

Land off Blacksmiths Close Babraham



Archaeological Evaluation Report



February 2013

Client: Hill Partnerships Ltd.

OA East Report No: 1442

OASIS No: oxfordar3-143898

NGR: TL 5152 5045

Land off Blacksmiths Close, Babraham

Archaeological Evaluation


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Report Date: February 2013

Report Number: 1442
Site Name: Land off Blacksmiths Close, Babraham
HER Event No: ECB 3915
Date of Works: 13-14 February 2013
Client Name: Hill Partnerships Ltd.
Client Ref: -
Planning Ref: S/0474/11
Grid Ref: TL 5152 5045
Site Code: BABBSC12
Finance Code: BABBSC12
Receiving Body: CCC Stores, Landbeach
Accession No: -
Prepared by: Louise Bush
Position: Project Officer
Date: February 2013
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Position: Senior Project Manager
Date: February 2013
Signed: 

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Summary

Between the 13th and 14th February 2013 Oxford Archaeology East carried out an archaeological evaluation on land off Blacksmith's Close, Babraham (TL 5152 5045). Work was carried out ahead of the construction of eleven affordable dwellings, together with the construction of a new access road, provision of open space and landscaping.

The trial trenching revealed only low level archaeological remains, the principal feature being a set of small ditches and gullies forming a field boundary (Trench 3). Seven of the nine trenches were devoid of features. Trench 7 contained a single gully, whilst Trench 3 was seen to contain two ditches and three gullies (on three separate alignments).

All features on site were extremely shallow, this was not however the result of modern ploughing. The subsoil/medieval ploughsoil across the site varied greatly in depth from 0.17m (in Trench 5) to 1.1m at its deepest (in Trench 8).

*Just four finds were recovered from the site; three residual struck flints (of Neolithic date) were recovered from topsoil/subsoil and part of a copper alloy brooch dating to the 1st century AD was retrieved from the fill of ditch **102**.*

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work

- 1.1.1 An archaeological evaluation was conducted on land behind Blacksmith's Close, Babraham, Cambridgeshire (551563 250468) (Fig.1).
- 1.1.2 This archaeological evaluation was undertaken in accordance with a Brief issued by Dan McConnell of Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC; Planning Application S/0474/11), supplemented by a Specification prepared by OA East (Mortimer 2012).
- 1.1.3 The work was designed to assist in defining the character and extent of any archaeological remains within the proposed redevelopment area, in accordance with the guidelines set out in *National Planning Policy Framework* (Department for Communities and Local Government March 2012). The results will enable decisions to be made by CCC, on behalf of the Local Planning Authority, with regard to the treatment of any archaeological remains found.
- 1.1.4 The site archive is currently held by OA East and will be deposited with the appropriate county stores in due course.

1.2 Geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The site is located at the eastern edge of the village of Babraham and is situated on flat ground of Holywell Nodular Chalk (BGS 2013) at an average height of around 27m OD. A small dry stream-bed, possibly a post-medieval cutting, borders the site to the east. The site lies on the eastern side of the valley of the River Granta (500m to the west) and c. 2km to the west of the *Via Devana* Roman Road.

1.3 Archaeological background

- 1.3.1 Since 1994, a significant amount of archaeological work has been undertaken within the grounds of the Babraham Institute to the immediate north-west of the proposed development area (see Butler 1994, Robinson 1995, Regan 1995, Hatton 1997, Wills 2004, Swaysland 2005, Armour 2006, Armour *et al.* 2007 and Timberlake *et al.* 2007). Extensive remains of the prehistoric, Romano-British, Saxon and Medieval periods – including *in situ* early Neolithic flint knapping scatters, a large Romano-British cemetery and Saxon *Grubenhäuser* – have been recorded across the area.

1.4 Acknowledgements

- 1.4.1 The author would like to thank Denis Devane of Hill Partnerships Ltd. for commissioning and funding the work. The project was managed by Richard Mortimer. The site was excavated by the author. Machine excavation and metal detecting was undertaken by Nick Richardson of LOC Plant Hire and Haulage.

2 AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

- 2.1.1 The objective of this archaeological evaluation was to determine as far as reasonably possible the presence/absence, location, nature, extent, date, quality, condition and significance of any surviving archaeological deposits within the development area.

2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 The Brief required that 250m of trenching be excavated across the site, giving a 5% sample of the overall development area.
- 2.2.2 Machine excavation was carried out under constant archaeological supervision with a tracked mechanical excavator using a 2m wide toothless ditching bucket.
- 2.2.3 The site survey was carried out by the author using a Leica 1200 GPS.
- 2.2.4 Spoil, exposed surfaces and features were scanned with a metal detector. All metal-detected and hand-collected finds were retained for inspection, other than those which were obviously modern.
- 2.2.5 All archaeological features and deposits were recorded using OA East's *pro-forma* sheets. Trench locations, plans and sections were recorded at appropriate scales and colour and monochrome photographs were taken of all relevant features and deposits.
- 2.2.6 Site conditions were good under foot, the weather was a mix of cloud and rain and was very cold.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Introduction

- 3.1.1 The trenches will be discussed below numerically (Fig.2). The topsoil consisted of a dark grey brown clayey silt about 0.25m in thickness and contained a high level of natural flint nodules and fragments. The subsoil, which is likely to be a Medieval plough soil, consisted of mid a brown orange clayey silt.
- 3.1.2 The depth of the subsoil varied greatly across the site. There was no subsoil present in Trench 1 by the High St. The shallowest subsoil was seen in Trench 5 (at the southern end of the development area) and measured 0.17m in thickness. The deepest subsoil was in Trench 8 (on the north-eastern side of the site), measuring 1.1m in thickness. The modern field surface is uneven, with noticeable plateaus and large hollow areas; the differential thickness of the subsoil is caused by its infilling of glacial hollows and undulations within the underlying natural chalk.
- 3.1.3 Full details of context and trench descriptions can be found in Appendix A. Unless otherwise stated, no finds were recovered from feature fills.

3.2 Trench 1

- 3.2.1 Trench 1 was devoid of archaeological features. A single later Neolithic flint blade (118) was recovered from the topsoil during machining.

3.3 Trench 2

- 3.3.1 Trench 2 was devoid of archaeology but contained a large post-medieval/modern tree throw.

3.4 Trench 3

- 3.4.1 A number of shallow archaeological features, in the form of ditches and gullies/ruts, was seen across the length of Trench 3 (Fig.3). The trench was extended c. 7m to form an 'L' shape, in order to pick up the continuation of these features. The features referred to below as 'gullies' could represent ruts or parts of a planted hedgeline, or indeed gullies - see discussion.
- 3.4.2 Ditch **102** (Plates 1 and 2) was 0.85m wide and 0.25m deep with steeply sloping sides and a concave base (Fig. 3, S.1). It was orientated north-west to south-east and was filled by a single mid grey brown clay silt (103). Retrieved from the fill was SF1 - part of a copper alloy brooch dating to the 1st Century AD.
- 3.4.3 Ditch **104** was orientated north-west to south-east (Fig.3, S.2). It was 0.92m wide and 0.17m deep with gently sloping sides and a concave base. It was filled by a light yellow grey clay silt (105). No finds were recovered.
- 3.4.4 Ditch **106** was potentially the continuation of ditch **104**. It was 0.75m wide and 0.1m deep with an open bowl shaped profile and ran in a north-east to south-west direction. It was filled with a mid orange brown silty sand (107). No finds were recovered.
- 3.4.5 Gully **108** (Plate 3) was 0.35m wide and 0.05m deep with a shallow bowl profile. It was orientated north-east to south-west. The fill (109) was made up of a mid brown grey silty sand. No finds were recovered.

- 3.4.6 Gully **110** ran parallel with gully **108**. It was 0.5m wide and 0.06m deep with a bowl shaped profile. It was filled with a mid brown grey silty sand (111). No finds were recovered.
- 3.4.7 Gully **112** was orientated west-northwest to east-southeast and was potentially the continuation of gully **110**. It was 0.5m wide and 0.1m deep and terminated in the trench. It was filled with a mid grey brown silty sand fill (113) which contained a single, probably later Neolithic, flint flake.
- 3.4.8 Gully **114** could be a continuation of gully **108**. It ran parallel with gully **112**, terminating in the trench. It was 0.35m wide and 0.07m deep with a bowl shaped profile. It was filled with a mid grey brown silty sand. No finds were recovered.
- 3.4.9 Gully **116** was different in its morphology to the other features in the trench. It was 0.6m wide and 0.11m deep with a bowl shaped profile. The gully was aligned in north-south direction. The fill consisted of a dark grey silty sand. No finds were recovered.

3.5 Trench 4

- 3.5.1 No archaeological features were identified in Trench 4.

3.6 Trench 5

- 3.6.1 No archaeological features were identified in Trench 5.

3.7 Trench 6

- 3.7.1 No archaeological features were identified in Trench 6 but a sizeable flint core (120) was collected from the topsoil during machining (see Finds Summary).

3.8 Trench 7

- 3.8.1 A single gully **100**, running in an east-west direction was recorded in Trench 7 (Plate 4). It was 0.38m wide and 0.06m deep with a bowl-shaped profile. It was filled with a mid orange brown silty sand (101). No finds were recovered.

3.9 Trench 8

- 3.9.1 No archaeological features were identified in Trench 8 (Plate 6).

3.10 Trench 9

- 3.10.1 No archaeological features were identified in Trench 9. However an area of post-medieval tree rooting was seen across the north-eastern end of the trench.

3.11 Finds Summary

Struck flint (Barry Bishop pers. comm)

- 3.11.1 Only three struck flints were recovered during the archaeological works, despite a search of all the spoilheaps. All three came from unstratified topsoil deposits. Two of the flints are small, broken, later Neolithic flakes, the third (120) is a core of 'Levallois'-type, but also probably of Later Neolithic date. The core has clearly failed and has possibly then been deliberately broken.

Metal find (Chris Faine)

- 3.11.2 A single copper alloy brooch was recovered from ditch **102** (Plate 6). The brooch is of the “Langton Down” type (c. 10-40 AD). Bent midway up the body with catch-plate and pin largely missing.

4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1.1 The features seen during the archaeological works at Blacksmith's Close show limited evidence for activity pre-dating the Medieval period. The site is clearly well outside the main area of activity and occupation around the Babraham Institute to the north-west.
- 4.1.2 Ditches **102** and **106** probably represent a Roman field boundary. Either they were originally very slight features or they have been heavily truncated by Medieval ploughing; they were clearly sealed by a depth of Medieval ploughsoil. The brooch recovered from the fill of **102** is likely to be a chance loss as no other material was present within the area to suggest middening during this period. There was no pottery, of any date, recovered anywhere on site, and there is unlikely to be any Roman or other occupation on or in the immediate vicinity of the site.
- 4.1.3 The narrow, shallow, parallel gullies are a little more ambiguous. Their alignment is somewhat non-uniform in plan, but they run broadly parallel with the Roman field boundary, and thus are probably associated with it. If the area has not been particularly heavily truncated they could represent the remnants of a dug and planted hedge line or perhaps the ruts of a trackway running along side the boundary ditch. If the area has been heavily truncated then they may be the bases of further ditch cuts along this line.
- 4.1.4 The very slight background scatter of struck flint across the site shows that natural flint was readily available in the surrounding environs and that limited prehistoric activity was taking place close to or on the site.
- 4.1.5 Overall, the evidence collected during the archaeological works reveals only a very small insight into the occupation of Babraham during the prehistoric or Roman periods.

APPENDIX A. TRENCH DESCRIPTIONS AND CONTEXT INVENTORY

Trench 1						
General description				Orientation		NW-SE
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of soil overlying a natural of chalky gravel.				Avg. depth (m)		0.3
				Width (m)		2
				Length (m)		25
Contexts						
context no	type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	comment	finds	date
118	-	-	-	Topsoil find	Flint	Neolithic
Trench 2						
General description				Orientation		NNE-SSW
Trench devoid of archaeology, but contained p/m tree throw. Consists of soil and subsoil overlying a natural of chalky gravel.				Avg. depth (m)		0.8
				Width (m)		2
				Length (m)		20
Contexts						
context no	type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	comment	finds	date
-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Trench 3						
General description				Orientation		NW-SE
Trench contained two ditches and three gullies. Consists of soil and subsoil overlying a natural of chalky gravel.				Avg. depth (m)		0.7
				Width (m)		2
				Length (m)		25
Contexts						
context no	type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	comment	finds	date
102	Cut	0.85	0.25	Ditch	-	-
103	Fill		0.25	Ditch	CuA	Roman
104	Cut	0.92	0.17	Ditch	-	-
105	Fill		0.17	Ditch	-	-
106	Cut	0.75	0.1	Ditch	-	-
107	Fill		0.1	Ditch	-	-
108	Cut	0.35	0.05	Gully	-	-
109	Fill		0.05	Gully	-	-
110	Cut	0.5	0.06	Gully	-	-
111	Fill		0.06	Gully	-	-
112	Cut	0.5	0.1	Gully	-	-
113	Fill		0.1	Gully	Flint	Neolithic

114	Cut	0.35	0.07	Gully	-	-
115	Fill		0.07	Gully	-	-
116	Cut	0.6	0.11	Gully	-	-
117	Fill		0.11	Gully	-	-
Trench 4						
General description					Orientation	NNE-SSW
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of soil and subsoil overlying a natural of chalky gravel.					Avg. depth (m)	0.96
					Width (m)	2
					Length (m)	25
Contexts						
context no	type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	comment	finds	date
-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Trench 5						
General description					Orientation	NW-SE
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of soil and subsoil overlying a natural of chalky gravel.					Avg. depth (m)	0.52
					Width (m)	2
					Length (m)	50
Contexts						
context no	type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	comment	finds	date
-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Trench 6						
General description					Orientation	NE-SW
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of soil and subsoil overlying a natural of chalky gravel.					Avg. depth (m)	0.55
					Width (m)	2
					Length (m)	25
Contexts						
context no	type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	comment	finds	date
120	-	-	-	Topsoil find	Flint	Neolithic
Trench 7						
General description					Orientation	NW-SE
Trench contained a single gully. Consists of soil and subsoil overlying a natural of chalky gravel.					Avg. depth (m)	0.7
					Width (m)	2
					Length (m)	25
Contexts						
context no	type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	comment	finds	date
100	Cut	0.38	0.06	Gully	-	-

101	Fit	-	0.06	Gully	-	-
119	-	-	-	Topsoil find	Flint	Neolithic
Trench 8						
General description				Orientation		NW-SE
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of soil and subsoil overlying a natural of chalky gravel.				Avg. depth (m)		1.4
				Width (m)		2
				Length (m)		25
Contexts						
context no	type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	comment	finds	date
-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Trench 9						
General description				Orientation		NE-SW
Trench devoid of archaeology but contained p/m tree rooting across one end. Consists of soil and subsoil overlying a natural of chalky gravel.				Avg. depth (m)		0.8
				Width (m)		2
				Length (m)		25
Contexts						
context no	type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	comment	finds	date
-	-	-	-	-	-	-

APPENDIX B. REFERENCES

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APPENDIX C. OASIS REPORT FORM

All fields are required unless they are not applicable.

Project Details

OASIS Number	<input type="text"/>		
Project Name	<input type="text"/>		
Project Dates (fieldwork) Start	<input type="text"/>	Finish	<input type="text"/>
Previous Work (by OA East)	<input type="text"/>	Future Work	<input type="text"/>

Project Reference Codes

Site Code	<input type="text"/>	Planning App. No.	<input type="text"/>
HER No.	<input type="text"/>	Related HER/OASIS No.	<input type="text"/>

Type of Project/Techniques Used

Prompt	<input type="text"/>
Development Type	<input type="text"/>

Please select all techniques used:

<input type="checkbox"/> Aerial Photography - interpretation	<input type="checkbox"/> Grab-Sampling	<input type="checkbox"/> Remote Operated Vehicle Survey
<input type="checkbox"/> Aerial Photography - new	<input type="checkbox"/> Gravity-Core	<input type="checkbox"/> Sample Trenches
<input type="checkbox"/> Annotated Sketch	<input type="checkbox"/> Laser Scanning	<input type="checkbox"/> Survey/Recording Of Fabric/Structure
<input type="checkbox"/> Augering	<input type="checkbox"/> Measured Survey	<input type="checkbox"/> Targeted Trenches
<input type="checkbox"/> Dendrochronological Survey	<input type="checkbox"/> Metal Detectors	<input type="checkbox"/> Test Pits
<input type="checkbox"/> Documentary Search	<input type="checkbox"/> Phosphate Survey	<input type="checkbox"/> Topographic Survey
<input type="checkbox"/> Environmental Sampling	<input type="checkbox"/> Photogrammetric Survey	<input type="checkbox"/> Vibro-core
<input type="checkbox"/> Fieldwalking	<input type="checkbox"/> Photographic Survey	<input type="checkbox"/> Visual Inspection (Initial Site Visit)
<input type="checkbox"/> Geophysical Survey	<input type="checkbox"/> Rectified Photography	

Monument Types/Significant Finds & Their Periods

List feature types using the [NMR Monument Type Thesaurus](#) and significant finds using the [MDA Object type Thesaurus](#) together with their respective periods. If no features/finds were found, please state "none".

Monument	Period	Object	Period
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<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

Project Location

County	<input type="text"/>	Site Address (including postcode if possible)
District	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Parish	<input type="text"/>	
HER	<input type="text"/>	
Study Area	<input type="text"/>	National Grid Reference <input type="text"/>

Project Originators

Organisation	<input type="text"/>
Project Brief Originator	<input type="text"/>
Project Design Originator	<input type="text"/>
Project Manager	<input type="text"/>
Supervisor	<input type="text"/>

Project Archives

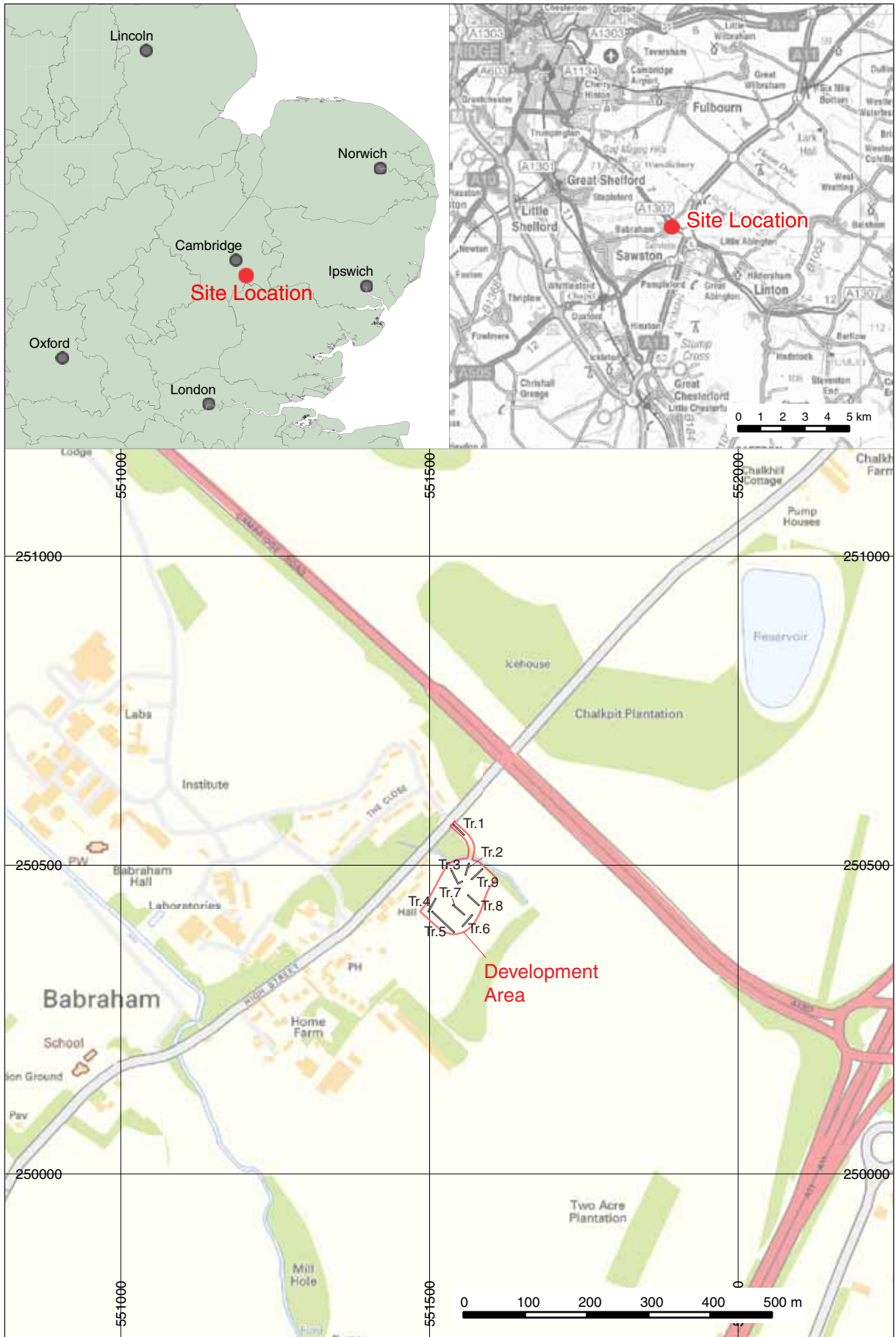
Physical Archive	Digital Archive	Paper Archive
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Archive Contents/Media

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Animal Bones	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ceramics	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Environmental	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Glass	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Human Bones	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Industrial	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Leather	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Metal	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Stratigraphic		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Survey		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Worked Bone	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Worked Stone/Lithic	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
None	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Digital Media	Paper Media
<input type="checkbox"/> Database	<input type="checkbox"/> Aerial Photos
<input type="checkbox"/> GIS	<input type="checkbox"/> Context Sheet
<input type="checkbox"/> Geophysics	<input type="checkbox"/> Correspondence
<input type="checkbox"/> Images	<input type="checkbox"/> Diary
<input type="checkbox"/> Illustrations	<input type="checkbox"/> Drawing
<input type="checkbox"/> Moving Image	<input type="checkbox"/> Manuscript
<input type="checkbox"/> Spreadsheets	<input type="checkbox"/> Map
<input type="checkbox"/> Survey	<input type="checkbox"/> Matrices
<input type="checkbox"/> Text	<input type="checkbox"/> Microfilm
<input type="checkbox"/> Virtual Reality	<input type="checkbox"/> Misc.
	<input type="checkbox"/> Research/Notes
	<input type="checkbox"/> Photos
	<input type="checkbox"/> Plans
	<input type="checkbox"/> Report
	<input type="checkbox"/> Sections
	<input type="checkbox"/> Survey

Notes:



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Figure 1: Site Location

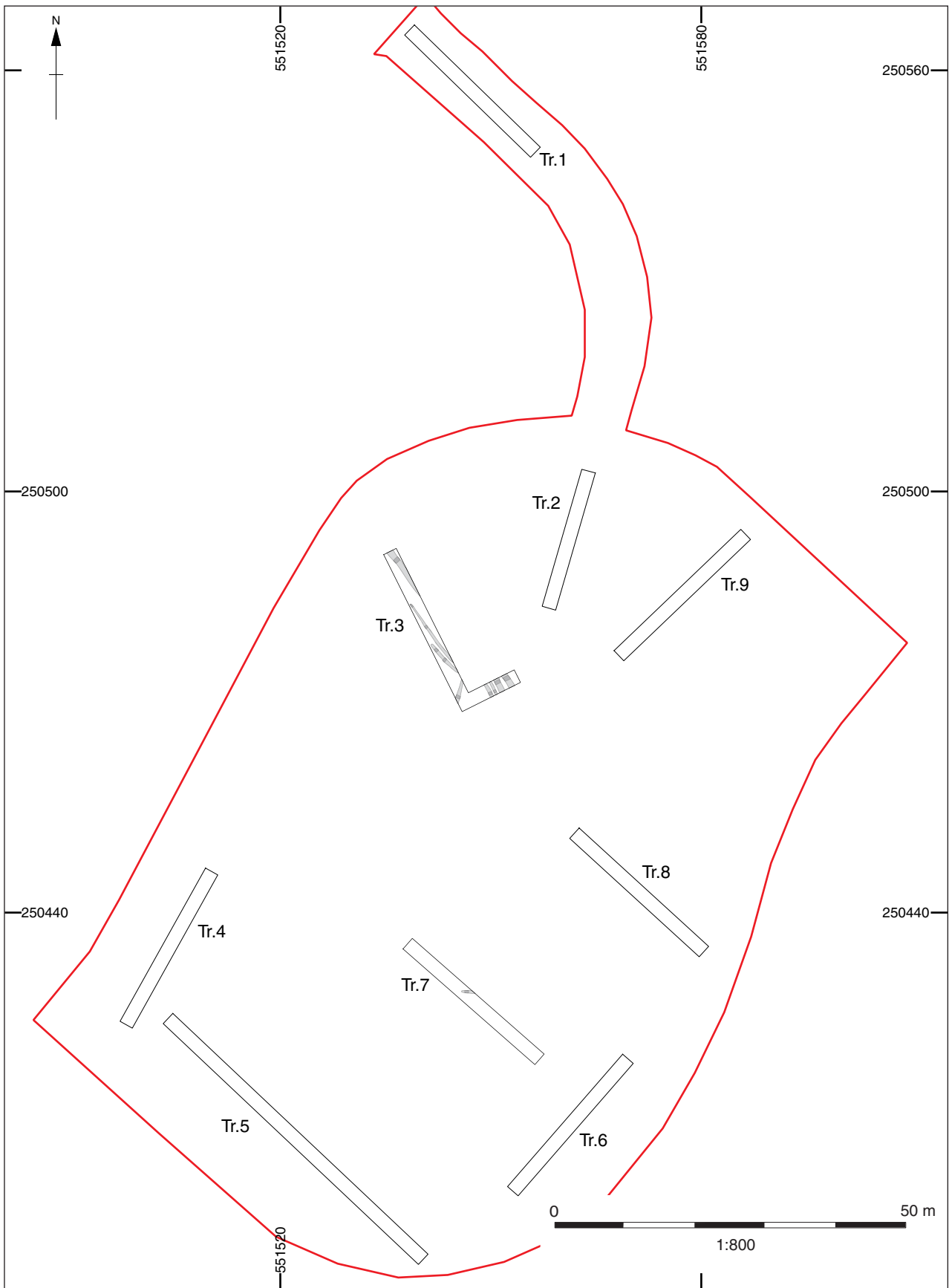


Figure 2: Trench plan

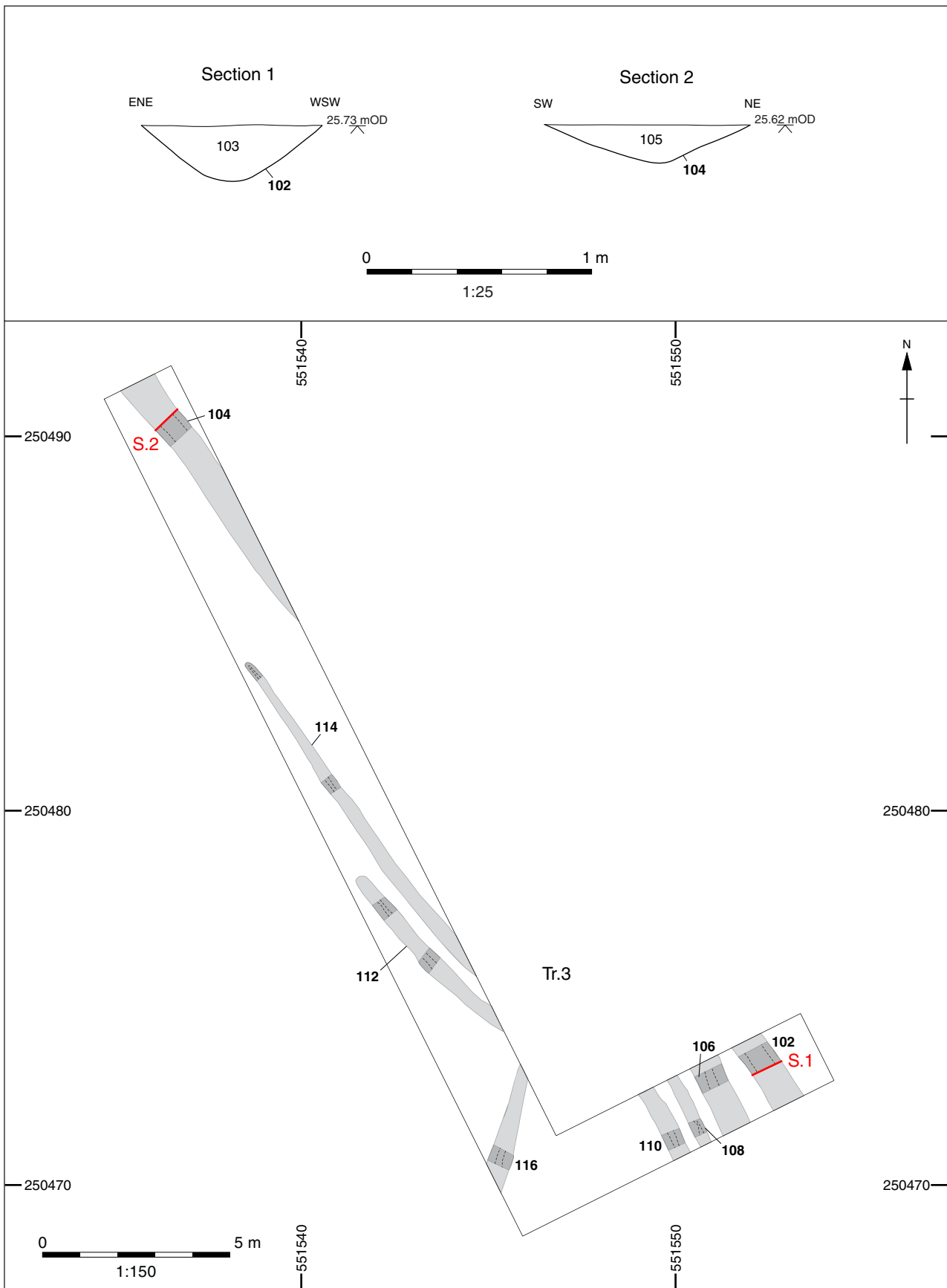


Figure 3: Plan of Trench 3 and sections 1 and 2



Plate 2: Ditch **102** (looking south-east)



Plate 1: Trench 3 extension (looking west-southwest)



Plate 4: Gully **100** (looking north-east)



Plate 3: Trench 3 (looking north-west)



Plate 5: Trench 8 (looking south-east)



Plate 6: Small Find 1



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