

Archaeological Services & Consultancy Ltd

WATCHING BRIEF: NOBEL SCHOOL STEVENAGE HERTFORDSHIRE

NGR: TL 2620 2510

on behalf of Mansell Construction Services Ltd



Martin Cuthbert BA (Hons) PIFA

May 2011

ASC: 1397/SNS/3



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Site Data

ASC project code:	SNS		ASC Project No:	1397		
OASIS ref:	Archaeol2-100501		Event/Accession no:	tbc		
County:		Hertford	shire			
Village/Town:		Stevenag	je			
Civil Parish:		Chells				
NGR (to 8 figs):		TL 2620	2510			
Extent of site:		7.8 hecta	res			
Present use:		School and playing fields				
Planning proposal:		New school buildings and improvement to playing fields				
Planning application	ref/date:	10/00457/CC				
Local Planning Authors	ority:	Stevenage Borough Council				
Date of fieldwork:		April-May 2011				
Client:		Mansell Construction Services Ltd				
		Balfour Beatty Education				
		Marlborough House				
		18 Upper Marlborough Road				
		St Albans				
		AL1 3UT				
Contact name:		Darren Simpson				

Internal Quality Check

Primary Author:	Martin Cuthbert	Date:	10 th May 2011
Revisions:		Date:	

Edited/Checked By:	A Hancock	Date:	12 th May 2011

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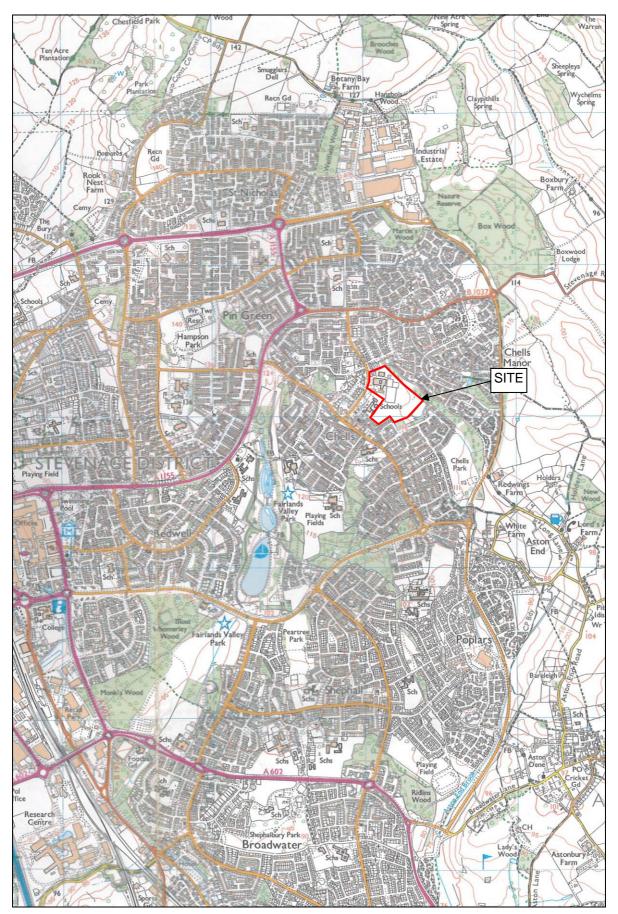


Figure 1: General location (scale 1:25,000)

Summary

In April and May 2011 Archaeological Services and Consultancy Ltd (ASC) carried out a watching brief at Nobel School, Stevenage, Hertfordshire during the construction of a replacement all weather pitch. The monitored groundworks comprised a 'cut and fill' excavation, which removed deposits at the north of the site of the replacement pitch to build up the south, therefore levelling out a west-east trending slope. The majority of the "cut" material is interpreted as recent made ground, probably deposited during construction of the school. Truncated natural deposits were revealed at the "cut" area but no archaeological finds or deposits were present.

1. Introduction

1.1 In April and May 2011 Archaeological Services and Consultancy Ltd (ASC) carried out a watching brief at Nobel School, Stevenage, Hertfordshire. The project was commissioned by Mansell Construction Services Ltd, and was carried out after discussions with the Hertfordshire County Council Historic Environment Unit, archaeological advisor (AA) to the local planning authority (LPA), Stevenage Borough Council, and in accordance with a project design prepared by ASC (Cuthbert 2011).

1.2 **Planning Background**

This watching brief was required under the terms of *Planning Policy Statement 5* (PPS5), as a condition of planning permission for the development of the site. The relevant planning application reference is 10/00457/CC.

1.3 Archaeological Services & Consultancy Ltd

ASC is an independent archaeological practice providing a full range of archaeological services including consultancy, field evaluation, mitigation and post-excavation studies, historic building recording and analysis. ASC is recognised as a *Registered Organisation* by the Institute for Archaeologists and is also accredited ISO 9001, in recognition of its high standards and working practices.

1.4 The Site

1.4.1 Location & Description

The development site is located on the eastern side of the town of Stevenage, within the Chells area, centred on NGR TL 2620 2510 (Fig. 1). The site comprised an irregular piece of land covering 7.8 ha, which was in use as a school and playing fields. The area of built development is located at the northwest of the site. The site was accessed from Mobbsbury Way at the northwest. It is surrounded on all sides by residential development. (Fig. 2).

1.4.2 Geology & Topography

The soils of the area are unsurveyed, but may belong to the Hornbeam 2 Association, which are characterised as *deep fine loamy over clayey soils with slowly permeable subsoils and slight seasonal waterlogging. Some well drained fine loamy and fine silty over clayey and clayey soils. Some soils very* *flinty* over plateau drift (Soil Survey 1983, 582c). The underlying geology comprises Quaternary Till (BGS, Sheet 221).

1.4.3 Development

The development comprises remodelling and extension of the school buildings and associated infrastructure. The focus of this report is construction of a replacement all weather pitch (Fig. 3).

1.4.4 Previous Archaeological Work

A desk based assessment (DBA) was produced by Albion Archaeology (Abrams and Pilkinton 2008). The DBA observed that the northern part of the development area had been truncated by cut and fill activity during construction of the school and revealed that a post medieval farm had existed at the development area, although no sites of archaeological or historical significance were recorded by the Hertfordshire Historic Environment Record (HER) within it.

A geophysical survey of the playing field was undertaken by ASC in April 2011. It was unclear whether magnetic disturbance at the playing fields originated from modern levelling material or from remains of the post medieval farm identified by the DBA The presence of artificial terracing and the results of the geophysical survey were interpreted to suggest that the archaeological potential of the development area was low at the north, south and west and moderate at the centre and east (Hancock 2011).

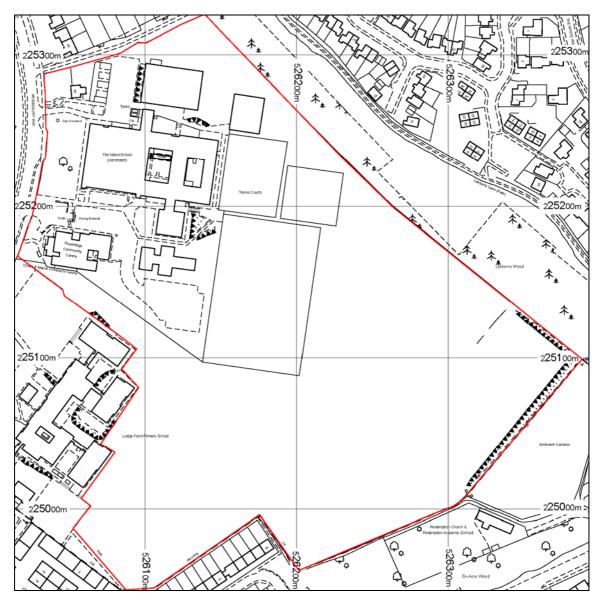


Figure 2: Site plan (scale 1:2500)

2. Aims & Methods

2.1 *Aims*

As described in the project design (Section 3.1), the aims of the watching brief were:

- To ensure the archaeological monitoring of the all phases of the development programme likely to have an impact upon archaeological deposits.
- To secure the adequate recording of any archaeological remains revealed by the works.
- To secure the analysis, conservation and long-term storage of any artefactual/ecofactual material recovered from the site.
- To provide an adequately detailed project report that will place the findings of the monitoring and recording of the development programme in their local and regional context, having made reference to the relevant regional research agendas, and through cartographic, documentary and other research.

2.2 *Methods*

The work was carried out according to the project design (Section 3.6), which required:

- Soil and overburden stripping under archaeological supervision.
- The inspection of the subsoil for archaeological features, deposits, and artefacts.
- The rapid investigation and recording of archaeological features or deposits where present, including adequate provision of both drawn and photographic records.
- The examination of any service and foundation trenches and the subsequent recording of any exposed archaeological remains, including adequate provision of both drawn and photographic records.
- Rapid examination of spoil-heaps for archaeological material.
- A programme of post-fieldwork analysis, archiving, and publication, if required.

2.3 Standards

The work conformed to the project design, to the relevant sections of the Institute for Archaeologists' *Code of Conduct* (IFA 2000) and *Standard & Guidance Notes* (IFA 2001), to the Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers East of England Region *Standards for Field Archaeology in the East of England* (ALGAO 2003), and to the relevant sections of ASC's own *Operations Manual*.

2.4 Constraints

No constraints were encountered during the watching brief.

3. Archaeological & Historical Background

3.1 The following sections provide a summary of the readily available archaeological and historical background to the development site and its environs. The site lies within an area of archaeological and historical interest, and has the potential to reveal evidence of a range of periods.

This section has been compiled with information from Hertfordshire County Council's Historic Environment Record (HER: request no.299/300), a desk-based assessment (Abrams and Pilkinton 2008) and other readily available sources.

3.2 **Prehistoric** (before 600BC)

Neolithic stone axes have been recovered from Barnwell School, Shephall (HER0424) and south of Ridlins Wood (HER0611). A major prehistoric site has been identified at Bragbury End some 2.8km south east of the school. Fieldwork at this site revealed quantities of struck flint, Beaker and Bronze Age pottery, and gullies, pits and postholes suggesting occupation in the late Neolithic and Bronze Age periods (Murray 1994). Approximately 3km southwest of the site at Roebuck School, St Margarets ASC carried out an archaeological evaluation. A small pit within which pottery sherds from at least four Late Bronze Age vessels and a spindle whorl from the same period were discovered (Shane 2011).

3.3 *Iron Age* (600BC-AD43)

Little is known of the Iron Age in the Stevenage area but a significant late Iron Age enclosure has been recorded at Shephalbury Manor, *c*.2.6km south of the school (HER11604; Grant & Hounsell 2003).

3.4 **Roman** (AD43-c.450)

During this period, the Stevenage area formed part of the tribal canton or *civitas* of the *Catuevallauni*, the capital of which was at *Verulamium* (St Albans). A possible Roman road linking Welwyn and Baldock (HER4637: Viatores 1964) is said to follow the line of the B197. Roman occupation is known at Collens Leg Wood, *c*.1.2km to the south of the development site, where two ditches and pottery, dated to the 4th century by the pottery and a coin, were uncovered during development works (HER442). An area of settlement and agricultural activity dating from the 1st to 4th centuries AD has been excavated at Boxfield Farm, Chells, *c*. 0.6km northwest of the development site (Going & Hunn 1999). Further occupation sites are known at New Farm and at Shephalbury Manor (Grant & Hounsell 2003). A bronze coin of Julius Caesar was found *c*.0.7km south of the site (HER445), while a bronze *antoninianus* of Allectus (AD293-6) was also found to the south west of the site (HER452).

3.5 *Saxon* (*c.450-1066*)

The only site belonging to this period lay at the east end of Broadwater Crescent, where traces of Anglo-Saxon settlement (HER0455) were recorded on the Roman site mentioned above (HER0444). The settlement evidence consisted of a rectangular sunken-featured building, with possible post-holes placed centrally at either end.

Shephall village (HER2626) is of probable Anglo-Saxon origin, since its landholdings prior to the Conquest are recorded in the Domesday survey.

3.6 *Medieval* (1066-1500)

The Domesday Survey of 1086 records that Shephall (*Escephale*) was divided into two parts. One, of three hides, was held by the abbot of St Albans as part of the abbey demesne. The other, containing two hides, was held by Anschitil Ros of Lanfranc archbishop of Canterbury (Morris 1976, sections 2.3 and 10.8). Anschitil's lands had belonged to the Abbey demesne in the time of Edward the Confessor, and could not be sold or alienated from the church.

A survey of Collens Leg Wood revealed an enclosure, house platform and cobbled area, probably likely to date to this period (HER1757). A probable medieval trackway was discovered during excavations for a water main, *c*.1.5km to the south west of the development site. Fragments of tile were worn into the chalk, and it was dated by a single sherd of pottery (HER359).

3.7 **Post-Medieval** (1500-1900)

The Abbey's tenure of Shephall was terminated during the Dissolution, when in 1542 the manor, with a pension of five shillings from the Rectory, was granted by Henry VIII to George Nodes, serjeant of the royal Buckhounds. Nodes had previously been lessee of the manor. In 1564 Nodes obtained licence to grant the manor to his nephew Charles Nodes and his heirs.

A post medieval farmstead is known to have existed in the grounds of Nobel School. Farm buildings focussed around a farmyard are shown in the 1834 tithe map, and on the 1851 Enclosure map, but not on any subsequent maps (HER13701). The same can be said of a now demolished farmstead on Campshill Lane, which now only survives as a cycle path (HER13702). Fairlands Farm, located within Fairlands Valley Park, is a 17th century timber framed lobby entrance house, much altered and extended in the 19th century (HER13297).

3.8 *Modern* (1900-present)

The core of the settlement of Stevenage is located c.1.5km to the west of the development site. Following WWII, the town began to expand eastwards, eventually encompassing the site. The Nobel School was constructed at the northern end of the development site in the late 20th century. Prior to this, cartographic evidence suggests that the site was open farmland.

4. **Results**

- 4.1 The replacement all weather pitch covered an area of c.0.6 hectares, it was located over part of the school playing field and part of an extant all weather pitch (Fig. 3).
- 4.2 Topsoil was removed from the impacted part of the playing field by a 360 excavator equipped with a toothless ditching bucket. A 'cut and fill' process then took place to level a west–east trending slope. (Plate 3).
- 4.3 The northwest of the site of the replacement all weather pitch was mechanically excavated to a maximum depth of 1.2m and excavated material was then deposited at the southeast (Fig. 3). The majority of the excavated material was reddish brown clayey sandy silt, which contained fragments of modern ceramic building material. This material is interpreted as recent made ground, perhaps deposited during construction of the school.
- 4.4 Truncated natural deposits were revealed at the deeper parts of the excavated area. The natural was most evident toward the northern corner of the site of the replacement all weather pitch; where the made ground sealed 0.2m of orange brown silty clay overlying orange clay with flint.
- 4.5 Removal of the surface of the extant all weather pitch exposed a made ground comprising light brownish yellow sand. The depth of ground removal here was relatively shallow, the sandy made ground was only partially removed and natural deposits were not revealed.
- 4.5 Archaeological artefacts were not recovered during the watching brief and no archaeological deposits or features were present at the areas of exposed natural.

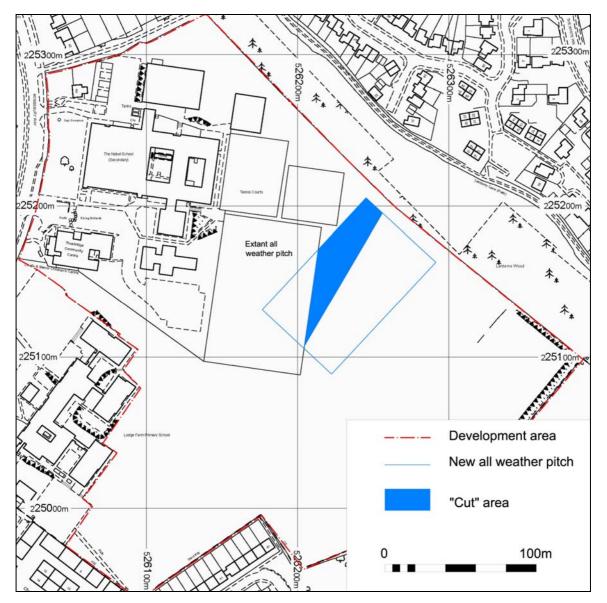


Figure 3: Location of the replacement all weather pitch and "cut" area (scale 1:2500)



Plate 1: Profile at the northwest of the replacement all weather pitch (1m scale)



Plate 2: Made ground under the existing all weather pitch



Plate 3: Northeastern edge of site after levelling.

5. Conclusions

- 5.1 The natural soil/sediment profile at the site of the replacement all weather pitch was truncated during construction of the original school.
- 5.2 Levelling material was introduced at the playing fields to reduce the gradient of a natural west-east trending slope during construction of the original school.
- 5.3 The levelling deposit covered the full extent of the replacement all weather pitch and it may extend across the majority of the playing field although it is likely to thin progressively westward.
- 5.4 The extent of truncation to the natural deposits at the school playing fields is unclear, but if shallow archaeological features were present they may have been removed during construction of the original school. Any deeper archaeological features present at the playing fields, may have been adversely impacted but could survive beneath the made ground.
- 5.5 It is probable that truncation of natural deposits at the area of built development was more severe than at the playing fields and it appears unlikely that archaeological remains would survive at the north of the development area.

5.6 Confidence Rating

The monitoring took place in dry and sunny weather conditions. Full co-operation was received from the contractors and a high degree of confidence is attached to the results of the archaeological watching brief.

6. Acknowledgements

The project was commissioned by *Mansell Construction Services Ltd.* The project was monitored by Andy Instone of *Hertfordshire County Council Historic Environment Unit*, archaeological advisor (AA) to the local planning authority. The onsite contractors are thanked for their co-operation during the watching brief.

The project was managed for ASC by Alastair Hancock BSc PgDip MIFA. Fieldwork was carried out by Martin Cuthbert BA PIFA and Carina Summerfield-Hill BA MA. The report was prepared by Martin Cuthbert and edited by Alastair Hancock.

7. Archive

- 7.1 The project archive will comprise:
 - 1. Project Design
 - 2. Initial Report
 - 3. Clients site plans
 - 4. Site Monitoring Sheets
 - 5. List of photographs
 - 6. B/W prints & negatives
 - 7. CDROM with copies of all digital files.
- 7.2 The archive will be deposited with *Stevenage Museum*.

8. References

Standards & Specifications

- ALGAO 2003 Standards for Field Archaeology in the East of England. East Anglian Archaeology Occasional Paper 14.
- Cuthbert, M. 2011 Nobel School, Chells, Stevenage Project Design for Archaeological Evaluation & Watching Brief Archaeological Services and Consultancy Ltd ASC ref: 1397/SNS/1
- EH 1991 *The Management of Archaeological Projects, 2nd edition.* English Heritage (London).
- IFA 2000a Institute of Field Archaeologists' Code of Conduct.
- IFA 2000b Institute of Field Archaeologists' Code of Approved Practice for the Regulation of Contractual Arrangements in Field Archaeology.
- IFA 2001 Institute of Field Archaeologists' Standard & Guidance documents (Desk-Based Assessments, Watching Briefs, Evaluations, Excavations, Investigation and Recording of Standing Buildings, Finds).

Secondary Sources

- Abrams J and Pilkinton, K 2008 Nobel School, Stevenage. Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment. Albion Archaeology. Bedfordshire County Council
- BGS British Geological Survey 1:50,000 Series, Solid & Drift Geology.
- Going, CJ & Hunn, JR Excavations at Boxfield Farm, Chells, Stevenage, Hertfordshire. Hertfordshire Archaeological Trust
- Grant, J. & Hounsell, D. 2003: *Shephalbury Manor, Stevenage: An Archaeological Excavation Interim Site Narrative*. Hertfordshire Archaeological Trust Report 1241.
- Hancock, A. 2011 Geophysical Survey: Nobel School, Chells, Stevenage ASC Ref: 1397/SNS/2
- Morris, J. 1976: *Domesday Book vol 12 Hertfordshire*. History from the Sources. Phillimore (Chichester).
- Murray, J. 1994: Proposed crematorium, Bragbury End, Stevenage; detailed archaeological evaluation. Hertfordshire Archaeological Trust Report 65.
- Soil Survey 1983 1:250,000 Soil Map of England and Wales, and accompanying legend (Harpenden).
- Shane, G. 2010 Archaeological Evaluation Report: Roebuck Primary School, St Margarets, Stevenage Archaeological Services and Consultancy Ltd ASC ref: 1310/SRS/2
- Viatores, 1964: Roman roads in the South East Midlands. Victor Gollancz (London).

Appendix 1: Monitoring Sheets

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Appendix 2: List of Photographs

SITE NAME: Nobel School, Stevenage, Herts			Stevenage, Herts	SITE NO/CODE: 1397/SNS	
Shot	B&W	Digital	Subject		
1	~	~	Site stratigraphy at the eastern end of site, looking northwest 1m scale		
2		\checkmark	Topsoil reduction of eastern end, looking southwest		
3		\checkmark	Ground reduction in progress, looking southwest		
4		\checkmark	Ground reduction at the northern corner, looking west		
5		\checkmark	Cut & fill in progress, looking southwest		
6		\checkmark	Site stratigraphy at the western end of site, looking northwest 0.5m scale		
7		✓	General site shot, looking north		
8		✓	Made ground not breached under previous all weather pitch, looking south		
9		~	Ground reduction at the northern corner, looking north		

Appendix 3: ASC OASIS Form

PROJECT DETAILS								
Project Name:	Nobel School, Stevenage, Herts		OASIS reference:	Archaeol2-100501				
Short Description:	In April and May 2011 Archaeological Services and Consultancy Ltd (ASC) carried out a watching brief at Nobel School, Stevenage, Hertfordshire during the construction of a replacement all weather pitch. The monitored groundworks comprised a 'cut and fill' excavation, which removed deposits at the north of the site of the replacement pitch to build up the south, therefore levelling out a west-east trending slope. The majority of the "cut" material is interpreted as recent made ground, probably deposited during construction of the school. Truncated natural deposits were revealed at the "cut" area but no archaeological finds or deposits were present.							
Project Type:	Watching Brief							
Previous work: (eg. SMR refs)	Geophysics		Site status: (eg. none, SAM, listed)	None				
Current land use:	School and playing fields		Future work: (yes/no/unknown)	Unknown				
Monument type:	None		Monument period:	None				
Significant finds: (artefact type & period)	None							
PROJECT LOCATION								
County:	Hertfordshire	OS refe	rence: (8 figs min)	TL 2620 2510				
Site address: (+ postcode if known)	Nobel School, Chells, Stevenage, Hertfordshire							
Study area: (sq. m. / ha)	7.8 hectares	Height	OD: (metres)	120m OD				
	PROJECT	CREATO	RS					
Organisation:	Archaeological Services & Consultancy Ltd							
Project brief originator:	N/a	Project	design originator:	ASC Ltd				
Project Manager:	Alastair Hancock BSc PgDip MIFA	Director/Supervisor:		M Cuthbert BA PIFA				
Sponsor / funding body:	Mansell Construction Services Ltd							
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	Location (Accession no.)	Conten	Content (eg. pottery, animal bone, files/sheets)					
Physical:	Stovopago Musoum	No finds	ïnds					
Paper:	Stevenage Museum Project		t Design, Report. B+W photo					
Digital:		All digital files						
BIBLIOGR	APHY (Journal/monograph, publi	shed or for	thcoming, or unpublis	ned client report)				
Title:	Watching Brief: Nobel School, Chells, Stevenage, Hertfordshire							
Serial title & volume:	ASC Ltd Report ref. 1397/SNS/3							
Author(s):	M Cuthbert BA (Hons) PIFA							
Page nos	1-23	Date:	Date: 10 th May 2011					