

Pipers II, Aylesford Way,  
Thatcham, Berkshire

Archaeological Excavation and Watching Brief

for Peter Hing and Jones  
on behalf of Headlam Group plc

Pipers II, Aylesford Way, Thatcham  
Archaeological Investigation and Watching Brief

by Melanie Hall

Project 94/11

**INTRODUCTION**

This report details the results of an archaeological investigation and watching brief commissioned by Mr. Peter Edmonds of Peter Hing and Jones, 28 Colthorpe Road, Edgbaston, Birmingham, on behalf of their clients, Headlam Group plc. The site is situated to the south east of Thatcham, adjacent to the Colthrop Mill just north of the Kennet and Avon canal (NGR SU5330 6670) (Figs. 1 and 2). The fieldwork took place in March 1994 and the site code is PAWT 94.

The brief prepared by the Principal Archaeologist of Babcote Public Services Division on behalf of Berkshire County Council has highlighted the archaeological potential of the development area. The supposed route of the major Roman road, Margary's 41a (Margary, 1955), between Cirencester and Silchester, passes through the south-west corner of the development site. There have also been stray finds in the general area, indicating possible Prehistoric activity, and the site lies to the east of the Roman settlement under Thatcham.

As the site lies within a potentially archaeologically sensitive area, it was requested that a formal investigation for the Roman road be carried out, together with a watching brief to cover the rest of the development area, in accordance with the policies of the Secretary of State as set out in *Archaeology and Planning* (PPG16, 1990).

The specific aims of the project were:

a) To locate, investigate and record the Roman road if it survives within the

development area.

b) To undertake a watching brief in other areas of ground disturbance, to preserve by record the presence or absence of archaeological deposits, together with their nature, character and date where possible.

### **Roman road**

The exact location of the Roman road is unknown and local variations from a straight course are likely to exist. In addition, for areas where drainage ditches or metalling are not a necessity, any traces of the road may at best be insubstantial.

Aerial photographs taken in 1969 and 1970 show the side ditches of part of the Roman road leading from Silchester, about 6 km. south-east of Brimpton, to Speen and then to Gloucester and Cirencester. The projected line of this route takes the Roman road through the south-western corner of the development site.

The road itself has been located and examined at Brimpton (NGR SU567654) south-east of Thatcham, where it was found to be 27 m. across flanked by two small v-shaped ditches (Lobb, 1977-8). In this case nothing remained of the agger or road surface, although the width of the carriageway may have been 15 m., as suggested by two possible drainage gullies. This compares well with a section of the same road recorded at Aldermaston Soke, c. 1.5 Km. from the west gate at Silchester (Aldermaston Archaeological Society, 1962).

### **TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY**

The site lies on the floodplain of the river Kennet, approximately 750 m. north of the river itself and 350 m. north of the Kennet and Avon canal, at a height of about 68 m. above O.D. The geology of the site comprises alluvium overlying

river and valley gravel (British Geological Survey 1:50,000 Drift Edition, Sheet 268).

## **METHOD**

### **Location and excavation of Roman road**

In order to locate the Roman road a single trench was dug, using a JCB with a toothless ditching bucket, from the south-western corner of the development site, perpendicular to the projected course of the road (Fig. 3). This was to be a minimum of 50 m. long, and in the circumstances was extended to a total of 76 m. across the development site, finishing as close to the northern boundary as was possible. A second trench, 20 m. long, was dug 25 m. to the east.

### **Watching brief**

The watching brief was to be carried out as and when topsoil stripping or any disturbance of subsoil was to take place, liaising with the main contractor, Wilcon Construction.

## **RESULTS**

### **Trenching**

**Trench 1** began *c.* 10 m. north of the existing Aylesford Way and crossed the site to within 11 m. of the north perimeter fence. A test pit between 6.6 m. and 7.9 m. from the southern end revealed the following geology: From the existing ground surface to a depth of 0.35 m. was a layer of disturbed ground containing some topsoil plus much modern building debris; below this, to a depth of 0.75 m., was a grey alluvium; underneath which was an orange alluvium to a depth of 1.3 m.; below this was gravel. This sequence continued for the length of the trench.

It was assumed that for the purposes of locating archaeological features removal of the layer of grey alluvium, together with the disturbed topsoil, would be required, whereas the probably ancient orange alluvium beneath this could be left *in situ*. Therefore, for most of its length the trench was dug to the top of the orange alluvium, i.e. to a depth of c. 0.65-0.75 m.

A similar geology was encountered in **trench 2**, with 0.40 m. of disturbed topsoil overlying 0.25 m. of grey alluvium and below this 0.25 m. of orange alluvium. Again the topsoil and grey alluvium were removed by machine. The depth of the trench varied from 0.65 m. at its southern end to 0.90 m. at the northern end, where the grey alluvium appeared to dip slightly.

No trace or indication of the Roman road was seen in either of the trenches.

#### **Watching brief**

In all three visits were made to the site whilst the groundworks were in progress. During these visits many of the foundation trenches, together with a striped area for the access road, were observed. No archaeological features were observed and no artefacts recovered during this phase of the project.

#### **CONCLUSIONS**

Despite expectations, the archaeological investigation and watching brief did not locate the Roman road that was projected as crossing the development area. It can be safely assumed, given that the investigation trench crossed virtually the whole site, that the road is not located on this projected route, but crosses elsewhere. No archaeological artefacts or subsoil features were seen during the watching brief.

## REFERENCES

ALDERMASTON ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY, 1962:  
Observations on the Roman road between Silchester and Speen.

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**Berkshire Archaeol. J.** 69, 37-48.

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# Berkshire

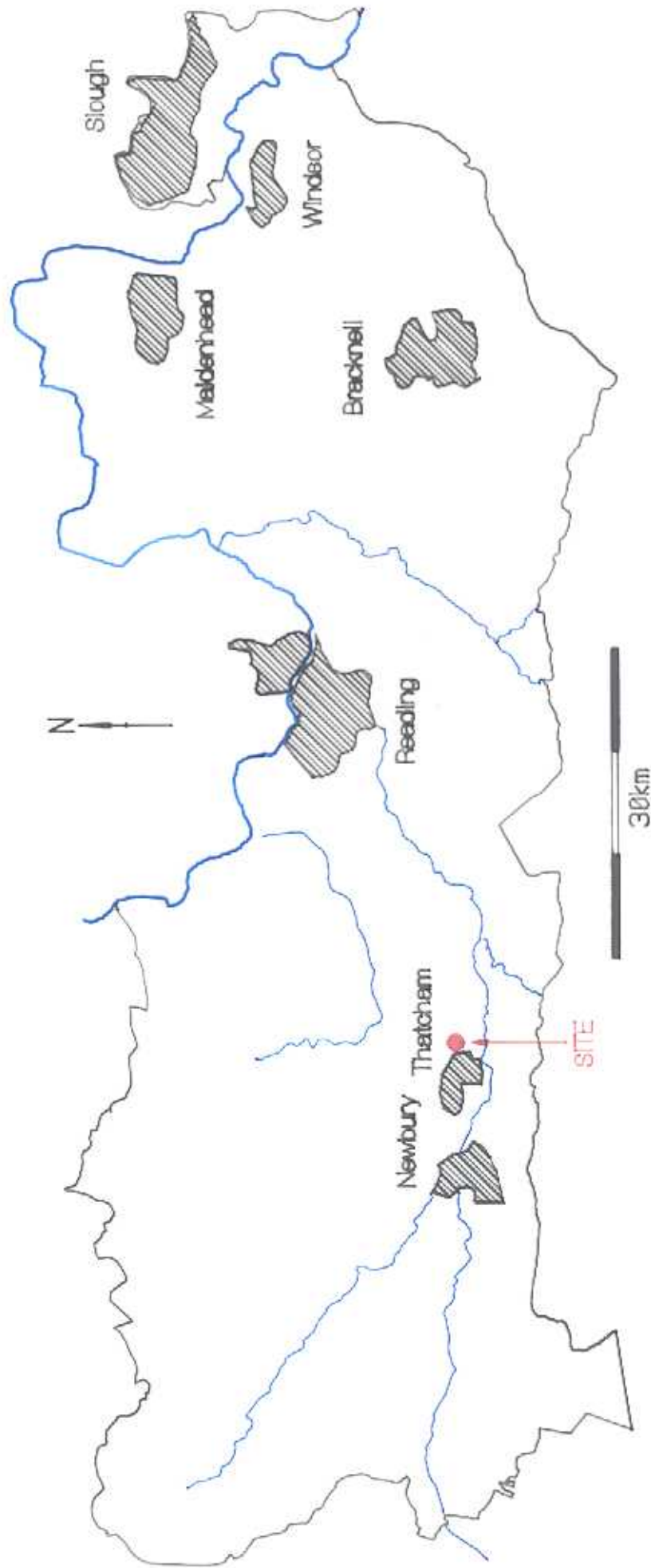


Figure 1. Location of site within county.

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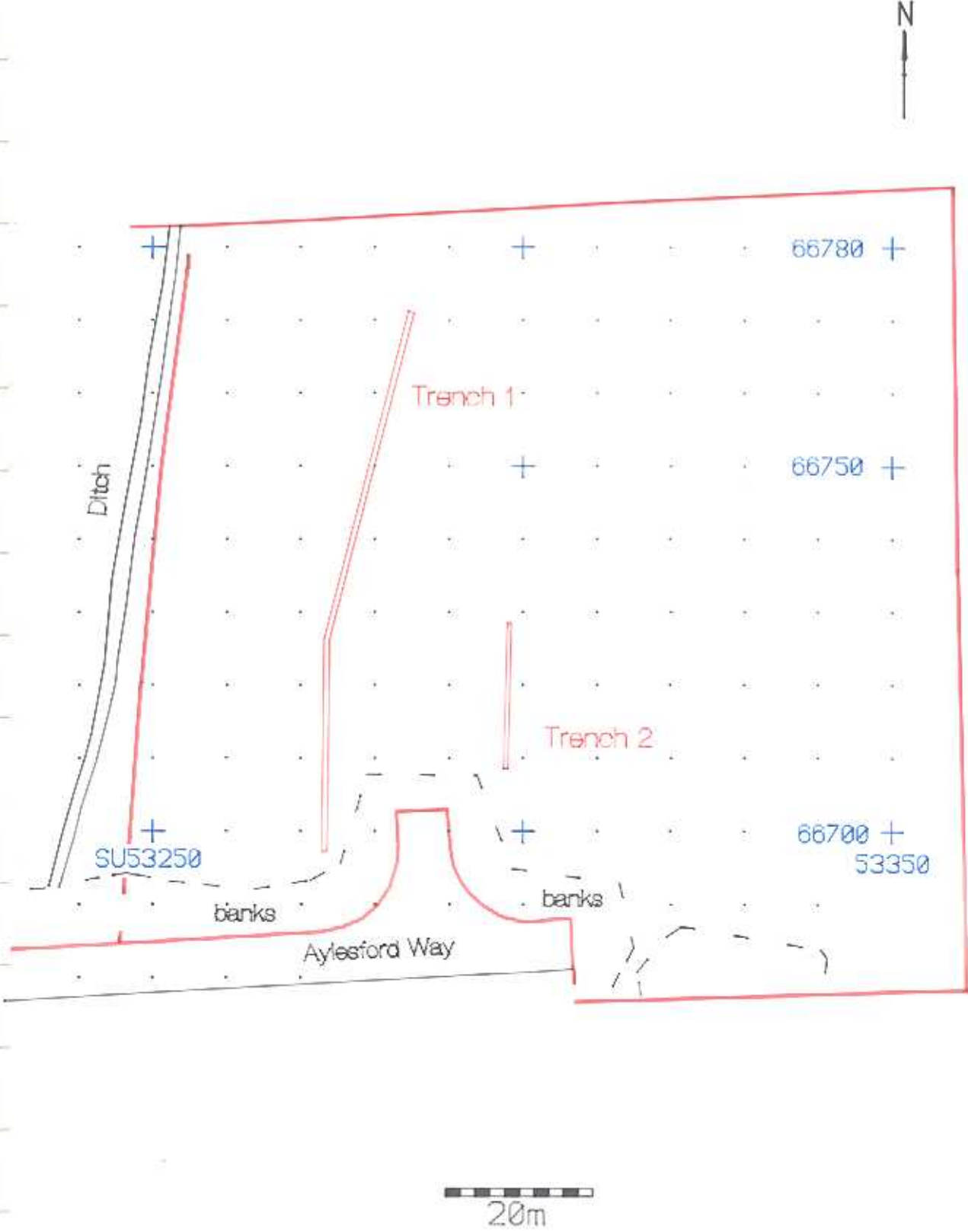


Figure 2. Location of trenches.