

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

ARCHAEOLOGICAL

S E R V I C E S

**25 Bridge End, Dorchester-on-Thames,
Oxfordshire**

Archaeological Evaluation

by Andy Taylor

Site Code: BDO14/247

(SU 5788 9377)

**25 Bridge End, Dorchester-on-Thames,
Oxfordshire**

An Archaeological Evaluation

for Mr T Fisher

by Andy Taylor

Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code BDO 14/247

February 2015

Summary

Site name: 25 Bridge End, Dorchester-on-Thames, Oxfordshire

Grid reference: SU 5788 9377

Site activity: Evaluation and Recording Action

Date and duration of project: 19th-21st January 2015

Project manager: Steve Ford

Site supervisor: Andy Taylor

Site code: BDO 14/247

Area of site: c.650 sq m

Summary of results: Two truncated pieces of human femur from different individuals were recovered from a gully or grave, of probable Saxon date.

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

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Report edited/checked by: Steve Ford ✓ 03.02.15 Steve Preston ✓ 03.02.15

25 Bridge End, Dorchester-on-Thames, Oxfordshire An Archaeological Evaluation

by Andy Taylor

Report 14/247

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological field evaluation carried out at 25 Bridge End, Dorchester-on-Thames, Oxfordshire (SU 5788 9377) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Richard Anderson of Anderson Orr Architects, The Studio, 70 Church Road, Wheatley, Oxford, OX33 1LZ on behalf of Mr Tim Fisher, 11 Wittenham Lane, Dorchester-on-Thames, Oxfordshire, OX10 7JR.

Planning permission (app no P14/S1635/FUL) has been gained from South Oxfordshire District Council for the demolition of the existing garage and erection of a new dwelling, and extension of an existing cottage on the site. The consent includes conditions (4 and 5) relating to archaeology requiring the implementation of a programme of archaeological works. It was determined that this should consist of two initial components of work: a field evaluation by means of machine trenching in the area of the proposed new development and a recording action on the extension to the existing property.

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 Richard Oram, Planning Archaeologist with Oxfordshire County Council advisers to the District on matters relating to archaeology. The fieldwork was undertaken by Andy Taylor between the 19th and 21st January 2015 and the site code is BDO 14/247. 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 on the east side of Wittenham Lane, which itself lies on the southern side of Dorchester-on-Thames (Fig. 1). It is currently the gardens associated with number 25 and its former stable building and is a roughly flat parcel of land that steps down to the rear of the property (Fig. 2). The underlying geology consisted of 1st (Flood Plain) Terrace Deposits (gravels), which were observed across the site and it lies at a height of c.48m above Ordnance Datum.

Archaeological background

The archaeological potential of the site stems from its location within an area of high archaeological potential (Munby *et al.* 1975). The site is located *c.* 170m south of the Scheduled Ancient Monument of Dorchester Roman Town (SAM OX116) and *c.* 160m north-east of the Scheduled Ancient Monument of the Dyke Hills Iron Age *oppidum* or fortified settlement site (SAM OX17). The route of the Roman road from *Calleva Atrebatum* (Silchester) is predicted to pass to the west, as might any outer earthwork of the town (Burnham and Wachter 1990). The area to the south of the Roman town is known to contain extra mural settlement as evidenced from sites recorded in the immediate vicinity of this development. Several episodes of fieldwork to the north have revealed settlement and cemetery deposits of Roman date (JMHS 2013; Munding 2008; Williams 2013; Platt in prep) and another burial is recorded in the Oxfordshire Historic Environment Record *c.* 10m beyond the site's southern boundary.

Objectives and methodology

The purpose of the evaluation was to determine the presence/absence, extent, condition, character, quality and date of any archaeological deposits within the area of development.

Specific aims of the project were:

- to determine if archaeological deposits of any period are present;
- to determine if any prehistoric occupation or landscape features are present on the site;
- to determine if there are later prehistoric, Roman, Saxon or medieval deposits present on the site; and
- to determine if there are Roman or Saxon burials on the site.

It was proposed to dig four trenches on the site. Three in the area of new development would be 5m in length and 1.60m wide with the fourth to cover the whole footprint of the proposed extension as a recording action.

Results

Four trenches were dug (Fig. 3) with the evaluation trenches measuring between 4.90m and 5.20m in length and between 0.50m and 1.00m deep, and the stripped area measuring 7.40m x 6.30m and 0.74m deep.

A complete list of trenches giving lengths, breadths, depths and a description of sections and geology is given in Appendix 1.

Trench 1

This trench was aligned East-West and measured 5.20m in length and 0.50m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.20m of brick rubble and soil made ground overlying 0.25m of subsoil overlying sandy gravel natural. Modern truncation was evident at the western end of the trench with a modern pit at the eastern end containing bottles.

Trench 2 (Fig. 4; Pls 1 and 3)

This trench was aligned North-South and measured 4.90m in length and 0.70m deep. It consisted of 0.30m of topsoil overlying 0.36m of subsoil overlying sandy gravel natural. A possible grave cut or gully (1) was noted at 2.50m from the south end, aligned more or less east-west with part of a human femur evident. However, this had been truncated at some point as only another ball from a second femur was evident where a pelvis should be (Pl. 3). This cut feature measured 0.49m wide and 0.11m, deep and a sherd of Saxon pottery was recovered from its dark brown grey sandy silty clay fill (52). Clinker was also evident although this may have been pressed in from the subsoil above.

Trench 3

This trench was aligned East-West and measured 5.10m in length and 1m deep. It consisted of 0.24m of topsoil overlying 0.71m of subsoil overlying sandy gravel natural geology. A modern posthole was evident at 3m from a removed telegraph pole and contained glass and plastic.

Trench 4 (Pl. 2)

This trench covered the footprint of the extension to the existing house, and measured 7.40m x 6.30m and 0.74m deep. It consisted of 0.30m of topsoil overlying 0.40m of subsoil overlying sandy gravel natural geology. A modern pit and soakaway were observed in this trench, but no deposits of archaeological interest.

Finds

Pottery by Malcolm Lyne

A single sherd of pottery (40g) came from feature 1. Vessels in this limestone/quartz-sand-gritted fabric are regarded as belonging to the earlier part of the Early Saxon occupation at Dorchester on Thames (Rowley and Brown 1982, 39, Fabric Group A/B) and were eventually replaced by grass-tempered and fine-sanded handmade wares. This, together with the condition of the sherd, suggests that the putative grave is 5th century in date.

Fabric ES1 Handmade black fabric with profuse <1.00mm crushed limestone and <0.30mm quartz-sand filler. Polished externally.

Human Bone by Ceri Falys

Two pieces of human bone were recovered from disturbed grave or gully 1. Both are portions of human proximal femora. A significant size difference suggests the skeletal remains originated from different individuals. The smaller fragment is the unsided femoral head, with just 19.9mm of femoral neck extending inferiorly from the head. Although the head is fully fused to the neck of the femur, the epiphyseal line is still visible. This indicates the individual was skeletally mature at the time of death (20+ years old), but it is possible

this fusion was relatively recent (younger adult, 20-30 years old). The maximum vertical diameter of the head is 47.1mm, which suggests a “probable male” (Stewart 1979). No pathological alterations or non-metric traits were observed.

The larger of the two fragments is the proximal third of a left femur of an adult individual (20+ years). The femoral head epiphysis has fully fused to the neck, without a visible epiphyseal line. The linea aspera is pronounced, especially at the proximal end. The maximum diameter of the head is 44.6mm, which results in a designation of “indeterminate sex” (Stewart 1979). Pathological changes are not observed, however, a non-metric trait in the form of an unusual patch of plaque formation is located adjacent to the head in the middle of the anterior surface of the neck. Non-metric traits are not pathological, but rather are variations in the human skeleton that are usually the result of genetics.

Conclusion

Despite the potential for archaeological deposits to be present on the site little was encountered with only a single feature containing two highly truncated pieces of human femur encountered. However, due to the presence of this, and the common reports of finds of human bone in this southern part of the town, there does remain the possibility of further human remains being present, both full burials or truncated. Other burials around the outskirts of Dorchester have suggested continuity of cemetery use from the 4th into the 5th centuries (Harman *et al.* 1979), a period about which little is known nationally: the suggested 5th-century date here (i.e., the very earliest Saxon settlement) while very tentative, and probably from a disturbed burial, fits this pattern and if further remains of this date are indeed present, could be a significant discovery. The organized cemetery excavated just across the road on Wittenham Lane (JMHS 2013) was mainly dated to the 3rd/4th century (subject to review once radiocarbon dates are known) but it was thought that its limits had been defined. While it is possible that the human remains here are disturbed and redeposited in a gully rather than a grave, it may also represent a further extension of cemetery deposits in space and time.

References

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APPENDIX 1: Trench details

0m at S or W end

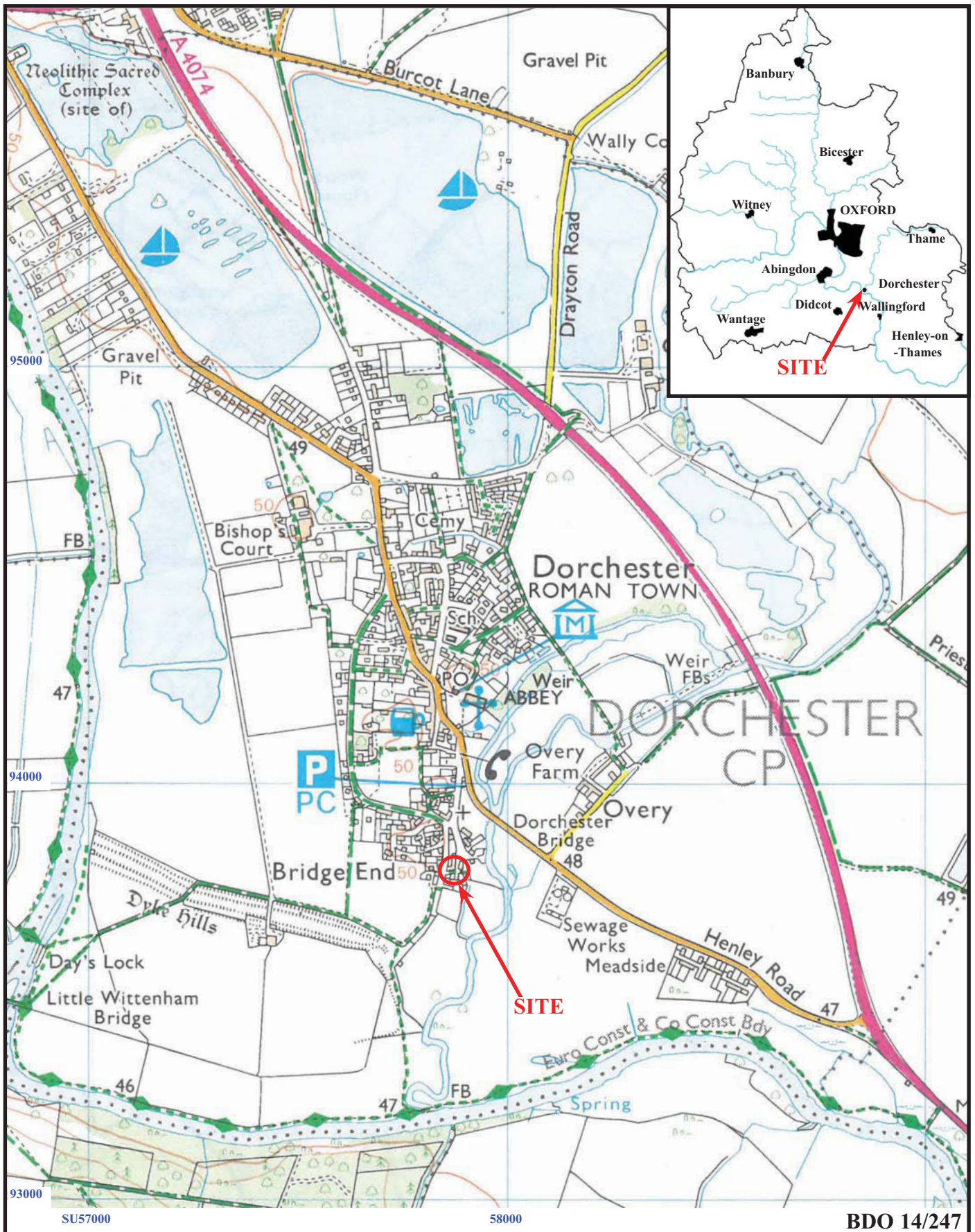
<i>Trench</i>	<i>Length (m)</i>	<i>Breadth (m)</i>	<i>Depth (m)</i>	<i>Comment</i>
1	5.20	1.60	0.50	0-0.20m rubble and soil made ground; 0.20m-0.45m subsoil; 0.45m-0.50m+ sandy gravel natural geology.
2	4.90	1.60	0.70	0-0.30m topsoil; 0.30m-0.66m subsoil; 0.66m-0.70m+ sandy gravel natural geology. Grave/Gully 1 [Pls 1, 3]
3	5.10	1.60	1.00	0-0.24m topsoil; 0.24m-0.95m subsoil; 0.95m-1.00m sandy gravel natural geology.
4	6.30	7.40	0.74	0-0.30m topsoil; 0.30m-0.70m subsoil; 0.70m-0.74m+ sandy gravel natural geology. [Pl. 2]

APPENDIX 2: Feature details

<i>Trench</i>	<i>Cut</i>	<i>Fill (s)</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Dating evidence</i>
2	1	52	Grave Cut/Gully	Saxon	Pottery

APPENDIX 3: Catalogue of Pottery

<i>Cut</i>	<i>Deposit</i>	<i>Fabric</i>	<i>Form</i>	<i>Date-range</i>	<i>No of sherds</i>	<i>Wt (g)</i>	<i>Comments</i>
1	52	ES1	Closed	c.450-550	1	40	Fresh

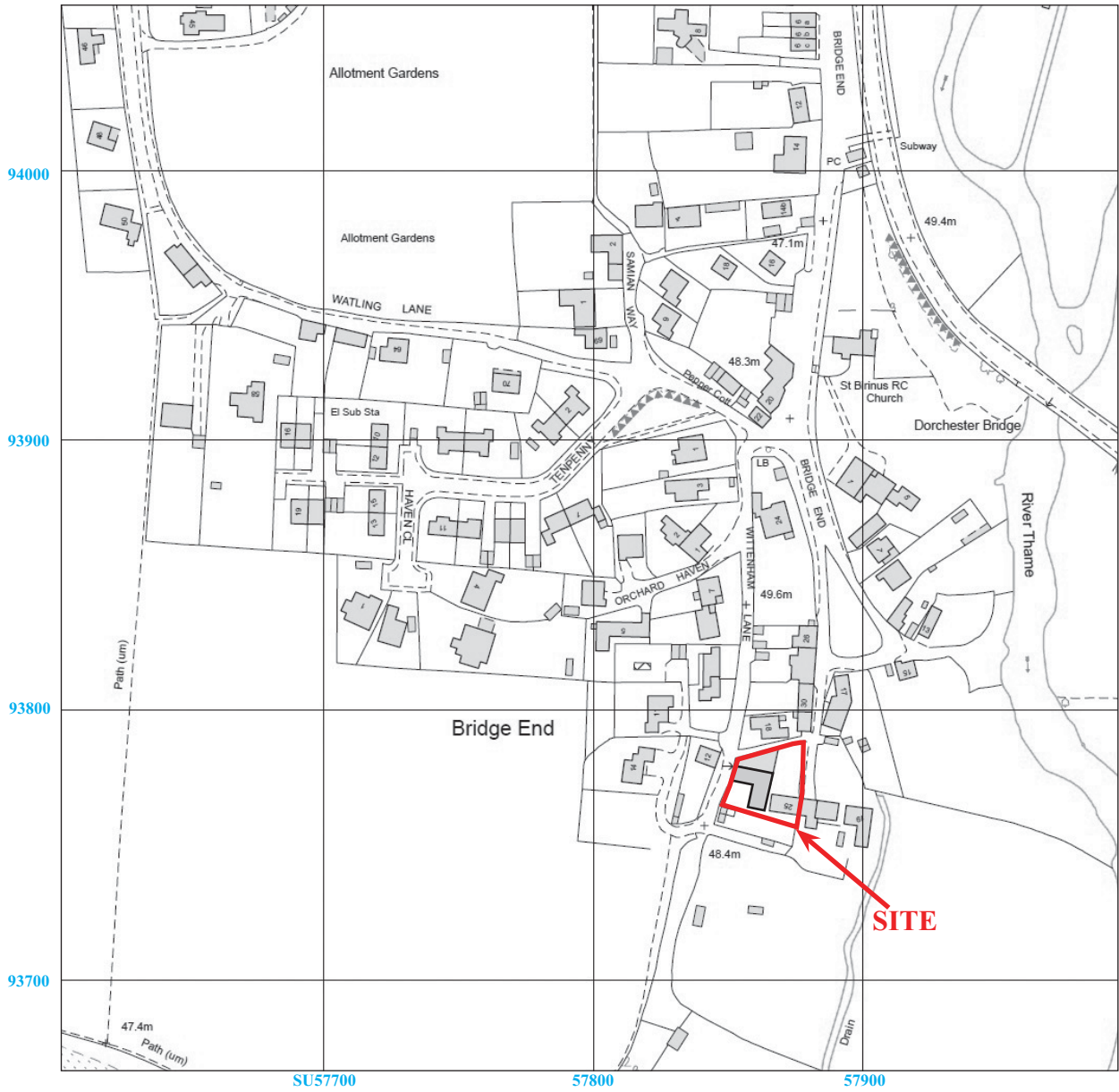


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Figure 1. Location of site within Dorchester-on-Thames and Oxfordshire.

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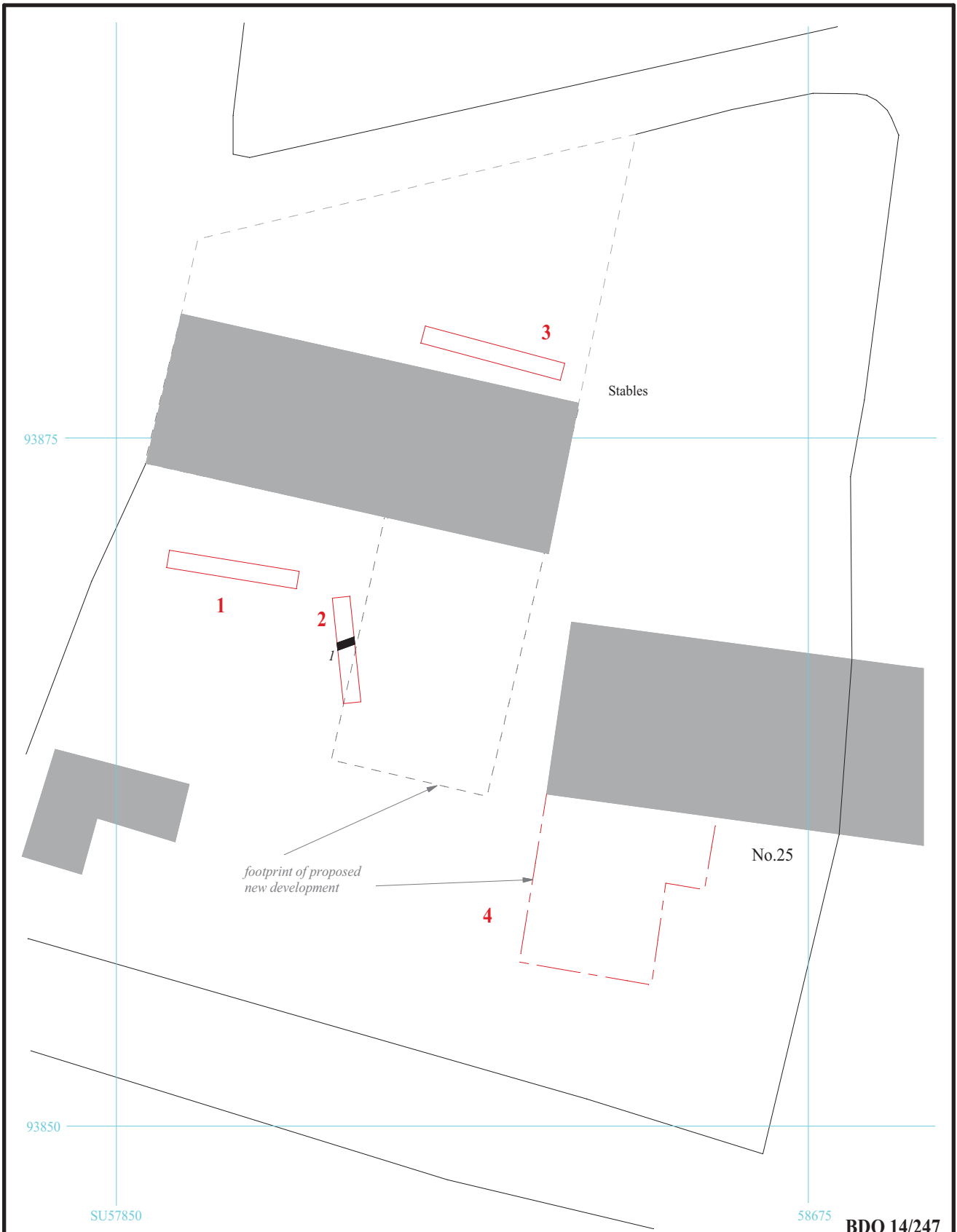


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Figure 2. Detailed location of site.

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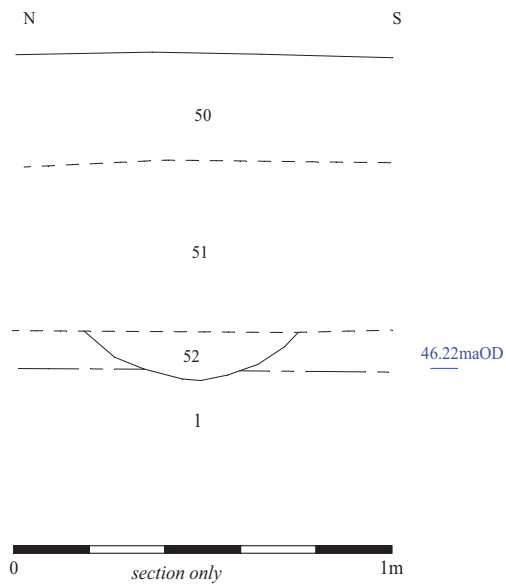
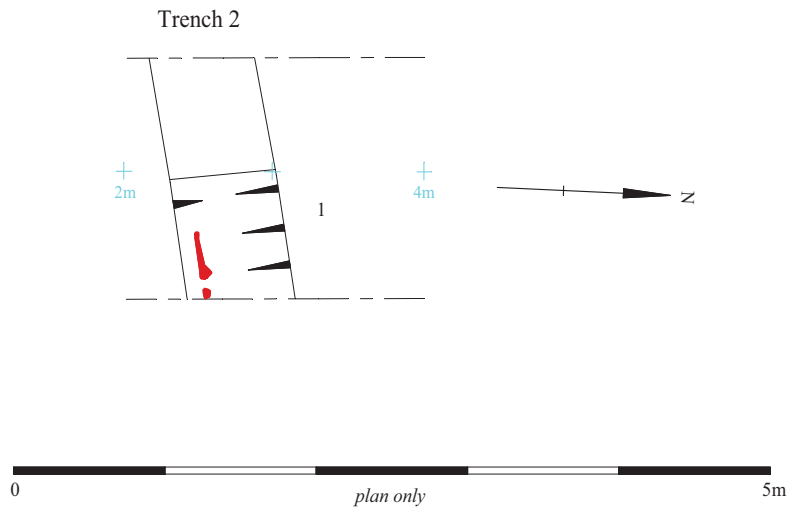
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Figure 3. Detail of area.



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Figure 4. Detail of Trench 2.

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Plate 1. Trench 2, looking south, Scales: horizontal 2m and 1m, vertical 0.5m.



Plate 2. Trench 4, looking west, Scales: horizontal 2m and 1m, vertical 0.5m.

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Plates 1 - 2.

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Plate 3. Gully or grave 1, trench 2, looking east. Scales horizontal 1m, vertical 0.5m, 0.1m

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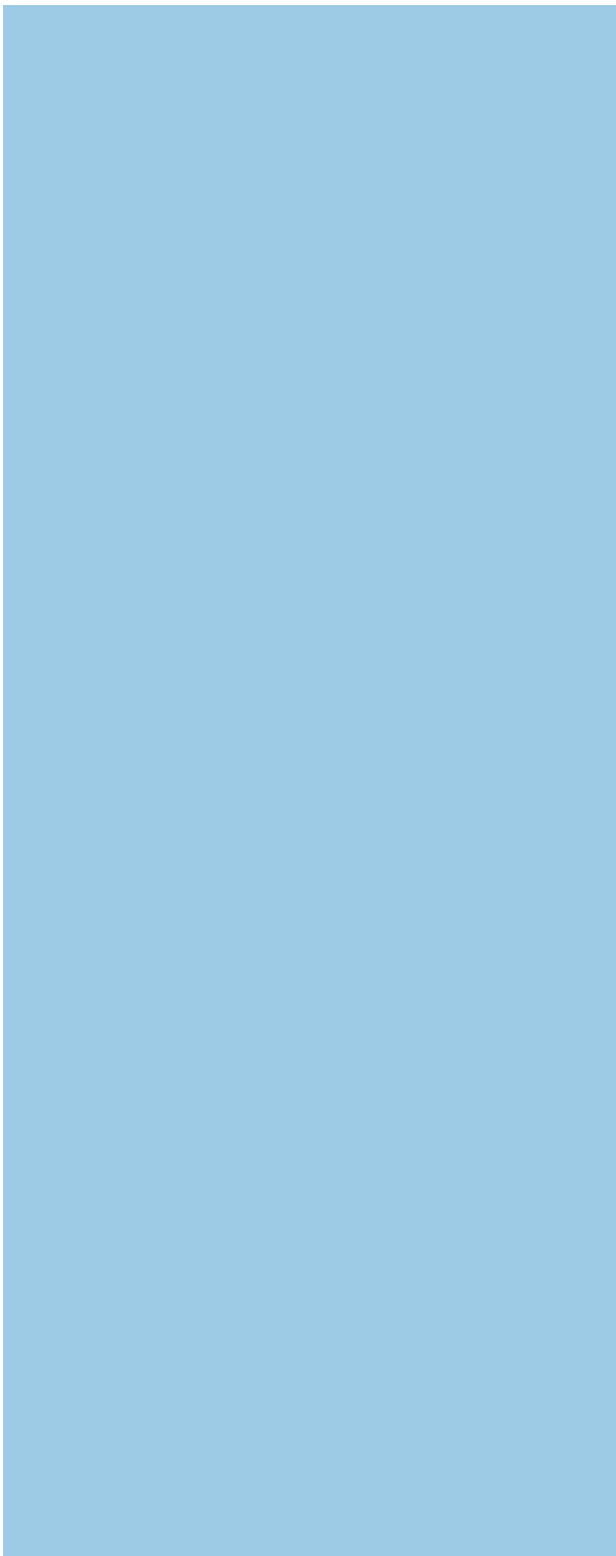
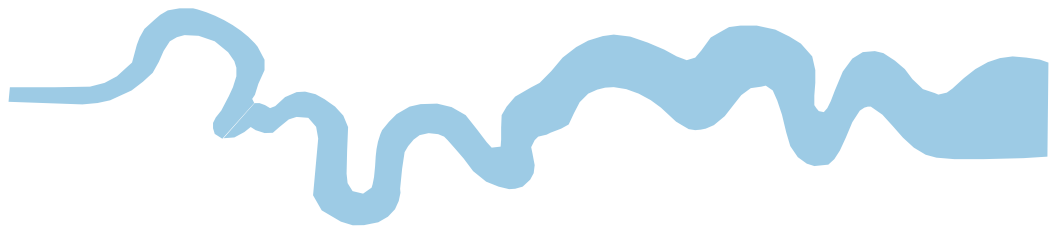
25 Bridge End, Dorchester-on-Thames,
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Plate 3.

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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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