

Archaeological Services & Consultancy Ltd

**WATCHING BRIEF:
ST PETERS SCHOOL, COTTONMILL LANE
ST ALBANS
HERTFORDSHIRE**

on behalf of Hertfordshire County Council



Jonathan R. Hunn BA PhD MIFA

August 2007

ASC: 946/SAP/2

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Site Data

<i>ASC site code:</i>	SAP	<i>Project no:</i>	946
<i>County:</i>	Hertfordshire		
<i>Village/Town:</i>	St Albans		
<i>Civil Parish:</i>	St Stephens		
<i>NGR (to 8 figs):</i>	TL 15020 06565		
<i>Extent of site:</i>	c.0.8 ha		
<i>Present land use:</i>	Primary School and associated grassed area		
<i>Planning proposal:</i>	Construction of mobile classroom and relocation of storage unit		
<i>Local Planning Authority:</i>	St Albans District Council		
<i>Client:</i>	Hertfordshire County Council c/o Mouchel Parkman Stag House Old London Road Hertford Hertfordshire SG13 7YY		
<i>Contact name:</i>	Kevin Liles		

Internal Quality Check

<i>Primary Author:</i>	Jonathan R. Hunn	<i>Date:</i>	6 th August 2007
<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 July 2007 a watching brief was carried out on the installation of a new classroom and associated services at St Peter's School, Cottonmill Lane, St Albans. The observations were able to establish that the ground level adjacent to the river Ver had been artificially raised in the 20th century by as much as 1 metre. This is likely to have occurred either during or prior to the construction of the school. No pre-modern features were identified. The only object retrieved during the project was a single, untouched flake, of uncertain date.

1 Introduction

1.1 In July 2007 *Archaeological Services and Consultancy Ltd* (ASC) carried out a watching brief at St Peter's School, Cottonmill Lane, St Albans (NGR TL 15020 06565; Fig. 1). The project was commissioned by Kevin Liles of *Mouchel Parkman* on behalf of *Hertfordshire County Council*, and was carried out according to a brief (Instone 2007) prepared by their archaeological advisor (AA), *the HCC Historic Environment Unit*, and a project design prepared by ASC (ASC: 946/SAP/1).

1.2 *Planning Background*

This watching brief has been required as a planning condition under the terms of *Planning Policy Guidance Note 16* (PPG16), in response to proposals for the construction of a temporary classroom and hard court area.

1.3 *Location*

The site is situated in St Albans, Hertfordshire (Fig. 1). It is located to the south of historic core of St Albans, on the east side of Cottonmill Road and is centred on Ordnance Survey National Grid Reference at TL 15020 06565 (Fig. 1). It comprises an irregular area of land within the school grounds covering *c.*0.8 ha.

1.4 *Description*

The site is located within a riverside setting, although the river Ver to the south is masked by a zone of vegetation. Cottonmill Lane lies to the west of the site, and suburban housing encompasses it to the north and east. Access to the site is from Cottonmill Lane.

1.5 *Geology & Topography*

The site is situated in an urban area and the soils of the area have not been surveyed in detail. If natural soils survive they are likely to comprise the *Charity 2 Association*, which are described as *well drained flinty fine soils* (Soil Survey 1983, 571m). The site lies immediately north of the river Ver, at an elevation of *c.*80m OD.

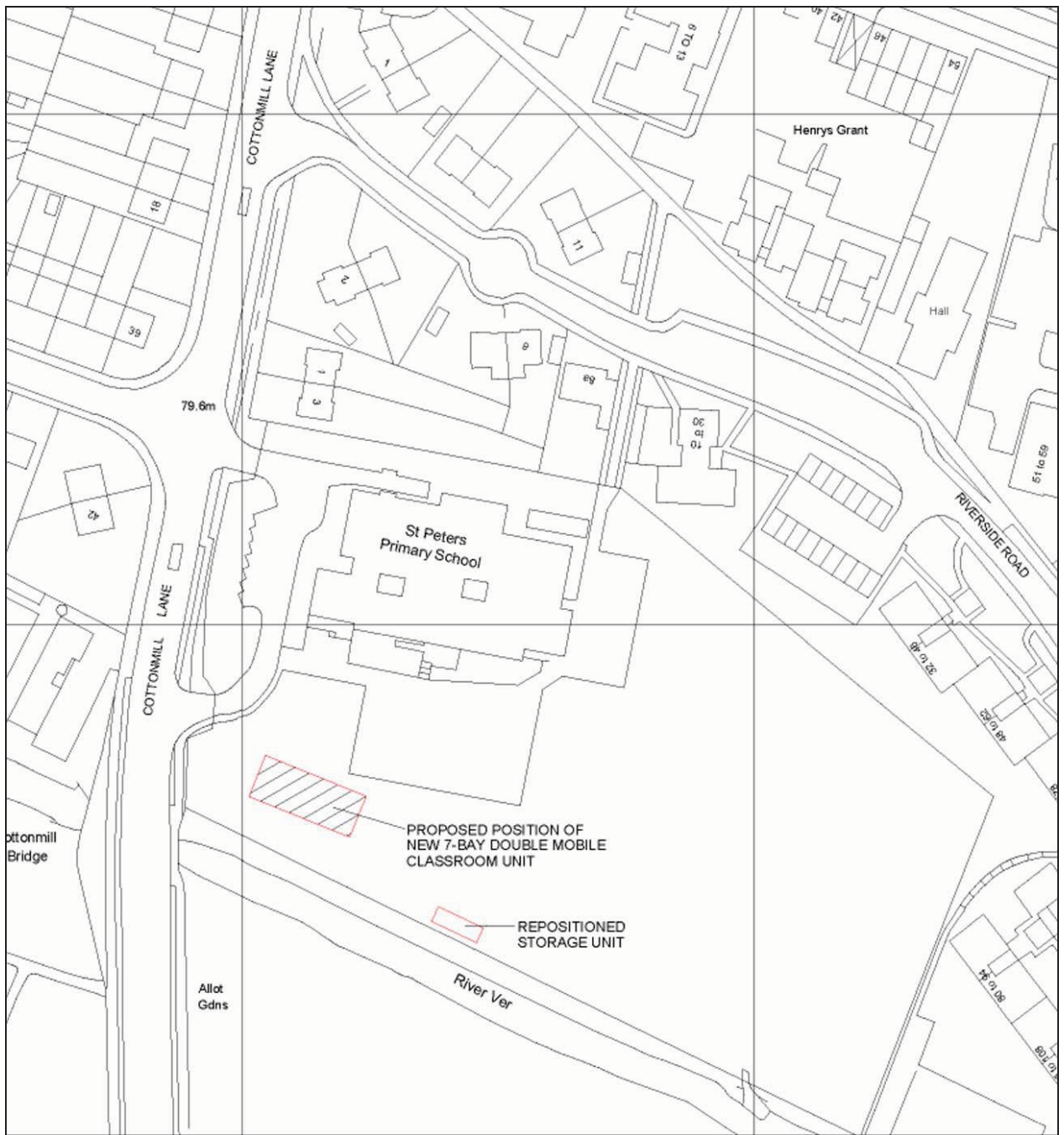


Figure 2: Site plan (scale 1:1250)

2 Aims & Methods

2.1 Aims

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

- To ensure the archaeological monitoring of all aspects of the development programme likely to affect archaeological remains
- To secure the adequate recording of any archaeological remains, including environmental, revealed by the development programme
- To secure the analysis, conservation and long-term storage of any artefactual/ecofactual material recovered from the site.

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 3), which required:

- Soil and overburden stripping under archaeological supervision
- Inspection of sub-soil deposits for archaeological features
- The rapid investigation and recording of any archaeological features/deposits
- Sub-soil stripping under archaeological supervision
- Examination of any service and foundation trenches and the subsequent recording of any exposed archaeological deposits
- Examination of spoil heaps for archaeological material
- A programme of post-fieldwork analysis, archiving and publication.

2.4 Constraints

There were no constraints to the implementation of the project.

3 Archaeological & Historical Background

3.1 Prehistoric (before 600BC)

In environmental terms this period is poorly understood in the St Albans area. There are two Neolithic sites dated by radiocarbon, in the general vicinity of the town (Niblett & Thompson 2005, 16-22) suggesting that the area has potential, but that what is lacking is securely dated environmental samples. Areas such as the Ver valley have the potential to yield such information, but only where suitable deposits such as peat have been identified.

3.2 Iron Age (600BC-AD43)

The area was of considerable importance during the late Iron Age and a number of major sites of this period are located in the area. Late Iron Age occupation was dominated by a settlement at Prae Wood c.3km southwest of the site (Wheeler & Wheeler 1936). Settlement of this period has been found at a variety of locations in this area, for example at Gorhambury (Neal *et al* 1990). Further evidence of this period has been found north of the river, notably at Folly Lane, where an important Late Iron Age high-status burial has been recorded (Niblett 1999).

3.3 Roman (AD43-c.450)

Following the Roman conquest there was a shift in settlement and a Roman town, known as *Verulamium*, was laid out on the south side of the river Ver. It developed into the third largest town in Roman Britain and is now a Scheduled Ancient Monument (Niblett 2001; Wheeler & Wheeler 1936). The school is located c.1km to the northwest of the Roman town. Communications in the area were dominated by a major Roman road, now known as *Watling Street*, which ran from *Londinium* (London) through *Verulamium* to the Midlands.

The early phase of buildings in the town was constructed of timber, and many were destroyed during the Boudiccan Revolt in AD60-61 (Frere 1972). The town was subsequently rebuilt and expanded and was later encircled by gated walls (Niblett 2001). St Alban, the first British Christian martyr, was executed in AD209 within the town walls (Niblett 2001, 137-139).

A number of cemeteries are recorded outside the town walls, notably on King Harry Lane to the south west of the town (Stead & Rigby 1989). Further burials are recorded on the east side of the town, c.400-500m southeast of the site (Anthony 1968).

St Albans began to decline after the departure of the Roman army, with many of its buildings falling into disuse. By the 5th century much of the population had relocated (Niblett 2001, 127-146).

3.4 Saxon (c.450-1066)

The focus of the settlement shifted to the north side of the river during the Saxon period, where a new site known as Kinsbury developed (Niblett 2001, fig 75). King Offa of Mercia founded an Abbey dedicated to St Alban and the present cathedral, which lies c.500m northwest of the St Peters School, occupies the site of the Saxon abbey. A market was established in the town during the 10th century.

3.5 Medieval & post-Medieval (1066-1900)

St Albans is mentioned in the Domesday Survey (1086) when the abbot was the principal landholder (Williams & Martin 2002). The town developed considerably during the medieval period, when settlement became focused around the abbey and the surrounding area. The site is situated a little to the south of the medieval heart of the city.

St Peter's School is situated adjacent to Sopwell Priory. Following the Dissolution in 1539 the priory passed to Sir Richard Lee who demolished the monastic buildings and constructed a house (Lee Hall) on the site. The house was later renamed Sopwell House and the line of the boundary around Lee Hall may cross the site.

In the mid-17th century the present school site lay in Spring Field which was shown as pasture on a map illustrating the lands of Ralph Sadleir (HALS: Gorhambury Deeds XIII. 30). It can be seen (Fig. 3) that the parochial boundary between St Andrew's and St Peter's parishes ran across the site. In the 19th century the site remained as pasture and this continued well into the 20th century (Figs 4 & 5). By 1897 the nearby Lee Hall had been demolished and the site was not developed until the late early 1970s.



Figure 3: Tracing of estate plan of Sopwell in 1649

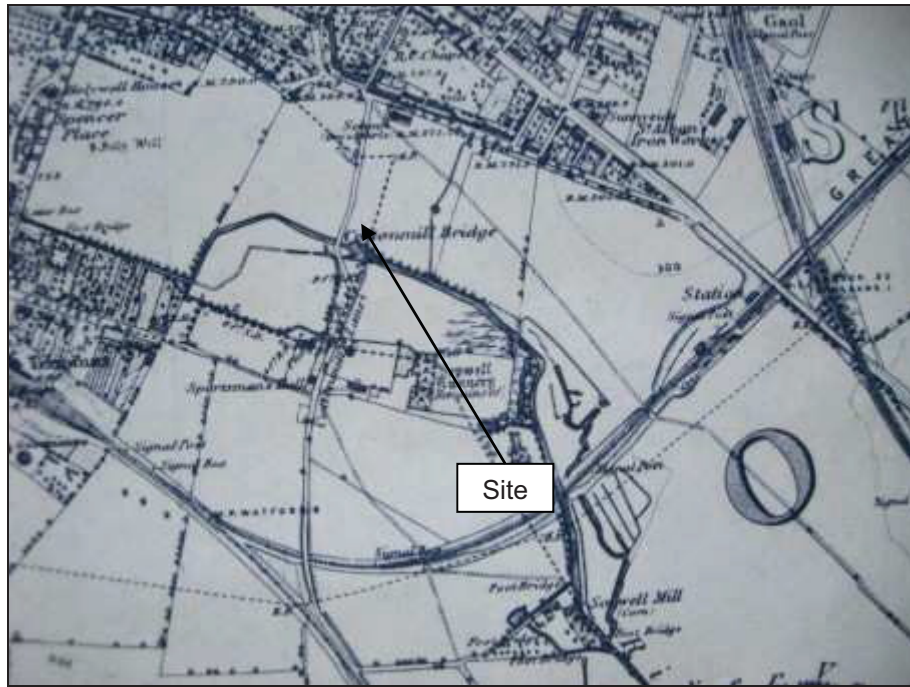


Figure 4: Extract from Ordnance Survey 6 inch scale plan of 1878



Figure 5: Extract from Ordnance Survey 6 inch scale plan of 1925

4 Results

- 4.1 Four visits were made between mid and late July 2007. Due to a breakdown in communication, the first visit was made after the foundation pits for the new classroom had already been filled with concrete. However, subsequent discussions with the contractors and observations of two service pits confirmed the general nature of the ground conditions. The foundations comprised twenty-one pits (1.8m × 0.8m) over an area approximately 22 × 9m. The pits were 1m deep and appear to have cut through about 0.9m of made ground. This consisted of a matrix of redeposited orange-brown clay mixed with dark grey loam, pebbles, flecks of chalk, glass and occasional fragments of 19th century chinaware. The made up ground overlay a deposit of silty, fluvio-glacial gravels. In the south east corner of the site the pit cut through a layer of made ground about 1.5m thick. Some of the excavated spoil had been redeposited and levelled around the site and some lay in a spoil heap. Both of these were closely examined and confirmed the nature of the underlying ground. The only object of any antiquity consisted of a single untouched flint flake of uncertain date (Plate 6).
- 4.2 Most of the service trench on the western side of the site, crossing the access road and the grass area beside the boundary hedge and the car parking bays was observed. Based on the observations of this area it was felt that there was little to be gained from observing the trench where it turned eastwards towards the school and crossed an area that had been truncated in the past.
- 4.3 The southern section of the service trench was 16 × c.0.4m wide and varied between 0.9m in depth (south) and 1.2m (north). Where it crossed the access road it exhibited the following characteristics (from top to base):
- 1) tarmac 0.05m;
 - 2) sandy gravel make-up 0.1m;
 - 3) chalky flint 0.3m;
 - 4) thin layer of asphalt 0.05m;
 - 5) dark brown gravely clay varying between 0.5 and 0.7m thick;
 - 6) reddish brown flinty gravel.

Beyond the kerb was made up ground for a distance of a further 8m up to a brick inspection hatch. Beyond this point for a further 16m the trench reached a depth of 0.7m. For virtually all this depth it cut through a dark brown/dark grey sandy loam containing fragments of glass, tile, clunch and bone. This layer overlay the natural gravel subsoil.



Plate 1: View west across site of new classroom



Plate 2: View NNW of ground clearance



Plate 3: View south across access road



Plate 4: Make up of ground in service trench looking south west



Plate 5: Middle section of service trench looking NNW



Plate 6: Struck flint flake

5. Conclusions

- 5.1 Despite the limitations of the initial observations sufficient information was gathered to permit a broad understanding of some of the key depositional events of the site. In some ways they simply confirm what was observed ten years ago when the school was extended on its eastern side (Hunn 1997). Nevertheless, while it is relatively easy to say what was not found, it is less easy to be absolutely certain in interpreting the results, especially as ground work monitoring is a 'reactive' rather than a 'proactive' procedure.
- 5.2 The various ground works seem to have cut through 'made-up ground' of mainly recent origin. The character of this 'made ground' varied between each locality. On the south side the ground had been raised by about one metre though it was thicker at the south east corner where the soakaway was located. Here the ground was composed of mainly orange brown flinty clay overlying the natural fluvio-glacial gravels. To the north, on the western side where the service trench ran, the ground was less deep overlying the natural flinty gravel deposit, which was encountered at a depth of 0.7m. None of this ground appears to have contained any artefacts predating the late 19th century. However, a flint flake was retrieved from the surface just to the west of the new classroom.
- 5.3 The previous watching brief had recovered some medieval shards dated to the mid 12th to late 13th century (Hunn 1997). These came from an extremely small area of the site and were purely a chance discovery. In the case of the present watching brief no further material of this date was observed. However, given the limited area explored and the circumstances of the conditions under which observations were made, this is perhaps not surprising.

6. Acknowledgements

The writer is grateful to Kevin Liles of Mouchel Parkman for commissioning this report. Thanks are due to Andrew Instone of the Historic Environment Team of Hertfordshire County Council and to the planning officer for St Albans District Council, Simon West for their advice. My thanks to my colleagues Janice McLeish for compiling the project design and to Bob Zeepvat BA MIFA for editing the report.

7. Archive

7.1 The project archive will comprise:

1. Brief
2. Project Design
3. Clients site plans
4. Site Monitoring Sheets
5. Finds
6. List of photographs
7. CDROM with copies of all digital files.

7.2 The archive will be deposited with the St Albans District Museum.

8. 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 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 Monitoring & Recording: St Peters School, St Albans*. Hertfordshire County Council.

Secondary Sources

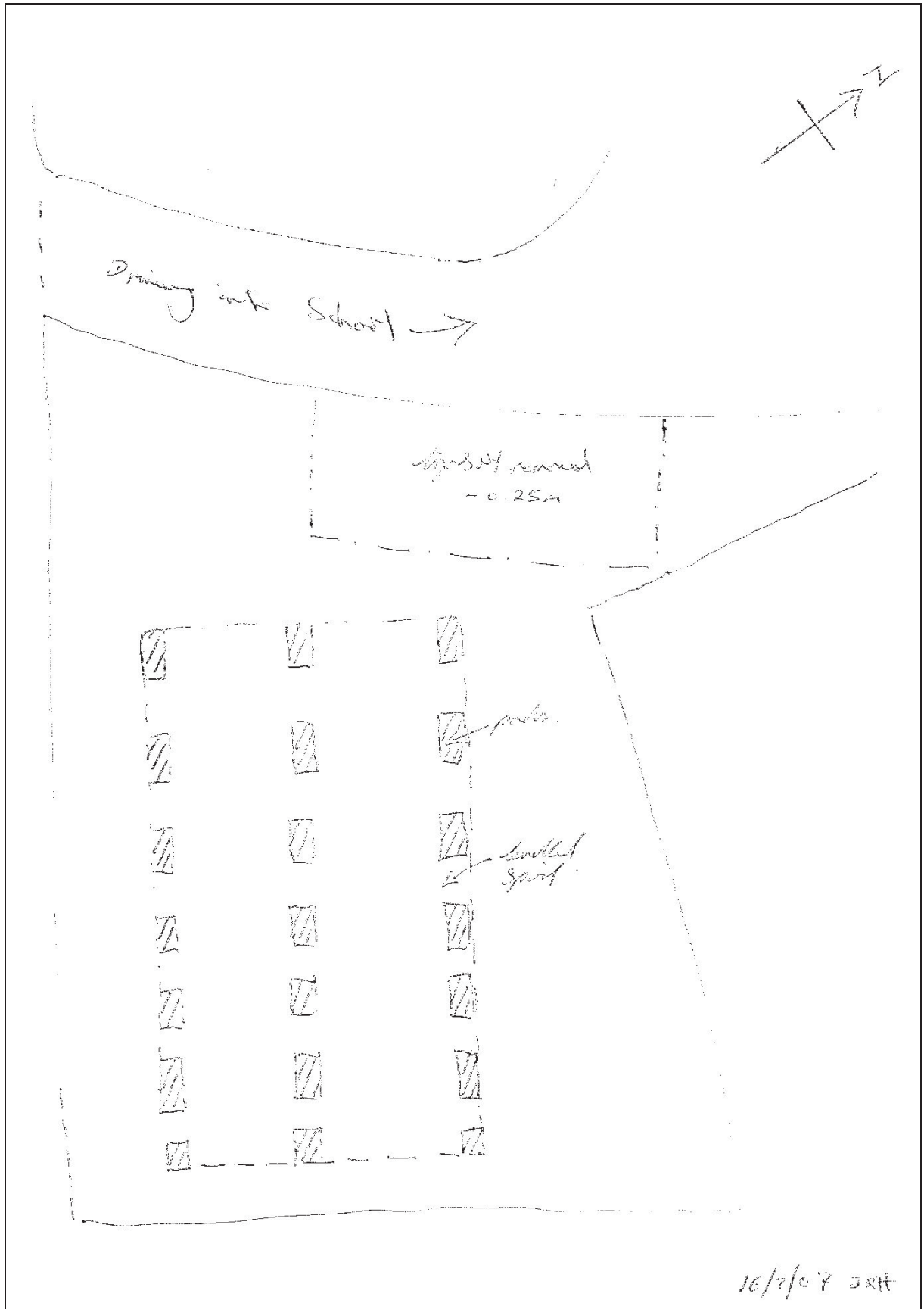
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- Frere S 1972 *Verulamium Excavations Vol 1*. Report of the Research Committee of the Society of Antiquities of London. **28**.
- Hunn, J.R. 1997: St Peter's JMI School Watchinb Brief (ASC /SP/SA/H97) . Unpublished Report by *Archaeological Services & Consultancy Ltd* (Milton Keynes).
- Neal D S, Wardle A and Hunn J 1990 *Excavation of the Iron Age, Roman and Medieval Settlement at Gorhambury, St Albans*. English Heritage Archaeological Report. **14**
- Niblett R. 1999 *The Excavation of a ceremonial Site at Folly Lane, Verulamium*. Britannia Monograph Series **14**
- Niblett R 2001 *Verulamium The Roman City of St Albans*. Tempus Ltd
- Niblett, R. & Thompson, I 2005 *Alban's Buried Towns: An assessment of St Alban's Archaeology up to AD 1600*. Oxbow Books (Oxford).
- Soil Survey 1983 *1:250,000 Soil Map of England and Wales, and accompanying legend* (Harpenden).
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- Wheeler R E M & Wheeler T V 1936 *Verulamium A Belgic and Two Roman Cities*. Reports of the Research Committee of the Society of Antiquities London.
- Williams A & Martin G H 2002 *Domesday Book, A Complete Translation*. Penguin Books.

Appendix 1: Monitoring Sheets

A.S.C. LTD		ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD MONITORING RECORD				
Project: St Peter School, Cottonmill Lane St Albans		Project No/Code: 946 1 SAP		Sheet: 1 of		
Client/Developer Mouchar Parkman		Date of visit: 16/7/07		Phone: 01227-21513		
Contact: Billy (Jerome)		Duration of Visit (inc. travel): Start: 11.15 am		Finish: 2.45 pm		
Completed by: SKH						
Development Type:						
Footings <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Services	Roads	Levelling	Quarrying	Pipelines	Other (specify):
Site & weather conditions: Dry & humid						
Observations: The foundations were not already been filled with concrete. However, the contractor confirmed that the individual pads (approximately 1.8m x 0.8m) were 1m deep, the top 0.9m of which was back-filled with the best 0.1m went into the underlying gravel. Some of the material was placed in a Spill heap which much of the remainder had been 'levelled up' across the ends of the same building (9m x 22m overall). To judge from a Small Section book which had only been partially back-filled the ground consisted of a base of de-saturated orange-brown clay covered with chert gravel - some pebbles, flakes of chert, glass and one fragment of 99 obsidian. The observation of the Southern Spill from the pads confirmed the location of ground level edge of Spill adjacent to the R.V. The Spill was in the SE corner was 1.8m deep and had depth of concrete coming out.						
Comments: few of work of project. The Spill boundary will be dug the week after next. Please have a concrete study.						

For sketch plan, use reverse

©ASC, 2003





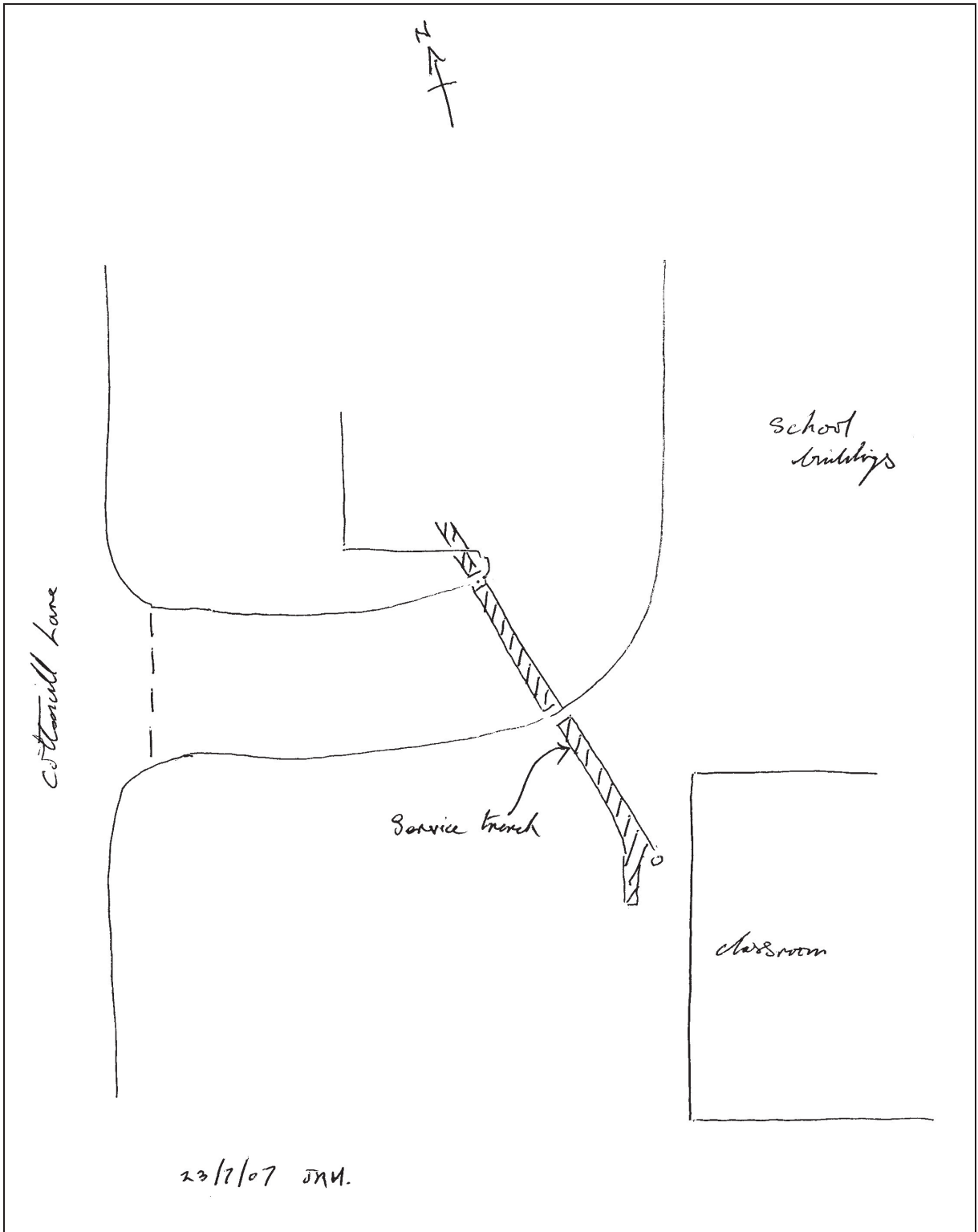
A.S.C. LTD

ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD MONITORING RECORD

Project: St Peter's, Cottonmill Lane		Project No/Code: 946 1 SAP		Sheet: 2 of		
St Albans		Date of visit: 24/7/07				
Client/Developer Mouhel Parkman						
Contact: Jeremy (Office)			Phone: 07887-578648 mob: 01327-811513			
Duration of Visit (inc. travel):		Start: 9.30		Finish: 12.30		
Completed by: JRA						
Development Type:						
Footings	Services <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Roads	Levelling	Quarrying	Pipelines	Other (specify):
Site & weather conditions: Dry, overcast Sun						
Observations: Observed about 16m of a service trench starting from the NW side of the new temporary classroom and orientated more or less N-S. It was c. 0.9m deep at its southern end and 1.20m at the northern end (ie on the north kerb of the existing access). The service trench was mostly too disturbed where it crossed the area of the new hard standing but much clearer where it crossed the access road. Here it was mostly made ground and consisted of: 1) terrace 0.05m 2) gravel 0.1m 3) cherty flint 0.3m 4) the layer of asphalt 0.05m then onto 5) dark brown gravelly clay varying in depth between 0.5m and 0.7m in depth 6) reddish brown flinty gravel. The ground becomes much wetter at the northern end (on kerb) where the gravel starts to slope up more. Width of trench = 0.4 to 0.45m.						
Comments: Ground partly v. disturbed						
Diggs down = mark						
th = pit						

For sketch plan, use reverse

©ASC, 2003





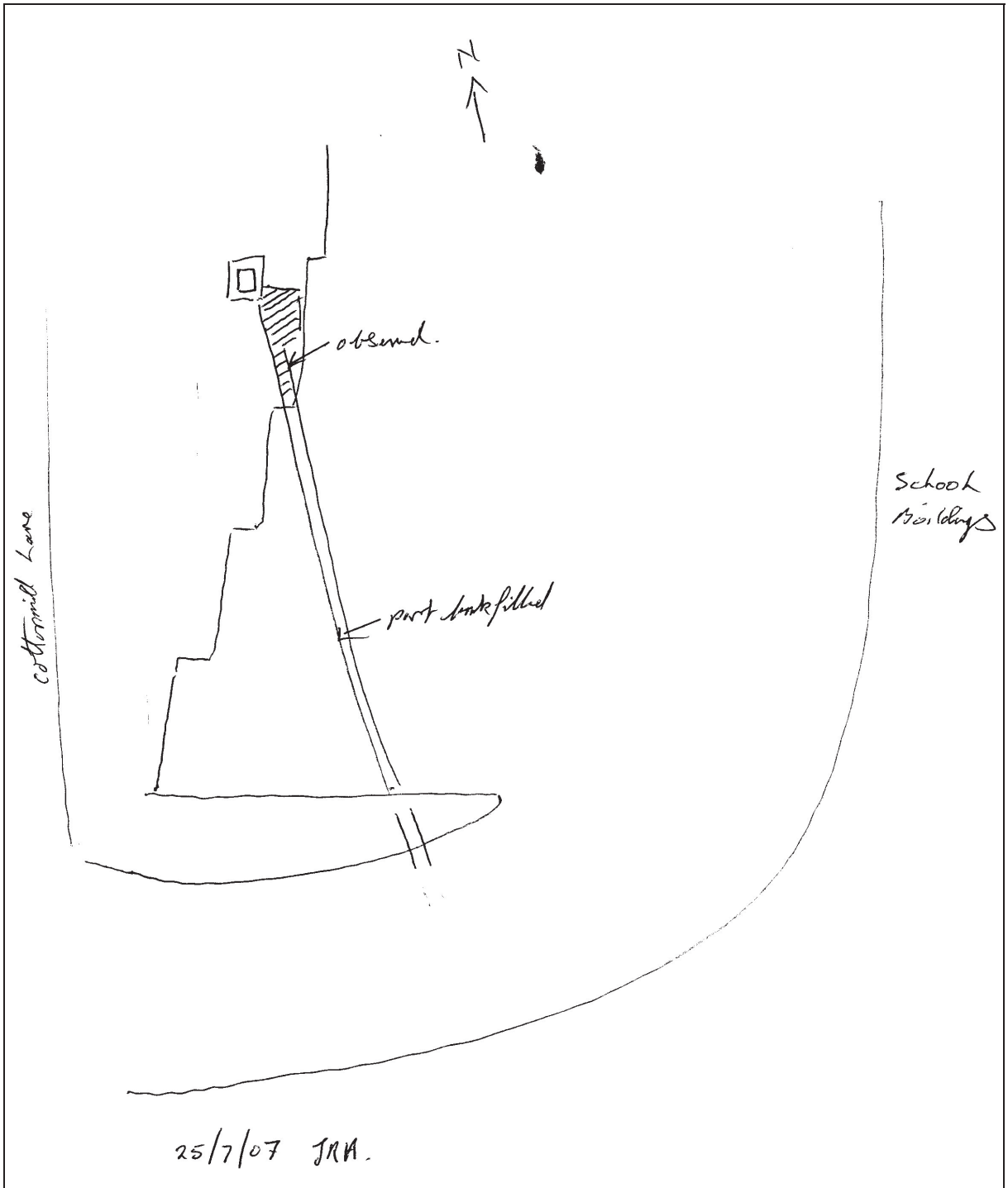
A.S.C. LTD

ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD MONITORING RECORD

Project: St Peter's School, Cottonmill Lane		Project No/Code: 946 1 SAP	Sheet: 3 of
St Albans		Date of visit: 25/7/07	
Client/Developer Merrill Parkman			
Contact: Jeremy		Phone: 07887-578648 01327-811513	
Duration of Visit (inc. travel):	Start: 1 pm	Finish:	
Completed by: JRA			
Development Type:			
Footings	Services <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Roads	Levelling
			Quarrying
			Pipelines
			Other (specify):
Site & weather conditions: Dull, overcast			
Observations: Observed the construction of service trench to the main brick built junction. Mostly filled in except at the northern end where it was clear that the ground contained voids delineated before. NB. Darius saw a packet of Sandy clay, which to judge from the spoil looks natural. The gravel near the brick junction consists of banded layers of gravel.			
Comments: Service trench contains gas & water. Work will be in the joint area tomorrow. Tarmac placed on Rd chd surface in car park area No images - digital camera left behind.			

For sketch plan, use reverse

©ASC, 2003





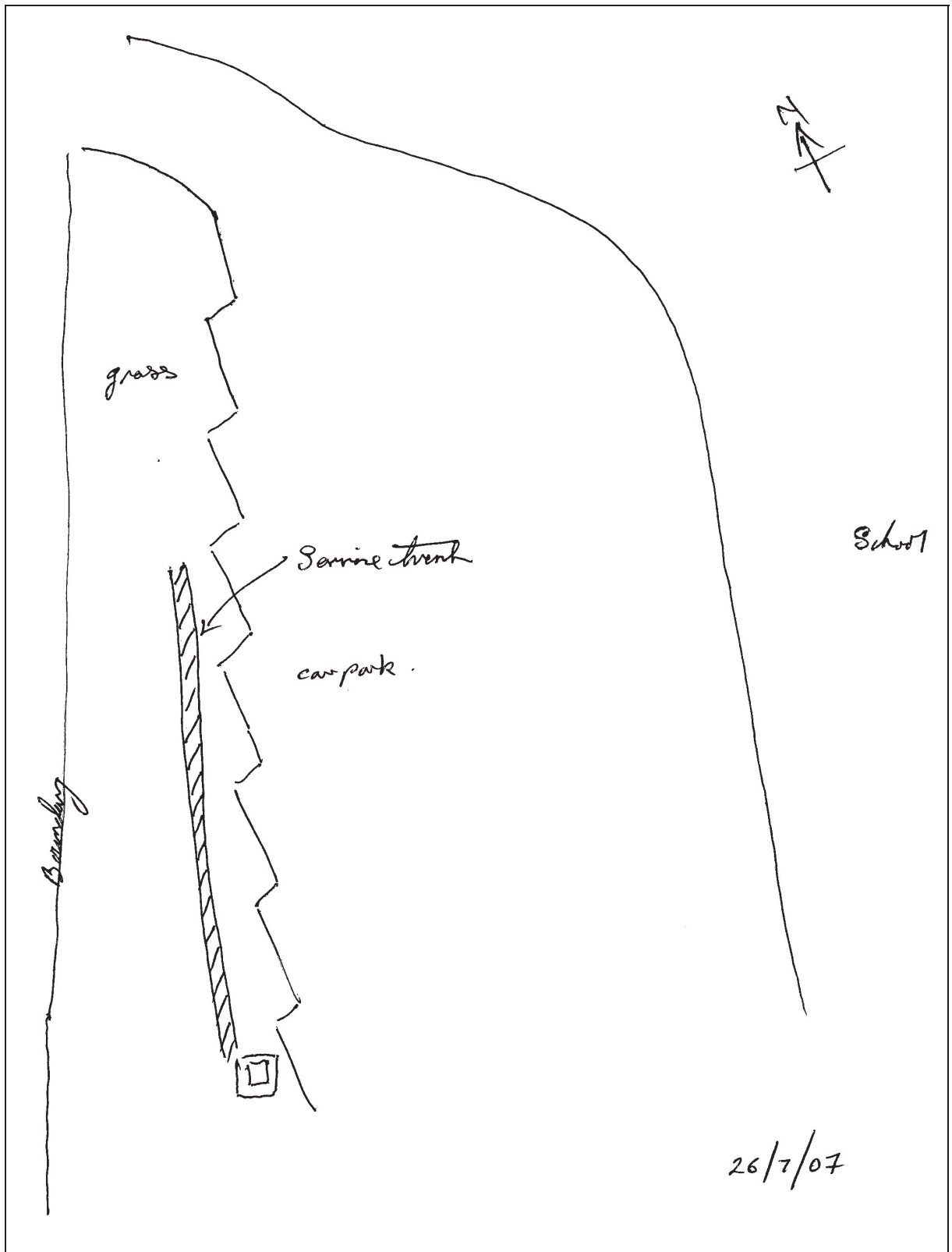
A.S.C. LTD

ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD MONITORING RECORD

Project: <i>St Peter's School, Cottonmill Lane, St Albans</i>		Project No/Code: <i>946 1 SAP</i>	Sheet: <i>4 of 4</i>
Client/Developer <i>Marchel Parkman</i>		Date of visit: <i>26/7/07</i>	
Contact: <i>Jeremy</i>	Phone: <i>01327-811573</i>		
Duration of Visit (inc. travel):	Start: <i>2 pm</i>	Finish:	
Completed by: <i>JRH</i>			
Development Type:			
Footings	Services <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Roads	Levelling
			Quarrying
			Pipelines
			Other (specify):
Site & weather conditions: <i>Dull, windy & one weak rain</i>			
Observations: <i>Observed a further 16m of water/gas pipe trench to the north of the bank junction above soil. That is, cut into the grass area to the west of the car park area. The trench was c. 0.4m wide by 0.7m deep. The soil was a mix of dark brown & dark grey sandy loam containing one fragment of glass, tile, chunk & bone. V. few fragments of pottery identified. The soil is clearly modern ground and is a more or less uniform horizon going down onto the natural gravel subsoil.</i>			
Comments: <i>There is more of the trench to be cut but given the state of the ground, the depth and cut across the former area it was not felt worthwhile monitoring further work.</i>			

For sketch plan, use reverse

©ASC, 2003



Appendix 2: List of Photographs

SITE NAME: St Peter's School, St Albans			SITE NO/CODE: 946/SAP
Shot	B&W	Digital	Subject
1		1802	View west across site of new classroom
2		1803	View NE across site of new classroom
3		1804	View east across site of new classroom
4		1805	View NNE to work on new access area
5		1806	View SE of machining
6		1807	View NNE of machining
7		1808	View east from Cottonmill Lane
8		1809	View south east across bridge to site
9		1810	View downstream of river Ver
10		1811	View NE across R. ver to boundary of site
11		1829	View south at south end of service trench
12		1830	View south across access road
13		1831	View SW of ground make up in service trench
14		1832	View at southern end of service trench
15		1833	Detail of ditto
16		1855	Middle section of service trench looking NNW
17		1856	North end of middle section of service trench looking NNW
18		1857	North end of middle section of service trench looking west
19			Small find of flint artefact
20	yes		General view of site looking south west

Appendix 3: ASC OASIS Form

PROJECT DETAILS			
Project Name:	St Peter's School, St Albans		
Short Description:	<i>In July 2007 a watching brief was carried out on the installation of a new classroom and associated services at St Peter's School, Cottonmill Lane, St Albans. The observations were able to establish that the ground level adjacent to the river Ver had been artificially raised in the 20th century by as much as 1 metre. This is likely to have occurred either during or prior to the construction of the school. No pre-modern features were identified. The only object retrieved during the project was a single, untouched flake, of uncertain date.</i>		
Project Type: (indicate all that apply)	Watching Brief		
Site status: (eg. none, SAM, Listed)	none	Previous work: (eg. SMR refs)	Hunn 1997 WB
Current land use:	School premises	Future work: (yes / no / unknown)	Not known
Monument type:	none	Monument period:	none
Significant finds: (artefact type & period)	Flint flake - unretouched		
PROJECT LOCATION			
County:	Hertfordshire	OS reference: (8 figs min)	TL 15020 06565
District:	St Albans District	Parish:	St Peters
Site address: (with postcode if known)	St Peters School, Cottonmill lane, St Albans, Herts		
Study area: (sq. m. or ha)	0.8 ha	Height OD: (metres)	80m AOD
PROJECT CREATORS			
Organisation:	Archaeological Services & Consultancy Ltd		
Project brief originator:	A. Instone	Project design originator:	McLeish, J
Project Manager:	D. Fell	Director/Supervisor:	J.R. Hunn
Sponsor / funding body:	Mouchel Parkman for herts County Council		
PROJECT DATE			
Start date:	16/7/07	End date:	24/7/07
PROJECT ARCHIVES			
	Location (Accession no.)	Content (eg. pottery, animal bone, files/sheets)	
Physical:	St Albans Museun	Flint flake	
Paper:	yes		
Digital:	yes		
BIBLIOGRAPHY (Journal/monograph, published or forthcoming, or unpublished client report)			
Title:	Watching Brief: St Peters School, Cottonmill Lane, St Albans, Hertfordshire		
Serial title & volume:	ASC 946/SAP/2		
Author(s):	Jonathan R Hunn		

Appendix 4: SMR Summary Sheet

Site name and address: St Peter's School Cottonmill Lane St Albans		
County: HERTFORDSHIRE	District: St Albans District	
Village/Town: St Albans	Parish: St Peters	
Planning application reference: not known		
Client name, address, & tel. no: Hertfordshire County Council C/o Mouchel Parkman Stag House Old London Road Hertford SG13 7YY		
Nature of application: new temporary classroom and associated services		
Present land use: school premises		
Size of application area: n/a 0.8 ha	Size of area investigated: n/a	
NGR (to 8 figures): TL 15020 06565	Site code: 946/SAP	
Site director/Organization: David Fell / ASC Ltd		
Type of work: Watching Brief		
Date of work:	Start: 16/7/07	Finish: 24/7/07
Curating museum: St Albans Museum		
Related SMR nos: none	Periods represented: none	
Relevant previous summaries/reports: Hunn 1997 WB		
<p><i>In July 2007 a watching brief was carried out on the installation of a new classroom and associated services at St Peter's School, Cottonmill Lane, St Albans. The observations were able to establish that the ground level adjacent to the river Ver had been artificially raised in the 20th century by as much as 1 metre. This is likely to have occurred either during or prior to the construction of the school. No pre-modern features were identified. The only object retrieved during the project was a single, untouched flake, of uncertain date.</i></p>		
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