

CAM ARC Report Number 1020

**Post-Medieval Boundary Ditch
at Old Court Place, March,
Cambridgeshire**

An Archaeological Evaluation

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With a contribution by Alasdair Brooks PhD

Site Code: MAR OCP 08
CHER Event Number: ECB2901
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PROJECT DETAILS				
Project name	Post-Medieval Boundary ditch at Old Court Place, March, Cambs			
Short description	<p>Between the 9th and 10th of April 2008, CAM ARC conducted an archaeological evaluation at Old Court Place, March (NGR TL 4174 9632).</p> <p>The archaeology revealed by the evaluation comprised a post-medieval boundary ditch that produced a small early 19th century pottery assemblage. In addition a possible 19th century gravel pit was identified. Other features exposed included modern postholes and ditches.</p>			
Project dates	Start 9/04/08		End 10/04/08	
Previous work	None		Future work	None
Associated project reference codes	MAROCP08			
Type of project	Evaluation			
Site status	Residential			
Current land use (list all that apply)	Residential			
Planned development	Housing			
Monument types / period (list all that apply and use thesaurus of monument types)	Post-Medieval			
Significant finds: Artefact type / period (list all that apply and use MDA object thesaurus)				
PROJECT LOCATION				
County	Cambridgeshire	Parish	March	
HER for region	Cambridgeshire			
Site address (including postcode)	Old Court Place, March, Cambs			
Study area (sq.m or ha)	0.1ha			
National grid reference	Easting (6 figure)	TL 4174 9632	Northing (6 figure)	
Height OD	Max OD 3.12m		Min OD 1.60m	
PROJECT ORIGINATORS				
Organisation	Cambridgeshire County Council, CAM ARC			
Project brief originator	Eliza Gore			
Project design originator	Richard Mortimer			
Director/supervisor	Spencer Cooper			
Project manager				
Sponsor or funding body	Exchange Developments Ltds			
ARCHIVES	Location and accession number	Content (e.g. pottery, animal bone, database, context sheets etc)		
Physical		Pottery		
Paper		Site records written and drawn evaluation report		
Digital		Digital photos, survey data		
BIBLIOGRAPHY				
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Summary

Between the 9th and 10th of April 2008, CAM ARC conducted an archaeological evaluation at Old Court Place, March (NGR TL 4174 9632).

The archaeology revealed by the evaluation comprised a post-medieval boundary ditch that produced a small early 19th century pottery assemblage. In addition a possible 19th century gravel pit was identified. Other features exposed included modern postholes and ditches.

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1 Introduction

Between the 9th and 10th of April 2008, CAM ARC conducted an archaeological evaluation at Old Court Place, March, Cambridgeshire (NGR TL 4174 9632). The proposed development includes construction of nine flats and the evaluation was commissioned by Exchange Developments.

This archaeological evaluation was undertaken in accordance with a Brief issued by the Cambridgeshire Archaeology, Planning and Countryside Advice team (CAPCA; Planning Application No F/YR07/1350/F), 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 site lies on an Island of sand and gravel overlying Ampthill clay at a height of approximately 5.00 m OD.

3 Archaeological and Historical Background

3.1 General

March sits on an island of high ground in the fens and has been extensively settled and exploited, particularly in the Iron Age and Romano-British periods. Deposits and features/finds of this date could potentially have survived within the area. The site also lies behind the High Street, close to the market place and is potentially within an area of Anglo-Saxon, Medieval and post-medieval activity.

3.1.1 Prehistoric

March has been a focus of settlement from the prehistoric times onwards. Stray Mesolithic & Neolithic finds have been made in the area (HER 05210 & 08455). Bronze Age implements have been found (HER 04588) and an Iron Age bowl recovered (HER 05922).

Cropmarks have been noted in the fields around March (e.g. HER 08976 & 09381) and the investigation of an earthwork site at Estover Road (ECB497 – James & More 1985) prior to residential development revealed Bronze Age and Late Iron Age activity before being used for Roman enclosures.

3.1.2 Roman

Roman remains are frequent within the March area, both from stray finds (e.g. HER 05905 & 05927) and during archaeological evaluations and excavations (Cooper 2006 and Hickling 2003).

313 Saxon, Medieval and Post-Medieval

Identified as early as 1086 as *Merc*, meaning "boundary" (Reaney 1926), March is located some 13km south of Wisbech, in the Fens, on the gravel island mentioned above. It was once a hamlet in the parish of Doddington, but soon outstripped both its parent and the other surrounding villages. It probably owes its origin to the ford on the old course of the Nene, where the road between Ely and Wisbech crossed the river. However the actual early settlement seems to have been concentrated somewhat to the south, around St Wendreda's church.

It is thought likely that the existing course of the Nene was constructed during the late Saxon period, possibly in the tenth century. Documentary references to March suggest it was an important fishing centre with valuable land of financial interest to the abbeys of Ely and Bury St Edmunds. Various charters between AD 955 and 1010 refer to exchanges and leases of fisheries at Wimblington and Stonea (Hart 1966). The bridge has existed in its present location since at least 1544, and in the reign of Elizabeth I, March was a minor port. This activity may have provided the focus for the later northwards expansion of March. Since the introduction of the railway, this expansion has continued apace.

In 1563, the population was around 1000, and this had risen to about 5,600 in 1861. By 1891, March had outstripped Whittlesey, and Ely also by 1911. In 1951 the population stood at 12,993.

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 subjected to trench evaluation.

Machine excavation was carried out under constant archaeological supervision with a wheeled JCB-type excavator using a 1.5m wide 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.

Site conditions were mostly dry.

5 Results

The overburden consisted of a dark brownish grey clayey silt topsoil (context 1) which varied in depth from 0.40m to 0.23m and a dark yellowish brown sandy silty clay subsoil (2) which was 0.46m to 0.17m deep across the site.

5.1 Trench 1

Trench 1 was 13.95m long and varied in depth between 0.76m and 0.83m. It was located on an east-west alignment in the northern part of the development area (Fig 2).

Two possible modern/ post-medieval pits or postholes (6 and 4) were identified in the eastern part of the site. Pit 4 which ran into the edge of the excavation measured 1.01m wide and 0.64m deep. This pit was filled by a dark brownish grey clayey silt (3) that produced no artefacts. To the west of pit 4 was a second pit (6) measuring 0.78m wide and 0.50m deep and filled by a dark brownish grey clayey silt (5). An unexcavated modern posthole was identified in the western part of the trench. All three features were recorded as cutting through the lower topsoil layer (2).

5.2 Trench 2

Trench 2 was 9m long and varied in depth between 0.86m and 0.94m. It was located on a north-south alignment in the eastern part of the development area (Fig2).

In the northern end of the trench an east-west post-medieval boundary ditch (**12**) was identified. The ditch measured 1.7m wide and 0.85m deep and was recorded again as ditch **23** in trench 3 (see below). It contained a sequence of three fills 11, 10 and 9. The primary fill 11 was 0.25m deep and consisted of a mid greyish brown sandy silt. The secondary fill 10 was a mid yellowish brown sandy silt which produced no artefacts. The upper fill 9 was a dark yellowish brown clayey silt 0.35m thick. 19th century pottery sherds were recovered from fills 10 and 11.

Immediately to the north side of ditch **12** was a modern feature (a machine-cut trench) that contained metal fencing sheets (14). In the southern end of the trench was a large quarry pit over 4m in width. The quarry had two fills a mixed yellow greyish brown clay silt (15) which contained brick and 19th century (post-1820) pottery and a dark brown grey sandy silt (16) which contained pottery and brick of the same date.

5.3 Trench 3

Trench 2 was 5.7m long and varied in depth between 0.86m and 0.94m. It was located on a north-south alignment in the centre of the development area (Fig2)

A section was excavated across an east-west post-medieval property boundary ditch (s/a ditch **12** in Trench 2) which may have had an associated hedgeline. The ditch was V-shaped and measured 0.80m wide and 1.03m deep and contained the same three-fill sequence as recorded in Trench 2 (fills 22, 21 and 20). 19th century pottery was recovered from the upper fill 20.

In the northern end of the trench was a modern pit, clearly cut from topsoil level, and containing large quantities of relatively fresh animal remains, principally sheep.

6 Discussion

The most notable observation from the evaluation was the presence of an east-west aligned post-medieval boundary ditch and possible hedge line recorded in Trenches 2 and 3. The small quantities of material recovered from the feature indicates a boundary at some distance from direct habitation which had gone out of use by the early-mid 19th century. This interpretation is supported by the cartographic evidence from the late 19th and early 20th centuries (OS maps 1888 and 1927) that shows the boundaries of the site as they appear today, with no ditch through its centre.

All of the remaining features encountered in the three trenches were of 20th century origin.

7 Conclusions

The results show an absence of prehistoric, Roman, Saxon and medieval remains or artefacts in the development area, perhaps surprisingly considering the proximity of Iron Age and Roman settlement in the vicinity and the location of the site in relation to the High St.

In uncovering a post-medieval ditch and quarrying the evaluation has made a limited, though useful contribution to current knowledge of the development of post-medieval March.

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

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Chris Campbell and Exchange Limited who commissioned and funded the archaeological work. The project was managed by Richard Mortimer and the graphics for the report were produced by Crane Begg.

The brief for archaeological works was written by Eliza Gore who visited the site and monitored the watching brief/evaluation/excavation.

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- | | | |
|--------------------------|------|--|
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Appendix 1: Context List

Context	Category	Trench	Feature Type	Width (metres)	Depth (metres)	Description
1	Layer	1,2 and 3	Topsoil		0.40	Dark brownish grey clayey silt
2	Layer	1,2 and 3	Subsoil		0.47	Dark yellowish brown sandy silt
3	Fill	1	Pit	1.01	0.64	Dark brownish grey clayey silt
4	Cut	1	Pit	1.01	0.64	Concave sides with flat base
5	Fill	1	Pit	0.78	0.50	Dark brownish grey clayey silt
6	Cut	1	Pit	0.78	0.50	Concave sides with flat base
7	Fill	1	Pit	0.50		Modern - unexcavated
8	Cut	1	Pit	0.50		Modern - unexcavated
9	Fill	2	Ditch	1.50	0.35	Dark yellowish clayey sandy silt
10	Fill	2	Ditch	1.20	0.25	mid yellowish brown sandy silt
11	Fill	2	Ditch	1.10	0.25	
12	Cut	2	Ditch	1.90	0.85	
13	Fill	2	Ditch	0.40	0.10	
14	Cut	2	Ditch	0.40	0.10	
15	Fill	2	Quarry Pit	1.50		Unexcavated
16	Fill	2	Quarry Pit	1.50		Unexcavated
17	Cut	2	Quarry Pit	1.50		Unexcavated
18	Fill	2	Posthole			Modern - Unexcavated
19	Cut	2	Posthole			Modern - Unexcavated
20	Fill	3	Ditch	2.20m	0.50	Dark yellowish brown clayey sandy silt
21	Fill	3	Ditch	1.20	0.30m	Mid yellowish brown sandy silt
22	Fill	3	Ditch	0.70	0.23	Mid greyish brown sandy silt
23	Cut	3	Ditch	2.20	1.03	V shaped steep sides
24	Fill	3	Ditch	0.60	0.50	Dark grey brown silty clay
25	Cut	3	Ditch	0.60	0.50	Concave sides

Appendix 2: Post-Medieval pottery




Spot dating by Alasdair Brooks

Context	Feature	Description	Qty	Context Date Range
10	Ditch	pearlware sherd and creamware sherd	2	1780-c.1830
11	Ditch	black-glazed refined red bodied earthenware	2	19 th century
15	Quarry	wire-cut whiteware plate base with willow pattern transfer print	2	1820-c 1840
16	Quarry	pearlware and whiteware	3	post 1820
20	Ditch	redware sherds	3	18th-19th centuries
		Total	11	


A small domestic assemblage was recovered derived from a quarry pit and two sections through a boundary ditch.

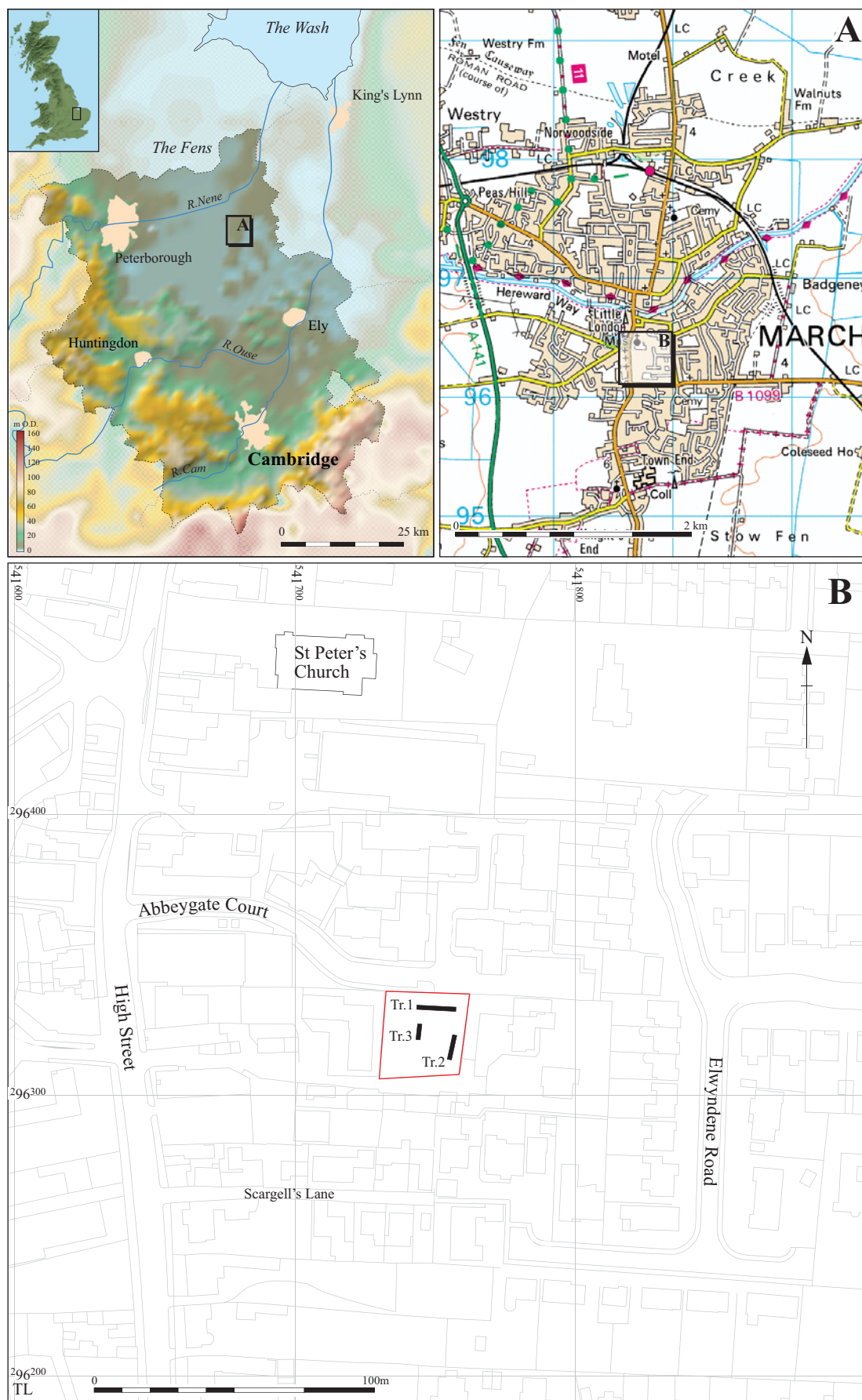
Drawing Conventions

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	



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

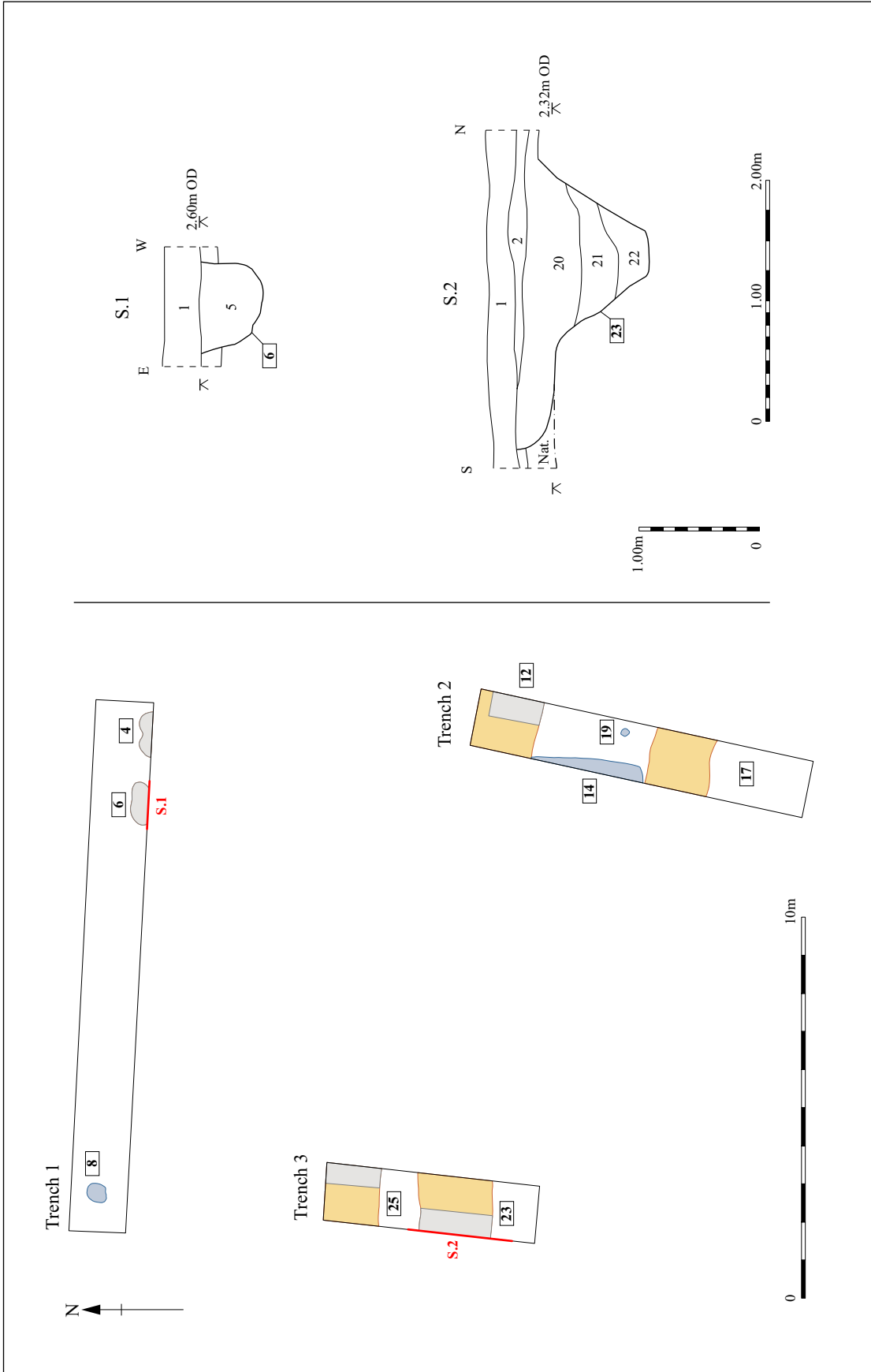
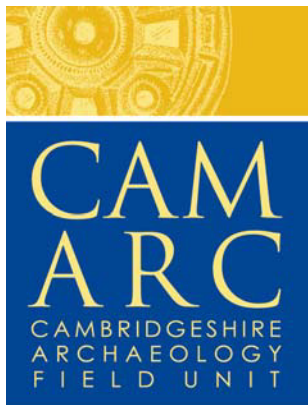


Figure 2: Trench plans and sections



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