

Land west of 15 Queen St., Whittlesey, Cambridgeshire

June 2008

CAM ARC Report Number 1027

**Land west of 15 Queen St.,
Whittlesey, Cambridgeshire.**

Evaluation Report

Jonathan House BA

With contributions by Chris Faine MA MSc, Carole Fletcher BA HND AIFA, Rachel Fosberry HNC (Cert Ed) AEA and Ross Lilley BA.

Site Code: WHS QUS 08

CHER Event Number: 2911 Date of works: May 2008

Grid Ref: TL 2691 9716

Status	Draft		
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Authorised By	R Mortimer		

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PROJECT DETAILS				
Project name	Land west of 15 Queen St., Whittlesey, Cambs.			
Short description	A Total of 8 features were Identified 3 large pits and 5 smaller pits. The archaeology was consistent with the activities in the rear plots of buildings of medieval date. There was an earlier undated phase of pit features, with later medieval quarrying activity.			
Project dates	Start	06/05/08	End	09/05/08
Previous work			Future work	
Associated project reference codes	WHS QUS 08 CHER ECB 2911			
Type of project	Evaluation, Sample Trench			
Site status	None			
Current land use (list all that apply)	Waste land			
Planned development	Residential Urban			
Monument types / period (list all that apply)	Gravel Pits, other Pits			
Significant finds: Artefact type / period (list all that apply)	None			
PROJECT LOCATION				
County	Cambridgeshire	Parish	Whittlesey	
HER for region	Cambridgeshire			
Site address (including postcode)	Land west of 15 Queen St., Whittlesey, Cambs. PE7 1BD			
Study area (sq.m or ha)	264 sq. m			
National grid reference	TL 2691 9716			
Height OD	Min OD	6.45m	Max OD	6.5m
PROJECT ORIGINATORS				
Organisation	CAM ARC			
Project brief originator	Eliza Gore			
Project design originator	Richard Mortimer			
Director/supervisor	Jonathan House			
Project manager	Richard Mortimer			
Sponsor or funding body	PDG Architects			
ARCHIVES	Location and accession number		Content (e.g. pottery, animal bone, database, context sheets etc)	
Physical	WHS QUS08			
Paper	WHS QUS08			
Digital	WHS QUS08			
BIBLIOGRAPHY				
Full title	Land west of 15 Queen St., Whittlesey. Cambridgeshire			
Author(s)	Jonathan House			
Report number	1027			
Series title and volume				
Page numbers				
Date	2008			

Summary

A Total of 8 archaeological features were Identified within the single excavated trench; 3 large pits and 5 smaller pits. The archaeology was consistent with the kind of activities expected towards the rear plots of buildings of medieval date. There was an earlier undated phase of pit features, with later medieval quarrying activity, however the majority of the finds were domestic in nature and mostly residual.

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1 Introduction

This archaeological evaluation was undertaken in accordance with a Brief issued by Eliza Gore of the Cambridgeshire Archaeology, Planning and Countryside Advice team (CAPCA; Planning Application F/YR06/1268/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 Oxford Clay at a height of between 6.00m and 7.00m AOD. The site is situated on the south-facing side of Whittlesey Island, sloping gently down to the watercourse, the Kings Dike.

3 Archaeological and Historical Background

Whittlesey sits on a large gravel-capped island of high ground in the fens immediately east of the 'mainland' at Peterborough and straddles the Romano-British (or Romanised) 'Fen Causeway' route across the fens from Peterborough to March and on to Norfolk. It has been extensively settled and exploited, particularly in the Bronze Age, Iron Age and Romano-British periods, and large areas of ritual and settlement archaeology of these periods have been excavated along the western fringes of the island prior to gravel and clay extraction. However, little is known of the archaeology of Whittlesey itself as the town centre has seen little systematic archaeological fieldwork.

Medieval activity is likely to have been centred on the area of the current town centre – large quantities of medieval pottery and other finds have been uncovered here (HER 01963 and 11910). A medieval church and hospital are located 200m to the southeast of the site (HER 02928 and 02916) and Anglo-Saxon remains were recorded in excavations within this area in 2004 (ECB 1616; Fletcher 2004 and MCB 15935; Bamforth 2002).

The proposed development lies within the historic core of the town, close to the Market Cross (HER 02814 and SAM 32) and it is possible that Saxon and Medieval deposits and features/finds of a domestic and/or industrial nature could survive within the area.

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.

A tracked 360° digger with a 1.50m wide ditching bucket was used to cut a single 12m long trench, along the central east/west axis of the proposed building, under the constant supervision of an archaeologist. The trench was cut to the upper interface of archaeological features and represents a 7% sample of the total development area.

Exposed surfaces were cleaned by trowel and hoe as necessary in order to clarify located features and deposits. Trench spoil and 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.

Environmental samples were taken from targeted archaeological features and have been processed (Appendix 3).

Site conditions were sunny and very hot, causing exposed surfaces to dry out very quickly.

5 Results

5.1 Topsoil and Sub-soil

The topsoil and sub soil were removed by machine and are illustrated in section 7 (Fig 3). The average depth of topsoil was 0.48m. The subsoil was undated and had an average depth of 0.12m. The subsoil sealed two of the features (**115** and **118**) and may have sealed two more (**105** and **116**). The remainder of the features were cut from the top of the sub soil horizon. No datable evidence was recovered from the subsoil, however, it was truncated by later medieval features.

5.2 Undated Early Features

Four shallow features, clearly sealed by the subsoil 101, were recorded along the trench. Two (**115** and **118**) produced single fragments of animal bone but no datable material was recovered from any of the features. The fills were generally an orange/yellowish brown sandy silt.

Feature **115** was seen at the east end of the trench, and was a shallow pit, width 0.78m, depth 0.19m.

At the centre of the south side of the trench the partially exposed pit **118** was seen. It was at least 1.5m in width and 0.35m in depth; the majority of the feature extended beyond the trench.

Two further pits (**105** and **116**) were recorded near the centre of the trench, with pit **105** truncating **116**. Pit **105** was 1m wide and 0.20m deep, while **116** was 0.55m wide and 0.10m deep. Feature **105** had 2 fills (**106** and **107**), **106** consisted of re-deposited natural silty sand, and **107** contained an unidentified bone fragment.

5.3 Medieval

The three larger pit features identified (**103**, **110**, and **112**) were of a similar character with dark, single backfills and while none were fully seen in plan, they appeared to have been sub-rectangular. Feature **110** lay at the eastern end of the trench, with **103** truncating **112** at the west.

Pit **103** had a width of 1.78m and depth of 0.55m, the full length was not seen in the trench, with the visible dimension being at least 1.60m. The pottery assemblage, at 11 sherds (weighing 54g) the largest from the site, was comprised of residual Roman shelly wares and local medieval wares, with a single sherd of earlier Stamford ware. The assemblage has a collective date range of 850 to 1350 AD. The base of the feature also contained an Iron hook.

Pit **110** was also only partially seen, 1.10m into the east end of the trench, and its size in plan is unknown; the depth, however, was 0.95m. Dating is uncertain, of the two sherds recovered, one was an abraded piece of Ely ware (1200 to 1400 AD), and the second a Bourne D type with a 1450-1650 date range.

Pit **112** was also only partially seen, both the depth (0.74m) and the width (1.50m) would not be near the full extent, however in terms of the characteristics of the cut, it could be viewed as similar to that of **110**. No datable finds were recovered but the feature was truncated by pit 103.

Feature **108** was a small, circular pit, 0.57m in depth and 0.66m in width. It contained large parts of a single, disarticulated sheep, along with elements of a second sheep and small numbers of cattle bone. The pottery assemblage consisted of two sherds, an abraded sherd of residual Roman, and a post-1350 AD sherd. Environmental analysis of this feature produced charred cereal remains and other dietary refuse in the form of animal bone fragments.

6 Discussion

The earlier phase of features are difficult to characterise or interpret due to their lack of finds and dating evidence. They are a collection of small pits sealed by the subsoil. Their shape, and the intermittent finds, show that the features were probably archaeological rather than of natural origin and they are at the very least spatially and stratigraphically linked. As the features cutting the subsoil were at the earliest later medieval, the subsoil layer must therefore be somewhat earlier. It may have been formed over an extended period of time, however, as some of the earlier features appear to have been truncated it is perhaps most likely to represent an earlier plough soil. Extensive cultivation of available land within and around villages reached a peak during the high medieval period, and it may be assumed that the subsoil was formed then. It could, however, have been formed by an earlier phase of ploughing, possibly Roman, as some residual Roman pottery was retrieved. Whatever the date of the subsoil, the pits will predate it.

The larger pit features **110** and **112** can most likely be attributed to gravel quarrying, due to the surrounding geology, their dimensions, and the apparent backfilling with redeposited topsoil material.

Feature **103** seen in *figure 3*, section 2, with a neat squared cut, could suggest that the feature had some function or purpose other than gravel extraction. Although different in form **103** had a similar backfill of re-deposited topsoil containing residual finds material and may simply be a different phase of gravel extraction, with the difference in form, (shallower and flat based) deriving from respecting the water level at the time.

7 Conclusions

The features sealed by the subsoil are difficult to interpret, and can only be seen as an earlier phase of use of the site.

Activities to the back of medieval street-front properties were thought to be likely in this location, and this appears to have been confirmed by the evaluation results. No clearly structural elements were recorded

that would suggest direct on-site occupation and the level of artefacts recovered, particularly pottery, was very low, again suggesting that the site was removed from direct occupation.

The infilling of pit **108**, however, can be attributed to domestic waste with relative certainty, containing directly deposited elements of slaughtered animals and an assemblage of charred cereal grains.

The possible quarry features (**112**, **110**, **103**) can be presumed to be relatively contemporaneous, however the features were filled with re-deposited topsoil containing residual finds thus making dating for both the digging and the infilling of the features extremely unreliable, and giving no further clue as to function or purpose other than that of quarrying. They are presumed here to date to between the 14th and 16th centuries. Gravel quarries could be expected in medieval backplots, and would also be expected to be backfilled with topsoil, from either the next quarry pit or material gathered from nearby. This appears to be the case with these features.

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

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank PDG Architects for commissioning and David Lutkin for funding the archaeological work. The project was managed by Richard Mortimer and site staff were the author and Rachelle Wood.

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

Appendix 1 Pottery

(By Carole Fletcher, with Ross Lilley)

The following is a brief summary of the pottery recovered from the evaluation, organised by context, and then in chronological order within each context.

Feature 103 One sherd (7g) of a Roman sandy grey ware dating from the mid-1st to the 4th century AD. – All 1st and 4th and 12th etceteras must be shown as 1st and 4th and 12th

One sherd (6g) of an unknown ware, probably Roman, 1st to 4th century AD

One sherd (4g) of Stamford ware, probably from a jug, 850 to 1050 AD.

Two St. Neots shelly ware jug sherds (5g), 850 to 1150 AD.

One sherd (6g) of Thetford ware, 900 to 1200 AD.

Three sherds (10g) of early Medieval type ware (EMW), 1050 to 1200 AD

One (7g) sherd of unknown shelly ware, 1150 to 1350 AD.

One sherd (14g) of Medieval Ely ware (MEL), probably from the base of a jug, 1200 to 1350 AD.

Feature 108 One sherd (13g) of an unknown undated material.

One sherd (7g) of a wheel-thrown and hard-fired late Medieval sandy ware, post-1350 AD.

Feature 110 One sherd (8g) of Ely-type ware (MEL), probably from the base of a bowl, 1200 to 1400 AD.

One sherd (7g) of Bourne D ware (BOND) from a jug, between 1450 and 1650 AD.

Appendix 2: Faunal Remains

Chris Faine

Little faunal material was recovered from the Queen Street, Whittlesey evaluation, with identifiable material recovered from 3 contexts dating from the late medieval period. The largest numbers of fragments were recovered from pit **108**. These consisted of the remains of two sheep along with scattered cattle elements. The majority of the sheep remains come from a single animal around 1 year of age (the remains of the second animal are limited to portions of radius only). The elements from the first animal consist of jaw, mandible and vertebral fragments along with intact front and hind limbs. Whilst some of these elements (particularly the radii and scapulae), are broken this could be as much due to post-depositional factors as butchery.

Pit **110** contained a portion of scapula and maxilla from a pig around 2-2 1/2 years at death. Also recovered from this context were a single butchered cattle metacarpal and humerus from an unidentified small bird. A single portion of butchered cattle radius was recovered from pit **103**.

The assemblage is extremely small and most likely represents general settlement debris rather than any specific husbandry practices.

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Davis, S.J.M. 1992. A rapid method of recording information about mammal bones from archaeological sites. London: English Heritage AML Report 19/92.

Grant, A. The use of tooth wear as a guide to the age of domestic ungulates. In: Wilson, R., Grigson, C. and Payne, S. (eds) *Ageing and sexing animal bones from archaeological sites*, pp. 91-108. BAR British Series 109. Oxford.

Appendix 3 Environmental

1 Introduction and Methods

Three bulk samples were taken from two fifteenth-century features within the evaluated areas of the site in order to assess the quality of preservation of plant remains and their potential to provide useful data as part of further archaeological investigations. Samples 1 and 3 were taken from pit [108] and Sample 2 was taken from Quarry pit [110]

Ten litres of each sample were processed by tank flotation for the recovery of charred plant remains, dating evidence and any other artefactual evidence that might be present. The flot was collected in a 0.5mm nylon mesh and the residue was washed through a 1mm sieve. Both flot and residue were allowed to air dry. The dried residue was passed through 5mm and 2mm sieves and a magnet was dragged through each resulting fraction prior to sorting for artefacts. Any artefacts present were noted and reintegrated with the hand-excavated finds. The flot was examined under a binocular microscope at x16 magnification.

2 Results

Preservation is by charring and is generally poor. All three samples contain fragments of animal bones some of which are burnt. Sample 1 from pit **108**, contains a single fragment of pottery. Charred plant remains include cereal grains (predominantly wheat (*Triticum* sp.) but with occasional grains of barley (*Hordeum* sp.) and a single oat (*Avena sativa*)), occasional weed seeds and sparse charcoal fragments. Sample 2 from pit **110**, contains a single nutlet of Saw sedge(*Cladium mariscus*).

3 Discussion

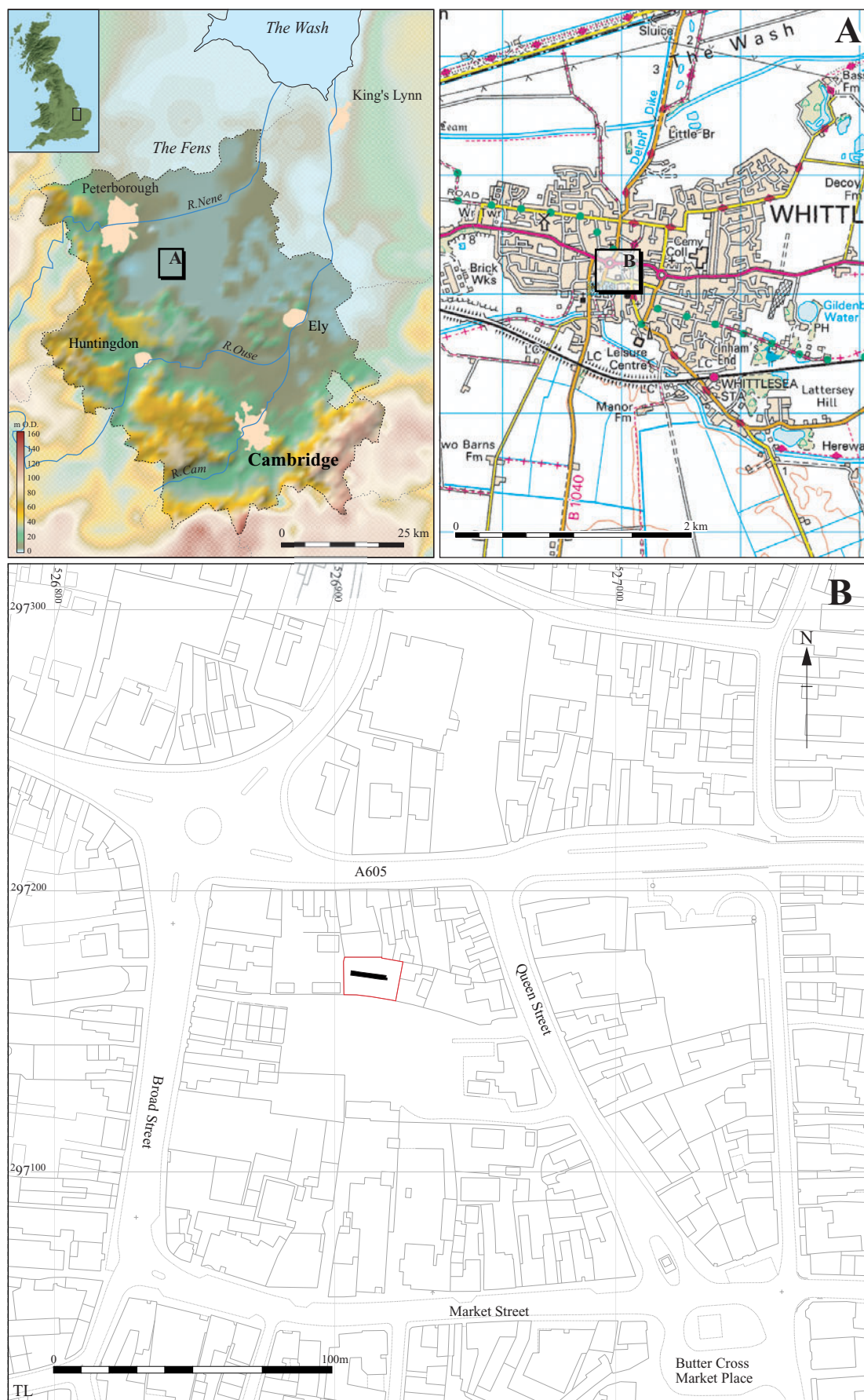
The plant remains recovered from this small assemblage are dominated by crop plants along with other dietary refuse in the form of animal bones.

4 Conclusions and Recommendations

From the three samples examined it appears that there is good potential for further archaeobotanical study. If further excavations are planned for this area, it is recommended that a schedule for environmental sampling should be appended to the updated project design. By extensive sampling the nature of cereal waste and weed assemblages should provide an indication of whether these cereals were locally grown or imported.

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- | | | |
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| Unknown. | Date Accessed
2/6/08 | http://camweb0/corpinfo/mapping/index.cfm |



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

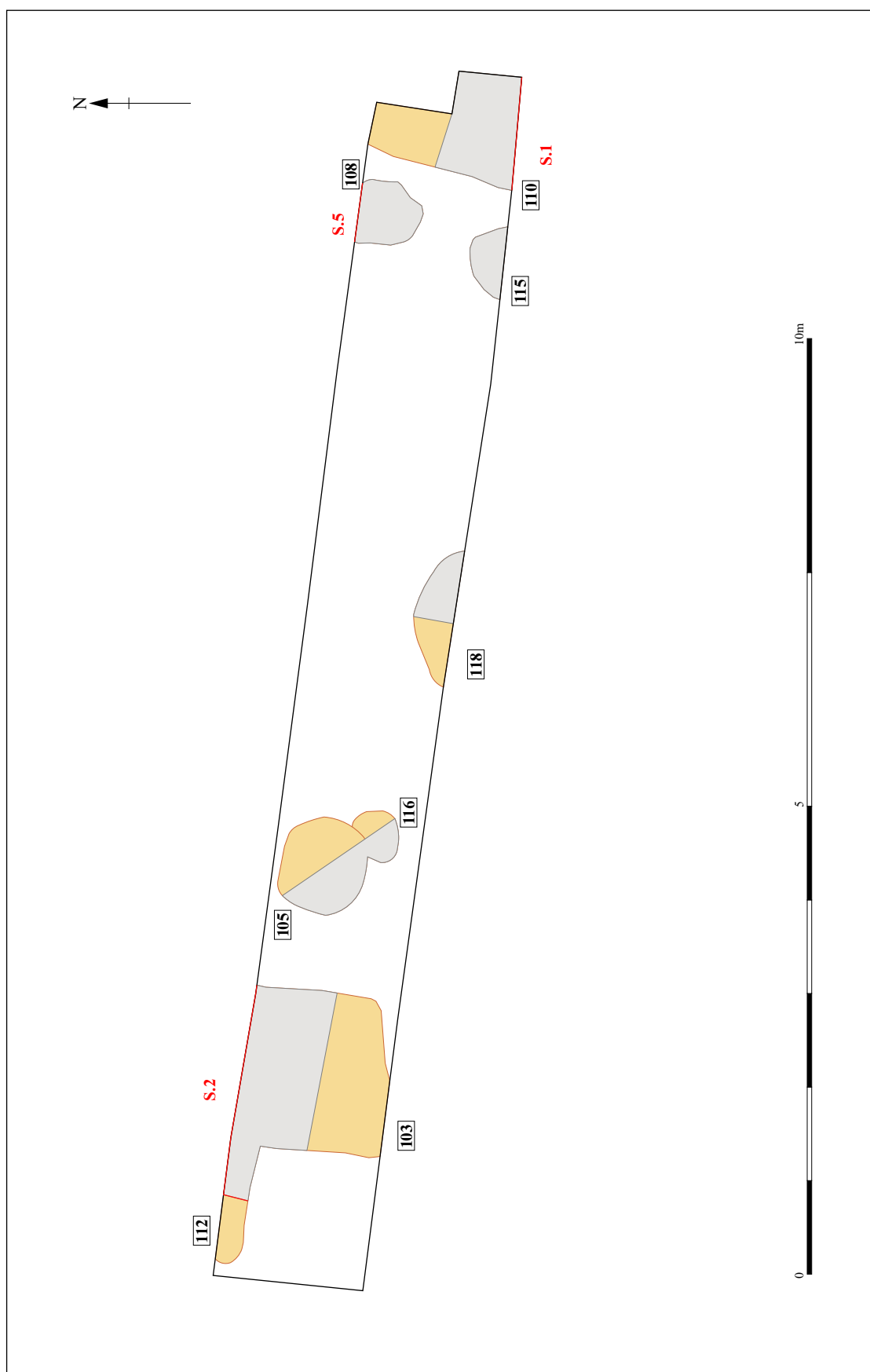


Figure 2: Trench plan

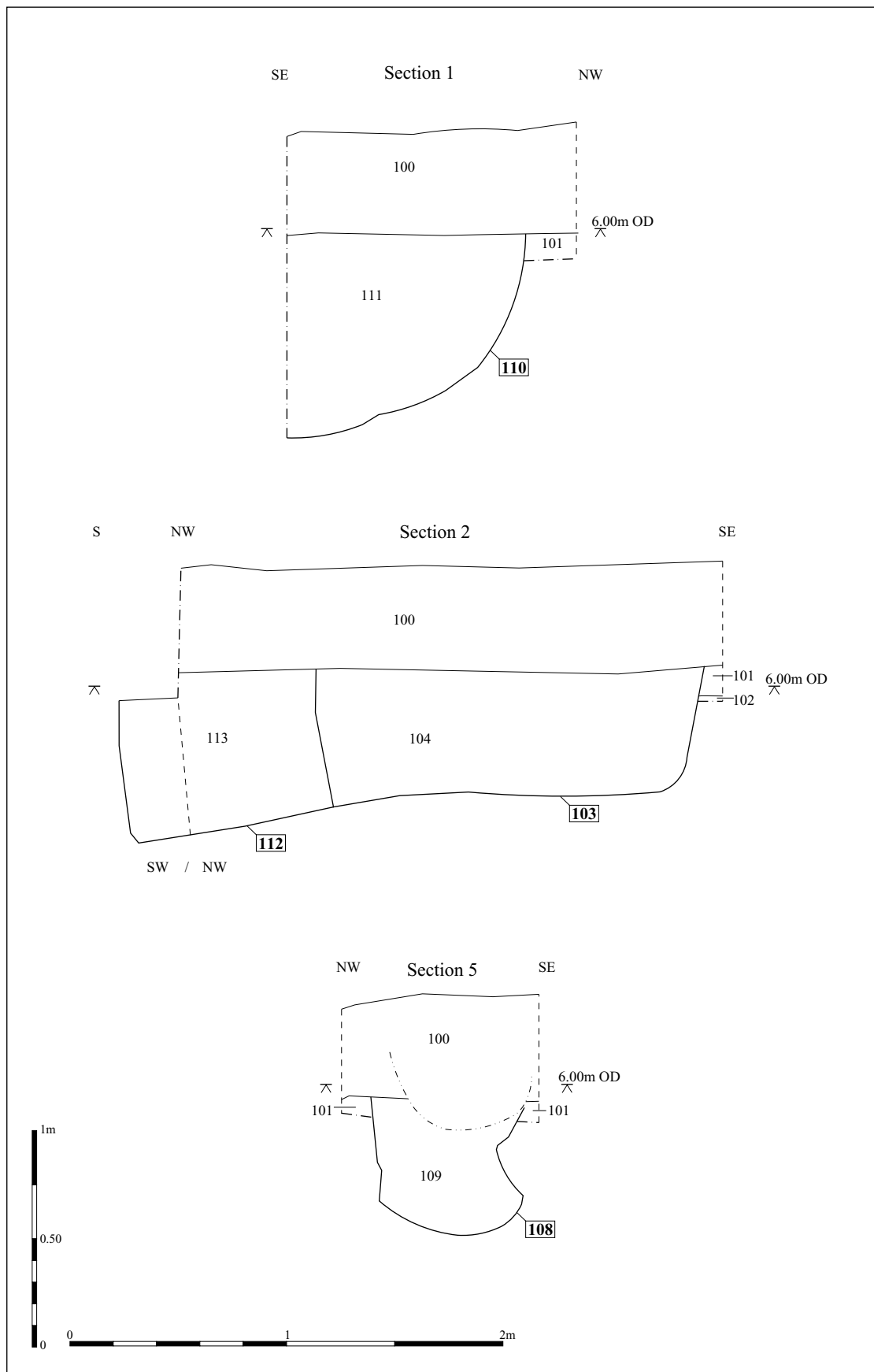


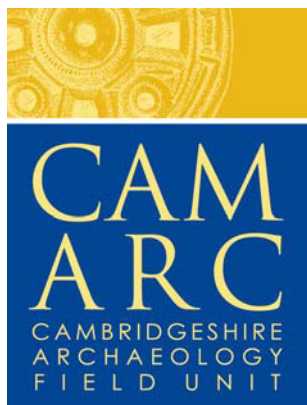
Figure 3: Sections



Plate1: South facing section through Pit 103



Plate 2: South facing section through Pit 108



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