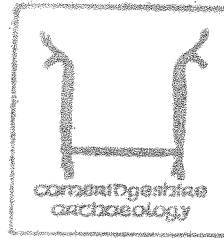
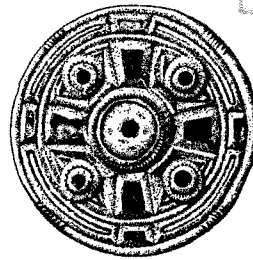


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ARCHAEOLOGY FIELD OFFICE  
FULBOURN COMMUNITY CENTRE  
HAGGIS GAP, FULBOURN  
CAMBRIDGE CB1 5HD Tel: 081574  
(Fax 881678)



Archaeological Field Unit

An Archaeological Evaluation at Huntingdon  
Racecourse, Cambridgeshire, 1993  
Area 1 - Hotel Site

Stephen Macaulay

1993

**Cambridgeshire Archaeology**

Report No. A8

*Commissioned By Huntingdon Steeplechases Ltd*

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Archaeological Field Unit  
Cambridgeshire Archaeology  
Fulbourn Community Centre  
Haggis Gap, Fulbourn  
Cambridge CB1 5HD  
Tel (0223) 881614  
Fax (0223) 881678

# Archaeological Evaluation at Huntingdon Racecourse, Cambridgeshire, 1993

## Area 1 - Hotel Site

### NON-TECHNICAL SUMMARY

In May 1993, Cambridgeshire Archaeology undertook an archaeological evaluation on the proposed Hotel site at Huntingdon Racecourse. The work was carried out to form part one of a two stage assessment of the impact on the archaeology from the development.

Substantial Prehistoric remains have been discovered in the vicinity. The area is rich in archaeological sites dating from the Mesolithic (7500-3500BC) through to the Roman period (AD43-410). These include riverside sites from the Mesolithic, Bronze Age ritual sites surviving as burial monuments along the watercourses, and Romano-British settlements which can be identified as cropmarks from air photographs. Air photographs have revealed many sites in the area, however extensive alluviation (deposits from river flooding) has led to masking of many features. It was felt that features might exist beneath this alluvium and that they would only be revealed through trenching.

Previous work in the area has revealed Roman features within the alluvium, however nothing was discovered in the trenches we excavated. After cleaning only two definite archaeological features, one a post-hole, were identified cut into the natural gravel. A few other 'suspect' features were revealed but were most likely to have been tree holes. No artefacts were recovered either from machine excavation or hand digging, and no evidence was found to indicate any date for the site.

It would appear that despite the Brampton area being rich in archaeological remains, the sampled area does not possess any substantial archaeological deposits. The excavation did not reveal any evidence of either stream side archaeology or settlement sites. The results of trenching have indicated that the alluvium masks an irregular gravel spur around which the earlier stream-line can be traced. It may well be that the area was not an ideal location for settlement when large areas of flat gravel terrace were available close by.

**STU HRC 93 - ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT**  
**AT HUNTINGDON RACECOURSE, AREA 1 - HOTEL SITE.**

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## Abstract

*In May 1993, Cambridgeshire Archaeology undertook an archaeological assessment on the proposed Hotel site at Huntingdon Racecourse. This fulfilled part one of a two stage evaluation covering the re-development of the racecourse. Recent investigations in the vicinity has produced substantial Prehistoric and Romano-British remains. The assessment area produced very little traces of any archaeological activity. A single stakehole and shallow scoop form the only concrete archaeological evidence. No definitive dating material was recovered from the sampled area and no artefacts were discovered.*

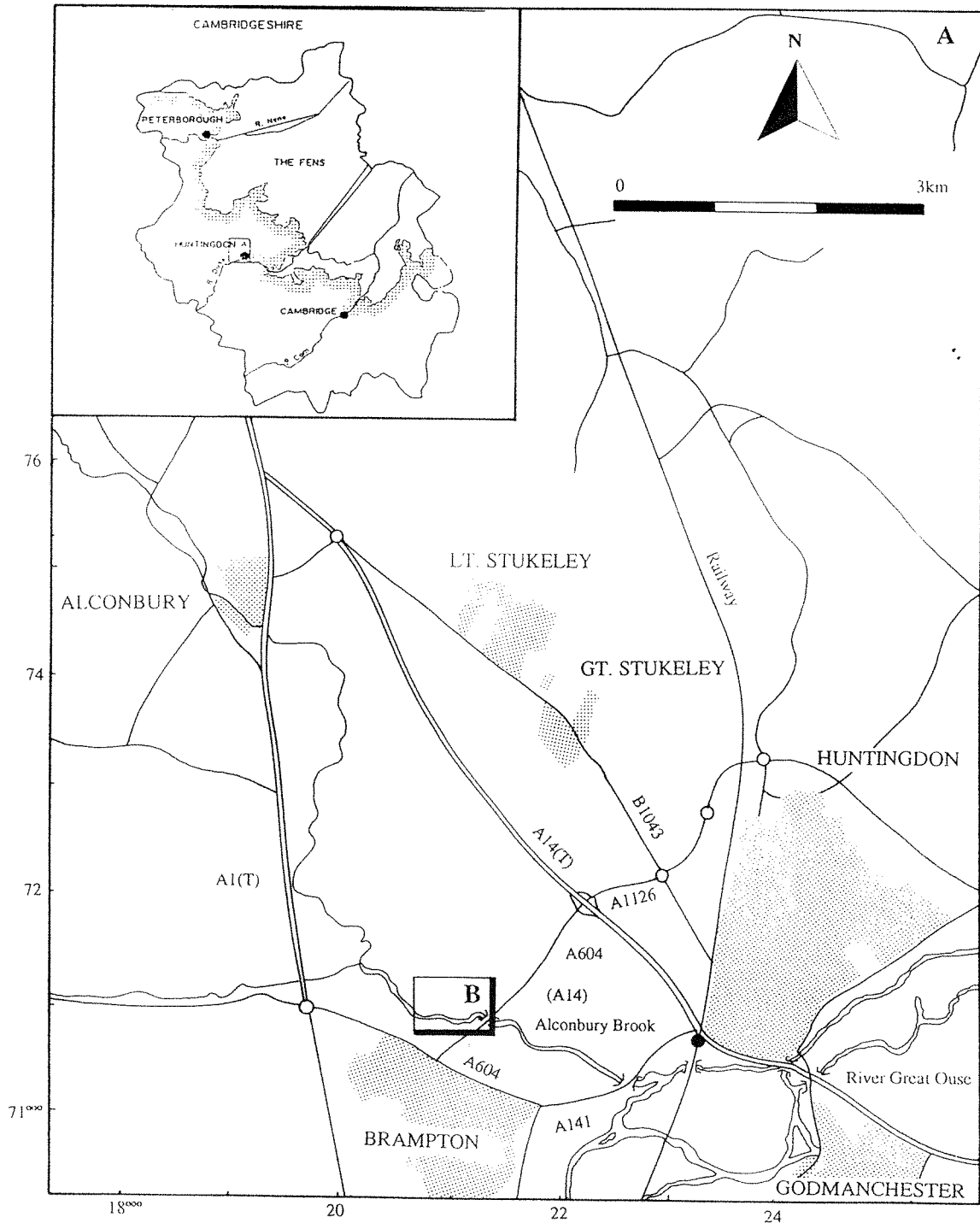


Figure 1 - Location Map

## 1 Introduction

Between the 20th to 25th May, 1993 Cambridgeshire Archaeology carried out an archaeological assessment (TL 205 720) on behalf of Huntingdon Steeplechases Limited on the planned area of the Hotel development site within Huntingdon Racecourse (Figure 2). This work was carried out following a brief provided by the County Archaeological Office to satisfy an archaeological planning condition. The work described here represents stage one of a two part archaeological assessment covering three areas within the Huntingdon Racecourse. This assessment concentrated on the proposed location of the hotel buildings and access road.

No previous records existed for any archaeological finds in the immediate vicinity, but it was felt that the area was in close enough proximity to extensive cropmark and excavated sites (SAM 121), which had produced an extensive Neolithic ritual landscape, along with Iron Age and Roman settlement remains (Malim 1990, Malim & Mitchell 1993), to warrant an archaeological investigation.

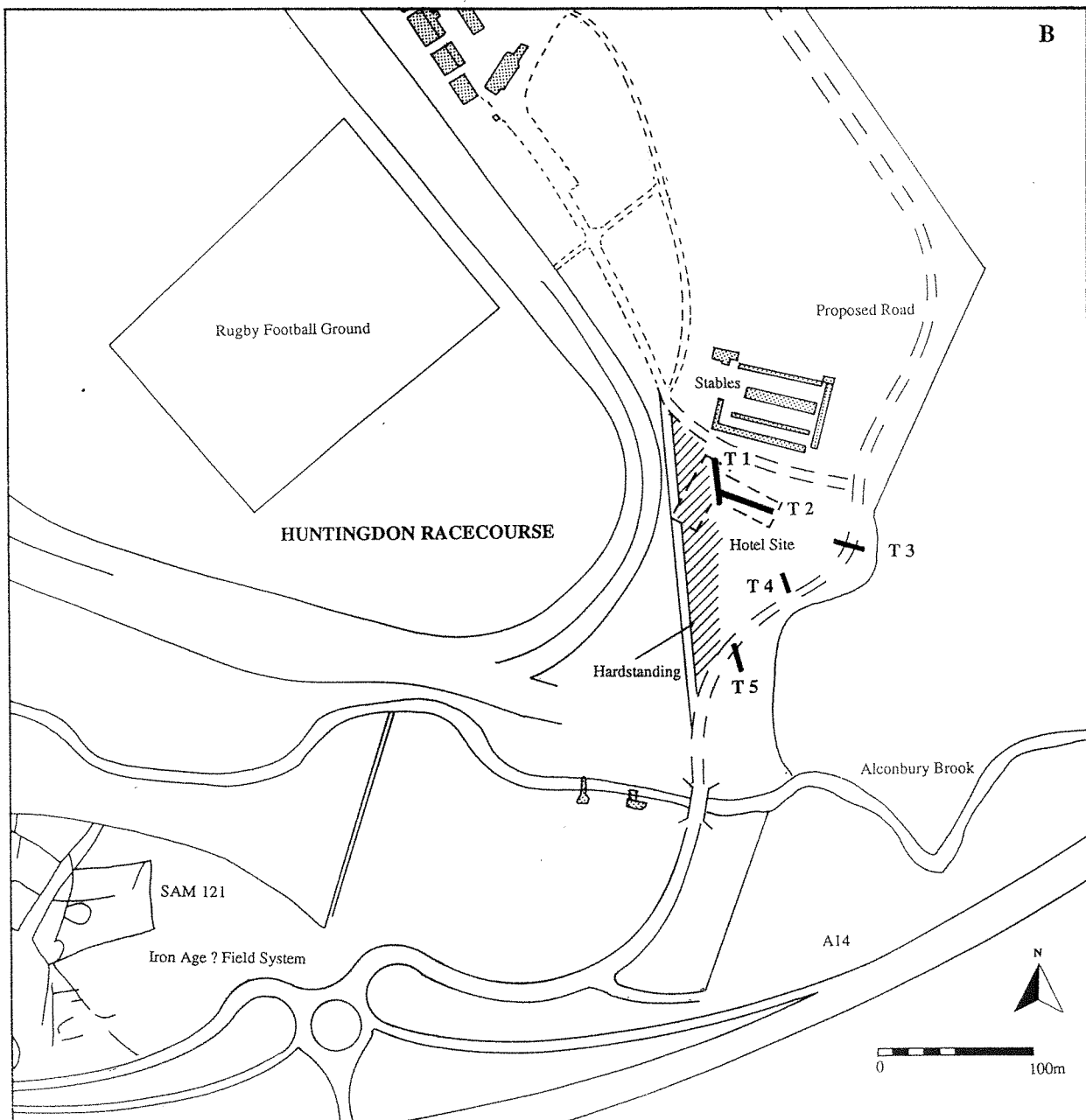


Figure 2 - Trench Locations

## 2 Topography and Geology

The area of the Racecourse lies on the North side of the small Alconbury Brook, a tributary of the Cambridgeshire Ouse (Figure 2). The geology of the site is defined on the 1:50,000 IGS map as alluvium over 1st terrace river gravels lying on an Oxford Clay base.

The area of the investigation is bounded to the East by the old course of the Alconbury Brook. The depth of the alluvium varies, increasing both towards the Northwest and East along the line of the old Brook (Figure 3).

## 3 Background

Brampton and its surroundings is an area rich in archaeological activity. A Scheduled Ancient Monument, located to the Southwest of the Racecourse (Figure 2), was revealed originally from Aerial Photography. It consists of a series of archaeological features interpreted as a group of Neolithic ritual monuments (including henges, a cursus and a long mortuary enclosure), Bronze Age rind-ditched burial monuments and Iron Age/Romano-British field systems.

Excavations South of the Thrapston road by D.A. White in 1966 (White 1969), revealed a triple ring-ditch which formed part of a rectilinear enclosure settlement. Discovered with these sites were cinerary urn and "maritime" beaker fragments which led Clark to argue for Early European Bronze Age contact (Clark in White 1969). Subsequent work to the Southwest of Thrapston Road (Malim & Mitchell 1993) uncovered an Iron Age settlement containing a round house surviving as features cut into the top of the gravel. This was associated with a contemporary ditch system and earlier parallel ditches which have been given a Neolithic date and interpreted as territorial boundary markers. All these features were sealed beneath alluvium. This alluvial cover has prevented the observation of archaeological features from the air.

In 1990-91 an investigation of a portion of the scheduled monument North of the Thrapston road (SAM 121 Figure 2) found evidence for a Neolithic Mortuary enclosure at the end of a cursus seen from aerial photography (Malim 1990). Further excavations in advance of road construction in the pasture field to the East, revealed Romano-British field ditches and agricultural processing areas, where archaeological remains had previously not been suspected (Malim 1990). Thus we know that archaeology does exist beneath the alluvial flood plain

From historical records it appears that the area under investigation has not been under the plough within the last century. This fact and the depth of alluvium has lead to the masking of any potential archaeology from all forms of observation except trenching. The field in question is delimited by the parish boundary which ran along the old line of the brook and survived as a minor field drain in 1842.

## 4 Methodology

Five trenches, totalling 120 metres, were opened using a mechanical excavator, with a 5ft toothless ditching bucket, under the supervision of an archaeologist. The trenches were located to investigate the area which would be disturbed by the development of the hotel and along the route of the proposed access road. Information supplied by the Client indicates that these locations are the only parts of the Brief Area (Hotel Site) that will receive development of a potentially damaging nature.

Trenches 1 and 2 were positioned under the hotel site, Trenches 3 and 4 along the access road and Trench 5 to the South of the development.

On the basis of the earlier work outlined in 3 above, expectations were that archaeological features were most likely to be found beneath the alluvium, cut into the gravels. Phases of activity between periods of alluviation, or since alluviation could not, however be ruled out. The removal of alluvium was closely observed as the machine opened trenches. Only when the archaeologist supervising was satisfied no archaeology existed, within the alluvium, were the trenches taken down to the working surface.

Once opened the trenches were cleaned by hand, photographed and planned, so that any features could be recorded and excavated using the standard techniques of the Archaeological Field Unit.

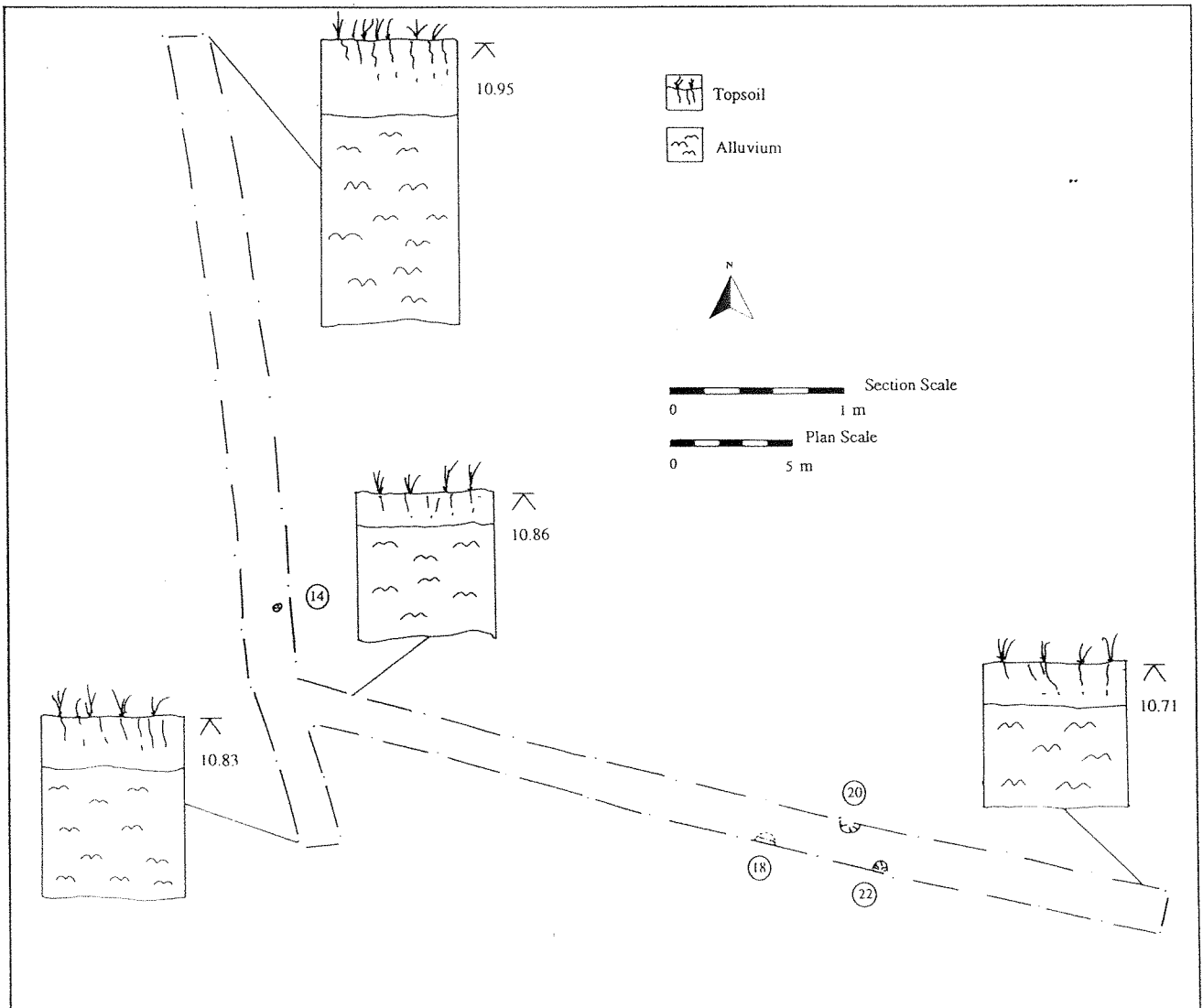


Figure 3 - Depth of Alluvium and Trench Plans 1 & 2



## 5 Results

In each trench, the topsoil was removed completely, the depth varied from 0.20m-0.45m. In each trench the topsoil overlay a light, yellowish brown silty clay alluvial deposit (deposit [2]), which in turn sealed the natural gravels (Figure 3). The alluvium appeared to be completely homogenous across all trenches excavated regardless of depth.

### Trenches 1 & 2 (Figure 3)

The depth of alluvium increased towards the North and West of the intersecting trenches (Figure 3) and the silty clay was very compacted in these areas. No artefacts were recovered from the machine excavated material. No features were observed within the alluvium, only one feature was identified in the gravel during the initial stages of cleaning [14]. After several days weathering three additional gravel filled features were revealed again cut into the natural [18], [20], [22]. After investigation these produced no dating evidence and appeared unconvincing, as archaeology, in excavation, suggesting the possibility that these were tree holes. The stakehole [14] was excavated, 0.52 long/0.24 wide/ 0.27 deep, and while producing charcoal did not produce any further information. The dark, grey, clay deposit [13] was sampled and removed for analysis.

### Trench 3

No archaeological features were uncovered in this trench, the machine was used to dig a sondage at the Eastern end of the trench through the alluvium, which went down to a depth of 1.75 metres (8.95 metres O.D). This sealed a rich dark grey organic layer (deposit [3]) above river and natural gravels. This may be interpreted as the final stages of the river action. Samples were taken of this deposit. Further action to study this material will be held over until the second stage of evaluation fieldwork has been completed. While this may form some the most important deposits within the area, the development will not cause disturbance at this depth and further investigation was not deemed necessary at this time within the scope of the Project Brief.

### Trench 4

The purpose of the trench was similar to Trench 3, again to investigate alluvium depth towards the old river course and sample any waterside archaeology. Again no traces of archaeology were recovered. A second sondage was excavated down to 9.00 metres O.D and at the base of the alluvium wood was discovered. This appeared to have not been worked and has been interpreted as *in situ* natural stream-side deposition.

### Trench 5

The final trench opened was aimed at investigating the area immediately to the South of the proposed access road. A single archaeological feature [12] was identified and excavation revealed it to be a shallow scoop 0.95m long/0.55m wide/ 0.15m deep, containing charcoal and a dark yellow brown silty sand (deposit [11]). The natural of Trench 5 consisted of a coarse orange sand (deposit [9]) above the gravels.

## 6 Conclusions

Considering the discoveries made from recent archaeological investigations in the area, the scarcity of remains is surprising (White 1969, Malim 1990 and Malim & Mitchell 1993).

There was no evidence of any archaeological features in the alluvium, which was not unexpected. Some previous work in the area has produced features within the alluvium (Trial trenches within old car park Southwest of the Alconbury Brook bridge and East of SAM 121). These were Roman in origin and were characterised by the associated artefacts appearing within the cuts (Robinson pers. comm.). These features occurred within an alluvial horizon which appeared to contained a much higher silt/clay ratio than was encountered.

It would seem that the survival of deposits relating to environmental conditions before alluviation form the most important data in the area. The preservation of wood and organic deposits could provide useful indications of pre-alluvial micro-topography. Within the scope of the development, however, these deposits will not be disturbed and thus do not affect the proposals.

Of the possible features that were recorded, only two appear to be certain [12] and [14], and these produced no artefactual or dating evidence. Similarly they do not provide an adequate sample for any interpretation of function to be made. It must be concluded that there is no substantial archaeological activity in the area sampled.

## 7 Recommendations

Although only a small percentage of the assessment area was investigated, the trenching covered the areas most likely to be affected by development. On the basis of the findings discussed here it does not appear that the proposed hotel development will disturb any substantial archaeological remains.

Any future work in nearby areas should continue to be conducted under archaeological supervision. The size of this assessment is not sufficient to draw recommendations for the wider areas archaeological potential. Larger scale investigations such as those at Brampton (Malim 1990) and Thrapston Road (Malim & Mitchell 1993), form better databases for development implications in the area.

## 8 Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank the Clients for their financial support of the project. Richard Thomas (Racecourse Manager), Julian Dingle (Daniel Smith Chartered Surveyors) and Stephen Bowley (John Phillips Consultancy) for their co-operation on the project. Dr Paul Spoerry, the Project Manager; Tim Malim for his advice on the area; Richard Heawood and Charles Evans for their hard work.

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## Appendix

### List of Contexts

Context	Description	Nature	Above	Below
1	Topsoil	Mid brown, silty clay	2	-
2	Alluvium	Light yellowish brown, silty clay	3,5,6,9,10,11, 13,17,19,21	1
3	Marsh soil (river bed)	Dark grey, sandy silt (Trench 3)	4	2
4	Poss. riverbed deposit	Grey, coarse sand (Trench 3)	5	3
5	Natural	Yellow, gravel 1st terrace	-	2,4,8,9,10, 15,17,19,21
6	Marsh soil ?(=3)	Dark grey, sandy silt (Trench 4)	7	2
7	Poss. riverbed deposit	Orange, coarse sand (Trench 4)	8	6
8	Poss. riverbed deposit (=4)	Grey, coarse sand (Trench 4)	5	7
9	Natural degraded gravel	Orange, coarse sand (Trench 5)	-	2,11
10	Natural	Blue, gravel	5	2
11	Fill of [12]	Dark yellowish brown, silty sand	12	2
12	Cut of scoop	- (Trench 5)	5	11
13	Upper fill of [14]	Dark grey, clay (inc. charcoal)	15	2
14	Cut of stakehole	Irregular sides (Trench 1)	5	15
15	Lower fill of [14]	Yellowish brown, silty clay	14	13
16	Timber in Trench 4	Wood in riverbed	6	2
17	Fill of [18]	Mid brown, silty clay	18	2
18	Cut of pit ?	Probable tree hole (Trench 1)	5	17
19	Fill of [20]	Dark yellow brown, sand silt clay	20	2
20	Cut of pit ?	Probable tree hole (Trench 1)	5	19
21	Fill of [22]	Dark greyish brown, silty sand	22	2
22	Cut of pit ?	Probable tree hole (Trench 1)	5	21

## Glossary of Archaeological Terms

**Artefact:** Any object made by people. Generally, this word is used for finds such as pottery, stone tools, or metal objects, but it can be used in a much wider context in that the landscape we have today is a product of human activity and is thus an artefact itself.

**Bronze Age:** Prehistoric period c. 2000 - 700 BC when bronze was used for many types of tools and weapons.

**Cropmarks:** Archaeological features below the ploughsoil can affect the growth of sensitive crops through moisture retention or loss. For example, the growth of cereal crops over buried ditches or pits will encourage rapid growth leading to tall, dark coloured plants, whereas walls and roads will lead to stunting and faster yellowing of the crop. These discrepancies in crop growth can be easily detected from the air, and by taking photographs the cropmark patterns can be plotted onto maps and given provisional interpretation.

**Cursus:** A linear feature of Neolithic date formed by a bank and ditch on both sides, possible functions suggested for them have been as trackways, horse racing tracks and ritual processional ways.

**Enclosures:** An area defined by a continuous surrounding ditch. These may be enclosures around human settlements, fields, or paddocks for stock. Rectilinear enclosures are ones with straight sides and corners, whilst curvilinear enclosures are ones with rounded sides.

**Fieldwalking:** Technique of archaeological survey. Walking over ploughed and weathered soil, an experienced observer can collect many ancient artefacts, and by plotting the distribution of such find spots on maps an idea of the use of the landscape can be built up for each period of the past.

**Henge:** See below, hengiform monument.

**Hengiform monument:** A feature which has the form of a henge, i.e. a circular area with opposed entrances formed by a bank and ditch, the bank of which is outside the ditch and, therefore unlikely to be a defensive earthwork. Some of these characteristics are lacking even in 'true' henges and a hengiform monument may grade into the ring ditch feature type, being, however, generally larger than them.

**Iron Age:** Prehistoric period c. 700 BC - AD 43 when iron was used extensively for tools and weapons. The period traditionally ends with the Roman invasions of AD 43 but in fact there was a considerable time of adjustment after this date when the Iron Age way of life continued with little change from Roman influence.

**Natural:** The local subsoil that is unaltered, in nature and location, by human activity.

**Neolithic:** Prehistoric period c. 3500 - 2000 BC when farming and pottery were introduced. Stone tools of fine workmanship were produced and exchanged over long distances, but before the use of metals.

**Posthole:** A hole dug to receive a post. They can also result from driving posts into the ground. The latter, however, do not have distinct fills such as packing

and a post pipe. A post pipe is the fill of a posthole which formed in the place of a removed post.

**Roman:** Historic period AD 43 - 410 when much of Britain was part of the Roman empire. The term Romano-British is now widely used to describe the people of this period, as few were Roman themselves, but they were a provincial manifestation of the empire developing in a unique way. AD 410 was the date the legions were withdrawn, but the Romano-British culture continued for some time into the 5th century in tandem with Anglo-Saxon migration.

**Ring-ditch:** A continuous circular ditch which is all that remains of a ploughed out round barrow, or the drainage ditch (eavesdrip gully) that surrounded a round-house normally of an Iron Age date.

**Round barrow:** A Bronze Age burial mound formed by heaping up earth over a central burial. They have several forms, including numbers of encircling ditches and can have many burials in them. The first burial is known as the primary burial, subsequent ones are referred to as secondary burials. It has been suggested that these burial mounds are a way of marking tribal territories, and they are often placed in prominent locations. They can occur in clusters known as 'barrow cemeteries'.

**Sites and Monuments Record (SMR):** A computer and paper database maintained by the County Archaeology Office of all known historic sites and individual findspots. This system can be applied in response to any query concerning the heritage of the county, e.g. the archaeology of a piece of land can be ascertained in response to a planning application and the archaeological requirement if needed can then be stated by the County Archaeologist.



Archaeological Field Unit  
Fulbourn Community Centre  
Haggis Gap  
Fulbourn  
Cambridge CB1 5HD  
Tel (0223) 881614  
Fax (0223) 881678



Cambridgeshire  
County Council

Archaeology

The Archaeology Office  
Rural Management  
Department of Property  
Shire Hall, Castle Hill  
Cambridge CB3 0AP  
Tel (0223) 317312  
Fax (0223) 317341