Report 2477

nps archaeology

Archaeological Evaluation at Smedley Trust New Build, 4a Cannon Street and 17-19 West Street, Wisbech, Cambridgeshire

ECB 3596

Prepared for
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BAU 2477

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Location:	4a Cannon Street and 17-19 West Street, Wisbech, Cambridgeshire
District:	Fenland
Grid Ref.:	TF 4640 0925
HER No.:	ECB 3596
OASIS Ref.:	106397
Client:	SW Smedley Charitable Trust c/o Richard C F Waite
Dates of Fieldwork:	27-28 June 2011

Summary

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken by NPS Archaeology on the site of a proposed new sheltered housing scheme off 4a Cannon Street and 17-19 West Street, Wisbech, Cambridgeshire. The proposed development includes the construction of 14 new dwellings following the demolition of existing buildings.

Three trenches measuring between 3m and 8 m long by 1.8m were excavated within the footprint of the proposed development. Of the three trenches, one produced a pit of post-medieval date and another post-medieval artefacts from one layer.

Although archaeological evidence was scarce with no real indication of any earlier settlement before the post-medieval period, the artefact assemblage indicates that activity near to the proposed development site is likely.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

A proposal to redevelop land at 4a Cannon Street and 17-19 West Street, Cambridgeshire (Fig. 1) required a programme of archaeological works to assess the potential effects of the proposals on the archaeological resource.

This work was undertaken to fulfil a planning condition set by Cambridgeshire Archaeology Planning & Countryside Advice office (Planning Application: F/YR09/0660/F) and a Brief issued by Cambridgeshire Archaeology Planning & Countryside Advice office (Andy Thomas 7 June 2010). The work was conducted in accordance with a Project Design and Method Statement prepared by NPS Archaeology (Ref. NAU/BAU2477/NP). This work was commissioned by Richard C F Waite, Chartered Architect and funded by the SW Smedley Charitable Trust.

This programme of work was designed to assist in defining the character and extent of any archaeological remains within the proposed redevelopment area, following the guidelines set out in *Planning Policy Statement 5: Planning for the Historic Environment* (Department for Communities and Local Government 2010). The results will enable decisions to be made by the Local Planning Authority about the treatment of any archaeological remains found.

The site archive is currently held by NPS Archaeology and on completion of the project will be deposited with the County Store, Cambridgeshire Archaeology Planning and Countryside Advice following the relevant policies on archiving standards.

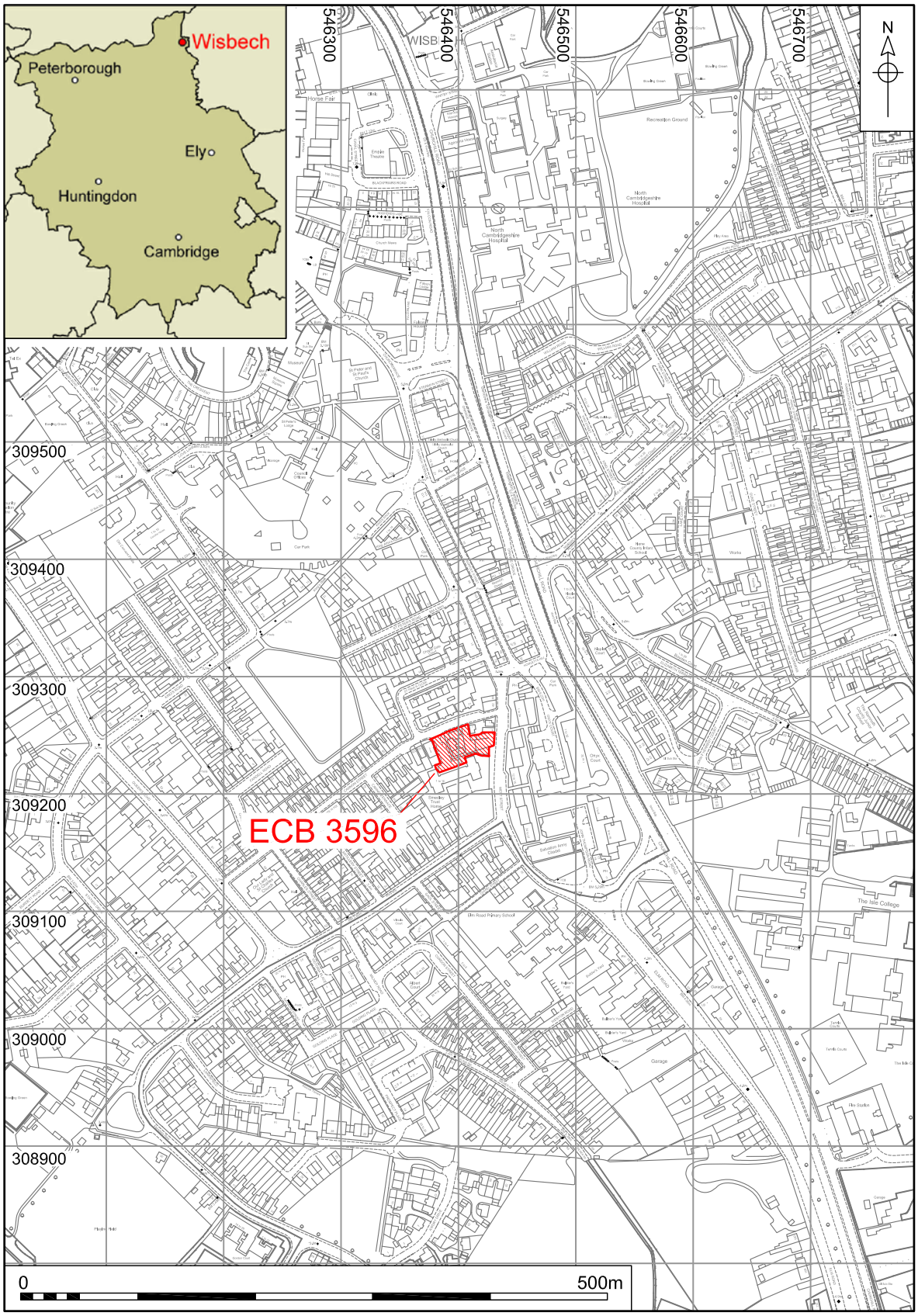

Figure 1. Site location. Scale 1:5000

2.0 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

The solid geology for the region of Wisbech consists of Ampthill Clay and Kimmeridge Clay including Upware Limestone (BGS 1985). The solid geology is overlain by Flandrian deposits with characteristics of marine, estuarine and freshwater sands, silts, clays and peat (BGS 1991). Auger testing within the site demonstrated that there are extensive deposits of silts and clays up to 2m deep.

The port and market town of Wisbech is located 15 miles south of Holbeach, 15 miles west of Downham Market and 18 miles north of Chatteris.

The site is situated approximately 800m east of the River Nene and located in the southern part of Wisbech lying between 3.80m OD and 4m OD.

3.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The site is situated in a rich archaeological landscape. A number of archaeological investigations have taken place in recent years, revealing extensive evidence of past activity in the area.

The Cambridgeshire Historical and Environmental Record (CHER) has been consulted and the entries considered to be most relevant are discussed in broad chronological order below.

Iron Age

A fragment of an Early Iron Age scabbard (CHER 04008) which contains the remains of an iron blade is held in Wisbech Museum. It was acquired in 1847 along with an assemblage of antiquities collected by 'Philosopher' Smith of Wisbech. The scabbard is finely decorated with symmetrical spiral motifs on both sides of the medial ridge, outlined by a thick engraved line flanked by two thinner lines.

Roman

Finds of Roman coins have been recovered within the parish of Wisbech. Two coins of Constantine the Great (CHER 03934) were recovered during excavation of the railway, near to the sea bank in 1850. A hoard of 17 bronze coins (CHER 03910) was found in 1852; although the precise location remains unknown other than that it was in the Wisbech area; these coins date somewhere between AD 268 and AD 395.

Saxon

CHER 01926a located to the north of the development site records an Anglo-Saxon 'Urnes-style' openwork brooch recovered from the castle ditch in 1846.

Medieval

Wisbech Castle (CHER 01926) was built on the order of William I in 1086 and covered an area of approximately four acres. Although all trace of the earthworks of the original castle have disappeared a sketch plan of the castle produced in 1794 shows that it was nearly circular in form and was most likely of Norman motte and bailey type. Two archaeological sites (ECB 2970 and ECB 3252) have produced evidence relevant to the interpretation of the castle area. ECB 2970 recorded stratified deposits up to 3m deep and produced early medieval pottery,

possibly relating to the castle moat. These earlier medieval deposits were overlain by post-medieval activity which included two brick walls thought to be associated with the Georgian development of the site in the area. Entry ECB 3252 records a community excavation at Wisbech Castle during 2009 and 2010. The aim of this work was to find evidence of the remains of the Bishops Palace or any related structures. Four trenches and forty 1m x 1m test pits were dug across the site and revealed the remains of walls, demolition rubble, a ditch and flood silt layers dating to the period of the Bishops Palace.

CB 14828 is located to the north of the proposed development site and records the site of the church of St. Peter and St. Paul built in the 12th century with further additions in the 14th and 16th centuries. At the beginning of the 14th century the church was modified with the enlargement of the chancel, addition of a large chapel on the southern side, and the widening of the north and south aisles. During the 16th century the west tower partially collapsed and was reconstructed. In *c.*1525 a tower was erected on the north-west part of the northern aisle. Geophysical survey (ECB 2105) of the churchyard located evidence of rubble and foundations at the western end of the church which may represent the old tower.

St John's Hospital (CHER 03870) was founded for sick persons during the 12th century and had ceased to exist by the 14th century. The western end of the hall dates to *c.*1160 and during the 17th century the front was cased with red brick and finished with a Dutch gable (the building has been a scheduled monument but was de-scheduled in 2002).

Post medieval

Record CHER 10312 consists of three test pits excavated in the Market Place in December 1991. The results of these test pits revealed post-holes which probably represent the remains of market stalls from a period before 1811. The pottery recovered was post-medieval in date.

An archaeological evaluation and excavation (ECB 436) at Market Mews revealed a sequence of deeply stratified medieval and post-medieval deposits which extended 3m below the current ground surface. Various artefacts were recovered including sherds of pottery, a bone needle, slag and a hearthstone dating from the 13th-16th centuries. There was also a seal matrix, a strap fitting, a 13th– to 14th-century coin and a 15th-century dagger.

4.0 METHODOLOGY

The objective of this evaluation was to determine as far as reasonably possible the presence or absence, location, nature, extent, date, quality, condition and significance of any surviving archaeological deposits within the development area.

The Brief required that a 5% sample (468m²) of the development site be investigated and although the Brief stipulated that four trenches be excavated, only three could be achieved (Fig. 2) due to material containing asbestos being found in one of the trenches which curtailed further exploration of this trench.

Machine excavation was carried out with a rubber tracked hydraulic 360˚ excavator equipped with a toothless ditching bucket and operated under constant archaeological supervision.

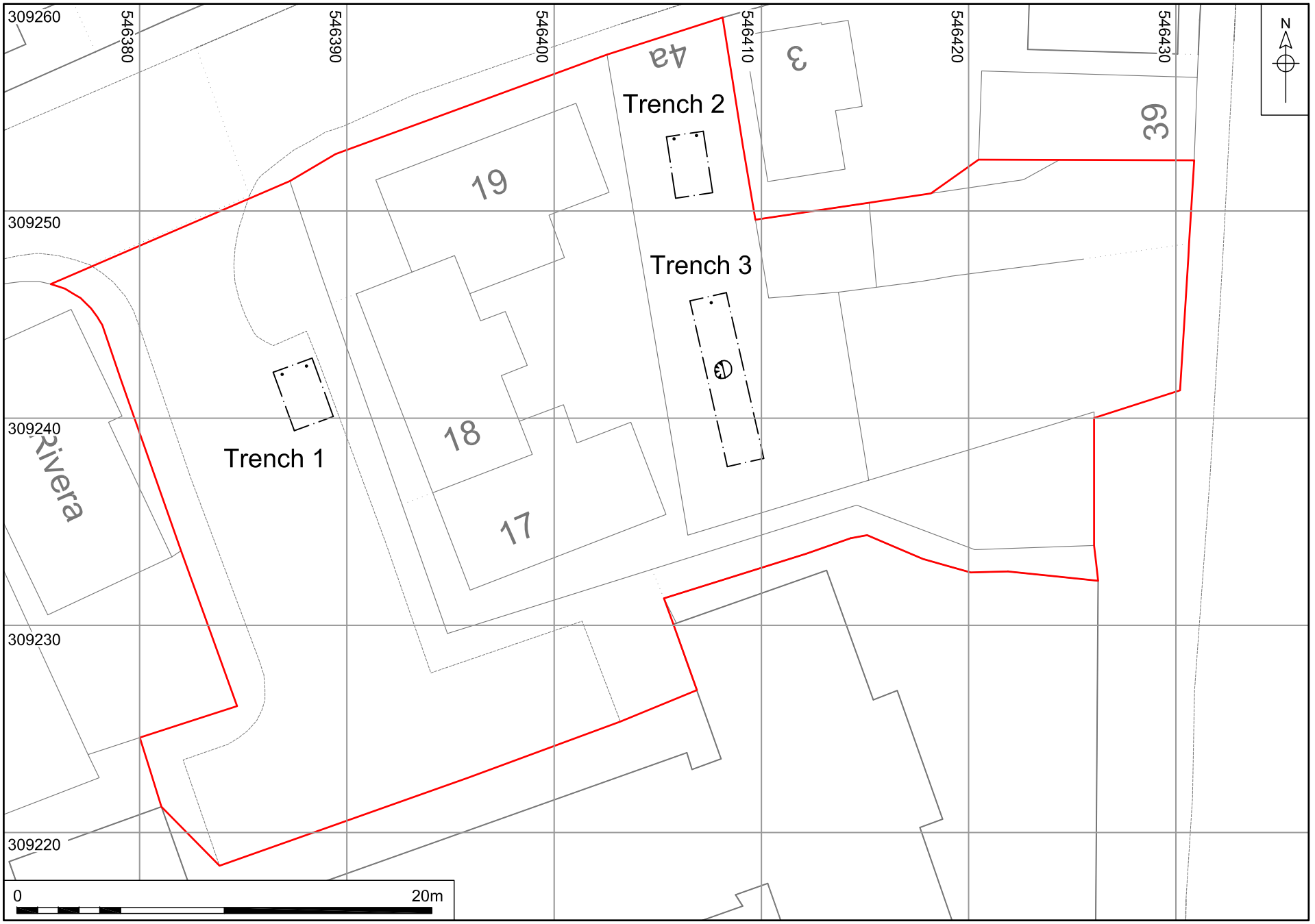

Figure 2. Trench location. Scale 1:250

Spoil, exposed surfaces and features were scanned with a metal-detector. All metal-detected and hand-collected finds, other than those which were obviously modern, were retained for inspection.

Three environmental samples were taken (Samples <1>, <2> and <3>) from deposits [9], [10] and [16] respectively.

All archaeological features and deposits were recorded using NPS Archaeology pro forma. Trench locations, plans and sections were recorded at appropriate scales. Monochrome photographs were taken of all relevant features and deposits where appropriate.

All trenches were located using a Leica GPS9000 surveying system. Temporary benchmarks were positioned at the ends of each trench and were established by the use of Leica GPS9000 surveying systems.

Site conditions were good, with the work taking place in fine weather.

5.0 RESULTS

Trench 1

Trench 1 was aligned roughly north–south and measured 3m long by 2m wide. The trench was situated at 3.80m OD (north end) and 3.89m OD (south end). The trench was located within a lay by (Fig. 2, Plate 1) which necessitated the removal of the road asphalt and underlying make-up prior to excavation of deposits within the trench.

Plate 1. Trench 1 with auger soundings 1 and 2, looking north

Excavation of Trench 1 was to 0.90m below the current road height (3.80m OD on the northern side of the trench). Thereafter two auger soundings were placed at the northern end of the trench which revealed two additional deposits (Fig. 3).

The asphalt [1] was 0.08m deep with the concrete make-up [2] measuring 0.20m in depth.

Below, the road was overburden which consisted of mixed homogeneous dark blackish brown clayey sand [03] which contained frequent lumps of charcoal, occasional fragments of brick rubble and modern rusted iron objects. Beneath deposit [3]) was black clay deposit [4]. Although, not fully revealed in section, the auger results demonstrated that deposit [4] was 0.52m deep and continued to a depth of 2.62m OD (Fig. 3 Section 1).

Auger soundings 1 and 2 revealed a sequence of deposits that are likely to be marine silts/clays. Deposit [5] (Fig. 3 Section 1) measured 1.30m deep and consisted of a very fine mid brown silt/clay. The top of this deposit was at 2.62m OD and the bottom at 1.33m OD. Below deposit [5] was a very similar deposit, layer [6] which consisted of a fine, light to mid brown silt/clay slightly coarser than deposit [5]. The top of deposit [6] was at 1.33m OD and was at least 0.90m thick. It

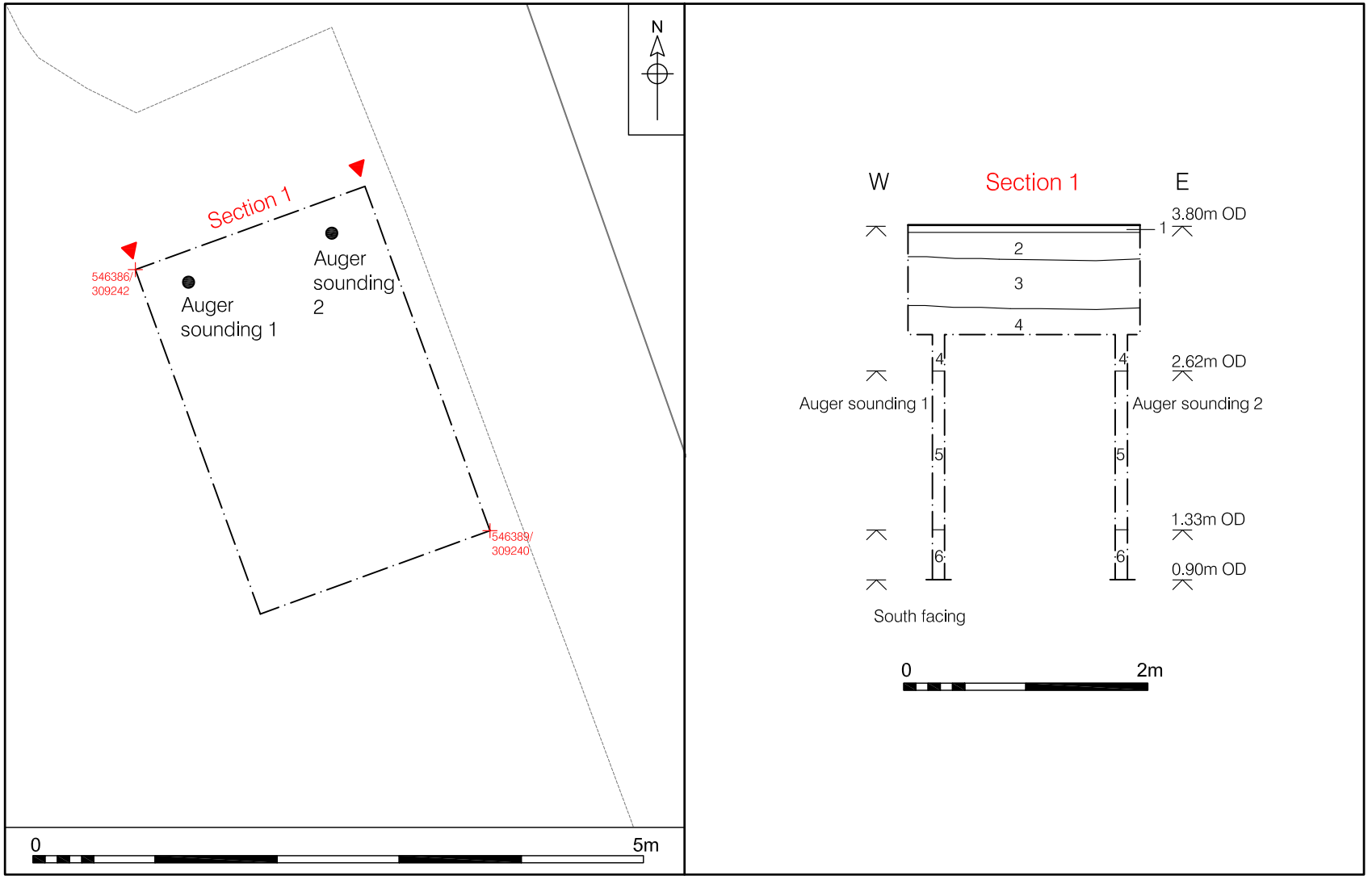

Figure 3. Trench 1, plan and section. Scale 1:50

was not possible to bottom this deposit because of water seepage at this depth which liquefied the deposits and caused soil to fall from the auger barrel.

Trench 2

Trench 2 was aligned roughly north–south and measured 3m long by 1.90m wide. The trench was located near the street frontage of 4a Cannon Street (Fig. 2, Plate 2) and prior to the excavation of deposits in the trench the concrete surface was cut and removed. The trench was situated at a height of 3.80m OD (north end) and 4.00m OD (south end). The trench was machined to 1.10m below current ground height (3.80m OD) on the northern side of the trench. Two auger soundings were placed at the northern end of the trench and like in Trench 1 they also revealed one additional deposit (Fig. 4).

Plate 2. Trench 2 with auger soundings 3 and 4, looking north

Concrete pad [7] measured 0.04m deep and overlay modern make layer [8] which consisted of mixed brick rubble, glass, chalk flecks and coal fragments, all of which were intermixed with a dark brown/black clayey sand.

Below deposit [8] was deposit [9] which comprised a dark brown silt with occasional charcoal flecks which contained 19th-century pottery and clay pipe fragments (including a fluted bowl). Deposit [9] was bottomed in auger soundings 3 and 4 and was 0.49m deep (between 3.48mOD and 2.99m OD). Environmental Sample <1> taken from deposit [9] contained black porous 'cokey' material, black tarry material, bone, burnt/fired clay, eggshell, coal, small mammal/amphibian bones and vitreous material.

The pottery from deposit [9] included yellow earthenwares, industrial slipwares and refined factory-made whitewares (Pottery 6.1 below). All vessels from this deposit were of 19th-century date and comprised slip decorated wares in common use during the first quarter of the 19th century and a less closely dateable plate

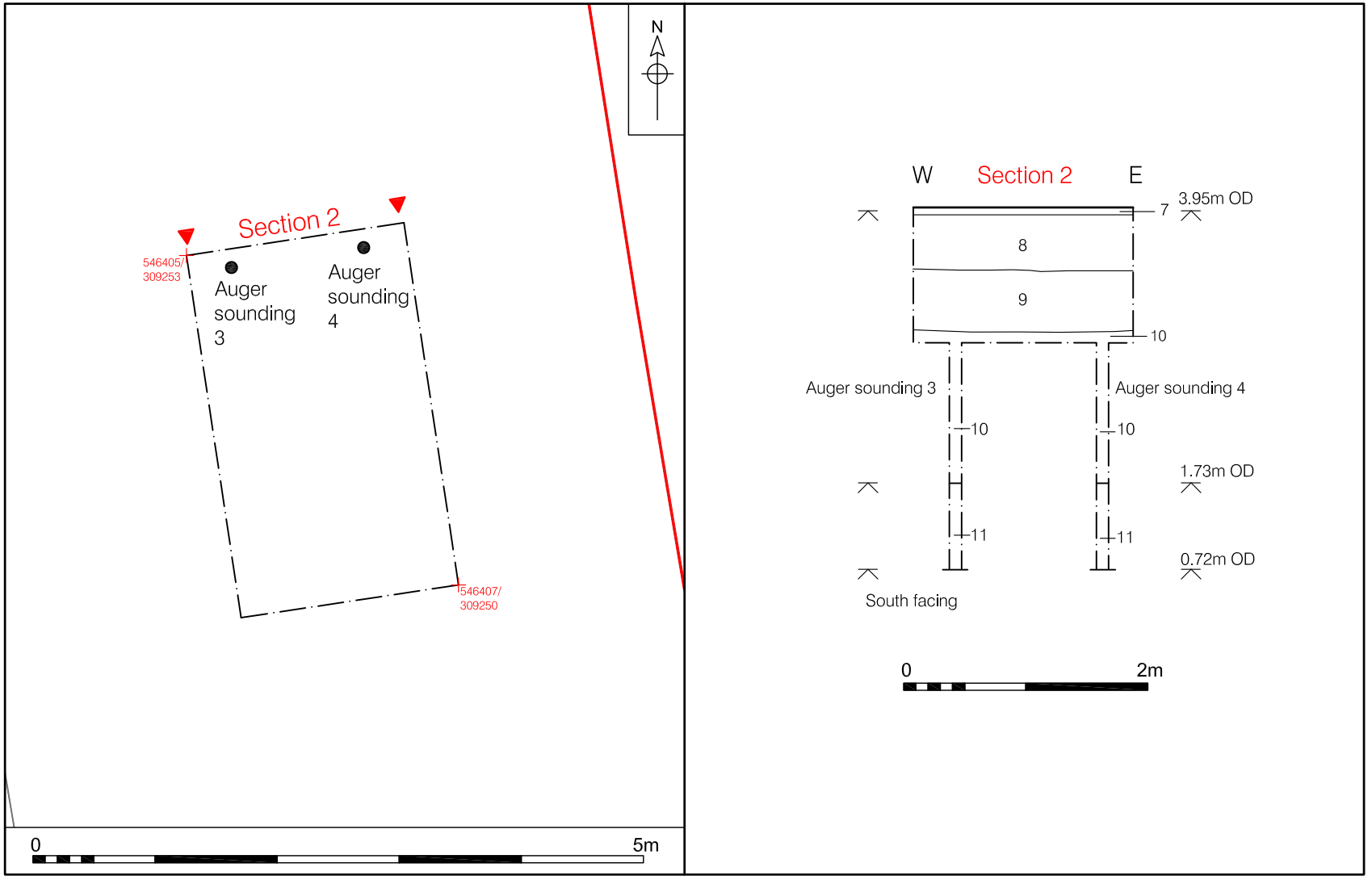

Figure 4. Trench 2, plan and section. Scale 1:50

fragment. A large part of a tankard with blue and brown slip bands and ‘mocha’ dendritic decoration was also present and contained material that was probably putty in its base.

Auger soundings 3 and 4 revealed that below the deposit [9] was deposit [10], a very fine mid brown silt/clay which is likely to equate to deposit [5] in Trench 1. Deposit [10] was 1.26m deep (from 2.99m OD and 1.73m OD) (Fig. 4 Section 2). Environmental Sample <2> from this deposit produced barley grains, cereal grains, black porous 'cokey' material, black tarry material, bone, coal fragments, burnt/fired clay, burnt stone, fish bone, marine mollusc shell and small mammal/amphibian bones (7.1 Plant Macrofossils, below). It appears that much of the environmental evidence points to hearth waste and small quantities of dietary refuse, indicating activity taking place in close proximity to the site.

Beneath, deposit [10] (revealed by auger soundings 3 and 4) was deposit [11] which was at least 1.01m deep and consisted of a fine, light- to mid-brown silt (top at 1.73m OD and base below 0.72m OD). Although, very similar to deposit [6], the composition of deposit [11] clearly included micaceous elements not obvious in that deposit.

Trench 3

Trench 3 was aligned roughly north–south, measured 8.2m long by 1.80m wide and was located towards the rear of 4a Cannon Street some 5m south of Trench 2 (Fig. 2, Plate 3). The trench was excavated to 1.20m below modern ground height on the northern side of the trench (3.93m OD). The height of each end of the trench was 3.93m OD (north end) and 3.83m OD (south end).

Modern make-up layer [12] was seen in Trench 3 (similar to that seen below the concrete pad in Trench 2). Deposit [12] was 0.80m deep and consisted of brick rubble, glass and fragments of charcoal intermixed with black clay. Below, deposit [12] was make-up deposit [13] which was 0.40m deep and consisted of mid to dark brown clayey sand with brick rubble, coal, charcoal and mortar.

Deposit [14] was at least 1.70m deep and consisted of a very fine mid orangey brown silt. This deposit was very different from the deposits recorded in the other two trenches. Auger sounding 5 demonstrated that the top of this deposit was at 2.61m OD and the base below 0.90m OD (Fig. 5 Section 3).

Pit [15] was located in the approximate centre of the trench (Fig. 5 Section 3) and was 080m in diameter and 0.40m deep (Plate 4). It contained a single fill consisting of mid brown clayey sand [16] from which two fragments of plain roof tile were found (6.2 Ceramic Building Material, below). Also recovered from the pit fill were sixteen pieces of an unidentified hardened substance. This material is thought to be similar to that found adhering to the inside of the 19th century pottery tankard from Trench 2 provisionally identified as ?putty. The purpose of this feature in unclear.

Environmental Sample <3> taken from pit fill [16] contained black porous ’cokey’ material, black tarry material, marine mollusc shell, coal fragments, small mammal/amphibian bones, vitreous material and white/buff mineral concretions (7.1 Plant Macrofossils, below).

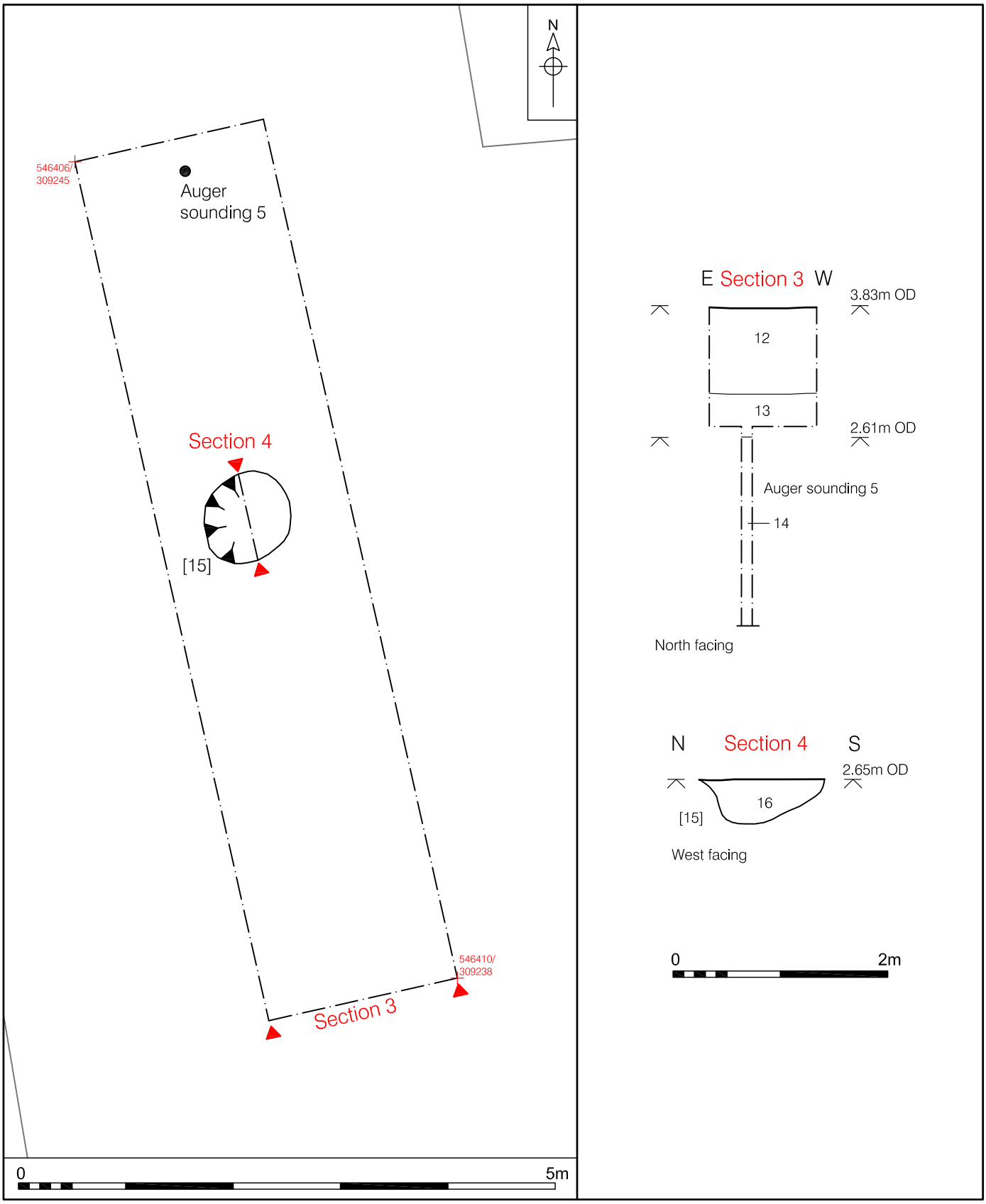

Figure 5. Trench 3, plan and sections. Scale 1:50

Plate 3. Trench 3, pre-excavation, looking south

Plate 4. Trench 3, pit [15], looking south

6.0 THE FINDS

6.1 Pottery

by Sue Anderson

Five sherds of pottery weighing 493g were collected from layer [9]. Table 1 shows the quantification by context.

Ctxt	Fabric	No.	Wt/g	Description	Spotdate
9	YELW	2	131	bowl rim (320mm diam) with external slip decoration - olive green 'mocha' dendritic on all-over white slip under two brown lines	19th c.
	YELW	1	11	small bowl (140mm diam) rim, blue line externally	19th c.
	INDS	1	324	large part of tankard with blue and brown slip bands and 'mocha' dendritic decoration, containing ?putty in base	19th c.
	REFW	1	27	base of pearlware ?plate with willow pattern transfer print	19th c.
Total		*5*	*493*		

Key to Table:
YELW–yellow earthenwares; INDS–industrial slipwares; REFW–refined factory-made whitewares

Table 1. Pottery catalogue

All vessels from this deposit were of 19th-century date and comprised slip decorated wares which were in common use during the first quarter of the 19th century, as well as a plate fragment which is less closely dateable due to the ubiquity and longevity of its transfer-printed design.

6.2 Ceramic building material

by Sue Anderson

Two fragments (120g) of plain roof tile in white-firing gault clay fabrics were found in pit fill [16]. One fragment has part of a square peg hole. This type of tile was common in the Fens from the late medieval period onwards, but these examples are likely to be post-medieval.

6.3 Clay Pipe

by Lucy Talbot

Three pieces of clay tobacco pipe weighing 12g all from deposit [9] were found.

The assemblage consists of two fragments of stem and a simple fluted bowl of 19th-century date (Flood 1976, p17, F)

6.4 Unidentified material

by Lucy Talbot

Sixteen pieces of an unidentified hardened substance weighing 14g were retrieved from deposit [16], the fill of pit [15].

This material is unidentified and is thought to be similar to material provisionally identified as ?putty, found adhering to the base of a 19th-century pottery tankard from deposit [9].

7.0 ENVIRONMENTAL EVIDENCE

by Val Fryer

7.1 Plant Macrofossils

7.1.1 Introduction and method statement

The evaluation excavations recorded a sequence of silt deposits and one discrete feature of probable medieval to post-medieval date. Samples for the evaluation of the content and preservation of the plant macrofossil assemblages were taken, and three were submitted for assessment.

The samples were processed by manual water flotation/washover and the flots were collected in a 300 micron mesh sieve. The dried flots were scanned under a binocular microscope at magnifications up to x16 and the plant macrofossils and other remains noted are listed in Appendix 3. Nomenclature within the table follows Stace (1997). All plant remains were charred.

The non-floating residues were collected in a 1mm mesh sieve and sorted when dry. Artefacts, including pottery, brick/tile and ferrous objects, and ecofacts, including bone and fish bone fragments, were retained for further analysis.

7.1.2 Results

All three assemblages were largely composed of coal fragments and pieces of black porous and tarry residue, with the latter two almost certainly being bi-products of the combustion of the coal. Plant macrofossils were scarce, but charcoal/charred wood fragments were noted in all three assemblages and sample 2 (from deposit [10]) also included a barley (*Hordeum* sp.) grain and two other cereals, which were too poorly preserved for close identification. One of these latter grains appeared to have been milled or ‘gristed’ prior to charring as it was completely flat, with only the embryo and ventral groove being obvious. Other remains included a fragment of eggshell, fish bones, marine mollusc shell fragments and pieces of bone.

7.1.3 Conclusions

In summary, it would appear most likely that all three assemblages are derived from small deposits of hearth waste. Although plant macrofossils are scarce, the assemblages are potentially of interest as they appear to contain small quantities of dietary refuse.

8.0 CONCLUSIONS

The mixed deposits observed in the trenches overlying the Fenland silts and clays gave the appearance that disturbance had taken placed within this area some time in the past and did indicate a gradual soil build-up. It suggested that truncation had taken place in the past which may explain the lack of subsoil and archaeological features within the development area.

Although archaeological evidence was scarce with no indication of any earlier settlement before the post-medieval period, the result of the evaluation has demonstrated that settlement during this period is likely to have been located near to the proposed development site.

Recommendations for future work will be based upon the results of this report by Cambridgeshire Archaeological Planning and Countryside Advice.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Richard Waite and Smedley Charitable Trust for commissioning and funding the project. Thanks are also extended to Debbie Biggs of Smedley Charitable Trust for her help and consideration during the project.

Thanks are extended to Karl Webber and Peter George of Bryn Williams Civil Engineering for their assistance throughout the duration of the fieldwork stage of this project, and to Andy Thomas of Cambridgeshire Archaeological Planning and Countryside Advice for his help and advice. .

The finds were washed and recorded by Lucy Talbot. The post-Roman pottery and ceramic building material were analysed by Sue Anderson. The clay pipe and unidentified material were reported on by Lucy Talbot. Environmental sample were processed by Rob Fryer and reported on by Val Fryer.

The graphics were undertaken by the author and David Dobson. The report was produced by David Dobson and was edited by Jayne Bown

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Stace, C. 1997 *New Flora of the British Isles*. Second edition. Cambridge University Press

Appendix 1a: Context Summary

Context	Category	Cut Type	Fill Of	Description	Period	Trench No
1	Deposit			Asphalt	Modern	Trench 1
2	Deposit			Concrete	Modern	Trench 1
3	Deposit			Make-up	Modern	Trench 1
4	Deposit			Black Clay	Post-medieval	Trench 1
5	Deposit			Mid brown clay	Uncertain	Trench 1
6	Deposit			Pale brown silt	Uncertain	Trench 1
7	Masonry			Concrete	Modern	Trench 2
8	Deposit			Make-up	Modern	Trench 2
9	Deposit			Dark brown silt	Post-medieval	Trench 2
10	Deposit			Mid brown silt	Uncertain	Trench 2
11	Deposit			Very fine brown silt	Uncertain	Trench 2
12	Deposit			Make-up	Modern	Trench 3
13	Deposit			Make-up	Modern	Trench 3
14	Deposit			Very fine brown silt	Uncertain	Trench 3
15	Cut	Pit		Round pit	Post-medieval	Trench 3
16	Deposit		15	Mid brown clayey sand	Post-medieval	Trench 3

Appendix 1b: OASIS Feature Summary

Period	Type	Total
Post-medieval	Pit	1

Appendix 2a: Finds by Context

Context	Material	Qty	Wt	Period	Notes
9	Pottery	5	493g	Post-medieval	
9	Clay Pipe	3	12g	Post-medieval	Bowl & stem frags
16	Ceramic Building Material	2	120g	Post-medieval	Roof tile frags
16	Unknown	16	14g	Unknown	

Appendix 2b: OASIS Finds Summary

Period	Material	Total
Post-medieval	Ceramic Building Material	2
	Clay Pipe	3
	Pottery	5
Unknown	Unknown	16

Appendix 3: Plant Macrofossils

Sample No.	1	2	3
Context No.	**9**	**10**	**16**
Feature No.			**15**
Feature type	**Layer**	**Layer**	**Pit**
Plant macrofossils			
Hordeum sp. (grain)		x	
Cereal indet. (grains)		x	
Charcoal <2mm	xx	x	x
Charcoal >2mm	x		x
Other remains			
Black porous 'cokey' material	xxxx	xxx	xxxx
Black tarry material	xxxx	xx	xxx
Bone	xb	x	
Burnt/fired clay	x	x	
Burnt stone		x	
Eggshell	x		
Fish bone		x	
Marine mollusc shell		x	x
Small coal frags.	xxxx	xxx	xxxx
Small mammal/amphibian bones	x	x	x
Vitreous material	x		x
White/buff mineral concretions			xx
Sample volume (litres)	**14**	**14**	**14**
Volume of flot (litres)	**<0.1**	**<0.1**	**<0.1**
% flot sorted	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Key to Table
x = 1–10 specimens xx = 11–50 specimens xxx = 51–100 specimens xxxx = 100+ specimens
cf = compare b = burnt