

**URSULA TAYLOR LOWER SCHOOL
HIGH STREET
CLAPHAM**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL OBSERVATION
INVESTIGATION AND RECORDING**

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Compiled by	Approved by
James Newbould	Drew Shotliff

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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.

Fieldwork was carried out by Christopher Mallows (Archaeological Supervisor). his report has been prepared by James Newbould (Project Officer), with contributions by Jackie Wells (Artefacts Officer). Joan Lightning (CAD Technician) produced the figures.

*Albion Archaeology
St Mary's Church
St Mary's Street
Bedford, MK42 0AS
☎: 01234 294007
Fax: 01234 294008
E-mail: office@albion-arch.com*

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Structure of the Report

Section 1 describes the background to the project. Section 2 describes the methodology used. There is a summary of the results of the fieldwork in Section 3, followed by a conclusion in Section 4. Section 5 is a bibliography. Appendix 1 contains a summary of the artefacts recovered. Appendix 2 provides an archaeological context summary.

Key Terms

Throughout this report, the following terms or abbreviations are used:

ACAO	Bedfordshire's Assistant County Archaeological Officer
DA	Development Area
IFA	Institute of Field Archaeologists



Non-Technical Summary

This document has been prepared by Albion Archaeology on behalf of Mouchel Parkman. In November 2003 Albion Archaeology attended the excavation of ground-works and footings in advance of the construction of a new classroom at Ursula Taylor Lower School. The site is centred at National Grid Reference TL 0332 5246.

The site of the proposed building lies within the historic core of the medieval village of Clapham, only c. 65m south-west of the parish church (Fig. 1). Previously recorded archaeological remains in the immediate vicinity include the site of a medieval manor house to the north and, beneath the school itself, features dating from the Mesolithic to the medieval periods.

Because the work had the potential to disturb similar archaeological remains, a brief for a programme of archaeological works was issued by the Assistant County Archaeological Officer (ACAO). Albion Archaeology produced a project design (2003) outlining how the requirements of the brief would be met.

A programme of archaeological observation, investigation and recording was then undertaken during the ground-works phase of construction. This document reports on the results of the work.

The remains of a probable NW-SE aligned, shallow ditch were identified within the development area. Artefactual evidence suggests an early medieval date (12th-13th century), although the pottery may be residual. This ditch is of indeterminate function but may represent some sort of boundary feature, possibly related to the manor house or medieval settlement excavated in 1987. The remains were moderately well preserved with evidence of later root damage.

The presence of 12th-13th century pottery within the topsoil suggests that modern activity, related to the construction of the school, may have disturbed other archaeological remains within the development area, again possibly related to the known medieval settlement. However, these sherds may equally have derived from probable ditch [104].

The identification of these remains is further confirmation of the survival of early medieval remains within the school grounds. The conditions and nature of the construction work prohibited a clearer understanding of their function and extent. As a probable boundary ditch, with potential associations with known medieval settlement activity, these remains are considered to be of local significance.

On completion of the project, the site archive will be deposited with Bedford Museum under Accession number BEDFM 2008/317. Prior to deposition the archive will be kept in secure storage at the offices of Albion at St Mary's Church, Bedford.



1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

In November 2003 a new classroom extension was built on the southern side of the northern wing of Ursula Taylor Lower School, High Street, Clapham. The footprint of the building was approximately 140sqm in extent. The works included the removal of small trees, shrubs and topsoil over an area of 180sqm and the excavation of foundation trenches, 0.7m wide. The site is henceforth referred to as the Development Area (DA).

Because the work had the potential to disturb archaeological remains, a brief for a programme of archaeological works (BCC 2003) was issued by the Assistant County Archaeological Officer (ACAO). A Project Design for the work (Albion Archaeology 2003) was prepared in accordance with ACAO requirements and was approved prior to commencement of fieldwork.

1.2 Site Location and Description

The site of the classroom extension is centred at TL 0332 5246, north of Clapham High Street and is only 65m south-west of the parish church (Fig. 1).

The site occupies an area of higher ground within the lower floodplain of the River Great Ouse, which lies approximately 220m to the south. Gleyed brown earth of the Biggleswade Association overlies the river terrace gravels.

1.3 Archaeological Background

The school lies within the historic core of Clapham, partially within the site of a medieval manor house, excavated by P Tilson in the 1970s. Further evidence for medieval settlement was uncovered in 1987 during construction of the eastern wing and playground of the school; this included post-built structures, walls and cobbled surfaces (Dawson 1998). At the same time features of prehistoric date, including Mesolithic pits and extensive evidence for Iron Age settlement, were also recorded. In 2007, a small evaluation revealed the remains of three pits containing early to post-medieval pottery and tile. These were thought to be related to the nearby manorial complex (Chapman 2008).

1.4 Project Objectives

Although the footprint of the proposed new classroom was relatively small, it was clearly sited in an area of high archaeological potential. The associated ground-works had the potential to impact on remains from the Mesolithic to the medieval periods. The aim of the fieldwork was therefore to:

- Observe all significant ground-works associated with the proposed development.
- Investigate and record these works and any archaeological deposits encountered within them.



- Prepare a report of the fieldwork findings for deposition in the Bedfordshire HER and with OASIS.
- Deposit the project archive with Bedford Museum.



2. METHODOLOGY

The archaeological works were undertaken between 4th and 6th November 2003. During this period, all construction ground-works requiring monitoring were completed. These ground-works were carried out by JCB excavator fitted with a toothed bucket.

The archaeological works adhered to the standards and field methods set out in the Project Design (Albion Archaeology 2003) and comprised the following:

- 1 Any stripping of overburden or excavation of foundation 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 could be tied in to the OS national grid.
- 5 Significant features were photographed using a digital camera.

Throughout the project, the standards set out in the IFA's *Code of Conduct and Standards and Guidance* documents (specifically *Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief*, September 1999) were followed.



3. RESULTS OF THE FIELDWORK

3.1 Introduction

All investigated archaeological features and deposits were issued with unique context numbers. Within this report, context numbers referring to cut features are written as [**], and layers or deposits within cut features are written as (**).

Detailed information on all the deposits and archaeological features referred to below can be found in Appendix 2.

3.2 Overburden

Approximately 0.3m of topsoil (100) was removed within the 180sqm DA revealing a largely undisturbed, silty subsoil (101) which may itself be a buried topsoil. No archaeological features or deposits were identified at this level. However, two sherds of 12th-13th century shell-tempered pottery (weighing 69g) and a small quantity of animal bone (36g) were recovered from the topsoil. It was noted that the topsoil appeared to have been re-modelled during the construction of the school, at which time trees and shrubs were planted. It is possible that these works may have disturbed underlying archaeological remains, possibly associated with the adjacent medieval settlement.

3.3 Early Medieval

A total of *c.* 37m of footing trenches was excavated within the DA (Plate 1). The remains of a possible ditch [104] were identified in the sections of the N-S and E-W trenches, toward the centre of the area (Plate 2, Fig. 1). These remains were shallow and concave, with diffuse edges, probably as a result of post-depositional processes. The possible ditch was aligned NW-SE and was up to 1.5m wide and 0.2m deep. It contained a single, silty fill which had probably accumulated as a result of natural weathering and erosion. Six sherds (45g) of 12th-13th century shell-tempered pottery were recovered from the fill, although these may have been residual. Frequent flecks of charcoal were also recorded, suggesting that burnt material existed in the surrounding soils, prior to the silting up of the ditch.



4. SYNTHESIS

4.1 *Discussion*

The remains of a probable, NW-SE aligned, shallow ditch were identified within the DA. Artefactual evidence suggests an early medieval date (12th-13th century), although the pottery may be residual. The function of this ditch is uncertain but it may represent some sort of boundary feature, possibly related to the manor house or medieval settlement excavated in 1987 (Dawson 1998). The remains were moderately well preserved with evidence of post-depositional root damage.

The presence of 12th-13th century pottery within the topsoil suggests that modern activity, related to the construction of the school, may have disturbed other archaeological remains within the DA, possibly related to the known medieval settlement. However these sherds may equally have derived from the remains of the probable ditch [104].

4.2 *Significance*

The identification of a these remains is further confirmation of early medieval activity within the grounds of the school. The conditions and nature of the construction work prohibited a clearer understanding of their function and extent. As a probable boundary ditch, with potential associations with known medieval settlement activity, these remains are considered to be of local significance.

4.3 *Project Archive*

It is anticipated that the project archive comprising documentary records will be deposited with Bedford Museum under accession code BEDFM 2008/317.



5. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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6. APPENDICES

6.1 Appendix 1 – Artefact Summary

The archaeological works yielded a small quantity of pottery and animal bone (Table 1). Pottery comprises eight wheel-thrown rim and body sherds in shell-tempered fabric type B07¹, datable to the 12th-13th centuries.

Three unstratified rib fragments from a large mammal (36g) of indeterminate species were also recovered.

Feature	Type	Context	Spot date*	Finds summary
100	Topsoil	100	Early medieval	Pottery (69g), animal bone (36g)
104	Ditch	103	Early medieval	Pottery (45g)

* spot date based on date of latest artefact in context

Table 1: Finds summary

¹ Fabric type defined in accordance with the Bedfordshire Ceramic Type Series, currently maintained by Albion Archaeology on behalf of Bedfordshire County Council.



6.2 Appendix 2 - Context Summary



Area: 1
Extent (ha): 1.018
OS Co-ordinates: TL0332005246
Description: Topsoil was stripped from the entire area prior to the opening of a series of foundation trenches 0.7m in width and a total of 37m in length

Context:	Type:	Description:	Excavated:	Finds Present:
100	Topsoil	Loose dark brown sandy silt occasional small ceramic building material, occasional small stones. 0.3m thick	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
101	Subsoil	Firm light grey brown sandy silt occasional small stones. 0.4m thick	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
102	Natural	Firm mid orange brown sandy clay	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
104	Ditch	Linear NW-SE profile: concave base: flat dimensions: max breadth 1.5m, max depth 0.2m, max length 2.m	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
103	Ditch	Firm dark brown black clay silt frequent flecks charcoal, occasional small stones. 0.2m thick	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

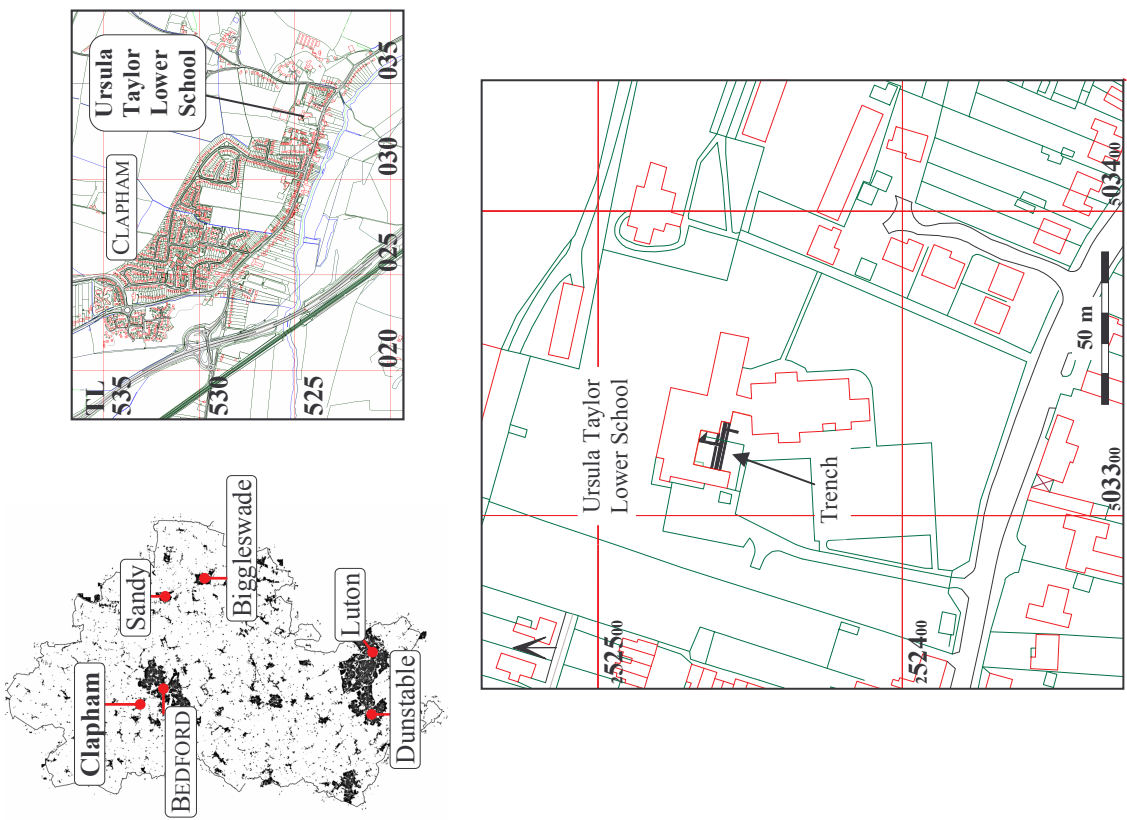


Figure 1: Site location and all features

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Plate 1: Footings facing east.



Plate 2: Probable ditch [104]. 1m scale.