

**NEW RIDING ARENA, PARNHAM HOUSE,
BEAMINSTER, DORSET
Archaeological Observations and Recording**



Report No. 53219/3/1

June 2006

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SUMMARY

A watching brief was undertaken by Terrain Archaeology in May 2006, during the topsoil stripping for the construction of a new riding arena, on the eastern side of the grounds of Parnham House, near Beaminster, Dorset (NGR ST47760025). A 0.15m thickness of topsoil was removed from an area measuring 60 m by 20 m. This revealed the top of a flint gravel hard-standing containing fragments of modern building materials. This may be related to the World War II activity at Parnham House. The only other features observed were stone-filled field drains.

No significant archaeological finds or features were observed.

INTRODUCTION

Terrain Archaeology was commissioned by Mr M Trichl of Parnham House to undertake archaeological observations and recording during the construction of a new riding arena at Parnham House, near Beaminster, Dorset. The groundworks for the development comprised the removal of topsoil by machine from an area measuring 60 m by 20 m to the west of the now unused entrance to Parnham House on the A3066 Bridport Road, prior to the laying of a new surface to create a riding arena.

The development site lies to the east of Parnham House, just to the west of the A3066 Bridport–Beaminster Road and north of the Dower House (North Lodge) (Ordnance Survey NGR ST47760025) on flat ground at a height of 60 m above OD (Figure 1). The site lies within the parkland of Parnham House and is within the area included in the English Heritage Register of Parks and Gardens, Grade II*.

The underlying geology of the site is mapped as Upper Lias Bridport and Yeovil Sands (Geological Survey of England and Wales 1974 Sheet 327 *Bridport* 1:50000 Drift).

The fieldwork was carried out on the 2nd May 2006 by Steven Tatler.

Terrain Archaeology would like to acknowledge the following for their help and cooperation during this project: Andy Snell and the staff at Parnham House and the groundwork contractors.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Parnham is an ancient manor, which has been in recorded occupation since the 12th century. A house is thought to have been built here by John Gerard c. 1400. The Strodes came to Parnham in the later 15th century and William Strode (d. 1499) is known to have done some building work. His son Robert rebuilt the house in the mid 16th century. The Strode family held Parnham until the 18th century and continued to make alterations. The kitchen wing was built as a separate structure to the northwest in the late 17th century. The house was considerably altered in the 18th century by George Strode (d. 1753) who enlarged it to incorporate the kitchen and brewhouse.

Parnham passed to the Oglander family in 1764 and was left empty until it was restored by John Nash, in 1807–11, for Sir William Oglander. Nash built a new dining room on the west of the house and constructed the E-shaped stable block and other service buildings north of the kitchen range.

The house was bought by Vincent Robinson in 1896 and he removed much of the Nash interiors (Robinson 1900). Parnham was soon sold again, in 1910, to Hans Sauer. He extensively remodelled and restored the interior of the house, built a new stable block to the north, and laid out a 16th century style forecourt and formal gardens.

The house was soon sold again and has had a succession of owners during the 20th century and it gradually fell into decay.

Parnham House was requisitioned for use by the British Army early in World War II. From mid 1943, the house was used as the Regimental Command Post for the 16th Infantry Regiment, with hutted and tented accommodation within the grounds. (Pomeroy 1995)

In 1976, John Makepeace purchased Parnham and set about restoring the house and gardens and established the School for Craftsmen in Wood (Makepeace 1996).

Parnham House was sold again in 2001, reverting back to a private house. A number of alterations have been made to the house and grounds following this sale

The area surrounding Parnham house has few recorded archaeological sites and findspots and all can be considered of no more than local significance. No archaeological remains have been recorded from the site itself.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The objective of the archaeological observations was to establish and make available information about the archaeological resource existing on the site.

The archaeological works aimed to observe and record all the *in situ* archaeological deposits and features revealed during the groundworks to an appropriate professional standard.

METHODS

The work was carried out in accordance with the Institute of Field Archaeologists Code of Conduct and *Standard and guidance for archaeological watching briefs*, although no written brief was issued for the project.

The groundworks comprised the removal of 0.15 m of turf and topsoil from a rectangular area measuring 60 m by 20 m by a machine fitted with a toothless grading bucket.

All deposits exposed in the trenches were recorded using elements of Terrain Archaeology's recording system of complementary written, drawn and photographic records. The location of the development area and observed features were located by taped measurements from existing boundaries. All depths recorded were below existing ground surface.

The records have been compiled in a stable, cross-referenced and fully indexed archive in accordance with current UKIC guidelines and the requirements of the receiving museum. It is proposed that the archive will be deposited with the Dorset County Museum.

RESULTS

The turf and topsoil, a layer of yellowish-brown sandy loam (100), was only removed to a depth of 0.15 m across the site (Plate 1). At this depth, over most of the stripped area, was a layer of flint pebbles and gravel (100) with quantities of building debris, including brick, mortar fragments, hamstone fragments, window glass (including reinforced glass), cast-iron guttering, tarmac, etc. Only the top surface of this deposit was exposed (Plate 2). It lay in a very slight depression in the field and was probably the remains of a surface or hard-standing, perhaps associated with the World War II military activity on the site.

A number of stone-filled field drains were visible cutting across the area and their location is shown on Figure 2. A modern pipe trench was observed running NE–SW across the western end of the site.

CONCLUSIONS

The groundworks were not of sufficient depth to disturb significant archaeological deposits. The gravel surface exposed may relate to the World War II activity at Parnham House, though the precise location of the military installations have not been determined as part of this project. The gravel surface lay in a slight hollow visible as an earthwork in the surface of the field. A number of other slight earthworks are visible in the field surface to the south, suggesting further disturbances in the surrounding area.

PROJECT ARCHIVE

The paper archive (Terrain Archaeology Project No. 532019) will be deposited with the Dorset County Museum. No finds were retained from this watching brief.

REFERENCES

- | | | |
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| Robinson, V. J. | 1900 | 'Parnham' <i>Proceedings of the Dorset Natural History and Antiquarian Field Club</i> 21 , 203–30. |
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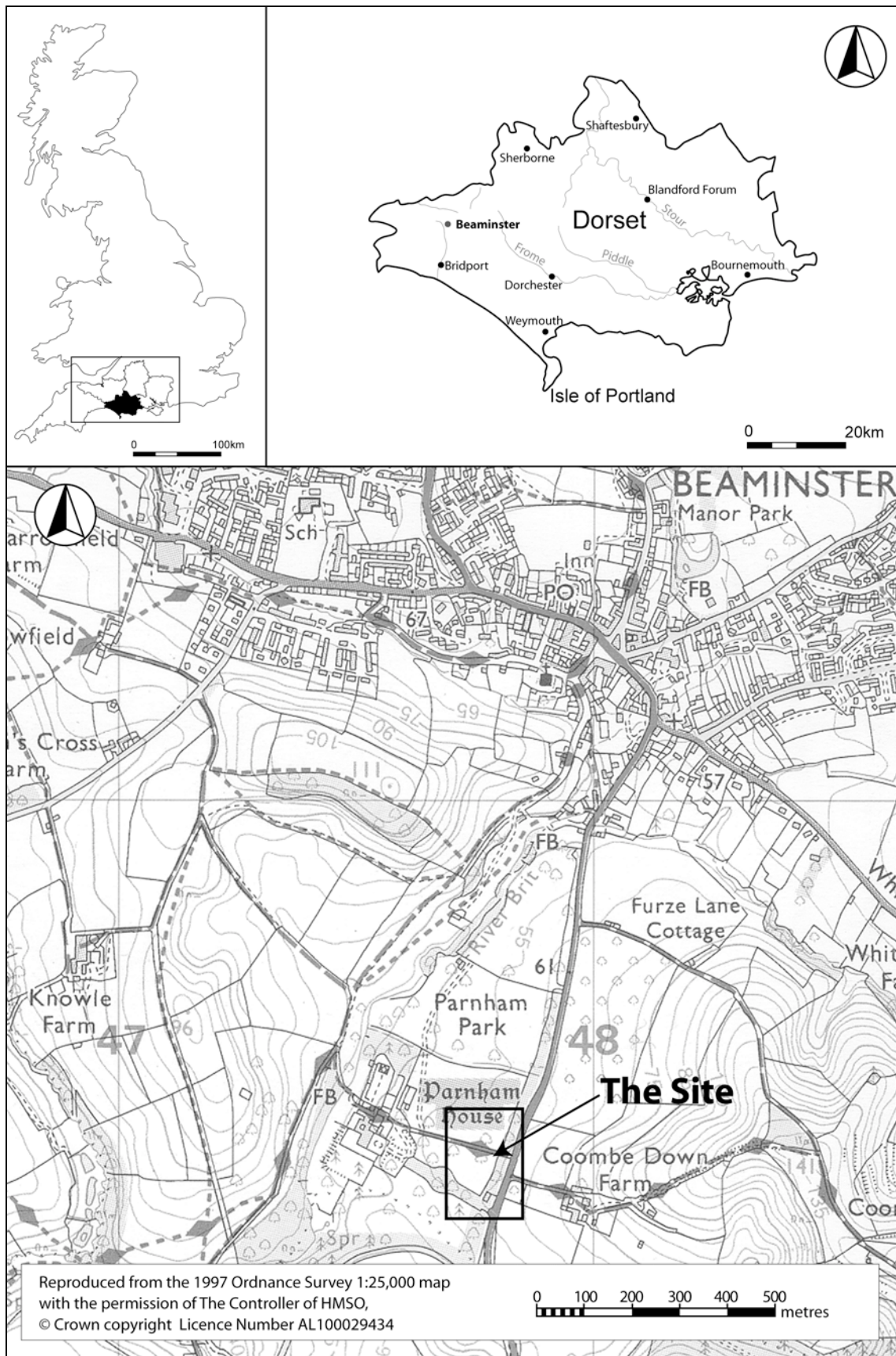


Figure 1: Site location

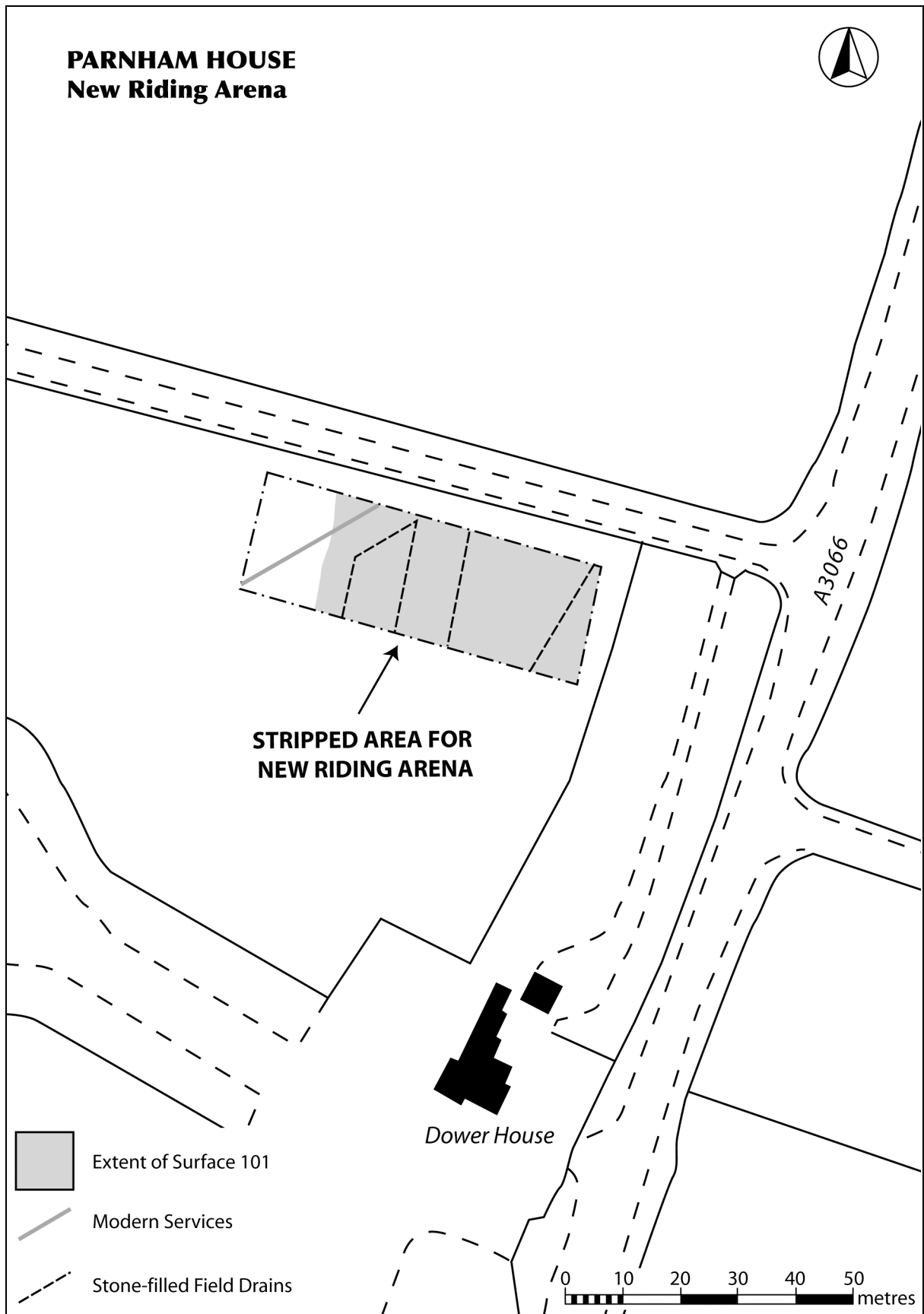


Figure 2: Plan of Observations



Plate 2: Detail of surface of context 101.