

# New Schools Eton College Common Lane Berkshire



## Archaeological Watching Brief



**Oxford Archaeology**

20th December 2001

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**Eton College Buildings Department**

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**New Schools, Common Lane  
Eton College, Berkshire**

NGR SU 966 780

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## SUMMARY

*In 2000 and 2001, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at New Schools, Eton College, Berkshire (NGR SU 966 780), during the refurbishment of existing, and the construction of new, school buildings; some older structures were removed in the course of the works. The College's architects for the project commissioned the work.*

*Limited excavations for new services and structures revealed soil layers interspersed with layers of building rubble that derive from construction of the buildings on the site. Elsewhere thick soil layers suggest that the ground level was raised when the New Schools buildings were constructed. A wall was found in the School Yard, and it is probably of 19th-century date.*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Location and scope of work

- 1.1.1 In 2000 and 2001, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at New Schools, Eton College, Berkshire (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned in respect of a planning application for the construction of new buildings, alterations to existing ones and associated services (Planning Application No. 99/77779).
- 1.1.2 OA was commissioned to undertake the watching brief by Corrigan, Soundy and Kilaiditi, Chartered Architects, on behalf of Eton College Buildings Department. The majority of the site works concerned above ground building work and improvements; limited excavations by building contractors Barnes and Elliot were monitored by OA as appropriate.
- 1.1.3 A project brief was set by Babbie Public Services Division, on behalf of the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead.
- 1.1.4 OA (formerly Oxford Archaeological Unit, OAU) prepared a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) detailing how it would meet the requirements of the brief (OA 1999).

### 1.2 Geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The site of the new developments is situated on the corner of Common Lane and Slough Road (NGR SU 966 780) and lies at c. 20 m OD. The site overlies the Thames Gravel and is 0.2 hectares in area.

### 1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The archaeological background to the watching brief was prepared for the WSI for the project (OAU 1999) and is briefly summarised below.

- 1.3.2 The site of the college is north of the 12th-century suburb of Windsor (Underore), which was probably an island in the Thames. The college was founded in 1440 by Henry VI as 'The King's College of Our Lady of Eton beside Windsor'.
- 1.3.3 Early buildings included a chapel and cloisters (now Lower School). In the 16th century the west range was built (now Senior School) while New Schools was constructed between 1861-3. A wing containing the Mathematics School was added in 1876-7.

#### 1.4 Acknowledgements

- 1.4.1 OA Supervisor David Score carried out the fieldwork.

## 2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Aims

- 2.1.1 To identify and record the presence/absence, extent, condition, quality and date of archaeological remains in the areas affected by the development.
- 2.1.2 To signal to all parties, if exceptional remains are discovered, for which the resources allocated are not sufficient to support a treatment to a proper standard, that such a find had been made.
- 2.1.3 To make available the results of the archaeological investigation.

### 2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 Below ground work was monitored by the attending archaeologist, including the excavation of pits, foundations and drainage trenches.
- 2.2.2 All contexts and finds therein were allocated unique numbers. A site plan was made of the below ground excavation areas at a scale of 1:200. Section profiles through excavated strata were drawn at a scale of 1:20. All excavations were photographed using colour slide and black-and-white print film and a general photographic record of the work was made. Recording followed procedures detailed in the *OA Fieldwork Manual* (ed. D Wilkinson, 1992).

## 3 RESULTS

### 3.1 Description of deposits

#### *Service trench in New Schools Yard - Trench 1*

- 3.1.1 A new service trench was excavated by the contractors using a JCB excavator in the New Schools Yard (Fig. 2, Fig. 3, section 1). The trench was c. 37 m long and c. 0.5 m wide and was dug to a maximum depth of 1.3 m. Numerous live and defunct service pipes were noted in the course of the excavation of the trench.

- 3.1.2 At the base of the trench was a layer of undated dark brown silty clay (6) that was at least 0.4 m thick. Occasional brick fragments and charcoal were observed within the deposit that extended fully along the trench. The layer was overlain by a mixed layer of sand, mortar, and stone (5) that was 0.3 m thick, in turn sealed below a 0.25 m thick layer of brown silty clay (4). No finds were recovered from this layer. It was overlain by mixed layer of sand, mortar and general hardcore material (3) used as make-up for the tarmac surface of the yard.
- 3.1.3 At the west end of the trench was a north-west/south-east aligned red-brick wall (1), sealed under layer 5 (Fig. 2). The truncated upper surface of the wall lay 0.5 m below the ground level and one course of brickwork survived *in situ*. The bricks measured 125 mm by 100 mm by 60 mm and were bonded with a light brown lime mortar.
- 3.1.4 The wall was 0.4 m wide and had been constructed upon a foundation of gravel and cement/mortar and was 0.7 m wide extending below the depth of the trench.

#### ***Lift Pit between Mathematics and Geography Blocks - Trench 2***

- 3.1.5 Excavations for a pit to contain a concrete lift shaft were monitored (Fig. 2, Fig. 3, section 2). The lift will provide access to the new second storey on top of the Mathematics block. The lift pit was enlarged after its initial excavation, and the same sequence of deposits sections was observed in section.
- 3.1.6 The lift pit was 1.55 m deep. At the base of the pit was a layer of gravel (10 = 14) with lenses of brickearth that was at least 0.35 m thick and interpreted as the natural geology. The gravel was overlain by a 0.3 m thick layer reddish-brown gravel and brickearth with lenses of loam (9 = 13). This layer was sealed by a 0.8 m thick layer of brown loam with gravel and charcoal flecks (8 = 12).
- 3.1.7 A bowl from a clay pipe and a single worked flint were recovered from near the base of this layer (see finds below). Above lay a compact clay loam (7 = 11) with gravel and small brick fragments that was 0.2 m thick. The floor overlying this deposit had been removed prior to inspection of the lift pit.

#### ***Demolition of 1930s building in Cannon Yard - Trench 3***

- 3.1.8 This building was removed to ground level prior to the construction of a new two-storey structure in its place. The building had abutted the Slough Road to the south (Fig. 2, Fig. 3, section 3).
- 3.1.9 The sequence of deposits observed at the south section the Slough Road comprised 20th century build up layers that supported the present road/pavement surface.
- 3.1.10 The formation level for the new building work comprised the demolition rubble; no archaeological deposits were observed in the course of this operation.

### **General**

- 3.1.11 General ground reductions inside the school yard did not impact upon pre-20th century deposits, and shallow postholes excavated for the erection of a hoarding had a minimal impact.

### **3.2 Finds**

- 3.2.1 The bowl from a clay pipe was recovered from context 8 within the lift pit. The piece has a small heel and a wide bore, typical of types current in the later 18th century and early 19th century. A single worked flint of un-diagnostic form was recovered from the same deposit, and this is clearly residual in this context. No other finds were recovered.

### **3.3 Palaeo-environmental remains**

- 3.3.1 No environmental remains were recovered in the course of the watching brief.

## **4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

- 4.1.1 Natural gravel was only exposed at the base of the lift pit. The single flint flake suggests limited evidence of prehistoric activity, though the piece is clearly residual and may indeed be within soil imported to the site.
- 4.1.2 The thick deposit of soil seen in the lift pit dates to the later 18th-century or later on the basis of the clay pipe recovered. The depth of this deposit is indicative of a period of raising of ground levels, probably around the time that the buildings here were constructed in the 19th century. Given that this layer sits on a disturbed layer of natural, with no obvious prehistoric soil above, it is possible that earlier soils were removed to clear the site prior to construction taking place.
- 4.1.3 The wall in the New Schools Yard appears to be of the same build as the other school buildings here. Its function is unclear, though it is probably a dividing wall or conceivably part of a formal garden layout in the yard dating to the 19th century. Layers of stone and mortar seen in the service trench here presumably represent the debris from periods of construction activity associated with the school buildings.
- 4.1.4 No archaeological evidence was recovered from the remainder of the groundworks on the site.

## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Depth</i>	<i>Width</i>	<i>Height</i>	<i>Comments</i>	<i>Finds</i>
1	Structure	0.55 m	0.7 m	-	Concrete foundation and brick wall in yard	-
2	Layer	0.05 m	-	-	Tarmac	-
3	Layer	0.3 m	-	-	Hardcore for 2	-
4	Layer	0.25 m	-	-	?Garden/yard soil	-
5	Layer	0.3 m	-	-	Demolition or construction layer	-
6	Layer	0.4 m+	-	-	Soil layer pre-college?	-
7	Layer	0.2 m	-	-	Floor make up	-
8	Layer	0.8 m	-	-	Make-up layer	C18 Clay pipe, residual flint flake
9	Layer	0.35 m	-	-	Disturbed natural layer	-
10	Layer	-	-	-	Natural gravel and brickearth	-
11	Layer				same as 7	
12	Layer				same as 8	
13	Layer				same as 9	
14	Layer				same as 10	



**APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES**

OA 1992 *Oxford Archaeology Fieldwork Manual* (ed. D Wilkinson, first edition, August 1992)

OA 1999 *New College, Common Lane, Eton College, Eton, Berkshire. Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Watching Brief*

**APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS**

**Site name:** Eton College, New Schools

**Site code:** ETNS 01

**Grid reference:** SU 966 780

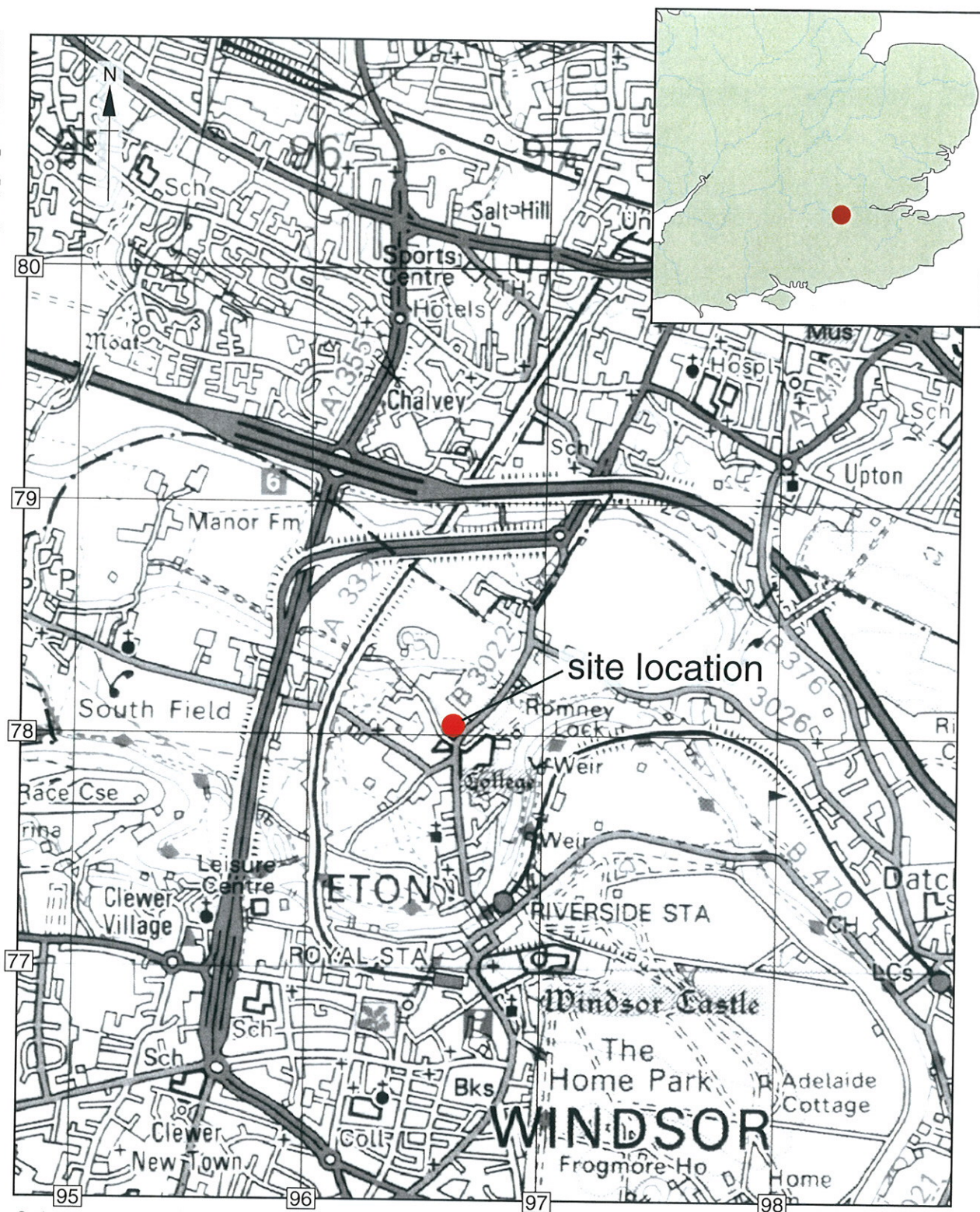
**Type of watching brief:** Observation of groundworks for new structures and services

**Date and duration of project:** January-May 2000; February-May 2001

**Area of site:** 0.2 ha.

**Summary of results:** 18th-19th century soil layers, construction deposits and a wall associated with the college buildings

**Location of archive:** The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Reading Museum in due course, under the following accession number: 2000.3



Scale 1:25,000

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Figure 1: Site location.



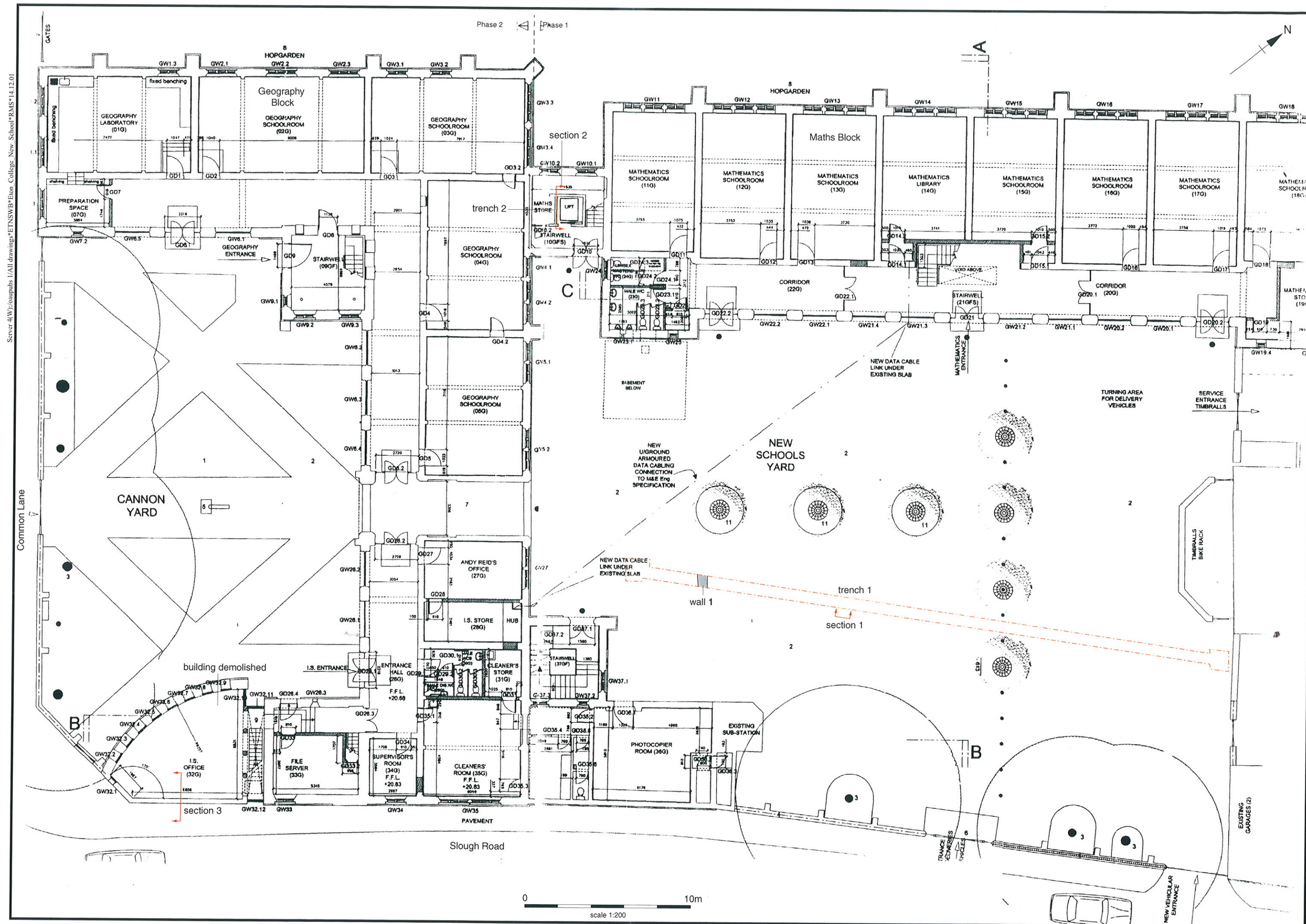


Figure 2: Site Plan of Eton New School

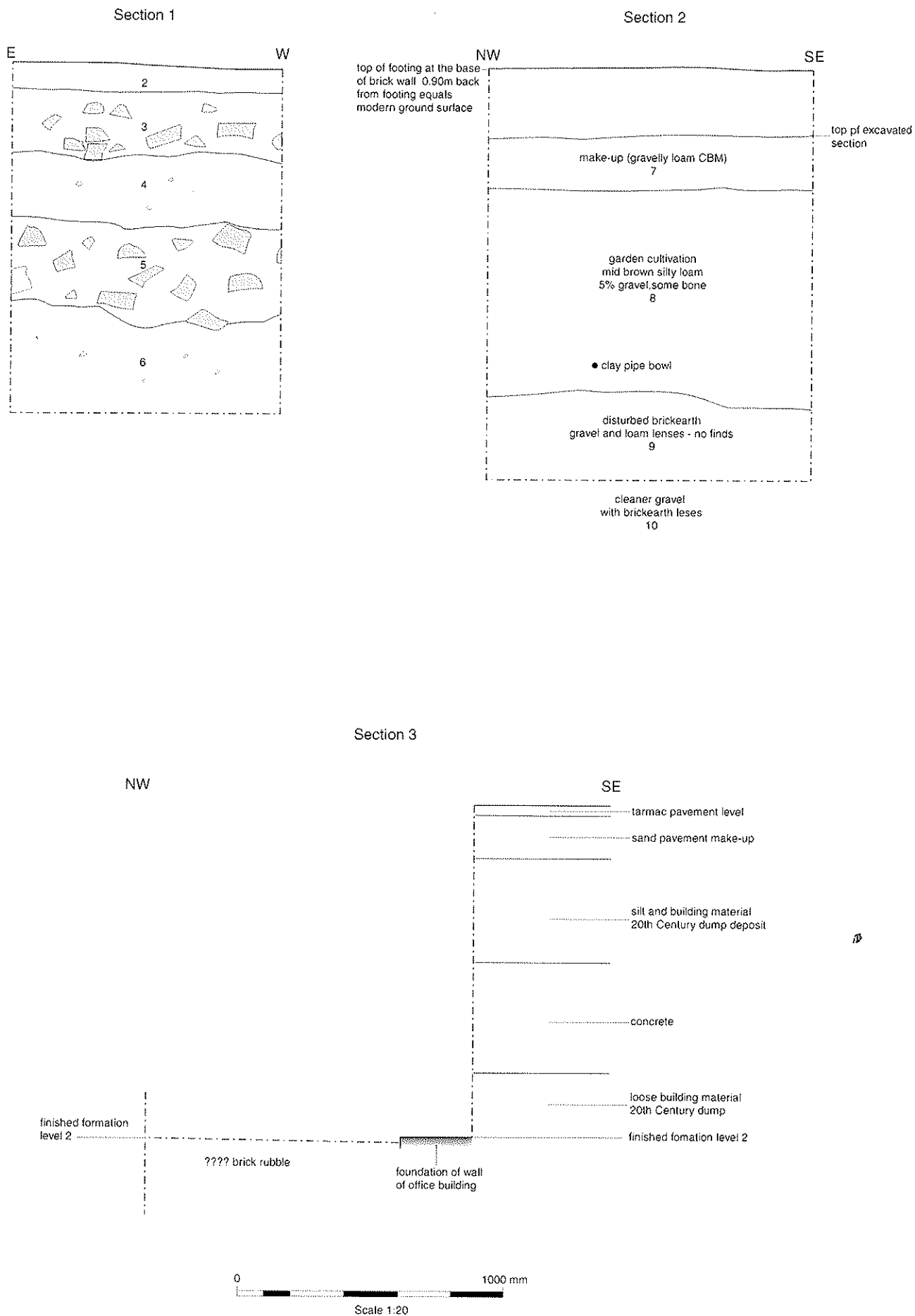


Figure 3 : Sections.





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