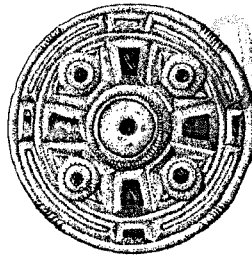


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Archaeological Field Unit

## Archaeological Evaluations at Crosshall Road, Eaton Ford, St. Neots

S.N.Kemp

1996

Cambridgeshire County Council

Report No. A82

*Commissioned By Smith and Farrer Properties Ltd*

**Archaeological Evaluations at  
Crosshall Road, Eaton Ford, St. Neots.**

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1996

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## **SUMMARY**

*During October 1995 the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council excavated six evaluation trenches at Crosshall Road, Eaton Ford, St Neots (TL 1787/6018). Work was undertaken on behalf of Smith and Farrer Properties Ltd in accordance with the archaeological brief supplied by the County Archaeology Office, Cambridgeshire County Council.*

*The development site lies on the western side of the River Great Ouse close to St Neots Bridge. The site of the medieval priory and market lay on the eastern bank of the river. The location of the site offered the potential for the preservation of palaeoenvironmental remains and organic artefacts of prehistoric, Roman and medieval date.*

*The archaeological trenching programme exposed three ditches all of which cut through the alluvial deposits. Though no finds were recovered these archaeological features are probably post-medieval, or more recent in date given their stratigraphic position within the alluvial sequence. Neither of these ditches proved to run the full extent of the site and down towards the river, a drainage function can therefore be excluded. The ditch in Trench 4 (17) may represent a boundary ditch, probably of a field, as no suggestion of nearby settlement was encountered.*

*Two features were recognised in Trench 3 (22 and 30), these do not extend into adjacent trenches, feature 22 was found to terminate in this trench. Given the probable recent date of these features and their penetration into the gravels it is possible that these were quarry trenches associated with the extraction of gravels for road building and construction.*

*No structural remains were associated with the earthwork platform lying in the centre of the field. During trenching a ridge, formed of upcast from the quarry trenches, was recognised as running towards this platform. It is likely that this central platform results from the dumping of soil in the area, and may also have been associated with quarrying activities. No historical information has been found to support this interpretation, although, local residents, remember similar remains surviving to the south of this area.*

*The results of the evaluation trenching indicate that this area is of low archaeological potential.*

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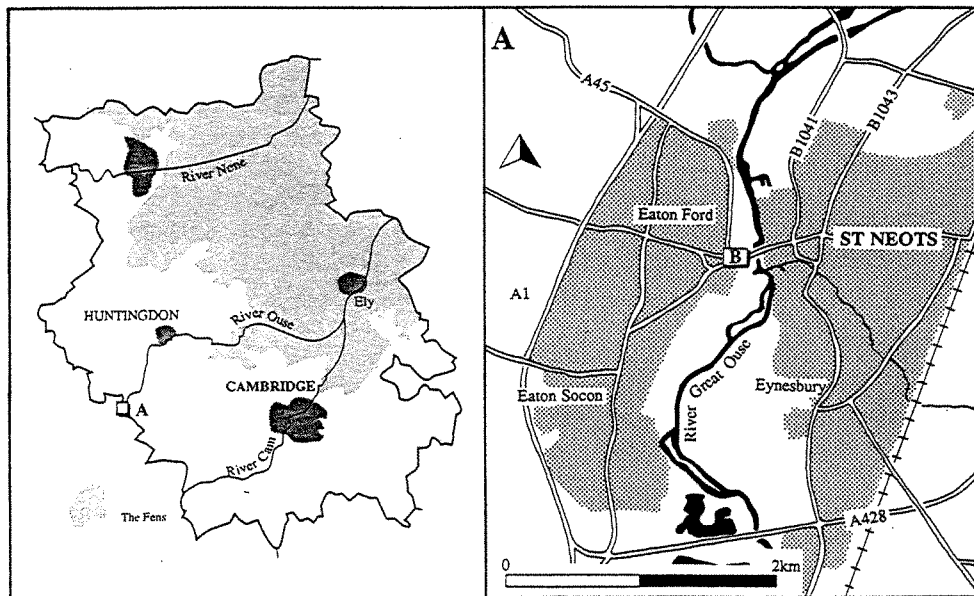
# ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATIONS AT CROSSHALL ROAD, EATON FORD, ST NEOTS.

NGR TL 1787 6018

## 1 INTRODUCTION

During October 1995 the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council undertook evaluation trenching at Crosshall Road, Eaton Ford, St Neots. Work was carried out on behalf of Smith and Farrer Properties Ltd. in accordance with the archaeological brief supplied by the Development Control, County Archaeology Office, Cambridgeshire County Council.

The development site lies on the western bank of the River Great Ouse at the junction of Crosshall Road and St Neots Road within Eaton Ford. The market place of St Neots lies three hundred metres away on the eastern side of St Neots Bridge (Fig. 1).



*Figure 1 Site Location Plan*

## 2 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

The development site lies on the third terrace river gravels on the edge of the present floodplain. The 1:50,000 geological map for the area (BGS Sheet 187) indicates that this area is alluviated, and this was verified during trenching. The terrace gravels formed a slight ridge running north to south through the development site, with the depth of alluvium increasing eastwards.

The site lies at about 14m OD with the land rising gradually westwards away from the river. The settlements of Eaton Ford and St Neots mostly lie above the 15m contour.

The site is presently under grass, and was for sometime maintained as pasture. Earthworks consisting of a slight ridge and large platform lie in the centre of the development site.

### 3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Eaton Ford lies on the western banks of the Great River Ouse two miles to the northeast of Eaton Socon. The Victoria and County History of Bedford considers Eaton Ford as a hamlet of Eaton Socon, however, today the hamlet is practically a suburb of St Neots which lies on the opposite bank of the River Great Ouse (Page 1972, 189).

The closest archaeological remains to the development site recorded by the Sites and Monuments Record for Cambridgeshire (SMR) lie within St Neots on the eastern bank of the Great River Ouse. Here Iron Age, Roman and Saxon artefacts have been recovered (e.g. SMR 00500, 00548, 08405). St Neots also contains important medieval remains associated with the development of the priory and market.

Prehistoric artefacts indicative of an as yet unexplained prehistoric presence have been found within St Neots. To the south of St Neots, around Eynesbury, occur cropmarks of Neolithic and Bronze Age funerary monuments on the river terrace (Kemp 1995, 1996, Oakey 1995).

Recent fieldwork and research suggest intensive Romano-British exploitation of the area probably comprising of farming communities dispersed throughout a cultivated landscape (Alexander 1993, Spoerry 1995).

St Neots Priory is believed to have been founded in the 10th century by Ethewold and refounded after 1066 and before 1086 (Haigh 1988, 74). In the reign of Henry I the monks were granted an annual three day fair (Haigh 1988, 75). The Victoria County Histories links the rising prosperity of the St Neots settlement to the ford or ferry and later bridge across the Ouse (Page 1972, 337). The bridge, formerly known as High Bridge, is known from 1180 and appears to have remained as a timber structure until at least 1538. It is likely that in 1616/17 that the stone arches were built, probably using stone from the priory (RCHM 1926, 224).

### 4 METHODOLOGY

Six trenches of varying length and up to 2m wide were machine excavated within the proposed development area (Figure 2). The features found in Trench 3 were excavated by machine and recorded in section. Limited hand excavation of the ditch observed in Trench 4 was undertaken because the ditch was only recognised where the ditch cut into the terrace gravels. Recognition of the ditch was initially hampered by the similarity between feature fill and alluvium. Trench sections were cleaned to confirm the absence of other archaeological features within all trenches. An earthwork platform lying central to the site was specifically targeted with trenches.

All exposed archaeological deposits were recorded to the standards of the Archaeological Field Unit's single context recording system. All site records

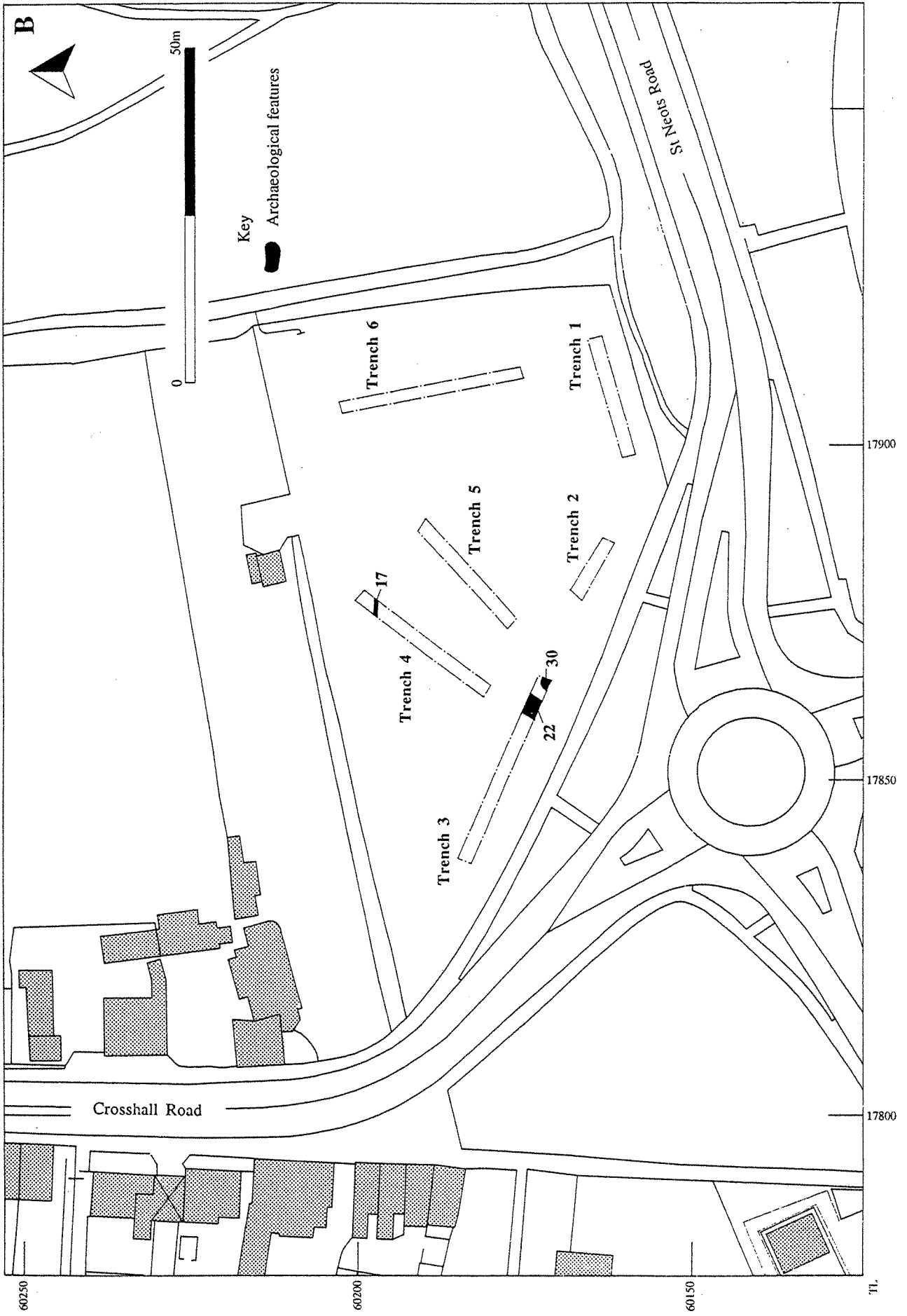


Figure 2 Trench Location Plan

and artefacts are presently held at the Archaeological Field Unit's Fulbourn Offices.

## 5 RESULTS

### **Trench 1**

Length 37m Depth to Natural 0.95

Trench 1 was located on the southern side of the development area, running parallel to the field boundary and St Neots Bridge (Fig.2). No archaeological remains were present. The terrace gravels were overlain by three units of alluvium. The upper unit was found to contain the occasional fragment of butchered cow bone.

### **Trench 2**

Length 10m Depth to Natural 1.02m

Trench 2 was located parallel to the field boundary on the south-western side of the development site (Fig.2). No archaeological remains were present.

### **Trench 3**

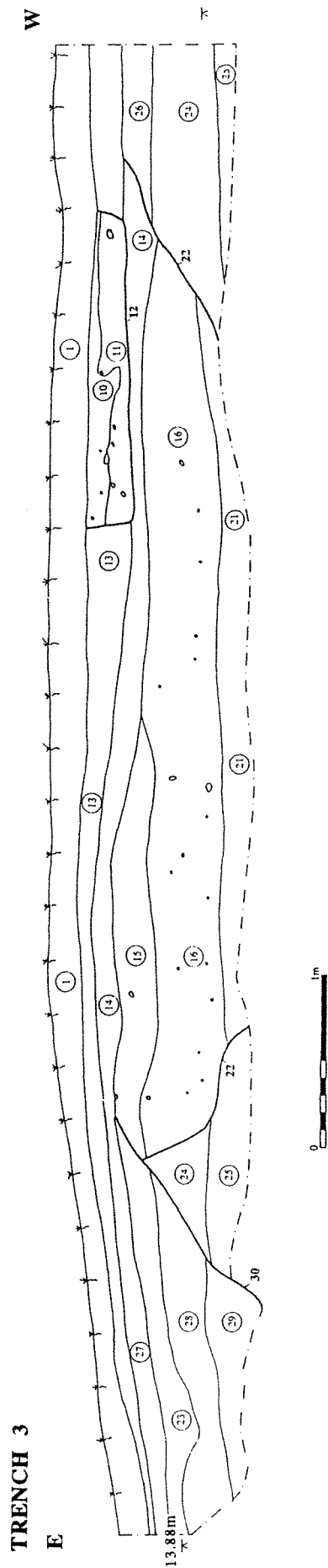
Length 30m Depth to Natural 0.95m

Trench 3 as located in line with Trench 2 and running parallel with the south-western field boundary (Fig.2). At the southern end of this trench, two intercutting features, one approximately 2.90m wide (30) and the other about 6.10m wide (22) were recognised. The narrower of these two (30) terminated within the trench, the other extended beyond, but not into Trench 4. Both features were cut from directly below the present topsoil. Feature 22 was cut by a later pit (12) which contained degraded sandstone blocks and some roof tile.

### *Feature numbers and Descriptions*

- 12 Feature 12 is a pit or shallow ditch 1.86m in width and approximately 0.29m in depth (Fig 3). The feature extended 1.50m into the trench. The full extent of the feature is not known as the feature extended southwards beyond the trench edge. The feature was filled with yellowish brown (10YR 4/4) to brown (10YR 5/3) sandy silts with degraded sandstone, brick and strips of iron. This is the most recent feature in the sequence within this trench cutting through the fills and capping layers of features 30 and 22.
- 30 Ditch of over 2.90m wide and over 0.98m in depth (Fig. 3). This feature terminates within Trench 3. Excavation was incomplete as the base of the feature lay below the water table. The feature is filled with dark yellowish brown (10YR 3/4 to 4/4) clayey silts with occasional subangular and sub-rounded flint pebbles. This feature cuts feature 22 and cuts from just below the topsoil indicating a fairly recent date for its excavation. Two small abraded late medieval and post-medieval sherds of pottery were recovered from its fill.





**Figure 3** Trench 3. North facing section through features 12, 22 and 30.

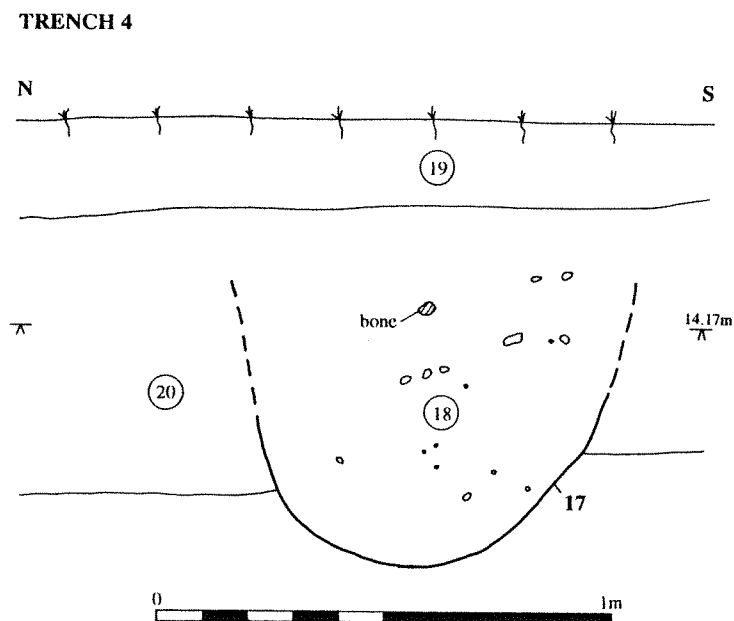
- 22 Feature of 6.10m wide and over 0.90m in depth (Fig.3). This feature extends northwards beyond Trench 3, but, not as far as Trench 4. Excavation was incomplete as the base of the feature lay below the water table. The feature is filled with dark yellowish brown clayey silts showing slight normal grading to a sandy silt at the top of the sequence. Stone content varies between 1 and 5% and is largely composed of flint pebbles of up to 0.10m in maximum dimension. This feature is cut by feature 30, and is cut from just below the topsoil. No finds were recovered.

**Trench 4**

Length 30m Depth to Natural 0.82m

Located within the centre of the development area crossing a large earthwork platform. A single archaeological feature was recognised (17). This was a ditch of 0.85m across and 0.67m in depth which was cut from within the alluvium (Fig. 4). No finds were recovered.

- 17 East to west orientated ditch of 0.85m wide and extending beyond the width of the trench, however, the ditch does not extend into Trench 6. The ditch was at least 0.60m in depth (Fig.4). The fill of the ditch was a dark yellowish brown sandy clayey silt. Due to the similarity between the fill and alluvium it proved to be very difficult to be precise about the height from which the feature was cut, however, it probably proves that alluvial events occurred after the initial digging of this ditch.



*Figure 4 Trench 4. Section through ditch 17.*

### **Trench 5**

Length 20m Depth to Natural 0.90m

Located parallel to, and east of Trench 4, crossing the earthwork platform (Fig. 2). No archaeological features were observed.

### **Trench 6**

Length 30m Depth to Natural 1.20m

Located on the eastern side of the development site, orientated north to south parallel with the eastern field boundary (Fig. 2). No archaeology was present.

## **6 DISCUSSION**

Machine trenching showed that the terrace gravels were overlain by up to 0.90m of alluvium. Alluviation along the Ouse Valley is believed to be a post Neolithic phenomena associated with anthropogenic activities; woodland clearance, agriculture and alterations to the river system, and climatic fluctuations which entailed periods of increased precipitation (Jones and Keen 1994). Archaeology was only present within the upper part of the alluvial sequence suggesting that these archaeological features were excavated during, and subsequent to, one of the more recent alluvial events.

The earliest archaeological feature within the development area is likely to be ditch 17, unfortunately no datable artefactual material has been recovered from this feature. The absence of the ditch from Trench 6 shows that it does not continue down to the river, which may exclude a drainage function for this feature. This ditch may have been used as a field boundary, which was presumably some distance from settlement as no finds were recovered. The cut to this feature proved to be difficult to discern as it was disguised by both a fill which was very similar to the alluvium through which the ditch was cut, and worm action which disrupted the upper 0.40m of the soil profile. No flow structures or changes in sedimentation exist within the lower ditch fills this suggests that low flow velocities and alluvial sedimentation were possibly a feature of ditch infilling.

The two archaeological features (22 and 30) which occur at the eastern end of Trench 3 do not continue into adjacent trenches. Feature 22 terminated within the trench. The width, discontinuous nature of these features, and the penetration of these features into the gravels may indicate quarrying adjacent to this area. Although no historical data has been found to support this interpretation, local residents remember similar earthwork remains lying to the south of the development area earlier this century. These features appear to be much later in date than 17 as they were found to contain the occasional tile fragment as well as abraded medieval and post-medieval pottery; no finds were recovered from 17. There is also very little evidence for earthworm activity below the topsoil above features 22 and 30, whilst elsewhere the upper alluvial sequence including the upper fills of ditch 17, have been heavily affected by worm action.

## CONCLUSIONS

The trenching programme exposed three features all of which cut through the alluvial deposits, indicating that 17 is probably of a medieval or post-medieval date, 22 and 30 are probably modern. These features appear to represent two different phases of anthropogenic activity ditch 17, probably represents a field boundary whilst 22 and 30 represent quarrying activities which were restricted to the southwest side of the development site.

The evaluation has shown that the development area has minimal archeological potential.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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