Wessex Archaeology

Bexhill Skills Centre, Down Road Bexhill, East Sussex

Archaeological Watching Brief Report

Ref: 71780.03

February 2010

BEXHILL SKILLS CENTRE, DOWN ROAD, BEXHILL, EAST SUSSEX

Archaeological Watching Brief Report

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BEXHILL SKILLS CENTRE,
DOWN ROAD, BEXHILL, EAST SUSSEX

Archaeological Watching Brief Report

Contents

Summary iv
Acknowledgements v

1 INTRODUCTION 1
1.1 Project Background 1
1.2 The Site, location and geology 1
1.3 Archaeological background 2
1.4 Geophysical Survey 3

2 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES 3
2.1 Archaeological Watching Brief 3

3 METHODOLOGY 3
3.1 Introduction 3
3.2 Fieldwork 4
3.3 Stratigraphy 4

4 RESULTS 4

5 FINDS 5

6 ENVIRONMENTAL 5

7 CONCLUSIONS 5

8 ARCHIVE 5
8.1 Preparation and Deposition 5
8.2 Copyright 5
8.3 Security Copy 5

9 REFERENCES 6

FIGURES

Figure 1 Location of watching brief and test pits
Figure 2 Foundation trench layout

PLATES

Plate 1 East facing section of Test Pit 332
Plate 2 North facing section of Test Pit 357
Plate 3 West facing section of Test Pit 400
Plate 4 West facing section of Foundation Trench P3
Front cover Bexhill High School
Back Cover Excavation of Test Pits.

APPENDIX 1 Trench summary tables
APPENDIX 2 Archive Index

BEXHILL SKILLS CENTRE,
DOWN ROAD, BEXHILL, EAST SUSSEX

Archaeological Watching Brief Report

Summary

Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by Kier Group (the Client) to undertake an archaeological watching brief on Bexhill Skills Centre, Down Road, Bexhill, East Sussex (hereafter 'the Site'), during groundworks in advance of development centred on National Grid Reference (NGR) 573750 108220 (**Figure 1**).

The watching brief was required as a condition of planning permission granted to the Kier Group by the Local Planning Authority (Planning Reference RR/2770/CC), for the demolition of a technology building and the ROSLA (Raising of the School Leaving Age) building, erection of a two storey "skill centre" together with landscaped areas, cycle and vehicle parking, workshops, temporary construction access and ancillary works.

A number of test pits and foundation trenches were dug within the proposed development area. No archaeological features were identified in any of the test pits or trenches and no artefacts were recovered from the excavated soils.

BEXHILL SKILLS CENTRE,
DOWN ROAD, BEXHILL, EAST SUSSEX

Archaeological Watching Brief Report

Acknowledgements

Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by Kier Group to carry out the archaeological watching brief and thanks are due to Gerald Brown (Design and Build Manager, Kier Group), Ian Cairncross (Kier Site Manager) and Jason Newbury (Kier Site Manager), and all Kier Staff for their participation. The advice from Casper Johnson , East Sussex County Archaeologist during the project is also gratefully acknowledged.

The watching brief was undertaken by Catrin Matthews and Phil Harding. The report was compiled by Catrin Matthews and the illustrations were prepared by Kenneth Lymer. The project was managed for Wessex Archaeology by Sue Farr.

BEXHILL SKILLS CENTRE, DOWN ROAD, BEXHILL, EAST SUSSEX

Archaeological Watching Brief Report

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project Background

1.1.1 Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by Kier Group (the Client) to undertake an archaeological watching brief on Bexhill Skills Centre, Down Road, Bexhill, East Sussex (hereafter 'the Site'), during groundwork in advance of development centred on National Grid Reference (NGR) 573750 108220 (**Figure 1**).

1.1.2 A desk-based assessment (L-P Archaeology 2008) had previously been undertaken which provided information on the archaeological and historical background of the Site. A watching brief was required as a condition of the planning permission granted to the Kier Group by the Local Planning Authority in order to record any archaeology that may be present and to provide further information on the archaeological potential of the Site.

1.1.3 The watching brief was undertaken in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI, Wessex Archaeology 2009), which was agreed in advance of the fieldwork by the East Sussex County Archaeologist . It was prepared in keeping with the relevant standards and guidance of the Institute for Archaeologists (IfA) and follows the East Sussex County Council (ESCC) Standards and Guidance (2008).

1.1.4 The watching brief was undertaken intermittently between 26th May to 24th September 2009.

1.2 The Site, location and geology

1.2.1 The Site is situated on Down Road, Bexhill and is on land adjacent to the east side of the existing school (**Figure 1**). The Site also includes the ROSLA building, temporary classrooms and a technology building.

1.2.2 The Site is bounded to the south by the Rother District Council Leisure Centre and a primary school and to the north by residential developments.

1.2.3 The Site slopes up gently from south to north with a rise of approximately 1 metre to the northern boundary and is positioned approximately 20m above Ordnance Datum (aOD). A partially culverted stream flows north to south along the eastern boundary of the Site

1.2.4 The underlying geology of the Site is Hastings Beds (Tunbridge Wells Sands), which comprises interbedded sands, soft sandstones and clays, with superficial deposits of alluvium, (Geological Survey of Great Britain, 1:50,000, sheet 320/321, *c*.1980).

1.3 Archaeological and Historical Background

1.3.1 The archaeological and historical background to the Site is covered in detail in the desk-based assessment (L-P Archaeology 2008), and is therefore presented below in summary form only.

1.3.2 Recorded Palaeolithic finds are rare in Bexhill and the surrounding area, and are more likely to occur in the gravels within the Rother River Valley (Woodcock 1978) where isolated finds have been identified.

1.3.3 Mesolithic evidence is equally sparse, although worked flint was found during trial trenching near Bexhill West Railway station in Terminus Road in 2005 (L-P Archaeology 2008). In addition a Mesolithic tranchet axe was found in the area of the dismantled railway north-east of the Down Lane, although the date and exact location are not recorded.

1.3.4 Neolithic activity is represented by a combination of stray single finds and scatters of worked flint to the south and west of the Site. Flint scrapers were recorded in allotments in 1952 on Terminus Road, approximately 1km south of Down Road and fire cracked flint and Neolithic pebble wasters were recovered from 49 Terminus Avenue, about 1200m south-west of the Site during archaeological evaluation in 2005 (L-P Archaeology 2008). In addition, a leaf-shaped arrowhead and a fragment of a Neolithic unpolished flint axe head was found in a garden in Cantelupe Road, 1.5km south- east of the Site in 1952.

1.3.5 Similarly, the Bronze Age evidence is represented by isolated finds; an arrow head was retrieved from a mole hill in Collington Wood in 1934, south-west of the Site and a second barbed and tanged arrowhead was discovered on Bexhill Down *c*. 1926. Trenching at 49 Terminus Avenue in 2006 by the Hastings Area Archaeological Research Group found a substantial quantity of fire fractured flint, and Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age pottery.

1.3.6 There is scant evidence for Romano-British activity in close proximity to the Site; a bloomery, or iron smelting site located at 36 Meadow Crescent, is approximately 1.2km north-east of Down Road and the nearest known Roman road is some 15km north-east of Bexhill (Margary 1967).

1.3.7 Recent archaeological fieldwork at Gunters Lane School, to the north-west of the Site exposed clusters of shallow oval pits, *c*. 1.0m diameter/long with evidence for burning *in situ* and filled with a charcoal rich ashy deposit. Whilst no dating evidence was retrieved, they were considered to be either prehistoric or more likely, Saxon in date (pers.comm Mr Casper Johnson).

1.3.8 Documentary evidence suggests a settlement existed at Bexelei from Saxon times and the ESCC Historic Environment Record (HER) records two medieval iron working sites within the vicinity; a bloomery at Meadow Crescent may date to the late medieval period and the other, known locally as ‘Cinderbanks Field’ was found to the north-east of Sidley Station. The main village settlement at Bexhill is approximately 1.2km to the south-east and the Site itself is likely to have been used as common agricultural land throughout most of the medieval period.

1.3.9 The 1840 Tithe Map shows the area of the settlement of Bexhill was still largely a mixture of rough and farmed pasture, with some arable land interspersed with a high concentration of farms.

1.3.10 St Stephens Church was built on Bexhill Common in 1898, to accommodate the growing community, although the Site at Down Lane remained common land throughout the post-medieval period.

1.4 Geophysical Survey

1.4.1 Two geophysical surveys have been undertaken on the Site. The first (RPS 2009) aimed to obtain magnetometry data that could be interpreted and used to locate buried ferro-magnetic objects, including unexploded ordnance (UXO). A second survey (Arrow 2009) aimed to locate buried obstructions ahead of the construction.

1.4.2 The results of both surveys indicated that the Site was heavily contaminated with magnetic interference, caused largely by existing structures, such as the existing buildings, steel fences and steel hand rails. A number of the anomalies detected (Arrow 2009) relate to construction footings, pipes or cables. Moreover, the results indicate that the Site is likely to comprise made or re-worked ground, noted by the numerous shallow small targets across the Site.

2 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

2.1 Archaeological Watching Brief

2.1.1 The aims of the watching brief were:

- To determine the presence or absence of archaeological remains, and should remains be found to be present to ensure their preservation by record to the highest possible standard.
- To determine or confirm the approximate date or date range of the remains, by means of artefactual or other evidence.
- To determine or confirm the approximate extent of the remains.
- To determine the condition and state of preservation of the remains.
- To determine the degree of complexity of the horizontal and/or vertical stratigraphy present.
- To prepare a report on the results of the Watching Brief.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 The following methodology was proposed in order to meet the aims of the watching brief. All works were undertaken in accordance with the standards set out within the WSI and the requirements of the Client and East Sussex County Archaeologist. All fieldwork was conducted in accordance with the guidance and standards outlined in the 'Institute for Archaeologists'

Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs (as amended 2008).

3.2 Fieldwork

3.2.1 The test pits and foundation trenches were machine-excavated using a 360° tracked excavator, under constant archaeological supervision. Excavation was also monitored by RPS Group Ltd, Explosives and Ordnance personnel.

3.2.2 The test pits and foundation trenches were positioned to correspond with the anomalies identified during the aforementioned geophysical surveys (Arrow 2009 & RPS 2009) and the footprint of the proposed buildings and located using a GPS (Global Positioning System).

3.2.3 Machine excavation was conducted in spits, using a narrow toothless bucket for the test pits and alternating between a narrow toothed and a 1m toothless bucket for the foundation trenches. The test pits were excavated to either the top of the uppermost archaeological levels or the top of natural geology, which ever was exposed first. The machine-excavated spoil was stored adjacent to the trench and was scanned for artefacts.

3.2.4 Recording was undertaken using Wessex Archaeology *pro-forma* record sheets. Representative soil profile sections of the foundation trenches were drawn at a scale of 1:10. A full photographic record was maintained using digital images. The photographic record illustrates both the detail and the general context of the Site.

3.3 Stratigraphy

3.3.1 The depth of the overlying topsoil was generally around 0.10m deep and consisted of light grey/brown silty clay with sparse gravel inclusions. Tarmacadam also covered a large part of the development area and was around 0.20m deep. The topsoil and tarmacadam overlay demolition rubble and made-ground up to 0.70m in depth. The underlying natural geology of Hastings Beds was identified.

4 RESULTS

4.1.1 A watching brief was conducted in May 2009 during the excavation of a single 3x2m and thirty-nine 1x1m test pits. The test pits were positioned in the northern half of the proposed development area, within the surrounding grounds of the old technology building (**Figure 1**) and were located to examine geophysical anomalies. Each test pit revealed made-ground and a significant amount of demolition rubble, consisting of modern brick and scraps of metal. Two of the test pits excavated to a depth of 0.50m revealed modern brick footings for a previous building, as well as demolition rubble.

4.1.2 To provide a representative sample of the stratigraphy in this area, three test pits, **332**, **357** and **400** were fully recorded. This was to demonstrate the nature of the made ground. The numbers assigned to each test pit were established by RPS Ltd to locate geophysical anomalies (RPS, 2009).

4.1.3 In August 2009, machine excavation of several test pits in the southern half of the proposed development area to further examine geophysical anomalies revealed an area heavily disturbed by former development and

comprised of modern made ground. The test pits were dug to a depth of around 0.30m and contained modern brick, a fragment of a railway sleeper, a scaffold bracket and a small length of wire.

4.1.4 Further monitoring was conducted during the machine-excavation of foundation trenches in September 2009 and showed an area heavily disturbed by former development. Fragments of modern brick, lengths of wire and demolition rubble were visible. Access to the trenches was restricted due to the depth of the trenches and overall instability of the surrounding ground surface. Recording within the foundation trenches was very limited due to the instability and only a single representative section, **P3,** was recorded as this was the most accessible (**Figure 2**).

5 FINDS

5.1.1 No archaeological artefacts were recovered from the Watching Brief.

6 ENVIRONMENTAL

6.1.1 No features or deposits suitable for environmental sampling were identified.

7 CONCLUSIONS

7.1.1 The watching brief did not identify any archaeological remains which would suggest occupation in the surveyed area.

7.1.2 Despite the archaeological potential, the high level of disturbance recorded throughout the Site coupled with the absence of any artefactual evidence, suggests there is an extremely low potential for significant archaeological remains to survive in this area.

8 ARCHIVE

8.1 Preparation and Deposition

8.1.1 The project archive is currently held at the offices of Wessex Archaeology in Salisbury under the project reference 71780 and will be deposited in the local museuwm. The contents of the archive are listed in **Appendix 2**.

8.2 Copyright

8.2.1 The full copyright of the written/illustrative archive relating to the Site will be retained by Wessex Archaeology Ltd under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 with all rights reserved. The Museum, however, will be granted an exclusive licence for the use of the archive for educational purposes, including academic research, providing that such use shall be non-profit making, and conforms to the Copyright and Related Rights regulations 2003.

8.3 Security Copy

8.3.1 In line with current best practice, on completion of the project a security copy of the paper records will be prepared, in the form of microfilm. The master jackets and one diazo copy of the microfilm will be submitted to the National Monuments Record Centre (Swindon), a second diazo copy will be

deposited with the paper records at the Museum, and a third diazo copy will be retained by Wessex Archaeology.

9 REFERENCES

Arrow Geophysics, 2009, *Geophysical survey to locate underground obstructions at Bexhill High School (Down Road Campus)*

Margary I D, 1967 *Roman roads in Britain*

Institute for Archaeologists 2008, *Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs*

Essex County Council 2008, *Standards for Archaeological Fieldwork, Recording and Post-Excavation work in East Sussex.*

L-P: Archaeology 2008, *Archaeological Desk based Assessment of land at Down Road, Bexhill.*

RPS Energy Consultants Ltd, 2009, *Report for Non-Intrusive Magnetometer Survey*

Wessex Archaeology, 2009. *Written Scheme of Investigation: Method Statement for an Archaeological Watching Brief*

Woodcock, 1978, *The Palaeolithic in Sussex,* in PL Drewett *Archaeology in Sussex to AD1500,* CBA Res Rep 29.

10 APPENDIX 1: TRENCH SUMMARY TABLES

Bgl = below ground level

TRENCH : 332			Type:	Machine Excavated
Dimensions: 2.10x1.30m	**Max. depth: 1.50m**			
context	**description**			**depth (bgl)**
33201	*Layer*	Thin layer of light grey/brown silty clay. Angular/subangular gravel inclusions. Loosely compact. Roots throughout.		0-0.10m
33202	*Layer*	Light yellow/brown silty clay. Angular/subangular gravel inclusions. Roots throughout.		0.10-0.30m
33203	*Layer*	Highly compact silty clay (higher frequency of clay), mid grey/brown. Natural.		0.30-1.50m

TRENCH : 357			Type:	Machine Excavated
Dimensions: 2.10x1.30m	**Max. depth: 1.66m**			
context	**description**			**depth (bgl)**
35701	*Layer*	Tarmacadam		0-0.03m
35702	*Layer*	Fine gravel makeup for tarmacadam. Loose material with roots throughout.		0.03-0.17m
35703	*Layer*	Tarmacadam		0.17-0.20m
35704	*Layer*	Mid yellow/brown, silty clay, very compact.		0.20-1.27m
35705	*Layer*	Dark brown/grey silty clay, compact.		1.27-1.45m
35706	*Layer*	Mid yellow/brown silty clay, very compact.		1.45x1.66m

TRENCH : 400			Type:	Machine Excavated
Dimensions: 2.10x1.30m	**Max. depth: 1.35m**			
context	**description**			**depth (bgl)**
40001	*Layer*	Tarmacadam.		0-0.07m
40002	*Layer*	Tarmacadam, disturbed with roots throughout.		0.07-0.26m

40003	*Layer*	Demolition rubble, bricks and fairly loosely compact mid grey/brown silty clay.	0.26-0.71m
40004	*Layer*	Mid yellow/brown silty clay, highly compact.	0.71-1m

TRENCH : P3			Type:	Machine Excavated
Dimensions: unknown	**Max. depth: 1.60m**			
context	**description**			**depth (bgl)**
301	*Layer*	Demolition material and made-ground. Loosely compact yellow brown silty clay. Bricks and steel observed.		0-1.10m
302	*Layer*	Moderately compact, blue/grey alluvial clay.		0.10-1.60m
303	*Layer*	Moderate – highly compact, brown/red clay.		1.60m+

11 APPENDIX 2: ARCHIVE INDEX

File No.	NAR Cat	Detail	Format No.	Sheets
1	-	Index to Archive	A4	1
1	A	Client Report	A4	1
1	-	Project Specification	A4	1
1	B	Day book (photocopy)	A4	2
1	B	Trial trench records	A4	4
1	B	Graphics Register	A4	1
1	D	Photographic Register	A4	1
1	B	Site Graphics	A4	4
1	-	Digital images	A4	50
Finds	**None**			

Watching brief area

New building foundation

Test pit

Wessex Archaeology

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Location of watching brief and test pits

Figure 1

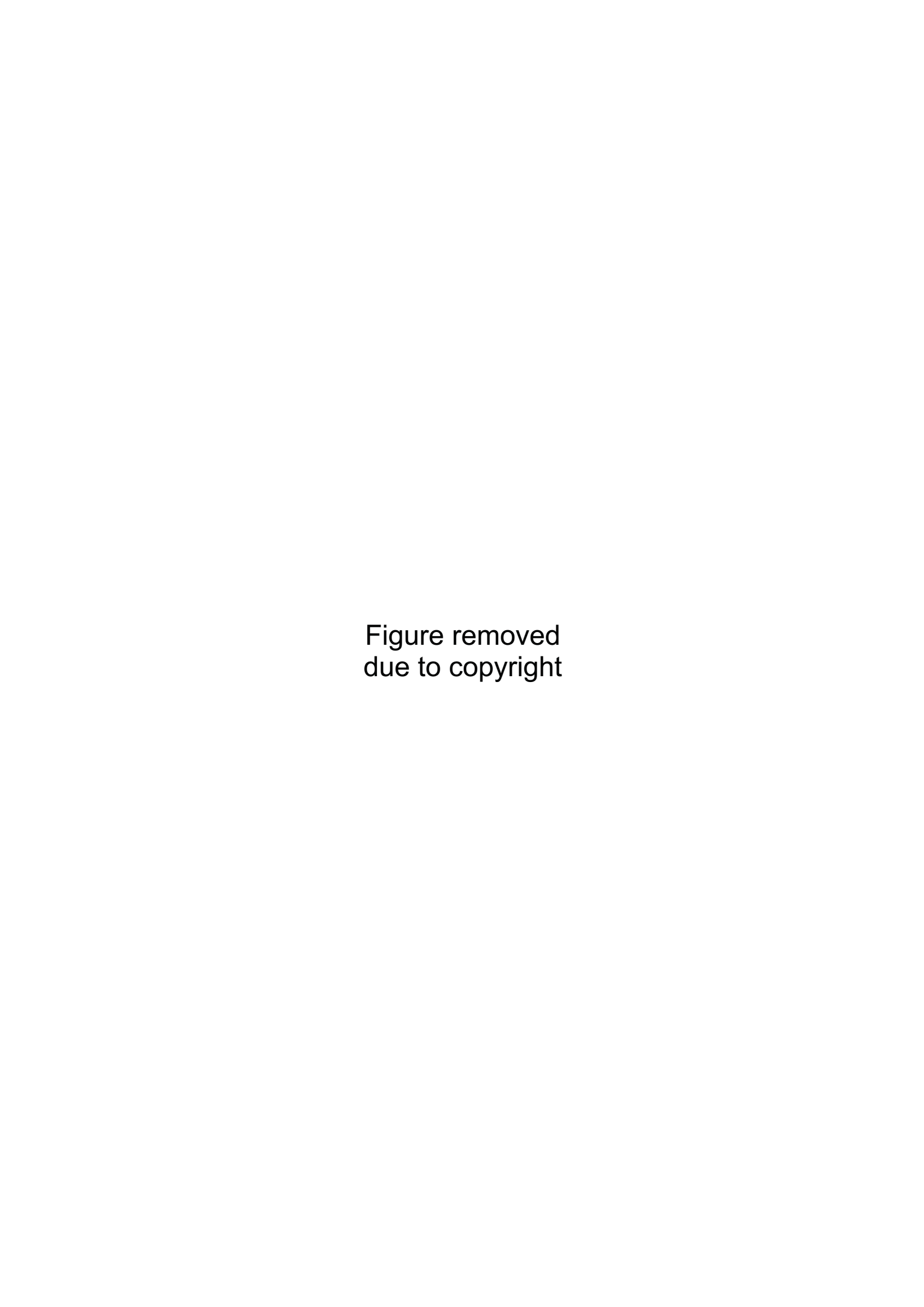
Figure removed
due to copyright

Plate 1: East facing section of Test pit 332

Plate 2: North facing section of Test pit 357

Plate 3: West facing section of Test pit 400

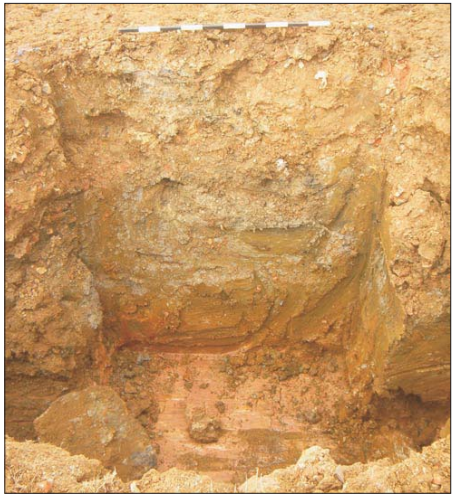

Plate 4: West facing section of Foundation Trench P3

Wessex Archaeology

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