

Archaeological Services & Consultancy Ltd

WATCHING BRIEF: GARDEN FIELDS JMI SCHOOL, ST ALBANS, HERTFORDSHIRE

on behalf of Mace (HCC)



by
Jonathan R. Hunn BA, PhD, MIFA

August 2004

ASC: 591/SAG/01

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Site Data

<i>ASC site code:</i>	SAG	<i>Project no:</i>	591
<i>SMR reference / Event No:</i>			
<i>County:</i>	Hertfordshire		
<i>District:</i>	St Albans		
<i>Village/Town:</i>	St Albans		
<i>Parish:</i>	St Michaels (ancient parish)		
<i>NGR:</i>	TL 1478-0868		
<i>Extent of site:</i>	N/a		
<i>Present land use:</i>	School grounds		
<i>Planning proposal:</i>	Building extensions		
<i>Extent of development:</i>	15m x 30m approx		
<i>Planning application ref/date:</i>	N/a		
<i>Client:</i>	Herts C.C. Mace Ltd, Stag House, Old London Rd, Hertford, SG13 7YY		
<i>Contact name:</i>	Salvatore Conti		
<i>Telephone</i>		<i>Fax:</i>	

Internal Quality Check

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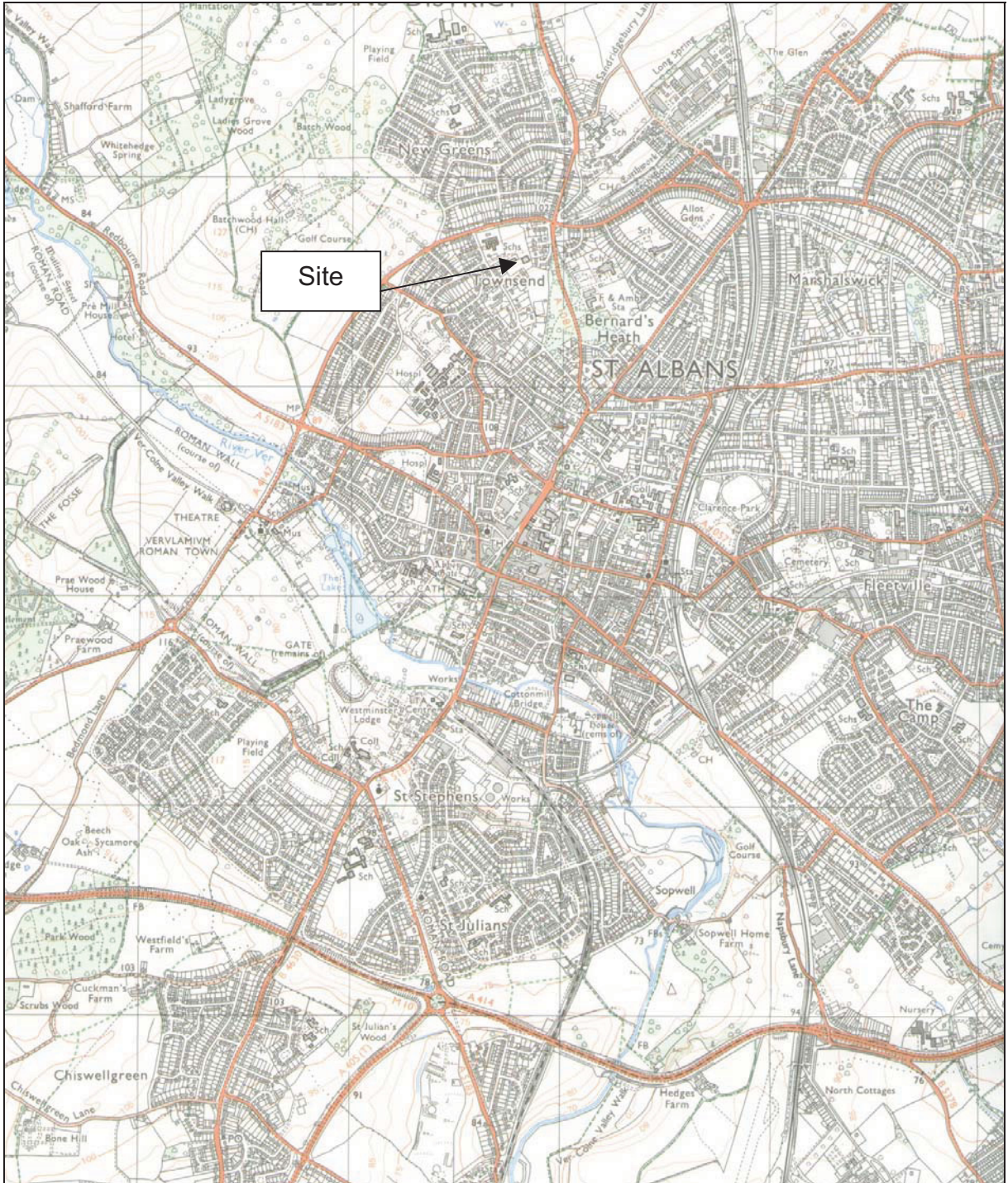


Figure 1: General location (scale 1:25,000)

Summary

In July 2004 an archaeological watching brief was undertaken during construction works at Gardens Field School, St Albans. This consisted of some further terracing of the existing site and extensions to two of the buildings. The sub-soils were entirely of composed of sandy clay; no features were observed or any artefacts recovered.

1 Introduction

1.1 During late July 2004 *Archaeological Services and Consultancy Ltd* (ASC) carried out a watching brief on a site at Garden Fields JMI School, St Albans (NGR TL 1478-0868: Fig. 1). The project was commissioned by Salvatore Conti of Mace Ltd on behalf of Herts County Council, and was carried out according to a standard brief with the approval of Jonathan Smith of the County Archaeology Office (CAO).

1.2 *Reason for Work*

The work was required due to the potential threat to known archaeological deposits in the area.

1.3 *Setting*

1.3.1 The site (NGR TL 1478-0868) lies towards the northern edge of St Albans in a landscape that essentially urban in character.

1.3.2 The site is situated towards the base of a dry valley which abuts onto the valley of the River Ver. The river itself lies some 1500 m to the south. The terrain is gently sloping and the site lies just above the 105 m contour (the river lies just below the 80 m contour OD). The natural soils have almost certainly been modified but would have belonged to the Batcombe Association. This is described as follows: *'The soils are developed in Plateau Drift and Clay-with-flints which cap chalk plateaux at 90 to 250 m OD. Most of the association is on level or gently sloping ground but slopes are steeper and convex near the margins of the drift outcrops.....Variably flinty fine silty and fine loamy over clayey Batcombe and Hornbeam soils, stagnoleytic paleo-argillic brown earths, with grey mottled subsoils dominate...'* Hodge et al 1984, 111).

1.3.3 The site has been partly terraced and there are existing buildings on the site which are to be extended.

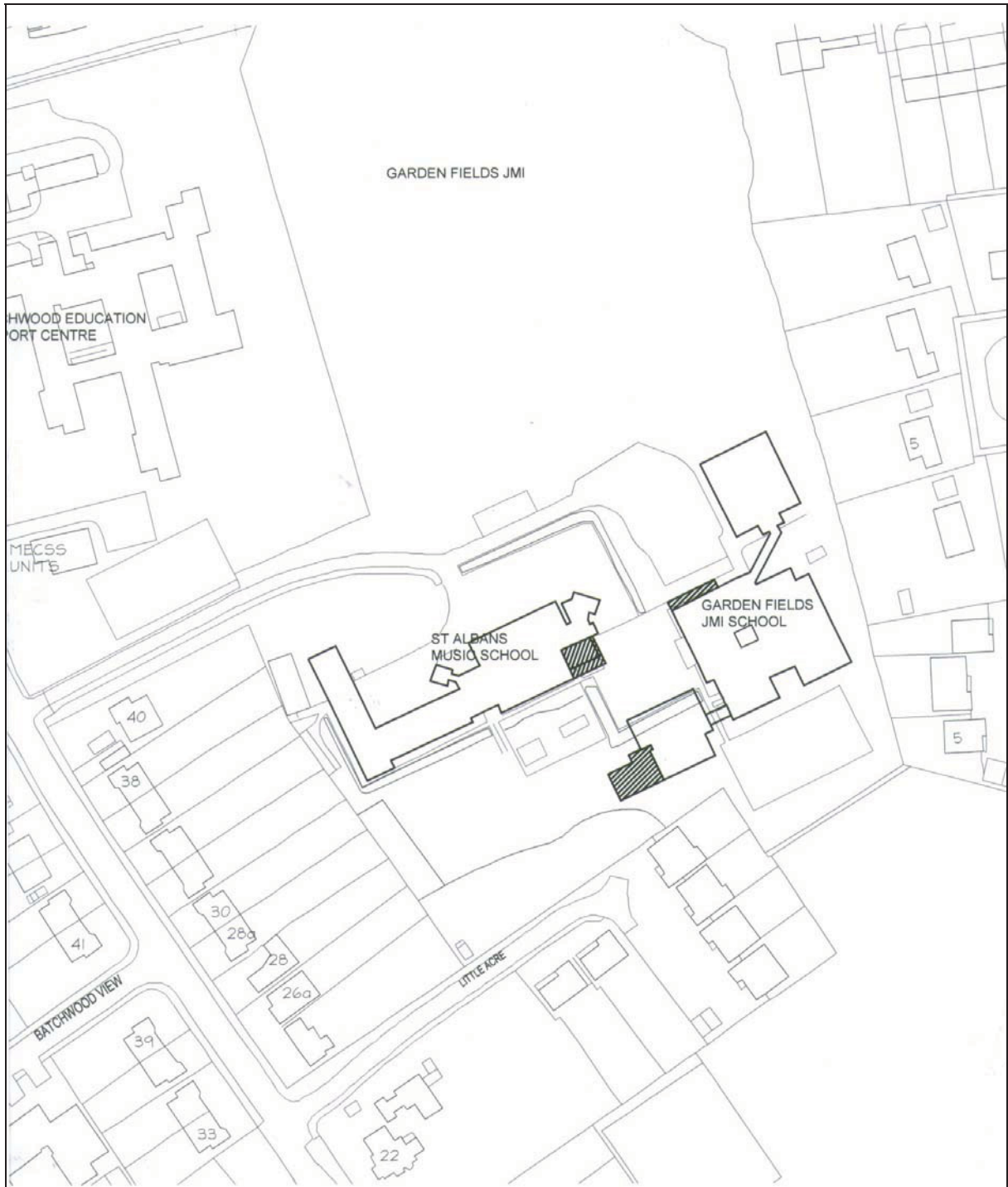


Figure 2: Site plan showing location of building extensions (shaded). Not to scale.

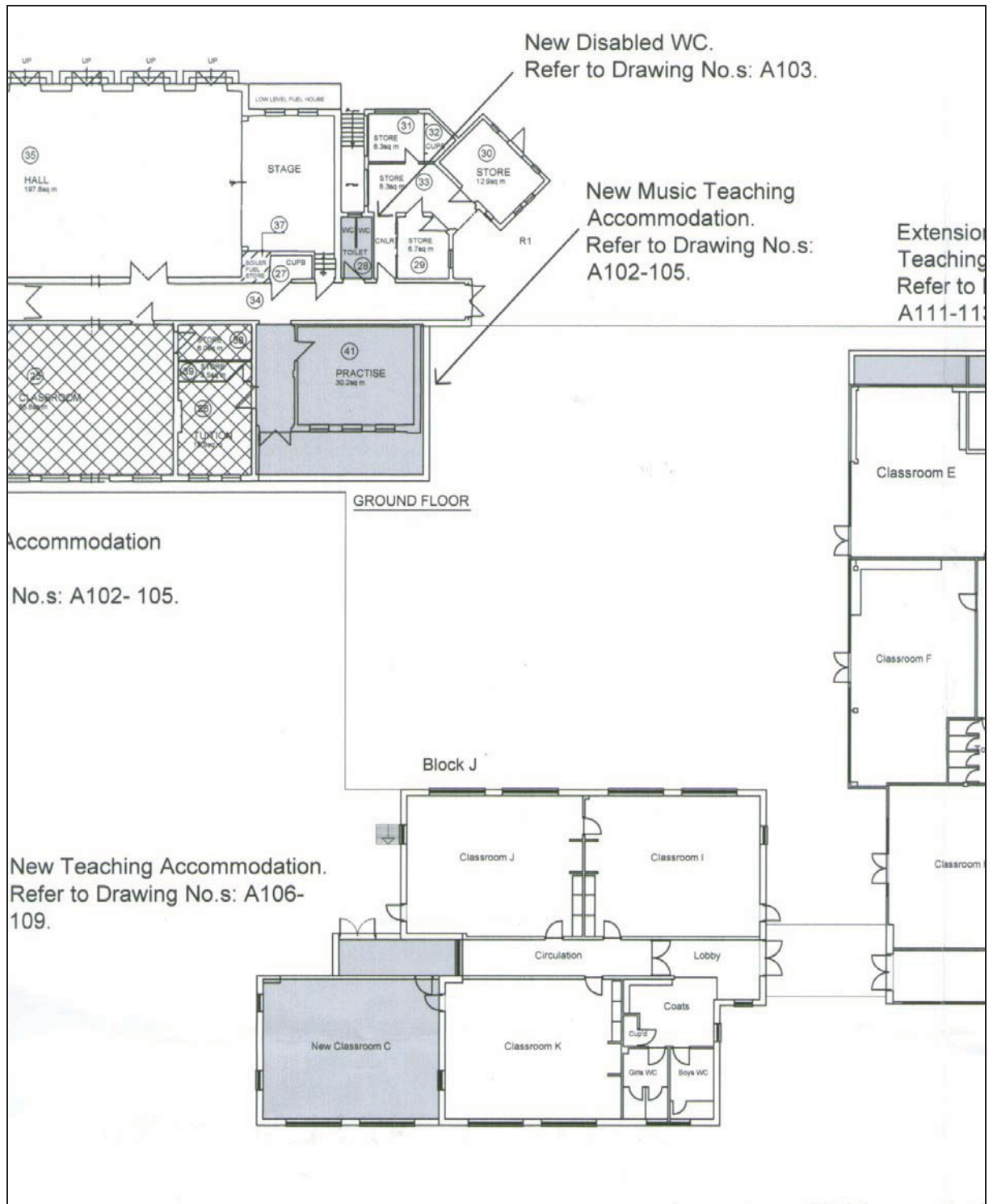


Figure 3: Detail layout of new building extensions (scale 1:200 approx.)

2 Aims & Methods

2.1 Aims

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.
- To attempt to place the project findings into their historical and geographical context, having made reference to the relevant regional research agendas (*East Anglian Archaeology occasional paper 8, 2000*), through cartographic and documentary research.

2.2 Methods

The work was carried out according to a standard brief, which require:

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

2.3 Standards

The work conforms to the project design, to the relevant sections of the Institute of Archaeologists' *Code of Conduct* (IFA 2000) and *Standard & Guidance Notes* (IFA 2001), and Standards for Field Archaeology in the East of England (ALGAO 2003), and to the relevant sections of ASC's own *Operations Manual*.

3 Archaeological & Historical Background

There is no direct information concerning the archaeology of the site. However, there are several pieces of evidence in the general vicinity that suggest that the landscape was fully developed by the late Iron Age, if not earlier. Four 'sites' are of particular note, as follows:

1. Beech Bottom Dyke SMR 0047 (Hunn 1994, 25-26)
2. Coin hoard within Beech Bottom Dyke SMR 0497
3. Cremation cemetery at Everlasting Lane SMR 4082
4. Royal burial enclosure SMR 6819 (Niblett 1999, 15, Fig. 8)

The area in which the school lies was probably part of the manorial holding of Kingsbury. Its proximity to Bernard's Heath and place name 'Townsend' point to the possibility that it once formed part of a larger area of 'waste ground' in the medieval period. However, since this period it has had a long history of arable cultivation until the spread of St Albans engulfed it in the mid-20th century.

4 Results

- 4.1 The southernmost area on the upper part of the site was lowered to between 1.7m and 2m (Figs 2 and 3; Appendix 1, sketch on reverse of sheet for July 21st). There was no evidence for any man-made features within the lower part of the terraced area though a shallow depression was noted on the upper southern edge of the area. This was about 3m wide and 0.65m deep and filled with a dark brown, pebbly fill (Plate 2). There was no indication of any date. The remainder of the area was devoid of any man made deposits (Plates 3-4).
- 4.2 On the northern side of the site an area approximately 8m square was observed which was situated at the eastern end of an existing range of buildings. Here the ground was lowered by between 0.4m and 0.55m. This revealed a natural sandy, pebbly clay (Plates 5-6). No pre-modern features were observed or any artefacts recovered.



Plate 1: View south to the southern building extension



Plate 2: Detail of southern terraced area



Plate 3: View west across the southern terraced area



Plate 4: view west showing shape of the terrain



Plate 5: View west across area of northern building extension



Plate 6: Detail of sub-soils beneath northern building extension

5. Conclusions

- 5.1.1 Until the present building programme the southern area still retained much of its natural terrain. In contrast, the northern building area had almost certainly been truncated or terraced to provide the site of the earlier school building which, according to the Ordnance Survey (revised version), must post-date 1922-3.
- 5.1.2 The Tithe map of 1840 for the parish of St Michaels, in which the site of the school was situated (HCRO DSA4 87/1) records that the field name as '*Claypit Meadow*' (TA no. 779). It was a field of 7.0.30 acres (grass) and formed part of the Joshua Lomax estate (i.e. Childwickbury estate). Previous observations on the site undertaken by ASC suggest that extraction pits for clay are present in the area (ASAC/GFS/SA/H98/2). However, no evidence for this activity was found during the present works, nor anything to suggest the proximity of an occupation or burial site.

6. Acknowledgements

The writer is grateful to Salvatore Conti of Mace Ltd on behalf of the client, Hertfordshire County Council, for commissioning this project. Thanks are also due to the Jonathan Smith and Alison Tinniswood of the County Archaeology Office for their advice; also to Russell McLean, the site manager for his co-operation. Finally, the author would like to thank his colleague, Bob Zeepvat for editing the report.

7. Archive

7.1 The project archive will comprise:

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

7.2 The archive will be deposited with St Albans Museum.

8. Bibliography

Avery, B. W. 1964: *The Soils and Land Use of the District around Aylesbury and Hemel Hempstead*. London. HMSO.

Hertfordshire County Council: *An Archaeological Strategy for Hertfordshire* 1997.

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 no. 13. Harpenden.

Hunn, J. R. 1994: *Reconstruction and Measurement of Landscape Change: a study of six parishes in the St Albans area*. Oxford. British Archaeological Reports 236.

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)*.

Niblett, R. 1999: *The Excavation of a ceremonial site at Folly Lane, Verulamium*. Britannia Monograph Series no. 14. Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies (London).

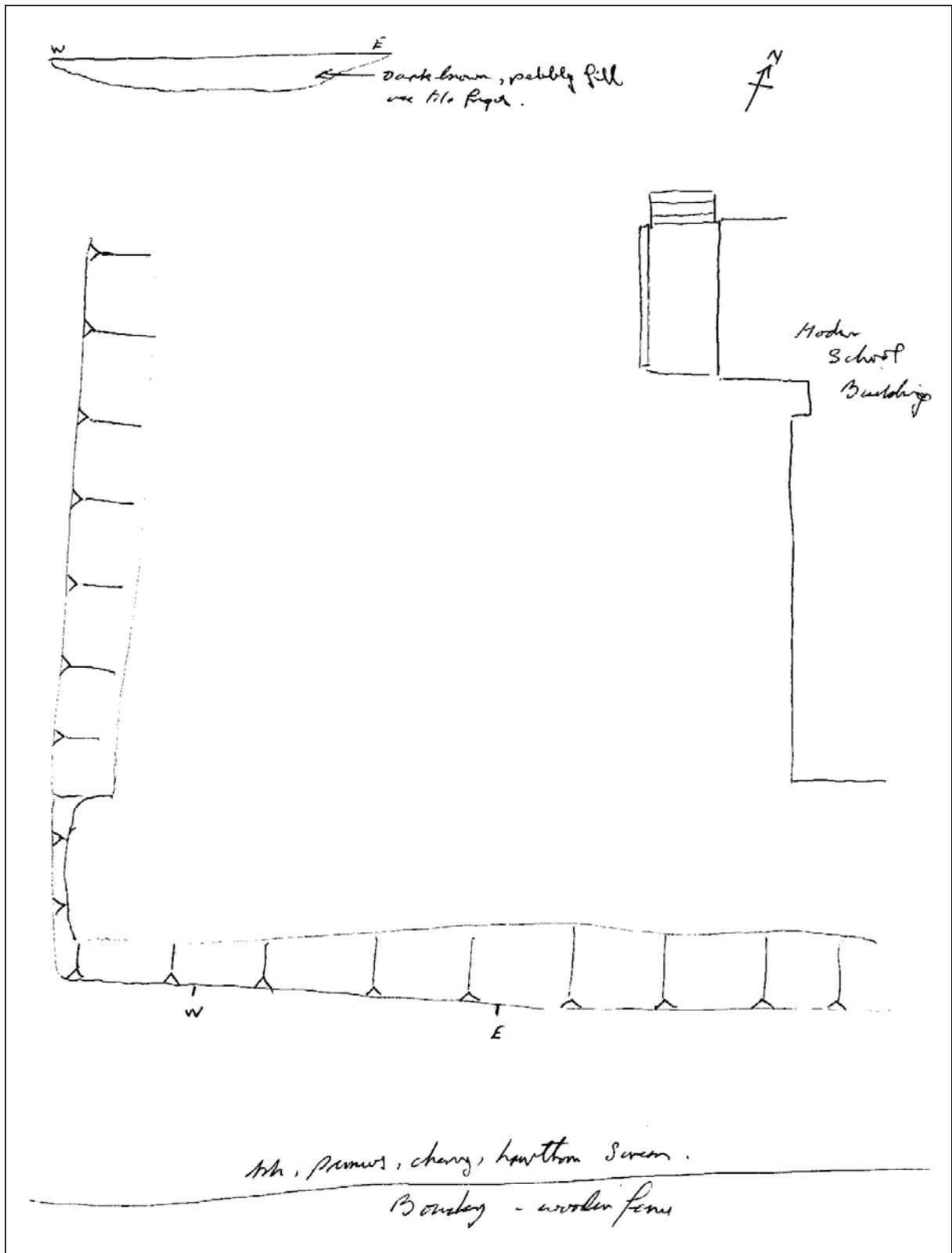
Soil Survey 1983 *1:250,000 Soil Map of England and Wales, and accompanying legend* (Harpenden).

Appendix 1: Monitoring Sheets

 A.S.C. LTD		ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD MONITORING RECORD			
Project Name: <i>Garden Fields School</i>		Project Code: <i>591/SAG</i>		Date of visit: <i>21/7/04</i>	
Location: <i>St Albans</i>					
Client/Developer: <i>Trace re Herts e.c.</i>					
Architect:					
Site Manager/Farmer: <i>Russell McLean</i>			Phone: <i>07795-442639</i>		
Development Type:					
Foundations	Services	Roads	Levelling	Quarrying	Other:
Site conditions (weather, ground condition, etc) <i>Dull, overcast & damp.</i>					
Observations made: (e.g. length of trench/foundation; depth/width; soil descriptions, archaeological features)					
<p><i>The footprint of the building has been covered by between 1.7m and 2m cut into the natural sandy clay deposits. Only in the southern section was the gravel at all disturbed by a pit or sump 3m wide and 0.65m deep - see sketch. Nothing of significance observed. The soil has been removed from the site.</i></p>					
<p><i>No further observations required in this area; the building extends to the north and its foundation checked.</i></p>					
Comments:					
<p><i>Time of arrival 11.15 departed 12.20</i> <i>Sub-cont: AShe Construction Ltd.</i></p>					
Completed by: <i>JRH</i>					

For sketch plan, use reverse

ASACFM26, revised 1999





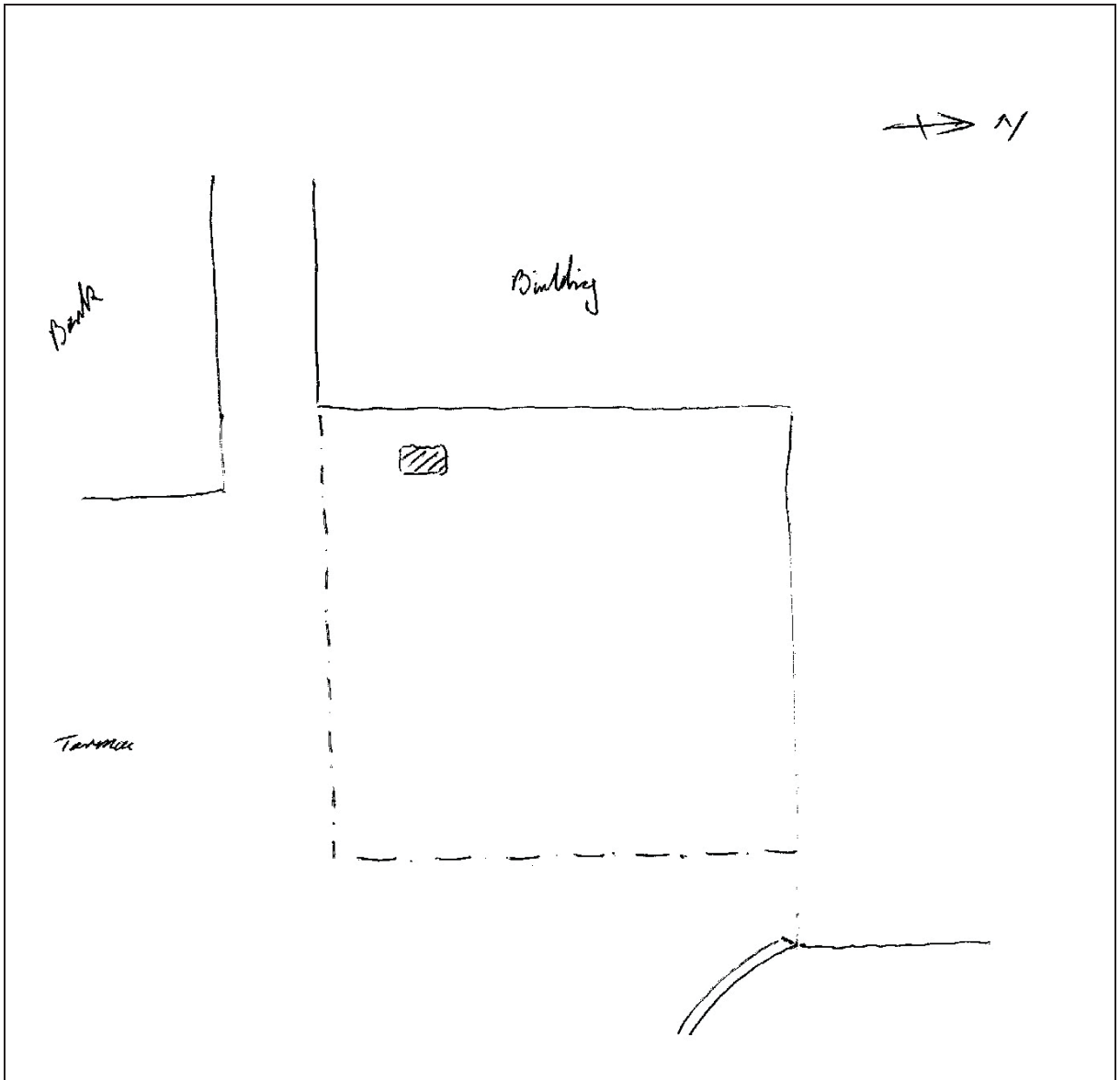
A.S.C. LTD

ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD MONITORING RECORD

Project Name: <i>Garden Fields School</i>		Project Code: <i>591/SAG</i>	Date of visit: <i>28/7/04</i>		
Location: <i>St Albans</i>					
Client/Developer: <i>Mare for H.C.C.</i>					
Architect:					
Site Manager/Farmer: <i>Russell J Lear</i>		Phone: <i>07795 - 442 639</i>			
Development Type:					
Foundations	Services	Roads	Levelling	Quarrying	Other:
Site conditions (weather, ground condition, etc) <i>Dry cool Sunny.</i>					
Observations made: (e.g. length of trench/foundation; depth/width; soil descriptions, archaeological features)					
<p><i>Observed the area at the eastern end of the older range of buildings that lies to the north of previous area. The ground was reclaimed by Somewhere between 0.4m and 0.55m in an area approx. 8m square. This exposed the underlying sandy, silty clay. Apart from a single, modern drainage gully towards the NE corner of the reclaimed area the site was devoid of any archaeology.</i></p> <p><i>The make up to the terrace was mostly brick, chalk and brown sand.</i></p>					
Comments:					
<p><i>This area has almost certainly been removed down when the original buildings were constructed.</i></p>					
Completed by: <i>JRAH</i>					

For sketch plan, use reverse

ASACFM26, revised 1999



Appendix 2: SMR Summary Sheet

HERTS

Site name and address: Garden Fields JMI School, Townsend Drive, St Albans, Herts		
County:Herts		District: St Albans
Village/Town:		Parish: St Michaels (ancient parish)
Planning application reference: tba		
Client name, address, & tel. no: Mace Ltd, Stag House, Old London Rd, Hertford, SG13 7YY		
Nature of application: extension to existing school buildings		
Present land use: school grounds		
Size of application area: n/a		Size of area investigated: n/a
NGR (to 8 figures): TL 1478-0868		Site code: SAG
Site director/Organization: Jonathan R. Hunn / ASC Ltd		
Type of work: Watching brief		
Date of work:	Start: 21/7/04	Finish: 28/7/04
Curating museum: St Albans		
Related SMR nos:		Periods represented:
Relevant previous summaries/reports 0047, 0497		
<p>Summary of fieldwork results:</p> <p><i>In July 2004 an archaeological watching brief was undertaken to an extension to Gardens Field School, St Albans. This consisted of some further terracing of the existing site and extensions to two of the buildings. The sub-soils were entirely of composed of sandy clay; no features were observed or any artefacts recovered.</i></p>		
Author: J.R. Hunn		Date: 19/8/04