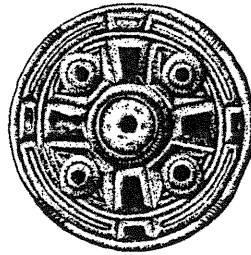


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Archaeological Field Unit

**A Prehistoric Ditch at Ernulf Community College, Eynesbury,
St Neots: An Archaeological Evaluation**

S Kenney

2002

Cambridgeshire County Council

Report No. A204

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**A Prehistoric Ditch at Ernulf Community College, Eynesbury,
St Neots: An Archaeological Evaluation
(TL 1822/5885)**

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SUMMARY

In May 2002, the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council conducted an archaeological evaluation on 0.09ha of land at Ernulf Community College, Eynesbury, St Neots, Cambridgeshire (TL 1822/5885). This was in advance of proposed classroom extensions to the existing buildings.

Three trenches were opened by machine and two were found to contain archaeological remains. A pit-like feature in Trench 1 was interpreted as a tree bole, possibly associated with Neolithic woodland clearance. A narrow ditch in Trench 2 may also belong to this period, but produced no finds to confirm this theory.

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St Neots: An Archaeological Evaluation
(TL 1822/5885)**

1 INTRODUCTION

On the 23rd of May 2002, the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council (AFU) conducted an archaeological evaluation on land at Ernulf Community College, Eynesbury, St Neots (TL 1822/5885). The work was carried out at the request of Cambridgeshire County Council, in response to a brief set by Andy Thomas of the County Archaeology Office (CAO), and dated February 27th 2002. The evaluation was conducted in advance of proposed extensions to the existing buildings.

The site lies on the southwestern side of Eynesbury. It consists of two areas roughly rectangular in plan and 0.09ha in total area.

The presence of archaeological remains was considered likely by the CAO on the basis of information contained in the County Sites and Monuments Record (SMR). It records Prehistoric and Roman finds in the immediate vicinity of the site.

Weather conditions during the fieldwork were fine, and there were no factors that are likely to have had an adverse effect upon context recognition. Accordingly, the confidence rating to be applied to the results is judged to be high.

2 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

According to the British Geological Survey, the site lies on Pleistocene First/Second Terrace River Gravels. In this area, the River Gravels overlie Boulder Clay, which in turn overlie Upper Jurassic Oxford Clay (BGS 1975).

The site lies at around 16mOD, being generally flat across its extent, the land rising only slightly to around 16.8mOD on Barford Road to the east.

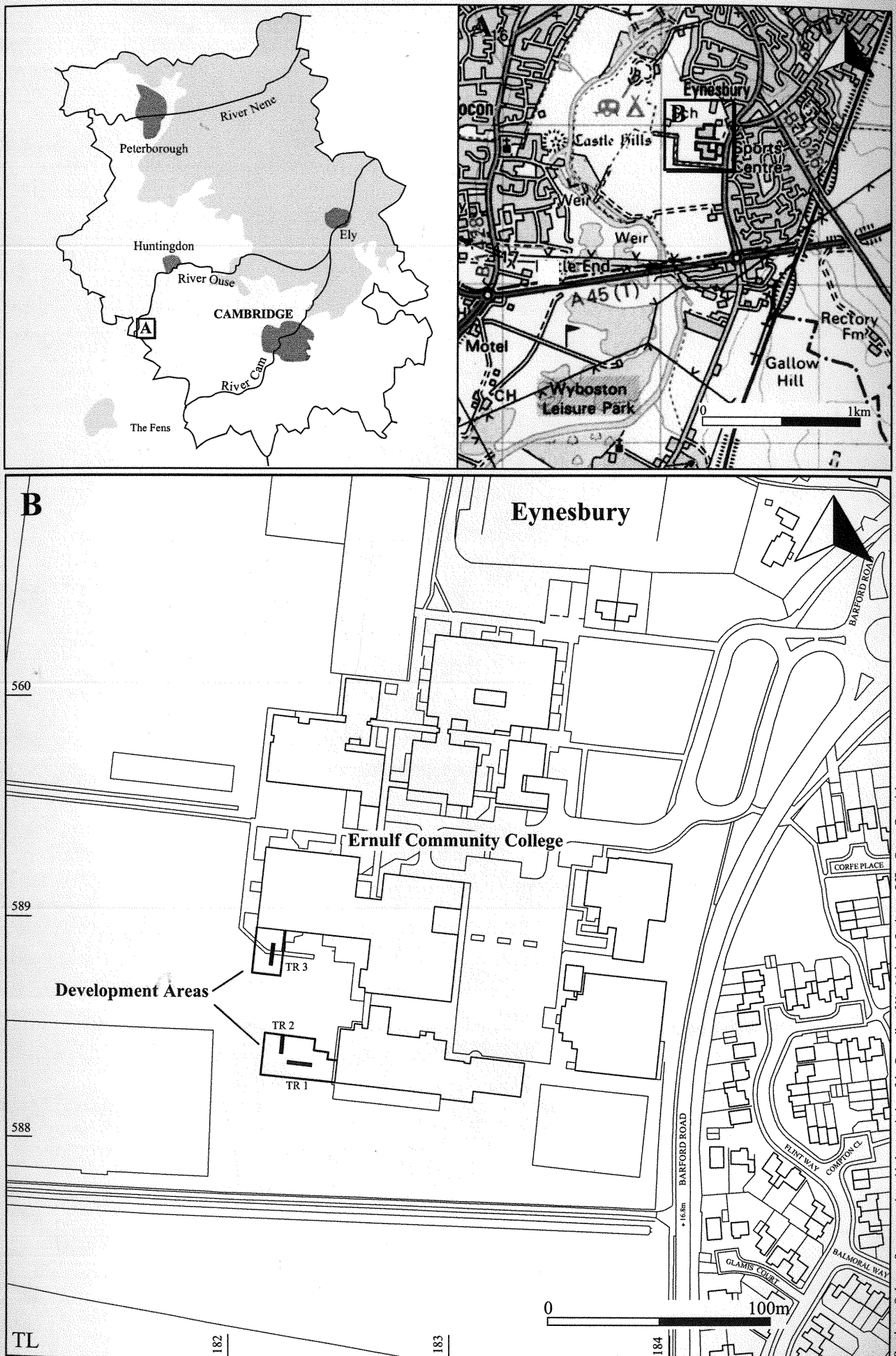


Figure 1 Site location

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

3.1 Palaeolithic

No finds of this period have been made from the vicinity of the development area.

3.2 Mesolithic

Worked flints of this period have been found to the southeast and south of the development area (SMR 00512, 00377).

3.3 Neolithic

To the southwest of the subject site lies the cropmark of a Neolithic cursus (SMR 06150), while immediately to the east, ditches forming part of the same monument were uncovered during an evaluation in 1994 (SMR 11671). Given its proximity, the cropmark positioned just to the west of the latter two may also belong to this period (SMR 00381).

3.4 Bronze Age

Bronze Age flints have been found close to the A428 to the south (SMR 00447).

3.5 Iron Age

No finds of this period have been made from the vicinity of the development area.

3.6 Roman

Numerous finds of this period have been made from the vicinity of the development. Villas existed to the north (SMR 04253) and southwest (SMR 10898), with a possible third to the west (SMR 00684). Pottery scatters have been found to the north (SMR 11920, 00389) and northwest (SMR 00389). Roman ditches were identified to the northwest (SMR 02201) and immediately to the west (SMR 11671).

3.7 Anglo-Saxon

No finds of this period have been made from the vicinity of the development area.

3.8 Medieval

No finds of this period have been made from the vicinity of the development area.

3.9 Post-Medieval

No finds of this period have been made from the vicinity of the development area.

3.10 Previous Archaeological Work

The AFU has conducted several evaluations and excavations during the 1990's on land around Ernulf Community College and off Barford Road to the south. These investigations uncovered extensive evidence of Prehistoric and Roman archaeology in the area (Kemp 1993, 1996, 1997; Alexander 1993; Macaulay 1994).

3.11 Historical Background

The name Eynesbury is first recorded as *Eanulfesbirig*, meaning 'Eanwulf's Burgh' in around 1000, and in the Domesday Book of 1086 as *Einuluesberie*. The first recorded instance of the modern spelling is in 1316.

At Domesday Eynesbury probably included the modern parishes of St Neots Urban and Rural, Eynesbury, Eynesbury Hardwick and possibly Abbotsley. St Neots parish was created some time after 1113, when one of the manors was granted to the Priory of St Neots, while Abbotsley became a separate parish around 1138.

4 METHODOLOGY

Three trenches with a total length of 29m were opened by a JCB using a flat-bladed 1.6m wide ditching bucket, under the supervision of an archaeologist (see Fig 1). This constitutes a 5.4% sample of the development area.

The trenches were cleaned by hand, planned and photographed, and the features recorded using the AFU's single context recording system. The trenches were tied in three-dimensionally to the Ordnance Survey mapping.

5 RESULTS

5.1 Trench 1

Trench 1 was 11m long and was oriented N-S. It contained a single pit-like feature. Up to 0.3m of dark greyish brown sandy silt topsoil 1 overlay up to 0.3m of strong brown silty sand and gravel subsoil 2, which in turn sealed the archaeology.

Pit 4 was 0.2m deep, 1.2m wide and at least 1.1m long. Its overall shape in plan was difficult to determine but the remaining part was irregular. The fill, 3, was a brown sandy silt with occasional manganese flecks and small stones.

5.2 Trench 2

Trench 2 was 8m long and was oriented E-W. It contained a single ditch. Up to 0.3m of dark greyish brown sandy silt topsoil 1 overlay up to 0.3m of strong brown silty sand and gravel subsoil 2, which in turn sealed the archaeology.

Ditch 6 was 0.3m deep, 0.4m wide and at least 8m long, with a round-based V profile. It was straight in plan and oriented NE-SW. The fill, 5, was a greyish brown sandy silt with occasional small stones. No finds were recovered from this fill.

5.3 Trench 3

Trench 3 was 10m long and was oriented E-W. It contained no archaeological features. Up to 0.3m of dark greyish brown sandy silt topsoil 1 overlay up to 0.3m of strong brown silty sand and gravel subsoil 2.

6 DISCUSSION

Nearby Roman features found during previous archaeological investigations produced significant amounts of pottery, and for this reason, ditch 6 is not thought to date from the Roman period. Although no finds were recovered from the fill, the alignment is similar to that of the Neolithic cursus ditches, and may suggest an association with that monument or other contemporary features in the area.

Pit 4 is probably a tree bole or tree-throw hole, which may also relate to the Neolithic, since forested areas would have been cleared before construction of the cursus began.

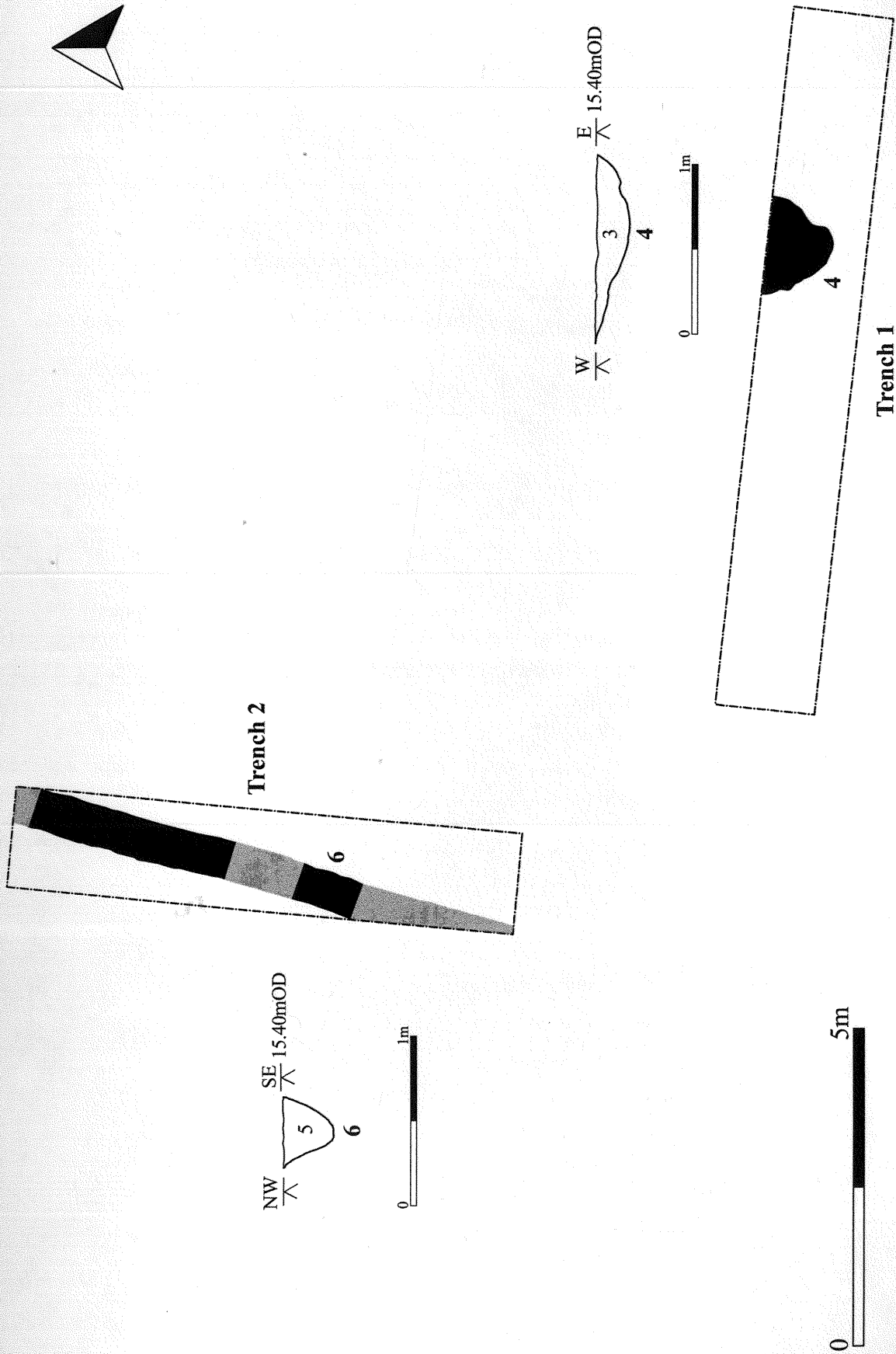


Figure 2 Trench plans and sections

Given the proximity of such a rich Prehistoric landscape, it was not unexpected to find further evidence of occupation dating to this period in the development area. The type of feature located during this evaluation might indicate field or boundaries or simply drainage at a greater distance from the settlement focus with the lack of finds contraindicating the nearby presence of buildings.

7 CONCLUSIONS

The objective of the project was to establish the character, date, state of preservation and extent of any archaeological remains within the site in advance of development. Information from the evaluation will allow an assessment of the proposed development's archaeological implications and to inform an appropriate mitigation strategy.

The project has been successful in achieving its objectives. Prehistoric archaeology has been identified that may relate to other nearby known features of the Neolithic landscape.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank Cambridgeshire County Council who commissioned and funded the archaeological work. Stephen Macaulay managed the project for the AFU and edited the report.

The brief for archaeological works was written by Andy Thomas of the CAO and Jeremy Parsons of that office visited the site and monitored the evaluation.

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