

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

ARCHAEOLOGICAL

S E R V I C E S

**Caversham Park, Caversham,
Reading, Berkshire**

Archaeological Evaluation

by Pierre-Damien Manisse

Site Code: CPC21/252

(SU 7227 7626)

Caversham Park, Caversham, Reading, Berkshire

**An Archaeological Evaluation
for Beechcroft Developments Limited**

by Pierre-Damien Manisse
Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code CPC 21/252

October 2023

Summary

Site name: Caversham Park, Caversham, Reading, Berkshire

Grid reference: SU 7227 7626

Site activity: Archaeological Evaluation

Date and duration of project: 18th-19th October 2023

Project coordinator: David Sanchez

Site supervisor: Pierre-Damien Manisse

Site code: CPC 21/252

Area of site: c. 7550 sq. m.

Summary of results: Six trenches were dug, two of them revealing a modest number of features that could relate to post-medieval to modern activity on site: two ditches, one pit, some brick walls and a brick-lined well. Ground disturbance of the same period was seen in two other trenches. The site's archaeological potential is considered to be low.

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

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Report edited/checked by:	Steve Ford✓ 31.10.23 Steve Preston✓ 31.10.23
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Caversham Park, Caversham, Reading, Berkshire An Archaeological Evaluation

by Pierre-Damien Manisse

Report 21/252b

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological field evaluation carried out at Caversham Park, Caversham, Reading RG4 8TZ (centred on SU 7227 7626; Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Ms Joanne Nayler on behalf of Beechcroft Developments Ltd, 1 Church Lane, Wallingford, OX1 DX.

Two planning applications (full planning permission ref. 220409 and listed building consent ref. 220410) have been made to Reading Borough Council for the redevelopment of Caversham Park for various residential uses and associated works and facilities. Considering that a condition pertaining to archaeology is likely to be attached to the consent, a programme of archaeological work is planned. This is due to the potential of disturbance of below-ground archaeological deposits. This is in accordance with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities' *National Planning Policy Framework* (NPPF 2023) and the Borough Council's policies on archaeology. The project is divided into several phases, corresponding to different fields within the overall site (Fig. 2). The present document deals with area LTW.

The field investigation for this specific area was carried out to a specification approved by Mr Edwin Wood, archaeology officer at Berkshire Archaeology, the archaeological advisers to the Borough Council, taking the form of an initial trial trenching programme. The fieldwork was undertaken by Pierre-Damien Manisse, on 18th and 19th October 2023 and the site code is CPC21/252. The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited with Reading Museum or the Archaeology Data Service in due course.

Location, topography and geology

The site is located to the east of Peppard Road, Caversham, within Caversham Park, 3km north-east of Reading and 2km north of the River Thames (Fig. 1). The total site area is 37.7ha with area LTW only occupying 0.75ha at the western end of it (Fig. 2). It is a flat irregular plot of land, dotted with trees and lying at approximately 83m above Ordnance Datum (aOD). It is bordered to the north and east by wooded parkland and to the south by the BBC Written Archives Centre. The underlying geology is Black Park Gravel with the possibility of Lambeth Group Formation (clay and sand) at the margins (BGS 2000).

Archaeological background

A desk-based assessment (Elliott 2021) highlighted the archaeological potential of the overall site. To summarize, its main interest lies in general in its location within the archaeologically rich Thames Valley. There are no previously known archaeological sites or finds within the development area but the late post-medieval parkscape and buildings within it are of some historic interest. The environs of the site has seen a number of discrete and isolated finds covering a broad range of periods, in particular from the Palaeolithic at St Peter's Hill and Henley Road. Other archaeological investigations in the vicinity, mainly concentrated to the west of Caversham Park, usually limited, have been less successful. To the north-west, however, at Emmer Green Primary School, multi-phase activity (Bronze Age, Iron Age and Roman) was attested.

The field is located within the limit of Caversham Manor since the Medieval period and has been mostly preserved from any later large-scale development, though some landscaping might have occurred at some point.

Objectives and methodology

The purpose of the evaluation was to determine the presence/absence, extent, condition, character, quality and date of any archaeological or palaeoenvironmental deposits within the area of development. More specifically its objectives are to

- determine if archaeologically relevant levels have survived;

- determine if archaeological deposits of any period are present;

- determine if any features or deposits have survived which relate to the landscaping of the site in the 17th and 18th centuries; and

- collect information with which to prepare a mitigation strategy if necessary.

It was proposed to open by mechanical means six trial trenches, each 1.6-2m wide and 25m long, under constant archaeological supervision. Features were to be hand cleaned and sufficiently sampled to answer the aims of the project. Any finds were to be assessed in view of the current research agendas (such as as set out in HE 2017) or more local/thematic priorities (i.e. as identified in Hey and Hind 2014). Work was to follow the recommendations of the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CifA 2020). Spoil heaps were to be monitored to enhance finds recovery.

Results (Fig. 3; Pls 1-4)

A 360° tracked excavator was used to open six trenches. This machine was equipped with a graded bucket, 1.60m wide. Compared to their original location, there was a certain degree of modification to take into consideration retained trees and their canopies. An unmapped service was also indicated by the park warden. Trench 2 had to be moved west as its proposed location was used for all the garden waste of the park. Trench 3 was realigned alongside the south hedge. Trench 5's orientation was shifted 45°. The trenches ranged in length from 23.80m to 26.1m and in depth from 0.50 to 1.20m.

A complete list of trenches giving lengths, breadths, depths and a description of sections and geology is given in Appendix 1. The excavated features, with dating evidence, are summarized in Appendix 2.

The natural geological horizon generally consisted of gravel in reddish to orange sand. Only in the mid-section of Trench 6 did it change to a mottled band of orange and light grey clay/sandy clay with patches of compact gravels. It was overlain by subsoil (51), very common gravels in a grey sand (with local variation of colours) and this was capped by topsoil (50), a dark grey silty sand with occasional gravels.

Trench 1 (Fig. 3)

Trench 1 was aligned WNW - ESE and was 26.10m long and 0.65m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.30m of topsoil and 0.30m of subsoil overlying natural geology. No finds were recovered. A double black plastic pipe crossed the trench between 12.40-12.70m from WNW. At 18m there was a pit filled with post-medieval or modern brick and tiles and other areas of modern truncation were present towards the eastern end.

Trench 2

Trench 2 was aligned SE - NW and was 23.80m long and 0.50-0.55m deep on average with a test pit 0.95m deep at 5.80m from the SE end. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.30m of topsoil and 0.20-0.30m of subsoil overlying natural geology. The subsoil thickens towards the south-east down to 0.95m below ground level. This is in line with what was observed in trench 3 further south. No finds were recovered and no archaeological features were observed.

Trench 3 (Figs 3 and 4; Pls 2, 5-8)

Trench 3 was aligned E - W and was 25.40m long and up to 1.20m deep at the east end, 1m elsewhere. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.35m of topsoil and 0.60m of subsoil or (in the eastern part) made ground, overlying natural geology. At the east end of the trench, pit 1 was recorded. It was at least 0.8m x 80m. Being already at 1.20m below ground level only a limited test slot was made, confirming a depth of at least 0.20m. Its infill

yielded a clay pipe, several fragments of bricks and tiles and a sherd of glazed post-medieval pottery. From 1.60m to 4.50m a NE-SW orientated ditch (2) was seen. It was 0.65m wide and 0.22m deep. It had steep sides and a flattish base. It contained a gun-flint, ceramic building material and a clay pipe. It was interrupted near the south baulk by brick wall (57). The latter likely defined, along with a second brick wall (58) part of a rectangular building with a 1.13m wide entranceway or porch facing NW (Pl. 8). The space enclosed by these walls (at least 4.85m by 1.6m) was filled with brick and tile rubble, likely resulting from the dismantling of the building (Pl. 6). The measurements of some of the bricks gave the following dimensions: 240 x 110 x 67mm. The masonry extended from 4.5m to 10.2m from the east end of the trench. Much further west, between 19.8m and 21m from the east end, was a well (3). It had an external diameter of 1.20m, an internal diameter of 0.70m. Lining (59) was made of bricks, some full, others halved or fragmented (Pl. 5). The commonest sizes were 232 x 110 or 113 x 58–60mm. The modern plastic pipes from trench 1 were seen continuing at the west end of trench 3.

Trench 4 (Fig. 3; Pl. 1)

Trench 4 was aligned S - N and was 25.20m long and 0.65-0.70m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.35m of topsoil and 0.35m subsoil overlying natural geology. At 13.60m from the south end of the trench, ditch (4) was recorded which was 0.54m wide and 0.18m deep with a single fill (56) of firm grey silty sand with frequent gravels and some brick/tile flecks. It was aligned SE-NW. No finds were recovered within the single infill but flecks of CBM were noted. It had a steep NE side and a gentler SW slope with a flattish base to a maximum depth of 0.30m.

Trench 5 (Pl. 4)

Trench 5 was aligned SW - NE and was 25.80m long and 0.65m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.25-0.30m of topsoil and 0.30m of subsoil overlying natural geology. No finds were recovered and no archaeological features were observed.

Trench 6 (Pl. 3)

Trench 6 was aligned W - E and was 25m long and 0.65m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.35m of topsoil and 0.30m of subsoil overlying natural geology. No finds were recovered and no archaeological features were observed.

Finds

Post-medieval Pottery by Cristina Mateos Leal

The pottery assemblage comprised a total of one sherd, from pit 1, weighing 9g. It is a fragment of Post-medieval orange earthenware with brown glaze on the inner surface.

Ceramic Building Materials by Danielle Milbank

Four pieces (weighing a total of 1.195kg) of ceramic building material were recovered during the evaluation, from two deposits. The pieces were examined under x10 magnification and categorized wherever possible based on dimensions, fabric and finish, and were retained after recording, however all four fragments are suitable for discard in line with the recipient museum's policy.

Pit 1 (53) contained two co-joining pieces of roof tile in a hard, fairly dense fabric, with sparse to moderate fine sand inclusions and a light orange red colour, with reduced (grey) upper surface. The thickness is 15mm, the finish is slightly uneven with a thickened edge, and the tile is slightly curved longitudinally. The fabric and finish are suggestive of a later medieval tile, or a fairly poorly-made post-medieval example.

Ditch 2 (54) contained two pieces, one tile in a dense fabric with moderate to frequent fine to medium sand inclusions, 15mm thick, with a fairly even finish. The tile is of broad late medieval to post-medieval date. From this context, a piece of brick was also recovered, in a slightly rough clay fabric with sparse fine grog and sand inclusions and occasional organic (straw) impressions. The piece is 60mm thick, with an uneven form, suggestive of a handmade (pre-mechanised) method, and may represent Harley (1974) type 4 (possibly 4.7 or 4.8), with a likely 17th or 18th century date, though it could represent an earlier form.

Clay pipe by Danielle Milbank

Two fragments of clay smoking pipe stem were recovered from two contexts: one from pit 1 (53) and one from ditch 2,(54), weighing 7g in total. The pieces are not datable other than broadly post-medieval and have no marks or other notable characteristics, but are likely to be of 17th to 19th century date.

Struck Flint by Steve Ford

A single fresh struck flint was recovered from trench 3, ditch 2 (54) which was of post-medieval date. The large flake (46x47mm) was retouched down both edges and platform with the latter shaped into a rounded form. It would be of a very unusual form for a prehistoric item and is probably a gun flint.

Conclusion

There was no trace of any prehistoric, Roman or Medieval activity on site. The features observed in trenches 3 and 4 probably all belong to the same phase of occupation that can be tentatively assigned an 18th-19th century date, though not shown on historic maps (Evans 2022; Elliott 2021). The remains (brick walls, a well, a ditch and a pit) in trench 4 were under a much thicker made ground than in the other trenches, likely the result of some more modern terracing. On the basis of these results, the site has very low archaeological potential

References

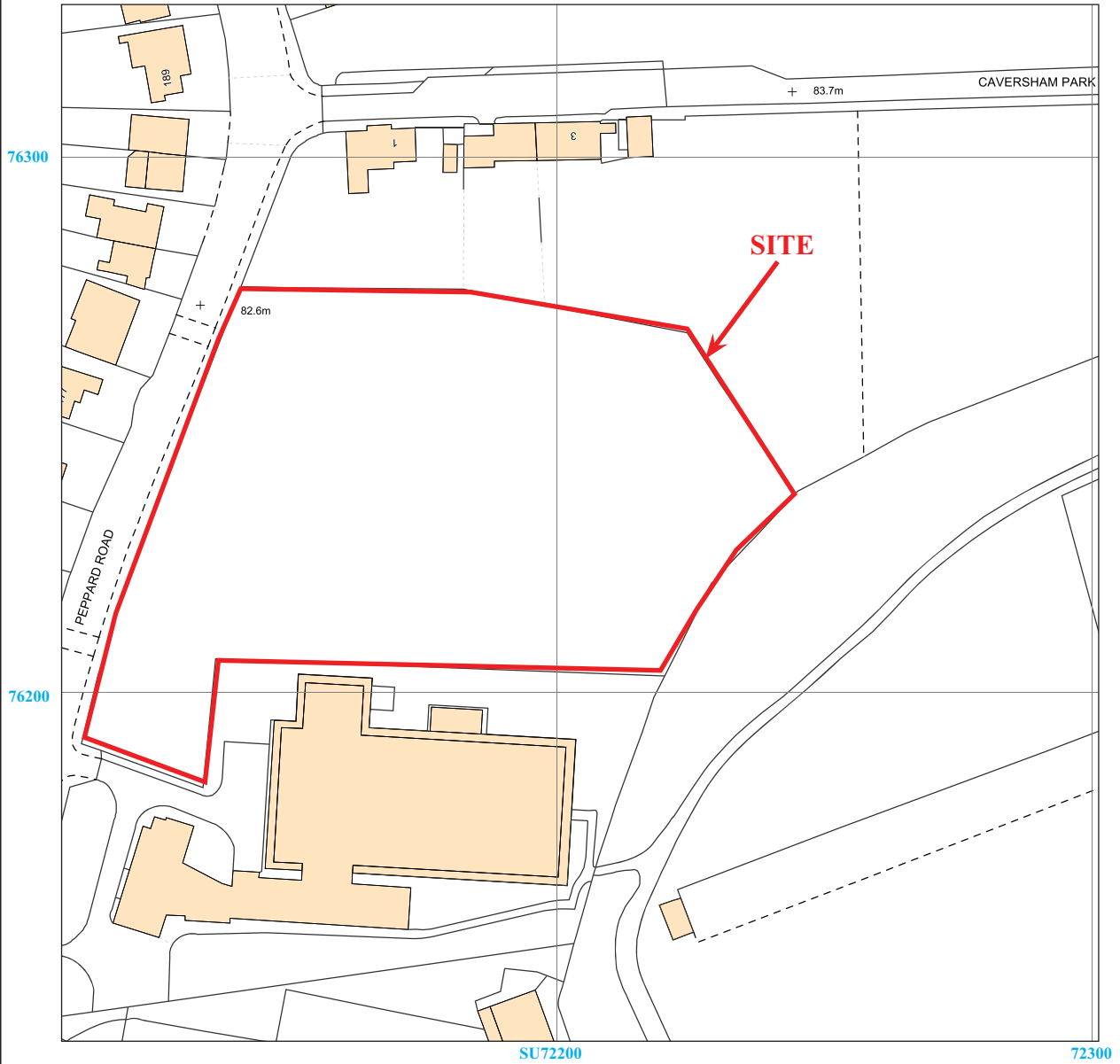
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APPENDIX 1: Trench details
0m at E or S.

<i>Trench</i>	<i>Length (m)</i>	<i>Breadth (m)</i>	<i>Depth (m)</i>	<i>Comment</i>
1	26.1	1.6	0.65	0–0.30m topsoil (dark grey brownish grey sandy silt with occasional gravels); 0.30-0.60m subsoil (greyish to yellowish sandy gravels); 0.60m+ natural geology (orange to reddish sandy gravels).
2	23.8	1.6	0.50-0.95	0–0.30m topsoil; 0.30-0.70m subsoil; 0.70m+ natural geology.
3	25.4	1.6	1-1.2	0–0.30m topsoil; 0.30-0.95m made ground?; 0.95m+ natural geology. Pit 1, ditch 2, walls 57-58, well 3. [Pls 2, 5-8]
4	25.2	1.6	0.65-0.70	0–0.35m topsoil; 0.35-0.70m subsoil; 0.70m+ natural geology. Ditch 4. [Pl. 1]
5	25.8	1.6	0.65	0–0.30m topsoil; 0.30-0.65m subsoil; 0.65m+ natural geology. [Pl. 4]
6	25	1.6	0.65	0–0.35m topsoil; 0.35-0.65m subsoil; 0.65m+ natural geology. [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>
3	1	53	Pit	Post-Medieval	CBM, Pottery, clay pipe
3	2	54	Ditch	Post-Medieval	CBM, clay pipe
3	3	55, 59	Well	Post-Medieval	
4	4	56	Ditch	Post-Medieval	
3		57	Brick wall	Post-Medieval	
3		58	Brick wall	Post-Medieval	



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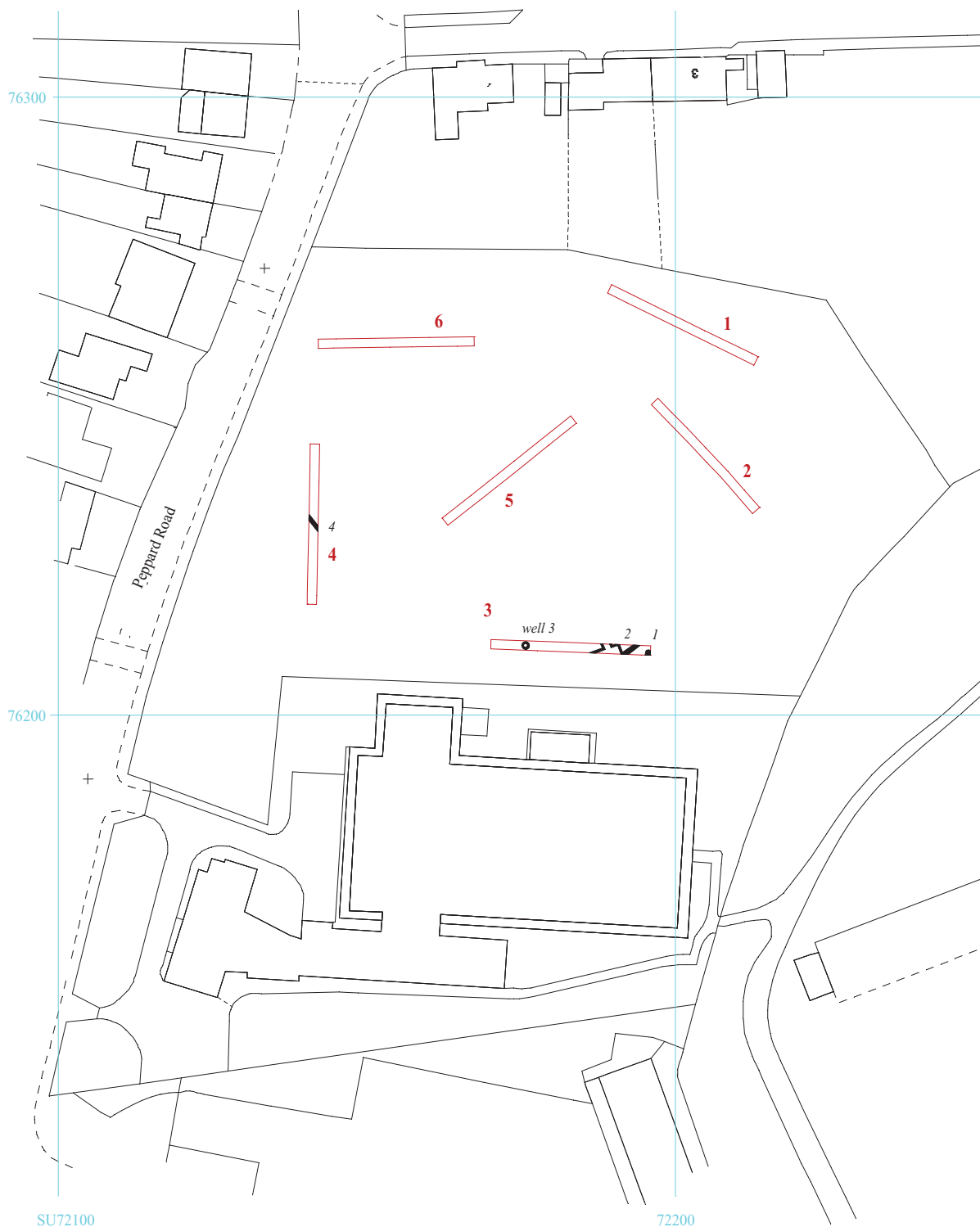


**Area LTW, Caversham Park, Caversham,
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Figure 2. Detailed location of site.

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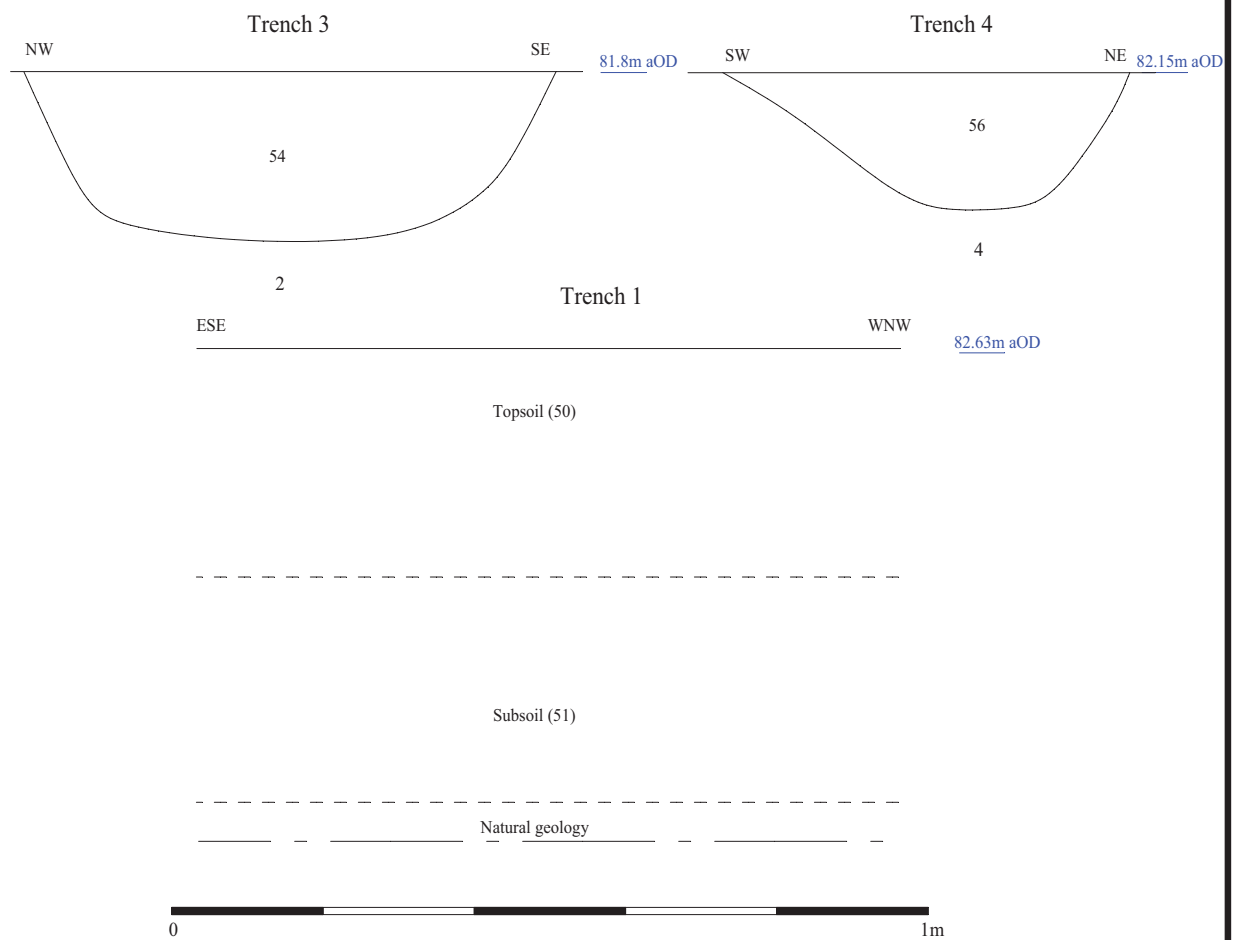
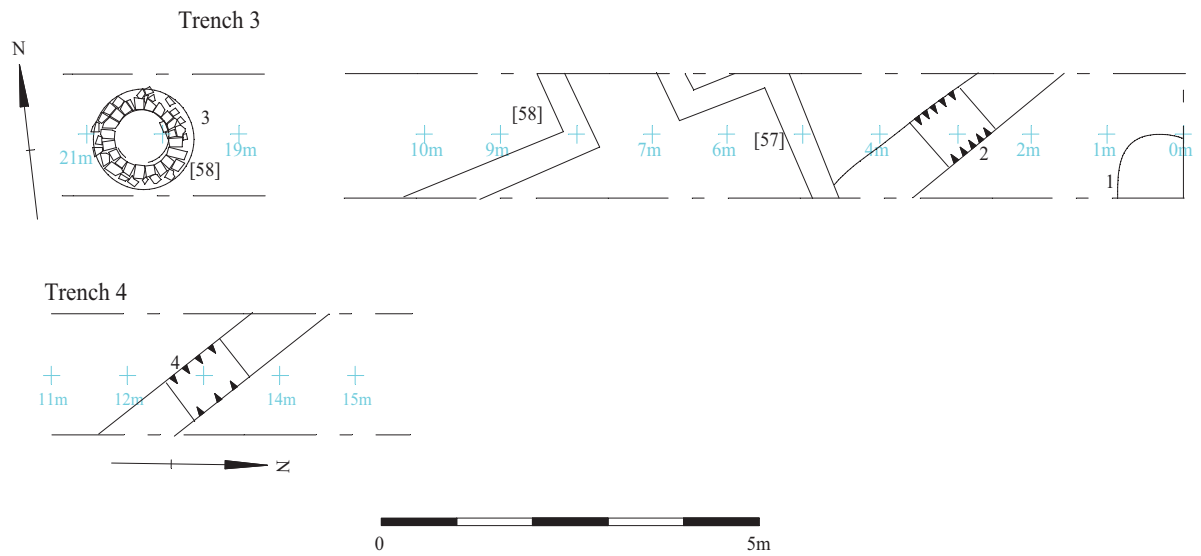
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Figure 3. Plan of trenches.

0 50m



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Figure 4. Trench plans and sections.

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Plate 1. Ditch 4 in trench 4, looking South, Scales: horizontal 0.5m and vertical 0.2m.



Plate 2. Ditch 2 in trench 3, looking South West, Scales: horizontal 0.5m and vertical 0.1m.

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 Plates 1 and 2.

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Plate 3. Trench 6, looking South East, Scales: horizontal 2x1m and vertical 0.5m.



Plate 4. Representative section in trench 5, looking North West,
Scales: horizontal 1m and vertical 0.5m.

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Plates 3 and 4.

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Plate 5. Well 3 in trench 3, looking West, Scales: 0.5m(2) and 0.3m.



Plate 6. Brick rubble in trench 3, looking West

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 Plates 5 and 6.

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Plate 7. Trench 3, section looking South, Scale: 1m.



Plate 8. Trench 3 Masonry, looking West
Scales: 1m and 0.5m

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Plates 7 and 8.

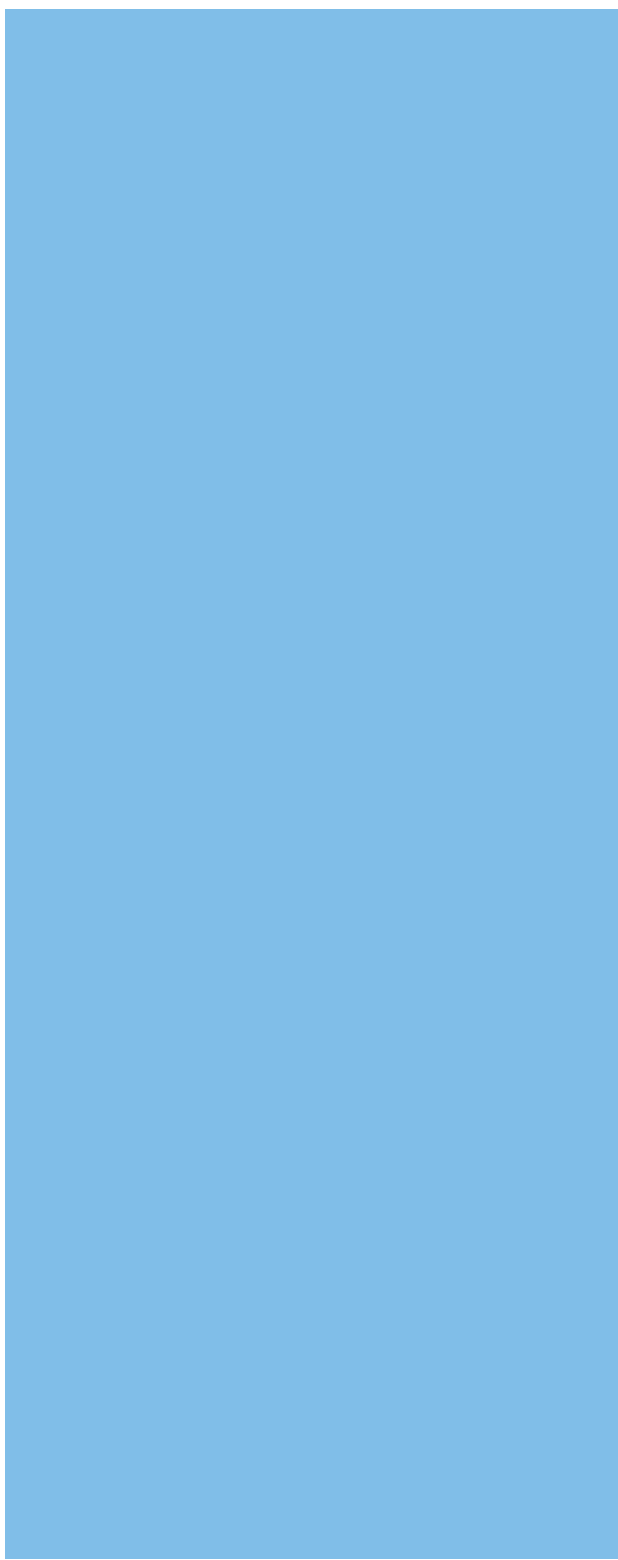
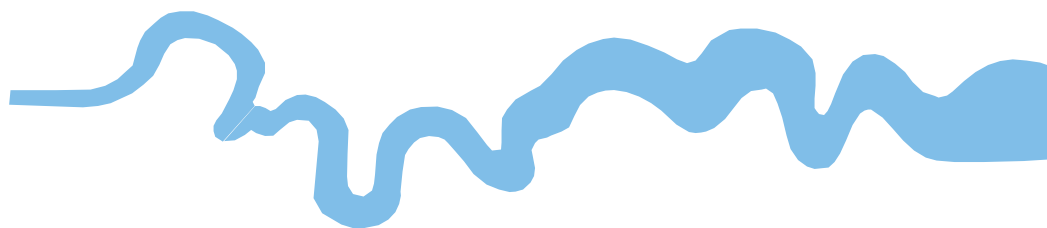
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TIME CHART

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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