

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

ARCHAEOLOGICAL

S E R V I C E S

**Former Scout Hut, St Georges Road,
Wallingford, Oxfordshire**

Archaeological Watching Brief

by Andrew Mundin

Site Code: SGW10/108

(SU 60425 89675)

**Former Scout Hut, St Georges Road,
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An Archaeological Watching Brief

For R&R Developments

by Andrew Muddin

Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

SiteCodeSGW10/108

November 2010

Summary

Site name: Former Scout Hut, St Georges Road, Wallingford, Oxfordshire

Grid reference: SU 60425 89675

Site activity: Watching Brief

Date and duration of project: 8th–18th October 2010

Project manager: Steve Ford and Andrew Munding

Site supervisor: Andy Taylor, Andrew Munding, Jacqueline Pitt

Site code: SGW 10/108

Area of site: c.350 sq m

Summary of results: The site lies immediately outside the earthwork rampart of the medieval town ditch on its western side (SAM OX234) next to the open area known as Bull Croft. This ditch is thought to follow the defences of the ‘*burh*’, dating from the 9th century, at which time Wallingford was part of a network of defended towns within the Thames Valley. An edge of an original cut for this ditch was identified on the site, within the east side of both of the new footings, under separately identified layers of made ground. This places it 2–2.5m west of the extant west edge of the town ditch. The ditch seen here cannot be dated, but its partial filling along this west side may be relatively recent.

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

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Report edited/checked by: Steve Ford✓ 19.11.10 Steve Preston✓ 19.11.10

Former Scout Hut, St Georges Road, Wallingford, Oxfordshire An Archaeological Watching Brief

by Andrew Muddin

Report 10/108

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out at a former Scout Hut, St Georges Road, Wallingford, Oxfordshire (SU 60425 89675) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Rod Rockall of R&R Developments, 6 Silver Street, Tetsworth, Thame, Oxfordshire, OX9 7AR.

Planning consent has been granted by South Oxfordshire District Council for the demolition of the Scout Hut and for the construction of two 2-storey dwellings on the site (P10/W1050). This consent is subject to a condition (4) relating to archaeology which requires a watching brief to be carried out during groundworks, due to proximity to the Scheduled earthwork (OX 234) of Wallingford's medieval defences at the Bull Croft.

This is in accordance with the Department for Communities and Local Government's Planning Policy Statement, *Planning for the Historic Environment* (PPS5 2010), and the District Council's policies on archaeology. The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Mr Richard Oram and based on a brief prepared by him (Oram 2010). The fieldwork took the form of a topographic profile of the site by Andy Taylor, with assistance from Steve Crabb on the 8th October 2010 and the watching brief element was undertaken by Andrew Muddin and Jacqueline Pitt, between 14th–18th October 2010. The site code is SGW 10/108. The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited at Oxfordshire County Museum Service in due course.

Location, topography and geology

The site is located within the north-western part of the modern town centre (Fig. 1). The historic centre is directly to the east and south-east, with the defensive earthwork for the town noted to partly enclose Bull Croft Park on the eastern boundary of the site (Fig. 2). The north-south aligned St Georges Road marks the western boundary of the site and a single line of housing is present to the north and south of the site between the road and the earthwork. An access point to the Bull Croft Park is at its northern end and the Park itself lies behind the earthwork, within the north-western part of the town's Scheduled Ancient Monument. Terrace Gravel deposits are the underlying geology (BGS 1980). The dilapidated Scout Hut had been demolished before the first site visit and part of the concrete slab it stood on has been broken up in the areas where new footings are to be dug. The

western side (road side) of the site is at c.49m above Ordnance Datum, though the topsoil underlying the slab sloped gradually down across the site to the east towards the dip of the earthwork.

Archaeological background

A wealth of archaeological information is available for Wallingford. An outline of the archaeology immediately associated with this site has been noted by the brief prepared by Oxfordshire County Archaeological Service (Oram 2010) and the broader background has recently been summarized (Keats-Rohan and Roffe 2009). Wallingford first appears in history in AD895, as *Welingaforde*, and derives from the elements *Wealh* (a name), *-inga* (family, or followers of) and *-ford*, meaning ‘the ford of Wealh’s people’ (Mills 1998, 362). Nothing more is known of Wealh. The town came to prominence under King Alfred, who designated it one of his *burhs*, or ‘fortified places’ designed for defence against the Danes. In a document known as the Burghal Hidage (c. AD919), Wallingford is the largest of the *burhs* after the capital Winchester (Blair 1970, 295), with an ‘*allotment of 2400 hydes*’. The defensive earthworks that still surround the town were erected under Alfred in the late 9th century and it is probable that the rectilinear street pattern will have been laid out at this time (although later modified).

The eastern boundary of the site rests on the western edge of the extant earthwork, of what is thought to be the Saxon and Medieval town wall and ditch (Scheduled Ancient Monument OX234). It has been noted previously that an original ditch existed under the position of the upstanding earthwork (Oram 2010) suggesting the existing ditch is a later redefinition of this probable town ditch (R. Oram, pers. comm.). In two sites where archaeological works have occurred on development plots on the immediate exterior of the existing earthwork, a ditch just outside the medieval earthwork has been noted (Jenkins and Wallis 2004; Ford 2004: Fig.3), but in neither case was convincing dating evidence available for this (presumably earlier) ditch.

Numerous other sites have been investigated in or close to the historic core, usually on a small scale (Fig. 3). Medieval evidence is almost ubiquitous, but other than an early Saxon cemetery (Leeds 1938), Saxon and earlier remains within the town have so far been elusive (Airs *et al*, 1974; Muddin, 2008; Preston, forthcoming). At the time of Domesday Book in AD1086, the town is recorded as *Walingeford* and it was a royal holding in Berkshire, and easily the most important place in that county. Nearly 500 houses or land plots are enumerated, and four priests (implying four churches and four parishes, as was also the case later), which allows a population of between two and three thousand people to be estimated (Nash Ford 2003; Williams and Martin 2002, 135–6).

Objectives and methodology

The purpose of the watching brief was to excavate and record any archaeological deposits affected by the works. This involved examination of extensive intrusive groundworks, which in this case involved the observation of foundation trenches. The purpose of the topographic survey was to establish a site profile of the existing earthwork, before groundworks commenced.

Results

Topographic survey

After demolition of the existing Scout Hut, and part of the concrete slab base removed, a profile of the existing earthwork on the eastern side of the site was carried out. This found that the base of the earthwork is 2.21m below the level of St Georges Road. The condition of the earthwork seemed to be good, with only the very top on its western side (exterior facing) potentially damaged from the previous construction of the slab's footing (Figs 4 and 5; Pl. 1). The inner bank rises some 4m above the present base of the ditch.

Footings

Southern footing

The southern plot footing excavation was viewed first (Pl. 2). This established the stratigraphic sequence from east-west across the site (Fig. 5, upper). The southern trench section found that under the concrete slab, a rooty, dark brown topsoil existed at a depth of 0.36m. This also covered the top of the earthwork. This overlay a layer of made ground (61) which was undatable and extended to a depth of 0.56m in the west and 0.86m in the east. This was grey brown and contained more clay to the east (Fig. 5). At the base of this layer, cut (2) was seen. This is thought to be a pit cut 0.54m below the existing ground level to a depth of c. 1m.

Pit 2 contained three fills (Pl. 3, Fig. 5). The upper fill of this feature was moderately compacted light grey brown gravelly clayey silt. It contained no finds and extended over the upper part of this feature. The secondary deposit (54) was a moderately compact, light grey clayey silt. The primary deposit (55) was a dark brown clayey silt with occasional rounded gravel inclusions. None of the fills contained datable material but this feature was seen to cut the western edge of cut 1 and deposit 59.

Two more layers of made ground (60 and 59) were noted to exist above the firm chalky silt clay (58) though it is unclear if this is the natural geology. These layers were only visible on the western side of the site, and were undated. Deposit (59) was an orange brown gravelly clayey silt. Above this deposit was layer 60 was a

friable, grey white clayey silt, which contained occasional rounded gravel. This is thought to be a redepositing of lower material, similar to 58.

Cut 1 seems to represent the western edge of a large ditch, presumably reflecting that associated with the extant earthwork. Its western edge was present 2.2m west of the current earthwork's western slope, extending the entire length of the eastern side of both footings. The top of the feature was seen at depth of 1.26m below ground level. Three fills were exposed associated with this feature (from the top down: 51, 50 and 52). Layer 51 was a yellow brown silt with frequent gravel inclusions. It contained no finds. Under this fill was a firm grey silty clay (50). This fill contained one sherd of pottery, which appears to be modern. It is possibly an intrusive find introduced during digging of the footing trench. Alternatively, this and the overlying layers were only formed in modern times, perhaps due to partial backfilling of the ditch to permit the construction of the scout hut. The lowest investigated deposit was 52, a firm grey clay. No finds were uncovered from this fill, and only a small area of this fill was exposed in a test pit within the foundation trench (Figs 4 and 5).

Northern footing

The northern plot footings revealed an essentially similar stratigraphic sequence (Fig. 5, lower), with several made ground layers sloping down towards the east. Here, only the topmost 0.23m of ditch fills were exposed, 1.4m below the modern ground surface. Fills 56 and 57 probably correspond to 51 and 50 in the southern footing. Here, as before, three layers of made ground were identified. The upper made ground deposit (62), below topsoil, is similar in colour and character to layer 61 seen in the southern footing. This extended to a depth of 0.26m. Below this was layer 63, a light orange brown clayey silt, which was 0.5m thick. Over the top of ditch 1, was the lowest layer of made ground (64), which was a orange brown clayey sand, similar to layer 59, but with less gravel. These layers were present though out the east to west section of this footing, and were wholly undated. The two layers identified here of ditch 1, were also undated.

Other groundworks

Further groundwork involved the digging of decking footing pads within the base of the earthwork. These did not impact to any great depth (no greater than 0.5m) and would be too small (0.75m by 0.75m) to glean any further information about the earthwork.

Finds

Pottery by Paul Blinkhorn

A single sherd of pottery weighing 17g occurred in context [50]. It is heavily burnt, and appears to be modern. It is a fragment of a refined red earthenware bowl with moulded decoration, probably from a planter or similar horticultural vessel.

Conclusion

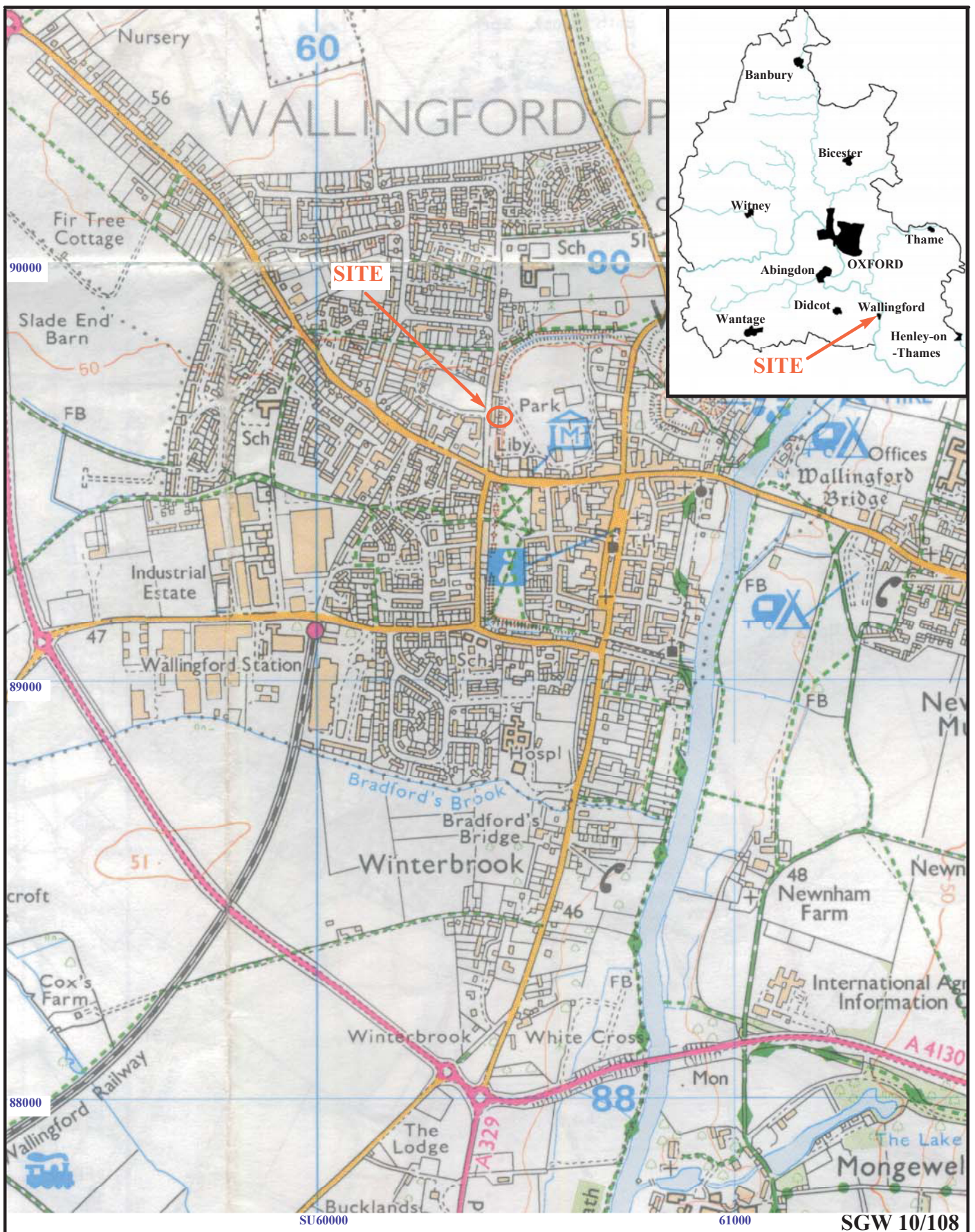
Two recent archaeological observations carried out adjacent to the *burh* defences towards the south of the town had observed an additional, smaller ditch outside the extant earthwork ditch (Jenkins and Wallis 2004; Ford 2004). It is possible that cut 1 here also reflects the presence of this additional ditch. However, this cannot be confirmed, and it is more plausible that cut 1 represents the original *burh* earthwork ditch. Little dating evidence was obtained and there is a suggestion that the upper fills of cut 1 are of fairly modern date.

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APPENDIX 1: Context details

<i>Cut</i>	<i>Deposit</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Dating evidence</i>
1 (south)	50, 51, 52	Ditch fill	Modern?	Pottery (?intrusive)
2	53, 54, 55	Pit fill	Undated	-
1 (north)	56, 57	Ditch fill	Undated	-
	58	Natural?	-	-
	59	Made ground	Undated	-
	60	Made ground	Undated	-
	61	Made ground	Undated	-
	62	Made ground	Undated	-
	63	Made ground	Undated	-
	64	Made ground	Undated	-
	65	Natural?	-	-



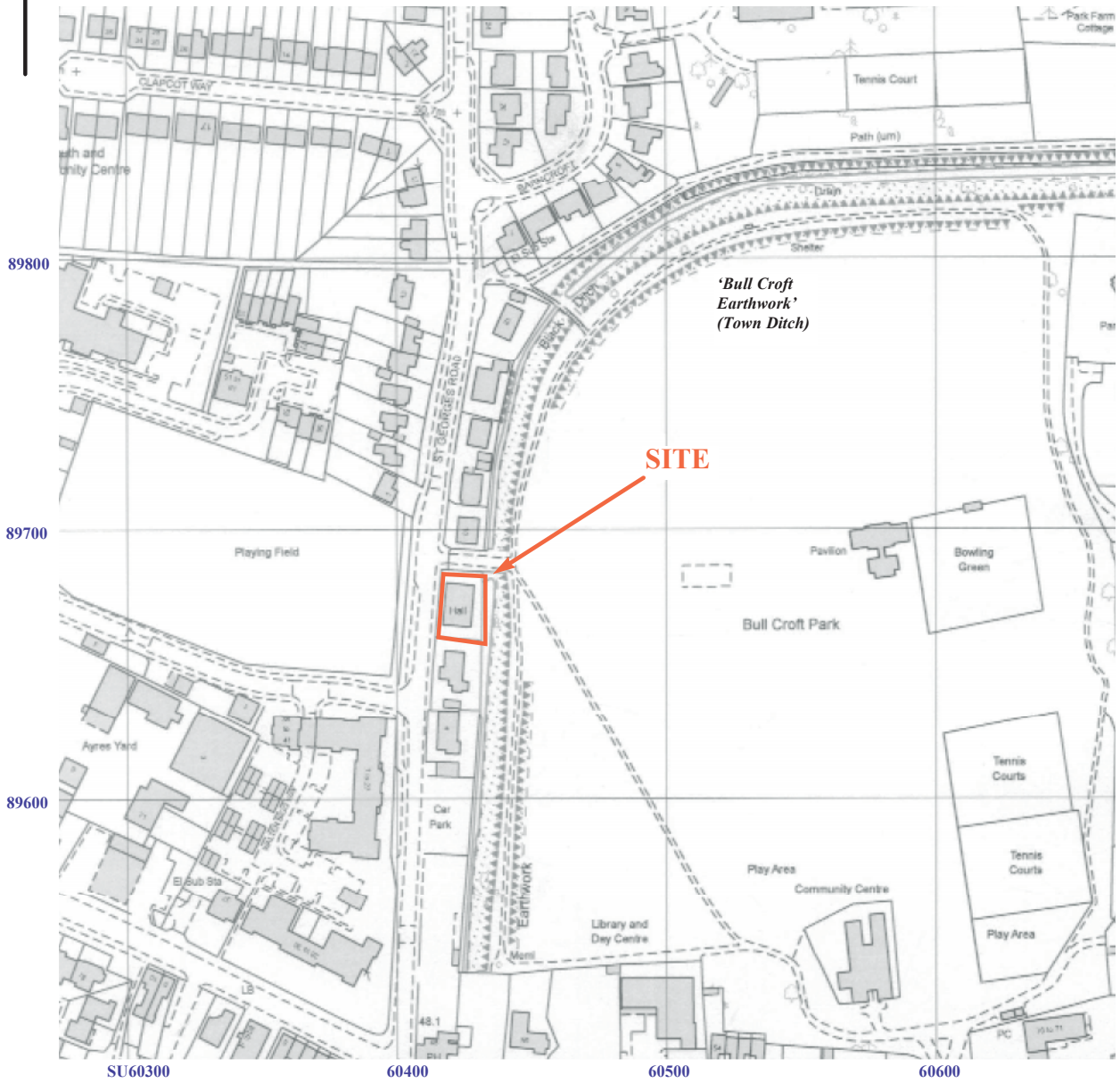
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Archaeological Watching Brief**

Figure 1. Location of site within Wallingford and Oxfordshire.

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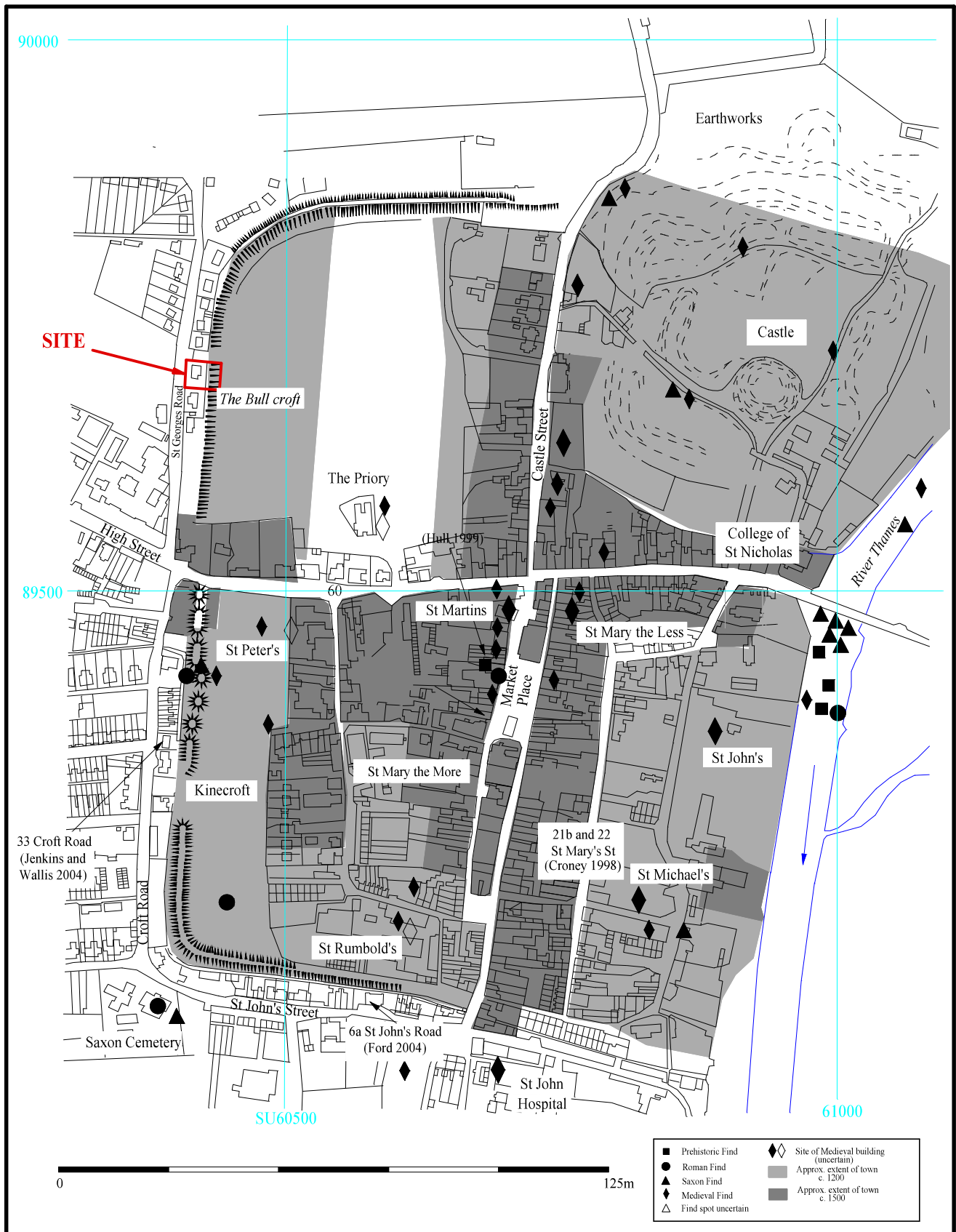
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Archaeological Watching Brief**

Figure 2. Detailed location of site off St Georges Road.

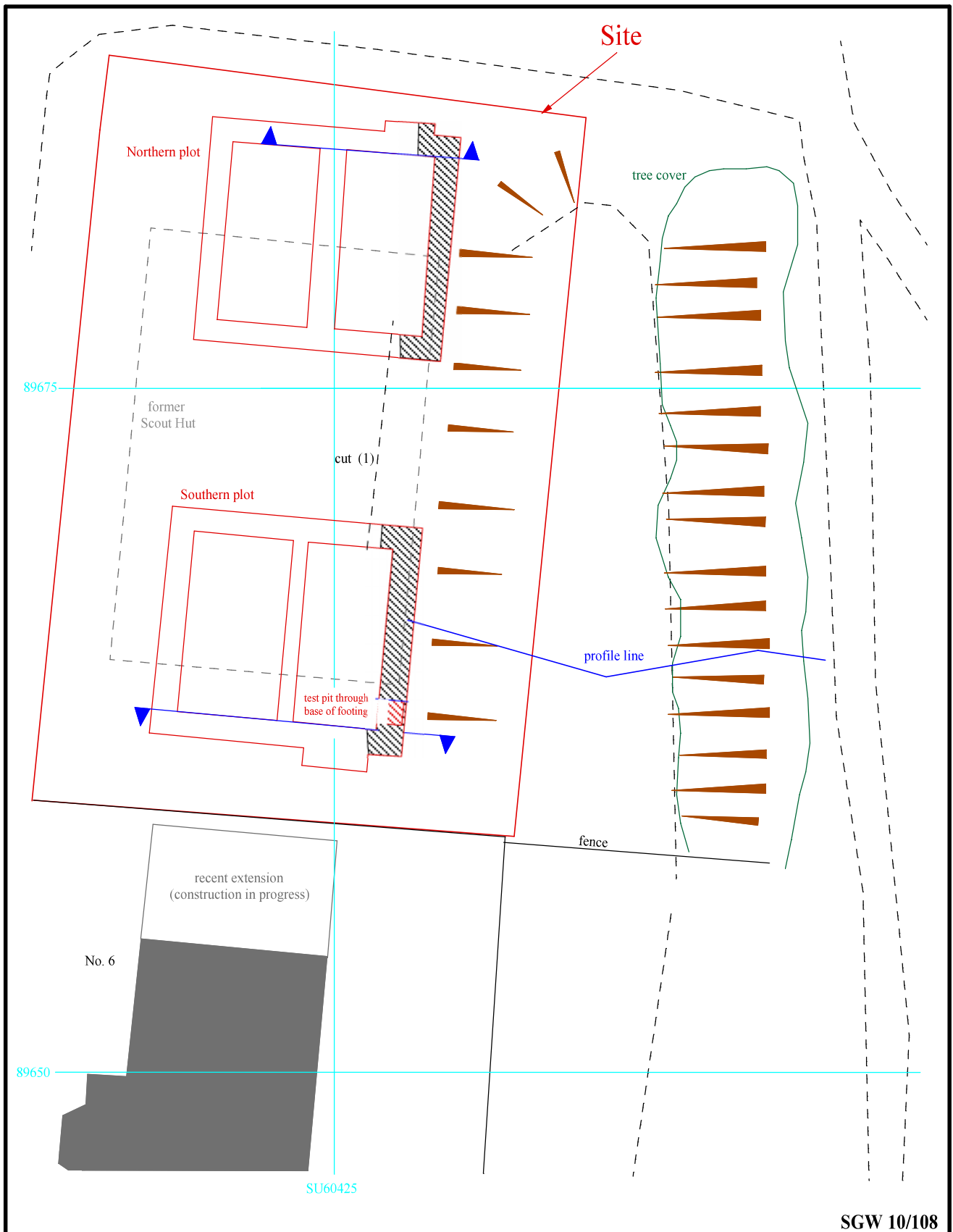
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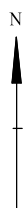


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Archaeological Watching Brief**

Figure 3. Location of site relative to archaeological finds within the town (after Airs et al, 1975, with additions)



SGW 10/108

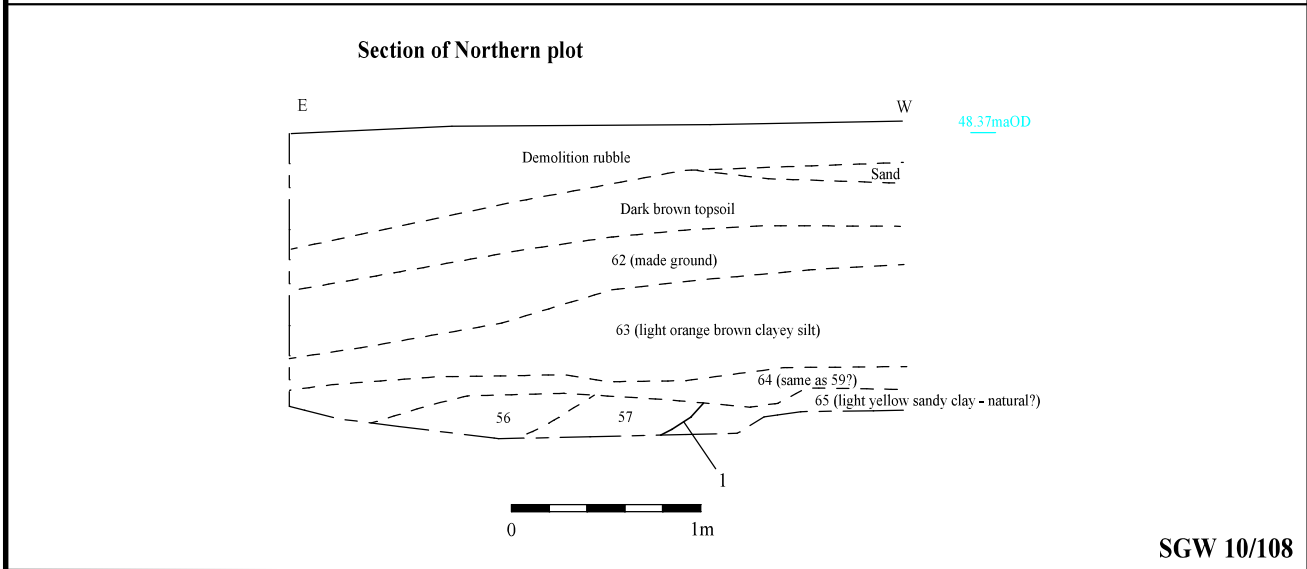
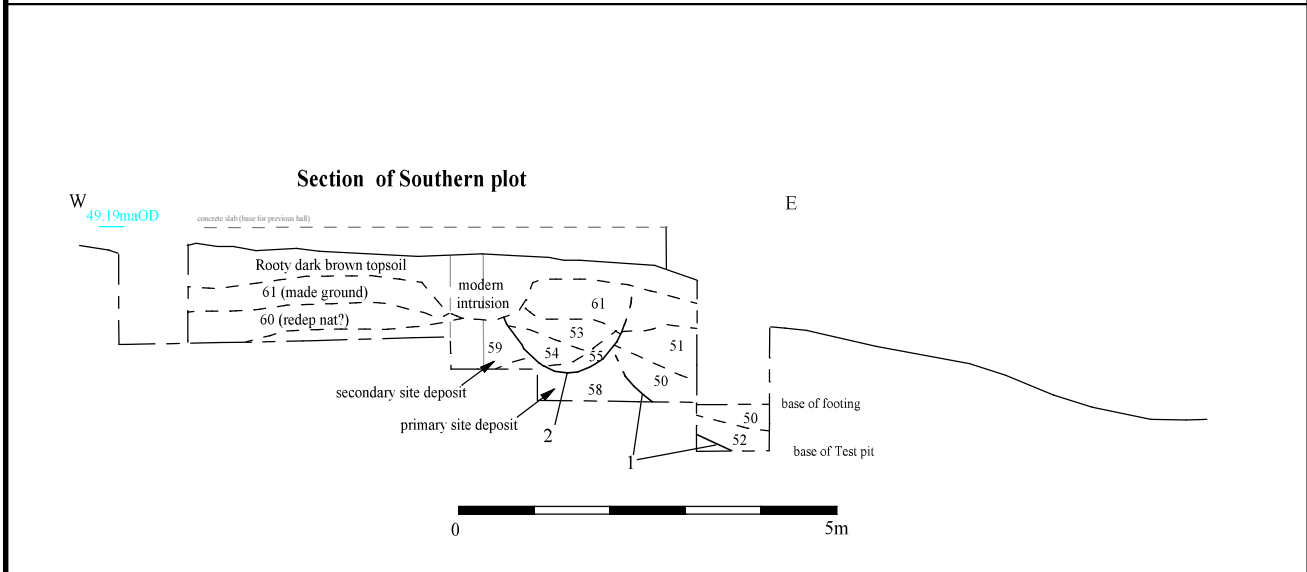
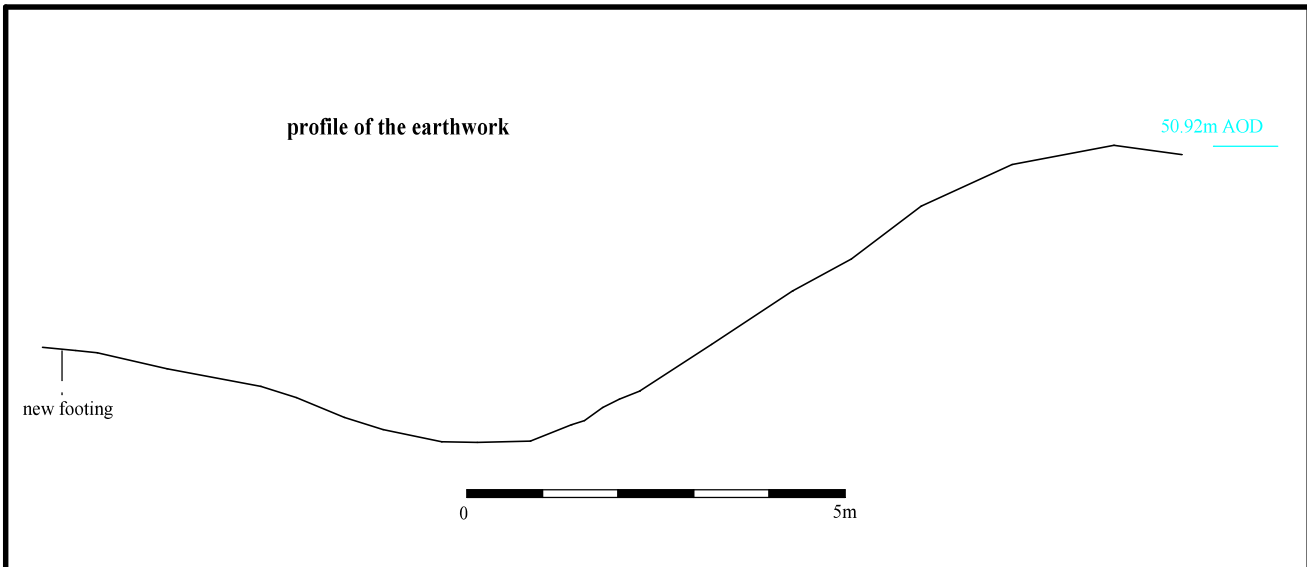


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Archaeological Watching Brief**

Figure 3. Location of areas observed during watching brief.



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Archaeological Watching Brief**

Figure 5. Sections and profile.





Plate 1. General view down existing earthwork ditch, looking south



Plate 2. Footing trenches for southern plot, looking south east.

SGW 10/108

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Archaeological Watching Brief**

Plates 1 and 2.

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Plate 3. Southern plot section, cut 1 with pit cut? 2, looking north, scale 1m.



Plate 4. Northern plot section, cut 1, looking south, scales: 2m and 1m.

SGW 10/108

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Archaeological Watching Brief

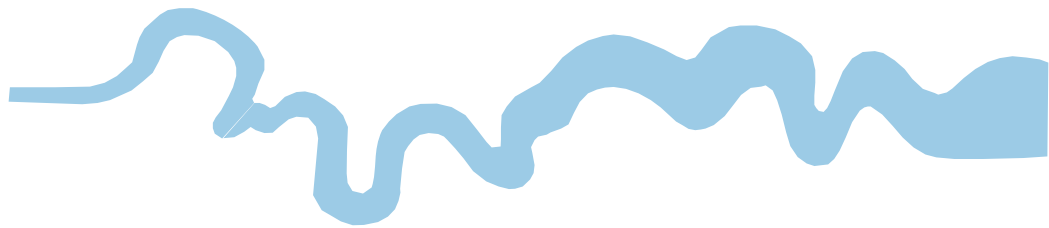
Plates 3 and 4

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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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