

**83-85 WATLING STREET,
BEXLEYHEATH, DA6 7QJ:
AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL
EVALUATION**



**LONDON BOROUGH OF
BEXLEY**

SITE CODE: WSB15

REPORT NO: R12109



MAY 2015



**PRE-CONSTRUCT
ARCHAEOLOGY**

83-85 Watling Street, Bexleyheath, DA6 7QJ, An Archaeological Evaluation

Site Code: WSB15

Central National Grid Reference: TQ 5008 7501

Planning Reference: 15/00028/FUL

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DOCUMENT VERIFICATION


Site Name

83-85 Watling Street, Bexleyheath, DA6 7QJ

Type of project

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

Quality Control

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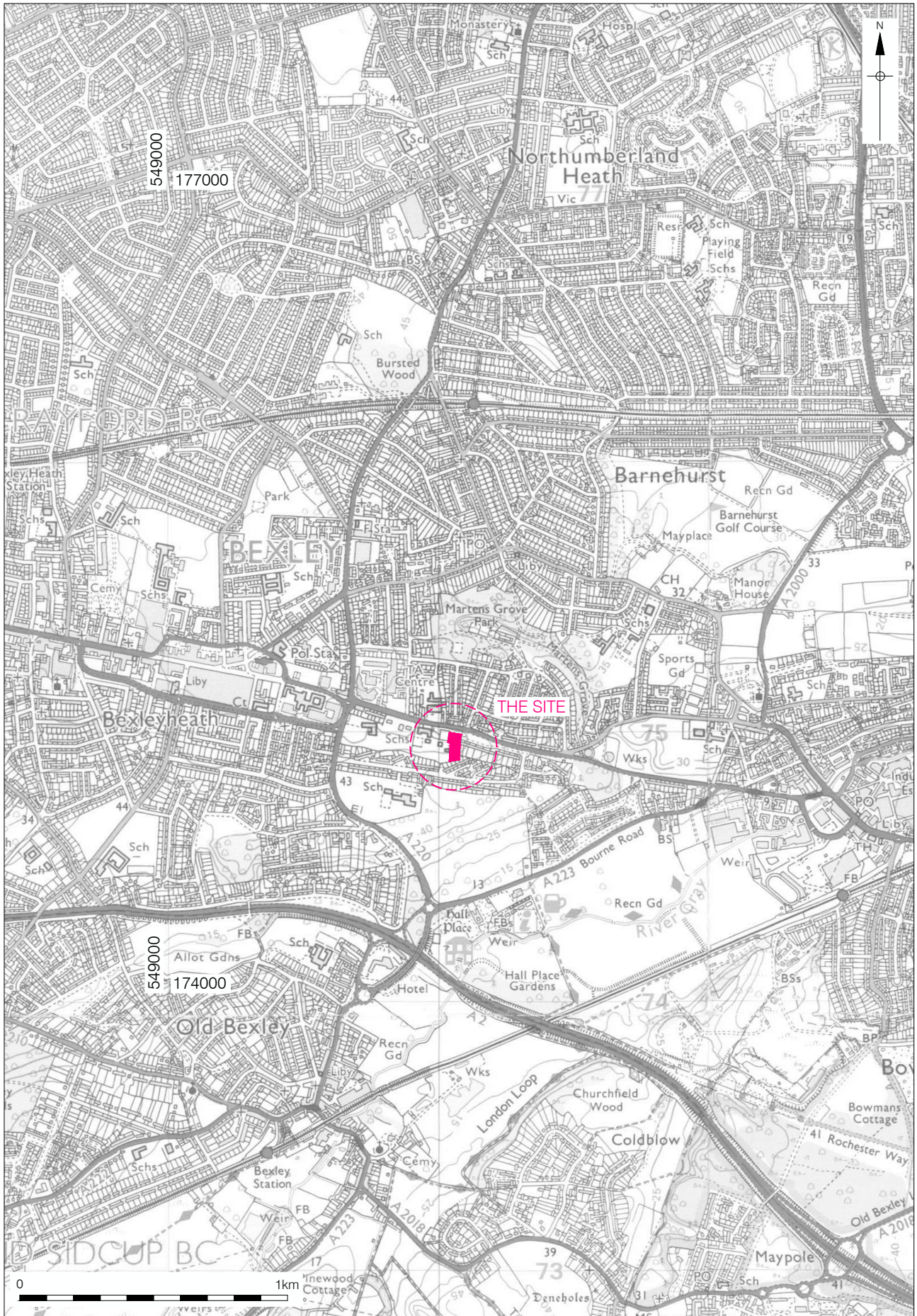
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1 ABSTRACT

- 1.1 An archaeological evaluation was undertaken by Pre-Construct Archaeology Limited between 11th and 12th May 2015 at 83-85 Watling Street, Bexleyheath, DA6 7QJ.
- 1.2 Two archaeological evaluation trenches were excavated within an area of open ground upon the study site. The aim of the archaeological evaluation was to evaluate the archaeological potential of the site, to determine the presence or absence of any surviving archaeology and how the proposed works would or would not affect those remains.
- 1.3 The evaluation identified that early 20th century terracing of the site had severely truncated the archaeological horizon. The only archaeological feature observed was a 20th Century flower bed associated with the current building on the site.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 An archaeological evaluation was undertaken by Pre-Construct Archaeology Limited between 11th and 12th May 2015 at 83-85 Watling Street, Bexleyheath, (Figure 1). The project was designed and managed by Helen Hawkins of Pre-Construct Archaeology Ltd and was commissioned by the Building Construction Partnership Ltd. The site was supervised by Guy Seddon.
- 2.2 The evaluation was conducted prior to the re-development of a nursing home. Two care home buildings were present on the site. The southernmost one was demolished prior to the evaluation taking place, and is to be redeveloped to extend over the central part of the site where the evaluation trenches were located.
- 2.3 The site was located to the south of Watling Street and was centred on National Grid Reference TQ 5008 7501.

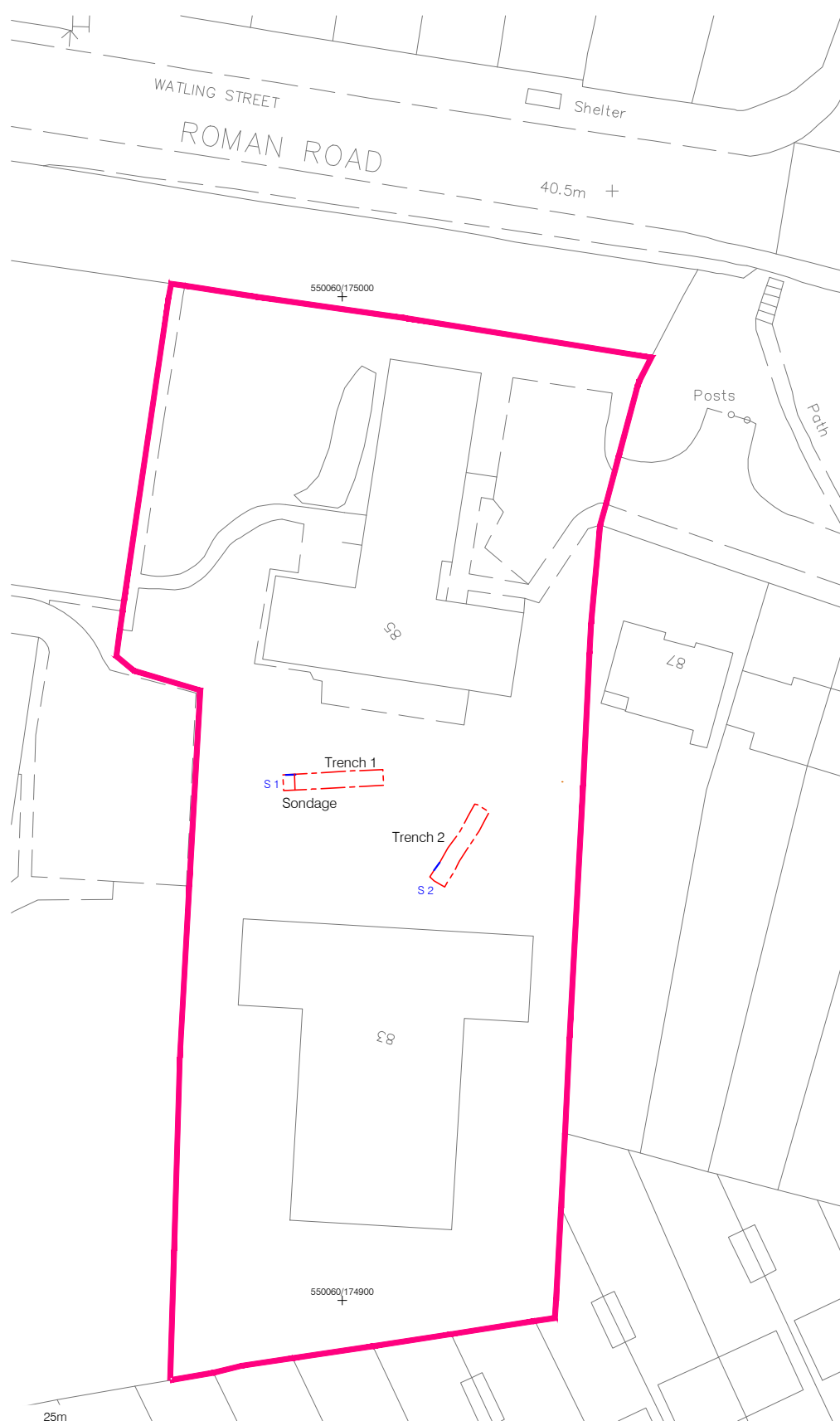


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Figure 1
Site Location
1:20,000 at A4



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Figure 2
 Trench Location
 1:625 at A4

3 METHODOLOGY

- 3.1 The evaluation was conducted according to the Written Scheme of Investigation¹ prepared by Helen Hawkins of Pre-Construct Archaeology Ltd. The fieldwork was designed to assess the presence or absence of significant archaeological remains, which might require further investigation.
- 3.2 Two trenches were excavated, one in a garden area and the other in a car park area, both located in the centre of the site where the main ground reduction area for the new development is proposed.
- 3.3 A wheeled mechanical excavator fitted with a 1.8m wide flat ditching bucket was used under archaeological supervision to remove non-archaeological soils down to the highest archaeological horizon or natural level. Trench 1 measured 10m in length and Trench 2 measured 7.5m. Both trenches were 1.8m wide.
- 3.4 Following the opening of the trenches they were cleaned by hand and inspected for archaeological finds and features. The trenches were then recorded using pro-forma sheets and all deposits were given individual context numbers.
- 3.5 The survey and heights above Ordnance Datum for Trench 1 were carried out on site by use of a GPS. Trench 2 was planned by hand using a baseline that had been set out with the GPS.
- 3.6 Upon the completion of the archaeological work the trench was backfilled under archaeological supervision.

¹ Hawkins 2015

4 PLANNING BACKGROUND

- 4 . 1 A planning condition (Condition 5) referring to archaeology was attached to the site. In pursuance of condition 05, it was recommended by the archaeological adviser to the London Borough of Bexley, that a programme of trial trench evaluation was undertaken to test the archaeological potential of the site.

5 GEOLOGICAL AND TOPOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND

5.1 Geology

- 5.1.1 The Geological Survey map of the area indicated the site was underlain by the Harwich Formation. The geotechnical investigations on the site indicated that in the area between the two care homes, between 0.6 and 0.75m of made ground was present, overlying sand.

5.2 Topography

- 5.2.1 The surrounding area and site slope downwards toward the east and north. However it is apparent that these slopes were excavated in the recent past as there were retaining walls present and there was also a slope on the northern boundary with Watling Street which also appears to have been more recently excavated. There were numerous immature to mature deciduous and coniferous trees located around the site, mainly along the northern, eastern and southern site boundaries.

6 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

6.1 The archaeological and historical background is taken from a desk based assessment for a site at Harcourt Road, to the west of the current site (Boyer 2004).

6.2 The archaeology of the Bexley area from the prehistoric to Saxon periods has been recorded in some detail. Prehistoric finds from the Palaeolithic to the Iron Age have been recorded throughout the Borough of Bexley, though these have tended to be chance finds, particularly those recovered during quarrying operations, rather than from formal archaeological interventions.

6.3 Prehistoric

6.3.1 Little material has been recovered in the Bexleyheath area itself, though a few chance finds of Neolithic material are recorded within a 1000m radius of the study site. In 1961 a Neolithic borer was found at 192 Woolwich Road, and part of an axe or chisel was found in 1954 at 32 Chestnut Drive. In 1878 or 1883 a hoard of seven axes was found at Mount Road.

6.3.2 A number of archaeological features of unknown date but of probable prehistoric origin have also been recorded in the area. At the Broadway Shopping Centre, a linear ditch and a ring ditch were identified. At 315-321 Broadway, a ditch containing a single flint flake was identified and a further ditch was identified at the former Astor Cinema on Mayplace Road. A poorly-cast bronze object of possible Bronze Age date was recorded at the site of the Bexleyheath Labour Exchange.

6.4 Roman

6.4.1 There has been no conclusive evidence of Roman settlement in the immediate area of Bexleyheath. However the study site lies directly to the south of the major Roman Road known as Watling Street. This road ran from the Kent coast, through London and on to the Legionary fort at Chester. The road is recorded by Hasted in 1798 as being plainly visible running across Bexley Heath and through to Welling and it was also observed by Stukeley at Shooters Hill. Broadway now follows a similar line of the Roman road, but probably lies to the north of it. The Roman road would have been constructed with compacted gravel or paving stones, atop a raised bank or *agger* with ditches running parallel at either side. The road itself is unlikely to survive due to the construction of the current surface. However, it is possible that remnants of the ditches survive.

6.4.2 Smaller roads, along the shortest and most direct routes, linked Canterbury and the Roman harbours. These include Reculver (Regulium) to the north, Richborough (Rutupiae) and Dover (Dubris) to the east and Lympne to the south.

6.4.3 The alignment of Watling Street has also been ascertained during archaeological work in the area. An evaluation in 1995 at 131 Broadway, revealed the possible south roadside ditch of the Roman road. A residual coin was also found on a site at 28-70 Broadway in 1996. Further afield, a number of burials have been recorded close to the road, for example at Welling, Crayford and East Wickham, though no roadside examples are recorded in Bexleyheath.

6.4.4 Chance finds of Roman material have also been recorded within a 1km radius of the study site. A Roman coin was found a short distance to the west of the site and coins have been recorded from near the Golden Lion public house, a short distance to the west of the study site. At the former Sheldons Farm at Long Lane a cremation burial was disturbed during development in 1934.

6.5 Saxon

6.5.1 There is no archaeological evidence for Anglo-Saxon activity in the area. This is possibly due to the lack of archaeological investigation using modern methods, rather than there being no occupation at that time.

6.5.2 The earliest documentary evidence for Bexley comes from the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle dating from AD 814, which records Cenwulf of Mercia granting Archbishop Wulfred “ten ploughlands in the place called Bexley”. The document also describes the boundaries of Bexley at this time. Bexley is recorded in Domesday Book as *Bix* and belonging to the Archbishop of Canterbury. It had a church, three mills, eight acres of meadow, enough woodland to feed a hundred pigs and ploughland. None of these documents makes any reference to settlement on the Bexley Heath.

6.6 Medieval

6.6.1 By the end of the 12th century the village of (Old) Bexley had become established, with outlying settlements at Hurst, Blendon, Danson, Upton and Welling. There is no evidence to suggest that any settlement was established on the Bexley Heath at this time, instead it was probably common land, providing rough pasture resources. However there was a manor at least by the 13th century called “Densynton”, worked by tenants of the Archbishop of Canterbury. This was centred upon the area now called Danson Park.

6.7 Post-Medieval

6.7.1 The Bexley Heath is shown as an undeveloped tract of land next to the Roman road both on Andrews, Dury & Herbert’s map of Kent, 1769 and on Hasted’s 1778 map of the Hundreds of Little and Lesnes and Dartford and Wilmington. In the middle of the 18th century the road had been taken over by the New Cross Turnpike Trust, which straightened the road (a number of deviations in the line of the Roman road had developed over the previous centuries) and improved its surface.

6.7.2 Before the beginning of the 19th century, much of Bexley Heath remained as an undeveloped tract of land covering some 300 acres, although squatters, classed as *sojourners* in the Bexley parish records, had begun to live in huts upon the heath by this time. Some of these people earned a living by making baskets and brushes from local materials, but most were attracted from the surrounding area by the employment opportunities of the fabric-printing industry of Crayford, where there was no room to house them.

6.7.3 The heath was enclosed by Acts of Parliament in the second decade of the 19th century and land granted to a number of private landowners. This rapidly led to development along either side of the Roman road. A parish survey of 1816 noted 12 cottages on the heath, by 1822 there were 18 cottages and 100 houses, and by 1837, 170 cottages and 100 houses. No water was available and a number of deep wells were excavated.

6.7.4 Pigot’s Directories of 1832 and 1840 noted that houses had been built on both sides of the Roman road within a short period of time. They mentioned the ‘healthful and pleasing situation’ and a provision market held on Saturdays. A market house was built at Market Place by 1831 and a chapel of ease was built in 1835.

6.7.5 The first map studied, dated 1869, show the site to be covered with trees as part of a wood named Gibbet Spring; Watling Street is shown directly to the north of the site. Between 1894 and 1897 a large building was constructed directly to the west of the site and is labelled as Stoneyhurst. At this time some outbuildings, which appear to be associated with Stoneyhurst, had been constructed on the eastern and central parts of the site. Between 1950 and 1961 Stoneyhurst has become part of St Catherine’s R C Secondary School, and the surrounding area was developed with houses. The maps show the outbuildings to have been extended in the centre of the site until they were demolished between 1966 and 1972, when a single building is shown in the northern half of the site. This was extended between 1975 and 1983 and another building was built in the southern half of the site between 1992 and 2006, by which time the site was in the existing layout.

7 ARCHAEOLOGICAL DESCRIPTION

7.1 Trench 1

Phase 1: Natural

7.1.1 The earliest horizons encountered within this trench were the natural gravels [2] of the Harwich Formation that formed the basal limit of excavation. The gravels were composed of loosely compacted mid yellow and reddish brown gravel within a slightly sandy matrix and were located at a height of between 45.87m OD in the west and 45.21m OD in the east.

7.2 Phase 2: Modern

7.2.1 Cutting into the natural gravel at the eastern end of the trench was a brick-lined flowerbed dating to the late 20th Century, associated with the current care home on the study site. Sealing this was a layer of topsoil [1]. The lack of any subsoil between the topsoil and the natural indicates that the topsoil was probably re-laid during landscaping on site.

7.3 Trench 2

Phase 1: Natural

7.3.1 The natural deposits within Trench 2 [3], were the same sands and gravel as described in Trench 1 and lay at between 45.21m OD to the south of the trench and 45.49m OD to the north.

7.4 Phase 2: Modern

7.4.1 The natural deposits in Trench 2 were directly overlain by a layer of crush, used as bedding for a tarmac surface.

8 THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SEQUENCE

8.1 Phase 1: Natural

8.1.1 The natural gravel deposits [2] and [3] that underlay the site were exposed in both trenches with levels ranging from 45.21m OD in the south-east to 45.87m OD in the north-west.

8.1.2 The difference in the height of the gravels between the two trenches illustrates the terracing that took place upon the site during the construction of the current day care home. It was apparent that any archaeological horizon in the area of Trench 2 had been totally removed and it was likely that a similar event had taken place in the area of Trench 1.

8.2 Phase 2: Modern

8.2.1 Directly overlying the natural gravels in Trench 1 was a layer of topsoil which was probably re-laid during garden landscaping within the grounds of the care home. The area of Trench 2 had been terraced and laid with hardcore bedding for a tarmac surface associated with the care home.

9 INTERPRETATION AND CONCLUSIONS

9.1 The following research objectives were put forth in the Written Scheme of Investigation and these can now be addressed:

9.1.1 *To determine the natural topography and geology of the site, and the height at which it survives.*

The natural topography of the site appears to have been terraced out to varying degrees during the construction of the care home. The initial indication of this is that although the study site is located upon the side of a steep hill, remarkably flat areas are visible across the study area. These areas contain the two buildings of the care home and areas of associated road ways and parking. The area of Trench 2 lay within a tarmaced, parking area and the archaeological horizon had been completely removed, while the absence of any subsoil in the garden area where Trench 1 was located indicates that the area was stripped and re-laid during landscaping associated with the construction of the care home. In Trench 1 the natural deposits were located at between 45.87m OD to the west of the trench and 45.21m OD to the east. The natural deposits in Trench 2 fell from 45.49m OD in the north to 45.21m OD in the south.

9.1.2 *To establish the presence or absence of prehistoric and Roman activity.*

There was no evidence of prehistoric or Roman activity on the site.

9.1.3 *To establish the presence or absence of medieval activity.*

There was no evidence of medieval activity on the site.

9.1.4 *To establish the presence or absence of post-medieval activity at the site.*

There was no evidence of post-medieval activity on the site.

9.1.5 *To establish the nature, date and survival of activity relating to any archaeological periods at the site.*

There was no evidence of any archaeological period on the site.

9.1.6 *To establish the extent of all past post-depositional impacts on the archaeological resource.*

It is apparent from the work of the evaluation that the post depositional impacts have had a severe effect on the preservation of any archaeology that may have been present on the study site. It is evident that the terracing of the hillside for the construction of the care home and the associated landscaping for the gardens in the late 20th Century had an extremely detrimental effect upon the archaeological horizon, with a very good chance that it was totally removed across the study site.

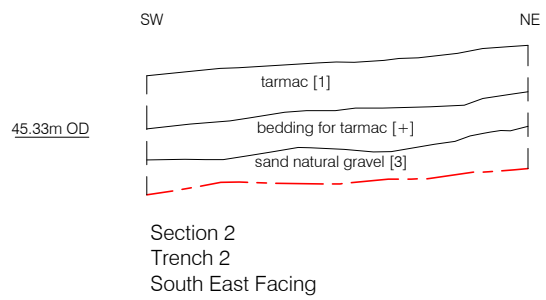
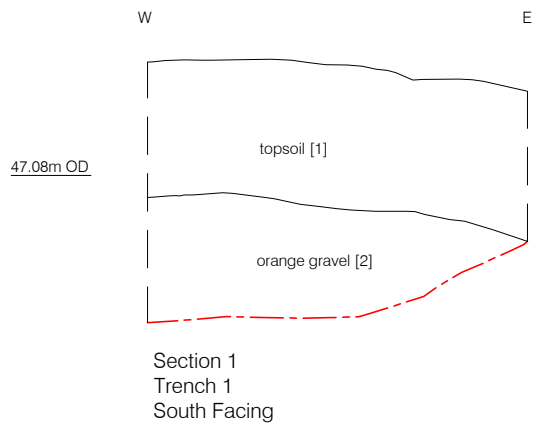


Figure 3
Sections 1-2
1:20 at A4

PLATES:



Plate 1: Trench 1. Looking East



Plate 2: Section 1, Trench1. Looking North



Plate 3: Trench 2. Looking North



Plate 4: Section 2, Trench 2. Looking West

10 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- 10.1 Pre-Construct Archaeology Limited would like to thank the Building Construction Partnerships Ltd for commissioning the work. We would also like to thank Mark Stevenson of Historic England for his help in monitoring the project on behalf of the London Borough of Bexley.
- 10.2 The author would like to thank Lauren Neal for her help in the field, Richard Archer for the survey, Sophie White and Samuel Burke for organising the logistics, Ray Murphy for the illustrations and Helen Hawkins for her project management and editing.

11 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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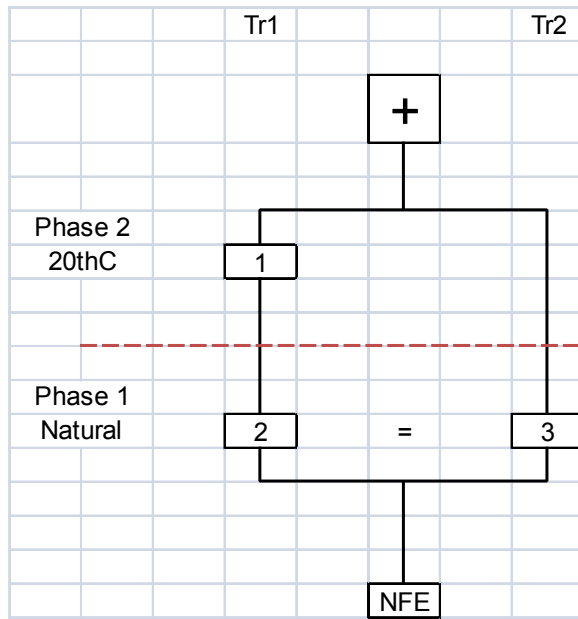
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APPENDIX 1: CONTEXT INDEX

Site Code	Context No.	Trench	Plan	Section / Elevation	Type	Description	Date	Phase
WSB15	1	1	Tr1	1	Layer	Topsoil	20thC	2
WSB15	2	1	Tr1	1	Layer	Natural Gravels	Natural	1
WSB15	3	2	Tr2	2	Layer	Natural Gravels	Natural	1

APPENDIX 2: SITE MATRIX



APPENDIX 3: OASIS FORM

OASIS ID: preconst1-211099

Project details

Project name 35-38 Watling Street, Bexley Heath, DA6 7QJ; An Archaeological Evaluation

Short description of the project Two archaeological evaluation trenches were excavated within an area of open ground upon the study site. The aim of the archaeological evaluation was to evaluate the archaeological potential of the site, to determine the presence or absence of any surviving archaeology and how the proposed works would or would not affect those remains. The evaluation witnessed that early 20th century terracing of the site had severely truncated the archaeological horizon, the only feature observed was a 20th Century flower bed associated with the current building on the site.

Project dates Start: 11-05-2015 End: 12-05-2015

Previous/future work No / No

Any associated project reference codes WSB15 - Sitecode

Type of project Field evaluation

Site status None

Current Land use Residential 2 - Institutional and communal accommodation

Monument type NONE None

Significant Finds NONE None

Methods & techniques "Sample Trenches"

Development type Urban residential (e.g. flats, houses, etc.)

Prompt Planning condition

Position in the planning process After full determination (eg. As a condition)

Project location

Country England

Site location GREATER LONDON BEXLEY BEXLEYHEATH 83-85 Watling Street

Postcode DA6 7QJ

Site coordinates TQ 5008 7501 51.4536374005 0.160271567552 51 27 13 N 000 09 36 E Point

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Project supervisor Guy Seddon

Type of Developer
sponsor/funding
body

Name of Building Construction Partnership Ltd
sponsor/funding
body

Project archives

Physical Archive No
Exists?

Digital Archive LAARC
recipient

Digital Contents "Stratigraphic","Survey"

Digital Media "Database","Images raster / digital
available photography","Spreadsheets","Survey","Text"

Paper Archive LAARC
recipient

Paper Contents "Stratigraphic", "Survey"

Paper available Media "Context sheet", "Drawing", "Photograph", "Plan", "Report", "Section", "Survey", "Unpublished Text"

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