

Report 2169



nau archaeology

**An Archaeological Evaluation at
7 Irving Burgess Close, Whittlesey,
Cambridgeshire**

HER: ECB3212



OASIS: norfolka1-62001



Prepared for
Joanna Hart



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July 2009



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Location:	Land East of 7 Irving Burgess Close, Whittlesey
District:	Fenland
Grid Ref.:	TL 262 975
HER No.:	ECB3212
Client:	Joanna Hart
Dates of Fieldwork:	5 June 2009

Summary

An archaeological evaluation was carried out prior to the construction of a residential development on land east of 7 Irving Burgess Close, Whittlesey, Peterborough. Only half of the total area of the site was available for evaluation as the other half was fenced off and wooded at the time of the work.

A single 15m trench was excavated under constant supervision. This was located on a north–south alignment through the centre of the footprint of the proposed building. The trench was excavated to a depth of 0.90m from the surface, at which depth natural sands and gravel were encountered. The excavation also exposed disturbed, mixed subsoil layers containing late 19th-century inclusions. The disturbance and inclusions continued to the depth at which the natural sands were encountered.

A single narrow ditch, oriented north-east to south-west, was revealed at the southern end of the trench. This was excavated, recorded and photographed, but no dating evidence was recovered. The fill of the ditch indicated a period of heavy silting, possibly as a result of flooding. No further archaeological finds or features were exposed.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The site was located on an area of disused land to the east of Irving Burgess Close, Whittlesey, Peterborough (Fig. 1). The area to be evaluated was the proposed construction site of a new residential building. This was a narrow, flat area enclosed by the fences and walls of existing properties, and featured a well-stocked koi pond at the southern edge. The eastern wall of 7 Irving Burgess Close formed the western boundary to the site, while fences enclosed the remaining three sides. A large spoil heap of sand and gravel was located in the northern half of the site, but the site was otherwise accessible.

The work was commissioned and funded by Joanna Hart.

This archaeological programme was undertaken to fulfil a planning condition set by Fenland District Council (ref. F/YR09/0118/F) and a Brief issued by Cambridgeshire Archaeology Planning and Countryside Advice (McConnell 2009). The work was conducted in accordance with a Project Design and Method Statement prepared by NAU Archaeology (Ref. BAU2169).

The work was designed to mitigate damage to 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).

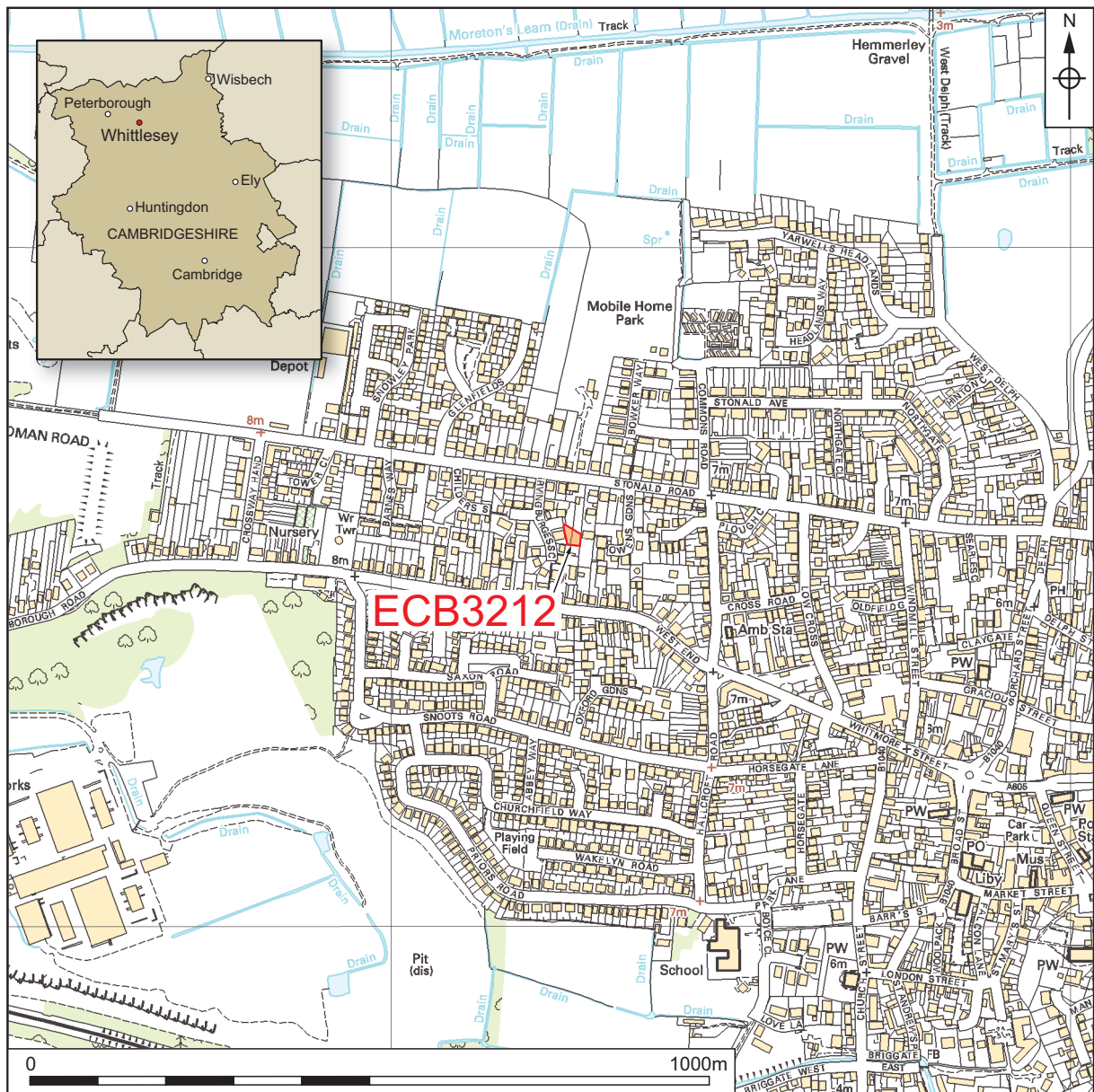


Figure 1. Site location. Scale 1:10,000

2.0 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

Whittlesey is a small town in the northern part of Fenland District on the A605 connecting March and Peterborough. The town lies on the crossroads between this main road and the secondary road connecting the centres of Thorney and Ramsey. Topographically, the parish of Whittlesey comprises two islands rising out of the fen. The larger island encompasses the current town and is roughly 3 miles long by half a mile wide, which rises to a maximum height of around 8m OD. The second island is smaller, and covers the areas of Eastrea, Coates and Eldernell, reaching a height of 6m OD.

Whittlesey is located on the edge of the fens on a gravelly peninsular, in an area of heavy soils. The pre-Flandrian deposits in the parish comprise Oxford Clay. These reach a depth of 20m where exposed by the brick quarries. The islands are mainly March Gravels with additional deposits of till. To the east of the parish at Eldernell these gravels are several metres thick, and have been quarried.

Off the islands onto the fen, the peat appears to have formed in the Neolithic period. These are covered by alluvial deposits that can reach a depth of 4m OD. Within the Washes between the Nene Cut and Morton's Leam the main geology is Barroway Drove Clay although again this is concealed beneath alluvium.

The site of the evaluation was located on land to the south of Morton's Leam, a drainage channel which was first cut in the 1480s at the request of Bishop Morton of Ely. The area of the site was relatively flat, although levels taken along Irving Burgess Close indicate a slight downward slope towards the south. There was no topsoil across the site, instead a layer of mixed soils, clay and gravels with post-medieval debris inclusions covered the area evaluated to a depth of 0.40m from the surface (6.05m OD). The natural sands and gravels were encountered at a depth of 0.75m below the surface (5.65m OD). This contained occasional lenses of clay, more of which was also revealed in a small sondage, which extended to a depth of 5.30m OD.

3.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The location and geology of Whittlesey made it an attractive place for prehistoric settlement. Islands of gravel alongside a major watercourse are traditional occupation sites. Unfortunately much of the gravel terrace at Whittlesey has been quarried away, with only a few unprovenanced stray finds being recorded. Much of the remaining gravel area and lighter soils has now been built on, also hindering archaeological recovery.

Work in Stonald Field, to the north of the site, has revealed a number of multi-period features, including a Bronze Age ring-ditch and pits, Iron Age pits and post-holes, and post-medieval pits and drains (HER 11047). Additional evidence for prehistoric activity has also been recorded, again to the north of the site (HER MCB12983). As a consequence, there is the potential for archaeological remains of any date to survive within the development area itself.

During the Roman period the area was intensively occupied. The Fen Causeway, the main Roman route into the region, crossed the islands and provided a focus for occupation. The road crosses the Nene Washes and enters the island to the

west, runs through the town, over to the other island then into the fen. There appear to have been two phases of the road, with one being laid in the 1st century AD that attracted settlement and roadside occupation, and was then bypassed by another route. In the fen itself, the Causeway appears to have been a canal that silted up and was subsequently metalled.

The site lies just to the south of the Fen Causeway (HER CB15033). There is therefore a potential for surviving Roman roadside settlement remains on the site; as have been recovered from other sites alongside the Fen Causeway, at Bradley Fen and Kings Dyke to the west. Roman finds from the area surrounding the site include a silver coin of Carausius (HER MCB16746) dated to the 3rd century AD, found just to the south-east, and some 4th-century bronze coins found to the west, in association with some clay pits (HER MCB01440).

Excavations carried out in 2002 at 99 Stonald Road (HER ECB898) revealed only modern features, with no traces of Roman activity despite the close proximity to the Fen Causeway. Previous excavations in 2001 (HER ECB410) at Stonald Road also failed to produce any Roman remains or to find evidence for the Fen Causeway itself. Some medieval furrows were revealed, however.

Whittlesey in the mediaeval period comprised two manors, one owned by Thorney Abbey (Whittlesey St Mary) and the other by Ely Abbey (Whittlesey St Andrew). After the Dissolution, both were held by the same lessee and appear to have been treated together before the revision into two ecclesiastical parishes in 1850. Mediaeval occupation was most likely under the current town, as attested by numerous finds from this period.

There were three areas of open field and ridge and furrow survives in various locations on the edge of the built up area (HER MCB15863). Two watercourses were in existence: Morton's Leam from the end of the 15th century and Whittlesey Dyke, which was probably established earlier. The town was prosperous, but although trading tokens are known it was never a port or commercial centre.

4.0 METHODOLOGY

The objective of this excavation 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 a single 15m x 1.8m trench to be excavated to allow an approximate 5% sample of the proposed house footprint (c.200m²) and of the available section of the site (c.219m²). The trench was to be positioned within the northernmost point of the proposed house footprint as close to the line of the Fen Causeway as possible.

Machine excavation was carried out with a wheeled JCB-type 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 which were obviously modern, were retained for inspection. No environmental samples were taken, due to the lack of suitable deposits.

All archaeological features and deposits were recorded using NAU Archaeology *pro forma*. 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 7.30m OD on the surface at the corner of Stonald Road and Hallcroft Road.

Site conditions were good, with fair weather and easy access.



Plate 1. Ditch [4], facing east.

5.0 RESULTS

The single trench was oriented north–south and was positioned with the aim of sampling as much of the proposed building footprint as possible, while still extending into the northern area as specified by the Brief (Fig. 2). The trench was 15m x 1.80m and was excavated in shallow spits to a total depth of 0.90m, at which depth the natural sands and gravels were encountered. A small sondage at the southern end extended this depth to 1.20m below the ground level in order to further establish the nature of the natural deposits. These were a mix of light orange clayey sands and gravels, with occasional sub-rounded medium flint inclusions (06). The natural was level across the length of the trench.

Above this was a 0.10m thick friable, slightly silty mix of orange clayey sand and gravel (03). Overlying this was a 0.28m thick layer of mid-brown clayey silt, with occasional gravel, flint and charcoal inclusions (02). There were no finds from either of these contexts.

Above (02) was a 0.50m thick layer of dark grey clayey silt (01). This contained occasional small gravels, coal fragments and stone fragment inclusions. There was no topsoil, and the context appeared to be well disturbed.

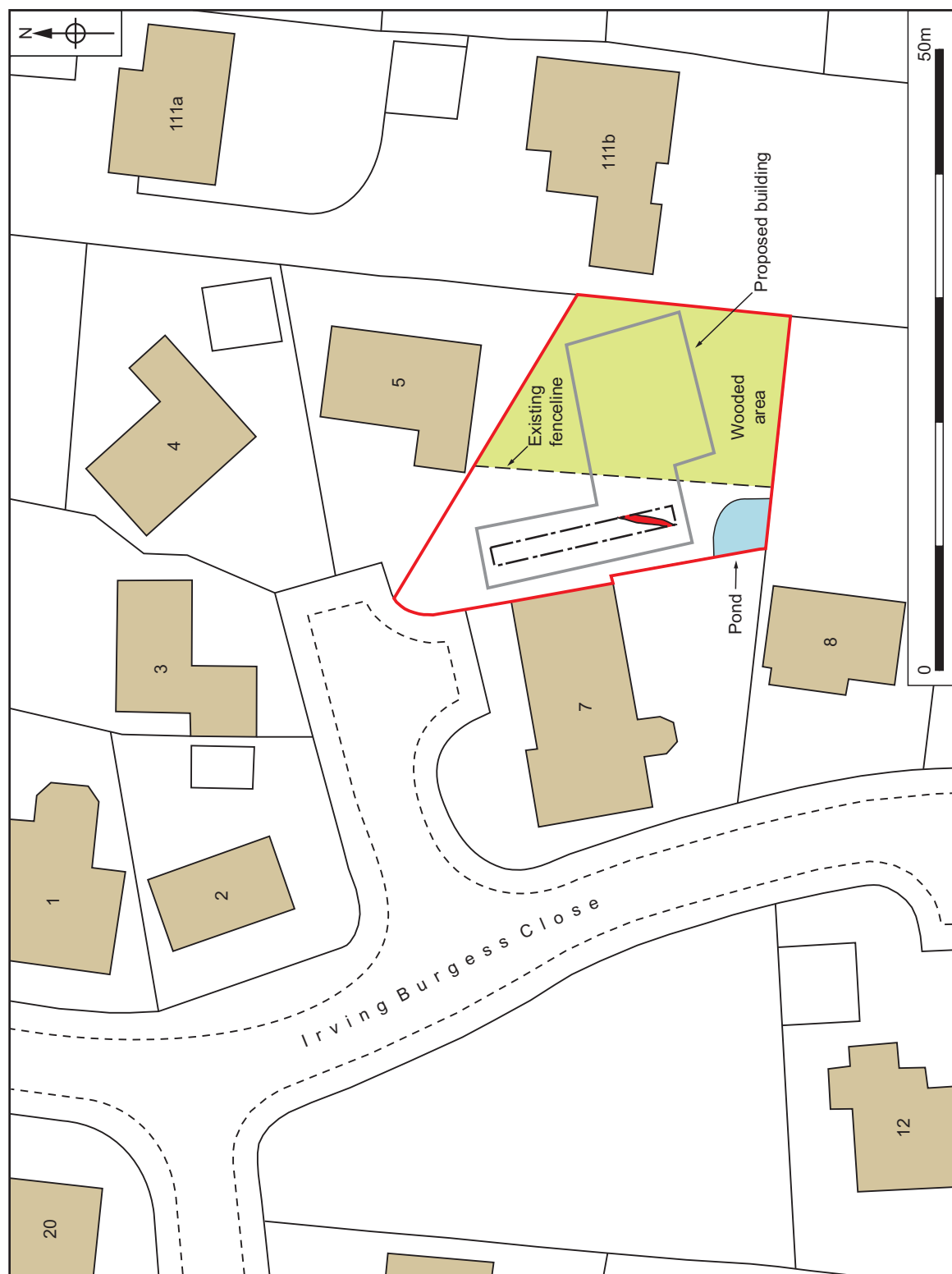


Figure 2. Trench location. Scale 1:500

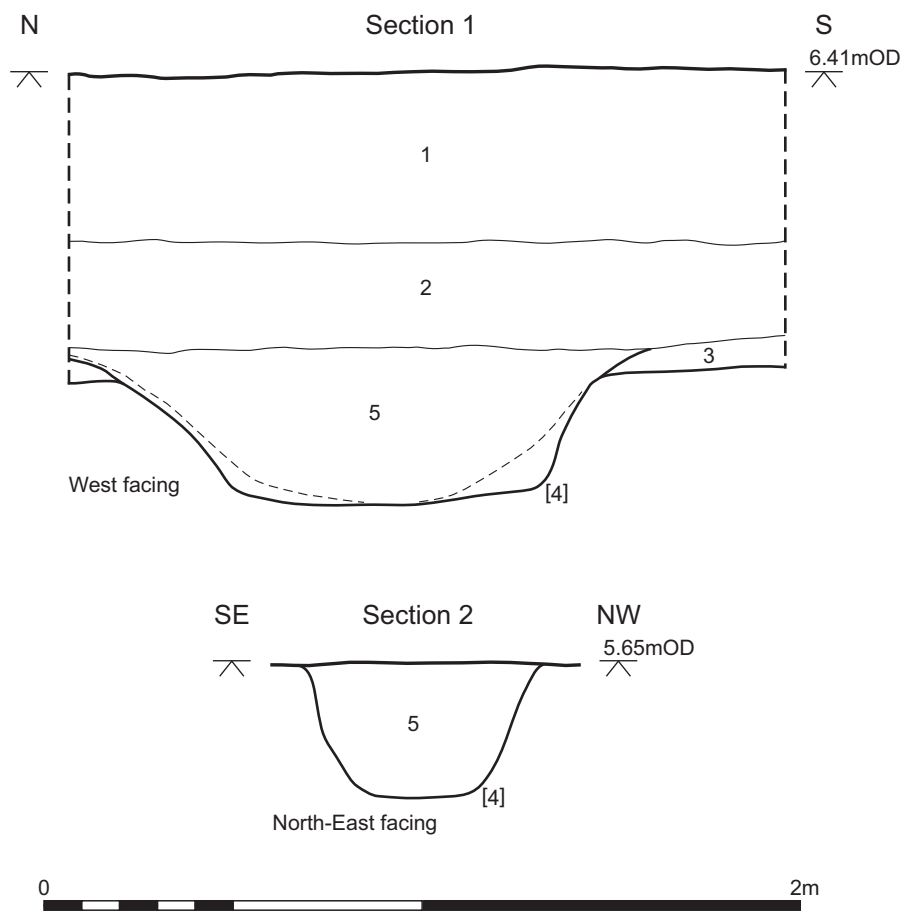
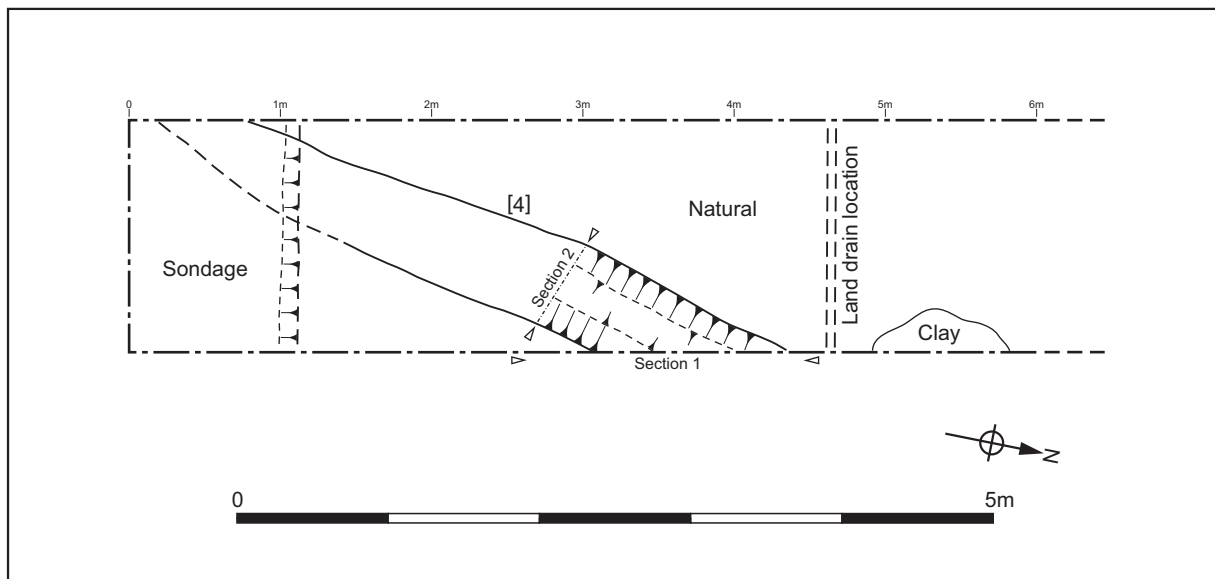


Figure 3. Plan of southern end of Trench and sections 1 and 2.
Scale 1:50 and 1:20

A single linear ditch [04] was revealed at the southern end of the trench (Fig. 3; Plate 1). This was oriented north-east to south-west, was 0.60m wide and 0.36m deep (5.23m OD). It had gradually sloping convex sides. The cut was well defined, and cut through the natural (06) and mixed natural (03) from a depth of 0.70m (5.65m OD).

Ditch [04] contained a single fill (05). This was a friable light greyish brown clayey silt (with a little sand) containing occasional small flint inclusions. The fill was pale in comparison to the surrounding contexts. No dating evidence was recovered from this deposit.

6.0 CONCLUSIONS

The trench excavated within the proposed house floor plan revealed only a single archaeological feature cut through the sandy gravel natural.

Although the single ditch found within the trench could not be dated, its presence does at least demonstrate the existence of surviving archaeological remains in this area, and may offer some clue as the nature of the land-use in the past. The size and shape of the ditch suggest a narrow drainage ditch or boundary, while fill (05) appears to be the result of a natural accumulation of silt. This may have been due to flooding from the river to the north. The mixed natural (03) is possibly the result of a past surface disturbance such as ploughing, which would have mixed the soil above, (02), with the top of the natural below (06).

The upper deposits within the trench did not reveal any features of archaeological interest and appeared to be primarily mixed redeposited material, with numerous modern intrusions. The few finds that were recovered from these deposits seemed to confirm this assessment and were not retained.

Acknowledgements

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Thanks are due to Sarah Poppy for supplying the HER information. The report was edited by Jayne Bown, and the graphics were produced by David Dobson.

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Appendix 1a: Context Summary

Context	Category	Description
1	Deposit	Imported soil
2	Topsoil	Topsoil
3	Deposit	Mixed natural
4	Cut	Small ditch
5	Fill	Fill of [04]
6	Natural	Natural

Appendix 1b: OASIS feature summary table

Period	Feature type	Quantity
Unknown	Ditch	1