STEPHENSON LOWER SCHOOL
BEDFORD

ARCHAEOLOGICAL OBSERVATION, INVESTIGATION, RECORDING, ANALYSIS AND PUBLICATION

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Preface

Every effort has been made in the preparation of this document to provide as complete a summary as possible within the terms of the Project Design. 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.

This report has been prepared by Caroline Clarke, Gary Edmondson and Jackie Wells (Artefacts Officer). Mick Garside undertook the archaeological investigation. The project was under the overall management of Drew Shotliff (Operations Manager). Joan Lightning (CAD Technician) produced the figures.

Albion Archaeology would like to acknowledge the assistance Bernie Fraser of Mouchel Parkman, Mark Pearson of M J Hillsons (contractors) and Martin Oake (County Archaeological Officer).

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Structure of the Report

After the introductory Section 1, there is a summary of results of the archaeological investigation in Section 2, followed by a brief conclusion (Section 3).

Key Terms

Throughout this project design the following terms or abbreviations are used:

Albion	Albion Archaeology
Client	Mouchel Parkman on behalf of Bedfordshire County Council
IFA	Institute of Field Archaeologists
CAO	County Archaeological Officer for Bedfordshire
Procedures Manual	*Procedures Manual Volume 1 Fieldwork, 2nd Edition 2001*. Bedfordshire County Council

Non-Technical Summary

Albion Archaeology was commissioned by Mouchel Parkman on behalf of Bedfordshire County Council to undertake a programme of archaeological investigation during groundworks associated with the construction of a nursery unit at Stephenson Lower School, Bedford. The site is situated c.2km south-east of the town centre, towards the southern extent of the urban area, adjacent to Canvin Way at National Grid Reference TL (5/2) 0616 4829. The site is located on relatively high ground, at approximately 26m above Ordnance Datum, between the River Great Ouse and the Elstow Brook. The geology of the site comprises river terrace gravels, which overlie Oxford Clay.

The site is within the grounds of the school, which immediately prior to the archaeological work comprised an area of block paving, grass and flower beds.

The site is within an area which contains considerable evidence for past human activity. In 1990 the digging of foundations for concrete fence posts adjacent to the Southway Building and Kingsbrook School playing fields produced Roman kiln debris (HER 16284). It is possible that the site is related to the extensive kiln site at the Mile Road allotments (HER 979), approximately 500m to the south.

The archaeological investigation was undertaken between the 27th July and 8th August 2005 in accordance with the approved Project Design, formulated by Albion. Initially the construction programme focused on the southern part of the site where the existing car park was to be extended. This initially consisted of reduction of the whole area by 0.3m. Subsequently an area c.5m by 4.5m was dug to a depth of c.1.3m below the present ground level, to create a soakaway. The investigation indicated that below the deposits associated with the construction of the school, a cultivated soil profile had been preserved, indicated by the considerable thickness of surviving ploughsoil. This sealed a substantial feature interpreted as a pit. A small quantity of abraded Roman pottery recovered from the fill of the pit may not provide reliable dating for the feature.

The second phase of monitoring focused on the excavation of wall footing trenches and associated deep service trenches for the nursery unit, situated north-west of the car park. Approximately 87m of foundation trench for the building were monitored. The trench was generally 0.7m wide and extended a maximum 1.2m below the level of the present ground, into the undisturbed geological strata. Below various deposits associated with construction of the existing school, a buried soil profile was revealed, characteristic of a former arable soil. Below this was a ditch oriented north-west to south-east. Despite a careful examination of the excavated fill, no artefacts were recovered. The nature of the fill indicated material derived from an unstable soil profile, typical of ploughing. This ditch would appear to be a field boundary of uncertain date.

Observations indicated that construction of the school had resulted in less disturbance to the adjacent area than would be expected, with the old soil profile being buried under landscaping deposits. The two features revealed are of uncertain date, though they suggest low level human activity in the vicinity.

The site archive, which contains all records of the project (Project number ST 1115), is currently held at St Mary's Church. It will eventually be transferred to Bedford Museum, under Accession Number 2005.241.

It is essential that the above summary is read in conjunction with the main body of the report.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Albion Archaeology was commissioned by Mouchel Parkman on behalf of Bedfordshire County Council to undertake a programme of archaeological works at Stephenson Lower School, Bedford. In response to an Archaeological *Brie*f issued by the CAO[1], Albion formulated a *Project Design*[2] detailing the scope nature and objectives of the project. This document was approved by the CAO prior to the commencement of the investigation. This involved monitoring of ground disturbance associated with the construction of a nursery unit and extension of the car parking area at the school. .

1.2 Site Location and Description

The site is located c.2km south-east of the town centre, towards the southern extent of the urban area, adjacent to Canvin Way (Figure 1). Centred at National Grid Reference TL (5/2) 0616 4829, the site is located on relatively high ground, at approximately 26m above Ordnance Datum, between the River Great Ouse and the Elstow Brook. The geology of the site comprises river terrace gravels, which overlie Oxford Clay.

The site is currently within the school grounds. Immediately prior to the archaeological investigation the southern part of the site was occupied by grass and flower beds with block paving in the north.

1.3 Background

Although the school lies some distance from the historic core of Bedford, it is in an area that has produced considerable evidence for past human activity. In 1990 the digging of foundations for concrete fence posts adjacent to the Southway Building and Kingsbrook School playing fields produced Roman kiln debris (HER 16284). It is possible that the site is related to the extensive kiln site at the Mile Road allotments (HER 979), approximately 500m to the south. Due to the archaeological potential of the site, a programme of archaeological investigation to monitor all ground disturbance associated with the development was required by the County Archaeological Officer (CAO) for Bedfordshire.

[1] Heritage and Environment Section Brief for a Programme of Archaeological Observation, Investigation, Recording, Analysis and Publication of Land at Stephenson Lower School, Canvin Way Bedford, Bedfordshire. V1 6th June 2005

[2] Albion Archaeology 2005 Land at Stephenson Lower School, Canvin Way, Bedford. Project Design for a Programme of Archaeological Observation, Investigation, Recording, Analysis and Publication 2005/45

2. RESULTS OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION

2.1 Introduction

The archaeological investigation was undertaken between the 27th July and 8th August 2005 in accordance with the approved Project Design. The methodology of the project is outlined below.

2.2 Methodology

1 Stripping of overburden or excavation of foundation or service trenches was monitored to try to identify *in situ* archaeological deposits.
2 All disturbed soil was scanned for artefacts.
3 Any excavated features and deposits were fully recorded in accordance with the Albion's *Procedures Manual* and the detailed requirements in section 3 of the *Brief*.
4 All archaeological observations were recorded at a suitable scale on base plans that can be tied in to the OS national grid.
5 Significant features were photographed using a digital camera.

Initially the construction programme focused on the southern part of the site where the existing car park was to be extended. Subsequently work shifted to the northern part of the area where the footings for the building and associated service trenches were opened. In this summary the results of the two areas will be discussed in turn, starting with the car park area. The deposits will be discussed sequentially from latest to earliest.

All archaeological and geological deposits (contexts) were assigned an individual number in a single sequence commencing at (1). Within this report context numbers issued to layers or deposits identified on site are expressed (**). Cuts for features are expressed [**].

2.3 Car Park Area

This area was stripped in two stages. The initial stage removed the modern landscaping material. Then an area c.5 by 4.5m was dug to a depth of c.1.3m below the present ground level, to create a soakaway (Figure 2).

2.3.1 Modern superficial landscaping

The thin grass horizon which covered the majority of this area was immediately above a topsoil horizon (1) consisting of dark grey black silty clay, up to 0.37m thick, with no obvious inclusions. The topsoil was imported to the site as part of the programme of construction and landscaping of the school. There were also areas of block paving (2) which were laid on a bed of compacted gritty sand (3), 0.05m thick.

2.3.2 Modern make-up deposits

Located directly under the superficial landscaping deposits (see ***2.3.1*** above) was a layer of compacted construction waste (4), composed of broken and whole bricks, sand and small stones, 0.30m thick. The material was derived from the construction of the school and was dumped directly on to the pre-existing ploughsoil (6).

2.3.3 Modern disturbance

Confined to the north-west face of the car park soakaway was a roughly concave depression [10] c. 0.4m wide east-west. This is interpreted as a possible wheel rut. In order to consolidate the ground, the void was filled with a mix of modern hard core including brick fragments (11). This feature appeared to have been sealed by the buried ploughsoil (6), however, it is likely that this relationship is misleading. It is more probable that the feature was cut through the ploughsoil. When it was backfilled the ploughsoil was replaced, either intentionally or accidentally, over the feature.

2.3.4 Buried ploughsoil

A layer of brown black silty clay (6) 0.15m to 0.22m thick extended across the area. The thickness of the deposit suggests that it is a former ploughsoil. The soil was buried by building debris, from the initial construction of the school (see ***2.3.2*** above).

2.3.5 Archaeological feature

Beneath the buried ploughsoil was a shallow concave pit [7], cut into the geological stratum. The pit was located on the south-western side of the soakaway, measuring at least 2.60m long east-west by at least 1.4m wide and 0.45m deep (Figure 2 and Figure 3: section 1). The feature contained two fills of mid red to grey brown silty clay 0.20m to 0.27m thick, with occasional to moderate amounts of small sized stones (Figure 4: photograph 1). Three very small sherds of Roman pottery, with a total weight of 3g were recovered from the upper fill (8). The nature of the fills suggests that they were derived from natural accumulation of material eroded from the upper soil profile.

2.3.6 Geological stratum

The undisturbed geological stratum (5) across the area was composed of dark yellow clay.

2.4 The Building Area

The second element of the archaeological investigation involved the monitoring of the excavation of wall footing trenches and associated deep service trenches for the nursery unit, north of the car park (Figure 2). Approximately 87m of foundation trench for the building were monitored. The trench was generally 0.7m wide and extended a maximum 1.2m below the level of the present ground, into the undisturbed geological strata.

2.4.1 Modern superficial landscaping

The topsoil (12, 17, 22, 26, 34 and 48) was composed of dark grey black silty clay, up to 0.37m thick, with no obvious inclusions. This material was imported to the site as part of the construction programme for the school. There were areas of block paving (38 and 45) which were laid on a bed of compacted gritty sand (46), 0.05m thick. Black tarmac (47) also formed one of the surfaces within the area. A small assemblage of post-medieval artefacts was recovered from this deposit including pottery, clay tobacco pipe stem fragments and a fragment of glass slag. A single small sherd of unidentified, though possibly Roman, pottery (2g) was also recovered. It is

likely that this material was brought to the site in the material used for landscaping.

2.4.2 Modern make-up deposits

Directly below the superficial landscaping deposits was a layer of yellow brown sand (13 and 23), up to 0.10m thick. This material was restricted to the southern part of the building area. In the northern part of the area, directly below the block paving, tarmac and imported topsoil, there was a deposit of crushed red brick (39) approximately 0.18m thick. This appears to have been a sub-stratum used to level up the area, prior to the laying of the different surfaces association with the school.

2.4.3 Services including manhole

Several modern drains and service trenches extended across the area of investigation. One of the drainage trenches [18] was recorded in detail, being generally 0.40m wide and 0.40m deep, with a ceramic pipe surrounded by a bedding of pea gravel. A brick lined manhole [32] was located towards the north-eastern limits of the area.

2.4.4 Building rubble

Two isolated layers of building rubble (27 and 44) were noted below the imported topsoil in the eastern part of the site. Layer (44) was located in the north-eastern area, near an existing access gate. These deposits were probably used to consolidate ground in the area of the access, being associated with the construction of the school.

2.4.5 Buried ploughsoil

A layer of buried ploughsoil (14, 20, 24, 28, 29, 35, 40 and 50) extended across the area of footing trenches, composed of brown black silty clay 0.15m to 0.22m thick. The ploughsoil had not been removed prior to the initial construction of the school, being sealed by deposits associated with its construction.

2.4.6 Archaeological features

A north-west to south-east oriented ditch [42] was identified within the footing trench which defined the eastern external wall of the building in the north (Figure 2), sealed beneath the buried ploughsoil. The ditch was at least 7.25m long, 1.35m wide and 0.60m deep with a slightly eroded “V” shaped profile (Figure 3: section 2 and Figure 4: photograph 2). The northern limit of the ditch was obscured by a deposit of modern building rubble (44), though no continuation of the ditch was identified in the undisturbed area further north. The ditch was filled with brown grey silty clay, which contained occasional amounts of small sized stones. As the wall footing trench extended along the line of the ditch a large part of the fill was investigated, however, no artefacts were recovered to provide dating evidence for the feature.

2.4.7 Geological Stratum

The undisturbed geological stratum across the area (15, 21, 25, 30, 36, 37, 41 51 and 56) was composed of dark yellow clay.

2.5 Finds Summary

The archaeological investigation produced a small finds assemblage, comprising pottery, clay pipe and glass slag. The material was scanned to ascertain its nature, condition and, where possible, date range. With the exception of three pottery sherds recovered from pit [7], all finds are unstratified.

The imported topsoil layer (12) yielded two sherds (13g) of 17th-18th century glazed earthenware (fabric type P01[3]) and an undiagnostic, abraded sand tempered sherd (2g) of probable Roman date. The deposit also contained three pieces of post-medieval clay tobacco pipe stem (9g) and a lump of glass slag (185g).

Three abraded Roman greyware sherds (fabric type R06C) weighing 3g, derived from the upper fill (8) of pit [7].

[3] Fabric types defined in accordance with the Bedfordshire Ceramic Type Series, held by Albion Archaeology.

3. CONCLUSION

In both areas of the site a similar sequence of deposits was identified, with various superficial layer of material associated with construction of the existing school being revealed. However, it was surprising to discover that the construction activity had resulted in less disturbance to the adjacent area than would be expected, with the old soil profile being buried under landscaping deposits. This had preserved the underlying archaeological deposits.

Two features were revealed below the former ploughsoil, though despite careful examination of the associated fills neither is securely datable. The lack of artefacts from the site suggests that there was a low-level of human activity in the vicinity. The ditch would appear to be a field boundary of uncertain date, whilst the pit was of uncertain function. There was no evidence for activity associated with the Roman kilns previously identified a relatively short distance to the west, in the vicinity of the Southway Building.

4. BIBLIOGRAPHY

Albion Archaeology 2000 *Procedures Manual, Volume 1: Fieldwork. 2nd Edition*

Albion Archaeology 2005 Land at Stephenson Lower School, Canvin Way, Bedford. Project Design for a Programme of Archaeological Observation, Investigation, Recording, Analysis and Publication. 2005/45

Bedfordshire Heritage and Environment Section 2005 Brief for a Programme of Archaeological Observation, Investigation, Recording, Analysis and Publication of Land at Stephenson Lower School, Canvin Way Bedford, Bedfordshire. V1 6th June 2005

FIGURES

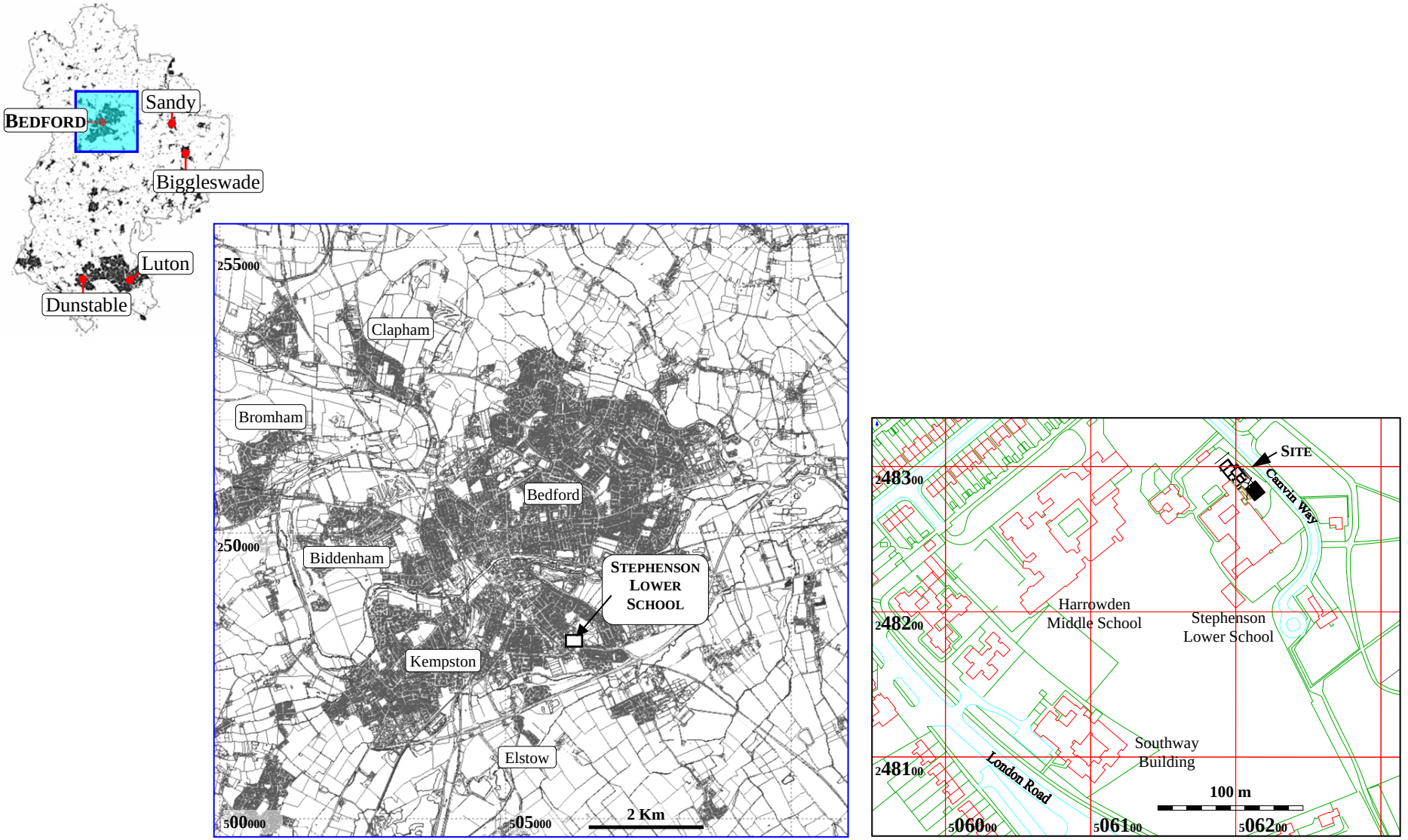


Figure 1: Site location map

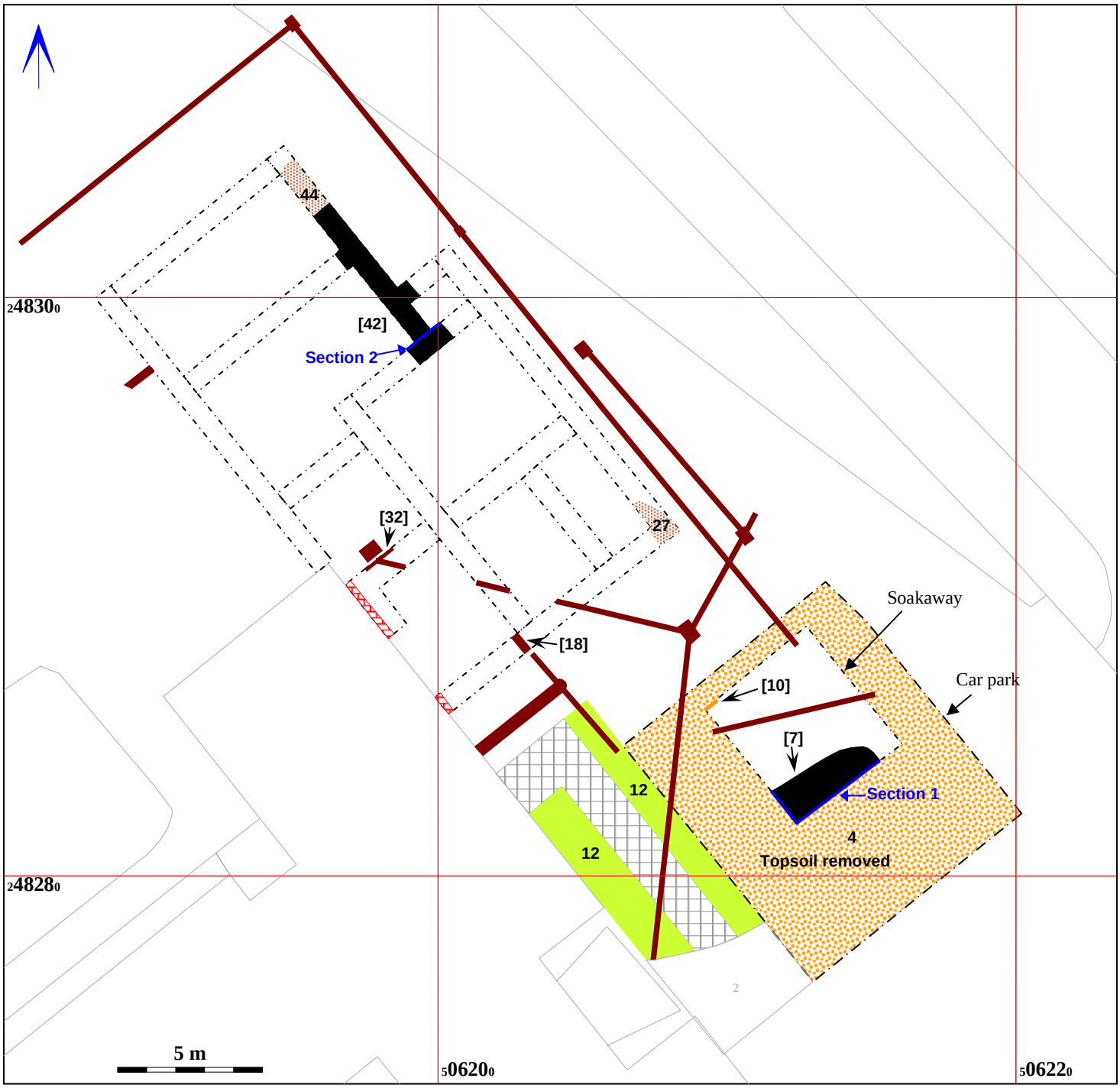
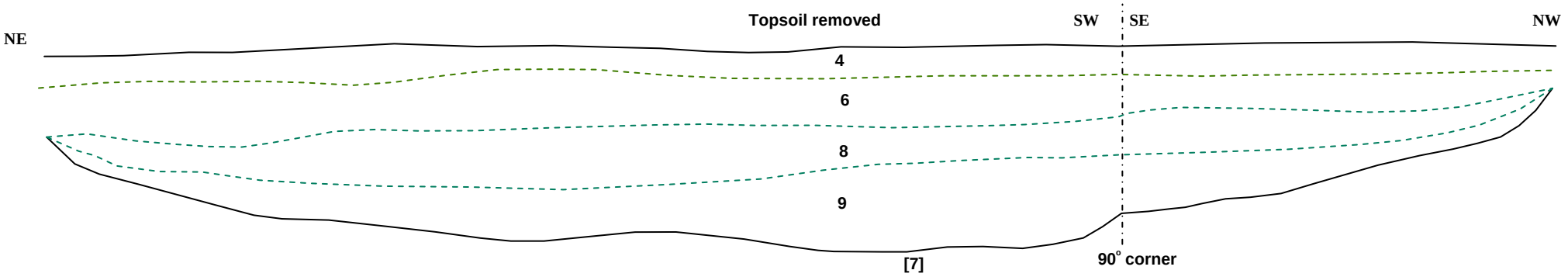
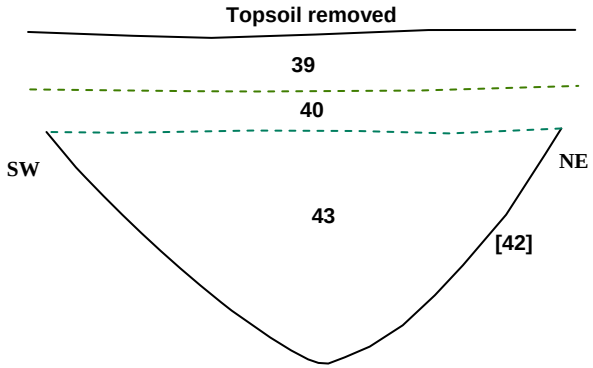


Figure 2: All features plan



Section 1



Section 2

Figure 3: Selected sections

Photograph 1- Southern face of soakaway cavity in car park area showing dark pit [7] sealed below the buried ploughsoil (6). The overlying modern deposits had been removed during initial stripping of the area. Scale 1metre in 0.5m divisions.

Photograph 2- Longitudinal section though north south ditch [42], the fill of which was sealed below ploughsoil.

Figure 4: Selected photographs