

Archaeological Services & Consultancy Ltd

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION:
SIR FREDERIC OSBORN SCHOOL,
WELWYN GARDEN CITY,
HERTFORDSHIRE**

on behalf of Hertfordshire County Council



Nicholas A Crank BSc AIFA

October 2005

ASC: 723/FOS/02

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Site Data

<i>ASC site code:</i>	FOS	<i>Project no:</i>	723
<i>County:</i>	Hertfordshire		
<i>Village/Town:</i>	Welwyn Garden City		
<i>Civil Parish:</i>	Welwyn Garden City		
<i>NGR (to 8 figs):</i>	TL 25559 13001		
<i>Extent of site:</i>	35m x 35m		
<i>Present land use:</i>	Youth centre, tennis court, sports field		
<i>Planning proposal:</i>	Childrens' home with parking and access		
<i>Local Planning Authority:</i>	Welwyn & Hatfield		
<i>Planning application ref/date:</i>	Not known		
<i>Client:</i>	Hertfordshire County Council c/o Vincent and Gorbings Sterling Court Norton Road Stevenage Herts SG1 2JY		
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Cover: The site looking north west



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

Summary

During October 2005 an archaeological trial-trench evaluation was undertaken by ASC Ltd at Sir Fredrick Osborn School, Welwyn Garden City, Hertfordshire. Three trenches were excavated revealing no archaeological features. No finds were recovered. The evaluation was preceded by a negative trial-trenching exercise and geophysical surveys in the adjacent areas. The combined results lead to the assertion that the site is of little archaeological potential.

1 Introduction

1.1 In October 2005 *Archaeological Services and Consultancy Ltd* (ASC) carried out an evaluation at Sir Frederic Osborn School, Welwyn Garden City (NGR TL 25559 13001: Fig. 1). The project was commissioned by Hertfordshire County Council, and was carried out according to a project design prepared by ASC (Semmelmann 2005), and a brief (Smith 2005) prepared on behalf of the local planning authority (LPA), *Welwyn and Hatfield District Council*, by their archaeological advisor (AA), *Hertfordshire County Council, County Archaeology Office*.

1.2 *Planning Background*

This evaluation was required under the terms of *Planning Policy Guidance Note 16* (PPG16), in response to proposals for the construction of a children's home and associated access, parking and landscaping

1.3 *Location*

Sir Frederic Osborn School is situated to the north-east of Welwyn Garden City in the district of Welwyn Hatfield, Hertfordshire. It lies on the junction of Hens Lane and Black Fan Road Black Fan Road in a largely residential area. The evaluation site lies near the west corner of the school grounds, centred on NGR TL 25559 13001 (Fig. 1).

1.4 *Description*

The proposed development area comprises part of the playing fields of Sir Frederic Osborn School, an adjoining area of tarmac tennis courts and a small car park, and a building formerly used as a youth club. The site occupies a roughly triangular area of about 0.5 hectares. It is accessed from Hens Lane to the north through the premises and a series of school buildings (Fig. 2). The perimeter is bounded by a metal chain-link fence with a hedge along its south and west side. To the west of the site are playing fields and to the north are school buildings.

1.5 *Geology & Topography*

The site lies on flat terrain below 80m OD, some 500m from the Mimram valley to the north east. The local geology is classified as Glaciofluvial drift, which is the parent material for soils belonging to the Ludford Association (Soil Survey 1983). The soils are well-drained, non calcareous, argillic brown earths which were developed in fine and coarse loamy Head (Hodge *et al* 1984, 237).

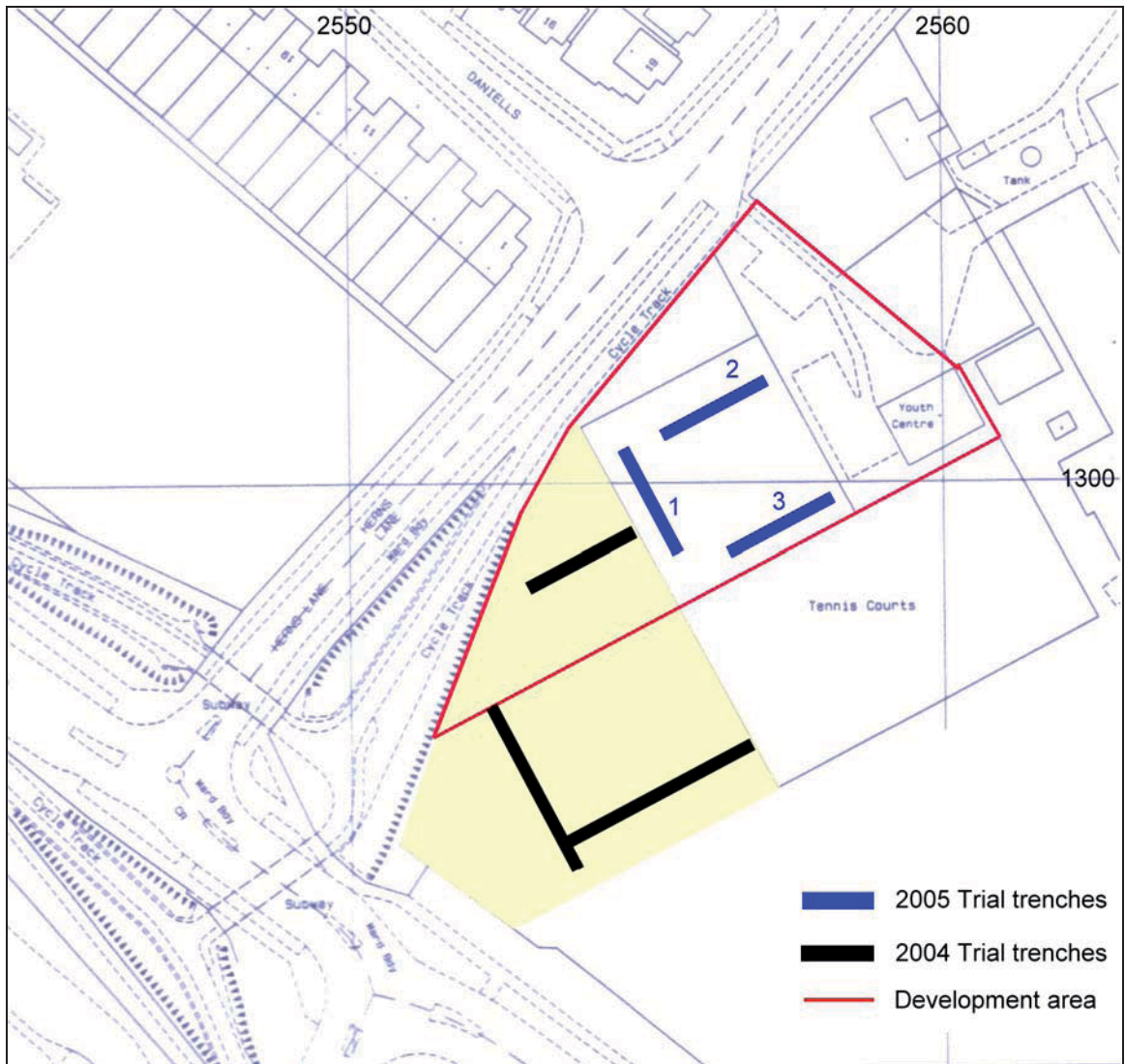


Figure 2: Site plan showing trench locations (scale 1:1250)

2 Aims & Methods

2.1 Aims

As described in the brief (Section 3), the aims of the evaluation were:

- To determine the location, extent, date, character, condition, significance and quality of any surviving archaeological remains liable to be threatened by the proposed development.
- To carry out a comprehensive assessment of the regional context within which any archaeological evidence rests and to highlight any regional research agendas relevant to any further investigation of the site.
- For the assessment to provide a predictive model of the archaeological remains likely to be present on the site and include an assessment of their significance.

2.2 Standards

The work conformed to the requirements of the *Brief*, to the relevant sections of the Institute of Archaeologists' *Standard & Guidance Notes* (IFA 2001) and *Code of Conduct* (IFA 2000a), to the Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers East of England Region *Standards for Field Archaeology in the East of England* (ALGAO 2003), to current English Heritage guidelines (EH1991; EH 1995), and to the relevant sections of ASC's own *Operations Manual*.

2.3 Methods

The work was carried out according to the brief, which required:

- The excavation of three 20-metre trial trenches within the footprints of the proposed building, car parking and access (Fig. 2).

3 Archaeological & Historical Background

The following section is based upon a comprehensive desk-based assessment of the school and its environs prepared by ASC for Herts CC in 2003 (Wilcox 2003).

- 3.1 Little is known of prehistoric sites in the Welwyn Garden City area. With the exception of a late Bronze Age axe from Woodhall Lane, nearly 2km south-west of the assessment site (SMR 0642), no sites or finds of pre Iron Age date are recorded in the garden city, although recent studies (Holgate 1995) indicate evidence of prehistoric activity in the upper Mimram valley, north-west of Welwyn.
- 3.2 In contrast, sites of Iron Age date are well represented in the Welwyn area generally. From a recent regional study (Niblett 1995, 61) it is clear that, during the late pre-Roman Iron Age (LPRIA), the area now encompassing Welwyn and Welwyn Garden City was quite densely settled, and that this thriving community included a particularly rich and influential group of people. Possibly the most significant discovery of this period made in the immediate environs of the site is the Iron Age cemetery and 'Chieftain Burial' located on the Panshanger estate in 1965 (Stead 1967: SMR 2815). The area surrounding this site is designated as *Area of Archaeological Significance* 15 by the CAO. Subsequent observations during house construction in this area (Rook 1970) have revealed much evidence of settlement and related activities of both late pre-Roman Iron Age (LPRIA) and Roman date (SMR 2818, 2819, 2820, 4245, 6416).
- 3.3 During the Roman period, the Welwyn area fell within the tribal territory (*civitas*) of the *Catuvellauni*, with its capital at *Verulamium* (St Albans). A number of Roman sites have been located in the area, primarily around Welwyn itself, showing that this part of the Mimram valley remained a centre of occupation. As in the late Iron Age, a significant part of the area's occupants appear to have had wealth and influence. Villas have been excavated at Lockleys (Ward Perkins 1938) and Dicket Mead (Rook 1986), and traces of other substantial Roman masonry buildings have been found elsewhere in and around Welwyn (Rook, *op. cit.*). Recently, the remains of a substantial Roman mausoleum and associated inhumation cemetery were excavated at Welwyn Hall (Macdonald, forthcoming). Moving closer to the site, Roman occupation debris and coins have been recovered from Panshanger (SMR 2818, 4252, 6416), and a Roman coin was found at a site in Heronswood Road (SMR 2821). The LPRIA/Roman native settlement at Grubs Barn, discovered by the Lockleys Archaeological Society in the late 1960s (Rook 1970, 31-36), is adjacent to the school grounds. Its full extent and nature have never been fully determined.
- 3.4 Very little is known of the Welwyn area during the centuries following the end of the Roman period, and no sites or finds of Saxon date are recorded within the environs of the site. By the later part of the Saxon period, the area fell within the large parish of Hatfield, which was itself part of the Broadwater Hundred (Page 1914, 91). Settlements appear to have existed prior to the Norman Conquest in the neighbouring parishes of Welwyn and Digswell: the principal settlement of Hatfield parish (now Old Hatfield) is some 5km south of the site.

- 3.5 In the 11th century the manor of Panshanger, to which the site belonged, was given to Geoffrey de Manville by William I (Soissons 1988). The manor passed to William de Melkesope in 1277 and to the Marchioness of Exeter by the 16th century. Her estate was forfeited by Henry VII in 1541 following the execution of her husband and the manor was given to Nicholas Throckmorton. The Panshanger estate later belonged to the Hitchcocks who sold the manor to William Cowper in 1710 (Soissons 1988).
- 3.6 In 1710 the Panshanger estate was bought by William Cowper, the Lord Chancellor (Soissons 1988; Rook 2001). The 3rd and 5th Earls Cowper purchased more land within the valley of Mimram, including part of the manor of Tewin, which was incorporated into the family seat of Panshanger (Rook 2001; Page 1914). Land at Tewin remained within the Panshanger estate and in the ownership of the Cowper family throughout the 19th century.
- 3.7 The estate was inherited by Lord Desborough in 1913 who some sold of it to Ebenezer Howard in 1919 in order to begin construction of Welwyn Garden City. The land on which the school now stands appears to have remained as largely open agricultural land until shortly after World War II (Rook 2001).
- 3.8 Several archaeological evaluations have been carried out by ASC within the school grounds in recent years. In 1999 a watching brief was undertaken during the construction of an extension to the southern end of the school block, east of the present site (Zeepvat 1999). In 2004 a geophysical survey followed by trial trenching was carried out on the playing field at the south-west end of the development site (Hunn 2004: Fig. 3). Subsequently the remainder of the playing fields to the south-west of the school were subject to geophysical survey (Hancock 2004). No archaeological features or finds were revealed as a result of these investigations.

4 Results and Conclusions

- 4.1 Three trenches were excavated in positions agreed with the AA (Fig. 2). The trenches were each 20m x 1.6m in area and varied in depth between 0.4-0.5m depending on the depth of the hardcore base for the existing tarmac tennis court. No archaeological features were revealed within the trenches and no finds were recovered.
- 4.2 The natural strata revealed comprised a mid orangey brown sand and gravel with occasional patches of similarly coloured clayey silt ('head'). This corresponded well both with the predictions of the existing soil survey and the findings of the prior trial trenching.
- 4.3 No obvious or intrusive ground disturbance was apparent in the trenches. However, as the area was occupied by a tarmac tennis court it is likely that it has been stripped and levelled in the recent past. The lack of any recognisable relict topsoil layer supports this conclusion.
- 4.4 In the light of this study and the results of the previous phases of work it seems reasonable to conclude that the development site is of little archaeological potential.

5. Acknowledgements

The writer is grateful to Richard Parsons for commissioning this project on behalf of Hertfordshire County Council. Also to Jonathan Smith and Kate Batt of Hertfordshire County Council, County Archaeological office who acted as curatorial officers.

The fieldwork was carried out by the author and Alastair Hancock BSc PG Dip. The report was edited by Jonathan Hunn PhD MIFA.

6. Archive

6.1 The project archive will comprise:

1. Brief
2. Project Design
3. Initial Report
4. Site records
5. List of photographs
6. B/W prints & negatives
7. CDROM with copies of all digital files.

6.2 The archive will be deposited with Mill Green Museum.

7. References

Standards & Specifications

- ALGAO 2003 *Standards for Field Archaeology in the East of England*. East Anglian Archaeology Occasional Paper **14**.
- EH 1991 *The Management of Archaeological Projects*, 2nd edition. English Heritage (London).
- IFA 2000a Institute of Field Archaeologists' *Code of Conduct*.
- 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

- Hancock, A 2004 *Geophysical Survey: Sir Frederic Osborn School, Welwyn Garden City, Hertfordshire*. ASC report 573/FOS/03.
- Hodge C.A.H, Burton R.G.O, Corbett W.M, Evans, R. and Seale, R.S. 1984 *Soils and their use in Eastern England*. Soil Survey of England and Wales Bulletin **13** (Harpenden).
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- Niblett, R., 1995 *Roman Hertfordshire*. Dovecote Press (Wimborne).
- Page, W. (ed.) 1914 *The Victoria History of the County of Hertfordshire*, vol. iii, 91-110.
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- Soil Survey 1983 *Soils of England & Wales: Sheet 4, Eastern England: 1:250,000 map and legend (Harpenden)*.
- Soissons, M de, 1988. *Welwyn Garden City. A town designed for healthy living*. Publications for Companies (Cambridge)
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- Zeepvat, B. 1999. *An Archaeological Evaluation of a site at Sir Fredric Osborn School, Welwyn Garden City, Hertfordshire*. ASC Report 126/FOS99/01.

Appendix 1: Trench Summary Tables



Trench 1							
Max Dimensions					Orientation		
Length	20m	Width	1.6m	Depth	0.5m	Northwest to southeast	
NGR Co-ordinates					Reason for Trench		
NW	TL25546 13006	SE	TL25556 12988	General evaluation			
Context	Type	Description and Interpretation			Max Width (mm)	Max Thckn (mm)	Depth BGL (mm)
100	Layer	Tarmac over hardcore			--	500	--
101	Layer	Natural strata – Mid orangey brown sand and gravel			--	500+	500



Trench 2							
Max Dimensions					Orientation		
Length	20m	Width	1.6m	Depth	0.4m	Northeast to southwest	
NGR Co-ordinates					Reason for Trench		
NE	TL25566 13017	SW	TL25553 13008	General evaluation			
Context	Type	Description and Interpretation			Max Width (mm)	Max Thckn (mm)	Depth BGL (mm)
200	Layer	Tarmac over hardcore			--	400	--
201	Layer	Natural strata – Mid orangey brown sand and gravel			--	400+	400



Trench 3							
Max Dimensions					Orientation		
Length	20m	Width	1.6m	Depth	0.5m	Northeast to southwest	
NGR Co-ordinates					Reason for Trench		
NE	TL25583 12997	SW	TL25565 12988	General evaluation			
Context	Type	Description and Interpretation			Max Width (mm)	Max Thckn (mm)	Depth BGL (mm)
300	Layer	Tarmac over hardcore			--	500	--
301	Layer	Natural strata – Light orangey brown clay			--	500+	500

Appendix 2: SMR Summary Sheet

Site name and address: Frederic Osborn School, Herns Lane, Welwyn Garden City, Hertfordshire		
County: Hertfordshire		District: Welwyn Hatfield
Village/Town: Welwyn Garden City		Parish: Welwyn Garden City
Planning application reference: n/a		
Client name, address, & tel. no: Hertfordshire County Council c/o Vincent and Goring Sterling Court Norton Road Stevenage Herts SG1 2JY		
Nature of application: Construction of children's homes and associated works		
Present land use: Tennis court		
Size of application area: 35m x 35m		Size of area investigated: 96 sq. m
NGR (to 8 figures): TL 25559 13001		Site code: 723/FOS
Site director/Organization: N.A. Crank / ASC Ltd		
Type of work: Trial trench evaluation		
Date of work:	Start: 17/10/05	Finish: 17/10/05
Curating museum: Mill Green		
Related SMR nos:		Periods represented: None
Relevant previous summaries/reports: ASC: 126/FOS99/01; 533/FWS/01; 573/FOS/02; 573/FOS/03. Stratascan: J1877.		
Summary of fieldwork results: During October 2005 an archaeological trial-trench evaluation was undertaken by ASC Ltd at Sir Fredrick Osborn School, Welwyn Garden City, Hertfordshire. Three trenches were excavated revealing no archaeological features. No finds were recovered. The evaluation was preceded by a negative trial-trenching exercise and geophysical surveys in the adjacent areas. The combined results lead to the assertion that the site is of little archaeological potential.		
Author: N.A. Crank		Date: 18 th October 2005