



CAM ARC Report Number 936

Land At Progress Park (Phase 2), Bedford

An Archaeological Evaluation

Dan Hounsell

March 2007

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An Archaeological Evaluation

Dan Hounsell BA. PhD.

Site Code: XBD PRP 07
Date of works: 5th February 2007
Grid Ref: TL 0412 4688

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CAM ARC OASIS Report Form

OASIS Number: 25253

PROJECT DETAILS				
Project name	Land at Progress Park (Phase 2), Bedford; An archaeological evaluation			
Short description	Evaluation consisting of 24 trenches. Only two small archaeological features and one modern dump feature seen. No finds discovered and archaeological features un-datable, but sterile and leached natures of fills probably indicates early date			
Project dates	Start	5 th February 2007	End	9 th February 2007
Previous work			Future work	No
Associated project reference codes	XBD PRP 07			
Type of project	Evaluation			
Site status	Finished			
Current land use (list all that apply)	Arable agriculture			
Planned development	Industrial Park			
Monument types / period (list all that apply and use thesaurus of monument types)	N/A			
Significant finds: Artefact type / period (list all that apply and use MDA object thesaurus)	None			
PROJECT LOCATION				
County	Bedfordshire	Parish	Elstow	
HER for region	Bedfordshire			
Site address (including postcode)	Land At Progress Park, Bedford			
Study area (sq.m or ha)	3.2 Ha			
National grid reference	Easting (6 figure)	504150	Northing (6 figure)	246760
Height OD	Max OD	29.16	Min OD	26.86
PROJECT ORIGINATORS				
Organisation	Cambridgeshire County Council, CAM ARC			
Project brief originator	The Heritage and Environment Section, Bedfordshire County Council			
Project design originator	Sally Randell			
Director/supervisor	Dan Hounsell			
Project manager	Stephen Macaulay			
Sponsor or funding body	WSP Environmental UK			
ARCHIVES	Location and accession number		Content (e.g. pottery, animal bone, database, context sheets etc)	
Physical				
Paper				
Digital				
BIBLIOGRAPHY				
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Author(s)	Dan Hounsell			
Date	12 th February 2007			

Summary

Between 5th - 9th February 2007 an archaeological evaluation was carried out by Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Field Unit (CAM ARC) on 3.2ha of land at the Progress Park (Phase 2) site, Elstow, Bedfordshire. This was undertaken to determine the archaeological potential of the area prior to the proposed construction of phase 2 of an industrial park, extending the existing Progress Park (phase 1) industrial park. The work was commissioned by WSP Environmental UK on behalf of Wrenbridge Ltd.

The evaluation excavated 24 trenches, each 20m x 2m, representing a 3% sample of the area. The evaluation revealed no significant archaeological features, only a small pit and linear gully of uncertain (although probably early) date, and no artefacts.

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

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Drawing Conventions

Plans

Limit of Excavation	_____
Deposit - Conjectured	-----
Natural Features	_____
Sondages/Machine Strip	- - - - -
Intrusion/Truncation
Illustrated Section	<u>S.14</u>
Archaeological Deposit	
Excavated Slot	
Modern Deposit	
Cut Number	118

Sections

Limit of Excavation	-----
Cut	_____
Cut-Conjectured	-----
Deposit Horizon	_____
Deposit Horizon - Conjectured	-----
Intrusion/Truncation
Top Surface/Top of Natural	_____
Break in Section/ Limit of Section Drawing	-----
Cut Number	118
Deposit Number	117
Ordnance Datum	18.45m OD X
Inclusions	

1 Introduction

This archaeological evaluation was undertaken in accordance with a specification prepared by Sally Randell of WSP Environmental UK and agreed by Lesley Ann Mathers of The Heritage and Environment Section, Bedfordshire County Council (HES) and Stephen Macaulay of CAM ARC.

The work was designed to assist in defining the character and extent of any archaeological remains within the proposed redevelopment area, in accordance with the guidelines set out in *Planning and Policy Guidance 16 - Archaeology and Planning* (Department of the Environment 1990). The results will enable decisions to be made by HES on behalf of the Local Planning Authority, with regard to the treatment of any archaeological remains found. It is proposed to construct an industrial park on the site consisting of office / industrial / warehousing development, extending the progress park industrial park.

The site archive is currently held by CAM ARC and will be deposited with the appropriate county stores in due course.

2 Geology and Topography

The site overlies solid Oxford Clays (British Geological Survey 1981), and the area was currently under arable cultivation. The site lay at roughly 28m OD, although the northern and southern extremes of the site lay at a lower level (roughly 27.44 and 27.09m respectively) than the central area of the site, lying at 29.16m, due to a slight hill. The north eastern, eastern and south eastern edges of the site were bounded by a railway embankment, and beyond this the Elstow park and ride and the Progress Park industrial area (Phase 1). A small brook (Elstow Brook) bounded the north and west edges of the site (beyond which lay Ampthill Road). Ampthill Road bounded the southern end of the site.

3 Archaeological and Historical Background

3.1 General

The study site lay between the modern villages of Kempston and Elstow, c. 1km south west of Elstow Abby and 1km south east of St. John's Church in Kempston and adjacent to the Mildland Railway Line.

The Great Ouse Valley, has been a focus of human activity and settlement from the Palaeolithic period to the modern day. Indeed, this

site appeared to lie within an area that was known (from previous archaeological investigations) to have seen relatively dense settlement during the Iron Age and Roman periods. These settlements typically consisted of long lived farmsteads set within their associated agricultural hinterlands. The presence of the Elstow Brook along with the quality of the ground (a rich soil overlying clays at depth – useful for holding water and offsetting droughts) were probably the main attractors for settlement in this area.

In addition to the sites known from previous archaeological investigations a search of the Bedfordshire Historic Environment Record (H.E.R) revealed a few others sites of archaeological interest within a 1km radius of the current study site. These are discussed below.

3.2 Cropmarks

A number of undated crop marks lie around the study site. H.E.R. 15792 lies c. 200m to the west of the site and consists of a pair of parallel, linear, crop marks which may be indicative of a track way of possibly pre-medieval date. The location and alignment of these indicate that there is potential for them to extend into the southern edge of the site. 1km to the southwest of the study site H.E.R. 16323 records an extensive area of rectilinear crop marks, occupying an area to either side of a former stream course. H.E.R. 14749 lies c. 800m to the south west of the site and consists of a single, roughly circular, crop mark.

3.3 Findspots

H.E.R. 15897, located 1 km to the north east of the study site records the recovery of a single sherd of medieval pottery, a sherd from a Roman Mortarium and fragment from a medieval harness. There was also found a lead copper alloy seal die brooch of 13th – 14th century AD date with the legend *AVE MARIA GRACI* upon it, and a copper alloy annular brooch dating to the 13th century AD. One kilometre to the east of the study site findspot H.E.R. 15929 consisted of a single fragment of stamped medieval floor tile, probably from Elstow Abbey. A further findspot, H.E.R. 15895, of a 6th century Anglo Saxon square headed brooch (found by metal detector in 1991), was located 500m to the east of the study site.

3.4 Previous Archaeological Investigations

A number of archaeological investigations have been undertaken in the vicinity of the study site. Albion Archaeology undertook an archaeological evaluation on land directly to the east of the current study site, on the other side of the railway, in 2000 and 2001 (Albion

reports 2000/62 and 2001/30). Trial trenching in 2000 was undertaken across the southern half of the site, whilst the northern half was evaluated in 2001. Watching briefs were undertaken during construction work associated with the park and ride site, and Progress Park (phase 1) in 2002, 2004 and 2005.

This work revealed a concentration of archaeological remains, located primarily in the northern part of the site (identified in the 2001 work). These remains consisted of pits, postholes and ditches, ranging in date from late Neolithic through to Romano - British. These features appeared to indicate use of the area over a very long period of time, but concentrated during the Iron Age to Romano-British period. It appeared that this area was primarily used as agricultural land, as indicated by the presence of boundary features (the ditches), although there was also some evidence (pits, post holes etc.) for actual occupation of the area. These evaluations appeared to identify a continuation in the dense belt of settlement along the Elstow brook, which had previously been identified at sites such as Marsh Leys Farm, Pear Tree Farm and Eastcotts.

The March Leys Farm site (c. 2km to the south west of the current study site) was also subjected to an archaeological evaluation by Albion Archaeology in 1999 (report 1999/23). This evaluation revealed evidence for two farmsteads, each of which appeared to consist of a number of structures - demonstrated by postholes and beam slot features. These showed a complex sequence of development from their origination in the Late Iron Age through to the Roman period where they underwent a phase of substantial remodelling and movement before falling out of use. Both of these farmsteads were seen to be set within a larger, contemporary, agricultural landscape - indicated by number of enclosure and field system type ditches associated with the structures.

The Pear Tree Farm site (c. 600m to the east of the current study site) was evaluated (again by Albion Archaeology, then the Bedfordshire County Council Archaeological Services) in 1993 (BCCAS report 93/11). This evaluation demonstrated a complex rural settlement of Iron Age and Roman date. The structural elements of the settlement were again associated with a series of enclosures indicating agricultural use of the surrounding landscape. In addition a sinuous driveway was also seen implying the rearing and moving of livestock. A firebar from a pottery kiln was also recovered from the fill of one of the ditches, implying some ceramic production at this settlement.

3.5 Cartographic Sources

A study of the available cartographic sources has shown that from the earliest times the study site had been open fields (enclosure map of 1767), and that it has remained so through to the present day. The

Ordnance Survey map of 1882 shows a number of major changes to the land use around the study site, with the construction of the Midland Railway lines and a slight re-alignment of the Ampthill Road. This map is also the first to clearly show the Cow Bridge. A bridge constructed over the Elstow brook to allow the movement of livestock on and off the land. Particularly necessary at this time, as following the construction of the railways this parcel of land becomes cut off from the surrounding landscape (by the brook on two sides and now the railway to the east and south). While this is the first documentary source for such a bridge the nature of the land use of the study site (see above) makes it highly likely some sort of bridge over the brook was in place from ancient times.

Following the construction of the railways, the maps through to the 1960's show very little change in the area of the study site, as Kempston and Elstow grow up around it. Major changes have only taken place in the last 10 years. This includes an adjustment in the course of the Ampthill road at the southern end of the study site, the construction of the A421, and the construction of the Elstow Park and Ride and Progress Park industrial area adjacent to the study site. All these developments have, however, taken place around the study site, they have not impacted upon it.

3.6 Historic Background

At the time of Edward the Confessor Elstow was held by four sokemen of the King. Following the conquest of 1066 William I gave Elstow to his niece, the Countess Judith, the widow of Waltheof, Earl of Huntingdon. She founded a nunnery at Elstow and endowed it with the vill, which in 1086 was assessed at 3.5 hides and valued at 100s. The Manor was held by the abbess until the dissolution of the monasteries. The manor was surrendered to the crown in 1539, when it was valued at £30 17s 3.5d and the King attached it to the manor of Ampthill. The site of the monastery, with its associated demesne lands was granted, by Henry VIII to Edmund Harvey in 1541. By 1912 this land had descended to one Mr Samuel Whitbread of Southill.

The Church of St. Mary and St. Helena (Elstow abbey) is a fragment of the nave of the monastic church, which was constructed in the early 12th century AD. The tower was added in the 15th century. To the south of the church are the ruins of a Jacobian mansion built by Thomas Hillersdon in the reign of James I. It was still standing in 1759, but by the early 20th century had become abandoned and ruined.

Elstow is best known to fame as the birthplace of John Bunyan, born in 1628 in a cottage on the eastern border of the parish. In the middle of the green is the old Moot Hall, a 16th century rectangular building of two stories and half timber and brick construction with a tile roof (V.C.H. vol III).

The name Elstow is thought to mean 'assembly place of a man called ÆEllen' (Mills, A.D. 2003).

4 Methodology

The objective of this evaluation was to determine as far as reasonably possible the presence/absence, location, nature, extent, date, quality, condition and significance of any surviving archaeological deposits within the development area. Specific aims, outlined in the specification were to determine;

- Any evidence for a possible medieval trackway in south west corner of the site (i.e. a continuation of the cropmark trackway seen to the west)
- Any evidence for Iron Age occupation or Romano-British activity on the phase 2 site.
- Any evidence of prehistoric activity extending from the phase 1 area into the phase 2 area
- Assess the environmental potential of the site through examination of suitable deposits.

The specification required that 24 trenches, each 20m x 2m and representing 3% of the study site be excavated. These were placed randomly across the site.

Machine excavation was carried out under constant archaeological supervision with a tracked 360° mechanical excavator using a toothless ditching bucket.

Spoil, exposed surfaces and features were scanned with a metal detector. All metal-detected and hand-collected finds were retained for inspection, other than those which were obviously modern.

All archaeological features and deposits were recorded using CAM ARC's *pro-forma* sheets. Trench locations, plans and sections were recorded at appropriate scales and colour and monochrome photographs were taken of all relevant features and deposits.

Environmental samples were not taken as the nature of the archaeological presence on the site did not warrant such a strategy

During the excavation the site was subjected to rain and snow, resulting in very wet conditions. These did not however significantly hinder the works or the identification of archaeological deposits / features.

The site was backfilled following approval from Lesley Ann Mathers of HES.

5 Results And Discussion

5.1 Deposit Model

The pattern of the build up of the overburden was the same across the site. The topsoil, context 1000, was a soft, dark brown / black, clayey silt containing occasional inclusions of small stones within its matrix. This directly overlay subsoil 1001, a compact mid brownish orange silty clay that also contained occasional small stone inclusions. This subsoil appeared to be alluvial in nature and sat directly on the natural geology, context 1002. This was solid, plastic, mid blue grey clay with frequent small stone inclusions, mixed with a mid yellow orange gravely sand – probably the result of paleochannels, glacial activity and freeze thaw action scarring the surface of the clay and depositing material within the resultant scar channels.

5.2 The Trenches

24 trenches were excavated across the site. Of these only 2 contained any archaeological features. The nature of the trenches excavated (depth, AOD etc.) is tabulated below.

Trench	AOD (m)	Max depth (m)	Typical Thickness of topsoil 1000 (m)	Typical Thickness of subsoil 1001 (m)
1	26.86	1.36	0.26	0.81
2	27.54	0.72	0.22	0.45
3	27.35	0.62	0.30	0.30
4	27.15	0.74	0.25	0.42
5	28.44	0.90	0.27	0.62
6	28.59	0.82	0.34	0.48
7	28.35	0.60	0.30	0.30
8	28.91	0.81	0.28	0.53
9	28.50	0.60	0.21	0.33
10	27.38	0.72	0.20	0.40
11	28.07	0.75	0.27	0.23
12	29.16	0.62	0.17	0.36
13	27.56	0.80	0.20	0.50
14	28.80	0.65	0.24	0.35
15	27.73	1.10	0.30	0.60
16	27.03	1.48	0.24	1.13
17	28.06	0.95	0.20	0.75
18	27.89	0.65	0.20	0.25
19	27.46	1.40	0.30	0.70
20	27.05	1.50	0.28	1.20
21	27.30	0.87	0.27	0.60
22	27.12	1.20	0.20	1.00
23	27.04	1.08	0.24	0.54
24	27.09	1.04	0.42	0.61

Table 1. Details of Trial Trenches

5.3 Archaeological Features

Only two archaeological features were noted. In trench 24 a small semi circular feature (**1003**) was seen to emerge from the south eastern face of the trench toward its southern end. This feature, as seen, was 0.45m long (NW – SE), 0.85m wide and 0.06m deep. It may have represented a small circular pit, or, the rounded terminus of a larger linear feature. In profile the feature was fairly irregular with gently sloping sides and a wide, U - shaped profile. The fill (1004) was a compact, mid yellow brown, silty clay that contained occasional inclusions of small stones but no artefacts. The nature and function of this feature was not clear, however the sterile, degraded and leached nature of fill 1004 appeared to indicate that the feature was very old, probably earlier than Roman or Iron Age in date.

In trench 8 a small linear feature, **1005** was recorded. This feature was aligned ENE – WSW and ran across the northern end of the trench. As seen it was 2m long, 0.38m wide and 0.18m deep with steeply sloping, slightly concave sides, a narrow, flat base and a v shaped profile. The fill of the feature (1006) did not contain any artefacts and was similar in nature to 1004 and so was also likely indicative of an early date for the feature. The functional nature of the feature was uncertain, it may have been a drainage gully associated with the early agricultural use of this land.

5.4 Modern Features

Almost all of the trenches contained at least one land drain set within the lower portion of subsoil 1001. In addition trench 3 also contained a modern pit that cut through, but was confined to, the subsoil. Feature **1007** was located roughly half way along the trench, was 4.90m wide, ran across the width of the trench (E-W) and was 0.08m deep. It showed very shallow and irregular side, and a flat base. It only truncated the upper portion of subsoil 1001 and did not penetrate the underlying clay geology. This feature was backfilled with a dark brown / black mix of clayey silt (probably re-deposited topsoil) and what appeared to be fragments of anthracite and bitumen (making up around 60% of the matrix). This fill (1008) was sealed by topsoil 1000.

5.5 The Ancient Landscape

The paucity of archaeological features discovered during this evaluation meant that little could be said about the ancient use of this site, or indeed if it was used at all. However, observations of the way the deposit model changed across the site were useful in making some broad observations as to how the landscape of the site may have changed over time.

It became obvious that those trenches located at the western edge of the site were much deeper than those located on the eastern edge of the site, this depth being seen as a greater thickness of subsoil 1001. For example, trenches 22, 20, 16, 13, 10, and 4 were all deeper, with thicker subsoil, than their counterparts on the eastern edge of site, trenches 21, 18, 14, 12, 8 and 6. Toward the northern end of the site this differences in depth across the width of the site became much less pronounced with trenches 2 – 10 all being around 0.70m deep (see table 1 for details).

This difference in depth may be indicative of the early nature of what is now Elstow Brook. Currently this brook is fairly small, confined within deep and steeply cut banks around the western and northern edges of the study site. The nature of the overburden across the study site would seem to indicate that at one point in its life the brook was a much more substantial water course. That it may have been bigger with greater flow and that it may have occupied a more easterly location (as a result of greater width and/or change in course). This earlier, more substantial, water course appears to have eroded the overburden and underlying natural geology of what is now the western part of the study site to a much greater depth than the eastern part of the site. As the water course narrowed, became more defined or changed its route slightly it then deposited a substantial amount of alluvial material (subsoil 1001) near to its course (i.e. along the western edge of what is now the current study site), the amount of material being deposited reducing with distance from the water.

In addition to the pattern of the deposition of subsoil 1001 across the site the nature of the natural geology in trenches 1 and 16 also demonstrated that the Elstow Brook had changed over time. Both trenches 1 and 16 were deep (1.36m and 1.48m respectively) with thick deposits of alluvial subsoil 1001 (0.81m and 1.13m). However, in both of these trenches the subsoil did not sit upon the usual mix of Oxford Clay and gravel but rather upon a layer of compact, mid yellowish orange, sand and gravel. This material may once have been part of the riverbed of the ancient Elstow Brook, indicating that it was once wider and / or occupied a more easterly and southerly position.

The various cartographic sources available show that the Elstow Brook has been of its current size, and followed its modern course since at least 1767.

6 Conclusions

The evaluation revealed no significant archaeological features, and no artefacts. The track way that was seen as a crop mark to the west of the study site was not seen to continue through it, and none of the features identified in the archaeological works associated with Phase 1

of the Progress Park industrial area continued through into this Phase 2 area. The track way, seen on maps to run across the northern part of the site was also not visible archaeologically.

Why this site was so archaeologically barren, when the area directly around it is know to be so rich, was not clear. It may have been due to the ancient nature of the Elstow Brook. If this brook was once a more substantial water course, as seems likely from the evidence presented above, it may not have been possible to live on or significantly use the parcel of land evaluated by this work. This may have been because the land was subjected to, possibly extreme, periodic flooding. The nature of the deposition of subsoil 1001 indicates that this certainly occurred, and probably over a long period of time. This may mean that, anciently, the land of the study site may have effectively been a flood plain, and so unsuitable for settlement or intensive agricultural use, possibly being suitable for use only as meadowland or seasonal pasture.

Recommendations for any future work based upon this report will be made by HES.

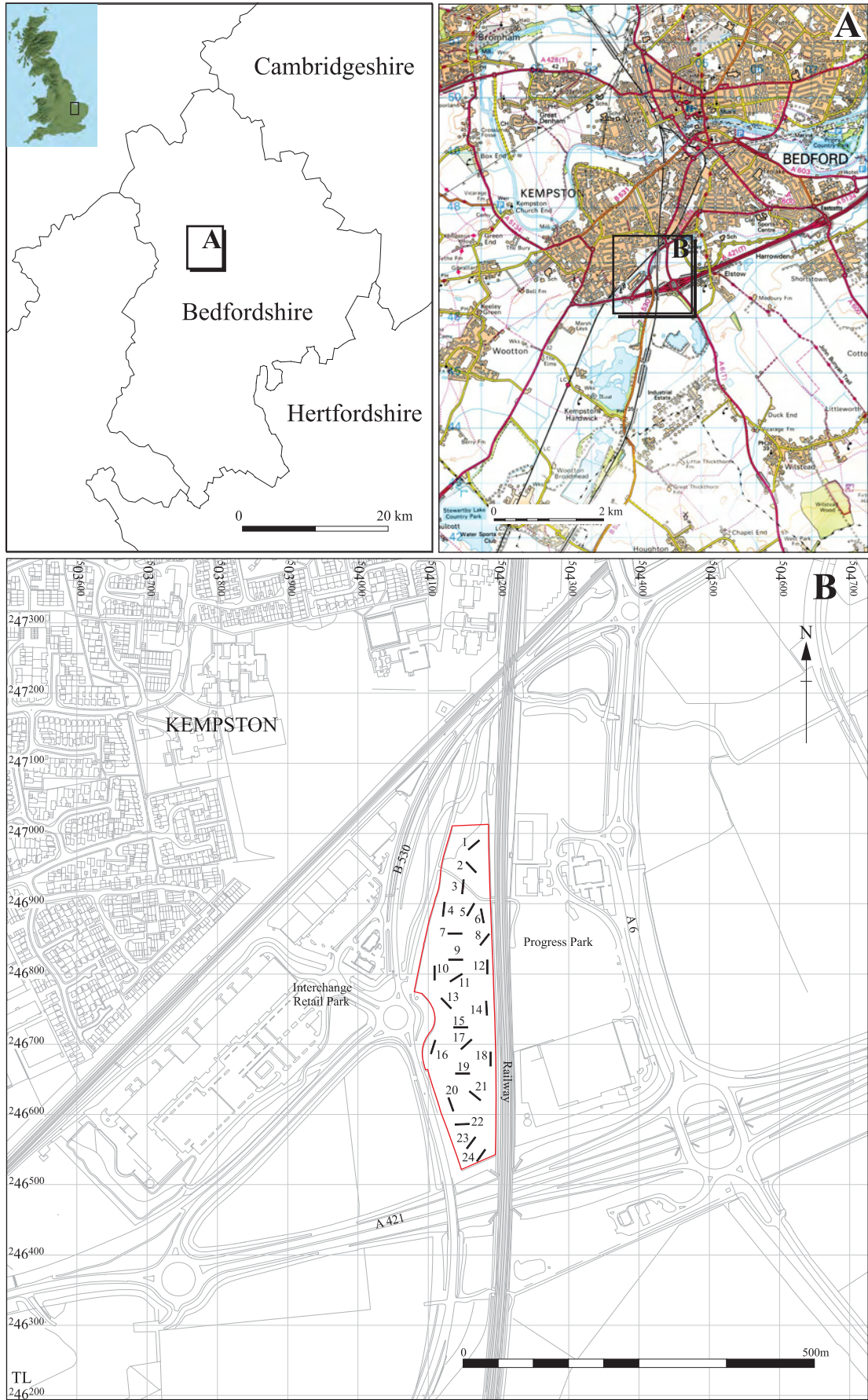
Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank WSP Environmental UK who commissioned and funded the archaeological work. The project was managed by Stephen Macaulay. The site was managed by Dan Hounsell in the field and the site staff included Ben Brogan and Dan Wheeler.

Thanks are also due to Sally Randell of WSP for writing the specification for the work, and Lesley Ann Mathers who approved this specification and visited the site to monitor the evaluation.

Bibliography

- | | | |
|-------------|------|---|
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Figure 1 Location of trench with the development area outlined (red)

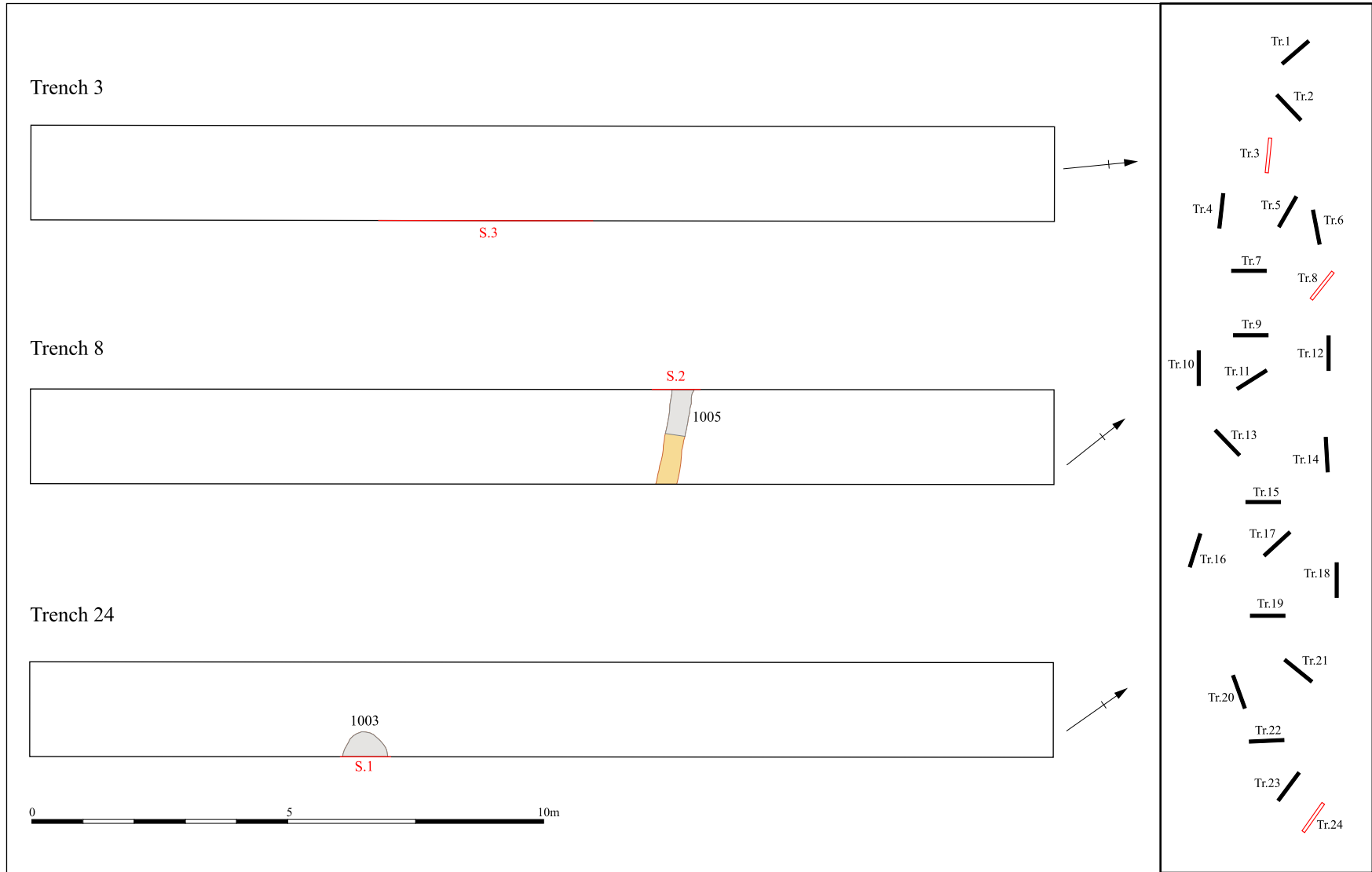


Figure 2: Trench plan and trench locations

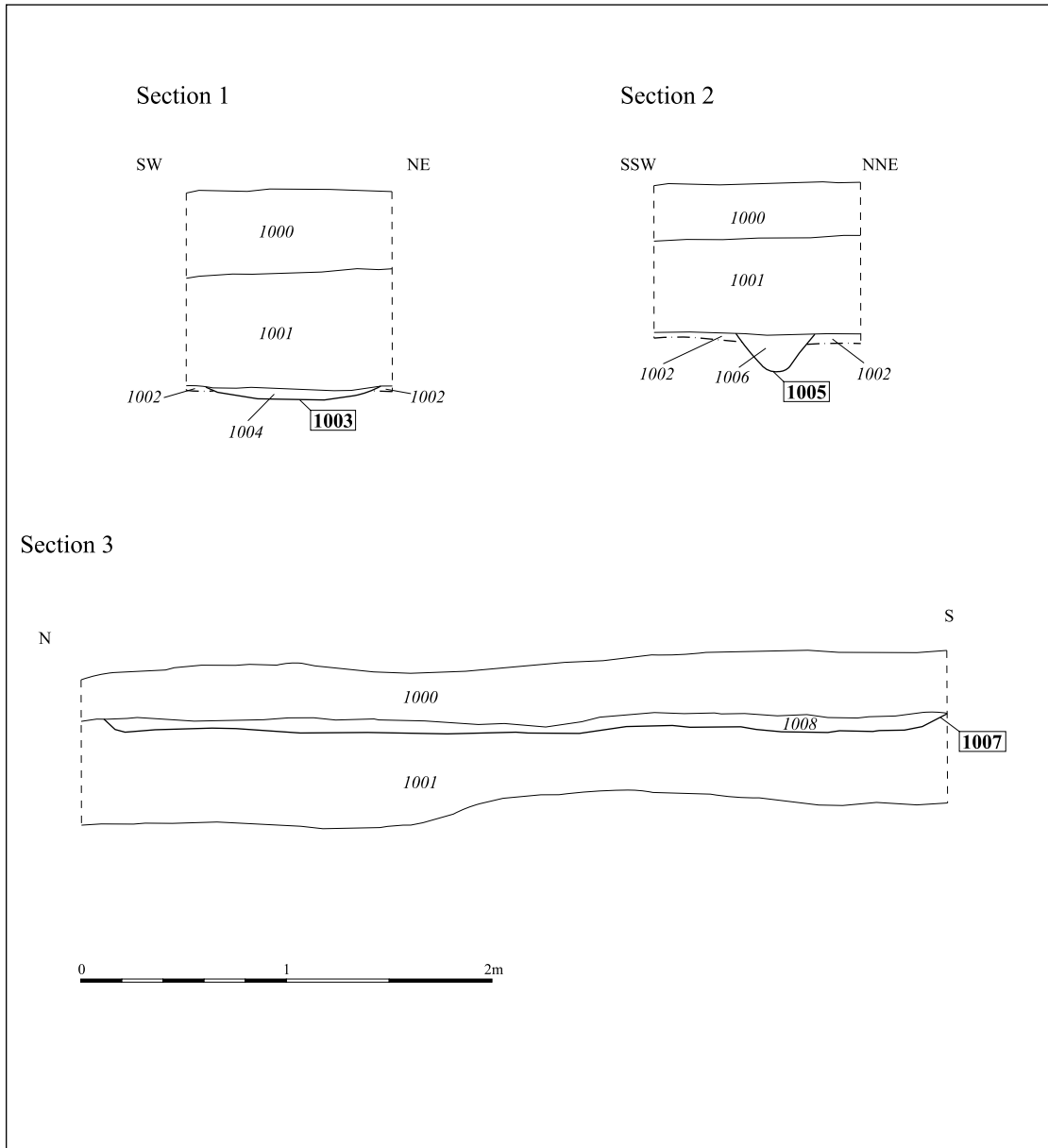


Figure 3: Section drawings

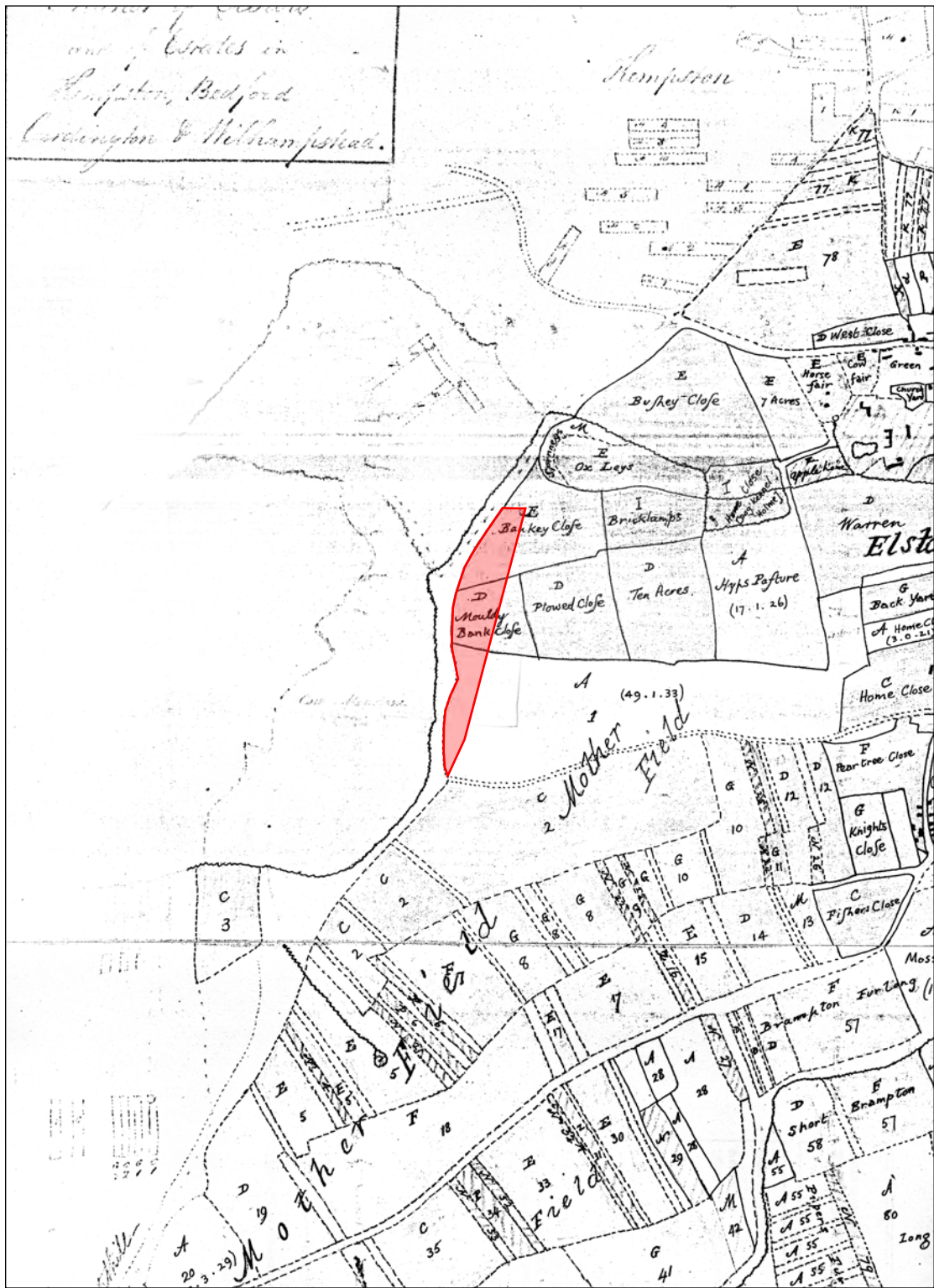


Figure 4: 1767 enclosure map with approximate development area in red

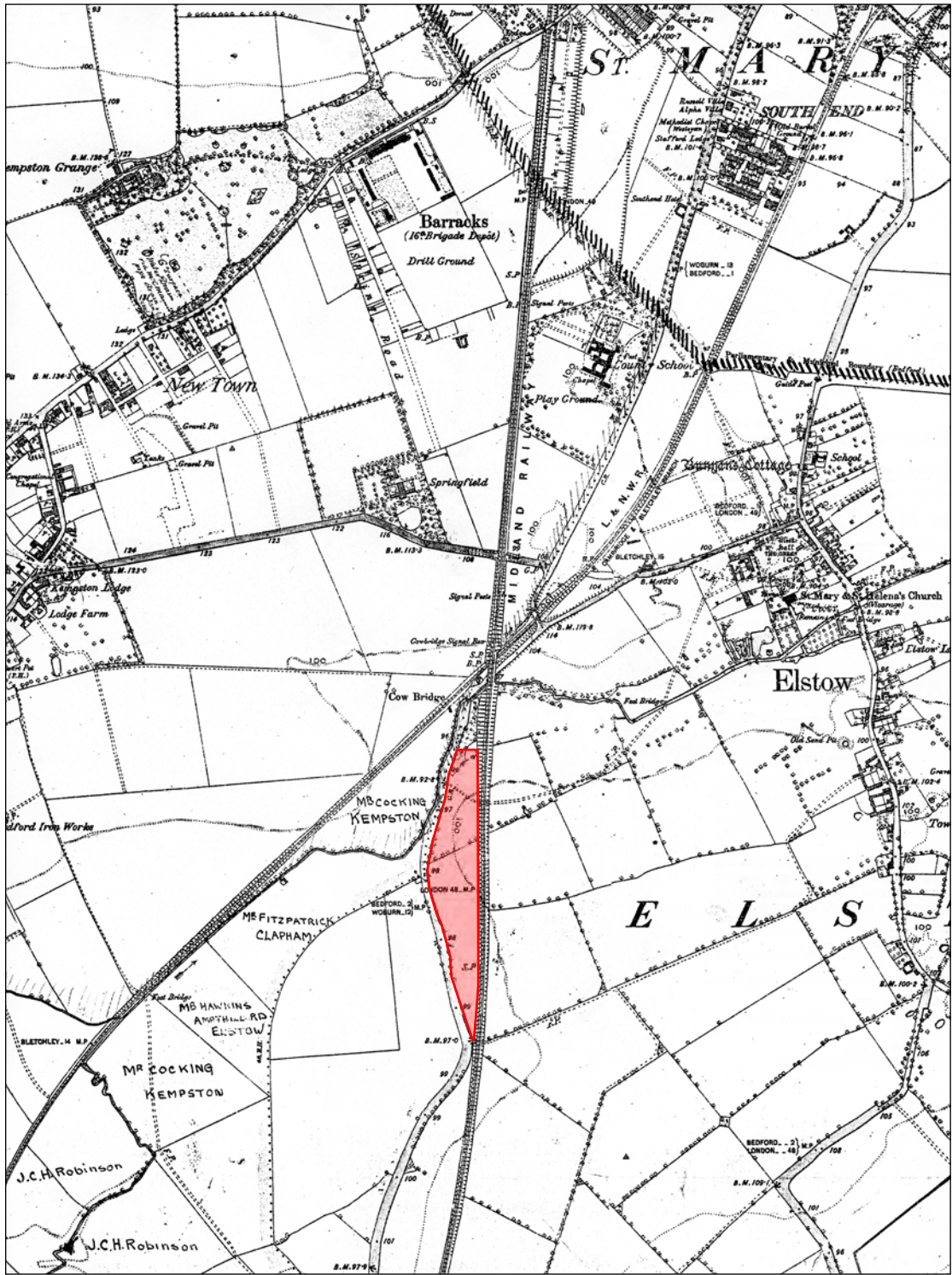
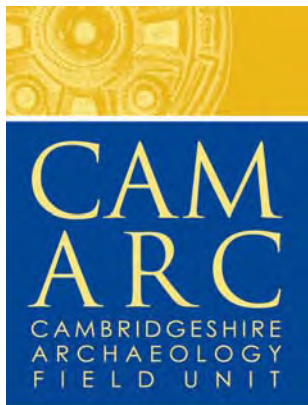


Figure 5: 1882 Ordnance Survey map, with approximate development area in red



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