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St LAWRENCE SCHOOL
Wymington, Beds.

HN406

Archaeological Evaluation Report



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Archaeological Director: David Hillelson, BA MIFA

ST LAWRENCE VA LOWER SCHOOL Wymington, Beds.

HN406

Archaeological Evaluation Report

Prepared on behalf of the Governors of St Lawrence VA Lower School

by

Hannah Firth, MA

Report No.183

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The cover illustration shows a detail from the Ordnance Survey 6-inch series, 1892

Acknowledgements

Fieldwork for the project was undertaken by Hannah Firth and Mark Winter under the supervision of Chris Turner. The illustrations were prepared by Karin Semmelmann and the report was edited by David Hillelson.

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Summary

| | | | |
|-------------------------------------|--|-----------------------------------|----------------------|
| Site name and address: | St Lawrence VA Lower School, Manor Lane, Wymington, Beds | | |
| County: | Bedfordshire | District: | Bedford |
| Village/town: | Wymington | Parish: | Wymington |
| Planning reference: | 900/HER/16957 | NGR (to 8 figures): | SP 9547 6442 |
| Client name and address: | The Governors, St Lawrence VA Lower School, Wymington | | |
| Nature of application: | New School Hall | Present land use: | Garden |
| Size of application area: | 400m ² | Size of area investigated: | 27m ² |
| Site Code: | HN406 | Other reference: | n/a |
| Organisation: | Heritage Network | Site Director: | David Hillelson |
| Type of work: | Evaluation | Finds location/Museum: | Bedford Museum |
| Start of work | 4th February 2003 | Finish of work | 14th February 2003 |
| Related SMR Nos.: | n/a | Periods represented: | Saxo-Norman & Modern |
| Previous summaries /reports: | n/a | | |

Synopsis: As the result of a request for further information prior to the determination of a planning application for the construction of a new school hall at St Lawrence VA Lower School, Wymington, Beds., the Heritage Network was commissioned by the school governors to undertake an archaeological evaluation of the site. The fieldwork consisted of the excavation of two trial trenches. The site lies within an archaeologically sensitive area and it was considered that there was potential for the discovery of prehistoric, Roman and medieval remains.

Trench 1 was located across the south-western half of the footprint of the proposed building. Four archaeological features were noted at the south-western end, beyond the footprint of the proposed new building. One feature produced pottery fragments which suggest a Saxo-Norman or early Medieval date.

Trench 2 was located within the eastern half of the proposed building. It demonstrated that the area had been significantly disturbed, probably during the construction of the existing school buildings.

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Introduction

1.1 This report has been prepared on behalf of the Governors of St Lawrence Lower School, Manor Lane, Wymington, Beds. as part of the archaeological evaluation of a proposed extension on land to the north of the present school buildings. It is intended to provide further information on the archaeological potential of the site which will allow the planning authority, Bedford Borough Council (BBC), to determine the planning application for the development. The scope of the required investigation was set out in a *Brief for Archaeological Field Evaluation* dated 29/11/02 prepared by the County Archaeological Officer (CAO) of Bedfordshire County Council, acting as adviser to the planning authority. A specification for the work is contained in the Heritage Network's approved *Project Design* dated January 2003.

1.2 The site lies in the medieval core of the village between the parish church and the manor, centred on NGR SP 95480 64425. The proposed development area lies immediately to the north of the existing school buildings, to the southeast of the Rectory, and the southwest of no.12 Manor Lane (see Figure 1). The footprint of the new building covers approximately 400m² and is currently grassed open space.

1.3 The location of the site, together with evidence for extensive Roman settlement in the vicinity, and a number of Neolithic flint implements, suggested that there was a high potential for the disturbance of archaeological remains in any groundworks. The aim of the evaluation has been to consider the location, extent, date, character, condition, significance and quality of any surviving archaeological remains which are liable to be threatened by the development, and to provide an archaeological and historical context for such remains should they have been discovered. The discovery of any evidence which might have related to the development of the Saxon and later settlements at Wymington was considered to be of particular interest.

1.4 The present report is intended to provide the planning authority with sufficient data to allow it to consider the archaeological implications of the proposed development, and thus to determine what further, if any, mitigation measures may be required by the planning authority to allow the development to proceed.

2 Fieldwork

TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

2.1 The site is situated on steeply sloping ground overlooking a tributary of the River Nene. The ground has been terraced and slopes downwards from the northeast to the southwest, with an average height of approximately 71.84mAOD.

2.2 The site forms part of a landscaped garden adjacent to the existing school building, with trees and bushes around the periphery. The underlying geology consists of Oolitic limestone overlain by boulder clay

EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

2.3 The plot covers an area of approximately 400m² and it was proposed that an area of approximately 24m² should be excavated within the building footprint. Circumstances on site led Trench 1 to be moved so that the southwestern end extended beyond the footprint of the proposed building. Consequently, an additional trench, Trench 2, was excavated to the south of Trench 1, which brought the total area excavated within the footprint to 27.2m² (see Figure 2).

2.4 The trenches were dug under close archaeological supervision using a 360° minidigger, which was fitted with a 1.2m wide toothless ditching bucket for Trench 1 and a 1m wide toothless ditching bucket for Trench 2. Spoil from the machining was inspected for archaeological artefacts.

2.5 The trenches were cleaned by hand, and where relevant all potential archaeological features were sampled to ascertain their nature, depth, date, and quality of preservation.

2.6 All work was carried out in accordance with the methodology contained in the Heritage Network's approved *Project Design*, and followed the procedures set out in the Heritage Network's *Operations Manual*.

RESULTS

Trench 1

2.7 Trench 1 measured 15m by 1.6m, and was aligned northeast-southwest (see Figure 3). The underlying natural geology was reached at a depth of approximately 0.4m and a layer of the natural limestone brash was revealed towards the northeast end of the trench.

2.8 The trench contained four archaeological features, only one of which produced any datable material which dated to the Saxo-Norman period. The contexts assigned in Trench 1 are summarised in the table below:

| Context | Type | Description and interpretation | Thickness (m) | Surface Level (mAOD) |
|---------|-------|---|---------------|----------------------|
| 0 0 1 | Layer | Topsoil; dark brown friable clayey silt containing a moderate amount of modern debris including glass and building materials | 0.3 | 71.84 |
| 0 0 2 | Layer | Subsoil/overburden; very dark grey, friable clayey silt, with moderate medium sized limestone fragments and some modern building materials. This is not a continuous layer, it appears at approximately 6.4m from the north-eastern end of the trench. It is likely that this layer related to the initial construction of the school | 0.5 | 71.59 |
| 0 0 3 | Layer | Natural; pale yellow, compact clay, with fragments of limestone brash in some areas | 0.8 | 71.54 |
| 0 0 4 | Cut | Linear; probably a gully with c. 45° sloping sides and a rounded based, narrower and shallower towards the north, oriented N-S | 0.19 | -- |
| 0 0 5 | Fill | Olive brown fairly firm silty clay, with occasional small limestone and clay inclusions | 0.19 | 70.72 |
| 0 0 6 | Cut | Circular pit; with c. 55° sloping sides and a concave base | 0.46 | -- |
| 0 0 7 | Fill | Brown friable silty clay with occasional small chalk fragments | 0.46 | 70.67 |
| 0 0 8 | Cut | Feature; possibly a linear with only one side revealed during excavation, concave in nature and with a flattish base. | 0.73 | -- |
| 0 0 9 | Fill | Dark greyish brown fairly firm silty clay, with occasional small chalk fragments | 0.29 | 70.89 |
| 0 1 0 | Fill | Light olive brown fairly firm silty clay, with moderate small to medium sized chalk fragments | 0.41 | 70.58 |
| 0 1 1 | Cut | Feature; possibly a linear, unexcavated however seems to be intercutting with [008] | Unexcavated | -- |
| 0 1 2 | Fill | Very dark greyish brown fairly firm silty clay, with occasional small limestone fragments and clay clumps | Unexcavated | 70.58 |

2.9 Two of the features identified in Trench 1 produced archaeological finds, these were pit [006] and feature [008]. The table below provides a quantification of these finds.

| Context | Pottery | | An Bone | | Slag | | Spot Date |
|---------------|-----------|----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|----------|-------------|
| | Wt. | No. | Wt. | No. | Wt. | No. | |
| 0 0 6 | | | 15 | 2 | | | |
| 0 1 0 | 50 | 6 | 70 | 14 | 10 | 1 | Saxo-Norman |
| Totals | 50 | 6 | 85 | 16 | 10 | 1 | |

2.11 A total of 16 fragments, weighing 85g of animal bone were recovered from features [006] and [008], both assemblages are small and they mostly represent indeterminable fragments, therefore no further work is recommended on this material. One fragment of slag,

weighing 10g, was also recovered from feature [008], due to the small size and the isolation of this fragment no further work is recommended.

2.12 A total of six sherds of pottery, weighing 50g were recovered from the lower fill of feature [008]. The assemblage represents five body sherds and one rim sherd of a soft, shell-tempered fabric of St Neots-type ware, dating to the Saxo-Norman period. The rim sherd represents part of a bowl with an inturned rim. Whilst the sherds are generally small, they are not particularly abraded, which suggests that they are not residual. Due to the size, nature and condition of the assemblage no further work is recommended on this material.

Trench 2

2.13 Trench 2 was placed to the immediate south of Trench 1, within the building footprint and closer to the existing school buildings (see Figure 4). It measured 7m by 1.6m and it was aligned northeast-southwest. The natural geology was reached at a depth of 0.46m and a summary of the contexts assigned are presented in the table below.

| Context | Type | Description and interpretation | Max. Thickness (m) | Surface Level (mAOD) |
|---------|-----------|---|--------------------|----------------------|
| 0 0 1 | Layer | Topsoil; dark brown friable clayey silt containing fragments of modern debris including glass and building materials | 0.45 | 71.84 |
| 0 0 3 | Layer | Natural; pale yellow, compact clay, with small to large fragments of limestone | 0.6m | 71.69 |
| 0 1 3 | Cut | Linear; possibly a ditch related to the modern drain [015] which abutts this feature. | Unexcavated | -- |
| 0 1 4 | Fill | Very dark greyish brown clayey silt, containing frequent fragments of later post-medieval ceramics and building materials | Unexcavated | 71.69 |
| 0 1 5 | Structure | Modern concrete set drain, pipe collar and degraded iron piping evident in the southern section of the trench | Unexcavated | 71.79 |

2.14 The recovery of later post-medieval pottery and ceramic building materials from feature [013] and its relationship with the modern drain [015] seems to indicate that it is also likely to be a modern feature. No other archaeologically significant remains were recovered from Trench 2 and the finds from feature [013] were not retained.

3 Discussion

3.1 The archaeological remains identified during the current evaluation confirm that the area to the north of St Lawrence VA Lower School is an archaeologically sensitive area. However, a visual inspection of the site, and of the section in Trench 1, clearly demonstrated that the whole site had been terraced, probably during the construction of the existing school buildings, car park and playground.

3.2 The material recovered from the southwestern end of Trench 1 indicates that there was activity on the site during the Saxon period, although it was not possible to characterise the exact nature of the remains within the confines of the evaluation exercise. It is possible that feature [008] represents a boundary of some sort, with perhaps further remains to the southwest of the study area.

3.3 The Saxon material recovered in Trench 1 lay outside the footprint of the proposed development, the remainder of the trench being blank. Trench 2 was also blank and on this basis it seems likely that any further archaeological potential has been destroyed by later activity.

Impact of the development

3.4 The only archaeological features observed on the site were discovered beyond the limits of the proposed development. Despite the recognition that groundworks would affect an area wider than the finished footprint of the proposed building, it is clear that it would be located in an area which has already been significantly disturbed. On this basis the overall risk that the proposed development would disturb archaeological remains of any significance may be considered to be Low.

Confidence Rating

3.5 During the course of the evaluation, the conditions were generally acceptable for the identification of potential features and deposits, and for their investigation. On this basis, there were no circumstances which would lead to a confidence rating for the work which was less than High.

4 Bibliography

Hillelson, D., 2003, *St Lawrence VA Lower School, Wymington, Beds. Project Design: Archaeological Evaluation.* The Heritage Network.

BCC, 2003 *Brief for the Archaeological Field Evaluation of Land at St Lawrence VA Lower School, Manor Lane, Wymington, Bedfordshire.* Bedfordshire County Council.

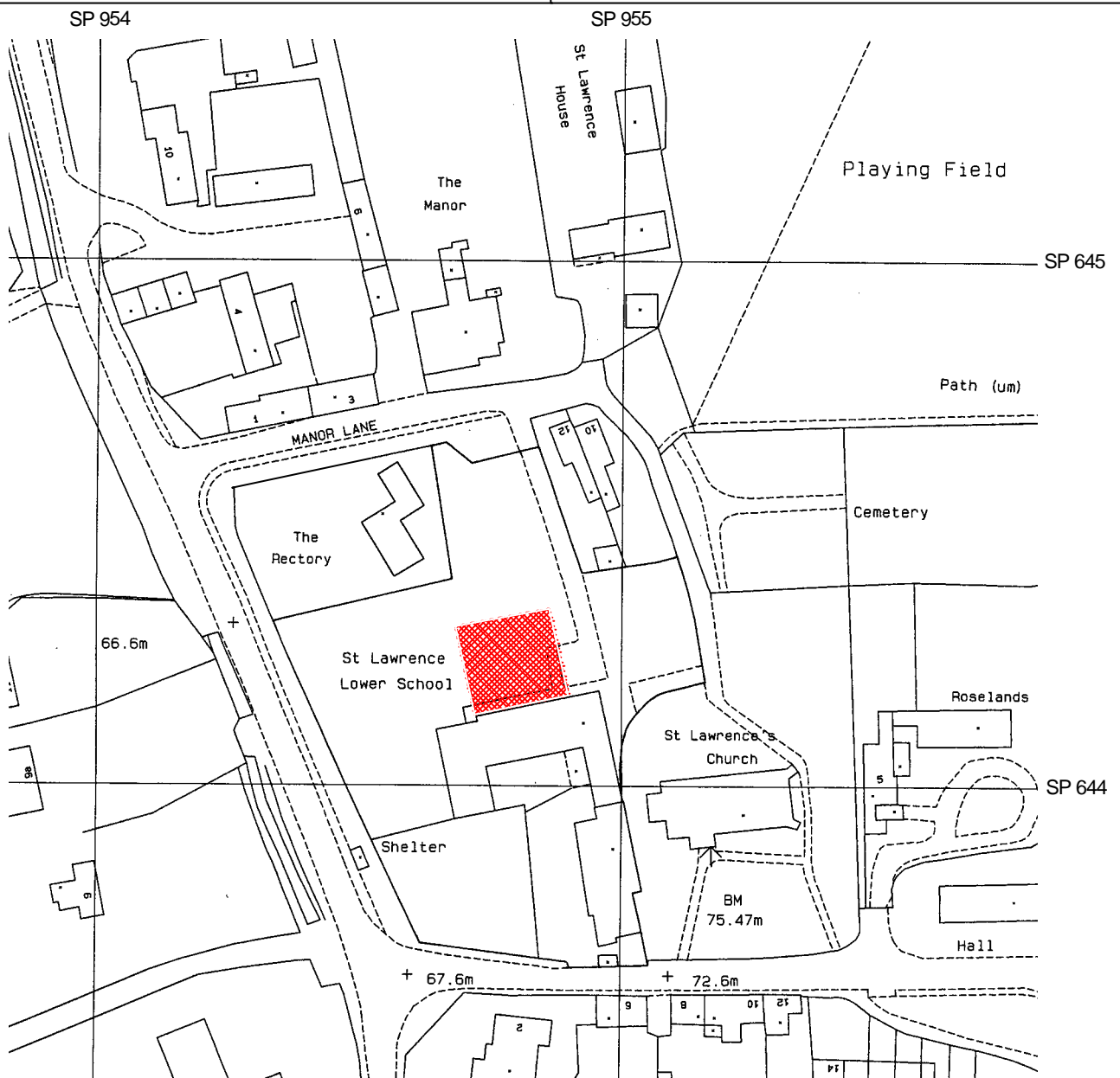
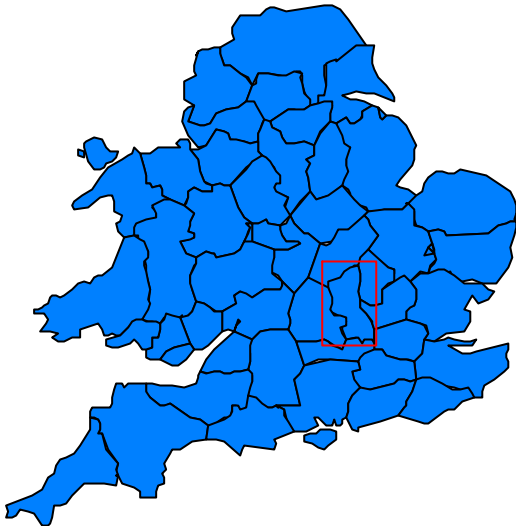
5 Illustrations

Figure 1 Site location

Figure 2 Trench location

Figure 3 Trench 1: plan & section

Figure 4 Trench 2: plan & section

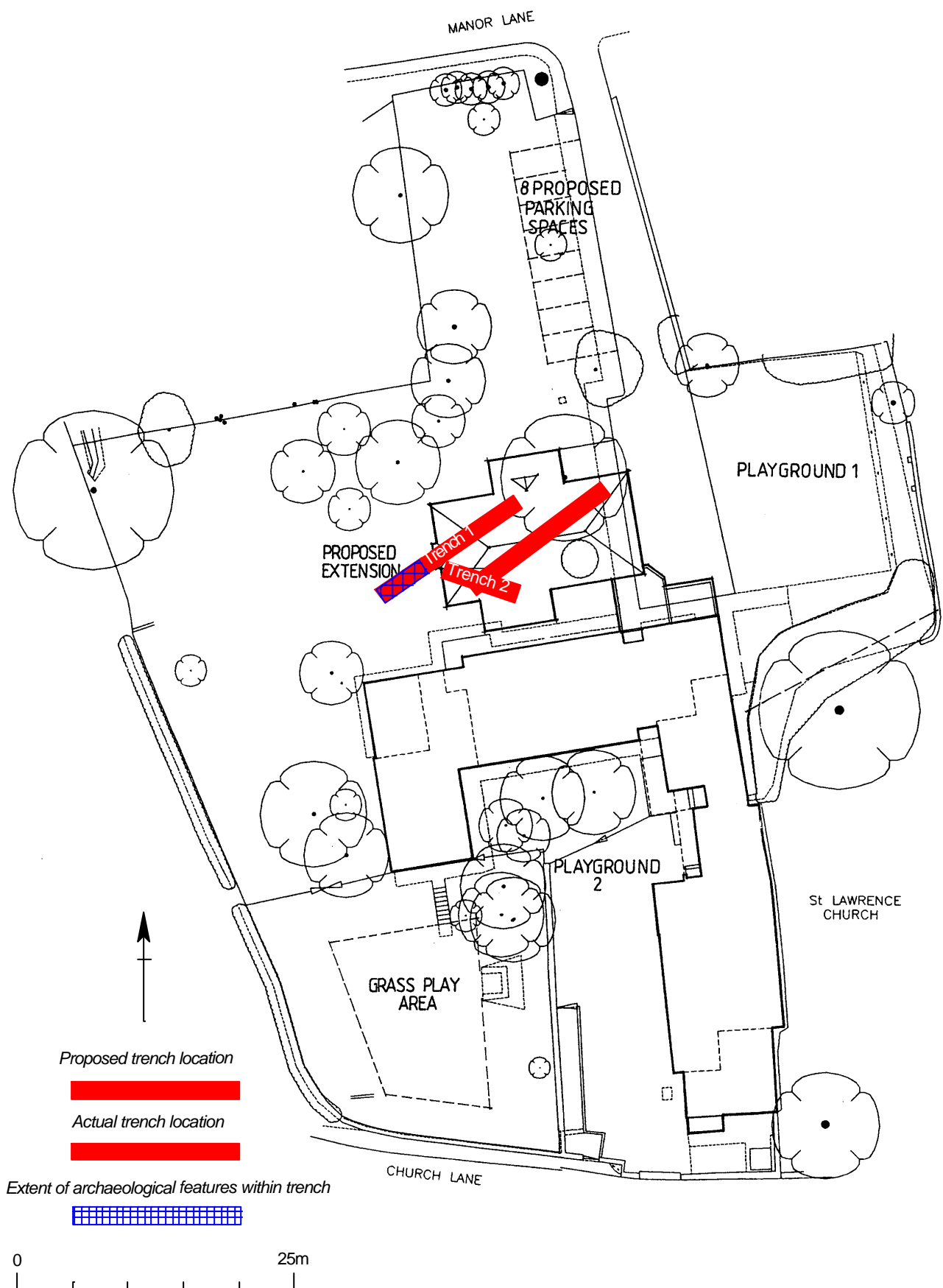


Site Location

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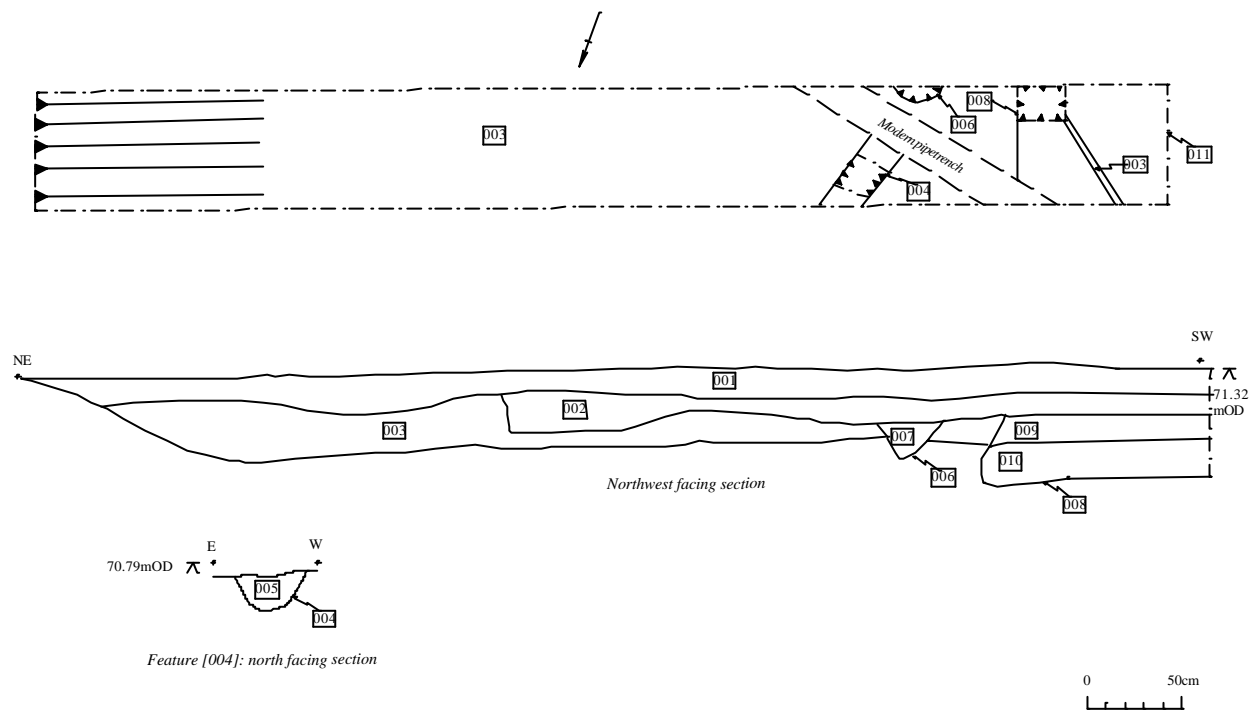
Figure 1



Trench location

Scale 1:500

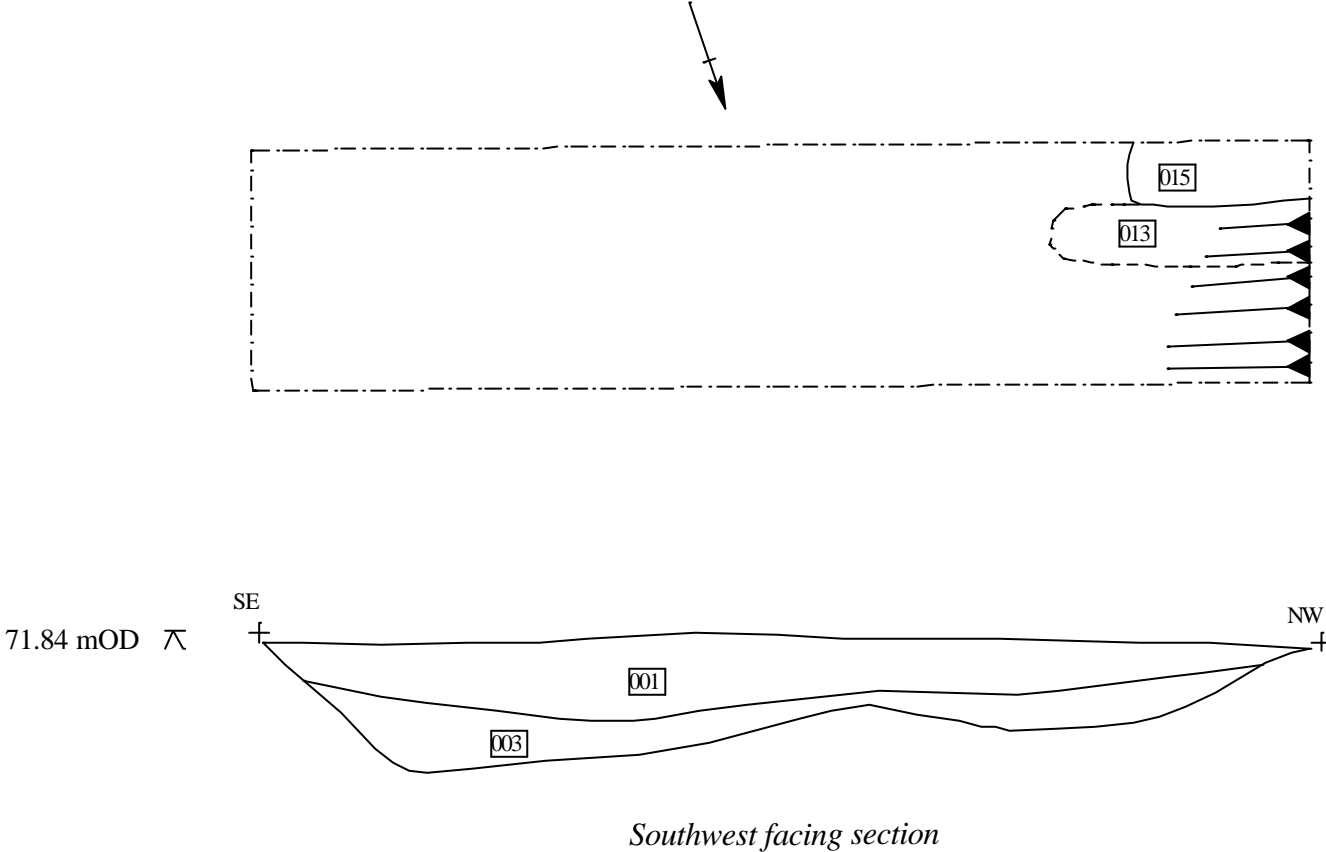
Figure 2



Trench 1: plan & section

Scale 1:25

Figure 3



Trench 2: plan & section

Scale 1:50
Figure 4