

# Fifty Farm, Isleham, Cambridgeshire

An Archaeological Evaluation Assessment.



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**Fifty Farm, Isleham, Cambridgeshire**  
*An Archaeological Evaluation Assessment*

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### ***Non-Technical Summary***

*Cambridge Archaeological Unit undertook an archaeological evaluation at Fifty Farm, Isleham, Cambridgeshire between the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> July 2012. Several worked flints and pieces of burnt flint were recovered during field-walking, however within the seven trenches only natural and modern features were identified, although a buried soil was present towards the southern part of the site.*

## Introduction

An archaeological evaluation was carried out by Cambridge Archaeological Unit (CAU) between the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> July 2012 on land at Fifty Farm, Isleham, Cambridgeshire, prior to the construction of a reservoir. Commissioned by Churchgate Property, the evaluation aimed to establish the presence, date, state of preservation and significance of any potential heritage assets of archaeological interest. The evaluation was carried out and this report was produced in accordance with an archaeological specification written by the CAU (Beadsmoore 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.*3.2 hectares of land located approximately 1.50 miles north of the village of Isleham, Cambridgeshire and centred on TL 6350 7688 (see Figure 1). Located within a potato field and a stand of mixed trees, the River Lark is 100m to the east, Prickwillow Road (B1104) is to the west and open farmland is to the north and south of the PDA. The site slopes upwards towards the river from a height of -0.89m OD at the western end of Trench 7 to -0.43m OD at the eastern end of Trench 1. Although, aerial photography and a field survey suggests the presence of a possible slight rise and a sandy ridge running northwest-southeast approximately midway across the field, and to the west of PDA. Underlying geology is 1<sup>st</sup> Terrace sand and gravels overlying Gault clay.

### *Archaeological Background*

Prehistoric activity is well-known from Isleham and the surrounding area, where rich Bronze-Age settlement related activity on the higher chalk-lands in, and immediately around, Isleham have been identified. This includes a Middle Bronze Age settlement that was partially excavated *c.*1.5m southwest of the PDA which recovered large quantities of artefacts including a rare antler bow (Gdaniec 1996), and an antiquarian excavation *c.*750m west of the PDA where a Bronze Age Beaker site was identified (NMR-1088292). A number of hoards are also known from the vicinity, including the largest hoard of Bronze-Age artefacts discovered to date within the UK, totalling some 6500 pieces of bronze, which was discovered to the southwest of the village (NMR-1360844).

Closer to the PDA, several Neolithic flint scatters have been identified to the north (MCB 20120), the northwest and west (MCB 12898 and MCB 12888) and to the southeast (MCB 12897) suggesting the possibility of similar scatters here. Local sources suggest the PDA and surrounding fields were not drained and turned over to agricultural use until the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, therefore making it unlikely to encounter evidence for medieval and post-medieval farming such as furrows.

### *Methodology*

The PDA was evaluated by several methods including fieldwalking, metal detecting, bucket sampling and trial trenching. The field walking was carried out along three

transects located on trackways within the potato crop. Metal detecting was carried out along the field walking transects, the trial trenching spoil heaps and across exposed features. Bucket sampling consisted of 90 litre samples being hand-sifted from the middle and ends of every trench from both the topsoil and any underlying deposits. The trial trenching totalled 297m in length (c.1.9% sample of the PDA) the placement of which was restricted by a stand of trees and the potato crop.

Topsoil and underlying deposits were removed under the supervision of an experienced archaeologist with a tracked 21-ton 360° machine using a 2m wide toothless ditching bucket. A datasheet detailing the characteristics of each trench was generated and a digital photographic record taken. Excavation of 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 trial 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 FFI 12 and the event number is ECB 3808.

### *Archive*

A total of 38 contexts from 11 features were excavated and recorded. Artefacts including pot, tile and worked and burnt flint 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**

### *Field Walking*

Three fieldwalking transects were examined during the evaluation, all of these followed established trackways within the standing potato crop (see Figure 3).

**Transect 1:** Measured 730m in length and was adjacent to the northern field boundary. This Transect yielded the highest number of artefacts, with a moderate amount of burnt and worked flint and two post-medieval pot sherds recovered from the south-western half. No artefacts were recovered from the north-eastern half.

**Transect 2:** Measured 730m in length and was parallel to Transect 1 c.30m to the southeast. A small quantity of worked and burnt flint and post-medieval pot was recovered towards the south-western end, with only a single worked flint and two pieces of burnt flint recovered from the north-eastern half.

**Transect 3:** Measured 260m in length and was parallel to the north-eastern half of Transect 2. Only two artefacts were recovered and included a single worked flint and a fragment of post-medieval tile.

Most of the recovered worked flint consisted of undiagnostic flint flakes; however two probable Early Neolithic flint cores were recovered from the southwest end of Transect 2.

### *Metal Detecting*

A metal detecting survey was carried out along the route of the fieldwalking transects, over the spoil generated from excavating the trial trenches and over any features identified within those trenches. The only metal objects recovered were shotgun cartridges and fragments of modern wire fencing. All of these were discarded.

### *Bucket Sampling*

Bucket sampling of the topsoil and any underlying deposits was carried out in the middle and at both ends of each trench for a total of 36 sampling points, each consisting of 90 litres. Only topsoil was sampled from Trenches 6 and 7 as no underlying deposits were present. Despite this quite intensive sampling strategy only four artefacts were recovered, of which three were post-medieval/modern.

Trench	Deposit	Artefact	Archaeological Period
1	Topsoil	PT	Post-medieval
3	Topsoil	FE	Modern
3	Topsoil	TL	Post-medieval
4	Topsoil	FL	Neolithic

### *Trial Trenching*

The trenching (see Figure 2) revealed a preserved buried soil in Trenches 1 and 2 which consisted of a pale to mid grey sandy silt, which was overlain by a brown peat deposit. The buried soil was not present in any of the other trenches, although the very shallow nature of Trenches 6 (see Figure 4) and 7 suggests that if it did originally extend to the northwest, it has most likely been removed through plough action. No artefacts were recovered from it to indicate the date of its formation, although it did seal a series of natural features including treethrows and probable water run-off channels. These features, including **F.105**, **F.109** and **F.112**, were present in most of the trenches and several were test excavated. They were generally irregular in shape with one edge being very steep and the other having a much shallower gradient and both sides showing evidence of severe rooting. The bases were slightly rounded, and fills consisted of water-lain sandy silts. No finds were recovered from any of these features. Together with the probable water run-off channels were small irregular hollows such as **F.104** in Trench 1, (see Figure 4). This feature was also sealed by the buried soil and was irregular in plan with a flattish base and infilled with water-lain, sterile, mid grey sandy silt, from which no finds were recovered. Other natural features included treethrows of which several were test excavated but again no artefacts were recovered.

Within Trenches 3, 4 and 5 were a series of postholes (see Figure 2) including **F.106**-**F.108**, **F.110**, **F.111** and **F.117**. These features varied in shape from circular to rectangular but were fairly substantial in size and, whilst no artefacts were recovered

from them, their mixed, topsoil derived peaty fills suggest they were all modern in date.

Within Trenches 6 and 7 were two small, undated pits, **F.100** and **F.102**. Both were circular with moderately steep sides and rounded bases and infilled with mid grey sandy silt. Neither of these features contained any charcoal or artefacts; however their fill type suggests they are potentially early in date. Also present in Trench 7 were two parallel field drains and a parallel line of modern pits which were probably dug for the purpose of providing clay to spread on the fields in order to preserve the peat, a practise seen on similar sites within the fens (Collins 2007 and 2012). One of these, **F.101**, was excavated and recorded. It contained no artefacts and was infilled with a topsoil derived blackish peaty material.

Trench 1									
General Description								Orientation	NE-SW
A preserved peat layer and buried soil were present within Trench 1. Beneath the buried soil were a series of natural hollows, treethrows and possible water run-off channels.								Avg. Topsoil Depth (m)	0.40
								Peat Depth (m)	0.20
								Buried Soil Depth (m)	0.10
								Width (m)	2.00
								Length (m)	50.00
Feature No.	Feature Type	Shape	Context No.	Cut/ Fill	Length (m)	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Artefacts	Archaeological Period
103	Treethrow	-	207	F	-	-	-	None	Undated
103	Treethrow	Irregular	208	C	1.10	0.70	0.17	-	
104	Hollow	-	209	F	-	-	-	None	Undated
104	Hollow	-	210	F	-	-	-	None	
104	Hollow	Irregular	211	C	>5.00	>2.00	0.20	-	
105	Root hollow	-	212	F	-	-	-	None	Modern?
105	Root hollow	-	213	F	-	-	-	None	
105	Root hollow	Irregular	214	C	1.50	>0.50	0.25	-	

Trench 2									
General Description								Orientation	NE-SW
A preserved buried soil was present in Trench 2. Beneath this layer was a series of natural hollows, treethrows and possible water run-off channels.								Avg. Topsoil Depth (m)	0.38
								Peat Depth (m)	0.00
								Buried Soil Depth (m)	0.10
								Width (m)	2.00
								Length (m)	50.00
Feature No.	Feature Type	Shape	Context No.	Cut/ Fill	Length (m)	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Artefacts	Archaeological Period
114	Treethrow	-	229	F	-	-	-	None	Undated
114	Treethrow	Irregular	230	C	>3.00	>1.50	0.25	-	
115	Treethrow	-	231	F	-	-	-	None	Undated
115	Treethrow	Irregular	232	C	>2.00	>1.50	0.34	-	
105	Run-off Channel	-	233	F	-	-	-	None	Undated
105	Run-off Channel	Linear	234	C	Unknwn	>7.00	>1.40	-	



Trench 3									
General Description								Orientation	NE-SW
Trench 3 contained no peat or buried soil beneath the topsoil. The trench contained a series of postholes, natural hollows, treethrows and possible water run-off channels.								Avg. Topsoil Depth (m)	0.39
								Peat Depth (m)	N/A
								Buried Soil Depth (m)	N/A
								Width (m)	2.00
								Length (m)	50.00
Feature No.	Feature Type	Shape	Context No.	Cut/ Fill	Length (m)	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Artefacts	Archaeological Period
109	Run-off Channel	-	221	F	-	-	-	None	Undated
109	Run-off Channel	Linear	222	C	>2.00m	0.90	0.57	-	
110	Posthole	-	223	F	-	-	-	None	Modern
110	Posthole	Square	224	C	N/A	0.30	0.28	-	
111	Posthole	-	225	F	-	-	-	None	Modern
111	Posthole	Square	226	C	N/A	0.30	0.21	-	
112	Run-off Channel	-	227	F	-	-	-	None	Undated
112	Run-off Channel	Linear	228	C	>2.00	1.75	0.31	-	
113	Treethrow	-	237	F	-	-	-	None	Undated
113	Treethrow	Irregular	238	C	2.50	1.25	0.21	-	

Trench 4									
General Description								Orientation	NW-SE
Trench 4 contained no peat or buried soil beneath the topsoil. The trench contained a series of postholes, natural hollows and treethrows.								Avg. Topsoil Depth (m)	0.45
								Peat Depth (m)	N/A
								Buried Soil Depth (m)	N/A
								Width (m)	2.00
								Length (m)	37.00
Feature No.	Feature Type	Shape	Context No.	Cut/ Fill	Length (m)	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Artefacts	Archaeological Period
107	Posthole	-	217	F	-	-	-	None	Modern
107	Posthole	Circular	218	C	N/A	0.30	0.40	-	
108	Posthole	-	219	F	-	-	-	None	Modern
108	Posthole	Circular	220	C	N/A	0.30	0.30	-	

Trench 5									
General Description								Orientation	NE-SW
Trench 4 contained a peat layer but no buried soil. Also contained postholes, treethrows and water run-off channels.								Avg. Topsoil Depth (m)	0.32
								Peat depth (m)	0.11
								Buried Soil Depth (m)	N/A
								Width (m)	2.00
								Length (m)	50.00
Feature No.	Feature Type	Shape	Context No.	Cut/ Fill	Length (m)	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Artefacts	Archaeological Period
106	Posthole	-	215	F	-	-	-	None	Modern
106	Posthole	Circular	216	C	N/A	0.30	0.30	-	
117	Posthole	-	235	F	-	-	-	None	Modern
117	Posthole	Circular	236	C	N/A	0.30	0.20	-	

Trench 6									
General Description								Orientation	NE-SW
Trench 6 contained no peat layer or buried soil. It did contain a small pit, treethrows and water run-off channels.								Avg. Topsoil Depth (m)	0.28
								Peat depth (m)	N/A
								Buried Soil Depth (m)	N/A
								Width (m)	2.00
								Length (m)	30.00
Feature No.	Feature Type	Shape	Context No.	Cut/ Fill	Length (m)	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Artefacts	Archaeological Period
100	Small Pit	-	200	F	-	-	-	None	Undated
100	Small Pit	Circular	201	C	N/A	0.55	0.20	-	

Trench 7									
General Description								Orientation	NE-SW
Trench 7 contained no peat layer or buried soil. It did contain a small pit, two field drains and a line of modern clay extraction pits.								Avg. Topsoil Depth (m)	0.31
								Peat depth (m)	N/A
								Buried Soil Depth (m)	N/A
								Width (m)	2.00
								Length (m)	30.00
Feature No.	Feature Type	Shape	Context No.	Cut/ Fill	Length (m)	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Artefacts	Archaeological Period
101	Pit	-	202	F	-	-	-	None	Modern
101	Pit	-	203	F	-	-	-	None	
101	Pit	Rectangular	204	C	1.87	1.00	0.26	-	
102	Small Pit	-	205	F	-	-	-	None	Undated
102	Small Pit	Circular	206	C	N/A	0.40	0.16	-	

## Discussion

The presence of a series of probable water run-off channels and natural hollows filled with water-lain silts, together with the average -0.80m OD height suggests the PDA was predominantly a wet landscape until the draining of this area in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and therefore probably not densely utilized. This view is supported by the lack of dateable features or artefacts from this evaluation.

Despite the constraining factors mitigating the placement of the trial trenches, the results from the trenching, taken together with the results from the bucket sampling, metal detecting and field walking are sufficient to suggest the area of the proposed reservoir contains very limited archaeological remains or deposits. Although the fieldwalking, which identified two Early Neolithic flint cores and a possible cluster of burnt flint suggests the possibility of archaeological activity located between the western edge of the PDA and Prickwillow Road (B1104).

## **Acknowledgements**

The archaeological evaluation was commissioned by Churchgate Property.. Monitoring was undertaken by Kasia Gdaniec (CHET). Alison Dickens was CAU Project Manager and Donald Horne (CAU) undertook the surveying. Many thanks to Selina Davenport, Lizzie Middleton, Toby Knight and Matt Jones for assisting the author on site.

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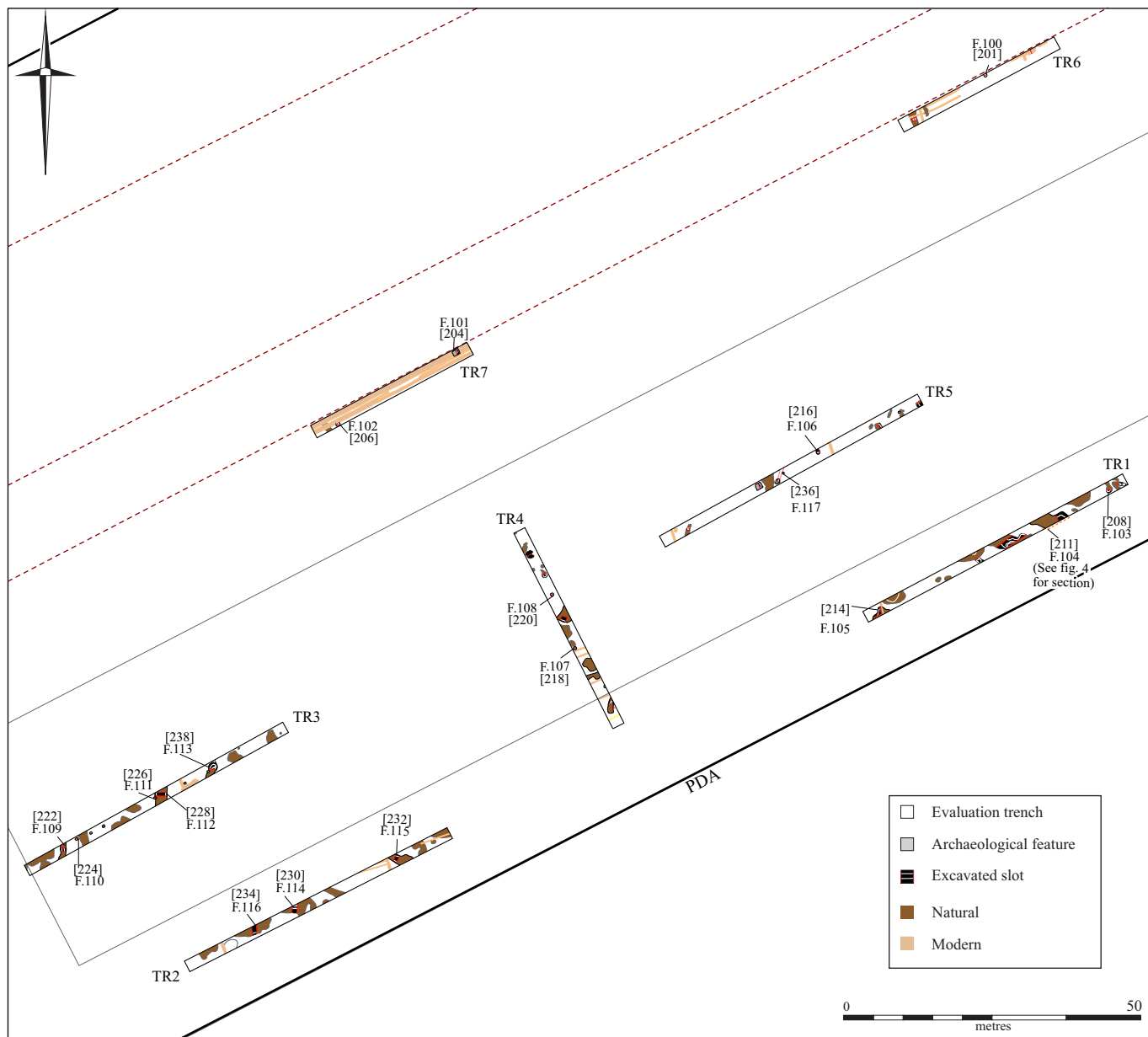


Figure 2. Trench Plan

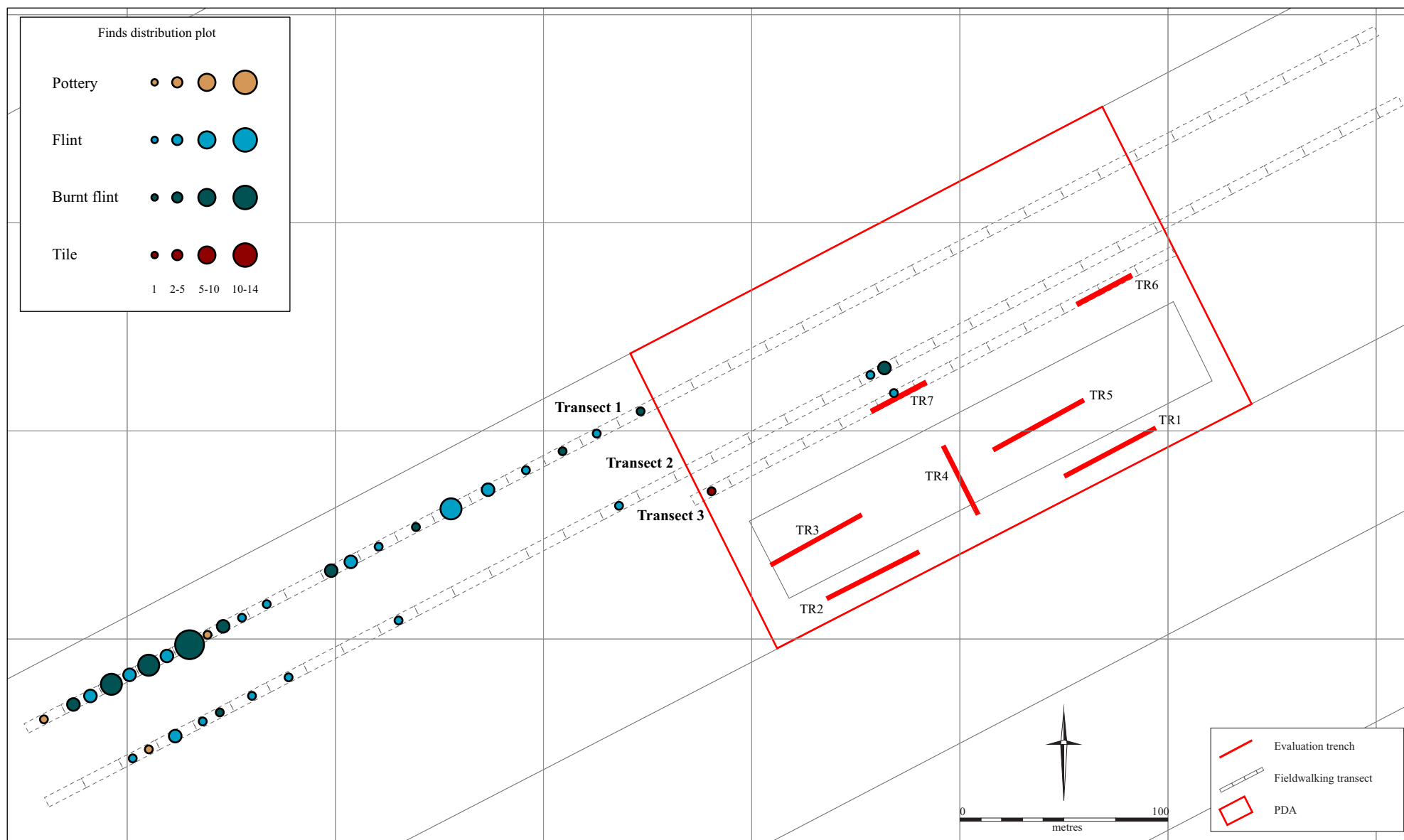


Figure 3. Plan of Archaeological Trenches with Fieldwalking Transects

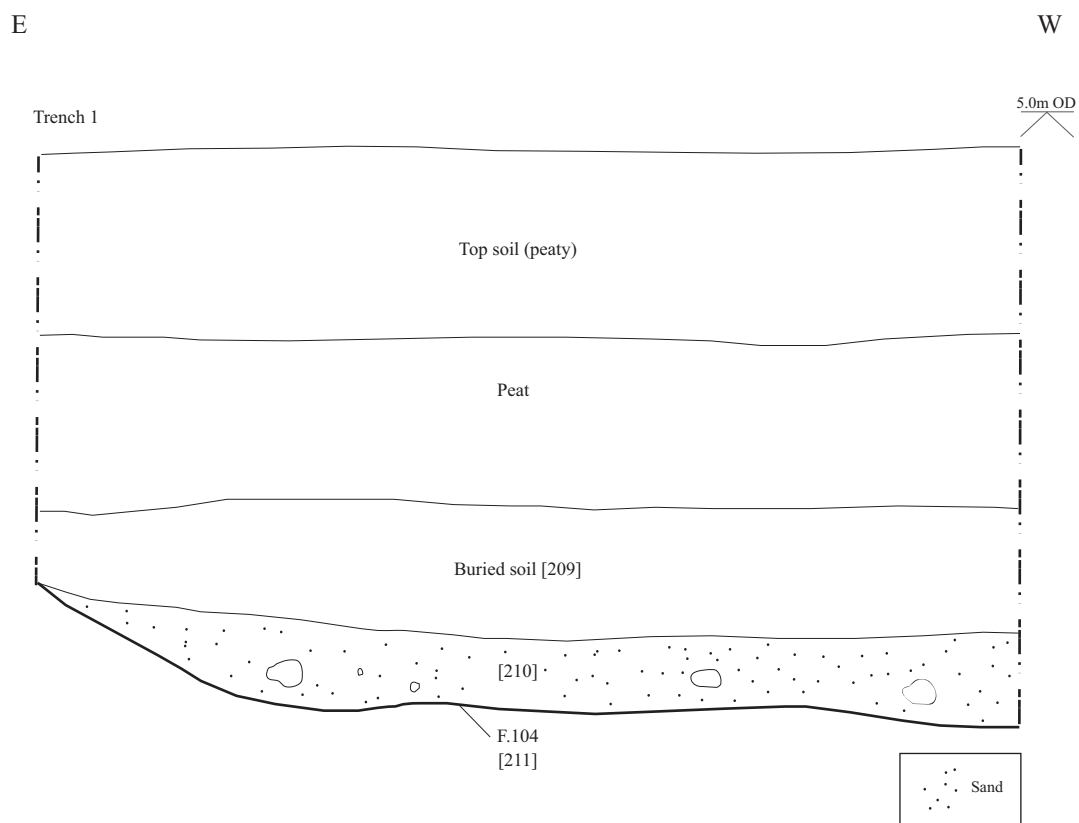


Figure 4. Section of Natural Hollow F. 104 and Photograph of Trench 6



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### Project details

Project name	Fifty Farm, Isleham, Cambridgeshire An Archaeological Evaluation Assessment
Short description of the project	Cambridge Archaeological Unit undertook an archaeological evaluation at Fifty Farm, Isleham, Cambridgeshire between the 2nd and 6th July 2012. Several worked flints and pieces of burnt flint were recovered during field-walking, however within the seven trenches only natural and modern features were identified, although a buried soil was present towards the southern part of the site.
Project dates	Start: 02-07-2012 End: 06-07-2012
Previous/future work	No / Not known
Type of project	Field evaluation
Site status	Local Authority Designated Archaeological Area
Current Land use	Cultivated Land 2 - Operations to a depth less than 0.25m
Current Land use	Woodland 5 - Undetermined
Monument type	POSTHOLES Modern
Monument type	NATURAL FEATURES Uncertain
Significant Finds	FLINT Neolithic
Methods & techniques	"Fieldwalking","Sample Trenches"
Development type	Farm infrastructure (e.g. barns, grain stores, equipment stores, etc.)
Development type	Reservoir
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 ISLEHAM Fifty Farm, Isleham, Cambridgeshire
Postcode	CB7 5RQ
Study area	3.00 Hectares
Site coordinates	TL 6350 7688 52 0 52 21 54 N 000 24 05 E Point
Height OD / Depth	Min: -0.89m Max: -0.43m

## Project creators

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	Alison Dickens
Project supervisor	Matthew Collins
Type of sponsor/ funding body	Landowner
Name of sponsor/ funding body	Churchgate Property

## Project archives

Physical Archive recipient	Cambridge Archaeological Unit
Physical Archive ID	FFI 12
Physical Contents	"Ceramics","Worked stone/lithics"
Digital Archive recipient	Cambridge Archaeological Unit
Digital Archive ID	FFI 12
Digital Contents	"none"
Digital Media available	"GIS","Images raster / digital photography","Survey"
Paper Archive recipient	Cambridge Archaeological Unit
Paper Archive ID	FFI 12
Paper Contents	"none"

Paper Media available "Correspondence", "Map", "Photograph", "Plan", "Report", "Section", "Survey", "Unpublished Text", "Context sheet"

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