

**ST SWITHUN'S LOWER SCHOOL  
SANDY  
BEDFORDSHIRE**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
FIELD EVALUATION**

Project: SS1559  
OASIS number: albionar1-64318

Document: 2009/98  
Version 1.0

Compiled by	Checked by	Approved by
James Newbould	Gary Edmondson	Drew Shotliff

15<sup>th</sup> September 2009

Produced for:  
Mouchel on behalf of  
Central Bedfordshire Council



---

## **Contents**

---

List of Figures.....	3
Preface.....	4
Structure of this Report.....	4
Key Terms.....	5
Non-Technical Summary.....	6
<b>1. INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>7</b>
1.1 Project Background.....	7
1.2 Site Location and Description.....	7
1.3 Archaeological Background.....	7
1.4 Project Objectives.....	9
<b>2. METHODOLOGY.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>3. RESULTS.....</b>	<b>11</b>
3.1 Introduction.....	11
3.2 Overburden and Undisturbed Geological Deposits.....	11
3.3 Ground Levels.....	11
3.4 Modern Landscaping.....	11
3.5 Modern Intrusion.....	12
<b>4. SYNTHESIS OF RESULTS.....</b>	<b>13</b>
4.1 Summary.....	13
4.2 Preservation and Significance.....	13
<b>5. BIBLIOGRAPHY.....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>6. APPENDICES.....</b>	<b>15</b>
6.1 Trench Summaries.....	15



## **List of Figures**

Figure 1: Site location and trench plan

Figure 2: All features and deposits

Figure 3: Trench 2 showing phases of landscaping and deposits

*All figures are bound at the back of this report.*



## Preface

*Every effort has been made in the preparation of this document to provide as complete an assessment as possible, within the terms of the specification. 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.*

*The project was commissioned by Mouchel, acting on behalf of Central Bedfordshire Council and was monitored on behalf of the Local Planning Authority by Hannah Firth, the Central Bedfordshire Council Archaeologist (CBCA).*

*The fieldwork was undertaken by Kathy Pilkinton (Assistant Archaeological Supervisor). This report has been prepared by James Newbould (Project Officer) and edited by Gary Edmondson (Project Manager) with figures by James Newbould and Joan Lightning (CAD Technician). All Albion projects are under the overall management of Drew Shotliff (Operations Manager).*

*Albion Archaeology  
St Mary's Church  
St Mary's Street  
Bedford, MK42 0AS  
☎: 01234 294001  
Fax: 01234 294008  
e-mail: [office@albion-arch.com](mailto:office@albion-arch.com)  
Website: [www.albion-arch.com](http://www.albion-arch.com)*

## Version History

<i>Version</i>	<i>Issue date</i>	<i>Reason for re-issue</i>
<i>1.0</i>	<i>15/09/2009</i>	<i>n/a</i>

## Structure of this Report

Section 1 serves as an introduction to the site, describing its location, archaeological background and the aims of the project. Section 2 describes the trial trenching methodology and Section 3 summarises the results. Section 4 provides a synthesis of the results and assesses their significance. Section 5 is a bibliography.

Appendix 1 contains trench summary information and detailed contextual data.



## **Key Terms**

Throughout this document the following terms or abbreviations are used:

CBC	Central Bedfordshire Council
CBCA	Central Bedfordshire Council Archaeologist
Client	Mouchel, acting on behalf of CBC
IfA	Institute for Archaeologists
LPA	Local Planning Authority
Procedures Manual	<i>Procedures Manual Volume 1 Fieldwork</i> , 2nd edn, 2001 Albion Archaeology
HER	Historic Environment Record



## **Non-Technical Summary**

*Mouchel are acting on behalf of Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC) to manage the construction of a new autism unit at St Swithun's Lower School, Sandy, Bedfordshire. Planning permission (MB/TP/2009/00369) for these works has been granted by CBC (formerly Mid Bedfordshire District Council). The new unit is hitherto referred to as the Development Area (DA).*

*The DA lies within an archaeologically sensitive area. As a result, the Central Bedfordshire Council Archaeologist (CBCA) advised the LPA that a condition should be attached to the planning permission requiring the implementation of a programme of archaeological investigation. On 19th August 2009, the CBCA issued two briefs (CBC 2009a, 2009b), outlining a three-staged approach to the programme of archaeological work. In September 2009, Albion Archaeology was commissioned by Mouchel to carry out the Stage 1, intrusive evaluation of the DA and to prepare a report on the results (this document).*

*The DA comprises an area of c. 130m<sup>2</sup> located on the north-eastern end of St Swithun's Lower School, Sandy, Bedfordshire and is centred on (NGR) TL 1748 4901. It lies at a height of c. 35m OD and occupies relatively flat ground in the valley of the River Ivel, c. 250m to the south-west. The current land use is largely tarmac, concrete and flagged surfaces with grassed areas. The underlying geology comprises Lower Greensand.*

*The evaluation revealed no archaeological remains. With the exception of undisturbed geological strata, all deposits encountered were modern in origin.*

*The evaluation revealed that land within the DA had been subject to two distinct phases of 20th-century landscaping. The first pre-dated the school and comprised large scale ground reduction followed by the introduction of levelling layers and a landscaped topsoil surface, c. 0.7m below current ground level. The second comprised ground works, observed in the south-eastern part of the DA, for concrete surfaces and paths associated with the construction of St Swithun's Lower School in the 1990s. Further levelling layers were also added at this time, bringing the ground within the remainder of the DA to its current level.*

*Given the extent of mechanical disturbance in the later half of the 20th century, it is very unlikely that pre-modern remains are preserved within the DA.*

*The project archive will be accessioned with Bedford Museum (Accession number BEDFM2009.57).*



## 1. INTRODUCTION

---

### 1.1 *Project Background*

Mouchel are acting on behalf of Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC) to manage the construction of a new autism unit at St Swithun's Lower School, Sandy, Bedfordshire. Planning permission (MB/TP/2009/00369) for these works has been granted by CBC (formerly Mid Bedfordshire District Council). The new unit is hitherto referred to as the Development Area (DA).

The DA lies within an archaeologically sensitive area. As a result, the Central Bedfordshire Council Archaeologist (CBCA) advised the LPA that a condition should be attached to the planning permission requiring the implementation of a programme of archaeological investigation. On 19th August 2009, the CBCA issued two briefs (BCC 2009a, 2009b), outlining a three-staged approach to a programme of archaeological work. In September 2009, Albion Archaeology was commissioned by Mouchel to carry out the Stage 1, intrusive evaluation of the DA and to prepare a report on the results (this document).

### 1.2 *Site Location and Description*

The DA comprises an area of *c.* 130m<sup>2</sup> located on the north-eastern end of St Swithun's Lower School, Sandy, Bedfordshire, centred on (NGR) TL 1748 4901 (Figure 1). It lies at a height of *c.* 35m OD and occupies relatively flat ground in the valley of the River Ivel, *c.* 250m to the south-west. The School grounds are bordered by Ivel road to the east and High Street to the north (Figure 1). The current land use is largely tarmac, concrete and flagged surfaces with grassed areas. The underlying geology comprises Lower Greensand.

### 1.3 *Archaeological Background*

Early prehistoric activity in Sandy is limited to isolated findspots. A late Neolithic wrist-guard of polished slate (HER1505) was found on Tower Hill, *c.* 600m south of the DA. Such objects were often included in Beaker burials as grave goods. However, no trace of a Neolithic/early Bronze Age burial was recorded. Later prehistoric remains comprise the Iron Age hill forts of Galley Hill (HER445), which lies *c.* 700m to the east of the DA, Caesar's Camp (HER442) and Sandy Lodge (HER1164) which both lie *c.* 1.5km to the south-east of the DA. The existence of three hill forts illustrates the importance of Sandy in the Iron Age.

Numerous Iron Age coins have been found in Sandy. These include HER447, HER11320 and HER16033. Many of the coins are from the reign of Cunobelinus (1st century BC). It has been suggested that Sandy may have been the site of a tribal mint (Dawson 1997). Late Iron Age features seem to underlie much of the Roman stratigraphy within Sandy, and there have even been suggestions that a small oppidum or proto-town was located here.

The DA is situated *c.* 400m to the north-west of the core of the Roman town (HER444) and its associated cemetery (HER11318). The archaeological



background of Roman Sandy has been summarised in greater detail in the Extensive Urban Survey (Albion Archaeology 2005).

The exact limits of the Roman town have not been established, but the area of greatest density of archaeology is located on what is still largely a green field site to the south-east of the modern town. The Roman cemetery (HER11318), parts of which were excavated from 1850 onwards, contained both cremations and inhumations suggesting that it was in use for some time.

The HER also records two conjectural Roman roads, located to the south and west of the DA. Their projected routes head north-west toward Sharnbrook (HER728) and eastwards toward Bedford (HER738) respectively. Simco (1984) has suggested that the former is largely a modern invention of the Viatores. Supporting evidence for the latter exists in the form of cropmarks between Cardington and Willington. It has been suggested that this road was either incomplete or was part of a local track-way rather than a formal road (Simco 1984).

The most recent excavations within the Roman core have revealed no evidence for continuity of settlement into the Saxon period. However, a Saxon presence is attested by cemetery remains dating from the 5th-6th centuries, located *c.* 200m to the north-east of the DA (HER432). At least thirteen Saxon urns, as well as two knives, a bone pin and a silver bracelet, are known to have come from Sandy. The location of the associated settlement (if any) is as yet unknown.

The DA lies within the medieval historic core of Sandy (HER17131). No standing remains from the Middle Ages are recorded in the HER; indeed, the fabric of the standing historic remains adjacent to the DA is largely post-medieval and modern. It is likely that these buildings would have had a significant negative impact on any medieval remains lining the frontage of the High Street. However, no post-medieval buildings are known to have stood within the DA.

The medieval parish church of St Swithun's (HER5396) and its associated graveyard (HER8959), lie *c.* 100m to the north-west of the DA. It was largely built in the 15th century but was first mentioned in 1240 (Albion Archaeology 2005). However, it is possible it may have been located on the site of an earlier Saxon church. To the south-west of the DA are the standing remains of a water mill (HER1111). Although built in 1857, it is possible that the present mill replaced an earlier structure mentioned in the Domesday survey.

The majority of the HER records within 1km of the DA relate to post-medieval remains. The DA lies within the boundaries of the former post-medieval landscaped park and gardens known as Sandye Place Grounds (HER9437). Within the park grounds, *c.* 200m to the west of the DA, stand the remains of the 18th-century house of Henry Flitcroft (HER440). These remains are now incorporated into the fabric of Sandye Place Middle School. The HER records the house as being sited on top of an undated mound. Also within the grounds of Sandye Place, *c.* 250m south of the DA, is an earthwork (HER3033) recorded as the possible remains of a Danish camp. Indeed the 1901 Ordnance Survey map





marks the site as “Danish Camp”. However, the 1926 edition records the earthwork as a manor house. The true nature of the remains is as yet unknown. An early 20th-century Grade II listed dovecote (HER1683) also survives in the southern part of the park close to the river bank.

Sandy is rich in standing post-medieval remains. More than a dozen listed buildings dating from the 17th to 19th centuries line the High Street (HERs 7506-7520) and Ivel Road (HERs 7521-7523, 7525-7527) which form the northern and eastern boundaries (respectively) of St Swithun’s School grounds. The now demolished St Swithun’s rectory, built in 1729 (HER2043), is also known to have stood *c.* 100m to the north-west of the DA.

#### **1.4 Project Objectives**

The layout of the trenches was discussed with and approved by the CBCA prior to the commencement of the evaluation. The trenches were arranged to maximise their ability to test the archaeological potential of the DA. The overall objectives of the work were to gain information on:

- the location, extent, nature and date of any archaeological features or deposits that might be present;
- the integrity and state of preservation of any archaeological features or deposits that might be present; and to
- recover artefacts to assist in the development of a type series within the region;
- recover palaeo-environmental remains to determine local environmental conditions.



## 2. METHODOLOGY

---

Trial trenching evaluation took place between 8th and 9th September 2009. Both the proposed trenches were opened. Trench 1 was placed in a NW-SE alignment due to the presence of an active fire escape route and tree within the DA. Trench 2 was also shortened by *c.* 1m to accommodate the fire escape route. The CBCA was informed of the changes to the trench layout.

Throughout the project the standards set out in the following documents were adhered to:

- IfA's *Code of Conduct (1999a)*
- IfA's *Standards and Guidance for Field Evaluation (1999b)*
- Albion Archaeology's *Procedures Manual for Archaeological Fieldwork and the Analysis of Fieldwork Records (2001)*
- English Heritage's *Management of Archaeological Projects (1991)*

The location of the trenches was marked out on the ground in advance of machine excavation. Overburden was removed using a mechanical excavator, fitted with a toothless ditching bucket and operating under close archaeological supervision. These deposits were removed down to either the top of archaeological deposits or undisturbed geological deposits, whichever was encountered first.

The bases and sections of all trenches were cleaned by hand in order to clarify the nature of potential archaeological remains. The deposits and any potential remains were noted, cleaned, excavated by hand and recorded using Albion Archaeology's *pro forma* sheets. The trenches were subsequently drawn, and photographed as appropriate. All deposits were recorded using a unique recording number sequence commencing at 100 for Trench 1 and 200 for Trench 2.

Modern artefactual materials, including 19th- to 20th-century ceramic building material (CBM), were collected but not retained.

The CBCA was informed of the results of trial trenching prior to backfilling. The CBCA gave permission for backfilling without the need for a site monitoring visit.



### 3. RESULTS

---

#### 3.1 Introduction

Deposits and features of archaeological interest are summarised below in chronological order. Allocated context numbers are prefixed with the trench number they were recorded from, *i.e.* contexts (100) and (101) are from Trench 1.

Detailed technical information on all deposits and archaeological features can be found in Appendix 1 (Section 6.1).

#### 3.2 Overburden and Undisturbed Geological Deposits

Pockets of undisturbed geological strata were encountered in Trenches 1 and 2 at a depth of *c.* 27.3mOD. However, the upper horizons of these deposits were heavily truncated by modern activity. With the exception of geological strata, all deposits encountered were modern in origin and are discussed in Sections 3.3-3.5 (below).

#### 3.3 Ground Levels

The current, average ground level within the DA and wider school grounds is *c.* 28.15mOD. The land surrounding St Swithun's School slopes gently upwards towards the north-east. The flat area on which the school now sits has clearly been cut into this natural slope. Indeed the land on the opposite side of the north-eastern school boundary wall is at *c.* 28.80m OD, some 0.65m above the level of the school grounds (including land within the DA). This suggests that a substantial amount of material has been removed from within the DA and school grounds.

#### 3.4 Modern Landscaping

The evaluation revealed two distinct phases of intrusive modern landscaping (Figures 2-3).

##### Phase 1

The first, deeper phase [110/208] was characterised by the reduction of ground to 27.03mOD (Figures 2 and 3). This was followed by the introduction of levelling layers (106, 107, 201-203) and an topsoil surface (105/210). The top of this former surface was encountered at 27.60-27.85mOD (*c.* 0.7m below current ground level) indicating that this landscaping pre-dates the construction of the school in the 1990s (Figures 2 and 2b). A single land drain of probable 19th-century date was encountered heading broadly SW-NE across Trench 1 (Figures 2 and 2b). Its presence indicates that it was deliberately avoided by Phase 1 landscaping.

The layers beneath (105) contained modern ceramic building materials and the depth, shape and scale of the intrusion suggests they were within a machine dug cut. It is likely, therefore, that this phase of landscaping occurred in the latter half of the 20th century. Indeed, anecdotal evidence suggests the site was reduced and levelled in the mid 1960s.



## **Phase 2**

This shallower phase of intrusive landscaping [209] was only observed in the south-eastern section of Trench 2 (Figure 3). It was cut into the upper part of the former surface (109/210) in preparation for a concrete plinth and block path (200) during the construction of the school in the 1990s (Figures 3a-b). Above-ground landscaping also took place at this time with the addition of further levelling layers and surfaces (100-104), which were added to create the current ground surface (Figures 2 and 2b).

### **3.5 Modern Intrusion**

An irregularly shaped intrusive feature [205] was encountered in the north-western end of Trench 2 (Figures 2-2a, 3a-b). It cut through the first phase of landscaping [110/208] and its deposits contained modern ceramic building materials, indicating a modern date for the disturbance. It is possible that it may have been caused by tree roots or burrowing animals.



## 4. SYNTHESIS OF RESULTS

---

### 4.1 *Summary*

The evaluation revealed no archaeological remains. With the exception of undisturbed geological strata, all deposits encountered were modern in origin.

The evaluation revealed that land within the DA had been subject to two distinct phases of 20th-century landscaping. The first pre-dated the school and comprised large scale ground reduction followed by the introduction of levelling layers and a landscaped topsoil surface, *c.* 0.7m below current ground level. The second comprised ground works, observed in the south-eastern part of the DA, for concrete surfaces and paths associated with the construction of St Swithun's Lower School in the 1990s. Further levelling layers were also added at this time, bringing the ground within the remainder of the DA to its current level.

### 4.2 *Preservation and Significance*

The difference in height between land within the DA (28.15mOD) and that to the north-east of the school boundary (28.80mOD) indicates the depth of material that may have been removed during the first phase of 20th-century landscaping. Undisturbed geological deposits were encountered at *c.* 27.3mOD, suggesting that as much as 1.5m of overburden may have been removed prior to the construction of the school. Such disturbance is likely to have removed all traces of pre-modern surfaces and cut deep into the geological deposits within the DA and the school grounds.

Given the extent of mechanical disturbance in the later half of the 20th century, it is very unlikely that pre-modern remains are preserved within the DA.



## 5. BIBLIOGRAPHY

---

- Albion Archaeology 2001 *Procedures Manual Volume 1 Fieldwork*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.
- Albion Archaeology 2005 *Extensive Urban Survey for Bedfordshire: The Roman Town of Sandy: Archaeological Assessment*. 2001/36
- CBC 2009a *Brief for a Programme of Archaeological Investigation, Recording, Analysis and Publication at St Swithun's Lower School, Sandy, Bedfordshire*.
- CBC 2009b *Brief for the Archaeological Evaluation of St Swithun's Lower School, Ivel Road, Sandy, Bedfordshire*.
- Dawson M 1997, *Roman Sandy*. BCAS
- English Heritage 1991 *The Management of Archaeological Projects*, 2nd edition. English Heritage (London)
- English Heritage 2002 *Environmental Archaeology: a guide to the theory and practice of methods, from sampling and recovery to post-excavation*
- Simco A 1984 *Survey of Bedfordshire: The Roman period*. BCC



## 6. APPENDICES

---

### 6.1 Trench Summaries



**Trench: 1**

**Max Dimensions: Length: 6.90 m. Width: 2.00 m. Depth to Archaeology Min: m. Max: m.**

**Co-ordinates: OS Grid Ref.: TL (Easting: 17482: Northing: 49041)**

**OS Grid Ref.: TL (Easting: 17485: Northing: 49036)**

**Reason: To evaluate archaeological potential**

<b>Context:</b>	<b>Type:</b>	<b>Description:</b>	<b>Excavated:</b>	<b>Finds Present:</b>
100	Turf line	Friable dark grey brown sandy silt 0.06m thick	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
101	Make up layer	Friable mid brown grey sandy silt occasional small-medium ceramic building material 0.34m thick	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
102	Make up layer	Friable mid yellow grey sandy silt moderate small-medium ceramic building material 0.28m thick	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
103	Redeposited natural	Loose mid yellow sand 0.11m thick	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
104	Make up layer	Compact light grey silty sand frequent small-medium ceramic building material, frequent small concrete 0.09m thick, contains fragments of tarmac	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
109	Natural	Firm light yellow orange sand	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
110	Modern disturbance	base: flat dimensions: min depth 1.1m Large scale ground reduction, full extent unknown	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
105	External surface	Firm mid brown grey silty sand moderate small ceramic building material, occasional small-medium stones 0.3m thick	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
106	Make up layer	Compact mid yellow orange sand occasional small ceramic building material 0.26m thick	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
107	Make up layer	Compact light brown sand frequent medium-large ceramic building material 0.2m thick	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
108	Redeposited natural	Compact mid orange sand 0.12m thick	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>





**Trench: 2**

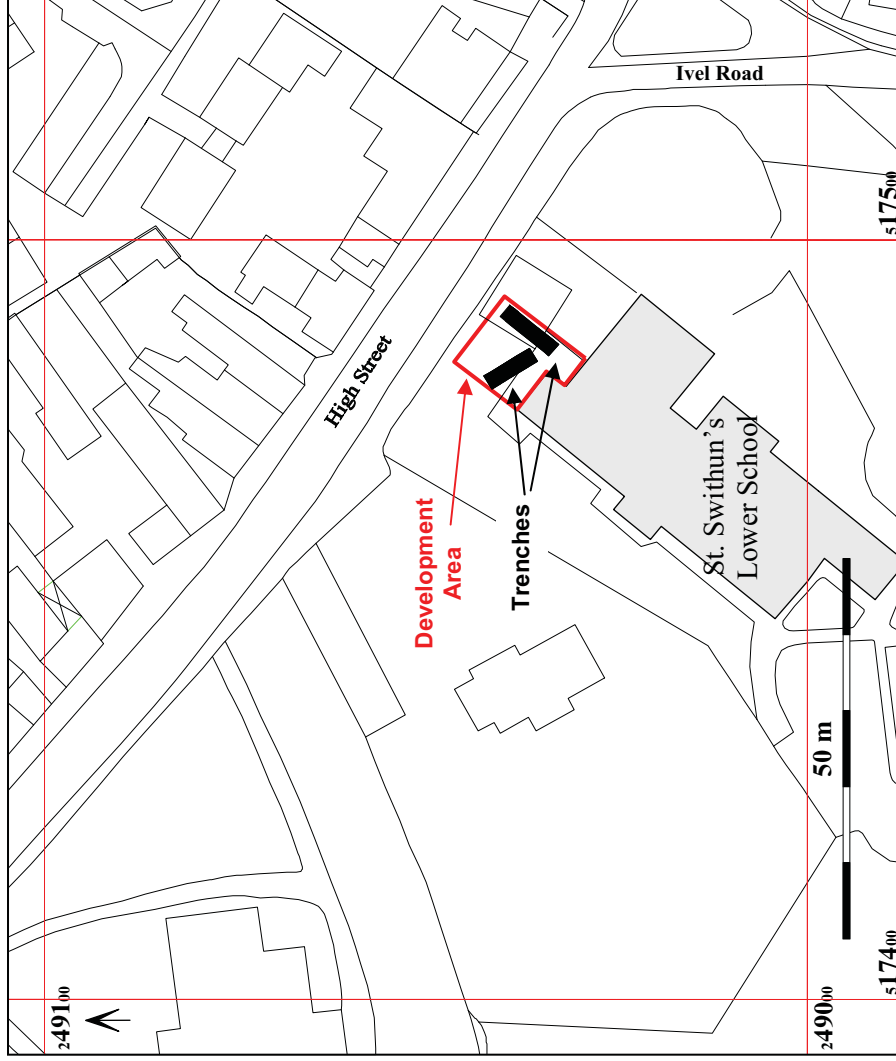
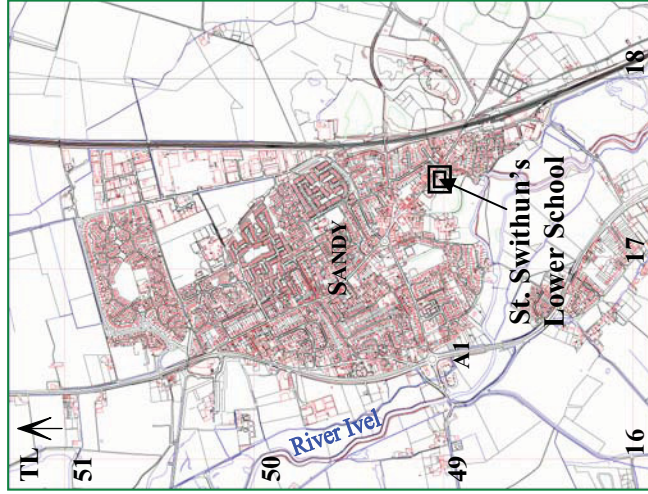
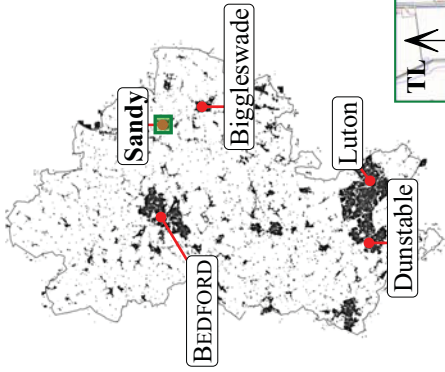
**Max Dimensions: Length: 8.40 m. Width: 2.00 m. Depth to Archaeology Min: m. Max: m.**

**Co-ordinates: OS Grid Ref.: TL** (Easting: 17485: Northing: 49033)

**OS Grid Ref.: TL** (Easting: 17491: Northing: 49040)

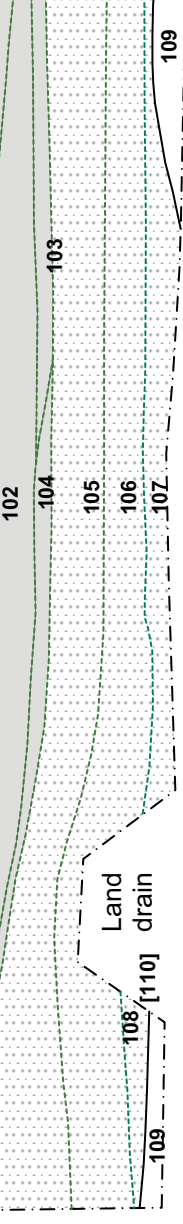
**Reason: To evaluate archaeological potential**

<b>Context:</b>	<b>Type:</b>	<b>Description:</b>	<b>Excavated:</b>	<b>Finds Present:</b>
204	Natural	Friable light yellow orange sand	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
205	Modern disturbance	Irregular profile: irregular base: uneven dimensions: max breadth 0.95m, max depth 0.65m	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
206	Lower fill	Friable light yellow orange sand occasional small ceramic building material	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
207	Upper fill	Friable mid brown yellow sand	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
208	Modern disturbance	base: flat dimensions: min depth 0.43m Large scale ground reduction, full extent unknown	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
201	Make up layer	Friable dark brown grey sand frequent small-medium ceramic building material 0.3m thick	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
202	Redeposited natural	Friable light orange yellow sand occasional small ceramic building material 0.31m thick	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
203	Make up layer	Friable mid brown sand occasional small ceramic building material 0.28m thick	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
210	External surface	Firm mid brown grey silty sand moderate small ceramic building material, occasional small-medium stones 0.3m thick	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
209	Modern disturbance	base: uneven dimensions: max depth 0.6m Machine dug groundworks for path and concrete plinth	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
200	Modern disturbance	Frequent small-large stones 0.31m thick, concrete, gravel, mixed topsoil and natural	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>






**Figure 1: Site location and trench plan**

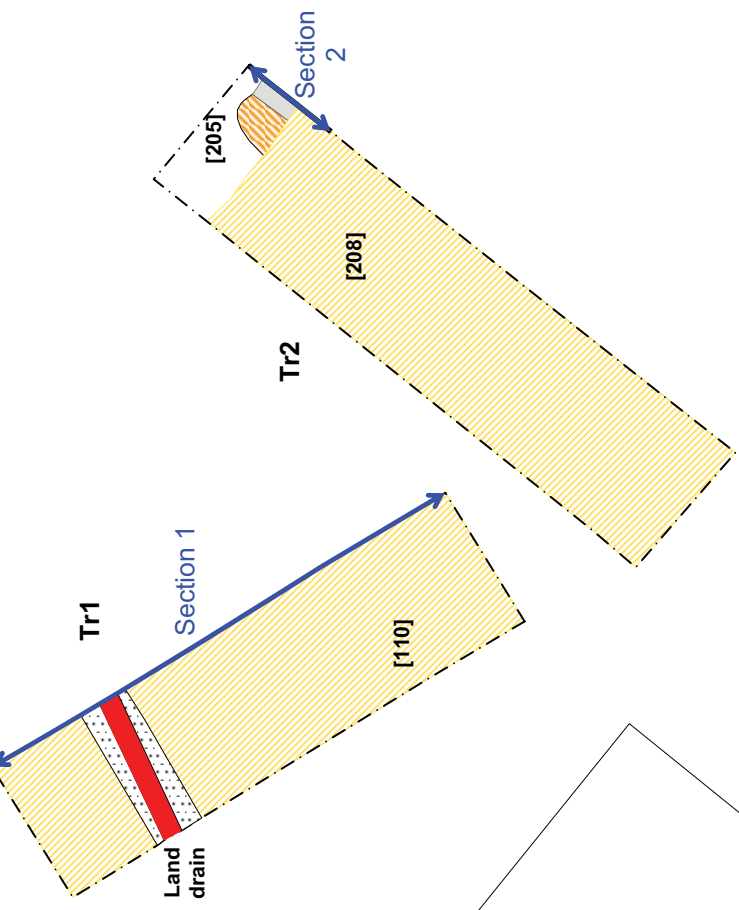
Base map reproduced from the Ordnance Survey Map with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, by Albion Archaeology, Central Bedfordshire Council. OS Licence No. 100017358(LA). © Crown Copyright.



Section 1

**Key**

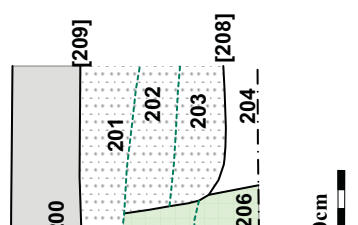
-  Phase 1 landscaping
-  Phase 2 landscaping
-  Possible rooting/burrow



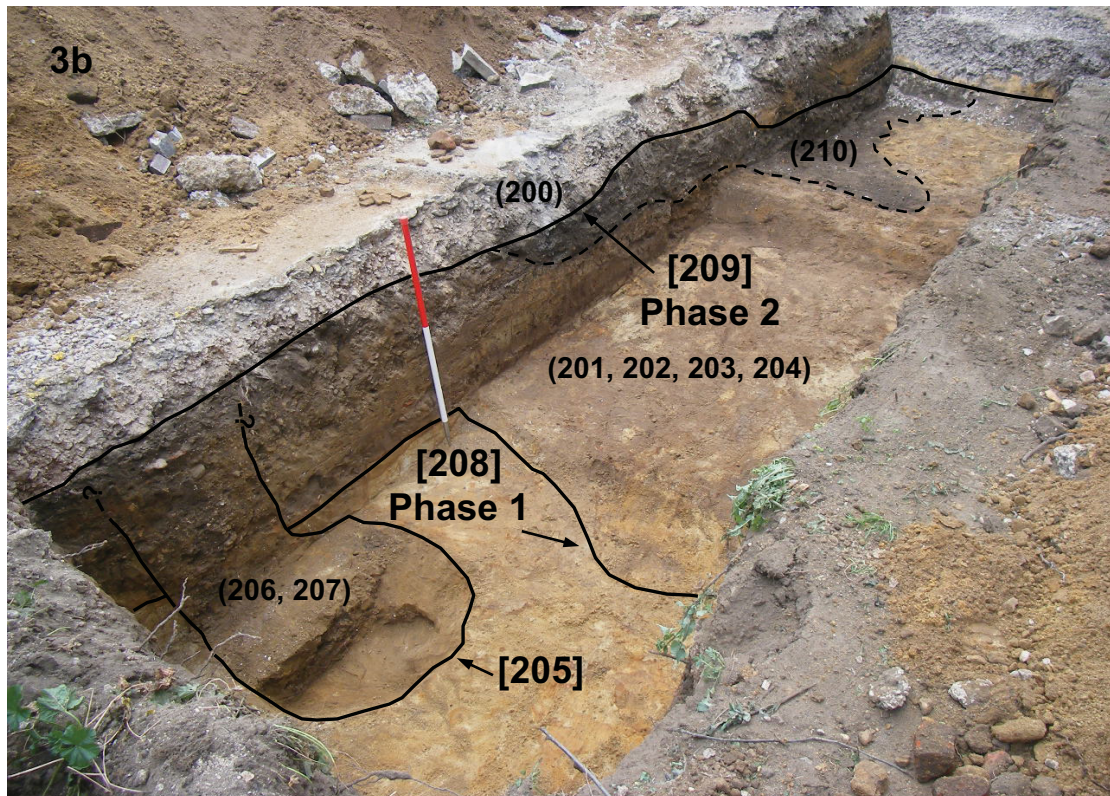
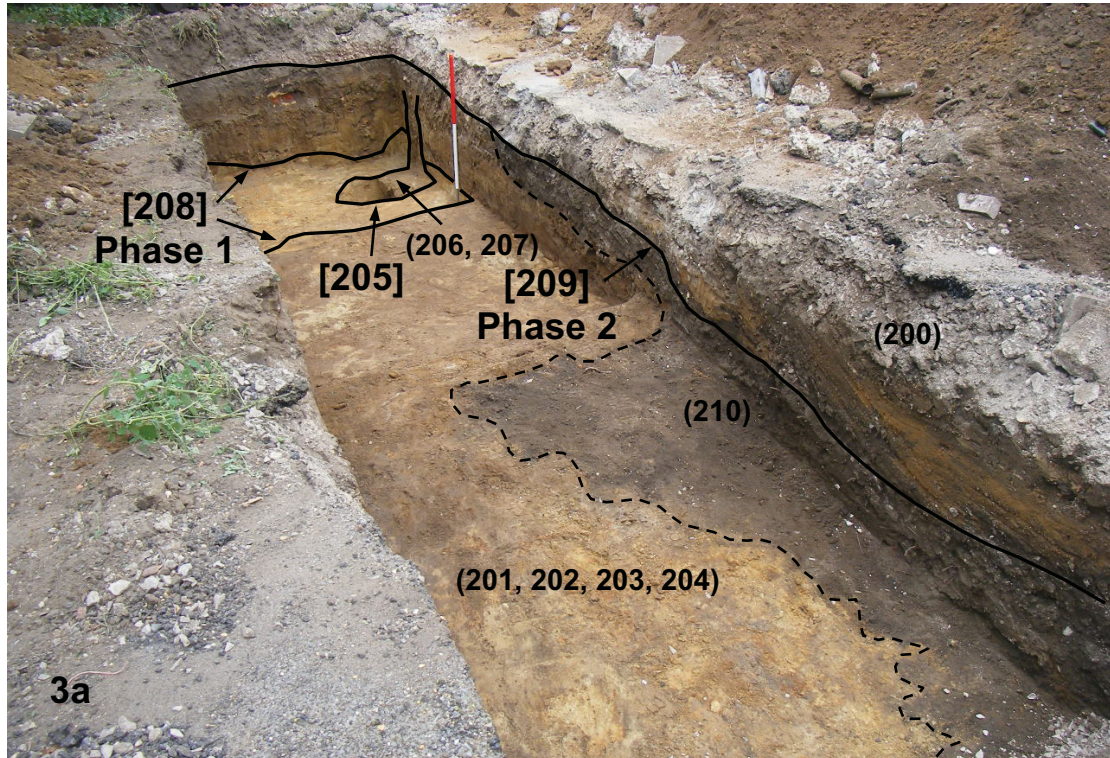
Photograph of Trench 2. Looking NE at possible root hole [205].  
Scale 1m



Photograph of Trench 1. Looking SW.  
Scale 1m



Section 2



**Figure 3:** Trench 2 showing phases of landscaping and deposits.  
Looking NE and SW. Scale 1m