

The Dower House, Pearson Road, Sonning, Berkshire

An Archaeological Watching Brief

For Mr Matthew King

by Jennifer Lowe

Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code DHS08/04

March 2008

Summary

Site name: The Dower House, Pearson Road, Sonning, Berkshire

Grid reference: SU 7577 7542

Site activity: Watching Brief

Date and duration of project: 3rd–12th February 2008

Project manager: Steve Ford

Site supervisor: Jennifer Lowe

Site code: DHS08/04

Area of site: 54 sq m

Summary of results: No archaeological finds or features were encountered during the course of the watching brief.

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

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| Report edited/checked by: Steve Ford ✓ 07.03.08 Steve Preston ✓ 07.03.08 |
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Dower House, Pearson Road, Sonning, Berkshire An Archaeological Watching Brief

by Jennifer Lowe

Report 08/04

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out at The Dower House, Pearson Road, Sonning, Berkshire (SU7577 7542) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Richard Bell of Thomas de Cruz Architects/Designers, 80/82 Chiswick High Road, London, W4 1SY on behalf of Mr Matthew King, The Dower House, Pearson Road, Sonning, Berkshire, RG4 6UL.

Planning permission (app no F2007/1173 and LB/2007/1175) has been granted by Wokingham Council to erect an extension to the rear of the existing Dower House. The consent gained is subject to a condition (4) relating to archaeology which requires a watching brief to be carried out during any ground disturbance works.

This is in accordance with the Department of the Environment's Planning Policy Guidance, *Archaeology and Planning* (PPG16 1990), and the Council's policies on archaeology. The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Ms Mary O'Donoghue of Berkshire Archaeology, the archaeological advisor to Wokingham Council. The fieldwork was undertaken by Natasha Bennett, Jennifer Lowe and David Platt between 3rd and 12th February 2008 and the site code is DHS08/04.

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

Location, topography and geology

The site is located on the north side of Pearson Road in the centre of the village of Sonning with the High Street and St Andrew's church are located to the west (Fig. 2.). The site is rectangular in shape with The Dower House located to the front of the plot with a long rectangular garden to the rear. According to the British Geological Survey (BGS 1946) the underlying geology is Valley Gravels which was not observed during the watching brief. The site lies at a height of approximately 45m above Ordnance Datum.

Archaeological background

The archaeological potential of the site is highlighted in a brief prepared by Berkshire Archaeology. In summary, the site lies in the archaeologically rich Thames Valley, with important prehistoric and Roman remains visible

from the air to the east of the village (Ford 1987; Gates 1975; Slade 1964). More specifically, the site lies close to the Saxon and medieval core of the village. A settlement is first documented at Sonning in AD932, and in Domesday Book (1086), it is recorded as *Soninges*. During the medieval period the settlement was an important administrative and ecclesiastical centre, with the Bishop of Salisbury's Palace, dating to the 13th century and altered during the 14th and 15th centuries, located not far to the west of the site. Saxon and early medieval deposits have also been recorded at St Andrew's church to the west (Hull and Hall 2003). Opposite the church, at the Bull Inn, recent fieldwork has recorded charnel deposits of uncertain date (Milbank 2007).

Nearby, recent evaluation and watching brief at Old Walls, Sonning Lane recorded a medieval ditch and an undated gully (Taylor 2006; Millbank 2006).

Objectives and methodology

The purpose of the watching brief was to excavate and record any archaeological deposits affected by groundworks. This included the examination of all areas of intrusive groundworks, in particular any ground reduction and the digging of trenches for foundations or services.

Results

Manhole

The initial phase of work on site involved the relocation of a manhole, which was moved roughly 1m to the east of its original location (Fig. 3). A small area measuring 2.10m by 1.50m and 1.20m deep was excavated to accommodate the new manhole. The stratigraphy observed comprised 0.25m of topsoil overlying 0.35m of mid brown yellow silty clay containing modern debris. This in turn sealed a layer of mid red/brown clay silt, 0.40m thick. This layer also contained brick and tile, and two ceramic drains were observed in the south-east facing section. Below this was a layer of sand.

Foundations

The entire plot for the new building which measured approximately 9m long by 6m wide, was reduced by 0.60m, on the north west side, and 1m on the eastern side of the plot (Fig. 3). The stratigraphy observed in this instance comprised 0.40m of made ground in the south-east corner and topsoil, of similar thickness, over the remainder of the plot (Fig. 4). Below this was 0.20m of dark grey brown silty clay with brick and tile inclusions, which covered a mid orange brown silty clay. A small section of brick-lined drain was observed emerging from the

south facing section, which appeared to be sealed by the dark grey brown silty clay layer. The drain was 0.40m wide and only appeared to extend for 0.60m into the excavated area. Several pieces of animal bone and late post-medieval pottery were retrieved from the backfill of the drain; these were not retained.

Finds

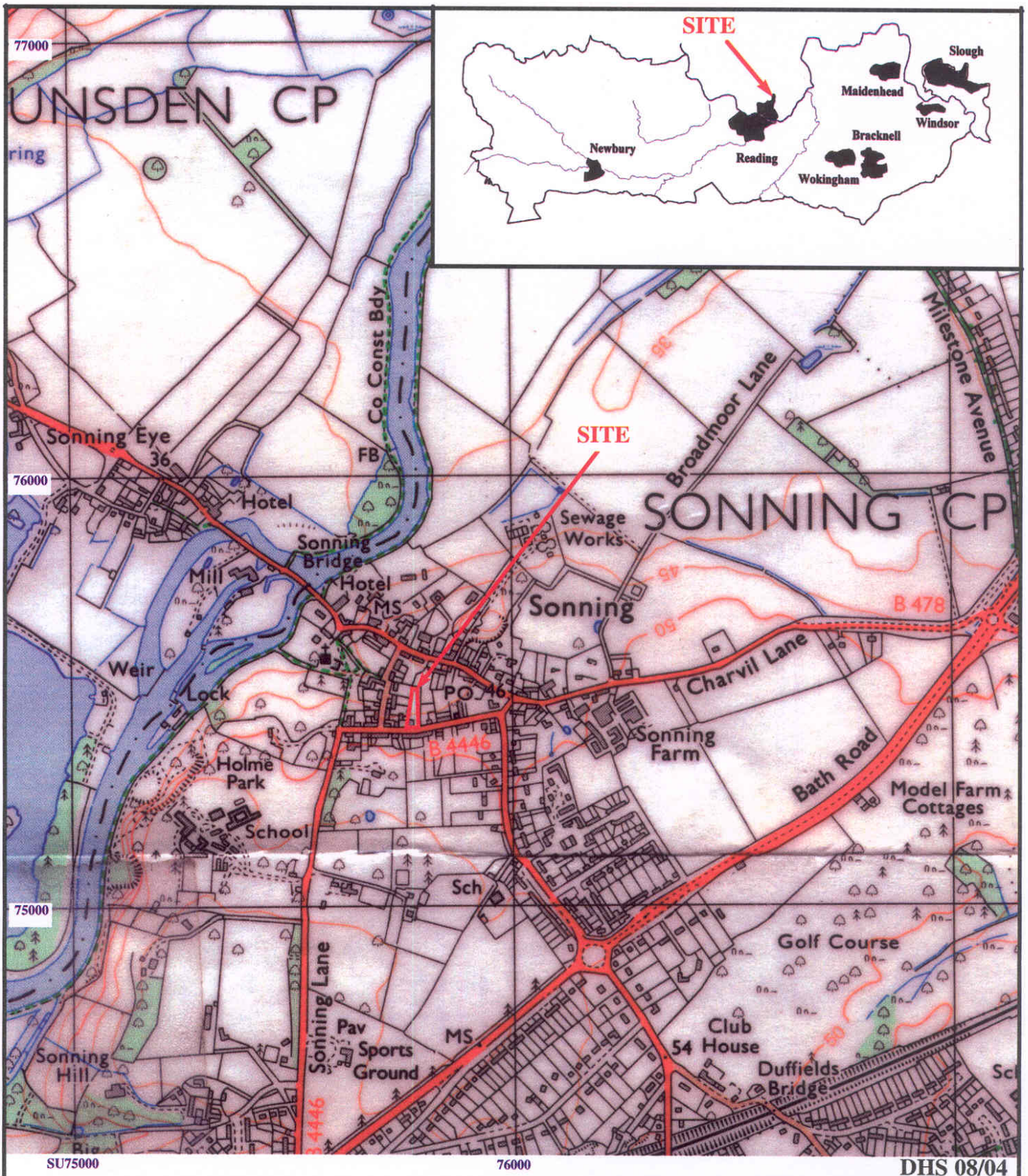
The only finds retrieved came from the backfill of the brick drain. These included a few fragments of animal bone and a sherd of late post-medieval pottery; these were not retained.

Conclusion

The watching brief failed to identify any finds or features of archaeological significance. The drain encountered was clearly late post-medieval in date and most likely associated with The Dower House. The stratigraphy observed suggests that the land to the rear of the house has been built up at some point in its later history. As a result natural geology was not observed in the main excavation area and therefore the survival of archaeological deposits at a lower depth cannot be ruled out.

References

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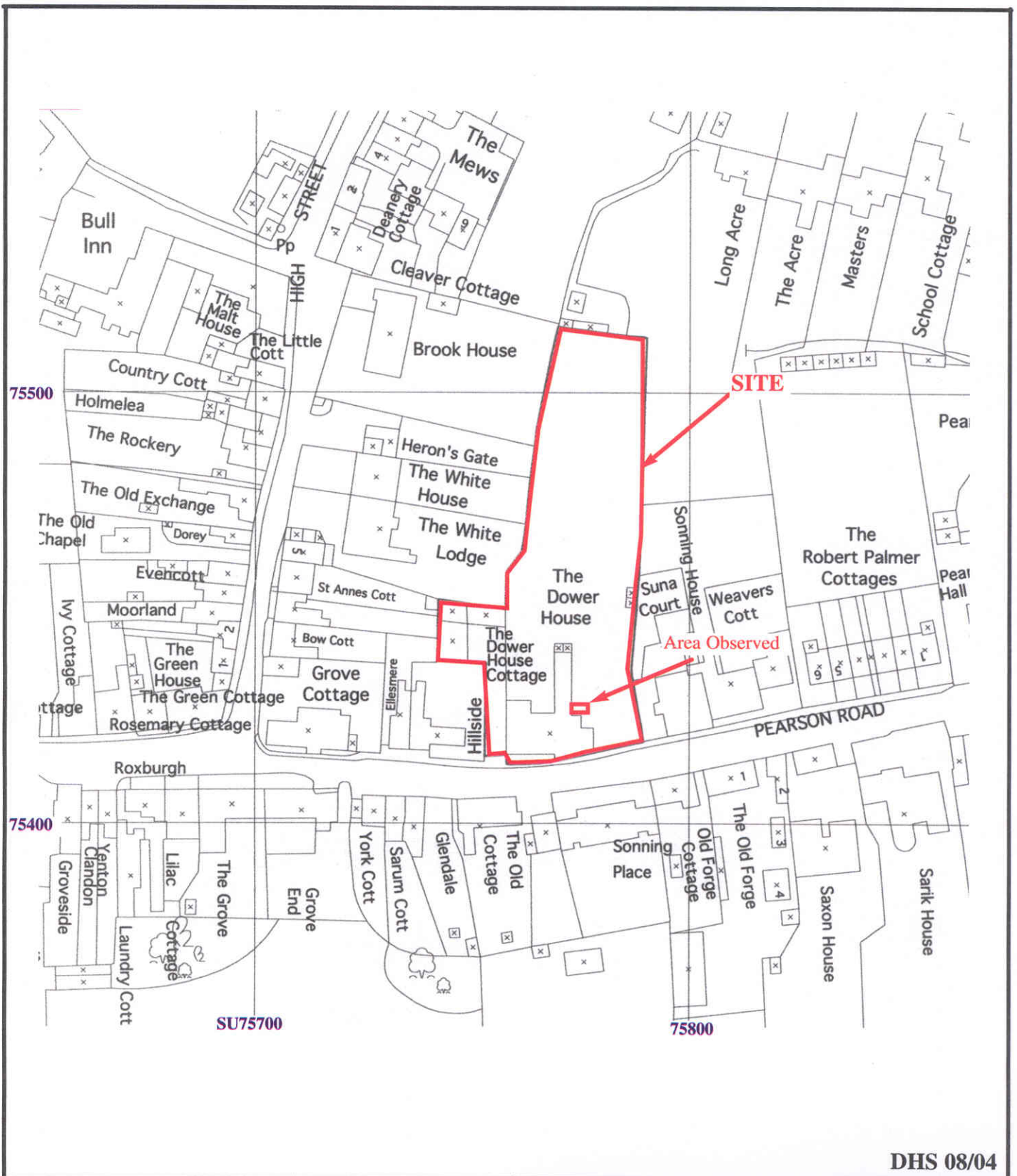


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Figure 1. Location of site within Sonning
and Berkshire.

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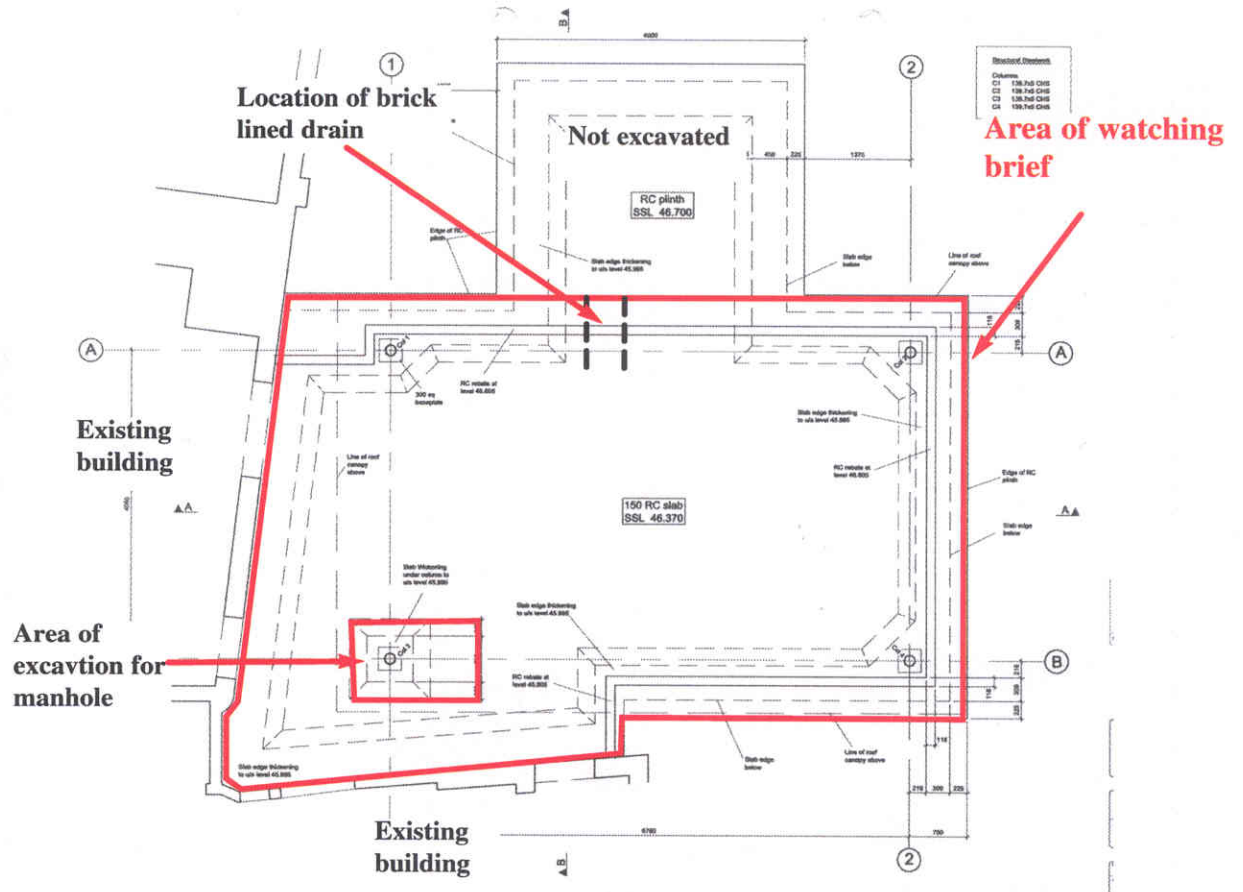
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Figure 2. Detailed location of site within Sonning,
and area of watching brief.

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Figure 3. Detailed location of watching brief.

Scale 1:100

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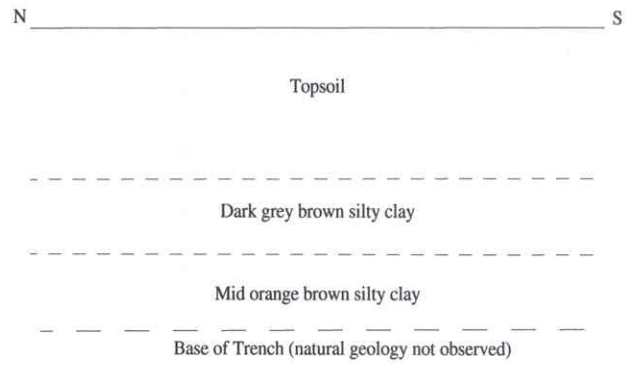


Figure 4. Representative Section