



Northamptonshire Archaeology

Archaeological excavation at St. Mary's Lower
School, Stotfold, Bedfordshire
BEDFM: 2010.32



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Report 10/94

June 2010



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QUALITY CONTROL

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OASIS REPORT FORM

PROJECT DETAILS		
Project title	Archaeological excavation at St. Mary's Lower School, Stotfold, Bedfordshire, June 2010	
An archaeological excavation of land at St. Mary's Lower School, Stotfold, was carried out in advance of the construction of an extension to the school. The excavation revealed a 12th century boundary ditch, and a pit. The ditch and pit may relate to features recorded during excavations in 1975, suggesting medieval settlement remains. Made-up ground was encountered in the southern part of the site, which was probably connected to the last phase of extension to the school.		
Project type	Archaeological excavation	
Previous work	Excavation by Bedfordshire County Council in 1975 (Simco 1976)	
Current land use	Front garden to the school	
Future work	Unknown	
Monument type and period	Medieval ditch and a pit	
Significant finds	12th century pottery	
PROJECT LOCATION		
County	Bedfordshire	
Site address	St. Mary's Lower School, Stotfold, Bedfordshire	
Easting Northing	TL 2205 3690	
Area (sq m/ha)	c134sqm	
Height aOD	46m	
PROJECT CREATORS		
Organisation	Northamptonshire Archaeology (NA)	
Project brief originator	Central Bedfordshire Council	
Project Design originator	NA	
Director/Supervisor	Anne Foard	
Project Manager	Tony Walsh	
Sponsor or funding body	Central Bedfordshire Council	
PROJECT DATE		
Start date	01/06/2010	
End date	04/06/2010	
ARCHIVES	Location (Accession no.)	Contents
Physical	Bedford museum	Pottery, tile, clay pipe, bone
Paper	BEDFM:2010.32	Site records (1 small archive box)
Digital		Client report PDF
BIBLIOGRAPHY	Journal/monograph, published or forthcoming, or unpublished client report (NA report)	
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**ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION AT
ST. MARY'S LOWER SCHOOL, STOTFOLD, BEDFORDSHIRE
JUNE 2010**

Abstract

An archaeological excavation of land at St. Mary's Lower School, Stotfold, was carried out in advance of the construction of an extension to the school. The excavation revealed a large 12th century boundary ditch, and a pit. The ditch and pit may relate to features recorded during excavations in 1975, suggesting medieval settlement remains. Made-ground was encountered in the southern part of the site, which was probably connected to the last phase of extension to the school.

1 INTRODUCTION

In June 2010, an archaeological excavation was carried out by Northamptonshire Archaeology (NA) on land at St. Mary's Lower School, Stotfold, Bedfordshire (NGR: TL 2205 3690; Fig 1). The work was commissioned by PCMS for Central Bedfordshire Council and was undertaken as fulfilment of a planning condition (CB/10/00566/REG3) for a new extension to the school.

The scope of works was outlined in the brief (Oakes 2010) issued by Central Bedfordshire Council and detailed in the specification prepared by NA. The objectives of the evaluation were to determine the presence of any archaeological features or deposits within the application area and to date and characterise their extent, depth of burial and state of preservation.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 Topography and geology

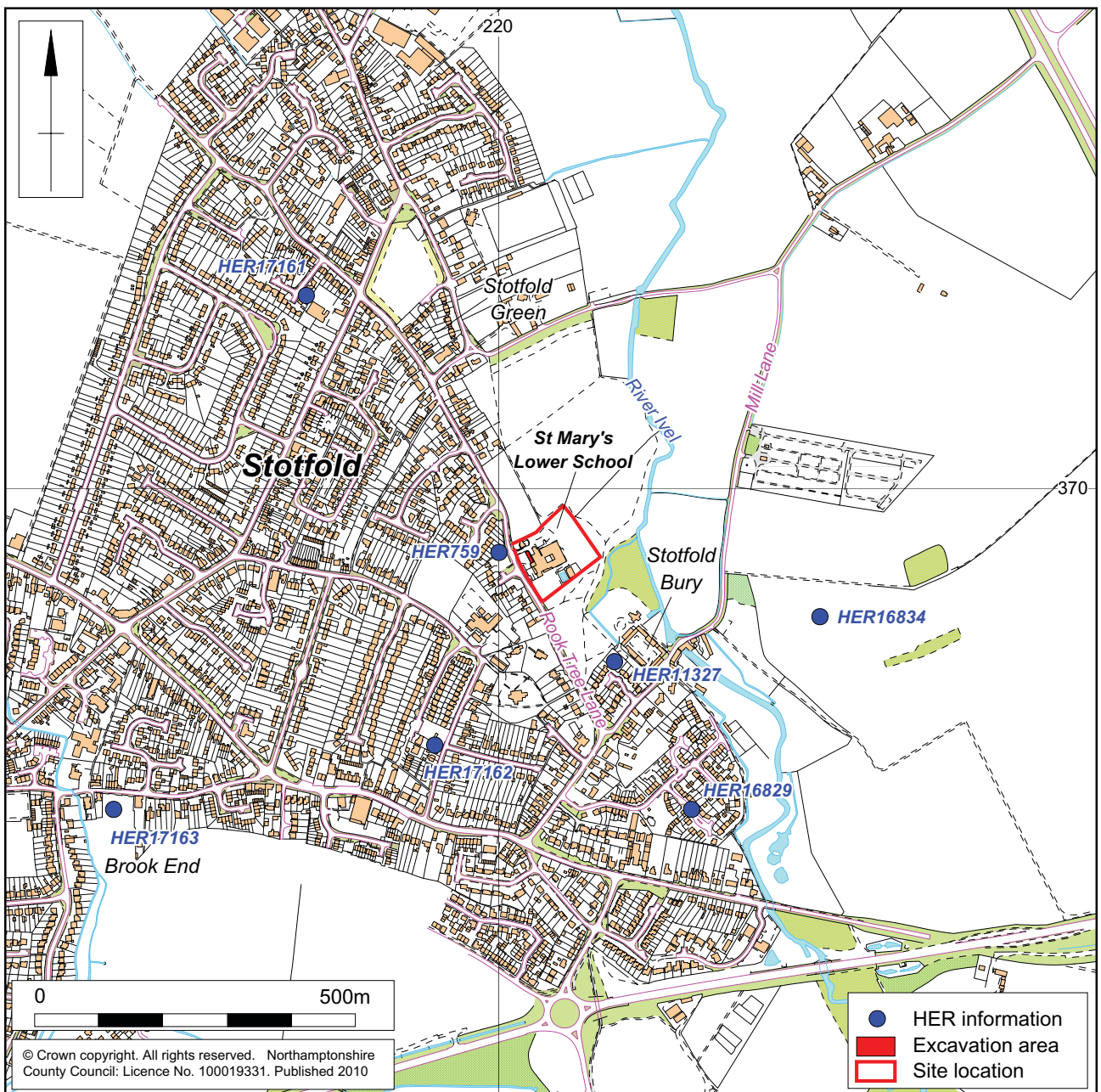
The development site, covers an area of c134sqm. It is located on the eastern edge of Stotfold village, on the north-west corner of the school building, bounded to the west by Rook Tree Lane, the school building and lawns to the east and grass paddocks to the north and south. The River Ivel is 160m to the east (Fig 1).

The site lies just to the west of a gentle slope at a height of 46m aOD. At the time of the excavation the land was part of the front garden of the school.

The underlying geology comprises Lower Chalk, overlain by glacial till (www.bgs.ac.uk/geoindex).

2.2 Historical and archaeological background

Reference to the Bedfordshire Historic Environment Record (HER) has identified a number of archaeological sites or finds spots, one within the boundary of the school site and others in the surrounding area (Fig 1).



Scale 1:10,000

Site Location and Historic Environment Record Plots Fig 1

Within the development area, and previous to the current school being built in 1975, earthwork survey recorded a possible medieval building platform, ditches and associated ridge and furrow (a similar arrangement of earthworks was also noted in the paddock to the south). Subsequently, a small excavation was undertaken on part of the remains before the erection of the school, which revealed ditches, pits and occupation levels dating from the 12th to 16th centuries (HER 759).

The Pre-Enclosure Map of 1848 shows that the site lay in an area of old enclosure known as 'Calves Close'. The Tithe Award of 1849 shows property boundaries marked on the west side of Rook Tree Lane, towards Stotfold Green, and several on the east side, but no buildings are indicated (Simco 1976).

Outside of the development area, finds and excavation has revealed a number of archaeological sites. To the north-east, c180m from the site a Palaeolithic handaxe was recovered close to the River Ivel. To the south-east, 460m from the school, cropmarks have been recorded by aerial photography. Subsequently trial trench evaluation and excavation was undertaken prior to the building of a housing estate which found occupation ranging in date from Iron Age through to medieval period and consisting particularly of ditches and pits, including a substantial enclosure dating to the Roman, Saxo-Norman and medieval periods, produced evidence of domestic occupation, and a cremation cemetery (HER 16829).

Further prehistoric cropmarks have been identified by aerial photography lying to the south of Stotfold cemetery, 460m from the site (HER 16834). Also to the south-east, 190m from the site at Bury Farm, Roman remains consisting of pottery and animal bone were recovered during the building of a house (HER 11327).

To the north of the site, an extant medieval building is situated in the medieval settlement of Stotfold Green (HER 17161). To the south-east, 380m from the site in Stotfold medieval village is an extant medieval building (HER 17162).

To the south-west, 750m from the site, was the medieval settlement of Brook End (HER 17163).

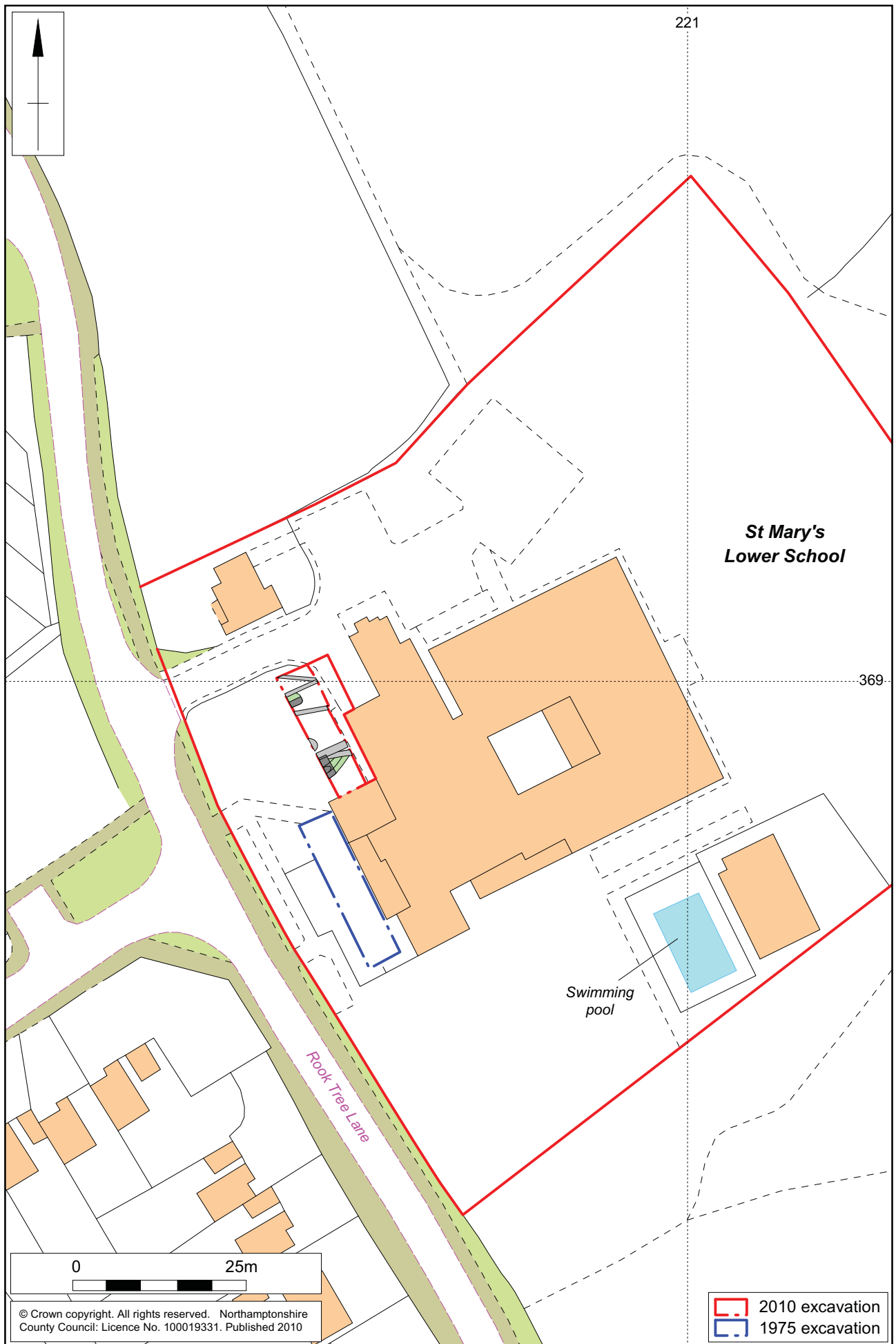
The modern village of Stotfold has a polyfocal character reflected in names such as Stotfold Bury, Stotfold Green and Brook End.

3 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

In general the aims of the investigation were to:

- establish the date, nature and extent of activity or occupation within the development area;
- establish the relationship of any remains found to the surrounding contemporary landscapes;
- recover artefacts to assist in the development of type series within the region;
- recover palaeo-environmental remains to determine local environmental conditions;

with particular reference to the origins and development of local medieval rural settlement.



Scale 1:750

Excavation location and previous excavation Fig 2

4 METHODOLOGY

An open area, measuring 19m long by 5m wide, was excavated in accordance with the excavation plan approved by CBC (Figs 2 and 3). The size of the area was reduced due to the constraints of the service runs detected during the excavation and the need to allow for foundation ease against the existing school building.

A 360° tracked mechanical mini excavator fitted with a toothless ditching bucket was used to remove overburden to archaeological levels or the natural substrate, whichever was encountered first. The site was cleaned sufficiently to enable the identification and definition of archaeological features. A hand-drawn plan of all archaeological features was made at scale 1:50 and was related to the Ordnance Survey National Grid. Archaeological deposits were examined by hand excavation to determine their nature. Recording followed standard NA procedures as described in the *Fieldwork Manual* (NA 2006). Deposits were described on *pro-forma* sheets to include measured and descriptive details of each context, its relationships, interpretation and a checklist of associated finds. Context sheets were cross-referenced to scale plans, section drawings and photographs. Photography was with 35mm black and white film and colour slides, supplemented with digital images. Sections were drawn at scale 1:10, and related to Ordnance Survey datum. Spoil heaps and features were scanned to maximise the recovery of objects. Two environmental samples were taken.

All works were conducted in accordance with the Institute for Archaeologists' *Code of Conduct* (IfA 2010), *Standards for Field Archaeology in the East of England*, (Gurney 2003) and Northamptonshire Archaeology's *Archaeological Fieldwork Manual* (NA 2006).

5 THE EXCAVATED EVIDENCE

5.1 General stratigraphy

The underlying geology was light grey-brown and orange mottled silty-sandy clay (107), with occasional chalk and gravel pebbles and cobbles which was encountered at approximately 0.75m below the modern ground surface. Overlying this was mid-dark grey-brown silty clay subsoil (104) containing chalk and gravel pebbles, which was present on the north half of the site only. This was overlain by dark grey-brown silty clay buried topsoil (103), containing chalk and gravel pebbles, and pottery dating from the medieval to the 18th century (Figs 4 and 5).

Layers of builder's rubble (102) overlay the buried topsoil, mostly at the south end of the excavation. The extent of the rubble coincided with the position of the recently built extension. The ground was criss crossed by modern service trenches, most of which were aligned roughly east to west (Fig 3).

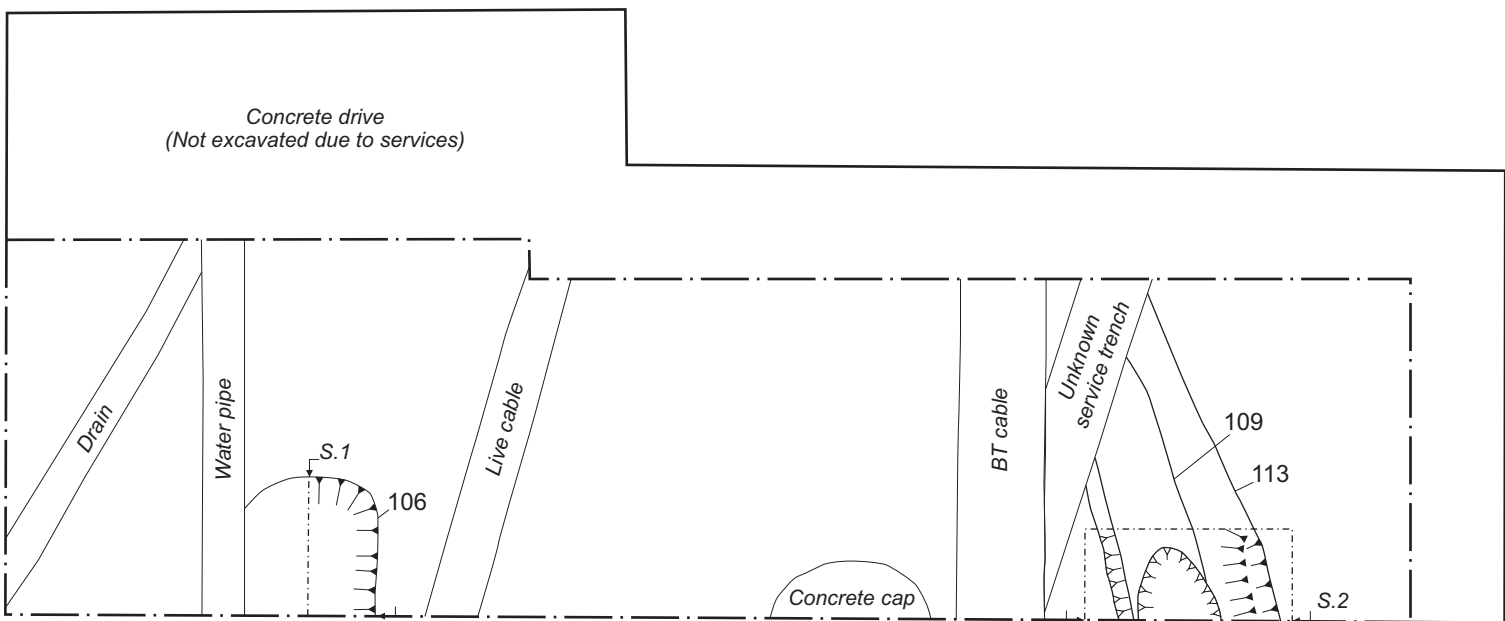
The whole front garden of the school was subsequently re-turfed (101), over a levelling layer which sealed the original layer of topsoil.

5.2 The archaeological evidence

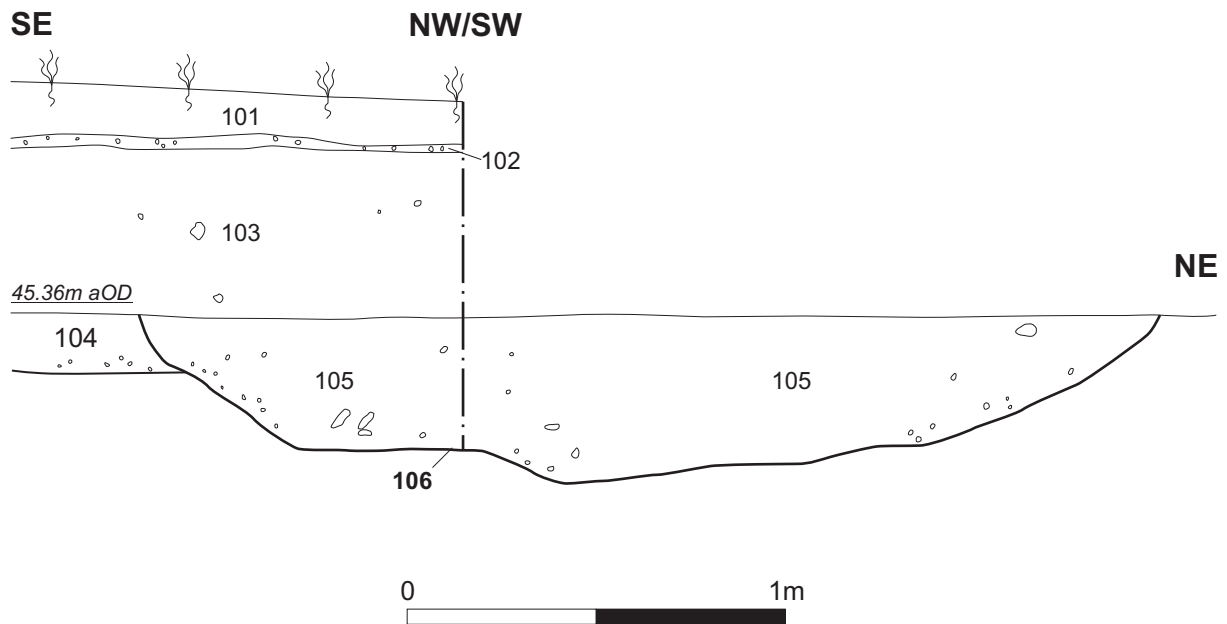
At the south end of the excavation area, two ditches [109] and [113] were aligned north-east to south-west (Fig 4, Section 2). The earlier ditch [113] had a wide and shallow upper profile, breaking at mid point to a steep U-shaped base. It was more than 2.50m wide and 0.83m deep, its northern edge being truncated by a service trench. The silty clay primary fill (112) contained tip lines of gravel, indicating that the spoil from the ditch may have been thrown onto the north edge. Overlying this was dark grey-brown and olive green mottled silty clay (111) which contained 12th-century pottery, animal bone, charred seeds and molluscs. Tip lines of pebbles, falling from the north edge were present in this fill, and suggested the spoil from the ditch, or possibly a bank of earth was situated on the northern edge. The upper fill was dark grey-brown silty clay (110) which contained sherds of 12th-century pottery and animal bone; it was cut by ditch [109].

A U-shaped ditch [109] cut into the upper fill (110) of the earlier ditch [113] on the same alignment. It was 0.97m wide and 0.29m deep and contained dark grey-brown silty clay (108). There were no finds present. As both ditches appeared to follow the same alignment, it is possible that the later ditch, although narrower, is a re-cut of the boundary defined by the earlier ditch.

At the north end of the excavation, situated on the west side and continuing beyond the limit of the excavation was a roughly rectangular, shallow-sided pit [106] cut the natural clay (Fig 5, Section 1). It was more than 1.90m long, 1.70m wide and 0.43m deep. The dark, brown-grey silty sandy fill (105) contained 12th-century pottery, charcoal, charred seeds and molluscs. There were no postholes associated with the pit and its purpose is unclear, however, the presence of charred seeds and molluscs suggests that the pit may have lain open for periods of time and although not necessarily waterlogged, the fill may well have retained moisture.



Section 1

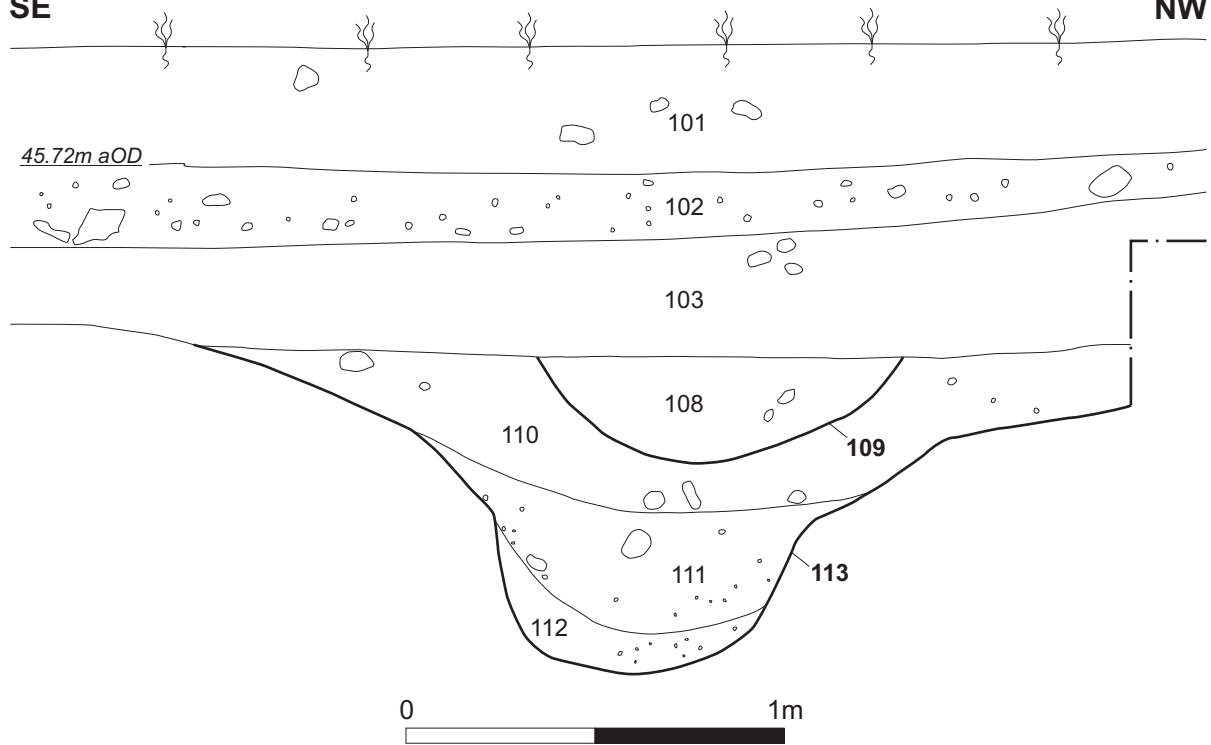


Pit [106], section 1, looking south west Fig 4

Section 2

SE

NW



Ditches [109] and [113], section 2, looking south west Fig 5

6 THE FINDS

6.1 Medieval pottery by Paul Blinkhorn

The pottery assemblage comprised 102 sherds with a total weight of 961g. The stratified material was all medieval in date. Where appropriate, the codings and chronology of the Bedfordshire County Archaeology Service type-series (eg Baker and Hassall 1977) were used, as follows:

B07: Medieval Shelly Ware: AD1100-1400. 8 sherds, 128g

C03: Fine sandy reduced ware, 12-13th century. 26 sherds, 254g

C60: Hertfordshire Grey Ware, 12th – 14th century. 40 sherds, 305g

C10: Potterspury Ware: mid 13th – 15th century. 4 sherds, 22g

P01: Glazed Red Earthenware, 16th century? 22 sherds, 223g

P06: Slip-decorated earthenware. 17th century. 1 sherd, 13g

P48: English Stoneware, late 17th – 18th century. 1 sherd, 16g

The pottery occurrence by number and weight of sherds per context by fabric type is shown in Table 1. Each date should be regarded as a terminus post quem. The range of fabric types is very typical of sites in the area, being dominated by unglazed coarsewares of predominately 12th century date. The range of medieval vessel types is restricted to jars and bowls, and suggests that the settlement was entirely of ordinary status. The general level of preservation is fairly good, and the assemblage appears reliably stratified.

Table 1: Pottery occurrence by number and weight (in g) of sherds per context by fabric type

	C03		B07		C10		P60		P01		P06		P48		
Cntxt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	Date
103	13	112			4	22	11	80	22	223	1	13	1	16	u/s
105			1	2			4	31							12thC
110	9	93	5	111			19	115							12thC
111	4	49	2	15			6	79							12thC
Total	26	254	8	128	4	22	40	305	22	223	1	13	1	16	

6.2 Ceramic material by Pat Chapman

There are five small sherds, weighing 197g. Two of the five sherds from the buried topsoil (103) are fragments of medieval roof tile, one with a remnant peghole, one other with a thin layer of mortar. Another sherd from context (103) could be mortar. The sherd from the fill (105) of pit [106] is probably fired clay. The tiny fragment, from the fill (111) of ditch [113], is almost vitrified from exposure to intense heat.

6.3 Clay tobacco-pipe by Tora Hylton

Three clay tobacco-pipe stems were recovered from the buried topsoil (103). The stem fragments measure no more than 53mm in length. Changes in manufacturing techniques and the use of finer wire to make the bores ensured that there was a

regular reduction in the hole diameters between c1620 and 1800. Two of the examples have relatively large bores, measuring 7/64th of an inch, while the other measures 5/64th. Their measurements together with their appearance suggest a mid 17th to early 18th-century date.

7 THE ENVIRONMENTAL EVIDENCE

7.1 Animal bone by Karen Deighton

Introduction

A total of 929 grams of animal bone was collected from four contexts during the course of excavation. This material was assessed to determine the level of preservation and the taxa present.

Method

Identifiable bones were noted. Ageable and measurable bones (after Von Den Driesch 1976) were also noted. Ageable elements were bones where the state of epiphyseal fusion is apparent (Silver 1969). Material from sieved samples was also included, samples were 40 litres and mesh sizes were 1mm, 2mm and 3.4 mm. Hand collected bones had previously been washed.

Results

Preservation

Fragmentation was heavy and bone surface condition was poor. However, the majority of the bone could be identified to taxa. Three instances of canid gnawing were noted. No evidence for butchery or burning was observed.

Taxa present:

Table 2: Taxa by context

Cut/fill	104	106/105	113/110	113/111	Total
Feature	Layer	Pit	Ditch	Ditch	
Cattle	2		1	1	4
Sheep/goat	3			3	6
Pig	1				1
Horse			1		1
L.ung	2		1		3
Rabbit				1	1
Small mammal				1	1
Amphibian		1			1
Total	8	1	3	6	18

Ageing and metrical data

Taxon	Cattle	Horse
Epiphyseal fusion	2	1
Measurements	1	3

Discussion

The taxa present are those expected for a medieval assemblage. Although rabbit was introduced into Britain during the 12th-century, its presence here as intrusive cannot be ruled out due to the burrowing activities of the taxa. Small mammal and amphibian could also be intrusive. The mixed nature of deposits both in terms of taxa

and skeletal element suggests the presence of domesticates to be the result of the disposal of kitchen waste.

Conclusion

Analysis has shown a small assemblage comprised largely of common domesticates.

7.2 Charred seeds and molluscs by Karen Deighton

Introduction

Two, 40 litre, soil samples were collected by hand during the course of the excavation and fully processed. This material was assessed to ascertain the presence, nature and level of preservation of ecofacts.

Method

The samples were processed using a modified siraf tank fitted with a 250micron mesh and flot sieve. Any resulting flots were dried and examined under a microscope (10x magnification). Identifications were made with the aid of the author's small reference collection, Schoch *et al* (1988) and Cappers *et al* (2006) for plant remains and Kerney and Cameron(1994), Glöer and Meier-Brook(2003) and the website of the Conchological society for molluscs.

Preservation

Preservation of plant remains was solely by charring. Charcoal was heavily fragmented although some fragments of over 2mm were recovered and could possibly be further identified if required. Charred grains exhibited some fragmentation and abrasion, which did affect identification. Mollusc shells were well preserved and only low fragmentation was observed.

Discussion

The terrestrial molluscan taxa (eg *V.excentrica* and *V.pymaea* the two most numerous taxa) present indicate largely dry, open calcareous conditions. The freshwater taxa were difficult to interpret because of the low numbers and the fact that the majority could not be identified to species, therefore they merely attest to the presence of some water in the features as does the presence of terrestrial species which prefer damper conditions (eg *C. minimum*, *D. rotundatus*). In summary analysis demonstrates that the prevailing conditions were dry but damper conditions existed around open features.

Bread wheat and barley were both common crops of the medieval period. Barley was commonly used in brewing; however, no evidence (ie sprouted grains) was noted from the current site. The presence of pulses is also expected for this period. Pulses were a cheap source of protein and often used dried in soups and stews, they can also act as nitrogen fixers in the soil. The presence of edible pulses (ie peas and possible Celtic bean) could suggest the growing and storage of cereal and pulse crops together as a maslin; however, with the low number of pulses this suggestion is tentative. Cleavers and sheep sorrel are both common weeds of disturbed ground and crop weeds. Some differences are seen in the presence of plant taxa between the two samples, although the significance and meaning of this is unclear.

The absence of cereal chaff and low frequencies of wild plant taxa suggests a late stage in crop processing. The presence of cereal grains in the features could be due to storage (although if the features were open as suggested above this seems unlikely) or cumulative waste disposal or waste disposal following accidental burning.

Results

Table 3: Taxa by context and sample

Cut/fill	[106]/(105)	[113]/(111)
Sample	1	2
Feature	Pit	Ditch
Volume	40 litres	40 litres
Charcoal	500-1000 fragments	300-500 fragments
Charred seeds		
Spelt (<i>Triticum spelta</i>)	3	2
Bread wheat (<i>T. aestivum</i>)	18	
Hulled barley (<i>Hordeum vulgare</i>)	13	3
Naked barley (<i>H.vulgare var nudum</i>)	14	
Barley indet (<i>Hordeum</i> sp)	2	7
Cereal indet	228	129
Celtic bean (<i>Faba</i>)	1	
Pea (<i>Pisum sativa</i>)	4	
Pulse indet	19	2
Cleavers (<i>Galium aparine</i>)	5	
Sheep sorrel (<i>Rumex acetosella</i>)	1	
Wild /weed indet		2
Mollusc:		
Terrestrial Taxa		
<i>Cochlicopa lubrica/lubicella</i>	30	23
<i>Discus rotundatus</i>	3	1
<i>Vallonia costata</i>	1	4
<i>V. excentrica</i>	181	96
<i>Carychium minimum</i>	4	1
<i>Carychium tridentatum</i>	8	
<i>Pupilla muscorum</i>	14	12
<i>Vertigo pygmaea</i>	94	52
<i>Helix aspersa</i>		1
<i>Aegopinella/oxychilus/zenobiella</i>		6
Freshwater Taxa		
<i>Valvata macrostoma</i>	5	
<i>Radix</i> sp	1	1
<i>R. labiata</i>	1	
<i>Anisus</i> sp	1	
<i>Potamopyrus</i> sp	24	2
Bivalve	3	
indeterminate	100+	100+

8 DISCUSSION

Excavation of the development site, has demonstrated the survival of medieval archaeological remains dating to the 12th century, consistent with the position of the site within the polyfocal settlement of Stotfold. The Church of St. Mary is situated to the south-west of the site and documentary evidence suggests it has its origins in the 12th century.

The open field survey plan of Stotfold shows the site lay in an area of old enclosures and is identified in the 1849 Tithe Award as pasture called Calves Close. The close remained as pasture until the building of the new school (Simco 1976). During the excavations of 1975, earthworks were recorded on the plot of land prior to development of the school. A possible building platform was identified situated towards the road (Rook Tree Lane), whilst ridge and furrow earthworks were recorded to the east, or back of the plot.

An existing public footpath, on the east side of and parallel to Rook Tree Lane, shown on the 1975 plan (but subsequently re-routed due to the building of the school) may have represented a 'back lane' between the building and closes fronting onto Rook Tree Lane and the open fields at the rear. Its route began at the south end of Rook Tree Lane, just north of Stotfold Bury (Manor) and continued to join Manor House Lane at Stotfold Green.

The 2010 archaeological excavation identified a ditch with a possible re-cut and a pit within the footprint of the proposed extension to the school. The earliest ditch and the pit contained medieval pottery, dating to the 12th century AD, together with domestic animal bone, charred seeds of legumes and weeds, and molluscs. The function of the ditch is unclear with such a short length exposed, but it is likely to be a boundary ditch, possibly part of an enclosure, the presence of which was suggested by the ditches uncovered during the initial archaeological exploration of the site in 1975. A total of 45 sherds of pottery from the middle fills (110 and 111) of the ditch, consisted of fine sandy reduced ware, medieval shelly ware and Hertfordshire Greyware.

A rectangular-shaped pit lay to the north of the ditch and contained five sherds of pottery, comprising four of Hertfordshire Grey ware and one of medieval shelly ware. The fill also contained domestic animal bone and that of an amphibian, charred legume and weed seeds. The presence of certain molluscs and the amphibian suggested that the pit had remained open and damp for sometime. The unglazed coarsewares recovered from the ditch and pit, are of predominantly 12th-century date. They are restricted in form to jar and bowl types typical of sites in the area and suggest that the settlement was not of high status.

The buried topsoil contained 52 sherds of pottery ranging in date from the 12th to 18th centuries. There were also clay pipe stems dating from the mid 17th to early 18th centuries and medieval roof tile. Pottery and finds from a later date were not present in the topsoil. This was probably due to the fact that the plot existed as pasture as identified on the 19th-century Tithe Award map. The plot remained a pasture field right up until the building of the school in 1976.

Made-ground, consisting of layers of builders' rubble was apparent overlying the buried topsoil, mostly at the south end of the excavation. The extent of the rubble coincided with the position of the recently built extension. The whole front garden of the school was subsequently re-turfed, over a levelling layer which sealed the original layer of topsoil.

Geographically, the site lies closer to the manor of Stotfold Bury, than to Stotfold Green and given its ordinary status suggested by the pottery types it may represent an area of settlement on the periphery, which later became part of a ribbon development linking the two manors.

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CSGBI 2010 www.conchsoc.org Conchological Society of Great Britain and Ireland website



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Northamptonshire
County Council

APPENDIX 1: CONTEXT DATA

Context	Type	Description	Dimensions /thickness (m)	Artefact type
101	Layer	Turf layer	0.12 - 0.34m thick	
102	Layer	Loose layer of sand and builders rubble	0.03 - 0.25m thick	
103	Layer	Buried topsoil, compacted dark grey-brown silty clay with chalk and gravel pebbles	0.24 – 0.44m thick	Pottery, tile, clay pipe
104	Layer	Subsoil, mid-dark grey-brown silty clay with patches of sand and flint and chalk inclusions	0.20m thick	Animal bone
105	Fill of pit [106]	Dark brown-grey silty, sandy clay loam with chalk pebbles, charcoal lumps	0.37m thick	Pottery 12th century
106	Cut of pit	Sub-rectangular pit, E-W, with shallow sides and slightly irregular base	More than 1.90m long, 1.70m wide, 0.43m deep	
107	Layer	Natural pale-mid cream and orange mottled with grey-brown silty-sandy clay		
108	Fill of [109]	Dark grey-brown silty clay with chalk & flint pebbles, charcoal flecks	0.97m wide 0.29m deep	
109	Cut of ditch	Linear, E-W, with U-shaped profile, possibly re-cut of ditch [113]	0.97m wide 0.29m deep	
110	Fill of [113]	Dark grey-brown silty clay with chalk & gravel pebbles, charcoal	At least 2.50m wide, 0.41m deep	Pottery 12th century, animal bone
111	Fill of [113]	Dark grey-brown silty clay with olive green mottling, chalk & gravel pebbles, charcoal lumps and snail shells	1.16m wide 0.32m deep	Pottery 12th century, animal bone
112	Fill of [113]	Dark grey blue-brown silty clay with re-deposited natural chalk & gravel pebbles	0.68m wide 0.16m deep	
113	Cut of ditch	Linear, E-W with a wide & shallow upper profile, breaking at mid point to a steep U-shaped base	At least 2.50m wide, 0.83m deep	