

**Archaeological Evaluation Report
Natural History Museum Access Road
Reading, Berkshire**

**NGR: 474481 169366
(SU 74481 69366)**

Wokingham BC Planning Ref: 232995

**ASE Project No: 240058
Site Code: BHI24
ASE Report No: 2024116
OASIS id: archaeol6-524963**



By Lucy May



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Abstract

This report presents the results of an archaeological evaluation carried out by Archaeology South-East on the land for the Natural History Museum Access Road between 15th April and 19th April 2024. The fieldwork was commissioned by RPS Consulting Services Ltd in advance of the construction of the access road for the Natural History Museum, Reading, Berkshire.

The preservation of the archaeological horizon was good, with an undisturbed subsoil overlying London Clay recorded in all of the trenches. Of the 12 trenches excavated, 2 in the northern part of the site revealed archaeological features; consisting of 2 ditches, 1 pit and 1 posthole. All of the features are undated by finds, however, it is considered that the ditches and the pit are likely related to post-medieval / modern field boundaries and agricultural activities. The rest of the trenches were archaeologically negative.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Background

- 1.1.1 Archaeology South-East was commissioned by RPS Consulting Services Ltd on behalf of the University of Reading to undertake an archaeological evaluation in advance of the construction of an access road for the Natural History Museum, Reading, Berkshire. The site is centred on National Grid Reference 474481 169366 and its location is shown in Figure 1.
- 1.1.2 The site comprised of two fields divided by a farm trackway and is surrounded by farm buildings to the north, further agricultural land and woodland to the east and south and industrial units to the west.

1.2 Geology and Topography

- 1.2.1 According to the British Geological Survey (2024), the bedrock geology of the study site is the London Clay Formation – clay, silt and sand. Superficial deposits of brickearth – clay, silt and sand – are present throughout most of the site.
- 1.2.2 The site lies within relatively level agricultural fields at c. 45m above Ordnance Datum.

1.3 Planning Background

- 1.3.1 Planning permission has been sought for the construction of an extension to the Thames Valley Science Park spine road to provide access to a proposed new building for the Natural History Museum (separate application), landscaping, surface water attenuation and other associated works (planning ref 232995). An archaeological desk-based assessment was compiled in support of the application (RPS 2023) and described the site as having low potential for archaeological remains of early prehistoric, medieval and post-medieval date, and negligible potential for remains from all other periods. The north-western part of the site lies within an Area of High Archaeological Potential associated with a series of cropmarks.
- 1.3.2 In light of these findings, it was decided to conduct a programme of archaeological evaluation to inform on the potential for further archaeological work.
- 1.3.3 A Written Scheme of Investigation for the archaeological evaluation of the site (ASE 2024) was compiled and submitted to all the relevant parties prior to the commencement of the fieldwork.

1.4 Scope of Report

- 1.4.1 This report details the results of the archaeological evaluation carried out between the 15th April and 19th April 2024.

2.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Introduction

- 2.1.1 The following archaeological background has been summarised from the Desk-Based Assessment (RPS 2023) and from an evaluation report for the neighbouring Natural History Museum Site (Wessex Archaeology 2023).

2.2 Prehistoric

- 2.2.1 Five pieces of worked flint, of Mesolithic or Early Neolithic date were recovered from three trenches at Shinfield Studios (MRM18543). Very little archaeological evidence of activity was recovered from this evaluation.
- 2.2.2 A single struck flint of broadly prehistoric date was recovered during the recent evaluation on the neighbouring site (Wessex Archaeology 2023, Figure 2).
- 2.2.3 Cropmarks identified from historic aerial photography identified features of potential prehistoric importance however following investigations no archaeological features were recorded.

2.3 Romano-British

- 2.3.1 Based on conjectural evidence, it is thought a section of Roman road (BHER MM34) is theorised to lie 350 m to the north and 420 m to the west of site. Work at the Shinfield Studios produced fragments of Late Iron Age/Roman pottery.
- 2.3.2 The recent evaluation on the neighbouring site (Wessex Archaeology 2023; Figure 2) found evidence of a possible Romano-British field system with nine ditches recorded within the trenches. Only one of these contained dating evidence.

2.4 Medieval

- 2.4.1 No archaeological finds or features dating to the early medieval period have been identified in the area. It is believed that the name Shinfield is Saxon in origin. By the publication of the Domesday Book in 1086, Shinfield had a population of fifteen households, and consisted of sixteen acres of meadow, ninety swine, renders of woodland, one mill and five fisheries.
- 2.4.2 The River Loddon was the medieval boundary of Windsor Forest during this period and remains the boundary between Arborfield and Shinfield parishes today. Shinfield settlement is well established by the medieval period, and its historic core is situated to the west of the site. This area of the site is likely to have been an area of agricultural activity and/or woodland.

2.5 Post-Medieval

- 2.5.1 Cutbush Lane East (MWK15639) is known to be at least eighteenth century in date, and it is depicted on the 1756 estate map. This map, prepared for the Earl of Fingal illustrates the site in considerable detail, and shows this area of the study site consisting of a number of arable fields, orchards and pasture.
- 2.5.2 An L-shaped feature representing a fishpond or possible moat (MWK1112, MWK1113) dating to the medieval or post-medieval period, is situated immediately beyond the

southern limit of the site. The feature is present on the 1838 Tithe Map (RPS 2023; Figure 3) but is not shown on the 1756 Estate Map suggesting a likely post-medieval date. That area is identified by the LPA as an Area of High Archaeological Potential.

- 2.5.3 Shinfield Grange, shown on the 1756 estate map, is a building built of brick and set within its own grounds (MWK15636). Post-medieval ditches, undated linear features, a pit and possible postholes were revealed during archaeological investigations on land either side of Cutbush Lane, to the east and north of Shinfield Grange (MRM18541).
- 2.5.4 The Earl of Fingal's 1756 Estate Map also depicts a pond to the north of Cutbush Lane East, within a triangular area of common or 'green'. However, this may represent early gravel extraction, as the area is later as Brown's Green Gravel Pit in early OS Mapping. The 1836 Tithe Map shows the removal of field boundaries and the amalgamation of fields within the area of the site. The accompanying tithe apportionment shows that the names listed correlated strongly with those identifiable on the 1756 estate map. Many of the field names incorporate the Middle English word 'pightle' meaning small field or enclosure.
- 2.5.5 Ordnance Survey mapping shows that field boundaries within this area of the site have been removed and additional buildings have been constructed at Badger Farm between the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century. The 1938 OS map shows further changes in boundaries, with many now disappearing, and Badger Farm is now labelled Cutbush.
- 2.5.6 By 1965 most of the area comes into the ownership of the University's agricultural land holding. Between 1965 and 1975, the M4 is constructed to the north of the site, and more field boundaries are removed.

2.6 Previous Work

- 2.6.1 A recent archaeological evaluation was conducted on the neighbouring site by Wessex Archaeology (2023; Figure 2). Here, 9 machine dug trenches were excavated to a depth of approximately 0.40m deep. The trenches recorded "a total of nine ditches were encountered along with a further two small pits. It was considered possible that the majority of these ditches form part of a Romano-British agricultural field system, although the only secure dating for this hypothesis was recovered in the form of 17 grams of Roman greyware in ditch 104, at the north-west end of the site. The two small pits were both encountered in the western part of the site, within Trenches 1 and 3. Unfortunately no dating evidence was recovered from either feature, but the burnt flint and charcoal deposits within their fills do suggest that the shallow features were used as refuse dumps for fire debris."
- 2.6.2 Considerable investigation has occurred in the fields 200m to the east of the site, where the British Museum's ARC facility has now been constructed. It had long been suspected that these fields had archaeological potential, as a network of cropmarks is documented within them. This included two parallel, linear cropmarks, interpreted to be a potential road (BHER MWK1805), off which were further features that were interpreted as enclosures (BHER MWK1804, MWK1805, MWK1806, MWK1807) and pits (BHER MWK1808). A geophysical survey undertaken by Wessex Archaeology found a large, curvilinear anomaly through the centre of the northern field, and a cluster of pit-like anomalies in the southern field (2018; BHER ERM2164). A fullscale evaluation was then undertaken by AOC Archaeology in 2018 (BHER ERM2230). Aside from modern ceramic field drains, no archaeological features were observed,

and it is suggested that natural variations in the geology may account for the cropmarks and geophysical anomalies.

2.7 Project Aims and Objectives

2.7.1 The general aims of the evaluation are to ascertain:

- *Whether archaeological remains are present on the site and if so to assess their location including depth below ground level, nature, date, survival, and significance*
- *How they might be impacted by the development of the site*
- *To enable the LPA's Archaeological Advisor to make an informed decision as to the requirement for any further archaeological work either in advance of, or during, the development*

2.7.2 Site specific research aims are defined as follows:

- *Is there any evidence for Romano-British activity?*
- *Is there any evidence for medieval or post-medieval agricultural activity?*

2.7.3 The project also has the potential to inform on the following areas of research from Solent-Thames Research Framework for the Historic Environment. Resource Assessments and Research Agendas (Oxford Wessex Monograph No. 6, 2014):

Romano-British Berkshire

- *Did some field systems support a number of farms and if so, were these in a formal economic relationship? Did the layout of new field systems in the first century imply a change in social organisation?*

3.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL METHODOLOGY

3.1 Fieldwork Methodology

- 3.1.1 All fieldwork and recording was carried out in accordance with the Written Scheme of Investigation (ASE 2024), the Code, Regulations, Standards and Guidelines of the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA 2024) and the General Standards for Historic Environment Projects (Berkshire Archaeology 2021).
- 3.1.2 All trench locations were scanned prior to excavation using a Cable Avoidance Tool (CAT) operated by accredited ASE personnel.
- 3.1.3 All trenches were excavated by a tracked machine fitted with a toothless ditching bucket under archaeological supervision, grading in spits of no more than 100mm at a time until the archaeological horizon or natural geology was uncovered.
- 3.1.4 The archaeological evaluation comprised 12 evaluation trenches which all measured 30m in length by 1.8m wide and were located as shown in Figure 2. There were some modifications to the trench plan:
- 3.1.5 Due to onsite constraints, the position of Trench 4 had to be adjusted slightly to avoid a groundwater borehole checkpoint.
- 3.1.6 Due to the presence of a posthole within Trench 6, it was agreed by all parties that a 5m by 5m extension around the posthole be excavated.
- 3.1.7 All resultant features were investigated by hand excavation and all deposits were recorded using the standard ASE recording sheets.
- 3.1.8 All features and trenches were planned using digital survey technology. Any sections were hand drawn at scales of 1:10 or 1:20.
- 3.1.9 A digital photographic record was maintained of all excavated features and of all trenches
- 3.1.10 No formal reinstatement was undertaken by ASE and the trenches were backfilled with the arisings only.

3.2 Archive

3.2.1 The site archive is currently held at the offices of ASE. The contents of the archive are tabulated below.

Context sheets	42
Section sheets	1
Plans sheets	0
Colour photographs	0
B&W photos	0
Digital photos	73
Context register	2
Drawing register	1
Watching brief forms	0
Trench Record forms	12

Table 1: Quantification of site paper archive

Bulk finds (quantity e.g. 1 bag, 1 box, 0.5 box 0.5 of a box)	0
Registered finds (number of)	0
Flots and environmental remains from bulk samples	0
Palaeoenvironmental specialists sample samples (e.g. columns, prepared slides)	0
Waterlogged wood	0
Wet sieved environmental remains from bulk samples	0

Table 2: Quantification of artefact and environmental samples

3.3.2 The site archive will be assembled in accordance with the guidelines set out in: *'Archaeological Archives. A guide to best practice'* (AAF 2011); *'A Standard and Guide to best practice for Archaeological Archiving in Europe'* (EAC 2013); and *'Standards in the Museum Care of Archaeological Collections'* (SMA 2020).

4.0 RESULTS

4.1 Summary

- 4.1.1 Archaeological features were found in 2 of the 12 trenches excavated and these are described below. Deposits recorded in the archaeologically negative trenches are listed in Appendix 1, with photographs on Figure 5. Trenches with archaeology are described below and illustrated on Figures 3 and 4.
- 4.1.2 The natural geology comprised of London Clay Formation and was overlain by subsoil, a firm, mid-grey brown, silt clay and sealed by a topsoil, light grey brown, silt sand in all trenches.

4.2 Trench 6

(Figure 3)

Context	Type	Interpretation	Length (m)	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Height (m OD)
6/001	Layer	Topsoil	30	1.8	0.21-0.33	43.06-43.17
6/002	Layer	Subsoil	30	1.8	0.15-0.24	42.73-42.96
6/003	Layer	London Clay	30	1.8		42.49-42.73
6/004	Cut	Posthole	0.35	0.35	0.17	42.71
6/005	Fill	Fill	0.35	0.35	0.17	
6/006	Cut	Ditch	1.8	0.8	0.16	42.98
6/007	Fill	Fill	1.8	0.8	0.16	
6/008	Cut	Pit				42.95
6/009	Fill	Fill				

Table 3: Trench 6 list of recorded contexts

- 4.2.1 A single posthole, [6/004], was found towards the northeast end of the trench. This was round in plan with concave sides and a rounded base and was filled with a soft, dark brown, clay silt, with occasional charcoal flecks, [6/005]. No archaeological finds were found. The trench was extended by 5m surrounding the posthole in order to see if there was an alignment in postholes, or any further features in proximity. None were identified.
- 4.2.2 A single ditch, [6/006], aligned northwest to southeast was recorded. This had slightly irregular, concave sides and a rounded base. It was filled with a blue grey, silt clay, [6/007], which would appear to be a contaminated fill and is likely a more recent feature. No archaeological finds were found in this feature.
- 4.2.3 Truncating the ditch was an irregular shaped pit, [6/008], which had a similar blue grey, silt clay fill, [6/009] which gave off a contaminated smell again is more likely a recent feature.

4.3 Trench 7

(Figure 4)

Context	Type	Interpretation	Length (m)	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Height (m OD)
7/001	Layer	Topsoil	30	1.8	0.20-0.30	42.34-42.7
7/002	Layer	Subsoil	30	1.8	0.26-0.30	42.14-42.59
7/003	Layer	London Clay	30	1.8		41.88-42.29
7/004	Cut	Ditch	1.8	2.7	0.5	42.46
7/005	Fill	Fill	1.8	2.7	0.5	

Table 4: Trench 7 list of recorded contexts

- 4.3.1 A single ditch, [7/004], aligned northeast to southwest across the northern section of the trench. This had irregular concave sides which were slightly stepped, with a rounded base and was filled with a mid-grey silt clay, [7/005]. No finds were retrieved from this feature.
- 4.3.2 This ditch runs perpendicular to the current field boundary and is evident as a field boundary on historic mapping (Figure 6).

5.0 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Overview of stratigraphic sequence

- 5.1.1 The stratigraphy across site comprised of London Clay natural geology overlain by subsoil and topsoil.
- 5.1.2 The natural geology was encountered at a maximum height of 43.46m OD within Trench 1 to the north west of site, falling away to 40.46m OD within Trench 12 towards the south of site.
- 5.1.3 Undated archaeological features were only encountered in 2 of the 12 trenches. These were to the north of the site. The features consisted of 2 ditches, 1 pit and 1 posthole.

5.2 Deposit survival and existing impacts

- 5.2.1 The recorded site stratigraphy suggests that the preservation of the archaeological horizon is good with undisturbed topsoil/subsoil overlying the natural geology in all trenches. Confidence in the archaeological findings of the evaluation is therefore considered as high.

5.3 Discussion of archaeological remains by period

- 5.3.1 No finds were retrieved from the 4 features found, however, the ditch recorded in Trench 7 appears to correspond with an old field boundary on the 1874 1st Edition Ordnance Survey map (Figure 6) and so is likely of post-medieval date.
- 5.3.2 An extension surrounding the undated posthole recorded in Trench 6 revealed no further features. The undated ditch and pit in Trench 6 shows evidence of contamination and are also considered likely to be post-medieval or modern features; potentially even an infilled machine wheel-rut.

5.4 Potential impact on archaeological remains

- 5.4.1 The lack of archaeological finds, the low density and the generally assumed, late date of most of the recorded features in the evaluation suggest that the construction of the proposed access road will have little impact upon significant archaeological remains.

5.5 Consideration of site specific research aims

- 5.5.1 No Romano-British or medieval activity was recorded. It is considered that the ditches and pit in the northern part of the site are likely related to post-medieval / modern field boundaries and agricultural activities. The single posthole that was recorded is undated.

5.6 Conclusions

- 5.6.1 The preservation of the archaeological horizon was good, with an undisturbed subsoil overlying London Clay recorded in all of the trenches. Of the 12 trenches excavated, 2 in the northern part of the site revealed archaeological features; consisting of 2 ditches, 1 pit and 1 posthole. All of the features are undated by finds, however, it is considered that the ditches and the pit are likely related to post-medieval / modern field boundaries and agricultural activities. The rest of the trenches were archaeologically negative.

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HER Summary

Site code	BHI24					
Project code	240058					
Planning reference	Wokingham Borough Council - 232995					
Site address	Natural History Museum Access Road,					
District/Borough	Reading					
NGR (12 figures)	474481 169366					
Geology	e London Clay Formation – Clay, Silt and Sand					
Fieldwork type	Eval					
Date of fieldwork	15 th -19 th April 2024					
Sponsor/client	RPS Consulting Services Ltd					
Project manager	Paul Mason					
Project supervisor	Lucy May					
Period summary						
				Post-Medieval	Undated	
Project summary	The preservation of the archaeological horizon was good, with an undisturbed subsoil overlying London Clay recorded in all of the trenches. Of the 12 trenches excavated, 2 in the northern part of the site revealed archaeological features; consisting of 2 ditches, 1 pit and 1 posthole. All of the features are undated by finds, however, it is considered that the ditches and the pit are likely related to post-medieval / modern field boundaries and agricultural activities. The rest of the trenches were archaeologically negative.					

OASIS Form

OASIS ID (UID): archaeol6-524963

Project Name: Evaluation at Natural History Museum Access Road

Activity type: Evaluation

Sitecode(s): BHI24

Project Identifier(s): 240058

Planning Id: 232995

Reason for Investigation: Planning: Between application and determination

Organisation Responsible for work: Archaeology South-East

Project Dates: 15-Apr-2024 - 19-Apr-2024

HER: Berkshire Archaeology HER

Project Methodology: The archaeological evaluation comprised 12 evaluation trenches measuring 30m x 1.8m. All trench locations were scanned prior to excavation using a Cable Avoidance Tool (CAT) operated by accredited ASE personnel. All trenches were excavated by a tracked machine fitted with a toothless ditching bucket under archaeological supervision, grading in spits of no more than 100mm at a time until the first archaeological horizon or natural geology was uncovered.

Project Results: The preservation of the archaeological horizon was good, with an undisturbed subsoil overlying London Clay recorded in all of the trenches. Of the 12 trenches excavated, 2 in the northern part of the site revealed archaeological features; consisting of 2 ditches, 1 pit and 1 posthole. All of the features are undated by finds, however, it is considered that the ditches and the pit are likely related to post-medieval / modern field boundaries and agricultural activities. The rest of the trenches were archaeologically negative.

Keywords:

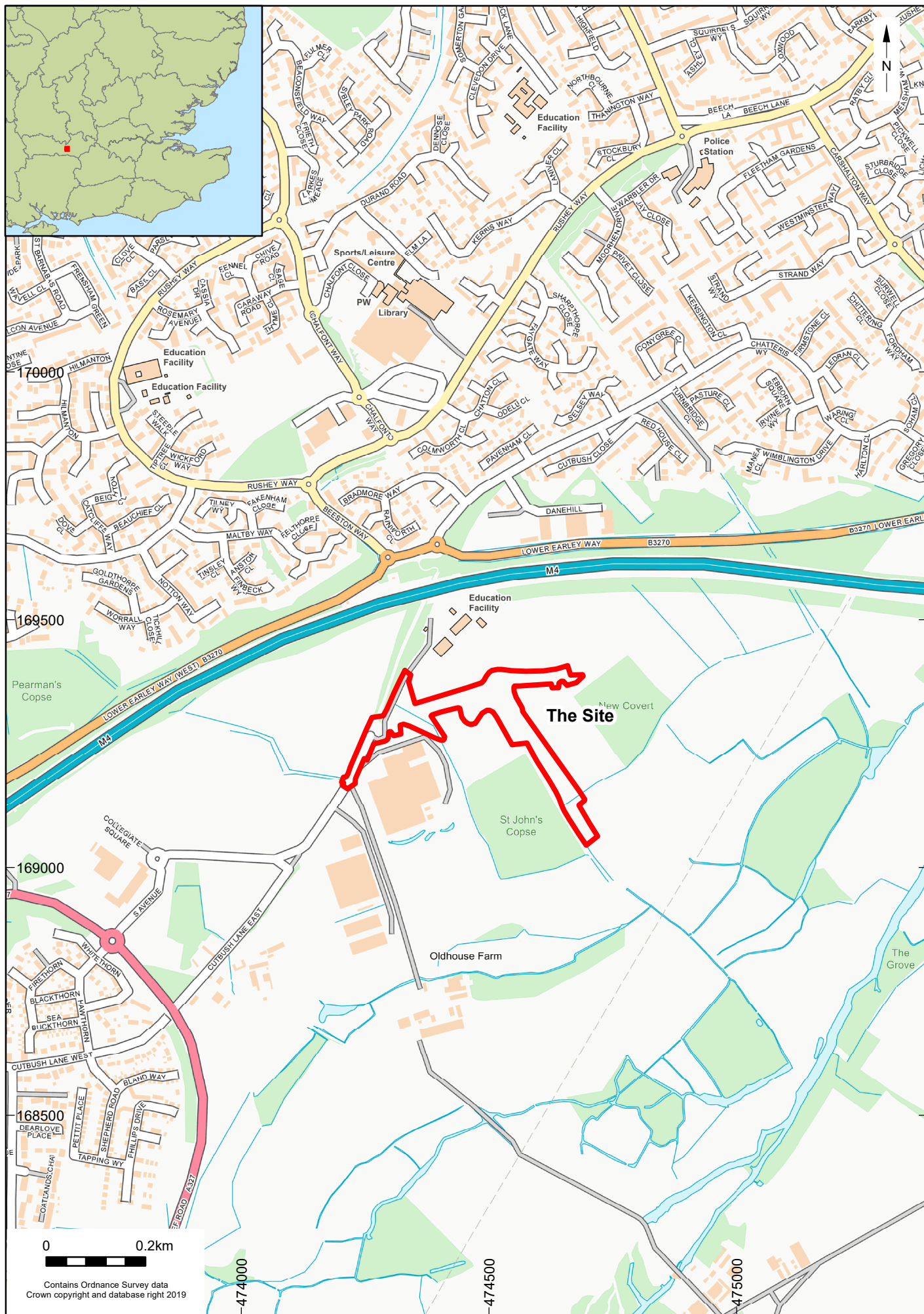
Subject/Period: Boundary Ditch: UNCERTAIN

Subject/Period: Post Hole: UNCERTAIN

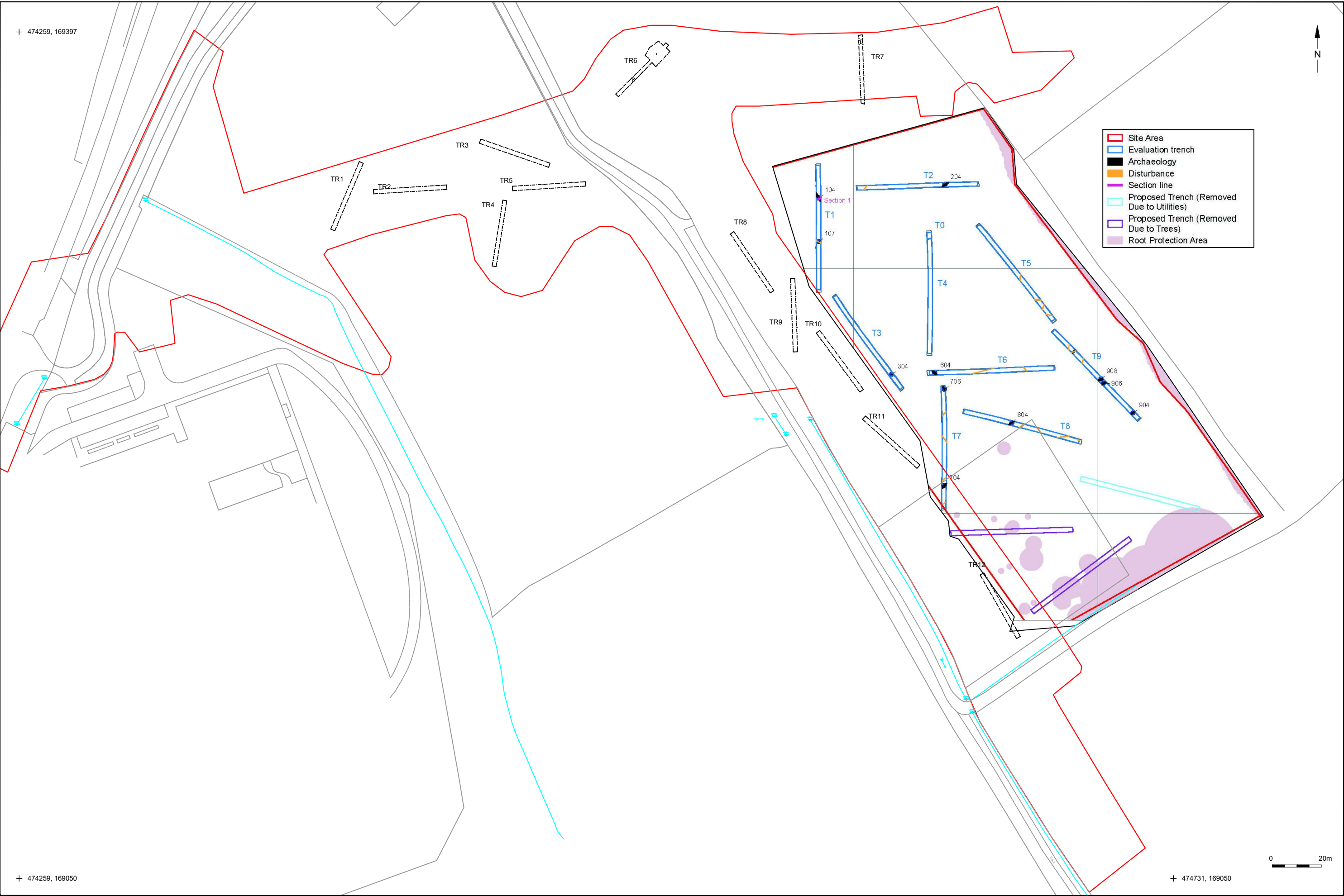
Reports in OASIS: May, L., (2024). *An Archaeological Evaluation at the Natural History Museum Access Road, Reading, Berkshire*. Portslade: Archaeology South-East. 2024116.

Appendix 1: Archaeologically Negative Trenches 1-5, 8-12

Context	Type	Interpretation	Length (m)	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Height (m OD)
1/001	Layer	Topsoil	30	1.8	0.29-0.32	40.95-41.05
1/002	Layer	Subsoil	30	1.8	0.20-0.30	43.62-43.76
1/003	Layer	London Clay	30	1.8		43.32-43.46
2/001	Layer	Topsoil	30	1.8	0.28-0.36	43.67-43.91
2/002	Layer	Subsoil	30	1.8	0.20-0.30	43.39-43.55
2/003	Layer	London Clay	30	1.8		43.13-43.25
3/001	Layer	Topsoil	30	1.8	0.26-0.30	43.25-43.67
3/002	Layer	Subsoil	30	1.8	0.24-0.29	42.99-43.36
3/003	Layer	London Clay	30	1.8		42.75-43.08
4/001	Layer	Topsoil	30	1.8	0.27-0.31	43.16-43.4
4/002	Layer	Subsoil	30	1.8	0.12-0.18	42.89-43.09
4/003	Layer	London Clay	30	1.8		42.77-42.91
5/001	Layer	Topsoil	30	1.8	0.23-0.33	42.92-43.4
5/002	Layer	Subsoil	30	1.8	0.15-0.21	42.69-43.1
5/003	Layer	London Clay	30	1.8		42.52-42.88
8/001	Layer	Topsoil	30	1.8	0.17-0.27	42.17-42.45
8/002	Layer	Subsoil	30	1.8	0.11-0.22	41.98-42.28
8/003	Layer	London Clay	30	1.8		41.87-42.06
9/001	Layer	Topsoil	30	1.8	0.20-0.22	42.05-42.11
9/002	Layer	Subsoil	30	1.8	0.12-0.21	41.74-41.91
9/003	Layer	London Clay	30	1.8		41.62-41.7
10/001	Layer	Topsoil	30	1.8	0.16-0.23	41.64-41.91
10/002	Layer	Subsoil	30	1.8	0.08-0.22	41.42-41.71
10/003	Layer	London Clay	30	1.8		41.34-41.49
11/001	Layer	Topsoil	30	1.8	0.19-0.29	40.99-41.57
11/002	Layer	Subsoil	30	1.8	0.14-0.09	40.8-41.31
11/003	Layer	London Clay	30	1.8		40.63-41.17
12/001	Layer	Topsoil	30	1.8	0.15-0.23	40.95-41.05
12/002	Layer	Subsoil	30	1.8	0.09-0.20	40.75-40.82
12/003	Layer	London Clay	30	1.8		40.46-40.73

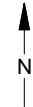


© Archaeology South-East		Natural History Museum Access Road, Reading	Fig. 1
Project Ref: 240058	May 2024	Site location	
Report No: 2024116	Drawn by: AC		



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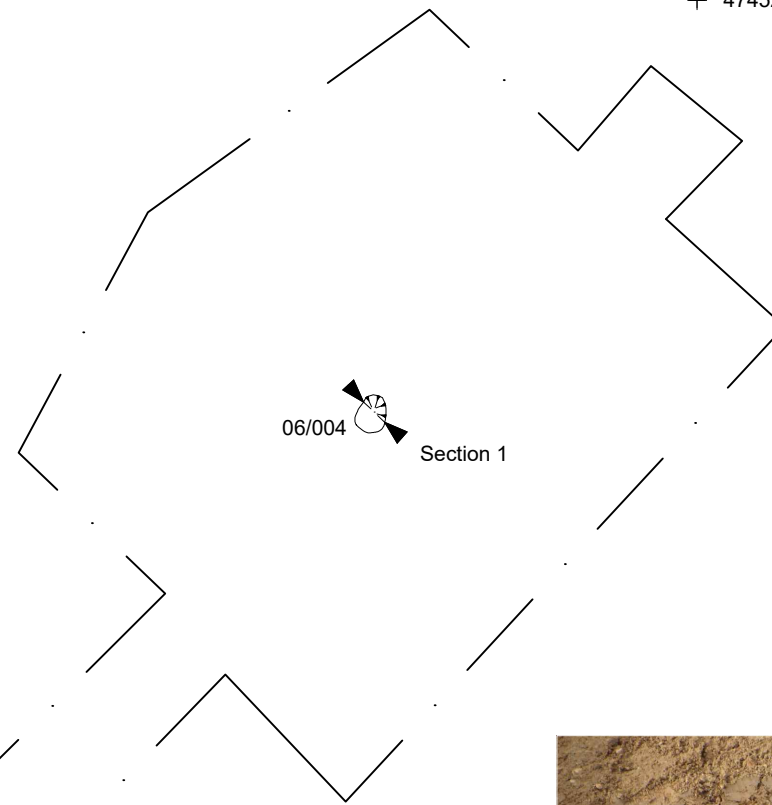
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Trench 6 looking south-west



Trench 6 Extension north-west



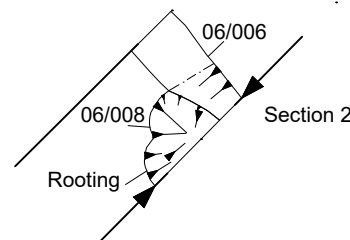
Trench 6



6/004 looking south-west

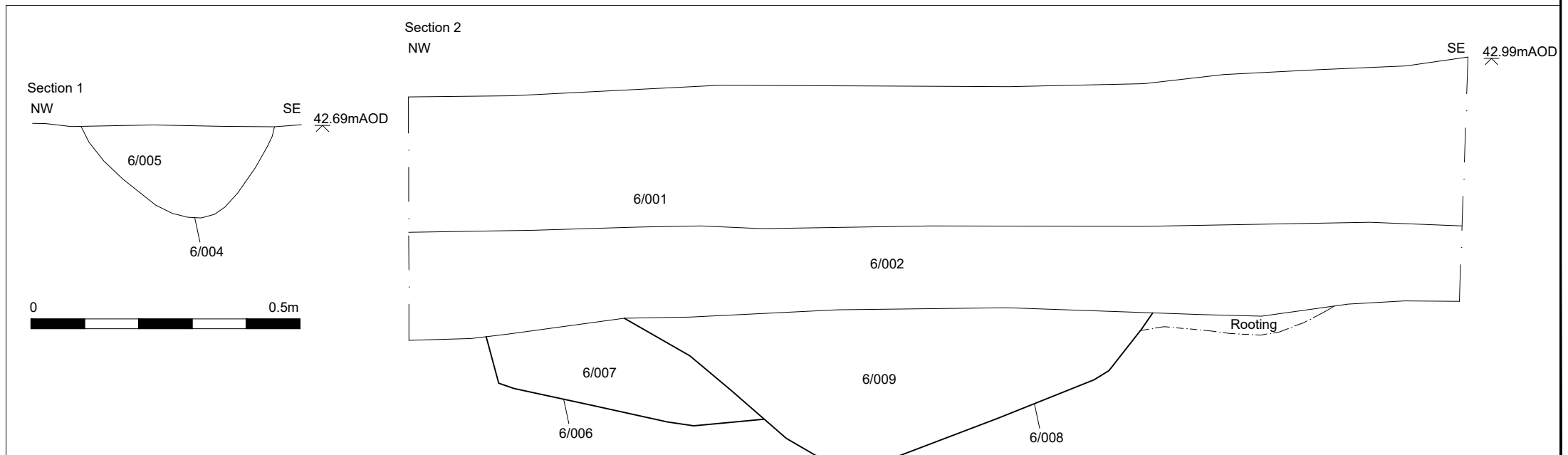


6/006 and 6/008 looking south-east



Section 2

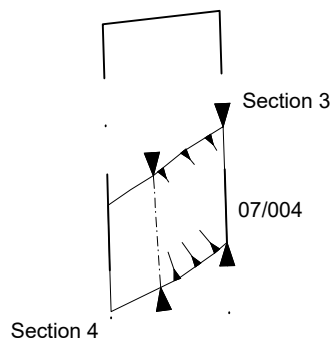
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Trench 7



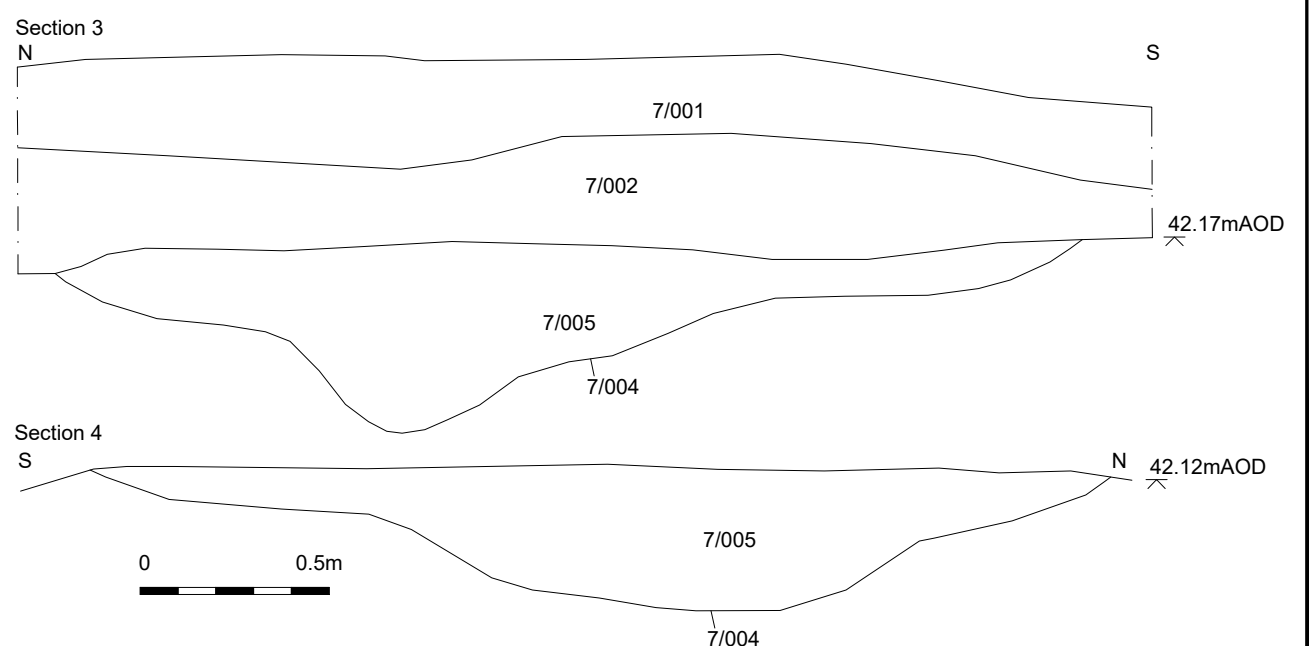
Trench 7 looking north-west



7/004 looking east

0 2m

+ 474600, 169362



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Natural History Museum Access Road, Reading

Trench 7; Plan, Sections and Photographs

Fig.4



Trench 1 looking north



Trench 2 looking east



Trench 3 looking north-west



Trench 4 looking south



Trench 5 looking east



Trench 8 looking north-west



Trench 9 looking south



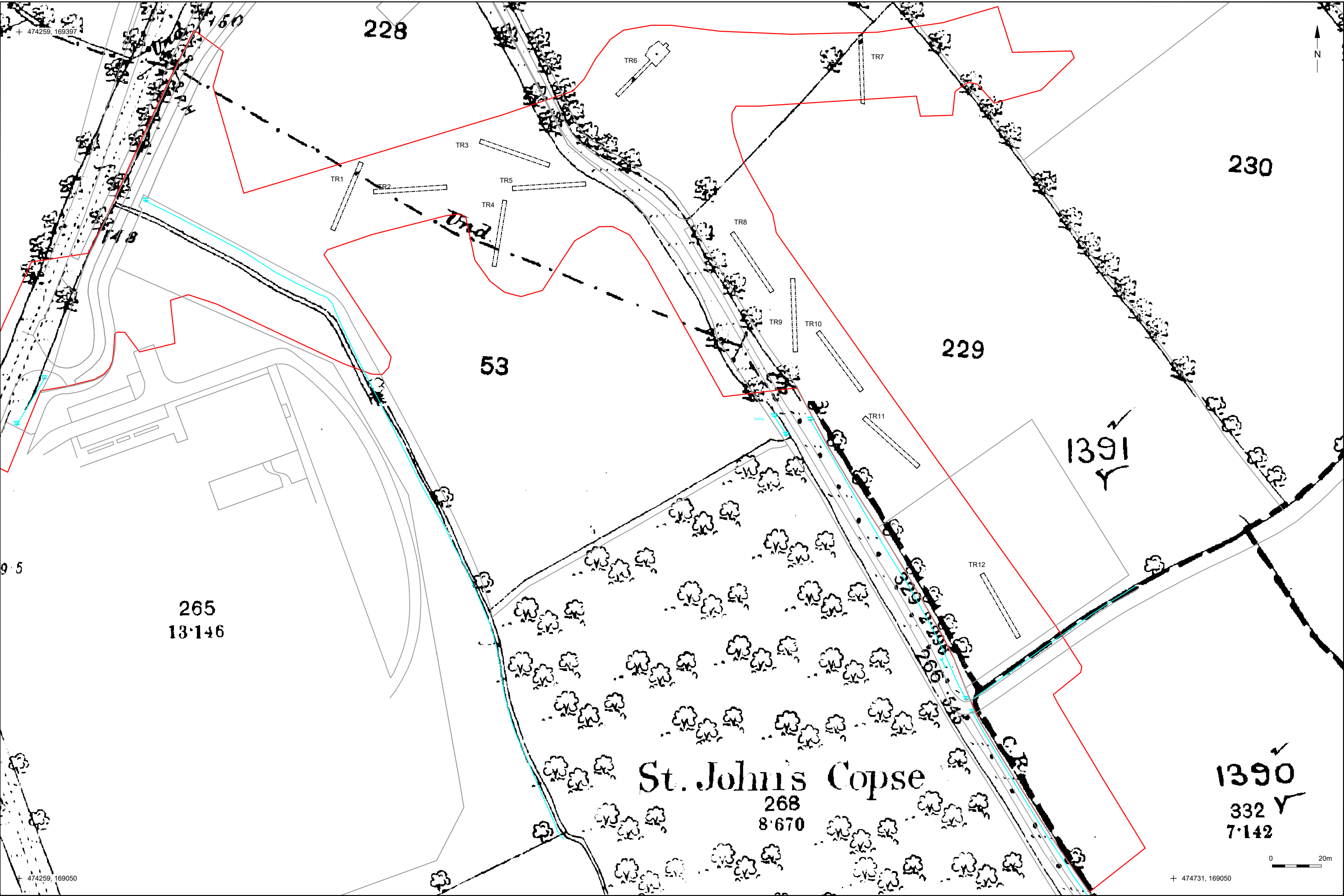
Trench 10 looking north-west



Trench 11 looking north-west



Trench 12 looking north-west





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