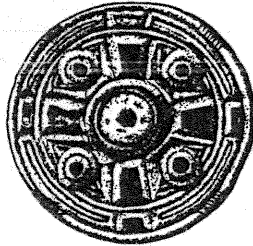


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Archaeological Field Unit

**Land off Mayor's Walk, Peterborough:  
An Archaeological Evaluation**

Andrew Hatton

2001

**Cambridgeshire County Council**

Report No. A 191

Commissioned by Abbey Developments Ltd

**Land off Mayor's Walk, Peterborough:  
An Archaeological Evaluation  
(NGR TF 2140 0062)**

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August 2001

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Report No. A191

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## **SUMMARY**

*Between the 30<sup>th</sup> July and 3<sup>rd</sup> August the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council conducted an archaeological evaluation on land off Mayor's Walk, Peterborough in advance of the construction of dwellings and associated ground works. The aim of the intervention was to record and assess the nature of any archaeological evidence encountered before development and hence to assess the potential for surviving remains.*

*Given the presence of prehistoric features and artefacts, Roman settlement evidence together with medieval and post medieval occupational encircling the development area, particular attention was paid to the identification and interpretation of deposits and features in the context of what is a rich archaeological landscape near to the centre of Peterborough.*

*Five out of the seven trenches excavated contained archaeological features. The features identified indicate occupational evidence.*

*The evaluation has shown that the site was probably settled during the prehistoric and Roman periods. The prehistoric evidence points to occupation at the end of the Iron Age.*

*Evidence for Roman occupation on the site is restricted to a single feature, which on excavation was found to contain fragments pottery, roof tile, and a fragment of building material. The nature of the material recovered from the feature, strongly suggest the presence of a high status building within or close to the development site.*

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**Land off Mayor's Walk, Peterborough:  
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**1 INTRODUCTION**

Between the 30<sup>th</sup> July and 3<sup>rd</sup> August the Archaeological Field Unit (AFU) of Cambridgeshire County Council undertook an archaeological evaluation on behalf of Abbey Developments Ltd on land off Mayor's Walk, Peterborough. The work was carried out to satisfy a planning condition in advance of development.

**2 SITE BACKGROUND**

**Planning Background**

The proposed development entails the construction of dwellings and associated services covering an area of 0.3 ha. (Planning Application No. 00/01227/FUL). Given that the site is near known archaeological sites (below), the possibility of there being archaeological remains within the development area determined the requirements for an archaeological evaluation.

The work was carried out by staff of the AFU for Abbey Developments Ltd, in accordance with a brief produced by Ben Robinson, Peterborough City Council Archaeological Service (PCCAS), (Brief for Archaeological Evaluation, 25/01/2001).

**Geology**

The local geology consists of alluvium overlying Oxford Clay (BGS Sheet 158).

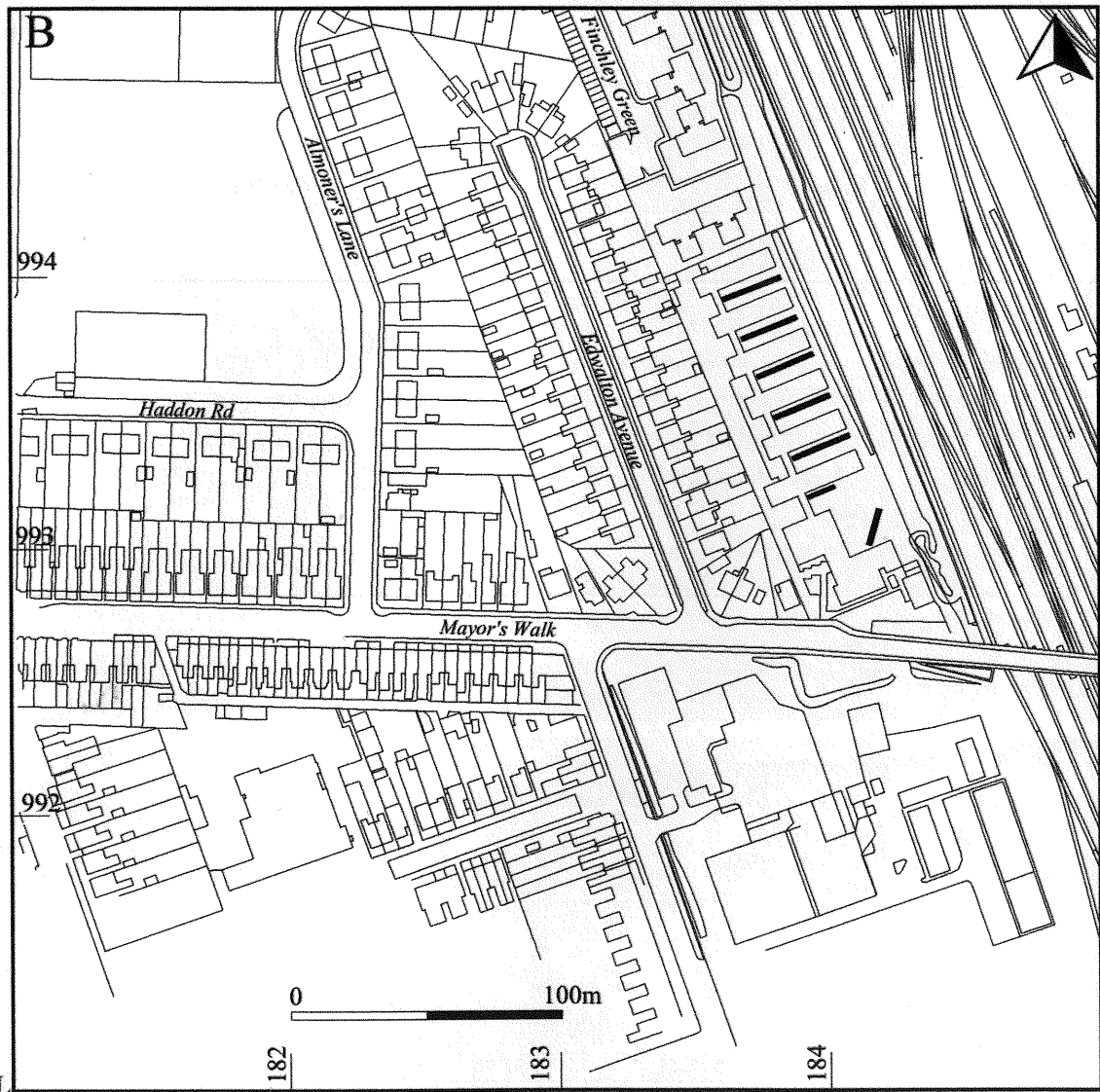
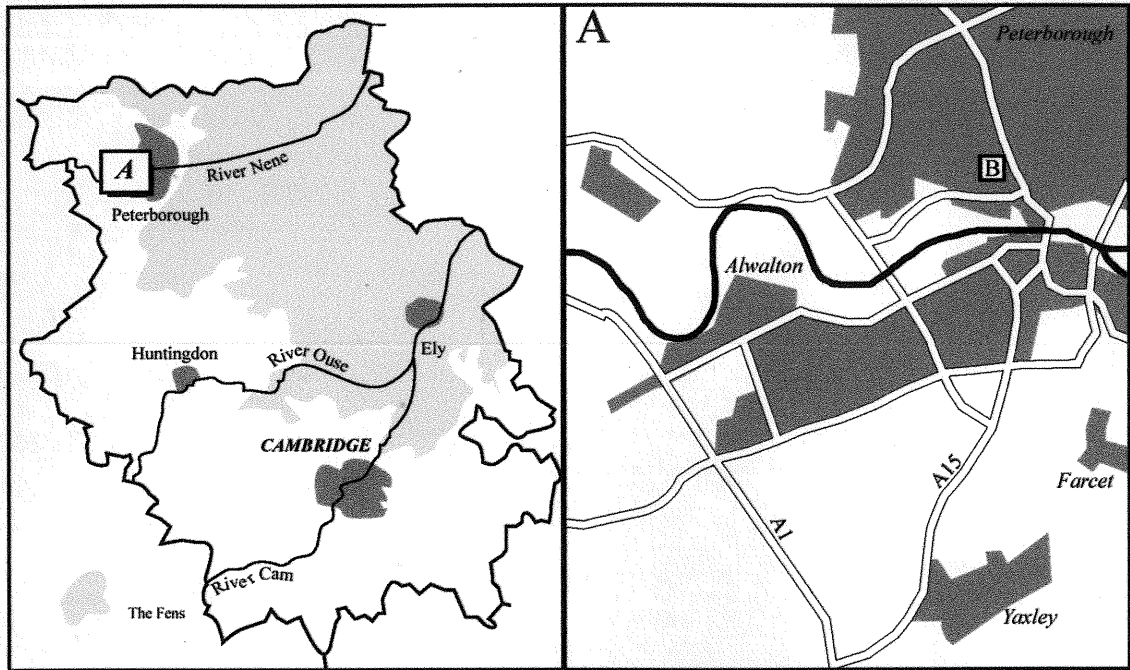
**3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

The likelihood of finding archaeology belonging to the prehistoric period was considered good given the known evidence from sites dating to this date in the immediate vicinity of the proposed development site.

**Palaeolithic period/Bronze/Iron Age**

Evidence of Palaeolithic activity in the area of the subject site is restricted to a stray find identified as a flint hand axe (PCCSMR 01356).

Bronze Age remains have been recorded 700m to the north-west of the subject



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**Figure 1** Site Location Map. Evaluation trenches are shown in black.

site (Knight 2000). The SMR also records a Bronze Age stray find to the south-east, identified as a bronze torc (PCCSMR 01751b).

### **Iron Age/Roman**

The likelihood of finding archaeology belonging to the later prehistoric/Roman period was considered to be high, considering the remains identified to the north-west and north-east of the subject site. Excavation approximately 300m to the north-west revealed archaeological remains (PCCSMR 11956) dated to the Late Iron Age, although, the site was considered predominantly Roman in date (Moore 2000).

The Peterborough City Council Sites and Monuments Record (PCC SMR) and the files of PCCAS record a number of archaeological sites and finds in the proximity of the area under investigation. These can be summarised as follows:

PCC SMR 01751 (TL184 996), to the north-east of the development site: the entry describes the excavation of a Roman village together with a Roman cemetery.

PCC SMR 01393 (TL1855 9970), to the north-east of the development site: the entry describes the identification of a section of Roman road uncovered during the construction of a dual carriageway.

PCC SMR 01394 (TL181 995), to the north-west of the development site: the entry describes the excavation of features and recovery of stray finds associated with domestic Roman buildings.

PCC SMR 50708 (TL1785 9903), to the south-west of the development site: the entry refers to the recovery of Roman pottery

PCC SMR 08204 (TL18-- 99--), to the south-west of the development site: the entry refers to the recovery of a Roman burial together with a Roman coin.

### **Medieval/Post Medieval**

Documentary evidence describes an area to the south-east of the subject site as being the location of St. Leonard's Hospital (PCC SMR 01629), founded before 1125 AD. The hospital was originally founded for the housing of lepers (or Lazars), undesirables and Scots! After the dissolution, St. Leonard's Hospital became the Pest House, accommodating the plague victims of Peterborough. In 1884 a bronze spout in the form of a dog (PCC SMR 01629a) was recovered from the site of St. Leonard's Hospital, this may have been used to administer water taken from a supposedly healing spring. The excavation of several areas close to the site of St. Leonard's Hospital, uncovered numerous bodies (PCC SMR 50586) believed to be post-medieval in date and associated with the 'Pest House'.

## 4 METHODOLOGY

Seven evaluation trenches were excavated for a total length of 121.3m using a toothless ditching bucket 1.5m wide. Five of the trenches were located in the exposed areas between each wing of the building with the remaining two trenches providing coverage of an open area at the south-eastern end of the site. It must be pointed out that the location of the trenches provided maximum coverage of land not covered by either the hostel or concrete.

The trenches were cleaned by hand to allow feature and deposit recognition. The A.F.U. pro forma recording system was used to record the exposed deposits supplemented by photographs. Trenches were located using tapes to offset to standing buildings.

## 5 RESULTS (Fig. 2)

### Trench 1

Trench 1 (20m x 1.5m), north-east/south-west oriented. At the south-western end of the trench, a brownish grey topsoil 0.28m thick overlay a layer of modern debris mixed with soil 0.27m thick. Removal of the make-up layer revealed the original brownish grey topsoil 0.18m thick, which in turn sealed a mid-brown sandy silt subsoil 0.07m thick. This sequence was seen at the north-eastern end, although all the deposited had increased in thickness by 0.01m and 0.02 m, with the exception of the subsoil which had remained the same. The natural geology consisted of a mid-brown sandy silt interspersed with outcrops of Cornbrash.

A total of four features (small pits and a single ditch) were observed cutting into the natural geology. All of the features identified were excavated.

**Cut 5** (0.90m wide, the feature extended beyond the baulk, and 0.10m deep), sub-circular in plan, truncated by 7, contained one fill:

Fill 6, a brown sandy silty soil, contained no artefactual remains.

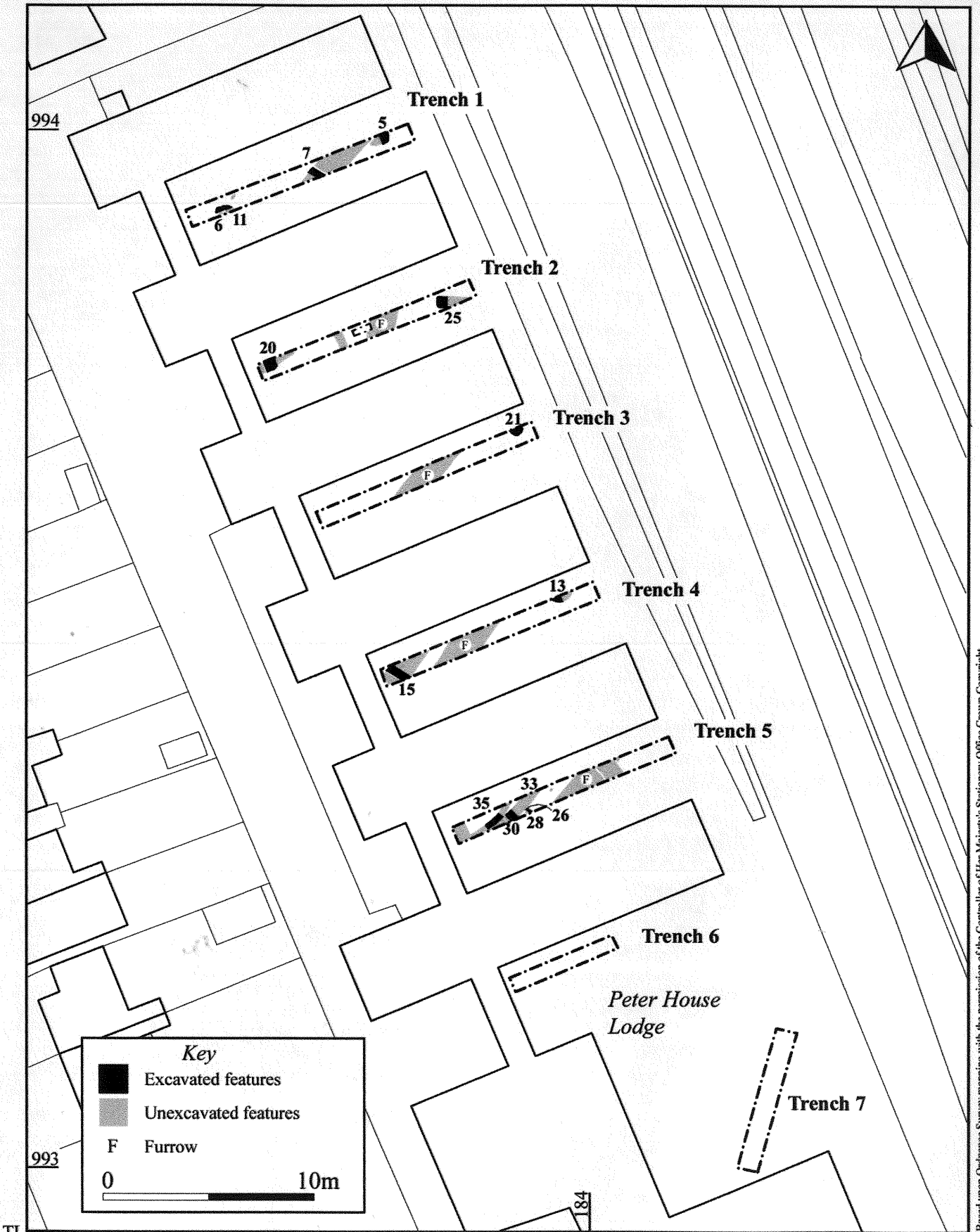
**Cut 7** (excavated segment 1.30m wide, estimated full width of the feature is 2.25m, 0.08m deep), linear in plan, oriented north-east/south-west (probable furrow), truncates 5, contained one fill:

Fill 8, greyish brown sandy silty soil, contained fragments of abraded Roman tile.

**Cut 9** (0.85m wide, 0.11m deep), circular in plan, truncates 11, contained one fill:

Fill 10, a very dark brown sandy silty soil which contained a high percentage of charcoal, contained no artefactual remains. This feature could be interpreted as a shallow burning pit as there is slight evidence of *in situ* burning.

**Cut 11** (0.74m wide, 0.12m deep), possibly oval in plan, truncated by 9, contained one fill:



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Figure 2 Details of Trenches 1 - 7



Fill 12, a mid-brown sandy silty soil, contained no artefactual remains.

### **Trench 2 (Fig 2)**

Trench 2 (20.7m x 1.5m), north-east/south-west oriented. At the south-western end of the trench, a brownish grey topsoil, 0.33m thick, overlay a layer of modern debris mixed with soil, 0.30m thick. Removal of the make-up layer revealed the original brownish grey topsoil, 0.15m thick, which in turn sealed a mid-brown sandy silt subsoil, 0.15m thick. A similar sequence was seen at the north-eastern end. The natural geology consisted of a mid-brown sandy silt interspersed with outcrops of Cornbrash.

Three features (a single pit and two ditches) were observed cutting into the natural geology. Two of the three features identified were excavated, the exception being the furrow, which had been sampled in Trenches 1 and 3.

**Cut 20** (0.80m wide, 0.56m deep), sub-rectangular in plan, truncated during the excavation of a railway siding, contained two fill:

Fill 19, a light brown silty sandy lower fill, contained no artefactual remains. It is possible that 19 was the result of natural erosion

Fill 18, a dark greyish brown silty clay upper fill, contained fragments of Late Iron Age/Roman pottery and animal bone.

Although the finds assemblage recovered is not huge, it is still possible to suggest that **20** was used for the disposal of plant material rather than domestic debris, i.e. pottery and animal bone.

**Cut 25** (0.94m wide, 0.63m deep) linear in plan, aligned north-west/south-east, contained two fills:

Fill 24, a greyish brown sandy silty lower fill, which contained a large amount of Cornbrash. No artefacts were recovered from this deposit. It is possible that 24 was the result of natural erosion.

Fill 23, a greyish brown silty clay upper fill, contained fragments of Roman tile, pottery and animal bone.

The recovery of Roman roof material together with a single piece of limestone may indicate that **25** was a foundation trench for a Roman building.

### **Trench 3**

Trench 3 (20m x 1.5m), north-east/south-west oriented. At the south-western end of the trench, a brownish grey topsoil, 0.29m thick, overlay a layer of modern debris mixed with soil, 0.60m thick. This sequence was seen at the north-eastern end, although all the topsoil deposit had decreased in thickness by 0.24m and the layer had increased to 0.68m. Removal of the make-up layer revealed the natural geology.

Two features (a single pit and ditch) were observed cutting into the natural geology. Both the features were excavated.

**Cut 21** (1.16m wide, 0.32m deep), circular in plan, contained one fill:

Fill 22, a mid-brown sandy silty soil, contained a single sherd of Late Iron Age/Roman pottery and animal bone.

The linear feature in Trench 3 was identified as a furrow and as a consequence no further recording took place.

#### **Trench 4**

Trench 4 (18.6m x 1.5m), north-east/south-west oriented. At the south-western end of the trench, a brownish grey topsoil, 0.26m thick, overlay a layer of modern debris mixed with soil 0.14m thick. Removal of the make-up layer revealed the original brownish grey topsoil, 0.15m thick, which in turn sealed a mid-brown sandy silt subsoil, 0.11m thick. A change in the depositional sequence was observed at the north-eastern end of the trench, where the topsoil was 0.18m thick the make-up was 0.39m thick. Removal of the make-up layer exposed the subsoil (0.15m thick) showing that the buried topsoil had been removed. The natural geology consisted of a mid-brown sandy silt interspersed with outcrops of Cornbrash.

Three features (a single pit and two ditches) were observed cutting into the natural geology. Two of the three features identified were excavated, the exception being the furrow, which had been sampled in Trenches 1 and 3.

**Cut 13** (0.50m wide, the feature extended beyond the baulk), 0.11m deep, sub-circular in plan, contained one fill:

Fill 14, a greyish brown sandy silty soil, contained no artefactual remains.

**Cut 15** (1.65m wide, 0.32m deep), linear in plan, aligned north-east/south-west, contained two fills:

Fill 16, a orange brown sandy silty soil, with no artefactual remains. This deposit is possibly the result of natural erosion/infilling.

Fill 17, a greyish brown sandy silty soil, contained fragments of Late Iron Age/Roman pottery and animal bone.

#### **Trench 5**

Trench 5 (20m x 1.5m), north-east/south-west oriented. At the south-western end of the trench, a brownish grey topsoil, 0.15m thick, overlay a layer of modern debris mixed with soil, 0.50m thick. Removal of the make-up layer revealed the original brownish grey topsoil, 0.10m thick, which sealed a mid-brown sandy silt subsoil, 0.05m thick. This sequence was seen at the north-eastern end with the exception of the subsoil which was not apparent in the section. The thickness of the topsoil decreased to 0.12m together with the make-up layer which was 0.45m, however the buried topsoil increased to 0.15m thick. The natural geology consisted of a mid-brown sandy silt interspersed with outcrops of Cornbrash.

Six features (a single large posthole, one shallow pit and four ditches) were observed cutting into the natural geology. All the features identified were excavated, with the exception of the furrow, which had been sampled in Trenches 1 and 3.

**Cut 26** (0.40m wide, 0.15m deep), linear in plan, aligned north-west/south-east, truncates **28**, contained one fill:

Fill 27, a dark greyish brown sandy silty soil, contained fragments of pottery and animal bone.

**Cut 28** (0.20m wide, 0.09m deep), circular in plan, truncated by 26, contained one fill:

Fill 29, a mid-greyish brown sandy silty soil with a high burnt organic component, contained a single burnt fragment of animal bone.

The recovery of burnt bone from 29 may indicate that **28** was a small burning pit/hearth.

**Cut 30** (0.69m wide, 0.4m deep), circular in plan, truncates **33**, contained two fill:

Fill 31, a mid-brown sandy silty soil, contained no artefacts. It is possible that 31 was post packing.

Fill 32, a dark greyish brown sandy silty soil with a high burnt organic component, contained fragments of Late Iron Age/Roman pottery and animal bone.

The presence of burnt organic remains within 32 may suggest the upright post in **30** was burnt *in situ*.

**Cut 33** (0.84m wide, 0.10m deep), linear in plan, aligned north-west/south-east, truncated by **30**, contained one fill:

Fill 34, a mid-brown sandy silty soil, contained no artefactual remains.

**Cut 35** (0.50m wide, 0.10m deep), curvilinear in plan, contained a single fill:

Fill 36, a mid-brown sandy silty soil, contained fragments of Late Iron Age/Roman pottery.

The curving nature of **35** together with a possible small posthole (Fig. 2) suggest that the feature could be associated with a circular structure of Iron Age date, which would correspond with the date of the pottery recovered from 36.

No archaeological features were observed in Trenches 6 & 7 (Fig. 2). The absence of archaeological features at the southern end of the area investigated is possibly due to an area of silt filled creeks (BGS sheet 158) resulting in a landscape unsuitable for occupation.

## 6 DISCUSSION

The aims of this study were to highlight the potential for preservation of archaeological remains on the subject site and to identify the nature of any remains that may be affected by the proposed development.

The full nature of the Iron Age and Roman occupation on the site cannot be fully determined from the evaluation trenches, however the nature and extent of the deposits encountered indicate significant Iron Age activity to the north of

Mayor's Walk, Peterborough. With the exception of Trenches 6 and 7 archaeological features have been identified in all of the remaining trenches. The main concentration of features was identified in Trench 5 immediately before the land drops off to an area of creeks.

The plan of Trenches 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 (Fig. 2) raise a number of questions about the function of the features encountered and their relationship to each other and to features identified on excavations in the immediate vicinity of the site. A number of ditches were identified which produced fragments of Iron Age and Roman pottery. In addition fragments of animal bone were also recovered.

A curvilinear ditch, **35**, identified in Trench 5 was sampled and produced sherds of Late Iron Age pottery, together with fragments of animal bone and a possible small posthole (Fig. 2). To interpret the use of feature **35** is problematic, given of the limited nature of the investigation but it appears to be associated with a dwelling. Ditches were identified in Trenches 2, 4 and 5, (Fig. 2). These were sampled and produced Late Iron Age/Roman pottery and animal bone.

A number of pits were also identified across the evaluation area, all of which were sampled, with only features **21**, **26** and **28** producing Late Iron Age/Roman pottery and animal bone. Interestingly, features **9** and **28** contained burnt organic material, suggesting occupation in the vicinity.

Settlement or occupation evidence during the Late Iron Age/Roman period, is further reinforced through association of the curvilinear ditch **35**, possible burning pits **28** and **9** and finally a large posthole **30**.

Trench 5 contained the highest concentration of features on the slightly higher ground to the north of the creeks. Moving away from Trench 5 there was a slight decrease in the density of features.

Ditch **25** identified in Trench 2 produced Roman pottery and tile together with animal bone and a single large fragment of limestone at the base. The material recovered from **25** suggests the presence of a high status Roman building.

## 7 CONCLUSION

The project has been very successful in achieving its objectives. Archaeological remains have been identified in all but two trenches (Trenches 6 and 7) suggesting that the area had been used from the Late Iron Age, with the main evidence for occupation identified in Trench 5.

The objectives of the project were to establish the character, state, date, state of preservation and extent of any archaeological remains within the site likely to be affected by development. Due to the nature of the archaeological evaluation it was not possible to make connections between features in different trenches. This inability to see the whole site restricts the accurate interpretation of individual features within a wider context. The reason for this settlement here may relate to the proximity of creeks to the south providing a good food source throughout the year. This land is likely to have been in agricultural use from

the medieval period, indicated by the presence of ridge and furrow in all trenches with the exception of 6 and 7, again suggesting a damp environment.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The author would like to thank the following people for their valued assistance in respect of this evaluation report: Abbey Developments Ltd who commissioned the project and co-operated during the work; Mr Ben Robinson of PCCAS, Peterborough Museum and Art Gallery, who monitored the project.

Thanks are also due to the staff of the AFU and, in particular Spencer Cooper and Ron Mckenna for invaluable work on-site, Steve Critchley (Mr Geology) for providing a metal detecting service and valuable information concerning the local geology, and Jon Cane for providing the reports illustrations.

Finally, the author would like to thank and Judith Roberts who managed the project and edited the report.

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