

**St Thomas More School,
Greenmoor Road, Nuneaton,
Warwickshire**

Archaeological Watching Brief



understanding heritage matters

Report No 1122
September 2011



*Working for
Warwickshire*

Project: St Thomas More School, Greenmoor Road,
Nuneaton, Warwickshire

Commissioned by: TSH Architects on behalf of Diocesan Schools
Commission

Project Report No. 1122

Site Code: NT10

NGR: SP 353 911

Planning Reference: 029916

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Contents

	Summary
1	Introduction
2	Location
3	Archaeological and Historical Background
4	Observation
5	Conclusions
	Acknowledgements
	Bibliography
	Appendix: List of Contexts

List of Figures

1	Site location
2	Ordnance Survey map of 1886 showing the site of the school as farmland
3	Ordnance Survey map of 1938 showing brickworks and clay pits
4	Areas observed
5	View of the site
6	Proposed car park areas and suggested furrows
7	Soil stripping for proposed sports pitch
8	Observed service trenches
9	Observed service trenches

Summary

An archaeological watching brief carried out at St Thomas More School, Greenmoor Road, Nuneaton failed to find any remains associated with the nearby medieval pottery industry based at Chilvers Coton. Two small groups of probable furrows, associated with medieval ridge and furrow ploughing, may represent the remains of two different 'fields' within a former open field system. Forty-four sherds of pottery were recovered during the work. Fourteen of these were medieval and dated from the 13th to the 14th century, including one over-fired example which may have derived from a nearby pottery kiln; whilst the remainder had a date range between the 17th and the 20th century.

1. Introduction

1.1 Planning permission has been granted by Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council for the erection of a new Sixth Form centre with associated all weather pitch, contractor's access and associated services (Planning Ref. 029961) at St Thomas More School, Greenmoor Road, Nuneaton. The site lies close to an area of medieval pottery production and it was therefore a condition of planning permission that the applicant should secure the implementation of a programme of archaeological work to be carried out in conjunction with the development.

1.2 A programme of fieldwork, consisting of the archaeological observation of soil stripping and service trenches, in accordance with a Brief prepared by the County Planning Archaeologist on behalf of the Planning Authority, was commissioned from Archaeology (Projects) Warwickshire, formerly Warwickshire Museum Archaeology Projects Group and carried out between 2010 and 2011. This report presents the results of that work and the project archive will be stored at the Warwickshire Museum under the site code NT10.

2. Location

2.1 The site is located on the western side of Greenmoor Road, Nuneaton and was centred around National Grid reference SP 353 911 in the parish of Nuneaton and Bedworth. The development site was previously part of playing fields belonging to the school.

2.2 The underlying geology of the area differs across the site and is recorded as a combination of Lower Coal Measures and Outwoods Shale Formation (British Geological Survey 1994).

3. Archaeological and Historical Background

3.1 The medieval settlement of Chilvers Coton was located approximately 200m to the south-east of the site, now largely a suburb of Nuneaton. To the west of this lies the site of one of the region's major pottery industries, lasting from the 13th to the 16th century. Records dating from 1394 mention a Potters Coton in the area, which is presumed to refer to the Heath End area of Chilvers Coton. The industry also included roof and floor tile production, including decorated floor tiles used in high status buildings such as Nuneaton Priory. In the 1960s and early 1970s a number of excavations were carried out in the area and these uncovered several medieval pottery and tile kilns (Fig 1).

These sites are recorded on the Warwickshire Historic Environment Record HER WA MWA) and include:

HER WA Ref*	Grid Ref	Description
MWA 5039	SP 35 90	Site of eight pottery kilns of the 13th to 14th century
MWA 5040	SP 35 90	Site of six pottery kilns of the 14th century
MWA 5041	SP 35 90	Site of eight pottery kilns of the 13th century
MWA 5042	SP 35 90	Site of two pottery kilns of the 14th century
MWA 5144	SP 35 90	Site of six tile kilns of 14th century date
MWA 5145	SP 35 90	Site of pottery kiln of the 15th to 16th century
MWA 5146	SP 35 90	Site of two tile kilns of 14th century date

* Warwickshire Historic Environment Record Reference Number

3.2 There are also a number of post-medieval sites recorded in the area. MWA 5726 is the site of a tramway marked on the 1913 Ordnance Survey map whilst MWA 5727 is an associated clay pit. To the south-east of the school is the site of a foundry (MWA 5756) whilst a number of structures associated with the Coventry canal, a wharf (MWA 5768) and a bank of lime kilns (MWA 5769) have also been recorded.

3.3 A small amount of archaeological work has happened in the area since the 1970s. In 1996 an archaeological observation (EWA 4150) carried out during the construction of new buildings at St Thomas More School found some evidence that the area had been quarried for clay in the past and backfilled shortly before the school was built. In 2000 another observation (EWA 6871) was carried out to the north-west and south-east during water main renewal across the housing estate that now lies over much of the site of the medieval pottery industry. Those trenches dug to the south-east were often excavated through soil containing large amounts of waste medieval pottery dumped from these kiln sites.

Map evidence

3.4 The First Edition Ordnance Survey map of 1886 (Ordnance Survey 1886) shows the site of the school as a field in an area of farmland to the south-west of the Coventry canal. The Second Edition of 1903 shows a similar picture, but with a very large clay pit to west of school, presumably to supply the nearby brick works.

3.5 By the time of the Third Edition map of 1924-26 the clay pit was far larger, extending to the west and south-west of school. The fields on which the school stands had become allotment gardens and the existing sports grounds, to the south, are marked. Greenmoor Road itself was not built at this time. The original school buildings were constructed in the later 1930s and appear on the Ordnance Survey 1:10560 map of 1938. Greenwood Road is also marked with a partially dashed line, suggesting it had been marked out, but not yet completed. New residential housing was being developed across the area to the east of Greenwood Road (Figs 2 and 3).

4. Observation

4.1 Various areas of ground reduction across the site were observed as part of the archaeological watching brief programme including the locations of the new sports pitch, new car parking area, new sixth form block and associated services and access road. Three large areas of topsoil stripping were observed at the southern limit of the site in the footprint of the proposed sixth form block, at the northern limit of the site for the car parking and at the western limit of the site in the footprint of the proposed sports pitch (Fig 4).

New Car Parking Area

4.2 In the north-eastern part of the site in the footprint of the proposed car park area a reddish brown geological natural (25) was revealed across the stripped area. Four furrows (17-20) were observed, running in a north-easterly to south-westerly direction. These were cut into the natural and were very hard to identify as they were filled with a very dry reddish brown clay loam (21-24) which was only a slightly different colour from the natural clay. It was only the consistency of the soil as it dried out that made them visible.

Sixth Form Block

4.3 In the south-eastern part of the site within the footprint of the new sixth form block was stripped down to a layer of yellowish brown clay (6). The layer was 0.4m below the ground surface contained no evidence of intrusions and the layer was probably geological natural.

4.4 Three possible furrows (4, 13 and 15) were observed running in a north-west to-south-east direction. These three features were quite large, being over 5m wide, and it is just possible that they were actually associated with some unrecorded activity when the site was allotments or were in some way associated with the clay extraction for 19th-century brick works to the west of the school.

4.5 The area was overlain by 0.3m of dark greyish brown clay loam topsoil. No other significant archaeological finds or features were recorded.

All weather pitch

4.6 No remains of archaeological features were observed on the site of the new all weather pitch on the western side of the site. Here the area was stripped by up to a maximum depth of 0.9m. A layer of yellowish brown clay (8) was revealed 0.3m below the ground surface and approximately 0.6m of the layer was removed. No intrusions or other finds were present in the layer and the layer was probably a variation of geological natural. This was overlain by 0.3m of dark greyish brown clay loam topsoil (7).

4.7 The topsoil (7) contained a small scatter of pottery of 13th to 19th century date. The sherds were heavily abraded and had almost certainly been worn by years of ploughing.

Service trenches and access road

4.8 A similar deposit sequence was observed in service trenches which crossed the site; however no other archaeological remains or features were revealed during observation of these trenches. Some of the deeper excavations did confirm the expected geology of the area; for example, a trench to the north of the new sixth form centre, exposed a bed of grey shale (26) at a depth of 1.5m below the topsoil (1), which is likely to be the Outwoods Shale Formation shown on the 1994 British Geological Survey map.

4.9 The area of the temporary access road was largely reduced prior to any archaeological attendance; however an inspection of exposed sections revealed topsoil deposits and no evidence of archaeological features.

5. Conclusions

5.1 No archaeological evidence was revealed during the watching brief to suggest prehistoric or Romano-British activity on or in the vicinity of the site. The majority of the observed areas contained no archaeological features or finds.

5.2 There was no evidence to indicate intensive industrial or settlement activity on the site prior to or during the medieval period; however a series of linear furrows cut into the geological natural were evidence for medieval ridge and furrow ploughing. These were observed in two areas of the site and two different alignments were recorded. This may indicate evidence for the remains of two different 'fields' within a medieval field system.

5.3 A scatter of heavily abraded pottery sherds including 13th and 14th century pottery probably represent debris brought from a nearby medieval settlement into the fields during the process of manuring of the fields.

5.4 No concentrations of pottery wasters or areas of burning were observed and it has to be assumed that the area of pottery and tile kilns did not extend this far. Although a single sherd of over-fired pottery was probably from a waster produced during pottery firing in kilns at nearby Chilvers Coton. There was no evidence for pottery or tile production on the site, although previous archaeological watching brief on the site clearly indicated that clay extraction had taken place. Therefore it is most likely that pottery or brick producing kilns did not extend onto the site, but were in sufficiently close proximity that evidence for both clay extraction and production debris was found on the site.

5.5 The possible furrows in the area of the new sixth form block may also be associated with post-medieval clay extraction. There is known pitting for the former brickworks to the west and the observation of the previous extensions to the school in 1996 did expose the remains of backfilled clay pits. However, whilst similar activity associated with the brickworks may have resulted in these features no maps show the clay pits extending this far in to the site.

Acknowledgements

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Appendix A: List of Recorded Contexts

<i>Context</i>	<i>Description</i>
1	Topsoil
2	Layer
3	Layer
4	Possible Furrow
5	Fill (of 4)
6	Geological natural
7	Topsoil
8	Geological natural
9	Tarmac
10	Hardcore
11	Layer
12	Geological natural
13	possible Furrow
14	Fill (of 13)
15	Possible Furrow
16	Fill (of 15)
17	Furrow
18	Furrow
19	Furrow
20	Furrow
21	Fill of 17
22	Fill of 18
23	Fill of 19
24	Fill of 20
25	Reddish brown geological natural clay
26	Geological natural shale

Appendix B: Finds List

<i>Context</i>	<i>Material</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Description</i>
2	Pottery	5	2 x medieval, 1 x 17th century, 2 x 19th/20th century
7	Pottery	37	12 x medieval, 3 x 17th century, 22 x 18th-20th century
7	Glass	1	19th/20th century
9	Pottery	2	2 x 17th century

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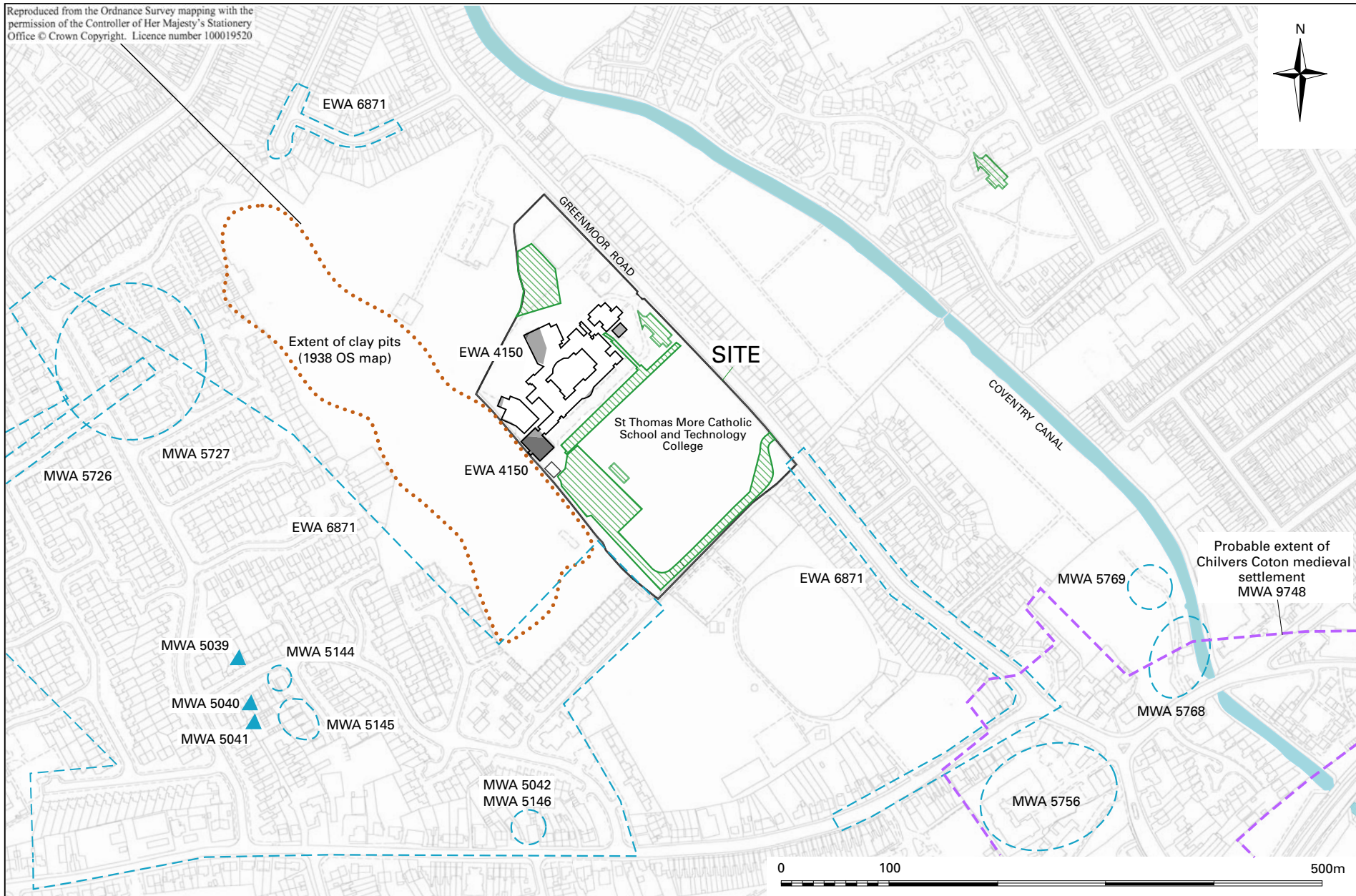


Fig. 1: Site location

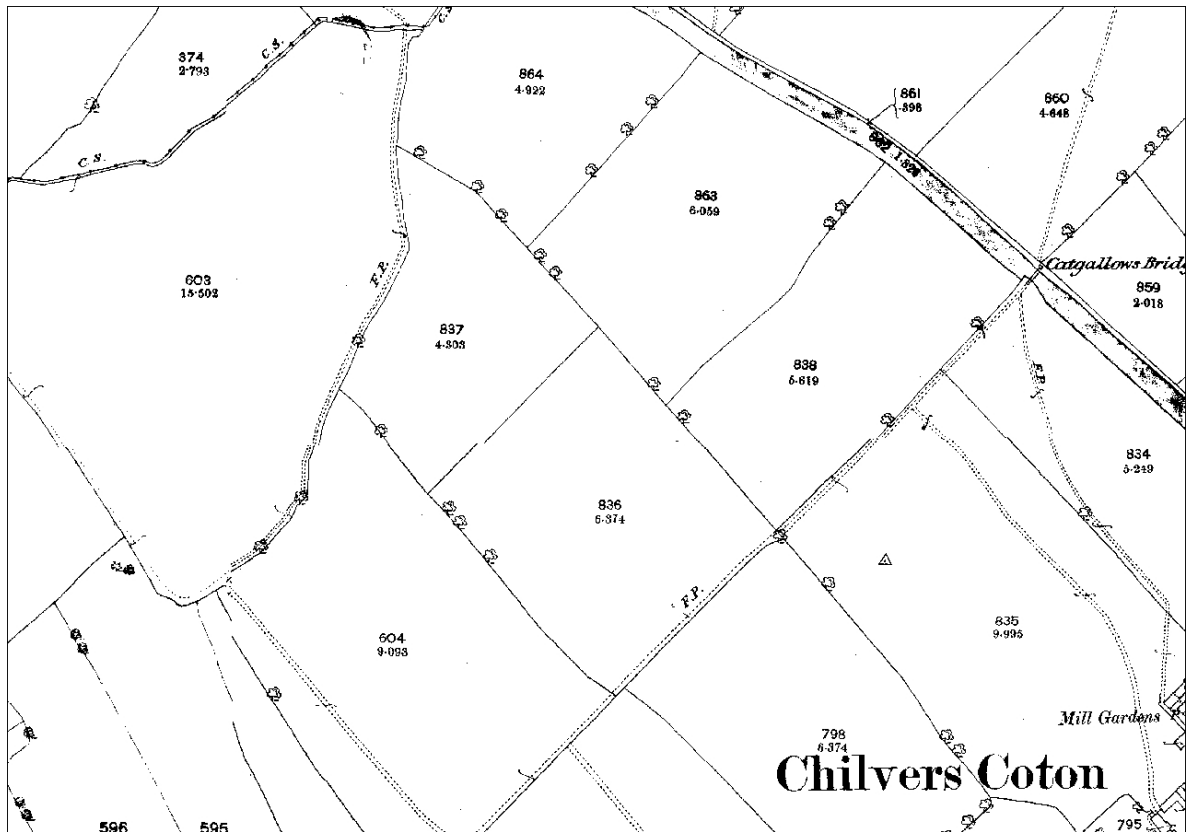


Fig 2: Ordnance Survey map of 1886 showing the site of the school as farmland

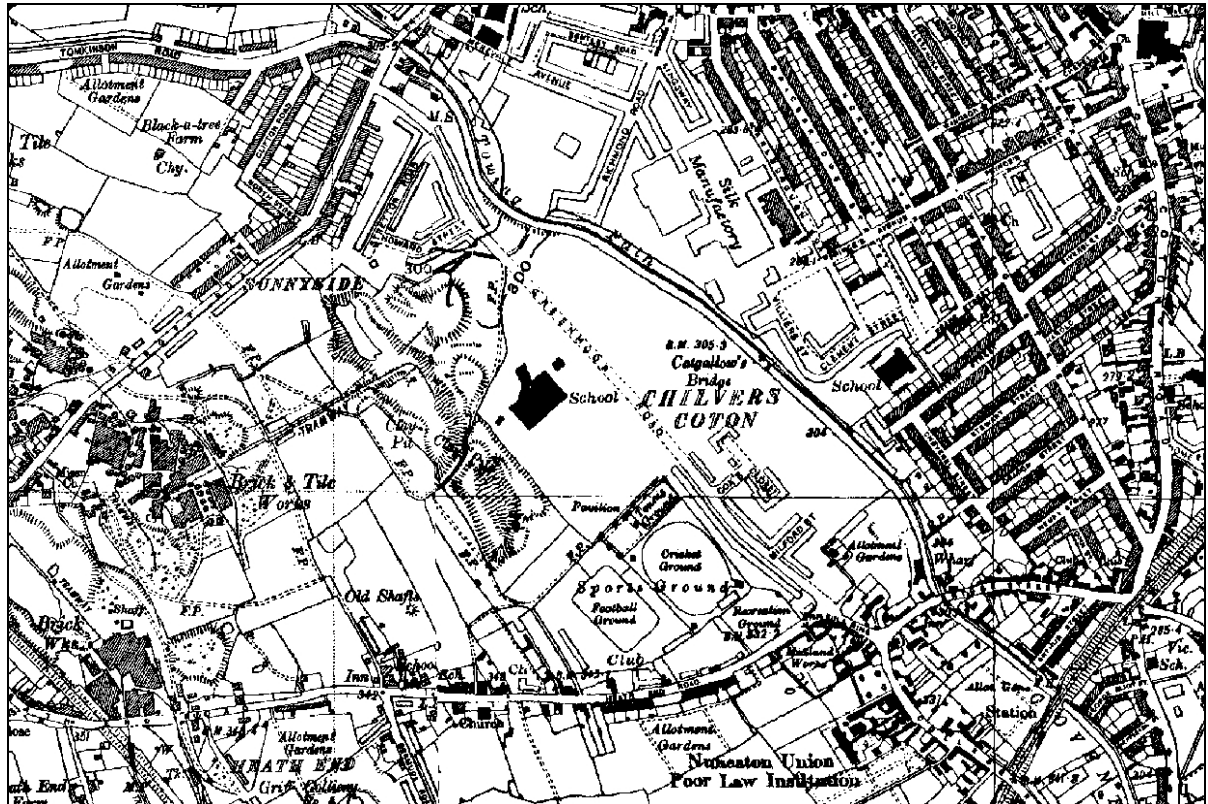


Fig 3: Ordnance Survey map of 1938 showing brickworks and clay pits

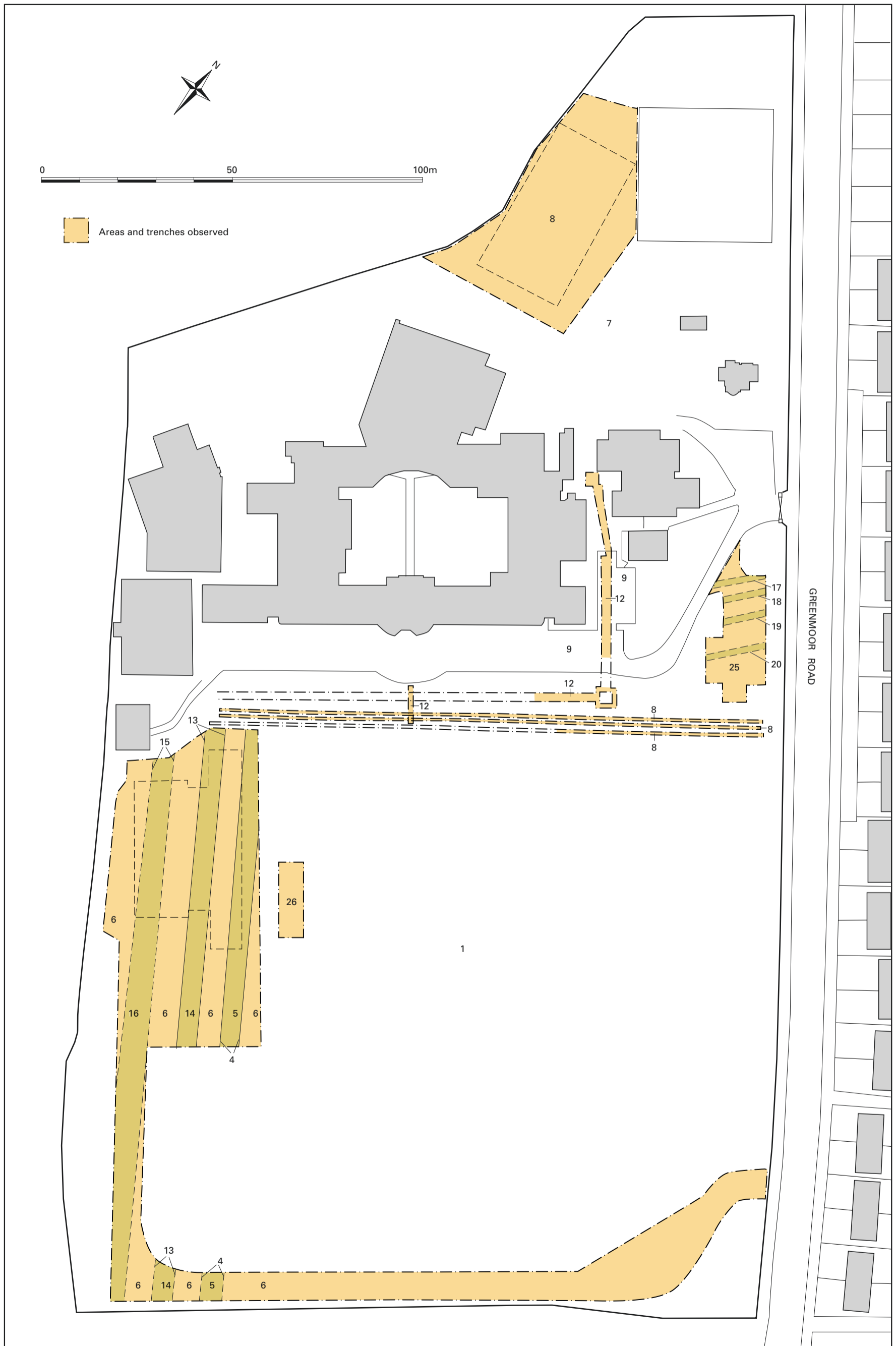


Fig. 4: Areas observed



Fig 5: Proposed sixth form block and suggested furrows



Fig 6: Proposed car park areas and suggested furrows



Fig 7: Soil stripping for proposed sports pitch



Figs 8 and 9: Observed service trenches