

T H A M E S V A L L E Y

ARCHAEOLOGICAL

S E R V I C E S

**The Hermitage, High Street,
Souldern, Oxfordshire**

Archaeological Watching Brief

by Andrew Muddin

Site Code: HGS15/212

(SP 5208 3150)

The Hermitage, High Street, Souldern, Oxfordshire

**An Archaeological Watching Brief
for William Green Architects**

by Andrew Muddin

Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code HGS 15/212

September 2015

Summary

Site name: The Hermitage, High Street, Souldern, Oxfordshire

Grid reference: SP 5208 3150

Site activity: Archaeological watching brief

Date and duration of project: 10th September 2015

Project manager: Steve Ford

Site supervisor: Andrew Muddin

Site code: HGS 15/212

Summary of results: A topsoil strip of the new detached garage at the rear of the property was observed. A shallow pit which contained two sherds of medieval pottery was uncovered.

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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www.tvas.co.uk/reports/reports.asp.*

Report edited/checked by:

Steve Preston ✓ 17.09.15

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Report 15/212

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological watching brief on land to the rear of The Hermitage, High Street, Souldern, Oxfordshire, OX27 7JN (SP 5208 3150) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Dr Isabel Lisboa, of Archaeologica Ltd, 7 Fosters Lane, Bradwell, Milton Keynes, MK13 9HD on behalf of William Green Architects, Unit 1a, Lakeside Farm, Middle Aston, Bicester, OX25 5PP.

Planning permission (app no P15/00145/F) and listed building consent (15/00146/LB) have been gained from Cherwell District Council to erect a new detached garage utilizing the access to the north-east of the existing house, which also includes terracing for an extension to the kitchen. The consent is subject to a condition relating to archaeology, which requires a programme of archaeological works, in this case a watching brief during groundworks.

This is in accordance with the Department for Communities and Local Government's *National Planning Policy Framework* (NPPF 2012), and the District Council's policies on archaeology. The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Mr Richard Oram, Planning Archaeologist at Oxfordshire County Historic and Natural Environment Team. The fieldwork was undertaken by Andrew Muddin on 10th September 2015 with the site code HGS 15/212. The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited at Oxfordshire County Museums Service in due course.

Location, topography and geology

The site is located in the village of Souldern, Oxfordshire 7km north-west of Bicester (Fig. 1). The Hermitage sits on the north side of the High Street, with a newly erected boundary wall separating its garden from the open parcel of land on the north. It is bounded by residential properties to the south and west. Manor Farm is to the north with its access to the east (Fig. 2). The natural geology is mapped as Northampton Sand over siltstone (BGS 1968), but a limestone marl was observed to be the natural deposit. The site lies at a height of 112m above Ordnance Datum.

Archaeological background

The archaeological potential of the site stems from its location on the margins of the historic (medieval) centre of Souldern. Souldern itself is not mentioned in Domesday Book but a Saxon cremation cemetery is located on the west side of the settlement. Also to the west of the site is the medieval manor and to the south several post-medieval buildings are listed. The Hermitage is mentioned in the Victoria County History, which notes it has two distinct phases of building with the western construct of 17th-century date and the other 18th, with 20th-century additions (VCH 1959). It is also a Grade II Listed Building. Of some significance is the presence of a Late Iron Age cremation burial in an urn from Manor Farm just to the north of the proposal site and there is a possibility of contemporary settlement nearby. A recent field evaluation immediately adjacent to the site to the north, located a several undated ditches, with their significance unclear (Bray 2015).

Objectives and methodology

The purpose of the watching brief was to excavate and record any archaeological deposits within the area of development. This involved the examination of a stripped area over the location of the footings for the new garage. A mechanical excavator was used fitted with bladed grading bucket, 1.6m wide. The new extension to the kitchen would only require minimal terracing to the already raised lawn in this location.

Results

The garden of The Hermitage had already been separated from the plot of land recently subjected to archaeological evaluation (Bray 2015). An insert within the boundary wall allowed for the garage to be placed at the end of the access to the rear of the property. This area was topsoil stripped to a depth of 0.3m, with a maximum of 0.56m removed on the western edge of the house's raised lawn (Fig. 3 and Pl. 2). This thickening of the ground had protected subsoil deposits and a shallow pit in the north-west corner of the strip.

Pit 1 was 0.06m deep and 1.8m in diameter with a roughly ovoid shape, with its northern edge just clipped by the cut for the new boundary wall foundation. Two sherds of pottery from the single fill (52) this pit (Fig. 4; Pl. 2), both large and in good condition, suggest a date in the 12th century AD.

Other deposits encountered (Fig. 3) included a brick course for a shallow foundation, most probably for a greenhouse, and a SW-NE aligned gully/drain which contained late 19th century pottery, which was retained onsite. An apple tree that had until recently been standing in this location had its roots removed, creating a shallow throw hole within the exposed surface.

Finds

Pottery by Paul Blinkhorn

The pottery assemblage comprised 2 sherds with a total weight of 105g. They both occurred in a single context, (52), and were recorded using the conventions of the Oxfordshire County type-series (Mellor 1994), as follows:

OX234: Banbury Ware, late 11th – late 14th century. 1 sherd, 18g,

OXBK: Medieval Shelly Coarseware, AD1100-1350. 1 sherd, 87g.

The fabric types are typical of sites in the region. Both the sherds are fairly large and in good condition, and appear reliably stratified. The sherd of OXBK is from the rim of a large shallow bowl, a typical product of the tradition (Blinkhorn 2010). The other sherd is an unglazed bodysherd from a jar, which is again typical (Mellor 1994). The assemblage is almost certainly of 12th century date.

Conclusion

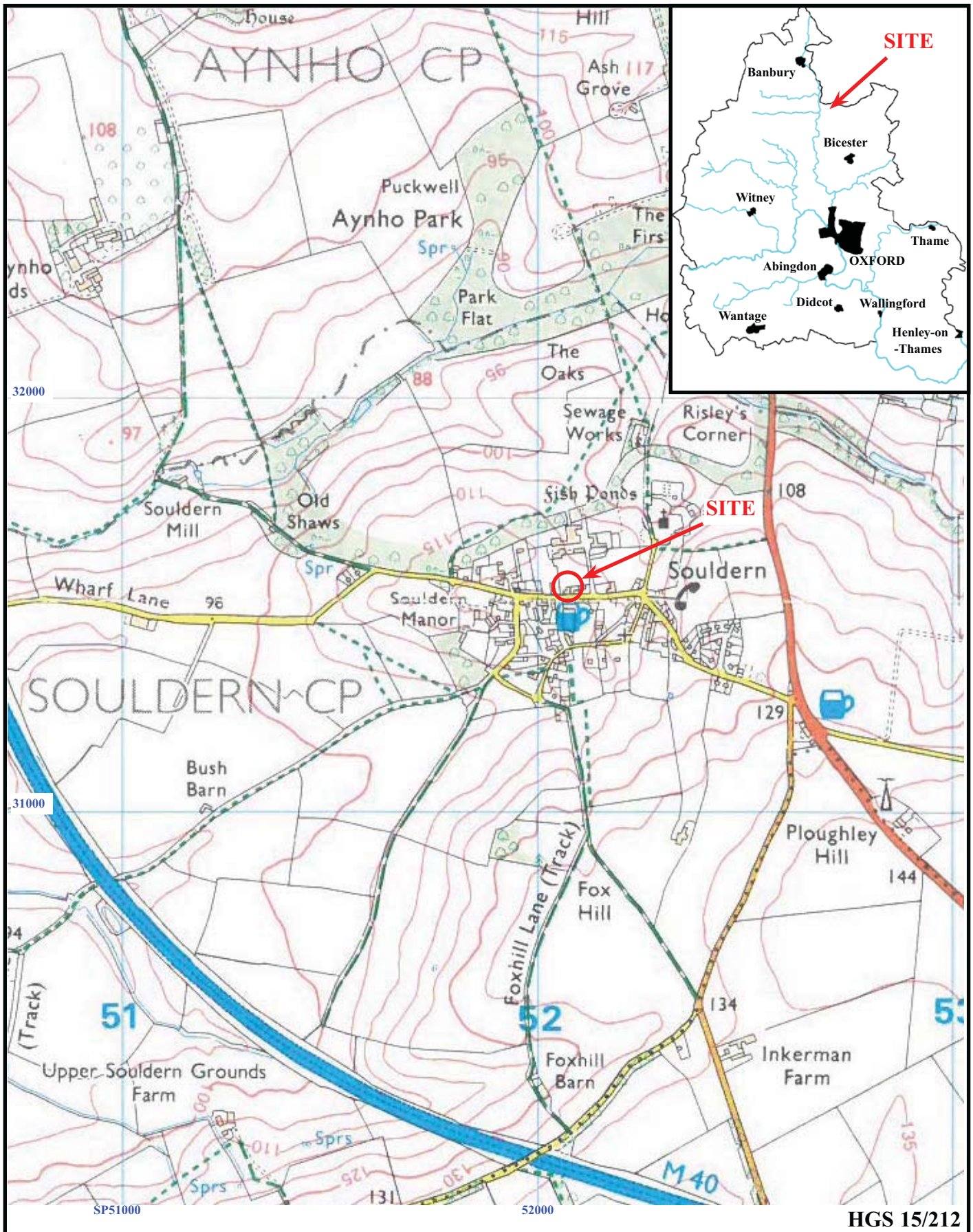
The watching brief was successful in recovering 12th-century pottery from a shallow pit. The site lies around 300m south-west of the parish church, which is first recorded in AD1161 but certainly must have existed earlier, along with a settlement of some sort, which has been supposed to have been part of an ‘exceptionally privileged’ manor (VCH 1959), perhaps accounting for its omission from Domesday Book. The modest findings here tentatively suggest occupation along the High Street at around the same period. There is, however, no obvious or immediate connection with the undated features previously noted to the north (Bray 2015).

References

- BGS, 1968, *British Geological Survey*, 1:50000, Sheet 218, Solid and Drift Edition, Keyworth
- Bray, D, 2015, ‘Proposed Beech House, High Street, Souldern, Oxfordshire: An Archaeological Evaluation’, TVAS unpubl rep **15/143**, Reading
- NPPF, 2012, *National Planning Policy Framework*, Dept Communities and Local Govt, London
- VCH, 1959, 'Parishes: Souldern', In *A History of the County of Oxford: Vol. 6* ed. Mary D Lobel (London 1959), pp301-312, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/oxon/vol6/pp301-312> (accessed 9th September 2015)

APPENDIX 1: Trench details

<i>Trench</i>	<i>Length (m)</i>	<i>Breadth (m)</i>	<i>Depth (m)</i>	<i>Comment</i>
1	20.10	1.80	0.62	0-0.28m topsoil; 0.28m-0.55m subsoil; 0.55m+ natural geology. Natural at N end; light blue grey silty sand. Natural at S end; light yellow brown sandy silt with silty clay patches. Ditches 1, 2, 3 [Pls 1 and 2]

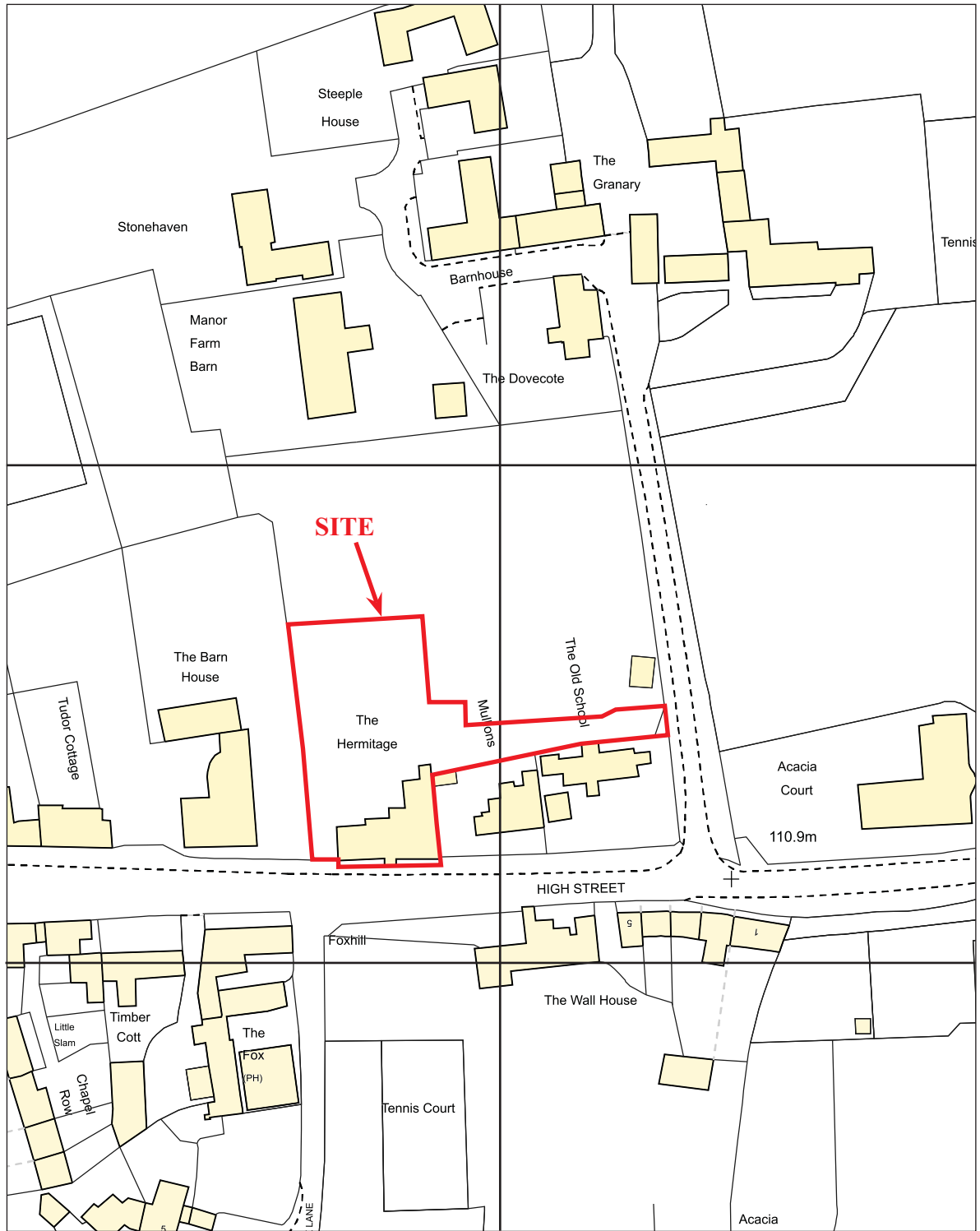


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Figure 1. Location of site within Souldern and Oxfordshire

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SITE

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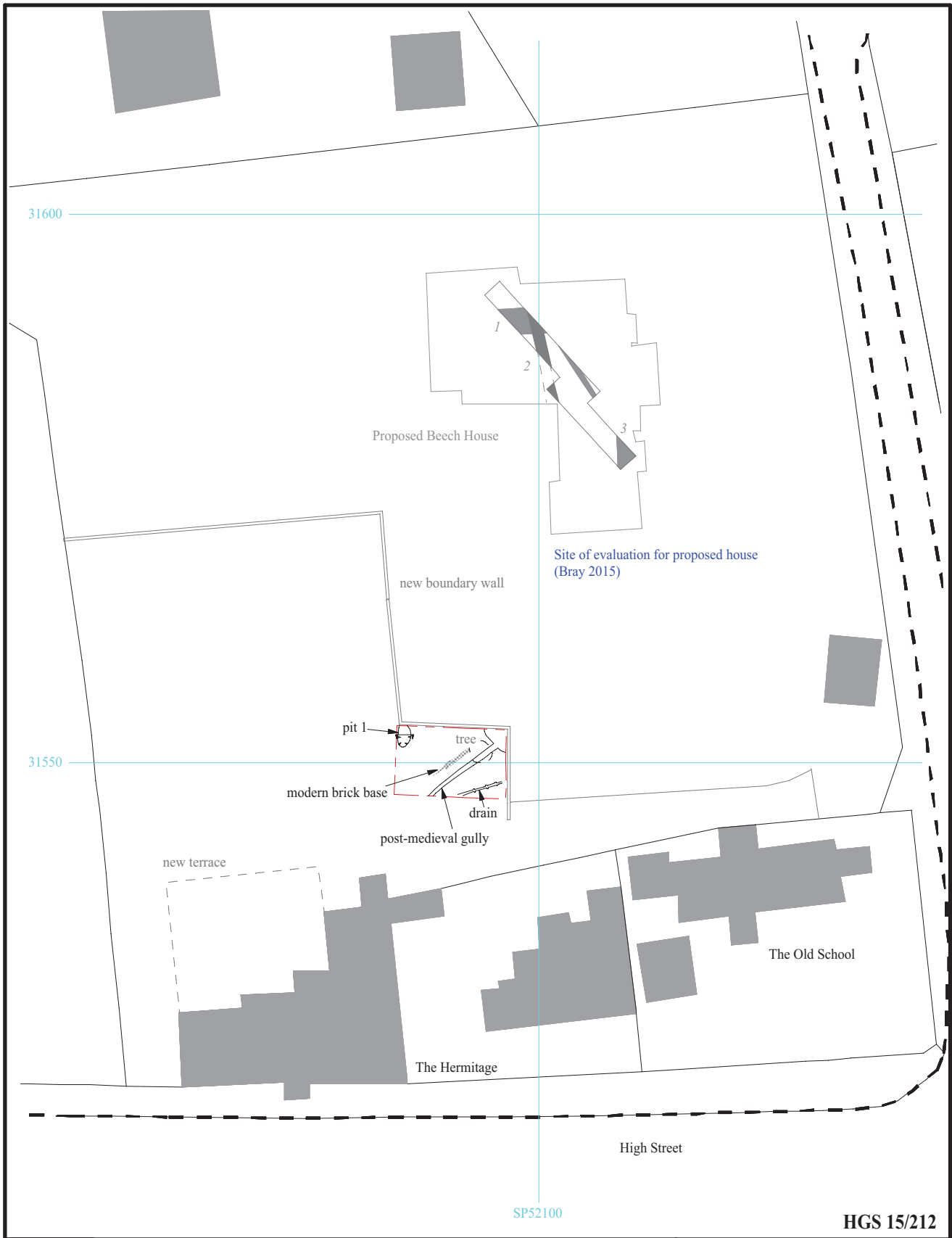


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Figure 2. Detailed location of site off High Street.

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Figure 3. Location of trench





1

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Figure 4. Section.



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Plate 1. Stripped area, looking east, Scales: 1m and 0.5m.



Plate 2. Pit 1, looking north, Scales: 0.5m.

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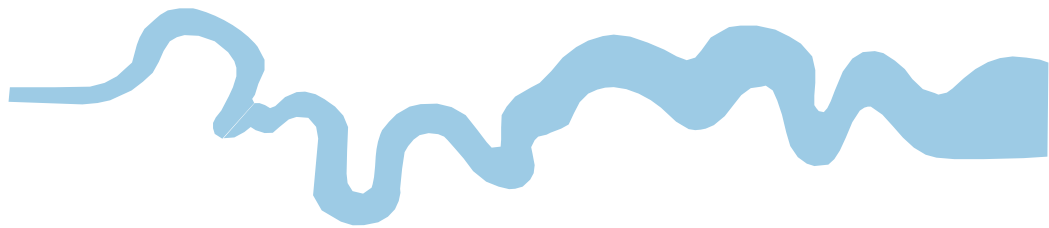
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Plates 1 - 2.

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TIME CHART

	Calendar Years
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





**Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd,
47-49 De Beauvoir Road, Reading,
Berkshire, RG1 5NR**

**Tel: 0118 9260552
Fax: 0118 9260553
Email: tvas@tvas.co.uk
Web: www.tvas.co.uk**