

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SERVICE



Suffolk County Council

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**Debenham Community Woodland,
Debenham (DBN 090),
Record of an Archaeological Evaluation**

Rpt. No. 97/64

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Suffolk County Council
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Summary

Debenham (TM 177 685; DBN 090) An archaeological evaluation carried out in advance of a tree planting, as part of a community woodland scheme, recovered evidence for Roman occupation of 1st-4th century date in the lowest lying portion of the field. (Stuart Boulter for Suffolk County Council)

1. Introduction

In response to a proposed Community Woodland scheme including tree planting in a c.3 hectare field (under the ownership of Suffolk County Council) on the north-east side of Debenham (centred on TM 1775 5350), the Conservation Team of Suffolk County Council's Archaeological Service informed the Suffolk County Council Land Agents & Valuers that there may be archaeological implications to the project.

As a result, a 'Brief and Specification for an Archaeological Evaluation' (Appendix I) was written by Jude Plouviez (Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service Conservation Team) to cover a programme of works which would effectively assess the archaeological potential of the site.

Nothing was known of the proposed area of tree planting as it had never been subjected to any form of archaeological survey. Its potential, however, was considered to be high due to the presence of the previously known archaeological site (DBN 011) in Priory Field immediately to the west. The SMR (Sites & Monuments Record) information for the DBN 011 site includes records of Roman and medieval finds recovered during the conversion of the field to arable in the early 19th century and the results of fieldwalking carried out in the 1990's which identified Roman (principally C3/4), limited Iron Age and further medieval material.

Topographically, the evaluation area sloped markedly from the north-east to south west falling 15 metres from the 50 metre contour line, to the north, down to the 35 metre contour line, to the south, and lies on the south facing slope of a spur on the north side of the valley of the River Deben. The underlying drift geology comprises glacial clays and the nearest natural source of water is the small tributary stream to the River Deben which runs past the southern edge of the site.

The archaeological evaluation, the fieldwork for which was carried out by members of the Suffolk County Council's Archaeological Service Field Projects Team on 20th October 1997, was funded by the Suffolk County Council Land Agents & Valuers Department.

2. Methodology

The trial-trenches were opened using a JCB mechanical excavator equipped with a 1.5 metre wide ditching bucket, to give a good clean cut. Topsoil and any underlying colluvial deposit were removed down to the surface of the naturally occurring subsoil. The location of the trenches was plotted on a 1:2500 scale OS map extract (Fig. 1).

The upcast spoil and surface of the trenches were scanned with a metal detector with the former also being examined visually for the presence of unstratified finds. The surface of the trench was cleaned manually to help identify features cut into its surface.

Where archaeological features were identified they were allocated context numbers within a 'unique continuous numbering system' under the site SMR code DBN 090 (Appendix II), with a plan of the relevant trench drawn at a scale of 1:50 (Fig. 2,

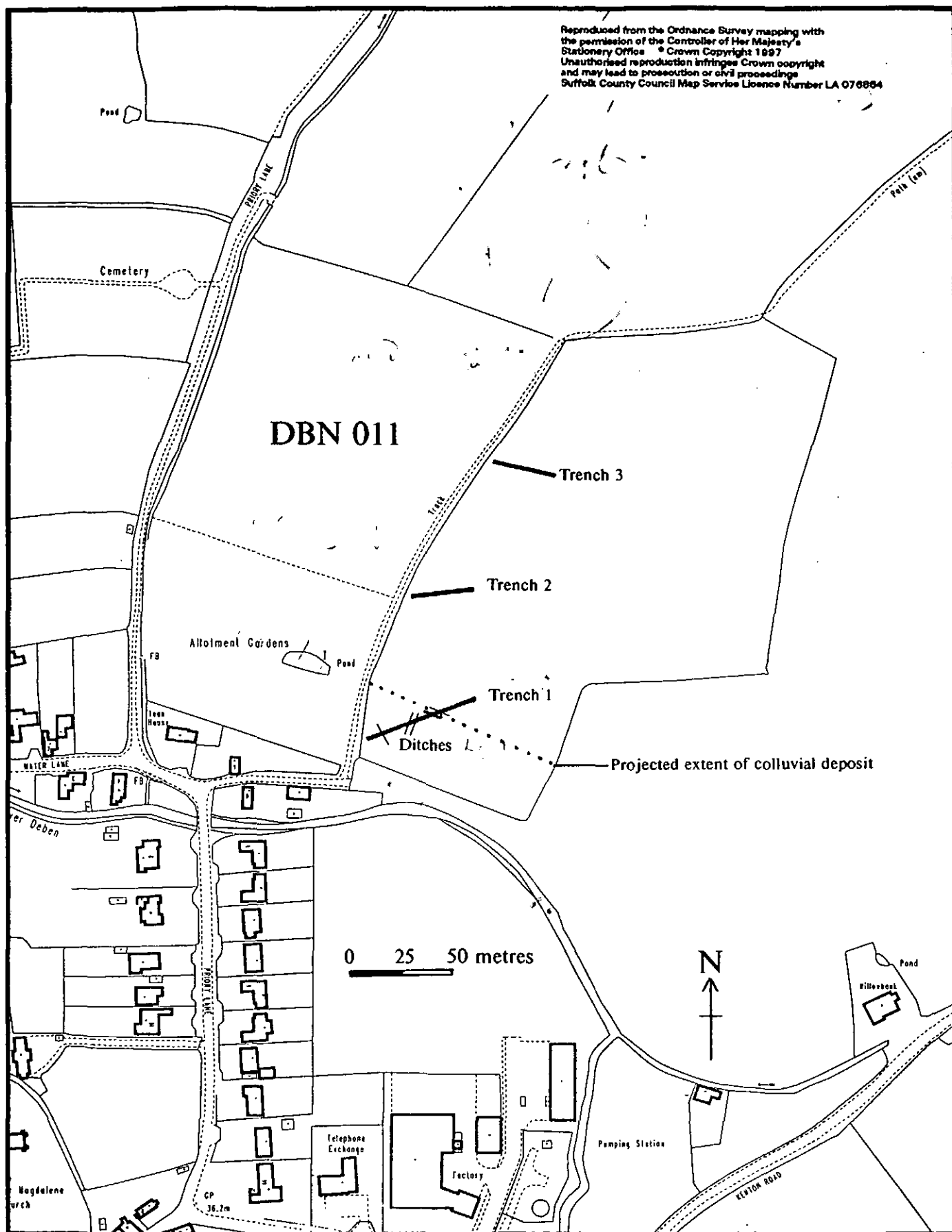


Fig.1 1:2500 scale OS map extract showing the location of the trial-trenches, projected extent of the colluvial deposit & recorded archaeological features

1:100 scale reduction). Excavation of the features was not considered necessary as adequate datable artefactual evidence was recovered from their surface (Appendix III).

3. Results

Trench 1 (1.5 metres x 55 metres, 77.5 square metres) was orientated south-west to north-east and was positioned to determine whether a 3rd to 4th century Roman finds scatter (part of DBN 090), immediately to the west, represented underlying archaeological deposits that continued in to the evaluation area.

The presence of archaeological features in the westernmost 20 metres of Trench 1 prompted the extending of the trench until, after a further 35 metres, the archaeology appeared to have run out.

The topsoil was found to be a uniform 0.25 metres in depth which, at the western end of the trench, lay on 0.85 metres of a grey/brown silty clay colluvial deposit (hillwash) which reduced in thickness until disappearing c. 15 metres from the eastern end of the trench. The disappearance of the colluvial layer appeared to coincide with a break in slope towards the southern end of the field and this has been used to project its likely extent onto Fig. 1. For the westernmost c. 8 metres the colluvial deposit lay on naturally occurring subsoil comprising angular flint cobbles with a clayey sand matrix which, to the east of this point, gave way to stiff silty clay.

Five features, all ditches (0003, 0005, 0008, 0010 & 0018), were identified during the manual cleaning of the trench (Fig. 2).

Ditch 0005 was orientated north-west to south-east across the trench at the juncture between the clay subsoil with the flint cobble rich subsoil. No finds were recovered from the surface of its brown silty clay fill (0006) and the edges were indistinct. On balance, this feature was interpreted as natural, but was still recorded on the plan as a precautionary measure.

Ditch 0003 was orientated north-north-east to south-south-west across the trench, directly down the existing slope of the field, approximately 20 metres from its south-west end. The feature was 0.7 metres wide with an indeterminate depth and a fill (0004) comprising grey/brown silty clay. The finds recovered from the surface of the ditch included eleven sherds of 1st century Roman pottery and an iron nail head located with the metal detector.

Ditch 0008 shared the same north-north-east to south-south-west alignment as ditch 0003, some five metres to the west, both running directly down the existing slope of the field. The feature was 1 metre wide with an indeterminate depth and a fill (0009) comprising grey/brown silty clay. The finds recovered from the surface of the ditch were limited to a single sherd of probably 3rd or 4th century Roman pottery.

Ditch 0010 was orientated west-north-west to east-south-east across the trench some thirty four metres from its south-west end and appeared to be aligned with the present contours of the field. The feature was 3.4 metres wide with an indeterminate depth and a fill (0011) comprising dark grey/black clayey loam (central component) and

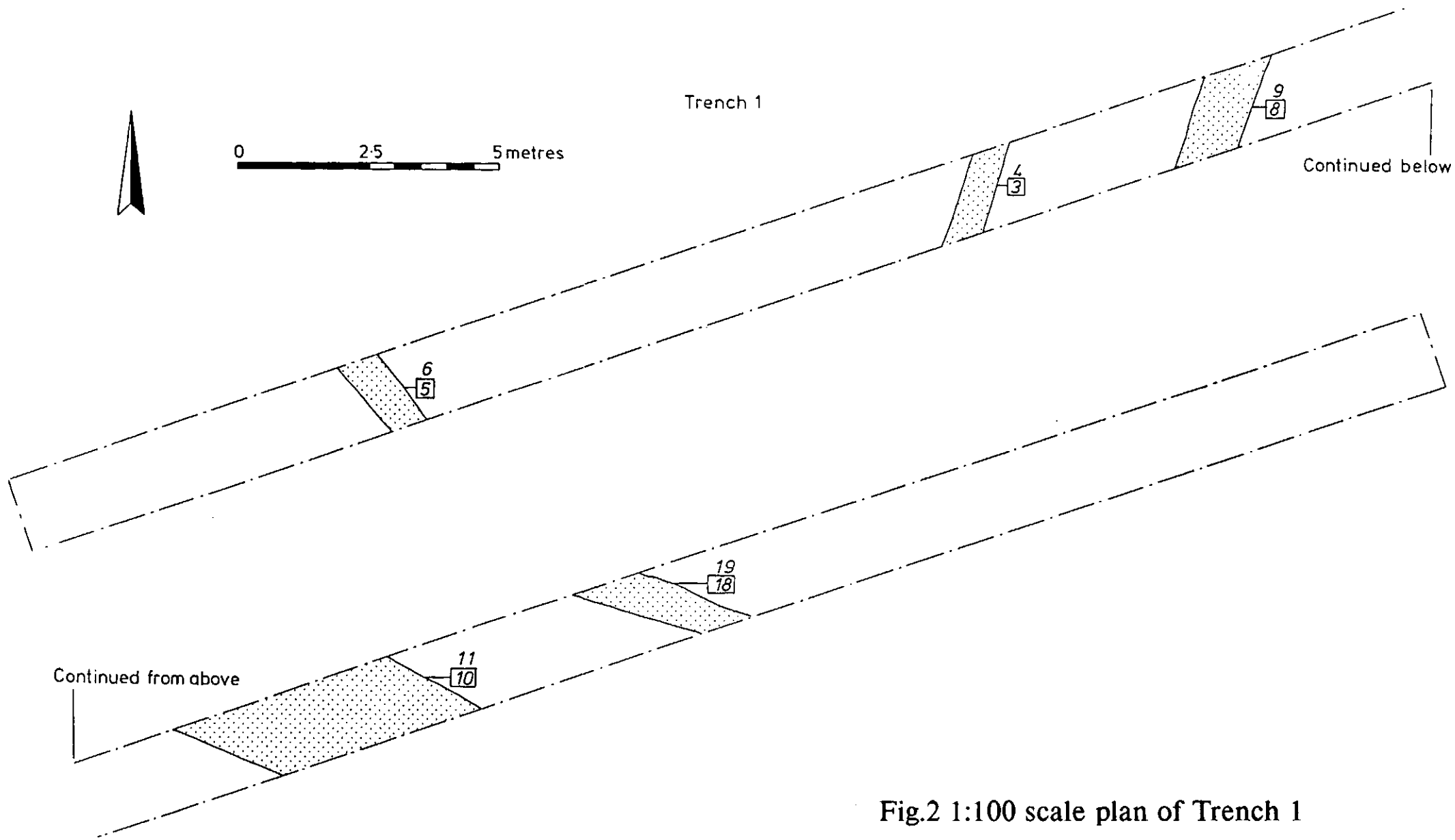


Fig.2 1:100 scale plan of Trench 1

sandy clay (outer component). The finds, all recovered from the surface of the central fill, included sixteen sherds of 3rd or 4th century Roman pottery, small quantities of brick/tile, animal bone and daub. In addition, five iron nails and copper alloy coin, the latter of 3rd century Roman date, were located by metal detector within the top 0.1 centimetres of the fill.

Ditch 0018 shared the same west-north-west to east-south-east alignment as ditch 0010, some five metres to the west, both conforming with the present contours of the field. The feature was 0.8 metres wide with an indeterminate depth and a fill (0019) comprising light brown silty clay from which no finds were recovered.

Trench 2 & 3 (1.5 metres x 30 metres, 45 square metres) was orientated west-south-west to east-north-east and west-north-west to east south-east, respectively, and were positioned to determine whether scatters of finds associated with the DBN 011 site, immediately to the west, represented archaeological deposits that continued into the evaluation area.

The topsoil in both trenches was found to be a uniform 0.3 metres in depth and lay directly on the naturally occurring clay subsoil. No features were identified and no unstratified finds were recovered from the upcast spoil. These trenches were discontinued after 30 metres due to the negative results.

4. Archaeological Interpretation

The results of the evaluation appear to confirm the presence of Roman activity towards the southern end of the site. Although no stratigraphic relationships occurred within the confines of the trench the artefactual evidence suggests that at least two phases of activity area represented with the ditches of the later phase respecting the alignment of the earlier features.

The ceramic evidence suggests that the activity on the site may span most of the Roman period with the lack of any definite 4th century material not significant with such a small assemblage. Similarly, the lack of finewares may not be representative of the overall site. Although some of the pottery appeared to be abraded a number of adjoining sherds were recovered which suggests the material was relatively fresh at the time of deposition, possibly in its primary context, and was generated by occupation in the immediate vicinity of the DBN 090 site.

The fact that Roman material had previously been recovered during fieldwalking at the southern end of Priory Field, at first, seemed somewhat problematic as the layer of colluvial deposit should have sealed the archaeology. However, the pond in the centre of the remaining allotments appears to lie on the projected line of the 3rd or 4th century ditch (0010/11) and the scatter of Roman finds, of similar date, may have been derived from this, or other features, during the excavation of the pond.

No archaeological deposits were identified in the northernmost two trenches indicating that the Roman or medieval archaeology thought to lie in the northern half of Priory Field (DBN 011) do not encroach over into the evaluation area.

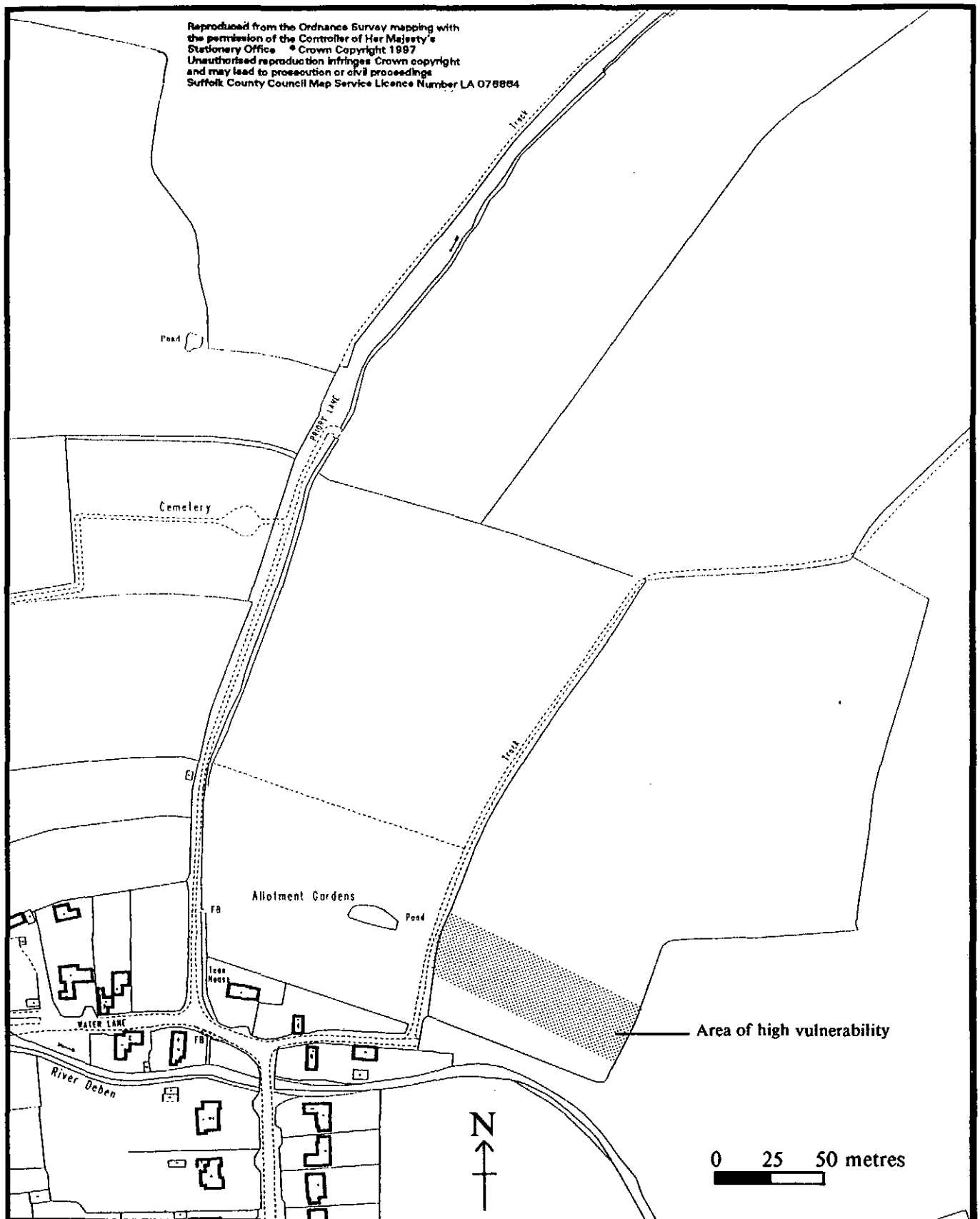


Fig.3 1:2500 scale OS map extract showing the area where any underlying archaeological deposits may be considered most vulnerable to damage during tree planting

5. Conclusion & Potential for Further Archaeological Works

The archaeological evaluation has shown that any archaeological constraints on the tree planting would be limited to the southern end of the site where the Roman archaeology was identified. Even here the problem may be relatively minor due to the presence of the layer of colluvial/hillwash deposit which affords some protection (depending on the planting technique employed, type of tree and likely depth of root disturbance) to the underlying archaeology. The most vulnerable area would appear to be a strip measuring c.25 metres by c.100 metres (Fig. 3) where the colluvial layer reduces in thickness towards the north. It is likely that further archaeological works would only be considered necessary if damage to the underlying deposits could not be avoided. However, if this proved to be the case then the recommendation for further works would almost certainly include the total excavation of the threatened area.

Any opinions expressed in this report about the need for further archaeological work are those of the Field Projects Division alone. The need for further work will be determined by the Local Planning Authority and its archaeological advisors when a planning application is registered. Suffolk County Council's archaeological contracting service cannot accept responsibility for inconvenience caused to clients should the Planning Authority take a different view to that expressed in the report

APPENDIX I

SUFFOLK COUNTY COUNCIL

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SERVICE - CONSERVATION TEAM

Brief and Specification for an Archaeological Evaluation

DEBENHAM COMMUNITY WOODLAND

1. Background

- 1.1 An area on the north-east side of Debenham has been proposed for tree-planting as a Community Woodland scheme. It comprises two fields with a total area of about 6.5ha adjoining SMR site DBN 011.
- 1.2 The proposal area is centred at c. TM 177 685. It lies on the east side of the Deben valley and on the south-east side of a tributary, on the 35m contour, rising to 50m to the north-east. Archaeological information is recorded only for 'Priory Field', SMR site DBN 011; the proposed woodland area is completely unsurveyed. Within DBN 011 extensive undated building foundations (said to be brick) and frequent finds of ancient coins (including two Roman and seven medieval) were recorded after the field was converted to arable in the early 19th century. There is no documentary evidence to support the identification of this site with a medieval priory. Fieldwalking in the 1990s has identified an area of Roman finds, mainly concentrated in the southern half of the field and including a few pieces of building debris - the material also includes one possible Iron Age sherd and mainly 3rd-4th century Roman wares. In the northern half of the field there is some Roman pottery but more medieval material (12th century onwards) plus an area of undated burnt clay fragments in the north-eastern corner of the field. It appears that there is Roman occupation which may include substantial building remains and potentially at least one area of medieval activity within DBN 011; how far any of this activity extends beyond the field boundaries is currently unknown.
- 1.3 All arrangements for the field evaluation of the site, the timing of the work, and access to the site, are to be negotiated with the commissioning body.

2. Brief for the Archaeological Evaluation.

- 2.1 The object of the evaluation is to establish the nature and extent of the known archaeological sites within the proposed community woodland area.

3. Field Evaluation

- 3.1 Linear trial trenches should be excavated to sample the areas as indicated on the attached plan. The suggested layout totals 350m of trench and is a maximum. Trenches should be cut from the boundary of DBN 011 outwards; if a length of 20m shows no archaeological features then that trench should be discontinued.
- 3.2 The topsoil may be mechanically removed using an appropriate machine (fitted with a toothless bucket) and other equipment. All machine excavation is to be under the direct control and supervision of an archaeologist. The topsoil should be examined for archaeological material.
- 3.3 The top of the first archaeological deposit may be cleared by machine, but must then be cleaned off by hand. The decision as to the proper method of further excavation will be made by the senior project archaeologist with regard to the nature of the deposit; there is a presumption that excavation of archaeological deposits will be done by hand unless it can be shown that there will not be a loss of evidence by using a machine.

- 3.4 In all evaluation excavation there is a presumption of the need to cause the minimum disturbance to the site consistent with adequate evaluation; that significant archaeological features e.g. solid or bonded structural remains, building slots or post-holes, should be preserved intact even if fills are sampled.
- 3.5 There must be sufficient excavation to give clear evidence for the period, depth and nature of an archaeological deposit. The depth and nature of colluvial or other masking deposits must be established across the site.
- 3.6 Any natural subsoil surface revealed should be hand cleaned and examined for archaeological deposits and artefacts. Sample excavation of any archaeological features revealed may be necessary in order to gauge their date and character.
- 3.7 Metal detector searches should take place at all stages of the excavation.
- 3.8 All finds will be collected and processed (unless variations in this principle are agreed with the Conservation Team of SCC Archaeological Service during the course of the evaluation).
- 3.9 Human remains should be left *in situ* except in those cases where damage or desecration are to be expected, or in the event that analysis of the remains is shown to be a requirement of satisfactory evaluation of the site.
- 3.10 Plans of the archaeological features on the site should be drawn at 1:20 or 1:50, depending on the complexity of the data to be recorded. Sections should be drawn at 1:10 or 1:20 again depending on the complexity to be recorded. Any variations from this will need to be agreed with the Conservation Team.
- 3.11 A photographic record of the work is to be made, consisting of both monochrome photographs and colour transparencies.
- 3.12 Topsoil, subsoil and archaeological deposit to be kept separate during excavation to allow sequential backfilling of excavations.

4. General Management

- 4.1 A timetable for all stages of the project must be agreed before the first stage of work commences, including monitoring by the Conservation Team of Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service.
- 4.2 The composition of the project staff must be detailed and agreed (this is to include any sub-contractors).
- 4.3 A general Health and Safety Policy must be provided, with detailed risk assessment and management strategy for this particular site.
- 4.4 No initial survey to detect public utility or other services has taken place. The responsibility for this rests with the archaeological contractor.
- 4.5 The Institute of Field Archaeologists' *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Desk-based Assessments* and for *Field Evaluations* should be used for additional guidance in the execution of the project and in drawing up the report.

5. Report requirements

- 5.1 An archive of all records and finds to be prepared consistent with the principle of *Management of Archaeological Projects*, English Heritage 1991 (particularly Appendix 3.1 and Appendix 4.1).

- 5.2 The data recording methods and conventions used must be consistent with, and approved by, the County Sites and Monuments Record.
- 5.3 The objective account of the archaeological evidence must be clearly distinguished from its archaeological interpretation. The conclusion should include a statement of the archaeological potential of the site.
- 5.4 An opinion as to the necessity for further evaluation and its scope should be given. A second phase will not be embarked upon until the primary fieldwork results are assessed and the need for further work is established. A second-phase cannot be developed in detail at this stage.
- 5.5 Finds should be appropriately conserved (in accordance with *UK Institute of Conservators Guidelines*). Every effort should be made to get the agreement of the landowner/developer to the deposition of the finds with the County SMR.
- 5.6 The site archive should be deposited with the County Sites and Monuments Record within three months of the completion of work.
- 5.7 Where positive conclusions are drawn from a project (whether it be evaluation or excavation) a summary report, in the established format, suitable for inclusion in the annual 'Archaeology in Suffolk' section of the *Proceedings of the Suffolk Institute for Archaeology*, should be prepared and included in the project report.

Specification by: J Plouviez

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Date: 18 November 1996

Reference: /debenham11

This brief and specification remains valid for 12 months from the above date. If work is not carried out in full within that time this document will lapse; the authority should be notified and a revised brief and specification may be issued.

The results of this evaluation, if they are to be used as part of a planning application, will need to be considered by the Conservation Team of the Archaeology Service of Suffolk County Council, who have the responsibility for making the recommendation to the appropriate Planning Authority.

APPENDIX II Context List & Descriptions

	OPNO	CONTEXT	LOCATION	IDENTIFIER	DESCRIPT	FINDSYN	SMFYN
1	1	1	U/S	Finds	Unstratified finds from whole field	Y	
2	2	1	Trench 1	Finds	Unstratified finds from Trench 1	Y	
3	3	3	Trench 1	Ditch (Cut)	Ditch, NNE-SSW orientated		
4	4	3	Trench 1	Ditch (Fill)	Grey/brown silty clay fill of 3, unexcavated	Y	Y
5	5	5	Trench 1	Ditch (Cut)	Ditch?, NW-SE orientated		
6	6	5	Trench 1	Ditch (Fill)	Dark brown silty clay fill of 5, unexcavated, no finds	N	
7	7	3	Trench 1	Detector find	Fe object		Y
8	8	8	Trench 1	Ditch (Cut)	Ditch, NNE-SSW orientated		
9	9	8	Trench 1	Ditch (Fill)	Grey/brown silty clay fill of 8, unexcavated	Y	
10	10	10	Trench 1	Ditch (Cut)	Ditch, WNW-ESE orientated		
11	11	10	Trench 1	Ditch (Fill)	Overall number for fill of ditch 10 (dark grey/black clayey loam central fill, sandier outer fill)	Y	Y
12	12	10	Trench 1	Detector find	Fe object		Y
13	13	10	Trench 1	Detector find	Fe object		Y
14	14	10	Trench 1	Detector find	Fe object		Y
15	15	10	Trench 1	Detector find	Fe object		Y
16	16	10	Trench 1	Detector find	Fe object		Y
17	17	10	Trench 1	Detector find	Ae coin		Y
18	18	18	Trench 1	Ditch (Cut)	Ditch, WNW-ESE orientated		
19	19	18	Trench 1	Ditch (Fill)	Light brown silty clay fill of 18, unexcavated, no finds	N	
20	20	2	Trench 1	Detector find	Fe object		Y
21	21	1	U/S	Detector find	Pb object		Y
22	22	1	U/S	Detector find	Ae lump/slag		Y
23	23	1	U/S	Detector find	Ae object		Y

APPENDIX III Finds List & Descriptions
(Assessed by Jude Plouviez of Suffolk County Council's Archaeological Service)

Context	OP	No.	Wt./g	Description	Date
0001	0021	1	-	Pb fragment	?
0001	0022	1	-	?Ae Slag	?
0001	0023	1	-	Ae foot of tripod vessel	med/p-med
0001	0002	1	5	body sherd, grey coarseware	Roman
		1	25	body sherd, grey coarseware	
				mortarium (high mica content),	?C4
				large mixed quartz grains	
		2	30	Pot totals	
0001/2	0020	1	-	Fe ?bolt (shaft with flat head each end)	?
0003	0004	1	5	body sherd grey coarseware, cordoned, C1 form and fabric	C1
		8	45	2 rim, 6 body sherds (probably single vessel) grey coarseware (high mica content) vessel form 5.1.1. undecorated	C1
		2	5	misc. body sherds	-
		11	55	Pot totals	
		2	20	burnt flints	-
0003/4	0007	1	-	Fe nail head	C1
0008	0009	1	5	body sherd, sandy grey coarseware, coarse rouletting	Prob. C3/4
		1	5	Pot Total	
0010	0011	1	5	body sherd, grey coarseware (high mica content)	Roman
		4	20	body sherds grey coarseware	
		11	160	4 rim sherds, 7 body sherds, single vessel, vessel form 5.4, wide slack profile	Roman C3/4
		16	185	Pot Totals	
		3	20	animal bone fragments	-
		2	35	brick/tile fragments	-
		1	<5	burnt clay/daub	-
0010/11	0012	1	-	Fe nail head & shaft, large	C3/4
0010/11	0013	1	-	? nail shaft	C3/4
0010/11	0014	1	-	Fe nail head +	C3/4
0010/11	0015	1	-	Fe nail shaft	C3/4
0010/11	0016	1	-	Fe nail shaft	C3/4
0010/11	0017	1	-	Ae coin, obv. radiate, illegible, Tetricus or similar, rev. figure standing	C3