University of Leicester
Archaeological Services

# An Archaeological Evaluation on land at Sandpit Road, Thorney, Peterborough.

**NGR: TF 2906 0389 (centre)**

Andrew Hyam

ULAS Report No. 2015-147

# An Archaeological Evaluation on land at

# Sandpit Road,

# Thorney,

# Peterborough

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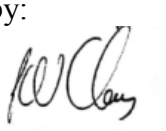
**A.R.Hyam**

**For: Bletsoes Limited**

Approved by:

**Signed:** … 

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**ULAS Report Number 2015-147**

**Event Number 53938**

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**An Archaeological Evaluation on land at Sandpit Road, Thorney, Peterborough. NGR: TF 2906 0389 (centre)**

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## Summary

*An archaeological evaluation was undertaken by the University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS) on land at Sandpit Road, Thorney, Peterborough between the 17th and 21st of August 2015. The work was carried out as a response to a pre-planning enquiry and was designed to provide preliminary information in advance of a potential residential development.*

*Eleven 30m long trenches were excavated across the proposed development site representing an approximate 5% sample of the area. A long curving ditch was identified which appeared to follow the original edge of the surrounding fenland. Limited finds and associated land drains within this feature suggest a probable 19th century origin. A U-shaped feature in the north-east corner of the site appears to be of similar or later date. An undated single small gully located in the north-west corner was found to be on a similar alignment to late 19th or early 20th century land drains and ploughing scars.*

*The report will be archived with Peterborough City Council under Event Number* 53938.

## Introduction

In accordance with National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) Section 12 Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment (DCLG 2012), the Peterborough City Council Archaeologist, as archaeological advisor to the planning authority, requested that an archaeological field evaluation take place in order to provide preliminary pre-planning information on the character and extent of any buried archaeological remains which may exist on the site. This document forms the report for the archaeological work on land at Sandpit Road, Thorney, Peterborough. Should planning permission be granted it is intended that a small-scale residential development will be built on the site.

## Background

Thorney is located approximately 12km to the east of Peterborough and occupies the northern end of a low rise in the Cambridgeshire Fens (Figs. 1 and 2). The village has a maximum height of around 7.1m OD in the vicinity of the parish church. From this high point the land drops away to around 3m or 4m OD. The old route of the main A47 road formerly ran along a raised causeway through the village but this trunk road has recently been re-routed to the north.

The modern topography of the site and surrounding area reflects large scale drainage works undertaken around Thorney from the early 17th to mid-19th centuries, and the rebuilding of Thorney as an Estate Village belonging to the Duke of Bedford in the mid-19th century. Prior to the fen drainage, the area formed a small island of dry ground, surrounded by marshland. The historic core of the village centres on the parish church of St. Mary and St. Botolph (formerly the medieval Benedictine Abbey church), Church Street and The Green, just to the south of the crossroads. The 19th century estate cottages are built in a strong linear fashion extending the village eastwards away from its medieval core along Wisbech Road. In the second half of the 20th century more houses have increased the village envelope. This enlargement includes Woburn Drive and Sandpit Road which form part of a new estate immediately to the north of the proposed development site.

An archaeological desk-based assessment and heritage statement was undertaken by ULAS in May 2014 (ULAS Report number 2014-083). The assessment concluded that, although the site had not undergone any archaeological investigation and that it was located on the extreme edge of the former island, there was good potential for prehistoric and Roman deposits.

A gradiometry survey of the site undertaken by Stratascan in April 2014 (Prestidge 2014) identified two anomalies, the first of which was interpreted as a possible U-shaped enclosure towards the north-east corner of the site. The second anomaly indicated the presence of a long sinuous ditch running across the site from the north-east to the south-west (Fig. 3). Neither of these features could be identified on any available historic mapping. Similarly neither anomaly matched any existing field boundaries or other visible above-ground features.

A Heritage assessment has been prepared for an adjacent area to the west (Flitcroft 2013). The Peterborough City Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) records two non-designated archaeological sites nearby to the west: an undated rectangular enclosure (SMR ref 6771), and the site of a Second World War Prisoner of War camp (SMR ref 50565). The SMR does not record any archaeological sites within the proposed development area.

The proposed development site lies on the raised south-eastern edge of the former island of Thorney to the south-east of the medieval abbey and the modern village. Ground levels within the site boundaries lie just below 5m OD. The British Geological Survey for England and Wales indicates that the underlying geology of the site is likely to consist of Oxford Clay Formation Mudstone.

Access to the site is from the southern end of Sandpit Road which leads from the former A47 through a modern housing estate. The site is currently used as an arable field and is roughly rectangular in shape (Figs. 4 and 5). A metalled farm track runs along the northern and eastern boundaries and leads to Park Farm which is close to the south eastern corner of the site. Trees and a hedge screen a small modern housing development along the western boundary and a hedge with a shallow drainage ditch run along the southern boundary. The site has a very slight slope running down from north to south. A gentle slope can also be detected dropping down to the south-east which corresponds to the former edge of the medieval Isle of Thorney as shown in the ULAS Desk-Based Assessment. To the north of the farm track is the southern limit of

the modern houses along with a small play area. At the east edge of the modern houses are two older houses dating to the early 20th century and built for the Duke of Bedford's estate. These two houses will eventually form part of the new development but the area they occupy was not evaluated during this work.

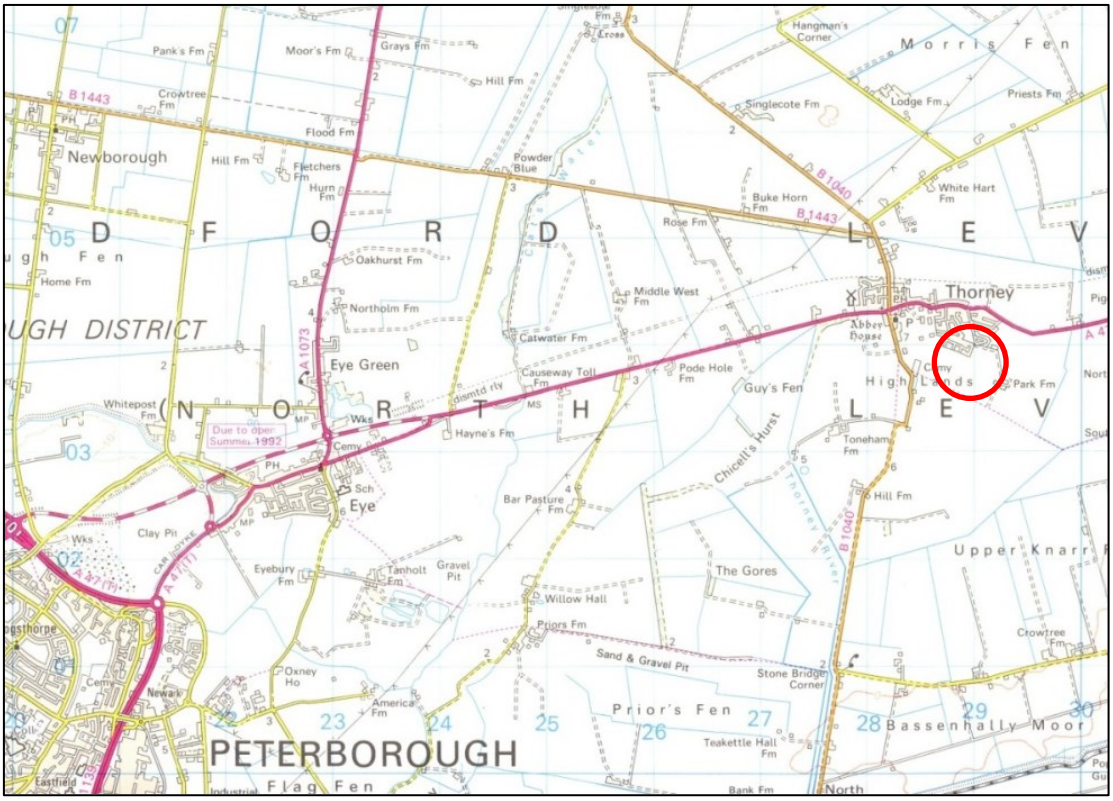


Figure 1 Thorney location


Figure 2 Site location
(© contains OS data).

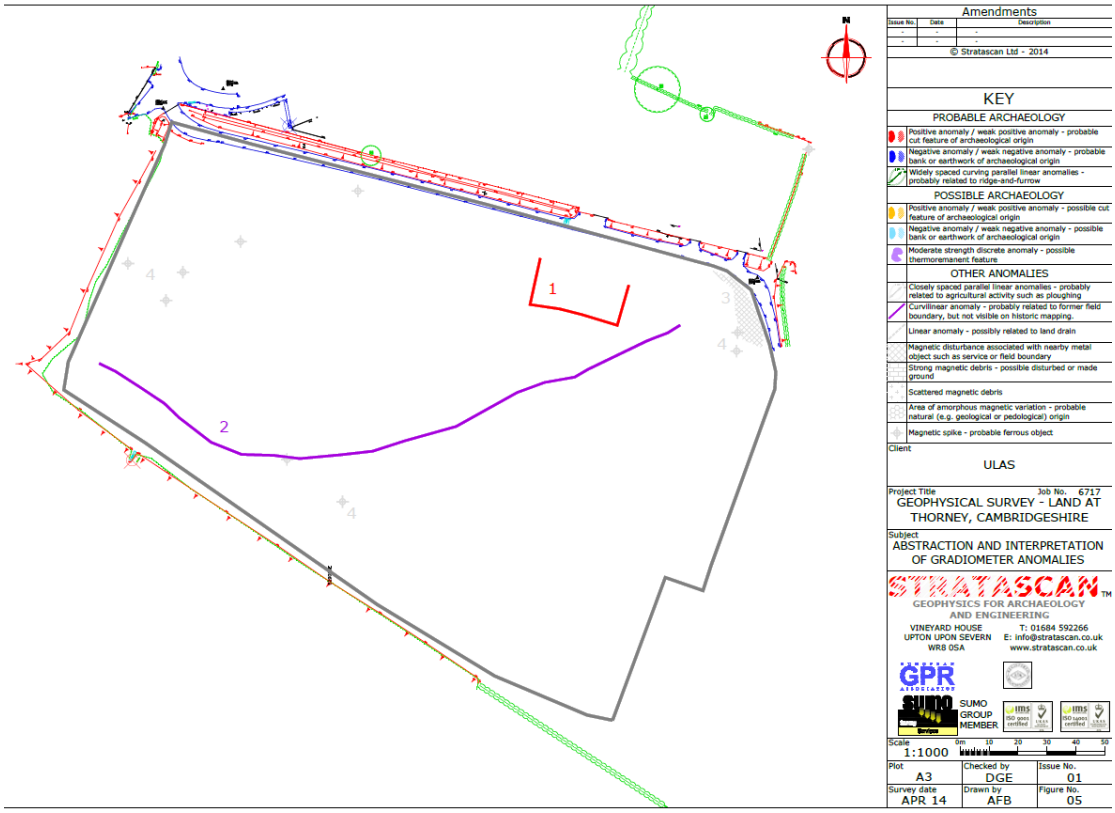


Figure 3 Stratascan geophysical survey results
Stratascan report J6717


Figure 4 Development site seen from Sandpit Road
Looking south-east towards Park Farm

Figure 5 Development site from Park Farm
Looking north-west

## Objectives

The archaeological objectives for the evaluation are discussed in detail in the ULAS Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) approved by the Peterborough City Archaeologist. However, within the stated project objectives, the principal aim of the evaluation was to establish the nature, extent, date, depth, significance and state of preservation of archaeological deposits on the site in order to determine the potential impact upon them from the proposed development. This will include characterisation of the sites within the broader landscape, any activities identified on the site and changes in land-use over time.

## Methodology

The general methodology for archaeological evaluations is shown in the ULAS WSI. For this project eleven 30m long trenches giving an approximate sample size of 5% was specified.

Topsoil and overburden were removed carefully in level spits, under continuous archaeological supervision with a mechanical excavator using a toothless bucket. Trenches were excavated down to the top of archaeological deposits or the natural undisturbed substratum, whichever was reached first. All excavation by machine and hand was undertaken with a view to avoid damage to archaeological deposits or features which may have appeared worthy of preservation in situ or where a more detailed investigation might be required. In the event of the discovery of structures, features or finds which might merit preservation in situ, they would be adequately protected from deterioration using suitable methods.

Appropriate recording methods as specified in the ULAS WSI were used throughout the project.

## Results

As noted in the methodology eleven 30m long trenches were specified which were distributed throughout the proposed development area. One of the trenches was intended to be located to the north of the farm track where two occupied houses currently stand. As there was the strong chance of heavy disturbance from these houses and associated services, and for safety reasons, it was decided to relocate this trench as shown in Figure 6 below. Instead of a 1.8m wide bucket the excavator was fitted with a 1.6m wide ditching bucket, therefore a number of trenches were lengthened to provide the necessary sample size.

Trenches are numbered in order of excavation with Trench 11 being the relocated trench. Trench lengths and depths are shown in Appendix 1.

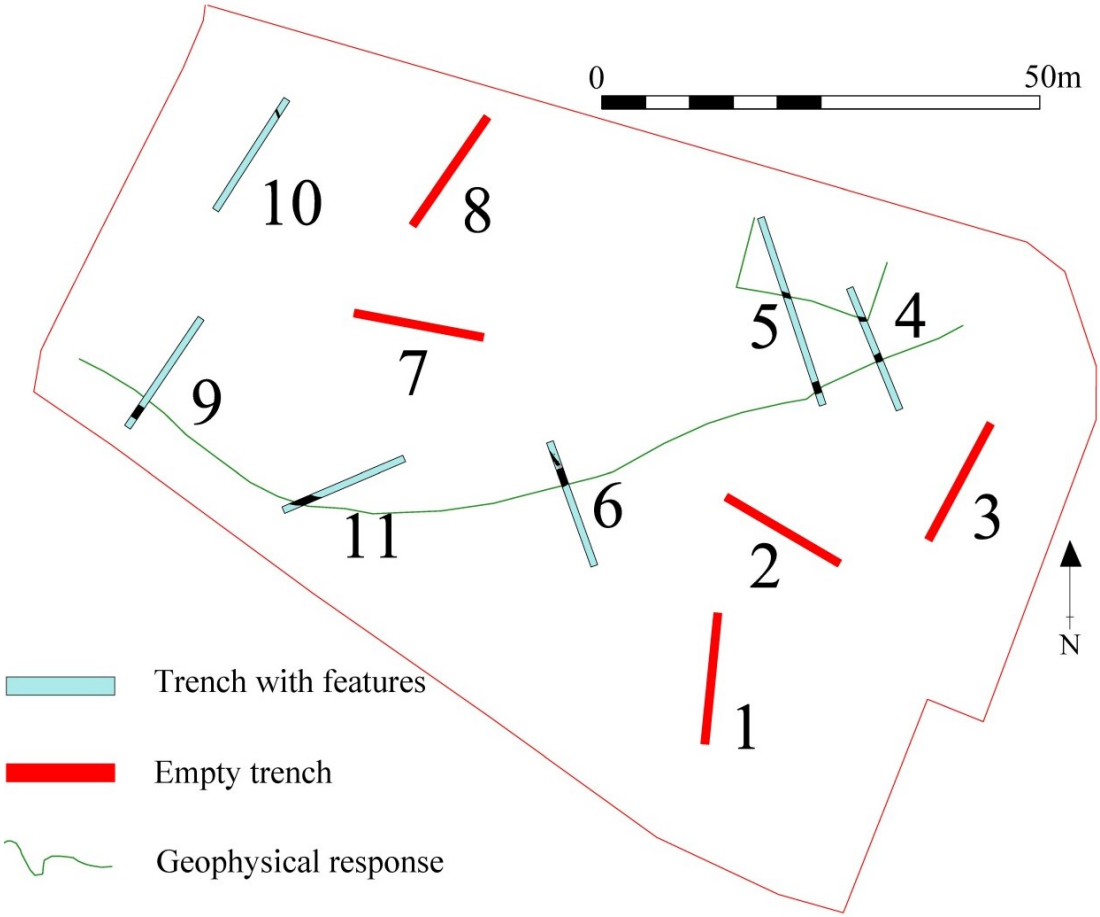


Figure 6 Evaluation trench layout

*Trench 1*

Trench 1 was located in the south-eastern corner of the proposed development site. Between 0.22 and 0.28m of mid to dark greyish brown silty sandy-clay topsoil was removed to expose the mid to light orange brown sandy clay subsoil. The topsoil and subsoil were identical across the entire site. The subsoil layer was relatively thin with a maximum thickness of 0.16m. Removal of the subsoil revealed the natural substratum consisting of a pale orange sandy-clay with patches of gravel. Small areas of a slightly darker greyish yellow clay were also noted (Fig. 7).

Whilst the natural substratum was relatively undisturbed a number of parallel plough scars running from north-west to south-east could be seen cutting several millimetres deep. These were especially pronounced towards the northern end of the trench. No archaeological features or deposits were present within this trench.


Figure 7 Trench 1
Looking north. Two 1m scales

*Trench 2*

Trench 2 was located to the north of Trench 1 on a north-west to south-east alignment. The same topsoil and subsoil was present in this trench although in this trench the natural substratum contained much larger bands of sandy gravel running across the trench. More plough scars were observed as was a land drain cut running from east to west (Fig. 8). The ceramic drain was left intact.

No archaeological features or deposits were seen within this trench.

*Trench 3*

Trench 3 also contained more plough scar evidence and three land drains running from east to west. As with the previous trenches, and indeed all trenches, no pottery or other finds were recovered from the topsoil and subsoil which may indicate a lack of manure scattering from farmyard dumps.

No archaeological features or deposits were present within this trench.


Figure 8 Trench 2
Looking north. Diagonal cut of land drain seen in foreground running E-W

*Trench 4*

Trench 4 was located to sample both of the geophysical anomalies. An east to west land drain was present in the north end of the trench as was a 1.1m wide ditch [10] running from east to west and a 1.8m wide ditch [12] running - north-east to south-west (Fig. 9). More plough scars were also observed running from east to west.

The 1.1m wide ditch [10] corresponded to the possible U-shaped enclosure identified by Stratascan. The cut for a land drain could be seen running along the northern edge of the ditch (Fig.10). Excavation revealed the feature to have a relatively irregularly shaped base with steep sides containing a very hard and compact single fill (9). Fill (9) consisted of a mid orange brown silty-clay with gravel, sandstone and flint inclusions. Despite the fill being so hard there were a number of voids within it suggesting that the ditch had been backfilled in the relatively recent past. No finds were recovered from the fill.

The north-east to south-west aligned ditch [12] also had a land drain cut following the same course although this time the drain ran along the centre of the ditch at it base (Fig. 11). When excavated it was found that the land drain cut through the fill (11) and into the base of the ditch which would suggest that the course of this feature was known about but that it had been backfilled before the land drain was laid. The profile indicated a fairly wide (1.8m) but relatively shallow flat-bottomed ditch (0.44m) which was very similar in profile to the existing ditch running along the southern boundary of the site. The single fill (11) consisted of a mid to dark orange brown silty-clay. Some small fragments of probable animal bone were present but their state of preservation was extremely poor so that little more information could be gained from them. Two sherds of very late medieval, or more possibly, early post-medieval hard-bodied wheel-thrown hollow-ware pots (pers. com. D Sawday, ULAS) were recovered from the upper part of this fill.

*Trench 5*

As with Trench 4, Trench 5 was placed to investigate both of the features identified in the geophysical survey although in order to do so the trench length was increased to 44m. Both features appeared where predicted with Ditch [10] in T4 being given the cut number [15] in T5, and Ditch [12] in T4 being given cut number [17] in T5 (Fig. 12). As with all other trenches a number of east to west plough scars were observed and noted on the pro-forma trench recording sheet.

Ditch [15] had a much more regular profile than when seen in Trench 4 but contained the same hard but crumbly mid orange brown silty-clay fill, identified in this trench as (16) (Fig. 13). No finds were recovered from the fill. In this trench the ditch was measured at 1m wide and 0.37m deep. The land drain running along the edge of the ditch in Trench 4 had diverged slightly by the time it reached Trench 5 so that it was approximately 0.2m to the north.

The wider ditch to the south, part of the sinuous feature running across the site, was given the cut number [17] in this trench. Although noticeably wider at 2.3m in this trench it had the same wide flat bottomed profile with a maximum depth of 0.49m (Fig. 14). The southern edge was fairly wide and shallow suggesting a possible re-cut although this could not be seen in the single mid to dark orange brown silty-clay fill (18). No finds were recovered from the fill. A land drain cut through the fill and into the base of the ditch following the same alignment.

No other archaeological features or deposits were found in this trench.

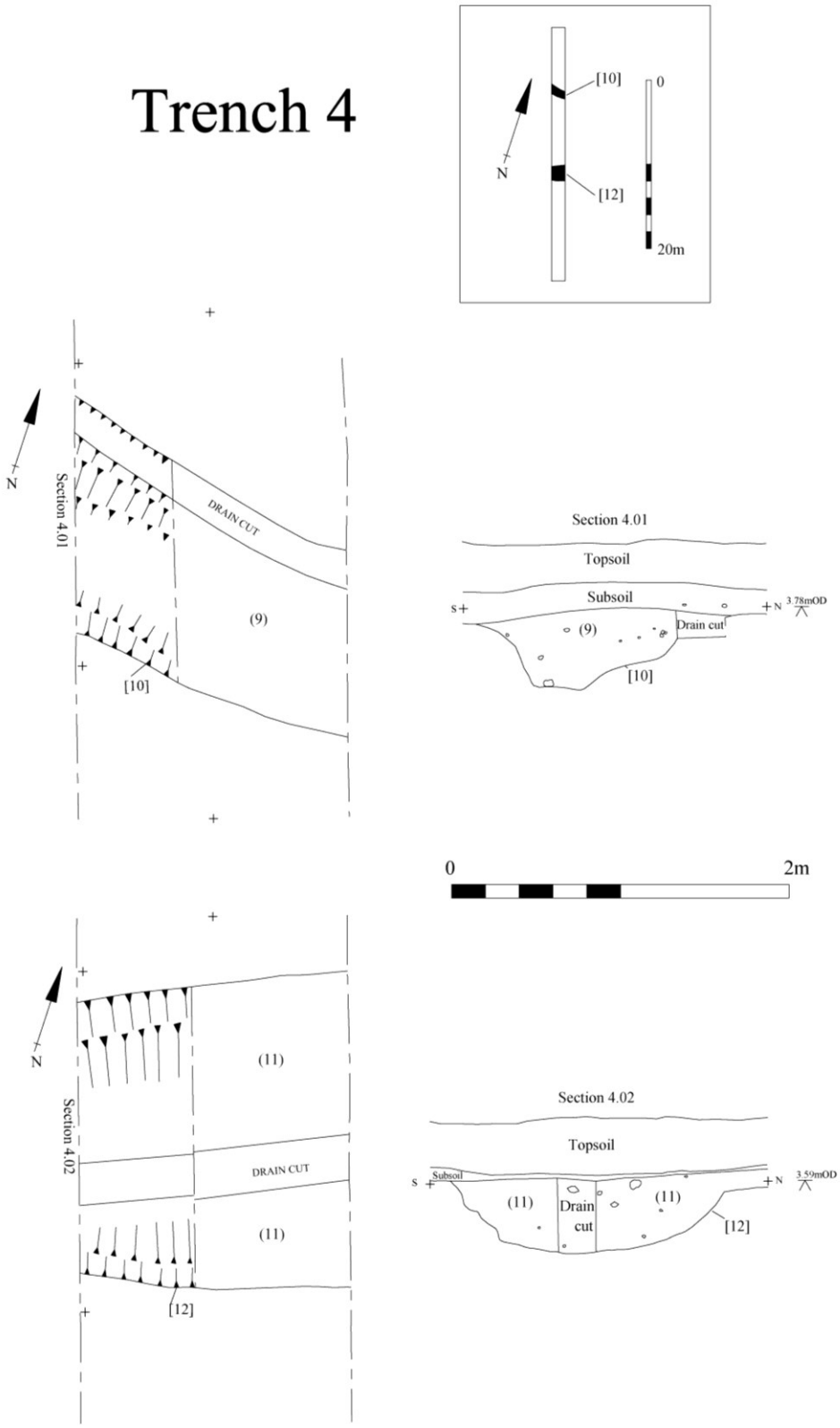


Figure 9 Trench 4 features

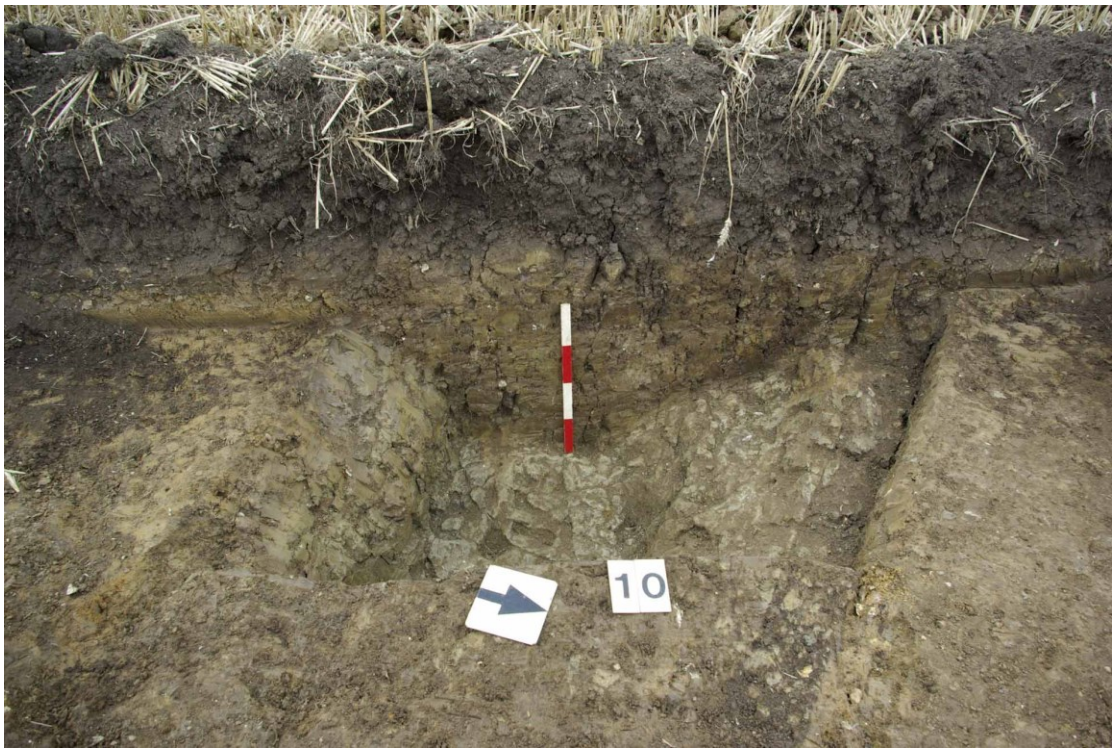


Figure 10 Trench 4. Ditch [10]
Looking west. 0.4m scale. Land drain cut to right of feature.

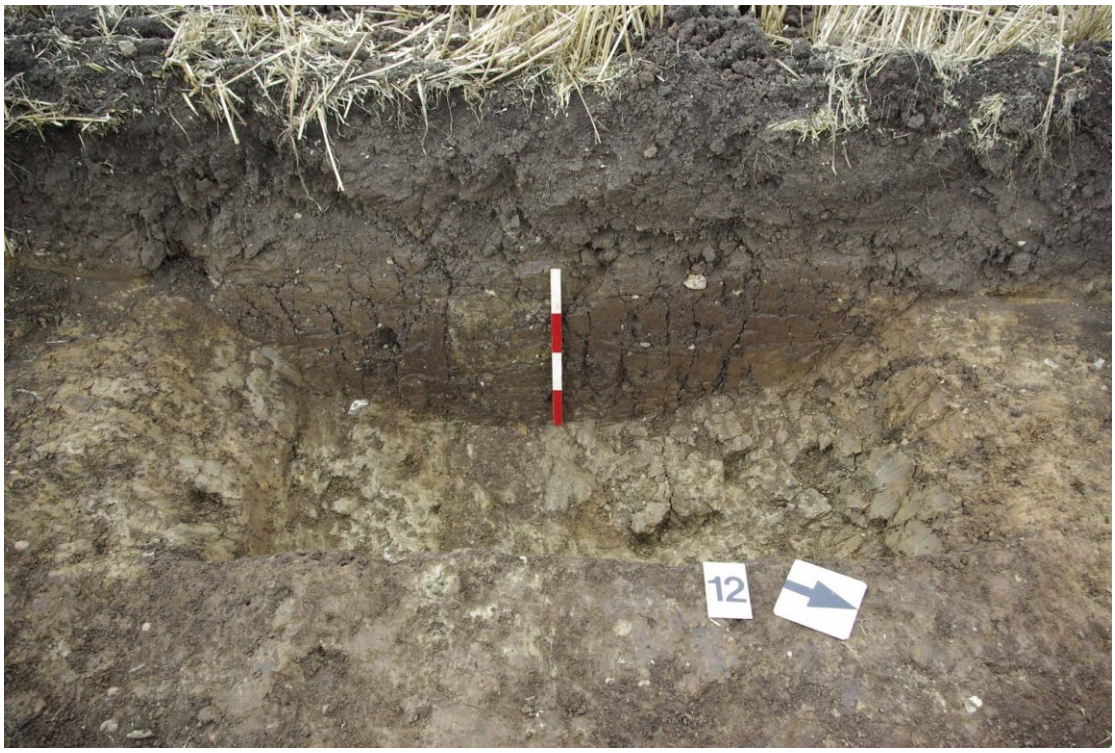


Figure 11 Trench 4. Ditch [12]
Looking south west. 0.4m scale. Land drain cut to left of scale

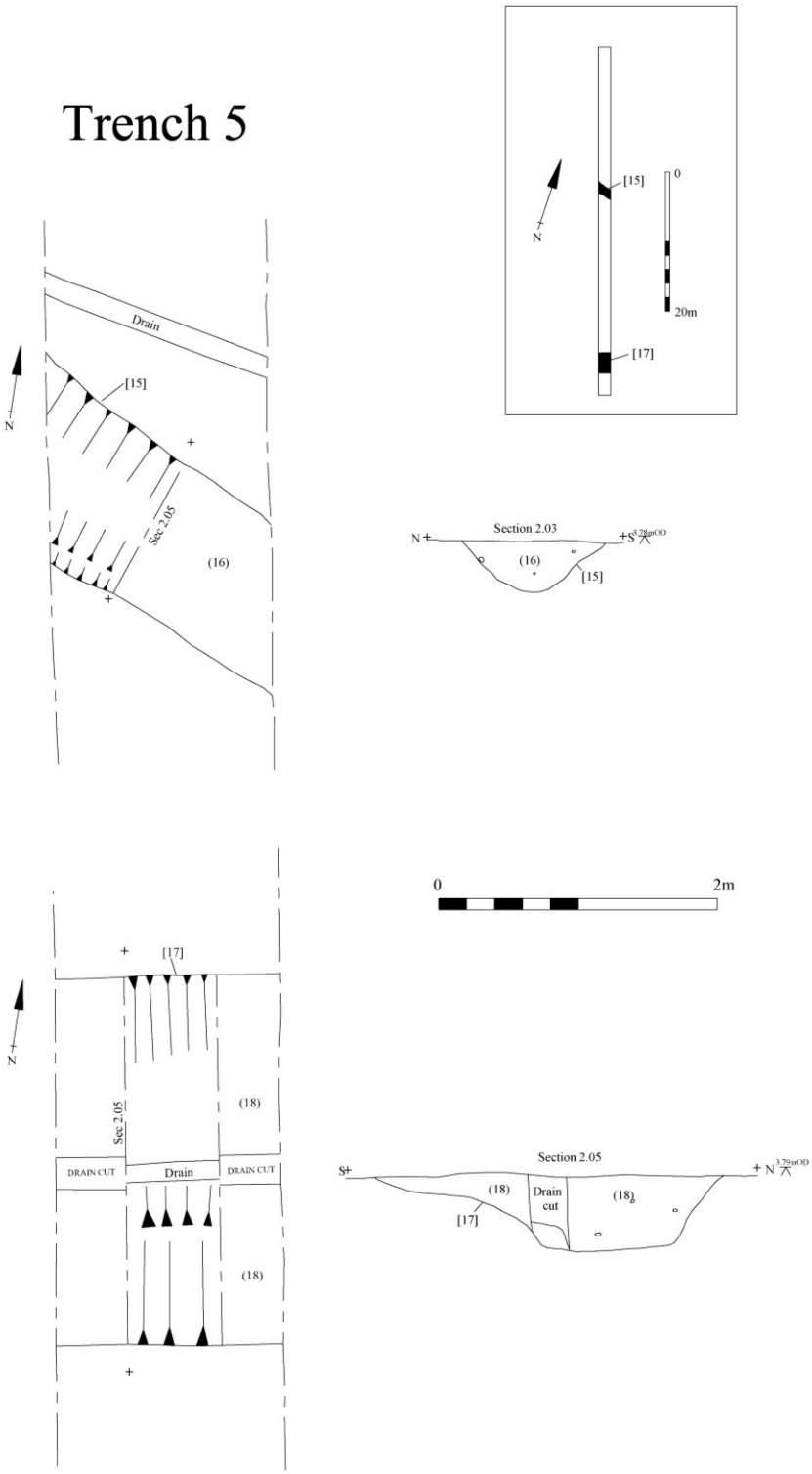


Figure 12 Trench 5 features

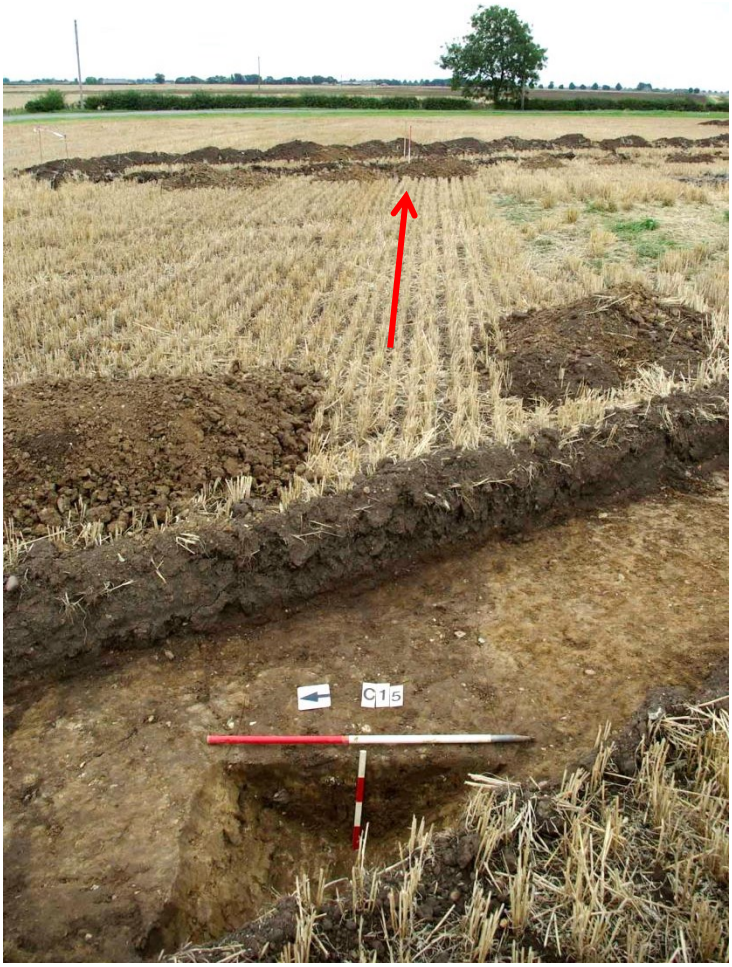


Figure 13 Trench 5. Ditch [15]
Looking south-east towards Trench 4. Red arrow and far ranging poles indicate line of ditch [15] and [10] in Trench 4. 1m and 0.4m scales.


Figure 14 Trench 5. Ditch [17]
Looking west. 1m and 0.4m scales

*Trench 6*

Trench 6 was placed to verify the continuation of the long ditch seen in the geophysical survey. This ditch was seen to be approximately 2.5m wide in this trench with the same fill as in Trenches 4 and 5 and was planned but not excavated. At this point of the site the ditch followed a north-east to south-west alignment (Fig. 15). Across the trench a number of land drains were observed running from the north-west to south-east. A narrow gully [14] was located running at right angles towards the northern edge of the unexcavated ditch. Gully [14] had a maximum width of 0.6m and a maximum depth of 0.22m with a rounded U-shaped profile. The single fill (13) consisted of a light grey brown slightly silty sandy-clay with a few angular stony inclusions. No finds were recovered from the fill. Whilst gully [14] appeared to be heading for the ditch a land drain running between the two features had destroyed any potential relationship. What is clear is that the gully did not reappear on the southern side of the large ditch.

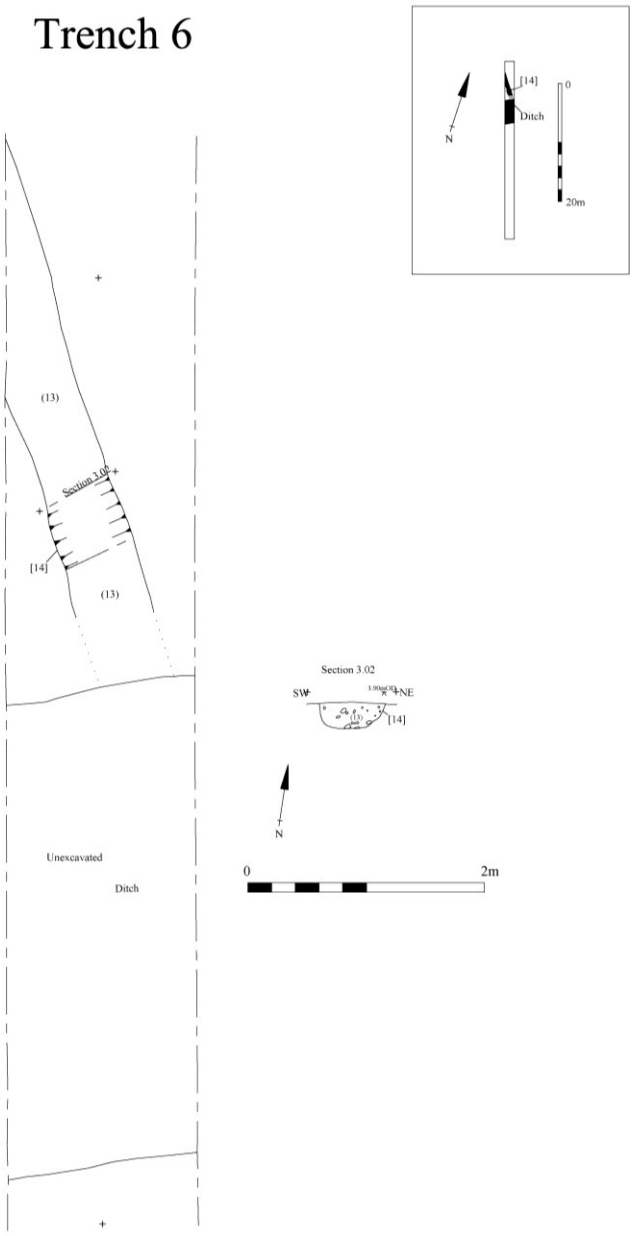


Figure 15 Trench 6 features

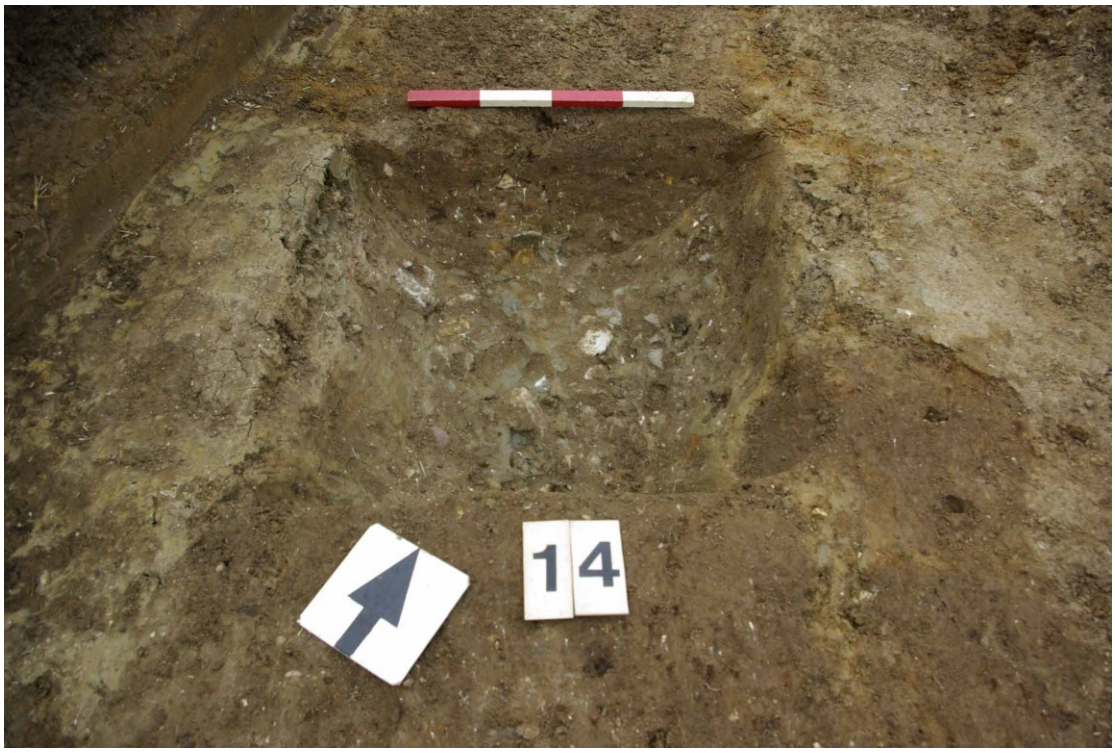


Figure 16 Trench 6. Gully [14]
Looking north-west. 0.4m scale

*Trenches 7 and 8*

Both Trenches 7 and 8 were located to the north and west of the centre of the proposed development site. A number of east to west plough scars and land drains following a variety of alignments were observed. No archaeological features or deposits were present in either Trench 7 or Trench 8.

*Trench 9*

Trench 9 was placed in the south-western corner of the site to investigate the southern end of the long ditch identified in the geophysical survey. As expected the ditch was located towards the southern end of the trench and given the cut number [3] (Fig. 17). At this point the ditch measured 3.1 metres in width and was 0.5m deep at its deepest point. The single fill (4) consisted of a dark greyish brown silty-clay with rare sub rounded stones. Although quite compact, the fill broke up into large blocks giving the feeling of having been hurriedly backfilled in a single phase. No finds were recovered from the fill although a large horseshoe was recovered from the interface of subsoil and fill. Running along the base of the ditch was a degraded ceramic circular drain which had been cut through and replaced by a later terracotta drain (Fig. 18). Both drains cut through the fill of the ditch.

No other archaeological features or deposits were present within this trench.

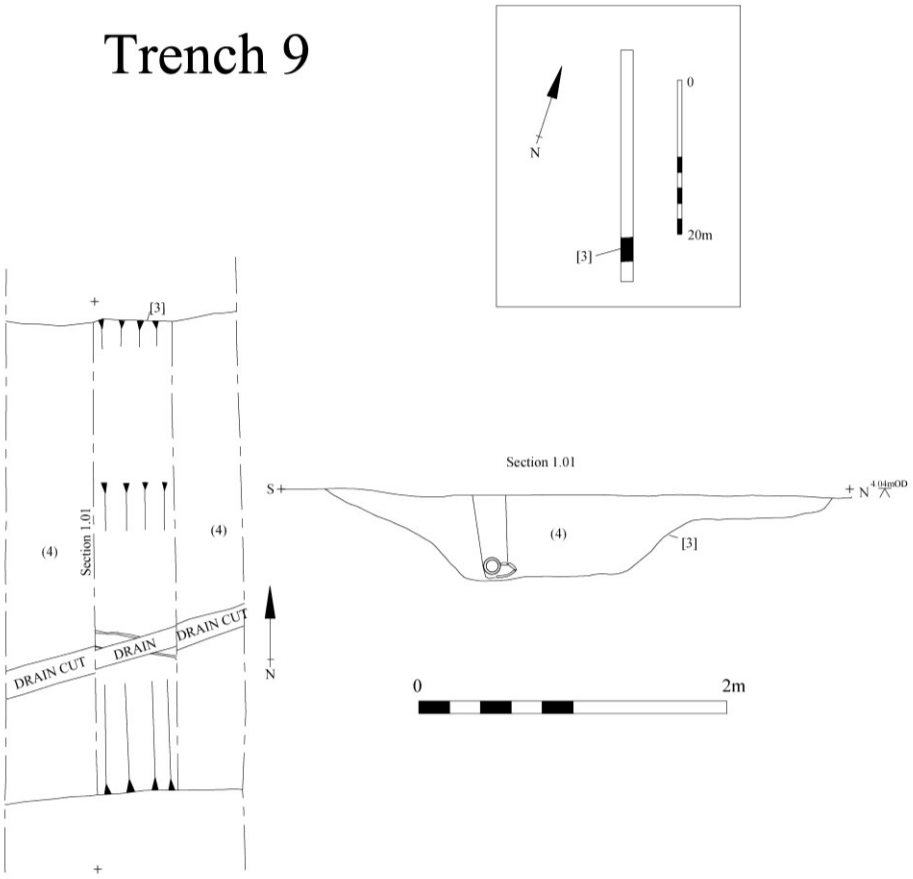


Figure 17 Trench 9 features

Figure 18 Trench 9. Ditch [3]
Looking north west. 1m scale. Note terracotta drain cutting across earlier white ceramic drain.

*Trench 10*

Trench 10 was located in the north-western corner of the proposed development site. Close to the northern end of the trench a shallow gully [7] 0.5m wide and 0.1m deep was located running on a north west to south easterly alignment (Fig. 19). Gully [7] contained a single mid orange brown silty-clay fill (8) from which no finds were recovered (Fig. 20). A number of land drains following a general east to west alignment were observed within the trench as was a dark area of probable diesel spillage at the interface of the subsoil and natural substratum in the south east corner of the trench.

No other archaeological features or deposits were present within this trench.

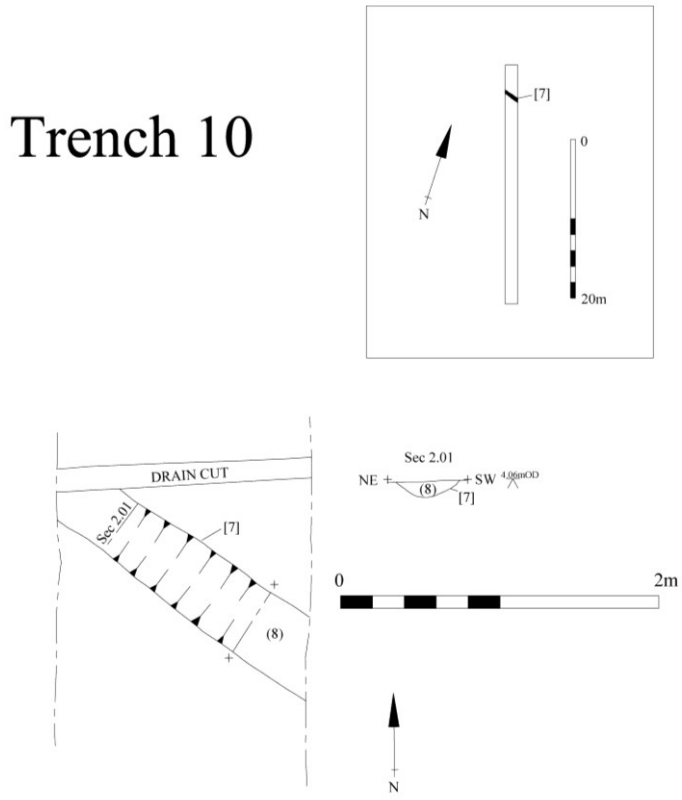


Figure 19 Trench 10 features


Figure 20 Trench 10. Gully [7]
Looking south-east. 0.4m scale

*Trench 11*

Trench 11 was the trench relocated to the south of the site from originally specified location between the two houses to the north of the farm track. The long ditch was again located close to the southern end of the trench and given the cut number [5] (Fig. 21). Because of time constraints and because the ditch had been investigated elsewhere on the site it was decided to machine cut a slot across the ditch before hand-cleaning and recording. In this trench ditch [5] was 2.1 m at its widest and had a maximum depth of 0.4m. Removal of the single fill (6) revealed the same wide, shallow and generally flat-bottomed profile seen elsewhere in this feature. The dark greyish brown silty clay fill, which was the same as it the other ditch fill, did not produce any finds. Cutting through the fill was the cut for a white ceramic land drain which rested on the base of the ditch. The drain appears to be the same drain as seen in Trench 9.

With the exception of the ditch no other archaeological features or deposits were found within this trench.

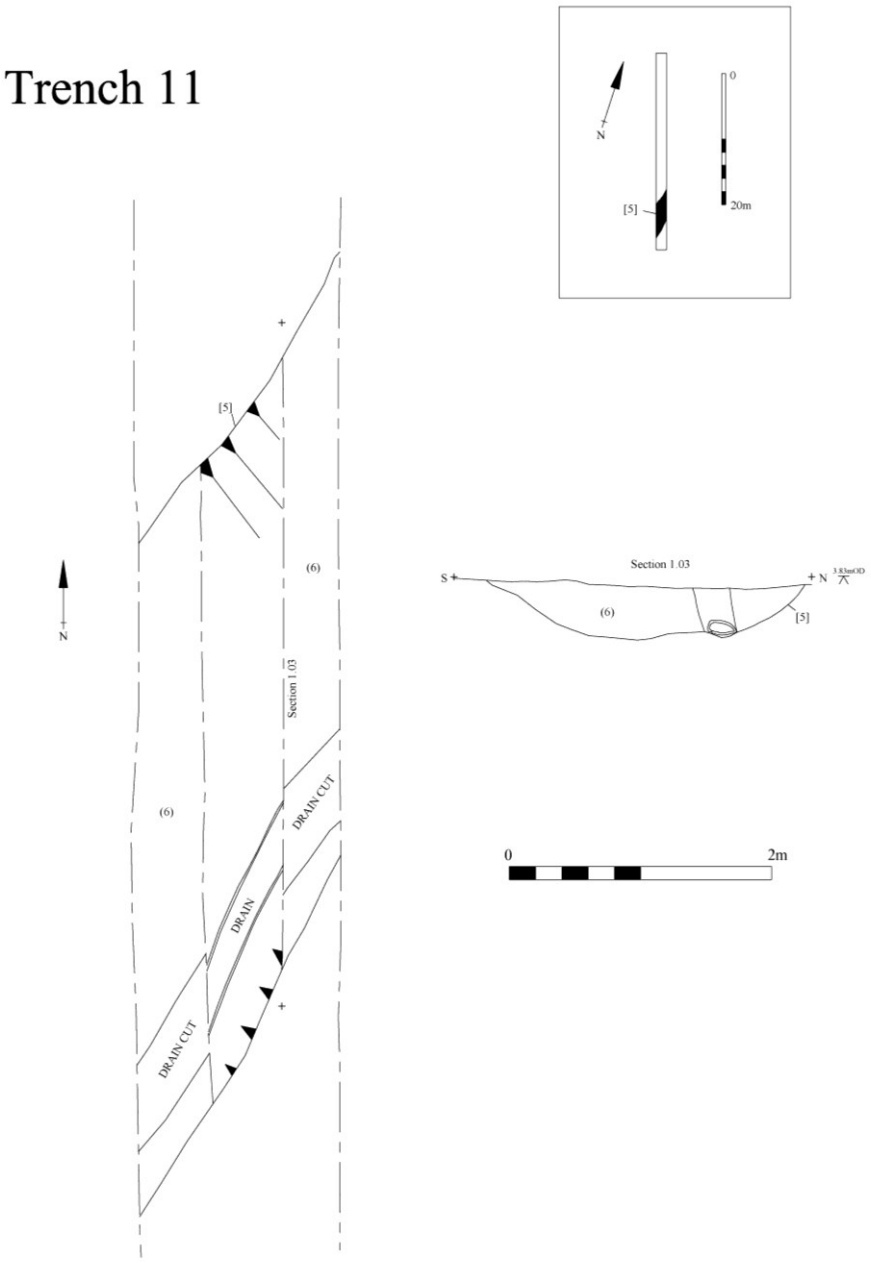


Figure 21 Trench 11features
Note that the section drawing has been rectified to provide an accurate representation of the ditch width rather than from the angled machine-cut slot


Figure 22 Trench 11. Ditch [5]
Looking west with land drain still in-situ. 1m scale

**Discussion**

Both of the potential archaeological features identified in the geophysical survey were clearly identified in five of the evaluation trenches. It does however appear that they are of a quite late date despite the general lack of dateable finds. The U-shaped possible enclosure close to the north-eastern corner of the site failed to produce any finds but appeared to have been deliberately backfilled rather than gradually silting up. The number of voids within the fill also suggests that this backfilling episode may have taken place relatively recently, certainly well within the post-medieval period and probably following drainage works during the 17th to 19th centuries. The U-shape would tend to suggest that this feature was not associated with draining the field and is more likely to have formed part of a stock enclosure or the drainage ditch of a structure.

The long ditch running across the site again appears to be of recent date and, because it tends to follow the contour of the slightly higher ground, is also likely to be associated with later post-medieval drainage works. The fact that more recent ceramic land drains have been placed within and follow this feature would suggest that its location and use has been known about at least until the later 19th or early 20th centuries. The two sherds of post-medieval pottery within the fill support the idea of recent backfilling too. What is rather surprising is that neither of the features is shown on any of the available maps. This may however simply indicate that they both had a very short lifespan and were not present when any of the maps were produced.

The two other undated gullies found during the evaluation also seem likely to be associated with later drainage especially the gully found in Trench 6 which appears to drain into the large ditch.

Overall, the site appears to show no evidence of any settlement activity and is likely to have only become useful land after the efforts to drain the site took place between the 17th and 19th centuries.

## Archive

The archive consists of:

This report,
18 single context record sheets: 2 layer sheets, 8 cut sheets, 8 fill sheets,
11 pro-forma A4 trench recording sheets,
1 A4 context register sheet,
1 A4 photo record sheet,
1 A4 drawing index sheet,
4 A3 perma-trace drawing sheets,
1 pro-forma level recording sheet,
3 A4 contact sheets of 73 digital photographs,
1 CD of digital photographs

## Publication

A summary of the work will be submitted for publication in the appropriate local archaeological and historical society in due course. A record of the project will also be submitted to the OASIS project. OASIS is an online index to archaeological grey literature.

## Bibliography

Brown, D., 2008. *Standard and guidance for the preparation of Archaeological Archives* (Institute for Archaeologists).

Clarke, S. 2014. *An Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment (Heritage Statement) for land off Sandpit Road, Thorney, Peterborough*. ULAS Report 2014-083

IfA, 2008 *Codes of Conduct and Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluation.*

Prestidge, O., 2014. *Geophysical Survey Report. Land at Thorney, Cambridgeshire*. Stratascan Report J6717.

ULAS. 2015 *Written scheme of investigation for archaeological work: Land at Sandpit Lane, Thorney, Peterborough*.

## Appendix 1 Trench Dimensions

| Trench | Length(m) | Max depth (m) | Min depth (m) | Presence absence of archaeology |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 30.20 | 0.47 | 0.38 | None |
| 2 | 30.60 | 0.50 | 0.40 | None |
| 3 | 31.60 | 0.44 | 0.38 | None |
| 4 | 32.60 | 0.55 | 0.42 | Small ditch [10], wider ditch [12] |
| 5 | 43.90 | 0.48 | 0.30 | Small ditch [15], wider ditch [17] |
| 6 | 30.50 | 0.65 | 0.35 | Guuly [14], unexcavated wide ditch |
| 7 | 29.10 | 0.45 | 0.30 | None |
| 8 | 26.80 | 0.45 | 0.30 | None |
| 9 | 29.30 | 0.34 | 0.26 | Wide ditch [3] |
| 10 | 31.30 | 0.55 | 0.42 | Gully [7] |
| 11 | 29.00 | 0.55 | 0.34 | Wide ditch [5] |

## Appendix 2 OASIS Details

| | |
|---|---|
| Project Name | Evaluation at Sandpit Road, Thorney, Peterborough |
| Project Type | Evaluation |
| Project Manager | P. Clay |
| Project Supervisor | A. Hyam |
| Previous/Future work | DBA and Geophysical survey carried out. No future work planned |
| Current Land Use | Arable field |
| Development Type | Housing |
| Reason for Investigation | Pre planning enquiry |
| Position in the Planning Process | Prior to planning application |
| Site Co ordinates | TF 2906 0389 (centre) |
| Start/end dates of field work | 17th to 21st of August 2015 |
| Archive Recipient | Peterborough Museums |
| Study Area | 3.4 hectares |

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