

Archaeological Field Unit

**The New Milton Road Primary School and Lady
Adrian School,
Cambridge:
An Archaeological Evaluation.**

Steve Hickling

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**The new Milton Road Primary School and Lady Adrian School,
Cambridge:
Archaeological Evaluation.**

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SUMMARY

Eight trenches were excavated in two areas within the sports grounds of Chesterton Community College, in advance of a new school (the new Milton Road Primary School) and an extension to an existing school (the Lady Adrian School). The trenches in the area of the new school revealed extensive late 19th or early 20th century gravel workings, while the trench on the site of the school extension revealed a Bronze Age ditch running on a totally different alignment to the modern layout of roads and fields, suggesting that it may be part of a pre-existing field system. No other archaeological features were encountered on this site.

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**The New Milton Road Primary School and Lady Adrian School, Cambridge.
An Archaeological Evaluation.**

TL 5453 2600

1 INTRODUCTION

During late July 2003, the Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Field Unit (CCC AFU) conducted an archaeological evaluation by trial trenching at the new Milton Road primary school site off Gilbert Road, Cambridge (TL 5453 2600). A trench was also excavated on land adjacent at the Lady Adrian School, in advance of proposed development work there. Both sets of work were carried out at the request of Cambridgeshire County Council Department of Property and Procurement and are presented here as one piece of work.

The site is located in open playing fields adjacent to the Lady Adrian School, Gilbert Road, off Milton Road, Cambridge. It is one of the last areas of open land left in an area of early 20th century suburban development. The proposed developments include the construction of a new primary school and the extension of the present Lady Adrian School. The brief for the new school site called for 450m of trenching, however this was curtailed due to the need to keep the field usable for team sports.

2 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

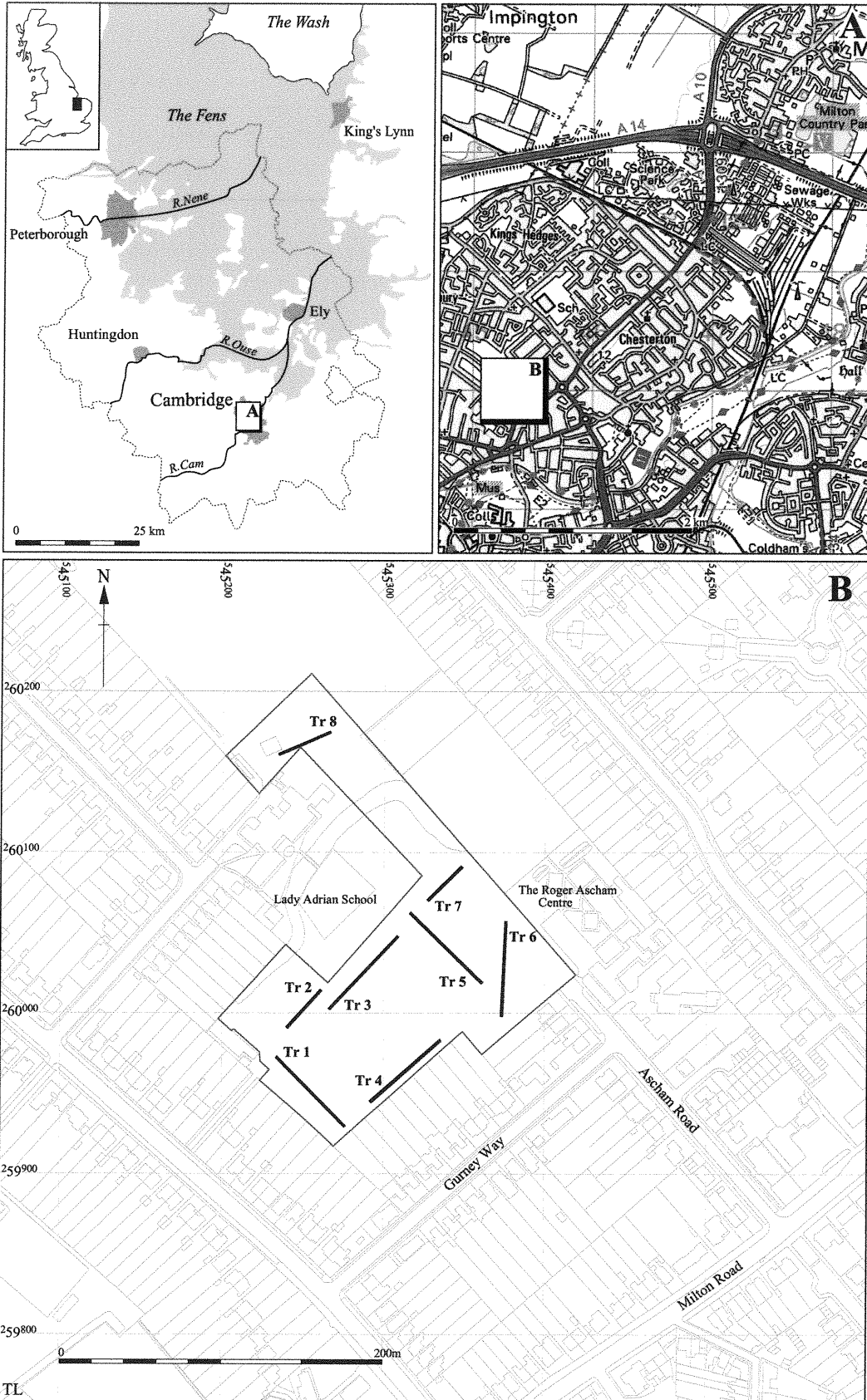
According to the British Geological Survey Map (Sheet 188), the development site lies on 2nd Terrace Gravels. The site appears to have been terraced and levelled and lies on the 10m OD contour.

The site lays 200m to the northwest of Milton Road and 100m to the northeast of Gilbert Road, 1.5km north of the centre of Cambridge.

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The site has been subjected to extensive non-invasive archaeological investigation, including a geophysical survey (Masters 2003) and a desktop assessment (Macaulay 2003).

The desktop assessment says, 'Although no archaeological remains have been recorded within the development area, the present study show that the site lies within a rich and important archaeological landscape.' (Macaulay 2003i).



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Figure 1 Location of Trenches with Development Area outlined (in red).

A Neolithic flint axe and arrow head (SMR CB2430) have been recorded as found 400m west of the development site. Apart from this there is no evidence in the locality for occupation before the Iron Age.

Iron Age material has been recovered from excavations on the Roman sites at Arbury Road and Kings Hedges, 900m north of the development site, (SMR 05414a, 05415a, 05416a, 05419a and 05422a) and at the Roman town and/or fort at Castle Hill, 1km to the southwest, (SMR 05251a and 08768). This suggests that the Roman settlement pattern is probably heavily based on the earlier Iron Age one.

The excavations at Arbury Road and Kings Hedges revealed a high status 2nd-3rd century villa and associated agricultural field systems and settlement. Extensive Roman settlement remains have been found 400-800m to the north, around Humphreys Road and upto Alex Wood Road, including stone buildings, ovens, hearths, wells and burials dating to the 3rd century (SMR 05427, 05430 etc). Other Roman remains have been found on Chesterton Road (drain pipes) and Victoria Road (pottery sherds). Castle Hill is the site of a Roman town and possibly a fort, which has been continuously occupied through the Anglo-Saxon and medieval periods, to the present day (SMR 05075, 05086, 05087, 05251 and 08768-CB10525), including a Civil War sconce on the site of the castle.

Anglo-Saxon remains have been found at Swanns Gravel Pit, 300m south of the site (Pagan cemetery) and settlement remains at Castle Hill (SMR 04422). Two bronze brooches were found at the junction of Gilbert Road and Milton Road in 1938, possibly relating to burials.

Although evidence of medieval settlement was found at the excavations at Humphreys Road (SMR 5430) found evidence of medieval settlement, the only other medieval evidence is ridge and furrow, the remains of medieval arable agriculture (SMR 5527, 5527a and 10106).

The geophysical survey (Masters 2003) found some strong readings, suggesting buried ceramics and burnt material, but suggested that these were probably modern in date. The survey, 'failed to produce definitive evidence for significant archaeological remains.' (Masters 2003).

4 METHODOLOGY

Eight trenches were excavated by a JCB fitted with a 1.5m wide toothless ditching bucket, under archaeological supervision. The topsoil was stripped down to the level of the archaeological horizons or the natural geology, whichever came first. It was subsequently discovered that what we thought was natural geology was in fact redeposited material, therefore several sondages were excavated to find the real, undisturbed, natural geology.

The exposed surfaces were cleaned in order to clarify any features or deposits. All exposed features and deposits were excavated and recorded according to CCC AFU standards and practises. Sections were drawn at a scale of 1/20 and trench plans at 1/100 or 1/50. The trenches were located using a Total Station Theodolyte.

5 RESULTS

Trench 1

Trench 1 was 60m long, 1.5m wide and orientated northwest to southeast. 0.12m of topsoil was found to be sealing layers of redeposited gravels. A machine cut sondage was cut at the northern end of the trench, revealing undisturbed natural geology 1.15m below the ground level.

Trench 2

Trench 2 was 30m long, 1.5m wide and orientated northeast to southwest. 0.1m of topsoil was removed revealing layers of redeposited gravels. A sondage was excavated at the western end of the trench, locating undisturbed natural geology at a depth of 0.8m below the modern ground surface.

Trench 3

Trench 3 was 62m long and 1.5m wide, aligned southwest to northeast. 0.1m of topsoil was removed, revealing layers of redeposited gravels and domestic rubbish (late 19th-early 20th century in date). Machine-cut sondages were sunk at the eastern and western ends, revealing undisturbed natural geology at a depth of 1.08m.

Trench 4

Trench 4 was 58.5m long and 1.5m wide, aligned southwest to northeast. 0.12m of topsoil was removed revealing deposits of redeposited gravels and demolition debris. Machine-cut sondages were sunk at each end of the trench, revealing undisturbed natural geology at depths of 2.1m below the ground at the western end and 0.9m at the eastern end.

Trench 5

Trench 5 was 63m long and 1.5m wide, orientated northwest to southeast. 0.1m of topsoil was removed, revealing redeposited gravels. A sondage was sunk at its southern end, revealing undisturbed natural geology at a depth of 1.2m below the ground.

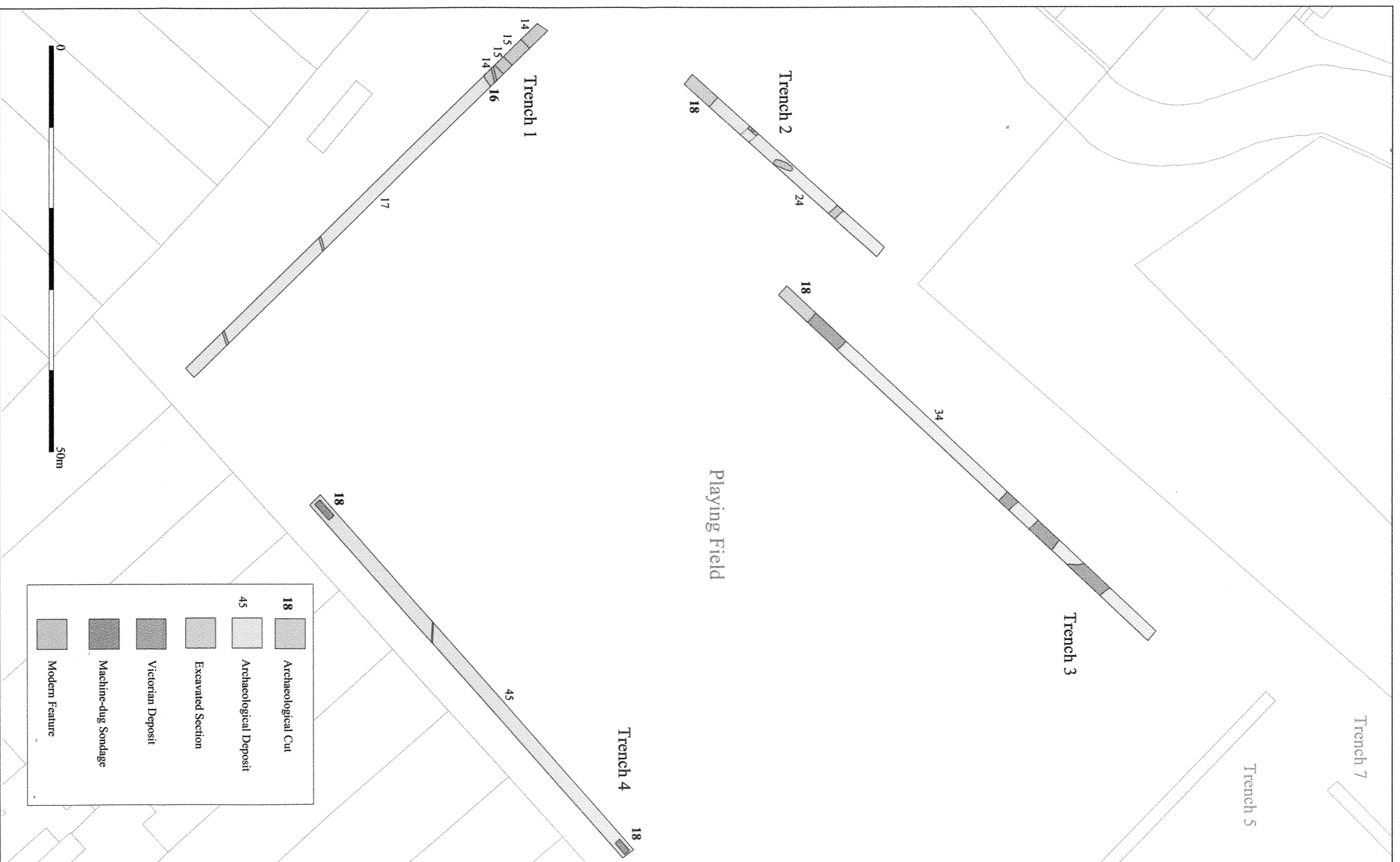


Figure 2 Plan of Trenches 1-4

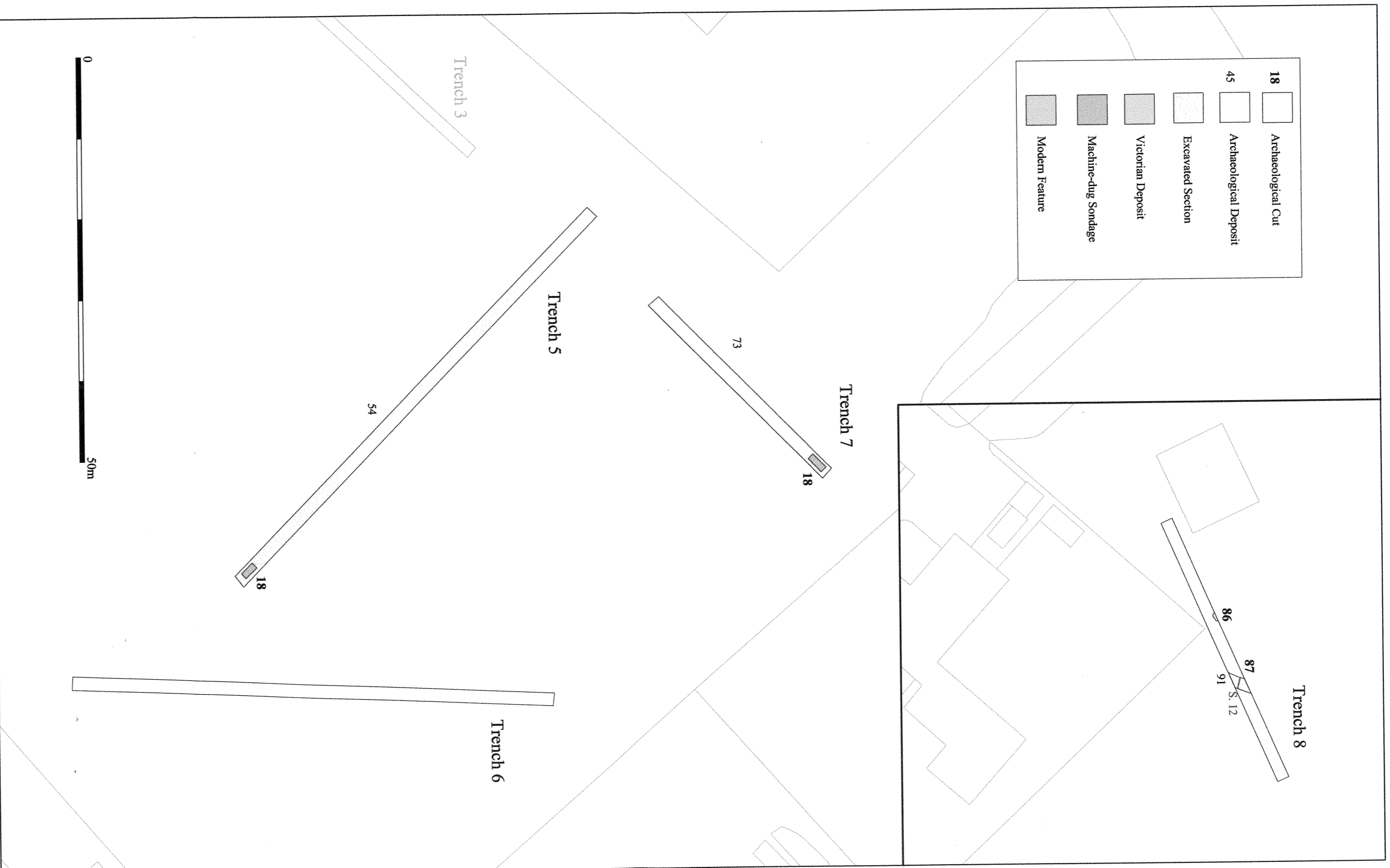


Figure 3 Plan of Trenches 5-7 and 8 (top right)

Trench 6

Trench 6 was 59.26m long and 1.5m wide, aligned north to south. Again redeposited gravels were encountered.

Trench 7

Trench 7 was 30.5m long and 1.5m wide, aligned northeast to southwest. 0.12m of topsoil was removed, revealing redeposited gravels. A machine-cut sondage was sunk at the eastern end, revealing undisturbed natural geology at a depth of 1.15m below the modern ground surface.

Trench 8 (Lady Adrian School site)

Trench 8 was 34.4m long and 1.5m wide, orientated east-northeast to west-southwest. 0.38m of topsoil and 0.26m of subsoil was removed by machine, revealing the undisturbed natural geology. Two features were recorded; a small modern pit, **86**, and a large ditch, **87**. Pit **86** was 1.2m wide and 0.5m deep, containing a dark greyish brown sandy silt with occasional bits of metal and glass. It was cut through the subsoil, but sealed by the topsoil. Ditch **87** was 1.4m wide and 0.95m deep. It was orientated north to south and was V shaped in profile, but with a distinct steep sided gully at the base. It had four fills, mostly the result of the natural erosion of the sides and although containing small amounts of charcoal, were otherwise devoid of cultural material. However one of the middle fills, **90**, was dark brown with a lot of charcoal and two finds, a flint waste flake and a fragment of Bronze Age pottery. This feature was sealed by the subsoil and topsoil.

6 DISCUSSION

The field where the new school is to be built (trenches 1-7) has been subject to extensive gravel quarrying and subsequent backfilling with waste gravel, demolition rubble and domestic waste. Therefore any archaeological features in this area have been destroyed. The area of the development attached to the Lady Adrian School (trench 8), however, has not been truncated and archaeological features were intact. Ditch **87** was found to be Bronze Age in date and orientated north to south, a totally different alignment to the modern streets and houses, which are in turn based on the alignment of the pre-20th century field system. Therefore this ditch is likely to be a relic of an earlier field system, on a different alignment.

7 CONCLUSION

The area of the new school site has been extensively truncated for gravel extraction, probably in the late 19th or early 20th centuries, resulting in the destruction of any

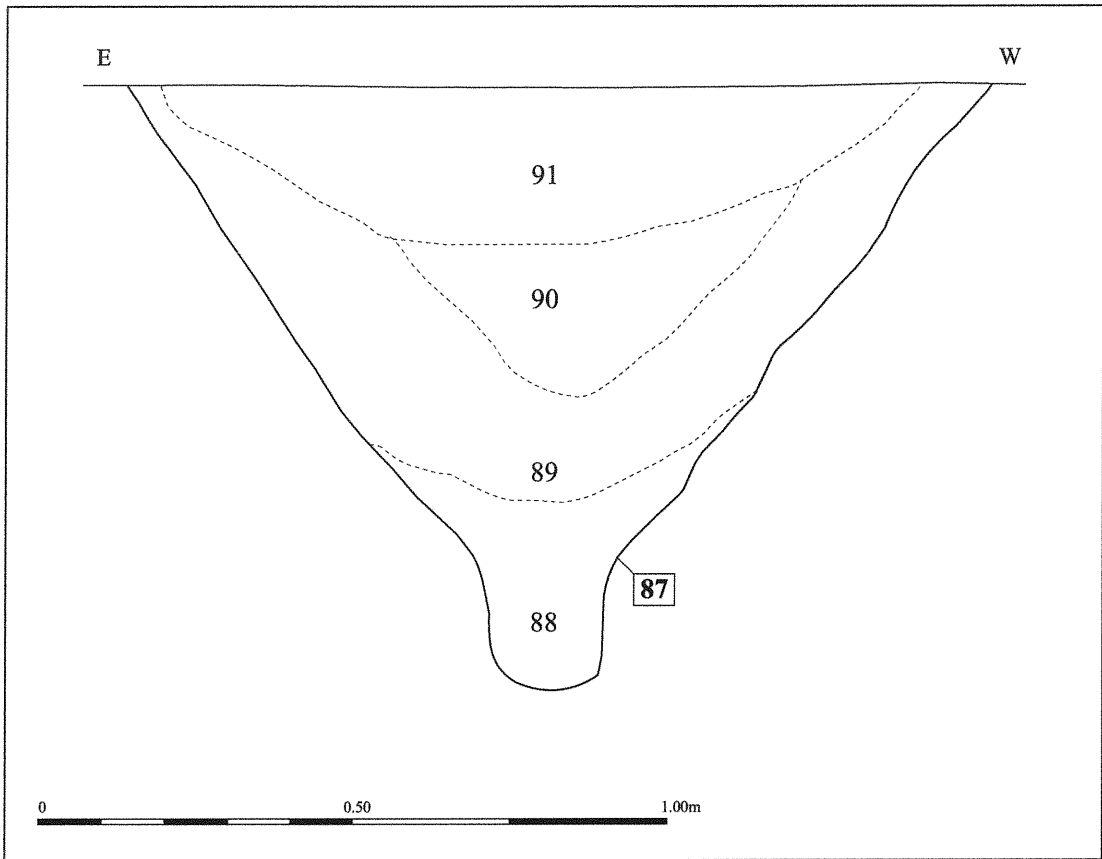


Figure 4 Section 12

archaeological remains. The area of the Lady Adrian School extension however, is comparatively untruncated. Of the two features discovered, one was of Bronze Age date, a period under represented in the locality and therefore potentially very important to our understanding of the prehistory of this part of Cambridge. This ditch was sealed beneath more than 0.6m of topsoil and subsoil, so it is likely that any further features of this date may survive in the land to the north of the Lady Adrian School.

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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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