

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT:**

**LAND NORTHWEST OF ST MARY MAGDALENE CHURCH, HIGH ROAD, GUYHIRN, CAMBRIDGESHIRE**

Planning Reference: F/YR09/0489/0

NGR: TL 3974 0332

AAL Site Code: GUMM 14

OASIS Reference Number: allenarc1-241559



Report prepared for Stuart Long Architects

By

Allen Archaeology Limited  
Report Number AAL 2016020

March 2016



Allenarchaeology



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*Cover photograph: General view of the site looking southwest*

## Executive Summary

- Allen Archaeology Limited was commissioned by Stuart Long Architects to undertake an archaeological watching brief during groundworks for construction of five terraced houses and ancillary works on land west of High Road and adjacent to the Victorian Church of St. Mary Magdalene, Guyhirn, Cambridgeshire.
- The site lies in an area of high archaeological potential and an earlier evaluation revealed the presence of large medieval ditches, probably relating to early drainage schemes. These were cut into alluvial deposits that contained 13<sup>th</sup> century and later pottery. The pottery assemblage included relatively large sherds of sooted and food-encrusted pottery, potentially indicating nearby occupation.
- The groundworks revealed a peat horizon that although undated is suggested to relate to the prehistoric intercalated peat found throughout the Fens. Sealing this was a naturally derived alluvial flood deposit that probably dates to the mid 12<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> century, and was likely formed during a flooding episode of 1236. A thin layer of undated peat sealed the alluvial deposit and indicates a period when the land became dry enough to allow vegetation to flourish.
- An undated ditch was recorded in the northern half of the site and is likely to be the continuation of a 14<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> century ditch revealed during the evaluation. A post-medieval subsoil and modern topsoil sealed the ditch and peat and represents the modern surface.
- The watching brief methodology was appropriate to the size and type of project and has provided information concerning the nature and extent of the archaeological resource present within the area.

## **1.0 Introduction**

- 1.1 Allen Archaeology Limited (AAL) was commissioned by Stuart Long Architects to undertake an archaeological watching brief during groundworks for construction of five terraced houses and ancillary works on land west of High Road and adjacent to the Victorian Church of St Mary Magdalene, Guyhirn, Cambridgeshire.
- 1.2 The fieldwork, recording and reporting was carried out in a manner consistent with current national guidelines, as set out in the '*Standard and guidance for archaeological watching briefs*' (ClfA 2014), '*Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment*' (English Heritage 2006), regional guidance in '*Research and Archaeology Revisited: a revised framework for the East of England*' (Medlycott 2011), a brief previously provided by Cambridgeshire Historic Environment Team (Gdaniec 2015) and a specification produced by this company (AAL 2015a). All relevant Historic England guidelines on archaeological best practice were also followed.

## **2.0 Site Location and Description**

- 2.1 The village of Guyhirn is a small ribbon development in the Cambridgeshire Fens, approximately 9km southwest of Wisbech. The development area lies in the centre of the village, to the west of High Road and adjacent to the Victorian Church of St. Mary Magdalene, and is centred on NGR TL 3974 0332.
- 2.2 The local geology comprises bedrock deposits of mudstone, overlain by superficial deposits of Tidal flats of clay sand and silt (<http://mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain/home.html>).

## **3.0 Planning Background**

- 3.1 A planning application was submitted for the construction of five terraced houses and ancillary works (F/YR09/0489/O). Due to the high archaeological potential of the site, a condition was attached to planning consent requiring a programme of archaeological evaluation by trial trenching in order to provide further information concerning the nature and extent of the archaeological resource.
- 3.2 The evaluation was undertaken by AAL in 2015 and revealed the presence of large medieval ditches, probably relating to early drainage schemes. These were cut into alluvial deposits that contained 13<sup>th</sup> century and later pottery. The pottery assemblage included relatively large sherds of sooted and food-encrusted pottery, potentially indicating nearby occupation.
- 3.3 The Cambridgeshire Historic Environment Team produced a brief recommending that a programme of archaeological monitoring and recording was undertaken during all ground reduction and disturbance associated with the development (Gdaniec 2015).
- 3.4 The approach adopted is consistent with the guidelines that are set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (Department for Communities and Local Government 2012).

## **4.0 Archaeological and Historical Background**

- 4.1 The site lies adjacent to the Grade II listed Church of St. Mary Magdalene (Cambridgeshire Historic Environment Record (hereafter CHER) 03830) which was designed by Sir George Gilbert Scott in an Early English style and constructed in 1878. In the church grounds lies a World War One memorial

(CHER DCB1499). A medieval precursor to the Victorian church is thought to have been located on this site and masonry is recorded as having been found during the construction for the current church. If this is the site of the medieval church, an associated cemetery is anticipated to lie in the immediate vicinity. Post-medieval burials are stated to have been confined to the Chapel of Ease (CHER 03830), at some distance northeast of the current site at NGR TF 403 040. The Chapel of Ease was constructed in 1660 and was used for services until the construction of St. Mary Magdalene, when it became used as a mortuary chapel. The Bishop of Ely consecrated the area around the Chapel as a burial ground in 1840 ([www.pastscape.org.uk/hob.aspx?hob\\_id=871994](http://www.pastscape.org.uk/hob.aspx?hob_id=871994), accessed 08/01/2015).

- 4.2 A search of the CHER reveals that isolated finds of Roman pottery were made at Guyhirn Gull, some distance to the north of the site in 1932 (CHER 03790 and 03791), and Roman field systems are recorded east of Chapelfield Road, thought to be associated with a farmstead to the north (CHER 09218). A series of undated, linear features have been found nearby (CHER 10082), possibly part of the same complex, and another cropmark complex of unknown date has been identified from aerial photographs near Ferry farm at NGR TF 399 038 (CHER 10652) (Palmer 2008).
- 4.3 The village does not appear in the Domesday Book of 1086, and there is limited physical evidence for activity of this period, although Saxon pottery has been discovered on Chapelfield Road (CHER 10082A).
- 4.4 Guyhirn lies at a point where the tidal flow inland along the Nene meets the freshwater flowing towards the sea, and was critical to the drainage of the region. An early, but ultimately unsuccessful attempt at drainage was made by the Bishop of Ely, John Morton, in 1478. He began the construction of a major drainage dyke named Morton's Leam, which runs broadly parallel to the Nene for 12 miles from Stanground to Guyhirn, where it turns north to join the Nene. Bishop Morton also built a tower at Ring's End, just to the south of Guyhirn, in order to watch his men working on the excavation of the drain (Darby 1983).
- 4.5 Further attempts at drainage were made in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, financed by the 4<sup>th</sup> Earl of Bedford and undertaken by the Dutch engineer Cornelius Vermuyden. The works proved unsuccessful as the drainage of the region led to rapid peat shrinkage and a reduction in the level of the ground, causing extensive flooding over the newly drained areas. The reduction of the ground level by peat shrinkage has left the drains and canalised rivers running higher than the surrounding ground surface, necessitating large scale embankment, and artificial drainage by pumps, powered initially by wind, then steam, and now electricity (Salzman 1948).
- 4.6 Guyhirn was an important strategic location in the English Civil War with a redoubt built there as part of a line of defences built across the silt fen in 1644. The location of this defence is unknown but it is reported to have housed a garrison of 50 men with one boat (CHER Reference MCB17290).
- 4.7 A small number of archaeological investigations have taken place near to the site. An evaluation on High Road a short distance northeast of the site, revealed modern deposits, alluvial silts and a thick band of subsoil containing 16<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> century ceramics and 18<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> century clay pipes. No finds predating the late 16<sup>th</sup> century were recovered, suggesting that the site was unoccupied prior to this time (Murphy 2007).
- 4.8 South of the current site at Homelands, High Road an archaeological evaluation undertaken in 2007 revealed a series of probable former drainage and boundary features of post-medieval to modern date. Layers of peat and alluvium in the northwest part of the site reflect the flooding of the area prior to drainage (Clay 2007). Post-medieval ditches have also been identified at the northeast end

of the village (CHER MCB 15869). Other previous archaeological work in the area has revealed Roman field systems and post-medieval and undated ditches (Trimble 2007, Cope-Faulkner 2009).

- 4.9 The previously completed evaluation revealed the presence of large medieval ditches cut into an alluvial deposit that may be associated with a known flooding event in Wisbech in 1236. The ditches may relate to known medieval and later drainage schemes within the area and contained a group of fairly large sherds encrusted with food waste and sooting, and are likely to indicate nearby occupation (AAL 2015b).

## 5.0 Methodology

- 5.1 The proposed development comprises five houses. However, at this stage work was limited to piling and trenching within one house plot only.
- 5.2 The construction methodology involved excavation of a trench c.900mm below the current ground surface to allow installation of a ring beam to support the proposed building. Prior to excavation of the ring beam trench, a series of piles were inserted.
- 5.3 Groundworks were monitored by an experienced field archaeologist from AAL on Monday 13<sup>th</sup> and Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> July 2015. Excavation of the trench was undertaken by mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless ditching bucket (Plate 1). All exposed plan and section surfaces were inspected for archaeological features and deposits to determine the stratigraphic sequence. Any archaeological remains exposed were excavated by hand and recorded.



*Plate 1: General view of the site looking north, clearly showing concrete piles within the footings*

- 5.4 A full written record of the archaeological deposits was made on standard AAL context recording sheets. Each deposit, layer and cut was allocated a unique three digit identifier (context number), and accorded a written description, a summary of these are included in Appendix 4. Numbers in square brackets represent cut features, e.g. hollow [008].
- 5.5 Deposits were drawn in section at an appropriate scale. All archaeological deposits and features were recorded photographically. General site shots were also taken to show the landscape context of the groundworks, a selection of these have been included in the report.



## 6.0 Results

- 6.1 The earliest deposit recorded at the base of the footings was a 0.1m+ thick compact, greyish yellow silty clay alluvium, 003, that corresponds with layer 101 as recorded during the evaluation and likely represents the marine flood event of 1236 (Plate 2). Sealing 003, within the southeast half of the footings, was a thin, dark brown peat, 004, within a shallow natural hollow [008]. The peat contained frequent twigs and roots and a discrete dumped deposit of burnt clay.



*Plate 2: Representative section showing the sequence of topsoil 001, subsoil 002, peat 004 and alluvium 003, looking south, scale 1m*

- 6.2 A poorly defined feature [007] was recorded cutting alluvium 003 within the northeast corner of the footings and is likely to be a continuation of ditch [109] which was recorded during the evaluation. Feature [007] was excavated to a depth of 0.55m below the base of the footings and contained a mid grey silty clay 005 with orange mottling (Plate 3). Excavation of this feature revealed a dark brown peat 006 layer at the base of the sequence.





Plate 3: Southeast facing section of [007] with peat deposit 006 clearly visible below the feature, scale 1m.

- 6.3 Sealing both ditch [007] and alluvium 003 was a light grey, silty clay subsoil, 002, from which a single sherd of 16<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> century pottery and bones from sheep/goat and possible Brent goose were recovered. The majority of the remains potentially originate from a single lamb carcass, likely to represent a recent animal burial. Overlying the whole site was a 0.3m dark brown clayey silt topsoil, 001, containing post-medieval pottery and ceramic building material.

## 7.0 Discussion and Conclusions

- 7.1 The groundworks were excavated to a depth of c. 900mm below the current ground surface and revealed a peat layer at the base of the sequence, within a slot excavated through ditch [007]. Although no dating was recovered from this deposit it is likely to relate to the prehistoric intercalated peat identified in the evaluation stage (AAL 2015b, context 114). Sealing the peat was a naturally derived alluvial flood deposit. Pottery recovered from this deposit during the evaluation dated from the mid 12<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> century, and it is speculated that it was formed during the flooding episode of 1236 (*ibid.*). A thin layer of undated peat sealed the alluvial deposit and indicates a period when the land became dry enough to allow vegetation to flourish before being inundated again.
- 7.2 An undated ditch [007] was recorded in the northern half of the site. This is likely to be the continuation of ditch [109], revealed during the earlier evaluation, and was probably infilled during the late medieval period (14<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> century), suggesting that it is a dyke constructed at, or around, the time Bishop Morton was undertaking his drainage of the peat fens between Peterborough and Wisbech.
- 7.3 A post-medieval subsoil and modern topsoil sealed the peat and represent the modern ground surface.

## 8.0 Effectiveness of Methodology

- 8.1 The watching brief methodology was appropriate to the size and type of project. It has identified the continuation of a ditch previously recorded during the archaeological evaluation and has

provided further information concerning the nature and extent of the archaeological resource present within the area.

## 9.0 Acknowledgements

9.1 Allen Archaeology Limited would like to thank Stuart Long Architects for this commission and for the cooperation of the groundworkers.

## 10.0 References

AAL, 2015a, *Specification for archaeological monitoring and recording: land northwest of St Mary Magdalene Church, High Road, Guyhirn*, Unpublished document

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Salzman, L F, (ed.), 1948, *Victoria History of the Counties of England. A history of Cambridge and the Isle of Ely. Volume II*, London: Oxford University Press

Trimble, D, 2007, *An archaeological evaluation on land at High Road, Guyhirn, Wisbech, Cambridgeshire*, Archaeological Project Services

## **Appendix 1: Post-Roman Pottery**

*By Jane Young*

### **Introduction**

Four sherds of pottery weighing 0.076kg in total were submitted for examination. The pottery recovered is all of post-medieval date. The pottery was catalogued by ware (common name) and fabric type using locally (Spoerry forthcoming) and nationally used mnemonic codenames. The assemblage was quantified within each context by ware and fabric type with three measures: number of sherds, estimated vessel count using sherds obviously and weight. The ceramic data including attributes such as decoration, condition and usage was entered on a Microsoft Access Database using ceramic codenames and a copy of this is available in the archive. Recording of the assemblage was in accordance with the guidelines laid out in Slowikowski *et al.* (2001) and forms were identified using the Medieval Pottery Research Group's guide to the classification of forms (MPRG 1998; 2001).

### **Condition**

The pottery is in a slightly abraded to abraded condition with sherd size falling into the small to medium size range (1g to 57g). The material is in a stable condition.

### **Overall Chronology and Source**

The four sherds were recovered from the topsoil 001 and subsoil 002. Deposit 002 produced a single small sherd from a Glazed Red Earthenware jar (PMR) of late 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> century date. The Glazed Red Earthenware sherd recovered from the topsoil 001 appears to come from a brown-glazed mug of mid 16<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> century date. The internal and external brown glaze is flecked with iron staining. Glazed Red Earthenwares were produced at several centres in East Anglia and Lincolnshire between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. The other two sherds found in the topsoil are fine Black-glazed Earthenwares (BABEL). The larger of the two sherds comes from an internally and externally side-handled bowl. The unusual form of the handle (formed from two slightly twisted sausages of clay) parallels one found on a possible churn at Broad Street, Ely (Cessford *et al.* 2006, Fig 45 - 1). This production was thought to date to the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The smaller sherd is from a drinking vessel. The two vessels are in a similar fine to medium orange sandy fabric, but may have been manufactured at different centres between the mid 16<sup>th</sup> and mid 17<sup>th</sup> centuries.

### **Summary and Recommendations**

The four sherds of pottery recovered from the site are all of post-medieval type and probably date to between the mid 16<sup>th</sup> and mid 17<sup>th</sup> centuries.

### **References**

Cessford, C, Alexander, M and Dickens, A, 2006, *Between Broad Street and the Great Ouse: Waterfront Archaeology in Ely*, East Anglian Archaeology 114

MPRG, 1998; 2001, *A Guide to the Classification of Medieval Ceramic Forms*, Medieval Pottery Research Group, Occasional Paper 1

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## **Appendix 2: Ceramic Building Material**

*By Jane Young*

### **Introduction**

Four pieces of brick and a fragment of drain weighing 0.805kgms in total were submitted for examination. The material ranges in date from the late medieval to the early modern period. The fragments were examined both visually and at x 20 binocular magnification. The resulting archive was then recorded using codenames in an Access database and complies with the guidelines laid out by the Archaeological Ceramic Building Materials Group (2001).

### **Condition**

The material recovered is mainly in an abraded to fairly abraded condition. The handmade bricks are in a poor but stable condition.

### **The Ceramic Building Material**

The five fragments submitted for examination were recovered from the topsoil 001. Four pieces are from handmade slop-moulded bricks (BRK) of late medieval to early post-medieval type. Two of the bricks are in calcareous fabrics ranging in colour from red to purple. One of these pieces is fired to near-vitrification point and has a thick fuel-ash type glaze. The other two bricks are in a fine silty fabric that also contains common iron-rich grains. These two bricks have sunken stretcher margins. No complete bricks are present in the assemblage and only one width measurement could be determined at 102mm. The single measurable thickness occurs on the glazed brick at 48mm. It is not possible to date these bricks closely but they fall into the type usually dated to between the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The drain fragment is industrially manufactured and dates to between the mid 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

### **Summary and Recommendations**

The brick recovered probably dates between 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries and is typical of types found on other sites in the area.

The brick could be retained for future study but the fragment of drain should be discarded.

### **References**

2001, *Draft Minimum Standards for the Recovery, Analysis and Publication of Ceramic Building Material, third version* [Internet]. Available from <<http://www.geocities.com/acbmg1/CBMGDE3.htm>>

## Appendix 3: The Animal Bone

By Jennifer Wood

### Introduction

Ten refitted fragments of animal bone (8g) were recovered during archaeological watching brief works undertaken by Allen Archaeology Ltd at land at Guyhirn Cambridgeshire.

### Results

The remains were of a good overall condition, averaging at grade 2 on the Lyman criteria (1996). No evidence of gnawing, butchery, pathology or burning was noted on any of the remains.

Context	Taxon	Element	Side	Number	Weight (g)	Comments
001	Medium Mammal	Long Bone	X	1	3	
002	Sheep/Goat	Femur	R	1	1	Juvenile/Lamb, unfused
	Medium Mammal	Vertebra	B	3	1	Neural arch fragments, Juvenile, unfused
	Medium Mammal	Innominate	R	1	0	Ilium, Juvenile/
	Sheep/Goat	Humerus	L	1	0	Unfused proximal epiphysis.
	Brent Goose?	Femur	L	1	2	Distal shaft, bd=16mm, Dd=14mm
	Unidentified	Unidentified	X	2	1	

Table 1: Summary of identified bone

As can be seen from Table 1, sheep/goat and possible Brent goose was identified within the assemblage, the remaining assemblage was not identifiable beyond size taxa. The majority of remains from subsoil 002 potentially originated from a single lamb carcass.

The assemblage is too small to provide meaningful information on animal husbandry and utilisation on site, save the presence of the animals/remains on site.

### References

Lyman, R L, 1996 *Vertebrate Taphonomy*, Cambridge Manuals in Archaeology, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge

#### Appendix 4: Context Summary List

Context	Type	Description	Interpretation
001	Layer	Compact, mid greyish black clayey silt, 0.4m thick	Topsoil
002	Layer	Compact, light grey with orange mottling sandy clay, 0.3m thick	Subsoil
003	Layer	Loose, light grey with yellow mottling, 0.4m+ thick	Natural geology
004	Layer	Loose, dark grey peat with frequent roots, 0.2m thick	Peat deposit within [008]
005	Fill	Loose, mid grey with orange mottling, 0.35m thick, fill of [007]	Natural silting of ditch [007]
006	Layer	Loose, dark grey peat with frequent roots, 0.2m+ thick, primary fill of [007]	Peat layer
007	Cut	Northwest-southeast orientated ditch with steep side, 0.95m+ long x 0.6m+ wide x 0.55m + deep, contains 005 and 006	Drainage ditch
008	Cut	Natural cut with shallow concave sides and flat base defining extent of peat deposit 004	Natural hollow containing peat deposit 004

## Appendix 5: OASIS record

OASIS ID: allenarc1-241559

### Project details

Project name LAND NORTHWEST OF ST MARY MAGDALENE CHURCH, HIGH ROAD, GUYHIRN, CAMBRIDGESHIRE

Short description of the project Allen Archaeology Limited (AAL) was commissioned to undertake an archaeological watching brief during groundworks for construction of five terraced houses and ancillary works on land west of High Road and adjacent to the Victorian Church of St Mary Magdalene, Guyhirn, Cambridgeshire.

### Project location

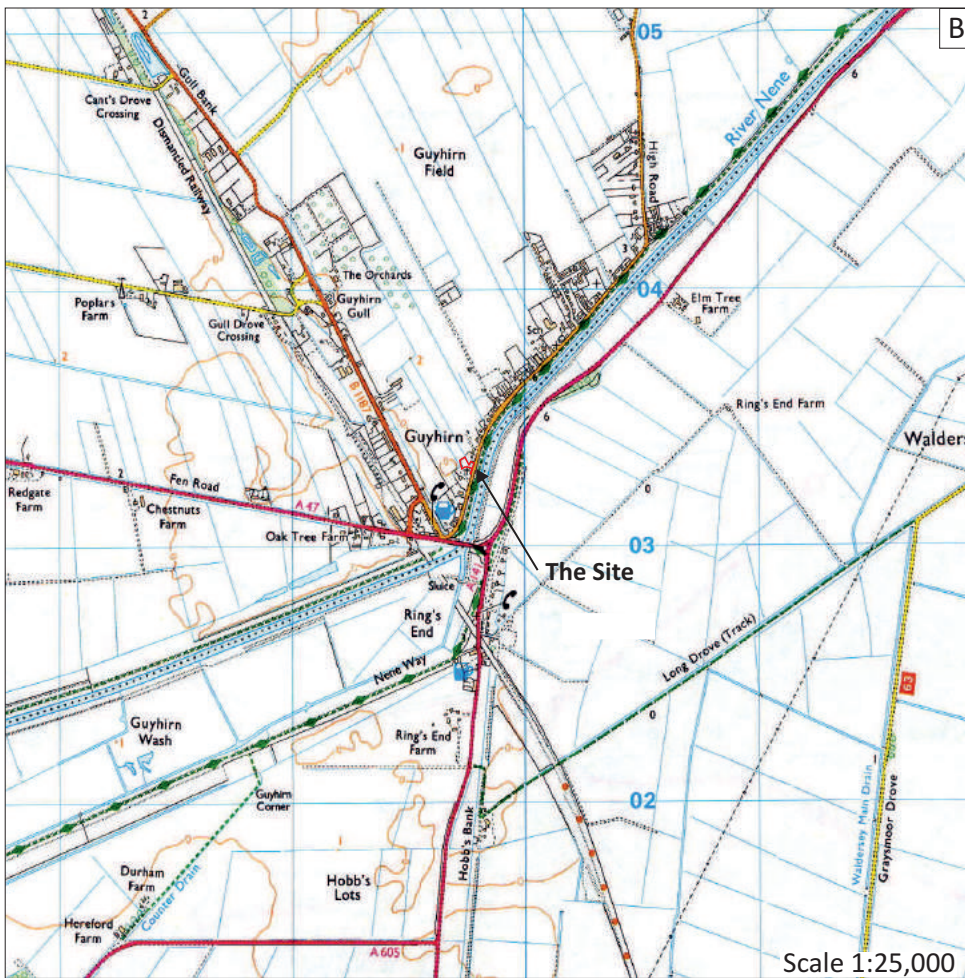
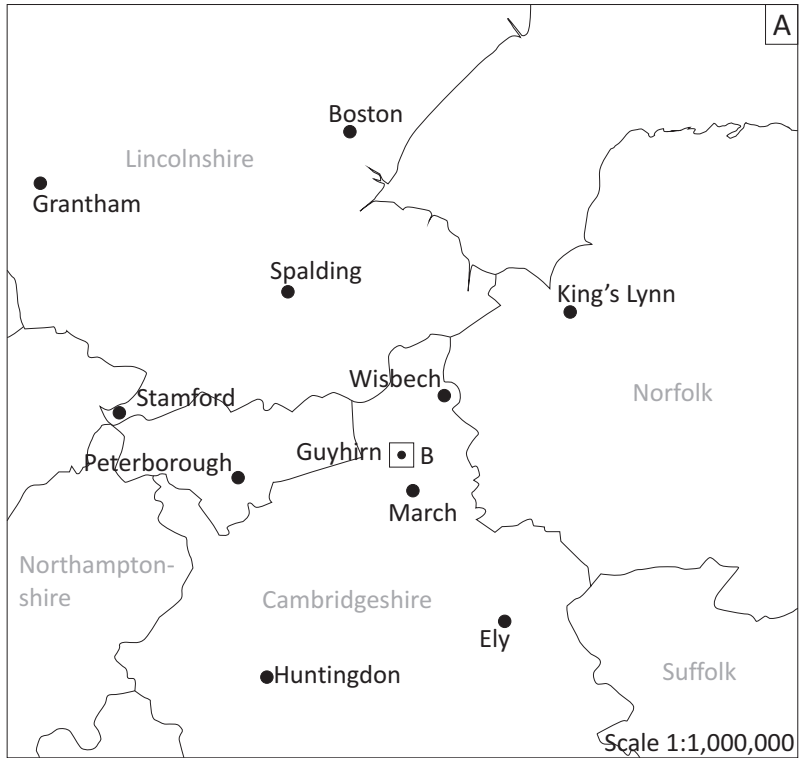
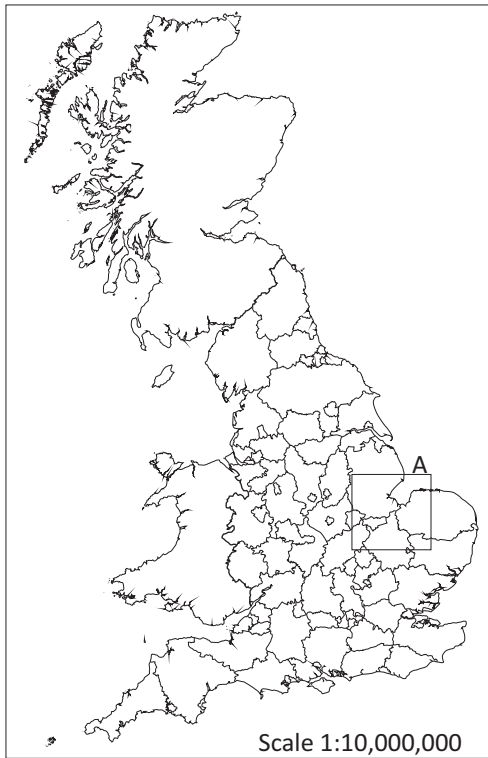
Country England

Site location CAMBRIDGESHIRE FENLAND WISBECH ST MARY LAND NORTHWEST OF ST MARY MAGDALENE CHURCH, HIGH ROAD, GUYHIRN, CAMBRIDGESHIRE

Entered by t rayner (info@allenarchaeology.co.uk)

Entered on 4 February 2016





**Figure 1:** Site location outlined in red  
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Site Code GUMM 14  
 Scales 1:10,000,000  
 1:1,000,000  
 1:25,000 @ A4  
 Drawn by R Birtwistle  
 Date 05/02/2015

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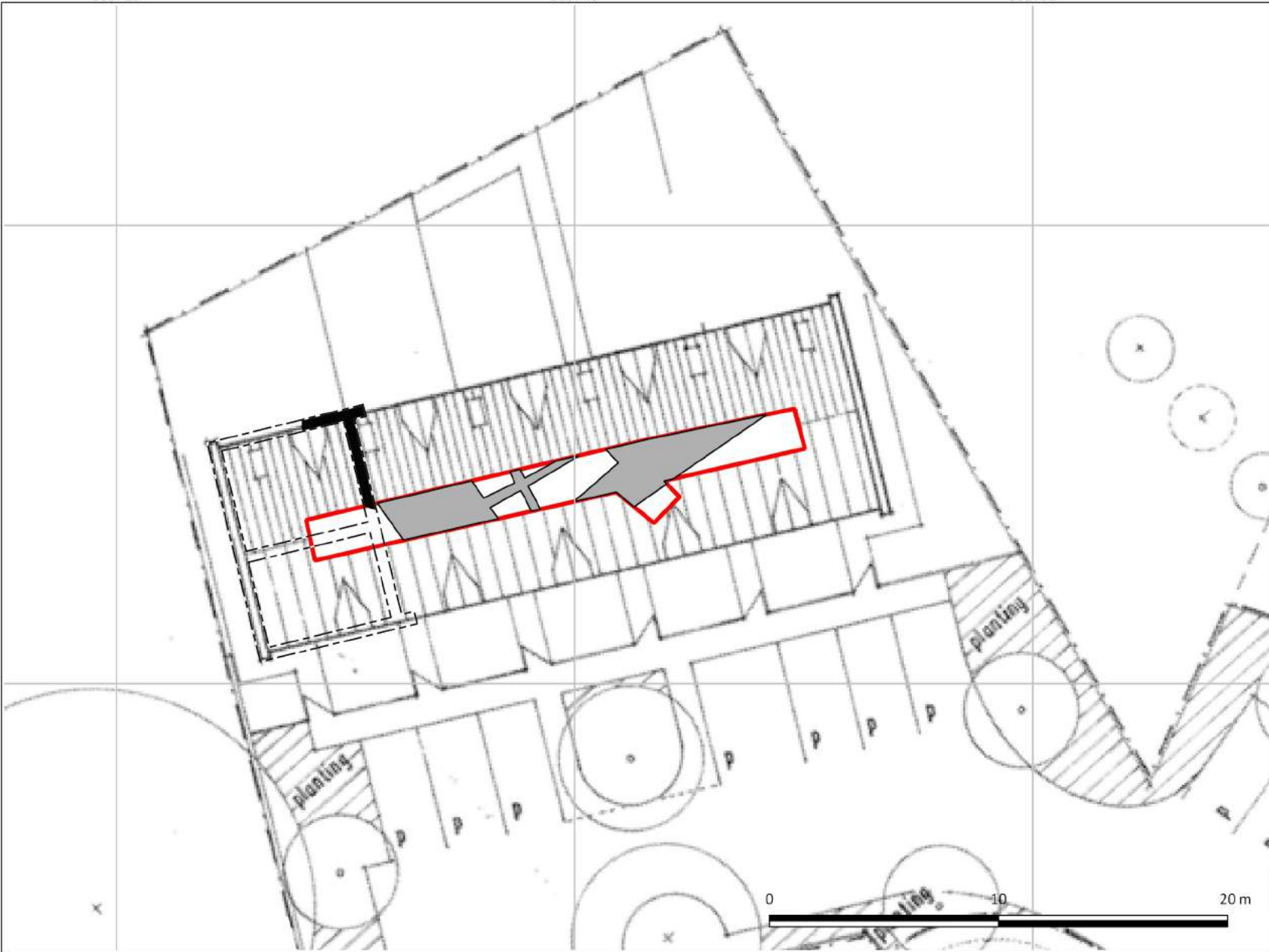
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539740

539760

303340

303320



Key

-  Excavated footings
-  Evaluation Trench
-  Archaeological feature
-  Previous features

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Drawn By	T Rayner
Date	03/02/15

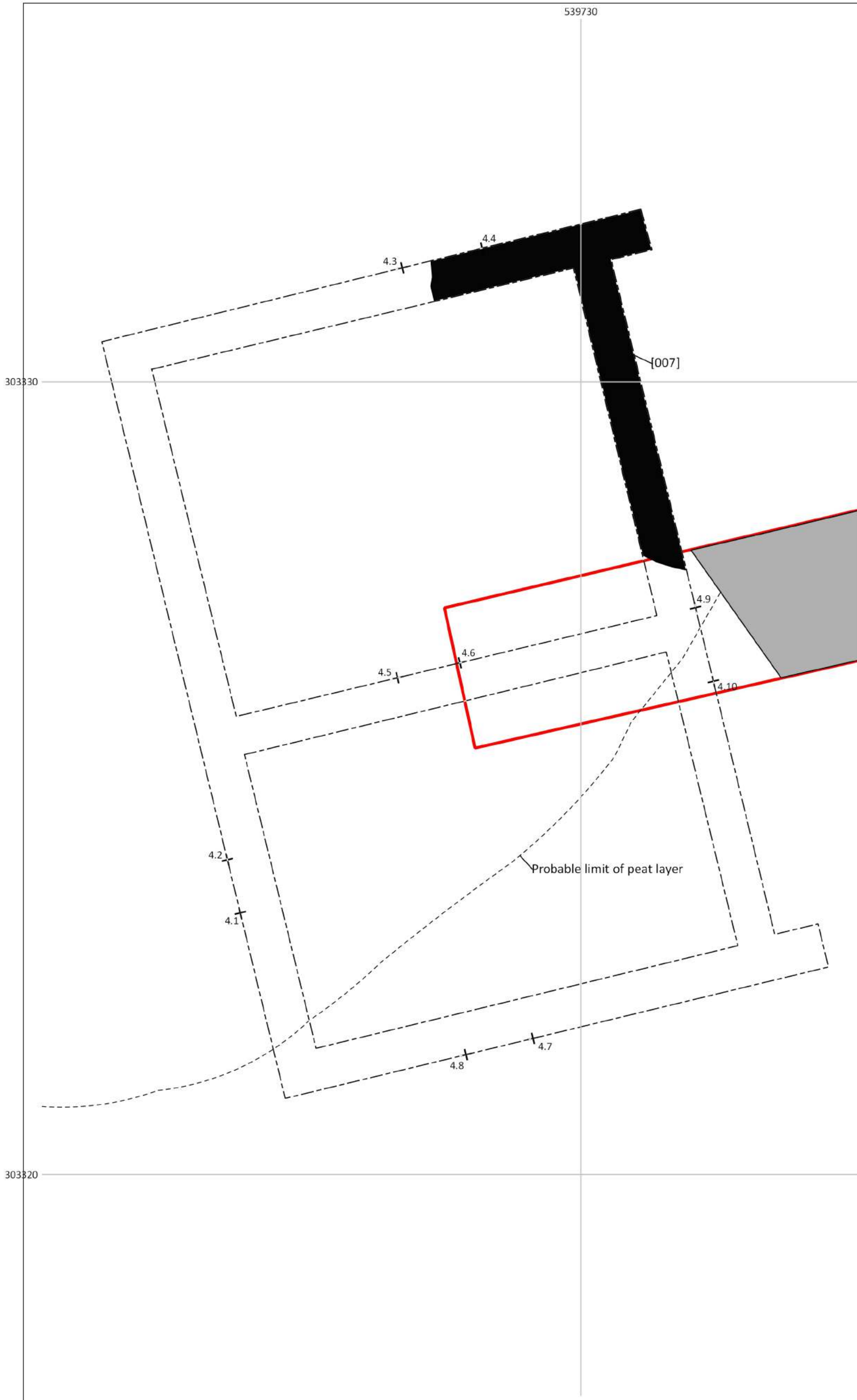


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Figure 2: Plan of excavated footings showing archaeological feature (in black) in relation to the previous evaluation trench (features in grey) and development area



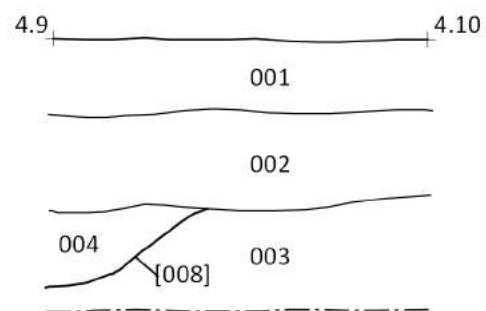
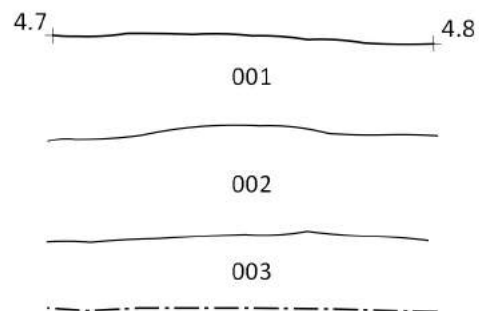
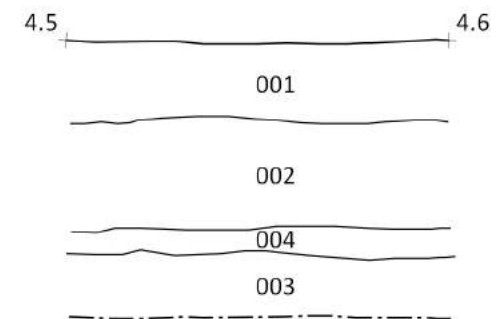
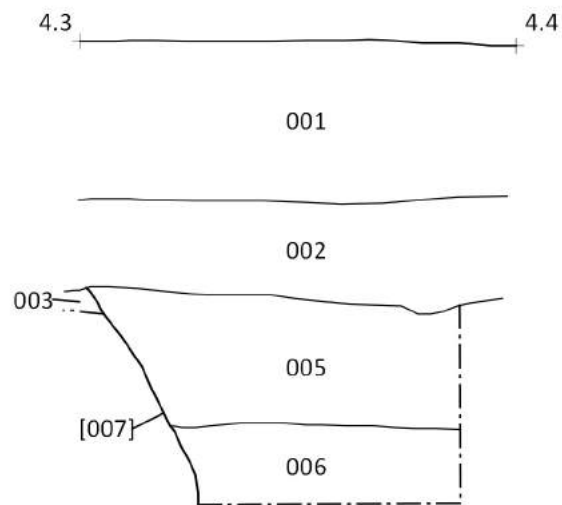
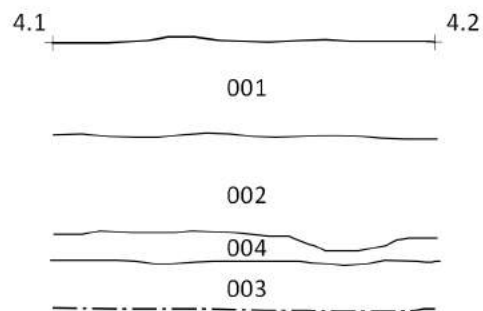
Key	
	Excavated footings
	Evaluation Trench
	Archaeological feature
	Previous features

Site Code	GUMM 14
Scale	1:50 @: A4
Drawn By	T Rayner
Date	03/02/15



Figure 3: Detailed plan of footings showing section locations

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**Figure 4:** Sections



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