



THE UNIVERSITY
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**An archaeological
watching brief at
the site of
Cathedral School
Lichfield,
Staffordshire
2001**

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit



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Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit
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by
Gary Coates and Cath Flitcroft,
with illustrations by Mark Breedon

For further information please contact:
Simon Buteux, Iain Ferris or Alex Jones (Directors)
Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit
The University of Birmingham
Edgbaston
Birmingham B15 2TT
Tel: 0121 414 5513
Fax: 0121 414 5516
E-Mail: BUFAU@bham.ac.uk
Web Address: <http://www.bufau.bham.ac.uk>

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An archaeological watching brief at the site of Cathedral School, Lichfield, Staffordshire. 2001

Summary

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken during augured pile foundations and topsoil clearance, in advance of the construction of an extension to the Cathedral School, Lichfield, Staffordshire (NGR SK 115 098). Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit was commissioned by Brownhill Hayward Brown Chartered Architects, on behalf of Lichfield Cathedral School, to carry out the work in July 2001. The extension to the existing school building was worthy of archaeological investigation given its close proximity to the historic Lichfield Cathedral and its position within the medieval Cathedral Close. A series of nine foundation augurs were drilled and the deposits recorded to identify archaeological horizons and recover artefacts. Soil horizons of potential archaeological interest were noted, which appeared to be the remains of medieval and post-medieval activity. As a result of the auguring, the removal of topsoil across the site was also monitored to identify and investigate any archaeological features that may have been associated with those deposits identified during the auguring. No in situ archaeological deposits were identified across the site, but it is probable that the artefacts associated with the medieval and post-medieval period derive from silted-up moat deposits redistributed over this site during development work in the 1980s.

1.0 Introduction

The following report details the results of an archaeological watching brief undertaken during the drilling of a series of 9 augured foundation piles and the removal of overburden, in advance of the construction of an extension. The watching brief was carried out as a precautionary measure and as 'good practice', in light of the historic nature of this area in close proximity to the Cathedral. This work was carried out as part of a construction programme for an extension to Cathedral School, Lichfield, Staffordshire (NGR SK 115 098). It was commissioned by Brownhill Hayward Brown Chartered architects on behalf of Lichfield Cathedral School. Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit undertook the archaeological work in July 2001. The watching brief was carried out in accordance with the Institute of Field Archaeologists' 1999 '*Standard and Guidance for an archaeological watching brief*'.

2.0 Site Location (Figs.1 & 2)

The site is located to west of St. Mary's and St. Chad's Cathedral, Lichfield (NGR SK 115 098). It is located immediately north of Cathedral School, Lichfield, which is part of a series of buildings fronting onto Cathedral Close.

3.0 Archaeological Background

Information on prehistoric activity within Lichfield City is limited, with very few finds dating earlier than the Roman period (Carver 1981b). The artefactual evidence is scanty

and only chance finds make up the majority of the present data set. However, at least 2 early prehistoric sites have been recorded. The earliest at St. Michael's Church, situated next to a tributary of the River Trent, where individual struck flints and a pebble 'macehead' of possible Mesolithic date were recorded (Hodder 1981) and the later, a series of shallow Neolithic pits revealed during excavations south of Lichfield Cathedral (*ibid.*). A main sewer excavated between the College and Minster pool, during 1976 and 1977, and a cutting, produced evidence of pits containing traces of Neolithic charcoal, burnt bone, flint tools, pottery and two pot-boilers (Carver 1981a).

There is still little evidence for the exploitation of Lichfield City, particularly around the Cathedral between the Neolithic and Anglo-Saxon periods. Any evidence of activity in this period appears to have been truncated by later, medieval deposits. Excavations during the 1970's, to the south of the Cathedral, uncovered a series of post-sockets and beam slots, which occupy a stratigraphic position between the Neolithic and medieval layers, but remain undateable as either Prehistoric or Roman deposits.

There is no definitive evidence of Roman activity in Lichfield, despite the story that Christians were martyred in the city under the Roman Emperor Diocletian. The nearest Roman urban centre was Wall (Letocetum), 2 miles to the south of the city, which was located near the crossing of Watling Street and Rykneld Street. A possible gypsum burial within a lead coffin, discovered below the floor in the south isle of the stone built Cathedral, was reported in 1751 (Gould 1976). Other Roman finds have also been discovered within the Cathedral Close and include a roman tile (Carver 1981b).

Much of Lichfield's known history begins in the 7th Century AD when Bishop Chad moved the seat of his diocese to Lichfield, which may already have been an important religious centre. Excavations in 1976 by Carver to the south side of the Cathedral, revealed several large and small timber structures situated besides a marshy pond. These structures were interpreted as the first ecclesiastical middle-Saxon timber built settlement, which was later truncated by a late-Saxon secular cemetery. When Bishop Chad died in 672, his body was interred in a Saxon Cathedral, built by Bishop Hedda, which lies beneath the present building.

Throughout the Cathedral area, there have been discoveries of early medieval finds, including stone foundations within the Cathedral relating to early masonry and a cist burial associated with silk, silver and a chalice found beneath the Cathedral floor (Gould 1976 & 1977). More recently, excavations in the north choir isle in conjunction with a reflooring programme, revealed early and later medieval inhumations (Nenk et al. 1995). Within the grounds of the Cathedral School itself, trial holes excavated prior to the extension of modern school buildings in 1987, also revealed several early and later medieval inhumations as well as a cist burial (Youngs et al. 1981a).

In the late-11th and early-12th century, a Norman Cathedral replaced the original Saxon building and at this time Bishop de Clinton fortified the Cathedral close. Within a century however, a Gothic Cathedral had replaced this and through the next hundred years, many changes occurred to the layout of the Cathedral area, including the octagonal Chapter

House and the Lady Chapel, built to contain the shrine of St. Chad. An archaeological investigation at the Cathedral Close, in 1960, revealed medieval features and pottery. These all dated between the 12th and 15th centuries and testimony to the level of activity in the vicinity of the Cathedral itself (Carver 1981b, Peyer & Simmons 1991). More recently, a medieval courtyard was discovered in the north-west corner of Cathedral Close (Meeson 1998), part of a medieval gatehouse at St. Mary's House (Youngs et al. 1981b), as well as parts of a 14th century cathedral close wall (West Midlands Archaeology 1998).

During the Civil war in the 1640's, the Cathedral came under siege three times. It was later restored by Bishop Hacket in the 1660's and to the north of the Cathedral area, there are several documented structures attributed to this era. William Wyatt further restored the Cathedral area in the 18th century and Sir George Gilbert Scott in 1855-1878. Archaeological investigations have also attested to this activity in the post-medieval period. Discoveries include a post-hole at Darwin's close (Meeson 1998), a cellar and building within the Cathedral School grounds (Meeson 1993) and a well shaft of possible post-medieval date at the Consistory court, Lichfield Cathedral (Rodwell 1992).

Cathedral Close has been subject to a considerable degree of activity since at least the 7th Century A.D. until the modern period. Much of this activity is associated with the Cathedral and the developing city. It remained likely therefore that any intrusive groundworks in this area could encounter archaeological deposits.

4.0 Aims

The objective of the watching brief was to attempt to establish the presence/absence, character, state of preservation and date of any archaeological features or deposits. Particular attention was to be paid to associated medieval and post-medieval activity in the area, particularly given its position within the historic Cathedral Close.

5.0 Method

The site measured a total area of approximately 5.15m by 5.15m. The foundations for the extension were constructed using a flight auger fitted with a 10-inch screw auger. This was monitored by a suitably qualified archaeologist. A detailed record of changes in the stratigraphy at each augured foundation hole was recorded. Possible archaeological horizons were noted and any artefactual evidence was kept. The spoil that was produced from the auguring was laid out on large sheets of tarpaulin and was also troweled by hand for further artefactual evidence. Photographs of the general area and of the deposits themselves were taken using both colour print and black and white film.

Following the auguring, the site was cleared of 0.7m depth of overburden. A J.C.B. excavator was used to achieve this and this strip was also monitored by a suitably qualified archaeologist.

6.0 Results (Fig. 3; Plate 1)

6.1 Augur 1

Depth of Deposit (m)	Description
0 – 0.5	Tarmac, rubble,
0.5 – 1.8	Buried topsoil (including red brick fragments at 1.5m)
1.8 – 2.5	Light brown silt-sand
2.5 – 5.0	Orange/brown silt-sand, occasional charcoal flecking, clay lenses
5.0 – 6.8	Compact light brown sand-silt
6.8 – 7.2 (bottom)	Brown silt-sand

Much of the deposit uncovered was sterile and represented no archaeological features; although there appeared to be the remains of a Post-Medieval floor level encountered at 1.5m. Beyond a depth of 4.5m the deposit appeared to be undisturbed natural sandstone.

6.2 Augur 2

Depth of Deposit (m)	Description
0 – 1.2	Mixed tarmac and topsoil
1.2 – 4.0	Light brown silt-sand, wet
4.0 – 6.0	Compact brown sand-silt with clay lenses
6.0 – 7.0 (bottom)	Orange/brown silt-sand

Many of the deposits were similar to those found in Augur 1. Post-Medieval pottery fragments, oyster shell and red brick fragments were noted in the uppermost deposit. The natural sand horizon was encountered at a depth of approximately 4.0m.

6.3 Augur 3

Depth of Deposit (m)	Description
0 – 0.8	Tarmac, rubble, red brick fragments
0.8 – 1.8	Remains of modern land drain
1.8 – 4.0	Light brown silt-sand
4.0 – 5.8	Compact brown silt-sand
5.8 – 6.5 (bottom)	Orange/brown silt-sand

This augured pile foundation encountered a modern land drain. The natural sand horizon was encountered at a depth of 4.0m

6.4 Augur 4

Depth of Deposit (m)	Description
0 – 1.0	Tarmac, rubble, topsoil
1.0 – 3.0	Buried topsoil (including red brick fragments, glass & post-medieval pottery)
3.0 – 4.0	Light brown/ orange silt-sand
4.0 – 5.0	Compact orange/brown silt-sand
5.0 – 6.5 (bottom)	Orange silt-silt

At a depth of approximately 1m, several fragment of red brick were identified and other artefacts including glass and glazed pottery were discovered. The natural subsoil horizon was identified at a depth of c.4.0m

6.5 Augur 5

Depth of Deposit (m)	Description
0 – 2.0	Tarmac, rubble, topsoil
2.0 – 3.0	Light brown/orange silt-sand
3.0 – 4.5	Light brown silt-sand
4.5 – 5.0	Orange/brown silt-sand
5.0 – 6.5	Compact light brown sand-silt

At a depth of approximately 2m, several artefacts were discovered associated with this deposit, including pottery, a possible bone object as well as red tile fragments. Between 4m and 5m fragments of brick and roof tile, along with glass, were recovered. The natural subsoil horizon was identified at a depth of c.5.0m

6.6 Augur 6

Depth of Deposit (m)	Description
0 – 0.5	Tarmac, rubble, topsoil
0.5 – 2.0	Brown silt-sand
2.0 – 4.5	Light brown silt-sand containing charcoal
4.5 – 6.0	Compact silt-sand-clay
6.0 – 6.5 (bottom)	Light brown sand-silt

This augur drill revealed similar deposits to Augur 5. At a depth of 1m, several large fragments of red brick were uncovered and between 1 and 2m deep, fragments of bone and pottery were retrieved. Associated with the deposit between 3 and 4m deep, several bone fragments were also recorded. The natural subsoil horizon was identified at a depth of c.4.5m

6.7 Augur 7

Depth of Deposit (m)	Description
0 – 0.5	Tarmac, rubble,
0.5 – 1.5	Topsoil
1.5 – 3.0	Light brown silt-sand
3.0 – 5.0	Brown silt-sand
5.0 – 6.5 (bottom)	Light brown sand-silt

At *circa* 1.5m, the augur hit a more compact layer and on return a series of fragmented red bricks were recovered. At 1.8m several sherds of post-medieval glazed pottery were recovered. The natural subsoil horizon was identified at a depth of c.5.0m

6.8 Augur 8

Depth of Deposit (m)	Description
0 – 1.5	Tarmac, rubble, topsoil
1.5 – 4.0	Light brown silt-sand
4.0 – 5.0 (bottom)	Compact Brown silt-sand

At a depth of 1.5m, several fragments of red brick and pieces of broken slate were retrieved. The natural subsoil horizon was identified at a depth of c.4.0m

6.9 Augur 9

Depth of Deposit (m)	Description
0 – 0.3	Tarmac, rubble, topsoil
0.3 – 2.0	Disused brick culvert
2.0 – 3.0	Light brown silt-sand
3.0 – 5.0 (bottom)	Compact Brown silt-sand

The auger hit a compact red-brick layer at 0.3m and appeared to penetrate a void until a depth of 2m. This appeared to be the inside of an old culvert. The natural subsoil horizon was identified at a depth of c.3.0m

6.10 Topsoil Strip

After the drilling of the augured pile foundations, the level of the site was reduced by 0.7m to allow a concrete base to be formed. The existence of a culvert in the vicinity of Augur 9 (Plate 2) and decomposed sandstone blocks near to Augur 2 (Plate 3) was noted during associated trench excavation prior to the general level reduction. It was difficult to determine whether these blocks related to an *in situ* structure or had been deposited as part of the general backfill/ levelling deposit. The uppermost horizon was a tarmac

surface sealing a brown sand-silt below this, which may have been associated with the re-deposition of the soils from the medieval moat, during levelling activity in the 1980s.

7.0 Discussion

The nature of the screw augur and the mixing of the deposits make interpretation of possible archaeological horizons and features very difficult. It does appear that there were deposits across the site, which might relate to medieval and post-medieval activity on the site. However, the area has been subject to several episodes of levelling and building-up of layers. The depth of the natural compact silt-sand varied across the site from 3m to 5m, which may reflect localised areas of disturbance.

Despite the close proximity of the school to the Cathedral and its position within the medieval Close, no evidence for archaeological structures were revealed during excavation and the continual presence of red brick (particularly at 1m depth) is believed to be part of the backfill from the original school buildings constructed in the 1980's.

8.0 Acknowledgements

Catherine Flitcroft carried out the fieldwork and wrote this report with Gary Coates. The illustrations were prepared by Mark Breedon. The project was managed by Gary Coates, who also edited this report.

We are grateful to Lichfield Cathedral School for commissioning the project and for their co-operation during the works and to Mr.B. Anderson, who monitored the watching brief on behalf of Erecenomic Construction Ltd. Thanks are also due to Mel Tongue, Brownhill Hayward Brown Chartered Architects, for his assistance. We are also grateful for the co-operation and assistance of the auguring team from the Mini Piling Company, Redditch.

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Figures

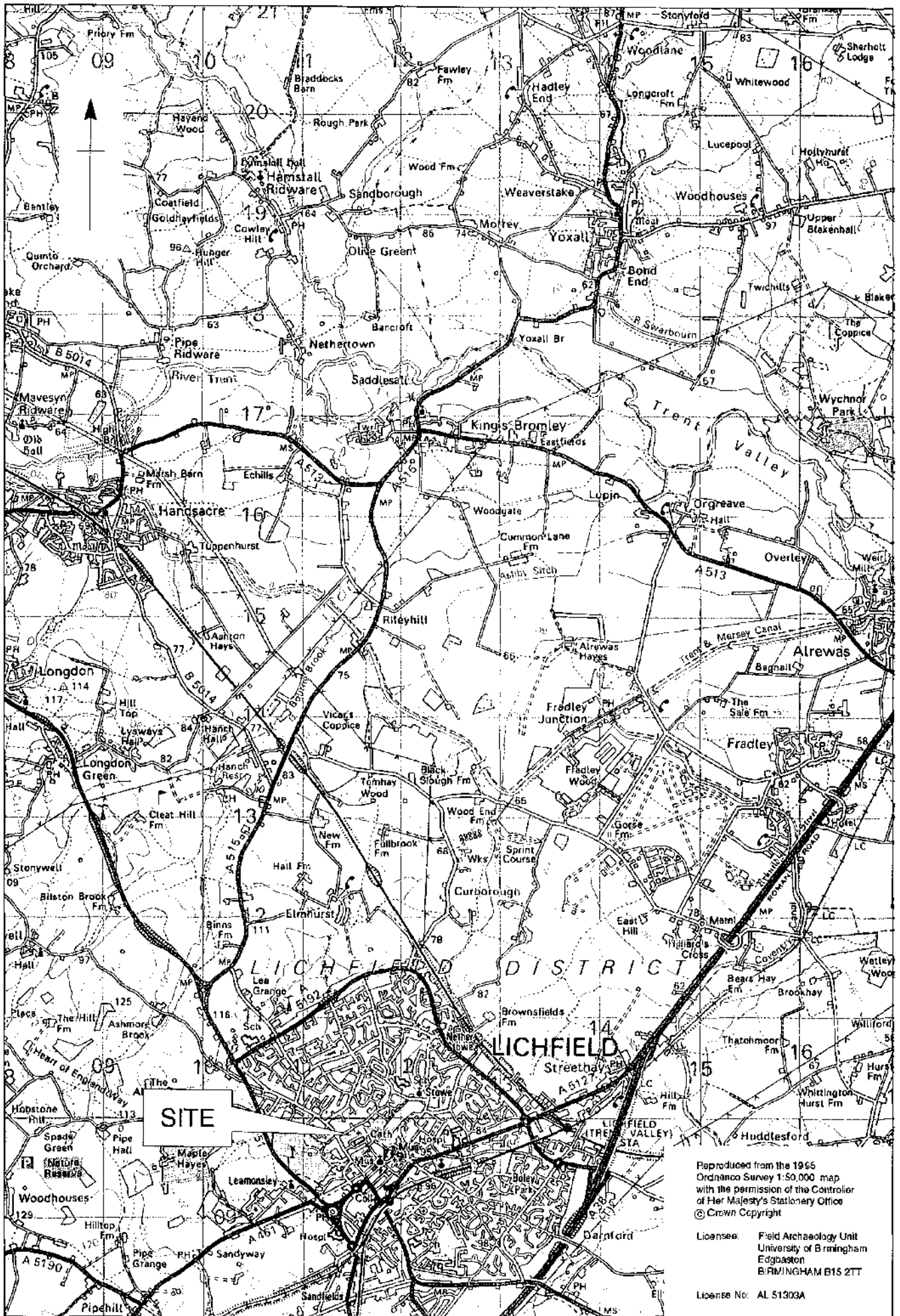
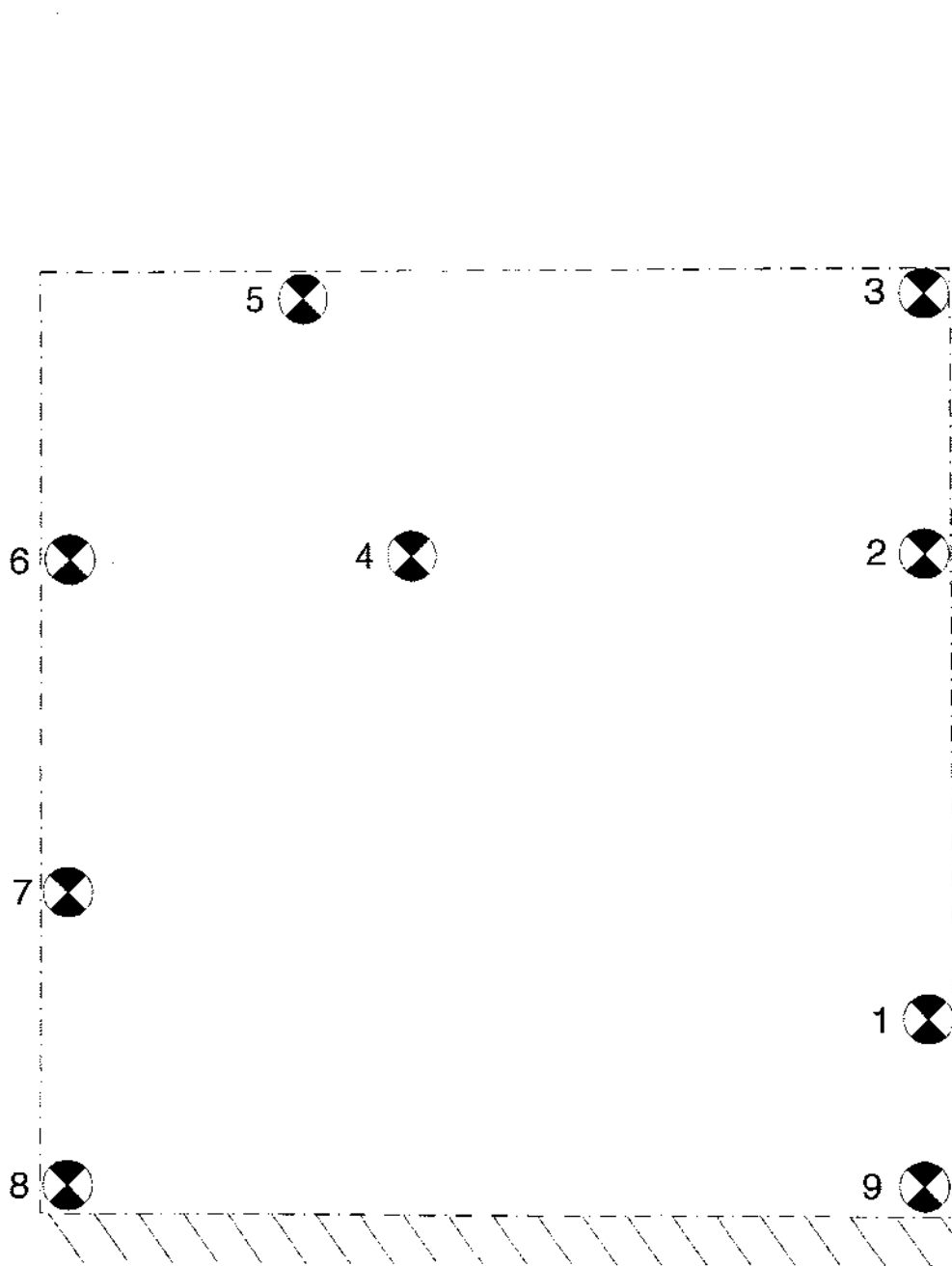


Fig.1



Fig.2



Existing Classroom

 Augered Pile Foundations

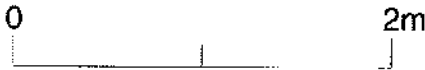


Fig.3

Plates

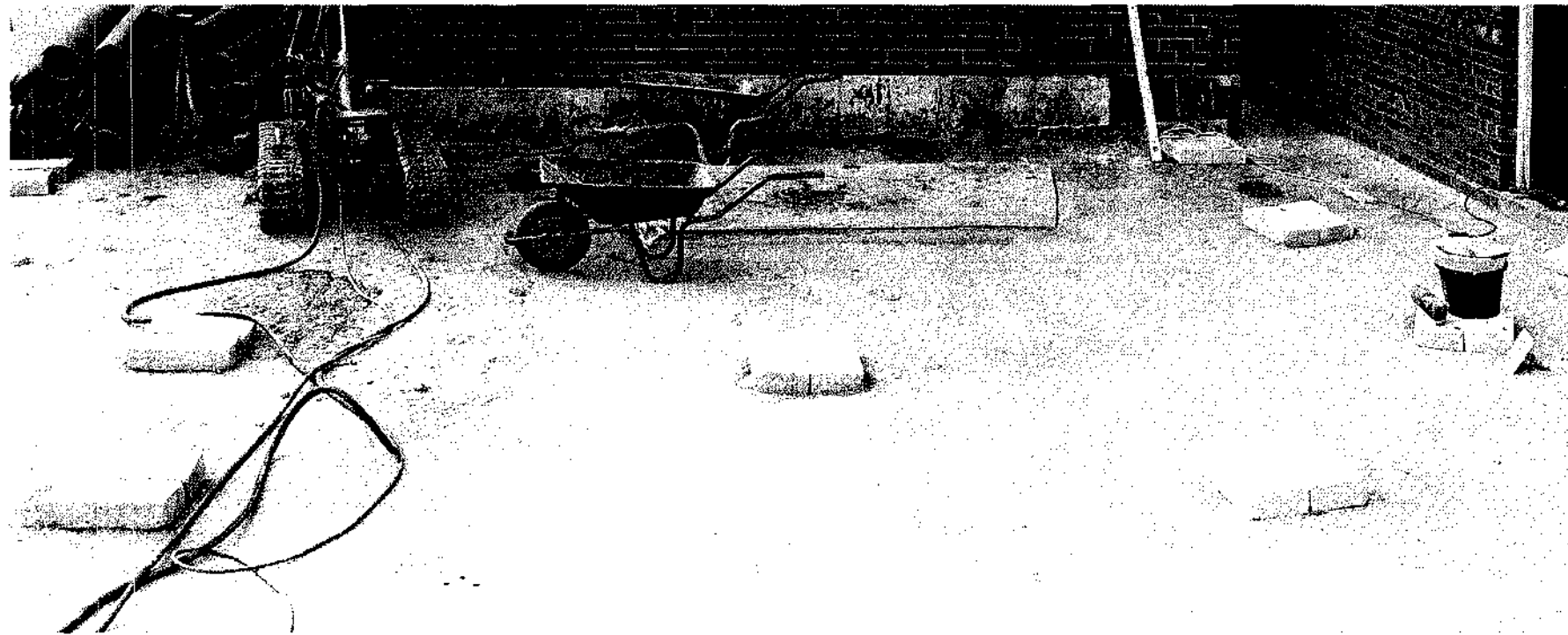


Plate 1



Plate 2



Plate 3