



Archaeological Field Unit

An Archaeological Evaluation at 9 Hallcroft Road, Whittlesey, Cambridgeshire

Spencer Cooper

February 2004

Cambridgeshire County Council

Report No.735

Commissioned by *GL Construction*

An Archaeological Evaluation at 9 Hallcroft Road, Whittlesey, Cambridgeshire

Spencer Cooper

2004

Editor: Aileen Connor
Illustrator: Emily Oakes



Report No. 735

©Archaeological Field Unit
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

Between 6th and 8th February 2004 staff of the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council conducted an archaeological evaluation at 9 Hallcroft Road, Whittlesey, Cambridgeshire (TL 2648 9730).

The remains represent a variety of features of probable post-medieval date, including evidence for a timber structure, the burial of cow/sheep remains and boundary ditches. These activities, which may not be contemporary with each other, were followed by one or more flooding episodes. Subsequent modern activity was represented by two pits. The overlying garden soil may have been imported or reworked in recent times since it contained much modern building material.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION	1
2	GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY	1
3	ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND	1
4	METHODOLOGY	5
5	RESULTS	5
6	DISCUSSION	8
7	CONCLUSION	9
	ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	10
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	10

LIST OF FIGURES

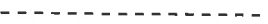
Figure 1	Location of trench with development area outlined	2
Figure 2	Trench plans	6
Figure 3	Section drawings	7

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 

Deposit Number 117

Ordnance Datum 18.45m ODN
X

Plans

Limit of Excavation 

Deposit - Conjectured 

Natural Features 

Intrusion/Truncation 

Sondages/Machine Strip 

Illustrated Section 

Archaeological Deposit 

Excavated Slot 

Modern Deposit 

Cut Number 118

**An Archaeological Evaluation at 9 Hallcroft Road, Whittlesey
(TL 2648 9730)**

1 INTRODUCTION

Between February 6th and 8th 2004 an archaeological evaluation was undertaken at 9 Hallcroft Road, Whittlesey, Cambridgeshire (TL 2648 9730) by staff of the Archaeological Field Unit (AFU) of Cambridgeshire County Council. The proposed development includes construction of four dwellings and an access road. The project was commissioned by G L Developments and was carried out in accordance with a Brief (Planning Application No. F/YR03/0207/F) for an archaeological evaluation issued by Kasia Gdaniec of the Archaeology Office, Cambridgeshire County Council.

2 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

The underlying geology of the fen basin at Whittlesey consists of Jurassic Oxford Clay that crops out around the later (Pleistocene) March Gravels. The March Gravels consist of sand and gravel of marine/estuarine origin, which form the first terrace deposits of the River Nene. The two gravel islands of Whittlesey (west island) and Eastrea with Coates and Eldernell (east island) are surrounded by Flandrian Lower Peat. Later marine transgression caused the deposition of silty clay Barroway Drove Beds. Barroway Drove clay is clearly exposed between Whittlesey and Eastrea (Horton, 1989).

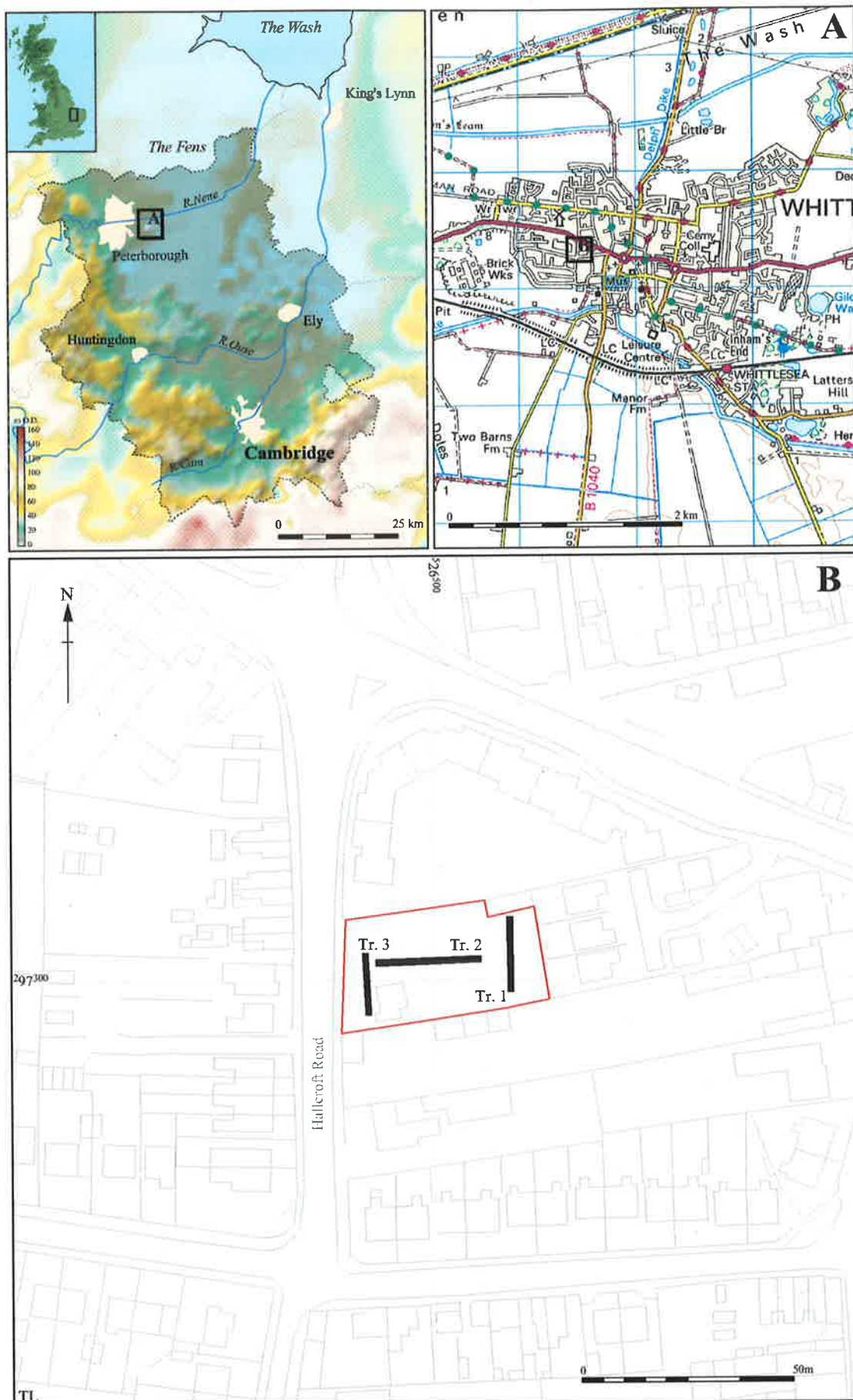
The subject site was located at 6.02m OD. The nearest benchmark was located at the northern end of Hallcroft Rd.

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Prehistoric

Prehistoric finds are known from the area around Whittlesey, their distribution along the fen-edge placing emphasis on the economic significance of the fen as an essential grazing resource. The early prehistoric presence is mainly represented by lithic scatters and stray finds.

The Bronze Age is characterised by both ritual activity and settlement. Barrow mounds have been identified at Eldernell and Suet Hill (to the south of Whittlesey).



Based upon Ordnance Survey mapping with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office Crown Copyright.
 Unauthorized reproduction infringes Crown copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. (Cambridgeshire County Council licence No. LA 07649X 2003)

Figure 1 Location of trenches (black) with the development area outlined (red)

Recent excavations between Whittlesey and Fengate have revealed evidence for settlement that had previously gone undetected through traditional air reconnaissance and field surveys. Furthermore, the archaeological investigations have offered the opportunity to study the location of settlements in relation to the Bronze Age fen. At King's Dyke West excavations revealed the presence of a short-lived late Bronze Age open settlement consisting of five round houses, four-post structures and pits. A cluster of pits inside one of the houses contained remains of butchered lambs. Outside, there were pits with fragments of pottery and disarticulated pig bone. The same type of pottery had been incorporated into the floors of the buildings, suggesting a link between the pits, the living spaces and the breaking of objects. The upland limit to the settlement distribution was around the 4m OD contour (Knight, 1999).

Further work at Bradley Fen also revealed evidence of early and late Bronze Age occupation in the form of pits, and postholes (representing round houses), respectively. The late Bronze Age settlement seems to have occupied a narrow belt between the 1.5m and 4m contours, which was beyond the southern and north-eastern limits of the evaluation site. Below the 1.5m contour and beyond the settlement belt, an isolated pocket of probable contemporary settlement features were identified, including a rectangular post-built structure (Knight, 2000b).

Iron Age

Iron Age finds have also been reported from the brick clay quarry c. 2km to the west of the development site (Hall, 1987).

Roman

The projected course of the Roman Fen Causeway from Peterborough to Grandford near March crosses to the north of Whittlesey. It comes onto the island from Flag Fen and Northey, where parts of the road have been identified. Further parts have been exposed at Eldernell and Eastrea (Hall, 1987).

Recent excavations at Stonald Field, to the east of the present development site, have confirmed the route of the Roman road in the eastern portion of the parish. Dating evidence indicates that it was originally built in the first century AD, probably for military purposes. As time went by, the road began to attract occupation, as suggested by the presence of paddocks, enclosures, a pottery kiln and evidence for iron working around the fringes of the settlement (Mortimer, 1996; Knight, 2000). A large number of rural sites are visible as crop marks along the Fen Causeway at both Whittlesey and Eastrea. Some of the crop marks (Hall, 1987, Sites 7, 8, 9) were recently replotted. The re-

assessment showed the presence of a possible marching camp at TL 3233 9882 (Palmer in Heawood, 1997). Roman material from the clay quarries and brick pits may represent more sites (Hall, 1987) on the islands.

Excavations at Bradley Fen revealed the course of a secondary route, parallel to the established course of the Fen Causeway, at Stonald Field. Earthwork remains of a field system further north are crossed by a trackway, which aligns with the road found at Bradley Fen. This latter may have represented a possible alternative route to Fen Causeway. It corresponds with a trackway earthwork north of Moreton's Leam, which by-passes the settlement at Stonald Field (Knight, 2000,). The track may join the route identified near Hall's Site 8 (Palmer in Heawood, 1997) where, compared with the traditional course, the Fen Causeway seems to turn sharply to the north at its landfall.

Saxon and Medieval

The Whittlesey area is not particularly rich in Saxon and early medieval remains. Approximately 1 km to the east of the development area an Anglo Saxon cemetery (SMR No 10594) consisting of seven inhumations was uncovered in the 19th century. All of the skeletons were orientated on an east-west alignment.

The place-name of Whittlesey indicates a late Saxon origin, being recorded in c. 972 as *(W)itlesig*, meaning 'Wil(t)el's island', from a personal name (Reaney, 1943). It has been suggested that the route formed by Hallcroft Road on the west, Stonald and Bassenhally Roads on the north and Cemetery Road and Inham's Lane on the east may represent the line of an earthen rampart and stockade associated with an early settlement (Pugh 1967, 123). However, Stonald Field is recorded in documents (from 1246) as *Littlestanhale* meaning 'field by the gravel nook' (Reaney, 1943, 262-3) and refers to the gravel soils in the western part of the parish. Further topographic names indicate a dubious early origin for Whittlesey. The marshy area at King's Delph to the north-east of Stonald Road derives its name from Delph Dyke, a canal reputed to have been dug by King Canute.

Early historical records refer to two separate manors that belonged to Thorney (Whittlesey St Mary, acquired in 973) and Ely (Whittlesey St Andrew's acquired in c. 1000). The manor house immediately to the south of St Mary's church is of medieval origin, but was considerably modified during the seventeenth century (Pugh 1967).

Later medieval finds have been discovered from the central area of Whittlesey. The churches of St Andrew's and St Mary's also appear to be relatively late in date, having been erected during the thirteenth century.

Post-Medieval

The two prosperous parishes of St Mary's and St Andrew's were unified after the Dissolution. The economic importance of the town continued in the seventeenth century when Whittlesey ranked second among the towns of the Isle, Ely coming first. The right to hold a market was granted in 1715. Drainage of the fens started at the beginning of the eighteenth century followed by the enclosure of large portions of land.

The SMR entries for Whittlesey correspond to the areas of known activity from the prehistoric period and show the progressive shifts of occupation in relation to the changed environmental conditions, from the prehistoric fenlands to the gravel island in historic times

4 METHODOLOGY

Prior to the commencement of fieldwork the AFU conducted a desktop and cartographic review of the development area including a review of historical data, previous archaeological work and an examination of all available SMR entries.

Three trenches were excavated using a mechanical excavator with a 1.6m toothless ditching bucket. The length of the trenching was 59m 5% of the development area. After machining was completed the trenches were recorded using the AFU standard archaeological recording system.

5 RESULTS

The overburden observed in all three trenches consisted of three layers. Layer 1 was a greyish brown silty clay which varied from 0.20-0.30m in depth. Layer 2 was a dark greyish silty clay which varied from 0.50m-0.60m in depth. Layer 3 was greyish green clay which varied from 0.20-0.30m in depth. Layers 1 and 2 contained large amounts of modern building material. No artefacts were recovered from layer 3.

All the cut features except **11** and **23** are sealed by the three layers which form the overburden.

Trench 1

Trench 1 was 18m long and 1.10m deep and was located on a north-south alignment. In the southern part of the trench a terminus of a ditch **5** was revealed. Ditch **5** was 0.32m wide and 0.14m deep and contained a single fill (4) of greyish brown sandy silt from which animal bone was recovered.

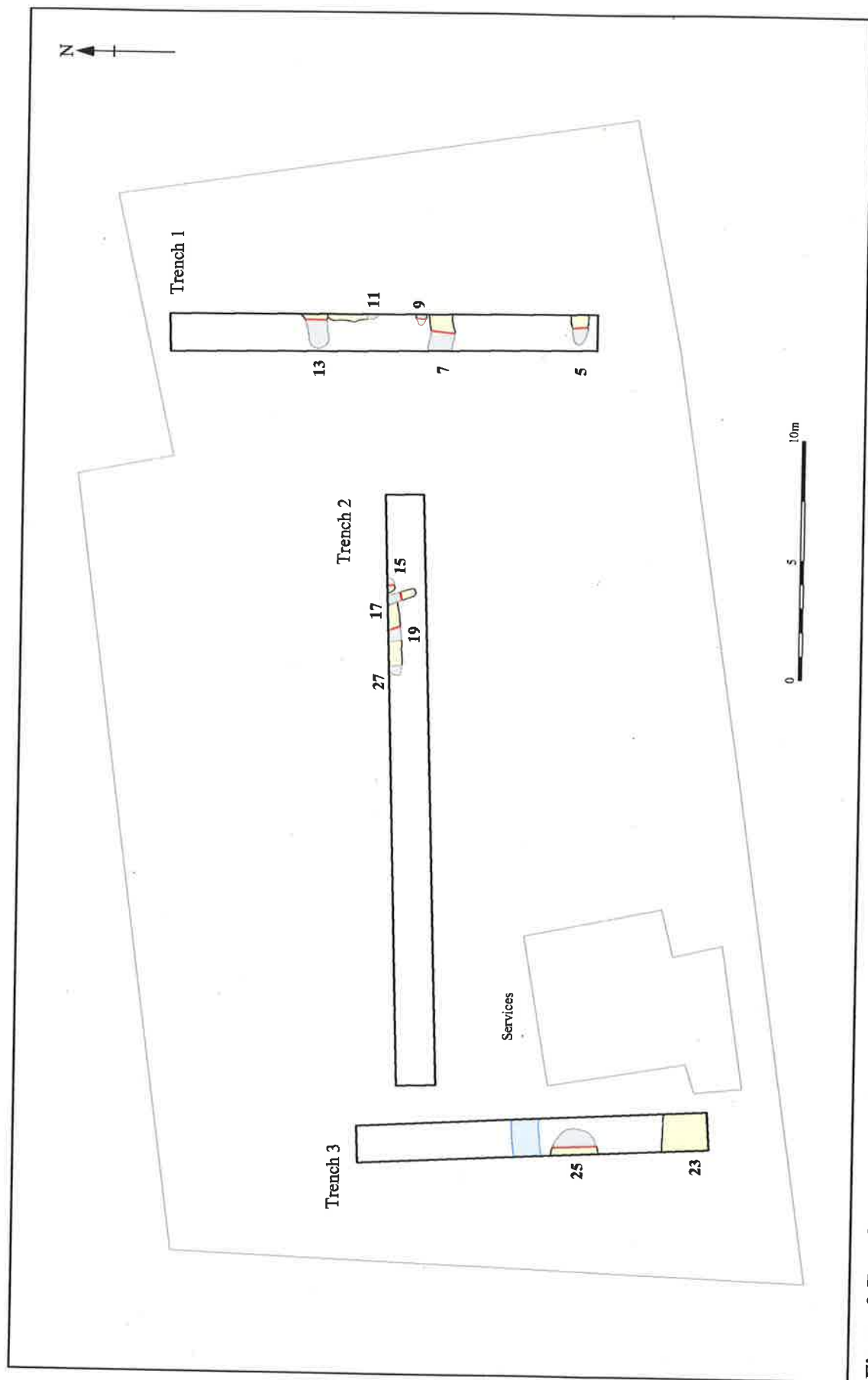


Figure 2 Trench plans

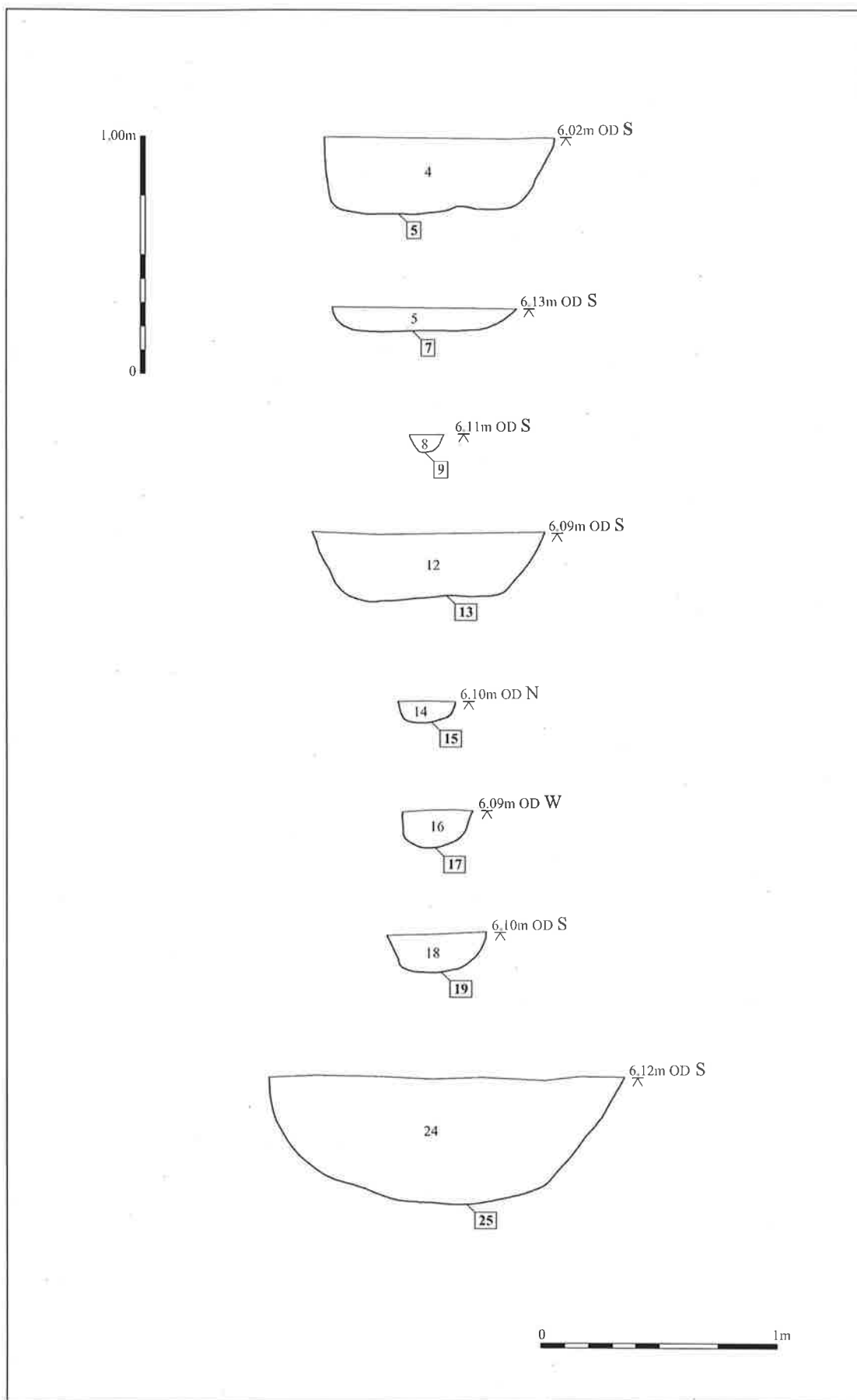


Figure 3 Section drawings

Ditch 7 was 1m wide and 0.25m deep and ran on an east-west alignment. It contained a single fill (5) of dark brown silty clay, which produced no artefacts. Immediately to the north of ditch 7 was posthole 9.

Posthole 9 was 0.15m wide and 0.07m deep and contained a single fill 8. Fill 8 was a light brown silty clay which produced no artefacts.

Pit 11 was 0.26m deep and 1.2m wide and contained a single fill 10 of dark grey silty clay. It was cut through layer 3.

Ditch 13 was 1m wide and 0.30m deep and contained a single fill 12. Fill 12 was a dark grey silty clay which produced no artefacts.

Trench 2

Trench 2 was 25m long and 0.90 m deep and was located on an east-west alignment. In the eastern part of the trench a number of features were identified.

Posthole 15 was 0.30m wide and 0.10m deep and contained a single fill (14) of greyish brown sandy silt.

Ditch 17 was 0.30m wide and 0.11m deep and contained a single fill 16. Fill 16 was a dark grey silty clay which produced no artefacts.

Ditch 17 truncated a possible pit 19.

Pit 19 = 27 was 0.45m wide and 0.12m deep and contained a single fill 18 of light greyish brown silty clay.

Trench 3

Trench 3 was 14m long and 0.95m deep and located on a north-south alignment.

Modern cut 23 was 2m wide and contained modern brick. This feature was partially excavated.

Pit 25 was 1.75m wide and 0.50m deep and contained a single fill 24 of dark grey silty clay from which a sherd of post medieval pottery was recovered.

Finds Quantification Table

Context	Bone	Ceramic
4	2.515	
12	1.871	
24		0.004

6 DISCUSSION

The evaluation shows that post-medieval and modern remains were present in all trenches examined in the evaluation.

Post-Medieval

Post-medieval features were present in all trenches. In trench 1 ditches 5, 7 and 13 may represent post-medieval field boundaries. No pottery was recovered from these ditches but a large quantity of animal bone was recovered from ditches 13 and 5. The lack of dating material from ditches in trench 1 inhibit our understanding of the periods represented, although the state of preservation of animal bone tends to suggest that the main phase of deposition was in the post-medieval period. Furthermore the equidistant spacing of ditches 5, 7 and 13 may suggest that these ditches are part of a contemporary system of land division. Immediately to the north of ditch 7 was posthole 9, which contained no dating material but could relate to ditches 5, 7 and 13.

In trench 2 gully 17 truncated pit 19 and may represent a possible undated beamslot. It is possible that gully 17 is linked with posthole 15 to form a structure. Pit 19 produced no artefacts and probably represents an earlier phase of activity within trench 2 by virtue of its stratigraphic position and different colour fill.

A large post-medieval pit 25 was located in the centre of trench 3. It contained relatively few finds and is unlikely to have been used for rubbish.

Modern

Layers 1 and 2 were garden soils, while layer 3 may have been alluvial in origin. Modern and post-medieval building material was recovered from layers 1 and 2 while no artefacts were identified within layer 3. The majority of features observed appear to have been cut into the natural gravel however pit 11 and ditch 23 were cut into layer 3.

7 CONCLUSION

The results of the evaluation indicate an absence of Roman and medieval remains and artefacts in the development area. This is surprising considering the proximity of the medieval town of Whittlesey and known Roman activity to the north. Despite the absence of significant remains the results of this

evaluation will aid the construction of a deposit model for the archaeology of Whittlesey.

The remains represent a variety of features of probable post-medieval date, including evidence for a timber structure, the disposal of cow/sheep remains and boundary ditches. Following these activities, the deposition of layer 3 suggests alluviation followed by a small amount of modern activity represented by the digging of 11 and 23. In recent times garden soils have been deposited although these are also characterised by the presence of much modern building material, perhaps implying reworking and importation during construction in adjacent areas.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank G L Construction who commissioned and funded the archaeological work. Thanks are also extended to thank Dr Paul Sperry for managing the site. The brief for archaeological works was written by Kasia Gdaniec, County Archaeology Office, who visited the site and monitored the evaluation.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Cambridgeshire County Council - Sites and Monuments Record (SMR)
Cambridgeshire Record Office (CRO)

Hall, D. H. 1987, *The Fenland Project No. 2: Fenland Landscape and Settlement between Peterborough and March*. EAA No. 35.

Heawood, R. 1997, *Two Sites East of Eldernell Lane, Whittlesey: An Archaeological Desktop Study*. Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Field Unit Rep. No. A112.

Horton, A. 1989, *Geology of the Peterborough District*. BGS, Peterborough Sheet Memoir 158, England and Wales (1:50 000).

Knight, M. 1999, *Prehistoric Excavations at King's Dyke, West Whittlesey, Cambridgeshire*. Cambridge Archaeological Unit Rep. No. 301.

Knight, M. 2000, *Whittlesey Pits. The Bradley Fen Site: An Archaeological Evaluation, Phase 1*. Cambridge Archaeological Unit Rep. No. 389.

Pugh, R. B. (ed.) 1967, *The Victoria History of the Counties of England. Cambridge and the Isle of Ely*. Vol. IV, University of London, London.

Reaney, P. H. 1943, *The Place-Names of Cambridgeshire and the Isle of Ely*.
English Place-Name Society, Vol. XiX. CUP.



AFU Reports

Distribution List: Cambridgeshire & Peterborough

Site Name: AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION & 9 HALLCROFT RD, WHITTLESEY, CAMS

Site Code: WHS HR 04 Report No.: 735 Date Sent:

☐ Author(s) ☐ Relevant Specialists (please list:)

☒ 2 Client (how many copies?)

☒ 1 Project Archive

☒ 1 Office Library

☐ Principal Archaeologist,
SMR Office, Room A108,
Castle Court, Shire Hall,
Castle Hill,
Cambridge CB3 OAP
Box No.: ELH1108

☐ A. Baker,
Librarian,
Haddon Library,
Downing Street,
Cambridge CB2 3DZ

☐ County Archivist,
County Records Office,
Room 001, Shire Hall,
Cambridge CB3 OAP
Box No.: RES 1009

Huntingdon Sites ONLY:
☐ Local Studies Librarian,
Huntingdon Library,
Princess Street,
Huntingdon PE1 1RX

☐ Chris Jakes,
Cambridgeshire Collection,
Central Library,
Lion Yard,
Cambridge CB2 3QD

Fenland Sites ONLY:
☐ Local Studies Librarian,
Wisbech Library,
1 Ely Place,
Wisbech PE13 EU

☐ Felicity Gilmour,
National Monument Record,
Kemble Drive,
Swindon SN2 2GZ

☐

Peterborough Reports ONLY:
☐ Ben Robinson,
x 2 Archaeological Officer,
Peterborough Museum & Art Gallery,
Priestgate,
Peterborough PE1 1LF

For English Heritage projects:
☐ Philip Walker,
Inspector of Ancient Monuments,
English Heritage,
Brooklands,
24 Brooklands Avenue,
Cambridge CB2 2BU

**For DC funded reports via the
Cambs planning process send to:**

For English Heritage projects:

☒ 2.
x 3 (inc. SMR) Andy Thomas,
Principal Archaeologist,
Land-Use Planning
Room A107, Castle Court,
Shire Hall, Castle Hill,
Cambridge CB3 OAP
Box No.: ELH1108

☐ Chris Scull,
Archaeology Commissions,
English Heritage,
23 Savile Row,
London W1X 1AB



**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