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# New Building Porton Down, Wiltshire

Archaeological Watching Brief Report

Planning Ref: 15/11677/FUL  
Ref: 112660.03  
June 2016



**New Building,  
Porton Down, Wiltshire**

**Archaeological Watching Brief Report**

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## Quality Assurance

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# New Building, Porton Down, Wiltshire

## Archaeological Watching Brief Report

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**Figures**

Figure 1: Location of site and watching brief area.

**Plates**

Plate 1: Reduced dig for building viewed from the west.



# **New Building, Porton Down, Wiltshire**

## **Archaeological Watching Brief Report**

### **Summary**

Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by Porton Biopharma Ltd to carry out an archaeological watching brief during groundworks associated with the construction of a new two storey building at Porton Down, Porton, Wiltshire, centred on National Grid reference (NGR) 420470 136757.

A planning application (ref. 15/11677/FUL) had been submitted for the construction of a new purpose-built two storey building with laboratories on the ground floor and office space above. The application area occupies an area of around 789m<sup>2</sup>, and lies at a height of approximately 107m above Ordnance Datum (aOD).

The proposed development is located in an area of high archaeological potential, with previous archaeological work at the Porton Down Estate placing the site within an important prehistoric and funerary landscape.

The fieldwork consisted of the monitoring of intrusive groundworks associated with the proposed development, including the reduction of ground surface to the natural chalk, landscaping and the removal of mature trees and vegetation.

The site had not been subject to previous landscaping, therefore there was the potential for the discovery of features and finds of Neolithic and Bronze Age date. The watching brief revealed no evidence of archaeological features and deposits; however, four pieces of worked flint were recovered from the surface of the subsoil.

The watching brief was carried out from the 10th May to the 13th May 2016.



# **New Building, Porton Down, Wiltshire**

## **Archaeological Watching Brief Report**

### **Acknowledgements**

Wessex Archaeology would like to thank Peter Marshall of Porton Biopharma Ltd for commissioning the work and for his help and assistance throughout the course of the project. Thanks are also due to Clare King of Wiltshire County Archaeology Service who monitored the site on behalf of the Local Planning Authority.

The watching brief was carried out by Neil Fitzpatrick. This report was compiled by Jon Sanigar and the illustrations were prepared by Nancy Dixon. The project was managed on behalf of Wessex Archaeology by Ruth Panes.



# New Building, Porton Down, Wiltshire

## Archaeological Watching Brief Report

### 1 INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Project background

- 1.1.1 Wessex Archaeology ('WA') was commissioned by Porton Biopharma Ltd (hereafter the 'Client') to carry out an archaeological watching brief during ground works associated with the construction of a new two storey building at Porton Down, Porton, Wiltshire, centred on National Grid reference (NGR) 420470 136757 (hereafter the 'Site').
- 1.1.2 A planning application (ref. 15/11677/FUL) had been submitted for the construction of a new purpose-built two storey building with laboratories on the ground floor and office space above.
- 1.1.3 Consultation with the Assistant County Archaeologist indicated that there was an archaeological interest within the Site as prehistoric findspots and monuments (including funerary monuments) are present in the area. As a result a watching brief during was recommended during any development groundworks.
- 1.1.4 The watching brief was carried out from the 10th May to the 13th May 2016.
- 1.1.5 The Planning Application was granted on the 16 February 2016 with the following archaeological condition (Condition 2):

*No development shall commence within the area indicated (proposed development site) until:*

*- A written programme of archaeological investigation (in the form of a watching brief), which should include on-site work and off-site work such as the analysis, publishing and archiving of the results, has been submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority; and*

*- The approved programme of archaeological work has been carried out in accordance with the approved details. The work should be conducted by a professionally recognised archaeological contractor in accordance with a written scheme of investigation approved by this office.*

*REASON: To enable the recording of any matters of archaeological interest.*





## 1.2 The site

- 1.2.1 The Site is located close to the southern edge of the main Public Health England complex at Porton Down, which lies immediately to the east of Idmiston and around 2 km to the north-east of village of Porton.
- 1.2.2 The Site is currently occupied by grass and trees and is bordered to the south-west by the perimeter fence. Other buildings lie to the south-east and a mixture of open ground and facility buildings lie to the north-east and north-west. The development occupies an area of approximately 789 m<sup>2</sup>, and lies at a height of approximately 107 m above Ordnance Datum (aOD).
- 1.2.3 The underlying geology is mapped as the Seaford Chalk Formation with no superficial deposits recorded (British Geological Survey).

## 2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

### 2.1 Introduction

- 2.1.1 A number of nationally important designated assets, defined as ten Scheduled Monuments and a Listed Building, are located within the Site's immediate environs.
- 2.1.2 A summary of the archaeological and historical background to the Site is discussed below, informed by an earlier desk-based assessment (WA 2015a), previous archaeological work undertaken by WA at the Porton Down Estate, and associated information from the Wiltshire and Swindon Historic Environment Record (WSHER). Relevant entry numbers from the WSHER and designated assets from the National Heritage List for England (NHLE) are included where appropriate. A summary of previous archaeological work in the area is listed in the following section.

### 2.2 Archaeological and historical background

#### *Palaeolithic and Mesolithic (900,000–4000 BC)*

- 2.2.1 While no Palaeolithic or Mesolithic features or artefacts are known close to the Site, some are recorded in the wider area, with two Palaeolithic handaxes recorded as being found in the general area of Porton (Roe 1969, 13) and Mesolithic axes or adzes found at Porton Field (WSHER ref. MWI17460) and at Gomeldon (WSHER ref. MWI10440).

#### *Neolithic and Bronze Age (4000–700 BC)*

- 2.2.2 The Neolithic and Bronze Age periods are associated with the establishment of farming and more permanent settlement, and while no little definite occupation evidence has been found within the vicinity, there is considerable evidence for activity in the area at this time.
- 2.2.3 A number of flint tools have been found approximately c.200 m to the north-east of the Site, at the site of the Microbiological Research Establishment at the Porton complex, including an assemblage of 51 flint scrapers and other tools thought to date to the Neolithic period (WSHER ref. MWI17264 and MWI17265).
- 2.2.4 Around 1.2 km to the north-east of the Site lies Idmiston barrow cemetery formed from at least 13 barrows including examples of the bell, saucer and disc barrow types, a number of which are Scheduled Monuments (NHLE 1013971, 1013970, 1013989, 1014818, 104819). In addition to the Scheduled examples several other undated probable barrows have also been identified in this area which may form part of this group.
- 2.2.5 Though the date and exact nature of a number of these possible barrows has not been confirmed, these along with the Scheduled examples and those investigated in the 19<sup>th</sup>

century indicate a significant concentration of funerary activity within this landscape during the Late Neolithic and Bronze Age.

- 2.2.6 Late Bronze Age activity can also be seen in the form of 'Wessex Linear' ditches (WSHER ref. MWI31385, MWI17380) reflecting later Bronze Age land divisions associated with pastoral agriculture. An example lies to the west of the Site, the extrapolated course of which may extend into the northern part of the Public Health England complex. The example(s) found at Porton may have been one of several linear earthworks which extended from the higher ground at Boscombe Down East to the River Bourne.
- 2.2.7 Lynchets located to the south-west probably relate to cultivation at this time (WSHER ref. MWI17388), and a buried soil deposit was identified that contained a single sherd of pottery dating to the Late Bronze Age period, although this is almost certainly residual (WSHER ref. MWI31378) (Wessex Archaeology 2009a).

*Iron Age and Romano-British (700 BC–AD 410)*

- 2.2.8 Two Iron Age pits and Iron Age activity has been identified 300m to the north of the Site (WSHER ref. MWI7280) and some undated field systems in the wider area recognised from aerial photographs may also relate to activity at this time.
- 2.2.9 To the north-west of the Site the course of a Roman road runs from the settlement at Stratford sub Castle near Salisbury (*Sorviodunum*) to the Late Iron Age oppidum and Roman town at Silchester (*Calleva Atrebatum*).

*Saxon, medieval and post-medieval (AD 410–1800)*

- 2.2.10 At the time of the Domesday Survey (1086) Porton is recorded as a small settlement of eight households, while Idmiston is recorded as a larger settlement of 15 households. Although not recorded in the Domesday Survey, Gomeldon to the south-west is the location of a deserted medieval village (NHLE 1003041). This would all seem to indicate a pattern of settlement at this time concentrated along the river valley.

*19th century and modern (AD 1800–present)*

- 2.2.11 The 1841 tithe map for Idmiston parish shows the Site as occupying part of three large fields on the southern edge of the road from Idmiston across the down. The Site continues to lie within arable land until the First World War period when the Porton Down complex was first developed.
- 2.2.12 Porton Down was established in 1916 in response to the use of gas as an offensive weapon by German forces during the First World War. The initial site was 2886 acres (1168 ha) increasing to 6196 acres (2507 ha) by 1918, and was originally known as 'The War Department Experimental Ground, Porton' and then later as the 'Royal Engineers Experimental Station, Porton' (Carter 2000, 3).
- 2.2.13 The Public Health England facility in Porton Down originated in the Second World War period when a Biology Department was established by the Ministry of Defence to study biological warfare and defence. By 1957 the UK was pursuing a solely defensive focus on biological research (Carter 2000, 79) and in April 1979 the complex became a solely civilian establishment.

## 2.3 Recent investigations in the wider landscape

### *Geophysical survey 2008*

- 2.3.1 A magnetometer survey was undertaken to the south of the Site (Archaeological Surveys Ltd 2008), the results of which identified a number of anomalies of likely archaeological origin within the site's boundaries. It is not proposed to describe the geophysical survey findings further here, as the site was subsequently subject to targeted trial trench evaluation based upon these results.

### *Archaeological field evaluation 2009*

- 2.3.2 A total of 45 evaluation trenches were machine-excavated across the area subject to geological survey in 2008 (WA 2009). The evaluation established that archaeological features comprising a segmented possible enclosure ditch, a crouched inhumation burial, a segmented ring-ditch, a small 'C' shaped enclosure and part of a 'Wessex Linear' ditch were present, though dating evidence was very limited. Relatively few other archaeological features were identified and the evaluation demonstrated that the geophysical survey (of 2008) had been very accurate in indicating the distribution, size and general nature of features present.

### *Archaeological watching brief 2009*

- 2.3.3 An investigation undertaken by Southampton Archaeology Unit (Garner, Russel and Thompson, 2009), immediately to the west of the Site, revealed a possible Late Neolithic ditch 0.8 m wide and 0.5 m deep containing four flint flakes.

### *Archaeological excavation 2011*

- 2.3.4 An archaeological excavation (WA 2012; Andrews and Thompson forthcoming) was undertaken which targeted the results of the 2009 WA evaluation. This partially revealed an Early Bronze Age funerary monument which comprised an unusually complex sequence of eight or more burials, all females or young children, surrounded by a segmented ring-ditch. In the centre was a large grave which contained the disturbed remains of an adult female, accompanied by a Beaker, which had probably been placed within a timber chamber and later revisited on one or more occasions. Two burials were accompanied by a Food Vessel and a miniature Collared Urn respectively, others were unaccompanied and there was a double cremation burial within an inverted Collared Urn. A Middle Bronze Age boundary ditch and a Late Bronze Age 'Wessex Linear' ditch reflected later prehistoric land divisions probably related to stock control.

### *Archaeological excavation 2014*

- 2.3.5 An archaeological excavation (WA 2014; Andrews and Thompson forthcoming) was targeted on the remaining portion of the segmented ring-ditch investigated in 2011 and an enigmatic 'C'-shaped enclosure (revealed in the geophysics), as well as recording more of the Middle Bronze Age field system. The segmented ring-ditch measured 15 m in diameter and was formed from nine separate ditch segments which surrounded two further graves containing the remains of three individuals; a single infant cremation within an inverted Collared Urn and a neonate inhumation sealed by cremated adult remains. An antler implement was recovered from the base of the segmented ring-ditch and radiocarbon dated to the Early Beaker period.
- 2.3.6 The 'C'-shaped enclosure was approximately 13 m long by 8.5 m wide, with a 12 m wide 'entrance' to the north. Although the date and function of the enclosure remains unclear, an association with the Early Bronze Age complex to the west is likely. In the Middle–Late Bronze Age the 'C'-shaped enclosure was augmented with the addition of a small gully, which narrowed the entrance perhaps indicating an alternative use, possibly an animal

corral associated with a probable watering hole or dew pond located to the south-west. Further land divisions were revealed in the watching brief indicating that the remains within the site formed part of a much wider complex of fields and paddocks established c. 1100-700 BC.

*Archaeological watching brief and evaluation 2015*

- 2.3.7 Two separate archaeological investigations (WA 2015b) were undertaken on land at Porton Down: an archaeological evaluation comprising the excavation of 42 trenches on former sport pitches proposed for redevelopment (Zone 2) immediately south of the Site, and an archaeological watching brief monitoring groundwork associated with redevelopment (Zone 3) to the west of the Site.
- 2.3.8 Despite the known archaeological potential, identified through a preceding DBA, the Zone 2 archaeological evaluation only identified a very low density of features. The majority of these features were of modern date and appear to relate to the earlier history of the Porton Down military establishment, although features of uncertain date were also uncovered, including a substantial ditch in the far west of the Site as well as a smaller possible ditch and two postholes. The large undated ditch may potentially be associated with the later prehistoric divisions of the landscape known in the Porton Down area, possibly a later Bronze Age 'Wessex linear' ditch.
- 2.3.9 The location of sub-surface remains of a demolished railway in the south of Zone 2 correspond to the line of a 'light railway' marked on Ordnance Survey (OS) maps from 1925–1961, although by 1961 it is labelled as 'disused'. In the west of Zone 2, the limited remains of a modern building (represented by its footings) approximately correspond to the location of a small building associated with the military establishment shown on OS maps from 1961 and 1977.
- 2.3.10 The Zone 3 archaeological watching brief uncovered a small number of more significant features dating to the Bronze Age. These comprised a slightly sinuous ditch that could not be precisely dated, although it was earlier than a radiocarbon-dated Middle Bronze Age inhumation burial. A short distance to the east of this landscape division, one small pit and a larger pit were both also dated to the Bronze Age and contained a limited range of artefacts indicative of occupation or settlement within the area. A single posthole identified in close proximity to the other remains was of uncertain date.

*Archaeological watching brief 2016*

- 2.3.11 A watching brief was carried out on three separate areas on the Porton Down Estate. A single a Late Neolithic pit containing worked flint was the only feature identified, in the northern end of the watching brief area 150 m south-east of the present Site.

## **2.4 Designated Sites**

- 2.4.1 A total of ten Scheduled Monuments lie within the Site's immediate environs (WA 2015a). These statutorily protected monuments include several groups of Bronze Age barrows (burial mounds) to the north of the Site (WA 06, 07, and 08), and to the east (WA 09 and 10). Further groups of barrows lie to the south-east of the Site (WA 11, the monument listing for which includes a Bronze Age enclosure) and to the south and south-west (WA 02, 03, 04 and 05).
- 2.4.2 In addition, there are a further five unscheduled probable barrows (WA 50, 51, 52, 55 and 56) to the north of the Site.



2.4.3 One Grade II Listed Building (WA1) lies to the west of the Site. The building (Building 106) represents part of the former Chemical Defence Establishment.

2.4.4 Immediately north-west of the Site is a possible field system (WA 41 and 49), while to the south a number of crop marks are visible on aerial photographs, representing undated enclosures and field systems (WA 46, 38 and 40).

### **3 METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Aims and objectives**

3.1.1 The aims of the watching brief were:

- *to determine the presence or absence of archaeological remains, and should*
- *remains be present, to ensure their preservation by record to the highest possible standard;*
- *to confirm the approximate date or date range of the remains, by means of artefactual or other evidence;*
- *to determine or confirm the approximate extent of any remains;*
- *to determine the condition and state of preservation of the remains;*
- *to determine the degree of complexity of the horizontal and/or vertical stratigraphy present; and*
- *to prepare a report on the results of the watching brief.*

#### **3.2 Fieldwork methodology**

3.2.1 The Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) (WA 2016) laid down full details of the way in which the watching brief would be carried out. In summary, where possible the areas of groundworks were monitored, with archaeological deposits or features characterised, their condition established, dated and the remains recorded.

3.2.2 The fieldwork consisted of the monitoring of all intrusive groundworks associated within the proposed development area. Associated site stripping, footings and service trench excavation will also be monitored.

#### **3.3 Best practice**

3.3.1 The fieldwork was carried out in accordance with the relevant guidance given in the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA) *Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief* (CIfA 2014a).

#### **3.4 Recording**

3.4.1 All exposed archaeological deposits were recorded using Wessex Archaeology's *pro forma* recording system.

3.4.2 A photographic record was made using digital photography. For security reasons, the location of the Site within the Porton Down Estate meant that a standard archaeological photographic record was not possible. In accordance with security regulations on the



Porton Down Estate, all images have thus been approved by the Client. Digital images have been subject to a managed quality control and curation process which has embedded appropriate metadata within the image and ensures the long term accessibility of the image set.

3.4.3 A unique WA project code **112660** was also allocated.

### **3.5 Health and safety**

3.5.1 Health and safety considerations were of paramount importance in conducting all fieldwork. Safe working practices override archaeological considerations at all times.

3.5.2 All work was carried out in accordance with the *Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974* and the *Management of Health and Safety Regulations 1992*, and all other relevant Health and Safety legislation, regulations and codes of practice in force at the time.

## **4 ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESULTS**

### **4.1 Introduction**

4.1.1 The fieldwork consisted of a watching brief on all intrusive groundworks associated with the proposed development (**Figure 1**). Site stripping, footings and service trench excavation were monitored.

4.2.1 Stripping of the topsoil began on the 11th May 2016, with the remaining subsoil stripped down to the natural chalk and clay on 12th May 2016 (**Plate 1**).

4.2.2 The topsoil was mid to darkish grey brown silt loam with a maximum thickness of 0.23 m. The subsoil was mid-yellowish brown silty clay with occasional sub-angular and sub-rounded flint inclusions, with a maximum thickness of 0.12 m. The natural comprised degraded chalk and yellowish brown clay with flint inclusions exposed at a depth of 0.35 m below ground level.

4.1.2 On the 12th May 2016, tree roots and stumps were removed from the area. One tree stump was 0.15 m in depth.

4.1.3 It was noted that not all of the Site was reduced to the natural due to the construction of a pathway. On the 13th May 2016 the stripping of the footpath to the formation level was completed and surveyed.

4.1.4 Four pieces of worked flint were recovered from the surface of the subsoil, but no archaeological features were identified.

4.1.5 A layer of made ground was noted along the length of the southern boundary of the Site and some modern disturbance in the form of services were visible along the eastern boundary.

## **5 ARTEFACTUAL EVIDENCE**

### **5.1 Introduction**

5.1.1 No artefacts were recorded from sealed contexts within archaeological features or deposits during the course of the watching brief. However, four pieces of worked flint were recovered from the subsoil.





## **5.2 Worked Flint**

- 5.2.1 The finds comprise four non-diagnostic prehistoric flint flakes, which are surface finds from Context 102, subsoil strip, weighing 95g. These are indicative of background prehistoric activity in the area.

## **6 ENVIRONMENTAL EVIDENCE**

- 6.1.1 No material suitable for environmental analysis was present within the Site.

## **7 CONCLUSIONS**

- 7.1.1 The archaeological watching brief did not identify any archaeological features or deposits, despite being located in an area of high archaeological potential. However, four pieces of worked flint were recovered from the subsoil.

## **8 STORAGE AND CURATION**

### **8.1 Museum and archive**

- 8.1.1 It is recommended that the project archive resulting from the evaluation will be deposited with Salisbury & South Wiltshire Museum, though it should be noted that this is currently a closed repository.
- 8.1.2 The complete Site archive, which will include paper records, photographic records, artefacts and digital data, will be prepared following the standard conditions for the acceptance of excavated archaeological material by the appropriate Museum, and in general following nationally recommended guidelines (SMA 1995; ClfA 2014b; Brown 2011; ADS 2013).

### **8.2 Storage**

- 8.2.1 It is proposed in principle that, subject to the wishes of the landowner, the entire archive (including the finds) will be deposited with Salisbury & South Wiltshire Museum. Provision has been made for the cost of long term storage in the post-fieldwork costs.
- 8.2.2 Until final deposition with the museum the archive will be stored at the offices of Wessex Archaeology in Salisbury

### **8.3 Discard policy**

- 8.3.1 Wessex Archaeology follows the guidelines set out in Selection, Retention and Dispersal (SMA 1993), which allows for the discard of selected artefact and ecofact categories which are not considered to warrant any future analysis. Any discard of artefacts will be fully documented in the project archive.

### **8.4 Copyright**

- 8.4.1 The full copyright of the written/illustrative archive relating to the site will be retained by Wessex Archaeology Ltd under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 with all rights reserved. The Museum, however, will be granted an exclusive licence for the use of the archive for educational purposes, including academic research, providing that such use shall be non-profitmaking, and conforms to the Copyright and Related Rights regulations 2003.

## 8.5 Security copy

- 8.5.1 In line with current best practice (e.g. Brown 2011) on completion of the project a security copy of the written records will be prepared, in the form of a digital PDF/A file. PDF/A is an ISO-standardised version of the Portable Document Format (PDF) designed for the digital preservation of electronic documents through omission of features ill-suited to long-term archiving.

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## 11 APPENDICES

### 11.1 Appendix 1: OASIS form

OASIS ID: wessexar1-253282

#### Project details

Project name	New Building, Porton Down, Wiltshire
Short description of the project	Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by Porton Biopharma Ltd to carry out an archaeological watching brief during groundworks associated with the construction of a new two storey building at Porton Down, Porton, Wiltshire, centred on National Grid reference (NGR) 420470 136757. A planning application (ref. 15/11677/FUL) had been submitted for the construction of a new purpose-built two storey building with laboratories on the ground floor and office space above. The application area occupies an area of around 789m <sup>2</sup> , and lies at a height of approximately 107m above Ordnance Datum (aOD). The proposed development is located in an area of high archaeological potential, with previous archaeological work at the Porton Down Estate placing the site within an important prehistoric and funerary landscape. The fieldwork consisted of the monitoring of intrusive groundworks associated with the proposed development, including the reduction of ground surface to the natural chalk, landscaping and the removal of mature trees and vegetation. The site had not been subject to previous landscaping, therefore there was the potential for the discovery of features and finds of Neolithic and Bronze Age date. The watching brief revealed no evidence of archaeological features and deposits; however, four pieces of worked flint were recovered from the surface of the subsoil.
Project dates	Start: 10-05-2016 End: 13-05-2016
Previous/future work	Yes / Not known
Any associated project reference codes	112660 - Contracting Unit No.
Type of project	Recording project
Current Land use	Industry and Commerce 2 - Offices
Monument type	NONE None
Significant Finds	WORKED FLINT Uncertain
Investigation type	"Watching Brief"
Prompt	Planning condition

#### Project location

Country	England
Site location	WILTSHIRE SALISBURY IDMISTON New Building, Porton Down, Wiltshire
Postcode	SP4 0JG
Study area	789 Square metres



Site coordinates SU 20470 36757 51.1291983731 -1.707436712162 51 07 45 N 001 42 26 W  
Point

Height OD / Depth Min: 106.65m Max: 107m

### Project creators

Name of Organisation Wessex Archaeology

Project brief originator Local Authority Archaeologist and/or Planning Authority/advisory body

Project design originator Wessex Archaeology

Project director/manager Ruth Panes

Project supervisor Neil Fitzpatrick

Type of sponsor/funding body Landowner

Name of sponsor/funding body Porton Biopharma Ltd

### Project archives

Physical Archive recipient Not Yet Transferred

Physical Contents "Worked stone/lithics"

Digital Archive recipient Not Yet Transferred

Digital Media available "Images raster / digital photography","Survey","Text"

Paper Archive recipient Not Yet Transferred

Paper Media available "Diary","Notebook - Excavation',' Research',' General Notes","Report","Survey","Unpublished Text"

### Project bibliography 1

Publication type Grey literature (unpublished document/manuscript)

Title New Building, Porton Down, Wiltshire

Author(s)/Editor(s) Sanigar, J. and Panes, R.

Other bibliographic details 112660



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Location of site and watching brief area

Figure 1



Plate 1: Reduced dig for building viewed from the west

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