

# Archaeological Services & Consultancy Ltd

## **ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION: RAF MOLESWORTH MOLESWORTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE**

NGR: TL 0743 7757

*on behalf of Mott MacDonald Ltd*



Martin Cuthbert BA (Hons) PIFA

January 2010

ASC: 1243/MWH/2



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## Site Data

<i>ASC project code:</i>	MWH	<i>ASC project no:</i>	1243
<i>OASIS ref:</i>	Archaeol2-70296	<i>Event/Accession no:</i>	ECB3321
<i>County:</i>	Cambridgeshire		
<i>Village/Town:</i>	Molesworth		
<i>Civil Parish:</i>	Brington and Molesworth		
<i>NGR (to 8 figs):</i>	TL 0743 7757		
<i>Extent of site:</i>	c.3800 sq.m		
<i>Present use:</i>	Grassland		
<i>Planning proposal:</i>	Erecting of administration block		
<i>Planning application ref/date:</i>	09/01033/FUL		
<i>Local Planning Authority:</i>	Huntingdonshire District Council		
<i>Date of fieldwork:</i>	January 2010		
<i>Client:</i>	Mott MacDonald Ltd, Mott MacDonald House St. Mary's Road Sheffield S2 4AP		
<i>Contact name:</i>	Simon Shaw		

## Internal Quality Check

<i>Primary Author:</i>	Martin Cuthbert	<i>Date:</i>	12-01-2010
<i>Revisions:</i>		<i>Date:</i>	
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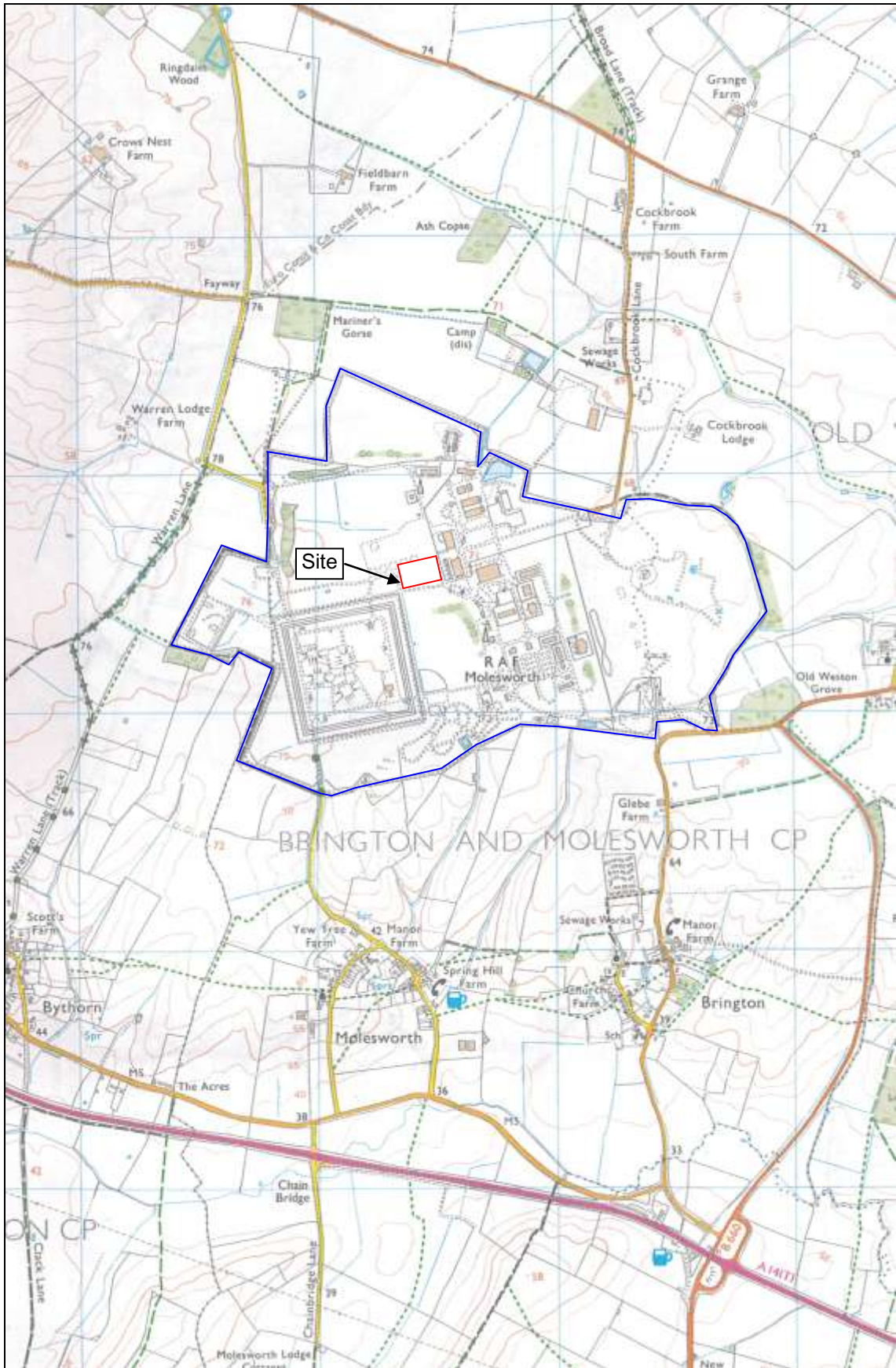


Figure 1: General location (scale 1:25,000)

## Summary

*In January 2010 a trial trench evaluation was undertaken at RAF Molesworth, Cambridgeshire prior to the construction of a new administration block. Four trenches were excavated within the footprint of the new building and the proposed access road. It was revealed that the site had been highly truncated and no natural soil profiles survive. This most likely occurred during the 1970's when the development area formed part of a large area of concrete hardstanding. No archaeological remains were observed within the trenches.*

### 1. Introduction

1.1 In January 2010 *Archaeological Services and Consultancy Ltd* (ASC) carried out an evaluation at RAF Molesworth, Cambridgeshire. The project was commissioned by Mott MacDonald Ltd, and was carried out according to a brief (McConnell 2009) prepared on behalf of the local planning authority (LPA), *Huntingdonshire District Council*, by their archaeological advisor (AA), *Cambridgeshire Archaeology Planning and Countryside Advice* (CAPCA). The relevant planning application reference is 09/01033/FUL.

#### 1.2 *Planning Background*

This evaluation was required under the terms of *Planning Policy Guidance Note 16* (PPG16), as a condition of planning permission for the development of the site.

#### 1.3 *Archaeological Services & Consultancy Ltd*

*Archaeological Services & Consultancy Ltd* (ASC) is an independent archaeological practice providing a full range of archaeological services including consultancy, field evaluation, mitigation and post-excavation studies, historic building recording and analysis. ASC is recognised as a *Registered Organisation* by the Institute for Archaeologists, in recognition of its high standards and working practices.

#### 1.4 *The Site*

##### 1.4.1 *Location & Description*

The development site is on the RAF base which is located in the parish of Brinton and Molesworth, in the administrative district of Huntingdonshire (Fig. 1). It is situated *c.* 1km to the north of the village of Molesworth, centred on Ordnance Survey National Grid Reference TL 0743 7757 (Fig. 2).

The proposed development area comprises a roughly rectangular plot of land covering *c.* 3800 sq. m, at the centre of the base immediately southwest of two existing buildings. It is surrounded to the north by concrete hardstanding, and to the south by grass.

##### 1.4.2 *Geology & Topography*

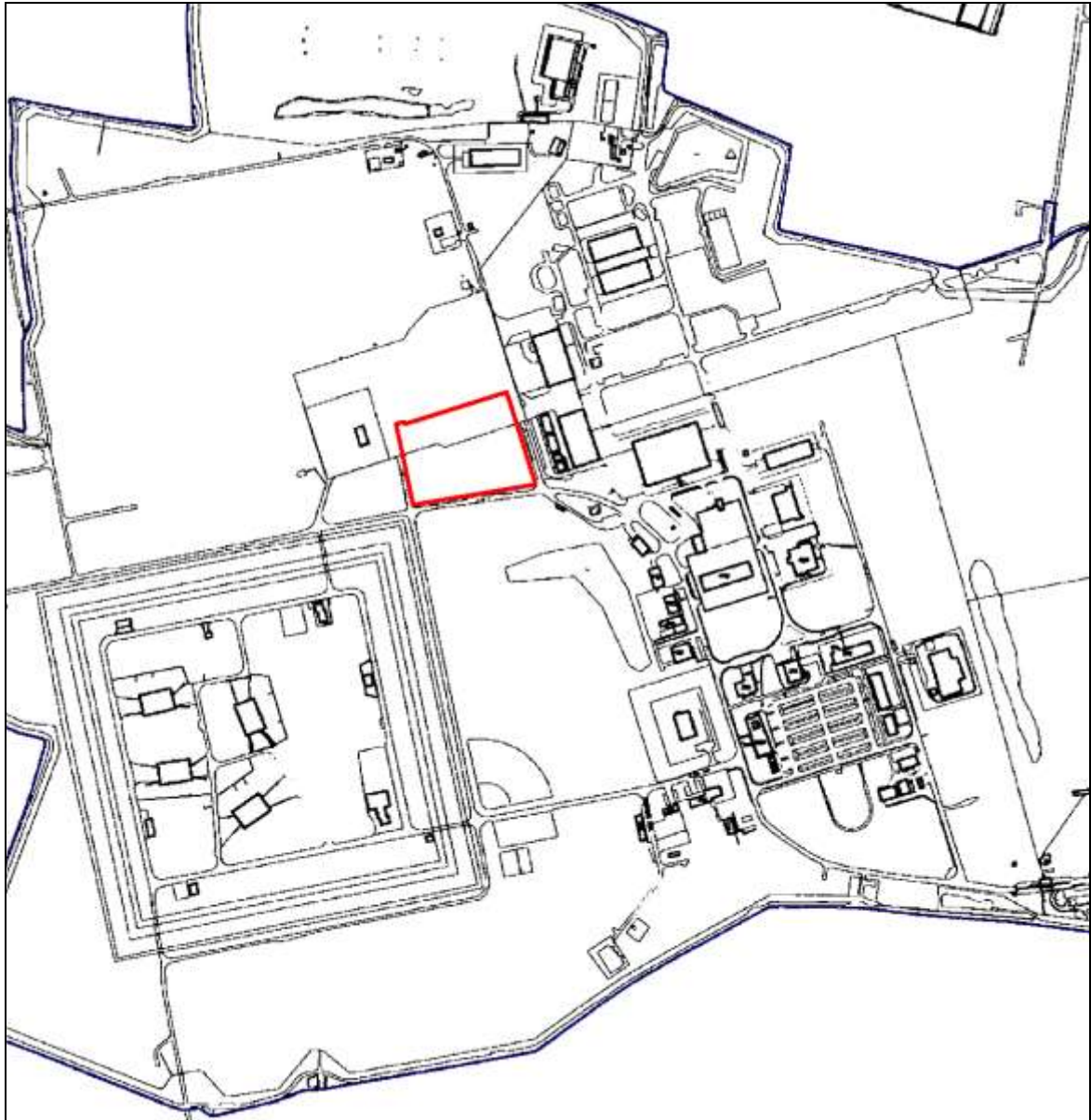
The soils of the area belong to the Hanslope Association, which are characterised as *slowly permeable calcareous clayey soils*. *Some slowly permeable non-calcareous clayey soils*. *Slight risk of water erosion*. over



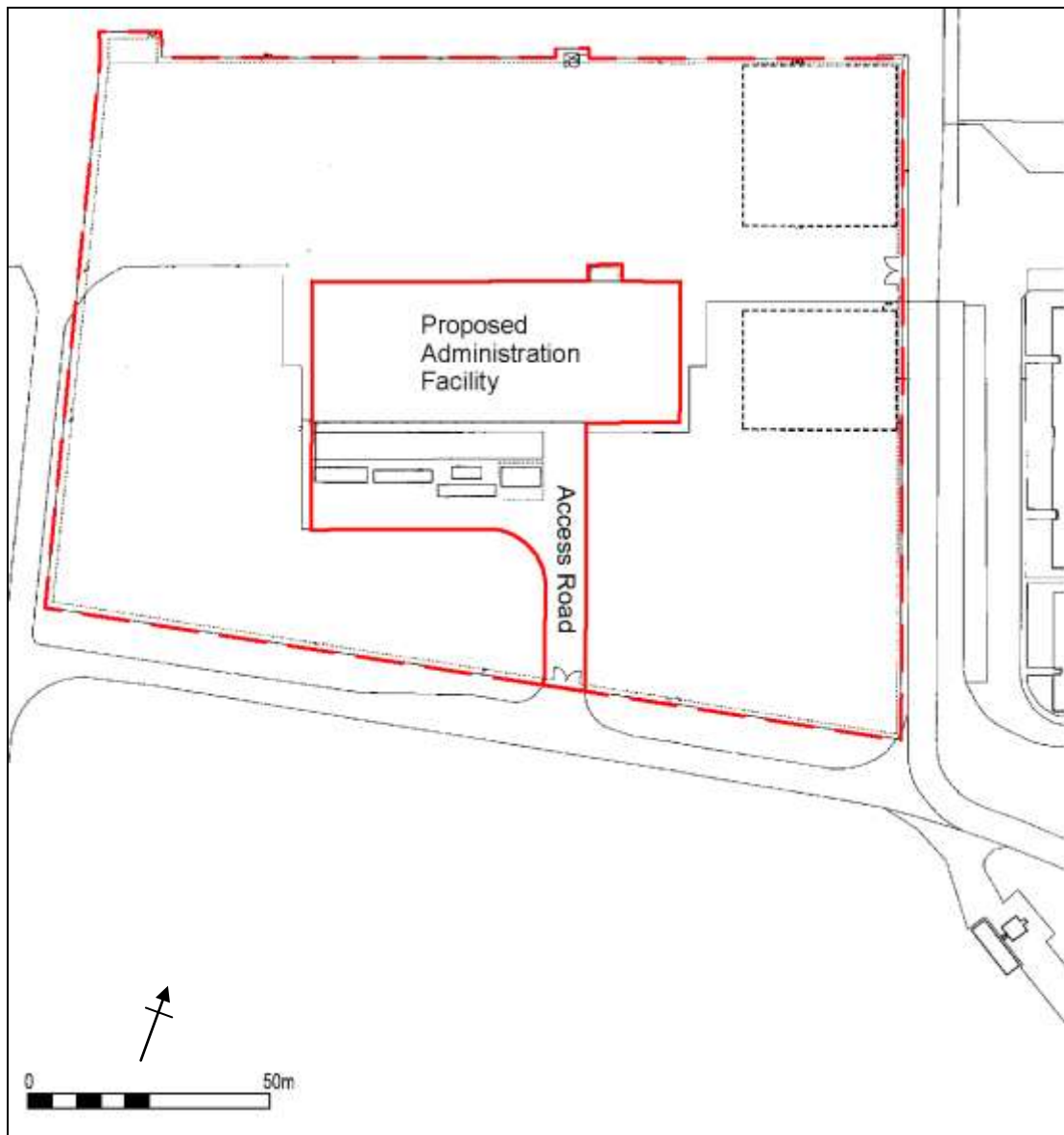
chalky till (Soil Survey 1983, 411d). The underlying geology comprises Oxford Clay (BGS, Sheet 171). The site is flat and lies at an elevation of *c.*74m AOD.

1.4.3 *Proposed Development*

The proposed development principally consists of the erection of a two storey modular administration facility, and access road (Fig. 3).



**Figure 2:** Site plan (scale 1:10,000)



**Figure 3:** Proposed development (scale 1:1500)

## 2. Aims & Methods

### 2.1 *Aims*

As described in the brief (Section 3), the aims of the evaluation were:

- To determine the location, extent, date, character, condition, significance and quality of any surviving archaeological remains liable to be threatened by the proposed development.
- To retrieve charred plant macrofossils and land molluscs from former dry-land palaeosoils and cut features, and to soil pollen analysis; to the retrieval of plant macrofossils, insect, molluscs and pollen from waterlogged deposits located
- To provide for the absolute dating of critical contacts: e.g. the basal contacts of peats over former dryland surfaces; distinct landuse or landmark change in urban contexts.
- To consider any artefact or economic information, in particular the survival of faunal evidence, and provide an assessment of the viability for further study of such information
- To provide a predictive model of surviving archaeological remains detailing zones of relative importance against known development proposals. An impact assessment will also be provided.

### 2.2 *Standards*

The work conformed to the project design, to the relevant sections of the Institute of Archaeologists' *Code of Conduct* (IFA 2000) and *Standard & Guidance Notes* (IFA 2001), to the Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers East of England Region *Standards for Field Archaeology in the East of England* (ALGAO 2003), and to the relevant sections of ASC's own *Operations Manual*.

### 2.3 *Methods*

The work was carried out according to the brief (Section 2), which required:

- A programme of linear trial trenching to adequately sample the threatened available area.
- Five trial trenches were to be excavated within the footprint of the proposed new building and access road. Four trenches were to be c.25m long and one c.20m. Trench locations are shown on Fig. 4.

### 2.4 *Constraints*

After the full excavation of Trenches 5 and 4 and the partial excavation of Trenches 2 and 3, it was revealed the site was highly truncated and no natural soil profile survived. It was agreed with the AA that excavation of Trench 1 and the completion of Trenches 2 and 3 did not have to take place.



### 3. Archaeological & Historical Background

3.1 The following section provides a summary of the readily available archaeological and historical background to the development site and its environs. The site lies within an area of archaeological and historical interest, and has the potential to reveal evidence of a range of periods.

This section has been compiled with information from Cambridgeshire County Council *Historic Environment Record* (HER) and other readily available sources.

#### 3.2 *Undated*

Little archaeological excavation has taken place in the vicinity of the development site, but the archaeological importance of the area is illustrated by the existence of groups of cropmarks, at various locations within the parish, which at present are undated. Traces of a trackway and an enclosure, or enclosures, are visible in aerial photographs of land c.1.7km to the southwest of the site (HER 10037). They appear to form parts of an extensive and linked system of features. At least one rectangular enclosure is represented as cropmarks 1.5km north of the site (HER 00526). Other apparently associated marks are located adjacent to it. Approximately 500m to the southeast of these features is another rectangular enclosure and ditch. (HER 00333). None of the cropmark dimensions are recorded, but from visual inspection they appear to be c.200m in length. To the south of Molesworth village, c.2km from the site, cropmarks form the remnants of what may be a pair ring ditches (ploughed-out burial mounds) (HER 00319a).

#### 3.3 *Iron Age* (600BC-AD43)

No specifically dated Iron Age features have been identified in the immediate vicinity of the site. However, it is possible that some of the undated cropmarks originate from this period, or indicate a continuation of occupation from that time.

#### 3.4 *Roman* (AD43-c.450)

The site is situated close to the Roman road which ran between Godmanchester and Leicester, and c.3km from the Romano-British settlement of Thrapston. Roman pottery has been recovered during fieldwalking to the east of the church in the village of Old Weston, c.2km west of the site (HER 00348b). However, it has been dated to a broad period, ranging from 43AD to 409AD.

#### 3.5 *Saxon* (c.450-1066)

The village of Old Weston is mentioned in the Domesday survey (1086), though apparently deserted in the late Saxon to medieval period, according to documentary evidence in existence in Leighton Bromswold. The remains of the old settlement are thought to be south of the church, which is now detached from the core settlement (HER 00361). Fieldwalking to the south of the village produced a substantial quantity of early to mid Anglo Saxon pottery sherds (HER 00348a).

3.6 **Medieval** (1066-1500)

- 3.6.1 The surrounding villages of Molesworth, Old Weston and Brington all have medieval origins, and some existing archaeological features dating from that period.
- 3.6.2 St. Peter's Church, Molesworth, and St. Swithin's Church, Old Weston, both date to the 14<sup>th</sup> century (HER 08661 & HER CB15036). All Saints Church in Brington dates to the 12<sup>th</sup> century (HER CB14869) (Pevsner 1970, 213).
- 3.6.3 Within Molesworth, at Spring Hill Farm there are a number of features. Well preserved ridge and furrow, and earthworks which have been interpreted as at least two fish ponds and a possible moated manor house, are thought to be present c.100m to the north of the village (HER 00319). More ridge and furrow is situated to the northeast of the village (HER 00329), and to the south (HER 00331). Further earthworks to the south of the village may represent the remnants of a moated village, which includes ridge and furrow, fish ponds and possibly the village itself (HER 00330).
- 3.6.4 St. Swithin's Church, in Old Weston is detached from the village, suggesting the settlement has relocated to the east. Close to the parsonage, which lies immediately north of the church, a substantial quantity of 12<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> century pottery was recovered during fieldwalking. Close by are earthworks which may suggest the presence of four house platforms (HER 00384). A medieval headstone is also present in the graveyard (HER 00347).
- 3.6.5 Within the confines of the base, 1.5km to the east of the site, a tanged and socketed iron arrowhead was recovered, which is thought to be medieval (HER 00367). Fragments of horseshoe and hand-made nails were also found nearby.

3.7 **Post-medieval - Modern** (1500- present)

Both the Inclosure map of 1797 (2100/15/21) and the 1<sup>st</sup> edition OS map of 1885 (sheet XII.14) show the site to have been occupied by large irregular shaped fields, one or more of which may have boundaries which cross the proposed development area. These boundaries remain relatively intact until the construction of the air base.

3.8 **General**

- 3.8.1 The base dates from 1917 but was significantly upgraded during the Second World War. The extended runways were subsequently closed in 1957 and demolished in the early 1970's to make way for Cruise missile bunkers, resulting in much of the current layout. A photograph of the site shows that the development area was covered in concrete hardstanding in 1977 (Freeman 1978 169).
- 3.8.2 The lack of entries on the HER located on the base itself, relative to its surroundings, may be a consequence of the nature of the development that occurred there. Large areas are under concrete or substantial buildings, thereby obscuring cropmarks, and none of the previous building work has been subject to archaeological monitoring. Site security has prevented findspots being identified in the usual manner.

## **4 Results**

### **4.1 General**

4.1.1 This section provides a summary of the results of the evaluation. Full trench descriptions, in tabular form, appear in Appendix One and conclusions appear in Section Five.

4.1.2 Trenches 4 and 5 were fully excavated whilst Trenches 2 and 3 only partially excavated and Trench 1 was not excavated. A JCB machine was used with a 1.6m toothless ditching bucket. A visual inspection was made of the excavated spoil from the trenches but no artefacts were observed.

### **4.2 Trenches 2-5 (Fig. 4: Plates 2-3)**

The general stratigraphy of the trenches was the same across the whole site, comprising 0.1m of turf overlying 0.5-0.6m of made ground containing brick and concrete debris, which in turn overlay the natural bedrock of yellow-mid brown blue clay with occasional flint inclusions.

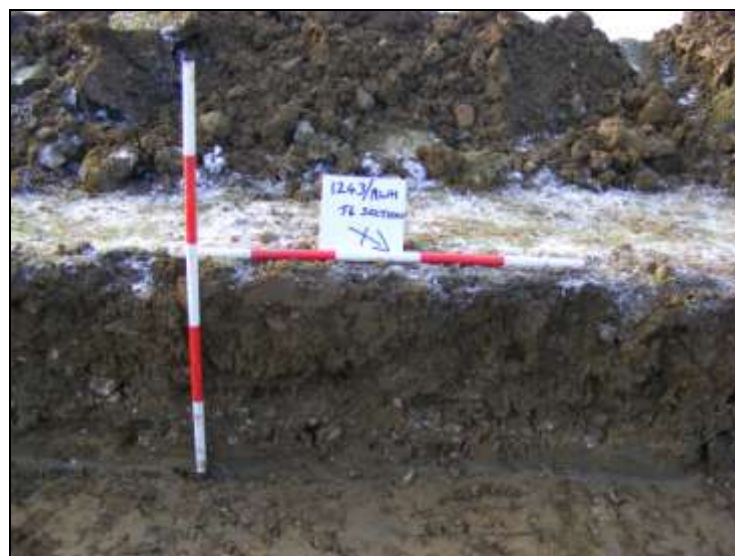
No archaeological finds or features were observed within the trenches.



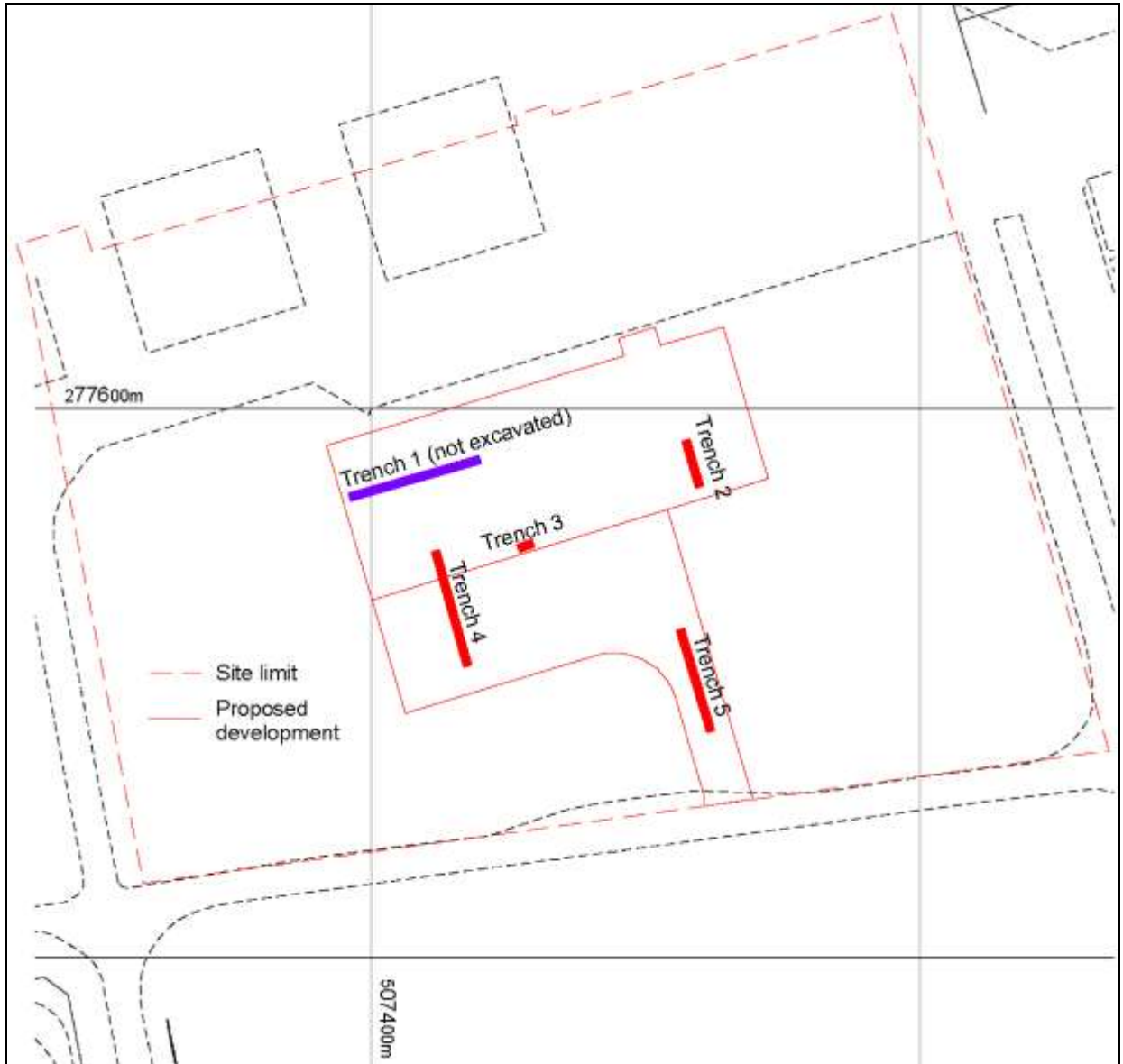
**Plate 1:** General site conditions



**Plate 2:** Trench 3 section, looking north



**Plate 3:** Trench 4 section, looking west



**Figure 4:** Trench layout (scale 1:1250)

## **5. Conclusions**

- 5.1 During WW2 the development area was open grassland, but by 1977 it formed part of a large area of concrete hardstanding and was covered with *c.*0.5m depth of concrete.
- 5.2 The full excavation of Trench 4 on the eastern side and Trench 5 on the western side of the site and the partial excavation of Trenches 2 and 3 showed that no natural soil profiles survived, and the site had been highly truncated, most likely during the latter development of the airfield.
- 5.3 No archaeological features were observed in the trenches. While the existence of individual isolated archaeological features away from the trenches cannot be specifically excluded, it is unlikely that large numbers of archaeological features were present on the site. It is unlikely that the proposed development will have a significant impact on archaeological remains.

### **5.4 *Confidence Rating***

The evaluation took place in very cold and snowy weather conditions. Full co-operation was received from the contractors and a high degree of confidence is attached to the results of the evaluation



## **6. Acknowledgements**

The evaluation was commissioned by Mott MacDonald Ltd. The writer is grateful to Simon Shaw of Mott Macdonald Ltd for his assistance. The project was monitored by Dan McConnell (CAPCA) on behalf of the local planning authority. Thanks are also due to Lt Hill and Lt Casper the airbase liaison officers and Jim Pawte of Huntingdon Plant Hire.

The project was managed for ASC by Karin Semmelmann BA MA MIFA. Fieldwork was carried out by Martin Cuthbert BA (Hons) PIFA and Calli Rouse BA PIFA. The report was prepared by Martin Cuthbert and edited by Bob Zeepvat BA MIFA.

## **7. Archive**

7.1 The project archive will comprise:

1. Brief
2. Project Design
3. Initial Report
4. Clients site plans
5. Site records
6. List of photographs
7. B/W prints & negatives
8. CDROM with copies of all digital files.

7.2 The archive will be deposited with *Cambridgeshire County Store*.

## 8. References

### *Standards & Specifications*

ALGAO 2003 *Standards for Field Archaeology in the East of England*. East Anglian Archaeology Occasional Paper **14**.

EH 1991 *The Management of Archaeological Projects*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. English Heritage (London).

IFA 2000a Institute for Archaeologists' *Code of Conduct*.

IFA 2001 Institute for Archaeologists' *Standard & Guidance documents (Desk-Based Assessments, Watching Briefs, Evaluations, Excavations, Investigation and Recording of Standing Buildings, Finds)*.

Kaye, D 2009 *Project Design for Archaeological Evaluation at RAF Molesworth, Molesworth, Cambridgeshire* ASC/1243/MWH/1

McConnell, D 2009 *Brief for Archaeological Evaluation: RAF Molesworth, Cambridgeshire* CAPCA

### *Secondary Sources*

BGS *British Geological Survey 1:50,000 Series, Solid & Drift Geology*.

Freeman, R.A. 1978 *Airfields of the Eighth*. Battle of Britain Prints International Ltd, (London)


Soil Survey 1983 *1:250,000 Soil Map of England and Wales, and accompanying legend* (Harpenden).


Page, W. (ed) 1908 *The Victoria History of the County of Huntingdon Vol. 3* Dawsons of Pall Mall (London)


Pevsner, N. 1970 *The Buildings of England: Bedfordshire, Huntingdon and Peterborough*. Penguin (London).


## Appendix 1: Trench Summary Tables

### Trench 1 (Not Excavated)

Trench 2						
	<b>Max Dimensions (m)</b>					
	Length	9m	Width	1.6m	Depth	0.7m
	<b>Levels</b>					
	Trench top *		74m OD			
	Trench base *		73.30m OD			
	Trench top *		74m OD			
	Trench base *		73.3m OD			
	<b>NGR Co-ordinates</b>					
	North	507457-277594		South	TL 507460-277585	
	Orientation			North-South		
Reason for Trench			General Evaluation			
Context	Type	Description and Interpretation	Width (max: mm)	Thickness (max: mm)	Depth (BGL: mm)	
200	Layer	Turf		100	0	
201	Layer	Mid brown silty clay with frequent modern debris		600	100	
202	Layer	Yellow-brown blue clay occasional moderate flint inclusions			700	

Trench 3						
	<b>Max Dimensions (m)</b>					
	Length	3m	Width	1.6m	Depth	0.6m
	<b>Levels</b>					
	Trench top *		74m OD			
	Trench base *		73.4m OD			
	Trench top *		74m OD			
	Trench base *		73.4m OD			
	<b>NGR Co-ordinates</b>					
	East	507429-277575		West	507426-277574	
	Orientation			East-West		
Reason for Trench			General Evaluation			
Context	Type	Description and Interpretation	Width (max: mm)	Thickness (max: mm)	Depth (BGL: mm)	
300	Layer	Turf		100	0	
301	Layer	Mid brown silty clay with frequent modern debris		500	100	
302	Layer	Yellow-brown blue clay occasional moderate flint inclusions			600	

Trench 4						
	<b>Max Dimensions (m)</b>					
	<b>Length</b>	22m	<b>Width</b>	1.6m	<b>Depth</b>	0.55m
	<b>Levels</b>					
	<b>Trench top *</b>		74m OD			
	<b>Trench base *</b>		73.45m OD			
	<b>Trench top *</b>		74m OD			
	<b>Trench base *</b>		73.45m OD			
	<b>NGR Co-ordinates</b>					
	<b>NNW</b>	507410-277576	<b>SSE</b>	507417-277552		
	<b>Orientation</b>		North northwest-South southeast			
<b>Reason for Trench</b>		General Evaluation				
<b>Context</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>Description and Interpretation</b>		<b>Width (max: mm)</b>	<b>Thickness (max: mm)</b>	<b>Depth (BGL: mm)</b>
400	Layer	Turf			100	0
401	Layer	Mid brown silty clay with frequent modern debris			450	100
402	Layer	Yellow-brown blue clay occasional moderate flint inclusions				550

Trench 5						
	<b>Max Dimensions (m)</b>					
	<b>Length</b>	19.6m	<b>Width</b>	1.6m	<b>Depth</b>	0.6m
	<b>Levels</b>					
	<b>Trench top *</b>		74m OD			
	<b>Trench base *</b>		73.4m OD			
	<b>Trench top *</b>		74m OD			
	<b>Trench base *</b>		73.4m OD			
	<b>NGR Co-ordinates</b>					
	<b>NNW</b>	507457-277556	<b>SSE</b>	507463-277537		
	<b>Orientation</b>		North northwest-South southeast			
<b>Reason for Trench</b>		General Evaluation				
<b>Context</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>Description and Interpretation</b>		<b>Width (max: mm)</b>	<b>Thickness (max: mm)</b>	<b>Depth (BGL: mm)</b>
500	Layer	Turf			100	0
501	Layer	Mid brown silty clay with frequent modern debris			500	100
502	Layer	Yellow-brown blue clay occasional moderate flint inclusions				600

## Appendix 2: List of Photographs

SITE NAME: RAF Molesworth, Molesworth, Cambridgeshire			SITE NO/CODE: 1243/MWH
Shot	B&W	Digital	Subject
1	✓	✓	Trench 5 general shot, looking north-northwest, 2x1m
2	✓	✓	Trench 5 general shot, looking north-northwest, 2x1m
3	✓	✓	Trench 4 section, looking west, 2x1m
4	✓	✓	Trench 4 general shot, looking north-northwest, 2x1m
5	✓	✓	Trench 2 general shot, looking north, 2x1m
6	✓	✓	Trench 2 general shot, looking north, 2x1m
7	✓	✓	Trench 3 general shot, looking east, 2x1m
8	✓	✓	Trench 3 section, looking north, 2x1m
9		✓	General working shot
10		✓	General working shot
11		✓	General working shot
12		✓	General working shot
13		✓	General working shot
14		✓	Backfilled trench

### Appendix 3: ASC OASIS Form

PROJECT DETAILS			
Project Name:	RAF Molesworth, Molesworth, Cambridgeshire	OASIS reference:	Archaeol2-70296
Short Description:	In January 2010 a trial trench evaluation was undertaken at RAF Molesworth, Cambridgeshire prior to the construction of a new administration block. Four trenches were excavated within the footprint of the new building and the proposed access road. It was revealed that the site had been highly truncated and no natural soil profiles survive. This most likely occurred during the 1970's when the development area formed part of a large area of concrete hardstanding. No archaeological remains were observed within the trenches.		
Project Type:	Trial trenching		
Previous work: (eg. SMR refs)	None	Site status: (eg. none, SAM, listed)	N/a
Current land use:	RAF Airbase	Future work: (yes/no/unknown)	Unknown
Monument type:	None	Monument period:	None
Significant finds: (artefact type & period)	None		
PROJECT LOCATION			
County:	Cambridgeshire	OS reference: (8 figs min)	TL 0743 7757
Site address: (+ postcode if known)	RAF Molesworth, Molesworth, Cambridgeshire		
Study area: (sq. m. / ha)	3800 sq m	Height OD: (metres)	c.74m
PROJECT CREATORS			
Organisation:	Archaeological Services & Consultancy Ltd		
Project brief originator:	D. McConnell	Project design originator:	D. Kaye
Project Manager:	K. Semmelmann	Director/Supervisor:	M.Cuthbert
Sponsor / funding body:	Mott MacDonald Ltd		
PROJECT DATE			
Start date:	05-01-2010	End date:	08-01-2010
PROJECT ARCHIVES			
	Location (Accession no.)	Content (eg. pottery, animal bone, files/sheets)	
Physical:	Cambridge County Store ECB3321	none	
Paper:		Site records, report, photographs	
Digital:		CD-ROM with copies of all digital files	
BIBLIOGRAPHY (Journal/monograph, published or forthcoming, or unpublished client report)			
Title:	Archaeological Evaluation: RAF Molesworth, Molesworth, Cambridgeshire		
Serial title & volume:	ASC Ltd Report ref. 1243/MWH/2		
Author(s):	Martin Cuthbert BA (Hons) PIFA		
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