



CAM ARC Report Number 950

Natural Features at The Elms, Thickett Road, Houghton, St Ives

An Archaeological Evaluation

Spencer Cooper and Mo Muldowney

April 2007

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Spencer Cooper HND, BA
Mo Muldowney BA PIFA

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Author	Spencer Cooper Mo Muldowney		
Checked By			
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Editor: Dr Paul Spoerry BTech Hons PhD PIFA
Illustrator: Louise Bush BA MA PIFA

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PROJECT DETAILS				
Project name	Natural features at The Elms, Thickett Road, Houghton, St Ives			
Short description	Between 17th and 20th April 2007 CAMARC conducted an archaeological evaluation at the Elms, Thickett Road. Four trenches were excavated across the development area that revealed a number of natural features.			
Project dates	Start	17/04/07	End	20/04/07
Previous work	CHER 02654		Future work	No
Associated project reference codes	HOU THR 07			
Type of project	Evaluation			
Site status	House and gardens			
Current land use (list all that apply)	Research Offices			
Planned development	Residential			
Monument types / period (list all that apply)	None			
Significant finds: Artefact type / period (list all that apply)	None			
PROJECT LOCATION				
County	Cambridgeshire	Parish	Houghton and Wyton	
HER for region	Cambridgeshire			
Site address (including postcode)	The Elms, Thickett Road, Houghton, St Ives.			
Study area (sq.m or ha)	0.5ha			
National grid reference	NGR 52862/27212			
Height OD	Min OD	8.5m	Max OD	9.7m
PROJECT ORIGINATORS				
Organisation	CAM ARC			
Project brief originator	Kasia Gdaniec			
Project design originator	CAM ARC			
Director/supervisor	Spencer Cooper			
Project manager	Dr. Paul Spoerry			
Sponsor or funding body	Sequoia Lodge			
ARCHIVES				
	Location and accession number		Content (e.g. pottery, animal bone, database, context sheets etc)	
Physical	Cambs County Council store		None	
Paper	Cambs County Council store		Plans, sections, <i>pro forma</i> sheets	
Digital			None	
BIBLIOGRAPHY				
Full title	Natural Features at the Elms, Thickett Road. St Ives			
Author(s)	Spencer Cooper and Mo Muldowney			
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Date	April 2007			

Summary

Between 17th and 20th April 2007 staff of CAM ARC (formerly the Archaeological Field Unit) conducted an archaeological evaluation at The Elms, Thickett Road, Houghton, Cambridgeshire (TL 28617211).

On machining, a variety of apparent features of varied morphology were identified and formally investigated. Excavation determined that the features were of natural, rather than archaeological origin.

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1 Introduction

Between 17th and 20th April 2007 staff of CAM ARC (formerly the Archaeological Field Unit) conducted an archaeological evaluation at Houghton Hall, Houghton Cambridgeshire (TL 2708 9763). The work was undertaken in accordance with a Brief issued by Kasia Gdaniec of the Cambridgeshire Archaeology, Planning and Countryside Advice team (CAPCA); supplemented by a Specification prepared by 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 CAPCA, on behalf of the Local Planning Authority, with regard to the treatment of any archaeological remains found.

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

Houghton is situated between Huntingdon and St Ives on the north bank of the River Ouse. The geology consists of sands and gravels of the First to Second River Terrace (BGS 1993).

3 Archaeological and Historical Background

3.1 Prehistoric

A large number of prehistoric flints have been located within the area of Houghton HER (MCB2505, 3354-5). These are thought to be Neolithic but a range of other artefacts, including Mesolithic and Bronze Age have been recovered. The presence of flints on Boulder Clay is itself of importance as this is a rare occurrence and suggests an absence of colluvium in the area.

A large well-preserved burial mound (CHER 02654) stands in the grounds of The Elms, now largely under tree cover. An investigation conducted into the mound in the 19th century discovered a single crouched burial and a number of grave goods, including iron and bronze objects. The barrow is almost certainly Bronze Age in date and the burial prehistoric, however the other objects are described to be of Saxon origin, thus implying secondary burials.

3.2 Roman

Roman occupation is present in the Houghton area through metal and pottery finds (MCB 2441) 3460. Definite evidence of Roman settlement exists in the cemetery found on Houghton Hill in 1843(CHER 00712) (Page et al 1932). Excavations during the 1930s at Houghton waterworks (CHER 00821) c.400m to the south produced a range of prehistoric finds, but Iron Age to Roman-British occupation was in greater evidence.

3.3 Medieval

The name Houghton was first recorded in the Anglo-Saxon period meaning 'Farm at the foot of the hoh ' with the hoh being the hill spur (Mawer and Stenton 1969).

There are a number of references to Houghton in early medieval documentary sources. Earl Alfwold who died in AD 990 gave Houghton and Wyton to Ramsey Abbey. The gift was confirmed by King Edgar in 974 and in 1086 the Abbeys holding in Houghton was assessed at 7 hides (Page et al 1932).

As described above, early Saxon grave goods were found in an extant burial mound (CHER 02654) within the grounds of The Elms. It is possible that these might represent the primary burial location within a larger (Saxon) cemetery distributed beyond the barrow. The Saxon re-use of prehistoric burial mounds such as this is commonplace and well documented.

To the south-west of the development area is a large watermill that was probably Anglo-Saxon in origin. A mill at Houghton was recorded as being given by Earl Ailwin to Ramsey at its foundation in AD 969, and from then onwards there are frequent references to a watermill at Houghton. The Cambridge Archaeology Unit (CAU) undertook an archaeological watching brief (Timberlake and Dickens 2006) of flood defence improvements to the west of Houghton Mill. This watching brief revealed an archaeological layer that contained hearth material and early medieval pottery.

Also to the south of the development area is the medieval church of St Mary, which consists of chancel, nave, north aisle, west tower and south porch. Although a church was mentioned in the Domesday period, the earliest part of the present church dates from the 13th century.

3.4 Post Medieval

The Elms is a Grade II Listed Victorian villa, designed in Florentine Renaissance revival style and built for the son of local entrepreneur

Potto Brown in 1868. In the 19th century its extensive grounds were landscaped.

Other Post-Medieval sites of note are the National Trust owned Houghton Mill (CHER 02723), which is the only working watermill left on the Ouse. The present building probably dates from the 18th century and was substantially altered and extended in the 19th century. An archaeological watching brief was undertaken in 1998 by CAM ARC (Way 1998), which revealed 19th century structural elements relating to the restoration and rebuilding of the mill. These works resulted in the truncation of deposits and structures relating to an earlier period.

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.

The Brief required that 5% of the total area should be sampled. Machine excavation was carried out under constant archaeological supervision with a wheeled JCB-type 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 that 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.

Site conditions were fine with dry ground and high temperatures.

5 Results

Four trenches were excavated across the site and seen to contain a number of irregular features. All the features were excavated and recorded, but found to be of non-anthropogenic origin.

The natural substrate consisted of the expected sand and gravel deposits and (in most trenches) was overlain by subsoil (12), light brown silty sand that varied in depth from 0.6m to 0.8m. This in turn, was overlain by topsoil (11), dark greyish brown silty clay, which was between 0.5m and 0.8m deep.

Part of the natural fluvial sand in Trench 4 was removed in order to fully explore the likelihood of archaeological features.

5.1 Trench 1

Trench 1 was located on an east to west alignment and measured 7.5m long, 2.10m wide and 1.2m deep. Six features were identified and excavated.

A large sub-oval feature (**14**), possibly a tree-throw, was located in the western part of the trench. A 2.85m wide by 0.23m deep sondage was excavated across its southern side, which revealed an irregular base and a number of tree roots. No artefacts were recovered.

Two small irregular features (**4** and **6**) were located to the east of **14**. Both contained sandy mottled fills. To the north of these, a 1.05m wide by 0.18m deep tree-throw (**2**) was excavated. It had an irregular profile and also contained a mottled sandy fill (1).

Two further natural features were excavated in this trench. Feature **8** was 1m long by 0.85m wide and 0.21m deep and filled by mid orange brown mottled sandy silt (7). Feature **10** was 0.85m long by 0.44m wide and 0.08m deep and was filled by mid brown silty sand (11). Neither contained artefacts.

5.2 Trench 2

Trench 2 was located on a north to south alignment and measured 25m long and 1.60m deep. Two features were identified and excavated.

Both **16** and **18** were located in the northern part of the trench. Feature **16** had an irregular base and irregular sides and measured 0.7m wide by 0.25m deep and contained dark grey silty clay (15). Feature **18** was located to the south of **16** and was 0.40m wide by 0.12m deep. It had irregular sides and base and was filled by light brown silty clay (17). No artefacts were recovered from either feature.

5.3 Trench 3

Trench 3 was located on an east to west alignment and measured 8m long 2.10m wide and 1.2m deep. No archaeological or natural features were encountered in this trench.

5.4 Trench 4

Trench 4 was located on an east to west alignment in the south-west part of the development area. It measured 25m long and 2.10m wide and varied in depth from 0.9m at the east end, to 1.6m at the west end. Two features were identified and excavated.

Feature **22** was located in the east of the trench and measured 0.72m wide by 0.14m deep. It was filled by mid reddish brown clay silt (21) and contained tree roots. Feature **20** was located in the centre of the trench. It was 0.60m wide by 0.14m deep and filled by mid reddish brown sandy clay (19). It also contained tree roots.

6 Discussion

Background research suggested the potential for finding archaeological remains in this location was high. Evidence for human presence in the vicinity commenced in the Bronze Age (burial mound) and settlement is documented from the Iron Age onwards. In addition, pagan Saxon burials are suggested associated with the burial mound and the site lies, generally, close to the historic core of the village of Houghton.

On preliminary examination, the features revealed in trenches 1, 2 and 4 were characteristic of those of prehistoric date. After excavation, however, it was determined that these features were non-anthropogenically derived having formed as a result of root disturbance.

7 Conclusions

The project has made a limited contribution for constructing a deposit model of the archaeology of Houghton. It has however, shown that there is a substantial amount of overburden in the north-west part of the site and that the development area was characterised by tree-boles. The depth of overburden may be explained build-up material associated with the Victorian garden landscaping. The lack of material culture and settlement evidence was disappointing considering its location within the Ouse valley. It maybe the case that the development area was just outside of the limits of the main hub of the settlement (church and mill to the south).

Recommendations for any future work based upon this report will be made by the County Archaeology Office.

Acknowledgements

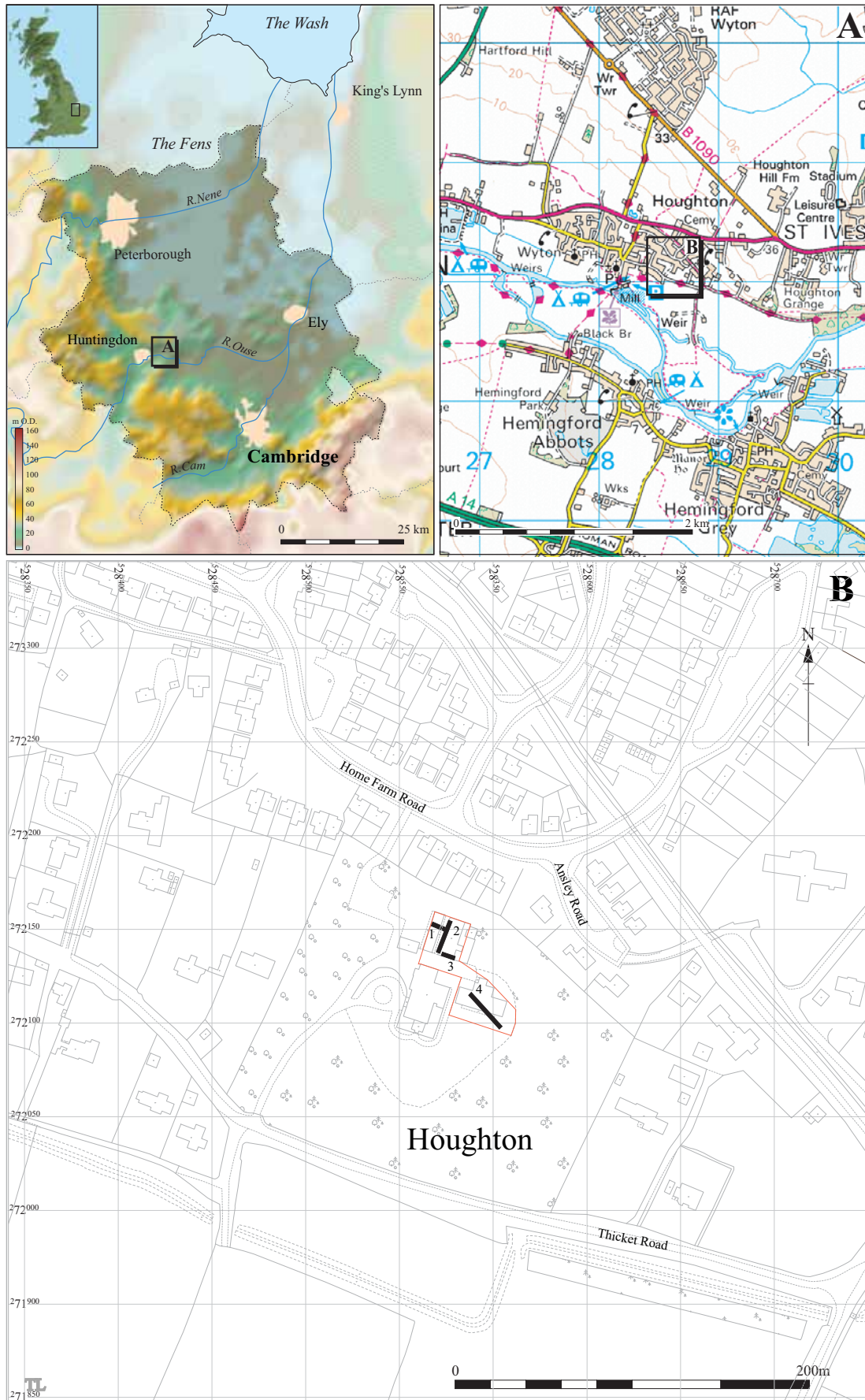
The authors would like to thank developer, Sequoia Lodge, who commissioned and funded the archaeological work. Thanks are also extended to Will Punched who worked and assisted on site and Gareth Rees who undertook site survey. Louise Bush produced the illustrations.

The project was managed by Dr Paul Spoerry

The brief for archaeological works was written by Kasia Gdaniec who visited the site and monitored the evaluation.

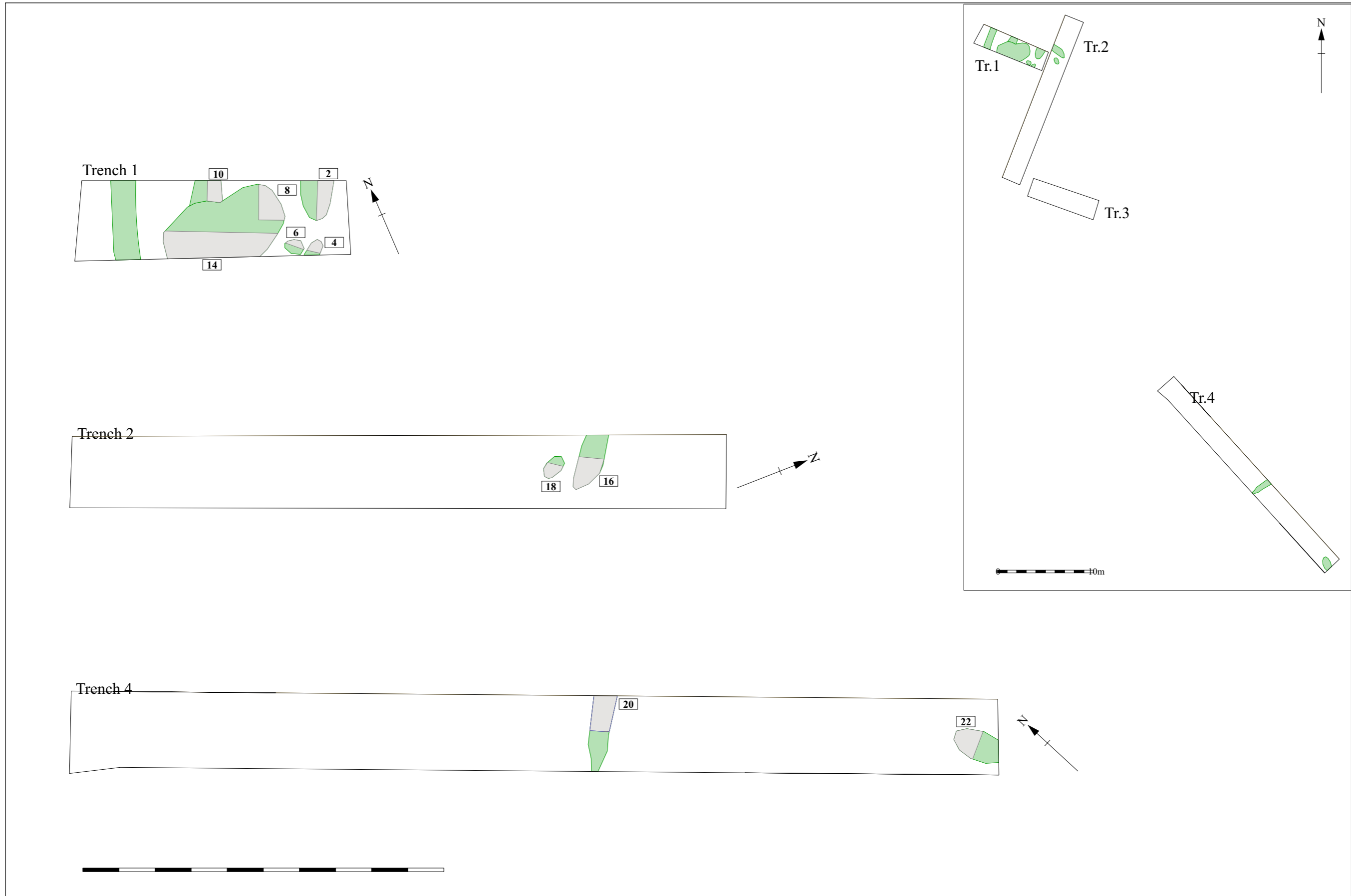
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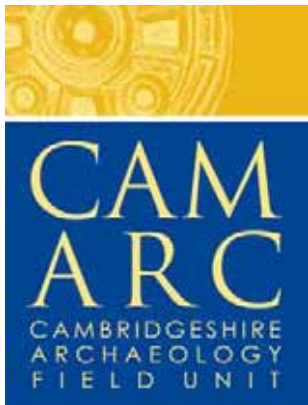
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Figure 1 Location of trenches (black) with the development area outlined (red)



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Figure 2: Trench plans



CAM ARC,
Cambridgeshire County Council,
15 Trafalgar Way,
Bar Hill,
Cambridgeshire,
CB3 8SQ

General Enquiries: 01954-204191
Fax: 01954-273376

<http://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/archaeology>