

Archaeological Field Unit

**Land Adjacent to The Willows, Church Road,
Wisbech St. Mary:
Archaeological Evaluation by Trial Trenching**

Steve Hickling

February 2005

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Cambridgeshire County Council

Report No. 785

Commissioned by *David Broker Design Services on behalf Mr. A. N. White*



Cambridgeshire
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SUMMARY

On the 8th of February 2005, the Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Field Unit was called on to carry out an archaeological evaluation by trial trenching in advance of a small residential development at Church Street, Wisbech St. Mary.

Two post-medieval features were encountered. A possible roadside ditch and a pit towards the rear of the site. Also encountered was a peaty layer at a depth below present ground level of 1.5m. This is probably a similar deposit to that encountered elsewhere in this area and dated to the mid to late Iron Age.

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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 S.14
Top of Natural	Deposit
Top Surface	Excavated Slot
Break in Section	Palaeochannel?
Cut Number	Modern
Deposit Number 117	Cut Number 118
Ordnance Datum $\frac{18.45m}{\times}$ ODN	

Land Adjacent to The Willows, Church Road, Wisbech St. Mary: Archaeological Evaluation by Trial Trenching

TF 4225 0823

1 INTRODUCTION

On February 8th 2005, the Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Field Unit (CCC AFU) conducted an archaeological evaluation by trial trenching at land to the south west of The Willows, Church Road, Wisbech St. Mary. The work was carried out on behalf of David Broker Design Services acting for Mr. A. N. White in order to fulfil a Brief for Archaeological Investigation issued by Kasia Gdaniec, Development Control Archaeologist, Cambridgeshire Archaeology, Planning and Countryside Advice.

The site lies on the edge of the medieval core of the village, 275m east of the church of St. Mary. The proposed development (planning application F/YR04/03546/F) includes the construction of four terraced houses. Trenching totalling 25m was investigated, giving a 5% sample of the area.

2 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

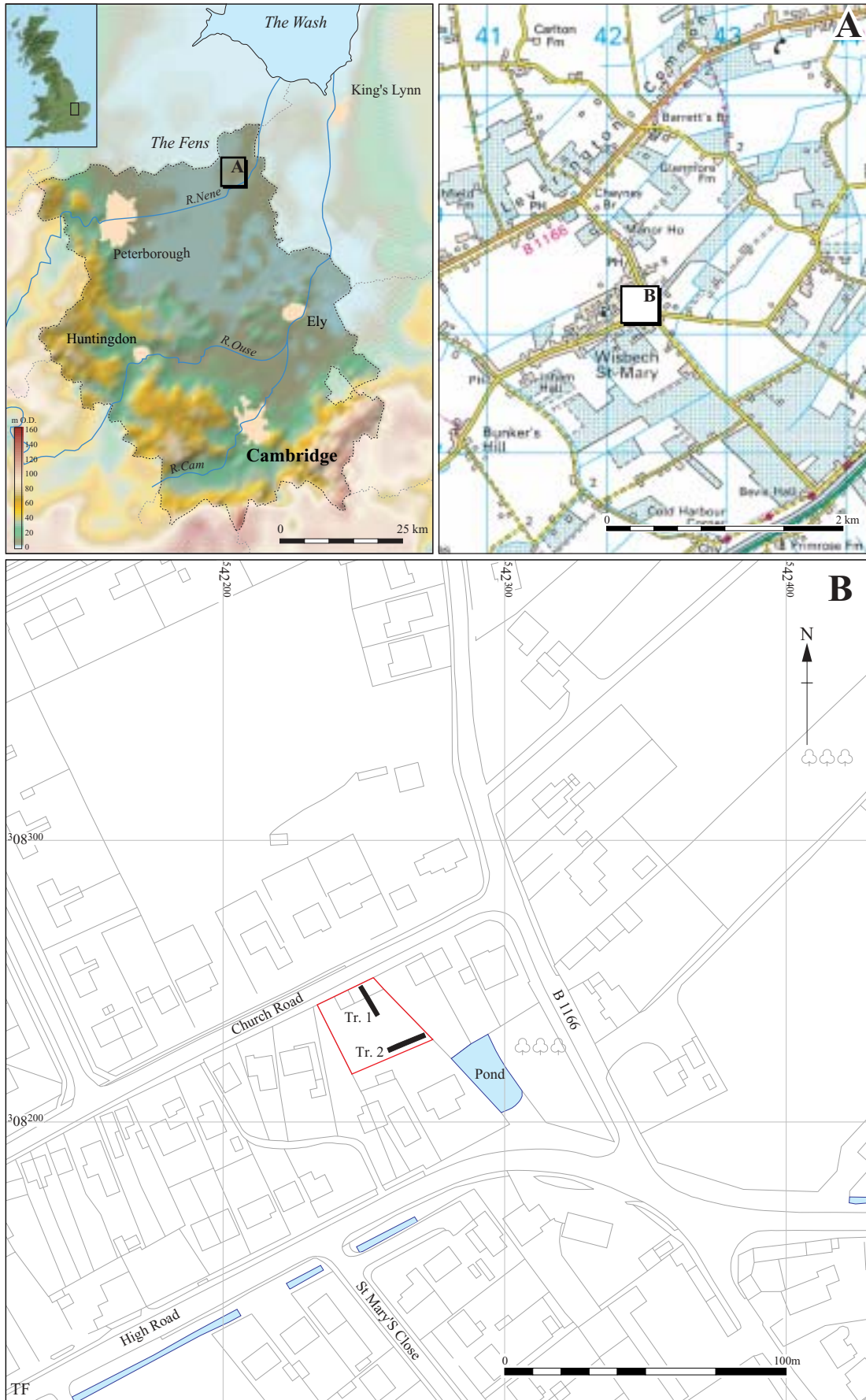
The site is located on the silty clay and sandy silt Terrington Beds, younger salt marsh and tidal creek deposits. The older Barroway Drove Beds lay 1km to the west (British Geological Survey, sheets 158 and 159, 1:50000). There was a considerable roddon system present in the Barroway Drove Beds, once draining into the newer Terrington Beds and ultimately the inlet of the Wash extending northwards from Wisbech, which was present in the Roman and medieval periods.

The village is largely located on the silt deposits of a large roddon, supposedly the course of the united Ouse and Nene rivers (Gdaniec 2005).

The topography of the area is flat, at a height of 2-2.5m O.D.

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

There was a considerable amount of Roman activity, especially to the west, concentrated around the roddons. This evidence is mainly finds spots and crop



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Figure 1 Location of trenches with the development area outlined (red)

marks/aerial photographs (for example HER 01999, 03813, 03944 and 10931), suggesting agriculture and settlement. Salt making activity is also evident in that area (SMR 07917). Roman activity is also suggested to the north east of the village (SMR 04065 and 10930) and south of the village (SMR 03903, 03902 and 09688), perhaps indicating that the newer salt marsh deposits in this area were being drained and exploited in the Roman period. A Roman coin has been found in the village itself (SMR 03843).

The pattern of medieval finds spots is the same as the Roman distribution pattern, perhaps suggesting that the drier land of the roddons was exploited in this period (for example HER 0381a, 03872 and 03815a on the roddon to the west of the village). Also present on the same roddon is a medieval moated site (SMR 07918)

4km to the west of the village lies the hamlet of Murrow, known to be a medieval settlement from documentary evidence, site investigation and surface finds in the surrounding fields (e.g. HER CB4722 and CB526). An evaluation here in 2004 recorded substantial medieval boundary ditches (Fletcher 2004).

Excavations at Parson Drove, 4-5km north west of Wisbech St. Mary, recorded Roman settlement and salt making, with medieval activity from the 12th century onwards. In the late medieval period there was a shift away from the Roman style settlement pattern as open fields were established, associated with the shift in agricultural practice from pastoral to arable (Wessex Archaeology 2003).

The present parish church of St. Mary was built on the site of an earlier chapel of Kilhus. Parts of its 14th century construction are still visible, while the chancel was rebuilt in the 15th century (Roberts 2005).

Post medieval remains are mainly wind pump sites, raising water from the draining of the fen in to the channel of the River Nene (SMR 05589 and 03863).

4 METHODOLOGY

Two trial trenches were opened, 1.6m wide and 12.5m and 14m long. The trenches were excavated under archaeological supervision, using the backhoe of a JCB wheeled excavator fitted with a toothless ditching bucket. The topsoil and subsoils were stripped off to the level of the archaeological horizons.

The exposed surfaces were cleaned in order to clarify any features or deposits. All exposed features and deposits were excavated and recorded according to AFU standards and practises.

5 RESULTS

5.1 Trench 1

This trench was 12.5m long and aligned north to south. It was excavated to a depth of 1.4m, revealing a build up of silt layers (layers 1,2 and 3) and a narrow layer of peaty silt (layer 4), possibly related to a similar layer/peat formation episode located in a couple of archaeological evaluations on the northern edge of March (Kenny 2003, Hickling 2003).

The only archaeological feature discovered was an irregular channel (feature **19**), aligned east to west, cut through all the layers of built up silt. This was dated by finds to the seventeenth century.



Plate 1 Trench 1 viewed from the south

5.2 Trench 2

This trench was 14m long and aligned east to west. It was excavated to a depth of 1.4m, with a small sondage at the eastern end to a depth of 1.7m. The stratigraphy was similar to that in trench 1, with layers of silt and a narrow layer of peaty silt (layer 15) present in a sondage at a depth of 1.5m.

Only one definite feature was encountered (pit **9**), a large rectangular pit 2m long and 0.5m wide. The depth was not ascertained. Its fill was mixed grey and cream silts. Finds dating to the late 18th or early 19th century were recovered.

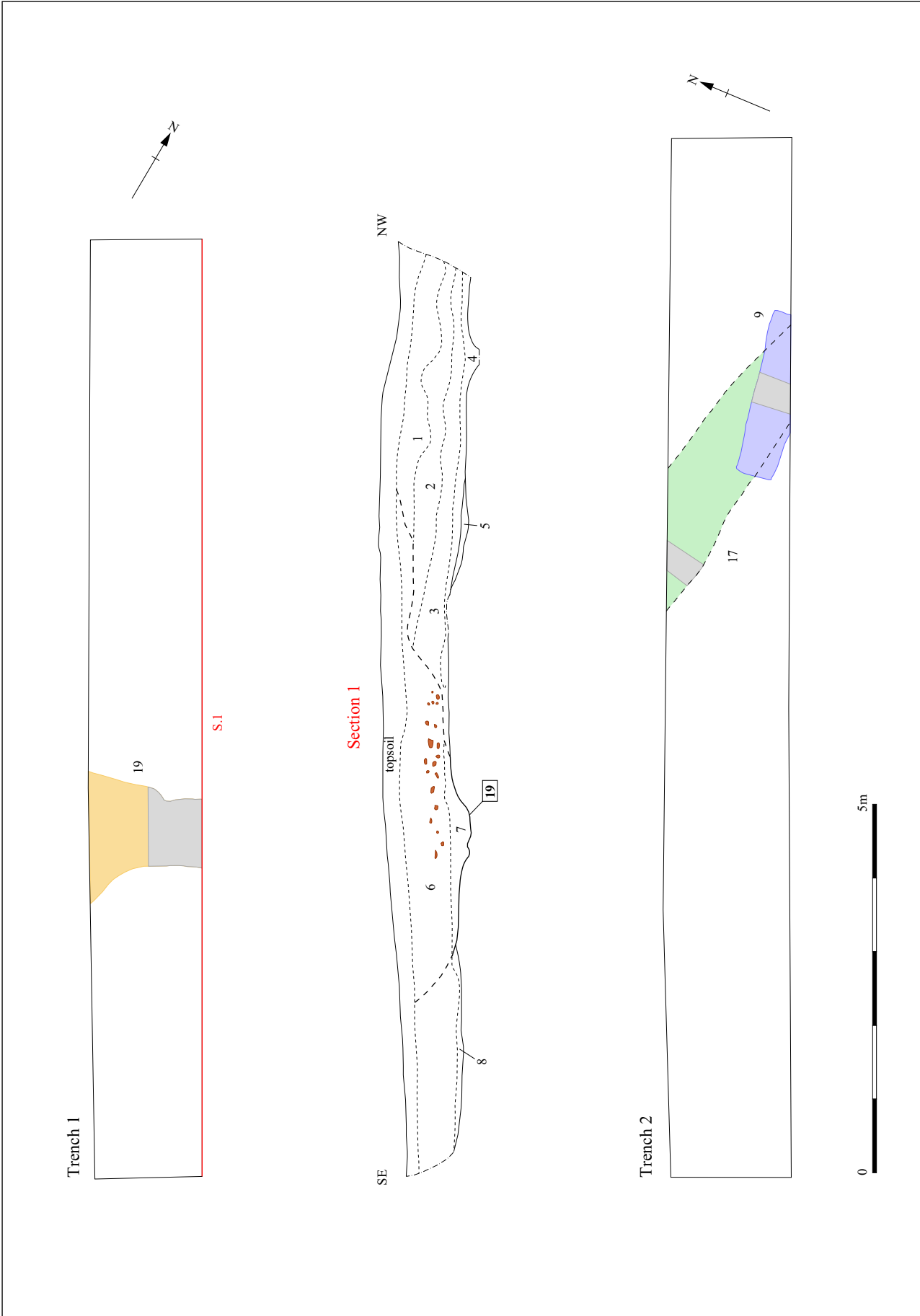


Figure 2 Trench plans and section 1

A possible channel was also noticed (feature 17) aligned south-east to north-west. This feature, however, was not clearly defined and may be natural. It was undated.



Plate 2 Trench 2 viewed from the west

6 DISCUSSION

The layer of peaty material discovered at a depth of 1.5m below present ground surface is potentially interesting. A very similar layer was observed at Wisbech in 1982 (Hall 1996), laying at a depth of 1.5m below present ground surface and was dated to 2130 +/- 50 BP. This layer was found at a depth of 1.2m at other parts of Wisbech St. Mary (Hall 1996, p.165) and probably covers the whole area, representing a phase of fresh water inundation and marsh formation.

The other features present are dated as firmly post medieval and probably represent expansion of the village in this period.

7 CONCLUSIONS

Two post-medieval features were encountered, one, ditch **19**, possibly a roadside ditch and pit **9**. Also encountered was a peaty layer at a depth below

present ground level of 1.5m. This is probably a similar deposit to that encountered elsewhere in this area and dated to the mid to late Iron Age.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank David Broker Design Services, acting on behalf of Mr. A. N. White, who commissioned and funded the archaeological work. The project was managed by Judith Roberts. Dennis Payne assisted with the fieldwork. Crane Begg provided the illustrations and Carole Fletcher commented on the finds.

The brief for archaeological works was written by Kasia Gdaniec, Cambridgeshire Archaeology Planning and Countryside Advice. Adrian Scruby of CAPCA visited the site and monitored the evaluation.

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Cambridgeshire Historic Environment Record (Sites and Monuments Record)

Appendix 1 Context Data

Context	Feature	Type	Description	Date
1		Layer	<i>Greenish grey silty clay. Rare brick fragments</i>	
2		Layer	<i>Pale orange silty sand</i>	
3		Layer	<i>Grey silty clay</i>	
4		Layer	<i>Brown peaty silt</i>	Iron Age (?)
5		Layer	<i>Pale grey silty clay</i>	
6	19	Fill	<i>Mid grey silty clay with brick fragments</i>	
7	19	Fill	<i>Pale grey silty clay with brick fragments</i>	1600-1700
8		Layer	<i>Pale grey silty clay</i>	
9		Cut	<i>Vertically sided pit, 2m long, 0.6m wide and not bottomed</i>	1775-1825
10	9	Fill	<i>Mixed grey and cream silts</i>	1775-1825
11		Layer	<i>Dark brown silt with gravel topsoil</i>	
12		Layer	<i>Mid grey brown silt, rare gravel and charcoal</i>	
13		Layer	<i>Yellowish brown silt</i>	
14		Layer	<i>Pale grey-brown silt</i>	
15		Layer	<i>Dark brown silty peat</i>	Iron Age (?)
16		Layer	<i>Orange cream silt</i>	
17		Cut	<i>Possible Palaeochannel</i>	
18	17	Fill	<i>Similar to 14, but higher organic content</i>	
19		Cut	<i>Possible roadside ditch</i>	1600-1700

Appendix 2 Finds data by Carole Fletcher

Context	Feature	Description	Spot Date
7	19	<i>3 undatable brick fragments 1 pottery sherd, a post-medieval red ware, probably from a Metropolitan Slip Ware jar</i>	1600-1700
10	9	<i>1 glass sherd 1 brick fragment, handmade and frogless</i>	1770-1850