

Archaeological Field Unit

**An Archaeological Evaluation at Mantles Yard  
St Barnabus Road, Cambridge,  
Cambridgeshire.**

Spencer Cooper

2004

**Cambridgeshire County Council**

Report No.751  
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St Barnabus Road, Cambridge  
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## SUMMARY




















*Between August 23rd and 25th 2004 an archaeological evaluation was undertaken at Mantles Yard, St Barnabus Road, Cambridge, Cambridgeshire (TL 4616 5755) by staff of the Archaeological Field Unit (AFU) of Cambridgeshire County Council. The proposed development includes the construction of houses. The project was commissioned by Twigden Homes and was carried out in accordance with brief issued by Andy Thomas of the Archaeology Office, Cambridgeshire County Council.*

*The evaluation has identified field ditches of possible Roman origin in trenches 1 and 7. No other features of archaeological significance were present.*

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# Drawing Conventions

Sections	Plans
Limit of Excavation 	Limit of Excavation 
Cut 	Deposit - Conjectured 
Cut - Conjectured 	Natural Features 
Soil Horizon 	Intrusion/Truncation 
Soil Horizon - Conjectured 	Sondages/Machine Strip 
Intrusion/Truncation 	Illustrated Section 
Top of Natural 	Archaeological Deposit 
Top Surface 	Excavated Slot 
Break in Section 	Modern Deposit 
Cut Number 	Cut Number 118
Deposit Number 117	
Ordnance Datum $\frac{18.45\text{m ODN}}{\lambda}$	

**An Archaeological Evaluation at Mantles Yard, St Barnabus Road,  
Cambridge Cambridgeshire; (TL4616/5755)**

**1 INTRODUCTION**

Between August 23rd and 25th 2004 an archaeological evaluation was undertaken at Mantles Yard, St Barnabus Road, Cambridge, Cambridgeshire (TL 4616/5755) by staff of the Archaeological Field Unit (AFU) of Cambridgeshire County Council. The proposed development includes residential development within the area. The project was commissioned by Twigden Homes and was carried out in accordance with a brief (planning application C/02/0366/FP) issued by Andy Thomas of the Archaeology Office, Cambridgeshire County Council.

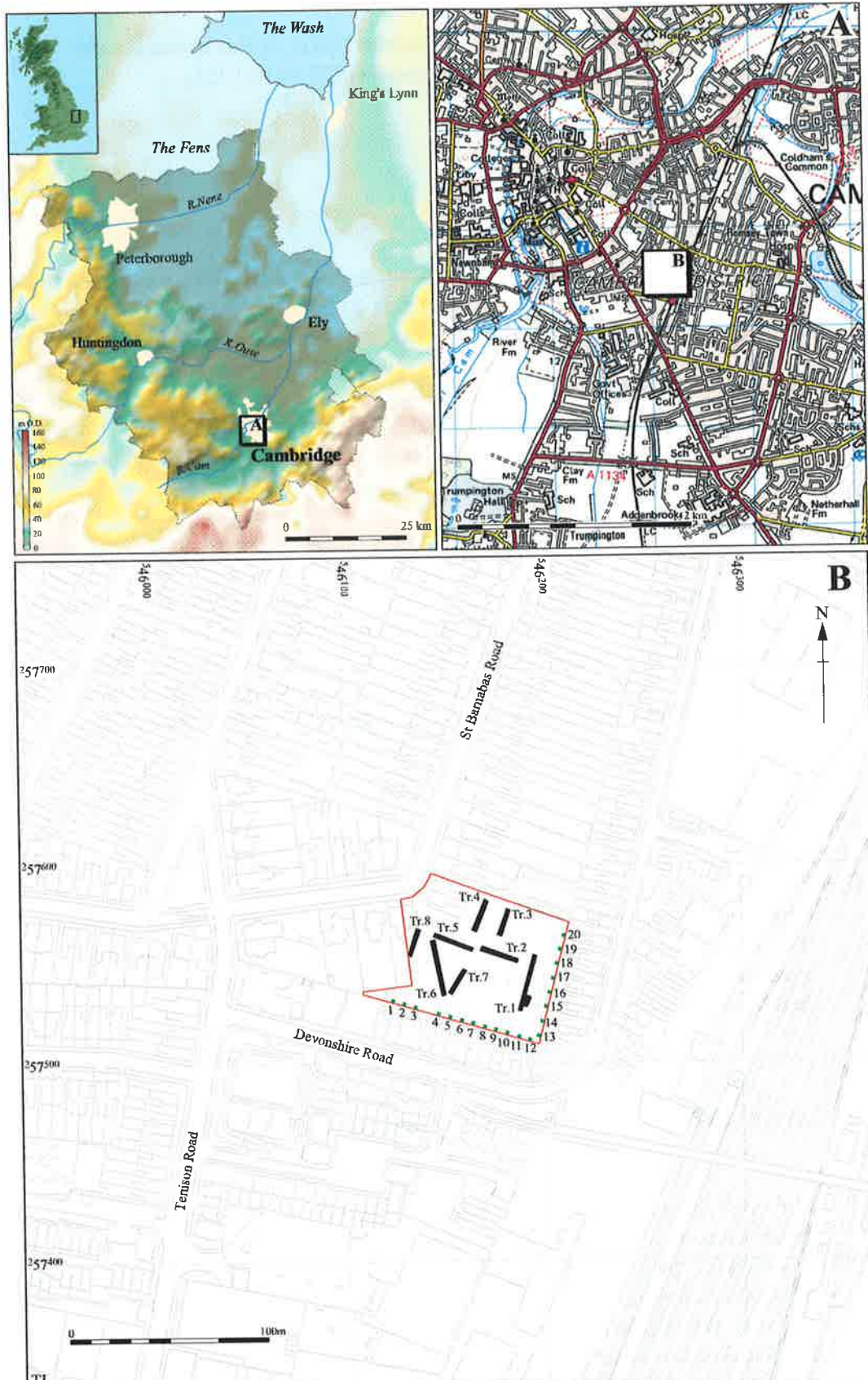
From the outset it was hoped that this evaluation would pinpoint possible Roman occupation relating to a marching camp and a Roman road (see 3 below). Overall very little is known about the archaeological character of this part of Cambridge. The evaluation revealed evidence of two ditches, one of which contained a single sherd of Roman pottery and some tiny fragments of animal bone. The lack of dating evidence is problematic but supports the interpretation of the ditches as field boundaries of Roman or later origin.

**2 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY**

The site is located in the Petersfield area of the historic City of Cambridge. The site is situated on the 3rd Terrace River Gravels, to the south of the medieval core and Roman town. The nearest benchmark is located to the southwest of the development area on Tenison Rd at 15.24m OD.

**3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

Although the site is not located directly within the known medieval or Roman urban cores it is known to lie in an area of high archaeological potential. It lies close to the known line of the Roman Road (SMR 04614) (locally known as Worts Causeway) that runs southeast from Castle Hill (Roman Cambridge) towards the Roman town of Great Chesterford. In addition earthworks (upstanding archaeological remains) of Roman origin have been recorded in the nearby vicinity of the Cattle Yard and Station area (SMR 04814). This has been suggested to have been an army marching camp which might tie with the proximity of the road (Thomas, Brief 2004).



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**Figure 1** Location of trial trenches (black), and foundation trenches (green) with the development area outlined (red)



A number of archaeological investigations were undertaken to the south of the subject site at Perse Rd. A Roman road was visible as a ridge until 1910 when it was levelled (Walker 1910, 166). According to Walker, the road would have run from a T-junction with Worts Causeway (a Roman road running east / west) near the New Addenbrooke's Hospital, north through the Perse School playing fields, across Luard Road and through the grounds of Homerton College, across Brooklands Avenue and the Botanical Gardens, to join the line of Regent Street at Hyde Park Corner. From this point north the modern road follows the line of the Roman road to the river crossing near Magdalene Bridge. Walker notes that this line is on slightly higher ground than the modern Hills Road, and suggests that the land to the east would have been marshland which occasionally flooded (*Ibid*, 167).

In 1910 Walker observed a section cut across the Roman road in the Perse School playing fields (*Ibid*, 166). The road was 12-15 feet wide, with a 9 inch hard-core of rammed chalk, 2.25 feet of gravel and earth, and more chalk above; the surface metalling had been robbed. A coin of Severus (AD 193-211) was found in a road-side ditch.

Two miles to the south east of the subject site an archaeological evaluation (Kenny, 2000) revealed evidence of Roman agricultural or horticultural practice overlain by early post medieval agriculture. The Roman features consisted of ditches, which shared orientation and spacing with local medieval ridge and furrow raising the question of a possible pre Medieval field. The alignment of these features at right angles to the nearby Roman road might indicate they are part of a larger system to the south of Roman settlement. Evaluation identified Roman agricultural remains at right angles to the Roman road that dated from the 1st and 2nd century.

### **Cartographic Evidence (Fig 3)**

The cartographic evidence shows that the development area consisted of a series of long thin fields in the 19th century. Bakers New map of the University and Town 1830 depicts a series of long thin strip fields within the development area with a Windmill and Orchard to the north. The 1840 OS map shows the railway line running to the east of the subject site and a series of long thin fields within the development area. The 1883 OS map shows the railway line to the east and open fields within the development area.

## **4**

### **METHODOLOGY**

Demolition and site clearance had been undertaken prior to the evaluation by sub contractors working for Twigden Homes. A mechanical 360 excavator (with 2.1m wide flat-bladed ditching bucket) was used to excavate eight trial trenches under archaeological supervision (Trenches 1-8). A total of 150m of trenching was excavated, a c.5% sample of the site. The trenches were

planned at 1:50 and sections at 1:20. All features and deposits were recorded using the AFU single context system. Each distinct cut, fill and layer was allocated an individual number. In the following text cut numbers are presented in **bold** and deposit numbers in plain text.

Monochrome and colour photographs were taken.

## **5 RESULTS** (Figs. 1, and 2)

### **General**

Two common layers (1 and 2) were identified in all eight trenches sealing all significant archaeological remains. Layer 1 was a dark grey sandy silt, with frequent modern masonry and rubble, varying in depth from 0.05-0.10m. This was probably the remnants of a demolition layer associated with contemporary site clearance. Layer 2 (Subsoil) was a light greyish brown sandy silt which varied in thickness from 0.30m to 0.60m across the development area.

One of the most notable observations from the evaluation was the low density of features and the lack of finds. The evaluation has identified field ditches in trenches 1 and 7. In trench 1 the ditch was on a northwest to southeast alignment and contained a single sherd of Roman pottery. In trench 7 an L-shaped ditch was identified. No finds were recovered from this ditch but its fill was identical in character to the ditch fills in trench 1.

### **Trench 1** (Fig 1 and Fig 2 )

Trench 1 was 27m long and 0.6 m deep and was aligned northeast to southwest. A large ditch which ran on roughly the same alignment was the only archaeological feature identified in this trench. A number of segments **5,7, 9** and **11** were excavated along its length in order to establish date and function.

Ditch **5** was 1m wide, 0.40m deep and 1m long and contained a single fill **4**. Fill **4** was a greyish brown sandy silt which contained no artefacts. This section had concave sides with a sloping base.

Ditch **7** was 1m wide, 0.40m deep and 1.8m long and contained a single fill **6**. Fill **6** was a greyish brown sandy silt which contained no artefacts. This section had concave sides with a sloping base.

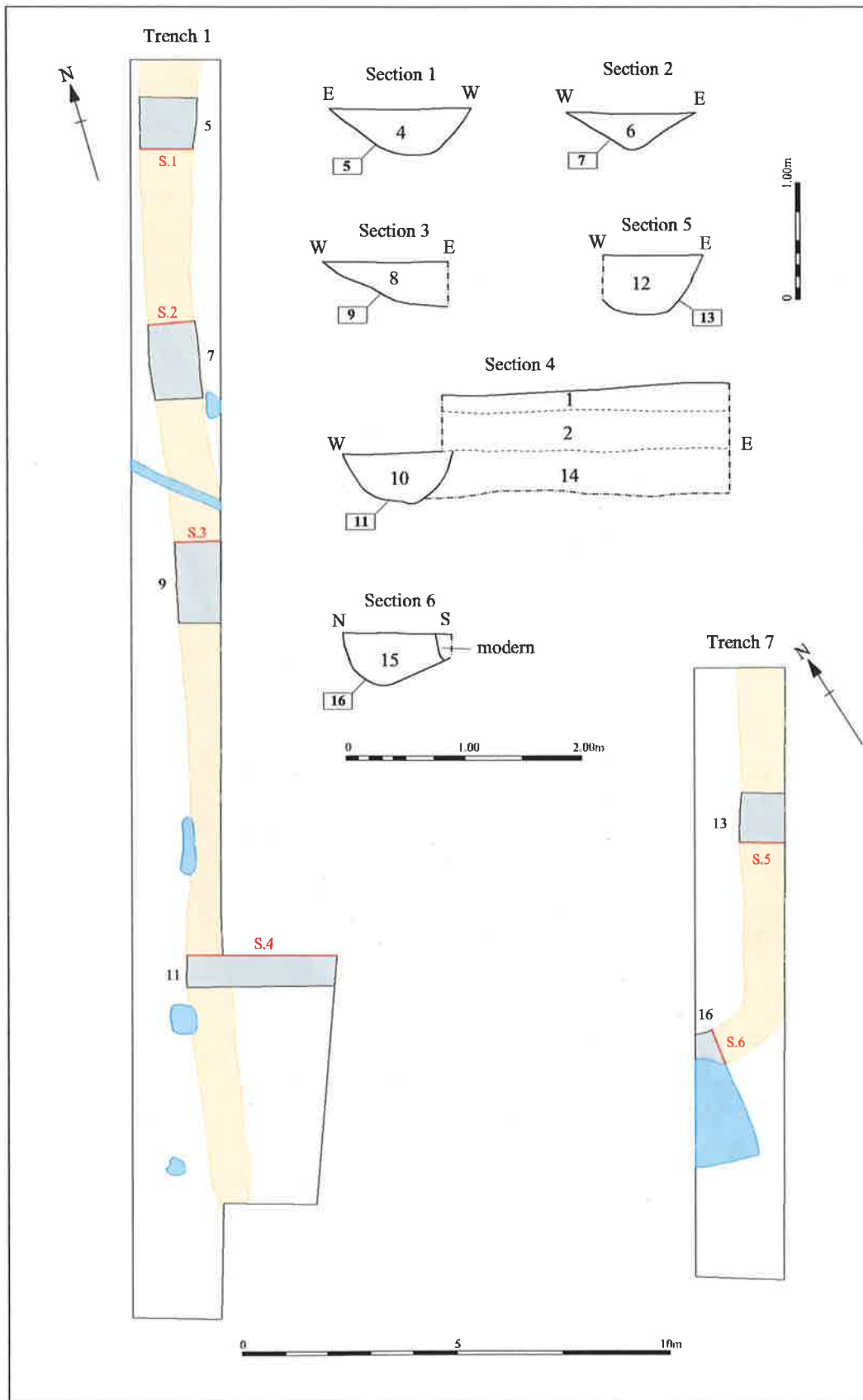


Figure 2 Plan of trenches 1 and 7 with sections of excavated features.

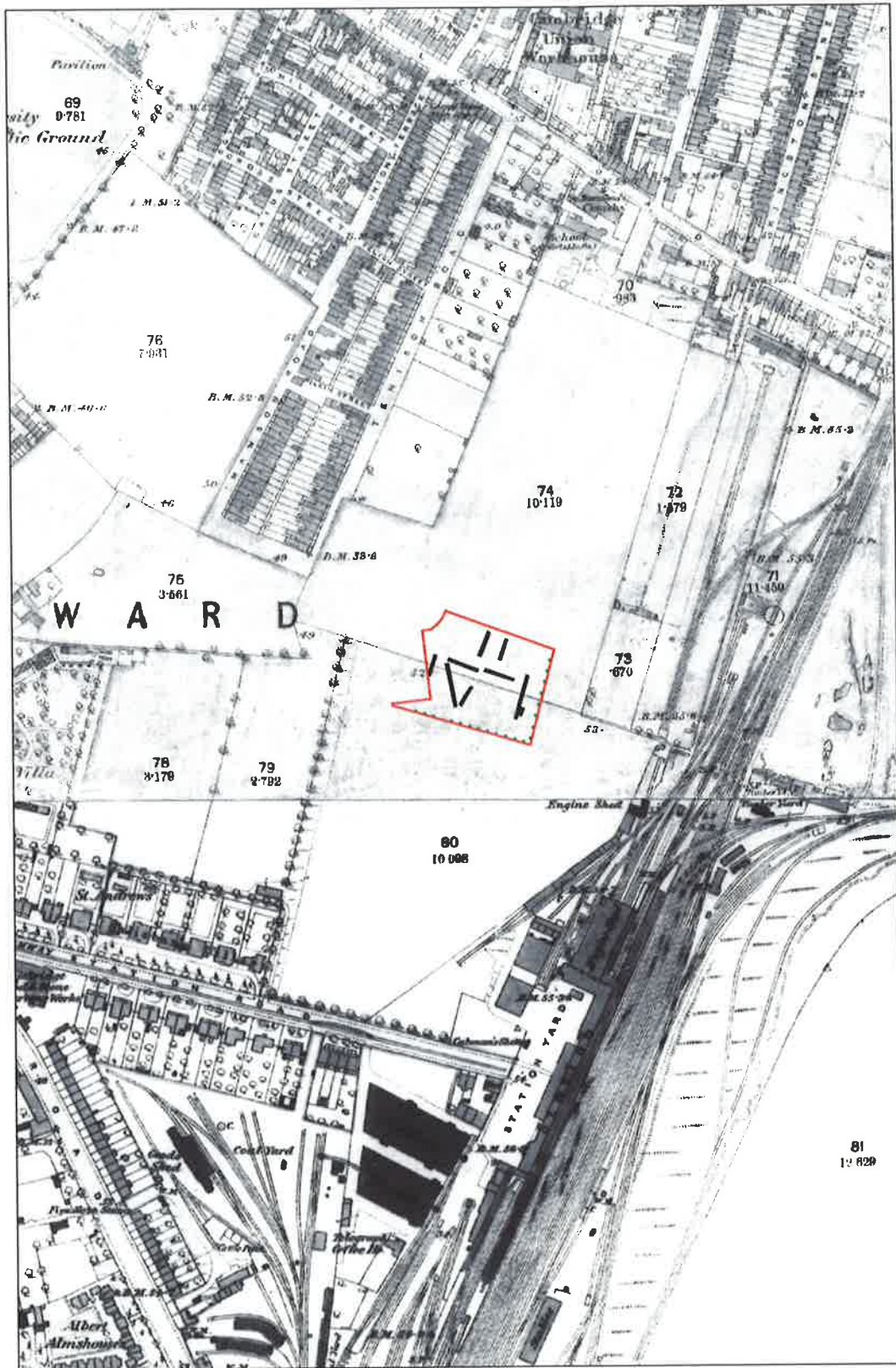


Figure 3 1883 1st edition 25inch O.S. Map

Ditch 9 was 0.9m wide, 0.40m deep and contained a single fill 8. Fill 8 was a greyish brown sandy silt which contained no artefacts. This section had concave sides with a sloping base. An environmental sample was taken from fill 8 but proved devoid of artefacts and ecofacts (see appendix 2).

Ditch 11 was 0.9m wide and 0.40m deep and contained a single fill 10. Fill 10 was a greyish brown sandy silt which contained a sherd of pottery from a Roman storage vessel and small fragments of animal bone. An environmental sample was taken from fill 10 but proved devoid of artefacts and ecofacts (see appendix 2). Layer 14 was natural gravel.

#### **Trench 2**

Trench 2 was 22m long and 0.70m deep and aligned east to west. No archaeological features were encountered in this trench.

#### **Trench 3**

Trench 3 was 14m long and 0.70m deep and aligned northeast to southwest. No archaeological features were encountered within this trench.

#### **Trench 4**

Trench 4 was 16m long and 0.70m deep and aligned northeast to southwest. No archaeological features were encountered within this trench.

#### **Trench 5**

Trench 5 was 20m long and 0.45m deep and aligned east to west. No archaeological features were encountered within this trench.

#### **Trench 6**

Trench 6 was 10m long and 0.70m deep and aligned north to south. No archaeological features were encountered within this trench.

#### **Trench 7**

Trench 7 was 15m long and 0.50m deep and aligned northeast to southwest. An L-shaped ditch possibly representing a corner of a field was identified in trench 7. The ditch was investigated in two sections 13 and 16.

Ditch 13 was 1.10m wide and 0.50m deep and contained a single fill 12. Fill 12 was a brown sandy silt which contained no artefacts. This section had concave sides with a sloping base. An environmental sample was taken from fill 12 which was devoid of artefacts and ecofacts.

Ditch 16 was 1.10m wide and 0.45m deep and contained a single fill 15. Fill 15 was a brown sandy silt which contained no artefacts. This section had concave sides with a sloping base.

### **Foundation trenches**

Twenty foundation trenches were observed on the southern and eastern side of the development area (Fig 1). No archaeological features were observed in the foundation trenches pits. The trenches were 1.20m by 2.10m and varied in depth from 1.08m-1.40m. The only layers observed in foundation trenches were demolition (layer 1) and subsoil (layer 2.).

## **6 DISCUSSION**

### **6.1 Roman**

Despite the development being stripped prior to the evaluation and considering the former land use of the site as a petrol station, the level of preservation was good. The subsoil varied in depth from 0.30-0.60m and the ditches were up to 0.45m deep.

The most notable observation from the evaluation was the presence of two ditches representing elements of a (probable) Roman field system.

The Ditch in trench 1 contained a sherd of Roman pottery and small, non diagnostic fragments of animal bone. The four segments excavated along the ditch demonstrated similar characteristics in terms of fill composition and profile. There was no evidence of recutting of the ditch and the stratigraphic sequence was identical in all four segments.

The ditch in trench 7 was L-shaped, possibly forming a corner of a field. The northwest to southeast element of the ditch was on similar orientation to the ditch in trench 1. There is a strong possibility that these ditches could be part of a contemporary field system as they are very similar in terms of scale and composition of fills. The paucity of artefacts within these features would support the idea that these ditches are part of a field system.

## **7 CONCLUSION**

The aim of the project was to establish the character, date, state of preservation and extent of any archaeology within the subject site. There was no evidence within the excavated trenches to suggest the presence of a Roman road (SMR 04614), marching camp (SMR 04814) or any other type of settlement related activity. The evaluation has identified two ditches on a

broadly north-south alignment. The date of these features remains uncertain although a single sherd of Roman pottery was recovered from the ditch in trench 1. A Roman or later date is suggested for both ditches and the relative sterility of the ditch fills is taken as evidence supporting their interpretation as field boundaries.

#### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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#### **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Cambridgeshire County Council- Sites and Monuments Record.

Thomas, A, 2004, The Archaeological Brief.

Kenny, D 2000, *An Archaeological Evaluation at the Former Government Offices Site, Brooklands Avenue, Cambridge*. Cambridge Archaeological Unit Rep 698.

Walker, FG, 1910, Roman Roads into Cambridge, *Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society vol XIV*.

#### **Maps Consulted**

Baker's New map of the University and Town of Cambridge, 1830.

O/S Sheet 54 Cambridge and Ely 1inch map 1836-1840.

O/S Sheet 64 Cambridge and Ely 25inch map 1883.

## APPENDIX 1: THE FINDS

Context	Object	Weight in kg	Comments
10	Roman pottery	0.34	Roman ,Storage vessel
10	Animal bone	0.4.0	Non diagnostic

## APPENDIX 2 Environmental Statement *by Rachel Fosberry*

Two 20 litre bulk samples were submitted for assessment. They were subjected to bucket flotation with the flot collected in 0.5mm mesh and the residue retained in a 1.0mm sieve. After air drying the flot was examined under a binocular microscope at x8 magnification.

No macrofossils were identified in the two samples taken.





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