

Chear Fen, Chittering, Cambridgeshire

An Archaeological Evaluation Assessment.



Matthew Collins

CAMBRIDGE ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT
UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE



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Matthew Collins

Illustrations by Bryan Crossan

Cambridge Archaeological Unit
University of Cambridge
Department of Archaeology

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Non-Technical Summary

Cambridge Archaeological Unit undertook an archaeological evaluation at Chear Fen, Chittering, Cambridgeshire between the 8th and 9th May 2012. The trenching revealed a series of substantial post-medieval strip-quarries and several rows of small, modern pits, together with areas of modern disturbance/truncation. A single, undated pit which potentially pre-dates the post-medieval period was also identified.

Introduction

An archaeological evaluation was carried out by Cambridge Archaeological Unit (CAU) between the 8th and 9th May 2012 on land at Chear Fen, Chittering, Cambridgeshire, prior to a small commercial development. Commissioned by Produce Connection Ltd. the evaluation aimed to establish the presence, date, state of preservation and significance of any archaeological remains. The evaluation was carried out and this report was produced in accordance with an archaeological specification written by the CAU (Dickens 2012) in response to a brief by the Cambridgeshire Historic Environment Team (CHET) at Cambridgeshire County Council. The specification and evaluation were approved and monitored by an Archaeological Officer from that team.

Location, Topography and Geology

The proposed development area (PDA) occupies *c.*0.5 ha of land at Chear Fen, Chittering, Cambridgeshire and centred on TL 5032/7156. It is to the rear of several existing structures and is bounded by drainage dykes to the south and east, a standing building to the west and open ground with greenhouses to the north (see Figure 1). The PDA is relatively level and averages 0.35m OD. Underlying geology is Lower Greensand (BGS 1981).

Archaeological Background

The PDA itself has no known archaeological remains or artefacts associated with it. However, known prehistoric occupation sites are located in the immediate vicinity on the gravel terraces south of the River Great Ouse, with Neolithic flint implements recovered 600m west of the PDA (MCB16024), Neolithic flint and Roman pot at Chear Fen Farms 320m to the north (MCB16992) and a Neolithic Flint axe on Adventurer's Land 330m to the northeast (MCB8310). Slightly further afield a CAU trenched evaluation 1200m to the east located a possible prehistoric pit (Ranson 2008), whilst 1000m to the northeast evidence for a probable Roman settlement has been recorded south of Grange Farm, Stretham (HER 5670).

Methodology

The PDA was evaluated by 4 trenches totalling 142.2m in length (a 6% sample of the area) which were placed in order to give a broad coverage of the site.

Topsoil and underlying deposits were removed under the supervision of an experienced archaeologist with a tracked 21-ton 360° machine using a 2.1m wide toothless ditching bucket. A datasheet detailing the characteristics of each trench was generated and a digital photographic record taken. Soil removed whilst machining was scanned by eye, and with a metal detector for finds, as were the exposed features. Excavation of the archaeological features was carried out using hand tools and ambiguous natural features were also tested. The recording followed a CAU modified MoLAS system (Spence 1990) whereby feature numbers, F. are assigned to stratigraphic events and numbers [fill] or [cut] to individual contexts. The evaluation trenches were planned at 1:50 and individual sections drawn at 1:10.

All work was carried out in strict accordance with statutory Health and Safety legislation and with the recommendations of FAME (Allen & Holt 2010) and in accordance with a site specific risk assessment and the CAU Health and Safety policy. The CAU assigned site code is CFD 12 and the event number is ECB 3743.

Archive

A total of 11 contexts from 6 features were excavated and recorded and artefacts including pot and tile were recovered. The documentary records have been assembled into a catalogued archive in line with Appendix 6 of MAP2 (English Heritage 1992) and are being stored at the CAU offices.

Results

Within the four trenches a significant number of features were identified (see Figure 2), however, with the exception of small pit **F.101** all of these were either late post-medieval or modern. Furthermore no artefacts dating prior to the post-medieval period were recovered from the spoil heaps and no non-ferrous artefacts were located during metal detecting of the features or heaps.

Pit **F.101** in Tr.3 contained no finds but was sealed by the subsoil and was infilled with pale to mid grey sandy clay silt with occasional charcoal. This fill type was very different to the other features on site and suggests it could be older; however the lack of artefacts also suggests it is some distance from any settlement related activity.

Within trenches Tr.1, Tr.2 and Tr.4 were three substantial post-medieval linear strip-quarries including **F.100** and **F.105**. Quarry **F.100** was seen in both Tr.2 and Tr.4 and a single sherd of glazed 19th century pottery was recovered from its surface. A slot was excavated in quarry **F.105** (see Figure 3) and revealed a substantial, vertically sided feature whose depth went beyond 1.20m. Several sherds of 19th century pot together with a fragment of field drain were recovered from the lower fills, which consisted broadly of topsoil derived dark brown, almost black peaty clay silt, with occasional lenses of redeposited yellowish sandy clay. All three strip quarries appeared to share the same upper fill and are probably contemporary.

Also within trenches Tr.1 and Tr.2 were a series of east-west and north-south aligned pits including **F.102**, **F.103** and **F.104**. All of these features were infilled with the same topsoil derived peaty clay silt and were oval in shape with vertical sides and a flat base (see Figure 3). No finds were recovered from the excavated pits, although they clearly cut the post-medieval quarries and are likely to date to the late 19th or 20th century. Tr.3 contained several more of these pits together with areas of modern disturbance and rubbish pits which contained plastic and modern building debris.

Trench 1										
General Description								Orientation		
Trench 1 contained post-medieval strip quarry F.105, and a line of modern pits including F.103 and F.104.								E-W		
								Avg. Topsoil Depth (m)		0.23
								Avg. Subsoil Depth (m)		0.30
								Width (m)		2.10
Length (m)		23.00								
Feature No.	Feature Type	Shape	Context No.	Cut/Fill	Length (m)	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Artefacts	Archaeological Period	
103	Pit	-	204	F	-	-	-	None	Modern	
103	Pit	Oval	205	C	1.90	1.05	0.22	-		
104	Pit	-	206	F	-	-	-	None	Modern	
104	Pit	Oval	207	C	1.80	0.96	0.22	-		

Trench 2										
General Description								Orientation		
Trench 2 contained three post-medieval strip quarries including F.100 and F.105, together with a line of modern pits including F.102.								N-S		
								Avg. Topsoil Depth (m)		0.23
								Avg. Subsoil Depth (m)		0.17
								Width (m)		2.10
Length (m)		51.70								
Feature No.	Feature Type	Shape	Context No.	Cut/Fill	Length (m)	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Artefacts	Archaeological Period	
100	Strip Quarry	Linear	N/A	N/A	N/A	2.20	N/A	None	Post-medieval	
102	Pit	-	202	F	-	-	-	None	Modern	
102	Pit	Oval	203	C	2.30	0.90	0.28	-		
105	Strip Quarry	-	208	F	-	-	-	None	Post-medieval	
105	Strip Quarry	-	209	F	-	-	-	None		
105	Strip Quarry	-	210	F	-	-	-	PT, TL		
105	Strip Quarry	Linear	211	C	Unknwn	2.12	>1.20	-		

Trench 2 Extension										
General Description								Orientation		
Trench 2 Extension contained a single (unexcavated) modern pit.								E-W		
								Avg. Topsoil Depth (m)		0.23
								Avg. Subsoil Depth (m)		0.17
								Width (m)		2.10
Length (m)		2.50								

Trench 3										
General Description								Orientation		
Trench 3 contained undated pit F.101, a treethrow and several modern pits and areas of disturbance.								E-W		
								Avg. Topsoil Depth (m)		0.24
								Avg. Subsoil Depth (m)		0.23
								Width (m)		2.10
Length (m)		54.30								
Feature No.	Feature Type	Shape	Context No.	Cut/Fill	Length (m)	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Artefacts	Archaeological Period	
101	Pit	-	200	F	-	-	-	None	Undated	
101	Pit	Oval	201	C	1.60	>0.70	0.22	-		

Trench 4									
General Description								Orientation	N-S
Trench 4 contained the continuation of post-medieval strip quarry F.100 (unexcavated) and a single modern pit (unexcavated).								Avg. Topsoil Depth (m)	0.22
								Avg. Subsoil Depth (m)	0.28
								Width (m)	2.10
								Length (m)	10.70
Feature No.	Feature Type	Shape	Context No.	Cut/Fill	Length (m)	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Artefacts	Archaeological Period
100	Strip Quarry	Linear	N/A	N/A	N/A	2.20	N/A	PT	Post-medieval

Discussion

The archaeological evaluation at Chear Fen, has demonstrated that very limited archaeological remains and/or deposits pre-dating the post-medieval period are present within the proposed development area. However, the site was clearly used for extensive, formalised quarrying within the 19th and 20th century. The rows of smaller, more modern pits are likely to have been excavated in order to extract small amounts of the underlying sandy clay for the purpose of ‘claying the fields’, whereby the heavier clay silts are spread onto peaty topsoil to help prevent wind erosion, a practise also recorded at Redmere Farm, Littleport, Cambridgeshire (Collins 2007).

Acknowledgements

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References

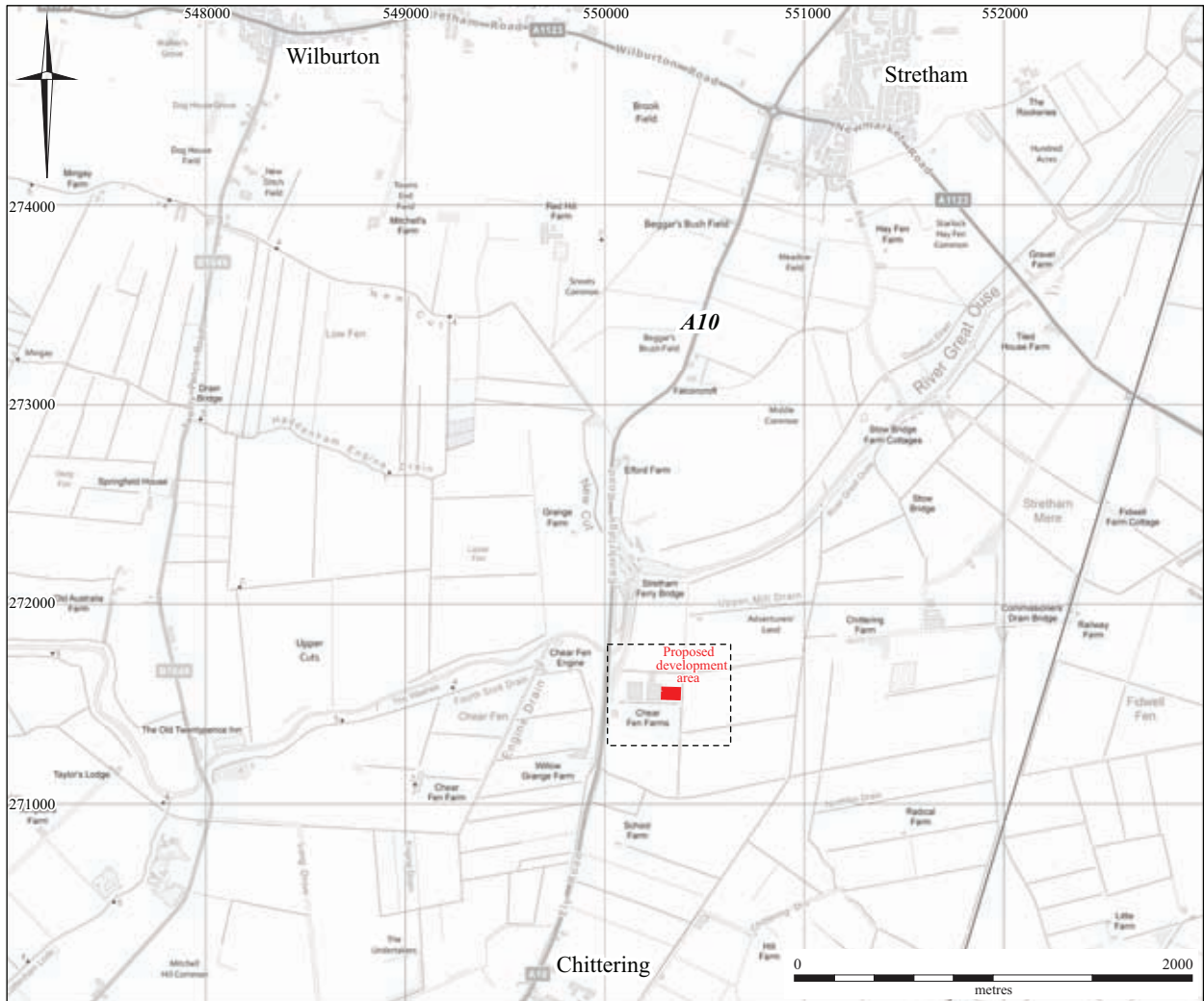
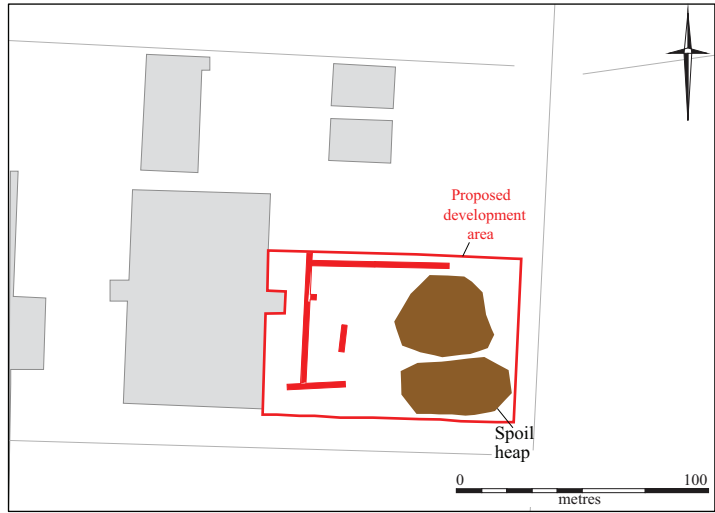
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Based on the Ordnance Survey 1:2500 map
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Figure 1. Location Plan

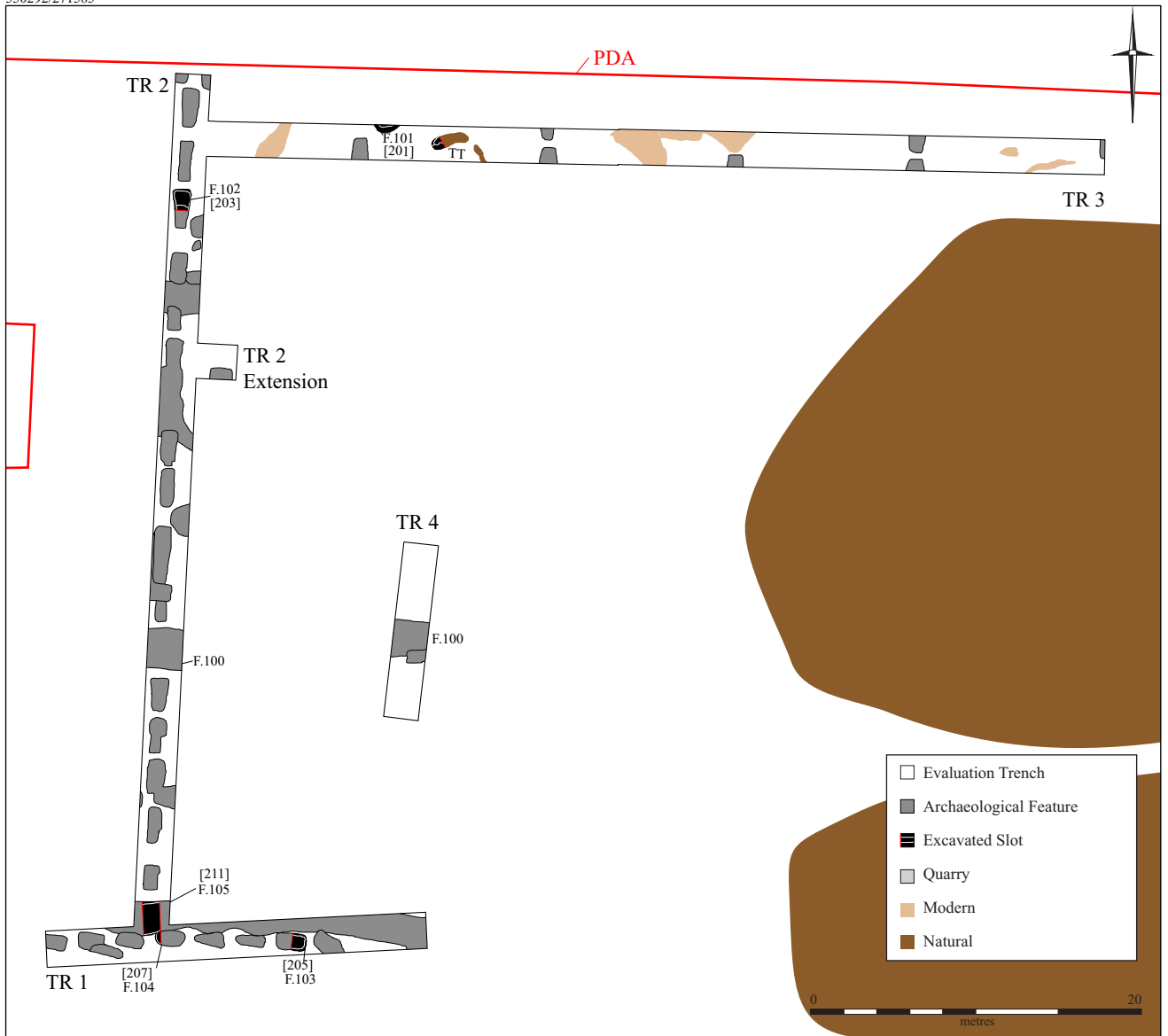


Figure 2. Trench plan.



Figure 3. Photographs of pit F. 103 (top) and quarry pit F. 105 (bottom).

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Project details

Project name	Chear Fen, Chittering, Cambridgeshire An Archaeological Evaluation Assessment
Short description of the project	Cambridge Archaeological Unit undertook an archaeological evaluation at Chear Fen, Chittering, Cambridgeshire between the 8th and 9th May 2012. The trenching revealed a series of substantial post-medieval strip-quarries and several rows of small, modern pits, together with areas of modern disturbance/truncation. No earlier archaeological deposits or features were identified.
Project dates	Start: 08-05-2012 End: 09-05-2012
Previous/future work	No / No
Type of project	Field evaluation
Site status	Local Authority Designated Archaeological Area
Current Land use	Grassland Heathland 3 - Disturbed
Monument type	STRIP QUARRY Post Medieval
Monument type	PITS Modern
Significant Finds	POT Post Medieval
Methods & techniques	"Sample Trenches"
Development type	Rural commercial
Prompt	Direction from Local Planning Authority - PPS
Position in the planning process	After full determination (eg. As a condition)

Project location

Country England

Site location	CAMBRIDGESHIRE EAST CAMBRIDGESHIRE STRETHAM Chear Fen, Chittering, Cambridgeshire
Postcode	CB25 9PN
Study area	1.00 Hectares
Site coordinates	TL 5032 7156 52 0 52 19 15 N 000 12 20 E Point
Height OD / Depth	Min: 0m Max: 0m

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	Matthew Collins
Type of sponsor/ funding body	Landowner
Name of sponsor/ funding body	Produce Connection Ltd.

Project archives

Physical Archive recipient	Cambridge Archaeological Unit
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