



**Archaeological trial trench evaluation at the former
North Hertfordshire College, Centre for the Arts
Willian Road, Hitchin, Hertfordshire
May 2016**

Report No. 16/89

Author: Adam Meadows

Illustrator: James Ladocha



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Project Manager: Jim Brown
Site Code: WRHIT 16
NGR: TL 1996 3010

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OASIS REPORT FORM

PROJECT DETAILS		OASIS No: molanort1-252893	
Project title	Archaeological trial trench evaluation of land at the former North Hertfordshire College, Centre for the Arts, Willian Road, Hitchin, Hertfordshire, May 2016		
Short description	An archaeological trial trench evaluation was carried out within the car park of the former North Hertfordshire College Centre for the Arts, along Willian Road, Hitchin. A number of modern brick walls and a variety of modern drains and service trenches were uncovered.		
Project type	Trial trench evaluation		
Previous work	None		
Current land use	Car parks and street verges		
Future work	None		
Monument type and period	Post-medieval		
Significant finds	Modern red brick foundations and drains		
PROJECT LOCATION			
County	Hertfordshire		
Site address	Willian Road, Hitchin		
Easting Northing	TL 1996 3010		
Area (sq m/ha)	1.05ha		
Height aOD	c.58m aOD		
PROJECT CREATORS			
Organisation	MOLA Northampton		
Project brief originator	Andy Instone, Hertfordshire County Council		
Project Design originator	Jim Brown, MOLA Northampton		
Director/Supervisor	Adam Meadows, MOLA Northampton		
Project Manager	Jim Brown, MOLA Northampton		
Sponsor or funding body	Crest Nicholson Chiltern		
PROJECT DATE			
Start date	16/05/2016		
End date	18/05/2016		
ARCHIVES	Location	Contents	
Physical	WRHIT 16	5 trial trench log sheets, 1 plan register,	
Paper		2 photo registers, 1 permatrace plan	
Digital		Client report PDF	
BIBLIOGRAPHY			
	Unpublished client report		
Title	Archaeological trial trench evaluation of land at the former North Hertfordshire College, Centre for the Arts, Willian Road, Hitchin, Hertfordshire		
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Archaeological trial trench evaluation at the former North Hertfordshire College, Centre for the Arts Willian Road, Hitchin, Hertfordshire May 2016

Abstract

An archaeological trial trench evaluation was carried out within the car park of the former North Hertfordshire College Centre for the Arts, along Willian Road, Hitchin. A number of modern brick walls and a variety of modern drains and service trenches were uncovered.

1 INTRODUCTION

Crest Nicholson Chiltern commissioned MOLA Northampton to carry out an archaeological trial trench evaluation ahead of demolition works at the site of the former North Hertfordshire College, Centre for the Arts (Fig 1; NGR TL 1996 3010).

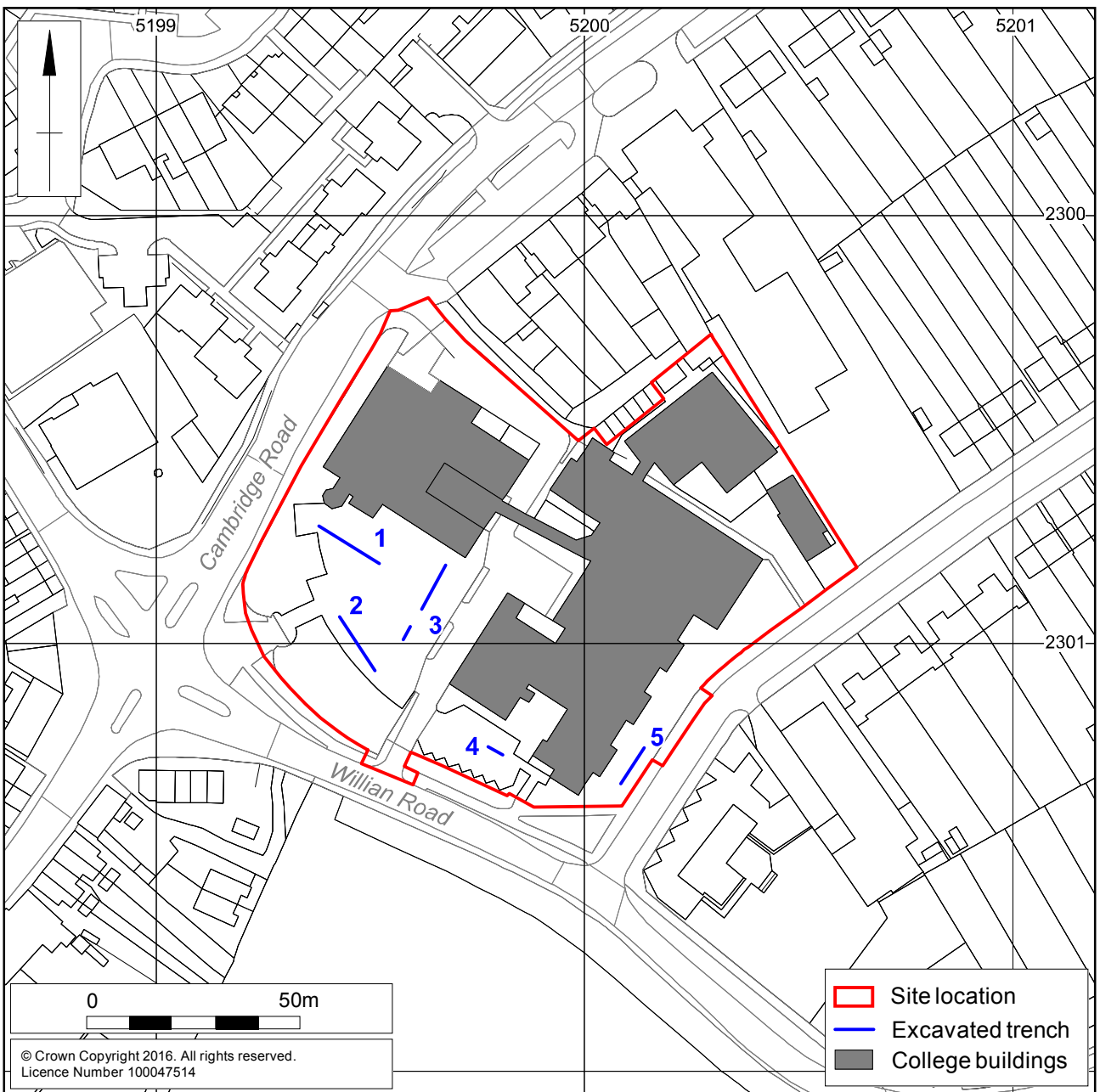
MOLA is a Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA) registered organisation and as such, the works required by Hertfordshire County Council were carried out in accordance with the *National Planning Policy Framework* (NPPF; DCLG 2012). The aim of the evaluation was to ensure that any archaeological remains within the Development Area were appropriately investigated and characterised to inform decisions for the proposed development. The archaeological evaluation was undertaken in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) prepared by MOLA and approved by North Hertfordshire District Council prior to the work commencing (MOLA 2016). All works followed the guidelines suggested by the CIfA's *Code of Conduct* and *Standard and guidance: archaeological field evaluation* (CIfA 2014a-b), regional guidelines for the East of England (Gurney 2003) and the procedural document *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment* (MoRPHE; HE 2015).

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 Location and geology

The investigation area lies on land occupied by the former North Hertfordshire College Centre for the Arts. This lies within the Purwell area of Hitchin and is bound by Cambridge Road to the west, Willian Road to the south and Hampden Road to the east. Residential properties are located along its northern limits.

The site lies on level ground at c.58m above Ordnance Datum and the British Geological Survey has mapped the area as comprising Zig-Zag Chalk Formation with areas of overlying River Terrace deposits (BGS 2016).



Scale 1:1500

Site location and excavated trenches Fig 1

2.2. Historical and archaeological background

A search of the Hertfordshire Historic Environment Record (HER) provided a single record within the Investigation area. This is Walsworth Farm, a post-medieval farmstead that was heavily remodelled in the mid-19th century (HER12577). Other results of archaeological interest were detected in the near vicinity and are summarised below.

Within 700m south-west of the development site Palaeolithic and Mesolithic flint tools were uncovered (HER1186, HER6454). More Neolithic flint artefacts were uncovered c.800m north-west of the development site, in the garden of 35 Cadwell Lane (HER11529). There are multiple spot finds of worked flint within a 1km radius of the investigation area dating from the Neolithic-Bronze Age, these range from flint scrapers (HER309), flint axes (HER298, HER307), a flint arrow head (HER6452) and a looped and socketed bronze axe head (HER303).

Iron Age activity in the area is present in the form of spot finds and a couple of Iron Age cremation burial sites. One of these sites was discovered at Grove Mill, located c.1km to the north-west (HER107) and the other burial site at Benslow Lane, Fairfield positioned c.1km to the south-east (HER6184). Iron Age find spots include Iron Age pottery uncovered during building works in Purwell (HER108) and some bronze coins of Cunobelin found a within a couple of hundred metres north-west of the development area (HER130)

The Ninesprings Roman Villa is located c.1.2km south-east of the site, situated on the eastern edge of Hitchin (HER467). The excavations that took place between 1884 and 1921 identified seven rooms with partially surviving painted plaster, three hypocausts and a tessellated pavement. Artefacts recovered from this site include a coin hoard (HER586), a bronze figurine of Hercules (HER6435), bronze ear picks (HER1199) and a dump of pottery c.200m north of the villa (HER468).

Evidence of Anglo-Saxon occupation in the area comes from the sole antiquarian record of burial urns supposedly found at a burial mound within 900m south-west of the development area (HER1610).

3 OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Objectives

In order to examine the archaeological resource within the proposed development area the main objectives of the investigation were to determine and understand the nature, function, and character of any archaeology found in its cultural and environmental setting. More specifically, the work would:

- Identify, investigate and record all archaeological deposits exposed during the excavation of the trenches;
- Determine and record the date, extent, character, state of preservation and depth of burial of any archaeological deposits;
- Create a permanent archive and record of the archaeological information collected during the course of the fieldwork and analysis.

3.2 Methodology

The areas of investigation will comprised narrow strips of land around the still-extant college buildings. The position, size and number of trenches was limited by these constraints and the position of sub-ground services across the site. Five trenches were positioned over areas of turf or former hard standing. Four trenches were laid out, 20m long by 1.8m wide, and one trench was 10m by 1.8m wide.

Prior to the commencement of the excavation work, the investigated areas of the site was predominantly tarmac car park, with one trench running through a grass verge. The excavation area was marked with spray paint and the tarmac broken, where present, using a breaker attachment on a 3CX wheeled excavator. The trenches were excavated under archaeological direction with a toothless ditching bucket, 1.8m wide, to the surface of the natural horizon. Some trenches were adjusted and shortened to avoid damage to known underground services and drains.

The recording followed standard MOLA Northampton procedures as described in the *Fieldwork Manual* (MOLA 2014). Deposits were described on *pro-forma* sheets to include measured and descriptive details of each unique context, relationships with other deposits and interpretations. The photographic record comprises 35mm black and white film and digital images at 12 megapixels.

All records were compiled during fieldwork into a comprehensive and fully cross-referenced site archive. All records and materials will be compiled in a structured archive in accordance with the guidelines of Appendix 3 in the English Heritage procedural document, *Management of Archaeological Projects 2* (1991b).

4 THE EXCAVATED EVIDENCE

The trenches were positioned on different alignments across the development area as shown in Figure 1. The three trenches located in the west of the site uncovered the late 19th to 20th-century remains of Walsworth Farm and modern services, while the remaining two trenches uncovered undisturbed natural geology.

4.1 Trench 1

Trench 1 was shortened slightly to 15m; with its eastern point relocated three metres south to avoid known underground cabling. Aligned north-west to south-east, this trench was dug to a depth measuring between 0.71m to 0.97m onto natural chalk (104). This was overlain by a deposit of rubble between 0.35m to 0.50m thick containing crushed brick, concrete fragments, shards of metal, plastic and redeposited chalk (103). A layer of light coloured concrete was laid over the rubble measuring c.0.30m thick (102) which was topped by c.0.06m of black tarmac (101).

Within this trench there were a number of backfilled service trenches that cut into the chalk and an exposed field drain and steel pipe found in the north-western end. At the centre of this trench there was a pit backfilled with modern brick rubble, abutting a non-load bearing wall foundation that comprised modern red brick lain around a sand filled core. A second red brick wall of a similar make-up was uncovered within a metre east with a section of heavily corroded iron pipe running towards it from the north. Two large wooden poles were also found buried into the natural chalk and are likely to be the bases of wooden supports. These features are likely to relate to the farm structure that used to be positioned here.



Trench 1 section, looking north-east Fig 2

4.2 Trench 2

Trench 2 was aligned north-west to south-east, running along the southern boundary of the existing car park. The length of the trench was shortened to c.15m to avoid damaging underground wiring running along the main access path. This trench reached natural chalk and sandy gravels at a depth ranging from 0.55m to 0.70m (204). This was overlain by c.0.27m of mixed rubble comprising bricks, concrete and uncured tarmac (203). The layer of concrete excavated within trench 1 appeared to extend over this trench, measuring c.0.30m thick (202) overlain by 0.10m of tarmac (201).

This trench contained a number of modern features, including a service trench cut into the chalk and a brick-lined water drain. The corner of a red brick building foundation was also visible, cutting into the natural limestone and is likely to represent one of the structures associated with Walsworth Farm. On the southern face of the trench, near to the wall foundation, a large concrete structure was present directly beneath layer (202), cutting through the rubble layer (203) and down into the natural chalk (204). This is likely the remains of a stanchion used after the farm was levelled, providing a firm surface for the construction of the current building.



Trench 2, looking south-east Fig 3



Brick-lined drain within trench 2 Fig 4

4.3 Trench 3

Trench 5, aligned north-east to south-west was located to the eastern side of the main car park and was split in two parts due to a water main. Natural sand and gravels lay at a depth of 0.54m (304). The natural was overlain by a 0.10m to 0.23m thick layer of rubble comprising of red bricks, concrete and loose tarmac (303). Over this lay a continuation of the concrete layer found in trenches 1 and 2 at a thickness between 0.20m and 0.32m (302) with 0.10m of tarmac at the surface (301).



Section of trench 3, looking north-west Fig 5

This trench contained more modern features, including a service trench aligned north-west to south-east and a concrete capped service trench aligned east-west. A third service trench in the southern portion of the trench was aligned north-north-east to south-south-west.



Trench 3, looking south-west Fig 6



Trench 4, looking north-west Fig 7

4.4 Trench 4

This trench was shortened to a length of four metres due to the position of the welfare cabins and the path of a live watermain. Natural chalk lay at a depth of 1.55m (406) and was overlain by two deposits of alluvium, a dark grey silty clay layer 0.33m thick (405) beneath a lighter brownish silty clay deposit of a similar thickness (404). A compressed rubble layer lay over this comprising broken brick mixed with chalk that is likely a result of landscaping works (403). This was superseded by a rubble layer 0.36m thick comprising mainly of red brick fragments (402) with a 0.16m thick layer of tarmac over the top (401). No features were found within this trench.

4.5 Trench 5

This trench was the only trench to be not located within the car park; instead this trench was located within the grass verge between the college buildings and Hampden Road. The northern part of the trench was not excavated due to a tree that the council requested be preserved, thus shortening the trench to ten metres. Natural sands and gravels lay at a depth ranging from 0.54m to 0.80m (503). Above this there was an orangey-brown silty sand subsoil between 0.14m to 0.40m thick (502). A very thick layer of dark black, root disturbed topsoil was present here, measuring between 0.34m to 0.40m thick (501). The thickness of the topsoil may be a result of the land being raised up to the level of the adjacent Hampden Road. No archaeological or modern features were found within this trench.



Trench 5, looking south-west Fig 8

5 DISCUSSION

The trial trench evaluation at the former North Hertfordshire College, Centre for the Arts, identified surviving sections of foundation walls and services that related to the demolished post-medieval and modern Walsworth Farm. Other features included field drains and service trenches dug into the natural horizons that are likely to contain pipes and cabling that served the former college that currently stands upon this site.

From the sections uncovered within Trenches 1-4, much of the natural soil horizon was lost during the 1980s construction of the college building. The spread of rubble, concrete and crushed redeposited natural chalk found directly over the natural with no subsoil suggested that the area had been fully stripped and levelled after the farm was demolished, thus significantly reducing the potential for surviving archaeological features.

The archive for this project will be deposited with the North Hertfordshire District Council Museum Services.

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MOLA
31 May 2016

APPENDIX 1: CONTEXT INVENTORY

Trench 1				
Context	Context type	Description	Dimensions	Artefacts
101	Tarmac	Modern tarmac car park surface	0.05m – 0.09m thick	-
102	Concrete	Concrete reinforcing surface	0.30m – 0.38m thick	-
103	Rubble	Layer comprising broken concrete fragments, red bricks, tarmac fragments and plastic	0.35m – 0.50m thick	-
104	Natural	Chalk with sand and gravel deposits	Depth between 0.71m – 0.97	-

Trench 2				
Context	Context type	Description	Dimensions	Artefacts
201	Tarmac	Modern tarmac car park surface	0.10m thick	-
202	Concrete	Concrete reinforcing surface	0.25m – 0.30m thick	-
203	Rubble	Layer comprising red brick, concrete fragment, crushed chalk and loose tarmac	0.20m – 0.30 thick	-
204	Natural	Chalk with yellow sand and gravel patches	Depth between 0.55m – 0.70m	-

Trench 3				
Context	Context type	Description	Dimensions	Artefacts
301	Tarmac	Modern tarmac car park surface	0.10m – 0.12m thick	-
302	Concrete	Concrete reinforcing surface	0.20m – 0.32m thick	-
303	Rubble	Layer comprising red brick, concrete fragment and uncured tarmac	0.10m – 0.23m thick	-
304	Natural	Sand and chert rich gravel, river terrace	Depth between 0.53m – 0.54m	-

Trench 4				
Context	Context type	Description	Dimensions	Artefacts
401	Tarmac	Modern tarmac car park surface	0.15m – 0.16m thick	-
402	Rubble	Layer comprising broken concrete, bricks, sand and metal fragments	0.35m – 0.36 thick	-
403	Layer	Compressed layer of crushed brick and chalk	0.35 – 0.37 thick	-
404	Alluvium	Upper layer of alluvium, mid silty grey-brown clay	0.33m thick	-
405	Alluvium	Bottom layer of alluvium, dark grey silty clay with infrequent chert inclusions	0.33m thick	-
406	Natural	Chalk bedrock	Depth of 1.53m – 1.55m	-

Trench 5				
Context	Context type	Description	Dimensions	Artefacts
501	Topsoil	Soft medium dark, grey-brown loamy soil. Root disturbed	0.36 – 0.40m thick	-
502	Subsoil	Soft, loose, mid brown-orange silty sand	0.14m – 0.40m thick	-
503	Natural	Light orange-yellow sand with chalk patches	Depth of 0.54m – 0.80m	-



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