

# Summer Fields School, Mayfield Road, Oxford

## Desk Based Assessment



*understanding heritage matters*

Archaeology Warwickshire Report No 1442

May 2014



*Working for  
Warwickshire*

**Project:** Summer Fields School  
**Commissioned by:** Graham Hale & Co  
**Project Report No.** 1442  
**Site Code:** OSS14  
**Planning References:** 13/03469/FUL & 13/03393/FUL  
**National Grid Reference:** SP50950907  
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**Date:** April 2104  
**Report reference:** Summer Fields School, Mayfield Road,  
Oxford, *Desk Based Assessment*,  
Archaeology Warwickshire Report 1442

Archaeology Warwickshire

Unit 9

Montague Road

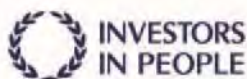
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## SUMMARY

*Summer Fields School in Oxford, close to the west bank of the River Cherwell, lies amidst a scatter of probable prehistoric archaeological features known from crop-marks, which have been noted from aerial photographs. It is also the location of a number of pagan Anglo-Saxon inhumations with grave goods, found in 1898 during the school's construction and development. No further remains have been reported in numerous construction programmes which have taken place since then. Proposed new construction works at the school have the potential to uncover related remains.*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 In 2013 Summer Fields School, Mayfield Road, Summertown, Oxford, applied to build two new structures:

- 13/03393/FUL Erection of a two-storey pavilion to provide additional changing facilities and a multi-function room incorporating a balcony with terraced area at 1st floor level;

and

- 13/03469/FUL demolition of existing kitchen and staff facilities. Erection of a two-storey extension to provide laundry facilities and staff facilities and erection of a plant room.

1.2 In requiring the applicant to furnish an archaeological assessment and evaluation before determination of the application, the Oxford City Archaeologist, David Radford, commented upon the applications and the significance of the site as follows:

*'It is located close to a find-spot that suggests the presence of an Anglo-Saxon cemetery in the vicinity. The extent of the likely cemetery is not known. An Anglo-Saxon grave group comprising shield boss, shield grip, knife and spear was found at time of building Summer Fields School in 1898. An Anglo-Saxon lance or spearhead was also found during the digging of foundations for a new school wing near a former orchard in 1882. Furthermore human bones were found in 1850 when digging a trench in a garden on the east side of the Banbury Road, along with a knife, disc brooch and a string of 23 beads (County HER No 6218).'*

*'Anglo-Saxon inhumation cemeteries (5th-7th centuries) can vary in size from one burial to several hundred. In 1991 there were 1000 recorded sites of inhumation burials in England, but only 100-150 of these were cemeteries known to have contained more than 50 burials. Burials were usually placed in grave cuts, although sometimes a wooden coffin or chamber enclosed the body. Bodies were usually extended or loosely flexed, they can be accompanied with grave goods (weapons, belt buckles and jewellery etc.). Many inhumation cemeteries are associated with cremation burials (mixed cemeteries). Cremations can be buried in ceramic, glass or metal containers or with no container; they can also be accompanied with grave goods (food offerings, jewellery).'*

*'Anglo-Saxon cemeteries can be concentrated or dispersed. For example at Dinton (Bucks) a later 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> century part of a compact inhumation cemetery of twenty burials (18 with grave goods) was excavated within an area of 15x25m. At Tring roundabout (Bucks) an extensive dispersed inhumation cemetery was excavated. Here 18 inhumations were recorded, mainly orientated south-north, spread out over area 90x170m. Two Anglo-Saxon burials recorded at Stephens Road, Headington, Oxford, have been recorded over the last 10 years and are likely to be part of a dispersed cemetery. The spacing of the 19th century observations in and near Summer Fields School also suggests the presence of dispersed burials.'*

## 2 SITE LOCATION

2.1 The site of Summer Fields School is located in the northern suburbs of Oxford to the east of the Banbury Road and is accessed from Mayfield Road. The school buildings on the site are approximately centred at NGR: SP 5097 0907. The school sits between the historic Banbury Road on its west and the River Cherwell on the east and is mapped as lying on river terrace gravels. Between the school and the river are dedicated playing fields and a narrow belt of agricultural land.

2.2 To the north lies the 19th-century suburb of Summertown and to the south a mélange of private and commercial property, much of it in the purview of Oxford University.

## 3 HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

3.1 It is the known archaeology of this southern prospect which is as relevant to the Summer Fields School site as the Anglo-Saxon finds. As will be seen, the school site contains evidence of potentially-related remains.

3.2 Further south lies the area of the Oxford University parks, an area demonstrated to be archaeologically rich in prehistoric remains, particularly Neolithic and Bronze Age. Just to

the west of this is the area of the Radcliffe Infirmary, demonstrated to be similarly rich in such remains. All lie within a radius of about 500m of the junction of the Banbury and Woodstock Roads. Some were formerly so prominent as parch-marks as to be notable on the ground and described and illustrated by Dr Plot in the late 17th century (Lambrick 2013, 11).

3.3 The archaeology of this concentration of remains seems to be largely funerary and/or ceremonial and spans the late Neolithic (which comprises a discrete but recognisable and well-dated henge-monument and a possible mortuary enclosure) and Bronze Age. At the site of the former Radcliffe Infirmary lay a line of three Bronze Age ring ditches with cremations within, and which were excavated. Geophysical survey has shown that this linear cemetery continues eastward, with another five underlying the University Parks. Outliers are known to both south and north of this line, the result of either planned or sometimes serendipitous fieldwork and chance discoveries. This forms the immediate background context of a discrete Bronze Age burial found just east of the Banbury Road, in an area between the University Parks and the Summer Fields School, about 700m from the site (Lambrick 2013, 21 fig 13).

3.4 As will be seen below crop-mark parch-marks under the school playing fields mean that this wider Bronze Age funerary and ceremonial landscape is pointedly relevant to the current application and assessment. It is particularly apposite since the parch-marks noted from aerial photographs may not represent the sum total of buried remains, since there is no guarantee that the differential drying noted in the views in a single aerial pass in one year has captured all that may be present. Continued overflights in dry summer conditions may yet discern more and different configurations.

3.5 Lambrick also noted that fieldwork has demonstrated numerous probable Iron Age enclosures within the Oxford University Parks, one of a number of discrete but intensively-settled sites dotted across the landscape, most notably at Binsey and Port Meadow (Lambrick 2013, 41-5). Other crop-marks at the Summer Fields School site may relate in morphological terms to this period.

### **The pre-school landscape and historic maps**

3.6 In a mark of unusual urban continuity, the modern boundary of the school playing field is exactly that which is mapped on the First Edition Ordnance Survey of 1885. So too are many of the field boundaries to the south and east of the site the same as at that first edition. The school and adjacent concerns have preserved a small concentration of the Inclosure fields or at least their plan-form.

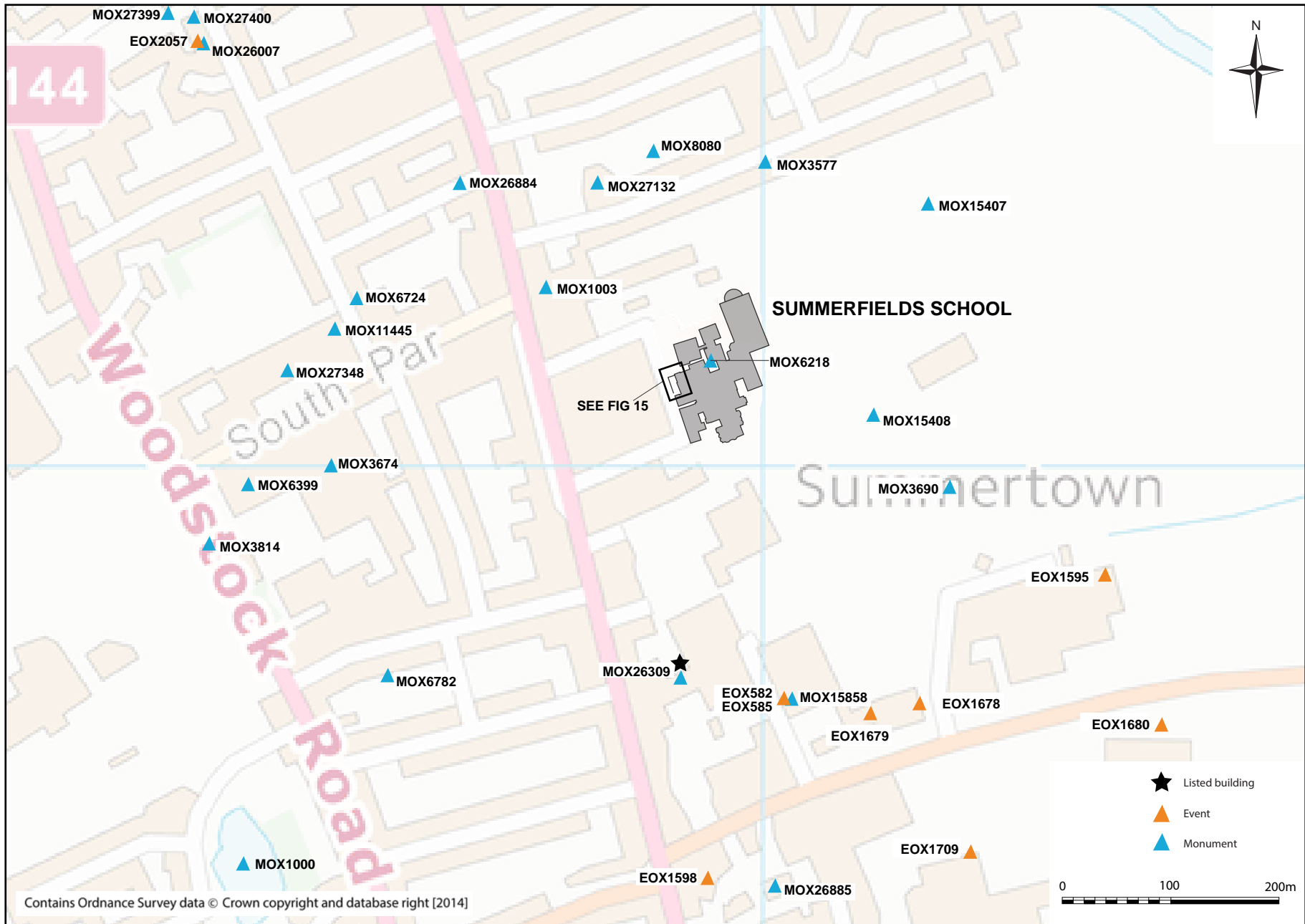


Fig 1: Location of site with relevant HER information



3.7 The earliest reliable map showing the site is the Enclosure Map of St Giles Parish of 1829 (Parliamentary Enclosure of the parish formally took place in 1832). It is found in Oxfordshire Record Office Enclosures (Volume E).

3.8 This map, which is concerned with the area south of the school site, makes it clear that the school stood outside St Giles' in an area already set aside by old private enclosures for Summertown. No similar map has been found to show these private enclosures. The enclosure map for the adjacent Wolvercote Parish (1834; ORO Enclosures, Book 61) has also been checked but contains no relevant data.

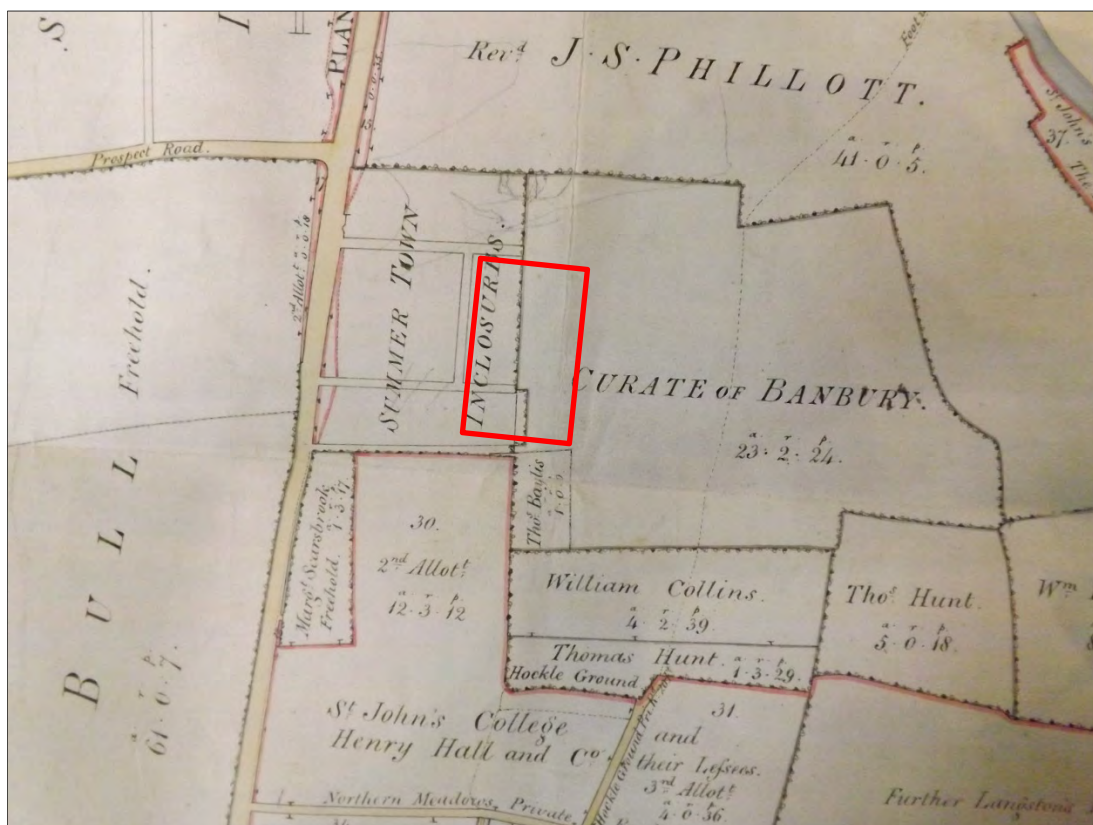


Fig 2: The site mapped for St Giles' Parish Enclosure 1829 (Courtesy of ORO). The school core is shown roughly in red

3.9 From the names on the nearest St Giles post-Enclosure owner, St John's College, their 2nd Allotment (12a 3r 12p), it can be surmised that the northernmost plot (marked 30 on the map), and closest to the future school, took in the former:

- Shepherd's Piece (probably a previous tenant's name)
- Diamond Furlong, so named from Diamond House, the property of Margaret Scarsbrook, on the West. Mayfield Road was initially called 'Diamond Street'
- Pick Meadow (the name Pick may be a tenant's name)
- Sling Meadow (sling or slang is a name given to a noticeably narrow strip of land)

3.10 Thomas Brookes, just to the east, was said to hold 'Hockle Ground', the only other plot named nearby.

3.11 Unfortunately the map shows no interest in the northern abuttals (the school site), beyond the area of the parliamentary enclosure.

3.12 This same plot can also be discerned on the Ordnance Survey Surveyor's drawing of 1814, although at minute scale. It is devoid of buildings. Copyright issues prevent the map being shown here but it may be found at: [www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/onlineex/ordsurvdrawing](http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/onlineex/ordsurvdrawing) - (and type in Ot Mor sheet). The near-parallel track of the Woodstock and Banbury Roads are discernible as is the distinctive bend on the river just north-east of the school site.

3.13 Summertown was created out of existing parishes around 1820 to tackle Oxford's growing population and overcrowding in the city, although its growth was not rapid. While there has been recent documentation of the suburb's changing face once established (Kennedy 1995, Symonds and Nichols 2009), it is the work of Fasnacht (1977) which brought the first scholarly eye to charting its establishment and early growth, aided in no small part to the eyewitness account of one of its early residents, John Badcock, whose memoirs of his arrival and description of his new home in 1832, is invaluable, charting plot-layouts and naming tenants in a way which is helpful to both archaeologists and historians alike. Badcock's entire manuscript has since been printed and published in full, 150 years after he wrote it (1983).

3.14 Badcock noted (1983, Map B) the layout of a number of buildings which pre-dated the school and which lined the east side of what is now Mayfield Road (Then called Diamond Street). From the north end of the road, and taking up about half the length of the eastern frontage, they comprised eight properties in a conjoined terrace, which had been built in 1824 as the Summertown Workhouse. Badcock listed the tenants, their ages and their families, together with trades and characteristics (such as their church attendance!). The buildings ceased to function in this capacity in 1835, after changes in the Poor Law, and subsequently served as school dormitories and later domestic staff quarters (Fasnacht 1977, 42-4). The site in part now supports 'The Manor' (below).



Fig 3: 'The manor', site of the 1824-35 Summertown Workhouse, looking south along Mayfield Road's eastern frontage. Note the laundry application site (arrowed) just beyond.

3.15 Just beyond the workhouse lay a further six separate cottage properties, which Badcock related in similar exact detail (Badcock 1983, Map B). Each stood in its own garden with high brick walls. The fifth stood on the corner at the return of Mayfield Road (then called Summerfield Road); the sixth was apparently just beyond, further south.

3.16 A small-scale map does survive of the same year as Badcock's survey (1832). However, its scale makes it of very limited value as the buildings are too small (Boundaries Act Map of Oxford).



Fig 4: Detail from 1832 map (Courtesy of ORO)

3.17 While Summer Fields School has dominated the locality since the 1860s, it is clear that for a short period, there was a phase of unrelated domestic construction along the east side of Mayfield Road.

### **The growth of Summer Fields locating the Anglo-Saxon inhumations found in 1898**

3.18 Existing scholarship has not tried to tie down the location of the graves discovered in 1898, during construction work on the school. However, it is very fortunate that most of the previous construction programmes at the school have left dated registered architect's plans (with the date of application), held on microfiche by Oxfordshire Record Office. These have been looked at in detail for the present report in order to discern which developments were applied-for, (almost certainly) begun, and (probably) finished in the period 1895-8. There are six:

Table 1 List of school buildings built 1895-1898

<b>Date of application</b>	<b>Building</b>	<b>ORO: City Engineer's Plan</b>
1895	'Additions'	2551
1896	New Dressing Room	2698A
1896	Chapel	2772
1898	Cricket Pavilion	3105
1898	Gymnasium	3153
1898	Servants' WC and extension to chapel	3186

3.19 All of these can be traced on the ground of the modern school; many of the buildings survive. The cricket pavilion is, of course, at some distance from the school, and it is not impossible that it was this building which disturbed burials. It was rebuilt on the same site in 2002 after the original burnt down. Copies of the microfiche plans for these buildings are held in archive. Their exact locations are shown in the figure below:

3.20 Subsequent construction episodes have taken place.

1890 New Room

1903 Dining Hall

1948 Ha-ha filled in

1961 Changing rooms

1963 Science Laboratory

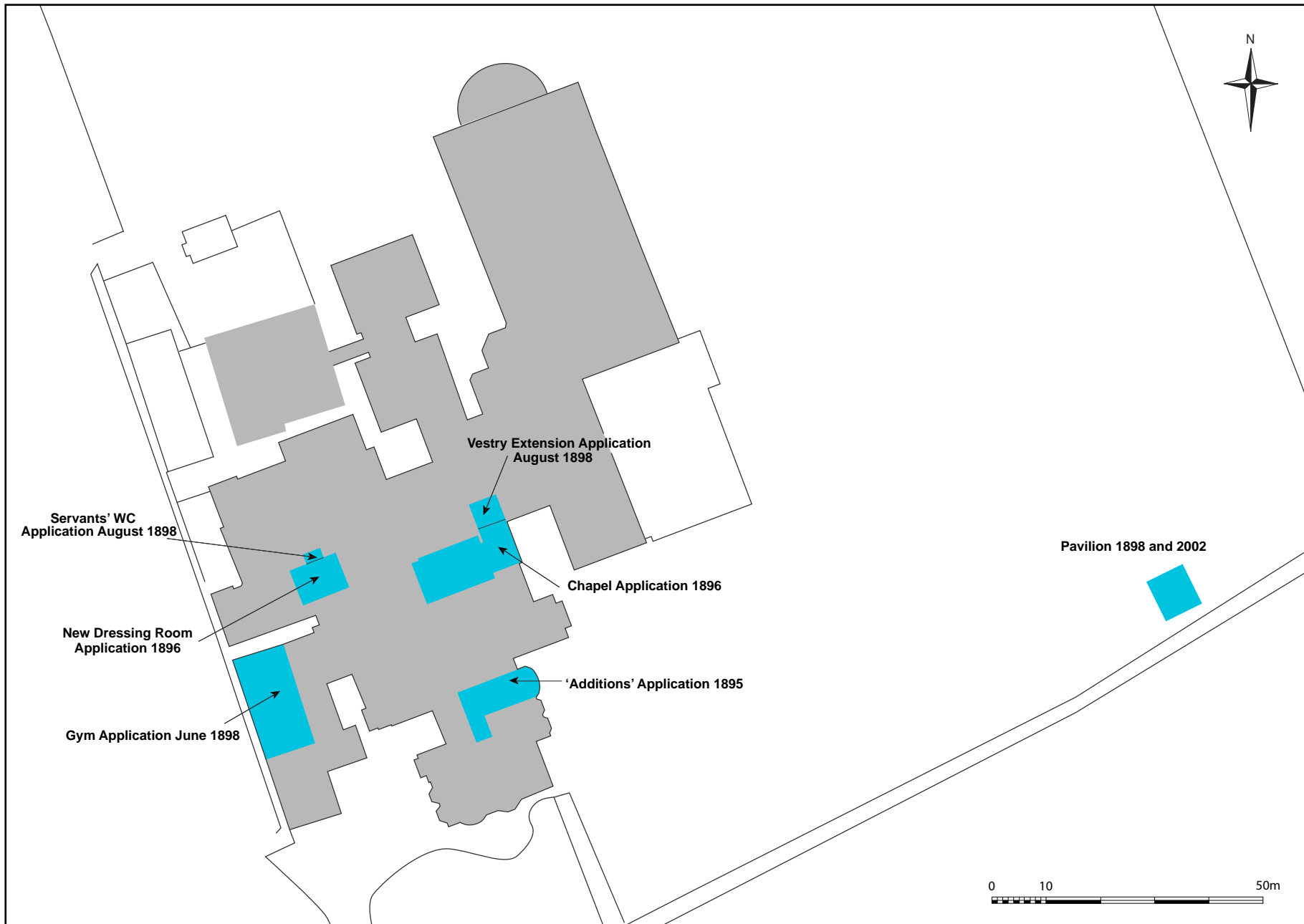


Fig 5: The school with locations of structures applied for during the years 1895-8 and subsequently built as a guide to the possible Anglo-Saxon inhumations

1985 Indoor swimming pool

1995 Sports Hall

2002 Cricket pavilion (of 1898) rebuilt after fire as a facsimile of its predecessor on the same site

2008 Kitchen

3.21 As far as can be ascertained no archaeological work accompanied any of the construction programmes until now, and no finds have been reported since 1898, so it is distinctly possible that the extent of any surviving Anglo-Saxon remains lie entirely under the footprint of the early school buildings, close to one of the list of six buildings given planning permission in 1895-8. On the basis that in any construction programme begins (broadly-speaking) with foundation-digging, and assuming that all the six programmes got under way relatively quickly, three in particular seem the best candidates to have discovered bones:

- The gymnasium
- The servants' WC (which no longer survives)
- The chapel's vestry extension

3.22 The cricket pavilion is another possibility which cannot be ignored, since no further school buildings constructed since 1898, (and there are many close to all those of 1898), have resulted in the reported discovery of human remains or archaeological artefacts.

3.23 The following photographs show these buildings in relation to their surroundings:

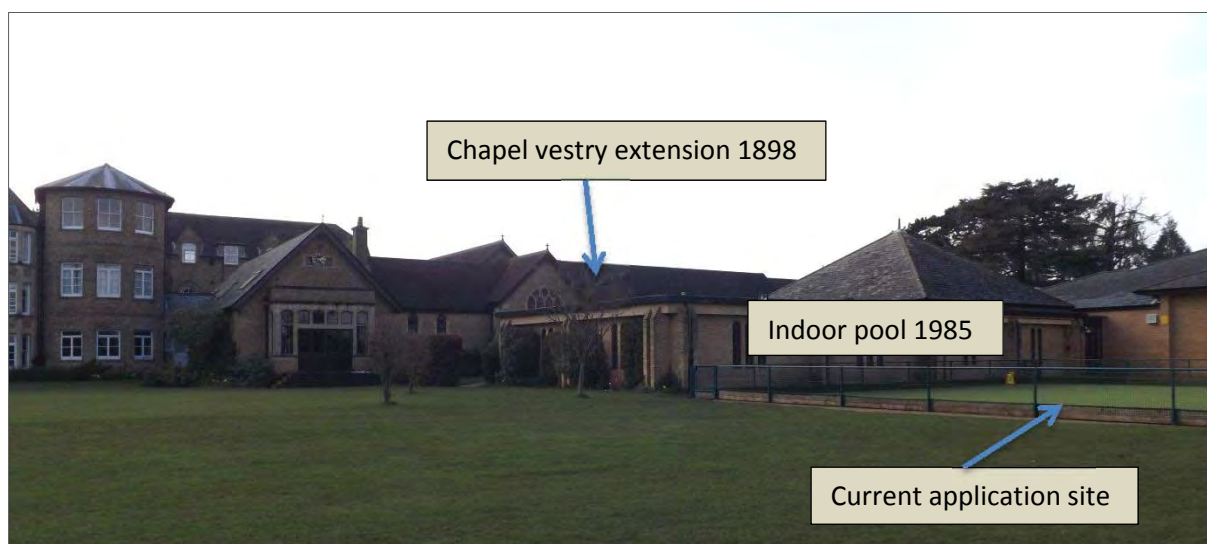


Fig 6 : The current application site (pavilion) relative to closest 1898 likely find-spot



Fig 7: The current application site (laundry) relative to closest 1898 likely find-spots



Fig 8: The cricket pavilion of 2002, rebuilt as a facsimile, on the site of its 1898 predecessor

## 4 HERITAGE ASSET ASSESSMENT

### Historic Environment Record and Urban Archaeological Database

4.1 The Oxfordshire Historic Environment Record was consulted, which holds data on 21 monuments and nine fieldwork events which lie within a radius of 500m of the school, an

area which narrows in from the wider view taken by Lambrick (2013). These are summarised as follows, with the closest to the site listed first:

Table 2 Historic or archaeological remains in the vicinity of the site (courtesy of Oxfordshire Historic Environment Record)

HER Monument	NGR (SP)	Period	Details
1000	5052 0862	Post-medieval	Brick kiln and brickyard
1003	5080 0917	Post-medieval	Summertown Congregational Church
3577	5100 0929	Palaeolithic?	Flints
3674	506 090	Palaeolithic	Flint
3690	5117 0898	Anglo-Saxon	Find of spearhead
3814	5048 0892	Roman	Occupation site
6218	5095 0910	Anglo-Saxon	Inhumation cemetery (1898)
6399	5052 0898	Post-medieval	School
6724	5062 0916	Post-medieval	Former Congregational chapel (1843)
6782	5065 0880	Palaeolithic	Flint
8080	509 093	Palaeolithic	Find of Hand Axe
11445	5060 0913	Post-medieval	10 & 12 Middle Way: former chapel (1824)
15407	5115 0925	Bronze Age	Crop-mark of possible ring-ditch
15408	5110 0905	'Prehistoric'	Crop-mark enclosures
15858	5102 0878	Iron Age	Ditch and sparse features, eval: Ferry Pool Rd 1995
26007	5047 0940	Roman	Periphery of Romano-British settlement
26309	5092 0879	Post-medieval	Terrace of Grade II Listed cottages
26885	5101 0860	Post-medieval	Somerville House Grade II Listed Victorian villa
27132	5084 0926	Post-medieval	St Michael and All Angels Grade II Listed church
27348	5056 0909	Post-medieval	23 South Parade: Grade II Listed Regency villa
27399	5044 0943	Post-medieval	The Lodge, 304 Woodstock Rd; Grade II Listed Regency Villa
27400	5047 0942	Post-medieval	Grade II Listed gate piers and walls to E of 304 Woodstock Rd
Events	NGR (SP)	Period	Details
EOX582	5102 0878	'Prehistoric'	Evaluation; features uncharacterised
EOX1595	5131 0889	-	Negative evaluation; five trenches and a test pit
EOX1598	5095 0861	-	Negative evaluation of four trenches
EOX1678	5114 0877	-	Negative watching brief
EOX1680	513 087	-	Negative watching brief
EOX1679	5109 0876	-	Negative watching brief
EOX1709	5119 0863	-	DBA & Negative evaluation; stray medieval pottery
EOX2057	5047 0940	IronAge/Roman	Surfaces and occupation

4.2 The records show that amongst a plethora of fine 19th century villas and former non-conformist chapels and meeting houses some distance away, there are few easily-defined



'sites' which might present a background to the find of pagan Anglo-Saxon inhumations and related metalwork (6218). It is possible that further similarly-dated burials or related occupation was destroyed by housing nearby, but this is inadvisable to suggest as any more than a possibility. No remains have been reported in the construction episodes at the school subsequent to 1898.

4.3 The attestation of nearby Bronze Age and other prehistoric enclosure crop-marks (15407 and 15408) will be dealt with below as more information can now be set out in this report from scrutiny of the aerial photographs. Palaeolithic, and possible Palaeolithic, tools are chance finds, probably from the relatively shifting river gravels and in themselves do not constitute proof of a concentration of activity close by.

4.4 Iron Age and Roman remains are known from the vicinity but not in any great density, which probably reflects the nature and number of interventions, together with the nature of existing knowledge of remains of this period, being mainly the result of aerial and geophysical views of open ground. In fact the majority of concerted fieldwork in the immediate area has been negative, suggesting that there are areas of the immediate locality which have always been open space or farmland and do not (now) contain remains from early occupation, due to destruction by ploughing. The Iron Age and Bronze Age crop-marks are better understood in the context of taking a broader view, which reflects much of the other field-work in the wider area, recently summarised by Lambrick (2013).

### **Stray finds**

4.5 Anni Byard, Finds Liaison Officer for the Portable Antiquities Scheme in Oxfordshire, was consulted in a search for recent finds in the area, whether metal-detected or casual finds, which may have been made and reported out of a planning arena. She noted that *'there is nothing recorded for this area; the closest ...is over 1km away to the south - west'*. This would suggest that the normal day-to-day activities of adjacent plots and gardens in all directions are not disturbing any new archaeological sites (assuming that if they were, natural curiosity eventually leads to enquiry by the public and subsequent recording and reporting). Again this might suggest that the pagan Anglo-Saxon cemetery discovered in 1898 forms a discrete concentration of this period (c 400-800 AD).

### **Aerial photographs**

4.6 The site is shown on a total of 51 vertical and nine military oblique angle and five specialist oblique angle aerial photographs, all held by the English Heritage Aerial Photographic Archive in Swindon. Taken between 1943 and 1997, all of these have been

viewed in detail for this assessment and the catalogue numbers are held in archive for this site.

4.7 Of the vertical views of the site one in particular was considered to be the best example which showed the site and adjacent plots to the best effect as a guide to vestigial earthworks (particularly ridge and furrow plough cultivation) before modern development had encroached to any great extent. This is:

5297 CPE/UK/2334. PT IV. 30SEPT47:F/12//4,800. 58 SQDN

4.8 The old and intermediate modern land-use discerned from this and other aerial photographs and confirming the 1829 Enclosure layout, are summarised on an Ordnance Survey base map in Fig 9

4.9 Amongst the photographs are four of the specialist oblique views which, due to favourable ground and weather conditions show concentrations of crop-marks as parching beneath the Summer Fields School playing fields and adjacent plots, described as items 15407 and 15408 on the HER. These are as follows:

SP5109/2 SP511090 24 June 1990; NMR 4659/25 (Colour)

SP5109/3 SP512091 24 June 1990; NMR 4659/26 (Colour)

SP5108/1 SP510089 24 July 1990; NMR 4384/23 (B&W)

SP5108/2 SP511089 24 July 1990; NMR 4384/24 (B&W)

The crop-marks have been rectified and plotted onto an OS base in Fig 14.

4.10 The plots, which have for many decades served as playing fields for Summerfield School, almost certainly previously supported ridge and furrow plough cultivation with the tell-tale earthworks, given the survival of similar features on adjacent plots into the modern period.

4.11 The variety of crop-marks can be in part characterised by their general forms in the aerial photographs and are numbered in Fig 14:

1. School ha-ha, filled in 1948
2. Probable Bronze-Age ring ditch with eccentric feature within circuit (burial/cremation?)
3. Smaller ring-ditches, possibly also Bronze Age, but may be hut-circles
4. Undated sinuous enclosure ditches
5. Straight-sided enclosure with small ring
6. Linear, interrupted ditch
7. Removed modern boundary

4.12 The ebb and flow of post-World War II school sports is captured in the aerial photographs as a regular shuffling around of different sports pitches, the consequent grass wear of goal-mouths, cricket-squares, cricket nets, long-jump pits, sand pits can all be discerned in different places and at different times, all confused by the additional line-marking in various stages of wear. So too pupil-paths and desire-lines make straight(-ish) alignments across playing fields and their appearance as apparent parch-marks years later is cautionary. Some remain visible when a pitch has long been moved or a sand-pit filled in. The unwary viewer must beware their appearance as quasi-archaeological, and a number have been positively identified in this study and ruled out of the crop-mark depiction. They are not shown here.

4.13 One linear feature which may also easily elicit a presumptuous response is no 6. The regular interruptions of the ditch render this feature apparently similar to a causewayed enclosure, or perhaps a pit-alignment. However, it seems equally likely, if not more so, that the apparent interruptions actually comprise later plough-damage, wrought when the area was under ridge and furrow; only the lengths formerly under ridges might survive, to hold moisture a little longer than the surroundings. This feature is in fact visible on a number of aerial photographs from 1947 onwards, other than the 1990 aerial passes, but is not obviously a crop-mark until shown in those of 1990.

## 5 SUMMER FIELDS SCHOOL BUILDINGS

5.1 The core buildings around which Summer Fields School began lie at the southern and northern ends of the school site.

5.2 The 1864-90 main school buildings which today form the core are those at the south. They are built of yellow stock brick under slate roofs and are three storeys high. Bow fronts look out to the south while full-height bay windows look out to the east, being the only two elevations which have either any prospect or aspect. These were added to incrementally as funds and the changing need of the school became clear, often under a new regime. To the west and north they look directly into other, later buildings, to some of which they are physically joined

5.3 At the northern end of the site stands Mayfield House, which was originally a privately owned Villa, said by Fasnacht (1977) to have been the first house built in Summertown (1821). Built in brick with prominent bay windows and whitewashed, it is sandwiched between modern school buildings, forming a discrete group. Only its façade is visible. It is secluded from the road (as was probably intended).

5.4 The later 19th and early 20th century buildings which form the northern and western sides of the school are in a mixture of yellow stock brick and red brick, some with simple terracotta detailing. It is unclear what promoted the choice of one or the other, perhaps merely cost or availability of materials. At different times red brick was used for a rear-face



Fig 9: The main school core, viewed from the south-east

(main core) and a stable (Mayfield Road frontage), but at another a gymnasium (also Mayfield Road frontage).

5.5 The chapel of 1898 and School Room of 1890 remain prominent structures, but which have little of their facades visible, being hemmed in by near-contemporary and more modern structures.

5.6 Later 20th-century and very recent buildings have added to the fringes of the site, particularly to the west and north in a mélange of gable heights and sizes. All have made use of buff/ochre or red brick, perhaps in a canting allusion to the older core, but the site itself now sprawls out into the former playing fields, principally in the form of sports facilities.



Fig 10 : The main school core, viewed from the south-west; the entrance onto Mayfield Road is to the far left



Fig 11: From left to right – Main school house, addition (1895), New Room (1890, in shadow)[Chapel behind], Indoor pool (1985), Sports Hall (1995)

5.7 Along the Mayfield Road frontage lie a mix of older buildings and relatively new ones. Of note are the Gymnasium of 1898 and a stable with cupola and (filled in) yard which is probably among the first ancillary buildings of the school.



Fig 12: The L-shaped stable (arrowed), left and behind, with filled-in yard (middle); on the right is the 1898 gymnasium, while the west gable of the chapel is glimpsed over the gates up an original access road.

## 6 OBSERVATION: GEOTECHNICAL PITS

6.1 An archaeologist visited the site to observe and record geotechnical pits dug adjacent to the existing walls of the kitchen building on 18th February 2014. Three test pits were observed and these were located on the western side of the school buildings and were approximately 1m long and 0.8m wide. No significant archaeological remains were revealed in these test pits, which did reveal the foundations of the existing building.

### Test pit 1

6.2 The concrete foundations and foundation trench cut for the existing building (4) were revealed (Fig 15). Undisturbed stratigraphic remains were exposed beyond the foundations and these comprised a layer of gravel and silt (3), which was apparent at the base of the pit. The top of gravel occurred at approximately 1m below the current ground level. This was sealed by a 0.45m thick layer of grey silty loam (2) and a 0.15m thick topsoil deposit (1).

### Test pit 2

6.3 The test pit revealed similar features to those in test pit 1 including the foundations for the existing building (4) and the same deposit sequence. This comprised a layer of gravel and silt (3), apparent at the base of the pit and a layer of grey brown silty loam (2)

### **Test pit 3**

6.4 There was a greater amount of disturbance revealed in Test Pit 3 where concrete slab, concrete foundation, service trench and foundation trench appeared to have removed other deposits. A pipe trench was identified against the wall and concrete or disturbed material was identified to a depth of 0.48m. The test pit was 1.05m deep and the combined depth and extent of excavation did not allow the identification of deposits with any clarity, but a silt and gravel layer was identified at the deepest part of the test pit. It was not clear if this was a redeposited layer or part of the natural geological sequence.

### **Summary**

6.5 No significant archaeological remains such as features or dateable artefacts were revealed during the recording of test pits. Only a restricted view of the deposit sequence was revealed largely as the pits were immediately adjacent to existing walls, so a substantial part of the pits was taken up by foundations and associated services.

6.6 The test pits did suggest that possible natural gravels were present at between 0.9m and 1.05m below current ground surface. A 0.4m to 0.5m thick band of potentially undisturbed archaeological deposits was revealed, although no other archaeological remains were identified in these deposits.

## **7 CONCLUSIONS: the potential and perceived significance of remains**

### ***Prehistoric***

7.1 The aerial photographic evidence shows that there are archaeological crop-mark remains in the immediate area of the proposed development. While they are largely uncharacterised, their likely identification comprises a probable Bronze Age ring-ditch (usually with a central burial) and a variety of (as yet) undated enclosures and ditches, with smaller ring-ditches or hut circles. Some, if not all, are likely to have been damaged by former ridge and furrow plough cultivation, which has itself now been largely flattened. The regular appearance in aerial photographs of one sinuous ditch south-east of the school, as an interrupted line, is most likely to be the result of repeated plough-damage, and does not beg interpretation as part of a Neolithic causewayed enclosure or an Iron Age pit-alignment.

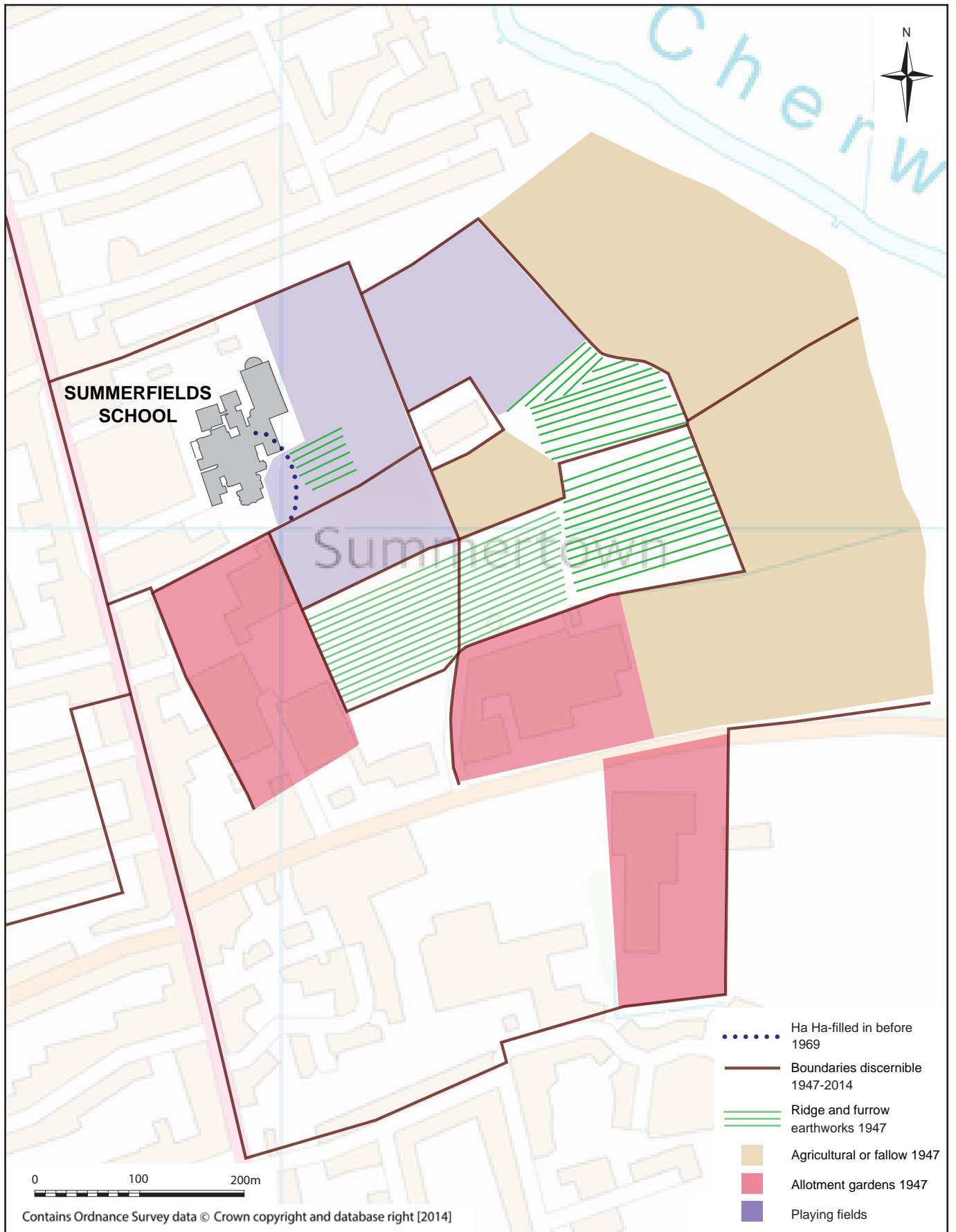


Fig 13: Evidence of previous land use from aerial photographs



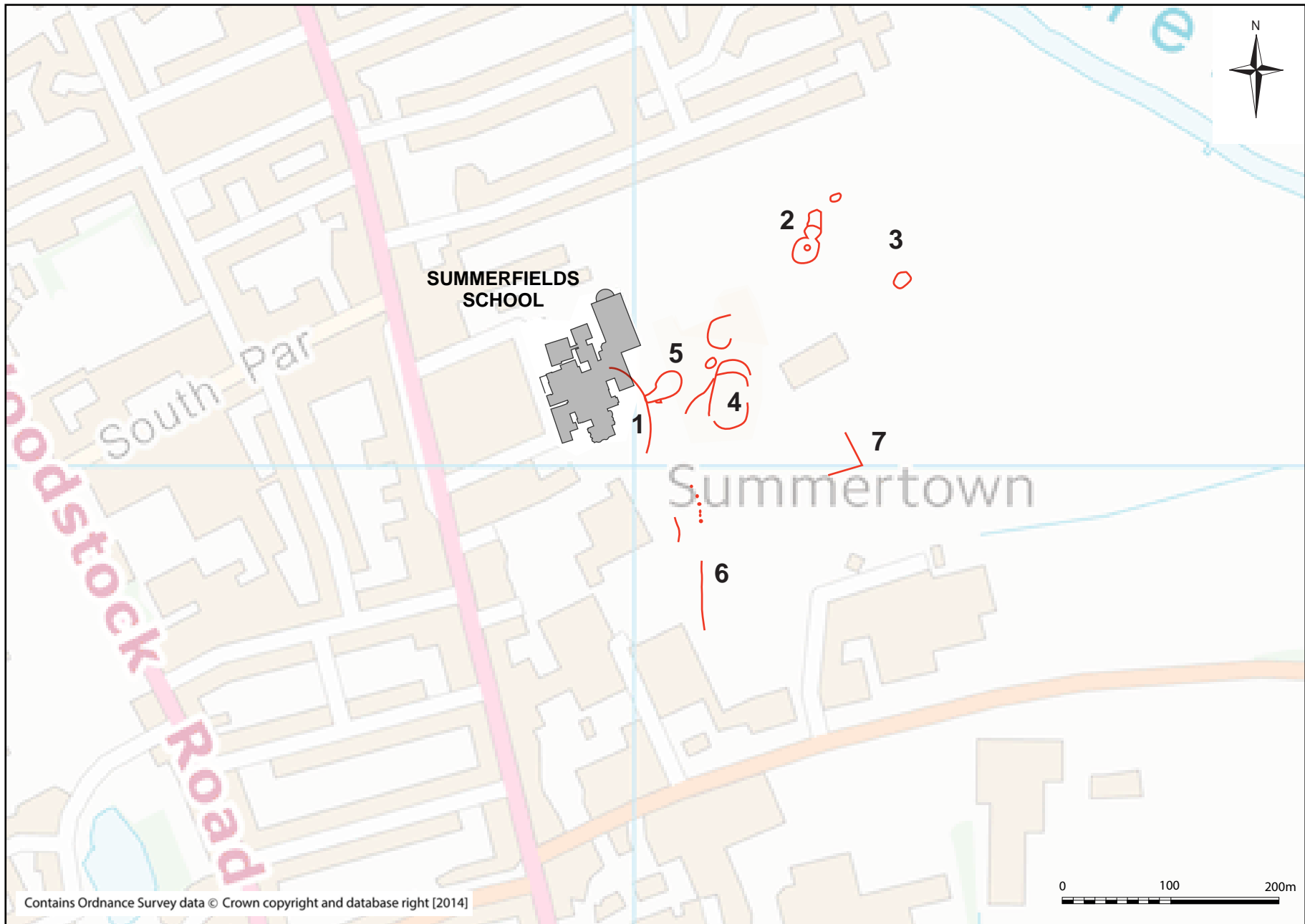


Fig 14: The location of cropmarks (1-7) identified from aerial photographs

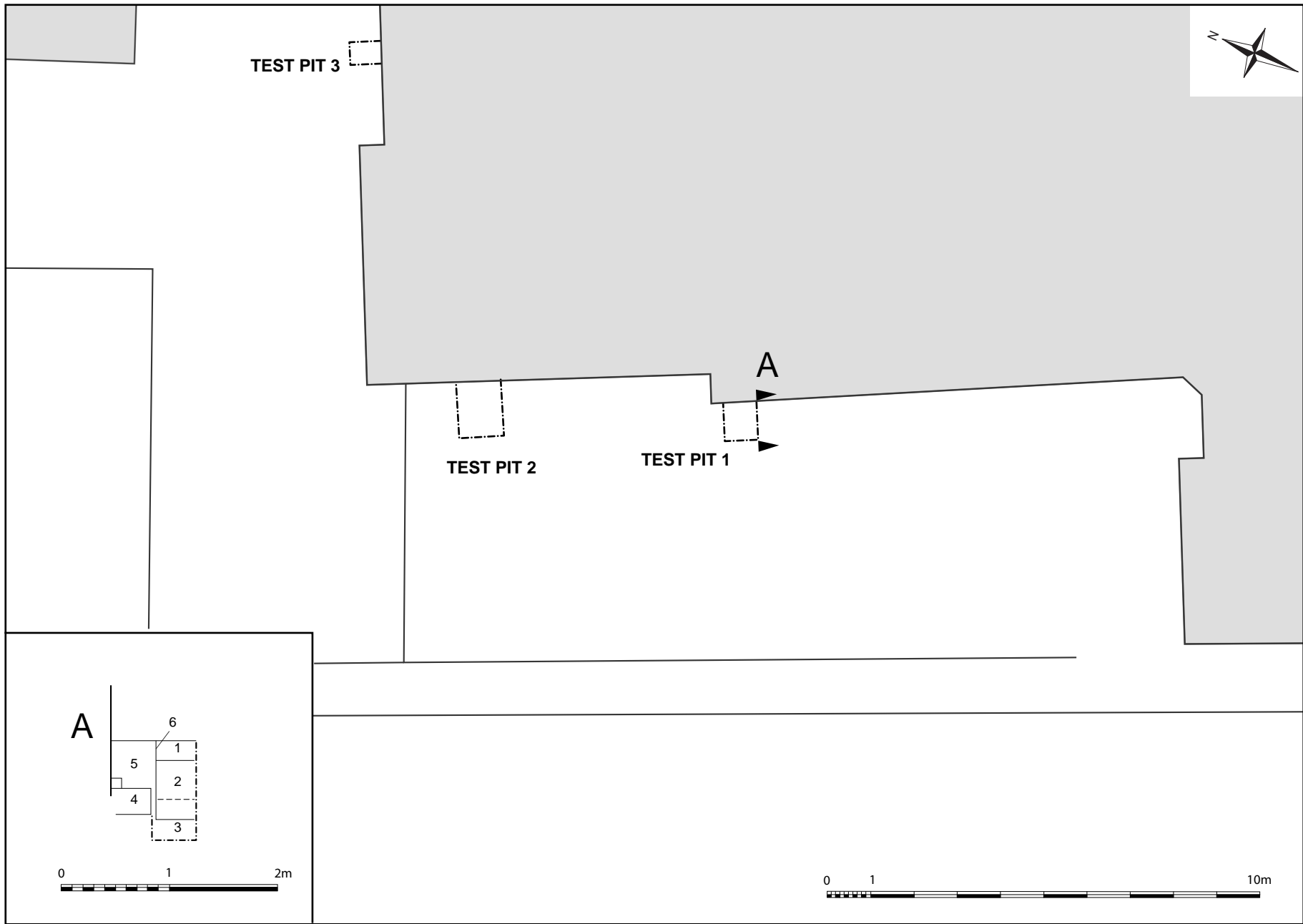


Fig 15: Location of geotechnical test pits (1-3) and section A

7.2 The significance of the possible remains is hard to gauge without characterisation through fieldwork. However, in setting what is known of Oxford's prehistoric archaeology (including some very well-preserved sites) into its context, Lambrick has said of the two possible periods which may be represented here (2013, 48):

*'There is now firm evidence of the Neolithic and early Bronze Age ceremonial and funerary complex at the confluence of the Thames and Cherwell, which puts Oxford on a par with other complexes of great significance in the (Thames) valley – and despite later development, it offers more opportunity for further discovery than better-known examples now largely destroyed by gravel extraction.'*

*'While Port Meadow (to the west) represents a unique survival of middle Iron Age settlement earthworks set within the living legacy of the grazing habitat in which they were established, most excavated settlement evidence is patchy. More coherent plans and good artefactual and environmental evidence are needed from multiple sites to elucidate the transition to settled farming and also the disruption/continuity of settlement in this pivotal part of the Thames Valley in the late Iron Age.'*

7.3 Clearly the Summerfield School site, with its potential Bronze Age ring ditch and its discrete enclosures, has the potential to begin to address both periods of occupation and farming in the area. This remaining potential, alone on the west bank of the Cherwell in this immediate area, is almost totally due to the presence and land-management regime of the school, in just the same way as the University Parks site, also playing fields, but further south, itself yielded such extensive remains.

7.4 Although no crop-marks are known from the proposed footprint of the new buildings at Summerfield School, it is usually the case that aerial photographs, even in instances where multiple frames contain evidence, no single summer shows up all the buried features as they dry out differentially. The known crop-marks may just denote a few among many buried features.

### **Anglo-Saxon**

7.5 The previously known, but perhaps little-understood, 1898 find of Anglo-Saxon skeletons with grave goods, and the nearby find of a spear head, may be isolated finds which have retrieved all of the Anglo-Saxon material which was there. However, given their discovery at a time when there was no alternative to hand-digging of foundations, which kept disturbance down to minimal areas, the advent of modern machine-stripping to build new structures, does present the best (and conversely) the most destructive opportunity to satisfy archaeological requirements to find out if related Anglo-Saxon funerary remains do, or do not, extend under or close to any of the 19th-century buildings. Their existence, close to a

site which probably contains at least one (almost certainly one, possibly more) Bronze-Age ring ditch, is redolent of an often-repeated scenario in which pagan Anglo-Saxon settlers in the 5th-7th centuries AD, sought to legitimise their hold on the landscape by their appropriation and re-use of pre-existing funerary and ceremonial landscape and other earthwork-features, such as upstanding barrows. This coincidence of such remains is not uncommon and often deliberate.

7.6 Dodd (2003, 12) relates the Anglo-Saxon burial remains found around the City of Oxford, taking Dickinson's research as a starting point (1976). Little has been added on the north-east side of the city since Dickinson's work and the Summer Fields School finds remain the best guide to the potential location of an early Anglo-Saxon pagan cemetery and settlement. This absence of newer discoveries in an age of great development is perhaps the best guide to the whereabouts of such a settlement, either under a long-lived building which has not been further disturbed, or under playing fields.

7.7 Scrutiny of planning applications in the run-up to and during 1898 now makes the discovery of that year likely in one of four known places, three under the school complex, the fourth under the pavilion. However, along Mayfield Road a previous phase of domestic development of the 1820s means that the road frontage of the school site had already been disturbed.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Archaeology Warwickshire would like to thank Graham Hale & Co for commissioning the work on behalf of Summer Fields School and to David Radford , Oxford City Archaeologist and the Oxfordshire Historic Environment Record for their assistance.



Fig 16: Test Pit 2