



Archaeological Services & Consultancy Ltd

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION: WESTON WAY NURSERY SCHOOL BALDOCK HERTFORDSHIRE

NGR: TL 2430 3298

on behalf of Hertfordshire County Council



Nigel Wilson HND AIFA

April 2008

ASC: 1058/BWW/2

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Site Data

<i>ASC site code:</i>	BWW	<i>Project no:</i>	1058
<i>OASIS ref:</i>	archaeol2-39936	<i>Event/Accession no:</i>	to be confirmed
<i>County:</i>	Hertfordshire		
<i>Village/Town:</i>	Baldock		
<i>Civil Parish:</i>	Clothall		
<i>NGR (to 8 figs):</i>	TL 2430 3298		
<i>Extent of site:</i>	c.143 sq m		
<i>Present land use:</i>	School grounds		
<i>Planning proposal:</i>	Construction of a new classroom		
<i>Local Planning Authority:</i>	North Hertfordshire District Council		
<i>Planning application ref/date:</i>	08/00253/1CC		
<i>Commissioned by:</i>	Mouchel Ltd Stag House Old London Road Hertford SG13 7YY		
<i>Client:</i>	Hertfordshire County Council		
<i>Contact name:</i>	Kevin Liles (Mouchel)		

Internal Quality Check

<i>Primary Author:</i>	Nigel Wilson	<i>Date:</i>	1 st April 2008
<i>Revisions:</i>		<i>Date:</i>	
<i>Edited/Checked By:</i>		<i>Date:</i>	

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

Summary

In March 2008, a trial trench was excavated at Weston Way Nursery School, Baldock. The work was required in advance of the construction of a new classroom. No archaeologically significant features were found. Observation of the trench section confirmed that the natural chalk lay below about 300mm of topsoil.

1. Introduction

1.1 In March 2008 *Archaeological Services and Consultancy Ltd* (ASC) carried out an evaluation at Weston Way Nursery School, Baldock, Hertfordshire. The project was commissioned by Mouchel Ltd acting on behalf of Hertfordshire County Council, and was carried out according to a brief (Instone 2008) prepared on behalf of the local planning authority (LPA), *North Hertfordshire District Council* by their archaeological advisor (AA), *the Historic Environment Unit of Hertfordshire County Council.*, and a project design prepared by ASC (Barclay 2008). The relevant planning application reference is 08/00253/1CC.

1.2 *Planning Background*

This evaluation was required under the terms of *Planning Policy Guidance Note 16* (PPG16), as a condition of planning permission for the development of the site.

1.3 *Archaeological Services & Consultancy Ltd*

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 Archaeological Organisation* by the Institute of Field Archaeologists, in recognition of its high standards and working practices.

1.4 *Management*

The project was carried out under the overall direction of **Bob Zeepvat** BA MIFA. Bob is an established archaeologist with extensive experience in managing archaeological projects, of a wide range of fieldwork in both rural and urban environments, of post-excavation, publication and presentation projects, and of work on a wide range of historic buildings and structures. He holds a first degree from the University of Leicester, and has been a validated Member of the Institute of Field Archaeologists since 1986. He has been involved in the management of archaeological projects since the late 1970s, formerly as Senior Field Archaeologist for the *Milton Keynes Archaeology Unit*, and as Project Manager for the *Hertfordshire Archaeological Trust*.

1.5 *The Site*

1.5.1 *Location & Description*

The site is located in Baldock, in the administrative district of North Hertfordshire. It lies to the south-west of the Baldock town centre, at the junction of Weston Way and Crabtree Lane and is centred on Ordnance Survey

National Grid Reference TL 2430 3298 (Fig 1). The school lies within a triangular area and the proposed development is rectangular in shape, and is immediately adjacent to the existing school buildings. Access to the site is from Weston Way (Fig. 2).

1.5.2 *Geology & Topography*

The site is in an urban area and the natural soils have not been mapped. If undisturbed soils survive they are likely to comprise the *Upton 1 Association*, namely shallow well drained calcareous silty soils (Soil Survey 1983, 342a). The underlying geology comprises Cretaceous Chalk (BGS, sheet 221). The site lies at an elevation of *c.*75m OD.

1.5.3 *Proposed Development*

The proposal is for the construction of an additional classroom (Fig 3).



Figure 2: Site plan and trench location (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.

2.2 *Standards*

The work conformed to the project design, to the relevant sections of the Institute of 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*.

2.3 *Methods*

The work was carried out according to the brief (Section 4), which required:

- Trial-trenching in the footprint of the proposed development. A single trial trench, c.10m long was excavated within the footprint of the proposed building. The location is shown in Fig. 3

2.4 *Constraints*

No constraints adversely affecting the evaluation were present. However as a modern pipe trench run diagonally across the central part of the trench, it was not possible to totally expose the natural in this area.

3. Archaeological & Historical Background

SMR = Sites and Monuments Record number

- 3.1 The following section provides a summary of the readily available archaeological and historical background to the development site and its environs. Baldock is an area of considerable archaeological and historical interest and this has recently been defined in the *Baldock Extensive Urban Survey* (Thompson 2002). The site has the potential to reveal evidence of a range of periods but the focus of interest is likely to lie in the Roman period.
- 3.2 Nothing is known of the site during the prehistoric periods, but a number of Bronze Age cremations (SMR 10077) and ring ditches (ploughed out burial mounds: SMR 2336, 2343, 1296, etc.) have been identified in the surrounding area. An important prehistoric track, now known as the *Ickniel Way* passed to the north of Baldock. Extensive traces of Iron Age occupation are known c.1km northeast of the site, adjacent to Clothall Road (Thompson 2002, fig. 2). Its situation on good farmland, combined with its position on the *Ickniel Way* made the area a natural focus for early settlement (Niblett 1995, 52).
- 3.3 During the Roman period the settlement developed into a small town. Excavations in advance of development between 1968-72 focussed on the area to the northeast of Clothall Road (A507) and the *Ickniel Way* (A505). These revealed extensive cemeteries skirting the Roman town from which almost two thousand Romano-British graves were excavated, in addition to wells, corn drying kilns, enclosure ditches, and houses of both native and Roman type. Evidence for ironworking and other craft production was also recovered (Niblett 1995, 53; Stead & Rigby 1986, 83-89). A major Roman road, linking Baldock with *Verulamium* (St Albans) passed c.400m southeast of the site and extensive traces of Roman settlement has been recorded in the area surrounding the site (eg. SMR 487, 1061, 1421, etc.).
- 3.4 Following the decline of the Roman town the area does not come to prominence again until the 12th century when in c.1140 Gilbert de Clare, earl of Pembroke granted Baldock to the Knights Templars (Page 1908, 66). The medieval settlement developed c.1km north of the site and was centred at the intersection of the High Street and Whitehorse Street (Thompson 2002, fig. 4). The church of St Mary, which dates from the 14th century is situated immediately to the west (Pevsner 2002, 81).
- 3.5 The site is situated beyond the southern limit of the medieval town. The 1884 Ordnance Survey map shows Weston Way and Crabtree Lane and the site of the school is shown as open land, with trees along the road frontages. The land formed the south tip of a larger estate, known as *The Elms*.

4 Results

4.1 General

The site slopes gently down from the southeast to the northwest. Prior to the start of the evaluation the area was lawn except for a disturbed area where a large tree had recently been removed. A single 10.2m trench orientated southeast to northwest was excavated along the major axis of the proposed new classroom using a mechanical excavator fitted with a 1.6m toothless ditching bucket (Fig. 4).

4.2 The topsoil comprised a dark greyish brown loam sitting directly on the underlying chalk natural. Within the top soil extensive tree roots remained from the tree which had been removed. These roots ranged in size from small to c.150mm in diameter.

4.3 Cutting the natural there were two archaeologically insignificant features. Towards the south-eastern end of the trench there was a sub circular depression (Context [03]) filled with a mid-greyish brown silty clay, which several large roots had penetrated. Many such irregular shaped features cut in to the chalk have been excavated in the Baldock area. In almost all cases they have proved to be natural features, and this feature seems to fit this pattern. The only other disturbance was a modern sewer pipe (Context [06]) orientated SSE - NNW running diagonally across the trench.



Plate 1: natural hollow [03]

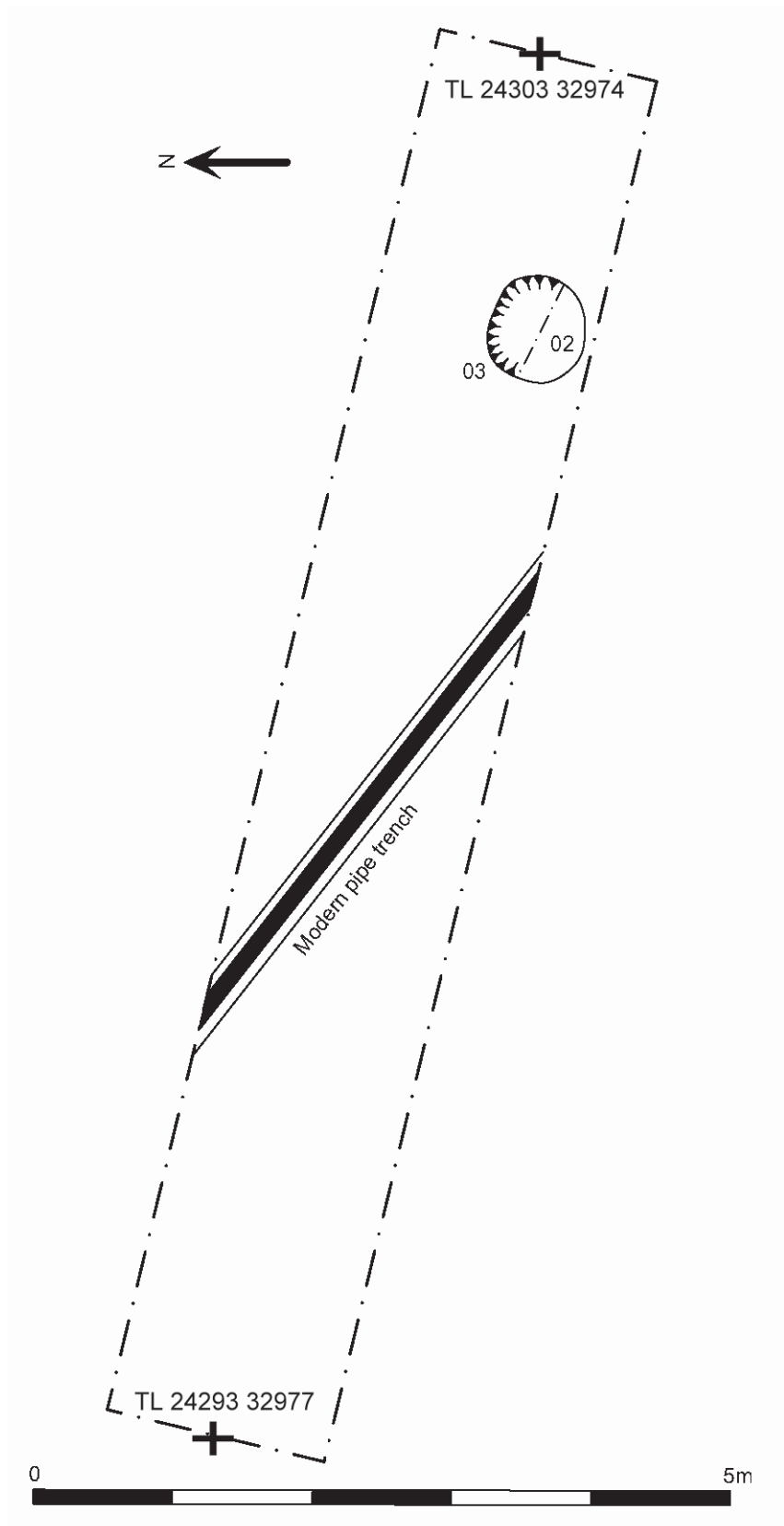


Figure 4: Trench plan (scale 1:50)

5. Conclusions

- 5.1 The valuation at Weston Way Nursery School produced no evidence for previous occupation of the site. However it is always possible that small discrete archaeological features may be present on site in the areas not covered by the trench.
- 5.2 Previous archaeological work in and around Baldock town centre has produced a wide range of sites, dating from the Bronze Age through to recent times. Despite this project producing negative results it is as useful as an archaeologically rich site. Individually small negative interventions are of limited value, however as the findings of each small investigation are put alongside previous work a detailed picture of Baldocks development and past settlement patterns is emerging.
- 5.3 *Confidence Rating*
The work was carried out in reasonable conditions for the identification of buried features by an experienced team and no constraints were placed on the work, so a high confidence rating can be placed on the results.

6. Acknowledgements

The evaluation was commissioned by Mouchel Ltd acting on behalf of their clients Hertfordshire County Council. The writer is grateful to Kevin Liles for his assistance. The project was monitored by Andy Instone of the HEU on behalf of the local planning authority.

The project was managed for ASC by Bob Zeepvat BA MIFA. Fieldwork was carried out by Nigel Wilson and Chris Swain. The report was prepared by Nigel Wilson and edited by Bob Zeepvat.

7. Archive

7.1 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.

7.2 The archive will be deposited with North Hertfordshire Museum Store

8. References

Standards & Specifications

ALGAO 2003 *Standards for Field Archaeology in the East of England*. East Anglian Archaeology Occasional Paper 14.

Barclay C.. 2008 *Project Design for Archaeological Evaluation, Weston Way Nursery School, Baldock* ASC Ltd (Ref 1058/BWW/01)

English Heritage 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)*.

Instone A. 2008 *Design brief for archaeological evaluation: Weston Way Nursery, Baldock*. Hertfordshire County Council

Secondary Sources

BGS *British Geological Survey 1:50,000 Series, Solid & Drift Geology*.

Niblett R 1995 *Roman Hertfordshire*. Dovecote Press (Wimborne)


Page W. 1912 *The Victoria County History of Hertfordshire*. Dawsons of Pall Mall. (Folkestone & London).

Pevsner N. 2002 *The Buildings of England*. Hertfordshire. Yale

Stead I.M. & Rigby V 1986 *Baldock: The Excavation of a Roman and Pre-Roman Settlement, 1968-72*. Britannia Monograph Series. 7 (London)

Soil Survey 1983 *1:250,000 Soil Map of England and Wales, and accompanying legend* (Harpenden).

Appendix 1: Trench Summary Tables

Trench 1						
	Max Dimensions (m)					
	Length	10.2	Width	1.6	Depth	0.3
	Levels					
	Trench top SE			75.46m OD		
	Trench base SE			75.11m OD		
	Trench base NW			75.65m OD		
	Trench top NW			75.93m OD		
	NGR Co-ordinates					
	TL	24303 32974		TL	24293 32977	
	Orientation			**Southeast - northwest		
Reason for Trench			Evaluate footprint of new classroom			
Context	Type	Description and Interpretation		Width (max: mm)	Thickness (max: mm)	Depth (BGL: mm)
01	Layer	Topsoil, dark greyish brown, frequent tree roots		>1600	300	0-300
02	Deposit	Fill of 03, mid greyish brown frequent roots				300-500
03	Cut	Irregular sub circular solution hollow				300-500
04	Natural	Chalk		>1600	-	>300
05	Deposit	Fill of pipe trench		250	-	250->300
06	Cut	NNW - SSE sewer pipe trench		250	-	250->300

Appendix 2: List of Photographs

SITE NAME: Weston Way Nursery School, Baldock			SITE NO/CODE: 1058/BWW
Shot	B&W	Digital	Subject
1	✓	✓	General view of trench looking NW
2		✓	View of trench and school looking SE
3	✓	✓	View of trench and school looking SE
4	✓	✓	Solution hollow [03] looking SW

Appendix 3: ASC OASIS Form

PROJECT DETAILS			
Project Name:	Weston Way Nursery School, Baldock	OASIS Ref No:	archaeol2-39936
Short Description:	<i>In March 2008, a trial trench was excavated at Weston Way Nursery School, Baldock. The work was required in advance of the construction of a new classroom. No archaeologically significant features were found. Observation of the trench section confirmed that the natural chalk lay below about 300mm of topsoil.</i>		
Project Type: (indicate all that apply)	Trial Trenching		
Site status: (eg. none, SAM, Listed)	None	Previous work: (eg. SMR refs)	None
Current land use:	School grounds	Future work: (yes / no / unknown)	No
Monument type:	n/a	Monument period:	n/a
Significant finds: (artefact type & period)	n/a		
PROJECT LOCATION			
County:	Hertfordshire	OS reference: (8 figs min)	TL 2440 3297
Site address: (with postcode if known)	Weston Way, Nursery School, Baldock, Hertfordshire SG7 6HD		
Study area: (sq. m. or ha)	144sq m	Height OD: (metres)	75.5m
PROJECT CREATORS			
Organisation:	Archaeological Services & Consultancy Ltd		
Project brief originator:	Hertfordshire C.C.	Project design originator:	ASC Ltd
Project Manager:	Bob Zeervat BA MIFA	Director/Supervisor:	Nigel Wilson HND AIFA
Sponsor / funding body:	Herts C.C.		
PROJECT DATE			
Start date:	26 th March 2008	End date:	26 th March 2008
PROJECT ARCHIVES			
	Location (Accession no.)	Content (eg. pottery, animal bone, files/sheets)	
Physical:	n/a		
Paper:	North Hertfordshire Museum Store	Brief (HCC) Project Design, Report (ASC Ltd)	
Digital:	North Hertfordshire Museum Store	CD (report, digital images)	
BIBLIOGRAPHY (Journal/monograph, published or forthcoming, or unpublished client report)			
Title:	Archaeological Evaluation: Weston Way Nursery School, Baldock, Hertfordshire		
Serial title & volume:	ASC Ltd Report ref. 1058/BWW/2		
Author(s):	Nigel Wilson HND AIFA		
Page nos	16	Date:	1 st April 2008