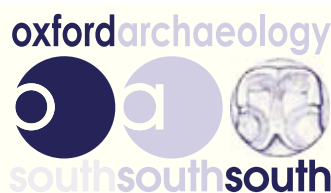


St Mary's School Ascot Berkshire



Archaeological Watching Brief Report



September 2012

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Issue No: 1

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St Mary's School, Ascot, Berkshire

Archaeological Watching Brief Report

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Front cover St Mary's School Chapel

Fig. 1 Site location

Fig. 2 Site plan

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Summary

Between August and September 2012 Oxford Archaeology conducted a watching brief during the excavation of underpinning pits and new foundations for a new senior library at St Mary's School, South Ascot, Berkshire (centred NGR: SU 9264 6690).

The watching brief observed post-medieval worked soils and landscaping directly overlying the underlying natural geology. No significant archaeology was encountered.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

- 1.1.1 Between August and September 2012 Oxford Archaeology (OA) was commissioned by Edgington, Spink and Hyne Ltd to undertake an archaeological Watching Brief during the conversion of an existing theatre, together with the construction of a new extension, for a new senior library at St. Mary's School, Ascot, Berkshire (NGR: SU 9264 6690).
- 1.1.2 The work was undertaken as a condition of planning permission (planning reference: 5016-1206-P). Discussions with Fiona McDonald, Principal Archaeologist for Berkshire Archaeology, acting on behalf of the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, established the scope of the work required and OA produced a Written scheme of Investigation (WSI) showing how it would meet these requirements (OA 2012).

1.2 Location, geology and topography

- 1.2.1 St Mary's School is located within the conurbation of South Ascot located immediately south of Ascot itself (Fig. 1). The school lies within an 18 hectare site bounded to the west and south by Coronation Road, to the east by the B3020 and to the north by Horse Gate Ride. The school buildings are located on land sloping gently towards the south-east and a level of approximately 75m AOD.
- 1.2.2 The former theatre / concert hall and the proposed extension is situated in the south east corner of the school building complex, to the west of the main school entrance. The new library extension is sited within an existing landscaped courtyard. The area of the new development measures approximately 500 m².
- 1.2.3 The drift geology of the area is alluvium and the underlying solid geology is of the Windlesham Formation, consisting of sedimentary sand, silts and clay. It is part of the Bracklesham Beds formed 34 to 55 million years ago (British Geological Survey, Sheet no. 269). The (British Geological Survey, Sheet no. 269).

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The archaeological and historical background to the site has been garnered from a number of published sources and is outlines below.

Prehistoric

- 1.3.2 There are no known sites of this period within the proposed area of works. Within the surrounding area there are records of occasional findspots of flints and stone objects and a cluster of four barrows are known to the NW of the site near the junction of the A332 and the A329 (Grinsell 1990).

**Roman**

- 1.3.3 A Roman building was identified on a nearby plot in 1924, although very few details are now available. The probable site was on the opposite side of the road to Earlywood Lodge to the SE of the school. The Roman road between London and Silchester (Margary 1973), known locally as the Devil's Highway, runs nearby to the south, and the aforementioned Roman building may be part of an associated settlement.

Medieval and Post-medieval

- 1.3.4 The area around the school was for most of the period a mixed landscape of woodland and bog (part of Sunninghill Bog), with routes through such as Ninemile Ride shown on the 1876 1:2500 OS mapping. Even into the early 20th century the majority of the parish was permanent grass or woodland and plantation (Ditchfield and Page 1923).
- 1.3.5 The area to the west of Sunninghill Park was originally part of the royal forest of Windsor but was transferred into private hands in 1630 (ibid).
- 1.3.6 The area contained only scattered farms and country houses. The use of the road network is demonstrated by the surviving 18th century milestones. The gentrified nature of the area is noted from monuments such as the racecourse and the large houses such as South Grange Manor to the north (ibid).
- 1.3.7 The arrival of the railway in the mid 19th century, which runs west-east several miles to the north of the site, linked the area more closely with London.
- 1.3.8 St Mary's School is a Catholic School and was originally administered and run by the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary. It is now run by the St Mary's School Ascot Trust. The chapel was built in 1885, as was the main building which has been added to over the last 115 years. The property is shown on the 1899 1:2500 OS mapping.
- 1.3.9 There are a number of remains related to the defence of Britain during WWII. The majority of surrounding houses and residential streets, particularly to the west were built after WWII but much of the area around the school itself remains as it was previously.

Previous Investigations

- 1.3.10 At May Cottage, 0.5km to the SE, a watching brief in 2005 revealed a light green-grey sandy clay at a depth of 0.25m below the current ground level. This was visible in section for a depth in excess of 0.95m, with the percentage of clay and incidence of iron panning increasing with depth. This deposit was cut by a series of ceramic land drains all aligned north-west to south-east. This was overlaid by a 0.25m thick deposit of very dark grey-brown silt loam. This contained fragments of brick and tile, pottery and clay pipe stem. The finds recovered were all post-medieval in date, and included fragments of 18th century clay pipe stem and 19th/20th glazed creamware, while the fragments of bricks and tiles probably date to 19th century.
- 1.3.11 The results of the watching brief may indicate that the site is composed of a post-medieval worked soil directly overlying the natural alluvial clay. The presence of the land-drains suggests that this area was agricultural or horticultural in nature prior to the construction of the standing property. No evidence for earlier deposits or features, particularly of those associated with the Devil's Highway Roman Road was encountered.



1.3.12 Several other watching briefs in the area east of the B3020 Bagshot Road have produced similar results with no significant archaeological remains revealed (search of OASIS forms through the Archaeological Data Service).

2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

2.1.1 The aims of the project were to:

- determine the existence or absence of any archaeological remains;
- determine the approximate date or date range of the remains, by means of artefactual or other evidence;
- determine the approximate extent of the remains;
- determine the condition and state of preservation of the remains;
- determine the degree of complexity of the horizontal and/or vertical stratigraphy present;
- assess the associations and implications of any remains encountered with reference to the historic landscape;
- determine the implications of the remains encountered with reference to economy, status, utility and social activity;
- to determine the likely range, quality and quantity of the artefactual evidence present;
- determine the potential of the site to provide palaeo-environmental and/or economic evidence and the forms in which such evidence may be present.

2.2 Methodology

2.2.1 The Watching Brief was undertaken in two parts. The first concerned the reduction of ground level within the old theatre together with the excavation of underpinning pits. An earlier test pit had shown the area to have been heavily truncated, and this phase was conducted as a series of site visits.

2.2.2 The second part involved the excavation of the foundations for the new library extension and other associated works. This area was outside the footprint of the theatre and was felt likely to have been less disturbed. The Watching Brief was conducted as a continuous presence during these works.

2.2.3 The majority of the excavations was achieved using a small tracked excavator fitted with a toothless bucket. Where the presence of services made this impractical, hand tools were used.

2.2.4 All spoil generated by both the machine and hand excavations was examined for the presence of archaeological artefacts.

2.2.5 All features and deposits were issued with unique context numbers, and context recording was in accordance with established OA practices. Bulk finds were collected by context. Black-and-white negative photographs and a digital photographic record was taken of all excavations, general settings and archaeological sections.



- 2.2.6 A site plan showing the location of any excavations and any recorded sections was maintained (Fig. 2). Section drawings of features and sample sections were drawn at a scale of 1:20.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Description of deposits

- 3.1.1 The work was undertaken in two distinct phases, the first involved the lowering of the floor level within the old concert hall and the underpinning of the walls at selected points, the second involved the excavations for the new library foundations.
- 3.1.2 Each phase of work will be described separately followed by an overall discussion and conclusion.

Work within the old Theatre

- 3.1.3 Prior to the start of the Watching Brief the original wooden floor and its concrete sub-base had been removed. The excavation of the underpinning pits was accomplished from this level. Following the completion of the underpinning the whole of the interior was reduced in level by approximately 0.35m.
- 3.1.4 The underpinning of the building (combined with the excavation of foundation pads for the steelwork supporting the new mezzanine floor) entailed the excavation of a total of 14 pits each measuring approximately 1.2m square and up to 1.6m in depth. The majority of the excavations were carried out using a tracked excavator fitted with a 0.6m wide toothless bucket with hand digging used to square off the pits and around services. A representative sample of the stratigraphy exposed within these pits was recorded in order to determine the survival of archaeological deposits and to understand the underlying geology (Fig. 3, Sections 1 to 6).

Pits 1 and 2, Sections 1 and 2

- 3.1.5 The underlying natural, a light yellow-brown fine silty sand (12) was exposed within the base and sides of both pits. This was overlaid by a layer of light grey sandy silt containing lenses of red sand, small sub-angular flints and chalk flecking (11) measuring between 0.4m and 0.5m in depth. Layer 11 was probably alluvium, and was very similar to layer 20 in other areas (see below). The presence of chalk flecks and gravel lenses here may indicate that this had been reworked at some point.
- 3.1.6 Lying directly above layer 11 was a semi-compacted layer of light brownish grey sandy silt containing construction debris such as brick fragments, mortar and slate (10). This deposit measured between 0.3m and 0.8m in depth.

Pits 3, 4 and 6, Sections 3, 4 and 6

- 3.1.7 As in the other pits, the underlying natural, the light yellow-brown fine silty sand (12) was exposed within the base and sides of all three pits. This was overlaid by a continuation of layer 11, measuring between 0.4m and 0.5m in depth.
- 3.1.8 Cut into layer 11 at this level was the construction cut (13). This was a vertical-sided, flat-bottomed linear feature running parallel to the standing walls of the old theatre. The depth of the cut measured approximately 1m deep along the north and south walls of the building, reducing to 0.6m deep along the east and west walls.



- 3.1.9 Cast within the base of the cut were the poured concrete foundations for wall (14). This was constructed using frogged red bricks measuring 0.225m x 0.105m x 0.072m. These were laid using a lime mortar and English Stretcher bonding.
- 3.1.10 Within Pits 4 and 6 the construction cut was sealed by a continuation of layer 10 which ran over the backfilling of the cut and butted up to wall 14. At the southern extent of the theatre, within Pit 3 (and also Pits 8 and 11, which were not recorded separately) cut 13 was sealed by a layer of dark brown silty loam (15) measuring up to 0.55m in depth, reducing in depth towards the north.

Pit 5, Section 5

- 3.1.11 This, together with Pit 12, was located against the external face of wall 14 on the western side of the theatre.
- 3.1.12 The stratigraphy encountered was similar to that in Pits 4 and 6, with a continuation of layer 12 exposed within the base of the pit, which in turn was overlaid by a 0.45m deep continuation of layer 11. Overlying layer 11 was a 0.5m deep layer of grey-brown silty loam displaying charcoal flecking (17). The construction cut 13 had been dug from this level and contained a similar concrete foundation and brick wall to that observed within Pit 6.
- 3.1.13 Overlying layer 17, and butting up to wall 14, was a 0.14m deep layer of sand mixed with construction debris (15). This formed a base for the 0.14m thick concrete floor (15).

The New Library Extension

- 3.1.14 This was located against the outside of the west wall of the old theatre. Part of this area was previously occupied by an external corridor which ran along the outside of the west wall of the theatre between the main school building and the stairwell. This was demolished prior to the commencement of work. The remainder of the area was occupied by a grassed area.
- 3.1.15 The monitored works undertaken as part of this construction included the excavation of a semi-circular foundation trench approximately 18m in length, measuring 0.6m wide and up to 1.6m in depth and four foundation pad pits each measuring 1m square and 1.6m deep. Following the excavation of the foundations the ground level was reduced within the interior of the extension by 0.5m.
- 3.1.16 All these works were accomplished using a mechanical excavator fitted with a 0.6m wide toothless bucket.

The Foundation Pad Pits, Sections 7 and 8

- 3.1.17 Two of the four pits were excavated as part of the semi-circular foundation trench and were not recorded separately. The remaining two were recorded in detail. The stratigraphy observed was broadly similar within both pits. Any exceptions were noted.
- 3.1.18 A layer of fine pale yellow-brown natural sand was exposed within the base of both pits (22). This layer was overlaid by a band of orange-yellow clayey silt containing quantities of river gravel and measuring up to 0.3m in depth (21). Within the southern foundation pad pit layer 21 was overlaid by a 0.15m deep lens of olive green silty clay (23). This was probably an alluvial deposit.
- 3.1.19 Above layer 21 within the northern pit, and lens 23 within the southern pit, was a layer of yellow-brown silty sand measuring between 0.4m and 0.5m in depth (20). This was



probably an alluvial deposit. It was sealed by a layer of yellowish grey-brown sandy silt containing chalk flecking, up to 0.18m in depth (19).

- 3.1.20 A layer of grey-brown silty loam measuring up to 0.3m in depth (18) completed both the sections. This deposit produced fragments of brick and slate together with modern finds.

The Semi-Circular Foundation Trench, Sections 9 and 10

- 3.1.21 This was excavated from the truncated wall of a corridor up to the north wall of the stair well. The stratigraphy observed was similar throughout its length, which was in turn identical to that recorded within the foundation pad pits.
- 3.1.22 Within Section 9 the foundation trench for the corridor wall was observed as cut from the present day ground level (25). Built within this cut was the western wall of the external corridor (24), built using modern frogged bricks bound with a cement mortar. The construction cut had been backfilled using redeposited material (26).
- 3.1.23 Other works that were completed as part of the library extension included the ground reduction within the interior of the new building and a sewer diversion (Fig. 2).
- 3.1.24 The ground reduction involved the removal of layers 18 and 19 exposing the top of layer 20. No features, other than modern service trenches, could be observed cutting the surface of layer 20.
- 3.1.25 During the excavation of the foundation a previously unknown foul water pipe was exposed. This was diverted into a different manhole in order to avoid the building footprint (Fig. 2). As part of this diversion a trench measuring 0.5m wide, 0.6m deep and 12m in length was excavated (Section 11). The stratigraphy exposed was similar to that exposed within the top part of the foundation trench.

3.2 Finds

- 3.2.1 All the finds recovered could be dated to the late 19th and 20th centuries. The finds included fragments of clay pipe stem, brick and tile, creamware pottery and modern plastic and metal artefacts.
- 3.2.2 The presence of these finds was noted but they were not retained.

3.3 Environmental remains

- 3.3.1 No deposits suitable for palaeo-environmental sampling were encountered during the course of the watching brief.

4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1.1 Work within the old Theatre showed that any potential archaeological deposits had been truncated. Comparison of the ground levels both within the interior and the exterior of the building suggest that the northern end of the building had been terraced into the natural slope of the site, accounting for the presence of the modern made ground 10 directly overlying layer 11. This terracing could be observed following the demolition of the external corridor wall (24), when a substantial drop between the external ground level and the corridor floor level was noted.
- 4.1.2 The southern end of the theatre building appeared to be flush with the surrounding ground level but the presence of made ground 15 directly above the natural would suggest that any earlier deposits had been truncated within this area as well.



- 4.1.3 Work observed during the construction of the new library extension showed that this area was relatively undisturbed, with deposits equating to the original ground level being recorded (layers 17, 18 and 19).
- 4.1.4 Layers 17 and 18 produced dating evidence relating to the later 19th or early 20th century, suggesting that they originated with the landscaping of the area around the standing buildings.
- 4.1.5 Layer 19 is undated but its composition suggests that it may represent a layer of earlier ploughsoil, probably originating before the construction of the school. This relationship probably indicates that the area was under cultivation prior to the construction of the original school buildings in the 19th century.
- 4.1.6 All three layers were recorded as directly overlying layer 20. This thick deposit, which was sterile, was probably alluvium overlying the natural sand and gravel deposits.
- 4.1.7 During the course of the ground reduction within the footprint of the new extension the surface of layer 20 was exposed. No features (other than modern) could be observed cutting this deposit suggesting that there had been little earlier activity within this immediate area.
- 4.1.8 Other than the undated ploughsoil layer 19, no features, deposits or dating evidence suggesting activity earlier than the 19th century were encountered during the course of the watching brief. The chalk flecks within layer 11 may indicate a period of more erosive flow during the deposition of the alluvium, or possibly some reworking of this deposit locally, but this is undated.



APPENDIX A. ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

Context	Type	Depth	Length	Comments	Finds	Date
10	Layer	0.6m – 0.8m	-	Made ground, part of theatre construction	Brick, glass	C20th
11	Layer	0.4m	-	Natural sand	-	-
12	Layer	> 0.5m	-	Natural sand	-	-
13	Cut	0.5m - 1m	> 10m	Construction cut for theatre foundations	-	C20th
14	Wall	> 1m	> 10m	Theatre walls and foundations	-	C20th
15	Layer	0.55m	-	Made ground, part of theatre construction	Brick, glass	C20th
16	Layer	0.14m	-	Hardcore base for concrete floor	Brick	C20th
17	Layer	0.5m	-	Buried topsoil horizon	Brick, slate, glass	C20th
18	Layer	0.3m	-	Present day topsoil and turf, landscaping layer	Brick, plastic, glass	C20th
19	Layer	0.12m–0.18m	-	Subsoil, possibly remains of an earlier ploughsoil ?	-	-
20	Layer	0.4m	-	Natural sand	-	-
21	Layer	0.3m	-	Band of natural gravel	-	-
22	Layer	> 0.5m	-	Natural sand	-	-
23	Layer	0.15m	-	Lens of natural clayey sand	-	-
24	Cut	1.2m	>10m	Construction cut for external corridor wall	-	C20th
25	Fill	0.6m	>10m	Backfilling of construction cut	Brick, slate	C20th
26	Wall	0.4m	> 10m	West wall of external corridor	Brick	C20th



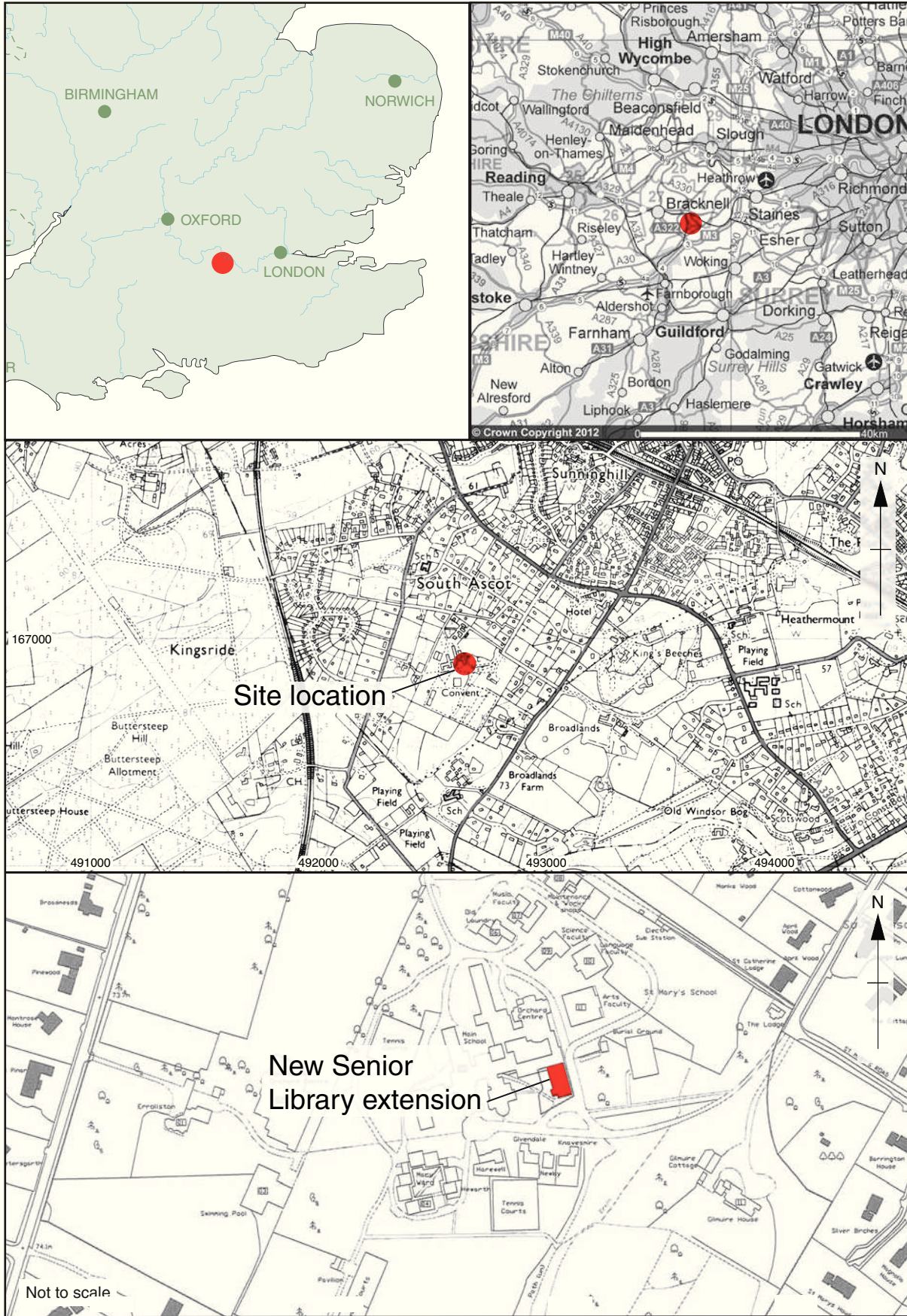
APPENDIX B. BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

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Grinsell, LV, 1990	<i>Barrows in England and Wales, Shire publications</i>
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OA 2012	<i>St Mary's School, Ascot, Berkshire: Written Scheme of Investigation</i>
RCHM (E) 1995	<i>Thesaurus of Monument Types: standard for use in archaeological and architectural records</i> http://thesaurus.english-heritage.org.uk/thesaurus.asp?thes_no=1



APPENDIX C. SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name:	St Mary's School, Ascot, Berkshire
Site code:	ASSMS 12
Grid reference:	Centred at NGR SU 924 669
Type of watching brief:	Machine and hand excavation of foundation, underpinning and service trenches and ground reduction.
Date and duration of project:	August to September 2012, intermittent visits over two months
Area of site:	Approximately 500m ²
Summary of results:	The watching brief observed post-medieval worked soils and landscaping directly overlying the underlying natural geology. No significant archaeology was encountered.
Location of archive:	The archive is currently held at Janus House and will be deposited with an appropriate museum when archive space becomes available.



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Figure 1: Site location

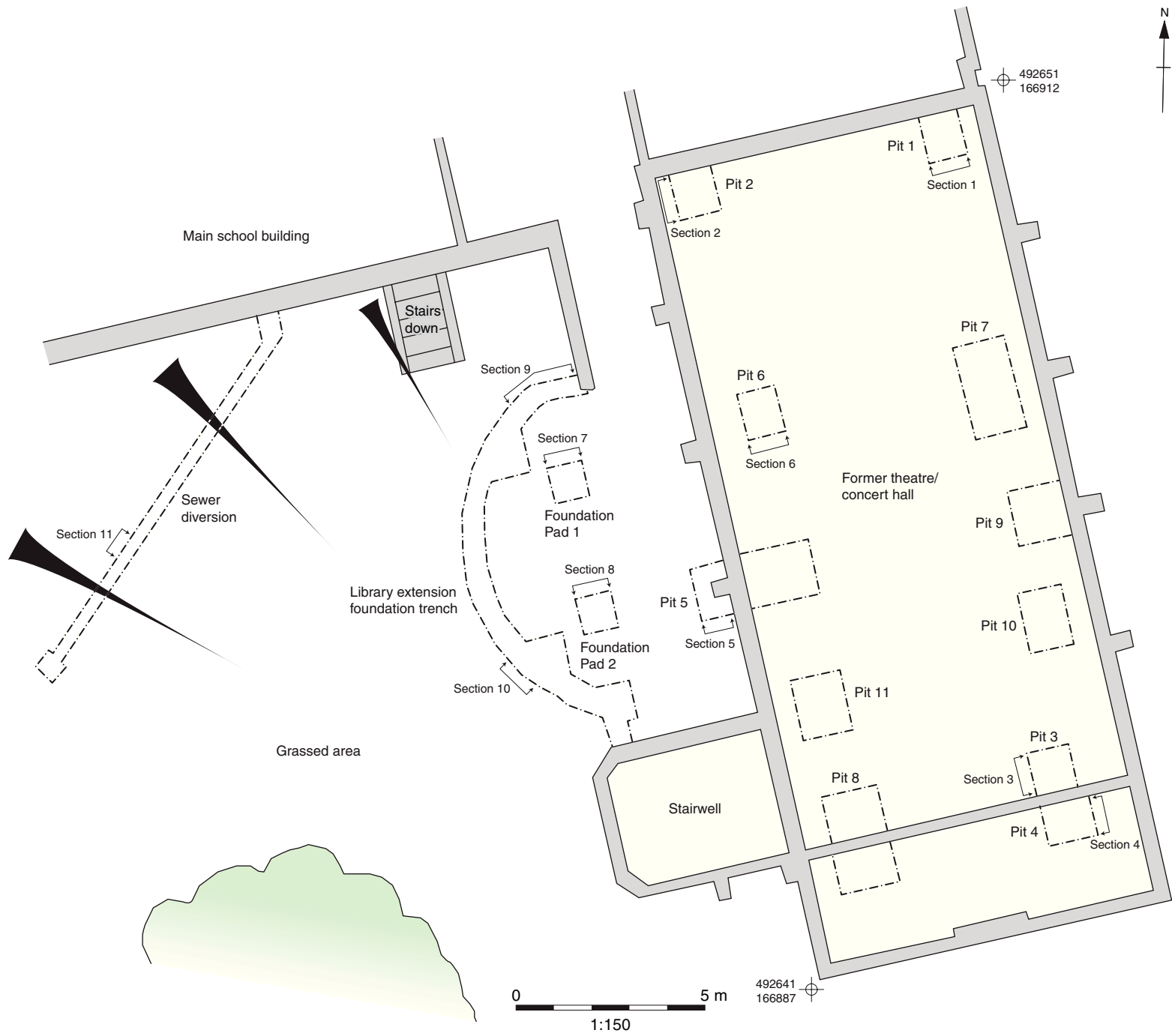


Figure 2: Site plan

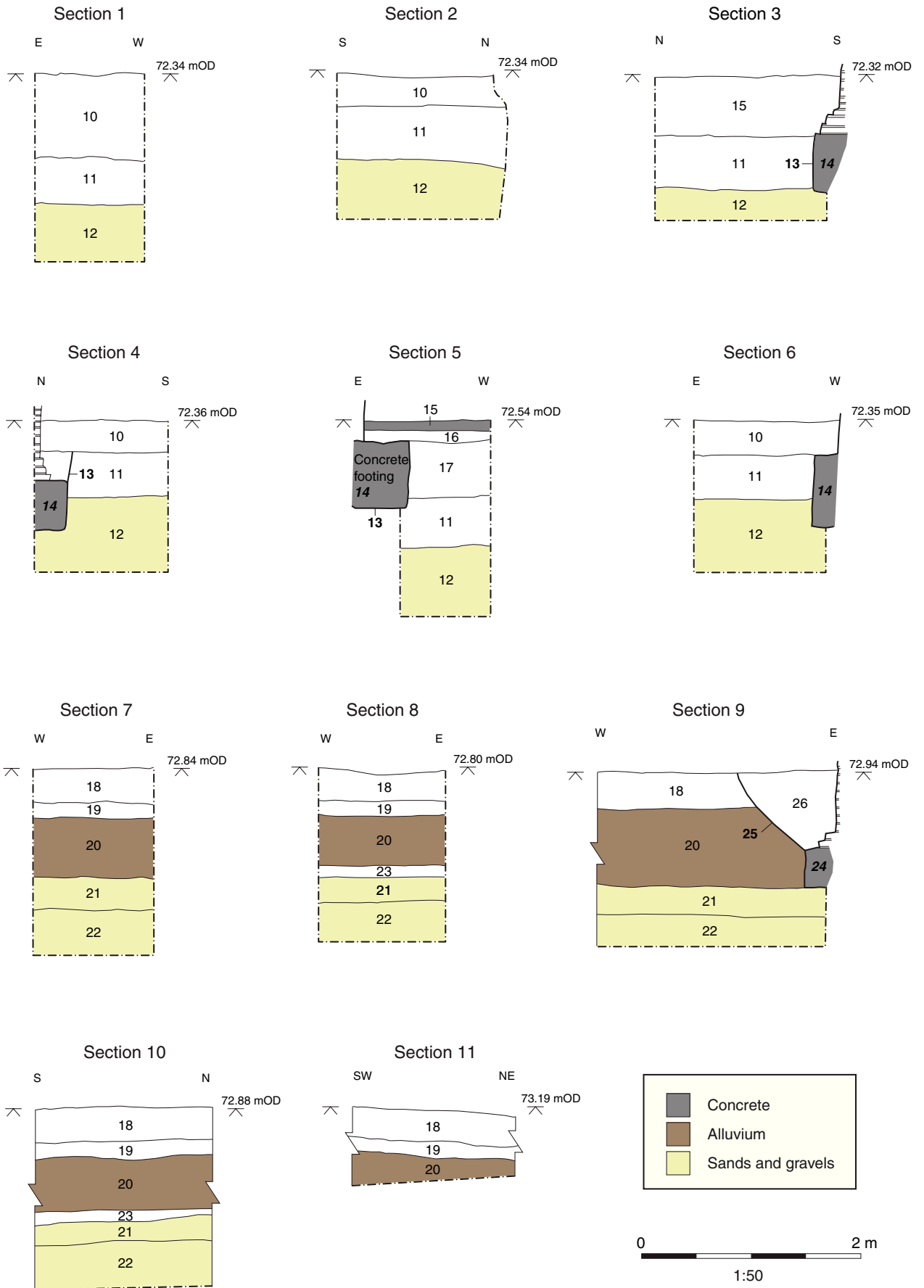


Figure 3: Sections



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