

Report 2737



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Archaeological Evaluation at 14 Market Place, March, Cambridgeshire

ECB 3646



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Location:	14, Market Place, March, Cambridgeshire
District:	Fenland
Planning Ref.:	F/YR11/0052/F
Grid Ref.:	TL 4176 9663
HER No.:	ECB 3646
OASIS Ref.:	109736
Client:	Swann Edwards Architects for Norman Fox
Dates of Fieldwork:	28-29 July 2011

Summary

An archaeological evaluation was conducted for Swann Edwards Architects on behalf of their client Norman Fox ahead of plans to build four new town houses on a compact plot of land at the centre of the market town of March.

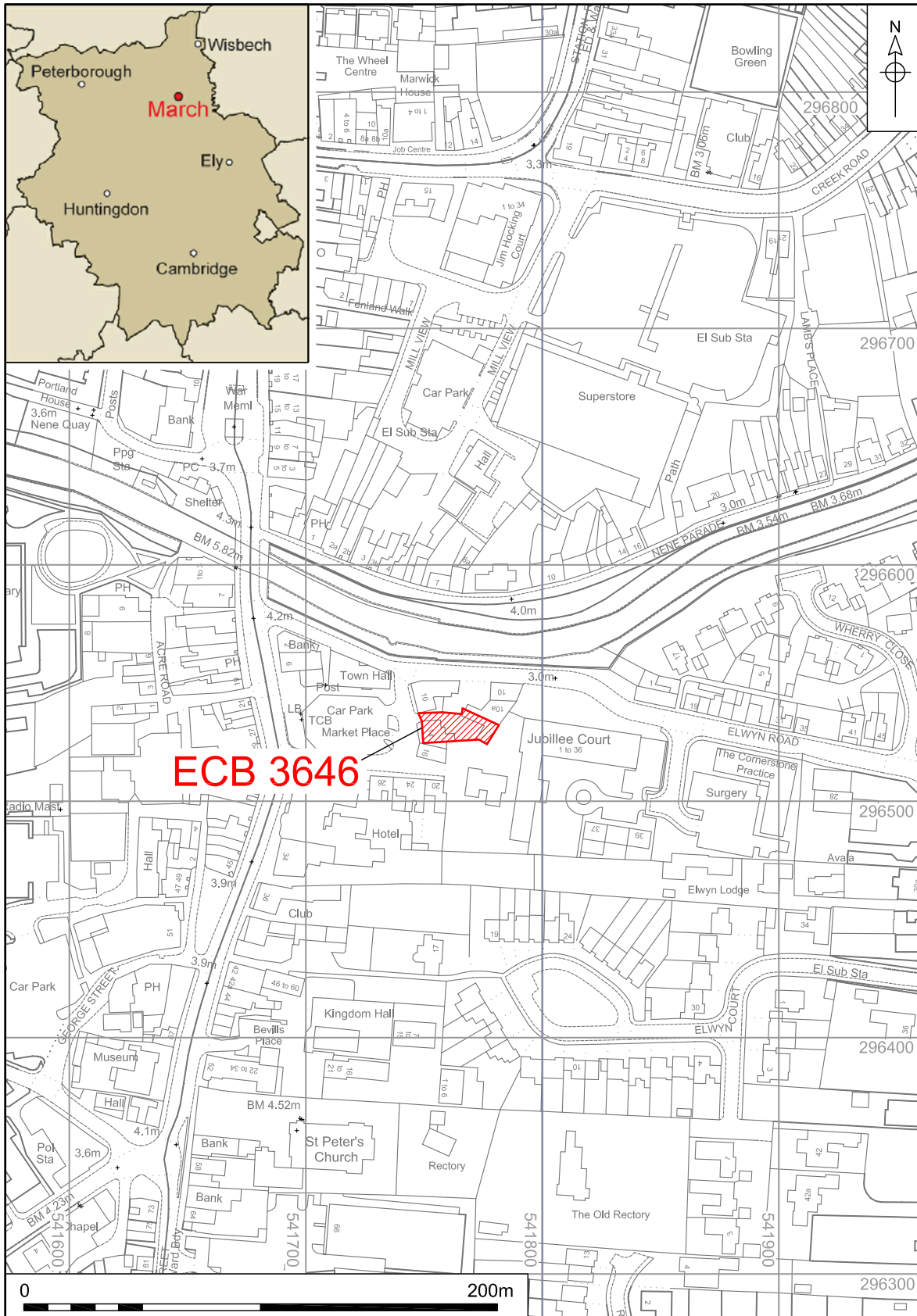
The single trench revealed evidence of Roman period salt production and a sequence of largely naturally deposited layers that had probably formed on the edge of a channel in the earlier medieval period. A layer of peat had also formed on the edge of the channel in the 12th-14th centuries which may mark the edge of the original course of the River Nene, prior to it being diverted in the 13th century, though this is not confirmed. The last deposits in the sequence were deliberately dumped to raise the ground level - probably during the 17th to 19th centuries.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The site is located in the centre of March at the east end of Market Place, which opens off of High Street close to the crossing point of the River Nene (Fig. 1). A single stepped evaluation trench was excavated in the yard behind 14 Market Place to sample excavate and determine the nature of any surviving archaeological remains present (Plate 1). The site extended 35m east to west by 13m north to south and had an irregular shape (Fig. 2). There were several derelict buildings located around the yard earmarked for demolition, including 14 Market Place itself which had several large cracks visible in the fabric suggesting foundation failure.

This work was undertaken to fulfil a planning condition set by Fenland District Council. (Ref.F/YR11/0052/F) and a Brief issued by Cambridgeshire Archaeology Planning and Countryside Advice. The project was conducted in accordance with a Project Design and Method Statement prepared by NPS Archaeology (Ref. NAU/BAU2737/NP). This work was commissioned by Swann Edwards Architects on behalf of their client Norman Fox who funded the project.

This programme of work was designed to assist in defining the character and extent of any archaeological remains within the proposed redevelopment area, area, following the guidelines set out in *Planning Policy Statement 5: Planning For The Historic Environment (March 2010)*. The results will enable decisions to be



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Figure 1. Site location. Scale 1:2500

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 Cambridgeshire Archaeology Planning and Countryside Advice (CAPCA), following the relevant policies on archiving standards.



Plate 1. The site, looking east

2.0 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

The specific underlying geology consists of Ampthill Clay Formation Mudstone.

Interestingly the site lies close to the boundary of two types of superficial geology. It appears that the site lay at the edge of an 'island' of March Gravels with Tidal Flat deposits consisting of clay and silt also present (British Geological Survey). The deposits recorded at the site seem to concur with these natural superficial deposits.

As the site lay within the centre of an urban area, the upper deposits have been heavily modified by dumping, so there was no true topsoil or subsoil present.

3.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

A search of the Historic Environment Record for Cambridgeshire (CHER) was made and the most relevant entries are reproduced below in order of broad archaeological period.

Prehistoric to Roman

Many of the earlier prehistoric remains in the area are probably masked by layers of silting and deposits laid down in a waterlogged environment, though some artefacts have been found in the vicinity of March.

Around 750m to the west of the current site, an archaeological evaluation at Gaul Road (MCB18589) revealed 234 struck flints in two concentrations either side of the stream. Aerial photographs of the study area at Gaul Road indicated that there were roddons and possible silt islands present. Previous projects had also indicated that a buried soil was also present within the valley which contained Mesolithic and Neolithic flints. The buried soil overlay a peat which had a radiocarbon date of c.1840BC, reflecting wetter conditions during the Bronze Age. Finds of an early date have added to this known early history in the vicinity of the present site. They include worked flint tools of Neolithic date represented by CHER 0521A, 10913A and 05904.

Activity was generally confined to 'islands' within marshland at this time, and an increase in population growth led to a corresponding increase in activity in the Bronze Age. The March area has several round barrows of this period. A site at Cherryholt Farm (05904) also contained struck flints of later date. In the Iron Age the settlement activity seemed to concentrate around the western and eastern sides of the island later occupied by March. An Iron Age pit (CHER MCB15694) was excavated close to the development site. On the opposite side of the River Nene a bowl was unearthed (CHER 05992). A hoard of Late Iron Age coins (CHER 05919) was also found somewhere within the parish.

The route of the Fen Causeway is known to have been located just to the north of March, between Denver and Peterborough, and the fenland was exploited in the later prehistoric to Roman period. There are several Romano-British sites within 1km of the proposed development site. To the north of the River Nene at Cedars Close an excavation found evidence of salt production with ovens, ash and briquetage (ECB 1394 and 2605); ditches, pits and post-holes were also present. Roman activity is also recorded south of the River Nene (CHER CB14565) where a stone platform, a gravel track, coins, pottery and oyster shells were present.

Anglo-Saxon to medieval

The settlement of March was probably founded at the fording point of the road from Wisbech to Ely across the River Nene. The name *Merche* or *mearc* means place by the boundary. There has only been a single find of Anglo-Saxon date found in March, a cruciform brooch found at CHER 03781a. The land was given to the monastery of Ely around AD 1000 by *Oswy* and *Ceolfleda* when their son was admitted as a monk to the monastery. At the time of the Domesday survey in 1086 the *Berewick* of March consisted of 12 *villeins* formed of 12 acres as part of Doddington manor. The Abbot of Bury St Edmunds was also a local landowner with 16 acres, 3 *bordars* and woodland supporting 4 pigs. The Abbot of Ely held the *soke*. In the 13th Century the River Nene was diverted through March in order to aid drainage and the settlement became an inland port. A nearby evaluation in Grays Lane (CHER CB15693) was located around 250m to the north of the present development site and found evidence of a medieval roadside ditch which by the 16th century had ceased to function. Another site at CHER MCB15694 recorded late medieval and post-medieval boundaries and drainage ditches.

The centre of the medieval town is thought to have developed around the parish church of St Wendreda, the daughter of the 7th-century East Anglian King Anna (the church is located at the southern tip of the modern town). There is a medieval wayside cross (CHER MCB 16840) to the north of the site.

Post-medieval to modern

Though the town had a successful port during Elizabeth I's reign in the 16th century) it did not thrive as well as some towns in the area – it was larger than Doddington and smaller than Downham and Littleport. During the 17th century Civil War the town was held by Parliamentary forces and part of the fortifications still exist in the south of the town (CHER 01997). At this time the settlement was continuing to grow and the commons were overrun with animals. It was agreed in 1661 that an additional 4,500 acres be set aside in the town for grazing animals. This new grazing area incorporated Town End and Burrow Moor and allowed each of the 165 tenants to graze two horses and either four cows or sixteen sheep between the months of May and September. In 1670 the town gained a market and two annual fairs which reflect its growing prosperity. However the town appears to have subsequently stagnated only starting to develop again with the advent of the railway in 1847.

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 excavation of a 4m x 4m evaluation trench which allowed provision for stepping and potentially deep depths to be attained without shoring. Conveniently, a square, rather than a rectangular trench fitted more easily into the limited space of the development area (Fig. 2). The trench was initially machined to a depth of 1.20m (Plate 2) and the deposits recorded and photographed.



Plate 2. Machining, looking west

As the work continued, a depth of 2.40m was achieved utilising stepped trench sides (Plate 3). The majority of the deposits were machine-excavated with a 0.20m slot hand dug at the base of the stepped trench. A further 0.90m was augered

from the base of the excavated sequence. The machine excavation was carried out with a wheeled JCB-type excavator equipped with a toothless ditching bucket and operated under constant archaeological supervision.



Plate 3. First step of trench machined showing the higher deposits, looking west

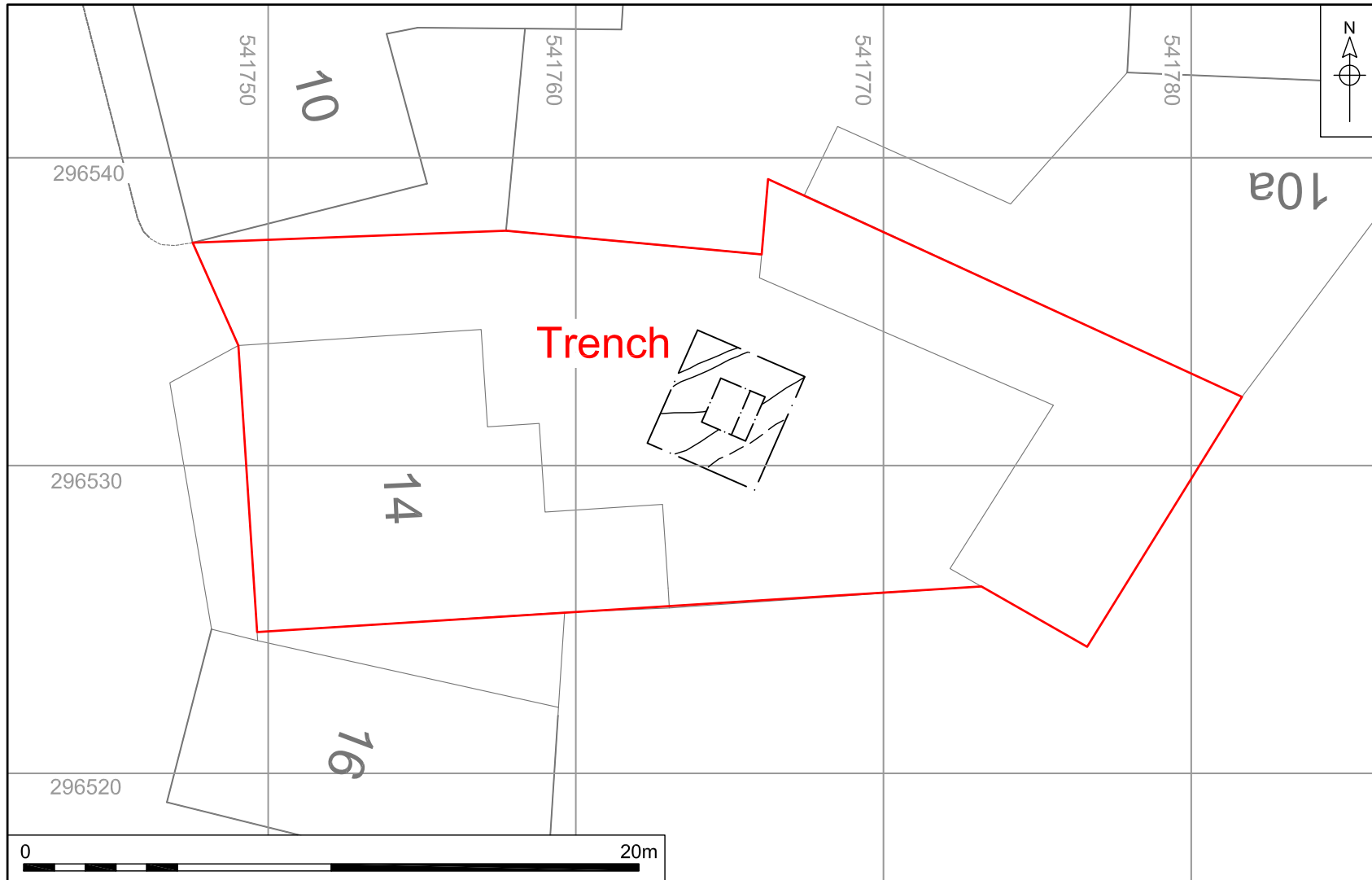
Spoil, exposed surfaces and features were scanned with a metal-detector; no metal finds were recovered however sherds of pottery and fragments of ceramic building material (CBM) were found.

Whole soil (bulk) samples were taken for environmental analysis of deposits [5] and [10] (Samples <1> and <2> respectively). A column sample was taken through the earlier part of the sequence exposed along with sub-samples of deposits [1] to [14] to allow for possible additional analysis if required.

All archaeological features and deposits were recorded using NPS Archaeology *pro forma*. Trench locations, plans and sections were recorded at appropriate scales. Monochrome and quality colour digital photographs were taken of all the deposits represented in the sequence.

The temporary benchmark used during the course of this work was transferred from a known height with a value of 3.0m to the north of the site on Elwyn Road adjacent to the River Nene. The temporary benchmark was located at the entrance to the site and had a value of 3.29m OD.

Site conditions were good, with the work taking place in warm and overcast weather.



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Figure 2. Trench location. Scale 1:200

5.0 RESULTS

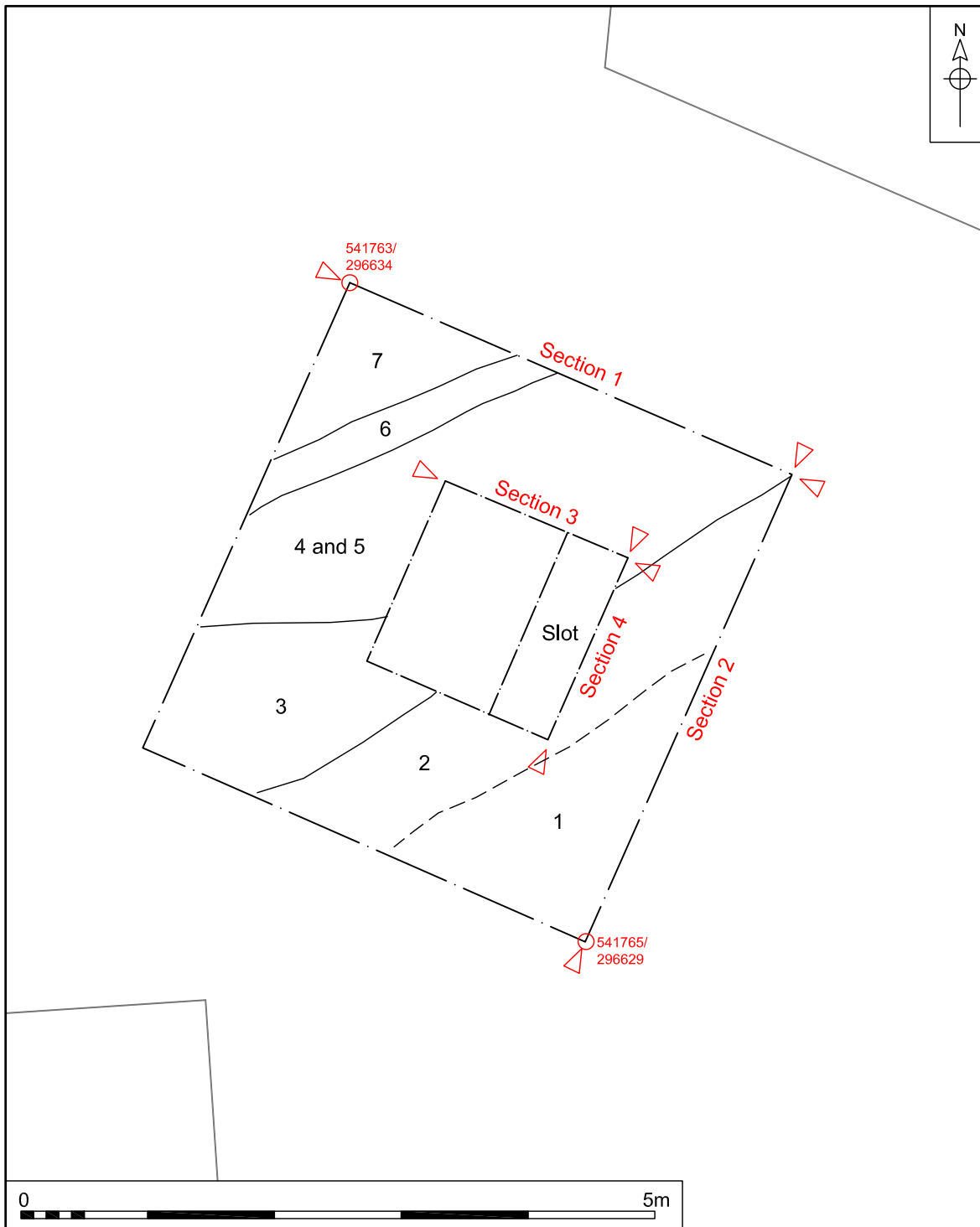
A total of fourteen deposits ([1]-[14]) were observed during the project and the uppermost ten deposits were observed to tip towards the south-east (Figs 3 and 4, Plates 4 and 5). This tipping became more pronounced towards the top of the sequence. Deposits [1] to [10] were encountered within the trench and were visible in section whereas deposits [11] to [14] were recorded via augering.



Plate 4. The fully excavated trench, looking east



Plate 5. The fully excavated trench, looking north-west



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Figure 3. Trench plan. Scale 1:50

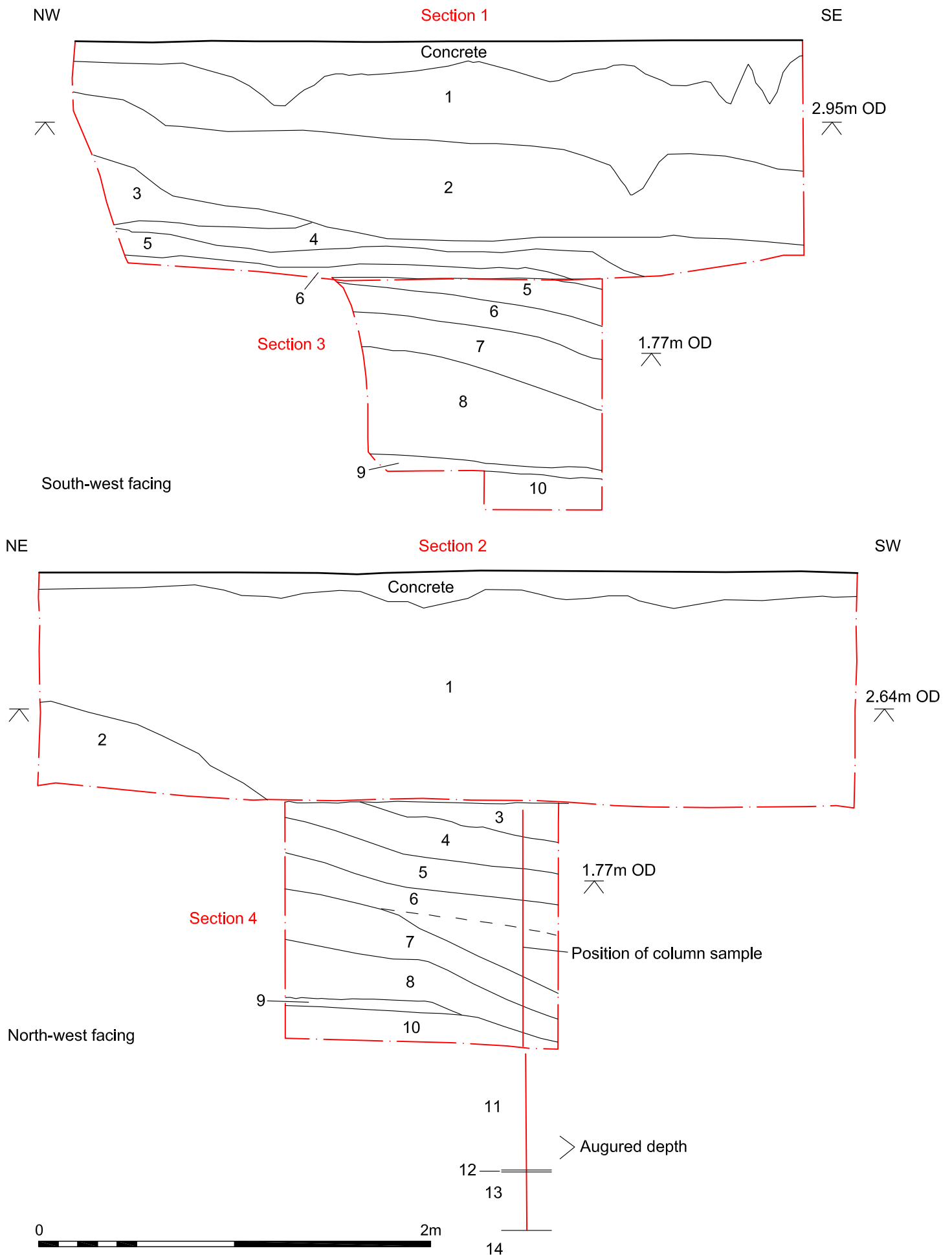


Figure 4. Sections 1-4. Scale 1:25



Plate 6. The fully excavated trench, looking south-east

The earliest deposit found on the site was loose, mottled, dark grey and yellow coarse sand [14] however its full thickness remained unknown as the auger was unable to penetrate through the base of this deposit (Fig. 4 Section 4). Layer [14] probably consisted of alluvial sand possibly located towards the base of a palaeo-channel. There were no inclusions within this deposit and it seemed to have been deposited through natural processes.

The next layer in the sequence was soft, light grey clayey silt [13] which also contained no inclusions. It was probably laid down in an alluvial environment through natural processes. Layer [13] was augered and was determined to be 0.30m thick (Fig. 4 Section 4).

A 0.02 thick layer of yellow sand ([12]) was observed above [13] (Fig. 4 Section 4) and probably represented a layer of alluvial river sand of natural origin. It also contained no inclusions.

The thickest deposit observed during augering was next in the sequence (Fig. 4 Section 4); it was 0.60m thick and consisted of friable, mid greyish brown clayey silt [11] with no inclusions.

At the base of the trench was 0.40m thick layer [10] (Fig. 4 Sections 3 and 4) which was formed of interleaving lenses of soft, loose, light yellow coarse sand and gravel (like beach sand) and tenacious light grey clay. The layer extended for at least 1.60m by 1.50m at the base of the stepped trench (Plates 4-7). The clay lenses contained frequent small fragments of possible degraded briquetage and larger fragments which were recovered from the layer as finds. A bulk sample was taken of the deposit which contained small inclusions suggesting firing at high temperatures. The lenses within the layer suggested that it may have developed naturally on the edge of a channel, although it became heavily influenced with material (a probable by-product of salt manufacture) of Roman date.



Plate 7. Section 3 deposits, looking north-east

Layer [9], similar to [10], was located next in the sequence (Fig. 4 Sections 3 and 4, Plates 4, 5 and 7). It consisted of interleaving lenses of loose orange sand with light grey clay. The layer was 0.04m thick and extended at least 1.60m by 1.50m in the base of the stepped trench. There were some smaller fragments of possible briquetage recovered from this layer also. The layer was also possibly naturally deposited although it was influenced by dumping as a by-product of salt manufacture and also contained one sherd of medieval pottery suggesting that it had been subjected to some mixing.

Above deposit [9] was layer [8] (Fig. 4 Sections 3 and 4, Plates 4, 5 and 7) which consisted of soft, mottled, yellowish light grey brown silt which contained occasional lenses of grey clay and pure yellowish brown sand. The layer was 0.30m thick and extended at least 1.60m by 1.50m in the base of the stepped trench. Medieval pottery was recovered from the layer, although it had almost certainly been largely deposited through natural processes.

Next in the sequence was layer [7], a soft, light grey, fine (slightly mottled with light brown) sandy silt (Figs 3 and 4 Sections 3 and 4, Plates 4, 5 and 7). The layer was 0.25m thick and extended at least 1.60m by 1.50m in the base of the stepped trench. It was possibly naturally occurring, located on the edge of a watercourse.

Above [7] was firm, mid ('chocolate') brown silty clay [6] which was mottled with moderate darker patches (Figs 3 and 4 Sections 1, 3 and 4, Plates 4-7). The layer was 0.45m thick at its thickest point towards the south east and was possibly originally an organic mud which had formed in a waterlogged environment. The layer was similar in character and appearance to layer [4] apart from being siltier in character. The layer extended at least 4.0m by 3.80m and was observed in the top part of the stepped trench.

A firm (crumbly when disturbed), black peat [5] mottled with reddish brown organic fragments was located halfway through the excavation sequence. It was 0.20m

thick and extended at least 4.0m by 3.80m and was observed in the top part of the stepped trench (Figs 3 and 4 Sections 1, 3 and 4, Plates 4-8). The layer appears to have formed in a waterlogged environment in the 12th-14th centuries. A bulk sample was taken from the deposit which confirmed that it had formed as an organic mud.



Plate 8. Close-up of section 1 deposits, looking north-east

Next in the sequence was firm mid ('chocolate') brown silty clay [4] which contained occasional charcoal flecks (Figs 3 and 4 Sections 1 and 4, Plates 4-8). It was similar in nature to layer [6], except that it was less silty. It was possibly originally an organic mud which had formed in a waterlogged environment. The layer had probably developed naturally though it contained inclusions. The layer was 0.20m thick on average and extended at least 4.0m by 3.80m and was observed in the top part of the stepped trench.

Layer [3] was the next deposit (Figs 3 and 4 Sections 1 and 4, Plates 4-8). It was composed of a firm, orange clay matrix holding frequent harder patches of compressed sand, occasional brick fragments and mortar flecks. The layer was probably dumped material designed to consolidate the edges of a generally waterlogged area and may have formed a 'hard standing' type of feature. The layer was 0.30m thick on average and extended at least 4.0m by 3.80m and was observed in the top part of the stepped trench.

Penultimate deposit [2] was a 0.50m thick, firm, mid grey silty clay (mottled in places with a light greenish brown silty sand) (Figs 3 and 4 Sections 1 and 2, Plates 4-8). It contained occasional charcoal flecks, brick, coal fragments, and mortar flecks. The layer became lighter towards the base and appeared to be mixed with layer [3] so that the boundary between the two deposits was diffuse. The layer probably represented a consolidation episode or a levelling layer designed to raise the ground surface to make it less prone to water-logging. The layer extended at least 4.0m by 3.80m and was observed in the top part of the stepped trench

The uppermost deposit in the development of the site also represented a consolidation episode or a levelling layer in a similar manner to layer [2]. It was 0.50m thick, extended at least 4.0m by 3.80m and was observed in the top part of the stepped trench (Figs 3 and 4 Sections 1 and 2, Plates 4-8). Layer [1] consisted of a friable dark grey clayey silt which contained occasional fragments of brick and fired clay and it had a diffuse boundary with layer [2]. The inclusions consisted of occasional animal bone, chalk flecks, coal fragments and charcoal as well as pottery. The finds were of mixed date ranging from medieval to the 19th century

6.0 THE FINDS

All finds were processed and recorded by count and weight, and an Excel spreadsheet was produced outlining broad dating. Each material type has been considered separately and is described below in date order. A list of all finds in context order can be found in Appendix 2a.

6.1 Pottery

by Sue Anderson

6.1.1 Introduction

Seventeen sherds of pottery weighing 512g were collected from five contexts. Table 1 shows the quantification by fabric; a summary catalogue by context is included as Appendix 3.

Description	Fabric	Code	No	Wt(g)	Eve	MNV
Early medieval ware	EMW	3.10	2	51	0.06	2
Medieval coarseware	MCW	3.20	1	2		1
Medieval chalk-tempered ware	MCWC	3.60	1	23	0.05	1
Ely coarseware	ELCW	3.61	1	1		1
Grimston-type ware	GRIM	4.10	1	67		1
<i>Total medieval</i>			6	144	0.11	6
Bourne Ware Type D	BOUD	5.24	1	103	0.16	1
Post-medieval redwares	PMRW	6.10	2	84	0.14	1
Glazed red earthenware	GRE	6.12	3	72	0.05	3
Post-medieval slipwares	PMSW	6.40	1	56	0.13	1
Cologne/Frechen Stoneware	GSW4	7.14	1	42		1
<i>Total late and post-medieval</i>			8	357	0.48	7
English Stoneware Staffordshire-type	ESWS	8.23	1	6		1
Staffordshire white salt-glazed stonewares	SWSW	8.41	2	5		2
<i>Total modern</i>			3	11		3
Totals			17	512	0.59	16

Table 1. Pottery quantification by fabric.

6.1.2 Methodology

Quantification was carried out using sherd count, weight and estimated vessel equivalent (eve). A full quantification by fabric, context and feature is available in the archive. All fabric codes were assigned from the author's post-Roman fabric series, which includes East Anglian and Midlands fabrics, as well as imported

wares. Imports were identified from Jennings (1981). Form terminology follows MPRG (1998). Recording uses a system of letters for fabric codes together with number codes for ease of sorting in database format. The results were input directly onto an Access database.

6.1.3 Pottery by period

6.1.3.1 Medieval

Six sherds were of medieval date, four from peat layer [5] and one each from layers [8] and [9]. These comprised the rim of a handmade early medieval ware bowl, a fragment of a bowl rim from a calcareous-tempered ware, three body sherds in medium sandy coarsewares (EMW, MCW, ELCW) and a fragment of body with handle base from a Grimston-type jug.

The calcareous tempered ware was in a fine silty clay with common mica, and was not typical of the chalk-tempered wares from the known production sites at Ely/Colne or Bourne, although the bowl rim was a simple upright thickened form which is comparable with early Ely products. The EMW bowl had a flat-topped rim, slight carination at the shoulder, and knife trimming below, and was in a fine sandy fabric with occasional red pellet inclusions.

6.1.3.2 Late and post-medieval

A rim and handle fragment of a Bourne D jug was found in topsoil [1]. The fragment was unglazed but covered in a thin white slip.

Two sherds of a post-medieval redware jar with a large beaded rim were also found in topsoil [1]. It had a couple of spots of glaze internally but was otherwise unglazed and may be of post-medieval or more recent date. Three sherds of glazed red earthenwares were also found, two body sherds with orange glaze, and a rim from a pancheon or bowl. The bowl rim was flanged and comparable with 16th-century examples made in Broad Street, Ely (cf Cessford *et al.* 2006, fig 41, no. 6). A slipware bowl was decorated with irregular white slip lines under an orange glaze. The origin of this is uncertain, although the fabric is similar to Bourne D. A brown stoneware Cologne-type mug rim was recovered from layer [3].

6.1.3.3 Modern

Modern wares comprised two small sherds of Staffordshire white salt-glazed stoneware, a base and a body from two different vessels, and a handle fragment from a Staffordshire white-dipped tankard. These are both of 18th-century date.

6.1.4 Pottery by context

Most of the pottery was recovered from topsoil (1), and this group ranged in date from the 15th/16th to 18th centuries. Pottery from layer [3] had a similar date range, although only a small sherd of 18th-century pottery was recovered and could be intrusive, suggesting a slightly earlier 16th/17th-century date. All pottery from peat layer [5] was medieval and the range of types suggests that the layer can be placed in the 13th century.

6.1.5 Discussion

This small group of sherds ranges from the early medieval to the early modern periods and suggests activity from at least the 13th century onwards. The range of

fabrics indicates that pottery was sourced locally in Cambridgeshire, as well as from Lincolnshire and Norfolk, in the medieval and post-medieval periods, with early modern pottery coming from the new factory production centres in Staffordshire.

6.2 Ceramic building material

by Sue Anderson

Ten fragments of ceramic building material (CBM) weighing 1125g was collected from three contexts (Appendix 4).

The assemblage was quantified (count and weight) by fabric and form. Fabrics were identified on the basis of macroscopic appearance and main inclusions. The width, length and thickness of bricks and floor tiles were measured, but roof tile thicknesses were only measured when another dimension was available. Forms were identified from work in Norwich (Drury 1993), based on measurements. Other form terminology follows Brunskill's glossary (1990).

Five fragments in estuarine clay fabrics were probably or certainly 'early bricks' of medieval date. Fragments were recovered from topsoil [1] and layers [3] and [4]. One fragment from [1] had a sanded base and sunken margins, and measured 57mm thick. An abraded fragment from [3] was 50mm thick, and a large piece from [4] was 70mm thick. All measurable pieces were hard-fired purple examples, but there was also a softer abraded orange fragment and a red fragment with straw impressions, both from [1]. These bricks were originally made in the 13th-15th centuries, although they were often reused in rubble cores or irregular brickwork of later periods.

Four fragments in a poorly mixed red and white fabric with leached calcareous inclusions were pieces of late brick. A piece of pale pinkish buff roof tile also had leached calcareous inclusions and was similar to the yellowish gault clay tiles typical of Cambridgeshire. These fragments, all from topsoil [1], are likely to be post-medieval.

6.3 Stone

by Sue Anderson

A fragment of a roofing slate was recovered from topsoil [1]. It has one complete peg hole and the possible remains of a second, c.60mm apart. The stone is a micaceous sandy limestone with occasional calcareous inclusions, and is likely to be a piece of Collyweston 'slate'. This material was used for roofing in the area from the Roman period onwards. It occurs in a band running between Lincolnshire and Northamptonshire and is readily available in north-west Cambridgeshire.

6.4 Clay Pipe

by Lucy Talbot

A single fragment of post-medieval clay tobacco pipe stem was recovered from the topsoil [1].

6.5 Briquetage

by Sarah Percival

A total of 27 pieces of briquetage weighing 590g were collected from two deposits (Appendix 5). The assemblage comprises six container fragments, six pieces from possible supports and fifteen bits of miscellaneous superstructure.

6.5.1 Methodology

The assemblage was analysed and recorded using the methodology devised for the briquetage recovered during the Fenland Management Project (Lane and Morris 2001). The complete assemblage was analysed and the briquetage recorded by context, grouped by class, form and fabric, and counted and weighed to the nearest whole gramme. Container wall thickness was recorded by thickness code (Lane and Morris 2001, 34), diameter, width and height of pedestals and other supports were noted where complete measurements were available. The thickness of a sample of structural pieces was recorded. Examples of diagnostic forms within each class were selected for illustration and were sketched or scanned for the archive. The archive is held by NPS Archaeology.

6.5.2 Containers

The six body sherds are made of fine organic-tempered fabric and are each around 4mm thick with inner surfaces bleached white by exposure to brine whilst the exterior surfaces are orange. No curved sherds or rim sherds were found however the presence of characteristic curved surfaces on the support pieces used to stabilise the containers suggests that they were flat-based pans with curved corners (Lane and Morris 2001, fig.100, 6).

6.5.3 Supports

A single fragment from a possible bar or rod (Morris 2008 fig.5, 5) was found along with two possible stabiliser clips. The rod is of fine, silty organic fabric suggesting that it have been made and pre-fired along with the containers before the salt making process began. In contrast the remainder of the supports, the stabilisers, were made ad-hoc of lumps of raw clay pressed between the base and sides of the pans and the superstructure walls to keep the containers steady during firing. This gives the stabilisers their characteristic curved edges which were formed where they were pushed against the walls of the container.

6.5.4 Superstructure

The remainder of the assemblage comprises formless pieces in coarse organic-tempered fabric which are from the superstructure of the drying oven. No pieces of hearth lining were found in keeping with the redeposited context of the material which may have moved some distance from the salt making site, perhaps reused as hard core or similar.

6.5.5 Discussion

The small size of the assemblage prohibits precise dating however the presence of the possible rod and pans with convex profiles suggest that it is early Roman, contemporary with previous finds of briquetage from an early 2nd-century saltern at Norwood (Potter 1981) and with the earlier phase of a complex multi-period salt making site from Cedar Close, March (Morris 2008).

6.6 Faunal Remains

by Lucy Talbot

Seven fragments of mammal bone were recovered, weighing 81g. The material was collected from two contexts, topsoil [1] and clay layer [3]. The pieces are likely to be derived from food waste, deposited during the medieval or post medieval period.

6.7 Shell

by Lucy Talbot

Deposit [3] produced a single piece of oyster shell weighing 27g which was recorded and subsequently discarded.

7.0 ENVIRONMENTAL EVIDENCE

7.1 Plant Macrofossils

by Val Fryer

7.1.1 Introduction and method statement

These evaluation excavations recorded a limited number of features of possible prehistoric and medieval date. Samples for the evaluation of the content and preservation of the plant macrofossil assemblages were taken from a possible prehistoric deposit of sand with clay lenses (Sample <2>, context [10]) and from a medieval organic mud deposit (Sample <1>, context [5]).

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 6. With the exception of a small number of waterlogged root/stem fragments noted in Sample <1>, all plant remains were charred.

The non-floating residue from Sample <2> was collected in a 1mm mesh sieve and sorted when dry. Small fragments of burnt or fired clay were retained for further specialist analysis. Sample <1> did not produce a residue.

7.1.2 Results

Plant macrofossils were exceedingly scarce, with only a very low density of charcoal/charred wood fragments being recorded along with a piece of charred culm (stem) and an indeterminate seed. Other remains were also scarce, although fragments of burnt or fired clay and burnt soil concretions were noted within both assemblages. Sample <1> also produced a fish vertebra, fragments of waterlogged caddis larval case and waterlogged arthropod remains. A single fragment of burnt bone was recorded within the assemblage from Sample <2>.

7.1.3 Conclusions and recommendations for further work

In summary, the assemblages are extremely sparse and, as a consequence, any interpretation of the deposits is very difficult. Although at the time of excavation, deposit [5] was described as a peat, identifiable plant remains are very scarce within the recovered assemblage and, as a result, it is probably more accurate to

describe this layer as an organic mud or silt. Why or how this deposit formed is unknown, but high levels of soluble minerals within the local water table have resulted in the formation of small, rounded 'cysts', which are easily mistaken for seeds and/or charcoal fragments. Fragments of burnt or fired clay and concretions of burnt soil are both predominant within the assemblage from Sample <2>, possibly indicating that the material within this deposit was, at some point, subjected to very high temperatures of combustion. Similar remains have been noted within other deposits from March (Fryer 2008), which contain materials derived from Roman salt production.

Because of the low density of remains within the assemblages submitted for analysis, it is difficult to make any recommendations for further sampling should the opportunity arise. However, because of the geographic importance of March within an area of both early salt production (Lane and Morris 2001) and fen edge settlement, if further interventions are planned, additional plant macrofossil samples of approximately 20–40 litres in volume may be taken from any well-sealed and dated contexts which are recorded during excavation.

7.2 Column and Sub-Samples



Plate 9. Section 4 after removal of column and sub-samples

A column sample was taken through the earliest part of the sequence exposed (Plate 9) to and sub-samples of deposits [1] to [14] were also taken to allow for possible additional analysis if appropriate as part of a mitigation strategy.

8.0 CONCLUSIONS

The evaluation, though relatively small in extent, presents useful evidence for the historical development of March through two millennia. Work done as part of the Fenland Project and published in *East Anglian Archaeology* (Hall 1987, 38-47) has been utilised to put the results of this evaluation into context. Although archaeologically significant remains are present within the development site they are encountered at some depth, with many layers sloping downwards from north-west to south east.

The earliest layers recorded at the site ([11]-[14]) were recorded as auger soundings. These deposits appeared to be free of inclusions and probably represented the natural infilling of a palaeo-channel at some point in the prehistoric period.

Layer [10] was the lowest layer exposed within the evaluation trench. The layer contained many fragments of briquetage and in keeping with other salt making activity in the area are thought to be of early Roman date. No pieces of hearth lining are present in the collected assemblage suggesting that these pieces have been re-deposited and may have moved from the salt making site itself. Hall (1987, 42) indicates that re-deposition or mixing rapidly breaks down the fragments of briquetage 'Nearly all of the sites on silt roddons, whether natural features or formed from silted canals, yield briquetage resulting from saltern activity. . . Sites subjected to ploughing for many years now have a mass of very small fragments scattered all over them. In those cases where a site is newly broken up, large chunks of briquetage are usually present, enabling kiln furniture and fabric to be reconstructed.' The environmental evidence from deposit [10] (Sample <2>) showed that small inclusions suggestive of high temperatures were present and indicates that activity such as salt-making which would produce such remains had been undertaken close by and had 'influenced' the deposit containing the briquetage fragments. This deposit has certainly been disturbed and may have been used a bit like hardcore to infill a waterlogged channel. The location of the salt making is in keeping with the general position of such sites as outlined by Hall (1987, 43) i.e. 'All the salt-producing sites are placed at the Roman fen-edge, as well as on a tidal watercourse, so that the two essential raw materials were in close proximity.' Evidence of salt making has been found reasonably close to the north of the development site beyond the River Nene at Cedars Close (ECB 1394 and 2605) with ovens, ash and briquetage represented in the record.

The absence of Roman pottery from this evaluation of the development site confirms that the main centres of settlement in the Roman period were situated away from salt-making activity and there are none recorded close to the current site. Hall suggests that it is highly likely that the River Nene ran to the north of March (1987, fig. 23). The fields and enclosures of Roman March also appear to be concentrated to the north-east of the development site and were focused around the Fen Causeway which presumably followed firmer and higher ground through the north of the modern-town.

Deposit [9] which partially sealed layer [10] contained fragments of briquetage and a sherd of medieval pottery which might suggest that it had been more mixed; layer [8] lying above these deposits also contained a sherd of medieval pottery and it is suggested that these two sherds are intrusive. Deposit [8] was probably deposited through natural actions as were layers [7] and [6] above it. They were probably accumulating at some point between the end of salt manufacturing and the build up of the 'peaty' layer during the 12th-14th centuries. All of these layers slope downwards from north-west to south-east which strongly suggests that they were formed on the edge of a channel. It might be possible that this channel was an earlier course of the River Nene prior to its re-direction in the 13th century or perhaps a smaller tributary which fed into the Nene to the north. The layer of 'peaty' material [5] appears to have formed in the 12th to 14th century, around the time that the River Nene was diverted in order to aid drainage of the medieval town.

Sample <1> from context [5] contained ecofacts (fish vertebra, fragments of waterlogged caddis larval case and waterlogged arthropod remains) confirming the wet nature of the area at the time. The absence of Saxon or earlier medieval evidence encountered during this work strongly supports the premise that the centre of the earlier medieval town was centred on St Wendreda's church at the southern tip of the modern town. Layer [3] and [4] contained brick of 13th- to 15th-century date which indicate that there were structures of that date reasonably close during that period. Layer [3] itself was probably dumped material designed to consolidate the edges of a generally waterlogged area. This evidence concurs with evidence that by the later medieval period March was prospering and had expanded northwards to include the area of the present site. The brick had probably been deliberately deposited and the layers were probably dumped also in an attempt to raise the level of this relatively low-lying area in order to make it usable. Layer [1] and [2] were thick layers of levelling material containing mixed dating evidence which appear to have been deposited as late as the 18th and possible 19th century. Layer [1] also contained some 20th-century material.

Recommendations for future work based upon this report will be made by Cambridgeshire Archaeology Planning and Countryside Advice (CAPCA)

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Appendix 1a: Context Summary

Context	Category	Cut Type	Fill Of	Description	Period
1	Deposit			Topsoil	Post-medieval
2	Deposit			Clay build-up	Post-medieval
3	Deposit			Orangey clay layer	Medieval
4	Deposit			Chocolate Brown organic mud	Medieval
5	Deposit			Black peat	Medieval
6	Deposit			Dark grey organic mud	Roman to medieval
7	Deposit			Grey sandy silt	Roman to medieval
8	Deposit			Yellow tinged silt	Roman to medieval
9	Deposit			orange coarse 'beach' like sand	Roman
10	Deposit			yellow coarse sand and clay lenses	Roman
11	Deposit			Mid grey clayey silt	Unknown
12	Deposit			Coarse sand	Unknown
13	Deposit			Light grey clay	Unknown
14	Deposit			Black sand	Unknown

Appendix 2a: Finds by Context

Context	Material	Qty	Wt	Period	Notes
1	Pottery	9	325g	Med./Post-Med.	
1	Ceramic Building Material	8	710g	Med./Post-Med.	
1	Clay Pipe	1	1g	Post-medieval	Stem frag.
1	Stone	1	267g	Unknown	
1	Animal Bone	3	32g	Unknown	
3	Pottery	2	43g	Post-medieval	
3	Ceramic Building Material	1	204g	Post-medieval	
3	Animal Bone	4	49g	Unknown	
3	Shell	1	27g	Unknown	Oyster; DISCARDED
4	Ceramic Building Material	1	211g	Medieval	
5	Pottery	4	141g	Medieval	
8	Pottery	1	1g	Medieval	
9	Pottery	1	2g	Medieval	
9	Fired Clay	4	15g	Roman	Briquetage
10	Fired Clay	22	564g	Roman	Briquetage

Appendix 2b: Oasis finds Summary

Period	Material	Total
Roman	Fired Clay	26
Medieval	Ceramic Building Material	1
	Pottery	6
Med./Post-med.	Ceramic Building Material	8
	Pottery	9
Post-medieval	Ceramic Building Material	1
	Clay Pipe	1
	Pottery	2
Unknown	Animal Bone	7
	Shell	1
	Stone	1

Appendix 3: Pottery

Context	Fabric	Form	Rim	No	Wt/g	Fabric date range
1	BOUD	jug	FTEV	1	103	15th-E.17th c.
1	GRE			1	22	16th-18th c.
1	GRE			1	12	16th-18th c.
1	GRE	bowl/pancheon	FLAN	1	38	16th-18th c.
1	PMRW	jar	BD	2	84	16th-18th c.
1	PMSW	bowl	BD	1	56	17th-19th c.
1	SWSW			1	4	18th c.
1	ESWS			1	6	L.17th-M.18th c.
3	SWSW			1	1	18th c.
3	GSW4	mug	UPPL	1	42	16th(-17th) c.
5	EMW	bowl	FTEV	1	49	11th-13th c.
5	MCW			1	2	L.12th-14th c.
5	MCWC	bowl	UPTH	1	23	12th-14th c.
5	GRIM	jug		1	67	L.12th-14th c.
8	ELCW			1	1	12th-14th c.
9	EMW			1	2	11th-13th c.

Key: Rim: FTEV–flat-topped everted; BD–beaded; FLAN–flanged; UPPL–upright plain; UPTH–upright thickened.

Appendix 4: Ceramic Building Material

Context	fabric	form	no	wt(g)	abr	height	mortar	comments	date
1	est	EB	1	167		57	thin	purple, sanded, occ straw	13-15
1	est	EB	1	26	+			soft orange	13-15
1	est	EB	1	60				red, sanded	13-15
1	msx	LB	4	331				coarse, laminated, leached calc - poss EB but no sunken margins	pmed
1	msc	RT	1	126				pale pink-buff, occ Fe	pmed?
3	est	EB	1	204	++	50		purple	13-15
4	est	EB	1	211		70		purple, strawed?	13-15

Appendix 5: Briquetage

Context	Fabric	Type	Form	Qty	Wt	Surfaces	Colour
9	O1	Superstructure	Miscellaneous	1	1g		Pink/orange
9	O2	Support	Miscellaneous	3	14g		Pink/orange
10	O2	Container	Body sherd	6	40g	2	Cream/orange
10	O1	Support	Miscellaneous	1	19g	3	Orange
10	O1	Support	Miscellaneous	1	65g	2	Cream
10	O1	Superstructure	Miscellaneous	14	440g	1	Cream/orange
10	S1	Support	Rod	1	11g	2	Cream/orange

Fabric descriptions: O1=common coarse elongated voids; O2=sparse to moderate elongated voids; S1=fine silt-rich clay, sparse elongated voids

Appendix 6: The Environmental Evidence

Sample No.	1	2
Context No.	5	10
Feature type	Deposit	Deposit
Date	Med.	?Prehist.
Plant macrofossils		
Charcoal <2mm	x	xx
Charcoal >2mm		x
Charred root/stem		x
Waterlogged root/stem	xx	
Indet.culm frag.		x
Indet.seed		x
Other remains		
Black tarry material		x
Bone		xb
Burnt/fired clay	x	xxx
Burnt soil concretions	x	xxxx
Caddis larval case	x	
Fish bone	x	
Mineral replaced root channel	x	
Vitreous material	x	
Waterlogged arthropod remains	x	
Sample volume (litres)	2ss	8
Volume of flot (litres)	0.4	<0.1
% flot sorted	25%	100%

Key: x=1–10 specimens xx=11–50 specimens xxx=51–100 specimens xxxx=100+ specimens
 b=burnt ss=sub-sample Med.=medieval Prehist=prehistoric