



Archaeological Services & Consultancy Ltd

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF: ASHWELL PRIMARY SCHOOL ASHWELL HERTFORDSHIRE

NGR: TL 26740 39520

on behalf of Hertfordshire County Council



Nigel Wilson HND AIFA

April 2008

ASC: 1030/APS/2

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Site Data

<i>ASC site code:</i>	APS	<i>Project no:</i>	1030
<i>OASIS ref:</i>	archaeol02-40481	<i>Event/Accession no:</i>	To be confirmed
<i>County:</i>	Hertfordshire		
<i>Village/Town:</i>	Ashwell		
<i>Civil Parish:</i>	Ashwell CP		
<i>NGR (to 8 figs):</i>	TL 26740 39520		
<i>Extent of site:</i>	252m ²		
<i>Present land use:</i>	School Grounds		
<i>Planning proposal:</i>	New classrooms		
<i>Local Planning Authority:</i>	North Hertfordshire District Council		
<i>Planning application ref/date:</i>	07/02900/1CC		
<i>Client:</i>	Hertfordshire County Council C/o Mace Ltd Stag House Old London Road Hertford Hertfordshire SG13 7YY		
<i>Contact name:</i>	Hellen Stevens		

Internal Quality Check

<i>Primary Author:</i>	Nigel Wilson	<i>Date:</i>	17 th April 2008
<i>Revisions:</i>		<i>Date:</i>	
<i>Edited/Checked By:</i>		<i>Date:</i>	

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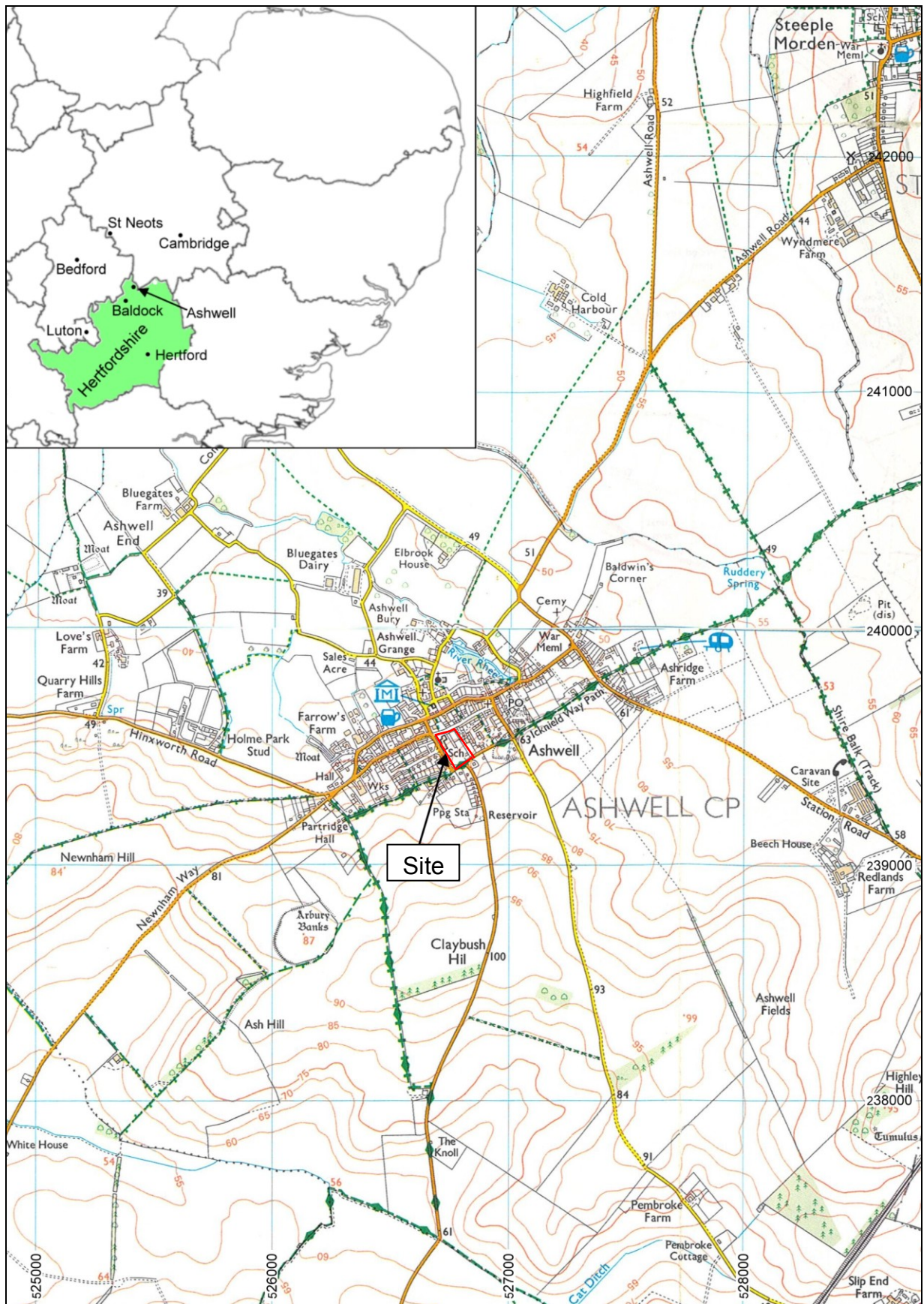


Figure 1: General location (scale 1:25,000)

Summary

During March 2008, Archaeological Services and Consultancy Ltd undertook a watching brief, at Ashwell Primary School, Ashwell, Hertfordshire. The work was required to monitor the groundworks associated with the construction of two new classrooms. The only significant finds were two southwest to northeast ditches. Though the only finds recovered from the fill dated to the 1st half of the 19th century it is likely that the ditches were medieval or early post medieval homestead boundaries extending from Silver Street to Ashwell Street. Mapping evidence shows that these ditches were filled sometime before 1877.

1. Introduction

1.1 In March 2008 *Archaeological Services and Consultancy Ltd* (ASC) carried out a watching brief at Ashwell Primary School, Hertfordshire. The project was commissioned by Mace Ltd acting on behalf of Hertfordshire County Council, and was carried out according to a brief (Instone 2007) prepared on behalf of the local planning authority (LPA), *North Hertfordshire District Council*, by their archaeological advisor (AA), the *Hertfordshire County Council Historic Environment Unit*, and a project design prepared by ASC. (Brown 2008) The relevant planning application reference is 07/02900/1CC

1.2 *Planning Background*

This strip and record 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 assessment was managed by **Karin Semmelmann** BA MA AIFA, and was carried out under the overall direction of **Bob Zeepvat** BA MIFA.

1.5 ***The Site***

1.5.1 *Location & Description*

Ashwell Primary School lies within the administrative district of North Hertfordshire and is situated on the south side of the centre of Ashwell. The site is on the east side of the primary school grounds, which are bounded by Silver Street, Bear Lane and Ashwell Street on the north, west, and south respectively. The excavation area is centred on NGR TL 26740 39520 (Fig. 1).

1.5.2 *Services, Buildings, Access, Etc*

Because the proposed new building is *c.*6m to the east of the main school and in an urban setting, the potential for encountering services exists. Access to the site is from the south via Ashwell Street. (Fig. 2)

1.5.3 *Geology & Topography*

The school grounds are situated on a gentle southeast-facing slope, dropping from *c.*50m OD in the north to *c.*60m in the south. The soils on site are likely to be of the Upton Association and to comprise “shallow well drained calcareous silty soils over chalk” (Soil Survey 1983, 342a). The underlying geology comprises Cretaceous Chalk (BGS, sheet 221).

1.5.4 *Proposed Development*

The proposal is to remove an existing temporary classroom and erect a head teachers office and two permanent classrooms (Fig. 3).

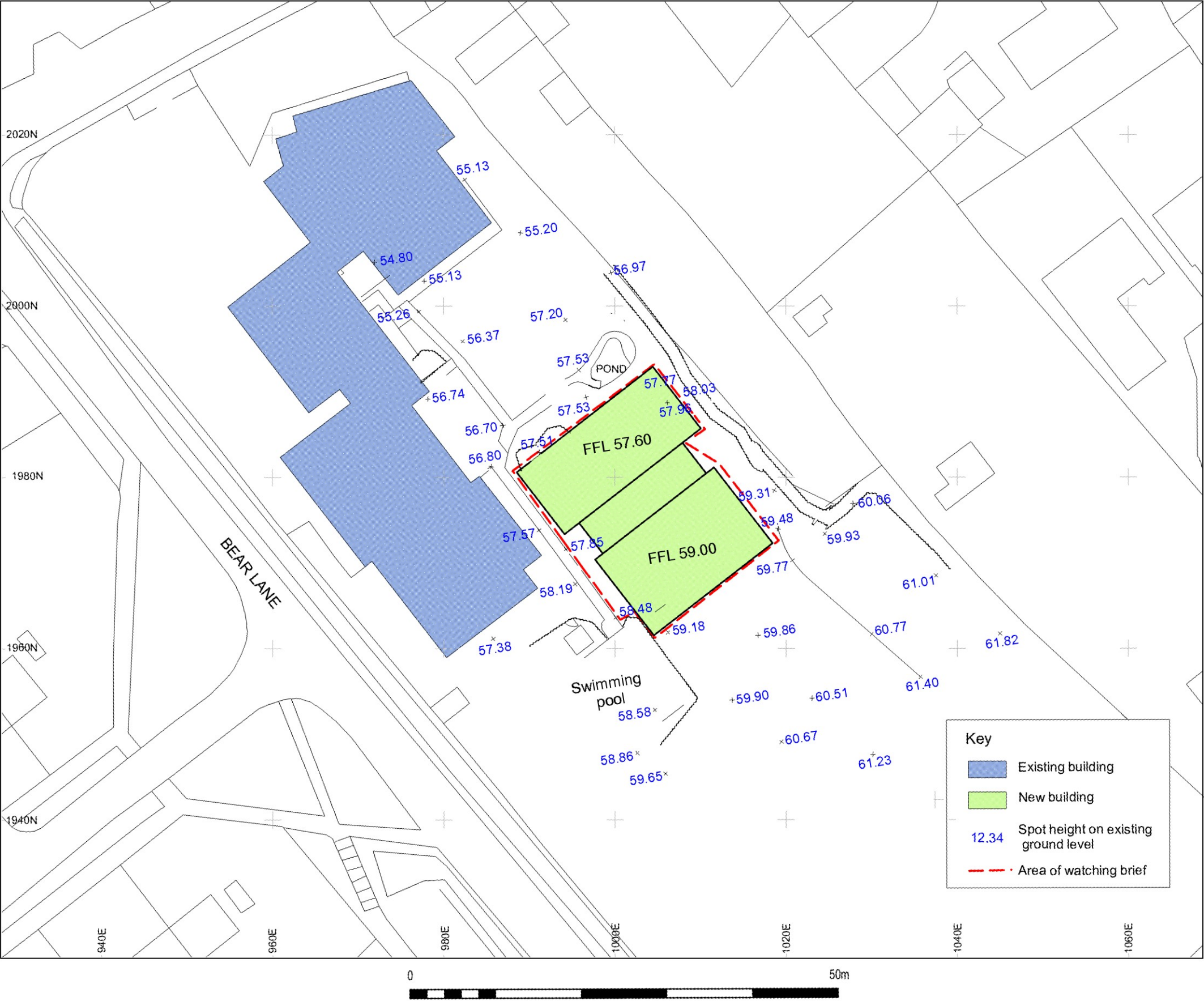


Figure 2: Site plan and proposed development (scale 1:500)

2. Aims & Methods

2.1 Aims

As described in the brief (Section 1), the aims of the watching brief were:

- To secure the adequate investigation and recording of any archaeological remains present within the excavation area.
- To obtain an overall plan of the site in all its phases.
- To establish the date and duration of activity on the site.
- To attempt to establish the nature and economic orientation of the site from artefactual and environmental evidence.
- To place the results in their local and regional context.
- To secure the analysis, conservation and long-term storage of any artefactual/ecofactual material recovered from the site.
- To create an archive of the project's findings, to provide a permanent record for future study.

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 1), which required:

- A top and subsoil strip to archaeological horizons of all areas likely to be disturbed by the development (e.g. building footprints and accesses), before construction commences
- A full record of any archaeological remains uncovered.
- The archaeological monitoring of all aspects of the development programme likely to affect archaeological remains.
- The adequate recording of any archaeological remains revealed by the development programme.
- The analysis, conservation and long-term storage of any artefactual/ecofactual material recovered from the site.

2.4 After discussion with the AA the strip and record requirement it was decided that a watching brief would be more appropriate for the recording of this site, due to the amount of known previous disturbance to the site. As the requirement was reduced to a watching brief some areas were not reduced to natural chalk, as that was below the level required by the development.

3. Archaeological & Historical Background

- 3.1 The site lies within *Area of Archaeological Significance 18*, as identified in the Local Plan. This notes that Ashwell is recorded in the Domesday Survey and was a substantial medieval settlement and borough (Instone 2007). As well as the strong medieval connection the site is located in an area of archaeological interest covering other periods also.

This section has been compiled with information from the Hertfordshire Historic Environment Record (HER).

3.2 ***Prehistoric*** (before 43AD)

A number of Neolithic barrows have been discovered in the area surrounding Ashwell, the nearest c.700m to the southwest of the site (HER 2360). Neolithic/early Bronze Age flints have also been recovered in the area, the closest of which comes from Westbury Farm c.400m to the west, where pits associated with flint working are also recorded (Thompson 2002, HER 0209).

During the Iron Age the area would have been dominated by Arbury Banks hillfort, c.800m southwest of the site. This possibly has its origins in the late Bronze Age but seems to have flourished during the early to middle Iron Age. Other than this monument, Iron Age finds are few in the area. The cemetery near Ruddy Spring included at least two or three burials of late Iron Age date (Thompson 1982), although the majority of the cemetery is of Roman date.

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

During the Roman period settlement focus shifted southwards from Arbury Banks to Baldock. However, the area around Ashwell seems to have continued to be populated with rural communities, as indicated by substantial masonry buildings, cropmarks of field systems, and scattered findspots that have been uncovered around the parish. Evidence of one possible villa comes from cropmarks of a substantial building surrounded by a possible Roman field system found on Claybush Hill, c.1km south of the site (HER 1681). However, it is also possible that this was a temple on the higher ground associated with the springs. One kilometre to the north east of Ashwell a Roman site with rectangular enclosures have been observed from the air, which is interpreted as being a villa (Munby 1977; HER 1912).

It has been suggested that Ashwell Street, which runs just to the south of the site, has its origins in the Roman period (Taylor 1997). If this is the case there may not have been one definite alignment at that stage, and that the route was probably in use connecting all the farms and villas. It could indicate that the southern boundary of the primary school also has its origins in the Roman period.

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

Ashwell meaning “ash spring” was first recorded in the Domesday Survey of 1086’. In the survey Ashwell was described as a borough, and would have been one of the largest

and most important in the surrounding area. Its founding is usually ascribed to the 9th century (Thompson 2002).

The owner of the Saxon estate would have laid out the borough. The centre of this estate is probably represented by the curving boundaries of Mill Street and the rectory grounds at the eastern end of the town. At the other end Westbury or the 'west manor' also has Saxon origins, yielding Saxon-Norman pottery (Gibson & Humphrey 2000; HER 1873). High Street forms the backbone of the planned town running from one estate to the other with an open market area at the corner of Mill Street. Large tofts (medieval house plots) lined the High Street. Silver Street, directly north of the school, would probably have provided access to the rear of these properties. The site appears to have one toft boundary running north south though it.

3.6 **Medieval** (1066-1500)

Ashwell continued to prosper until the mid 14th century and maintained its status as one of the most important market towns in the area for much of the early medieval period. However, in the 14th century the fortunes of Ashwell started to decline, compounded by the Black Death. The church of St Mary was constructed around this time and the graffiti on the wall at St Mary's testifies to the suffering here (HER 4296). The town was in competition with many of the other large market towns of the area in the medieval period. The location of Baldock at the main crossroads and the distance of Ashwell from a main road evidently made it impossible to successfully maintain a market at there in later times (VCH 1912). Eventually Ashwell's borough status quietly vanished (Thompson 2002).

Later in the medieval period the original tofts became the homesteads of those who farmed the strip fields that would have flanked Ashwell to the north and south. Many of the occupants also had pasture closes stretching back to Ashwell Street. The boundaries of some of these survive.

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

As Ashwell declined as a market town it branched into producing malt out of the barley grown in the area, and at one time many of the large houses and farms in the village would have had their own brewhouses (Whitaker 2006). With this thriving industry in the 17th century the inhabitants of Hinxworth complained that they were not taxed in fair comparison with Ashwell, which had many rich maltsters and three times as much land and as good as Hinxworth (VHC 1912).

Although some houses were built during the early post-medieval period, Ashwell did not expand much from its medieval boundaries. By the 18th century very few new houses were being constructed. In the 19th century industrialisation came to the malting industry in Ashwell, as the breweries stepped up production and constructed new buildings. The old back yard brewing and malting industries consequently declined.

A fire in 1850 provided the main impetus for development in the 19th century. It broke out on the south side of the High Street and swept eastwards along the High Street and Back Street towards the site. It destroyed six farms and thirty cottages, and two

hundred people were made homeless. Over the following twenty years much construction took place, including that of a new school. It is not clear whether or not this was Ashwell Primary School, which was founded in 1878.

3.8 ***Modern*** (1900-present)

Ashwell did not see much change in the 20th century and still largely retains its medieval layout.

4. Results

- 4.1 Once the site had been cleared of the existing temporary classroom two building terraces were cut into the gently sloping ground, one for each classroom (Fig. 2). The overburden comprised up to *c.* 0.5m of dark topsoil/ overburden, below which the natural chalk was exposed. Though the chalk was not exposed at the north-western end of each platform it seems highly unlikely that any significant archaeology would survive in the remaining few centimetres of overburden. A 1.5m wide, northwest to southeast orientated water pipe trench supplying the swimming pool was observed on the western side of both platforms (Fig 3, Plate 5).
- 4.2 The upper southern platform covered an area *c.* 17 x 19m. The only feature observed in this area was a former tarmac road access road to the school *c.* 4m wide (Fig. 3). This road would have been a continuation of the current access road from the south east. Towards the north-western end of the upper platform the road turned through 90° on to a northeast to southwest orientation and crossed the entire width of the upper platform except where it had been removed by the cutting of the water pipe trench. No other features were exposed during the stripping of the upper platform.
- 4.3 The lower northern platform covered an area *c.* 9m x 19m. Two modern ditches (03 & 05) *c.* 2.0m wide were recorded in this area (Fig. 4) on the north-western side of the platform. Both of these ditches were cut from a very high level. However they only survived at this level along the north-eastern and south-eastern side of the site where earlier construction work had not disturbed the soil profile. From within the fill of both ditches blue and white decorated pottery (Plate 7) probably dating from the first half of the 19th century was recovered. The 1877 Ordnance Survey 1:2500 map of 1877 (Fig. 6) shows the western boundary of the site in its current position. If the ditches had still been open when the surveying for the map was undertaken they would certainly have been shown on a map of this scale. It must therefore be concluded that the ditches were filled some time before the map was produced.

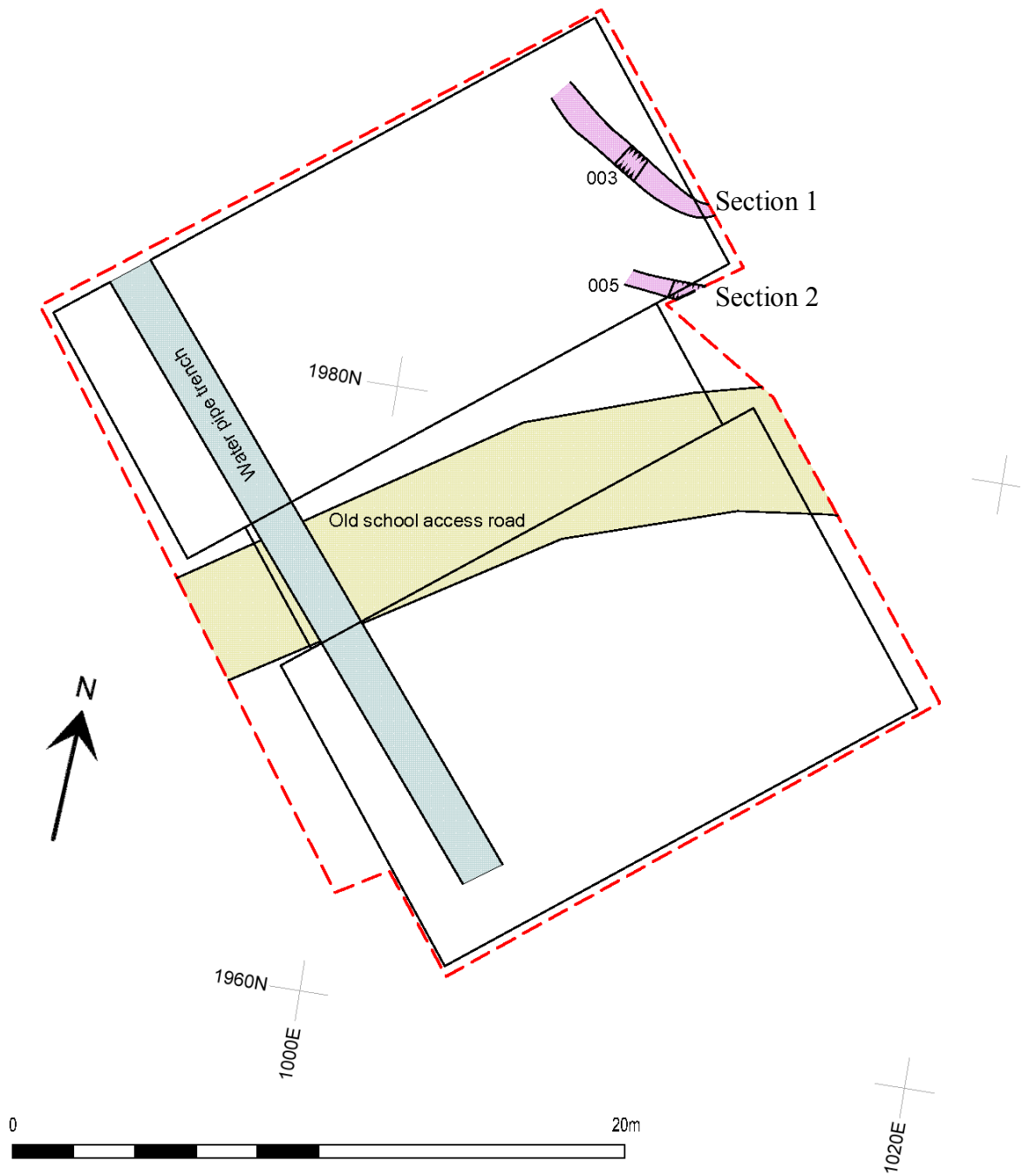


Figure 3: All feature plan (*scale 1:200*)

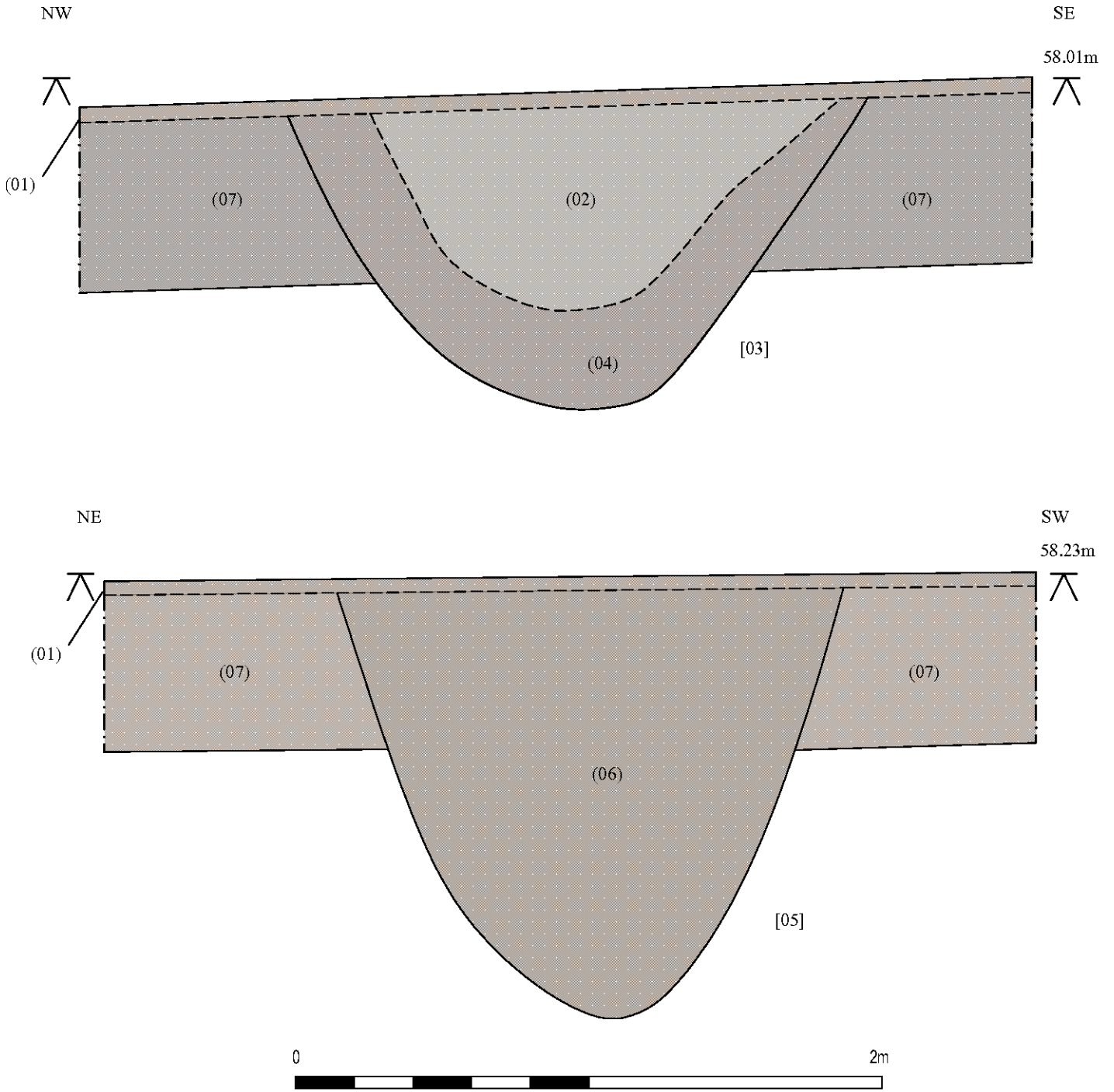


Figure 4: Section drawings (scale 1:20)

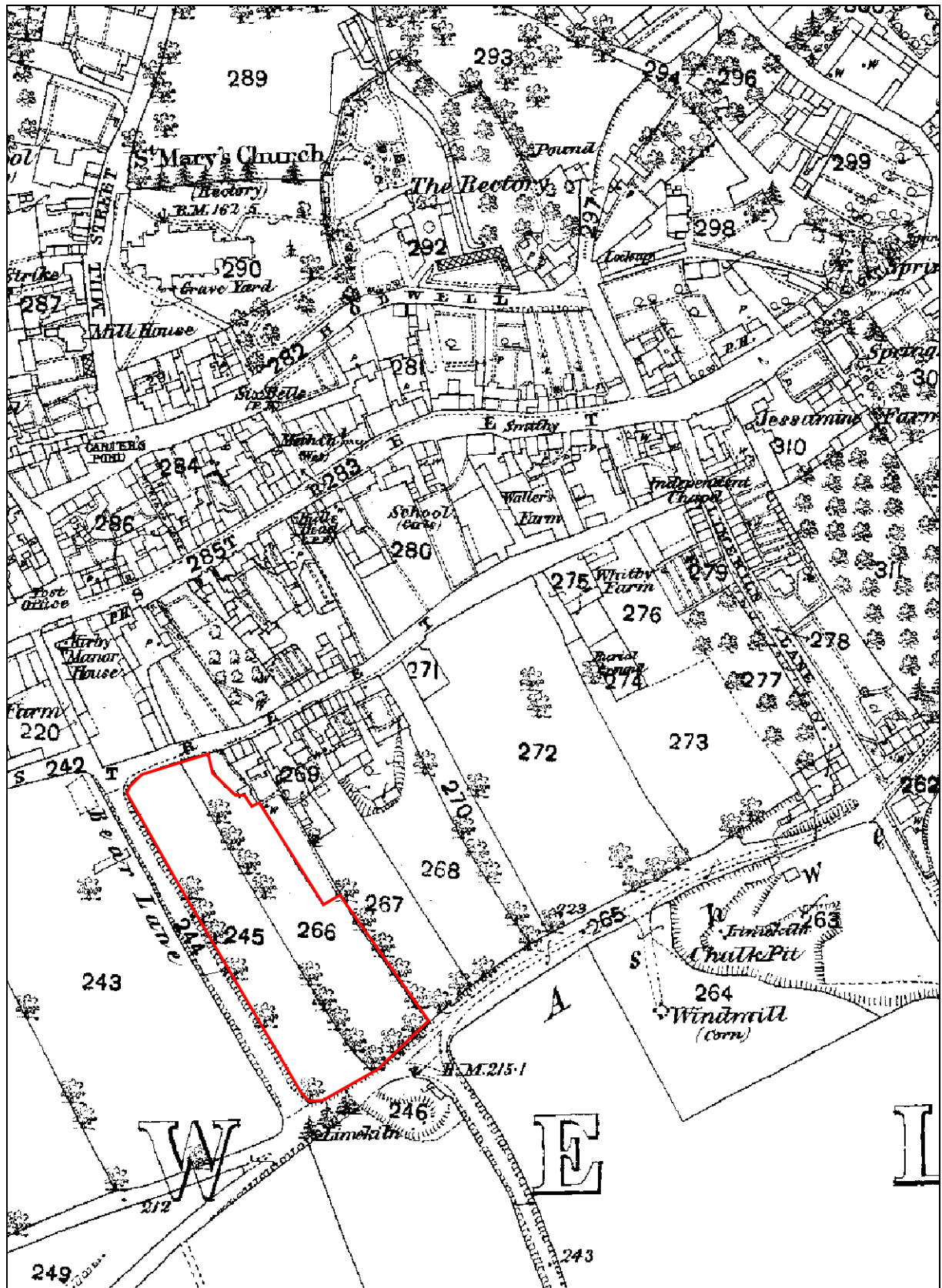


Figure 5: Extract from the 1877 Ordnance Survey map (scale 1:2500)



Plate 1: Ditch 03



Plate 2: Section of Ditch 03 showing its relationship to the overburden



Plate 3: Excavated section across Ditch 03



Plate 4: Ditch 05



Plate 5: Water pipe trench



Plate 6: The lower platform



Plate 5: 19th century pottery from Ditch 03 (10cm scale)

5. Conclusions

- 5.1 Whilst the watching brief at Ashwell Primary School failed to reveal any significant archaeology pre dating the 19th century it is likely that the two ditches exposed on the north-western platform represent a much older boundary possibly of medieval origin. The ditches probably denote one of the toft or homestead boundaries, many of which still survive to the south of Silver Street up to Ashwell Street. It is likely that the boundary was realigned to its present alignment during the rebuilding work after the fire in 1850. It is clear from the 1877 Ordnance Survey map that the school and grounds stand in what were two of these homesteads.
- 5.2 As the site seems to have been in use as a homestead since the medieval period and no features or artefacts other than modern were discovered during the watching brief it is unlikely that any major remains are present in the area surrounding that observed during the watching brief. However it is always possible that archaeology may be present away from the area observed.

5.3 *Confidence Rating*

The archaeological work took place under generally favourable weather conditions and full cooperation was given by the onsite contractors. It is therefore possible to give a high level of confidence to the results.

6. Acknowledgements

The evaluation was commissioned by Mace Ltd acting on behalf of Hertfordshire County Council. The writer is grateful to Helen Stevens who project managed the development for Mace. ASC would also like to thank all the contractors on site for their cooperation. The project was monitored by Andy Instone of the Historic Environment Unit on behalf of the local planning authority.

The project was managed for ASC by **Karin Semmelmann** BA MA AIFA. Fieldwork was carried out by Nigel Wilson. The report was prepared by Nigel Wilson and edited by Bob Zeepvat BA MIFA..

7. Archive

7.1 The project archive will comprise:

1. Brief
2. Project Design
3. Initial Report
4. Clients site plans
5. Site Monitoring Sheets
6. Finds records
7. Site record drawings
8. List of photographs
9. B/W prints & negatives
10. CDROM with copies of all digital files.

7.2 The archive will be deposited with the North Hertfordshire Museum Service Store.

8. References

Standards & Specifications

- ALGAO 2003 *Standards for Field Archaeology in the East of England*. East Anglian Archaeology Occasional Paper 14.
- Brown R. 2008 *Ashwell Primary School, Ashwell, Hertfordshire. Project Design for Archaeological Excavation and Watching Brief*. ASC Ltd (Ref. 1030/ASP/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)*.
- Instone A 2007 *Design Brief for Archaeological Strip, Map and Record and Monitoring and Recording of Groundworks for Ashwell Primary School* County Historic Environment Unit, Hertfordshire County Council

Secondary Sources

- BGS *British Geological Survey 1:50,000 Series, Solid & Drift Geology*.
- Gibson C & Humphrey R 2000 *An Archaeological Investigation at Westbury Farm, Ashwell* Hertfordshire Archaeological Trust unpublished report
- Munby L 1977 *The Hertfordshire Landscape* London: Hodder & Stoughton
- Soil Survey 1983 *1:250,000 Soil Map of England and Wales, and accompanying legend* Harpenden
- Taylor 1997 *Archaeology of Cambridgeshire Vol.1: south west Cambridgeshire* March: Cambridgeshire County Council
- Thompson I 1982 *Grog –tempered 'Belgic' pottery of south-eastern England* Oxford:BAR British Series 108
- Thompson I 2002 *Ashwell: Extensive Urban Survey Project Assessment Report* Hertfordshire County Council
- VCH 1912 *The Victoria History of the County of Hertfordshire* vol. 3 199-209.
- Whitaker, A 2006 *Brewers in Hertfordshire: A Historical Gazetteer* Hertfordshire Press an imprint of the University of Hertfordshire Press

[illegible]

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD MONITORING RECORD

Project: ASHWELL SCHOOL		Project No/Code: 10301 APS		Sheet: 2 of 4	
		Date of visit: 26/3/08			
Client/Developer: MACE					
Contact: HELLEN STEVENS (MACE) TOMMY SITE				Phone:	
Duration of Visit (inc. travel):		Start: 7.30		Finish: 4.30	
Completed by: N J WILSON					
Development Type:					
Footings	Services	Roads	Levelling <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Quarrying	Pipelines
Other (specify):					
Site & weather conditions: DRY BRIGHT					
Observations:					
WORK STARTED ON THE LOWER TERRACE WHERE THE TEMPORARY CLASSROOM HAD BEEN. MUCH OF THE AREA HAD BEEN DISTURBED. LARGE MODERN TRENCH DOWN THE EAST SIDE OF THE SITE					
1.5m WIDE WATER PIPES.					
N-S DITCH TURNS WEST AT NORTHERN END. 1m SECTION EXCAVATED 1st 1/2 C19 POTTERY. CUT FROM BELOW THE TOPSOIL BUT MOSTLY REMOVED BY PREVIOUS WORK ON THE SITE WHEN TEMP CLASSROOM BUILT.					
SOUTHERN AREA OF SITE NOT FULLY EXCAVATED TO NATURAL CHALK.					
C. 0.5m OF MODERN OVER BURDEN ABOVE THE CHALK					
Comments: CHRIS SWAIN ALSO ON SITE					
END OF VISIT.					

For sketch plan, use separate sheet

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD MONITORING RECORD

Project: ASHWELL SCHOOL		Project No/Code: 1030 1 APS		Sheet: 3 of 4	
		Date of visit: 27/3/08			
Client/Developer: MACE					
Contact:			Phone:		
Duration of Visit (inc. travel):		Start: 7.30		Finish: 4.15	
Completed by: N J WILSON					
Development Type:					
Footings	Services	Roads	Levelling <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Quarrying	Pipelines
Other (specify):					
Site & weather conditions: DRY OVERCAST @ TIMES					
Observations: WORK CONTINUES ON LOWER TERRACE A SECOND DITCH (MODERN) EXPOSED IN THE NW CORNER ONLY SEEN IN SECTION. LOWER TERRACE FINISHED					
Comments: NO MORE DIGGING TILL MONDAY					

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD MONITORING RECORD

Project: ASH WELL SCHOOL		Project No/Code: 1030 1 APS		Sheet: 4 of 4		
		Date of visit: 31/3/08				
Client/Developer: MACE						
Contact:			Phone:			
Duration of Visit (inc. travel):		Start: 7.30		Finish: 3.45		
Completed by: N S WILSON						
Development Type:						
Footings	Services	Roads	Levelling <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Quarrying	Pipelines	Other (specify):
Site & weather conditions: DRY AFTER WEEKEND RAIN.						
Observations: WORKING ON UPPER TERRACE MUCH SHALLOWER DEPTH. OLD SCHOOL ACCESS ROAD ON SOUTHERN SIDE C. 3.4m WIDE. PIPE TRENCH CONTINUES ON E. SIDE. NO OTHER FEATURES OBSERVED.						
Comments: NO FURTHER VISITS REQUIRED.						

For sketch plan, use separate sheet

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Appendix 2: Finds Concordance

Context	Pottery		Bone		Flint (no)	Shell (g)	Stone (no)	Other Finds	
	(no)	(g)	(no)	(g)				Type	(no)
04	2	10							

Appendix 3: List of Photographs

SITE NAME: Ashwell Primary School			SITE NO/CODE: 1030/APS
Shot	B&W	Digital	Subject
1	✓	✓	Ditch 03
2	✓	✓	Ditch 03
3	✓	✓	Excavated section of Ditch 03
4	✓	✓	Ditch 03
5	✓	✓	Ditch 05
6	✓	✓	Ditch 03
7	✓	✓	Ditch 03
8		✓	Ditch 03
9	✓	✓	Water pipe trench
10	✓	✓	General view across the lower platform
11		✓	Working shot
12	✓	✓	Part of the old road
13		✓	General view of lower platform and school
14	✓	✓	Ditch 03 baulk section
15	✓	✓	Road crossing upper platform

Appendix 4: ASC OASIS Form

PROJECT DETAILS			
Project Name:	Ashwell Primary School		
Short Description:	During March 2008, Archaeological Services and Consultancy Ltd undertook a watching brief, at Ashwell Primary School, Ashwell, Hertfordshire. The work was required to monitor the groundworks associated with the construction of two new classrooms. The only significant finds were two southwest to northeast ditches. Though the only finds recovered from the fill dated to the 1 st half of the 19 th century it is likely that the ditches were medieval or early post medieval homestead boundaries extending from Silver Street to Ashwell Street. Mapping evidence shows that these ditches were filled sometime before 1877.		
Project Type:	Watching Brief		
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:	Ditch	Monument period:	Post medieval
Significant finds: (artefact type & period)	Pottery post medieval		
PROJECT LOCATION			
County:	Hertfordshire	OS reference: (8 figs min)	TL 26740 39520
District:	North Hertfordshire	Parish:	Ashwell CP
Site address: (with postcode if known)	Ashwell Primary School, Silver Street, Ashwell,		
Study area: (sq. m. or ha)	252m ²	Height OD: (metres)	57.5
PROJECT CREATORS			
Organisation:	Archaeological Services & Consultancy Ltd		
Project brief originator:	Hertfordshire County Council	Project design originator:	ASC Ltd
Project Manager:	David Fell MA MIFA	Director/Supervisor:	Nigel Wilson
Sponsor / funding body:	Hertfordshire County Council		
PROJECT DATE			
Start date:	25/3/2008	End date:	31/3/2008
PROJECT ARCHIVES			
	Location (Accession no.)	Content (eg. pottery, animal bone, files/sheets)	
Physical:	North Herts Museum Store	Pottery	
Paper:	North Herts Museum Store	Field Records	
Digital:	North Herts Museum Store	Digital images	
BIBLIOGRAPHY (Journal/monograph, published or forthcoming, or unpublished client report)			
Title:	Archaeological Watching Brief, Ashwell Primary School, Ashwell, Hertfordshire, T		
Serial title & volume:	ASC Ltd Report ref. 1030/APS/2		
Author(s):	Nigel Wilson HND AIFA		
Page nos	27	Date: 17 th April 2008	