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Knowles and Son

**CHURCH OF ENGLAND PRIMARY SCHOOL, CHECKENDON,
OXFORDSHIRE**

NGR SU 6635 8306

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

Planning Ref. Nos. P99/S1023/CC

Oxford Archaeological Unit

May 2001

Knowles and Son

CHURCH OF ENGLAND PRIMARY SCHOOL, CHECKENDON

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

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Date:

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Oxford Archaeological Unit

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Summary

In November 2000 the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) undertook a watching brief at C of E Primary School, Checkendon, Oxfordshire (SU6635 8306). Several potential archaeological features were observed and recorded in plan. The majority of these were not excavated as they lay below the impact of the development. The remaining features were observed in section within the strip foundation trenches.

1 Introduction

The site lies within Checkendon village (Fig. 1) and is bounded to the south by St Peter and St Paul's Church, to the east by The Rectory and Rectory Cottage, and open fields to the north and west. Due to the potential disturbance of below ground archaeological deposits a condition for an archaeological watching brief was attached to the permission, in line with PPG16 and local plan policy CON18. The watching brief monitored the topsoil reduction and excavation of strip foundation trenches for the construction of a new hall, classroom, resource areas, library and staff accommodation, together with the temporary relocation of an existing prefabricated building. The site is located at c. 171 m AOD on the plateau of the south-west Chilterns and occupies c. 0.3 ha. The geology is plateau and glaciofluvial drift (clay with flints and loam, overlying chalk).

2 Background

The site of the development is located in an area of archaeological potential. However, no below ground archaeology has been recorded in the area. The main focus of this potential lies in the proximity of the site to *St Peter and St Paul's Church*. This church dates to the 12th century, though it has been suggested that a church was founded in the 7th century by St Birinus in this location. The Norman church was constructed in flint and stone. The existing church has a number of post 12th century additions including the tower, added in the 14th century, and 15th century windows inserted into the nave and the chancel.

The existing churchyard, which lies adjacent to the school, was separated from the school buildings in the mid 19th century. Significantly a plan of the site, drawn prior to the insertion of the churchyard wall, shows the churchyard extending onto the development site. There was therefore some potential for medieval burials to be encountered during the works.

To the east of the school buildings lies the original rectory (now *Rectory Cottage*) and some 250 m to the west lies 16th-century Checkendon Court, which was rebuilt in 1920 in Tudor style.

3 Aims

The aims of the watching brief were to identify any archaeological remains exposed on site during the course of the works, and to record these to established OAU standards (Wilkinson 1992), in order to secure their preservation by record.

4 Methodology

The watching brief was undertaken by means of separate inspection visits; all digging was undertaken by mechanical excavator.

Within the constraints imposed by health and safety considerations the deposits exposed were cleaned, inspected and recorded in plan, section and by colour slide and monochrome print photography. Written records were also made on proforma sheets. Soil description utilises standard charts for the approximation of percentage of inclusion types in soil deposits.

5 Results (*Fig. 2*)

General topsoil reduction to the north of the existing playground revealed a stratigraphic sequence consisting of natural clay with flints (1) overlain by a layer of mid brownish grey silty clay (2) which produced a large quantity of nineteenth century material. This was presumably associated with the construction of the existing school building in 1846 and was in turn overlain by modern topsoil (3).

Underlying the 19th-century deposit (2) and cut through the natural clay were a number of possible archaeological features, the fills of which predominantly consisted of a mid-light grey clay silt. These included two possible linear features (5 and 10) and a number of possible pits (6-9 and 11). The location of these was planned but they were not excavated as they lay to the north of the development, beneath the new playground area, and were immediately covered by a layer of hardcore.

The reduction of the existing playground area revealed a layer of made ground and hardcore which was cut by numerous services associated with the existing school building. There was no impact below the layer of made ground, with the exception of the strip foundation trenches which formed the footprint of the new buildings. The location of these was planned and two possible linear features (12 and 14) were recorded in section (*Figs 2*). No finds were recovered from these features.

6 Finds

A limited number of finds were recovered and these were exclusively from the 19th-century deposit underlying the topsoil to the north of the existing playground. Whilst the majority of these finds were 19th-century (ceramic building material, pottery, glass etc.), a number of possible medieval pottery sherds were also recovered and suggest that there may have been some medieval activity within the development site.

7 Environmental results

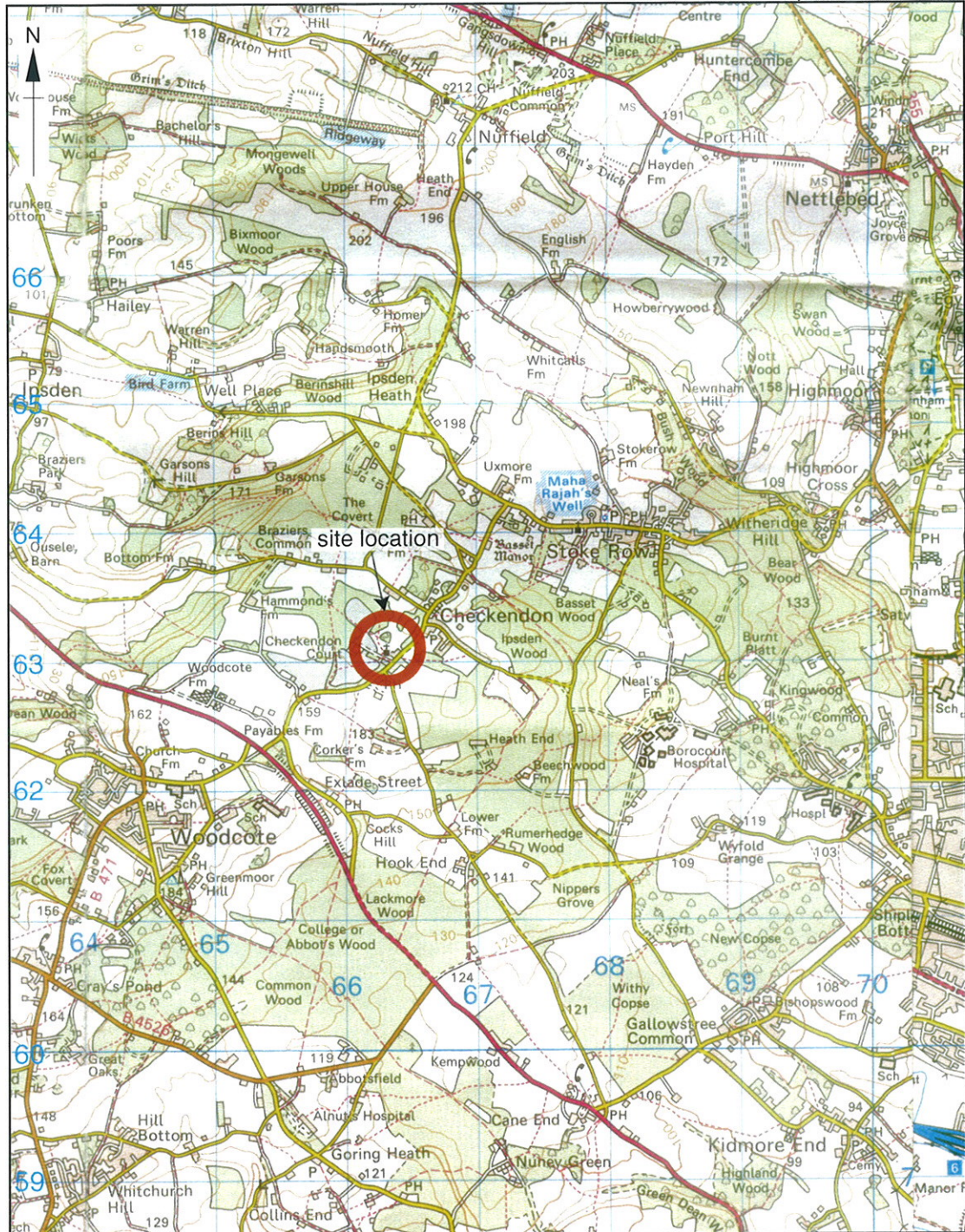
No environmental soil samples were taken as no suitable deposits were observed.

8 Discussion

Although a number of potential archaeological features have been recorded within the development site, these have not been compromised due to the limited impact of the development. Where features have been disturbed within the strip foundations (12 and 14), the impact was minimal and not sufficient to fully characterise the features. No evidence for the pre-1846 boundary of the churchyard was observed.

References.

Wilkinson, D (ed) 1992 Oxford Archaeological Unit Field Manual, (First edition, August 1992).



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Figure 1: Location of site.

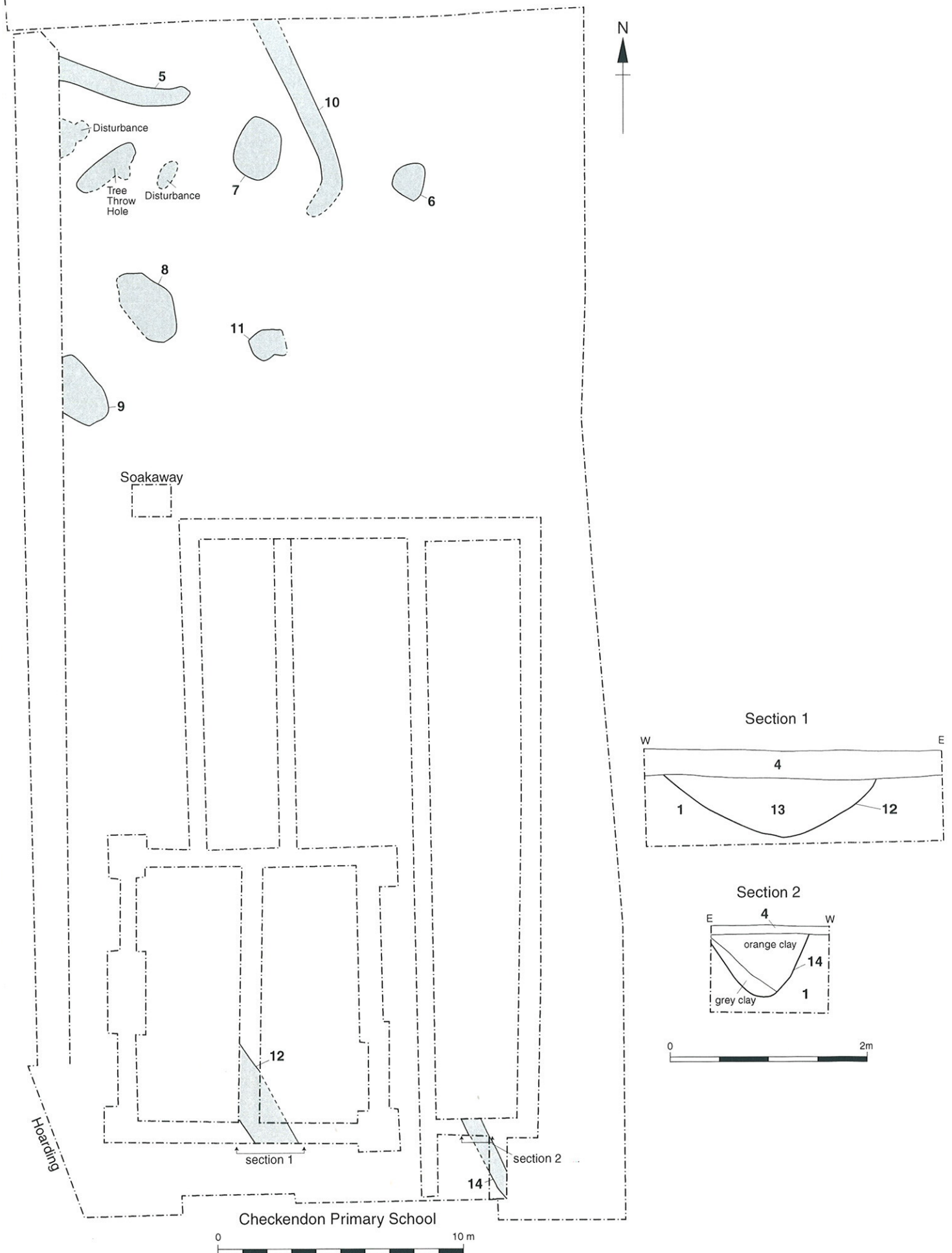


Figure 2: Site plan.



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