

A Possible Saxon Ditch at  
Steeple Morden Primary School,  
Steeple Morden,  
Cambridgeshire



**Archaeological  
Evaluation Report**



October 2010

**Client: Capita Symonds for CCC**

OA East Report No: 1212  
OASIS No: oxfordar3-83788  
NGR: TL 28538 42531

**A Possible Saxon Ditch at Steeple Morden Primary School, Steeple Morden,  
Cambridgeshire**

*Archaeological Evaluation*

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*Report Date: October 2010*

**Report Number:** 1212  
**Site Name:** Steeple Morden Primary School  
**HER Event No:** ECB3454  
**Date of Works:** 27th-28th September 2010  
**Client Name:** Capita Symonds for CCC  
**Client Ref:** N/A  
**Planning Ref:** S/00333/10/CC  
**Grid Ref:** TL 28538 42531  
**Site Code:** STEPRS10  
**Finance Code:** STEPRS10  
**Receiving Body:** CCC Stores, Landbeach  
**Accession No:** STEPRS10  
**Prepared by:** Jonathan House  
**Position:** Supervisor  
**Date:** October 2010  
**Checked by:** James Drummond-Murray  
**Position:** Senior Project Manager  
**Date:** October 2010  
**Signed:** .....

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## Summary

*An archaeological evaluation was carried out in September 2010 at Steeple Morden Primary School (TL 28538 42531) in advance of the construction of a new pre-school building. The evaluation consisted of a single trench located within the proposed development area, forming an L shape around the existing temporary structure.*

*The trench revealed evidence of a possible track-side or boundary ditch, which may have been established during the Saxon period. If the ditch was part of a track it may have served as an access between the nearby manor house, that once stood to the west of the school, and the church. Alternatively it may have been an early property boundary for a tenement fronting onto Hay Street to the east. At some point in the post-medieval period the boundary was re-established in the form of a clunch wall, constructed after the infilling of the ditch and accumulation of a subsoil layer had occurred.*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Location and scope of work

- 1.1.1 An archaeological evaluation was carried out by Oxford Archaeology East at Steeple Morden Primary School (TL 28538 42531) in advance of the construction of a new pre-school building. The evaluation consisted of a single trench located within the proposed development area, forming an L shape around the existing temporary structure (Fig. 1).
- 1.1.2 This archaeological evaluation was undertaken in accordance with a Brief issued by Dan McConnell of Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC; Planning Application S/00333/10/CC), supplemented by a Specification prepared by OA East.
- 1.1.3 The work was designed to assist in defining the character and extent of any archaeological remains within the proposed redevelopment area, in accordance with the guidelines set out in *Planning Policy Statement 5: Planning for the Historic Environment* (Department for Communities and Local Government 2010). The results will enable decisions to be made by CCC, on behalf of the Local Planning Authority, with regard to the treatment of any archaeological remains found.
- 1.1.4 The site archive is currently held by OA East and will be deposited with the appropriate county stores in due course.

### 1.2 Geology and topography

- 1.2.1 Steeple Morden is located in southwestern Cambridgeshire close to the Hertfordshire border, 8km north-west of Royston. The land is gently rolling terrain cut by small streams flowing into the River Cam or Rhee; the site itself is located within the centre of Steeple Morden village.
- 1.2.2 The site is at a height of approximately 49m OD and lies on the Lower Beds (known as Chalk Marl) of the Cretaceous Lower Chalk ridge of south Cambridgeshire (British Geological Survey 2002).

### 1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The village of Steeple Morden ('*Alia Mordune*') is recorded in Domesday Book as having 42 peasants and 12 servi. The population rose until it reached a peak in the early 17th century, declining again during the second half of the century: in 1660 it was recorded as having approximately 195 adults living within the village, the population increased again, reaching 1018 adults in 1871. By the early 20th century the population had stabilised and averaged at 640.
- 1.3.2 By the 13th century the village had built up along a north-to-south axis past the church with the street to the north known as Hay Street. Hay Street comprised c.30 houses north of the church and c.40 houses south of the church. By 1800 Cheyney Street had developed east of the church with up to 10 houses along its length (Wright 1982).

- 1.3.3 Archaeological fieldwork in Steeple Morden has so far largely focused on the village core to the south of the subject site, although there has been previous work within the school grounds.
- 1.3.4 Investigations at 15-17 Hay Street (Grant and Wilkins 2002) revealed archaeological features sealed beneath 0.5-0.6m of topsoil and mature subsoil. These features were dated to the Romano-British period and included ditches and narrow curvilinear features together with pits and post-holes indicative of occupation on the site during this period. Further investigations (Rudge 2002/2004) revealed a large ditch dated to the Romano-British period which contained significant amounts of pottery.
- 1.3.5 Evaluation in the playground of the Primary School, close to the current site, produced similar evidence for occupation sealed beneath approximately 0.50m of overburden (Kenney 2001). The features encountered were undated ditches on two alignments (north-northeast to south-southeast and east-to-west), one of which could be a continuation of a feature found at 15-17 Hay Street. Investigation at No.1 Cheyney Street uncovered a large undated pond or quarry pit together with a post-hole and a late medieval ditch terminal (Fletcher 2004).

## **1.4 Acknowledgements**

- 1.4.1 The author would like thank Capita Symonds for CCC who respectively commissioned and funded the archaeological work. The project was managed by Aileen Connor and the illustrator was Daniel Bashford, with Jonathan House as the on-site staff; Rachel Clarke edited the report. The project was monitored by Dan McConnell of CCC.



## 2 AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Aims

- 2.1.1 The objective of this evaluation was to determine as far as reasonably possible the presence/absence, location, nature, extent, date, quality, condition and significance of any surviving archaeological deposits within the development area.

### 2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 The Brief required that all archaeological deposits should be investigated, and recorded.
- 2.2.2 A single trench was excavated, measuring 14m in length and forming an L-shape around the existing building. The trench was aligned east-west with a north-south return at the west end. Approximately 6% of the total development area was investigated.
- 2.2.3 Machine-excavation was carried out under constant archaeological supervision with a wheeled JCB-type excavator using a toothless ditching bucket.
- 2.2.4 The site survey was carried out by Jonathan House using measurements from existing buildings.
- 2.2.5 All archaeological features and deposits were recorded using OA East's *pro-forma* sheets. Trench locations, plans and sections were recorded at appropriate scales and digital photographs were taken of all relevant features and deposits.
- 2.2.6 No environmental samples were taken from the site, as no suitable deposits were identified during the investigations.
- 2.2.7 The site conditions and the weather did not inhibit the archaeological work.

### 3 RESULTS

#### 3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 A single trench was excavated, the results of which are presented and described below; a trench summary is also included as Appendix A. Overburden comprising topsoil (c.0.13m thick) and subsoil (c.0.25m) was removed by mechanical excavator..

#### 3.2 Trench 1 (Figs 2 and 3, Plates 1-3)

3.2.1 Three features were excavated within the trench. A single undated tree bowl (**103**) was investigated in the east-west arm of the trench which contained a yellowish brown, clayey sand fill within which flecks of charcoal were observed. Two possible similar tree bowl-like features were seen at the trench corner, but were not excavated.

3.2.2 A ditch (**105**) orientated east-west was investigated at the northern end of the trench, sealed beneath the subsoil (Fig. 3 section 2, and Plate 2). The ditch measured 2.25m across, 0.85m in depth with a U-shaped profile, and contained two fills. The uppermost deposit (106) consisted of a light brown silt, with a very high frequency of chalk inclusions, whilst the primary fill (107) was a mid-greyish brown silt, with less chalk inclusions.

3.2.3 The latest feature recorded was a narrow wall footing (108) comprising a single surviving course of clunch blocks with occasional brick fragments. The foundation cut (**109**) for this wall truncated the subsoil sealing the infilled ditch (Fig. 3 section 2, and Plate 2). This wall, albeit stratigraphically separated, appears to share the same east-west alignment as the earlier ditch.

#### 3.3 Finds Summary

3.3.1 Datable evidence was recovered from the wall and both of the ditch fills, including a pottery sherd from the very base of the ditch. The wall (108) contained fragments of post-medieval bricks; other finds included a small sherd of St Neots ware pottery, animal bone and mussel shells, all of which is likely to be residual. The upper ditch fill (106) also contained animal bone, mussel shells and a small quantity of pottery, again St Neots Ware datable to AD850-1150 (Carole Fletcher pers. comm.). The primary fill of the ditch contained a small but unabraded sherd of Early-Mid Saxon pottery (Richard Mortimer pers. comm.), found at the very base of the ditch.

***Finds Quantification Table. (All weights in Kg)***

<b>Context</b>	<b>Bone</b>	<b>Ceramic</b>	<b>Flint</b>	<b>Shell</b>	<b>Tile</b>
106	-	0.008	-	-	-
108	0.18	0.009	0.001	0.033	-
109	0.002	0.001	0.001	0.006	0.038

## 4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

### 4.1 Discussion

- 4.1.1 The site is located very close to the central focus of the village, between the parish church to the south, and the site of the former Morden Manor to the west (Fig. 4). This arrangement seems to be based around a former crossroads of routeways, made up of Hay street running to the north, Church Street running to the south and Cheyney Street running to the east. The route to the west running beside and through the site exists only as a footpath now.
- 4.1.2 Ditch **105** appears to be a significant boundary, which seems to have been re-established in the post-medieval period, in the form of a wall. This may have formed one side of an early tenement or plot extending back from the Hay Street frontage to the east. A ditch was recorded on a similar east-west alignment during an evaluation within the school grounds (Kenney 2001) to the north of the current site, which although undated was also sealed beneath the subsoil. This suggest that it might also be an early boundary, perhaps delineating a property.
- 4.1.3 An alternative interpretation is that the ditch formed part of a trackway. Partial earthworks observed in the churchyard to the south include a linear depression which may have formed an earlier boundary on the same alignment as the ditch. Combined these would have created a narrow corridor of an appropriate size for a lane or trackway. This may conceivably have once linked the church and the nearby manor to the west (and on towards the road to Guilden Morden); a track is still visible on the first edition Ordnance Survey map (Fig. 4). Morden House is thought to have stood on the site of one of the medieval manors (Brewis Manor), which may feasibly have had a Saxon origin.
- 4.1.4 In 1662 the manor house was taxed as a large house with 20 hearths; it was demolished in the 18th century and afterwards the estate was sold to the Hardwickses of Wimpole (Taylor 1997, 100). The site is now marked by a number of earthworks and the track, which probably became redundant, survives only as a footpath beside the church.

### 4.2 Significance

- 4.2.1 The possible Saxon date of the ditch is of particular significance as it provides evidence for the early development and evolution of the village and (potentially) its earliest organised routeways.

### 4.3 Recommendations

- 4.3.1 Recommendations for any future work based upon this report will be made by the County Archaeology Office.

## APPENDIX A. TRENCH DESCRIPTIONS AND CONTEXT INVENTORY

Trench 1						
General description				Orientation		E-W /N-S
L shaped Trench, Close to church yard.				Avg. depth (m)		0.38
				Width (m)		1.5
				Length (m)		14
Contexts						
context no	type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	comment	finds	date
100	Layer	-	0.13	Topsoil	Y	-
101	Layer	-	0.25	Subsoil	Y	-
102	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-
103	Cut	0.7	0.2	Tree Bowl	-	-
104	Fill	0.7	0.2	Fill of Tree Bowl	N	-
105	Cut	2.25	0.85	Ditch	-	-
106	Fill	2.25	0.6	Upper fill ditch	Y	Late Saxon
107	Fill	1.2	0.23	Lower fill ditch	Y	Early-Mid Saxon
108	Cut	0.39	0.8	Construction cut	-	-
109	Wall	0.39	0.8	Wall	Y	Post Medieval

## APPENDIX B. BIBLIOGRAPHY

- |                             |                        |   |
|-----------------------------|------------------------|---|
| British Geological Survey   | 2002                   | Geological Maps of England and Wales sheet 205 Solid and Drift Edition  |
| Fletcher, T.,               | 2004                   | Late Medieval features at 1, Cheyney Street, Steeple Morden, Cambridgeshire An Archaeological Evaluation, Archaeological Field Unit Cambridgeshire County Council. Report No. 719 |
| Grant, J., and Wilkins, B., | 2002                   | <i>15-17 Hay Street, Steeple Morden, Cambridgeshire. An Archaeological Evaluation (Trial Trenching)</i> Archaeological Solutions  |
| Kenney, S.,                 | 2001                   | <i>Undated Ditches at Steeple Morden Primary School: An Archaeological Evaluation</i> , Archaeological Field Unit Cambridge County Council Report No. A185                        |
| Rudge, A                    | 2002<br>(revised 2004) | <i>Roman Remains at 15-17 Hay Street, Steeple Morden, Cambridgeshire</i> , Archaeological Field Unit Cambridge County Council. Report No. A215                                    |
| Taylor, A.,                 | 1997                   | <i>Archaeology of Cambridgeshire Vol 1: South West Cambridgeshire</i> . Cambridgeshire County Council   |
| Wright, A.P.M (ed),         | 1982                   | A History of the County of Cambridge and the Isle of Ely Vol VIII, The University of London Institute for Historical Research   |

## APPENDIX C. OASIS REPORT FORM

All fields are required unless they are not applicable.

### Project Details

OASIS Number	oxfordar3-83788			
Project Name	Steeple Morden Primary School			
Project Dates (fieldwork)	Start	28-09-2010	Finish	29-09-2010
Previous Work (by OA East)	No		Future Work	Unknown

### Project Reference Codes

Site Code	STEPSRS10	Planning App. No.	S/00333/10/CC
HER No.	ECB3454	Related HER/OASIS No.	

### Type of Project/Techniques Used

Prompt	Planning condition
Development Type	Public Building

### Please select all techniques used:

<input type="checkbox"/> Aerial Photography - interpretation	<input type="checkbox"/> Grab-Sampling	<input type="checkbox"/> Remote Operated Vehicle Survey
<input type="checkbox"/> Aerial Photography - new	<input type="checkbox"/> Gravity-Core	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Sample Trenches
<input type="checkbox"/> Annotated Sketch	<input type="checkbox"/> Laser Scanning	<input type="checkbox"/> Survey/Recording Of Fabric/Structure
<input type="checkbox"/> Augering	<input type="checkbox"/> Measured Survey	<input type="checkbox"/> Targeted Trenches
<input type="checkbox"/> Dendrochronological Survey	<input type="checkbox"/> Metal Detectors	<input type="checkbox"/> Test Pits
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Documentary Search	<input type="checkbox"/> Phosphate Survey	<input type="checkbox"/> Topographic Survey
<input type="checkbox"/> Environmental Sampling	<input type="checkbox"/> Photogrammetric Survey	<input type="checkbox"/> Vibro-core
<input type="checkbox"/> Fieldwalking	<input type="checkbox"/> Photographic Survey	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Visual Inspection (Initial Site Visit)
<input type="checkbox"/> Geophysical Survey	<input type="checkbox"/> Rectified Photography	

### Monument Types/Significant Finds & Their Periods

List feature types using the [NMR Monument Type Thesaurus](#) and significant finds using the [MDA Object type Thesaurus](#) together with their respective periods. If no features/finds were found, please state "none".

Monument	Period	Object	Period
Ditch	Early Medieval 410 to 1066	Pottery	Early Medieval 410 to 1066
wall	Post Medieval 1540 to 1901		Select period...
	Select period...		Select period...

### Project Location

County	Cambridgeshire	Site Address (including postcode if possible)
District	S. Cambs	7 Hay Street, Steeple Morden, Royston, Herts. SG8 0PD
Parish	Steeple Morden	
HER	Cambridgeshire County Council	
Study Area	300m2	National Grid Reference
		TL 28538 42531

### Project Originators

Organisation	OA EAST
Project Brief Originator	Local Planning Authority
Project Design Originator	Aileen Connor
Project Manager	Aileen Connor
Supervisor	Jonathan House

### Project Archives

Physical Archive	Digital Archive	Paper Archive
CCC Stores	OA East (Bar Hill)	CCC Stores.
STEPRS10	STEPRS10	STEPRS10

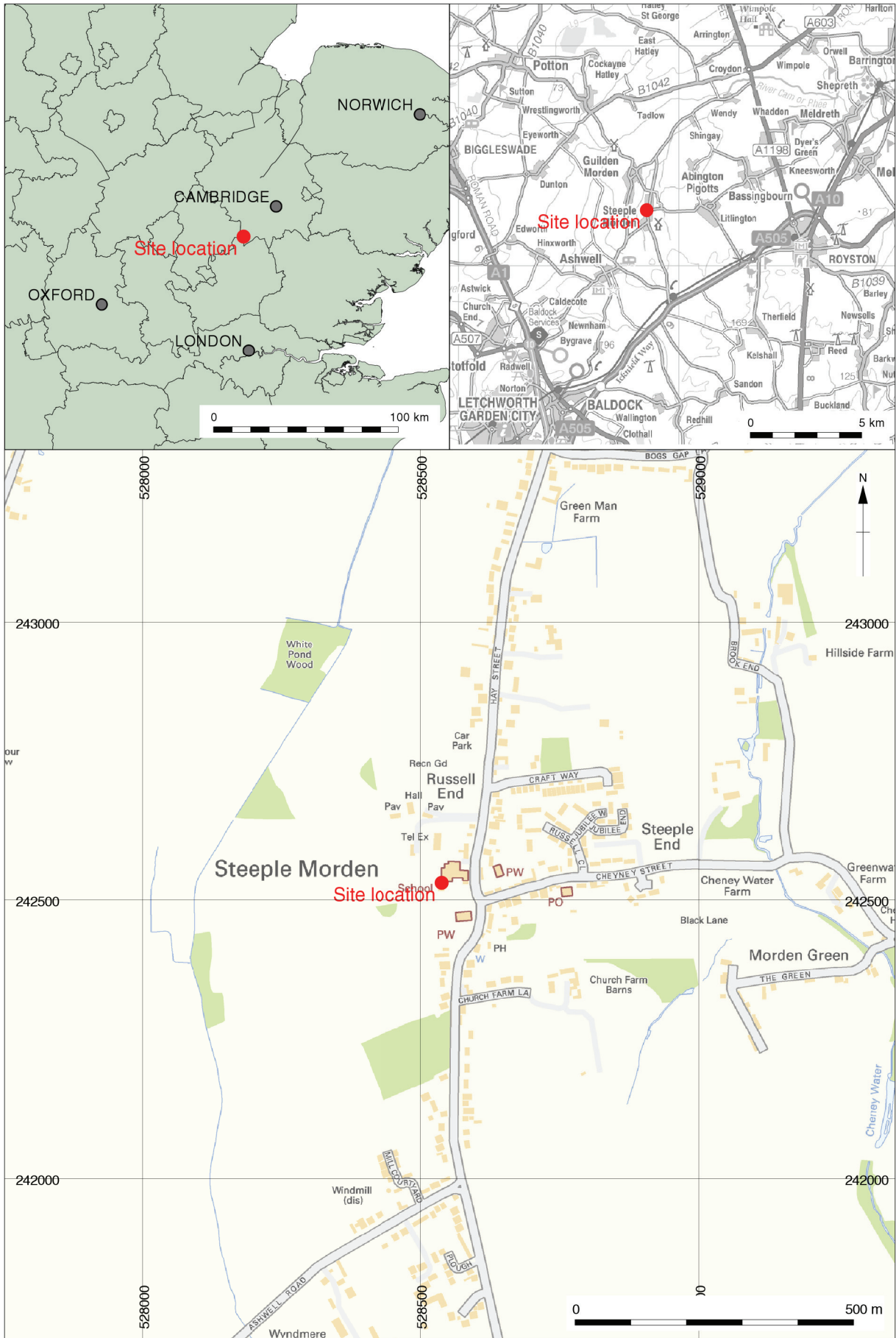
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Ceramics	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Environmental	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Glass	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Human Bones	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Industrial	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Leather	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Metal	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Stratigraphic		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Survey		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Textiles	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Wood	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Worked Bone	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Worked Stone/Lithic	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
None	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Digital Media	Paper Media
<input type="checkbox"/> Database	<input type="checkbox"/> Aerial Photos
<input type="checkbox"/> GIS	<input type="checkbox"/> Context Sheet
<input type="checkbox"/> Geophysics	<input type="checkbox"/> Correspondence
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Images	<input type="checkbox"/> Diary
<input type="checkbox"/> Illustrations	<input type="checkbox"/> Drawing
<input type="checkbox"/> Moving Image	<input type="checkbox"/> Manuscript
<input type="checkbox"/> Spreadsheets	<input type="checkbox"/> Map
<input type="checkbox"/> Survey	<input type="checkbox"/> Matrices
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	<input type="checkbox"/> Research/Notes
	<input type="checkbox"/> Photos
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Plans
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Report
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Sections
	<input type="checkbox"/> Survey

### Notes:

The trench revealed evidence of a tenement boundary or possible road side ditch, which appears to be established in Saxon period, this boundary is re-established in the Post Medieval period as a wall, built once the infilling of the ditch had occurred. The track way may have also served as an access between the 15th century Manor and the church.



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Figure 1: Site location



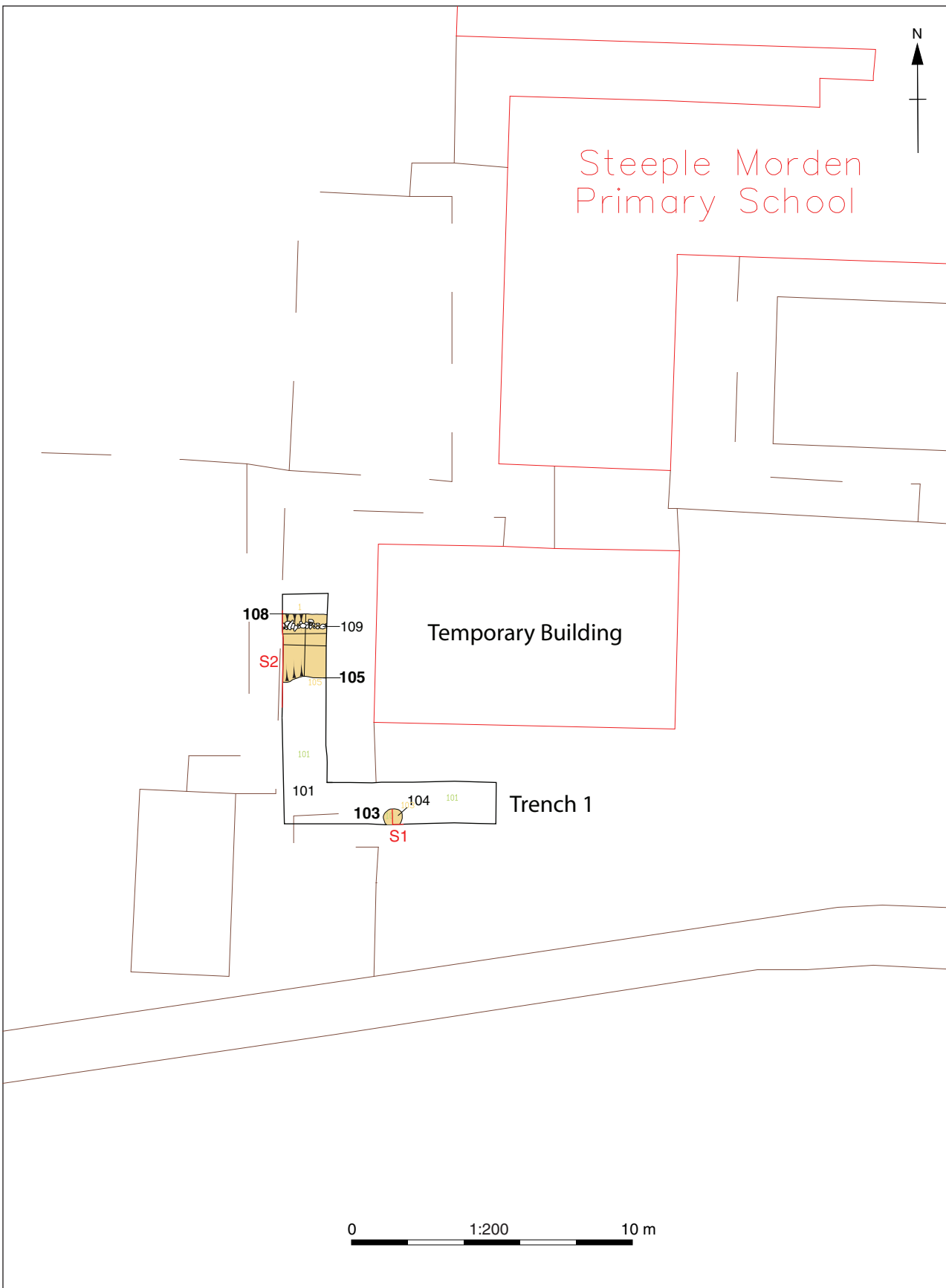


Figure 2: Trench Plan

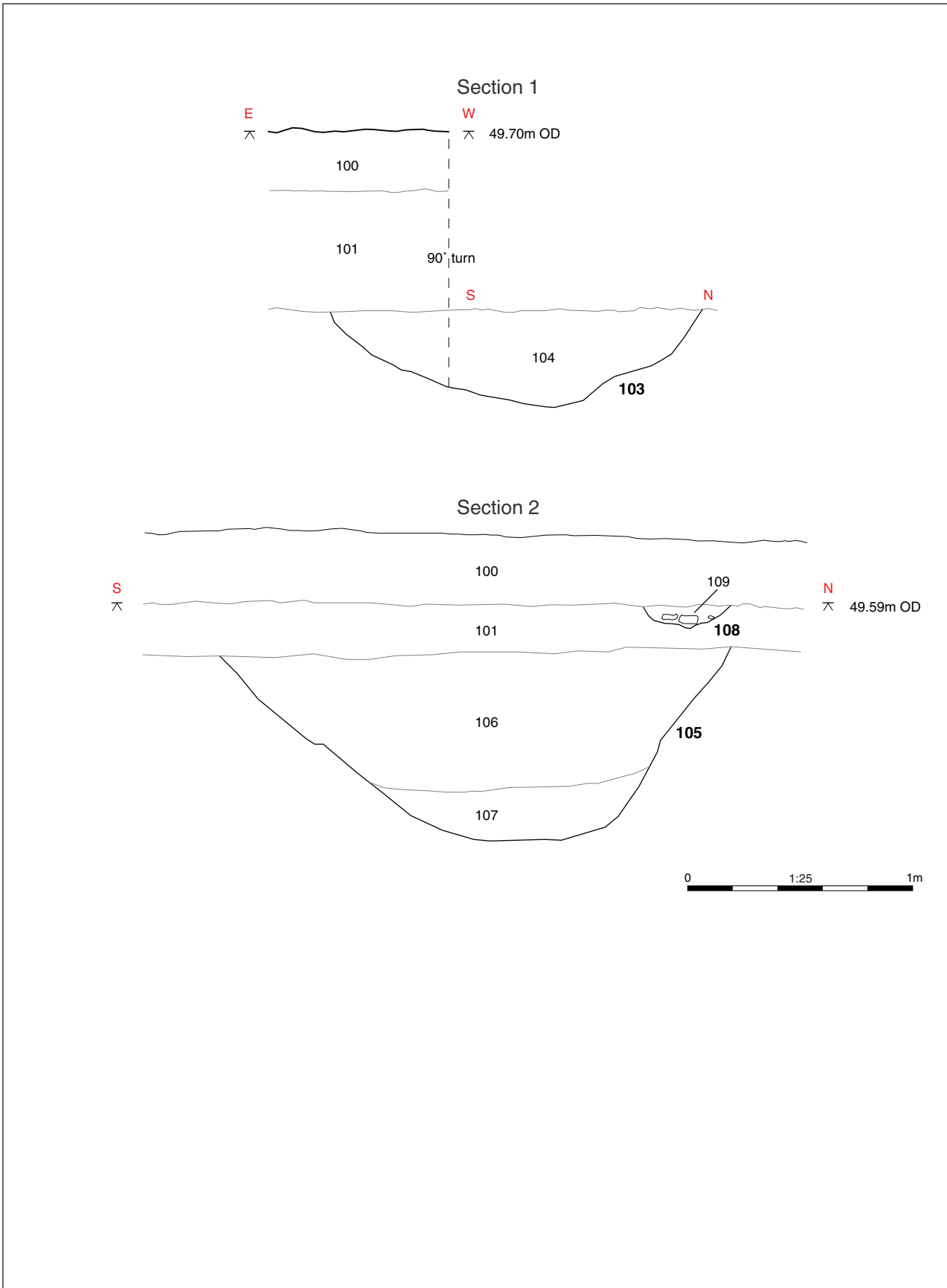


Figure 3: Sections



Figure 4: Extract from 1st edition Ordnance Survey map (1876-1886 25") showing the approximate location of the site





Plate 1: Trench shot, photo taken from the east.



Plate 2: Photo of Section 1, taken from the east.





Plate 3: Photo of Section 2, taken from the east.



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