



**CCC AFU Report Number 892**

## **A Roman Ditch at No. 15 Latham Road, Cambridge, Cambridgeshire**

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**Archaeological Evaluation and  
Excavation**

Tom Phillips

August 2006

## 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

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**A Roman Ditch at No. 15  
Latham Road, Cambridge,  
Cambridgeshire**

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**Archaeological Evaluation and  
Excavation**

Tom Phillips BA

With contributions by Katie Anderson MA, Chris  
Faine MA, MSc, BABAO and Rachel Fosberry HNC  
(Cert Ed) AEA

Site Code: CAM LRD 05

CHER Event Number: ECB2000

Date of works: 26th June 2006, 10-11th July 2006

Grid Ref: TL 4485 5679

Editor: Elizabeth Shepherd Popescu BA PhD MIFA

Illustrator: Crane Begg BSc (Hons)

## **Summary**

On 26th June 2006 an archaeological evaluation comprising a 10m trench was carried out by Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Field Unit at No. 15 Latham Road, Cambridge, prior to the construction of a swimming pool.

The work was designed to assist in defining the character and extent of any archaeological remains within the proposed development area.

The one feature discovered was a ditch of Roman date which contained a large amount of cultural debris. As a result it was decided to strip the entire footprint of the swimming pool, an area of approximately 10.5 x 4.5m. No further archaeological features were encountered although the form and function of the ditch was further elucidated. This further work took place between 10th-11th July 2006.

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


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## Drawing Conventions

Sections		Plans	
Limit of Excavation		Limit of Excavation	
Cut		Deposit - Conjectured	
Cut-Conjectured		Natural Features	
Deposit Horizon		Sondages/Machine Strip	
Deposit Horizon - Conjectured		Intrusion/Truncation	
Intrusion/Truncation		Illustrated Section	
Top Surface/Top of Natural		Archaeological Deposit	
Break in Section/ Limit of Section Drawing		Excavated Slot	
Cut Number		Modern Deposit	
Deposit Number	117	Cut Number	
Ordnance Datum	 18.45m OD		
Inclusions			

## **1 Introduction**

This archaeological evaluation and subsequent excavation was undertaken in accordance with Briefs issued by Kasia Gdaniec of the Cambridgeshire Archaeology, Planning and Countryside Advice team (CAPCA; Planning Application C/05/0425/FUL) supplemented by Specifications prepared by Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Field Unit (CCC AFU).

The initial 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 subsequent work was carried out due to a request from CAPCA to investigate fully the area being developed.

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 is located on second terrace gravels overlying Lower Chalk with exposures of Gault Clay (British Geological Survey 2002) and is within the floodplain of the River Cam, which is situated 200m to the west.

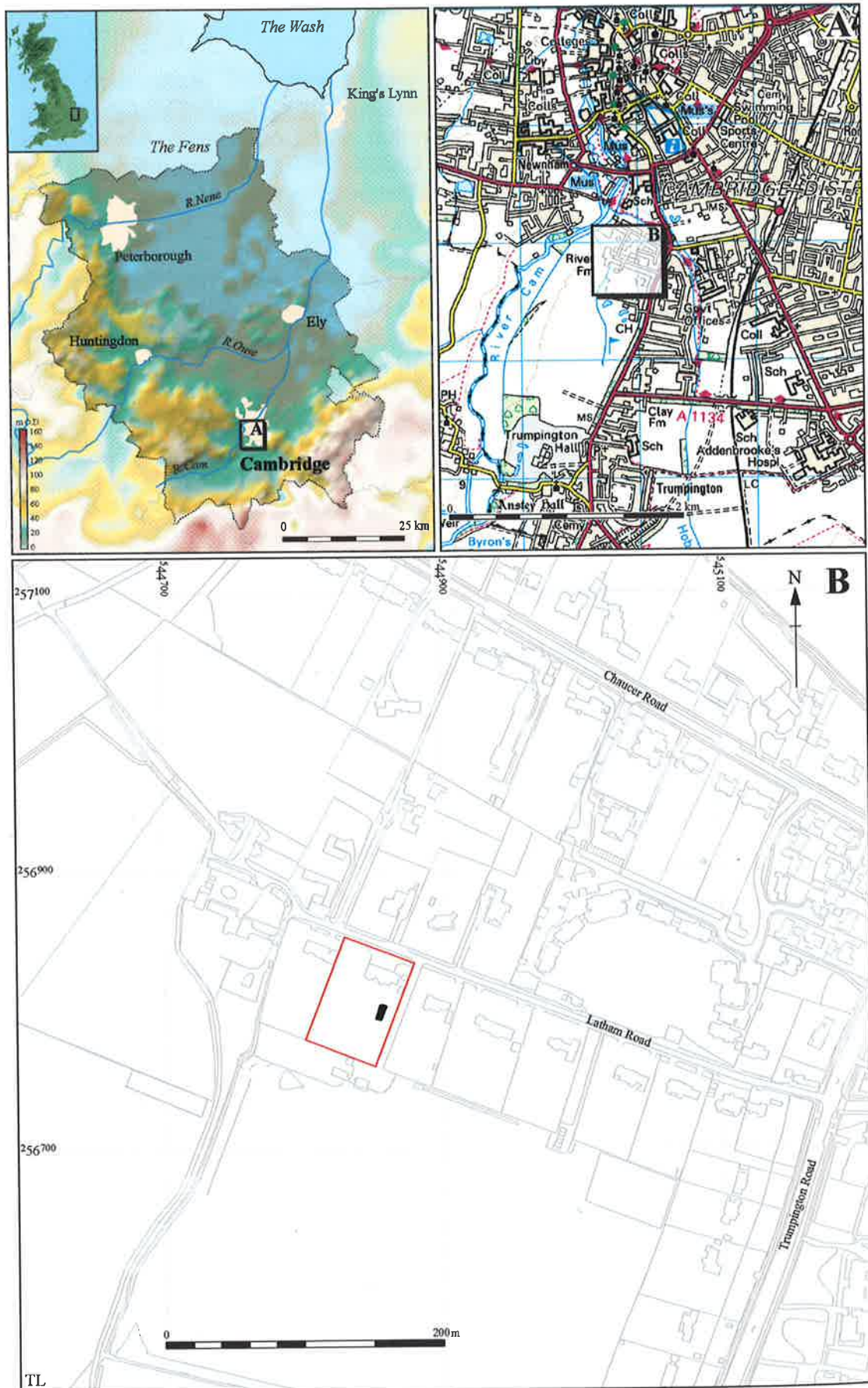
The topography of the site and surrounding area is flat and it lies at approximately 11m OD.

## **3 Archaeological and Historical Background**

Although there are two Iron Age find spots recorded nearby (Fig. 2) (Historic Environment Record 01650a and 04799), the greatest archaeological representation for this part of Trumpington stems from the Roman period with dense cropmarks of settlement enclosures, fields and paddocks, denoting the Roman usage of the River Cam terraces. Such cropmarks exist 200m to the south of the development area (HER 09603) and a similar distance to the east (HER 05031 and 09601).

Rescue excavations were conducted at Latham and Chaucer Roads in the early 20th century ahead of residential development. Excavations in 1910 actually took place on the property directly to the west of the subject site and in the field to the south (HER 05023) (Walker 1911, 192-196). Roman pits, a well and a possible road were found, as well as several later Roman coins, pottery, glass, horn, ivory and metal objects, tesserae, floor and roof tile and bone – all indicative of high status settlement in this area.





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**Figure 1** Location of trench with the development area outlined (red)



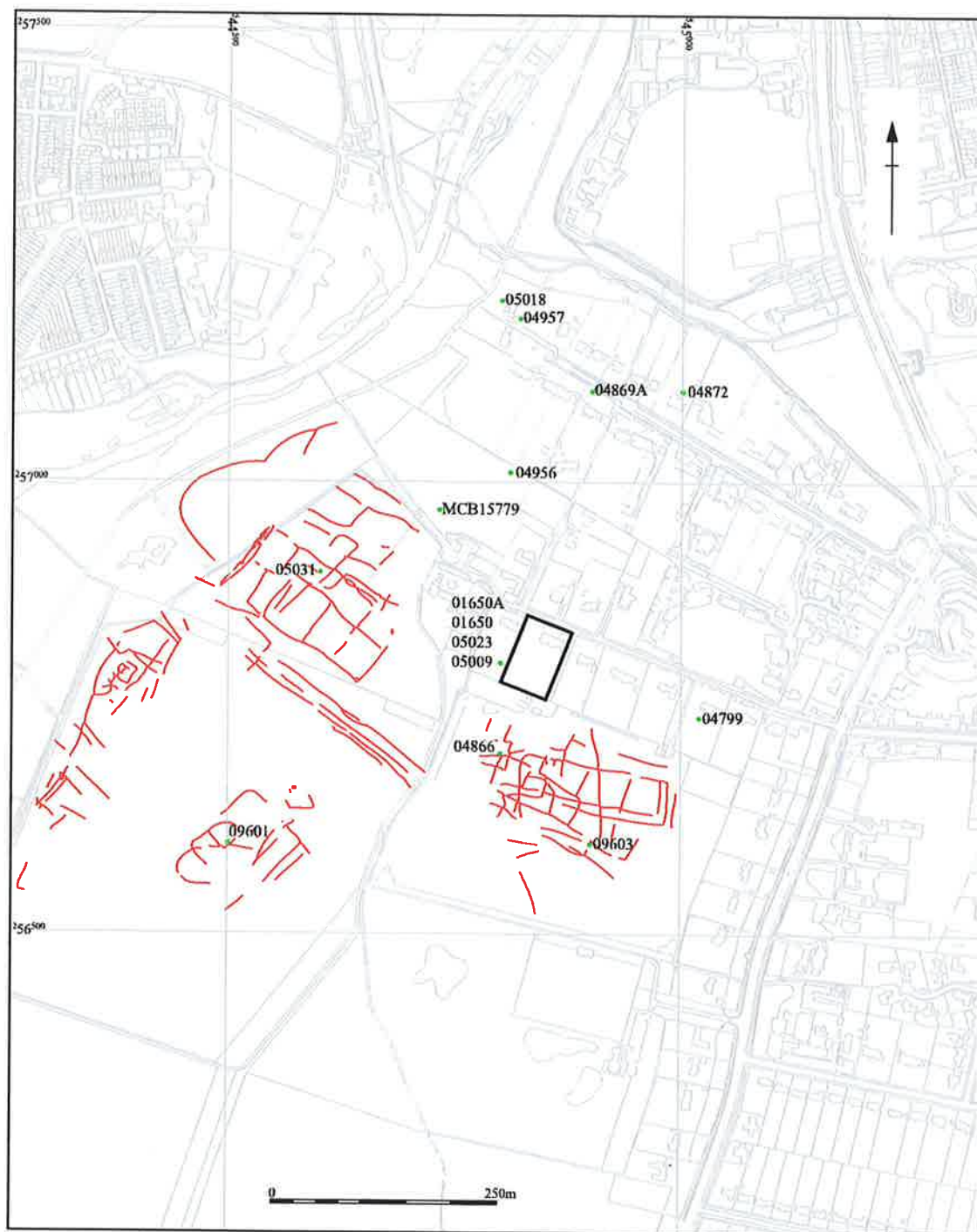


Figure 2: HER and cropmark information

An extensive Romano-British cemetery was discovered in the 18th century during gravel workings of Dam Hill – at the confluence of the Vicars Brook and Cam, approximately 300m to the north of the development area (HER 04956). Inhumations and cremations were both present, associated with Samian ware and other Mediterranean fine wares (Liversidge 1977, 21).

Recent evaluation work by the Cambridge Archaeological Unit at the Perse School's playing field at Latham Close, 200m to the north west of the site revealed extensive strip quarrying with redeposited Roman material in their in fills and two ditches of Roman date at the periphery of the site (Mackay 2004).

The extent and varied nature of the archaeology existing in the locality suggest the site at Latham Road is part of a densely occupied Roman landscape and, as the extent of the 18th century quarrying is unknown (as is the extent of the cemetery), this part of Trumpington remains of considerable archaeological importance.

#### **4 Methodology**

The objective of this evaluation and excavation 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 initially a 10m trench be opened, providing approximately a 25% sample of the development area. During the second stage of work the sample was increased to include the entire footprint of the swimming pool.

Machine excavation was carried out under constant archaeological supervision with a mini-digger and a wheeled JCB-type excavator using a 1.6m wide toothless ditching bucket.

All archaeological features and deposits were recorded using CCC AFU's *pro-forma* sheets. The trench location was recorded using a Total Station, archaeological features were recorded in plan at scale 1:50 and in section at 1:20. Colour and monochrome photographs were taken of all relevant features and deposits.

Environmental samples were taken from the one archaeological feature encountered.

The trench was located to the rear of the house. Site and weather conditions were good.

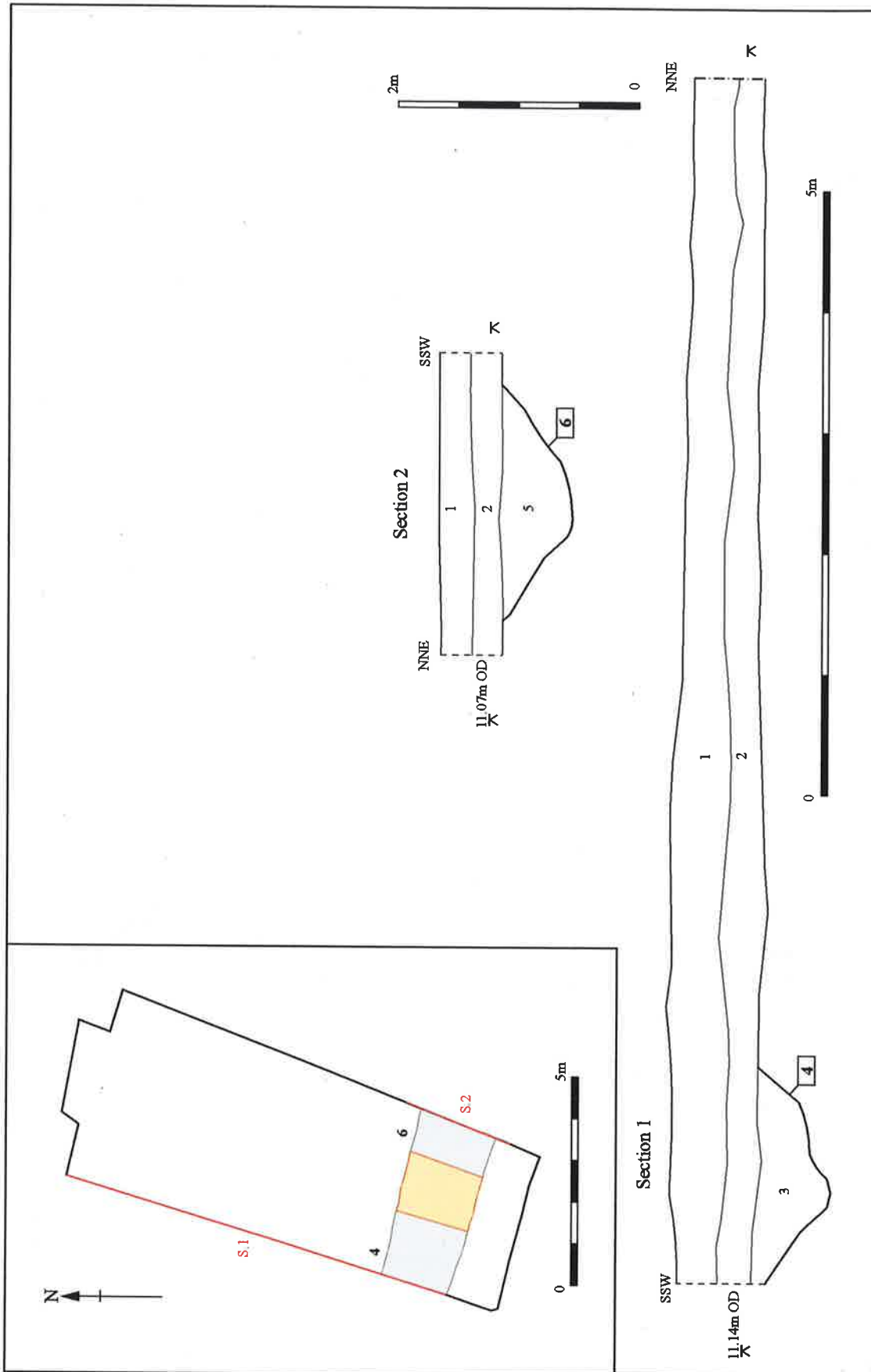


Figure 3: Trench plan and section drawings





*Plate 1: Trench 1 looking north*



*Plate 2: Ditch 6 looking east*

## 5 Results

Trench 1 was 10.75m long with a width of 4m at the southern end and 4.5m at the northern end, orientated roughly north to south (Fig. 3 and Plate 1). The depth of the trench ranged between 0.54-0.90m. Only one archaeological feature was present, a ditch, aligned east-west, at the southern end of the trench. Two excavated segments (4 and 6) were recorded.

Ditch 4 was a wide u-shape in profile, measuring 1.7m wide and 0.4m deep. Its fill (3) was a yellowish brown slightly silty sand with frequent flint inclusions. It yielded 95 sherds of abraded Roman pot, mostly domestic wares, including non-diagnostic sandy greywares, storage jars, and lids, dating to the mid-late 1st century AD. There were also occasional animal bones within fill (3). Small finds included a small iron object (SF1), possibly part of a nail, a small piece of lava quern (SF2) and a small piece of pudding stone quern (SF3).

Ditch 6 was u-shaped in profile, measuring 1.9m wide and 0.61m deep (Plate 2). Its fill (5) was a yellowish brown slightly silty sand with frequent flint inclusions. It contained 96 sherds of abraded Roman pot, similar to the assemblage above, again dating mid-late 1st century AD, and occasional animal bones. Another piece of lava quern (SF4) came out of this fill.

The ditch was sealed by subsoil layer 2, a mid greyish brown silty sand measuring 0.2-0.4m deep. Dark blackish brown loamy sand topsoil (1) sealed the subsoil and was 0.28-0.50m thick. Both topsoil and subsoil were stripped by machine.

## 6 Discussion

The excavated ditch was probably part of the Roman field system of enclosures, paddocks and boundaries which can be seen in the cropmarks only 200m the south and 300m to the west of the development area. Indeed many of the cropmarks are on a similar alignment. Although it appears an isolated feature, the artefactual remains indicate domestic activities and occupation in close proximity to the development site. A study of the pottery (see Appendix 2) suggests this was part of an early Romano-British settlement, either a small low status one or on the periphery of a larger one. Sooting on the outside of some of the sherds, evidence of food preparation, supports the idea of domestic activities, as do the pieces of quern stone.

Of interest is how the evidence from this small area ties in with the findings made in 1910 directly to the west and south (Walker 1911). Those excavations yielded artefacts relating to a high status settlement. The current development area may be part of a higher

status settlement but the evidence has not been found due to the small sample size, or it lies on the periphery of the site to the west. A more likely explanation is that the two are not related at all, this being a small-scale Early Roman settlement and the site to the west being later in date, as is suggested by some of the artefactual evidence.

## **7 Conclusions**

This work has successfully shown, despite such a small sample area, that there is strong evidence for human activity in the immediate vicinity of the site. This contributes to current knowledge of this region of the River Cam as a rich agricultural landscape, particularly during the Roman period.



## Acknowledgements

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

Claire Martin, also of CCC AFU, worked on the site, Katie Anderson assessed the pottery, Chris Faine analysed the faunal remains and Rachel Fosberry looked at the environmental evidence. The report was illustrated by Crane Begg and edited by Elizabeth Shepherd Popescu. Sarah Poppy of CCC Historic Environment Record assisted with the historical and archaeological background.

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

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| Mackay, D.                | 2004 | <i>Latham Close, Cambridge: An Archaeological Evaluation</i> , Cambridge Archaeological Unit Report No. 619 |
| Walker, F.G.              | 1911 | 'Excavations near Latham Road, Trumpington', <i>Proc. Cambridge Antiquarian Society</i> 15                  |

## Appendix 1: HER Entries and Details

HER No.	Details
01650	Roman remains, Latham Road, found during 1910 excavations in field beyond Coles property on south side: pit, well, road, coins, pottery, stone objects, tesserae, tile, bronze, brooch, iron object, bone, ivory, horn object.
01650a	Prehistoric Pottery found at Latham Road during 1910 excavations.
04799	Iron Age pottery found in 1923 in the foundations of Gransett House, Latham Road.
04866	Roman coins found at Latham Road.
04869a	Roman pottery found in Chaucer Road (Upwater Lodge) in 1902-1903.
04872	Roman pottery from Chaucer Road (precise location unknown), 1905.
04956	Roman Cemetery at Dam Hill. Burials and pottery found 1719.
04957	Roman pottery found in Chaucer Road (Upwater Lodge) in 1907
05009	Roman pottery found in Latham Road, 1916.
05018	Roman pottery found in Chaucer Road in 1907.
05023	Roman remains, Latham Road, found during 1910 excavations at Mr. Coles' house, west end of road: pit, well, possible road, pottery, fragment of a basin in a marble of unknown origin but probably Mediterranean, and an object described as a 'Baby's feeding bottle'.
05031	Earthworks and cropmarks west of River Farm.
09601	Cropmarks.
09603	Complex enclosure system plus possible trackways and possible fields.
MCB15779	An evaluation was carried out by Cambridge Archaeological Unit at Latham Close in 2004. Two ditches of Roman date were discovered with pottery suggesting a 3rd – 4th century date.

## **Appendix 2: The Pottery**

By Katie Anderson

### **1 Introduction**

The site yielded a total of 191 sherds of pottery, weighing 2157g, coming from two contexts. All of the material was examined and details of fabric, form, decoration and date were recorded along with any other information deemed significant.

### **2 Assemblage Composition**

Context (3) (the fill of ditch segment 4) contained ninety-five sherds, weighing 1086g, a large number of which were non-diagnostic sandy greywares (63%). Fifteen sherds came from a single vessel (234g), an oxidised sandy storage jar with combed line decoration, dating mid-late 1st century AD. This context also contained seven different sandy greyware jar sherds, including beaded rim, everted rim and lid-seated types, which are fairly generic throughout the Roman period, although the fabrics (including one sandwich fired) imply a mid-late 1st century AD date. Finally, one small, everted, greyware jar sherd was recovered which is probably from the same vessel as one of the jars found in context (5).

Three sherds from lids were recovered, two of which refitted. Both were beaded rim variants, one of which was in a sandy greyware fabric, with slight internal abrasion, while the other was a black-slipped ware. These three sherds also date mid-late 1st century AD. One fine sandy oxidised ware was recovered, with a fabric similar to those identified at Cherry Hinton (Lucas 1999), which also showed a possible perforation in the centre of the base, although due to the condition of the sherd and the breaking position, establishing whether this was a pre or post-firing hole is problematic. The fabric dates this sherd to the mid-late 1st century AD.

Ninety-six sherds, weighing 1071g were collected from context (5), the fill of ditch segment 6. The non-diagnostic sandy wares were dominant (72%), although a number of these were decorated with combed or rilled lines, giving an early Roman date (mid-late 1st century AD). Ten different jars were identified, represented by 12 sherds. This included five everted rim jars, one lid-seated rim and one large everted rim from a medium sized storage jar, all of which date mid-late 1st century AD. Two further lids were also identified, consisting of one beaded rim lid and one plain rim lid, also dating mid-late 1st century AD.

This context also contained one small Verulamium whiteware sherd, which was non-diagnostic, although this is the only sherd which can be sourced, with a date of mid 1st-2nd century AD. Two possible Late Iron Age sherds were also recovered from this context, one of which was a non-diagnostic grog-tempered sherd.

### 3 Discussion

The assemblage consisted generally of small sherds, with a mean weight of 11.3g, many of which were moderately abraded. The fabrics and forms identified imply domestic assemblage, with a number of jars and lids identified. Some of these had sooting on the exterior which is further evidence that these vessels were used for food preparation. The only other useware evidence consisted of a black-slipped ware with heavy interior limescale, suggesting it had functioned as a vessel to hold/store water.

The absence of any dishes, bowls and beakers is in part due to the relative small size of the assemblage, but is perhaps better explained as a result of the date of the pottery, which is all Early Roman (mid-late 1st century AD). Due to the size and condition of the sherds more accurate dating was problematic, although the presence of several 'sandwich' fired sherds suggests a pre-Flavian (AD 43-68) element, probably extending into the Flavian period (AD 69-96). Therefore this is before pottery assemblages had been fully 'Romanized', thus explaining the lack of other wares, specifically finewares. However, it should still be considered that the lack of early finewares may be a reflection of the status of the site, implying a relatively poor, small-scale early Roman settlement that did not have access to the wider trade networks.

All of the pottery was recovered from a single feature, an east-west ditch, with a mid-late 1st century AD date. Even though some of the sherds are more heavily abraded, there is no noticeable difference in date between these sherds and those with little abrasion, suggesting that these are not residual, but were exposed to more damaging use before deposition.

Other excavations in this area of South Cambridge have shown evidence of a number of Early Roman settlements. This site is clearly not on the same scale, although there is the possibility that these excavations centred on the periphery of a site. A small scale evaluation carried out by the CAU in Latham Close (Mackay 2004) recovered a later Roman assemblage, consisting primarily of 3rd-4th century AD sherds, including Nene Valley colour-coated wares and a small number of Oxfordshire red-slipped wares. This therefore demonstrates that this area of Cambridge continued to be utilized into the later Roman period, although whether this was a continuous occupation, or discrete periods is as yet unclear.

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- |            |      |  |
|------------|------|--|
| Lucas, G   | 1999 | <i>Roman Pottery Production in Cambridgeshire, Supplement Report to CUMAA/Crowther-Benyon Fund</i>         |
| Mackay, D. | 2004 | <i>Latham Close, Cambridge: An Archaeological Evaluation, Cambridge Archaeological Unit Report No. 619</i> |

## **Appendix 3: Faunal Remains**

By Chris Faine

### **1 Results**

This small assemblage consists of 40 fragments, with 22 elements identifiable to species (58% of the sample). All unidentifiable elements were classed as medium/large mammals. Ageing of individuals (where possible), was carried out using mandibular tooth wear stages following Grant (1982) and Hambelton (2000). Preservation of the sample is fair, albeit extremely fragmented in some cases. Faunal remains were recovered from 2 contexts (both being ditch fills) provisionally dated to the Romano-British period, the largest number deriving from context (5). These largely consist of cattle lower limb bones from at least two adult individuals, including two astragali, calcanei, a single metacarpal, tibia and a portion of sacrum. One calcaneus showed evidence of butchery at its distal articulation, possibly indicating disarticulation of the ankle joint. A portion of cattle pelvis also displayed several severe cut marks, most likely made by a heavy knife or cleaver.

A number of identifiable elements were also recovered from context (3). These include a number of postcranial adult cattle elements, including pelvis and lumbar vertebrae. Many of these elements show signs of butchery, with the vertebrae in particular having their transverse processes removed. In addition to these elements context (3) also contained a butchered Sheep/Goat tibia, several ribs and a mandible from an individual around 3-4 years of age. Portions of dog mandible, maxilla and metacarpi were also recovered.

### **2 Conclusions**

It is likely, given the range of elements, the approximate ages of the individuals and the pattern of butchery, that the assemblage represents small-scale domestic waste. The dog remains show no evidence of butchery and are most likely an accidental deposition. However, given the extremely small sample size few definite conclusions can be drawn.



## Bibliography

- Grant, A. 1982 The use of tooth wear as a guide to the age of domestic ungulates. In B. Wilson, C. Grigson & S. Payne (eds.) *Ageing and sexing animal bones from archaeological sites*. Oxford: BAR British Series 199.
- Hambelton, E. 2000 A method for converting Grant mandible wear stages to Payne style wear stages in sheep, cow and pig. In Millard, A (eds.) *Archaeological Sciences 1997. Proceedings of the conference held at the University of Durham*. BAR International Series 939.

## **Appendix 4: Environmental Remains**

By Rachel Fosberry

### **1 Introduction and Methods**

Two bulk samples were taken from features within the evaluated area 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.

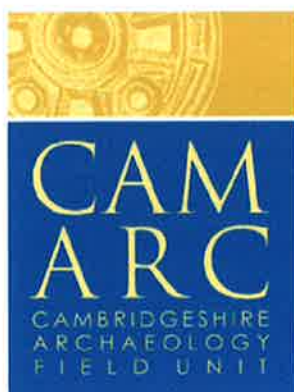
Ten litres of each sample were processed by tank flotation for the recovery of charred plant remains, dating evidence and any other artefactual evidence that might be present. The flot was collected in a 0.5mm nylon mesh and the residue was washed through a 1mm sieve. Both flot and residue were allowed to air dry. The dried residue was passed through 5mm and 2mm sieves and a magnet was dragged through each resulting fraction prior to sorting for artefacts. Any artefacts present were noted and reintegrated with the hand-excavated finds. The flot was examined under a binocular microscope at x16 magnification.

### **2 Results**

Both samples were identical in content and appearance. Modern contaminants in the form of rootlets, twigs, leaf fragments and a few common seeds such as *Chenopodium* sp. (goosefoot) and *Gallium* sp. (cleavers) are present in both of the samples. Charcoal fragments are present in small quantities along with a few cereal grains that are severely degraded making identification impossible.

### **3 Conclusions and Recommendations**

The low density of charred plant macrofossils in this assemblage precludes the identification of any specific activity that may be associated with the feature. It is not considered that full analysis would add significantly to this interpretation and further work is not recommended.



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