

# Artificial Sports Field at Bourbon Fields Stowe School Buckinghamshire

**Archaeological Watching Brief**



March 2008

**Client: Stowe School**

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# Artificial Sports Field at Bourbon Fields, Stowe School, Buckinghamshire

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## SUMMARY

*In July 2007 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at Bourbon playing fields of Stowe School, Stowe, Buckinghamshire (NGR SP 6815 3833). The work was commissioned by Stowe School in advance of the construction of a synthetic sports pitch with associated fencing, floodlights and access. The watching brief revealed a number of Roman ditches and features relating to Roman industrial and agricultural activity in the area.*

### 1 INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Location and scope of work

- 1.1.1 In July 2007 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at the Bourbon playing fields of Stowe School, Stowe, Buckinghamshire (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Stowe School in respect of a planning application for the construction of a synthetic sports pitch with associated fencing floodlights and access (Planning Application No. 06/02629/APP).
- 1.1.2 A project brief was set by David Radford MA the Archaeological Officer for Buckinghamshire County Archaeological Service (BACS 2006).
- 1.1.3 OA prepared a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) detailing how it would meet the requirements of the brief.

#### 1.2 Geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The development area is located to the north-east of Stowe School, on the edge of formal gardens surrounding the house (NGR SP 6815 3833). The application site is generally level, at approximately 135 m OD. The underlying geology is clay.

#### 1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The archaeological background to the watching brief was prepared for the WSI for the project (OA 2006) and is reproduced below.
- 1.3.2 The earliest known human activity within the study area dates to the Roman period and a Roman villa of early 4th century date lies c 500 m north-west of the Site. The main Towcester to Alchester Roman Road runs south-west/north-east c 200 m to the west and the Fenny Stratford to Buckingham road, lies immediately to the north of the site on a south-east/north-west alignment.
- 1.3.3 Roman pottery kilns were uncovered nearby in the early 1990s. Part of a pottery kiln was salvage recorded in 1990, and further indications of a kiln were noted in 1995. Among the artefacts recovered was a quantity of pink-grogged ware from both kiln locations. This material dates from the 2nd-4th centuries, and similar material has

been found by the National Trust's archaeologists during ground disturbance in and around the gardens of Stowe Park.

- 1.3.4 Domesday records four manors, which are likely to have represented the pre-conquest settlements within the area. In the early medieval period these settlements became nucleated around a church and manor house. The four manors recorded in Domesday comprise Stowe, Boycott, Lamport and Dadford (of which the latter two were divided into two holdings each).
- 1.3.5 Recorded as *Stov* in Domesday, it was leased from the Bishop of Bayeux by Robert d'Oilly and Roger of Ivry in 1086. In the 13th century it was granted to Osney Abbey (Oxfordshire), who held it until the Dissolution. In 1591 the manor of Stowe was sold to the Temple family, who had made their wealth from sheep farming.
- 1.3.6 The mansion, which stands in the Grade I listed registered park at Stowe dates originally to the 16th/17th centuries, and was remodelled in the 18th century. The original manor house was demolished and replaced by Sir Richard Temple before his death in 1697. Later his son (the first Lord Cobham) re-built the front and added the wings. The house was further enlarged by Earl Temple, who died in 1779 and afterwards by the Marquis of Buckinghamshire. During this time, the Temple family had begun to invest heavily in the gardens. The first Lord Cobham, who died in 1749, had started to extend the area of parkland (which had been present as a Deer Park from the 13th century). By the end of the 1720s due to the ever-expanding Stowe Park, the village of Stowe, which in 1712 had 31 houses, had been largely cleared, leaving only the 13th-century church of the Assumption of St. Mary the Virgin.
- 1.3.7 The land within Stowe Manor became an extensive, complex pleasure garden, surrounding a country mansion, probably one of the finest examples of later Renaissance houses in England. Developed by a number of famous landscape designers, including Charles Bridgeman and Capability Brown, by the 18<sup>th</sup> century it was supremely influential to English landscape gardening. At its largest the designed landscape and woodlands covered some 250 hectares.
- 1.3.8 Notable post-medieval structures in the grounds include Conduit House and the Bourbon Tower, both probably of 18th century date.

## 2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Aims

- 2.1.1 To determine the location, extent, date, character, and state of preservation of any archaeological remains surviving on the site, in particular those of the Roman period, especially Roman pottery production.
- 2.1.2 To establish the ecofactual and environmental potential of archaeological deposits and features within the site and to take samples where appropriate.
- 2.1.3 To clarify the nature and extent of any modern disturbance and intrusion on the site.

2.1.4 To inform a mitigation strategy for any archaeological remains revealed during the stripping.

2.1.5 To make available the results of the archaeological investigation.

## 2.2 Methodology

2.2.1 The site was stripped of topsoil with a 360° machine using a ditching bucket under archaeological supervision. The site was then cut and filled to form a level surface and the areas, which were reduced, were excavated under archaeological supervision.

2.2.2 All archaeological features were planned at a scale of 1:100 and where excavated their sections drawn at scales of 1:20. All excavated features were photographed using colour slide and black and white print film. A general photographic record of the work was made. Recording followed procedures detailed in the *OAU Fieldwork Manual* (ed. D Wilkinson, 1992).

## 3 RESULTS

### 3.1 Description of deposits

3.1.1 The area of the new sports pitch and access road was first stripped of topsoil and then reduced and levelled by cut and fill method. This work exposed the natural (1) of light reddish silty clay with bands of flinty gravel. The north-east half of the pitch had been built up and levelled with light reddish brown silty sand (12) with patches of dark brown. This was excavated material from the construction of the playing fields in the 1920's. The natural was exposed at the south-west corner of the pitch and along the new access road along the southern edge of the existing all-weather pitch. Cutting the natural within the line of the access road was a number of badly truncated Roman features.

3.1.2 A small ditch (3) was identified, aligned north to south with a shallow concave profile and measuring 9.4 m long, 0.60 m wide and 0.08 m in depth. It was filled by a dark reddish brown silty clay loam (4). To the west of the ditch was the base of a badly truncated sub-circular pit with a shallow concave profile (5). It measured 0.54 m x 0.43 m x 0.04 m and was filled by a very dark reddish brown silty clay (6) with fragments of pottery and quern stone. The pottery dated from the 2nd to 3rd century. A second pit (7) was also exposed. It had near vertical sides rounding to a flat base and measured 0.80 m in diameter and 0.28 m in depth. The pit had a reddish brown clay lining (8) for a ceramic storage jar that was placed in the pit. The jar had collapsed in on itself and had been filled by a dark grey brown silty clay (9) with fragments of pottery dating from the 2nd to 3rd century. A second ditch (10) was also exposed aligned north-west to south-east with steep sloping sides and a concave base. It measured 19 m x 0.50 m x 0.18 m and was filled by a light grey brown silty sand loam (11) with a fragment of pottery. This dated from the 2nd to 3rd century. All these features were sealed below the 0.20 m - 0.25 m thick layer of dark reddish brown silty clay loam topsoil of the playing fields.

### 3.2 Finds

#### *Pottery by Edward Biddulph*

- 3.2.1 A pottery assemblage of 196 sherds weighing 13.8 kg was recovered from the watching brief. This was sorted by context into fabric groups, which were quantified by sherd count and weight in grammes. Fabrics were assigned codes from Oxford Archaeology's standard recording guidelines (Booth 2007).
- 3.2.2 The bulk of the assemblage was pink-grogged ware (fabric O81). This ware, characterised by pink/orange surfaces and dark grey core, was manufactured in the Stowe and Towcester area (kilns have been discovered in Stowe Park) from the second half of the 2nd century to the first half of the 4th (Taylor 2004, 60). Forms identified in this assemblage included hook-rimmed jars – at least three vessels were represented – and one or more storage jar, represented by body and base sherds. In addition to the pink-grogged ware, context 9 also contained a bead-rimmed dish in Nene Valley grey ware (fabric R46), which dated to AD 150-250.
- 3.2.3 The pottery was generally in good condition. The sherds, belonging to relatively few vessels, were large and unabraded, suggesting that they were discarded close to settlement and areas of pottery use.

Context	Fabric	Count	Weight (g)	Description	Spot-date
6	O81	11	331	Storage jar body and base sherds, some reduced	160-350
9	O81	183	13421	Hook-rimmed <b>jars</b> x 3 (AD 160-350); storage jar body and base sherds, some reduced	160-250
	R46	6	176	<b>Bowl</b> , ?carinated (AD 160-230) Bead-rimmed <b>dish</b> (AD 150-250)	
11	O81	2	25	Storage jar body sherds, burnt	160-350
Total		196	13777		

### 3.3 Palaeo-environmental remains

- 3.3.1 No deposits suitable for environmental sampling were identified during the watching brief.

## 4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1.1 The watching brief revealed some surviving Roman features and field boundary ditches to the south side of the present all-weather pitch within the location of Roman finds recovered in 1990 during the pitch construction.
- 4.1.2 The works exposed the extent of landscaping for the construction of the Bourbon Fields with heavy machinery using the cut and fill method. This meant cutting into the slope in the south-east corner and using the excavated material to level up the north-west corner and forming a large rectangular playing field. These works formed a terrace step aligned east to west along the northern edge. A later smaller playing was constructed to the north of the larger playing fields and the present artificial pitch has

been constructed. The depositing of material in the north-west corner of the playing field could overlay and seal surviving Roman and later archaeological features.

- 4.1.3 The features revealed along the southern edge along the line of the new access road date from the 2nd to 3rd century and consisted of pottery made locally in kilns from around Stowe and Towcester. The features were all very shallow and had been truncated by later ploughing and landscaping of the grounds prior to the construction of the playing fields in the late 1920's. Although no direct evidence of pottery production was found, it is reasonable to infer, from the material and features discovered, some level of settlement activity in the near vicinity, possibly associated with the villa.

## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Depth</i>	<i>Width</i>	<i>Length</i>	<i>Comments</i>	<i> Finds</i>
1	Natural				Silty clay and flinty river gravels	
2	Layer	0.20 m - 0.25 m			Topsoil	
3	Cut	0.08 m	0.60 m	9.40 m	Ditch	
4	Fill				Fill of ditch	
5	Cut	0.04 m	0.43 m	0.54 m	Pit	
6	Fill				Fill of pit	
7	Cut	0.28 m	0.80 m	0.80 m	Pit for storage jar	
8	Fill				Clay lining of jar	
9	Fill				Material filling in jar	
10	Cut	0.18 m	0.50 m	19 m	Boundary ditch	
11	Fill				Fill of ditch	
12	Layer				Subsoil	

## APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

BCAS 2006 Brief for Archaeological Excavation, Bourbon Fields, Stowe School, Stowe

Booth, P, and Oxford Archaeology Roman pottery recording system: an introduction unpublished (revised June 2007)

OA 2006 Artificial Sports Pitch at Bourbon Fields, Stowe School, Buckinghamshire Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Strip and Record Exercise

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

Taylor, J, 2004 The distribution and exchange of pink, grog-tempered pottery in the East Midlands: an update, *J Roman Pottery Studies* 11, 60-66

## APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

**Site name:** Artificial Sports Pitch at Bourbon Fields, Stowe School, Buckinghamshire

**Site code:** STSASP 07

**Grid reference:** NGR SP 6815 3833

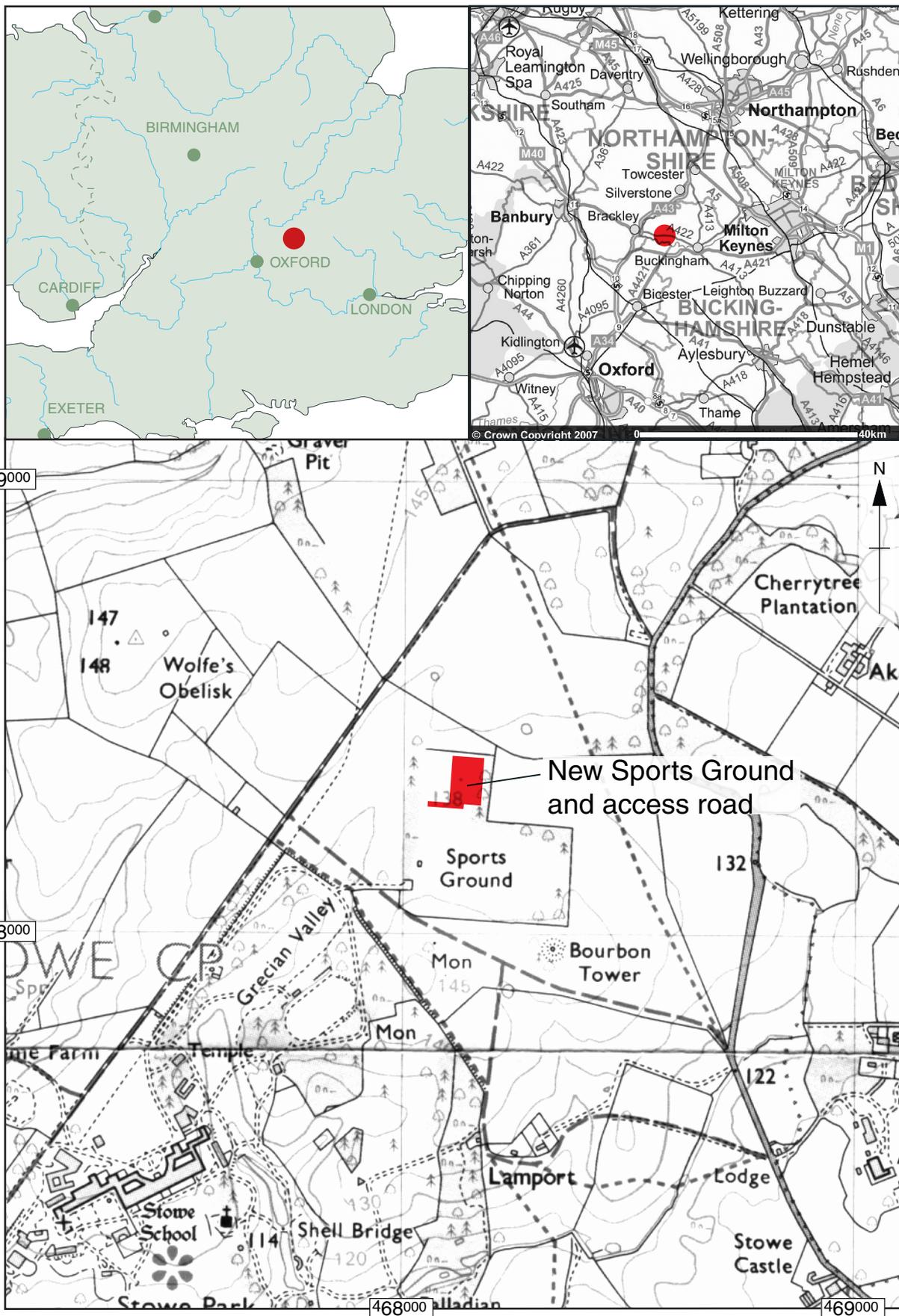
**Type of watching brief:** Ground works for the construction of new football pitch and access.

**Date and duration of project:** Eight days from the 10/7/07 to 19/7/07.

**Area of site:** 60m x 120 m

**Summary of results:** A number of Roman ditches and features were located relating to Roman industrial and agricultural landscape in the area.

**Location of archive:** The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Buckinghamshire County Museums Service in due course, under the following accession number: AYBCM 2007.100



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Figure 1: Site location and new sports ground



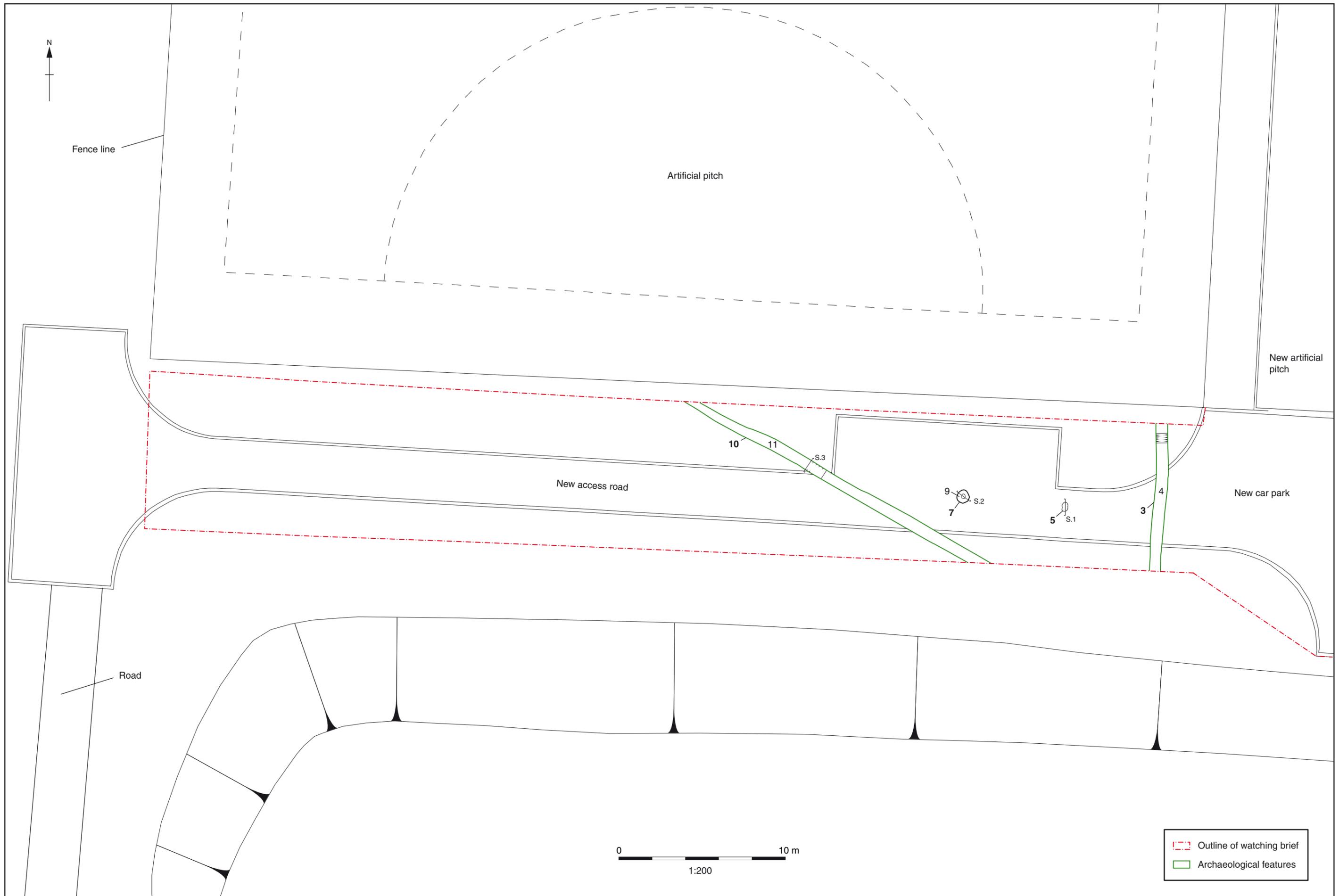


Figure 2: Area of watching brief and plan of features











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