# DANSON PARK POLLUTION & FLOOD ALLEVIATION SCHEME

# WELLING DA6, KENT

# LONDON BOROUGH OF BEXLEY

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL OBSERVATION AND RECORDING

## ON BEHALF OF THAMES WATER UTILITIES

May 2005

COMPASS  ARCHAEOLOGY

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WELLING DA6, KENT

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SITE CODE: DPK05

SITE CENTRE NGR: TQ 4684 7518

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Project 306

***Abstract***

*Archaeological observation and recording took place in February and March 2005 on the western side of Danson Park, Welling. The programme was carried out during groundworks for a Thames Water sewer and flood alleviation scheme, and in response to recommendations made by English Heritage. In total about 360m of pipe trench excavation were monitored, including preliminary topsoil stripping of the site compound and of corridors* c *6m wide on the line of the proposed trenches.*

*This area has potential for a range of archaeological remains, including prehistoric and Roman material. It was also hoped that there might be evidence for medieval development, predating the Danson Estate.*

*No archaeological finds or features were observed. There was fairly consistent sequence across the site of topsoil and subsoil (*c *400mm thick) over undisturbed natural. The upper soil horizons produced occasional recent finds, mainly ceramics (tile, brick and less frequently 19th and 20th century pottery). In the northeastern corner of the site and adjacent to Danson Lane there was an overlying layer of 20th century made ground, presumably levelling when the stream just to the east was culverted.*

*The underlying natural was generally a firm orange-light brown sandy silt, identified by the Geological Survey Sheet 271 as Blackheath Beds. At a depth of about 0.5m this frequently became much sandier, and at a lower level (*c *1.4m to 1.7m) more gravely.*

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*Figure 1 reproduced from the 1:2500 OS map with the permission of the Ordnance Survey on behalf of the Controller of HMSO. ©Crown Copyright. All rights reserved (Compass Archaeology Ltd., London SE1 1SG, licence no. AL 100031317)*

*Figure 2 based on a Location Plan by Thames Water Utilities (Engineering), Drawing No. 2PWD-A1-02000-IN*

## 1. Introduction

Groundworks for a Thames Water sewer and flood alleviation scheme on the western side of Danson Park, Welling were archaeologically monitored during February and March 2005. The works comprised preliminary topsoil stripping of the site compound and of corridors *c* 6m wide along the line of the proposed pipelines, followed by some 360m of open-cut trenching. The site was divided into two areas, with the principal works taking place along the line of a replacement sewer to the east and a separate clean water pipe to the northwest (Figure 1).

The project was carried out in response to recommendations made by English Heritage, and reflected the archaeological potential of this area for a range of finds from prehistoric to post-medieval date. Palaeo-environmental remains were also possible from the watercourse that flows just to the east of the site.

## 2. Acknowledgements

The archaeological programme was commissioned by Mr Nick Clark, Biodiversity and Heritage Advisor, Environment Group, Thames Water Utilities Limited.

Assistance during the project was also given by representatives of the on-site contractor, Clancy Docwra.

The archaeological measures on this site were supported by Mark Stevenson (English Heritage Greater London Archaeology Advisory Service).

## 3. Location and topography

**3.1** The groundworks were located in open ground on the western side of Danson Park, adjacent to Danson Lane and on a northwest to southeast line over 300m in length (Figure 1: site centred at National Grid Reference TQ 4684 7518).

Topographically the site lies on ground that is gently rising to the northwest, to a maximum of about 40.5m OD. The principal pipe trench was located just to the west of a stream (sometimes referred to as the River Danson) that issues from several closed culverts and flows southward to feed the ornamental lake at the centre of the Park. Land surface levels in this area range from just below 39m OD alongside Danson Lane to a low point of *c* 36.7m OD at the southern limit of excavation.

**3.2** The British Geological Survey (*Sheet 271*) indicates that the site stands on a natural ground surface of disturbed Blackheath Beds, with the higher ground and Danson House itself directly over London Clay.

## 4. Archaeology and history

**4.1** A number of local prehistoric finds are recorded, in particular of Later Bronze and Iron Age date. The site also lies some 600m to the south of the line of Watling Street, which is followed by the present-day A207. There have been numerous Roman finds in association with this route, and there is evidence for a roadside settlement at Welling.

**4.2** The present House was not the first on the estate, and there are references to Danson from the 13th century onward (*The London Encyclopaedia* 1983, 220). Historic plans show that up to the 1760s the House stood some 600m southeast of its present site, close to the river and in an area now covered by the Lake. It is reasonable to assume that this location was maintained from the medieval period onwards.

**4.3** There is no direct evidence for occupation in the area of the present site, although recent observation has suggested that there may be traces of medieval building platforms just to the south (Mark Stevenson, *letter of 3.8.04*).

**4.4** Pre-1760 plans indicate that the site area was open, and apparently outside landscaping development. The *Estate Map* of 1684 shows it as part of a large plot held by several named individuals, and divided by the River from Arleys Wood to the north.

The larger scale *Plan of Danson* of 1753 shows a number of landscape features between the old House and the present site. These comprise, from east to west, a Canal (a length of water presumably formed by damming of the river and reconstruction of the banks), a Basin (perhaps for fish), and a *Chineyes* House. The Canal is also shown on the 1684 plan, but the other features probably date to the second quarter of the 18th century. All three were lost in the remodelling of the 1760s: their western extent appears to be roughly on a line with that of the present Lake, and so outside the site area. A small plot of land beyond the Chinese House is simply marked as 'in the Lease' (*ie,* of the contemporary Danson Estate).

**4.5** The present House, a Grade II listed building of *c* 1762, stands on higher ground some 300m to the east of the site. Subsequent illustrations show the latter area as part of a large open field (for example, the Estate *Sale Plan* of 1805, the *Estate Plan* of 1829-30, the Bexley *Tithe Map* of 1839 and the later OS plans of c. 1860 and 1898). The *Tithe Map* shows the southern part of the river slightly to the east of its present course, and without the separate ponds that now exist.

## 5. Archaeological research questions

The project presented an opportunity to address a number of research questions, as defined in the preliminary *Specification*:

- Is there any evidence for prehistoric or Roman activity, and what is the stratigraphic context and date range?
- Is there any evidence for medieval/early post-medieval activity. Is there any indication whether this relates to the Danson estate or to potentially earlier settlement?
- Is there any evidence for garden design or features, possibly related to the mid 18th century remodelling of the garden and predating the construction of the present house?
- What evidence is there for later land development and usage post-1762?
- What evidence is there for the past river regime, and in particular any earlier channels or changes in course. Does this include environmental remains?

## 6. Methodology

**6.1** A *Specification for a Programme of Archaeological Observation and Recording* was agreed prior to commencement of the fieldwork (Compass Archaeology, Feb. 2005). The programme was also carried out in accordance with guidelines issued by English Heritage and by the Institute of Field Archaeologists.

**6.2** The basic elements of the groundworks were as follows:

- Creation of a site compound adjoining Danson Lane, requiring a topsoil strip prior to rubble surfacing.
- Further topsoil stripping to create an easement corridor along the line of the new pipe trenches.
- Upgrading of *c* 315m of existing sewer pipe, requiring an open-cut trench approximately 1.3m wide and 2.5m deep.
- Installation of a new clean water pipe *c* 50 m in length, trench profile to be as above.

**6.3** The topsoil strip was observed and exposed deposits were examined for finds and/or buried features. Representative samples of the subsequent trench excavation were monitored and exposed surfaces recorded by scaled drawing, supplemented by 35mm photography. Individual elements were described on the drawings but did not produce any significant finds and were not separately contexted. Levels were derived from an OSBM located on the southeast corner of No. 111 Danson Crescent, value 40.77m OD (see Fig 2).

The groundworks and recorded sections were located onto the existing site survey by taped measurement: this was in turn related as a 'best fit' to the Ordnance Survey grid as derived from the 1:2500 plan (Fig 1).

**6.4** The records from the evaluation have been allocated the site code: DPK05 by the Museum of London Archaeological Archive. An ordered and indexed site archive will be compiled in line with the MoL *Guidelines* and will be deposited in the Museum of London Archive.

## 7. The archaeological fieldwork

For descriptive purposes the groundworks can be divided into two distinct phases: the initial topsoil strip of the site compound and along the line of the proposed pipelines, and the subsequent narrower but much deeper excavation of the pipe trenches.

### 7.1 The topsoil strip *(Figures 2-4)*

Initial topsoil stripping took place within the site compound in the northeast of the site, an area of approximately 12m by 25m in plan. This was followed by a corridor along the line of the replacement sewer on the eastern side of the site, about 6m wide by 300m in length. At a later date a separate area of *c* 7m by 50m in plan was stripped on the line of the proposed clean water pipe to the northwest.

The topsoil strip was quite shallow, typically 180mm to 300mm in depth, and removed the existing turf, dark sand/silt topsoil and generally the upper level of the subsoil. In most areas the strip exposed a surface of light-coloured and fairly clean sandy silt, although with some evidence of root action, reworking and occasional finds. The main exception to this was in the compound area to the northeast, where the land surface had been progressively levelled up to the east by recent (probably earlier to mid 20th century) made ground. This clearly reflects the line of the historic stream flowing in from Danson Lane, which in this area is now culverted and capped by a concrete slab. The overall depth of made ground was not determined but to the east was clearly in excess of 300mm.

The few finds that were produced by the topsoil strip consisted mainly of small fragments of ceramic building material (brick, roof tile and very rarely drain pipe), plus occasional sherds of 19th to 20th century pottery. There were also some small pieces of coal, five short lengths of clay tobacco pipe stem (<45mm), and from the northwestern part of the site one fragment of slag (*c* 40mm by 25mm). None of these finds were associated with discrete features or deposits and they have not been retained.

### 7.2 The pipe trench excavations *(Figures 5-9)*

Following the topsoil strip excavation of the principal (sewer replacement) pipe trench proceeded from the southern end of the site. The trench was generally about 1.35m wide and from 2.2m to 2.5m deep, although at a few points (F1-F7 on Figure 2) between 2m and 4m wide.

The subsoil deposit previously exposed in plan could now be seen in section as a fairly consistent layer of mid to light grey-brown sandy silt with occasional small pebbles, some 150mm to 200mm thick. The layer produced a few finds, similar to those noted above and including some commonly occurring pottery of broadly later 18th to early 20th century date: creamware, English stoneware, refined white earthenware and transfer printed ware. Additionally eight isolated pieces of burnt flint were recovered, of approximately 20mm to 40mm diameter. However, there were no significant finds nor any cut features or other remains.

The subsoil became cleaner and slightly lighter with depth and in all areas overlay a firm and homogeneous light orange-brown sandy silt, which is identified from the Geological Survey as the top of the Blackheath Beds. In several areas this deposit continued to the base of the trench, although it frequently became more sandy at a depth of between

0.45m and 0.65m. In several areas on the eastern side of the site a further change was noted at about 1.40m to 1.75m, to a much more gravely deposit within a matrix that varied from clay-silt to very sandy silt (*cf.* Figure 7).

## 8. Assessment of the results

The archaeological fieldwork has provided an opportunity to address the site-specific objectives that were defined within the preliminary *Written Scheme* (5. above). The responses are outlined below:

- *Is there any evidence for prehistoric or Roman activity, and what is the stratigraphic context and date range?*

There was no evidence for any prehistoric or Roman activity, nor were any residual artefacts recovered.

- *Is there any evidence for medieval/early post-medieval activity. Is there any indication whether this relates to the Danson estate or to potentially earlier settlement?*

There was no evidence for any medieval or early post-medieval occupation or activity. It is assumed that there was some land use, although perhaps only as pasture.

- *Is there any evidence for garden design or features, possibly related to the mid 18th century remodelling of the garden and predating the construction of the present house?*

There was no evidence for garden or landscape features. The *Plan of Danson* of 1753 suggests that much of the present site area was outside the Estate, and that there was perhaps only a small area to the south which was held by lease.

- *What evidence is there for later land development and usage post-1762?*

The only general evidence for post-1762 land use was provided by occasional finds within the topsoil and subsoil horizons, principally small fragments of brick and tile plus a few sherds of 19th and 20th century pottery. Further evidence was limited to modern cut features for drainage and other services.

- *What evidence is there for the past river regime, and in particular any earlier channels or changes in course. Does this include environmental remains?*

There was no evidence for past changes in the river regime, with the exception of recent culverting and levelling of adjacent ground within the northern part of the site. Nor was there any sign of alluvial deposits that may have been deposited in the past, even on the lower ground to the south.

## 9. Conclusions

The archaeological fieldwork did not reveal any significant features or finds. There was no evidence of past human activity, with the exception of occasional finds of probable late 18th and 19th century date within the reworked soil horizons.

Similarly there was no palaeo-environmental evidence, despite the proximity of a watercourse to the main pipe trench. The soil horizons consistently overlay a clean natural deposit at a depth of about 0.4m.

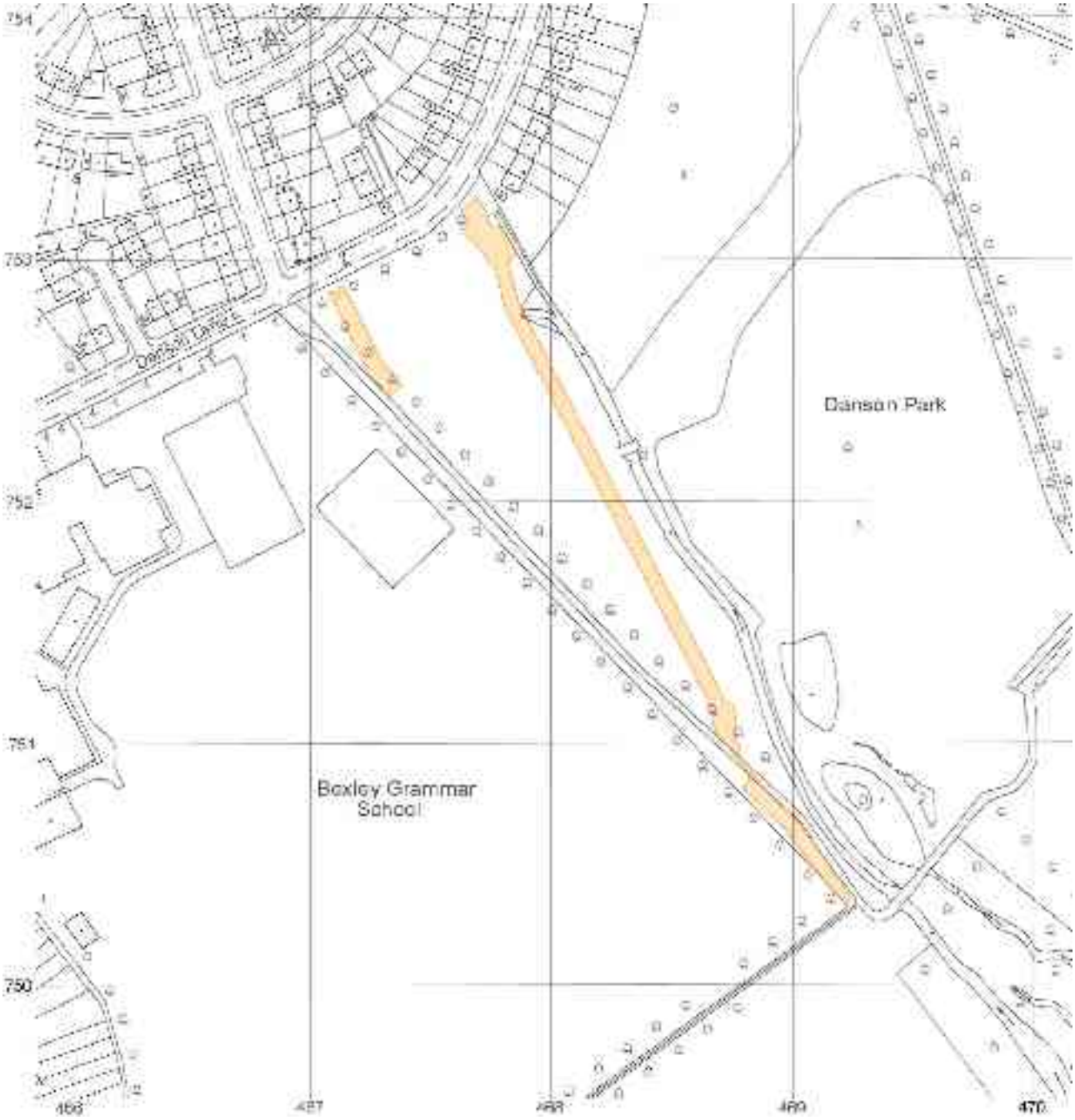


Fig 1 Areas of groundworks (shaded orange) in relation to the 1:2500 Ordnance Survey map

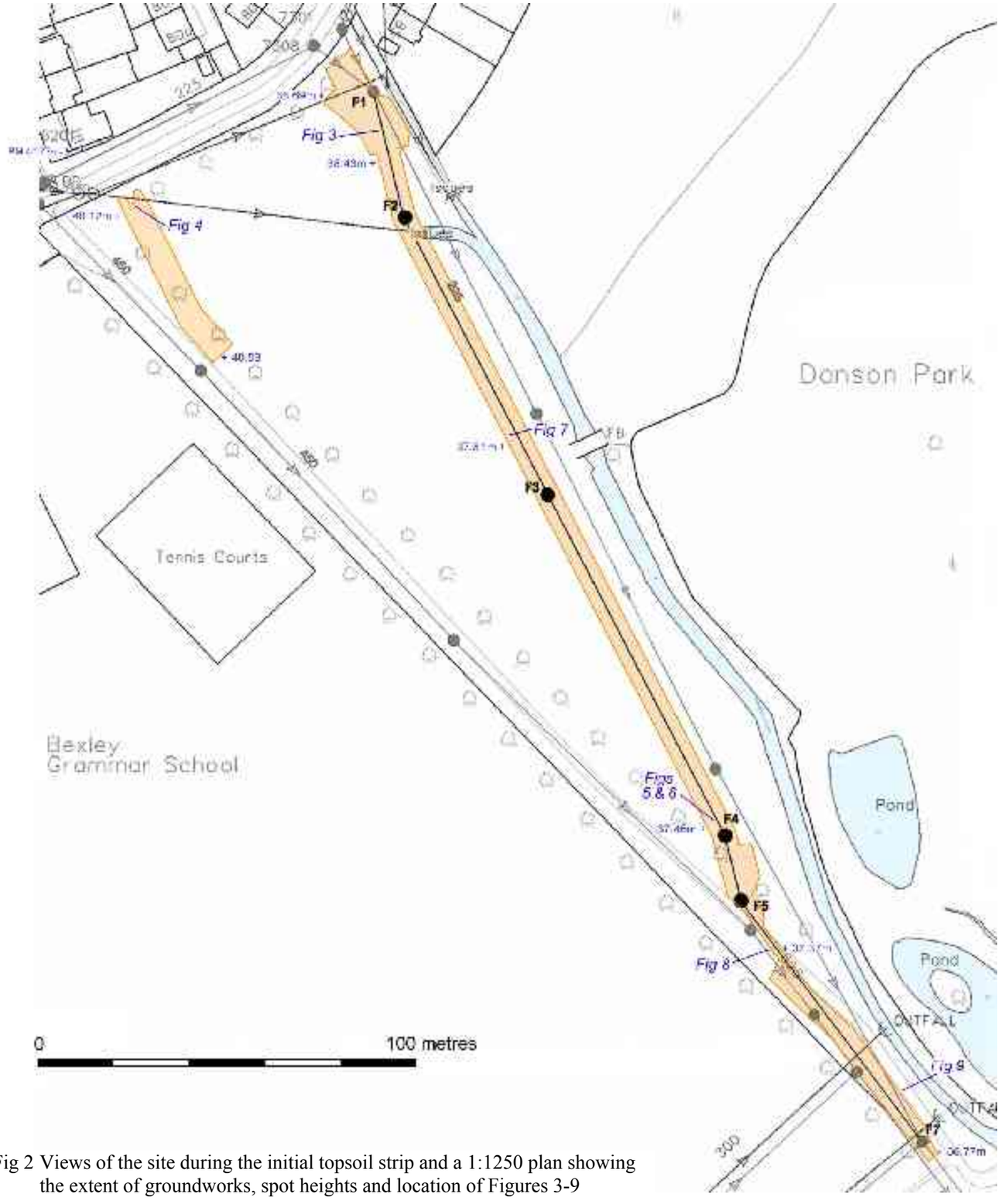


Fig 2 Views of the site during the initial topsoil strip and a 1:1250 plan showing the extent of groundworks, spot heights and location of Figures 3-9

Fig 3 View looking east across the southern end of the site compound. The line of the culverted stream is marked by a concrete slab which is just visible below the fence line

Fig 4 View at the northwestern corner of the site, looking east after topsoil stripping for the clean water pipe installation. This area is crossed by a modern east-west drain, identified by the lighter gravely deposit below the 0.5m scale *(see Fig 2 for location)*

Fig 5 View of the sewer pipe trench excavation at point F4, looking southeast

Fig 6 Detail of the exposed section seen in the foreground of Figure 5. A shallow layer of disturbed subsoil overlies natural: the latter changes from firm sandy silt to a lighter, much more sandy deposit at *c* 36.4m OD (approx. the top of the 0.5m scale)

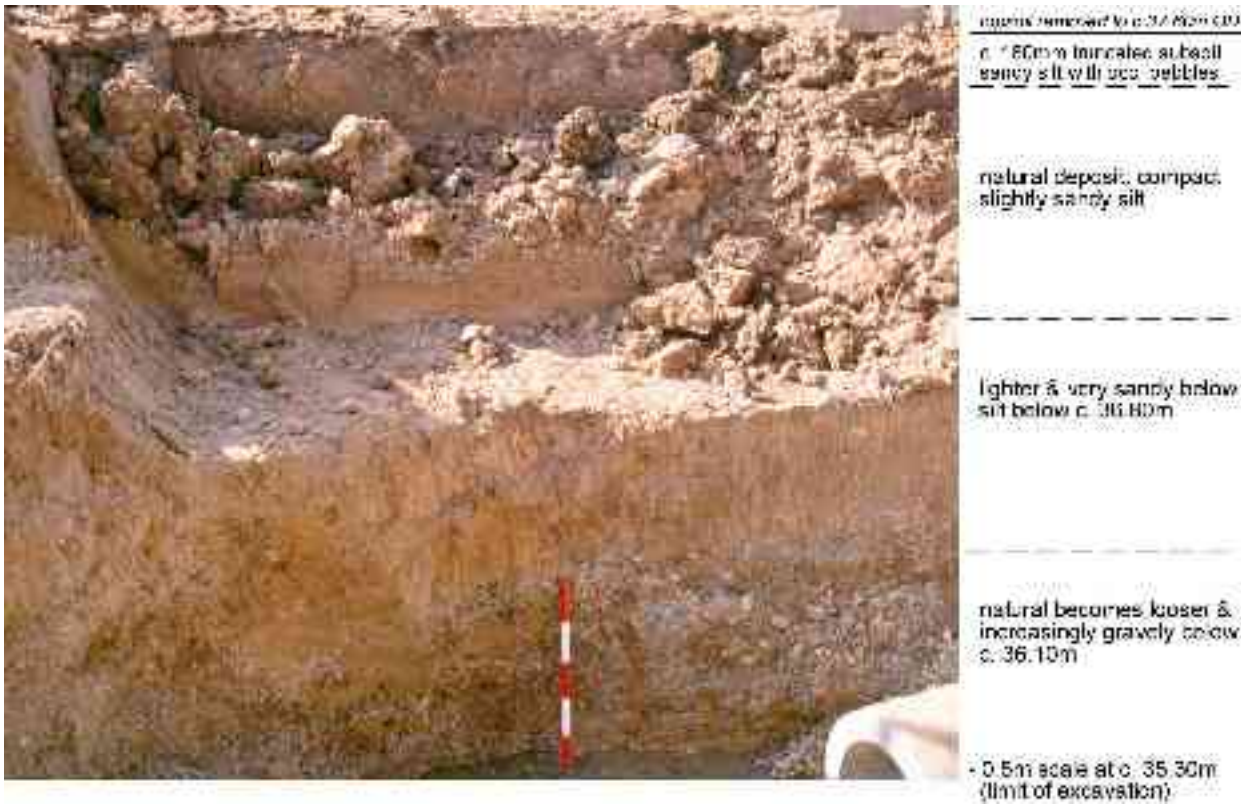


Fig 7 View of the pipe trench excavation close to point F3, looking northwest


Fig 8 The eastern side of the pipe trench crossing the pedestrian path *(see Fig 2 for location)*

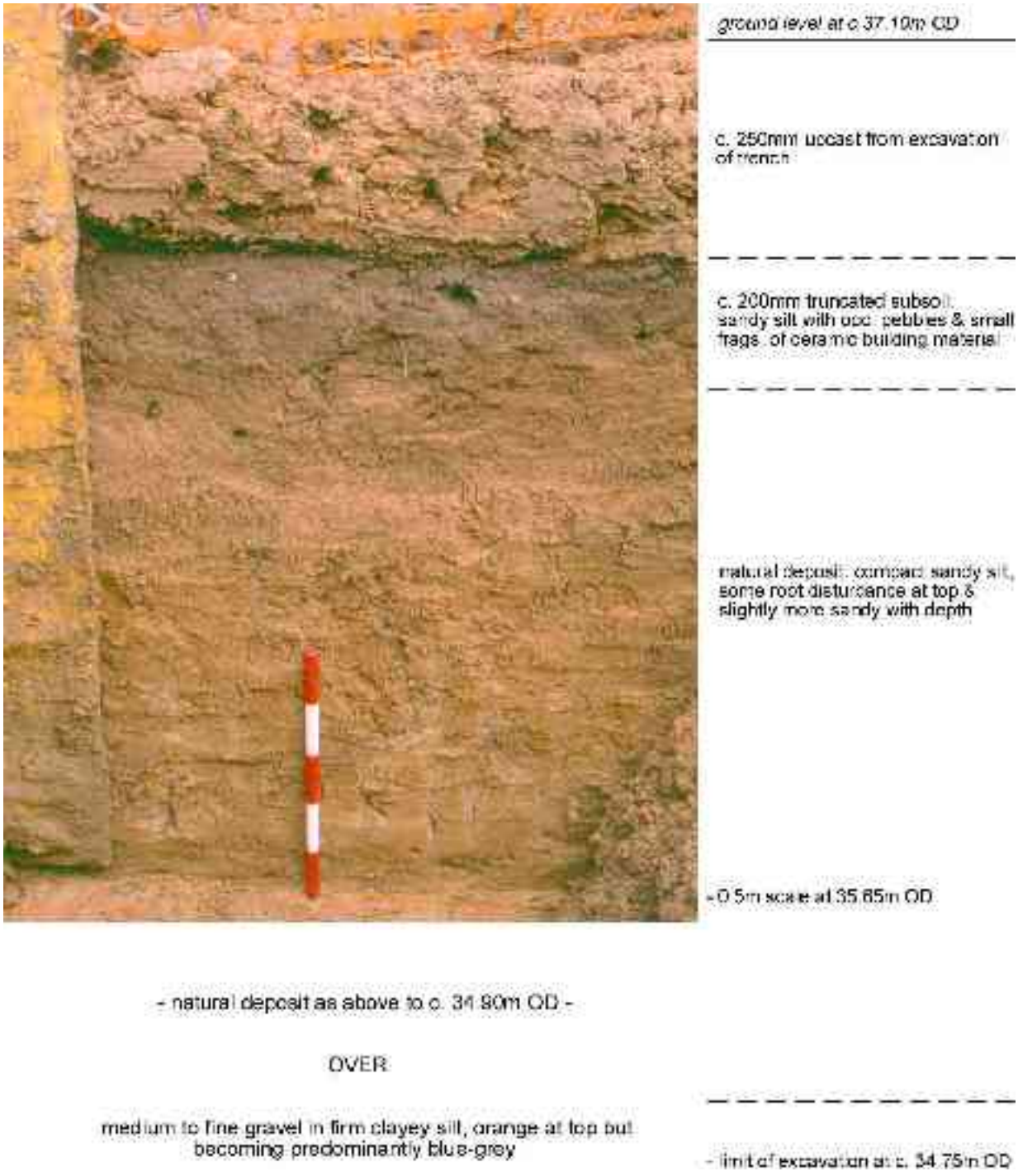


Fig 9 The eastern side of the pipe trench near the southern limit of excavation *(see Fig 2 for location)*

## Appendix I. London Archaeologist publication summary

**Danson Park (adjacent Danson Lane), Welling DA6**. NGR: TQ 4684 7518. CA (Geoff Potter). Watching brief. Feb-March 2005. Thames Water Utilities. DPK05

### Summary

Observations during topsoil stripping and *c* 360m of pipe trench excavation did not reveal any remains. A soil profile some 400mm thick overlay undisturbed natural, with surface levels of *c* 37.0m to 40.5m OD. The soils produced occasional 19th century pottery.

The natural was a firm light brown sandy silt, becoming sandier and more gravely with depth (identified as Blackheath Beds by the Geological Survey Sheet 271).