



## ROBERT BLOOMFIELD MIDDLE SCHOOL, SHEFFORD (RB 1263)

### REPORT ON ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

2007/54

#### 1. Introduction

A planning application has been submitted by Mouchel Parkman Services Ltd for classroom extensions at Robert Bloomfield Middle School, Shefford, Bedfordshire. The extension comprises a series of rooms to be added to the western side of the existing building within a central courtyard, centred on TL 1385 3875 (Figure 1). The investigation area was *c.* 340sqm in size and at the time of the fieldwork consisted of paths, flower beds, hedges and grass.

#### 2. Archaeological Background

Several archaeological investigations have been completed within the vicinity of the current study area and are summarised below (Figure 1).

##### Evaluations

Project 365 comprised trial trenching and test pitting undertaken in 1993 in advance of a new access road and car park for Shefford Lower School<sup>1</sup>. These investigations identified Roman ditches, pits and postholes with associated artefact assemblages comprising pottery and metal objects. In 1999 and 2000, five evaluation trenches (Project 583) were dug. They were located *c.* 100m north of the present study area and revealed a substantial Romano-British boundary ditch and posthole<sup>2</sup>. Watching briefs (Projects SL694 and SL1181) also identified a ditch associated with Romano-British artefacts.

##### Open Area Investigations

Further evaluations carried out in 2001 and 2003 led to open area excavations. Project ASH773 revealed settlement evidence in the form of a ditched enclosure that was in use from the late Iron Age through to the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries AD<sup>3</sup>. Within the enclosure, a substantial aisled building with an external cobbled yard was identified. By the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD, a new enclosure had replaced the original one. This later enclosure followed a different alignment suggesting a break in occupation.

Four further open area investigations (SLS893) were undertaken in advance of building extensions at Shefford Lower School from January 2004 to January 2005<sup>4</sup> (Albion 2005). These excavations revealed a similar chronological sequence to that described above. The original enclosure ditch continued into this area with a second, parallel ditch to the west, suggesting a route-way. A second post-built structure, gullies and pits were also identified.

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<sup>1</sup> BCAS 1993, Robert Bloomfield Middle School, Shefford: Archaeological Evaluation, (Report 93/23)

<sup>2</sup> BCAS 2000, Land at 59 Ampthill Road, Shefford: Archaeological Field Evaluation Stage II (Report 00/48)

<sup>3</sup> Luke, M., Preece, T. and Wells, J., in prep. 'A Romano-British aisled building and associated settlement at Ampthill Road, Shefford' Bedfordshire Archaeology

<sup>4</sup> Albion Archaeology 2005, Shefford Lower School, Bloomfield Drive, Shefford, Bedfordshire: Assessment of potential and updated project Design (Report 2005/24)



### 3. Evaluation

A brief issued by Bedfordshire County Council's Archaeological Officer (CAO) outlined a three-staged programme of archaeological work<sup>5</sup>. This report comprises Stage II, an appraisal of the results of the field evaluation carried out as Stage I.<sup>6</sup>

Four 2m by 2m test pits were initially planned for the evaluation of the study area, two in the south-east and two in the north-west. However, due to the proximity of trees and hedges in the north-west part of the site, the two test pits that were planned were altered to a single 3m by 3m test pit (Figure 2).

Albion staff were present on site from Monday 14<sup>th</sup> to Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> May 2007, to oversee machining of the test pits and to carry out subsequent hand excavation and recording of archaeological features. On Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> May 2007, a monitoring meeting was held with the CAO.

The results of the investigation are summarised below with full context details presented in Appendix 1.

#### Results

A total of fifteen contexts were investigated within the three test pits. Two archaeological features were identified in test pit 1. They were cut into the underlying natural geology and overlain by topsoil.

#### Topsoil

A friable, clay-loam topsoil (100), (200) and (300) was present in test pits 1-3, varying in thickness from 0.17m to 0.23m and directly overlaying the geological deposits. A prehistoric flint flake was recovered from the topsoil of test pit 2 (200). Subsoils were not encountered in any of the test pits.

#### Modern disturbance

A service trench [306] aligned north-west to south-east was identified within test pit 1. In test pit 3, four layers of modern make up layers were identified (301), (302), (303) and (304). They were composed of modern materials, including tarmac, mortar, concrete and ceramic building material with a total thickness of 0.38m -0.41m (Plate 4).

#### Geological deposits

The undisturbed geological stratum (101), (201) and (305) consisted of firm, dark yellow orange silty clay, with occasional flecks of stone and manganese staining. In test pits 1 and 2, the upper part of these deposits was disturbed by roots and contained elements of topsoil. In test pit 3 the geological stratum was also disturbed by roots and was much firmer than in test pits 1 and 2 as a result of the overlying layers of modern materials.

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<sup>5</sup> Bedfordshire County Council, 2007. Brief for an Archaeological Investigation at Robert Bloomfield Middle School, Bloomfield Drive, Shefford, Bedfordshire. Version 1 (4<sup>th</sup> April 2007)

<sup>6</sup> Bedfordshire County Council, 2007. Brief for an Archaeological Filed Evaluation of Land at Robert Bloomfield Middle School, Bloomfield Drive, Shefford, Bedfordshire. Version 1 (4<sup>th</sup> April 2007)



### Ditch

A north-east to south-west aligned ditch [102] was identified in test pit 1. It was at least 2.04m long as it extended beyond both sides of the test pit. It was 0.7m wide and 0.5m deep with an asymmetrical V-shaped profile and concave base (Plates 1 and 2). The sole clay-silt fill (103) of the ditch appears to result from natural silting, derived from the surrounding geology. It contained the partial remains of a late Iron Age/early Roman grog tempered vessel (104) (Plate 3).

### Artefacts

The fill of ditch [102] test pit 1 yielded 53 abraded base and lower body sherds (471g) from a grog and sand tempered cordoned vessel (fabric type F09<sup>7</sup>), datable to the *c.* 50BC-AD100. The feature also contained a worn body sherd (3g) from a second vessel, also in fabric type F09, and four sand tempered fired clay fragments (20g), likely to derive from a handmade slab or brick.

A poorly made, unstratified flint flake (5g) was recovered from ploughsoil (200), trench 2.

### Summary

Test pit 1 contained a late Iron Age/early Roman ditch [102]. This ditch lies approximately 82m east of the eastern limits of the SLS893 excavations and is, therefore, within the limits of the previously identified settlement. It appears to run parallel to the major NE-SW ditch which defines the north-western limit of the enclosure, some 150m to the north. It is, however, much shallower and narrower than the enclosure ditch previously identified in Project ASH773 and as such may represent a smaller field system within or adjacent to the larger enclosure. The late Iron Age/early Roman pottery from ditch [102] also complements the chronologies identified in ASH773 and SLS893.

Test pits 2 and 3 contained no archaeological features. The modern makeup layers (301), (302), (303) and (304) in test pit 3 may be associated with the construction of Robert Bloomfield Middle School in the 1930s and 1970s. These layers demonstrate that truncation of the undisturbed geological stratum has taken place to a depth of 0.55-0.58m below the present surface level. This has significant implications for the survival of shallow archaeological features in this area. However, deeper and larger features, such as ditch [102] may survive as truncated remains.

Similarly, the absence of subsoil in test pits 1 and 2, suggest that remodelling of the land surface has also taken place in this area, possibly again in association with the construction of the school. This also suggests the potential, partial truncation of archaeological features, though to a much lesser extent than that identified in test pit 3. Overall, preservation potential within the area of test pits 1 and 2 is considered to be very high.

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<sup>7</sup> Defined in accordance with the Bedfordshire Ceramic Type Series, currently maintained by Albion Archaeology on behalf of Bedfordshire County Council.



### ***Acknowledgements***

This report had been prepared by James Newbould (Archaeological Supervisor), Tracy Preece (Project Officer) and Jackie Wells (Artefacts Officer) and was edited by Mike Luke (Project Manager). All Albion projects are under the overall management of Drew Shotliff (Operations Manager). All illustrations in this report were prepared by Joan Lightning (CAD Technician). Hand excavation and recording was undertaken by James Newbould and Marcin Koziminski. The finds were processed by Jackie Wells.

Albion Archaeology would like to acknowledge the assistance of Roy Phelan (Mouchel Parkman Services Ltd), Lesley-Ann Mather (County Archaeological Officer) and the staff of Robert Bloomfield Middle School.



**APPENDIX 1**  
**TRENCH TABLE**



**Trench: 1**

**Max Dimensions: Length: 2.70 m. Width: 2.05 m. Depth to Archaeology Min: 0.2 m. Max: 0.23 m.**

**Co-ordinates: Easting: 1386430: Northing: 3873913**

**Reason: To assess the archaeological potential of the site**

<b>Context:</b>	<b>Type:</b>	<b>Description:</b>	<b>Excavated:</b>	<b>Finds Present:</b>
100	Topsoil	Friable dark grey brown clay loam occasional small ceramic building material, occasional small stones 0.23m thick	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
101	Natural	Firm light grey orange silty clay occasional flecks manganese staining	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
102	Ditch	Linear NE-SW profile: 45 degrees base: concave dimensions: max breadth 0.7m, max depth 0.5m, min length 2.04m	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
103	Main fill	Compact mid orange grey clay silt occasional flecks charcoal, occasional small stones from which the remains of a pottery vessel were recovered in Finds Deposit (104)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
104	Finds deposit	Partial remains of late Iron Age/early Roman vessel	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
306	Service Trench	Linear NW-SE dimensions: max breadth 0.8m	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
307	Backfill	Firm dark grey brown silty clay	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



**Trench:** 2

**Max Dimensions:** Length: 2.35 m. Width: 2.30 m. Depth to Archaeology Min: m. Max: m.

**Co-ordinates:** Easting: 1386346: Northing: 3874391

**Reason:** To assess the archaeological potential of the site

Context:	Type:	Description:	Excavated:	Finds Present:
200	Topsoil	Friable dark grey brown clay loam occasional small ceramic building material, occasional small stones 0.2m thick	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
201	Natural	Firm dark yellow orange silty clay occasional flecks stones	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



**Trench: 3**

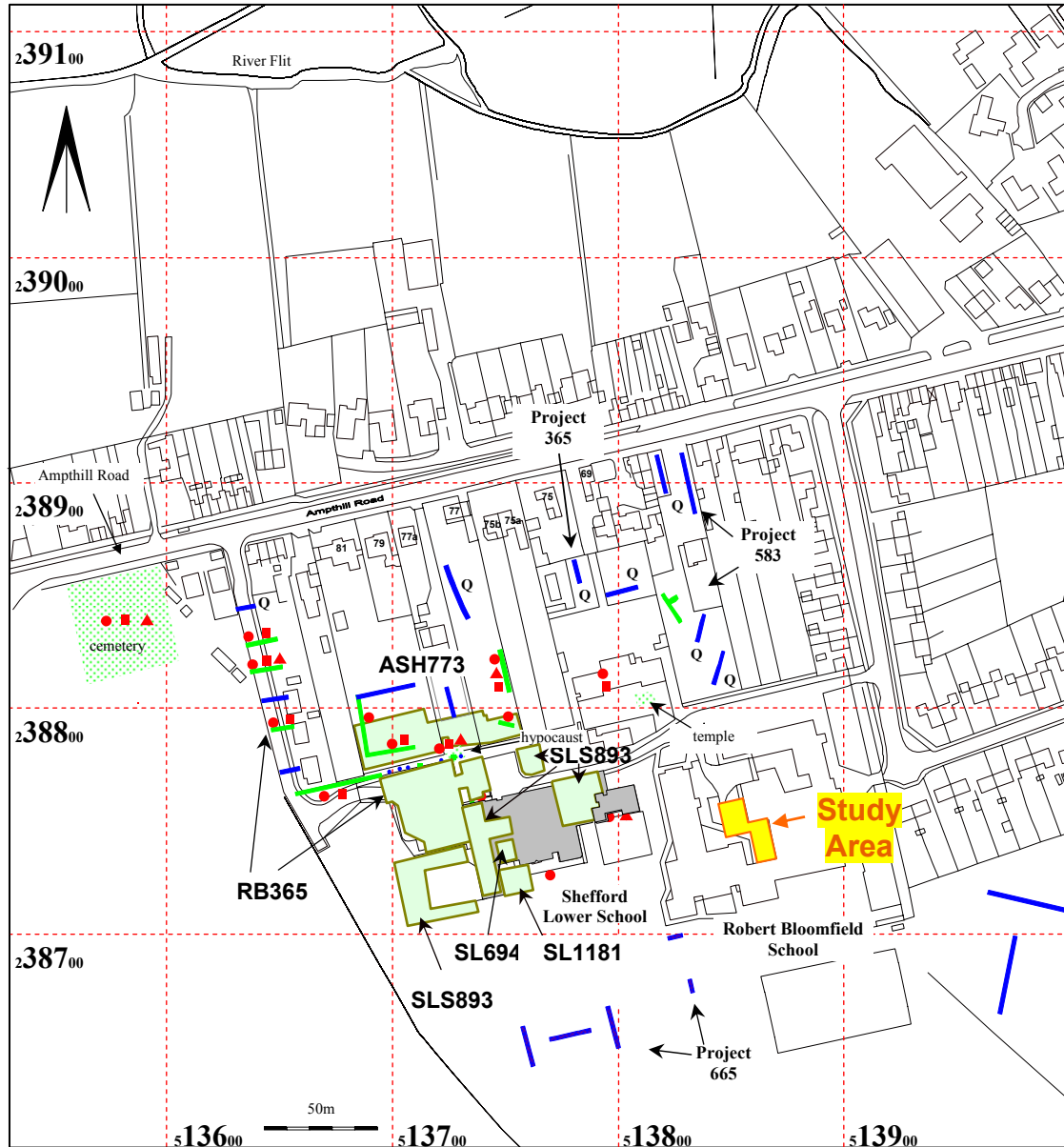
**Max Dimensions: Length: 3.25 m. Width: 3.05 m. Depth to Archaeology Min: m. Max: m.**

**Co-ordinates: Easting: 1385222: Northing: 3875163**

**Reason: To assess the archaeological potential of the site**

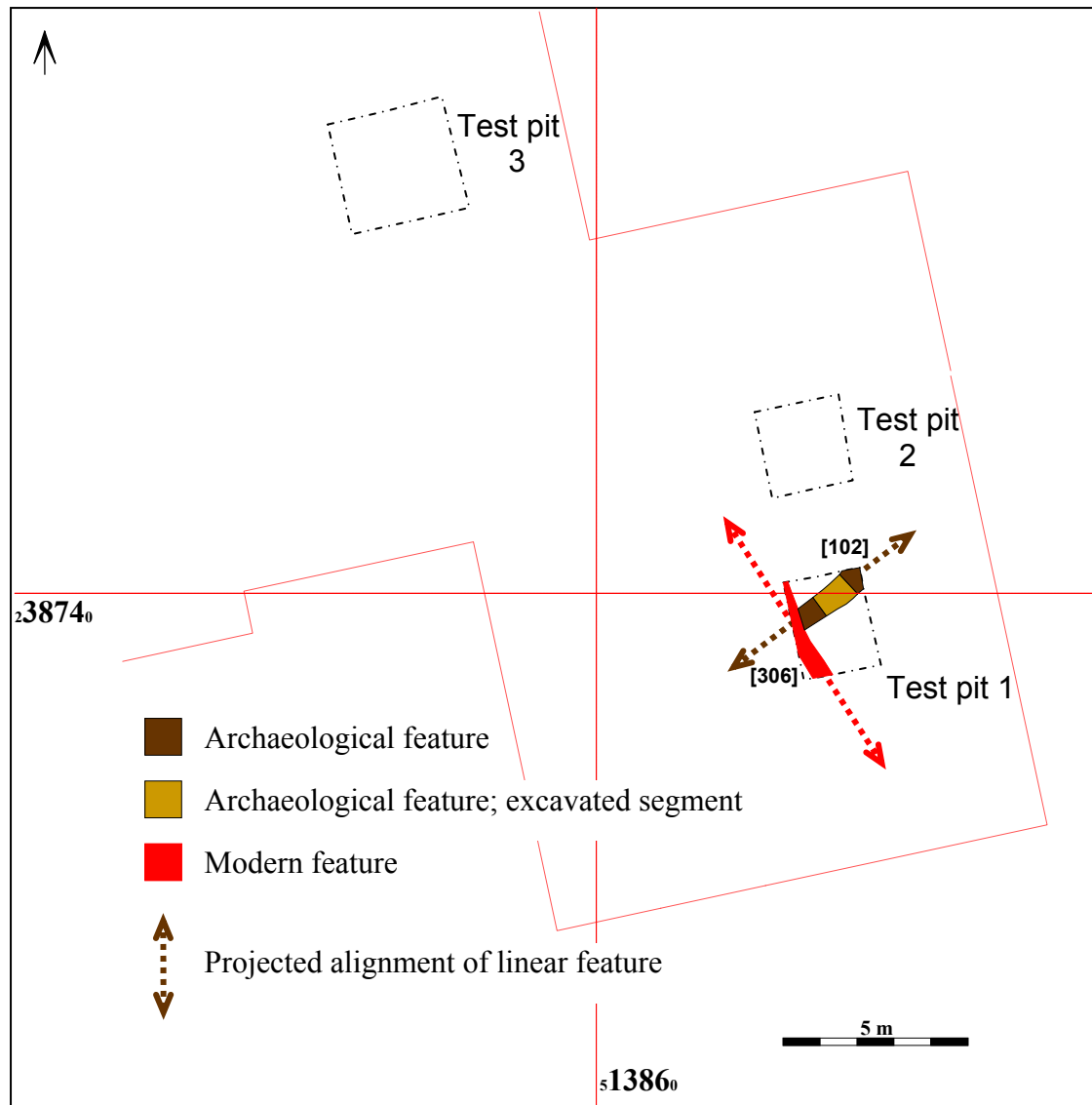
<b>Context:</b>	<b>Type:</b>	<b>Description:</b>	<b>Excavated:</b>	<b>Finds Present:</b>
300	Topsoil	Friable dark grey brown clay loam occasional small ceramic building material, occasional small stones 0.17m thick	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
301	Make up layer	Hard mid brown grey silty clay moderate medium ceramic building material, occasional small-large concrete, moderate small stones 0.16m thick	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
302	Make up layer	Hard mid brown grey silty clay frequent small ceramic building material, moderate medium-large ceramic building material, frequent small stones 0.14m thick	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
303	Make up layer	Hard light yellow sand occasional small ceramic building material, occasional small chalk, occasional small stones 0.11m thick	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
304	Make up layer	Hard dark blue brown silty clay moderate small-medium ceramic building material, moderate small stones 0.23m thick	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
305	Natural	Firm dark yellow orange silty clay	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>





Key	
<span style="border: 1px solid green; display: inline-block; width: 10px; height: 10px;"></span>	Area excavation
<span style="border-bottom: 2px solid blue; width: 20px; display: inline-block;"></span>	Trial trench; (No archaeological features)
<span style="border-bottom: 2px solid green; width: 20px; display: inline-block;"></span>	Trial trench; (Archaeological features found.)
<span style="display: inline-block; width: 10px; height: 10px; background-color: lightgreen; border: 1px solid green;"></span>	Test pit; (Archaeological features found.)
<span style="display: inline-block; width: 5px; height: 5px; background-color: lightblue; border: 1px solid blue;"></span>	Augerhole
<span style="display: inline-block; width: 10px; height: 10px; background-color: blue; border: 1px solid blue;"></span>	Observation of house construction; (No archaeological features)
<span style="display: inline-block; width: 10px; height: 10px; background-color: red; border: 1px solid red;"></span>	Pottery
<span style="display: inline-block; width: 10px; height: 10px; background-color: orange; border: 1px solid orange;"></span>	Brick /tile
<span style="display: inline-block; width: 10px; height: 10px; background-color: yellow; border: 1px solid yellow;"></span>	Other artefacts
<span style="display: inline-block; width: 10px; height: 10px; border: 1px dashed black;"></span>	Quarry
<span style="display: inline-block; width: 10px; height: 10px; background-color: lightgreen; border: 1px dashed green;"></span>	Specific archaeological remains

**Figure 1:** Study area with known archaeological remains in the vicinity.  
 Base map reproduced from the Ordnance Survey Map with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office,  
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**Figure 2: All features plan**

Base map reproduced from the Ordnance Survey Map with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, by Bedfordshire County Council, County Hall, Bedford. OS Licence No. 100017358(LA). © Crown Copyright.





**Plate 1.** Test pit 1 showing ditch [102] prior to excavation (light brown in colour aligned left to right). 1m scale.



**Plate 2.** Ditch [102] after excavation showing asymmetrical profile. 1m scale.





**Plate 3.** Partially excavated late Iron Age/early Roman pottery vessel, part of finds deposit (104). 25cm scale.



**Plate 4.** Test pit 3 showing modern makeup layers used to level the site. 1m scale.