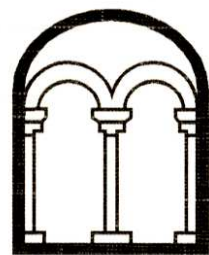


**ROBERT BLOOMFIELD ACADEMY
SHEFFORD
BEDFORDSHIRE**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL OBSERVATION,
INVESTIGATION, RECORDING, ANALYSIS
AND PUBLICATION**

Albion
archaeology



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INVESTIGATION, RECORDING, ANALYSIS
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Preface

Every effort has been made in the preparation of this document to provide as complete an assessment as possible, within the terms of the specification. All statements and opinions in this document are offered in good faith. Albion Archaeology cannot accept responsibility for errors of fact or opinion resulting from data supplied by a third party, or for any loss or other consequence arising from decisions or actions made upon the basis of facts or opinions expressed in this document.

The project was commissioned by Procare Building Services Ltd on behalf of Robert Bloomfield Academy and was monitored on behalf of the Local Planning Authority by Martin Oake (Central Bedfordshire Council Archaeologist).

The fieldwork was undertaken by Iain Leslie and Ian Turner (Archaeological Supervisors) and Ben Barker (Project Officer). This report was prepared by Ian Turner and edited by Ben Barker. The illustrations are by Joan Lightning (CAD Technician). All Albion projects are under the overall management of Drew Shotliff (Operations Manager).

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Key Terms

Throughout this document the following terms or abbreviations are used:

CBCA	Central Bedfordshire Council Archaeologist
DA	Development Area
HER	Historic Environment Record
WSI	Written Scheme of Investigation



Non-Technical Summary

Planning permission (CB/14/01266/FULL) was granted for the construction of an extension to Robert Bloomfield Academy, Shefford, Bedfordshire.

The development lies in an archaeologically sensitive area close to a focus of Roman settlement (HER 379). A condition requiring a programme of archaeological investigation was attached to the planning permission. Albion Archaeology was commissioned by Procure Building Services Ltd, on behalf of Robert Bloomfield Academy, to carry out the archaeological works.

Archaeological monitoring of construction works with the potential to impact on archaeological remains was carried out between 27th March and 24th April 2015. The groundworks consisted of the mechanical excavation of foundation trenches, up to 1.40m deep, for the new building. A large pit was also excavated during the removal of a soakaway.

The soil profile (from the top) generally consisted of: tarmac and concrete; levelling aggregate; a disturbed layer containing modern brick fragments; and the undisturbed clay geology.

No archaeological features were identified and no pre-modern artefacts were found during monitoring of the foundation trenches or from scanning spoil. The absence of topsoil or subsoil in the foundation trenches suggests that the area has been subject to ground reduction, probably during levelling for the existing school playground.

The results from this investigation suggest that this development is located beyond the limits of Roman-British settlement located c. 110m to the north-west.

The project archive will be deposited with Bedford Museum (accession no. BEDFM 2015.34). This report will be uploaded onto the Archaeology Data Service's OASIS website (OASIS ID no. albionar1-206238).



1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 *Planning Background*

Planning permission was granted (CB/14/01266/FULL) for the construction of an extension to the east-facing main façade of the existing building at Robert Bloomfield Academy, Shefford, Bedfordshire (Figure 1).

A heritage assessment (Allen Archaeology Limited 2014) prepared in support of the planning application identified heritage assets in the vicinity of the development area (DA). The archaeological background data indicated the presence of high-status Roman settlement (including an aisled building, possible temple and cemetery) a short distance to the north-west of the DA. Accordingly, a condition (no. 3) was attached to the planning consent to secure a programme of archaeological investigation as a consequence of the development.

This approach was in line with national planning guidelines in the form of Policy 141 of the *National Planning Policy Framework* (NPPF).

Albion Archaeology was commissioned by Procure Building Services Ltd, on behalf of Robert Bloomfield Academy, to carry out the archaeological works in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) (Albion 2015). The WSI detailed the methodology for archaeological observation, investigation and recording of any archaeological remains and a programme of post-fieldwork analysis, reporting and archiving.

This report presents the results of the archaeological observations.

1.2 *Site Location, Topography and Geology*

The small town of Shefford lies in the eastern part of Central Bedfordshire on the A600 from Bedford to Hitchin. The rivers Flit and Hit pass through the town from the west and south, converging to become part of the River Ivel in the east.

The Robert Bloomfield Academy is located in the western part of the town between modern housing estates to the south of the Amphill Road and arable fields to the north of the A505. The DA lies in the southern part of the school grounds, in between the current sports field and a block of classrooms built in the last few years.

The DA is centred on grid reference TL 1386 3867 and lies on fairly level ground at c. 45m OD. The underlying geology is Gault Mudstone overlain by the Lowestoft Formation of sands and gravels (Contains British Geological Survey materials ©NERC [2014]).

1.3 *Archaeological Background*

Robert Bloomfield Academy is located within an area of known archaeological remains related to late Iron Age to Roman occupation (HER 379). The new development is located to the south-east of the main focus of the Romano-British settlement.



Ampthill Road, to the north, is on the same ENE-WSW alignment as a suggested Roman road (HER5342) running from Flitwick to Shefford. Another suggested Roman road (HER717) from Shefford to Bedford meets it at a T-junction to the north of the DA.

Both the academy and adjacent Shefford Lower School sites have been subject to archaeological investigation since the late 19th century and in particular over the last few years during previous construction work within the school grounds.

Archaeological remains of Roman occupation were first identified by local antiquarian Thomas Inskip in the 1820s, during gravel extraction south of Ampthill Road (Luke, Preece and Wells 2010, 270–274 and HER 379). Here, he identified what he believed to be a walled Roman cemetery (Inskip 1850). The cemetery included cremation burials, grave goods including complete pottery vessels, such as Samian ware and amphora, as well as glass and bronze vessels with coins and other metal objects. In the 1830s Inskip examined an area south-east of the cemetery (Dryden 1845) and discovered a possible rectangular Roman building, interpreted at the time as a temple.

During levelling of the school field in 1940, the remains of a Roman building were identified by Edgar Gray (recorded in the Victoria County History). Simco believed this building was the same as that previously claimed by Inskip as a temple (Simco 1984).

Artefacts and material of Roman date continued to be recovered during the construction of a school extension in 1976.

In the last 20 years a range of archaeological investigations have been undertaken by Albion Archaeology within the area of the Roman settlement, including field evaluations, watching briefs and open area excavations (Albion project numbers 244, 365, 412, 445, 583, 665, 694, 773 and 893). The results of these investigations are summarised by Luke, Preece and Wells (2010), who also summarise and reinterpret the results of earlier investigations in the light of the recent work.

The earliest firm evidence for settlement was in the form of a substantial ditch, which possibly originated in the late Iron Age but continued in use throughout the Roman period (Luke *et al.* 2010, 323 and fig. 18). A post-built building, pits and gullies dated to the Roman period were also located within the settlement enclosure during an investigation carried out in 2004 (Luke *et al.* 2010, fig. 6).

A second enclosure was located to the west of a possible routeway and this contained a large number of quarry pits and a dog burial (Luke *et al.* 2010, fig. 6). The investigations recovered a substantial quantity of Roman pottery, ceramic building material, along with mortar and painted plaster indicating the presence of a high status building

More recent archaeological investigations have produced further evidence of archaeological remains within the Lower School site (Flavell 2010, Jones 2012 and Albion Archaeology 2014a). A large expanse of Roman quarry pitting,



boundary ditches and traces of medieval ridge and furrow cultivation were identified within two playground areas. Whilst investigation of a tank area and drainage trenches identified an extensive Roman boundary, which is likely to have defined the western limit of the settlement's domestic focus (*ibid.*).

The new development is located within an area of intense Roman occupational evidence (HER379), characterised by the HER as a Roman villa and cemetery. The results of the archaeological interventions suggest that the main concentration of Roman remains, including an aisled building and cobbled surface (EDB394), are situated to the north and north-west of the DA. However, a ditch dated to the Roman period was found to the north-west containing domestic debris suggestive of domestic occupation (Albion Archaeology 2007). No remains dated to this period were identified during evaluation on land to the west of the academy (Project CR2336) or during archaeological observation and investigation of construction work on the south side of the academy building (Albion Archaeology 2014b).

Robert Bloomfield Academy is also on the western edge of the historic town of Shefford. The archaeological background of the town is summarised in the Extensive Urban Survey Assessment for Shefford (Bedfordshire County Council 2003).

Other archaeological remains comprise traces of medieval ridge and furrow cultivation (HER 19881) and post-medieval pits (HER 19882), identified during evaluation to the south-west of the school (Project CR2336). A likely continuation of the ridge and furrow was also identified during recent investigations on the west side of the school (SLS2012).

1.4 Project Objectives

The DA had the potential to contain sub-surface archaeological remains relating to the late Iron Age and Roman settlement. There was also a low potential of uncovering middle to late Iron Age remains.

The general objectives of the investigation were to determine: the date, nature and extent of any activity or occupation within the development area; the relationship of any remains found to the surrounding contemporary landscapes; and to recover palaeo-environmental remains to determine local environmental conditions.

A number of specific research objectives were also defined in the WSI. These were focused on the potential for Iron Age and Roman remains and were derived from the local and regional research agendas (Glazebrook 1997), (Brown and Glazebrook 2000), (Oake *et al* 2007) and (Medlycott 2011).

1.5 Methodology

The methodology for the archaeological works is set out in full in the WSI (Albion 2014). In summary, all groundworks associated with the construction of the new extension that had the potential to reveal archaeological remains were to be observed.



Archaeological monitoring of the groundworks took place between 27th March and 24th April 2015. This work including observation of geotechnical test pits, ground reduction within planted areas and excavation of foundation trenches. Following the observation of the excavation of the majority of the foundation trenches it was concluded that there was little chance of archaeological features or deposits surviving within the footprint of the extension. On 27th April the following amendments to the WSI were proposed:

- No further observation of the remaining segments of foundation trench that are likely to be disturbed by modern services;
- No further observation of ground reduction within the interior of the extension;
- Any additional archaeological observation was to be confined to the monitoring of trenches/ground reduction external to the footprint of the new build.

These variations were agreed by the CAO by return of email.



2. RESULTS

The area of archaeological observation was confined to the footprint of the building extension, which covered an area of *c.* 400m² (Figure 1). The trenches were generally 0.6m wide although, the foundations include wide ‘pad’ areas to support ground beams. The depth of the individual varied from 1m to 1.55m deep, as dictated by the geology and site topography.

No archaeological remains were present within the development area. Modern agricultural land drains and services associated with the Robert Bloomfield Academy were the only features encountered. The results of the fieldwork are summarised below and are illustrated in Figure 2.

2.1 *Modern Made Ground*

The majority of the trenches were cut through the tarmac school playground, although areas of block paved footpath and flower bed were also disturbed (Figures 3 and 4). The sequence of deposits encountered was typically as follows:

- Tarmac, occasionally above concrete, (*c.* 0.07m thick) – extant playground surface;
- MOT ‘Type 2’ levelling aggregate (*c.* 0.15m thick) – modern site levelling layer;
- Dark grey-black silty clay with large modern brick fragments (< 0.2m thick) – contaminated and churned former surface layer of modern date, probably associated with the building of the school in the 20th century.

2.2 *Geological Deposit*

The undisturbed natural geology was identified directly beneath the modern layers. It comprised light grey or light orange clay which lay at *c.* 0.3–0.45m below ground level. The geological deposit lacked an overlying subsoil, or naturally weathered interface; as such, it is likely to have been truncated by modern levelling activity.

2.3 *Modern Intrusions*

A number of land drains and modern utility services were exposed during the machining of the foundation trenches. The services were left in-situ pending relocation before the construction of the school extension.

Three modern ceramic land drains were identified at a depth of *c.* 0.65m below ground level. These are likely to relate to agricultural ground improvements prior to the construction of the school.

A north-south aligned 25mm-diameter plastic gas pipe was identified within the foundation trenches at the southern limit of the new building. Two segments of the foundation trench located immediately east and west of the gas pipe were not excavated pending its re-routeing.



Five electrical service cables were exposed during the machining at a depth of *c.* 0.30m below ground level

Three surface water run-off drainage pipes were also exposed within the foundation trenches. These are likely to have been associated with two concrete manholes that were exposed and left in-situ.

A modern soakaway was encountered toward the centre of the new building (Figure 2). It was 6.2m long, 3.8m wide and 1.75m deep and was filled with plastic cages. The soakaway was dug out under archaeological supervision and backfilled with concrete to provide a stable foundation to the new structure. No traces of archaeological features or deposits were observed.



3. CONCLUSIONS

No significant archaeological features were identified during the archaeological observation. The only identified features consisted of land drains and modern service trenches. Close monitoring of the groundworks and scanning of the spoil did not identify any pre-modern artefacts.

The level of archaeological visibility was good, with all machining carried out with a toothless bucket down to the undisturbed geological deposit. Although some segments of foundation trench were not monitored due to the presence of live services (Figure 2) pending their re-routing outside the development area, they were not extensive and are unlikely to have masked the presence of any significant archaeological remains.

The absence of a surviving topsoil or subsoil within the foundation trenches indicates that the area was reduced in height during the 20th century, prior to the construction of the school, or when the later extensions and playground were added.

Although levelling activity would have destroyed any shallow archaeological features, the lower parts of any larger features are likely to have survived. The fact that no such archaeological features were present, and no residual archaeological finds were apparent, suggests that this development is located beyond the limit of the Roman-period settlement previously identified *c.* 110m to the north-west.

The project archive will be deposited with Bedford Museum (accession no. BEDFM 2015.34). This report will be uploaded onto the Archaeology Data Service's OASIS website (OASIS ID no. albionar1-206238).



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5. FIGURES

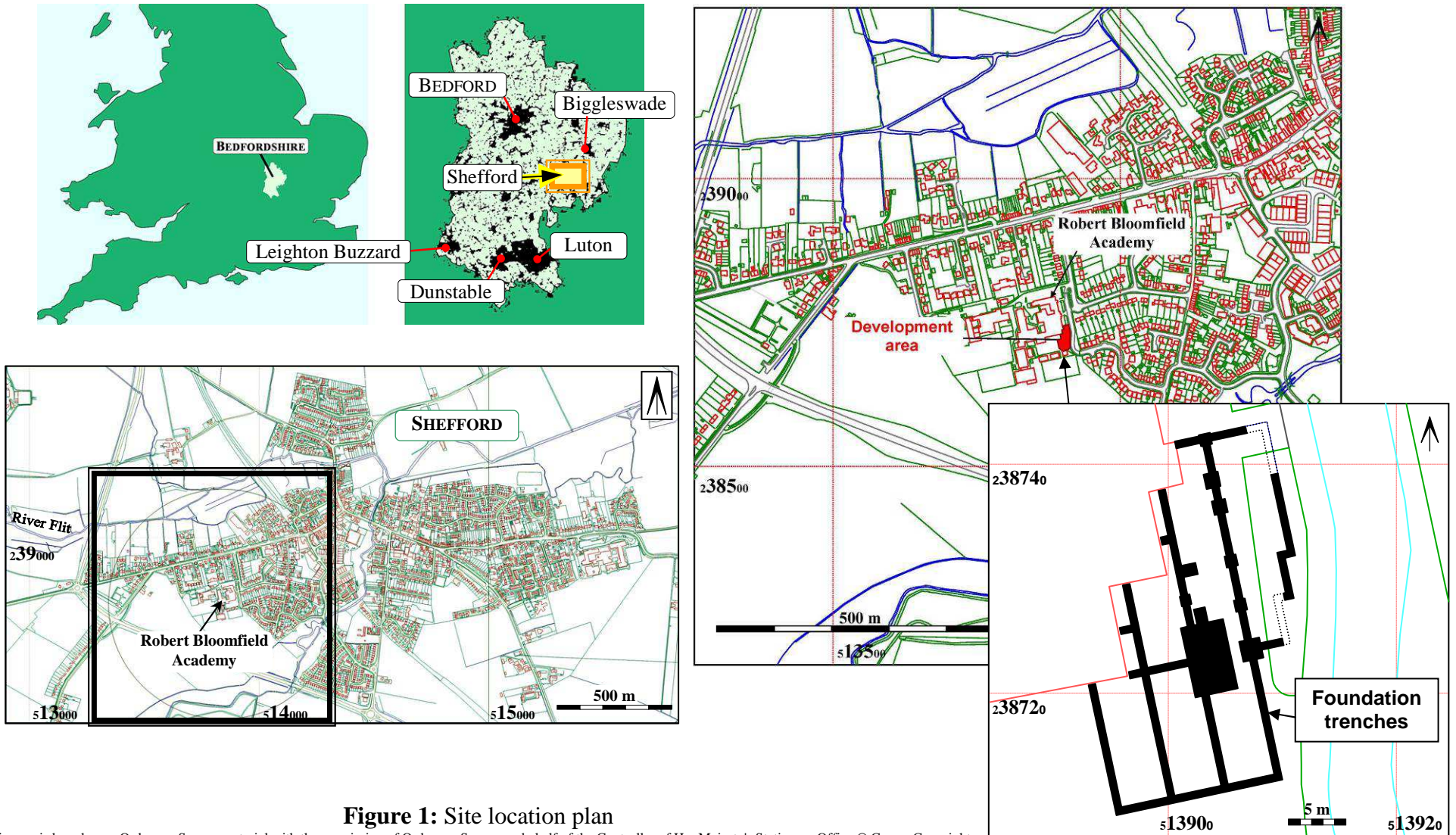


Figure 1: Site location plan

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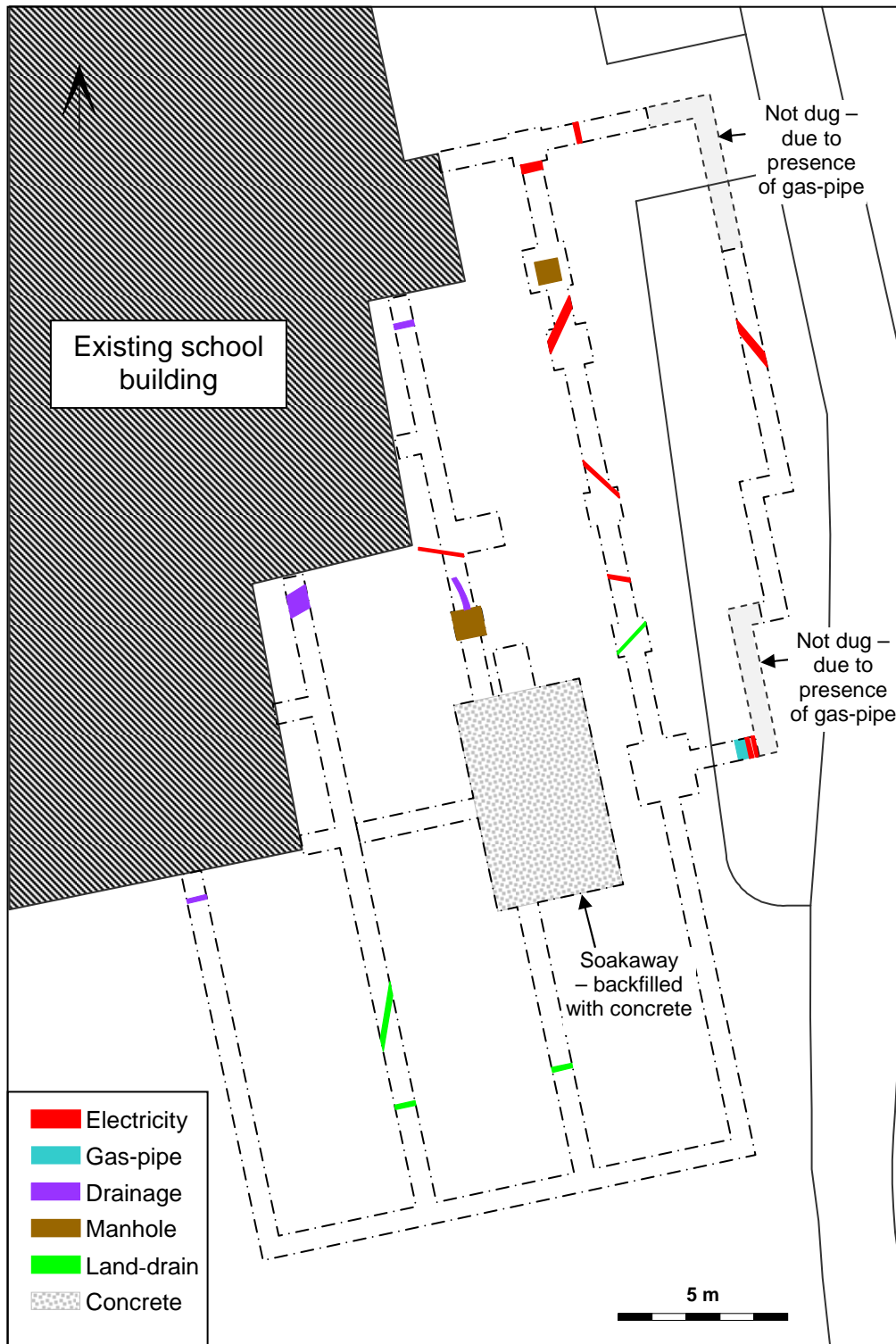


Figure 2: All features plan

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Figure 3: Typical trench section to south (looking SE)



Figure 4: Northernmost trench section (looking NE)

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