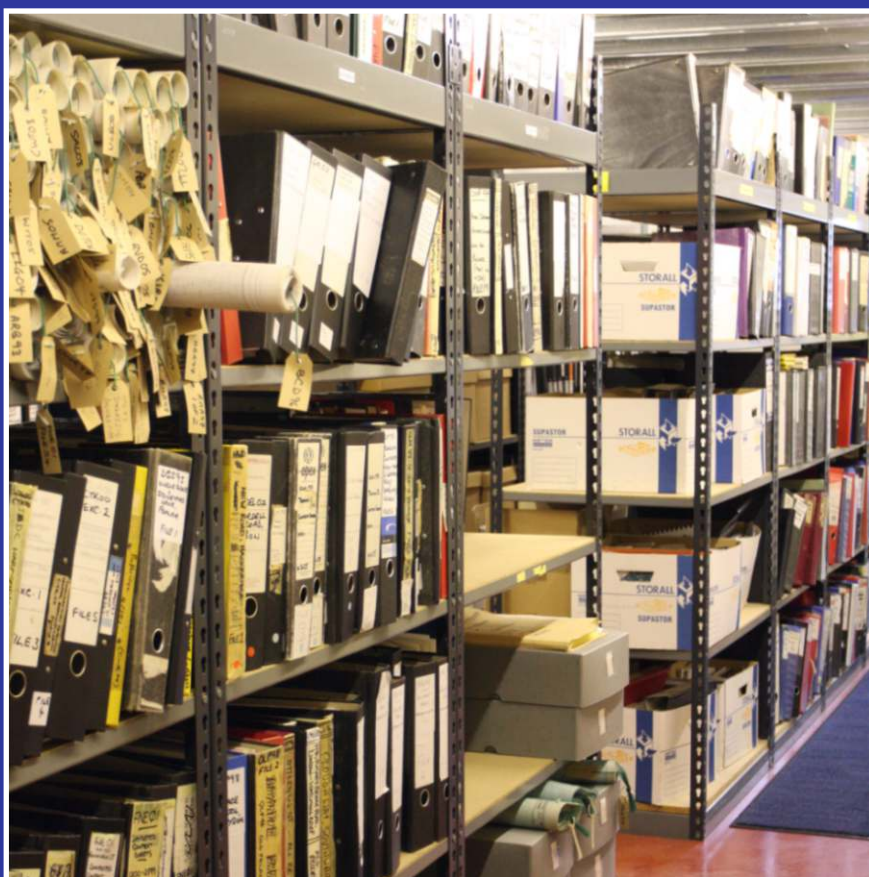


Reading Abbey Waterfront Berkshire

Excavation Summary Report



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READING ABBEY WATERFRONT (3682)

SU 719734

Excavation Summary Report for 1983/4

P. J. Fasham, J. W. Hawkes 3rd April 1984

Two trenches were excavated to the north and south of the 1981 excavation which had revealed a complex sequence of waterfront activity from the later twelfth to the early eighteenth century.

It was believed that the 1981 excavations had been located at the confluence of the river Kennet and the Holy Brook, the Abbey Mill stream.

The 1983/4 campaign extended the chronological sequence and identified the 1981 confluence as a second channel, probably a storm water overflow taken upstream from the Mill.

Trench A at the south covered an area of about 500m² and Trench B to the north about 100m². The provisional phasing and results are best summarised thus.

Period 1. Pre-monastic watercourses and deposits indicate a broad swathe in which various channels flowed with considerable lateral movement. Iron Age pottery of the third century BC was discovered in the muds of Trench B.

Period 2. The river margins were consolidated in the early twelfth century by a dump of clay up to 1.5m thick and covering an estimated minimum area of 40m x 16m which, in effect, formed a causeway along the swampy edge of the river. To the south a series of wattles formed a revetment. The north of the site was different; a hard of large flint nodules and other stones was constructed to slope out of the water. This hard has been traced for 27m in total. The Holy Brook - the Abbey Mill tail race - ran across the north side of the hard. The overflow channel from the mill flowed into the Kennet just south (upstream) of the junction of the hard and the clay bank.

Period 3. Later in the twelfth century the front of the clay bank was strengthened by post and plank structures. Birch stakes were inserted into the hard, presumably to act as channel and beaching markers. There were various further attempts to stabilise the clay bank.

Period 4. In the early fourteenth century the whole waterfront area was subject to a major redesign. An arrangement of closely-set posts consolidated the south of the area and a substantial building at least 10m by 7m was constructed on the clay bank. The southern end of the building with foundations measuring up to 1.2m wide was in the end of the primary clay bank. In Trench B at the north the outflow of the mill tail race and the confluence of the Kennet moved south. A complex structure of posts marked this new arrangement.

Period 5. The new structure in Trench B was modified. A wharf extending for 25m was constructed in front of the consolidation timbers at the south. The land south of the wharf and clay bank had been gradually reclaimed and by now industrial activities including the use of lime barrels. This reclamation may also have included a small island in the Kennet channel. The island is shown on maps of 1802 but the location of a lime barrel recovered in 1979 suggests it may already have been extant at this phase.

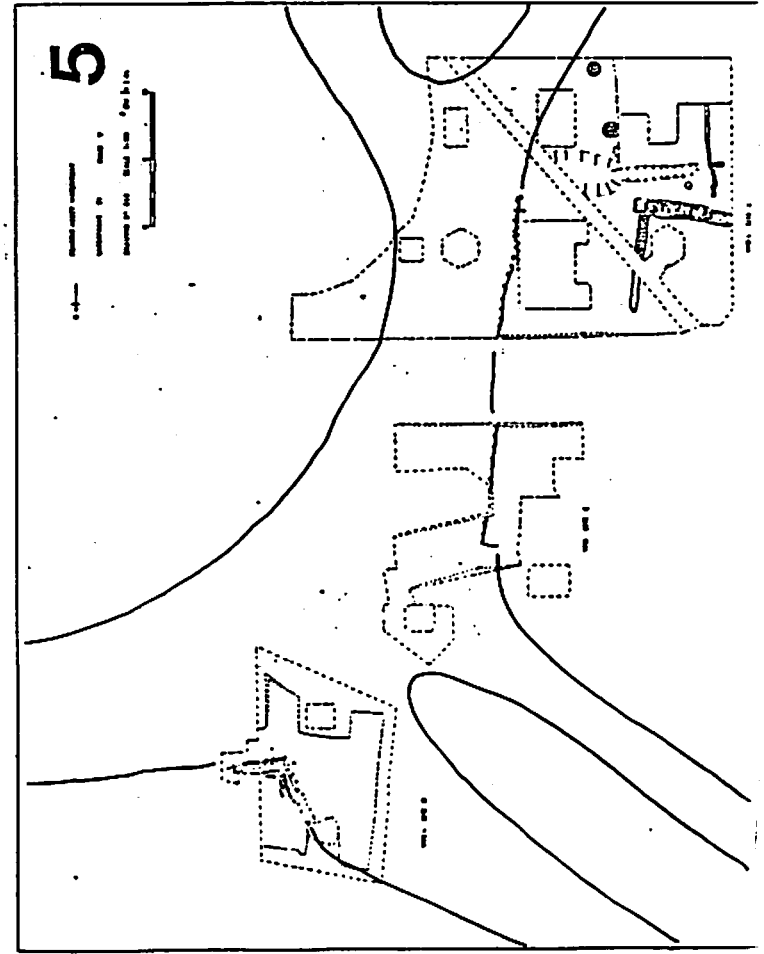
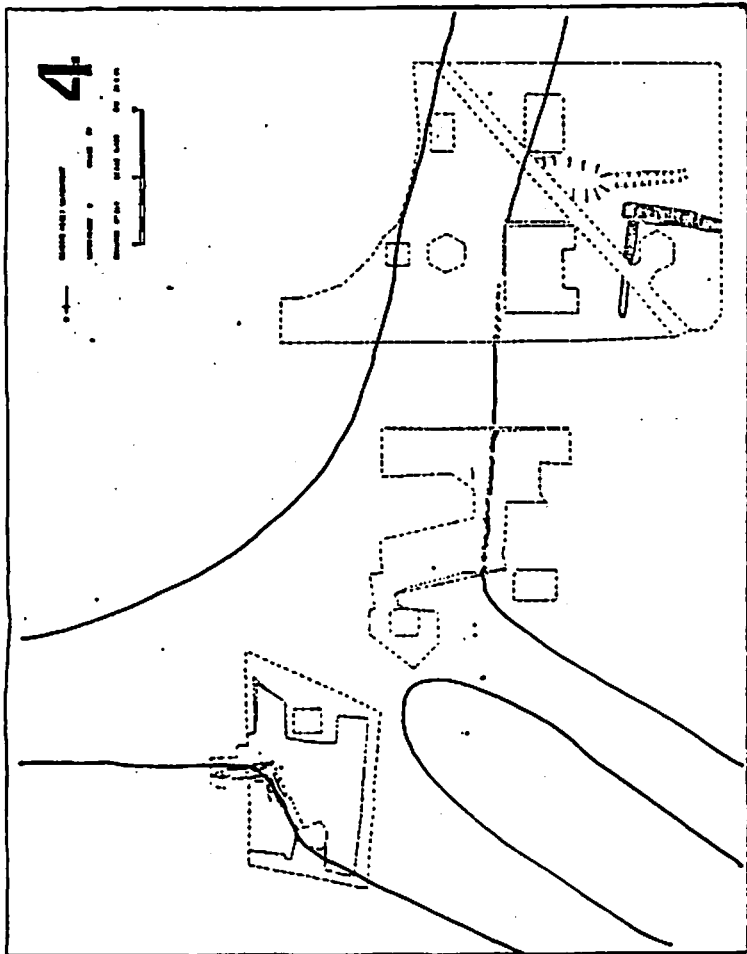
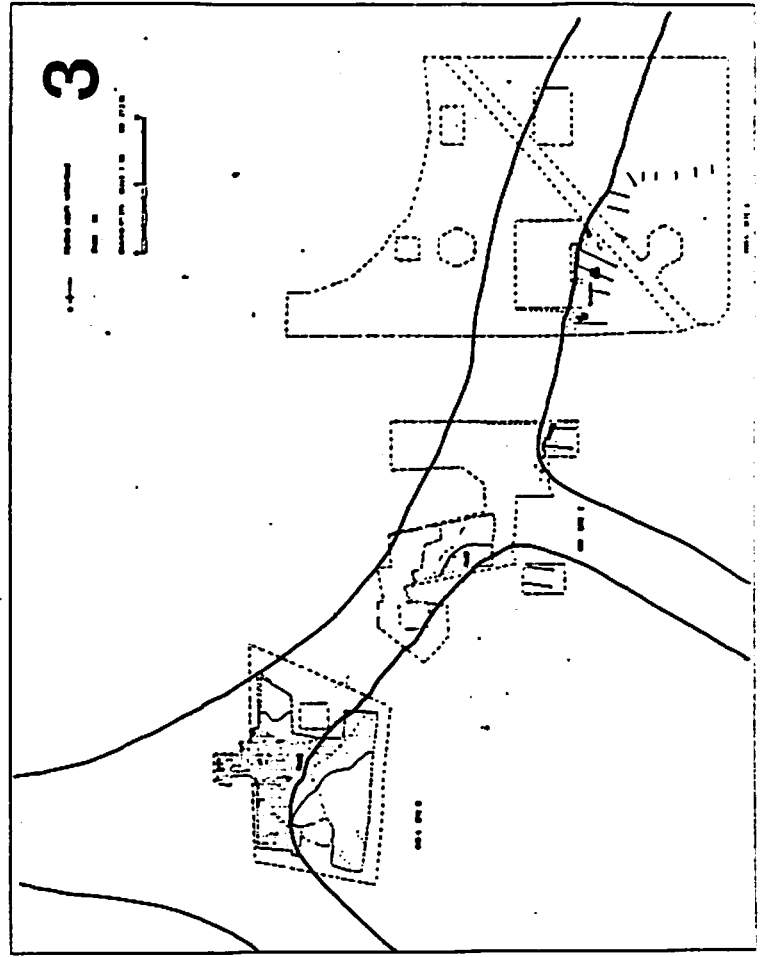
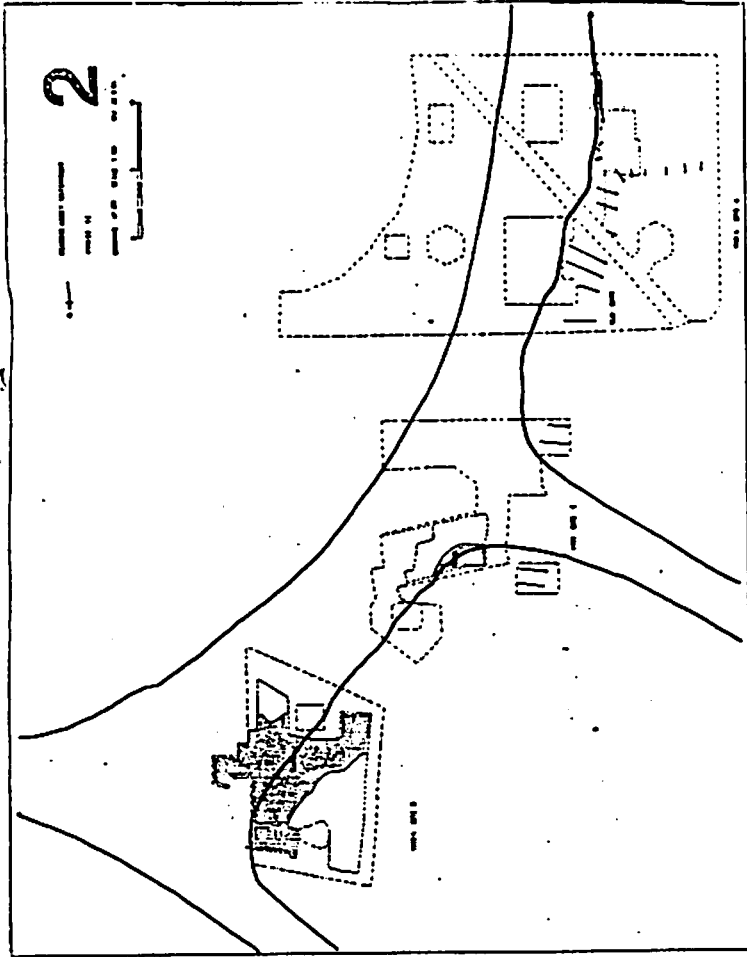
Period 6. The structures in Periods 4 and 5 appear to last until the Dissolution of the Monasteries in 1539 although there are minor modifications relating to the confluence of the mill overflow channel and including the construction of the battered flint wall found in the 1981 excavation. During the sixteenth century the whole of the area falls into decay and silting over the wharf structures is evident.

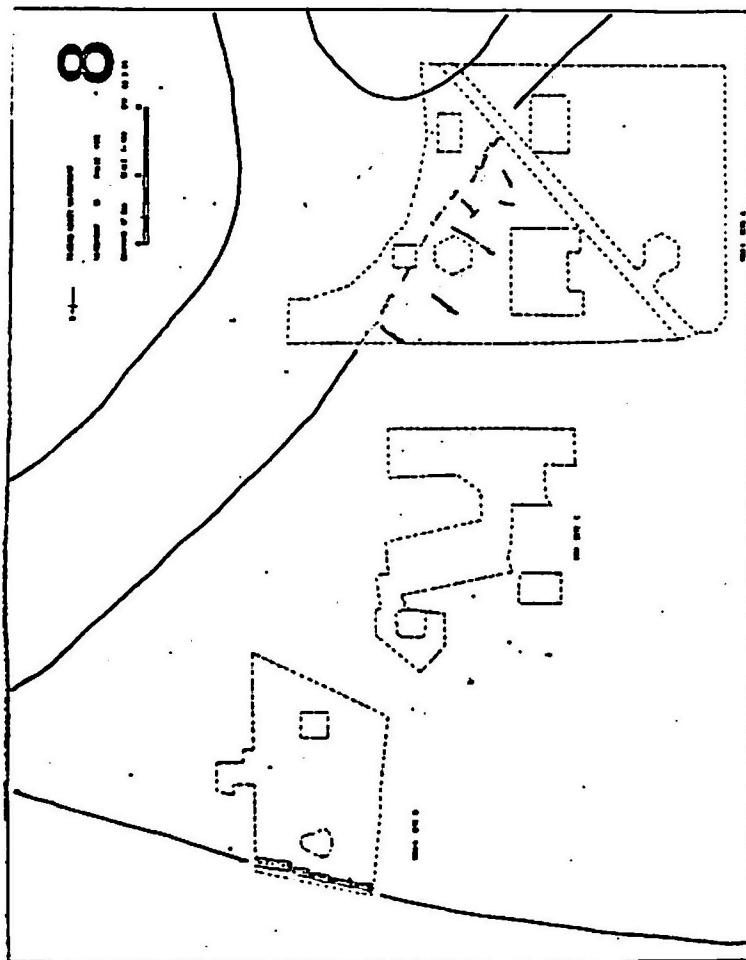
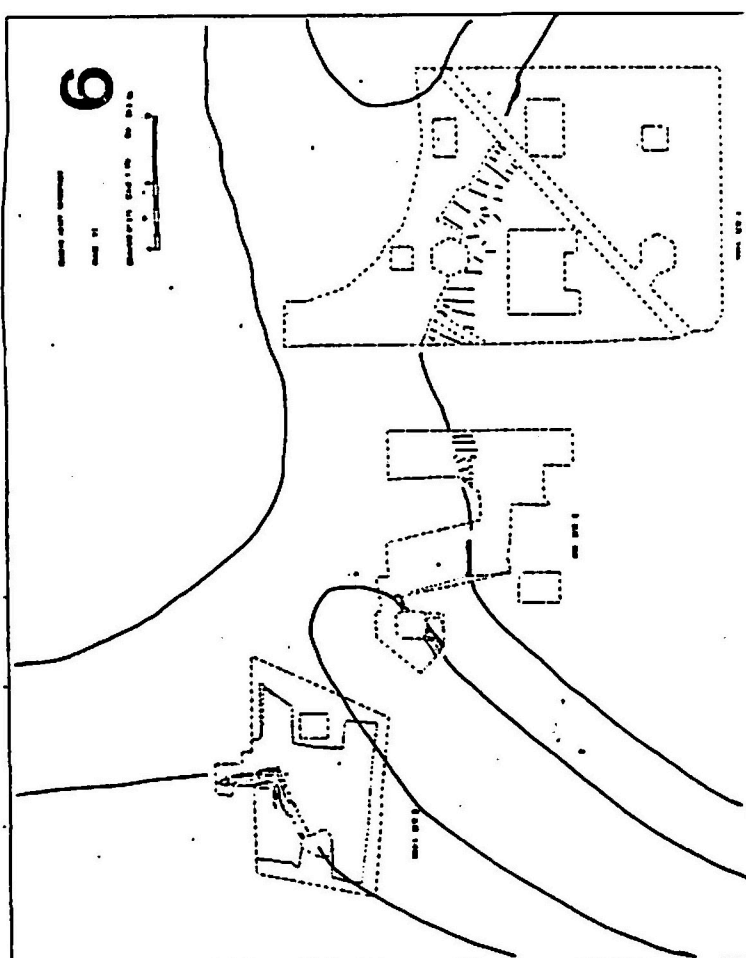
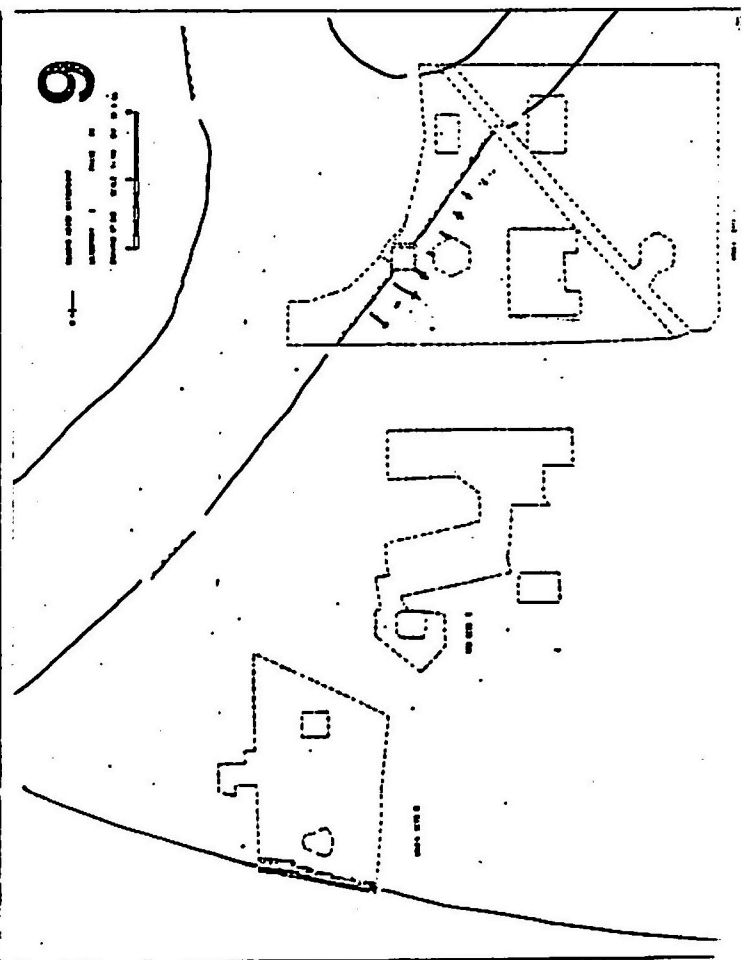
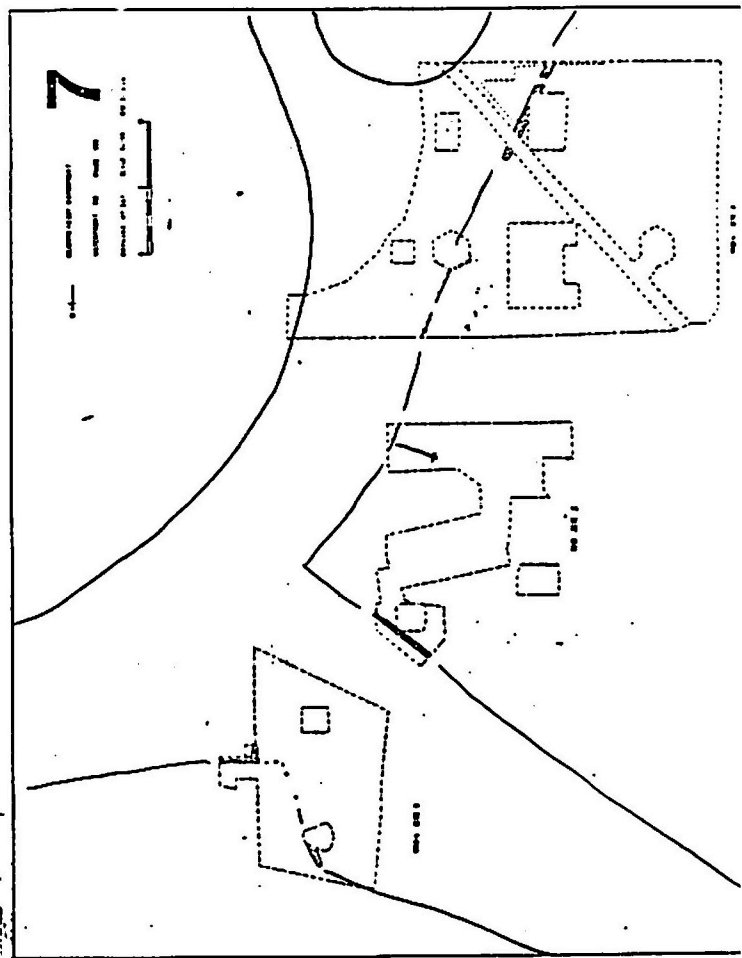
Period 7. In the early eighteenth century, probably associated with the construction of the Kennet and Avon canal the waterfront was reconstructed in a mixture of brick and stone walls and post and plank revetments with traces of two substantial tie-backs.. The outflows of the Holy Brook and the overflow channel were by now probably amalgamated.

Period 8. The main changes in the later eighteenth century was the replacement of the post and plank structure by a stone built affair with tie-backs presumably jointed into a horizontal top plate. The overflow channel had ceased to exist and the Holy Brook now ran east-west across the north of the site.

Period 9. About 1800 the Holy Brook was moved further north to run in a brick channel. The bank of the Kennet is faced by a substantial post and plank structure with tie backs spaced every 1.5 - 2m. During the watching brief for the site the east side of this late river channel was found. The river was moved to its present alignment c. 1860.

The excavation was directed by Peter Fasham and John Hawkes of the Trust for Wessex Archaeology. The finance was raised by a public appeal organised by the Trust for Wessex Archaeology and the Berkshire Archaeological Trust. The main funds came from MEPC plc (the developers), the Department of the Environment, Berkshire County Council, Reading Borough Council, Legal and General Insurance Company, and Nabisco Brands Ltd with numerous small donations from the public. Almost 3000 visitors saw the site in a six week period and trips were arranged for 1400 schoolchildren.







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