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Maids Moreton School, Buckinghamshire

Archaeological Evaluation Report

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With illustrations by Matt Bradley and Sophie Lamb

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Summary

Between 15th and 21st April 2020, Oxford Archaeology undertook an archaeological evaluation involving the excavation of 12 test-pits within the footprint of a proposed extension to Maids Moreton Primary School, Buckinghamshire (NGR: SP 70407 35175). The site was divided into two concentrations of test pits, with two located at the front of the school and the remaining 10 at the rear.

A single feature of unknown function was identified at the front of the school. The feature contained a mixed rubble fill, including 20th-century brick. The feature cut a made ground deposit thought to be associated with the construction of the school in the latter half of the 20th century.

Acknowledgements

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The project was managed for Oxford Archaeology by Joakim Thomason. The fieldwork was directed by John Carne, who was supported by Chris Clark and Inês Matos Glover. Survey and digitising was carried out by John Carne and Matt Bradley. Thanks are also extended to the teams of OA staff that prepared the archive under the supervision of Nicola Scott.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

- 1.1.1 Oxford Archaeology (OA) was commissioned by Clipston Construction Control Ltd acting on behalf of Buckinghamshire Council to undertake an archaeological evaluation on the site of a proposed development at Maids Moreton School, Aylesbury Vale in Buckinghamshire.
- 1.1.2 The work was undertaken as a condition of Planning Permission (planning ref: CBC14407). Although the Local Planning Authority did not set a brief for the work, discussions with Phil Markham, Senior Archaeology Officer at Buckinghamshire Council, established the scope of work required; this document outlines how OA implemented those requirements.
- 1.1.3 All work was undertaken in accordance with local and national planning policies and Chartered Institute for Archaeologists Guidance (CIfA 2014).

1.2 Location, topography and geology

- 1.2.1 Maids Moreton School is located in the southern outskirts of the Maids Moreton historic village core, c. 1.5km north-east of Buckingham (Fig. 1). The area of the proposed development, the site, lies both to the front and rear of the school. To the front the area comprises grassland and the area to the rear is currently used as a playground and comprises paved areas, grassland and trees.
- 1.2.2 The bedrock geology of the area is mapped as Cornbrash Formation – Limestone, a sedimentary bedrock formed approximately 164 to 168 million years ago in the Jurassic Period, in a local environment dominated by shallow carbonate seas (BGS 2020). The superficial deposits comprise Till and Mid Pleistocene Diamicton, formed up to 2 million years ago in the Quaternary Period. The site is located at 114m above Ordnance Datum.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The following archaeological and historical background comprises a review of recorded archaeological remains and records retrieved from Buckinghamshire Historic Environment Record that are located within a 1km buffer of the site. The following summary provides a context for the works.

Prehistoric period (500,000 BP – AD 43)

- 1.3.2 The focus for prehistoric settlement was in the River Ouse valley, c. 1.5km southeast of the village. There, a ring ditch visible as a crop mark on aerial photographs may represent the site of an early Bronze Age burial mound. Nearby, next to the river and the Foscoote/Foxcote Reservoir, there is large circular enclosure which is believed to have been an Iron Age fort.
- 1.3.3 Evidence for settlement predating the medieval period in and around Maids Moreton is limited. This may, however, simply reflect the lack of archaeological investigations

rather than an absence of activity. A few sherds of Iron Age pottery have been found near Moreton House.

Romano-British period (AD 43 – 410)

- 1.3.4 The Upper Ouse Valley was intensively settled in the Roman period, by which time the population had risen dramatically and more substantial longer-lived settlements were being established. Roman villas have been recorded along the valley, for example in Foscoate/Foxcote c. 1.8km east of the site and at Tingewick c. 5km to the south-west. A temple and rich aristocratic burials have been found at Thornborough. Other Roman settlements are indicated by finds about 1km to the north and south-west of the village.
- 1.3.5 A minor Roman road running from Bletchley in Buckinghamshire to Wormleighton in Warwickshire (Royal Commission 1982), passes through the temple site at Thornborough and runs along the southern boundary of the site, continuing further towards the west-north-west as Avenue Road .

Early medieval period (AD 410 – 1065)

- 1.3.6 The early medieval landscape in the vicinity was dominated by the town of Buckingham (Green & Beckley 2008), which dates back to at least AD 914 when Edward the Elder established a double burh. Buckingham was a significant settlement in the late Anglo-Saxon period, possessing a mint and a possible Minster church, and it became the administrative centre of the county. The town is also associated with St Rumbold, a 7th-century Anglo-Saxon saint, and this association may indicate an earlier origin for the settlement. After the Conquest in the 11th century, a castle was constructed within the burh and the town began to expand. By the 13th century it was supplying wool to the cloth trade, although it was never as wealthy as equivalent towns in the south of England. As early as the 13th century the town's economic and political influence started to wane.
- 1.3.7 The village was known as Mortone, Old English for *mor* and *tun*, meaning farmstead in moorland or marshy grounds. It was not known as Maids Moreton - denoting the patronage of the maiden daughters of Thomas Pever to the parish church - until 1488 (Mills 2011).
- 1.3.8 According to the Domesday Survey of 1086, when the village is first mentioned in written documents, it had a recorded population of 20 households that are listed under three owners (Palmer & Powell-Smith 2020). Before Domesday there had been six separate small manors which would be consistent with a small Saxon farming community with a dispersed settlement pattern (Archaeological Solutions 2009). The lack of archaeological evidence does not, however, allow the village's origins and early development to be reconstructed with any confidence.

Later medieval period (1066 – 1550)

- 1.3.9 The earliest standing historic building is the 15th-century parish church of St Edmonds. The oldest domestic buildings are attributed to the 16th and 17th centuries, and are mainly situated along Main Street and the northern part of Duck Lake (Page 1927).

- 1.3.10 Earthworks with adjacent areas of ridge and furrow cultivation are present in several areas in the vicinity of the site. The earthworks next to the Buckingham Arms, c. 380m north-west of the site, comprise a 50m diameter circular mound from which 12th-14th-century medieval pottery has been recovered (AS 2009). It probably represents the site of a windmill. Nearby, another area with earthworks is thought to represent the site of a medieval manor, where and 12th- and 13th- century pottery has been recovered. A further area of earthworks lies to the east of the parish church of St Edmonds.
- 1.3.11 The present church of St Edmonds, which lies c. 230m east of the site, was entirely rebuilt about 1450, being traditionally ascribed to the two maiden daughters of the last Thomas Pever, who died in 1429 (Page 1927). The only remains from the former church are the late 12th-century font and some 12th-century moulded stones, reused in the rear arches of the windows of the north porch.
- 1.3.12 The 19th century Maids Moreton Hall is situated by Church Street, c. 280m north-east of the site. It is situated on the site of a former manor probably dating back to the early middle ages (Page 1927).

Post-medieval period (1550-1900)

- 1.3.13 The medieval landscape, comprising a village set within open fields, continued until enclosure created the pattern of hedged fields (Page 1927). The earliest hedged fields found in the western conservation area and to the north and east of the village have been classified as pre-18th century irregular enclosure, whilst later regular surveyed fields were created by parliamentary enclosure in 1803.
- 1.3.14 According to historic maps, the site comprised land in agricultural use from the time of the earliest 1595-1596 All Souls College map until the construction of the current school (OA 2005). The earliest buildings south of Avenue Road are visible on the 1938 Ordnance Survey Map.
- 1.3.15 A cobbled surface containing 17th to 19th-century pottery was uncovered c. 200m east of the site by Glebe Terrace (AS 2009). Given the orientation and location, it is likely that it represents a trackway which led from the church to the old rectory.

2 AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

2.1.1 The general aims and objectives of the evaluation were:

- i. To determine the presence or absence of any archaeological remains which may survive,
- ii. To determine or confirm the approximate extent of any surviving remains,
- iii. To determine the date range of any surviving remains by artefactual or other means,
- iv. To determine the condition and state of preservation of any remains,
- v. To determine the degree of complexity of any surviving horizontal or vertical stratigraphy,
- vi. To assess the associations and implications of any remains encountered with reference to the historic landscape,
- vii. To determine the potential of the site to provide palaeoenvironmental and/or economic evidence, and the forms in which such evidence may survive,
- viii. To determine the implications of any remains with reference to economy, status, use and social activity, and
- ix. To determine or confirm the likely range, quality and quantity of the artefactual evidence present.

2.2 Specific aims and objectives

2.2.1 The specific aims and objectives of the evaluation were:

- x. To determine or confirm the presence of remains related to the Roman Road, and
- xi. To determine or confirm the presence of remains related to the medieval village.

2.3 Methodology

2.3.1 The works comprised the excavation of 12 test-pits, measuring 1m by 1m, within the footprint of the proposed development. The works were undertaken in accordance with the methodology outlined in the written scheme of investigation (WSI) produced by Oxford Archaeology (OA 2020).

2.3.2 The test-pits were set-out using a GPS with sub 15mm accuracy as proposed in the WSI with the exception of Test-pits 1 and 2. The location of both test-pits had to be changed due to the presence of tree roots. The test-pits remained, however, within the footprint of the proposed development (Fig. 2).

2.3.3 The test-pits were excavated by hand until the underlying natural geology was identified. Where present, archaeological features were hand excavated to characterise them.

2.3.4 Unique context numbers were allocated to all archaeological features and deposits, and all context recording was carried out using OA proforma sheets. Finds were

collected by context. Plans and section were hand drawn at an appropriate scale (1:10 or 1:20) and digital photograph were taken of all deposits, features and the works in general.

- 2.3.5 Upon completion, and in agreement with Phil Markham, Senior Archaeology Officer at Buckinghamshire Council, the test-pits were backfilled.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Introduction and presentation of results

3.1.1 The results of the evaluation are presented below, and include a stratigraphic description of the test-pits which contained archaeological remains. The full details of all test-pits with the dimensions and depths of all deposits is tabulated in Appendix A. Finds data and spot dates can be found in Appendix B.

3.2 General soils and ground conditions

3.2.1 The soil sequence in the test-pits was fairly uniform across the site. The natural geology of clay with limestone inclusions was overlain by a silty clay subsoil, which in turn was overlain by topsoil. There was a change in the relative depths of subsoil and topsoil layers between the test-pits at the front and the back of the school, with those at the front having a much shallower topsoil (Plates 1-2 and Fig. 3).

3.2.2 At the back of the school, within Test-pits 5, 6, 9 and 12 there were areas of disturbed natural due to rooting activity from nearby trees.

3.2.3 Ground conditions throughout the evaluation were generally good, and the site remained dry throughout. Archaeological features, where present, were easy to identify against the underlying natural geology.

3.3 General distribution of archaeological deposits

3.3.1 Archaeological features were only present in Test-pit 1; the other test-pits were devoid of archaeological remains.

3.4 Test-pit 1 (Fig. 3)

3.4.1 A single feature was recorded in Test-pit 1. The feature, 104, was only partially exposed within the test-pit and its true shape in plan is thus unknown but appears to be either linear or rectangular. The feature, which was aligned NE-SE, continued beyond all sides of the test-pit with the exception of the north-west. The feature measured over 0.56m in width and 0.6m in depth, and the one recorded side was near vertical.

3.4.2 The feature contained two fills, 105 and 106. The earlier fill, 105, was formed of redeposited natural clay. Given the near vertical interface between the two fills, fill 105 had either been applied to the edge of the feature to form a lining or, the later fill, 106, is the backfill of a later truncation. The later fill comprised predominately roughly hewn limestone blocks, slate and bricks in a loose dark grey silt. The bricks have been dated to the first half of the 20th century.

3.4.3 As well as truncating both the subsoil and the natural geology, the feature cut through a thin layer of made ground observed between the topsoil and the subsoil. The date of this deposit is unknown but it is thought to be associated with the construction of the school and suggests that even if fill 106 is indicative of a later truncation, the origin of the original feature and fill 105 also dates to the 20th century.

3.5 Finds summary

- 3.5.1 With the exception of a brick from feature 104 in Test-pit 1, all finds were recovered from the subsoil.
- 3.5.2 The finds include nine sherds of pottery, of which seven were recovered from Test-pit 9. The remaining two sherds, and two fragments of ceramic building material (CBM), were recovered from Test-pits 4 and 7. A Halfpenny of George II was recovered from Test-pit 8.
- 3.5.3 All the artefactual evidence recovered dates to the post-medieval or modern periods.

4 DISCUSSION

4.1 Reliability of field investigation

- 4.1.1 The fieldwork was undertaken during a period of sustained mild, dry weather over a period of seven days. Overall, this had a positive effect, making the archaeological horizon obvious and clear.
- 4.1.2 The distribution of test-pits to the rear of the school gave a good coverage of the area and can be considered to provide a reliable indication of the archaeological potential. Although the test-pits to the front of the school were repositioned they were still located within the footprint of the proposed development. Due to constraints, services and the trees, it was not possible to expand Test-pit 1 to enable the function of feature 104 to be established.

4.2 Evaluation objectives and results

- 4.2.1 The results of the evaluation suggest there is limited potential for archaeological remains to be present within the proposed development area. Although of uncertain function, the only feature present is thought to date to the 20th century and is potentially associated with the construction of the school.
- 4.2.2 The pottery assemblage recovered from the subsoil is a reflection of the sites proximity to the historic core of Maids Moreton. It is unlikely to be an indicator of post-medieval activity in this area beyond agriculture, which the historic mapping of the site suggests remained in agricultural use until the construction of the school in the latter half of the 20th century.

APPENDIX A TEST-PIT DESCRIPTIONS AND CONTEXT INVENTORY

Test-pit 1						
General description						
The test-pit contained a single feature of function which has been dated to the 20th century. Consists of topsoil, made ground and subsoil overlying natural geology of clay.					Length (m)	1
					Width (m)	1
					Avg. depth (m)	0.55
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
100	Layer	-	0.1	Topsoil	-	-
101	Layer	-	0.09	Made ground	-	-
102	Layer	-	0.36	Subsoil	-	-
103	Layer	-	-	Natural		
104	Cut	>0.56	>0.6	Unknown	-	-
105	Fill	0.13	>0.6	Fill of 104, redeposited natural	-	-
106	Fill	0.43	>0.6	Fill of 104, dark grey silt with rubble inclusions	Brick	20th Century

Test-pit 2						
General description						
Test-pit contained a modern drainage ditch. Consists of topsoil and subsoil overlying natural geology of clay.					Length (m)	1
					Width (m)	1
					Avg. depth (m)	0.56
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
200	Layer	-	0.16	Topsoil	-	-
201	Layer	-	0.25	Subsoil	-	-
202	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-
203	Cut	>0.5	>0.56	Modern drainage ditch	-	-
204	Fill	>0.5	>0.56	Fill of 203, mixed backfilled material	-	-

Test-pit 3						
General description						
Test-pit devoid of archaeology. Consists of topsoil and subsoil overlying natural geology of clay					Length (m)	1
					Width (m)	1
					Avg. depth (m)	0.44
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
300	Layer	-	0.21	Topsoil	-	-
301	Layer	-	0.23	Subsoil	-	-
302	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-

Test-pit 4						
General description						
Test-pit devoid of archaeology. Consists of topsoil and subsoil overlying natural geology of clay.					Length (m)	1
					Width (m)	1

					Avg. depth (m)	0.44
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
400	Layer	-	0.2	Topsoil	-	-
401	Layer	-	0.24	Subsoil	Pottery, CBM, Coal	P-Med
402	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-

Test-pit 5						
General description						
Test-pit contained a probable tree throw. Consists of topsoil and subsoil overlying natural geology of clay.					Length (m)	1
					Width (m)	1
					Avg. depth (m)	0.45
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
500	Layer	-	0.2	Topsoil	-	-
501	Layer	-	0.25	Subsoil	-	-
502	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-
503	Cut	>0.7	0.18	Tree throw	-	-
504	Fill	>0.7	0.18	Fill of 503, mid brownish grey, silty clay	-	-

Test-pit 6						
General description						
Test-pit devoid of archaeology. Consists of topsoil and subsoil overlying natural geology of clay. Area of disturbed natural due to rooting.					Length (m)	1
					Width (m)	1
					Avg. depth (m)	0.41
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
600	Layer	-	0.21	Topsoil	-	-
601	Layer	-	0.2	Subsoil	-	-
602	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-

Test-pit 7						
General description						
Test-pit devoid of archaeology. Consists of topsoil and subsoil overlying natural geology of clay with some gravel inclusions.					Length (m)	1
					Width (m)	1
					Avg. depth (m)	0.47
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
700	Layer	-	0.23	Topsoil	-	-
701	Layer	-	0.24	Subsoil	Pottery, CBM	P-Med
702	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-

Test-pit 8						
General description						
Test-pit devoid of archaeology. Consists of topsoil and subsoil overlying natural geology of clay with gravel inclusions.					Length (m)	1
					Width (m)	1

					Avg. depth (m)	0.39
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
800	Layer	-	0.21	Topsoil	-	-
801	Layer	-	0.18	Subsoil	Coin	AD 1752
802	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-

Test-pit 9						
General description						
Test-pit devoid of archaeology. Consists of topsoil and subsoil overlying natural geology of clay. Natural heavily disturbed by rooting.					Length (m)	1
					Width (m)	1
					Avg. depth (m)	0.41
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
900	Layer	-	0.2	Topsoil	-	-
901	Layer	-	0.21	Subsoil	Pottery	P-Med
902	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-

Test-pit 10						
General description						
Test-pit devoid of archaeology. Consists of topsoil and subsoil overlying natural geology of clay.					Length (m)	1
					Width (m)	1
					Avg. depth (m)	0.43
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
1000	Layer	-	0.19	Topsoil	-	-
1001	Layer	-	0.24	Subsoil	-	-
1002	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-

Test-pit 11						
General description						
Test-pit devoid of archaeology. Consists of topsoil and subsoil overlying natural geology of silty clay with gravel inclusions.					Length (m)	1
					Width (m)	1
					Avg. depth (m)	0.36
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
1100	Layer	-	0.17	Topsoil	-	-
1101	Layer	-	0.19	Subsoil	-	-
1102	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-

Test-pit 12						
General description						
Test-pit devoid of archaeology. Consists of topsoil, subsoil and a layer of disturbed natural overlying natural geology of clay. Disturbed layer due to rooting from nearby tree.					Length (m)	1
					Width (m)	1
					Avg. depth (m)	0.56
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
1100	Layer	-	0.2	Topsoil	-	-

1101	Layer	-	0.22	Subsoil	-	-
1102	Layer	-	0.14	Disturbed natural, mid greyish orange, silty clay with gravel inclusions	-	-
1103	Layer	-	-	Natural		

APPENDIX B FINDS REPORTS

B.1 Post-Roman Pottery

By John Cotter

Introduction and methodology

B.1.1 A total of 9 sherds of pottery weighing 35g were recovered from three contexts. This is all late post-medieval or modern date. Given the small quantity present, this has not been separately catalogued but is fully described below. Post-medieval fabric codes used here are those of the Museum of London (MoLA 2014).

Description

B.1.2 **Context (401) Spot-date: c 1780-1840.** Description: 1 sherd (weight 6g). Dish rim in transfer-printed Pearlware (Fabric PEAR TR). Chinese-style decoration on rim.

B.1.3 **Context (701) Spot-date: c 1750-1900?** Description: 1 sherd (weight 8g). Body sherd in post-medieval red earthenware (PMR).

B.1.4 **Context (901) Spot-date: c 1800-1840.** Description: 7 sherds (weight 21g). Joining sherds from the rim of a dish in transfer-printed Pearlware (PEAR TR). Chinese-style scroll decoration on rim – probably associated with willow pattern design.

Discussion

B.1.5 The pottery comprises ordinary domestic post-medieval wares typical of much of southern England. The sherds are generally in a good condition, though fragmentary.

Recommendations regarding the conservation, discard and retention of material

B.1.6 The pottery here has little potential for further analysis and could be discarded.

B.2 Ceramic building material (CBM)

By John Cotter

Description

B.2.1 Four pieces of CBM weighing 3332g were recovered from three contexts. These have not been separately catalogued but are fully described below.

B.2.2 **Context (106) Spot-date: c 1900-1950?** Description: 1 piece (3000g). A complete modern Fletton-type brick. Machine-made. The upper surface has a rectangular frog of sunken V-shaped cross-section. On the sloping sides of the frog is an impressed maker's mark 'WOODHAM/ BC'. The 'BC' stands for Brick Company. Hard granular fabric – pinkish-brown with yellowish surface patches. Bricks this type are particularly common after the First World War.

B.2.3 **Context (401) Spot-date: c 1880-1950?** Description: 2 pieces (236g). 1x side fragment from a machine-made red brick with a circular perforation from top to bottom –

probably one of several perforations to assist in keying. Dense, fine orange-red fabric with a very smooth side surface. 1x small edge fragment (8g) from a machine-made wall tile in refined white earthenware with a clear external glaze (late 19th century onwards).

- B.2.4 **Context (701) Spot-date: c 1900-1950?** Description: 1 piece (96g). Machine-made tile in dark grey fine cement or concrete with smooth surfaces. Upright flange along surviving edge and possibly around the whole tile (possible trace of a corner surviving)? Function uncertain – possibly a roof tile, or possibly a drain or gutter tile?

Recommendations regarding the conservation, discard and retention of material

- B.2.5 The CBM has little potential for further research and has all been discarded.

B.3 Coal

By John Cotter

Description

- B.3.1 **Context (401) Spot-date: 19th or 20th century?** Description: 1 piece (4g). A flattish flake of domestic coal. Probably burnt.

Recommendations regarding the conservation, discard and retention of material

- B.3.2 This has little potential for further research and could be discarded.

B.4 Coins

By Leigh Allen

- B.4.1 A single coin was recovered from context 801. Test-pit 8.
- B.4.2 Dated to 1734, the coin is a Halfpenny of George II. The legend on the obverse reads GEORGIUS II REX and on the reverse BRITANNIA with the date stamp.

Recommendations regarding the conservation, discard and retention of material

- B.4.3 The coin will not be deposited with the local museum but returned to the school at their request. A photograph of both the obverse and reverse sides of the coin will be submitted with the archive.

APPENDIX C BIBLIOGRAPHY

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APPENDIX D**SITE SUMMARY DETAILS**

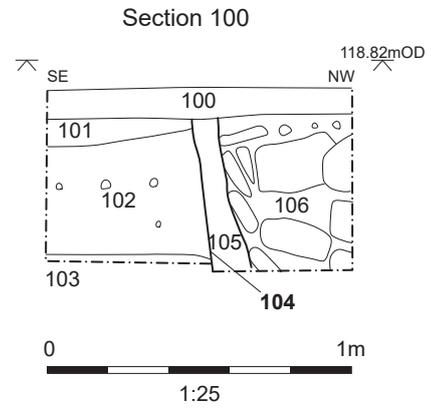
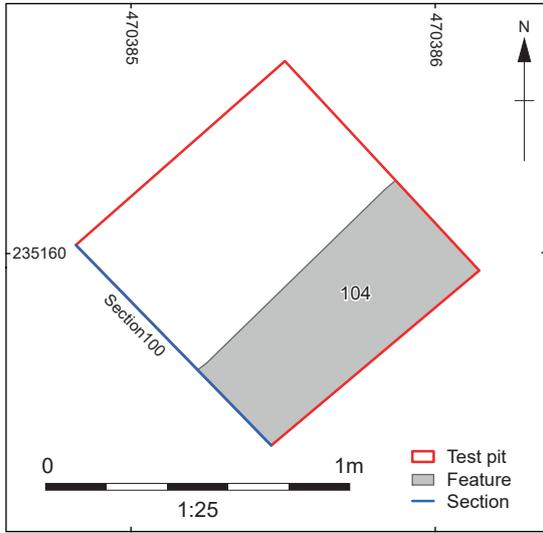
Site name:	Maids Moreton School, Buckinghamshire
Site code:	MAMS19
Grid Reference	SP 70407 35175
Type:	Evaluation
Date and duration:	5 days
Area of Site	740m ²
Location of archive:	The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with the Buckinghamshire County Museum Service in due course, under the following accession number: AYBCM:2020.24.
Summary of Results:	<p>Oxford Archaeology undertook an archaeological evaluation comprising the excavation of 12 test-pits within the footprint of a proposed extension to Maids Moreton Primary School, Buckinghamshire (NGR: SP 70407 35175). The site was divided into two concentrations of test pits, with two located at the front of the school and the remaining 10 at the rear.</p> <p>A single feature of unknown function was identified to the front of the school. The feature contained a mixed rubble fill, including 20th-century brick. The feature cut a made ground deposit thought to be associated with the construction the school in the latter half of the 20th century.</p>



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Figure 1: Site location

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Test-pit 1, view to south-west

Figure 3: Test-pit 1



Plate 1: Test-pit 9, view to north-east



Plate 2: Test-pit 12, view to north-east



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