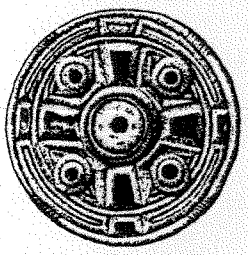

Archaeological Field Unit

Alderman Jacobs Primary School, Whittlesey
An Archaeological Evaluation

G.D. Bailey

August 2003

Cambridgeshire County Council

Report No. B117

Commissioned by Mouchel

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An Archaeological Evaluation

G.D. Bailey BSc

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Editor: Stephen Macaulay BA, MPhil, AIFA
Illustrator: C. Begg BSc

Report No. B117

Cambridgeshire County Council
Fulbourn Community Centre
Haggis Gap, Fulbourn
Cambridgeshire CB1 5HD
Tel (01223) 576201
Fax (01223) 880946

arch.field.unit@cambridgeshire.gov.uk
http://edweb.camcnty.gov.uk/afu

SUMMARY

The Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council undertook an archaeological evaluation land (TL 2767 9758) to the rear of Alderman Jacobs Primary School on 22nd August 2003. The work was commissioned by Mouchel Property Services on behalf of Cambridgeshire County Council in advance of a school extension development.

The proximity of the site to the route of the Roman Fen Causeway lent potential to the deposits being part of the causeway or an offshoot to possible roadside development. The evaluation revealed that the area of proposed development had been subject to extensive modern disturbance. The natural gravels being exposed at depths of 0.60m to 1.06m.

The stratigraphic relationship of a limestone layer to modern service trenches confirms that it post-dates them and therefore cannot be part of any Roman roadside development.

In conclusion it appears that the deposits present in the trench excavated were of no archaeological significance, being a product of modern disturbance.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Alderman Jacobs Primary School, Whittlesey
An Archaeological Evaluation

1 INTRODUCTION

On the 22nd of August 2003, an archaeological evaluation was undertaken at Alderman Jacobs Primary School, Drybread Road, Whittlesey (TL 2767 9758). The proposed development area covers approximately 400m^2. The project was commissioned by Mouchel. Staff of the Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Field Unit undertook the evaluation. The work was carried out according to the brief issued by the Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeology Office (Thomas 2003). The work was supervised on site by the author and managed by Stephen Macaulay.

2 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

This site is located on the eastern side of the town of Whittlesey. Whittlesey was a former gravel island, once surrounded by ancient river tributaries to the south and east and open water to the north. The site lies within a large, flat, grassed area (Bassenhally Field), currently used as school playing fields.

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The development site is on the March gravels in an area of high archaeological potential close to the line of the Fen Causeway Roman road (SMR no 11048)

The gravel island (interglacial gravels overlying Oxford Clay) formed a secure crossing point for a second century Roman road – The Fen Causeway – that crossed the fenland between Peterborough and Denver, Norfolk. The significance of this road is undisputed and has been discussed elsewhere (Hall and Coles, 1994) but seldom investigated. While information about its construction is reasonably well known, evidence of roadside activities (a typically association of Roman road systems) is less well understood. Settlements at the northwestern and northeastern edges of the island have been investigated to some extent, where internal roads that may have linked up to the major fen route were in evidence. How frequently the road was a focus of roadside activities, at least on the former island crests, is high priority on the regional research agenda.

Figure 1 *Location of Trench with Development Area outlined in red.*

4 METHODOLOGY

The site lies immediately to the south of existing buildings belonging to Alderman Jacob's School, Whittlesey. The County Archaeological Office required trenching totalling 12.5m, a 5% sample of the proposed development area.

Trenching consisted of a single 12.5m long trench that was located so as to avoid seriously disturbing the active rainwater run-off culverts. The trench was opened using a wheeled JCB with a 1.6m wide toothless ditching bucket. The trench was cut to a depth (0.60-0.80m) so as to expose any archaeological features and the underlying natural gravels.

Following machining the trench was cleaned by hand and recorded, drawn and photographed according to the standards of the Archaeological Field Unit. Recording conditions were good with dry and clear skies.

5 RESULTS

No archaeological features were exposed during excavation. The trench cut into two rainwater drainage culvert trenches and through a layer of limestone (**8**). The proximity of the site to the route of the Roman Fen Causeway indicated that **8** might be part of the actual causeway or an offshoot to possible roadside development. The limestone layer was 0.20m thick towards the eastern end of the trench, tapering gradually to 5 cm thick to the west. There was also a gentle camber, with a 0.30m drop off, over the westernmost 6m of the layer. This implies that **8** was the surface of a rough road.

Overlying the limestone a layer of grassed topsoil (**1**) 0.27-0.40m thick is present. The camber recognised from the limestone layer is still present at the upper horizon of the topsoil. A modern posthole penetrates the topsoil and intrudes 0.1m into the limestone. To the westernmost extent of **8** a relatively small layer (1.12m E/W, 0.09m thick) of firm gravely silt infill a hollow.

Below **8** lies a deposit similar to topsoil with a fair percentage of gravel included. This deposit seals deposit **4** to the east, **5** mid-trench and **9** to the west. All these deposits were of compacted sandy gravel, identical to each other. **4** and **9** were back filling deposits for rainwater run-off culverts trenches. Deposit **5** (3.60m long, 0.13m thick) seems to be surplus trench-filling material dumped on the exposed gravels.

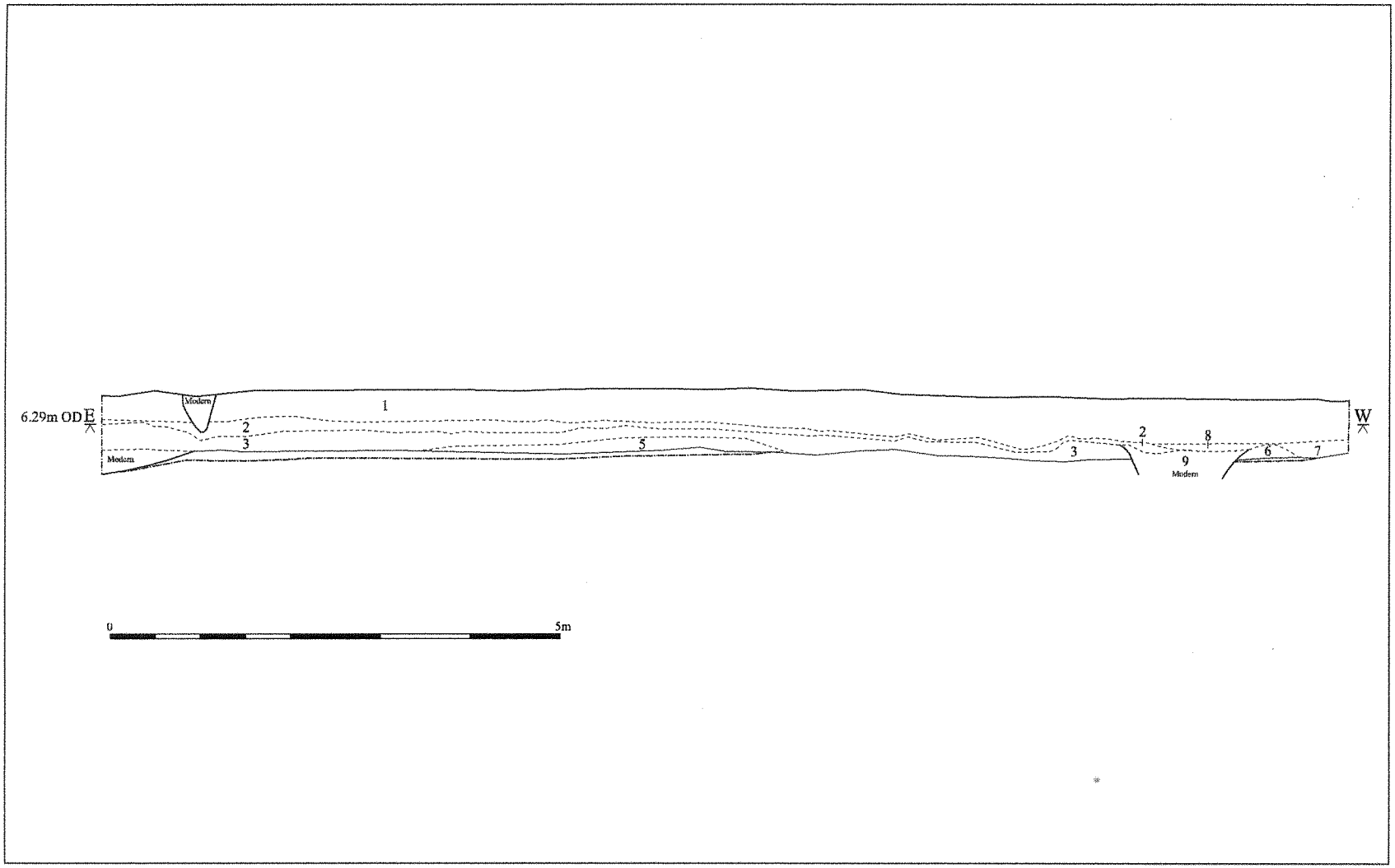

Figure 2 *North-facing section of Trench.*

6 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The stratigraphic relationship of the limestone to the modern service trenches confirms that it post-dates them and therefore cannot be Roman in origin. The limestone appears to have been part of a modern haul road, presumably in use during the construction of the school. The dirty gravel (**6**) at the lower horizon of the deposits reinforces the belief that all of the deposits overlying the natural gravel are recent, the result of the construction work carried out for the school.

In conclusion it appears that the deposits present in the trench excavated were of no archaeological significance, being a product of modern disturbance.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank Mouchel who commissioned and funded the archaeological work. The project was managed by Stephen Macaulay. Thanks also to David Andrews who provided assistance during the excavation and Crane Begg, who illustrated the drawings and maps.

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

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Institute of Geological Sciences. Peterborough Sheet 158

APPENDIX

Contexts List

Context No.	Trench	Description
1	1	Topsoil
2	1	Limestone Layer
3	1	Redeposited topsoil
4	1	Sandy Gravel Backfill
5	1	Sandy Gravel Backfill
6	1	Sandy Gravel dump
7	1	Sandy Gravel Backfill
8	1	Gravelly Silt Layer
9	1	Sandy Gravel Backfill

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 118

Deposit Number 117

Ordnance Datum 18.45m OD N

Plans

Limit of Excavation

Deposit - Conjectured

Natural Features

Intrusion/Truncation

Sondages/Machine Strip

Illustrated Section S.14

Deposit

Excavated Slot

Cut Number 118

Deposit Number 117

Cambridgeshire
County Council

Education, Libraries
and Heritage

The Archaeological Field Unit
Fulbourn Community Centre
Haggis Gap
Fulbourn
Cambridge CB1 5HD
Tel (01223) 576201
Fax (01223) 880946