SMR 26815 SW 8065 DC 474.2 ACT 03/01377/0



Archaeological Excavation

The High School for Girls Denmark Road Gloucester

For The Governors of The High School



Richard Barrett Archaeology Service Environment Directorate

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Site details

Site address:

The High School for Girls, Denmark Road, Gloucester, Gloucestershire.

OS NGR:

383829 219363

Site type:

Excavation

Client:

The Governors of The High School

Planning Application No:

03/01377/DCC

Development & Control No:

474.2

GSMR No:

26815

Date of fieldwork:

1st - 10th June 2004

Recipient museum:

Gloucester City Museum and Art Gallery

Accession No:

GLRCM 2004/35

Archived finds:

Yes

Author:

Richard Barrett

Date of Report:

January 2005

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Summary

Gloucestershire County Council Archaeology Service were commissioned by the Head Teacher of The High School for Girls on behalf of the school governors, to carry out an excavation at The High School for Girls, Denmark Road, Gloucestershire (OS NGR 383829 219363). The excavation was carried as a condition of planning permission (03/01377/DCC) for new classrooms at the school.

The evidence from the excavation has indicated activity relating to possible occupation of the area dating from the 1st century AD on the northern side of Ermin Street and to the east of the 1st century fort at Kingsholm. Three features had survived the post-medieval truncation of the site, the main feature being a probable well, and the excavation of these has provided a greater understanding of Roman activity in the area.

1 Introduction

- 1.1 Gloucestershire County Council Archaeological Service (GCCAS) were commissioned by the Head Teacher of The High School for Girls on behalf of the school governors, to carry out an excavation at The High School for Girls, Denmark Road, Gloucestershire (OS NGR 383829 219363). The excavation was carried out as a condition of planning permission (03/01377/DCC) for new classrooms at the school. Richard Barrett, Paul Nichols and Tony Morris, Assistant Project Officers and Neil Wright, Senior Site Assistant of GCCAS carried out the site work between the 1st 10th June 2004.
- 1.2 The excavation was completed in accordance with the requirements of the 'Brief for a programme of archaeological recording' issued by the Senior Archaeology Officer at Gloucestershire County Council. The specific requirements for the excavation were detailed in the project design (Vallender 2004), informed by a desk based assessment (Mullin 2004). The excavation was also carried out in accordance with the 'Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Field Excavations' produced by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA 2001). The Archaeology Service is an Institute of Field Archaeologists, Registered Archaeological Organisation (IFA RAO 42).
- 1.3 Thanks are due to: Staff and pupils at The High School for Girls; Richard Hyett at W.S. Atkins; Steve Cox at Beam Construction; David Mullin for the flint report; Fiona Roe for the stone report; Jane Timby for the pottery report, Charlotte O'Brien for the environmental sample report; Toby Catchpole and Jo Vallender, Senior Project Officers of GCCAS, Paul Nichols and Tony Morris, Assistant Project Officers and Neil Wright, Senior Site Assistant of GCCAS; and Gloucestershire Sites and Monuments Record (GSMR) for providing background information.

1.4 Purpose of the excavation

In the IFA document referred to at 1.2 above:

The purpose of the excavation was "to examine the archaeological resource within a given area or site within a framework of defined research objectives, to seek a better understanding of and compile a lasting record of that resource, to analyse and interpret the results, and disseminate them." (IFA 2001).

2 Site location and methodology (Figure 1)

- 2.1 The High School for Girls is located in the northern part of the city of Gloucester, between Denmark Road, Seabroke Road and Lansdown Road, centred on OS NGR 383829 219363 and was constructed in the early 20th century. The site stands at a height of c.13-14m Above Ordnance Datum (AOD) and is geologically located on the Third Main Terrace gravels of the River Severn (OS 1972). The site is situated within the Kingsholm Area of Principal Archaeological Interest as defined in the City of Gloucester Local Plan.
- 2.2 The programme of archaeological field investigation comprised archaeological excavation of the total area of the site of the new extension. The excavated area was larger than the footprint of the new building to allow for a service trench. Therefore the proposed watching brief, following the archaeological excavation, was not necessary.
- 2.3 All undifferentiated topsoil or overburden of recent origin within the area was removed down to the first significant archaeological horizon. The mechanical excavator employed in the removal of topsoil/overburden removed spits of no more than 0.30m in depth. Successive spits were similarly removed until the first significant horizon was reached. That level was cleaned in plan using a wide bladed, ditching bucket. All machine work was carried out under archaeological supervision and ceased immediately when significant evidence was revealed. All services within the excavation area were left *in situ*.
- 2.4 Following machine clearance, all faces of the area were cleaned using appropriate hand tools. The whole area was then cleaned by trowel and all features were drawn on a pre-excavation plan at 1:50. A site grid was set up for planning purposes running from the north-eastern end of the site. All investigation of archaeological levels was by hand, with cleaning, examination and recording both in plan and section. Sampling of deposits was at least to the minimum percentage levels specified in the brief.
- 2.5 All deposits were recorded on a pro-forma context sheet and photographed. These photographs included black and white prints, colour transparencies (on 35mm film) and digital photography, illustrating in both detail and general context the principal features. A site location plan indicating north and based on the Ordnance Survey 1:2500 map (OS 2003) was prepared. Levels Above Ordnance Datum (AOD) were recorded for archaeological deposits as required in the brief.
- 2.6 The site archive will be stored at Shire Hall, Gloucester, under a unique site code, GSMR 26815 issued by the County Sites and Monuments Record Officer. It will eventually be deposited with Gloucester City Museum and Art Gallery under accession number GLRCM 2004/35. This archive will include all the previous archaeological work by GCCAS listed under GSMR 15681 (Figure 2 and Table 5); the 1994 watching brief (GSMR 15641/2-5, the 1995 evaluation and excavation (GSMR 15641/6-8 and 15641/9-12) and the 1996 excavation (GSMR 15641/13-15) and the subsequent watching brief in 1999 (GSMR 15641/16).

3 Results (Figures 3, 4 and Sections 1 to 4)

- 3.1 The results of the excavation are outlined below, with the deposits discussed starting from the western end of the site and in stratigraphic order starting with the earliest, where possible. Cut numbers are shown in square brackets [] and other context numbers are shown in rounded brackets ().
- 3.2 The area was machine-excavated to the undisturbed natural deposits (000), the level at which archaeological features were first encountered. This level varied between an average of 12.96m AOD at the northern end of the excavation and 12.98m AOD to the south. The natural deposits were variable throughout the length of the excavated area, and comprised clays, gravels and sands. These ranged from light yellow-orange gravely sand at the northern end of the excavated area, to a more brown sand with dark mottled patches in the centre. In the south the natural contained more patches of orange sand and very light, slightly green grey clay.

On completion of the pre-excavation plan, further investigation of the features was undertaken. The level of post-medieval truncation had resulted in the survival of only very shallow archaeological features and only in the northern half of the site. The features discussed below were all recorded cutting into the natural deposits (000).

Located on the north-western side of the excavated area and continuing beyond the limit of excavation, was a cut sub-circular feature [001]. This feature measured 0.60m in length, 0.58m in width and a maximum depth of 0.22m. The feature was roughly orientated east to west, but as the western side continued beyond the limit of the excavation, it was unclear whether this feature was a ditch terminal or part of a circular feature. The single fill was a mid orange red to orange brown sandy clay (002), with a moderate amount of small gravel inclusions and sherds of Roman pottery (see 4.3 Pottery report). This feature has been interpreted as a probable pit of the Roman period.

To the west of pit [001], also on the north-western side of the excavated area, was a cut ovoid feature [003]. This feature measured 0.76m in length, 0.41m in width and a maximum depth of 0.16m. The feature was orientated east to west. The single fill was a mid orange red to orange brown sandy clay (004), with a moderate amount of small gravel inclusions. No artefacts were recovered from the fill. This feature has been interpreted as a possible shallow pit or elongated post hole.

To the south-east of features [001] and [003], was a cut circular feature [008], which was 2.03m in diameter and in excess of 1.25m in depth. The sides of this feature were vertical, but became slightly concave in profile c.1m below the surviving upper edge. The feature has been interpreted as a possible well.

Two fills were recorded (011) and (009). The earlier (011), measured 2.03m in diameter and up to 1.20m in depth, and continued below the limit of the excavation. It was a mixed deposit, containing loose, yellow brown sandy gravel with frequent small to medium sized gravel inclusions, an orange brown silty clay, with a moderate amount of small sized stone inclusions and red brown silty sand, with a moderate amount of small to medium sized stone inclusions. Within the deposit a number of tip lines were recorded (see Section 4), sloping down towards the centre of the feature. It was unclear whether they abutted cut [012] or were truncated by it. This deposit contained two sherds of Roman pottery (see 4.3 Pottery report), and has been interpreted as the backfill to the well construction cut [008].

Sealing this deposit was a mid grey brown sandy silt (009), measuring 2.03m in diameter and up to 0.31m in depth, with the occasional large stone and a moderate amount of small sized stone inclusions. This deposit contained sherds of Roman pottery (see 4.3 Pottery report). It was unclear whether this deposit abutted cut [012] or was truncated by cut it and has also been interpreted as a backfill to well construction cut [008].

Central to the large cut circular feature [008] and stratigraphically cutting its fills, was a smaller circular cut feature [012]. Cut [012] was slightly oval, measuring 1m by 0.87m in plan and in excess of 1.50m in depth.

Cut [012], contained a single fill (010), a mid brown sandy silt, with concave lenses of black brown silty clay within it, with a rare amount of small to medium sized stone inclusions and a moderate amount of charcoal flecks. Soil samples were taken from these lenses and one was assessed (see 4.4 – Plant macrofossil and pollen assessment – sample no.2). This deposit contained a large amount of Roman pottery (see 4.3 Pottery report). A single whole spouted jar in a grey Severn Valley ware-related fabric, was recovered from the northeast quadrant of this deposit, which was excavated to level of 11.38m AOD. The context also contained animal bone, flint, metal objects and a quern stone fragment (see finds table - Table 4 in the appendix).

The stratigraphic sequence of the well construction is unclear. It is probable that after the initial cut was made [008] a structure now represented by cut [012], possibly wooden, was placed central to the construction cut [008] which was subsequently backfilled with (011) and (009). When the well fell out of use, deposit (010) built up within the possible wooden structure, probably as a result of dumped material and silting. No evidence of any surviving structure was revealed during the excavation.

Sealing the upper fills of all excavated features was a mottled orange brown sandy silt (007), 0.18m deep across the whole site. This deposit contained a moderate amount of small to medium sized stone and gravel inclusions, and has been interpreted as a layer of disturbed/redeposited natural.

Above was a mid dark grey brown silty sand (006), which also covered the whole excavation area up to a depth of 0.60m. This deposit contained a moderate amount of small to medium sized stone and gravel inclusions, with post-medieval to modern and residual Roman artefacts (these artefacts were not retained). This context has been interpreted as a modern levelling layer, possibly associated with the construction of the school.

Sealing the modern levelling (006), was 0.20m of tarmac and hardcore (005), which had formed the modern ground surface for the school.

The modern surface (005) had been truncated in a number of places by modern services, which were left *in situ* (see Figure 3).

4 Specialist reports

4.1 Flint Report David Mullin

A single fragment of worked flint was recovered from the excavation. It was the distal end of a Neolithic blade.

This flint represents the only prehistoric artefact recovered from the excavation and has been recovered from a securely dated Romano-British feature. It was a residual artefact; therefore it was, of course, impossible to draw firm conclusions about any prehistoric activities that might have occurred within the area, if any.

Description - Table 1

Context No.	Context description	Artefact description
010	Fill of R.B well	Distal end of translucent light brown flint. 20mm x 17mm,
		probable blade

4.2 Stone Report Fiona Roe

A single stone quern fragment was recovered from the fill (010) of the probable well [012], which has been dated to the Roman period. The fragment was of upper old red sandstone, probably from the Forest of Dean. The grinding surface has some traces of rings, which suggest its use as a rotary quern.

4.3 Pottery Report J R Timby

The archaeological work resulted in the recovery of 190 sherds of pottery weighing 4105g dating exclusively to the early Roman period. Pottery was recovered from just four contexts and was in a good state of preservation with the substantial parts of three vessels from contexts (002) and (010).

The pottery was scanned to assess its likely chronology, and quantified by sherd count and weight. The resulting data was summarised in Table 2. The table distinguishes amphora, South Gaulish samian and imported finewares, Kingsholm military wares, and other Roman wares.

The assemblage includes eight sherds of amphora amongst which are wine amphora from South Gaul and Dressel type 20 olive oil amphora from South Spain. Other continental imports include three sherds of pre-Flavian South Gaulish samian and one colour-coated, roughcast cup or beaker, also from Central Gaul. The remainder of the assemblage comprises wares from local sources, several of which are from Kingsholm or early Gloucester kilns. Of particular note are several sherds from a collared rim flagon in Gloucester type fabric (TF) 24 from context (002). The only other vessel from this context was a grey sandy ware jar (TF 39) again represented by several sherds. Both these wares are associated with the military occupation at the Kingsholm fortress and were probably manufactured by potters working for the army somewhere in the immediate locality of the fortress. Complete or semi-complete vessels are rare and usually associated with burials, occasionally with wells, and possibly with abandoned stores or similar. Caches of deliberately broken vessels have been observed elsewhere at Kingsholm and it may have been military practice to deal with unwanted supplies in this way.

Most of the remaining pottery recovered came from feature [012], context (010). This yielded 121 sherds of which 17 (1560 g) came from a single spouted jar in a grey Severn Valley ware related fabric. Again this could be a disturbed burial urn or a semi-complete vessel put into the backfill of the well. A range of other wares came from this feature including the entire amphorae and imported finewares from the site, which undoubtedly originated from military supplies. Other wares include Kingsholm flagon and jar (TF 24, 39), Gloucester kiln ware (TF 11a, 7, 25), Severn Valley ware (TF 11B) and greyware jars with rusticated decoration of a type similar to material associated with a kiln found in Kingsholm Rugby Ground.

Very small assemblages were recovered from contexts (009) and (011), which would appear to be broadly contemporary with the other material but comprised unfeatured sherds only.

The assemblage was entirely in keeping with that to be expected from contexts associated with the early military occupation at Kingsholm in the 1st century AD. The assemblage was noteworthy for the good state of preservation reflected in the semi-complete vessels.

Table 2

Context	Amphora	samian/fw	Kingsholm	other	Tot No	Tot Wt	Date	CBM/FC
2	0	0	62	0	62	524	pre-Flavian	
9	0	0	0	5	5	68	C1 AD	
10	8	4	11	98	121	3492	pre-Flavian	3
11	0	0	0	2	2	21	C1 AD	
TOTAL	8	4	73	105	190	4105		

4.4 Plant macrofossil and pollen assessment Charlotte E. O'Brien

Summary

A sample was taken from a well of Romano-British date in Denmark Road, Gloucester. Material from the sample was sieved through a 500 and 250 μ m sieve and examined at up to x50 magnification. The plant macrofossils were identified by comparison with modern reference material. Only charred material was preserved, which was dominated by wheat and oat grains and spelt chaff.

The sample was prepared by standard pollen preparation techniques. Pollen was absent, however microscopic charcoal was present.

Methods

Plant macrofossil assessment

Sediment from context 10 (sample 2) was assessed. Half a litre was wet-sieved through a 500 and 250 µm mesh. The material was scanned at up to x 50 magnification for waterlogged and charred botanical remains. Identification of these was undertaken by comparison with modern reference material held in the Environmental Laboratory at Archaeological Services, University of Durham. Total numbers of remains per species were logged and the results were interpreted in their archaeological and palaeoecological contexts. Plant taxonomic nomenclature follows Stace (1997).

Pollen assessment

A 2ml subsample of context 10 (sample 2) was prepared by standard pollen techniques. This involved treatment with HCL, NaOH and an acetylation mixture. Following this a heavy liquid sodium polytungstate was used to separate the pollen from the mineral matrix. The pollen was dehydrated in tertiary butyl alcohol and mounted in silicone fluid. Slides were prepared and scanned under high magnification.

Results

Plant macrofossil assessment

Only charred remains were present in the sample. These included oat and wheat grains, spelt wheat glume bases and spikelet bases. Indeterminate cereal grains and grass caryopses were present. Pieces of wood and the occasional fragment of mollusc shell also occurred. Table 3 presents the plant macrofossil remains from the sample.

Table 3. Plant macrofossil remains from context 10 (sample 2)

Context	10
Sample	2
Volume processed (ml)	500
Volume after processing (ml)	75
Volume assessed (ml)	75
Matrix (relative abundance)	
Mollusc shell fragment	1
Wood	2
Charred remains (total counts)	•
(c) Avena spp grain (Oat species)	17
(c) Triticum spelta spikelet base (Spelt wheat)	3
(c) Triticum spelta glume base (Spelt wheat)	64
(c) Triticum spp (Wheat spp)	11
(c) Cerealia indeterminate	9
(x) Poaceae (grass)	3

(c: cultivated plant; x: wide niche)

Relative abundance was based on a scale from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest).

Pollen assessment

Pollen was absent. The sample contained microscopic charcoal.

Discussion

The absence of waterlogged seeds suggests the sediment was deposited in well-drained, aerobic conditions. Insects were also not preserved for this reason. However, charring allowed the preservation of a number of cereal remains including oat and wheat grains, indeterminate cereal grains and spelt wheat chaff. The occurrence of spelt wheat was not surprising as studies in northern England have shown that spelt wheat was the dominant cereal in the Roman period (Huntley & Stallibrass, 1995).

The large number of chaff fragments suggests that the crops were processed at the site. However, the absence of arable weed seeds may indicate that some processing occurred away from the site. Further analysis of this sample would provide additional data to help to answer this question.

The absence of pollen reflects the aerobic nature of the sediment and prevents a reconstruction of the palaeoenvironment of the site. The microscopic charcoal may derive from small domestic fires or from larger-scale fires such as woodland clearance.

5 Discussion

5.1 Introduction

Several pieces of archaeological work at the school since 1991 have recorded Roman activity from the 1st to 4th centuries, probably associated with the 1st century Roman fort at Kingsholm (GSMR 11273) and later settlement off Ermin Street (GSMR 7542).

The earliest Roman occupation at Gloucester was sited at the Kingsholm fort, the eastern boundary of which may have been c.350m to the west of the school. The dating of the features recorded by this excavation places the activity as contemporary with that at the fort. Other archaeological work carried out at the school has also recorded features of Roman date (Figure 6) and two of them have recorded features, which appear to be contemporary with the activity recorded during this excavation. The 1995 excavation of the gymnasium area (GSMR 15641/9-12 – Piper 1995b) c.30m to the east, was carried out following an evaluation (GSMR 15641/6-8 – Piper 1995a). It revealed a ditch and two pits from the 1st or 2nd centuries. Similar evidence was recorded during an excavation in 1996 (GSMR 15641/13-15 – Vallender 1997a), c.45m to the north-east, where three pits dated to the same period. The features recorded in these pieces of work are suggestive of an area of managed landscape, where extra mural activity associated with the fort may have been taking place. Outside the grounds of the school, an evaluation in 2003 (GSMR 22277- Barrett 2003) c.140m to the east, recorded three ditches and three post holes, which may suggest the area of extra mural activity continued to the east.

5.2 The 2004 excavation

Three features were recorded during the 2004 excavation, of which two dated to the early Roman period and the other was undated. All the features were heavily truncated and therefore the scope for their interpretation is limited.

Pit [001] contained several sherds of a collared rim flagon in Gloucester type fabric and a grey sandy ware jar (TF 39). Both these wares, are associated with the military occupation at the Kingsholm fortress and were probably manufactured by potters working for the army somewhere on the immediate locality of the fortress (section 4.3 above).

The pit or elongated post hole [003] provided no dating evidence, but due to its stratigraphic position it has been tentatively dated to the Roman period.

The main feature recorded during the excavation was a well [008] and [012]. Its physical remains, through their interpretation, may indicate the processes that created this feature, and therefore elucidate it's function. The construction processes resulted in near vertical edges, would have required some form of circular revetment to prevent the natural gravel from slumping inwards. The structure of the revetment has not been preserved, however the gradual formation of the central deposit preserving nearly complete spouted jar, does suggest that a structure retained the construction backfills probably throughout the life of the well.

The soil chemistry, has prevented the survival of organic remains, including wood. The slow decomposition of the wooden revetment may explain the slightly irregular profile of the interface, caused by pressure from deposit (011) on to the rotting wooden revetment over a period of time, hence the irregular profile. Additionally the revetment may not have been solid and more fence like construction, therefore a slow leeching of material through gaps in the revetment, may give an irregular profile of the interface and resulted in the gradual backfilling of the feature. However, the lenses of black - brown material within (010) show that a physical barrier was still in place during backfilling.

The plant macrofossils recorded from the well have indicated that the general area was being used, in some form, for cereal processing perhaps within a managed agricultural landscape. Chaff fragments within the samples indicate crops were been processed near by, the lack of arable weeds probably indicates that crops were not grown in the immediate vicinity, this may be supported by the fragment of rotary quern perhaps indicating the area of the excavation was more likely to have been in use for the processing of grain.

In the region of 30 Roman wells have been recorded in Gloucestershire, of which only a small proportion have been excavated, and no similarities could be found with the structure at Denmark Road. The majority of these were stone lined and had preserved little in the way of organic material.

6 Conclusions

The evidence from this excavation in conjunction with previous work at the school has indicated that there was occupational activity during the 1st century AD on the northern side of Ermin Street, to the east of the 1st century fort at Kingsholm. Although only three features survived the post-medieval truncation, the excavation of these has provided a greater understanding of Roman activity in the area. The main feature, the probable well, has clearly shown that there was human occupation in the vicinity of the excavation, within a managed agricultural landscape. Any structural evidence from this occupation may have been destroyed by the extensive truncation of the archaeological deposits on the site.

7	References
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os	c.1900	Ordnance Survey Second Edition County Series map. OS digital data held on Gloucestershire County Council GIS
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8 Appendix

Artefacts table - Table 4

Context	Artefact material	Artefact type	No.	Wt gms	Date Date
002	bone	animal	22	84	
002	ceramic	pottery	64	1030	Roman (pre-Flavian before 69AD)
009	bone	animal	3	19	
009	ceramic	pottery	5	66	Roman (1st century)
009	metal	slag	1	10	
010	bone	animal	164	2352	
010	ceramic	pottery	124	3484	Roman (pre-Flavian before 69AD)
010	ceramic	Tile/brick	2	44	
010	metal	Fe - nail	1	4	
010	metal	Fe object	1	2	
010	mortar	_	4	306	
010	shell	Oyster/snail	4	166	
010	stone	flint	1	2	
010	stone	quern	1	n/a	
011	ceramic	pottery	2	18	Roman (1st century)

Site reference table – Table 5 (see Figure 2)

GSMR No.	Old GSMR No.	Type of work & Year	Author of report	Museum accession No.
15641	15641/2-5	Watching brief 1994	Reilly 1996	GLRCM 2004/35
15641	15641/6-8	Evaluation 1995	Piper 1995a	GLRCM 2004/35
15641	15641/9-12	Excavation 1995	Piper 1995b	GLRCM 2004/35
15641	15641/13-15	Excavation 1996	Vallender 1997a	GLRCM 2004/35
15641	15641/16	Watching brief 1999	Hicks 1999	GLRCM 2004/35
19680	19680	Evaluation 1997	Vallender 1997b	Currently not archived
21781	21781	Watching brief 2002	Wright 2002	GLRCM 2002/30
26815	26815	Excavation 2004	Barrett 2004	GLRCM 2004/35

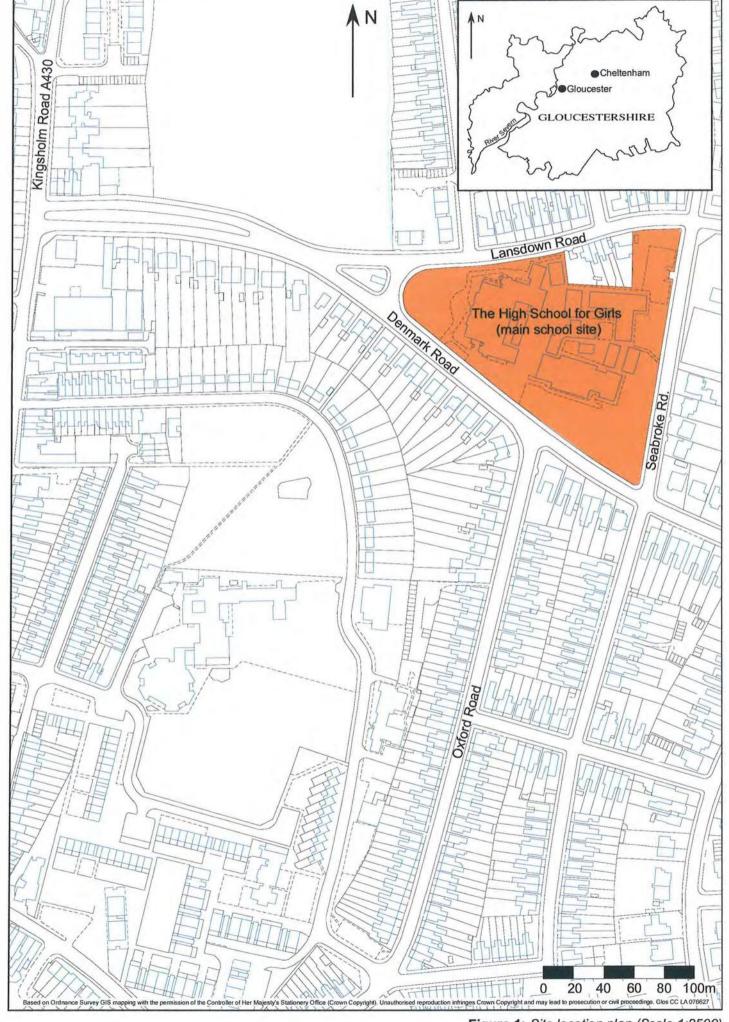


Figure 1: Site location plan (Scale 1:2500)



Figure 2: Excavation location plan (Scale 1:1250)

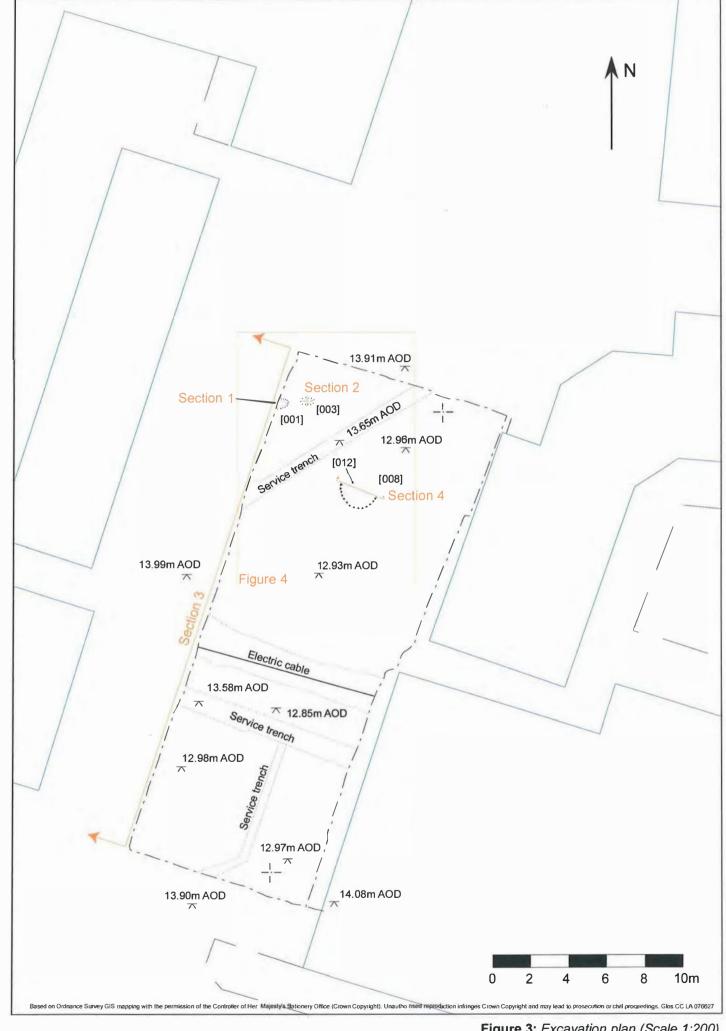


Figure 3: Excavation plan (Scale 1:200)

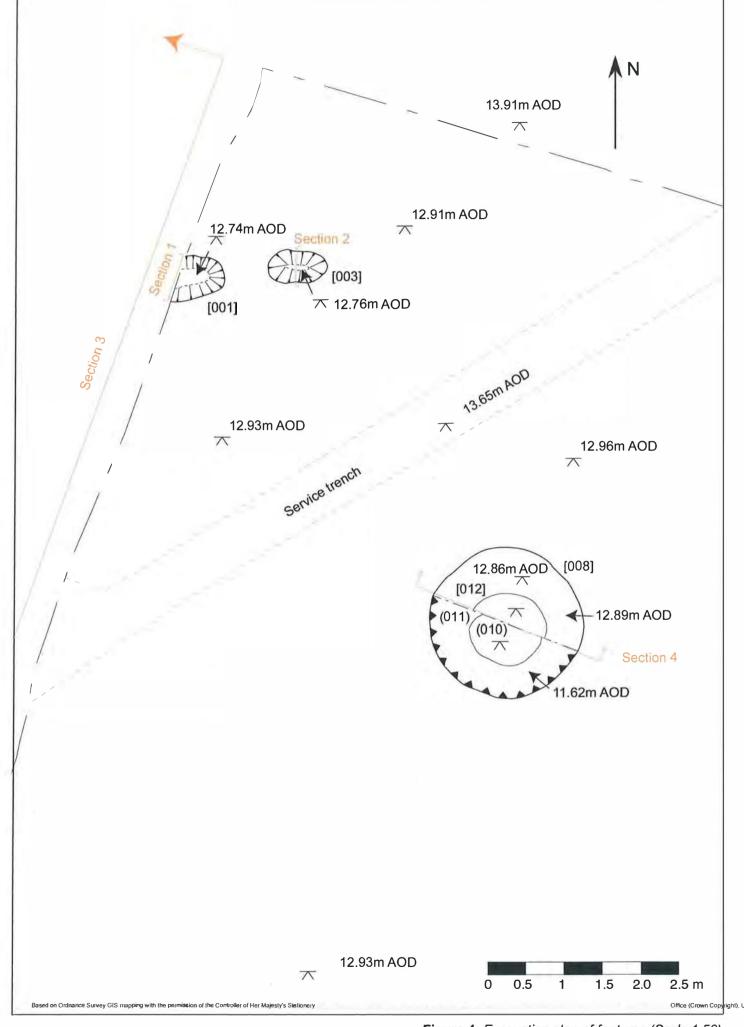
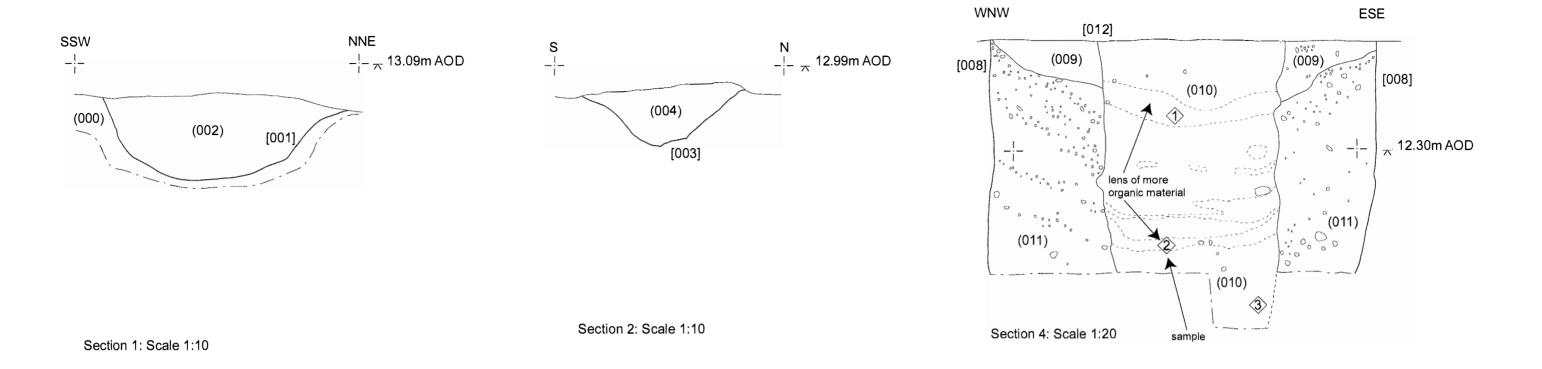
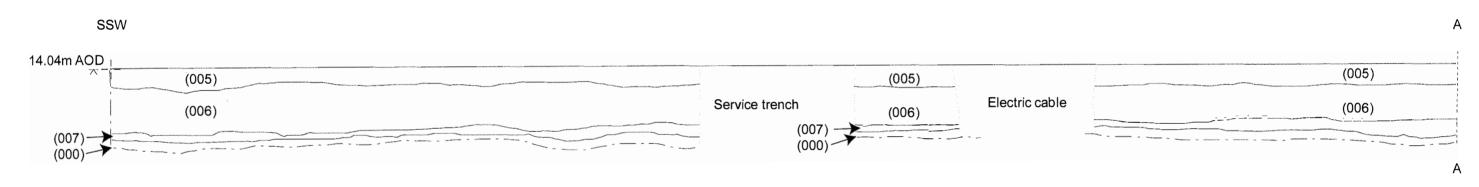
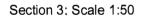
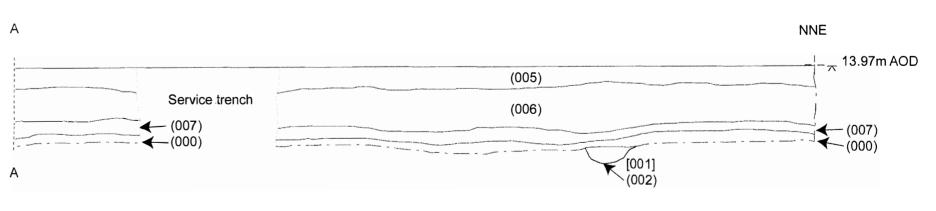


Figure 4: Excavation plan of features (Scale 1:50)









Section 3 cont.: Scale 1:50



Figure 6: Excavated areas plan (Scale 1:500)