

Land to the Rear of 2a Forehill, Ely

An Archaeological Evaluation



Richard Newman and Alison Dickens

CAMBRIDGE ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT
UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE



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Introduction

An archaeological trench-based evaluation was conducted by the Cambridge Archaeological Unit (CAU) on land situated to the rear of No. 2a Forehill, Ely, on the 28th and 29th of February 2012. The Proposed Development Area (PDA), which is centred on TL5428 8024, is located within the bounds of the medieval city (see Figure 1). At present, the PDA – which covers an area of 580m² – comprises an open garden area. Two evaluation trenches, covering a combined area of 13.9m², were excavated within this space (see Figure 2). Due to the substantial depth of the made-ground deposits that were encountered in both of these locations, the excavations were stepped at a depth of 1.0m. As a result, the lowest deposits in the sequence were investigated within central, 1.1m by 1.1m hand-dug test pits. This project followed the specification issued by the CAU (Dickens 2012) and was monitored by Kasia Gdaniec, Development Control Archaeologist at Cambridgeshire's Historic Environment Team (CHET). The work was commissioned by Tony Walton Design in advance of redevelopment.

Landscape, Geology and Topography

The PDA lies within the former monastic precinct of Ely cathedral. Topographically, it is situated towards the apex of Forehill (see Figure 1). Its present surface level varies between 20.90m OD to the north and 19.52m OD to the south. This variation reflects in part the underlying topography, with natural being encountered at 18.68m OD in Trench 1 and 18.55m OD in Trench 2, but is also a result of differences in the depth of the overlying made-ground deposits. It is notable, for example, that the southern end of the site lies 1.27m higher than the surface of the immediately adjacent paddock. In geological terms, the PDA is situated upon Kimmeridge Clay (British Geological Survey, Sheet 173).

Methodology

During the course of the evaluation two trenches were excavated with topsoil and made-ground layers removed by a small 360° mechanical excavator with a 1.0m wide toothless bucket; this material was then visually inspected and metal detected. Following this, all archaeological features were excavated by hand and recorded using the CAU-modified version of the MoLAS system (Spence 1994). Base plans were drawn at a scale of 1:20, whilst sections were drawn at a scale of 1:10. A digital photographic archive was also compiled. Throughout the following text, context numbers are indicated by square brackets (*e.g.* [001]) and feature numbers by the prefix F (*e.g.* F.01). All work was carried out in strict accordance with statutory health and safety legislation and the recommendations of the Federation of Archaeological Managers & Employers (Allen & Holt 2010). The site code for this project is **TFE 12**, and the event number is **ECB3744**.

Historical and Archaeological Background

Historical records and archaeological work in the vicinity around the site indicate that it lies within the precinct of the medieval monastery and Cathedral and just on the edge of the town market place. Investigations further down Forehill revealed a continuous sequence of roadside occupation dating from the 12th century onwards (Alexander 2003). Also nearby an archaeological excavation carried out in advance

of the construction of the Post Office sorting office revealed property boundaries, a trackway, intercutting pits and a possible timber building dating within the early 13th to mid 14th centuries (Oakey and Connor 1999). Saxon remains have been found around the Cathedral, within the area between Broad Street and the river, and further away in the western part of the town along West Fen Road (Cessford & Dickens 2007, Cessford et al. 2006; Mortimer et al 2005).

Some limited investigations have been carried out within the bounds of the site and in the immediate vicinity (Figure 2): In 1985 several trenches were both dug and observed by Alison Taylor in the Paddocks immediately south of the site's southern boundary (Taylor 1985). Four trenches cut in the Paddocks revealed a number of features, most of which were on the northwest side. Three linear features produced St. Neots and Thetford ware dating them to the late 11th or 12th century. All the features were very shallow. Following on from this, in 1986 Anne Holton-Krayenbuhl opened up three more trenches to further examine some of the ditches identified in 1985 (Holton-Krayenbuhl 1988). Further pre-Conquest pottery was recovered and two broad phases of land-use were suggested, (I) in the 11th century indicative of settlement in the vicinity and (II) from the 12th century to the present day where the site was open ground and had been cultivated for at least part of the time.

In 1993 six 1m x 1m x 1m hand dug test pits were opened up on the current site to test the foundation locations of a proposed timber framed building that was never built (A-F on Figure 2; Hunter 1993). At only 1m in depth the test pits did not reveal much beneath the garden soil, however four of them (C-F) encountered brick built structural remains probably related to buildings shown on the site on the 1885 map (Figure 5) but no longer extant. Two of the pits (C and D) additionally did reveal traces of late medieval activity immediately behind the street frontage. In 1985 Anne Holton-Krayenbuhl observed the location of a brick and stone lined well during construction of a rear extension to the frontage building (Holton-Krayenbuhl 1985). The well was thought to be in excess of 5m deep and almost certainly fed the pump visible behind the property on the 1885 map (Figure 5).

Results (Figures 2-4)

The earliest deposit to be identified at the site comprised a layer of sub-soil that was present in both Trench 1 (as [008]) and Trench 2 (as [015]). This layer consisted of moderately firm pale brownish orange silty sand with mid grey sandy mottles, which varied between 0.13m and 0.32m in thickness. No datable material culture was recovered from this deposit. Truncating the sub-soil in Trench 1 were two medieval pits. The first of these, **F.01**, measured 1.1m+ by 0.92m+ in extent and 0.48m+ in depth. Its fill, [006], consisted of mid greyish brown sandy silt with occasional gravel and charcoal fleck inclusions. It contained a sherd of 13th to 15th century coarseware, along with a residual Neolithic flint blade. Subsequently, **F.01** was truncated by **F.02**, a sub-oval pit that measured 1.1m+ by 0.78m+ in extent and 0.87m+ in depth. Its fill, [004], consisted of mid brownish grey sandy silt with occasional to rare gravel inclusions. This feature contained a sherd of Medieval Ely ware (of 12th-15th century date) along with a residual Late Saxon sherd. Within Trench 2, in contrast, no medieval features were present. Instead, the sub-soil here was overlain by two distinct layers. The first of these, [014], consisted of mid brown sandy silt with rare gravel inclusions that measured 0.32m thick. Above this lay [013], a deposit of mid to dark

brown clay silt with occasional gravel, charcoal and chalk fleck inclusions that measured 0.21m+ thick. The former layer potentially represents a medieval horticultural soil, whilst the latter may perhaps be associated with later ground-raising activity. Unfortunately, neither of these deposits contained datable material culture.

Subsequently, the archaeological sequences within the two trenches diverged still further. In Trench 1 the medieval pits were overlain by made-ground deposit **[003]**. This comprised a layer of mid brown sandy silt with frequent brick and tile fragment inclusions that measured 0.45m thick. Alongside several residual sherds of medieval pottery, this deposit also contained a clay tobacco pipe bowl that dates to *c.* 1680-1710. Furthermore, capping the layer was a patchy spread of lime-mortared brick rubble (which is visible in Figure 3). This may have acted as a footing for a temporary or ancillary building, although no further structural evidence was encountered. Within Trench 2, in contrast, a very different sequence was encountered. Here, a minimum of five post-medieval features were present. The earliest of these was **F.03**, a sub-oval pit whose cut – **[017]** – measured 0.82m+ by 0.76m+ in extent and 0.51m in depth. This contained a single fill, **[016]**, which consisted of mid brown sandy clay silt with occasional to frequent chalk fleck, tile, gravel and charcoal fleck inclusions. Sherds of 16th century Glazed Red Earthenware and Babylon ware were recovered from this deposit, along with a small quantity of residual medieval material. This feature was subsequently truncated by **F.05**, a sub-oval pit that measured 1.0m+ by 0.44m+ and 0.76m deep. The fill of this pit, **[020]**, consisted of banded mid brown sandy clay silt with occasional lenses of dark brown to black charcoal-rich silt. It contained a single, badly burnt clay tobacco pipe bowl that can be dated to *c.* 1660-1760. The three remaining features – **F.04**, **F.06** and **F.07** – all consisted of postholes that shared near identical fills. Only one of these features, however – **F.04** – fell within the area of the central hand-dug test pit. Its cut, **[019]**, had near vertical sides and a relatively flat base: it measured 0.46m by 0.36m in extent and 0.27m deep. The single fill, **[018]**, consisted of loose mid brown clay silt with occasional gravel and charcoal fleck inclusions. No datable material culture was recovered.

The uppermost portions of the sequences in both trenches consisted of made-ground deposits associated with the development of a modern horticultural horizon. In Trench 1, a substantial layer of mid orangey brown sandy clay silt with occasional to frequent gravel inclusions and extensive bioturbation was present. This layer, **[002]**, measured 0.52m thick. Overlying it, and capping the sequence in this trench, was topsoil deposit **[001]**, which measured 0.42m thick. In Trench 2 the post-medieval pits were initially overlain by layer **[012]**. This consisted of a mid to dark brown clay silt deposit, with occasional gravel, charcoal and chalk fleck inclusions, which measured 0.21m thick. Subsequently, mid orange sand and brick rubble layer **[011]** was deposited. This measured 0.16m thick. Above **[011]** lay **[010]**, a mid brown sandy silt deposit was present. This layer, which was extensively bioturbated and measured 0.34m thick, may well represent a continuation of **[002]** from Trench 1. Finally, the sequence in Trench 2 was capped by topsoil deposit **[009]**, which measured 0.36m thick.

Material Culture

A small assemblage of material culture was recovered during the evaluation at No. 2a Forehill. This group – which includes pottery, worked stone and clay tobacco pipe – has been subdivided by material type and is discussed in detail below.

Pottery

A small pottery assemblage – consisting of only 30 sherds, weighing 396g – was recovered. Within this group, material representing four separate periods was identified (Table 1).

Period	Fabric	Count	Weight (g)	MSW (g)
<i>Late Saxon</i>	Shell-tempered	2	16	8
	St Neots-type	1	7	7
<i>Medieval</i>	Grimston Ware	1	68	68
	Medieval Ely ware	11	71	6.5
	Medieval coarsewares	4	73	18.2
<i>Post-medieval</i>	Glazed red earthenware	6	140	23.3
	Babylon-type lead-glazed earthenware	3	9	3
<i>Modern</i>	Plain red earthenware	1	2	2
	Lead-glazed earthenware	1	10	10
		30	396	13.2

Table 1: No. 2a Forehill pottery assemblage by fabric.

The earliest material to be recovered was Late-Saxon in date (3 sherds, weighing 23g), although all of these fragments occurred residually within later features and no definite evidence of Late Saxon activity was identified. Instead, much the most common fabric at the site was medieval in date. Medieval Ely ware (11 sherds, weighing 71g) is known to have been produced locally between the 12th-15th centuries (see Spoerry 2008). Other medieval fabrics included coarsewares (4 sherds, weighing 73g), which may also have been produced locally, and Grimston ware (1 sherd, weighing 68g), which was imported from Norfolk. Post-medieval fabrics were represented by glazed red earthenware (6 sherds, weighing 140g) and Babylon-type lead-glazed earthenware (3 sherds, weighing 9g), both of which are also known to have been produced locally (see Cessford *et al.* 2006). Finally, a small quantity of modern 18th/19th century material was also encountered (2 sherds, weighing 12g). None of this material is of particular significance.

Worked Stone

Two small quernstone fragments were recovered, one from post-medieval pit **F.03** (weighing 89g) and the second from modern layer **[011]** (weighing 27g). Both fragments were composed of fine-grained bluish grey vesicular stone that is identifiable as Niedermendig Mülstein lava (also known as Rhenish or Mayen lava) from the Eifel region in Germany (Kars 1983). Although such querns were frequently used during the Roman period, and are common finds on Middle and Late Saxon sites, they are much rarer in the medieval period as their use was controlled and many people were instead compelled to use centrally regulated mills (Watts 2002, 38-42). This indicates that, although in both instances the fragments were recovered from residual contexts, they are most likely to have been 10th or early 11th century origin.

Clay Tobacco Pipe

Two clay tobacco pipe bowls were recovered. In general, the presence of clay tobacco pipe fragments in a context indicates a date between late 16th to early 20th centuries (*c.* 1580-1910). Only bowls can be more closely dated on typological grounds (Oswald 1975). In this instance, the bowl recovered from horticultural layer **[003]** conformed to Oswald's general Type 9 (1680-1710), while that from **[020]**, **F.05** was only partially complete and could be broadly dated to *c.* 1660-1760.

Discussion

The investigation has shown that in this localised part of central Ely, despite the promising nature of the location, the archaeological sequence whilst comparably deep

with other locations, is not dense, at least this far back in the plot. Based on the pottery the earliest dated features, two small pits in Trench 1 towards the front, are 13th to 15th century in date rather than the Saxo-Norman evidenced to the south in the Paddocks. The presence of a residual Neolithic flint and a single sherd of late Saxon pottery indicate earlier activity in the vicinity, but not activity that has left a physical trace. The quieter nature of the site may reflect its peripheral location in relation to the monastery and Cathedral, tucked as it is into a far corner of the precinct.

Although there clearly is evidence of later medieval and post-medieval activity on the site in the form of pits, demolition rubble and a deep garden soil, again it does not have the density seen at sites such as Forehill, Broad Street, the Hoist Development or Lynn Road (Alexander et al 2003, Cessford et al 2006, Woolhouse et al 2006, Smith et al 2000). Most of the remains observed appear to relate to the buildings shown on the 1885 OS map (Figure 5) or their subsequent demolition. Trench 2 is located in an area shown as garden in 1885, and the sequence suggests that activity in that area has changed little during the traceable history of the site. Trench 1 also lies in an area of garden, but one which appears slightly more intensively used at that later date.

Although there is evidence of previous land-use and activity present on the site it indicates that such activity was never very intensive and that such “quiet areas” can exist even within a busy and important medieval town such as Ely.

Acknowledgments

The project was commissioned by Tony Walton Design and the fieldwork was monitored by Kasia Gdaniec, Development Control Archaeologist at Cambridgeshire Historic Environment Team (HET). The project was managed for the CAU by Alison Dickens and the evaluation was directed by Richard Newman. It was undertaken in the field with the assistance of Marcus Brittain and Alisdair Wright. The graphics for the report were produced by Jane Matthews and Alison Dickens.

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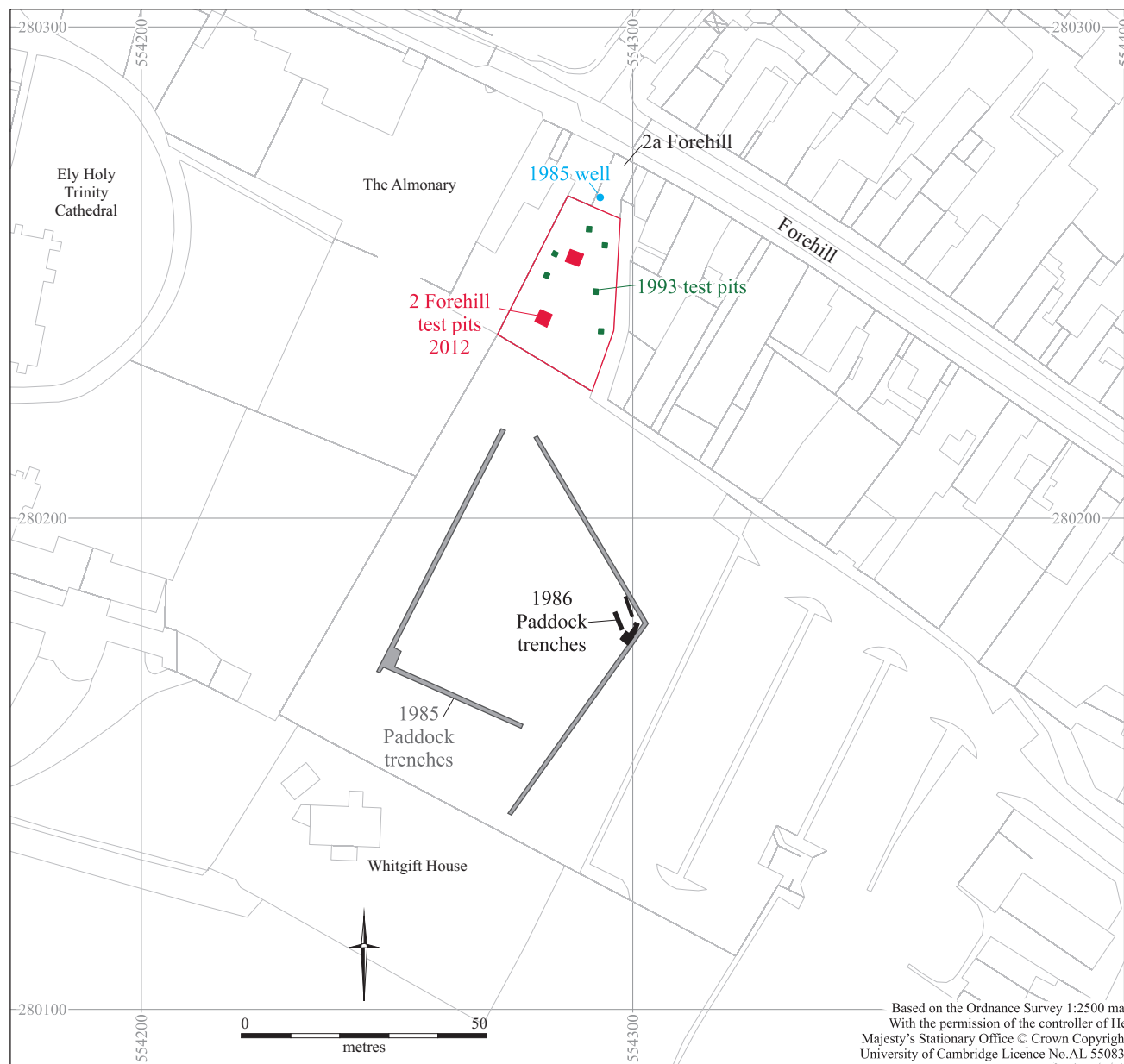


Figure 1. Location of site and earlier archaeological investigations in the vicinity

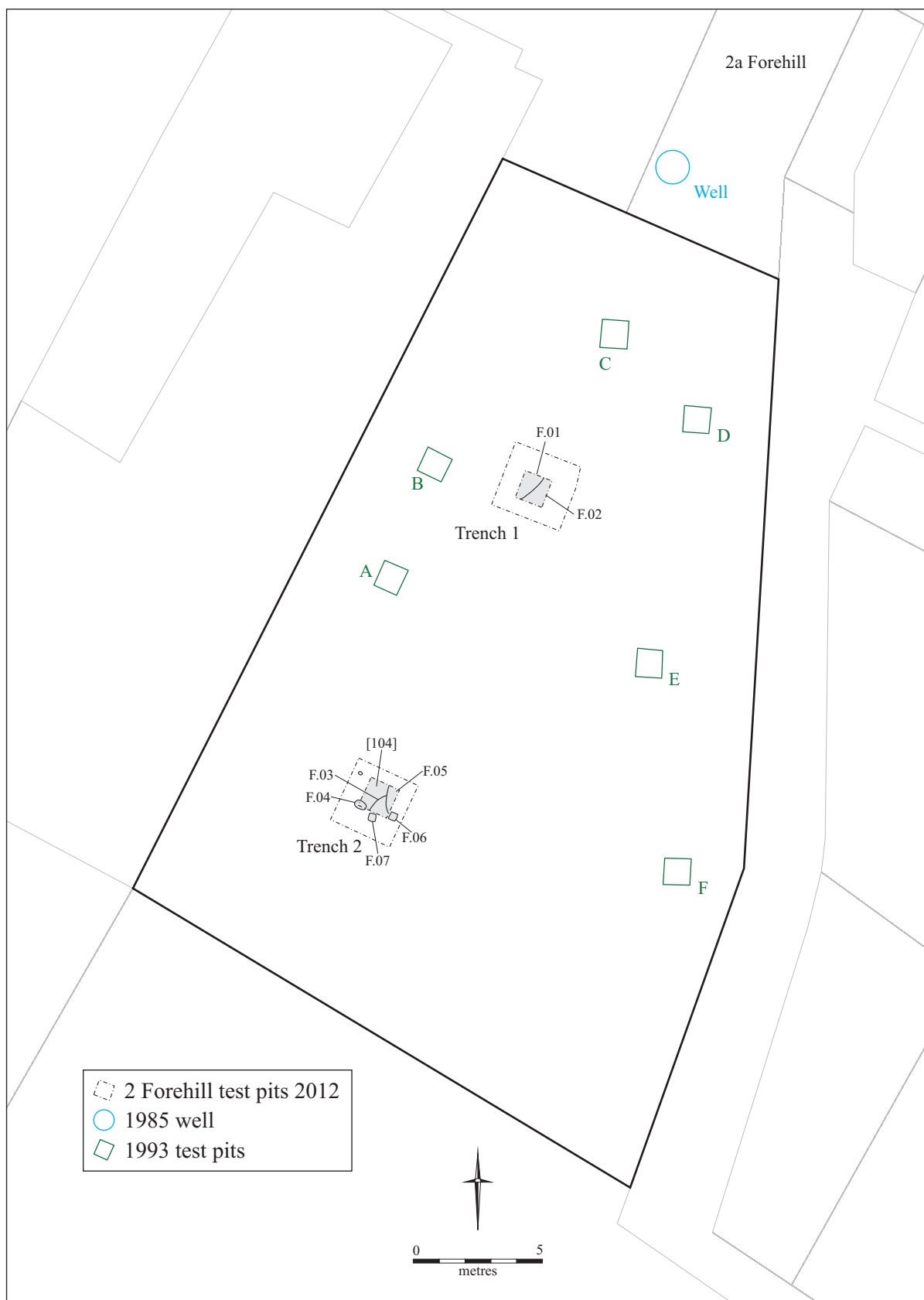


Figure 2. Detailed site plan

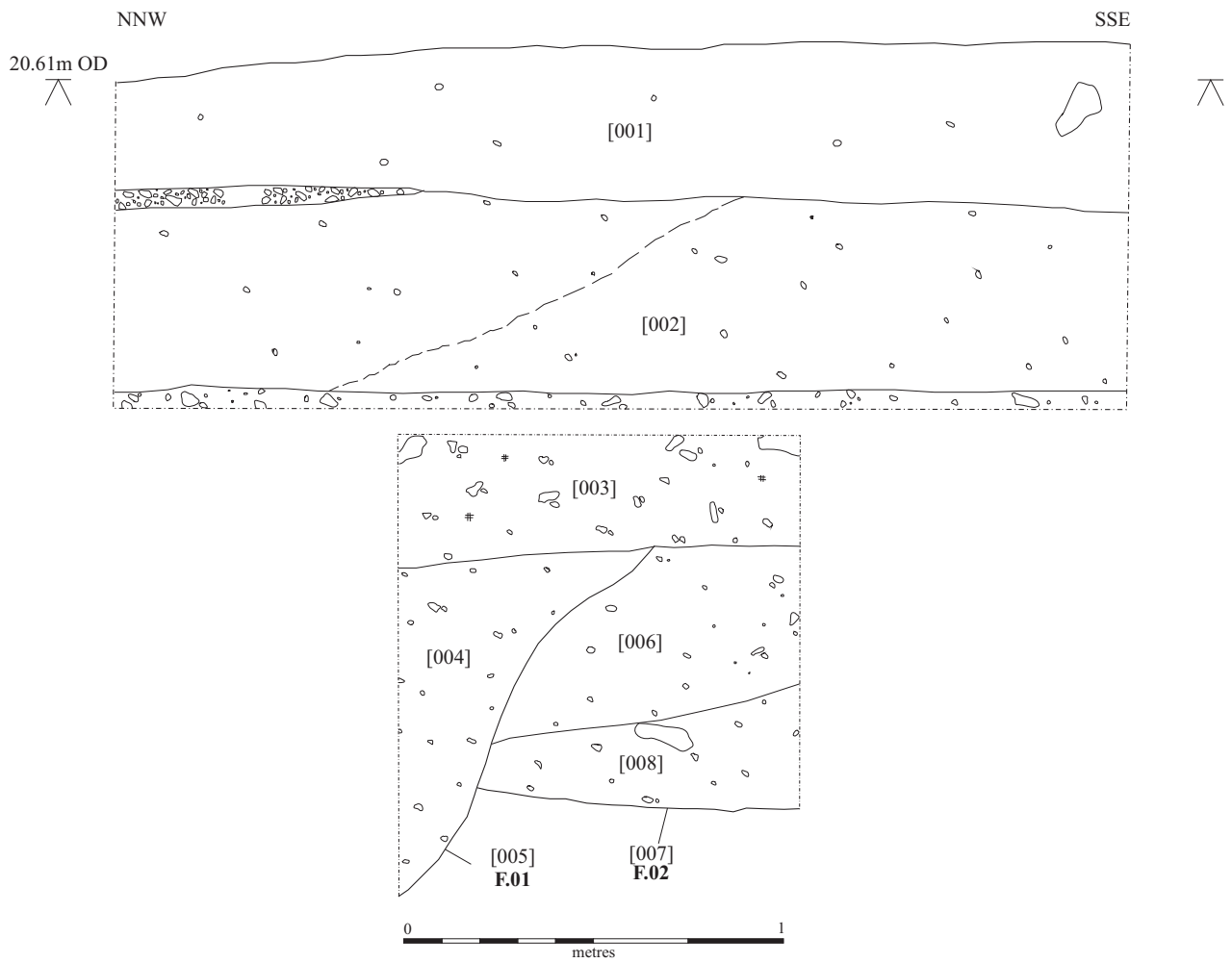


Figure 3. Trench 1, photograph facing North

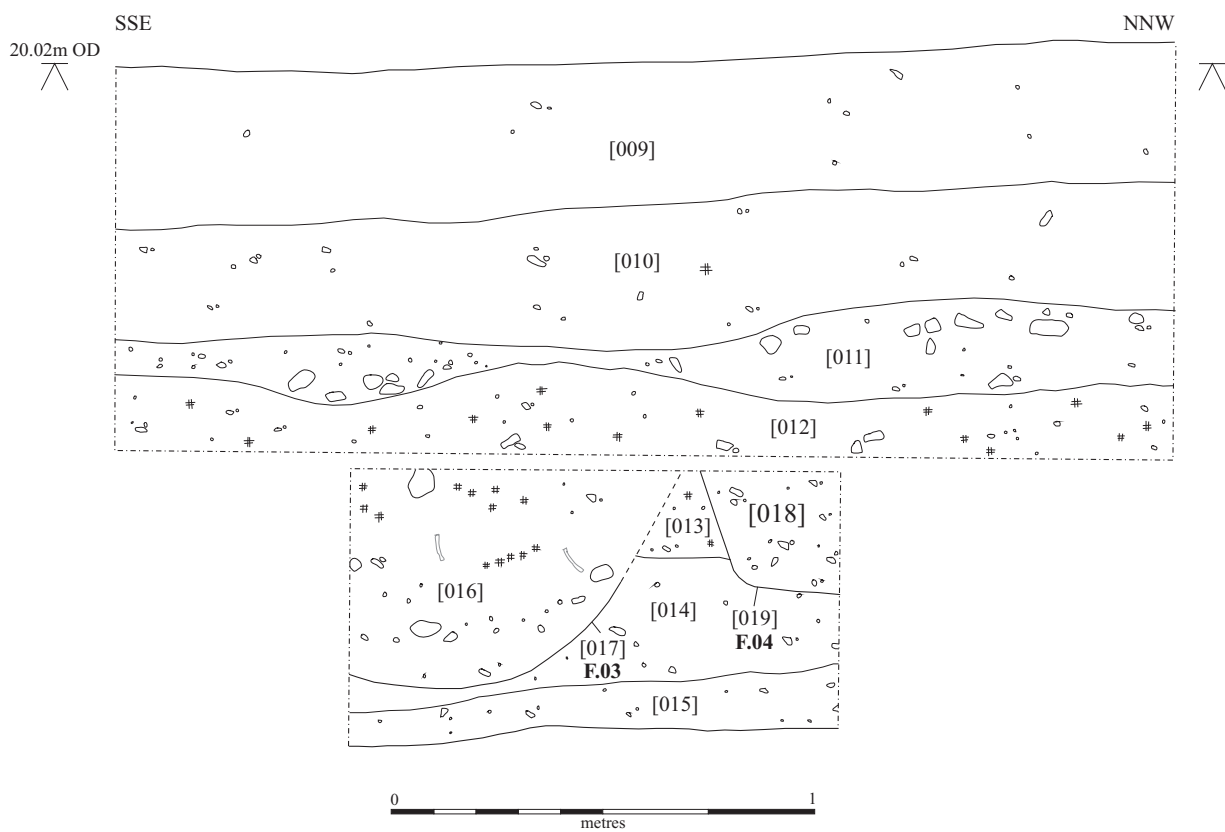


Figure 4. Trench 2, photograph facing South

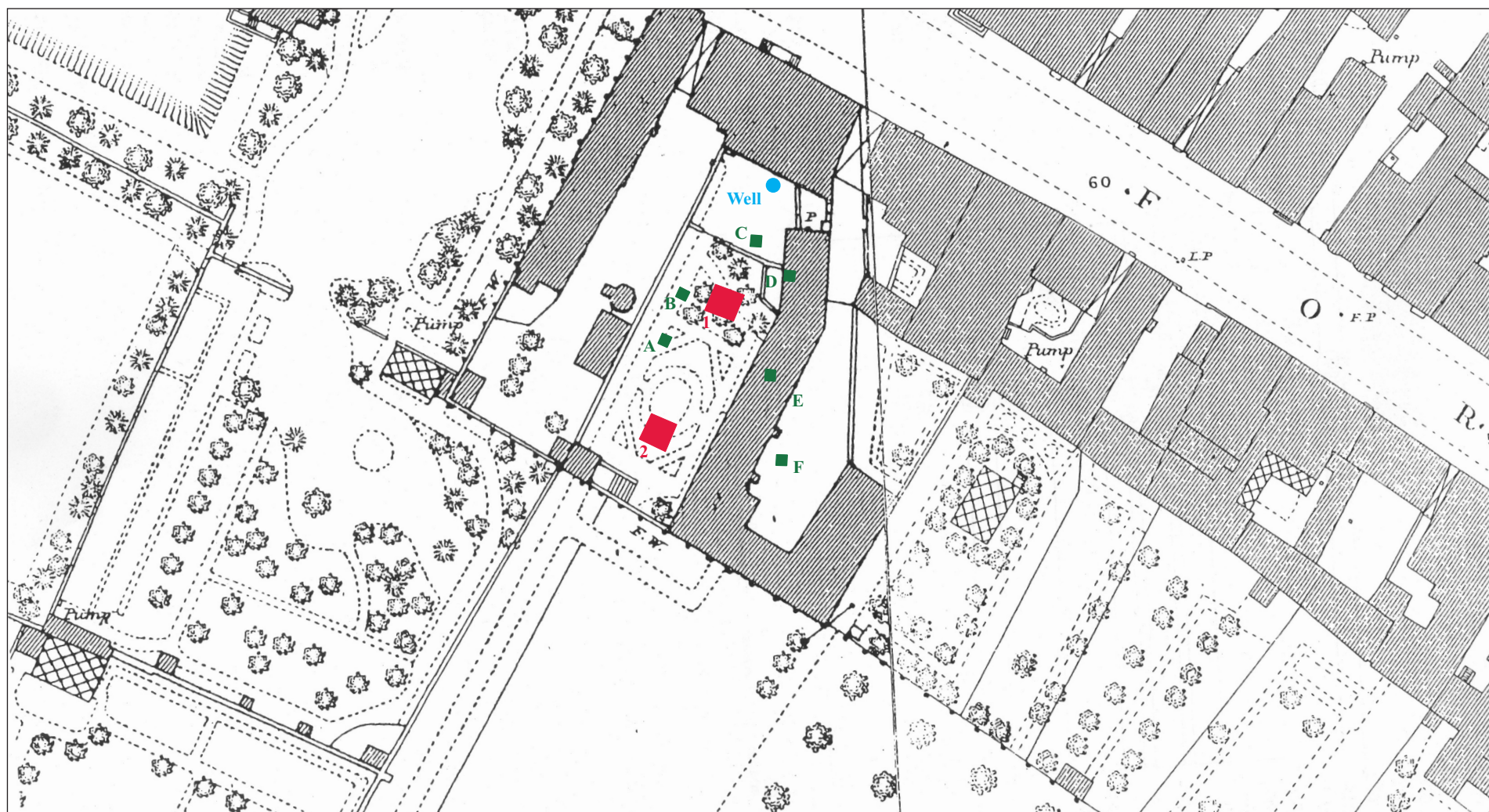


Figure 5. 1885 OS map with 2012 and 1993 test pits and 1985 well overlain.

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OASIS ID: cambridg3-122030

Project details

Project name	Rear of 2 Forehill, Ely
Short description of the project	An archaeological trench-based evaluation was conducted by the Cambridge Archaeological Unit (CAU) on land situated to the rear of No. 2a Forehill, Ely, on the 28th and 29th of February 2012. Two evaluation trenches were excavated. The earliest datable features were two small pits with 13-15th century pot. Post-medieval pits and evidence of demolition were present. The uppermost portions of the sequences in both trenches consisted of made-ground deposits associated with the development of a modern horticultural horizon.
Project dates	Start: 28-02-2012 End: 29-02-2012
Previous/future work	Yes / Not known
Any associated project reference codes	TFE 12 - Sitecode
Any associated project reference codes	ECB3744 - HER event no.
Type of project	Field evaluation
Site status	None
Current Land use	Residential 1 - General Residential
Monument type	PITS Medieval
Monument type	PITS Post Medieval
Significant Finds	POTTERY Medieval
Significant Finds	POTTERY Post Medieval
Significant Finds	POTTERY Early Medieval
Significant Finds	POTTERY Modern
Significant Finds	QUERNSTONE FRAGMENTS Early Medieval
Significant Finds	TOBACCO PIPE Post Medieval
Methods & techniques	'Metal Detectors','Test Pits'
Development type	Urban residential (e.g. flats, houses, etc.)
Prompt	Direction from Local Planning Authority - PPS
Position in the planning process	Not known / Not recorded

Project location

Country	England
Site location	CAMBRIDGESHIRE EAST CAMBRIDGESHIRE ELY Rear of 2 Forehill, Ely
Postcode	CB7 4AN
Study area	580.00 Square metres

Site coordinates TL 5428 8024 52.3979887948 0.267858618841 52 23 52 N 000 16 04 E Point
 Height OD / Depth Min: 19.52m Max: 20.90m

Project creators

Name of Organisation Cambridge Archaeological Unit
 Project brief originator Local Authority Archaeologist and/or Planning Authority/advisory body
 Project design originator Alison Dickens
 Project director/manager Alison Dickens
 Project supervisor Richard Newman
 Type of sponsor/funding body Landowner
 Name of sponsor/funding body Mrs Walton

Project archives

Physical Archive recipient Cambridge Archaeological Unit
 Physical Archive ID TFE 12
 Physical Contents 'Animal Bones','Ceramics','Worked stone/lithics','other'
 Digital Archive recipient Cambridge Archaeological Unit
 Digital Media available 'Images raster / digital photography','Images vector','Spreadsheets','Survey','Text'
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