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S E R V I C E S

**The White House, High Street,
Sonning, Berkshire**

Archaeological Watching Brief

by Joshua Hargreaves and Andy Taylor

Site Code: HSS16/83

(SU 7574 7549)

The White House, High Street, Sonning, Berkshire

An Archaeological Watching Brief

For Mr and Mrs M Johnson

by Joshua Hargreaves and Andy Taylor

Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code: HSS 16/83

June 2019

Summary

Site name: The White House, High Street, Sonning, Berkshire

Grid reference: SU 7574 7549

Site activity: Watching Brief

Date and duration of project: 20th April to 2nd May 2018

Project coordinator: Steve Ford

Site supervisor: Joshua Hargreaves, Andy Taylor, Luis Esteves

Site code: HSS 16/83

Area of site: c.720 sq m

Summary of results: The watching brief successfully investigated those parts of the site that were affected by the improvement works. The excavation of 4 test pits in the basement was monitored but no archaeological remains were recorded. Two test pits were monitored outside the front of the house and construction deposits associated with the construction of the property were recorded.

Location and reference of archive: The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited with suitable depository when one becomes available.

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Report edited/checked by:	Steve Ford✓ 17.06.19
	Steve Preston✓ 17.06.19

The White House, High Street, Sonning, Berkshire An Archaeological Watching Brief

By Joshua Hargreaves and Andy Taylor

Report 16/83

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out at The White House, High Street, Sonning, Berkshire, RG4 6UP (SU 7574 7549) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Kevin Brady of Woodfield Brady Architects, Arlington House, Curridge, Hermitage, Newbury, West Berkshire, RG18 9EF, on behalf of their client, Mr and Mrs M Johnson, of the above address.

Planning permission (153369) and Listed Building consent (153370) have been gained from Wokingham Borough Council for refurbishment of the existing property, which includes construction of a single-storey extension with a swimming pool to the rear.

Due to the potential of archaeological deposits being present on the site, with the proximity of the historic core of Sonning and the properties location on the High Street with a number of Listed properties nearby, a condition (6) of the consent requires the implementation of a scheme of archaeological works, to preserve and record of any archaeological deposits or finds.

This was in accordance with the Department for Communities and Local Government's *National Planning Policy Framework* (NPPF 2012) and the Borough Council's policies on archaeology. The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Ms Kathelen Leary, former Archaeological Officer at Berkshire Archaeology, who advised Wokingham Borough on archaeological matters. The fieldwork was undertaken by Joshua Hargreaves, Luis Esteves, Andy Taylor and Benedikt Tebbit between 20th April to 2nd May 2018. The site code is HSS 16/83.

The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited with a suitable depository when one becomes available.

Location, topography and geology

The site is located on the High Street, within the historic core of the village of Sonning in Berkshire 150m to the south of the River Thames (Fig. 1). The White House is on the east side of the High Street (Fig. 2), and is a Grade II Listed property (1117427), which has origins in the early 19th century. There are several other Listed properties in the vicinity, dated from the 16th-early 19th century. Attached to the house is Heron's Gate, a later

annex on its northern side. Both are slightly set back from the road frontage and its front garden in contrast to late 17th century shop fronts, now housing to the south (Fig. 2). The land slopes gradually southwards on the High Street, eventually leading to the River Thames to the north-west of the village. The underlying geology is Seaford Chalk Member (Upper Chalk), overlaid by clay, silts and gravels of the Reading Beds (BGS 2000) and the site is at a height of c.50m above Ordnance Datum (OD).

Archaeological background

The site lies within the archaeologically rich Thames Valley, with important Neolithic, Bronze Age and Roman remains situated to the east of the village; first identified from the air, and then magnetically surveyed (Gates 1975; Slade 1963; Ford 1987; Dawson 2012). The broad plain, south of the River Thames on which Sonning sits, has been a crossing point of the river since prehistoric times, with the village name (*Sonninges*) derived in Saxon times (VCH 1923b).

Sonning was an important administrative and ecclesiastical centre (VCH 1923a), with the historic development based on the church, and where the Bishops of Salisbury maintained a palace. To the south of the church, the location of the Bishops Palace has been explored by early excavation (Brakspear 1916) which suggested a complex phasing of buildings between the 13th to 15th century. Quality stonework and further Medieval deposits have been described from excavation in its proximity, particularly with Medieval tracery found in later Medieval deposits nearby (Hull and Hall 2003; Milbank 2010).

Fieldwork to the west of High Street, at The Bull Inn (Grade II*; 1117462) revealed a charnel pit deposit of human bone, thought to be redeposited from elsewhere (Milbank 2007). The pub itself has late 16th century origins, and was used as a rest stop for pilgrims heading to the church. The Church of St. Andrew's (Grade II*; 1135979) has fragments of 10th-century stonework in the extant fabric (Tyack *et al* 2010, 519). Recent archaeological investigation, in advance of development for its parish rooms, immediately to the south within the modern churchyard, found prehistoric and Medieval deposits (Elliott 2013; Sanchez 2017).

Further small-scale archaeological observations have also taken place at various locations in the village, with the most fruitful sites including; Old Walls on Sonning Lane, where a Medieval boundary was found (Taylor 2006; Milbank 2006) and Greendown on Pearson Road, where work, in advance of construction for a new house, founded Medieval features, with a small quantity of residual Roman and Early-Middle Saxon pottery (Platt 2013; Muddin 2013).

Objectives and methodology

The purpose of the watching brief was to observe, excavate and record any archaeological deposits affected by the ground works. This involved monitoring the reduction of the floor level in the basement. Key-hole test pit excavation was used to characterize underlying soils to the required depths of excavation.

Observation also was undertaken in the front garden of the property, either side of the main entrance. Two test pits, placed against the exterior walls, exposed the facing of the foundations. Additional to this, there was general observation tracing services (water, electric and gas pipes). Small test pits were excavated after the lifting of the concrete floor in the basement. The excavation of the test pits were carried out by hand, initially to 0.5m deep, and continually archaeological monitoring during excavation.

Results

In total, six test pits were excavated, interior and exterior to the house (Fig. 3).

Exterior

Test pit 1 (Pl. 1)

This test pit was excavated against the exterior wall of the house, in the front garden of the property and north of the main entrance. This test pit was 1.3m square and dug to a depth of 0.5m deep. The stratigraphy showed a mixed deposit of dark brown silt and grey brown clayey silt with rounded gravel inclusions (made ground) (50) 0.35m deep, overlying chalk mortar (51). Below this was made ground of dark brown, chalk-flecked silt, to a depth of 0.5m (52). At its base was a grey clay natural. No archaeological deposits were encountered. An electricity cable leading through the foundation of the house, leading from the north west. The test pit exposed the foundations of the extant building, of brick, exposing four regular courses. Above the wall was rendered and white washed. The foundation of the stairs for the entrance, were also exposed, to a depth of 0.35m. This was composed of a single brick course on a concrete foundation (1).

Test pit 2

This test pit was to the south of the entrance, against the boundary of White House Lodge and the site. This pit was 1.5m (N-S) and 2.5m (W-E) and excavation reached a depth of 1m close to the house, 1.6m further west. The stratigraphy close to the house was the gravel surface of the drive above dark brown, chalk-flecked silt (53) to a depth of 0.75m. Below this was a light brown sand (54) above 55. To the west, the extension of the test pit into the garden (through topsoil rather than gravel) found a pit cut (2) from the level of 53. This was filled with concrete rubble in a matrix of soft yellow-brown clay (56). Exposed at its base was a firm and chalky, light

greyish yellow sandy clay (55). Below this, light reddish-brown silty clay was reached, assumed to be natural clay. This was reached at 0.6m, though was excavated to 1.3m in section, where natural chalk was reached.

Within the exposed wall foundation was what seemed to be an infilled window or light-well, an original feature, of the early 18th century, Georgian frontage, which was to be reopened in this development. It was filled with concrete blockwork, suggesting infill in the late 20th century (Pl. 2). Further excavation, removed brick rubble from in front of the opening to a maximum depth of 1.6m against the house wall.

Interior cellar floor

The floor of the cellar (Pls 3 and 4) was removed, and various points of the exposed floor was sampled covering the ongoing development. Though the test pits were only dug to a shallow depth, various fills were encountered (Fig. 3).

Test pit 3 (Pl. 5)

This small test pit, was 0.5m square was within the north-east corner of the room, and against the exterior walls. This was excavated to a depth of 0.2m, and removed made ground, a grey sandy silt with limestone pieces. This exposed the foundations to the north and east. No archaeological deposits or finds were observed.

Test pit 4

This was dug to the north-centre of the basement, against the outside of the coal store. This was 0.5m by 0.4m and was 0.2m deep. This was excavated through grey brown silty clay, with frequent rounded chalk inclusions. No archaeological deposits or finds were observed.

Test pit 5 (Pl. 6)

This test pit lay central to the eastern part of the room, internal to the flint foundation exposed when the original floor was removed. The pit was 0.5m x 0.45m dug through grey cement which was tempered with flint within its fill. The exposed east face of the foundation was also flint to the base of excavation. This reached 0.18m and the foundation continued beyond the base of excavation.

Test Pit 6 (Pl. 7)

Test pit 6 was between Test Pits 3 and 4, to the south of the coal store, It covered 0.5m x 0.3m dug through sandy silt surface, to a depth of only 0.1m onto concrete rendered foundation which was not broken out.

Test Pit 7

Test pit 7 was in the centre of the former floor. This was 1m by 0.7m dug to 0.7m deep through chalk mortar onto the chalk geology. No archaeological deposits or finds were observed.

Test Pit 8

The final test pit was towards the west side of the floor. This was 1m square dug to 0.9m deep through chalk mortar onto the chalk geology. No archaeological deposits or finds were observed.

Finds

A single pottery sherd was recovered from under the floor of the basement in the house, prior to the excavation of Test Pits 3-6. The sherd is considered to be Early Medieval, flint tempered ware, black on the interior, and brown-black on the exterior.

Conclusion

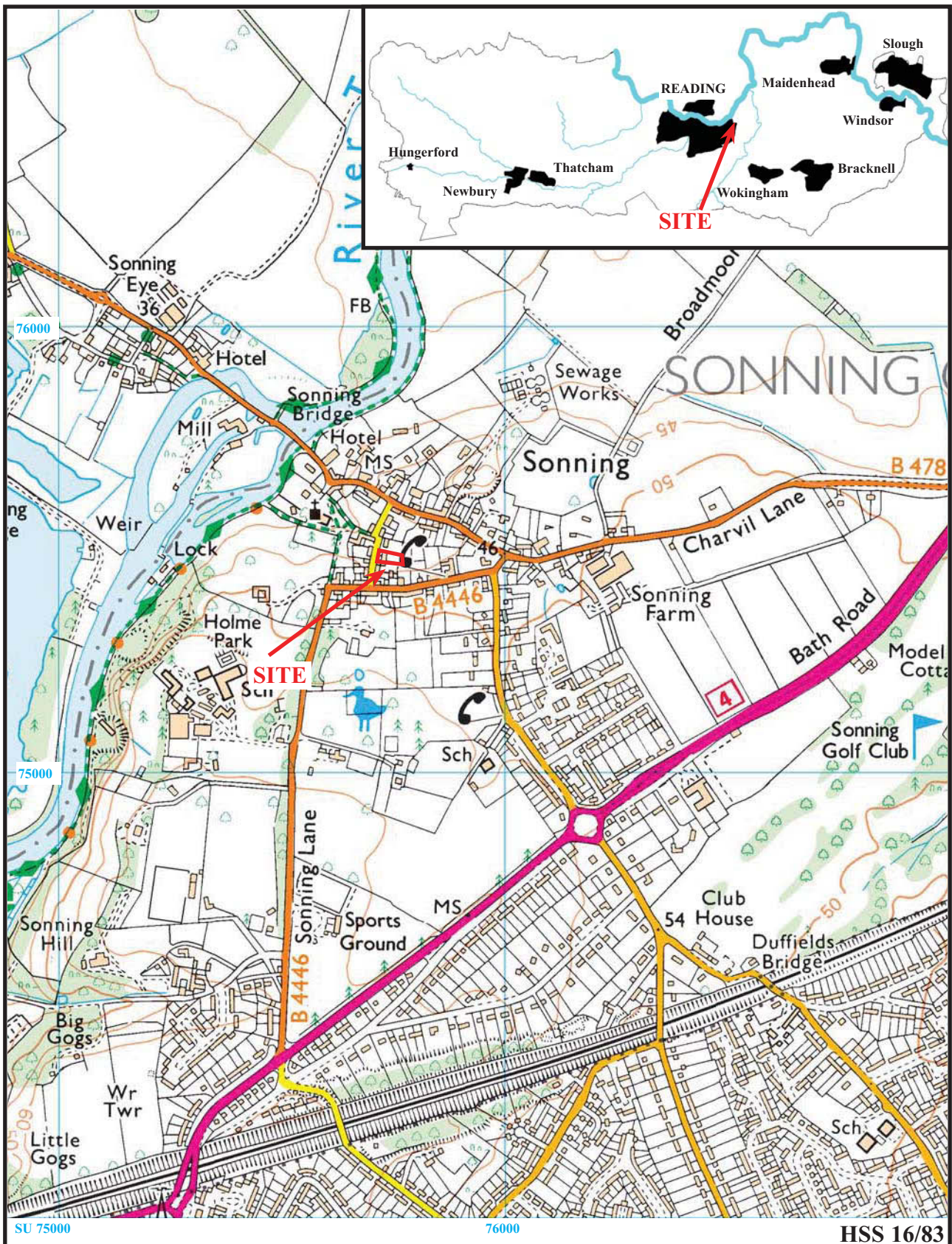
Investigations have identified the deposits overlying the natural geology to the exterior of the house. Though buried deposits are present, nothing seems to pre-date the original construction of the early 18th century property and the only feature which may have been of this early date was clearly backfilled in the 20th century. This related to the exposed window opening for the new lightwell, which was not unexpected and is considered an original feature.

On excavation of the cellar floor, underlying chalk deposits and flint foundations potentially could predate the original 18th century features, the sherd of pottery found could point to a Medieval date, but is more probably redeposited and the foundations are part of the early 19th-century house.

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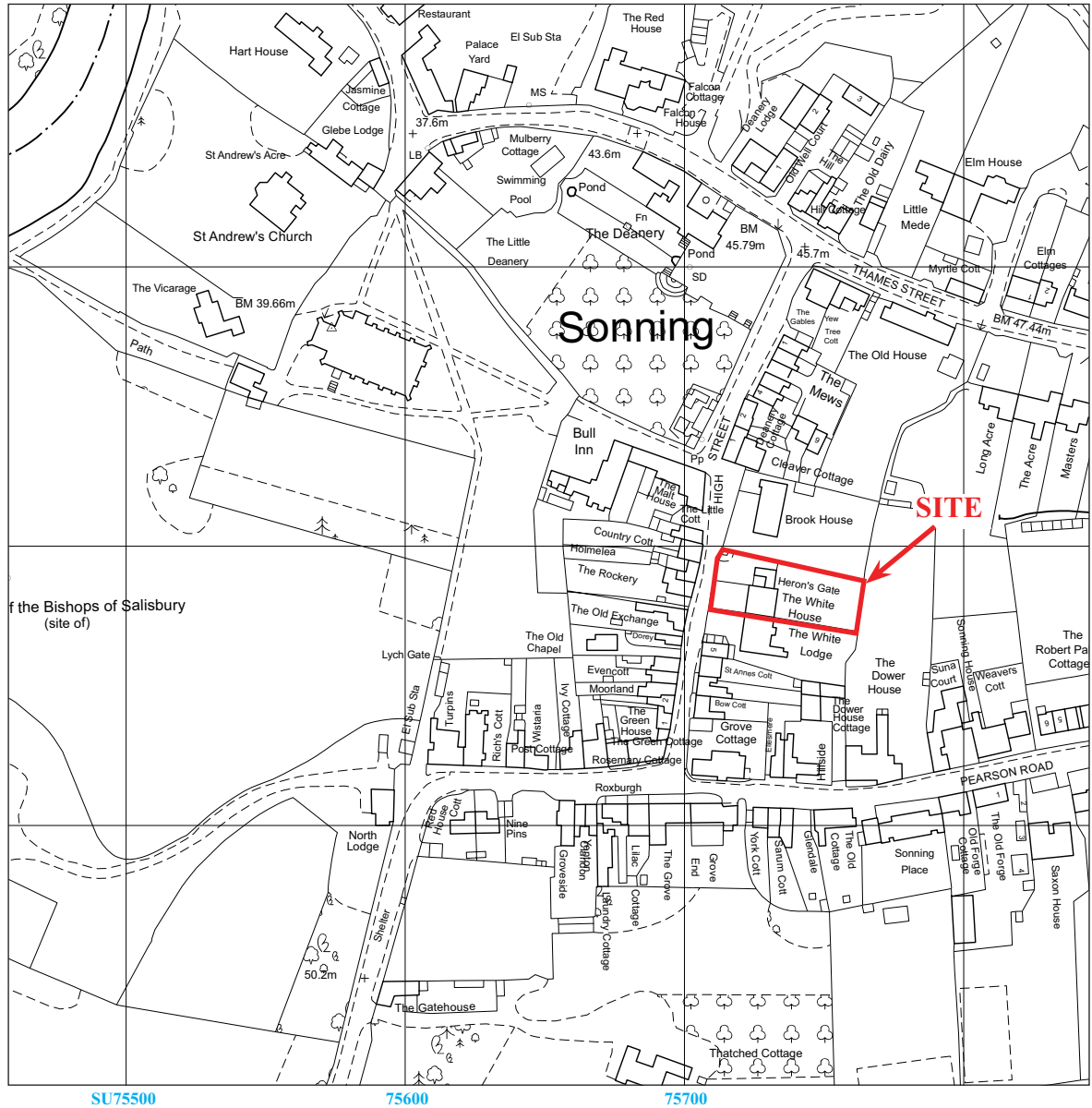
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Figure 1. Location of site within Sonning and Berkshire.

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Archaeological Watching Brief
Figure 2. Detailed location of site off High Street.

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Figure 3. Location of observed areas.



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Plate 1. Test pit 1, looking southeast, Scales: 1m and 0.5m.



Plate 2. Blocked window in test pit 2, looking northeast, Scales: 1m and 0.5m.

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Archaeological Watching Brief
Plates 1 and 2.**

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Plate 3. Interior construction, looking northwest, Scales: 2m and 1m.



Plate 4. Interior construction, looking west.

HSS 16/83

**The White House, High Street,
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Archaeological Watching Brief
Plates 3 and 4.**

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Plate 5. Test pit 3, looking northwest, Scales: 0.5m.



Plate 6. Test pit 5, looking northeast, Scales: 0.5m.

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The White House, High Street,
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Archaeological Watching Brief
Plates 5 and 6.

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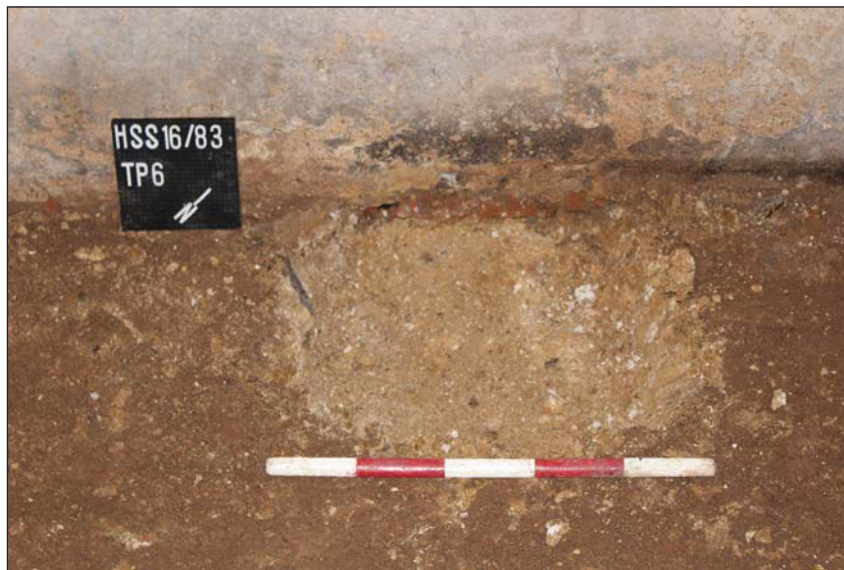


Plate 7. Test pit 6, looking southeast, Scales: 0.5m.

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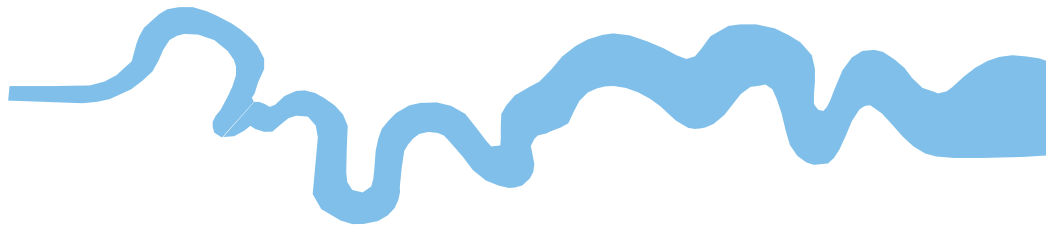
**The White House, High Street,
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Plate 7.

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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 AD 0 BC
Iron Age _____	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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