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ARCHAEOLOGICAL

S E R V I C E S

**Priest End Allotments, adjacent St Mary's Churchyard,  
Priest End, Thame, Oxfordshire**

**Archaeological Evaluation**

**by David Platt**

**Site Code: PET15/206**

**(SP 7032 0628)**

# **Priest End Allotments, adjacent St Mary's Churchyard Priest End, Thame, Oxfordshire**

**An Archaeological Evaluation  
for Thame Town Council**

by David Platt

Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code PET15/206

**November 2015**

## Summary

**Site Name:** Priest End Allotments, adjacent St Mary's Churchyard, Priest End, Thame, Oxfordshire

**Grid reference:** SP 7032 0628

**Site activity:** Archaeological Evaluation

**Date and duration of project:** 9th and 10th November 2015

**Project manager:** Steve Ford

**Site supervisor:** David Platt

**Site code:** PET15/206

**Area of site:** 0.13ha

**Summary of results:** The evaluation has demonstrated the archaeological potential of the site with occupation deposits of Late Saxon and early medieval date. The fieldwork seems to have recorded a component of Thame that is likely to have been in existence before the later planned town.

**Location and reference of archive:** The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited with Oxfordshire County Museum 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 ✓ 27.11.15 Steve Preston ✓ 30.11.15
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# **Priest End Allotments, adjacent St Mary's Churchyard, Thame, Oxfordshire An Archaeological Evaluation**

by David Platt

**Report 15/206**

## **Introduction**

This report documents the results of an archaeological field evaluation carried out at Priest End Allotments, Thame, Oxfordshire (SP 7032 0628) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Ms Janine Howells of Thame Town Council, Town Hall, High Street, Oxfordshire OX9 3DP.

Planning permission (app no P14/S0620/FUL) has been sought from South Oxfordshire District Council to create an extension to the churchyard burial ground. As a consequence of the possibility of archaeological deposits on the site which may be damaged or destroyed by groundworks, a field evaluation has been requested by Oxfordshire County Archaeological Service. This is in accordance with the *National Planning Policy Framework* (NPPF 2012, para 128) and the District Council's Local Plan policies. Further fieldwork may be required if significant archaeological deposits are encountered. The archaeological potential of the site has been highlighted in a brief for the project prepared by Mr Richard Oram of Oxfordshire County Archaeological Service (Oram 2015) and the field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by him. The fieldwork was undertaken by David Platt and Thomas Stewart on the 9th and 10th November 2015 and the site code is PET15/206. The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited with Oxfordshire Museums Service in due course.

## **Location, topography and geology**

The site is located on an irregular parcel of land in the north-western extent of Thame, *c.* 0.2km to the south of the River Thame (Fig. 1). The site is bordered to the west by Priest End, to the north and east by St Mary's Church and to the south by an area of grass owned by the Tithe Barn (Fig. 2). The site is at an elevation of *c.* 65m aOD and the underlying geology is mapped as sand (BGS 1994), which was observed at the bottom of the trenches, approximately 0.50m below a layer of light red brown sandy clay.

## **Archaeological background**

The archaeological potential of the site has been highlighted in a brief for the project prepared by Oxfordshire County Archaeological Service (Oram 2015). In summary the site lies with the historic core of Thame close to the medieval parish church which has 12th century origins. To the south-east lies the site of the medieval manor complex documented in the 13th century and to the south stands the tithe barn of early post-medieval (15th/16th century) date. The prebendal manor house of 13th century date lies to the north. In general the site lies within the area of Thame in existence before the Bishop of Lincoln formed the planned town in the 13th century.

## **Objectives and methodology**

The purpose of the evaluation was to determine the presence/ absence, extent, condition, character, quality and date of any archaeological or palaeoenvironmental deposits within the area of development.

The specific research aims of this project were:

- to determine if archaeological deposits of any period were present;
- to determine if any occupation or burial deposits of late Saxon or medieval date were present; and
- to determine if any deposits relating to late Saxon or medieval settlement were present.

It was proposed to dig 2 trenches, 20m long and 1.6m wide and this was done using a 360° excavator fitted with a toothless ditching bucket and under constant archaeological supervision to expose archaeologically sensitive levels. All spoilheaps were checked for finds. Where archaeological features were certainly or probably present, the stripped areas were to be cleaned using appropriate hand tools, and sufficient of the archaeological features and deposits exposed will be excavated or sampled by hand to satisfy the aims of the brief, without compromising the integrity of archaeological features or deposits which warranted preservation in-situ, or might have better been excavated under conditions pertaining to full excavation.

## **Results**

Both trenches were dug as intended. They ranged in length from 19.40m to 20.20m and in depth from 0.50m to 0.56m. A complete list of trenches giving lengths, breadths, depths and a description of sections and geology is given in Appendix 1.

### Trench 1 (Figs 3, 4 and 5; Pl. 1)

Trench 1 was aligned SW - NE and was 19.40m long and 0.50m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.40m of topsoil and 0.10m subsoil overlying natural geology. A ditch (1) was recorded which was 1.75m wide and 0.75m deep and filled with three fills (Pl. 3). The primary fill (54) consisted of a dark brown grey sandy silt with

occasional charcoal and gravel inclusions, 12 early medieval (11th century) pottery sherds, bone and a single piece of probably Roman tile were recovered. The secondary fill (53) consisted of a light brown grey sandy silt with very occasional charcoal and gravel inclusions, no finds were recovered. The tertiary fill (52) consisted of a dark brown grey sandy silt with occasional charcoal inclusions, pottery, iron slag and animal bone were recovered.

Two pits were also observed. Pit 2 was 0.75m in diameter and 0.20m deep and had a single fill (55) which consisted of a dark grey brown sandy silt with very occasional gravel inclusions, no finds were recovered. The second pit (3) was more than 1.10m in diameter and 0.27m deep (Pl. 4) and had a single fill which consisted of a dark brown grey sandy silt with occasional charcoal inclusions, this feature may have been a ditch terminus but due to its location within the trench it was difficult to tell. A single sherd of early medieval (11th century) pottery was recovered.

#### Trench 2 (Figs 3, 4 and 5; Pl. 2)

Trench 2 was aligned W - E and was 20.20m long and 0.56m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.26m of topsoil and 0.19m subsoil overlying natural geology. A gully terminal (4), posthole (5) and two ditches (6, 7) and a pit (8) were observed in Trench 2. The gully terminal (4) was 0.70m wide and 0.09m deep and contained a single fill (57) which consisted of a dark brown grey sandy silt with very occasional charcoal and occasional gravel inclusions, a single sherd of 13th century medieval pottery was recovered. Pit (5) was 0.50m in diameter and 0.18m deep (Pl. 5) and contained a single fill (58) which consisted of a dark brown grey sandy silt with occasional gravel inclusions. No finds were recovered.

Ditch 6 (Pl. 6) was 1.40m deep and 2m wide and contained 5 fills, the primary fill (63) consisted of a light red brown sandy silt with very occasional gravel inclusions, 2 early medieval (11th century) pottery sherds and bone were recovered. The secondary fill (62) consisted of a dark brown grey sandy silt with occasional gravel inclusions, 9 early medieval (11th century) pottery sherds and bone. The tertiary fill (61) was light yellow brown sandy silt with very occasional gravel inclusions and 3 early medieval (11th century) pottery sherds, and a small fragment of non-diagnostic iron slag. The 4th fill (60) consisted of a mid brown grey sandy silt with very occasional gravel inclusions, no finds were recovered. The 5th fill (59) consisted of a light brown grey sandy silt with frequent gravel inclusions and very occasional charcoal inclusions, 13 early medieval (11th century) pottery sherds, bone a human tooth and tile were recovered. Ditch 7 was 1.10m deep and was cut by ditch 6. A single fill (64) was observed and this consisted of a light brown grey sandy silt with occasional gravel inclusions. No finds were recovered.

Pit 8 was 0.95m in diameter and 0.14m deep and contained a single fill (65) which consisted of a dark brown grey sandy silt with very occasional gravel inclusions. A small piece of unidentified animal bone was recovered, and a fragment of irregular hand-made brick, likely of medieval date.

## **Finds**

### *Pottery* by Paul Blinkhorn

The pottery assemblage comprised 41 sherds with a total weight of 489g. It is entirely of earlier medieval date, (late 11th century) other than one later 13th century sherd and a single Roman vessel. It was recorded using the conventions of the Oxfordshire County type-series (Mellor and Oakley 1984; Mellor 1994), as follows:

**OXAC: Cotswolds-type Ware**, AD975–1350. 11 sherds, 63g.

**OXBF: North-East Wiltshire Ware**, AD1050–1400. 2 sherds, 15g.

**OXY: Medieval Oxford Ware**, AD1075–1350. 22 sherds, 335g.

**OXAM: Brill/Boarstall Ware**, AD1200–1600. 1 sherds, 7g.

There were also five sherds (69g) of Roman pottery, all from the foot-ring base of a single vessel in Oxford Colour-Coat Ware, fabric OXRS (Tomber and Dore 1998), and of 3rd – 4th century date. The pottery occurrence by number and weight of sherds per context by fabric type is shown in Appendix 3. The range of fabric types is typical of sites in the region.

The assemblage from context 62 includes a large fragment from the rim and body of a jar which, unusually, has square-notched rouletting covering most of the outer surface, and is also heavily sooted. The rest of the medieval assemblage comprised fragments of undecorated jars, other than a single fragment of a glazed OXAM jug. They are all typical products of their respective traditions.

### *Human Bone* by Ceri Falys

A single human tooth was recovered from ditch 6 (59) in Trench 2. Identified as a permanent (i.e. adult) right maxillary second molar, a small area of calculus formation (medium severity) was present on the buccal surface of the tooth (graded based criteria by Brothwell 1981), and a large carious lesion was located on the distal surface along the cemento-enamel junction. Based on the degree of occlusal surface wear, the individual was approximately 25-35 years of age at the time of death. No further information could be retrieved from this isolated adult tooth.

### *Charred Plant remains* by Joanna Pine

Samples were taken from ditches 1 (54) and 6 (53) and c. 10L from each were floated wet sieved using a 0.25m mesh. Sample <1> 1 (54) contained a large number (> 20) charred cereal grains whilst sample <2> 6 (63) also

contained burnt cereal grains (>8) and a small number of charcoal fragments. These being of a size and condition to have the potential for identification.

### *Animal Bone* by Lizzi Lewins

A small assemblage of animal bone (26 pieces), weighing a total of 271g was recovered from four features (Appendix 4). The bone was classified according to size (large mammal – cow/horse; medium – sheep/goat, deer; small – cat, dog) and where possible to species level. The bone although fragmentary was generally in good condition with a small amount of surface erosion and abrasion noted. The majority of the bone was hand collected on site although a small proportion was recovered from the environmental samples.

Ditch 1 (52, 54) contained a total of twelve pieces of bone, six of which were recovered from sample 1. Deposit 52 contained one piece of calcaneus from a large mammal which was unfused (metaphysis) and may have been chopped. Deposit 54 contained five pieces of identifiable bone, comprising a fragment of medium sized mammal rib and two fragments of rib from a small mammal. A long bone shaft, which showed evidence of slicing, and partial tibia shaft were identified from a sheep/goat. A piece of jaw was too small to identify.

Ditch 6 (59, 62, 63) contained eleven pieces of bone, including three from sample 2. Deposit 59 included two cattle teeth (M1 or M2) and a rib fragment which had been burnt and came from either a small mammal or a young medium mammal. Deposit 63 contained a small fragment of pig maxilla with fragments of teeth *in situ*.

The minimum number of individuals was one each of cattle, pig and sheep/goat. The small assemblage of animal bone recovered is likely to represent domestic consumption. A small proportion of the bone showed evidence for butchery but no other taphonomic processes were observed.

## **Conclusion**

The evaluation has demonstrated the archaeological potential of the site with a number of certain and probable archaeological features of Late Saxon/early medieval (11th century) date. The features revealed seem typical of occupation deposits but include a substantial ditch which probably acts as a plot boundary. One feature of probable 13th century date was also identified. The fieldwork seems to have recorded a component of Thame that is likely to have been in existence before the later planned town. Residual Roman finds also point to some earlier occupation nearby.

## **References**

BGS, 1994, *British Geological Survey*, 1:50000, Sheet 237, Solid and Drift Edition, Keyworth



- Oram, R, 2015, 'Priest End Allotments, Former private allotments adjacent to St Mary's Churchyard, Priest End, Thame', Design Brief for archaeological Evaluation, Oxfordshire County Council, Oxford
- Mellor, M and Oakley, G, 1984, 'A summary of the key assemblages, a study of pottery, clay pipes, glass and other finds from fourteen pits, dating from the 16th to the 19th century', in T G Hassall, C E Halpin and M Mellor, 'Excavations in St Ebbe's, Oxford, 1967–1976: Part II: Post-medieval domestic tenements and the Post-Dissolution site of the Greyfriars', *Oxoniensia*, **49**, 181–211.
- Mellor, M, 1994, 'A Synthesis of middle and late Saxon, medieval and early post-medieval pottery in the Oxford Region', *Oxoniensia*, **59**, 17–217.
- NPPF, 2012, *National Planning Policy Framework*, Dept Communities and Local Government, London.

**APPENDIX 1: Trench details**  
 0m at W and SW end

<i>Trench</i>	<i>Length (m)</i>	<i>Breadth (m)</i>	<i>Depth (m)</i>	<i>Comment</i>
1	19.40	1.8	0.50	0–0.40m topsoil, 0.40-0.50m light brown grey sandy clay subsoil, 0.50m+ natural light red brown sandy clay geology. Ditch1 and Pits 2 and 3. <b>[Pls 1, 3 and 4]</b>
2	20.20	1.8	0.56	0–0.26m topsoil, 0.26-0.45m subsoil, 0.45m+ natural geology. terminus 4, posthole 5 and ditches 5,6 and 7. <b>[Pls 2, 5 and 6]</b>

**APPENDIX 2: Feature details**

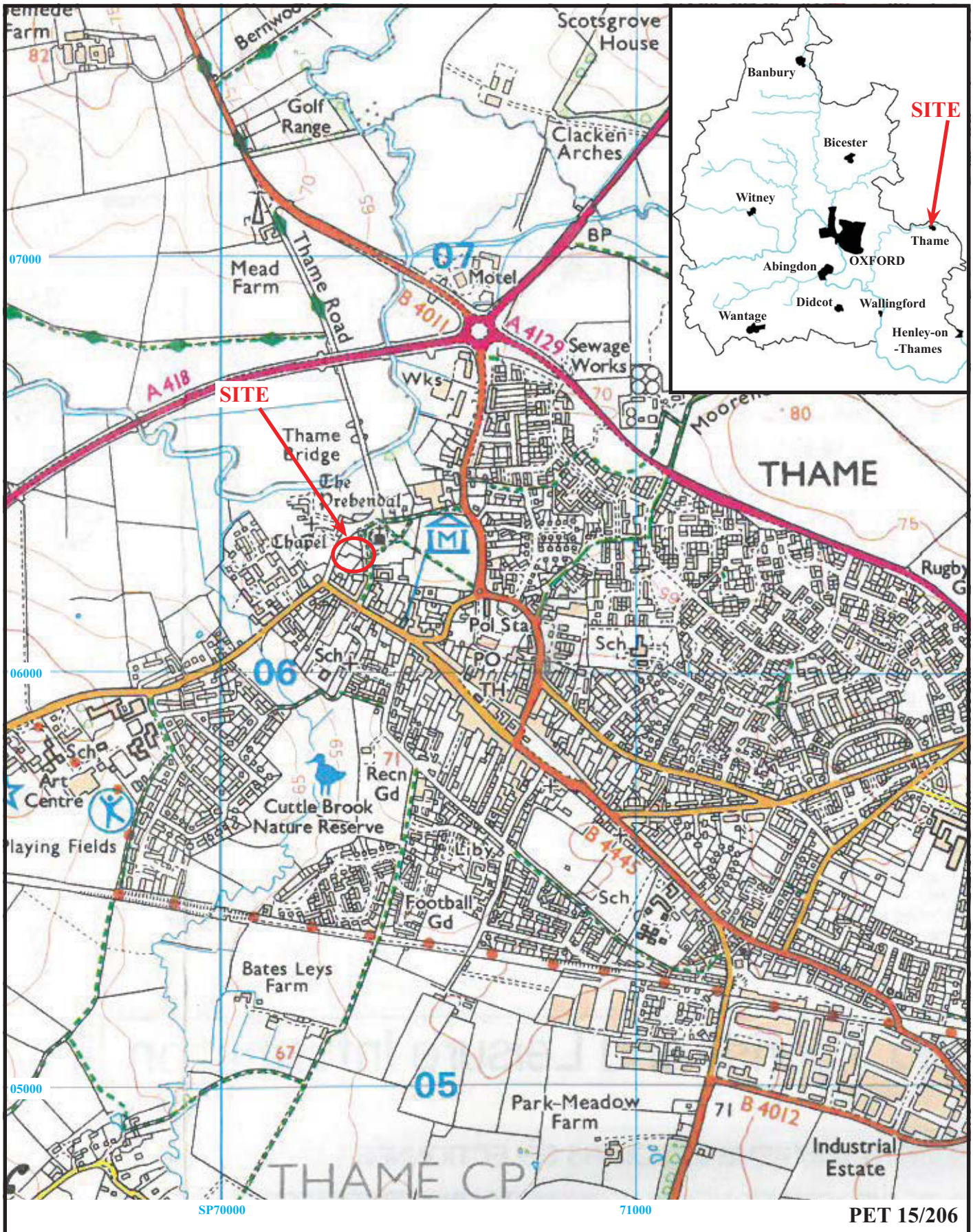
<i>Trench</i>	<i>Cut</i>	<i>Fill (s)</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Dating evidence</i>
1	1	52-4	Ditch	Late Saxon/Early medieval 11th century	Pottery
1	2	55	Pit	-	
1	3	56	Pit	Late Saxon/Early medieval 11th century	Pottery
2	4	57	Gully Terminus	Medieval 13th century	Pottery
2	5	58	Posthole	-	
2	6	59-63	Ditch	Late Saxon/Early medieval 11th century	Pottery
2	7	64	Ditch	-	
2	8	65	Pit	?Medieval	Brick

**APPENDIX 3: Pottery occurrence by number and weight (in g) of sherds per context by fabric type**

<i>Cut</i>	<i>Fill</i>	<i>OXRS</i>		<i>OXAC</i>		<i>OXBf</i>		<i>OXY</i>		<i>OXAM</i>	
		<i>No</i>	<i>Wt</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Wt</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Wt</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Wt</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Wt</i>
1	52	-	-	2	7	1	7	3	32	-	-
1	54	-	-	4	23	-	-	2	8	-	-
3	56	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	10	-	-
4	57	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	7
6	59	5	69	3	25	1	8	4	55	-	-
6	61	-	-	1	4	-	-	2	9	-	-
6	62	-	-	1	4	-	-	8	207	-	-
6	63	-	-			-	-	2	14	-	-
	Total	5	69	11	63	2	15	22	335	1	7

**APPENDIX 4: Animal Bone Inventory**

Trench	Cut	Deposit	Sample.	Type	No. Frags	Wt (g)	Cattle	Pig	Sheep/Goat	Large	Medium	Small	Unid	Notes
1	1	52	-	Ditch	2	22	-	-	-	1	-	-	1	Unfused, chopped?
1	1	54	-	Ditch	4	34	-	-	2	-	1	-	1	Sliced
1	1	54	1	Ditch	6	18	-	-	-	-	-	2	4	
1	3	56	-	Pit	2	50	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	Rib and tooth
2	6	59	-	Ditch	3	53	2	-	-	-	-	1	-	Burnt rib
2	6	62	-	Ditch	2	16	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	
2	6	63	-	Ditch	3	54	-	1	-	2	-	-	-	
2	6	63	2	Ditch	3	6	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	
2	8	65	-	Pit	1	18	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	
		Total			26	271	1	1	1					
		MNI					1	1	1					



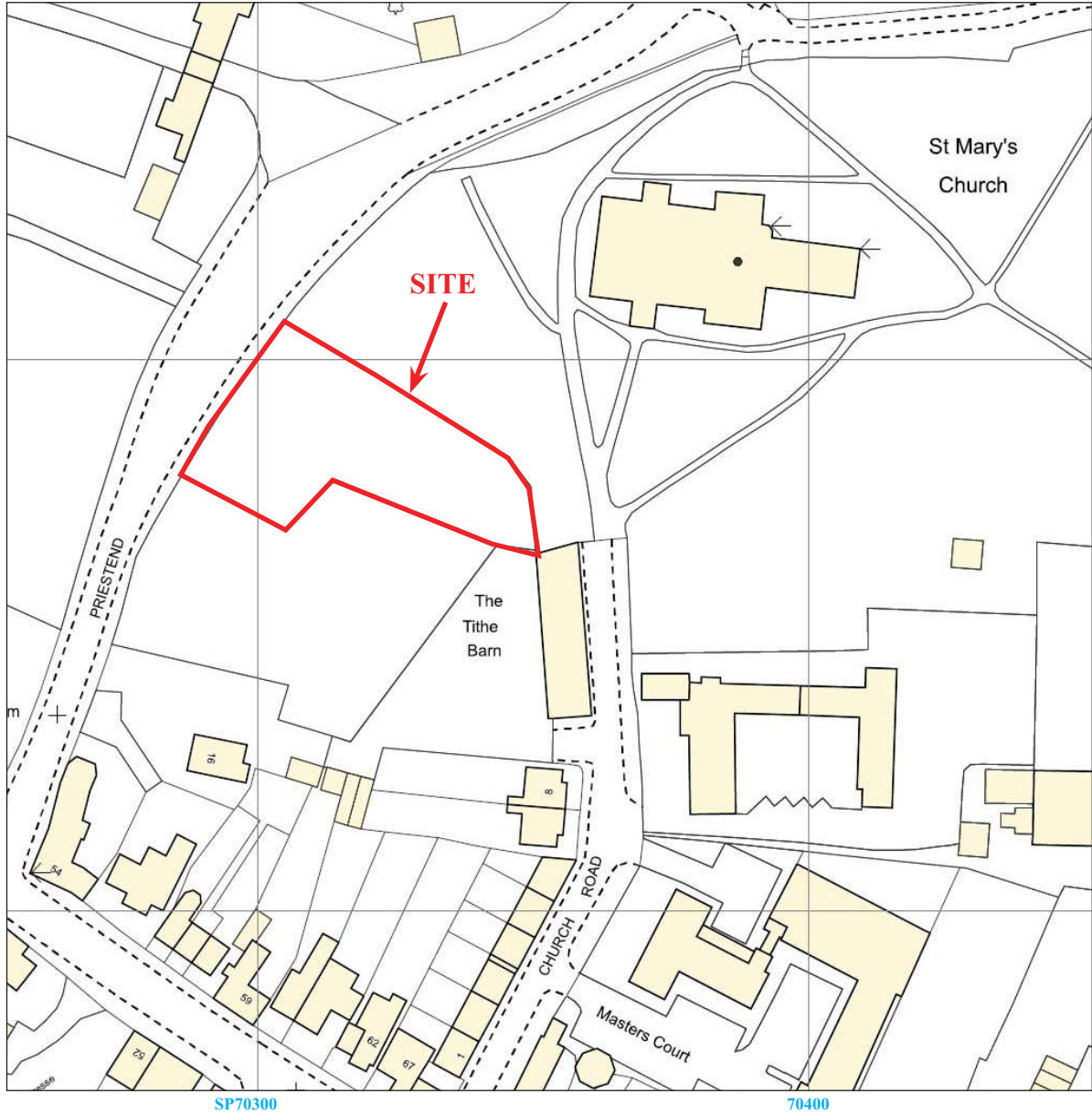
**Priest End Allotments, adjacent St. Mary's Churchyard,  
 Priest End, Thame, Oxfordshire, 2015  
 Archaeological Evaluation**

Figure 1. Location of site within Thame and Oxfordshire

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**Priest End Allotments, adjacent to St. Mary's Churchyard,  
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Figure 2. Detailed location of site off Priest End.

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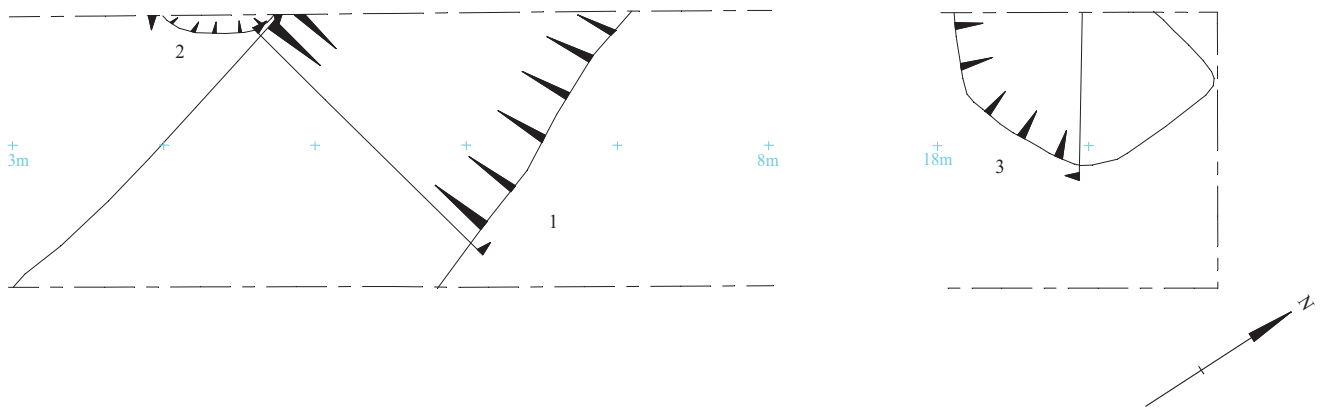
**Priest End Allotments, adjacent to St. Mary's Churchyard,  
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Figure 3. Location of trenches.

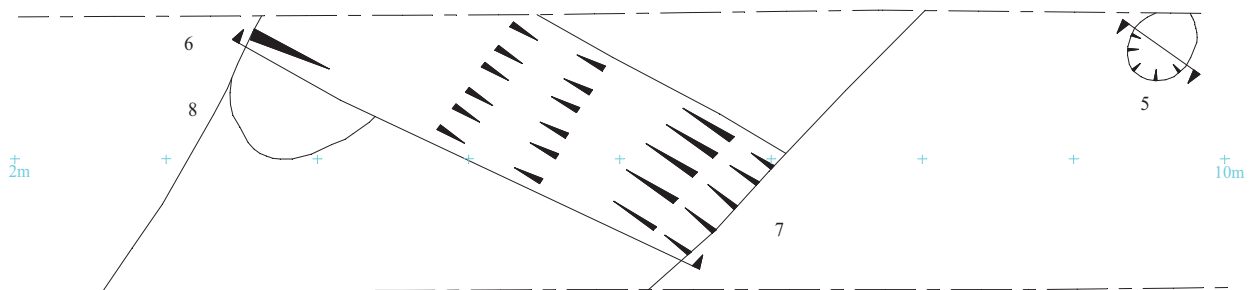




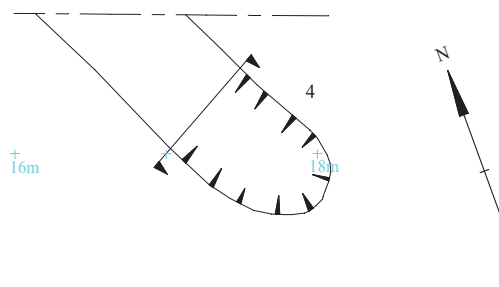
Trench 1



Trench 2



Trench 2 continued



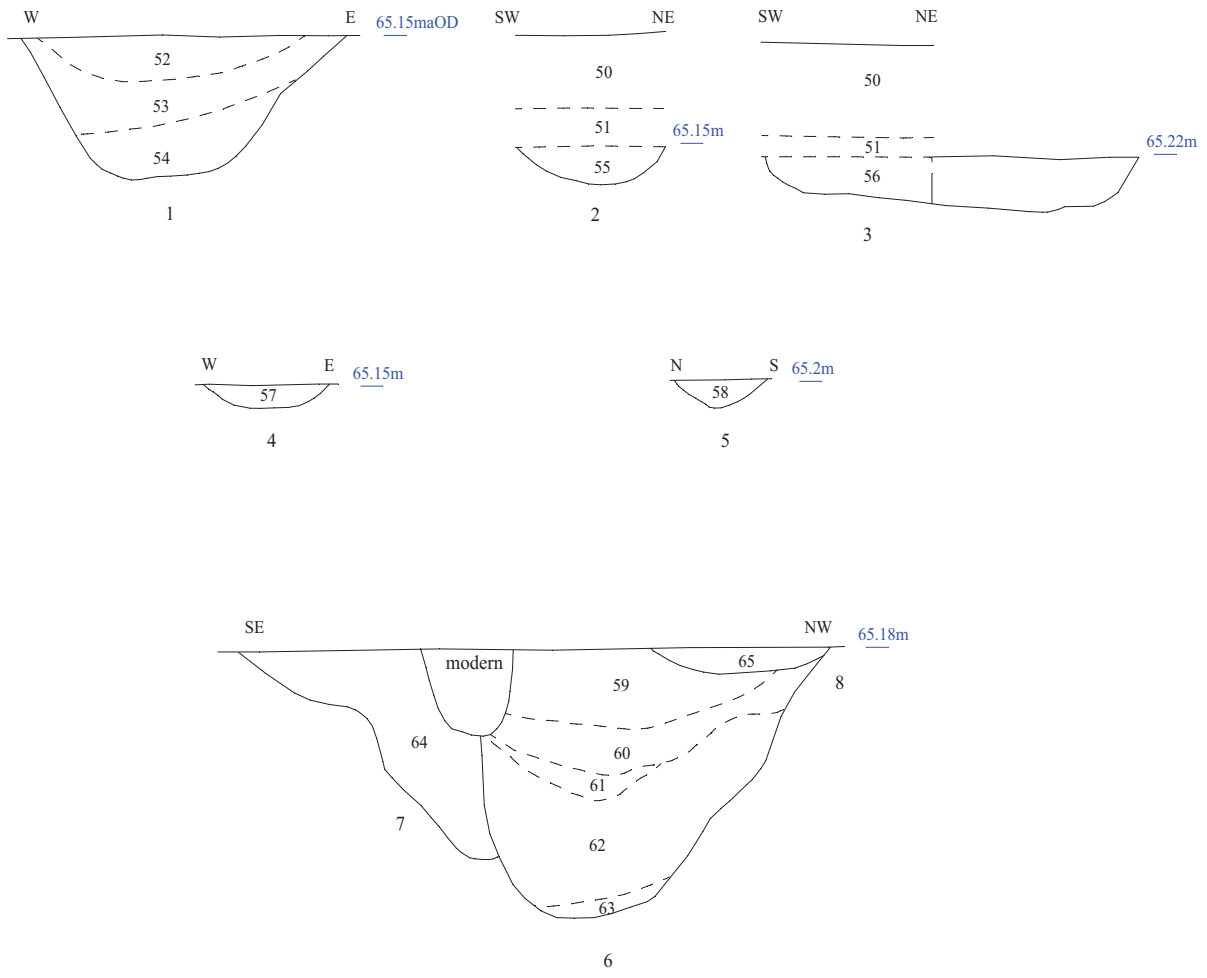
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**Priest End Allotments, adjacent to St. Mary's Churchyard,  
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Figure 4. Detail of trenches.



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Figure 5. Sections.





Plate 1. Trench 1, looking north east, Scales: horizontal 2m and 1m, vertical 0.5m.



Plate 2. Trench 2, looking east south east, Scales: horizontal 2m and 1m, vertical 0.5m.

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**Priest End Allotments, adjacent to St. Marys Churchyard,  
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Plates 1 - 2.**

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Plate 3. Trench 1, ditch 1, looking north west, Scales: 2m and 0.5m.



Plate 4. Trench 1, pit 3, looking north east, Scales: 1m and 0.1m.

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**Priest End Allotments, adjacent to St. Marys Churchyard,  
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Plates 3 - 4.**

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Plate 5. Trench 2, pit 5, looking east, Scales: 0.5m and 0.1m.



Plate 6. Trench 2, ditch 6 and 7 cut by pit 8, looking north east Scales: 2m and 1m.

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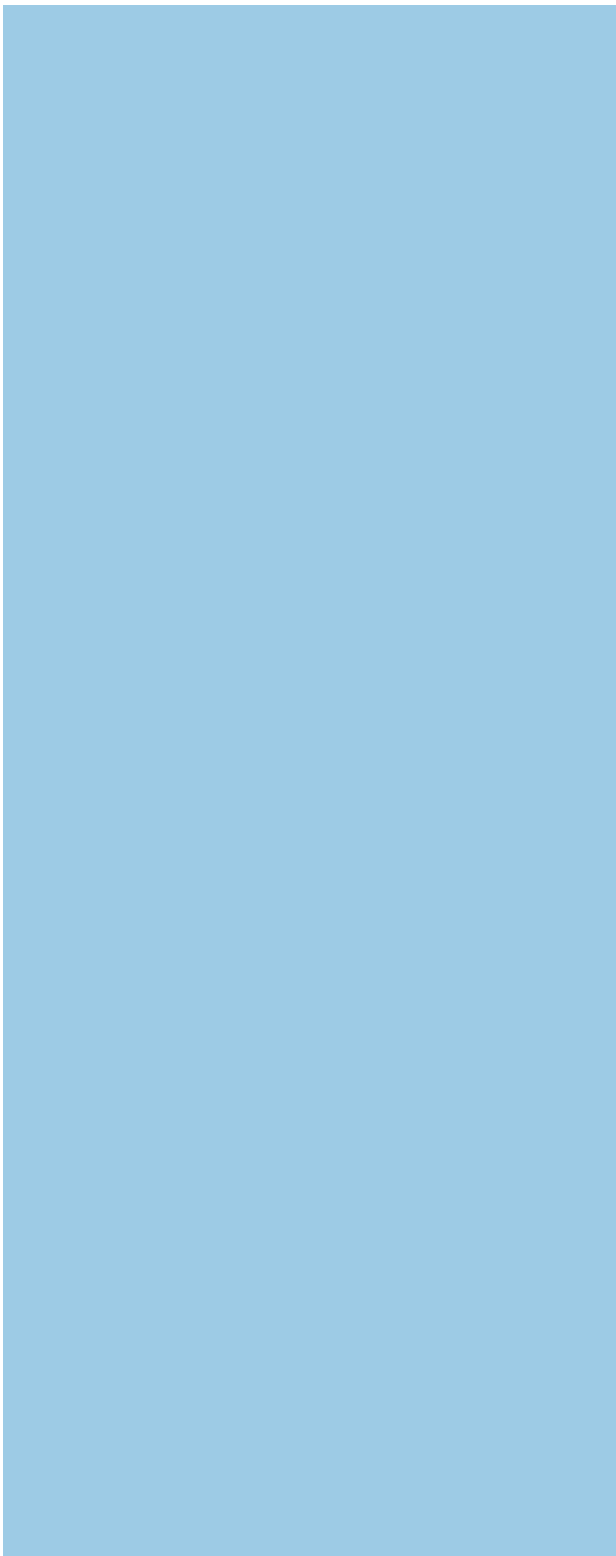
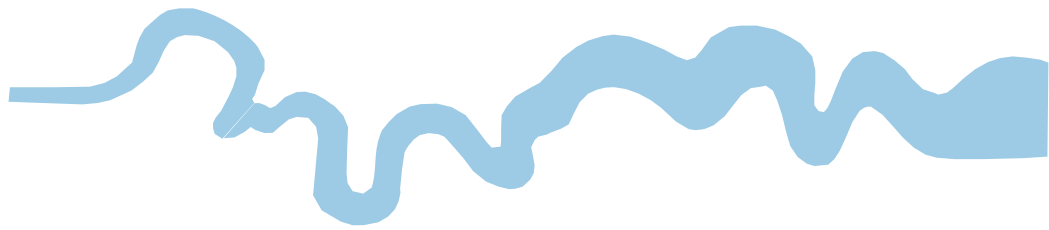
Plates 5 - 6.

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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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