cambridgeshire archaeology
archaeological field unit

CCC AFU Report Number 872

Observations at Brown Spinney, Shepreth, Cambridgeshire

An Archaeological Watching Brief

Mo Jones

June 2006

Cambridgeshire County Council
Environment & Community Services

Commissioned by Lamva Ltd

Cover Images

Machine stripping, Soham	On-site surveying
Roman corn dryer, Duxford	Guided walk along Devil's Dyke
Bronze Age shaft, Fordham Bypass	Medieval well, Soham
Human burial, Barrington Anglo-Saxon Cemetery	Timbers from a medieval well, Soham
Blue enamelled bead, 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 Hinchingbrooke Iron Age Farm	Environmental analysis
Research and publication	Monument Management, Bartlow Hills

AFU Reports

Distribution List: Cambridgeshire & Peterborough

Site Name: Sheffreth Watching Brief

Site Code: SHH BSP 06 Report No.: 872 Date Sent: .....

1	**Author(s)**		**Relevant Specialists** (please list:)
1	**Client** (how many copies?)		
1	**Project Archive**		
42	**Office Library**		
1	**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		
x 2	**Peterborough Reports ONLY:** **Ben Robinson,** 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
2 x 3 (inc. SMR)	**For developer funded reports via the Cambs planning process send to:** **Andy Thomas,** Principal Archaeologist, Land-Use Planning Room A107, Castle Court, Shire Hall, Castle Hill, Cambridge CB3 OAP **Box No.: ELH1108**		**For English Heritage projects:** **Chris Scull,** Archaeology Commissions, English Heritage, 23 Savile Row, London W1X 1AB

Please tick/add numbers of reports sent in the relevant boxes

CCC AFU Report Number 872

Observations at Brown Spinney, Shepreth, Cambridgeshire

An Archaeological Watching Brief

Mo Jones BA PIFA

Site Code: SHH BSP 06
CHER Event Number: ECB 2186
Date of works: 2nd May 2006
Grid Ref: TL 3972 4830

Editor: Elizabeth Shepherd Popescu BA PhD MIFA
Illustrators: Crane Begg B Sc. (Hons), Séverine Bézie MA

Summary

Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Field Unit was commissioned by Lamva Limited to undertake an Archaeological Watching Brief at Brown Spinney, Shepreth. The work took place on 2nd May 2006.

The watching brief was required in order to monitor archaeologically the replacement of part of the existing 33kv Shepreth to Sawston Overhead Power Line, in particular, the section of Overhead Line located within the boundaries of Scheduled Ancient Monument 85, identified as a possible Roman Villa site.

Three trenches were excavated by machine immediately adjacent to the post and pylons of the existing Overhead Line.

No archaeological activity was present in any trench, although thick alluvial deposits were identified in Trenches 6 and 7 (603 and 703). All deposits were examined for archaeological artefacts and features but none were observed.

Despite the lack of archaeological features, the alluvial deposits show that extensive and repeated flooding events occurred here. It is very likely that these depositions are directly related to the palaeochannel located to the east and north of the development area (Roberts1998, fig. 1).

Contents

1	**Introduction**	1
2	**Geology and Topography**	1
3	**Archaeological and Historical Background**	4
4	**Methodology**	4
5	**Results**	4
	5.1 Trench 5	4
	5.2 Trench 6	4
	5.3 Trench 7	6
6	**Discussion**	6
7	**Conclusions**	7
	Acknowledgements	10
	Bibliography	10

List of Figures

Figure 1:	Location of the pylon route with trench positions highlighted in red and cropmarks (green)	2
Figure 2:	Trench plans and section drawings	8

List of Plates

Plate 1:	Trench 5	5
Plate 2:	Trench 6	5
Plate 3:	Trench 7	9
Plate 4:	Alluvial layers (703) and water-logging in Trench 7	9

List of Appendices

Appendix 1: Context Summary 11

Drawing Conventions

Sections

Limit of Excavation

Cut

Cut-Conjectured

Deposit Horizon

Deposit Horizon - Conjectured

Intrusion/Truncation

Top Surface/Top of Natural

Break in Section/
Limit of Section Drawing

Cut Number 118

Deposit Number 117

Ordnance Datum 18.45m OD

Inclusions

Plans

Limit of Excavation

Deposit - Conjectured

Natural Features

Sondages/Machine Strip

Intrusion/Truncation

Illustrated Section S.14

Archaeological Deposit

Excavated Slot

Modern Deposit

Cut Number 118

1 Introduction

This archaeological watching brief was undertaken in accordance with a Brief issued by Adrian Scruby of the Cambridgeshire Archaeology, Planning and Countryside Advice team (CAPCA; Planning Application N/A), supplemented by a Specification prepared by Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Field Unit (CCC AFU; Drummond-Murray 2006).

The proposed development is for the replacement of the existing Overhead Line running from Shepreth to Sawston. New post-holes and ground anchors will be required for the line. Three of the posts (nos 5,6 &7) lie within a Scheduled Ancient Monument (Cambs 85), a large Roman building, probably a villa (Fig. 1). The Overhead Line runs east to west at the northern extremity of the Scheduled area, adjacent to the railway line.

Currently, the land is under arable cultivation with a small area of light woodland in the north-east corner. Trenches 5 and 6 lie in the arable area, Trench 7 within the wooded area. Each trench was located directly adjacent to the existing concrete base of the original pylons, probably erected in the 1940s or 1950s.

The work was designed to ensure the recording to an acceptable standard any archaeological remains exposed 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. Any significant artefacts will be subject to an appropriate programme of recording and analysis.

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

2 Geology and Topography

The site overlies first and second River Terrace deposits and alluvium (British Geological Survey 1976) and is located on relatively flat arable ground at approximately 20m OD. The village of Shepreth is located to the south-west, its eastern edge forming the boundary of the site and the Foxton Brook lies at the eastern edge of site.

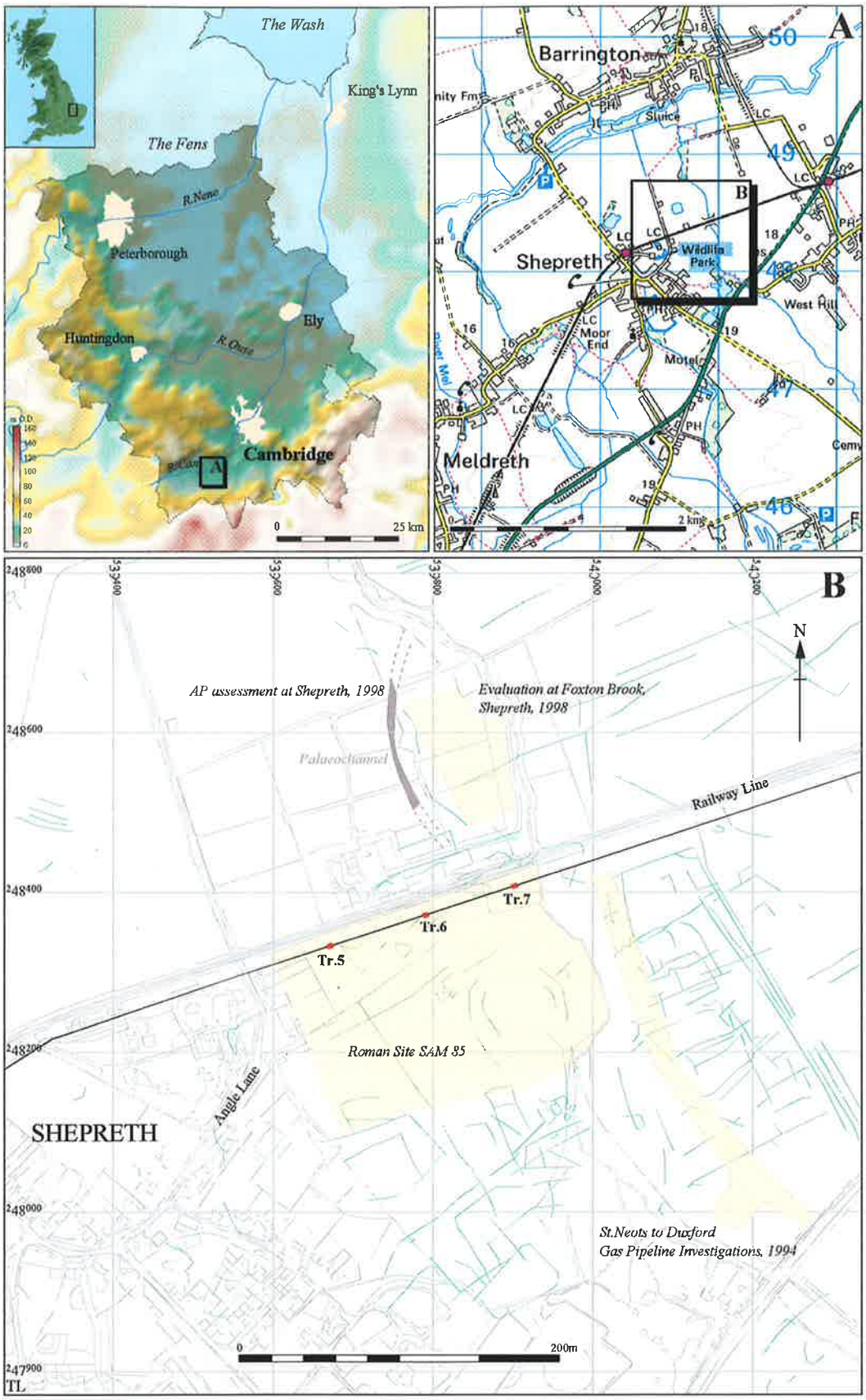

Figure 1: Location of the pylon route with trench positions highlighted in red and cropmarks (green)

3 Archaeological and Historical Background

The site lies within the boundaries of SAM 85, relating to the Roman villa originally excavated in 1885 and subject to further excavation by R Parker between 1968 and 1972. The Overhead Line runs east to west at the northern extremity of the Scheduled area, adjacent to the railway line.

The main building was dated to the Early Roman period and there are several cropmarks visible on the line of the Overhead Line that may relate to the villa complex.

On the other side of the Foxton Brook to the east, and outside the Scheduled area, excavations for the St Neots to Duxford pipeline (Maynard *et al* 1997) revealed multi-period remains including Neolithic pits and a group of Iron Age roundhouses. From the early Roman period there was a chalk building with a flue system as well as pit and ditch complexes. In the 3rd and 4th centuries the area was in use as a cemetery.

To the north of the railway line an evaluation revealed linear features of Iron Age/Romano-British date (Roberts 1998) and an aerial photographic assessment suggested further Roman features in the area (Palmer 1998).

4 Methodology

The objective of this watching brief 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.

The Brief required that any archaeological features exposed during ground works are recorded and interpreted to an acceptable standard and to ensure that any significant discoveries of artefact evidence are recorded and analysed to an acceptable standard (Scruby 2006).

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

Each trench was located immediately adjacent to the existing Overhead Line post in order to facilitate its removal and position the new post as close as possible to the original.

All deposits were removed stratigraphically and subsoil and alluvial layers were inspected for artefacts. Each trench was photographed

and a sample section was drawn to show the natural topsoil, subsoil and alluvial layers (where present) overlying the natural strata. For ease of identification, each trench was given the same number as the as the Overhead Line post (5, 6 and 7).

All archaeological deposits and full trench dimensions were recorded using CCC AFU's *pro-forma* sheets. Trench locations and sections were recorded at 1:20 and colour, monochrome and digital photographs were taken of all relevant features and deposits.

Environmental samples were not taken during this watching brief.

5 Results

No archaeological features were encountered during this watching brief despite the location of the development area (see above). No evidence relating to the possible villa site was identified. The only deposits with potential archaeological, and in particular, environmental interest, were the alluvial layers observed in Trenches 6 and 7 (see below). See Appendix 1 for trench soil descriptions.

5.1 Trench 5

Trench 5 was the location of the westernmost Overhead Line post (Figs. 1 and 2). It measured 4m long by 1.6m wide and was excavated to approximately 3m deep. Potential archaeological horizons - topsoil 501, subsoil 502 and natural 503 - were observed to a maximum depth of 0.5m (Section 1, Fig. 2 and Plate 1).

5.2 Trench 6

Trench 6 (Figs. 1 and 2) was located *m east of Trench 5. It measured 3m long by 1.6m wide and was excavated to approximately 3m deep. Underlying the topsoil and subsoil layers (601 and 602) was a deep alluvial deposit (603), measuring up to 0.8m thick. This deposit comprised three separate layers, each representing a different flood event. The initial and tertiary events were recorded as measuring up to 0.2m thick and were pale in colour. The secondary event was slightly darker in colour with a brownish hue. It was the largest of the three identified flood events, measuring up to 0.4m thick (Section 2, Fig. 2 and Plate 2).

Plate 1: Trench 5

Plate 2: Trench 6

5.3 Trench 7

Trench 7 (Figs. 1 and 2) lay in the north-east corner of the development area, in the centre of the wooded area and measured 3m long by 1.6m wide. It was also the closest to the Foxton Brook, currently forming the eastern site boundary.

All measurements pertaining to soil depths are approximate due to various limitations, including:

a) an abundance of intrusion by root activity
b) overhead and ground level obstructions caused by trees and tree roots
c) groundwater, encountered at 0.2m - 0.3m deep
d) unstable and rapidly collapsing trench edges

Alluvial deposits were also identified in Trench 7 (Plate 3). They appeared to consist of multiple silty layers, dark brown in colour with frequent small snail shells. Two or three thin gravel lenses (up to 0.05m thick) were observed within the alluvium (Section 3, Fig. 2). Each deposit was probably related to sediment deposition caused by flooding or within a (river) channel. The alluvial layer was sealed by subsoil and topsoil deposits, similar to the other trenches (Plate 4) (see Appendix 1).

6 Discussion

The watching brief at Shepreth has shown that no archaeological remains were identified during the replacement of part of the Shepreth to Sawston Overhead Power Line, despite being located within possible Roman Villa site and near to previous excavations which revealed archaeological activity dating from the Neolithic to medieval periods (Maynard *et al*, 1997 and Roberts 1998).

A dark stony feature was observed during aerial photographic survey in 1998. This feature curved across the eastern part of the area under archaeological investigation and a section was dug, by machine, and confirmed as a palaeochannel with a dark organic clay lower fill with shallow lenses of sand sealed by a dark greyish brown silty clay with large stones and coarse gravel (Palmer 1998). It is therefore highly likely that the alluvial deposits identified in Trenches 6 and 7 (see above) are part of the same palaeochannel and serve to map its course continuing southwards.

7 Conclusions

The results of this work should not signify that no archaeological remains are present. The trenches excavated examined only a small percentage of the Scheduled Area and the probability of encountering archaeological features was therefore limited. However, the excavations to the north and east (Maynard *et al*, 1997 and Roberts 1998) combined with the results of cropmark survey to the south and east strongly suggest that there is still high archaeological potential here.

The alluvial deposits encountered in Trenches 6 and 7, whilst not revealing archaeological remains, are potentially very informative in determining the extent of palaeochannel activity and frequency of flooding events and also for procuring environmental information via sampling and pollen analysis. This technique could provide a snapshot of the environment and land use. Further examination of the strata underlying the alluvial deposits may also reveal archaeological remains not encountered during this work.

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

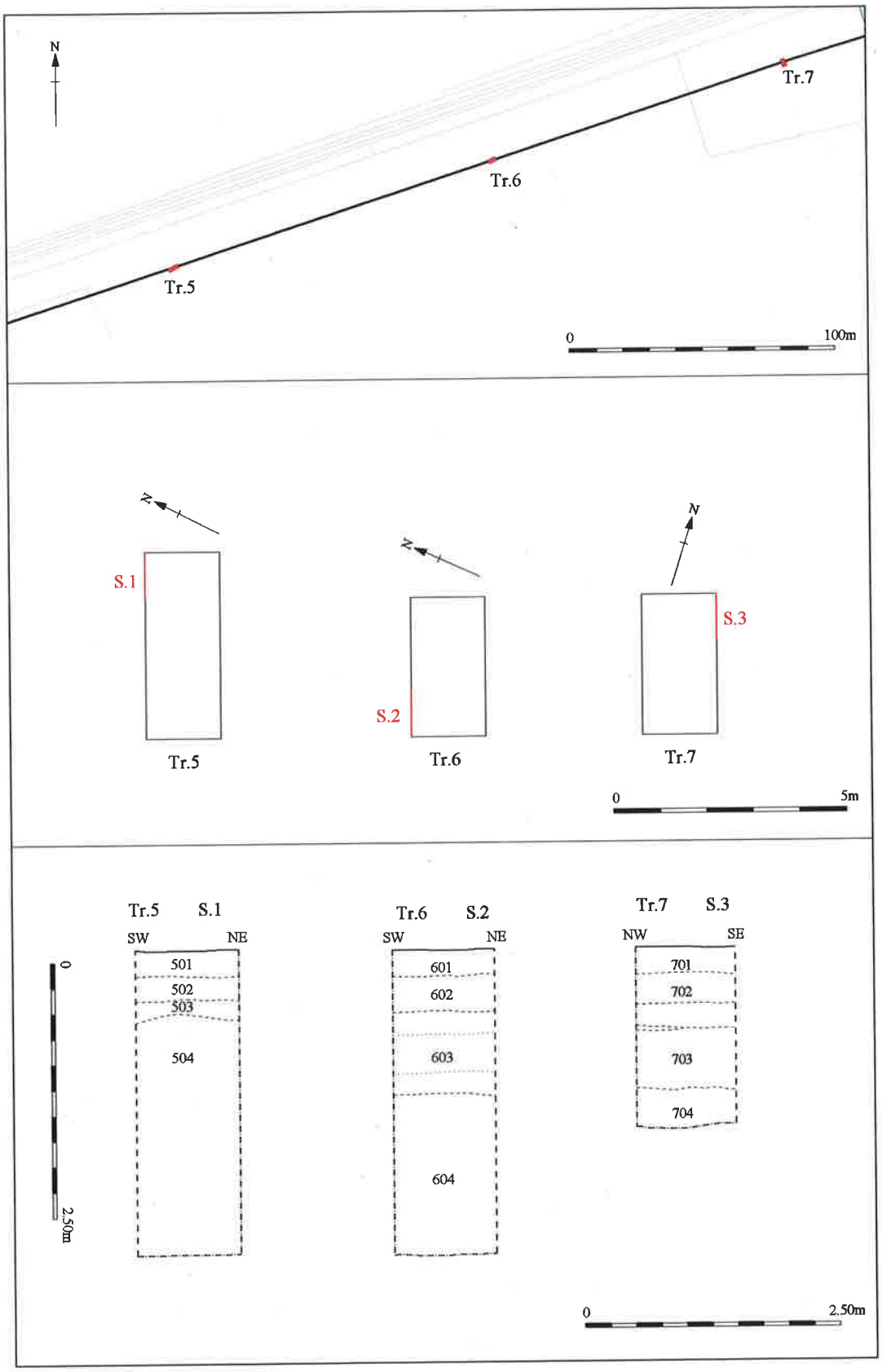

Figure 2: Trench plans and section drawings

Plate 3: Trench 7

Plate 4: Alluvial layers (703) and water-logging in Trench 7

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Lamva Limited who commissioned and funded the archaeological work. The project was managed by James Drummond-Murray.

The brief for archaeological works was written by Adrian Scruby, who visited the site and monitored the watching brief.

Bibliography

British Geological Survey	1976	*Drift Edition*, Sheet 204
Drummond-Murray, J	2006	*Specification for Archaeological Monitoring and Recording, Shepreth to Sawston 33kv Overhead Line Rebuild*
Maynard, D. J; Cleary, R; Moore, R; Brooks, I. P and Price, J	1997	*Excavations at Foxton, Cambridgeshire.* British Archaeological Reports 255
Palmer, R	1998	'Shepreth TL 398486, Cambridgeshire: Aerial Photographic Assessment' in Roberts, J *Iron Age Features Adjacent to Foxton Brook, Shepreth: An Archaeological Evaluation,* CCC AFU Report A139 (unpublished)
Roberts, J	1998	*Iron Age Features Adjacent to Foxton Brook, Shepreth: An Archaeological Evaluation,* CCC AFU Report No. A139 (unpublished)
Scruby, A	2006	*Brief for Archaeological Monitoring and Recording, Shepreth to Sawston 33kv Overhead Line Rebuild, Shepreth*, CAPCA (unpublished)

Appendix 1: Context Summary

Context	Type	Description	Depth (m)	Function
501	Layer	Mid yellowish brown sandy clay	0.25	Topsoil
502	Layer	Light brownish yellow sandy clay	0.25	Subsoil
503	Layer	Yellow fine gravels	0.20	Natural
504	Layer	Light grey chalk marl	+2.27	Natural
Total			**2.97**	

Table 1: Trench 5

Context	Type	Description	Depth (m)	Function
601	Layer	Mid yellowish brown sandy clay	0.25	Topsoil
602	Layer	Light brownish yellow sandy clay	0.37	Subsoil
603	Layer	Light brownish white silt	0.82	Alluvium
604	Layer	Light blueish grey chalk marl	+1.64	Natural
Total			**3.08**	

Table 2: Trench 6

Context	Type	Description	Depth (m)	Function
701	Layer	Dark greyish brown silty clay	0.26	Topsoil
702	Layer	Light yellowish grey clay sand	0.30	Subsoil
703	Layer	Dark brown silt	0.84	Alluvium
704	Layer	Light blueish grey chalk marl	+0.38	Natural
Total			**1.78**	

Table 3: Trench 7

INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

REGISTERED ORGANISATION IFA

Beacon Council
2004-2005
Better Local Public Transport
2005-2006
Asset Management

Cambridgeshire County Council's **Archaeological Field Unit** undertakes a wide range of work throughout the county and across the eastern region.

Our key purpose is to increase understanding of the rich heritage of the region.

We are keenly competitive, working to the highest professional standards in a broad range of service areas. We work in partnership with contractors and local communities.

We undertake or provide:

- surveys, assessments, evaluations and excavations
- popular and academic publications
- illustration and design services
- heritage and conservation management
- education and outreach services
- volunteer, training and work experience opportunities
- partnership projects with community groups and research bodies

contact

cambridgeshirearchaeology
archaeological field unit

Fulbourn Community Centre Site
Haggis Gap
Fulbourn
Cambridge
CB1 5HD

Tel : 01223 576201
Fax: 01223 880946
email: arch.field.unit@cambridgeshire.gov.uk
web: www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/archaeology

Printed on recycled paper