

**T H A M E S      V A L L E Y**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL**

**S E R V I C E S**

**Old Ship House, Wharfe Lane,  
Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire**

**Archaeological Watching Brief**

**by Andy Mundin**

**Site Code: OSH14/21  
(SU 7628 8288)**

# **Old Ship House, Wharfe Lane, Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire**

**An Archaeological Watching Brief**

**For Mrs Barbara Laithwaite**

by Andrew Muddin

Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code OSH 14/21

**April 2014**

## Summary

**Site name:** Old Ship House, Wharfe Lane, Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire

**Grid reference:** SU 7628 8288

**Site activity:** Watching Brief

**Date and duration of project:** 28th March - 10th April 2014

**Project manager:** Steve Ford

**Site supervisors:** James Mc-Nicoll-Norbury, Natasha Bennett, Andrew Mundin

**Site code:** OSH 14/21

**Area of site:** 150 sq m of reduction of a c. 600 sq m site

**Summary of results:** Part of the rear garden of the property was reduced to allow for new access and a patio area to be constructed, defined by a retaining wall. Modern soil build up was discovered under the lawn of the areas reduced, and only a small portion of natural gravel was uncovered in the base of one of the footing trenches. A flint foundation was exposed on the northern boundary wall under render for the previous garage. No deposits of archaeological interest were encountered.

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

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# Old Ship House, Wharfe Lane, Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire An Archaeological Watching Brief

by Andrew Muddin

Report 14/21

## Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out at Old Ship House, on the west side of Wharfe Lane, Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire, RG9 2LL (SU 7628 8288) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Stuart MacKay, of Edgington, Spink and Hine, Meridian House, 2 Russell Street, Windsor, Berkshire, SL4 1HQ, working on behalf of Mrs B Laithwaite, c/o Direct Wines, New Aquitaine House, Exeter Way, Theale, Berkshire, RP7 4PL.

Planning application P13/S2205/HH was granted by South Oxfordshire District Council with an attached condition (4) relating to archaeology, which required a watching brief to be carried out during ground works. These groundworks were to reduce part of the garden and be retained by a new wall with stepped access to the garden, at the rear of the property. A patio was also laid with associated access to the front gate, along with demolishing the existing garage to allow two cars to be parked in an open area.

This was in accordance with the *National Planning Policy Framework* (NPPF 2012) and the District Council's policies relating to archaeology. The watching brief was carried out in accordance with a written scheme of investigation approved by Mr Richard Oram, of Oxfordshire County Archaeological Service, advisers to the District Council on archaeology in the planning process. This scheme was based on a brief prepared by him (Oram 2014). The fieldwork was undertaken by James McNicoll-Norbury, Natasha Bennett and Andrew Muddin between 28th March and 10th April 2014. The site code is OSH 14/21. The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited with Oxfordshire County Museums Service in due course.

## Location, topography and geology

The site is located on the west side of Wharfe Lane (Fig. 1), on the western bank of the River Thames, within the town of Henley-on-Thames. Wharfe Lane is a cul-de-sac off the northern side of New Street on the northern edge of the town centre (Fig. 2). The house forms one of a row of houses, some of which, especially on the eastern side of the road closer to the river, were historically boathouses, that have now been converted to private

residences. The site sits at *c.*32m above Ordnance Datum and the underlying geology is First Flood Plain Terrace Gravel over Upper Chalk (BGS 1980).

## **Archaeological background**

The archaeological potential of the site has been highlighted in the brief for the project (Oram 2014), which notes that the site is located on the northern part of the historic core of the town with medieval potential both from the town and the manorial estate at Phyllis Court to the north. The manorial estate dates from the 12th and 13th centuries, with an enclosed area known as Countess Gardens thought to exist at the southern part of the manorial estate, with a southern boundary close to this site. The southern part of the Old Ship House itself dates to the 18th century and is Grade II Listed, but the northern parts are modern and not included in the listing. Other houses from the 18th and 19th century exist on Wharfe Lane. New Street has a surviving 16th-century timber building situated 50m from the site, which would, along with other tenements, probably have evidence of back yard activity in the form of pitting for refuse disposal.

Henley was a planned town, possibly developing from the late 12th century with a town charter, which has no mention of a settlement at the time of Domesday Book (AD 1086) (Airs *et al.*, 1974; Williams and Martin 2002) and there is relatively little archaeological evidence from this part of the town.

## **Objectives and methodology**

The purpose of the watching brief was to excavate and record all archaeological deposits under immediate threat of damage or destruction from groundworks. These works would include areas of ground reduction for deep landscaping, new drainage trenching and footing trenching, and excavation of soakaways or other disturbance which would call for deep excavation. Works were to occur after the demolition of the garage at the north of the site had been carried out. Part of the ground reduction for the patio areas had already commenced, prior to an archaeologist attending the site, but only turf and modern made ground had been removed to a depth of 0.6m, 0.2m above the final formation level.

## **Results**

Excavation initially took place using a small mechanical excavator fitted with a bladed bucket for areas of ground reduction and then a small toothed trenching bucket for footing and drainage trenching. It was initially noticed that demolition of the garage had exposed a flint foundation to the northern brick boundary wall of the

site (Pl. 2). Eight courses of unworked flint nodules were visible, but no continuation was visible at the level of the current garden. This element certainly pre-dates the above ground structure of this boundary and could conceivably be medieval in date, or be a post-medieval marking of such a boundary. However, no finds were uncovered from the site to suggest such an early date.

Soil from the garden behind the listed portion of the house, and the more recent parts of the house, was reduced in stages (Fig. 3; Pl. 1), initially removing 0.6m of soil over the area. This was then further reduced by 0.15m then to the final depth of 0.82m below the previous ground surface. Once the final level had been reached footing trenches on the western edges of the excavation were dug against the sections. These further reduced the ground by 0.3m, giving a total maximum depth of excavation at between 1–1.12m.

The stratigraphy was observed on the western faces of the garden section and measurements taken from these exposed faces. Beneath 0.2m of topsoil was a deposit of modern made ground comprising areas of brick and tile rubble and brown silt with areas of light brown gravel. This reached no greater depth than 0.55m. Beneath this was another made ground layer, a brown clayey silt with gravel, which also contained tile fragments indicating a date no earlier than the 18th century. This overlay the natural gravel geology. In the footing trenches in the patio area, natural geology was exposed at 0.98m. Towards the northern insert of the retaining wall allowing for a raised inspection chamber, natural gravel was also exposed in the base of the footing trenches. No discrete features were seen cutting the gravel in the areas exposed. Towards the southern end of the site the lower made ground layer gave way to a buried garden soil up to 0.25m deep above the natural silty clay with gravel, at a total depth of 0.98m below the previous ground surface. The buried soil contained clay tobacco pipe, tile, including peg tile, and brown-glazed red earthenware pottery, all suggesting a late 18th or 19th century date.

A brick structure [1], was exposed during soil reduction of the north western corner of the older part of the house. This was 0.45m square, at least 0.2m deep and made with unfrosted red bricks bonded with lime mortar. The individual bricks were 200mm by 100mm by 60mm. It is thought to be remains of a soakaway associated with the 18th century house. It was backfilled with a light red/grey clayey silt (54) which contained no finds.

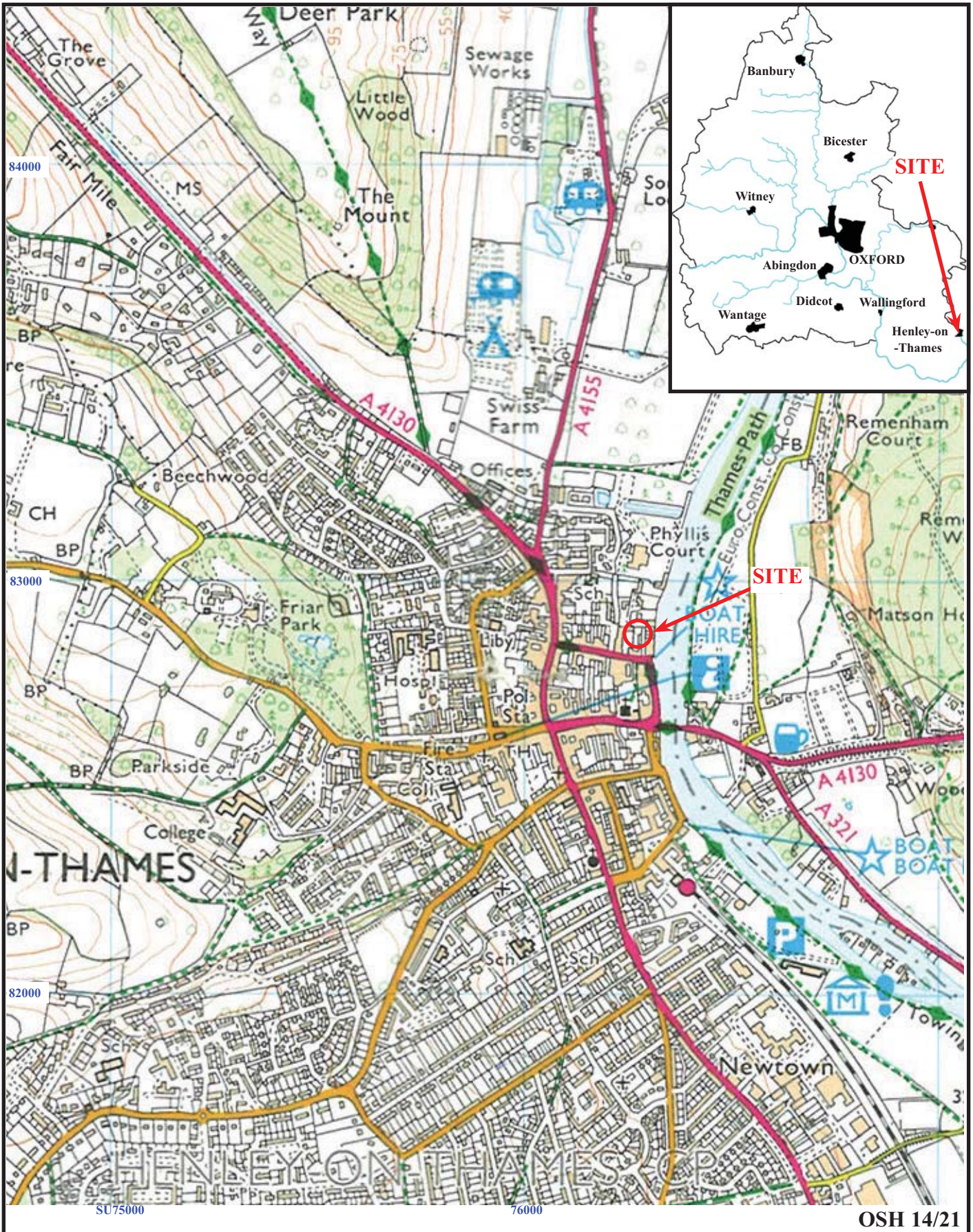
The only other features observed were modern drains (one plastic, one ceramic) wholly within the made ground layers.

## **Conclusion**

No remains that pre-date the earliest part of the house were uncovered. Limited amounts of natural gravel geology were exposed in the base of trenching. The northern brick boundary of the site seemed to have been set on an earlier foundation which possibly pre-dates the extant house but was not further affected by the groundworks. No deposits or artefacts of archaeological interest were revealed.

## **References**

- Airs, M, Rodwell, K and Turner, H, 1974, 'Henley' in K Rodwell, (ed) *Historic Towns of Oxfordshire*, Oxford Archaeol Unit Survey **3**, Oxford, 125–31
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- Oram, R, 2014, 'Old Ship House, Wharfe Lane, Henely-on-Thames, Oxfordshire County Archaeological Service, Design Brief for Archaeological Watching Brief', Oxford
- Williams, A and Martin, H, 2002, *Domesday Book: a complete translation*, Penguin Books, London



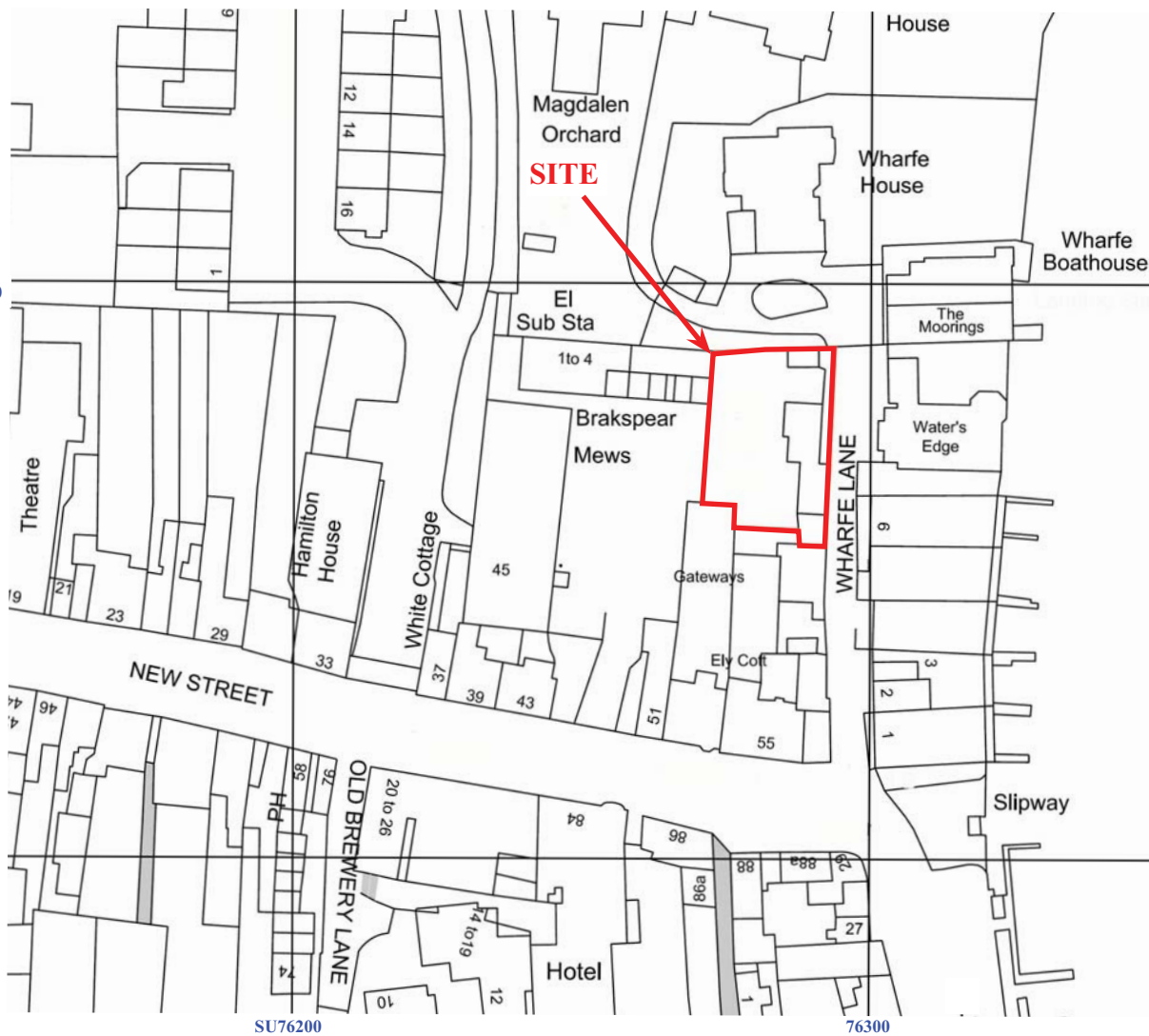
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Figure 1. Location of site within Henley-on-Thames and Oxfordshire

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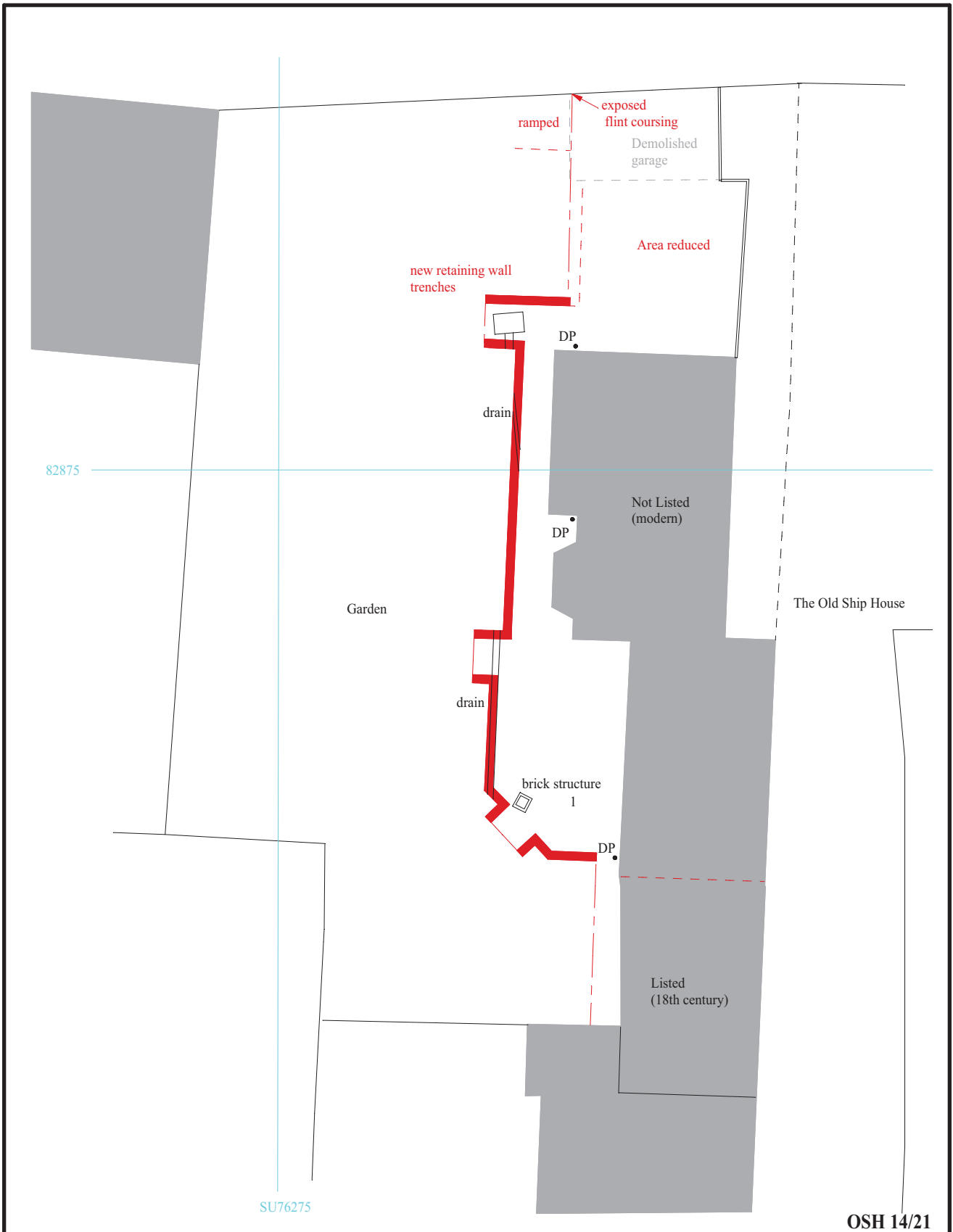
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Figure 2. Detailed location of site off Wharf Lane.

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Figure 3. Location of observed areas.



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Plate 1. Level of reduction compared to garden, looking south, Scale: 0.5m.



Plate 2. Exposed coursing on northern boundary wall, looking north west, Scale: 0.5m.

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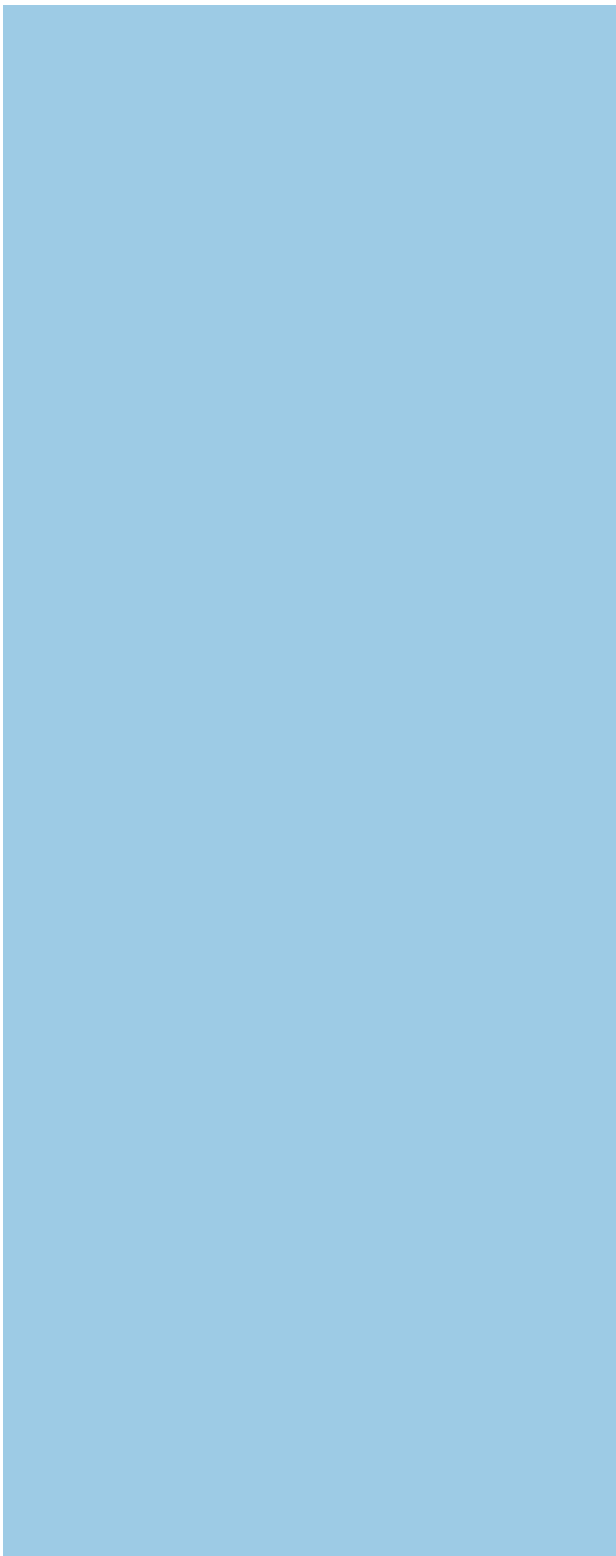
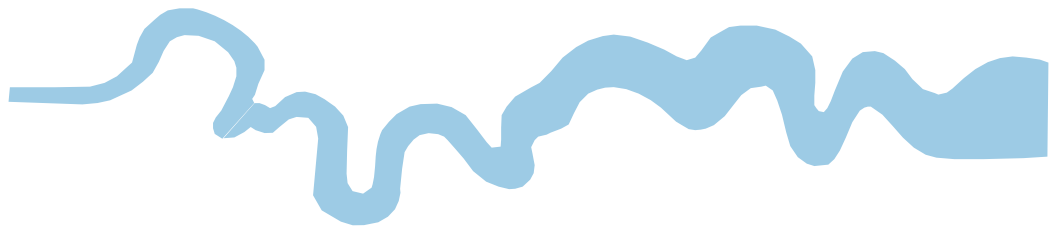
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Plates 1 - 2.

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## TIME CHART

	<b>Calendar Years</b>
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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