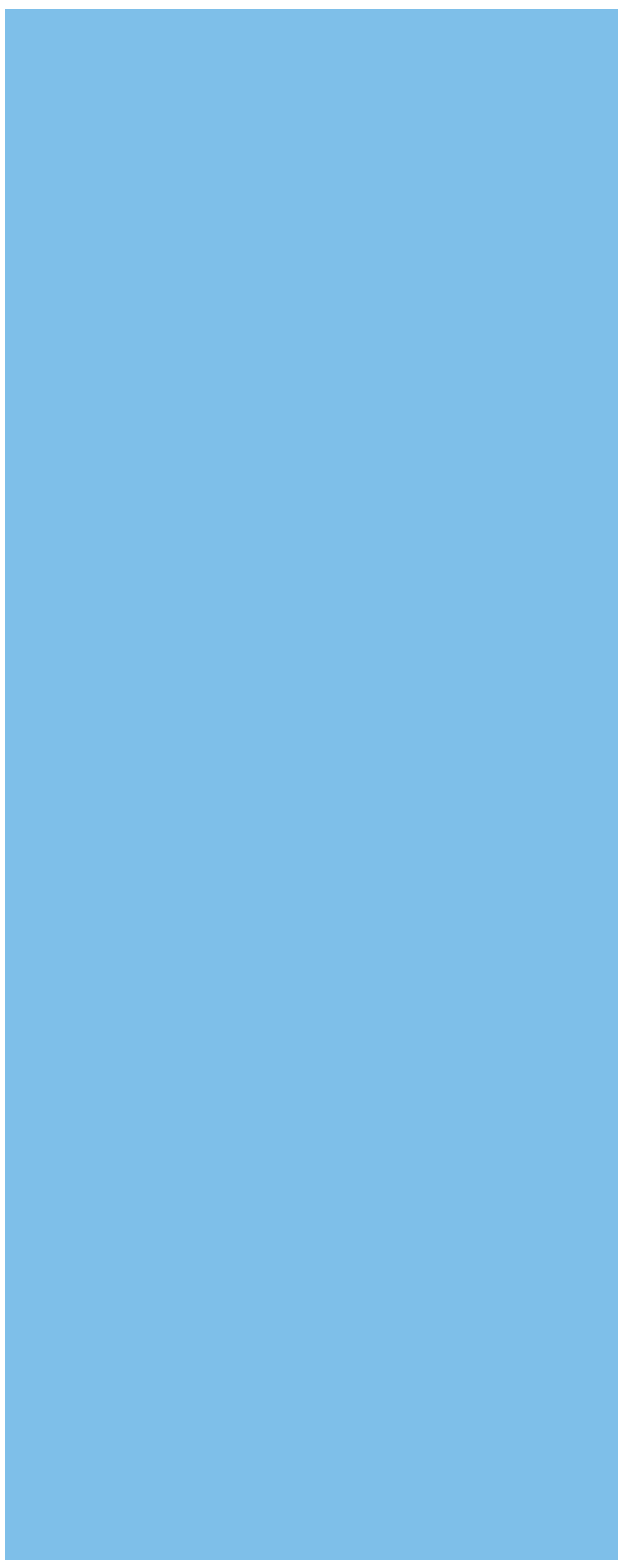
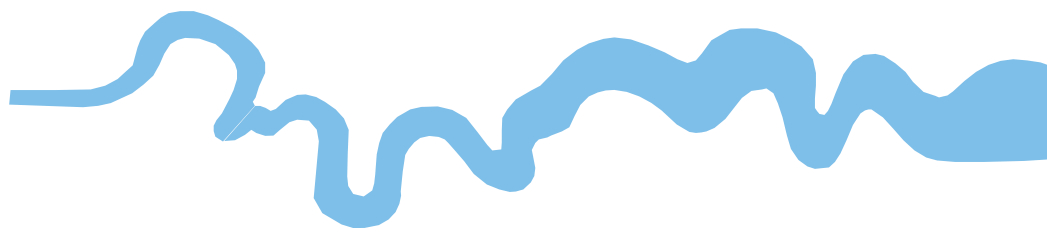
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TIME CHART

Calendar Years

Modern _____	AD 1901
Victorian _____	AD 1837
Post Medieval _____	AD 1500
Medieval _____	AD 1066
Saxon _____	AD 410
Roman _____	AD 43
	AD 0 BC
Iron Age _____	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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