

PORTERGILL ARCHITECTURAL AND PLANNING CONSULTANT

18 THE LAWNS, BRILL, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

NGR SP 1420 6545

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

Planning Ref. 00/02999/APP

Oxford Archaeological Unit

July 2001

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

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Date: July 2001

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Date: *17. 7. 01*

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Date: *20/7/2001*

Oxford Archaeological Unit

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Summary

In July 2001, Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) undertook a watching brief at 19 The Lawns, Brill, Buckinghamshire (SP 1420 6545). No archaeological deposits or features were observed during the groundwork.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Permission has been granted by Aylesbury Vale District Council for the construction of a single-storey extension to 18, The Lawns, Brill, Buckinghamshire. Due to the potential disturbance of below ground archaeological deposits a condition for an archaeological watching brief was attached to the permission, in line with PPG16 and local plan policy.
- 1.2 The site lies at c187 m OD, to the north of the historic core of Brill, and to the west of Temple Farm (SP 1420 6545). The underlying geology is Upper Greensand overlying Limestone.

2 Background

- 2.1 The village of Brill is situated 14 miles west of Aylesbury and 13 miles north-east of Oxford. The village owes its name to its position on a limestone outcrop rising from the Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire plain that surrounds it. The name derives from the Celtic *bre*, meaning hill and the Anglo-Saxon synonym *hyll* - in other words hill-hill.
- 2.2 There is some evidence for Iron Age occupation adjacent to the Church of All Saints (which was largely rebuilt in 1888 but is probably 13th century in origin). This is in the form of an earthwork which may be the remains of a hillfort rampart (Farley, 1979 quoted in Bateson 1966).
- 2.3 Archaeological evidence for Roman activity in the village is scarce, although there is some anecdotal evidence published in 1755 by Browne Willis in "*The History and Antiquities of the Town, Hundred and Deanery of Buckingham.*" In his visit to Brill in 1730, Browne Willis records that "*Tradition says here was a Market and that it was an old Roman city*". Whilst this claim is clearly overstated, it is possible that there was some activity in Brill during the Roman period. Roman 'villa' sites are known at Rymans Farm and Oakley to the south and south-west respectively. Roman tiles and pottery have also been found at Muswell Hill to the north west and it has been suggested that this may also be the site of a Roman 'villa'. Additionally, the Roman road from Silchester to Towcester passes approximately six miles to the east, and Akeman Street (the main road from St Albans to Cirencester) approximately five miles to the north. Indeed, the two roads intersect a mile or two to the south of Biscester, which lies approximately 8 miles to the north west of Brill.
- 2.4 In the late Saxon period, Brill was a royal manor and was one of only six royal manors known in Buckinghamshire prior to the Norman Conquest (Bateson, 1966). Brill was the most important settlement within the medieval forest of

Bernwood which was legally established following the Conquest, based on the pre-existing woodland and hunting lodge constructed by Edward the Confessor. The forest of Bernwood (sometimes referred to as Brill Forest (Bateson, 1966, p. 3)) is mentioned in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle entry for 921, and the Domesday Book of 1086, although Brill itself is not referred to.

- 2.5 In the 13th and 14th centuries Brill was described as a borough but thereafter it went into decline and lost its status as a town. Brill was the centre of an important regional pottery and tile industry which is believed to have originated in the 12th century and continued into the post-medieval period when it also produced bricks (Harvey, 1997 quoted in Bateson 1966). Extensive remains of the kilns and their products have been found in the village, including two late medieval/early post-medieval kilns found and excavated during the building of The Lawns in 1983 (Yeoman, 1988 quoted in Bateson 1966).
- 2.6 Brill also figured briefly during the Civil War. Following the battle of Edghill on the 29th of November 1642 - and the subsequent withdrawal of Charles I to Oxford - a small Royalist force occupied Brill under the command of Sir Gilbert Gerard. January 1643 saw an abortive attempt by the parliamentary forces under the command of Arthur Goodwin to dislodge the Royalists. This encounter is recorded in an anonymous report of 2nd February 1643, which describes Brill as "*a Towne fortified by nature, standing upon a hill, and made much stronger by art, having outworks, half-Moones and Redouts, the like not to be found in any Towne in England.*" (from *The Latest Intelligence of Prince Ruperts Proceedings in Northamptonshire: and also Colonell Goodwins at Brill* quoted in Bateson, 1966). Sir Gilbert Gerard's force finally withdrew in April 1643 to increase the Royalist force sent (unsuccessfully) to prevent the capture of Reading by Parliament. In the winter of 1644-5, a small Parliamentary garrison was installed at Brill.

3 Aims

- 3.1 The aims of the watching brief were to identify any archaeological remains exposed on site during the course of the works, and to record these to established OAU standards (Wilkinson 1992), in order to secure their preservation by record.

4 Methodology

- 4.1 The watching brief was undertaken by means of separate inspection visits; with the exception of the archaeological features observed, all digging was undertaken by mechanical excavator.
- 4.2 Within the constraints imposed by health and safety considerations the deposits exposed were cleaned, inspected and recorded in plan, section and by colour slide and monochrome print photography. Written records were also made on proforma sheets.

5 Results

- 5.1 The groundwork for the new extension involved the demolition of the existing conservatory and the reduction of the site by an average of 0.20 m. The excavation of the new strip foundations was then monitored.
- 5.2 The foundations were excavated through a deposit of loosely compacted made ground containing 20th-century building material and other debris which almost certainly originated from the construction of The Lawns in 1983. Natural geology was observed at a depth of 0.90 m below ground level (bgl) to the south of the site and 1.20 m bgl to the north. No archaeological features were observed and the west-east aligned trenches were roughly on the same alignment as the foundations for the demolished conservatory and had therefore already been disturbed.

6 Finds

- 6.1 20th-century building material and other debris were observed within the made ground deposit but were not retained.

7 Environmental results

- 7.1 None of the archaeological deposits revealed were considered to have potential for environmental analysis.

8 Discussion

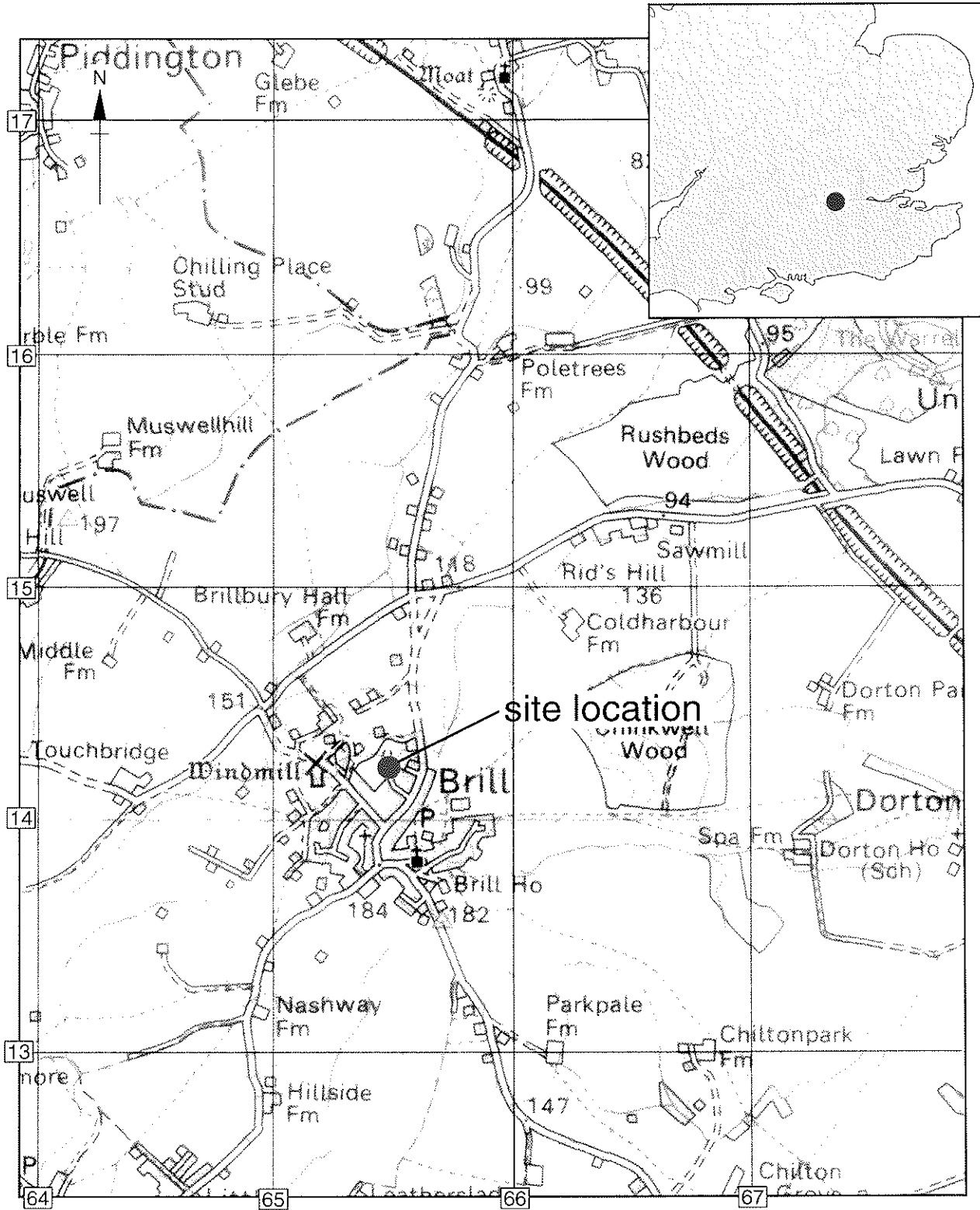
- 8.1 The foundations for the new extension did not impact on any archaeological remains as the ground had already been disturbed during the construction of the existing house and demolished conservatory. Where natural geology was observed, no archaeological features were present and any archaeology which may have existed has been truncated by the earlier development.

References.

Wilkinson, D (ed) 1992 Oxford Archaeological Unit Field Manual, (First edition, August 1992).

Victoria County History of Buckinghamshire, Vol. IV, 1927, London.

Bateson, FW, Brill; A Short History, 1966, The Brill Society.



Scale 1:25,000

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Figure 1: Site location.

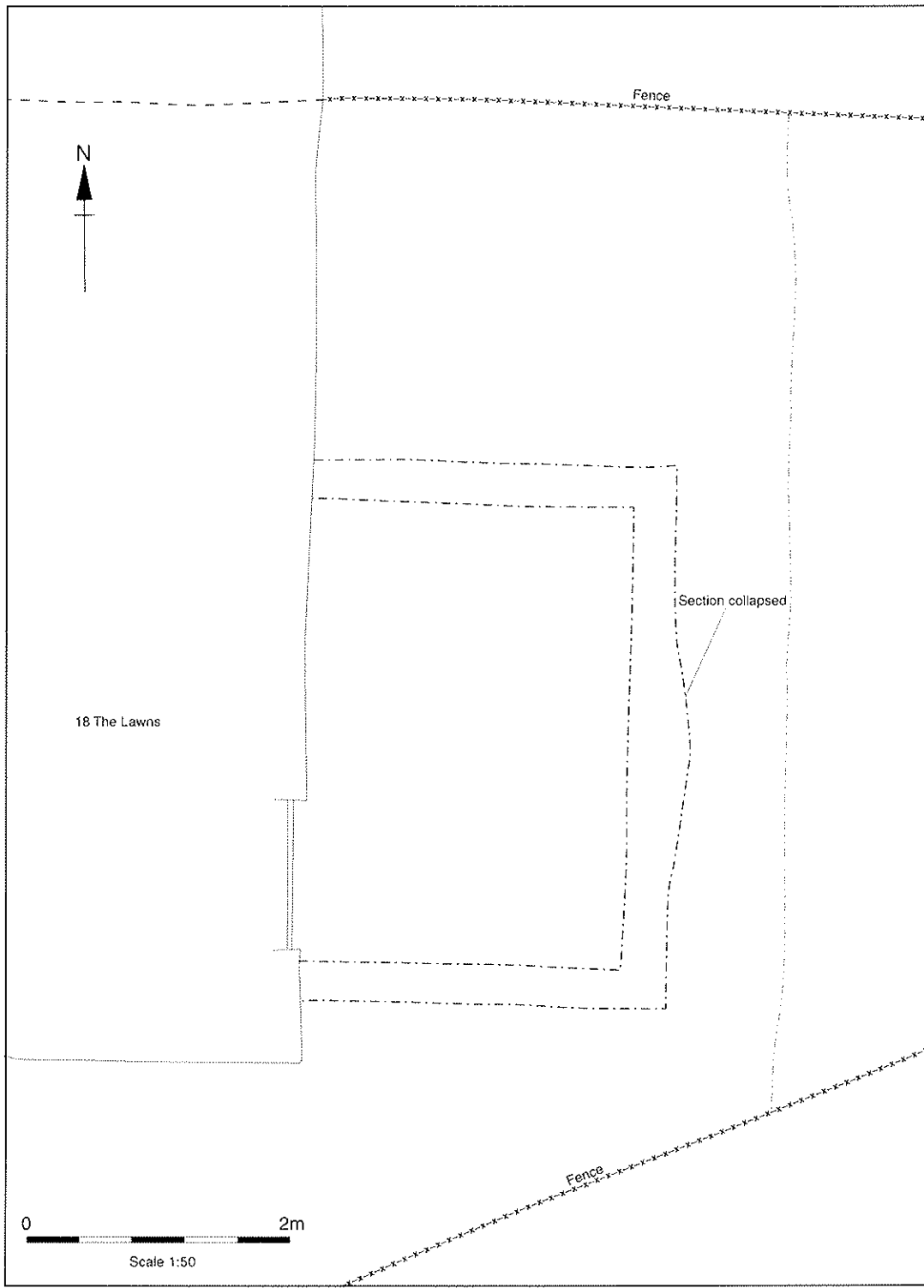


Figure 2 : Site plan.



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