

Archaeological Services & Consultancy Ltd

**WATCHING BRIEF:
ST JOAN OF ARC SCHOOL
RICKMANSWORTH
HERTFORDSHIRE**

NGR: TL 0635 9450

on behalf of St Joan of Arc Catholic School



A. Thompson BSc

January 2008

ASC: 1014/RSJ/2

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Site Data

<i>ASC project code:</i>	RSJ	<i>ASC Project No:</i>	1014/RJA/1
<i>OASIS ref:</i>	tbc	<i>Event/Accession no:</i>	n/a
<i>County:</i>	Hertfordshire		
<i>Village/Town:</i>	Rickmansworth		
<i>Civil Parish:</i>	Unparished		
<i>NGR (to 8 figs):</i>	TQ 0635 9450		
<i>Extent of site:</i>	c.0.13ha		
<i>Present use:</i>	School		
<i>Planning proposal:</i>	Construction of new school building		
<i>Planning application ref/date:</i>	N8/07/17/1750/FUL		
<i>Local Planning Authority:</i>	Three Rivers District Council		
<i>Date of fieldwork:</i>	8/11/2007 – 4/12/2007		
<i>Client:</i>	St Joan of Arc Catholic School High Street Rickmansworth WD3 1HG		
<i>Contact name:</i>	Jacqui Ratcliffe		

Internal Quality Check

<i>Primary Author:</i>	Alex Thompson	<i>Date:</i>	29/01/2008
<i>Revisions:</i>		<i>Date:</i>	
<i>Edited/Checked By:</i>		<i>Date:</i>	

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CONTENTS

Summary.....	4
1. Introduction	4
2. Aims & Methods	8
3. Archaeological & Historical Background	9
4. Results.	10
5. Conclusions	12
6. Acknowledgements	13
7. Archive	13
8. References	14

Appendices:

1. ASC Watching Brief Monitoring Sheets	15
2. Photo List.....	19
3. ASC OASIS Form	20

Figures:

1. General location plan.....	3
2. Site plan	6
3. Plan of the proposed drama block	7

Plates:

Cover: Ground works in progress

1. Footprint of the drama block, looking east, showing overburden stripping in progress	11
2. Construction of the ring beam foundations	11
3. Detail of the foundation construction cutting through buried soil and subsoil	11

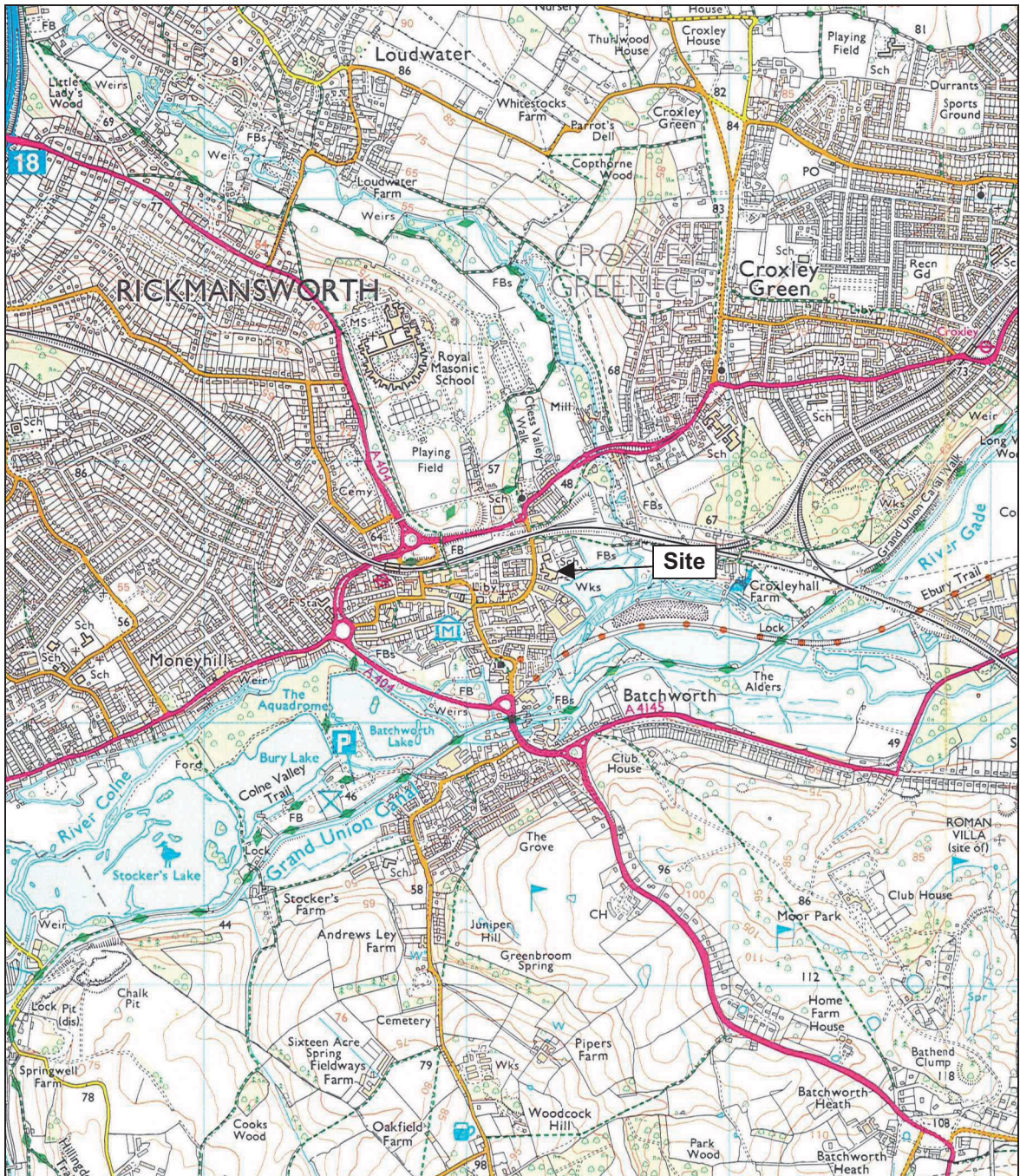


Figure 1: General location (scale 1:25,000)

Summary

In November and December 2007 a watching brief was carried out during groundworks for a new drama block at St Joan of Arc School, Rickmansworth. No deposits or finds of archaeological significance were revealed. However, as the groundworks were limited in scope this does not preclude the presence of archaeological remains elsewhere on the site. The absence of artefactual evidence suggests that the site is located outside the eastern extents of the medieval town core. Its river valley location would suggest that it lay within meadowland until the construction of a house within its grounds in the 18th century.

1. Introduction

1.1 In November and December 2008 *Archaeological Services and Consultancy Ltd* (ASC) carried out a watching brief at the St Joan of Arc Catholic School, Rickmansworth, Hertfordshire. The project was commissioned by *St Joan of Arc Catholic School*, and was carried out according to a project design prepared to the requirements of the *Hertfordshire County Council Historic Environment Unit*, archaeological advisors (AA) to the local planning authority (LPA), *Three Rivers District Council*. The relevant planning application reference is N8/07/1750/FUL.

1.2 *Planning Background*

This watching brief 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 **David Fell** MA MIFA. David is an experienced archaeologist with extensive fieldwork and post-excavation experience, and also of historical research and building recording. David holds a first degree from the University of York, and a master's degree from Birmingham University. He has held a range of supervisory appointments since 1990, including *Milton Keynes Archaeology Unit*, *Bucks County Archaeology Service*, *Beds County Archaeology Service*, *Archaeological Project Services*, *Hertfordshire Archaeological Trust* and the *Museum of London Archaeology Service*.

1.5 *The Site*

1.5.1 *Location & Description*

The site is situated in Rickmansworth, in the administrative district of Three Rivers, Hertfordshire (Fig. 1). It lies to the northeast of Rickmansworth town centre, on the east side of the High Street and is centred on Ordnance Survey

National Grid Reference (NGR) TL 063 945 (Fig. 2). The site comprises school buildings and car parking areas.

1.5.2 *Geology & Topography*

The site is in an urban area within the grounds of the school, and the natural soils may not have survived. Any such surviving soils will probably comprise the *Fladbury 3 Association*, namely stoneless clayey and fine silty soils over river alluvium (Soil Survey 1983, 813d). The natural drainage of the area is dominated by the river Colne. The natural course of the river has been modified by gravel workings and the construction of the adjacent Grand Union Canal, but is situated *c.*400m south of the school site. The site lies at an elevation of *c.*45m OD.

1.5.3 *Proposed Development*

The development proposal comprises the construction of a new drama block on the site of a former modular building (Figs 2-3). The design comprises a single-storey brick building with external wooden boarding with two classes in the interior divided by a folding door.

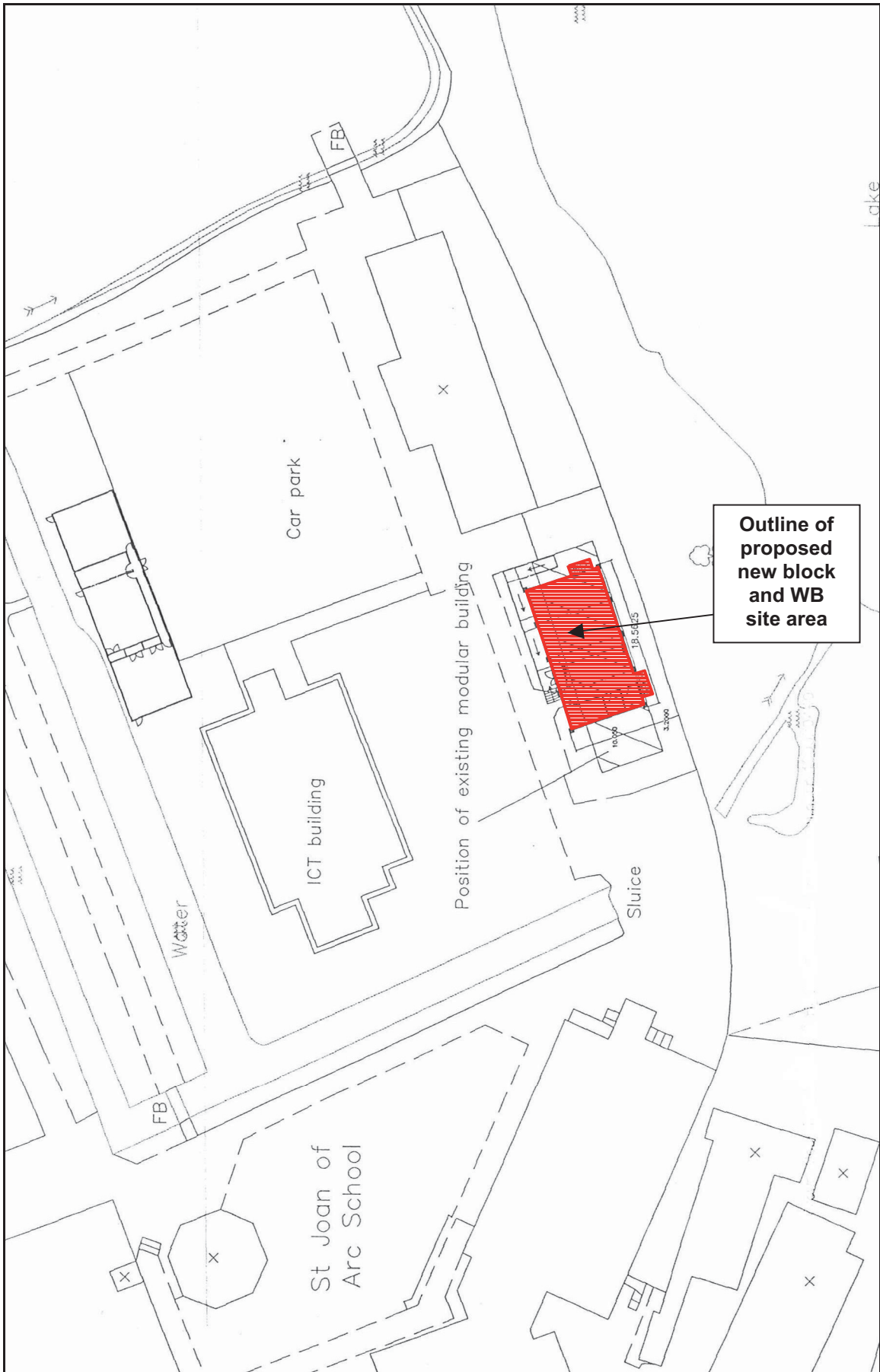


Figure 2: Site plan (scale 1:500)

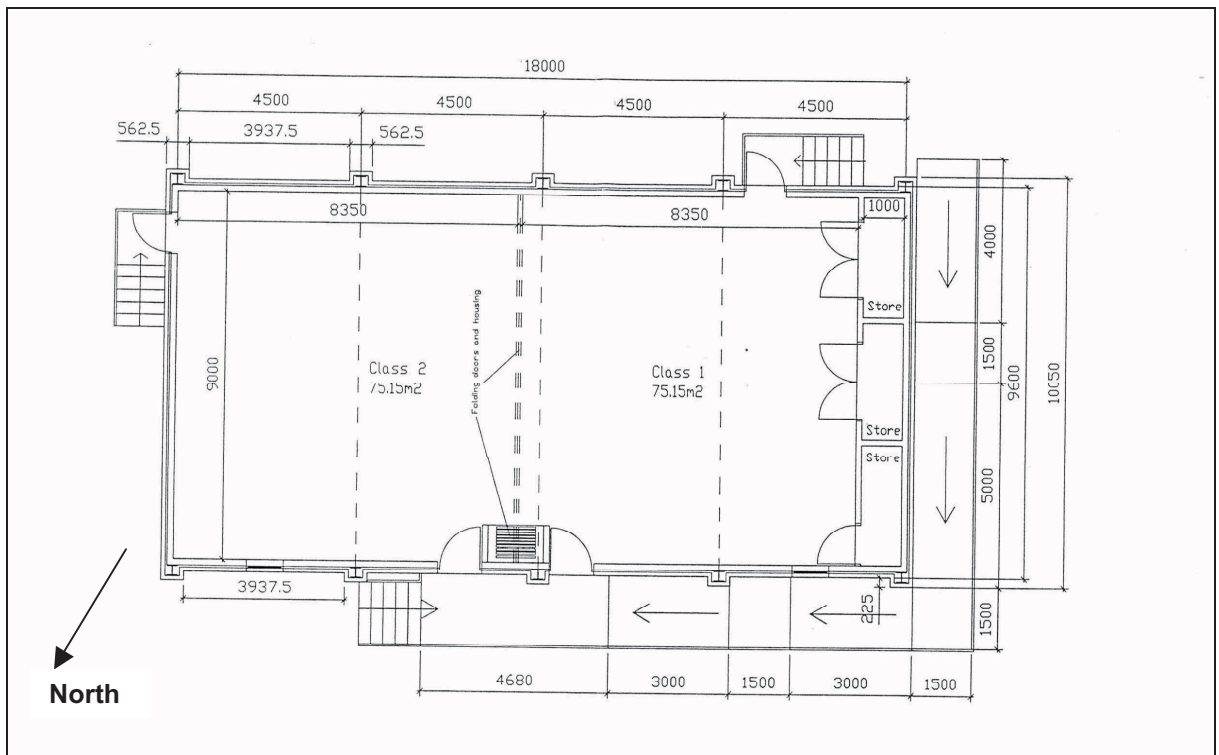


Figure 3: Plan of the proposed drama block (scale 1:100)

2. Aims & Methods

2.1 *Aims*

As described in the project design, 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 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 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), and to the relevant sections of ASC's own *Operations Manual*.

2.3 *Methods*

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

- Observation of topsoil and overburden and subsoil stripping, followed by the excavation of ring-beam foundation trenches, under archaeological supervision, as required
- Inspection of sub-soil deposits for archaeological features
- Archaeological features/deposits were present to be recorded
- Examination of any service and foundation trenches and recording of any exposed archaeological deposits
- Examination of spoil-heaps

2.4 *Constraints*

Hardcore which covered the majority of the site was not removed so there was little opportunity to observe or record the subsoil. The natural substrata was not reached.

3. Archaeological & Historical Background

- 3.1 Rickmansworth is an area of considerable archaeological and historical interest (eg Page 1908; Seddon 1999) and this has been recognised by the local authority by the designation of much of the town centre as an *Area of Archaeological Significance*. The site has the potential to reveal evidence of a variety of periods but the focus of interest is considered to lie in the prehistoric and medieval periods.
- 3.2 The site is close to the rivers Colne and Chess. River valleys and their underlying deposits constitute one of the most important environmental records that survive in the British Isles. The presence of organic deposits provides a record of past environments that allows an understanding of the nature and chronology of long vanished landscapes. This is particularly true of the Colne valley in the early prehistoric periods, where excavations have revealed vegetational and archaeological changes in the late glacial/early Holocene boundary (Lewis & Wiltshire 1992, 235-47; Brown 1997, 199).
- 3.3 Little is known of the area during the Roman period but river valleys often attracted settlement during this period. A major Roman villa has been identified at Moor Park c.2km southeast of the site.
- 3.4 The early history of the town is not well understood, but the town may have originated during the Saxon period. Rickmansworth is mentioned in the Domesday Survey (1086) where it is referred to as *Prichemareworde*. The land was held by the Abbot of St Albans and was assessed at 15 hides (Williams & Martin 2003, 377).
- 3.5 The site is situated slightly to the east of the medieval core of the town, which was centred on the High Street and Church Street (Seddon 1999, fig. 1). There is currently no evidence for medieval occupation on the site of the school.
- 3.6 The original school buildings appear in the register of listed buildings and date from the 18th century. It was probably originally constructed as a private house. This is shown on the 1896 edition Ordnance Survey map and is labelled '*The Elms*'. A formal garden water feature lay to the rear. The following section provides 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.

4. Results

- 4.1 During the initial groundworks, observations were made in an area of approx 20m (east-west) by 5m in the north-west corner of the new building footprint. The topsoil in this area was *c.*250mm thick and was not totally removed but levelled off in preparation prior to the piling works (Plate 1). The topsoil did not contain any archaeological artefacts. The remaining area of the building footprint was covered with compacted hardcore. This was left *in situ* so there was no opportunity to observe the underlying subsoil or the natural substrata.
- 4.2 Observations were later made during approximately two thirds of the ring-beam foundation construction (Plate 2). Each trench was in approximately 0.6m wide and 0.5m deep. It was difficult to ascertain the exact profile of the material excavated from the trenches due to the presence of the ring beams, rising ground water and modern ceramic drainage pipes (Plate 3). Deposits removed comprised a dark, organic horizon, which is presumed to be a modern buried soil sealed below the hardcore. The underlying subsoil comprised brown silty clay containing frequent small gravel pebbles. There were no archaeological features observed and no pre-modern artefacts were recovered from the up-cast deposits.



Plate 1: Footprint of the drama block, looking east, showing overburden stripping in progress.



Plate 2: Construction of the ring beam foundations.



Plate 3: Detail of the foundation construction cutting through buried soil and subsoil

5. Conclusions

- 5.1 No archaeological deposits were observed in the very limited groundworks within the footprint of the new drama building. However, the shallow depth of excavation reached during the ground works do not preclude the possibility that prehistoric or medieval archaeological remains are present elsewhere on the site. The absence of pre-modern artefacts within the deposits removed does reflect the location of the site to the east of and outside the core of the medieval town of Rickmansworth. As no other evidence of medieval activity has yet been found within the school grounds it is likely that, at that time, the site lay within agricultural land on the fringes of the town. Being within the Colne valley, it would be likely to find seasonal meadowland at this location and this perhaps explains the lack of medieval pottery finds from middening. The late development of the land and gardens in the 18th century suggests that the site was open land until the post-medieval period.

6. Acknowledgements

The evaluation was commissioned by St Joan of Arc School. The project was monitored by Andy Instone of the *Hertfordshire CC Historic Environment Unit*, of on behalf of the local planning authority.

The project was managed for ASC by David Fell BA MA MIFA. Fieldwork was carried out by Jonathon Hunn BA PhD MIFA. The report was prepared by Alex Thompson BSc and edited by Bob Zeepvat BA MIFA.

7. Archive

7.1 The project archive will comprise:

1. Project Design
2. Clients site plans
3. Site Monitoring Sheets
4. List of photographs
5. B/W prints & negatives
6. CDROM with copies of all digital files.

7.2 The archive will be deposited with the Three Rivers Museum.

8. References

Standards & Specifications

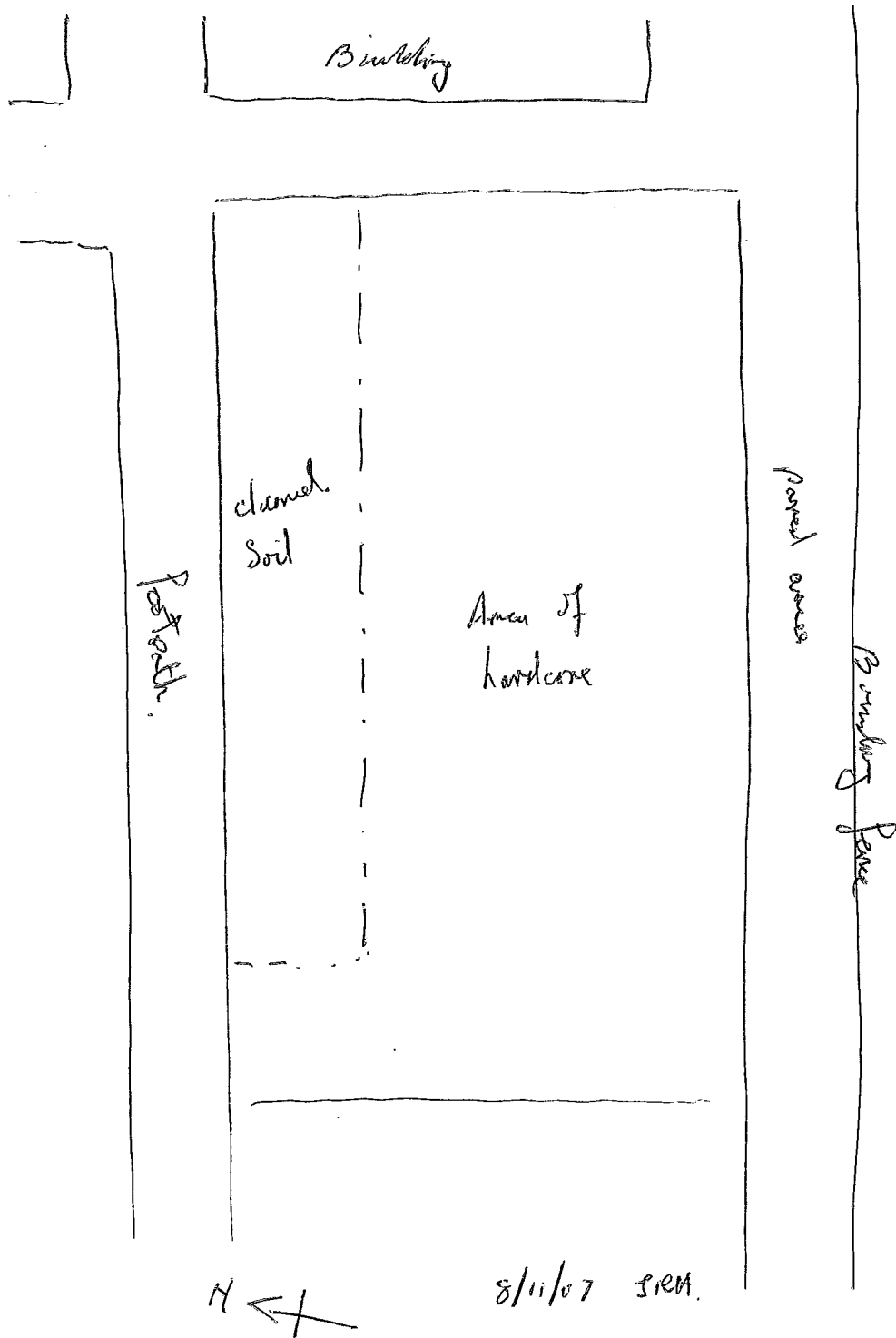
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- IFA 2000a Institute of Field Archaeologists' *Code of Conduct*.
- IFA 2001 Institute of Field Archaeologists' *Standard & Guidance documents (Desk-Based Assessments, Watching Briefs, Evaluations, Excavations, Investigation and Recording of Standing Buildings, Finds)*.
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Secondary Sources

- Brown, A.G. 1997: *Alluvial Geoarchaeology: Floodplain archaeology and environmental change*. Cambridge University Press (Cambridge).
- Lewis, J.S.C, Wiltshire, P.E.J., and Macphail, R. 1992: A Late Devensian/early Flandrian site at Three Ways Wharf, Uxbridge: environmental implications. Needham, S. & Macklin, M.G (eds) *Alluvial Archaeology in Britain*. Oxbow Monograph (Oxford).
- Page, W. 1908: *The Victoria County History of Hertfordshire*. Dawsons of Pall Mall (Folkestone & London).
- Soil Survey 1983 *1:250,000 Soil Map of England and Wales, and accompanying legend* (Harpenden).
- Williams A & Martin G (eds) 2003 *Domesday Book. A Complete Translation*. Penguin.

Appendix 1: ASC Watching Brief Monitoring Sheets

A.S.C. LTD		ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD MONITORING RECORD				
Project: <i>St Joan of Arc School</i>		Project No/Code: <i>1014 1 RJA</i>		Sheet: <i>1 of 2</i>		
<i>Rickmansworth</i>		Date of visit: <i>8/11/07</i>				
Client/Developer: <i>School - ditto</i>						
Contact: <i>T. Bawz</i>			Phone:			
Duration of Visit (inc. travel):		Start: <i>10.25</i>		Finish: <i>12.25</i>		
Completed by: <i>JRM</i>						
Development Type:						
Footings	Services	Roads	Levelling <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Quarrying	Pipelines	
Other (specify):						
Site & weather conditions: <i>Dry & overcast</i>						
Observations: <i>Observed area some 20m E-W by c. 5m (max) which had been cleared of vegetation. The soil was about 0.25m deep. This was not removed but levelled off prior to the piling operation. The remains of the area of the new building was left in situ as it consisted of rolled hard-core material.</i>						
Comments: <i>No real opportunity to observe the subsoil. No artefacts contained within soil.</i>						

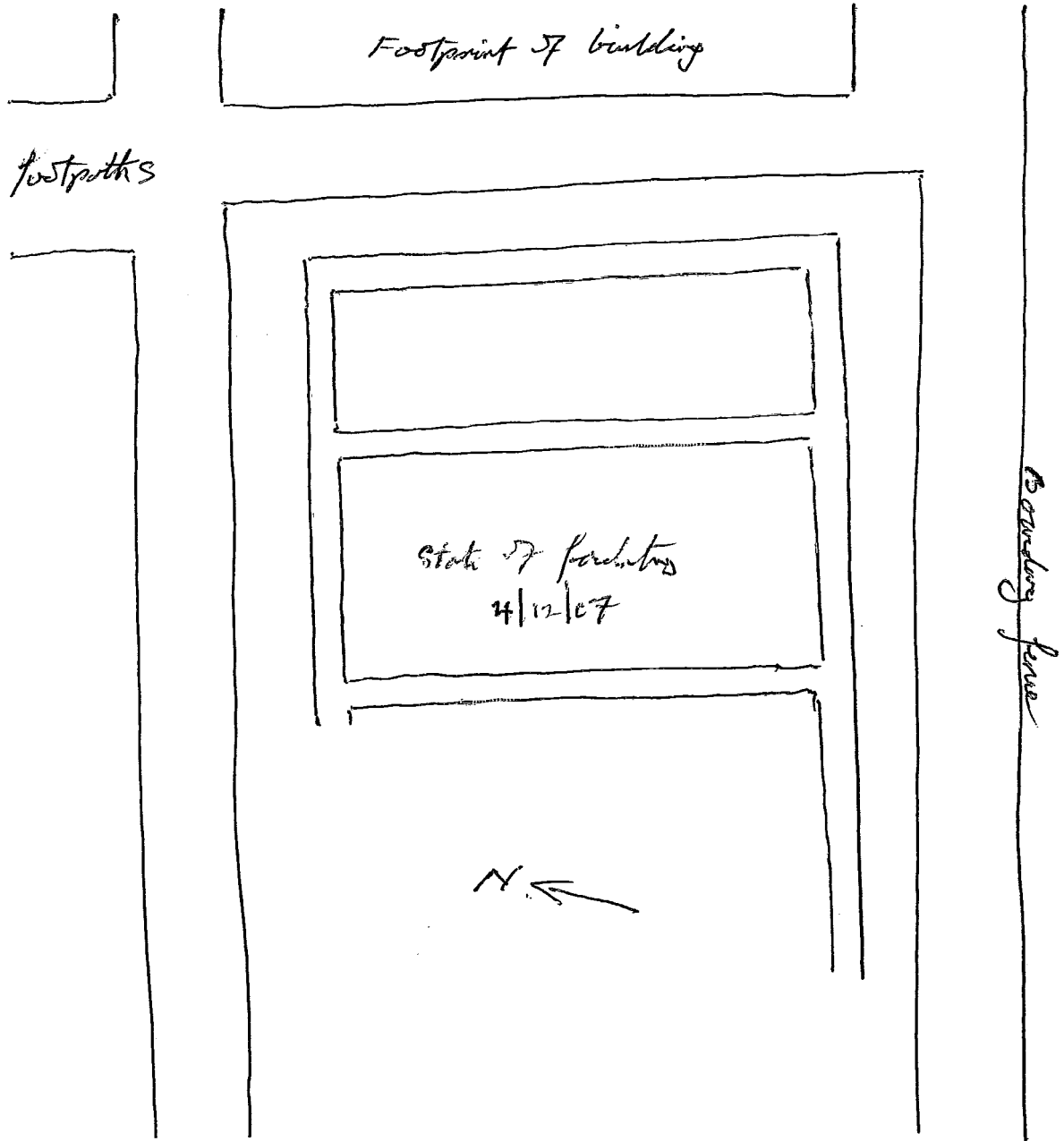




A.S.C. LTD

ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD MONITORING RECORD

Project: St Joan of Arc School, Rickmansworth, Herts.		Project No/Code: 1014 1 RSA	Sheet: 2 of 2
Client/Developer Schol-ditta		Date of visit: 1/12/07	
Contact: T. Bains		Phone:	
Duration of Visit (inc. travel):	Start: 10.05 am	Finish: 11.35	
Completed by: SRH			
Development Type:			
Footings <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Services	Roads	Levelling
			Quarrying
			Pipelines
			Other (specify):
Site & weather conditions: Dull & wet			
Observations: Observed about two thirds of the ring beam foundations. The cut was about 0.6m wide and 0.5m deep. It was difficult to see the sides of the trenches since they had been 'sealed' or shored by a yellow plastic, steel framed material. To judge from those parts which had not been obscured by this material the ground varied from a dark organic horizon to a brown, probably clay. The Spill heaps confirmed this. There were no signs of any pre-modern material.			
Comments: Conditions were very poor with damp, grey skies and boggy ground. The use of shuttering provided good visibility. However, where the ground was visible there did not appear to be anything that indicated the presence of archaeological deposits. No further visits proposed.			



Appendix 2: List of Photographs

SITE NAME: ST JOAN OF ARC SCHOOL, RICKMANSWORTH		SITE NO/CODE:RSJ/1014	
Shot	B&W	Digital	Subject
1	✓	✓	Footprint of the drama building looking west, showing overburden stripping
2	✓	✓	Detail of the topsoil as disturbed. View towards the west showing topsoil/ hardcore locations.
3	✓	✓	View of the footprint of the drama building looking east, showing topsoil/ hardcore locations.
4	✓	✓	View south towards the Colne.
5	✓	✓	General view of the footprint of the building looking east, showing ring-beam foundations in progress.
6	✓	✓	Detailed view of the ring-beam foundations together with disturbed topsoil, subsoil and recent drains.

Appendix 3: ASC OASIS Form

PROJECT DETAILS			
Project Name:	St Joan of Arc Catholic School		
Short Description:	In November and December 2007 a watching brief was carried out during groundworks for a new drama block at St Joan of Arc School, Rickmansworth. No deposits or finds of archaeological significance were revealed. However, as the groundworks were limited in scope this does not preclude the presence of archaeological remains elsewhere on the site. The absence of artefactual evidence suggests that the site is located outside the eastern extents of the medieval town core. Its river valley location would suggest that it lay within meadowland until the construction of a house within its grounds in the 18 th century.		
Project Type:	Watching Brief		
Site status:	None	Previous work:	None
Current land use:	School	Future work:	Not known
Monument type:	None	Monument period:	None
Significant finds:	None		
PROJECT LOCATION			
County:	Hertfordshire	OS reference: (8 figs min)	TQ 0635 9450
District:	Rickmansworth	Parish:	None
Site address:	St Joan of Arc School, High Street, Rickmansworth Herts. WD3 1HG		
Study area: (sq. m. or ha)	0.13ha	Height OD: (metres)	C 45m aOD
PROJECT CREATORS			
Organisation:	Archaeological Services & Consultancy Ltd		
Project brief originator:	None	Project design originator:	David Fell
Project Manager:	David Fell	Director/Supervisor:	Jonathon Hunn
Sponsor / funding body:	St Joan of Arc School		
PROJECT DATE			
Start date:	8/11/2007	End date:	4/12/2007
PROJECT ARCHIVES			
	Location (Accession no.)	Content (eg. pottery, animal bone, files/sheets)	
Physical:	None	None	
Paper:	Three Rivers Museum	Watching sheet monitoring forms, project design, report	
Digital:	Three Rivers Museum	CD of all digital data including photographs	
BIBLIOGRAPHY (Journal/monograph, published or forthcoming, or unpublished client report)			
Title:	Watching Brief: St Joan of Arc School		
Serial title & volume:	ASC Ltd Report ref. 1014/RJA/2		
Author(s):	Alex Thompson		
Page nos	20	Date:	January 2008