

# **NAU ARCHAEOLOGY**

Report No. 1178

## **An Archaeological Evaluation at Bury Lane Farm, Ramsey (Upwood Parish), Cambridgeshire**

CHER Event No. ECB2289

ONLINE ACCESS to the INDEX of ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS (OASIS) No 15365

Gary L Trimble, August 2006

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## **Contents**

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### ***Summary***

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Geology and Topography
- 3.0 Archaeological and Historical Background
- 4.0 Methodology
- 5.0 Results
- 6.0 Conclusions

### ***Acknowledgements***

Appendix 1a: Context Summary

Appendix 1b: OASIS feature summary table

### **Figures**

- Fig.1 Location of Ramsey, Cambridgeshire
- Fig.2 Site location
- Fig.3 Trench location
- Fig.4 Trench 1, plan of features
- Fig.5 Trench 1, section through modern ditch [35]



Location: Bury Lane Farm, Ramsey (Upwood parish), Cambridgeshire  
Grid Ref: TL 2658 8469  
CHER Event No: ECB 2289  
Date of fieldwork: 15th to 18th May 2006

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## **Summary**

*An archaeological evaluation was carried out prior to development on land at Bury Lane Farm, Ramsey, Cambridgeshire. The development area was positioned approximately 200m east of previous discoveries of Roman artefacts that perhaps marked an area of settlement. To the west of the site are the remains of the moated Biggin house, built in the 16th century on the probable site of a medieval hospital.*

*The evaluation did not identify any features, deposits or artefacts of archaeological significance. Modern field boundary ditches represent the only identified features.*

*The lack of archaeological evidence indicates that the postulated Roman settlement and medieval hospital do not extend into the area of development.*

## **1.0 Introduction**

(Figs 1 and 2)

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken by NAU Archaeology on a proposed development area at Bury Lane Farm, Ramsey, Cambridgeshire between the 15th and 18th May 2006. The proposed development involved the construction of a composting facility. The area evaluated measured almost 1.2ha (11975 sq. m).

The work was commissioned by Charles Thomas of Wisser Waste Information Services Ltd and undertaken in accordance with a Project Design and Method Statement prepared by the NAU Archaeology (NAU Ref: BAU1303/DW) and a Brief issued by Cambridgeshire Archaeology Planning & Countryside Advice (CAPCA Ref: Andy Thomas 19 April 2006).

The 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 and Policy Guidance 16 — Archaeology and Planning* (Department of the Environment 1990). The results will enable decisions to be made by the Local Planning Authority with regard to the treatment of any archaeological remains found.

The site archive is currently held at NAU Archaeology offices at Cathedral Street, Norwich. The site archive will ultimately be deposited in the Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeology Store following the relevant policy on archiving standards. The store is curated by Cambridgeshire Historic Environment Record (CHER).

## **2.0 Geology and Topography**

The site lies at an elevation of 4.25m OD (centred) and towards the edge of an expanse of higher ground elevated above the surrounding fen on which the town of Ramsey is sited. The ground slopes away gently to the north-west into the fen (at 0m OD) but rises gradually in all other directions. Boulder clay forms the drift geology of

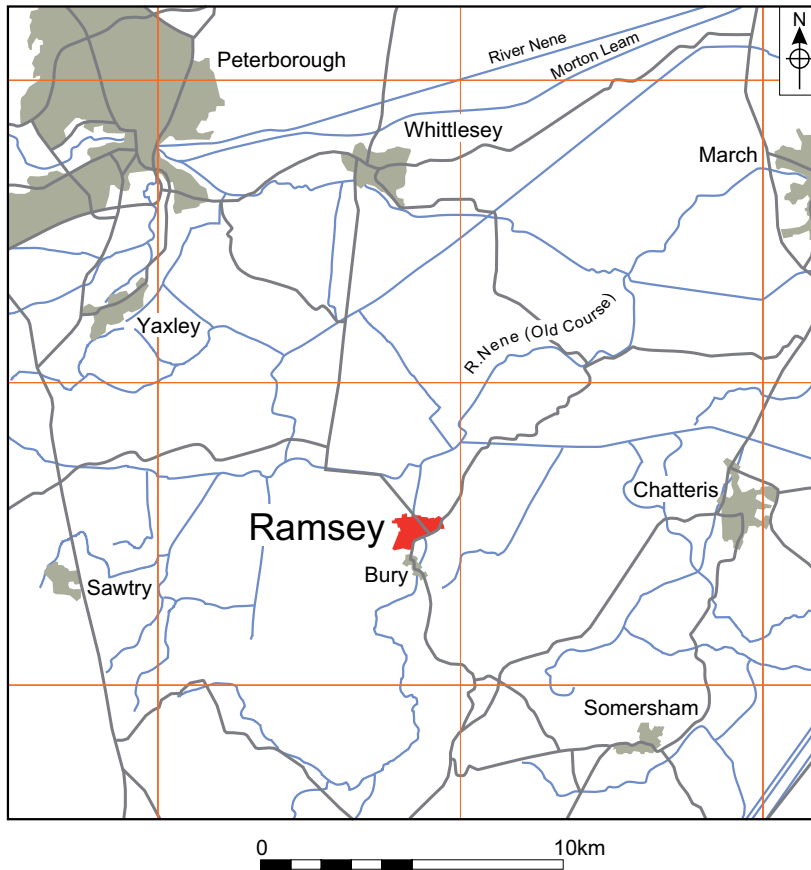


Figure 1. Location of Ramsey, Cambridgeshire. Scale 1:100,000

the area. The site is bounded on the north, east and west sides by agricultural land. Buildings associated with the disused Upwood Airfield lie to the south.

### 3.0 Archaeological and Historical Background

No finds of historical or archaeological interest have been previously recorded within the confines of the evaluation area although approximately 200m to the north-west of the site lay the remains of a probable Roman settlement (Historic Environment Record (CHER) 01855). Here quite a lot of Roman pottery and a shale bracelet have been recovered during ploughing. Further afield, located approximately 600m north-west of the evaluation area, was the find spot of a Neolithic axe head (CHER 01757).

The location of the 16th-century moated Biggin house (CHER 01033) is c. 800m east of the proposed development area. Although nothing of the house itself survives above ground, the site is visible as an earthwork and the moat surrounding the house is visible as a quadrangular cropmark. The house was probably built on the site of a medieval hospital.

The area lies on the north side of the disused airfield of RAF Upwood (CHER CB15153). The site was first used as an airfield in 1916 although only until the end of WWI (1918). The airfield was reopened in 1937 and continued in use until 1961. Some buildings still stand including the bomb stores that are located immediately south-west of the evaluation area. The proposed development area itself was at

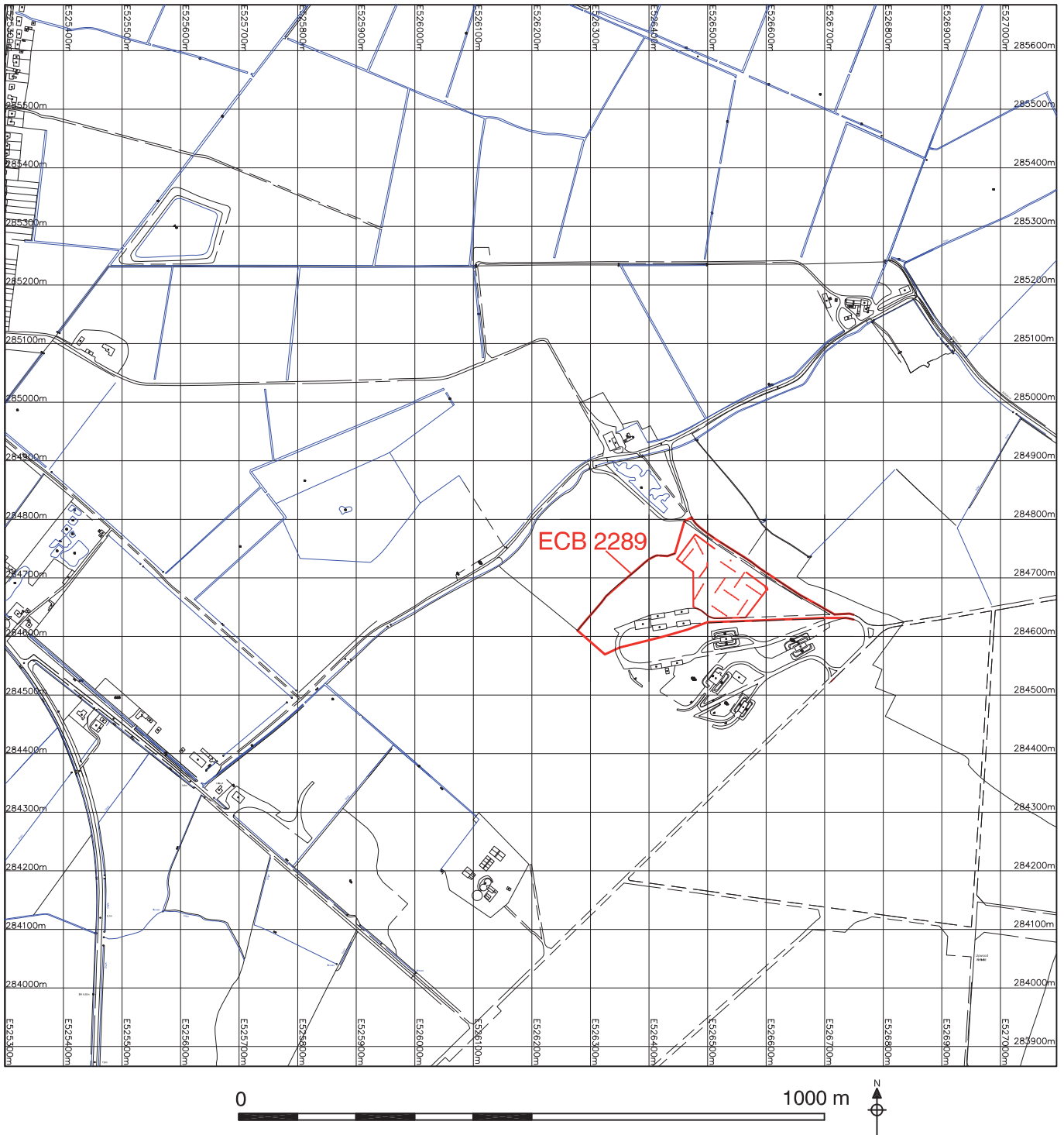


Figure 2. Site location. Scale 1:10,000

one time concreted over and used as a dispersal point as part of the airfield. The concrete was removed in the 1960s and the land reverted to agricultural use. Within the last decade the evaluation area has been used as a compost storage area.

All aerial photographs (held by Cambridge University) that show the evaluation area and surrounding land were examined for cropmarks. Although a number of aerial photographs showing the area were available for study, none depicted any cropmarks with the exception of the previously recorded quadrangular remains of the moated house mentioned above.

## 4.0 Methodology

(Fig. 3)

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 minimum of 5% sample of the area to be affected by the development should be subject to trial trenching.

Eleven trenches each measuring 30m in length and 2m in width were excavated across the site (a total of 660 sq. m). Machine excavation was carried out with a hydraulic 360° excavator using a toothless ditching bucket under constant archaeological supervision.

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

All archaeological features and deposits were recorded using NAU Archaeology *pro forma* sheets. Trench locations, plans and sections were recorded at appropriate scales and colour and monochrome photographs were taken of all relevant features and deposits.

A level was transferred from an Ordnance Survey benchmark of 3.50m on the north-east corner of Bury Lane Farm. A non-permanent peg was used as a temporary benchmark on site.

Due to the lack of suitable deposits, no environmental samples were taken.

Weather conditions during the evaluation were dry and sunny. The clay that formed the natural quickly dried out in these conditions leading to shrinkage and cracking. Any features present were clearly visible during or shortly after machining but obscured within hours as the clay dried.

## 5.0 Results

Only Trenches 1, 2 and 3 retained profiles that included the topsoil. Utilisation of the remainder of the area as a store for compost has resulted in the topsoil being removed during machine handling of the compost or homogenised and mixed with the compost itself. The use of heavy plant during compost handling has also resulted in the truncation of the upper horizon of natural clay in this area. Ruts and hollows formed by the wheels of machinery and by digging equipment were clearly visible in the natural clay in most trenches.

**Trench 1** (Fig. 4) was orientated south-east to north-west and was located in the north-west corner of the development area. The topsoil ([07]) measured 0.20m in depth and consisted of mid brown clayey silt, whilst the subsoil ([08]) measured 0.12m in depth and consisted of yellowish brown clay mixed with some silt. The natural ([09]) was formed of clean yellow brown clay.

The only features to be recorded in the trench were two contemporary ditches of modern – probably mid-to-late 20th century date. Ditch [35] measured 1.68m in



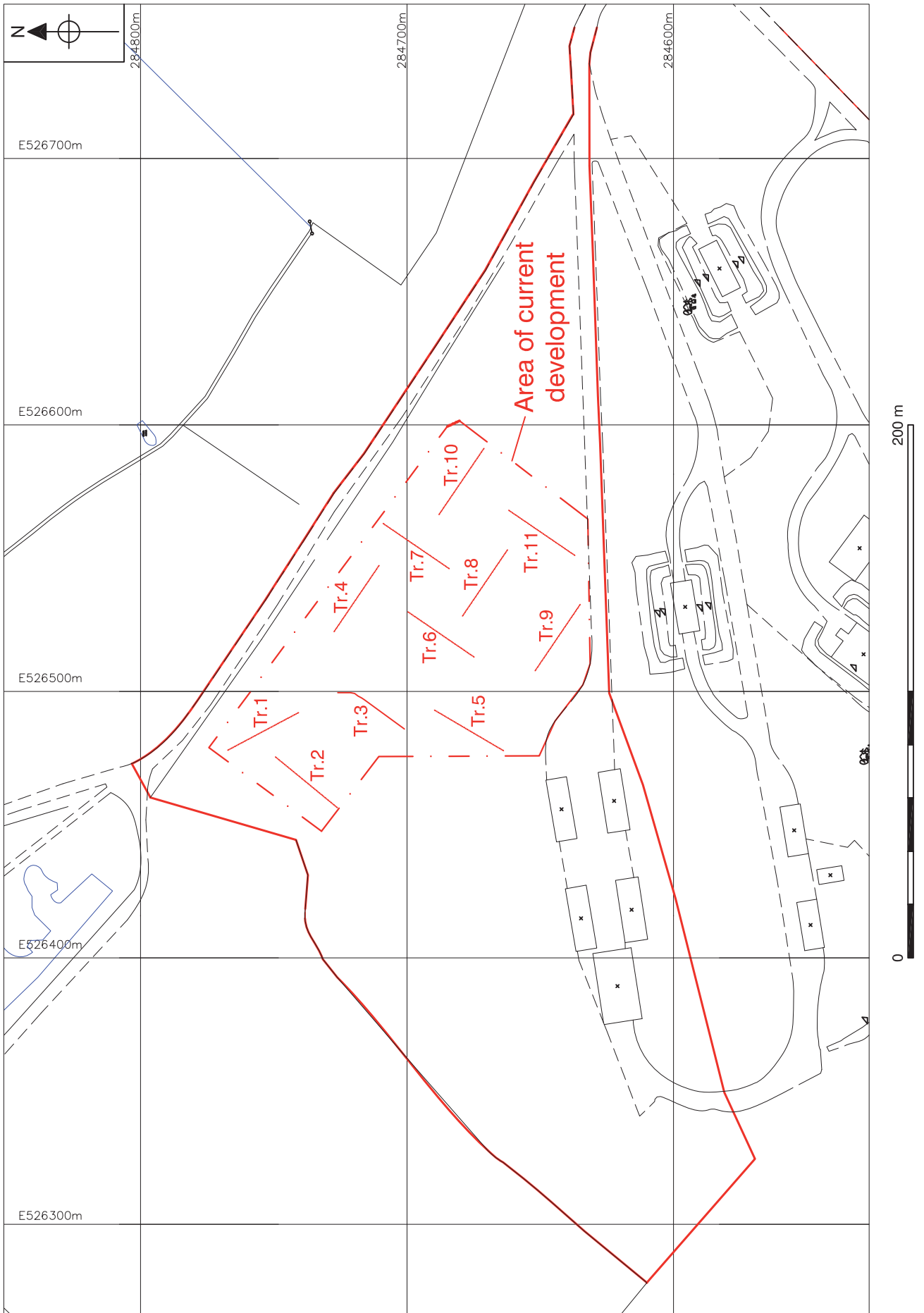


Figure 3. Trench location. Scale 1:2000

width and traversed the full width of Trench 1 (2m). It measured 0.70m in depth and was filled by reddish brown silty clay ([36]) with frequent pieces of tree root surviving throughout its profile. Fragments of barbed wire, bottle glass and plastic sheet (none retained) were found within the ditch. Ditch [37] was aligned north-to-south and aligned perpendicular to ditch [35].

East-to-west orientated ditch [35] appears to be a continuation of the extant field boundary that ends at a point 42m to the west of Trench 1. The presence of white plastic from wrapping or a bag suggests that the ditches were in-filled relatively recently.

**Trench 2** was orientated south-west to north-east and machined to a depth of 0.35m. The undisturbed natural was light orange brown clay ([03]). Above the natural was a deposit of building rubble ([02]) that varied in depth between 0.10m and 0.20m. The deposit included brick and concrete fragments mixed with clayey silt that was very similar to the topsoil. It is uncertain as to function of this rubble layer although it may have been laid down in order to consolidate the ground in this part of the site that is occupied by a wide trackway.

The topsoil ([01]) measured 0.20m in thickness and consisted of mid brown clay silt.

**Trench 3** was orientated north-east to south-west and was positioned in the western part of the evaluation area. The northern part of the trench turned to the north in order to avoid the danger of machine excavation close to overhead power lines. The trench was excavated to a depth of 0.35m.

The undisturbed natural comprised mid yellow brown clay ([06]). Sealing the natural was a 0.12m depth of subsoil formed of light-to-mid brown silty clay ([05]). The topsoil ([04]) consisted of mid brown clay silt which measured 0.20m in depth.

**Trench 4** was orientated north-west to south-east and was located in the central north part of the site and excavated to a depth of 0.35m.

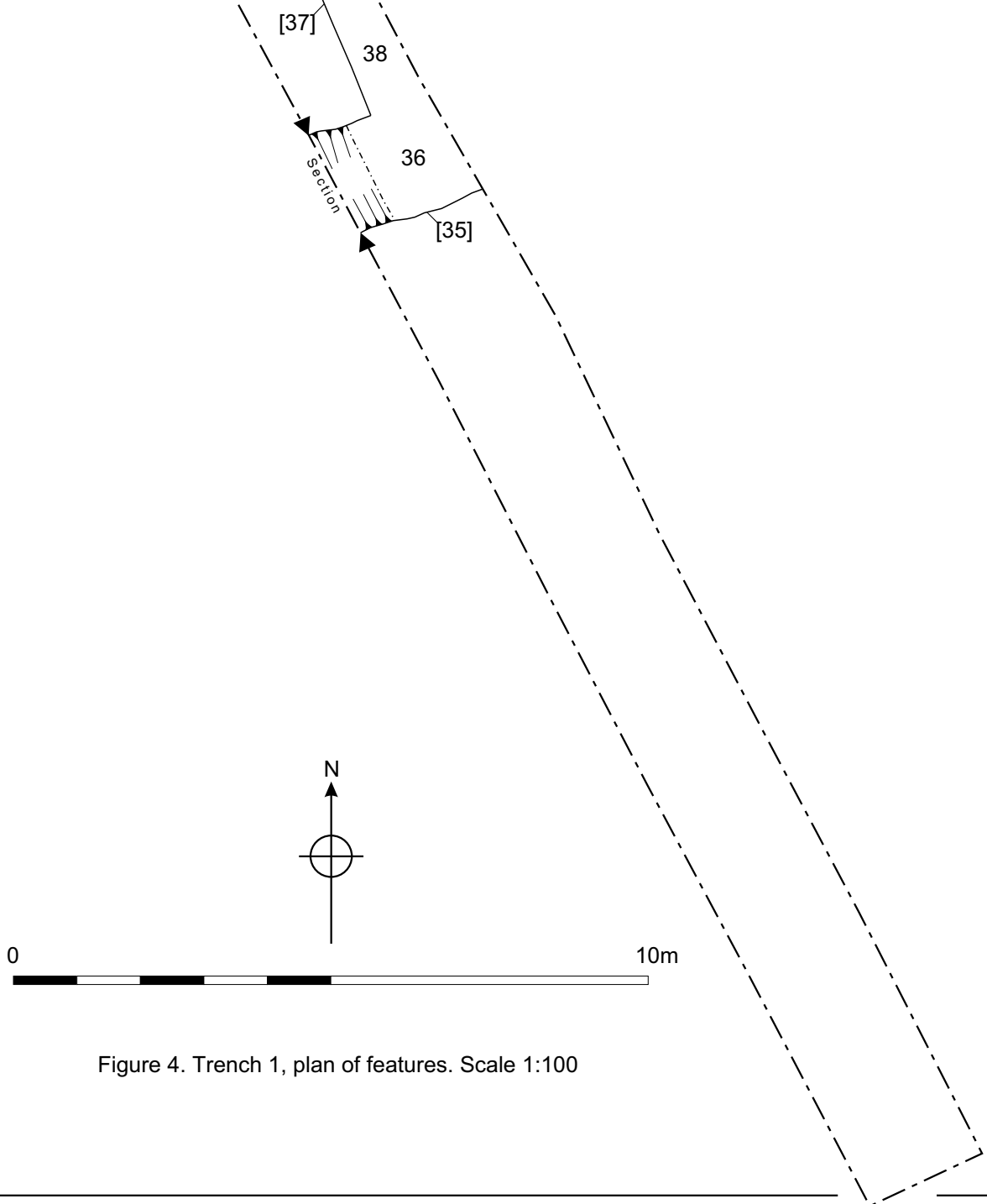
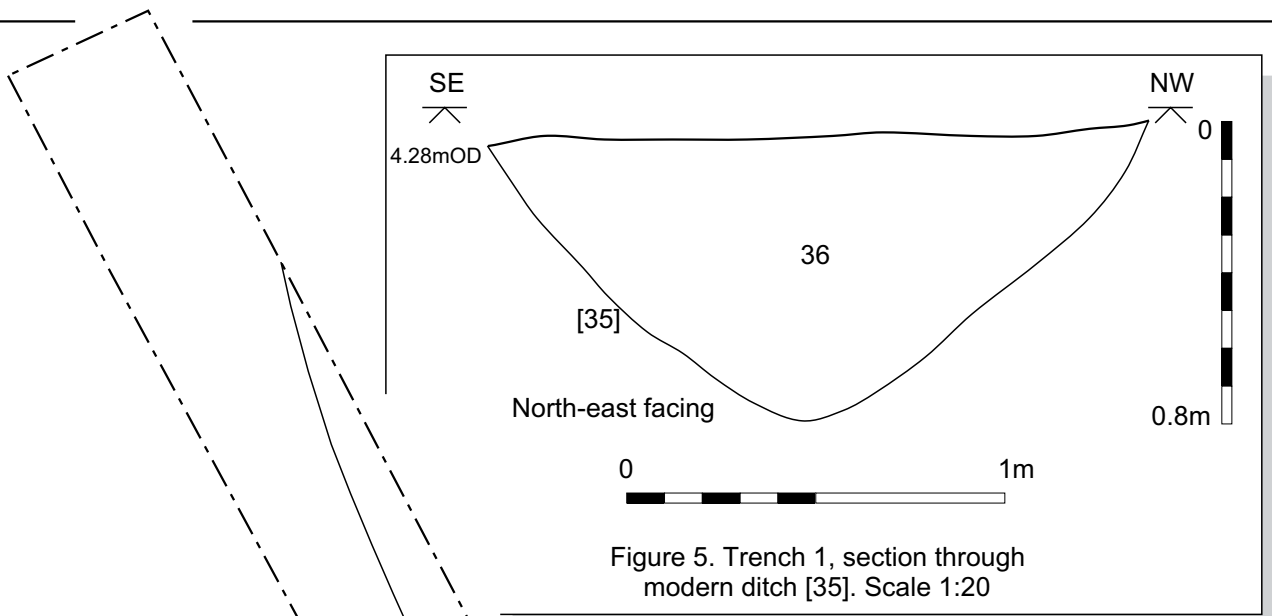
The natural within this part of the site was formed of clean yellow clay ([13]). This was overlain by deposit ([12]) that consisted of a 0.18m depth of mixed natural yellow clay and dark grey silt clay topsoil. The mixing is almost certainly the result of the use of heavy machinery to handle the compost. In places along the trench compacted remnants of the dark grey silty clay topsoil ([11]) survived up to a depth of 0.12m. The uppermost deposit was formed of a thin (0.5m) layer of compost ([10]).

**Trench 5** was aligned south-west to north-east and located in the central south area of the evaluation area. It was excavated to a depth of 0.35m.

The natural was formed of clean brownish yellow clay ([16]). Above the natural clean clay was a disturbed 'dirty' layer of mixed yellow clay and topsoil ([15]) that measured 0.15m in depth. The uppermost deposit ([14]) comprised a 0.21m thick deposit of dark grey silty clay topsoil mixed with frequent compost.

**Trench 6** was orientated south-west to north-east and was positioned in the central part of the site. It was excavated to a depth of 0.25m.

The trench was machined down to the clean yellow clay natural ([19]). A disturbed



and mixed 'dirty' layer ([18]) that measured 0.10m lay above the natural that in turn was sealed by a 0.15m thick layer of compost.

**Trench 7** was situated in the north-east part of the evaluation area and aligned south-west to north-east.

Clean orange brown clay ([22]) was encountered at a depth of 0.35m. Above deposit ([22]) was a disturbed and mixed dirty layer comprising natural clay, compost and topsoil. The uppermost deposit consisted of compost 0.22m deep.

**Trench 8** was located in the central east part of the evaluation area and orientated south-east to north-west.

The sequence was very similar to that of Trench 7. Clean orange clay ([25]) occurred at 0.20m below the surface. A 'dirty' and mixed layer ([24]) incorporating clay, topsoil and compost measured 0.12m thick and was intermediate between the clean clay ([25]) and overlying compost ([23]). The compost layer measured 0.09m in depth.

**Trench 9** was positioned in the south-east part of the site and orientated south-east to north-west.

The sequence of deposits was the same as seen in Trenches 7 and 8 with clean orange brown sand ([25]) encountered 0.30m below the surface. The intermediate 'dirty' layer ([24]) measured 0.20m in depth whilst the overlying compost deposit ([23]) measured 0.15m.

**Trench 10** was positioned in the north-east corner of the evaluation area and aligned south-east to north-west.

The natural in this trench differed from all other trenches in that it was composed of clean mid green silt ([31]) as opposed to the usual firm clay that occurred elsewhere on the site. The silt was located at a depth of 0.35m below the surface. Immediately above the silt was a deposit of rubble ([30]) that included concrete fragments up to 0.40m in diameter. Brick fragments were also common. The rubble was in a matrix of dark grey silty clay that was the same as the topsoil. The topsoil ([29]) measured 0.29m in depth.

**Trench 11** was positioned at the east side of the site and orientated south-west to north-east.

Clean clay ([34]) was found 0.25m below the surface. Disturbed brown silty clay ([33]) lay above [34] and measured 0.16m deep. The uppermost deposit was compost ([32]) 0.10m deep.

## 6.0 Conclusions

With the exception of the modern field boundaries in Trench 1, no archaeological features, deposits or artefacts were found during the course of the evaluation.

The ground surface has been severely truncated during its use as an airfield, subsequent ploughing and ultimately as a compost store. This truncation will almost certainly have caused significant damage to any archaeological remains that may have been here. However, as there was no evidence of deep cut features (*i.e.* pits or ditches), even in Trenches 1, 2 and 3 that were located on the west side of the

evaluation area away from the area of the severest truncation, it is likely that this was an area negative of archaeological features.

The dearth of features combined with the total lack of artefacts would confirm that the postulated Roman settlement to the north-west does not extend into the proposed development area.

Cambridgeshire Archaeology and Planning Advice will make recommendations for future work based upon this report.

### ***Acknowledgements***

Thanks to Charles Thomas of Wiser Waste Information Services Ltd who commissioned this work.

The author, assisted by Matt Radcliffe and Steve Morgan, undertook the fieldwork. Surveying was by Sandrine Whitmore. Illustrations are by the author and David Dobson, who also produced the report. Alice Lyons edited the report.

### Appendix 1a: Context Summary

Context	Trench No.	Category	Description	Period
01	2	Deposit	Mid brown clay/silt topsoil	
02	2	Deposit	Rubble layer	Modern
03	2	Deposit	Light orange brown clay natural	
04	3	Deposit	Mid brown clay/silt topsoil	
05	3	Deposit	Light brown silty clay subsoil	
06	3	Deposit	Mid yellowish brown clay natural	
07	1	Deposit	Mid brown clay/silt topsoil	
08	1	Deposit	Yellowish brown clay/silt subsoil	
09	1	Deposit	Yellowish brown clay natural	
10	4	Deposit	Compost	Modern
11	4	Deposit	Dark grey silt/clay topsoil	
12	4	Deposit	Disturbed 'dirty' natural clay	
13	4	Deposit	Yellow clay	
14	5	Deposit	Mixed grey silt/clay topsoil and compost	Modern
15	5	Deposit	Disturbed 'dirty' natural clay	
16	5	Deposit	Brownish yellow clay natural	
17	6	Deposit	Compost	Modern
18	6	Deposit	Disturbed 'dirty' natural clay	
19	6	Deposit	Yellow clay natural	
20	7	Deposit	Compost	Modern
21	7	Deposit	Disturbed 'dirty' natural clay	
22	7	Deposit	Orange brown clay natural	
23	8	Deposit	Compost	Modern
24	8	Deposit	Disturbed 'dirty' natural clay	
25	8	Deposit	Orange clay	
26	9	Deposit	Compost	Modern
27	9	Deposit	Disturbed 'dirty' natural clay	
28	9	Deposit	Orange brown natural clay	
29	10	Deposit	Mixed compost and grey silt/clay topsoil	Modern
30	10	Deposit	Rubble layer	Modern
31	10	Deposit	Mid green grey silt natural	
32	11	Deposit	Compost	Modern
33	11	Deposit	Disturbed 'dirty' natural clay	
34	11	Deposit	Orange brown clay natural	
35	1	Cut	Field boundary ditch	Modern
36	1	Deposit	Fill of ditch [35]	Modern
37	1	Cut	Field boundary ditch	Modern
38	1	Deposit	Fill of ditch [37]	Modern

### Appendix 1b: OASIS feature summary table

Period	Feature type	Quantity
Modern	Ditch	2