



JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

AT

GARTH HILL SCHOOL, BRACKNELL,

BERKSHIRE

NGR 487030 169820

On behalf of

CgMs Consulting

APRIL 2008

REPORT FOR Garth Hill OSP
c/o CgMs Consulting
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Summary

John Moore Heritage Services conducted an archaeological evaluation of school playing fields to the west of Garth Hill School, Bracknell on the 7th-10th April 2008. Berkshire Archaeology, the archaeological advisory body to Bracknell Forest Borough Council, called for an archaeological evaluation in order to make an informed decision on the planning application for a proposed redevelopment. CgMs Consulting commissioned the evaluation on behalf of their client Garth Hill OSP. Four trenches, totalling 150 metres in length, were excavated to the natural geology. Archaeological deposits were limited to mid-20th Century school playing field landscaping and drainage features for Garth Hill School.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)

The site is located at Garth Hill School, Bracknell (NGR 487030 169820).

1.2 Planning Background

Mary O'Donoghue of Berkshire Archaeology, who acts as archaeological advisor to the Local Planning Authority, requested that the proposed development site be made subject to an archaeological evaluation, comprised of four trenches totalling 270 m² (c.2.3% of the development site). This will enable the Local Authority, Bracknell Forest Borough Council, to make an informed decision on the Application.

2 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

2.1 Geology

The underlying geology of the site is London Clay. An outcrop of the Bagshot Formation (sand) lies to the immediate northeast of the study site (Geological Survey of Great Britain, Sheet 269).

2.2 Topography

2.2.1 The study site lies on the southwest and west facing slopes of Wick Hill. The highest point within the area, to the northeast corner, lies at some 75m above Ordnance Datum (AOD). The slope falls to around 60m AOD west of Bull Lane. The natural slope has been terraced across most of the intermediate area to accommodate the buildings, car parks and playing fields of Garth Hill.

2.3 Previous Geotechnical Work

2.3.1 A geotechnical survey (Soil Mechanics 2007) of the playing field located to the immediate east of Bull Lane found that there was made ground to about 0.5m below ground level throughout this part of the site. The made ground was thicker towards the middle of the playing field. However, this approximately corresponds with the location of a building, which historic maps indicate stood in this area after 1899 and had been demolished before 1953.

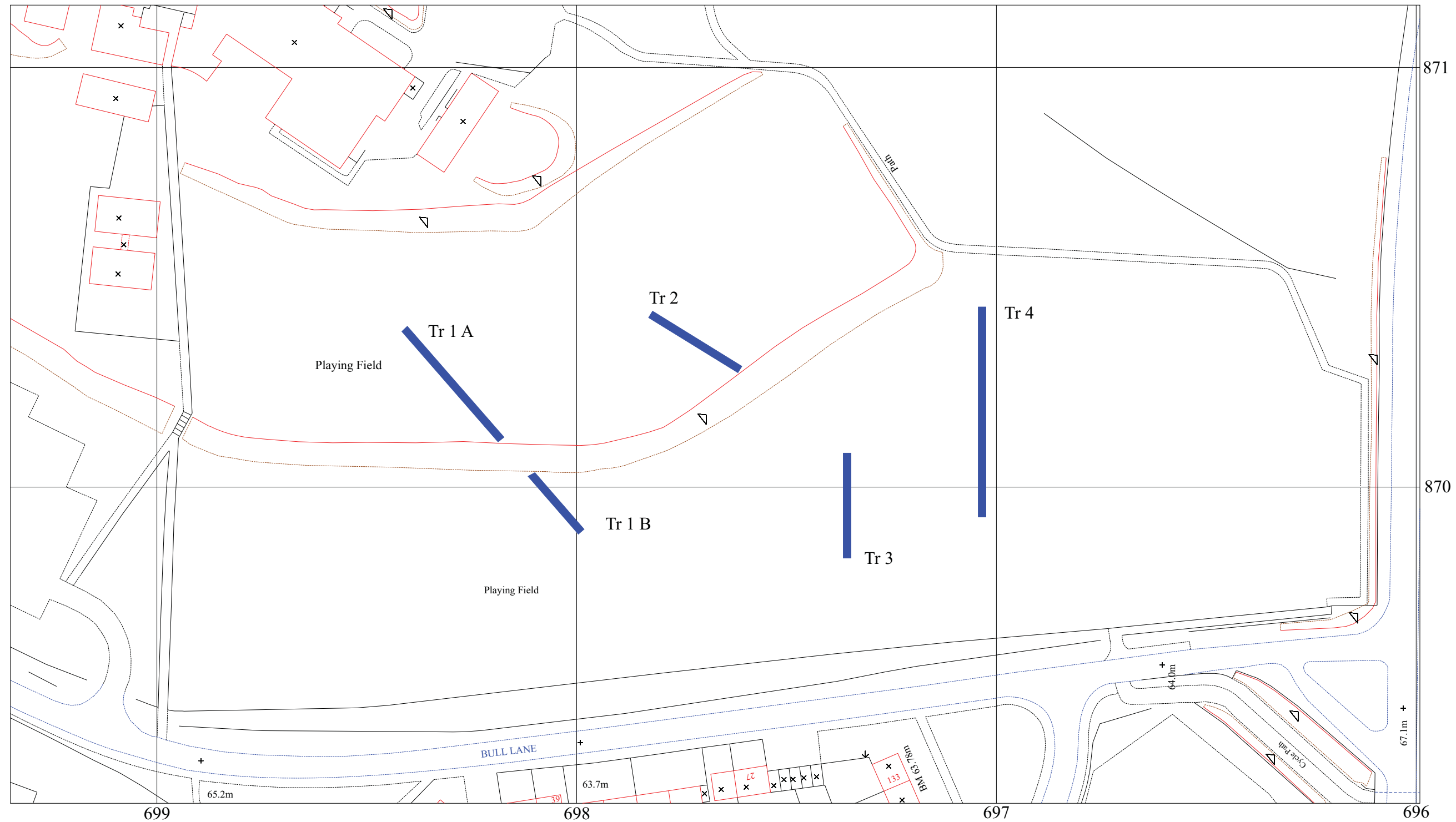


Figure 1. Site and trench location

2.3.2 Made ground comprises gravelly sandy clay and on occasion had fragments of concrete (Trial Pits 1, 2, 3A, 5 and 8), ash (Trial Pit 6), brick (Trial Pit 2, 3A and 5) and tarmac (Trial Pit 3A). In the main this implies that the made ground is of modern origin and likely to have been created as part of the landscaping process for the playing fields. The made ground sits directly on top of the London Clay.

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 An archaeological desk based assessment was carried out on the site in 2007 (CgMs Consulting, 2007), the results of which are summarised below.

3.2 Prehistoric

3.2.1 The desk-based assessment established that the SMR holds no records from the Prehistoric period within the study site. A single flint flake (SMR No. 3378) was found during fieldwalking undertaken as part of the East Berkshire Archaeological Survey. The flake was found some 300m to the north of the western part of the study site.

3.2.2 In the wider area a bowl barrow is located on Bill Hill, some 1.2km to the south of the study site. The barrow was scheduled in 1991. The mound and ditch both survive, though the ditch has been mostly infilled. A pronounced depression on the top of the barrow mound may indicate an early exploration of the site. A second bowl barrow, also scheduled (SAM 19023), is located at Swinley Park, some 2.7km to the southeast of the study site, with a third bowl barrow (SAM 19016) at Woodenhill over 3km away. Most examples of bowl barrows date to the late Neolithic through to the Bronze Age. A little further to the south is a univallate Iron Age hill fort known as Caesar's Camp (SAM 28182) that comprised a single massive rampart bank enclosing some 10ha.

3.2.3 While there has been very limited evidence for Prehistoric activity in the area of the study site, it should be noted that this limited evidence may partially reflect a lack of archaeological investigation. Where archaeological investigations have been undertaken in the region it has been noted that the geology often makes archaeological features difficult to see and where these sites are visible the numbers of artefacts limited.

3.2.4 While the potential affect of the geology on the archaeology needs to be taken in to account, the established presence of Prehistoric archaeology to the south of Bracknell and the current paucity of evidence from the study site and within 1km radius, the DBA suggested a low potential for this period.

3.3 Roman

3.3.1 No finds from this period have been recorded from within the study site itself or from the surrounding 1km.

3.3.2 The nearest significant focus of activity in the area during the Roman period was the settlement at Wickham Bushes (SAM 28176) some 4.5km to the south of the study site. Excavations in the 19th century and 1980s revealed evidence for a small settlement located along a minor road running from the main London to Silchester (Calleva Atrebatum) road which is situated less than 400m to the south. Evidence for agriculture and metal working was recorded, with occupation from 1st to 4th centuries (Corney and Gaffney 1984).

3.3.3 While Roman activity has been recorded in the wider area, it lies some distance from the study site. Therefore, the DBA identified a low potential for the study site.

3.4 Saxon - Early Medieval

3.4.1 The desk-based assessment established that the SMR holds no records from the Saxon and Early Medieval period on or near to the study site. Documentary evidence indicates that Bracknell is first mentioned in a Charter of AD923 and then again in AD942 in the Royal Anglo Saxon Charter of King Edmund (Sears). The later reference mentions Brachan Heal as one of the parish of Winkfield's boundaries (Hickson 1984).

3.4.2 Historically the study site lay within the parish of Warfield (it now lies within the modern civil parish of Backnell), with Old Bracknell in the Parish of Wakefield. The manor of Warfield was held at the time of Edward the Confessor by Queen Edith (VCH 1923). There is no evidence to date for settlement within the study site or the surrounding area.

3.4.3 The name 'Wick Hill' could suggest the presence of a Saxon farm, though no archaeological evidence has been found to date to support this.

3.4.4 The lack of evidence to date even taking account of the limited amount of archaeological fieldwork undertaken in the area suggests that it is likely that the study site was woodland or agricultural fields during this period. Therefore the desk based assessment identified low potential for the study site.

3.5 Medieval

3.5.1 The desk based assessment established that there are no entries in the Berkshire SMR relating to the Medieval period within the study site or its vicinity. The area now occupied by Bracknell was part of Windsor Great Forest during the Medieval period. Royal forests were not necessarily an area of densely wooded land but included large heathland, grassland and wetland habitats. Essentially, they were for deer and other game. In addition, when an area was initially designated forest, any villages, towns and fields that lay within it were also subject to forest law. However, there is no evidence for such a settlement within the study site. A hunting lodge was built within the grounds of what is now Easthampstead Park on the orders of Edward III in about 1335, some 3.5km to the southwest of the study site.

3.5.2 After the Norman Conquest the manor of Warfield was held in demense by William I holding it after the conquest and by the Bishop of Winchester in 13th

century (VCH 1923). However, there are no records that identify settlement or activity within the study site or its vicinity.

3.5.3 Following site visit, earthworks potential relating to Medieval ridge and furrow was observed in the area to the west of Bull Lane. While the field is currently used as a village green, the historic maps indicate that the site was fields during the 19th century. Following the site visit aerial photographs held at the National Monuments Record Office in Swindon were reviewed in order to establish the presence or absence of cropmarks and in particular Medieval ridge and furrow. Evidence for linear ploughing was observed on two different photographs from 1946 and 1990, on both occasions respecting the Post-Medieval/Modern field boundaries. However, these features are on a different alignment to the features observed during the site visit. This indicates that both the existing earthworks and the cropmarks are of Post-Medieval/Modern date and not Medieval and probably relate to field drains put in the 1940's.

3.5.4 The current evidence suggests that the study site lay in an area likely used for agriculture or woodland. Considering the above and taking account of the absence of archaeological fieldwork within the study site, the desk-based assessment identified a low potential for the Medieval period for the majority of the study site.

3.6 Post-Medieval and Modern

3.6.1 The cartographic and documentary sources consulted for the desk based assessment indicated that prior to the mid-20th Century limited development occurred on the Site. From the documentary and cartographic sources consulted it seems likely that the land use was related to agricultural activity until the construction of the school in the mid-1960s. Therefore, the desk-based assessment identified a low potential for significant archaeological remains from this period.

4 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

The aims of the investigation as laid out in the Written Scheme of Investigation were as follows:

- Clarify the presence/absence and extent of archaeological deposits within the Site.
- Identify, within the constraints of the evaluation, the date, character, condition, significance, quality and depth of any surviving remains within the Site.
- Assess the degree of existing impacts to sub-surface horizons and to document the extent of archaeological survival of buried deposits.

5 STRATEGY

5.1 Research Design

5.1.1 A *Specification* for the work issued by John Lord of CgMs Consulting (2008) on behalf of Garth Hill OSP was approved by Berkshire Archaeology. The work was carried out by JMHS and involved the excavation of a total of four trenches across the site (Fig. 1).

5.1.2 Site procedures for the investigation and recording of potential archaeological deposits and features were defined in the *Specification*. The work was carried out in accordance with the standards specified by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (1994).

5.2 Methodology

5.2.1 The trenching sample comprised four trenches; two 50m in length and two 25m in length (Fig. 1). Trench 1, one of the 50m long trenches was located across the terrace of the upper and lower playing fields. The location made it impossible, with the plant available, to machine strip as one long trench; therefore, the trench was split into two smaller trenches, Trench 1a on the upper playing field and Trench 1b on the lower. All trenches were 1.8 m wide and were excavated by an eight tonne tracked 360° mechanical excavator fitted with a 1.5m wide toothless ditching bucket. The resultant surfaces were cleaned by hand prior to limited hand excavation of any identified archaeological deposits. The trench locations were surveyed and set out by Mercedes Planas from Souterrain Archaeological Services Ltd.

5.2.2 Standard John Moore Heritage Services techniques were employed throughout, involving the completion of a written record for each deposit encountered, with scale plans and sections drawings compiled where appropriate. A photographic record was produced.

6 RESULTS (Figure 2)

6.1 Natural

6.1.1 The natural for all four trenches, (1/03) (2/03) (3/03) and (4/03) was a firm dark orange clay with occasional sub-angular to angular medium sized flint inclusions (London Clay). Some variation in hue of the clay was observed across all four trenches.

6.2 Trench 1

6.2.1 Trench 1 was located in the north of the site, aligned northeast – southwest and was originally planned to be 50m long. As the trench ran across the terrace separating the upper and lower playing fields, it was decided to split the trench with a 30m long section being located on the upper field (Trench 1a) and a 20m long section on the lower field (Trench 1b). The top of Trench 1a in the northeast lay at 69.63m O.D. and in the southwest at 68.79m O.D., giving a fall from northeast to southwest of 0.84m

over 30m. The top of Trench 1b in the northeast lay at 67.03m O.D. and in the southwest at 66.39m O.D., giving a fall from northeast to southwest of 0.64m over 20m. Trench 1a was excavated to a depth of 100mm where “natural” clay (01/03) was observed. “Natural” clay (01/03) in trench 1a lay at 69.53m O.D. in the northeast of the trench and at 68.19m O.D. in the southwest. In Trench 1b “natural” lay at 66.43m O.D. in the northeast of the trench and at 65.59m O.D. in the southwest. The clay was overlain by topsoil (01/01), a firm grey brown silty clay with flint fragments and tile fragment inclusions. Trench 1b displayed the same sequence except in the western end where a 0.50m thick friable orangey brown sandy clay (01/02) containing flint gravel, tile and brick fragments lay between the topsoil and the “natural” clay; the deposit thinned out towards the eastern end of the trench.

6.3 Trench 2

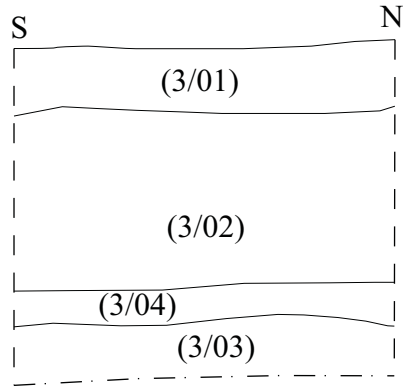
6.3.1 Trench 2 located on the upper playing field in the east of the site, was 25m long and aligned northeast – southwest. The top of the trench in the northeast lay at 68.88m O.D. and in the southwest at 67.91m O.D., giving a fall from northeast to southwest of 0.97m over 25m. “Natural” clay (02/03) in trench 2 lay at 68.38m O.D. in the northeast of the trench and at 67.16m O.D. in the southwest. (02/02), a 0.50m thick layer of friable orangey brown sandy clay containing flint gravel, tile and brick fragments overlay the clay; the deposit thinned out towards the northeast end of the trench. Topsoil (02/01) lay at the top of the sequence in Trench 2 and was a 0.10m thick layer of firm grey brown silty clay with flint fragments and tile fragment inclusions.

6.4 Trench 3 (Figure 2, Section 1)

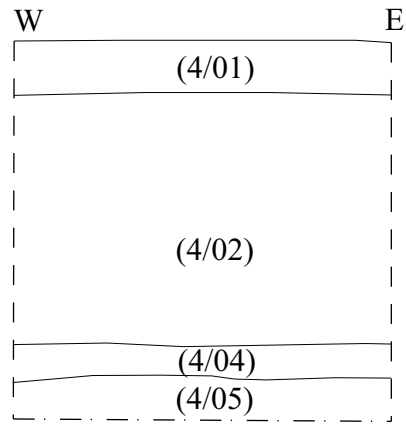
6.4.1 Trench 3 located on the lower playing field in the east of the site, was 25m long and aligned east – west. The top of the trench in the east lay at 65.64m O.D. and in the west at 65.05m O.D., giving a fall from east to west of 0.59m over 25m. “Natural” clay (03/03) in trench 3 lay at 64.89m O.D. in the east of the trench and at 64.30m O.D. in the west. The “natural” clay was overlain by (03/04), a 0.10m thick layer of dark brown silty clay which in turn was overlaid by (03/02), a 0.50m thick layer of friable orangey brown sandy clay containing flint gravel, tile and brick fragments overlay the clay. The deposit thinned out towards the east end of the trench. Topsoil (03/01) lay at the top of the sequence in Trench 3 and was a 0.10m thick layer of firm grey brown silty clay with flint fragments and tile fragment inclusions.

6.5 Trench 4 (Figure 1, Section 2)

6.5.1 Trench 4 was located on the lower playing field in the south of the site, was 50m long and aligned east – west. The top of the trench in the east lay at 65.67m O.D. and in the west at 65.00m O.D., giving a fall from east to west of 0.67m over 50m. “Natural” clay (04/03) in trench 4 lay at 64.67m O.D. in the east of the trench and at 64.00m O.D. in the west. The “natural” clay was overlain by (04/04), a 0.10m thick layer of dark brown silty clay. (04/02), a 0.50m thick layer of friable orangey brown sandy clay containing flint gravel, tile and brick fragments overlay the clay; the deposit thinned out towards the east end of the trench. Topsoil (04/01) lay at the top of the sequence in Trench 3 and was a 0.10m thick layer of firm grey brown silty clay with flint fragments and tile fragment inclusions.



Section 1
Trench 3



Section 2
Trench 4



Figure 2. Sections

7 FINDS

7.1 Post-Medieval

7.1.1 No finds other than one coin from (04/04) in Trench 4 were recovered from the site. The coin although heavily worn and corroded was identified as a farthing minted in 1954/55.

8 DISCUSSION & CONCLUSIONS

No archaeological features other than 20th century drainage runs and landscaping deposits for the school playing fields were observed within the trenches. Trenches 3 and 4 displayed a heavily disturbed soil horizon, (03/04) (04/04) which is believed to represent the pre-terracing land surface. A farthing dated to 1954/55 was recovered from the disturbed soil horizon. It is believed but not conclusively proven that (01/02) (02/02) (03/02) (04/02) was a dumped deposit of material partly derived from the demolition of the cottage which stood in the near vicinity of the evaluation trenches prior to construction of the school, and partly derived from material including “natural” clay machined away from the area of the upper playing field and subsequently used as a levelling layer on the lower playing field in order to create a more level surface.

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APPENDIX – ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

Context	Type	Description	Depth (m)	Width (m)	Length (m)	Finds	Date
Trench 1			0.65m	1.80m	50.00m		
(01/01)	Layer	Dark brown silty clay	0.10m	1.80m	50.00m	-	20 th Century
(01/02)	Layer	Orangey brown silty clay	0.50m	1.80m	50.00m	-	20 th Century
(01/03)	Layer	Dark orange clay	Unexcavated	1.80m	50.00m	-	Geological
Trench 2			0.50m	1.80m	25.00m		
(02/01)	Layer	Dark brown silty clay	0.10m	1.80m	25.00m	-	20 th Century
(02/02)	Layer	Orangey brown silty clay	0.50m	1.80m	25.00m	-	20 th Century
(02/03)	Layer	Dark orange clay	Unexcavated	1.80m	25.00m	-	Geological
Trench 3			0.90m	1.80m	25.00m		
(03/01)	Layer	Dark brown silty clay	0.10m	1.80m	25.00m	-	20 th Century
(03/02)	Layer	Orangey brown silty clay	0.50m	1.80m	25.00m	-	20 th Century
(03/03)	Layer	Dark orange clay	Unexcavated	1.80m	25.00m	-	Geological
(03/04)	Layer	Dark brown silty clay	0.10m	1.80m	25.00m	-	20 th Century
Trench 4			1.00m	1.80m	50.00m		
(04/01)	Layer	Dark brown silty clay	0.10m	1.80m	50.00m	-	20 th Century
(04/02)	Layer	Orangey brown silty clay	0.50m	1.80m	50.00m	-	20 th Century
(04/03)	Layer	Dark orange clay	Unexcavated	1.80m	50.00m	-	Geological
(04/04)	Layer	Dark brown silty clay	0.10m	1.80m	50.00m	Coin - farthing	20 th Century