

**T H A M E S      V A L L E Y**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL**

**S E R V I C E S**

**Fieldside, Long Wittenham,  
Abingdon, Oxfordshire**

**Archaeological Watching Brief**

**by Tim Dawson**

**Site Code: FLW11/82**

**(SU 5462 9373)**

# **Fieldside, Long Wittenham, Abingdon, Oxfordshire**

**An Archaeological Watching Brief**

**For Mr J Merrifield**

by Tim Dawson

ThamesValleyArchaeologicalServices

Ltd

SiteCodeFLW11/82

**August 2011**

## Summary

**Site name:** Fieldside, Long Wittenham, Abingdon, Oxfordshire

**Grid reference:** SU 5462 9373

**Site activity:** Watching Brief

**Date and duration of project:** 5th - 10th August 2011

**Project manager:** Steve Ford

**Site supervisor:** Tim Dawson

**Site code:** FLW 11/82

**Area of site:** c.70 sq m

**Summary of results:** Four linear features were recorded in the foundation trenches, one of which can be tentatively dated to the medieval period.

**Location and reference of archive:** The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited with Oxfordshire Museum Service.

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[www.tvas.co.uk/reports/reports.asp](http://www.tvas.co.uk/reports/reports.asp).*

Report edited/checked by: Steve Ford ✓ 30.08.11
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# **Fieldside, Long Wittenham, Abingdon, Oxfordshire An Archaeological Watching Brief**

by Tim Dawson

**Report 11/82**

## **Introduction**

This report documents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out at Fieldside, Didcot Road, Long Wittenham, Abingdon, Oxfordshire (SU 5462 9373) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr J Merrifield, Thomas Merrifield Ltd, 120 Broadway, Didcot, Oxfordshire, OX11 8AB.

Planning consent (P10/W1636) has been granted by South Oxfordshire District Council to construct a new house on the north side of Fieldside, Long Wittenham. This is subject to a condition (6) which requires the implementation of an archaeological watching brief during groundworks.

This is in accordance with the Department for Communities and Local Government's Planning Policy Statement, Planning for the Historic Environment (PPS5 2010), and the District's policies on archaeology. The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Mr Richard Oram, Planning Archaeologist at Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services (Oram 2011). The fieldwork was undertaken by Tim Dawson on 5th and 10th August 2011 and the site code is FLW 11/82.

The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited with Oxfordshire Museum Services in due course.

## **Location, topography and geology**

The site is located on the south-eastern edge of Long Wittenham, a small village *c.*2.5km northeast of Didcot and 5km southeast of Abingdon. The river Thames flows north-eastwards *c.*200m northwest of the site (Fig. 1). The site is currently waste ground though it was previously occupied by a barn, the last remains of which, a concrete slab, were removed immediately prior to the current works. Large houses with associated gardens surround the site on the north, west and east sides while the southern edge fronts onto Fieldside, a patchy gravel track, with open fields on the opposite side of the road (Fig. 2). The topography of the site is flat at the southern end, the former location of the barn, from where it falls away steeply to the north with a height difference between the two areas of *c.*0.70m. The underlying geology observed on site is described as 1st (Flood Plain) Terrace Deposits of Younger River Gravels (BGS 1980). The site is at a height of *c.*50m above Ordnance Datum.

## **Archaeological background**

The archaeological potential of the area has been highlighted in a brief prepared by Mr Richard Oram of Oxfordshire County Archaeological Service (Oram 2011). In summary, the site lies within the historic (medieval) core of Long Wittenham which has late Saxon origins (Williams and Martin 2002). A variety of early post-medieval listed buildings are present in the vicinity of the site and Saxon and medieval features were recorded during a watching brief 350m west of the site. However, a watching brief just to the northwest located no deposits of archaeological interest (Croxson 2001). A Saxon or Viking bracelet was recovered from the site itself.

A Saxon cemetery was discovered in the 19th century to the southeast of the village on the west side of Didcot Road and an extensive cropmark complex visible from the air lies to the south of the village and which includes a Saxon timber hall, a possible Iron Age pit alignment, Saxon pits, Iron Age enclosures and a series of trackways and possible field systems (Fig. 3). Iron Age deposits have also been recorded 200m north of the site within the village.

## **Objectives and methodology**

The purpose of the watching brief was to excavate and record any archaeological deposits affected by the works. This was to involve examination of all areas of intrusive groundworks, in particular monitoring of the excavation of foundation trenches and other deeply invasive features such as soakaways.

A soakaway and the foundation trenches for the house and garden store were excavated using a mini-digger with 0.60m- and 0.50m-wide buckets. In addition to this, the change in height across the site necessitated the reduction of the ground around the southern end of the house. Spoil from each area of groundworks was monitored and possible archaeological deposits were hand-cleaned when the depth and stability of the trench allowed. It was not possible, however, to closely inspect deposits in the southern end of the house foundations as the trench at this point was *c.*1.90m deep. Similarly, it was not safe to enter the foundation trench of the garden store as the ground into which it was dug consisted of loose gravel and modern rubbish and was consequently very unstable and prone to collapse. Possible features observed in these areas were recorded as accurately as possible taking into account the circumstances.

## Results

### *House foundations and ground reduction*

The excavation of the foundation trenches for the house was observed in the southern half of the site. The trenches measured 0.60m in width, were 1.16m deep at the northern end and *c.*1.90m deep at the southern end. At the northern end the stratigraphy exposed consisted of 0.19m of topsoil, 0.18m of small to medium gravel, 0.41m of pale yellow sandy gravel and 0.38m of mid red-yellow sandy gravel. This sequence changed as the ground rose towards the south with the addition of a 0.33m-thick layer of subsoil and some minor alterations in the thickness of the different coloured gravel bands (Fig. 5).

Four archaeological features were recorded in the area of the house foundations all of which appeared to be linear in plan (Fig. 4). Cuts 1 and 2 were exposed in the north-western corner of the foundations and appear to both be ditches running NNE-SSW with 1 possibly terminating in the centre of the northernmost trench. Ditch 1 was *c.*0.96m wide, 0.52m deep and exposed for *c.*3.20m with curved sides and a flat base. Its fill (51) consisted of a firm mid red-brown sandy silt. Adjoining this was half-exposed ditch 2, which, with a width of 0.78m and a depth of 0.66m was slightly larger than ditch 1. It too was filled with a firm mid red-brown sandy silt (52) and was consequently indistinguishable from the fill of ditch 1 which meant that the relationship between the two features could not be discerned. One fragment of tile and a broken fragment of animal long bone were recovered from ditch 1 although it is unclear whether these were dragged in by the digger bucket from the loose topsoil, or were actually deposited during the infilling of the ditch.

The remaining two features were another pair of intersecting ditches (3 and 4). Ditch 3 was exposed in the western foundation trench in the south-western corner of the house and appeared to be running in a similar alignment to 1 and 2, that is roughly north east-south west. It had a width of *c.*1.90m and depth of *c.*0.65m and was visible in both trench walls though not in the foundation trenches further to the northeast, suggesting that it had terminated or turned in the area between. Ditch 3 had a pronounced concave cross-section and was filled with firm mid-dark grey sandy silt (54). Intersecting with the southern edge of ditch 3 was the partially-exposed ditch 4. Aligned ENE-WSW, this had a width of *c.*4.00m and depth of *c.*1.05m and had a visible length of *c.*8.00m. Due to the depth of the trench in this area it was not possible to closely examine or excavate ditches 3 or 4 but ditch 4 could be clearly seen continuing down into the base of the trench. Given its width, an alternative interpretation is that this is some form of large pit or hollow. As with ditches 1 and 2, ditches 3 and 4 contained fills (54 and 55) too similar to differentiate between the two. Because of this it was not possible to discern the

relationship between the two features. One sherd of medieval pottery was recovered from the upper extents of ditch 4 during the ground reduction (see below).

Because of the rapid change in height between the southern and northern ends of the house an area of ground around the southern end was reduced (Fig. 4). This cut a maximum of 0.40m into the ground through the topsoil and subsoil with the upper levels of ditch 4 fill 55 being exposed in some areas. It was during this phase that the fragment of pottery was found.

Several areas of modern disturbance were exposed during the excavation of the house foundations. A rubbish pit containing, amongst other things, a rusted bicycle, a shoe and a large amount of green string was dug into in the south-eastern area of the groundworks immediately north of ditch 4. Cutting into the ground surface above ditches 3 and 4 were a concrete footing with bricks embedded in its upper levels and a separate fragment of brick foundation (Fig. 5). These were both aligned with the levelled area and of the site and are almost certainly the remains of the barn that once stood in that area.

### *Garden storage foundations*

The foundation trench for the garden storage shed was excavated with a width of 0.50m and depth of 1.20m. The stratigraphy exposed was similar to that in the northern end of the house foundations: topsoil over gravel and sandy gravel. No archaeological finds or features were recorded in this set of foundations although the entire south-western half of the area had been subject to disturbance to the full depth of the trench. This area of disturbance contained loose silty sand with modern bricks, glass and metal.

### *Soakaway*

A soakaway measuring 1.00m × 1.00m × 0.40m deep was excavated to the north of the house. This exposed topsoil and the surface of the sandy gravel natural geology but no finds or features of archaeological interest.

## **Finds**

### *Pottery by Paul Blinkhorn*

A single sherd of pottery weighing 6g occurred in ditch 4 (55). It is a fragment of North-east Wiltshire ware, categorized in the Oxfordshire County type-series (Mellor 1994) as fabric OXBF, and dated AD1050 – 1350. It is a typical find at sites in the region. The sherd is in good condition, and appears reliably stratified.

## Conclusion

The watching brief has allowed the recording of a number of archaeological features on the site. These features all appear to be linear in nature and are likely to demark boundaries. However, one feature (4) was unusually wide and it is possible that it was a large pit or hollow rather than a ditch. The latter feature was the only one to contain any dating evidence, which was a single sherd of medieval pottery, suggesting that it was of medieval or later date.

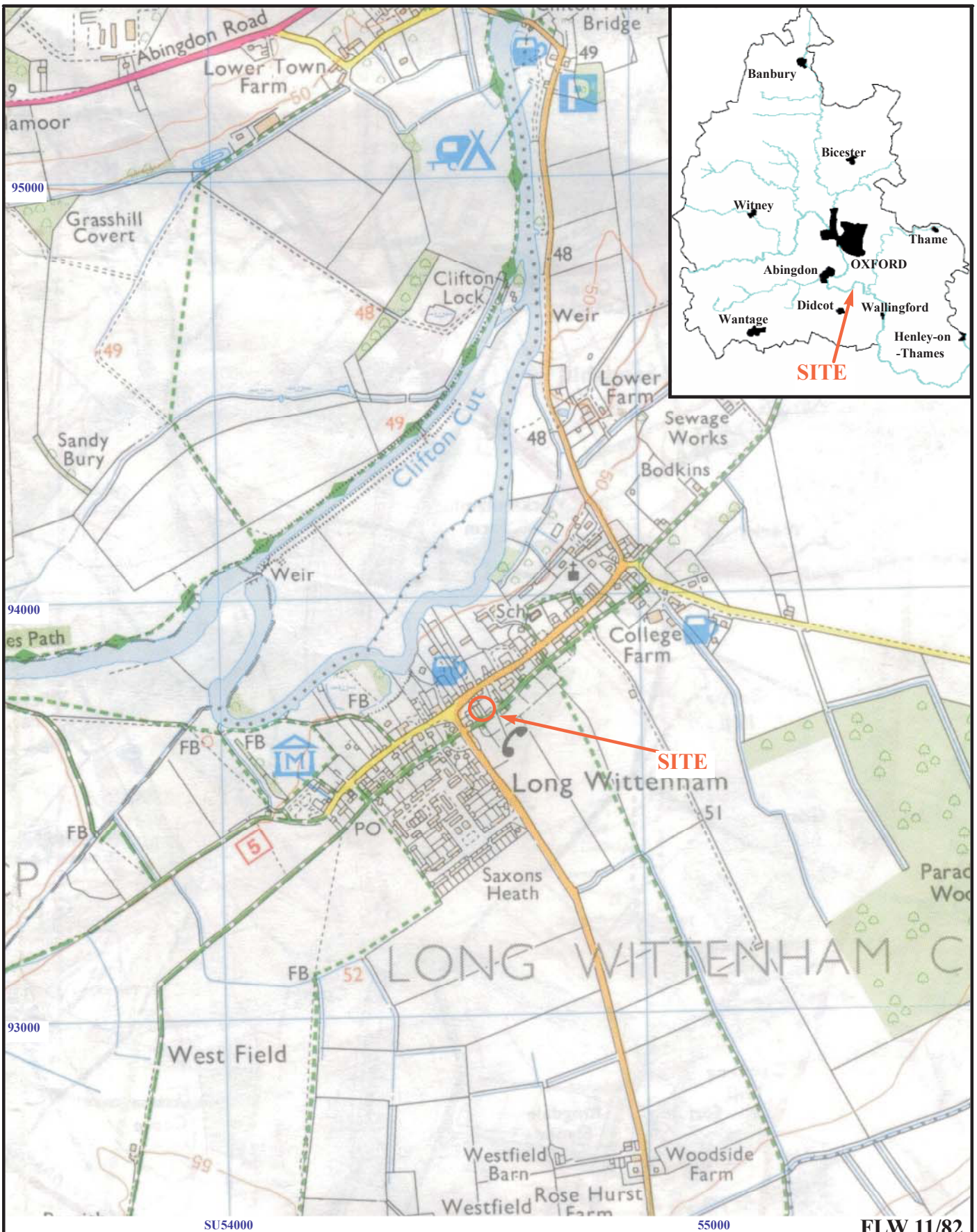
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**APPENDIX 1: Feature details**

<i>Cut</i>	<i>Fill (s)</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Dating evidence</i>
	50	Topsoil	-	
1	51	Ditch	Undated	
2	52	Ditch	Undated	
	53	Subsoil	-	
3	54	Ditch	Undated	
4	55	Ditch	Medieval or later	Pottery



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Figure 1. Location of site within Long Wittenham and Oxfordshire.

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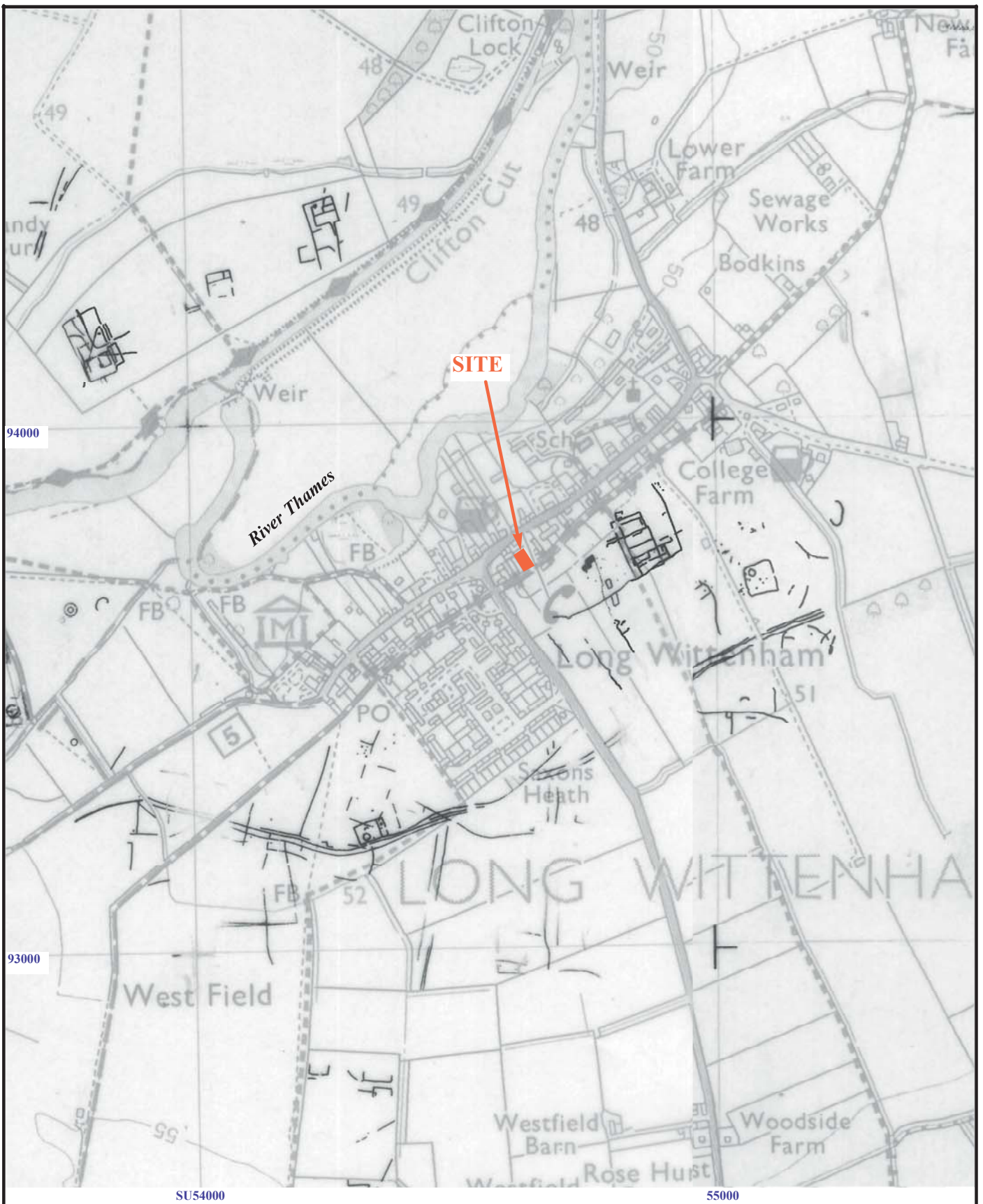


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Figure 2. Detailed location of site off Fieldside.

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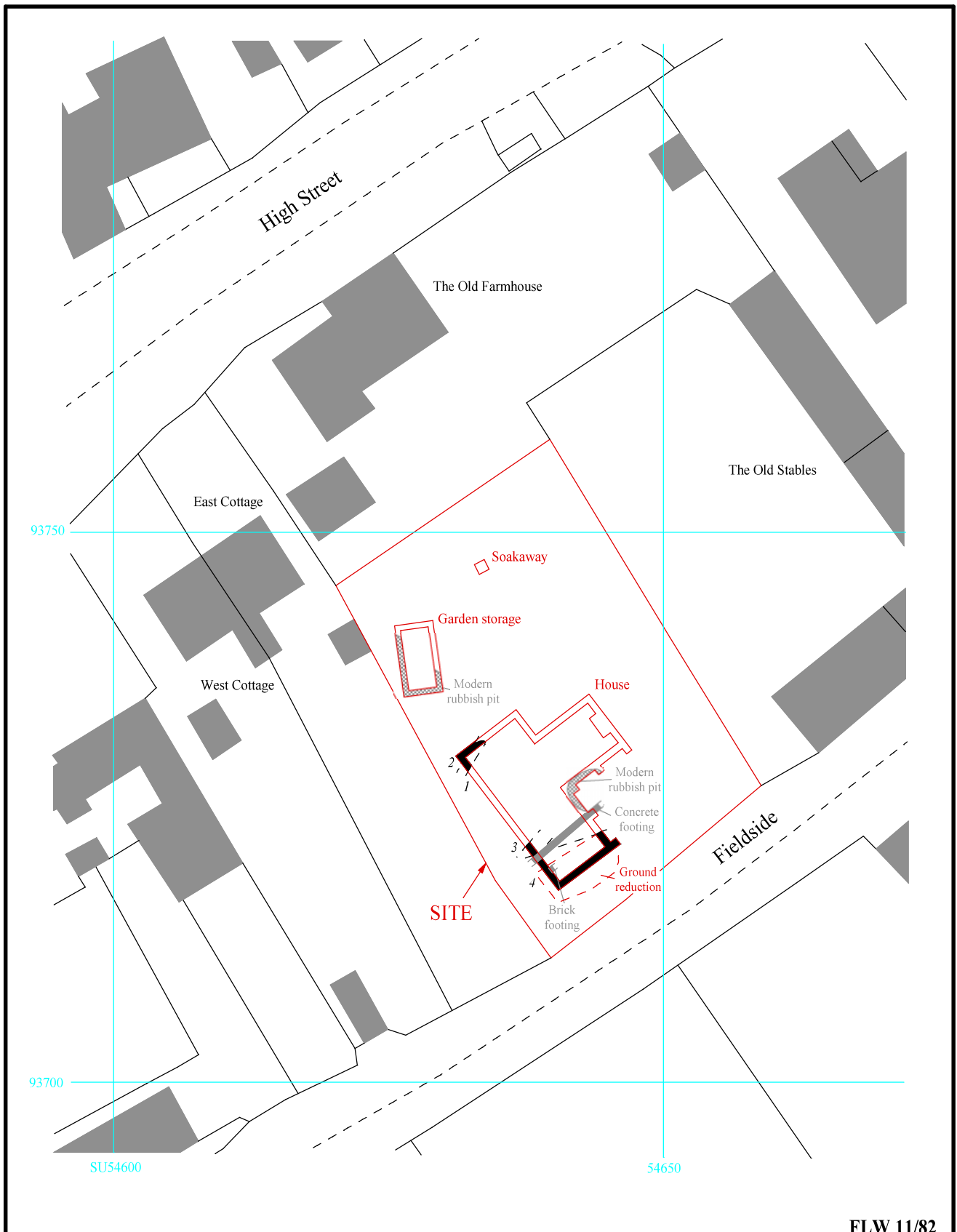


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Figure 3. Cropmark plot of Long Wittenham.

Modified from RCHME SU58 SW and SU58 SE  
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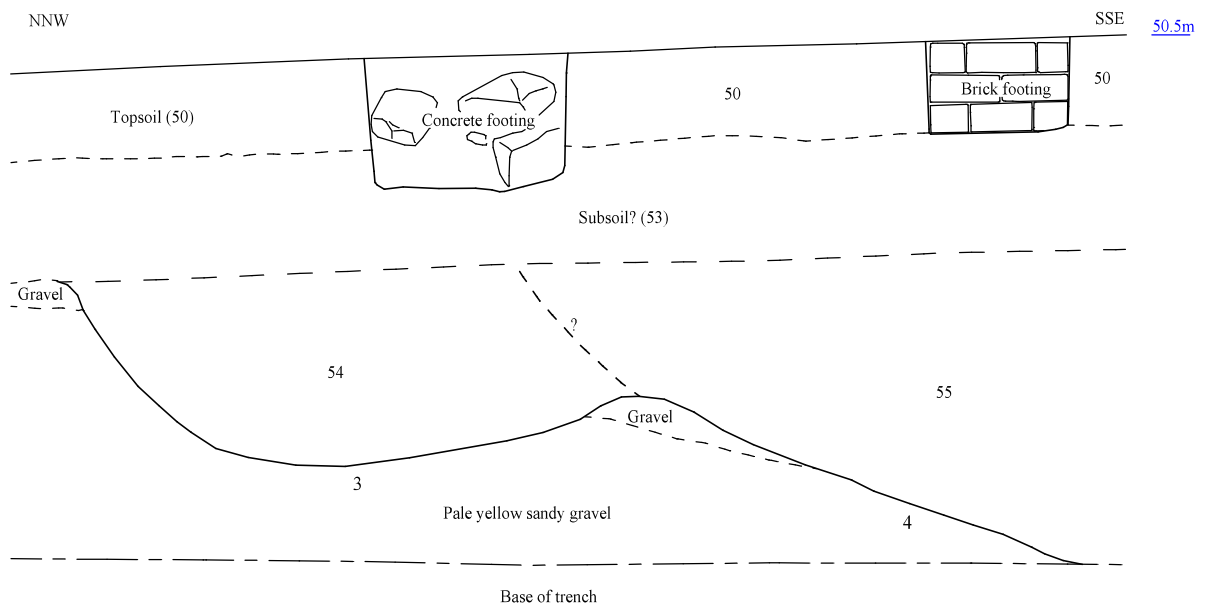
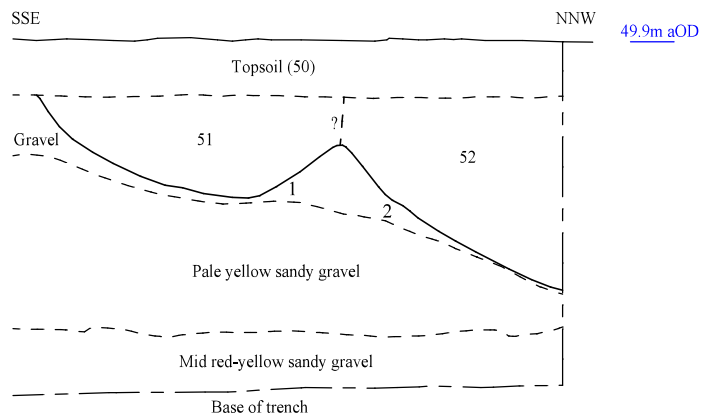
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Figure 4. Location of areas observed during watching brief.



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Figure 5. Sections.





Plate 1. Features 1 and 2, looking southwest, Scales: 2m and 1m



Plate 2. Feature 4, looking southwest, Scales: 2m and 1m.

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Plates 1 and 2.

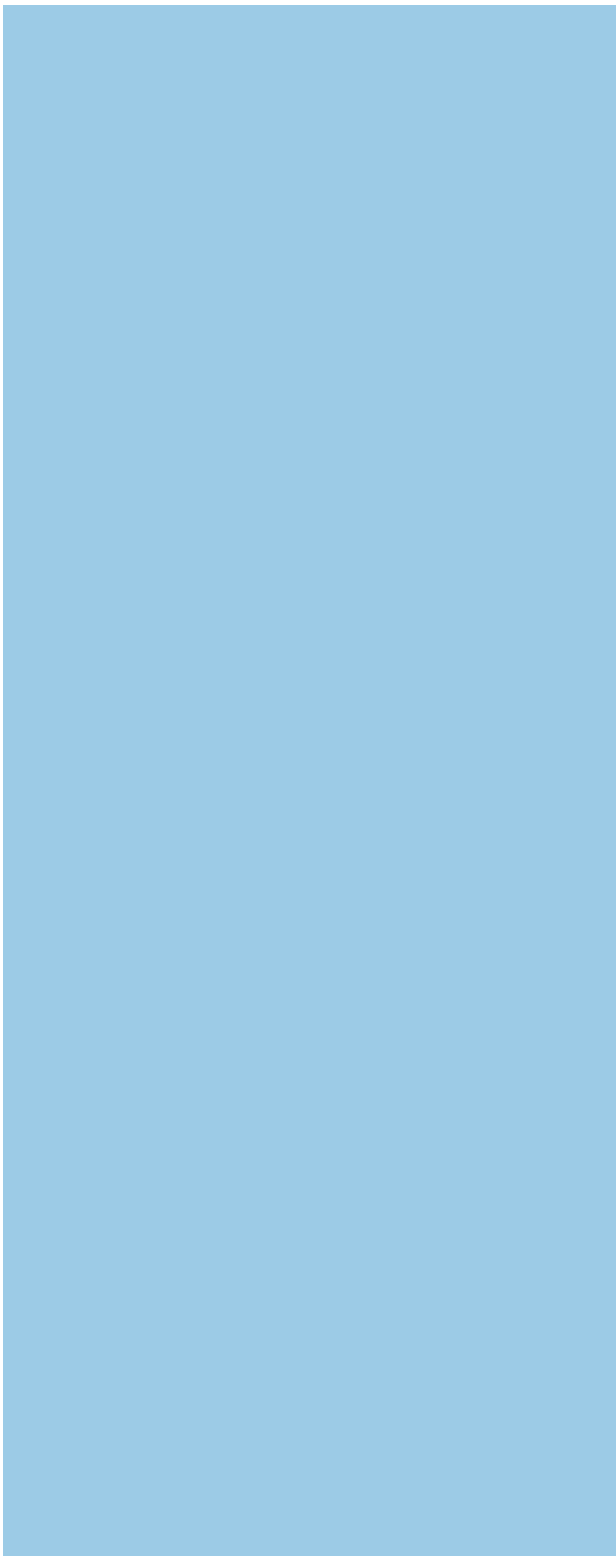
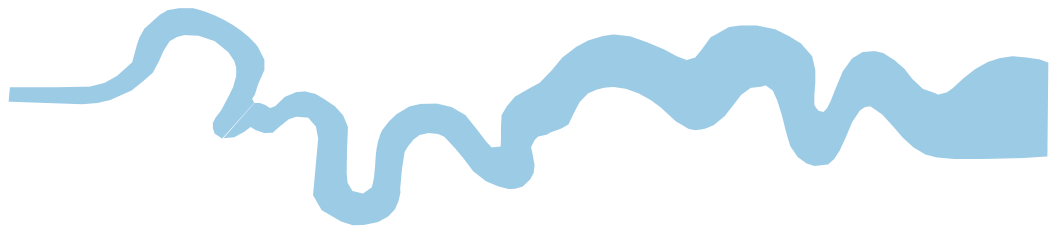
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## TIME CHART

	Calendar Years
Modern _____	AD 1901
Victorian _____	AD 1837
Post Medieval _____	AD 1500
Medieval _____	AD 1066
Saxon _____	AD 410
Roman _____	AD 43
Iron Age _____	BC/AD 750 BC
Bronze Age: Late _____	1300 BC
Bronze Age: Middle _____	1700 BC
Bronze Age: Early _____	2100 BC
Neolithic: Late .....	3300 BC
Neolithic: Early .....	4300 BC
Mesolithic: Late .....	6000 BC
Mesolithic: Early .....	10000 BC
Palaeolithic: Upper .....	30000 BC
Palaeolithic: Middle .....	70000 BC
Palaeolithic: Lower .....	2,000,000 BC







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