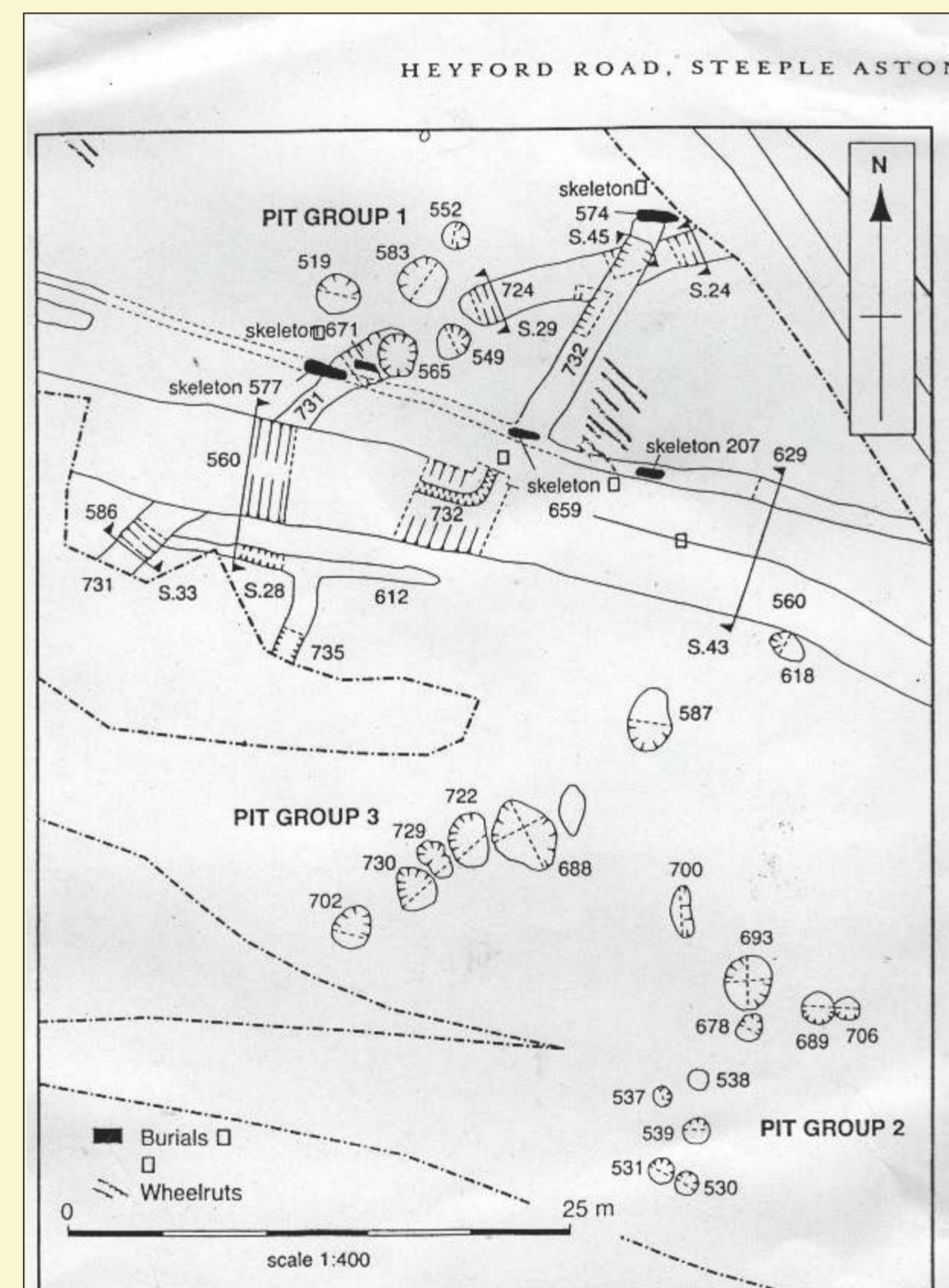
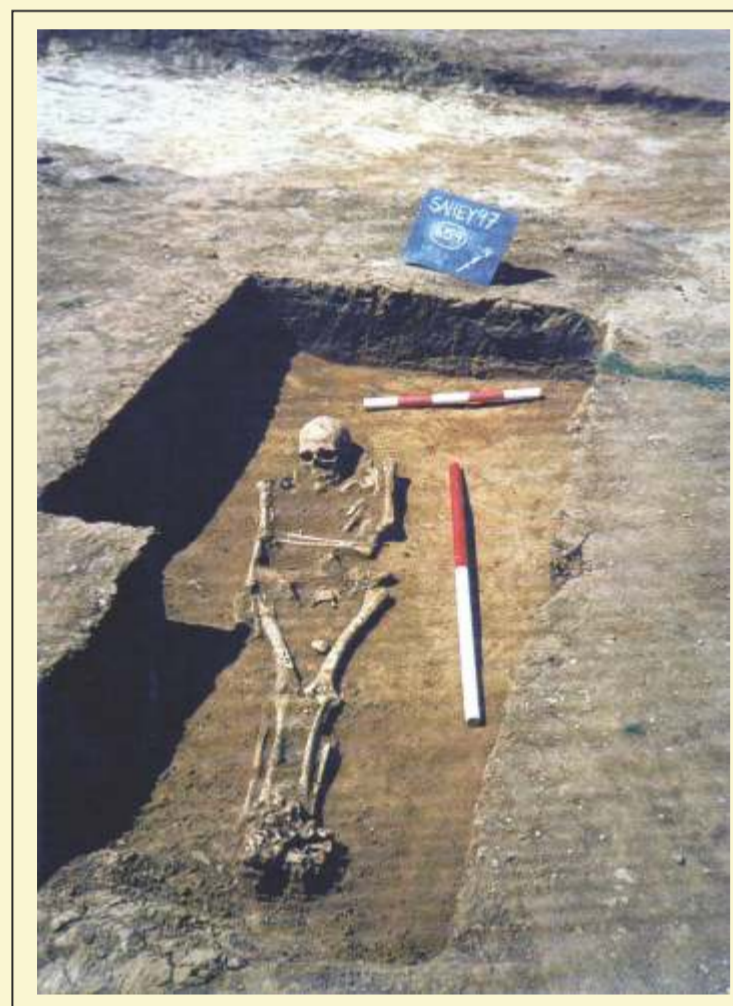
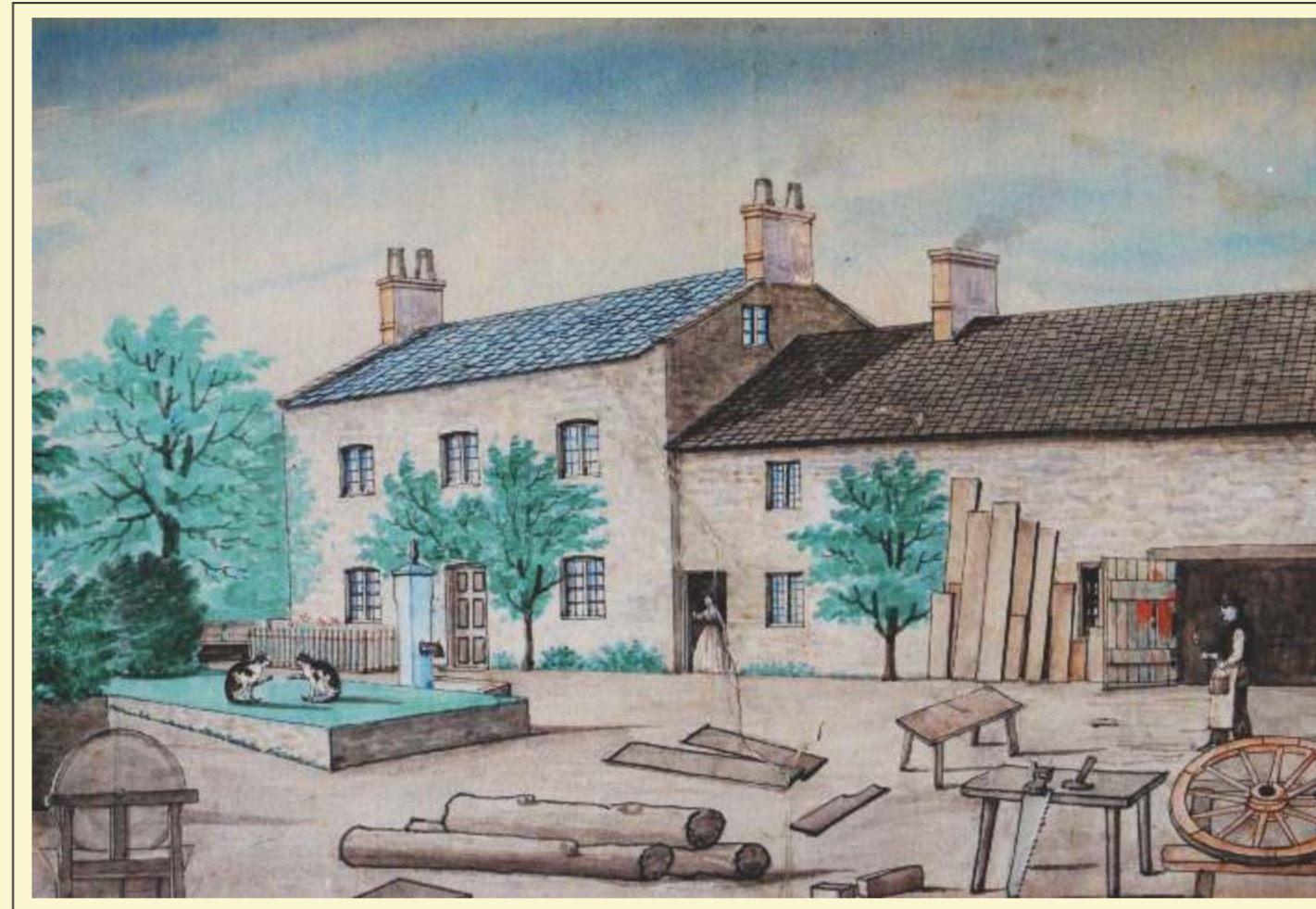


DEVELOPMENT IN THE VILLAGE: 1

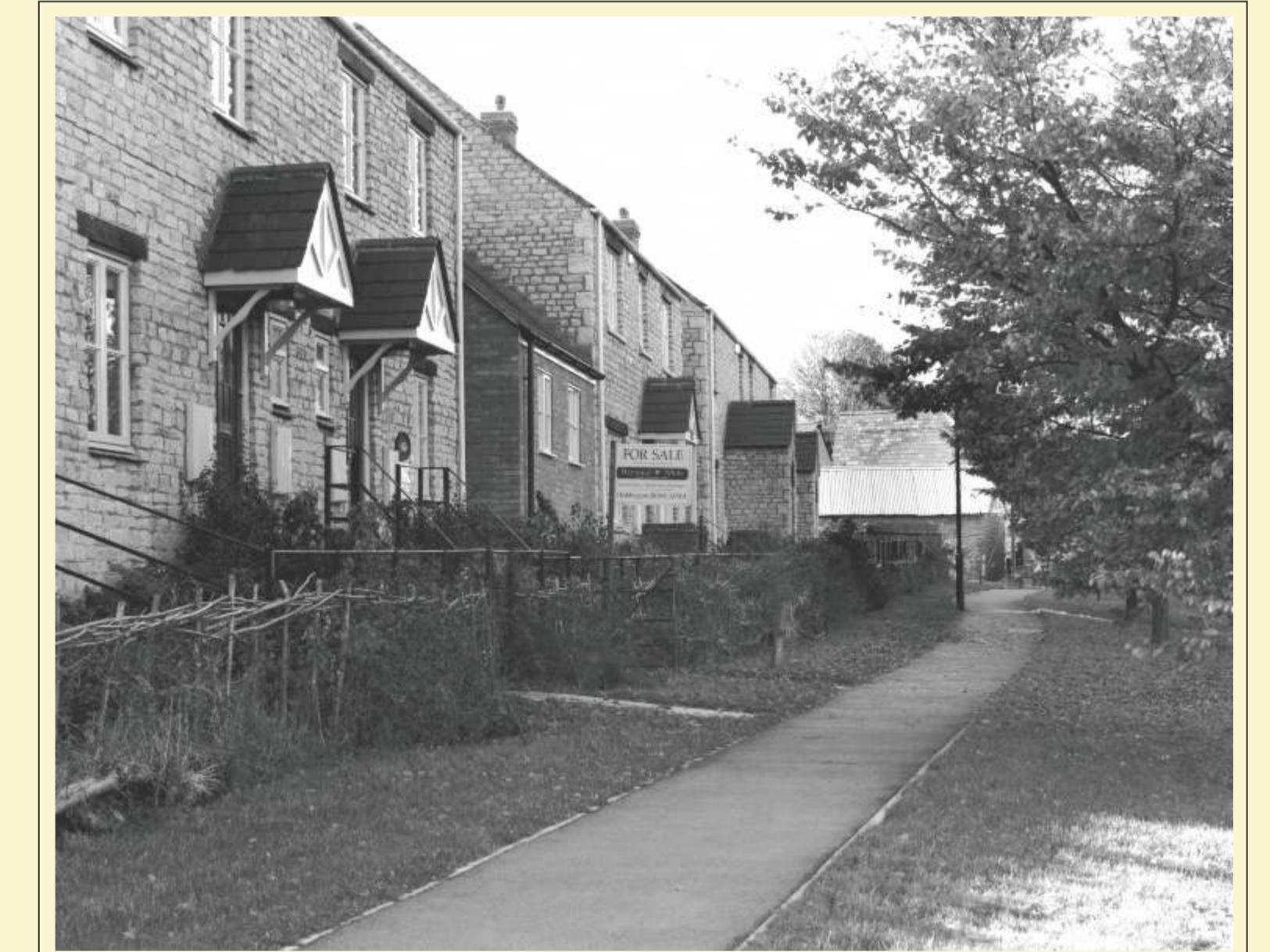
Laurence Fields



The saga of the Laurence Fields development was one of the “big” stories of our village life in the 1990s. It began in 1992 when Cherwell District Council, despite having refused applications from the owners of the site three times in previous years, identified the land on Heyford Road next to The Old Forge as a potential housing site. An outline plan for 14 homes was approved (with conditions) but it wasn't until 1996 that Tay Homes submitted their plan for 19 houses. Following much opposition from the village, this was at first refused by Cherwell's local planning committee, but that was over-ruled by a higher committee five months later. In January 1997 Margaret Mason wrote in SAL: *“I believe that the whole process eloquently demonstrates the power of developers and the basic lack of discussion with the people whose villages are to be affected by their developments. Lip service is paid to 'consultation'; it is stated by CDC that 'Parish Councils play an important role in expressing local opinion in planning matters' but in practice very little occurs. If a site brief had been developed in consultation with the Parish before this site was released many of the issues surrounding this application could have been addressed”.*

In February, Tay's bulldozers attempted to rip out the ancient Enclosure Act hedge fronting the site, but were stopped in their tracks by Margaret and others physically obstructing them. A court case in June, brought by the Parish Council, heard evidence that the hedge was in fact protected by an ancient law, but it wasn't until December that Tay Homes agreed a compromise: much of the hedge was to be left, with the roadside verge and trees. In the meantime, Iron Age finds had been unearthed by archaeologists on the site, and in January 1999 a skeleton – later established as Roman – was found. For the future residents of Steeple Aston a battle had been, at least in part, won. Except that as the foundations went in for the new houses, the Parish Council noticed that they were much higher out of the ground than had been expected. Also, the parking arrangements, anticipated as inadequate, proved to be so. More complaints, but this time with no result. By the end of 1998 new residents were writing to SAL wondering what all the fuss had been about. One or two campaigners wrote back trying to explain, but by then.....it was all over.

Incidentally, for those that don't know the origin of the name chosen for the development, Laurence Field was the carpenter son of the last wheelwright who worked at The Old Forge next door to the site.



STEEPLE ASTON PARISH COUNCIL

The saga of the hedge has finally been resolved. Tay contractors are now beginning work on site, having agreed with the Parish Council to the retention of the hedge along the whole length save for the access road and 5 pedestrian accesses in the stretch between the new road and the bus shelter. Legal agreements are being made which will preserve the hedge and provide for its maintenance. These are in the form of Section 106 notices, at present with Cherwell District Council. We believe that this will be the most satisfactory and administrable means of achieving proper protection. The ownership and therefore responsibility for maintenance of the hedge will finally be transferred to the Parish Council together with an agreed sum sufficient to ensure that maintenance. Until these are satisfactorily agreed, Tay are still bound by a legal undertaking not to damage the hedge other than at these access points.

The hornbeam tree which was in the site entrance has been replanted, at Tay's expense, at the Banbury road junction at the top of Fenway, where it should have room to grow and become a landmark. This should now be the only one of the Jubilee trees to be moved. All the others will stay and at most will require a little pruning of lower branches.

The hedge will need to be properly laid, ideally during this winter, and any infill planting will be done, again at Tay's expense. The line of the houses to the right of the access road has been moved back slightly to accommodate the hedge. It will now receive the care and good management it needs to grow thick and strong for the future.

Thank you to all of you helped in the fight to retain it. It should now survive to form, with the Jubilee trees, a green and rural boundary to the development site, and preserve the character of this entrance to the village along the Heyford Road.

The building works on site will probably last about a year, with the first houses being ready for sale in the Spring. The site manager's name is Tony Colborn. He will be on site throughout. Tay's wish to cause as little disruption as possible. If any problems arise, he is the man to call.

Margaret Mason

December 1997

