



Northamptonshire Archaeology

Archaeological evaluation of land east of White Walls, Coates, Cambridgeshire January 2011



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Northamptonshire
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Report 11/37

February 2011



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SITE NAME: White Walls, Coates, Cambridgeshire

NATIONAL GRID REF: NGR TL 317 978

CLIENT: CgMs Consulting Ltd

CONTRACTOR: Northamptonshire Archaeology
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QUALITY CONTROL

	Print name	Signed	Date
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Verified by	Ian Meadows		
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(Front cover: General view of site)

(Back cover: General view of site with open trenches)

OASIS REPORT FORM

PROJECT DETAILS		
Project title	Archaeological evaluation of land east White Walls, Coates, Cambridgeshire	
Short description	In January 2011, an archaeological trial trench evaluation was carried out by Northamptonshire Archaeology, on behalf of CgMs Consulting Ltd on land to the east of White Walls, Coates, Cambridgeshire. An undated ditch was at the north-east of the development area. Middle Iron Age pottery was recovered from a colluvium deposit on the eastern edge of the gravels. The excavation identified the possible former fen edge of Coates Island on the east of the development area.	
Project type	Trial trench evaluation	
Previous work	Geophysical Survey	
Current land use	Arable	
Future work	Unknown	
Monument type and period		
Significant finds	Iron Age pottery	
PROJECT LOCATION		
County	Cambridgeshire	
Site address	White Wall, Coates	
Easting Northing	TL 317 978	
Area (sq m/ha)	2 hectares	
Height aOD	1mAOD	
PROJECT CREATORS		
Organisation	Northamptonshire Archaeology (NA)	
Project brief originator	Cambridgeshire County Council	
Project Design originator	CgMs Ltd	
Director/Supervisor	Jason Clarke (NA)	
Project Manager	Ian Meadows(NA) and Mike Dawson (CgMs)	
Sponsor or funding body	PJ Thory Ltd	
PROJECT DATE		
Start date	28 January 2011	
End date	31 January 2011	
ARCHIVES	Location	Contents
Physical		Pottery
Paper		Site records (1 archive box)
Digital		Client report PDF. Survey Data, Photographs
BIBLIOGRAPHY		
Title	Archaeological evaluation of land east of White Walls, Coates, Cambridgeshire January 2011	
Serial title & volume	11/37	
Author(s)	Jason Clarke	
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Contents

	Abstract	
1	INTRODUCTION	1
2	BACKGROUND	1
	2.1 Topography	1
	2.2 Geology by Steve Critchley	1
	2.3 Historical and archaeological background	2
3	METHODOLOGY	3
4	OBJECTIVES	3
5	THE EXCAVATED EVIDENCE	4
	5.1 General stratigraphy	4
	5.2 The deposits in Trenches 2, 3 and 7	4
6	THE FINDS AND ENVIRONMENTAL EVIDENCE	5
	6.1 Iron Age pottery by Andy Chapman	5
	6.2 Artefact recovery from soil samples	5
	6.3 Molluscs from (305), Ditch [305] by Karen Deighton	5
7	DISCUSSION	5
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	6
	APPENDIX: CONTEXT INDEX	

Figures

Fig 1: Site location

Fig 2: Trench locations and the margin between the March Gravels and the Oxford Clay

Fig 3: Trenches 2 and 3

Fig 4: Sections showing peat layer and undated gully [306]

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRIAL TRENCH EVALUATION OF LAND EAST OF WHITE
WALLS, COATES, CAMBRIDGESHIRE
JANUARY 2011**

Abstract

In January 2011, an archaeological trial trench evaluation was carried out by Northamptonshire Archaeology, on behalf of CgMs Consulting Ltd, on land to the east of White Walls, Coates, Cambridgeshire. An undated ditch was at the north-east of the development area. Middle Iron Age pottery was recovered from a colluvium deposit on the eastern edge of the gravels. The excavation identified the possible former fen edge of Coates Island on the east of the development area.

1 INTRODUCTION

In January 2011, an archaeological trial trench evaluation was carried out by Northamptonshire Archaeology (NA) on land east of White Walls, Coates, Cambridgeshire (NGR: SP 319 978; Fig 1). The work was commissioned by CgMs Consulting Ltd on behalf of PJ Thory Ltd, and was undertaken to inform a forthcoming planning application for the proposed expansion of the present reprocessing depot of PJ Thory Ltd.

The scope of works was outlined and detailed in the written scheme of investigation prepared by Northamptonshire Archaeology (NA 2011). The objectives of the evaluation were to determine the presence of any archaeological features or deposits within the application area and to date and characterise their extent, depth of burial and state of preservation.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 Topography

Coates lies on the A605 to the east of Whittlesey, Cambridgeshire. The site comprises an arable field off Eldernell Lane, to the north-east of the village and to the immediate east of re-processing yards at White Walls, the premises of PJ Thory Ltd, a haulage specialist.

2.2 Geology by Steve Critchley

The geology of the site is straightforward and consists of a solid geology of the Upper Jurassic Oxford Clay Formation, Peterborough Member overlain by Pleistocene sands and gravels belonging to the March Gravels Formation and peats of the Nordelph Peat Formation.

The Oxford Clays when freshly exposed are seen to consist of dark bluey to dark brownish fossiliferous marine mudstones. The upper layers are, however, frequently weathered to grey-brown mottled clay with locally abundant bivalve fossils such as *Gryphaea* species. The latter beds were observed in most trenches and seen to be overlain by the March Gravels, whilst in the topographically lower trenches the gravels were observed to be overlain by remnants of the Nordelph Peat. (Radiocarbon dates for the peat vary from 1845 to 3250 BP)

Further to the east within Fenland the Nordelph Peat is underlain by the Barroway Drove Beds which are composed of soft grey clays and silty clays deposited in a salt

marsh environment. However, because of the presence of the Coates Fen Island the sequence of Pleistocene deposits have been topographically controlled with only the stratigraphically higher Nordelph Peat beds present overlying the older periglacially weathered March Gravels. A number of periglacial ground ice features were observed within the gravels with cryoturbation dominant with subsidiary thermal crack infills observed. These features relate to the permafrost conditions prevalent during the Late Pleistocene Devensian Glaciation.

Coates Island rises to around 6m above OD and is entirely underlain by Oxford Clay whilst the overlying cap of March Gravels, from borehole evidence, lie at about 2m OD. These coarse dark orangey-brown poorly sorted gravels consist of rounded to irregular clasts of limestone, flint, sandstones, ironstone and quartzite within a sandy matrix.

The presence of marine fossils within these gravels has led to them being considered by many 19th-century workers as having a marine origin. Baden Powell (1934) collected from these gravels a marine fauna of bivalves and gastropods indicative of a shallow intertidal estuarine environment. In 1991 Davey in his review of the Pleistocene geology of the Peterborough area describes the March Gravels as being "*characterised by a marine/estuarine molluscan fauna and comprises poorly bedded, sandy gravels and clayey, pebbly sand with limestone and flint pebbles predominating.*" He goes on to suggest that they have "*a general compositional similarity*" to local river terrace gravels. However, Langford and Briant (2004) in their description of the Pleistocene history of the Fen basin examine the evidence for their origin and suggest that some of the deposits mapped as March Gravels are of fluvial origin. Indeed within the Ely district the gravels are noted by the British Geological Survey to be contiguous with river terrace gravels.

The Fenland embayment is considered by Langford and Briant (2004) to be "*an unlikely analogue for gravel deposition*" whilst Langford (1999) states that "*the deposits mapped as the March Gravels may have accumulated under different conditions at different times.*" The idea that these gravels were deposited purely by marine action is open to challenge on many grounds. The coarseness of the gravels, their geographical extent and topographical position would require a sustained high energy marine environment for their deposition in contrast to the intertidal estuarine environment indicated by their marine fossil content.

Despite the hangover of 19th-century opinions of the evidence it is likely that the March Gravels represent the remains of glacio-fluvial outwash/terrace gravels deposited at the end of the Wolstonian Glaciation and subsequently reworked by both marine and fluvial agencies during the subsequent eustatic sea level fluctuation of the late Pleistocene.

2.3 Historical and archaeological background

A Heritage Assessment undertaken by CgMs (Dawson 2010) concluded that there is slight potential for below ground archaeological evidence, particularly from the prehistoric period.

The wider archaeological background is considered in the brief (CCC 2010). The following is paraphrased from this document. Flint and stone tool scatters (eg MCB2210, 1857) and groups of plough-damaged burial mounds (MCB4597) of the Neolithic to earlier Bronze Age periods are known from the west and south of the plot, while later Bronze Age and Iron Age settlement, also found as ploughed up artefact scatters, has been recently investigated during the evaluation of a nearby

group of fields at Highfield Farm (eg MCBs17256-9). Evidence for Roman occupation and major engineering works dominates the historic environment record for this area. Clusters of evidence of both artefacts scatters on the field surfaces, cropmarked sites and, until recently, earthwork remains of major engineering schemes are known from the area. Principal among these is the Fen Causeway (MCB15033), located approximately 750m to the north of the development area. Fields to the immediate west of White Walls contain a wealth of ploughed Roman artefacts (eg MCB4617, 4567, 12569).

3 METHODOLOGY

Nine trial trenches were excavated in accordance with a trench plan prepared by CgMs Consulting and approved by Kasia Gdaniec (Senior Archaeologist, Planning and Countryside Advice, Cambridgeshire County Council) (Fig 2). The total area excavated was 600 m².

Trenches were positioned using a Leica system 1200 GPS. A 360° tracked mechanical excavator fitted with a 2m wide ditching bucket was used to remove overburden to archaeological levels or the natural substrate, whichever was encountered first. The trenches were cleaned sufficiently to enable the identification and definition of archaeological features.

A hand-drawn plan of all archaeological features was made at scale 1:50 or 1:100 and was related to the Ordnance Survey National Grid. Archaeological deposits were examined by hand excavation to determine their nature. Recording followed standard NA procedures as described in the *Fieldwork Manual* (NA 2006). Deposits were described on *pro-forma* sheets to include measured and descriptive details of the context, its relationships, interpretation and a checklist of associated finds. Context sheets were cross-referenced to scale plans, section drawings and photographs. Photography was with 35mm black and white film and colour slides, supplemented with digital images. Sections were drawn at scale 1:10 or 1:20, as appropriate and related to Ordnance Survey datum. Spoil heaps and features were scanned with a metal detector to maximise the recovery of metal objects.

All works were conducted in accordance with the Institute for Archaeologists' *Code of Conduct* (IfA 2010) and *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluation* (IfA 1994, revised 2008).

4 OBJECTIVES

The objective of the work was to gather information regarding the location, extent, nature and date of archaeological deposits/features within the site in order to appraise the impact of development proposals.

The specific aims were:

- To record and characterise below ground deposits and the archaeological topography of the site
- To create full and proper records of all observed archaeological material
- To collect artefactual and ecofactual material as appropriate
- To prepare a report/archive of the results of the archaeological work and any

consequent analytical work

- To take account of and inform local, regional and national research frameworks
- To further understand the history and development of human activity at the site and its immediate environs.

5 THE EXCAVATED EVIDENCE

5.1 General stratigraphy

The underlying geology was Oxford Clay overlain by March gravels. The Oxford clay was encountered in Trenches 1-3 and 6-8 between 0.60-0.80m below the modern ground surface. The March gravels were present in all trenches between 0.40m and 0.50m below the modern ground surface. Dark black Peat was encountered in Trenches 3, 7 and 8 and was between 0.40m and 0.50m below the modern surface (Fig 4, Section 1). Topsoil was dark black-brown silty clay mixed with modern fertilising material and was between 0.30m and 0.50m thick across the development area.

No features were found in Trenches 1, 2, 4-7, and 9.

The trench locations are shown in Figure 2 and an inventory of contexts from the trenches where archaeology was present is provided in the Appendix.

5.2 The deposits in Trenches 2, 3 and 7

Trench 2

Trench 2 measured 40m long and 2.0m wide and was aligned north-west to south-east (Figs 2 and 3). At the south of the trench were nine irregular-shaped loam-filled, non-anthropogenic features.

A full list of the natural features descriptions is be listed in the appendix. Due to the similar form of the natural features one shall be described below which is typical of all of them.

Natural feature [207]

At the south of the trench was natural feature [207], 0.50m wide and 0.05m deep. It had an undulating irregular profile and was filled with mid grey silty clay (206). There were no finds.

Trench 3

Trench 3 measured 45m long and 2.0m wide and was aligned north-east to south-west (Figs 2 and 3).

Ditch [306]

At the north of the trench was gully [306], aligned east to west. It measured 0.40m wide and 0.08m deep (Figs 3 and 4, section 3). It had a shallow U-shaped profile and was filled was mid grey silty clay (305). There were no finds.

Trench 6

Trench 6 measured 50m long and 2.0m wide and was aligned north-west to south-east (Fig 2). At the south-west end of the trench was silty colluvial subsoil that contained middle Iron Age pottery was recovered from.

Colluvium Deposit (605) (Fig 4)

At the south-eastern end of the trench the gravels were overlain by a 0.10m-0.15m thick layer of silty clay (Fig 4, section 2). Middle Iron Age pottery was recovered. The deposit was overlaid by Peat and overlying Oxford clay.

6 THE FINDS AND ENVIRONMENTAL EVIDENCE

6.1 Iron Age pottery by Andy Chapman

There are nine sherds, weighing 62g, of hand-built pottery from the colluvium deposit (604). The sherds are all from the base of a single vessel in a fabric containing sparse crushed shell and small calcareous pieces, of up to 2mm, and small rounded pieces of grey-black grog, up to 2mm. The core is grey and surfaces are brown, with some sooting of the base. The base is flat, c150mm diameter, and the lower body is plain and 9mm thick.

There are few diagnostic features, but a broad middle Iron Age date can be suggested.

6.2 Artefact recovery from soil samples

Three samples were collected by hand from colluvium deposit (604), Peat (302) and ditch fill (305). This material was processed and assessed to determine the presence, preservation and nature of artefacts.

The samples were processed using a modified siraf tank fitted with a 250micron mesh and flot sieve. The resultant flots and residues were dried, sorted with the aid of a stereoscopic microscope (10x magnification) and residues were scanned. No artefacts were present from any of the samples.

6.3 Molluscs from (305), Ditch [305] by Karen Deighton

Following standard processing, molluscs were examined using a stereo microscope (10x magnification) and identified with the aid of Glöer and Meier-Brook (2003). The specimens present were all freshwater taxa. *Bithynia tentaculata* was the predominant species and *Valvata* sp and *Planorbis planorbis* was also present. All taxa favour still or slow flowing water habitats.

7 DISCUSSION

The underlying geology was Oxford clay with an overlying cap of March gravels. The gravels were present throughout trenches 4, 5 and 9. It was also present in trenches in the north-west of Trench 1, south-west of Trench 2, south-west of Trench 3, and the west of trenches 6-8.

A single ditch was identified in the north-east of the development area. No dating evidence was recovered. The ditch was overlain by peat.

The natural features present in Trench 2 were all located on the gravels and appear to be the result of root action or tree holes, no finds were recovered from any of the non anthropogenic features.

At the east of the Trench 6, overlying Oxford clays and the edge of the gravels was a colluvial deposit derived from the gravels, contained middle Iron Age pottery and was overlain peat.

The evaluation appears to have identified the Fen edge of the Coates Island with a possible embayment at the north-east of the development area, where peat has formed. The gravels were thin where exposed in the same trench as the Oxford clay but were thicker as the ground level rose to the west and south-west. Evidence of habitation was limited to residual middle Iron Age pottery and a small shallow undated ditch located in the north-east, off the sand and gravels. Prior to the draining of the fens in the 17th century the development area would have been wet, on the margin of the very edge of the March gravels, the water table would always be high, especially in the winter, habitation would have been on dryer land a little way inland to the west.

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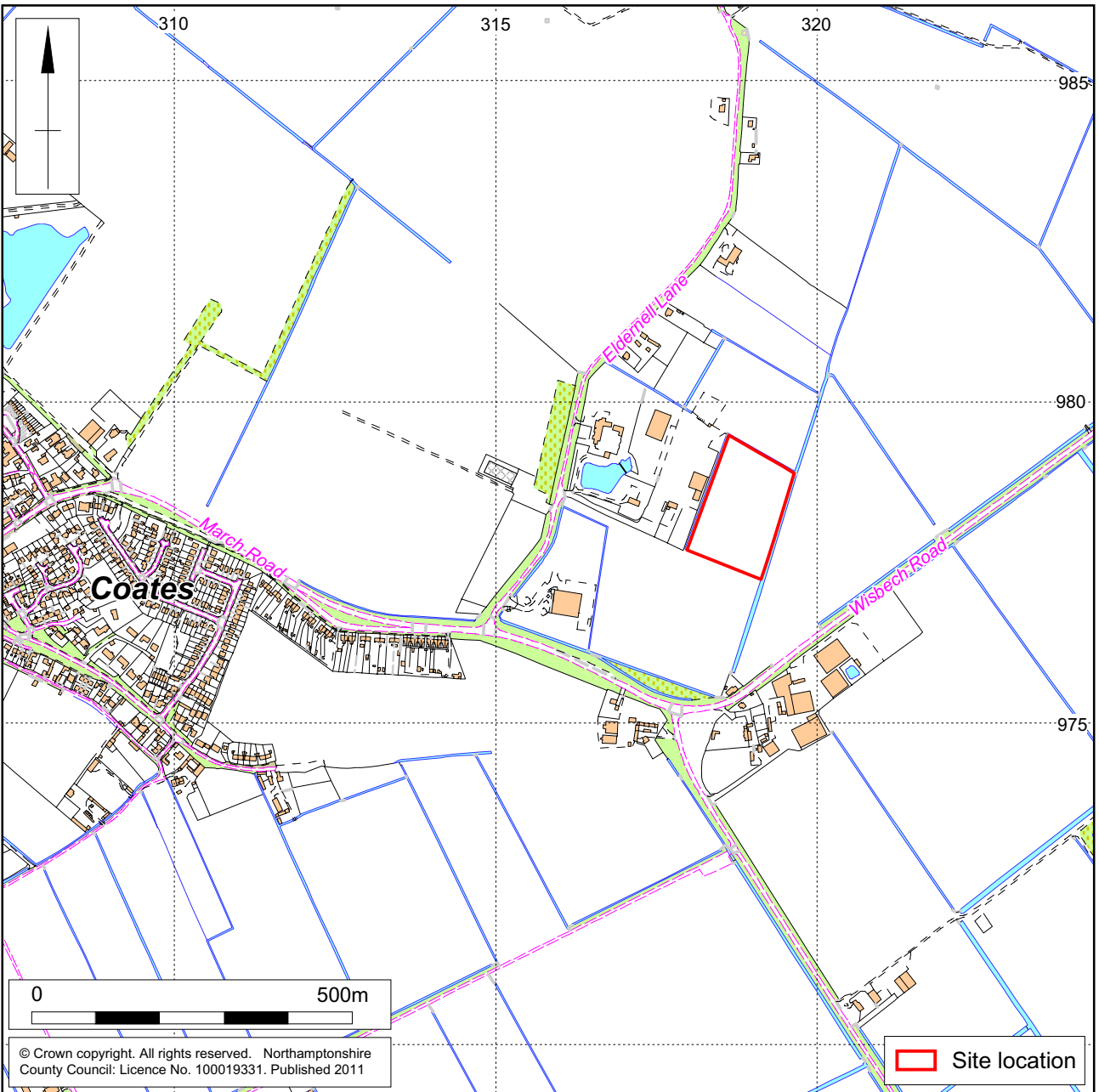
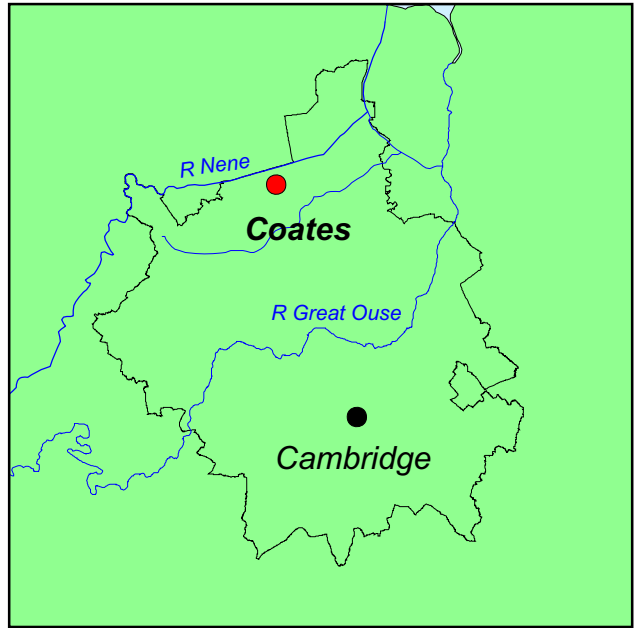
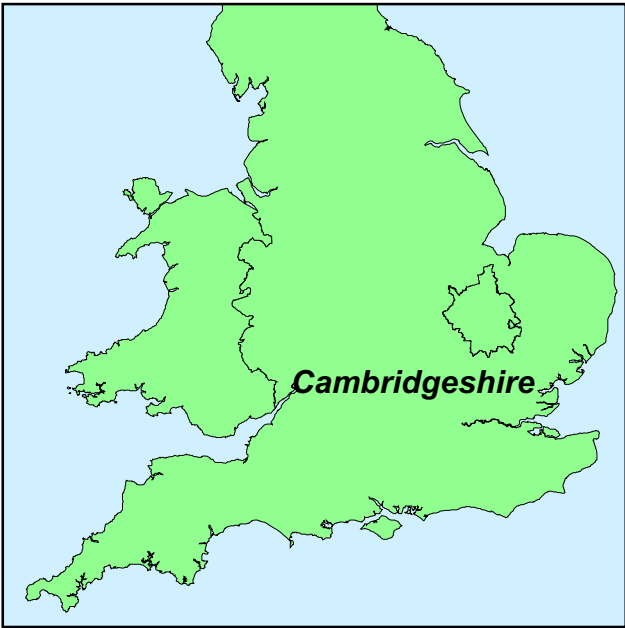
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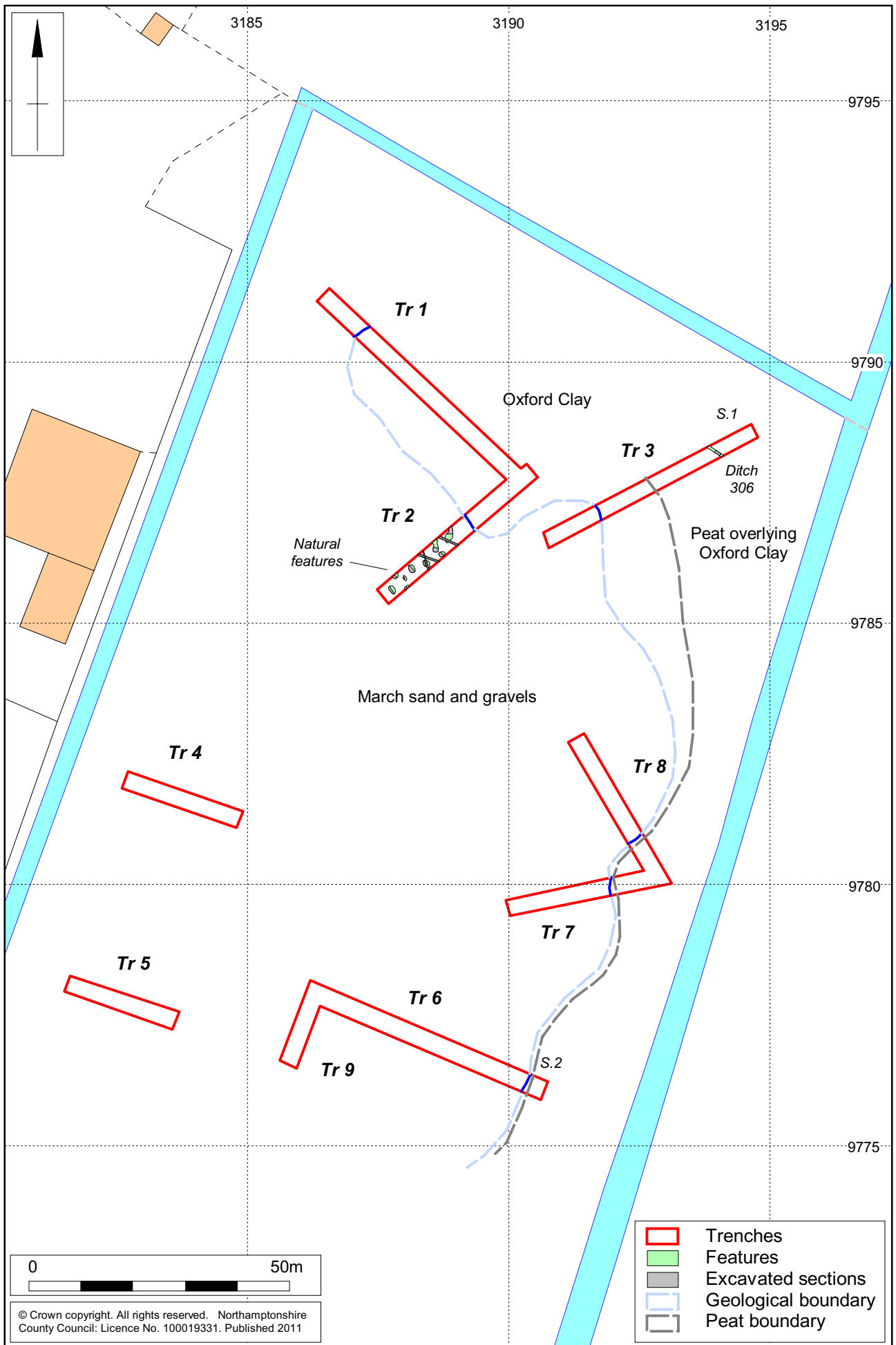
Websites

BGS 2009 <http://www.bgs.ac.uk/geoindex/home.html> British Geological Survey website



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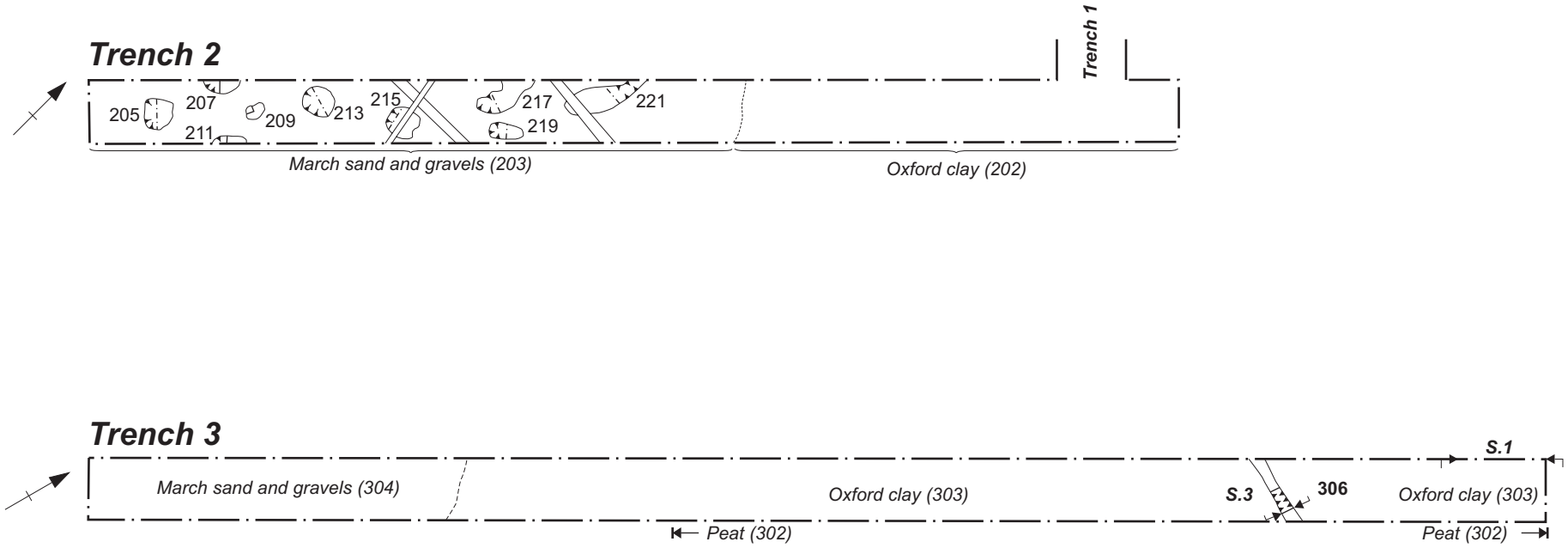
Site location Fig 1



Scale 1:1000

Trench locations and the margin between the March Gravels and Oxford Clay Fig 2

Scale 1:200



Trenches 2 and 3 Fig 3

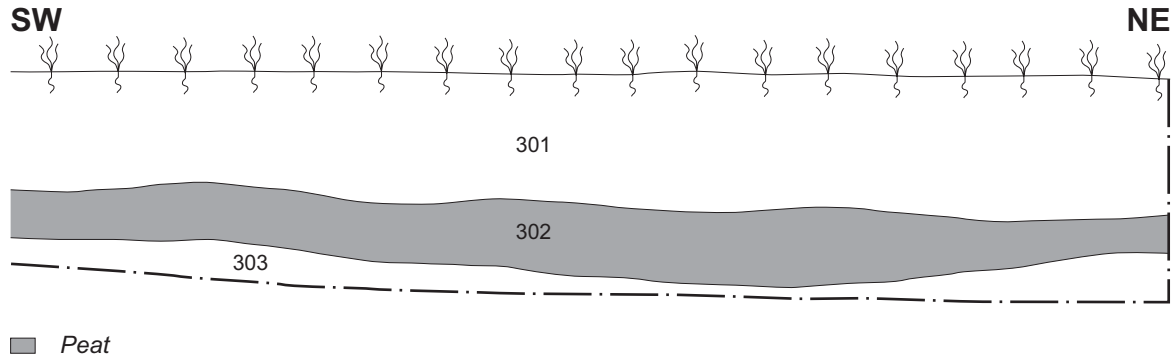


Scale 1:25 and 1:10

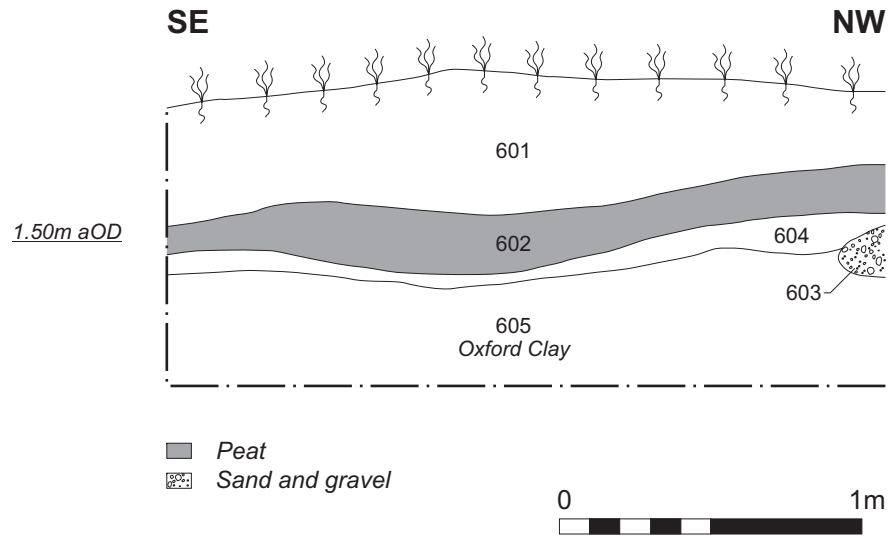
Sections showing peat layer and an undated gully [306]

Fig 4

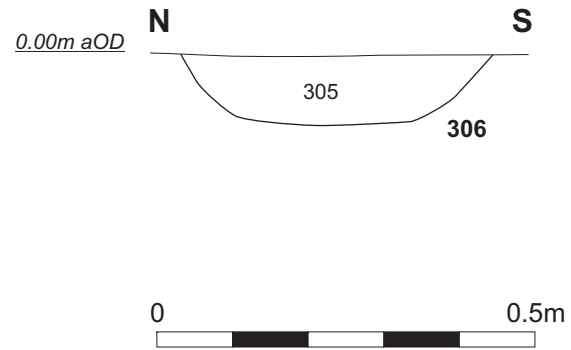
Section 1, Trench 3



Section 2, Trench 6



Section 3, Trench 3



APPENDIX: Context Index

Trench No	Length, width & alignment	NGR	Surface height	Depth & height of natural
1	50m x 2.0m NE to SW	531865/297914	1.60m aOD	0.50m, 1.10m aOD
Context	Context type Feature & type	Description	Dimensions	Artefacts/ Samples
101	Topsoil	Mid grey-brown silty clay	0.50m thick	
102	Natural	Mid brown-grey clay with thin gravel patches at the north-east end		

Trench No	Length, width & alignment	NGR	Surface height	Depth & height of natural
2	40m x 2.0m NW to SE	531877/297853	1.70m aOD	0.55m, 1.15m aOD
Context	Context type Feature & type	Description	Dimensions	Artefacts/ Samples
201	Topsoil	Dark grey-brown silty clay	0.55m thick	
202	Natural at the south-east of the trench	Light grey clay with silty patches		
203	Natural at the north-west end of the trench	Mid orange-brown sandy gravels		
204	Fill of 205	Mid grey silty clay		
205	Cut of natural feature	Irregular shaped	0.50m wide and 0.05m deep	
206	Fill of 207	Mid grey silty clay		
207	Cut of natural feature	Irregular shaped	0.40m wide and 0.05m deep	
208	Fill of 209	Mid grey silty clay		
209	Cut of natural feature		0.20m wide and 0.05m deep	
210	Fill of 211	Mid grey silty clay		
211	Cut of natural feature	Irregular shaped	0.40m wide and 0.05m deep	
212	Fill of 213	Mid grey silty clay		
213	Cut of natural feature	Irregular shaped	0.40m wide and 0.05m deep	
214	Fill of 215	Mid grey silty clay		
215	Cut of natural feature	Irregular shaped	0.30m wide and 0.04m deep	
216	Fill of 217	Mid grey silty clay		
217	Cut of natural feature	Irregular shaped	0.45m wide and 0.05m	
218	Fill of 219	Mid grey silty clay		
219	Cut of natural feature	Irregular shaped	0.50m wide and 0.05m deep	
220	Fill of 221	Mid grey silty clay		
221	Cut of natural feature	Irregular shaped	0.30m wide, 0.05m deep	

Trench No	Length, width & alignment	NGR	Surface height	Depth & height of natural
3	45m x 2.0m NE to SW	531941/297882	0.90m aOD	0.75m, 0.15m aOD
<i>Context</i>	<i>Context type Feature & type</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Dimensions</i>	<i>Artefacts/ Samples</i>
301	Topsoil	Mid grey-black silty clay	0.50m	
302	Peat	Dark brown-black		
303	Natural	Mid blue-grey clay		
304	Natural	Mid orange-brown sand and gravel		
305	Fill of 306	Mid grey silty clay		
306	Cut of ditch	U-shaped, north-south aligned ditch	0.40m wide and 0.08m deep	

Trench No	Length, width & alignment	NGR	Surface height	Depth & height of natural
4	30m x 2.0m E-W	531826/297820	2.65mOD	0.45m, 2.20m aOD
<i>Context</i>	<i>Context type Feature & type</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Dimensions</i>	<i>Artefacts/ Samples</i>
401	Topsoil	Mid black-grey sandy clay	0.45m thick	
402	Natural	Mid orange-brown sand and gravel		

Trench No	Length, width & alignment	NGR	Surface height	Depth & height of natural
5	25m x 2.0m NW-SE	531856/297772	3.1m aOD	0.60m, 2.50m aOD
<i>Context</i>	<i>Context type Feature & type</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Dimensions</i>	<i>Artefacts/ Samples</i>
501	Topsoil	Mid grey-brown sandy clay	0.40m thick	
502	Subsoil	Light grey-brown sandy clay with gravel inclusions	0.20m thick	
503	Natural	Mid orange-brown sand and gravel		

Trench No	Length, width & alignment	NGR	Surface height	Depth & height of natural
6	50m x 2.0m NW-SE	531908/297758	1.91m aOD	0.80m, 1.11m aOD
Context	Context type Feature & type	Description	Dimensions	Artefacts/ Samples
601	Topsoil	Mid black-grey sandy clay	0.50m thick	
602	Subsoil	Dark brown-black peat	0.40m thick	
603	Natural	Mid orange-brown sand and gravel		
604	Colluvium layer	Light grey silty clay	0.15m thick	Middle Iron Age pottery
605	Natural	Mid blue-grey clay		

Trench No	Length, width & alignment	NGR	Surface height	Depth & height of natural
7	35m x 2.0m NE-SW	531929/297801	1.30m aOD	0.55m, 0.76m aOD
Context	Context type Feature & type	Description	Dimensions	Artefacts/ Samples
701	Topsoil	Mid black-grey sandy clay	0.45m thick	
702	Subsoil	Mid brown-black peat	0.15m thick	
703	Natural	Mid blue-brown clay		
704	Natural	Light orange-brown sandy gravel		

Trench No	Length, width & alignment	NGR	Surface height	Depth & height of natural
8	35m x 2.0m NW-SE	531929/297801	1.30m aOD	0.50m, 0.80m aOD
Context	Context type Feature & type	Description	Dimensions	Artefacts/ Samples
801	Topsoil	Dark black-grey sandy clay	0.45m thick	
802	Subsoil	Dark brown-black peat	0.20m thick	
803	Natural	Mid orange-brown sand and gravel with clay patches		

Trench No	Length, width & alignment	NGR	Surface height	Depth & height of natural
9	20m x 2.0m NE-SW	531862/297778	2.68m aOD	0.50m, 2.18m aOD
Context	Context type Feature & type	Description	Dimensions	Artefacts/ Samples
901	Topsoil	Mid black-grey sandy clay	0.50m thick	
902	Natural	Mid orange-brown sand and gravel		



Northamptonshire County Council

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