

DUNSTABLE, BEDS
2004/111

Ashton St Peter's Lower School
Church Street
Dunstable
Bedfordshire



Archaeological Evaluation Report



Oxford Archaeology

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Ashton St Peter's Lower School, Church Street, Dunstable, Bedfordshire

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION REPORT

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SUMMARY

On the 26th and 27th of January 2004 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out a field evaluation at Ashton St Peters Lower School, Church Street, Dunstable, Bedfordshire (NGR: TL 01862220) on behalf of Turley Associates Ltd. The evaluation produced evidence of a possible Roman pit and a significant period of activity from around the 11th-13th century with the scale and shape of the excavated features indicating domestic land use and possible quarrying. These features have survived within the site despite a considerable period of later post-medieval activity.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work

- 1.1.1 Between the 26th and 27th January 2004, Oxford Archaeology carried out a field evaluation at Ashton St Peter,s Lower School, Church Street, Dunstable, Bedfordshire (NGR TL 01862220) on behalf of Turley Associates in respect of a planning application by Aldi Stores Ltd. for a proposed development (Fig. 1).
- 1.1.2 This was undertaken in line with the requirements as set out in Bedfordshire County Council's *Brief for the archaeological field evaluation of land to the rear of the Quadrant Centre, Dunstable, Bedfordshire* (BCC 2004) and a WSI (OA 2004) agreed by Lesley-Ann Mather, Archaeological Officer to Bedfordshire County Council. The requirement for a field evaluation is in line with the Local Plan policy and PPG 16.

2 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

- 2.1.1 The proposed development site lies at the foot of the Chilterns chalk ridge within the north-east quadrant of Dunstable town centre. It is sited at a height of c. 140 m OD and has an area of approximately 0.6 hectares.
- 2.1.2 The underlying solid geology of the development site is Middle Chalk, although local shallow deposits of clay are encountered overlying the chalk.
- 2.1.3 The site is currently used as a school.

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- 3.1.1 A summary of the archaeological background to the evaluation has been provided below from the WSI (OA 2004).
- 3.1.2 The development site lies within the historic core of Dunstable. The original Roman settlement at Dunstable is centred on the junction of the Icknield Way, an ancient cross country routeway with prehistoric origins, and Watling Street a Roman road linking London with the north-west of England. This Roman small town was called *Durocbrivis*.
- 3.1.3 Unusually there does not seem to have been any Saxon settlement bridging the gap between Roman and medieval periods. During the Saxon period the town seems to

have been deserted, certainly there is no evidence as yet of any urban type settlement, although evidence of Saxon occupation from the surrounding area is known.

- 3.1.4 Archaeological investigations undertaken during the building of the Quadrant Centre in the 1960s produced evidence of Roman occupation (HER 11270).
- 3.1.5 An archaeological evaluation undertaken by Hertfordshire Archaeological Trust (HAT 2000), in the area to the rear of the school and north of the current proposal area, revealed evidence of Roman deposits.
- 3.1.6 In the medieval period Henry I founded a new town at the same crossroads, created out of his Houghton Regis estate in AD1119. His royal residence was regularly visited by the monarch until the time of Henry VIII (HER 4355). It has been suggested that the residence was located to the east of the development area around Kingsbury Court and Old Palace Lodge. Excavations at Kingsbury Court did produce some medieval remains although the excavator concluded that they did not belong to the royal residence (Warren 1988). Two human burials were also recovered during works at Kingsway (HER 16165).
- 3.1.7 On the south side of church Street is Dunstable Priory, also founded by Henry I (HER 131 and 132).
- 3.1.8 In January 2000 HAT evaluated an area of land which partially intrudes into the present application area (HAT 2000). One of the trenches contained remains related to the Roman and medieval periods surviving below the yard surface

4 EVALUATION AIMS

- 4.1.1 To establish the location, presence or absence, extent, condition, nature, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains within the proposed development area. Particular attention would be given to remains of the Roman, Saxon and medieval periods.
- 4.1.2 To establish the ecofactual and environmental potential of archaeological deposits and features.
- 4.1.3 To make available the results of the investigation.

5 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

5.1 Scope of fieldwork

- 5.1.1 The archaeological evaluation comprised two trenches positioned in accordance with the agreed WSI (Fig. 2). Trench 1 was 11.5 m long by 1.6 m wide, and located in the old playground. Trench 2 measured 5.5 m by 4.6 m and was located on grass at the site of the former swimming pool. A contingency of 10 m² was held in reserve but was not used on this occasion.

5.2 Fieldwork methods and recording

5.2.1 The trenches were excavated under continuous archaeological supervision using a mechanical excavator equipped with a toothless grading bucket. Excavation proceeded to the top of the natural geology or the top of the first significant archaeological horizon whichever was encountered first.

5.2.2 The trenches were cleaned by hand and the revealed features were sampled to determine their extent and nature. All the trenches and any archaeological features were planned at a scale of 1:50 while sample sections, and sections of excavated features were drawn at a scale of 1:20. The trenches, sections and features were photographed using colour slide and black and white print film. Recording followed procedures laid down in the *OA Fieldwork Manual* (OAU, 1992).

5.3 Palaeo-environmental evidence

5.3.1 No deposits suitable for paleo-environmental sampling were identified during the evaluation.

5.4 Presentation of results

5.4.1 The results of the evaluation are presented below, with the stratigraphic accounts of each trench are described individually, followed by an overall discussion and interpretation. A full context inventory and pottery assessment is included in the Appendices.

6 RESULTS:

6.1 Soils and ground conditions

6.1.1 The site was located on level ground. Both the trenches came down onto natural geology represented by chalk deposits. All the boundaries of layers and features were well defined.

6.2 Distribution of archaeological deposits

6.2.1 Both trenches produced a variety of post-holes and pits, although Trench 2 appears to have contained earlier medieval features, while Trench 1 produced post-medieval remains.

7 RESULTS: DESCRIPTIONS

7.1 Description of deposits

Trench 1 (Fig. 3)

7.1.1 This trench measured 11.5 m long by 1.6 m wide. During initial excavation at the Southern end, a brick wall (119) was encountered. This wall was left *in situ* and excavation of the trench continued beyond its limits.

7.1.2 Natural chalk (125) was encountered at a depth of 1.08 m below ground level. Towards the NW end of the trench a series of inter-cutting features were observed. The earliest evidence of activity encountered consisted of features 107, 121 and

deposit 122. Feature 121 was a shallow pit, measuring 0.2 m deep and containing a mid grey-brown sandy silt (124) which produced two sherds of possible Roman pottery. This was cut by pit 120 featuring steep sides extending below a depth of 0.31 m. This was filled by a dark grey-brown silty clay (123). No dating evidence was retrieved from this feature.

- 7.1.3 To the south of pit 121, feature 107, the truncated remains of a possible pit, was observed containing a light grey-green clay silt (111) measuring 0.42 m wide by 0.28 m deep but contained no dating evidence. Both pit 107 and pit 120 were cut by pit 109. Pit 109 was not bottomed but its irregular cut extended over 1.68 m wide by 0.58 m deep, continuing beyond the limits of the trench. It was filled by a mid brown clay silt (110) which was in turn cut by pit (103) containing *c.* 18th-19th century brick and tile.
- 7.1.4 A mid grey clay silt layer up to 0.34 m thick was observed overlaying the chalk natural (125) in the middle section of the trench. This was cut by both pit (103) at the north-western end of the trench, and pit (105) towards the south-west. The excavation of pit (103) revealed a slightly irregular base. This was filled by a mid greenish grey clay silt (104) containing a large quantity (approximately 60%) of ceramic building material (CBM). The pit measured 0.80 m wide by 0.54 m deep.
- 7.1.5 A square cut pit (105) containing a single fill of mid brown clay silt (113), produced five sherds of post-medieval pottery. This feature cut the post-medieval layer (122) in the southern half of the trench and measured 0.46m but was not bottomed. Feature 105 was then cut by gully (108), which terminated within the trench. This had a concave base measuring 0.60 m wide by 0.46 m deep containing a mid brown grey clay silt (116). Gully 106, observed in section to be 1.00 m wide, also cut feature 105 and similarly terminated within the trench slightly further north. It contained two fills; a primary fill (115) consisting of a loosely compacted redeposited chalk 0.12 m thick whilst the secondary fill (114) of mid brown clay silt, 0.34 m deep.
- 7.1.6 A rectangular shaped feature (101), measuring 0.44 m by 0.30 m and 0.21 m deep was seen to cut the natural just north of the centre of the trench. The fill (102) consisted of a dark brown-grey silty clay containing one sherd of pottery and two pieces of brick, dating to the post-medieval period.
- 7.1.7 All the archaeological features in Trench 1 were sealed by a dark grey clay silt (117) up to 0.40m thick. This ran the length of the trench and appears to be a buried soil. This deposit was cut by a foundation trench for a possible Victorian wall. This wall may once have been part of the existing school running on a NE-SW alignment, towards the south-eastern end of the trench. Finally, all the deposits were sealed by a levelling deposit and tarmac surface (118).

Trench 2 (Fig. 4)

- 7.1.8 This trench measured 5.5 m x 4.6 m. The chalk natural (225) was encountered at a depth of 0.84 m below ground level. This was cut by a post hole (220) located towards the NW of the trench and features 212 and 218 to the centre and the east. Posthole 220 measured 0.35 m in diameter and 0.04 m in depth and contained a single fill of mid grey-brown clay silt (221) containing sherds of post-medieval

ceramics. Feature (218) could to be the terminus of a possible ditch, or more likely, a large quarry pit. The feature had steep sides and an irregular base, measuring in plan over 2.8 m (E-W) by 1.5 m (N-S) and 1 m deep and contained four episodes of backfilling (219, 226-8). Two of these fills (219 and 226) produced pottery dating to the 11th-13th centuries. Similar to feature 218, feature 212 measured 2.4 m (E-W) by 2 m (N-S) and also appeared to be either part of a ditch terminus or more likely a large pit. It also contained four fills (213, 222-4) of which 213 and 222 contained pottery dating to the 11-13th centuries.

- 7.1.9 Although not excavated, feature 229 could clearly be seen to truncate features 212 and 218. This feature continued beyond the northern and southern limits of the trench. It is possible that this is part of a linear feature such as a gully or ditch or again, part of a large pit. In plan it was seen to contain a mid grey- brown clay sand upper fill. Sealing this feature and all the earlier activity was a light grey brown clay silt up to 0.32 m thick. Overlying this was a hard, compacted layer of chalk (205) thought to be a bedding layer for a pebble surface (204). This surface measured 0.02 m thick and was located near to the southern section.
- 7.1.10 Deposit 205 was cut by a square shaped pit (210) featuring straight sides and a flat base and filled by a dark grey-black sandy silt (211) containing late post-medieval CBM. The pebble surface (204) was later overlain by a mid grey-brown sandy clay (209), containing clay pipe, glass and a piece of glazed tile of modern date representing a levelling or demolition layer.
- 7.1.11 Both pit 210 and the layer 209 were sealed by identical deposits 203 and 206. These are thought to be part of the same post-medieval levelling deposit consisting of a light brown-yellow clay sand measuring 0.10 m thick and containing pottery dating to the 17th century.
- 7.1.12 Feature 215, seen in section, was a shallow cut 0.8 m wide by 0.2 m deep and filled by a mid grey-brown clay sand (207). This fill contained a large quantity of late post-medieval CBM. Similarly, feature 214 was also seen in section measuring 1.2 m wide by 0.18 m deep and filled by a dark grey-black clay sand (208). Both shallow pits were sealed by a black clay sand buried topsoil (202) up to 0.4 m thick, which in turn were sealed by a 0.16 m of modern turf and topsoil (201).

7.2 Finds

Pottery

- 7.2.1 The pottery assemblage comprised 67 sherds with a total weight of 695 kg, and a broad date range from Roman to Post-Medieval. The medieval assemblage of mainly abraded body sherds were mixed with a small amount of residual Roman sherds e.g. contexts 219 and 222. The medieval rim sherds present in contexts 222, 219, 226 and 213 were all from jars. The Post-Medieval wares were mainly 17th century and later, and the vessel forms ranged from pancheon food preparation dishes to finer tablewares.

General

- 7.2.1 Finds recovered from the site included tile, a copper alloy chain, clay pipe stems and glass dating from the late post-medieval (18th-19th century) to modern periods.
- 7.2.2 A small quantity of animal bone was also retrieved consisting of sheep/goat, cattle and dog.

8 DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

- 8.1.1 The evaluation indicated land use mainly from the early medieval and the late post-medieval periods. It is possible that the gap between the two could be associated with some form of abandonment of this area although this is only speculation considering the size and nature of the evaluation. No Saxon activity bridging the gap between the Roman and medieval periods was noted during the investigation. This is consistent with the lack of evidence observed elsewhere in the town, despite the confirmation of Saxon occupation in the surrounding area.
- 8.1.2 There appears to be a significant period of activity from around the 11th-13th century surviving within the site with the scale and shape of the excavated features indicating domestic land use or as is the case with Trench 2, possible quarrying. This medieval activity could be associated with the rear of medieval burgage plots where domestic refuse was often disposed. However, no structural evidence was uncovered during the evaluation apart from a single post-medieval post hole.
- 8.1.3 Given the density of features on site it is clear that it was the focus of considerable activity. The density of pottery recovered is a good indicator of the archaeological potential of the site. However, the limited size of the trenches and likewise extent of the features within these trenches leaves further questions about the function and extent of the activity over the entire development area.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

<i>Trench</i>	<i>Ctxt No</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Depth (m)</i>	<i>Comment</i>	<i>Finds</i>	<i>Date</i>
1						
	101	Cut	0.4 m	Rectangular post hole	-	Post-med
	102	Fill	0.4 m	Fill of 101	Pottery, bone	Post-med
	103	Cut	0.5 m	Pit	-	Post-med
	104	Fill	0.5 m	Fill of 103	Brick, tile	Post-med
	105	Cut	>0.5 m	Square cut pit	-	Post-med
	106	Cut	0.45 m	Gully	-	-
	107	Cut	0.3 m	Pit	-	-
	108	Cut	0.5 m	Gully	-	-
	109	Cut	>0.6 m	Pit	-	-
	110	Fill	>0.6 m	Fill of 109	-	-
	111	Fill	0.3 m	Fill of 107	-	-
	112	Cut	>0.2 m	Foundation cut	-	C19th
	113	Fill	>0.5 m	Fill of 105	Pottery	Post-med
	114	Fill	0.3 m	Secondary fill of 106	-	-
	115	Fill	0.15 m	Primary fill of 106	-	-
	116	Fill	0.5 m	Fill of 108	-	-
	117	Deposit	0.4 m	Buried topsoil	Pottery	C19th
	118	Deposit	0.4 m	Made ground and tarmac	-	C20th
	119	Structure	>0.3 m	Wall	Brick	C19th
	120	Cut	>0.6 m	Pit	-	-
	121	Cut	0.4 m	Shallow pit	-	-
	122	Deposit	0.25 m	Remnants of subsoil	-	-
	123	Fill	>0.6 m	Fill of 120	-	-
	124	Fill	0.4 m	Fill of 121	Pottery	Romano-British
	125	Natural	-	Chalk	-	-
2						
	201	Deposit	0.15 m	Turf and topsoil	-	C20th
	202	Deposit	0.4 m	Buried topsoil	-	C19th
	203	Deposit	0.1 m	Levelling layer (same as 206)	Pottery	C18th

<i>Trench</i>	<i>Ctxt No</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Depth (m)</i>	<i>Comment</i>	<i>Finds</i>	<i>Date</i>
	204	Structure	0.02 m	Pebbled surface	-	-
	205	Layer	0.14 m	Compacted chalk bedding layer	-	-
	206	Fill	0.1 m	Levelling layer (same as 203)	Pottery	C18th
	207	Fill	0.2 m	Fill of 215	-	-
	208	Fill	0.18 m	Fill of 214	-	-
	209	Layer	0.2 m	Levelling/demolition deposit	Pottery	C17th
	210	Cut	0.16 m	Square cut pit	-	-
	211	Fill	0.16m	Fill of 210	-	-
	212	Cut	1.0 m	Possible quarry pit	-	C13th/14th
	213	Fill	0.15 m	Fill of 212	Pottery, Tile	C13th/14th
	214	Cut	0.18 m	Possible pit	-	-
	215	Cut	0.2 m	Possible pit	-	-
	216	Deposit	0.35 m	Clay silt layer	-	-
	217	Fill	-	Fill of 229	-	-
	218	Cut	0.75 m	Possible pit	-	C11th/13th
	219	Fill	0.45 m	Fill of 218	Pottery, Bone	C11th/13th
	220	Cut	0.04 m	Post hole	-	-
	221	Fill	0.04 m	Fill of 220	-	-
	222	Fill	0.7 m	Fill of 212	Pottery	C11th/13th
	223	Fill	0.5 m	Fill of 212	-	-
	224	Fill	0.2 m	Fill of 212	-	-
	225	Layer	-	Natural chalk	-	-
	226	Fill	0.3 m	Fill of 218	Pottery, Bone	C11th/13th
	227	Fill	0.1 m	Fill of 218	-	-
	228	Fill	0.12 m	Fill of 218	-	-
	229	Cut	-	Possible ditch or quarry pit	-	-

APPENDIX 2 POTTERY REPORT (BY CAROLE WHEELER)

8.1.4 The pottery assemblage comprised 67 sherds with a total weight of 695 kg, and a broad date range from Roman to Post-Medieval. The medieval assemblage of mainly abraded body sherds were mixed with a small amount of residual Roman sherds e.g. contexts 219 and 222. The medieval rim sherds present in contexts 222, 219, 226 and 213 were all from jars. The Post-Medieval wares were mainly 17th century and later, and the vessel forms ranged from pancheon food preparation dishes to finer tablewares.

<i>Context</i>	<i>No. of Sherds</i>	<i>Weight (g)</i>	<i>Fabric</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Bedfordshire Pottery Code</i>
102	1	11	Redware	Post-Med	P01
213	4	37	-	?13/14thC	-
209	1	2	Surrey Border Ware	16/17thC	P09
	2	12	White tinglazed earthenware	17thC +	P33
	1	1	Staffordshire trailed slipware	17thC +	P30
	1	66	Redware	17thC +	P02
206	1	5	Tinglazed earthenware	18thC+	P33
113	1	14	Tinglazed earthenware?	Post-Med	P33
	4	98	Redware	Post-Med	P02
203	1	5	-	18thC+	-
117	1	48	Stoneware	Post-Med	P50
	1	9	Tinglazed earthenware	18thC +	P33
	3	34	White tinglazed earthenware	Post-Med	P33
	1	8	Redware	?15/16thC	E02
222	2	3	Oxford Colour-coated	Roman	R11D
	1	24	OXY type	11-13thC	C01
	1	9	-	?10/11thC	-
	1	1	-	?Roman	-
	2	15	-	medieval	C01
	1	28	-	12-14thC	C04
124	2	10	-	?Roman	-
226	1	7	-	?Roman	-
	1	6	Early Surrey Ware?	11/12thC	C16
	1	16	-	11-13thC	C03
	1	5	-	-	V.abraded
219	8	46	Samian/Ox Colour coated +	Roman	1 x R01 & R11D 1 x mortarium 1 x Roman dish 4 x ? Roman
	1	22	OXB type Late Saxon Shelly Ware	10-11thC	B04
	8	39	-	11-13thC	C03
	8	69	-	11-13thC	C03
	1	18	-	11-13thC	C03
	1	21	-	-	CBM?
	3	6	-	?Roman	-
	Totals	67	695		

APPENDIX 3 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

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Written Scheme of Investigation

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October 2002

APPENDIX 4 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: Ashton St Peter's Lower School, Church Street, Dunstable, Bedfordshire

Site code: 2004/111

Grid reference: TU 0186 222090

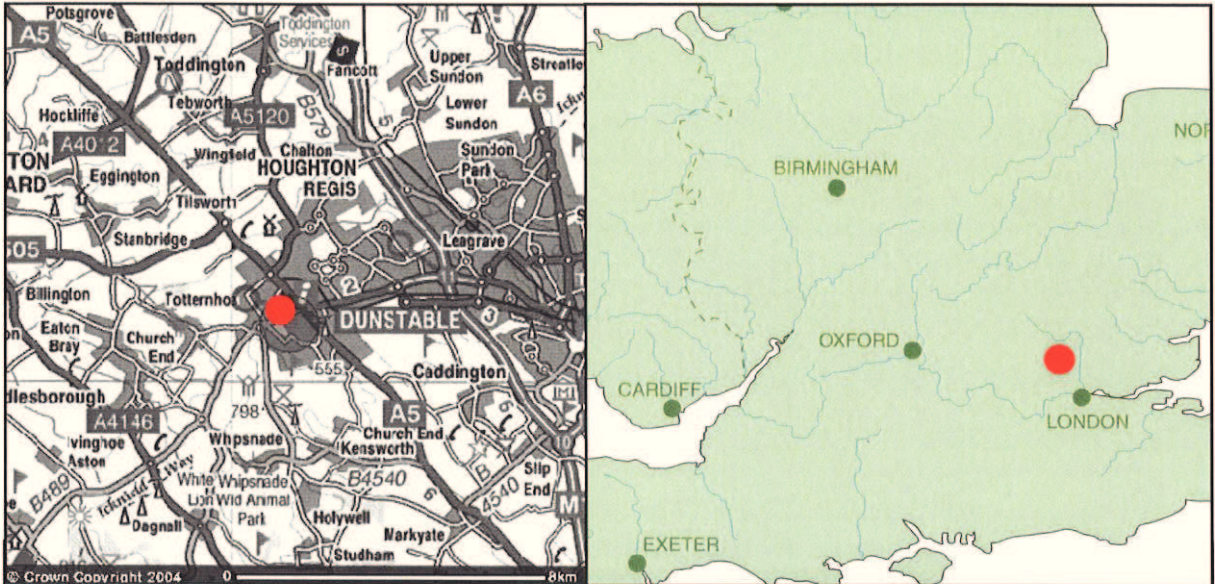
Type of evaluation: Two machine excavated trenches

Date and duration of project: 26th-27th January 2004

Area of site: 0.6 hectares

Summary of results: The evaluation produced evidence of a possible Roman pit and early medieval, possible quarrying pits and mid/late post-medieval activity.

Location of archive: The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with an appropriate museum in due course.



Scale 1:50,000

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Figure 1: Site location

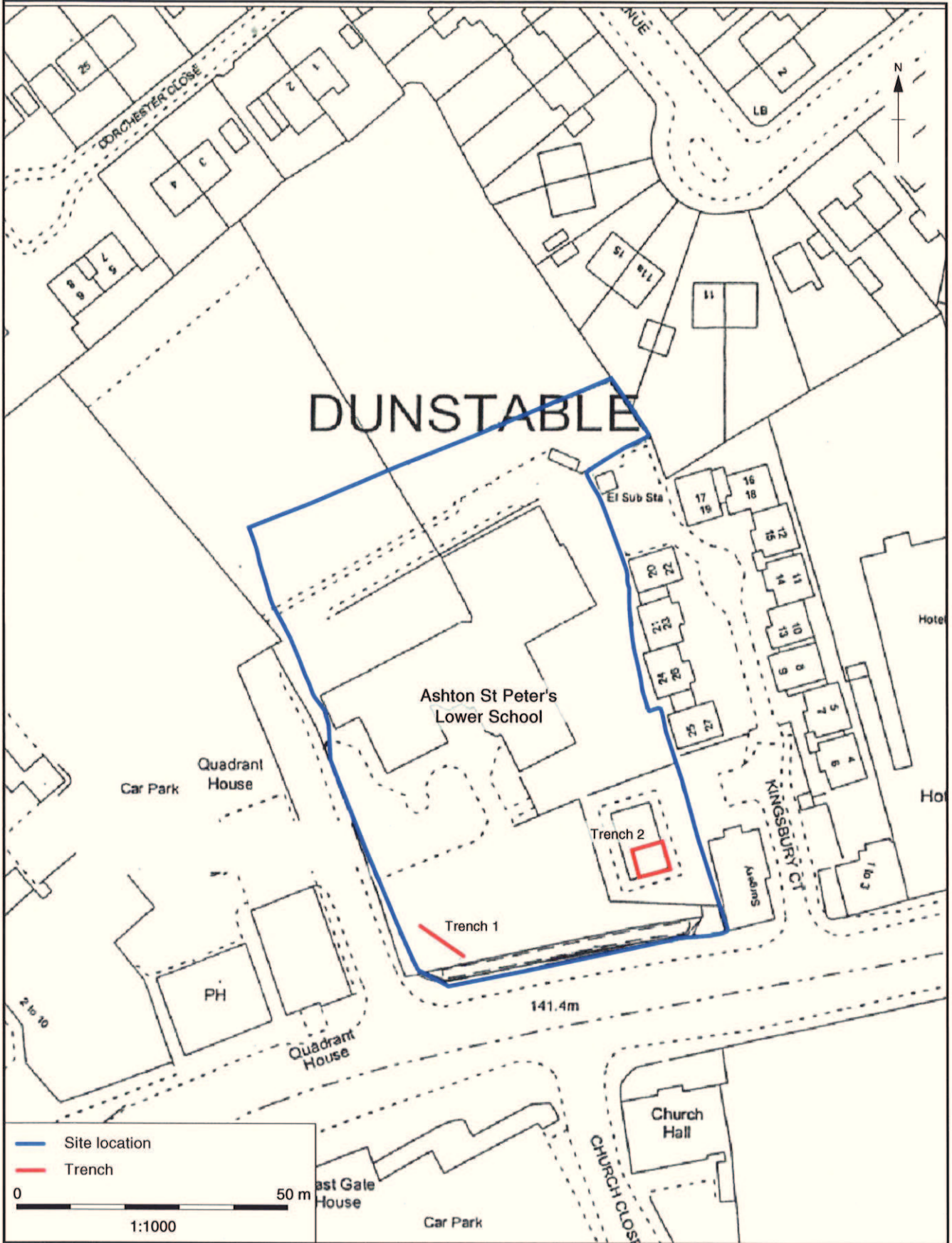


Figure 2: Trench location plan

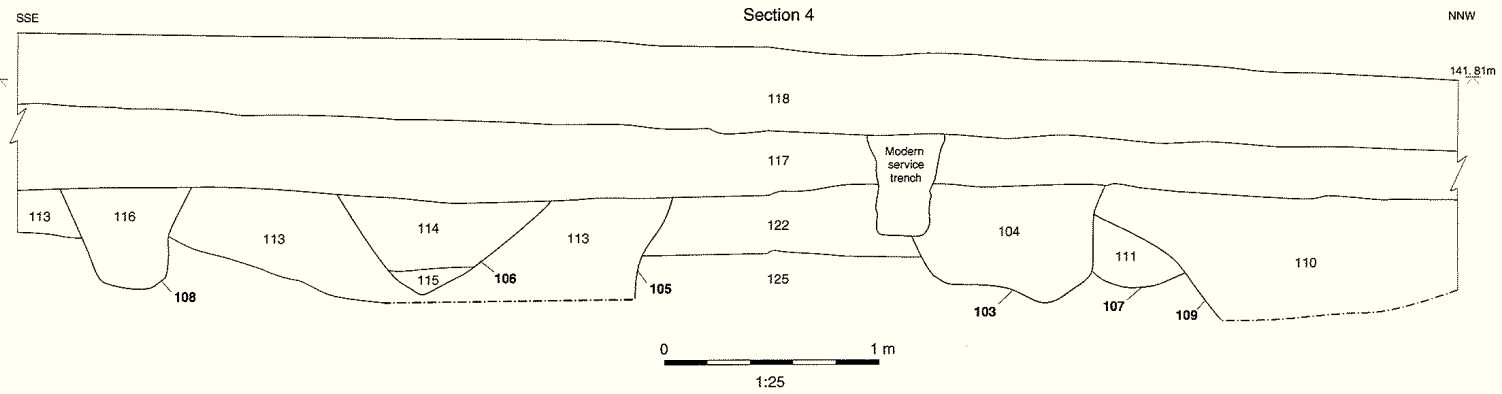
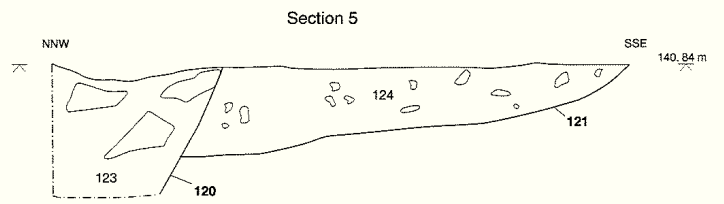
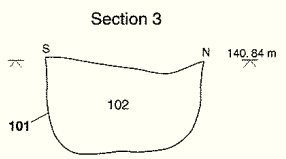
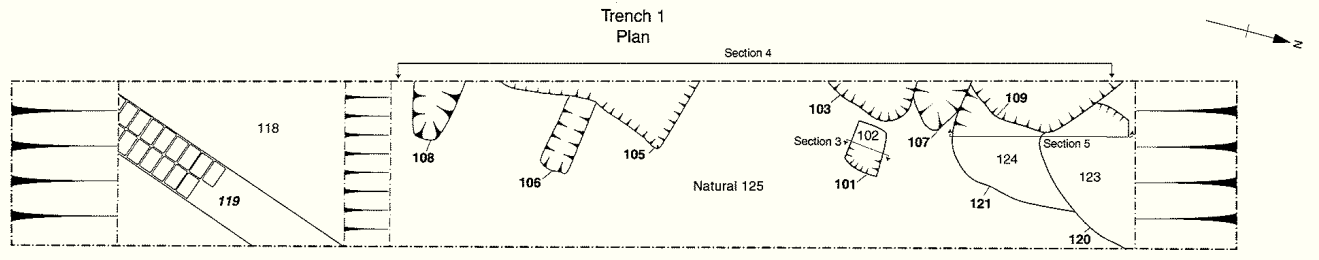
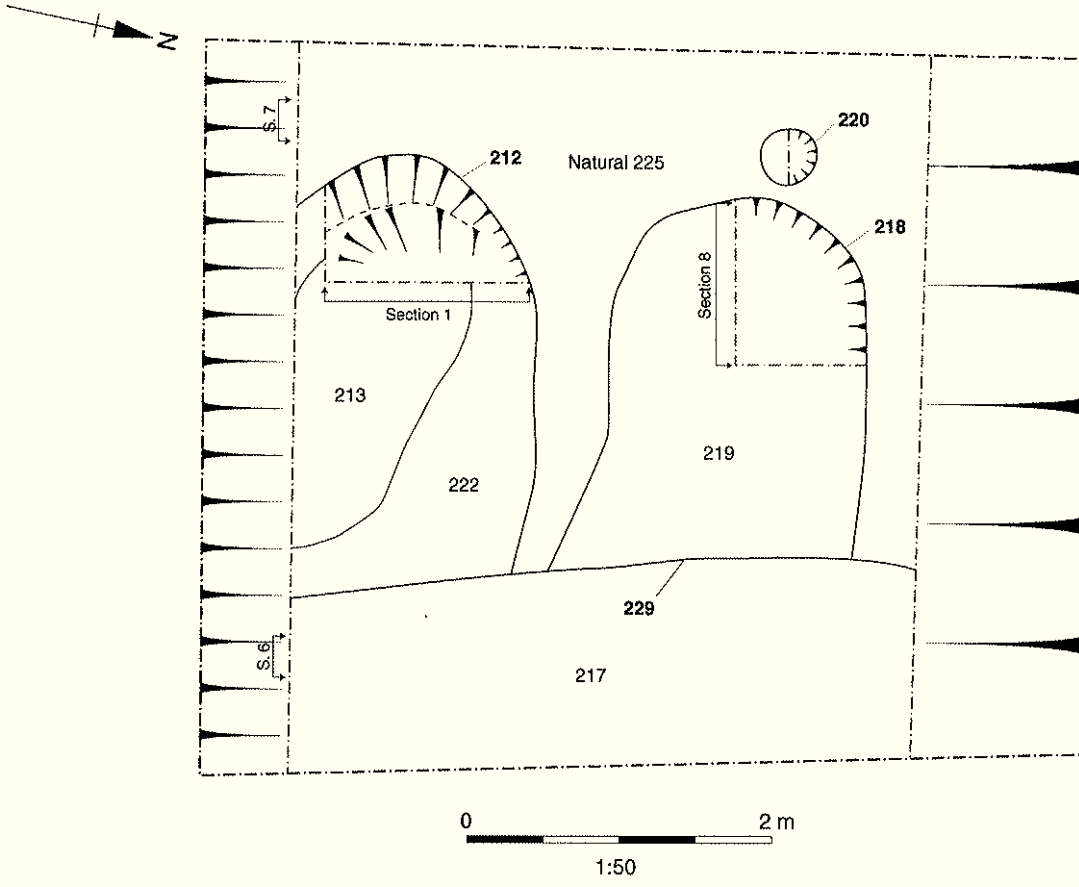
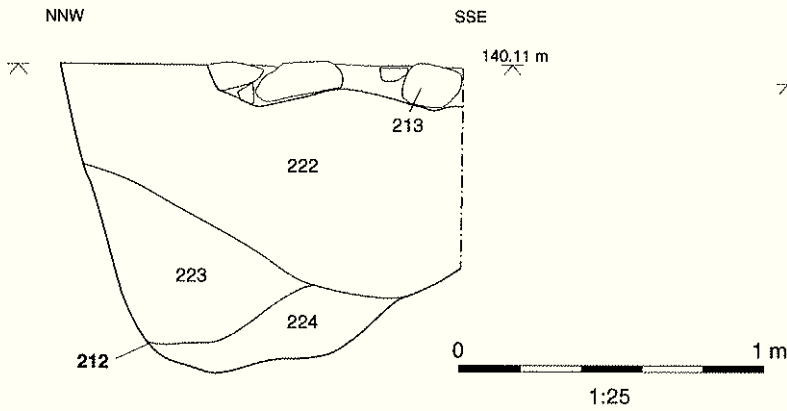


Figure 3: Trench 1, plan and sections

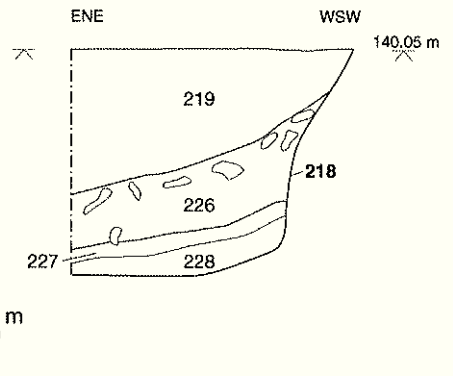
Trench 2 Plan



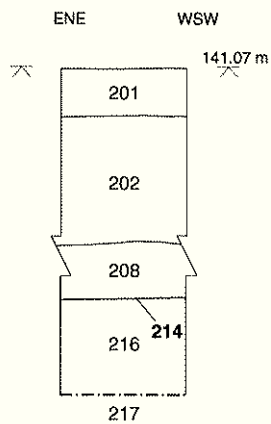
Section 1



Section 8



Section 6



Section 7

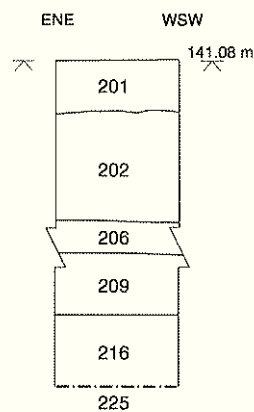
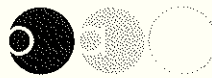


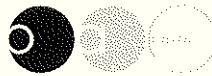
Figure 4: Trench 2, plan and sections



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