

Temporary Contractors Compound, Rear of Gower's Yard, Eton, Berkshire

An Archaeological Watching Brief

For Bewley Homes

by Danielle Colls

Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code GYE03-90

June 2006

Summary

Site name: Gower's Yard, Eton, Berkshire

Grid reference: SU 9600 7750

Site activity: Watching Brief

Date and duration of project: 30th May 2006

Project manager: Steve Ford

Site supervisor: Danielle Colls

Site code: GYE 03/90

Area of site: 660 sq m

Summary of results: Topsoil stripping was superficial and no archaeological finds or features were located during this phase of work

Monuments identified: None

Location and reference of archive: The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited with Reading Museum in due course

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| Report edited/checked by: | Steve Ford ✓ 22.06.06 |
| | Steve Preston ✓ 16.06.06 |

Temporary Contractors Compound, Gower's Yard, Eton, Berkshire An Archaeological Watching Brief

by Danielle Colls

Report 03/90

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out in South Meadow to the rear of Gower's Yard, 114a and 116, High Street, Eton, Berkshire (SU 9600 7750) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Steve Parks, Associate Technical Director with Bewley Homes, Bewley House, Park Road, Esher, Surrey, KT10 8NP.

Planning permission has been granted by the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead for the demolition of existing structures on the site of Gower's Yard and the construction of new buildings with associated access roads. Planning permission (06/00587) has also been granted by Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead for the temporary use of an existing emergency access route and construction of a temporary carpark and compound area adjacent to the development site in South Meadow. This consent is subject to a condition (3) relating to archaeology which requires a watching brief to be carried out during groundworks and is the subject of this report.

This is in accordance with the Department of the Environment's Planning Policy Guidance, *Archaeology and Planning* (PPG16 1990), and the Royal Borough's policies on archaeology. The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Ms Fiona MacDonald, Principal Archaeologist for Berkshire Archaeology, advisers to the Royal Borough. The fieldwork was undertaken by Danielle Colls on Tuesday 30th May 2006, and the site code is GYE 03/90. The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited at Reading Museum in due course.

Planning consent for the redevelopment of Gower's Yard was also subject to a planning condition which required an archaeological evaluation. This evaluation revealed that the site lay on land which had been reclaimed in fairly recent times (Taylor 2006). The environs of the site had also been considered in an earlier desk-based assessment which had highlighted the archaeological potential of the area (Lowe 2003).

Location, topography and geology

The site is located on the margins of the historic core of the town, lying immediately to the south of St John's church. The site comprises an access road, compound and turning area. This is located at the west end of the

main development site in South Meadow which is currently used as playing fields. It is a flat plot of land and lies at approximately 20m above Ordnance Datum. The underlying geology is mapped as flood plain gravels (BGS 1981).

Archaeological background

The desk-based assessment highlighted the archaeological potential of the site (Lowe 2003). In summary, the Middle Thames Valley is known to be archaeologically rich with a high density of prehistoric activity (Gates 1975). Also, work at Eton Rowing Lake (Allen and Welch 1998) and at the Maidenhead Flood Alleviation Scheme (Foreman *et al.* 2002) has highlighted that the floodplain river gravels have a high concentration of sites of all periods from Mesolithic to Saxon. Also to the north-west of the site at Eton Wick, a complex of Neolithic and Bronze Age monuments have been identified (Ford 1993).

There is limited evidence for Roman activity in the area with a Roman urn and vase found nearby (Balance 1983).

The town is believed to have Saxon origins and is recorded in the Domesday Book as *Ettone*, meaning 'farmstead by the river' (Mills 1998). It was noted as having 12 hides with land for 8 ploughs, 2 mills and a fishery (Williams and Martin 2002, 415)

The medieval town developed along the High Street shortly after the construction of Windsor Castle across the Thames in AD1070 (Blinkhorn and Pugh 1997). An evaluation and subsequent excavation just off the High Street, at King Stable Street, revealed deposits dated from the 11th century onwards (Blinkhorn and Pugh 1997), with a series of alluvial deposits at around 19m AOD thought to represent first land reclamation from a falling river level and then flooding and consolidation as the water levels rose again through the medieval period. A watching brief carried out at 39 High Street failed to reveal any archaeological deposits (Hammond 2003).

Objectives and methodology

The purpose of the watching brief was to excavate and record any archaeological deposits affected by the groundworks. This involved supervision of topsoil and overburden removal in the area designated for access and turning, and also to accommodate site facilities. Sufficient time was allowed, within the groundworkers' schedules, to excavate and record any archaeological deposits revealed.

Results

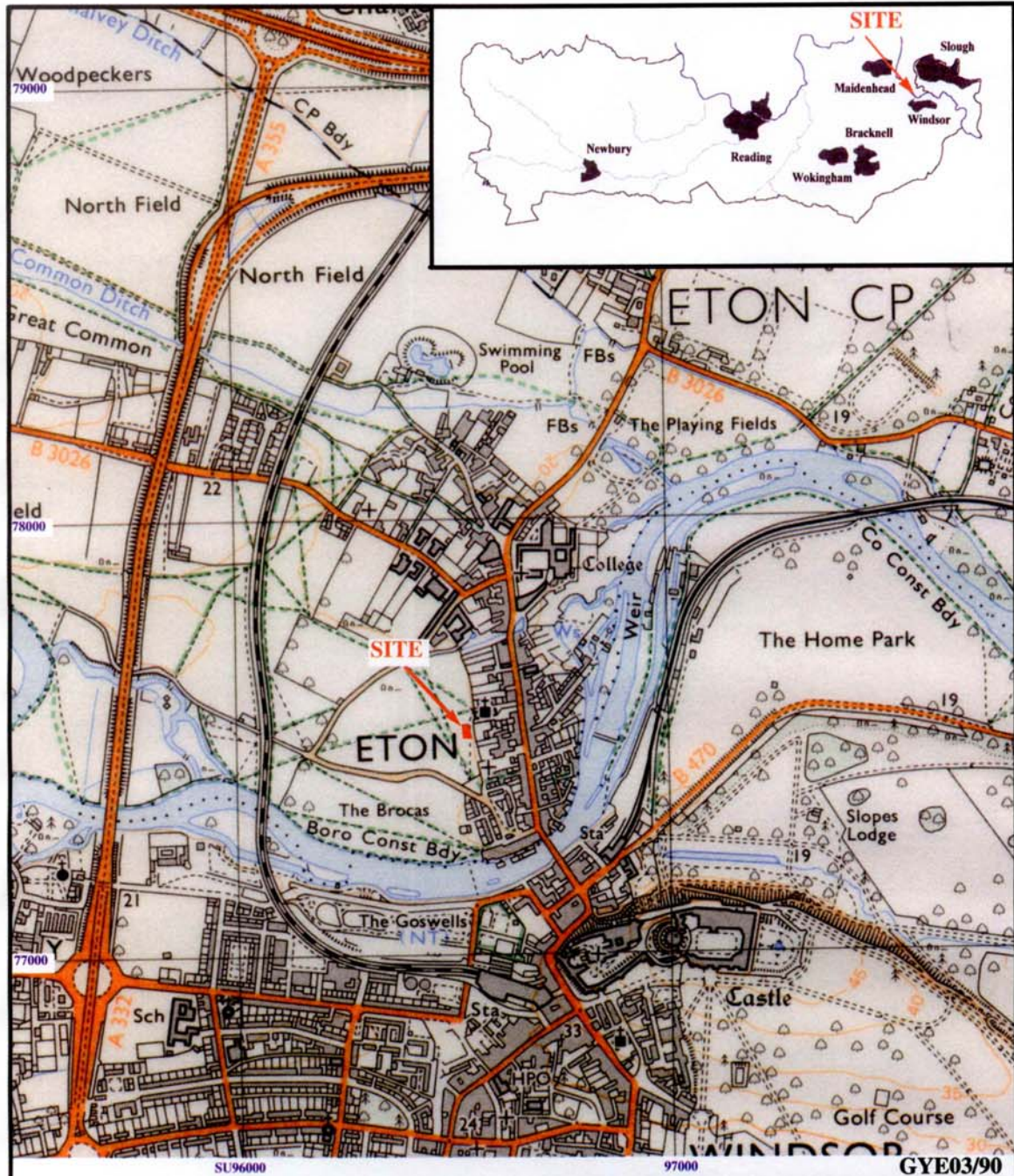
The site comprised an excavated area of only up to 0.25m depth (Figs. 2 and 3). The overburden was removed under archaeological supervision using a 360° machine fitted with a ditching bucket. The general stratigraphy encountered consisted of c.0.20m of turf and topsoil overlying brown grey sandy silt subsoil with occasional gravel patches. No archaeological features or deposits were encountered.

Conclusion

The watching brief did not reveal any finds or deposits of an archaeological nature during the groundworks. Due to the intended use of the area, the overburden stripping was not sufficiently deep to expose archaeologically sensitive layers.

References

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**Temporary contractors compound, rear of
Gower's Yard, High Street, Eton, Berkshire, 2006
An archaeological watching brief**

Figure 1. Location of site within Eton and Berkshire.

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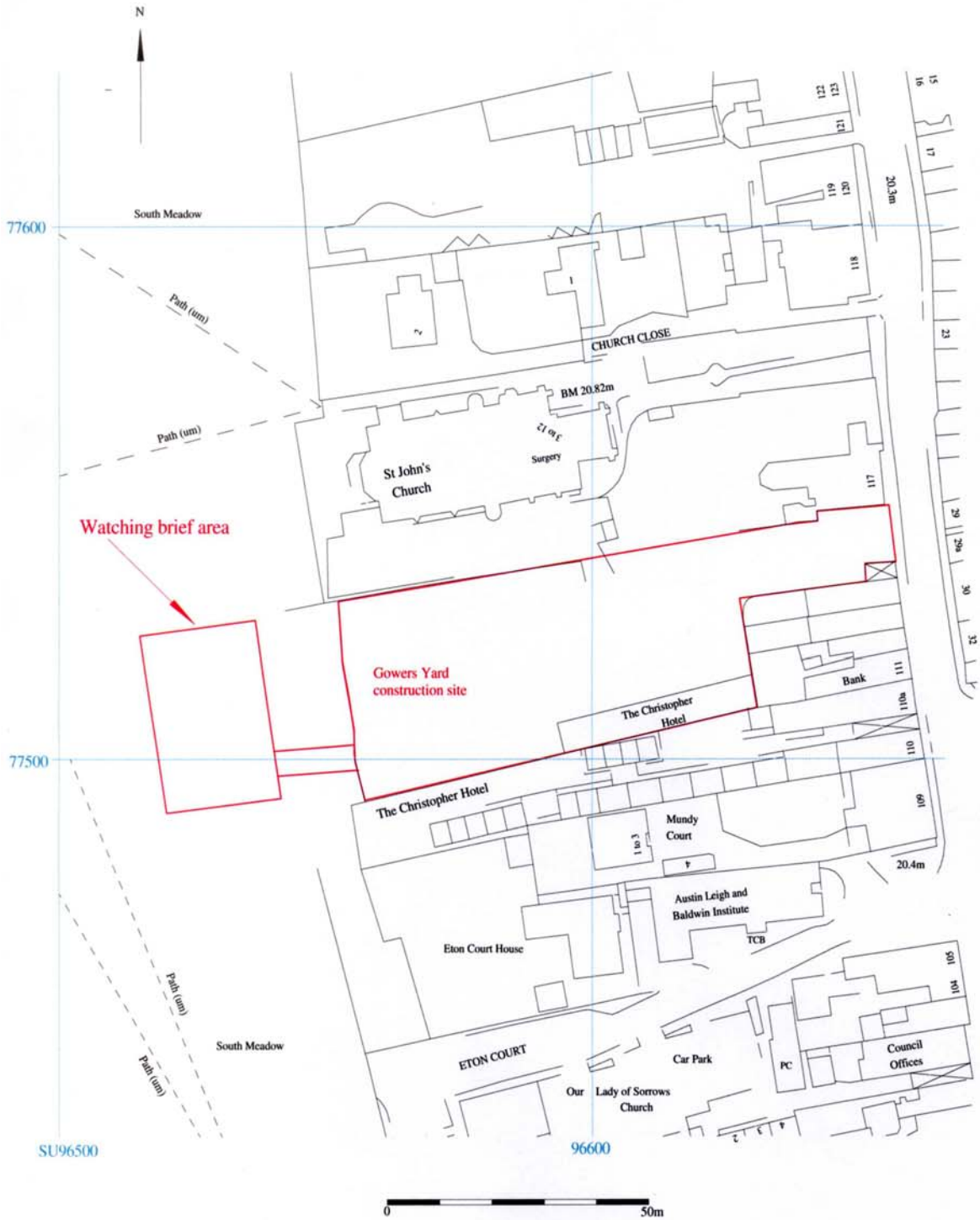
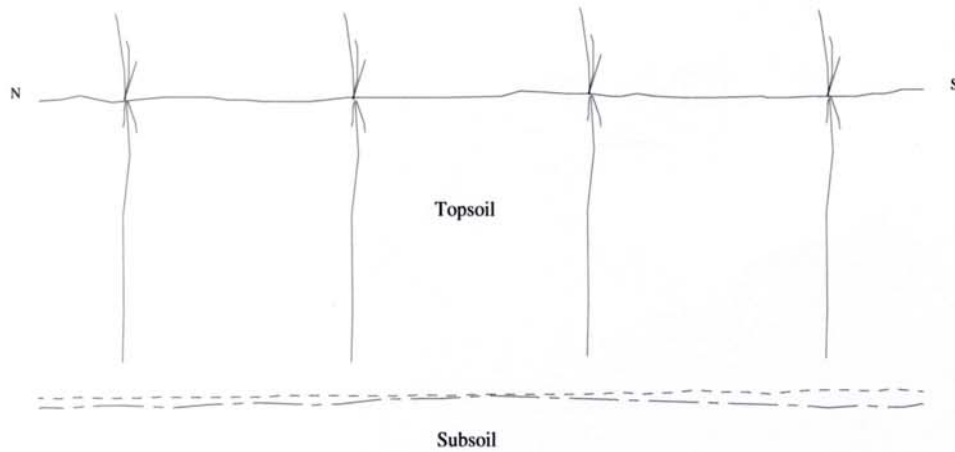


Figure 2. Location of watching brief area

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0 0.25m

Figure 3. Representative section through stripped area

GYE 03/90