



CCC AFU Report Number 844

Romano-British Droveway activity on a Roddon at Church Road, Christchurch, Wisbech, Cambridgeshire

An Archaeological Evaluation

Glenn Bailey and Paul Sperry

February 2006

Cover Images

Machine stripping, Soham	On-site surveying,
Roman corn dryer, Duxford	Guided walk along Devil's Dyke
Bronze Age shaft, Forkham Bypass	Medieval well, Soham
Human burial, Barrington Anglo-Saxon Cemetery	Timbers from a medieval well, Soham
Blue enamelled head, Barrington	Bed burial reconstruction, Barrington Anglo-Saxon Cemetery.
Aethusa cynapium 'Fool's parsley'	Medieval tanning pits, Huntington Town Centre
Digging in the snow, Huntingdon, Town Centre	Beaker vessel
Face painting at Hinchinbrooke Iron Age Farm	Environmental analysis
Research and publication	Monument Management, Bartlow Hills

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activity on a Roddon at Church
Road, Christchurch, Wisbech,
Cambridgeshire**

An Archaeological Evaluation

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Summary

The Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC AFU) conducted an evaluation on 0.69ha of land at Church Road, Christchurch, Wisbech in Cambridgeshire (TL 4916 9649). The site was recorded prior to the proposed housing development.

The evaluation revealed a series of ditches running east to west cut into a roddon that dominated the site. The deposits underlying the roddon were exposed to both satisfy the brief and allow for a better understanding of the depositional sequence.

The full sequence of fluvial deposits making up the roddon was recorded. In its latest phase probable channels of natural origin were recorded, and these were subsequently reinforced and/or replaced by ditches on similar alignments. No features running on a different alignment were exposed.

The paucity of artefactual evidence recovered did not enable a clear picture of the history of the exploitation of the site to be formed, although this lack of finds tends to suggest that the activity was not domestic. No direct dating for the final phase fluvial deposits or for the two or more phases of replacement ditches was recovered, although it seems certain that these are part of the Romano-British field system already mapped here from aerial photographs.

The information gathered at this site, when combined with that drawn from the surrounding landscape, implies that the roddon was incorporated into the form of the Romano-British field system as its key east-west cross member. The ditches along its length provided functions of both water management and as driveway boundaries, enabling access to 'cells' within the field system and perhaps offering a link into a wider system of driveways.

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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	118
Deposit Number	117
Ordnance Datum	18.45m ODN
Sample Number	◇

Plans

Limit of Excavation	—————
Deposit - Conjectured	-----
Natural Features	-----
Intrusion/Truncation	-----
Sondages/Machine Strip	-----
Illustrated Section	S.14
Deposit	
Excavated Slot	
Machine Cut Sondage	
Modern	
Roddon	-----
Cut Number	118
Ditch	D.18

1 Introduction

This archaeological evaluation was undertaken in accordance with a Brief issued by Kasia Gdaniec of the Cambridgeshire Archaeology, Planning and Countryside Advice team (CAPCA; Planning Application F/YR05/0578/F), supplemented by a Specification prepared by John Samuels Archaeological Consultants (JSAC).

The work was designed to assist in defining the character and extent of any archaeological remains within the proposed development area, in accordance with the guidelines set out in Planning and Policy Guidance 16 - Archaeology and Planning (Department of the Environment 1990). The results will enable decisions to be made by CAPCA, on behalf of the Local Planning Authority, with regard to the treatment of any archaeological remains found.

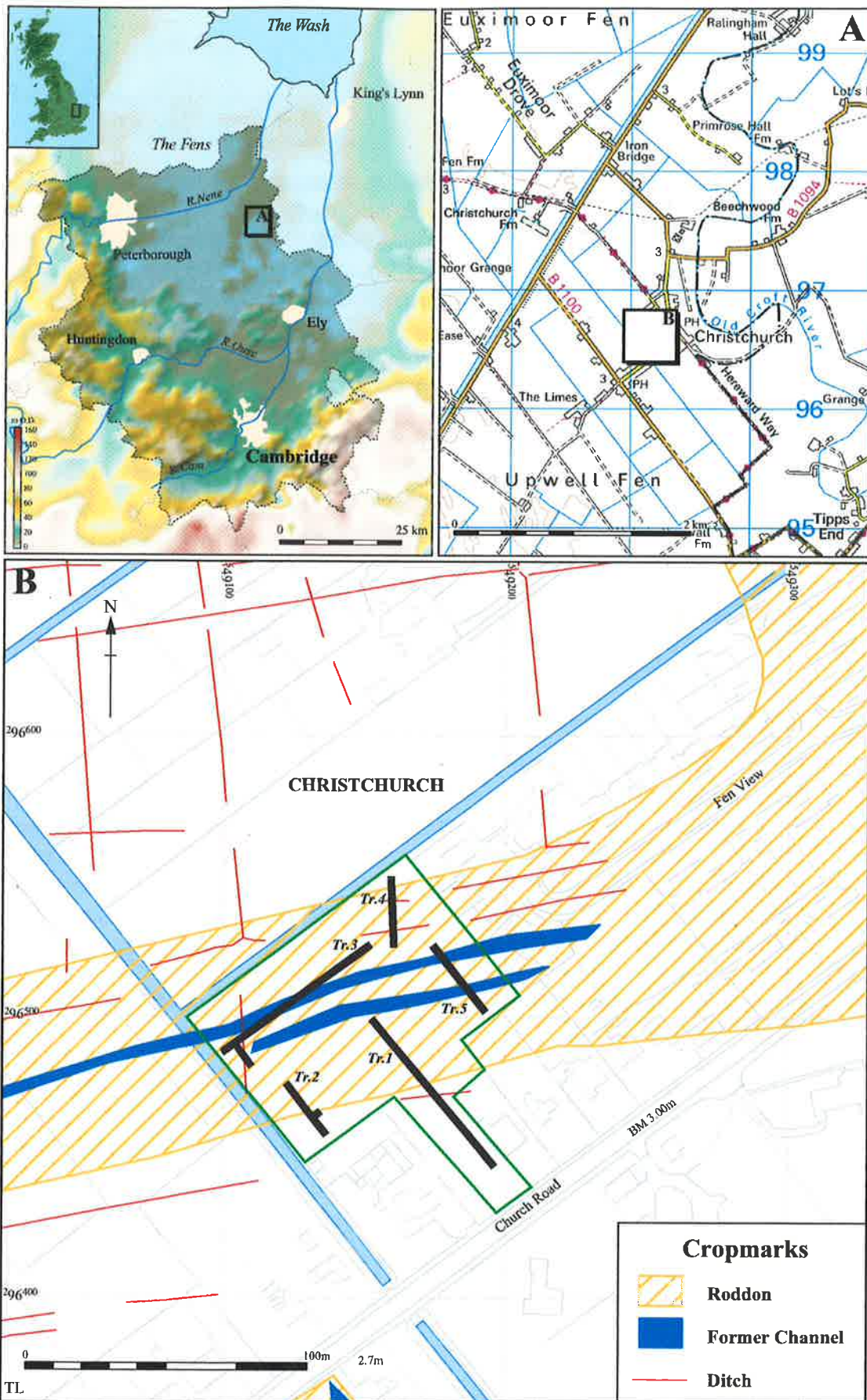
The site archive is currently held by CCC AFU and will be deposited with the appropriate county stores.

2 Geology and Topography

The site lies on the Terrington Beds; young (Iron Age) salt marsh and tidal creek deposits of silty clay and sandy silt that characterise the seaward 'silt fen' at TL 4916 9649. Here these deposits form a roddon, a silted up former water channel, that in this case was an east-west tributary of the Old Croft River which it joined c.500m to the east of the subject site (Hall and Palmer 1996). From aerial photographic evidence this roddon appears to be around 80m wide at this point, traversing the whole of the larger, northern end of the subject site (Air Photo Services 2005).

On either side of the roddon lie upper peat deposits which, through shrinkage have caused the roddon itself to stand proud in the landscape. These drift deposits overlay the bedrock Ampthill Clay (British Geological Survey Sheet 159, 1995).

The topography of the site is flat, with a slight north to south incline. The height of the site is between 2.1 and 2.4m OD.



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

3 Archaeological and Historical Background

The site is located 7km to the east of March in Fenland District (Fig.1). The modern settlement of Christchurch lies within the largest and most regular block of rectangular ditched fields of Romano-British date in the Fens. This field-system covers an area of c.85 ha and it appears to be orientated with the Fen Causeway (east-west) and the Old Croft River (north-south), which is ultimately linked to the Car Dyke canal at Waterbeach. David Hall and Roger Palmer, in the Fenland survey, suggested that the dimensions of the land divisions at 1200m by 700m are suggestive of either 'centuriation' or the less rigid division of 'limitatio', which was sometimes adopted within Imperial Estates (Hall & Palmer *op. cit.* 176-177). The Roman Fen centres of Stonea Grange and Stonea Camp are located c.5km to the southwest of the subject site.

Most of the information concerning this field-system has come from aerial photography, although CCC AFU has investigated elements of it on the County Farms Estate. The following HER sites are recorded in the vicinity of the development area:

MCB 8267	Roman pottery/coins
MCB 191	Roman site
MCB 262	Roman track way
MCB 12607	Cropmarks/settlement
MCB 732	11th-century gravestone
MCB 200	Roman settlement?
MCB 263	Sub-rectangular feature/moat?
MCB12615	Double ditch feature
MCB 12614	Ditch/field boundary
MCB 7303/2	Flint flakes/kiln furniture

The aerial photographic assessment commissioned for this project illustrates the fact that the development area is crossed by a roddon (former water-course, now silt-filled), which is flanked by ditches that may have had a water-management function (Air Photo Services 2005). Roddons provided the highest and driest ground for settlement in the Roman period. Fen Circles have also been identified within 100m of the development area; these are poorly understood, but may represent the positions of Roman haystacks.

The brief set for the evaluation notes that the fenland around March is known for significant Iron Age and Roman settlement, burial and defensive sites and it is possible that there may be evidence for such activity within the development area.

The village of Christchurch has developed in recent centuries and in part takes advantage of the slightly higher and drier ground of the roddon silts.

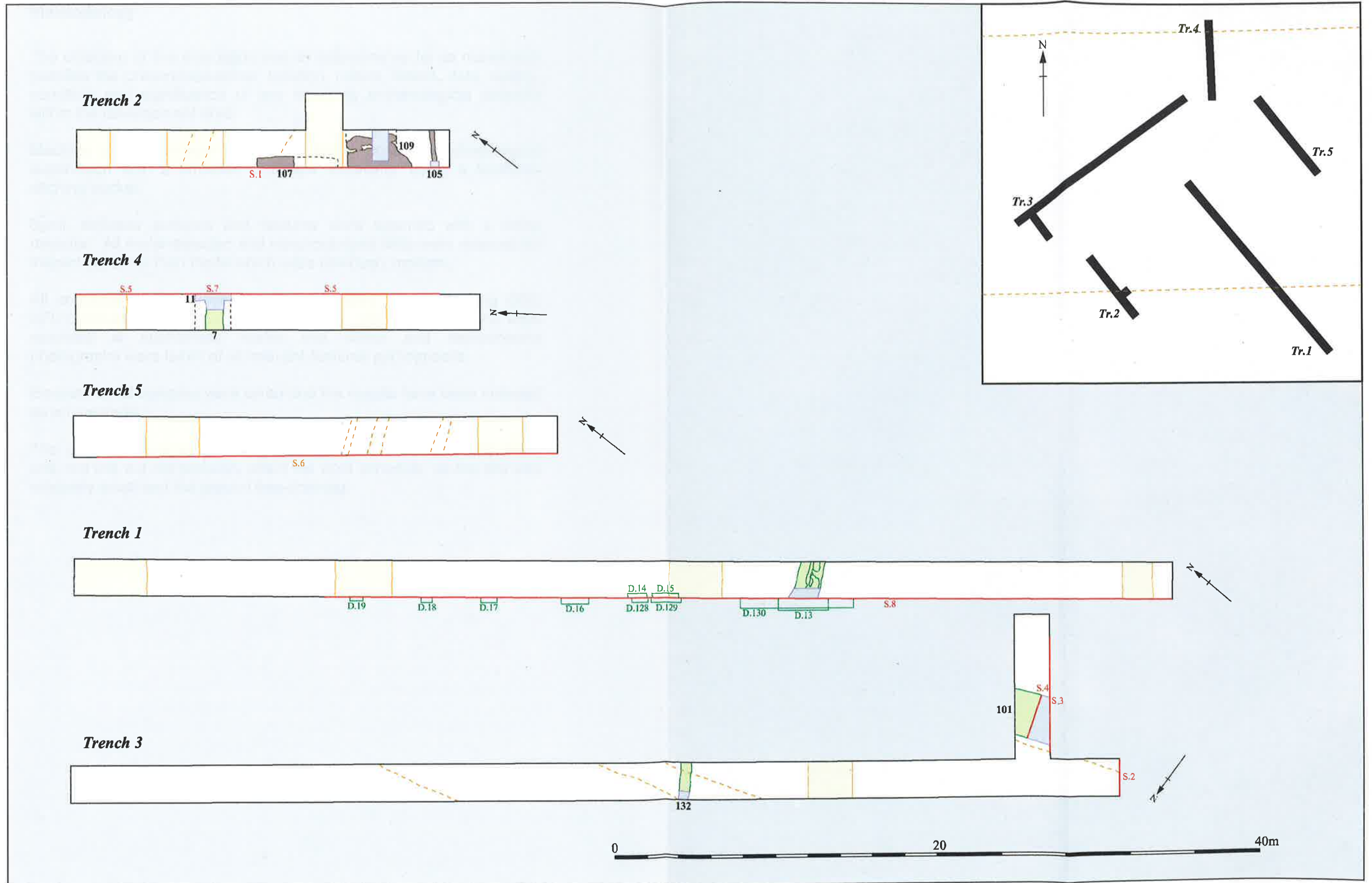


Figure 2: Trench plans

4 Methodology

The objective of this evaluation was to determine as far as reasonably possible the presence/absence, location, nature, extent, date, quality, condition and significance of any surviving archaeological deposits within the development area.

Machine excavation was carried out under constant archaeological supervision with a wheeled JCB-type excavator using a toothless ditching bucket.

Spoil, exposed surfaces and features were scanned with a metal detector. All metal-detected and hand-collected finds were retained for inspection, other than those which were obviously modern.

All archaeological features and deposits were recorded using CCC AFU's *pro-forma* sheets. Trench locations, plans and sections were recorded at appropriate scales and colour and monochrome photographs were taken of all relevant features and deposits.

Environmental samples were taken and the results have been included as an appendix.

The site conditions were fairly good. Rain did occur throughout day one, but this did not seriously affect the work schedule, as the site was relatively small and the ground free-draining.

5 Results

(Figs 2-4, Plates 1-2)

5.1 Trench 1

Trench 1 contained the majority of the excavated information and its orientation afforded the most thorough partial transect of the roddon and associated features.

The Roddon Sequence

This trench provided a section through the upper roddon deposits at c.45 degrees to the roddon alignment (Section 8, Fig.3). These deposits were largely silty clay sand with orange, yellow and grey laminations.

A silty clay sand with orange, yellow and grey laminations (61) was present throughout the whole trench being at least 1.0m deep, with the highest upper interface at 2.27m OD. Towards the southeastern end of the trench and close to the roddon edge the upper surface of deposit 61 slumped by more than 1m into a natural gully within the roddon that presumably represents a final phase water channel.

Deposit 59 overlay layer 61 in the southeastern part of the trench and, as a depositional horizon, may be analogous with other layers (73, 80, 151, 142 and 149). These deposits appeared to be composed of *disturbed* roddon silts, generically a silty clay sand with orange, yellow and grey laminations. They thinned out towards the roddon centre, being less than 0.1m thick in places, and increased in thickness to around 0.3m closer to the roddon edge. As with deposit 61, layer 59 also slumped into the channel close to the roddon edge.

Towards the roddon centre a further thin horizon was present above those so far described, represented by deposits 96, 141 and 148, all mid-bluish-grey sandy clay.

The general appearance of the laminated roddon sequence can be seen in Plate 1 which shows the southeast-facing section of the sondage at the extreme northwestern end of Trench 1.

Archaeological Features

Seven ditches were recorded in Trench 1, although only one of them (13) was sufficiently distinct for it to be fully planned on Fig.2. All other ditches were only seen in section, where they were recorded and sample excavation of their fills was conducted. The alignment of these

ditches, as far as this was discernable, seemed on the whole to be perpendicular to the roddon.

The three southernmost ditches all exhibited recuts. Their primary cuts are dealt with first here, followed by their recuts, and then the other four ditches are described. Where available, deposit descriptions are given here. Basic information regarding all deposits is also tabulated in Appendix 1.



Plate 1 Laminated roddon deposits in Trench 1

Six of the seven ditches in this trench shared a similar v-shaped profile. The remaining ditch (18) was much steeper sided, the profile being more u-shaped. A complex sequence of deposits showed very clearly the pattern of infilling in most of the ditches.

Ditch 130, a wide v-shaped ditch with a long 'tail' on the south eastern side making the feature more than 6.5m wide, but with the central v-shaped component being around 3.6m wide and 0.9m deep, was the only ditch that did not cut through the whole sequence of horizontal laminated deposits that comprised the upper deposits of the roddon. The reason for this is that the ditch was placed within the naturally slumped region of a pre-existing natural channel and thus it did not reach the base of the uppermost deposit 59. It contained three

deposits; 62 and 25 at its base (both a bluish-grey clay and almost certainly the same deposit) and 131, a mid-bluish grey sandy clay, filling the uppermost part.

Ditch **130** was recut as Ditch **13**. This v-shaped feature was 3.24m wide and 0.76m deep with a small 'ankle-breaker' type depression at its base. It contained a complicated sequence of eight fills (in sequence - 28, 27, 26, 24, 23, 22, 21, 20).

28; dark blackish brown clay sand silt, from which one sample was taken.

27; mid-yellowish grey sandy clay.

26; dark blackish brown clay sand silt from which one sample taken.

23; dark greyish brown clay sand silt with rare flecks of charcoal and brick or tile. Flecks of yellow sand and grey clay with a tip-line of grey clay lenses.

22; mid-yellowish brown clay sand silt.

21; dark greyish brown clay sand silt.

20; mid-yellowish brown clay sand silt.

The most significant fill is probably 23, which contains cultural material in a matrix otherwise fluviially similar to the layers above it. Deposits 28 and 27 probably represent initial clear-ditch deposition, perhaps in combination with scouring, whilst 26 and 23 probably represent an organic-rich and gleyed phase of infilling at slower water speeds.

Around 5.5m northwest from ditch **130** lay ditch **129**. This smaller feature was a similar v-shaped ditch 1.95m wide and 0.42m deep. It contained two fills (63 and 64; both a bluish-grey clay), which were almost certainly the same deposit, separated by a later recut.

Ditch **129** was recut as Ditch **15**. This v-shaped feature was 1.6m wide and 0.54m deep with a small 'ankle-breaker' type depression at its base. It contained a complex sequence of seven fills (71, 70, 69, 68, 67, 66, 65). Layer 68 probably represents a pseudo-stabilisation phase that may be associated with deposit 23 in ditch **13**.

71; dark greyish brown clay sand silt.

70; pale greyish yellow clay sand.

69; mid-bluish grey sandy clay.

68; dark greyish brown clay sand silt.

67; pale greyish yellow clay sand.

66; mid-greyish brown clay sand silt.

65; mid-greyish brown clay sand silt.

Only 0.25m northwest of ditch **130** was ditch **128**. This v-shaped ditch was narrower, at 1.2m wide, and was 0.5m deep. It contained two fills; a shallow basal fill (78), which was a pale bluish-grey clay sand, and above it was a pale yellowish grey clay sand (77).

Ditch **128** was recut as ditch **14**. This v-shaped feature was 1.2m wide and 0.38m deep with a slight depression at its base. It contained a sequence of three fills (76, 75, 74).

76; pale orange grey sandy clay with dark silty lenses.

75; dark greyish brown clay sand silt (with grey clay lenses).

74; pale yellowish grey clay sand.

Ditch **16** was located 3.5m northwest of ditch **14**. It was a small, shallow v-shaped ditch at 0.6m wide and 0.3m deep containing a single fill a mid-brown clay sand silt with orange flecks (79).

About 4.2m further to the northwest was ditch **17**, another small, shallow v-shaped ditch at 0.9m wide and 0.38m deep but containing a sequence of four fills (95, 93, 94, 81).

95; pale greyish yellow clay sand.

93; dark greyish brown clay sand silt.

94; pale yellowish grey clay sand lens within 93.

81; yellowish mid-grey clay silt.

About 3.0m further to the northwest was Ditch **18**, a small, u-shaped ditch 0.7m wide and 0.62m deep and containing a sequence of five fills (147, 146, 145, 144, 143).

147; pale greyish yellow clay sand.

146; dark greyish brown clay sand silt.

145; pale yellowish grey clay sand.

144; mid-greyish brown clay sand silt.

143; yellowish mid-grey clay silt.

About 3.6m further to the northwest was Ditch **19**, another small, shallow v-shaped ditch at 0.8m wide and 0.36m deep containing a single fill 139, a pale greyish yellow clay sand.

5.2 Trench 2

Pre-Roddon Deposits

Below all the silts described below a sharp horizon defined a blue grey clay layer. Some 0.23m thick, it was quite moist but fairly firm. Below this clay, a peat layer 0.29m thick was exposed and sampled for plant remains. When exposed the peat was slightly moist and had well preserved fragments of vegetation. A further clay layer, this time saturated with water, occurred below the peat layer. It was soft and very pale grey in colour, quite distinct from the one above. This deposit was hand-excavated to a depth of 0.2m and not bottomed.

The Roddon Sequence

Much of the section through the roddon had been cut away in this trench by later features. The silt laminations were, however, observed to slope down towards the north for the northernmost 10m of trench 2 and have been recorded in detail in this area (see Section 1, Fig.3). Deposits 123 and 124 in the central and northern parts of this trench

also exhibited laminations, in both cases slight changes within a generally pale silt, but they were not interpreted as a sequence of separate layers as was the case further to the north.

A deep sondage was cut 7m from the southern end of this trench to ascertain the nature of underlying deposits. It revealed a very deep silt sequence extending to 2.1m below the topsoil (not shown in section but forming the lower part of deposit 123 and visible in Plate 2). Laminations appeared to be present throughout most of the sequence. The silts were fairly consistent in their composition, other than the lowest 0.15m. Here the fine pale silts were replaced by sandy silt with a noticeable gravel component. The second significant factor in this sandy deposit was its water content. Whereas the overlying silts were dry, this layer was very wet, with water surging out of it shortly after the sondage was cut.

Overlying deposit 123 was a sequence of more recognisable stratigraphic units that represent a more variable and active phase of roddon deposition than that recorded slightly to the south. This sequence was not bottomed although it is possible that the fine pale orangey brown soft sandy silt recorded below layer 116 is the upper part of deposit 123.

The sequence recorded above this horizon was found to be approximately 1.3m deep, sloped down from southeast to northwest into the centre of the roddon and was composed of seven contexts (lowest first);

- 116; a soft, pale grey/orangey brown silt c. 0.18m thick.
- 115; a greyish-brown slightly clay silt c. 0.32m thick.
- 114; a mottled, mid-brown silt c. 0.18m thick.
- 113; pale brown slightly clay silt c. 0.18m thick.
- 112; a loose, soft, pale brown silt c. 0.14m thick.
- 111; greyish-brown clay silt c. 0.18m thick.
- 110; a soft, pale grey/orangey brown silt c. 0.16m thick.

Above Deposit 110 was the modern topsoil.

Archaeological Features

The features in this trench were shown to be relatively modern. Features **107** and **109** were very similar in nature, with similar dimensions and deposits. Pit **107** measured 4.7m north south, 2m+ east west and 1m+ deep. Pit **109** was 4.3m by 2m+ by 0.5m+. They were both cut into pale laminated silts and were filled by brown silts that had not undergone compaction, being friable and well aerated. One small fragment of modern ceramic was recovered from deep within the fill of pit **109**. It can reasonably be concluded that these were both modern features, possibly little used cesspits. The clarity of the upper horizon of pit **107** was not clear, and it may therefore have

cut through the overlying topsoil. The same was not true for pit **109**, which was more visibly sealed by topsoil.

Towards the southern extreme of Trench 2, feature **105** was found to cut through the upper laminated silts. Excavation showed that this narrow and shallow linear feature, with its irregular and poorly defined edges, was probably the remains of a series of bushes delimiting a recent property boundary for the houses to the south.

5.3 Trench 3

This trench was located across the northern and western part of the site. Aligned in such a way, it afforded a clear view of later deposits associated with the roddon, albeit not in cross-section. This facilitated interpretation of exposed elements of the roddon in other trenches. This trench was also positioned to investigate the western end of the cropmark features preliminary interpreted as Romano-British (interrupted) drainage ditches along the roddon top. A further cropmark interpreted as a field boundary traversed this trench's position from north to south at its western end, but no trace of this was found.

The Roddon Sequence

The upper roddon deposits, described from southwest to northeast across this trench, are described as follows.

127; a dark clay silt.

134; a slightly clay silt.

135; a pale silt.

136; a light brown mixed/mottled fine slightly clay silt.

137; a pale beige very fine soft silt.

These deposits were aligned with the cropmark interpreted as the more northerly drainage ditch, approximately west-southwest to east-northeast.

A further phenomenon of interest was a region of grey silty clay (138) which lay at the topsoil/roddon silt interface (a grey 'halo'), starting 0.14m northeast of feature **132** and running for a further c.16m to the northeast, meaning it lay for the most part above deposit 136.

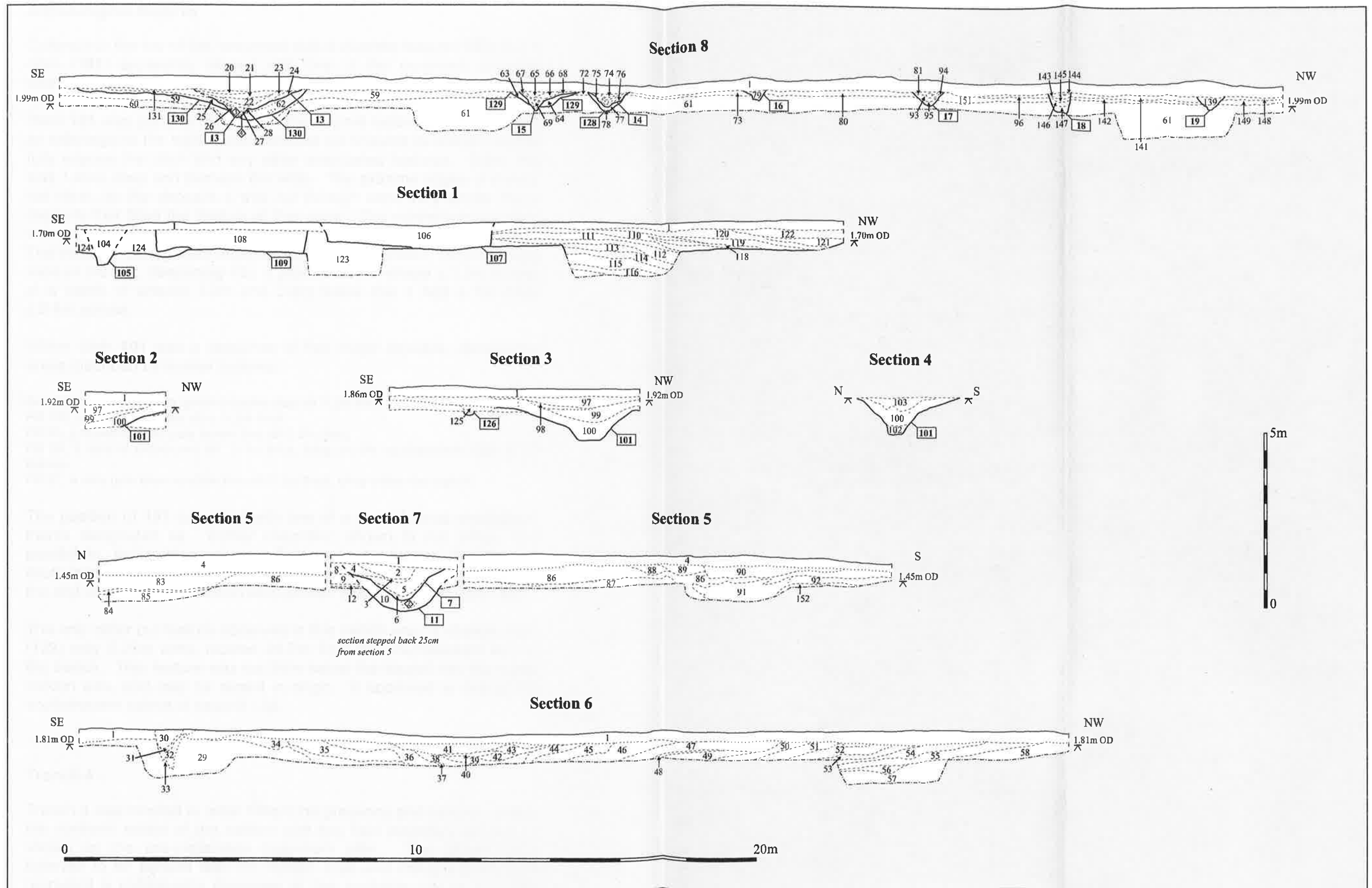


Figure 3: Section drawings

Archaeological Features

Cutting into the top of this sequence was a discrete feature (**132**) and a ditch (**101**) apparently aligned with one of the cropmark drainage ditches.

Ditch **101** was partially exposed in the original extent of Trench 3 and an extension to the trench was therefore cut towards its eastern end to fully expose the ditch and any other associated features. Ditch **101** was 1.40m deep and perhaps 6m wide. The extreme edges of it were not clear, as the deposits it was cut through were very similar those deposits that filled the feature at that point. The northernmost extent was not exposed as it was beyond the limits of potential machining. The southern side graded imperceptibly into the subsoil. Its profile was wide at the top, deepening into a pronounced V-shape c.1.2m across at a depth of around 1.0m and 0.4m below this it had a flat base c.0.4m across.

Within ditch **101** was a sequence of five major deposits, discounting areas disturbed by animal burrows.

Basal deposit 102, a firm, greyish-brown clay silt 0.2m thick.

Fill 100, a dark brown clay silt c. 0.5m thick.

Fill 99, a mixed/mottled pale brown fine silt 0.3m thick.

Fill 98, a lens of mid-brown silt, 0.1m thick, lying on the southeastern edge of the feature.

Fill 97, a very pale brown/yellow fine silt 0.3m thick, lying below the topsoil.

The position of **101** coincided with one of a pair of aerial photograph marks designated as 'former channels', shown to run within, and parallel to, the roddon proper. This particular former channel, the southernmost, was identified from aerial photographs as terminating at the end of Trench 3, but excavation proved that this was not the case.

The only other cut feature observed in this trench was a shallow ditch (**132**) only 0.25m wide, located 28.7m from the southwestern end of the trench. This feature was cut from below the topsoil into the upper roddon silts, and may be recent in origin. It appeared to delimit the southwestern extent of deposit 138.

5.4 Trench 4

Trench 4 was located in order to test the presence and position of both the northern extent of the roddon and two field boundary ditches as shown on the pre-excavation crop-mark plan. The ditches were believed to be parallel with the roddon itself and thought to perhaps represent a roddon-side driveway at the southern end of the large block of Romano-British Fields discussed in Section 3.1 above.

The Roddon Sequence

The northern end of the trench revealed, in section, three silty layers; context 83, a yellowish-grey silt, 84, a dark brown silt clay and 85, mid-brown silty clay. These extended some 4m from the limit of excavation and, whilst closely resembling those immediately to the south, these deposits were devoid of the laminations that indicate undisturbed roddon layers. The ill-defined southern edge of these three deposits also lends weight to the suggestion that they represent the erosion of the northern edge of the roddon.

The three deposits described above lay on top of, or possibly represent a disturbed part of, deposit 86 which represents the upper roddon silt sequence for much of the rest of the trench. This silt exhibited a range of yellow, brown and grey laminations and was found to be up to 0.5m thick. Below this the upper part of a light greyish-brown silt (87) was revealed.

Beyond the interruption of ditch 11 the laminated silts typical of the roddon continued for several metres in an undisturbed formation. Towards the southern end of the trench, however, there was a further disturbed zone around 5m across. Although no cut feature could be identified here the deposits are described after ditch 11, below. At the southern end of the trench was a further sequence of laminated silt deposits. Here context 86 may have continued in a thin band of c.0.15m and below it lay a heavily laminated yellowish-brown silt (92) and a light greyish-brown silt laminated with orange lenses (140).

Archaeological Features

Six and a half metres from the northern end of the trench ditch 11 stood out clearly, with u-shaped deposits consistent with successive infilling events. It was positioned in exactly the position where a Romano-British boundary had been predicted crossing the trench, from aerial photographs. The ditch cut was approximately 3.4m across and extended to 1.25m beneath the topsoil profile. The initial deposit (10) was similar in make-up to one encountered elsewhere on the site as a grey 'halo' at the top of the roddon sequence. It was a grey clay with yellow silt laminations and only filled the feature to a depth of 0.35m as it had been truncated by a recut. This recut (7) was a similar u-shaped profile, with a wider cut above a break of slope, but smaller at c.3m wide and 0.9m deep. Above that was a thin peaty silt fill (6) that presumably represents a stabilisation phase in the fluvial history of the ditch and 'lined the ditch' perhaps indicating that subsequent activity had truncated or scoured the centre of the ditch before leaving further fills. Above that lay a mid-brown silt (5) c.0.4m thick and again truncated in the centre. Above this were a mid-to light brown silt (4) and a yellow silt (3) respectively. The former was earlier in the sequence and filled the southern side of the ditch. It may have been truncated by fluvial action and seemed to be succeeded in the ditch

base by layer 3, which was only around 0.1m thick in the ditch centre and may also have been truncated by fluvial action. The final deposit in this ditch sequence was a mid-brown silt (2) that was 0.35m thick and had only experienced lateral truncation through cultivation.

As described in the previous section above around 5m to the south of ditch 11 was a disturbed area that showed some form reminiscent of a former ditch, but was by no means certainly attributable to human action. It also crossed the trench in a position where a possible Romano-British boundary was suggested from aerial photographs. No cut was defined, but the deposits showed a general u-shaped profile, albeit rather disturbed in the central part, extending to perhaps 5m across and c.1m in depth. The greatest confusion was associated with layer 86, which has already been described as an upper roddon deposit. It was observed to run both beneath and above deposits forming part of this possible feature and although this makes little stratigraphic sense, it may simply be a reflection of the effect of animal action and bioturbation confusing the original sequence.

The majority of this putative feature was filled by mid-brown silt clay (91) with yellow silt lenses up to 0.6m thick. This was succeeded by a layer up to 0.15m thick and suggested to be part of deposit 86. Above this were three upper layers c.0.3m thick, filling the northern, central and southern parts of the feature (88, 89, and 90 respectively). The first two were mid-grey and light grey silt, both with yellow lenses towards their lower horizon. The third was mid-brown clay silt with yellow lenses.

5.5 Trench 5

Trench 5 was positioned, like Trench 3, to cross the two putative drainage channels that were seen to be lying along the roddon on aerial photographs.

The Roddon Sequence

The deposits within this trench sloped down towards a point 12m from the southern end, which equates exactly with the suggested location of the more southerly drainage channel. The gradient of the soil horizons increased as this point was neared and the deposits around this point seemed similar to those exposed within the other putative section through this drainage channel, ditch 101 in Trench 3. The difference here was that no cut was observed, although it may well be that one was present originally. The sequence of undisturbed roddon deposits revealed here includes twenty-six separate contexts, many of which contained further variation in the form of colour and textural laminations. None of these contexts were recognisable as being

particularly sandy or clay-rich, and all have been generally classified as silts. The lowest deposit in the southern part of the trench was a pale brown silt (29) with laminations that proved to be at least 1.0m thick. As a result of the way the sequence shelved towards the centre of the putative 'ditch' this earliest deposit also appeared at sub-topsoil level. Immediately to the north of this the deposits shelved into the 'ditch', with deposits 36 and 45 probably representing two parts of the same slightly gleyed depositional horizon on either side of the 'ditch'. Between them lay a group of later and more oxidised 'ditch' deposits (37-44). Deposits found northwestwards from layer 46 represent a more greyish-hued (reduced or greyed) sequence across the remainder of the roddon surface.

Archaeological Features

It seem likely that there was a ditch cut in the region of contexts 36 and 45, but this is not proven. Alternatively, this may have been a natural watercourse when active deposition took place.

At the southern end of this trench deposits 30 to 33 seemed to result from relatively recent plant disturbance, being mixed and organic-rich. The lack of clarity of horizons between the deposits supported this assumption. A similar disturbance was identified in Trench 4.

6 Discussion

6.1 General

The five trenches excavated at this site revealed a series of features, all of which were ditches, cut into a silted-up ancient creek system: this roddon was identified from aerial photography as traversing the site almost exactly east to west. The evaluation has also established the form and nature of the deposits making up the roddon itself, and in addition the deposits underlying the roddon have been recorded.

Work on aerial photographs suggests that there was a Romano-British field system evident in this area (Hall & Coles, 1994) and as previously discussed four possible field or driveway boundaries are plotted on this site as are two putative drainage ditches, positioned along the length of the roddon.

Contextually, the Romano-British activity here can be viewed as follows: 'Twenty sites lie on roddons west of Wisbech... but there was no saltern activity. They were probably connected with animal raising, as suggested by the extensive cropmarks of droves and enclosures, the site being located on roddons for protection from flooding.' (Hall &

Coles 1994, 117). This has very important implications for this site. The virtual absence of meaningful artefacts from the ditches does suggest a non-domestic use. In addition the association of saltern activity with roddons that occurs on many other sites in the fens (e.g. Wimblington and Manea) does not appear to apply here. The absence of any fragments of briquetage or evidence for widespread heat-altered deposits, tends to suggest that salt production was not carried out in this area as such positive evidence is very evident in those locations where the process has been confirmed.

6.2 The Pre-Roddon Sequence (Trench 2)

The soil profile exposed in the deepest sondage of Trench 2, through the roddon silts, peat and 'clays' showed the sequence of deposit that have accumulated during the changes in sea and ground surface levels. The deposits identified as belonging to the roddon overly a sandy gritty silt layer. This deposit was clearly distinguishable from those of the roddon by having no clear laminations, comprising a mixture of smaller and larger particle sizes than present in the considerably more uniform silts above. The lower clay layer observed here might well be the 'bedrock' Amphill Clay.



Plate 2 Clay and peat deposits beneath the roddon silts in Trench 2

6.3 The Roddon Sequence

The roddon sequence appears from Trench 2 to be 2.1m deep and apparently commenced with a sand indicating faster-flowing fluvial conditions. Below this was a thin layer of peat.

The roddon top rises to 2.37m OD at its highest point in Trench 1. This point aligns roughly with the projected southern edge of the roddon, as identified by aerial photography. The high point being on the edge is somewhat suspect and it may actually represent the southern edge of ditch **130**, which offers a very close match. This would mean that the initial aerial photographic interpretation for the southern edge of the roddon was erroneous. The aerial photographs did indicate a credible extrapolation of the roddon's extent, so caution should be taken in future to not rely overly on such supporting material. The roddon deposits were shown to extend beyond the southern limits of the trenches during excavation. It is difficult to interpret the roddon's internal structure in any meaningful way. There were clearly two varieties of infilling:

- a) lenses/mottling within definable discrete deposits, and;
- b) these discrete deposits themselves, forming stratigraphic units of differing fluvial origin and date.

These suggest in the former case ongoing variation within depositional regimes and in the latter case new regimes precipitated by local contextual and environmental alterations.

The presence of the natural channel beneath ditch **130/13** in Trench 1 indicates the final natural phase of drainage on the roddon. The deposits that define this are significantly much paler and more sterile than those of ditch **130/13** that was cut to enhance or replace this natural drainage gully, suggesting the human-derived drainage system involved different depositional components.

The increased depth of disturbed laminated deposit 59, where it lay in the natural channel pre-dating ditch **130**, indicates that it formed a perhaps seasonally active watercourse. The laminations could only be formed in a low energy environment presumably towards the end of the formation of the roddon.

The northern end of Trench 4 revealed, in section, three silt layers (83, 84 and 85) that extended some 4m from the limit of excavation. Whilst closely resembling those immediately to the south, these deposits were devoid of the laminations that indicate undisturbed roddon layers. The ill-defined southern edge of these three deposits also lends weight to the belief that they represent the erosion of the northern edge of the roddon. This erosion process would be caused by changes in the hydrology of the fens. They may well represent the upper (latest)

layers of the roddon formation that have been eroded subsequent to its final silting up, and after the land surrounding it shrunk.

The southern half of Trench 1, although located beyond the southern edge of the roddon as mapped from aerial photographs, clearly lies on roddon deposits, so requiring the suggested extent of this feature to be enlarged.

6.4 Drainage Ditches (Trenches 3 and 5)

The more northerly ditch noted in aerial photographs supposedly traversed Trench 3 at a shallow angle and then cut across Trench 5. In the former, the top part only of the roddon silts was observed and here there is no cut feature or interruption in the roddon depositional sequence that could explain the aerial photographic evidence.

Some evidence for the southerly drainage ditch was, however, observed in section in Trenches 3 and 5. In the former it was defined as ditch **101**, whilst in the latter only the upper deposits of a possible channel were confirmed. Several elements of the profile of feature **101** in Trench 3 indicate that it was an artificial ditch; the straight sides, the sharp horizons defining the interface between roddon and ditch deposits, sharp breaks of slope and the flat base. All of these factors lean heavily in favour of this feature being an artificial one. It is important to note that the position where this ditch was recorded in Trench 3 lies beyond the apparent butt-end of the feature mapped from aerial photographs. The end/interruption in this ditch/channel suggested by the cropmark information is thus erroneous and the feature makes much more logical sense once it is seen to continue along the roddon top.

6.5 Romano-British Boundary Ditches

A putative Romano-British boundary ditch supposedly aligned along the roddon edge, on the basis of aerial photography, crossed Trench 1 about halfway along its length. As far as can be determined once the potential errors inherent in aerial photographic rectification and replotting are accounted for, this feature should be represented by ditch **128/14** or ditch **129/15**. Why no evidence for similar cropmarks appears to be present in locations appropriate for any other of the ditches seen in this trench is, however, not readily explained. From the extent of the silts observed in the ground, which continue throughout the length of Trench 1, the roddon appears here to have extended at least 40m further to the south than as mapped previously. Thus neither the cropmark ditch nor any others in this trench can now be described as a roddon-edge feature.

No evidence was recorded for the supposed cross-roddon ditch previously mapped at the western end of Trench 3.

Trench 4 was positioned to cut two putative Romano-British boundary ditches as suggested by cropmark evidence. The more northerly was confirmed as ditch **11/7**.

Objective data might suggest that the horizons represented by deposits 88-91, which lie in the position of the more southerly cropmark ditch in Trench 4, are not consistent with those of a cut feature and they are probably the result of diogenesis and/or plant and animal activity. The softness of these silts makes any perturbation easy and collapse into root and burrow voids inevitable. The fact that this disturbance was observable in both trench sections, and that it lies precisely where aerial photography has suggested a Romano-British driveway or field boundary lies, does however, imply that the deposits here may have an anthropogenic origin after all. The section here may not have bottomed the sequence, which slumps in a characteristic u-shaped fashion at 1m depth. A pre-existing ditch could perhaps have been substantially altered by preferential animal action targeting the ditch fills. Thus it seems likely that the two ditches expected from cropmark evidence have indeed been identified here, and it is also evident that the northern edge of the roddon silts is indeed present in this trench.

6.6 Other Ditches

Seven ditches were recorded in Trench 1, all probably roughly parallel to the roddon in alignment. The largest was ditch **130/13** and this was cut and recut to re-use a pre-existing natural channel in the roddon top. Ditches **129/15** and **128/14** were also recut and together these three features might represent two phases of similar water and land management along the roddon. The earliest cuts in these three features are characterised by a simple one or two deposit infilling. It may be that the single fills in ditches **16** and **19** date to this same early phase.

Ditches **13**, **14**, **15**, **17** and **18** all have a complicated sequence of silt fills and all except ditch **18** have a simple v-shaped profile. It is tempting to link these as a second phase of ditch digging to provide roddon top water and land management. The sequences of infilling within ditches 13, 14, 15, 17 and 18 are clearly a result of differing episodes of natural in-washing and slumping of the surrounding roddon deposits. Two small, narrow ditches (**105** in Trench 2 and **132** in Trench 3) may both be recent in origin, although the latter may delimit a grey clay silt layer (138) on its western side that might itself be a final phase roddon episode. This would therefore offer instead a Romano-British date for ditch 132.

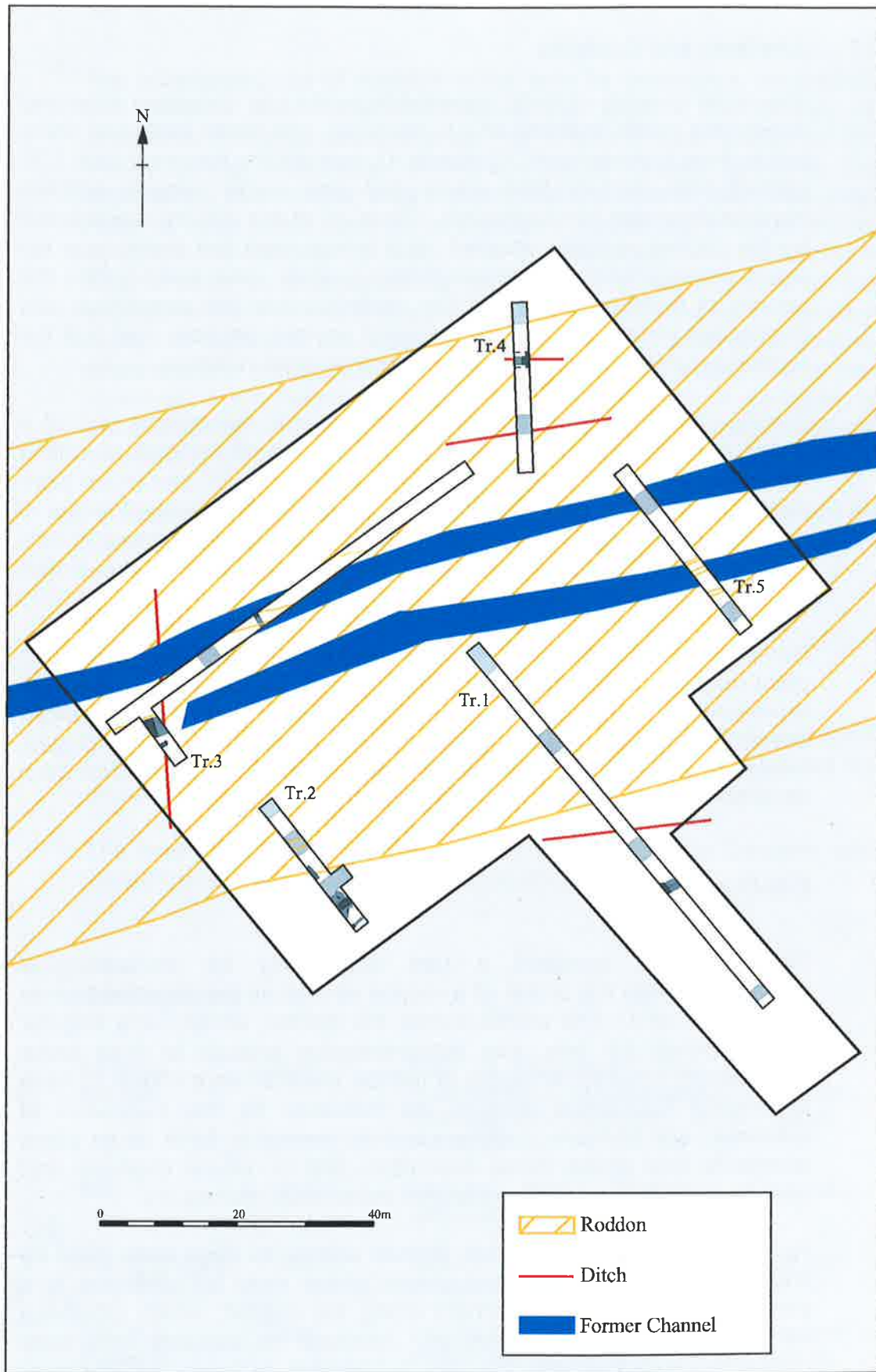


Figure 4: Location of the roddon

6.7 Artefacts and Ecofacts

The small quantity of finds retrieved from the site consisted of animal bones (the partial skeleton of a juvenile pig, one horse tooth and some bones from a sheep/goat; Appendix 4), one pottery fragment (late 17th century-18th century Red ware) and one small ceramic building material fragment (undiagnostic). Thus all of the activity represented by the ditches remains undated. If it is assumed that the roddon top water management is Romano-British in date (see below) then the paucity of finds must support the assertion that the droveways and enclosures were supporting widespread pastoralism here, and that the roddon-top activity was not domestic or industrial in nature.

Twenty-one identifiable animal bone fragments, comprising part of a small pig, were recovered from 104, a fill of a modern ditch or setting for a hedge. More interestingly a cattle scapula and horse molar were recovered from 97, a fill of ditch **18** in Trench 1. This deposit is one of a sequence that appear to suggest that this ditch was allowed to infill with water-borne deposits, presumably during the Romano-British phase of roddon occupation.

Samples from ditches in Trench 1 produced very little waterlogged plant remains (Appendix 3). A fill of ditch **101** in Trench 3, believed to represent a recut of a roddon top drainage channel, produced ostracods and a range of plant species indicative of wet places. Wetland plant species also characterised a sample from a fill of ditch **11**, a probable droveway boundary from Trench 4.

7 Conclusions

This site has provided a rare opportunity for archaeological investigation into the profile of a roddon as well as the potential human exploitation of it. The profile across the roddon, whilst not a singular and perpendicular one, was comprehensive enough to draw some conclusions. The upper layers of roddon material were shown to have undergone substantial erosion, as indicated by the truncation of laminated soil horizons. Human activity seems to have taken place alongside final phase fluvial deposition, first in natural channels and later in recut and revised longitudinal roddon-top ditches.

As the longitudinal roddon top ditches appear to have been filled by water-borne roddon silts, their disuse phase must be attributed to a period when water management along the roddon, which otherwise existed as dry land, was required. Although no dateable finds were recovered from the site, the very substantial evidence for Romano-British agricultural management in the surrounding area, primarily for pastoralism, and the inclusion of the roddon itself in the spatial arrangements of fields and droveways, strongly supports the notion that these features are Romano-British in date.

The widespread use of roddons in the fens as droveways, enclosures and salterns was considered during the work. The paucity of artefactual evidence recovered did not enable a clear picture of the history of the exploitation of the site to be formed, however, the implications from similar sites indicate that the roddon itself was most likely to have been used as a droveway across the fens, providing access to the fields to the north. The ditches would have performed a dual function for drainage/water capture and in some cases as the boundaries for these droveways. The two parallel ditches in Trench 4 appear to represent two sides of a droveway from aerial photographic evidence, and although the evaluation exercise has added little to that assertion, it still seems the most likely interpretation. A domestic or salt-producing function can be discounted as no recognisable features or artefacts to support such assertions were recovered.

Recommendations for any future work based upon this report will be made by the County Archaeology Office.

Acknowledgements

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The brief for archaeological works was written by Kasia Gdaneic, who visited the site and monitored the evaluation.

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Appendix 1: Context Summary

Context No.	Trench	Description	Section No.
1	All	Top soil	All
2	4	Fill of [7]	7
3	4	Fill of [7]	7
4	4	Fill of [7]	5, 7
5	4	Fill of [7]	7
6	4	Fill of [7]	7
7	4	Cut of ditch	7
8	4	Layer	7
9	4	Layer	7
10	4	Fill of 11	7
11	4	Cut of ditch	7
12	4	Layer	7
13	1	Ditch cut	8
14	1	Ditch cut	8
15	1	Ditch cut	8
16	1	Ditch cut	8
17	1	Ditch cut	8
18	1	Ditch cut	8
19	1	Ditch cut	8
20	1	Fill of [13]	8
21	1	Fill of [13]	8
22	1	Fill of [13]	8
23	1	Fill of [13]	8
24	1	Fill of [13]	8
25	1	Fill of [30]	8
26	1	Fill of [13]	8
27	1	Fill of [13]	8
28	1	Fill of [13]	8
29	5	Silt layer in Tr.5	6
30	5	Layer in recent intrusion	6
31	5	Layer in recent intrusion	6
32	5	Layer in recent intrusion	6
33	5	Layer in recent intrusion	6
34	5	Layer adjacent to channel	6
35	5	Layer adjacent to channel	6
36	5	Layer adjacent to channel	6
37	5	Layer in channel	6
38	5	Layer in channel	6
39	5	Layer in channel	6
40	5	Layer in channel	6
41	5	Layer in channel	6
42	5	Layer in channel	6
43	5	Layer in channel	6
44	5	Layer in channel	6
45	5	Layer in channel	6
46	5	Layer adjacent to channel	6
47	5	Layer adjacent to channel	6
48	5	Layer adjacent to channel	6
49	5	Layer adjacent to channel	6
50	5	Layer adjacent to channel	6
51	5	Layer adjacent to channel	6
52	5	Layer adjacent to channel	6
53	5	Layer adjacent to channel	6
54	5	Layer adjacent to channel	6
55	5	Layer adjacent to channel	6
56	5	Layer adjacent to channel	6
57	5	Layer adjacent to channel	6
58	5	Layer adjacent to channel	6
59	1	Silt layer	8

60	1	Silt layer	8
61	1	Silt layer	8
62	1	Fill of [130]	8
63	1	Fill of [129]	8
64	1	Fill of [129]	8
65	1	Fill of [15]	8
66	1	Fill of [15]	8
67	1	Fill of [15]	8
68	1	Fill of [15]	8
69	1	Fill of [15]	8
70	1	Fill of [15]	8
71	1	Fill of [15]	8
72	1	Layer	8
73	1	Silt layer	8
74	1	Fill of [14]	8
75	1	Fill of [14]	8
76	1	Fill of [14]	8
77	1	Fill of [128]	8
78	1	Fill of [128]	8
79	1	Fill of [16]	8
80	1	Silt layer	8
81	1	Fill of [17]	8
82	1	Possible rabbit hole	8
83	4	Layer	5
84	4	Layer	5
85	4	Layer	5
86	4	Layer	5
87	4	Layer	5
88	4	Layer	5
89	4	Layer	5
90	4	Layer	5
91	4	Layer	5
92	4	Layer	5
93	1	Fill of [17]	8
94	1	Fill of [17]	8
95	1	Fill of [17]	8
96	1	Grey sandy clay layer	8
97	3	Fill of [101]	2, 3
98	3	Fill of [101]	3
99	3	Fill of [101]	2, 3
100	3	Fill of [101]	2, 3, 4
101	3	Cut of ditch	2, 3, 4
102	3	Fill of [101]	4
103	3	Fill of [101]	4
104	2	Fill of [105]	1
105	2	Cut of ditch	1
106	2	Fill of [107]	1
107	2	Modern cut	1
108	2	Fill of [109]	1
109	2	Modern feature	1
110	2	Roddon laminations	1
111	2	Roddon laminations	1
112	2	Roddon laminations	1
113	2	Roddon laminations	1
114	2	Roddon laminations	1
115	2	Roddon laminations	1
116	2	Roddon laminations	1
117	2	Roddon laminations	1
118	2	Roddon laminations	1
119	2	Roddon laminations	1
120	2	Roddon laminations	1
121	2	Roddon laminations	1

122	2	Roddon laminations	1
123	2	Roddon laminations (not split)	1
124	2	Roddon laminations (not split)	1
125	3	Fill of [126]	3
126	3	Animal burrow	3
127		Dark clay silt	
128	1	Ditch cut	8
129	1	Ditch cut	8
130	1	Ditch cut	8
131	1	Latest fill of [130]	8
132	3	Narrow linear feature cut	N/A
133	3	Fill of [132]	N/A
134	3	Upper roddon deposit	N/A
135	3	Upper roddon deposit	N/A
136	3	Upper roddon deposit	N/A
137	3	Upper roddon deposit	N/A
138	3	Grey silty clay above 136	N/A
139	1	Fill of Ditch [19]	8
140	5	Layer	5
141	1	Grey sandy clay layer	8
142	1	Layer, same as (151)	8
143	1	Fill of [18]	8
144	1	Fill of [18]	8
145	1	Fill of [18]	8
146	1	Fill of [18]	8
147	1	Fill of [18]	8
148	1	Grey sandy clay layer	8
149	1	Silt layer	8
150	1	Fill of [19] – same as 139	8
151	1	Silt layer	8
152	4	Layer	5

Appendix 2: Finds Summary

Context	Bone	Ceramic	Flint
1	0.000	0.000	0.000
11	0.000	0.000	0.000
97	0.064	0.004	0.000
98	0.000	0.006	0.000
104	0.075	0.000	0.000
unstratified	0.000	0.000	0.038
TOTAL	0.139	0.010	0.038

Appendix 3: Environmental Appraisal

by Rachel Fosberry

1 Introduction and Methods

Five bulk samples were taken from features within the excavated areas of the site in order to assess the quality of preservation of plant remains and their potential to provide useful data as part of further archaeological investigations.

One litres of each sample were processed by wet sieving through 5mm, 1mm and 0.5mm sieves for the recovery of plant remains, dating evidence and any other artefactual evidence that might be present. The flot was examined under a binocular microscope at x16 magnification.

2 Results

Sample No.	Context No.	Cut No.	Feature Type	Sample Type	Sample Size (L)	Volume processed (L)	Preservation	Comments
1	95		Fill of Ditch 17	wet sieve	10	1	Waterlogged	Single seed of <i>Ranunculus subg. Batrachium</i> and waterlogged roots
2	10	11	Layer	wet sieve	10	1	Waterlogged	Several seeds of <i>Eupatorium cannabinum</i> (hemp agrimony). Also few <i>Carex</i> (sedges) achenes.
3	26	13	Fill of Ditch 13	wet sieve	10	1	Waterlogged	No plant remains recovered
4	28	13	Lower fill of Ditch 13	wet sieve	10	1	Waterlogged	No plant remains recovered
5	102	101	Fill of Ditch	wet sieve		1	Waterlogged	<i>Lemna sp.</i> (pondweed), <i>Ranunculus subg. Batrachium</i> (water crowfoot), Ostracods

As indicated in the table above, only three of the samples contain any plant remains and these are preserved by waterlogging.

3 Conclusions and Recommendations

The plant remains recovered from these samples are from typical fenland plants growing in damp places. The low density of plant macrofossils in this assemblage precludes the identification of any specific activity that may be associated with the features.

Ostracods are small (<2mm) crustaceans found in a variety of aquatic habitats. Species distribution is dependant on particular habitats and it may be worth considering ostracod analysis for palaeoenvironmental reconstruction during any future investigation.

Appendix 4: Animal Bone

by Chris Faine

1 Introduction

The assemblage in question was obtained from an evaluation carried out at Church Road, Christchurch, Wisbech. Two contexts contained bone, all of which contained identifiable elements. In total 23 fragments were recovered, of 21 were identified to species (92% of the total sample). All bones were collected by hand, with preservation being extremely good. All unidentified fragments were classed as being from large/medium sized mammals.

2 Recording

All elements were assessed and catalogued in terms of siding (where applicable), completeness, tooth wear stages (also where applicable) and epiphyseal fusion. In addition any taphonomy *i.e.* burning, gnawing *etc* was recorded where necessary. Completeness was assessed by percentage and zones present (after Dobney & Reilly, 1988). Tooth wear was assessed using Grant (1982). Where two or more fragments are clearly of the same bone they are recorded as a single element. All data was entered using MS Excel.

3 Assessment

Unfortunately the sample size is very small, with only 23 fragments being recovered. Context 104 contains the vast majority of the faunal remains (90% of the identifiable sample). Forming part of a hedge line, the context contains of the partially articulated skeleton of a pig. This largely consists of the axial skeleton along with two scapulae and a humerus. Although no teeth were recovered, the state of epiphyseal fusion suggests a sub-adult individual, albeit no younger than 1 year old. Context 97 forms part of a watercourse and contains one cattle scapula and a third molar of a mature adult horse.

4 Conclusions

Due to the extremely small size of the assemblage few conclusions can be drawn about the wider area. The pig remains from context **104** are thought to be relatively modern and there are no signs of butchery or other taphonomic processes on the remains. Earlier remains from context **97** do show evidence of butchery, but are too few to yield further information. However, preservation of the bone from both contexts is extremely good and one would expect an assemblage resulting from further work to be in the same condition.

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