Archaeological Field Unit

Fen Croft, Ringer's Lane, Leverington: An Archaeological Evaluation

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Fen Croft, Ringer's Lane, Leverington: An Archaeological Evaluation

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SUMMARY

During May 2001 the Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Field Unit carried out work in response to a brief for archaeological evaluation of land known as Fen Croft, Ringer's Lane, Leverington (TF 4429 4408) following the planning application by Construct Reason Ltd. An initial desk-based assessment considered cartographic and textual evidence.

Following the desk-based assessment intrusive evaluation was carried out to determine the presence and extent of surviving archaeological remains. Seven trenches were excavated revealing three ditches.

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1 INTRODUCTION

On the 3rd and 4th of May 2001 the Archaeological Field Unit (AFU) of Cambridgeshire County Council undertook an archaeological evaluation on behalf of Construct Reason Ltd on land known as Fen Croft, Leverington. 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 1.78ha. Given that the site is located near the historic centre of Leverington in an area of high archaeological potential (below), the possibility of there being archaeological remains within the application site determined the requirements for an archaeological evaluation.

The brief produced by Andy Thomas, Cambridgeshire County Council County Archaeology Office, (Brief for Archaeological Evaluation, 20/02/2001).

Site Location

The development site is located on land known as Fen Croft, to the south of the medieval parish church of St. Leonard, in the Parish of Leverington, some 2.5miles to the north-west of the centre of Wisbech (fig.1).

Topography and Geology

At the time of the archaeological investigation the development site comprised 1.78 hectares of reasonably well drained land that has been taken out of cultivation. It is centred on NGR TF 4429 4408 at an average height of 3m AOD.

The local geology consists of Terrington beds (saltmarsh and tidal creek deposits) over Ampthill Clay (BGS Sheet 159).

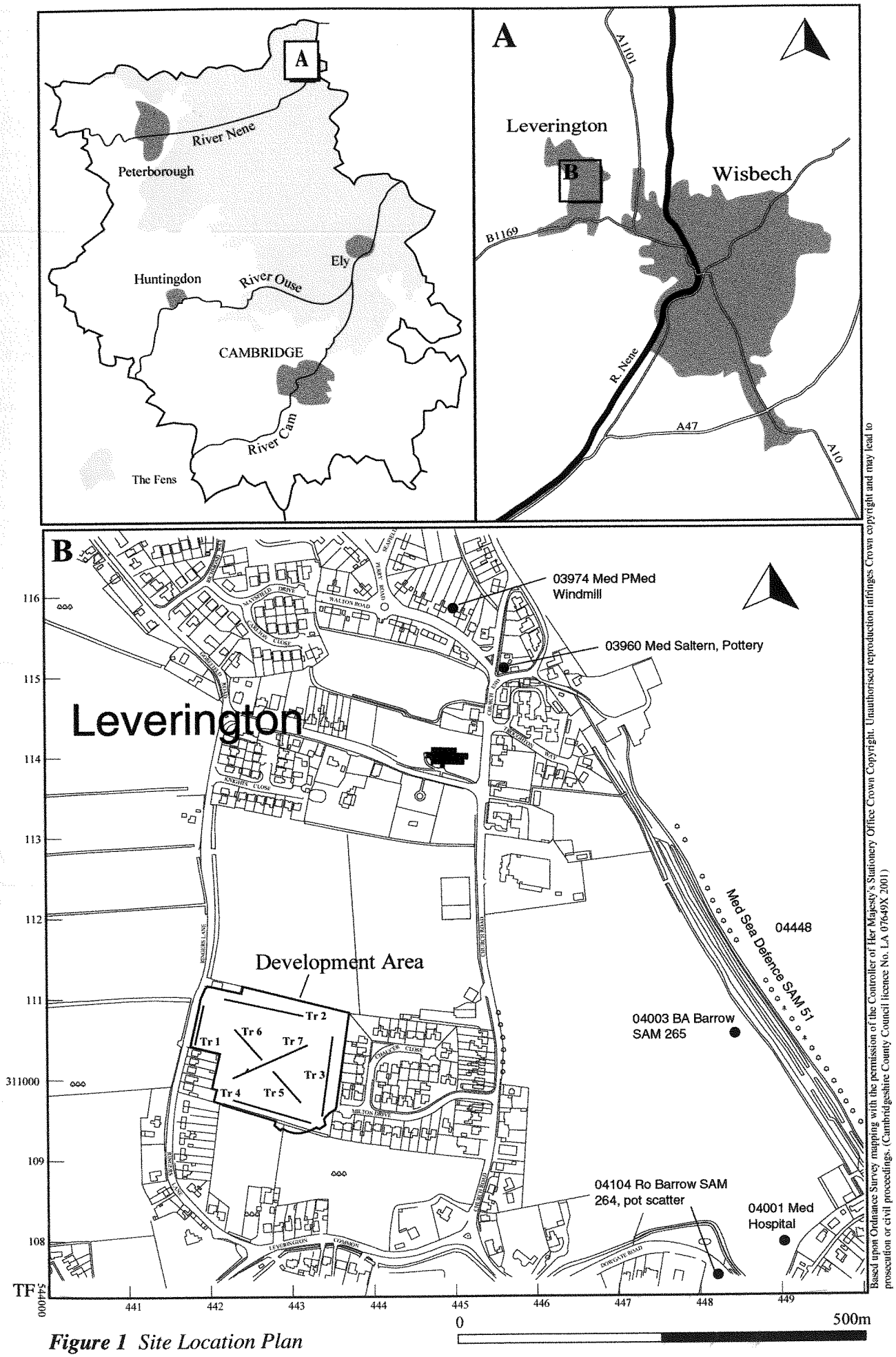

Figure 1 *Site Location Plan*

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Before the evaluation stage of this project, a desk-based assessment of archaeological potential was undertaken, and this forms the background for this report. The results will not be reiterated here, and can be found in the companion report (Cooper 2001).

4 THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL POTENTIAL OF THE SITE

There is very little potential for prehistoric or Roman remains being found on the site as this area would have been under water or used only for grazing during these periods.

Considering the type of landscape that the subject area is in there is a moderate potential for encountering medieval cultivation features on the site (Darlands or ditched strip fields probably running west/east (Hall, 1996)).

The post-medieval and medieval periods are well represented in the documentary record for this area. Post-medieval buildings include Leverington Hall, the Chapter House and Fen Croft House.

The presence of post-medieval material from the archaeological evaluation (Kenney, 2000) at the nearby Chapter House indicates that there is a moderate likelihood of encountering post-medieval remains within the development area.

5 METHODOLOGY

Following on from the desktop assessment (Cooper 2001) seven evaluation trenches were excavated for a total length of 550m using a toothless ditching bucket 1.80m wide. They were located across the site in order to provide maximum coverage of the proposed development area.

The trenches were cleaned by hand to allow feature and deposit recognition. The stratigraphic sequence at both ends of each trench was described. A general scale plan of the site was produced showing the location of the excavated trenches within the development site. Finally a photographic record was compiled which consisted of colour slides, colour and monochrome prints. Due to the absence of archaeological features and deposits, no further recording was undertaken.

The recording system and the post-excavation procedures followed the standard AFU practice.

6 RESULTS (Fig. 1 and 2)

Trench 1 (50mx1.80m), north/south oriented. It was excavated to a minimum depth of 0.50m (northern end) and a maximum depth of 0.53m (southern end).

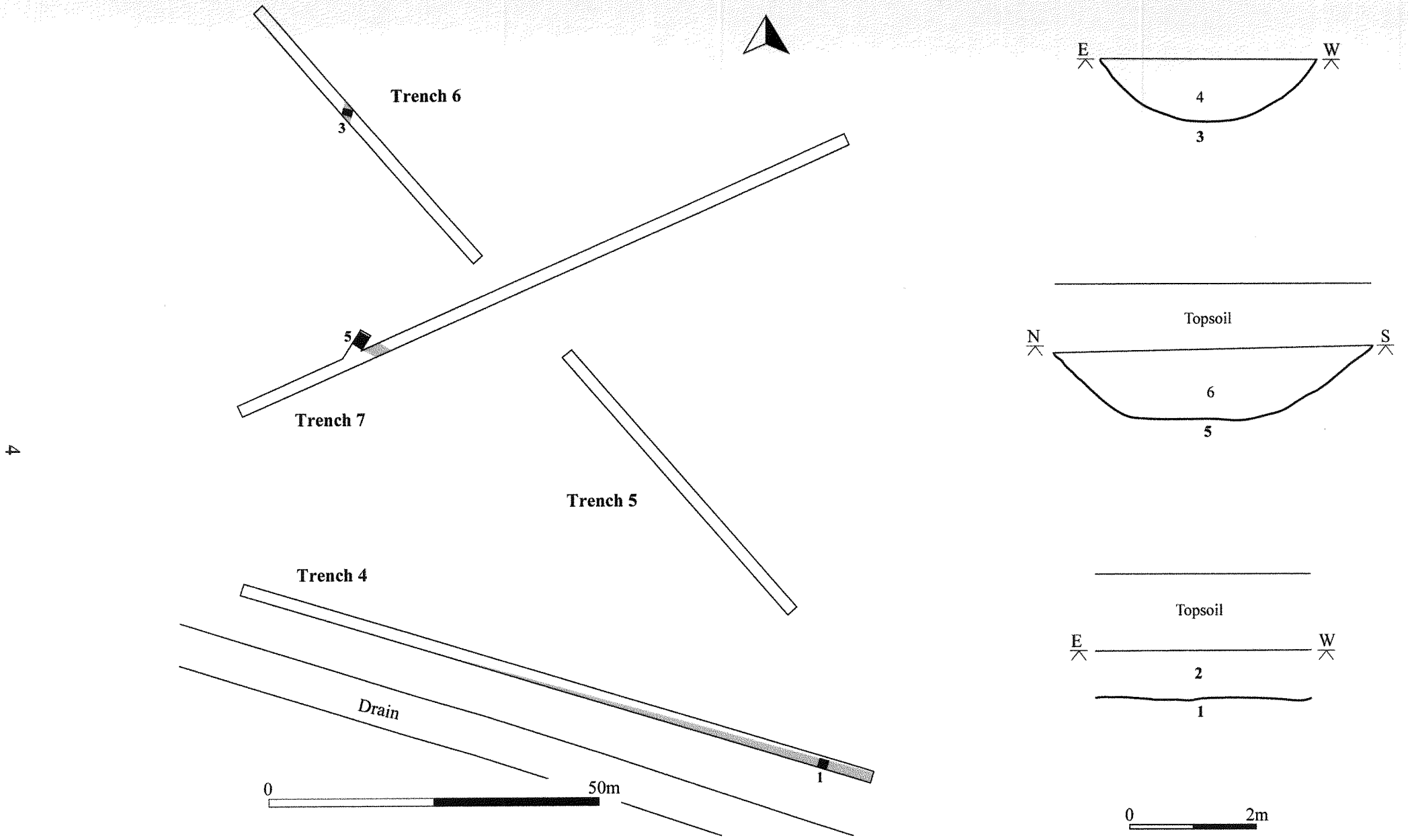

Figure 2 *Site trench plans and sections*

The removal of the brownish-grey silty clay topsoil revealed the natural clayey silt geology mixed outcrops of clay. No archaeological features observed in this trench. Trench 2 (100mx1.80m), east/west oriented. It was excavated to a minimum depth of 0.42m (western end) and a maximum depth of 0.52m (eastern end). The removal of the brownish-grey silty clay topsoil revealed the natural clayey silt geology mixed outcrops of clay. No archaeological features observed in this trench.

Trench 3 (100mx1.80m), north/south oriented. It was excavated to a minimum depth of 0.35m (northern end) and a maximum depth of 0.43m (southern end). The removal of the brownish-grey silty clay topsoil revealed the natural clayey silt geology mixed with outcrops of clay. No archaeological features observed in this trench.

Trench 4 (100mx1.80m), west-east oriented. It was excavated to a minimum depth of 0.35m (northern end) and a maximum depth of 0.43m (southern end). The removal of the brownish-grey silty clay topsoil revealed the natural clayey silt geology mixed outcrops of clay. A ditch **1** aligned approximate east/west was observed cutting into the natural geology for a distance of 45m. On excavation, the ditch was found to be 0.55m in depth, however the width measurement could not be taken because of the location of the ditch in relation to the trench edge (fig. ?). The ditch was filled with a single deposit consisting of a dark grey clayey silt. No artefacts was recovered from the deposit

Trench 5 (50mx1.80m), north-west/south-east oriented. It was excavated to a depth of 0.40m for its entire length. The removal of the brownish-grey silty clay topsoil revealed the natural clayey silt geology mixed with outcrops of clay. No archaeological features observed in this trench.

Trench 6 (50mx1.80m), north-west/south-east oriented. It was excavated to a minimum depth of 0.43m (south-eastern end) and a maximum depth of 0.46m (north-western). The removal of the brownish-grey silty clay topsoil revealed the natural clayey silt geology mixed with outcrops of clay. At 19m from the north-western end of the trench a ditch **3**, aligned north/south was observed cutting into the natural geology. On excavation the ditch was found to be 1.70m wide and 0.50m deep. Feature **3** contained single deposit consisting of a dark grey clayey silt. No artefacts was recovered from the deposit.

Trench 7 (100mx1.80m), north-east/south-west oriented. It was excavated to a minimum depth of 0.35m (south-western end) and a maximum depth of 0.42m (north-eastern). The removal of the brownish-grey silty clay topsoil revealed the natural clayey silt geology mixed with outcrops of clay. At 21m from the south-western end of the trench a ditch **5**, aligned east/west was observed cutting into the natural geology. An additional trench (fig. ?) was machine excavated in order to obtain accurate measurements for the feature both in plan and on excavation in profile. On excavation feature **5** was found to be 1.70m wide and 0.50m deep it contained a single deposit consisting of a dark grey clayey silt. No artefacts was recovered from the deposit

7 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 development involves the excavation of foundation trenches, services and road construction.

The key research issues specific to the site relate to its location to the historic core of Leverington centering on the parish church of St. Leonard *c.* 13th century. Evaluation trenches revealed the presence of either boundary or drainage ditches, aligned north-south and east-west. However the ditches do not appear in every trench suggesting a certain irregularity to the ditch system which divides the landscape into small plots. Dating the ditches is somewhat problematic, with no datable material recovered during the excavation process. However, it is possible to say that the ditches were no longer in use by 1824 as they do not appear on the 1824 Ordnance Survey Map (sheet 45, reprint).

8 CONCLUSION

The evaluation identified the depositional sequence present on site as mainly sandy gravels together with extensive spreads of clay overlaid by approximately 0.40m of topsoil.

It is clear that the land was not within the settlement area of Leverington during the medieval and post-medieval period but suggests rather that it was peripheral to the settlement and has been used for agriculture for many centuries.

It is unlikely that the development on the evaluation site will have an impact on archaeological remains.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank the following people for their valued assistance in respect of this evaluation report: Construct Reason Ltd, who commissioned the project. Thanks are also due to Rebecca Casa-Hatton who worked on site, Scott Kenney who prepared the illustrations and Judith Roberts who edited the report. The Brief was written by Andy Thomas, Cambridgeshire County Council Development Control Officer who also monitored the work on site.

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