

The Trustees of Ewelme School

The Annexe, Ewelme School, Ewelme, Oxfordshire

NGR SU 646 913

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL BUILDING WATCHING BRIEF
REPORT**

Oxford Archaeological Unit

July 2000

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REPORT**

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Summary

In March, April and May 2000 the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) undertook a building watching brief at the Annexe, Ewelme School, Oxfordshire (NGR SU 646 913). A possible robber trench was seen within the new foundation trench. Modern finds, derived from the topsoil were examined on site but not retained; works to the standing building did not reveal any features of architectural or historic interest within the fabric.

1 Introduction

The development proposal comprised construction of a new extension for, and making alterations to, the outbuilding known as the Annexe, which lies in the grounds of Ewelme Primary School, a Grade I Listed Building; the Annexe itself dates from the 18th century and is Listed Grade II. An archaeological Building Watching Brief was required during these works in accordance with the planning consent granted under PPG 16 and PPG 15 and Local Plan requirements. Listed Building consent was also required for the work.

The watching brief was commissioned by W S Atkins on behalf of the Trustees of Ewelme School. It was undertaken to a brief set by and a WSI agreed with the County Archaeological Officer for Oxfordshire.

2 Background

Ewelme lies approximately 4 kms to the north-east of Wallingford, and 15 kms to the south-east of Oxford. Ewelme Primary School, together with its adjacent Almshouses was constructed in the 15th century by the Earl and Countess of Suffolk; they also rebuilt the medieval church of St Mary. The entire complex is Listed Grade I and is considered to be of national importance; the use of brick in both the school and the Almshouses is one of the earliest in the county.

The Annexe building (shown in yellow on the site plan) is situated approximately 10 m to the west of the Schoolhouse building. The ground slopes slightly from north to south and the underlying geology is a clayey loam over lower chalk.

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 maintained by means of separate inspection visits, co-ordinated with the main contractor's programme. Excavation was undertaken by the contractors using a Kubota mini-digger, supplemented by occasional hand-digging.

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 1)

The Standing Building.

Works to the standing building comprised both alterations and a new extension. The new extension was to be added to the north-east elevation, with the single window in this elevation being altered and reduced in order to accommodate the new roof line. A new kitchen and toilet facilities were added within the building, along with a staircase accessing the new first floor. The Annexe was originally constructed in the 18th century; it has a flint base with red brick dressing; it comprises a single storey and lies at right angles to the road.

The removal of hardboard panelling covering the interior walls to an average height of 2 m revealed whitewashed stonework, containing no architectural features beyond those already noted from the exterior of the building. A photographic record of the interior of the building was made at this stage, prior to the commencement of further works; these works did not reveal any further architectural features.

The Buried Archaeology.

The foundation trench for the extension to the Annexe was dug at the north-eastern end of the building and measured 1 m deep by 0.80 m wide; the trench exposed construction cuts for both the Annexe itself and the western boundary wall of the school grounds. The earliest deposit seen was the chalky natural, (3), which was sealed by a light brown silty clay loam, (2), with 2% fine subrounded gravel; this deposit did not produce any finds. Sealing deposit (2) was 0.60 m of very mixed mid gray silty loam with chalk lumps and small fragments of brick and unworked limestone, concrete fragments and very occasional small pieces of animal bone, (1). This deposit was interpreted as a dump of made ground, the exact provenance of which remains unknown at this time.

Deposit (1) was seen to seal a small possible robber trench, [4], aligned north-east/south-west; this feature measured 0.40 m square and was cut from the upper horizon of (2) to the surface of (3). The cut was filled with a mixture of sand, chalky natural and small fragments of brick, (5).

6 Finds

Finds were retrieved only from deposit (1); these were examined on site but were not retained.

7 Environmental results

Full consideration was given to various sampling strategies however, due to the absence of any significant buried archaeology, no environmental soil samples were taken.

8 Discussion

If feature [4] does represent a robber trench, then it would appear to be aligned north-east/south-west, perhaps implying the existence of an earlier phase to the Annexe building, since demolished. Having said this, the remainder of the new foundation trench was examined very carefully for any return of this feature, but none was seen. Its location could also imply that it represents the location of an earlier boundary wall.

References.

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

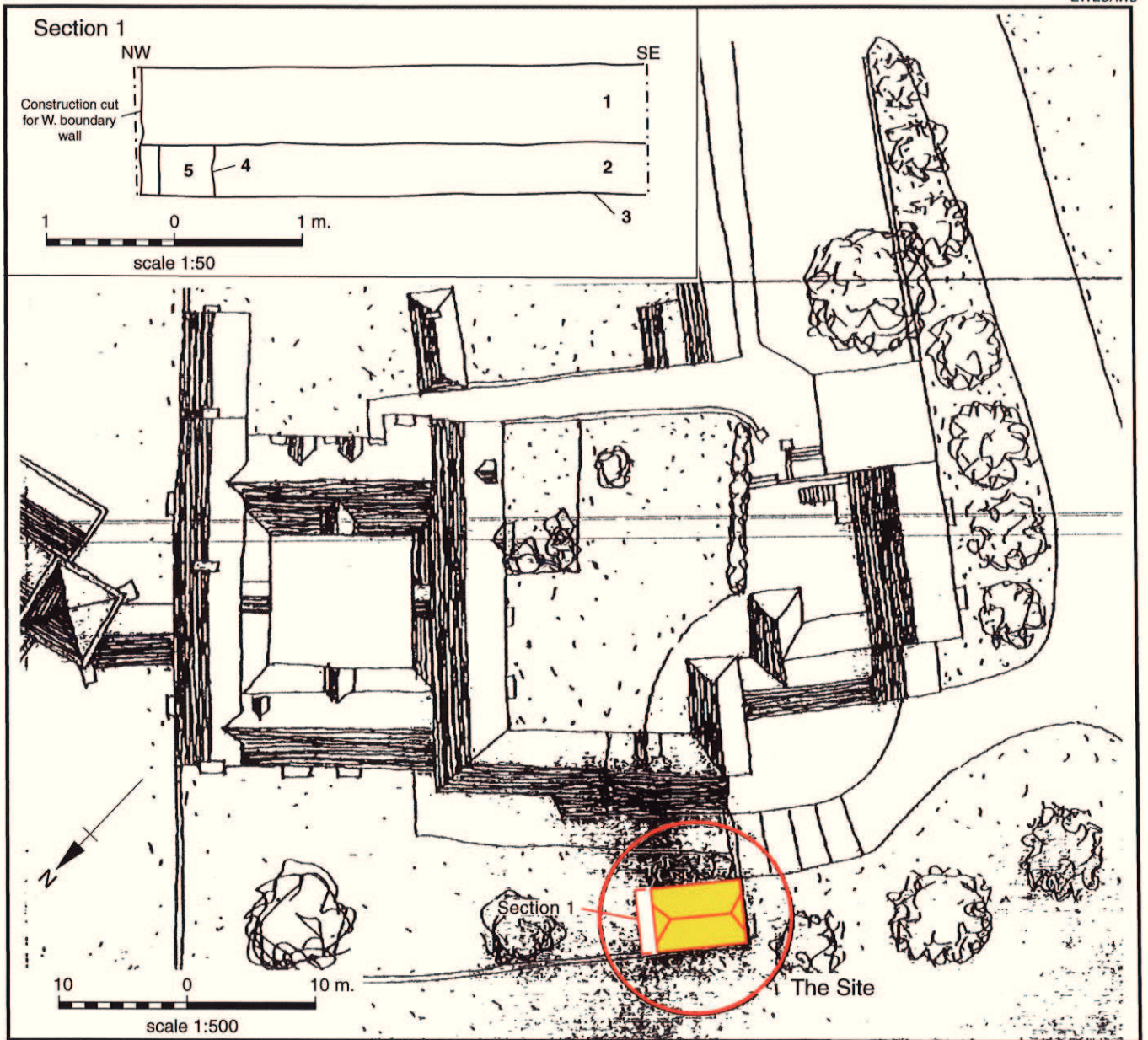


Figure 1: Site plan and section



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