

Aragon Primary School, London Borough of Merton: An Archaeological Evaluation Report

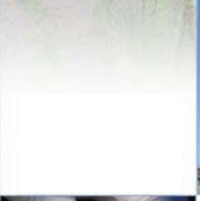
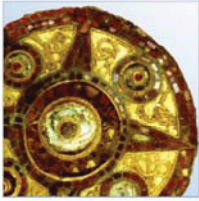
Planning Application Number: 11/P2429

National Grid Reference Number: TQ 2404 6695

AOC Project No: 32074

Site Code: ARG 12

January 2012



ARCHAEOLOGY

HERITAGE

CONSERVATION

Aragon Primary School, London Borough of Merton

An Archaeological Evaluation Report

On Behalf of:	EC Harris ECHQ 34 York Way London N1 9AB
National Grid Reference (NGR):	TQ 2404 6695
AOC Project No:	32074
Prepared by:	Chris Clarke
Illustration by:	Jonathan Moller
Date of Fieldwork:	12th & 13th January 2012
Date of Report:	January 2012

This document has been prepared in accordance with AOC standard operating procedures.

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Draft/Final Report Stage:	Date: January 2012

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Non-Technical Summary

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken by AOC Archaeology Group, on behalf of EC Harris, on the 12th and 13th January 2012 at the site of Aragon Primary School, Aragon Road, London Borough of Merton. The evaluation consisted of one machine excavated trench measuring 10m by 1.9m.

The only feature encountered during the evaluation was a ceramic field drain thought to relate to 19th or 20th century agricultural drainage activity on site prior to the construction of the current school. Overlying the sandy clay natural and sealing the field drain was a limited sequence of deposits relating to construction of the modern school playground. It is highly likely that a phase of modern horizontal truncation has taken place which has removed previously surviving soil horizons down to the level of the natural.

The feature and deposits encountered during the evaluation are of limited significance, while the high levels of horizontal truncation encountered strongly imply that the potential for other archaeological features and horizons to survive on site is also limited. Due to the limited nature of the archaeological deposits encountered it is recommended that no further archaeological fieldwork be undertaken. The final decision in regards to the requirement for further archaeological fieldwork lies with Diane Abrams of GLAAS, Archaeology Advisor to the London Borough of Merton.

The results of the evaluation will be summarised for inclusion in the London Archaeology Round-up and published via the Archaeological Data Service (ADS) website.

1. Introduction

1.1 Site Location

- 1.1.1 This document details the results of an archaeological evaluation, consisting of one evaluation trench excavated at the site of Aragon Primary School, Aragon Road, London Borough of Merton (Figure 1). The centre point of the site is located at (NGR) TQ 2404 6695.
- 1.1.2 The site is located on the eastern side of Aragon Road, Morden. Aragon Road forms the western boundary of the site, while the southern boundary is formed by residential properties fronting onto Aragon Place. The north-western and northern limits of the site are bounded by residential properties fronting onto Aragon Road and Tudor Drive, while the eastern boundary of the site is formed by the boundary with King George's Field recreation ground (Figure 2).

1.2 Planning Background

- 1.2.1 The local planning authority is the London Borough of Merton. Archaeological advice to the borough is provided by the Greater London Archaeological Advisory Service (GLAAS), part of English Heritage.
- 1.2.2 There are no known designated or previously identified heritage assets within the proposed development site; however, the north-west corner of the site falls within Lower Morden Archaeological Priority Zone. This area is designated based on medieval finds from this area, which are thought to indicate the presence of settlement.
- 1.2.3 The site is not located within a Conservation Area.
- 1.2.4 The development consists of the previous demolition of an existing single storey toilet block located on the northwest corner of the school, followed by the erection of a new two storey extension in the same location.
- 1.2.5 A Statement of Heritage Significance was produced by AOC Archaeology as part of the planning application (AOC 2011). The planning application (11/P2429) was granted with an archaeological condition attached in order that the archaeological implications of the development could be fully considered. Condition 5 states:

Prior to the commencement of works on the two storey classroom extension, a phase of archaeological trenching is to be undertaken in the proposed area of development to establish and record the nature, depth and survival of any surviving archaeological deposits if present. In the event of important archaeological features or remains being discovered which require fuller rescue excavation, then construction work shall not proceed until the applicant has secured the implementation of a further programme of archaeological work in accordance with a written scheme of investigation which has been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority.

Reason: In order to provide the opportunity to record the history of the site and to comply with policy BE13 of the Adopted Merton Unitary Development Plan 2003.

- 1.2.6 AOC Archaeology Group were commissioned by EC Harris to carry out the field evaluation, which represents the first stage of archaeological fieldwork. The methodology was set out in a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) (AOC 2012). This document detailed how the evaluation would be undertaken and was approved by Diane Abrams of GLAAS.

1.3 Geology and Topography

- 1.3.1 The British Geological Survey map sheet 270 (BGS 1981) shows the site to be located on London Clay with terrace gravels present to the north of the site.
- 1.3.2 The area of the school is situated is relatively flat ground at a height of approximately 27m Above Ordnance Datum (AOD). The localised topography follows a gentle gradient rising towards the northeast.
- 1.3.1 No known geotechnical information is available for the site.

2. Historical and Archaeological Background

The information below has been extracted and summarised from the Statement of Heritage Significance (AOC 2011).

2.1 The Prehistoric Periods

(Palaeolithic c. 500,000 – 10000 BC; Mesolithic c. 10000 to 4000 BC; Neolithic c. 4000-2200 BC; Bronze Age c. 2200-700 BC and Iron Age c. 700 BC - AD 43)

- 2.1.2 During the early prehistoric period the wider area of Morden and Merton would have been densely forested. The underlying geology comprises heavy clay soils which were less attractive for early settlement than riverside locations with fertile alluvial soils (Goodman 1995). It is generally thought that prehistoric activity in the borough of Merton was restricted to areas of easily-worked soils overlying gravel and alluvial deposits, principally found around Wimbledon Common and Mitcham where Mesolithic flints have been recorded (Merton Council 2004).
- 2.1.3 Evidence of later prehistoric activity and settlement in the wider area around the London Borough of Merton is recorded in the form of the Iron Age Hill fort of Caesar's Camp at Wimbledon Common, approximately 4km to the north-west of the school site; here Neolithic finds and Bronze Age axeheads have also been found in addition to the Iron Age settlement remains (MoLAS, 2000; Merton Library Service, 1977). In addition Neolithic flint tools, Bronze Age metalwork, Iron Age coins have been identified from Mitcham Common, c.4.3km to the east of the site, (Merton Council 2004). A round barrow has also been identified on Mitcham Common.
- 2.1.4 There is a no evidence of prehistoric activity recorded within close proximity to the site.

2.2 The Roman Period (AD 43 – AD 410)

- 2.2.1 Shortly after Romans arrived in Britain in AD43, they constructed an important road called Stane Street through the area now covered by the borough of Merton. This busy trade route linked London with the Roman port of Chichester. The street crossed the border with Tooting, bridged the Wandle at Colliers Wood, passed under Merton Civic Centre, crossed Morden Park and continued on to Sutton (Merton Council 2008). The Roman road is thought to survive at a depth of 1.2m below the present ground level at Modern Park (Weinreb & Hibbert 1995) and passes c.500m to the south-east of the site along the modern route of Stonecot Hill. However, no significant archaeological features or finds were recorded during a watching brief carried out at the site of Sutton/Merton Territorial Army Centre, on Stonecott Hill in the vicinity of the projected route of Stane Street.
- 2.2.2 The Morden Park Mound, a designated scheduled monument, is thought to have originated as a Roman burial mound (GLHER) although it may represent an ornamental landscape feature of 18th Century date.

- 2.2.3 It has also been postulated that a '*mansio*' may have existed in Morden or Merton (Goodman 1995). A *mansio* was an official stopping place established on Roman roads maintained and used by government officials.
- 2.2.4 There is no physical evidence of Roman activity recorded within close proximity to the site, although the projected route of Stane Street (and associated Archaeological Priority Zone) lies c. 500m to the south-east of the site and Lower Morden Archaeological Priority Zone to the north of the site has yielded Roman remains.

2.3 The Early Medieval (AD 410 – AD 1066) and Medieval Periods (AD 1066 – AD 1538)

- 2.3.1 While there is no physical evidence for early medieval activity in close proximity to the site, the wider area of Morden is known to have been occupied during this period. The site was probably located within the parish of Morden. Morden was first recorded in AD 968 and is recorded in the Domesday survey of 1086, when it comprised a settlement of 14 people (Merton Council 2008). The etymology of the place names in the surrounding landscape indicate the widespread settlement and utilisation of the landscape during the early medieval period with, for example, the place names of Merton, Morden, Mitcham and Sutton all deriving from Saxon (Old English) elements. The name 'Morden is Anglo-Saxon in origin, meaning 'hill by the swampy spot' (Gover et al. 1934). The earliest mention of land at Merton dates to AD 967.
- 2.3.2 The Borough of Merton is likely to have contained a number of scattered settlements and manors during the early medieval period, now largely hidden by the urban expansion of Greater London and suburban development of the 19th and 20th centuries
- 2.3.3 The northern limit of the site extends into Lower Morden Archaeological Priority Zone, which has yielded medieval remains. In 1975 a small pottery sherd of light buff ware of gritty fabric with traces of green glaze was found in Lower Morden Lane, c.150m to the north of the site.

2.4 The Post-Medieval (AD 1538 – AD 1900) and Modern Period (AD 1900 to present)

- 2.4.1 The settlement of Morden appears to have remained relatively rural and undeveloped during the first half of the post-medieval period, though it did experienced the growth of a number of country estates created by wealthy landowners. The large estates, such as Morden Hall and Morden Park, dominated the surrounding landscape and led to further development of wealthy villa style residences in the late 18th and early 19th century. Post medieval potsherds have been recorded from Tudor Drive and a nearby school, c. 230m to the north of the site (AOC 2011).
- 2.4.2 The Lower Morden Lane Cemetery was founded in 1891 covering an area of 70 acres. It contained two chapels designed by William Poole, one of which was converted into a crematorium that opened in 1958. An additional cemetery at Garth Road was opened in the 20th century (GLHER 2011).
- 2.4.3 A local research document held in the Merton Local Studies Centre states that the Morden Farm School (now Aragon Primary-within the site) and Tudor School (now redeveloped as Aragon Place) were opened in 1939, although the schools are not shown on the Ordnance Survey map until 1955.
- 2.4.4 Bombing raids during the Second World War caused considerable damage to the wider area of Merton. Following this, the area was subject to significant redevelopment and regeneration and it was during this time that the area of the site and immediate area was developed with Aragon Road and Tudor Drive being laid out. In 1965 a new borough was created and 5 new town centres emerged: Colliers Wood, Mitcham, Morden, Raynes Park and Wimbledon (Merton Council 2008).

3. Strategy

3.1 Aims of the Archaeological Investigation

3.1.1 The aims of the evaluation were defined as being:

- To establish the presence/absence of archaeological remains within the site.
- To determine the extent, condition, nature, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains encountered.
- To record and sample excavate any archaeological remains encountered.
- To assess the ecofactual and environmental potential of any archaeological features and deposits.
- To determine the extent of previous truncations of the archaeological deposits.
- To enable the archaeology advisor to the London Borough of Merton, to make an informed decision on the status of the condition, and any possible requirement for further work in order to satisfy that condition.
- To make available to interested parties the results of the investigation.

3.1.2 The specific aims of the watching brief were defined as being:

- To identify any evidence for prehistoric evidence on site.
- To identify any evidence for Romano-British activity on site.
- To identify any evidence that may relate to the early medieval-medieval activities on site.
- To identify any evidence which may relate to the post-medieval development of the area.

3.1.3 The final aim is to make public the results of the investigation, subject to any confidentiality restrictions.

3.2 Methodology

3.2.1 A Written Scheme of Investigation prepared by AOC Archaeology (2012), defined the site procedures for the archaeological evaluation. This document detailed how the evaluation, consisting of one machine excavated trench, would be undertaken. All work was carried out in accordance with local and national guidelines (IfA 2009 & 2010, EH 2008 & 2009). Provision was made for a report as defined in the Written Scheme of Investigation.

3.2.2 During the evaluation the orientation of the trench was altered to facilitate access across the site.

3.2.3 A unique site code for the project (**ARG12**) has been issued by the London Archaeological Archive Resource Centre (LAARC), and was used as the site identifier for all records produced.

3.2.4 The evaluation trenching was undertaken on the 12th & 13th January 2012.

3.2.5 The levels for the trench were established in relation to the main contractor's surveyor station on site at a value of 27.34m AOD.

3.2.6 The evaluation was conducted by the author under the overall management of Alan Ford, AOC Project Manager. The site was monitored by Diane Abrams of GLAAS on behalf of Merton Borough Council.

4 Results

4.1 Trench 1

4.1.1 Surface of Trench = 27.32m AOD

Level (OD)	Depth BGL	Context Number	Description
27.32-27.22m	0.00m	(100)	Tarmac.
27.22-27.04m	0.10m	(101)	Made ground/Formation deposit. Loose. Black, CBM is ashy sandy matrix.
27.04-26.96m	0.18m	(102)	Tarmac and compacted clay.
26.96-26.41m (NFE)	0.36- 0.91m	(105)	Natural. Firm, greenish grey, sandy clay.

4.1.2 Trench 1 was located centrally within the footprint of the new development to the northwest of the main school building, orientated northeast-southwest and measured 10m by 1.90m (Figures 3 & 4, Plate A).



Plate A. Trench 1 Looking Northeast

4.1.3 The earliest deposits identified in Trench 1 was a firm, greenish grey, natural sandy clay deposit (105), recorded at a height of 26.96m AOD. Cut through the natural (105) in the southwest end of the trench was the linear cut for field drain [104]. The cut was orientated east-west and was approximately 0.30m wide with steep sides. Field Drain [104] was in excess of 2.80m in length. At the base of cut [104] were connected lengths of ceramic pipe 80mm in diameter which had been backfilled using a firm, greenish grey, sandy clay deposit (103) containing patches of brown clay and a fragment of post-medieval peg tile.

4.1.4 Sealing fill (103) and covering the full area of the trench, was a compact layer of dark brown clay immediately overlain by a thin horizon of tarmac (102), which in total was 0.10m thick. These layers appear to represent compacted ground over which a former play ground surface has been laid. A residual fragment of post-medieval redware pottery was recovered from the compacted clay element of layer (102). Overlying context (102) was a loose, black made ground horizon made up of large ceramic building fragments in a ashy sandy matrix (101), measuring up to 0.20m thick, which acted as the formation deposit for the 0.10m thick existing tarmac playground surface (100).

5. Finds

- 5.1 During the course of the archaeological investigation a limited finds assemblage was recovered. The finds assemblage consisted of a fragment of post-medieval peg tile from context (103), and a rim sherd of post-medieval redware pottery from context (102).

6. Conclusion

- 6.1 The evaluation successfully characterised both the stratigraphic sequence and the archaeological potential of the site. Undisturbed natural sandy clay deposits were observed at the base of Trench 1 at a maximum height of 26.96m AOD.
- 6.2 The only feature encountered during the evaluation was a ceramic field drain thought to relate to 19th or 20th century agricultural drainage activity on site prior to the construction of the current school.
- 6.3 Overlying the natural and sealing the field drain was a limited sequence of deposits relating to two separate phases of tarmac playground construction, both of which are associated with the modern school on site. The fact that these deposits immediately overlie the natural sandy clay, strongly implies that a phase of horizontal truncation took place immediately prior to the construction of the school.
- 6.4 The feature and deposits encountered during the evaluation are of limited significance due their late post-medieval or modern origins. The finds recovered are also of limited significance either due to their late post-medieval or modern date or residual nature. The high levels of horizontal truncation encountered strongly imply that the potential for other archaeological features and horizons to survive on site is limited.
- 6.5 Due to the limited nature of the archaeological deposits encountered it is recommended that no further archaeological fieldwork be undertaken. The final decision in regards to the requirement for further archaeological fieldwork lies with Diane Abrams of GLAAS, Archaeology Advisor to the London Borough of Merton.

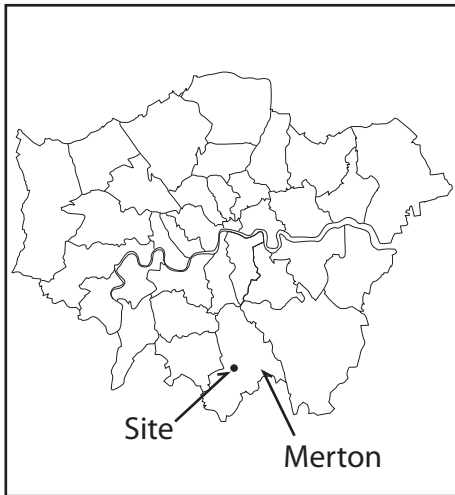
7. Publication and Archive Deposition

- 7.1 Due to the nature of the results at this stage of the archaeological investigation, publication is expected to be limited to a summary in the London Archaeology Round-up and publication via the Archaeological Data Service (ADS) (Appendix B).
- 7.2 On completion of the project, the archive, consisting of paper records, drawings, digital and black and white photographs, and finds, will be deposited with the LAARC.

8 Bibliography

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Site Location Within London

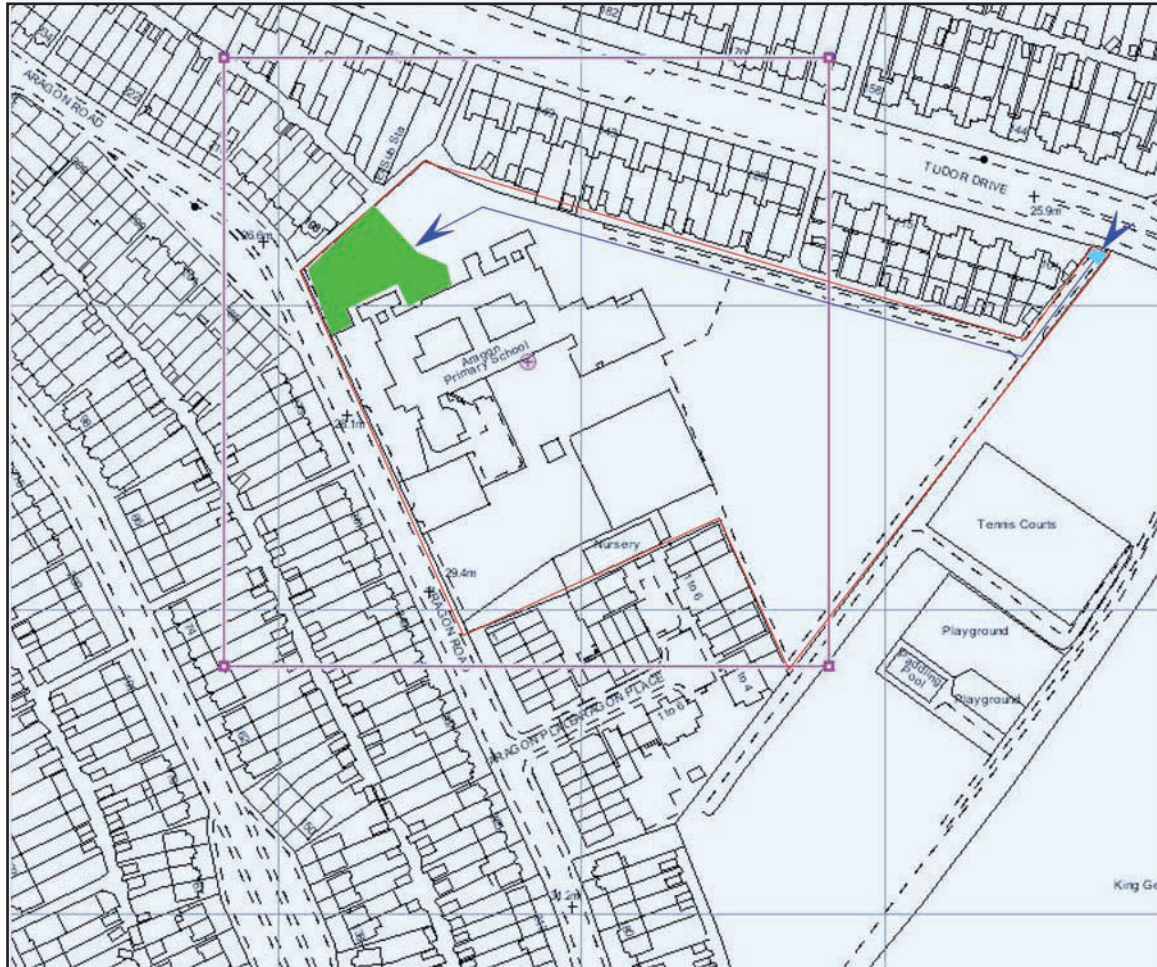


Based on the Ordnance Survey's 1:50 000 Landranger map of 2008 with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, © Crown Copyright. Licence No. AL 100023757

500m 0 2 km

1:50 000

Figure 1: Site Location

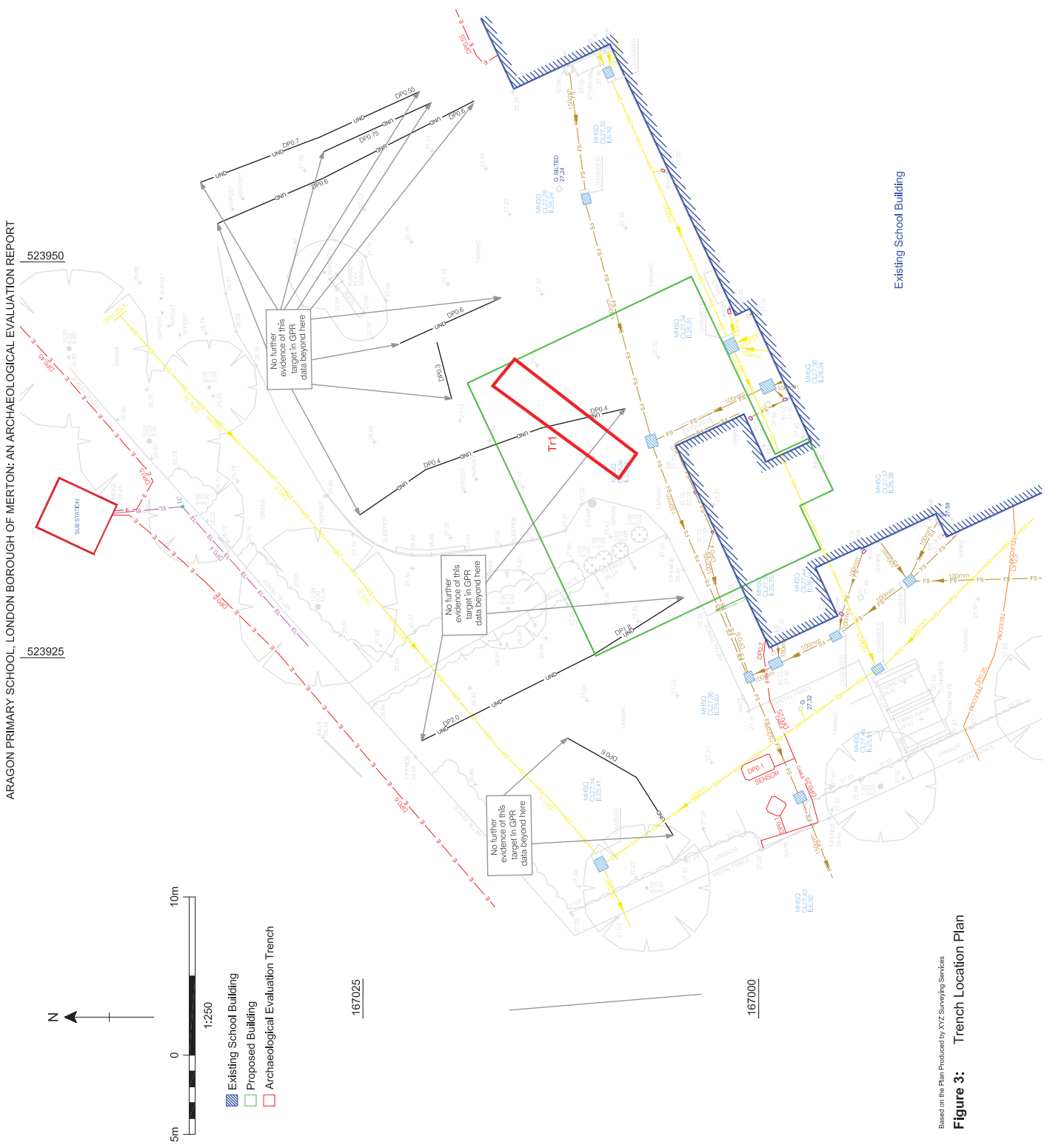


Based on the Plan Produced by EC Harris

Not To Scale

 Approximately the Area Shown in Figure 3

Figure 2: Detailed Site Location



Based on the Plan Produced by XYZ Surveying Services

Figure 3: Trench Location Plan

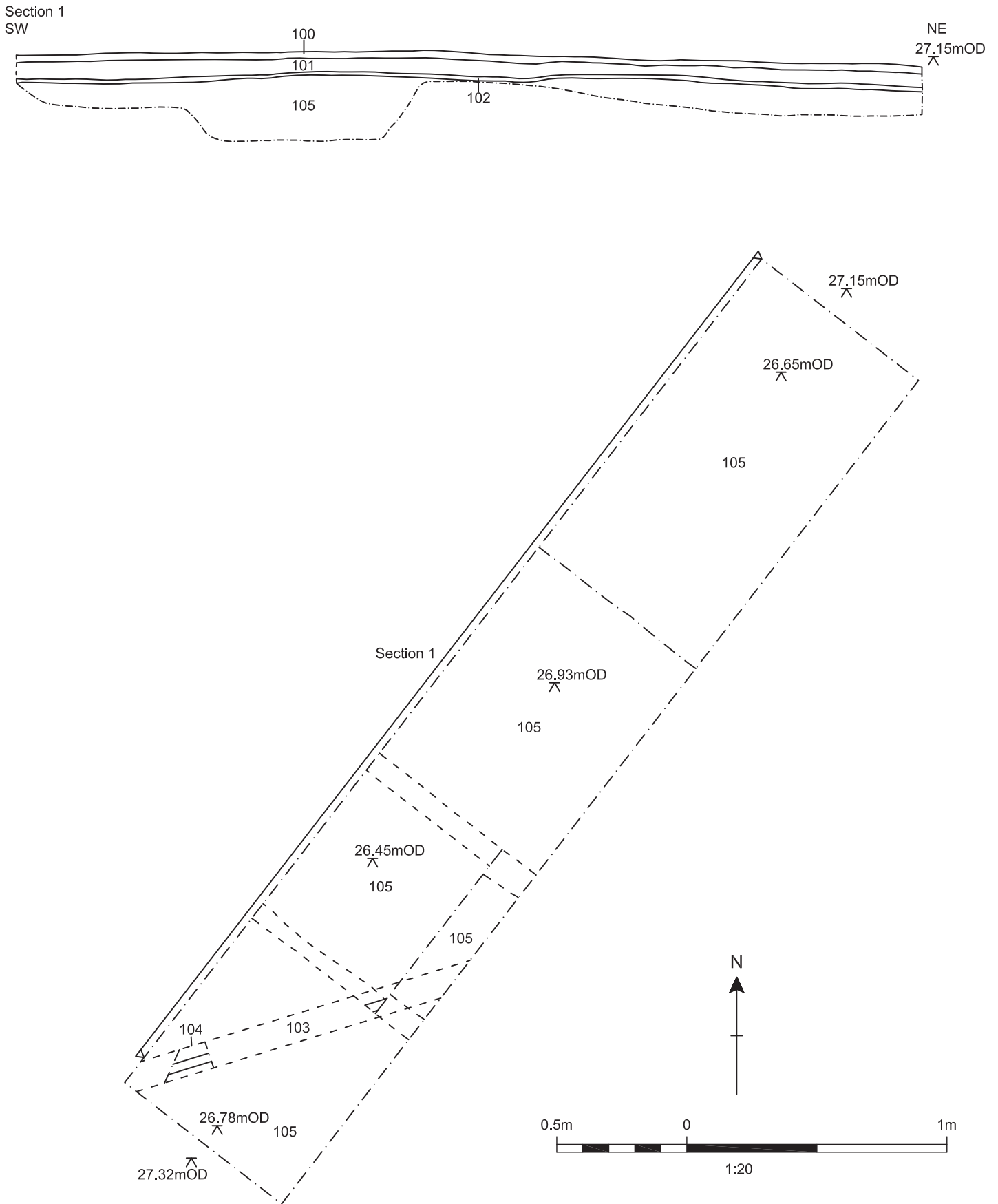


Figure 4: Trench 1: Plan & Section

Appendices

Appendix A – Context Register

Context No.	Context Description	Length	Width	Depth
100	Tarmac	10.00m	1.90m	0.10m
101	Made Ground	10.00m	1.90m	0.20m
102	Tarmac	10.00m	1.90m	0.10m
103	Fill of cut [104]	2.80m+	0.30m	0.30m
104	Cut of Field Drain	2.80m+	0.30m	0.30m
105	Natural	10.00m	1.90m	0.55m+

Appendix B – OASIS Form

OASIS ID: aocarcha1-116585

Project details

Project name Aragon Primary School

Short description of the project An archaeological evaluation was undertaken by AOC Archaeology Group at the site of Aragon Primary School, Aragon Road, London Borough of Merton. The only feature encountered during the evaluation was a ceramic field drain thought to relate to 19th or 20th century agricultural activity. Overlying the sandy clay natural and sealing the field drain was a limited sequence of deposits relating to construction of the modern school playground.

Project dates Start: 12-01-2012 End: 13-01-2012

Previous/future work Yes / No

Any project codes associated reference 32074 - Contracting Unit No.

Any project codes associated reference ARG12 - Sitecode

Any project codes associated reference 11/P2429 - Planning Application No.

Type of project Field evaluation

Site status None

Current Land use Community Service 1 - Community Buildings

Monument type FIELD DRAIN Post Medieval

Methods techniques & 'Sample Trenches'

Development type Public building (e.g. school, church, hospital, medical centre, law courts etc.)

Prompt Planning condition

Position in the After full determination (eg. As a condition)
planning process

Project location

Country England

Site location GREATER LONDON MERTON MORDEN Aragon Primary School

Postcode SM4 4QU

Study area 300.00 Square metres

Site coordinates TQ 2404 6695 51.3875115035 -0.217157684908 51 23 15 N 000 13 01 W Point

Height OD / Depth Min: 26.96m Max: 26.96m

Project creators

Name of AOC Archaeology Group
Organisation

Project brief AOC Archaeology Group
originator

Project design AOC Archaeology Group
originator

Project Alan Ford
director/manager

Project supervisor Chris Clarke

Type of developer

sponsor/funding
body

Name of EC Harris
sponsor/funding
body

Project archives

Physical Archive LAARC
recipient

Physical Archive ID ARG12

Physical Contents 'Ceramics'

Physical Archive To be held at AOC until ready to archive.
notes

Digital Archive LAARC
recipient

Digital Archive ID ARG12

Digital Media 'Images raster / digital photography'
available

Digital Archive notes To be held at AOC until ready to archive.

Paper Archive LAARC
recipient

Paper Archive ID ARG12

Paper Contents 'Ceramics'

Paper Media 'Context sheet', 'Matrices', 'Plan', 'Report', 'Section'
available

Paper Archive notes To be held at AOC until ready to archive.

Project bibliography 1

Publication type	Grey literature (unpublished document/manuscript)
Title	Aragon Primary School, Morden, London Borough of Merton: Statement of Heritage Significance
Author(s)/Editor(s)	Smith, C.
Date	2011
Issuer or publisher	AOC Archaeology
Place of issue or publication	London
Description	A4 text, 9 figures, 19 pages bound between plastic covers.

Project bibliography 2

Publication type	Grey literature (unpublished document/manuscript)
Title	ARAGON PRIMARY SCHOOL, LONDON BOROUGH OF MERTON: A WRITTEN SCHEME OF INVESTIGATION FOR AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION
Author(s)/Editor(s)	Edwards, C.
Date	2012
Issuer or publisher	AOC Archaeology
Place of issue or publication	London

Description A4 text, 3 illustrations, 20 pages bound between plastic covers.

Project bibliography 3

Publication type Grey literature (unpublished document/manuscript)

Title ARAGON PRIMARY SCHOOL, LONDON BOROUGH OF MERTON: AN
ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION REPORT

Author(s)/Editor(s) Clarke, C.

Date 2012

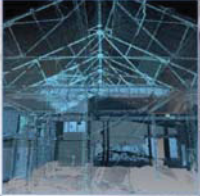
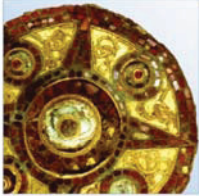
Issuer or publisher AOC Archaeology

Place of issue or London
publication

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Entered on 17 January 2012



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