Wessex Archaeology

Chamberhouse Farm
Thatcham, West Berkshire

Archaeological Watching Brief Report

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February 2006

CHAMBERHOUSE FARM
THATCHAM, WEST BERKSHIRE

Archaeological Watching Brief Report

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Summary

Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by Capita Symonds to undertake an archaeological watching brief during experimental drainage testing at Chamberhouse Farm, Thatcham, West Berkshire, centred on National Grid Reference 45124 16593.

The fieldwork comprised the excavation of five 'recharge' trenches in an area previously subjected to archaeological evaluation, which had identified flint scatters of Mesolithic date in close proximity to the proposed trenches.

During the course of the watching brief, no archaeological features, deposits or artefact scatters were recorded during the excavation of any of the five trenches or an additional sondage. The sequence of peat and alluvial deposits was recorded and was found to conform closely with the sedimentological sequence previously recorded during the earlier archaeological evaluation.

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Acknowledgements

Wessex Archaeology would like to thank Toby Gill of Capita Symonds for commissioning the work and for subsequent help during the course of the work. Wessex Archaeology would also like to thank Gavin Chaplin of BCL Consultant Hydrogeologists Limited, who oversaw the experimental work, and Duncan Coe of West Berkshire Council, who monitored the archaeological fieldwork, for their help and assistance.

Susan Clelland undertook the fieldwork and compiled this report. The illustrations were produced by Linda Coleman. Andrew Manning managed the project on behalf of Wessex Archaeology.

CHAMBERHOUSE FARM
THATCHAM, WEST BERKSHIRE

Archaeological Watching Brief Report

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project Background

1.1.1 Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by Capita Symonds to undertake a watching brief during experimental drainage testing at Chamberhouse Farm, Thatcham, West Berkshire, centred on National Grid Reference 45124 16593, hereafter referred as 'the Site' (**Figure 1**).

1.1.2 The experimental work included the excavation of five 'recharge' trenches in an area, which had previously subjected to archaeological evaluation and shown to contain significant archaeological potential (Wessex Archaeology 1998).

1.1.3 A Written Scheme of Investigation covering the watching brief was prepared by Wessex Archaeology (2005) and was approved by West Berkshire Council in advance of the commencement of the watching brief.

1.1.4 This report contains the results of the watching brief, which was carried out in late October 2005.

1.2 Location, Geology, Topography and Land-use

1.2.1 The Site lies within agricultural land, which is located on the Kennet floodplain, immediately to the south of the town of Thatcham, Berkshire (**Figure 1**). The Site is bordered to the west and north-west by a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

1.2.2 The Site lies at a height of approximately 66.50m above Ordnance Datum (aOD), on the northern bank of a former palaeochannel of the Kennet. The geology of the area consists of Quarternary deposits, which had been examined in some detail in previous archaeological work.

1.2.3 In general a sequence of floodplain gravels has been identified within an eroded bedrock valley at an elevation of between *c*.60 and 66m aOD. The gravels occur as discontinuous thin layers. A variable distribution and thickness of peats, alluvium and occasional tufa overlay these gravels. An upper soil horizon of up to a metre is common and final surface elevations typically ranged between 65.5 and 69.5m aOD.

1.3 Archaeological Background

1.3.1 The Site and wider Chamberhouse Farm area have been the subject of an archaeological programme of fieldwalking and trenched and test-pit

evaluation. All the fieldwork was carried out in the late 1990s (Wessex Archaeology 1998).

1.3.2 Palaeotopographic modelling suggests that the ancient Chamberhouse Farm landscape was bisected by an east-west running palaeochannel, which was gradually in-filled from the Late Glacial period onwards (from 12,000 BC).

1.3.3 The wide spread pattern of trenching and test-pitting employed during the 1990s, detected at least 12 *in situ* possible Late Glacial and Early Mesolithic flint and faunal flint scatters (*c.* 12,000-8000 BC), all of which were situated on the northern bank of the former palaeochannel. These remains were considered to be potentially of National Importance.

1.3.4 Situated within 20m of the proposed Trenches A and B, Early Mesolithic flint had been previously recovered from two evaluation Test-pits, 11 and 12 (**Figure 2**). The flints were contained within peat, sealed by alluvium, at a depth of approximately 0.70m-1.0m below the present ground level.

1.3.5 A total of five flakes/blades were recovered from Test-pit 11 and eight flakes/blades, one core and one micro burin from Test-pit 12.

1.3.6 Evidence for Late Iron Age and Romano-British field systems were identified along the southern edge of the palaeochannel. In conjunction with a possible Romano-British midden site, enough material was recovered to infer that a contemporary settlement may have been located nearby. Throughout the evaluation, drainage ditches dating to the medieval and Post-medieval periods were exposed.

1.4 Fieldwork Objectives

1.4.1 The objective of the watching brief was to:

- Record the presence/absence, extent, date, character and condition of any surviving archaeological remains and enable the record the preservation by record of any remains,

- To identify the presence of any significant Late Glacial/Mesolithic flintwork associated with underlying peat deposits, which would be potentially of National Importance and to provide sufficient information, if present, to undertake further detailed archaeological mitigation, if required.

2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Fieldwork Strategy

2.1.1 The locations of Trenches A-E were identified in advance of excavation and were excavated by a 360^{o} tracked mechanical excavator with a toothless bucket.

2.1.2 Subsequent to discussions with West Berkshire Council, a constant archaeological watching brief was maintained during the excavation of Trenches A and B (the two trenches closest to the previously identified flint

scatters in test-pits 11 and 12). During recording of these two trenches, an intermittent watching brief was undertaken during the excavation of the remaining Trenches C-E and an additional small area, Sondage F.

2.1.3 In Trenches A and B, all undifferentiated topsoil or overburden was removed down to the top of any significant archaeological horizon (found to be the upper surface of peat deposits). At this point the trench was cleaned and examined for archaeological artefacts. Machine excavation then continued under constant archaeological supervision in shallow spits and was examined to allow for the identification and collection of any potential small isolated artefacts or the identification of significant *in situ* scatters.

2.1.4 In Trenches C-E, the same procedure was followed, except that archaeological supervision was generally intermittent below the peat horizons.

2.2 Methods of Recording

2.2.1 All archaeological fieldwork was conducted in compliance with the Institute of Field Archaeologist's *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluations* (as revised 1999). All deposits revealed by the excavations, including all natural deposits, were drawn to appropriate scales (1:20 for plans, 1:10 for sections), and with reference to the Ordnance Survey National Grid.

2.2.2 A full photographic record was maintained using digital, colour transparencies and black and white negatives (on 35 mm film). The photographic record illustrated both the detail and the general context of all principal deposits, and the Site as a whole.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 No archaeological features, artefact scatters or significant archaeological deposits were observed during the excavation of the 'recharge' trenches or the sondage.

3.1.2 A visual survey of the Site, which comprises pasture, noted the presence of a series of narrow concave drainage gullies, visible on the ground surface. These modern drainage features were noted aligned north north east – south south west and more commonly north west – south east.

3.1.3 A general sequence of alluvial deposition and peat formation was recorded across the Site, with similar episodes of deposition occurring throughout the excavated trenches.

3.1.4 Below is a summary of results by trench. Full details of all trenches are contained in **Appendix 1**.

Trench A

3.1.5 Trench A was aligned north west – south east and was the largest and northern most of the excavated trenches. Mechanical excavation proceeded to a depth of approximately 0.8m below the present ground surface, removing topsoil (**100**), alluvium (**101**) and a deposit of sandy silt (**102**) to the top of the upper peat (**103**).

3.1.6 The peat (**103**) consisted of a brown black humic layer with un-decomposed tree roots formed to a depth of 0.25m at the south eastern end of Trench A and reaching a maximum depth of 0.6m at the north western end of the trench. The south east facing trench section revealed that this peat layer also rose from 0.6m in the south west corner, to 0.3m in the north west corner of the trench. It is thought that a greater depth of peat developed where an irregular curvilinear hollow was created in the ground surface along the line of a probable palaeochannel.

3.1.7 Subsequent hand cleaning and monitoring of removed spoil did not reveal any archaeological components. A five metre length of the north west end of the trench was then excavated further, through the peat (**103**), clay sand (**104**) to the top of the upper surface of the natural gravel (**105)**, at a depth of 1.7m.

3.1.8 Due to the waterlogged nature of overlying deposits, truncation below the water table and the depth at which this gravel layer was reached exposed trench sides were subject to collapse. On heath and Safety grounds, it was therefore decided that only the southern half of the trench would be excavated to fully expose the gravel (**105).**

3.1.9 The peat layer (**103)** overlaid an alluvial clay sand (**104)** with a blurred horizon indicative of rooting marking this interface, with two very thin bands of very small sub-rounded flint pebbles, suggested an episodic deposition. The clay sand (**104)** had a maximum recorded depth of 0.7m at the south eastern end of the trench and 0.5m at the north western end. Water derived grooves, probable remnant palaeochannels, filled by the clay sand (**104)** were observed cut into the top of the natural gravel (**105).**

Trench B

3.1.10 Aligned north west – south east, Trench B measured 34m in length and was 2.5m wide. The method of machine excavation and archaeological monitoring was consistent with that described above for Trench A.

3.1.11 The overburden was initially removed in spits to a depth of 0.6m, through the topsoil (**200**), alluvium (**201**) and to the top of peat horizon (**202**) along the length of the trench. Within the central fifteen metres of the trench an area of disturbed, re-deposited peat and alluvium was recorded and was subsequently proven to be a previous unrecorded hydrological test trench. The top of the exposed undisturbed peat (**202**) was cleaned by hand and removed spoil checked for archaeological components, none were recovered.

3.1.12 The trench was then excavated, in spits, to a depth of 1.4m through a series of alluvial silts and gravel bands (**203-208)**, generally indicative of natural

river gravels, to the top of fine sand and flint pebble deposit (**209)** at the base of the trench.

3.1.13 To facilitate the drainage required for the intended hydrological investigations the south eastern end of Trench B was extended towards the eastern field boundary (**Figure 1**). A 2m wide trench was excavated to the upper level of the peat horizon. A 0.8m wide machine excavated slot was then excavated along the centre line of this trench. All works were monitored and all spoil checked for archaeological components. The stratigraphic sequence observed within the original 30m length of Trench B was maintained up to approximately 6metres of the eastern field boundary where it is thought that the trench truncated an earlier water course. Sondage F details the stratigraphy recorded.

Trench C

3.1.14 Parallel to trenches A and B, Trench C initially measured 30m in length and 2.5m in width. The method of machine excavation and archaeological monitoring was consistent with that described above for Trench A.

3.1.15 The overburden was initially removed in spits to a depth of 0.45m, excavated through topsoil (**300**) and alluvium (**301**) to the upper horizon of the peat (**302)**. The exposed peat was rapidly cleaned by hand and removed spoil checked for archaeological components, none were recovered.

3.1.16 The trench was subsequently excavated in spits to a depth of 1.3m. Removal of peat layer (**302)** was fully monitored while excavation of the underlying alluvial and gravel layers (**303-305**) was monitored intermittently. Particle size and the occasional small flint pebble inclusions increased in size and frequency downwards through these layers. River gravels (**305**) with an undulating upper interface were encountered at approximately 1.15m below ground level.

Trench D

3.1.17 Trench D aligned parallel with trenches A-C was the southern most of the trenches. The method of machine excavation and archaeological monitoring was consistent with that described above for Trench A.

3.1.18 The overburden was initially removed in spits to a depth of 0.5m, through topsoil (**400**) and alluvium (**401**) to the upper horizon of peat layer **402**. The exposed peat was rapidly cleaned by hand and removed spoil checked for archaeological components, none were recovered.

3.1.19 As with Trench C excavation subsequently proceeded in spits to a depth of 1.3m. Removal of peat layer **402** was fully monitored. Excavation of the underlying alluvial and gravel layers (**403-404**) was monitored intermittently. The alluvium (**403)** represented alluvial deposition with two very thin bands of very small sub-rounded flint pebbles, suggested an episodic deposition. River gravels (**404)** were encountered at approximately 1m at the south eastern end of the trench and 1.15m below ground level at the north western end.

Trench E

3.1.20 Trench E was orientated at an approximate right angle to the other four trenches and followed a north north east – south south west alignment. The method of machine excavation and archaeological monitoring was consistent with that described above.

3.1.21 The topsoil (**500**) and alluvium (**501**) was removed in spits to the upper horizon of peat layer (**502**), which lay at a depth of 0.4m below the present ground surface. Removed material was checked and the exposed surface rapidly cleaned and scanned for archaeological components.

3.1.22 The trench was then excavated through the peat layer (**502)**, which maintained a consistent depth throughout the length of the trench, and alluvium **(503**), which was represented by thin intermittent bands of very small sub-rounded flint pebbles, suggested an episodic deposition. Excavation continued into the river gravels (**504)** comprising fine orange sandy flint gravel with some manganese staining onto the top of the natural gravel (**505),** which was encountered at 0.7m below ground level.

3.1.23 All spoil removed was checked for archaeological components, none were recovered.

3.1.24 Sondage F

3.1.25 A sondage measuring approximately 12m by 10m was excavated to a final depth of 1.6m below the present ground surface, between Trenches B and C. The sondage partly cut a previously recorded evaluation trench (Trench 55).

3.1.26 The sequence of excavated deposits was similar to the sequences recorded in adjacent trenches, with the top of the peat (**602**) recorded at a depth of 0.52m below the present ground surface. However, one difference was the recording of a second layer of peat (604) at a depth of 1m.

4 FINDS AND PALAEO-ENVIRONMENTAL RESULTS

4.1 Finds

4.1.1 No finds were recovered during the course of the watching brief, either from hand-cleaning of the excavated trenches/sondage or from the scanning of the excavated spoil.

4.2 Palaeo-environmental Results

4.2.1 No deposits were suitable for palaeo-environmental sampling.

5 CONCLUSION

5.1.1 No archaeological remains, significant archaeological deposits or flint artefacts, either singly or as part of a scatter, were found during the watching brief.

5.1.2 The recorded sequence of deposits within the trenches was broadly similar and corresponded with the sequences recorded in the previously excavated evaluation trenches and test-pits.

6 REFERENCES

6.1.1 Institute of Field Archaeologists, 1999, Standard and Guidance for Archaeological watching brief

6.1.2 Wessex Archaeology, 1998, Chamberhouse Farm, Thatcham, Berkshire: Draft Archaeological Evaluation Report, Unpublished Client Report Ref. 43211, March 1998, issued September 2005

6.1.3 Wessex Archaeology, 2005, Chamberhouse Farm, Thatcham, West Berkshire: Written Scheme of Investigation for Archaeological Mitigation, Unpublished Client Report Ref. 61300, issued October 2005

Appendix 1: Trench Summaries

Evaluation Trench A		**Max depth:1.7 m**	**Length:32 m**	**Width: 5.2m**
Context No.	**Type**	**Description:**		**Depth: (m)**
100	*layer*	Topsoil/A² horizon – A light to mid brown, friable clay silt with very rare small angular and sub-angular flint pebbles. Occasional lenses of re-deposited 101. Deposit becomes more compact downwards through layer. Very sharp mower horizon. Moderate rooting.		0-0.3m
101	*layer*	Degraded chalk alluvium (tufa) A creamy brown sandy texture with peat and sand lenses throughout. Rare inclusions of small sub-rounded flint pebbles. Diffuse lower horizon.		0.3-0.65m
102	*layer*	Active interface between 101 and 103. A very mottled (brown sandy and peat) grey white sandy silt.		0.65-0.8m
103	*layer*	Peat. A brown black humic layer with wood (tree) and root fragments present. Very rare medium sub rounded flint pebbles (no worked, flaked or burnt pieces). Diffuse lower horizon.		0.8-1.3m
104	*layer*	Waterlogged grey cream clay sand. Rare small flint pebbles inclusions (no worked, flaked or burnt pieces). Small irregular moderate orange mottling throughout. Moderate concentrations of Fe veins noted throughout.		1.3-1.7m
105	*layer*	Flint gravel (small-large sub-rounded –angular pieces) within a grey white coarse sandy matrix. Water derived grooves truncated gravel.		1.7m+
Trench excavated in spits for use as an overflow tank				

Evaluation Trench B		**Max depth: 1.4m**	**Length: 34m**	**Width: 2.5m**
Context No.	**Type**	**Description:**		**Depth: (m)**
200	*layer*	Topsoil/A² - Dark brown friable clay silt with very few grit sized – small flint pebble inclusions. In creasing compaction towards base. Sharp lower horizon		0-0.35m
201	*layer*	Degraded chalk alluvium. A cream brown chalky clay silt with peat lenses and lenses of concreted chalk with Fe derived veined orange mottling.		0.35-0.6m
202	*layer*	Peat. Dark brown black humic peat with a shallow upper horizon of mixed brown and cream mottled clay silt with peat lenses.		0.6-0.75m
203	*layer*	A narrow horizontal band of cream white sandy silt with veined Fe staining.		0.75-0.82m
204	*layer*	Narrow gravel band comprised of *c*60% small – medium sub-angular flint pebbles in a creamy white sandy matrix with occasional fine veined fe staining.		0.82-0.9m
205	*layer*	Dark orange coarse sandy gravel (flint)		0.9-1.2m
206	*layer*	Mid yellow orange gravel sand with abundant flint pebbles. Coloured sand was mottled in appearance.		1.2-1.25m
207	*layer*	Mid-Dark yellow orange sandy flint gravel (*40-50% flint pebbles)*		1.25-1.35m
208	*layer*	Yellow brown coarse sandy flint gravel (*c70% flint pebbles)*		1.35-1.4m
209	*layer*	Yellow fine sand with abundant flint pebbles		1.4m+
A previous trench truncated the centre of this 'recharge' trench. Layers 205-209 are thought to be the same depositional context recorded as a series of deposits to facilitate a detailed description.				

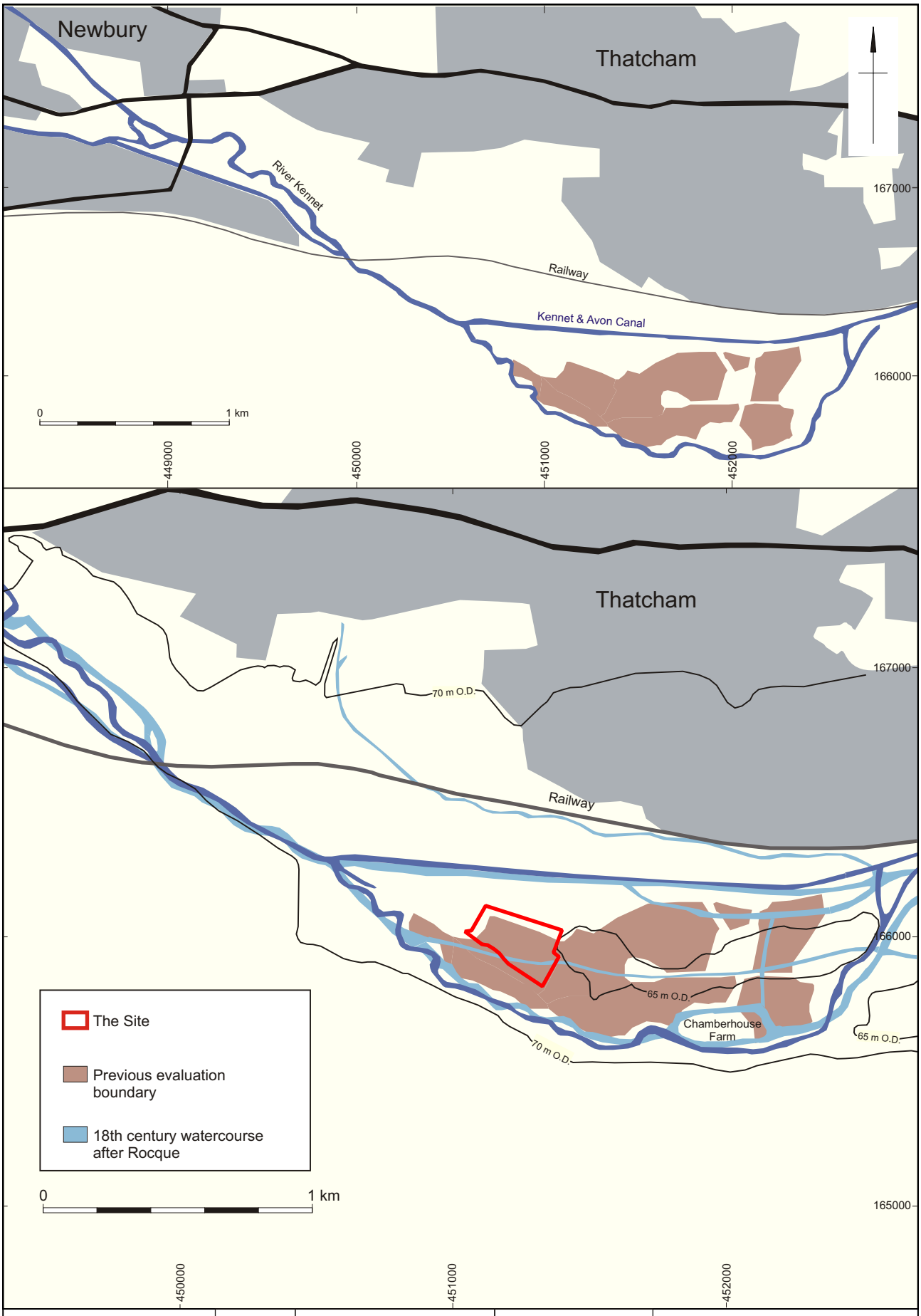
Evaluation Trench C		**Max depth:1.3 m**	**Length:30m+**	**Width: 2.5m**
Context No.	**Type**	**Description:**		**Depth: (m)**
300	*layer*	Topsoil/A² - Mid brown friable clay silt (very grainy) with considerable rooting. Very rare grit sized – small flint pebble inclusions. Deposit becomes more compact towards base. Occasional flecks of re-worked 301 noted.		0-0.3m
301	*layer*	Weathered alluvial silty clay chalk. A very mixed, mottled yellow, grey brown deposit. Of varied compaction occasionally concreted. Sharp upper and lower horizons.		0.3-0.45m
302	*layer*	Peat – Brown black humic deposit. Diffuse lower horizon of grey white peat and creamy silty sand.		0.45-0.65m
303	*layer*	Light white grey alluvial sandy clay with mid blue grey rooting.		0.65-0.9m
304	*layer*	Waterlogged alluvial layer. A mid white grey clay san. Less compact than overlying layer 303 and comprised of larger particles. Occasional roots and snails (same snails as found within the topsoil. Occasional but increasing numbers towards base, of small flint pebbles.		0.9-1.2m

305	*layer*	Yellow orange sandy flint gravel. Gravel comprised of pea grit sized at top becoming increasingly larger and brighter in colour towards base of exposed section. Upper horizon of deposit formed a distinct bronze band, thought to be due to post depositional mineral and water transfer through layer.	1.2m+

Evaluation Trench D		**Max depth: 1.3m**	**Length: 30m+**	**Width: 2.5m**
Context No.	**Type**	**Description:**		**Depth: (m)**
400	*layer*	Topsoil/A² - Mid –dark brown frequent manganese and rooting. Lenses of underlying 401 and occasional small flint pebbles.		0-0.35m
401	*layer*	Degraded chalk. A mixed silty chalk deposit with yellow brown homogenous silty lenses and occasional small – moderate orange mottles, concreted in places.		0.35-0.5m
402	*layer*	Brown black humic deposit with a diffuse lower horizon becoming mid-light grey silty sand and peaty mix.		0.5-0.65m
403	*layer*	Grey cream silty sand with small – moderate mottles. Waterlogged deposit with two very thin bands of very small sub-rounded flint pebbles, suggesting an episodic deposition.		0.65-1.2m
404	*layer*	Yellow orange coarse sandy flint gravel. Layer 404 was reached at 1m at the northern end of the trench and 1.2m at the southern end.		1m+

Evaluation Trench E		**Max depth:1m+**	**Length: 30m**	**Width: 2.5m**
Context No.	**Type**	**Description:**		**Depth: (m)**
500	*layer*	Topsoil/A² - Mid –light clay silt. A friable coarse grained deposit with very few inclusions, becoming more compact to base. Occasional small lenses of reworked 501.		0-0.3m
501	*layer*	Degraded alluvial chalk. A mottled appearance formed from the peat and both coarse and fine grained sandy lenses. Sharp upper and diffuse lower horizons.		0.3-0.4m
502	*layer*	Peat. Brown black humic deposit with un-decomposed roots. Merges with overlying deposit forming a very diffuse upper horizon. Diffuse lower horizon appearing as a mid grey band of peaty clay sand.		0.4-0.55m
503	*layer*	Creamy grey alluvium. A waterlogged clay sand with occasional horizontally banded small sub-rounded flint pebbles. Small moderate orange mottling throughout and fine Fe veining.		0.55-0.7m+
504	*layer*	Fine orange sandy flint gravel. A gravel fan overlying 503 with moderate manganese staining. Does not extend through the length of the trench.		0.55-0.65m
505	*layer*	Creamy orange coarse sandy flint gravel with very little manganese.		0.7m+

Sondage F		**Max depth: 1.6m**	**Length: 12m**	**Width: 10m**
Context No.	**Type**	**Description:**		**Depth: (m)**
600	*layer*	Topsoil/A² - Mid brown friable clay silt.		0-0.3m
601	*layer*	Alluvial deposit of crushed chalk within a coarse mottled grey white silty sand.		0.3-0.52m
602	*layer*	Dark black brown humic peat.		0.52-0.6m
603	*layer*	Degraded alluvial chalk. A mottled appearance formed from the peat and both coarse and fine grained sandy lenses. Moderate upper and lower horizons.		0.6-1m
604	*layer*	Mid-black brown humic peat		1-1.15m
605	*layer*	Mottled and partially concreted yellow orange sandy silt sharp upper and lower horizons.		1.15-1.4m
606	*layer*	Light grey blue stiff clay		1.4-1.6m
607	*layer*	Yellow fine sand with abundant flint pebbles		1.6m+



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Site location plan

Figure 1

Location of Trenches A-E and Sondage F

Figure 2

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