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ARCHAEOLOGICAL

S E R V I C E S

S O U T H W E S T

**Umberleigh Barton Farm,
Umberleigh, Devon**

Archaeological Watching Brief

by Richard Tabor and Andrew Weale

Site Code: UBF13/91

(SS 5938 2458)

Umberleigh Barton Farm, Umberleigh, Devon

An Archaeological Watching Brief

For Mr Johnathan Andrew

by Richard Tabor and Andrew Weale

Thames Valley Archaeological Services

(South West) Ltd

Site Code UBF13/91

March 2014

Summary

Site name: Umberleigh Barton Farm, Umberleigh, Devon

Grid reference: SS 5938 2458

Site activity: Watching Brief

Date and duration of project: 21st-24th May 2013

Project manager: Andrew Weale

Site supervisor: Andrew Weale

Site code: UBF13/91

Area of site: c. 100 sq m

Summary of results: Much of the site has been altered by grading and the laying down of levelling deposits in the 20th century. Three archaeological features were encountered of which one, a drain, was almost certainly modern despite its stone construction, whilst the other two were walls. One of these can be regarded with confidence as part of the original ground plan of a Post-medieval barn. The other may either be part of the Medieval chapel complex or, perhaps more probably, a later wall blocking access between two buildings. Modern artefacts were recovered from the levelling deposits and from the stone-lined drain.

Location and reference of archive: The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services (South West), Taunton and will be deposited at the Archaeology Data Service in due course, with accession code NDDMS2013.22.

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Umberleigh Barton Farm, Umberleigh, Devon An Archaeological Watching Brief

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Report 13/91

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out at Umberleigh Barton Farm, Umberleigh, Devon (NGR SS 5947 2458; Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr J. Andrew, of Umberleigh Barton Farm, Umberleigh, Devon EX37 9DX.

Planning permission and listed building consent (55398 and 55399) were obtained from North Devon District Council for the construction of a biomass boiler and district heating system at Umberleigh Barton Farm. The consent was subject to a condition relating to archaeology, requiring a programme of archaeological work in view of the Medieval origins of the farm and the nearby church. Mr Steven Reed (Archaeology Officer, Devon County Historic Environment Team) indicated that this was to take the form of a watching brief during groundworks.

Umberleigh House is a Grade I listed building on the probable site of a pre-13th-century mansion. The fabric of the house includes some remains of what is believed to have been a chapel rebuilt in the 13th century. Umberleigh Barton is a group of post-medieval buildings included in the listing as they represent a particularly fine example of a developing farmstead.

This is in accordance with the Department for Communities and Local Government's *National Planning Policy Framework* (NPPF 2012) and the District Council's policies on archaeology. The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Mr Reed and was undertaken by Andrew Weale between 21st–24th May 2013. The site code is UBF13/91.

The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services South West, Taunton, and will be deposited with the Archaeology Data Service (ADS) in due course, with accession code NDDMS2013.22.

Location, topography and geology

Umberleigh is a small village located 9km south-south-east of Barnstaple, Devon. It is an outlying settlement in the civil parish of Atherington, the core village of which is 1.5km to the south (Fig. 1). Umberleigh Barton Farm occupies a low promontory sandwiched between two streams in a coomb draining northwards into the River Taw. The service trenches for the heating system formed a T-shape, the long axis of *c.* 105m extending

northwards from a building adjacent to the A377 to the north side of Umberleigh Farmhouse, declining from *c.* 26m above Ordnance Datum (aOD) to *c.* 22m aOD. From there it branched to supply buildings to the west and east over a distance of *c.* 80m over near level ground between 22–23m aOD. The biomass plant was located in a west to east oriented former threshing barn on the east side of the axial service trench *c.* 35m north of the road.

The promontory is formed of Quaternary Taw River Terrace Deposits, 2nd member, comprising gravel, silt and sand, which overly Bideford Formation Carboniferous sedimentary mudstone and siltstone (BGS 2013). The soil is free-draining, slightly acidic loam of low fertility (NSRI 2013).

Archaeological background

The derivation of the name Umberleigh is by no means clear. Whilst the root of the element 'ley' is well understood as from the *OE Leah*, meaning a clearing in woodland which later became pasture or meadow (Mills 1998, 405) Mills reading of 'umber' as *winnburna*, woodland stream, seems tendentious (Mills 1998, 358). Tristram Risdon's *Chorographical Description, or Survey of the County of Devon*, written in the early 17th century but not published in full until 1811, records that Athelstan, king of Wessex from AD924-7 and of England from 927-39 had a palace and chapel on the site. The earliest authenticated mention of Umberleigh is in Domesday Book as *Umberlei*. By 1086 it was a holding of the Church of La Trinite of Caen with 10 householders and valued at £11. Prior to the conquest it had been held by Beorhtric and valued at £10 (Williams and Martin 2002, 292). The subsequent holders of the manor have been recorded by Cresswell (1938). A chapel was constructed on the site in the 13th century.

The area subject to Grade I listing (LB 96871) is described as 'Barton including adjoining hothouse to rear courtyard, and remains of Chapel Umberleigh House, Atherington' (BLB 2013). The listing notes the survival of some fabric from the 13th-century chapel in outhouses and substantial 15th-century fabric concealed by late 18th- and early 19th-century remodelling in the main range, which forms an 'L' with a wing added to its rear in the 17th century. Where it survives, the Medieval roof carpentry is regarded as one of the best examples in Devon. It is also one of the best surviving Post-medieval farmsteads in the area (Watts 2007; KHBC 1999; Pevsner 1952).

Cropmarks of a possible ring ditch and enclosure 790m south-east of the site represent the only recorded indicators of potential prehistoric activity.

Objectives and methodology

The purpose of the watching brief was to identify, excavate and record any archaeological deposits affected by the works. This involved examination of the intrusive groundworks including topsoil stripping and the excavation of foundation and service trenches.

Surfaces of either concrete, gravel, cobbles or topsoil, and any other overburden were removed along the route of a pipe trench to a depth of between 0.18m and 0.68m by a 360° tracked machine fitted with a toothed or toothless grading bucket, depending on the material being removed, under constant archaeological supervision. The trench was continuous but varied in character and for the purposes of recording was divided into segments designated by upper case letters where changes in the nature of the deposits occurred (Fig. 3). The trench varied in width from 0.60m and 0.80m deep in Area A to B, to 0.20m wide and 0.46m deep in areas D to F.

Written, drawn and photographic records were made of the identified archaeological and natural cuts and deposits. The nature of the operation was described and illustrated with photographs.

Results

The results are presented by area, from the land to the east of cottages at the southern end (D to F), passing the western gable of the threshing barn and structures to the north of the latter (A to B) and alongside tennis courts (B to C) (Pl. 1) before branching at a 'T' junction at the northern end. At the northern end the results are presented from west to east, covering Areas G, K, H, I, C and J (Pls 2 and 3).

At the south end area D (not shown in Fig. 3 but adjacent to the south of E) in a trench of width 0.20m cobbles to a depth of 0.09m gave way to up to 0.17m of made ground deposited over the natural geology (67). The made ground included a base sherd of white 'china' which might date from the late 18th century to the 20th century but some of the associated brick and tile was modern. In Area E the trench width was increased to 0.26m. Topsoil with a depth of 0.19m lay over 0.08m of subsoil formed over the natural geology.

Between Areas F and A the trench was increased to 0.40m deep. Concrete had been laid to a depth of 0.09m directly over the natural geology which was excavated to 0.60m below the modern surface. An 0.88m wide, 0.31m deep, apparently V-profiled linear cut [1] into natural, sealed by the concrete, appeared to be a westward projection of the threshing barn's southern wall (Figs 3 and 4, section 1). Two basal courses of stone wall (54) were laid in the trench, set into an earthen fill (55). Rubble from the wall had spread over the earthen fill. The wall seem likely to form part of the barn's original outline. Two courses of rough stone (53) laid directly onto natural (67) and covered with concrete clearly what remained of a demolished wall of the surviving barn.

Across the yard area from A to B the width of the trench was increased to 0.60m, reaching a depth of 0.80m. The straightforward sequence of layers comprised a surface of 0.07m of concrete laid over a 0.04m deep make-up layer including slate and concrete deposited onto silty clay 0.10m deep subsoil. The natural geology was encountered at 0.20m below the surface. At B the trench was excavated below the standing stone wall which divides the yard from an area of grass tennis courts which is believed to have been laid out in 1924 (client, pers comm). The topsoil reached a depth of up to 0.20m, with a further 0.27m of subsoil over natural geology probably produced by the grading of the surface. The natural geology was reached at 0.47m.

Midway between B and C a 5m length of trench branched westwards into Umberleigh Barton house. The trench cut through gravel (62) laid over cobbles (63) which had been cut by a soakaway filled with pitched slates (58) and a trench for a stone drain [2] (Figs 3 and 4, section 2). The drain was made up of a slate base and mortared slate walls (60) and had accumulated a homogenous organically rich silty clay (61) which filled it completely. The box-profiled trench was *c.* 0.80m wide and 0.52m deep. The wall slates were *c.* 0.12m thick. The fill (61) contained a fragment of hand-made red brick with mortar attached and a jug handle sherd. Given that the drain trench cut the cobbled surface it is unlikely to be earlier than 19th century. The cobbles were set on the natural geology.

Area G was a small courtyard accessed via a modern arch linking the western end of the northern range of Umberleigh Barton House to an extant structure which was once a lean-to against the southern wall of the medieval chapel (Pl. 3). Paving slabs of 0.05m thickness had been laid over a levelling deposit of scalpins of similar depth, spread over 0.10m of concrete. Subsoil below the concrete was excavated to a depth of 0.34m below the surface. The sequence varied in where the trench encountered a west to east-oriented linear cut [3] (Figs 3 and 4, section 3; Pl. 4). The cut was sealed by 0.10m of made-ground (64) which was under a similar depth of cobbles (63). Approximately 0.07m of gravel had been spread over the cobbles. The fill (66) of the cut was made up of mid grey silty sand including fragments of slate with maximum dimensions of up to 0.18m. The layer (65) into which the feature had been cut was a 0.25m deep mid red grey sandy silt including fragments of slate distinct from make-up layers and subsoil seen elsewhere on the site. It lay directly over natural geology.

The remainder of the pipe trench ran from west to east along the northern side of a range of outbuildings (Areas H and I), past the tennis courts (C and J), before turning into the former blacksmith's workshop (Pl. 2). In Area H the sequence comprised 0.15m of concrete road laid directly over 0.25m of former topsoil. The topsoil covered 0.10m of subsoil and natural geology was encountered at 0.50m. Further east (Area I), concrete only

0.10m thick was set on 0.40m of made ground which contained brick/ tile and stone, some of the latter possibly worked. The pattern was similar in Area J, where natural geology was encountered at 0.45m below the surface.

Cartographic evidence

The possible walls exposed during the watching brief both had the potential to be related to structures represented on historic maps. The map of Umberleigh Manor drawn in 1833 (Pl. 5) appears to be a fairly accurate representation of the ground plan of the time, corresponding better than the tithe map of 1840 (Pl. 6) with the Second Edition Ordnance Survey map (1904) (Pl. 7).

In the southern area of the site the 1833 and 1904 maps show two south to north oriented blocks of buildings with gables facing onto the road whereas the tithe shows only one. Indeed, on the tithe map the drive to Umberleigh House appears to be in the place where the western block should be. It seems likely that the western block shown in 1833 was stables which were converted into workers' cottages in 1946 (Pl. 8). Allowing that to be the case, the two earliest maps both show the threshing barn to extend beyond the line of the western wall of the stables. It seems likely that the remains of a wall [1] identified in Areas F to A belonged to the southern wall of the threshing barn as it stood in 1833. As an aside it should be noted that an apse-like annexe towards the east end of the barn's north wall, shown again in 1904, was probably a wheelhouse where horses or cattle would have been harnessed to provide the drive for threshing equipment during the first half of the 19th century (Hutton 1976).

Differences between the manor and tithe maps are no less problematic in trying to identify the feature under the covered access to Area G. Again, the differences may reflect the quality of mapping. However, there appears to have been a re-arrangement of access to Area G. A possible wall blocking access by the present covered route shown in 1833 is no longer represented on the tithe map. Its situation corresponds well with that of the robber trench [3].

Conclusion

The site at Umberleigh Barton Farm is clearly of medieval and post-medieval interest, as demonstrated by the *in situ* survival of fabric from both those periods. However, much of the route of the pipeline cut into modern make-up layers lying over the natural geology. Of the three cut features encountered, one, the stone-lined drain [2] post-dates a cobbled layer which was thought to be modern at the time of excavation. However, the wall trench [1] and the lower courses within it are probably part of the original western end of the threshing barn as

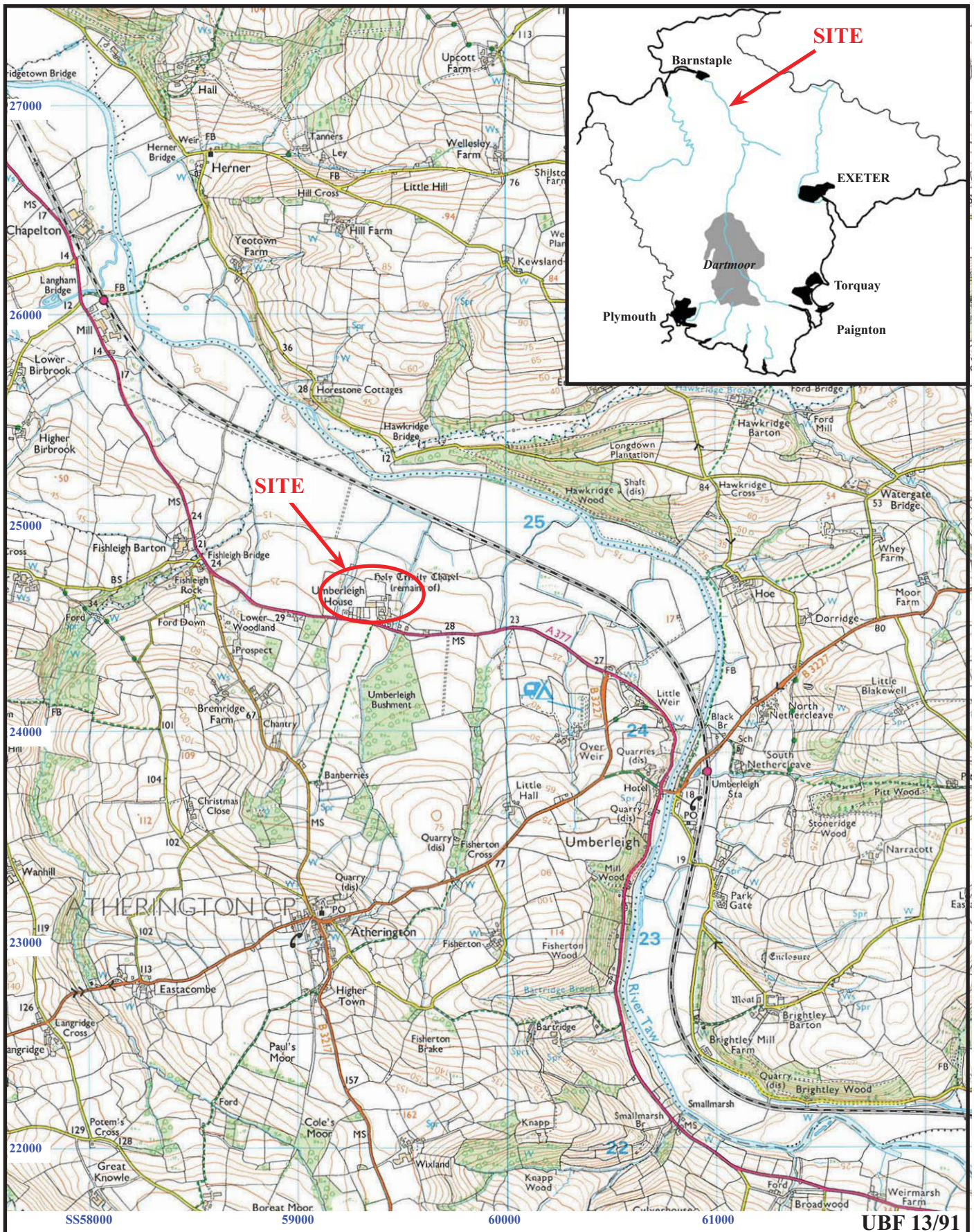
shown in the map of 1833. The robber trench might possibly have formed part of the Medieval chapel complex or it may simply have been a Post-medieval wall placed to re-direct access to the small courtyard.

References

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APPENDIX 1: Feature details

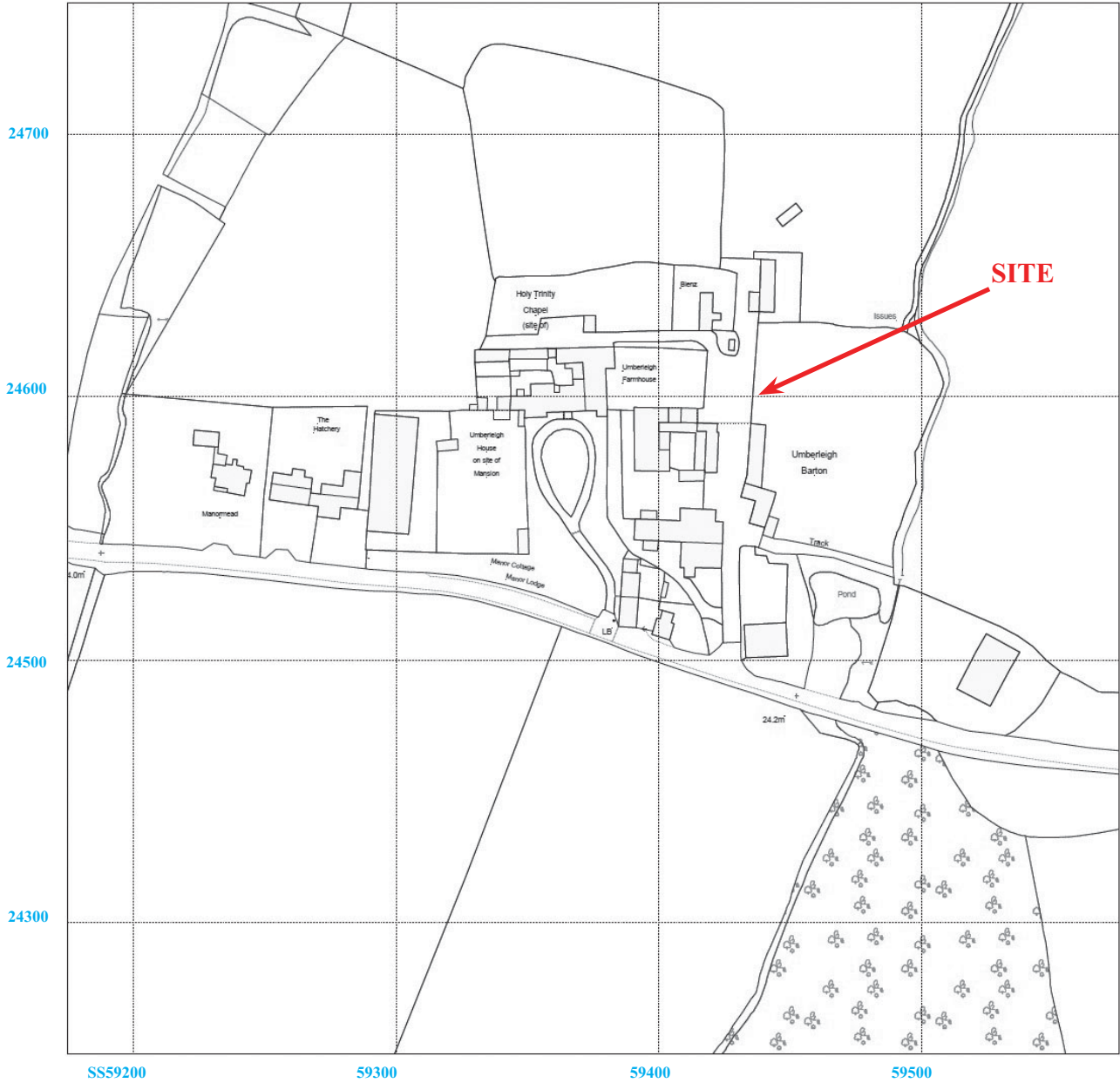
<i>Area(s)</i>	<i>Cut</i>	<i>Deposit/Fill</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Dating evidence</i>
F-A	1	54-5	Possible wall trench	Post-medieval	Stratigraphy
B-C	2	60-1	Stone drain cut	Post-medieval/Modern	Stratigraphy, finds
G	3	66	Ditch or robber trench		
		50	Concrete	Modern	
		51	Made ground		Stratigraphy
		52	Possible subsoil		
F-A		53	Wall		
B-C		56	Topsoil	Modern	Stratigraphy
B-C		57	Possible subsoil		
B-C		58	Slate drain		
B-C		59	Buried topsoil		
B-C		62	Gravel surface	Modern	Stratigraphy
G		63	Cobbled surface	Modern	
G		64	Made ground	Modern	
G		65	Made ground		
		67	Natural		



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Figure 1. Location of site in relation to Umberleigh and within Devon.

Reproduced from Ordnance Survey Explorer 127 at 1:25000
Ordnance Survey Licence 100025880

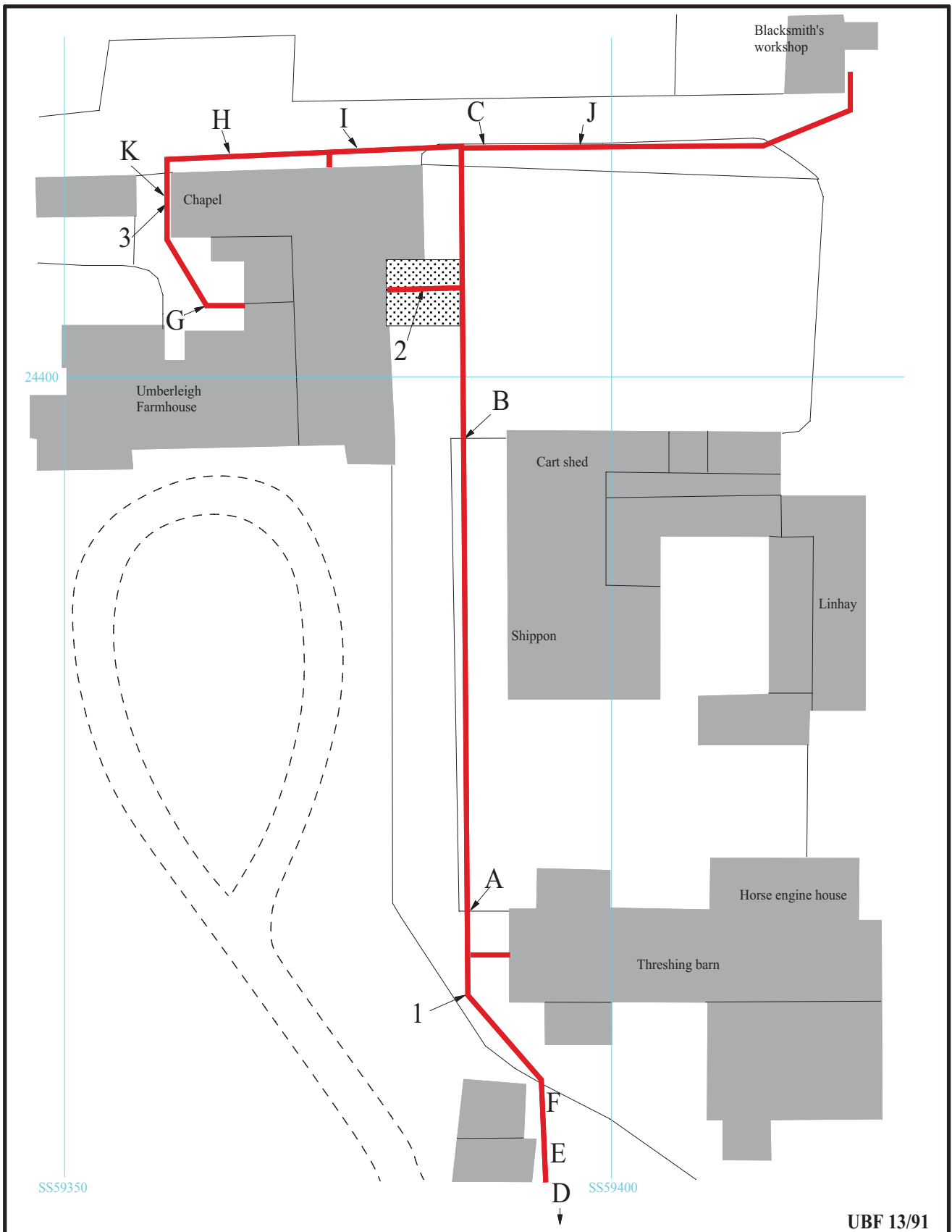


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Figure 2. Detailed location of the site.

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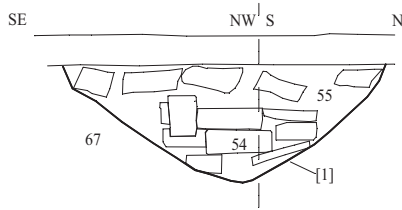


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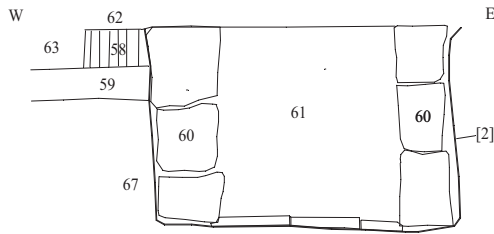
Figure 3. Location of observed areas A to K and sections 1 to 3.



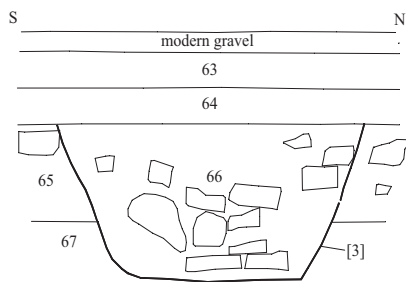
West of barn, section 1



West of tennis court, section 2



Area K, section 3



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Figure 4. Sections 1 - 3



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Plate 1. From C, looking southwards



Plate 2. From H, looking eastwards

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Plates 1 and 2.**

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Plate 3. From H towards G, looking southwards



Plate 4. Possible robber trench in Area G, looking eastwards

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Plates 3 and 4.**

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Plate 5. Manor of Umberleigh map, 1833

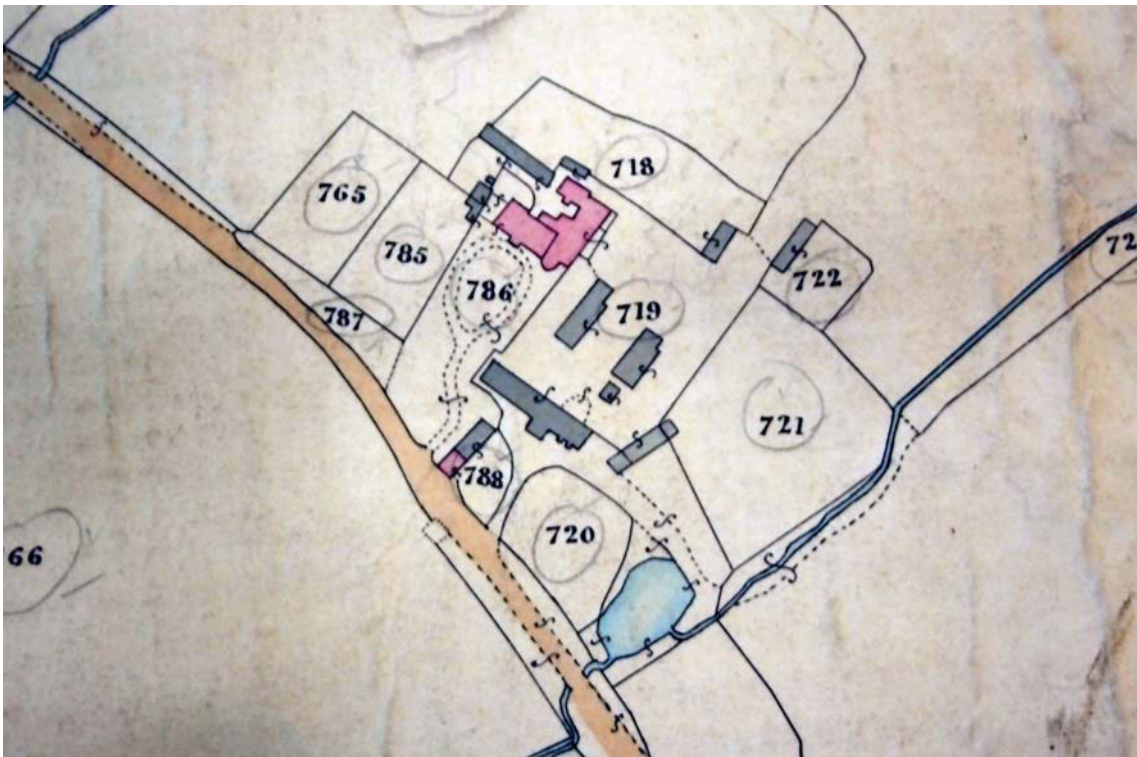


Plate 6. Tithe map, 1840

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Plates 5 and 6.**

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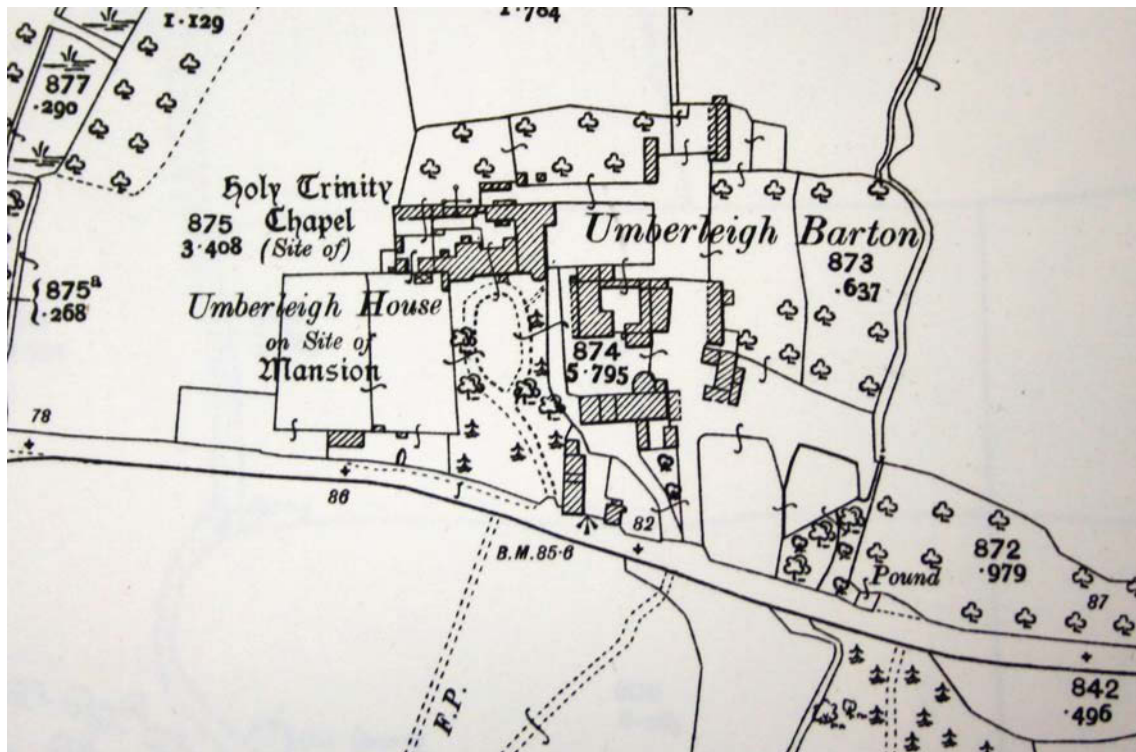


Plate 7. Ordnance survey map, 1904

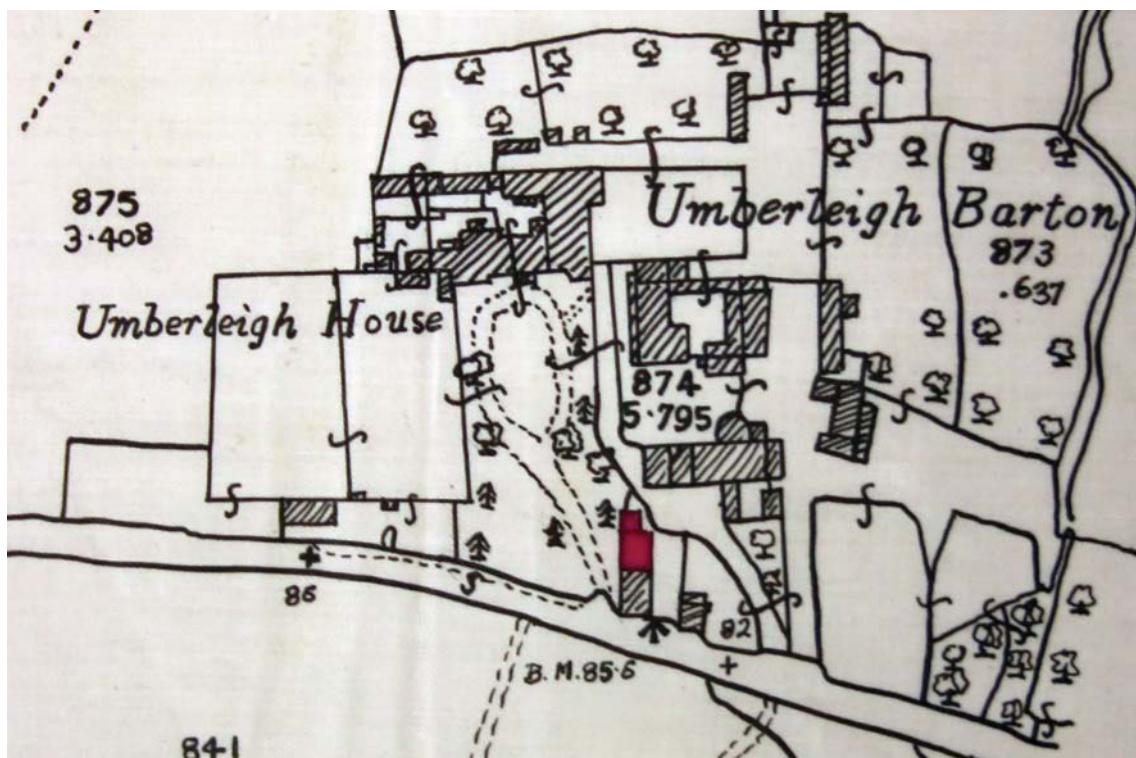


Plate 8. Planning application for workers' cottages, 1946

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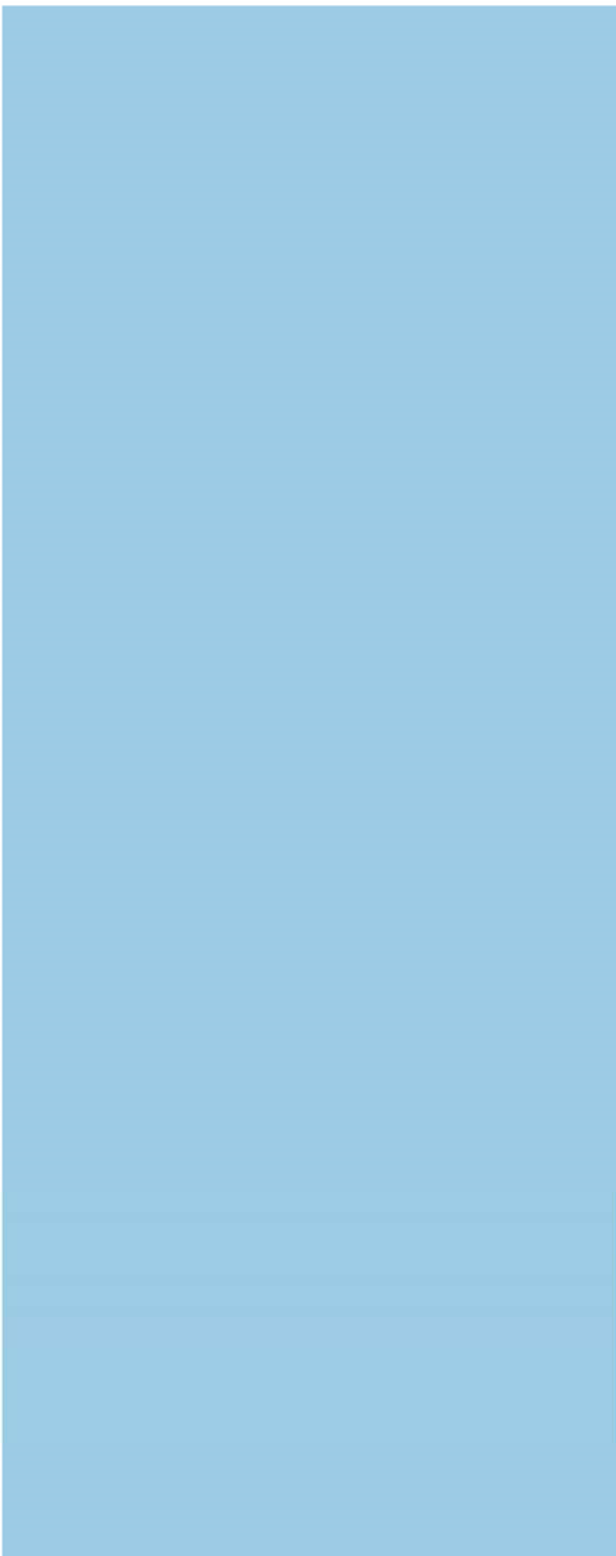
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Plates 7 and 8.

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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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