



# **Chris Butler MIFA Archaeological Services**



**An Archaeological  
Watching Brief  
at the proposed  
Upper Lake Zebra Crossing,  
Battle,  
East Sussex**

**TQ 7507 1566**

**by  
Chris Butler**

**September 2008**

### ***Summary***

*An archaeological watching brief was carried out during the excavation of a number of trial trenches adjacent to the precinct wall at Battle Abbey to assess the archaeological impact of a proposed Zebra crossing at Upper Lake, Battle.*

*The watching brief involved the observation of two hand excavated trial trenches across the footpath adjacent to the Abbey precinct wall. It established that there had been substantial disturbance immediately below the current footpath as a result of the laying of previous footpaths. Below this was a relatively undisturbed layer containing artefacts dating from the 16<sup>th</sup> to mid 18<sup>th</sup> centuries.*

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## Contents

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Archaeological & Historical Background
- 3.0 Archaeological Methodology
- 4.0 Results
- 5.0 Finds
- 6.0 Discussion
- 7.0 Acknowledgements

### Figures:

- Fig. 1 Map of Battle showing location of Trial Trenches and HER data
- Fig. 2 Map of Battle showing the location of Events from the HER
- Fig. 3 Map showing the location of the trial trenches
- Fig. 4 Section drawings of Trial Trench 2
- Fig. 5 Trial Trench 2 section (photograph)
- Fig. 6 Trial Trench 2 wall section (photograph)
- Fig. 7 Photograph showing the change in precinct wall construction
- Fig. 8 Photograph showing the different phases of precinct wall construction

## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1** Chris Butler Archaeological Services (CBAS) was commissioned by East Sussex County Council (ESCC) to carry out an archaeological watching brief during the excavation of three trial trenches adjacent to the precinct wall at Battle Abbey.
- 1.2** It is proposed to install a new Zebra Crossing at Upper Lake, Battle, which would involve the reduction of the footpath adjacent to the Abbey precinct wall. Although Scheduled Ancient Monument is not required for this work, a watching brief is required to assess the archaeological impact of the proposed work, and the stability of the wall also needs to be assessed.
- 1.3** The site is situated within the Battle Conservation Area, and is in the Archaeologically Sensitive Area of Battle town centre (Fig. 1). The site of Battle Abbey is a Scheduled Ancient Monument and is in the ownership of English Heritage.
- 1.4** The site (TQ 7507 1566) is located at Upper Lake, which is the road (A2100) leading from the High Street eastwards to Lower Lake, and gently slopes down from west to east. It runs along the north side of Battle Abbey, the precinct wall of which is on the south side of the site. On the north side of the road, opposite the site, are a number of houses, and the church and churchyard of St. Mary's Church.
- 1.5** The geology, according to the British Geological Survey sheet 320/321, is Ashdown Beds, at the junction with an outcrop of Tunbridge Wells Sand on the site of Battle Abbey, with Wadhurst Clay to the south, west and north of the site.
- 1.6** At the request of ESCC a Written Scheme of Investigation was prepared for the watching brief, and has been submitted to the County Archaeologist and English Heritage for approval.
- 1.7** The fieldwork was undertaken on the 14<sup>th</sup> August 2008 by the author.

## **2. Archaeological & Historical Background**

- 2.1** There is little evidence for a settlement at Battle prior to the establishment of the Abbey, with no Prehistoric, Roman or Saxon sites or finds currently recorded on the HER. The line of the High Street and Upper Lake has been proposed as an east-west ridgeway track of Prehistoric or Roman date. A number of Roman ironworking sites are known from around the Battle area, including the important site at Beauport Park, some 4km to the east<sup>1</sup>.
- 2.2** It has been suggested that in the Saxon period the area of infertile soils around Battle was occupied by a few dispersed farms, and there was no semblance of villages in the sparsely occupied landscape<sup>2</sup>.
- 2.3** Battle Abbey was founded by William the Conqueror after the Battle of Hastings, which was reputed to have been fought near this site. The Abbey was granted to the Benedictine Monks and consecrated in 1076, although building work did not finish until 1094. After the dissolution of the Abbey in 1538, the buildings began to decay, and in the 20<sup>th</sup> century it passed into the care of English Heritage.
- 2.4** It is only after the establishment of the Abbey that a settlement began to be established at Battle. The early settlement grew up along the High Street to the north of the Abbey, and the surviving buildings and early maps suggest there was little expansion beyond this area until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century
- 2.5** Ordnance Survey maps for 1878, 1899, 1911 and 1930 were consulted. The map regression exercise showed that there has been very little change in the immediate area of the site over this period of time. The first three maps show a footpath at the location of the trial trenches, whilst the fourth map (1930) appears to suggest the footpath was then raised above ground level, as it is today.
- 2.6** The maps also show that the Abbey to the south, and the Church and other buildings to the north have remained unaffected by the recent growth of the town, most of which has occurred to the north and west of the High Street and to the east between Upper Lake and the railway station.
- 2.7** In 1940 Battle was designated as a Category A Nodal Point and fortified by a ring of anti-tank cubes which encircled the town<sup>3</sup>. The line of cubes ran around the north side of the rectory and houses on the north side of Upper Lake to the road at the junction with Lower Lake where there was a roadblock. It is possible that there were modifications to the road and buildings along Upper Lake as part of these defences.

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<sup>1</sup> Cleere, H. & Crossley, D. 1995 *The Iron Industry of the Weald*, Cardiff, Merton Priory Press.

<sup>2</sup> Drewett, P. et al. 1988 *The South-East to AD1000*, London, Longman.

<sup>3</sup> Butler, C. 2007 *East Sussex Under Attack*, Stroud, Tempus Publications Ltd

- 2.8** The HER records were consulted and produced 37 sites within a 500m radius of the site (Fig. 1). Most of the sites are located in the High Street and relate to buildings, the majority of which are Listed Buildings, which date from the 15<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> centuries.
- 2.9** The HER also listed 19 archaeological events; which include excavations and watching briefs undertaken in Battle (Fig. 2). A number of these relate to projects carried out in the Abbey grounds, although the majority were located in the High Street. Most archaeological features and deposits located were of Post Medieval date, although a few sherds of Medieval pottery have been recovered.
- 2.10** One watching brief (EES14363) was carried out in 2007, at Stiles Garage in Upper Lake, a short distance to the east of the trial trenches. Nothing was found, but a Post Medieval tannery was apparently located in the area of the garage<sup>4</sup>, although this is not currently recorded on the HER.

### **3. Archaeological Methodology**

- 3.1** The trial trenches were excavated by hand by ESCC contractors, May Gurney, and the watching brief was intended to observe this excavation, and record any archaeological remains encountered in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation prepared by the author and agreed with the County Archaeologist. The watching brief was carried out by the author on 14<sup>th</sup> August 2008.
- 3.2** Initially it was planned that up to three trial trenches would be excavated. In the event only two trenches (TH2 and TH3) were excavated, as these provided sufficient information regarding the archaeological potential and the wall structure, and it was decided that the third trench (TH1) was not required. Each trial trench was 1.7m long and 0.5m wide.
- 3.3** The process of excavation involved the cutting of the tarmac surface of the current footpath using a circular saw, the tarmac then being removed using a pickaxe and jack hammer. The underlying soil layers were then removed using a spade and shovel in spits of c.100mm under archaeological supervision.
- 3.4** After the removal of each spit the revealed surface was quickly cleaned by trowel, before the next spit was removed. This process continued to a depth of 0.5m in TH2, which was the maximum depth of the proposed footpath reduction, and also exposed the base of the Abbey precinct wall.
- 3.5** Artefacts were collected during the excavation, and the spoil was also inspected for artefacts.

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<sup>4</sup> Steven, L. Pers. Com.

- 3.6** Apart from the previous footpaths, there were no archaeological deposits or features to be excavated, although the stratigraphy was recorded according to accepted professional standards using context record sheets. Deposit colours were recorded by visual inspection and not by reference to a Munsell Colour chart.
- 3.7** A photographic record of the work was kept as appropriate and will form part of the site archive. The archive is presently held by Chris Butler Archaeological Services and, after any further analysis, will be offered to Battle Museum. A site reference of ULB08 has been allocated.

#### **4. Results**

- 4.1** Trial trench 2 (TH2) was the first trench to be excavated (Fig. 3). It was 1.7m long and 0.5m wide, orientated lengthways across the path from wall to road. Some 80mm of modern tarmac (Context 1) was initially removed, and below this there were two deposits (Fig. 5). A double line of un-frogged bricks, set on edge, some 280mm from the precinct wall formed the edge to an earlier path (Context 2), the degraded tarmac surface of which continued to the north end of the trench where it was 60mm thick (Fig. 4).
- 4.2** Between the precinct wall and the brick path edge was a deposit 130mm deep of a mid grey-brown sandy clay loam (Context 3), from which a number of tile fragments were recovered. Below Contexts 2 and 3, was a firm mottled yellow-brown very sandy clay (Context 4), which contained two large flat sandstone pieces (flagstones) each c.350x250mm, together with smaller sandstone pieces and rare pieces of tile and shingle. It is possible that these sandstone pieces may have originally been part of an earlier flagstone path (see TH3 below) Context 4 was 90mm deep at the south (wall) end, and 260mm deep at the north end of the trench. A number of later 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> century pieces of clay pipe were found in this context.
- 4.3** Below Context 4 was a firm mid brown sandy clay loam (Context 5), which contained sandstone pieces to 100mm (3%), charcoal flecks (1%) and rare pieces of tile. Context 5 was 200mm deep at the wall end, and 50mm deep at the north end of the trench, and excavation of the trench ceased at an overall depth of 0.5m. Two sherds of early/mid 18<sup>th</sup> century pottery and four pieces of similarly dated clay pipe were recovered from Context 5, together with a single sherd of late 15<sup>th</sup> to mid 16<sup>th</sup> century pottery.
- 4.4** The base of the precinct wall (Context 7) was exposed at a depth of some 480mm and was seen to be sitting on top of the mid to dark grey sandstone natural (Context 6), which although compact was also crumbly (Figs. 4 & 6). A number of small roots which had come under the base of the wall extended into Context 5.

- 4.5** Trial trench 3 (TH3) was excavated a short distance further east of TH2 (Fig. 3). It also had 80mm depth of modern tarmac (Context 1), below which was the degraded earlier tarmac layer 60mm deep (Context 2). In this case however, the brick edging comprised three courses of bricks set on edge some 250mm from the precinct wall. These bricks were also un-frogged, and it was noted that most were part bricks. Between the bricks and the wall was the same deposit that had been seen in TH2; a deposit 130mm deep of a mid grey-brown sandy clay loam (Context 3).
- 4.6** Immediately below Context 2 was evidence for an earlier path. This comprised a number of flat sandstone pieces, all having a worn upper surface set in a firm yellow brown sandy clay (Context 8). Adjacent to the precinct wall was a single line of un-frogged bricks that appeared to form the edge of this path.
- 4.7** Below Context 8 was the firm mottled yellow-brown very sandy clay of Context 4. Excavation of TH3 ceased at c.200mm, as the large flagstone extended outside the trench sides and could only have been removed by extending the size of the trench.
- 4.8** No modern utility services were located or observed within either of the two excavated trial trenches, and no cuts or deposits suggesting services might be buried at a lower depth were seen.
- 4.9** The Abbey precinct wall was also briefly inspected. The thickness of the wall could be measured at a nearby door, just to the west of the trial trench site, where it was 600mm thick. The height of the wall measured from the pavement beside the trial trenches was c.5.6m high, whilst the ground level on the other side of the wall, inside the Abbey grounds was 3.7m thus it can be seen that the ground level inside the Abbey grounds is 1.9m higher.
- 4.10** The construction of the wall appears to change just to the east of the door mentioned above (Fig. 7), whilst it is possible to see perhaps three different phases of construction in the wall adjacent to the trial trenches (Fig. 8). This would suggest that the wall has been repaired or rebuilt on a number of different occasions in the past. The construction of the wall foundations as seen in TH2 is of rectangular sandstone blocks of various sizes bonded with a cream coloured mortar. Occasional patches of regular thinner sandstone pieces can also be seen above the foundations, together with tile fragments used for galletting.



## 5. Finds by Luke Barber

The excavation produced a small assemblage of finds, which are summarised in Table 1 below:

**Table 1 The Finds**

Context Number	Pottery No./gms.	Building Material No./gms.	Glass No./gms.	Other No./gms.
TH2 (3)	1 Clay pipe (1g)			
TH2 (4)	6 Clay pipe (5g)	2 Brick/tile frags (23g)		1 Oyster frag (<1g)
TH3 (4)		2 Tile frags (49g)		
TH2 (5)	3 Post Med Pot (44g) 4 Clay pipe (7g)	4 Brick/tile frags (118g)		

**5.1** Although the three sherds of pottery from the site are from two different periods they derive from a single deposit (TH 2, Context **5**). The earliest sherd, which is quite large and unabraded, is from the base of a late 15<sup>th</sup> to mid 16<sup>th</sup> century colander in hard-fired fine oxidized earthenware. The remaining two sherds are smaller but also relatively unabraded. They consist of the base from a white salt-glazed stoneware mug and a bodysherd of late tin-glazed earthenware. Both are likely to be of an early/mid 18<sup>th</sup> century date.

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**5.2** A small selection of plain clay tobacco pipe stems was also recovered. These all belong to either the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (all of those from TH 2, Contexts **3** and **5**) or from the later 18<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. No 17<sup>th</sup> century pipe fragments are present

**5.3** The peg tile fragments from the site are all well fired and tempered with sparse fine sand and sparse to moderate iron oxides to 1mm. Those from TH 2, Context **4** are probably of the mid 18<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries and include one example with a diamond-shaped peg hole. The two pieces of tile from TH 3, Context **4** are in a fairly similar fabric but more crudely finished suggesting they may be somewhat earlier, perhaps between the mid 16<sup>th</sup> and mid 18<sup>th</sup> centuries.

**5.5** A single small fragment of oyster shell in Context **4** (TH2) was the only other find recovered during the watching brief.

**5.6** The assemblage holds no potential for further analysis

## **6. Discussion & Recommendations**

- 6.1** The trial excavation has shown that the lowering of the footpath to accommodate the Zebra crossing is unlikely to affect any archaeological features or deposits. The upper part of the site has been affected by the construction of previous footpaths during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries to a depth of some 150-200mm, and it is unlikely that any archaeology will survive in this upper part of the stratigraphy.
- 6.2** Below the paths, Context **4** appears to be a disturbed layer of 19<sup>th</sup> century date, perhaps associated with the footpath construction. Context **5** however, which makes up the lower 50mm - 200mm of soil above the natural, seems to be a relatively undisturbed layer of mid 18<sup>th</sup> century date with some earlier residual artefacts, and it is possible that this layer may contain archaeological deposits and features.
- 6.3** Although a sign board inside the Abbey suggests that the precinct wall was built by 1124, it is very unlikely that all, if any, of the section of wall adjacent to the trial trenches dates from that time. The wall walk, which survives inside the Abbey further west near to the gatehouse, was apparently added some 200 years later. The evidence seen in the wall construction suggests that it has been altered or rebuilt, on a number of occasions in the past.
- 6.4** The ground level inside the Abbey is higher than that outside, and it is clear that the upper part of the wall is currently bowing out slightly. The shallow foundations seen in TH2 mean that if the ground level outside the wall is reduced by 0.5m then the entire depth of the wall foundations will be exposed.

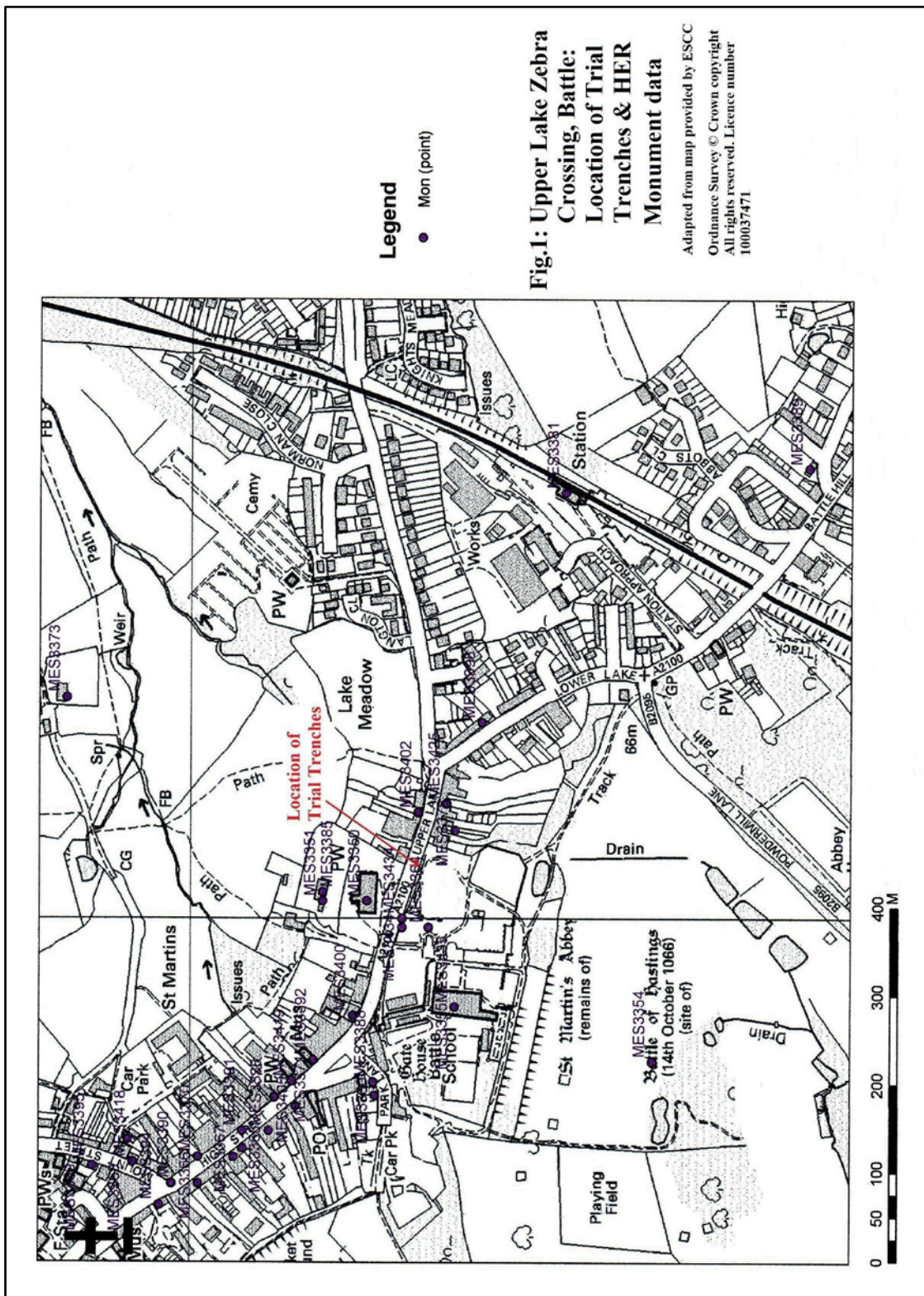
### **6.5 Recommendations**

It is therefore recommended that in the event of the Zebra crossing being constructed, and the footpath being lowered to accommodate it, the following mitigation should take place:

1. An archaeological watching brief should be carried out where the depth of the footpath reduction is likely to be greater than 300mm (i.e. likely to impact on Context **5** or the lower part of Context **4**). This is to record any possible undisturbed archaeological features or artefacts in the soil layers below the earlier footpaths.
2. Advice should be taken from a structural engineer as to whether any form of reinforcement of the wall is required. If this work is likely to impact directly on the wall then a drawn and photographic record of the affected part of the wall should be made beforehand. It is also possible that Scheduled Monument Consent would be required from English Heritage for this work.

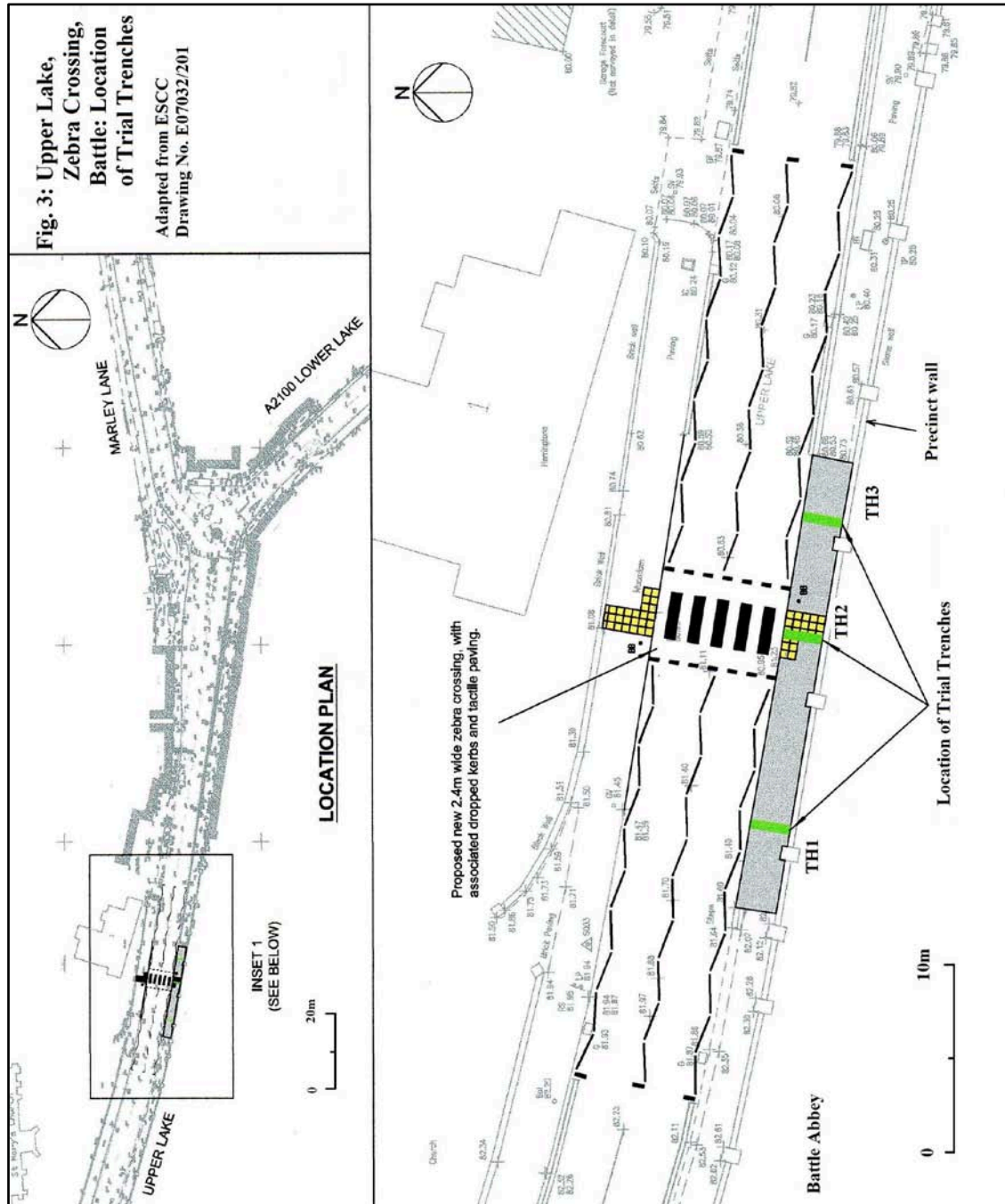
## **7. Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank Sarah Lade, East Area Project Engineer at ESCC who made the arrangements for the watching brief, Julian Collins, Design Engineer at ESCC who co-ordinated the work, and Richard Hammond also of ESCC who attended the site to assess the precinct wall. I would also like to thank Mark Watson and his team from May Gurney for their assistance and co-operation in excavating the trial trenches. Casper Johnson, East Sussex County Archaeologist agreed the WSI, and Greg Chuter provided the HER records. Luke Barber reported on the artefacts recovered during the watching brief.









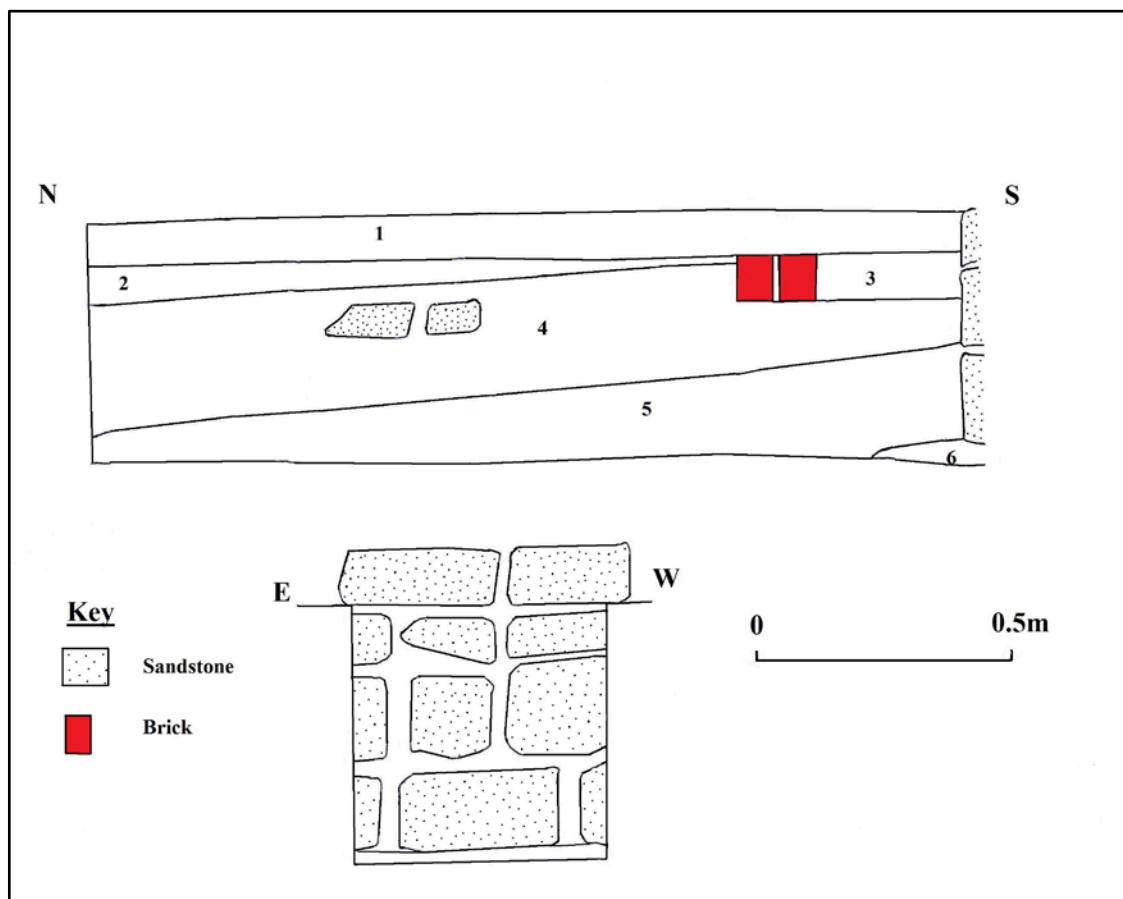


Fig. 4: Upper Lake Zebra Crossing, Battle: Trial Trench 2:  
Main north-south section and section of exposed wall  
footing.





Fig. 5: Upper Lake Zebra Crossing: Trial Trench 2 section



Fig. 6: Upper Lake Zebra Crossing: Trial Trench 2 wall section





Fig. 7: Upper Lake Zebra Crossing: Photograph showing the change in precinct wall construction



Fig. 8: Upper Lake Zebra Crossing: Photograph showing the different phases of precinct wall construction

## **Chris Butler Archaeological Services**

Chris Butler has been an archaeologist since 1985, and formed the Mid Sussex Field Archaeological Team in 1987, since when it has carried out numerous fieldwork projects, and was runner up in the Pitt-Rivers Award at the British Archaeological Awards in 1996. Having previously worked as a Pensions Technical Manager and Administration Director in the financial services industry, Chris formed **Chris Butler Archaeological Services** at the beginning of 2002.

Chris is a Member of the Institute of Field Archaeologists, a committee member of the Lithic Studies Society, and is a part time lecturer in Archaeology at the University of Sussex. He continues to run the Mid Sussex Field Archaeological Team in his spare time.

Chris specialises in prehistoric flintwork analysis, but has directed excavations, landscape surveys and watching briefs, including the excavation of a Beaker Bowl Barrow, a Saxon cemetery and settlement, Roman pottery kilns, and a Mesolithic hunting camp. He has also recently undertaken an archaeological survey of Ashdown Forest and Broadwater Warren.

**Chris Butler Archaeological Services** is available for Flintwork Analysis, Project Management, Military Archaeology, Desktop Assessments, Field Evaluations, Excavation work, Watching Briefs, Field Surveys & Fieldwalking, Post Excavation Services and Report Writing.

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