

ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING REPORT

Stormwater Drainage adjacent Rochester Road, RAF Lakenheath ERL 141

A REPORT ON THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING, 2004
(Planning app. no. Pre-planning)

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Acknowledgements

This project was funded by MoD Defence Estates (USF) and was monitored by Judith Plouviez (Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service, Conservation Team). The fieldwork was carried out by Jo Caruth, John Craven and Andrew Tester from Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service, Field Team. The project was managed by John Newman, who also provided advice during the production of the report.

The post-excavation was managed by Richenda Goffin. Finds processing and the producing of site plans and sections was carried out Gemma Adams, and the specialist finds and environmental reports by Cathy Tester.

Summary

A limited monitoring of five small trenches, a length of drainage trench and the stripping of an open area for a new road and car-park identified Late Roman occupation evidence in the form of a linear ditch which contained animal bone and sherds of Late Roman pottery. Together with several other undated ditches, pits and an overlying Late or post Roman buried soil horizon, this indicates that deposits relating to the known surrounding area of Roman occupation survive throughout the area of Rochester Road.

SMR information

Planning application no.	Pre-planning
Date of fieldwork:	13 th -14 th December and April 2005
Grid Reference:	TL 7286 8075
Funding body:	MoD Defence Estates (USF)
Oasis reference.	Suffolkc1-9226

1. Introduction

An archaeological monitoring was carried out during the groundworks for a new stormwater drainage system at Rochester Road, RAF Lakenheath, Eriswell. The work was carried out to meet a condition which was placed, during the pre-planning stage, by Judith Plouviez (Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service, Conservation Team). The work was funded by the developer, MoD Defence Estates (USF).

The main groundworks (Fig. 1) were situated within the sewage works on Rochester Road at a height of c.10m OD. Two smaller trenches (1 and 2) lay outside the sewage works entrance. Three further trenches (3-5), situated on the grass verges along the edge of Rochester Road were also seen, and have been included in this report because of their proximity, although they were not part of this project.

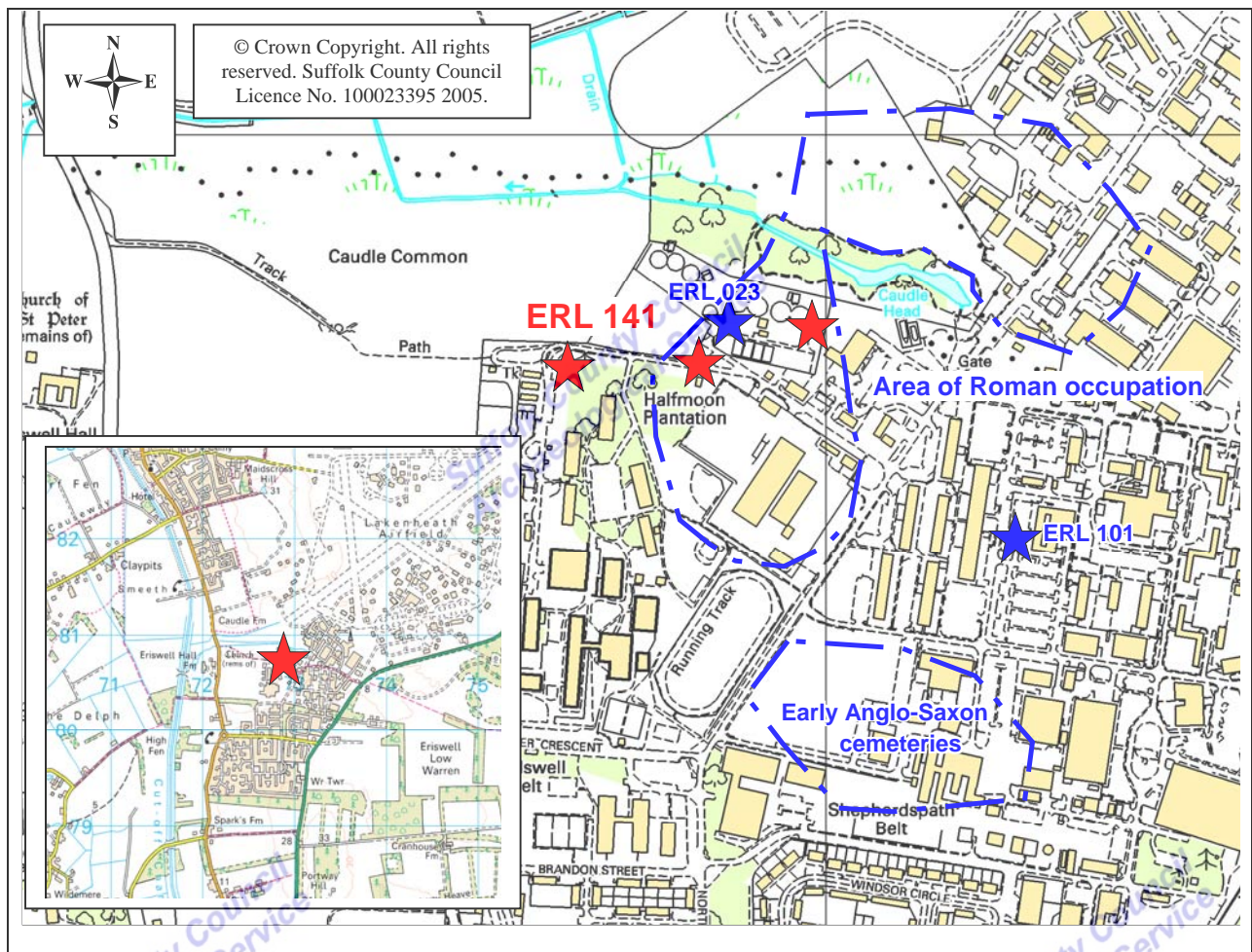


Figure 1. Site location plan

Interest in the site was based upon its location within the airbase, which lies between the eastern edge of the fens and the western margins of Breckland. The airbase has seen considerable development, particularly in the past 10 years, and a substantial amount of archaeological work has been carried out in the vicinity of the site. The site lies within a known area of Roman occupation and various excavations, e.g. LKH 191, LKH 194, LKH 207 and LKH 223 (Caruth 2005a), have identified a Late Iron Age/Roman settlement focused around a natural spring at Caudle Head mere, 300-400m to the north-east. Evidence of preserved Roman soil layers and features, e.g. ERL 117 and ERL 132 (Caruth 2002 and Craven 2004), have also been identified extending south from Caudle Head, through the vicinity of the site, and up to 200m to the south.

In particular Roman occupation evidence and a single burial were found 50m to the north at ERL 023 (Tester 1993). Other important sites nearby are the three large Early Anglo-Saxon cemeteries, ERL 046, 104 and 114, which lie 400-500m to the south-east (Caruth 2005b) and Early Anglo-Saxon settlement which stretches northwards past Caudle Head mere from ERL 101 (Tester forthcoming), 350m to the south east.

The site therefore lay in an area of high archaeological interest and any groundworks would almost certainly disturb archaeological deposits from the period of Roman occupation. Because the ground disturbance was to be limited in size a program of monitoring was thought sufficient to record any archaeological evidence exposed during the development.

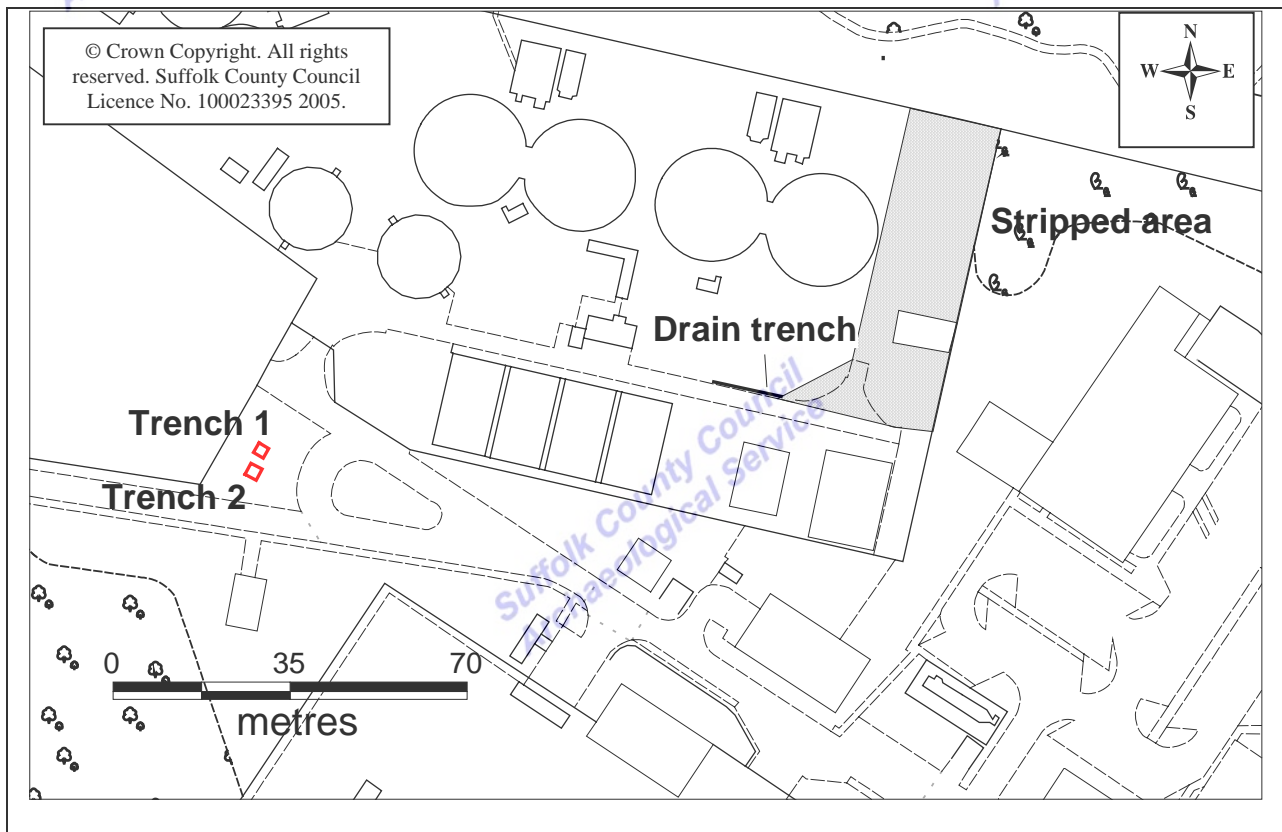


Figure 2. Location of trenches and stripped area

2. Methodology

Two visits were made to monitor the stripped surface for the new road and car-park and the excavation of a drainage run along the northern side of the existing road within the sewage works compound. In addition two deep, rectangular trenches, 1 and 2 (Fig. 2), each measuring c.2.5m² were seen just outside the entrance. Three further trenches (3-5) alongside Rochester Road were also observed while this project was underway, although these were part of a separate project to replace the drainage alongside Rochester Road (Fig. 3).

Trench 1 was monitored during excavation, with the archaeology being recorded after the initial soil strip, prior to the trench being excavated to its full depth of 2m+. Trench 2 was observed only after its full excavation, to a depth of 2.5m, meaning that identified archaeology could only be recorded in section. The natural subsoil, formed of yellow/orange sands, was observed in the trenches at a depth of c.0.5m, sealed beneath the topsoil and a buried soil horizon.

Trench 3 was also monitored after excavation and could only be recorded in section, which showed the natural subsoil at a depth of 0.95m. Two further areas of trenching, 4 and 5, were observed after excavation, these were 0.8m deep and did not expose the natural subsoil and were spot located.

In Trench 1 the archaeological levels were cleaned by hand and planned at a scale of 1:20. After further machining trench sections were recorded at a scale of 1:20. In Trench 2 the trench sections were recorded at a scale of 1:50 as they could not be cleaned or easily accessed. A single context, continuous numbering system was used and digital photographs (included in the digital archive) were taken during the monitoring of Trench 2.

Site data has been input onto an MS Access database and recorded using the County Sites and Monuments Record code ERL 141, and inked copies of section drawings and plans have been made. Bulk finds were washed, marked and quantified. The site archive is kept in the small and main stores of Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service at Bury St Edmunds under SMR No. ERL 141.

An OASIS form has been completed for the project (reference no. suffolke1-9226).

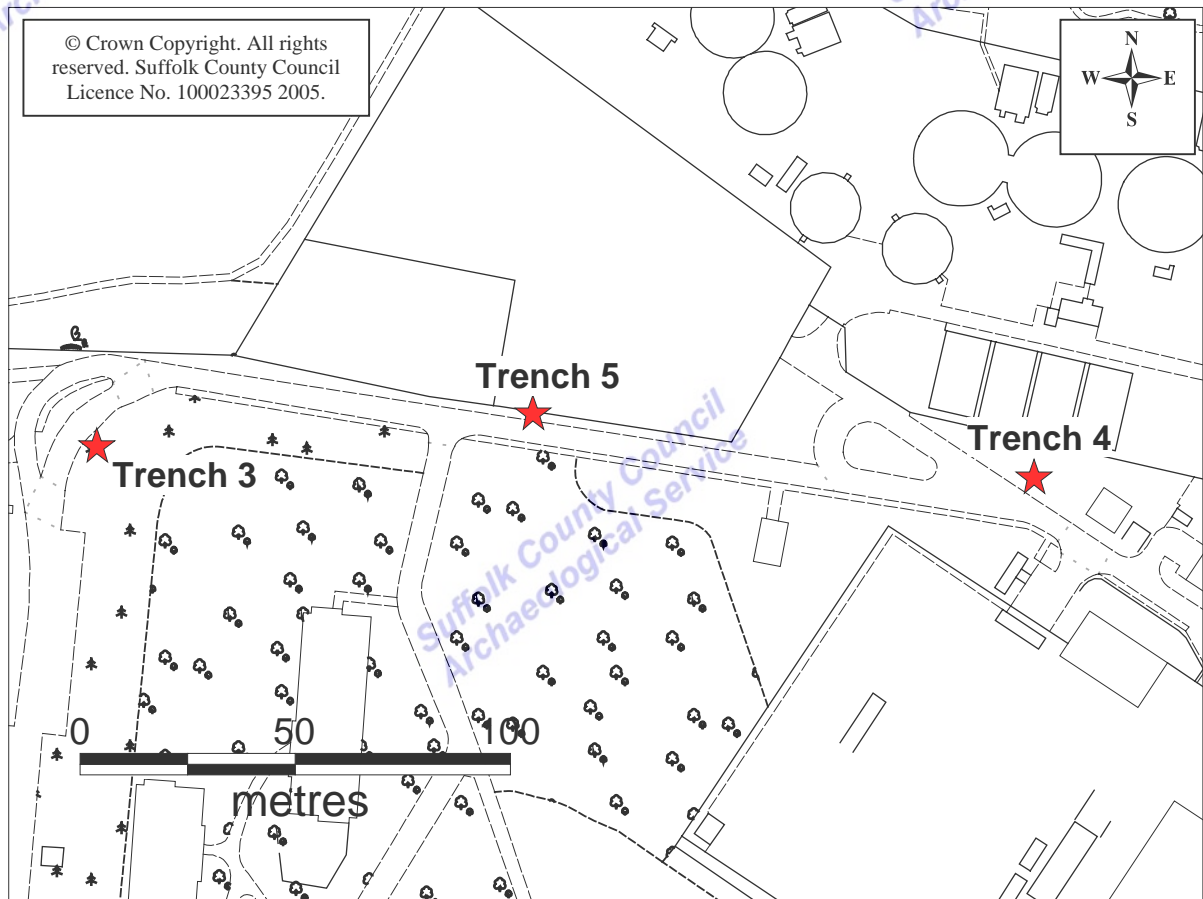


Figure 3. Location of other observed trenches

3. Results

Stripped area

The area for the new road and car-park was examined after the stripping had been completed, this totalled an area of c.1200sqm (Fig. 2). Approximately 0.5m had been removed and a horizon of mixed brown-grey sand with patches of yellow sand was revealed. None of this was subsoil and most looked to be a previous topsoil with modern disturbances within it. The whole area was searched for archaeological finds but none was found. If archaeological deposits exist beneath this, they have not been damaged by this work.

Drainage trench

A c.10m length of drainage trench was examined during excavation (Fig. 2). This ran through largely disturbed deposits and no archaeological finds or features were seen.

Trenches 1 and 2

Four features were identified in Trench 1 (Fig. 4), two pits and two ditches sealed beneath a buried soil layer. The topsoil was 0.2m-0.3m thick and lay above a thin layer, 0005, of dark sand with organic material. This in turn lay above a thicker layer, 0004/0007, of dark loam/sand which lay above the features or the natural subsoil. The western and southern baulk sections of the trench, 0002 and 0006 respectively, were recorded.

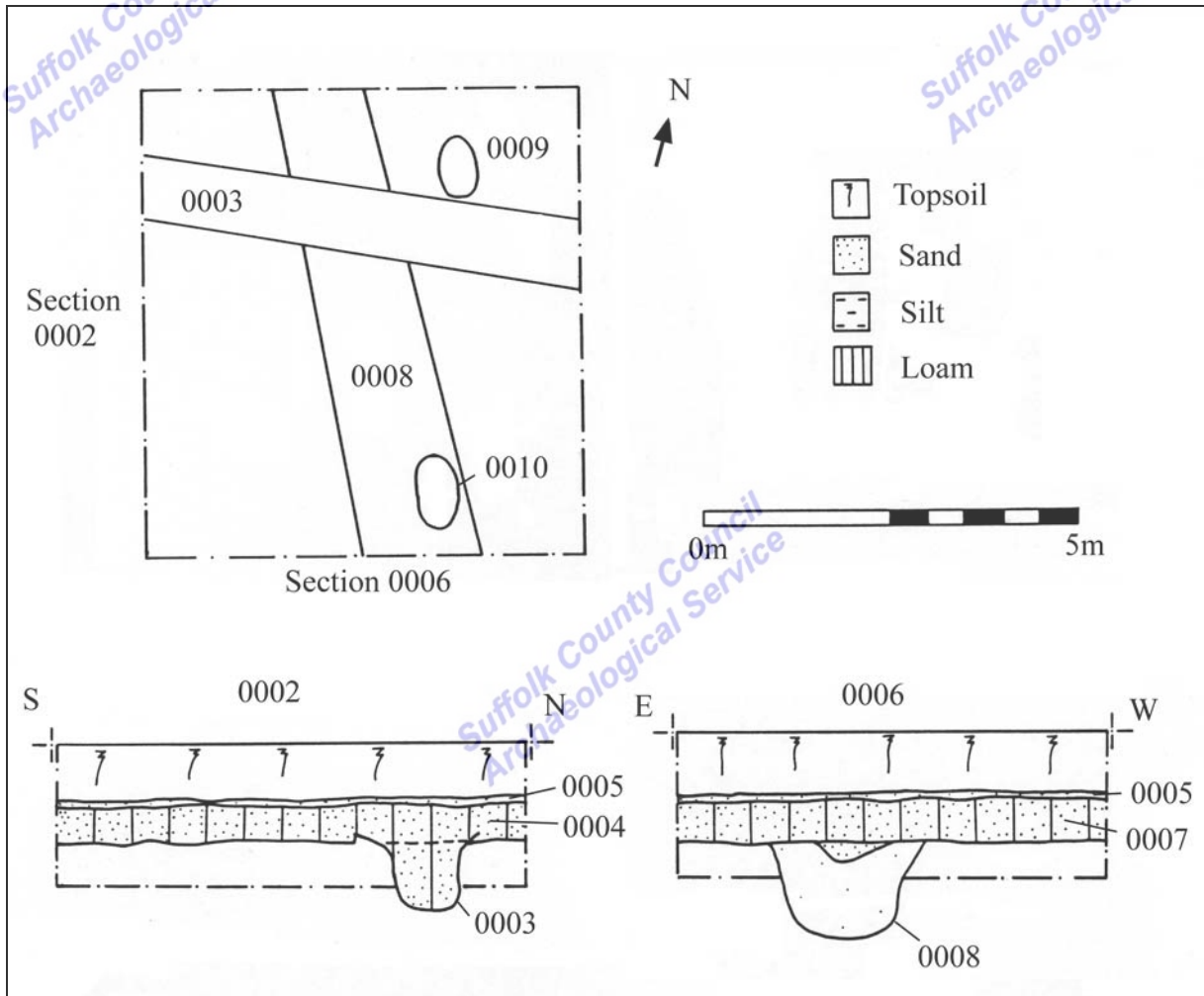


Figure 4. Trench 1 plan and sections

0003 was a linear ditch running through the centre of the trench and cutting ditch 0008. It was aligned west-east, measured 0.3m-0.4m wide and was cut 0.4m deep into the natural subsoil with vertical sides and a concave base. It had a dark brown sand/loam fill containing Roman pottery and animal bone.

0008 was a linear ditch, aligned north-south and measuring 0.6m-0.7m wide and 0.5m deep with steep sides and a concave base. Cut by ditch 0003 it had a fill of pale grey/brown sand.

0009 was an oval pit, measuring 0.2m by 0.4m with a dark sand fill.

0010 was an oval pit, measuring 0.3m by 0.4m, cut into the top of ditch 0008. It had a fill of dark sand.

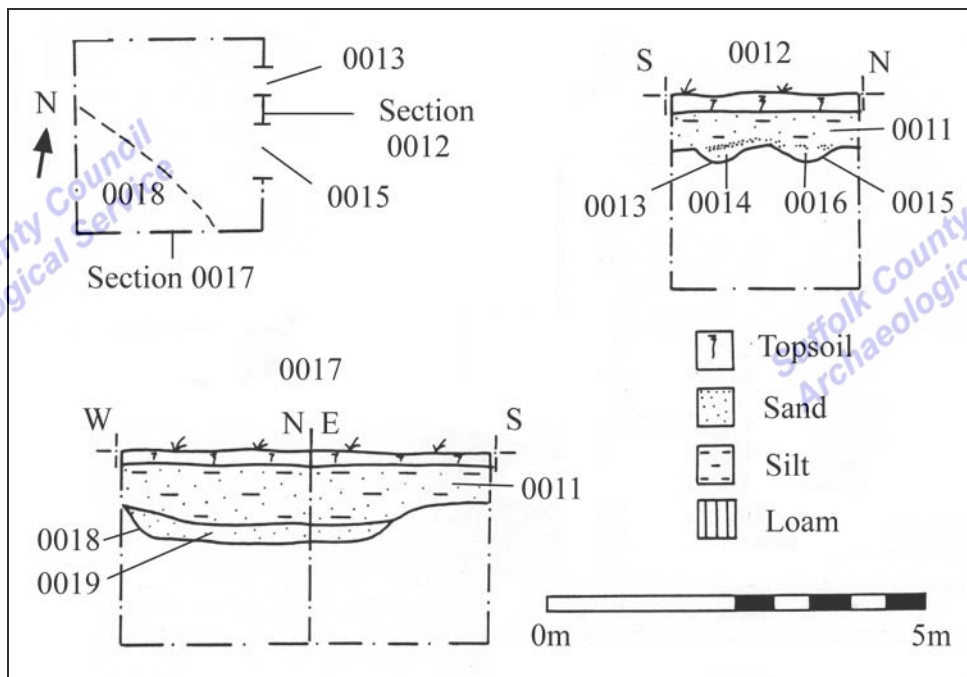


Figure 5. Trench 2 plan and sections

Three features were identified in the sides of Trench 2 (Fig. 5), sealed beneath a thick layer of mid brown sand/silt, 0011, which lay under the topsoil. The eastern and southern baulk sections of the trench, 0012 and 0017 respectively, were recorded.

0013 was possibly a ditch or pit, measuring 0.4m-0.6m wide and 0.3m deep, lying adjacent to 0015. It had a fill, 0014, of dark brown sand with a lens of black sand either at its top or in the base of layer 0011.

0015 was possibly a ditch or pit, measuring 0.6m-0.7m wide and 0.3m deep, lying adjacent to 0013. It had a fill, 0016, of dark brown sand with a lens of black sand either at its top or in the base of layer 0011.

0018 was a broad feature, possibly a large shallow pit or an oblique section through a ditch, measuring over 1.5m+ wide. It had a fill, 0019, of mid grey sand mottled with dark brown sand and iron panning flecks.

Trenches 3-5

These were three trenches that were observed during drainage works along the north side of Rochester Road outside the sewage works and were part of a separate project (Fig. 3). All trenches were seen after excavation. Trench 3 showed 0.25m of topsoil, over a 0.5m thick deposit of pale brown windblown sands, which in turn overlaid a 0.2m thick layer of brown sand, 0020, which lay above the natural sand and chalk subsoil, found at 0.95m. No features were observed in the trench sections.

Trenches 4 and 5 showed a 0.3m topsoil overlying a layer of brown sand, 0021, 0.5m+ thick, but did not expose the natural subsoil.

4. The Finds

Cathy Tester

The finds assemblage consists of five sherds of pottery (314g) and five fragments of animal bone (186g) all collected from ditch 0003.

The pottery was Roman and includes local and regional coarsewares which are represented by a Horningsea black-surfaced ware (HOGB) jar sherd and a grey micaceous jar base in the black-surfaced variant (GMB). Both are probably 2nd century or later. Also found were 'late specialist' wares which are a feature of later Roman pottery assemblages. These include the footring base from a Hadham red-slipped ware (HAX) bowl and a late shell-tempered ware (LSH) large storage jar rim and a base sherd from a standard jar. Both wares have late 3rd or 4th century dates.

Fragments of animal bone include cow metacarpal and mandible and two large mammal ribs.

5. Discussion

The earliest feature identified on the site appears to be ditch 0008 which is cut by ditch 0003 and pit 0010. The stratigraphy, and the nature of its pale sand fill which contained no finds evidence, suggests that it may be a prehistoric feature.

Pit 0010 is clearly later than ditch 0008 but its date is still uncertain, as is the date of pit 0009, and it is unclear how these features relate to ditch 0003. This latter ditch, which contained finds evidence indicative of occupation, is of a Late Roman date and was sealed beneath a buried soil layer, 0004/0007. Features 0013, 0015 and 0018 are again of uncertain date but are also sealed below a soil horizon, 0011, which is probably the same deposit as 0004/0007.

This soil horizon was apparent in all five trenches outside the sewage works (0004, 0005, 0007, 0011, 0020 and 0021), and lay above the natural subsoil and archaeological features. These deposits, predominantly of dark brown sands, did not appear to contain any finds material but are believed to be further surviving evidence of the Late Roman or post-Roman soil horizons that have been previously identified in the surrounding area.

The depth of the subsoil and layer 0020 in Trench 3 is probably due to the presence of a natural hollow in the original landscape. This has subsequently been infilled by windblown sand in the post-Roman period.

Neither of the excavations inside the sewage works exposed archaeological deposits.

6. Conclusion

The limited monitoring of these relatively small trenches has identified firm Late Roman occupation evidence, with the presence of a linear ditch, 0003, containing animal bone and Late Roman pottery. The presence of several other ditches and pits, some of which may be contemporary, in a dense group in Trenches 2 and 3, together with ditch 0003, shows that archaeological deposits relating to the area of Roman occupation, which stretches from sites to the south at ERL 132 through to Caudle Head Mere to the north, are well preserved at depth at this point on Rochester Road. The site has also shown the widespread presence of a buried soil horizon, beneath which the archaeological deposits are sealed, which is of a probable Late Roman or post-Roman date.

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