118 Mereside, Soham, Cambridgeshire

Archaeological Evaluation Report

March 2020

Client: Mr Brett Claydon

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OAE Report No: 2417
NGR: TL 58709 73993

oxfordarchaeology

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118 Mereside, Soham, Cambridgeshire

Archaeological Evaluation Report

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With contributions from Martha Craven BA PCIfA and Matt Brudenell and illustrations by Sara Alberigi and Séverine Bézie BA MA

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Summary

On the 4th of March 2020, Oxford Archaeology East (OAE) conducted an archaeological investigation in the back gardens of the residential property 118 Mereside, Soham, Cambridgeshire (centred on TL 58709 73993) in advance of its redevelopment. Two trial trenches were excavated.

The site was almost devoid of archaeological remains with only one possible Neolithic pit identified towards the north-western end of Trench 1, while archaeology was completely absent in Trench 2. The findings indicate a low level of prehistoric activity on the shoreline of the Soham Mere; a now drained prehistoric freshwater lake.

Acknowledgements

OAE would like to thank Mr Brett Claydon for commissioning this project. Thanks are also extended to Leanne Robinson Zeki who monitored the work on behalf of Cambridgeshire Historic Environment Team (CHET) and provided advice and guidance

The project was managed for OAE by Pat Moan. The fieldwork was directed by Edmund Cole, who was supported by Lattenbury Services. Survey and digitising was carried out by Thomas Houghton with illustrations by Sara Alberigi and Séverine Bézie. Thanks to Martha Craven who processed the environmental remains and wrote the environmental report under the management of Rachel Fosberry. Thanks to Katherine Hamilton who prepared the archive. Thanks are also extended to prehistoric pottery specialist Matt Brudenell for his contribution.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

1.1.1 OAE was commissioned by Mr Brett Claydon to undertake a trial trench evaluation at the site of 118 Mereside, Soham, Cambridgeshire (NGR TL 58709 73993; Fig. 1). The work was undertaken as a condition of Planning Permission (planning ref. 18/0054/FUL). A brief was set by Leanne Robinson Zeki of CHET outlining the Local Authority's requirements for work necessary to discharge the planning condition. A Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) was produced by OAE (Moan 2020) detailing the methods by which OAE proposed to meet the requirements of the brief. This document outlines how OAE implemented the specified requirements.

1.2 Location, topography and geology

1.2.1 The proposed redevelopment area consisted of a residential property to the south-west and its back garden to the north-east. This site lay on the western edge of the village of Soham and just to the east of Mereside. The infilled Soham Mere is located *c*.200m to the west and the site location would historically have been broadly placed on its shoreline; on level ground above the 5m OD contour.

1.2.2 The site's underlying geology is mapped as Gault Formation Mudstone with no superficial deposits recorded, although river terrace gravels are identified just to the east of the site (British Geological Survey Online Viewer, accessed 19/02/20) http://www.bgs.ac.uk/discoveringGeology/geologyofBritain/viewer.html).

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

1.3.1 A full search of the Cambridgeshire Historic Environment Record (CHER) of a 1km radius centred on the evaluation site was commissioned from CHET (under licence number 19-4175). The following is a summary based on the results of the CHER search, with pertinent records shown on Figure 2.

Soham Mere

1.3.2 Soham Mere was a prehistoric freshwater lake that lay to the west of Soham and was drained in the 17th century. Across Cambridgeshire prehistoric sites have been found associated with the Mere's at Whittlesey and Willingham (which also have medieval archaeology). These wetland/waters were also the focus of the ritual deposition of metalwork in the Bronze Age (e.g. Flag Fen, Fengate and Must Farm) and associated prehistoric ritual landscapes, including burial mounds (barrows) both individual and in cemeteries in the Late Neolithic and early Bronze Ages.

1.3.3 Archaeological evaluation was undertaken by Oxford Archaeology in 2014 on land within the boundaries of the former mere (Clarke 2014). A total of fifteen shallow linear ditches were revealed across site, with seven respecting the field boundary layout as it was in 2014, and therefore considered drainage ditches from the later post-medieval period. The remaining eight, on a differing alignment represented an older layout of land management, possible associated with the drainage of Soham Mere

earlier in the post-medieval period. No artefacts were recovered from these features, nor were any lacustrine deposits encountered during the excavation of the trenches.

Later prehistoric (c.4000 BC to AD 43)

1.3.4 The numerous archaeological records of the area show a low concentration of prehistoric activity on the eastern edge of the Mere.

1.3.5 In 1954, on the Soham Mere shelf (Bracks Farm), in an arable field adjacent and approximately 0.1km to the south of the development area, a 4-flanged Bronze Age gold torc was found (CHER07092), perhaps suggesting either the ritual deposition of metalwork as noted above or the presence of burials.

1.3.6 Approximately 0.25km to the north-east of the site at Cloverfield Drive, roughly dated prehistoric ditches and a post hole were excavated (MCB15835), as well as a Bronze Age well (MCB16867), indicating the presence of prehistoric settlement activity in the area. Likewise, about 0.5km to the south-east of the site, a Bronze Age waterhole containing pottery and burnt flint was discovered (ECB3690).

1.3.7 Excavations of an Early Iron Age ditch *c*.0.8km to the east-south-east (MCB16872) and an Iron Age inhumation burial and pit *c*.0.8km to the south-south-east of the development area (MCB18106), indicate further settlement and even ritual activity associated with the Mere.

Roman (c.AD 43-410)

1.3.8 Coins of Roman date have been found south-east of the site (MCB8554), in the vicinity of an undated ring ditch (MCB8561). Human skeletal remains of possible Roman date have been found in the area of White Hart Lane (MCB8413). Closer to the development area, 0.1km to the north-west, further Roman finds were noted (MCB8559). The evaluation at Fordham Road allotments also produced Romano-British settlement remains (Connor 2001).

Anglo-Saxon and medieval (c.AD 410-1540)

1.3.9 During the Saxon and Medieval periods, the site was primarily underwater, however, the present day settlement of Soham is early Saxon in origin (the place name being derived from Old English “Soegan Hamm” or “swampy” settlement), and funerary remains from three cemeteries have been found within a 2km radius of the site.

1.3.10 In 1968, Saxon spearheads (CHER07093, CHER07094) were discovered at Triangle Farm approximately 0.3km to the north of site. Medieval settlement evidence has also been recorded in the vicinity including a medieval house, ditch and well *c*.0.25km to the north-east of the site (MCB1867).

Post-medieval (c.AD 1540-1700)

1.3.11 Post-medieval remains are a well-documented in the vicinity of the development area, reflecting the changes in land use after the 17th century drainage of the Fens, including the Soham Mere. There are numerous historic buildings standing to the present day, including the windmill *c*.1km to the south (MCB213840). There are also records of post-medieval ditches and pits c.0.5km to the east (MCB21807) and a field system c.0.5km to the north (ECB897).

1.3.12 Much of the impetus for the fen drainage of the 16th and 17th centuries came with changes in land ownership after the Reformation with many large church estates being broken into smaller holdings. Areas like those around Soham had been effectively isolated by the Fens until the Bedford Rivers and the main Denver Sluice were constructed. Following this drainage large areas of the fen were reclaimed and ploughed and agriculture replaced the (in part seasonal) grazing lands the fenland had previously supported. This move away from grazing to arable farming in turn created a greater need for agricultural labour.

1.3.13 Very little specifically post-medieval archaeological work has been undertaken in the area, but pits and ditches have been recorded in the nearby town of Soham.

1.3.14 The 1656 map of Soham and Fordham Manors shows the area to the south-west of Soham as comprising “Sandecroft Fenn”. This fen extends south-west of Soham towards Soham Mere and may have encompassed the development site which lies only a short way beyond the extent of the map.

2 AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

2.1.1 The project aims and objectives defined in the WSI (Moan 2018) were as follows:

i. To establish the presence or absence of archaeological remains within the proposed development area, characterise where they are found (location, depth and extent), and establish the quality of preservation of any archaeology and environmental remains;
ii. To provide sufficient coverage to establish the character, condition, date and purpose of any archaeological deposits;
iii. To provide sufficient coverage to evaluate the likely impact of past land uses, and the possible presence of masking deposits; and
iv. To provide – in the event that archaeological remains are found – sufficient information to construct an archaeological mitigation strategy, dealing with preservation, the recording of archaeological deposits, working practices, timetables, and orders of cost.

2.2 Methodology

2.2.1 In accordance with the WSI, a total of two trenches were excavated (Trench 1 measuring 11m by 1.65m and Trench 2 measuring 12m by 1.65m) to adequately sample the 0.2ha development area.

2.2.2 During machine stripping, the alignment of Trench 1 had to be altered midway along its length due to the presence of a water drain running diagonal across its original path. Both Trenches 1 and 2 were extended from the proposed 10m lengths in order to compensate for the relatively narrow bucket width of the JCB-type excavator, resulting in trench widths lower than the proposed 2m.

2.2.3 Prior to their machine excavation, the footprint of each trench was scanned by a qualified and experienced operator using a CAT with a valid calibration certificate.

2.2.4 Machine excavation was carried out under constant archaeological supervision with a JCB-type mechanical excavator using a 1.65m-wide toothless ditching bucket.

2.2.5 The site survey was carried out using a Leica GPS GS08 with SmartNET.

2.2.6 Spoil, exposed surfaces and features were scanned with a metal detector set not to discriminate against iron. All metal-detected and hand-collected finds were retained for inspection, other than those which were obviously modern.

2.2.7 All archaeological features and deposits were recorded using OA's pro-forma sheets. Trench locations, plans and sections were recorded at appropriate scales and high resolution digital photographs were taken of all relevant features and deposits.

2.2.8 Bucket samples of 90 litres of excavated soil were be taken from each trench, in order to characterise artefactual remains in the topsoil and other soil horizons above the archaeological level.

2.2.9 A 10L bulk environmental sample was taken from the single feature encountered in Trench 1.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Introduction and presentation of results

3.1.1 The results of the evaluation are presented below. The full details of both trenches with dimensions and depths of all deposits can be found in Appendix A. The prehistoric pottery report is presented in Appendix B and the environmental report in Appendix C. Figure 3 provides an overall plan of the results of the evaluation. The section of pit **4** in Trench 1 is presented as Figure 4.

3.2 General soils and ground conditions

3.2.1 The soil sequence in the two trenches was uniform. The natural geology of pale blueish and orange clay (3=10) was overlain by a 0.3-0.4m thick layer of mid orange brown subsoil (2=9), which in turn was overlain by a 0.3-0.4m thickness of topsoil (1=8).

3.2.2 Ground conditions throughout the evaluation were very wet, with the excavated feature in Trench 1 flooding with water soon after excavation. However, water was seeping into the trenches at a slow enough rate for it not to present too much of a challenge. The archaeological feature was easy to identify against the underlying natural geology.

3.3 General distribution of archaeological deposits

3.3.1 Only one archaeological feature was revealed in Trench 1. Trench 2 was devoid of archaeology. No artefacts or ecofacts were recovered from the topsoil or subsoil of either trench through metal detecting or bucket sampling.

3.4 Trench 1

3.4.1 Trench 1 (Fig. 3; Plate 1), containing a possible Neolithic pit, was located nearest to the residential property fronting Mereside. It lay on a north-west to south-east alignment, with a kink midway along its length to avoid a modern drainpipe.

3.4.2 Pit **4** (Fig. 4; Plate 2) was located about 4m from the north-western end of the trench. It was sub-circular in plan with steep sloping sides and a V-shaped base and profile. Cut into the natural layer (3) and overlaid by the subsoil (2), it measured 0.53m in diameter and 0.29m in depth. The pit was filled by three deposits. The primary, basal fill of mid greyish brown silty clay (5) was overlaid by a dark grey silty clay (6), which contained 11g of charcoal and a single sherd (4g) of prehistoric (possibly Neolithic) pottery. The uppermost deposit consisted of a mid grey silty clay (7) with a moderate amount of charcoal scattered throughout.

3.5 Trench 2

3.5.1 Trench 2 (Fig. 3; Plate 3), containing no archaeological features or deposits, was located 10m to the east of Trench 1 on a similar north-north-west to south-south-east alignment. A sondage was machine excavated at the southern end of Trench 2, measuring 2.10m across which extended 0.40m deep into the natural geology to reveal an underlaying darker blue layer of very pure clay natural (11) at depth beneath the site (Fig. 3; Plate 4).

3.6 Finds and Environmental summary

3.6.1 A single fragment of flint-tempered, possibly Neolithic pottery (4g) was recovered from the fill (6) of pit **4**. The bulk sample taken from this deposit produced a moderate quantity (11g) of charcoal.

4 DISCUSSION

4.1 Reliability of field investigation

4.1.1 The mid grey silty clay of the single archaeological feature uncovered in Trench 1 contrasted strongly with the pale blueish and orange natural clay geology. Although water continually seeped into the trench and the feature, it was not sufficient to hinder identification. Therefore, the results of the evaluation trenching are considered to have a good level of reliability.

4.2 Evaluation objectives and results

4.2.1 The evaluation aimed to address the objectives defined in the WSI and listed in Section 2.1. Only a single pit was encountered which contained a small sherd of prehistoric pottery and small quantity of charcoal. The feature is considered to be of low archaeological interest/significance due to the limited information the single pit can provide. No masking deposits were encountered beneath the subsoil in either trench. Other than the pit, there was a lack of any further archaeological remains encountered by the trenches that might be adversely impacted by the site's redevelopment.

4.3 Interpretation

4.3.1 The pit uncovered in Trench 1 is a small addition to the corpus of later prehistoric activity on the eastern margins of Soham Mere (see Section 1.3.4-7).

4.4 Significance

4.4.1 The evaluation has identified there is a low potential for significant archaeological remains present on the site.

4.5 Archiving

4.5.1 The physical archive will be deposited with the CCC Stores in due course once the Transfer of Title is obtained. The digital archive will be uploaded to ADS and a digital copy of the report also made available on the OA Library (https://library.thehumanjourney.net/). Archiving will follow the guidance provided by Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC Guidelines for the deposition of archaeological archives in Cambridgeshire v4, 2019; accessible at https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/libraries-leisureculture/archaeology/archives/depositing-archaeological-archive-in-cambridgeshire).

APPENDIX A TRENCH DESCRIPTIONS AND CONTEXT INVENTORY

Trench 1						
General description					**Orientation**	NW-SE/NNW-SSE
Trench contained one pit. Consists of topsoil and a thick layer of subsoil overlying natural geology of pale blueish and orangey clay.					**Length (m)**	11
					Width (m)	1.65
					Avg. depth (m)	0.70
Context No.	**Type**	**Width (m)**	**Depth (m)**	**Description**	**Finds**	**Date**
1	Layer	-	0.30	Topsoil	-	-
2	Layer	-	0.40	Subsoil	-	-
3	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-
4	Cut	0.53	0.29	Pit	-	? Neolithic
5	Fill	0.37	0.13	Basal fill of pit **4**		
6	Fill	0.46	0.14	Middle fill of pit **4**	Pottery	? Neolithic (4000-2500BC)
7	Fill	0.53	0.13	Upper fill of pit **4**		

Trench 2						
General description					**Orientation**	NNW-SSE
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of topsoil and a thick layer of subsoil overlying natural geology of pale blueish and orangey clay. A sondage at the southern end was excavated into the natural, reaching a darker blue layer of clay natural below.					**Length (m)**	12
					Width (m)	1.65
					Avg. depth (m)	0.65
Context No.	**Type**	**Width (m)**	**Depth (m)**	**Description**	**Finds**	**Date**
8	Layer	-	0.40	Topsoil	-	-
9	Layer	-	0.30	Subsoil	-	-
10	Layer	-	0.25	Natural	-	-
11	Layer	-	-	Darker natural layer	-	-

APPENDIX B FINDS REPORT

B.1 Prehistoric Pottery

By Matt Brudenell

B.1.1 A single small body sherd of flint-tempered prehistoric pottery (4g) was recovered from context 6, pit **4** (Trench 1). The sherd is in coarse burnt flint tempered fabric with poorly sorted inclusions (2-5mm in size). The fabric is not especially diagnostic, but the size and sorting of the inclusions is more typical of Neolithic wares as opposed to those of the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age in Cambridgeshire.

APPENDIX C ENVIRONMENTAL REPORT

C.1 Environmental Remains

By Martha Craven

Introduction

C.1.1 One bulk sample was taken from a feature within the development site in order to assess the quality of preservation of plant remains and their potential to provide useful data as part of further archaeological investigations. The sample was taken from a pit the north-western end of Trench 1 from a deposit that is thought to be prehistoric in date.

Methodology

C.1.2 The sample was soaked in a solution of sodium carbonate for 24hrs prior to processing to break down the heavy clay matrix. The total volume (5L) of the sample was processed by tank flotation using modified Sīraf-type equipment for the recovery of preserved plant remains, dating evidence and any other artefactual evidence that might be present. The floating component (flot) of the sample was collected in a 0.3mm nylon mesh and the residue was washed through 10mm, 5mm, 2mm and a 0.5mm sieve.

C.1.3 The dried flot was scanned using a binocular microscope at magnifications up to x 60 and an abbreviated list of the recorded remains are presented in Table 1.

Quantification

C.1.4 For the purpose of this initial assessment, items such as pottery have been scanned and recorded qualitatively according to the following categories:

= 1-5, ## = 6-25, ### = 26-100, #### = 100+ specimens

Results

C.1.5 Preservation of plant remains is through carbonisation and is poor; the flots contained rootlets which may have caused movement of material between contexts.

C.1.6 The plant remains from Sample 1, fill 6 of pit **4** (Trench 1), consists only of a moderate quantity of charcoal, 11ml, and the sample did not contain any molluscs.

C.1.7 A single fragment of pottery was recovered from Sample 1, which may be suitable for dating.

Sample No.	Context No.	Cut No.	Trench No.	Feature Type	Volume processed (L)	Flot Volume (ml)	Charcoal Volume (ml)	Pottery
1	6	4	1	Pit	5	5	11	#

Table 1: Environmental sample

Discussion

C.1.8 The recovery of a moderate quantity of charcoal from Sample 1 suggests that there is limited potential for the preservation of plant remains at this site. However, it should be noted that it is difficult to speculate on the preservation potential of a site based on a single sample.

APPENDIX D BIBLIOGRAPHY

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APPENDIX E OASIS REPORT FORM

Project Details

OASIS Number	oxfordar3-388230
Project Name	118 Mereside, Soham, Cambridgeshire

Start of Fieldwork	04/03/2020	End of Fieldwork	04/03/2020
Previous Work	No	Future Work	No

Project Reference Codes

Site Code	ECB6188	Planning App. No.	18/0054/FUL
HER Number	ECB6188	Related Numbers	n/a

Prompt	Planning condition - NPPF
Development Type	Residential
Place in Planning Process	After full determination (eg. As a condition)

Techniques used (tick all that apply)

☐ Aerial Photography – interpretation	☐ Grab-sampling	☐ Remote Operated Vehicle Survey
☐ Aerial Photography - new	☐ Gravity-core	☒ Sample Trenches
☐ Annotated Sketch	☐ Laser Scanning	☐ Survey/Recording of Fabric/Structure
☐ Augering	☐ Measured Survey	☐ Targeted Trenches
☐ Dendrochonological Survey	☒ Metal Detectors	☐ Test Pits
☐ Documentary Search	☐ Phosphate Survey	☐ Topographic Survey
☒ Environmental Sampling	☐ Photogrammetric Survey	☐ Vibro-core
☐ Fieldwalking	☐ Photographic Survey	☐ Visual Inspection (Initial Site Visit)
☐ Geophysical Survey	☐ Rectified Photography	

Monument	Period	Object	Period
N/A	Choose an item.	N/A	Choose an item.
	Choose an item.		Choose an item.
	Choose an item.		Choose an item.

Insert more lines as appropriate.

Project Location

County	Cambridgeshire
District	East Cambridgeshire
Parish	Soham
HER office	Cambridgeshire
Size of Study Area	450 sqm
National Grid Ref	TL 58709 73993

Address (including Postcode)

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Soham
Cambridgeshire

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Project Originators

Organisation	Oxford Archaeology East
Project Brief Originator	Leanne Robinson Zeki

Project Design Originator	Pat Moan
Project Manager	Pat Moan
Project Supervisor	Edmund Cole

Project Archives

	Location	ID
Physical Archive (Finds)	CCC Stores	ECB6188
Digital Archive	OA East	SOHMES20
Paper Archive	CCC Stores	ECB6188

Physical Contents	Present?	Digital files associated with Finds	Paperwork associated with Finds
Animal Bones	☐	☐	☐
Ceramics	☒	☐	☐
Environmental	☒	☐	☐
Glass	☐	☐	☐
Human Remains	☐	☐	☐
Industrial	☐	☐	☐
Leather	☐	☐	☐
Metal	☐	☐	☐
Stratigraphic		☐	☐
Survey		☐	☐
Textiles	☐	☐	☐
Wood	☐	☐	☐
Worked Bone	☐	☐	☐
Worked Stone/Lithic	☐	☐	☐
None	☐	☒	☒
Other	☐	☐	☐

Digital Media		Paper Media	
Database	☒	Aerial Photos	☐
GIS	☐	Context Sheets	☒
Geophysics	☐	Correspondence	☐
Images (Digital photos)	☒	Diary	☐
Illustrations (Figures/Plates)	☒	Drawing	☐
Moving Image	☐	Manuscript	☐
Spreadsheets	☐	Map	☐
Survey	☒	Matrices	☐
Text	☒	Microfiche	☐
Virtual Reality	☐	Miscellaneous	☐
		Research/Notes	☐
		Photos (negatives/prints/slides)	☐
		Plans	☒
		Report	☒
		Sections	☒
		Survey	☐

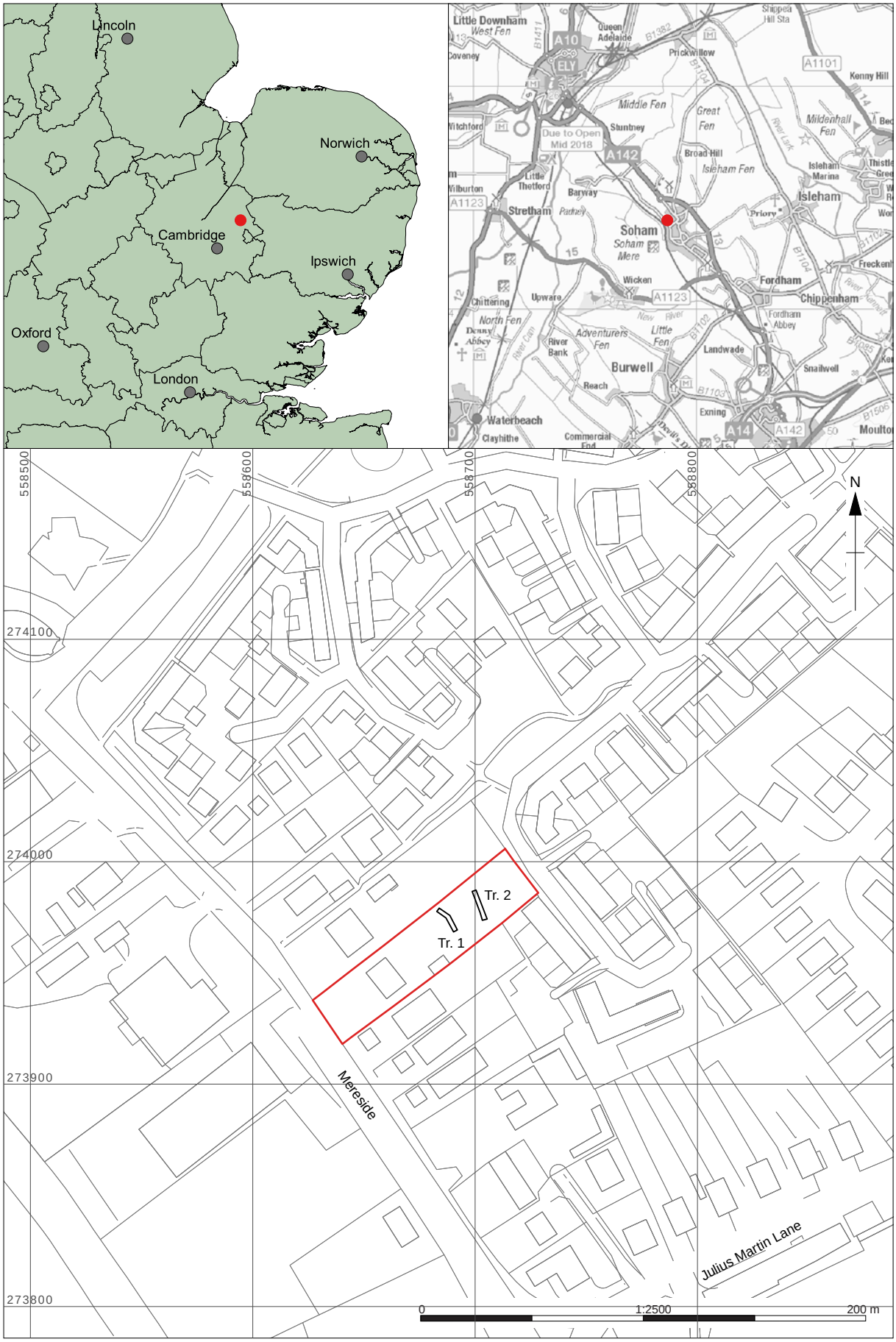

Figure 1: Site location showing archaeological trenches (black) in development area outlined (red)

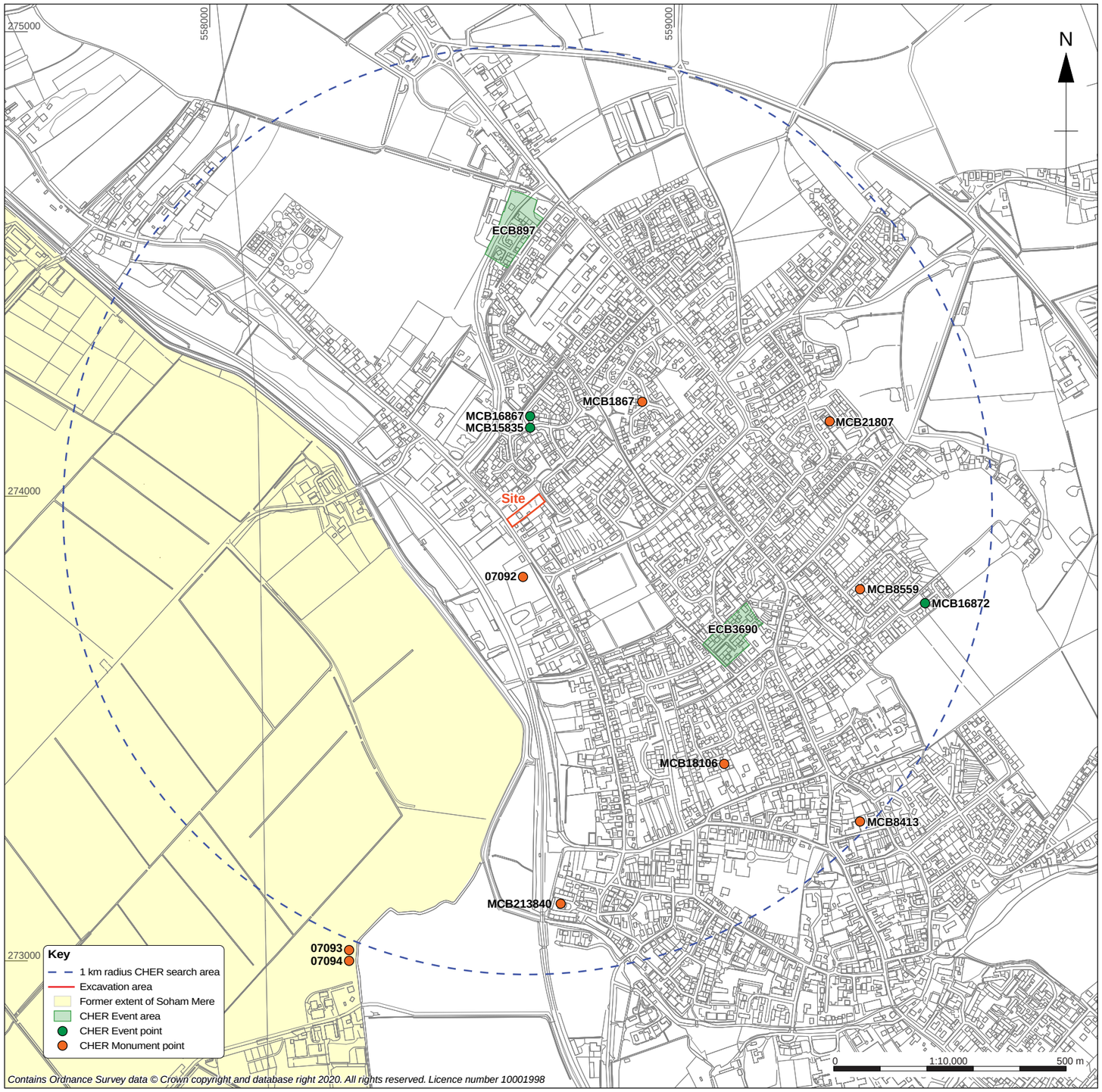

Figure 2: HER data map surrounding the investigated area

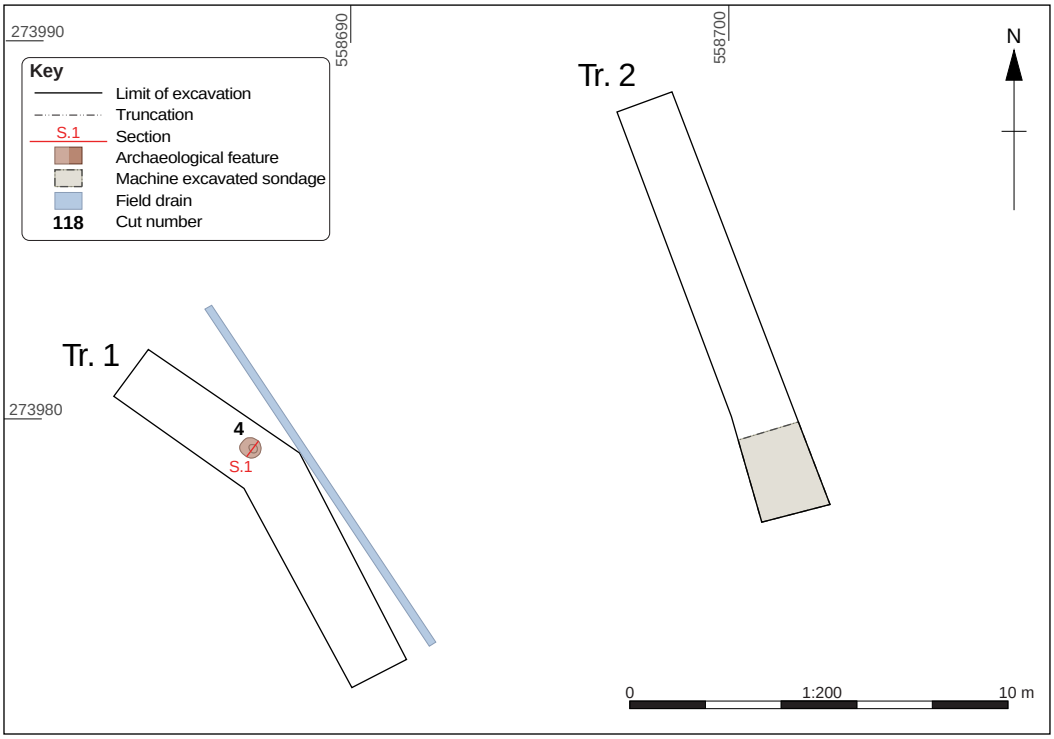

Figure 3: Trench plan

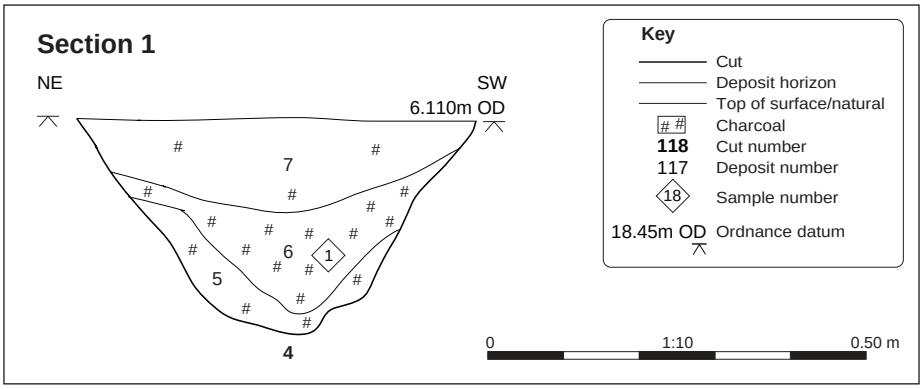

Figure 4: Selected section

Plate 1: Trench 1, looking north-north-west.

Plate 2: Section of pit **4** in Trench 1, looking south-east

Plate 3: Trench 2, looking north-north-west.

Plate 4: Section of sondage in Trench 2, looking east-north-east

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