

WHITE HOUSE PUBLIC HOUSE, LONDON ROAD, NEWBURY

Archaeological Evaluation 1987

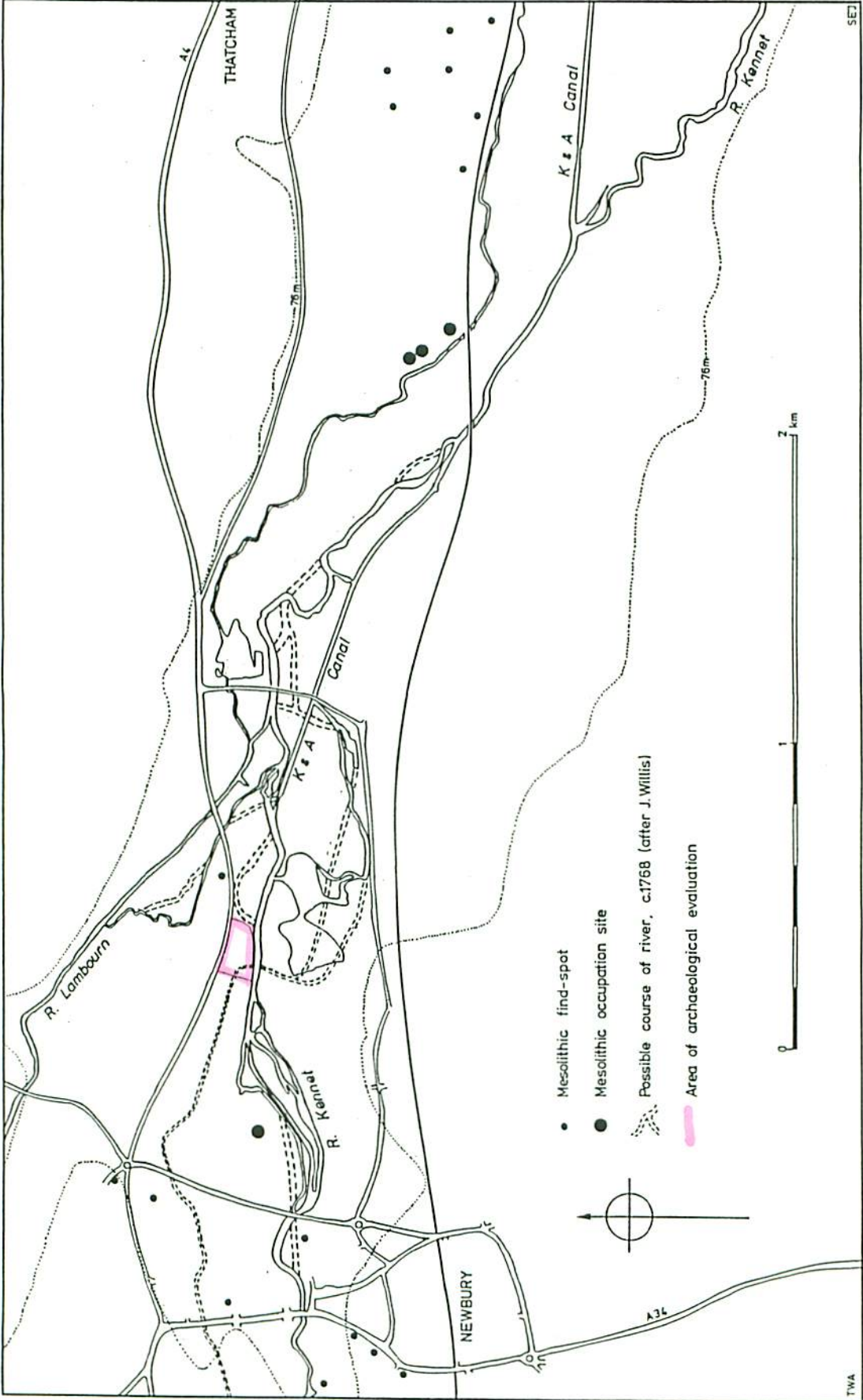
31472

W178

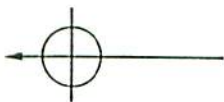
Introduction

Archaeological discoveries and research over the past sixty years have clearly demonstrated the importance of the River Kennet between Hungerford and Thatcham for the wealth of sites dating to the Mesolithic period. In particular several finds and two occupation sites have been recorded between Newbury and Thatcham. Excavations of the Mesolithic site at SU511668 south of Lower Way, carried out in advance of gravel extraction in 1957/8 produced evidence for occupation typified by a rich assemblage of bone and flint working associated with a radio-carbon date of 8415 ± 170 bc (Q659). The occupation material was largely to be found on the top of the gravel, sealed by a thin covering of tufa or peat. A small quantity of Mesolithic material was recovered in 1985, similarly found on the top of the gravel sealed by a thin covering of peat at SU48476742, north of London Road, Newbury.

In 1986 Ushers Brewery Ltd submitted a planning application to erect a retail warehouse with car parking facilities and an extension to the White House public house at London Road, Newbury, SU48206738, north of the River Kennet. This area of land lies c.275m west of the 1985 find spot. Because of the high archaeological potential of the area the County Council requested that archaeological evaluation of the site should be carried out before the application was determined in accordance with policy EN26 of the Review of Berkshire Structure Plan 1985. This work was carried out over one week in March 1987, and was funded by Ushers Brewery Ltd.



- Mesolithic find-spot
- Mesolithic occupation site
- Possible course of river, c.1768 (after J. Willis)
- Area of archaeological evaluation



TWA

SEJ

The site

The site comprises 1.52 hectares of land west of the White House public house and east of a now disused railway embankment. The land is bounded to the south by the River Kennet and to the north by the A4, London Road. An east-west brick-lined culvert divides the site into two. The land is low-lying and flat, c.72.75m above OD, although there is a very slight, c.0.7m rise to the north of the site. Most of the land is in pasture with some reed growth; a small number of trees and bushes were located to the north of the culvert. The land is currently used for the grazing of three goats. The faint remains of a water meadow system were evident as shallow channels running approximately north-south across the western end of the site.

Excavation strategy

The trenches were positioned on a subjective basis in areas accessible to a tracked excavator, avoiding existing trees and the grazing goats. Five test-holes (T.H. 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7) were excavated entirely by machine south of the brick culvert, while two trenches (T.H. 1 and 2), north of the culvert, were excavated entirely by hand. Each test-hole was excavated to a depth of 1.2m and the sections subsequently cleaned by hand; the machine test-holes (except T.H. 3) were then excavated to the top of the gravel. A total of 50 sq.m. was excavated, 3.3% of the total redevelopment area.

The Results

The gravel was reached in four test-holes (T.H. 4, 5, 6 and 7) at a depth of c.2.5m below ground surface (c.70.2m A.O.D.) except for T.H.

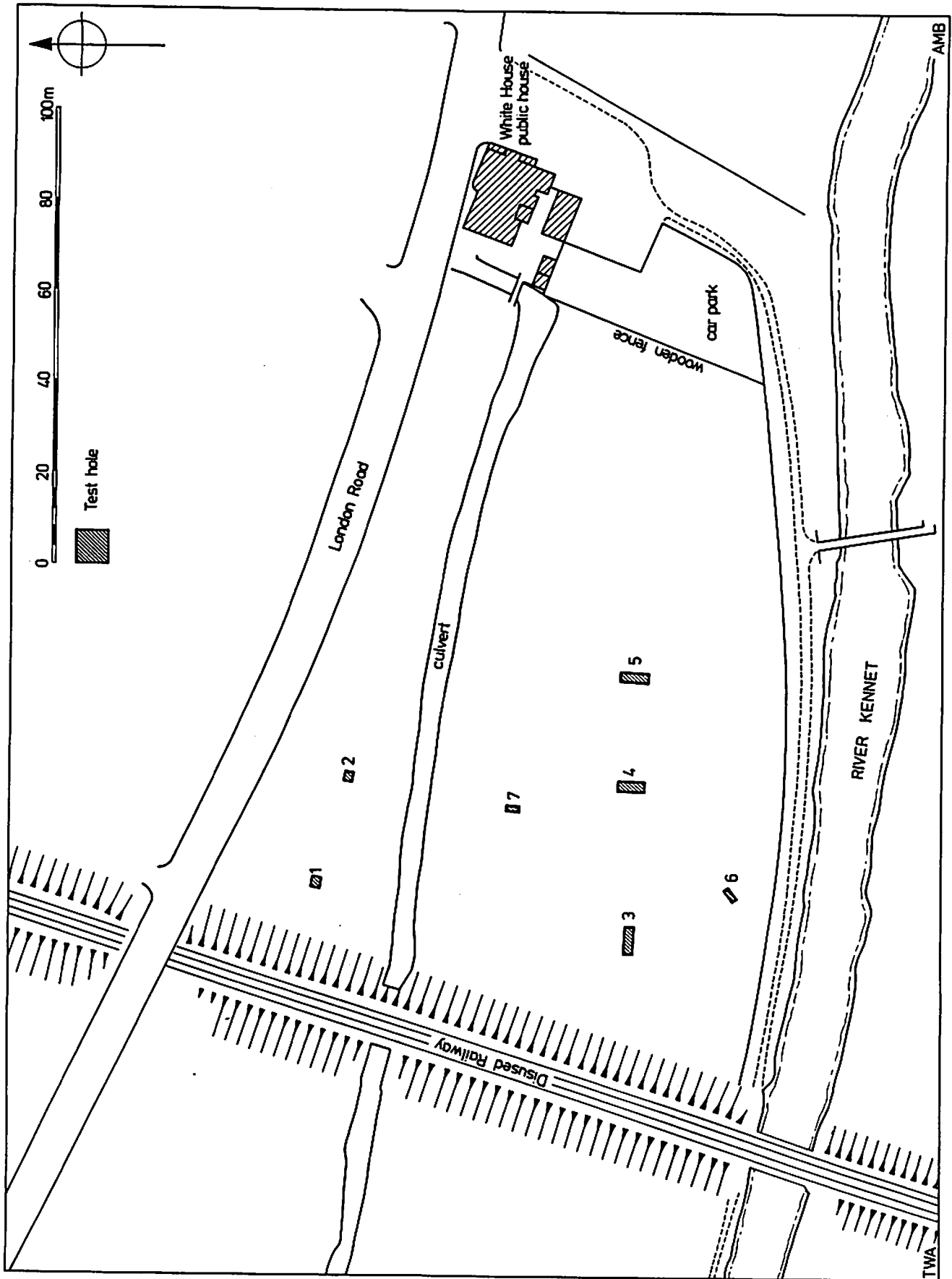


Fig. 2: Location of archaeological trenches.

6, where it was at a shallower depth of c.2.0m below ground surface (71.04m A.O.D.).

The soil sequence above the gravel was similar in all seven test-holes, and consisted of:

(3) reddish-brown to black compact peat varying in thickness from c.0.1m (T.H.6) to 2.1m (T.H.7);

(2) mixed cream to light grey tufa with lenses and patches of silt and peat, nodular, less mixed and slightly iron-stained in T.H.1 and T.H.2, with a thickness of c.1.5m (T.H.6) to 0.6m (T.H.1). In T.H.3 and T.H.5 the upper limits of this tufa was extremely mixed and silty and showed in T.H.5 distinct evidence of bedding;

(1) dark brown silty loam topsoil c.0.25-0.3m thick.

This sequence was interrupted only in T.H.7 where the tufa (2) was absent, the topsoil resting directly on peat (3). In T.H.1 and T.H.2 the base of the peat (3) was not reached because of the combination of hand excavation and the high water table, while in T.H.3 the base of the tufa (2) was not reached, again due to the high water table.

No finds were recovered from the peat (3). A single nodule of burnt and worked flint was recovered from the tufa (2) in T.H.1, while four sherds of medieval pottery and a single flint flake were recovered from the topsoil (1) of T.H.1 and T.H.2. A number of post-medieval sherds and tile fragments were also noted from the topsoil of T.H.1 and T.H.2 but were not kept.

Discussion

Despite the obvious potential for mesolithic occupation at this site no evidence for this was recovered. Because of the mobility of the river course in relatively recent years it is possible that occupation levels of this date may have been eroded away, but equally the area may have been too marshy and unattractive to mesolithic settlers.

No evidence could be secured to date the deposition of the peat or tufa layers. The character of the tufa deposit suggests it comprises both *in situ* deposition within earlier water channels and reworked flood deposits. It is likely that a similar soil sequence above the gravel recurs throughout the development area.

Roland Smith

April 1987

Acknowledgements

The work at this site was carried out with the assistance of Lorraine Mephram and the drawings were prepared by Liz James and Amanda Balfour.