

# Ovey's Farm High Street Cookham Berkshire



## Archaeological Evaluation Report



January 2009

**Client: GMTW Architects**

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# Ovey's Farm, High Street, Cookham, Berkshire

## *ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION*

### CONTENTS

Summary.....	1
1 Introduction .....	1
1.1 Scope of work.....	1
1.2 Location, geology and topography .....	1
1.3 Archaeological and historical background.....	1
2 Evaluation Aims .....	2
3 Evaluation Methodology .....	2
3.1 Scope of fieldwork .....	2
3.2 Fieldwork methods and recording.....	3
3.3 Finds.....	3
3.4 Palaeo-environmental evidence.....	3
3.5 Presentation of results .....	3
4 Results: General .....	3
4.1 Soils and ground conditions .....	3
4.2 Distribution of archaeological deposits.....	3
5 Results: Descriptions.....	4
5.1 Description of deposits.....	4
5.2 Finds .....	6
6 Discussion And Interpretation.....	6
6.1 Reliability of field investigation.....	6
6.2 Overall interpretation .....	6
Appendix 1 Archaeological Context Inventory .....	8
Appendix 2 Bibliography and references.....	10
Appendix 3 Summary of Site Details.....	10

### LIST OF FIGURES

- Fig. 1 Site location  
 Fig. 2 Site plan showing location of the test pits  
 Fig. 3 Test pits and sections

Front cover: Ovey's Farm, main house

## SUMMARY

*On the 27th of November 2008 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out a field evaluation at Ovey's Farm, The High Street, Cookham, Berkshire (NGR: SU 896 853) on behalf of GMTW Architects. The evaluation revealed extensive deposits of garden soils sealing layers of alluvium. In the southern test pits a possible beam slot on the same alignment as the front of the farm house was observed, while another produced evidence of tree throw holes.*

### 1 INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Scope of work

- 1.1.1 On the 27th of November 2008, OA carried out a field evaluation at Ovey's Farm, The High Street, Cookham, Berkshire (NGR: SU 896 853) on behalf of GMTW Architects prior to the construction of a single storey rear extension and a two storey side extension. Following discussions with Fiona MacDonald of Berkshire Archaeology it was decided to undertake an archaeological evaluation of the site prior to development.
- 1.1.2 OA produced a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) detailing how it would undertake the required evaluation (OA, 2008).

#### 1.2 Location, geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The town of Cookham is located approximately 3 km north of the town of Maidenhead (Fig. 1). Ovey's Farm lies on the north side of the High Street, approximately in the centre of the town. The site is on level ground and is currently in use as a residential garden to the west and rear of the main building.
- 1.2.2 The site lies at approximately 26.5 m above OD and the underlying geology is alluvium over Floodplain Terrace Gravels (British Geological Survey sheet no. 255).

#### 1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The archaeological background to the evaluation was prepared for the WSI (OA, 2008) and is reproduced below.
- 1.3.2 Ovey's farmhouse is situated in Cookham High Street opposite the house where Sir Stanley Spencer the famous painter lived and worked. This was formerly a working farm and the subject of Spencer's painting 'The Farm Gate'. It is set back from the road with a front garden behind a brick boundary wall.
- 1.3.3 The house is listed Grade II and is timber framed with the black stained frame showing on the exterior, infilled with whitewashed brick nogging. The roof is pitched and clad in plain clay tiles. The house is a medieval hall house of five bays with a later inserted floor and later timber-framed extension to the rear. Most of the original

frame survives excepting the roof which has been completely replaced apart from some timbers in the west gable. A central empty mortice in a cambered tie beam at the west end implies that originally there was a crown-post roof.

- 1.3.4 Originally the house had a service bay at the east end with buttry and pantry on the ground floor reached from the screens passage by adjacent pointed arched headed doorways; these survive but one has lost the arched head. The dividing wall between the service rooms has been removed but the mortices for it survive in a ceiling joist.
- 1.3.5 The central hall was of two bays and would have reached to the rafters, with one open truss. This space has had a floor inserted, probably in the 16th century, and the crossframe below the tiebeam has been infilled on the first floor to further subdivide the upstairs. The high end of the house was west of the hall and was of two bays. The upper chamber would probably have been open to the rafters originally but a later ceiling has been inserted. There are also empty mortices for joists on the central tie beam in the upstairs bedroom suggesting there was an earlier ceiling/loft floor.
- 1.3.6 Some early wattle and daub infill survives in the partition walls and in what was the rear external wall which is now enclosed within the rear extension, probably added in the 16th century.
- 1.3.7 A brick chimney stack has been added to the west wall of the house, and the west wall of the house and earlier addition where the proposed extension is to be added have been infilled with later brick nogging, but the timber-framing is still in situ and was recorded prior to the development.

## **2 EVALUATION AIMS**

- 2.1.1 To determine the extent, date, character, quality, significance and state of preservation of the archaeological remains surviving on the site.
- 2.1.2 To assess the impact of the development on any significant archaeological remains and assess the need for further mitigation before and/or during construction.
- 2.1.3 To establish the ecofactual and environmental potential of archaeological deposits and features.
- 2.1.4 To make available the results of the investigation and to place the results of the evaluation in wider local and regional context.

## **3 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Scope of fieldwork**

- 3.1.1 The evaluation consisted of five 1.5 m by 1.5 m test pits originally evenly distributed along the centre line of the proposed development. Due to a modern extension

scheduled for demolition still standing, Test Pit 1 was moved 1.5 m to the south and Test Pit 2 approximately 1.2 m to the west.

- 3.1.2 The overburden was removed under close archaeological supervision by a 360° mechanical excavator fitted with a 0.6 m wide toothless bucket. Excavation proceeded in spits down to undisturbed natural or to the first significant archaeological layer, whichever was encountered first.

### 3.2 **Fieldwork methods and recording**

- 3.2.1 The trenches were cleaned by hand, and any revealed features were sampled to determine their extent and nature, and to retrieve dating evidence. The test pits and any archaeological features were planned at a scale of 1:50 and their sections were drawn at a scale of 1:20. All trenches and features were photographed using digital photography, colour slide and black and white print film. Recording followed procedures laid down in the *OA Field Manual* (ed. D Wilkinson, 1992).

### 3.3 **Finds**

- 3.3.1 Finds were recovered by hand during the course of the excavation and bagged by context.

### 3.4 **Palaeo-environmental evidence**

- 3.4.1 No samples for palaeo-environmental analysis were taken at this stage of the investigation.

### 3.5 **Presentation of results**

- 3.5.1 The results of the evaluation will be detailed on a trench by trench basis followed by an overall discussion and interpretation.

## 4 **RESULTS: GENERAL**

### 4.1 **Soils and ground conditions**

- 4.1.1 The site was located on dry clay silts enabling clean excavation. Groundwater was not encountered in any of the trenches.

### 4.2 **Distribution of archaeological deposits**

- 4.2.1 Significant archaeological evidence was only encountered within Test pits 1 and 4, at the southern and northern ends of the evaluated area. With those exceptions the stratigraphy encountered was similar in all the test pits.



## 5 RESULTS: DESCRIPTIONS

### 5.1 Description of deposits

#### *Test Pit 1*

- 5.1.1 The underlying natural, a reddish brown silt clay alluvium (14) was encountered at a depth of 0.9 m below the current ground level (Fig. 3, Section 1). This was cut along the southern edge of the pit by an east to west running linear feature with steeply sloping sides (17) (Fig. 3, Plan 1). This was filled with a dark red-brown clay silt (16). No dating evidence was recovered from the context. Sealing the feature and the alluvium was a 0.25 m deep layer of light brown clay silt (13). This contained sub-angular fragments of flint and chalk flecking.
- 5.1.2 Overlying layer 13 was a 0.3 m deep layer of grey-brown clay loam (12). This contained charcoal flecking and fragments of creamware pottery suggesting a worked (garden) soil dating to the 19th-century. This was overlaid by a 0.15 m deep layer of light grey clay silt (11) containing a large number of small to medium sized sub-angular lumps of chalk and fragments of tile. This was sealed by a 0.12 m deep layer of light yellow brown silt clay (15), a probable layer of worked soil. The modern topsoil, a dark grey-brown silt loam (10) 0.18 m deep completed the section. A modern paving slab surface laid on a bed of sand had been set into the surface of this deposit.

#### *Test Pit 2*

- 5.1.3 The reddish brown alluvium (25) was encountered at a depth of 0.85 m below the level of the paving slabs (Fig. 3, Section 2). Overlying this was a 0.15 m deep layer of light brown clay silt (24), a probable continuation of layer 13 from Test Pit 1. Sealing this was a 0.15 m deep layer of grey-brown clay loam (23) containing charcoal flecking suggesting it was a worked soil/occupation layer. This was overlaid by a light grey clay silt (22) which contained a large amount of chalk fragments and is a probable continuation of Layer 11 from Test Pit 1. Cut into this layer was a very steep sided linear feature (26). This ran parallel to the 1970s extension and was in excess of 0.6 m deep. Exposed within the base of the cut was a layer of light orange brown sand (28), while the remainder of the cut was filled with a mixed grey-brown and yellow-brown clay silt (27). The feature's location adjacent to the extension, and its alignment suggests that it is the construction cut for the extension.
- 5.1.4 Feature 26 was sealed by a 0.12 m deep layer of light yellow brown silt clay (21), possibly redeposited material from the construction cut. This was overlaid by a 0.15 m deep layer of dark grey-brown silt loam (20). This was covered by sand and paving slabs.

#### *Test Pit 3*

- 5.1.5 The underlying natural alluvial clay (34) was encountered at a depth of 0.7 m below the current ground level (Fig. 3, Section 3). Overlying this layer was a 0.15 m deep

deposit of dark brown clay silt (33), possibly a worked (garden) soil horizon which produced fragments of glazed earthenware pottery.

- 5.1.6 Sealing layer 33 was a 0.18 m deep layer of grey-brown silt clay (32) containing charcoal flecking and many brick fragments. This was overlaid by a 0.25 m deep layer of yellow brown clay silt (31) which produced numerous fragments of chalk and clay roofing tile together with gravel inclusions. This may be a continuation of Layers 11 and 22. Overlying this was a dark grey-brown silt loam (30), the last phase of garden soil. As in the previous test pits this was covered by sand and paving slabs.

#### *Test Pit 4*

- 5.1.7 The underlying alluvium, a red-brown silt clay (44) was observed at a depth of 0.85 m below the current ground level (Fig. 3, Section 4). In order to determine if the alluvium sealed any earlier ground surfaces the machine was used to dig a sondage along the western side of the test pit. This showed that the alluvium was in excess of 0.5 m in depth and became lighter in colour with depth. No other deposits were encountered.
- 5.1.8 Cutting into the surface of the alluvium were 2 roughly oval shaped features (46 and 48) (Fig. 3, Plan 4). Upon excavation these were seen to be shallow bowl-shaped depressions suggesting that were tree throw holes. Both were filled with a dark grey-brown clay silt 45 and 47 respectively. Sealing the fills was a 0.3 m deep layer of greyish yellow-brown silt clay (43). This produced charcoal flecking suggesting that it was a worked soil. Overlying this was a 0.2 m deep layer of grey silt clay (42), which also produced chalk and charcoal flecking indicative of a worked soil. The southern edge of this deposit was overlaid by a yellow-brown clay silt (41) containing many small chalk inclusions. This is probably a continuation of layer 31 and may mark its northern extent.
- 5.1.9 Both layers 41 and 42 were overlaid by a 0.25 m deep layer of dark grey-brown clay loam (40), the last phase of garden soil.

#### *Test Pit 5*

- 5.1.10 The underlying natural, a red-brown alluvium (54) was observed at a depth of 0.8 m below the current ground level (Fig. 3, Section 5). This was overlaid by a 0.25 m deep layer of light orange brown silt clay (53) containing charcoal flecking.
- 5.1.11 Overlying this was a 0.2 m deep layer of grey silt clay (52), which also produced chalk and charcoal flecking indicative of a worked soil. This was sealed by a grey-brown clay silt (51), 0.12 m deep, containing numerous chalk inclusions. A 0.25 m deep layer of the modern grey-brown clay loam garden soil (50) completed the section.

## 5.2 Finds

- 5.2.1 Few finds were recovered during the course of the evaluation. Numerous fragments of ceramic roof tile were observed within the layers of worked soil. The presence of this was noted but the majority was not retained.
- 5.2.2 Fragments of pottery including glazed earthenware and transfer printed ware, dating to the 19th and 20th-centuries were recovered from layers 11, 12, 33 and 40. These were all deposits of worked soil. The deposition of these fragments probably represents domestic rubbish disposal.

## 6 DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

### 6.1 Reliability of field investigation

- 6.1.1 All the test pits excavated encountered archaeology or natural deposits providing information across the evaluation area. The even distribution of both the trenches and these deposits suggest that the results can be applied across the site.
- 6.1.2 Although two of the proposed trenches were moved from their original positions it is thought that this would not have significantly effected the results and conclusions.

### 6.2 Overall interpretation

- 6.2.1 All the test pits came down onto the top of the underlying undisturbed natural, an alluvium. The excavation of the sondage in Test pit 4 showed that this did not seal any earlier archaeological deposits.
- 6.2.2 Feature 17 may represent a beam slot, however the small length exposed did not give any indication to its extent or to its relationship to the house. The absence of stone or hardcore within the slot to support a wooden beam does not mitigate against this being a structural feature as this could have been dependant on date of construction and local practise. Alternatively it may represent a truncated boundary or drainage ditch although its profile makes this unlikely.
- 6.2.3 Layers 13, 24, 33, 43 and 53 represent an earlier phase of worked soil. The recovery of glazed earthen ware from layer 33 gives a date range from the early 17th-century up to the late 19th-century.
- 6.2.4 Layers 12, 23, 32, 42 and 52 represent the same phase of worked soil. The presence of brick fragments within these layers suggest that it may coincide with the brick infilling of the timber frame of the house or the construction of the chimney stacks.
- 6.2.5 Layers 11, 22, 31 and 41 are probably all the same deposit. The quantity of chalk found within the deposit suggest that it may represent a layer of hardcore or hardstanding around the house, possibly the farmyard ? The construction cut 26 shows that this predates the extension.

- 6.2.6 Layers 10, 20, 30, 40 and 50 represent the last phase of worked garden soil before it was sealed below the paving slabs. This is probably late 20th-century in date. Layers 15 and 21 are similar and are possibly composed of material excavated from the construction cut for the 1970s extension.
- 6.2.7 The presence of post-medieval worked soil (13, 24, 33, 43 and 53) directly overlying the alluvium suggests that the area around the house has been heavily cultivated. This activity would have resulted in the disturbance and/or destruction of the medieval occupation layers associated with the houses original construction.
- 6.2.8 A subsequent site visit during the excavation of the foundation trenches for the new extension confirmed the stratigraphy observed within the test pits and showed that the entire area had been subjected to cultivation. No other significant archaeology was observed during the course of the site visit.

## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

<i>Test Pit</i>	<i>Ctxt No</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Width (m)</i>	<i>Thick. (m)</i>	<i>Comment</i>	<i>Finds</i>	<i>Date</i>
1							
	10	Layer	-	0.2 m	Modern topsoil	-	C20th
	11	Layer	-	0.15 m	Mixed soil and construction debris, possible yard surface ?	Tile, pottery	C19th
	12	Layer	-	0.25 m	Buried soil horizon, earlier garden soil	Tile, pottery	C19th
	13	Layer	-	0.2 m	Buried soil horizon, earlier garden soil	Tile	-
	14	Layer	-	> 0.3 m	Alluvium	-	-
	15	Layer	-	0.15 m	Buried soil horizon, earlier garden soil	Tile	-
	16	Fill	> 0.2 m	0.2 m	Backfill of 17	-	-
	17	Cut	> 0.2 m	0.2 m	Possible beam slot	-	-
2							
	20	Layer	-	0.2 m	Modern topsoil	-	C20th
	21	Layer	-	0.15 m	Buried soil horizon, earlier garden soil	-	-
	22	Layer	-	0.25 m	Mixed soil and construction debris, possible yard surface ?	Tile	-
	23	Layer	-	0.15 m	Buried soil horizon, earlier garden soil	Tile	-
	24	Layer	-	0.15 m	Buried soil horizon, earlier garden soil		
	25	Layer	-	> 0.3 m	Alluvium	-	-
	26	Cut	0.4 m	> 0.6 m	Construction cut for 1970s extension	-	C20th
	27	Fill	0.4 m	0.4 m	Backfill of 26		C20th
	28	Fill	0.3 m	> 0.2 m	Backfill of 26		C20th

<i>Test Pit</i>	<i>Ctxt No</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Width (m)</i>	<i>Thick. (m)</i>	<i>Comment</i>	<i> Finds</i>	<i>Date</i>
3							
	30	Layer	-	0.15 m	Buried soil horizon, earlier garden soil	-	C19th/ C20th
	31	Layer	-	0.25 m	Mixed soil and construction debris, possible yard surface ?	Tile	-
	32	Layer	-	0.15 m	Buried soil horizon, earlier garden soil	Tile	-
	33	Layer	-	0.15 m	Buried soil horizon, earlier garden soil	Pottery	C17th – C19th
	34	Layer	-	> 0.3 m	Alluvium	-	-
4							
	40	Layer	-	0.25 m	Buried soil horizon, earlier garden soil	Pottery	C19th/ C20th
	41	Layer	-	0.1 m	Mixed soil and construction debris, possible yard surface ?	Tile	-
	42	Layer	-	0.18 m	Buried soil horizon, earlier garden soil	Tile	-
	43	Layer	-	0.25 m	Buried soil horizon, earlier garden soil	Tile	-
	44	Layer	-	> 0.5 m	Alluvium	-	-
	45	Fill	0.3 m	0.2 m	Fill of 46	-	-
	46	Cut	0.3 m	0.2 m	Tree throw hole	-	-
5							
	50	Layer	-	0.18 m	Buried soil horizon, earlier garden soil	-	C19th/ C20th
	51	Layer	-	0.12 m	Mixed soil and construction debris, possible yard surface ?	Tile	-
	52	Layer	-	0.2 m	Buried soil horizon, earlier garden soil	Tile	-
	53	Layer	-	0.25 m	Buried soil horizon, earlier garden soil		
	54	Layer	-	> 0.2 m	Alluvium	-	-

**APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES**

IFA, 2008 *Standard and Guidance for archaeological evaluations*

OA, 2000 *Oxford Archaeology Environmental Sampling Guidelines*

OA, 2008 *Ovey's Farm, High Street, Cookham, Berkshire: Written scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Evaluation*

OAU, 1992 *Fieldwork Manual (ed. D Wilkinson)*

**APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS**

**Site name:** Ovey's Farm, High Street, Cookham, Berkshire

**Site code:** COOVFa 08

**Grid reference:** SU 896 853

**Type of evaluation:** 5 machine dug trenches each 1.5 m by 1.5 m

**Date and duration of project:** 27th, November 2008, 1 day

Area of site: 300 m<sup>2</sup>

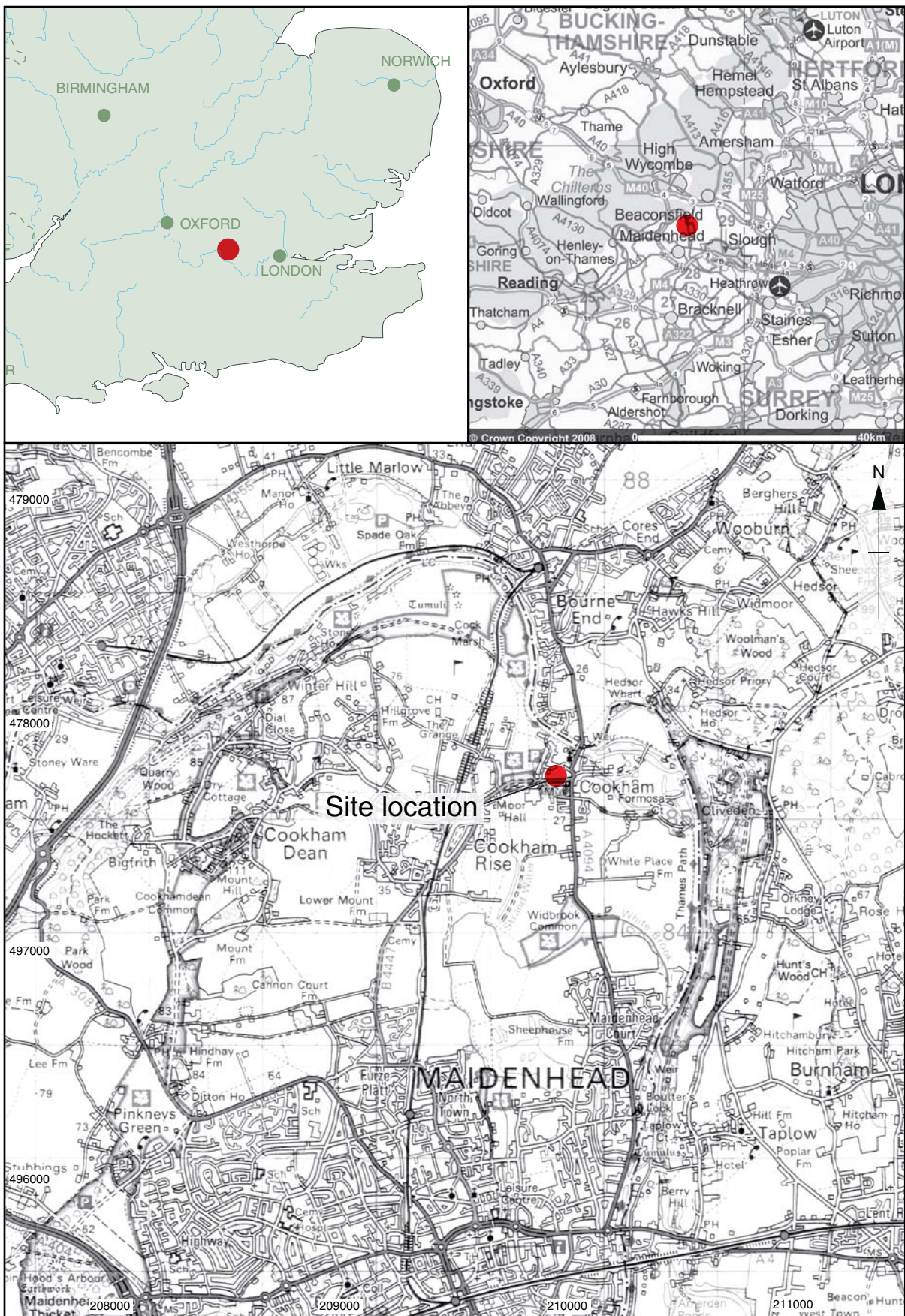
**Summary of results:** All test pits produced evidence of worked (garden) soils. The southern pit produced evidence for a possible beam slot on a similar alignment to the front of the farmhouse. Two probable tree throw holes were also observed.

**Location of archive:** The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Reading Museum under the following accession number: REDMG:2008.1014.









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Figure 1: Site location

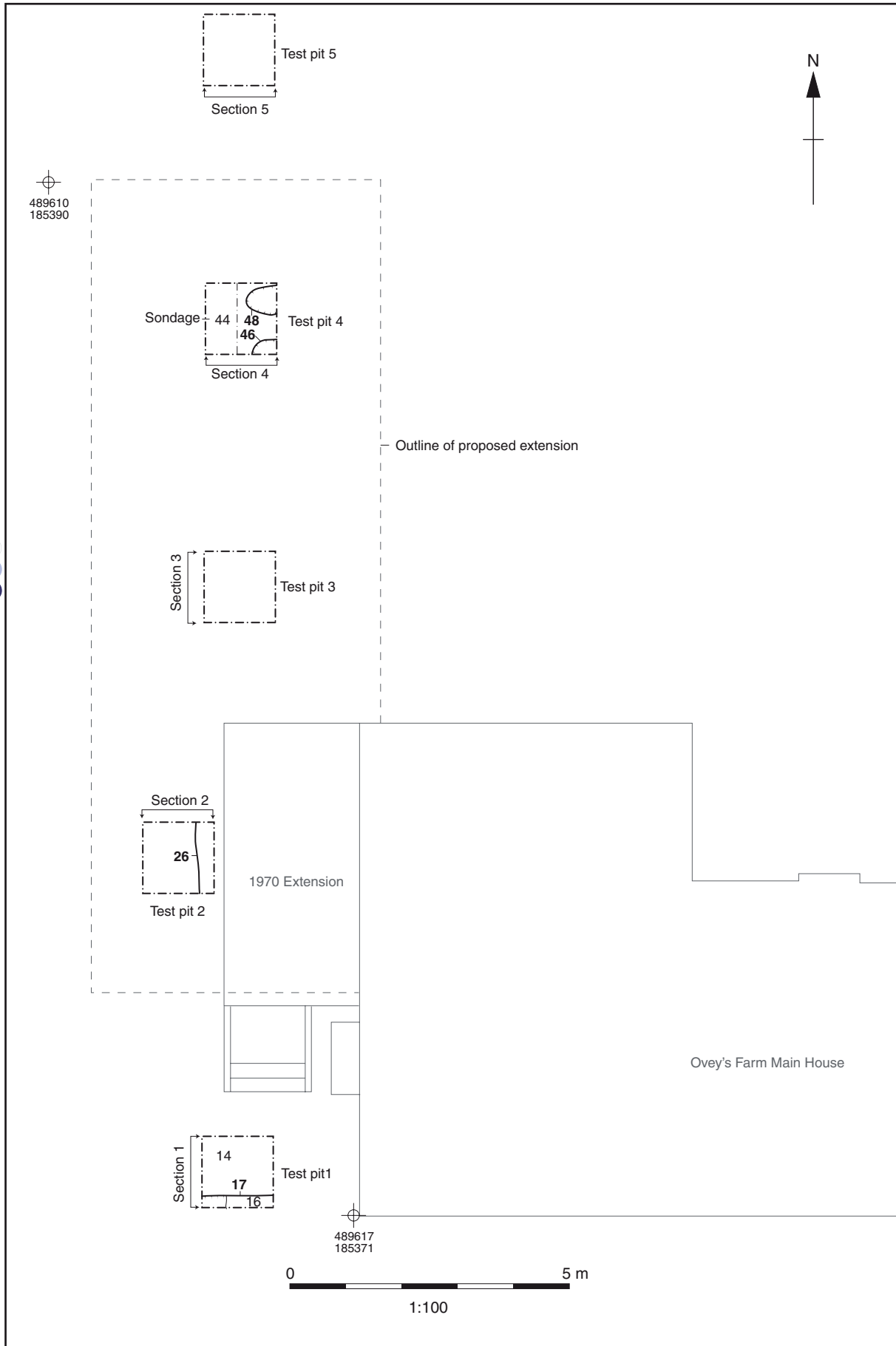


Fig 2: Site plan showing location of the test pits

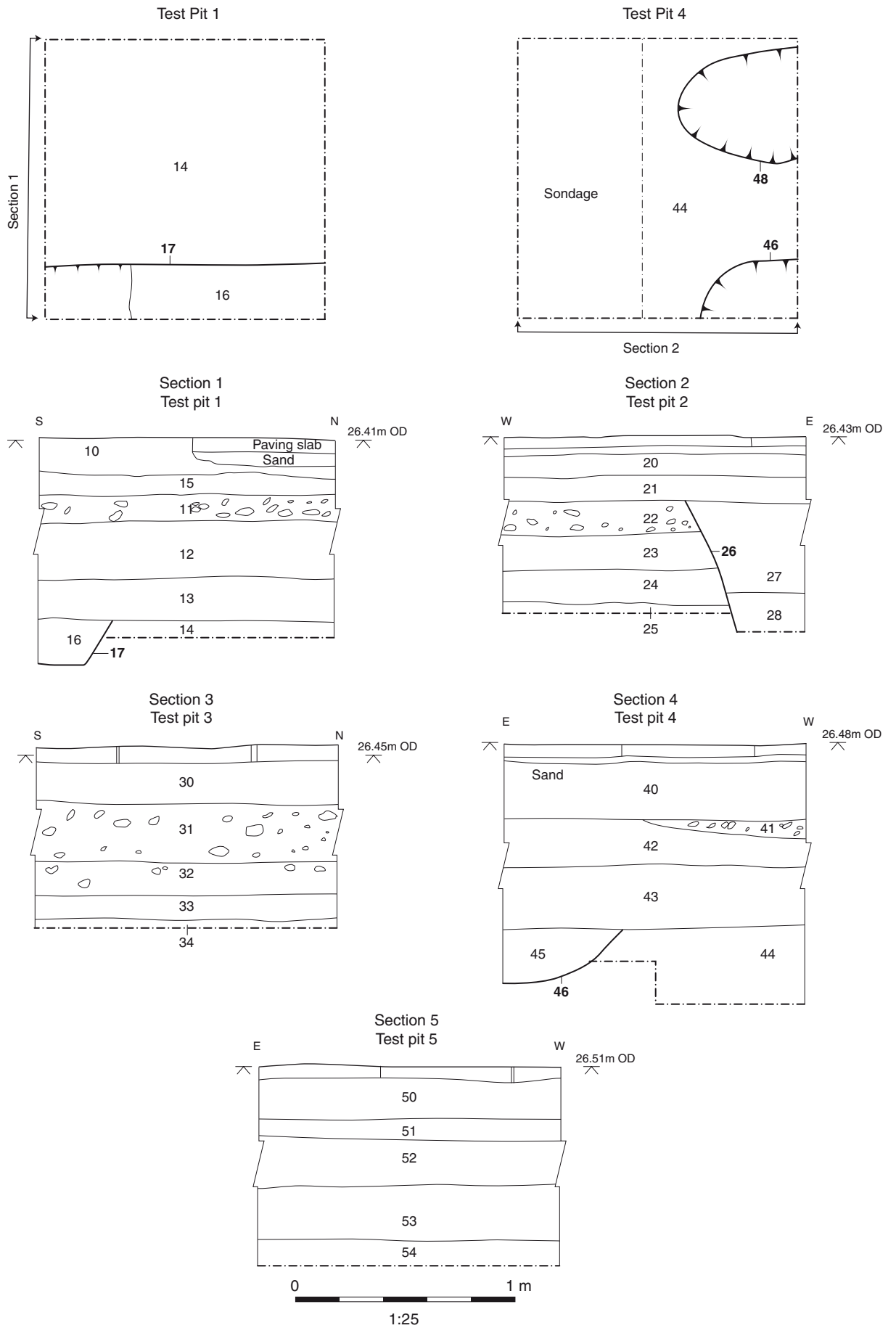


Fig 3: Test pits and sections