



CAM ARC Report Number 962

Iron Age and Undated Features at Little Paxton Primary School, Little Paxton, Cambridgeshire

An Archaeological Evaluation

Mo Muldowney

August 2007

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Iron Age and Undated Remains at Little Paxton Primary School, Little Paxton, Cambridgeshire

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Status	Approved		
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PROJECT DETAILS				
Project name	Evaluation at Little Paxton Primary School, Little Paxton			
Short description	This small evaluation uncovered remains of possible prehistoric date in the form of ditches and a posthole. One of these ditches corresponded with a cropmark. Later activity was identified in the form of a post-medieval pit and levelling layer. No activity relating to Paxton Hall was identified.			
Project dates	Start	6th August 2007	End	7th August 2007
Previous work	None		Future work	unknown
Associated project reference codes	PXL PYS 07 and ECB 2628			
Type of project	Evaluation			
Site status	None			
Current land use (list all that apply)	Primary school playing field			
Planned development	Extensions and alterations to the school			
Monument types / period (list all that apply)	Iron Age ditch Undated ditch, pit and posthole			
Significant finds: Artefact type / period (list all that apply)	Iron Age and post-medieval pottery			
PROJECT LOCATION				
County	Cambridgeshire	Parish	Little Paxton	
HER for region	Cambridgeshire			
Site address (including postcode)	Little Paxton Primary School, Little Paxton, St Neots PE19 6NG			
Study area (sq.m or ha)	1.5 ha			
National grid reference	TL 1890 6239			
Height OD	Min OD	15.16	Max OD	15.54
PROJECT ORIGINATORS				
Organisation	CAM ARC			
Project brief originator	Andy Thomas			
Project design originator	James Drummond-Murray			
Director/supervisor	Mo Muldowney			
Project manager	James Drummond-Murray			
Sponsor or funding body	Mouchel Parkman			
ARCHIVES	Location and accession number	Content (e.g. pottery, animal bone, database, context sheets etc)		
Physical	CAM ARC	Pottery, animal bone, lava quernstone, CBM		
Paper	CAM ARC	Evaluation report; pro forma sheets; photographs		
Digital	CAM ARC	Evaluation report; photographs		
BIBLIOGRAPHY				
Full title	Iron Age and Undated Remains at Little Paxton Primary School, Little Paxton, Cambridgeshire			
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Summary

Cambridgeshire County Council's CAM ARC (formerly the Archaeological Field Unit) was commissioned by Mouchel Parkman to undertake an archaeological evaluation at Little Paxton Primary School. The work took place on the 6th and 7th August 2007 in advance of proposed extensions and alterations to the school buildings.

Two trenches were machine excavated in the south-east corner of the playing field and located with reference to the proposed development and cropmarks (HER 00628). Four archaeological features were identified, comprising a ditch in Trench 1 and a ditch, a pit and a posthole in Trench 2. Although dateable material (pottery) was recovered from ditch **9** only (Trench 2), both ditches and the posthole are of probable prehistoric date, whilst the pit is post-medieval.

Evidence for later activity is limited to post-medieval deposits relating either to the installation of a water pipe or the levelling/landscaping of the school playing field.

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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 N/A), supplemented by a Specification prepared by CAM ARC, Cambridgeshire County Council (formerly Archaeological Field Unit).

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

The evaluation area is located on the flat playing field belonging to Little Paxton Primary School and lies at a height of just over 15m OD. The underlying drift geology comprises 1st and 2nd river terrace gravels (British Geological Survey 1975).

3 Archaeological and Historical Background

3.1 Prehistoric

To the east of the subject site excavations were carried out at Little Paxton quarry (1960s), which found evidence for extensive prehistoric features (ECB 1828) and an evaluation at the Great North Road (ECB 1350) to the west, revealed settlement activity from the Late Neolithic into the Early Bronze Age. Other prehistoric activity comprises spot finds of lithic material, such as Palaeolithic flakes and implements at South Pit Lodge (HER 00578) and a Neolithic blade (HER 00584) to the south-west and a Neolithic 'hut' was found to the north-west near the A1(M) (HER 00589).

3.2 Roman

Very few Roman remains have been identified near to the development area, but include a greyware flask spot find (HER 00592) to the south-west, a cremation cemetery to the south (HER 00581) and settlement site to the north-east (HER 00633).

3.3 Anglo-Saxon

To the east, Great Paxton boasts a church with some fine late Saxon remains. In Little Paxton domestic remains of the 9th to 11th centuries have been excavated as well as earlier burials (Addyman 1969). The excavations at Little Paxton quarry in the 1960s also identified two phases of Saxon settlement (HER 00628).

3.4 Medieval

The medieval settlement of Little Paxton lies beneath the modern village. The parish church of St James dates to the late 12th century (HER 13010). The site lies within the 14th century Paxton Park (HER 00671), associated with Moyne Manor.

A number of medieval agricultural features have also been identified across the Little Paxton parish, generally comprising ridge and furrow, such as that at Lakefield Avenue (HER 08268).

3.5 Post-medieval

The subject site lies within the grounds of the early 19th century Paxton Park, an area of c90 acres, which may originally have been part of the manor of Little Paxton (HER 12149).

3.6 Undated

A number of undated finds have been identified in the area, including pits, ditches and postholes at St Neots Golf Course to the south-west (MCB16927). Of particular interest to this evaluation are the cropmarks plotted in the grounds of the school, which are currently undated. It is proposed that the evaluation trenches target these cropmarks.

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 at least 5% of the development area should be subject to trial trenching resulting in the instatement of two approximately 10m long trenches. The trenches (Fig. 2) were placed with reference to the location of the proposed development and more specifically, to target cropmarks which were located in the south half of the playing field (Fig. 3).

Machine excavation was carried out under constant archaeological supervision with a wheeled JCB-type excavator using a toothless ditching bucket.

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.

Given the small size of this evaluation, environmental sampling was considered unnecessary at this stage, as it was felt that it would not contribute to the understanding of the activity that had taken place here.

Conditions throughout the evaluation were good, with broken cloud cover. The topsoil deposit in Trench 1 was concreted, making excavation by machine very difficult and slow. All lower deposits were friable, allowing ease of hand-excavation. No groundwater was encountered.

5 Results

Archaeological features were encountered in both trenches (Fig. 4) and were of probable prehistoric date, with the exception of pit 8 (Trench 2), which is thought to be post-medieval or modern. The only modern intrusion encountered was a disused pipe, which ran approximately north-west to south-east across the centre of Trench 2.

The natural (5) was seen in both trenches but varied slightly in composition, as expected in sands and gravels of this nature. In Trench 1 the sands were predominantly mid brownish yellow in colour, with an increase in gravel content towards the east end of the trench. A similar picture was seen in Trench 2, where the north half of the trench comprised the yellowish sands, with an increase in gravels in the southern half. It may be worth noting here that all the features, except probable post-medieval pit 8, were located on the sands, not the gravels and were almost certainly prehistoric.

Subsoil (2) was mid greyish yellow sandy silt and encountered in both trenches, but was truncated (particularly in Trench 2) by landscaping associated with the construction of the school and its playing fields. A greater depth survived in Trench 1 (0.18m thick).

Topsoil (1) overlay the subsoil in Trench 1 and landscaping/levelling layer 6 in Trench 2 (see below) and varied in depth from 0.27m to 0.37m thick. It was dark greyish brown silty clay and varied between compact and concreted.

5.1 Trench 1

Trench 1 (Fig. 2) was located immediately to the north of the school buildings, parallel with the south edge of the playing field. It was aligned east to west and measured 9.6m long by 1.5m wide.

One archaeological feature (ditch **3**) was encountered at the west end of the trench and appears to coincide with a cropmark (Fig. 3). Ditch **3** was oriented north-west to south-east and was up to 1.5m wide and no more than 0.27m deep. It had an uneven profile with a steeply sloping west edge and a more oblique east edge. The base was also slightly undulating (Fig. 4, s.1). The single fill (4) was mid greyish brown sandy silt, which contained occasional flint gravels but no finds.

Location of level within trench	Height (m OD)	Trench depth (m)
West end top	15.16	0.5
West end base	14.66	
East end top	15.36	0.61
East end base	14.75	

Table 1: Trench 1 Ordnance Datum heights with corresponding depths

5.2 Trench 2

Trench 2 was oriented north to south and lay at right-angles to the north-east of Trench 1 (Fig. 2 and 4). It was 9.8m long by 1.5m wide. Three archaeological features were encountered in Trench 2 and comprised a ditch, a pit and a posthole. A post-medieval water pipe was also identified (see above).

Ditch **9** (Fig. 4, s.4) was located in the north half of the trench and oriented north-north-west to south-south-east. It was slightly curvilinear in plan and approximately 3.4m long by 0.2m deep. It had a regular, flat-based profile and contained a single fill (10) from which two sherds of pottery (Appendix 2) and two fragments of slag (Appendix 3) were recovered. Circular posthole **12** (Fig. 4, s.3) was located immediately to the east of ditch **9** and was 0.27m in diameter by 0.1m deep. It had steep, near vertical sides and a flat base and contained a single fill (11). This was mid yellowish brown silty sand and contained no finds.

Pit **8** (Fig. 4, s.2) was located 3m from the south end of the trench and lay partially beyond the east edge of excavation. It was sub-circular in plan and very shallow, measuring 1.05m long by 0.56m wide and 0.12m deep. The single fill (7) was very similar to levelling/landscaping layer 6, but contained fewer inclusions and no finds.

Landscaping/levelling layer (6) (Fig. 4, s.3) was dark greyish brown sandy silt and located in Trench 2 only. It was 0.51m thick and

contained occasional to frequent CBM fragments, coke/coal fragments and lava quernstone.

Location of level within trench	Height (m OD)	Trench depth (m)
North end top	15.49	0.71
North end base	14.78	
South end top	15.54	0.67
South end base	14.87	

Table 2: Trench 2 Ordnance Datum heights with corresponding depth

6 Discussion

As stated in the Specification (Drummond-Murray 2007), the evaluation trenches were located in order to determine the veracity of cropmark evidence (HER 00671), in particular, the two distinct linear marks that appeared to cross the playing field under the proposed development area. Although features that align with the cropmarks were found in both trenches, only one (ditch **3**, Trench 1) proved to be of archaeological origin; the other was an iron covered ceramic water pipe of late 19th or early 20th century origin (Trench 2).

In total, four features were identified in the 29m sq evaluation area. Three of these were of probable prehistoric origin whilst the fourth, although no dating evidence was recovered, was post-medieval or slightly later.

The three probable prehistoric features were located in both Trench 1 and Trench 2 and are dated by association from the single sherd of Late Bronze Age or early Iron Age (Richard Mortimer pers. comm.) pottery recovered from ditch **9** (Appendix 2). Ditches **3** and **9** were enclosure-type ditches, with the former having a more defensive nature, given its irregular shape (Fig 4, s.1) and clearly form part of the extensive field system suggested by the cropmarks (HER 00671). The posthole (**12**), whilst located very close to ditch **9**, may not necessarily be related (that is, form a parallel fenceline) and instead form part of a structure of unknown size and shape. Given its pale fill, it is also likely to be of prehistoric date, but it is inconclusive as to whether it was contemporary with either ditch.

Interestingly, all the prehistoric features were located on the softer sands in Trench 1 or northern half of Trench 2, perhaps suggesting a preference for more easily cultivatable soils or a difference in water levels at the time. Only the post-medieval pit (**8**) was located on the gravels.

Evidence for post-medieval activity was identified in Trench 2 only and comprised pit **8**, of unknown function and a thick deposit of dark

material (6), which overlay the subsoil (5). It is clear that this deposit relates in some way to the levelling of the playing field, but not apparent why it is located in Trench 2 only, unless it relates to the instatement of the ceramic pipe identified in cropmarks.

7 Conclusions

The evaluation has demonstrated that there is potential prehistoric activity in this part of Little Paxton, which appears to form a part of a larger field system to the south and west, as suggested by cropmarks (HER 00671). The interpretation of these features, in particular their date, must be viewed with caution because of the paucity of dating evidence, although it is highly likely that they are prehistoric. Activity of this date is not unusual in this area; at least eighteen other sites have been identified either through excavations or from spot finds. It is worth noting that some truncation may have occurred to the prehistoric features during either the laying of the water pipe or levelling of the school's playing field.

There was no evidence for activity relating to Paxton Hall, which is unsurprising given that the development area lies within the bounds of the park on land most likely used for pastoral purposes.

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

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Mouchel Parkman who commissioned and funded the archaeological work and Ruth Hatfield who assisted with excavation. Survey was undertaken by Louise Bush and Séverine Bézie produced the illustrations.

James Drummond-Murray managed the project and the brief for archaeological works was written by Andy Thomas.

Bibliography

British Geological Survey	197 5	Solid and Drift Geology Sheet 187
Drummond-Murray, J	200 7	<i>Specification for Archaeological Evaluation Little Paxton Primary School</i> CAM ARC
Thomas, A	200 7	<i>Brief for Archaeological Evaluation Little Paxton Primary School</i> CAPCA

Appendix 1: Context Summary

Trench	Context	Cut	Category	Function	Width	Depth
1; 2	1	0	layer	topsoil	-	0.37
1; 2	2	0	layer	subsoil	-	0.18
1	3	3	cut	boundary	1.5	0.27
1	4	3	fill	backfill	1.5	0.27
1; 2	5	0	layer	natural	-	-
2	6	0	layer	levelling	-	0.51
2	7	8	fill	indeterminate	0.56	0.12
2	8	8	cut	indeterminate	0.56	0.12
2	9	9	cut	enclosure	0.6	0.22
2	10	9	fill	enclosure	0.6	0.22
2	11	12	fill	structural	0.27	0.1
2	12	12	cut	structural	0.27	0.1

Appendix 2: Finds Summary

by Mo Muldowney

Finds were recovered from three contexts only and are summarised below in Table 3.

Tr	Context	Cut	Object	Description	Weight (kg)	Date
1	1	-	Pottery	Brown glazed, poor condition	0.007	18th - 19th C
1	1	-	Tile	Badly abraded ?floor tile fragment	0.045	18th - 19th C
1	1	-	Animal bone	Fragmented proximal end of cattle (bovine) ?fibia. Fine cut marks suggest butchery	0.067	-
2	6	-	Pottery	Hard-fired generic sandy ware	0.027	14th - 16th C
2	6	-	Slag	35m x 36mm x 31mm. Small air bubbles, ?mortar adhering to two surfaces	0.032	Post-medieval
2	10	9	Pottery	Yellowish brown fabric with abundant, large (up to 3mm) flint inclusions. 10mm thick	0.003	Late Bronze Age/early Iron Age
2	10	9	Pottery	Hard-fired porous dark fabric, grass tempered. Dark brown external surface. 6mm thick	0.001	Iron Age
2	10	9	Slag (x2)	Light, porous slag, probably fuel ash	0.007	-

Table 3: Finds summary





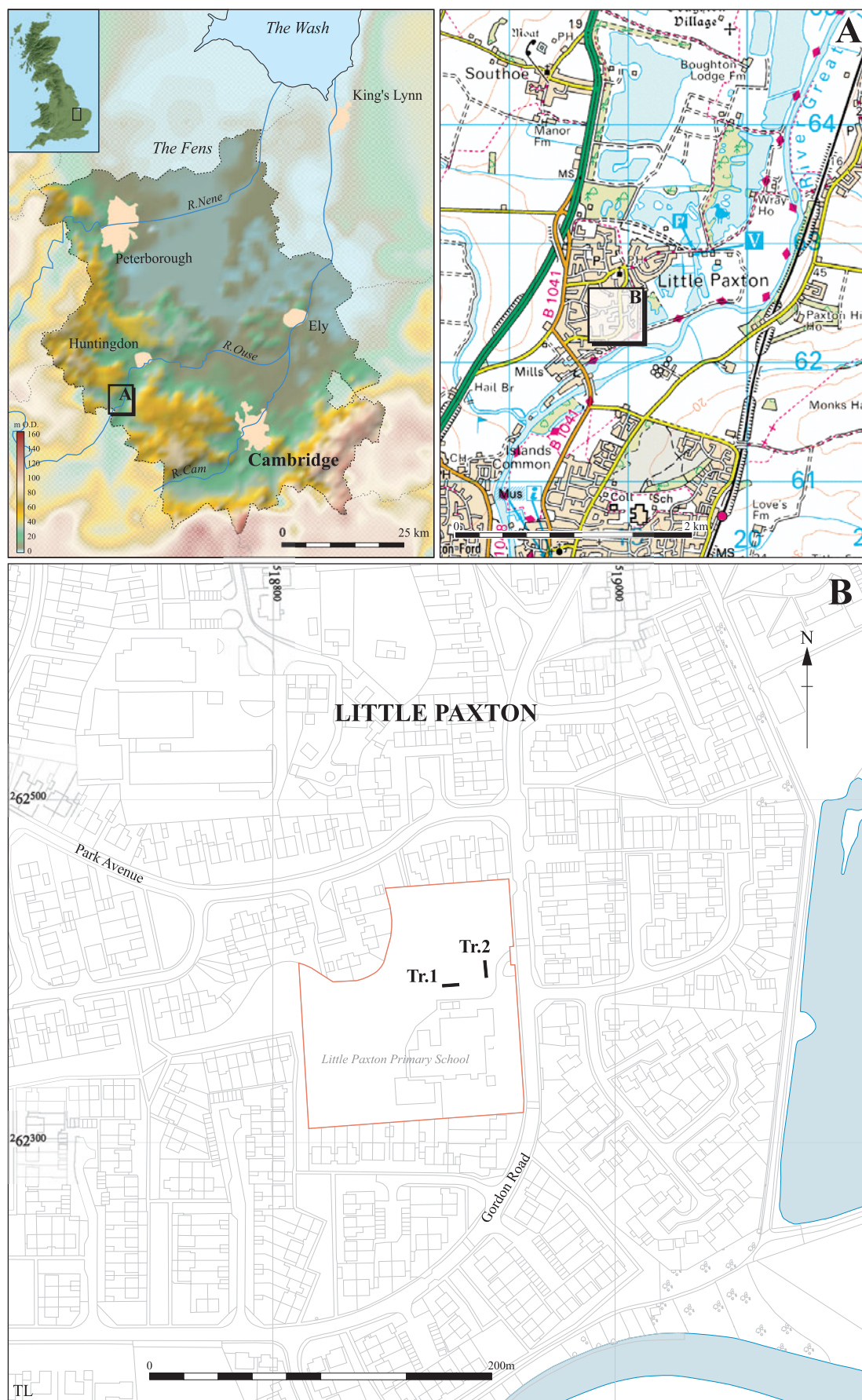
Drawing Conventions	
Plans	
Limit of Excavation	_____
Deposit - Conjectured	-----
Natural Features	_____
Sondages/Machine Strip	- - - - -
Intrusion/Truncation	-
Illustrated Section	S.14 _____
Archaeological Feature	
Excavated Slot	
Pipe	
Cut Number	118
Sections	
Limit of Excavation	-----
Cut	_____
Cut-Conjectured	-----
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 

Figure 1: Convention keys



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Figure 2: Location of trenches (black) with the development area outlined (red)

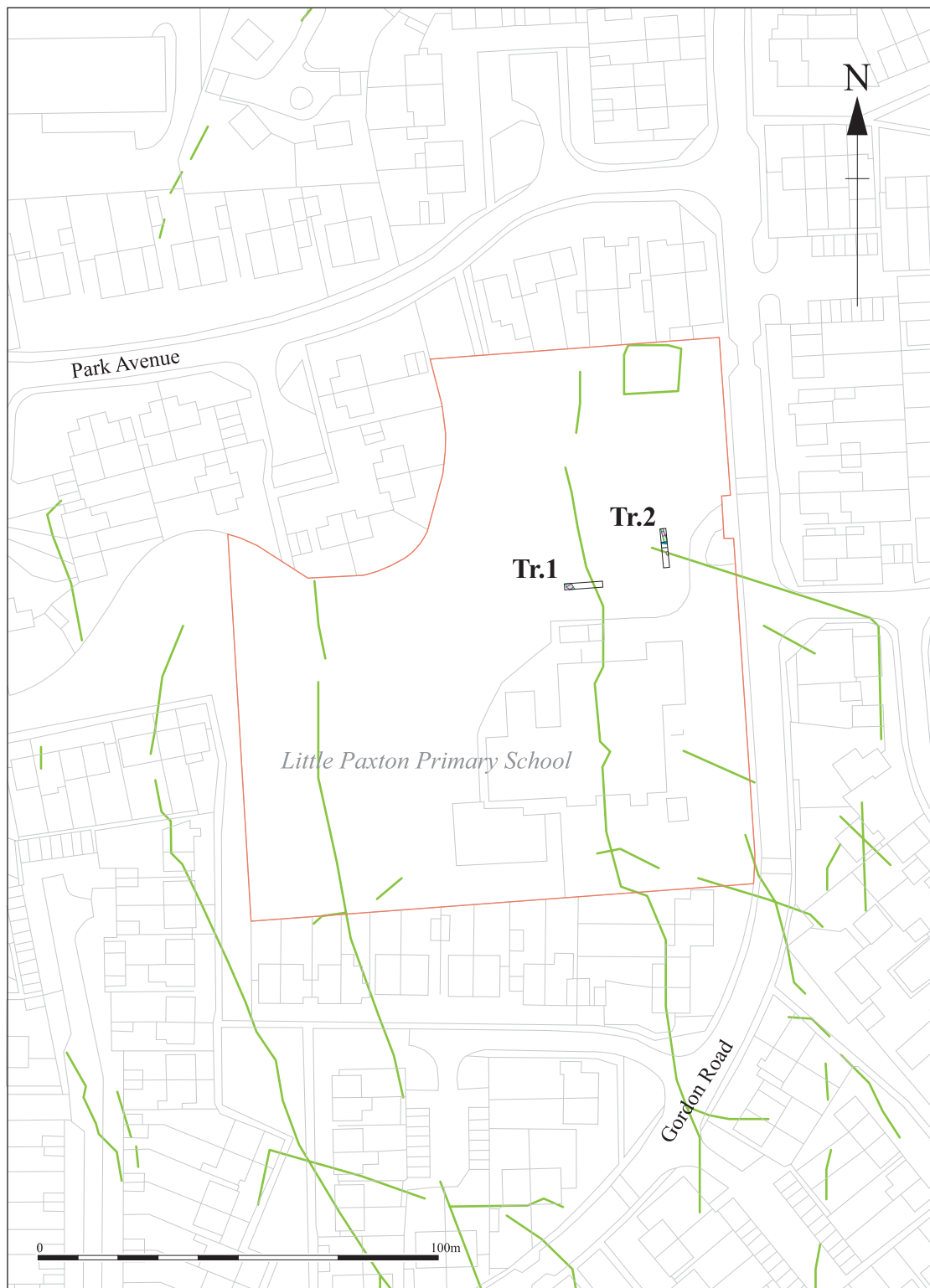


Figure 3: Cropmarks (green) overlying the development area

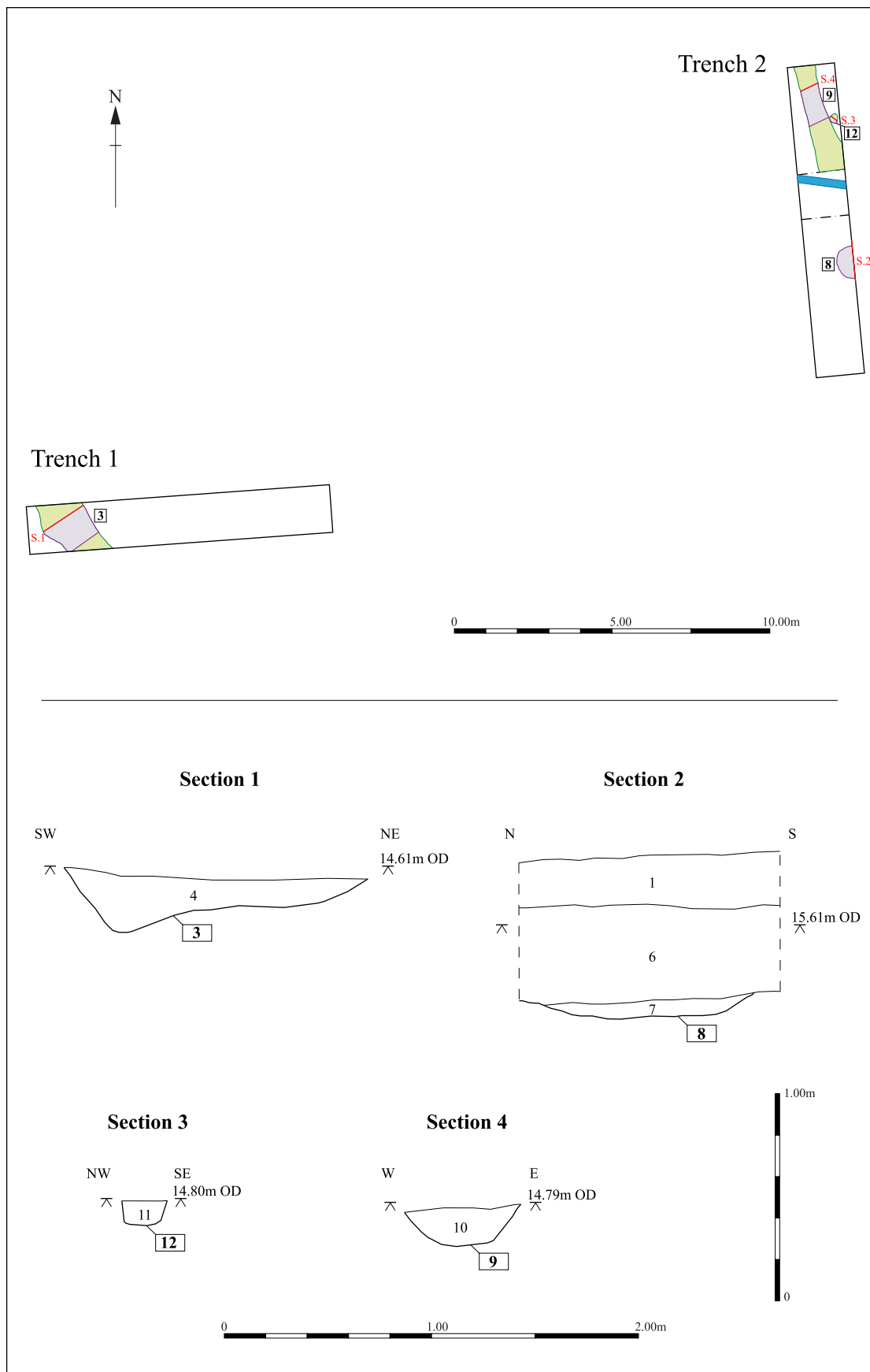


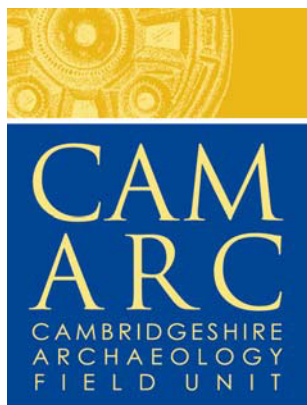
Figure 4: Trench plans and section drawings



Figure 5: Ditch 3 in Trench 1



Figure 6: Ditch 9 in Trench 2



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