THAMES VALLEY

ARCHAEOLOGICAL

SERVICES

# The Dower House, High Street, Bray, Berkshire

**Archaeological Watching Brief**

**by Steven Crabb**

**Site Code: DHB14/14**

**(SU 9013 7965)**

# Dower House, High Street, Bray, Berkshire

**An Archaeological Watching Brief**

**for Mr and Mrs Thresh**

by Steven Crabb

Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code DHB 14/14

**May 2014**

## Summary

**Site name:** The Dower House, High Street, Bray, Berkshire

**Grid reference:** SU 9013 7965

**Site activity:** Watching Brief

**Date and duration of project:** 31st March-27th July 2014

**Project manager:** Steve Ford

**Site supervisor:** Steve Crabb

**Site code:** DHB 14/14

**Area of site:** 233 sq m

**Summary of results:** Ground reduction and test pitting prior to the addition of new extensions were observed at the site. Though no archaeological deposits were encountered, disarticulated human bone was recovered.

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




| | |
|---|---|
| Report edited/checked by: | Steve Ford✓ 31.07.14 |
| | Steve Preston✓ 31.07.14 |




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# The Dower House, High Street, Bray, Berkshire
# An Archaeological Watching Brief

by Steven Crabb

**Report 14/14**

## Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out at The Dower House, High Street, Bray, Berkshire (SU 9013 7965) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Ms Elena Beatrice Zonta of Gregori Chiarotti Architects, United House, North Road, London N7 9DP, on behalf of the homeowners, Mr and Mrs Thresh.

Planning permission has been granted (app no 12/03230) from the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead for the construction of an extension to the existing house following demolition of existing extensions. The consent is subject to a condition (6) which relates to archaeology requiring that a watching brief be carried out during groundworks.

This is in accordance with the Department for Communities and Local Government's National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF 2012) and the Royal Borough's policies on archaeology. The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Mr Roland Smith, Archaeological Officer for Berkshire Archaeology, advisers to the Royal Borough on matters pertaining to archaeology. The fieldwork was undertaken by Steve Crabb and James McNichol-Norbury between 31st March and 23rd May 2014, and the site code is DHB 14/14. The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited at an appropriate local museum in due course.

## Location, topography and geology

Bray is a village between Windsor and Maidenhead in the Thames Valley (Fig. 1). The site is located in the centre of the village, approximately 300m south of the river Thames and immediately to the south of St Michael's Church. The development is centred on NGR SU 9013 7965. The underlying geology is described as flood plain gravels (BGS 1981). The site lies approximately 24m above Ordnance Datum.

## Archaeological background

The site lies in the centre of the village of Bray which is in any area that is rich in archaeological sites and finds (Ford, 1987). Excavations related to mineral extraction in the surrounding areas have revealed a wealth of deposits (Barnes and Cleal 1995). The village has Saxon origins and is mentioned in Domesday Book (Williams and Martin 2002) and the site is also located close to the 12th-century parish church of St Michael. Bray was the centre of an administrative hundred during the Saxon period and the village has several listed late medieval and early post-medieval buildings.

## Objectives and methodology

The purpose of the watching brief was to record and, if necessary, excavate any archaeological deposits affected by the groundworks.

## Results

To examine the potential impact of the works two test pits were dug against the north-eastern wall of the site. Test pit 1 measured 0.5m by 0.5m and 0.6m deep. Test pit 2 measured 0.8m by 0.7m and 0.75m deep. The locations are shown on Fig. 3.

### *Test Pit 1*

Test pit 1 was excavated to a depth of 0.60m. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.20m of concrete overlying at least 0.40m of a dark grey brown clay silt made ground deposit. This contained frequent small fragments of ceramic building material. No archaeological finds or features were observed and the natural geology was not reached at this depth.

### *Test Pit 2*

Test pit 2 was excavated to a depth of 0.75m (Fig. 4). The stratigraphy consisted of 0.2m of concrete overlying at least 0.55m of made ground. On the north-eastern side of the pit was a concrete footing 0.25m wide at a depth of 0.3m. The north-eastern side of the pit was constrained by a brick wall whose footing extended 0.1m into the pit at a depth of 0.3m. Both of these extended beyond the bottom of the dig and it was backfilled with mid reddish yellow brown silty clay made ground. This contained several large fragments of cast iron pipe and machine

made frogged bricks. This appears to have been a drain or soakaway with a cast iron pipe leading from a down pipe drain on the southern side of the building.

### *Ground reduction and footings*

A visit was made once the surrounding concrete of the old extensions had been removed, and levelled (Fig. 3). A made ground layer was exposed (52), and in areas this had been reduced as much as 0.5m. Footing trenches, 0.6m wide, were dug a further 0.3m into the made ground around the edge of the excavated area. No natural deposits had been exposed. Disarticulated human bone was uncovered from the made ground. This was found generally under where the northern extension had been located. No further finds of interest were uncovered from the made ground, and no discrete features were uncovered.

### *Septic Tank*

A large pit was reduced to allow for the placement of a septic tank within the garden to the west of the house. This was 3.60m long and 3.20m wide. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.20m garden topsoil overlying 0.13m of re-deposited dark brown-yellow gravel. This lay over a crushed chalk layer 0.10m thick above 0.18m of rubble, which consisted of crushed brick and chalk. Below this was a dark grey-brown silty-sand layer 0.38m deep that contained a small percentage of crushed chalk. The natural light brown-yellow sand geology was reached at a depth of 0.98m. The pit truncated the geology to a maximum depth of 3.00m, showing natural sand and gravel banding. No archaeological features were observed during the machining of the pit.

## Finds

### *Human Bone* by Ceri Falys

A moderate amount of disarticulated human bone was recovered from deposit (52) within the observed area. A total of 58 pieces of bone were present for osteological analysis (Table 1), which followed the procedures suggested by Brickley and McKinley (2004) and Buikstra and Ubelaker (1994). The condition of the bone was fair, with frequent areas of cortical exfoliation and a moderate degree of fragmentation.

A complete inventory and summary of the remains can be found in Table 1, which shows that all regions of a human skeleton were represented, with the exception of the teeth, several cranial bones, the mandible, and the small bones of the hands and toes. Despite the lack of duplication of skeletal elements, it is suggested the assemblage contains the remains of two individuals, as the robusticity of the lower limbs was significantly greater than that of the upper limbs.

Age

All skeletal long bones indicated the individual(s) were an adult (20+ years) at the time of death (i.e. all epiphyses were fused). The endplates of the thoracic vertebrae were still in the process of fusing to the vertebral bodies, and the first sacral vertebra was unfused from the others (although S2-S5 were absent), which suggests an age range of 20-25 years. Both auricular surfaces of the ilia were present and well preserved, and

demonstrated differing stages of degeneration (left = 20-24 years, right = 30-40 years based on Lovejoy et al. 1985), perhaps supporting the presence of two individuals in the assemblage.

Sex

Sex could not be determined for the majority of skeletal elements (i.e. indeterminate sex, "I", Table 1). The elements of the lower limbs were robust with strong muscle markings suggesting they belonged to a male. This designation was supported by the metric analysis of the left formal head (diameter = 48.6mm), and the morphology of the greater sciatic notches of the innominates (bones of the pelvis) present.

Pathology

The vertebrae were the only skeletal elements to demonstrate pathological alterations. Schmorl's nodes were observed on inferior surface of the twelfth thoracic vertebra (located on the posterior aspect of the left side), and centrally located on the inferior surfaces of the second and third lumbar vertebrae.

Three of the lumbar vertebrae (L3, L4 and L5) demonstrate localized erosive lesions or depressions on the anterior-superior surface of the vertebral bodies. They vary slightly in shape and size. The third lumbar vertebra is affected with a semi-circular lesion measuring 25.3mm wide by 14.5mm long and 6.2mm deep. The fourth lumbar vertebra has a crescent-shaped lesion measuring 36.2mm wide by 12.3mm long and 5.8mm deep. The fifth lumbar vertebra has the smallest lesion, which is also crescent-shaped, and measures 16.0mm wide by 6.4mm long and 4.5mm deep. The first two lesions are symmetrical, while the one on L5 is only located on right anterior edge of the superior surface. While vertebral marginal lesions have many aetiologies (e.g., intervertebral disc degeneration, brucellosis, tuberculosis, trauma), this individual is too young to have experienced severe disc degeneration normally, and the lack of infectious disease lesions on other skeletal elements does not support the presence of diseases such as brucellosis or TB. It is proposed that these lesions result from traumatic anterior herniation of the vertebral disc (i.e., stress applied to the spine). Traumatic injury can produce excessive mechanical forces that may cause the disc material to be displaced anteriorly and penetrate the trabeculae of the vertebral body (Mays 2007).

Non-Metric Traits

Non-metric traits were not observed.

In summary, this assemblage disarticulated of human remains is likely co-mingled, comprising elements of two adult individuals. The upper body of an adult (aged 20-25 years based on the state of fusion of the spinal elements) of indeterminate sex, and an adult male (aged 20+ years, based on the complete fusion of the femoral epiphyses). The vertebrae demonstrated pathological changes that suggested the spine was subjected to traumatic injury at one point in the individual's life span.

Table 1: Inventory of human remains

| ***Element*** | ***Side*** | ***Amount of bone*** | ***No. of frags*** | ***Age (years)*** | ***Sex*** | ***Pathology/ Non-metric traits*** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| occipital | n/a | missing basiocciput | 1 | adult | ?F | none observed |
| parietal | right | posterior ¼ only | 1 | adult | I | none observed |
| humerus | right | distal ½ only | 2 | adult | ?M | none observed |
| radius | left | complete, except for distal surface | 1 | adult | I | none observed |
| radius | right | superior and inferior ½ (midshaft frag absent) | 2 | adult | I | none observed |
| ulna | left | complete, with the exception of the olecranon and distal articular surface | 1 | adult | I | none observed |
| ulna | right | top of olecranon absent. Fragments broken at distal 1/3 of shaft | 2 | adult | I | none observed |
| metacarpals | left | MC 2-5, proximal surfaces damaged | 5 | adult | I | none observed |
| metacarpals | right | MC 5, proximal surface damaged | 1 | adult | I | none observed |
| ribs | right | heads | 2 | adult | I | none observed |
| ribs | unsided | shafts | 7 | ? | I | none observed |
| vertebrae | T11-T12, L1-L5, S1 | nearly 100% complete, few areas of damage | 9 | 20-25 | I | erosive lesions to L3, L4, L5 anterior aspect of superior surface |
| innominate | left | highly fragmented | 3 | 20-24 | M | none observed |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| innominate | right | highly fragmented | 2 | 30-40 | M | none observed |
| innominate | unsided | highly fragmented | 5 | ? | I | none observed |
| femur | left | complete | 1 | adult | M | femoral head diameter = 48.6mm |
| femur | right | ½ of shaft only (from intertrochanteric line to midshaft) | 1 | adult | M | none observed |
| tibia | left | complete | 1 | adult | M | none observed |
| tibia | right | distal ½ only | 1 | adult | M | none observed |
| fibula | left | distal ½ only | 1 | adult | M | none observed |
| fibula | right | ¾ of element complete, proximal ¼ absent | 1 | adult | M | none observed |
| tarsals | left | talus and calcaneus | 2 | adult | I | double facets |
| tarsals | right | calcaneus | 1 | adult | I | double facets |
| metatarsals | left | MT1-5, distal ends absent | 5 | adult | I | none observed |
| metatarsals | right | MT5 only, distal end absent | 1 | adult | I | none observed |

## *Animal Bone* by Ceri Falys

In addition to human bone, two fragments of animal bone were also recovered from context (52), weighing 37g. The smaller of the two fragments was identified as a posterior portion of a right calcaneus of a medium sized animal (e.g. pig or sheep/goat). The second piece of bone was a mid-shaft tibial fragment of a large animal (e.g. horse or cow). Evidence of butchery practices were observed on this fragment, in the form of a minimum of four chop marks parallel to the bone's surface. No further information could be retrieved.

## Conclusion

Ground reduction and test pitting prior to the addition of new extensions were observed at the site. No deposits nor artefacts of archaeological interest were encountered. But a collection of disarticulated human bone and some animal bone was recovered from made ground layers.

## References


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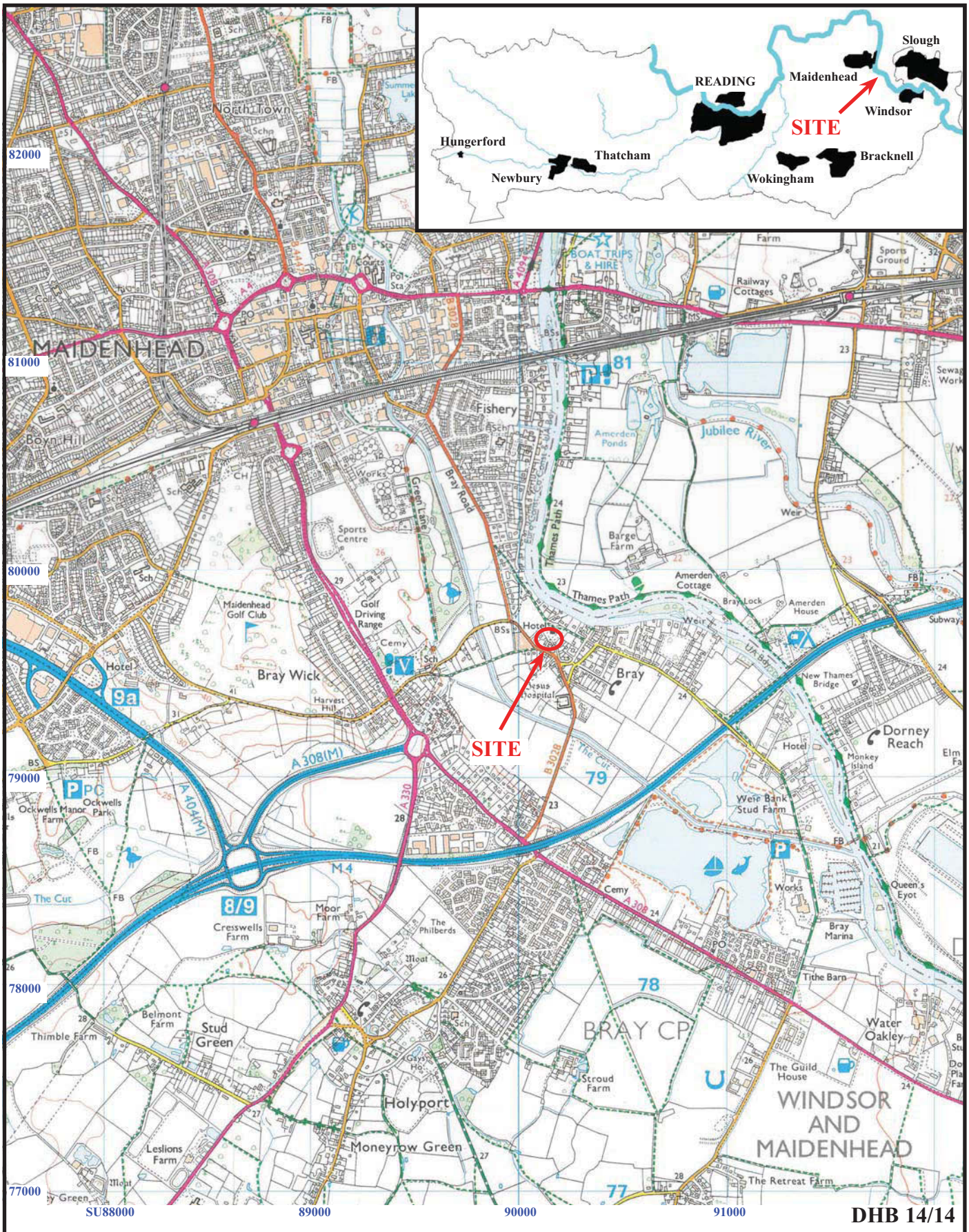


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Figure 1. Location of site within Bray and Berkshire.



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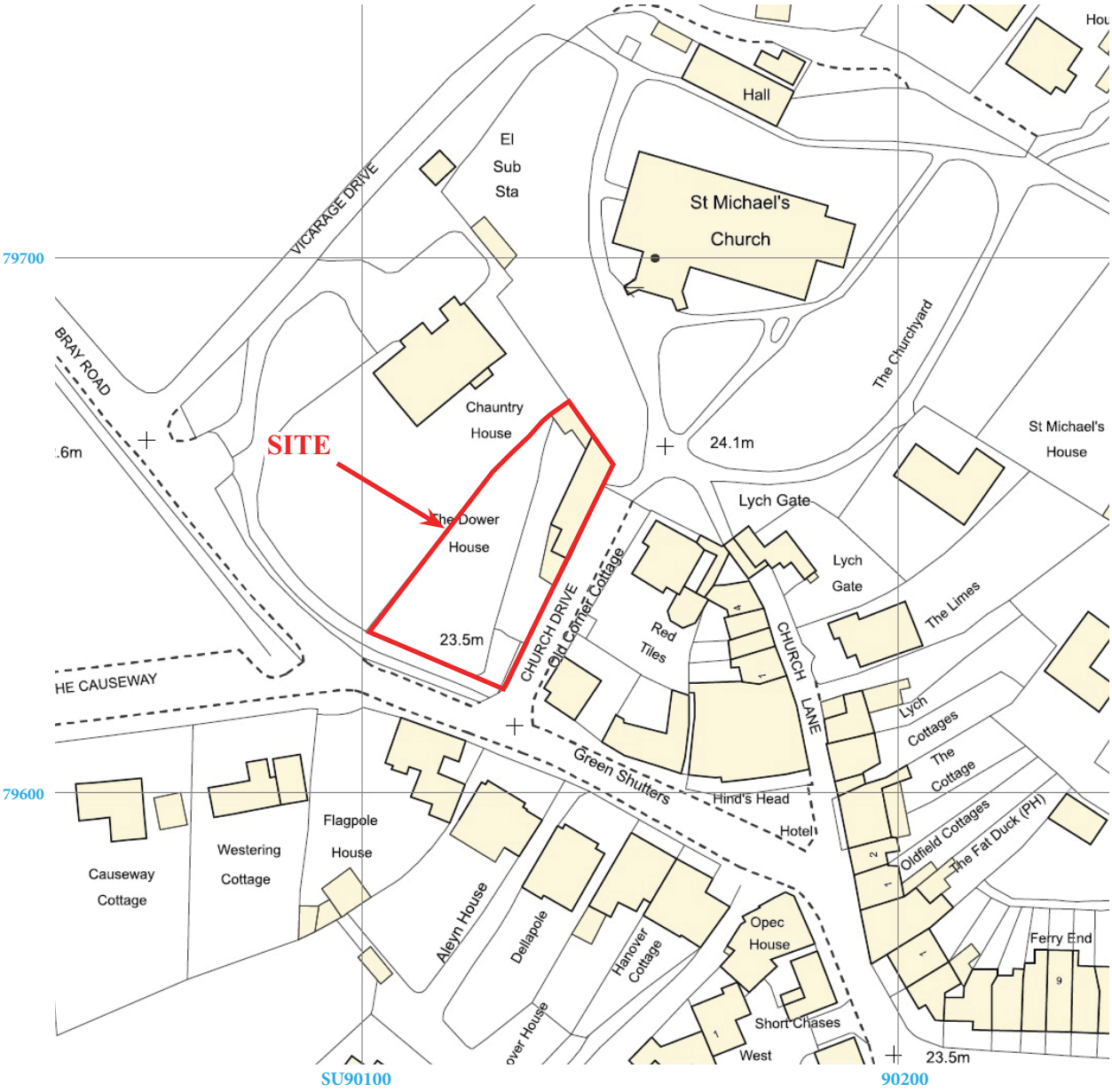


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Figure 2. Detailed location of site.



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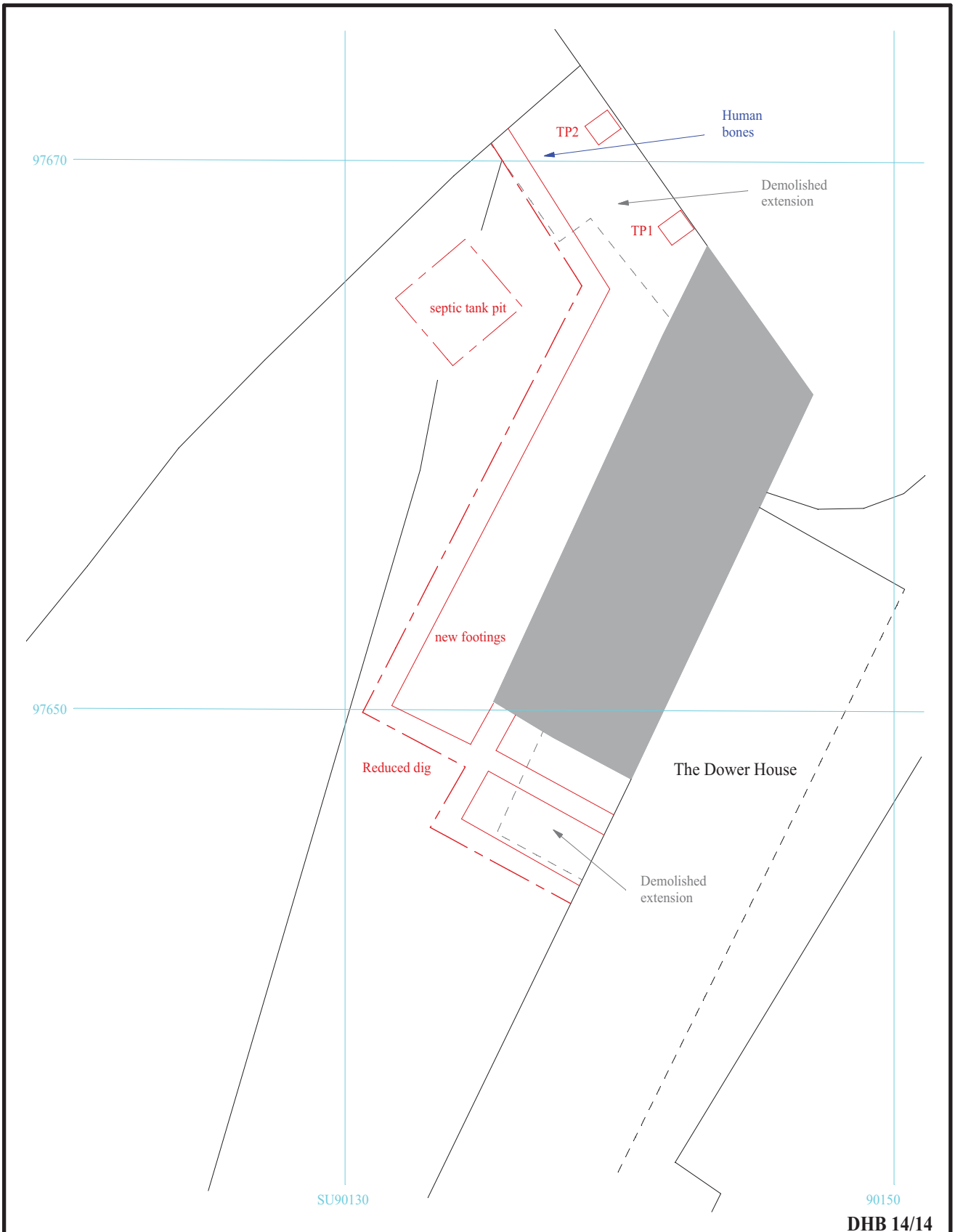


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Figure 3. Location of observed areas.

0 10m

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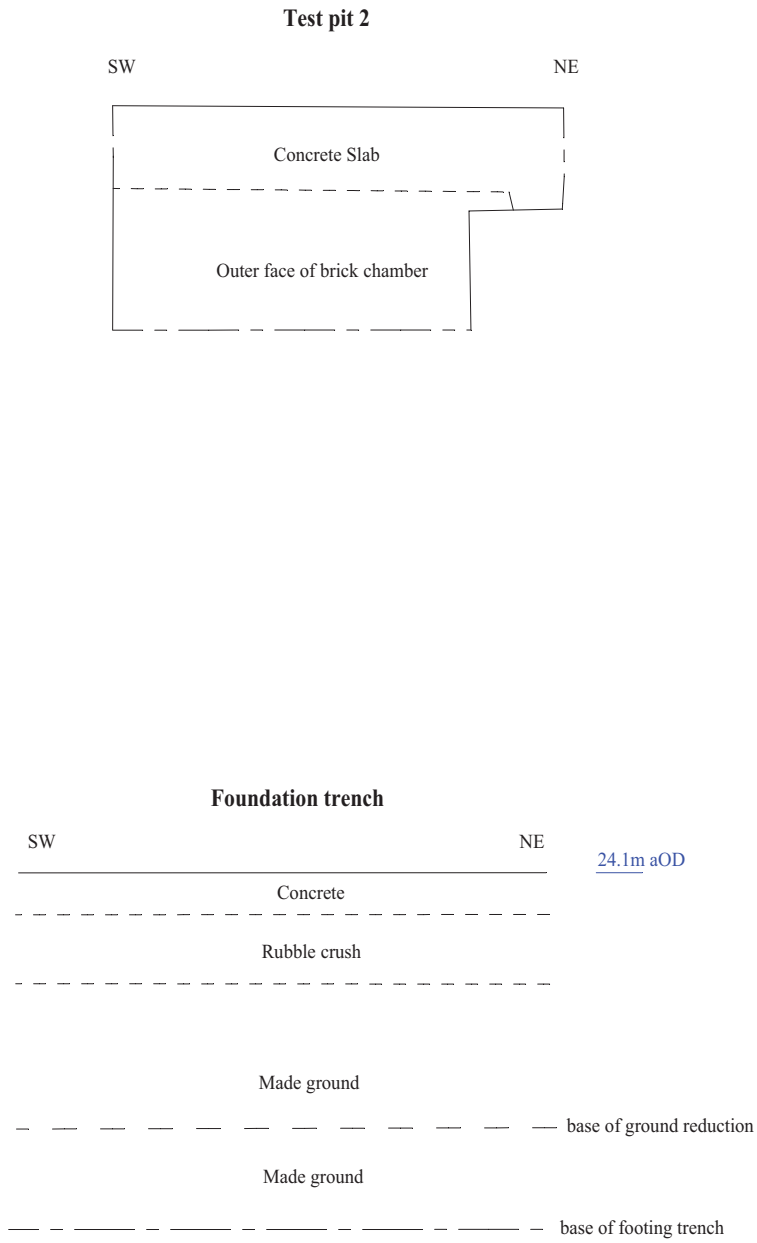


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Figure 4. Representative sections.

0 1m

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Plate 1. Test pit 1, looking north west, Scales: 0.5m and 0.3m.


Plate 1. Test pit 2, looking north west, Scales: 0.5m and 0.3m.

Plate 2. Site showing reduced dig.

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Plates 1 - 3.

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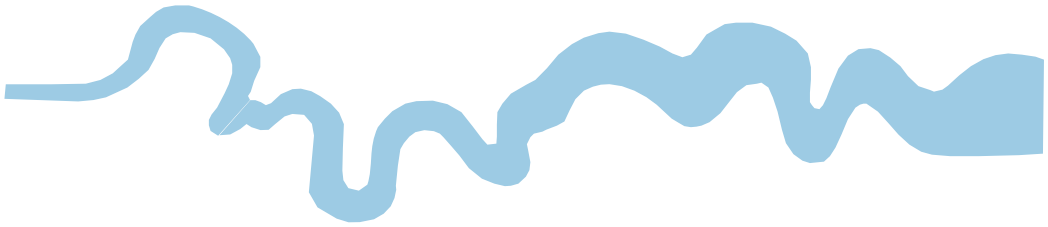
## TIME CHART

| | 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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