

# Woodhead Drive, Cambridge

An Archaeological Evaluation



Richard Newman

CAMBRIDGE ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT  
UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE



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University of Cambridge

October 2011

Report No. 1055

**Event Number: ECB 3640**

## **Summary**

*A trench-based evaluation, comprising three trenches covering a combined total of 43m<sup>2</sup>, was undertaken on land situated off Woodhead Drive, Cambridge, on the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> of October 2011. This revealed that the site had previously been subject to very limited anthropogenic activity. Although the sequence was well-preserved, only two archaeological features were identified. These consisted of regular east-northeast to west-southwest aligned furrows with shallow, concave profiles. Although undated, these features were most probably medieval in origin as they were associated with a well-worked subsoil deposit that contained 14<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> century pottery. This indicates that during the medieval period the site was situated within the open fields that constituted the rural hinterland of the nearby village of Chesterton. Above the subsoil, the remainder of the sequence comprised a layer of 19<sup>th</sup> century garden soil and a modern brick car park surface with associated hardcore.*

## Introduction

The Cambridge Archaeological Unit (CAU) undertook a trench-based evaluation within a 960m<sup>2</sup> area of land located in the northern part of Cambridge, Cambridgeshire, on the 11<sup>th</sup> and the 12<sup>th</sup> of October 2011. The Proposed Development Area (PDA) is situated off Woodhead Drive, where it is bounded to the southeast by a newly constructed block of flats, to the northeast by Woodhead Drive itself and to the northwest and southwest by external property boundaries (see Figure 1). It is centred on TL 4633 6077, and lies approximately 2km to the northeast of the historic core of Cambridge and 1km to the northeast of the village of Chesterton. Previously, the majority of the site was in use as a car park serving the adjacent block of flats. A total of three trenches – covering a combined area of 43m<sup>2</sup>, or 4.5% of the PDA – were excavated at the site. These trenches were positioned in such a way as to sample the widest possible spectrum of the area (see Figure 2). The project followed the specification prepared by the CAU (Beadsmoore 2011) in response to a design brief issued by Andy Thomas, Senior Archaeologist at Cambridgeshire Historic Environment Team (Thomas 2011). It was commissioned by Adam Tuck on behalf of Beechdale Homes Ltd, in advance of development.

### *Methodology*

All modern deposits – including the brick surface and rubble hardcore make-up that constituted the car park, along with an underlying layer of 19<sup>th</sup> century garden soil – were removed by a 360° mechanical excavator using a 1.8m wide toothless bucket. In addition, the upcast subsoil was visually scanned and metal detected. Following this, all archaeological deposits were recorded using the CAU modified version of the MoLAS system (Spence 1994). Base plans were drawn at a scale of 1:50, whilst sections were drawn at a scale of 1:10. All work was carried out with strict adherence to Health and Safety legislation, and within the recommendations of SCAUM (Allen & Holt 2002). Throughout the following report, context numbers are indicated by square brackets (*e.g.* [100]), and features by the prefix F. (*e.g.* F.100). The photographic archive for this site consists of a series of digital images.

### *Landscape and Geology*

Due to the recent construction of the car park, the present ground surface of the PDA prior to the commencement of the evaluation was relatively even and lay at *c.* 10.2m OD. The rear portion of the site had previously comprised part of a separate garden; as part of the current development, however, the surface height of this area was raised to be equal with that of the car park via the introduction of a layer of compacted hardcore. Geologically, the PDA is situated upon 2<sup>nd</sup> Terrace river gravels (British Geological Survey, Sheet 188). The upper horizon of this material, which consisted of mixed orange sandy gravels, was encountered at between 9.17m and 9.36m OD. In Trenches 1 and 2 the natural (along with all overlying layers) had been very heavily compacted, most probably in advance of the car park's construction.

### *Historical and Archaeological Background*

The earliest recorded evidence of archaeological activity in this area is Lower Palaeolithic in date. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, three abraded handaxes were recovered

during gravel extraction activity conducted a short distance to the northeast on Milton Road (CHER ref: 05224). In addition, a Bronze Age hoard, along with a number of Iron Age pits, were also encountered within quarries situated in this same area (CHER refs: 05452 & 05452a). Little other evidence for prehistoric activity is recorded in the vicinity, however. In contrast, extensive Romano-British activity – including the location of a probable villa – is known to the west of the PDA, in the Arbury Road area (see Alexander *et al.* 1968; Alexander *et al.* 1969; Browne 1978; CHER refs: 05421 & 05424). Furthermore, in rather closer proximity to the site an archaeological evaluation was undertaken at the Manor Community College, which is situated approximately 600m to the west of the PDA, in 2000 (Reynolds 2000). Within the single trench that was excavated at this site, an undated ditch and palisade trench were identified. These features were also interpreted as being most probably Roman in date (CHER ref: MCB16487). Nevertheless, a recent evaluation conducted in 2008 only 400m to the west, at the Ranc Care Homes site, encountered no archaeological remains of any period (Collins 2008).

Around a kilometre to the south of the PDA is situated the village of Chesterton (see Wright 1989; Taylor 1999, 121-26; Cessford with Dickens 2004; Mackay 2009). Although small quantities of residual Prehistoric and Roman material have been recovered from this area, the earliest definite evidence of settlement activity in the village is Late Saxon in date. The royal *vill* of *Cestretone* was most probably founded here during the 8<sup>th</sup> century, when the area was subdivided from the newly established *burh* of Cambridge (Cessford with Dickens 2004, 125-6). A polyfocal settlement then developed, which was situated within an extensive open-field agricultural hinterland. The present site was located within these open fields, and a small area of poorly defined ridge and furrow, aligned on a southwest to northeast alignment, has previously been recorded approximately 250m to the west of the site (CHER ref: 10106). The open fields were finally inclosed in 1808, and at this time Milton Road was also established as a turnpike leading to Ely (CHER ref: 05353). Subsequently, during the later 19<sup>th</sup> century, the area gradually became incorporated into Cambridge's rapidly expanding suburban fringe (see Byran & Wise 2005).

## Results

Two undated archaeological features were encountered. These both consisted of broadly east-northeast to west-southwest aligned linears with shallow, concave profiles (see Figures 2 and 3). Whilst it is possible that these features – which comprised **F.100** in Trench 1 and **F.300** in Trench 3 – formed part of the same irregular or sinuous gully, they are perhaps more likely to have lain broadly parallel to one another, situated approximately 7m to 8m apart. Both contained near identical deposits of relatively sterile, eroded subsoil. The absence of material culture within their fills – when allied with the paucity of charcoal and other domestic debris – indicates that the features were originally situated within a rural milieu, at some distance from any contemporary locus of occupation. As such, they are perhaps most likely to represent the bases of denuded furrows.

Furrow **F.100** consisted of an east-northeast to west-southwest aligned linear cut, **[109]**, which had moderately sloping concave sides and a concave base. It measured 3.20m+ by 0.58m+ in extent by 0.16m+ deep and was filled by **[108]**, a firmly compacted mid orangey brown sandy silt deposit with occasional gravel and rare charcoal and manganese fleck inclusions. Furrow **F.300** also consisted of an east-northeast to west-southwest aligned linear cut, **[303]**, which had moderately

sloping concave sides and a concave base. It measured 2.18m+ by 0.62m+ in extent by 0.13m+ deep and was filled by [302], a moderately compacted mid orangey brown sandy silt deposit with occasional gravel and rare charcoal and manganese fleck inclusions. It is likely that both of these features originally measured in excess of 0.50m deep, and were also somewhat wider, prior to later disturbance and truncation.

The furrows were overlain by well-worked subsoil deposit [106] = [204] = [302], which extended across the entire site (see Figures 3 and 4). Although it is likely that F.100 and F.300 originally truncated this material, the degree of later disturbance – associated with widespread horticultural activity – has now rendered any direct stratigraphic relationship indistinguishable. In common with the furrows' fills, the subsoil itself was also relatively sterile and contained very few inclusions. A single sherd of pottery was recovered from [302] in Trench 3, however. This consisted of generic 13<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> century grey coarseware, although the robust and micaceous fabric of this particular fragment indicates that it was most probably 14<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> century in date. The presence of such material indicates that this deposit represents the vestiges of a well-worked medieval ploughsoil.

Subsoil layer [106] = [204] = [302] consisted of a moderately to firmly compacted mid orangey brown sandy silt deposit, with occasional gravel and rare charcoal and manganese fleck inclusions. This layer measured a maximum of 0.42m deep, and remained consistent between all three trenches.

Overlying the subsoil within each trench was poorly-worked buried topsoil horizon [103] = [203] = [301]. This material most probably represents 19<sup>th</sup> century garden soil, which was associated with the rear of the nearby properties fronting onto Milton Road. In Trench 1, a probable planting bed of similar date – whose cut, [105], had vertical sides and a relatively flat base – was also present (see Figure 4A). Above the topsoil lay a thin, dark band of rotted organic matter. This appears to have comprised the remnants of the vegetation that was sealed beneath the hardcore make-up layer of the recently constructed car park. Finally, a series of amorphous tree-boles, containing traces of modern tree roots, were also present (see Figure 2). The actual trees themselves were again most probably cleared when the car park was constructed.

Garden soil layer [103] = [203] = [301] consisted of a firmly compacted mid to dark brown clay silt deposit, with occasional to rare ceramic building material, gravel, chalk fleck and charcoal fleck inclusions. This layer measured a maximum of 0.26m deep, and remained relatively consistent between all three trenches. Truncating this layer in Trench 1 was [105], the cut of a 19<sup>th</sup> or early 20<sup>th</sup> century planting bed. This feature had vertical sides leading to a relatively flat base, and measured 2.0m+ by 0.46m+ in extent by 0.20m deep. It was filled by [104], a moderately compacted mid to dark brownish grey clay silt deposit with greenish mottles and occasional to frequent gravel inclusions.

## Discussion

As previously outlined above, the present site is located between two known foci of intensive archaeological activity. The first of these – which was principally Roman in date – was situated to the west, on Arbury Road, and the second – which was principally Late Saxon and medieval in date – to the south, in Chesterton. The PDA, however, appears instead to have been situated within an agrarian hinterland that lay between these two areas. Although it had no doubt fulfilled a similar agricultural role since at least the 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries AD, the primary evidence of such activity to be revealed at the site was medieval in date. At this time, the PDA lay outside the liberty of Cambridge, which consisted of two main field systems. Both of these – the town's East and West Fields respectively – have been subject to detailed historical analysis

(see Stokes 1915 and Hesse 2007 for the former, and Seebohm 1883; Maitland 1898; Hall & Ravensdale 1977 for the latter). In contrast, the present area of investigation – which lay within the rural hinterland of Chesterton – has been the subject of relatively little research. These fields were most probably separated from those of the burgeoning town during the later Saxon period (see Haslam 1984, 23-6), and remained attached to the *vill* of Chesterton until their inclosure in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. They are of archaeological interest because the process by which the practice of open-field agriculture was adopted in this area remains a subject of ongoing debate. Across Cambridgeshire generally, for example, three separate models of adoption have been proposed, each of which is based upon fieldwork conducted in different parts of the county. These theories can be summarised as follows:

- I. *Piecemeal*: in this model, open-field agriculture represents a gradual development following the slow expansion of a local population, with crop rotation practices having been introduced when grazing land is finally consumed by arable (Roberts 1989, 49-51). The ‘finished’ system is seen as a largely medieval phenomenon.
- II. *Two-stage*: in this model, a Middle Saxon pattern of land division between arable and pastoral activities is believed to have been converted into a true open-field system in the 10<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup> centuries (Oosthuizen 2005, 184-94). Such a transition has principally been identified in the Bourn Valley, which is situated on the claylands a little way to the southwest of Cambridge.
- III. *Large-scale*: in this model, large swathes of open fields are thought to have been laid out in single events during the Late Saxon period (Hall 1982, 43-55). The original *lands* (or strips) of which the fields were comprised were very long, but became increasingly subdivided over time.

Of course, the reason for the adoption of an open-field system in any given area is unlikely to have been mono-causal, and the stimuli involved probably varied from location to location (with potential factors including the geology and topography of the region, as well as economic or political considerations). In general, however, it seems that “where arable cultivation appears to have been continuous since the Roman period, and/or the landscape had been relatively open by its use for pasture, open fields were laid out on a large scale from about the mid 9<sup>th</sup> century” (Oosthuizen 2005, 167). Therefore, although small-scale investigations such as that undertaken at Woodhead Drive are, in themselves, unlikely to contribute directly to this debate, cumulatively, the evidence recovered from similar sites situated within the suburbs of Cambridge has the potential to elucidate the wider pattern of Late Saxon and medieval land use in this area.

#### Acknowledgements

The project was managed for the CAU by Emma Beadsmoore and was monitored on behalf of Cambridgeshire County Council’s Historic Environment Team (formerly CAPCA) by Andy Thomas. It was funded by Beechdale Homes Ltd. in advance of development. The fieldwork was directed by Richard Newman and was undertaken with the assistance of Hayley Roberts. The illustrations were produced by Jane Mathews.

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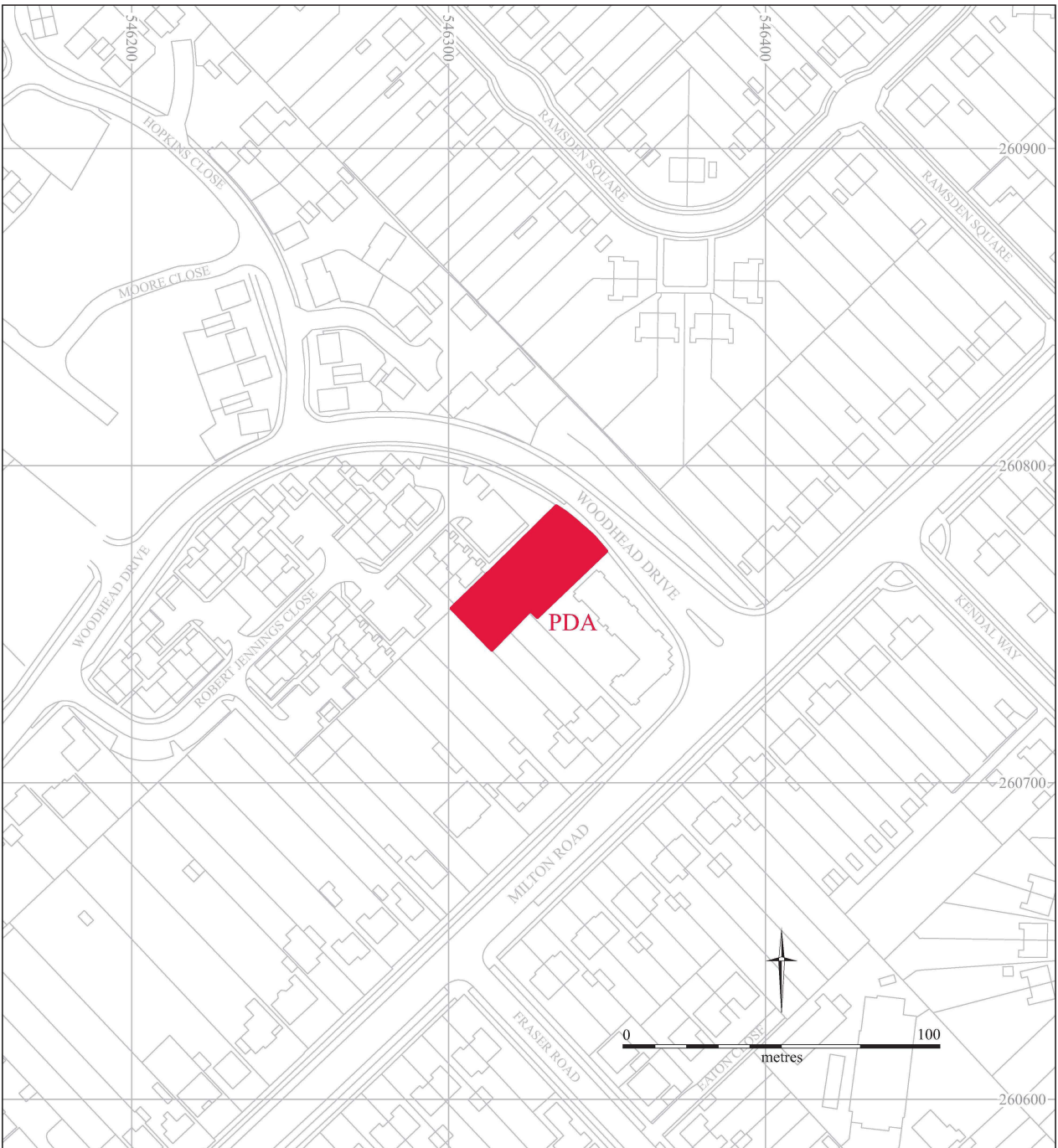
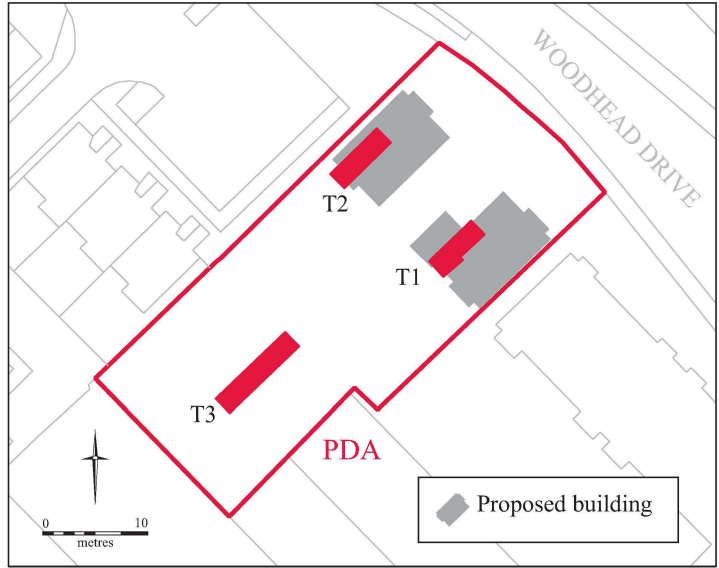
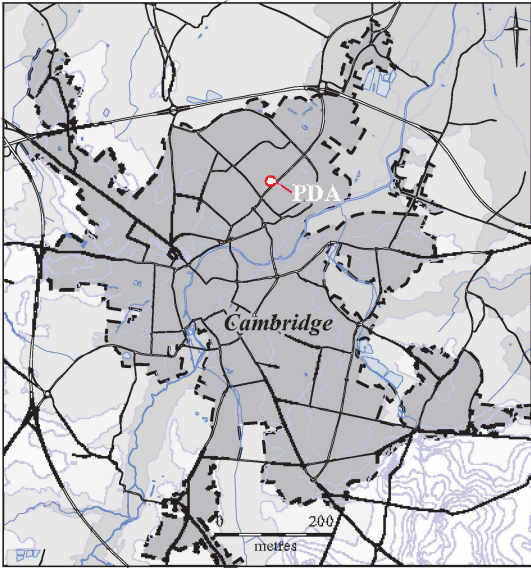


Figure 1. Location map

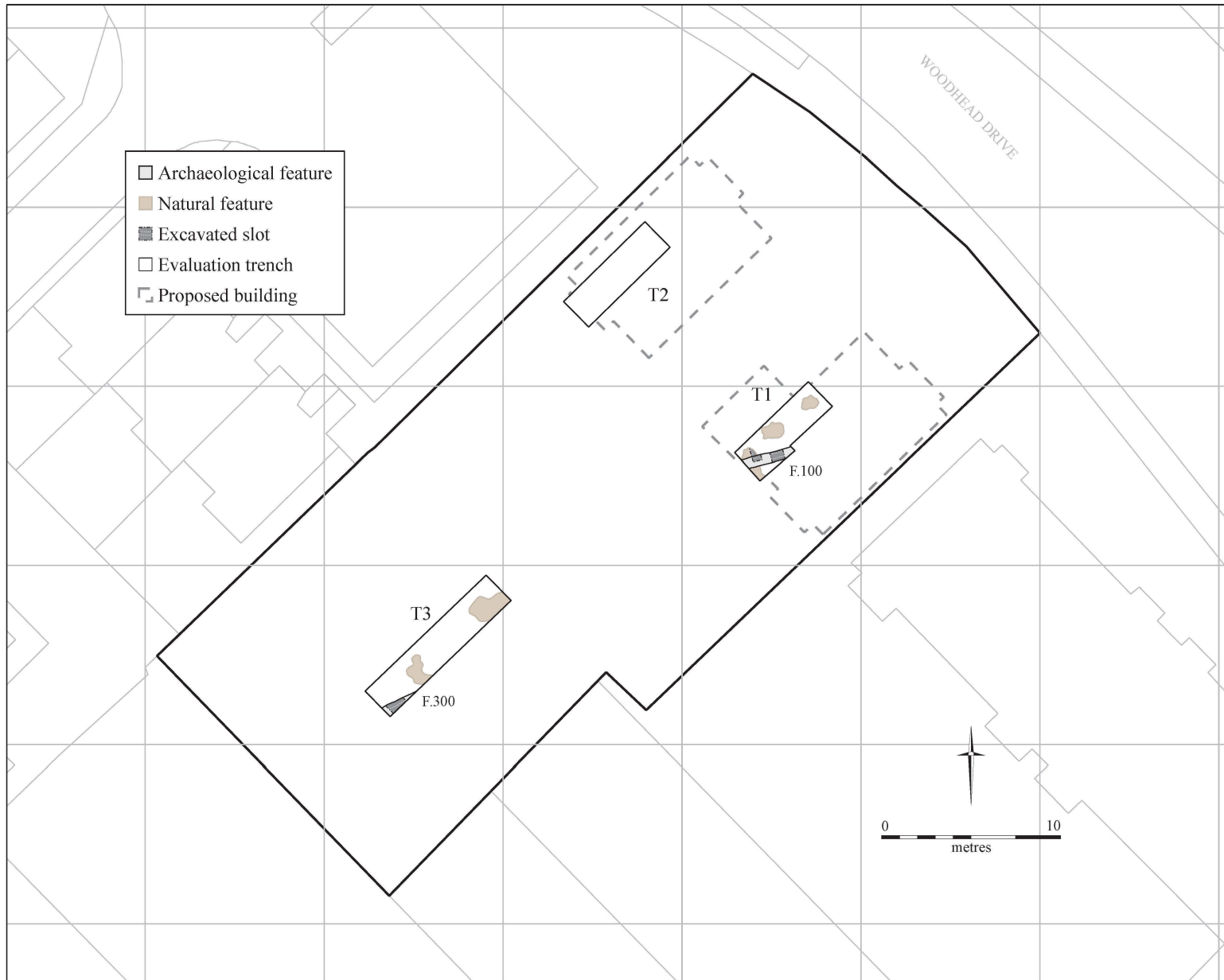


Figure 2. Trench plan



Figure 3. Photographs of probable furrows; top - F.100 in Trench 1, and bottom - F.300 in Trench 3 (both facing south-east)

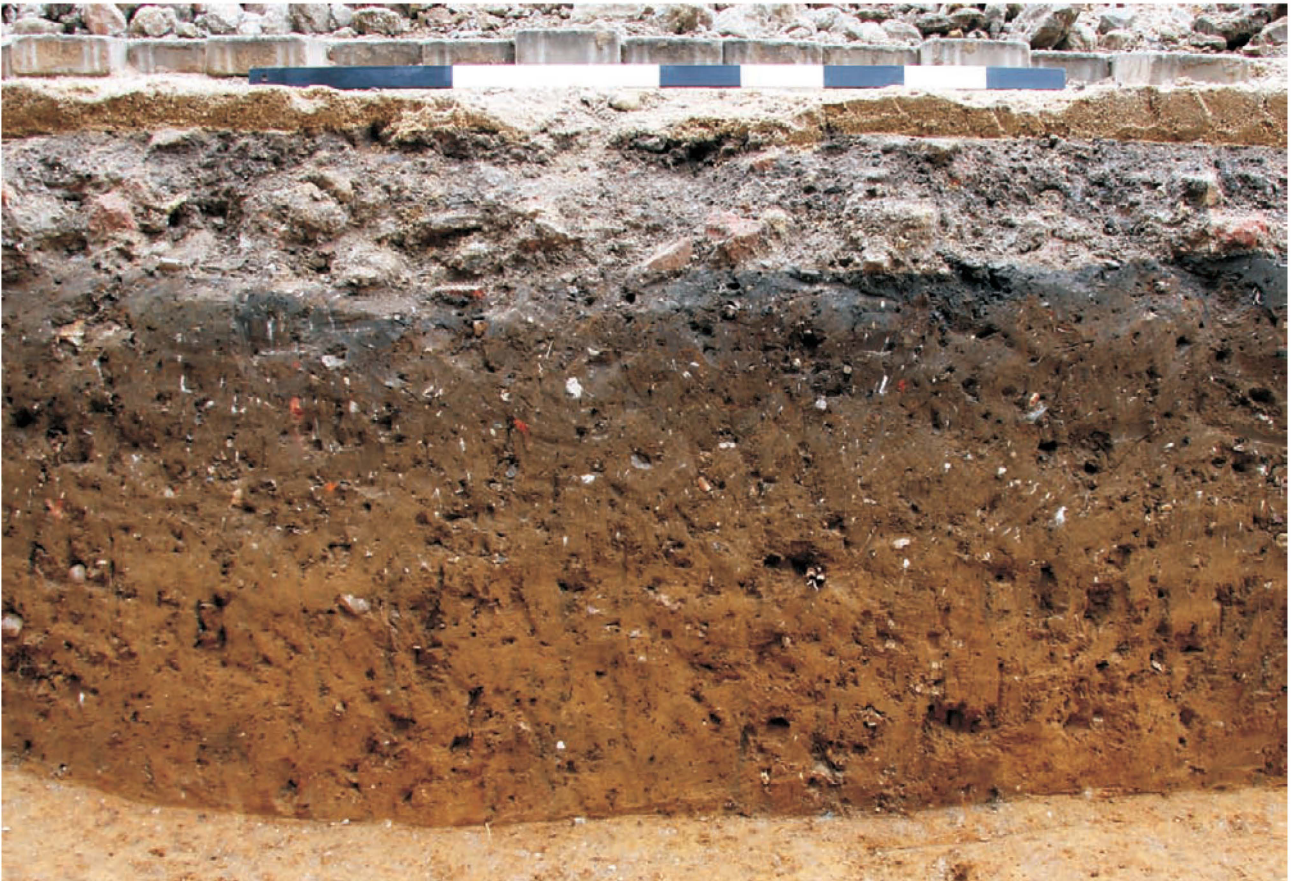


Figure 4. Top - section of Trench 1 (facing north-west), and bottom - section of Trench 2 (facing south-east)

## Oasis Form

<b>OASIS ID: cambridg3-112467</b>	
<b>Project Details</b>	
Project name	Woodhead Drive, Cambridge
Short description of the project	A trench-based evaluation, comprising three trenches covering a combined total of 43m <sup>2</sup> , was undertaken on land situated off Woodhead Drive, Cambridge, on the 11th and 12th of October 2011. This revealed that the site had previously been subject to very limited anthropogenic activity. Although the sequence was well-preserved, only two archaeological features were identified. These consisted of regular east-northeast to west-southwest aligned furrows with shallow, concave profiles. Although undated, these features were most probably medieval in origin as they were associated with a well-worked subsoil deposit that contained 14th to 15th century pottery. This indicates that during the medieval period the site was situated within the open fields that constituted the rural hinterland of the nearby village of Chesterton. Above the subsoil, the remainder of the sequence comprised a layer of 19th century garden soil and a modern brick car park surface with associated hardcore.
Project dates	Start: 11-10-2011 End: 12-10-2011
Previous/future work	No / Not known
Any associated project reference codes	ECB 3640 - HER event no.
Any associated project reference codes	WDC 11 - Sitecode
Type of project	Field evaluation
Site status	None
Current Land use	Other 15 - Other
Monument type	FURROW Medieval
Significant Finds	POTTERY Medieval
Methods & techniques	'Sample Trenches'
Development type	Woodland planting (e.g. lowland broadleaf woodland)
Prompt	Direction from Local Planning Authority - PPS
Position in the planning process	After full determination (eg. As a condition)
<b>Project Location</b>	
Country	England
Site location	CAMBRIDGESHIRE CAMBRIDGE CAMBRIDGE Woodhead Drive, Cambridge
Postcode	CB4 1YY
Study area	960.00 Square metres
Site coordinates	TL 4633 6077 52.2252418354 0.142620730358 52 13 30 N 000 08 33 E Point
Height OD / Depth	Min: 9.17m Max: 9.36m
<b>Project Creators</b>	
Name of Organisation	Cambridge Archaeological Unit
Project brief originator	Local Authority Archaeologist and/or Planning Authority/advisory body
Project design originator	Emma Beadsmoore
Project director/manager	Emma Beadsmoore
Project supervisor	Richard Newman
Type of sponsor/funding	Developer

body	
Name of sponsor/funding body	Beechdale Homes Ltd.
<b>Project Archives</b>	
Physical Archive recipient	Cambridge Archaeological Unit
Physical Archive ID	WDC 11
Physical Contents	'Ceramics'
Digital Archive recipient	Cambridge Archaeological Unit
Digital Archive ID	WDC 11
Digital Contents	'Ceramics'
Digital Media available	'Images raster / digital photography'
Paper Archive recipient	Cambridge Archaeological Unit
Paper Archive ID	WDC 11
Paper Contents	'other'
Paper Media available	'Context sheet','Photograph','Plan','Section'
<b>Project Bibliography</b>	
Publication type	Grey literature (unpublished document/manuscript)
Title	Woodhead Drive, Cambridge: An Archaeological Evaluation
Author(s)/Editor(s)	Newman, R.
Other bibliographic details	Cambridge Archaeological Unit Report No. 1055
Date	2011
Issuer or publisher	Cambridge Archaeological Unit
Place of issue or publication	Cambridge
Description	An A4 wire bound document with a plastic laminate cover. It is 13 pages long, and has 4 illustrations.
URL	<a href="http://www.oasis.ac.uk">http://www.oasis.ac.uk</a>
Entered by	Richard Newman (rn276@cam.ac.uk)
Entered on	24 October 2011