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Archaeological Field Unit

**Archaeological Monitoring of  
The Proposed Cycleway,  
St. Neots, Cambridgeshire**

G. D. Bailey

October 2004

**Cambridgeshire County Council**

Report No. 753

Commissioned by  
Cambridgeshire County Council Environment and Transport Division

**Archaeological Monitoring of  
The Proposed Cycleway,  
St. Neots, Cambridgeshire**

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## SUMMARY

*Between 13<sup>th</sup> August and 26<sup>th</sup> August 2004, an archaeological monitoring was undertaken on a site between Eaton Socon Cricket Pitch and Ernulf Community School, Eynesbury, (TL 517465 259027). The proposed development is a linear cycleway, running across the River Great Ouse, including the construction of six bridge supports, which were the focus of this monitoring brief.*

*No apparent disturbance of any potential archaeological features had occurred due to development of the site. There was no indication of intrusive land drainage or use, either land management or building.*

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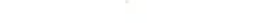
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# Drawing Conventions

## 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	$\frac{18.45m}{\times}$ ODN

## Plans

Limit of Excavation	
Deposit - Conjectured	
Natural Features	
Intrusion/Truncation	
Sondages/Machine Strip	
Illustrated Section	
Cut Number	118

**Archaeological Monitoring of  
The Proposed Cycleway,  
St. Neots, Cambridgeshire  
(TL517465 259027)**

**1 INTRODUCTION**

Between 13<sup>th</sup> August and 26<sup>th</sup> August 2004, an archaeological evaluation was undertaken between Eaton Socon Cricket Pitch and Ernulf Community School, Eynesbury (TL 517465 259027). The proposed development is a cycleway, running across the River Great Ouse and the construction of six bridge supports, which were the focus of this monitoring brief.

The project was commissioned by Cambridgeshire County Council Environment and Transport Division. Staff of the Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Field Unit (AFU) undertook the monitoring.

The work was carried out following consultation with the Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeology Office (CAO).

**2 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY**

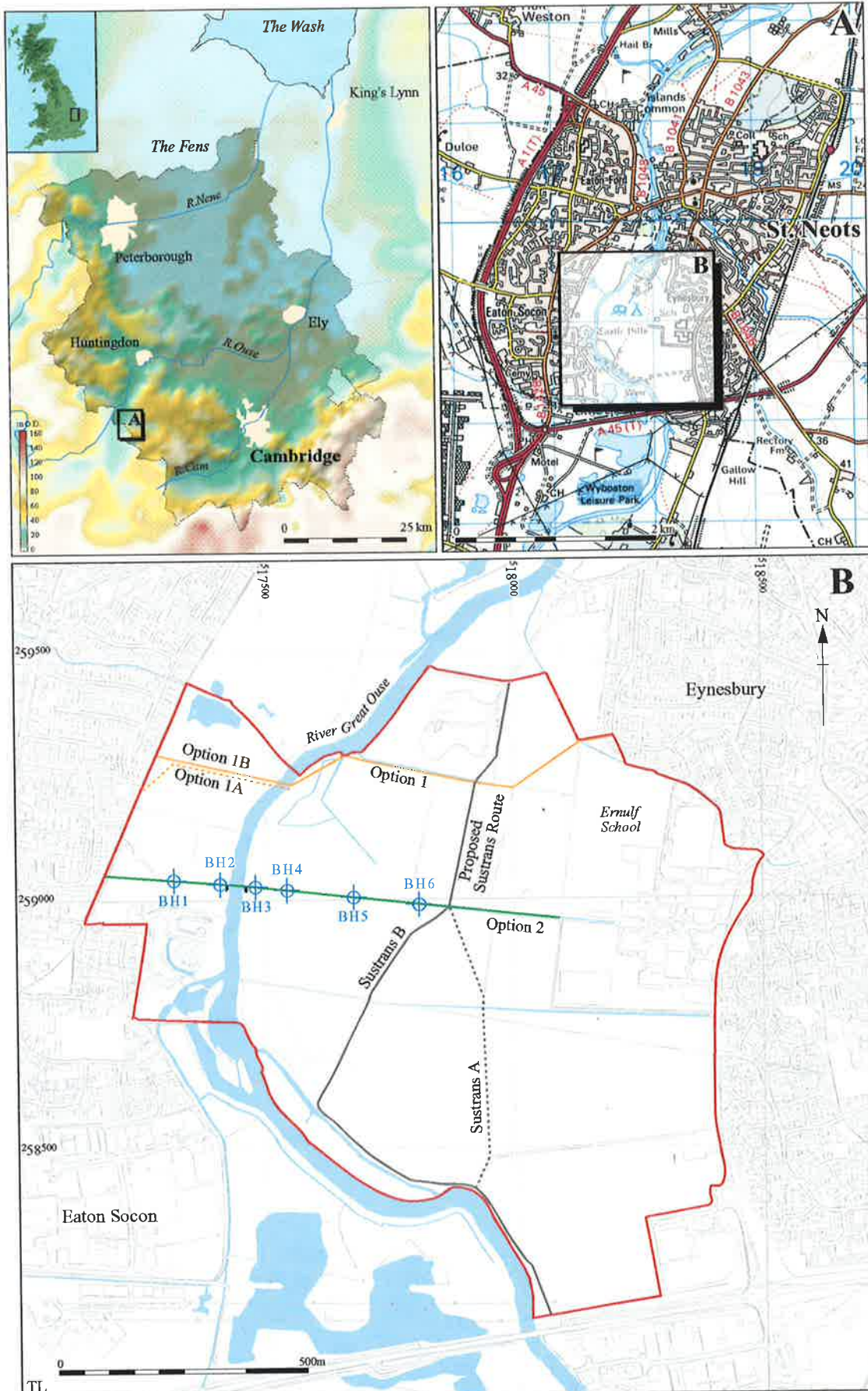
The site lies between 14 and 16m AOD in a broad meander of the River Great Ouse between Eaton Socon and Eynesbury in Cambridgeshire

The Institute of Geological Sciences map showed the local geology consisting of 2nd terrace river gravels immediately to the west and river borne alluvium directly to the east of the present course of the River Great Ouse. Beyond the alluvium 1<sup>st</sup> terrace river gravels extended to Ernulf School.

Field investigation showed that the alluvium extended for a few metres to the west of the river, immediately below a steep bank. Beyond this the land slopes gently up to the inhabited part of Eaton Socon. The western side of the river valley had a comparable bank and slope.

**3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

The earliest evidence for activity in the area is flint scatters from the Mesolithic period (c. 5000BC) found in four areas in the southern part of the site (SMR Nos 373, 377, 512) as well as under the Bronze Age barrow



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**Figure 1** Location of evaluation trenches (black) and development area (red) with boreholes (blue).



excavated by Herne (SMR no.376). There is no evidence that there were any areas of concentrated knapping within the site and these scatters may be random small-scale workings and casual losses.

Cropmark evidence and archaeological work has shown that the area to the south was part of a large, linear, ritual landscape more than 700m long and 300m wide. This landscape consisted of monuments dating from c.4000BC and continuing into the Iron Age, c.700BC, (SMR Nos 376, 381, 447, 6150 and 11671). Many different people and organisations have excavated these monuments over 20 years (Herne 1984, Kemp 1993, 1997 and 1998, Macaulay 1994 and Wessex Archaeology 2001a and b). The long barrow (SMR No. 381) seems to be the earliest monument (4000-3000BC) with placed human and animal remains. Two later Neolithic (3000-2400BC) 'Cursus' sit within this landscape: a ritual/funerary double enclosure with numerous discrete Neolithic pits containing 'placed deposits', and a hengiform ring-ditch. Three later Neolithic cremation burials were found within this complex. At least two Bronze Age ring ditches were former funerary structures (excavated by Herne in 1984 and Kemp in 1997).

The site may have been used in the first century AD as a Roman fort, in a strategic position next to the River Great Ouse, directly outside the development area. This has been known in recent times as Conygeare (SMR Nos 391 and 396c; Figs 6 and 7). In the early nineteenth century its earthworks survived above ground to the extent that it was mapped as a large rectangular encampment on the First edition 1" Ordnance Survey Map. Tebbutt recorded in the St Neots Gazetteer that this encampment had almost been completely destroyed by gravel quarrying in the 19th century. Remains of a settlement, measuring at least 400m by 300m, have been found directly to the east and south of the postulated fort. Cropmarks consisting of Roman small square fields and pits and circles have been recorded to the west of Ernulf School (SMR No. 389).

Eton Socon is known to have been of considerable importance in the late Anglo-Saxon period. A late Anglo-Saxon/Saxo-Norman settlement (SMR No. 374 and No. 371) was found partly under and to the west of the later Eaton Socon castle in a series of small excavations.

#### 4 METHODOLOGY

The site lies across the river course and flood plain of the River Great Ouse between Eaton Socon Cricket Pitch and Ernulf Community School, Eynesbury. The County Archaeological Office required archaeological monitoring of the proposed development area. In this particular case, monitoring was restricted to the points at which geological test pits were excavated. These coincided with the proposed pile locations for the cycleway bridge.



All test pits were excavated using hand tools under archaeological supervision. The test pits were opened within the footprint of the proposed area of development.

No services were expected or found during the excavation.

All six test pits were cut to a depth of approximately 1.20m by hand, exposing the natural geology and any archaeological features. Below this depth the pits were cut using a mechanical auger, operated by D. Farrar Drilling Ltd, for Geotechnics Ltd on behalf of Atkins.

Artefacts within the soils were retrieved for dating evidence, record and comparison. All hand-dug sections were cleaned by hand to establish their nature and enable an assessment of their character. The auger holes were recorded to gain an understanding of the underlying geological sequence.

All test pits were recorded, drawn and photographed to the standards of the AFU. Vertical soil profiles were drawn for each test pit. The locations of the test pits were planned. Recording conditions were generally poor, with heavy shadows due to pit size and strong sunlight. The upsurge in water level in the pits, following the removal of the auguring equipment, also caused recording problems.

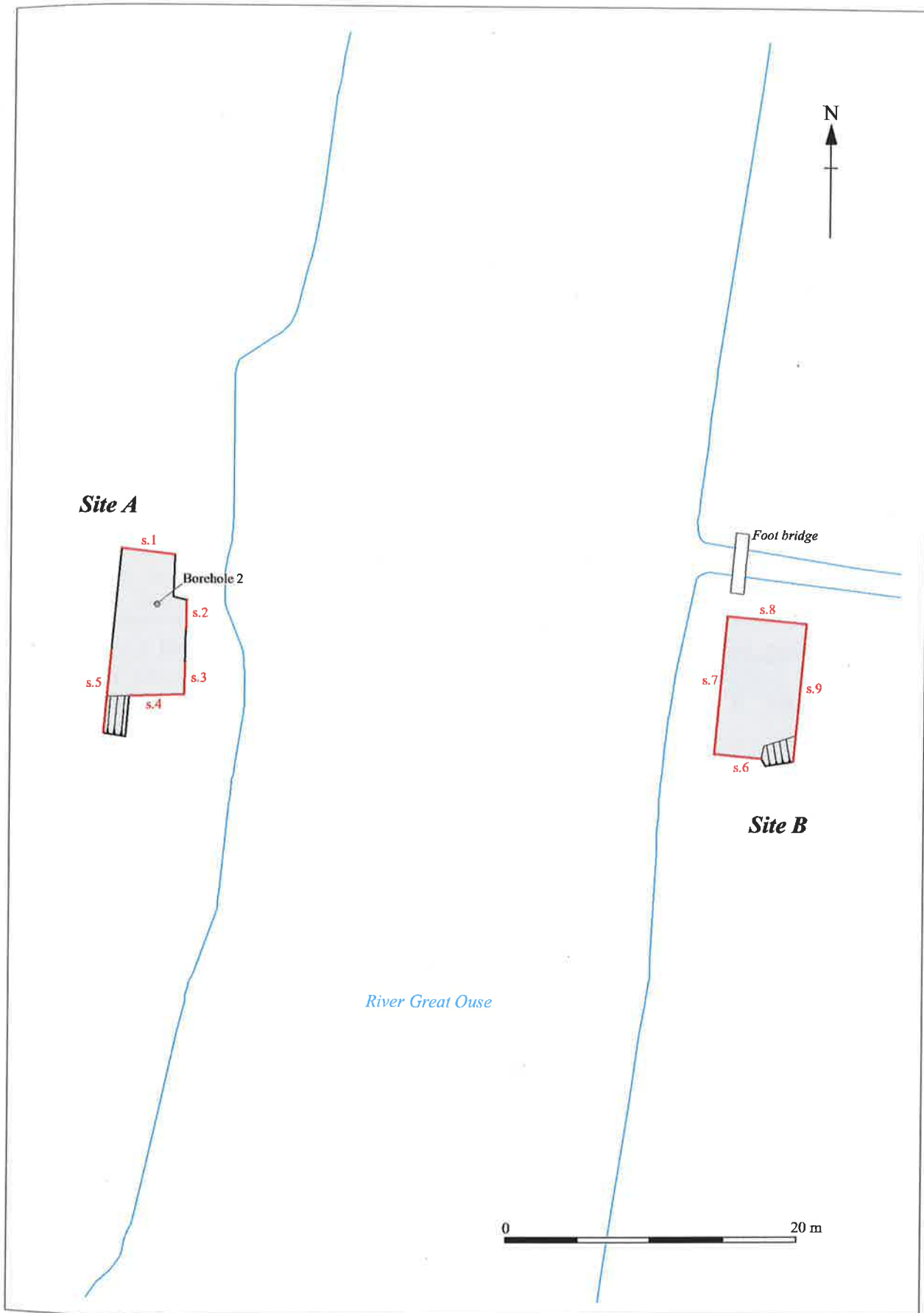
## **5 RESULTS**

The excavation results across the site suggest that the area has been prone to flooding. The small size of the test pits would have made the interpretation of any buried archaeological remains problematic. However, all the test pits had negative results in terms of archaeological features. Three pits did contain artefacts: Test Pit 1 (a fragment of long bone from a large mammal), Test Pit 3 (a worn pig tooth; a modern glass fragment, 1cm by 0.5cm; a similarly sized bivalve shell fragment), and Test Pit 6 (one small fragment of blue and white pottery).

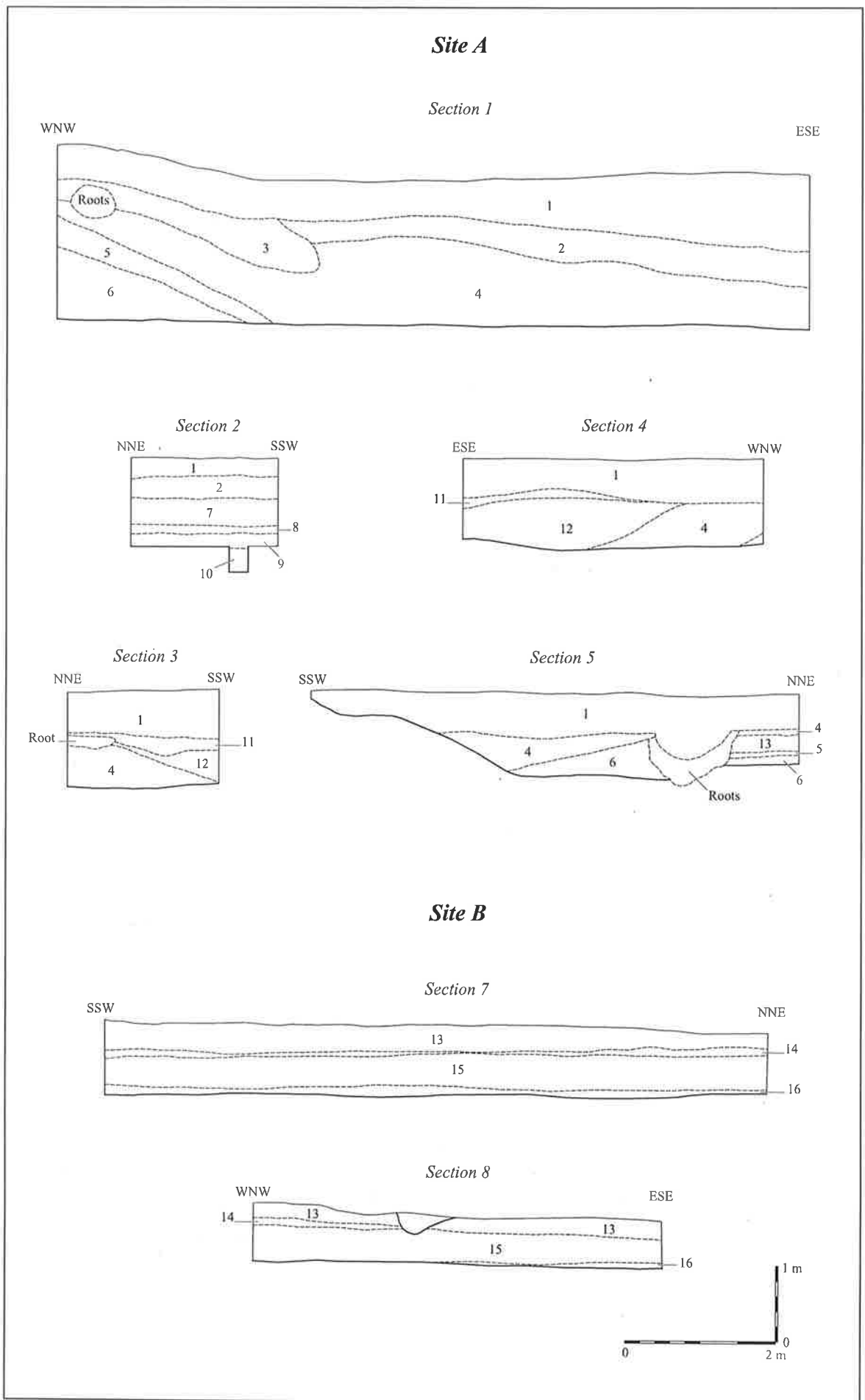
Below the hand-dug section of Test Pit 3, an unworked, waterlogged wood fragment (7cm by 3cm) was recovered from the augured borehole. This was from the base of a sandy gravel deposit and was determined to be of no archaeological relevance.

No apparent disturbance of any potential archaeological features had occurred due to development of the site. There was no indication of intrusive land drainage or usage, whether land management or buildings.

A full list of archaeological deposits is contained in Appendix 1.



**Figure 2** Evaluation trenches



**Figure 3** Section drawings

## 6 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Although the surrounding area has a high potential for archaeology, the monitoring showed negative results for any archaeological features. The artefacts that were recovered were either in the topsoil and updateable, or of a relatively modern date i.e. 18th century onward.

As the excavations were of a very restricted impact, the negative results were not surprising. Further excavation may show some indication of previous land use. The presence of earthworks to the south of the site, part of an extensive defensive structure, may have precluded the development of any buildings or other structures in close proximity to the river. The defensive merit of the Castle would have been compromised had a building or even low wall been in place during its active lifetime.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank Cambridgeshire County Council's Environment and Transport Division who commissioned and funded the archaeological work. The project was managed by Judith Roberts. Thanks also to D. Farrar Drilling Ltd who provided the geotechnical results, C. Begg for the illustrations and R. Atkins who wrote the desktop report.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

British Geological Survey (Huntingdon, Sheet 187)

Cambridgeshire SMR

Ordnance Survey

## FINDS SUMMARY

Test Pit 1: - a fragment of long bone from a large mammal

Test Pit 3: - a worn pig tooth; a modern glass fragment (1cm by 0.5cm); a bivalve shell fragment (1cm by 0.5cm);

Test Pit 6 (one small fragment of blue and white pottery).

**APPENDIX 1**

**Soil Profile For Test Pits and Associated Boreholes**

<b>Test Pit 1</b>	<b>Test Pit 2</b>	<b>Test Pit 3</b>	<b>Test Pit 4</b>	<b>Test Pit 5</b>	<b>Test Pit 6</b>
Dark Greyish Brown Silt with Occasional Stones	Dark Greyish Brown Silt with Occasional Stones	Dark Greyish Brown Silt with Occasional Stones	Dark Greyish Brown Silt with Occasional Stones	Dark Greyish Brown Silt with Occasional Stones	Dark Brown Sandy Silt with Occasional Stones
Mid Orange Sandy Gravel	Mid Orange Sandy Gravel	Pale Yellowish Brown Silty Clay with Occasional Stones	Pale Yellowish Brown Clay with Grey Flecking	Pale Yellowish Brown Clay with Frequent Stones	Brown Very Sandy Clay
Brown Silt with Occasional Stones	Brown Silt with Occasional Stones	Pale Yellowish Brown Slightly Silty Clay	Pale Yellowish Brown Clay with Grey Mottling	Pale Brown Very Sandy Gravel with Occasional Clay	Brown Sandy Gravel
Pale Yellowish Brown Very Sandy Gravel	Pale Yellowish Brown Sand	Mid Grey Green Clay with Frequent Shell Fragments	Pale Yellowish Brown Sandy Gravel with Occasional Clay	Pale Brown Sandy Gravel	Brown Clay
Mid Brown Slightly Silty Gravel	Yellow Very Sandy Gravel	Mid Grey Sandy Clay with Frequent Shell Fragments	Pale Brown Very Sandy Gravel	Mid Grey Clay with Frequent Chalk	Mid Grey Clay with Frequent Chalk
Mid Brown Clay	Organic Black Silt	Mid Brown Clay with Frequent Shell Fragments	Mid Brown Clay	Mid Grey Clay with Frequent Chalk	Mid Grey Clay with Frequent Chalk
Mid Grey Clay with Stones and Chalk Flecks	Mid Brownish Grey Clay	Mid Grey Gravel	Mid Grey Clay with Frequent Chalk		
Mid Grey Sand	Dark Grey Sand with Occasional Clay	Mid Grey Clay with Frequent Chalk			
Mid Grey Clay with Frequent Chalk	Mid Brown Sandy Gravel with Occasional Clay				
	Mid Grey Clay with Frequent Chalk				



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