

Godmanchester Flood Defence Scheme



Archaeological Watching Brief Report



July 2010

Client: Atkins

OA East Report No: 1187

OASIS No: oxfordar3-80313

NGR: TL 524 270

Godmanchester Flood Defence Scheme

Watching Brief

Site Code: GODFDS10

CHER No. ECB 3374

Date of Works: 29/04/10 – 30/06/10

Report No: 1187

Excavator: Jonathan House

Client: Atkins

Report Date: July 2010

Table of Contents

Summary	5
1 Project Background	7
2 Geology and Topography	7
3 Archaeological Background	7
4 Methodology	8
5 Results	9
5.1 Introduction.....	9
5.2 Excavated Test Pits (Fig. 1).....	9
6 Discussion and Conclusions	11
7 Acknowledgements	12
Bibliography	13
Appendix A. OASIS Report Form	14

List of Figures

Fig. 1 Site location map and Section 1

List of Plates

Plate 1 Sample of post medieval finds recovered from topsoil
Plate 2 Test Pit 13
Plate 3 Test Pit 12
Plate 4 Test Pit 15
Plate 5 Test Pit 18
Plate 6 Causeway Test Pit 1 during excavation
Plate 7 Test Pit 19a showing dumped deposits overlying natural clay.

Summary

Between the 29/04/10 and 30/06/10 Oxford Archaeology East carried out an archaeological watching brief in Godmanchester (TL 524 270). This monitoring observed the excavation of ground probing works, mainly trial pits against existing boundary walls. These ground works were undertaken in order to gather information in preparation of a flood defence scheme proposed by the Environment Agency. No archaeological features, artefacts or definitive archaeological layers were identified.

1 PROJECT BACKGROUND

- 1.1.1 The Environment Agency are undertaking flood defence works along the river Great Ouse, Godmanchester. As framework suppliers to the Environment Agency, Atkins and Jackson Civil Engineering (JCE) are undertaking the roles of consulting engineer and main contractor respectively on this project.
- 1.1.2 The proposed scheme includes the construction of a series of flood defence walls and embankments through private rear gardens extending for 1.5km between areas of high ground and also the construction of two pumping stations to control seepage. This will require the flood defence to cross through a number of existing boundary walls that run perpendicular to the scheme alignment. In some instances it is proposed that the existing walls will act as the flood defences. This work falls into two categories; Trial pits and Causeway investigations.
- 1.1.3 Godmanchester is a Roman town located approximately 19 miles north-west of Cambridge and situated immediately to the south-west of the A14 dual carriageway. In the late 20th Century, Godmanchester experienced significant residential development but remains a relatively small town supporting a population of approximately 6,000 people.
- 1.1.4 The town of Godmanchester has high archaeological potential; it was an important settlement during the Roman period, and there is evidence (mainly from finds of pottery) that it was occupied during the Saxon period to the south of Cambridge Street. The putative 9th-10th century Danish settlement was located between West Street and the river. Due to its high potential, Cambridgeshire Archaeology (Cambridgeshire County Council) advised that an archaeological watching brief should take place during all ground works associated with the project. As a result WS Atkins has commissioned Oxford Archaeology East to undertake this work on their behalf. This report details the results of the Archaeological Watching Brief.

2 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

- 2.1.1 The test pits were located in an approximate line between TL 244 712 and TL 242 702, following the eastern bank of the Great Ouse river which flows to the west of Godmanchester. Ground level is between 12m and 14m OD although there is little variability in the topography alongside the river where the test pits are located.
- 2.1.2 The geology is Oxford Clay beds, overlain by 1st and 2nd Terrace gravel deposits of the Great Ouse river system.(British Geological Survey 1975).

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

- 3.1.1 The development is situated in the core area of the Roman town of *Durovigutum*, close to the town centre and virtually on the cross roads of Ermine Street, the great trunk road to the north, and the Cambridge to Sandy road. Extensive published material is available regarding the development of the town and the long history of archaeological work that has taken place, most notably Green (1977). The brief archaeological background here is largely from that publication along with that provided by Phillips (2007) and Hounsell (2008).
- 3.1.2 The importance of Godmanchester during the Roman period was primarily geographical as it controlled the crossing of the river Great Ouse. Roman forces moving north along the line of Ermine Street had established a legionary fort at Godmanchester within a year of the invasion of AD 43. The fort was abandoned within

a few years as the frontier moved north, but an associated civilian settlement or *vicus* survived. During the Flavian period (AD 69-96) the *vicus* expanded and flourished with occupation concentrated along Ermine Street and the cross roads in the town centre.

- 3.1.3 By the Hadrianic period (AD 117-38) a *mansio* and baths were designed and built in the centre of the town, to the north of the cross-roads, on the western side of Ermine Street. These were very large and elaborate buildings reflecting, in both their design and furnishings, the progressive Romanisation of the inhabitants. *Mansiones* were originally connected to the imperial postal service, providing overnight accommodation and fresh horses. This role later expanded to include facilities for other imperial travellers and later served as both a police post and a tax collection centre. The Godmanchester *mansio* as eventually built was one of the largest in Britain, at over 100 metres long, including stabling. Both *mansio* and baths were substantially built with masonry walls and were half-timbered above the ground floor. Floors were tessellated and walls were of painted plaster (Green 1977).
- 3.1.4 Somewhat later (shortly after c. AD 200) the town centre was redesigned and a formal basilica or town hall was built, in front of the western side of Ermine Street. Godmanchester may have achieved the formal status of *Vicus*, with a legal constitution and rights of self-government (possibly following an edict of Caracalla in AD 214 which granted Roman citizenship to all free-born members of the community).
- 3.1.5 West of the *mansio* and possibly associated with it was a small temple apparently dedicated to a god named Abandinus, not known elsewhere and so possibly a local deity.
- 3.1.6 Evidence for Saxon occupation comes largely from occasional traces of timber buildings and finds of pottery and other objects including a Saxon purse mount (CHER 9770) found at Dovehouse Close and two Saxon coins (sceattas) found on Roman Way (MCB16789). The finds would suggest that the earlier settlement was centred on the Roman town but later moved to the south around the south gate (Green 1977, 22-3).
- 3.1.7 A Danish Burh was established at Huntingdon, probably in the late 9th or early 10th century and retaken by Edward the Elder in 971. It is possible that Godmanchester was incorporated into Edward's defences to make a double burh (Green 1977, 27).
- 3.1.8 Elements of the road layout of Godmanchester suggest that there was a Danish settlement here (Green 1977, 28) in the area around West Street.
- 3.1.9 The medieval town expanded to the north along Post Street, and to the south along West Street, London Road and Silver Street. It prospered in the 12th and 13th centuries and reached its height in the 14th century.

4 METHODOLOGY

- 4.1.1 The objective of this watching brief was to monitor the hand excavation of exploratory test pits commissioned by WS Atkins on behalf of the Environment Agency, all the test pits were located beside walls, with the addition of one test pit (19a) which was requested by Cambridgeshire Archaeology to investigate an earthwork located to the rear of the Cedars retirement Home on West Street which is in the area of Godmanchester thought to have been occupied by a Danish settlement in the 9th-10th century.
- 4.1.2 The specification (Connor, 2010) required that all ground penetrating works undertaken by the client will be observed and recorded by a suitably qualified and experienced archaeologist.

- 4.1.3 The area of investigation was located between TL 244 712 to TL 242 702, closely following the alignment of the Great Ouse river.
- 4.1.4 Measurements of the test pit dimensions and the depths of deposits encountered were recorded, all excavated test pits were photographed and finds collected from spoil arising from the test pits.
- 4.1.5 Site conditions were dry and sunny with occasional rain, site conditions did not inhibit the archaeological observations or recording.

5 RESULTS

5.1 Introduction

- 5.1.1 A total of 16 test pits were excavated out of a proposed 24 test pits. An additional test pit (19a) was excavated specifically to investigate a linear earthwork noted to the rear of the Cedars Retirement Home. The test pits were dug under constant archaeological observation and were recorded on Oxford Archaeology East pro-formas. Photographs of each test-pit comprise colour digital and Monochrome. Finds were retrieved from the spoil, prior to backfilling. The results of the excavated test pits are recorded below and in the table. The test pits that were not excavated are listed only within the accompanying table.

5.2 Excavated Test Pits (Fig. 1)

- 5.2.1 No archaeological deposits were encountered in any of the test pits, aside from remains associated with existing structures. Post medieval finds were recovered from topsoil in several of the test pits (Plate 1).
- 5.2.2 Test pit 1 was excavated beside the Avenue Bridge in Godmanchester. The test pit showed that the area here consisted of disturbed ground associated with the construction/improvements for the bridge itself. A small quantity of butchered animal bone was recovered but could not be dated due to lack of associated datable artefacts.
- 5.2.3 Test pits 6 to 10, 11, 13, 14 and 16 were located in the back gardens to the rear of properties along Post street, within an area of medieval expansion.
- 5.2.4 Test pits 6-10 all contained similar deposits, comprising a greyish brown sandy silt topsoil (0.21m-0.30m thick) overlying a sandy silt subsoil (alluvium?) at least 0.93m thick, and very similar to the topsoil (plate 1). The full depth of the layer was not exposed, with the deepest test pit measuring 1.16m below ground level.
- 5.2.5 Test pits 11, 13 (Plate 2), 14 and 16, showed a very similar sequence to test pits 7 to 10, however the subsoil in these pits also contained modern brick and tile, presumably derived from demolition, and possibly deliberately incorporated to alleviate wet ground conditions.
- 5.2.6 Test pit 12 (plate 3) was dug in the public car park on Post street, all the deposits exposed appeared to be modern, probably made ground deposits associated with the car park construction.
- 5.2.7 Test pit 15 (plate 4) was located close to 16, the test pit was cut into garden top soil measuring 0.29m, below the top soil was a mortar and rubble deposit at least 0.51m thick, the full depth of the deposit was not reached.
- 5.2.8 Test pit 18 (plate 5) was located beside the town hall, the test pit was cut through top soil, underlying the topsoil was a mixed clay rubble material (at least 0.49m thick),

which appeared to be a made ground for the town hall, the base of the material was not reached.

- 5.2.9 Test pits 20, 21 and 22 were all excavated beside walls acting as the boundary for a field, the deposits within the field were consistent and appeared to be a standard top soil (up to 0.27 thick) overlying a dark greyish brown sub soil (at least 0.75m thick), possibly alluvium incorporating some organic matter from manuring.
- 5.2.10 Causeway test pit 1 was located at the edge of a channel of the river Great Ouse where it meets the Causeway (plate 6). It was excavated by forming a small coffer dam which was then drained. Unfortunately the test pit encountered an extremely hard gravel surface, and it was not possible to dig through it due to the rapid ingress of water, a coin dated to 1943 was found in the gravel surface.
- 5.2.11 An additional 2m x 1m test pit (19a) was excavated by hand to investigate a linear earthwork located to the rear of the Cedars Retirement home (Section 1 Fig. 1; Plate 7). Topsoil (100; 0.25m thick) overlay a very stony brownish yellow clay (101; 0.20m thick) which contained a lot of ?modern brick and tile. This overlay a clean dark yellowish brown clay (102; 0.30m thick), which also contained Post Medieval finds, although much more sparsely than in 101. Clean yellowish (probably natural) clay was encountered below 102. The earthwork bank appeared to comprise dumps of clay incorporating relatively modern finds suggesting that it may have been created in the relatively recent past perhaps as a result of dredging the nearby river or in association with building works.

Test Pit	Context	Depth	Description
TP 1	Topsoil	0.31	
TP 1	Upper Subsoil	0.73	Yellowish Brown, sandy silt
TP 1	Lower subsoil	≥0.14	Dark Grey brown silt clay
TP 2	-	-	Not Excavated
TP 3	-	-	Not Excavated
TP 4	-	-	Not Excavated
TP 5	-	-	Not Excavated
TP 6	Topsoil	0.24	
TP 6	Subsoil	≥0.68	Greyish Brown, sandy silt.
TP 7	Topsoil	0.21	
TP 7	Subsoil	≥0.64	Greyish Brown, sandy silt.
TP 8	Topsoil	0.3	
TP 8	Subsoil	≥0.45	Greyish Brown, sandy silt.
TP 9	Topsoil	0.28	
TP 9	Subsoil	≥0.8	Greyish Brown, sandy silt.
TP 10	Topsoil	0.23	

Test Pit	Context	Depth	Description
TP 10	Subsoil	≥0.93	Greyish Brown, sandy silt.
TP 11	Topsoil	0.12	.
TP 11	Subsoil	≥0.78	Top soil material, Rubble inclusions
TP 12	Car Park	≥0.8	Brick rubble/tarmac - Made ground
TP 13	Topsoil	0.2	
TP 13	Subsoil	≥1.2	Top soil material, Rubble inclusions.
TP 14	Topsoil	0.15	
TP 14	Upper subsoil	0.5	Top soil material, Rubble inclusions
TP 14	Lower subsoil	≥0.2	Brownish yellow clay.
TP 15	Topsoil	0.29	
TP 15	Subsoil	≥0.51	Mortar and Rubble inclusions
TP 16	Topsoil	0.16	
TP 16	Subsoil	≥0.32	Top soil material, Rubble inclusions.
TP 17	-	-	Not Excavated
TP 18	Topsoil	0.31	
TP18	Subsoil	≥0.49	Yellowish Brown, Clay, Rubble inclusions.
TP 19	-	-	Not Excavated
TP 19a	Topsoil (100)	0.25	
TP 19A	Subsoil (101)	0.18	Light yellow clay, frequent flint inclusions
TP 19A	Subsoil (102)	0.27	Dark greenish yellow clay.
TP 20	Topsoil	0.25	
TP 20	Subsoil	≥0.51	Dark greyish brown, sandy silt.
TP 21	Topsoil	0.27	
TP 21	Subsoil	≥0.55	Dark greyish brown, sandy silt.
TP 22	0.25	≥0.75	Dark greyish brown, sandy silt.
Causeway 1		≥0.30	Dark greyish brown silt, frequent flint inclusions.
Causeway 2	-	-	Not Excavated

6 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

6.1.1 All the soil layers and deposits encountered within the test pitting contained Post Medieval material (see plate 1), all of which appear to be of low archaeological significance. However the depth of these deposits and the implications for the potential level of cover for surviving archaeological deposits if sealed below these layers is note worthy. As all of the test pits were dug immediately adjacent to walls the majority of the

ground encountered during excavation was disturbed, and through later constructions, ground reductions and garden works, appears to have been consistently disturbed to modern times. Test pit 19a dug to investigate an earthwork would appear to confirm a post-medieval date for its construction.

7 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- 7.1.1 The author would like to thank WS Atkins who commissioned the work on behalf of the Environment Agency. The archaeological work was managed by Aileen Connor, and staffed by Jonathan House.

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APPENDIX A. OASIS REPORT FORM

All fields are required unless they are not applicable.

Project Details

OASIS Number	oxfordar3-80313			
Project Name	Watching Brief Godmanchester Flood Defence scheme			
Project Dates (fieldwork)	Start	29-04-2010	Finish	30-06-2010
Previous Work (by OA East)	No		Future Work	Unknown

Project Reference Codes

Site Code	GODFDS10	Planning App. No.	
HER No.	ECB 3374	Related HER/OASIS No.	

Type of Project/Techniques Used

Prompt: Environmental (unspecified schedule)

Please select all techniques used:

<input type="checkbox"/> Field Observation (periodic visits)	<input type="checkbox"/> Part Excavation	<input type="checkbox"/> Salvage Record
<input type="checkbox"/> Full Excavation (100%)	<input type="checkbox"/> Part Survey	<input type="checkbox"/> Systematic Field Walking
<input type="checkbox"/> Full Survey	<input type="checkbox"/> Recorded Observation	<input type="checkbox"/> Systematic Metal Detector Survey
<input type="checkbox"/> Geophysical Survey	<input type="checkbox"/> Remote Operated Vehicle Survey	<input type="checkbox"/> Test Pit Survey
<input type="checkbox"/> Open-Area Excavation	<input type="checkbox"/> Salvage Excavation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Watching Brief

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
None	None	None	None
	Select period...		None
	Select period...		Select period...

Project Location

County	Cambridgeshire	Site Address (including postcode if possible)	
District	Huntingdon		
Parish	Godmanchester		
HER	Cambridgeshire		
Study Area	10,000 sq m	National Grid Reference	TL 524 270

Project Originator

Organisation	OA EAST
Project Brief Originator	Cambridgeshire County Council
Project Design Originator	Aileen Connor
Project Manager	Aileen Connor
Supervisor	Jonathan House

Project Archives

Physical Archive	Digital Archive	Paper Archive
Cambridgeshire HER	Cambridgeshire HER	Cambridgeshire HER
GODFDS10	GODFDS10	GODFDS10

Archive Contents/Media

	Physical Contents	Digital Contents	Paper Contents
Animal Bones	<input checked="" 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 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 type="checkbox"/>
Survey		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input 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"/> Geophysics	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Correspondence
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<input type="checkbox"/> Spreadsheets	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Map
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	<input type="checkbox"/> Report
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Sections
	<input type="checkbox"/> Survey

Notes:

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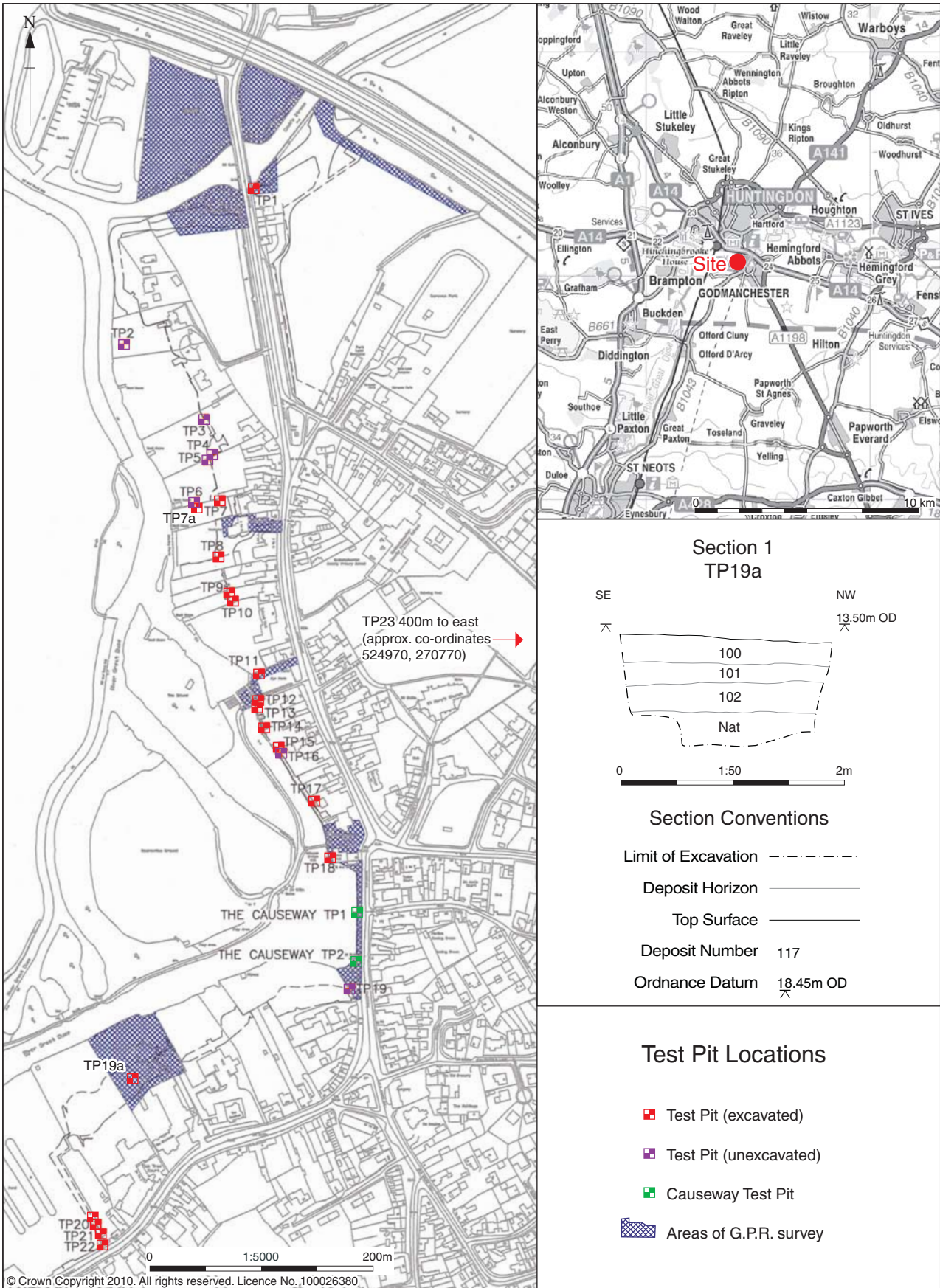


Figure 1: Test pit locations and Section 1



Plate 1: Sample of post medieval finds recovered from topsoil



Plate 2: Test Pit 13



Plate 3: Test Pit 12



Plate 4: Test Pit 15



Plate 5: Test Pit 18



Plate 6: Causeway Test Pit 1 during excavation



Plate 7: Test Pit 19a showing dumped deposits overlying natural clay



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