

Archaeological Field Unit

**Romano-British remains relating to the
Bath House and Mansio at Pinfold Lane, Godmanchester**

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SUMMARY

Between August 1997 and April 1998 the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council undertook a scheme of test pitting and a subsequent recording brief on a building plot adjacent to 2 Pinfold Lane. Test Pitting established the presence and level of surviving archaeological deposits allowing the design of a mitigation strategy for the preservation in - situ of the remains. During observation of the stripping of the building footprints three medieval pits were revealed cut into a late or possibly post Roman layer. The partial reopening of past excavation trenches attributable to Charles and Michael Green revealed evidence for possible structural features from the Romano - British period. These structures are on the same alignment as the adjacent bath house and mansio with one notable exception: a beamslot relating to a timber - framed construction following a different alignment was revealed within Area 1. Evidence for medieval agriculture was also noted. Although excavation was not within the remit of the brief, this project has served to highlight a number of important issues, most notably the current lack of published material by previous excavators within this archaeologically important town from the prehistoric to the post medieval periods and the implications of this lack of information on current, developer - funded, excavations.

**Romano British Remains Relating to the Bath House and Mansio at
Pinfold Lane, Godmanchester.**

A Basic Archaeological Investigation

TL 245 / 704

1 INTRODUCTION

Between the 13th and 14th of August 1997 the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council undertook test pitting on a building plot adjacent to 2 Pinfold Lane. Test Pitting established the presence and level of surviving archaeological deposits allowing a mitigation strategy for the preservation in - situ of the remains. Between the 30th of September and the 1st of October a recording brief was undertaken within the areas of proposed construction. The final phase of the project required the recording of a trench excavated to facilitate the laying of a sewerage pipe connecting to services within the garden of the adjacent property, number 2 Pinfold Lane, and was carried out on the 21st of April, 1998. The work was commissioned by Mr DM Arnold in advance of the proposed development of the site for housing with associated gardens and car parking. The evaluation and subsequent recording briefs were undertaken in accordance with AFU specifications BR079 / MH012 and approved by Simon Kaner of the County Council Archaeology Section.

2 TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

The site is situated within the town of Godmanchester and rests on the undifferentiated terrace gravels of the river Ouse, which in this area overlay Oxford Clays.

3 HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

Detailed accounts of the development of Godmanchester may be found in Green (1977) and Victoria County History Vol I & II for Huntingdonshire. A brief summary, highlighting information relevant to the proposed development area, is given below.

The Ouse valley in the vicinity of Godmanchester has yielded abundant evidence of prehistoric activity. Dispersed Iron Age settlement existed in the area,

although the town owes its Roman development to its situation on an important Roman Road (Ermine street) adjacent to a crossing of the Ouse. A fort was established on this river crossing soon after the conquest, the southern circuit of which falls just to the north of the present development site. Settlement grew rapidly around this early nucleus and along Ermine Street; re-development in the early second century saw the construction of the massive mansio and bath house, the remains of which have been excavated near to and within the development site. The subject site and surrounding area have been the focus of a prolonged series of archaeological investigations by HJM Green between 1949 and 1972 with some earlier work by Charles Green.

Green encountered early Saxon pottery associated with timber buildings close to the mansio site (1977, 22) and elsewhere within the area of the formerly Roman town, indicating sub-Roman continuity or re-occupation. There is some evidence to suggest that Godmanchester formed the southern twin of a double burh, and was re-fortified along with Huntingdon during the early tenth century. Late Saxon boundary ditches have been noted in the vicinity of Pinfold Lane. A charter of 1212 established Godmanchester as a self-governing manor or liberty, and the town remained prosperous throughout the medieval period. The town plan, however, lacks signs of large scale medieval re-planning and tenements seem to have been established haphazardly along the various roads and lanes. Pinfold Lane is mentioned in 1539 (VCH).

A plan of the 'Commonable Messuages, Cottages, and Toftsteads' of Godmanchester dating to about 1809 (County Records Office, Huntingdon PM2/12), depicts no buildings on the north side of Pinfold Lane in the vicinity of the present development site. The OS 25" map of 1885 (CRO Huntingdon) shows an irregular polygonal shaped yard with buildings around its periphery over part of the present development site. Orchards are shown to the north.

Upon the commencement of this project the excavator was unaware of the extent or location of trenches attributable to earlier excavators and it is clear that much important information remains unpublished. Thanks to the co operation of Godmanchester's most prolific excavator - Michael Green (HJMG)- it has been possible to significantly enhance the results of this particular piece of work and link the results to those of Green. Differences in interpretation due in particular to the stripping of open areas as well as the discovery of previously unknown features serves to highlight the importance of re assessing the results of past excavators and the need for further excavation.



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Figure 1 Site location

4 METHODOLOGY

The methodology employed for ensuring the preservation *in - situ* of remains of great archaeological significance within the subject site was not research led but reactive in this instance, being determined by the changing requirements of the builder and his architect. Test pitting resulted in the redesign of the foundations for the proposed dwelling from conventional trench built footings to a less intrusive raft. When examining the footprint of the proposed dwelling and associated garage no concessions were made towards archaeological excavation practices.

Test Pitting

Three test pits (approximately 1.50m square) were opened to varying depths using a small mechanical excavator. These depths were dependant on the level at which surviving archaeological deposits were first encountered. The test pitting was conducted on the understanding that no archaeological deposits were to be removed but that the depth at which these deposits were present below current ground level was to be established.

Two of the test pits were positioned within the footprint of the proposed house plan and the third was placed centrally within the location of the proposed garage.

All sections and the bases of the test pits were cleaned and recorded. The presence of previous archaeological excavation trenches presumed (and later confirmed) to be those of HJM Green within at least two of the test pits permitted the removal of modern backfill from certain features, allowing us to establish the presence of surviving archaeological deposits. A representative sample of unstratified artefacts was collected and a rapid scan of the material was conducted by the Unit Finds Supervisor P Copleston. Photographs were taken and plan and section drawings made where appropriate.

The Recording Brief

The total area contained within the 'footprints' or outlines of the proposed house and garage were stripped under archaeological supervision to the required depth for the construction of raft foundations, 0.40m in this instance. These foundations had been specially designed to minimise the impact of construction on the surviving archaeological deposits within the development area. Additional recording was undertaken within the location of two soakaways and the sewerage outflow pipe trench for the new property. Each area included within the recording brief has been allocated a separate area number for ease of reference (No's 1 to 4).

Post Excavation Analysis

Given the evidence of past archaeological excavations within the development area and the lack of detailed published material relating to these excavations the AFU contacted HJM Green who was able to provide invaluable information and considerable assistance in interpreting the findings of this investigation. Many of the contexts recorded during this project relate directly to the work of previous excavators (i.e. in the numbering of old trenches) and have since become obsolete. Only those deposits or features of any archaeological significance have been described within the body of this report.

All deposits were recorded using the Archaeology Field Unit's single context system.

All site records and artefacts are held currently at the AFU headquarters at Fulbourn and stored under the site code GODPL 97.

5 RESULTS

The Evaluation

Test Pit 1

Measuring 1.30m east - west by 1.50m north - south Test Pit 1 was located towards the south western corner of the proposed house towards the southern end of the proposed development area (Fig 2).

Excavation reached a maximum depth of 1.30m below present ground surface (BPS) with no natural deposits in evidence. Archaeological deposits were first encountered at a depth of 0.40m BPS along the northern limit of excavation. A depth of 1.30m was achieved along the southern limit of the pit due to the presence of a previous machine cut trench (HJMG Trench IX 54). The backfill of this trench, which was aligned east - west, contained a moderate amount of redeposited Roman artefactual material including a range of coarse and fineware ceramics predominantly second to fourth century AD in date, as well as tegulae and imbrices (including tile with shelly fabrics thought to be attributable to late Romano - British activity, P Copleston pers. Comm.). Also present within the finds assemblage were fragments of well preserved animal bone, medieval and post - medieval ceramics and recently deposited pieces of wood.

The earliest deposit revealed in plan within the base of Trench IX 54 (layer 9) comprised a compact mid to light orange brown sandy clay silt layer in excess of 0.50m in depth. Despite an apparent absence of visible inclusions this layer is not thought to have been naturally deposited. The underlying natural geology of the area should be gravel and it seems most probable that this layer represents one in a series of foundation / levelling layers associated with the construction of structures identified by HJM Green as a bath house and mansio which should be present within the development area. Two parallel features (7 and 8) interpreted as either ditches or possibly wall foundation trenches were observed cutting through layer 9. The northwest - southeast alignment of these features matches the expected wall alignments of the Bath House and Mansio excavated by Green. The exact significance of these features is unclear as they lie outside of the limits of both structures as defined by Green but are assumed to relate to the 'conduit' (Ditch R4) partially excavated by Green. These cuts were in turn sealed by a second phase of foundation levelling (6), similar in make-up to layer 9, of maximum thickness 0.40m. No further deposits of archaeological significance were observed within this test pit as layer 6 was in turn sealed by the backfill of previous excavations (2).

Test pit 2

Measuring 1.20m east - west by 1.50m north - south, Test Pit 2 was located towards the northeastern corner of the proposed house towards the centre of the proposed development area (Fig 2).

Archaeological deposits attributable to the Romano - British period were revealed at a depth of 0.65m BPS. Recording of the archaeology visible in plan at the base of the test pit showed that the earliest deposits were layers 11 and 13, both composed of reddish yellow sandy gravel. Interpretation of these deposits without excavation is difficult although naturally deposited river gravel or Romano - British make up / surfaces are the most likely possibilities.

Truncating these deposits was cut 24, a possible ditch or wall foundation cut on the same northwest - southeast alignment as those cuts observed within Test pits 1 and 3. Fill 12, a light greyish brown very sandy silt of 0.40m minimum observable depth which extended into the N, E and S limits of the area requires excavation to provide an accurate interpretation. The two most obvious possibilities are ditch backfill or robber trench backfill.

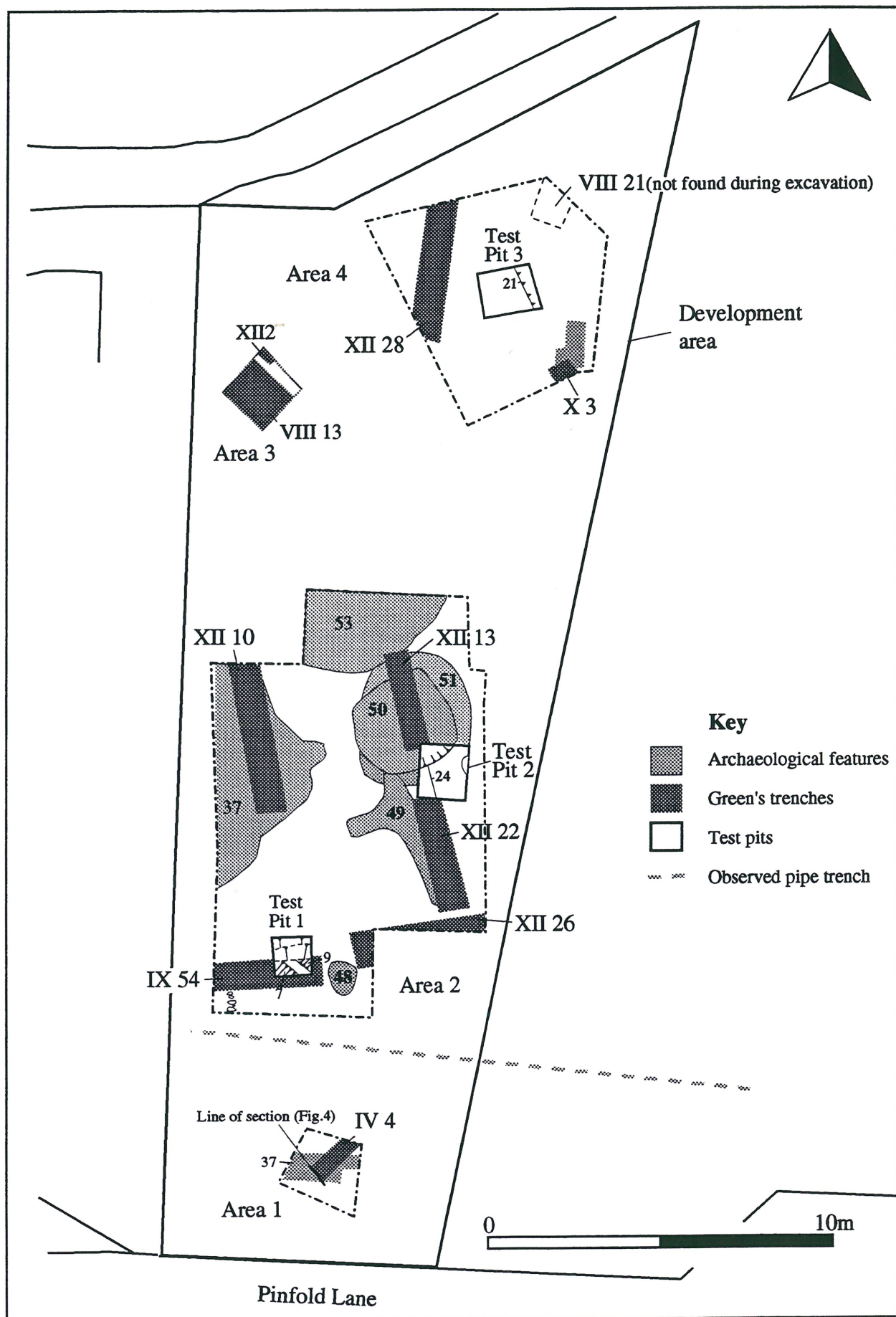


Figure 2 Detail of development area

This feature does not appear on any of the currently available records provided by HJMG.

Sealing the Romano - British phase of occupation was layer 16, a loosely compacted dark grey brown sandy clay silt 0.40m thick. Quite how this layer accumulated is unclear at present but the presence of at least one sherd of green glazed pottery points to a date no earlier than the medieval period.

Truncating this layer was pit 14 (HJMG Pit M 91). The exposed edge of this pit was rounded, extending into the northern and western limits of excavation. The sides of the pit slope steeply into the limits of excavation. Pit cut 14 contained a single fill, 15, a very dark grey sandy silt with occasional inclusions of yellowish mortar and fragments of yellow brick.

The survival of this feature, cut from directly below the topsoil, indicates an area of the site which has not been excavated previously. The effect of truncation by this feature on the underlying archaeology can be considered minimal. Subsequent stripping of the 'footprint' of the proposed house (Area 2) revealed the presence of not one but two separate intercutting pits re - numbered as cuts 50 and 51.

Test pit 3

Measuring 1.30m east - west by 1.80m north - south, Test Pit 3 was located in the northeastern corner of the proposed development area, within the area of the proposed garage (Fig 2).

Archaeological deposits attributable to the Romano - British period were revealed at a depth of 0.90m BPS. Stratigraphically the earliest surviving deposits, gravel layer 23 and overlying sandy layer 22 were not excavated. It is possible that both of these deposits could be naturally lain glacial deposits given the absence of any visible artefactual inclusions. It is equally possible however that these layers represent make up / levelling for surfaces associated with the bath house and mansio identified by Green.

Cut 21, a robbed - out wall foundation trench aligned northwest - southeast was the earliest surviving feature revealed within Test Pit 3. The loose fill (20) of this feature was a clear indication that it had already been excavated, although when and by whom remains unknown.

The wall trench was in turn sealed by a mixed layer (19) 0.70m in depth, interpreted as the backfill from previous excavations.

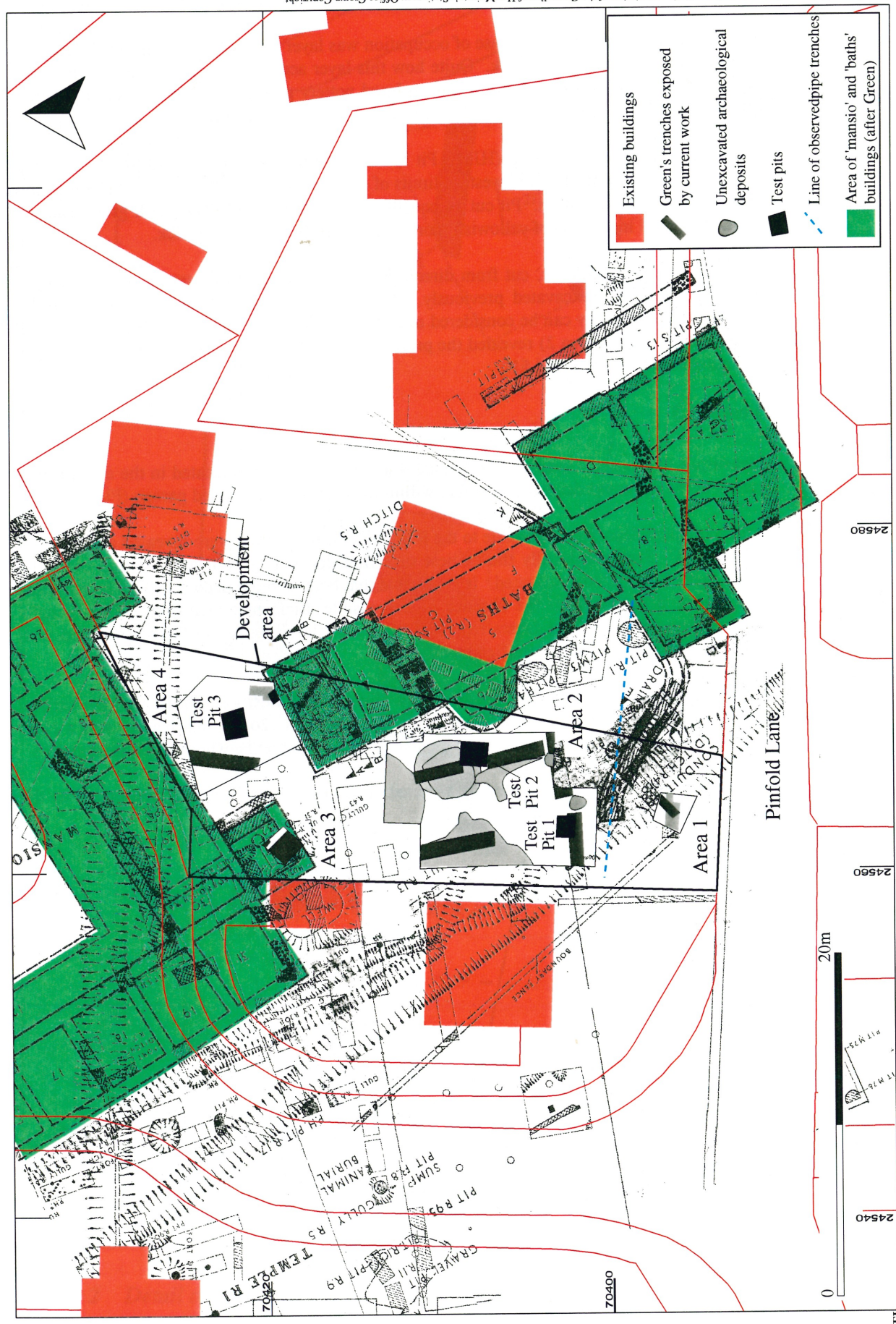


Figure 3 The development area in relation to Roman buildings (after Green)

The Recording Brief

Area 1

Measuring 2.50m east - west by 1.50m north - south Area 1 was opened onto the top of surviving archaeological deposits in order to determine the least destructive position for a soakaway. Subsequently excavation by hand within a 1m square located over previous excavations ascribed to Green (including trench IV 4) was undertaken to a depth of 1m BPS. Due to negligible truncation of archaeological deposits elements of at least four phases of Romano - British activity were revealed (see Fig. 4).

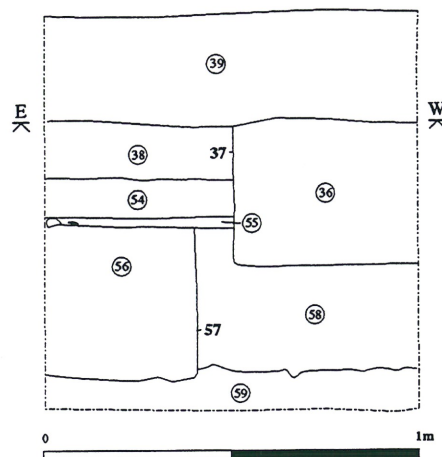


Figure 4: North facing section of Trench IV 4

Phase 1: stratigraphically the earliest deposit revealed in section and the base of the soakaway was layer 59, (9.98m OD) a sterile light yellowish white sandy clay which appears to have been naturally deposited.

Phase 2: layer 58, a mid orange brown clay silt 0.28m thick was also devoid of any man - made material. Given the lack of excavation however, it is not possible to state with any degree of certainty whether this deposit is naturally lain or rather a deliberately placed levelling deposit from the Romano - British period.

Phase 3: cut 57 (56) truncates both earlier deposits. Aligned roughly northeast - southwest with vertical sides and a flat base this cut would appear to be a beamslot. The significance of this feature remains unclear at present. It does not share the same alignment as the bath house or mansio and despite having been truncated by at least two previous excavation trenches attributable to Green there is no reference made to this potential structure within the supplied copy of his site plan. Green does however make reference to a masonry building to the west of the mansio on a 'different' alignment to that structure which had been systematically robbed of its building materials during the fourth century (JRS 1964). Without further excavation it is only possible to speculate that 57 may represent evidence for another building dateable to this period.

Phase 4: layer 55, a compact dark grey silty clay 30mm thick, with a high degree of mineralisation seals Phase 3. This layer appears to be a potential occupation surface but it was not possible to reveal this deposit in plan.

Also visible within the area was a backfilled machine cut trench 37, thought to relate to the work of previous archaeological excavators. This trench is not illustrated on the plan provided by Green.

Area 2

The Romano - British Period

Measuring c 12m north - south x c 7m east - west the overall shape and extent of Area 2 was determined by the requirements for a raft foundation for the proposed dwelling. Detailed archaeological recording and interpretation was seriously compromised by the requirement to adhere exactly to the engineers specification and not to disturb any deposits exceeding 0.40m BPS. Full cleaning of the area by hand although carried out in order to comply with the CAO brief resulted in archaeologically significant features and deposits remaining fully or partially obscured by topsoil. A number of previously excavated trenches were revealed however and have subsequently been identified by HJMG as IX 54 (first noted in Test Pit 1), XII 10, XII 13, XII 22 and XII 26. In addition to evidence for past excavations a number of archaeologically significant deposits and features were revealed. The earliest of these exposed deposits was layer 52, a mid - light orangey brown sandy clay silt. Recorded during test pitting as layer 6 this deposit, interpreted as pre - construction make up and levelling, clearly seals all features relating to the main phases of use of the bath house. It is assumed that this layer represents evidence for the last major phase of re - development within the Roman Town presumably during the late third to fourth centuries AD. It was not possible to collect any dateable material from this context.

The Medieval Period

Four pits 47 (40), 48 (41), 50 (42) and 51 (43), were observable within the house footprint. A rapid scan of the few sherds of pottery collected from the exposed surfaces of these pits was conducted by Dr P Spoerry. Fabrics and types identified include Brill (1250 - 1500) and Developed Essex Ware Type 21 (1400 - 1550) both from context (41). It is assumed that all of these pits were used primarily for the disposal of domestic waste although no sampling for environmental or artefactual data was possible.

It is worth noting that due to the exposure of the 'open area' of the house footprint it became apparent in plan that Pit M91, partially excavated by HJGM within Trench XII 13 and also recorded as Pit 14 during Test pitting in fact comprises two separate features. This highlights the relative difficulties in accurately identifying and interpreting archaeological features and deposits within the restrictions of a narrowly confined trench or test pit as opposed to open area excavation. When reviewing the interpretations of previous excavators under any circumstances it is of course necessary to consider the limitations imposed on interpretation by methodology. Pit M 91 as excavated by HJMG was dated to the 14th - 15th centuries AD. Preservation of materials within the pit would appear to have been excellent. He notes that in addition to pottery the pit contained a wooden bowl! (normally only preserved in waterlogged or other anaerobic conditions - pers. comm.) and an iron dagger.

As had been observed during test pitting the level at which archaeological deposits were present within the development area vary considerably. This phenomenon had also been noted and explained by HJMG: *'In the 11th to 12th centuries AD (method of dating unknown) the land was laid out in 10m wide strips with frontages facing Courthall. The boundaries, probably broad hedges, form 2m wide strips. Within the tenement strips agriculture has removed an average 1.40m (minimum 0.80m) of deposits, and all foundations and floors have been robbed out. Under the boundary strips naturally lain geology is present (as high as) 0.60m BPS and structures are found reliably intact. The boundary strips lie east - west across the bath house.'* (Letter to the AFU 28/01/98)

The house footprint is placed directly over one of these boundary lines. The excellent state of preservation recorded by HJMG within rooms G and H of the bath house immediately to the east of the current development area is attributable to the presence of this same boundary strip.

Area 3

Measuring c 1.80m north - south x c 1.50m east - west Area 3 was opened to determine the extent of archaeological survival within the location of a proposed soakaway. Excavation reached a depth of 1.00m BPS without encountering any archaeological deposits. Truncation of archaeological deposits within this area is again attributable to the work of previous excavators and despite the limited size of this area elements of two separate trenches (60 and 61) were revealed within the base of the soakaway. These have subsequently been identified as HJMG trenches VIII 13 and XII 2, placed over the southern limit of the 'mansio'.

Area 4

Measuring c 7m north - south x c 5m east - west the overall shape and extent of Area 4 was determined by the requirements for the foundations for a garage for the proposed new dwelling, in this instance a depth of 0.30m. Two trenches (30 and 31) attributable to HJMG were exposed, X 3 and XII 28. Trench X 3 was seen to be truncating an earlier narrow slip trench, 64 thought to be the work of Charles Green. HJMG's Trench VIII also extended into the northeastern limit of the area but was not recorded. The omission of this trench from our own records is due to the fact that the uniform deposit revealed through stripping within the area was clearly modern topsoil and thus only limited cleaning by hand was undertaken. Consideration should be given within the remit for any future projects within Godmanchester to the identification and full recording of the works of past excavators whilst the full extent of previous records remains uncertain.

Area 5

On the 21st of April 1998 the final 'Area' was exposed. Measuring only 0.35m in width the cut made was intended for the laying of a sewerage pipe linking the newly built property with services located in the front garden of the adjacent property, 2 Pinfold Lane. Excavation reached a maximum depth of 0.85m adjacent to the manhole but failed to expose any deposits of archaeological significance. Small fragments of Roman tile (*tegulae*) and plaster were noted within the garden soil but were not retained.

6 DISCUSSION

Despite the limited scope of the test pitting it was immediately clear that a considerable depth of archaeological deposits attributable to the Romano - British period was present within the proposed development area and that previous archaeological excavations had truncated these deposits to varying degrees across the area.

Within Test pit 1 at least three phases of activity appear to be represented.

- 1: Foundation preparation / levelling and foundation trench preparation occur (this assumes that 7 and 8 were wall cuts).
- 2: These cuts were infilled or alternatively robbed and then infilled.
- 3: Preparation of a new building foundation which seals all earlier phases.

This sequence, although undated, would appear to accord with Green's findings (1977, p10-13). He dates the first phase of construction of the baths and mansio to the beginning of the second century AD. Green states that '*A bath house and inn building (mansio) were laid out and some of the foundation trenches dug. A considerable delay followed, in the course of which rubbish pits were dug amongst the foundations. When work was resumed...*'.

Further excavation offers us the opportunity to test the findings of previous excavators. That possible wall foundations are present within Test Pit 1 requires some explanation as they are located beyond the limits of the bath house and mansio as defined by Green.

Similar features on the same alignment as the possible wall foundations in Test Pit 1 were also revealed within Test Pits 2 and 3. Again, the exact implications of these findings are unclear.

Limited excavation comprising the partial removal of the backfill of HJMG Trench IV 4 within Area 1 identified the presence of a possible beamslot 57 within the north - facing section of the soakaway. It is uncertain whether the presence of this possible structure was noted by previous excavators and to what date / phase of the development of the Roman town it may be attributed.

Despite the lack of opportunity for excavation cleaning of open Area 2 allowed for the limited re interpretation of Pit 14, (HJMG Pit M 91) as two separate features, now recorded as Pits 50 and 51. An additional two previously unknown Pits 47 and 48 thought to date to the medieval period were also cleaned by hand and planned.

Conclusions

Although test pitting established the extent of truncation due to previous excavation and medieval agricultural practices, it should be noted that without the fortuitous presence of HJMG's Trench IX 54 it would have been far more difficult to determine either the nature or depth of archaeological deposits due to the restrictions imposed on the evaluation by the CAO Brief.

Examination of the 'footprints' of the new buildings highlighted the extent of past excavations but sadly did not allow for the re evaluation of these areas.

As an exercise in mitigation leading to preservation in situ the project has been a complete success allowing our client to realise the construction of a new house and garage within what is known, from an archaeological viewpoint to be an extremely sensitive area for any type of new development.

In terms of generating new archaeological data, however, our results are somewhat more limited. This project serves to highlight the extensive nature of previous excavations and our relative ignorance as to the detailed findings of these works. It is a tribute to the recording system employed by Michael Green

combined with his willingness and ability to assist us with specific enquiries that has allowed us to present the level of detail contained within this report.

The chronology, methodology, aims and results of past excavations remain unpublished at present. Considering the perceived importance of this Roman town within the academic community and the potential interest value of these findings to the general public it is strongly recommended that this large gap in our current knowledge is addressed immediately. This is particularly important as the unique archaeological resource sealed beneath the streets and gardens of present day Godmanchester is under an ever increasing threat from new development. Each of these new developments serves to highlight the superb potential of the town for further excavation led research. The level of resources available through a wholly developer - funded environment is clearly insufficient to address not only the excellent state of preservation of deposits and artefacts but also the standard of recording and post excavation analysis required to make a genuine contribution to the continuing study of the prehistoric landscape, the Roman Town and all phases of post Roman activity from the early Saxon settlers onwards. Past excavations whilst appearing to be fairly extensive are by no means sufficient on their own to provide the level of data which will be needed by future generations of researchers. What then can we identify as current gaps in our knowledge? Within the current climate of development - led excavation and the apparent lack of co - ordinated research resulting from competitive tendering the archaeological profession must attempt to generate a consensus on techniques and research aims if we are to be able to maximise the effectiveness of our limited resources not only within Godmanchester but within the county as a whole.

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