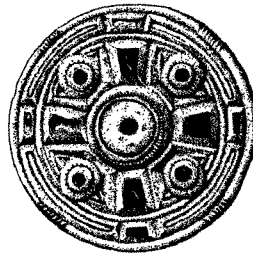


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Archaeological Field Unit

High Barns, Ely, an Archaeological Evaluation.

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1996

Cambridgeshire County Council

Report No. A87

Commissioned By Hereward Housing Association Ltd.

High Barns, Ely, an Archaeological Evaluation.

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SUMMARY

Between the 24th and 30th of January 1996 the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council undertook field evaluations, which included trenching, on a site adjacent to Larkfield Road, Ely.

Four archaeological ditch alignments were encountered during the course of these evaluations. The earliest remains in Trench 4 were the north-south orientated ditches which were cut by an east-west alignment of ditches. The north-south orientated ditches run down slope, and may have had a drainage function. The east-west ditches traverse the slope suggesting that they may have functioned as boundaries. Two other ditches were present in the evaluation trenches; ditch 4 a northwest-southeast orientated ditch in Trench 1 and ditch 21, a northeast-southwest orientated ditch in Trench 5. Excavation of ditch 4 recovered a small piece of Roman pottery.

The very small quantities of pottery within the development site (verified by spoil scanning) and the absence of other types of archaeological finds and features suggest that the site is at some distance from any settlement or occupation area. The combination of pottery and historical data suggest that these ditches are likely to be of Roman or Saxon periods particularly as none of the these ditch alignments continued into the existing field system or are marked on the earlier maps for this area.

Traces of the twentieth century allotments were recognised during the course of this work. They lie near the centre of the field and consist of a single ditch with a parallel alignment of post-holes.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Between the 24th and 30th of January 1996 the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council undertook an archaeological evaluation of a site adjacent to Larkfield Road, Ely which has been proposed for residential development. The evaluation was undertaken in accordance with the 'Brief' prepared by the County Archaeology Office; Development Control. The archaeological evaluation comprised of trenching, historical and aerial photographic research.

The development proposal for the evaluated area includes the construction of 44 semi-detached houses with garages and an electricity sub-station within a 13,678 sq. m area. Ground works will also include the laying of tarmac roads, the excavation of a balancing pond and planting of trees.

2 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

The site lies on the junction between the Lower Greensands and glacial Boulder Clays on the northern side of Ely. During trenching the geological sediments proved to be very variable, being largely composed of glacial sediments and clays.

The site lies at 20m OD with the land dipping down northwards and eastwards towards Queen Adelaide and Waterden Fen which lie at 1m OD. About 200m to the north of the site lies a former stream channel demarcated by dark soils. The course of this channel is presently occupied by a drainage ditch which drains eastwards towards Prickwillow Road and Roswell Pits. The conjunction of such channels with the Fens further to the east may have acted as a focus for settlements which exploited both the Fenland upland landscapes. Such channels may also offer good preservational environments for organic artefacts and palaeoenvironmental data.

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Archaeological remains listed on the Sites and Monuments Record all lie at over 250m from the development area. Prehistoric remains include a Beaker burial (SMR 06136) found to the north of the evaluation area in 1958 (Trump 1959). In 1992 an archaeological evaluation undertaken by the Archaeological Field Unit, to the northwest of this site, recovered sherds of Iron Age pottery, but no evidence for any associated settlement (Haley 1992). An Anglo-Saxon cemetery (SMR 02074) which was excavated in 1959 lies 300m to the west of the development area.

The evaluation area lies outside of the medieval and post-medieval core of Ely. It is likely that High Barns was enclosed during the reign of Henry VIII (1509-1547) and was probably used for agricultural purposes during the medieval period (Palmer 1937).

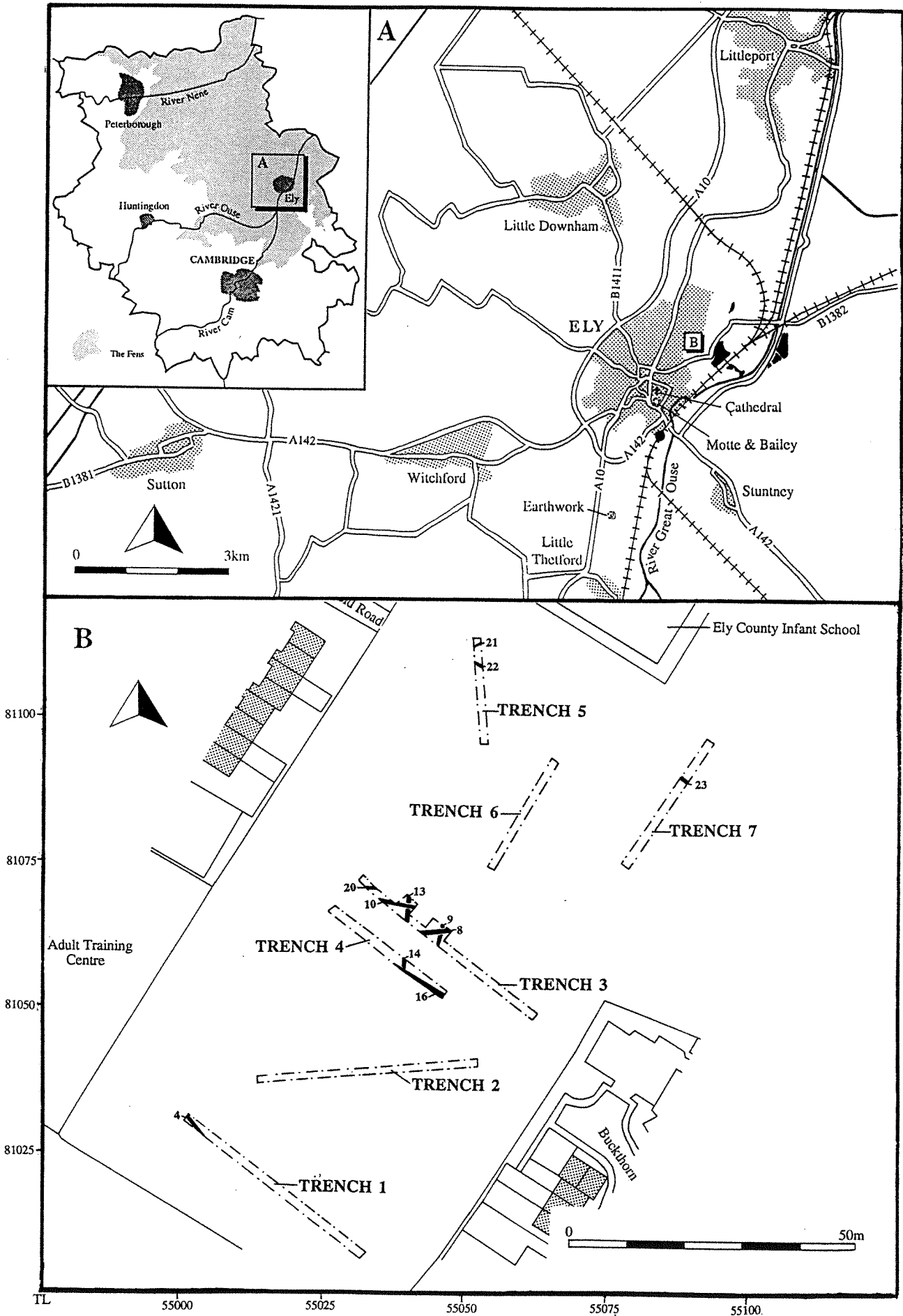


Figure 1 Location Plan

Close to the proposed development site are the remains of a mill mound which are described as "The Old Mill of the Bishop" in the early 15th century (Calender of Patent Rolls, Henry V MEM5-1, 191)

4 AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHY

A programme of aerial photographic research was undertaken by Air Photo Services as part of this archaeological evaluation. Aerial photographs from the Cambridge University Collection of Aerial Photographs and the Cambridgeshire Record Office were examined.

Specialist oblique photographs taken in 1952 of a cropmark enclosure 300m to the north-west of the site show the assessment area distantly in the background. In addition vertical aerial photographs show the field and its surrounding area on seven dates between 1946 and 1988. No archaeological remains were identified during the analysis of vertical or oblique photographs. The poor cropmark response has been attributed to the soil type (clays) and the management of the land (allotments) by Palmer (1996).

4 METHODOLOGY

Seven trenches totalling 269.65m in length and covering 3.5% of the evaluation area were machine excavated. Trenches were subsequently recorded in plan and features excavated where appropriate. A single context recording system was utilised with plans and sections drawn at 1:20 and 1:10 respectively. The site survey was undertaken using a total station with internal data logger. Trenches were photographed following soil stripping, after which plan and section photographs were taken of excavated features. Twenty percent of the machine excavated topsoil and subsoil removed from the seven trenches were scanned for the retrieval of artefacts. These machine excavated deposits and all features suspected to be of archaeological origin were scanned with a metal detector prior to further investigation.

5 RESULTS

Contexts have been described in Appendix A.

Trench 1

The geology within Trench 1 was found to be very variable consisting of Boulder Clay and gravels which were cut by periglacial gulleys filled with red/yellow brown sandy clays. These clays lay at a depth of 0.62m in the northwest and 0.43m in the southeast and were overlain by 0.20m of natural sub-soil; a B horizon.

A single northwest to southeast orientated ditch (4) was located on the western side of the trench and contained a single sherd of Roman pottery. The ditch was

0.55 wide and cut to a depth of 0.54m through the natural sub-soil and contained a single sherd of Roman pottery.

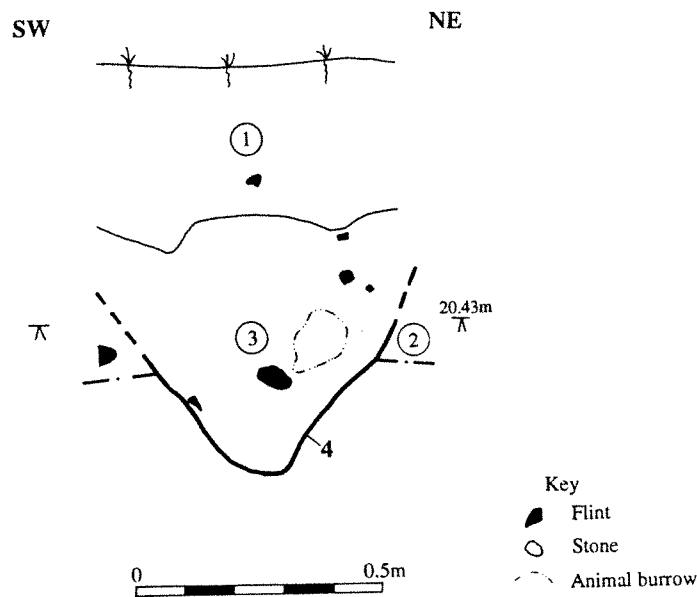


Figure 2 Section through ditch 4.

Trench 2

The geology within Trench 2 consisted of Chalky Boulder Clay which was cut by periglacial channels filled with red/yellow brown sandy clays. The Boulder Clays lay at a depth of 0.65m and were overlain by 0.36m of natural sub-soil. No archaeology was encountered.

Trench 3

The geology in Trench 3 consists of Chalky Boulder Clay with flints cut by periglacial channels filled with red/yellow sandy clays. The Boulder Clays lay at a depth of 0.42m and were overlain by 0.17m of natural sub-soil.

Five archaeological ditches were encountered lying on two different alignments. Three of these ditches are orientated east to west (8, 10, 20) and cut two north-south orientated ditches (9 and 12). All five ditches are between 0.50 and 0.77m across with a depth of up to 0.42m cutting through the natural sub-soil. No finds were recovered from any of the excavated segments.

Trench 4

The geology in Trench 4 consists of Chalky Boulder Clay with flints which is cut by periglacial channels filled with red/yellow sandy clays. The Boulder Clay lies at a depth of 0.50m and was overlain by 0.25m of the natural subsoil.

The only feature of archaeological interest was a single north-south orientated linear ditch (14) which continued in to Trench 3. A modern east-west orientated ditch (16), ran parallel to at least seven post-holes containing wooden stakes (18)

indicative of a fence line. No finds were recovered from any of these features. This modern ditch and fence are probably related to the twentieth century allotments.

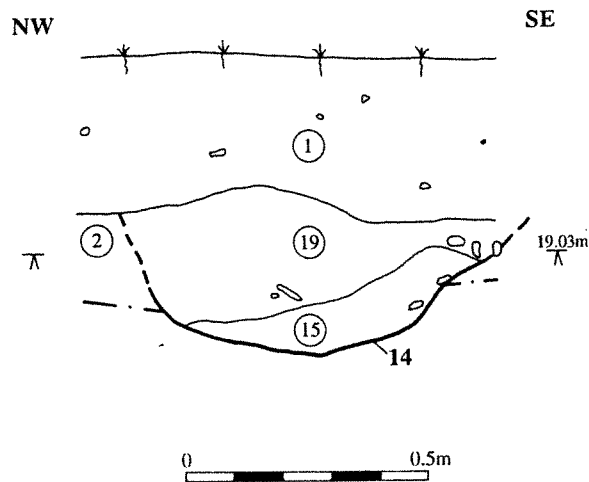


Figure 3 Section through ditch 14.

Trench 5

The geology in Trench 5 consists of natural grey blue clays with occasional chalk fragments and seams of sand, the clay deposit becomes homogeneous with depth. This deposit proved to be greater than 1.5m in depth. Natural clays are overlain by 0.25m of subsoil and 0.30m of topsoil.

Two features were recognised, one of which was a modern pipe trench, 22, running northwest-southeast, which was also encountered in Trench 7. The other feature, 21, was orientated northeast-southwest and contained a fill similar to those from excavated features within Trench 4. No finds were recovered from this trench.

Trench 6

The geology consists of natural grey blue clays with occasional chalk fragments and seams of sand in the upper horizon of the deposits. These clays are over 1.50m in depth. Natural occurs at a depth of 0.45m and is overlain by 0.22m of natural subsoil. No archaeological features were encountered.

Trench 7

The geology consists grey blue clays as in Trench 5 and 6. Natural occurs at a depth of 0.50m and is overlain by 0.30m of natural sub-soil.

Apart from a ceramic and a plastic land drain the only other feature encountered, 24, was the continuation of the modern ditch recognised in Trench 5 (22).

6 DISCUSSION

Five ditch alignments were encountered during the course of these evaluations (Fig. 2). In Trench 1 a single ditch running northwest-southeast was partially excavated. In Trench 3 two parallel ditches aligned north-south and three non-parallel east-west orientated ditches were revealed. Two of the east-west ditches (8 and 10) were observed to cut the north-south ditches (9 and 12). In Trench 4 was a north-south orientated ditch (14) which is presumed to be a continuation of ditch 12. Ditch 14, did not continue into Trench 2 (Fig.1). A modern infilled ditch (16), with parallel post alignment (18) which ran east-west was also found in Trench 4. In Trench 5 two alignments were recognised; a north-south orientated ditch (21) of probable ancient origin, and a northwest to southeast orientation which is of recent origin (22). In Trench 7 a single ditch was recorded which is likely to be a continuation of 22.

The fills of the archaeological features were similar although distinctions could be made between the north-south (9, 13 and 14), east-west northeast-southwest (8, 10, 20, 23), and the modern ditches (16, 22 and 23).on the basis soil characteristics such as colour and matrix. This may suggest different functions or source of sediments, but may also result from differences in the date of infilling. The analysis of cut relationships during the course of these excavations confirmed that these ditches alignments were cut at different dates.

The north-south orientated ditches run down slope and appear to have been excavated from the break of slope which occurs close to Trench 3 at 19m OD. This may indicate that these ditches had a drainage function. The east-west ditches traverse the slope suggesting that they may have functioned as boundaries at a later date. The sediments within these ditches are indicative of low velocity sedimentation; the silts have probably been washed in from ditch edges and adjacent fields. This is supported by the symmetry of infilling and the virtual homogeneity of fills, with only very gradual variations in sedimentation being detected. Commonly the edges of features were blurred in the subsoil zone, this may be the result of a combination of factors which include bioturbation and sourcing of sediments; the subsoil and original topsoil were the probable sources of the ditch fill.

A single sherd of Roman pottery was found within the development site (verified by spoil scanning) and the absence of archaeological features other than ditches suggest that the site is at some distance from any settlement. These ditches remained undated, but given that their alignments do not correlate with the enclosure boundaries they are certainly ancient, and are probably of a Roman or Saxon date.

7 CONCLUSION

Archaeological evaluations which have included trenching, aerial photographic and historic research has shown that the development will not affect any significant archaeological deposits.

Trenching has shown the presence of drainage and boundary ditches within the area which probably reflect an agricultural landuse. Traces of modern allotment boundaries were also present.

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I would also like to thank Spencer Cooper and Wendy Wilson whose help and enthusiasm were particularly appreciated in the freezing conditions experienced during the course of the fieldwork. This project was managed by Ben Robinson, and Melodie Paice prepared the illustrations.

This work was undertaken in response to the Brief prepared by The County Archaeology Office; Development Control and in accordance with Specification written by Nial Oakey of the Archaeological Field Unit, Cambridgeshire County Council.

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APPENDIX A: Feature Description

Context No.	Trench	Type	Description
1	All	Layer	Topsoil
2	All	Layer	Subsoil/Natural
3	1	Fill to 4	Brown (10YR 4/3) clayey sandy silt with occasional (10%) subangular and rounded flint and chalk up to 0.08m in maximum dimension. Also the very occasional fragment of sandstone, mica and flecks of charcoal. A single small, well abraded sherd of Roman colour coat was recovered from the excavated segment.
4	1	Cut of Ditch	Linear northwest-southeast orientated ditch with uneven rounded sides and base. Cuts down through 2, although the edges of the feature are indistinct above the natural. 0.62m in width and 0.54m in depth. Filled by 3
6	3	Fill to 8	Dark yellowish brown (10YR 4/4) clayey silts with occasional (15%) subangular and subrounded flint and chalk inclusions.
7	3	Fill to 9	Yellowish brown (10YR 5/4) clayey sands with occasional (10%) inclusions of subangular flint and chalk.
8	3	Cut of Ditch	Linear east-west orientated ditch. The eastern side of the ditch was concave, whilst the northern was vertical, the base was uneven. 0.70m wide and 0.32m in depth. Filled by 6
9	3	Cut of Ditch	Linear north-south orientated ditch with vertical sides and concave base. 0.60m wide and 0.24m in depth. Filled by 7.
10	3	Cut of Ditch	Linear east-west orientated ditch with concave sides and base. 0.50m in width and 0.30m in depth. Filled by 11.
11	3	Fill to 10	Brown (10YR 5/3) sandy silty clay with occasional (15%) inclusions of subangular flint up to 0.08m in maximum dimension.
12	3	Cut of Ditch	Linear north-south orientated ditch with irregular, concave sides and base. 0.70m in width and 0.45m in depth. Filled by 13. Feature extends into Trench 4.
13	3	Fill to 12	Yellowish brown (10YR 5/8) sandy silty clay with occasional angular and subrounded flint up to 0.03m in maximum dimension.
14	4	Cut of Ditch	Linear north-south orientated ditch with concave sides and flat base. 0.77m in width and 0.36m in depth. Filled with 15 and 19. Feature extends into Trench 3.
15	4	Fill to 14	Yellowish brown (10YR 5/8) sandy silty clay with occasional (5-10%) flint, and very occasional (1-5%) subrounded chalk. Clasts are upto 0.05m in maximum dimension. Basal fill to ditch 14.
16	4	Unexcavated Modern Feature	Modern ditch running east-west across eastern side of Trench 4. No finds recovered.
17	4	Fill to 16	Yellowish brown (10R 5/6) silty clay and sand with occasional (10-15%) subangular chalk and 5-10% flint. Clasts are upto 0.05m in maximum dimension.
18	4	Unexcavated Modern Post-hole Complex	East-west alignment of seven post-holes running parallel with feature 16. each post-hole was square in plan (0.30 x 0.30m) and contained a wooden stake of about 0.10m across.
19	4	Fill to 14	Yellowish brown (10YR 5/6) sandy clayey silts with very occasional (1-5%) sub-rounded flint. Clss up to 0.02m in maximum dimension.
20	3	Unexcavated Feature	Linear east-west orientated ditch containing brown (10YR 5/3) sandy silty clay with occasional (10-15%) inclusions of flint.
21	5	Unexcavated Feature	Linear northeast-southwest orientated ditch containing brown (10YR 5/3) sandy silty clay with occasional (10%) inclusions of flint.
22	5	Unexcavated Modern Feature	Linear northwest-southeast orientated ditch. same as feature 23 in Trench 7.
23	7	Unexcavated Modern Feature	Linear northwest-southeast orientated ditch. same as feature 22 in Trench 5.



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