

**135 St Helen's Avenue,
Benson, Oxfordshire**

An Archaeological Watching Brief

For Mr Trevor Styles

by Danielle Milbank

Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code SAB 06/09

January 2007

Summary

Site name: 135 St Helen's Avenue, Benson, Oxfordshire

Grid reference: SU 62143 91362

Site activity: Watching Brief

Date and duration of project: 30th January-12th April 2006

Project manager: Steve Ford

Site supervisor: Steve Hammond

Site code: SAB 06/09

Area of site: c. 640 sq m

Summary of results: No finds or deposits of archaeological relevance observed.

Monuments identified: None

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

This report may be copied for bona fide research or planning purposes without the explicit permission of the copyright holder

Report edited/checked by: Steve Ford✓ 30.01.07 Steve Preston✓ 31.01.07

135 St Helen's Avenue, Benson, Oxfordshire An Archaeological Watching Brief

By Danielle Milbank

Report 06/09

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out on land at 135 St Helen's Avenue, Reading, Berkshire (SU 62143 91362) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Craig Burden of West Waddy ADP, The Malthouse, 60 East St Helen Street, Abingdon, Oxfordshire, OX14 5EB on behalf of Mr Trevor Styles, Lower Farm House, Lower Road, Darlington, Oxfordshire, OX44 9DP.

Planning consent (ref. no. P05/W0430) has been granted by South Oxfordshire District Council to construct two semi-detached dwellings and a garage on this site. This consent is subject to a condition (6) relating to archaeology, which requires a watching brief to be carried out during ground works.

This is in accordance with the Department of the Environment's Planning Policy Guidance, *Archaeology and Planning* (PPG16 1990), and the Council's policies on archaeology. The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Mr Paul Smith of Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services, who advise the District Council on matters of archaeology. The fieldwork was undertaken by Steve Hammond, Richard Oram and Sean Wallis between the 30th January and 12th April 2006 and the site code is SAB 06/09.

The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited at Oxfordshire Museum Service in due course.

Location, topography and geology

The site is located at the eastern end of St Helen's Avenue, Benson (Fig. 2) and was formerly the garden to an adjacent house. The site is mapped as being on an area of 1st and 2nd terrace gravel (BGS 1980), but this was not observed in any of the excavated areas and the limestone encountered might be an outcrop of malmstone from the underlying greensand formation. The site is situated c.55m above Ordnance Datum.

Archaeological background

A brief for the project prepared by Mr Paul Smith of Oxfordshire County Archaeological Service has highlighted the archaeological potential of the environs of the proposal site. In summary, Benson and its surrounding areas are rich in archaeological deposits of many periods. Neolithic and Bronze Age occupation has been recorded at

the north-west end of St Helens Avenue (Pine and Ford 2004) with a *cursus* monument (ceremonial way) recorded on the airfield to the east. An early Roman occupation site has recently been partly excavated to the north on The Moorlands (Pine 2006) and early Saxon deposits were also recorded at the north-west end of St Helen's Avenue (Pine and Ford 2004). Benson was an important Royal settlement in early/middle Saxon times lying on the border between the kingdoms of Wessex and Mercia (Blair 1994).

Objectives and methodology

The aims of the project were to excavate and record any archaeological deposits which would be damaged or destroyed by the groundworks, involving excavation by machine of the house foundations. This was to involve examination of all areas of intrusive ground works, including any ground reduction, and any foundation trenches, service trenches or soakaways dug to archaeologically relevant layers.

Results

Initially a small area (c. 45 sq m) at the south-west end of the site was stripped under observation for the site office and compound (Fig. 3). Topsoil and subsoil were removed by machine to a depth of 0.60m, showing stratigraphy of 0.40m of topsoil overlying grey/brown silty clay subsoil. A small test pit was dug to 0.85m within this area which showed the subsoil to be 0.45m thick, with a limestone layer observed beginning at 0.85m deep.

Most of the remaining area of the site (Fig. 3) was stripped by machine to a depth of 0.90m revealing stratigraphy of 34m of topsoil overlying yellow/brown clay silt subsoil up to 0.49m thick, overlying pale (possibly decayed) limestone (0.07m thick). No archaeological features or deposits were observed at this stage.

A service trench leading to a soak away in the north-western corner of the site, 0.74m wide and to a maximum depth of 1.95m (Fig. 4), was observed to have a thicker layer of subsoil (0.65m) under the topsoil but other than this the stratigraphy was broadly the same. It should perhaps be noted that the limestone layer continued below this depth.

The foundations for the buildings were dug to a depth of between 0.35m and 0.45m below the previously stripped level (0.95–1.05m below original ground level) and these revealed the decayed limestone layer to be approximately 0.2m thick with clean limestone at a depth of 0.8m below the original surface level.

Finds

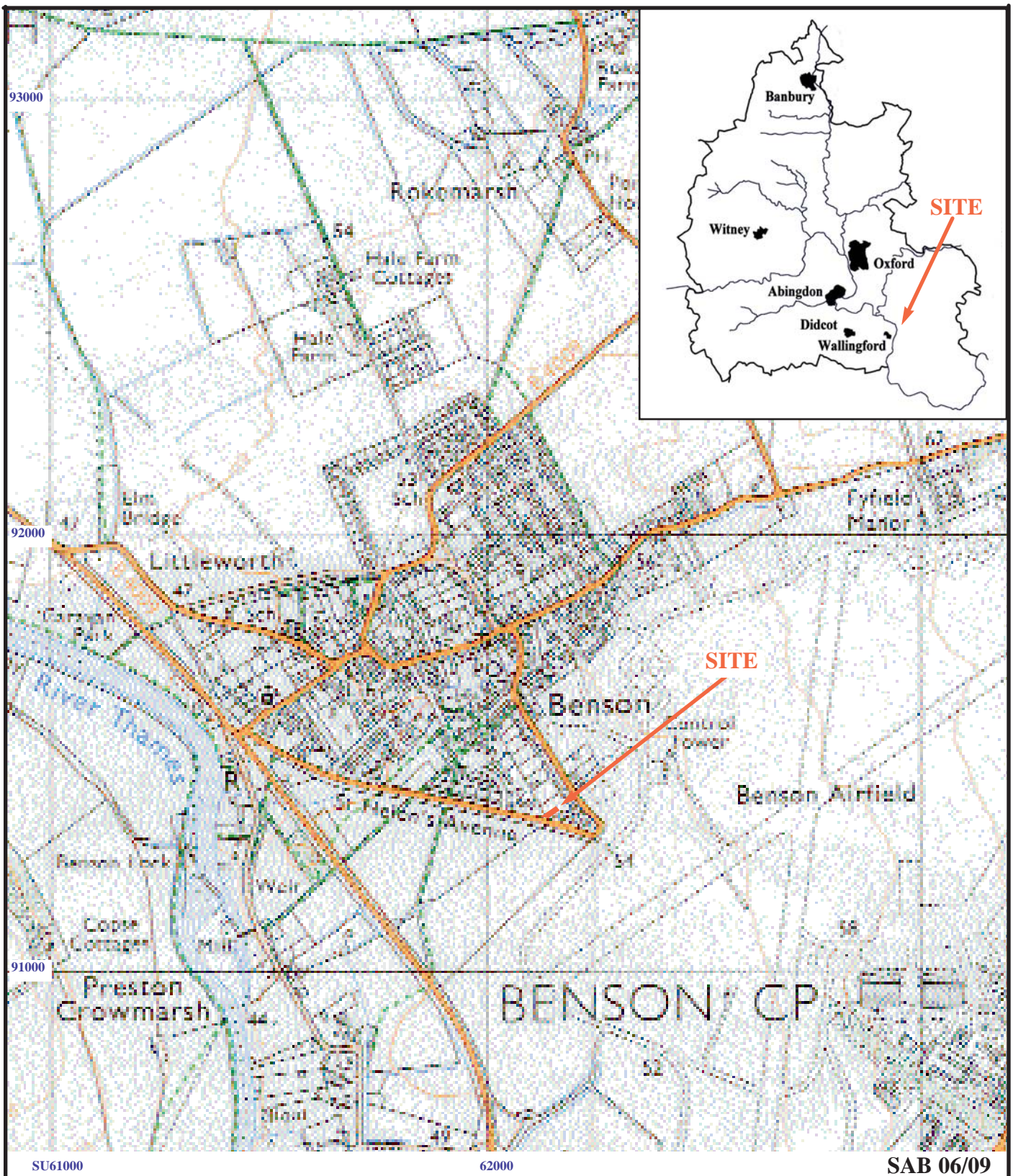
No archaeological finds were recovered during the watching brief. Some modern brick and tile fragments observed in the subsoil were not retained.

Conclusion

The observed ground works did not encounter any archaeological deposits or finds, despite the site's proximity to areas of known prehistoric and later occupation.

References

- BGS, 1980, *British Geological Survey*, 1:50000, Sheet 254, Solid and Drift Edition, Keyworth
- Blair, J, 1994, *Anglo-Saxon Oxfordshire*, Stroud
- Pine, J, 2006, 'Early Roman occupation at Jubilee Villa, 21 The Moorlands, Benson, Oxfordshire', *Oxoniensia*, **LXX** (for 2005), 115–28
- Pine, J and Ford, S, 2004, 'Excavation of Neolithic, late Bronze Age and early Iron Age and early Saxon features at St Helen's Avenue, Benson, Oxfordshire', *Oxoniensia* **LXVIII** 2003, 132-178
- PPG 16, 1990, *Archaeology and Planning*, Dept of the Environment Planning Policy Guidance 16, HMSO

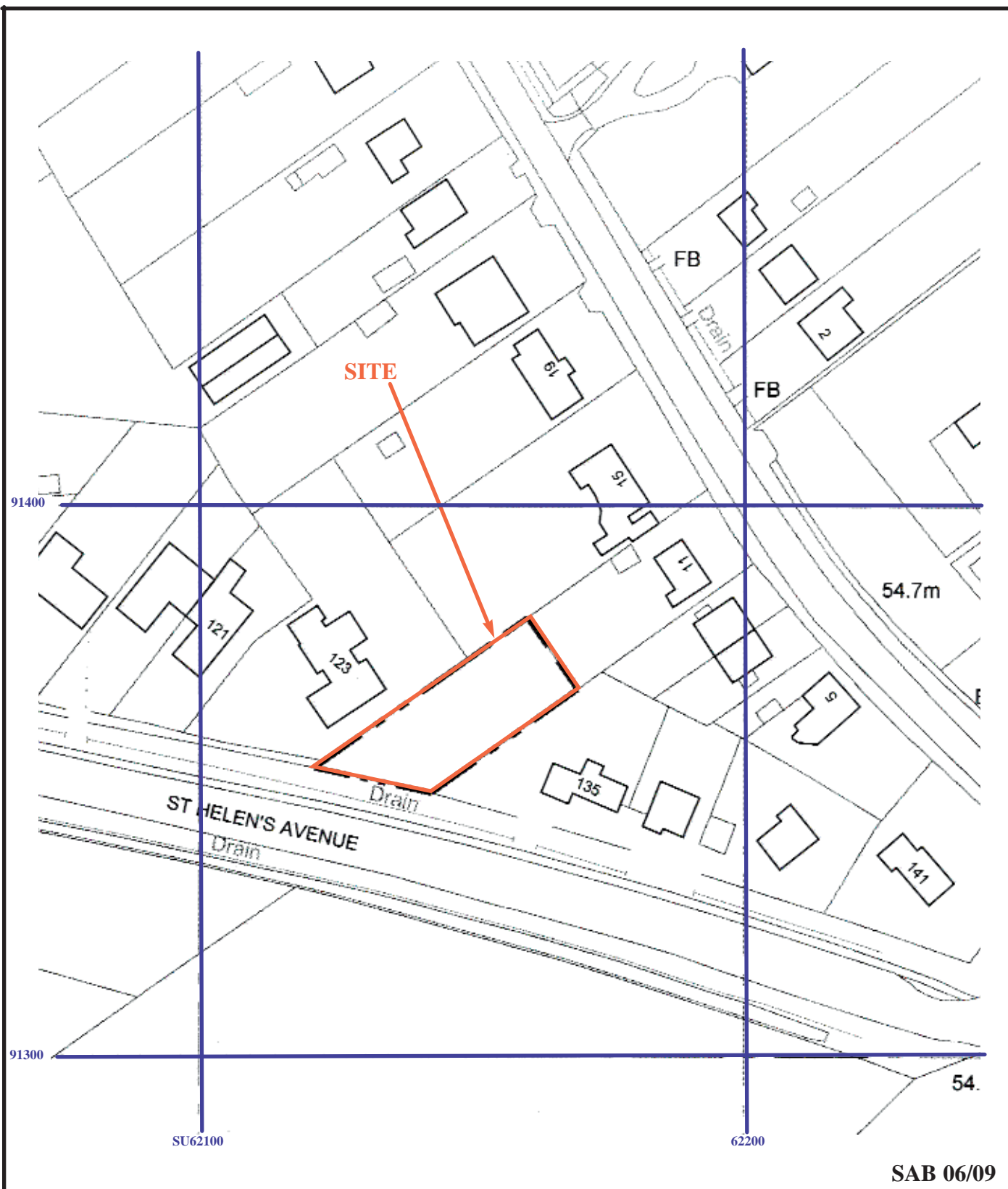


**135 St Helen's Avenue, Benson,
Oxfordshire, 2006
An archaeological watching brief**

Figure 1. Location of site within Benson and Oxfordshire.

Reproduced from Ordnance Survey Pathfinder 1137
at 1:12500
Ordnance Survey Licence 100025880

T H A M E S V A L L E Y
ARCHAEOLOGICAL
S E R V I C E S

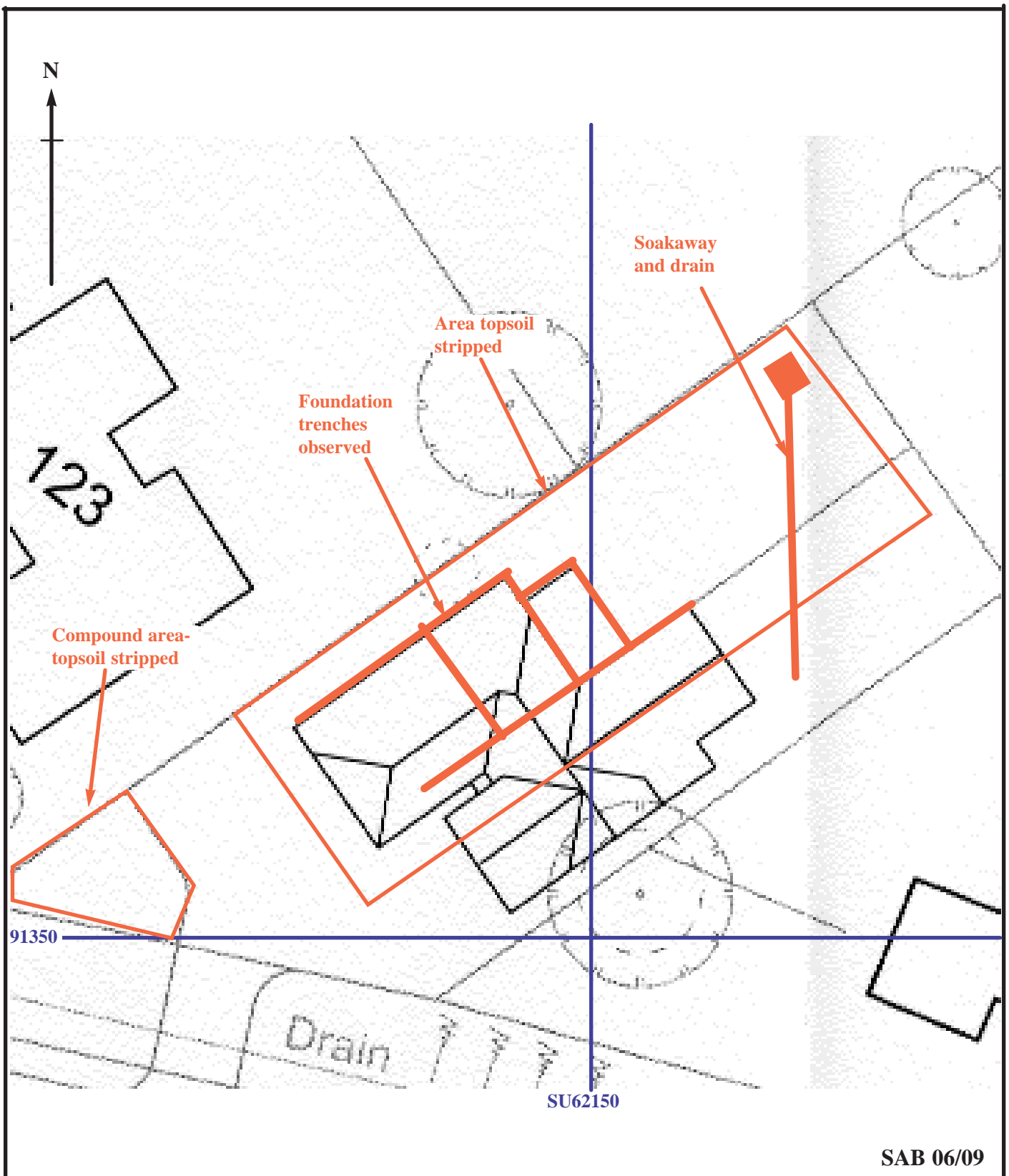


**135 St Helen's Avenue, Benson,
Oxfordshire, 2006**
An archaeological watching brief

Figure 2. Detailed location of site on St Helen's Avenue.

Scale: 1:1000
Ordnance Survey Licence Number 100025880

T H A M E S V A L L E Y
ARCHAEOLOGICAL
S E R V I C E S



135 St Helen's Avenue, Benson,
Oxfordshire, 2006
An archaeological watching brief

Figure 3. Location of watching brief observations.

Scale 1:250

T H A M E S V A L L E Y
ARCHAEOLOGICAL
S E R V I C E S

135 St Helen's Avenue, Benson, Oxfordshire

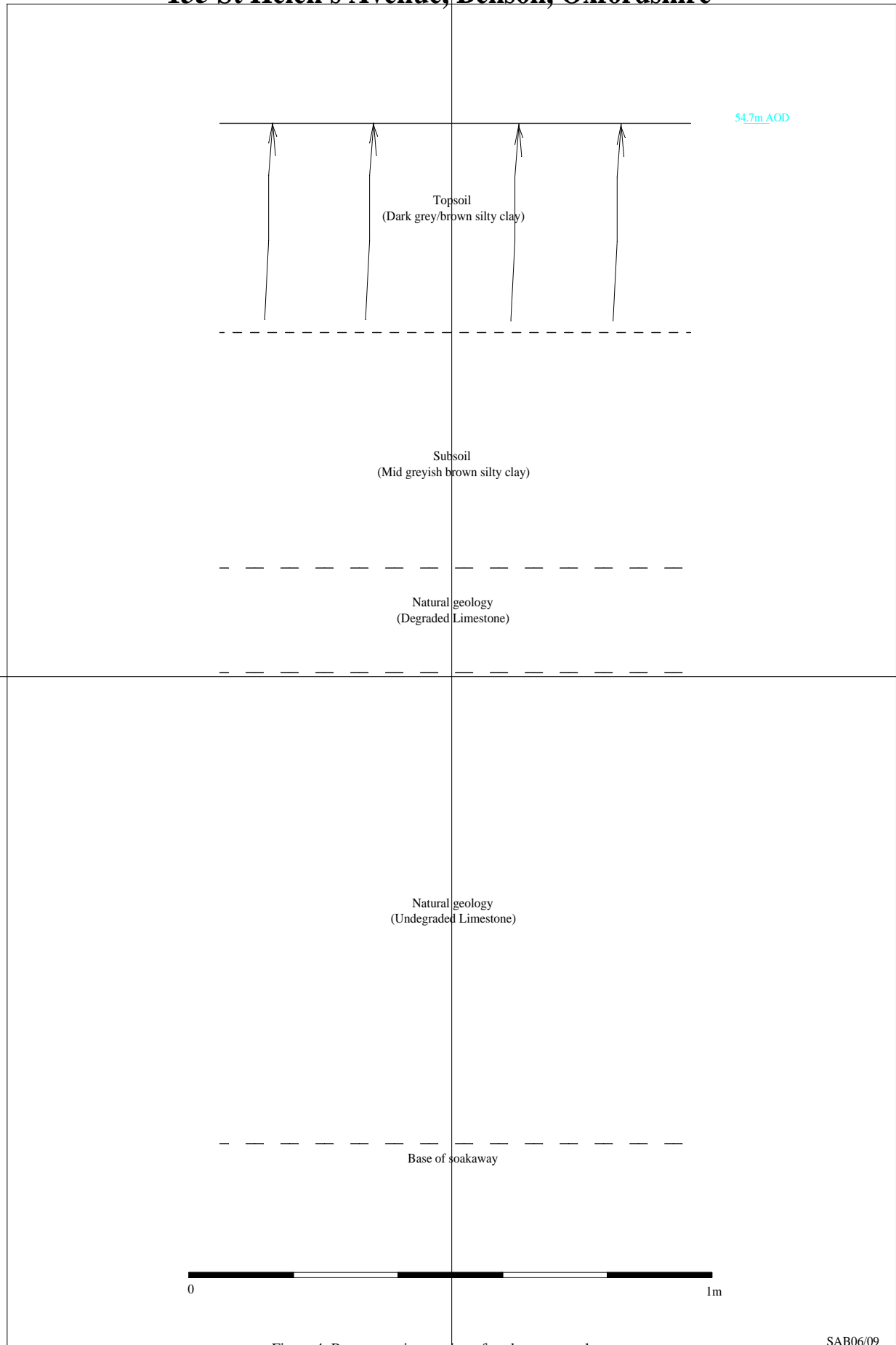


Figure 4. Representative section of soakaway trench.