

T H A M E S V A L L E Y

ARCHAEOLOGICAL

S E R V I C E S

**Old Bell House, 9 Northfield End,
Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire**

Archaeological Watching Brief

by Andy Taylor

Site Code: BHH14/170

(SU 7604 8299)

**Old Bell House, 9 Northfield End,
Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire**

An Archaeological Watching Brief

For Mr Alan Simmons

by Andy Taylor

Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code BHH 14/170

October 2014

Summary

Site name: Old Bell House, 9 Northfield End, Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire

Grid reference: SU 7604 8299

Site activity: Watching Brief

Date and duration of project: 4th-25th September 2014

Project manager: Steve Ford

Site supervisor: Andy Taylor

Site code: BHH 14/170

Area of site: 118 sq m

Summary of results: Several areas of ground reduction and trench digging were observed in the garden of Old Bell House, which is a listed building and dates to the 18th century. No archaeological deposits were revealed but a small collection of pottery of late medieval or early post-medieval date was recovered.

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

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www.tvas.co.uk/reports/reports.asp.*

Report edited/checked by: Steve Ford✓ 16.10.14 Genni Elliott✓ 16.10.14

Old Bell House, 9 Northfield End, Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire An Archaeological Watching Brief

by Andy Taylor

Report 14/170

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out at Old Bell House, 9 Northfield End, Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire (SU 7604 8299) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Alan Simmons of Old Bell House, 9 Northfield End, Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire.

Planning consent (P13/S3069/HH) has been gained from South Oxfordshire District Council subject to a condition (4) relating to archaeology which requires a watching brief to 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 District's policies on archaeology. The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Mr Richard Oram, Planning Archaeologist with Oxfordshire County Council, advisers to the District on matters relating to archaeology. The fieldwork was undertaken by Andy Taylor, Genni Elliott, Tim Dawson and Dave Platt between the 4th and 25th September 2014 and the site code is BHH 14/170.

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

Location, topography and geology

The site is located within the centre of Henley-on-Thames on the western side of Northfield End and south of Kings Walk and occupies the back garden of Old Bell House (Fig. 2). It is a parcel of land that slopes down to the house at its eastern end. The underlying geology consists of 1st (Flood Plain) Terrace Deposits (BGS 1980), which were observed in the deeper areas investigated and the site lies at a height of c. 35m above Ordnance Datum.

Archaeological background

The archaeological potential for the site has been highlighted in a brief provided by Mr Richard Oram of Oxfordshire County Archaeology Service (Oram 2014). In summary, the site lies within the historic (medieval) core of the town. Henley is a planned town with the first reference to it in 1179 (Airs et al 1975). Relatively little archaeological work has been carried out within the town itself, although excavations on Bell Street have

revealed a Roman building (Moloney 1997) with medieval deposits on a nearby site (Pine 1999). The site also lies close to the projected route of a Roman Road between Silchester and Dorchester. In general, the Thames Valley as a whole is an archaeologically rich environment with prehistoric and Roman activity visible from the air (Gates 1975). A few stray finds of prehistoric, Roman and Saxon date are known for the town (Airs et al 1975). The Old Bell House is grade II listed and is of 18th century date.

Objectives and methodology

The purpose of the watching brief was to excavate and record any archaeological deposits affected by the works. This would involve the examination of all areas of intrusive groundworks and include observation of surface stripping, geo-technical investigations, the excavation of foundations and service trenches, landscaping works and all other invasive works.

An area of ground reduction for a patio was to be observed with trench digging for a surrounding retaining wall, a second linear retaining wall and a drainage soakaway. These were dug using a small 360° type machine under constant archaeological supervision.

Results

The four ground disturbing components of the project were monitored as intended.

Patio ground reduction

A semi-circular area with a rectangular extension for new steps to the south west was reduced in height by c. 0.45m from the existing ground level. The stratigraphy revealed comprised 0.11m of turf/topsoil above 0.35m+ of subsoil which was a brown/grey sandy silt with some gravel and containing brick/tile fragments. Natural gravel geology was not reached for the main area. The area of the steps was reduced further to a depth of 0.9m which revealed a second layer of subsoil/made ground (dark brown clayey silt) lying above natural gravel. No archaeological deposits were recorded but a small number of pottery finds were recovered.

Retaining wall 1

This retaining wall trench comprised two segments arranged in a semi-circular arc with short offshoots (Fig. 3). The trench was 0.3m wide and dug into the base of the reduced area to a depth of 0.35m. The stratigraphy

comprised more subsoil (brown/grey sandy silt with some gravel and containing brick/tile fragments to a depth of 0.35m overlying gravel, the latter forming the base of the trench.

Retaining wall 2

The second retaining wall was L-shaped in plan and lay adjacent to the house in an area that had already been reduced. The trench was 0.65m wide and 0.7m deep. The stratigraphy revealed comprised 0.4m of dark greyish brown, sandy silt (50) which contained pottery, clay pipe, brick/tile and oyster shell. Solid gravel was not exposed.

Soakaway and drain

A soakaway was also dug, to the rear (south west) of the site in an area not previously stripped of overburden. The soakaway was c. 1.5m by 1.2m across and 2m deep. The stratigraphy revealed consisted of approximately 0.12m of turf/topsoil above 0.42m of pale brown, sandy silt made ground with frequent gravel inclusions, including lenses of denser gravel and ceramic building material. This was above 0.20m of dark greyish brown, sandy silt above the gravel natural geology at a depth of c. 0.75m. The connecting drain was 6.5m long and 0.3m wide and up to 1m deep. No archaeological deposits were revealed in either component.

Finds

Pottery by Paul Blinkhorn

The pottery assemblage comprised 7 sherds with a total weight of 254g. It was all from layer 50, and largely of early post-medieval date. It was recorded utilizing the coding system and chronology of the Oxfordshire County type-series (Mellor and Oakley 1984; Mellor 1994), as follows:

OXBX: **Late Medieval Brill/Boarstall Ware**, 15th – early 17th century. 1 sherd, 10g
OXDR: **Red Earthenwares**, 1550+. 4 sherds, 165g.
OXRESWL: **Polychrome Slipware**, 17thC. 2 sherds, 79g

The range of fabric types is typical of sites in the region. All the sherds, other than that of OXBX, were fragments of large bowls or pancheons, which is typical of the respective traditions.

Clay Pipe by Genni Elliott

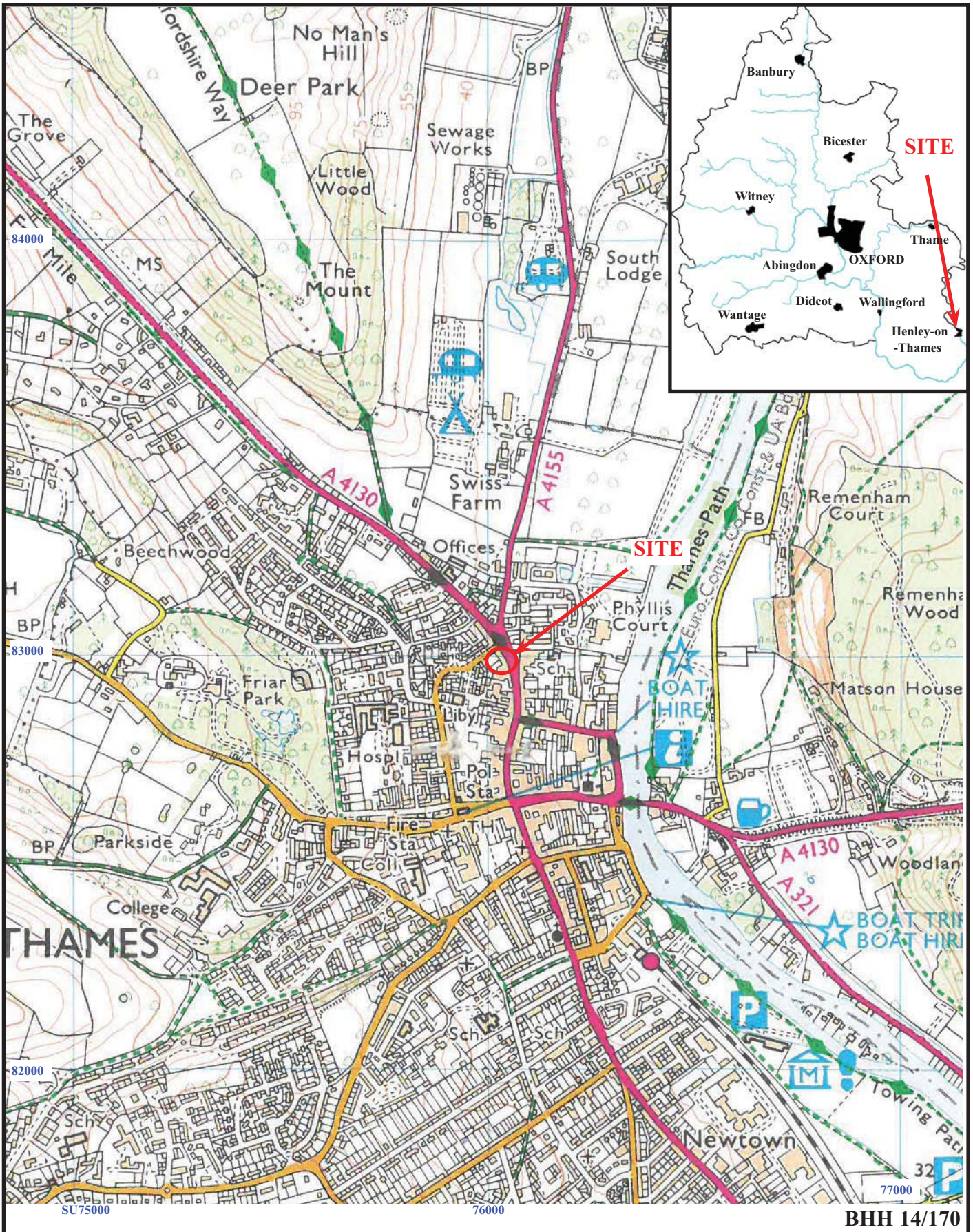
Two fragments of clay pipe were recovered from context 50; one stem fragment and one bowl. Both had a bore size of 7/64" tentatively suggesting a date in the mid 17th – early 18th century. The bowl is covered in a hard concretion, which is also over the break in the stem and the broken rim of the bowl. The bowl has a flat heel and does not appear to have any initials stamped on the base. In shape it is fairly slender with straight sides, stylistically dated to approximately 1680–1700 (Ayto, 1994).

Conclusion

The watching brief has observed several components of ground reduction and trench digging on the site, though relatively small areas were deep enough to expose the archaeologically relevant levels, (the top of the gravel). No archaeological deposits were revealed but a small collection of pottery and other finds were recovered dating from late medieval into post-medieval times. These finds may be contemporary with or slightly preceded construction of Old Bell House itself.

References

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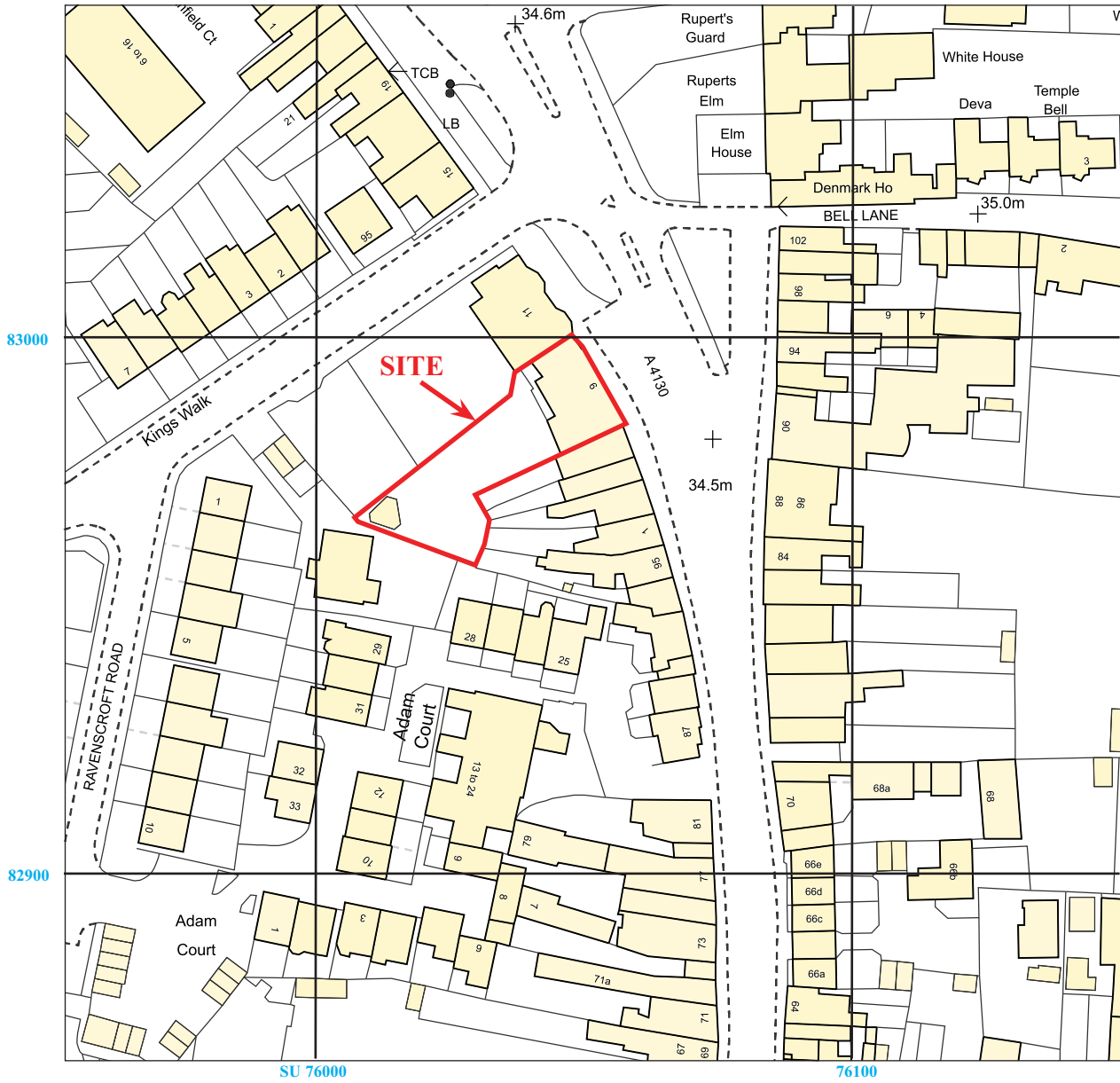


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Figure 1. Location of site within Henley-on-Thames and Oxfordshire

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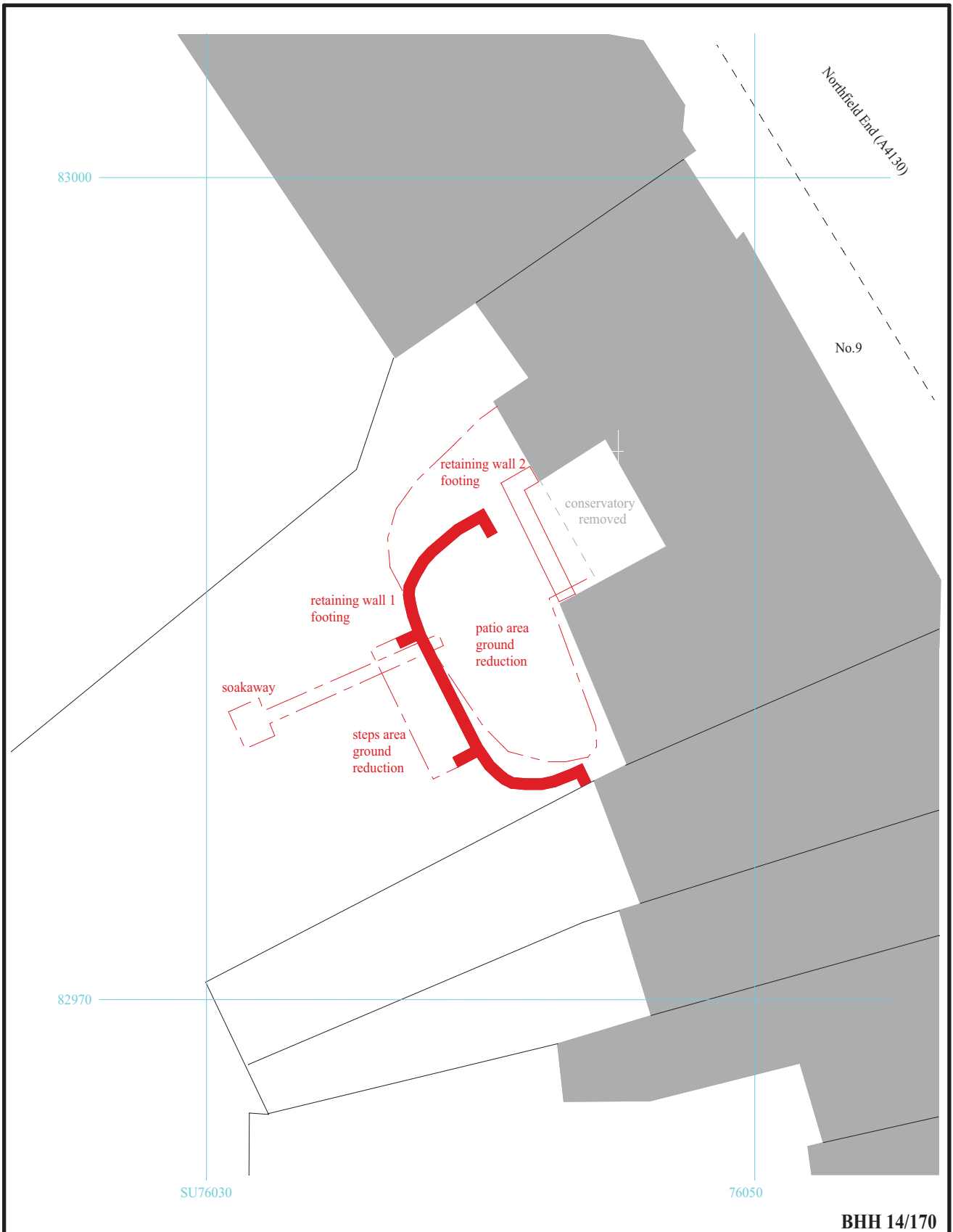
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Figure 2. Detailed location of site off Northfield Road.

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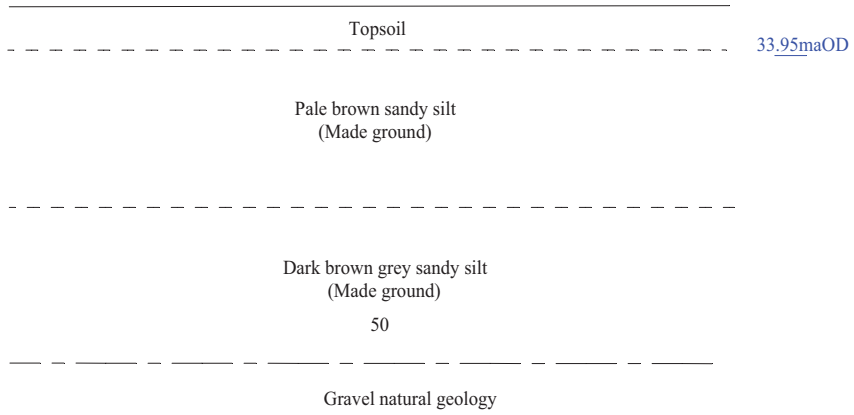
Figure 3. Location of areas observed during the watching brief.



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Figure 4. Representative section



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Plate 1. Ground reduction in progress, looking northeast, Scale: 2m.



Plate 2. Section, looking west, Scales: 2m and 0.5m.

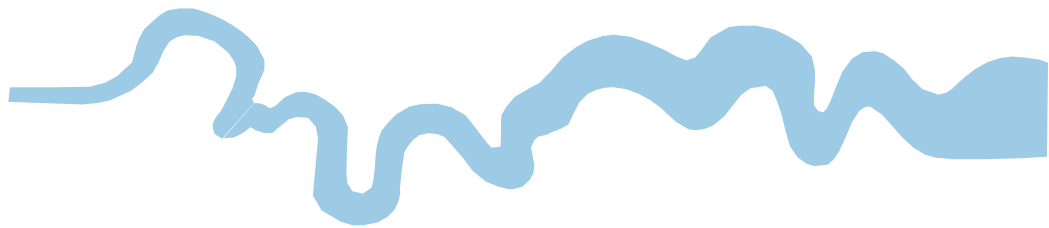
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Plates 1 - 2.

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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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