

**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF  
ON THE DEVELOPMENT WORK AT  
WATTS GALLERY HOPE PROJECT, COMPTON, SURREY**



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**Summary**

*An archaeological watching brief was undertaken by the Surrey County Archaeological Unit (SCAU) on the Watts Gallery site in Compton Surrey, due to the proximity of the gallery to a nearby Roman Villa, north of Limmerslease, G.F.Watts' home, and historical Compton village. A significant amount of re-development was conducted, with stripping of the northern and western car parks, as well as a system of new drainage located around the gallery building and stretching across the site. The vast amount of excavated trenches revealed no features of archaeological significance and only a few finds of medieval or earlier date. Debris from the former 20<sup>th</sup> century kiln producing pottery and other objects was found, and is of some interest in relationship to objects held by Watts gallery.*

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Client	Watts Gallery, Down Lane, Compton, Surrey
Project Code	HMCA084Y
Site Code	WGC10



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## 1. Introduction

1.1 Planning permission has been granted by Guildford Borough Council for the development of Watts Gallery, Compton, Surrey as part of the Watts Gallery Hope Project.

1.2 The planning permission (GU07/P/02254 & 02255) was subject to a condition (no.4) requiring that:

*‘Prior to the commencement of development, a written scheme of investigation shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. No development shall take place until the applicant has secured the implementation of a programme of archaeological work in accordance with the written scheme of investigation. The development shall only take place in accordance with the detailed scheme approved pursuant to this condition. The archaeological works shall be carried out by a suitably qualified investigating body approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.’*

Reason: To allow adequate archaeological investigation before any archaeological remains are disturbed by the approved development. In accordance with the following policy number(s), ES5 of the Surrey Structure Plan 2004 (as saved by CLG Direction 21/09/07).”

1.3 Mills Whipp Projects, on behalf of the Watts Gallery Hope Project, commissioned the Surrey County Archaeological Unit (SCAU) to undertake the required archaeological work. Mills Whipp Projects produced a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) for undertaking the fieldwork in response to the planning condition. This was approved by Guildford Borough Council by letter dated 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2008 (their ref: TH/33/-7/26).

1.4 A controlled watching brief was conducted by the Surrey County Archaeological Unit (SCAU) between 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2009 and 1<sup>st</sup> February 2011 on the site of the planned development (fig 1).

## 2. Site Background

2.1 An account of the archaeological and historical background of the Watts Gallery site was presented in both the Archaeological Desktop Assessment and Written Scheme of Investigation (both by Mills Whipp Projects Ltd. 2007 and 2008). A summary of these reports is outlined below.

2.2 Prehistoric activity (notably through an assortment of Iron Age finds) in the area was highlighted during the 1931 construction of the A3 by-pass, however it cannot be determined if there was any focus for activity within the Watts Gallery site itself.

2.3 Within the grounds of G.F. Watts’ home, Limnerlease, are the remains of a Roman Villa, which was excavated in 1914 and is dated from the 2<sup>nd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> century

AD. As well as this various other Roman finds have been recorded in the vicinity of Watts Gallery, suggesting an active Roman agricultural landscape.

2.4 No HER Saxon entries exist within the study area, but St Nicholas's Church in Compton certainly dates to this period. It is thought the Watts Gallery site was an area of pasture or agricultural land during this period.

2.5 Compton is mentioned in Domesday and it is likely that Down Lane, running northeast to southwest to the east of the Watts Gallery site, has medieval or possibly Saxon origins.

2.6 Watts Gallery and the Old Kiln are themselves important sites within a local historical context.

### **3. Watching Brief Methodology**

3.1 An archaeological watching brief, comprising some 40 visits, was undertaken by staff of Surrey County Archaeological Unit on varying dates between 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2009 and 1<sup>st</sup> February 2011 on the groundworks associated with the redevelopment of Watts Gallery in Compton, Surrey.

3.2 The redevelopment of the site of Watts Gallery, Compton, involved several stages of groundwork. Site visits were made in liaison with the developer and the on-site contractors in order to monitor the various stages of the groundwork, and to identify any features or finds of archaeological interest. The principal stages are listed below:

- Observation of land stripping in the northern car park
- Observation of associated service trenches in northern car park
- Observation of all trenches excavated for the purpose of service provision during the redevelopment of the western car parking area.
- Observation of new foul water drainage trench running parallel with the Old Kiln.
- Observation of excavation of large pit required for installation of the Klargester sewage treatment tank and associated soakaway.
- Observation of any excavation required for additional soakaways and service trenches in proximity of the main gallery building (the observation exercise for this required only strategic watching, e.g if one trench was observed and proved negative, any adjacent ones would not be watched).
- Observation of foundation excavation for electrical substation.

### **4. Results**

4.1 The results of the watching brief on the various stages of the groundworks are summarised below.

4.2 Stripping of northern car park (fig 2)

Stripping was observed, showing minimal topsoil cover with sterile sand (natural) of varying hue below. Nothing of archaeological interest was observed.

#### 4.3 Service trenches in northern car park

All viewed with similar results as the stripped area, minimal topsoil and sterile orange/yellow sand. Nothing of archaeological interest was observed.

#### 4.4 Service trenches - western car park (fig 2)

- The first service trench was excavated mechanically, in the western car park redevelopment using a 360° excavator with toothless bucket. It ran east to west and was approximately 18.0m long, 0.60m wide and 0.80m deep. Nothing of archaeological interest was observed.
- The second service trench was excavated mechanically in the north end of the western car park redevelopment (fig 7). It ran east to west, and was 18.0m long, 0.60m wide and 0.80m deep. Nothing of archaeological interest observed.
- Service trench three was excavated mechanically and runs parallel with trench two. It was on the same orientation, but slightly smaller in dimensions, being 17.6m long, 0.60m wide and 75cm in depth. No features of archaeological interest observed, but one piece of calcined flint was recovered. Due to the site being occupied by a once working kiln, vast amounts of broken pottery litter the site and were all identified as modern. One piece of Roman greyware was recovered and was not associated with a feature, so would appear to be residual.
- The fourth service trench was excavated diagonally across the western car park on a northeast/southwest orientation, from the electricity substation. The excavation method was the same as the previous three and it was 22.3m long, 0.60m wide and 0.70m in depth. Nothing of archaeological interest observed.
- A very crude, possible Bronze Age, scraper was picked up from the trackway during the duration of the Watching Brief within the western car park redevelopment. However, the trackway itself was made up of numerous flint nodules which could possibly have been brought in from elsewhere.

#### 4.5 Long drainage trench, the Old Kiln.

This drainage trench (fig 2 and fig 8) began in close proximity to the main entrance of Watts Gallery, running from east to west along the service road, parallel with Sandy Lane. Sporadic use of mechanical excavation was permitted, but due to tree conservation and overhead power lines, most excavation was conducted by hand. Approx 20.0m of trench was excavated, before revealing service pipes, that had not been recorded on any current plans. As a result, the drainage trench had to be back filled, realigned and excavated to greater depth. Due to a complete lack of rooting, the existing road surface for the realigned trench was stripped using a 360° mini excavator. However all of the excavation below the road surface was still conducted manually. One clear feature was revealed in the western end of the trench, however this was certainly modern. Once investigated, a clear 'V' shaped cut could be seen in both trench sections, beginning just below the existing road surface. This was further corroborated by the general disarray of the fill and subsequent finds, which included some white china, brick and tile fragments and slate.

Approximately 9m from the southwest end of the trench, there was a distinct chalk layer beneath the road surface, which is most likely the remains of the original

roadway running along the southern edge of the kiln. Below this layer of chalk there was a distinct change to a yellow sand, almost devoid of any coarse material. It did however reveal one small sherd of Bronze Age calcined flint gritted courseware pottery, probably residual. Also recovered was a small piece of clay pipe of which the date is indeterminate. As well as this, a handful of calcined flints were recovered. Some other flint pieces were initially thought to be worked, but have since been confirmed as naturally occurring. There were no archaeological features.

#### 4.6 Klargester (sewage treatment tank) pit and soakaway

This large pit (fig 2 and fig 9) was excavated to the south-east of the entrance to Watt's gallery. The purpose of this was to insert a large Klargester sewage treatment tank and soakaway. Sheet pile shoring was driven around the perimeter of the proposed pit before any soil removal commenced, so as to prevent any possible collapse. Due to this and the fact that large sections of earth were removed in uneven spits, observation was difficult. The remainder of the Watching Brief was conducted checking the spoil for any possible finds, until the pit had reached such depths so as to be unworthy of further observation. No archaeological finds or features were observed.

#### 4.7 Soakaways and services trenches around gallery building and Old Kiln

Various service trenches and soakaways (fig 3) were watched for any potential archaeological features or finds.

4.7.1 A relatively modern culvert (fig 2 and fig 10) was unearthed while excavating the service trench to the north of the toilet block, located in the Old Kiln car park. It was approximately 1.7m wide and 1.15m deep, running north to south and appeared to run into the east corner of the kiln building. The service trench was 1.1m wide. Already broken through on arrival, the culvert appeared to have been backfilled at some point in the gallery site's history. The kiln was closed in 1956 and this would be a reasonable date as to when it was backfilled. Mainly consisting of a loose mix of rubble and clay, the fill also consisted of a number of ceramic pieces (fig 12) produced by the kiln, including a candle stick holder, an almost complete unglazed pot, two incomplete figurines, a pot lid and a fragment of a large terracotta bowl. This is further corroborated by the kiln stamp on the base of a cherub-like ornamental figurine, as well as confirmation from the Curator of Watts Gallery, who matched certain objects to similar pieces from the small museum located within the Old Kiln. Interestingly, three concrete bricks were recovered, one of which is inscribed with the word 'looking', while the other two are blank, apart from a curved design on the facing edge. The bricks are also numbered, indicating that they may have been used in sequence, perhaps to create a saying or sentence. Further investigation at the nearby Watts Chapel revealed a number of similar grave surrounds; these pieces may have been intended for a similar use, but, if so, the reason why they were dumped is unclear. Also found was an industrial sized ladle, whose use is uncertain. The largest find, which was left in the care of the gallery, was a terracotta statue base or column support, which has a design of three cherubs standing back to back with their arms raised, so as to support something above.

4.7.2 Further surface drainage and foul drainage trenches, around the gallery building itself were observed with no evidence of archaeology. The natural here varied from a pale grey to a rather vivid orange/yellow sand. Within the confines of the building it was noted that in places, the ground had been heavily disturbed, most notably in and around the basement area. Between the gallery and the new build in the centre of the site a large amount of sand was removed, creating a pit (fig 11) c.5m x 5m with an approximate depth of 1.2m, for the mass of drainage concentrated in that area. Again no archaeological finds were recovered and no archaeological features observed.

4.7.3 At the eastern edge of the building, the land levels differ greatly. Adjacent to the building is a field which is at least 2.0m higher than the foundation level of Watts Gallery. The initial strip was observed, but it was decided that further observation would not be required due to the fact that ground reduction had probably taken place on the eastern edge of Watts Gallery when it was originally constructed. Various modern drains were running parallel with and perpendicular to the gallery building, although the disturbance was relatively shallow and revealed a bright yellow/orange natural beneath. Further groundworks took place at the southeastern end of the building, around and through the sunken garden, but what was observed was very similar to the eastern edge of the building.

## **5. Summary, conclusion and recommendations**

5.1 The aim of the watching brief was to preserve archaeological deposits by record. This was achieved by observing and recording significant ground disturbance work.

5.2 The modern culvert unearthed in the western car park revealed a number of items that would have been, most probably, defective products from the Old Kiln or remnants from the closure of the kiln in 1956. Although of limited archaeological significance, such items may well be of interest to Watts Gallery and it is recommended that they should be consulted before any further action is taken in regard to the objects.

5.3 Overall the Watts Gallery site is devoid of any notable archaeology. No archaeological features were unearthed during the entire period of observation. Initially this would certainly support the suggestion that this site has been generally unoccupied, used only for its resources, whether woodland, pasture or agricultural land, throughout antiquity. The sherd of Roman Greyware, retrieved from service trench three, must be related to the nearby villa north of Linnerlease, but clearly does not suggest any significant level of activity. Only the sherd of Bronze Age pottery intimates any possible prehistoric activity within close proximity of the Watts Gallery site, but the absence of other finds or features mean its significance is uncertain. Such material is, however, easily degraded and is unlikely to have moved far from its original place of deposition. One crude, possible Bronze Age scraper was found on the track way near the northern car park, but could have been brought in from somewhere else entirely and should not be considered evidential. A few pieces of calcinated flint were recovered from site, but the low quantities and the fact that they were not excavated from archaeological features indicates that a suggestion of prehistoric origin would be purely speculation.

It would appear that the original geographic natural features were altered during the construction of Watts Gallery and the Old Kiln, essentially levelling the general gradient and in particular the eastern portion of the site. Little proof can be offered due to the lack of reliable topographical recording on the early Ornance Survey maps, but three maps (from 1871, 1895 and 1916, figs 4, 5 and 6 respectively) have been included in this report to show the stages of construction at the Watts Gallery site. These maps and the relatively sharp change in ground level witnessed during the Watching Brief would make this proposition very likely and therefore little archaeology would survive, had any been present.

The paucity of archaeological evidence may, then, be largely due to the extent of earlier disturbance of the site, but the very low level of residual ancient finds identified in such an extensive programme of observation can also be probably taken as an indication that it was never the location of intensive ancient activity.

5.4 The watching brief provided a thorough programme of observation and there are no recommendations for further archaeological work in relation to this development.

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## References

Poulton, R 2008 Watts Gallery Hope Project, Compton, Surrey: A Written Scheme of Investigation for the Conduct of an Archaeological Strip, Map and Sample Investigation and an Archaeological Watching Brief

Hutchinson, M 2008 Written Scheme of Investigation for Archaeological Excavation. Watts Gallery Hope Project



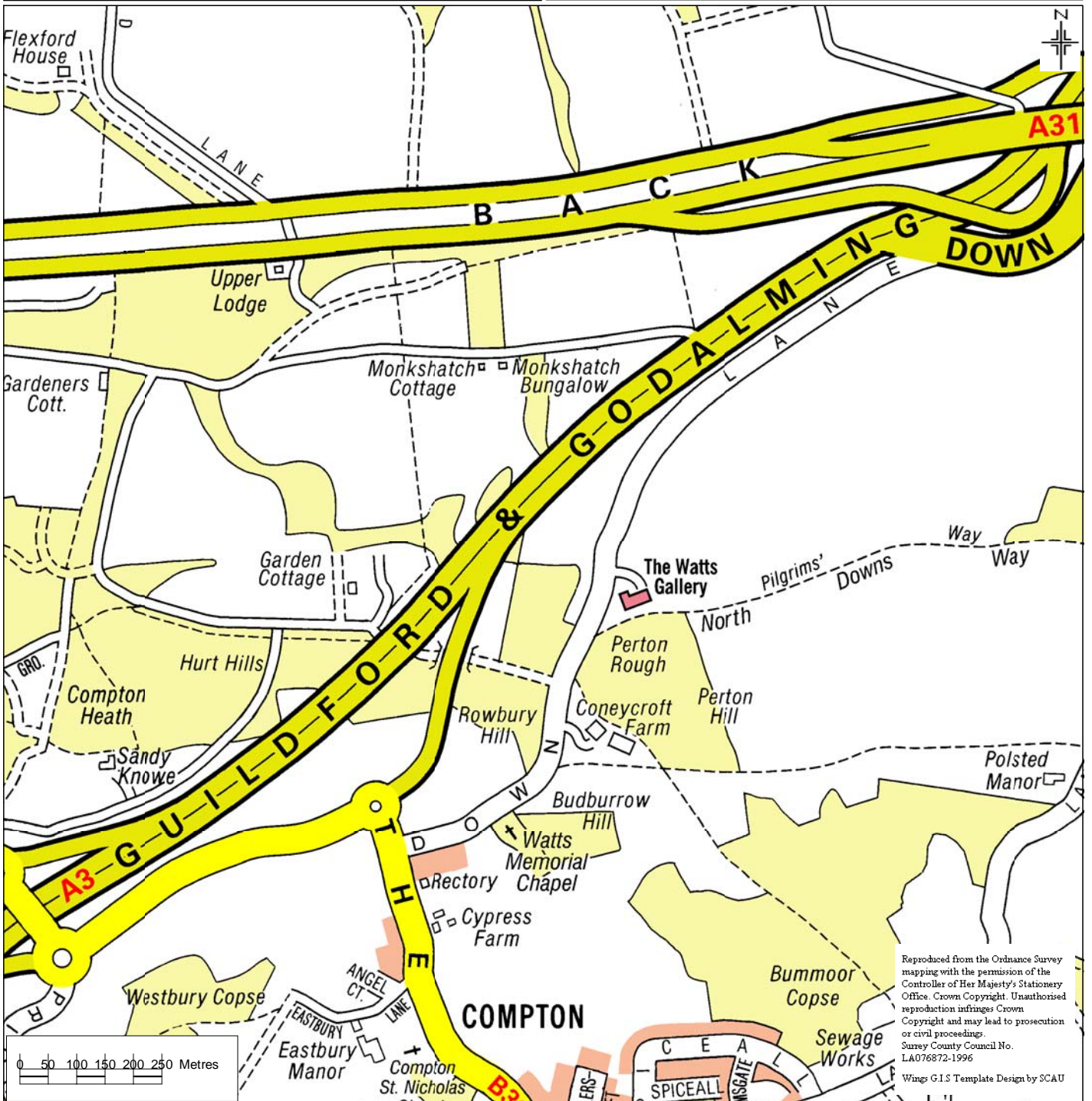
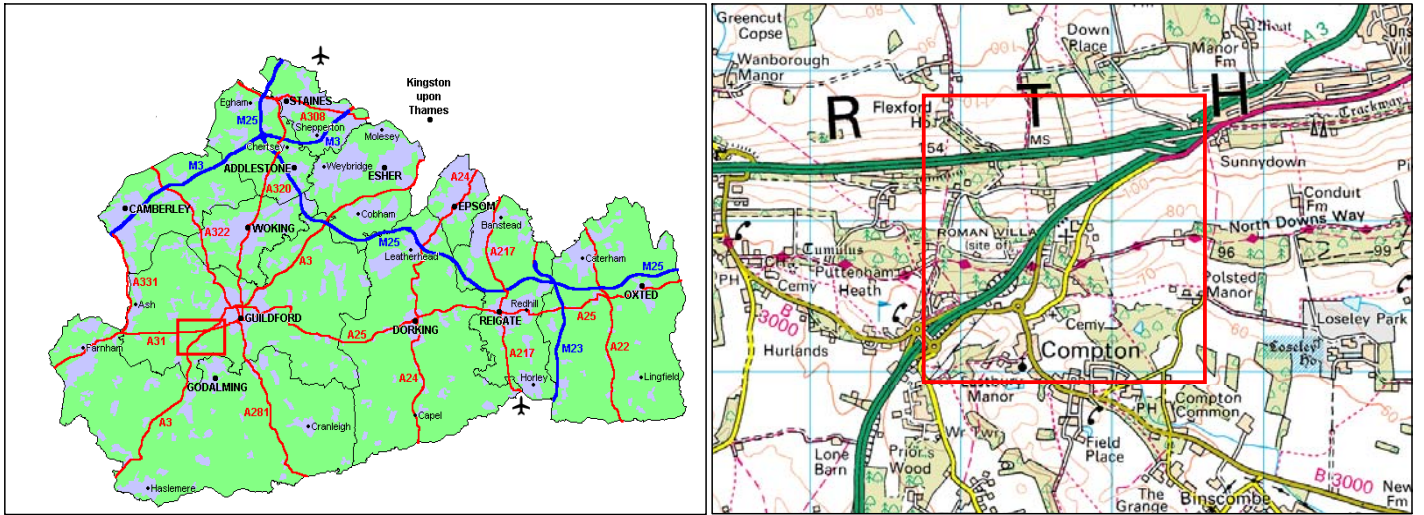


Fig 1 Watts Gallery: The Location of the Site

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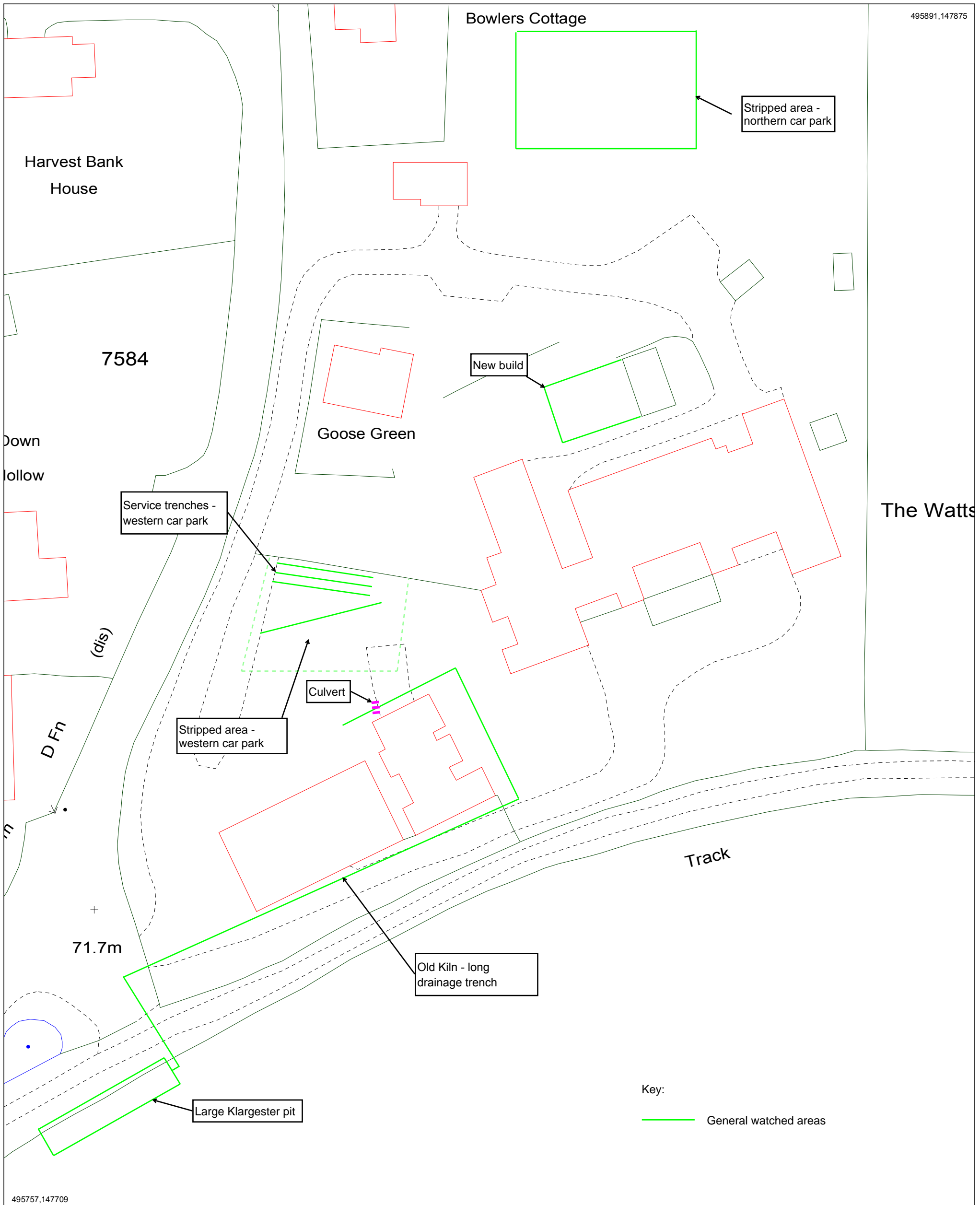


Fig 2 Plan of site showing watched service and drainage trenches, large Klargestester pit and position of new build

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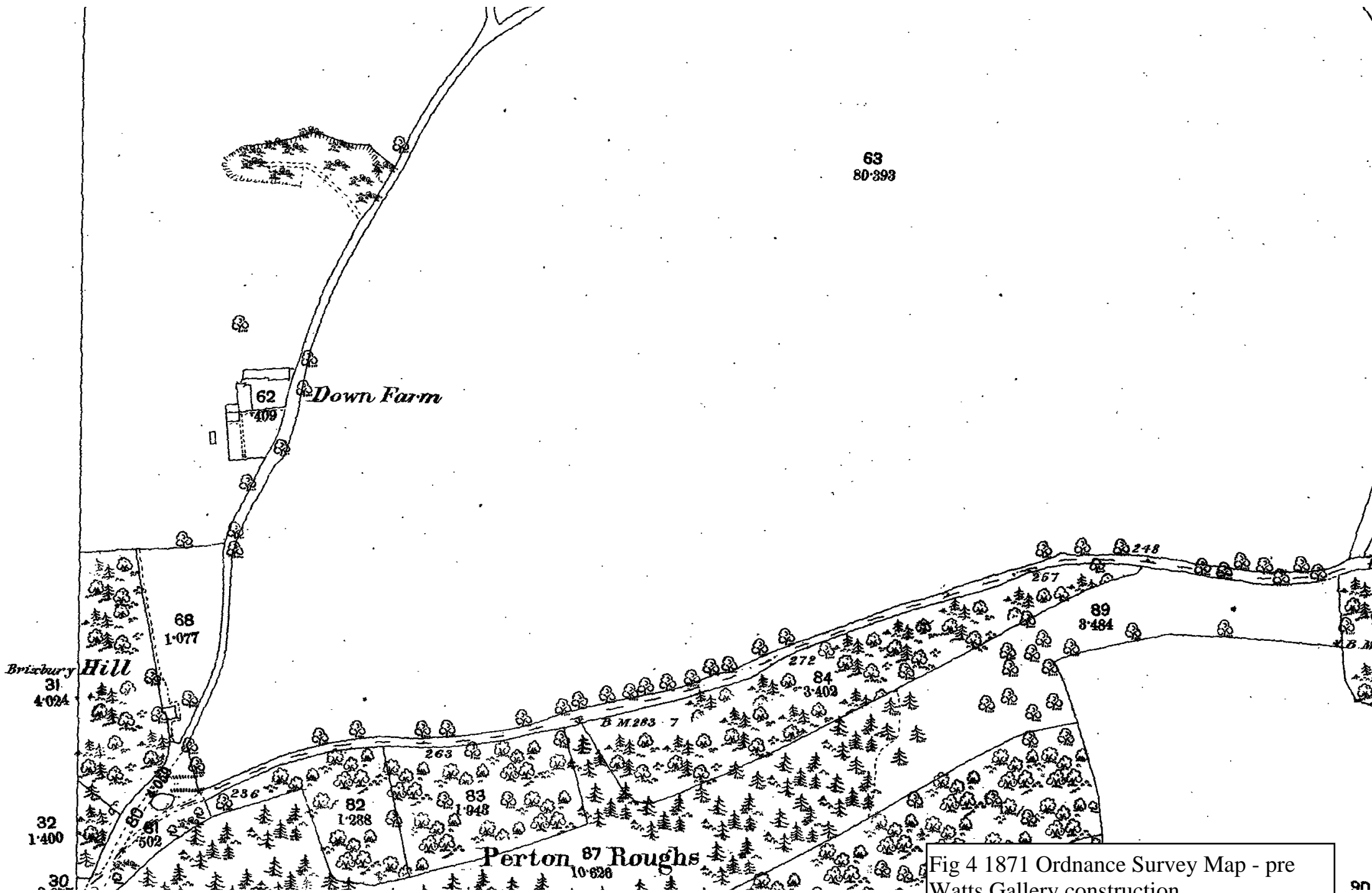


Fig 4 1871 Ordnance Survey Map - pre Watts Gallery construction

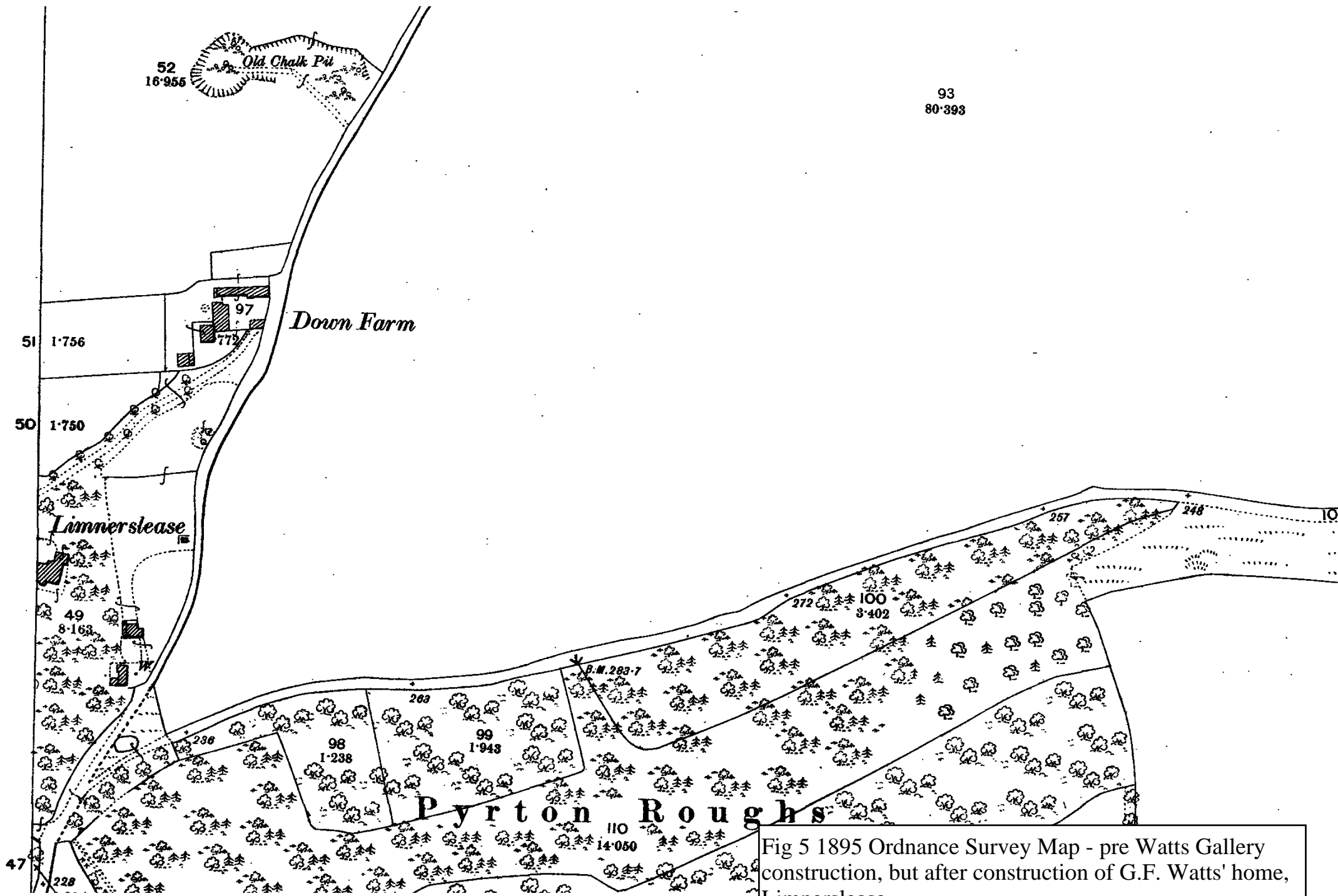


Fig 5 1895 Ordnance Survey Map - pre Watts Gallery construction, but after construction of G.F. Watts' home, Limnerslease

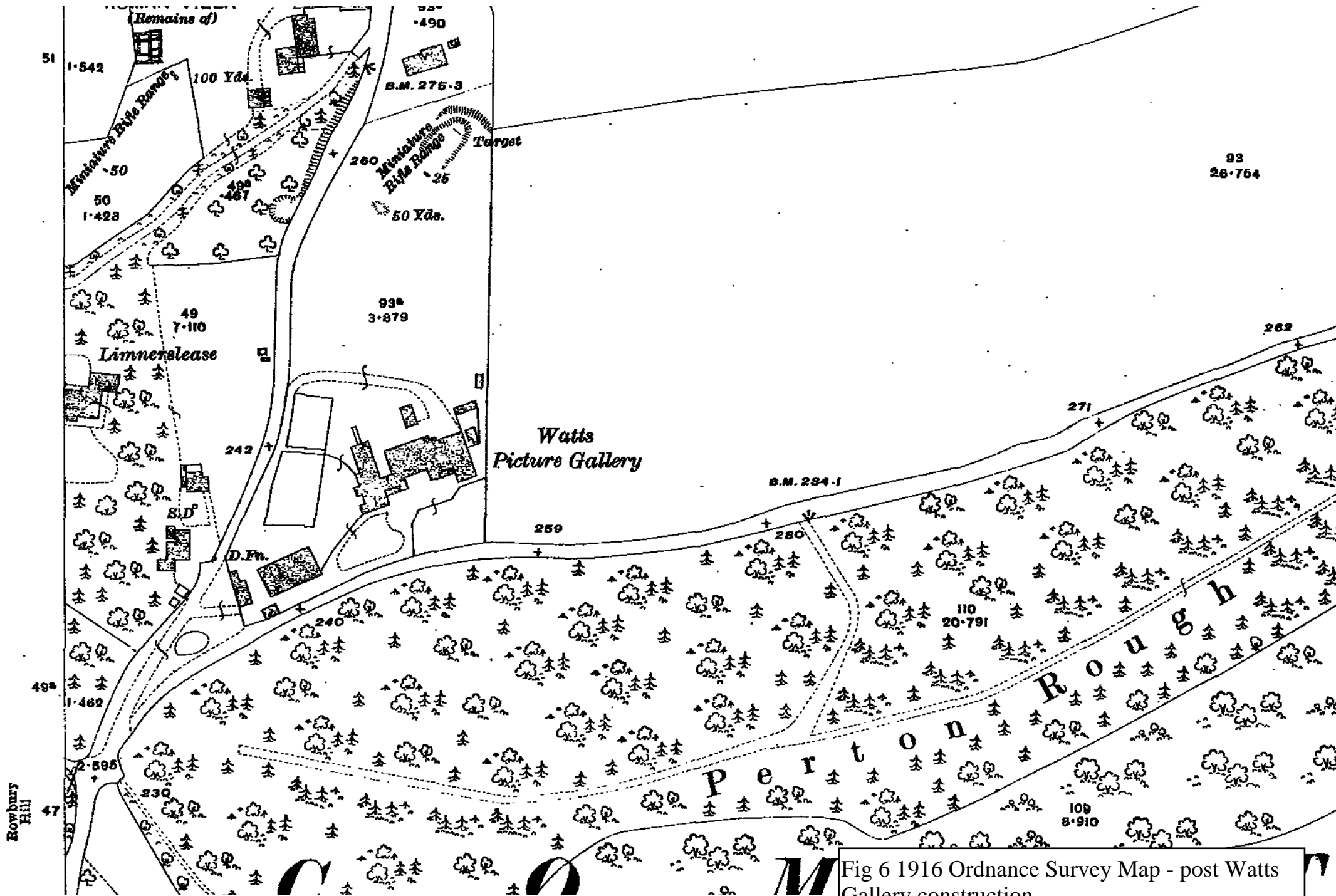


Fig 6 1916 Ordnance Survey Map - post Watts Gallery construction



Fig 7 Service trench three – western car park



Fig 8 Long drainage trench – Old Kiln



Fig 9 Klargester sewage pit



Fig 10 Culvert – western car park





Fig 11 Area between gallery building and new build



Fig 12 Various objects from culvert