Trial Trench Evaluation on land at former Abington Vale School Northampton March 2014

Report No. 14/73

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Illustrator: James Ladocha

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OASIS REPORT FORM

PROJECT DETAILS	**OASIS No: molarnort1 - 176147**	
Project name	Archaeological trial trench evaluation on land at former Abington Vale School, Northampton	
Short description (250 words maximum)	MOLA was commissioned by Bellway Homes to carry out archaeological trial trenching on land at the former Abington Vale School, Northampton prior to proposed development of the site. Ten trenches were excavated. Modern terracing, levelling and landscaping has destroyed much of the original ground surface across the site. Two undated archaeological features were investigated in those areas least disturbed by the modern activity.	
Project type (eg DBA, evaluation etc)	Evaluation	
Site status (none, NT, SAM etc)	None	
Previous work (SMR numbers etc)	None	
Current Land use	Unused, demolished buildings	
Future work (yes, no, unknown)	Unknown	
Monument type/ period	Modern buildings/terracing	
Significant finds (artefact type and period)	None	
PROJECT LOCATION		
County	Northamptonshire	
Site address (including postcode)	Land off Bridgewater Drive, Abington, Northampton	
Study area (sq.m or ha)	2.5ha	
OS Easting & Northing (use grid sq. letter code)	SP 7831 6134	
Height OD	Approx. 65m aOD	
PROJECT CREATORS		
Organisation	MOLA	
Project brief originator	Assistant County Archaeological Advisor NCC	
Project Design originator	MOLA	
Director/Supervisor	Chris Chinnock	
Project Manager	Elizabeth Muldowney	
Sponsor or funding body	Bellway Homes	
PROJECT DATE		
Start date	10/03/2014	
End date	12/03/2014	
ARCHIVES	**Location (Accession no.)**	**Content (eg pottery, animal bone etc)**
Physical	MOLA Northampton Offices: ABV14	Environmental material
Paper	MOLA Northampton Offices: ABV14	Site file
Digital	MOLA Northampton Offices: ABV14	Mapinfo plans, Word report
BIBLIOGRAPHY	Journal/monograph, published or forthcoming, or unpublished client report (MOLA report)	
Title	Archaeological trial trench evaluation on land at former Abington Vale School, Northampton, Northamptonshire	
Serial title & volume	14/73	
Author(s)	Chris Chinnock	
Page numbers	22	
Date	02.04.14	

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**ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRIAL TRENCH EVALUATION,
ON LAND AT FORMER ABINGTON VALE SCHOOL,
NORTHAMPTON
MARCH 2014**

Abstract

MOLA was commissioned by Bellway Homes to carry out archaeological trial trenching on land at the former Abington Vale School, Northampton prior to proposed development of the site. Ten trenches were excavated. Modern terracing, levelling and landscaping has destroyed much of the original ground surface across the site. Two undated archaeological features were investigated in those areas least disturbed by the modern activity. The larger feature with its steep sides and flat base may relate to the nearby ponds of medieval origin in Abington Park.

1 INTRODUCTION

MOLA was commissioned by Bellway Homes to conduct an archaeological evaluation on land at the former Abington Vale School. Northampton (NGR 7831 6134, Fig 1). The fieldwork was carried out on the 10th, 11th and 12th of March 2014.

As a condition on planning consent there is a requirement for archaeological investigation in accordance with Section 12, paragraph 128 and Appendix 2 of the *National Planning Policy Framework* (DCLG 2012). As a result a programme of archaeological evaluation was agreed. The requirements were outlined in the Written Scheme of Investigation prepared by MOLA (2014).

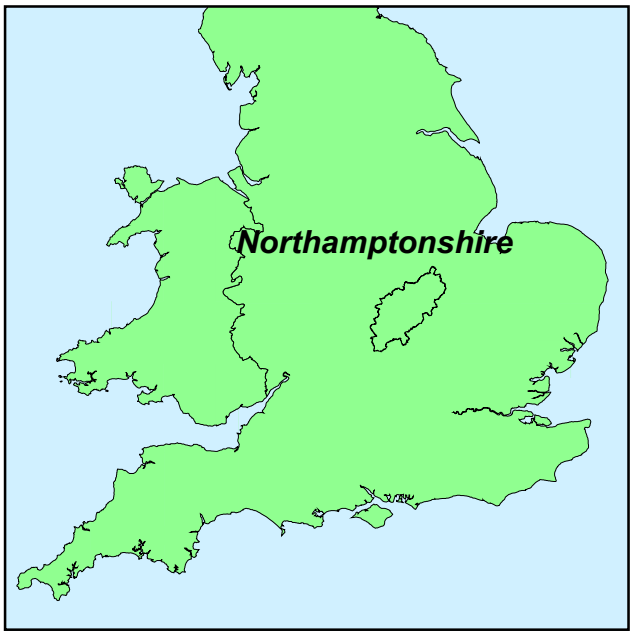
2 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

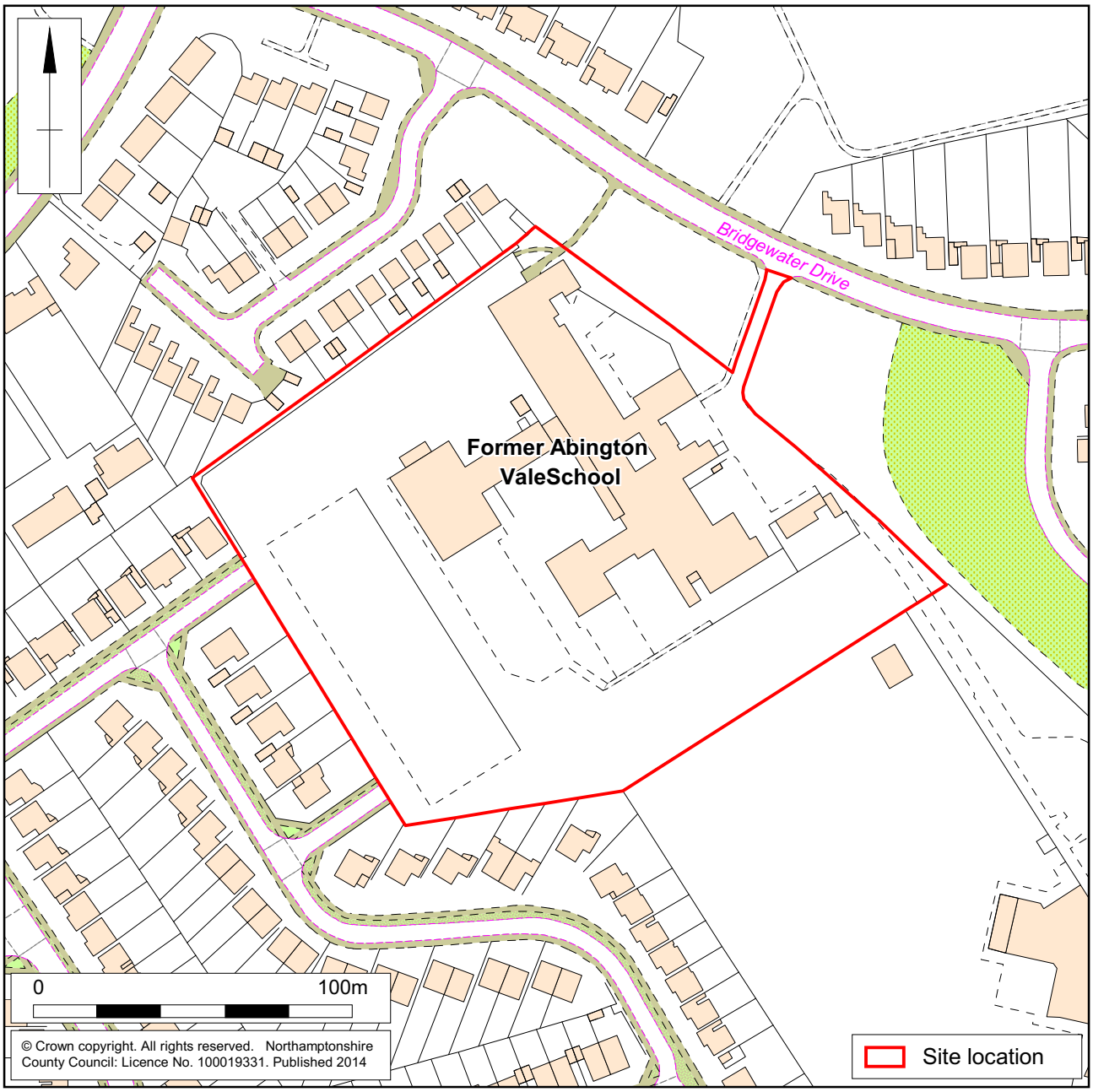
The evaluation of the site was designed to provide information that will allow for the effective targeting of further investigation of the site, if required, prior to or during the early phases of its development.

The following information was required to allow the development of a strategy for further investigation of the site:

- The location, extent, nature, and date of any archaeological features or deposits that may be present;
- The integrity and state of preservation of any archaeological features or deposits that may be present.

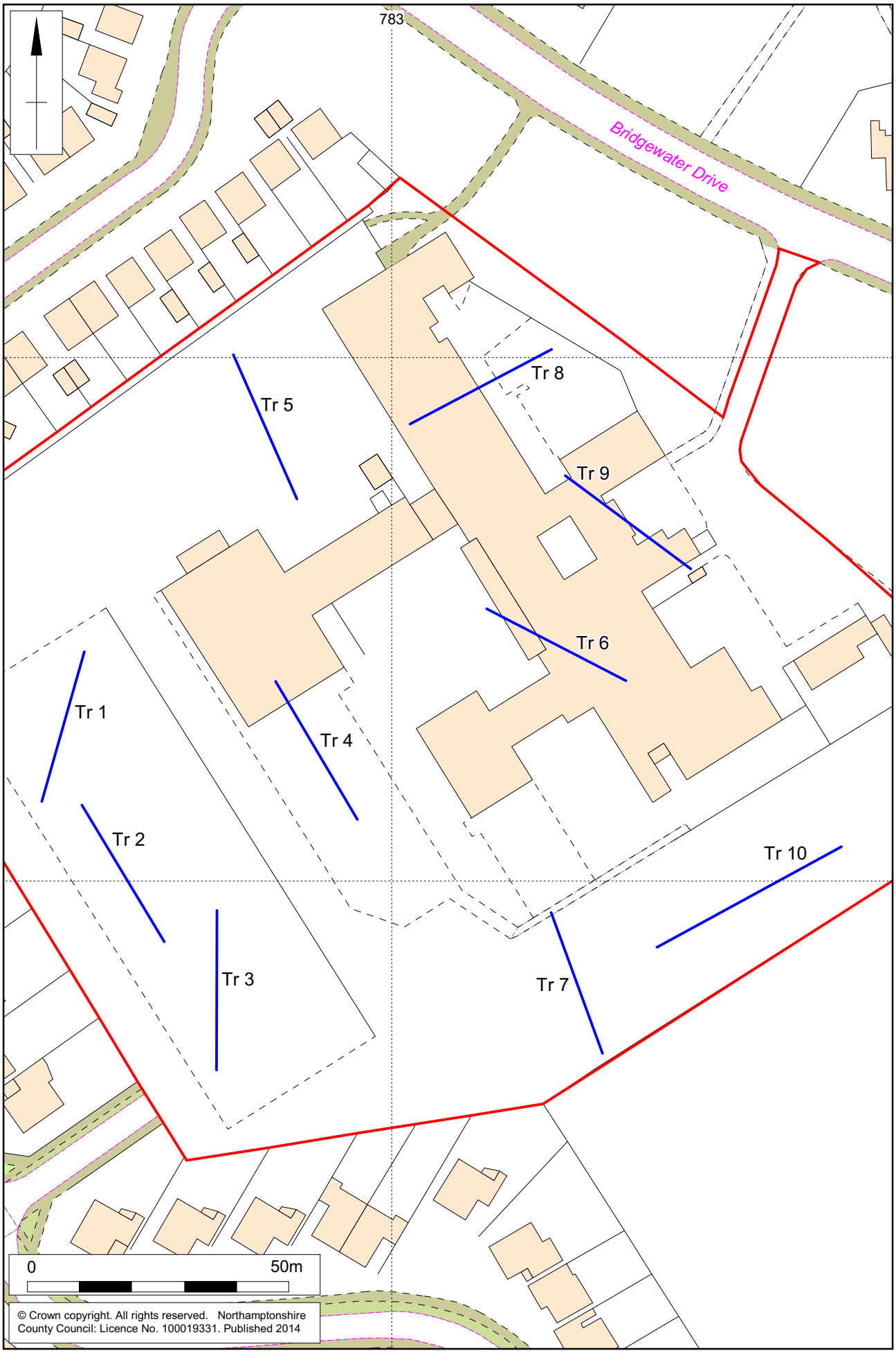
The evaluation was carried out in accordance with the IfA's *standards and guidance for archaeological field evaluation* (IfA 2008), the MOLA Northampton Fieldwork Manual (MOLA 2014) and the East Midlands regional framework (Knight *et al* 2012).





Scale 1:2,000

Site location Fig 1



Scale 1: 1000

Excavated trenches Fig 2

3 BACKGROUND

3.1 Topography and geology

The site is located within the suburbs of Northampton and is part of the former Abington Vale School site. The development area occupies four main levels which have been cut into the valley slope. These levels lay at approximately 64m, 65.5m, 67m and 69m aOD. The school buildings were demolished a few years ago and the site has been unoccupied since that time.

The site is bounded by Bridgewater Drive to the east and residential development to the north and west. To the south are further areas associated with the former school. The site is situated in a broad open valley at about 64m aOD and the bedrock geology comprises part of the Whitby Mudstone Formation with superficial alluvial deposits likely at the east edge of the site (http://www.bgs.ac.uk accessed 5/02/14).

3.2 Archaeological background

There is only a single Historic Environment Record (HER) monument associated with the site, indicating that it lay within Abington Vale allotments (HER 2187/1). However, this is likely to reflect the lack of directed archaeological investigation that was undertaken when this area was developed in the later 20th century.

Unstratified Roman pottery has been found *c* 50m to the east of the site as well as at a number of other locations nearby, although no other evidence of Roman activity has been found nearby.

The eastern edge of the site is situated on the edge of a former brook that was originally aligned north-west to south-east through Abington Park and from which a series of ponds were created which may have medieval origins. The brook appears to have been culverted and appears 110m to the south-east of the site. The remains of a further series of medieval fishponds have been recorded to the south-east in Weston Favell parish utilising the same brook (HER 5168/0/1). Immediately to the east of the site was a possible dam (HER 5168/0/4).

The open fields of Abington are thought to have been enclosed by agreement in 1659, although on a map of 1671 two open fields are shown to the north and south of the village (RCHME 1985). The whole parish was enclosed by 1742. The site lies to the south of Abington Park, which was created by the Barnard and Thursby families from at least the 17th century onwards. The village of Abington lay around the church and manor house and in the 17th century had four farm houses and 20 cottages. However, the village was removed as part of a program of enlargement in the 18th century.

4 EXCAVATION METHODOLOGY

Ten trenches, nine 30m long and one 40m long were excavated using a tracked mechanical excavator fitted with a 1.8m-wide toothless ditching bucket (Fig 2). The topsoil and subsoil were removed under archaeological direction to reveal natural substrate. The topsoil and subsoil were stacked separately at the side of the excavated area. All procedures complied with MOLA Health and Safety policy and MOLA Health and Safety Operational Procedures (MOLA 2013).

The trenches were cleaned sufficiently to define any features. The excavated area and spoil heaps were scanned with a metal detector to ensure maximum finds retrieval. All archaeological deposits encountered during the course of the evaluation were fully recorded, following standard MOLA Northampton procedures (MOLA 2014). All deposits were given a separate context number. They were described on *pro-forma* context sheets to include details of the context, its relationships and interpretation. Unstratified animal bones and modern material were not retained.

The location of the trenches were surveyed and related to the Ordnance Survey National Grid using Leica System 1200 dGPS survey equipment using SMARTNET real-time corrections, operating to a 3D tolerance of ± 0.05m. A full photographic record comprising both 35mm black and white negatives and digital images was maintained. The field data from the evaluation has been compiled into a site archive with appropriate cross-referencing.

The evaluation conformed to the Institute for Archaeologists *Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluation* (revised Oct 2008). All stages of the project were undertaken in accordance with English Heritage, *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment* (MoRPHE) (EH 2006). The evaluation was carried out in accordance with the Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) prepared by MOLA (2014).

5 THE EXCAVATED EVIDENCE

5.1 General Stratigraphy

Due to the terracing on-site, the stratigraphy is not consistent across the site. A detailed description of each trench can be found in the Context Inventory (Appendix 1).

Only Trench 5 and the north-east end of Trench 8 had topsoil and subsoil as these areas lay beyond the buildings and yards of the former school. Where present the topsoil was a dark brown heavily root disturbed silty clay with modern material throughout. The rest of the site had been levelled with mixed clay and/or light yellow aggregate, overlain with asphalt and Type 1 sub-base (Fig 3). Trenches 1, 2 and 3 were located in the former playground and had a compacted asphalt surface.

The correct natural level was only observed in Trenches 1, 2, 3, 4 and the north-eastern end half of Trench 8 (Fig 2). In Trenches 1, 2, and 3 the natural comprised light brown-yellow silty clay with patches of degraded ironstone throughout. In Trench 4 it was light orange-yellow silty clay with large patches/bands of degraded ironstone and blue-grey clay. At the north-east end of Trench 8 in the valley base, the natural comprised mid brown-yellow silty clay with occasional small rounded pebbles throughout. The rest of the trenches were located in areas where the slope had been heavily remodelled and the natural level cut away. In these areas firm-plastic blue-grey clay lay directly beneath the modern overburden.

Trench 10, representative section, looking south-east Fig 3

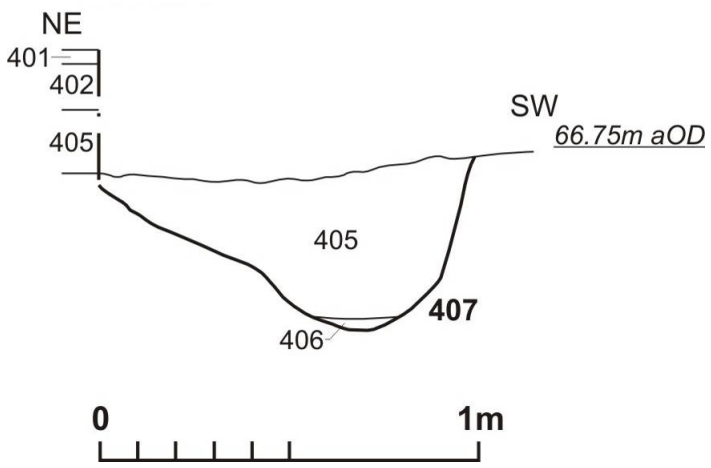
5.2 The archaeological features

In Trench 4 a sub-oval pit [407] was recorded midway along the trench partially obscured by the trench side (Fig 4). The pit lay 0.33m below the present ground surface and was approximately 0.98m wide, 1.40m long and 0.37m deep. No dating evidence was recovered from the excavated section. The fill comprised a 0.03m thick primary fill of firm, mid brown silty clay (406), overlain by a 0.34m thick compact dump of broken and crushed degraded ironstone (405) (Fig 5).

At the north-eastern end of Trench 8, a sub-square feature [810] mostly obscured by the limit of the trench was recorded (Figs 7 and 8). It is unclear whether the feature is a large pit or part of a ditch due to its location in the trench. The visible extent of the feature was 1.7m long by 1.5m wide and approximately 0.62m deep, with a near vertical side and flat base. The fill of the feature comprised three broadly similar silting phases. Primary fill (809) was 0.20m thick and comprised compact mid-dark grey-orange-brown silty sand with manganese staining throughout. Fill (808) was 0.21m thick and was compact mid-light grey-orange silty clay with some root disturbance throughout. Upper fill (807) was 0.28m thick comprising compact mid

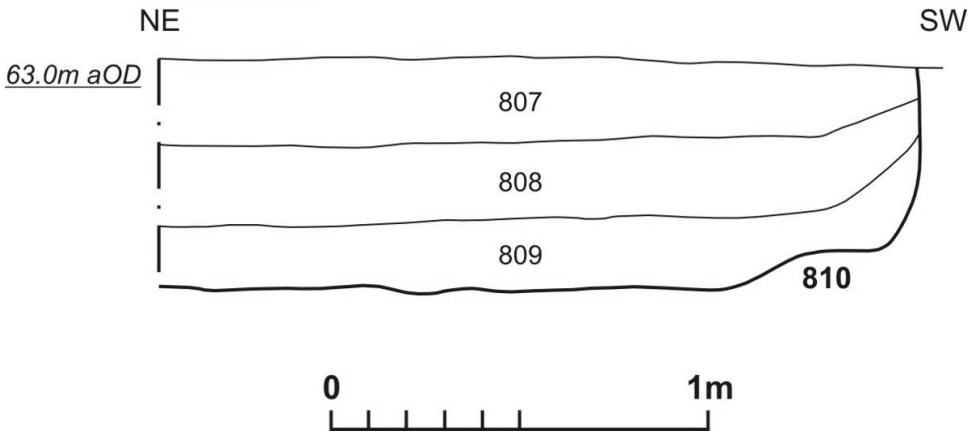
grey-brown silty clay with some small charcoal and coal fragments throughout. The feature lay approximately 0.50m below the present ground surface. No dating evidence was recovered from the excavated section.

Trench 4, pit [407], looking south-east Fig 4



Trench 4, section of pit Fig 5

Trench 8, pit/ditch [810], looking south-east Fig 6



Trench 8, section of pit/ditch [810] Fig 7

6 ENVIRONMENTAL REMAINS by Val Fryer

A sample for the retrieval of the plant macrofossil assemblage was taken from the silted fill (809) of pit/ditch [810].

The sample was bulk floated by MOLA and the flot was collected in a 300 micron mesh sieve. The dried flot was scanned under a binocular microscope at magnifications up to x16 and the plant macrofossils and other remains noted are listed below in Table 1. Nomenclature within the table follows Stace (1997). All plant remains were charred. Modern roots and seeds were also recorded.

Results

The recovered flot is small (<0.1 litres in volume), and although highly comminuted charcoal/charred fragments are relatively common, other plant macrofossils are scarce. Fragmentary barley (*Hordeum* sp.) grain is recorded along with two further indeterminate cereals, a small piece of possible hazel (*Corylus avellana*) nutshell and a single spelt wheat (*Triticum spelta*) glume base. Although the latter may indicate the feature is unlikely to be of post-Roman date, it should be noted that a single, small ecofact can easily travel both up and down through the soil column via root channels, worm/small mammal activity or similar bioturbation. Other remains are also scarce, although small pieces of coal are recorded.

Conclusions and recommendations for further work

In summary, the paucity of macrofossils within the assemblage precludes any accurate interpretation of the material. However, it is thought most likely that the few remains which are recorded are derived from scattered refuse, which was accidentally incorporated within the feature fill. The date of the feature remains unclear.

As the assemblage contains insufficient material for quantification (i.e. <100 specimens), no further analysis is recommended. However, a summary of this assessment should be included within any publication of data from the site.

Table 1: Charred plant macrofossils and other remains

Sample 1, fill (809) pit/ditch [810]	
Hordeum sp. (grain)	x
Triticum spelta L. (glume base)	x
Cereal indet. (grains)	x
Corylus avellana L.	x
Charcoal <2mm	xx
Charcoal >2mm	x
Charcoal >5mm	x
Black porous material	x
Small coal frags.	x
Sample volume (litres)	**40**
Volume of flot (litres)	**<0.1**
% flot sorted	**100%**

Key: x = 1 – 10 specimens; xx = 11 – 50 specimens

7 DISCUSSION

The results confirm that across much of the site, modern terracing and landscaping associated with the former Abington Vale School has removed any potential for archaeological remains. However, toward top of the slope and at the bottom, the natural level survives in places. The ground level has been raised in the south-east corner of the site. Elsewhere, terraces have been cut into the valley slope to accommodate the school buildings, yards and sports areas.

Two archaeological features were recorded. One small isolated, undated pit and a large undated square edged feature mostly obscured by the limit of the trench. The large feature possibly relates to the nearby ponds with a medieval origin in Abington Park and a culverted brook which runs immediately to the east of the site.

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MOLA
2nd April 2014

APPENDIX: CONTEXT INVENTORY

Trench No.	**Length, width & alignment**		**Surface height, NE end (aOD)**	**Depth & height of natural (aOD)**
1	**30mx1.8m NE-SW**		**68.78m**	**0.46 – 0.74m 68.32 – 68.04m**
Context	***Context type***	***Description***	***Dimensions***	***Artefacts/ Samples***
101	Playground surface/ asphalt	Firm/friable black asphalt heated and rolled flat on surface.	0.15 – 0.20m	-
102	Subsoil	Dark grey firm clay with sandy gravel throughout.	0.26 – 0.54m	-
103	Natural	Mid orange-yellow clay and degraded ironstone patches.	-	-

Trench 1, looking north-east Fig 8

Trench No.	**Length, width & alignment**		**Surface height, NW end (aOD)**	**Depth & height of natural (aOD)**
2	**30mx1.8m NW-SE**		**68.92m**	**0.36 – 0.40m 68.56 – 68.52m**
Context	***Context type***	***Description***	***Dimensions***	***Artefacts/ Samples***
201	Playground surface/ asphalt	Firm/friable black asphalt heated and rolled flat on surface.	0.14 – 0.18m	-
202	Subsoil	Dark grey firm clay with sandy gravel throughout.	0.20- 0.25m	-
203	Natural	Mid orange-yellow clay and degraded ironstone patches.	-	-

Trench 2, looking north-west Fig 9

Trench No.	**Length, width & alignment**		**Surface height, N end (aOD)**	**Depth & height of natural (aOD)**
3	**30mx1.8m N-S**		**68.84m**	**0.40m 68.44m**
Context	***Context type***	***Description***	***Dimensions***	***Artefacts/ Samples***
301	Playground surface/ asphalt	Firm/friable black asphalt heated and rolled flat on surface.	0.20m	-
302	Subsoil	Dark grey firm clay with sandy gravel throughout.	0.20m	-
303	Natural	Mid orange-yellow clay and degraded ironstone patches.	-	-

Trench 3, looking north Fig 10

Trench No.	**Length, width & alignment**		**Surface height, NW end (aOD)**	**Depth & height of natural (aOD)**
4	**30mx1.8m SE-NW**		**67.08m**	**0.15m 66.93m**
Context	***Context type***	***Description***	***Dimensions***	***Artefacts/ Samples***
401	Yard/path surface	Firm/friable black asphalt heated and rolled flat on surface.	0.02 – 0.05m	-
402	Levelling layer	Light yellow aggregate with patches of mid brown clay.	0.03 – 0.10m	-
403	Natural	Light orange-yellow firm clay with patches of degraded ironstone throughout. Occasional patches of blue/grey clay.	-	-
404	VOID	-	-	-
405	Fill of 407	Broken ironstone with a little bit of silty mid-brown clay throughout.	1.40m in diameter, 0.34m deep	-
406	Fill of 407	Basal firm mid-brown silt.	0.40m in diameter, 0.03m deep	-
407	Cut of pit	Sub-circular pit with irregular bowl-shaped profile.	1.40m in diameter, 0.37m deep	-

Trench 4, looking south-east Fig 11

Trench No.	**Length, width & alignment**		**Surface height, NW end (aOD)**	**Depth & height of natural (aOD)**
5	**30mx1.8m SE-NW**		**65.52m**	**0.14 - 0.22m 65.38 – 65.30m**
Context	***Context type***	***Description***	***Dimensions***	***Artefacts/ Samples***
501	Topsoil	Friable dark grey-brown silt clay with significant root intrusion throughout.	0.06 – 0.12m	-
502	Subsoil	Firm mixed mid brown-yellow-grey silty clay with significant root intrusion throughout.	0.08 – 0.10m	-
503	Natural	Firm mid blue-grey clay with root intrusion throughout.	-	-

Trench 5, looking north-west Fig 12

Trench No.	**Length, width & alignment**		**Surface height, NW end (aOD)**	**Depth & height of natural (aOD)**
6	**30mx1.8m SE-NW**		**63.92m**	**0.15 – 0.28m 63.77 – 63.64m**
Context	***Context type***	***Description***	***Dimensions***	***Artefacts/ Samples***
601	Yard/path surface	Firm/friable black asphalt heated and rolled flat on surface.	0.10m	-
602	Layer	Light yellow aggregate with patches of mid brown clay.	0.05 – 0.18m	-
603	Natural	Firm/plastic blue clay.	-	-

Trench 6, looking north-west Fig 13

Trench No.	**Length, width & alignment**		**Surface height, NNW end (aOD)**	**Depth & height of natural (aOD)**
7	**30mx1.8m NNW-SSE**		**64.96m**	**0.14 – 0.24m 64.82 – 64.72m**
Context	***Context type***	***Description***	***Dimensions***	***Artefacts/ Samples***
701	Topsoil	Friable mid-light brown silty clay with root intrusion throughout.	0.08 – 0.10m	-
702	Layer	Type 1 sub-base	0.04m	-
703	Layer	Firm/friable black asphalt	0.05 – 0.12m	-
704	Layer	Light yellow aggregate with patches of mid brown clay.	0.10 – 0.12m	-
705	Natural	Firm/plastic dark blue-grey clay	-	

Trench 7, looking north-north-west Fig 14

Trench No.	**Length, width & alignment**		**Surface height, SW end (aOD)**	**Depth & height of natural (aOD)**
8	**30mx1.8m SW-NE**		**63.84m**	**0.60m 63.24m**
Context	***Context type***	***Description***	***Dimensions***	***Artefacts/ Samples***
801	Topsoil/Made-up ground	Friable mid brown silty clay with root intrusion throughout. Only present in north-east half of trench. Gravel and asphalt present in the south-west half of the trench.	0.20m	-
802	Layer	Light orange-grey clay with occasional gravel throughout. Only present in north-east half of trench.	0.20m	-
803	Subsoil	Mid-dark orange-grey silty clay with occasional root disturbance throughout. Only present in north-east half of trench.	0.20m	-
804	Natural	Firm mid orange-brown silty clay in north-east half of trench. Firm/plastic blue grey clay with bands of sand and gravel in south-west half of trench.	-	-
805	Fill of 806	Friable coarse light brown sand with small angular flint throughout.	c 1.00m wide, 0.20m deep	-
806	Natural band	Natural band of sand and flint gravel in the clay natural.	c 1.00m wide, 0.20m deep	-
807	Fill of 810	Firm mid brown silty clay with root disturbance and occasional coal and charcoal throughout.	2.00m wide, 0.28m deep	-
808	Fill of 810	Firm light-mid brown silty clay with some rooting and charcoal throughout.	2.00m wide, 0.20m deep	
809	Fill of 810	Mid red-brown silty clay with manganese staining throughout.	1.95m wide, 0.20m deep	Sample 1, 40l
810	Cut	Cut of large square edged feature with a near vertical boundary. Full profile not observable in the trench.	2.00m visible in trench, 0.68m deep	-

Trench 8, looking north-east Fig 15

Trench No.	**Length, width & alignment**		**Surface height, NW end (aOD)**	**Depth & height of natural (aOD)**
9	**30mx1.8m NW-SE**		**63.76m**	**N/A**
Context	***Context type***	***Description***	***Dimensions***	***Artefacts/ Samples***
901	Foundations/ demolition debris	Concrete foundations, walling, concrete drains and disconnected services observed throughout the trench.	-	-
902	Natural	Not reached	-	-

Trench 9, looking north-west Fig 16

Trench No.	**Length, width & alignment**		**Surface height, NE end (aOD)**	**Depth & height of natural (aOD)**
10	**40mx1.8m NE-SW**		**64.32m**	**0.17 – 0.80m 64.15 – 63.52m**
Context	***Context type***	***Description***	***Dimensions***	***Artefacts/ Samples***
1001	Layer	Type 1 sub-base	0.06 – 0.10m	-
1002	Layer	Firm/friable black asphalt	0.06 – 0.08m	-
1003	Layer	Light yellow aggregate with patches of mid brown clay.	0.10 – 0.14m	-
1004	Layer	Firm mixed grey-orange-yellow clay. Only present at north-east end of trench.	0.48m	--
1005	Natural	Firm/plastic blue-grey clay with patches of orange sand.	-	-

Trench 10, looking south-west Fig 17

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