

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION REPORT

SCCAS REPORT No. 2011/086

New Gate Complex at RAF Mildenhall MNL 625

J. A. Craven
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Lucy Robinson, County Director of Economy, Skills and Environment
Endeavour House, Russel Road, Ipswich, IP1 2BX

1. Introduction

This report is to be read as an appendix to SCCAS Report 2010/122 which describes the results of an archaeological evaluation at RAF Mildenhall, Suffolk in March-May 2010. Part of the site was unavailable for trial trenching at that time, due to the proximity of the operational runway and so the report stated that additional trenching was still required before a full summary of the site's archaeological resource could be produced, and recommendations made as to the need for further archaeological mitigation prior to development.

The additional trenching was carried out over two USA Bank Holiday weekends in March and April 2011 by John Craven, Andrew Beverton, Rob Brooks, Duncan Stirk, Johns Sims and Adam Yates from SCCAS Field Team. The report was written by John Craven and the digital site plan was produced by Ellie Hillen.

2. Results

The 18 trenches (Fig. 1, No's 93-100 & 114-123) had a combined length of 781m. The work was carried out to the same methodology detailed in the main report. Two planned trenches (113 and 114 in the original report) were abandoned due to their proximity to an underground fuel line.

Basic trench descriptions are given in Table 01 below. The natural geology consisted of chalk and occasional patches of mid orange/brown sands.

The trenching showed that the original landscape, prior to creation of the runway, had undulated considerably. This landscape had been levelled, with up to 0.7m of modern material being dumped upon the site, at times truncating or wholly removing the topsoil, to create a flat and level surface around the runway.

This undulating landscape, and subsequent variation in trench depth, was due to the presence of several natural hollows in the underlying chalk, and substantial changes in the thickness of a subsoil layer, 0020, which in most instances was sealed under the c.0.3m thick topsoil. This naturally formed deposit of mid brown silt/sands with

Trench No	Length	Orientation	Depth	Description
93	50m	NNE-SSW	0.3m-1.55m	Topsoil sealing 0.2m of layer 0020. A 1.55m deep natural hollow or channel was seen at the south end of the trench, infilled with 0020 and a basal layer of dark brown sands. A 1.2m deep hollow, also infilled with 0020, was seen toward the north end of the trench.
94	50m	E-W	0.4m-1m	Majority of trench was 0.3m-0.4m deep, with topsoil either overlying the natural chalk or a 0.1m thick remnant of layer 0020. Small natural hollow at eastern end where 0.3m of topsoil overlaid 0.5m of 0020 and then 0.2m of dark brown silt/sand infilling the base of the hollow.
95	50m	NW-SE	0.35m	Topsoil overlying 0.1m of layer 0020.
96	50m	E-W	1.3m	0.4m of modern deposits overlying 0.3m of topsoil and up to 0.6m of 0020.
97	49m	WNW-ESE	0.24m-1.2m	0.3m of topsoil overlying layer 0020 which varies in thickness up to 0.9m thick.
98	50m	SE-NW	0.4m-1.1m	At south-east end the trench was 1.1m deep, with 0.3m of modern material overlying 0.2m of topsoil and then layer 0020 which infilled a natural hollow. 10m to the north-west the natural subsoil began to rise out of the hollow until in mid trench 0.2m of modern material overlaid 0.2m of topsoil and 0.4m of 0020. At the north-west end of the trench the modern overburden had disappeared, leaving the topsoil overlying the 0.1m thick remnants of layer 0020.
99	50m	NW-SE	0.4m-1.2m	0.3m topsoil overlying 0.1m-0.9m of layer 0020.
100	50m	SE-NW	0.7m-1.8m	0.7m of modern deposits overlying natural chalk or up to 1.1m of layer 0020.
114	26m	N-S	0.3m-0.5m	0.3m topsoil directly overlying natural chalk subsoil or 0.2m of layer 0020.
115	48m	E-W	0.5-1.2m	Hollow at western end, base not seen. East end of trench c.0.5m deep with topsoil overlying 0.2m of layer 0020.
116	6m	NW-SE	1.1m	Trench shortened to avoid line of fuel pipe. 0.7m of modern deposits over 0.4m thick layer 0020.
117	48m	NE-SW	0.4m-1.9m+	At north-east end the trench was 0.4m deep, with topsoil overlying 0.1m of layer 0002. Trench gradually deepens to south-west as a layer of modern material develops above the topsoil and 0020 thickens. The south-western 20m of trench was occupied by a large hollow, 0024, which was at least 1.9m deep.

118	52m	NE-SW	0.8m-1.1m	0.5m of modern material overlying a truncated, 0.15m thick topsoil and 0.15m-0.45m of layer 0020. Deepest at centre of trench – probably northern edge of hollow 0024.
119	43m	NE-SW	0.6m-1.7m	South-west end of trench contained a hollow, c.1.7m deep and 15m wide. 0.6m of modern material directly overlaid layer 0020 which completely infilled the hollow. In the centre the trench was 0.8m deep, with 0.5m of modern deposits overlying a truncated, 0.15m thick topsoil and 0.15m of layer 0020. At the north-east end 0.5m of modern material overlaid 0.1m of truncated topsoil, which directly overlaid the chalk subsoil.
120	23m	E-W	0.7m-1.7m+	Eastern part of trench was 0.7m deep and had 0.5m of modern deposits overlying 0.2m layer 0020. The western half of the trench was occupied by hollow 0022 which was at least 1.7m deep.
121	40m	NE-SW	0.85m-1.1m	Topsoil overlying c.0.5m thick layer 0020 and 0.1m of mixed broken chalk subsoil and silt.
122	52m	WNW-ESE	1.2m	Up to c.1m of modern deposits over 0.15m thick truncated topsoil and 0.25m thick layer 0020.
123	44m	N-S	0.5m-0.95m	0.2m-0.7m of modern deposits overlying topsoil and, in southern half of trench, up to 0.2m of layer 0020. Trench is deepest at each end.

Table 1. Trench list

occasional fragments of chalk was identified throughout the trenching and reached up to 1.1m thick. 0020 also infilled the various hollows and other small depressions in the chalk subsoil surface.

Two of the largest hollows were recorded. 0022 was seen in the western end of Trench 120 and measured c.15m wide. It was sealed under 0.5m of modern deposits, 0.2m of topsoil and c.0.4m of layer 0020, the latter deposit then slumped into the hollow and reached 0.7m thick. Under 0020 was 0023, a deposit of dark brown silt/sand which was at least 0.4m thick. The base of the hollow was not reached so it was not clear if 0023 was the basal fill.

0024 was a large hollow in the western end of Trench 117, measuring c.0.16m wide and 1.9m deep. It was sealed under 0.5m-0.7m of modern deposits and then layer 0020, which slumped into the feature. Under 0020 was a 0.3m thick basal layer, 0025, of dark brown silt/sand with chalk flecks.

No archaeological features, deposits or finds were observed within the trenching.

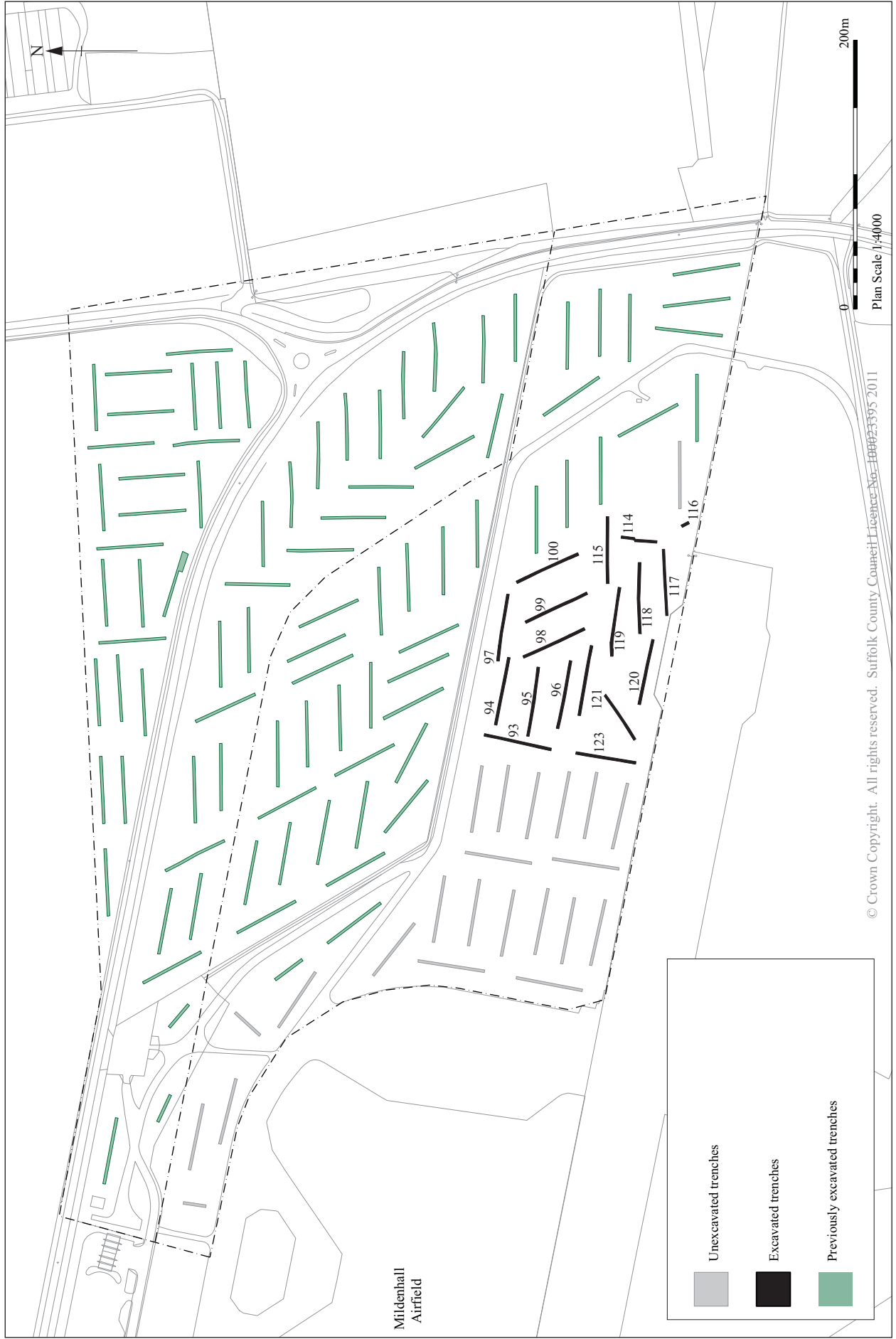


Figure 1. Trench plan

3. Discussion and conclusion

The near total absence of archaeological deposits is similar to that seen in the previous phase of evaluation. This almost complete lack of archaeological features across such a large area clearly indicates a genuine absence of past activity despite the site's proximity to the known Anglo-Saxon cemetery (MNL 084) at the east edge of the development area or the intensive multi-period settlement evidence known on the airbase and at Beck Row to the west.

This additional evaluation therefore confirms the previous view that the wider site has always been devoid of settlement, instead being open farm or heathland. The planned development of a new taxiway and alterations to the RAF Mildenhall Gate 1 Access is unlikely therefore to have any impact upon archaeological deposits and so no further archaeological work is thought necessary. This includes the abandonment of the remaining original planned trenches (Trenches 78, 80-92 and 124-131) which lie in an area that will not be directly affected by the development.

Disclaimer

Any opinions expressed in this report about the need for further archaeological work are those of the Field Projects Team alone. Ultimately the need for further work will be determined by the Local Planning Authority and its Archaeological Advisors when a planning application is registered. Suffolk County Council's archaeological contracting services cannot accept responsibility for inconvenience caused to the clients should the Planning Authority take a different view to that expressed in the report.