

**T H A M E S      V A L L E Y**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL**

**S E R V I C E S**

**New Netball Court, St Albans High School for Girls,  
Townsend Avenue, St Albans, Hertfordshire**

**Archaeological Watching Brief**

**by Jacqueline Pitt**

**Site Code: SSG12**

**(TL 1522 0781)**

**New Netball Court, St Albans High School for Girls,  
Townsend Avenue, St Albans, Hertfordshire**

**An Archaeological Watching Brief**

**For St Albans High School for Girls**

by Jacqueline Pitt

Thames Valley Archaeological Services

Ltd

Site Code SSG12

**September 2012**

## Summary

**Site name:** New Netball Court, St Albans High School for Girls, Townsend Avenue, St Albans, Hertfordshire

**Grid reference:** TL 1522 0781

**Site activity:** Watching Brief

**Date and duration of project:** 3rd–7th September 2012

**Project manager:** Steve Ford

**Site supervisor:** Jacqueline Pitt and Andrew Munding

**Site code:** SSG12

**Area:** c.800 sq m

**Summary of results:** No archaeological finds, features or deposits were observed.

**Location and reference of archive:** The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited at St Albans Museum in due course, with accession code SSG12.

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Report edited/checked by: Steve Ford✓17.09.12 Steve Preston✓ 17.09.12
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**New Netball Court, St Albans High School for Girls, Townsend Avenue, St Albans,  
Hertfordshire  
An Archaeological Watching Brief**

by Jacqueline Pitt

**Report 11/127**

## **Introduction**

This report documents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out at St Albans High School for Girls, Townsend Avenue, St Albans, Hertfordshire, AL1 3SJ (TL 1522 0781) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Mark Smith of Acanthus Clews Architects, Acanthus House, 57 Hightown Road, Banbury, Oxfordshire OX16 9BE, on behalf of St Albans High School for Girls.

Planning permission (5/11/2091) has been granted by St Albans City and District Council for the construction of a new netball court. This is subject to a condition which requires the implementation of an archaeological watching brief during groundworks, including monitoring the removal of the footings of the previous building on the site.

This is in accordance with *Planning for the Historic Environment* (PPS5, 2010), and the City Council's policies on archaeology. It is acknowledged that PPS5 has now been superseded by the *National Planning Policy Framework* (NPPF 2012). The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Mr Simon West, District Archaeologist at St Albans City and District Council. The fieldwork was undertaken by Jacqueline Pitt and Andrew Muddin between 3rd and 7th September 2012 and the site code is SSG12. The TVAS project number is 11/127.

The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited at St Albans Museum in due course, with accession code SSG12.

## **Location, topography and geology**

The site is located c.300m to the north-east of the modern city centre of St Albans and c.1.3km north of the River Ver, which passes through southern St Albans (Fig. 1). The site is a rectangular shaped piece of land within the northern extent of the school grounds, near the summit of a hill. The ground sloped gently down from the north to the south and south-east at a height of c.122m above Ordnance Datum. The area originally housed a number of school classrooms and ancillary buildings, now demolished, in an 'L' shaped formation (Fig. 2). The south-western part comprises a Tarmac playground and car park. The area is bounded to the south, south-east and west

by school buildings and to the north and north-east by a surgery and private housing (Fig. 2), the northern boundary being planted. The underlying geology is described as Glacial Gravel (with Bunter Pebbles) (BGS 1978), however only a brown-red silty clay, with few stones was observed, as also observed in previous excavations conducted within the school grounds to the south (Dawson and Porter 2011).

## **Archaeological background**

The archaeological potential of the site stems from its location on the north-east margins of the historic core of St Albans, encompassing the Saxon, medieval and post-medieval city, though there are no known archaeological finds nor deposits on the site. This potential is reflected in its incorporation with an archaeological priority area within the City (ASR25). The Roman city of *Verulamium* and its Iron Age precursor lie to the west of the modern city but with the proposal site clearly within their hinterland. The site lies on or close to the line of Tonmans Ditch, which is considered to be the defensive boundary of the medieval town. To the west is a medieval moated site at St Peter's Grange and to the south stand the church and churchyard of St Peter. A watching brief on a new Art and Technology block c.60m to the south uncovered a ditch containing medieval pottery of 12th- to 14th-century date, two undated pits, two undated possible postholes and a large, deep feature of unknown date or purpose. A single sherd of Roman pottery was also recovered (Dawson and Porter 2011).

## **Objectives and methodology**

The purpose of the watching brief was to excavate and record any archaeological deposits affected by the groundworks. This was expected to comprise ground reduction for the new court and landscaping and the construction of a chain-linked fence. The groundworkers intended to reduce the ground level beneath the demolished buildings by approximately 0.40m and remove the Tarmac in the area to the south-west. The removal of the Tarmac surface was a reduction of c.0.08m onto hardcore which would not have any impact on archaeologically relevant levels. It was deemed necessary by the groundworkers to entirely remove the concrete footings for the demolished buildings, resulting in an observation of the grubbing out of these footings and the areas in between using 360°-type mechanical diggers equipped with 2m wide toothed buckets to a depth of 0.75–1.05m. Test pits were also excavated to establish the level of natural geology. Spoil was monitored as it was removed from the ground.

## Results

### *Footings removal (Figs 3 and 4)*

Due to the removal of large concrete foundations of varying depths associated with the demolished buildings, the site was excavated to a depth below the original ground level of c.0.75m in the north to c.1.05m in the south.

Two test pits were dug to establish the level of natural geology (Fig. 3).

Test pit 1 within the north-eastern extent against the section of the planted area (which was not being reduced), revealed a stratigraphy of 0.30m of topsoil overlying 0.60m of mid-grey brown sandy-silt subsoil, above the natural geology of red-brown silty clay at 0.90m (Fig. 4 and Pl. 1). This was the only area where untouched ground was evident and no archaeological features were seen in section along its extent.

Test pit 2 further south-east comprised 0.85m of dark brown clayey silt with brick inclusions above 0.45m of light brown clayey silt with brick inclusions, overlying the natural geology of red-brown silty clay at 1.30m (Fig. 4). This stratigraphy was seen across the entire excavated area which also contained lenses of builders sand and metal pipework. Natural geology was exposed in part beneath the foundations in the north-west area of the site but no archaeological features or finds were observed. Twentieth-century glass bottles, including an embossed Lea & Perrins Worcestershire sauce bottle, were observed near the surface in the upper layer of made ground in the north-eastern area shortly before the south-east return, but retained on site.

Neither the Tarmac removal in the south-west area of the site nor the south-east return were observed as it was established that the excavations were insufficiently deep to impact undisturbed areas.

## Conclusion

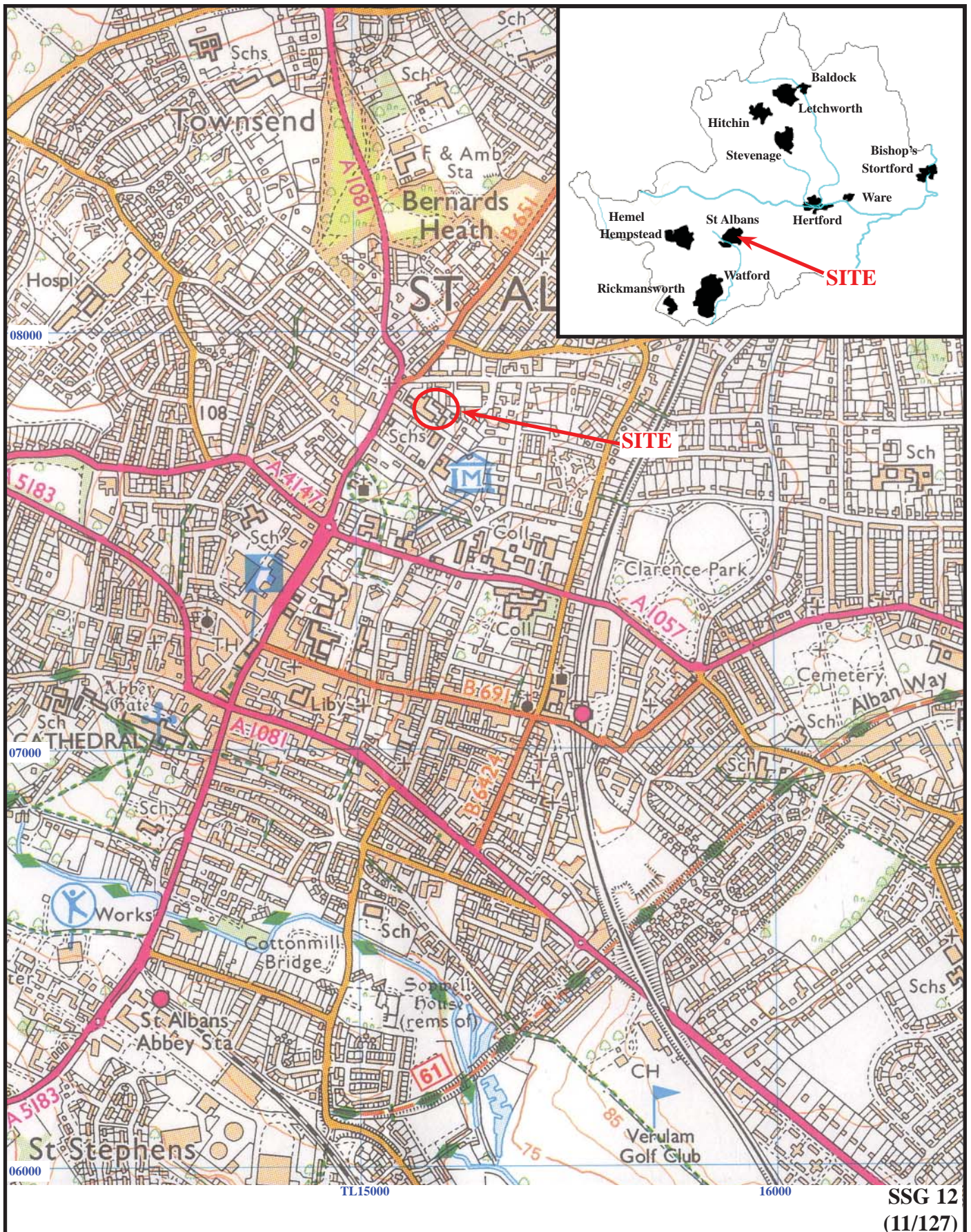
No archaeologically relevant finds, features or deposits were observed either in section against the planted area to the north-east of the site or within the natural geology encountered in the north-western part of the site beneath the foundations of the demolished buildings. Despite some truncation of the area any sizeable features would have survived had any been present. Ground reduction and foundation removal in the south-west and south-east areas of the site respectively were not observed as it was established that it was not deep enough to impact archaeologically sensitive layers.

## References

- BGS, 1978, *British Geological Survey*, 1:50 000, Sheet 239, Solid and Drift Edition, Keyworth
- Dawson, T and Porter, S, 2011, 'New Music Hall, St Albans High School for Girls, Townsend Avenue, St Albans, Hertfordshire, An Archaeological Watching brief', Thames Valley Archaeological Services rep 11/22, Reading
- NPPF, 2012, *National Planning Policy Framework*, Department of Communities and Local Government, London (TSO)
- PSS5, 2010, *Planning for the Historic Environment*, The Stationery Office, Norwich

**APPENDIX 2: HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT RECORD SUMMARY SHEET**

<b>Site name and address:</b> New Netball Court, St Albans High School for Girls, Townsend Avenue, St Albans, Hertfordshire, AL1 3SJ		
<b>County:</b> Hertfordshire	<b>District:</b> St Albans	
<b>Village/Town:</b> St Albans	<b>Parish:</b> -	
<b>Planning application reference:</b> 5/11/2091		
<b>Client name, address, and tel. no.:</b> Fraser Campbell (Bursar), St Albans High School for Girls, Senior School, Townsend Avenue, St Albans, Hertfordshire, AL1 3SJ. (01727) 792 540		
<b>Nature of application:</b> Construction of new netball court.		
<b>Present land use:</b> Classrooms, playground and car park		
<b>Size of application area:</b> c.900m <sup>2</sup>	<b>Size of area investigated:</b> c.800m <sup>2</sup>	
NGR (to 8 figures): TL 1522 0781		
Site code (if applicable): SSG12		
Site director/Organization: Jacqueline Pitt/Andrew MUNDIN, Thames Valley Archaeological Services		
Type of work Archaeological watching brief		
Date of work:	Start: 3 <sup>rd</sup> September 2012	Finish: 7 <sup>th</sup> September 2012
Location of finds & site archive/Curating museum: To go to St Albans Museum		
Related HER Nos:	Periods represented: Modern	
Relevant previous summaries/reports Dawson, T and Porter S 2011, New Music Hall, St Albans High School for Girls, Townsend Avenue, St Albans, Hertfordshire. An Archaeological Watching brief, Thames Valley Archaeological Services report 11/22, Reading		
Summary of fieldwork results: No archaeological features or finds were observed.		
Author of summary: Jacqueline Pitt	Date of summary: 13 <sup>th</sup> September 2012	

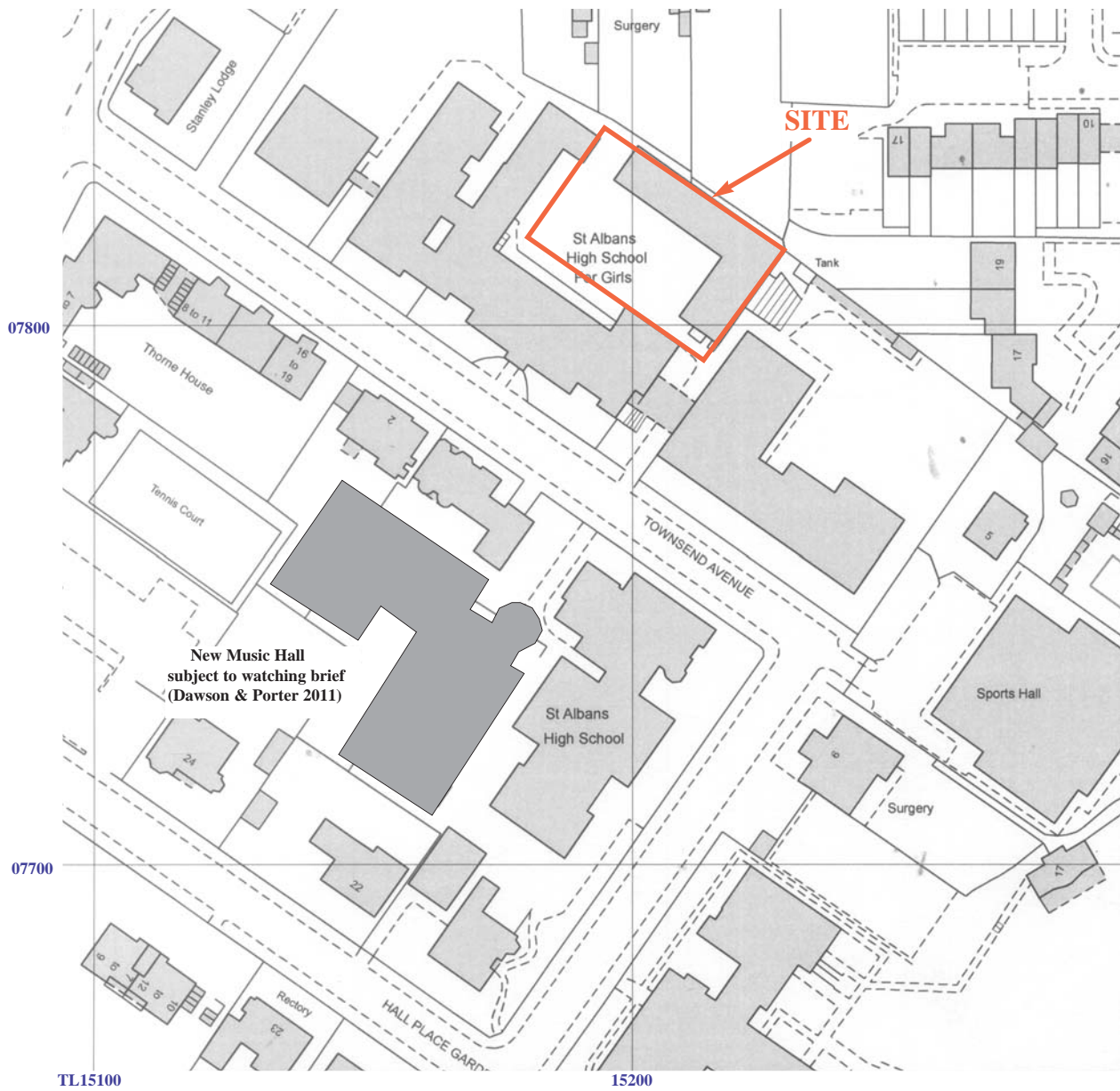


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Figure 1. Location of site within St Albans and Hertfordshire.

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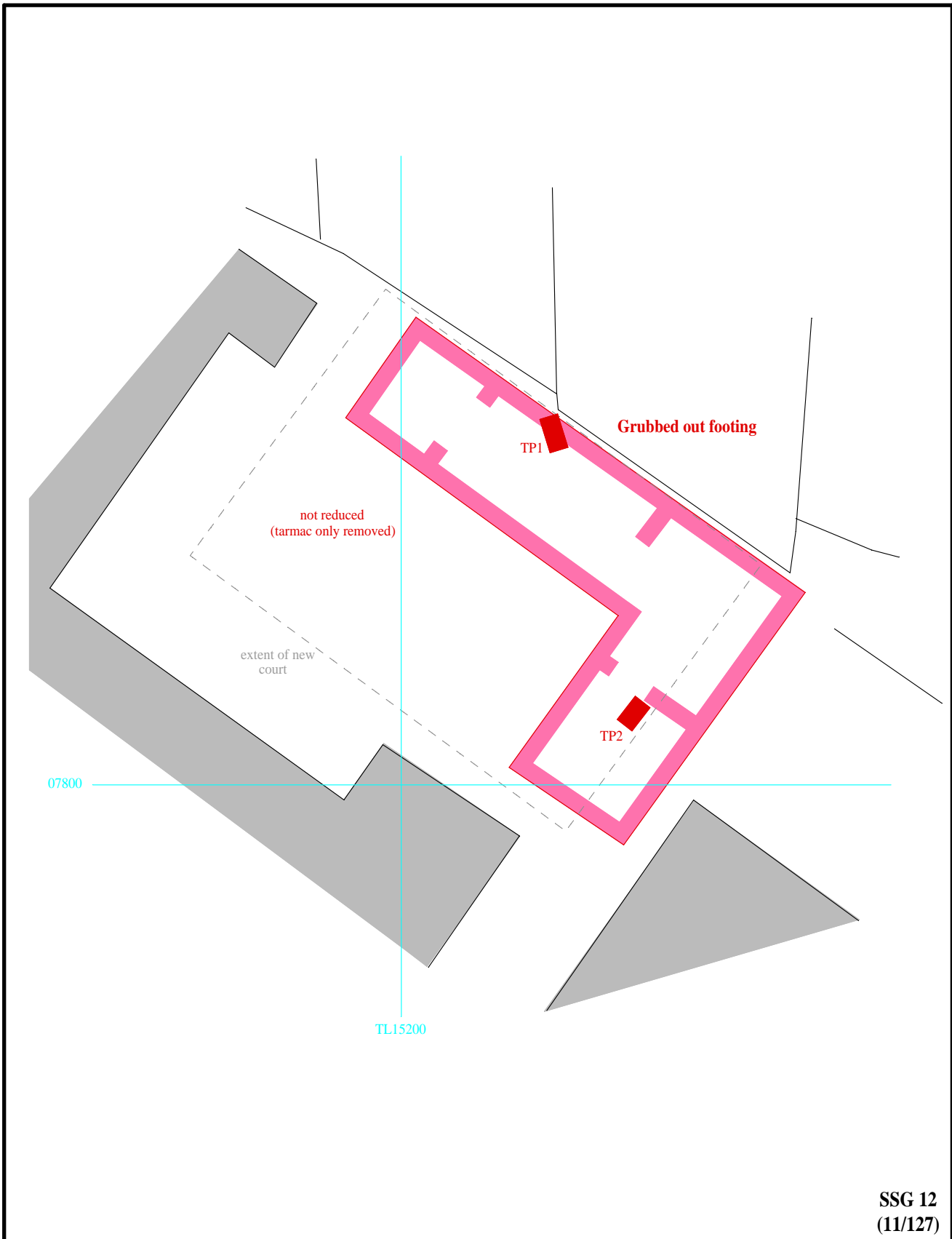


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Figure 2. Detailed location of site off Townsend Avenue.

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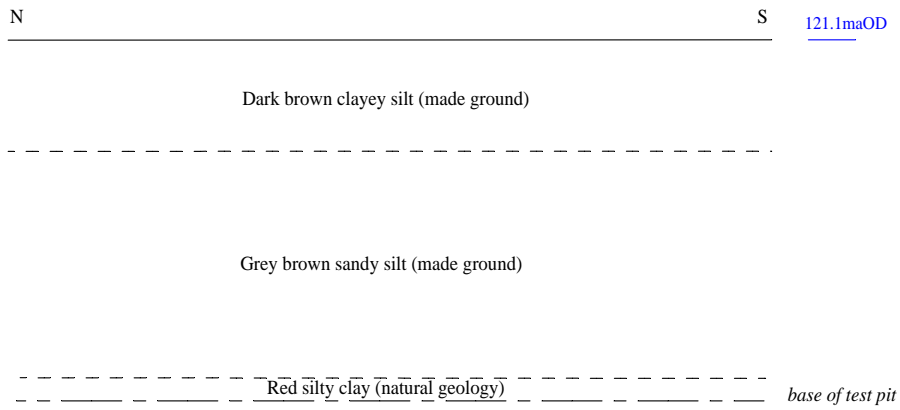
**New Netball Court, St. Albans High School for Girls,  
Townsend Avenue, St. Albans, Hertfordshire, 2012  
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Figure 3. Detail of observed area.

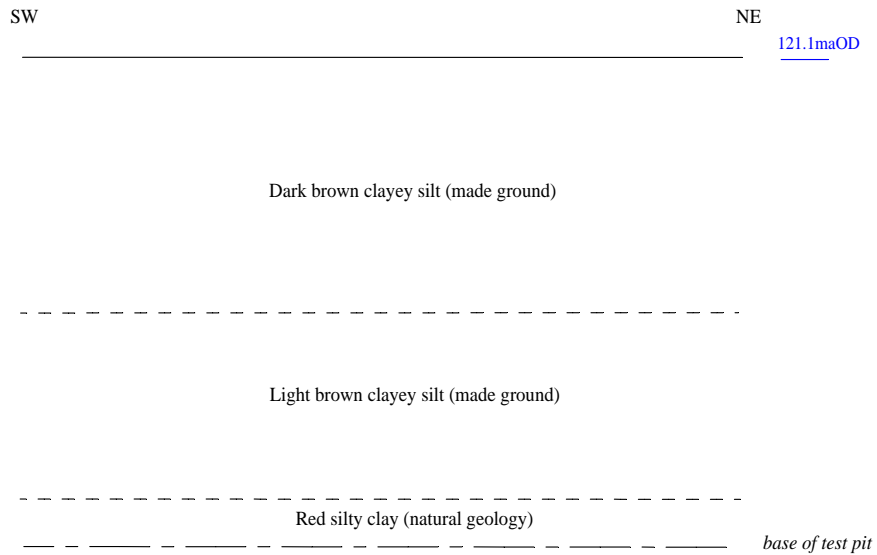


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**Test pit 1**



**Test pit 2**



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Figure 4. Representative sections.





Plate 1. Test pit 1 dug during footing removal, looking north, Scales: 2m and 1m.



Plate 2. General site shot, looking south-east, Scales: 2m and 1m.

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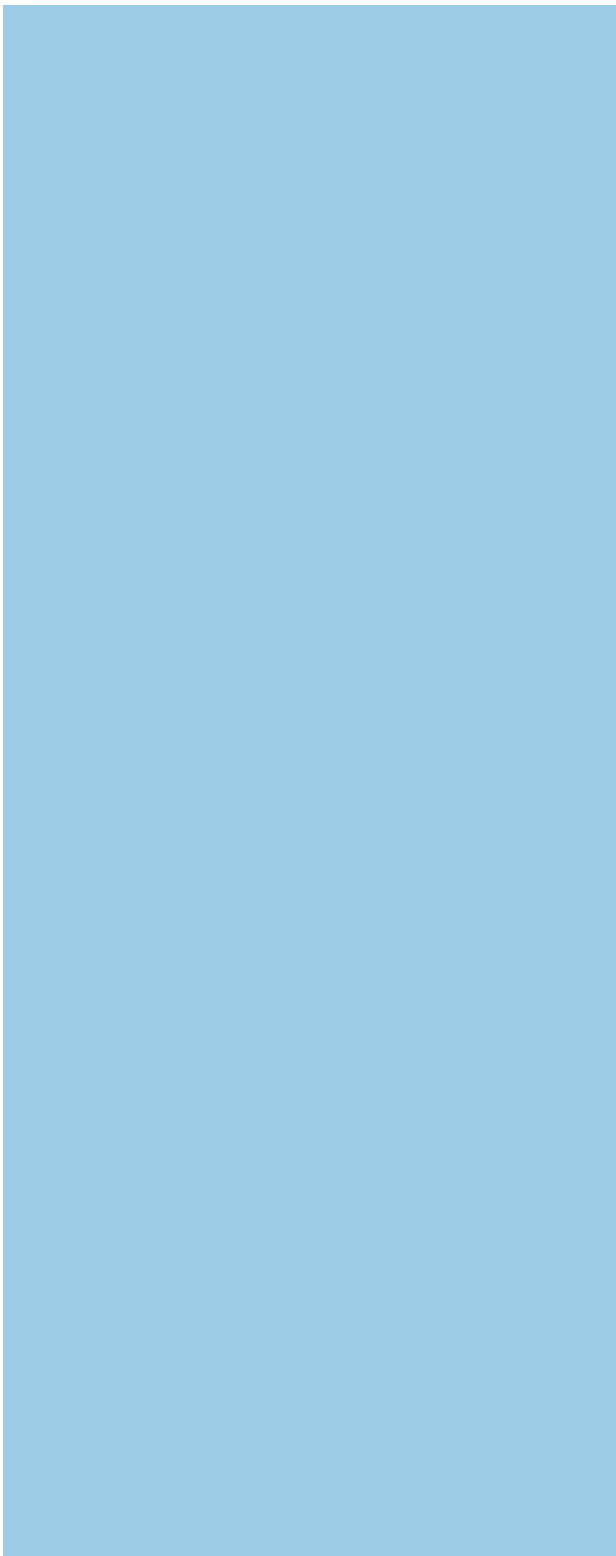
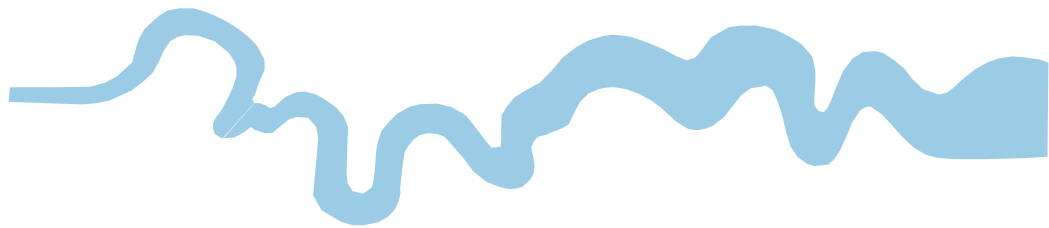
Plates 1 and 2.

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## TIME CHART

	Calendar Years
Modern _____	AD 1901
Victorian _____	AD 1837
Post Medieval _____	AD 1500
Medieval _____	AD 1066
Saxon _____	AD 410
Roman _____	AD 43
Iron Age _____	BC/AD 750 BC
Bronze Age: Late -----	1300 BC
Bronze Age: Middle -----	1700 BC
Bronze Age: Early -----	2100 BC
Neolithic: Late .....	3300 BC
Neolithic: Early .....	4300 BC
Mesolithic: Late .....	6000 BC
Mesolithic: Early .....	10000 BC
Palaeolithic: Upper .....	30000 BC
Palaeolithic: Middle .....	70000 BC
Palaeolithic: Lower .....	2,000,000 BC





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