

Archaeological Field Unit

An Archaeological Recording Brief at Central Farm, Reach

John Cane

1998

Cambridgeshire County Council

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Commissioned By N. Day

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SUMMARY

Archaeological recording during the excavation of foundation trenches for a new agricultural building at Central Farm Reach (TL 566 652) revealed limited evidence of archaeological deposits of unknown date and function. The site lies 400m SW of a substantial Romano-British villa complex (SMR 06433, 06442, 06437, 06809) and finds of Romano-British pottery are reported from the field in which the development will take place. Fifteen small trenches were dug by mechanical excavator to a maximum depth of 1 metre. Some evidence of linear and other discreet features was observed but no dating evidence was recovered from the excavations or from else where on the site.

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORDING BRIEF AT CENTRAL FARM, REACH

1 INTRODUCTION

A member of staff from the Archaeological Field Unit Carried out monitoring and recording work on May 11th 1998 at Central Farm, Reach during the mechanical excavation of foundation trenches for a new agricultural building. The work was carried out on behalf of Mr Nigel Day in response to a request for monitoring from the County Archaeology Office (Development Control).

2 TOPOLOGY AND GEOLOGY

The site lies arable land approximately 1 km south of Reach, on the edge of the chalk 'spur' on which the village is sited, and some 500m to the east of Swaffham Prior Fen. The land slopes down slightly to the west and is currently under a cereal crop. The observed natural subsoil was a buff chalky clay.

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The recording brief was requested because of the archaeological richness of the immediate area. A substantial Romano-British villa complex lies 400m to the east and casual finds of Romano-British pottery are reported from the field in which the work took place. Evidence of Iron Age settlement is known from an area less than 1km to the north-west (SMR 06432, 06392, 06394) and the fields in the area contain traces of Medieval ridge and furrow (SMR 06714, 06715). It was considered the development might have an impact on possible evidence of early land use of this area.

4 METHODOLOGY

A series of 15 foundation pits were dug around the perimeter of the site to take the steel uprights of the new building (See Figure 2). These were all approximately 0.9m by 1.0m and were dug to a depth of approximately 1.0m using a JCB with a toothed bucket. Removal of the ploughsoil first allowed a brief examination of the top of the natural subsoil before the trenches were fully excavated. The developer reports that the floor of the building will be laid on a layer of brick rubble which in turn will be laid directly on the ploughsoil. The trenches were therefore the only areas of potential threat to any surviving archaeological deposits and further stripping of ploughsoil was therefore kept to a minimum (see below). The bottom of the trenches rapidly filled with water after excavation to a level of 0.90m below ground level and this, combined with the small areas excavated, made the recording of deposits difficult and identification almost impossible.

The ploughsoil (a mid-brown silty clay) was c.0.3m deep over the natural subsoil which was a dirty buff /yellow silty clay.

5 RESULTS

Trenches 1, 3, 4, 6, and 12 - 15 revealed no evidence of archaeological activity and no artefacts were recovered. Limited evidence for activity was recorded in the remaining trenches as described below.

5.1 TRENCH 2

A linear feature approximately 1.5m wide was identified running E-W, cut into the natural subsoil and sealed by the ploughsoil. The southern edge was revealed in section by machine and the northern edge was defined during limited topsoil stripping. It was steep-sided (45 degrees approx.) and was filled with a homogenous mid-grey silty clay with occasional small stones. No artefacts were recovered.

5.2 TRENCH 5

A small linear feature was recorded in the west facing section and it's SE-NW course traced after limited ploughsoil stripping to the SE. It was 0.70m wide and 0.40m deep in section and was filled with a homogenous mid-grey silty clay. No artefacts were recovered.

5.3 TRENCH 7

The natural subsoil was only observed in the SE corner where it was cut by a steep-sided feature. This cut ran roughly NE-SW but it was not possible to define it's extent and form. It was filled with a mid grey silty clay. No artefacts were recovered.

5.4 TRENCH 8

A steeply sloping cut was observed against the clay subsoil in the SE corner, but further definition was not possible. It was filled with mid grey silty clay. No artefacts were recovered.

5.5 TRENCH 9

The SW edge of a small, shallow feature was recorded in the NE corner. It was approximately 0.30m deep and filled with mid-grey silty clay. It's shape in plan could not be determined and no artefacts were recovered.

5.5 TRENCH 10

A series of at least two cuts against the natural subsoil in the SE corner were seen before the trench bottom filled with water. These cuts did not show in the sections and the fill was a homogenous mid-grey silty clay.

5.6 TRENCH 11

A fairly well defined steeply sloping cut was recorded, possibly the western edge of a linear feature running N-S. Its shape in plan or section could not be determined. It was filled with a homogenous mid-grey silty clay. No artefacts were recovered

6 CONCLUSIONS

Although 7 of the 16 foundation pits produced evidence of cut features, no evidence for their date or function was recovered. Only the possible ditch in Trench 2 and the much less substantial feature in Trench 5 were defined in plan. It seems likely that they represent landscape features such as drainage or field ditches and it is possible that the homogeneity of fills of these features means that they were contemporary, shared the same function or at least similar deposition histories. No artefacts were recovered from the trenches or the surrounding ploughsoil.

8 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank Mr Nigel Day and his contractors for their assistance on site.

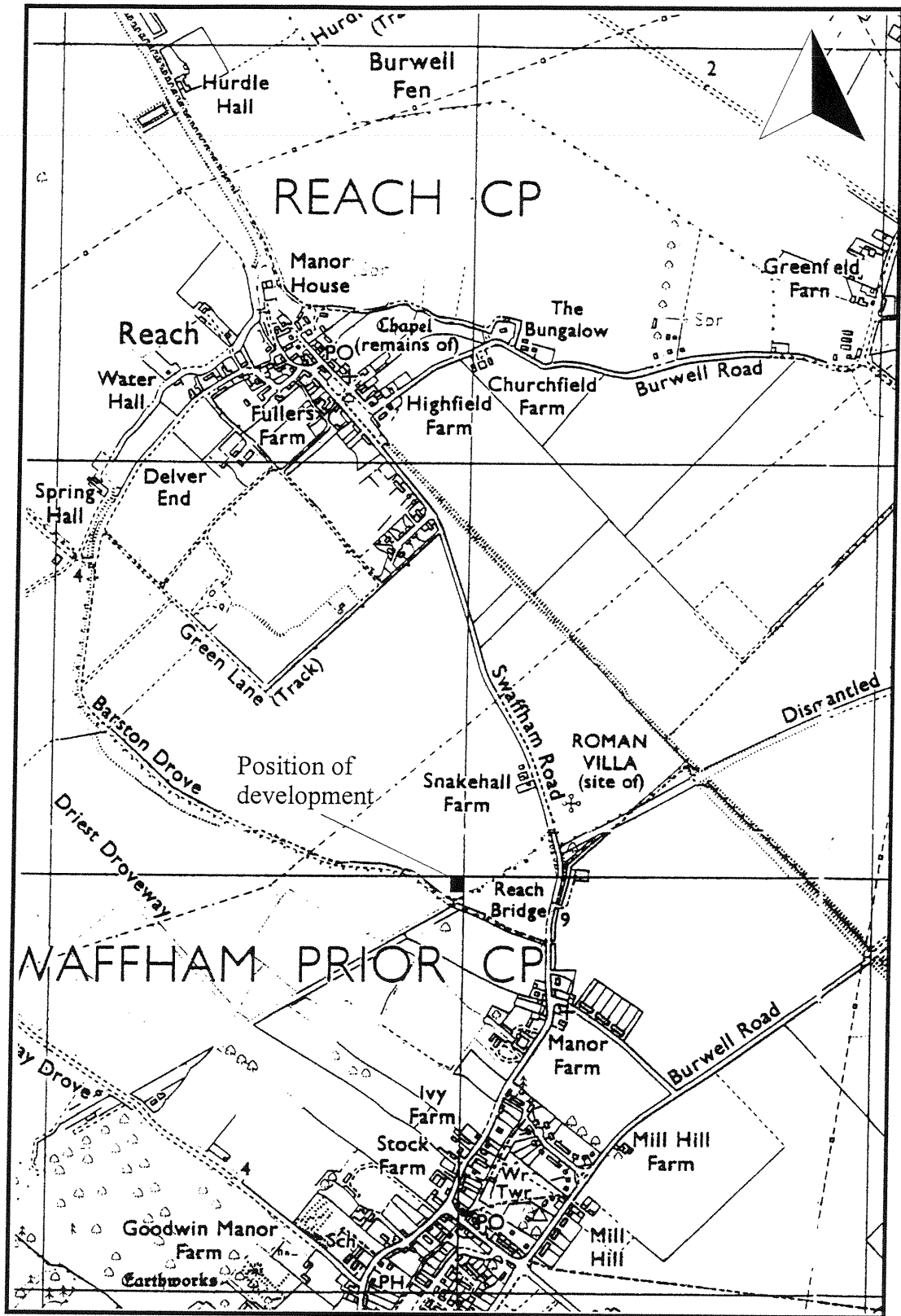
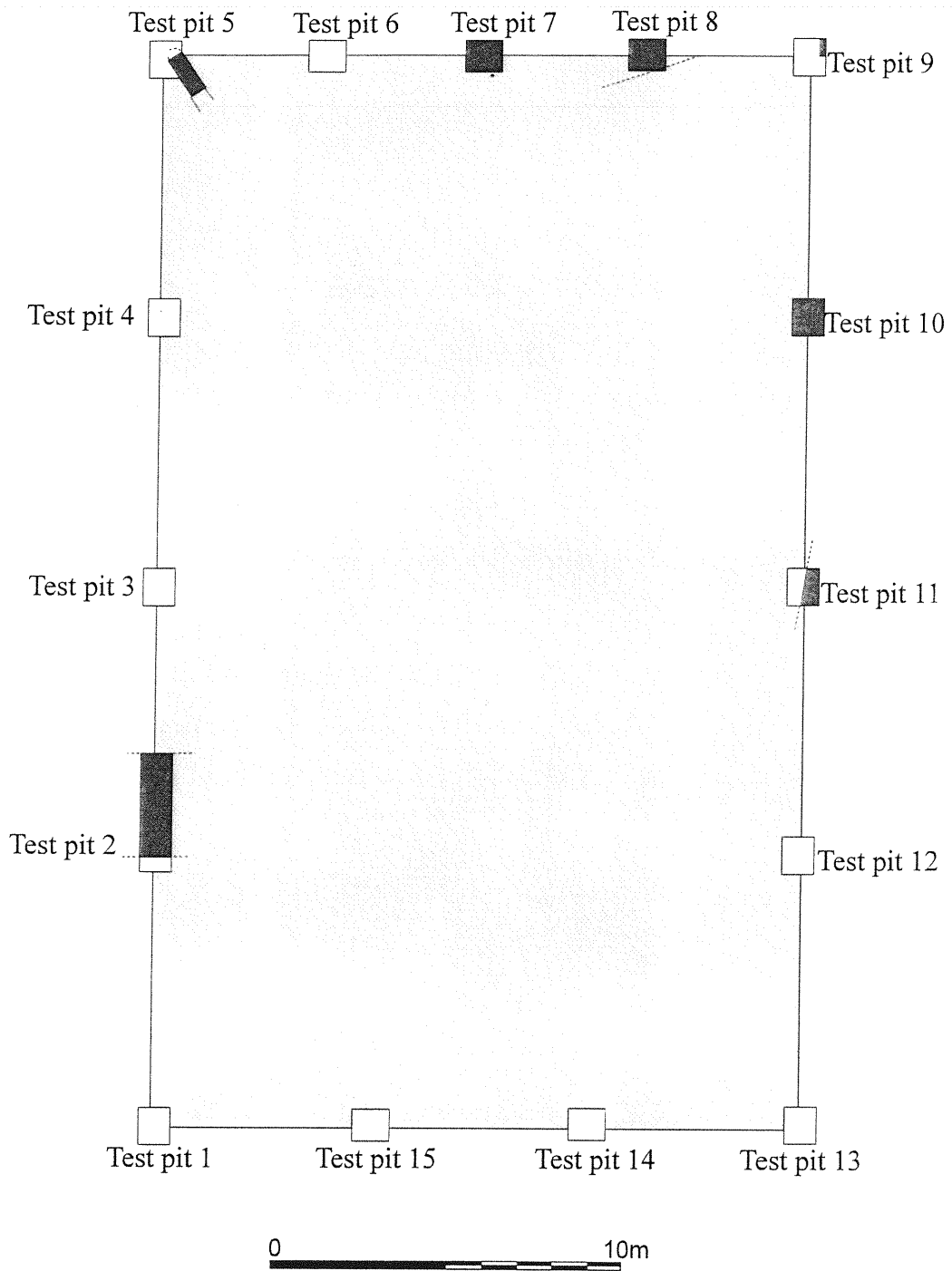


Figure 2 Location map



■ = Possible archaeological features

Figure 2 Schematic plan of proposed building, foundation pits and archaeological features



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