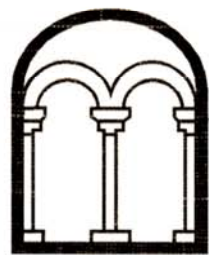


**ICKNIELD LOWER SCHOOL
DUNSTABLE
BEDFORDSHIRE**

STAGE 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

Albion
archaeology



**ICKNIELD LOWER SCHOOL
DUNSTABLE
BEDFORDSHIRE**

STAGE 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

Project: ILS2760

Document: 2015/182
Version 1.0

Luton Museum Entry No: LTNMG 1165
OASIS reference no: albionar1-227421

25th November 2015

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Produced for:
David Prewett

On behalf
Icknield Lower School

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Preface

Every effort has been made in the preparation and submission of this document and all statements 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.

This document has been prepared by Ben Barker and approved by Drew Shotliff.

Albion Archaeology is grateful to David Prewett for commissioning the project on behalf of Icknield Lower School. We would also like to acknowledge the assistance of the staff of the Central Bedfordshire Council Historic Environment Team.

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Version History

Version	Issue date	Reason for re-issue
1.0	25/11/2015	n/a

Key Terms

Throughout this document the following terms or abbreviations are used:

Albion	Albion Archaeology
CBCA	Central Bedfordshire Council Archaeologist
CIfA	Chartered Institute <i>for</i> Archaeologists
Client	Icknield Lower School, Dunstable
DA	Development area
HER	Central Bedfordshire Council Historic Environment Record
LPA	Local Planning Authority
OS	Ordnance Survey
Procedures Manual	Procedures Manual Volume 1 Fieldwork, 2nd ed, 2001
	Albion Archaeology
WSI	Written Scheme of Investigation

**Non-technical Summary**

Planning consent (CB/15/02175/FULL) was granted for the erection of a two-storey extension together with demolition of existing temporary classrooms and existing ancillary buildings at Icknield Lower School, Dunstable, Bedfordshire.

The development area lies close to the core of the Roman and medieval towns of Dunstable. Accordingly, a condition (no. 4) was attached to the planning consent to secure a programme of archaeological investigation as a consequence of the development. Albion Archaeology prepared a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI), setting out a strategy for the first stage of archaeological evaluation by trial trenching. The WSI was approved by the CBC Archaeologist (CBCA).

The single archaeological trench, covering 20m², was excavated, investigated, and recorded on 28/10/2015. It was inspected by the CBCA prior to backfilling.

The trench identified a modern service run, two possible tree-planting pits and an undated ditch. Although three small sherds of medieval pottery were recovered from the pits, these are likely to have been residual.

The evaluation did not produce any evidence for the presence of significant archaeological features or deposits within the footprint of the proposed extension to the school.



1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 **Background**

Planning consent (CB/15/02175/FULL) was granted for the erection of a two-storey extension together with demolition of existing temporary classrooms and existing ancillary buildings at Icknield Lower School, Dunstable, Bedfordshire.

Because of the site's archaeological potential the Central Bedfordshire Council Archaeologist (CBCA) advised that a condition (no. 4) should be attached to the permission requiring the implementation of a programme of archaeological investigation as a consequence of the development. This is in line with paragraph 141 of the National Planning Policy Framework. The CBCA issued a brief setting out what work was required to address the condition (CBC 2015).

The requirement for archaeological works as a consequence of the development is in line with national planning guidelines in the form of Policy 141 of the *National Planning Policy Framework* (NPPF).

Albion Archaeology prepared a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI), setting out a strategy for the Stage 1 archaeological evaluation by trial trenching (Albion 2015). The WSI was approved by the CBCA prior to the start of works.

1.2 **Site Location and Description**

Icknield Lower School lies on the north-east side of Burr Street, Dunstable, centred on NGR TL 01585 21645 (Figure 1). The development area (DA) comprises the school buildings, car parking and playground.

Topographically the town of Dunstable is situated at the foot of the Chiltern Ridge. The site itself lies at a height of 151–152m OD.

The geology of the area is the Holywell Nodular and New Pit Chalk Formations of the Late Cretaceous period Chalk (British Geological Survey materials ©NERC [2014]). No superficial geology is recorded.

1.3 **Archaeological Background**

Existing knowledge of the known archaeological heritage of the area has been summarised in the brief and is reproduced here.

The Roman town at Dunstable (HER 135) recorded as *Durocobrivae* or *Durocobravis*, appears to have developed around the crossroads between the prehistoric routeway known as the Icknield Way (HER 353) and Watling Street (HER 5508), one of the major arterial roads in Roman Britain. *Durocobrivae* may have been one of a series of mansios (stopping points / staging posts) along Watling Street.



Numerous small archaeological investigations (many undertaken prior to PPG16 by the Manshead Archaeological Society) have revealed evidence for; cobbled road surfaces, wells, timber buildings, boundary features, industrial activity and a large late Roman cemetery. The core of the Roman town seems to have radiated out for a distance of around 400m from the Icknield Way / Watling Street crossroads.

The development site is located to the south of West Street, which overlies the Icknield Way and lies *c.* 60m to the south-west of the presently known extent of the Roman town in this part of Dunstable. It also lies *c.* 300m to the north-west of an area of Roman activity centred upon the Icknield Way. This activity includes a large Roman ditch, evidence for the road surface itself and a roadside burial (Albion Archaeology 2004, 2007 and 2009).

The decline of *Durocobrivae* is likely to have taken place sometime during the 5th century AD following the official withdrawal of Roman rule from Britain. Evidence for Saxon activity in Dunstable is largely restricted to the north-western part of the modern town (for example Marina Drive HER 152). At present there does not appear to have been any continuity between the Roman and Saxon settlements.

In approximately 1119 Henry I founded the medieval town of Dunstable (HER 16986). Like the Roman settlement it was focussed on the Icknield Way / Watling Street crossroads. The town was laid out in burgage plots, some of which may be preserved in surviving property boundaries (particularly along High Street South). Medieval features including kilns, pits and ditches have been recorded at a number of locations (BCC 2005).

Henry I also had a royal residence within the town (HER 148) possibly located on the northern side of Church Street and in 1131/32 he founded the Augustinian Priory of St Peter (HER 131, SM 3) on the opposite side of Church Street to his residence. In the 13th century a Dominican Friary was also founded in Dunstable. It was dedicated to St Mary and located on the opposite side of High Street South to the Augustinian Priory; its presence was not welcomed by the Priors and there are numerous records of discontent between the two institutions. Medieval Dunstable was a prosperous market town, a circumstance that largely continued into the post-medieval and early modern periods.

There is a growing body of archaeological evidence relating to the medieval town and in proximity to the proposed development site investigations around St Mary's Street / Cross Street in the 1970s recorded the foundations of a building as well as a tile kiln (HER 11273). Roman activity, including a cess pit, was also recorded at this location, (Manshead Archaeological Society 1975).

Prior to the erection of the school between 1900 and 1922, OS maps show the site was largely undeveloped open land (Figure 3). As a consequence, while there may have been some truncation of archaeological deposits as a result of



the erection of the school and its ancillary buildings, there is the potential for archaeological deposits to survive relatively undisturbed at this location.

1.4 Project Objectives

The DA had the potential to contain sub-surface archaeological remains relating to Roman, medieval and post-medieval Dunstable. Research into the origins and development of small towns, their interrelationships with their hinterlands and early town planning from the Saxon through to the early post-medieval periods are local and regional archaeological research objectives (Ayers 2000, 27–32; Going and Plouviez 2000, 21; Oake et al 2007, 11 and 14; and Medlycott 2011, 47–48, 58, 70 and 79).

The general objectives of the investigation were to determine:

- the date, nature and extent of any activity or occupation within the DA;
- the integrity and state of preservation of any archaeological features or deposits that may be present.

As the project progressed and the archaeological potential of the site became clear, research objectives were to be revised as necessary.



2. METHODOLOGY

The methodological approach to the project is summarised below. A full methodology is provided in the WSI (Albion Archaeology 2015).

2.1 Methodological Standards

The standards and requirements set out in the following documents were adhered to throughout the project:

Albion Archaeology	<i>Procedures Manual: Volume 1 Fieldwork</i> (2nd edn, 2001).
ALGAO	<i>Standards for Field Archaeology in the East of England</i> . EAA Occasional Paper No. 14 (2003)
CIfA	<i>Charter and By-law; Code of Conduct</i> (2014) <i>Standard and guidance for an archaeological field evaluation</i> (2014)
Gurney, D	<i>Standards for Field Archaeology in the East of England</i> , EAA (2003)
Historic England (formerly English Heritage)	<i>Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment (MoRPHE) Project Managers' Guide</i> (2015) <i>Environmental Archaeology: A guide to the theory and practice of methods, from sampling and recovery to post-excavation</i> (2nd edn, 2011)
Luton Culture	<i>Procedure for preparing archives for deposition with Luton Culture</i> (2013)

2.2 Trial Trenching

The trial trench (Figure 1) was located within the part of the proposed building footprint that was accessible, given the site constraints imposed by standing buildings, service runs, current car parking etc. The area of the trench measured 20m², as specified by the CBCA brief. The contingency allowance for an extra 10m² of trenching was not utilised (CBC 2015, 8).

The existing tarmac car park surface was broken out with a mechanical breaker. All subsequent mechanical excavation, down to the archaeological horizon, was carried out by a machine fitted with a flat-edged bucket, under close archaeological supervision. All excavation and recording was carried out by an experienced Albion Archaeology staff member. The trench was inspected by the CBCA prior to backfilling.

2.3 Location of the Archive

The project archive will be deposited with Luton Museum (Entry No: LTNMG 1165).



3. RESULTS

3.1 *Introduction*

The location of the groundworks that were subject to archaeological observation, investigation and recording is shown on Figures 1 and 2. Three potential archaeological features were identified, but none were securely dated by well-stratified finds.

3.2 *Overburden, Made-Ground and Geological Deposits*

The area in which the trench was located was covered by a 0.1m-thick layer of tarmac which formed a car park surface (101). This overlay a layer of bricks (0.12m thick), arranged in a herringbone pattern, that are likely to have formed an early school yard surface (102). The bricks were of modern machine-made type (stamped “LBC”) and most showed evidence of over-firing. They are likely to have been rejects and would have been laid down at the time of the original construction of Icknield Primary School in the early 20th century.

Immediately below the brick surface was the remnant of the original topsoil (103). It was 0.3m thick and consisted of a clayey silt with occasional flecks of charcoal and frequent rooting.

A layer of slightly paler clay-silt subsoil (104) was identified below the topsoil layer. It was 0.25m thick and contained stones and fragments of chalk.

The base of the trench was dug down to the natural chalk bedrock, approximately 0.7–0.8m below the existing ground level. A geotechnical test pit was dug to a depth of 0.5m into the chalk at the south-western end of the trench.

3.3 *Potential Archaeological features*

Two intercutting pits were identified toward the north-east corner of the trench. The pits were roughly rectilinear in plan, but upon excavation proved to be shallow and highly root-disturbed. Pit [106] was aligned NE-SW and appeared to be cut by pit [108], which was aligned NW-SE. Both extended beyond the north-western edge of the trench, but were less than 0.1m deep. Hand-cleaning of the surface of the features produced three abraded sand-tempered body sherds (5g) of early medieval pottery (fabric types C59A and C59B), but none were securely stratified.

A potential NW-SE aligned ditch was identified against the north-eastern end of the trench. It was in excess of 0.8m wide but less than 0.15m deep; it also exhibited evidence of root disturbance. No finds were recovered from the excavation of the ditch, but it appeared to cut adjacent pit [106].

3.4 *Modern Services*

A modern service trench was identified along the south-eastern edge of the trench. It cut through the herringbone brick surface (102) and continued



below the base of trench (Plate 2). It clearly post-dated the construction of the school and was not further investigated.

The remains of a disconnected gas service pipe were revealed at the extreme south-western end of the trench. It is likely to have supplied the now demolished mid-20th-century building that once occupied this part of the school site.



4. INTERPRETATION AND CONCLUSIONS

The evaluation trench did not produce any evidence for the presence of significant archaeological features or deposits within the footprint of the proposed extension.

The survival of a relic topsoil (103) and subsoil (104) beneath the Edwardian brick yard surface indicates that there has been little disturbance to the archaeological horizon other than by isolated modern services. As such, there is a good chance that sub-surface archaeological features would have survived, if the area had been a focus for past human activity.

The features that were identified comprise an undated ditch of unknown function and two root-disturbed pits. The regular shape of the pits suggests that they were man-made. Historical maps indicate that in 1840 the DA was still agricultural land (Figure 3). By 1880 the expansion of Dunstable had started to encompass the DA — it was divided into much smaller plots, two of which contained trees. It is possible that the pits identified by the evaluation relate to deliberate tree planting, perhaps associated with the creation of an orchard. The NW-SE ditch may relate to a plot sub-division, similar to those shown on the 1880 25-inch OS map. The recovered pottery was not associated with any other evidence for domestic activity and is, therefore, likely to be residual, possibly the result of manuring of fields on the outskirts of the medieval town.

The absence of any finds or features dating from the Romano-British period supports the current interpretations that the DA is situated outside the known extent of the Roman town of *Durocbrivae*.



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Digital Archives from Excavation and Fieldwork Guide to Good Practice

Second Edition: available online at

<http://ads.ahds.ac.uk/project/goodguides/excavation>

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6. CONTEXT DATA

Trench: 1

Max Dimensions: Length: 8.00 m. Width: 2.50 m. Depth to Archaeology Min: 0.7 m. Max: 0.8 m.

Co-ordinates: OS Grid Ref.: TL (Easting: 1564; Northing: 21660)

OS Grid Ref.: TL (Easting: 1571; Northing: 22166)

Reason: To sample the archaeological potential within the footprint of the proposed new build.

Context:	Type:	Description:	Excavated:	Finds Present:
101	Tarmac	Hard dark black tarmac 0.1m thick (two layers).	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
102	Surface	Hard mid brown frequent medium CBM External surface constructed from bricks laid in a herringbone pattern. Comprising modern, machine-made, frogged bricks stamped "LBC". Most show signs of being over-fired.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
103	Buried topsoil	Compact dark grey brown clay silt occasional flecks charcoal 0.3m thick	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
104	Buried subsoil	Compact mid brown grey clay silt occasional flecks chalk, moderate small stones 0.25m thick	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
105	Natural	Hard white chalk Natural geology, tested by geotechnical sondage (>0.5m thick).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
106	Pit	Linear NE-SW sides: 45 degrees base: uneven dimensions: min breadth 0.55m, max depth 0.1m, min length 2.6m Highly root disturbed.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
107	Fill	Firm mid brown grey silty clay frequent small-medium chalk 0.1m thick	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
108	Pit	Sub-rectangular NW-SE sides: asymmetrical base: uneven dimensions: max breadth 0.8m, max depth 0.05m, min length 1.55m Highly root disturbed.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
109	Fill	Firm mid brown grey silty clay frequent small-medium chalk 0.05m thick	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
110	Ditch	Linear NW-SE sides: concave base: concave dimensions: min breadth 0.8m, max depth 0.15m, min length 2.5m	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
111	Fill	Firm mid brown grey clay silt moderate small chalk Some traces of root disturbance evident.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



Figure 1: Site location plan

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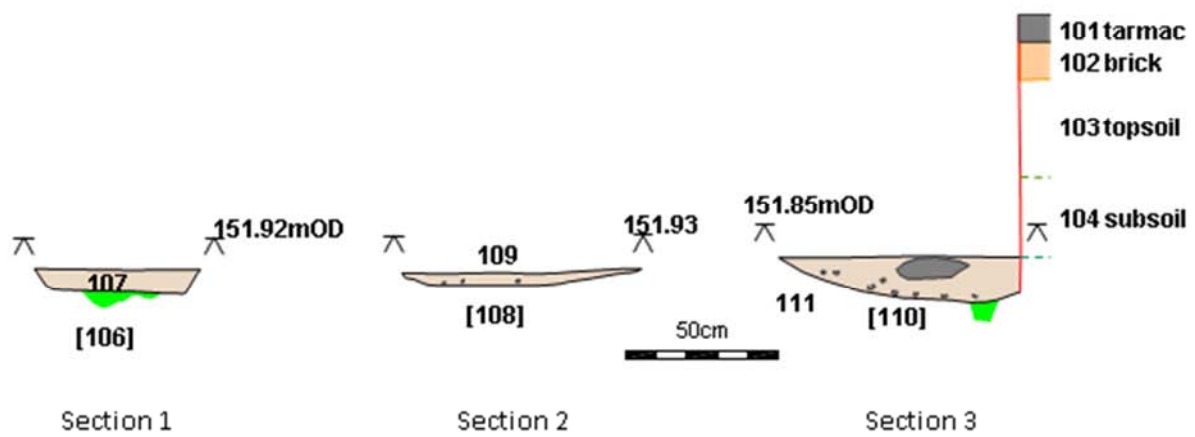
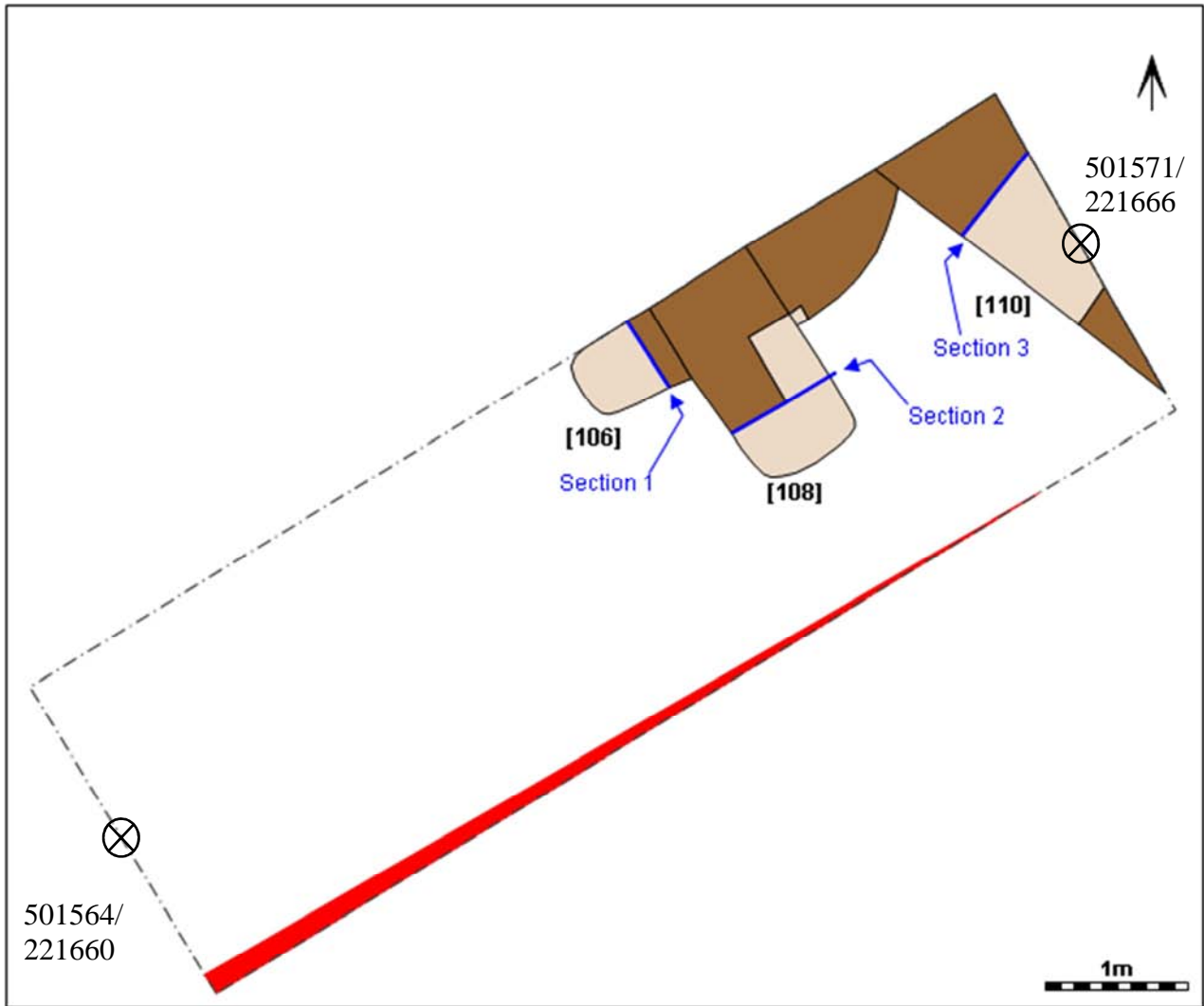


Figure 2: All features plan and sections



Extract of the 1840 parish map of Dunstable
(BLARS ref. MAT 12/1)



Extract of the 1880 25-inch OS map of
Bedfordshire (Sheet XXXII-2)

Figure 3: Historical mapping



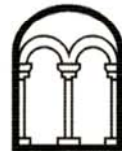
Plate 1: Pre-excavation view of north-east end of trench (looking north-east)



Plate 2: Post-excavation view of trench (looking SSW)

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