



JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

**ST GABRIEL'S SCHOOL, SANDLEFORD PRIORY,
GREENHAM, WEST BERKSHIRE**

NGR SP 477 645

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

On behalf of

St Gabriel's School

SEPTEMBER 2010

REPORT FOR St Gabriel's School
c/o Ms J Whitehead
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West Mills
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Summary

A watching brief was conducted by John Moore Heritage Services (JMHS) between the 12th of July and the 26th of August 2010 during the excavation of foundation trenches and other groundwork associated with the construction of new school buildings at St Gabriel's School, Sandleford Priory.

The majority of the site had been levelled previously, probably during ground preparation for the temporary school buildings located on the site prior to this work. Numerous service trenches and pipes were uncovered, as well as hard standing associated with 21st century concrete pathways.

Two possible postholes were found, one of which appears to be modern and the other undated. No other features of archaeological significance were found.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)

The development site was located to the south of Newbury on the east side of Newtown Road on the A339 (NGR SP 477 645). The proposed new building was located to the west of the Sports Hall and south of the Technology Building. The geology of the area was Bracklesham Beds (sand and loam) (Institute of Geological Sciences, sheet 267). The development area lies between existing school buildings which were erected in the 20th century and early 21st century.

1.2 Planning Background

West Berkshire Council had granted planning permission for the erection of a two-storey school building to provide a dining room extension and fifteen classrooms with ancillary spaces. Condition 7 attached to the permission required the implementation of a programme of archaeological work in accordance with a written scheme of investigation which was submitted by the applicant and approved by the Local Planning Authority. JMHS was appointed by the school to carry out the archaeological work.

1.3 Archaeological Background

The school includes the former buildings and land of Sandleford Priory, a 12th century Augustinian foundation. It declined in the 15th century and the Dean and Chapter of St George's Chapel, Windsor, took over the property. Subsequently it became a private residence. Various alterations were undertaken by several tenants from the 17th century. Most notable of these were John Wyatt's remodelling of the house and 'Capability' Brown's landscaping on the grounds in the 18th century.

The school buildings include a Grade I listed country house with surviving medieval chapel and a Grade II stable block used for teaching purposes. The exact location of the 12-15th century priory is unknown, although the chapel was clearly a key part of it, and the monastic cemetery appears to have been located immediately north of the chapel. This cemetery continued to be used after the Priory's closure in 1478, and is

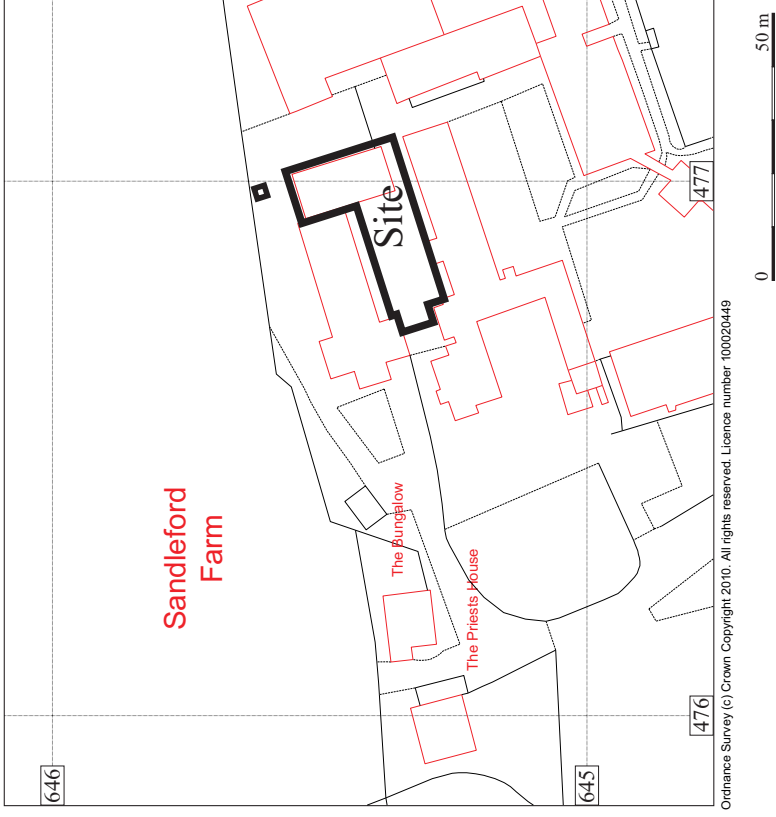
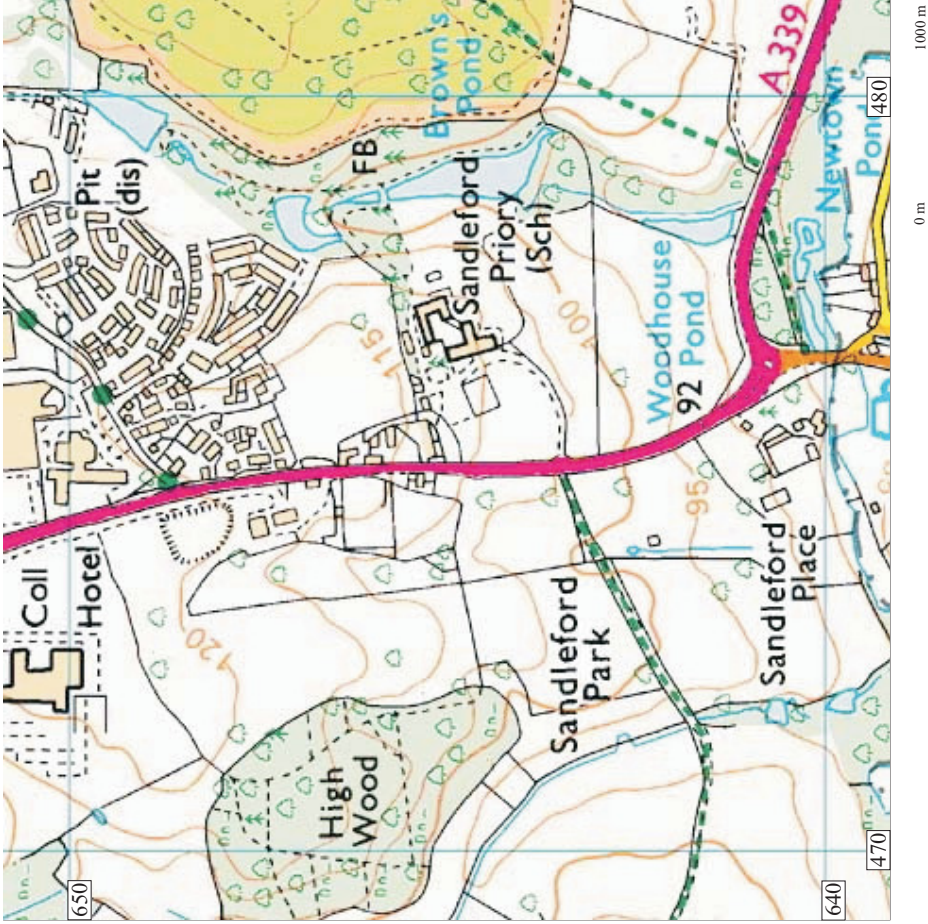


Figure 1. Site Location

documented up until 1668; a burial ground is shown on historic Ordnance Survey maps.

Archaeological monitoring of the groundworks was carried out for the building of the Dining Block (application reference 131461-2, granted 1988) and the building of the Sports Hall (01/00161/FUL). The monitoring indicated that the land at the northern edge of the school had been used as a dump for many years, although on the site of the Dining Room there were also the remains of ice houses. Former rubbish pits containing late 19th and early 20th century artefacts were found (Brown 2002 & 2003). In 2001-2 the skeletons of a horse or donkey were excavated. A medieval horse pendant was also once found within St Gabriel's grounds.

2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

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

- To identify, investigate and record any archaeological remains revealed within the site to an appropriate level.

In particular;

- Are any further bones present and to determine whether they are animal or human
- Are there any remains present relating to the Priory
- Is there anything present relating to residential use in the post-medieval period

3 STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

West Berkshire Council's Historic Environment Record Officer (Sarah Orr) stated that the programme of archaeological work should consist of an archaeological watching brief. JMHS carried out the work to a Written Scheme of Investigation. Standard John Moore Heritage Services techniques were employed throughout, involving the completion of a written record for each deposit encountered, with scale plans and section drawings compiled where appropriate and possible.

The recording was carried out in accordance with the standards specified by the Institute for Archaeologists (1994) and the usual requirements of the West Berkshire Council.

3.2 Methodology

An archaeologist was on site during all operations that had the potential to disturb or destroy archaeological remains. This included surface stripping, the removal of overburden, the excavation of trenches for new foundations and services.

Archaeological features revealed were cleaned by hand and recorded in plan before being excavated. Archaeological features were recorded by written, drawn and photographic record.

4 RESULTS

4.1 Field Results

The site sloped sharply from north to south. The only original strata present was in the far north. This area had been levelled to approximately 2m below the natural topsoil at some point in the past. The remainder of the site, presumably following the original natural slope, was levelled to a point within the natural loam and gravels (003).

The lowest geological horizon attained was the underlying orange-brown gravel and loam Bracklesham Beds (003). These consisted of compacted and homogenous orange-brown loam, with occasional stone inclusions. The majority of the site was excavated to a layer of made ground (013) sealing natural (003). The upper layers of layer (013) contained a higher proportion of gravel and concentrated areas of dark staining and lighter, leached areas of finer gravel. It is likely this was caused by the surface being exposed for a time during the ground works associated with the construction of the 21st century school buildings.

A layer of remnant ploughsoil was present in the far north of the site. This layer of light grey gravels and sand had a thickness of 0.48cm and contained c. 20% stone and gravel inclusions (002).

Cut into the remnant ploughsoil in the north was large trench 004 (Fig. 2, Section 1001). With a sharp break of top slope and vertical sides this appears to be a modern service trench. Cut 004 contained a single fill (005) of loose grey and orange gravels <1.2m in thickness. Blue plastic sheeting was present in lower parts of the fill.

Also cut into the remnant ploughsoil (002) and truncated by cut 004 was a possible posthole 010. This had inward sloping, straight sides, with a sharp break of base slope and a concave base. It contained a single fill (011) consisting of dark brown silty gravel with occasional ceramic building material flecking, with a thickness of 0.19m.

Cut into the remnant ploughsoil in the north was cut 006. This was probably associated with levelling for the construction of the existing classrooms on the site. The topsoil follows the curve of this cut. Cut 006 contained a single fill (007) consisting of loose light grey-brown alternating bands of angular gravels and yellow sand, tipping to the west. In addition to levelling for the existing classrooms, 2 plastic service pipes are located in the base of the cut, running north-south.

Cut into the upper layers of fill (007), and sealed by topsoil (001) was a possible posthole 008 of modern date. This contained fill (009) consisting of dark brown silty gravel to a thickness of 0.22m.

Sealing the natural and remnant ploughsoil on all parts of the site was a layer of brown silty loam topsoil (001). This contained 20% sub-angular gravels throughout and was c. 0.20m – 0.40m in thickness.

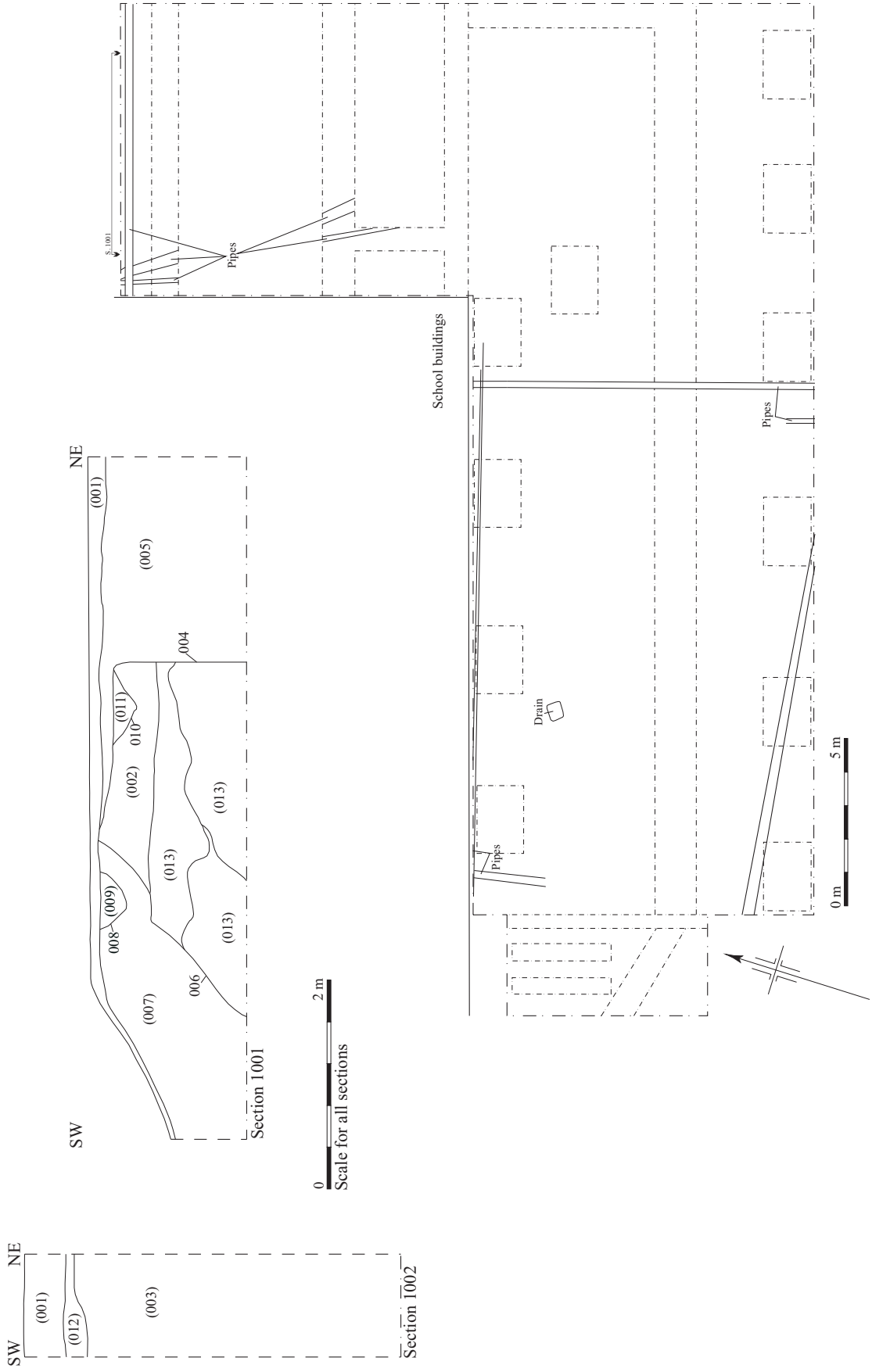
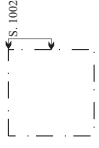


Figure 2. Plan and sections

A 2 x 2m sump constructed to the northwest of the site was more representative of undisturbed strata as it was located upslope, beyond the area of previous development. This contained a layer of topsoil (001) with a thickness of 0.40m, sealing a black ashy layer (012) with a maximum thickness of 0.35m. This sealed the natural Bracklesham Beds (003) (Fig. 2, Section 1002).

4.2 Reliability of Results

The watching brief was carried out in clement conditions and the results are felt to be representative.

5 FINDS

5.1 Finds

No finds were recovered from the site.

5.2 Environmental Remains

No features were considered to warrant environmental sampling.

6 DISCUSSION

The site at St Gabriel's School was highly truncated by previous groundwork (probably relating to construction work in the 1960's) and numerous service trenches. Previous levelling of the site appears to have removed any archaeology that may have existed in the upper Bracklesham Beds or original ploughsoil.

The only features on the site were two possible postholes. One of these was cut into a modern fill layer and therefore is not archaeologically significant. The second posthole appears to have been cut into the remnant ploughsoil but could not be dated.

7 ARCHIVE

Archive Contents

The archive consists of the following:

Paper Record

The project brief	The project report
Written Scheme of Investigation	The primary site records
The drawn records	

8 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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