

The Old Boot House, Thorpe Street, Aston Upthorpe, Oxfordshire

An Archaeological Watching Brief

for Mr Peter le Conte

by Andrew Mordin

Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code AUD 08/67

June 2008

Summary

Site name: The Old Boot House, Thorpe Street, Aston Upthorpe, Oxfordshire

Grid reference: SU5531 8624

Site activity: Watching Brief

Date and duration of project: 2nd June 2008

Project manager: Jennifer Lowe

Site supervisor: Andrew Munding

Site code: AUD 08/67

Area of site: c. 150 sq m

Summary of results: One Medieval pit was uncovered close to the existing house. Though the footings varied in depth, natural geology was uncovered in all the bases, and an area of soil, thought to be a depression from a tree hole was noted in the southern corner.

Monuments identified: Medieval Pit

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

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Report edited/checked by: Steve Ford✓ 20.06.08 Steve Preston✓ 18.06.08

The Old Boot House, Thorpe Street, Aston Upthorpe, Oxfordshire

An Archaeological Watching Brief

by Andrew Munding

Report 08/67

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out at The Old Boot House, Thorpe Street, Aston Upthorpe, Oxfordshire, OX11 9EG (SU 5531 8624) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Peter le Conte, of the above address.

Planning consent (P07/W0971) was granted by South Oxfordshire District Council for the alteration and construction of extensions to the rear of the property with new patio. A new double garage was also to be constructed off the southern side of the property. The consent was subject to a condition which requires the implementation of a programme of archaeological work, in this case a watching brief to take place during groundworks.

This is in accordance with the Department of the Environment's Planning Policy Guidance, *Archaeology and Planning* (PPG16 1990), and the District Council's policies on archaeology. The archaeological potential of the site was highlighted in a brief prepared by Mr Richard Oram, of Oxfordshire County Archaeological Service advising the district, and the work was carried out according to a specification approved by him. The site lies within the environs of Blewburton Hill (SAM OX205) which itself lies upslope to the west. The fieldwork was undertaken by Andrew Munding on 2nd June 2008, and the site code is AUD 08/67. The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited with the Oxfordshire Museum Service in due course.

Location, topography and geology

The site is located on the western side of Aston Upthorpe, on the eastern side of Thorpe Street (Fig. 2). The site once was 'The Boot' public house, but the 20th-century property is set back from the road off the location of the former pub. The rear garden was terraced to allow for its build as the garden slopes quite steeply downwards towards the spring to the east. The village itself lies on the edge of the Middle Chalk to the south-west of the flood plain out of which rises Cholsey Hill (BGS 1980). The Upper Chalk ridge runs west-east to the south (followed by the route of the A417). Blewburton Hill sits on a spur of Middle Chalk directly to the west.

Of the site, the road height is approximately 63m above Ordnance Datum (OD) with the works to the rear at between 61m and 62m AOD. The natural geology noted onsite was grey chalk marl, most probably Totternhoe Stone, outcropping within the Middle Chalk.

Archaeological background

The site lies to the east of Blewburton Hill (SAM OX205), an Iron Age hillfort, which has been excavated in the 1950s, investigating its palisade and earthwork defences (Harding 1974, 58–60). A neolithic causewayed enclosure is strongly suspected to lie beneath. A findspot of particular importance within the village is a gold *solidus* (coin) of Honorius, one of the latest Roman coins to reach Britain, and exceptionally rare (and for this reason also probably of limited archaeological value, it being difficult to be certain it reached Britain in antiquity), which was found in 1969 during the laying of a garden path in a house in the village some 60m south-west of the current site. It is thought that Roman and prehistoric settlement could be somewhere in the vicinity.

The village of Aston Upthorpe itself may have early origins with the local church of All Saints thought to be 11th century in date. The manor was mentioned in Domesday Book (AD 1086), when it was in Berkshire. Aston is common Old English (Anglo-Saxon) name meaning ‘east farm’ while Upthorpe is a mix of Old English (*upp*: ‘higher’) and Old Scandinavian (*thorp*: ‘outlying or secondary settlement’). An origin as a secondary settlement in the period of Danish settlement, derived from an earlier Saxon settlement, thus seems plausible.

Many of the surrounding houses are 16th and 17th century in date. It is likely that the previous original pub building was contemporary with these. Though no other early Medieval archaeology has been clearly identified for the village, it is thought that a core of medieval agriculture must exist in the area as evidenced by the presence of strip lynchets (field terraces).

Objectives and methodology

The purpose of the watching brief was to excavate and record any archaeological deposits affected by groundworks. This involved examination of all areas of deep foundation trenching truncating down through possible archaeological relevant layers to natural geology. The specific research aims of this project were:

To determine if archaeological relevant material survived on this site;

To determine if archaeology of any period are present;

To establish whether there is evidence/potential for Iron Age activity or finds or medieval occupation or finds that may survive, unaffected by the post-medieval and more recent occupation and structures of the pub buildings.

Results

All the footings of the extensions, new garage and new patio were viewed. It was noted that the rear of the garden was sloped quite steeply downwards to the east from the existing dwelling. A terrace was evident (Fig. 3), it was unclear if this could be an earthwork, but the current home owner suggested that this terrace had been raised to level the rear of the property so the current dwelling could be set back from the road. It was also understood that 'The Boot' public house had stood on the street frontage, before it was destroyed by fire in the 1920s.

The footings for the extensions to existing rooms and new patio area were dug to the rear (east) of the property. The garage footings were to the south (Fig. 3). The garage footings were excavated to, in general, 1.15m deep, at their deepest 1.3m on sloped ground. The stratigraphy showed much recent ground levelling and truncation from the building activity associated with the public house, which has drainage associated with the toilets, now office, on the south side of the house.

This stratigraphy (Fig. 4) was 0.25m of garden topsoil over 0.05m of mixed brick rubble, which contained china pottery, glass, and building material (not retained). Beneath this was chalk blocking, probably to make the ground up on the street front, to a depth of 0.65m. This lay above a buried subsoil that was wholly undated to a depth of 1.1m. This layer seemed mostly undisturbed. At the base of the trench natural chalk was uncovered. No archaeologically relevant material was noted from these footings.

The house and patio footings varied in depth across the excavated area (as shown on Figure 3). Two areas of noted were recorded across the sections. In the footing for the living room extension to the south, a pit (2) was recorded in section. This showed that the feature was cut from a depth of c.0.4m below existing ground level through natural geology. Six fills (53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58) made up this feature, of which fill 53 contained pottery datable to the medieval period. Between fills 57 and 58 in the upper part of the feature a thin burning deposit was noted.

In the southern corner of the footings natural geology was not exposed in the base of the trenching at a depth of 0.9m. It was noted that this area at ground level had a slight depression on the slope of the garden. It was noted by the owner that an ash tree had been removed in this area and the down slope from here an orchard

had probably existed. Due to the size of this feature (1), and a mix of finds including pottery, animal bone, wood building materials in its fill (50) it was thought this feature was probably a tree hole cutting the natural geology.

Apart from the areas noted, natural geology was uncovered in all footings, and, apart from stray clay-pipe and glass finds from the topsoil, no archaeologically relevant material was noted in the groundworks.

Finds

Pottery by Paul Blinkhorn

The pottery assemblage comprised 5 sherds with a total weight of 31g. It was recorded utilizing the coding system and chronology of the Oxfordshire County type-series (Mellor 1984; 1994), as follows:

OXY: Medieval Oxford ware, AD1075 – 1350. 2 sherds, 9g.

OXAM: Brill/Boarstall ware, AD1200 – 1600. 1 sherd, 16g.

OXDR: Red Earthenwares, AD1550 onwards. 1 sherd, 5g.

WHEW: Mass-produced white earthenwares, 19th - 20th century. 1 sherd, 1g.

The pottery occurrence by number and weight of sherds per context by fabric type is shown in Appendix 1. All the fabric types are well-known in the region.

Animal bone

Two pieces of animal were recovered from feature 1. Both seem to be from the same animal and have been identified as the 1st phalanx and part of the distal metatarsal of a juvenile bovine. This is evident due to the unfused metatarsal. The bone is generally slightly weathered but in relatively good condition. The 1st phalanx seems to have a cut mark to its proximal surface, showing the material is probably from a domestic context.

Glass

The base of a bottle was recovered from the topsoil and is roughly 18th to 19th century in date.

Clay pipe

Three pipe stems were recovered from the topsoil and are general undiagnostic in date, roughly datable from the 17th to 19th century.

Conclusion

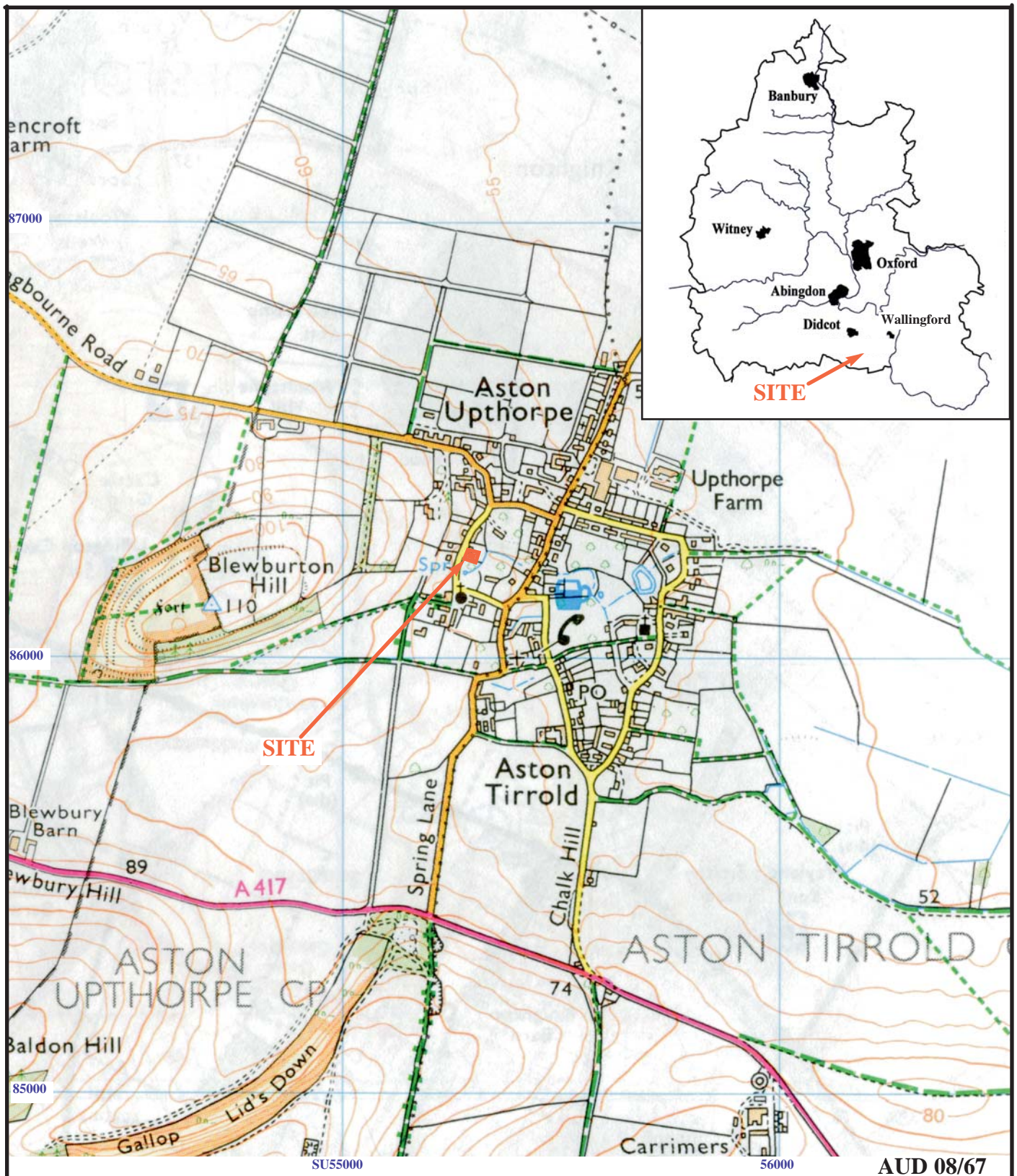
One pit of possibly medieval date was uncovered close to the existing house. Though the footings varied in depth, natural geology was uncovered in all the bases, though an area of soil, thought to be a depression from a tree hole was noted in the southern corner. One sherd of pottery seems to date this feature to the 17th century (or later) and thus this tree clearance could be contemporary with the original pub. The terrace for the house only seemed to be from landscaping of topsoil, and was not medieval in date. The finds from pit 2 are of importance to the village as no previous medieval archaeological evidence, apart from features in the local church, was known.

References

- BGS, 1980, *British Geological Survey*, 1:50 000, Sheet 254, Solid and Drift Edition, Keyworth
- Harding, D W, 1974, *The Iron Age of Lowland Britain*, London
- PPG 16, 1990, *Archaeology and Planning*, Dept of the Environment Planning Policy Guidance 16, HMSO
- Mellor, M and Oakley, G, 1984, 'A summary of the key assemblages, a study of pottery, clay pipes, glass and other finds from fourteen pits, dating from the 16th to the 19th century', in T G Hassall, C E Halpin and M Mellor, 'Excavations in St Ebbe's, Oxford, 1967–1976: Part II: Post-medieval domestic tenements and the Post-Dissolution site of the Greyfriars', *Oxoniensia*, **49**, 181–211
- Mellor, M, 1994, 'Oxfordshire Pottery: A Synthesis of middle and late Saxon, medieval and early post-medieval pottery in the Oxford Region', *Oxoniensia*, **59**, 17–217

APPENDIX 1: Pottery Table

		<i>OXY</i>		<i>OXAM</i>		<i>OXDR</i>		<i>WHEW</i>	
<i>Cut</i>	<i>Deposit</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Wt</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Wt</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Wt</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Wt</i>
	U/S							1	1
1	50					1	5		
2	53	2	9	1	16				
	Total	2	9	1	16	1	5	1	1

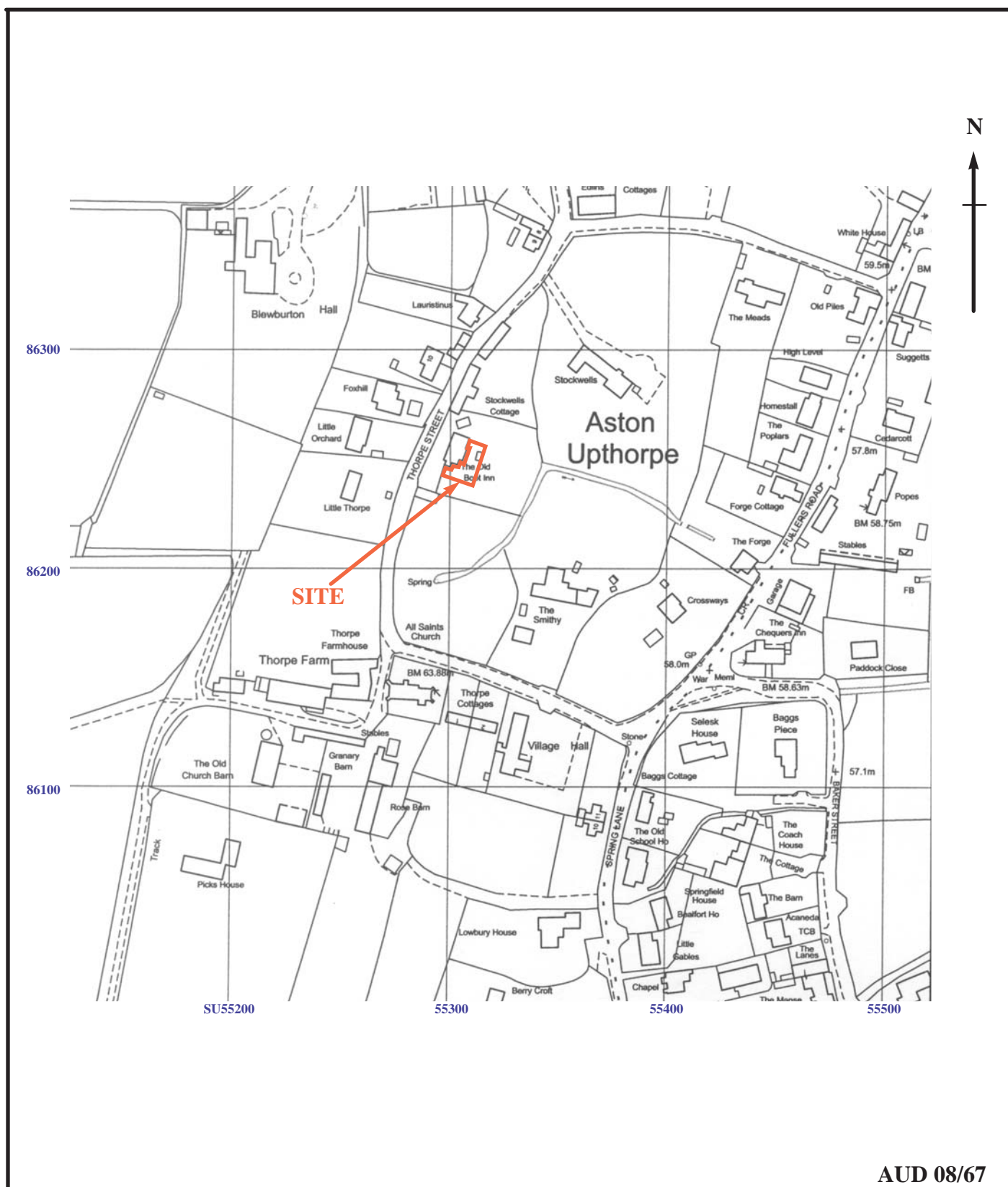


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Figure 1. Location of site within Aston Upthorpe and Oxfordshire.

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Figure 2. Detailed location of site on Thorpe Street.

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Figure 3. Areas observed, with depths of footings.

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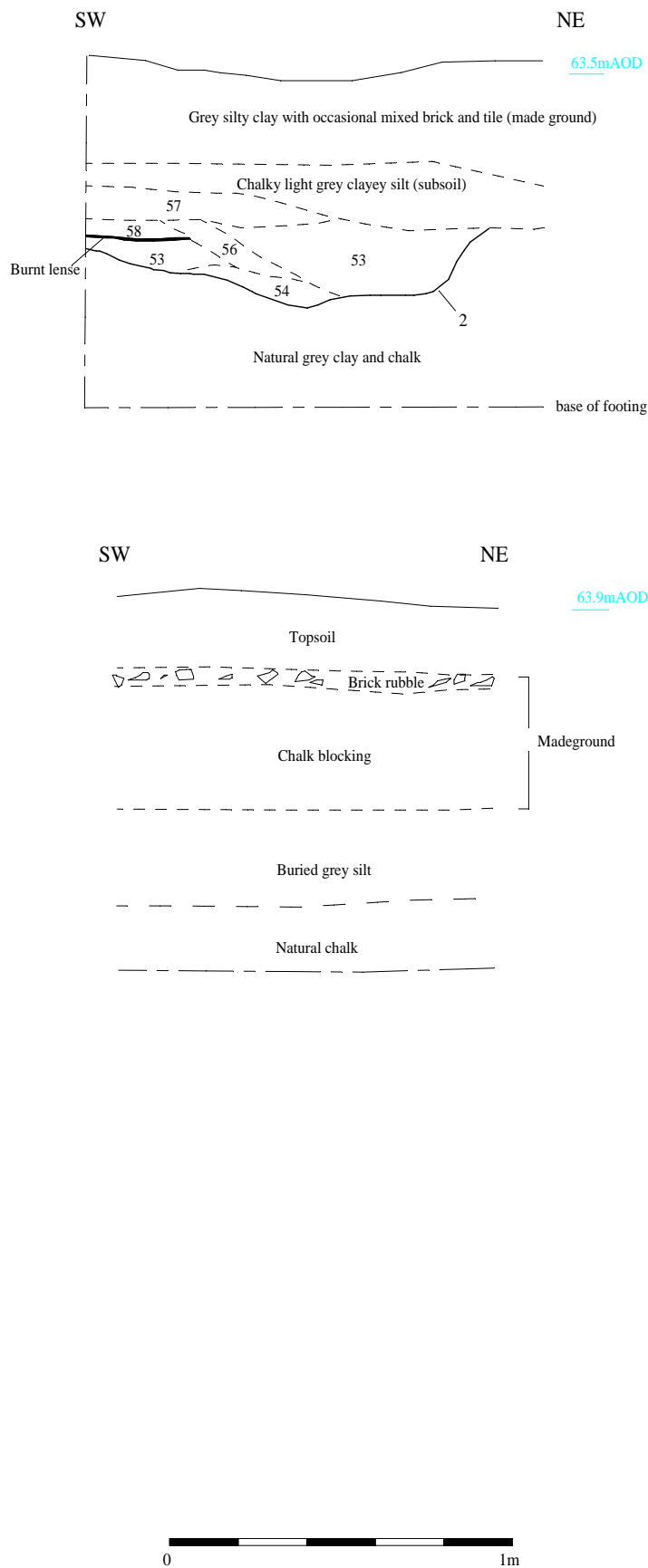


Figure 4. Sections.



Plate 1. General rear footings for extension and patio, looking south.



Plate 2. Pit 2, looking west-northwest, scale 0.5m.