

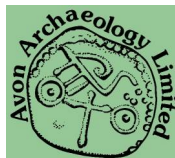
William Morris Primary School, Blunsdon, Swindon

Archaeological Evaluation NGR ST 57443 80747



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Avon Archaeology Limited
Bristol: October 2018



SUMMARY

Avon Archaeology Limited were commissioned by Willmott Dixon Construction Limited to undertake an archaeological evaluation of land off Greene Street, Blunsdon, Swindon, centred on NGR SU 13285 90850.

The evaluation was designed to inform the planning process for the development of a new primary school on the site, which will be called William Morris School. It encompassed a 2.5% sample of the overall site area, reflected as eleven 30 x 2m trenches.

Prior to evaluation a geophysical survey of the site was undertaken by Wessex Archaeology and identified linear features related to agriculture and a single pit-like feature. However none of the features identified could be attributed to be of archaeological significance. The trenches were situated to intersect with features identified by geophysics and to provide a broad coverage of the site.

No archaeological features or deposits were identified within any of the trenches. The same stratigraphic sequence was recorded in each trench and comprised approximately 0.2m of topsoil overlying up to 0.3m of subsoil, which in turn overlay the natural clay substrate.

The results of the evaluation would suggest that the site is of extremely low archaeological potential. On the basis of the evaluation it seems unlikely that the site has been subject to any human activity beyond agriculture.

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Copyright

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Avon Archaeology Limited wishes to acknowledge the assistance given during the project by the following: Wessex Archaeology for preparing the WSI and assistance with project management, to the staff of Curtis Groundworks and to Willmott Dixon Construction Limited for funding and commissioning the project.

NOTES

Whereas Avon Archaeology Limited have taken all care to produce a comprehensive summary of the known and recorded archaeological evidence, no responsibility can be accepted for any omissions of fact or opinion, however caused.

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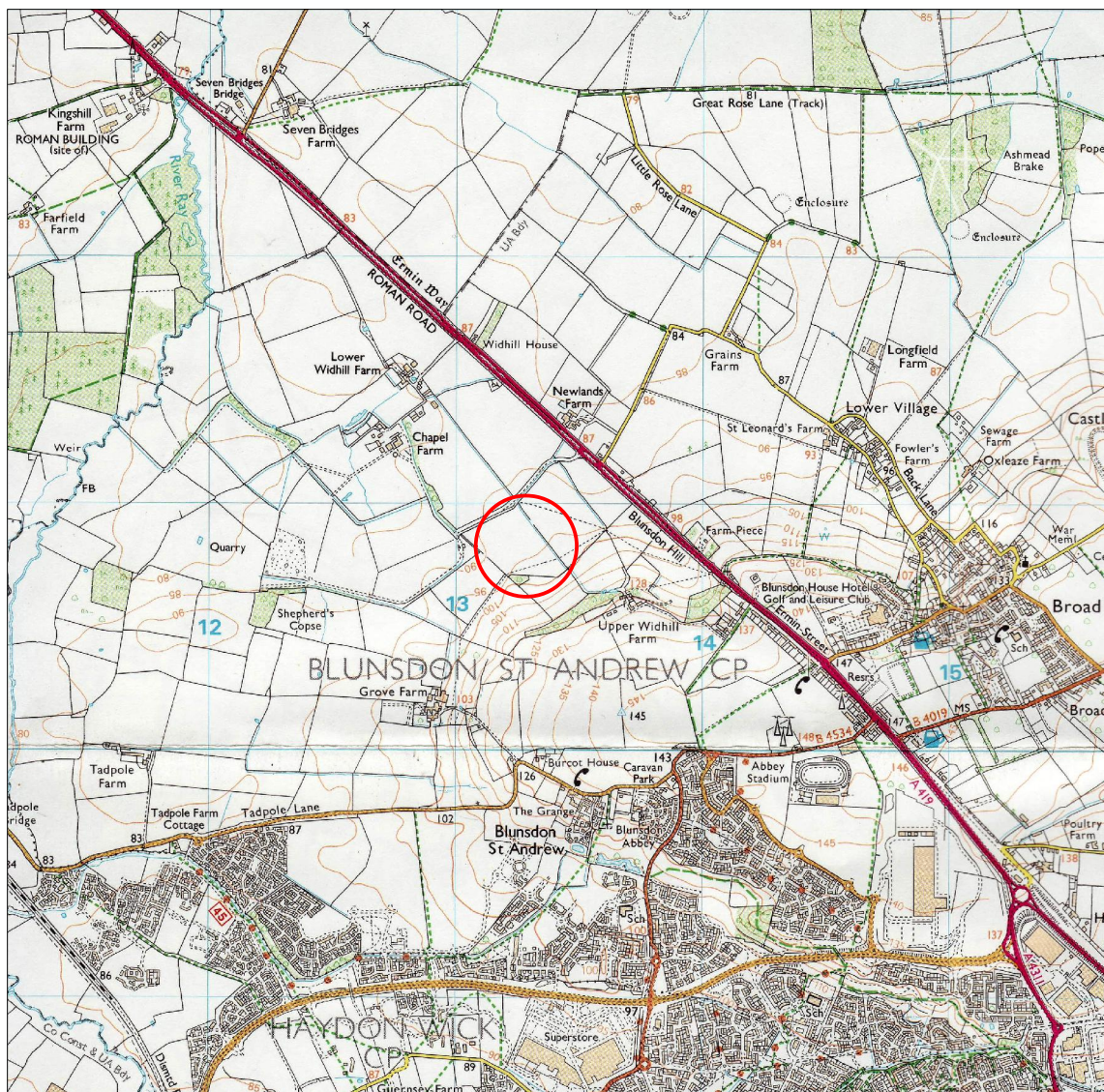
ABBREVIATIONS

AAL	Avon Archaeology Ltd
aOD	above Ordnance Datum
NGR	National Grid Reference
OS	Ordnance Survey



Figure 1

Site Location Plan

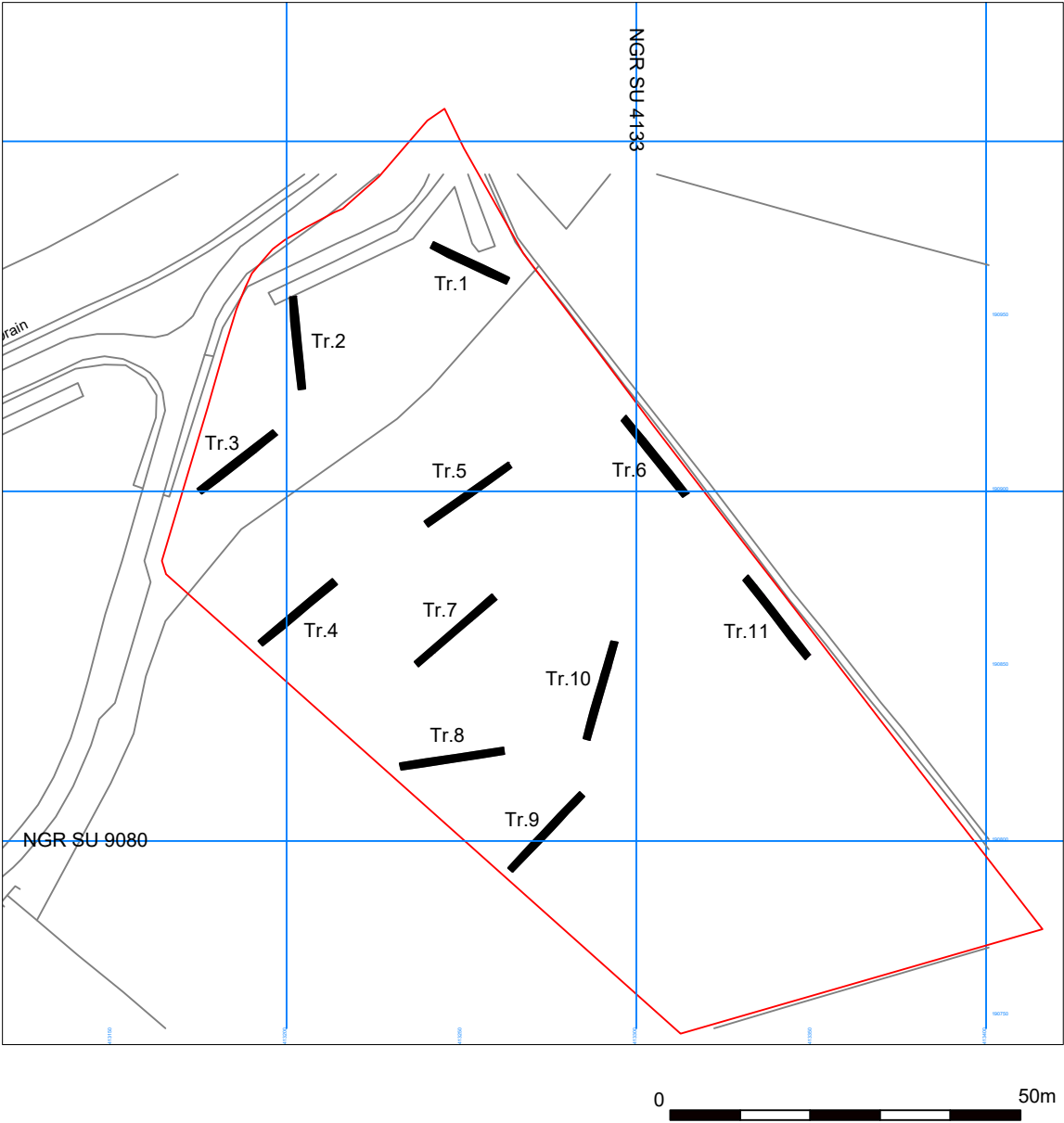


Not to scale



Figure 2

Site Boundary with Trench Survey



1 INTRODUCTION

Avon Archaeology Limited were commissioned by Willmott Dixon Construction Limited to undertake an archaeological evaluation of land off Greene Street, Blunsdon, Swindon, centred on NGR SU 13280 90860. The evaluation formed a pre-commencement planning requirement (application ref: S/18/1080) ahead of a development that will construct a new primary school, with associated parking and landscaping.

The evaluation comprised the excavation of eleven 30 x 2m trenches, reflecting a 2.5 % sample of the overall site area. The trench layout and evaluation methodology were set out in a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) prepared by Wessex Archaeology (Wessex Archaeology 2018 c) and approved by Wiltshire County Council.

2 Site Location, Topography and Geology

The site is located to the north of Swindon and north-west of Blunsdon St Andrew. It lies approximately 300m west of the A419, part of which reflects the route of the Roman Ermin Street. The site is bounded to the north by Greene Street, from which it is accessed, and to the east by a drainage ditch and hedgerow. There is no formal boundary to either the south or west.

The British Geological Survey online viewer records the underlying geology of the site as:

Kellaways Formation and Oxford Clay Formation (undifferentiated) - Mudstone, Siltstone and Sandstone. Sedimentary Bedrock formed approximately 156 to 165 million years ago in the Jurassic Period. Local environment previously dominated by shallow seas

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The site was the subject of an archaeological Desk-Based Assessment (Wessex Archaeology 2018). The following background is condensed from that document, which does not require full repetition here. In summary the Desk Based Assessment concluded:

'No overriding heritage constraints which should preclude development were identified, although the assessment established that there is an archaeological interest in the Site. This is defined as the potential for the presence of archaeologically significant buried remains, which may include traces of Romano-British activity and remains associated with the nearby Saxon and medieval settlements at Widhill.

There are no specific indications that the site is likely to contain complex or highly significant (e.g. nationally important) archaeological remains.'

The broad archaeological and historical context is of low potential for prehistoric archaeology. The earliest recorded discovery in the wider area is the chance find of a Neolithic arrow head (MW16864) and multiple flint assemblages have also been recorded in the wider site area. Despite these discoveries however there is no accompanying contextual evidence to pinpoint a locus of settlement and no suggestion that the site has buried prehistoric remains.

Archaeological monitoring and excavations during the creation of the A419, which lies approximately 300m east of the site, have identified post holes and pits attributed to the late Bronze Age – Iron Age. Further evidence from the period was also identified at nearby Chapel Farm during a 2006 excavation (EW1276), comprising pits and a ditch feature.

The wider area of the site has a Romano British context. The A419 traces, in part, the route of the Roman Ermin Street, which is the locus of several important Roman sites, although all well removed from the evaluation site. The most substantial nearby Roman discoveries were recorded at Chapel Farm, and included cremation burials, ditches gullies and pits.

The site lay within the medieval manor of Widhill, which is recorded in Domesday as Widehille, an indication that it was in existence during the Anglo Saxon period. However the Wessex Archaeology DBA notes that

'Despite the considerable scale of previous archaeological excavation in the Study Area, and the presence of several known areas of settlement, relatively little direct evidence of Saxon activity has been recorded to date. The principle exception to this are the remains of 'Saxon houses' (MW175488) found during excavations

at Chapel Farm (EWI7276), at the north-western edge of the Study Area.’ (Wessex Archaeology 2018).

Medieval features and ceramics have been identified at various sites in the wider area and the neighbouring field to the west of the site has evidence of ridge and furrow cultivation.

In the post medieval period, as the site emerges into the cartographic record, the map evidence suggests that it remained rural with no evidence of development depicted.

A geophysical survey of the site (Wessex Archaeology 2018 a) was undertaken in August 2018. It highlighted possible agricultural features, which were targeted in the evaluation. The report on the geophysics concluded

‘The detailed gradiometer survey has been successful in detecting a series of linear anomalies that are associated with historic cultivation at the site. However, it has not identified any anomalies that can confidently be interpreted as being of an archaeological origin. A single pit-like feature has been identified as possible archaeology, but the isolated nature of this suggests that it may simply be natural in origin. This is consistent with historic mapping of the area which suggests that during the post-medieval period the area remained largely agricultural, with little evidence of settlement other than the listed farmhouses.’

4 OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

The objectives of the evaluation were determined via correspondence between the archaeological officer for Wiltshire Council and Wessex Archaeology and were set out in a WSI (Wessex Archaeology 2018,a).

The general objectives were defined as:

- To determine the presence or absence of archaeological features, deposits, structures, artefacts or ecofacts within the specified area;
- To establish, within the constraints of the evaluation, the extent, character, date, condition and quality of any surviving archaeological remains;
- To place any identified archaeological remains within a wider historical and archaeological context in order to assess their significance; and
- To make available information about the archaeological resource within the site by reporting on the results of the evaluation.

Site specific objectives were also highlighted:

- To test the results of the geophysical survey (Wessex Archaeology 2018b);
- To examine evidence for remains of medieval/post-medieval ridge and furrow and assess if this has impacted on any earlier remains; and
- To determine any remains associated with the medieval occupation of the manor of Widhill, and the documented chapel associated with these settlements.

Trench locations, heights and features were located using a Topcon GRS1 survey grade GPS rover. Single contexts records were completed for each contextual unit identified and a photographic record of each trench was created.

Trenches were excavated using a 360° mechanical excavator, onto the surface of the first significant archaeological deposit or the natural substrate.

A copy of this report will be submitted to Wiltshire County Council and an entry for the project will be placed within the Wiltshire Historic Environment record (HER). A copy of the report will be placed within the OASIS archaeological database. The project archive will be retained at the premises of Avon Archaeology Limited until space becomes available for its accession to the Wiltshire Museum Service.

5 THE EVALUATION

Note: Ordnance datum levels are given on the trench plans at the back of the report, they are not included within the following descriptions unless specifically relevant.

Trench Descriptions

Trench 1 (**Figure 3**) was located towards the NE corner of the site, close to the site entrance and was orientated NE – SW. It was excavated to a maximum depth of roughly 0.80m below the modern ground surface within two sondages located towards each end of the trench. The depositional sequence observed was an average of 0.1m of mid brown silty clay topsoil. Below the topsoil was between 0.13 and 0.2m of yellow brown clay subsoil, which probably reflected the weathered surface of the underlying natural substrate. The surface of the natural itself was encountered at an average depth of just over 0.2m below the modern ground surface. It was a stiff yellow-brown clay with occasional inclusions of limestone and fossilized oyster shell. Within the sondages the excavation extended into a lower layer of natural geology, at roughly 0.80m depth, which was a yellow-brown marl of degraded limestone. No archaeological features or deposits were found within the trench. A field drain was found towards its southern end.

Trench 2 (**Figure 3**) was located towards the southern end of the site and was orientated roughly N-S. It was excavated to a maximum depth of roughly 0.90m below the modern ground surface within two sondages located towards each end of the trench. The depositional sequence observed was identical to that recorded in Trench 1, and does not require repetition.

Trench 3 (**Figure 3**) was located towards the NW corner of the site and was orientated roughly SW-NE. It was excavated to a maximum depth of approximately 0.80m below the modern ground surface within a box section excavated to investigate a linear feature at the southern end of the trench. The linear feature (context [302], **Figures 3 & 4, Plate 3**) ran N-S across the trench. It was a vertical sided cut with a bowl shaped base and a width of 1.00m cut into the natural substrate. It was filled (context (303) with a mixed silt/clay deposit with frequent lenses of topsoil, suggesting recent modern origins. No finds were retrieved from the fill. Two sondages were also excavated towards each end of the trench, to depths of roughly 0.8m below the modern ground surface. Beyond the modern linear feature the depositional sequence was the same as that described above for Trench 1.

Trench 4 was located in the northern half of the site towards its western boundary and was orientated roughly NE - SW. It was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.84m below the modern ground surface, within two sondages excavated towards each end of the trench. The depositional sequence observed was identical to that recorded in Trench 1, and does not require repetition.

Trench 5 (**Figure 3a, Plates 1 & 2**) was located towards the centre of the site and was orientated roughly NE – SW. It was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.74m below the modern ground surface within two sondages located towards each end of the trench. The depositional sequence observed was identical to that recorded in Trench 1, and does not require repetition.

Trench 6 (**Figure 3a**) was located midway along the eastern site boundary and was orientated approximately SE – NW. It was excavated to a maximum depth of 1.2m below the modern ground surface within two sondages excavated towards each end of the trench. The depositional sequence observed was identical to that recorded in Trench 1, and does not require repetition.

Trench 7 (**Figure 3b**) was located towards the centre of the site, to the SW of Trench 5, and was orientated NE – SW. It was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.84m below the modern ground surface within two sondages located towards each end of the trench. The depositional sequence observed was identical to that recorded in Trench 1, and does not require repetition.

Trench 8 was located towards the western site boundary to the south of Trench 6 and was orientated roughly ENE-WSW. It was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.7m below the modern ground surface within two sondages located towards each end of the trench. The depositional sequence observed was identical to that recorded in Trench 1, and does not require repetition.

Trench 9 was located towards the SW corner of the site and was orientated NE – SW. It was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.47m below the modern ground surface within two sondages located towards each end of the trench. The depositional sequence observed was identical to that recorded in Trench 1, and does not require repetition.

Trench 10 was located towards the centre of the site, to the south of Trench 7 and was orientated NNE – SSW. It was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.85m below the current ground level within two sondages located towards each end of the trench. The trench contained a single feature (context [1003]) cut into the natural substrate, located towards the southern end of the trench. It was a sub circular shallow pit, or possibly a tree bowl, with a diameter of 0.77m. Its maximum depth was 0.21m, to its southern side. The base was broadly flat with a slight southerly incline. It was filled (context (1002)) with a deposit of silty yellow brown clay which was mottled with charcoal throughout and inclusions of larger charcoal fragments and burnt limestone. No finds were found within the fill. The feature was sealed by the subsoil (context (1001)) which was in turn sealed by topsoil, in the same stratigraphic sequence as that described for Trench 1.

Trench 11 was located towards the southern end of the site along its eastern edge and was orientated SE – NW. It was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.96m below

the current ground level within two sondages located towards each end of the trench. The depositional sequence observed was identical to that recorded in Trench 1, and does not require repetition.

Table 1: Context Tables

Trench 1

Context	Type	Description	Dimensions
100	Layer	Orange brown marley clay containing decayed limestone. Natural layer below (101)	Natural substrate
101	Layer	Yellow brown natural clay with ridges and inclusions of degraded limestone. Also patches of fossilised oyster shell.	Natural substrate
102	Layer	Yellow brown clay subsoil. Occasional small limestone pebble inclusions.	130 – 200mm thick
103	Layer	Mid brown silty clay topsoil supporting surface flora. Regular consistency with little evidence of mixing, for example from plough activity.	100 - 130mm thick

Trench 2

Context	Type	Description	Dimensions
200	Layer	Yellow brown natural clay with ridges and inclusions of degraded limestone. Also patches of fossilised oyster shell.	Natural substrate
201	Layer	Yellow brown clay subsoil. Occasional small limestone pebble inclusions.	130 – 200mm thick
202	Layer	Mid brown silty clay topsoil supporting surface flora. Regular consistency with little evidence of mixing, for example from plough activity.	100 - 130mm thick

Trench 3

Context	Type	Description	Dimensions
300	Layer	Yellow brown natural clay with ridges and inclusions of degraded limestone. Also patches of fossilised oyster shell.	Natural substrate
301	Layer	Yellow brown clay subsoil. Occasional small limestone pebble inclusions.	130 – 200mm thick
302	Cut	Linear straight sided cut located at the SW end of the trench. Orientated roughly NNE – SSW. Depth of 0.80m. Width of 1.00m Cut through both (300) and (301). Length extended beyond trench confines.	Depth 800mm, Width 1000mm.
303	Fill	Highly mixed fill of Cut [302]. Yellow brown clay with frequent lenses of topsoil.	800mm thick
304	Layer	Mid brown silty clay topsoil supporting surface flora. Regular consistency with little evidence of mixing, for example from plough activity.	100 - 130mm thick

Trench 4

Context	Type	Description	Dimensions
400	Layer	Yellow brown natural clay with ridges and inclusions of degraded limestone. Also patches of fossilised oyster shell.	Natural substrate
401	Layer	Yellow brown clay subsoil. Occasional small limestone pebble inclusions.	130 – 200mm thick

402	Layer	Mid brown silty clay topsoil supporting surface flora. Regular consistency with little evidence of mixing, for example from plough activity.	100 - 130mm thick
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Trench 5

Context	Type	Description	Dimensions
500	Layer	Yellow brown natural clay with ridges and inclusions of degraded limestone. Also patches of fossilised oyster shell.	Natural substrate
501	Layer	Yellow brown clay subsoil. Occasional small limestone pebble inclusions.	130 – 200mm thick
502	Layer	Mid brown silty clay topsoil supporting surface flora. Regular consistency with little evidence of mixing, for example from plough activity.	100 - 130mm thick

Trench 6

Context	Type	Description	Dimensions
600	Layer	Yellow brown natural clay with ridges and inclusions of degraded limestone. Also patches of fossilised oyster shell.	Natural substrate
601	Layer	Yellow brown clay subsoil. Occasional small limestone pebble inclusions.	130 – 200mm thick
602	Layer	Mid brown silty clay topsoil supporting surface flora. Regular consistency with little evidence of mixing, for example from plough activity.	100 - 130mm thick

Trench 7

Context	Type	Description	Dimensions
700	Layer	Yellow brown natural clay with ridges and inclusions of degraded limestone. Also patches of fossilised oyster shell.	Natural substrate
701	Layer	Yellow brown clay subsoil. Occasional small limestone pebble inclusions.	130 – 200mm thick
702	Layer	Mid brown silty clay topsoil supporting surface flora. Regular consistency with little evidence of mixing, for example from plough activity.	100 - 130mm thick

Trench 8

Context	Type	Description	Dimensions
800	Layer	Yellow brown natural clay with ridges and inclusions of degraded limestone. Also patches of fossilised oyster shell.	Natural substrate
801	Layer	Yellow brown clay subsoil. Occasional small limestone pebble inclusions.	130 – 200mm thick

802	Layer	Mid brown silty clay topsoil supporting surface flora. Regular consistency with little evidence of mixing, for example from plough activity.	100 - 130mm thick
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Trench 9

Context	Type	Description	Dimensions
900	Layer	Yellow brown natural clay with ridges and inclusions of degraded limestone. Also patches of fossilised oyster shell.	Natural substrate
901	Layer	Yellow brown clay subsoil. Occasional small limestone pebble inclusions.	130 – 200mm thick
902	Layer	Mid brown silty clay topsoil supporting surface flora. Regular consistency with little evidence of mixing, for example from plough activity.	100 - 130mm thick

Trench 10

Context	Type	Description	Dimensions
1000	Layer	Yellow brown natural clay with ridges and inclusions of degraded limestone. Also patches of fossilised oyster shell.	Natural substrate
1001	Layer	Yellow brown clay subsoil. Occasional small limestone pebble inclusions.	130 – 200mm thick
1002	Fill	Yellow brown silty clay, with charcoal mottling, filling Cut [1003]. Inclusions of limestone and charcoal fragments.	210mm max thickness
1003	Cut	Sub-circular cut into the natural substrate. Flat base with acutely sloping sides.	770mm in diameter. Up to 230mm deep.
1004	Layer	Mid brown silty clay topsoil supporting surface flora. Regular consistency with little evidence of mixing, for example from plough activity.	100 - 130mm thick

Trench 11

Context	Type	Description	Dimensions
1100	Layer	Yellow brown natural clay with ridges and inclusions of degraded limestone. Also patches of fossilised oyster shell.	Natural substrate
1101	Layer	Yellow brown clay subsoil. Occasional small limestone pebble inclusions.	130 – 200mm thick
1102	Layer	Mid brown silty clay topsoil supporting surface flora. Regular consistency with little evidence of mixing, for example from plough activity.	100 - 130mm thick

7 CONCLUSIONS

The evaluation found no evidence of significant buried archaeology on the site, indeed the lack of even modern finds was notable. There was also a diffuse separation between the topsoil, subsoil and underlying natural substrate, suggesting that the field may never have been subject to consistent arable farming, although ridge and furrow is visible within the neighboring field to the west.

Ceramic field drains were present within four of the trenches (**Figures 3 – 3b**), and therefore the field has clearly been agriculturally managed in recent years.

The only features identified were either modern; or of undefined date and low archaeological significance. Cut feature [302] within Trench 3 (**Figure 3, Plate 3**) was clearly modern as it was cut from above the subsoil and contained lenses of topsoil. Sub circular feature [1003] contained no dating evidence. Its fill (303) was rich in charcoal and had a regular shape and even base, which suggest it was a deliberate cut rather than a natural feature, such as a tree bowl.

Overall the results were negative and indicate a very low potential for buried archaeology on the site.

8 REFERENCES

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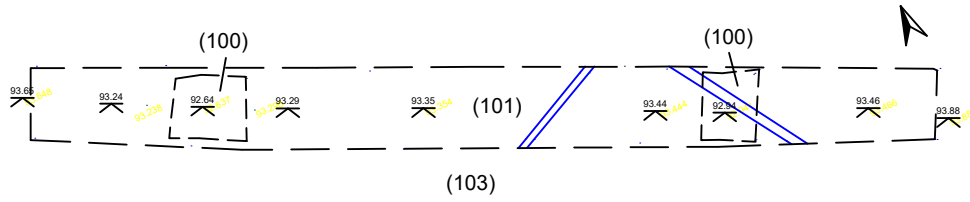
Wessex Archaeology, 2018 b *William Morris Primary School, Blunsdon, Swindon. Written Scheme of Investigation for Archaeological Evaluation*. Unpublished report, Wessex Archaeology ref: 207812.01

Figure 3

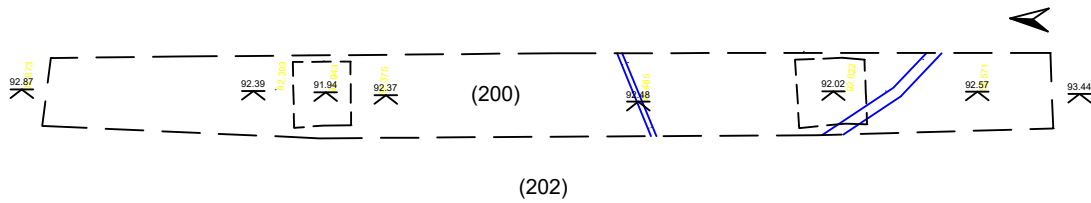
Trench Plans

Modern Field Drains in Blue

Trench 1



Trench 2



Trench 3

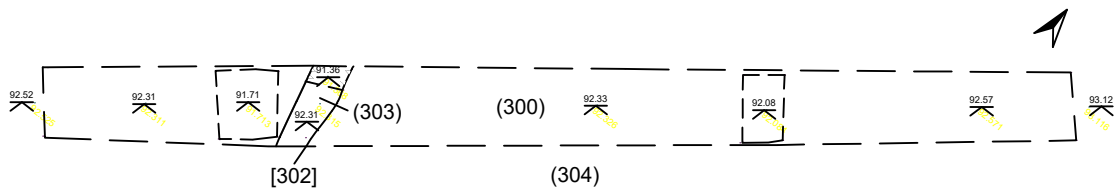
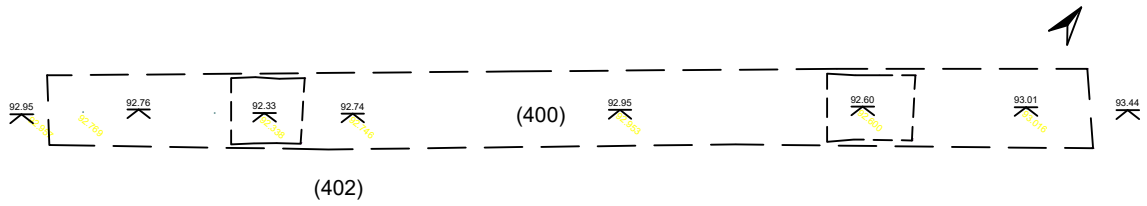


Figure 3 a

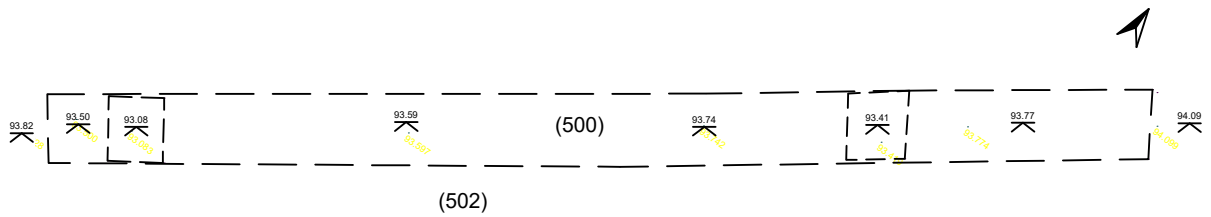
Trench Plans

Modern Field Drains in Blue

Trench 4



Trench 5



Trench 6

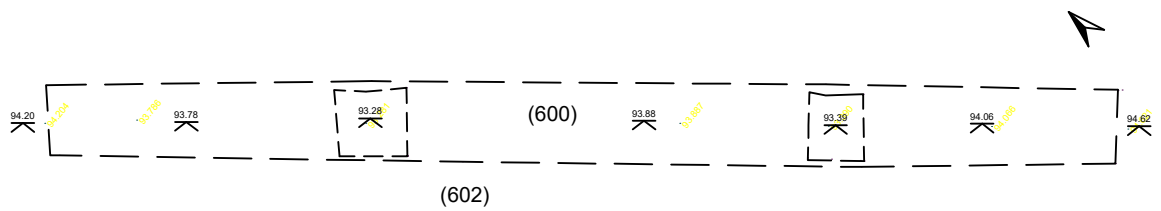
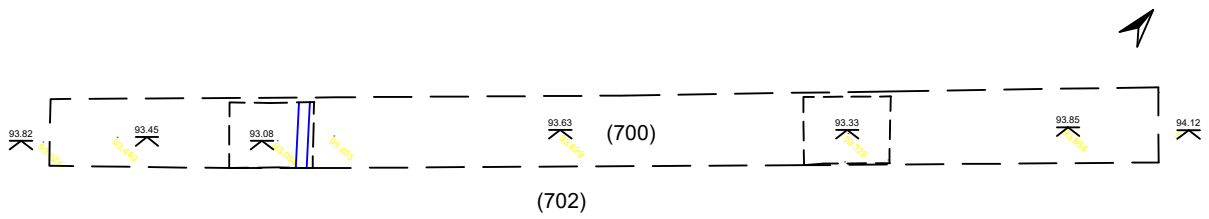


Figure 3 b

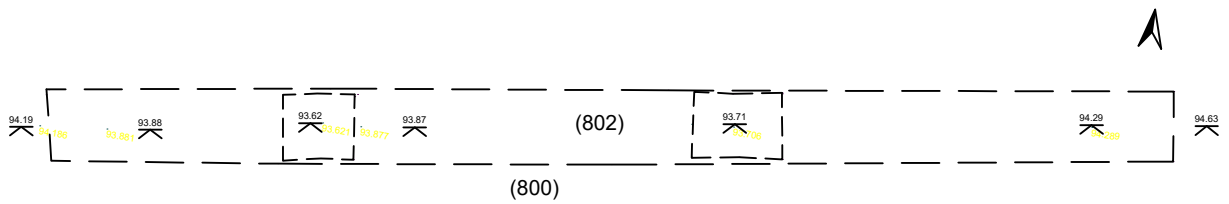
Trench Plans

Modern Field Drains in Blue

Trench 7



Trench 8



Trench 9

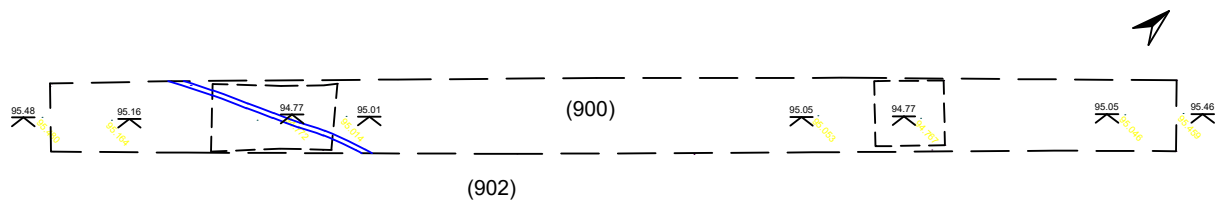
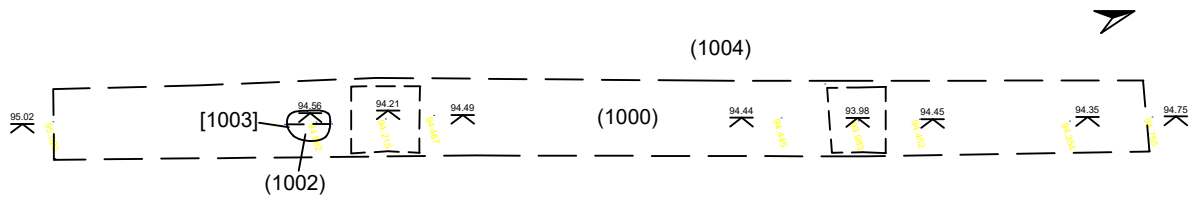


Figure 3 c

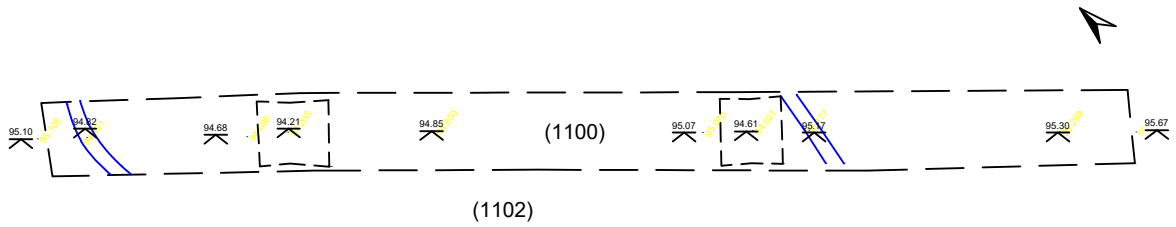
Trench Plans

Modern Field Drains in Blue

Trench 10



Trench 11



Sections

Figure 4

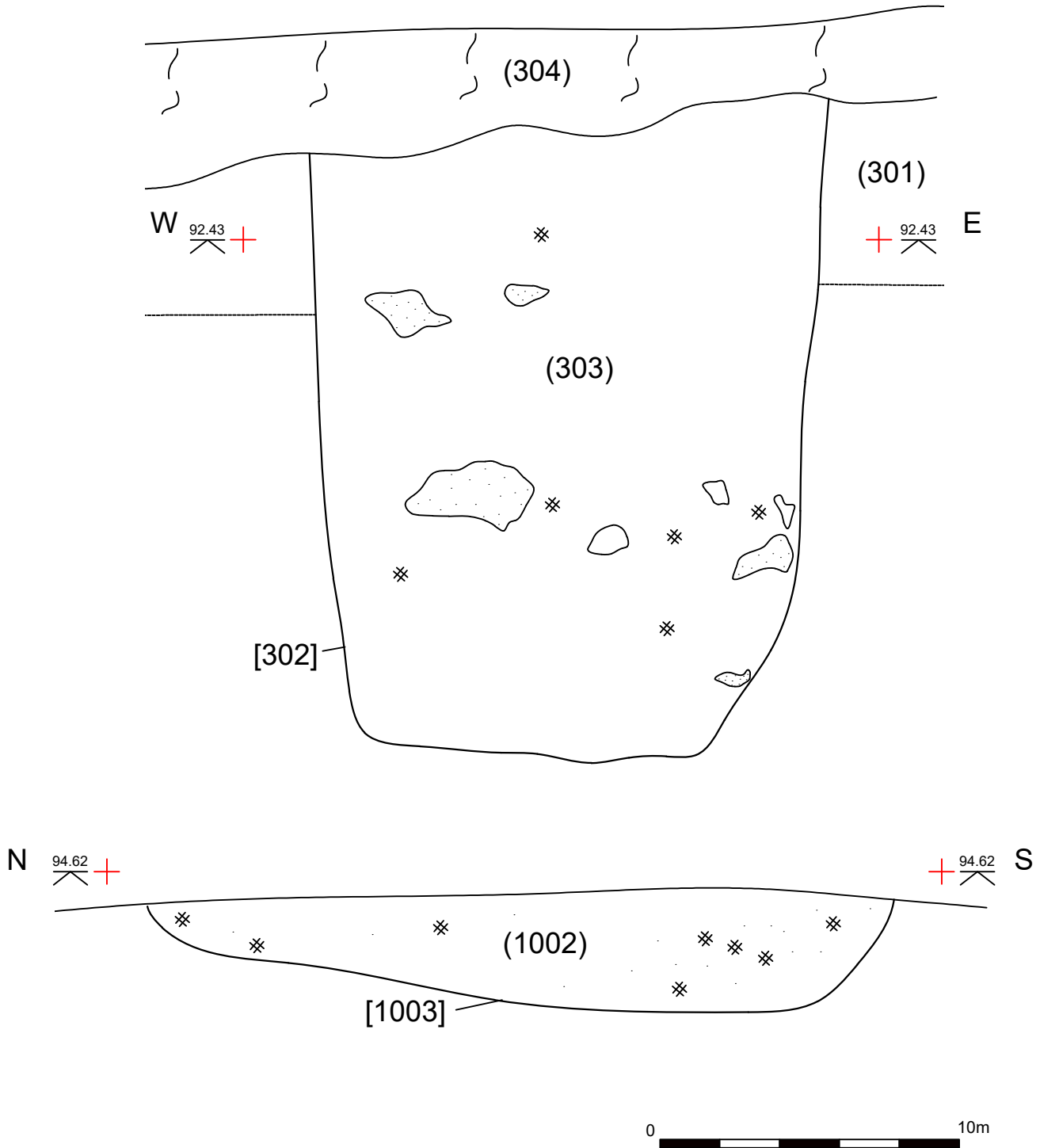




Plate 1. Looking east at Trench 5.



Plate 2. Detail showing the general stratigraphy of the site, looking north at sondage in Trench 5



Plate 3. Looking north at cut [302]



Plate 4. Looking north at feature [1003]