

Archaeological Field Unit

**17-21 Victoria Avenue, Cambridge:  
An Archaeological Evaluation**

Steve Hickling

July 2003

**Cambridgeshire County Council**

Report No. A227

Commissioned by Armstrong Burton Architects

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An Archaeological Evaluation**

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## **SUMMARY**

*The Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Field Unit conducted an archaeological evaluation by trial trenching in July 2003 at the rear of 17-21 Victoria Avenue, Cambridge (TL 4534 5940). The work was carried out in advance of the redevelopment of the plot into 4 residences.*

*One trench was excavated, revealing one large modern pit, a medieval gully and two undated, but probably early pits.*

# Drawing Conventions

## Sections

Limit of Excavation	-----
Cut	_____
Cut - Conjectured	-----
Soil Horizon	-----
Soil Horizon - Conjectured	-----
Intrusion/Truncation	-----
Top of Natural	_____
Top Surface	_____
Break in Section	-----
Cut Number	<b>118</b>
Deposit Number	117
Ordnance Datum	18.45m ODN

## Plans

Limit of Excavation	_____
Deposit - Conjectured	-----
Natural Features	-----
Intrusion/Truncation	-----
Illustrated Section	_____ S.14
Excavated Slot	<input type="checkbox"/>
Deposit	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cut Number	118

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**Figure 1** Location of Excavated Area (black) with Development Area outlined (red).

**17-21 Victoria Avenue, Cambridge:  
An Archaeological Evaluation  
(TL 4534 5940)**

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

During July 2003 the Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Field Unit (CCC AFU) conducted an archaeological evaluation by trial trenching at the rear of 17-21 Victoria Avenue, Cambridge (TL 4534 5940). The work was carried out at the request of Armstrong Burton Architects and was undertaken in order to fulfil a brief for archaeological investigation issued by Kasia Gdaniec, Development Control Archaeologist, Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeology Section.

The site is located 1.5km to the east of the historic core of Cambridge city and 50m north of the River Cam. The Roman road represented by Chesterton Road lies 50m to the north. The proposed development (Planning application C/02/0953/FP) of this site includes the demolition of existing shop and sheds, before the construction of four residential apartments. An area totalling 12m<sup>2</sup> was investigated in one trench.

## **2 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY**

According to the British Geological Survey Map (Cambridge, Sheet 188, 1:50,000), the development site is situated on river gravels, adjacent to a spine of Gault Clay, which runs parallel to the meander of the River Cam.

The site is on land gently sloping to the south, at a height of 7.5m above sea level. It is on the north bank of the River Cam.

## **3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

Bronze Age activity has been noted south of the River Cam (SMR 4801).

The site lies 5-600m east of the walled Roman town centred on Castle Hill, and 1.5km south of extensive Roman remains at Kings Hedges, Arbury Road and Humphry's Road, comprising stone walls, wells, hearths and kilns (Macaulay, 2003, p.7). Closer to the development site, Roman pottery has been found on Jesus Close (SMR 4621) and Roman drainpipes on Chesterton Road (SMR 4547). Chesterton Road is thought to have been a Roman road. It was thought that this site may fall within an area of Roman extramural settlement.

Anglo-Saxon inhumations were noted at Milton Road (SMR 4551).

The medieval Chesterton Abbey lies 800m to the East, along Chesterton Road (Scheduled Ancient Monument 25).

Victoria Avenue and its river crossing are 19<sup>th</sup> century in date.

The area of the site appears to have been agricultural since at least medieval times, until the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

#### **4 METHODOLOGY**

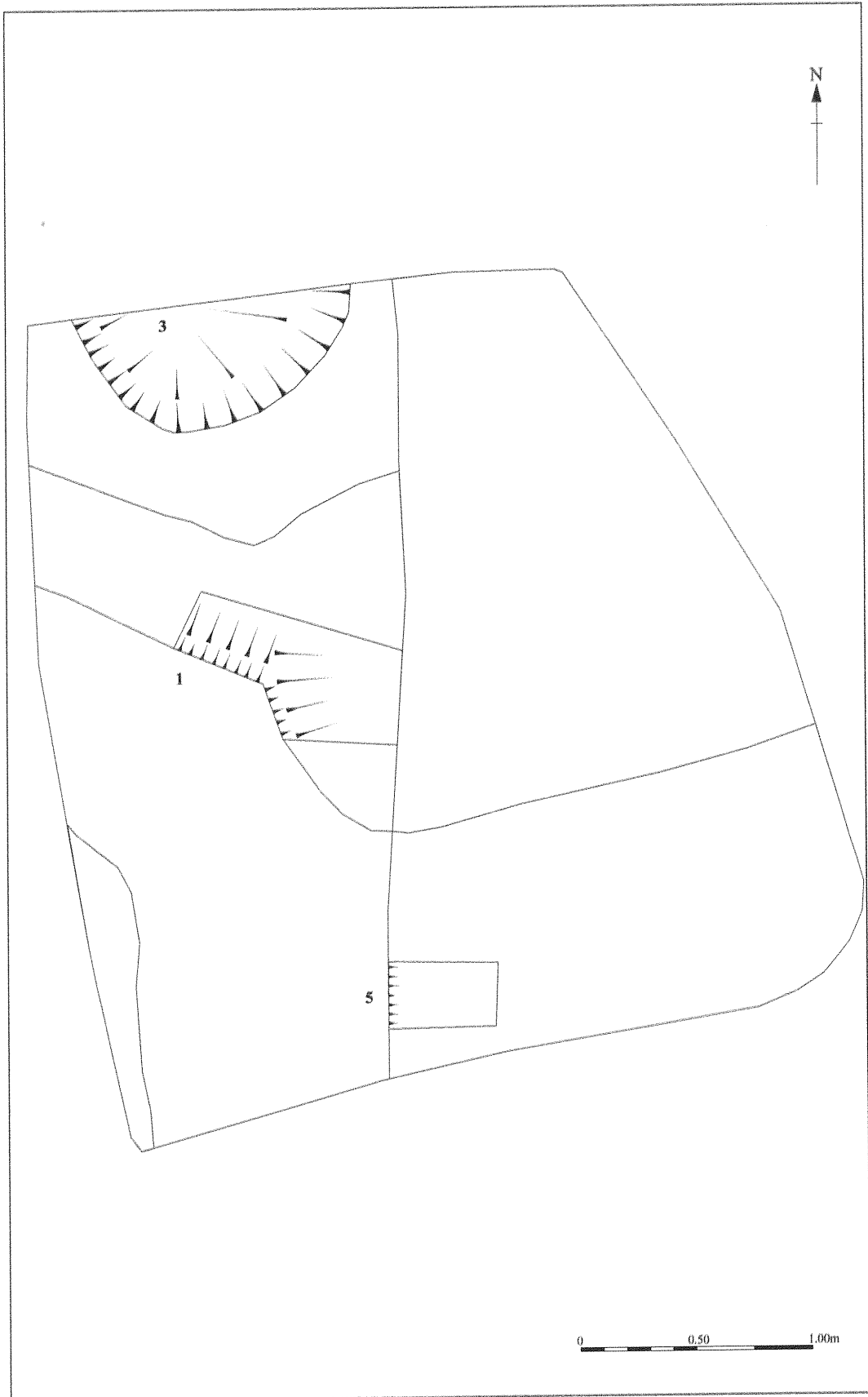
One trial trench was excavated using the backhoe of a JCB fitted with a 1.6m wide toothless ditching bucket under archaeological supervision. The topsoil and subsoil was stripped down to the level of the natural geology (in this case river gravels), where any cut features would become apparent.

The exposed surfaces were cleaned in order to clarify any features and deposits. All exposed features and deposits were excavated and recorded according to CCC AFU standards and practices. Drawings were executed at a scale of 1:20.

#### **5 RESULTS**

The trench was approximately 3.5m long and 3.5m wide. The first deposit encountered was a dark brown gravelly sand topsoil 10, 0.45m deep, containing modern and Victorian material. This sealed a mid reddish brown gravelly sand layer 9, 0.9m deep and containing one fragment of Roman pottery (a jar rim, undated). Pit 5 was cut through layer 9, but sealed by layer 10. It was filled with a mixed backfill layer 6 containing coal fragments and a dark brown silty sand layer 7, found to contain Victorian glazed pottery. Because of its obviously modern date, this feature was not excavated. However, just before the trench was backfilled, a sondage was machine excavated and the spoil sifted through by hand in an effort to recover any redeposited Roman material. None was found, but the pit was found to extend more than 1m below the base of the trench. Pit 5 cut through an earlier feature; gully 1. This was a small linear feature, 0.52m wide and 0.12m deep, orientated WNW to ESE. Its fill, 2, was very similar to layer 9, a mid reddish brown gravelly sand, which contained two fragments of pottery. One was possibly a sherd of 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> century Heddingham Ware, while the other may have been a fragment of 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> century Mill Green Ware. Two other features were seen, both containing fills very similar to layer 9. Pit 3 was truncated by the edge of excavation, but was excavated as fully as possible. It yielded no finds. Pit 8 was unexcavated due to the fact that most of it was





*Figure 2 Plan of Excavated Area*

truncated by the edge of excavation, leaving only a tiny part of it visible. Features 1, 3 and 8 all appeared to have been sealed by layer 9.

## **6 DISCUSSION**

The earliest feature within this trench, gully 1, can be dated to the 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> century and probably relates to agricultural or horticultural land use. Pits 3 and 8 may also date to this phase, as may layer 9. The Roman pottery found in layer 9 is probably residual.

The area has suffered extensively from modern or Victorian truncation (pit 5).

## 7 CONCLUSION

The depth of the old topsoil layer 9 is probably due to the movement of soil down the hill towards the river, exacerbated by agricultural activity. The nature of the datable archaeological features (gully 1) suggests agricultural or horticultural activity rather than intensive occupation in the medieval period. The one fragment of Roman pottery (layer 9) suggests similar activity in the Roman period.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank Armstrong Burton Architects who commissioned and funded the archaeological work. The project was managed by Aileen Connor. Emily Oakes did the illustrations for this report, while Steve Macaulay, Paul Spoerry and Carole Fletcher examined the pottery.

The brief for archaeological works was written by Kasia Gdaniec, County Archaeology Office, who visited the site and monitored the evaluation.

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