



LAND AT SHEFFORD LOWER SCHOOL, BLOOMFIELD DRIVE, SHEFFORD, BEDFORDSHIRE

RESULTS OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL OBSERVATION AND RECORDING

(Report 06/60)

NON-TECHNICAL SUMMARY

This document represents the results of the archaeological observations and recording undertaken during the construction of footings for a new classroom at Shefford Lower School, Shefford, Bedfordshire. The latter is located in an area of Roman settlement, possibly a villa. The investigations located a substantial Roman enclosure ditch from which Roman pottery and building material was retrieved. Although restricted to the footprint of the new class room the results will contribute to the understanding of the nature and extent of the Roman settlement in this part of Shefford.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Planning background

Bedfordshire County Council has granted planning permission (06/0003/FUL) for the construction of a new classroom at Shefford Lower School. The planning permission contained a condition requiring the implementation of a programme of archaeological investigation as a consequence of the development. This is in line with Mid Beds Local Plan Policy BE18 and the guidance contained in PPG 16 *Archaeology and Planning*.

A Brief outlining the nature of the required archaeological investigation and recording was issued in March 2006 by the Archaeological Officer of Bedfordshire County Council¹. On 28th April 2006 Albion Archaeology produced a Project Design² to fulfil the requirements of the Brief and this was approved by the Archaeological Officer on 2nd May 2006.

1.2 Site location (Fig. 1)

Shefford Lower School lies on the western side of Shefford, to the south of the Ampthill Road. The current development is centred on TL 1376 3873 and has a total area of approximately 99sqm. Prior to development, it comprised a paved area adjacent to existing school buildings.

1.3 Landform, geology and soils

Topographically the site lies on the north facing slope of a low east-west ridge between the River Flit (to the north) and a tributary stream to the south at a height of c.40m OD. The geology of the site is Lower Greensand with Valley Gravels and alluvium associated with the River Flit and localised deposits of Boulder Clay.

¹ BCC 2006 *Brief for a programme of archaeological observation, recording, analysis and publication at Shefford Lower School, Bloomfield Drive, Shefford, Bedfordshire.*

² Albion 2006 *Land at Shefford Lower School, Bloomfield Drive, Shefford, Bedfordshire: Project Design for archaeological observation, recording, analysis and publication* (Report 06/48)



1.4 Archaeological background (Fig. 1)

Roman remains were first reported in this part of Shefford in 1826 by a local antiquarian (Thomas Inskip)³. He located a building and a cemetery during quarrying; the precise location of these remains is uncertain. Further Roman remains and artefacts were recorded when the school was built in 1872, during levelling of the school field in 1940 and during building work at the school in 1976.

With the implementation of PPG16 by Local Planning Authorities all subsequent developments in this part of Shefford have been subject to archaeological investigations. These have comprised watching briefs, trial trench evaluation and open area excavations.

The most recent investigations, undertaken in 2002 and 2004⁴, have produced the most significant results. The 2002 investigation (Project 773) in advance of housing development on land immediately to the north of the school located the remains of a substantial Roman building. The southern part of this building appeared to be of a higher status and may have contained a hypocaust. This building may have been the one located in the 19th and 20th centuries and clearly continued into the school land. It appeared to be situated within a ditched enclosure which may have originated in the late Iron Age. The 2004 investigations (Project 893), in advance of the construction of new school buildings, located the continuation of the enclosure ditch, a second building, evidence for a possible trackway and quarry pits.

All archaeological investigations in this part of Shefford have located evidence for Roman settlement in terms of sub-surface features such as ditches, pits, postholes, surfaces etc along with a wide range of pottery, metal objects, building material (including painted wall plaster). The results of some of the investigations are currently being analysed in preparation for publication in the county-based archaeological journal *Bedfordshire Archaeology*⁵.

2. RESULTS

2.1 Overburden

Lying below the paving slabs were several make up layers c. 0.5m thick. These comprised sand (2), concrete (3) and a pink grey stony gravel (4). Below the latter was a mid yellow orange silty clay (5) between 0.3m and 0.5m thick. No artefacts were recovered from any of these deposits. In the southern section of footings a further layer (9) was identified, comprised of a dark grey yellow deposit. This contained fragments of modern brick along with Roman pottery and roof tile.

2.2 The ditch (Fig. 2)

In the southern trench of the footings a substantial ditch [7] was identified, sealed by layer (9). It was on a NW-SE alignment, was 2m wide and 0.7m deep with a

³ Inskip, T, 1850. "On ancient relics collected in Bedfordshire", *Associated architectural societies reports and papers* 1. pt. 1, 165-172

⁴ Shefford Lower School, Bloomfield Drive, Shefford, Bedfordshire: Assessment of potential and updated project design (Report 2005/24)

⁵ Albion in prep. 'A Roman aisled building and associated settlement at Ampthill Road, Shefford' *Bedfordshire Archaeology*



steep concave profile and slightly concave base (Fig. 2; section 1). It was filled by a dark yellow brown silty clay (8) with occasional small stones. This contained Roman pottery and roof tile, along with a small quantity of animal bone and shell.

2.3 The underlying geology

The undisturbed geological stratum consisted of a mid grey clay (6).

2.4 Artefact assemblage

The finds assemblage comprised pottery, ceramic roof tile, animal bone and oyster shell (Table 1). The material was scanned to ascertain its nature, condition and where possible date range.

Feature	Type	Context	Spot date*	Pottery	Finds summary
7	Ditch	8	Roman	18:227	Roman pottery; Roman roof tile (141g); animal bone (53g); shell (189g)
9	Layer	9	Modern	3:52	Roman pottery; animal bone (1g); Roman roof tile (127g); Modern brick (250g); shell (17g)
Total				21:279	

* - spot date based on date of latest artefact in context

Table 1: Artefact Summary

2.4.1 Pottery

Twenty-one pottery sherds weighing 279g were recovered. These were examined by context and quantified using minimum sherd count and weight. Sherds are generally abraded and small, with an average weight of 13g. Ten fabric types were identified in accordance with the Bedfordshire Ceramic Type Series, maintained by Albion Archaeology on behalf of Bedfordshire County Council, and are listed below (Table 2) in chronological order.

The pottery dates predominantly to the early Roman period and the majority of the assemblage comprises reduced sand tempered coarsewares of probable local manufacture. A single shell tempered sherd of unknown provenance also occurred. Regional imports are represented by two whiteware sherds of second century date, from the Verulamium (St Albans) industries. Forms comprise a lid-seated vessel, a burnished dish and a reeded rim bowl, the latter heavily sooted. Three abraded late Iron Age grog-tempered sherds recovered from fill (8) are likely to be residual.

Fabric type	Common name	Total Sherd No.	Context/Sherd No.
<i>Late Iron Age</i>			
Type F06B	Medium grog	1	(8): 1
Type F09	Grog and sand	2	(8):2
<i>Early Roman</i>			
Type R03A	Fine whiteware	1	(8):1
Type R03B	Gritty whiteware	1	(8):1
Type R06B	Coarse greyware	3	(8):3
Type R06C	Fine greyware	6	(8):4, (9):2
Type R07B	Sandy blackware	2	(8):2
Type R07C	Gritty blackware	2	(8):2
Type R13	Shell	1	(9):1
Type R14	Sand (red-brown harsh)	2	(8):2

Table 2: Pottery Type Series



2.4.2 Other finds

Two sand tempered fragments of curved roof tile (*imbrex*), weighing 268g were identified. Both are approximately 20mm thick, and are moderately abraded.

Three skull, rib and long bone fragments (53g), deriving from animals of unknown species, were recovered from the fill of ditch [7] and a single bird bone (1g) from layer (9). All survive in fair condition, with some surface erosion. Five oyster shells, weighing 206g were also recovered.

2.5 CONCLUSION

The nature and depths of the overburden layers suggest that there has been considerable disturbance, probably associated with the building work and the levelling of the playing fields going back to the 1940s. While this may have removed smaller features like postholes and pits, a more substantial Roman ditch survived along with pottery, building material, animal bone and shell.

Based on the alignment and profile of the ditch, it is likely to be the continuation of the enclosure boundary identified in previous archaeological excavations (Fig. 3). This ditch is believed to define an enclosure to the east and a possible routeway to the west. Elsewhere within the enclosure, at least two Roman buildings have been identified: one substantial of aisled nature and the other post-built. The enclosure ditch has now been traced for c. 92m and continues to the south-east.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ANALYSIS AND PUBLICATION

It is likely that some settlement-type features may have existed in this area, but that they were removed by modern disturbance. However, the presence of an enclosure ditch and the quantity of artefacts recovered from it indicate that Roman domestic activity probably occurred within the vicinity. Evidence for Roman settlement in this part of Shefford has been discovered largely on an intermittent and piecemeal basis for the past 200 years. However, it is now clear that the settlement extended over an area of at least c. 1.2ha and comprised a series of enclosures.

The results of the more substantial investigations undertaken in 2002 and 2004 will form the basis of a publication being prepared for the county-based archaeological journal, *Bedfordshire Archaeology*. It is proposed that the results of the investigations reported on here are incorporated into this article.

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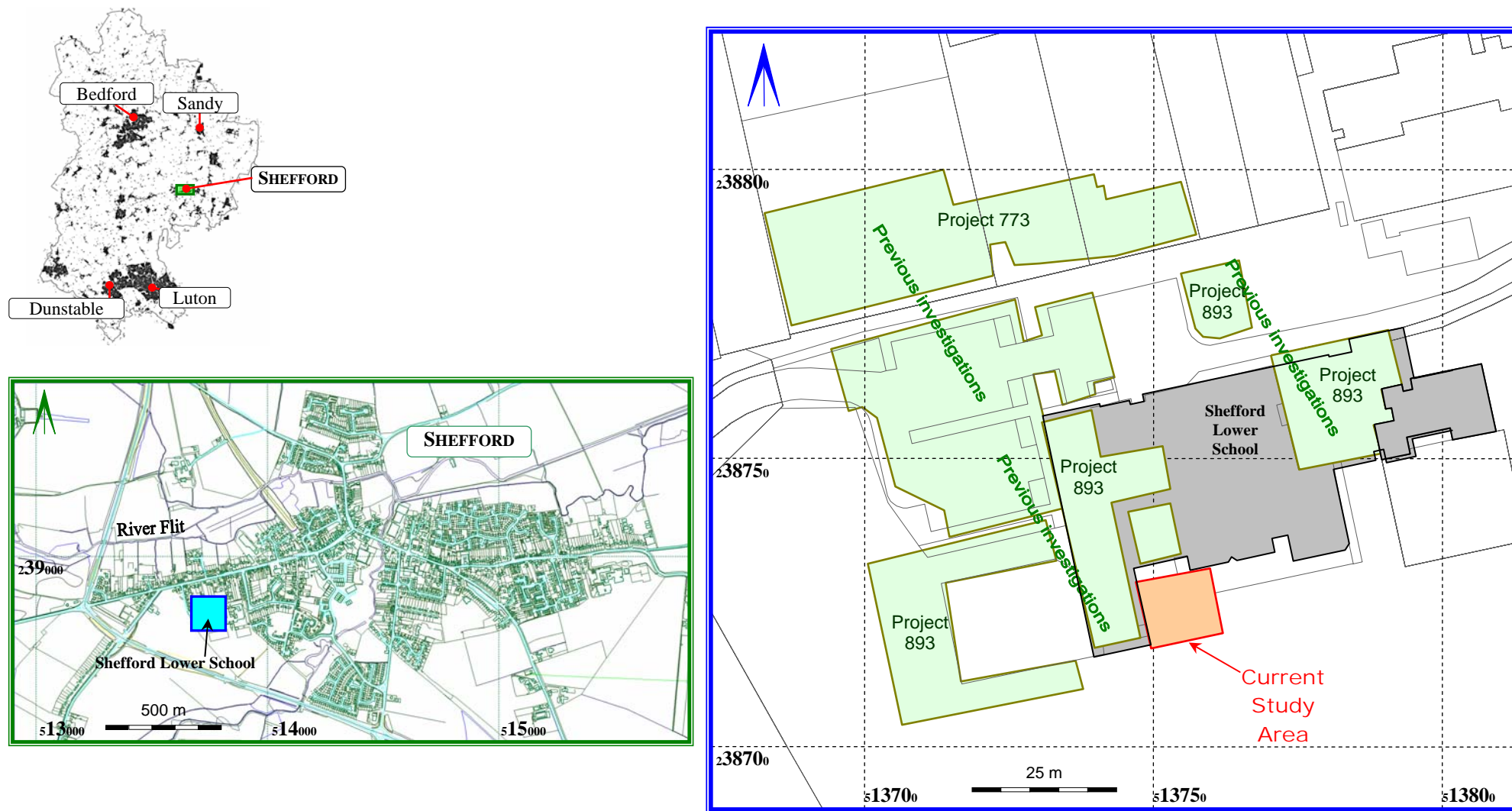
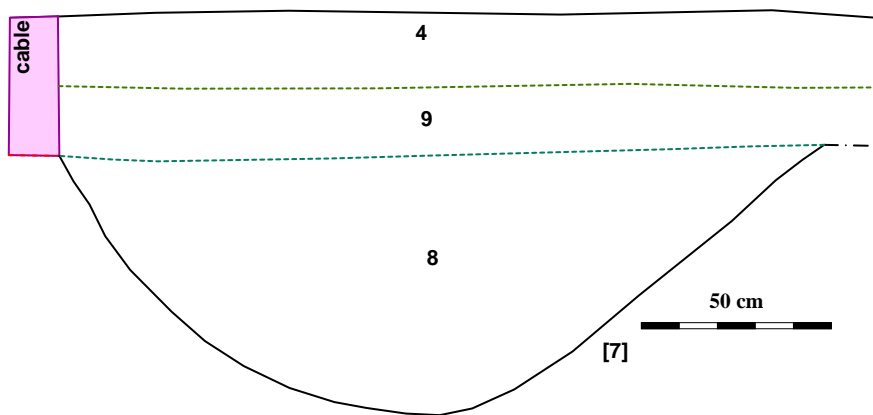


Figure 1: Location of the study area.

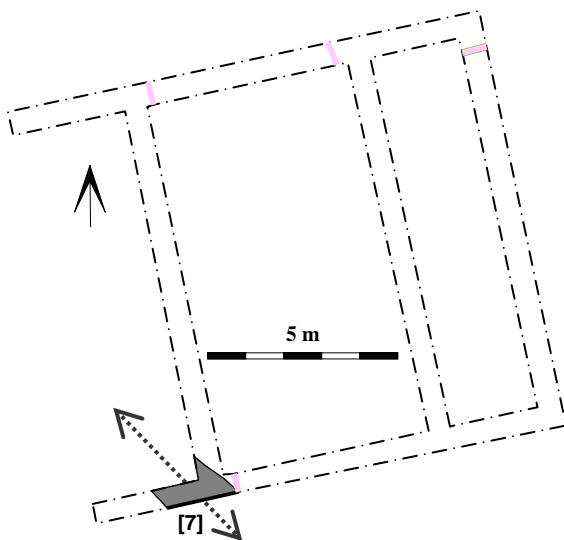
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Photograph of the site



Section of ditch [7]



Plan of building footings showing ditch [7]

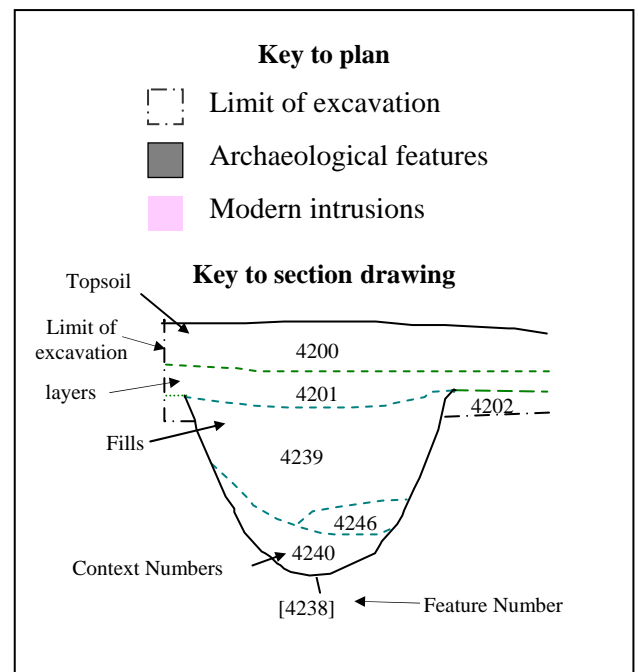


Figure 2: Current study area; all features

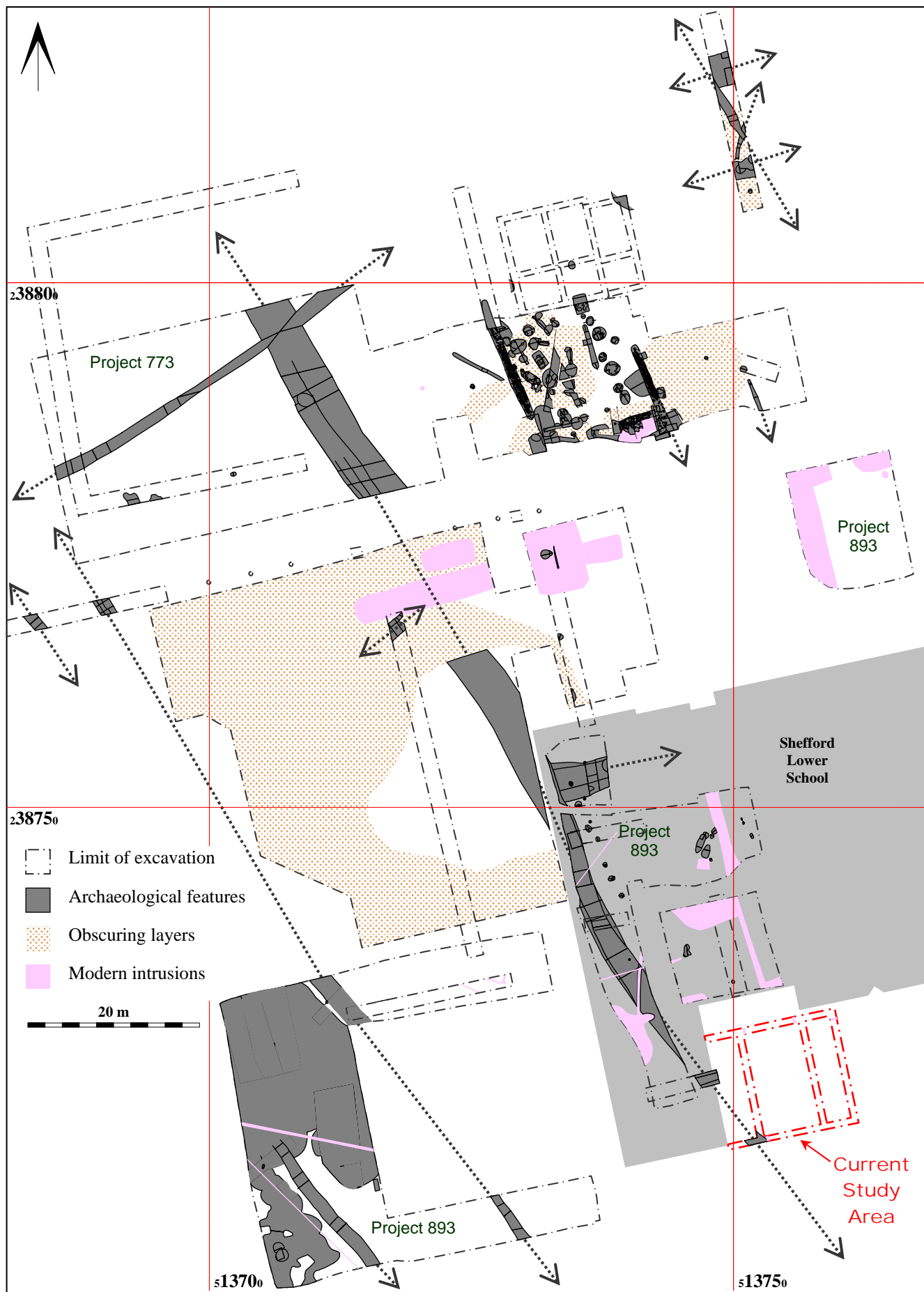


Figure 3: Current study area plus previous excavations, all features plan

Land at Shefford Lower School, Bloomfield Drive, Shefford, Bedfordshire
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