

# **MARGARET ROPER ROMAN CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL, CROYDON, CR8 2XP**

**An archaeological programme of observation and recording  
during construction of a new modular classroom unit**

**March 2015**



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during construction of a new modular classroom unit

Site code: MRS15  
Planning Application ref: 14/02289/P  
NGR: TQ 3111 6223

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## ***Abstract***

*In February 2015 Compass Archaeology conducted a programme of observation and recording during groundworks for a new modular classroom unit on land at the Margaret Roper Primary School, in the London Borough of Croydon, CR8 2XP.*

*The archaeological programme followed recommendations from English Heritage due to the site's location in a locally designated Archaeological Priority Area, and close to a known Saxon inhumation cemetery on Russell Hill.*

*In the event monitoring of all trenching works and foot pad pits revealed no archaeologically significant features or deposits.*

*The natural chalk was exposed at approximately 109.90mOD across much of the site overlain by reworked chalk and silt horizons to a depth of up to 0.60m. Excavations in the northeast corner of the site were slightly deeper where a natural depression was filled by thicker deposits of colluvium, up to 0.80m.*

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Figs.5 reproduced with alterations from original drawings supplied by the client and drawn by Boyton BRJ

## 1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This document forms a summary of the results of an archaeological programme of observation and recording conducted on the site of Margaret Roper Roman Catholic Primary School, Russell Hill Road, Purley, in the London Borough of Croydon, CR8 2XP, (fig.1).

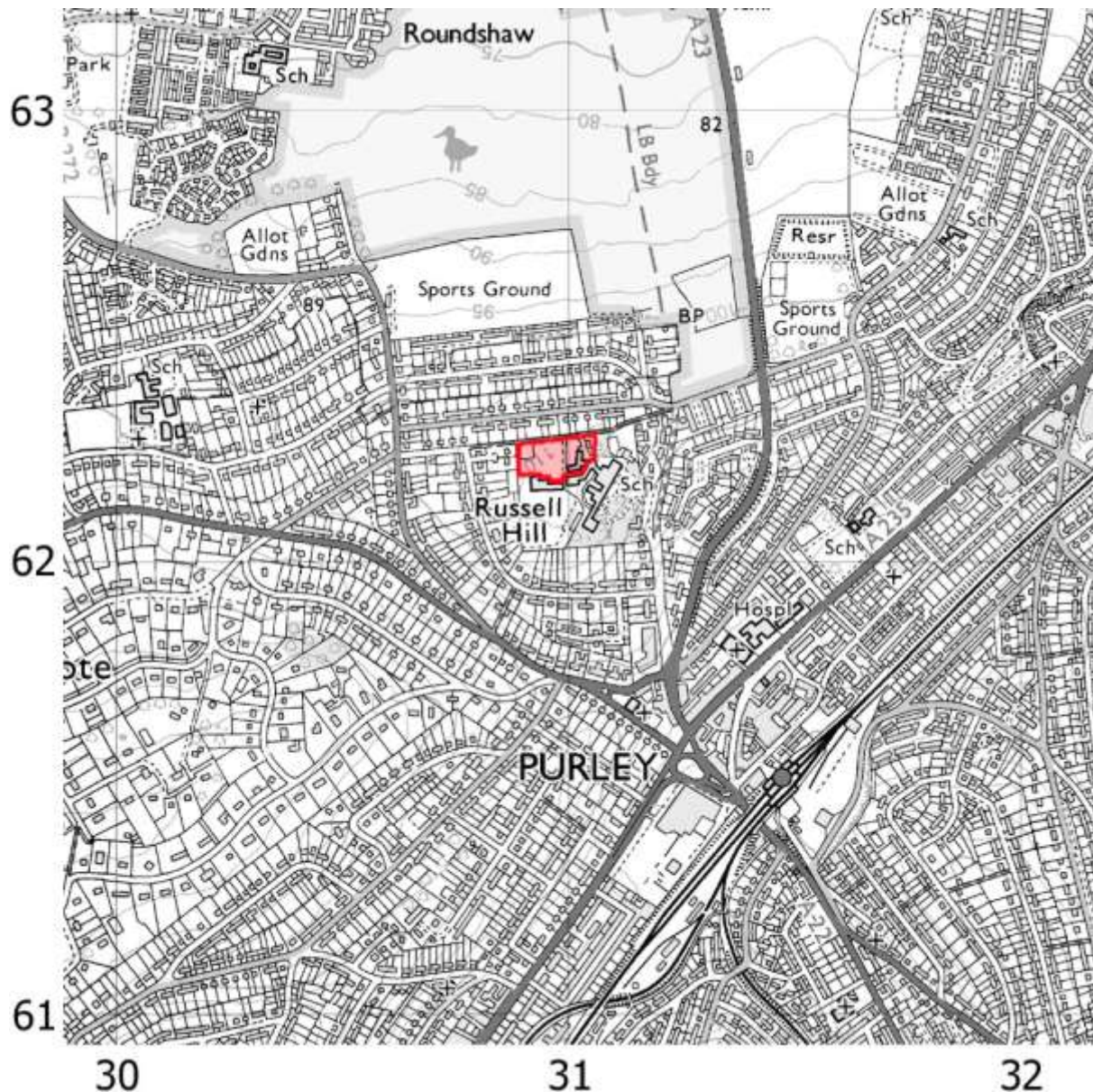


Fig.1: School site location plan

- 1.2 The archaeological programme was conducted during the soft stripping and excavation of footings for a new modular unit classroom at the far northern end of the school, (planning reference 14/02289/P approved 28<sup>th</sup> July 2014). The programme was attached as a condition to groundworks by the English Heritage Archaeological Advisor to the London Borough of Croydon due to the site's location within the locally designated Archaeological Priority Zone of Russell Hill, and the potential for encountering prehistoric remains and Saxon inhumations.

**1.3** The watching brief was commissioned by Synergy CPC LLP on behalf of the London Borough of Croydon. The groundworks were conducted by Oaklands Construction and Carpentry Ltd.

## **2 SITE LOCATION, GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY**

**2.1** The site for the new modular unit was located at the far northern end of the existing school buildings towards the northeastern corner of the site, (fig.2). The school is adjacent to the Thomas More Catholic School (Secondary), situated to the southeast. The two schools are located at the top of Russell Hill, and are surrounded by housing developments to the north, west and south and bounded by Coldharbour Lane to the east, (fig.1).

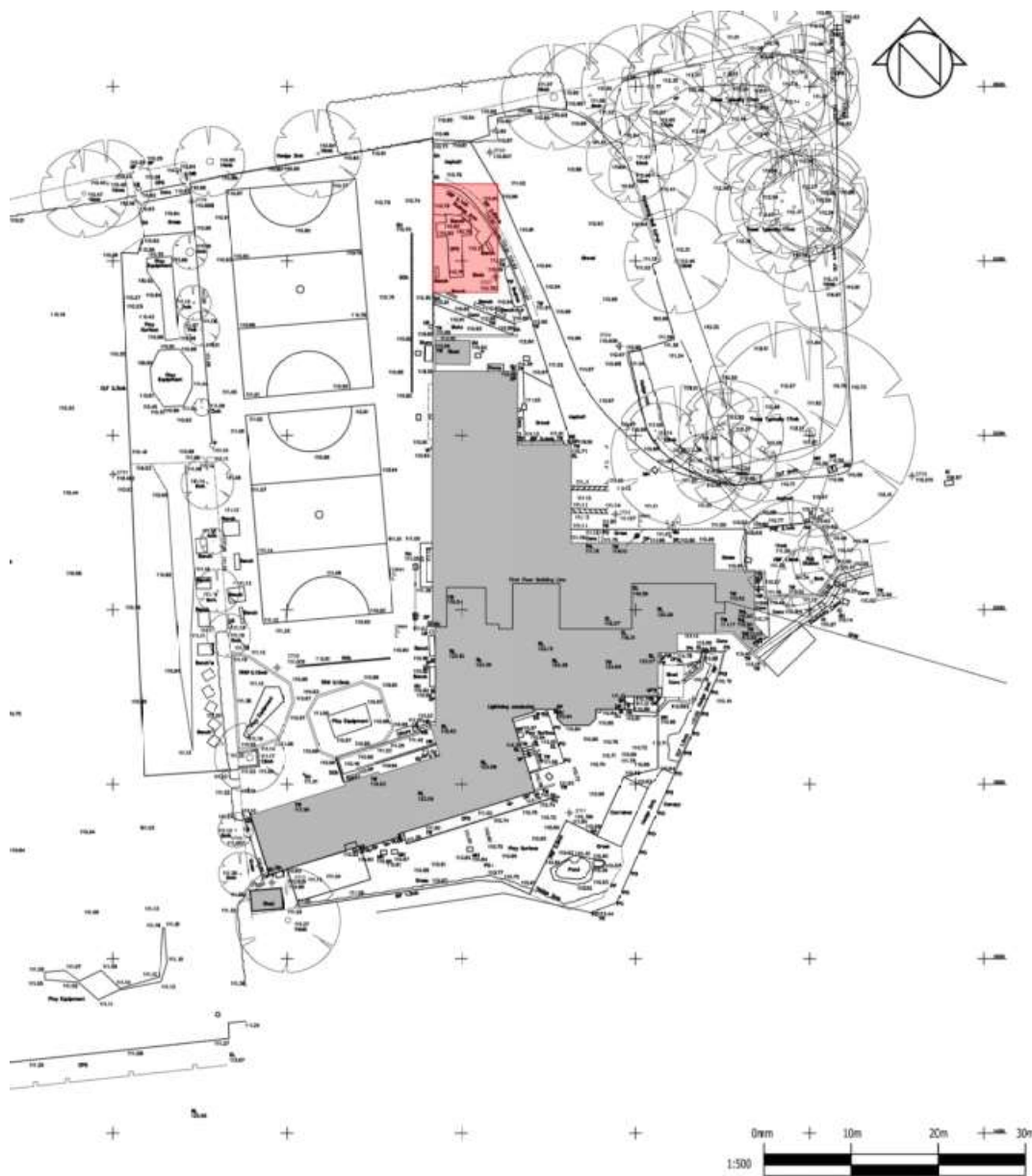


Fig.2: Location of new modular unit in relation to existing school buildings



- 2.2 The British Geological Survey 1998, Sheet 270: South London, indicated that the site lies over an area of Upper Cretaceous Chalk and this was confirmed during the course of the archaeological programme.
- 2.3 The site lies at the top of Russell Hill, with a height of c110.80mOD in the area of the proposed development.

### 3 **ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

The archaeological and historical background to the site has been discussed at length in the Desk-Based Assessment compiled by Compass Archaeology Ltd. in April 2014 and submitted with the planning application. It shall not be repeated in full; only the most relevant points will be reproduced below<sup>1</sup>.

#### 3.1 ***Prehistoric***

Entries from the Greater London Historic Environment Record, (GLHER), have shown that there are a number of prehistoric finds within the immediate area including individual Mesolithic and Neolithic stone tools, and several Bronze Age implements such as a gouge, axe, and copper ingot, most of which came from the top of Russell Hill. Previous archaeological investigation in the Thomas More School has uncovered remains that may form part of an early Bronze Age barrow.

Although such early remains may have been partially truncated by later agricultural practices, landscaping and development, the potential for prehistoric archaeology was considered to be *moderate*.

#### 3.2 ***Saxon***

The importance of Russell Hill as a prominent feature in the landscape appears to have continued into the early medieval period. Antiquarian records indicate that more than 160 inhumations were found on the top of Russell Hill, as close as 18inches, (450mm), or 2ft, (600mm), below the existing ground surface. The precise number is unknown due to the antiquity of the find/record, and the lack of any close inspection at the time. All burials were believed to belong to the Anglo-Saxon period, and many included grave goods including weapons of various description. Others were less well-preserved, with no skeletal remains surviving, (presumably due to chalky soil conditions). It is plausible that further development might discover additional evidence related to this cemetery.

For this reason the potential for encountering Anglo-Saxon archaeology was considered to be *high*.

#### 3.3 ***Later history***

There is no evidence for surviving medieval activity documented close to the area of groundworks, and it is believed that the site lay within an essentially agricultural landscape prior to the development of the site as a school in 1863.

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<sup>1</sup> Compass Archaeology, (2014)



## 4 ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The archaeological programme provided the opportunity to address the following specific and more general research questions:

- Is there any evidence for prehistoric activity in the area such as stone tools or ritualistic features as indicated during the evaluation at Thomas More School adjacent to the site?
- Are there any surviving remains associated with the Anglo-Saxon cemetery located on Russell Hill and partly investigated in the 19<sup>th</sup> century? Does this take the form of inhumations and can any indication as to the date of the cemetery be found?
- Is there any evidence for medieval occupation of the site either domestic or agricultural?
- Is there any evidence of the post-medieval history of the site such as agricultural soils or re-landscaping prior to development of the site as a school?
- At what level does archaeology survive across the site?
- At what level is natural ground encountered across the site and what form does it take?

## 5 METHODOLOGY

### 5.1 *Standards*

**5.1.1** The field and post-excavation work was carried out in accordance with English Heritage guidelines, (in particular, *Greater London Archaeology Advisory Service: Standards for Archaeological Work*, 2014). Works will also conform to the standards of the Chartered Institute of Field Archaeologists, (*Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs*, 2014). Overall management of the project will be undertaken by a full Member of the Chartered Institute.

**5.1.2** Fieldwork was carried out in accordance with the Construction (Health, Safety & Welfare) Regulations. All members of the fieldwork team will have valid CSCS Cards, (Construction Skills Certificate Scheme), and wore hi-visibility jackets, hard-hats, and steel-toe-capped boots as required during the watching brief. All members of the fieldwork team followed the contractors' health and safety guidelines.

### 5.2 *Fieldwork*

**5.2.1** The watching brief took place during the initial ground reduction of the development footprint and during subsequent excavation of all foundation pads for the modular unit and during strip-footings around the perimeter of the unit for the base of brickwork cladding<sup>2</sup>, (figs.3-4).

A total of 15 foundation pads measuring 1.00m<sup>2</sup> were dug in 3 parallel rows of 5 pads each, each pad being roughly 1.90m apart, and the rows 2.40m apart. The wall foundations for the brick cladding ran around the entire perimeter of the classroom amounting to approximately 40m of trenching, (the classroom measuring c12.50m N-

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<sup>2</sup> Architon, (2014)a

S, and 7.5m E-W). The depth of foundation pads and strip footings were awaiting confirmation from engineers at the time of writing the WSI.

The English Heritage archaeological advisor for the London Borough of Croydon was advised of the on-site start date, and regularly updated regarding progress on site.

- 5.2.2 Every effort was made not to disrupt the development programme. During excavation, spoil was deposited separately, in such a way as to facilitate examination.
- 5.2.3 Underlying deposits and features were investigated and recorded in stratigraphic sequence, and additional techniques were applied as appropriate, for example metal detecting, though this produced negative results.
- 5.2.4 Contexts were recorded as appropriate on pro-forma sheets by written and measured description, and/or drawn in plan or section, generally at scales of 1:10 or 1:20. The investigations were recorded on a general site plan and related to the Ordnance Survey grid. Spot levels were taken on the top and base of excavations using the on-site surveyor. The fieldwork record was supplemented as appropriate by photography.

### **5.3 *Post-excavation***

- 5.3.1 Assessment of finds was undertaken by appropriately qualified staff. Finds and samples will be treated in accordance with the appropriate guidelines, including the Museum of London's 'Standards for the Preparation of Finds to be permanently retained by the Museum of London'.
- 5.3.2 All identified finds and artefacts were retained and bagged with unique numbers related to the context record.

### **5.4 *Report and Archive***

- 5.4.1 Copies of this report will be supplied to the client, English Heritage and the Croydon Museum & Archives.
- 5.4.2 The report contains a description of the fieldwork plus details of, and an interpretation of observed deposits. Illustrations have been included as appropriate, including a site plan located to the OS grid. A short summary of the project has been appended using the OASIS Data Collection Form, and in paragraph form suitable for publication within the 'excavation round-up' of the London Archaeologist.
- 5.4.3 There is no provision for further analysis or publication of significant findings. Should these be made the requirements would need to be discussed and agreed with the Client and with English Heritage.
- 5.4.4 Assuming that no further work is required, an ordered indexed and internally consistent archive of the evaluation will be compiled in line with MoL Guidelines for the Preparation of Archaeological Archives, and will be deposited in the Museum of London Archaeological Archive under the site code MRS15. The integrity of the site archive should be maintained, and the landowner will be urged to donate any archaeological finds to the Museum.

## 6 RESULTS

- 6.1 The archaeological programme comprised a total of three site visits made during groundworks between the 18<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2015. The following section is a written description of the observations made accompanied by a photographic record, illustrating the main points. This section should be read in conjunction with figs.3 and 5 for location of observations. The observations are described in relation to the site visits. Contexts are indicated by round brackets; (x).

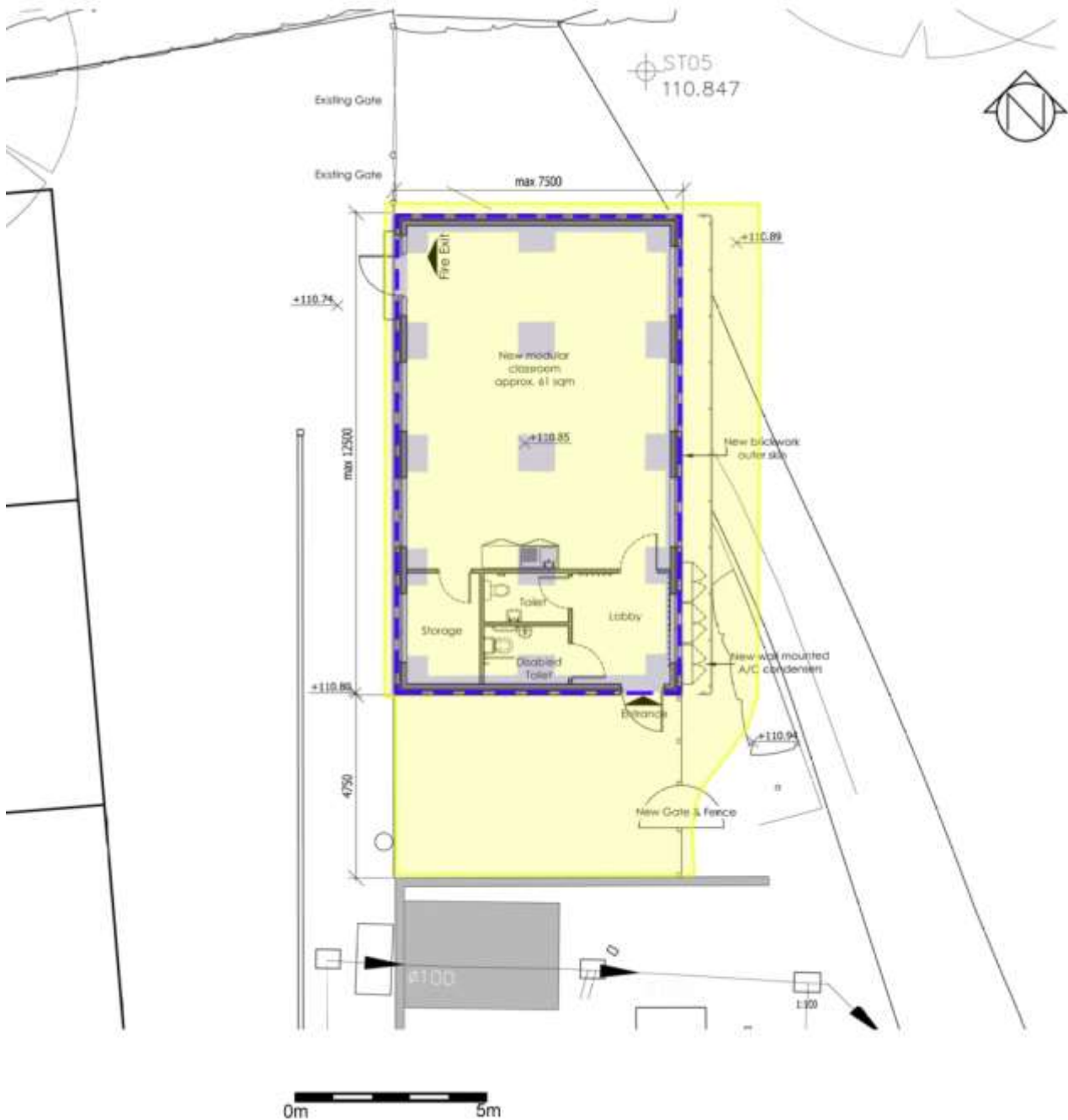


Fig.3: Site of groundworks, showing the area of initial reduction observed on 18.02.15, (yellow), and deeper excavations associated with footings on the 19.02.15 and 23.02.15, (blue)

## 6.2 *First site visit (18.02.15)*

- 6.2.1** An initial visit was made to monitor the enabling works; the reduction of ground to a general formation level. This entailed machine stripping of an area approximately 17.5m long, (N-S), by 9.75m wide, (E-W). The reduction was between 0.20m in the northwest corner to 0.30m in the south. A deeper area of made ground in the northeast corner meant that ground reduction here was approximately 0.42m deep.
- 6.2.2** The existing concrete / asphalt surface of the playground, (1), overlay a mix of modern building rubble used as hardcore, (2) in the northeast corner of the site and mixed dark-brown / black silt containing frequent small pebbles / chalk fragments and roots (3) elsewhere. No archaeological deposits were observed at this depth.



Fig.4: *North end of initial stripped area facing ENE, made ground (2) is visible in the northeast corner*

### 6.3 *Second site visit (19.02.15)*

**6.3.1** The second visit observed the excavation of around 2/3 of the footings, including half of the northern and southern perimeter trenching and the full length of the eastern footings. The 3 central foot pads for the modular unit, along with 7 perimeter pads were also excavated and recorded. The perimeter footings were between 0.55m to 0.60m wide and up to 0.65m deep. A total length of 24m of trenching was observed. The 3 central pads measured between 1.20m<sup>2</sup> to 1.30m<sup>2</sup> and were up to 0.60m deep.

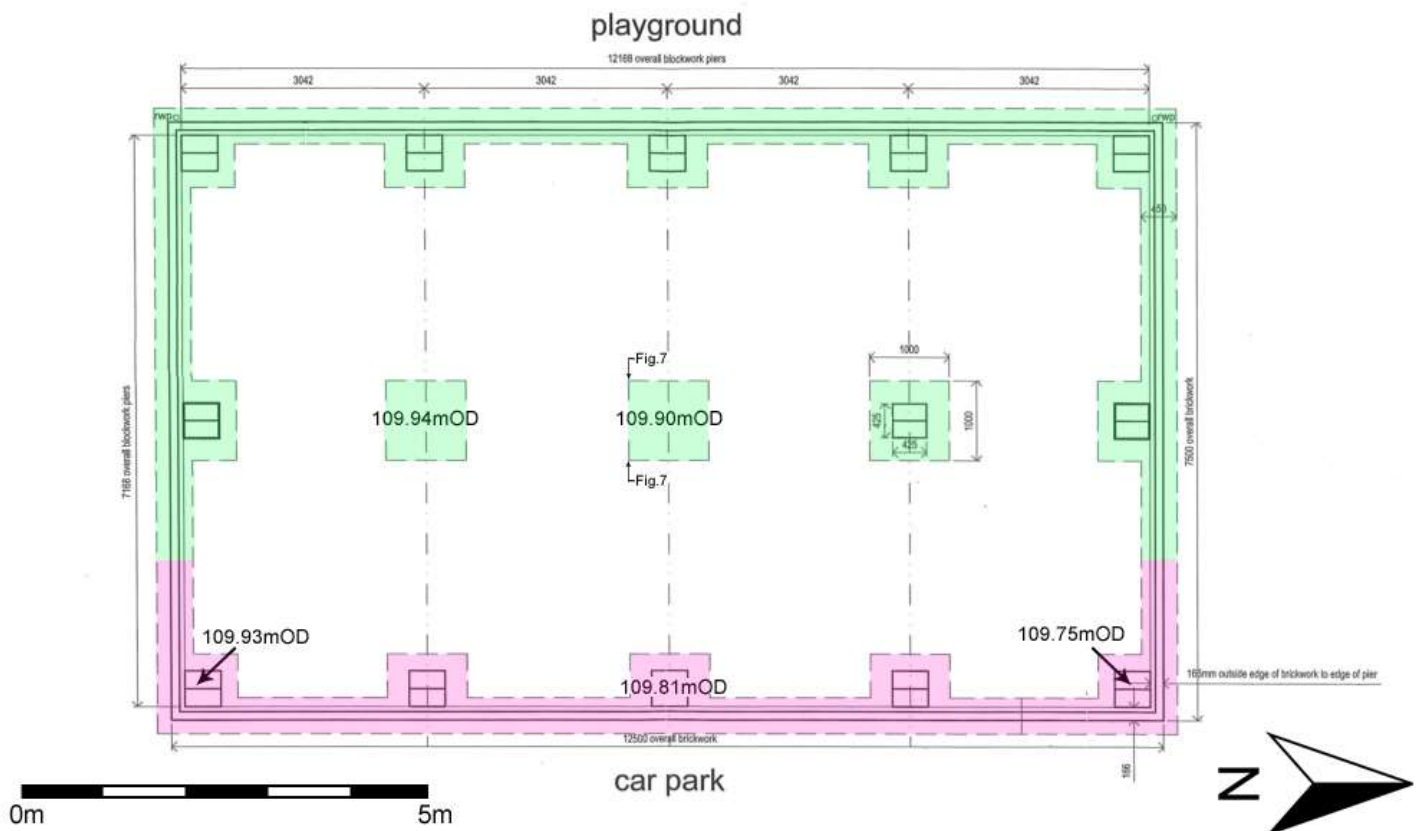


Fig.5: Plan of footings observed on the 19.02.15, (green), and 23.02.15, (pink)

**6.3.2** Throughout these excavations a broadly similar stratigraphic sequence was observed. This comprised a basal deposit of compact, but fragmented chalk, representing natural frost-shattered deposits, (6), overlain by similarly small chalk fragments within a light-buff silty matrix, 0.14m to 0.16m thick, (5), representing reworked natural geology. This in turn was overlain by another layer of mottled lighter-brown sandy silt containing moderate levels of chalk fragments approximately 0.20m thick, (4). This context was sealed below the dark sandy-silt mix containing occasional small pebbles / chalk fragments and roots observed in the initial ground reduction, (3).





Fig.6: North-facing section through central pit near south end of site, (0.60m scale)

**6.3.3** The exception to this sequence was in the northeast corner of the excavations where context (4) formed a much deeper deposit, as much as 0.80m, with the fragmented and natural chalks, (5)/(6), diving down into naturally formed depression. This depression was probably the result of a periglacial ice fracturing creating faults in the natural chalk which later filled with hill wash and other sediments. (These observations were made during the third visit to the site on the 23.02.15)

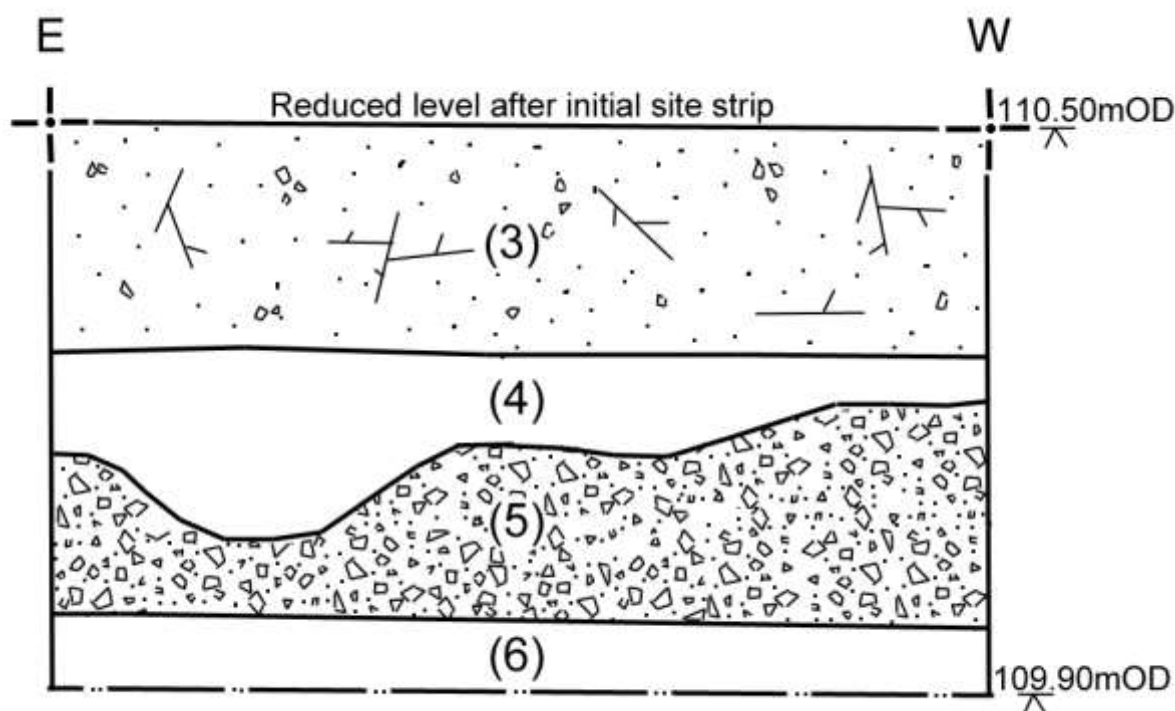


Fig.7: Section through central pier near south end of site





Fig.8: *Northeast corner of site showing the drop down into the depression filled with silt (4). Facing SSE, (1m scale)*



#### **6.4**     *Third site visit (23.02.15)*

- 6.4.1** A final site visit was made to observe the excavation of footings and foot pads along the eastern edge of the building footprint. This amounted to 5 foot pads and a total of c18m of trenching. The trenching measured up to 0.58m wide and up to 0.70m deep, whilst foot pads were approximately 1.15m<sup>2</sup> to 1.20m<sup>2</sup> and up to 0.60m deep. The base of excavations lay at between 109.94mOD and 109.75mOD with the latter recorded in the NE corner as discussed in 6.3.3.
- 6.4.2** The same depositional sequence was revealed within the excavations, and no significant archaeological deposits were observed.



Fig.9: *Eastern side of classroom footprint, facing NE, (0.60m scale)*



Fig.10: *The site with all trenching and foot pads dug, facing NW*

## **7 CONCLUSIONS**

In the event monitoring of all trenching works and foot pad pits revealed no archaeologically significant features or deposits.

The natural chalk was exposed at approximately 109.90mOD across much of the site overlain by reworked chalk and silt horizons to a depth of up to 0.60m. Excavations in the northeast corner of the site were slightly deeper where a natural depression was filled by thicker deposits of colluvium, up to 0.80m.

## 8 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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English Heritage, (2014), *Greater London Archaeology Advisory Service: Standards for Archaeological Work*

## Appendix I: OASIS data collection form

OASIS ID: compassa1-204974

### Project details

Project name	Margaret Roper Primary School, CR8 2XP: An archaeological programme of observation and recording
Short description of the project	In February 2015 Compass Archaeology conducted a programme of observation and recording during groundworks for a new modular classroom unit on land at the Margaret Roper Primary School, in the London Borough of Croydon, CR8 2XP. The archaeological programme followed recommendations from English Heritage due to the site's location in a locally designated Archaeological Priority Area, and close to a known Saxon inhumation cemetery on Russell Hill. In the event monitoring of all trenching works and foot pad pits revealed no archaeologically significant features or deposits. The natural chalk was exposed at approximately 109.90mOD across much of the site overlain by reworked chalk and silt horizons to a depth of up to 0.60m. Excavations in the northeast corner of the site were slightly deeper where a natural depression was filled by thicker deposits of colluvium, up to 0.80m.
Project dates	Start: 18-02-2015 End: 23-02-2015
Previous/future work	No / No
Any associated project reference codes	MRS15 - Sitecode
Any associated project reference codes	CROY023 - Contracting Unit No.
Type of project	Recording project
Site status	Local Authority Designated Archaeological Area
Current Land use	Community Service 1 - Community Buildings
Monument type	N/A None
Significant Finds	N/A None
Investigation type	"Watching Brief"
Prompt	Planning condition

### Project location

Country	England
Site location	GREATER LONDON CROYDON PURLEY Margaret Roper Primary School
Postcode	CR8 2XP
Study area	170.50 Square metres
Site coordinates	TQ 3111 6223 51.343496351 -0.11733794295 51 20 36 N 000 07 02 W Point
Height OD / Depth	Min: 109.75m Max: 109.94m

### Project creators

Name of Organisation	Compass Archaeology
Project brief originator	English Heritage GLAAS
Project design originator	Compass Archaeology
Project director/manager	Geoff Potter
Project supervisor	Honza Horak
Type of sponsor/funding body	Borough Council
Name of sponsor/funding body	Croydon Borough Council

### Project archives

Physical Archive Exists?	No
Digital Archive recipient	Museum of London Archaeological Archive
Digital Media available	"Images raster / digital photography","Text"
Paper Archive recipient	Museum of London Archaeological Archive

Paper Media available	"Drawing", "Notebook - Excavation", ' Research', ' General Notes', "Photograph", "Plan", "Unpublished Text"
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## Project bibliography 1

Publication type	Grey literature (unpublished document/manuscript)
Title	MARGARET ROPER ROMAN CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL, CROYDON, CR8 2XP An archaeological programme of observation and recording during construction of a new modular classroom unit
Author(s)/Editor(s)	Aaronson, J
Date	2015
Issuer or publisher	Compass Archaeology
Place of issue or publication	5-7 Southwark Street, SE1 1RQ
Description	A brief summary of the watching brief including written description / interpretation of stratigraphy observed, site background and methodology used. Supplemented by site plans, representative section drawing, and illustrative photographs.

## **Appendix II: London Archaeologist Summary**

Site Address: Margaret Roper Primary School, Russell Hill, Croydon, CR8 2XP  
Project type: Watching brief

Dates of Fieldwork: 18<sup>th</sup> – 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2015

Site code: MRS15

Site Supervisor: Honza Horak

NGR: TQ 3111 6223

Funding body: Croydon Borough Council

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