

Evaluation at Highfield School Ely Cambridgeshire



Archaeological
Evaluation Report



July 2008

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Evaluation at Highfield School, Ely, Cambridgeshire

Archaeological Evaluation

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Summary

On 23rd July 2008, OA East (formerly Cambridgeshire County Councils CAM ARC) conducted an evaluation on a plot of land within Highfield School, Ely, in advance of the proposed development to expand the school.

One 11m trench was excavated. The majority of the features were of Medieval date or later, this included ridge and furrow which could also be seen on the adjacent playing fields to the north of the development area.

The earliest feature in the trench was a small ditch, of probable Prehistoric or Romano-British date, possibly forming part of a Bronze Age field system. Activity in this part of Ely was dedicated to agriculture, evidence has been found for continuous farming of this area from prehistory through to the medieval period.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work

- 1.1.1 An archaeological evaluation was conducted at Highfield School, Ely, Cambridgeshire.
- 1.1.2 This archaeological evaluation was undertaken in accordance with a Brief issued by Andy Thomas of the Cambridgeshire Archaeology, Planning and Countryside Advice team (CAPCA; Planning Application -E/03003/08/CC), supplemented by a Specification prepared by OA East (formerly Cambridgeshire County Council's CAM ARC).
- 1.1.3 The work was designed to assist in defining the character and extent of any archaeological remains within the proposed redevelopment 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.
- 1.1.4 The site archive is currently held by OA East and will be deposited with the appropriate county stores in due course.

1.2 Geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The site is situated on Kimmeridge Clay at a height of approximately 10m OD on a very slight north and west facing slope.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 Lying 16 miles north-east of Cambridge on the River Great Ouse, Ely was mentioned in the Domesday Book (AD 1086) as a small agricultural settlement, however, its origins are much earlier and archaeological work has shown that occupation on the island begins as early as the Neolithic. The name means very much what it sounds like, being derived from the Old English *ael-ge*, or “eel-district” (VCH 1967). The earliest evidence for occupation on the summit of the Isle of Ely is a Mesolithic flint scatter from the Bray's Lane excavation (SMR 10175). This site also produced part of a possible Bronze Age field system (Hunter 1992), later occupation from the Iron Age was found just south-east of the Cathedral.
- 1.3.2 A series of archaeological investigations on the lower-lying clays to the west and south of the site have identified extensive areas of occupation. Excavations at West Fen Road and Trinity and Runciman Fields to the southwest of the site revealed sporadic Neolithic and Bronze Age activity, along with Middle to Late Iron Age settlement. Located west of the site is the Late Iron Age/early Roman site at Hurst Lane where the remains of house gullies and enclosure complexes were uncovered (Mortimer *et al* 2005).
- 1.3.3 Archaeological investigations in and around the city of Ely have revealed Bronze Age, Iron Age, Romano-British, Saxon and Medieval settlement remains, as well as a heavily exploited agricultural landscape. Crop marks of a rectangular and circular enclosure (HER 06966), of presumed prehistoric date are located to the south of the town.
- 1.3.4 Ely's development as an important medieval town began after the construction of the Cathedral on or near the site of an earlier monastery, and at the same time, the canalisation of the river provided important trade links. By the time of the survey of

Episcopal properties in 1251 Ely had trebled in size. The variety of trades described indicates a settlement of mixed rural and urban economy with commercial growth focusing on the Market Place and along the land between Broad Street and the River Ouse. The Cathedral itself dates from the 1080's. While little or no documentary evidence survives prior to this, the early town has Middle Saxon origins, in association with Etheldreda's first monastery, occupying a large area between the fen edge at the west and the river at the east of the island (Mortimer *et al* 2005). Numerous excavations in Ely have produced Late Saxon and medieval finds, and evidence of medieval structures has been found in several locations.

- 1.3.5 Evidence for Mid-Late Saxon and medieval settlement and agriculture has been identified to the south of West Fen Road. This predominantly consisted of settlement enclosures and paddocks with later ridge and furrow (Mortimer *et al* 2005). Ely is also well known as a pottery production centre in the medieval and post-medieval periods, and quantities of the local wares have been recovered from sites all over the city.

1.4 Acknowledgements

- 1.4.1 The author would like to thank Georgina Nwabuzo of Capita Architecture who commissioned and funded the work. The project was managed by Richard Mortimer. Field work was carried out by the author and Ross Lilley. The illustrations were also by the author. The mechanical excavation was undertaken by Mark from Lattenbury Services. The brief for archaeological works was written by Andy Thomas, and Eliza Gore visited the site and monitored the evaluation.

2 AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

- 2.1.1 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.

2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 The Brief required that 5% of the development area be subject to trial trenching. The area of development was 144 sq metres, and one 11m x 1.6m trench was opened, giving a 12% sample of the area.
- 2.2.2 Machine excavation was carried out under constant archaeological supervision with a wheeled JCB-type excavator using a toothless ditching bucket.
- 2.2.3 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.
- 2.2.4 All archaeological features and deposits were recorded using OA East'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.
- 2.2.5 One environmental sample was taken to investigate the possible survival of micro- and macro- botanical remains.
- 2.2.6 Site conditions were fine and dry, although the weather was extremely hot.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Introduction

- 3.1.1 A full trench description and context inventory can be located in Appendix B.
- 3.1.2 Archaeological features were revealed all across the excavated trench (Figure 2). Natural geology was encountered 0.66m below modern ground level. Topsoil (01) throughout was c. 0.4m deep and consisted of a mid grey brown silty clay. The subsoil (02) consisted of a mid grey brown silty clay with frequent stone and brick inclusions c. 0.2m deep. The trench was oriented north to south and was 11m in length.

3.2 Phase 1: Prehistoric or Romano-British field ditch

- 3.2.1 The earliest feature in the trench, [06], was a single, narrow ditch running northeast to southwest. It was 0.5m wide, 0.1m deep and was a shallow bowl shape. The fill was a very light grey brown clay silt. A 10 litre environmental sample was taken from this fill. The feature was 100% excavated (running for 2.45m through the trench), but no finds were recovered. The northeastern end of the ditch was truncated by a modern intrusion which ran northwest to southeast. To the immediate south of the ditch was a modern feature running east to west. The position of these and other truncating features meant that there was no scope for extending the trench to open up more of this feature.

3.3 Phase 2: Medieval

- 3.3.1 Linear features [04], [11] and [12] were identified as Medieval furrows running in an east to west direction. Earthwork ridge and furrow was not obvious on the modern surface in the land surrounding the trench. However, it was visible in the playing field to the immediate north of the site, where it also ran on an east to west alignment.
- 3.3.2 The furrows were approximately 1.2m wide and 0.12m deep. Their fills consisted of mid grey-brown clay silt with rare small stones. Furrow [11], which narrowed as it ran east, was truncated by furrow [12], and may represent an earlier version of the same furrow. Furrows [12] and [04] were 6m apart.
- 3.3.3 Finds from these features included two highly abraded pieces of Ely ware, as well as post-medieval tile.

3.4 Phase 3: Post-Medieval and modern

- 3.4.1 Within the trench there was one post-medieval ditch, [08], 0.8m wide and 0.22m deep which was oriented east to west, running parallel with the furrows. The fill was a mid grey brown silty loam with a moderate amount of degraded brick pieces in it.
- 3.4.2 The trench contained two further modern features, both of which were investigated but neither of which were excavated. The first, a land drain, ran northwest to southeast and was 0.2m wide. The second, a modern service trench, ran east to west and was 0.6m wide. It was evident from the trench section that these features had been cut from high up, through the subsoil. Their fills were dark grey brown and contained a large amount of blue-grey clay.

3.5 Finds Summary

- 3.5.1 A variety of finds were recovered from the features in the trench. Furrow [04] contained two small unidentifiable pieces of bone and one very abraded brick fragment. Also from

this deposit was one very abraded sherd of Ely ware dating from the 13th-15th century, and one fragment of late medieval/post-medieval roof tile.

- 3.5.2 Feature [08] contained ten fragments of variously abraded yellow post-medieval roof tile, five fragments of variously abraded orange brick of post-medieval date, two very small finer fragments of red-orange brick, one small piece of cream mortar, and one small piece of abraded iron slag.
- 3.5.3 Within [12] were two small fragments of clinker, one very small piece of brick, and one highly abraded Ely ware sherd of 13th-15th century date.
- 3.5.4 Furrow [11] contained three fragments of abraded pale orange brick, one very small fragment of post-medieval roof tile, one extremely small sherd of Ely ware dating from the 12th-15th century, and one small sherd of fine white English stoneware dating from the 18th-19th century.

3.6 Environmental Summary

- 3.6.1 A 10 litre environmental sample was taken from the fill of the early field ditch [06], but no botanical remains were recovered.

4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1.1 This evaluation has identified activity from a variety of archaeological periods. The assortment of finds produced in the three furrows, varying from medieval Ely ware to post-medieval pottery, brick and slag, confirms that the features are part of a ridge and furrow system, with the fields being manured throughout the medieval and post-medieval periods, with constant ploughing, churning and mixing the finds, depositing them in the trough of the furrow. Furrow [11] may represent a slightly earlier period of cultivation.
- 4.1.2 The early field ditch also reinforces that the land to the west of Ely was used for agricultural purposes. The site is located on an area of slightly higher ground, with the land sloping away into a natural dip to the northeast, suggesting good drainage, and thus lending itself to agriculture.
- 4.1.3 The date of the early ditch is uncertain, though it clearly pre-dates the medieval field system (itself perhaps set out around the 12th century). The pale, clean, bleached nature of its fill, allied to the complete lack of finds material, indicate an early date, with the ditch cutting through a relatively unused and unoccupied landscape. Two possible dates for the feature are suggested: it could form part of a wider Middle Bronze Age field system, or represent a small Romano-British field ditch, with the lack of finds suggesting it lay at some distance from any settlement area.
- 4.1.4 The form, size, fill and orientation of the ditch would all be compatible with its interpretation as a Middle Bronze Age field system ditch - coaxial Bronze Age field systems generally exhibit northeast to southwest, and opposing, alignments. While these systems have been recorded within the fens to all sides of Ely, none have as yet been recorded on the Island itself.

4.2 Significance

- 4.2.1 Less is known of prehistoric and Romano-British settlement in this area compared with that of the medieval period. This is due to the extensive amounts of medieval occupation and land cultivation which has destroyed much of what remained from earlier periods (Lewis *et al* 2001). If the ditch were of Roman origin its significance would be slight – Roman farmsteads have been recorded across the Island at various points, and are indeed fairly common. However, it would be of particular interest if part of a Bronze Age field system had survived within the area. Despite a number of very large trench evaluations and open-area excavations in the area over the past decade, as yet no definite Middle Bronze Age field system ditches have been identified on the Isle of Ely. The only other possible candidate for such a feature was recorded in a trench evaluation to the southeast of the site at Bray's Lane in 1991 (Hunter 1992). This ditch was of similar size and form and ran on an opposing northwest to southeast alignment. The two features together may represent isolated elements of a broader coaxial system of the kind seen over larger parts of the lower fen and the surrounding 'mainland'.

4.3 Recommendations

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

APPENDIX A. HEALTH AND SAFETY STATEMENT

- A.1.1 OA East will ensure that all work is carried out in accordance with relevant Health and Safety Policies, to standards defined in *The Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act, 1974* and *The Management of Health and Safety Regulations, 1992*, and in accordance with the manual *Health and Safety in Fieldwork Archaeology* (SCAUM 1997).
- A.1.2 Risk assessments prepared for the OA East office will be adhered to.
- A.1.3 OA East has Public Liability Insurance. Separate professional insurance is covered by a Public Liability Policy.
- A.1.4 Full details of the relevant Health and Safety Policies and the unit's insurance cover can be provided on request.

APPENDIX B. TRENCH DESCRIPTIONS AND CONTEXT INVENTORY

Trench 1						
General description					Orientation	N-S
Trench comprised of soil and subsoil overlying a natural of silty clay. Archaeological features consisted of two/three furrows, one small NE-SW ditch, one E-W ditch and two modern features.					Avg. depth (m)	0.6m
					Width (m)	1.6m
					Length (m)	11m
Contexts						
context no	type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	comment	finds	date
1	Layer	-	0.4	Topsoil	-	-
2	Layer	-	0.2	Subsoil	-	-
3	Fill	1.68	0.12	Fill of furrow	Pottery, tile, bone	Medieval
4	Cut	1.68	0.12	Cut of furrow	-	Medieval
5	Fill	0.5	0.1	Fill of ditch	-	?Bronze Age
6	Cut	0.5	0.1	Cut of ditch	-	?Bronze Age
7	Fill	0.8	0.22	Fill of ditch	Pottery, tile, slag	Post-medieval
8	Cut	0.8	0.22	Cut of ditch	-	Post-medieval
9	Fill	1.1	0.12	Fill of furrow	Pottery	Medieval
10	Fill	0.9	0.08	Fill of furrow	Pottery	Medieval
11	Cut	0.9	0.08	Cut of furrow	-	Medieval
12	Cut	1.1	0.12	Cut of furrow	-	Medieval

APPENDIX C. BIBLIOGRAPHY

Hunter, J. (1992) *Archaeological Investigations at Bray's Lane, Ely*. CAU Report 8.

Lewis, C., Mitchell-Fox, P. & Dyer, C. (2001) *Village Hamlet and Field: Changing Medieval Settlements in Central England*. Cheshire.

Mortimer, R., Regan, R. & Lucy, S. (2005) *The Saxon and Medieval Settlement at West End Fen Road, Ely: The Ashwell site*. East Anglian Archaeology 110.

Victoria County History (1967) *Cambridge and the Isle of Ely: Vol IV*. London.

APPENDIX D. OASIS REPORT FORM

All fields are required unless they are not applicable.

Project Details

OASIS Number	oxfordar3-46196		
Project Name	Evaluation at Highfield School, Ely, Cambridgeshire		
Project Dates (fieldwork)	Start	23-07-2008	Finish 23-07-2008
Previous Work (by OA East)	No	Future Work	No

Project Reference Codes

Site Code	ELYHFS08	Planning App. No.	-E/03003/08/CC
HER No.	ECB3001	Related HER/OASIS No.	

Type of Project/Techniques Used

Prompt	Direction from Local Planning Authority - PPG16
Development Type	Other

Please select all techniques used:

<input type="checkbox"/> Aerial Photography - interpretation	<input type="checkbox"/> Grab-Sampling	<input type="checkbox"/> Remote Operated Vehicle Survey
<input type="checkbox"/> Aerial Photography - new	<input type="checkbox"/> Gravity-Core	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Sample Trenches
<input type="checkbox"/> Annotated Sketch	<input type="checkbox"/> Laser Scanning	<input type="checkbox"/> Survey/Recording Of Fabric/Structure
<input type="checkbox"/> Augering	<input type="checkbox"/> Measured Survey	<input type="checkbox"/> Targeted Trenches
<input type="checkbox"/> Dendrochronological Survey	<input type="checkbox"/> Metal Detectors	<input type="checkbox"/> Test Pits
<input type="checkbox"/> Documentary Search	<input type="checkbox"/> Phosphate Survey	<input type="checkbox"/> Topographic Survey
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Environmental Sampling	<input type="checkbox"/> Photogrammetric Survey	<input type="checkbox"/> Vibro-core
<input type="checkbox"/> Fieldwalking	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Photographic Survey	<input type="checkbox"/> Visual Inspection (Initial Site Visit)
<input type="checkbox"/> Geophysical Survey	<input type="checkbox"/> Rectified Photography	

Monument Types/Significant Finds & Their Periods

List feature types using the [NMR Monument Type Thesaurus](#) and significant finds using the [MDA Object type Thesaurus](#) together with their respective periods. If no features/finds were found, please state "none".

Monument	Period	Object	Period
Ditch	Bronze Age -2.5k to -700	None	Select period...
Ridge and furrow	Medieval 1066 to 1540	Pottery	Medieval 1066 to 1540
	Select period...		Select period...

Project Location

County	Cambridgeshire	Site Address (including postcode if possible)	
District	South Cambridgeshire	Highfield School Downham Road Ely, Cambridgeshire CB6 1RN	
Parish	Ely		
HER	Cambs		
Study Area	144sqm	National Grid Reference	TI 5375 8085

Project Originators

Organisation	OA EAST
Project Brief Originator	Andy Thomas
Project Design Originator	Richard Mortimer
Project Manager	Richard Mortimer
Supervisor	Louise Bush

Project Archives

Physical Archive	Digital Archive	Paper Archive
Cambs County Store	OA East	Cambs County Store
ELYHFS08	ELYHFS08	ELYHFS08




Archive Contents/Media

	Physical Contents	Digital Contents	Paper Contents
Animal Bones	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ceramics	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Environmental	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Glass	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Human Bones	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Industrial	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Leather	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Metal	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Stratigraphic		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Survey		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Textiles	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Wood	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Worked Bone	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Worked Stone/Lithic	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
None	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



Digital Media	Paper Media
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<input type="checkbox"/> GIS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Context Sheet
<input type="checkbox"/> Geophysics	<input type="checkbox"/> Correspondence
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Images	<input type="checkbox"/> Diary
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Illustrations	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Drawing
<input type="checkbox"/> Moving Image	<input type="checkbox"/> Manuscript
<input type="checkbox"/> Spreadsheets	<input type="checkbox"/> Map
<input type="checkbox"/> Survey	<input type="checkbox"/> Matrices
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Text	<input type="checkbox"/> Microfilm
<input type="checkbox"/> Virtual Reality	<input type="checkbox"/> Misc.
	<input type="checkbox"/> Research/Notes
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Photos
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Plans
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Report
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Sections
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Survey

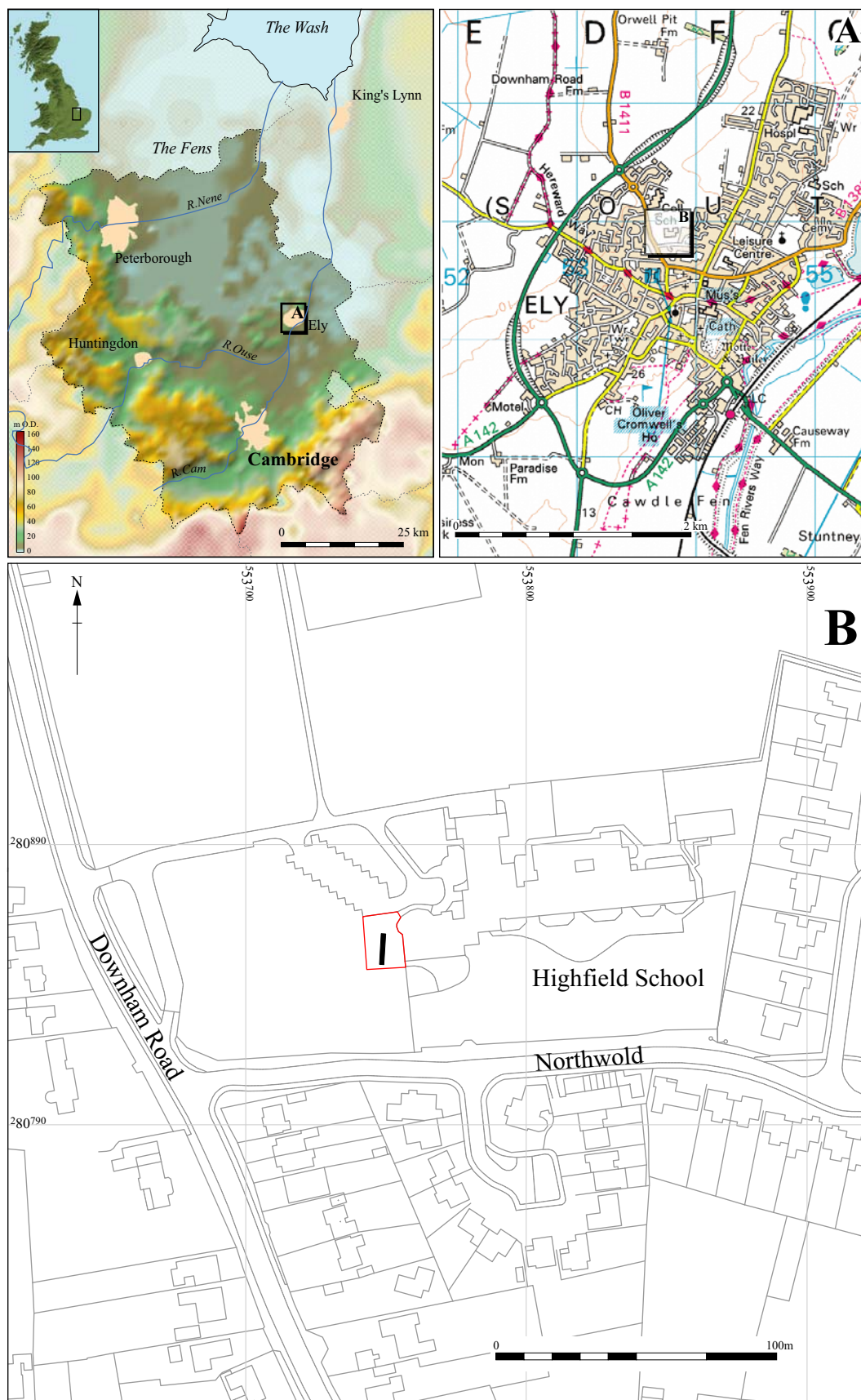
Drawing Conventions

Plans

Limit of Excavation	_____
Deposit - Conjectured	-----
Natural Features	_____
Sondages/Machine Strip	-----
Intrusion/Truncation	-----
Illustrated Section	<u>S.14</u>
Archaeological Deposit	
Excavated Slot	
Modern Deposit	
Cut Number	118

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
Ordinance Datum	18.45m OD 
Inclusions	



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Figure 1: Location of trench (black) with development area outlined (red)

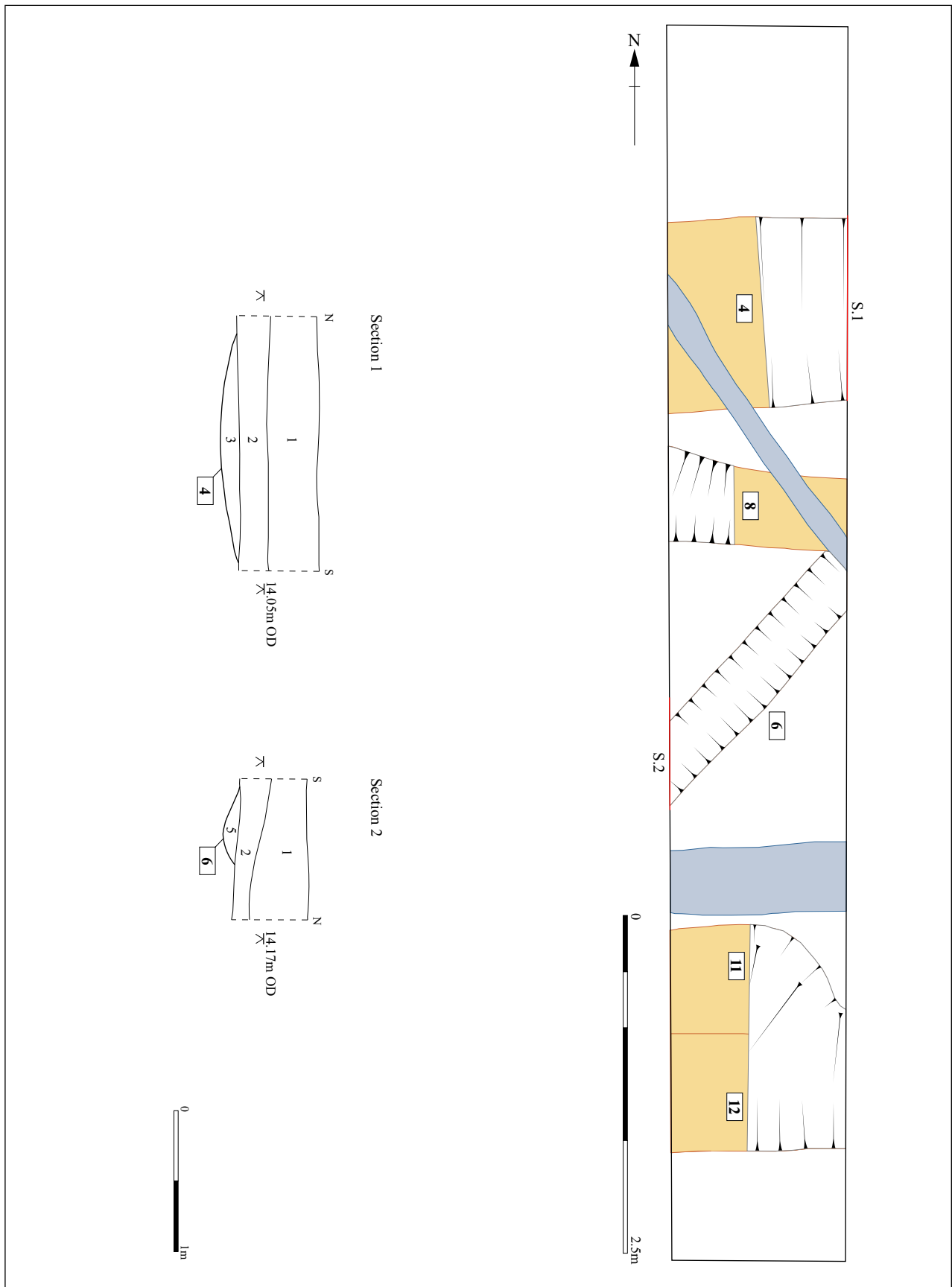


Figure 2: Trench plan with selected sections



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