

## Summary

- *Pre-Construct Archaeological Services Ltd (PCAS) was commissioned by Michael Beckett to undertake an intrusive archaeological evaluation on land to the rear of 32 – 34 Eastrea Road, Whittlesey, Cambridgeshire.*
- *This work was undertaken to fulfil a condition attached to the granting of planning permission for the demolition of 32 Eastrea Road and the construction of three new houses (Planning application F/YR11/0323/F).*
- *Two trenches were excavated within the proposed development area. A number of square cut postholes were observed within the southernmost of the trenches. Nearly all of these were demonstrably modern, containing 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century material, or having been cut through the subsoil.*
- *No other features or artefacts of archaeological significance were observed.*
- *Effectively, the negative results from the relatively large area examined within the development site would suggest further investigation is unlikely to yield any more significant information.*



**Fig. 1:** Site location map. Scale 1:50 000  
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## 1.0 Introduction

Pre-Construct Archaeological Services Ltd (PCAS) was commissioned by Michael Beckett, to undertake an intrusive archaeological evaluation on land to the rear of 32-34 Eastrea Road, Whittlesey, Cambridgeshire (NGR: TL 2750 9706). Site works were undertaken by the author on the 5-6/9/11.

The archaeological evaluation was undertaken to meet the objectives of a project specification prepared by PCAS (2011) in consultation with Mr. Andy Thomas, the Senior Archaeological Advisor for Fenland District Council and in accordance with the Regional Spatial Strategy for Fenland District in the East of England, Fenland District-Wide Local Plan, the recommendations of *Planning Policy Statement 5, Policy HE6; Code of Conduct* (Institute for Archaeologists, 1994 as revised), *Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Evaluations* (Institute of Field Archaeologists, 2008 as revised).

## 2.0 Site Location and Description (Figs. 1 & 2 see Photographs Nos. 1 & 2)

The proposed development site lies close to the centre of the small town of Whittlesey, Cambridgeshire. Historically known as *Whittlesea*, the town is an ancient Fenland market town located c. 8 km east of Peterborough, situated within the west side of the Fenland administrative district. The site is located on the central, eastern side of Whittlesey, within the Development Area Boundary and is in a predominately residential area.

The proposed development site is sub-rectangular in shape and covers an area of c. 0.1 hectare, centred on NGR: TL 2750 9706. The site currently comprises land at 32 Eastrea Road and to the rear (south of) 32-34 Eastrea Road. The site is surrounded by residential properties on all sides except to the north which is defined by the public highway Eastrea Road.

Whittlesey is located between the Nene Wash flood plains (Site of Special Scientific Interest: SSSI), to the north and the Briggate River/Whittlesey Dyke to the south. Whittlesey developed on comparatively dry land before the fens of the Bedford level were drained ([www.fenland.gov.uk/](http://www.fenland.gov.uk/)).

The proposed development site is situated at an average height of 7.0m OD. The drift geology of the site and surrounding area is mapped as Older Marine/Estuarine Sand and Gravels (March Gravels), (BGS 1984).

## 3.0 Planning Background

On 12/4/2011 a planning application (Ref.: F/YR11/0323/F) was made to Fenland District Council for the erection of a single 2-storey, 3-bed dwelling and two, 2-storey, 4-bed dwellings with detached garages; and the demolition of 32 Eastrea Road. Full conditional planning permission was granted on 22/7/2011. Due to the high archaeological potential of the site, a condition was placed on planning consent requiring a scheme of archaeological work to be undertaken at the site. An archaeological condition (No. 5) attached to the planning permission states:

*No development shall take place within the area indicated until the applicant, or their successors in title, has secured the implementation of a programme of archaeological work in*

*accordance with a written scheme of investigation which has been submitted by the applicant and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.*

*Reason - In the interests of preserving any archaeological artefacts found on the site.*

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

The proposed development site is located just outside the medieval core of the town, along Eastrea Road and to the northeast of the medieval church of St Mary (CHER 02928).

A large number of archaeological investigations have previously taken place in Whittlesey, particularly within the historic core, located c. 500m west of the proposed development site. A few of these have been conducted in the general vicinity (i.e. within 500m) of the proposed development site within the past ten years. The closest to the site are:

- ECB1587 (c. 200m northeast of the proposed development site). In 2003, an evaluation was carried out by Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Field Unit (CCC AFU), in advance of extensions to college buildings at Sir Harry Smith Community College. Two parallel ditches were revealed but no dating evidence was recovered (Fletcher 2004).
- ECB893 (c. 250m west of the proposed development site). In 2002, a 17th century pit (CB15239) was observed during an archaeological evaluation conducted by Soke Archaeological Services Ltd. at 6 Inhams Road, Whittlesey (TL 27211 97005), Elsewhere severe 19th/20th century truncation of the site was observed. Several residual finds dating to the 13th and 14th centuries were also recovered, suggesting there may have been earlier activity on the site, but this was not seen during the evaluation (Bamforth 2002).
- ECB2412 (c. 450m southwest of the proposed development site). In 2007, two evaluation trenches were excavated by Archaeological Project Services (APS) on land at Station Road, Whittlesey (TL 27141 96757). The evaluation revealed undated dumping layers and two post-medieval quarrying pits. An array of post-medieval artefacts was recovered, including pottery, glass, clay pipe and glass (MCB17675), (Bradley-Lovekin and Cope-Faulkner 2007).
- ECB3539 and ECB3571 (c. 200m-400m north of the proposed development site). In 2011, a test-pit survey and trial-trench evaluation was carried out by Oxford Archaeology East in the Sir Harry Smith Community College playing fields at TL 2763 9744. The evaluation identified several undated features cutting into the natural gravels. Three pits and ditches recorded here indicate earlier activity within the development area. A compact gravel spread was also recorded and this may have been a track or surface associated with earlier occupation, and may have connected with the Fen Causeway to the north. A single undated ditch was also identified to the front of the school (MCB19501), (Rees 2011).

- ECB2033 (c. 400m west of the proposed development site). In 2004, an evaluation was undertaken by CCC AFU on land adjacent to Grosvenor House, Eastgate (TL 27124 97107). The evaluation revealed a late medieval ditch, which may have been part of a larger complex and modern features (MCB16704), including a road, brick surface and Victorian rubbish pits (Hatton 2004).
- ECB412 (c. 500m northwest of the proposed development site). In 2000, ten trial trenches were excavated by Cambridge Archaeological Unit in advance of a residential development on land off Bassenhally Road, Whittlesey (TL 27264 97647). Only two furrows of part of a probable field system were recorded. Evidence for strip quarries were discovered which were thought to date have been backfilled between the 14<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries (Patten 2000).

The only other archaeological monument record listed on the HER in the near vicinity of the proposed development site is CHER 01374, which relates to a fragment of Green-glazed Medieval jug with brown geometric pattern, found in a yard behind J. W. Ailsby's shop in High Causeway (TL 273 972), c. 250m northwest of the proposed development site.

## 5.0 Aims and Objectives

The purpose of the evaluation is to gather sufficient information to establish the presence or absence, extent, depth, condition, character, quality and date of any archaeological deposits. Such information is used to assist the Local Planning Authority to reconcile development proposals within their own policy framework, of safeguarding archaeological remains when at risk from development proposals and inform the need for any further archaeological intervention and take into consideration such things as sympathetic foundation designs with a view to minimising damage to archaeological deposits (mitigation) where appropriate.

## 6.0 Methodology

Two trenches were located within the proposed development area, however due to restricted space these were partially repositioned, from their originally proposed position, after consultation with the Senior Archaeological Advisor.

The adjusted trench positions were accurately located by offsetting from the site boundary and then opened using a JCB mechanical excavator fitted with a smooth blade down to the first archaeologically significant horizon/ the natural substrate. This was undertaken under constant supervision by the author. The trench was then hand cleaned. All potential archaeological features were then partially or fully excavated and recorded as appropriate.

Context sheets were completed for each feature/deposit, and multi-context drawings were produced in both plan and section. Plans were recorded at 1:100, sections at 1:20, and these scales were sufficient to allow a comprehensive understanding of relationships to be made and to show the detail of features and deposits. Colour slide and digital photographs were taken to complement these accounts.

## 7.0 Results (see Figs. 2-4 and Photographs Nos. 3-6)

**Trench 1** Ground level: 7.07m OD (SSW) – 7.23m OD (NNE – patio surface)

This trench was located within the back garden of 32 Eastrea Road. The garden was overgrown and had clearly been used for dumping waste for some time.

The natural substrate was encountered at c. 0.65m below the existing ground surface. This consisted of predominantly light-mid orange-brown silt and small flint gravels with occasional clayey lenses (105).

The natural substrate was sealed by mid, slightly orange-brown silt subsoil which contained frequent small flint gravels (104). This was up to 0.15m thick, but had been heavily disturbed in places by modern waste pits (see below).

Subsoil (104) was sealed by up to 0.5m of loamy silt topsoil (103) across the garden area. This deposit contained a notable amount of general modern building and domestic waste. Numerous discernable pits containing more modern waste were also observed to have been excavated within the back garden. These pits were not further recorded.

Only at the northern end of the trench, underneath the existing patio, was the topsoil relatively undisturbed. At this location the sealed topsoil consisted of mid-dark brown loamy silt (102) which showed some signs of having been reworked and contained frequent charcoal flecks and occasional brick fragments. This was up to 0.22m thick.

Topsoil (102) was sealed by a bedding layer of ash and fuel waste on to which a brick surface had been laid, contemporary with the existing property, this was probably the original rear yard surface. This surface was subsequently sealed by sand and grit bedding layer onto which the modern concrete 'crazy' paving was laid. These surfacing deposits were recorded as (101).

#### **Trench 2** Ground level: 7.04m OD (WSW) – 7.09m OD (ENE)

This trench was located within the grassed area behind 32-34 Eastrea Road.

The natural substrate was encountered at c. 0.5m below the existing ground surface. This consisted of predominantly light-mid orange-brown silt and small flint gravels becoming more yellowish in colour to the east (203). A small machine cut sondage was excavated into this deposit to confirm that this layer was the top of the natural gravel substrate.

Two postholes [204] and [206] were observed cut into the top of the natural substrate. Both postholes were square in plan, had near vertical sides and a flattish base. Posthole [204] was 0.42m x 0.42m square and 0.28m deep and still retained the decayed remains of the post within its backfill (205). Posthole [206] was 0.42m x 0.40m in plan and 0.22m deep. A fragment of pipe stem was recovered from the mixed soil and redeposited natural backfill (207).

The natural substrate was sealed by mid, slightly red-brown silt subsoil which contained frequent small flint gravels (202). This was up to 0.26m thick.

Three more square cut postholes [208], [210] and [212] were observed cut through the subsoil, one of which, [210] contained the concrete setting for a post. These features were clearly modern and not excavated.

Subsoil (202) was sealed by up to 0.3m of loamy silt topsoil (201). Only 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century material was observed within the topsoil, this material was not retained.

## 8.0 Discussion and Conclusion

Although not all of the observed postholes produced dating evidence, those that did so were clearly constructed in the modern era. Due to the similar characteristic of the other postholes it may be speculated that the undated ones were contemporary with the others and thus also modern. As such no archaeologically significant features or deposits were observed within the evaluation trenches and consequently it would seem unlikely that any further work at this location would be useful.

## 9.0 Effectiveness of Methodology

The methodology employed was entirely sufficient to allow the investigation and recording of deposits exposed within the evaluation trenches.

## 10.0 Acknowledgements

Pre-Construct Archaeological services Ltd would like to thank Adrian Carrington and Andy Thomas for their assistance with this project.

## 11.0 Bibliography

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## **12.0 Site Archive**

The documentary and physical archive for this site is currently held by Pre-Construct Archaeological Services Ltd. This will be deposited at the County Store within six months of completion of this report under CHER Event No. ECB 3659.