

Summary

Site name: New Swimming Pool, Old Walls, Sonning Lane, Sonning, Berkshire

Grid reference: SU 75610 75385

Site activity: Watching Brief

Date and duration of project: 30th–31st October 2006

Project manager: Steve Ford

Site supervisor: Danielle Milbank

Site code: OWS 06/119

Area of site: 50 sq m

Summary of results: One undated gully was identified.

Monuments identified: One undated gully.

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

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Report edited/checked by:	Steve Ford ✓ 29.11.06
	Steve Preston ✓ 29.11.06

New Swimming Pool, Old Walls, Sonning Lane, Sonning, Berkshire, 2006 An Archaeological Watching Brief

by Danielle Milbank

Report 06/119

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out at Old Walls, Sonning Lane, Sonning, Berkshire (SU 75610 75385) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Kevin Hendley of A K Harris, The Studio, 101 London Road, Reading, RG1 5BY on behalf of Mr and Mrs Griffiths.

A planning consent (F/2006/7989) has been granted by Wokingham District Council to construct a new swimming pool at Old Walls, Sonning, Berkshire. This consent is subject to a condition relating to archaeology which required a watching brief to be carried out during groundworks.

This is in accordance with the Department of the Environment's Planning Policy Guidance, *Archaeology and Planning* (PPG16 1990), and the District's policies on archaeology. The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Mr David Thomason, Archaeology Officer with Berkshire Archaeology, advisers to the District on matters relating to archaeology. The fieldwork was undertaken by Danielle Milbank on 30th and 31st October 2006 and the site code is OWS 06/119.

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 on an irregular plot of land on the east side of Sonning Lane, on the south-west margins of the village, which is situated 3km north-west of Reading (Fig. 2). A detached house is currently under construction on the western side of the plot. The site itself is level but lies on a gentle incline to the north-west, at an elevation of c. 50m above Ordnance Datum. The underlying geology consists of Valley Gravel and Upper Chalk (BGS 1971).

Archaeological background

The archaeological potential of the site stems from its location near the Saxon and medieval settlement of Sonning, which was an important administrative and ecclesiastical centre. Two parallel gullies of medieval date, aligned approximately east-west, were recorded in an earlier evaluation on the site, prior to the construction of

the new house (Taylor 2006). On the opposite side of Sonning Lane from the development lies the site of the palace of the Bishops of Salisbury, dating from the 13th century. This site was partly excavated during the First World War, and revealed well-preserved remains of extensive medieval buildings. Excavations to the north of that site, in the grounds of the vicarage, uncovered late Saxon and early medieval deposits (Hull and Hall 2003).

In more general terms, the site lies within the archaeologically rich Thames Valley. The Upper Chalk in particular carries a notable concentration of prehistoric activity in this part of east Berkshire (Ford 1987), while cropmark evidence suggests a major Neolithic monumental site (*cursus*) at Sonning (Gates 1975), and excavations near the end of the *cursus* have revealed a later Neolithic enclosure (Slade 1964). Further to the south, investigations at Thames Valley Park revealed several phases of prehistoric and Roman occupation of the flood plain and lower terraces (Barnes *et al.* 1997).

Objectives and methodology

The purpose of the watching brief was to excavate and record any archaeological deposits affected by construction of the swimming pool. A specific aim of the watching brief was to determine if any deposits of a medieval or early post-medieval date survive on this site, which may relate to the features uncovered in the earlier evaluation (Taylor 2006).

The watching brief phase was to involve stripping of topsoil and subsoil, and ground reduction, under constant archaeological supervision.

Results

The pool was dug using a small 360° type machine and measured 5m wide, 10m long and 2m deep overall, though the area of the deep end of the pool was excavated further, to 2.5m. The stratigraphy consisted of topsoil/garden soil, 0.10m thick, overlying a modern orange sand and flint gravel levelling layer containing modern brick and glass fragments (not retained) which was 0.26m thick. This in turn overlay 0.56m of brown grey silty clay, which overlay the natural geology which was observed here as orange sand and flint gravel.

The first strip of ground reduction exposed an area of disturbance associated with a disused water pipe and was recorded, though that part of the section (c. 2m in length) collapsed. At this point shoring was put in place to ensure no further collapse.

The remaining two-thirds of the pool area was stripped and a 2.25m stretch of gully uncovered, aligned approximately north-south. This was cut into the top of the natural gravel layer at a depth of 0.88m, was 0.62m

wide and 0.22m deep, and a 0.30m slot [3] was excavated through it by hand. It was filled with medium-compaction mottled orange brown slightly clay silty sand with occasional small subrounded flints (52) (Fig. 4). No finds were recovered. The gully appeared to terminate c. 3m from the west end of the pool area.

Covering the easternmost 2m of the pool area, a deposit (53) was encountered, immediately below the topsoil and overlying the gravel, replacing the subsoil layer. This layer was 0.55m thick and comprised brown sandy silt with charcoal flecks and occasional small subrounded flints. It contained one sherd of post-medieval pottery and two clay pipe stem fragments. This deposit appears to be a post-medieval levelling layer which graduated, with no clear edges, into the brown grey silty clay observed in section throughout the rest of the pool.

Finds

Pottery by Paul Blinkhorn

A single sherd of pottery was noted in context 53. It is a fragment of post-medieval Red Earthenware, and is dateable to the mid-16th – 19th centuries.

Clay Pipe by Danielle Milbank

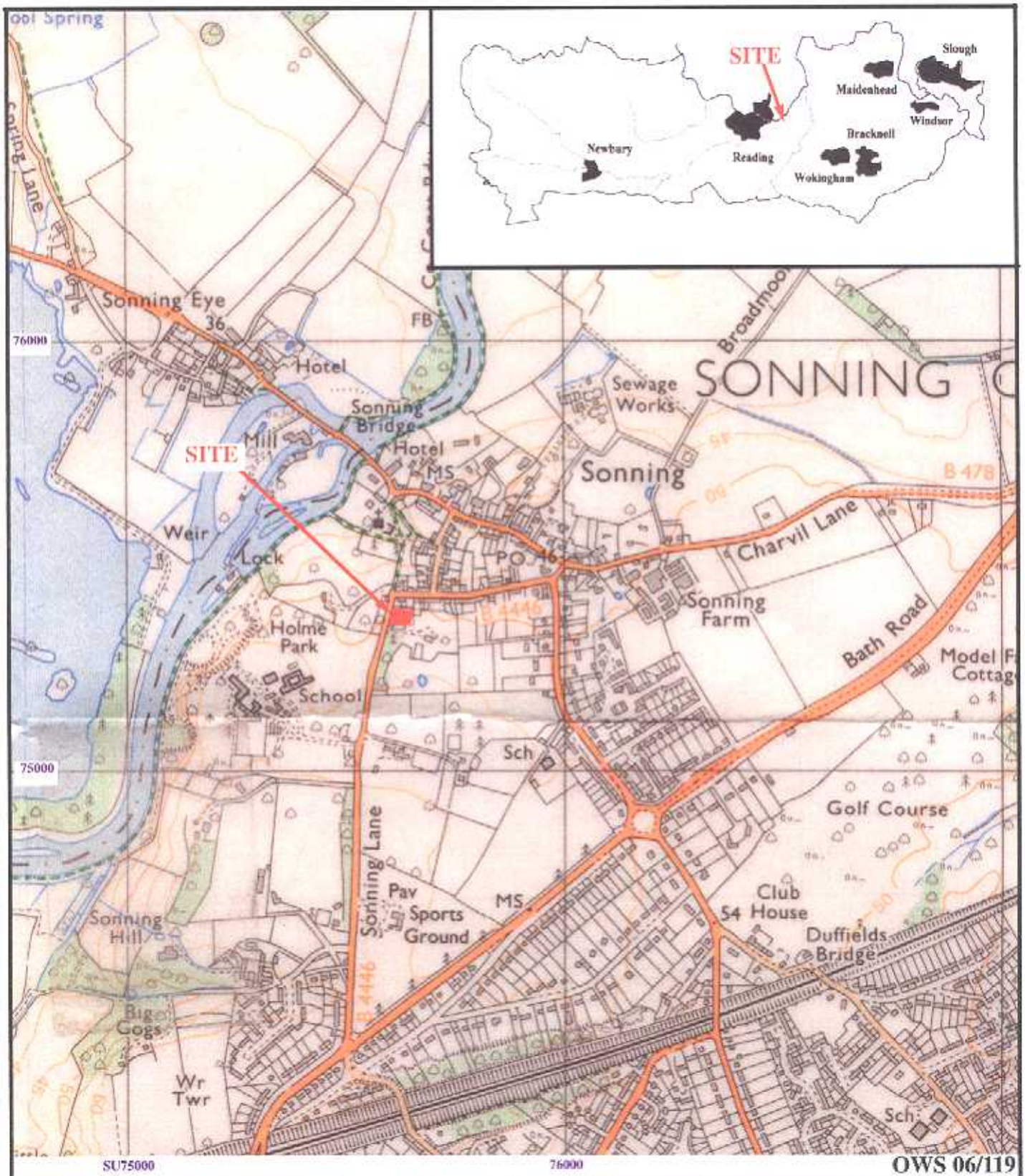
Two short fragments of clay pipe stem were recovered from layer (53). These each weighed 5g and represent typical undecorated clay pipe stems, and as such are not closely dateable within the post-medieval period.

Conclusion

The watching brief revealed just a single gully possibly of archaeological interest. The gully did not contain any dating evidence, but it may be associated with the other medieval boundary features observed to the south east of the pool during the earlier evaluation (Taylor 2006). Made ground of post-medieval date was present.

References

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**New Swimming Pool, Old Walls, Sonning Lane,
Sonning, Berkshire, 2006**
An archaeological watching brief

Figure 1. Location of site within Sonning
and Berkshire.

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**New Swimming Pool, Old Walls, Sonning Lane,
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Figure 2. Detailed location of swimming pool within
Old Walls.

Scale: 1:1250.

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Old Walls, Sonning Lane, Sonning, Berkshire, 2006

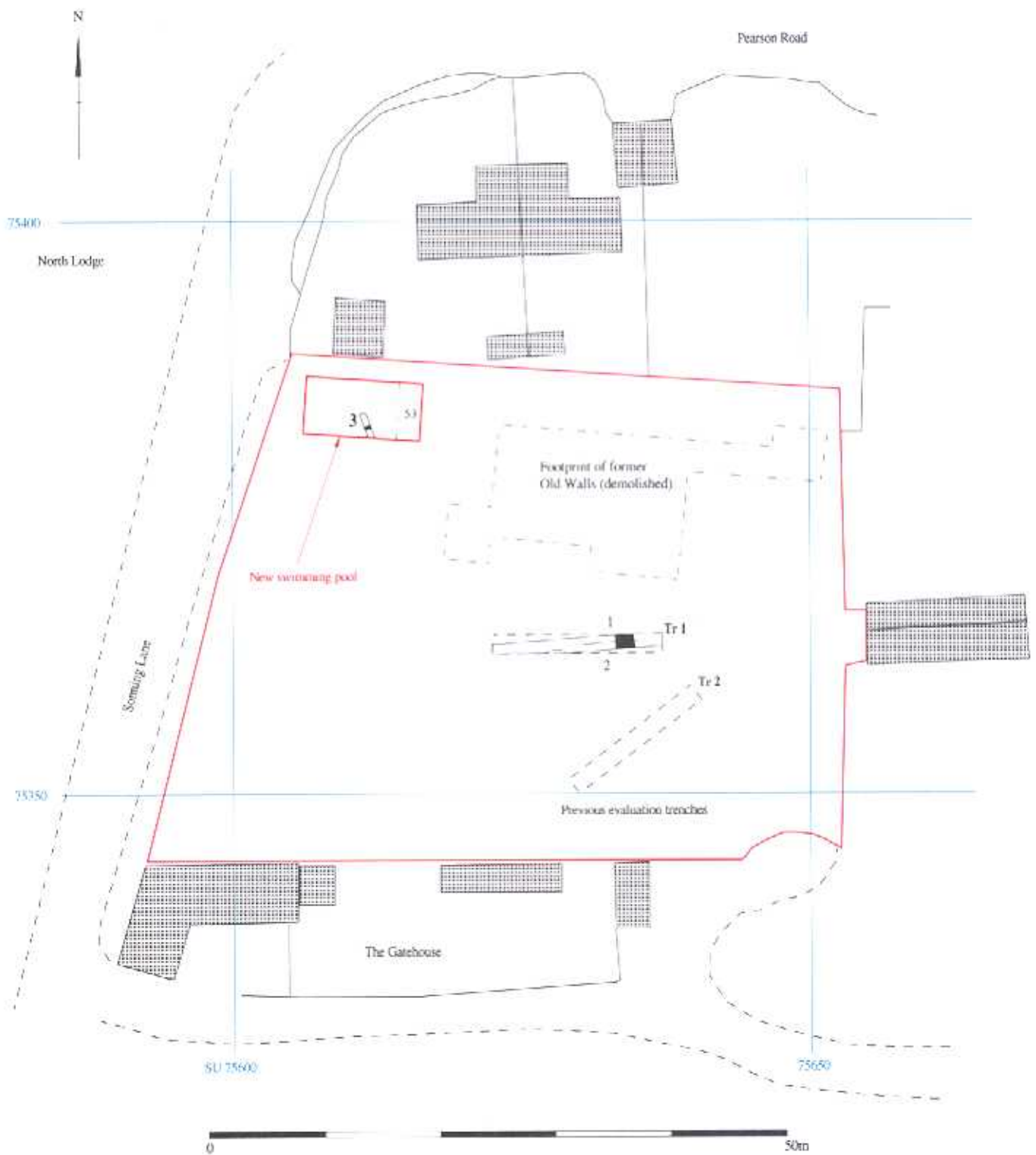


Figure 3. Trench Locations

Old Walls, Sonning Lane, Sonning, Berkshire, 2006

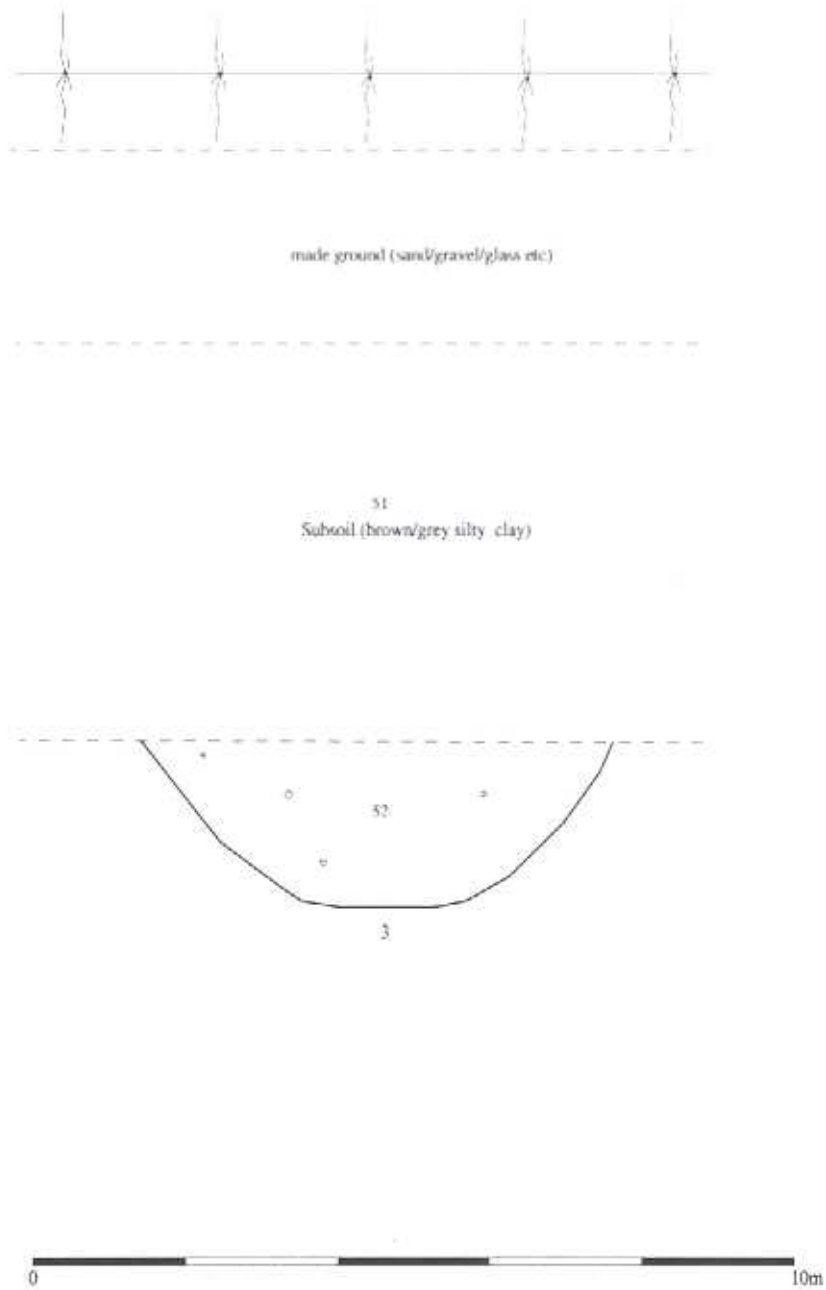


Figure 4: Section