

**CHARMOUTH HOUSE, THE STREET,
CHARMOUTH, DORSET
Archaeological Watching Brief**



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July 2004

Charmouth House, The Street, Charmouth, Dorset

Archaeological Watching Brief, July 2004

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SUMMARY

A watching brief was maintained during the construction of a new block of garages at Charmouth House, The Street, Charmouth (SY36259354). No significant archaeological features or deposits were encountered. The hardcore of the former hotel car park sealed a modern garden soil, which lay directly on top of the natural deposits.

INTRODUCTION

Terrain Archaeology was commissioned by Building Services, Weymouth, to undertake archaeological observations and recording during the construction of a new block of three garages, as part of the refurbishment of Charmouth House, The Street, Charmouth. This is in fulfilment of a condition of the consent for Planning Application No. 1/W/2000/0583 and 0584. This condition by West Dorset District Council, the local planning authority, follows advice from Steven Wallis, Senior Archaeologist, Dorset County Council. This is in line with Planning and Policy Guidance Note 16 (Archaeology and Planning).

The site is in the western part of Charmouth on the south side of The Street, at Ordnance Survey NGR SY36259354 (Figure 1). It lies in the area of the car park of the former Charmouth House Hotel. The site is situated on ground sloping down to the east and is at about 49 m above Ordnance Datum. The superficial geology is mapped as undifferentiated Head (Geological Survey of Great Britain 1:50,000 Sheet 327 *Bridport* Solid and Drift 1974).

The development comprised the construction of a block of three new garages as part of the refurbishment of Charmouth House. The groundworks comprised the machine excavation of the footings for the new buildings (Figure 2). These were up to 1.0 m wide and 1.8 m deep.

The fieldwork was carried out on 14th July 2004 by Peter Bellamy.

Terrain Archaeology would like to acknowledge the following for their help and cooperation during this project: Lou Parker and the groundworkers from Building Services, Weymouth and Steven Wallis (Dorset County Council).

ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Charmouth is mentioned in Domesday but the reference probably refers to a much larger area than the present town. Charmouth was acquired by Forde Abbey in the 12th century and by 1240 there was a chapel at Charmouth, dependent on Whitchurch, suggesting that there may have been a settlement here by this date (Penn 1980, 34). In 1278, the Abbot of Forde was granted a weekly market and annual fair at Charmouth in 1278 (*ibid.*) indicating that there was almost certainly a settlement here by that date.

In the late 13th century (c. 1290–97), William, Abbot of Forde, improved the manor of Charmouth by making it into a 'free borough' (Keen 1999, 17). The grant details the bounds of the new borough, and describes the building plots as being four perches (22 yards) by twenty perches (110

yards). The pattern of the burgage plots can still be clearly seen in the layout of the present town. The town does not appear to have grown and many of the plots appear to have been amalgamated into two, perhaps as a consequence of a failure to attract sufficient tenants (*ibid.*). The site lies on the western edge of the medieval planned borough, and the present garden wall forming the western limit of the new garage block has been proposed as a possible medieval burgage boundary (*ibid.* fig. 3).

There is a little evidence for 16th century prosperity, but it seems to have remained a small town. There was some development of villas in the town in the mid 19th century, but it was not until the second half of the 20th century that the population of Charmouth increased significantly (Penn 1980).

The present Charmouth House incorporates two old buildings, probably both of 17th century date (RCHME 1952, 89). It was formerly used as a hotel.

The mapping evidence shows no activity on the site of the new garage block. The 1903 Ordnance Survey 25-inch map shows the area as part of a large field. By the time of the 1929 Ordnance Survey map, the site lies within a narrow strip of land. The 1961 Ordnance Survey map shows the beginnings of encroachment of the site with the construction of 'Gardenside' to the south of the site. There are no houses shown on the north side of 'Gardenside' until the 1974 map, at which time the existing southern boundary to the site is established. The present site boundaries are first shown on the 1991 Ordnance Survey map..

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

There was no written brief or specification produced for this project. Otherwise, the work was carried out in accordance with the Institute of Field Archaeologists Code of Conduct and *Standard and guidance for archaeological watching briefs*.

The watching brief was carried out during the excavation of the footings for the new building. All the footings were observed, other than that along the west side, which was adjacent a garden retaining wall and was to be excavated immediately before pouring the concrete footings. The area of the footings was 9 m by 7 m across. The external footings were 0.7 m and 1.0 m wide and up to 1.8 m deep, with the internal footings being 0.5 m wide and 1.0 m deep.

The location of the observations was surveyed by taped measurements to the existing boundaries and marked on a plan provided by the client. All depths have been recorded as below present ground levels.

All archaeological deposits and features exposed during the works were recorded using components of the Terrain Archaeology recording system of complementary written, drawn and photographic records.

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, Dorset County Museum.

RESULTS

The basic stratigraphic sequence was the same across the whole of the site. Natural grey clay (104) was encountered at a depth of 1.7 m, with a 0.75 m thick layer of natural reddish-grey clay with frequent flint gravels (103) overlying it.

The natural deposits were sealed by a 0.35 m thick layer of dark greyish-brown silty clay loam (102), which is probably a buried topsoil layer. It was sealed by a 0.4 m thick layer of demolition debris comprising bricks, stone rubble, concrete, etc., (101). This is probably the hardcore base for the former hotel car park. The present surface overlying it was a 0.2 m thick layer of stone scalplings, gravel and sand (100).

No archaeological features were observed and no finds were recovered.

CONCLUSIONS

No significant archaeological features or deposits were discovered.

Prior to the construction of the hotel car park in the later 20th century, the site appears to have been gardens or fields. The lack of evidence for earlier activity on the site is a reflection of its position behind the street frontage in the backlands of the medieval burgage plot on the edge of the medieval borough and suggests that this part of the town was not densely occupied in the medieval period. It is likely that the area was fields or gardens from the medieval period onwards.

PROJECT ARCHIVE

The archive (Terrain Archaeology Project No. 53164) will be deposited with Dorset County Museum, which has agreed in principle to accept the archive, subject to fulfilment of the Museum's requirements of the preparation of archaeological archives. A copy of the microfilmed archive will be deposited with the National Monuments Record.

REFERENCES

- Keen, L., 1999 'Monastic urban speculation: the Cistercians and medieval Charmouth' *Proceedings of the Dorset Natural History and Archaeology Society* **121**, 17–22.
- Penn, K. J., 1980 *Historic Towns in Dorset* Dorset Natural History and Archaeology Society Monograph 1.
- RCHME 1952 Royal Commission on Historic Monuments England *An Inventory of the Historical Monuments in the County of Dorset*. **1**, West Dorset.

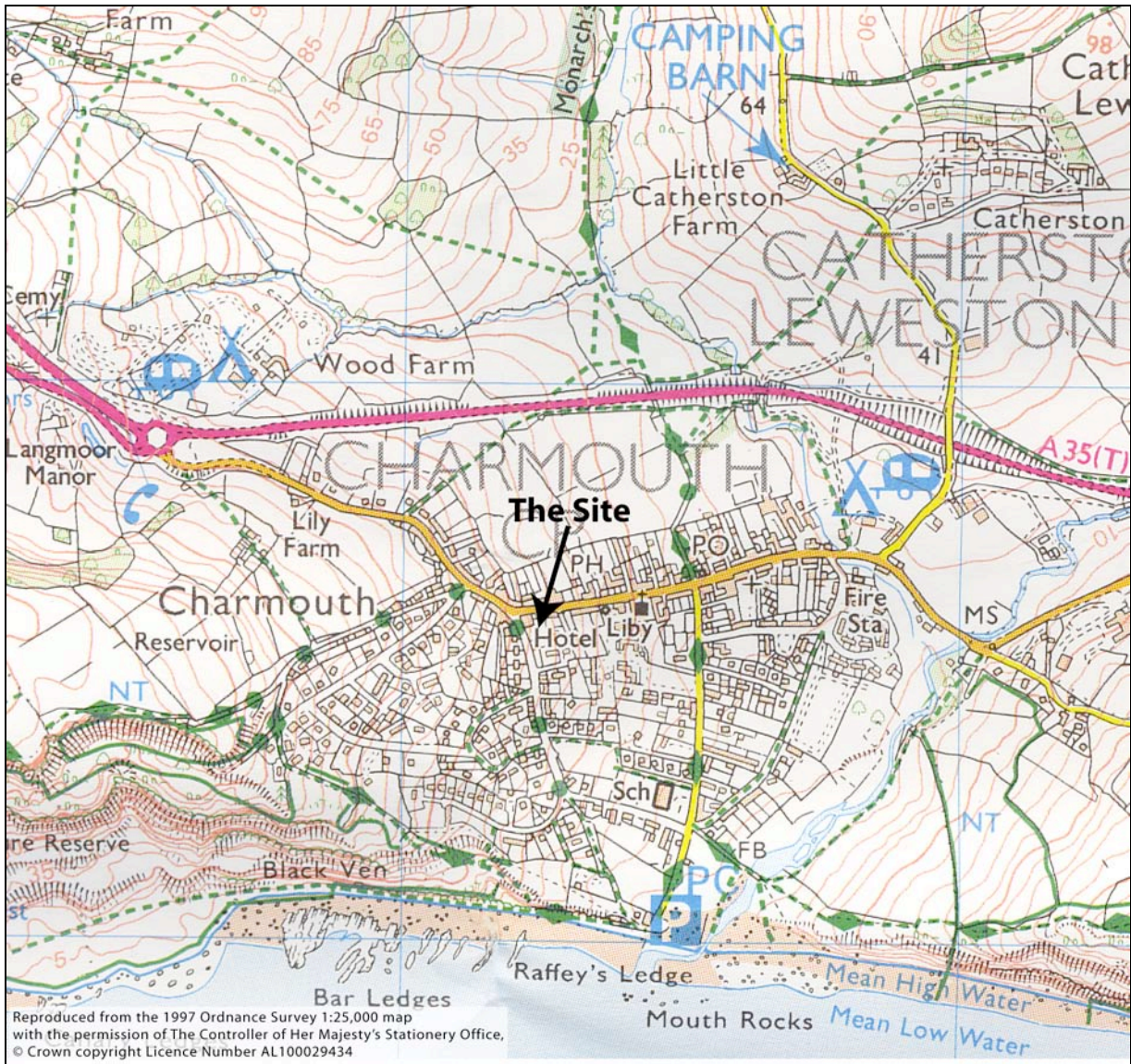


Figure 1: Location map

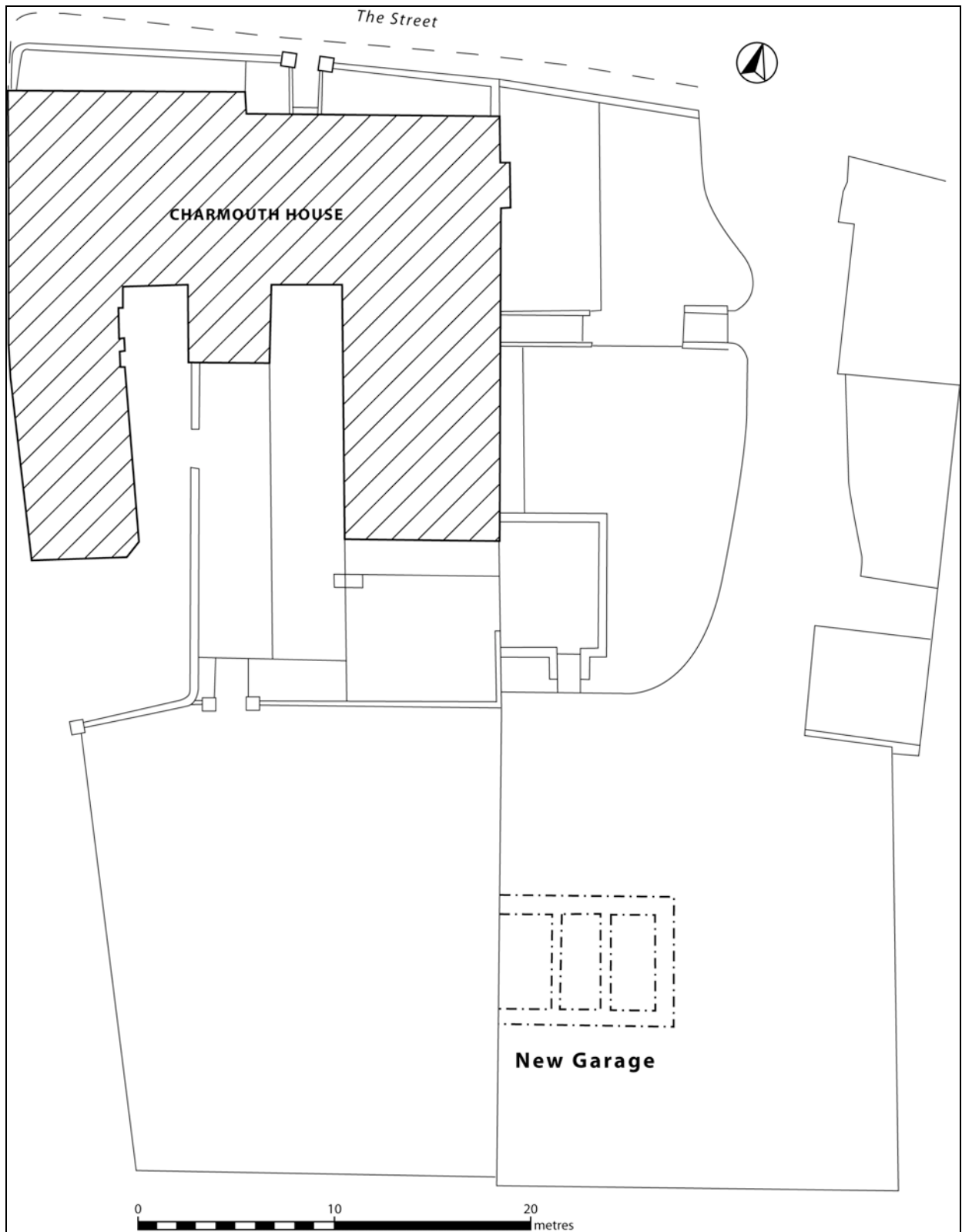


Figure 2: Location of footing trenches



Plate 1: General view of footings trenches from northeast.



Plate 2: Detail of the east-facing section of the east footings trench, showing deposits encountered.