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**ARCHAEOLOGICAL**

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

**St Andrew's Church, The Street, South Stoke,  
near Wallingford, Oxfordshire**

**Archaeological Watching Brief**

**by Tim Dawson**

**Site Code: SSO13/178**

**(SU 5988 8357)**

**St Andrew's Church, The Street, South Stoke,  
near Wallingford, Oxfordshire**

**An Archaeological Watching Brief**

**For The Incumbent and Church Warden of St Andrews' Church**

by Tim Dawson

Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code SSO 13/178

**September 2013**

## Summary

**Site name:** St Andrew's Church, The Street, South Stoke, near Wallingford, Oxfordshire

**Grid reference:** SU 5988 8357

**Site activity:** Watching Brief

**Date and duration of project:** 29th August 2013

**Project manager:** Steve Ford

**Site supervisor:** Tim Dawson

**Site code:** SSO 13/178

**Area of site:** c.13.8 sq m

**Summary of results:** The excavation of two sections of pipe trench and a sewerage management system under the existing path was observed. The sewerage trench exposed the remains of four human inhumations, two of which were in identifiable grave cuts. The burials themselves are undated but the fill of one of the graves contained two sherds of medieval pottery although these are likely to be the product of secondary deposition.

**Monuments identified:** Four human inhumations, two of which lay within grave cuts.

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

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[www.tvas.co.uk/reports/reports.asp](http://www.tvas.co.uk/reports/reports.asp).*

Report edited/checked by:	Steve Ford✓ 26.09.13
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# **St Andrew's Church, The Street, South Stoke, near Wallingford, Oxfordshire An Archaeological Watching Brief**

by Tim Dawson

**Report 13/178**

## **Introduction**

This report documents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out at St Andrew's Church, The Street, South Stoke, near Wallingford, Oxfordshire (SU 5988 8357) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Ms Zoe Sawbridge of Acanthus Clews Architects, Acanthus House, 57 Hightown Road, Banbury, Oxfordshire OX16 9BE on behalf of The Incumbent and Church Wardens of St Andrew's Church.

A faculty has been gained from the Archdeaconry of Oxfordshire to build a new drain at St Andrew's Church. Due to the possible presence of archaeological features and skeletal remains a condition was attached to the consent and faculty requiring that an archaeological watching brief be maintained during the period of ground works.

The fieldwork was undertaken by Tim Dawson on 29th August 2013 and the site code is SSO 13/178. 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 approximately in the centre of the small village of South Stoke, *c.*5km south of Wallingford in south Oxfordshire (Fig. 1). The River Thames flows southwards *c.*400m west of the site, with the village of Moulsoford on its western bank. The site itself is located within the churchyard of St Andrew's Church with the trenches curving around the western and southern sides of the tower. The ground at this point slopes downhill from east to west with the church standing significantly higher than the road, The Street, to the west. To the north of the churchyard is housing, to the east an area of open ground and the Great Western Railway and to the south is South Stoke Primary School (Fig. 2). The underlying geology is described as First Flood Plain Terrace Gravels (BGS 1980) although excavations on site did not reach a depth that exposed this. The site is at *c.*45m above Ordnance Datum.



## **Archaeological background**

The archaeological potential of the site stems from its location both within the archaeologically rich Thames Valley and also within the historic core of South Stoke. South Stoke has late Saxon origins and is mentioned in Domesday Book (Williams and Martin 2002). Churches are usually regarded as lying close to the historic centre of a settlement and late Saxon occupation deposits or a pre-medieval church may be revealed in this area. The church itself has 13th-century origins and 14th-century features although the whole structure was restored in 1857. The stretch of river valley north of the village is rich in archaeological sites and finds (Ford 1987; Ford and Hazell 1989) with a notable cluster of prehistoric burial mounds (ring ditches) and ceremonial monuments at North Stoke (Case 1982), with additional monuments at Wallingford and Benson (Benson and Miles 1974).

## **Objectives and methodology**

The purpose of the watching brief was to excavate and record any archaeological deposits affected by the works. This will involve examination of all areas of intrusive groundworks involved with the digging of the new drainage trench.

The trench was dug in two sections using a mini-digger. The pipe trench along the southern side of the tower was excavated using a 0.30m wide bucket and the main sewerage management trench to the west with a 1.00m wide bucket. Both sections were dug to a depth of approximately 0.80m and were monitored for archaeological deposits as were the spoil heaps. Any potential deposits were hand-cleaned and excavated where necessary. The human remains that were found were exposed before being fully recorded and lifted. Once bagged they were deposited with the churchwarden for reburial.

## **Results**

The pipe trench was observed being dug along the southern side of the tower to the existing gravel pathway where the trench turned and widened into the sewerage trench which followed the path north-westwards for *c.*10.75m (Fig. 3, Plate 1). The stratigraphy exposed was relatively uniform (Fig. 5), consisting of 0.07-0.12m of path gravel or topsoil overlying *c.*0.60m of a homogenous chalky brown subsoil, which, in turn, overlay 0.11m of a firm mid-light grey sandy silt (deposit 56) with another layer of chalky brown subsoil covering the base of the trench at 0.80m below ground level. The natural gravel geology was not reached.

A patch of chalk rubble was observed in the pipe trench near the south-western corner buttress of the tower in addition to several service pipes, both water and electricity, with another electric cable heading west from the north-western corner of the tower.

The only features recorded within the ground works were four human inhumations (Fig. 4), all clustered near the tower at the southern end of the sewerage trench (Fig. 3). Skeleton 50 (Pl. 2) as it was exposed consisted only of the distal portions of both femurs and the proximal ends of the right tibia and fibula and the left fibula as well as a collection of loose bone, possibly disturbed by the machine during the initial excavations, the rest of the individual lying outside the trench to the west. Where they had survived the bones were in a good state of preservation. The fusion of the epiphyses on the surviving *in situ* bones suggested that the individual was an adult. The remains were probably laid in an extended supine position orientated west-east within a 0.42m-wide grave cut (1) of unclear shape that was filled with a firm mid-light brown sandy silt (54).

Skeleton 51 was found *c.*1.5m north-west of skeleton 50, lying within a grave cut (2) on the same orientation (Pl. 3). This skeleton was also in good condition and was largely complete with only the right forearm, half of the right hand and fragments of pelvis missing. The grave cut was 0.53m wide and excavated to a depth of 0.14m. It had regular shallow sloping sides and a flat base on which the bones were lying and was filled with a mid grey-brown silty sand (55) with few small chalk and flint inclusions. The individual was lying extended in a supine position with the remains of the right hand twisted behind the lower back and pelvis and the left hand resting on the upper left leg (Fig. 4). The size of the bones and the very good condition of the teeth suggested that this may be a young adult burial. As with Skeleton 50, part of 51, in this case the lower legs and feet, extended into the baulk where, as they would not be disturbed, they were left. The only pottery found during the watching brief, two sherds of medieval Wallingford Ware, were recovered from the fill of this grave.

Skeleton 52 consisted only of 7 left ribs and a fragment of the left scapula (Pl. 3). These appeared to be lying in an west-east orientation with the lower body extending into the eastern side of the trench. The missing arms, skull and entire right-hand side of the torso can probably be attributed to the excavation of graves, including grave 2, for Skeleton 51, through ground in which Skeleton 52 was already buried, thus disturbing the earlier bones. Both Skeleton 52 and the last inhumation discovered, Skeleton 53, were found lying on top of layer 56 (see above) while both graves 1 and 2 (Skeletons 50 and 51) seemed to have been cut through this deposit.

The fourth burial, Skeleton 53, was discovered *c.*0.40m north and 0.20m higher than Skeleton 51 (Fig. 5). Like the others it was lying in an extended supine position, orientated with its head to the west and feet to the

east and with a portion of the skeleton extending into the ground outside the trench (Pl. 3). The bones exposed consisted of most of the skull, the top having been removed by the machine thus discovering the burial, the ribs and upper arms and the spinal column. Of particular note were the presence of unfused proximal and distal epiphyses on the humeri and right proximal radius and ulna suggesting that the individual is a sub-adult, probably in their early teens. As previously, the bone had been preserved in a good condition with the only damage being made during the discovery of the burial. As described above, Skeleton 53 was found at a higher level than 50 and 51, lying instead on top of layer 56 and not within a grave cut.

There was no indication as to the presence of the graves in the ground above but whether headstones had been removed at some point to clear the route of the path it is unclear. None of the bones appeared to have any obvious signs of trauma.

## **Finds**

### *Pottery* by Paul Blinkhorn

The pottery assemblage comprised 2 sherds with a total weight of 4g. They both occurred in the same context, (55), and are from an unglazed vessel, probably a jar, in Wallingford Ware (Oxfordshire County type-series fabric WA38) and dated *c.*AD1050 – 1250 (Mellor 1994). The ware is a common find in the area. Both the sherds are small, and are almost certainly the product of secondary deposition, if not residual.

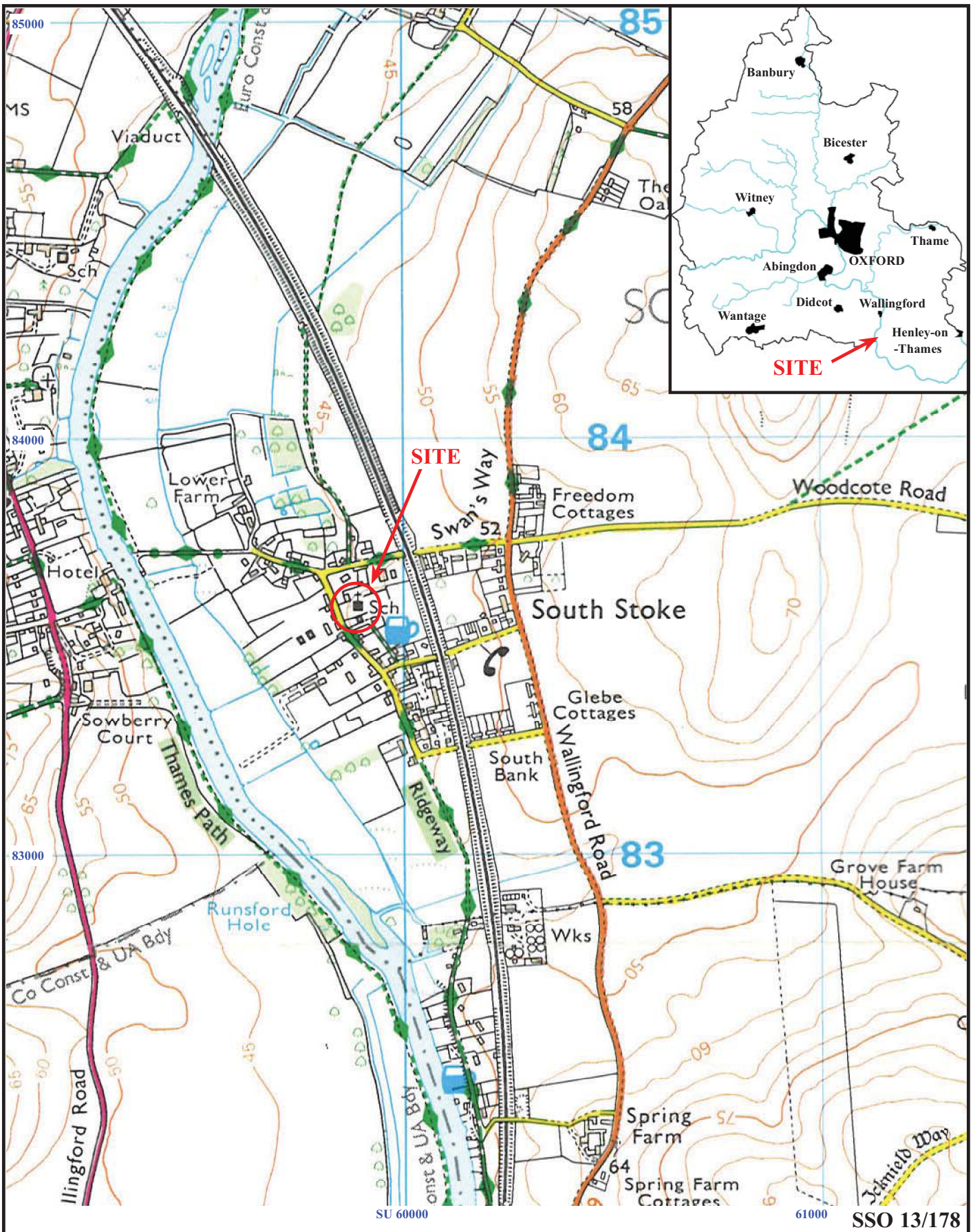
## **Conclusion**

As expected, the excavation of the pipe and sewerage trenches within the churchyard of St Andrew's Church located several human burials. The four that were exposed were all aligned west to east and, from their differing depths, the presence of grave cuts and the disturbed nature of one of the skeletons, appeared to represent at least two different phases of burial. As there were no grave markers or headstones the date of death and burial for each of the individuals is unknown with only their orientation suggesting that they are of the Christian era. The finding of two sherds of medieval pottery within one of the grave fills may indicate that it dates to this period but is significantly more likely to be the product of secondary or residual deposition, that is having been present in the ground in which the grave was dug and therefore appearing in the backfill. The ages at death represented appear to range from sub-adult through to adult and none of the bones had any obvious signs of trauma. The inhumations discovered, therefore, are likely to be either unmarked graves or those whose marker has been removed during the development over time of the churchyard.

## References

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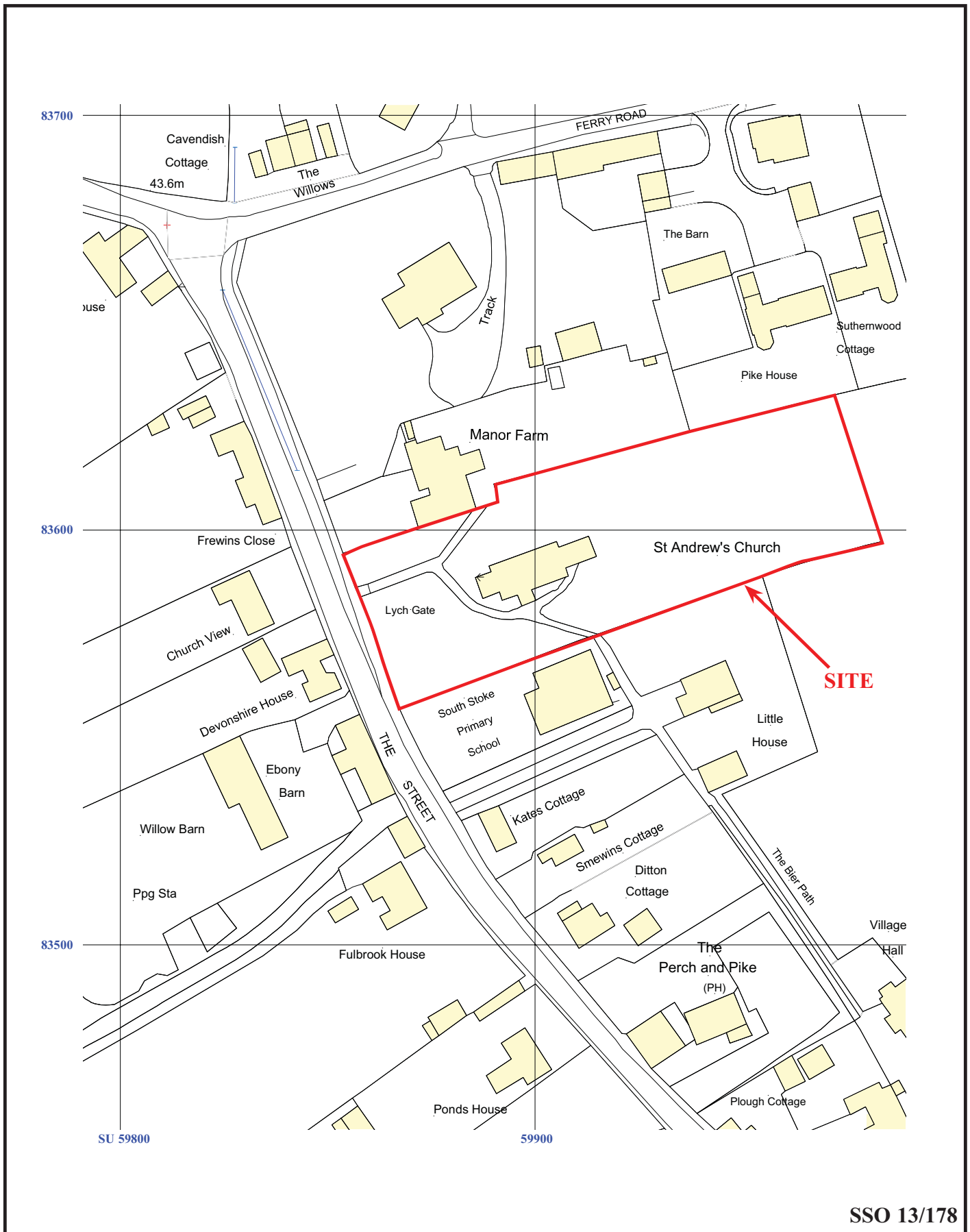


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Figure 1. Location of site within South Stoke and Oxfordshire

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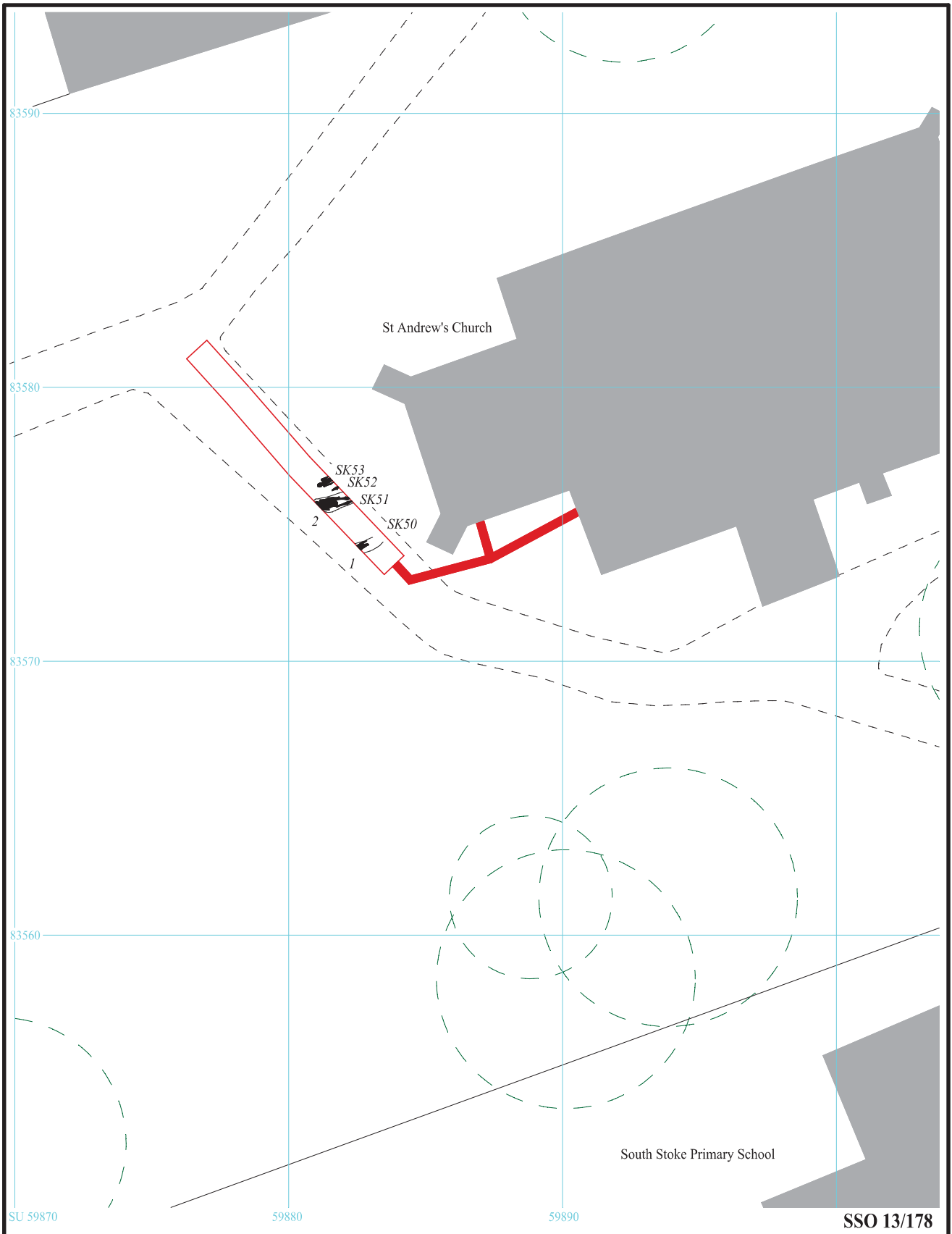
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Figure 2. Detailed location of site off The Street.

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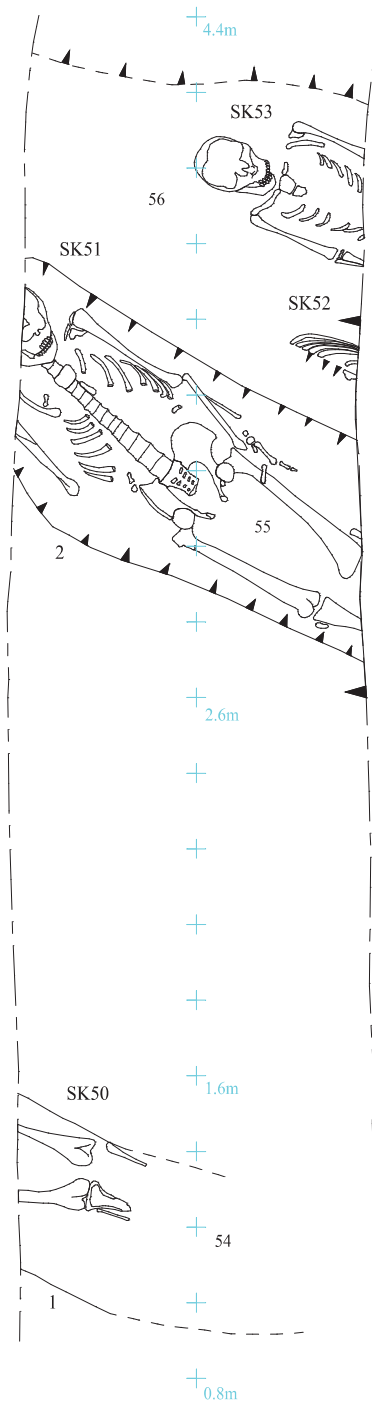


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Figure 3. Site plan.



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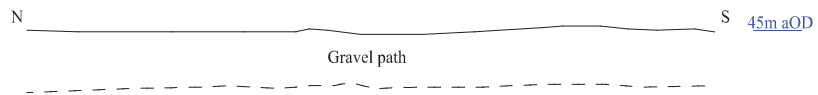
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Figure 4. Plan of burials.

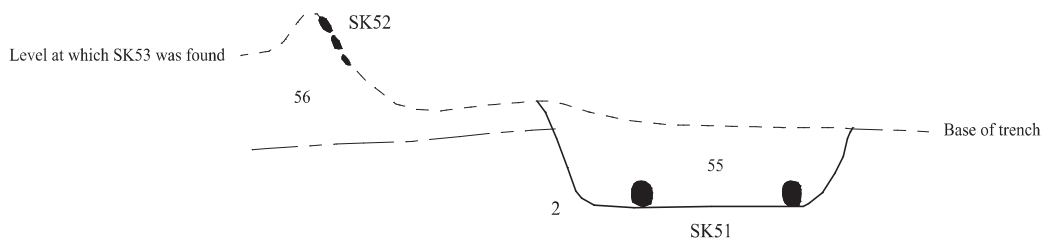


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Subsoil



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Figure 5. Representative section.



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Plate 1. Sewerage trench, looking northwest, Scales: 2m and 1m.



Plate 2. Grave 1 SK50, looking west, Scales: 1m and 0.1m.



Plate 3. Grave 2 SK51, SK52, SK53, looking west, Scales: 1m and 0.1m.

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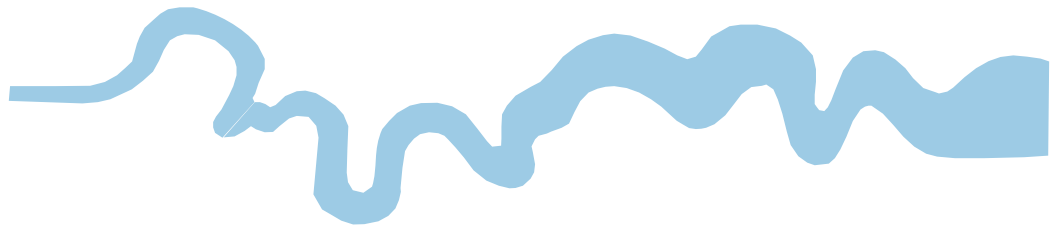
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Plates 1 - 3.

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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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