

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION REPORT:  
TRIAL TRENCHING ON LAND AT 28 QUAKERS LANE, WISBECH, CAMBRIDGESHIRE**

Planning Reference: F/YR20/1182/O  
NGR: TF 47176 09016  
AAL Site Code: WIPG 21  
CHER Event Number: ECB6748  
OASIS Reference Number: allenarc1-431665



Report prepared for Swann Edwards Architecture

By  
Allen Archaeology Ltd  
Report Number AAL2021108

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Allenarchaeology



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Version no.:	2.0	

*Cover image: General shot of Trench 1, looking southwest*

## Executive Summary

- Swann Edwards Architecture commissioned Allen Archaeology Limited to undertake an archaeological evaluation by trial trenching on land at 28 Quakers Lane, Wisbech, Cambridgeshire as a condition of planning consent for a residential development.
- Within the vicinity of the site, prehistoric and Roman activity is represented by a number of find spots including a flaked flint axe, a highly decorative Iron Age bronze scabbard and a Roman coin hoard. It was a large and prosperous settlement by the time of the Domesday Book. The site lies to the southeast of the historic core of the town in an area predominantly used for agriculture in antiquity.
- Three evaluation trenches, each measuring 20m by 1.8m wide, were excavated in the proposed development area. Trench 2 revealed the edge of a large pit or curving linear feature containing a small assemblage of medieval to early modern finds, and another modern pit. Trenches 1 and 3 were devoid of archaeology.
- Overall, the results of the evaluation trenching suggests the proposed development will have little to no impact upon the archaeological resource of the area.



## 1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Swann Edwards Architecture commissioned Allen Archaeology Limited (AAL) to undertake an archaeological evaluation by trial trenching on land at 28 Quakers Lane, Wisbech, Cambridgeshire as a condition of planning consent for a new residential development.
- 1.2 All site works and reporting has been undertaken in line with recommendations of the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists 'Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluations' (CIfA 2020), the Historic England document 'Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment' (Historic England 2015), local guidelines outlined in the 'Research and Archaeology Revisited: a revised framework for the East of England' (Medlycott 2011), and a brief provided by Cambridgeshire HET (Thomas 2021) and site specification prepared by this company (AAL 2021).
- 1.3 The documentary and physical archive has been assembled in accordance with national guidelines; 'Archaeological Archives: A guide to best practice in creation, compilation, transfer and curation' (Brown 2011), and the local guidelines set out in 'Deposition of archaeological archives in Cambridgeshire' (Cambridge County Council 2020). The archive will be submitted to Cambridge County Council Archaeological Archives Facility under the CHER Event Number: ECB6748 within 12 months of the submission of the report.

## 2.0 Site Location and Description

- 2.1 The proposed development site is located in Wisbech, in the administrative district of Fenland District Council. It is situated 51km north of Cambridge and 13km southwest of King's Lynn. The proposed development site is located c.500m to the southeast of Wisbech town centre on the junction of Quaker Lane and Penrose Gardens, centred on NGR TF 47176 09016 (Figure 1).
- 2.2 The local bedrock geology comprises West Walton Formation, Amphill Clay Formation and Kimmeridge Clay Formation mudstone, siltstone and sandstone, with an overlying superficial geology of alluvium formed up to 2 million years ago in the Quaternary Period (<http://mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain/home.html>).

## 3.0 Planning Background

- 3.1 An outline planning application (F/YR20/1182/O) has been submitted and approved by Fenland District Council 'for the erection of up to 3 dwellings' on the site of former 28 Quaker Lane, Wisbech, Cambridgeshire.
- 3.2 The planning application was approved with conditions including:

*No development shall commence until the applicant, or their agents or successors in title, has implemented a programme of archaeological work which has been secured in accordance with a written scheme of investigation (WSI) which has been submitted to and approved by the local planning authority in writing. For land that is included within the WSI, no development shall take place other than under the provisions of the agreed WSI, which shall include:*

*a) the statement of significance and research objectives;*

*b) The programme and methodology of site investigation and recording and the nomination of a competent person(s) or organisation to undertake the agreed works;*

*c) The timetable for the field investigation as part of the development programme;*

*d) The programme and timetable for the analysis, publication & dissemination, and deposition of resulting material*

- 3.3 A written scheme of investigation was prepared by this company (AAL 2021) in response to a design brief from Cambridgeshire County Council Historic Environment Team (CHET) at Cambridgeshire County Council (Thomas 2021) for an archaeological evaluation by trial trenching on this site. The results of these works will provide sufficient information to determine the design and extent of any subsequent archaeological mitigation works that may be required in advance of development.
- 3.4 The approach adopted is consistent with the recommendations of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), with the particular chapter of relevance being 'Section 16. Conserving and enhancing the historic environment' (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government 2021) and Policy LP18 of the Fenland Local Plan (2014).

#### **4.0 Archaeological and Historical Background**

- 4.1 The site is situated on the eastern perimeter zone of the higher ground forming the fen island. Within the vicinity of the site the earliest evidence of human activity dates to the Neolithic period. During the 1970s, a flaked flint axe was excavated at the Station Hotel, c.1km northeast of the site (Cambridgeshire Historic Environment Record (hereafter CHER) Reference MCB17756). There is no evidence of Bronze Age activity, and Iron Age activity is represented by the recovery of a bronze scabbard with ornamental, symmetrical, linked spiral motifs, and evidence of former circular coral studs, found to the west of the proposed development area (MCB4870). The artefact is of high status, potentially deriving from a ritual or funerary deposit.
- 4.2 Roman activity is also noted within the study area, and is represented by several findspots. These include potsherds and a hoard of 17 bronze coins found within a pottery vessel, dating to between AD 268 and AD 395, recovered during groundworks in the early-20<sup>th</sup> century, west of the proposed development area (CHER References MCB4741 and MCB4764). Two coins of Constantine the Great were also found near the ancient sea bank, when excavating for the railway in 1850, c.400m to the west of the site.
- 4.3 Early medieval evidence is very limited within the vicinity of the site, with only a single find spot recorded, which comprised two Saxon brooches, revealed in 1858 within the foundations of Wisbech Corn Exchange, situated to the west of the development area (CHER Reference MCB4875). These are suggestive of burial practice, although no associated human remains were recorded. Despite the absence of archaeological evidence from this period, literary evidence indicates the occupation of Wisbech from at least the 8<sup>th</sup> century AD (Atkinson et al 2002) whilst the wider region of East Anglia is known to have been heavily occupied throughout the Anglo-Saxon period (Hamerow et al 2011).
- 4.4 The town was known as *Wisbece* in the Domesday Book of 1086, with the name deriving from the Old English 'wisse' meaning a meadow or marsh, and the Middle English 'beche' meaning a stream in a valley (Watts 2007). The settlement was very large with 73

households, consisting of 15 villagers and two slaves, and taxable assets including 10 ploughlands, 1 ¼ lord's lands, meadow and two fisheries (Williams and Martin 2002).

- 4.5 The development site is located in an area that is depicted on 16<sup>th</sup>-century mapping. The 1<sup>st</sup> edition Ordnance Survey map indicates the presence of an 'old burial ground' in the location of this junction. Its possible origins are preserved in the name 'Quaker Lane' (CHER Reference MCB24313).
- 4.6 Archaeological evidence from the medieval and post medieval period has been revealed during schemes of archaeological evaluation trenching in the vicinity, with small ditches and associated 16<sup>th</sup> - 18<sup>th</sup> century pottery identified at Somers Road, (MCB19579), and residual 13<sup>th</sup> - 14<sup>th</sup> century pottery sherds at Oldfield Lane (MCB20242), situated northwest of the development area.
- 4.7 Wisbech was predominantly an agricultural community at the beginning of the post-medieval period, but with an increased diversification of trades during the mid-late 18<sup>th</sup> century and 19<sup>th</sup> century. The settlement core of Wisbech was focused along the northern and southern banks of the river at the Town Bridge, a bridge constructed of stone in 1758, succeeding wooden bridges from at least 1326, and replaced in 1857 by a broad, level, iron bridge.

## **5.0 Aims and Objectives**

- 5.1 The purpose of the evaluation was to gather sufficient information for the CHET at Cambridgeshire County Council to be able to formulate a policy for the management of the archaeological resources present on the site.
- 5.2 Evidence was gathered to establish the location, extent, date, character, condition, significance and quality of any surviving archaeological remains liable to be threatened by the proposed development. In addition, the evaluation aimed to provide an adequate representative sample of all areas where archaeological remains are potentially threatened.
- 5.3 The results of the evaluation will be used to determine the character, date, condition and significance of the archaeological resource, and define the nature and extent of any additional mitigation works that may be required.

## **6.0 Methodology**

- 6.1 The trial trenching strategy was agreed with CHET at Cambridgeshire County Council, and comprised three trenches each measuring 20m long by 1.8m wide (Figure 2). The fieldwork was carried out between Monday 13<sup>th</sup> September and Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> September 2021 and was supervised by Robert Evershed.
- 6.2 The trenches were located using a survey-grade Leica GS08 RTK NetRover GPS, which allowed centimetre accuracy, and were tied into the National Grid. In each trench, a mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless ditching bucket was used to remove the topsoil, subsoil and underlying non-archaeological deposits in spits no greater than 0.1m in thickness.

- 6.3 Machine excavation was monitored by an experienced archaeologist at all times and the process was repeated until the first archaeologically significant or natural horizon was exposed. All further excavation was undertaken manually to define the archaeological stratigraphy and the nature of the deposits.
- 6.4 In addition, a bucket sampling programme was undertaken, whereby 90 litres of spoil was hand sorted for each soil horizon encountered at the trench ends and the mid-point. Unstratified artefacts were sought and recovered from trench spoil heaps. Metal detecting (with the detector set to not discriminate against iron objects) was undertaken in the trenches and on the soil heaps to aid the recovery of artefacts. No finds were recovered from this process.
- 6.5 A full written record of the archaeological deposits was made on standard AAL context recording and trench sheets. Each deposit, layer or cut was allocated a three-digit unique identifier (context number) and given a written description. A summary of these is included in

- 6.6 Appendix 3. Three-digit numbers within square brackets represent cut features (e.g. ditch [205]).
- 6.7 Archaeological deposits were drawn to scale, in plan and section (at scale 1:20 or 1:50), with Ordnance Datum heights being displayed on each class of drawing. Colour photography formed an integral part of the recording strategy, and all photographs incorporated scales, an identification board and directional arrow. The photographic record consists of high-quality digital uninterpolated images of a least 10 megapixels taken with an APS-C or larger sensor.
- 6.8 All finds of all classes were collected and were bagged and labelled with the appropriate deposit context number. All finds were processed (cleaned, marked and labelled as appropriate) at the offices of AAL and were then submitted for specialist analysis.
- 6.9 Whole earth environmental samples of 40 litres or the total volume of the context if less than were taken for environmental analysis from suitable contexts that had the potential to provide information on the preservation conditions and potential of analysis of all biological remains.

## 7.0 Results

### *Trenches 1 and 3 (Figure 3)*

- 7.1 Trench 1 was situated toward the western side of the site and Trench 3 located towards the east, both were broadly northeast to southwest orientated and devoid of archaeology.
- 7.2 The stratigraphic sequence was broadly similar within these trenches, with the earliest deposit encountered; a mid-brownish yellow sandy silt tidal flat superficial geology. Above this were mid-greyish/yellowish brown alluvial deposits measuring between 0.30-0.46m thick. Overlaying these alluvial deposits were dark greyish/yellowish brown sandy silt levelling deposits, measuring between 0.20-0.30m thick. This was sealed with a dark brown sandy silt topsoil.

### *Trench 2 (Figure 4)*

- 7.3 Trench 2 was northwest to southeast aligned, situated in the centre of the site, measuring 20m long and 1.80m wide. The same stratigraphic sequence of alluvial layers and levelling deposits was also present in this trench.
- 7.4 Emerging from the eastern limit of excavation, a broadly sub oval feature [207], was cut into natural deposit 204, measuring 12.20m long with an exposed width of 0.48m and 0.35m deep (Plate 1). The feature had shallow concave sides and contained a single natural silting deposit 208, from which a sample was taken. This produced a small assemblage of medieval and early post-medieval pottery, a fragment of clay tobacco pipe, a modern piece of window glass, 2 undateable fragments of ceramic building material and a very small quantity of what are likely to be modern plant remains and mollusc shells.



*Plate 1: Oblique shot of feature [207], looking southeast, scales 2m*

- 7.5 Towards the southern end of the trench, emerging from the western limit of excavation was one side of a probable pit [205] (Plate 2). It contained a single mottled sandy silt dumped deposit, and the exposed portion measured 1.04m long, 0.62m wide and 0.62m deep. The pit was cut into the levelling deposit 201 and is likely to be modern in date.



*Plate 2: Northeast facing section of pit [205], looking southwest, scales 1m and 2m*

## 8.0 Discussion & Conclusions

- 8.1 The trial trenching has exposed very few features and deposits of archaeological interest. Trenches 1 and 3 were devoid of archaeological features and Trench 2 revealed two features; a pit likely to be of modern date, and part of a feature that could be a large pit or

the edge of a curving linear feature. An environmental sample was taken from the latter producing a very small amount of environmental material.

- 8.2 A number of alluvial deposits were noted in each of the three trenches. This correlates with historic mapping from 1886-1959, where the location of this site is within an arable area named 'Marsh ditch field', suggesting damp ground conditions persisted until relatively recently.
- 8.3 The results of the evaluation trenching suggest the proposed development will have little to no impact upon the archaeological resource.

## 9.0 Effectiveness of Methodology

- 9.1 The archaeological methodology was appropriate to the nature and extent of the proposed development. It has allowed for an assessment of the archaeological potential of the proposed development area.

## 10.0 Acknowledgements

- 10.1 Allen Archaeology would like to thank Swann Edwards Architecture for this commission and CHET for their assistance. Thanks also go to Elvin Plant for providing the plant for trench excavation and backfilling.

## 11.0 References

AAL, 2021, *Specification for an Archaeological Evaluation by Trial Trenching: 28 Quakers Lane, Wisbech, Cambridgeshire*, Unpublished project document

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**Ordnance Survey Map** [online] Available at: <https://maps.nls.uk/> [Accessed 29<sup>th</sup> September 2021]



## Appendix 1: Finds

*By Alice Forward*

### Introduction

A small assemblage of finds was retrieved from the residue from sample no. 1 collected from context 208 during excavations at Wisbech, Cambridgeshire.

### Methodology

The finds have been recorded by count and weight (g) and the pottery has been identified by fabric following the Cambridgeshire Fabric Series (Spoerry 2016). The pottery has been recorded in accordance with *The Standards* (2016) and the assemblage has overall been recorded following the *ClfA Toolkit for Specialist Reporting*.

### Results

#### *Pottery*

Three sherds of pottery were retrieved from context 208, sample 1. Two sherds are medieval and the third is later medieval to early-post medieval in date. The sherds are all highly abraded and are not indicative of the date of the feature.

Context no.	No. Sherds	Weight (g)	Fabric	Form	Decoration	Date
208	1	19	BOUA	Jug	External green glaze	1150 - 1400
208	1	2	BOUA	Jar		1150 - 1400
208	1	1	BOND	Dish	Internal brown glaze	1430 - 1650

*Table 1: Pottery catalogue*

#### *Clay Pipe*

A small fragment of clay pipe stem, weighing <1g was found within the residue of sample 1 from context 208.

#### *Animal bone*

A small fragment of unidentifiable animal bone weighing 1g was retrieved from the sample from context 208.

### Discussion

This small group of highly fragmented finds demonstrates that there is a high degree of residuality, with none of the finds indicating a primary deposit. The presence of medieval finds may suggest limited medieval activity within the vicinity of the site but this feature is not datable by any of this material.

The finds have been fully recorded and no further work is recommended. Due to the fragmented and abraded nature of the finds it is not considered necessary to retain the material and disposal is recommended.

## References

Barclay et al 2016, *A standard for pottery studies in archaeology*.

CifA, *Toolkit for Specialist Reporting*, <Available Online <https://www.archaeologists.net/reporting-toolkit>>

Spoerry P., 2016, *The Production and Distribution of Medieval Pottery in Cambridgeshire*. East Anglian Archaeology 159.

## Appendix 2: Environmental Assessment

*Bryn Leadbetter*

A single whole-earth environmental sample was taken during excavations carried out by Allen Archaeology Ltd during works at 28 Quakers Lane, Wisbech, Cambridgeshire (Site code: WIPG21). The sample was taken for the recovery of charred plant remains and wood charcoal, and any further environmental evidence in order to aid an interpretation of the feature from which the sample derived. Any artefacts found in the sample were also collected. Following is an assessment of the sample along with proposals for any further analysis required.

### Methodology

The sample was processed by flotation with the lighter, floating, material (flot) retained in a 300-micron mesh and the heavier fraction (residue) captured in a 1000-micron mesh. The flot was then air dried before being scanned under a microscope. The residue was air dried and sieved at 5mm and 2mm. Any artefacts in the residue were removed and united by context with those hand-collected during excavation, whilst any additional vegetation and other environmental material was added to the corresponding flot.

### Results

*Table 2: Quantification of whole-earth samples from WIPG21*

Sample no.	Context no.	Context type	Sample volume (ltrs)	Flot volume (ml)	Environmental Remains	Residue finds
1	208	natural fill of feature 207	18	5	frequent rootlets/>20 seed/occasional charcoal speck <1mm/<100 mollusc shell	5x pottery, 2x cbm, 1x glass, 1x clay pipe, 4x animal bone fragments
Total	-	-	18	5	-	-

Table 2 quantifies the sample taken. The flot contained a high (relative to flot size) amount of rootlets and <100 terrestrial mollusc shells of mixed species. Charred and what appear to be modern seeds were present in small numbers, <10 specimens of each. A small amount of a tarry-charcoal material of no greater than 1mm was also noted. The geological aspect comprised a sandy-silt material with occasional angular flints <41mm in size. Fragments of pottery, ceramic building material (cbm), glass, clay pipe and animal bone were all recovered from the residue

### Discussion

The sample contained little environmental material of archaeological interest. The small roots and uncharred seed component are likely modern and intrusive. Although mollusc shells can inform on environmental conditions pertaining to the deposit, the feature from which they derive or the wider, immediate, environment, the present assemblage is too small to be sufficiently informative. Similarly, the charred seeds and tarry/charcoal material, whilst possibly of archaeological interest, are too small in unit size (<1mm) and abundance (<50 specimens) to warrant further consideration.

The environmental material is insufficient to warrant further analysis and suggested here that no such study need take place.

### Appendix 3: Context Summary List

#### Trench 1

Context	Type	Description	Length (m)	Width (m)	Thickness/depth (m)	Interpretation
100	Layer	Loose, dark brown sandy silt with frequent rooting			0.16	Topsoil
101	Layer	Compact, dark greyish brown sandy silt with moderate charcoal flecks			0.20	Demolition/levelling deposit
102	Layer	Loose, mid greyish brown sandy silt			0.46	Alluvial deposit
103	Layer	Loose, mid brownish yellow sandy silt			0.16+	Tidal flat superficial geology

#### Trench 2

Context	Type	Description	Length (m)	Width (m)	Thickness/depth (m)	Interpretation
200	Layer	Loose, dark brown sandy silt with frequent rooting			0.28	Topsoil
201	Layer	Compact, dark greyish brown sandy silt with moderate charcoal flecks			0.24	Demolition/levelling deposit
202	Layer	Loose, light yellowish brown sandy silt			0.26	Alluvial deposit
203	Layer	Loose, mid yellowish brown sandy silt			0.32	Alluvial deposit
204	Layer	Loose, mid brownish yellow sandy silt			0.20+	Tidal flat superficial geology
205	Cut	Circular shaped pit with steep straight sides, sharp break of slope leading to a flat base	10.4	0.62	0.62	Cut of pit
206	Fill	Compact, dark greyish brown sandy silt mottled with mid yellowish brown sandy silt			0.62	Backfill of pit [205]
207	Cut	Sub-oval shaped pond/pit with shallow concave sides leaving to a flat base	12.20+	0.49+	0.35	Cut of pit
208	Fill	Compact, mid brownish grey sandy silt			0.35	Natural silting of pit [207]

### Trench 3

Context	Type	Description	Length (m)	Width (m)	Thickness/depth (m)	Interpretation
300	Layer	Loose, dark brown sandy silt with frequent rooting and occasional stones			0.12	Topsoil
301	Layer	Compact, dark yellowish brown sandy silt with occasional stones			0.40	Demolition/levelling deposit
302	Layer	Compact, mid yellowish brown sandy silt with occasional rooting			0.30	Alluvial deposit
303	Layer	Compact, mid brown sandy silt with occasional rooting			0.30	Alluvial deposit
304	Layer	Loose, mid yellowish brown sandy silt			0.38	Alluvial deposit
305	Layer	Loose, light brownish yellow sandy silt			0.04	Tidal flat superficial geology

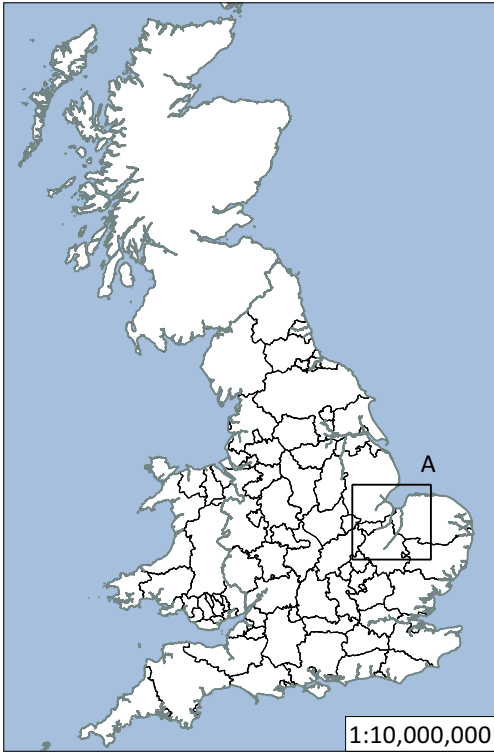


Figure 1: Site location outlined in red

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Site Code	WIPG 21
Scale	1:10,000,000 1:1,000,000 1:25,000 @ A4
Drawn by	E Danielsson
Date	05/10/2021

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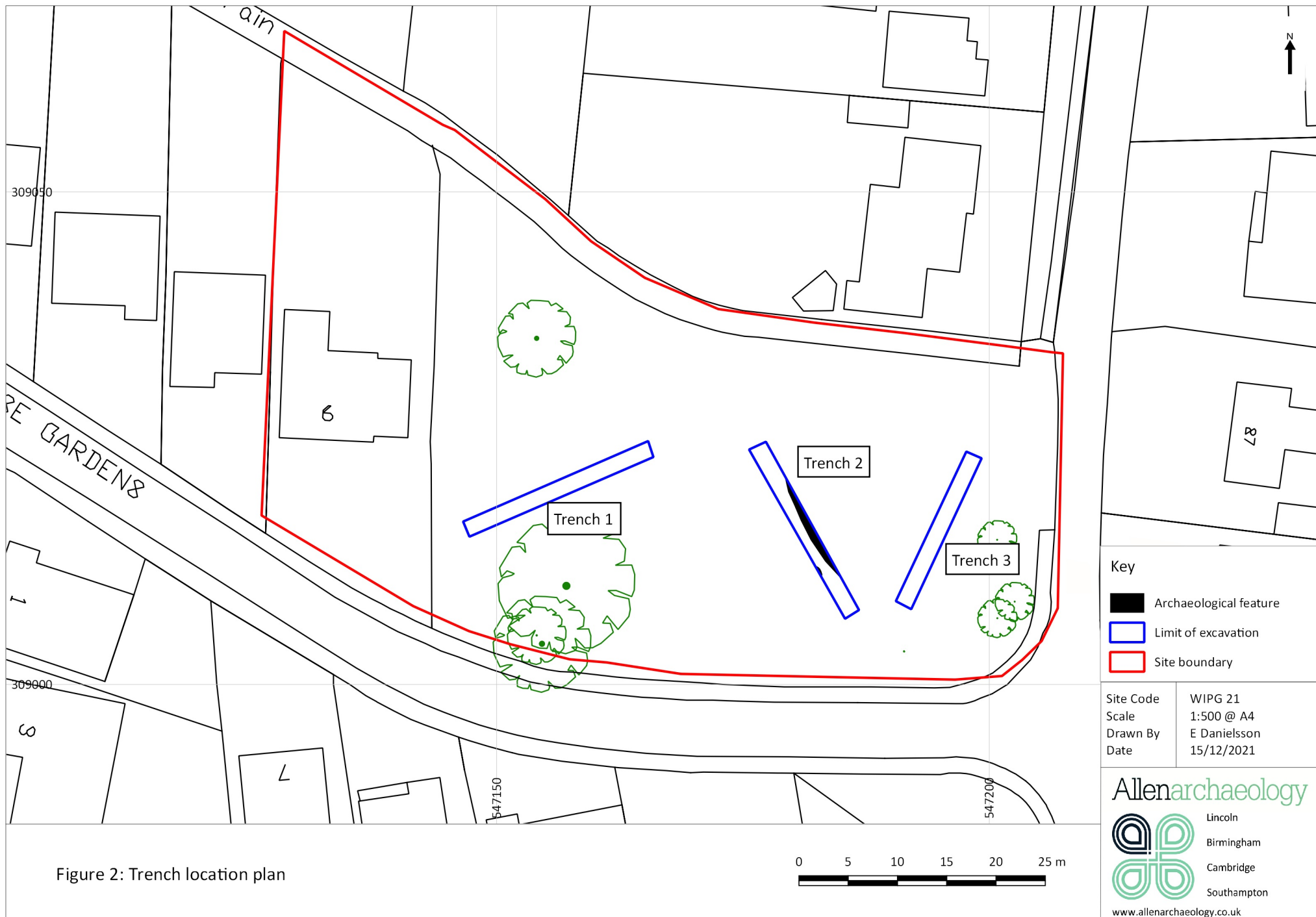
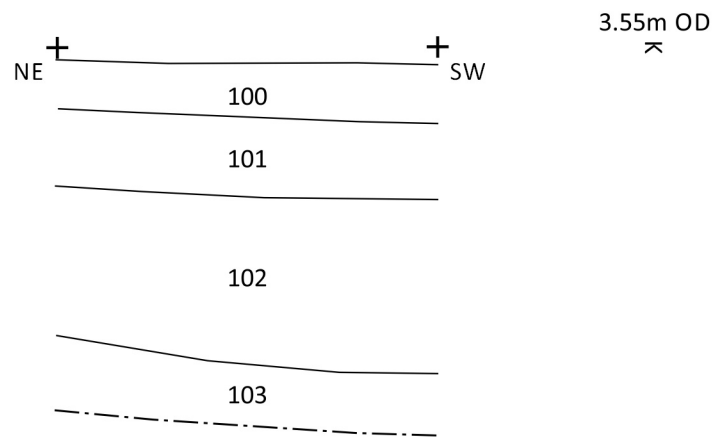
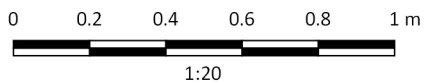
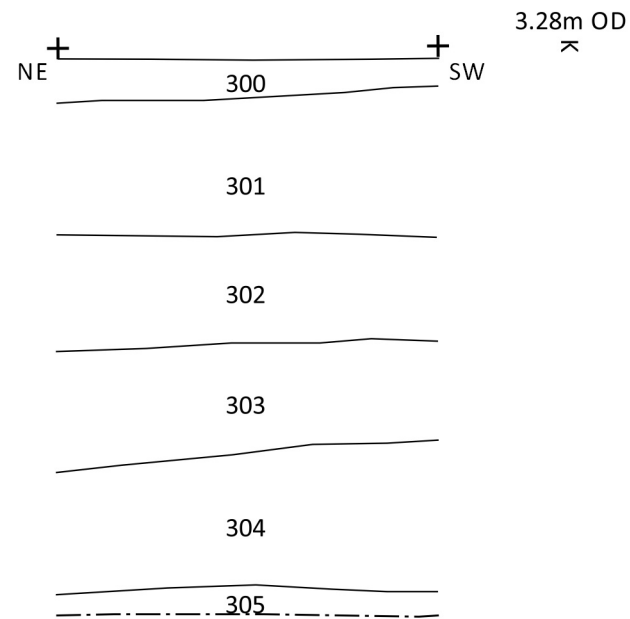


Figure 2: Trench location plan

Northwest-facing representative section of Trench 1



Northwest-facing representative section of Trench 3



Site Code	WIPG 21
Scale	1:20 @ A4
Drawn By	E Danielsson
Date	05/10/2021

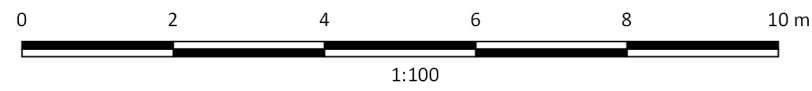
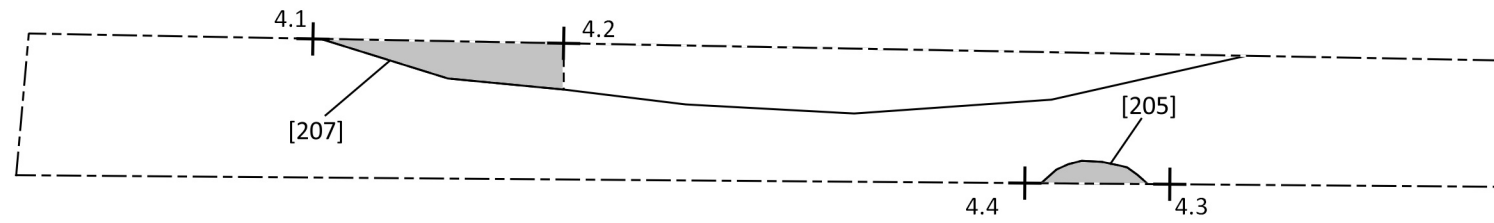
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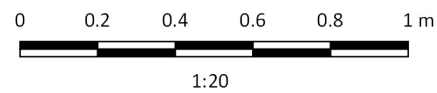
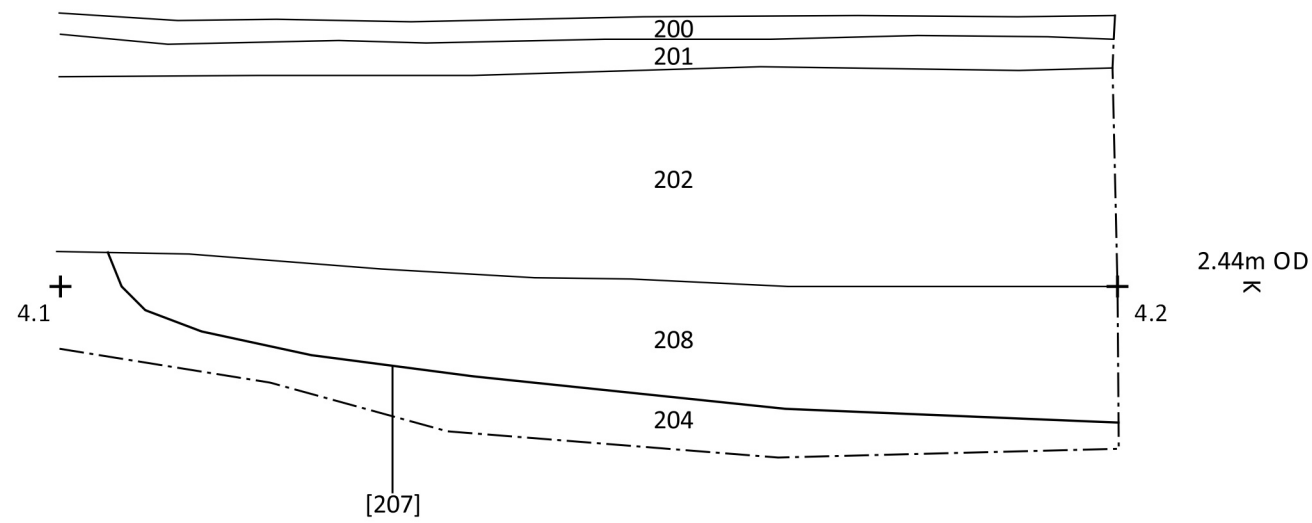
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Figure 3: Representative sections from Trenches 1 and 3

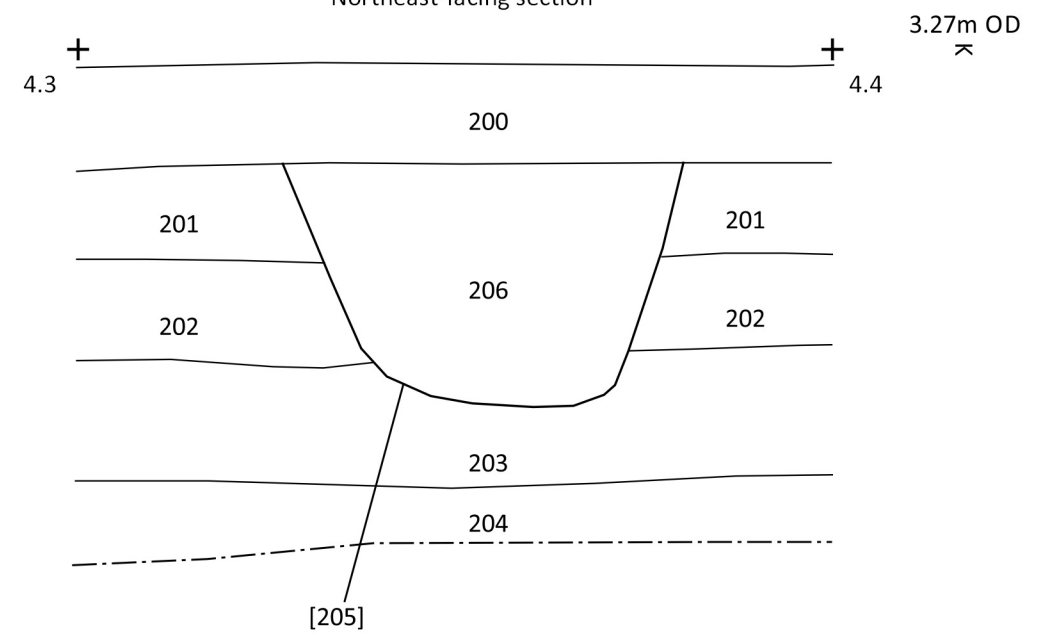




Southwest-facing section



Northeast-facing section



Site Code	WIPG 21
Scale	1:20 & 1:100 @ A3
Drawn by	E Danielsson
Date	05/10/2021

Figure 4: Plan and sections of Trench 2

## Appendix 5: OASIS summary

OASIS ID: allenarc1-431665

### ? Project details

Add or edit entries

Project name LAND AT 28 QUAKERS LANE, WISBECH, CAMBRIDGESHIRE

Short description of the project ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION BY TRIAL TRENCHING ON LAND AT 28 QUAKERS LANE, WISBECH, CAMBRIDGESHIRE

Project dates Start: 13-09-2021 End: 14-09-2021

Previous/future work No / Not known

Type of project Field evaluation

Monument type NA None

Significant Finds NA None

### ? Project location

Add or edit entries

Site location CAMBRIDGESHIRE FENLAND WISBECH 28 QUAKERS LANE, WISBECH, CAMBRIDGESHIRE

Study area 0.328 Hectares

Site coordinates NGR - TF 47176 09016  
LL - 52.658487419916 0.176263331911 (decimal)  
LL - 52 39 30 N 000 10 34 E (degrees)  
Point

### ? Project creators

Add or edit entries

Name of Organisation Allen Archaeology Limited

Project brief originator Local Authority Archaeologist and/or Planning Authority/advisory body

Project design originator AAL

Project director/manager Tobin Rayner

Project supervisor Robert Evershed





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