

**Rear of 7–9 Gun Street,  
Reading, Berkshire**

**An Archaeological Evaluation  
for the Purple Turtle**

by Steve Ford

Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code GSR03/115

**December 2003**

## Summary

**Site name:** Rear of 7–9 Gun Street, Reading

**Grid reference:** SU 7146 7325

**Site activity:** Archaeological Evaluation

**Date and duration of project:** 1st–8th December 2003

**Project manager:** Steve Ford

**Site supervisor:** Steve Ford

**Site code:** GSR03/115

**Area of site:** c. 320 sq m.

**Summary of results:** Medieval dump(?) layers and cut features were found in one trench located to the north of (higher than) the Holy Brook, below about 1.3m of made ground. Two, possibly three, medieval hearths and further small areas of dumping were present in the lower trench below about 1.5m of made ground. No waterlogged deposits or water management features were encountered but restricted access limited investigation of deeper levels on the site. A few sherds of Roman pottery were also recovered

**Monuments identified:** Medieval features and layers

**Location and reference of archive:** The archive is currently held by Thames Valley Archaeological Services, 47-49 De Beauvoir Road, Reading, Berkshire, RG1 5NR and will be deposited with Reading Museum in due course.

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	Steve Preston✓ 23.12.03

# Rear of 7–9 Gun Street, Reading, Berkshire, An Archaeological Evaluation

by Steve Ford

Report 03/115

## Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological field evaluation carried out on land to the rear of the 'Purple Turtle', 7–9 Gun Street, Reading, Berkshire, (SU 7146 7325) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Mark Thackeray of Cliff Walsingham and Company, Bourne House, Cores End Road, Bourne End, Buckinghamshire, S18 5AR on behalf of the Purple Turtle.

Planning permission (application no 03/01120) has been sought from Reading Borough Council, for a change of use and development of the rear of the site for a new café, offices and concert hall. In order to inform the planning process an archaeological evaluation was requested to be undertaken to assess whether archaeological deposits were present on the site. The results of this would enable a plan to be formulated to mitigate the effects of development upon any surviving archaeology.

This is in accordance with the Department of the Environment's Planning Policy Guidance, *Archaeology and Planning* (PPG16 1990), and Borough policies on archaeology. The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Mr K. Beachus of Babtie Group, archaeological advisers to Reading Borough Council. The fieldwork was undertaken by Steve Ford and Pamela Jenkins between 1st and 8th December 2003 and the site code is GSR03/115. 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 within the centre of Reading on the south side of Gun Street opposite the parish church of St Mary's (Figs 1, 2). The new development is to take place in the rear of the properties which are currently occupied by a car park and marquee.

The site is located on the side of the Kennet Valley at a height of approximately 39m above Ordnance Datum. The ground now slopes gently to the south and the Holy Brook bisects the site, though this is mostly in a culvert. The underlying geology is terrace gravel or alluvium according to the British Geological Survey (BGS 1946) and this distinction appears to reflect the position of the site exactly on the junction of the terrace and floodplain. It was considered that the position of the site on the edge of the valley may reveal an outcrop of chalk

rather than gravel, as present further to the west, and this appears to have been demonstrated from auguring in the northern portion of the site.

## **Archaeological background**

The site lies within the historic core of Reading and Gun Street was one of the original medieval streets (Astill 1978). The town has late Saxon origins and it is thought that the focus of the Saxon town lies close to St Mary's as at this location roads from London to Bristol and Winchester to Oxford meet. The site lies within this area. However, relatively little late Saxon material has come to light and the topography of the Saxon town is so far defined mainly negatively. The proximity of the site to the Holy Brook and the floodplain of the Kennet suggests the possible presence nearby of water management features (cf. Hawkes and Fasham 1997) or reclamation deposits as found further to the west at Castle Hill (Pine forthcoming) or to the south during excavations in advance of the Oracle shopping centre (D. Wilkinson pers. comm ).

## **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. Three trenches were proposed to be excavated which were to be 6m long and 1.6m wide at the depth of the archaeologically relevant level. In the event, the current use of part of the site for a marquee-covered external bar limited the area available for evaluation prior to the granting of planning consent and just two trenches were dug (Fig. 3). All the trenches were excavated using a JCB-type machine, fitted with a toothless ditching bucket, and supervised by an archaeologist at all times. Spoil heaps were monitored for finds.

A complete list of trenches giving lengths, breadths, depths and a description of sections and geology is given in Appendix 1. Appendix 2 details all archaeological features/deposits.

## **Results (Figs. 4–6)**

### Trench 1 (Plate 1; Fig. 5)

This trench was located in the northern portion of the site to the north of the Holy Brook. The trench was 5.2m long (5m at base) and 1.6m wide (at base) with the upper levels stepped and battered to allow safe access.

Beneath layers of modern gravel and scalpins, made ground of 19th-century date was encountered to a depth of 1.3m (38.35m AOD). Within this made ground various services and brick footings were observed.

Beneath the 19th-century made ground, a greyish brown silty sand with chalk and charcoal flecks, gravel pieces and broken flint nodules (52) was observed across the whole extent of the trench with a thickness of 0.2–0.25m. This deposit was cut by two small intercutting pits (1 and 2), which contained fragments of coal in sieved samples and which are unambiguously of 19th-century date despite the presence of single sherds of medieval and Roman pottery respectively. Layer 52, however, produced three sherds of medieval and late medieval pottery in addition to a quantity of tile.

Layer 52 was cut at the southern end by a feature with a straight edge (4). The full extent and nature of this feature could not be examined within the trench but it contained at least one fill (54) which produced a Roman sherd, and seven sherds of medieval pottery perhaps with a currency within the 14th century. An early post-medieval sherd was a surface find and probably derived from the late post-medieval activity that partly cut into the top of the feature. Tile was also present.

Beneath layer 52, but exposed only at the northern and southern ends were further deposits. To the south was a chalky horizon (56) with flint nodule fragments, burnt flint, charcoal and tile and which was considered as a possible floor deposit but is more likely to represent upcast from feature digging or general consolidation/dumping. Layer 60 to the south of layer 56 produced a single sherd of medieval pottery and may be a further dumping episode, or the fill of a pit. Layer 57 has a similar interpretation.

At the northern end of the trench, layer 52 overlay an orange brown clayey sand (61) with much chalk, flint, tile and some animal bone. The relationship of layer 61 with a second chalky layer (62) was uncertain. A single medieval sherd was recovered from the interface between these two layers. Both layers appear to be cut by a possible feature (3). The feature was only partially excavated and neither the full profile or plan was obtained. It is not certain if this deposit is a cut feature or is another spread layer. The upper parts of the fill (53) produced one sherd of Roman pottery and two sherds of medieval pottery and the lower fill (54) produced a sherd of later medieval pottery. It is possible, although not demonstrated, that 3 and 4 are the same feature.

The full profile of deposits was not exposed within the trench as it was clear that complex medieval deposits had been exposed across the full extent of the trench and their position, their depth below the ground and their height relative to the ground floors of the new development could be ascertained. However, an auger was used to investigate the depth of deposits at the south end. From the base of feature 4, a further 0.95m of deposit was encountered overlying chalk which was present at 37.13m AOD.

## Trench 2 (Plate 2; Fig. 6)

This trench was located in the southern part of the site to the south of the Holy Brook culvert. It was dug in two parts but was 4.7m long and 1.6m wide. Beneath layers of modern gravel and concrete, and a brick floor, made ground of 19th-century date was encountered to a depth of 1.5m (38.9m AOD). This overlay a soil deposit (78) of uncertain date, below which were various deposits of medieval date. These deposits include two, possibly three, hearths with dumps of chalk and other layers. Two hearths (72, 75) were exposed within the trench with a third (79) just present within the north eastern section. The hearths comprised fire reddened areas of *c.* 0.8m or more across with discoloration beneath (73, 76) and charcoal rich soil (74, 81) above. The hearths were buried by chalk dumps (70, 80, 82), one of which (80) produced a sherd of medieval pottery. The hearths overlay a grey-black clayey sand with gravel, charcoal flecks and rare chalk flecks (71). This layer was partly investigated by a sondage and 6 sherds of medieval pottery were recovered.

At the northern end of the trench a test pit 1m long and 1.6m wide was dug to a depth of 2.9m (37.65m AOD), which was the maximum reach of the machine within the constricted working space. Beneath the level at which the medieval activity was taking place, this revealed a damp, humic, clayey sand with some gravel. The full depth of this deposit above natural gravel could not be ascertained. No waterlogged organic remains such as peat or timber were noted in this small trench.

## **Finds**

### *Pottery* by Paul Blinkhorn

The pottery assemblage comprised 35 sherds with a total weight of 336g. All the pottery was medieval or later, apart from 3 sherds (22g) of Roman material. The range of post-Roman fabrics indicates that there was activity at the site throughout the period.

### Fabrics

The pottery occurrence by number and weight of sherds per context by fabric type is shown in Appendix 3. The following fabrics were noted:

- F1:** Local fine sandy ware, ?Late 11th – ? 14th century. 14 sherds, 119g. A range of fine sandy fabrics, similar to those noted at the Reading Waterfront excavations (Underwood 1997, 144).
- F2:** Local coarse sandy ware, ?Late 11th – mid 13th century. 6 sherds, 31g. A range of coarse sandy fabrics, similar to those noted at the Reading Waterfront excavations (Underwood 1997, 144).
- F101:** Oxford ware, mid 8th – early 11th century (Mellor 1994, 37–44). 1 sherd, 12g. Predominantly hand-made shelly ware is found at many sites in the Thames Valley from London to Gloucestershire, and to the north at places such as Worcester and Droitwich, where it is thought to be linked to the salt trade (Underwood 1997, 144). It is not possible to date vessels other than to within the life-span of the tradition.

- F202:** Newbury coarsewares, late 11th – early 15th century (Mephram 1997, 51–2). 2 sherds, 16g, Flint, sand and shell tempered ware, probably manufactured in the Savernake Forest (Mephram 1997, 65). It has a wide distribution throughout Berkshire, northern Hampshire and Oxfordshire (Mephram 1997, fig. 29),
- F352:** Brill/Boarstall ware, AD1200 – 1600 (Mellor 1994). 1 sherd, 11g. Fine, wheel-thrown sandy ware, with the earlier products of the industry typified by glazed jugs, with production sites at a small number of villages on the Oxfordshire/Buckinghamshire border. The ware has a wide distribution throughout the south midlands, and has been previously noted in small quantities from sites on the Reading Waterfront (Underwood 1997, 144 and table 16) and also at Broad Street.
- F361:** London ware c. 1150-1350 (Pearce *et al.* 1985). 1 sherd, 5g. Sandy ware, common in small quantities throughout the Home Counties, and at more distant locations such as Exeter, King’s Lynn, Ipswich, Northampton, Hereford, Gloucester and the east coast of Scotland (Pearce *et al.* 1985, 6–7 and figs. 4 and 5). Source unknown, but likely to be close to the City of London, where it occurs in extremely large quantities. The jug was by far the most common form, and these were often highly decorated, sometimes copying imported pottery from Northern France (eg. Pearce *et al.* 1985, pl. 2).
- F403:** ‘Tudor Green’ Ware, late 14th century - c 1550. (Pearce and Vince 1988, 79–81 and figs 126–7). 1 sherd, 1g. Green-glazed, fine sandy whitewares produced in Surrey and northern Hampshire. Other sources are known, such as Ludgershall in Buckinghamshire (Blinkhorn, in press), where potters of the Brill/Boarstall tradition were making some ‘Tudor Green’ type vessels, particularly mugs, in the late 15th – early 16th century.
- F456:** Surrey Whiteware, mid 13th – mid 15th century (Pearce and Vince 1988). 4 sherds, 19g. A range of whitewares from several sources in Surrey, including Kingston and Cheam (Pearce and Vince 1988 figs. SW1 – SW12). Range of vessel forms which changes over time, but the earlier assemblages are dominated by glazed jugs, some with slipped, incised and plastic decoration (eg. Pearce and Vince 1988, figs. SW1, SW6 and SW8). The ware is invariably found on sites of the period in Reading, and occurs on a large number of sites all over southern England (Pearce and Vince 1988, figs 2 – 4).
- F425:** Red Earthenwares, mid 16th – 19th century. 2 sherds, 100g. Fine sandy earthenware, usually with a brown or green glaze, occurring in a range of utilitarian forms.

### *Tile by Clare Challis*

In total, 306 fragments of tile (12.3 kg) were recovered from Trench 1. Of these, 27 fragments (1.160kg) came from the 19th-century contexts (1 and 2). The remaining material is of medieval date and includes peg tiles. Some of the tiles are spotted with a brown glaze. The tile is catalogued in Appendix 4.

### *Metal objects by Clare Challis*

Three iron nails and two small unidentified lumps were recovered from the features and layers in Trench 1. These are detailed in Appendix 5.

### *Animal Bone by Sian Anthony*

A small collection of 39 pieces of animal bone was recovered. Most were in good condition with little weathering, although one piece had possible puncture holes, probably from a dog tooth. The expected range of species is represented, with sheep and cattle bones most prominent, some with chop and cut marks showing butchery. Some bones are unfused, which may give a good indication of age-at-death if a future, larger assemblage is analysed. An unstratified sheep/goat femur shaft (9mm long) from Trench 1 had been sawn on

both sides evenly with visible kerfs. It is possibly a die or gaming token. The collection is detailed in Appendix 6.

## Conclusion

The evaluation has been successful in its main objectives by confirming the presence of medieval archaeology on the site and establishing the depth at which it is present. In Trench 1 to the north, the deposits appear to represent make up layers possibly from deliberate dumping. The upper levels contain later medieval pottery with the prospect that earlier levels, (not explored) are present deeper down. If the auger at the southern end of the trench was drilled through layers and not the localised cut of a discrete, feature, the archaeological strata may be up to 1.5m thick.

The strata in Trench 2 showed a markedly different pattern, and which appears to reflect the significance of the boundary of the Holy Brook culvert. A brick floor above the made ground may relate to a building shown on the Second Edition Ordnance Survey of 1900. The made ground was a little thicker than for Trench 1 and overlay a thicker soil deposit. Below this, some dumping had taken place, but the archaeology of the trench was characterized by the presence of at least two hearths, again of medieval date. A test pit at the northern end of Trench 2 indicated a considerable thickness of humic deposits but did not reveal natural gravel or chalk deposits. No structures relating to the earlier management of the nearby Holy Brook were identified though the test pit was not as close to the Brook as wished due to a need to avoid destabilizing the culvert wall. It was noted, however, that the present Holy Brook water level was higher than archaeology in Trench 2. Coates's map of Reading dated 1802 shows a small structure built across the already culverted (or at least regularized) Holy Brook, on or very close to the rear of the site (Fig. 7). The area would therefore appear to have been subject to quite complex management from the medieval period onwards.

## References

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**APPENDIX 1: Trench details**  
 0m at south or west end

<i>Trench No.</i>	<i>Length (m)</i>	<i>Breadth (m)</i>	<i>Depth (m)</i>	<i>Comment</i>
<b>1</b>	5.2m	1.60m	1.3m	0-0.2m gravel and scalpins; 0.2- 0.95m made ground; 0.95-1.2m buried soil (52); 0.95m+ layers (unexcavated). Chalk natural? in auger hole at 37.36m AOD <b>[Plate 1]</b>
<b>2</b>	4.7m	1.60m	2.0m	0-0.15m gravel; 0.15-0.35m concrete; 0.35-0.55m made ground; 0.55-0.6m brick floor; 0.6m-1.5m made ground; 1.5m-1.85m buried soil 1.85m-2.0m layers and hearths; Test pit N end 1m wide 2.0- 2.9m+ dark grey humic clayey sand with gravel. Natural gravel or chalk not found. <b>[Plate 2]</b>

## APPENDIX 2: Catalogue of Contexts

<i>Trench</i>	<i>Cut</i>	<i>Deposit</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Dating evidence</i>	<i>Date</i>
1	1	50	Pit	coal	19th century
1	2	51	Pit	coal	19th century
1	3	53	Pit?	pottery	13th century
1	4	54, 55	Pit?	pottery	13th century
1		52	Layer	stratigraphy	13th century or later
1		56	Layer	stratigraphy	medieval
1		57	Layer	stratigraphy	medieval
1		58	Layer	stratigraphy	medieval
1		59	Layer	stratigraphy	medieval
1		60	Layer	pottery, stratigraphy	medieval
1		61	Layer	pottery, stratigraphy	medieval
1		62	Layer	pottery, stratigraphy	medieval
1		63	Layer	stratigraphy	medieval
2		70	Layer	stratigraphy	medieval
2		71	Layer	stratigraphy	13th century?
2		72	Hearth	stratigraphy	medieval
2		73	Hearth	stratigraphy	medieval
2		74	Hearth	stratigraphy	medieval
2		75	Hearth	stratigraphy	medieval
2		76	Hearth	stratigraphy	medieval
2		77	Layer	stratigraphy	medieval
2		78	Layer	stratigraphy	medieval/post-medieval
2		79	Hearth	stratigraphy	medieval
2		80	Layer	stratigraphy	medieval
2		81	Layer	stratigraphy	13th century?
2		82	Layer	stratigraphy	medieval

**APPENDIX 3: Pottery occurrence by number and weight (in g) of sherds per context by fabric type**

Trench	Cut	Context	Roman		F1		F2		F101		F202		F361		F352		F456		F403		F425	
			No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt
1		u/s																			1	90
1		52			2	14											1	3				
1		52/53			6	41																
1		60											1	5								
1		61/62			2	22																
1	1	50			1	3																
1	2	51	1	7																		
1	3	53	1	6							1	5			1	11						
1	3	54															1	4				
1	4	55	1	9	3	39					1	11					2	12	1	1	1	10
2		71					5	25	1	12												
2		80					1	6														
		Total	3	22	14	119	6	31	1	12	2	16	1	5	1	11	4	19	1	1	2	100

**APPENDIX 4: Tile and brick by number and weight (in g) of sherds per context**

<i>Cut</i>	<i>Fill</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Weight (kg)</i>	<i>Type(s)</i>
1	50	4	24	Tile fragments
2	51	23	1.136	Tile, inc. two peg tiles
	52	33	1.164	Tile
	52/53	40	1.79	Tile, inc. two peg tiles and several with spotting of brown glaze
	52/55	15	554	Tile, inc. one with spotting of brown glaze
3	53	52	2.358	Tile, inc. one with spotting of brown glaze
3	54	24	1.226	Tile, inc. one peg tile
4	55	98	2.864	Tile, inc. one with spotting of brown glaze
	56	4	16	Tile fragments
	61	2	198	Tile, inc. one peg tile and one with evidence of burning
	61/62	11	916	Tile, inc. one peg tile

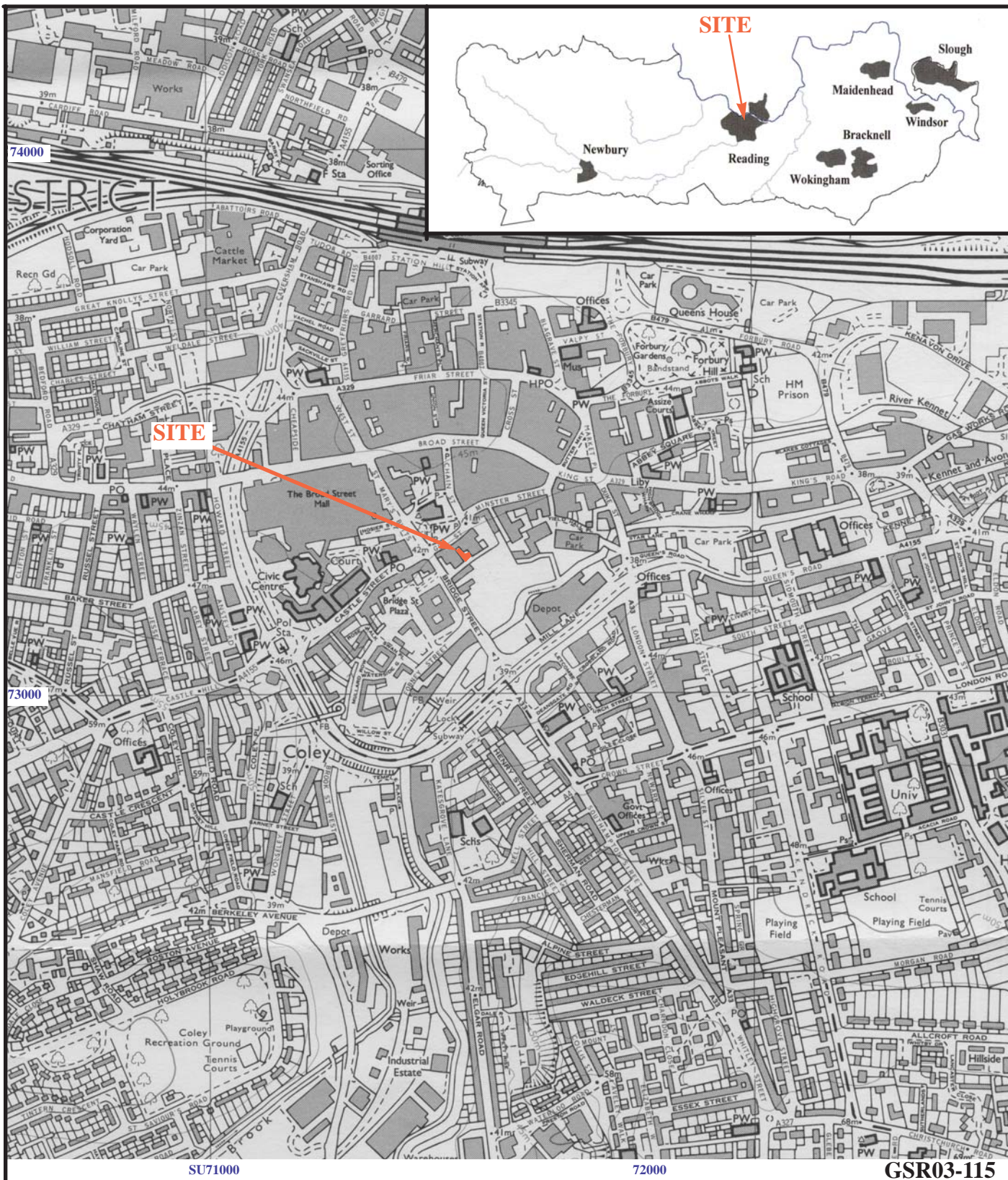
## APPENDIX 5: Catalogue of Iron objects

<i>Cut</i>	<i>Deposit</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Wt (g)</i>	<i>Comment</i>
	52	1	14	Nail head, concreted to a piece of flint
	52	1	10	Nail
4	55	1	6	Nail
4	55	1	4	Small lump
4	55	1	8	Lump

**APPENDIX 6:** Catalogue of faunal remains by context

<i>Trench</i>	<i>Cut</i>	<i>Fill</i>	<i>S/G</i>	<i>S/G size</i>	<i>Cow</i>	<i>Cow size</i>	<i>Pig</i>	<i>Fowl</i>	<i>Unid</i>	<i>Butchery</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Wt (g)</i>
1	-			1						2 saw	1	2
1	2	51			1	2			1	6 cut	4	117
	3	52/53		4	1					-	5	6
	4	52/55				1				-	1	8
	-	61		1						-	1	6
	-	71			1					-	1	2
	4	55	3	3	1	3				-	10	38
	3	54		1						-	2	4
1	3	53		2		2			1	-	5	16
	-	52		5			1	1		-	7	20
	1	50				2				-	2	10
<i>Total</i>			3	17	4	10	1	1	1	8	39	229

S/G: Sheep/goat



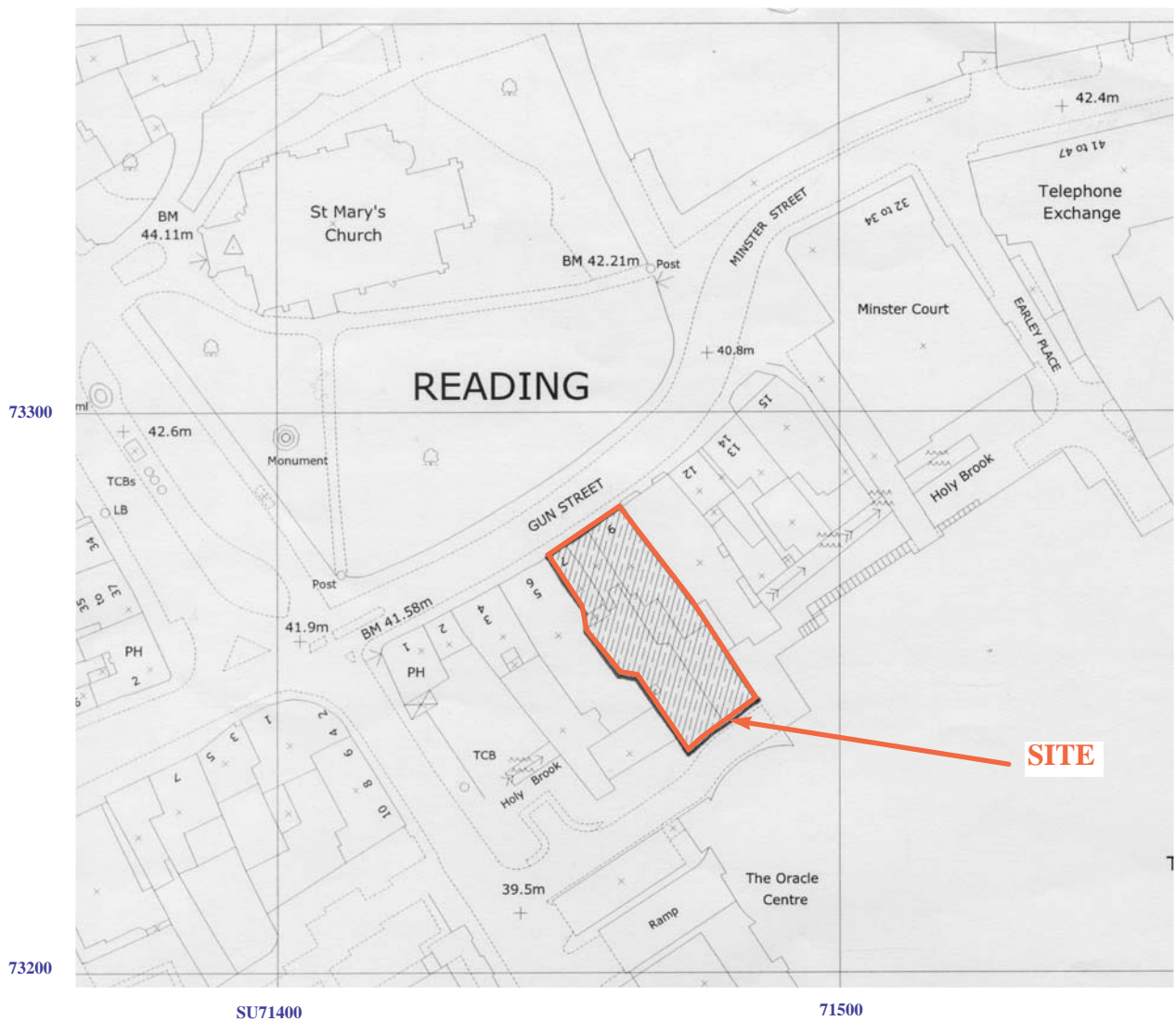
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Figure 1. Location of site within Reading and Berkshire.

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Berkshire, 2003  
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Figure 2. Location of site within Gun Street.

T H A M E S V A L L E Y  
 A R C H A E O L O G I C A L  
 S E R V I C E S

### Rear of 7-9 Gun Street, Reading 2003

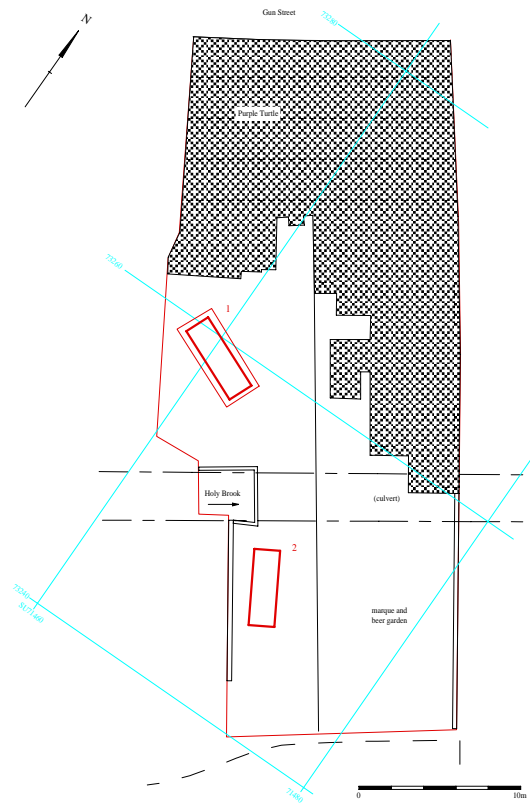


Figure 3. Location of trenches

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# Rear of 7-9 Gun Street, Reading, Berkshire, 2003

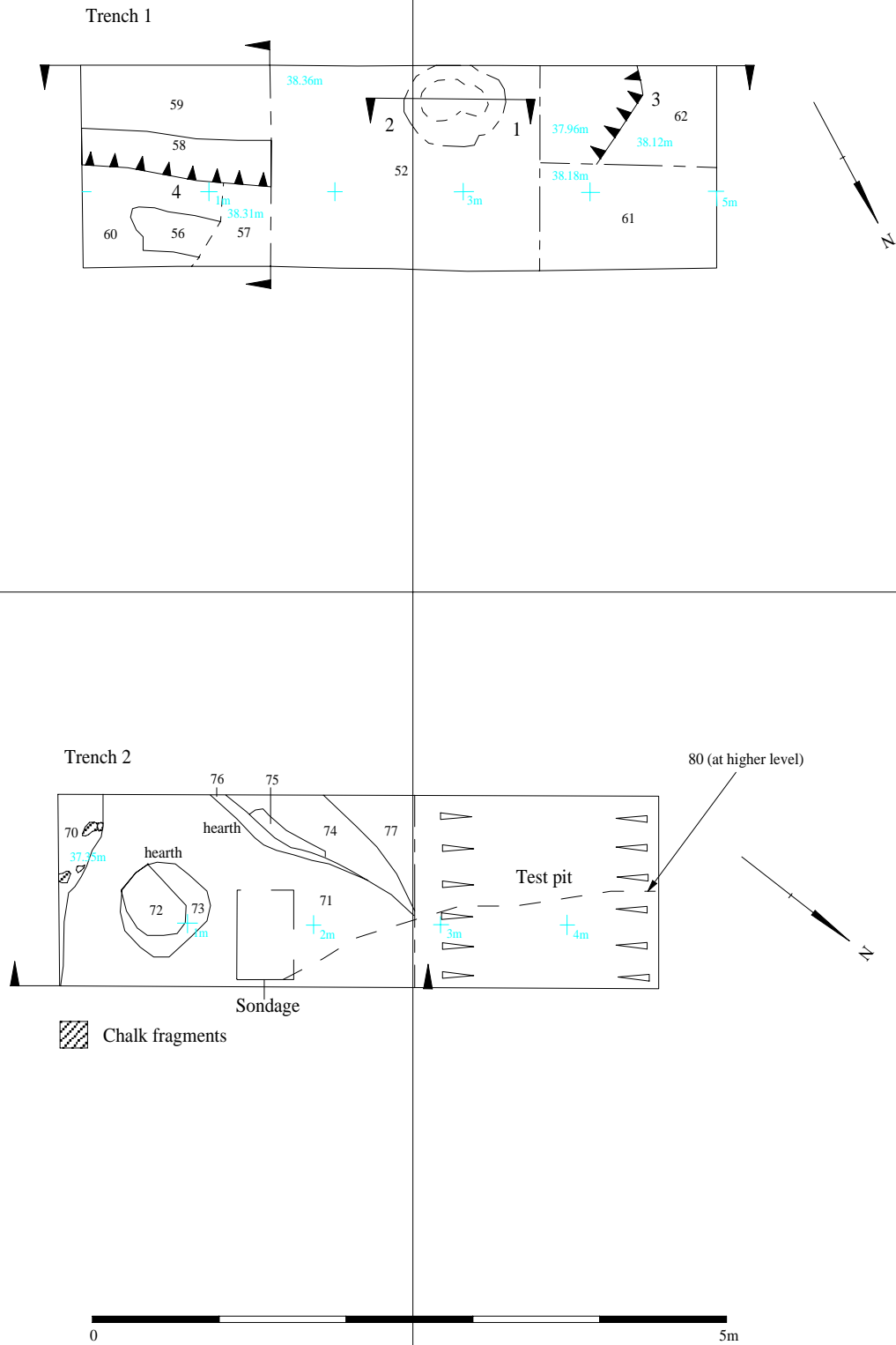


Figure 4. Plans

### Rear of 7-9 Gun Street, Reading, Berkshire, 2003

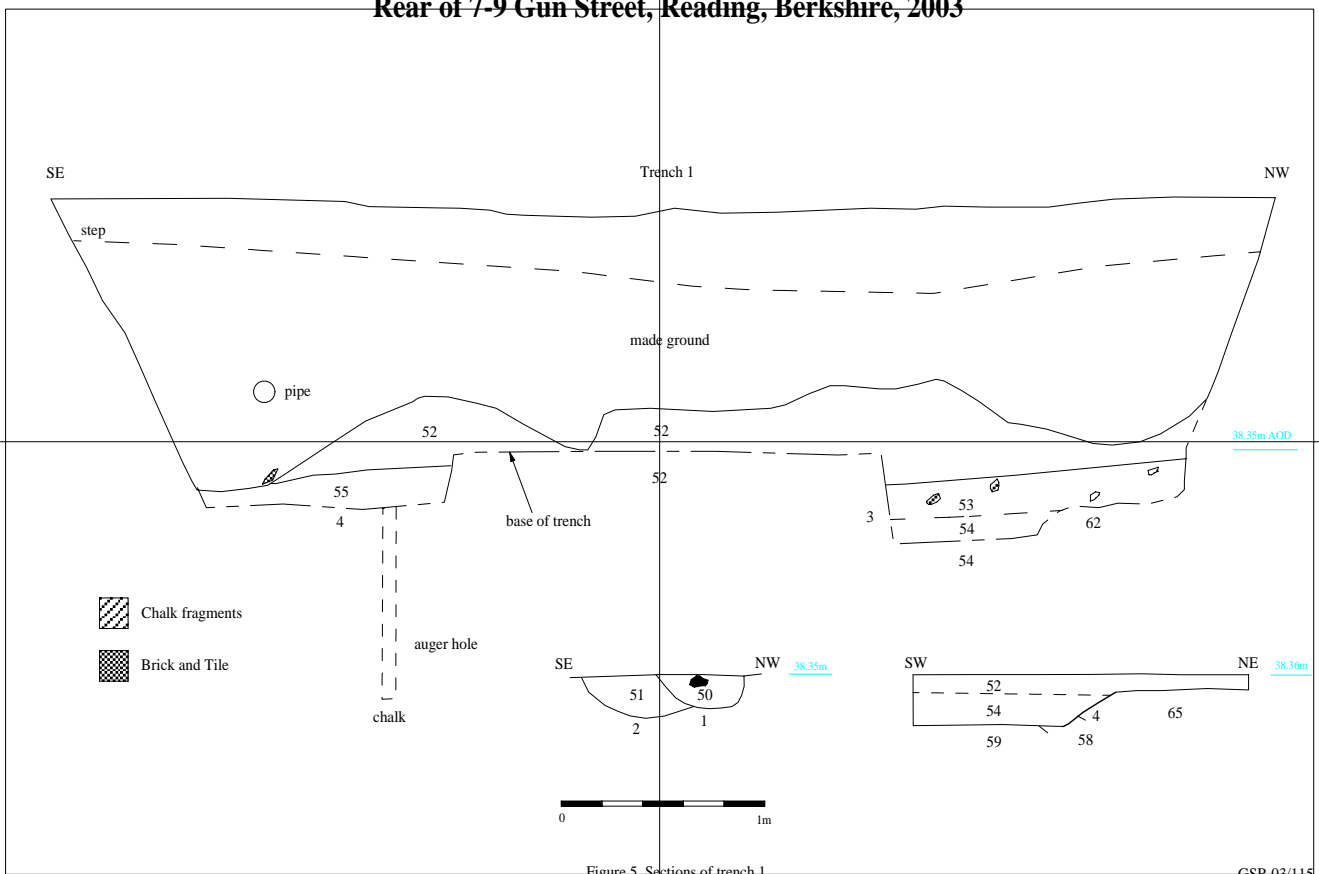


Figure 5. Sections of trench 1

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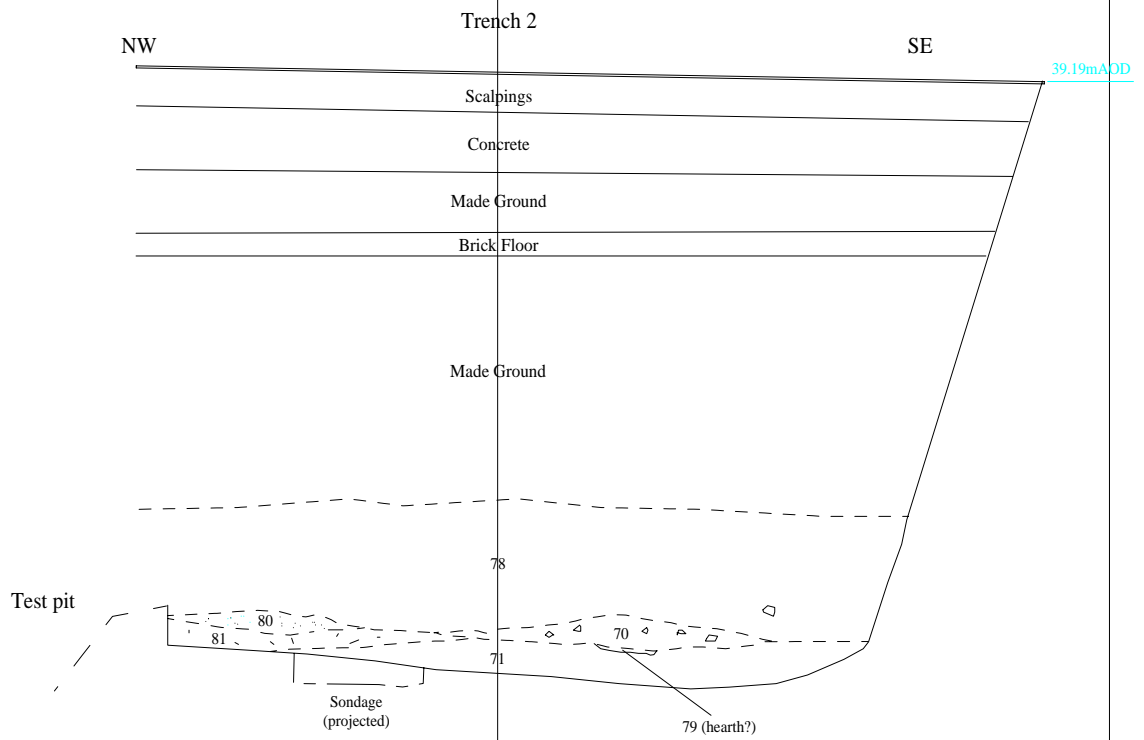
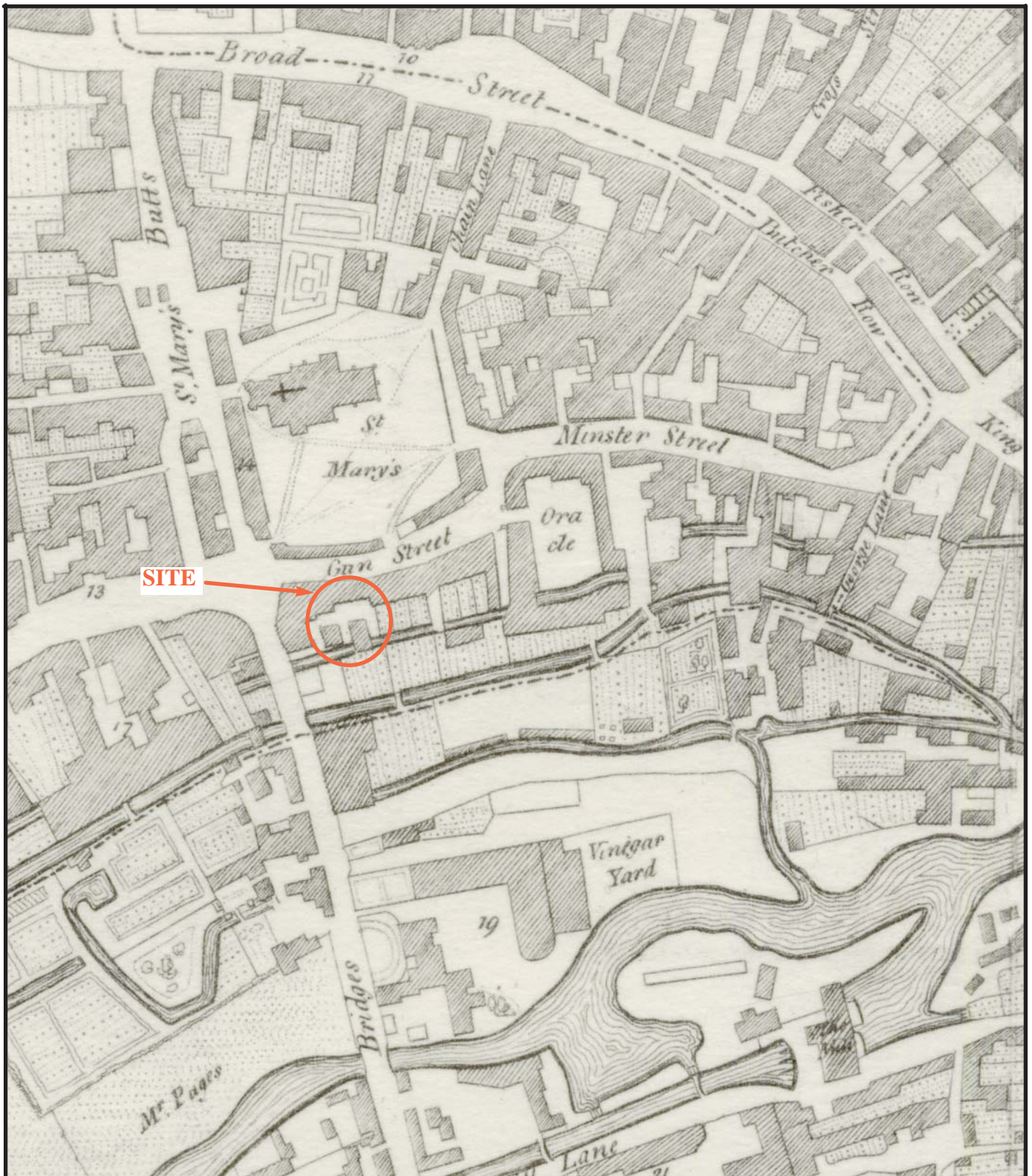


Figure 6. Trench 2, section



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Rear of 7-9 Gun Street, Reading,  
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Figure 7. Detail from Coates' map of Reading, 1802

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