

CAM ARC Report Number 947

**Former Youth Centre Site,
Priory Road, St Neots,
Cambridgeshire**

An Archaeological Evaluation

Neil Wright

May 2007

Commissioned by Cambridgeshire County Council
(Suzanne Braybrook)

CAM ARC Report Number 947

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Priory Road, St Neots,
Cambridgeshire**

An Archaeological Evaluation

Neil Wright BSc (Hons) AIFA

Site Code: STN YCS 07
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PROJECT DETAILS

Project name	Evaluation at Priory Road, St Neots, Cambridgeshire		
Short description	The evaluation found three ditches, two of which were no earlier than medieval; the third was undated. A series of modern intrusions were also identified.		
Project dates	Start	2nd April 2007	End 5th April 2007
Previous work	None		Future work No
Associated project reference codes	STN YCS 07		
Type of project	CHER: ECB2537		
Site status	Evaluation		
Current land use (list all that apply)	None		
Planned development	Former Youth centre site - derelict		
Monument types / period (list all that apply)	Residential		
Significant finds:	Ditches – medieval/post-medieval		
Artefact type / period (list all that apply)	None		
PROJECT LOCATION			
County	Cambridgeshire	Parish	St Neots
HER for region	Cambridgeshire		
Site address (including postcode)	Former Youth Centre, Priory Road, St Neots		
Study area (sq.m or ha)	0.48 ha		
National grid reference	TL51812606		
Height OD	Min OD	14.29m	Max OD 15.60m
PROJECT ORIGINATORS			
Organisation	CAM ARC		
Project brief originator	Andy Thomas		
Project design originator	Stephen Macaulay		
Director/supervisor	Neil Wright		
Project manager	Paul Spoerry		
Sponsor or funding body	Cambridgeshire County Council (Suzanne Braybrook)		
ARCHIVES		Location and accession number	Content (e.g. pottery, animal bone, database, context sheets etc)
Physical			Bone, pot, CBM, cinder, Fe
Paper			<i>Pro forma</i> sheets, plans and sections
Digital			Photographs, database, reports
BIBLIOGRAPHY			
Full title	Former Youth Centre Site, Priory Road, St Neots, Cambridgeshire		
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Summary

CAM ARC undertook an archaeological evaluation of a parcel of land within St Neots. The work was commissioned by Cambridgeshire County Council in response to a brief issued by Andy Thomas of the Cambridgeshire Archaeology Planning and Countryside Advice (CAPCA), supplemented by a Specification prepared by CAM ARC.

Three archaeological features were recorded during the machine excavation of six evaluation trenches. Two heavily truncated ditches (**302** and **304**) were recorded within trench 3 and were dated to no earlier than the medieval period. A larger undated ditch (**202**, **300** and **500**), which ran east by west across the evaluation site, was recorded in trenches 2, 3 and 4.

The presence of the three ditches suggest that this area was in agricultural use in at least the medieval/post-medieval periods. The work did not find evidence for Anglo-Saxon activity, which was anticipated by the brief and specification, neither did it find evidence for the medieval priory. Modern ground disturbance may have completely removed any shallower deposits related to the medieval priory, or earlier activity, leaving only the deeper ditches.

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1 Introduction

This archaeological evaluation was undertaken in accordance with a Brief issued by Andy Thomas of the Cambridgeshire Archaeology Planning and Countryside Advice team (CAPCA; Planning Application 0501976OUT), supplemented by a Specification prepared by CAM ARC, Cambridgeshire County Council (formerly the Archaeological Field Unit (Macaulay 2007)).

The work was designed to assist in defining the character and extent of any archaeological remains within the proposed development area, in accordance with the guidelines set out in *Planning and Policy Guidance 16 - Archaeology and Planning* (Department of the Environment 1990). This evaluation is intended to fulfil the conditions of the brief that 5% of the affected site be evaluated.

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

The following information is taken from the specification (Macaulay 2007).

The site is located in the historic core of the town of St Neots, immediately north of the medieval St Neots Priory and is itself on Priory Street and encloses an area of 0.48 hectare.

The site is located on the 1st and 2nd Terrace River Gravels, within the flood plain of the River Great Ouse.

3 Archaeological and Historical Background

The following information is taken from the specification (Macaulay 2007).

Prehistoric and Roman remains are recorded on the Cambridgeshire Historic Environment Record (CHER) at various points in and around St. Neots. Iron Age and Roman settlement evidence has been found to the south of St. Neots at Eynesbury and Conygeare (Kemp 1993 and Alexander 1993), but stray finds (mainly coins) have been found in the town and the HER reports a Roman cemetery on open land to the north of St. Neots. Some 500m to the south-east considerable

amounts of residual third to fourth century Romano-British pottery were recovered from many of the Late Saxon features excavated in 1961/2 to the south of Cambridge Street and east of Church Street (Addyman 1973). The evidence is indicative of dense rural activity and associated settlement in the vicinity during the late 3rd and 4th century and possibly into the 5th century.

A Roman road runs between Sandy and Godmanchester to the east of the Great Ouse, and also to the east of St Neots and Eynesbury. It has been suggested that there is a possible east-west crossing point of the river at St Neots (Margary 1967). Its exact route has not yet been found but it is thought to be a few hundred metres north of the medieval bridge in the area of Islands Common (Spoerry 1994).

There is evidence of pagan Saxon occupation in the St. Neots area with increasing evidence for mid and late Saxon settlement and, by the medieval period, St Neots was well established within the parish of Eynesbury. A Benedictine priory was established by the early 12th century.

By 1180 the medieval settlement was well developed, with a bridge at the crossing point, to the south of the Priory and north of the market place and the settlement growing up around the Priory on the eastern bank of the Great Ouse.

None of the Priory buildings survive but excavations by C. F. Tebbutt during the mid 20th century are claimed to have located various parts of the Priory precinct and other parts of the medieval town have been located in more recent excavations. The town continued to develop in the later medieval and post-medieval period and expand to the north and east, on the higher land to the east of the Great Ouse.

A World War II pillbox (CB15200) stands in the north-west corner of the development area. It is a Type 22, hexagonal structure constructed largely in brick, with concrete lintels and roof.

4 Methodology

4.1 General

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 proposed development site was evaluated by trial trenching.

4.2 Physical Investigation

Machine excavation was carried out under constant archaeological supervision with a rubber-tracked 360° excavator using a toothless, 1.5m wide ditching bucket. Further investigation of archaeological deposits was carried out by hand and by suitably qualified archaeological staff. No environmental samples were taken during the evaluation.

4.3 Recording

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.

5 Results

A total of 6 trenches (Figure 1), each measuring approximately 1.5m wide were excavated. They measured a total of 132.5m in length. The results from each of the 6 trenches will be discussed below, from Trench 1 to Trench 6. Archaeological deposits were recorded in trenches 2, 3 and 5 (Figure 2). A context list, detailing all deposits and archaeological features encountered, can be found in Appendix 1.

5.1 Trench 1

Trench 1 was located in the south-west corner of the evaluation site. It measured 35m in length and was aligned approximately north-west to south-east. The top of the trench was at 15.26m OD and the base at 14.29m OD. No archaeological deposits were present. The sandy gravel natural (120) was encountered in places just under 1m below the present ground level. Cut through and laid on top of the natural were several post-medieval/modern features/deposits (contexts 100 – 115) (Figure 2, Section 3). They were located at the east end of the trench.

Ditch **111** contained three fills (108 to 110) comprised mainly of yellowish gravels. It was 2m wide and 0.4m deep and contained no finds although two fragments of hard-fired post-medieval tile (Carole Fletcher pers. comm.) were recovered from overlying layer 107. Ditch **111** was truncated by both ditch **106** and **113**.

Ditch **106** contained six fills and was 2.5m wide by 0.4m deep. The fills were a mixture of gravels and silty clays that contained very few finds; ceramic building material was recovered from fill 101 only and comprised one fragments of tile, one fragment of brick and one

fragment of probable architectural moulding. All are hard-fired and post-medieval in date (Carole Fletcher pers. comm.).

Ditch **113** had a gully-like profile and was 0.6m wide by 0.25m deep. It contained a single fill (112), mid greyish brown silty clay, from which no finds were recovered.

Ditch **115** was 0.8m wide by 0.25m deep and contained one fill (114), mid brown silty clay. One sherd of post-medieval transfer-printed ware pottery was recovered (Carole Fletcher pers. comm.).

These deposits are likely to have derived from later landscaping of the area and included re-deposition of 120. These deposits/features were overlain by a series of four layers, which are summarised in Table 1 below.

Context	Description	Thickness (m)
116	mid grey-brown topsoil	0.11
117	gravels	0.26
118	modern demolition layer	0.30
119	mid red-brown loam	0.28

Table 1: Summary of deposits overlying modern features in Trench 1

5.2 Trench 2

Trench 2 was situated at the west end of the evaluation site. It was 19m long and aligned approximately north-east by south-west. The top of the trench was at 15.47m OD and the base at 14.76m OD. Light orange-yellow sandy gravel natural (208) was encountered 0.7m below the present ground level.

Cut through the top of the natural was east to west aligned ditch **202** (Figure 2, Section 6). It was 2.6m wide by 0.6m deep and had sloping sides (40-50°) and a rounded base. It contained one fill (201), mid grey-brown silty clay. It was probably the same ditch as those identified in trenches 3 (**300**) and 5 (**500**). No finds were recovered. The top of the feature was at c.14.76m OD, approximately 0.7m below the present ground level.

Ditch **202** was overlain by a series of layers, similar to those in trench 1. They are summarised in Table 2, below.

Context	Description	Thickness (m)
205	mid grey-brown silty clay topsoil	0.19
206	dark cultivation layer	0.28
207	sands and gravels with dark cultivation layer 206	0.23

Table 2: Summary of deposits overlying ditch **202**

5.3 Trench 3

Trench 3 was 24m long and located near the west end of the evaluation site, parallel with trench 2. The top of the trench was measured at 15.60m and the base at 14.65m AOD. Mid orange-yellow sandy gravel natural (310) was encountered 0.98m below the present ground level.

Ditch **300** was only partly exposed due to the presence of modern footings, but seen to contain a single fill (301), mid brown silty clay. It was 1.85m wide by 0.57m deep and had a similar profile and alignment to ditch **202**. The top of the feature was at 14.47m OD, approximately 1.04m below the present ground level.

In the centre of the trench was ditch **304**. It was aligned approximately north to south and measured 0.5m wide by 0.5m deep. It was filled by dark brown silty clay (305), which contained a single horse/ox shoe. The top of the feature was at 14.60m OD, approximately 0.73m below the present ground level. Ditch **304** was probably a heavily truncated boundary ditch, no earlier than medieval in date.

Ditch **302** truncated **304** and was aligned approximately north-east to south-west and measured 0.5m wide by 0.1m deep. It was filled by dark brown silty clay (303) and contained no finds. The top of the feature was measured at c.14.60m AOD, approximately 0.73m below the present ground level. Ditch **302** was probably a heavily truncated boundary ditch, no earlier than medieval in date.

The ditches in this trench were overlain by a series of layers, similar to those in trenches 1 and 2,. They are described in Table 3, below.

Context	Description	Thickness (m)
306	mid grey-brown topsoil	0.28
307	modern demolition layer	0.32
308	dark black-brown buried soil	0.38
309	disturbed sand and gravel with soil layer 308	0.10

Table 3: Summary of deposits overlying ditches **300**, **302** and **304**

In addition to these ditches and layers, a series of parallel linear markings were identified. They are believed to be scars left from the teeth of a machine bucket used to landscape the area.

5.4 Trench 4

Trench 4 was situated in the centre of the site. It was 31m long and aligned approximately north-west to south-east. The top of the trench was measured at 15.57m OD and the base at 14.38m OD. No archaeology was present.

Table 4, below, summarises the deposits in this trench.

Context	Description	Thickness (m)
400	mid grey-brown topsoil	0.43
401	modern demolition layer	0.51
402	dark red-brown buried soil	0.32
403	sand and gravels with soil layer 402	0.16
404	mid yellow sandy gravel natural	-

Table 4: Summary of deposits in trench 4

5.5 Trench 5

Trench 5 was located near the east end of the evaluation site. It was 12m long and aligned approximately north-east to south-west. The top of the trench was at 15.58m OD and the base at 14.62m OD. Light orange sandy gravel natural 506 was encountered 1m below the present ground level.

Cut through the top of the natural was ditch **500**, which was only partly exposed due to the presence of a live electricity service. It was aligned approximately east to west and was at least 1.3m wide by 0.9m deep. Ditch **500** had sloping sides (40-50°) and although not fully exposed appeared to have a rounded base. It was filled by mid brown silty clay (501) and contained no finds. The top of the feature was at 14.62m OD, approximately 0.96m below the present ground level.

The table below summarises the deposits overlying ditch **500**.

Context	Description	Thickness (m)
503	dark grey-brown topsoil	0.38
504	mid red-brown silty/sandy clay	unrecorded
505	sand and gravels with soil layer 504	0.20

Table 5: Summary of deposits overlying ditch 505

5.6 Trench 6

This trench was situated at the east end of the evaluation site, within the area of the now demolished clubhouse. It was 11.5m long and aligned approximately north-west to south-east. The top of the trench was measured at 15.40m and the base at 14.61m AOD. No archaeology was present. Table 6, below, summarises the deposits in this trench.

Context	Description	Thickness (m)
600	mid grey-brown topsoil	0.28
601	sand and gravels with topsoil 600	0.47
602	mid yellow sandy gravel natural	-

Table 6: Summary of deposits in trench 6

5.7 Drainage, visible disturbance and services

Numerous inspection chambers were visible within the eastern and central parts of the site, particularly surrounding the area of the now demolished clubhouse. At least two modern drains were detected during the evaluation as well as a possible electricity service cable running north-west to south-east (trench 5 – identified from hazard tape and left *in situ*).

6 Discussion

Three archaeological features were recorded during the archaeological evaluation. Two heavily truncated ditches (**302** and **304**) were recorded within trench 3 and were dated to no earlier than the medieval period. A larger undated ditch (**202**, **300** and **500**), which ran east to west across the evaluation site, was recorded in trenches 2, 3 and 5.

It is likely that these three ditches were associated with agricultural use of the land and represent boundaries used to delineate land in the medieval/post-medieval period.

The evaluation has shown that a high level of ground disturbance has occurred within the evaluation site. This is apparent by the layers of disturbed natural and demolition rubble present. It is likely that this occurred during the construction and subsequent additions to the now demolished clubhouse.

7 Conclusions

The presence of the three ditches suggest that this area was in agricultural use in at least the medieval/post-medieval periods. The work did not find evidence for Anglo-Saxon activity, which was anticipated by the brief and specification, neither did it find evidence for the medieval priory. The modern ground disturbance may have completely removed any shallower deposits related to the medieval priory, or earlier activity, leaving only the deeper ditches.

Of interest however, is the WWII Pillbox (CB15200) in the north-west corner of the development area. It is one of hundreds that were constructed across the country during 1940-1 as part of Britain's defence against invasion and was recorded in 1997 as part of the Defence of Britain project (Britarch) as:

PILLBOX (TYPE FW3/22) (ID: S0002007), St. Neots, Cambridgeshire, England Off Ware Road on W bank of the River Great Ouse., Condition: Fair (Grid ref: TL 183 607) (Clarke 2007).

A search of the Defence of Britain database on ADS Arch Search has shown that not only is this the sole Type 22 pillbox in St Neots, but also

the only pillbox to survive in the town. As such, this structure should be regarded as unique to the immediate area and of value regarding the military history of St Neots and Cambridgeshire. It is recommended therefore, that future development considers the impact of construction upon this structure.

Further recommendations for any future work based upon this report will be made by the County Archaeology Office (CAPCA).

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Suzanne Braybrook (Cambridgeshire County Council) who commissioned and funded the archaeological work and Helen Stocks who assisted on site. The project was managed by Paul Spoerry.

The brief for archaeological works was written by Andy Thomas (CAPCA) who visited the site and monitored the evaluation.

Bibliography

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|---------------------------------|------|---|
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Figure 1 Location of trenches

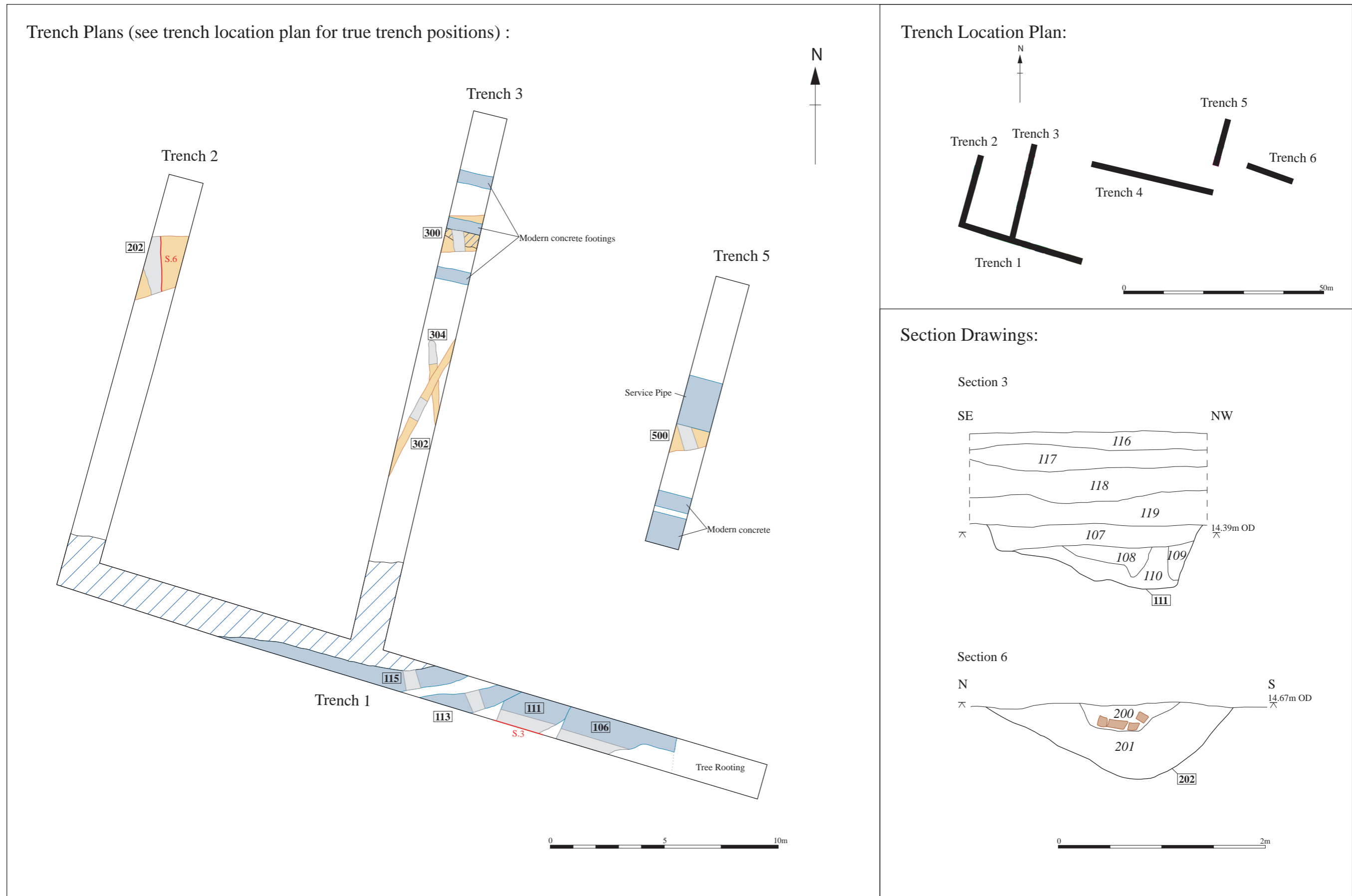


Figure 2: Trench location plan, trench plans and section drawings



Plate 1: External view of Pillbox S0002007 from west



Plate 2: Access door on south-west elevation

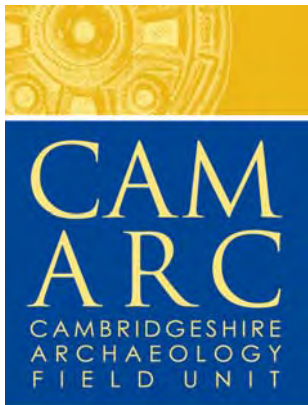


Plate 3: West side, internal view from north

Appendix 1: Context Table

Context	Tr	Category	Type	Shape in plan	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Colour	Fine component	Coarse component	Other comments
100	1									pm/modern disturbance
101	1									pm/modern disturbance
102	1									pm/modern disturbance
103	1									pm/modern disturbance
104	1									pm/modern disturbance
105	1									pm/modern disturbance
106	1									pm/modern disturbance
107	1									pm/modern disturbance
108	1									pm/modern disturbance
109	1									pm/modern disturbance
110	1									pm/modern disturbance
111	1									pm/modern disturbance
112	1									pm/modern disturbance
113	1									pm/modern disturbance
114	1									pm/modern disturbance
115	1									pm/modern disturbance
116	1	deposit	topsoil			0.11	mid greyey brown	silty clay		
117	1	deposit	gravel layer			0.26				
118	1	deposit	demolition layer			0.30	silty/sandy clay	abundant crushed stone and brick		
119	1	deposit	buried soil			0.28	mid reddy brown	silty/sandy clay	frequent small gravel	
120	1	deposit	natural subsoil				light orangey yellow	sand	gravel	
200	2	cut	pit/ditch	irregular						modern pit cut into 201
201	2	fill					mid greyey brown	silty clay		fill of 202
202	2	cut	ditch	linear	2.6	0.6				Same as 300 and 500? - E by W
203	2									-----discarded-----
204	2									-----discarded-----
205	2	deposit	topsoil			0.18	mid greyey brown	silty clay		
206	2	deposit	ploughsoil			0.25	mid reddy brown	silty/sandy clay	frequent small gravel	
207	2	deposit	disturbed natural			0.19	mid reddy brown and light orangey yellow	silty/sandy clay and sand	gravel	
208	2	deposit	natural subsoil				light orangey yellow	sand	gravel	

300	3	cut	ditch	linear	1.85	0.57				same as 202 and 500? – E by W
301	3	fill					mid brown	silty clay	rare small gravel	fill of 300
302	3	cut	ditch	linear	0.5	0.1				NE by SW
303	3	fill					dark brown	silty sand	frequent small gravel	fill of 302
304	3	cut	ditch	linear	0.5	0.05				NW by SE
305	3	fill					dark brown	silty sand	frequent small gravel	fill of 304
306	3	deposit	topsoil			0.28	mid greyey brown	silty clay	rare small gravel	
307	3	deposit	demolition layer			0.32	mid reddy brown	silty/sandy clay	abundant crushed stone and brick	
308	3	deposit	buried soil			0.38	dark brown/black	silty/sandy clay	rare small gravel	
309	3	deposit	disturbed natural			0.10	dark brown/black and mid orangey yellow	silty/sandy clay and sand	gravel	mixture of 308 and 310
310	3	deposit	natural subsoil				mid orangey yellow	sand	gravel	
400	4	deposit	topsoil			0.43	mid-dark greyey brown	silty clay		
401	4	deposit	demolition layer			0.51	light orangey yellow	silty/sandy clay	abundant crushed stone and brick	
402	4	deposit	buried soil			0.32	dark reddy brown	silty/sandy clay	rare bricks	
403	4	deposit	disturbed natural			0.16	dark reddy brown and mid yellow	silty/sandy clay and sand		mixture of 402 and 404
404	4	deposit	natural subsoil				mid yellow	sand	gravel	
500	5	cut	ditch	linear	>1.3	>0.9				same as 202 and 300? – E by W
501	5	fill					mid brown	silty clay	rare small gravel	fill of 500
503	5	deposit	topsoil			0.38	dark greyey brown	silty clay	rare small gravel	
504	5	deposit	ploughsoil			0.44	mid reddy brown	silty/sandy clay	rare small gravel	
505	5	deposit	disturbed natural			0.20	mid reddy brown and light orange	silty/sandy clay and sand	gravel	mixture of 504 and 506
506	5	deposit	natural subsoil				light orange	sand	gravel	
600	6	deposit	topsoil			0.28	mid greyey brown	silty clay	rare small gravel	
601	6	deposit	disturbed natural			0.47	mid greyey brown and light yellow/dark orange	silty clay and sand	gravel	mixture of 600 and 602
602	6	deposit	natural subsoil				mottled light yellow and dark orange	sand	gravel	



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