THAMES VALLEY

ARCHAEOLOGICAL

SERVICES

Mereoak Park and Ride, Mereoak Lane, Reading, Berkshire

An archaeological excavation

By James McNicoll-Norbury

Site Code: MPR 14/209

(SU 7100 6780)

Mereoak Park and Ride, Mereoak Lane, Reading, Berkshire

An Archaeological Excavation

For CgMs Consulting

by James McNicoll-Norbury

Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code MPR 14/209

May 2015

Summary

Site name: Mereoak Park and Ride, Mereoak Lane, Reading, Berkshire

Grid reference: SU 7100 6780

Site activity: Excavation

Date and duration of project: 21st October - 14th November 2014

Project manager: Steve Ford

Site supervisor: James McNicoll-Norbury

Site code: MPR 14/209

Area of site: 0.378ha

Summary of results: The excavation revealed further deposits relating to the nearby Late Iron Age/Early Roman settlement previously recorded. The features examined included a small number of linear features, one of which is considered to be the partial remains of an enclosure ditch, along with a small number of pits. Five cremation burials were also recorded, two definitely of early Roman date and three assumed to be contemporary.

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

Report edited/checked by:	Steve Ford✓ 21.05.15
	Steve Preston✓ 19.06.15

Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd, 47–49 De Beauvoir Road, Reading RG1 5NR
Tel. (0118) 926 0552; Fax (0118) 926 0553; email tvas@tvas.co.uk; *website: www.tvas.co.uk*

Mereoak Lane Park and Ride, Mereoak Lane, Reading, Berkshire
An Archaeological Excavation

by James McNicoll-Norbury

Report 14/209

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological excavation carried out at Mereoak Lane, Reading, Berkshire (SU7100 6780) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Ms Sally Dicks of CgMs Consulting on behalf of the Reading Area Local Sustainable Transport Fund (LSTF) Partnership.

In 2007 a programme of archaeological trial trenching was undertaken on the site, which recorded late Iron Age/early Roman features (Cass 2007). A further phase of fieldwork was undertaken ahead of the construction of a compound for A33 widening and related drainage work. This comprised a watching brief on the removal of topsoil and an excavation along the A33 widening and related drainage work (Milbank 2008).

The construction of the park and ride was to involve cut and fill to create a level surface, which would have the potential to impact on archaeological remains. In order to comply with condition 20 attached to the planning permission (planning ref. F/2013/0884) granted by Wokingham Borough Council, a programme of archaeological strip, map and record excavation was required.

This is in accordance with the Department for Communities and Local Government's *National Planning Policy Framework* (NPPF 2012) and the Borough's policies on archaeology. The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Mr Roland Smith of Berkshire Archaeology. The fieldwork was undertaken by James McNicoll-Norbury, William Attard and Sophie Frampton between 21st October and 14th November 2014 and the site code is MPR 14/209.

The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited at an approved local museum in due course.

Location, topography and geology

The site is located on a parcel of land adjacent to the A33 between Reading and Basingstoke, just south of junction 11 of the M4 (Fig. 1). The A33 lies to the east of the site and Mereoak Lane bounds the site to the west, to the north lies land formerly used for work on the A33 and to the south a slip road linking the A33 to Mereoak Lane. (Fig. 2). The site was formerly in use as a contractors compound during widening works of the A33 and is generally flat with a concrete track running through the site. The underlying geology is described as London clay

to the east and valley gravel to the west (BGS 1946). The gravels were predominantly what was observed on site, with a strip of clay along the eastern edge, and the site lies at 40m above Ordnance Datum.

Archaeological background

The site's location on the margins of the Kennet Valley/Foudry Brook immediately suggested generalized archaeological potential. Extensive archaeological deposits, of both prehistoric and Roman dates, have been found a short distance to the north at Green Park and Reading Business Park (Brossler *et al*. 2004; Moore and Jennings 1992) and field survey and aerial photography have indicated the presence of further remains in the vicinity (Lobb and Rose 1996; Gates 1975). The fieldwork at Green Park and Reading Business Park revealed extensive later Bronze Age occupation set amidst an organized landscape of field systems. Late Neolithic and early Bronze Age occupation and burial were also recorded. Roman field boundaries or enclosures of 2nd- to 3rd-century date were also present but without an occupation area being discovered (Moore and Jennings 1992).

Evaluation at Little Lea Farmhouse, also to the north, revealed occupation of early Roman date along with medieval deposits (Howell and Ford 1994). Subsequent excavation there showed the settlement originated in the middle or late Iron Age. The extent of that site is not known, although it included several enclosures (Booth *et al*. 2007, fig. 3.5). Evaluation on Whitley Wood Lane to its east did not reveal any further archaeological deposits in that direction (Milbank 2010). In addition, evaluation and excavation of land immediately adjacent to the current site, on the eastern side of the A33, revealed an area of early-middle Iron Age occupation including iron production (Ford et al. 2013), a medieval gully (Hammond 2005) and further Roman deposits have been excavated to the north-west at Hartley Court Farm (Moore and Jennings 1992, 124) and Pingewood (Lobb 1985, 99; Bowden and Johnston 1986) More recent work at Moore's Farm, Pingewood, uncovered prehistoric and Roman settlement evidence in an area already known for extensive cropmark evidence (OAU 2000). Just to the southwest, in Grazeley, evaluation had also revealed late Iron Age and early Roman fields or enclosures, and later Roman ditches (WA 1999).

Not much further afield, the Loddon valley to the west seems to have a similar pattern of settlement, with fieldwalking finds (Ford 1997) and small investigations routinely showing occupation in the Roman period. The projected line of a Roman road from Silchester to St Albans, via Henley, might pass through or near the area, but evidence for this is almost entirely speculative.

The evaluation on this site (Cass 2007) revealed a concentration of linear features in the area subsequently excavated both in the previous phase of work to the south, and here. Of the features within the current area, few

could be dated, but several, which all turn out to be in ditch 101 (see below) did produce a reasonable assemblage (81 sherds) of mainly early Roman pottery. Features from both the evaluation (Cass 2007) and the excavation to the south (Milbank 2010) are shown in grey on Figure 2.

Objectives and methodology

The purpose of the archaeological works was to establish the character, date, state of preservation and extent of any archaeological remains within the proposed development.

Specific aims of the project included:-

establishing the presence and absence, character and significance of any remains of late Iron Age/Roman activity and to define the date and nature of such activity;

to establish the presence and absence, character and significance of any other remains from other periods;

to determine the survival, extent and minimum depth below modern ground level of such remains;

to determine the nature and significance of any archaeological deposits;

to establish the environmental context of the late Iron Age/early Roman activity; and

to evaluate the likely impact of past land use and development.

The excavation areas were stripped down to the archaeological horizon using a 360^0 machine fitted with a toothless ditching bucket under constant archaeological supervision. Identified archaeological deposits were to be hand cleaned and excavated. A summary of all excavated features, with phasing, is given as Appendix 1.

Results

The excavation was carried out in two areas of the site targeting known archaeological deposits from the previous evaluation. Topsoil and modern made ground was removed using bulldozers and the subsoil was stripped using a 360^0 machine fitted with a toothless ditching bucket.

Area 1 (Figs. 2-5; Pls 1-8)

The stratigraphy of Area 1 comprised topsoil overlying made ground and small amounts of subsoil less than 0.10m deep overlying gravel. A small number of linear features and pits were identified as well as five cremations.

Late Iron Age/early Roman Linear features

Ditch 103 was aligned NW-SE and measured 37.5m in length, 1.10m wide and up to 0.34m deep. The ditch had been previously located by the evaluation where a single slot was excavated, a second linear feature to the north may also be the continuation of it. A further three slots were excavated (12, 13 and 16) which revealed a rounded base profile with a single fill from which late Iron Age pottery was recovered. The ditch is cut by furrow 100, it is likely that the ditch has a relationship with ditch 106 however, where such a relationship would have occurred both features had been disturbed by the usage of the site as a compound.

Ditch 104 was aligned almost north–south and measured 28m in length, 0.98-1.11m wide and up to 0.32m deep. It was previously identified during the evaluation where a single slot was excavated. Three slots were excavated (15, 17 and 28) which revealed steep sides and a flat base and containing a single deposit of grey silt from which Iron Age pottery was recovered. This ditch may have continued into the previous excavation to the south where it terminated (feature 116 in Milbank 2010) but this is uncertain, and feature 116 contained a single sherd of later Roman (3rd/4th century) pottery, alongside an assemblage of earlier Roman pottery.

Ditch 105 was aligned S-N before turning NE and measured 27.68m in length, 0.98-1.10m wide and up to 0.35m deep. Three slots were excavated (27, 30 and 32) which revealed steep sides and a rounded base and containing a single deposit of grey silt from which Iron Age pottery and fired clay were recovered.

Ditch 106 was aligned W-E and measured 44.64m in length, 0.44-0.91m wide and up to 0.13m deep, the ditch was previously identified during the evaluation where two slots were excavated and possibly a third. A further three slots were excavated (29, 33 and 34) which revealed a shallow sided, flat based linear containing a single fill of grey silt from which no finds were recovered. Although itself undated it is reasonably clear that this ditch forms a rectangular enclosure with ditches 103, 104 and probably 105.

Roman Linear features

Ditch 102 was aligned NW-SE and measured 8.92m in length, 0.85m wide and 0.12m deep, a single slot was excavated (10) which revealed a flat base and shallow sides containing a single deposit of grey silt from which fragments of ceramic building material were recovered. The ditch is possibly the continuation of a linear feature (211) found in previous excavation (Milbank 2010), which was dated to the early Roman period. It was truncated by furrow 100, just at the point where its relationship to ditch 101 might have been visible, but ceramically it appears earlier than the latter.

Ditch 101 was a curved ditch running NW from the edge of the site before turning and assuming a NE alignment and measured 64.28m in length, 1.10-2.18m in width and up to 1.01m deep. The ditch was previously identified from the evaluation where four slots were excavated, three of which produced early Roman pottery. A

further four slots (9, 19, 20 and 21) were excavated as part of the excavation. The excavated slots revealed a large steep sided ditch with a rounded base with a small number of fills made up of accumulated silt from which late Iron Age and 2nd-century Roman pottery was recovered. It is possible that the ditch was recut (18) as shown in the slot of cut 19 which contained pottery and metal fragments, it is therefore possible that the ditch may have been originally cut during the late Iron Age and was used again later in the Roman period. The ditch was clearly seen to be cut by ditch 100.

Cremations

Five cremations were found on the site, all to north and/or west of ditch 101. Cremation 22 measured 0.19m in diameter and was 0.05m deep, contained within the cut was the partial remains of the urn (77) which in turn contained the cremated remains (76). Cremation 23 measuring 0.17m in diameter and 0.04m deep was also found to contain the partial remains of an urn (79) with cremated remains contained within. To the north were cremations 24, 26 and 31 measuring between 0.24 and 0.35m in diameter and up to 0.20m in depth, however these cremations contained no ceramic remains. The cremations were excavated in spits of 0.02m which were in turn 100% sampled for complete recovery of all bone, finds and environmental remains. Both the urns can be dated to the early Roman period, and the un-urned cremations may be of similar date (although a Late Iron Age date is not ruled out). Charcoal was present in all samples but identifiable fragments only from cremation 31 (where it was all of oak); no other plant remains were present in these deposits, and there were no additional finds other than the burial urns.

Pits and Postholes

Eight discrete features were identified during the excavation: 1-5, 7, 8 and 25,with all but the latter located to the eastern side of ditch 101. The features were all filled with a single episode of grey brown silt and their dimensions and finds recovered are listed below.

Cut	*Fill*	*Diameter (m)*	*Depth (m)*	*Finds*
1	53	0.30	0.09	Pottery (1 chip)
2	54	0.40	0.11	Pottery (2 sherds), tile (1 chip)
3	55	0.65	0.15	Pottery (4 sherds)
4	56	0.26	0.08	Pottery (2 crumbs)
5	58	0.28	0.14	Pottery (1 chip)
7	59	0.41	0.09	None
8	60	0.85	0.25	None
25	81	0.30	0.13	None

Medieval? furrows

Furrow 100 was aligned NW-SE and measured 24.10m in length, 1.30-1.40m wide and up to 0.20m deep. Three slots were excavated (6, 11 and 14), from which no finds were recovered. The furrow truncated ditches 101, 102 and 103.

A similarly aligned feature was found to the north that truncated Ditches 103, 104 and 105 and contained modern debris and is possibly a continuation of a large modern anomaly found to the east.

Area 2 (Fig. 2)

Area 2 was located to the north of Area 1 and the stratigraphy comprised 0.20 Tarmac and concrete overlaying various levels of made ground (including services) which in turn overlay natural alluvial gravels.

Despite the presence of archaeological deposits identified during the previous evaluation of the site no archaeological deposits were identified due to more recent use of the area as a compound, the foundations of which and associated services truncated the archaeological horizon.

Finds

Pottery by Jane Timby

The excavation at Mereoak Lane produced a moderately small assemblage of 308 sherds weighing 2560g comprising material of later prehistoric (Later Iron Age) and Roman date (Appendix 2).

The assemblage was sorted into fabrics based on the colour, texture and nature of the inclusions present in the clay. Known named or traded Roman wares were coded using the National Roman fabric reference system (Tomber and Dore 1998) (codes in brackets). Other wares, generally of local origin, were coded more generically according to colour and main fabric inclusions.

The sorted assemblage was quantified by sherd count and weight for each recorded context. Freshly broken sherds were counted as single pieces. Rims were additionally coded to general form. A summary of the main ware types and associated forms can be found in Appendix 2; more detail is held in the archive.

In general terms the assemblage was in poor condition with well-fragmented, very leached sherds. Many pieces had lost their original surfaces and any original finish. The overall average sherd weight was 8.3g. Despite this there are a few instances of multiple sherds from the same vessels.

Pottery was recovered from 14 defined features comprising pits, postholes and ditches. Quantities ranged from single sherds up to a maximum of 154 sherds from ditch 101 (slot 9).

<u>Later Prehistoric</u>

The later prehistoric assemblage can be broadly divided into flint-tempered, grog-tempered and sandy wares. Flint-tempered sherds dominated, many in a coarse flint-tempered fabric analogous to Silchester ware,

considered to be made locally. Also present are other fabric variants with sparse flint inclusions. Overall this group accounts for 31.8% of the assemblage by count. Forms include internally thickened rim jars.

Grog-tempered wares account for 10.3% of the assemblage. Forms are mainly limited to handmade forms, largely jars with at least one necked bowl. Sandy wares, some of which may be Roman, account for 7.5%.

Roman

The Roman pottery is dominated by a diverse range of 'local' coarse wares with a few continental and regional imports. Continental imported wares are limited to two abraded sherds of South Gaulish samian (LGF SA) and eight sherds from a fish-sauce *amphora* from Cadiz (CAD AM). Regional imports include three sherds of Dorset black burnished ware (DOR BB1) and possibly some Oxfordshire white ware (OXF WH) and reduced wares from the Alice Holt-Farnham industries (ALH RE). Other wares mainly comprised grey sandy wares of uncertain source.

Chronology

Although wares of later Iron Age, early Roman and later Roman date can be discerned there are several instances, as within ditch 101, where sherds of different date come from the same feature suggesting a high level of residuality present or disturbance of upper levels.

Five features produced single small sherds weighing 1g or less which cannot be closely dated. Two of these came from ditch 101 which is dateable from other material; the others from postholes 1 and 5.

Ditches 103, 104 and 105 produced small assemblages which seem to indicate a late Iron Age or early Roman date. Similarly pit 3 and posthole 4 have later Iron Age material.

The pottery from posthole 2 includes a sherd of South Gaulish samian suggesting a date in the second half of the 1st century AD or later. Cremation burials 22 and 23 each produced multiple sherds of grey sandy ware from the lower half of jar forms. There are no diagnostic sherds present. The ware could suggest a date from the later 1st or early 2nd century.

The largest group of material came from ditch 101 with some 212 sherds, 69% of the total recovered assemblage. This group of material is very mixed with several sherds of Later Iron Age-early Roman date. The *terminus post quem* is provided by a sherd of Dorset black burnished are jar from slot 18 (70) decorated with an oblique line lattice indicating a date from the mid-later 3rd century onwards. Some of the grey sandy wares from cut 20 could be equally late.

The assemblage recovered from this phase of work at Mereoak Lane is very similar to the larger assemblage reported on from Three Mile Cross (Timby 2010). Here the assemblage was dated to the pre-Roman period continuing into the 2nd century with potentially a hiatus and minor later re-use in the later Roman period. It is possible that the later Roman sherds from ditch 101 reflect this later use of the site and the ditches were open at an earlier date.

Burnt Bone by Ceri Falys

Small amounts of burnt bone were recovered from five contexts. Each deposit of bone was whole-earth recovered on site, in a series of 0.02m thick spits. During the post-excavation processing, the samples containing the bone were floated and wet-sieved to a 1mm mesh size, with all burnt bone and any other associated residues separated for further analysis. The bone from each spit was sorted using a sieve stack of 10mm, 5mm, and 2mm mesh sizes, and weighed. As demonstrated by Appendix 3, which provides a detailed summary of each context of bone, the deposits of burnt bone varied greatly in quantity. The total weights ranged to between 4g and 122g.

In general, the burnt bone was poorly preserved, with a chalky texture and worn and rounded appearance. A high degree of fragmentation was present, as detailed by Appendix 4. Maximum fragment sizes ranged between 9.7mm and 36.1mm in length, however, these measurements were unusual compared to the rest of the bone in the deposits. With the exception of context (78), which contained a few fragments of bone that were grey in colour, all bone was uniformly white in colour. This indicates the bone was subjected to an efficient cremation process (i.e., an adequate time, temperature and oxygen supply was applied to the skeleton to allow for the organic components of the bone to be fully oxidized).

Every piece of bone was subjected to osteological analysis following procedures suggested by Brickley and McKinley (2004) and Buikstra and Ubelaker (1994). The lack of element duplication or identification of differing states of skeletal development, a minimum number of one individual was present in this deposit.

The poor preservation greatly limited the amount of information able to be retrieved from the fragments. The most frequently preserved elements that allowed identification were portions of the cranial vault. Non-descript fragments of long bone shafts made the bulk of the assemblage. No pieces of bone were identifiable in (87), and as a result, it was not possible to determine whether this deposit is human or animal in origin. The remaining four contexts contained burnt human remains (76, 78, 80 and 82).

Duplication of skeletal elements was not found in any context, which suggested a minimum of one individual in each. Due to the lack of suitably preserved aspects of the skeleton, the sex and the age at death of

the individuals represented in the deposits of burnt bone could not be determined with any specificity. Tentative designations of age (i.e. adult, 20+ years; non-adult, <20 years) were based solely on the overall thicknesses of the cranial vault fragments and the cortical bone of the long bone shaft fragments. The thickness of these elements suggested deposits (76, 78 and 82) were likely adult at the time of death. In comparison, the cranial bones and long bone shafts recovered from (80) were very thin and gracile, and were suggestive of a non-adult individual. Assessments of sex could not be determined (i.e. indeterminate sex).

Although evidence of pathological conditions and non-metric traits was investigated on all bone fragments, the degree of preservation and fragmentation masked any alterations present. No further information could be retrieved from these remains. To summarize, four of the deposits of burnt human bone each contained the remains of a single individual (three adults and one non-adult), all of indeterminate sex. The fifth context (87) contained a minimal amount of unidentifiable bone. The degree of fragmentation was exceptional, and hindered the majority of osteological analysis. McKinley (1993) investigated the amount of burnt bone expected from the cremation of complete adult individuals using information gained from modern crematoria. These values were found to range between 1001.5g to 2442.5g, with an average of 1625.9g. Admittedly, all contexts of burnt bone from this site are lower than this expected weight range. It is, however, still suggested that the majority of these deposits do in fact represent human cremation burials. It has been noted that a common practice in the past was to deposit only some of the calcined bone from a cremated individual, representing a symbolic/token interment **(**McKinley 2006**)**. It is likely this is a contributing factor to these smaller deposits of burnt bone.

Ceramic Building Materials by Danielle Milbank

A total of 290g of ceramic building material (15 fragments) were recovered during the recording action. Of these, the majority of identifiable fragments were tile, with several brick fragments also identified. A significant proportion of the material comprised small fragments that could not be identified. The vast majority of the material is of likely Roman date. The condition of the majority of the fragments was fair, though a small proportion was highly fragmented and fairly to very abraded. The pieces were examined under x10 magnification.

A sieved soil sample (5) from context 2 (54) contained a very small fragment (1g) of a sandy orange fabric which could not be identified or dated.

Context 9 deposit (61) contained 12 fragments (88g) of a range of fabrics,. A second fabric type comprises a fine, medium hard sandy fabric with an orange colour. An example of this type represents a piece of the flange of a *tegula* roof tile, however it is a small fragment and the overall thickness of the tile could not be determined.

Deposit 10 (62) contained a single fragment of brick (12g) which is a fine sandy fabric with occasional groggy inclusions and a pink red colour, and could not be closely dated.

Context 18 (70) contained a single piece of brick (189g) which is a hard fabric with frequent coarse and medium sand inclusions and sparse fine groggy inclusions. The base is rough suggesting a sandy mould and the colour is a pale orange red with grey parts suggestive of reducing conditions during firing. A small amount of corroded iron on one corner indicates the presence of an iron nail, sometimes used to hold fittings such as iron clamps in place.

Overall, the ceramic building material assemblage recovered from the site is modest, and can be characterised as domestic, based on the forms present (plain roof tile and brick). Of the three main types of *tegula* form (those with profiles which are square, those rounded on one side, and those which are rounded on both), the example from this site is of the first form. This is a commonly-occurring type and is formed by pulling up the sides of the rectangular clay form against a flat surface (Brodribb 1987).

Burnt clay by Danielle Milbank

A total of 6 contexts produced fired clay (total weight 331) which was typically in small quantities and highly fragmented. These are summarized in Appendix 6. Three larger pieces (230g) were recovered from ditch 9 (61) which were of a fine slightly soft clay fabric with a brown red colour. The pieces have a black core suggestive of reducing conditions during firing, and although the form is uneven the pieces each have one fairly flat side and possibly represent pieces of a clay object such as a loomweight.

The small pieces were of a largely homogenous, soft clay fabric with no notable inclusions. None of the smaller fragments were recovered which have any characteristics to suggest they represent fired clay for a particular functions, although it is possible that they represent daub fragments.

Burnt Flint by James McNicoll-Norbury

A total of 62 fragments of burnt flint were recovered from three separate contexts that weighed a total of 125g.

Environmental Remains by Rosalind McKenna

A programme of soil sampling was implemented during the excavation, which included the collection of soil samples from sixteen sealed contexts, and numerous sub-samples from cremations excavated in spits. Details of

methodology are in the site archive. The preservation of the charred remains was very poor. The only remains recorded were a single indeterminate cereal grain from pit 3.

Charcoal fragments were present in the majority of the samples, but again the preservation was poor. Identifiable remains were present in small numbers in just three of the samples (Appendix 7). The identifiable charcoal was all of oak (*Quercus*). It is possible that this was the preferred fuel wood obtained from a local environment containing a broader choice of species. Whilst oak tends to be the most commonly used wood for cremation pyres, it may be over-represented in the record due to its robust heartwood. The high temperatures reached during the cremation process would have burnt up the majority of other species, thus favouring the preservation and recording of oak. As oak is the only species recorded here it probably represents the fuel from the heart of the cremation process as opposed to the kindling at its extents.

Conclusion

The excavation has revealed occupation, landscape and funerary features of late Iron Age and early Roman date which add to those found in adjacent areas to the east, and has enhanced an understanding of the previously recorded settlement. As before, the deposits excavated are of similar date, that is with the site being initially occupied during the late Iron Age or early Roman period and continuing in use until the 2nd or 3rd century AD. The majority of the deposits identified were in the form of shallow linear features which probably formed parts of small enclosures probably in use as paddocks or pens. This, together with the paucity of charred plant (cereal) remains both here and on the earlier phase of excavation (Milbank 2010, 16) may indicate an emphasis on a pastoral agricultural economy. A similar paucity of evidence for cereals was found on the Middle Iron Age site to the east (Ford *et al*. 2013, 56) and perhaps this reflects the low-lying setting of this location being unsuitable for arable use.

The previous excavation revealed a number of linear features considered to represent a miscellany of small enclosures and pens which were remodelled through time, but otherwise the site was considered to be unenclosed. However, the excavations described above, revealed a segment of a relatively large curving ditch (101) which may have served as an enclosure. The ground plan is not, though, entirely clear. The southern extension, if it traversed the previous excavation area, coincided with a zone of disturbance from a former field boundary and it was not observed there. Its north-eastern limit may have terminated in the previous excavation area (as 103) but no continuation was observed further to the east unless it lies beneath the A33 bypass.

Finally, this phase of excavation also revealed five burials comprising cremated bone deposits, both urned and un-urned, though it is clear that only a fraction of the original cremated bone had survived or had been placed in the burials. They were not placed in a single dedicated area that could be described as a cemetery, but were widely dispersed as isolated single burials or just a pair. The cremation rite is typical of the later Iron Age and earlier Roman period in much of south-eastern England, but in the middle to upper Thames region, later Iron Age burials are very rare (Booth *et al*. 2007, 209) and early Roman cremations tend to be found in small groups of graves or isolated burials (for the environs of Reading, see Preston 2010, Appendix 2), rather than the organized cemeteries seen in, for example, Sussex, Essex or Hertfordshire. even where large areas are explored, and settlement sites of the same date revealed, burials remain surprisingly rare (for example, several large sites in the vicinity of Slough combined, produced not a single deposit of human bone that could be dated to these periods: Preston 2012; while further afield, at Ducklington (Oxon), excavations of over 100ha produced just eight cremation and three inhumation burials, presumed Roman: Booth and Simmonds 2011) Exceptions do occur, however, with more organized cemeteries apparent around major centres such as Silchester (Taylor 2011, J Creighton pers. comm.), Dorchester, or along major roads, as at Staines (Booth *et al.* 2011, 224–5), or very rarely, apparently in isolated locations (Hood and Walton 1948). In many cases, outside these few cemeteries, it is suspected that the burial of (un-urned) cremated bone may be incidental ('redeposited pyre debris') rather than an integral par of the rite, and, often, difficult to date. Urned burials, of course, are clearly deliberate, even when, as here, they contain little bone.

It is intended to publish the site in full to complement the previous excavations in the area. The archive will be deposited with an appropriate local museum once one has been designated for this area.

References

BGS, 1946, *British Geological Survey*, 1:50000, Sheet 268, Drift Edition, Keyworth

Booth, P, Dodd, A, Robinson, M and Smith, A, 2007, *The Thames through Time: The Archaeology of the Gravel Terraces of the Upper and Middle Thames: The early historical period AD1–1000*, Oxford Archaeol Thames Valley Landscapes Monogr **27**, Oxford

Booth, P and Simmonds, A, 2011, 'Gill Mill, Ducklington and south Leigh, oxfordshire; post-excavation assessment and project design', Oxford Archaeol unpubl rep, Oxford

Bowden, M and Johnston, J, 1986, 'Excavations at Pingewood', *Berkshire Archaeol J* **72** (for 1983–5), 17–52

Brickley, M and McKinley, J (eds), 2004, *Guidelines to the Standards for Recording Human Remains*, IFA Pap **7**, Reading

Brodribb, G, 1987, *Roman Brick and Tile,* Gloucester

Brossler, A, Early, R and Allen, C, 2004, *Green Park (Reading Business Park), Phase 2 excavations 1995 – Neolithic and Bronze Age sites*, Oxford Archaeol Thames Valley Landscapes Monogr **19**, Oxford

Buikstra, J E and Ubelaker, D H, 1994, *Standards for data collection from human skeletal remains,* Arkansas Archaeological Survey Research Series, **44**, Fayetteville, Ark.

Cass, S, 2007, 'Mereoak Lane, Three Mile Cross, Reading, Berkshire, An Archaeological Evaluation', TVAS unpubl rep **07/102**, Reading

Ford, S, 1997, 'Loddon Valley (Berkshire) fieldwalking survey', *Berkshire Archaeol J* 75 (for 1994–7), 11–33

Ford, S, Pine, J and Weale, A, 2013, 'Middle Iron Age occupation and iron production and a late Saxon hearth at Grazeley Road, Three Mile Cross, Reading, Berkshire', in S Preston (ed) *Iron Age Iron Production Sites in Berkshire: Excavations 2003–2012,* TVAS Monogr 16, Reading, 36–59

Gates, T, 1975, *The Thames Valley, An Archaeological Survey of the River Gravels*, Berkshire Archaeol Comm Pubn **1**, Reading

Hammond S, 2005, 'Land adjoining Milestone Cottage, Basingstoke Road, Three Mile Cross, Reading, Berkshire, an archaeological evaluation', Thames Valley Archaeol Services rep 05/104, Reading

Hood, S and Walton, H, 1948, 'A Romano-British cremating place and burial ground on Roden Down, Compton, Berks', *Trans Newbury Dist Fld Club* **9**, 10–62

Howell, I and Ford S, 1994, 'Little Lea Farmhouse, Reading, Berkshire, an archaeological evaluation', TVAS unpubl rep **94/42**, Reading

Lobb, S, 1985, 'Trust for Wessex Archaeology', in P Chadwick, 'Berkshire Archaeological Notes', *Berkshire Archaeol J* **71** (for 1981–2), 99

Lobb, S J and Rose, P G, 1996, *Archaeological Survey of the Lower Kennet Valley, Berkshire,* Wessex Archaeol Rep **9**, Salisbury

McKinley, J I, 1993, 'Bone fragment size and weights of bone from modern British cremations and its implications for the interpretation of archaeological cremations', *Int J Osteoarchaeol* **3**, 283–7

McKinley, J I, 2006, 'Cremation…the cheap option?', in R Gowlands and C Knusel (eds), *Social Archaeology of Funerary Remains*, Oxford, 81–8

Milbank, D, 2008, 'Horseman Coach Depot, Whitley Wood Lane, Reading, Berkshire: an archaeological evaluation', TVAS unpubl rep rep **08/94**, Reading

Milbank, D, 2010, 'Roman landscape features at Mereoak Lane, Three Mile Cross', in S Preston (ed), *Archaeological Investigations to the south of Reading, 2002-2008*, TVAS Monogr **13**, 1–19

Moore, J and Jennings, D, 1992, *Reading Business Park: a Bronze Age landscape*, Oxford Archaeol Thames Valley landscapes: the Kennet Valley Vol **1**, Oxford

NPPF 2012, *National Planning Policy Framework*, Dept Communities and Local Govt, London

OAU, 2000, 'Moores Farm, Burghfield, Berkshire; post-excavation assessment and research design', Oxford Archaeol Unit rep, Oxford

Preston, S (ed), 2010, *Archaeological Investigations to the south of Reading, 2002-2008*, TVAS Monogr **13**, Reading

Preston, S (ed), 2011, *Archaeological Investigations in the Silchester Hinterland*, TVAS Monogr **9**, Reading

Preston, S (ed), 2012, *Settlement and Landscape Archaeology in the Middle Thames Valley: Slough and Environs*, TVAS Monogr **14**, Reading

Schweingruber, F H, 1978 *Microscopic wood anatomy,* Birmensdorf

Taylor, A, 2011, 'Bronze Age occupation, a Roman cremation cemetery and landscape and a medieval timber building at Mortimer Hill Farm, Mortimer, West Berkshire, 2003', in S Preston (ed), *Archaeological Investigations in the Silchester Hinterland*, TVAS Monogr **9**, 45–80

Timby, J, 2010, 'Pottery', in D Milbank, 'Roman landscape features at Mereoak Lane, Three Mile Cross', in S Preston (ed), *Archaeological Investigations to the south of Reading, 2002-2008*, TVAS Monogr **13**, 12–16

Tomber, R, and Dore, J, 1998 *The National Roman fabric reference collection: a handbook*, Mus London / Engl Heritage/ British Mus, London

WA, 1999, 'New Village Settlement, Grazeley: archaeological evaluation phase 1', Wessex Archaeol rep, Salisbury

APPENDIX 1: Feature Details

Group	*Cut*	*Fill(s)*	*Type*	*Date*	*Dating Evidence*
		50	Topsoil		
		51	Made ground		
		52	Subsoil		
	1	53	Posthole	Roman	Pottery
	2	54	Posthole	2nd Century AD	Pottery
	3	55	Pit	Late Iron Age	Pottery
	4	56	Posthole	Late Iron Age	Pottery
100	6	57	Ditch		None
	5	58	Posthole	Roman	Pottery
	7	59	Pit		None
	8	60	Pit		None
101	9	61	Ditch	2nd Century	Pottery
102	10	62	Gully		None
100	11	63	Ditch		None
103	12	64	Ditch	Late Iron Age	Stratigraphy
103	13	65	Ditch	Late Iron Age	Stratigraphy
100	14	66	Ditch		None
104	15	67	Ditch	Late Iron Age	Stratigraphy
103	16	68	Ditch	Late Iron Age	Pottery
104	17	69	Ditch	Late Iron Age	Pottery
101	18	70	Ditch	3rd Century AD	Pottery
101	19	71	Ditch		Stratigraphy
101	20	72, 75	Ditch	2nd Century	Pottery
101	21	73, 74	Ditch	Late Iron Age	Pottery
	22	76, 77	Cremation	Roman	Pottery
	23	78, 79	Cremation	Roman	Pottery
	24	80	Cremation	Roman	
	25	81	Posthole		None
	26	82	Cremation	Roman	
105	27	83	Ditch	Roman	Stratigraphy
104	28	84	Ditch	LIA	Stratigraphy
106	29	85	Ditch		None
105	30	86	Ditch	Roman	Pottery
	31	87	Cremation	Roman	
105	32	88	Ditch	Roman	Stratigraphy
106	33	89	Gully		None
106	34	90	Gully		None

APPENDIX 2: Pottery by context

Cut	*Deposit*	*Group*	*Type*	*Flint*	*Grog*	*Sand*	*Sam*	*Amp*	*ALHRE*	*Ro other*	*crumbs*	*Tot No*	*Tot Wt*
1	53		Posthole	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	1
2	54		Posthole	-	1	-	1	-	-	-	-	2	6
3	55		Pit	1	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	23
4	56		Posthole	-	-	7	-	-	-	-	2	9	20
5	58		Posthole	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	1
9	61	101	Ditch	65	24	3	1	8	37	8	14	160	1649
16	68	103	Ditch	5	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	5	16
17	69	104	Ditch	-	-	10	-	-	-	-	-	10	18
18	70	101	Ditch	19	4	2	-	-	1	3	6	34	111
20	75	101	Ditch	3	-	-	-	-	3	10	-	16	232
21	73	101	Ditch	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	1	1
21	74	101	Ditch	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	4
22	77		Cremation	-	-	-	-	-	-	31	-	31	175
23	79		Cremation	-	-	-	-	-	-	29	-	29	262
30	86	105	Ditch	4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	41
TOTAL				**98**	**32**	**23**	**2**	**8**	**41**	**83**	**22**	**308**	**2560**

APPENDIX 3: Inventory of burnt bone

Cut	*Deposit*	*Spits*	*colour*	*Wt (g)*	*Max frag (mm)*	*Age*	*Sex*	*Other info*
22	76	3	white	122	36.1 x 27.4	adult	I	
23	78	2	white, few grey pieces	89	29.7 x 9.9	adult?	I	
24	80	2	white	15	25.2 x 13.5	non-adult?	n/a	
26	82	2	white	4	13.1 x 9.7	I	I	
31	87	5	white	11	9.7 x 9.7	I	I	non-human? found with much charcoal

APPENDIX 4: Summary of burnt bone fragmentation

Context			*10mm*		*5mm*		*2mm*		*Total Wt (g)*
Cut	*Deposit*	*Sample*	*(g)*	*(%)*	*(g)*	*(%)*	*(g)*	*(%)*	
22	76	9	51.5	42.2	32	26.2	38.5	31.6	**122**
23	78	10	29	32.6	29	32.6	31	34.8	**89**
24	80	11	5.5	36.7	4	26.6	5.5	36.7	**15**
26	82	13	0.5	12.5	1	25.0	2.5	62.5	**4**
31	87	16	0	0	2	18.2	9	81.8	**11**
Total			**86.5**	**35.9**	**68**	**28.2**	**86.5**	**35.9**	**241**

APPENDIX 5: Ceramic Building Material catalogue

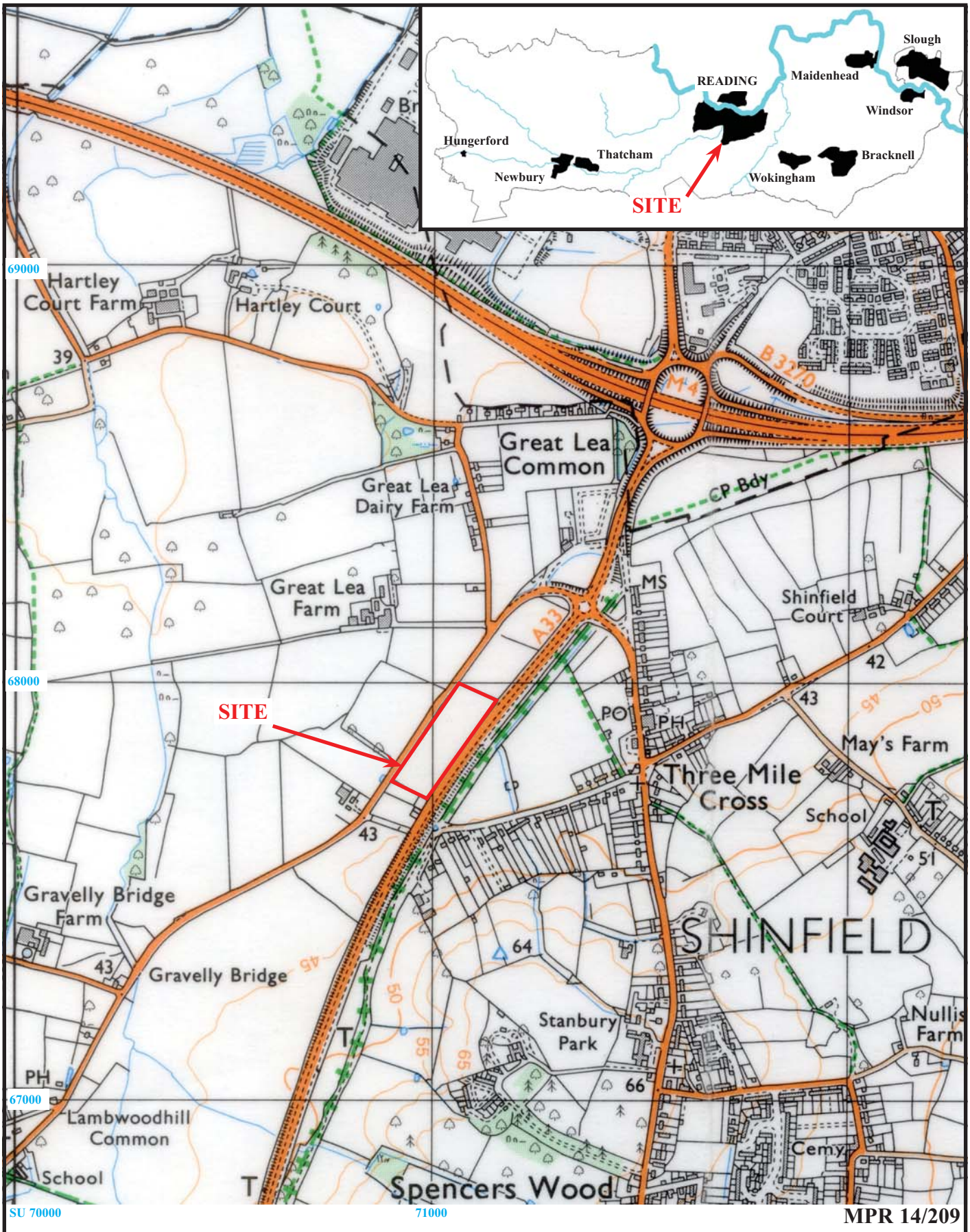
Cut	*Deposit*	*Group*	*Type*	*No*	*Wt (g)*
2	54		Posthole	1	1
9	61	101	Ditch	12	88
10	62	102	Gully	1	12
18	70	101	Ditch	1	189

APPENDIX 6: Fired clay catalogue

Cut	*Deposit*	*Group*	*Type*	*No*	*Weight*
1	53		Posthole	4	3
9	61	101	Ditch	3	230
21	73	101	Ditch	1	8
24	80		Cremation	1	3
27	83	105	Ditch	1	13
30	86	105	Ditch	6	74

APPENDIX 7: Charcoal
(Number of fragments or % where over 100)

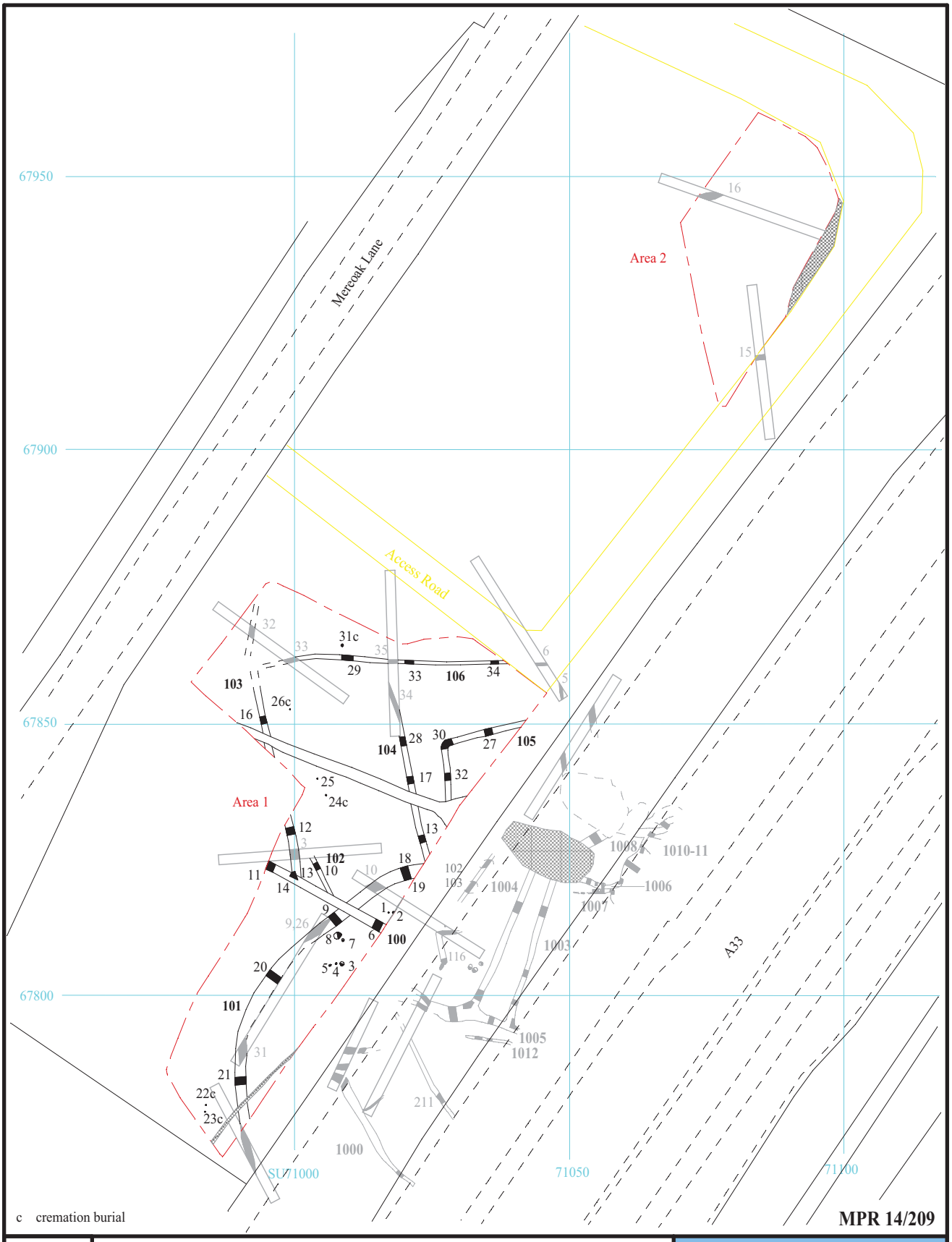
	Sample	7	8	16	16	16
	Feature	4	5	31	31	31
	Context	56	58	87	87	87
	Spit			2	3	4
	Feature Type	Posthole	Posthole	Cremation	Cremation	Cremation
	No. frags	17	50+	300+	200+	150+
	Max. size (mm)	8	10	18	17	10
Quercus	Oak	3	17	28	69	29
Indeterminate	Indeterminate	14	33	42	31	71



Mereoak Park and Ride, Mereoak Lane,
Reading, Berkshire, 2014
Archaeological Excavation

Figure 1. Location of site within Reading and Berkshire.

THAMES VALLEY ARCHAEOLOGICAL SERVICES



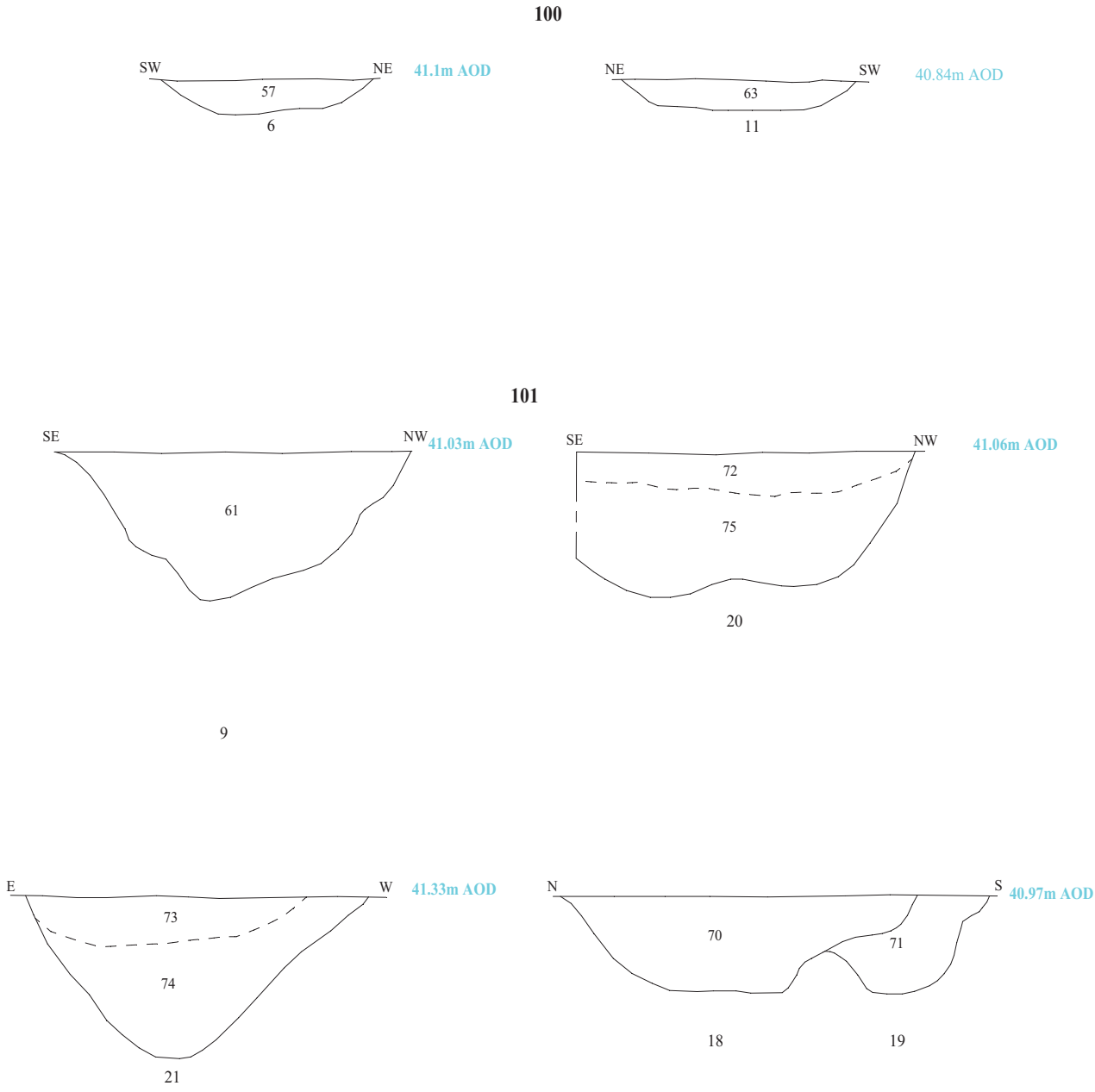
N

Mereoak Park and Ride, Mereoak Lane, Reading, Berkshire, 2014 Archaeological Excavation

Figure 2. Excavation Areas (previous work in grey)

0 50m

THAMES VALLEY ARCHAEOLOGICAL SERVICES



MPR 14/209

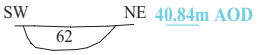
Mereoak Park and Ride, Mereoak Lane
Reading, Berkshire, 2014
Archaeological Excavation

Figure 3. Sections

0 2m

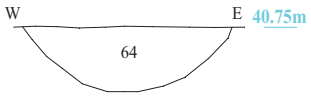
THAMES VALLEY ARCHAEOLOGICAL SERVICES

102

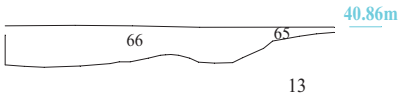


10

103

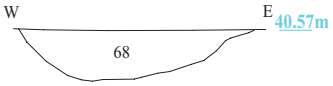


12



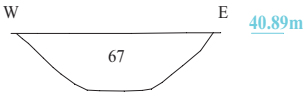
13

14

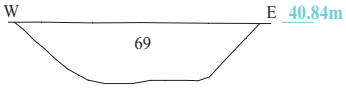


16

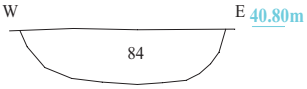
104



15

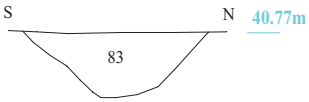


17

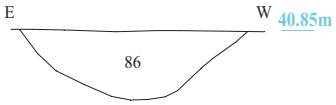


28

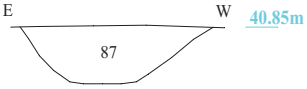
105



27

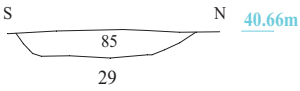


30

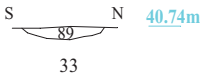


32

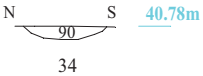
106



29



33



34

MPR 14/209

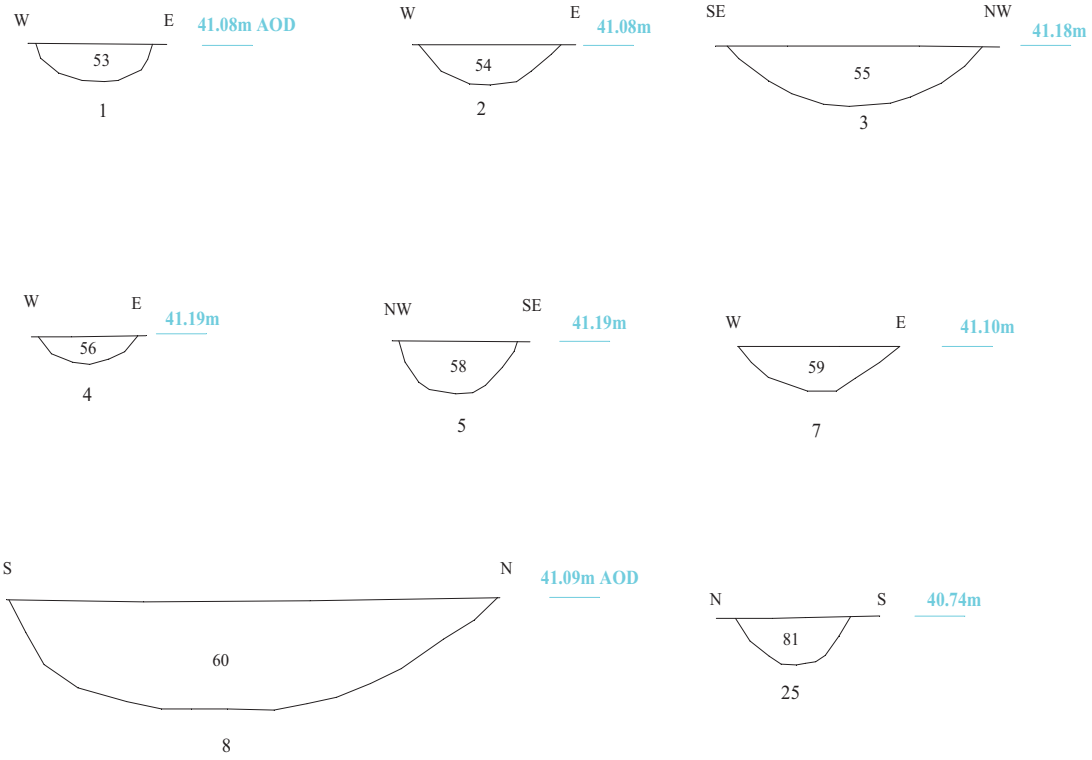
Mereoak Park and Ride, Mereoak Lane
Reading, Berkshire, 2014
Archaeological Excavation

Figure 4. Sections

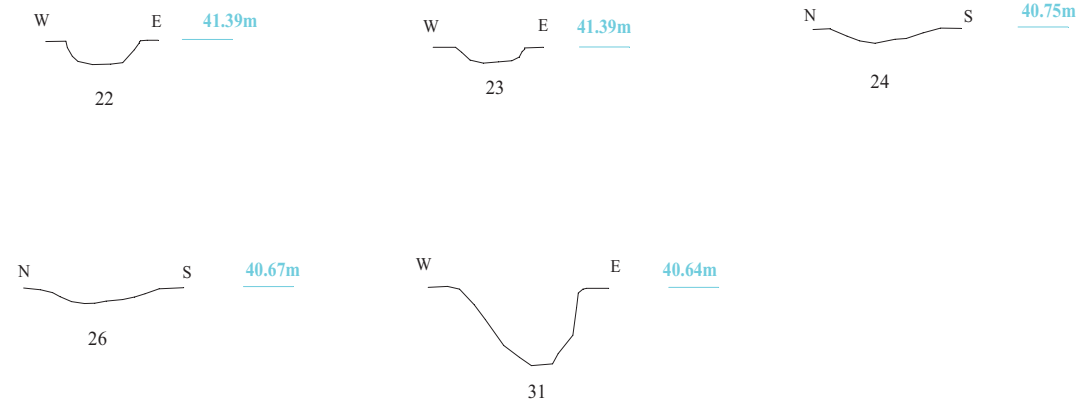
0 2m

THAMES VALLEY ARCHAEOLOGICAL SERVICES

Pits



Cremations



MPR 14/209

Mereoak Park and Ride, Mereoak Lane
Reading, Berkshire, 2014
Archaeological Excavation

Figure 5. Sections

0 1m

THAMES VALLEY ARCHAEOLOGICAL SERVICES

Plate 1. Ditch [21], looking S, Scales: 2m and 1m.

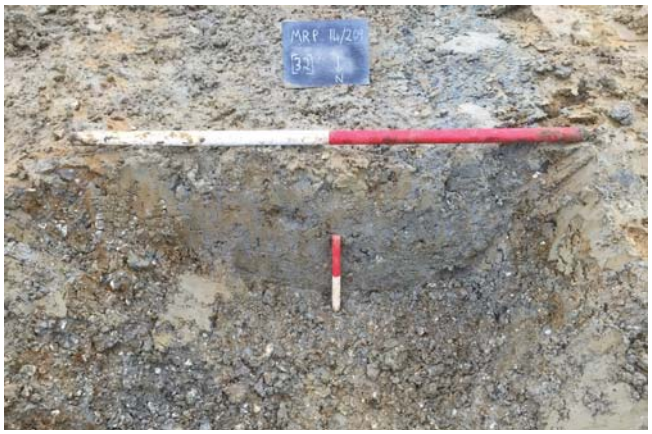


Plate 2. Ditch [32], looking S, Scales: 1m and 0.2m.

Plate 3. Ditch [17], looking N, Scales: 1m and 0.2m.

Plate 4. Ditch [12], looking N, Scales: 1m and 0.2m.

Plate 5. Cremations [22] and [23], looking East, Scales: 0.1m and 0.2m.

Plate 6. Cremation under excavation, looking South.

Plate 7. Cremation [22], looking East, Scale: 0.1m.

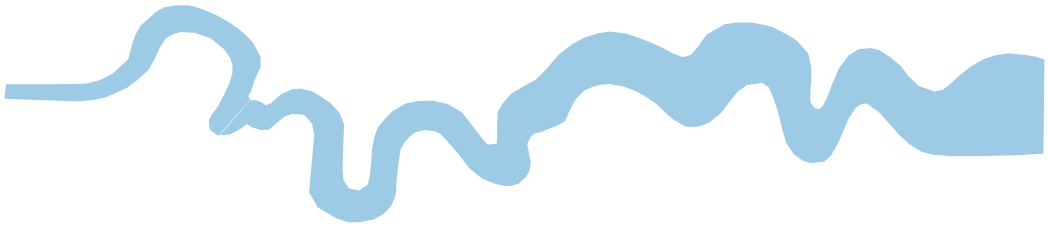
Plate 8. Cremation 31, looking North, Scales 0.2m.

Mereoak Park and Ride, Mereoak Lane, Reading, Berkshire
Archaeological Excavation
Plates 5 - 8.

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