

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

ARCHAEOLOGICAL

S E R V I C E S

**Tree Tops House, Gillott's Lane,
Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire**

Archaeological Evaluation

by Will Attard

Site Code: TTH21/215

(SU 7480 8122)

Tree Tops House, Gillott's Lane, Henley-on-Thames, Oxon

**An Archaeological Evaluation
for West Bourne Homes**

by Will Attard

Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code TTH 21/215

November 2021

Summary

Site name: Tree Tops House, Gillott's Lane, Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire

Grid reference: SU 7480 8122

Site activity: Archaeological evaluation trenching and test pitting

Date and duration of project: 1st – 4th November 2021

Project Coordinator: Tim Dawson

Site supervisor: Will Attard

Site code: TTH 21/215

Area of site: c.0.7 hectares

Summary of results: Five of seven intended trenches were opened, along with three of four intended test pits through the underlying terrace gravels. No archaeological features cut into the top of the gravels were present, but early Palaeolithic flints were recovered from two of these test pits.

Location and reference of archive: The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, 47-49 De Beauvoir Road, Reading, RG1 5NR and will be deposited with Oxfordshire Museums Service and the ADS in due course.

*This report may be copied for bona fide research or planning purposes without the explicit permission of the copyright holder. All TVAS unpublished fieldwork reports are available on our website:
www.tvas.co.uk/reports/reports.asp.*

Report edited/checked by:	Steve Ford✓ 26.11.21
	Steve Preston✓ 26.11.21

Tree Tops House, Gillott's Lane, Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire An Archaeological Evaluation

by Will Attard

Report 21/215

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological evaluation carried out at Tree Tops House, Gillott's Lane, Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire, (SU 7480 8122) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Dan East of Westbourne Homes, Farthings Barn, Ashridgewood Business Park, Warren House Rd, Wokingham, RG40 5RD.

Planning permission (P21/S3371/FUL & P21/S3034/FUL) has been sought from South Oxfordshire District Council for the demolition of an existing structure and the construction of five apartments and a two-storey dwelling at Tree Tops, Gillott's Lane, Henley-on-Thames. Due to the potential for groundworks to expose, disturb or otherwise damage archaeological features within the development area, an archaeological evaluation has been requested.

This is in accordance with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government's *National Planning Policy Framework* (NPPF 2021), and the District Council's policies on archaeology. The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Mr Steven Weaver, Planning Archaeologist with Oxfordshire County Archaeology Service, the advisers to the District on matters relating to archaeology. The fieldwork was undertaken by Will Attard and Foteini Doriti between 1st and 4th November 2021 and the site code is TTH 21/215. The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited with Oxfordshire Museums Service and ADS in due course. A signed transfer of title form has been received from the client.

Location, topography and geology

The site is located on the south-west margins of Henley-on-Thames in south Oxfordshire (Fig. 1) and consists of a roughly triangular parcel of land, immediately to the south-west of Gillott's Lane, and opposite Gillott's School & Henley Leisure Centre (Fig. 2). The site occupies the southern extent of a ridge, with the southern border extending to the edge of a relatively steep south-facing slope down to hamlet of Harpsden Bottom. The site lies at a height of approximately 75m above Ordnance Datum (OD), whilst the farmland to the south lies at around 54m OD. The nearby lower Palaeolithic site and scheduled monument of Highlands Farm lies at approximately 77m OD. To the north of Tree Tops, the land continues to rise to a maximum height of c.80m aOD (just north of

the extent of the site), before dropping away slightly. The underlying geology for the site is recorded as terrace gravel belonging to the Black Park gravels overlying the Seaford Formation & Newhaven chalk Formation (BGS 1980).

Archaeological background

The archaeological potential of the site has been highlighted in a brief for the project prepared by Mr Steven Weaver of Oxfordshire County Archaeological Service. In summary, this potential stems primarily from the site's proximity to the Scheduled Ancient Monument at Highlands Farm (SM 254), a lower Palaeolithic occupation site situated *c.*290m to the north-west of Treetops. The Scheduled Area only covers the area of the former quarry workings at Highlands Farm; it is considered possible that lower Palaeolithic archaeological material may survive beyond the limits of the scheduled area. The Black Park gravels over which the site lies and from which the Highlands Farm assemblage was recovered extend discontinuously along a roughly north-east/south-west alignment (BGS 1980). The potential for these gravels to contain surviving lower Palaeolithic remains outside of the scheduled area is demonstrated by the results of test-pitting undertaken south of the scheduled Area. A number of struck flakes and cores were recovered from a relatively wide area during this investigation (Wenban-Smith 2016). The same programme of work recorded the Black Park Gravel Member as being present in some areas at a depth of just 0.30m, and thus well within the depth range of expected for disturbance from development and associated groundworks.

The Black Park Gravel Member dates to the Anglian stage of the Middle Pleistocene, laid down approximately 480,000-425,00 years ago. It was historically supposed that the climate during the Anglian was too extreme for ancient human species to withstand, and that Britain was largely uninhabited. Increasingly, however, the archaeological evidence suggests this was not always the case. Sites such as Highlands Farm (and thus the Black Park Gravels) are critical to gathering more data on this poorly understood portion of the Lower Palaeolithic (Wymer 1999, 44).

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. Archaeological or Palaeoenvironmental features warranting investigation under full excavation conditions were to be left *in situ*.

Specific aims of the project were:

- to determine if archaeological deposits of any period are present at the site;
- to determine if any early Palaeolithic deposits are present at the site;
- to provide information to allow the preparation of a mitigation strategy if necessary.

It was proposed to dig seven trenches: one 15m long, four 10m long, and two 7m long, and all 1.6m wide. The trenches were to be targeted at the two main areas of proposed development on the site. Four of the trenches were to contain 2m deep test pits in order to evaluate the potential for early Palaeolithic or contemporary palaeoenvironmental remains within the underlying terrace gravels.

Excavation was undertaken by a 2.5 tonne 360° type excavator fitted with a 1.5m wide toothless grading bucket under constant archaeological supervision. All spoil heaps were to be monitored for finds, with the sediment from all test pits examined more closely for lithics and faunal remains.

Results

Five of the intended seven trenches were stripped, along with three of the four intended test pits. Trenches 6 and 7 were inaccessible due to being situated in an area covered by thick woodland. Trenches 1, 2 and 4 were opened as close as possible to their intended locations, whilst trench 3 was opened as planned (Fig. 3). A complete list of trenches and test pits giving lengths, breadths, depths and a description of sections and observed geology is given in Appendices 1 and 2 respectively.

Trench 1 (Fig. 3)

Trench 1 was aligned NE-SW and measured 8.10m long and 0.80m deep. The stratigraphy observed consisted of 0.25m of topsoil overlying 0.27m of subsoil, in turn overlying mid orange-grey sandy gravel. All deposits observed were heavily rooted, with extant tree and vegetation roots still present. A small and irregular patch of mid orange-grey silt was investigated and found to be a tree throw.

Trench 2 (Fig. 3)

Trench 2 was aligned north–south. It measured 5.80m long and 0.15m deep. The stratigraphy observed consisted of a thin layer of grass (0.10m thick) overlying rubble (0.10-0.15m+). A service trench containing a yellow plastic gas pipe was uncovered early on in the excavation of this trench, and due to spatial constraints it was not possible to reach natural geology in the southern end of trench. The north end was excavated much deeper as part of the programme of test pitting (see below). No archaeological remains, features or finds were encountered during the excavation of this trench.

Test Pit 1 (Fig 4; Pl. 3)

Test Pit 1 was located at 3.0m to 5.80m from the southern end of Trench 2, and was excavated to a depth of 1.95m. The observed stratigraphy consisted of 0.10m of turf (52) overlying 0.1m of rubble (53), in turn overlying a Tarmac surface (54) 0.05m in thickness and a bedding layer 0.10m thick (55). No topsoil survived, but 0.30m of subsoil (51) remained underlying the various modern deposits. Terrace gravels were encountered from a depth of 0.65m onwards. The upper (0.65m – 1.50m depth) deposit (56) consisted of poorly sorted flint/quartzite/quartz gravel poorly supported by a coarse sandy matrix. This deposit had an undulating, sub-horizontal junction and was relatively clean, with very faint remnants of bedding. The lower unit (57) (1.40-1.95m depth) consisted of a coarse sand supported by silt, with moderately to well-abraded flint clasts throughout. This deposit was poorly sorted, and continued beyond the lower limit of the test pit. Careful examination of the excavated sediments produced no archaeological or palaeoenvironmental remains.

Trench 3 (Fig. 3)

Trench 3 was aligned NE-SW and measured 9.50m long by 0.55m deep. Observed stratigraphy included 0.25m of topsoil overlying 0.30m of subsoil, in turn overlying a natural geology of terrace gravel in a mottled mid yellow-grey/mid red-grey clay-sand matrix. Trench 3 contained Test Pit 2; full details of the test pit & the exposed gravel deposits can be found below. No archaeological features or finds were encountered during the excavation of this trench.

Test Pit 2 (Fig. 3; Fig 5)

Test Pit 2 was located within Trench 3. To allow better access to the main test pit for recording, 5.20m from the southern end was stripped to a depth of 1.0m, with the main test pit located at 1.8-3.7m from the southern end. Underlying 0.55m of top and subsoil deposits (detailed above) was a band of rooted, disturbed sandy gravel (58) at a depth of 0.55m-0.75m. A second, homogenous deposit (60) was present from a depth of 0.75m to the base of the test pit (2.0m) - a poorly sorted flint/quartzite/quartz gravel well supported by a clay-sand matrix. The matrix supporting this gravel deposit was more clay-rich than that present in other deposits or test pits. At the western end of the section, a portion of ice wedge (59) is visible, intruding into gravel 60 and extending beyond the limit of the test pit. Two struck flakes were recovered from the lower 0.5m of gravel layer 60. Following recording, the test pit was extended in order to establish the thickness of the gravel deposit, but despite reaching a depth of 3.6m, no sign of the underlying chalk was present.

Trench 4 (Fig. 3)

Trench 4 was aligned close to east–west and measured 18.70m long by 0.44m deep. This trench contained Test Pit 3, details of which can be found below along with a detailed description of the underlying natural geology. Stratigraphy observed within Trench 4 consisted of 0.28m of topsoil, 0.16m of subsoil and mid yellow-grey sandy gravel natural geology from a depth of 0.44m onwards. No archaeological finds or features were present within this trench.

Test Pit 3 (Fig 3; Fig 6; Pl.4).

Test Pit 3 was excavated to a depth of 2.0m initially, then extended to a depth of 3.10m to attempt to establish the total thickness of the Pleistocene gravels. Observed deposits consisted of rooted and disturbed mid-grey brown silty gravel (61) at a depth of 0.55-0.65m, overlying a poorly sorted deposit of flint/quartzite/quartz gravel (62) poorly supported by a clay-sand matrix (0.65-0.85m). A 0.50m thick deposit (63) of poorly sorted red-brown flint/quartzite/quartz gravel in a loose sandy matrix was present at 0.85-1.35m. Faint diagonal striations (from west to east) may be the remnants of bedding, although closer inspection was not possible due to the instability of the section. A relatively stable clay-sand matrix supported gravel (64) was present at 1.35-1.85m, and produced five flint flakes. Below gravel deposit 64, a thin horizontal band of very clean sandy gravel (65) was observed, predominantly composed of angular and sub-angular flints. Due to the small overall size of the exposed gravel section within the test pit, it was not possible to ascertain whether this is a small, localized deposit or evidence of a larger event. It is worth noting, however, that this layer was not present in the other test pits excavated during this evaluation. The final deposit encountered consisted of a firm, matrix-supported flint/quartzite/quartz gravel (66). Following recording, Test Pit 3 was extended to a depth of 2.8m to try and establish the lower limits of the terrace gravels, but no evidence of the underlying chalk was revealed.

Trench 5 (Fig. 3; Pl. 2)

Trench 5 was aligned NW-SE. It measured 8.30m in length and 0.46m in depth. Observed stratigraphy consisted of 0.28m of topsoil overlying 0.38m of subsoil. Natural geology was encountered at a depth of 0.38m+, and consisted of a mid orange-grey sandy gravel. No archaeological features were observed within this trench.

Finds

Palaeolithic struck flints by Will Attard

A small assemblage of 7 struck flints was recovered during the test pitting (Pls 5-7, Appendix 3). Two flints were recovered from Test Pit 2, with the remaining three recovered from deposit 64 in Test Pit 3. Six of the seven pieces are simple struck flakes, whilst the seventh shows signs of utilization or retouch as a scraper. In condition, the assemblage ranges from fairly fresh to fairly abraded, and from lightly patinated to opaque, white patination. In general, however, the flints recovered are only lightly to moderately patinated, and their relatively fresh condition suggests they have not travelled a huge distance from their point of entry into the river system.

Conclusion

Evaluation trenching and test pitting at Tree Tops, Henley-on-Thames produced a small assemblage of early Palaeolithic struck flints from secure contexts within the Black Park gravels. Despite being a small assemblage by most standards, to recover any lithics from a small test pitting project is unusual, and serves to demonstrate the richness of the Black Park Gravel Member as a Pleistocene archaeological resource. More importantly, it suggests that the area of Palaeolithic potential extends beyond the immediate area of the Scheduled Monument at Highlands Farm.

References

- BGS, 1980, *British Geological Survey*, 1:50,000, Sheet **254**, Solid and Drift Edition, Keyworth
- CIFA, 2020, *Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluation*, Chartered Institute for Archaeologists, Reading
- NPPF, 2021, *National Planning Policy Framework (revised)*, Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government, London
- Wenban-Smith, F. 2016, 'Highlands Farm, Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire - Palaeolithic Test Pit Evaluation (Phase 2)', *Cotswold Archaeology*, unpubl rep 16823, Kemble
- Wymer, J J, 1999, *The Lower Palaeolithic Occupation of Britain*, Salisbury

APPENDIX 1: Trench details

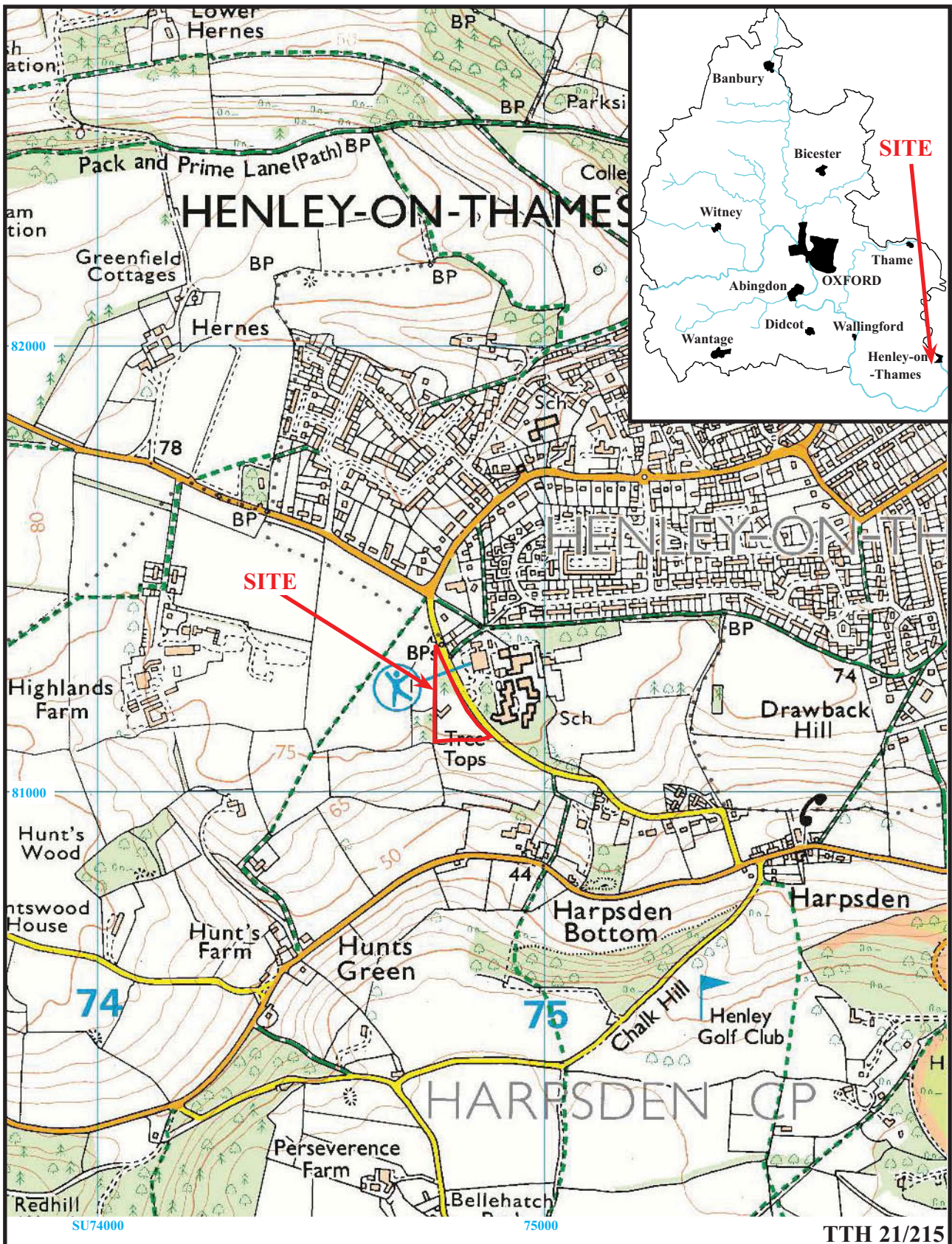
<i>Trench</i>	<i>Length (m)</i>	<i>Breadth (m)</i>	<i>Depth (m)</i>	<i>Comment</i>
1	8.10	1.80	0.80	0-0.25m topsoil; 0.25-0.52m subsoil; 0.52-0.62m rooted interface with natural geology; 0.62m+ mid brown-grey sandy gravel natural geology.
2	5.80	1.80	0.20; 2.00	0-0.49m topsoil; 0.49m-0.69m subsoil; 0.69m+ yellow gravel natural geology. Test pit 1 [PI. 3]
3	9.50	1.80	0.65; 3.00	0-0.10m Turf; 0.10-0.20m rubble; 0.20-0.25m tarmac; 0.25-0.35m bedding layer; 0.35m-0.65m subsoil; 0.65m+ natural gravel geology. Test Pit 2. [PI. 1]
4	11.00	1.80	0.44; 2.50	0-0.28m topsoil; 0.28-0.44m subsoil; 0.44m+ mid orange-grey sandy gravel natural geology. Test Pit 3 [PI.4]
5	13.50	1.80	0.46	0-0.28m topsoil; 0.28-0.38m subsoil; 0.38m+ mid orange-grey sandy gravel natural geology. [PI. 2]

APPENDIX 2: Test Pit details

<i>Test Pit</i>	<i>Length (m)</i>	<i>Breadth (m)</i>	<i>Depth (m)</i>	<i>Comment</i>
1	2.80	1.80	2.00	0-0.10m turf; 0.10-0.20m rubble; 0.20-0.25m tarmac; 0.25-0.35m bedding for tarmac; 0.35-0.65m subsoil; 0.65-1.50m poorly sorted flint/quartzite/quartz gravel in a sandy matrix; 1.40-1.95m coarse clay-sand with frequent sub-angular and sub-rounded flint clasts & rounded quartzite cobbles. [PI.3]
2	1.90	1.80	3.60	0-0.25m topsoil; 0.25-0.55m subsoil; 0.55m-0.75m rooted, disturbed gravel; 0.75m+ homogenous, firm matrix-supported flint/quartz/quartzite gravel. Produced 2 struck flints.
3	2.50	1.80	2.80	0-0.28m topsoil; 0.28-0.44m subsoil; 0.44m-0.65m rooted disturbed gravel; 0.65-0.85m poorly sorted red-brown flint/quartzite/quartz gravel in a firm clay-sand matrix; 0.85-1.35m red-brown flint/quartzite/quartz gravel in a loose coarse sand matrix; 1.35-1.75m firm gravel deposit supported by a clay-sand matrix. Produced five struck flints; 1.75-1.85m clean flint gravel layer; 1.86m+ red-grey flint/quartzite/quartz gravel supported by a clay-sand matrix. [PI.4]

APPENDIX 3: Catalogue of struck flint

<i>Test Pit</i>	<i>Context</i>	<i>Intact Flake</i>	<i>Retouched Flake</i>	<i>Comment</i>
2	60	2		
3	64	4	1	

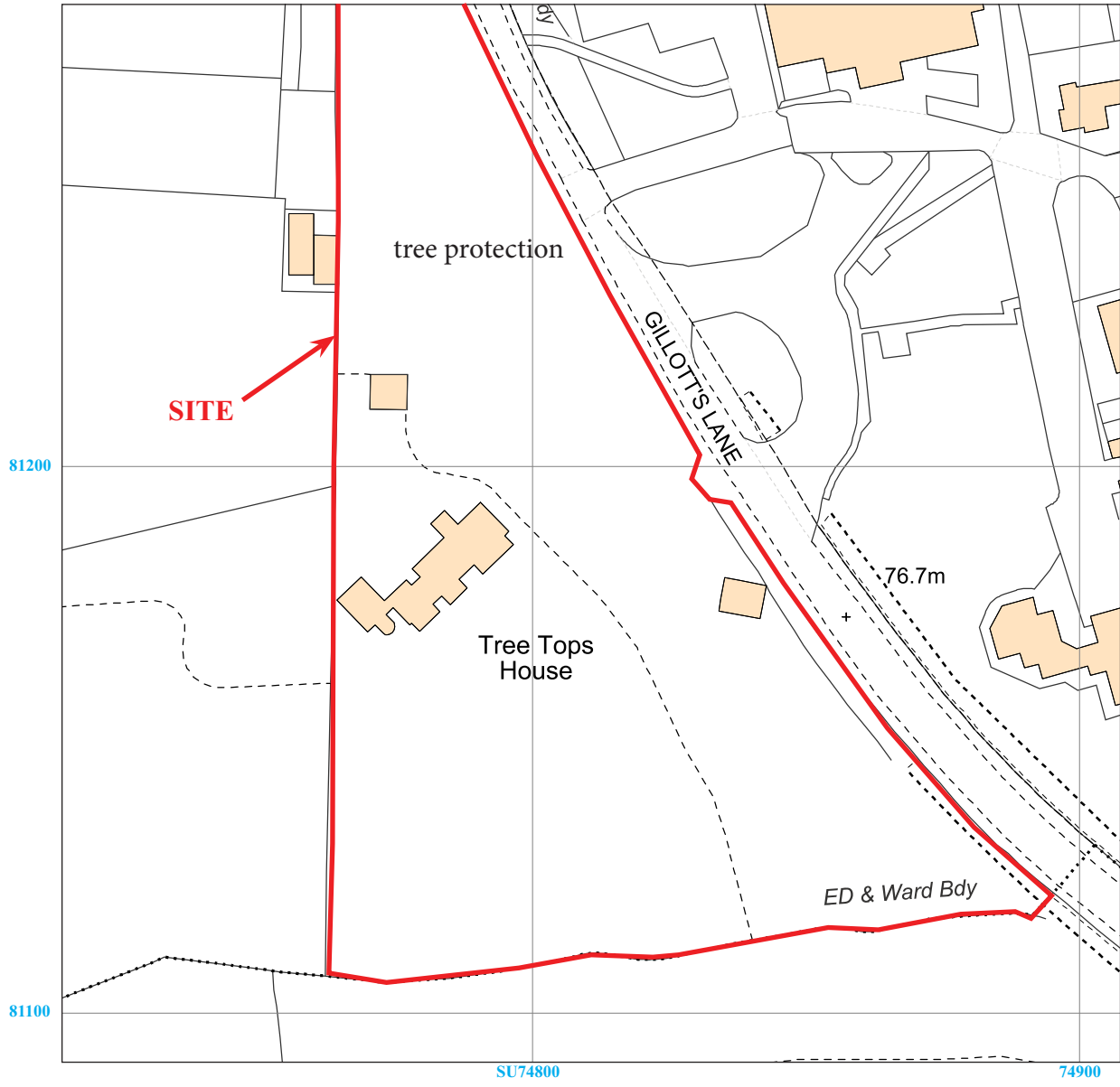


**Tree Tops House, Gillott's Lane, Henley-on-Thames,
Oxfordshire, 2021
Archaeological Evaluation**

Figure 1. Location of site within Henley-on-Thames and Oxfordshire.

Reproduced under licence from Ordnance Survey Explorer Digital mapping at 1:12500
Crown Copyright reserved





TTH 21/215

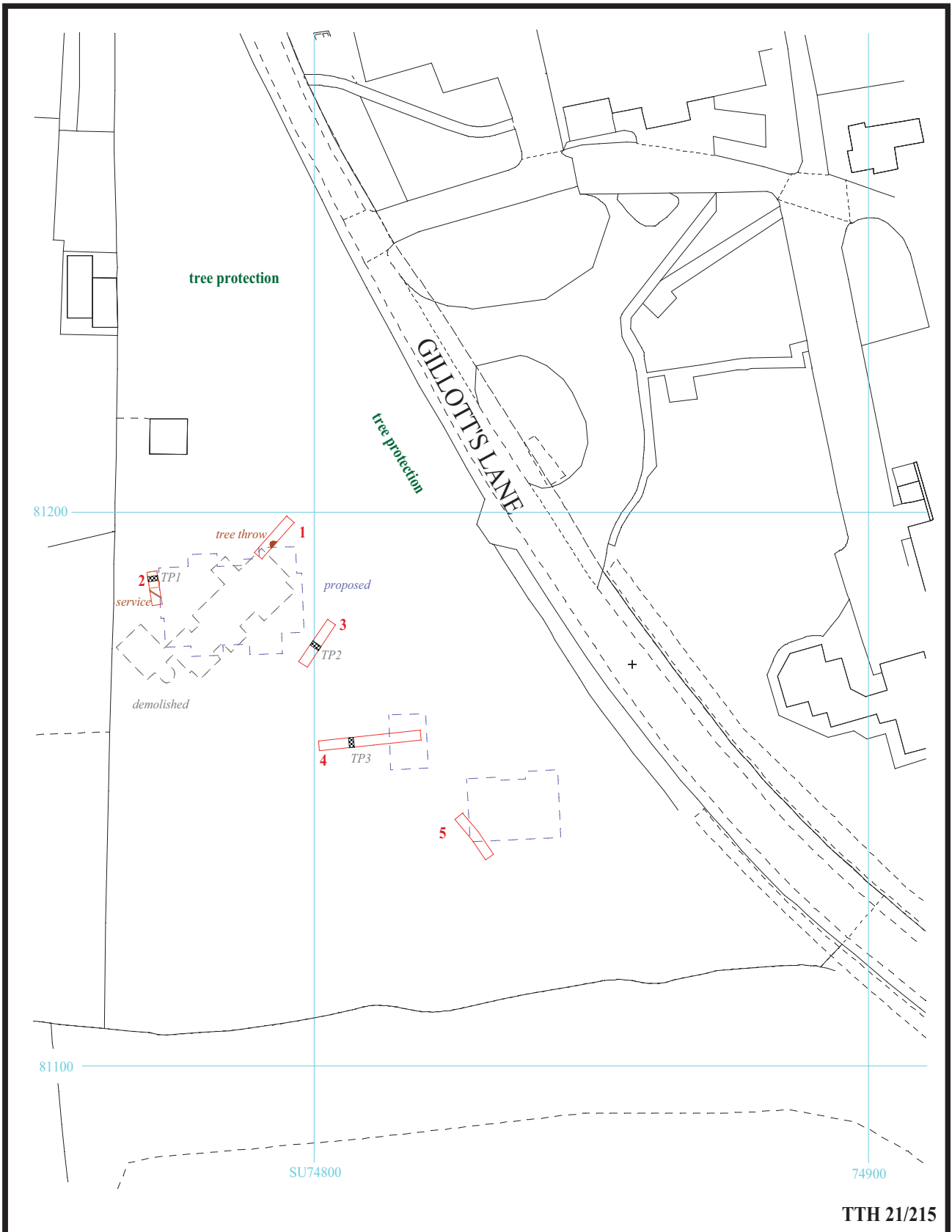


**Tree Tops House, Gillott's Lane, Henley-on-Thames,
Oxfordshire, 2021**
Archaeological Evaluation

Figure 2. Detailed location of site off Gillott's Lane.

Reproduced from Ordnance Survey Digital Mapping under licence.
Crown copyright reserved. Scale 1:1250





TTH 21/215

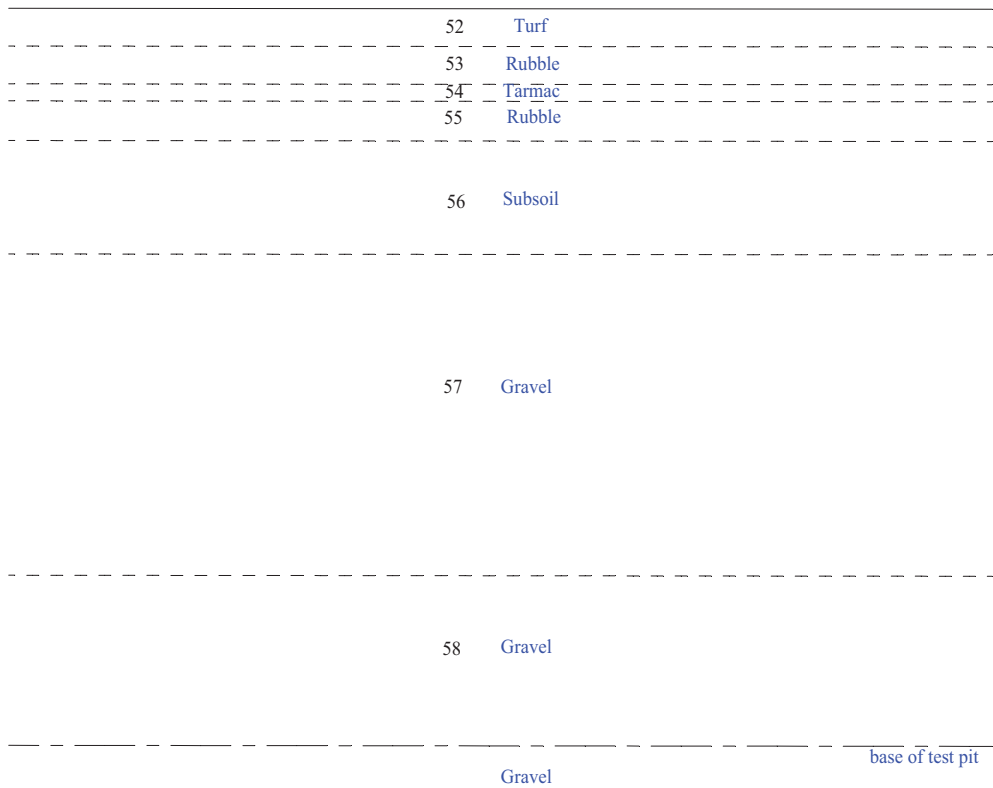
**Tree Tops House, Gillott's Lane, Henley-on-Thames,
Oxfordshire, 2021
Archaeological Evaluation**

Figure 3. Location of trenches and Test pits.



THAMES VALLEY
ARCHAEOLOGICAL
SERVICES



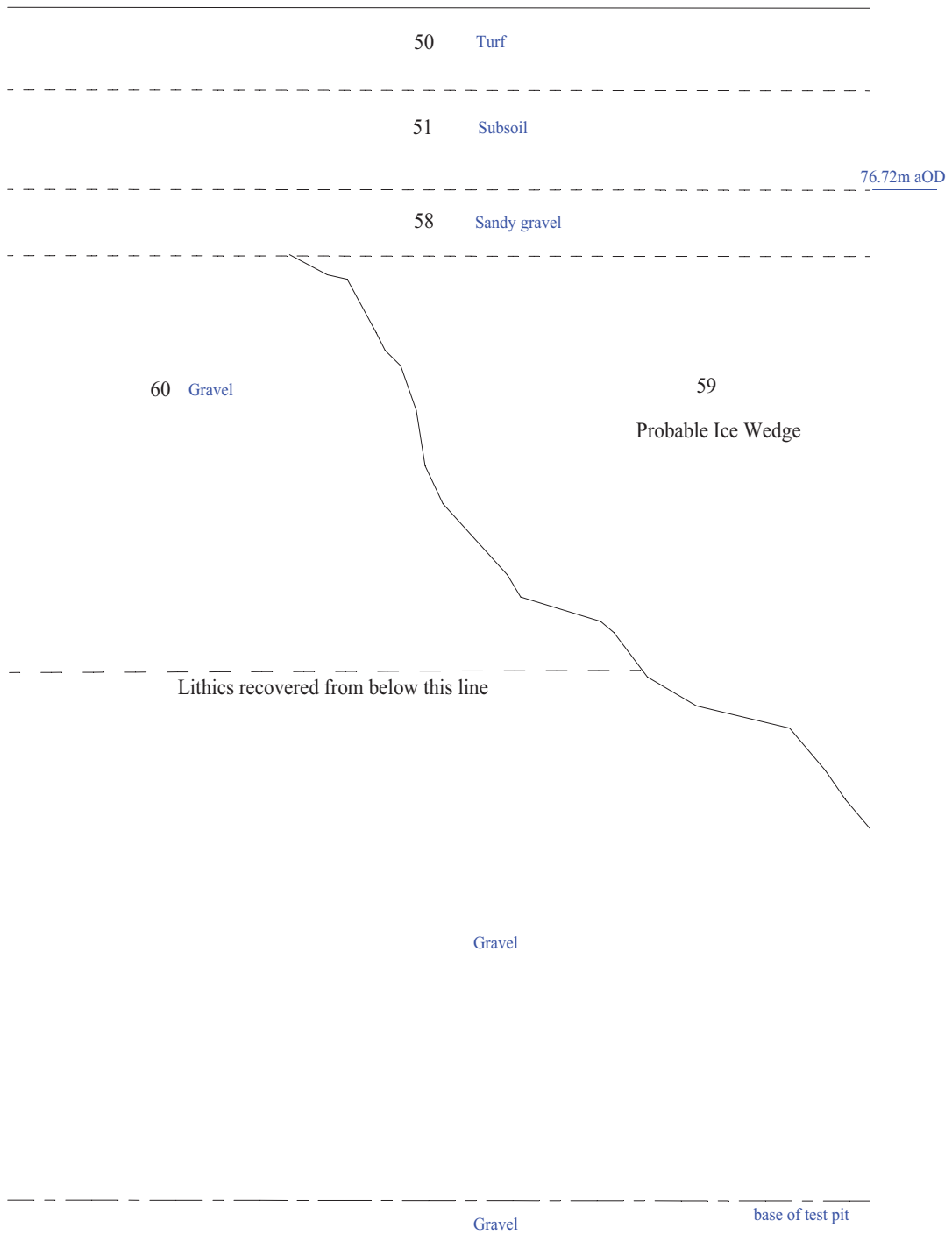


TTH 21/215

**Tree Tops, Gillott's Lane,
Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire, 2021
Archaeological Evaluation**

Figure 4. Section of Test Pit 1 (trench 2).





TTH 21/215

**Treetops, Gillott's Lane,
Henley on Thames, Oxfordshire, 2021
Archaeological Evaluation**

Figure 5. Section of Test Pit 2 (trench 3)





TTH 21/215

**Tree tops, Gillott's Lane,
Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire, 2021
Archaeological Evaluation**

Figure 6. Section of Test Pit 3 (trench 4)





Plate 1. Trench 3, looking North East,
Scales: horizontal 1m and 0.5m, vertical 0.3m.



Plate 2. Trench 5, looking North West,
Scales: horizontal 2m and 1m, vertical 0.5m.



Plate 3. Test pit 1, (trench 2) looking West,
Scales: horizontal 1m, vertical 2m.



Plate 4. Test pit 3, (trench 4) looking South East,
Scales: horizontal 1m and vertical 2m.

TTH 21/215

**Tree Tops House, Gillott's Lane,
Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire, 2021
Archaeological Evaluation
Plates 1 to 4.**

THAMES VALLEY
ARCHAEOLOGICAL
SERVICES



Plate 5. Struck flints from Test Pit 2. Ventral view. Scale: 0.10m



Plate 6. Struck flints from Test Pit 3. Dorsal view. Scale: 0.10m



Plate 7. Flints from Test Pit 3. Ventral view. Scale: 0.10m

TTH 21/215

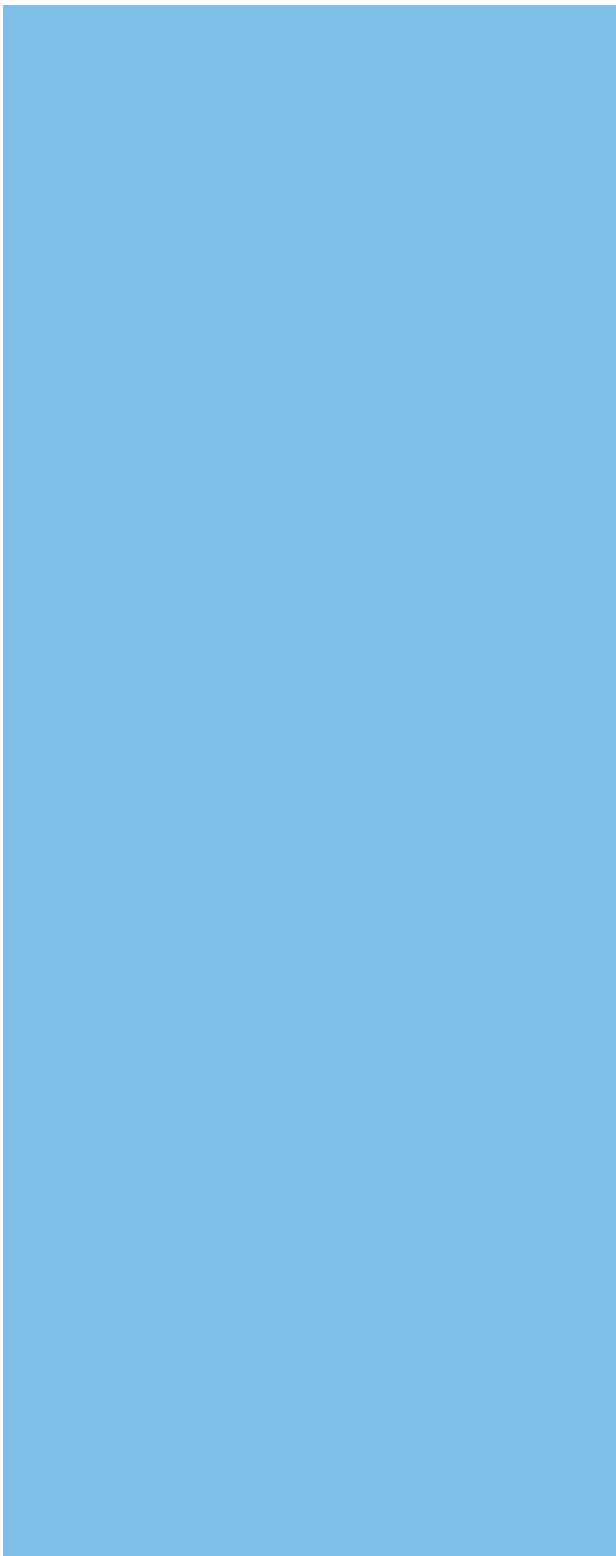
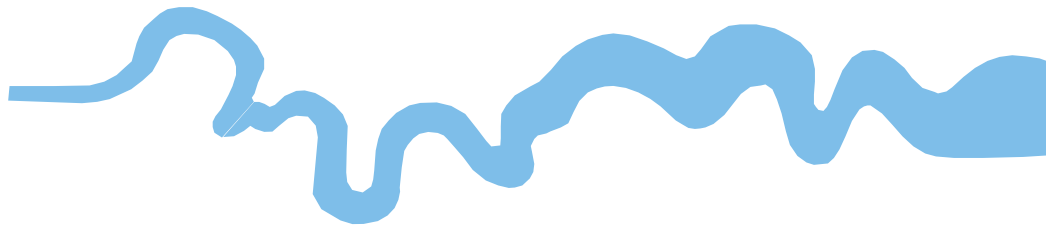
Tree Tops House, Gillott's Lane,
Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire, 2021
Archaeological Evaluation
Plates 5 - 7.

THAMES VALLEY
ARCHAEOLOGICAL
SERVICES

TIME CHART

	Calendar Years
Modern _____	AD 1901
Victorian _____	AD 1837
Post Medieval _____	AD 1500
Medieval _____	AD 1066
Saxon _____	AD 410
Roman _____	AD 43 AD 0 BC
Iron Age _____	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 RG1 5NR**

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

*Offices in:
Brighton, Taunton, Stoke-on-Trent and Ennis (Ireland)*