

# Land at Hill Farm, Fowlmere Road, Foxton Archaeological Evaluation Report

January 2021

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## Land at Hill Farm, Fowlmere Road, Foxton

## **Archaeological Evaluation Report**

Written by Kelly Sinclair

## With contributions from Carlotta Marchetto MA PCIfA and Martha Craven BA PCIfA

## Illustrations by David W Brown BA

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## **Summary**

Between the 15th and 16th December 2020, Oxford Archaeology East carried out a trial trench evaluation at the site of a proposed residential development on land at Hill Farm, Fowlmere Road, Foxton (TL 41625 48028). Three trenches were excavated within the development area which revealed a small concentration of archaeological features in the northern part of the site. Two parallel ditches broadly correspond with features observed in previous evaluation work to the south of the site which uncovered Iron Age ditches considered to be part of an agricultural hinterland. A large natural solution hollow was also uncovered in the northern part of the site, as well as two undated gullies and a posthole.



## **Acknowledgements**

Oxford Archaeology East would like to thank M M Developers for commissioning and funding this project. Thanks are also extended to Leanne Robinson-Zeki who monitored the work on behalf of Cambridgeshire County Council.

The project was managed for Oxford Archaeology by Patrick Moan. The fieldwork was directed by Kelly Sinclair Survey. Survey was carried out by Valerio Pinna and the illustrations were produced by Dave W Brown. Thanks are also extended to the teams of OA staff that cleaned and packaged the finds under the supervision of Natasha Dodwell, processed the environmental remains under the supervision of Rachel Fosberry and prepared the archive under the supervision of Katherine Hamilton. Thanks are also extended to the specialists for their contributions.



#### 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Scope of work

- 1.1.1 Oxford Archaeology East (OA East) was commissioned by M M Developers to undertake a trial trench evaluation at the site of a proposed new residential development on land at Hill Farm, Fowlmere Road, Foxton (Fig. 1; TL 41625 48028).
- 1.1.2 The work was undertaken as a condition of Planning Permission (planning ref. S/1763/16/OL). A Brief (Stewart 2019) was set by Cambridgeshire Historic Environment Team (CHET) and a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) was produced by OA East (Moan 2019) detailing the Local Authority's requirements for work necessary to inform the planning process. The decision on the need for any further work/mitigation will be made by CHET following the results of the evaluation. This document outlines how OA implemented the specified requirements.

## 1.2 Location, topography and geology

- 1.2.1 The site lies on level ground (25m OD) on the south-eastern edge of the village and comprises of part of Hill Farm (Fig. 1). It is bounded on its eastern side by Fowlmere Road, to the north by a residential property, to the west by the remainder of Hill Farm and to the south by residential properties.
- 1.2.2 The proposed development area consists of a disused farmyard and demolished farm buildings. The topsoil and uppermost ground surface of the site had been stripped prior to the evaluation due to asbestos clearance.
- 1.2.3 The geology of the area is mapped as Zig Zag Chalk (British Geological Survey 2014, (BGS map viewer http://mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain/home.html; accessed 4th January 2021).

#### 1.3 Archaeological and historical background

1.3.1 Foxton and its surrounding landscape contain a wealth of archaeological remains (Fig. 2). A full search of the Cambridgeshire Historic Environment Record (CHER) was commissioned from CHET under licence number 19-3928. The following section provides a brief period summary of known heritage assets within 1km of the site.

#### Bronze Age

1.3.2 The findspot of a Bronze Age palstave (CHER 03990, not illustrated) is recorded around 0.8km west of the site. Geophysical survey (ECB2826) undertaken at West Hill, around 0.9km south-west of the site, identified a probable Bronze Age ring ditch (MCB 17776). Further cropmarks of ring ditches (CB15638, not illustrated) and a trackway (CHER 08623) have been recorded to the immediate north of this. A possible Bronze Age barrow (CHER 08634) has also been recorded c.0.7m north of the current site.

#### Iron Age and Roman

1.3.3 Aerial photography at Herod's Farm, c.0.8m to the south of the current site, identified a complex series of cropmarks (CHER 08624 & 08776). Ensuing archaeological works



(ECB2296 & ECB755) revealed extensive remains dating from the 2nd century BC through to the 1st century AD (CHER 07870) forming a rural farming settlement with ditched enclosures, multiple trackways and large finds assemblages. This expansive settlement has not been excavated in its entirety; the remainder is now a Scheduled Monument (DCB175/1004670).

- 1.3.4 Further Iron Age remains have been identified off Foxton High Street (MCB15792), c.0.5km to the north-west of the current site. An evaluation (ECB1483) revealed Late Iron Age pits, one of which contained a Gallo-Belgic vessel with cremated human remains.
- 1.3.5 Cropmarks of believed Iron Age and Roman settlement including enclosures, boundary ditches and trackways (CHER 04042, not illustrated) have been recorded by aerial photographs 1km to the north of the site. Just to the east of this are further cropmarks of an enclosure and ring ditch (CHER 04227) and around 0.5km north-east of the site are cropmarks (MCB24411) believed to relate to Iron Age and Roman remains.
- 1.3.6 The Caxton Lane Roman villa (CHER 04006, not illustrated) is situated just 0.6km west of the current site. Large quantities of Early Roman pottery, animal bone and oyster shell, along with floor file, bricks and wall plaster have been identified at this location (CHER 04007, not illustrated). Findspots of Roman coins have also been recorded on land 200m south of the site (CHER 11563) and 0.7m to the west (CHER 10269).

#### Anglo Saxon

1.3.7 In 1935, a burial (CHER 03996, not illustrated) was uncovered at a gravel pit, around 0.8km north-west of the current site. The skeleton was buried with an Anglo-Saxon knife and may be part of the cemetery located just to the north. A further four Anglo-Saxon burials (CHER 04027, not illustrated) have been recorded just 170m to the northeast of the site, however this record dates back to 1921 and is believed to have the wrong grid reference, so this location should be viewed as tentative.

#### Medieval

- 1.3.8 The historic core of Foxton is situated around 0.7km to the north-west of the current site with Saint Laurence's Church (CB14810, not illustrated) at the heart of it which originates in the 13th century.
- 1.3.9 Geophysical survey (ECB2704) head of a development in Foxton itself has identified medieval housing platforms, a hollow way and trackways (CHER 09822). Further archaeological works (ECB1483) off the High Street revealed land division ditches and gravel quarrying (MCB15793).
- 1.3.10 Cropmarks relating to an east-west aligned double ditch/trackway (CHER 08985) has been recorded around 250m to the south-west of the current site. The medieval date for this record is only tentative.
- 1.3.11 Offa's Brook runs through the landscape to the east of the site. A brass pyx (CHER 04090) has been recovered from the brook during dredging and probably dates from the 14th or 15th century.



1.3.12 A moated site (CHER 01255, not illustrated) belonging to Mortimer's Manor is recorded around 0.5m north of the site. The moat itself has been partially infilled and covered with farm buildings. Archaeological works in this location (ECB2737) have identified extensive medieval and post-medieval remains (MCB17771) dating from the 11th century onwards.

#### Undated

1.3.13 A substantial trackway (MCB20947) orientated north-east to south-west is recorded leading from Offa's Brook past the south-eastern side of Foxton and on towards the Rushmoor Plantation. The trackway is up to 20m wide in places and has been traced for over 2.5km. A large number of undated cropmarks have been recorded in the landscape around Foxton and include CHER 08635, 08640 (not illustrated), 08641, 08642, 08643, 08755 and MCB20942.

#### Evaluation on land adjacent to Hill Farm

1.3.14 A trial trench evaluation (ECB4397) has previously been undertaken on land immediately south-east of the current site, which identified archaeological remains (MCB20475). The majority of features were undated ditches on varying alignments. However, V-shaped parallel ditches which corresponded with a cropmark of a trackway (MCB20947) were found to contain Mid to Late Iron Age pottery. Another perpendicular V-shaped ditch produced Early Roman pottery. This latter ditch truncated a hollow way which produced Late Iron Age pottery along with Mesolithic/Neolithic struck flint.



#### 2 AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

#### 2.1 Aims

- 2.1.1 The project aims and objectives defined in the WSI (Moan 2019) were as follows:
  - To establish the presence or absence of archaeological remains on the site, characterise where they were 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 were 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 Three trenches, totalling 40m in length (one measuring 20m x 1.8m and two measuring 10m x 1.8m) were excavated. Site conditions were good throughout (Plate 1).
- 2.2.2 Trial trenches were opened by wheeled JCB-type excavator to the depth of the geological horizon, or to the upper interface of archaeological deposits. A toothless ditching bucket with a width of 1.8m was used to excavate trenches with spoil stored alongside. A sondage was dug into the western end of Trench 1 to determine the character of a possible solution hollow (a periglacial landform locally known as a pingo). Natural ground was encountered at a depth of 1.7m prior to its immediate backfilling.
- 2.2.3 Surveying was carried out using a survey-grade GPS Leica GS08 fitted with "smart-net" technology with an accuracy of 5mm horizontal and 10mm vertical.
- 2.2.4 The top of the first archaeological deposits were cleared by machine, then cleaned off by hand. Exposed surfaces were cleaned by trowel and hoe as necessary, in order to clarify located features and deposits. All archaeological features encountered were excavated and recorded to adequately characterize the remains on site, as well as all relationships between features or deposits. All excavation of features was done by hand. Investigation slots through all linear features were at least 1m in width.
- 2.2.5 Records comprise survey, drawn, written and photographic data. A register of all trenches, features, photographs, survey levels and small finds were kept. All features were individually documented on context sheets and hand drawn in sections. Written descriptions were recorded on pro forma sheets comprising factual data and interpretive elements. Sections were drawn at appropriate scales and tied into Ordinance Datum and digital photographs were taken of all relevant features and deposits.



- 2.2.6 Spoil, exposed surfaces and features were scanned with a metal detector. All metal detected and hand-collected finds were retained for inspection, other than those which were obviously modern.
- 2.2.7 Bucket samples of 20 litres (for the 10m long trenches) and 40 litres (from the 20m long trench) of excavated soil were to be taken from each trench, in order to characterise artefactual remains in the topsoil and other soil horizons above the archaeological level. Each sample was to be hand-sorted in order to retrieve artefacts.



#### 3 RESULTS

#### 3.1 Introduction and presentation of results

3.1.1 The results of the evaluation are presented below and include a stratigraphic description of the trenches that contained archaeological remains. The full details of all trenches with dimensions and depths of all deposits can be found in Appendix A supplemented by artefact and environmental reports, included as Appendices B and C. Figure 3 provides a plan of the results with a section of ditch 106.

## 3.2 General soils and ground conditions

- 3.2.1 The soil sequence in the trenches was fairly uniform. The natural chalk geology was overlain by mid grey clayey silt subsoil. The farmyard's ground surface and topsoil had been previously stripped prior to the evaluation to a depth of c.0.3m due to asbestos clearance.
- 3.2.2 Ground conditions throughout the evaluation were generally good, and the site remained dry throughout. Archaeological features, where present, were easy to identify against the underlying natural geology.

#### 3.3 General distribution of archaeological deposits

3.3.1 Archaeological features were only present in Trench 1 which comprised two ditches, two gullies and a probable natural solution hollow (pingo) in the chalk (Fig. 3). Trench 2 revealed some disturbance from modern water pipes and cables relating to the demolished farm buildings.

## 3.4 Trench 1

- 3.4.1 Trench 1 (Plate 2) was located in the northern part of site on a north-west to south-east alignment. Extending for 3m into the western end of the trench lay the eastern extent of a possible solution hollow in the natural chalk (104, Plate 3). A sondage was excavated by machine into this feature to determine its depth. The natural chalk was encountered at approximately 1.7m deep.
- 3.4.2 To the east of the solution hollow, a single post hole (112) was revealed against the northern baulk which measured 0.24m wide and 0.05m deep with a single light grey clayey silt fill (113). To the east of the posthole lay two opposing gully terminals on broadly north-south alignments (108 and 110). Gully 110 measured 0.29m wide by 0.07m deep with a single light grey clayey silt fill (111). Less than 1m to the west, gully 108 measured 0.54m wide by 0.13m deep and contained a single fill of light grey clayey silt (109).
- 3.4.3 Two parallel ditches on a broadly north-south alignment were located towards the eastern end of the trench. Ditch **106** (Plate 4) measured 1.16m wide by 0.14m deep and contained a mid grey clayey silt (107) which produced land molluscs (snails) and a single untransformed duckweed seed from its bulk sample (Appendix C.1.6-7). This fill also yielded a sherd of pottery in a shell and grog tempered fabric which can be broadly dated to the Middle to Late Iron Age (Appendix B.1.1). Ditch **102** was 1.12m wide by 0.07m deep and contained a single fill of mid grey clayey silt (103).



## 3.5 Finds summary

3.5.1 Only one sherd (3g) of probable Mid to Late Iron Age pottery was recovered from the fill of ditch **106**.



#### 4 DISCUSSION

## 4.1 Reliability of field investigation

4.1.1 Site conditions were good, and features could be clearly observed in the natural chalk across the site. Although the farmyard's ground surface and any topsoil had been removed prior to the evaluation, the subsoil below ranged between 0.6m and 0.71m in depth and has therefore probably aided the preservation any archaeological remains. Consequently, the results of the investigation are thought to have a good level of reliability.

## 4.2 Evaluation objectives and results

- 4.2.1 The project's aims and objectives are set out above in Section 2.1.1.
- 4.2.2 The objectives of the evaluation have been achieved to the extent that the presence of archaeological remains has been established at this site. The trenching located a small concentration of features in the northern part of the site. There were no masking deposits encountered beneath the subsoil observed within the trenches. The absence of any charcoal and the recovery of only a single untransformed seed indicates that there is limited potential for the preservation of plant remains at this site.

#### 4.3 Interpretation

- 4.3.1 The two ditches in Trench 1 may be related to those observed in the evaluation undertaken immediately south of the site (Fig. 2, ECB4397; Bull 2015) as they lay on similar alignments. The single sherd of pot found in ditch 106 could only be broadly dated to the Middle to Late Iron Age and does not provide reliable dating evidence, however, it would tally with the pottery recovered in the neighbouring evaluation to the south. The two gullies were very shallow and along with the posthole did not produce any dating evidence to place these features within a wider context.
- 4.3.2 Natural feature **104** is probably a solution hollow, which commonly occur in the chalk geology of the area. Previous borehole works on this site demonstrate that this solution hollow extends west of Trench 3 (Fig. 3, borehole WS3) with superficial deposits recorded to a depth of 1.95m (Judson 2019).

#### 4.4 Significance

4.4.1 Features have been encountered in the northern part of this site which may represent peripheral settlement activity only tentatively dated to the Mid to Late Iron Age due to the paucity of finds. This site therefore complements previous evaluation work to the south of the site which uncovered evidence for the presence of Iron Age field boundaries.



# TRENCH DESCRIPTIONS AND CONTEXT INVENTORY

Trench 1						
General o	descriptio	n	Orientation	NW-SE		
Trench co	ntained t	wo ditch	es, two g	ullies, a possible post hole and	Length (m)	30
a large pi	ngo/solut	ion hollo	w.		Width (m)	1.8
					Avg. depth (m)	0.65
Context	Type	Width	Depth	Description	Finds	Date
No.		(m)	(m)			
100	Layer	-	0.65	Subsoil	-	-
101	Layer	-	0.15	Natural	-	-
102	Cut	1.12	0.07	Ditch	-	-
103	Fill	-	0.07	Fill of ditch	-	-
104	Cut	2.5	1.7	Pingo/solution hollow	-	-
105	Fill	-	1.7	Fill of pingo/solution hollow	-	-
106	Cut	1.16	0.14	Ditch	-	-
107	Fill	-	0.14	Fill of ditch	-	-
108	Cut	0.54	0.13	Gully terminus	-	-
109	Fill	-	0.13	Fill of gully	-	-
110	Cut	0.29	0.07	Gully terminus	-	-
111	Fill	-	0.07	Fill of gully	-	-
112	Cut	0.37	0.05	Posthole	-	-
113	Fill	-	0.05	Fill of posthole	-	-

Trench 2							
General o	descriptio	n			Orientation	NNW-SSE	
Trench de	evoid of ar	chaeolog	y. Consis	ts of subsoil overlying natural	Length (m) 10		
geology c	of chalk.			Width (m) 1.8			
					Avg. depth (m)	0.65	
Context	Type	Width	Depth	Description	Finds	Date	
No.		(m)	(m)				
200	Layer	-	0.65	Subsoil	-	-	
201	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-	

Trench 3							
General o	description	n			Orientation NE-S\		
Trench de	Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of subsoil overlying natural					10	
geology o	geology of chalk.				Width (m) 1.8		
					Avg. depth (m)	0.6	
Context	Туре	Width	Depth	Description	Finds	Date	
No.		(m)	(m)				
300	Layer	-	0.6	Subsoil	-	-	
301	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-	



#### APPENDIX A FINDS REPORTS

## A.1 Pottery

By Carlotta Marchetto MC PCIfA

A.1.1 A small sherd (3g) of handmade prehistoric pottery was recovered from ditch **106**, context 107, Trench 1. The sherd is in a shell and grog tempered fabric and has a possible scored/combed line decoration on the exterior. The external surface seems to be burnt. The sherd cannot be closely dated, but the character of the fabric and the decoration originated in the Middle Iron Age and continued into the Late 'Belgic' Iron Age (date range of between c.350BC-AD50).



#### APPENDIX B ENVIRONMENTAL REPORTS

#### **B.1** Environmental Samples

#### By Martha Craven BA

#### Introduction

B.1.1 Two bulk samples were taken from features within the evaluated area of the site. These samples were taken in order to assess the quality of preservation of plant remains and their potential to provide useful data as part of further archaeological investigations. Samples were taken from natural hollow/pit 104 and ditch 106 encountered within Trench 1, from deposits of unknown date.

#### Methodology

- B.1.2 The total volume (up to 16L) of each of the samples 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 samples was collected in a 0.3mm nylon mesh and the residue was washed through 10mm, 5mm, 2mm and a 0.5mm sieve.
- B.1.3 The dried flots were scanned using a binocular microscope at magnifications up to x 60 and an abbreviated list of the recorded remains are presented in Table 1. Identification of plant remains is with reference to the Digital Seed Atlas of the Netherlands (Cappers *et al.* 2006) and OAE's reference collection. Nomenclature is according to Zohary and Hopf (2000) for cereals and Stace (2010) for other plants. Plant remains have been identified to species where possible. The identification of cereals has been based on the characteristic morphology of the grains and chaff as described by Jacomet (2006).

#### Quantification

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

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

B.1.5 Items that cannot be easily quantified such as molluscs have been scored for abundance

```
+ = occasional, ++ = moderate, +++ = frequent, ++++ = abundant
```

Key to table: U=untransformed

#### Results

- B.1.6 Preservation of plant remains on this site is extremely sparse. Sample 2, fill 107 of natural hollow/pit **104** (Trench 1) contains a single untransformed duckweed (*Lemna* sp.) seed. The samples do not contain any charcoal.
- B.1.7 The samples contain frequent relatively well-preserved molluscs.



Sample No.	Context No.	Cut No.	Trench No	Feature Type	Volume Processed (L)	Flot Volume (ml)	Wetland/Acqu atic plants	Molluscs
1	105	104	1	Natural hollow/ Pit	16	10	#U	+++
2	107	106	1	Ditch	16	10	0	++

Table 1: Environmental samples

#### Discussion

- B.1.8 The absence of any charcoal and the recovery of only a single untransformed seed indicates that there is limited potential for the preservation of plant remains at this site.
- B.1.1 Unfortunately, due to the scarcity of plant remains little can be inferred regarding the plant use at this site. The presence of duckweed in Sample 2 could suggest that pit **104** may have once held water however duckweed was only recovered as a single specimen, so this suggestion is tentative.
- B.1.2 If further excavation is planned for this area, it is recommended that environmental sampling is carried out in accordance with Historic England guidelines (2011).



#### APPENDIX A BIBLIOGRAPHY

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#### Version 1 **OASIS REPORT FORM APPENDIX B Project Details** oxfordar3-412827 **OASIS Number** Land at Hill Farm, Fowlmere Road, Foxton Project Name Start of Fieldwork 15/12/2020 End of Fieldwork 16/12/2020 **Previous Work Future Work** no **Project Reference Codes** Site Code FOXFOW19 S/1763/16/OL Planning App. No. ECB5910 **HER Number Related Numbers** Prompt **NPPF Development Type** Residential Place in Planning Process After outline determination (eg. A a reserved matter)

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

Monument	Period	Object	Period
Ditch	Uncertain	Pot	Iron Age ( - 800 to 43)
Posthole	Uncertain		Choose an item.
Pit	Uncertain		Choose an item.

Insert more lines as appropriate.

#### **Project Location**

County	Cambridgeshire	 Address (includir
District	South Cambridgeshire	Hill Farm
Parish	Foxton	Fowlmere Road
HER office	Cambridgeshire HER	Foxton
Size of Study Area	0.13ha	
National Grid Ref	TL 41625 48028	

#### ing Postcode)

#### **Project Originators**

Organisation Project Brief Originator Project Design Originator Project Manager

Oxford Archaeology East
Leanne Robinson - Zeki
Pat Moan
Pat Moan



Project Supervisor	Kelly Sinclair

## **Project Archives**

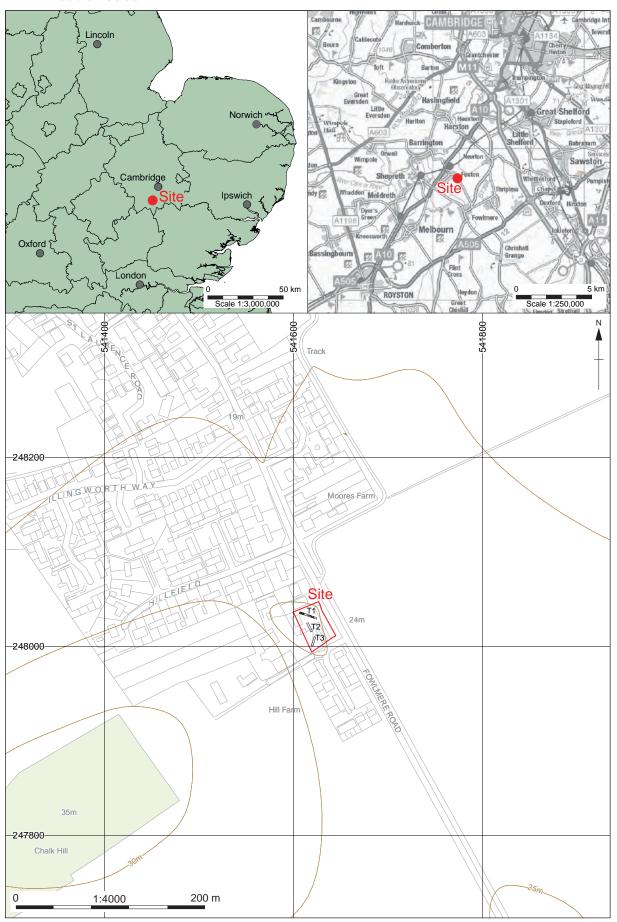
Physical Archive (Finds) Digital Archive Paper Archive

Location	ID
CCC Stores	ECB5910
Oa East	ECB5910
CCC Stores	ECB5910

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

#### **Further Comments**

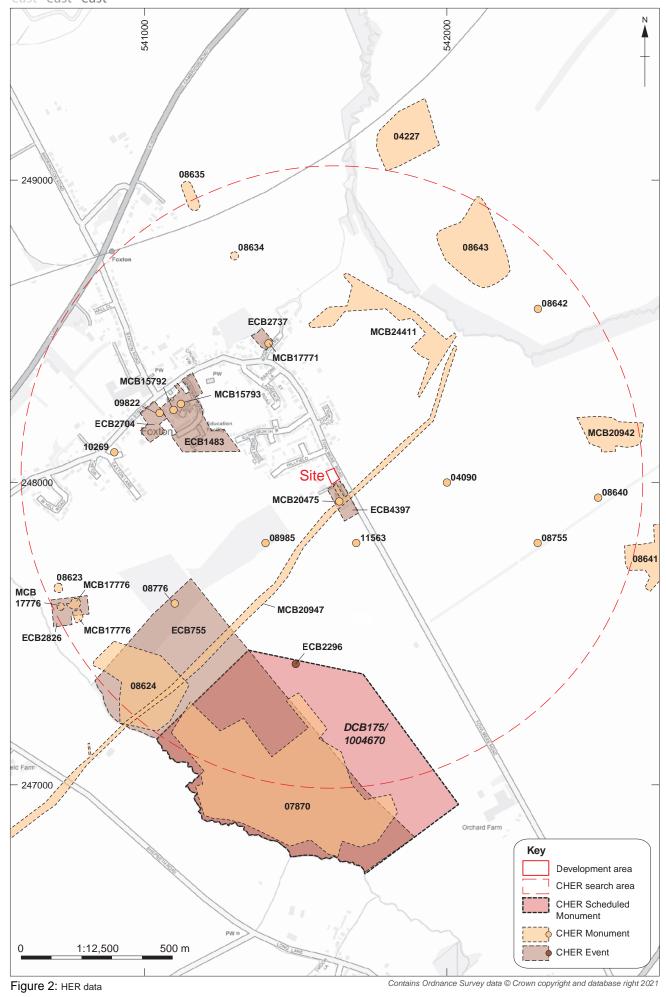




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Figure 1: Site location





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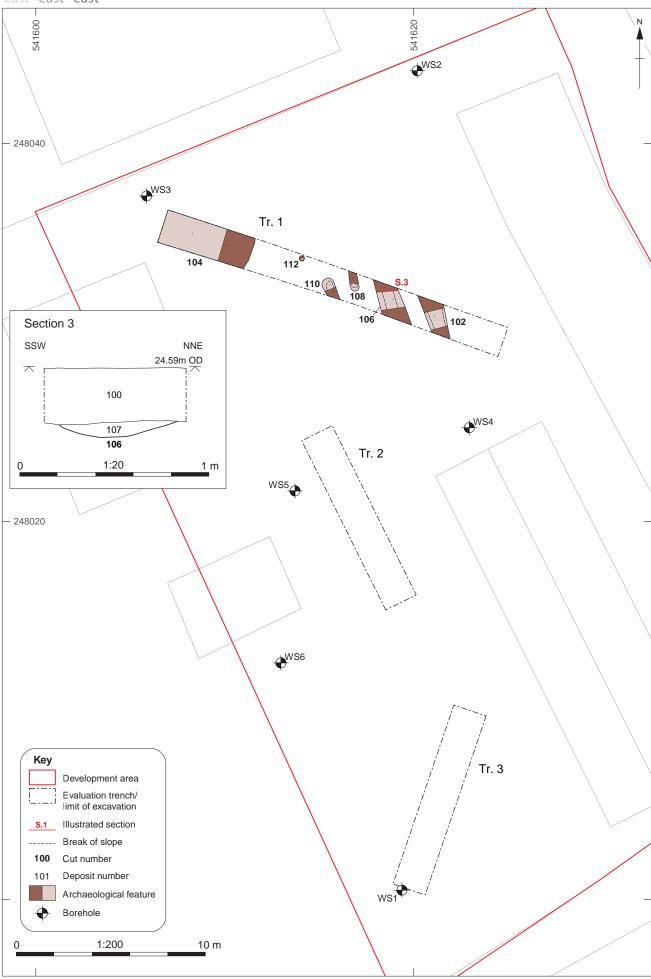


Figure 3: Trench plan with section

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Plate 1: Trench 3, from the north-east



Plate 2: Trench 1, from the south-east





Plate 3: Trench 1, Natural Pingo 104, from the north-east



Plate 4: Trench 1, Ditch 106 from the south-west





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