

plan app C/8/67/98/PA

NYCC HER	
SNY	875
ENY	657
CNY	2000
Parish	8067
Rec'd	08/11/1999

SAXTON CHURCH OF ENGLAND PRIMARY SCHOOL

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION OSA REPORT No. 98EV09

National Grid Reference: SE 4758 3686

November 1998

ON SITE **ARCHÆOLOGY**

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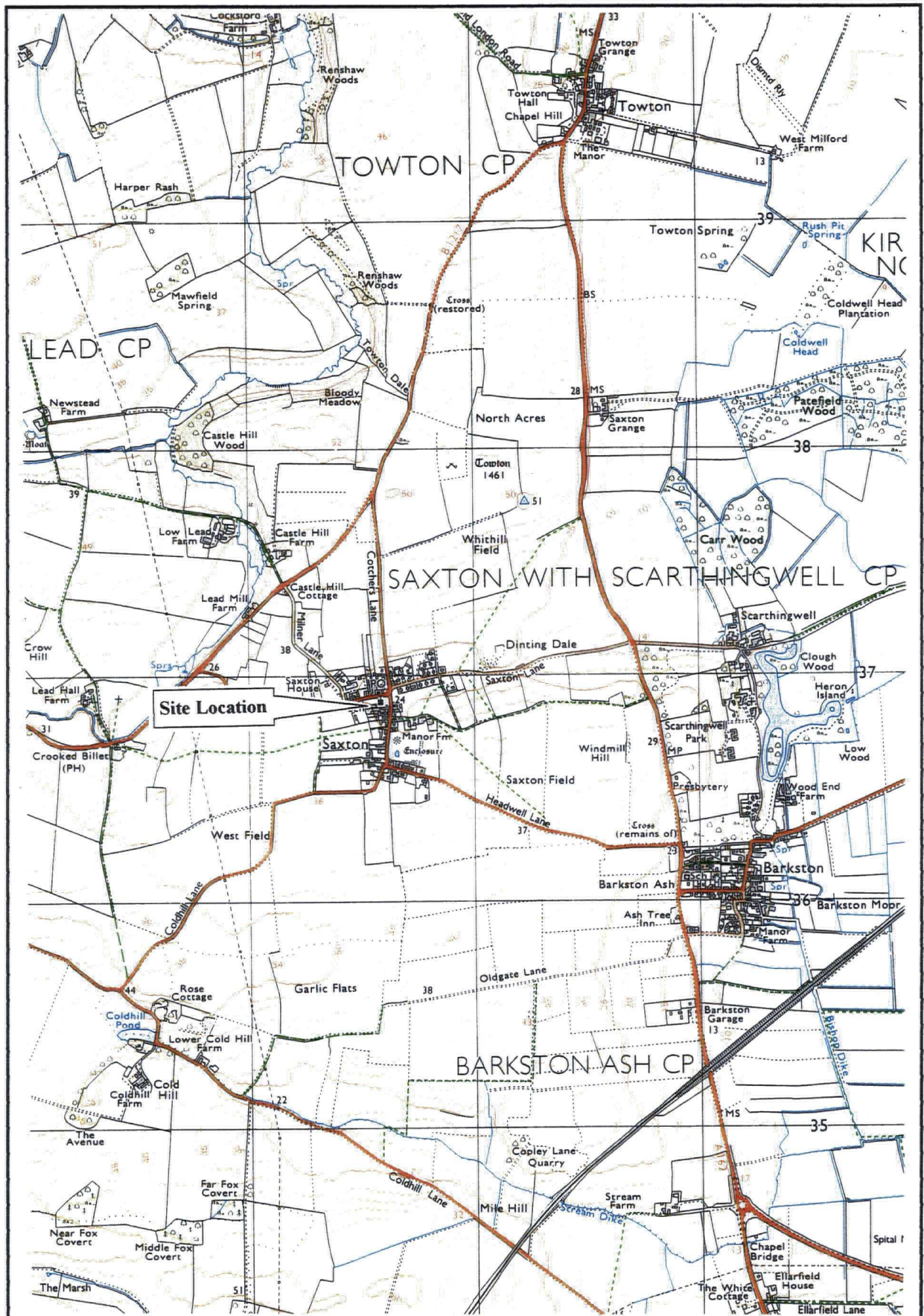


Figure 1. Site Location (SE 4758 3686)

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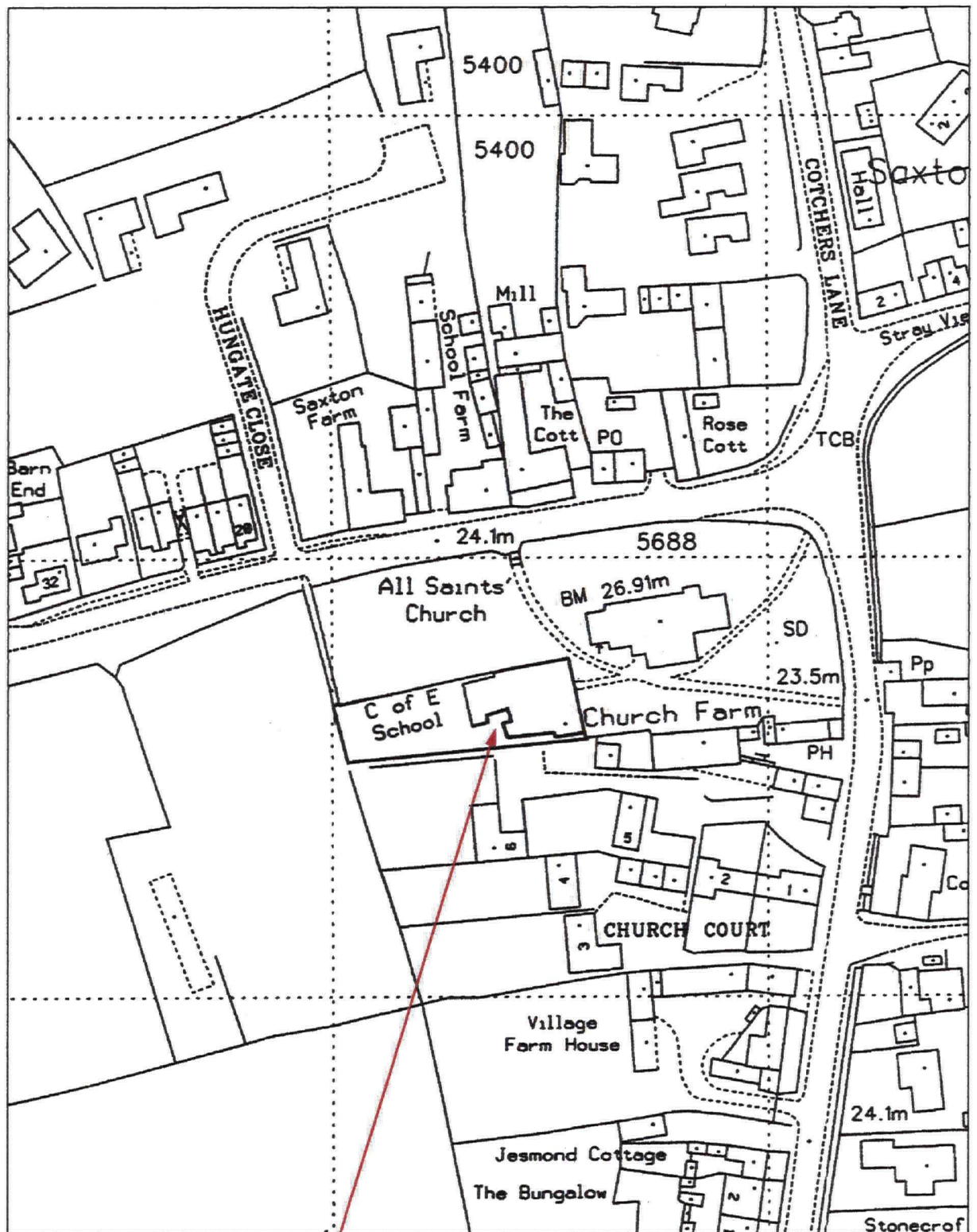


Figure 2. Location of evaluation trench.

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1.0 Summary

An archaeological evaluation was carried out on behalf of The North Yorkshire County Council Building Design and Management Unit in advance of their proposed extension to the Primary School which occupies the site. This evaluation comprised a search of the relevant documentary sources and the excavation of the proposed foundation trenches. The documentary searches were undertaken during the weeks commencing Monday the 19th and 26th of October. The fieldwork was carried out on Monday the 26th of October. The documentary search indicated that the rectangular area currently the site of the school and its playground had previously been within the churchyard of All Saints Church. This change presumably came about in the 1860s when the first school was built on the site. The burial plan currently in use at the church only shows burials within the existing churchyard perimeter. The search did not produce any earlier burial plan which might have indicated the possible presence of human remains within the area of the proposed school extension.

The excavation of the foundation trenches revealed traces of the floors and walls of a 19th school outhouse. Local people remember this building being demolished in the 1960s. The only feature of any archaeological significance was an alignment of limestone boulders set in crushed limestone at the base level of the foundation trench. This has been tentatively interpreted as a possible capping for a grave. It is recommended that this feature should be left in situ when the proposed new foundations are constructed.

This report was prepared by Nick Pearson of On-Site Archaeology.

2.0 Site Location and Archaeological Background

2.1 Area of proposed development

The site is situated immediately adjacent to the current school building in a small external courtyard between the existing staffroom and classroom 1. It is intended that this area will be enclosed within the school building to provide additional internal space. The National Grid reference for the site is SE 4758 3686 (see Figure 1 for location).

An examination of early Ordnance Survey maps shows that the area currently occupied by the school building and the playground was likely to have been within the church yard of All Saints Church until the first school building was erected in the 1860s. There was therefore the possibility that the area may have been used as part of the church cemetery at any time until the land was given over to the construction of the school. As a result of this factor it was considered plausible that human remains might be uncovered during the construction of the foundation trenches for the proposed school extension.

There were two further reasons why this area was considered to be archaeologically sensitive. Firstly, All saints Church is of pre-conquest foundation. As a result of this, deposits and / or

features of Anglian date may be encountered during the excavation of the foundation trenches. Secondly, there is a long tradition linking this church with the Battle of Towton, which took place on March 29th 1461. In addition to the tomb of Lord Dacre, the Lancastrian leader who was killed in the battle and is buried at this location, it is also known that a number of the fallen are buried in a mass grave on the north side of the church. Although the development area lies to the south of the church, the fact that in excess of 26,000 lives were lost in the battle must leave open the possibility that mass internment may have taken place elsewhere in the churchyard other than just on the northern side of the church. In the aftermath of the battle and with the need to bury so many dead, it is unlikely that adequate records of burial locations would have been recorded systematically.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

In order for the planning application for this proposed development to be effectively expedited it was imperative that the presence or absence of human remains should be determined. If human remains were encountered it would be necessary to obtain the necessary permissions and to fulfill all statutory requirements in order to remove them from within the limits of the foundation trenches. It was important that the scale of the problem should be determined as it was possible that the financial implications of such an eventuality might make the development proposal not viable, even if all permissions were granted and statutory requirements satisfied.

A twin track strategy therefore formed the basis of the current evaluation. Firstly a search was made of all relevant documentary sources in order to determine if there was evidence to prove the likely presence or absence of human remains from within the development area. Secondly, the area within the limits of the foundation trenches were excavated by hand under archaeological constraints.

3.2 The Documentary Search

Documentary searches were made at the following locations:-

North Yorkshire County Council Sites and Monuments Register, (Heritage Unit, County Hall, Northallerton).

North Yorkshire County Council, County Records Office, Northallerton.

York City Reference Library, Museum Street, York

Saxton, Church of all Saints. (in the Safe in the vestry)

The Borthwick Institute, Peasholme Green, York

The above searches revealed that the bulk of the data comprised details of Births, Marriages and Deaths in the parish. Recent information, including a burial plan showing only those graves which are currently visible in the churchyard was located in the church vestry. The bulk of the earlier documentary sources is held in the Borthwick Institute in York. This again largely comprised information regarding Births, Marriages and Deaths in the parish. There was no earlier burial plan including the area where the school and its playground are now located.

Examination of the ordnance survey map of 1852 showed that the area now occupied by the school and its playground was at that time within the churchyard boundary and as such there is the possibility that burials pre-dating the construction of the school may be encountered. The first school building was built in the 1860s. All later Ordnance Survey maps reflect this change in land use.

3.3 *Excavation Methodology*

A single trench was excavated, entirely by hand. This was L shaped in plan, measuring a total of 8 linear metres. This trench measured 0.80m in width and 0.80m in depth. Its dimensions and location were designed to take in the area of the proposed foundations for the school extension. The trench location is illustrated in Figure 2.

Standard *On-Site Archaeology* techniques were followed throughout the excavation. This involved the completion of a context sheet for each deposit or feature encountered, along with plans drawn to scale. Heights above Ordnance Datum (AOD) were calculated by taking levels from a Temporary Benchmark (TBM) which was then tied in with the existing Ordnance Survey benchmark on the south wall of the church tower (26.91m AOD). A photographic record of the deposits and features was also maintained.

4.0 Results of the Excavation .

4.1 *The succession of deposits, in stratigraphic sequence, were as follows;*

- 1000..... Layer: Paving stones. School yard surface. Level on top of deposit 26.26m AOD.
- 1001..... Layer: loose yellow sand. Levelling for [1000].
- 1002..... Layer: very mixed loose light brown sandy clay loam with limestone and sandstone fragments and mortar fleck. Level on top of deposit 26.16m - 25.76m AOD.
- 1003..... Structure: Limestone course foundation wall. Level on top of structure 26.16m AOD.
- 1004..... Layer: Pink ash and mortar mix. (Rough concreted floor surface). Level on top of deposit 25.86m AOD.
- 1005..... Structure: Modern concrete beam, perhaps protecting a pipe. Level on top of structure 26.16m AOD.

1006 Structure: Modern pipe. Level on top of structure 25.86m AOD.

1007 Layer: Heavy brown clay with large, medium and small limestone fragments.
Possible demolition dump. Level on top of deposit 25.77m AOD.

1008 Structure: Large angular limestone blocks set in crushed limestone. Aligned approximately east / west. Level on top of structure 25.47m AOD.

Contexts [1000] and [1001] represent modern yard surfacing and associated levelling material.

Contexts [1005] and [1006] represent modern intrusions, (concrete beam and pipe).

Contexts [1003] - [1004] represent the vestigial remains of a wall and the mortar / ash floor of a building (see plate 1). The floor [1004] was sealed by a mixed deposit of loose light brown sandy clay loam [1002] which was late 19th to early 20th century in date. This building is remembered by Mr and Mrs Roebuck, who act as the school caretakers and key-holders. It was a brick built washroom of Victorian date and was demolished in the 1960s when the school was extended. They have photographic records of this building in their possession.

Context [1007] was mid Victorian in date and comprised a 30cm thick deposit rich in building demolition material. It has therefore been interpreted as a dump associated with renovations to the Church, which took place in the second quarter of the 19th century.

Context [1008] is undated but is stratigraphically earlier than the 19th century dump [1007] and may therefore be post medieval or perhaps earlier. The top of this feature was observed 0.80m BGL (25.47m AOD) at the base level of the proposed foundation trenches. It comprised a rough alignment of large angular limestone blocks set in a matrix of crushed limestone (see Figure 3 and plates 2 and 3). Although only partially within the excavation area its orientation appears to be approximately east / west. As this feature lay at the bottom level that was required for the purposes of this evaluation exercise it was not possible to undertake further excavation work in order to try and interpret this feature. Although it may represent the foundations of a building it is equally possible that it may be capping a grave. The east - west alignment gives some limited weight to this latter theory.

5.0 Conclusions

The evaluation set out to answer the following questions as regards that part of the site that is the subject of this planning application:-

- *Are human remains present or absent within the depth that the proposed foundations will be excavated?*
- *Are there any features or deposits of pre Conquest date present on this part of the site?*

It was clear that all of the deposits that were excavated to the prescribed depth of 0.80m BGL were 19th century or later. The limestone alignment observed at the base level [1008] is probably earlier than that date on the basis of the stratigraphic evidence although as no dateable material was excavated this cannot be a certainty. It seems definite therefore that if deposits of pre-Conquest date exist on this part of the site that they are lower than 0.80m BGL (25.47m AOD).

It was equally clear that no human remains or grave cuts were present within the area of the proposed foundation trenches. The single limestone feature that was observed at the base level of the excavation may perhaps be interpreted as the capping of a grave. The fact however that no disarticulated human remain were recovered during the excavation work would perhaps indicate that burials never did take place on this southern perimeter of the site, even when it was part of the churchyard, prior to the construction of the first school in the 1860s.

Given that the only feature of archaeological potential was uncovered at the base level of the proposed foundations and will not be affected by them, on the basis of the evidence of this evaluation exercise it is the opinion of this author that the proposed development will not impact on any archaeological features or deposits.

6.0 Bibliography

Gilleghan John, 1998. A Guide to Staxton Church

7.0 Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to the staff and children of Saxton Primary School for their interest in our work, especially those children who assisted us during their half term break. I am also indebted to Mr and Mrs Marshall who opened up the school for us and to Mr Roebuck who allowed me access to the Church vestry to consult the records held therein. I am also grateful to Mr Jim Counter and Mr Neil Campling of North Yorkshire County Council who undertook their diverse duties with good humour and diligence. Last but not least, I must thank Tim Charlson and Daniel Pearson, who undertook the hand excavation work.

7.0 Appendix 1 - Archive Index

7.1 Drawing Register

<i>Dwg No</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Scale</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Initials</i>
1	Composite plan, showing modern features and limestone structure [1008]	1:20	26/10/98	NFP

7.2 Photographic Register

<i>Frame</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Scale</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Initials</i>
1 -6	View from west of wall [1003] and [1004]	yes	26/10/98	NFP
7-12	Detail of stone wall [1003]	no	26/10/98	NFP
13-29	Detail of limestone feature [1008]	yes	26/10/98	NFP
30-31	General view of trench at completion level	yes	26/10/98	NFP



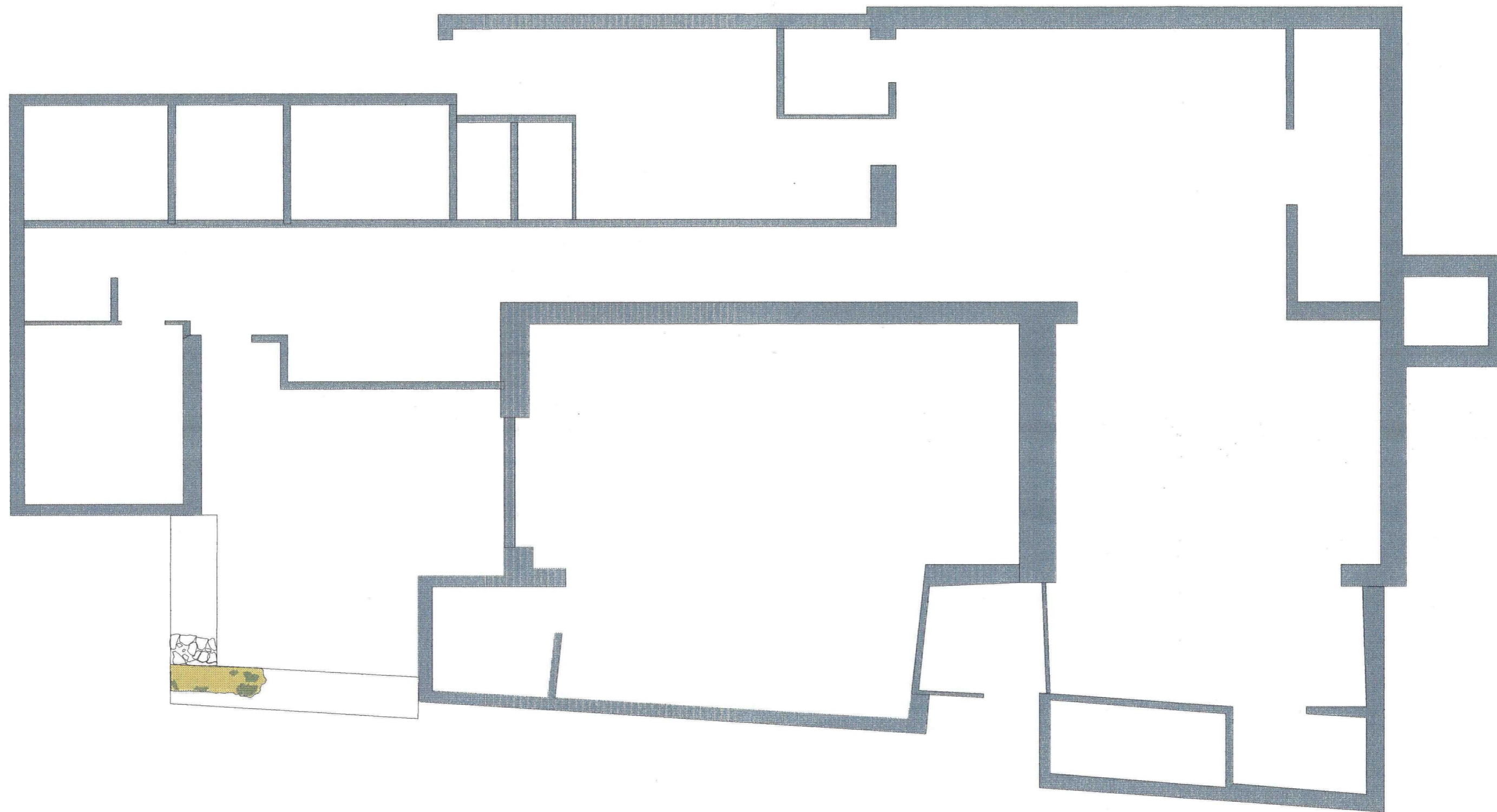
Plate 1. General view from west showing modern features Scale of 1.00m



Plate 2. Detail of limestone feature [1008], scale 1.00m,



Plate 3. General view of excavation from west at completion level. Scale of 1.00m




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Drawing Name: School.dwg
Drawn By: Nick Pearson
Date: 18.11.98

0 metres 5

Location of evaluation trench,
Saxton Primary School

 [1003] Modern wall foundation


 [1008] Limestone feature



Figure 3