

**T H A M E S      V A L L E Y**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL**

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

**Former Police Station, Church Street,  
Wantage, Oxfordshire**

**Archaeological Evaluation**

**by David Platt**

**Site Code: CSW15/201**

**(SU 3976 8778)**

**Former Police Station, Church Street,  
Wantage, Oxfordshire**

**An Archaeological Evaluation  
for Renaissance Group of Companies Ltd**

by David Platt

Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code CSW15/201

**February 2016**

## Summary

**Site name:** Former Police Station, Church Street, Wantage, Oxfordshire

**Grid reference:** SU 3976 8778

**Site activity:** Archaeological Evaluation

**Date and duration of project:** 10th–11th February 2016

**Project manager:** Tim Dawson

**Site supervisor:** David Platt

**Site code:** CSW 15/201

**Area of site:** c. 0.27 ha

**Summary of results:** A ditch of post medieval date was observed as well as a ditch and a gully of unknown date.

**Location and reference of archive:** The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited with Oxfordshire Museums Service in due course, with accession code OXCMS:2016.18.

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Report edited/checked by: Steve Ford ✓ 16.02.16 Steve Preston ✓ 16.02.16
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# Former Police Station, Church Street, Wantage, Oxfordshire An Archaeological Evaluation

by David Platt

Report 15/201

## Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological field evaluation carried out at the former Police Station and Magistrates' Court, Church Street, Wantage, Oxfordshire (SU3976 8778) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Robert Taylor of Renaissance Group of Companies, Brightwater House, Market Place, Ringwood, Hampshire, BH24 1AP.

Planning permission (app no P15/V0729/FUL) has been gained from Vale of White Horse District Council to demolish the existing magistrates court and police station on the site and to erect thirty-two retirement apartments, with associated landscaping and car parking. As a consequence of the possibility of archaeological deposits on the site which may be damaged or destroyed by groundworks, conditions (6 and 7) have been attached to the planning consent that require a staged programme of archaeological investigation undertaken. This was to take the form, initially, of field evaluation by trial trenches, based on the results of which, further work might be required in order to mitigate the impact of the development on archaeological remains. This is in accordance with the *National Planning Policy Framework* (NPPF 2012) and the District Council's Local Plan policies.

The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Mr Hugh Coddington of Oxfordshire County Archaeological Service and based on a brief prepared by him (Coddington 2015). The fieldwork was undertaken by David Platt and Peter Banks on 11th and 12th February 2015 and the site code is CSW15/201. The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited with Oxfordshire Museums Service in due course with accession code OXCMS:2016.18.

## Location, topography and geology

The site is located in the centre of Wantage on the south side of Church Street (Fig. 1). The site was a former police station and magistrates court and lies at 92m above Ordnance Datum. The underlying geology is mapped as Upper Greensand (BGS 1971) and this was observed in the trenches as a pale grey green clay with sedimentary stone patches. The buildings on the site had been demolished by the time of the fieldwork (Fig. 2).

## **Archaeological background**

The archaeological potential of the site area has been highlighted in a brief for the project prepared by Mr Hugh Coddington of Oxfordshire County Archaeological Service (Coddington 2015). In summary the site lies within the historic core of the settlement just to the south of the 13th church and market place (Foster *et al.* 1975) (Fig. 5). However, more recent fieldwork on the eastern fringes of the town centre have revealed extensive medieval occupation suggesting that the medieval town was larger than originally thought or its focus is further to the east (Lewis in press). Evidence of Bronze Age Roman and Saxon activity has also been recorded in the locality (Holbrook and Thomas 1997; Lewis in press).

## **Objectives and methodology**

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

The specific research aims of this project are:

to determine if archaeological deposits of any period were present; and

to determine if any deposits of prehistoric Roman or Saxon date were present

It was proposed that five trenches, each 15m long and 1.6m wide (*c.*4% of the site area) were to be dug within the footprint of the new buildings. These were to be excavated with a 360° excavator under constant archaeological supervision. 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 any features that might warrant preservation *in situ* or might be better investigated under the conditions pertaining to full excavation. All trench spoilheaps were to be monitored for finds.

## **Results**

One trench was not excavated due to the presence of a 2m deep cellar in the area of intended investigation, this cellar had completely truncated the natural geology and therefore any archaeological deposits that might have been present would have been destroyed. Trenches 1 and 4 were dug as intended but Trenches 2 and 3 were re-positioned because of large stores of demolition rubble which inhibited the digging of the trenches (Fig. 2).

The trenches ranged in length from 12.50m to 17.70m and in depth from 0.65m to 1.0m. A complete list of trenches giving lengths, breadths, depths and a description of sections and geology is given in Appendix 1.

#### Trench 1 (Pl. 1)

Trench 1 was aligned SW–NE and was 17.70m long and 1.00m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.10m of concrete overlying 0.35m of gravel and sand levelling layer, which overlay 0.10m of dark brown grey silty clay made ground, and this in turn overlay the natural pale grey green clay geology. Several wall foundations from the former building were observed cutting into the natural geology. No features of archaeological significance were observed nor finds recovered.

#### Trench 2

Trench 2 was aligned SE - NW and was 12.50m long and 0.88m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.30m of concrete overlying 0.20m of gravel and sand levelling layer, this overlay 0.09m of dark brown grey silty clay made ground, this in turn overlay the natural pale grey green clay geology. Several wall foundations from the former building were observed cutting into the natural geology. A ditch was observed but not excavated at the northern end of the trench: this was the same as the one excavated in Trench 3.

#### Trench 3 (Figs 2 and 3; Pls 3 and 4)

Trench 3 was aligned S–N and was 15.50m long and 0.95m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.13m of concrete overlying 0.29m of gravel and sand levelling layer, this overlay 0.14m of dark brown grey silty clay made ground, this in turn overlay the natural pale grey green clay geology with patches of sedimentary stone.

Gully 1 was observed at the southern end of the trench, aligned north–south and was 0.20m wide and 0.08m deep and contained a single fill (52) which consisted of a mid brown grey clayey silt. No finds were recovered from this gully. A recut ditch was also observed in the centre of the trench, aligned east–west and was the same as the ditch observed in Trench 2. Ditch 2 was 0.50m deep and contained a single fill (53) which consisted of a dark grey brown humic clayey silt from which no finds were recovered. This ditch was cut by ditch 3 which was 1.80m wide and 0.55m deep and had a single fill (54) of dark brown grey sandy silty clay with occasional stone inclusions. Animal bone, a single piece of burnt flint weighing 1g, and a small piece of ceramic building material, likely to be post-medieval in date were recovered. It is likely that ditch 3 was a re cut of ditch 2 and therefore was later in date but closely related.

#### Trench 4 (Figs 2, 3 and 4; Pl. 1)

Trench 4 was aligned SW - NE and was 14.0m long and 0.65m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.17m of concrete overlying 0.20m of gravel and sand levelling layer, this overlay 0.19m of dark brown grey silty clay

made ground, this in turn overlay the natural pale grey green clay geology. Several wall foundations from the former building were observed cutting into the natural geology. No features of archaeological significance were observed nor finds recovered.

## **Finds**

### *Ceramic Building Material* by David Platt

A single piece of burnt clay was recovered from the fill (54) of ditch 3. This is most likely to be a piece of brick, but weighed less than 1g. The piece was pale reddish yellow in colour with yellow inclusions, likely to be post-medieval in date but due to its small size, and the lack of additional fragments from the site, no more information can be gained.

### *Animal Bone* by Lizzi Lewins

A small assemblage of animal bone (33 pieces), weighing a total of 399g, was recovered from one feature (ditch 3, fill 54) during the course of the evaluation. The bone was in good condition with little surface erosion or abrasion noted. The bone was classified according to size (medium sized mammal - sheep/goat, pig; small sized mammal - dog, cat) and where possible by species. Texts by Schmid (1972) and Hillson (1992) were used to confirm identification where necessary.

Of the 33 pieces of bone recovered, twelve pieces were identifiable. The identified remains consisted of two rib fragments, a partial metapodial shaft and two large fragments of innominate bone (pelvis; partial acetabulum; neck and partial iliac crest) which refitted and were classified as a medium sized mammal. A caudal vertebra was identified but could not be classified beyond either a small or medium sized mammal.

The bones that were identified to species level consisted of a rib fragment from a pig, two refitting fragments of sheep/goat tooth, an un-fused metapodial epiphysis from a sheep/goat, which was burnt, and two large fragments of cattle innominate bone. Once again the innominate consisted of a partial acetabulum, neck and partial iliac crest and was partially refitted. A cut mark, 25mm in length, was noted on the neck of the bone. The remaining 21 pieces of bone were too fragmentary to identify.

Apart from the burning and possible cut mark no other taphonomy was evident within the assemblage. It is likely that this assemblage represents small-scale domestic consumption.

## Conclusion

Three features were identified in the southern trenches on the site. A gully was undated and the ditches appeared to be post-medieval in date. The trenches in the northern area had footings cutting into the natural geology and made ground lying directly upon it. An area of approximately 18m x 4m at the northern end of the site had a cellar which was approximately 2m deep. The likelihood is that the northern half of the site was truncated by earlier building works and any archaeological remains there would have been destroyed. It is possible that the same occurred in the southern area of the site and that the two features observed were in fact originally deeper and only the bases had survived.

## References

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- Schmid, E, 1972, *Atlas of Animal Bones*, London



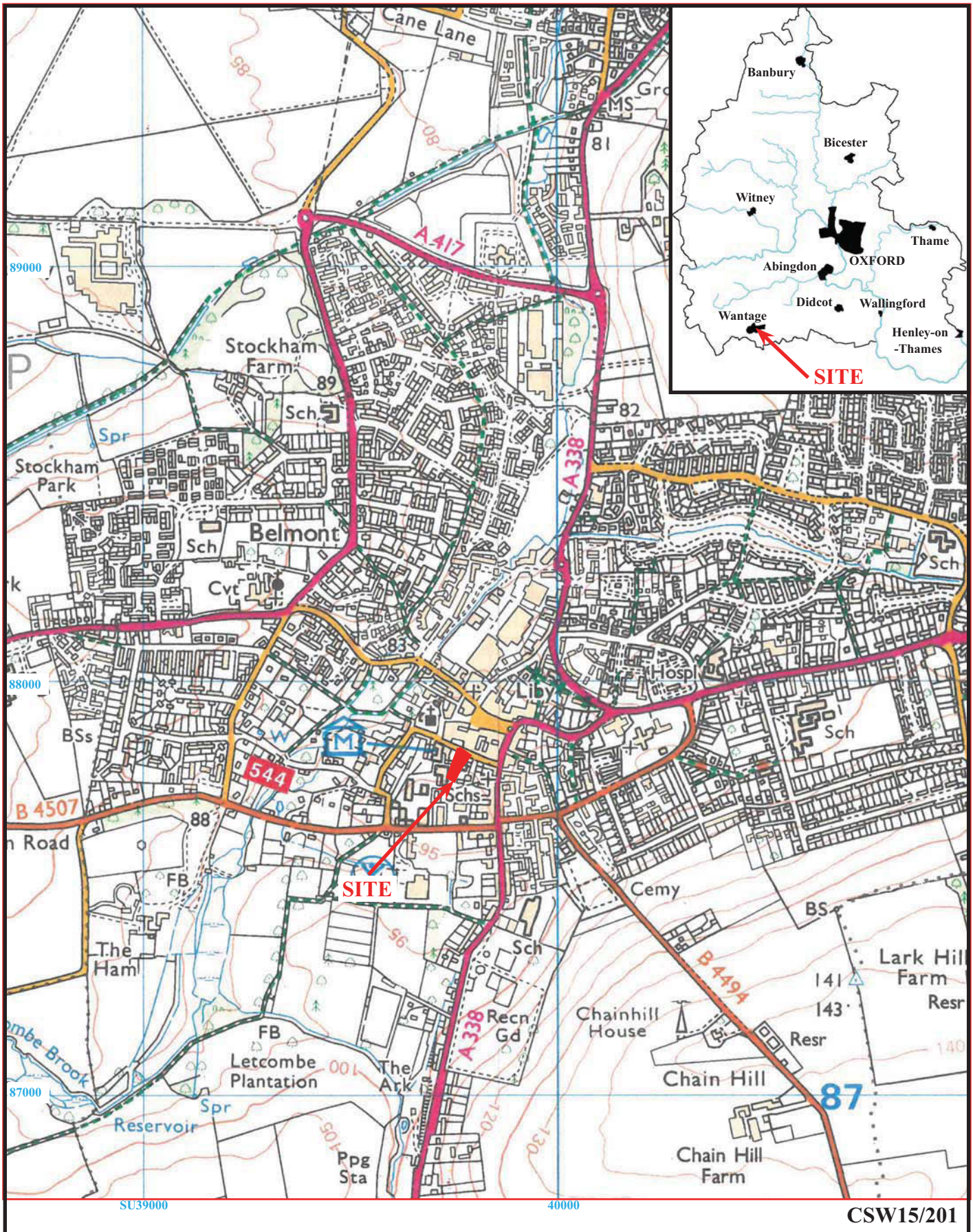
**APPENDIX 1: Trench details**

0m at S, SW and SE end

<i>Trench</i>	<i>Length (m)</i>	<i>Breadth (m)</i>	<i>Depth (m)</i>	<i>Comment</i>
1	17.70	1.80	1.00	0-0.10m concrete, 0.10-0.45m gravel levelling layer, 0.45-0.55m dark brown grey made ground, 0.55m+ natural geology. <b>[Pl. 1]</b>
2	12.50	1.80	0.88	0-0.30m concrete, 0.30-0.50m gravel levelling layer, 0.50-0.59m dark brown grey made ground, 0.59m+ natural geology. Ditch observed but not excavated.
3	15.50	1.80	0.95	0-0.13m concrete, 0.13-0.42m gravel levelling layer, 0.42-0.56m dark brown grey made ground, 0.56m+ natural geology. Gully 1, ditches 2 and 3. <b>[Pls 3 and 4]</b>
4	14.0	1.80	0.65	0-0.17m concrete, 0.17-0.37m gravel levelling layer, 0.37-0.56m dark brown grey made ground, 0.56m+ natural geology. <b>[Pl. 2]</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>
3	1	52	Gully	Unknown	
3	2	53	Ditch	Post medieval or earlier	stratigraphy
3	3	54	Ditch	Post Medieval	brick



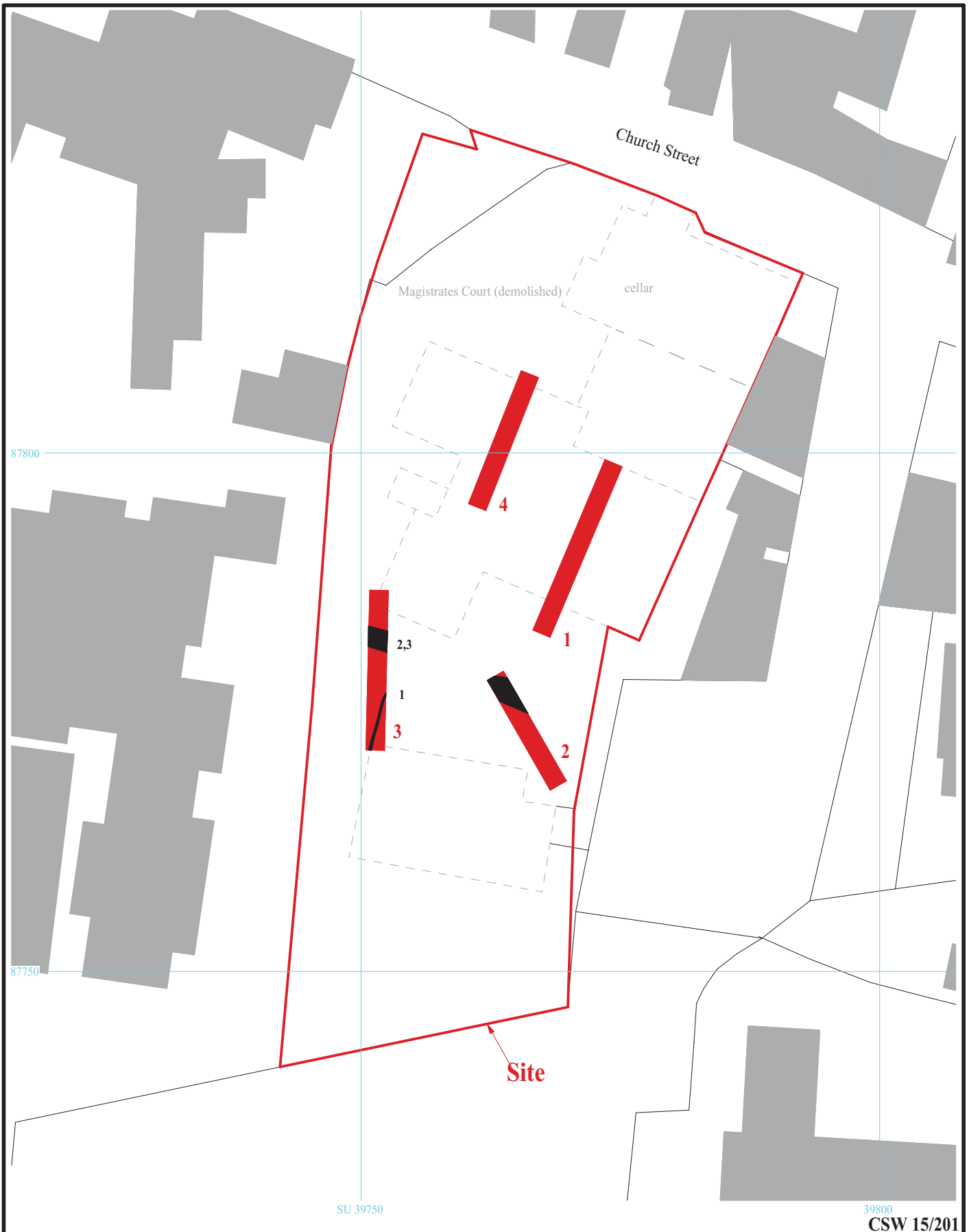
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Figure 1. Location of site within Wantage and Oxfordshire.

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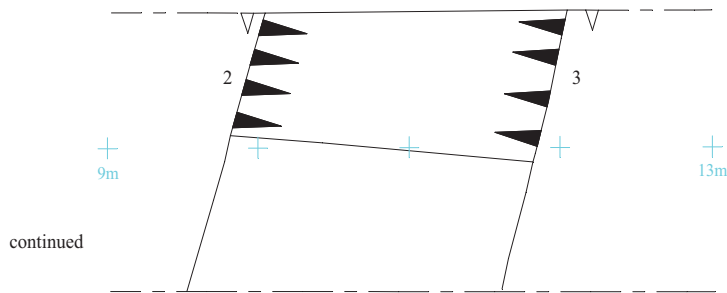
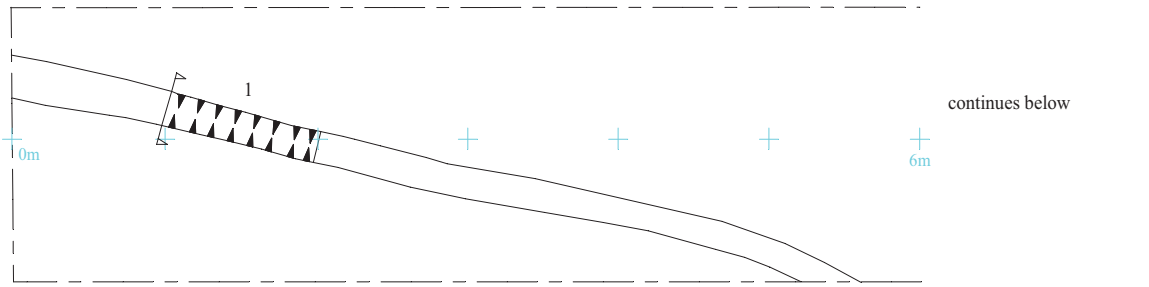
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Figure 2. Trench locations.

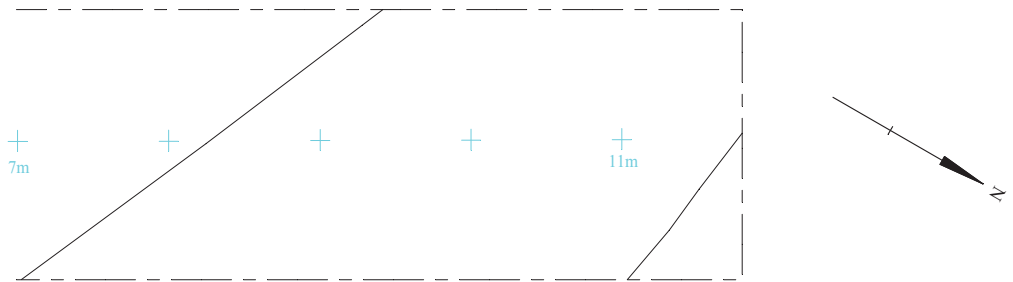


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Trench 3



Trench 2

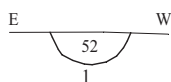
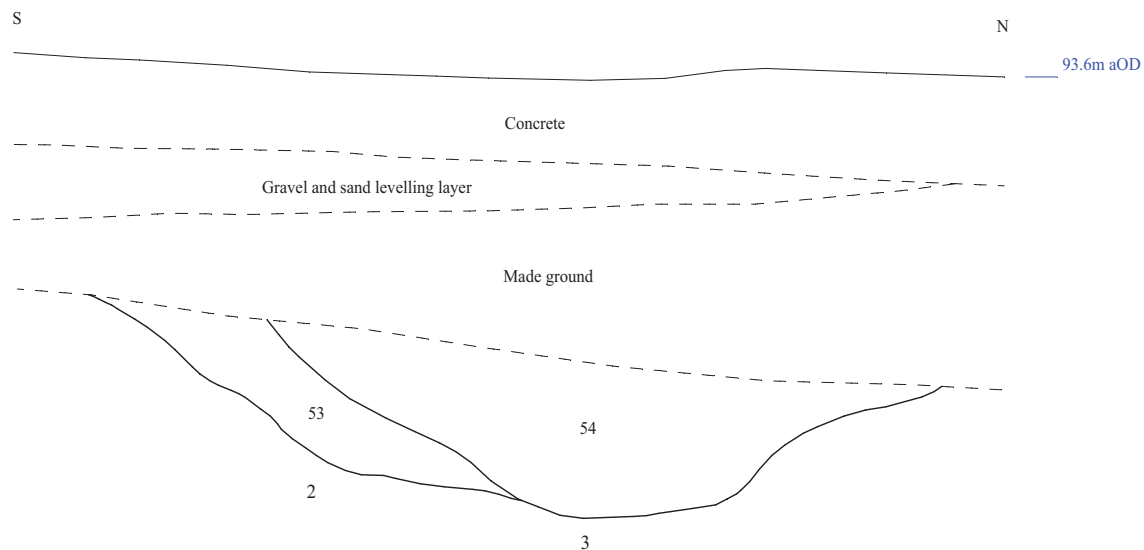


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Figure 3. Trench plans.





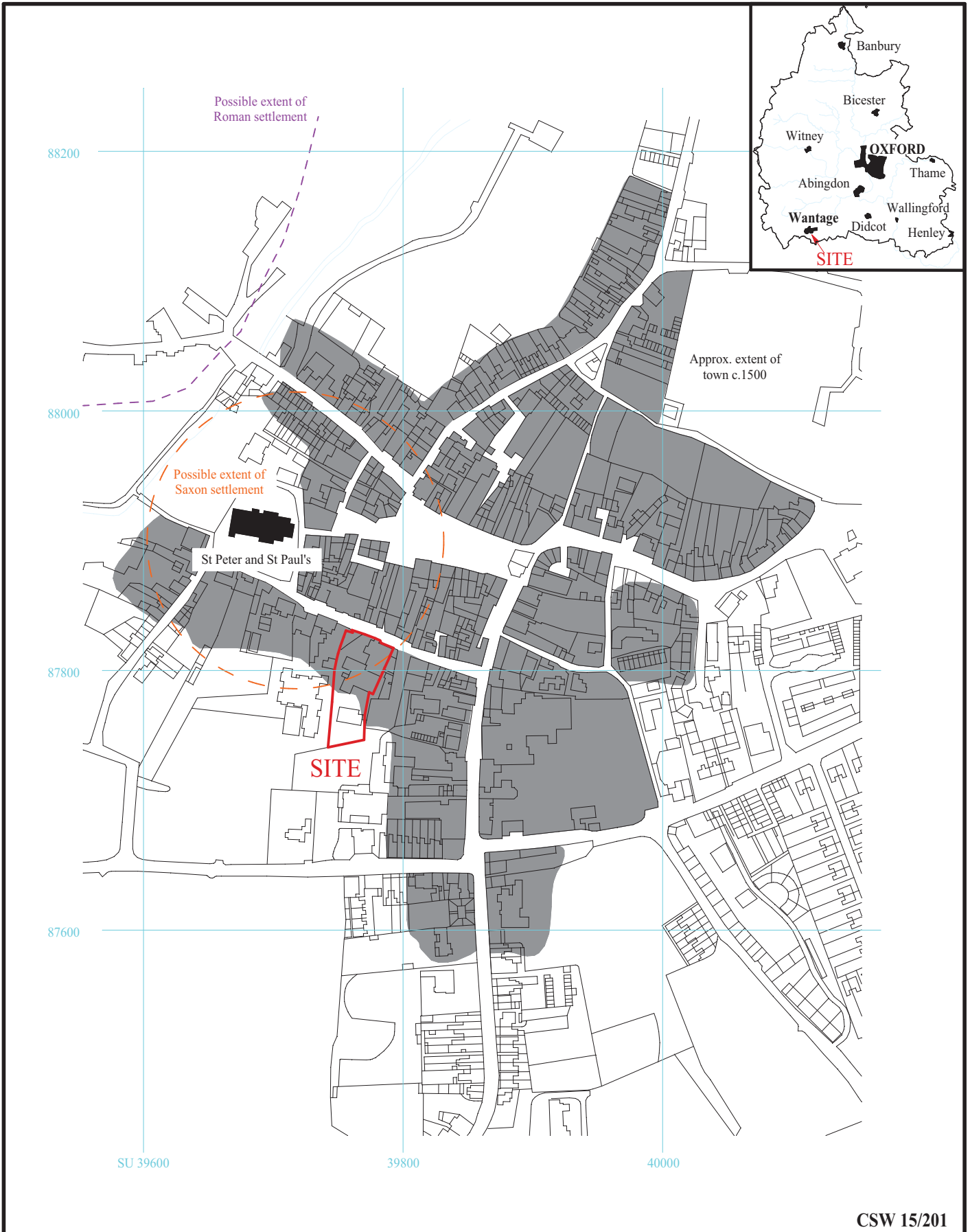
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Figure 4. Sections.



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Figure 5. Location of the site in Oxfordshire and Wantage showing the possible extents of the settlement in Roman, late Saxon and late medieval times (after Foster et al 1975).

0 250m



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



Plate 2. Trench 4, looking north east, Scales: 0.50m, 1m and 2m.

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Plates 1 - 2.**

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Plate 3. Gully 1, looking south, Scale: 0.10m.



Plate 4. Ditches 2 and 3, looking west, Scales: 0.50m and 2m.

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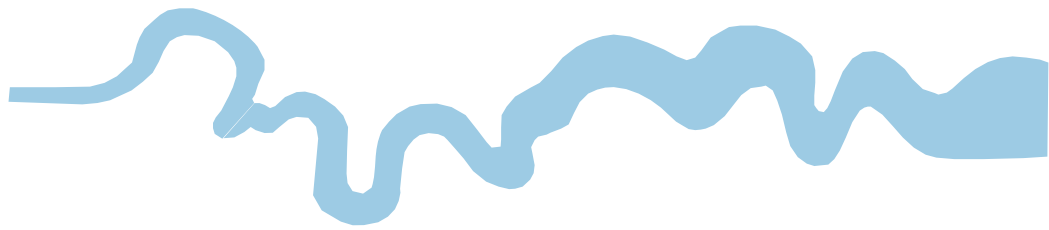
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Plates 3 - 4.

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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





**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](mailto:tvas@tvas.co.uk)  
Web: [www.tvas.co.uk](http://www.tvas.co.uk)**