A programme of archaeological observation, Investigation, recording and analysis on land at West Fen Road, Willingham, Cambridgeshire November 2010 to October 2017

Event No: ECB5292

Report No: 18/19

Author: Adam Meadows

Illustrator: Joanne Clawley

Project Manager: Anthony Maull
Event No: ECB5292
NGR: TL 396 713

MOLA
Kent House
30, Billing Road
Northampton
NN1 5DQ, 01604 809 800
www.mola.org.uk
sparry@mola.org.uk

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Author: Adam Meadows

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MOLA
Kent House
30, Billing Road
Northampton
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01604 809 800
www.mola.org.uk
sparry@mola.org.uk

STAFF

Project Manager:	Anthony Maull Cert Arch
Fieldwork:	Adam Meadows BSc
	David Leigh BA
Text:	Adam Meadows
Illustrations:	Joanne Clawley BA MSc

OASIS REPORT

PROJECT DETAILS	**Oasis No. molanort1-309082**	
Project name	A programme of archaeological observation, investigation, recording and analysis on land at West Fen Road, Willingham, Cambridgeshire November 2010 to October 2017	
Short description	Northamptonshire Archaeology, now trading as MOLA (Museum of London Archaeology) was commissioned by CgMs Consulting on behalf of the land owner, Ray Garner to carry out a programme of archaeological observation, investigation, recording and analysis on land at West Fen Road, Willingham Cambridgeshire, prior to the construction of agricultural buildings. The resulting excavations revealed an area disturbed by modern landscaping directly over gravel rich natural geology.	
Project type	Watching Brief	
Site status	None	
Previous work	Trial trench evaluation (brown 2007)	
Current land use	Pasture	
Future work	Not known	
Monument type/ period	Unknown	
Significant finds	None	
PROJECT LOCATION		
County	Cambridgeshire	
Site address		
Study area	Less than 1ha	
OS Easting & Northing	TL 396 713	
Height OD	*c* 4.3m aOD	
PROJECT CREATORS		
Organisation	MOLA	
Project brief originator	Kasia Gdaniec, Senior Archaeologist for Cambridgeshire County Council	
Project design originator	CgMs Consulting	
Director/Supervisor	David Leigh and Adam Meadows (MOLA)	
Project Manager	Anthony Maull (MOLA)	
Sponsor or funding body	CgMs Consulting	
PROJECT DATE		
Start date	1st November 2010	
End date	20th October 2017	
ARCHIVES	Location	Content
Paper	CHET Under the Accession Number ECB5292	Site archive and associated paperwork
Digital		Report text and figures
BIBLIOGRAPHY	Journal/monograph, published or forthcoming, or unpublished client report	
Title	A programme of archaeological observation, investigation, recording and analysis on land at West Fen Road, Willingham, Cambridgeshire November 2010 to October 2017	
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A programme of archaeological observation, Investigation, recording and analysis on land at West Fen Road, Willingham, Cambridgeshire November 2010 to October 2017

Abstract

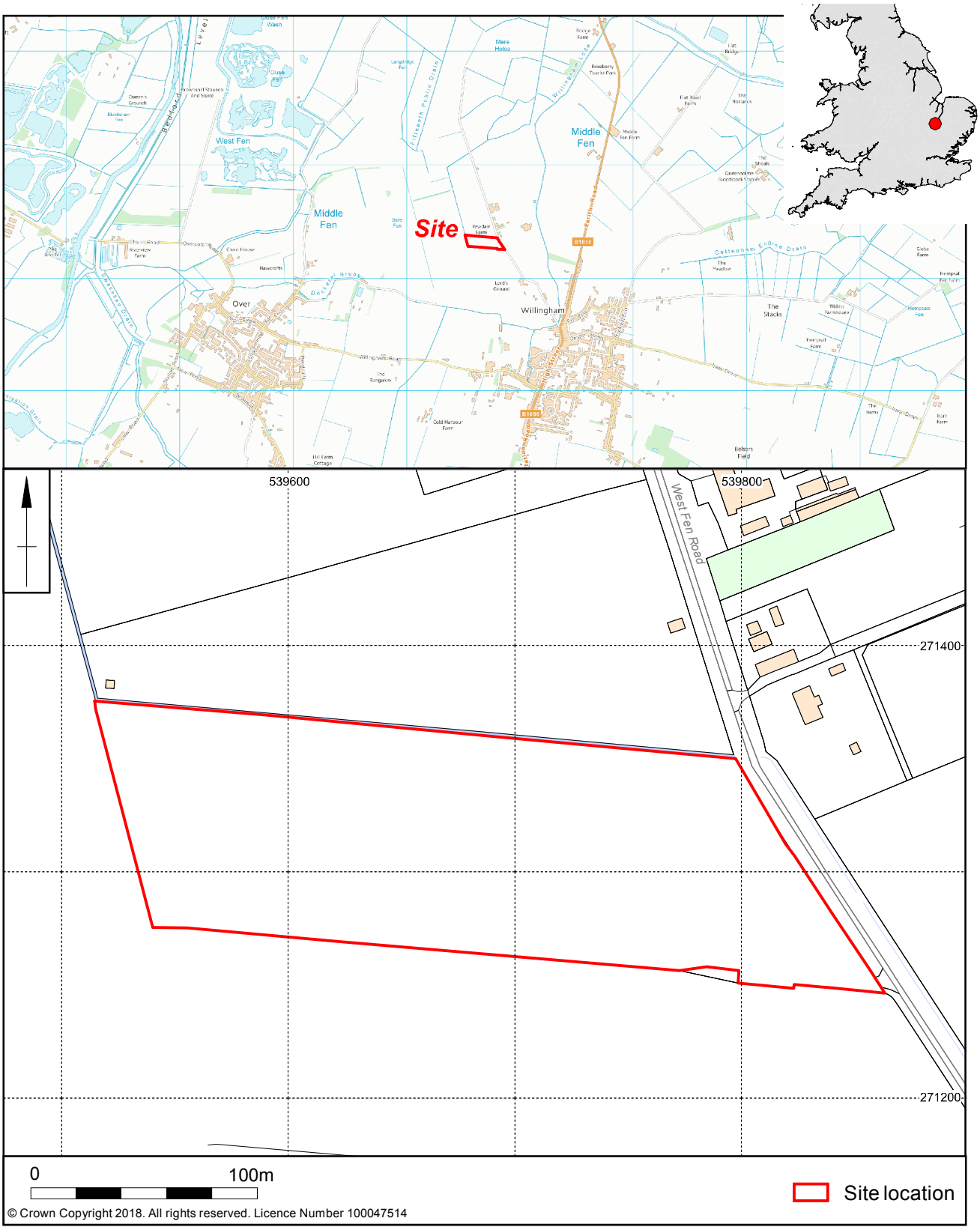
Northamptonshire Archaeology, now trading as MOLA (Museum of London Archaeology) was commissioned by CgMs Consulting on behalf of the land owner, Ray Garner to carry out a programme of archaeological observation, Investigation, recording and analysis on land at West Fen Road, Willingham Cambridgeshire, prior to the construction of agricultural buildings. The resulting excavations revealed an area disturbed by modern landscaping directly over gravel rich natural geology.

1 INTRODUCTION

Northampton Archaeology, now trading as MOLA (Museum of London Archaeology) was commissioned by CgMs Consulting to undertake a programme of archaeological observation, investigation, recording and analysis on a proposed development site at West Fen Road, Willingham (NGR TL 396 713, Fig 1).

The works were undertaken in compliance with the Planning Policy Statement which was applicable at the commencement of works at the request of the Cambridgeshire Archaeology Planning and Countryside Advice (CAPCA), now known as the Cambridgeshire Historic Environment Team (CHET) to inform planning decisions for the development (Planning Application: S/0204/07/F).

The project was conducted following a Written Scheme of Investigation prepared by Northamptonshire Archaeology (Northamptonshire Archaeology 2010) in accordance with the recommendations of CAPCA (Thomas 2007). The Project Design for the fieldwork and the subsequent programme of works were prepared in accordance with the best archaeological practice at the time, defined in the Institute of Field Archaeologists' Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluation (1999 revision), English Heritage's procedural document Management of Archaeological Projects (MAP 2) (EH 1991) and the East Anglian Archaeology Standards for Field Archaeology in the East of England (Gurney *et al* 2003). All works were approved and monitored by CAPCA who inspected the site on 19th October 2007.



Scale 1:2500

Site location Fig 1

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 Location, topography and geology

The application area lies on the west side of West Fen Road, north of Willingham, around 13km north of the centre of Cambridge.

The current phase of work comprised the archaeological observation of works located east of, but within the same field boundary as an earlier study by Northamptonshire Archaeology (Brown 2007).

The geology of the development area comprises river terrace sand and gravels over West Walton Formation and Ampthill Clay Formation Mudstones (BGS 2018). Typically for a Fen edge location, the topography of the development area maintains a consistent elevation *c*4.3m aOD.

2.2 Historical and archaeological background

In 2007, the development area was subject to a multi-stage evaluation that included a study of aerial photography, geophysical survey and trial trench excavations (Brown 2007).

Cropmarks present within the aerial photographic survey allude to the presence of rectilinear archaeological features located *c*60m north-north-east of the development area. Features present within the development area, comprise a pair of parallel linear features orientated north-east to south-west in the western portion of the site. This was not observed within the geophysical survey results. This survey only detected a general spread of ferrous objects within the soil and geological anomalies associated with variable gravel rich geology.

The trial trench evaluation uncovered fairly substantial ditches containing low densities of well-preserved materials originating from the Roman occupation. It is theorised that the excavated features relate to field boundaries located a fair distance away from the main occupational zone, explaining the lack of archaeological material within the fill (Brown 2007).

Other than this earlier study the immediate surroundings of this site had very few archaeological records present within the HER (historic environment record) with the exception of a number of listed buildings within Willingham.

3 OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Objectives

The purpose of the archaeological investigation was to determine and understand the nature, function and character of any archaeology revealed within its cultural and environmental setting. In particular the objectives were to:

- mitigate the impact of the development through preservation by record;
- establish the date, nature and extent of activity or occupation in the development site;
- establish the relationship of any remains found to the surrounding contemporary landscapes;

- recover artefacts to assist in the development of type series within the region;
- recover palaeo-environmental remains to determine local environmental conditions as an intrinsic part of the investigation.

Further specific regional research questions were considered, where appropriate, following those outlined in Brown and Glazebrook (2000) and Medlycott (2011).

3.2 Methodology

All works were carried out in accordance with the Institute of Field Archaeologists' Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluation (1999 revision), English Heritage's procedural document Management of Archaeological Projects (MAP 2) (EH 1991). Later works were compliant with the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists *Code of Conduct* (CIfA 2014b), and *Standard and guidance for archaeological watching brief* (CIfA 2014a) and conformed to the Historic England procedural document *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment (MoRPHE)* (HE 2015). All current site recording procedures are detailed in MOLA Northampton's in-house manual (MOLA 2014), which is issued to all staff.

The archaeological investigation and recording took place in stages, as required by the planned schedule of works. Therefore an archaeological presence was held on the 1st November 2010, the 25th November 2010, the 7th May 2013 and the 20th October 2017. The works comprised of archaeological observation during the excavation of 57 stanchion pits measuring *c*1m in length and breadth with a variable depth down to the natural substrate, ranging between 0.11m and 0.65m. Localised landscaping works were also observed, largely within the topsoil and a 10m long drainage ditch measuring 0.7m wide with a maximum depth of *c*1m.

The archaeological mitigation comprised the continuous observation of the removal of overburden within the stanchion pits using a tracked mechanical excavator, fitted with a 0.6m wide, toothless bucket operating under archaeological direction, followed by the investigation and recording of any archaeological features revealed. In each stanchion pit a record was also made of the uppermost natural substrate and the overlying subsoil and topsoil where possible. The ground reduction was undertaken under close archaeological observation in order to recover any potential artefacts that might be located within the subsoil. A full digital photographic record was maintained. The field data from the evaluation has been compiled into a site archive with appropriate cross-referencing.

4 THE EXCAVATED EVIDENCE

A total of 57 stanchion pits were excavated over the course of the project in three phases of work. The staggered work program caused the topsoil to become increasingly disturbed with each phase of work.

4.1 2010 works

On the 1st November 2010, 18 stanchion pits were excavated in what looked to be a largely untouched pasture field. Each pit encountered *c*48cm of dark blackish grey loamy topsoil, heavily root disturbed and containing the occasional small rounded chert inclusions. This was in direct interface with the underlying natural geology which consisted of orange-red sandy gravels characteristic of river terracing. No archaeological features were encountered.

The next phase of works commenced on the 25th November 2010. This comprised the archaeological observation of the removal of 0.15m of topsoil for the creation of hard standing and a drainage ditch. These works encountered mid-brown silt loam topsoil with the occasional subangular chert inclusion. Evidence of modern disturbance was revealed within these works, with fragments of concrete, modern ceramic and wiring found mixed within the soil. The topsoil lay directly on the river terrace natural geology, no archaeological evidence was recorded.

4.2 2013 works

On the 7th May 2013 27 stanchion pits were excavated south of the 2010 works for the construction of another stable barn. Due to the nearby works the ground here had been subjected to an increased amount of disturbance, being visibly compacted down bare earth.

Here *c*0.42m of topsoil was encountered, comprising compact dark grey silty clay containing fragments of modern concrete, sherds of ceramic and discarded wiring. The natural river terrace gravels made up of orange coloured sands and gravels were uncovered directly beneath this. No archaeological features were present within these works.

Fig 2 General shot of the 2013 works area of investigation

4.3 2017 works

An extension to the western side of the southern barn was to be added, smaller in scope, this comprised 12 stanchion pits. The ground here had been similarly disturbed like the 2013 works, with debris visible on the surface.

The pits predominantly exhibited a layer of disturbed topsoil, which overlay natural geology, encountered t a depth of between 0.48m and 0.65m. The topsoil comprised dark grey silty clay and contained frequent inclusions of sub-angular chert among fragments of modern brick and concrete rubble.

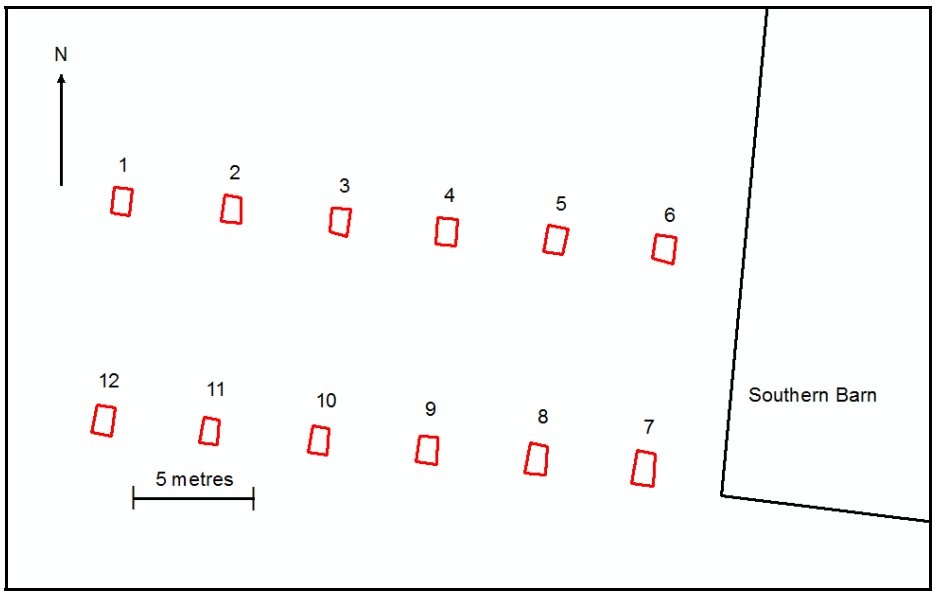


Fig 3 GPS plan of the 2017 works

Fig 4 General shot of the 2017 works facing east

Stanchion Pit 6, located closest to the western side of the existing barn contained what appeared to be largely undisturbed ground exhibiting both topsoil and subsoil, the nearby barn possibly sheltering the land from use. The topsoil measured 0.11m thick and comprised a dark loam displaying signs of bioturbation from the roots of weeds. The subsoil measured 0.37m thick and was an orange-brown silty clay containing the occasional chert inclusion.

Stanchion Pit 7 contained a thin layer of loamy root disturbed topsoil measuring 0.12m thick. Below this two deposits were uncovered overlaying the natural substrate. The upper most deposit was a orangey brown silty clay with a dirty gritty texture measuring 0.21m thick. The lower deposit comprised a 0.30m thick layer of

brown silty clay mixed with small gravel inclusions of below 1cm in diameter. Both layers are likely evidence of modern landscaping works.

Fig 5 Excavated section of Stanchion Pit 7

Stanchion Pit 8 was topped by a clean, light brown coloured clay measuring 0.29m thick. Below this was a thick deposit of greyish blue clay 0.50m thick. This contained numerous chert inclusions, modern concrete fragments and pieces of poorly preserved wood that was not retained. This stanchion is likely dug into a spread of modern buried debris that lies directly over the natural sands and gravels.

Fig 6 Excavated section of stanchion Pit 8

5 DISCUSSION

No archaeological remains were uncovered during these works. The features described during the nearby trial trench evaluation were predominantly aligned north-south and did not extend towards the study area. These features were described as being away from the main area of occupation, so the lack of archaeological finds here may indicate that the occupational zone lies further to the west of this site.

Evidence of modern disturbance was encountered within almost every stanchion pit. This corroborates with a statement by the land owner, Ray Garner who said the area had been subject to modern levelling up activity.

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MOLA
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MOLA
Kent House
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Northampton
NN1 5DQ
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sparry@mola.org.uk