

Report 2220



nau archaeology

**An Archaeological Excavation on the  
Wilson Court Extension, Fitzwilliam College,  
Cambridge**

ECB 3273



Prepared for  
Fitzwilliam College



Peter Crawley

December 2009



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BAU 2220

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Location:	Fitzwilliam College
District:	Cambridge City
Grid Ref.:	TL 4398 5945
HER No.:	ECB 3273
Client:	Fitzwilliam College
Dates of Fieldwork:	Test-pitting: 17 September 2009 Excavation: 24–29 September 2009

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## **Summary**

*In September 2009, NAU Archaeology undertook an excavation in the footprint of an extension to the Wilson Court building, Fitzwilliam College, Cambridge. Extensive Bronze Age and Roman remains had been found within 50m to the north and east of the site during the previous ten years, however only a few probable 19th-century planting- or post-holes, with associated root disturbance were found during the present work. Half of the building's footprint remains to be stripped at a later date.*

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In September 2009, NAU Archaeology undertook an excavation in the footprint of an extension to the Wilson Court building, Fitzwilliam College, Cambridge (Fig. 1). The site lay on the northern side of the Wilson Court building, situated in the south–centre of the Fitzwilliam College complex. .

The archaeological programme was undertaken to fulfil a planning condition set by Cambridge City Council and a brief issued by Cambridgeshire Archaeology Planning and Countryside Advice office (CAPCA Ref: Dan McConnell 8 July 2009). This work was conducted in accordance with a Project Design and Method Statement prepared by NAU Archaeology (Ref: BAU 2220). The fieldwork and this report were sponsored by Fitzwilliam College and arranged by the Bursar, Christopher Pratt.

It was agreed with CAPCA that work would take place in two phases. This was due to a desire by the College to preserve several large trees and a hedge until closer to the time that the building work would commence. The building's footprint had a total size of 250m<sup>2</sup> and the area examined archaeologically amounts to around 50% of this footprint.

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).

The site archive is currently held by NAU Archaeology and on completion of the project will be deposited at the Cambridgeshire County Store, following the relevant policy on archiving standards.

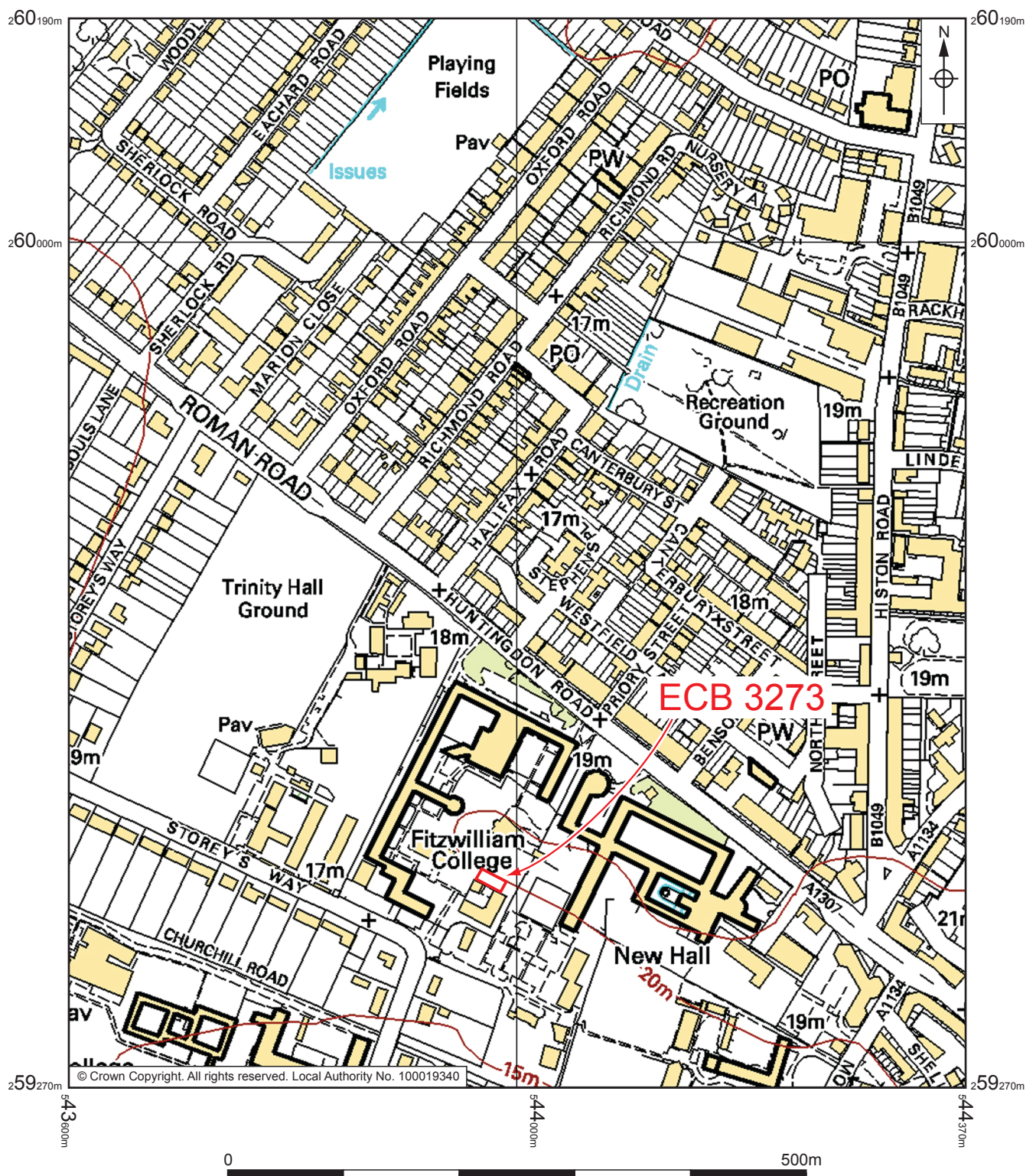


Figure 1. Site location. Scale 1:5000

## 2.0 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

The site lies at c.20m OD at the end of a low east–west ridge which overlooks the River Cam to the east. The site lay directly on West Melbury chalk. The natural undisturbed substratum was a greyish-white chalky Gault clay. The site rises sharply at its northern end, suggesting that there has been a wholesale landscaping of the area. Prior to the excavation the site had been planted as a small lawn and border with shrubs and large mature deciduous trees on the northern side (Adams and Penn 2002).

The removed deposits were in most cases a humic, ‘improved’ garden soil which contained a large amount of mulch and small roots. It was between 0.20m and 0.40m thick. There was no subsoil, also suggestive of wholesale landscaping. Various thick layers of dumped ‘clinker’ and soil had been used to build up the ground level as part of large-scale landscaping.

## 3.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Fitzwilliam College was founded by the reform movement in the 19th century and moved to the present location between Huntingdon Road and Storey’s Way in 1960. An extensive 1st-century BC Iron Age settlement lay on the crest of the slopes overlooking the river 300m south-east of the site, within the area that later became the Roman town. The remains consisted of ditched enclosures covering an area of two acres. (Alexander and Pullinger 1999; Frere 1984, 296–7). A further Iron Age enclosure was found south-east of the site (Evans 1996). The Huntingdon Road to the north is thought to lie on the line of the old Roman road to Godmanchester.

The Roman town of *Durolipons* appears to have continued the large Iron Age settlement on the northern bank of the river at an important crossing point, which had been situated between major Iron Age kingdoms (Alexander and Pullinger 1999). This settlement was never very large and did not act as a *civitas* capital or administrative centre. Roman remains were found around 50m to the north and east of the site.

There are known Anglo-Saxon cemeteries situated around the walled area from the 5th century, although it appears that the settlement only took on a major use and market function in the 8th century. It appears to have been situated at the edge of Mercian territory. By 875 it was taken by the Danes and was known as *Granta Brcge* in the Anglo-Saxon chronicle. In 917 it was given to the West Saxon King Edward the Elder (Adams and Penn 2002).

The area of the site lay within the ‘West Fields’ of medieval Cambridge and is marked on the 1789 Bennet’s College map as being within a large open parcel of land called Dukmere or Wylmere (Hall and Ravensdale 1976). These names suggest that the area was wet in nature and attest to the lack of habitation in the area.

The Grove House was built in 1813, which probably involved landscaping and major garden-planting and associated works. In more recent years the area of the site has been considerably re-worked as a garden space.

## 4.0 METHODOLOGY

Six 1m<sup>2</sup> test-pits were initially hand excavated to ascertain the nature of the root coverage from the large trees located on the northern side of the development footprint, some of which were the subject of tree preservation orders. The test-pits were excavated and backfilled during the same day. Five pits were excavated through the garden soils and one further pit was used to see how deep the natural substratum was. The results of the test-pitting were used to inform the excavation.

It appeared that the root coverage was not extensive, although it was stressed that care would have to be taken when machining during the excavation so as not to damage the roots of the larger trees. There were no directly archaeological results from the test-pitting except that a shallow 'cut' observed within the garden soils appeared to belong to the building of Wilson Court. During the excavation of these pits, the head gardener was on hand to give advice about root identification. Further details of these test-pits are not reproduced in this report due to their exploratory non-archaeological nature.

The stated objective of the excavation phase 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 the 250m<sup>2</sup> proposed footprint be looked at. During this phase of work only 125m<sup>2</sup> was stripped and a further 125m<sup>2</sup> remains to be examined closer to the time of building.

Machine excavation was carried out with a wheeled JCB-type excavator provided by Mead Construction equipped with a toothless ditching bucket and operated 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 known level OD situated at the eastern end of a previous archaeological evaluation trench was used for the present work.

The weather was dry and reasonably warm for the length of the excavation. Access was excellent and the staff of Fitzwilliam College were very helpful.

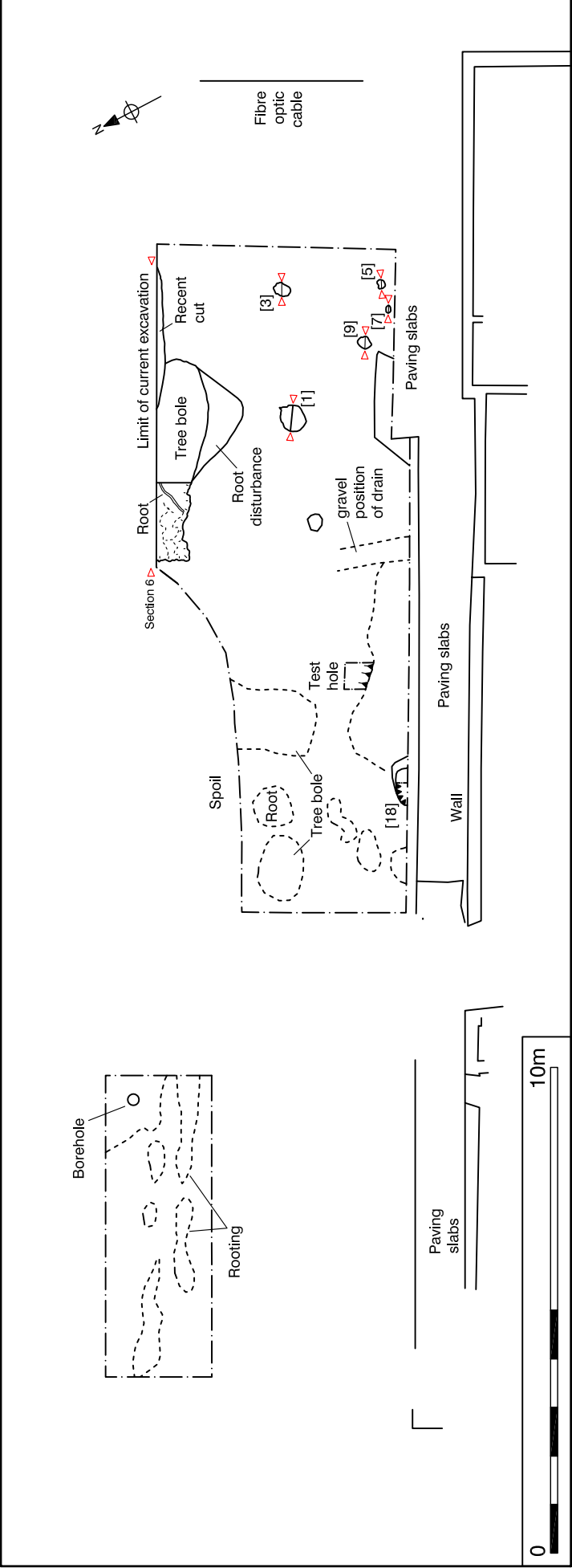


Figure 2. Site plan. Scale 1:125





Plate 1. Main area pre-excitation, looking east.



Plate 2. Western area pre-excitation, looking west.

## 5.0 RESULTS

Six probable planting- or post-holes were seen during the excavation, as well as a tree hole (Fig. 2; Plates 1 and 2). The features were all very shallow and sealed by the garden soils and dumped deposits.

Planting/post-hole [01] was situated at the centre of the strip, towards its eastern end (Fig. 2). It had a depth of 0.11m and a diameter of 0.45m. The edges and base of the feature were irregular, which suggested it had been dug quickly (Plate 3; Fig. 3). The fill (02) was a fairly compact greyish-brown friable clayey silt which had no major inclusions and frequent small roots. It was probably a deliberate backfill.

Planting hole/post-hole [03] was located a short distance to the east (Fig. 2). It was 0.06m deep and measured 0.32m by 0.30m. The appearance of the feature was also irregular, and the sides were reasonably steep and jagged (Plate 4; Fig. 3). The single fill (04) was a fairly compact and friable greyish-brown friable clayey silt which also had no major inclusions and frequent rooting. It was almost certainly deliberately backfilled.

A very small planting hole/post-hole [05] was observed at the southern side of the area (Fig. 2). It was 0.05m deep, measured 0.20m east–west and 0.20m north–south. The base was uneven and the sides were steep and irregular (Plate 5; Fig. 3). The only fill of the feature was composed of a fairly compact greyish-brown friable clayey silt. There were no major inclusions and frequent small roots within the fill.



Plate 3. Planting/post-hole [01], looking south.



Plate 4. Planting/post-hole [03], looking south.



Plate 5. Planting/post-holes [05], [07] and [09], looking south.

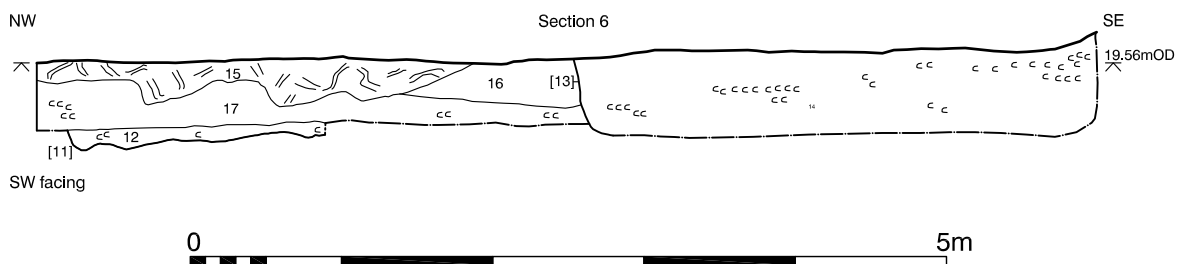
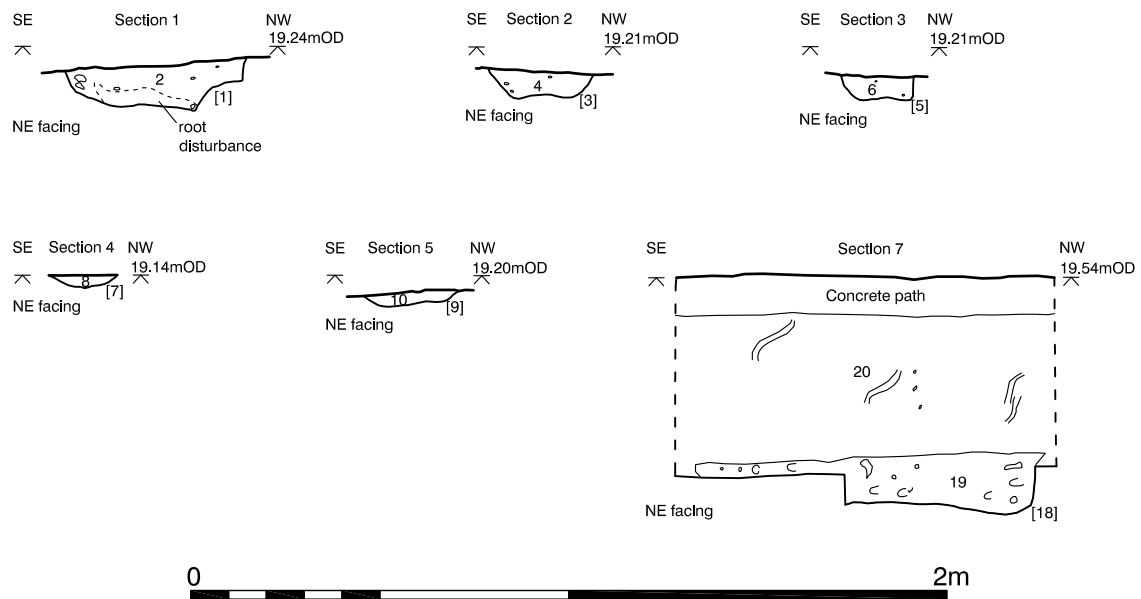


Figure 3. Sections. Scale 1:20 and 1:50



A further small possible planting hole/post-hole [07] was situated immediately to the west (Fig. 2; Plate 5). It was only 0.03m deep and extended 0.12m by 0.10m. The base was concave with gently sloping sides (Fig. 3). The single fill (08) consisted of a fairly compact greyish-brown friable clayey silt which contained no major inclusions.

Another small planting hole/post-hole [09] was situated at the southern end of the proposed footprint (Fig. 2). It was roughly circular and shallow, with a depth of 0.04m. The base was slightly uneven and the sides were slightly concave (Fig. 3; Plate 5). The fill (10) was a moderately compact greyish-brown friable clayey silt which contained no major inclusions.

A moderately sized planting hole/pit [18] was situated several metres to the west (Fig. 2). It had an observed length of 0.90m and a depth of 0.15m. The base was roughly flat and the sides steep (Fig. 3). There was one fill (19) within the feature, a very compact dark brown, slightly silty sand which contained patches of re-deposited natural clay.



Plate 6. Tree-hole [11], looking north.

A relatively large tree hole [11] was observed at the northern extent of the strip (Fig. 2; Plate 6). It measured 4.60m by 1.20m and was of interest because it suggested how recent the truncation on the site had been. It was only 0.18m deep at its deepest part and had a very uneven base and sides (Fig. 3). Only one third of the natural feature was excavated. The fill (12) was a very compact mid-greyish-brown sand which contained well sorted small and medium stones and lumps of re-deposited clay.

The dumped deposits which were situated above the tree hole [11], which had been removed by JCB, were recorded in the section. There were three deposits: immediately above tree hole [11] was a very compact pale greyish-brown slightly silty sand (17) beneath a layer of loose pinkish-grey clinker and pure sand (16). This was overlain in turn by a loose dark brown silty sand (15).

## **6.0 THE FINDS**

### **6.1 Pottery**

Six sherds of pottery (11g) were recovered from three contexts (Appendix 3). The earliest pottery within the assemblage are two small body sherds of glazed Ely Ware of late medieval date, both in pale grey to orange fabric with dense quartz and sparse iron oxide inclusions and a dark green glaze on internal and external surfaces. Two post-medieval body sherds were recovered, including a single sherd of glazed red earthenware and one sherd of plain red/pink ware. Two small sherds of post-medieval transfer printed earthenware were also found.

### **6.2 Ceramic Building Material**

Four small pieces of roof tile weighing 67g were found in three contexts (Appendix 4). All are medieval fabrics similar to examples found in Ely dating from the 14th and 15th centuries (Mills 2006, 31).

### **6.3 Clay Tobacco Pipe**

A small assemblage of five pieces of tobacco pipe weighing 11g was found in two contexts. Two pieces of stem were recovered from context (02) and a further two stem fragments of stem and one piece of undatable bowl were found in context (12).

### **6.4 Glass**

A piece of plain window glass was found in context (02) and single pieces of dark green post-medieval bottle glass perhaps from the same vessel, came from contexts (02) and (04).

### **6.5 Faunal Remains**

By Julie Curl

The assessment was carried out following a modified version of guidelines by English Heritage (Davis 1992). All of the bone was examined to determine range of species and elements present. A note was also made of butchering and any indications of skinning, hornworking and other modifications. When possible a record was made of ages and any other relevant information, such as pathologies. Counts and weights were noted for each context. Information for this small assemblage was input directly into the table in this report.

A total of 6g of faunal remains, consisting of four pieces, was recovered from two contexts, (9) and (12). The remains from both fills were generally unidentifiable to species, with a neonatal or pre-natal sheep/goat metatarsal in (12); this very young animal suggests breeding on site.

The bone is highly fragmented, although in reasonable condition. One of the pieces from context (12) showed canid gnawing, suggestive of scavenging and therefore the remains may not be in their original place of deposition.

## 7.0 CONCLUSIONS

The excavation within in the grounds of Fitzwilliam College revealed no further evidence for prehistoric or Roman activity, although there has been considerable evidence found to the north and east. The lack of medieval features ties in with this area having once been one of probable wetland in the medieval period.

The sherd of late medieval pottery and the small fragments of medieval roof tile do suggest that there was some activity close by, although their presence in the planting holes/post-holes is almost certainly as residual elements within very recent 19th/20th-century features. The present work revealed a similar lack of historic remains to that of the 1991 evaluation at the Grove (Gdaniec 1991). This work indicated that there had been considerable landscaping connected with the 19th-century Grove building.

The present site has also been subjected to recent improvements to the soil and other more recent landscaping activities, which explains why tree hole and probable planting holes were relatively shallow and were sealed by the modern garden soils. The proximity of the extensive prehistoric and Roman remains seen in previous episodes of archaeological work in the vicinity suggest that further such discoveries may be made in the second half of the footprint which has yet to be examined.

### **Acknowledgements**

The finds were processed by Lucy Talbot and analysed by Sarah Percival. The animal bone was analysed by Julie Curl of Sylvanus. Thanks are due to the head gardener at Fitzwilliam College for his considerable help during the completion of the project.

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## Appendix 1a: Context Summary

Context	Category	Description	Period
1	Cut	Planting hole	Post-medieval
2	Fill	Fill of Planting hole	Post-medieval
3	Cut	Planting hole	Post-medieval
4	Fill	Fill of Planting hole	Post-medieval
5	Cut	Planting hole	Post-medieval
6	Fill	Fill of Planting hole	Post-medieval
7	Cut	Planting hole	Post-medieval
8	Fill	Fill of Planting hole	Post-medieval
9	Cut	Planting hole	Post-medieval
10	Fill	Fill of Planting hole	Post-medieval
11	Cut	Tree Bole	Post-medieval
12	Fill	Fill of Tree Bole	Post-medieval
13	Cut	Modern Construction cut	Post-medieval
14	Fill	Fill of Construction cut	Post-medieval
15	Deposit	Mid-brown silty sand	Post-medieval
16	Deposit	Clinker and sand	Post-medieval
17	Deposit	Compacted sand and clay	Post-medieval
18	Cut	Small unknown modern feature	Post-medieval
19	Deposit	Fill of [18]	Post-medieval
20	Deposit	Modern compacted sand	Post-medieval

## Appendix 1b: OASIS Feature Summary

Period	Feature type	Quantity
Post-medieval (1540 to 1900)	Planting Holes?	6

## Appendix 2a: Finds by Context

Context	Material	Quantity	Weight (g)	Period
2	Roof tile	1	5	Medieval
2	Pottery	1	1	Late Medieval
2	Pottery	1	1	Post-medieval
2	Clay tobacco pipe	2	4	Post-medieval
2	Bottle glass	1	1	Post-medieval
2	Window glass	1	1	Post-medieval
4	Pottery	1	2	Post-medieval
4	Bottle glass	1	1	Post-medieval
7	Pottery	1	1	Post-medieval
9	Animal bone	1	1	Undated
12	Roof tile	2	50	Medieval
12	Pottery	2	6	Post-medieval
12	Clay tobacco pipe	3	7	Post-medieval
12	Animal bone	3	5	Undated
12	Animal bone	2	3	Undated
19	Roof tile	1	12	Medieval

## Appendix 2b: OASIS Finds Summary

Period	Material	Quantity
Unknown	Animal bone	6
Medieval (1066–1539)	Roof tile	4
Post-medieval (1540–1900)	Bottle glass	2
	Clay tobacco pipe	5
	Pottery	6
	Window glass	1

## Appendix 3: Pottery

ELYG = Glazed Ely Ware; TPE = Transfer Printed Earthenware; PR/P = Plain red/pink Ware; GRE = glazed red earthenware.

Context	Fabric	Form	Qty	Wt(g)	Date
2	ELYG	Glazed interior and exterior	1	1	Late Med
	TPE	Decorated body sherd with blue transfer printed design	1	1	C18–20
4	PR/P	Undecorated body sherd	1	2	C16–17
7	ELYG	Glazed interior, exterior surface missing	1	1	Late Med
12	GRE	Glazed interior and exterior	1	5	C16–18
	TPE	Undecorated body sherd	1	1	C18–20
Total			6	11	

## Appendix 4: Ceramic Building Material

Context	Fabric	Form	Qty	Wt (g)	Date
2	ELY13	Roof tile	1	5	C14
12	ELY01	Roof tile	2	50	C15
19	ELY22	Roof tile	1	12	C15

ELY01: Sparse moderately-sorted medium sub angular limestone, sparse moderately-sorted medium sub-rounded quartz; sparse moderately-sorted medium sub angular iron stone and abundant moderately sorted medium angular voids

ELY13: Sparse moderately-sorted medium sub angular limestone, sparse moderately-sorted medium sub-angular quartz; sparse poorly sorted coarse sub rounded shell

ELY22: Common lime

## Appendix 5: Faunal Remains

Ctxt	Ctxt Qty	Ctxt Wt (g)	Spp.	NISP	Comments
9	1	1	Mammal	1	Small, undiagnostic fragment
12	3	5	Sheep/goat	1	Neonatal/pre-natal lamb/kid metatarsal fragment
			Mammal	2	Some canid gnawing

NISP = Number of Individual Species elements Present