
ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOLUTIONS LTD

**SKERRIES, DARR'S LANE, NORTHCHURCH,
BERKHAMSTED, HERTFORDSHIRE HP4 3TT**

ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING & RECORDING

HER Enquiry No. 7/15

Authors: Gareth Barlow	
NGR: SP 9690 0830	Report No. 4937
District: Dacorum	Site Code: AS1763
Approved: Claire Halpin MCIfA	Project No. 6117
Signed:	Date: 7 September 2015

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OASIS SUMMARY SHEET

Project details			
Project name	<i>Skerries, Darr's Lane, Northchurch, Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire HP4 3TT</i>		
<p>Project description (250 words)</p> <p><i>In July 2015 Archaeological Solutions Ltd carried out archaeological monitoring at Skerries, Darr's Lane, Northchurch, Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire (NGR SP 9690 0830. The monitoring was undertaken in compliance with a planning condition attached to planning approval requiring a programme of archaeological work during the groundworks associated with the construction of side/rear extensions to the existing building (Dacorum Borough Council Planning Ref.4/03391 /14/FHA), based on the advice of Hertfordshire County Council Historic Environment Advisor (HCC HEA).</i></p> <p><i>The site had the potential to reveal further evidence of Iron Age and later activity associated with Grim's Ditch, as well as a more general potential for prehistoric and later activity which is well attested in the area. A brick field with clay pits, kilns and a limekiln is recorded on late 19th and early 20th century OS maps. It fell out of use by 1924, but the site of Skerries appears to have been unaffected by the mineral workings</i></p> <p><i>In the event the monitoring revealed no archaeological features or finds. The site had suffered ground disturbance associated with the construction of the current dwelling.</i></p>			
Project dates (fieldwork)	<i>15th July 2015</i>		
Previous work (Y/N/?)	<i>N</i>	Future work (Y/N/?)	<i>?</i>
P. number	<i>P6117</i>	Site code	<i>AS1763</i>
Type of project	<i>Archaeological Monitoring</i>		
Site status	<i>Area of archaeological importance</i>		
Current land use	<i>Private garden</i>		
Planned development	<i>Residential extension</i>		
Main features (+dates)	<i>None</i>		
Significant finds (+dates)	<i>None</i>		
Project location			
County/ District/ Parish	<i>Hertfordshire</i>	<i>Dacorum</i>	<i>Northchurch</i>
HER/ SMR for area	<i>Hertfordshire County Council</i>		
Post code (if known)	<i>HP4 3TT</i>		
Area of site	<i>50m2</i>		
NGR	<i>SP9690 0830</i>		
Height AOD (max/ min)	<i>c.173m AOD</i>		
Project creators			
Brief issued by	<i>HCC HEU</i>		
Project supervisor/s (PO)	<i>Matt Baker</i>		
Funded by	<i>Amy Harman</i>		
Full title	<i>Skerries, Darr's Lane, Northchurch, Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire. Archaeological Monitoring and Recording</i>		
Authors			
Report no.	<i>4937</i>		
Date (of report)	<i>September 2015</i>		

SKERRIES, DARR'S LANE, NORTHCHURCH, BERKHAMSTED, HERTFORDSHIRE HP4 3TT

ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING

SUMMARY

In July 2015 Archaeological Solutions Ltd carried out archaeological monitoring at Skerries, Darr's Lane, Northchurch, Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire (NGR SP 9690 0830). The monitoring was undertaken in compliance with a planning condition attached to planning approval requiring a programme of archaeological work during the groundworks associated with the construction of side/rear extensions to the existing building (Dacorum Borough Council Planning Ref.4/03391 /14/FHA), based on the advice of Hertfordshire County Council Historic Environment Advisor (HCC HEA).

The site had the potential to reveal further evidence of Iron Age and later activity associated with Grim's Ditch, as well as a more general potential for prehistoric and later activity which is well attested in the area. A brick field with clay pits, kilns and a limekiln is recorded on late 19th and early 20th century OS maps. It fell out of use by 1924, but the site of Skerries appears to have been unaffected by the mineral workings

In the event the monitoring revealed no archaeological features or finds. The site had suffered ground disturbance associated with the construction of the current dwelling.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 In July 2015 Archaeological Solutions Ltd carried out archaeological monitoring at Skerries, Darr's Lane, Northchurch, Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire (NGR SP 9690 0830; Figs. 1- 2). The monitoring was undertaken in compliance with a planning condition attached to planning approval requiring a programme of archaeological work during the groundworks associated with the construction of side/rear extensions to the existing building (Dacorum Borough Council Planning Ref.4/03391 /14/FHA), based on the advice of Hertfordshire County Council Historic Environment Advisor (HCC HEA).

1.2 The monitoring and recording was conducted in accordance with advice from Hertfordshire County Council Historic Environment Unit (HCC HEU) and a written scheme of investigation compiled by AS (22/01/2015). The project conformed to the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA) *Code of Conduct*

and *Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief* (2014), and the document *Standards for Field Archaeology in the East of England* (Gurney 2003).

1.3 The objectives of the project of archaeological monitoring and recording were:

1. to ensure the archaeological monitoring of all aspects of the development programme likely to affect buried archaeological remains;
2. to secure the adequate recording of any archaeological remains revealed by the development programme; and
3. to secure the analysis, interpretation, publication (if required), long-term conservation and storage of the project archive.

2 DESCRIPTION OF THE SITE

2.1 The site comprises the existing dwelling of Skerries, Darr's Lane, Northchurch. It is located within Northchurch, approximately 2km to the north-west of the town centre of Berkhamsted.

3 TOPOGRAPHY, GEOLOGY AND SOILS

3.1 The site is located on the southern slope of the Bulbourne Valley at a height of c.173m AOD. The course of the River Bulbourne flows c.900m to the north-east. The land slopes steeply downwards in a north-easterly direction towards the floor of the valley and Northchurch High Street.

3.2 Geologically the area is characterised by flinty and chalky silty clays over chalk bedrock of the Upper Cretaceous White Chalk Subgroup, with occasional gravel deposits. The soils in the vicinity of the site are those of the Batcombe association comprising slowly permeable subsoils and fine silty and loamy over clayey soils, while the surrounding area has soils of Charity 2 Association.

4 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Prehistory

4.1 Excavations in advance of the construction of the A41 King's Langley and Berkhamsted by-pass, c.350m to the south of the site, revealed that the heavy soils were exploited during the Neolithic, late Bronze Age and early Iron Age (HHER 11478 & 11479). An excavation in this area also revealed Iron Age

roundhouses and post-hole structures within a large rectangular enclosure c.750m to the west (HHER 11480).

4.2 An important, extant monument is Grim's Ditch located to the south of Northchurch, now understood to be a late Bronze Age or early Iron Age stock or tribal demarcation line, which probably extended along the entire Bulbourne Valley. It survives as an upstanding earthwork in places, approximately c.300m to the east of the site, and is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM 35348). Although it only survives in fragments (HHER 2022 & 2023), it may have passed directly to the north of the site through the adjoining property.

Romano-British

4.3 During the Iron Age, the presence of iron ore in the clay of the valley floor gave rise to the development of an iron working industry, (Niblett 1995, 19), and ensured the continuity of activity around the site into the Roman period. The establishment of Akeman Street, possibly on an already established route, further assisted in the continuing growth of the settlement after the conquest (Margery 1973; Niblett 1995). The road linked Verulamium (St Albans) to Alcester and Cirencester, through Northchurch and Berkhamsted following the line of the High Street c.750m to the north (HHER 4595). This continued activity and growth is represented by several Roman villas in the area of the modern town. In 1973 a villa was excavated to the north of Darr's Lane with the earliest occupation evidence dating from the mid 1st century AD. Multiple phases of rebuilding and growth occurred until its abandonment in AD 170, possibly due to flooding (HHER 1859). Other Roman villas comprise Northchurch to the north-east (HHER 1337) and at Boxmoor to the south-west (HHER 72).

Saxon

4.4 The presence of Saxon fabric at St Mary's Church, as identified by Pevsner (1977, 261) c. 250m to the north east of the site, provides strong evidence for the presence of settlement in Northchurch by the later Saxon period. However the nature of this settlement and how it had evolved from the end of the Roman period remains to be established.

4.5 Given their close proximity, it is likely that the development of Northchurch is closely associated with the growth of Berkhamsted. The parish of Northchurch was formerly known as Berkhamsted St Mary and had links with Berkhamsted St Peter. In addition it is possible that boundaries of the early parish of St Mary represent the boundary of a Saxon farming estate, which pre-dated the formation of the parish. St Mary's is one of the earliest churches in Hertfordshire, albeit it was refurbished during the 13th and 15th centuries (HHER 9317). Such an estate could have had the church and manor as its administrative centre, and it is known there was a rectory attached to St Mary's which may have served this purpose (Thompson & Bryant 2005, 5). The Domesday entry mentions a priest

and 14 'villeins', and with no evidence of a manor at Berkhamsted, it may be judged that the priest belonged to Northchurch (Page 1971, 163).

Medieval

4.6 By the time of Domesday, Berkhamsted was one of the most prominent centres in Hertfordshire. Berkhamsted also possessed a strategic importance being on one of the main routes between London and the Midlands (Thompson & Bryant 2005, 6). William of Normandy marched to the town after his victory at Hastings in 1066 to accept the submission of the English nobility, and the town's importance was confirmed by the construction of the castle as one of a number of defensive earthworks ringing London shortly after. Northchurch has no entry in Domesday, further supporting the view that it was originally part of the parish of Great Berkhamsted. After the Conquest, any manorial centre which may have existed at Northchurch was moved to the castle at Berkhamsted. Between 1087 and 1104 William, Count of Mortain granted the advowson of the church of Berkhamsted, probably the church of St Mary, together with the advowson of the chapel of the castle and the tithes and lands to the monastery of St Mary of Grestein in Normandy (Page 1971, 163).

4.7 The manor of Berkhamsted remained an important centre throughout the Middle Ages. The production of tiles and bricks seem to have been especially prominent (Page 1912, 162) augmenting the wool trade. By the 14th century the castle declined in prominence and although it remained in royal hands as a favoured residence, it held no strategic importance. Archaeological evidence for medieval activity in Northchurch is sparse. It is probable that during the medieval period Northchurch was a small settlement located along the High Street.

Post-medieval

4.8 By the 16th century, Berkhamsted's fortunes had diminished considerably and the castle lost much of its importance after the death of its last notable owner, Cecily, Duchess of York, the mother of King Edward IV in 1495. The manor remained in royal hands but was rarely, if ever, visited. It remained in the crown's hands by virtue of the Duchy of Cornwall until 1862. There are signs of continuing local prosperity, despite the fire in 1664 that reportedly devastated the town (Page 1971, 246). Many surviving 16th and 17th century buildings in the High Street attest the town's wealth, including the George & Dragon public house (HHER 18190). The borough was granted corporate rights by James I in the early 17th century, though the enhanced status was not maintained for long, and does not reflect an uplift in the town's fortunes. By the mid-19th century both Northchurch and Berkhamsted straddled the High Street and the main industries were lace making and straw plaiting. Maltings and breweries, a sheep-dip manufacture, milling and wood turning were also undertaken. A brick field is marked on the 1878 OS map, a cluster of kilns, lime kilns and three small clay pits are also shown (HHER 12823).

5 METHODOLOGY

5.1 The monitoring and recording focused on ground works associated with the ground reduction of the footprint of the extension and the excavation of a soakaway. The ground works were undertaken using a tracked 360° mechanical excavator.

5.2 The archaeological monitoring comprised the observation of all ground works, inspection of subsoil, make-up layers, and natural deposits for archaeological features, the examination of spoil heaps for archaeological finds and the recording of soil profiles. Deposits were recorded by means of *pro forma* recording sheets, drawn to scale and photographed as appropriate.

6 RESULTS

6.1 Sample sections of the stratigraphy encountered were recorded:

<i>Sample Section 1</i> <i>North east facing</i>		
0.00 – 0.08m	L1000	Topsoil. Firm, dark grey brown silty sand with frequent small and medium sub-rounded flints.
0.08m – 0.26m	L1003	Hardcore layer. Compact, dark yellow red sand with frequent CBM rubble.
0.26m – 0.58m	L1001	Made ground. Compact, mid yellow grey silty sand with frequent medium and large sub-rounded flints.
0.58m+	L1002	Natural deposits. Compact, pale reddish yellow grey sand with frequent small medium and large sub-rounded flints.

<i>Sample Section 2</i> <i>South east facing</i>		
0.00 – 0.22m	L1000	Topsoil. As above
0.22m+	L1002	Natural deposits. As above.

Description No archaeological finds or features were present.

7 CONFIDENCE RATING

7.1 It is not felt that any factors inhibited the recognition of archaeological features and finds during the archaeological investigation.

8 DEPOSIT MODEL

8.1 The uppermost layer was Topsoil L1000, a firm, dark grey brown silty sand with frequent small and medium sub-rounded flints. Close to the existing building its depth was only 0.08m whilst further out in the garden to the north it was present to a depth of 0.22m. Again close to the existing building, the topsoil overlay Hardcore Layer L1003, a compact, dark yellow red sand with frequent CBM rubble (0.18m thick). L1003 in turn overlay Made Ground L1001, a compact, mid yellow grey silty sand with frequent medium and large sub-rounded flints (0.32m thick).

8.2 The natural, L1002, was a compact, pale reddish yellow grey sand with frequent small medium and large sub-rounded flints (0.58m below the current ground surface). Further to the north the topsoil (L1000) directly overlay the natural deposits (L1002).

9 DISCUSSION

9.1 The site had the potential to reveal further evidence of Iron Age and later activity associated with Grim's Ditch, as well as a more general potential for prehistoric and later activity which is well attested in the area. A brick field with clay pits, kilns and a limekiln is recorded on late 19th and early 20th century OS maps. It fell out of use by 1924, but the site of Skerries appears to have been unaffected by the mineral workings

9.2 In the event the monitoring revealed no archaeological features or finds. The site had suffered ground disturbance associated with the construction of the current dwelling.

10 DEPOSITION OF THE ARCHIVE

10.1 Archive records, with inventory, will be deposited at Dacorum Museum in accordance with their requirements. The archive will be quantified, ordered, indexed, cross-referenced and checked for internal consistency. In addition to the overall site summary, it will be necessary to produce a summary of the artefactual and ecofactual data.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Archaeological Solutions would like to thank Ms Amy Harman for funding the project and Mr David Edwards for assistance, and also Mr Mick Baird of the Sacred Space Company.

AS would also like to acknowledge the input and advice of Mrs Kate Batt of Hertfordshire County Council Historic Environment Unit.

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APPENDIX 1**CONTENTS OF THE ARCHIVE**

Records	Number
Brief	N
Specification	Y
Registers	Context, Digital Photo, Drawing, Drawing Sheet
Context Sheets	4
Site drawings A1	0
Site drawings A3	0
Site drawings A4	1
Site photographs b/w	0
Site photographs colour slides	0
Digital Photographs	12

APPENDIX 2

HER SUMMARY SHEET

Site name and address:	Skerries, Darr's Lane, Northchurch, Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire HP4 3TT
County: Herts	District: Dacorum
Village/Town:	Parish: Northchurch
Planning application reference:	Planning Ref. 4/03391/ 14/ FHA
Client name/address/tel:	Amy Harman
Nature of application:	New side/rear extensions
Present land use:	Garden
Size of application area: c.50m2	Size of area investigated c.50m2
NGR (8 figures):	SP 9690 0830
Site Code:	AS 1763
Site director/Organization:	Archaeological Solutions Ltd
Type of work:	Archaeological Monitoring & Recording
Date of work:	15 th July 2015
Location of finds/Curating museum:	Dacorum
Related SMR Nos:	Periods represented:
Relevant previous summaries/reports: -	None
Summary of fieldwork results:	<p><i>In July 2015 Archaeological Solutions Ltd carried out archaeological monitoring at Skerries, Darr's Lane, Northchurch, Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire (NGR SP 9690 0830. The monitoring was undertaken in compliance with a planning condition attached to planning approval requiring a programme of archaeological work during the groundworks associated with the construction of side/rear extensions to the existing building (Dacorum Borough Council Planning Ref.4/03391 /14/FHA), based on the advice of Hertfordshire County Council Historic Environment Advisor (HCC HEA).</i></p> <p><i>The monitoring revealed no archaeological features or finds. The site had suffered ground disturbance associated with the construction of the current dwelling.</i></p>
Author of summary: G Barlow	Date of Summary: September 2015

PHOTOGRAPHIC INDEX



1
Site strip in progress.



2
View of site looking south.



3
View of site looking north.



4
view of site looking northeast.



5
Excavation of soakaway in progress.



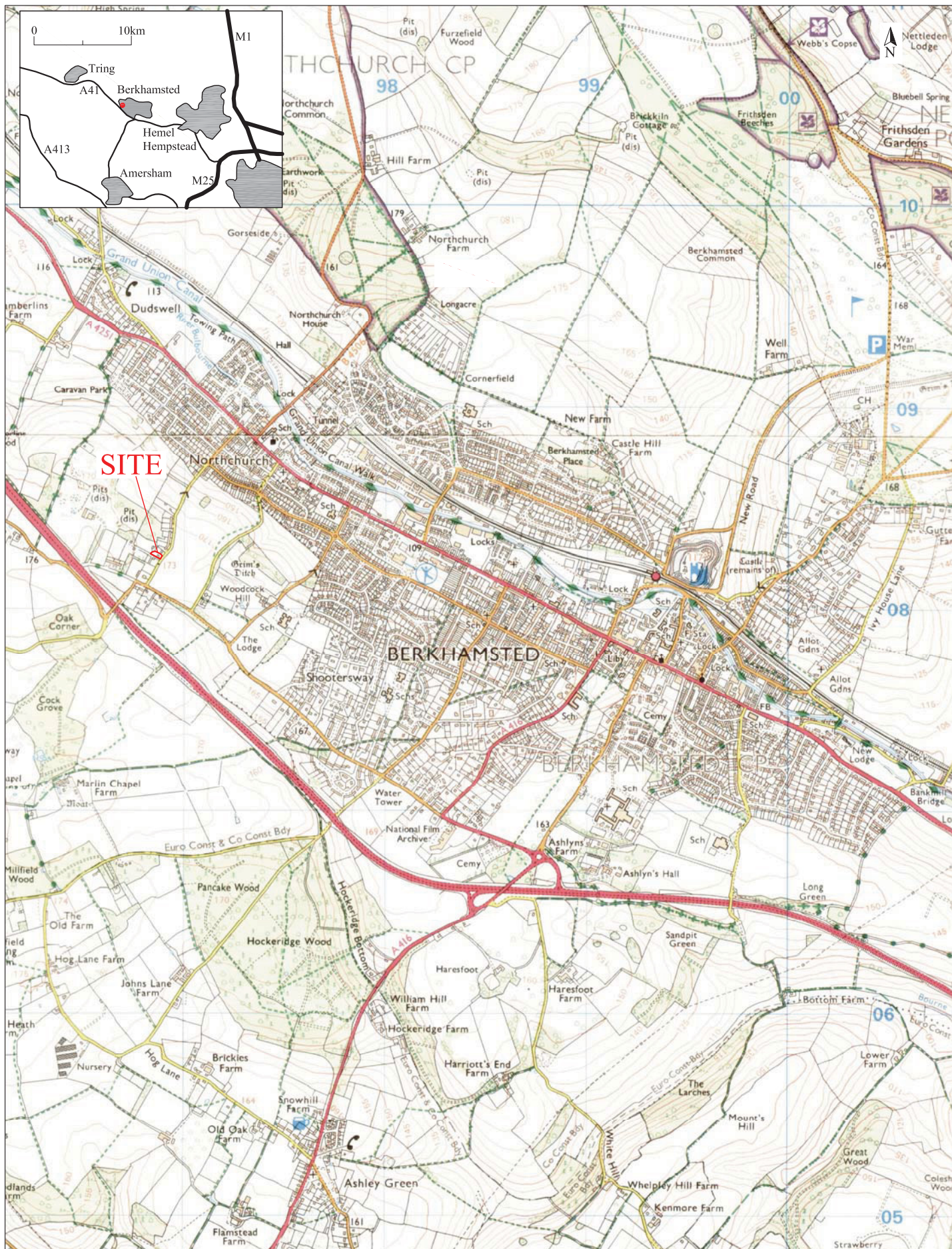
6
Sample Section 1 looking northeast.



7
Sample Section 2 looking northwest.



8
Soakaway post exc. Looking northwest.



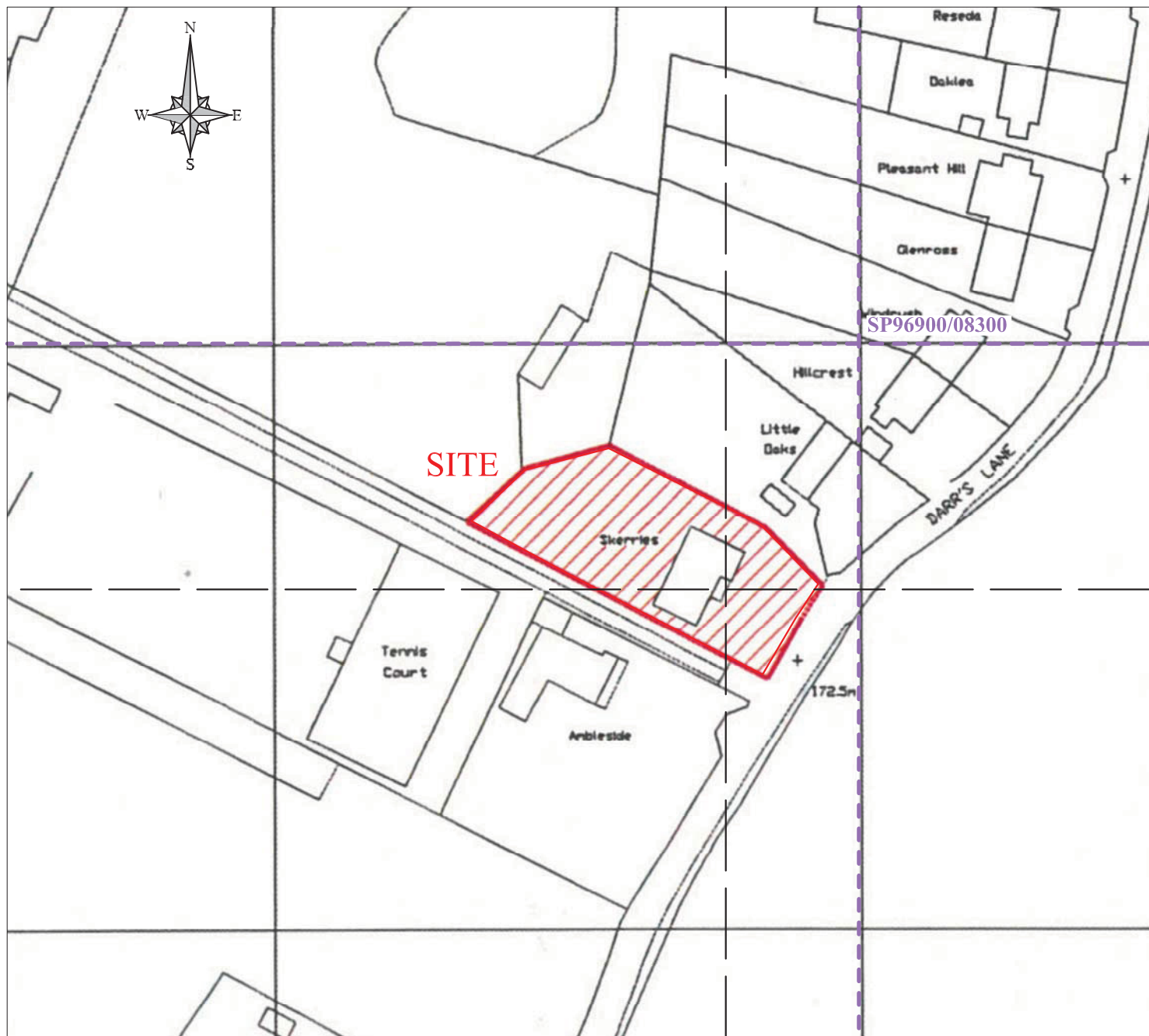
Reproduced from the 1999 Ordnance Survey 1:25000 map with the permission of Her Majesty's Stationery Office. Crown copyright Archaeological Solutions Ltd. Licence No. 100036680

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Fig. 1 Site location plan

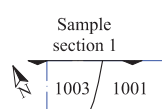
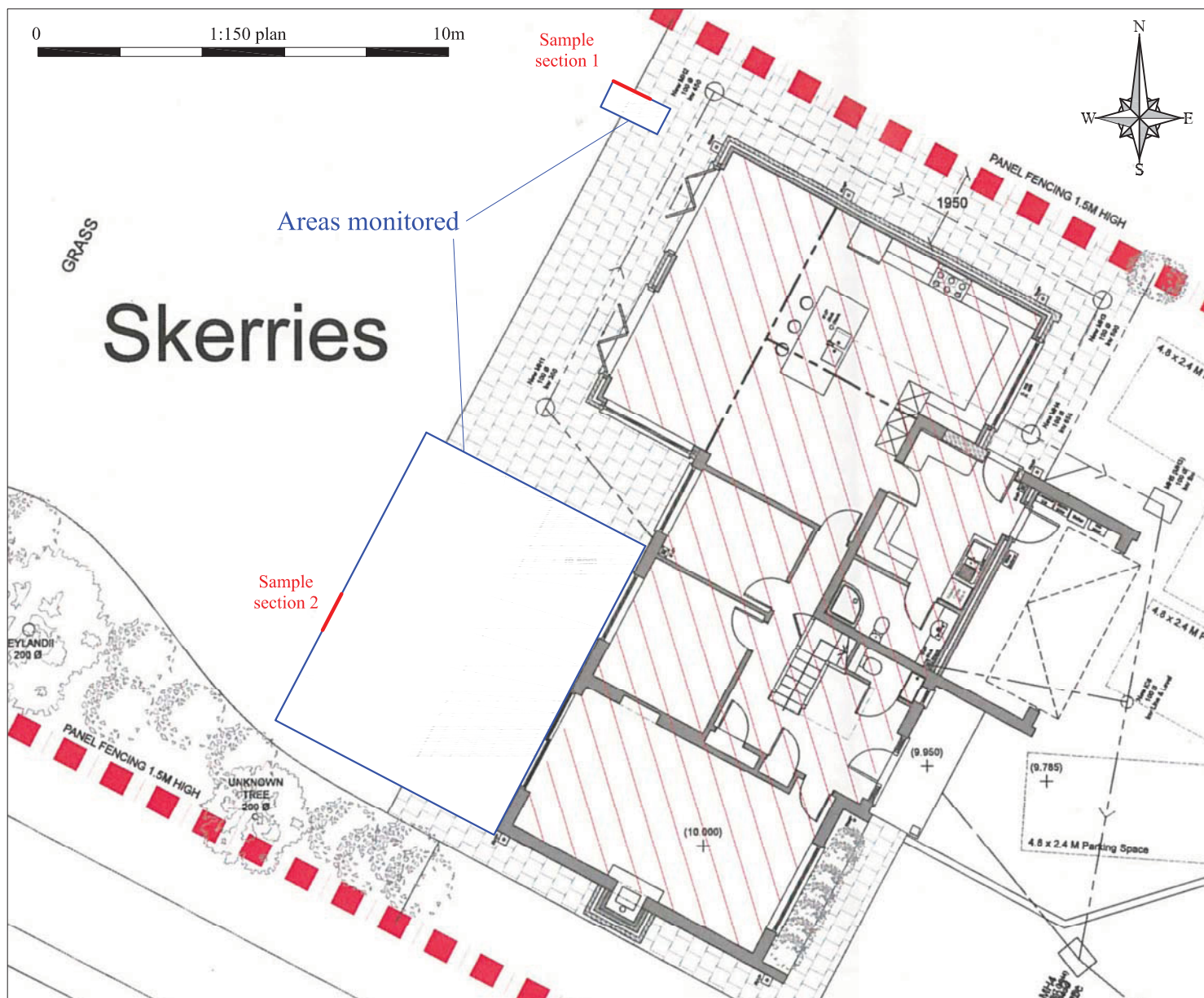
Scale 1:25,000 at A4

Skerries, Darrs Lane, Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire (P6117)

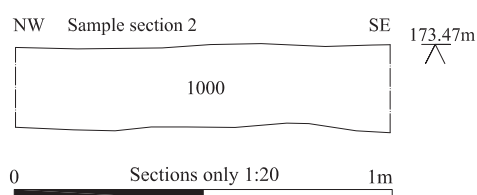
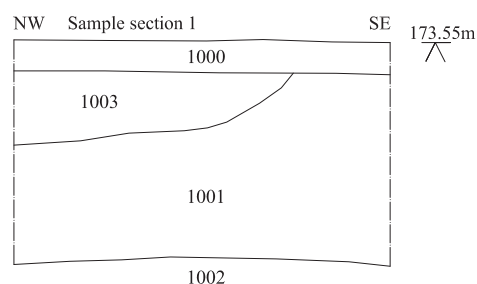
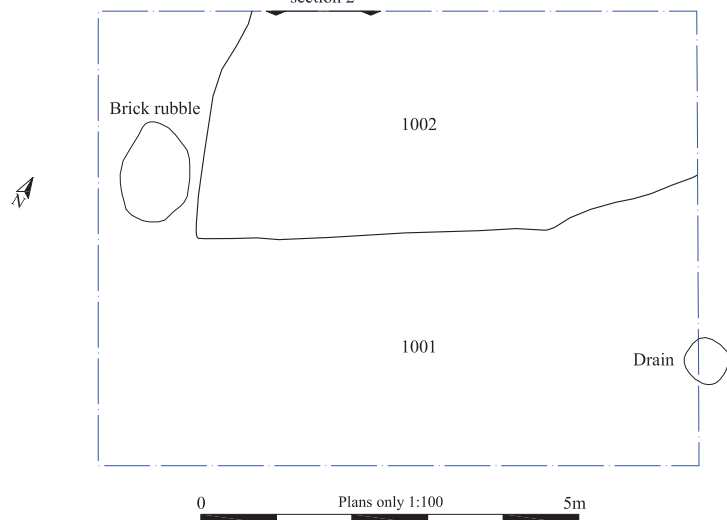


0 75m

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Fig. 2 Detailed site location
Scale 1:1000 at A4
Skerries, Darrs Lane, Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire (P6117)



Sample section 2



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Fig. 3 Site plans and sections

Scale 1:150, 1:100 and 1:20 at A4

Skerries, Darrs Lane, Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire (P6117)