

BLUECOAT PRIMARY SCHOOL, WHITE'S LANE, GREAT TORRINGTON, DEVON

NGR SX 8104 5981

Results of an archaeological trench evaluation and historic building appraisal

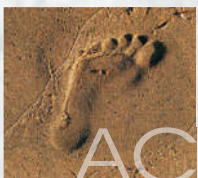
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On behalf of:
Trewin Design Partnership

Report No: ACD626/2/0

Date: February 2013



AC archaeology

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Summary

An archaeological trench evaluation and historic building appraisal were undertaken by AC archaeology in January 2013 on land at the former Bluecoat School site, White's Lane, Great Torrington, Devon (NGR SX 8104 5981). The work was undertaken in support of a forthcoming planning application for the redevelopment of the site.

The evaluation entailed the excavation of three trenches totalling 39.8m in length, with each trench 2m wide. Buried soil layers were exposed within all trenches and produced pottery dating from the medieval period through to the 19th century. Exposed features include a probable burgage boundary ditch, a pit, and the foundations of a school outbuilding. No pre-school building remains were found.

The building appraisal established that the surviving buildings are the remains of a 1870s Board School of some architectural merit and interest. The original schoolrooms and classrooms are well preserved, but restricted to the northern and southern parts of the complex, the central part having been entirely rebuilt following a fire in 1968.

1. INTRODUCTION (Fig. 1)

- 1.1 An archaeological trench evaluation and historic building appraisal were carried out by AC archaeology in January 2013 on land at the former Bluecoat School site, White's Lane, Great Torrington, Devon (NGR SX 8104 5981). The work was commissioned by Trewin Design Partnership on behalf of clients, following consultation with Devon County Council's Historic Environment Service (hereafter DCCHES) and was undertaken in support of a forthcoming planning application for the redevelopment of the site.
- 1.2 The site comprises the former Victorian school building, modern extensions and annexes and surrounding asphalt playgrounds. It lies at approximately 100m aOD, with the underlying geology comprising sandstone of the Bude formation.

2. ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND (Figs 2-4)

- 2.1 The archaeological interest in the site derives from its location within the historic core of the medieval town, immediately to the southwest of St Michael and All Angels parish church, which dates to the 14th century, if not earlier. An archaeological watching brief carried out by Exeter Archaeology in 2000 during the construction of an extension to the school, identified a buried soil horizon containing medieval pottery (Higbee 2001). It was therefore considered possible that building remains and/or associated features of this period such as domestic rubbish pits may survive, buried within the site.
- 2.2 The Great Torrington parish tithe map of 1844 shows the site as a mainly open plot of land, surrounded by houses. A building is shown close to the White's Lane frontage and clearly must have been removed prior to the construction of the school. The Ordnance Survey first edition 25-inch map of 1886 shows that the school had been constructed by this time.

3. AIMS OF THE WORK

- 3.1 The principal aim of the trench evaluation was to establish the presence or absence, extent, depth, character and date of any archaeological features or deposits within the site. The results of the evaluation (this document) will be reviewed by Torrington District Council and may be used to inform a subsequent programme of archaeological work (if needed), should the planning application be successful.

4. TRENCH EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

- 4.1 The evaluation comprised the machine excavation of three 2m wide trenches totalling 39.8m in length (Fig. 5). The work was carried out in accordance with a project design prepared by AC archaeology (Valentin 2013), following consultation with DCCHEs.
- 4.2 The asphalt playground surface and non-archaeological overburden were removed using a tracked excavator fitted with a toothless grading bucket, under the direct supervision of the site archaeologist. Excavation ceased at the level at which archaeological deposits were exposed, at which point the sides and base of each trench were cleaned and investigation continued by hand.
- 4.3 All archaeological deposits were recorded using the standard AC archaeology recording system, comprising written, drawn and photographic records, and in accordance with AC archaeology's *General Site Recording Manual, Version 2* (2012). Stratigraphic information was recorded using *pro-forma* context record sheets, detailed plan and section drawings were produced at a scale of 1:20 or 1:50, and a photographic record was compiled in high-resolution digital format. All site levels were related to Ordnance Survey data.

5. TRENCH EVALUATION RESULTS (Fig. 6; Plates 1-8)

5.1 Trench 1 (Detailed plan and sections Fig. 6a-c; Plates 1-2)

This trench measured 9.8m long by 2m wide and was aligned E-W towards the NE corner of the site. Natural subsoil (112), consisting of yellow clay was encountered from a depth of 1.42m below ground level.

Two features (F105 and F107) cut from the level of natural subsoil.

Feature F105 was a N-S aligned ditch exposed 4.2m from the east end of the trench. It measured 1.1m wide and 0.5m deep, with steeply sloping sides tapering to a flat open base. It contained a single fill (106) consisting of clean, light greyish brown silty clay. No pottery or other dating evidence was recovered.

Feature F107 was a shallow circular pit, partially exposed within the northern side of the trench. It measured 0.7m in diameter and 0.2m deep, with steeply sloping sides and a flat base. It contained a single fill (108) of light greyish brown silty clay. No finds were recovered.

Both features were sealed by a soil layer (104) consisting of mid brown silty clay. This layer measured between 0.2m and 0.28m thick and extended throughout the trench. With the exception of occasional mortar and charcoal flecks, the soil was clean. Finds recovered from this deposit consisted of a single unglazed sherd from a post-medieval North Devon gravel-tempered ware vessel and a gravel-tempered ridge tile dating to the 16th or 17th century.

A posthole (F109) containing a clearly defined postpipe (F111) was exposed within the southern side of the trench. It measured 0.4m wide and 0.4m deep and cut through soil layer 104. No finds were recovered from the posthole fill (110).

Soil layer 104 and posthole F109 were sealed by a second soil layer (103), which measured 0.4m thick and extended throughout the trench. It consisted of dark grey silty clay and contained pottery, clay pipe and glass ranging in date from the 18th to 20th centuries.

The upper deposits within the trench comprised a 0.6m thick layer of 19th- or early 20th-century building rubble (101) sealed by the modern asphalt playground surface (100).

5.2 Trench 2 (Detailed plan and sections Fig. 6d-f; Plates 3-5)

This trench measured 15m long by 2m wide and was aligned N-S to the rear of the main school building. Natural subsoil (208) consisting of yellowish brown clay with localised outcrops of stone was encountered from a depth of 1m. The trench stratigraphy comprised an undisturbed soil sequence (in ascending order: 206, 205, 204) totalling 0.7m thick, which extended to within 0.26m of ground level, overlain by 19th- or early 20th-century levelling layers (201, 202). The foundations to a series of contemporaneous walls (F203, F207, F212), all probably forming part of the same building, had been inserted through the made ground.

The lower of the three soil layers (206) consisted of light brown silty clay up to 0.32m thick, which directly overlay the natural subsoil throughout the trench. It contained occasional flecks of charcoal and lime mortar but was otherwise clean. A number of medieval pottery sherds were recovered, all of which consisted of North Devon coarsewares with a date range of c. 1200 – 1450. The middle layer in the sequence (205) consisted of light to mid-brown slightly sandy clay, and measured up to 0.34m thick. Slightly darker than the underlying soil layer, this deposit had been more heavily worked, containing a higher proportion of mortar and charcoal flecks, as well as occasional small slate fragments. Pottery dating to the 16th century was recovered from the layer. The uppermost layer in the sequence (204) consisted of dark grey clay loam and measured 0.2m thick. This layer, which represents the pre-existing topsoil at the time of the construction of the school, contained a moderate level of mortar and brick flecks, together with occasional oyster shell and small slate fragments. A number of fragments of brick or tile dating to after 1700 were recovered.

Soil 204 was overlain throughout the trench by a 0.2 – 0.3m thick layer of mixed, yellow and brown redeposited clay (202), which, together with an overlying layer of gravel (201) represents a single episode of levelling, raising ground level by approximately 0.4m.

All of the above deposits were cut through by the foundations of three walls (F203, F207, F212), which were constructed from the level of the upper make-up layer (201). All of the walls were of similar construction, consisting predominantly of random-coursed local slate, bonded with a grey ash-lime mortar. Bricks, and occasional quartz fragments were present within all three walls.

Wall F212 was aligned N-S, parallel with the trench and measured 0.82m deep. It was exposed over a distance of 2.4m, terminating to the south some 0.9m from perpendicular wall F207, the gap between the walls most probably marking an entrance. It continued beyond the limit of the trench to the north. To the east, the wall was abutted by a contemporary concrete surface that featured an integral eaves drip gully extending along the length of the wall. This indicates that F212 represents the eastern external wall of a building.

Walls F203 (aligned N-S) and F207 (aligned E-W) were both 0.84m deep and were keyed together, forming a T-junction. Wall F203 lay parallel with wall F212, but was offset to the south. To the south the wall continued for an unknown distance behind the west side of the trench. It featured an integral sub-surface drain (F209) immediately beyond its junction with wall F207. To the north, it ended opposite the southern terminus of wall F212, the distance between the two walls measuring 0.9m. It is likely that this position marks a doorway between the two walls, and that wall F203 returned at this point to the west, to form the south wall of a room or small building, the east wall of which was formed by F212. Wall F207 continued beyond the limit of the trench to the west.

The building represented by walls F202, F207 and F212 appears to have been demolished relatively recently, as they are directly overlain by asphalt (200).

5.3 Trench 3 (representative sections Fig. 6g-h; Plates 6-8)

This trench measured 15m long by 2m wide and was aligned N-S along the front of the school. The tithe map of 1844 shows the area occupied by a building at that time (Fig. 2).

Natural clay subsoil (303) was encountered at a depth of 0.42m below ground level at the south end of the trench, increasing in depth to the north where it occurred at 0.9m. No archaeological features or any structural evidence of the building shown on the tithe map were found.

The deposit sequence was very simple, consisting essentially of two soil deposits. The lower (304) consisted of light to mid brown silty clay and contained occasional mortar flecking and small slate fragments but was otherwise clean. No pottery or other dating evidence was recovered. This deposit overlies natural subsoil but was only present within the deeper, northern half of the trench, becoming gradually thicker from the centre of the trench northwards, where it reached a maximum thickness of 0.3m.

Above this deposit and sealing natural subsoil within the shallower, southern half of the trench was a darker, greyish brown silty clay (302) up to 0.28m thick. This contained significantly more slate and mortar as well as small fragments of brick, and post-medieval and (residual) medieval pottery, which together provide a date range of 1680-1750, or slightly later.

Overlying layer 302 was a thin deposit of grey compacted clay (301), which was in turn overlain by asphalt forming the current playground surface. A very thin and intermittent mortar layer (305) was noted at the interface between the upper soil 302, and the overlying levelling layer 301, within the northern half of the trench. This layer was very fragile and could not have functioned as a surface. It is viewed as a trampled mortar spread associated with the construction of the school.

6. THE FINDS

by Naomi Payne and John Allan

All finds recovered on site during the evaluation have been retained, cleaned and marked where appropriate. They have been quantified according to material type within each context and the assemblage scanned to extract information regarding the range, nature and date of artefacts represented.

The evaluation produced small quantities of medieval and post-medieval pottery, as well as a range of other post-medieval or undated finds including clay pipe, window glass, ceramic building material, slag, fired clay, animal bone, mortar and oyster shell. The finds are summarised in Table 1, below.

6.1 Medieval pottery

Nine sherds (58g) of medieval pottery were recovered from three contexts spread across all three evaluation trenches. Context 206, the earliest soil layer in Trench 2, only contains handmade medieval sherds. Of five sherds from this context, four are body sherds and one is a cooking pot base. One of the body sherds has faintly incised combed decoration on the external surface. The other medieval sherds, a single sherd from context 302 and three sherds (two of which conjoin) from context 103, are residual.

All of the medieval sherds are North Devon medieval coarseware. This was first manufactured in c. 1200 and continued in production with little discernible change until c. 1450.

6.2 Post-medieval pottery

20 sherds (456g) of post-medieval pottery were recovered from five contexts spread across all three trenches. Context 103, a post-medieval soil layer, produced four sherds including two sherds of 17th- to 18th-century North Devon Gravel Tempered pottery (one of which is a rim from a Type 3J bowl), two sherds of North Devon Gravel Free pottery (one of which is a 19th century flower pot rim) and two fragments of Staffordshire type white ware of 19th- or early 20th-century date.

From context 104 there is a single unglazed base sherd from a North Devon Gravel Tempered vessel. The acute (80 degree) angle of this sherd superficially resembles a saggar. However, the sherd is too thin-walled and the exterior is decorated with two circumferential incised lines, so this must be from another unidentified vessel form.

Context 205 appears to be 16th century in date, with its three sherds of North Devon Gravel Tempered pottery, including a rim sherd from a 16th century jug (Type 14). The remainder are body sherds, one of which is from a large vessel.

There are nine sherds of post-medieval pottery from context 302, the upper of two soil layers in Trench 3. The assemblage includes a body sherd of a Portuguese faience plate of early to mid-17th century date, two body sherds from Bristol/Staffordshire yellow slip ware cups (c. 1680-1750), a rim sherd from a North Devon plain yellow slip ware cup, five sherds of North Devon Gravel Tempered pottery (one of which is a rim from a small bowl) and a single body sherd of North Devon Gravel Free pottery. The North Devon pottery all dates from the 17th or 18th centuries. This fairly mixed context therefore dates from c. 1680-1750, or slightly later.

6.3 Clay tobacco pipe

Two fragments (23g) of clay pipe were recovered, including a complete bowl with a short length of stem from post-medieval soil layer 103 and a stem fragment from 302, the upper of two soils within Trench 3. The complete bowl with incomplete stem dates from c. 1640-80. The edge of the bowl has been milled and the bowl is stamped on the stem side with a flower or sun motif. This may be an eglantine (sweet briar) mark, which is often associated with Plymouth (Preece 2005). The stem fragment cannot be closely dated typologically but this context also contained pottery dating from c. 1680-1750 or slightly later.

6.4 Ceramic building material (CBM)

Six fragments (306g) of CBM were recovered from four contexts. Context 104, the earliest soil layer in Trench 1, produced an incomplete glazed North Devon Gravel Tempered ridge tile of 16th-to 17th-century date. One side is decorated with an incised 'fir tree' pattern below the ridge. The other pieces of CBM are fragmentary and may be brick or tile. They most likely post-date 1700.

6.5 Mortar

The mortar fragment (78g) contains an admixture of waterborne gravel and may be of medieval origin, in which case it is residual in its context, 104, the earliest soil layer in Trench 1.

6.6 Glass

A sherd (4g) of industrially made glass was recovered from context 103 within Trench 1. This dates from the later 19th or 20th century.

6.7 Slag and fired clay

A piece of vitrified industrial waste (27g) was recovered from context 206, along with three small pieces (10g) of fired clay. These could be kiln waste or they may relate to iron working.

6.8 Animal bone

Three fragments of animal bone (30g) were recovered from two contexts within Trench 1. The two smaller pieces are two fragmentary to identify. The largest piece is part of the pelvis of a small to medium sized mammal.

6.9 Shell

Context 104 produced an incomplete oyster shell (20g).

Table 1: Summary of finds by context (weights in grams)

Context	Context Description	Medieval pottery		Post medieval pottery		Clay pipe		CBM		Mortar		Glass		Fired clay		Slag		Animal bone		Shell	
		No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt
103	Soil layer	3	29	7	85	1	17	2	83			1	4					2	26		
104	Soil layer			1	112			1	195	1	78							1	4	1	20
204	Soil layer							1	14												
205	Soil layer			3	119																
206	Soil layer	5	23										3	10	1	27					
302	Soil layer	1	6	9	140	1	6	2	14												
Totals		9	58	20	456	2	23	6	306	1	78	1	4	3	10	1	27	3	30	1	20

7. DISCUSSION: TRENCH EVALUATION

7.1 The evaluation has established a relatively straightforward stratigraphic sequence across the site, consisting of buried soils with a broad date range of medieval through to the 19th century, overlain by late 19th-century levelling material associated with the construction of the school. The soil is markedly deeper away from the site frontage, to the rear of the school. The lowest soil layers within each trench were similar (Trench 1: 104, Trench 2: 206, Trench 3: 304) and, where pottery was present, consisted of relatively early material – in the case of Trench 2, exclusively medieval. Together, these layers can be viewed as representing part of a medieval soil development, which although absent from the southern half of Trench 1, extends across the greater part of the site.

7.2 The absence of evidence for medieval or early post-medieval occupation (building foundations, domestic rubbish pits etc.) is notable. The earliest features identified comprise ditch F105 and pit F107 (Trench 1), both of which are undated. The ditch shares the same north-south alignment as White's Lane and the property boundaries to the north and south and is therefore of probable medieval rather than earlier (i.e prehistoric) date. It is probable that the ditch represents part of a former burgage plot boundary, pre-dating the creation of the open plot shown on the tithe map. Both the ditch and adjacent pit (which is shallow at 0.2m deep) would have subsequently been significantly truncated as a result of repeated ploughing.

7.3 The absence of evidence within Trench 3 (foundation/ robber trenches etc.) for the building shown on the tithe map is somewhat surprising but may be indicative, to a certain degree, of a relatively light structure (timber rather than stone) to the front of the building. The absence of medieval soil within the southern half of the trench does suggest a greater level of post-medieval disturbance here, which may have been sufficient to remove any building remains that extended onto, but did not penetrate into, natural subsoil.

7.4 The construction of the school during the late 19th century entailed a significant levelling of the rear of the site, as evidenced by layers 101-2 (Trench 1) and 201-2 (Trench 2). The structural remains exposed within Trench 2 (walls F203, F207 and F212) all form part of a school outbuilding built either during or subsequent to the initial school construction. The position and alignment of wall 207 correlates well with a wall shown on the 1884 Ordnance Survey map, the primary function of which was probably to separate the boys' and girls' playgrounds.

8. APPRAISAL OF SCHOOL BUILDINGS

8.1 Introduction

The Bluecoat School is the remains of a large former Board School. The name 'Bluecoat School' was not originally connected with this site or these buildings. Bovett records that the Bluecoat School at Great Torrington was founded in 1709 by members of the Rolle family, a local gentry family then living at Stevenstone in St. Giles in the Wood. The school then had premises in Well Street, to the east of the present site, and continued here until c.1850, when the school was amalgamated with the National School (Bovett 1989, 156). The National School was a Church of England School which had been founded in 1811 in premises on New Street (north of the present site) but which had moved to premises on Castle Hill in 1834. These premises had been the Castle Chapel, and had been occupied by an ancient Grammar School (whose origins are obscure) from c.1600/1615 to c.1817 (*ibid.*, 415). A memorial plaque on the buildings suggests that the ancient chapel may have been completely rebuilt by the Rolle Family. After the Bluecoat school and the National School were amalgamated in 1850 they continued in the Castle Hill premises until 1978 when a new County School was built in another part of the town (*ibid.*, 156).

The buildings under consideration in this appraisal had originally no connection with the Bluecoat School, but were built to house a Board School founded as a result of the 1870 Elementary Education Act. This act enabled the establishment of school boards to establish and operate elementary schools in most centres of population. The schools were to be run on an undenominational basis, open to those of all religious affiliations, but the foundation and the composition of the school boards was initially controversial as different religious groups fought to ensure representation.

From this point onward government legislation for education had a pivotal influence on the provision and design of educational buildings. The school boards were abolished in 1902 as a result of the Education Act of that year, when Local Education Authorities were established in their place. Changes to the fabric of school buildings often reflect these changes in jurisdiction as well as more minor decisions of local or national government and are a valuable, if under-appreciated archaeological resource. 'ROSLA', the 'Raising Of the School Leaving Age' in the 1970s, for example, led to the erection of pre-fabricated classrooms at many schools to accommodate larger school populations. Many of these temporary 'ROSLA buildings' have never been replaced and remain in use long after their expected life-span has been exceeded. Recent government legislation to improve school accommodation means many of these buildings are only now being replaced.

The Board School in Great Torrington became a Council School in 1902 and, after 1944 a County Primary School. During this period the buildings may have been extended by the addition of extra accommodation, and in 1968 the central part of the original buildings was rebuilt following a fire (Bovett 1989, 156). From 1978, when the new County School was opened, the buildings in White's Lane were used to house a Voluntary Controlled Infants' School, that is, a school operated by the Local Education Authority, but in which the land, buildings and the right of appointment of school governors are controlled by a charitable trust or religious organisation. This is, presumably, when the name 'Bluecoat' was first applied to

these buildings. It is likely that many of the modern prefabricated structures at the rear of the Victorian buildings may be assigned to this phase.

8.2 Building survey

The original Board School buildings at Great Torrington were designed by Alexander Lauder (Cherry & Pevsner 1989, 462) and constructed, according to a date stone built into one of the classrooms, in 1872. The buildings stand well back from the street frontage (Plate 9) behind a low wall crowned with Gothic railings with fleur-de-lys finials. There were originally two gateways in the wall, presumably providing separate entrances for boys and girls, reflecting a fundamental division in the school buildings. The gates also remain: these are elaborate, with quatrefoil motifs Gothic trefoil arches and ornate hinge-posts rising into crozier-shaped finials (Plate 10). This is an unusually overt ecclesiastical motif for use on a non-denominational Board School. The central gateway is a more modern piece of ironwork, but its piers may be older. This may have been intended as an entrance to the central part of the school building.

The building is very simple in appearance and layout, consisting of a long range in the centre flanked by two gabled wings containing the schoolrooms, originally segregated schoolrooms for boys and girls. The original façade was more complex, with a section in the middle of the central range projecting to front and rear. It is likely that this part of the building served as the Master's House, with perhaps a boardroom for the meetings of the School Board. It would have provided a central feature of some architectural ambition and was perhaps crowned with a bell turret.

The central range has been much altered in the 20th century, as a result of the 1960s fire, which destroyed the central element of the composition; however, the northern and southern ends of the central range remain intact and preserve some original fabric, including parts of their roofs, now cut through by later dormer windows. These parts of the central range were probably classrooms, each a single open volume of two bays, which allowed the large classes of the period to be split into smaller groups for special tuition by either the master and mistress, or student- or pupil-teachers. These rooms and the main schoolrooms were probably heated by open fires, or by cast-iron stoves. Unfortunately any chimneys seem to have been removed, possibly as a result of reconstruction after the fire. Evidence of chimney flues and fireplaces may remain in the substantial dividing walls between the central section of the building and the classrooms and also between the classrooms and the schoolrooms. These solid masonry divisions probably saved the classrooms and the schoolrooms from destruction when the central part of the building burned.

The large school rooms at each end of the main building are well preserved and originally consisted of large, open halls with high roofs. Neither schoolroom is identified by a porch or plaque, but it seems likely that the northern schoolroom was reserved for girls and the southern one for boys, on the basis that the infants' school, which was added to the complex in 1876 (Bovett 1989, 156), was situated to the north of the original building.

Both schoolrooms are expressed externally with considerable, if understated, architectural elegance, by high, steeply-pitched gables with copings and kneelers at the eaves and trefoil ornaments at the apex contained within bands of Ham stone (Plates 9 and 11). The schoolrooms are lit by triplets of very tall, trefoil-headed lancets with Ham stone dressings contrasting with the hard, brown-necked limestone rubble of the walling. At the base is a chamfered plinth of Ham stone. The southern schoolroom is marked with a foundation stone bearing the legend 'GREAT TORRINGTON BOARD SCHOOL. 1872'. Most of the fenestration has been renewed, but the central light of the northern classroom window retains the original, very thin cast-iron window frame (Plate 11).

The side elevations, facing south and north, were originally provided with groups of six shorter lancet windows (Plate 12); those of the southern classroom survive, but those of the northern classroom, which can still be traced as shadows in the internal walling, were modified in two phases, initially by the creation of a central doorway in the north wall in 1876, when the infants school was added, and later, after 1902 by the addition of a low infill block between the northern schoolroom and the infants' schoolroom. At this point the remaining windows in this wall may have been blocked. The eastern elevations of the classrooms repeat the same elegant Gothic detail but are slightly simpler, without copings and with barge boards flush with the walls below the eaves and brick ventilator slits at the apex.

Each schoolroom has a high roof of five bays supported by composite trusses of timber and iron springing from curved corbel blocks (Plate 13). The bases of the principal rafters are fitted into iron shoes resting on these blocks, from which iron tie rods rise diagonally to collar level. These ties are secured to the shoes by decorative bolts and nuts in the shape of rose heads. There are angled lower purlins at wall top level; unfortunately the upper parts of the roof structures are obscured by modern suspended ceilings and the details of the apex are now obscured. The roofs of the two classrooms were similar, but were slightly different in form, with horizontal tie rods and vertical ties to the apex, perhaps reflecting some lost treatment of the western façade or roof slope, such as gablets or dormers for additional lighting.

The original access to the schoolroom remains somewhat obscure, since neither schoolroom retains an original porch. These entrances may have been through the subsidiary classrooms, and might have been obscured through alterations to the west wall of the building following the fire. It is possible that the porches were formed by covered verandahs under overhanging sections of the roof on the west elevation, assuming the parts of the west wall between the outer gables and the central building to be slightly indented. Something of this kind is shown on the OS 1st edition map, dated 1887. After the addition of the infants' schoolroom a new entrance appears to have been made at the centre of the north wall of the northern schoolroom, sheltered by a new porch. No similar arrangement was provided for the southern schoolroom.

The OS 1st and 2nd edition maps of 1887 and 1904 (Figs 3 and 4) show no division of the open area to the west of the school buildings, which may perhaps have been laid out as gardens. The area to the rear, however was divided into separate playgrounds for boys, girls and infants, with lavatory facilities ranged along the rear of the central range across two smaller yards within the playgrounds, walled off from the playgrounds and corresponding in length to the central range. The sites of these facilities lie under the 20th-century extension at the rear of the Victorian buildings, but are still reflected in the layout of the modern buildings by a row of washrooms, suggesting that the modern facilities may have tapped into or utilised the 19th-century drainage runs. Both the classrooms in the central range of the building had rear entrances allowing access to these lavatories. There are also primary doorways in the east ends of the side walls of each schoolroom, which opened upon these smaller yards, but not the larger playgrounds. All of the classrooms and schoolrooms retain high dados, originally of vertical boarding with torus mouldings, parts of which may be original. Unfortunately there is evidence of some resetting of the dado, in many cases with considerable skill. Identifying these alterations might help determine the difference between primary and secondary openings between the rooms.

8.3 Alterations to the buildings

The earliest addition to the buildings was the construction of the infant's schoolroom to the north of the original structure, apparently in c.1876 (Bovett 1989, 156). This pre-dates the Elementary Education Act of 1880, which made attendance compulsory between the ages of 5 and 10, but the school board may well have anticipated such a change.

The infant's schoolroom has very similar architectural detail to that of the earlier buildings, but incorporates subtle differences (Plate 11): the trio of lancets in the western gable are divided by horizontal transoms and rise from a chamfered sill which unifies the group; the roof has no coping, but features a chamfered Ham stone string immediately under the eaves, which divides to run across the gable below the apex, forming a sill to a group of narrow lancets. Inside the building the roof is of identical form to those of the older buildings, but the trusses spring from conical corbels. This roof is divided into four bays, and the interior is separated at the centre by a solid masonry wall dividing the interior into two classrooms with a wide opening between them. This may reflect either segregation of the sexes or higher and lower classes. There were originally rows of lancets in the south wall, overlooking the alley between this building and the earlier schools but they seem to have been filled in by 1904, when the 2nd edition Ordnance Survey (OS map) (Fig. 4) shows a solid range of infill buildings in this position. The outlines of the lancets remain visible in the plaster, and a dormer within the roof on the south side of the western classroom may have been added to compensate for the loss of light when they were blocked (Plate 14).

The lighting of both the classrooms must either have been by low windows or dormers in the roof; it would otherwise have been rather inadequate. The variant form of the roof may imply that there gables containing larger windows or dormers within the roof on the western side. The lighting of these rooms was subsequently improved, probably in the early 20th century, by the addition of large dormer windows in the form of gabled lucams on the eastern face of the roofs. These were, to a degree, sensitive to the Gothic styling of the original buildings and make a picturesque show from the rear (Plate 15).

With the increase in numbers of attendees after the amendment of the 1880 Act in 1893 it is likely that the accommodation for separate classes needed to be improved. Partitions were therefore inserted within both of the original schoolrooms, dividing them both into two separate classrooms. These partitions may have been moveable screens, which could be drawn back to allow the whole schoolroom to be employed for assemblies or other special occasions. Fragments of both partitions remain, cutting across the original bay system of the roofs.

8.4 Later additions

The large, flat roofed building attached to the rear of the original school buildings (Plate 15) may have been added after the Second World War, as a result of the Butler Education Act of 1944 or, more plausibly, as a result of the fire which destroyed the central building in 1968. These ranges, created a new reception area, awkwardly situated to the rear of the original buildings, with new classrooms and washrooms (oddly reflecting the original arrangement of lavatories), offices and a kitchen. The southern schoolroom appears to have become the canteen, with a servery formed by breaking through the wall below the lancets in its eastern gable. The rebuilt central section of the fire-damaged buildings was sensitive to the form of the surviving Victorian buildings in that it has a steep roof, but the rebuilding omitted the central projecting feature, and probably involved the removal of elements such as dormers, chimneys and the putative bell turret, assuming this had survived the fire. The suggested phasing of the Victorian buildings is summarised in the phased plan (Fig. 6).

The prefabricated buildings at the rear of the site, infilling the former playgrounds, may be ROSLA buildings constructed to accommodate increased numbers following changes to educational legislation in the 1960s or 70s. The proliferation of temporary buildings may have prompted the removal of the school to a new site and buildings in 1978. Alternatively, these buildings may post-date the establishment of the Voluntary Controlled Infant's School at that time. Most of these building have now collapsed or been partially demolished.

9. CONCLUSIONS

9.1 Trench evaluation

The presence of surviving soils indicates that the site has been utilised for agricultural purposes since the medieval period, with no evidence found for earlier activity. Additionally, no evidence, either direct (building remains) or indirect (domestic rubbish pits) has been found to indicate medieval buildings within the site. The site may have originally consisted of a number of rear plots to properties fronting New Road to the north, the plots subsequently amalgamated to form an open plot or field, as shown on the 1844 tithe map (Fig. 2). It is not known when the open plot was created, although it is clear that it remained undeveloped until the late 19th century.

The building shown on the tithe map close to the site frontage has not been located. Localised survival of elements of this building (perhaps between Trench 1 and the front wall of the school) cannot be excluded, although significant preservation beneath the school building is considered unlikely.

A number of wall foundations have been found all of which relate to a 19th- or early 20th-century school outbuilding.

9.2 Building appraisal

The surviving buildings at White's Lane are the remains of an 1870s Board School of some architectural merit and interest. The Gothic styling of the building reflects a 19th-century association between education and religion which was to change shortly afterwards under the influence of architects such as E.R. Robson, who argued in 1874, in his popular book *School Architecture*, that more secular styles should be employed to reflect the non-denominational nature of Board Schools (Dixon & Muthesius 1978, 239). This policy was adopted by many architects of Board and Council Schools thereafter.

The original schoolrooms and classrooms are in the main well preserved, but restricted to the northern and southern parts of the complex, the central part having been entirely rebuilt after the fire in 1968. The proposed development, substituting a wide gabled archway for the modern central part of the building, would be unlikely to affect archaeologically significant fabric and might go some way to recreating the form of the original composition.

10. ARCHIVE AND OASIS

10.1 The paper and digital archive and finds are currently held under site code ACD629, at the offices of AC archaeology Ltd, at 4 Halthaies Workshops, Bradninch, near Exeter, Devon, EX5 4LQ, prior to deposition at Plymouth Museums and Art Gallery.

10.2 An online OASIS entry has been completed, using the unique identifier 142253, which includes a digital copy of this report.

11. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The work was commissioned by Trewin Design Partnership on behalf of clients. The trench evaluation was carried out by Peter Stead and Gareth Holes and the building appraisal was undertaken by Richard Parker. The report figures were prepared by Sarnia Blackmore.

12. REFERENCES

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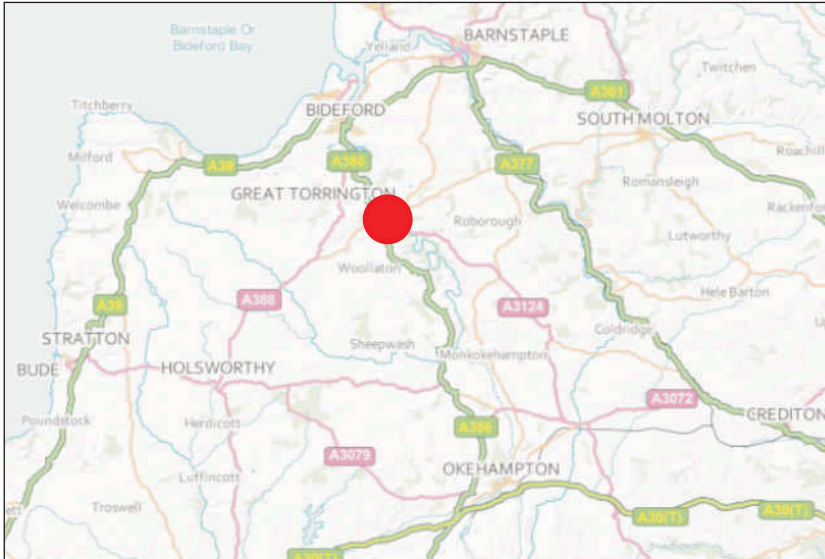
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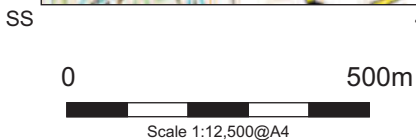
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PROJECT

Bluecoat Infant school, Great Torrington, Devon

TITLE

Fig. 1: Site location



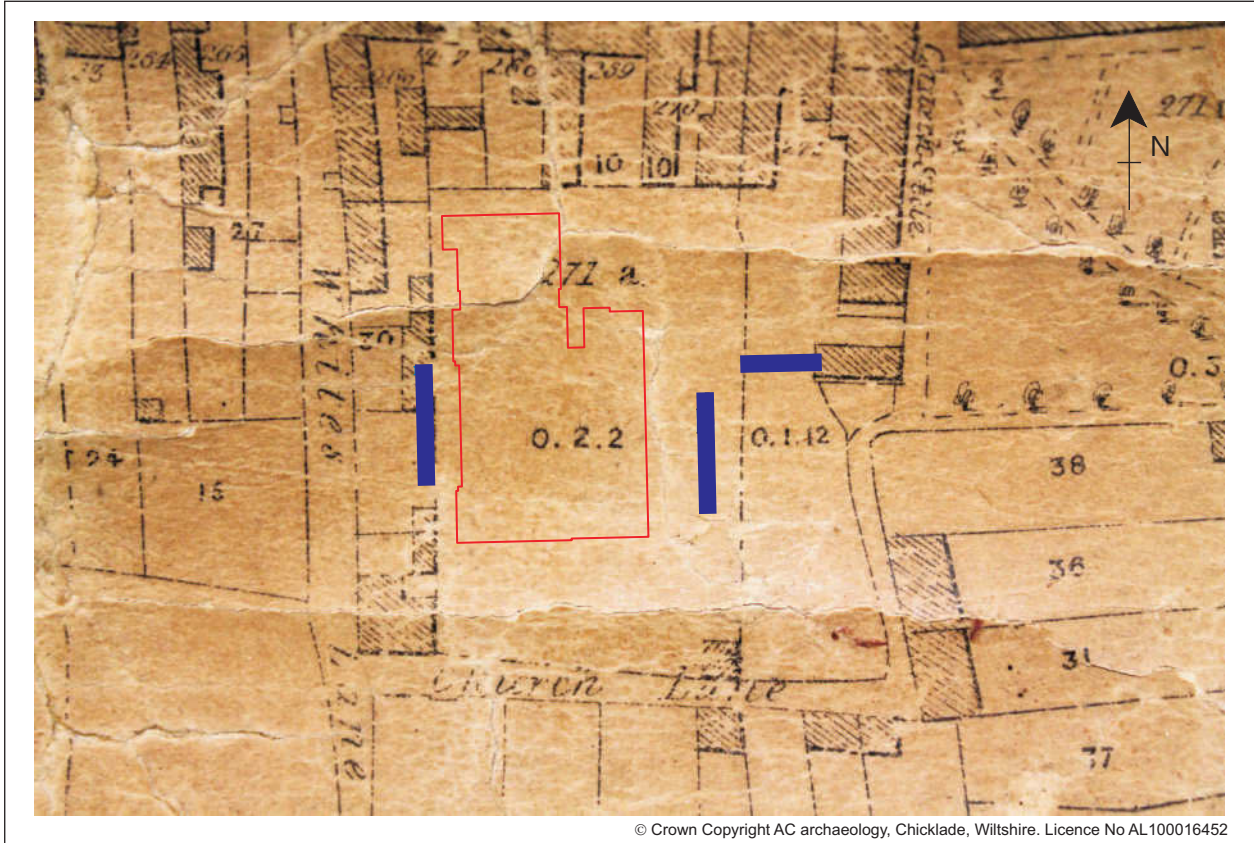



Fig. 2: Extract from Great Torrington tithe map, 1844

 Trenches

 Proposed building outline

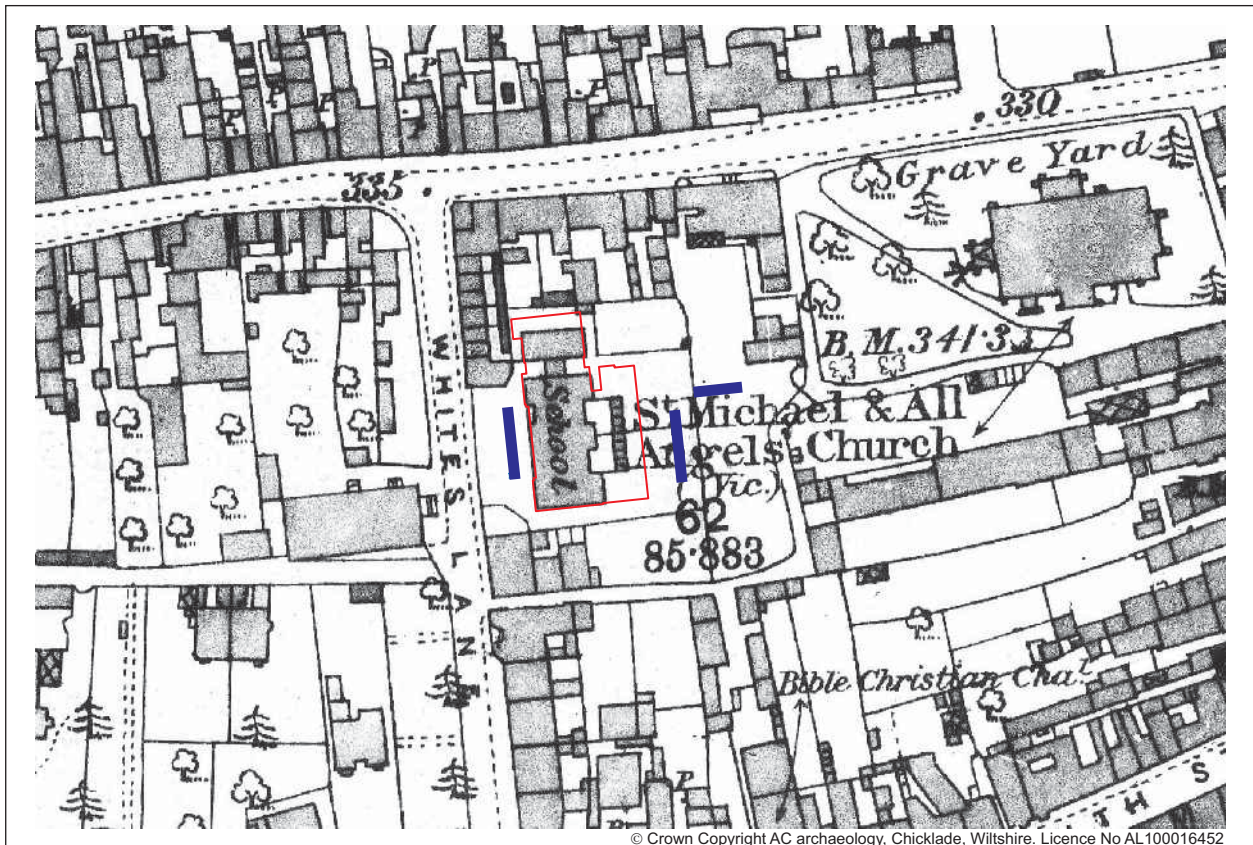


Fig. 3: Extract from the 1st edition Ordnance Survey 25-inch map, 1886



Fig. 4: Extract from the 2nd edition Ordnance Survey 25-inch map, 1904



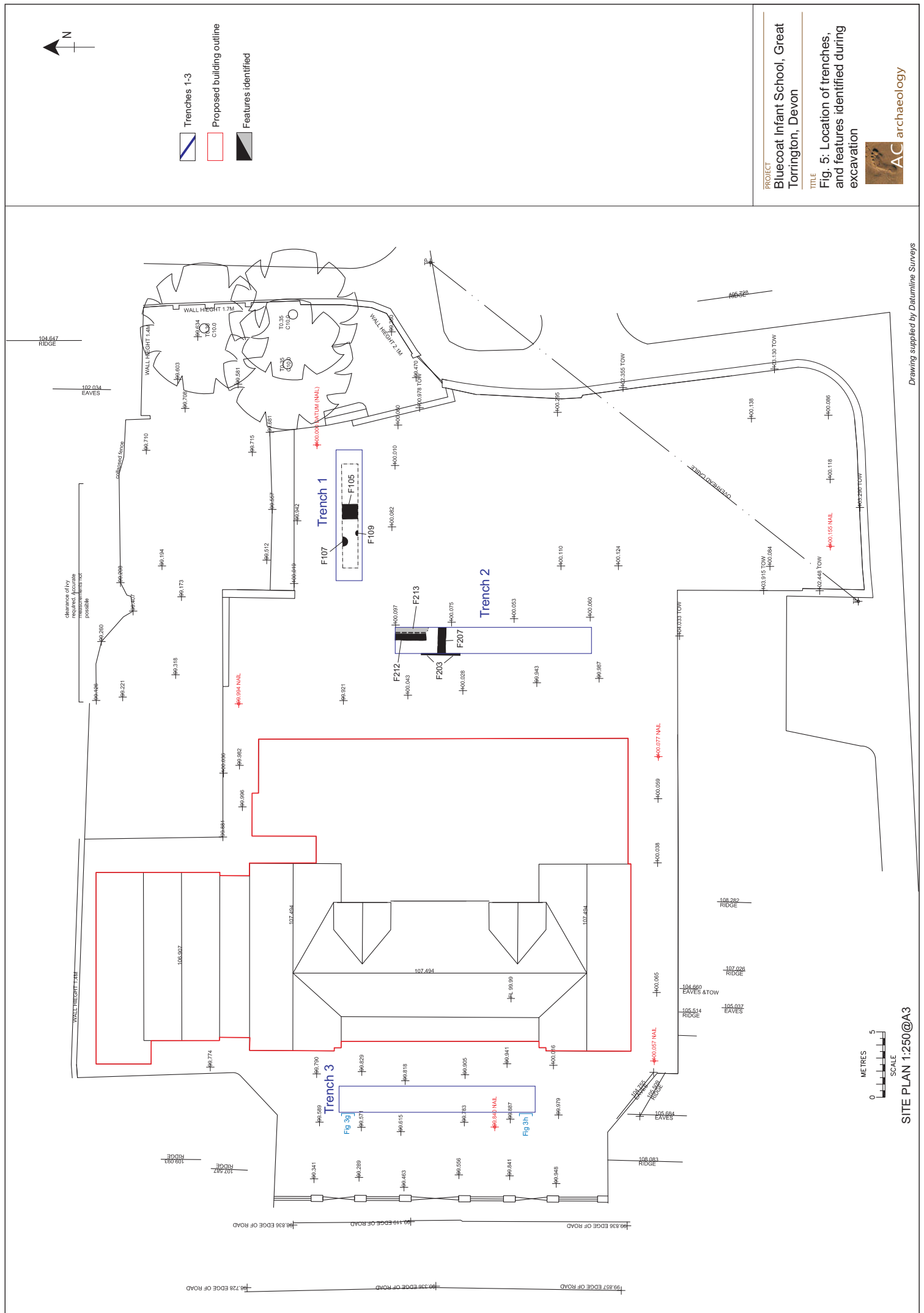
- Trenches 1-3
- Proposed building outline
- Features identified

PROJECT
Bluecoat Infant School, Great Torrington, Devon

TITLE
Fig. 5: Location of trenches, and features identified during excavation



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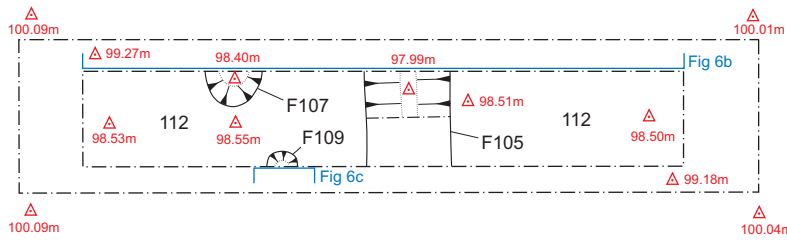


Drawing supplied by Datuline Surveys

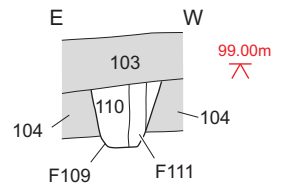


SITE PLAN 1:250@A3

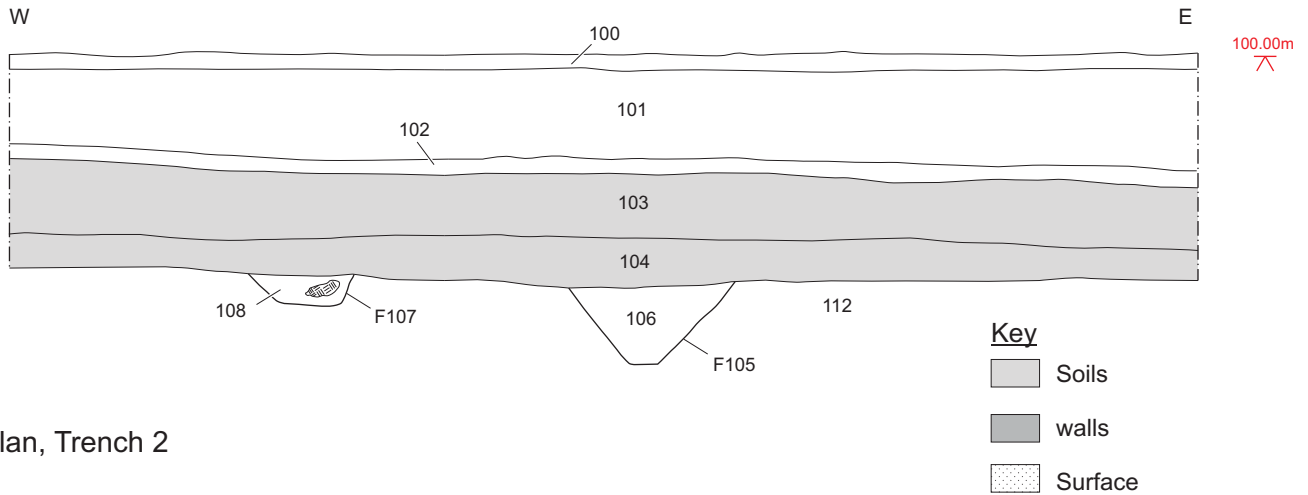
a) Plan, Trench 1



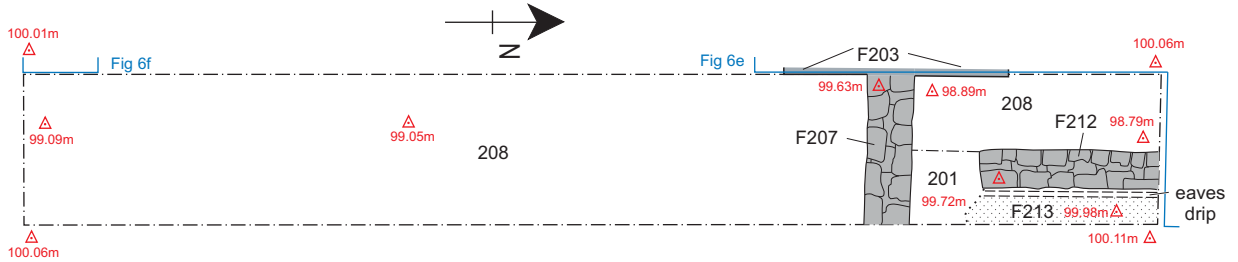
c) North facing section, Trench 1



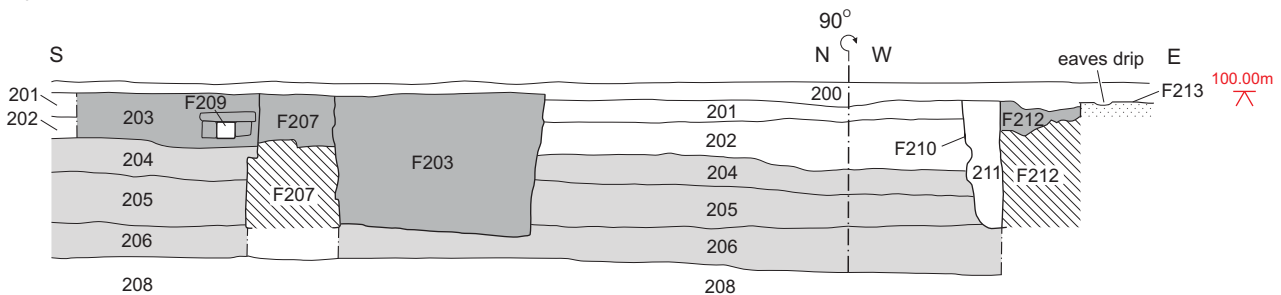
b) South facing section, Trench 1



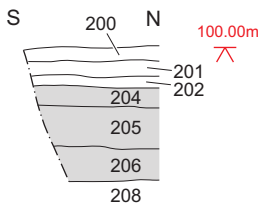
d) Plan, Trench 2



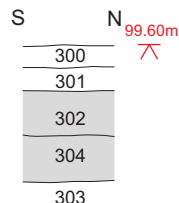
e) Section, Trench 2



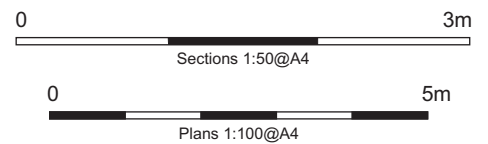
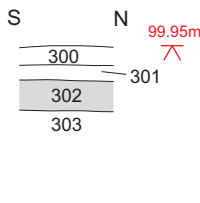
f) Section, Trench 2



g) Representative section, Trench 3



h) Representative section, Trench 3



PROJECT
Bluecoat Infant School, Great Torrington, Devon

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Fig. 6: Trench plans and sections



Plate 1: Trench 1, general view. Ditch F105 below scale. View from east (scale 1m)



Plate 2: Trench 1, detailed view of ditch F105. View from south (scale 1m)



Plate 3: Trench 2, general view. Walls of former school outbuilding in foreground. View from north (scale 2 x 1m)



Plate 4: North end of Trench 2 showing buried soils 204-6. Wall F203 to left. View from east (scale 1m)



Plate 5: South end of Trench 2. View from northeast (scale 1m)



Plate 6: Trench 3, general view. View from north (scale 1m)



Plate 7: Trench 3, general view (modern service in centre). View from south (scale 1m)



Plate 8: Trench 3, showing trampled mortar spread 305. View from east (scale 1m)



Plate 9: Western elevation from White's Lane



Plate 10: Detail of gates



Plate 11: Comparative elevations of northern schoolroom and Infant's school. 2m scale



Plate 12: Short lancets on side walls, now blocked in northern and Infant's schoolroom. 2m scale



Plate 13: Interior of typical schoolroom. 2m scale



Plate 14: South wall of Infant's schoolroom showing shadow of blocked lancets. 2m scale



Plate 15: View from rear of school showing demolished prefabricated classrooms. 2m scale

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