

Overcote Farm, Over Cambridgeshire

An Archaeological Evaluation Assessment.



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October 2012

Report No. 1126
Event No. ECB 3767

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Non-Technical Summary

Cambridge Archaeological Unit undertook an archaeological evaluation at Overcote Farm, Over, Cambridgeshire, between the 1st and 3rd October 2012. Within the evaluation trenches a substantial probable prehistoric ditch, a smaller Romano-British ditch and a series of small, shallow post-medieval pits were excavated and recorded.

Introduction

An archaeological evaluation was carried out by Cambridge Archaeological Unit (CAU) between the 1st and 3rd October 2012 on land at Overcote Farm, Over, Cambridgeshire, prior to the redevelopment and expansion of a poultry farm. Commissioned by Acorus Rural Property Services Ltd. 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 3.80 ha, although at this stage only 1.43 ha was available for evaluation. It is located off Overcote Lane on the eastern side of the village of Needingworth, Cambridgeshire and approximately 950m northwest of the River Great Ouse, and centred on TL 3494 7177, (see Figure 1). The evaluation was carried out within a recently harvested field with poultry sheds to the north and open fields to the south, west and east. The area sloped gently from west to east, with Trench 1 at 4.50m OD and the eastern end of Trench 5 at 3.30m OD. Underlying geology is at the junction of 3rd Terrace River Gravels and the neighbouring low lying areas of alluvium (British Geological Survey 1975).

Archaeological Background

The PDA is located within a landscape of dense archaeological activity which is described in detail in a recent CAU desktop assessment (Standring 2009), and the relevant results are summarised below.

Extensive prehistoric field-systems, settlement and funerary remains have been excavated by the CAU within the Hanson Needingworth quarry (Evans & Knight 1998 and 2001) to the north of the PDA, which extend to the opposite side of Overcote Lane. Whilst within the adjacent field to the west, cropmarks including an old channel/watercourse and a substantial ring-ditch (CHER 08125) have been identified. Also within this field, pottery dating from the Bronze Age through to the post-medieval period has been recovered (CHER 11692), and a significant collection of large unabraded Romano-British pottery sherds, indicative of settlement activity, have been collected primarily from its northern end.

Roman activity is also known from the wider landscape and a field-system dating to this period was identified during the quarry excavations. Stray Roman finds have been recovered from within the village of Needingworth, and extensive cropmarks to the northeast of the village suggest the presence of a rural settlement dating to this period (Standring 2009).

The village of Needingworth has been continually inhabited since the Middle Saxon period and stray sherds of pottery have been recovered from close to the PDA suggesting medieval activity within the PDA can also not be ruled out.

Methodology

The PDA was evaluated by 6 trenches totalling 290m in length with an additional 3.25m extension at the eastern end of Trench 5 and a 3.70m by 2m extension at the northern end of Trench 6 (a 3.72% sample of the available area). The trenches were placed in order to investigate potential features identified as cropmarks and through geophysics, as well as to give a broad coverage of the area.

Topsoil and underlying deposits were removed under the supervision of an experienced archaeologist by a tracked 7-ton 360° machine using a 1.80m 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 1999) 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 OFO 12 and the event number is ECB 3767.

Archive

A total of 18 contexts from 7 features were excavated and recorded. Artefacts including pot, animal bone, brick and worked 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

Within the six trenches, and their extensions, a small number of archaeological features were identified and included substantial, undated ditch **F.7**, a smaller Romano-British ditch **F.5** which was recut by **F.6**, a series of small, shallow post-medieval pits and two square post-medieval postholes, (see Figure 2). 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 exposed features or heaps.

Ditch **F.7**, located in Trench 6 and orientated northwest-southeast, was 2.30m wide and 0.95m deep with moderately steep sides and rounded base, (see Figure 3). It was primarily infilled with a homogenous mid grey clayey sandy silt; although a blue/grey clay was present towards the base. No artefacts were recovered, although it was sealed

by a thick layer of clay subsoil, suggesting it dates from before the post-medieval period. This is supported by the fact it is completely off-alignment with the current post-medieval/modern field layout.

Ditches **F.5** and **F.6**, located in Trench 5 and orientated northeast-southwest, averaged 1.08m wide and 0.39m deep and were infilled with mid grey clay silt. The fragmented remains of a Romano-British jar/vessel were recovered from **F.5**, which is probably indicative of a casual loss. Within Trench 3 were several small, shallow pits including **F.3** and **F.4**. These features were one hundred percent excavated and a large fragment of post-medieval brick and an undiagnostic worked flint were recovered from them. They are probably too small to represent quarrying and their purpose is undetermined at this stage.

Trench 1									
General Description						Orientation		N-S	
Trench 1 contained two post-medieval postholes.						Avg. Topsoil Depth (m)		0.26	
						Avg. Subsoil Depth (m)		0.21	
						Width (m)		1.80	
						Length (m)		48.80	
Feature No.	Feature Type	Shape	Context No.	Cut/ Fill	Length (m)	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Artefacts	Archaeological Period
1	Posthole	-	1	F	-	-	-	None	Post-medieval
1	Posthole	Square	2	C	N/A	0.25	0.05	-	
2	Posthole	-	3	F	-	-	-	None	Post-medieval
2	Posthole	Square	4	C	N/A	0.25	0.09	-	

Trench 2									
General Description						Orientation		E-W	
Trench 2 contained no archaeological features or deposits						Avg. Topsoil Depth (m)		0.29	
						Avg. Subsoil Depth (m)		0.32	
						Width (m)		1.80	
						Length (m)		45.70	

Trench 3									
General Description						Orientation		N-S	
Trench 3 contained several small, shallow post-medieval pits.						Avg. Topsoil Depth (m)		0.29	
						Avg. Subsoil Depth (m)		0.30	
						Width (m)		1.80	
						Length (m)		48.90	
Feature No.	Feature Type	Shape	Context No.	Cut/ Fill	Length (m)	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Artefacts	Archaeological Period
3	Pit	-	5	F	-	-	-	None	Post-medieval
3	Pit	Oval	6	C	0.96	0.72	0.10	-	
4	Pit	-	7	F	-	-	-	FL, TL	Post-medieval
4	Pit	-	8	F	-	-	-	None	
4	Pit	Irregular	9	C	1.80	1.63	0.14	-	

Trench 4		
General Description	Orientation	N-S
Trench 4 contained no archaeological features or deposits.	Avg. Topsoil Depth (m)	0.31
	Avg. Subsoil Depth (m)	0.46
	Width (m)	1.80
	Length (m)	23.70

Trench 5									
General Description						Orientation		N-S	
Trench 5 contained northeast-southwest orientated linear F.5 which was recut by F.6.						Avg. Topsoil Depth (m)		0.29	
						Avg. Subsoil Depth (m)		0.30	
						Width (m)		1.80	
						Length (m)		48.90	
Feature No.	Feature Type	Shape	Context No.	Cut/ Fill	Length (m)	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Artefacts	Archaeological Period
5	Ditch	-	10	F	-	-	-	BN	Romano-British
5	Ditch	-	11	F	-	-	-	PT	
5	Ditch	Linear	12	C	N/A	0.96	0.29	-	
6	Ditch	-	13	F	-	-	-	None	Romano-British
6	Ditch	-	14	F	-	-	-	None	
6	Ditch	Linear	15	C	N/A	1.20	0.49	-	

Trench 6									
General Description						Orientation		N-S	
Trench 6 contained substantial, undated ditch F.7 which is cut by a modern drain.						Avg. Topsoil Depth (m)		0.29	
						Avg. Subsoil Depth (m)		0.55	
						Width (m)		1.80	
						Length (m)		74.00	
Feature No.	Feature Type	Shape	Context No.	Cut/ Fill	Length (m)	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Artefacts	Archaeological Period
7	Ditch	-	16	F	-	-	-	None	Undated
7	Ditch	-	17	F	-	-	-	None	
7	Ditch	Linear	18	C	N/A	2.30	0.95	-	

Discussion

The substantial ditch identified in Trench 6 appears not to be on the same alignment as the Romano-British ditches in Trench 5, suggesting they are not components of the same system. In fact this ditch has a similar alignment to the Bronze Age land divisions identified during excavations at the Hanson Needingworth quarry just to the north of the PDA, (Evans & Knight 2001), suggesting it is potentially part of that system. Although if this is the case, the complete lack of artefacts indicates it could be some distance from any settlement activity.

The presence of a recut Roman-British ditch at the eastern end of Trench 5, but no other similarly dated features is interesting considering the concentration of artefacts dating to this period recovered from the adjacent field to the west. It is possible this feature represents part of a broad field-system extending from a potential settlement in that area. Alternatively it could represent the edge of Romano-British activity which extends to the east outside of the PDA.

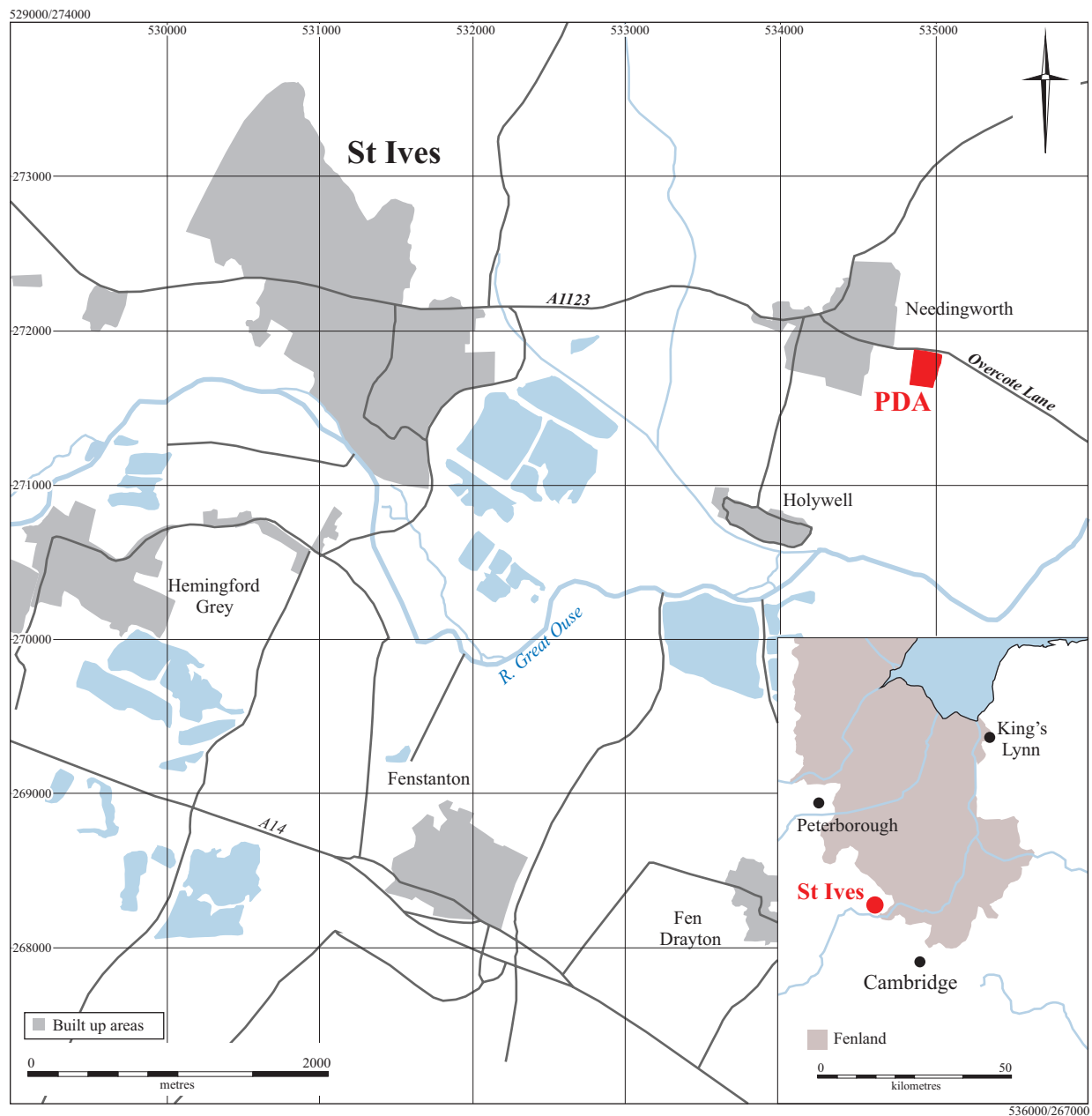
Overall, this evaluation has identified a limited amount of archaeology which suggests the PDA is within a marginal area on the periphery of a broader archaeological landscape.

Acknowledgements

The archaeological evaluation was commissioned by Acorus Rural Property Services Ltd. Machining and backfilling of trenches was undertaken by Lattenbury Services. Monitoring was undertaken by Dan McConnell (CHET). Emma Beadsmoore was CAU Project Manager and Donald Horne (CAU) undertook the surveying. Many thanks to Hayley Roberts for assisting the author on site.

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

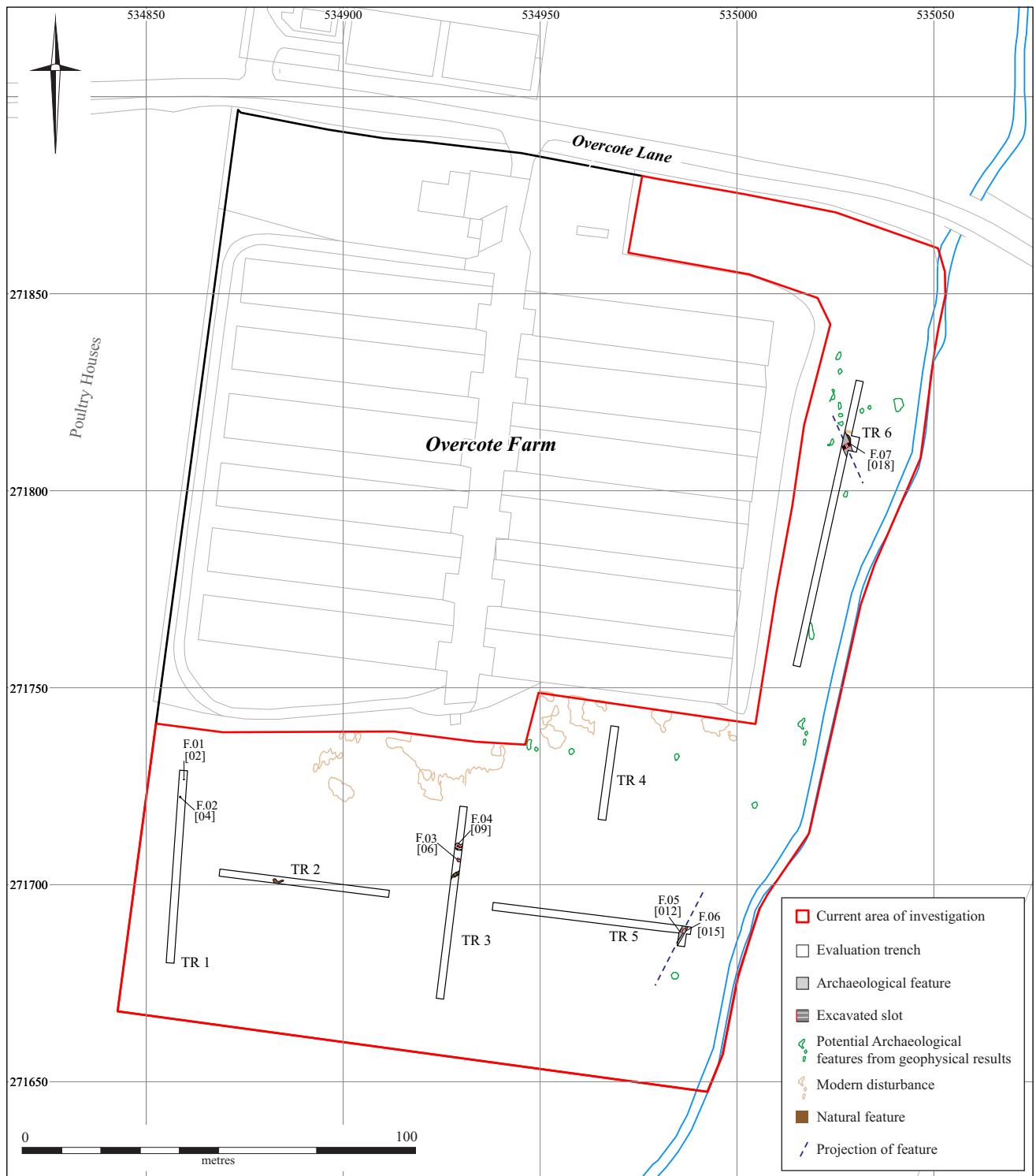


Figure 2. Trench Plan.

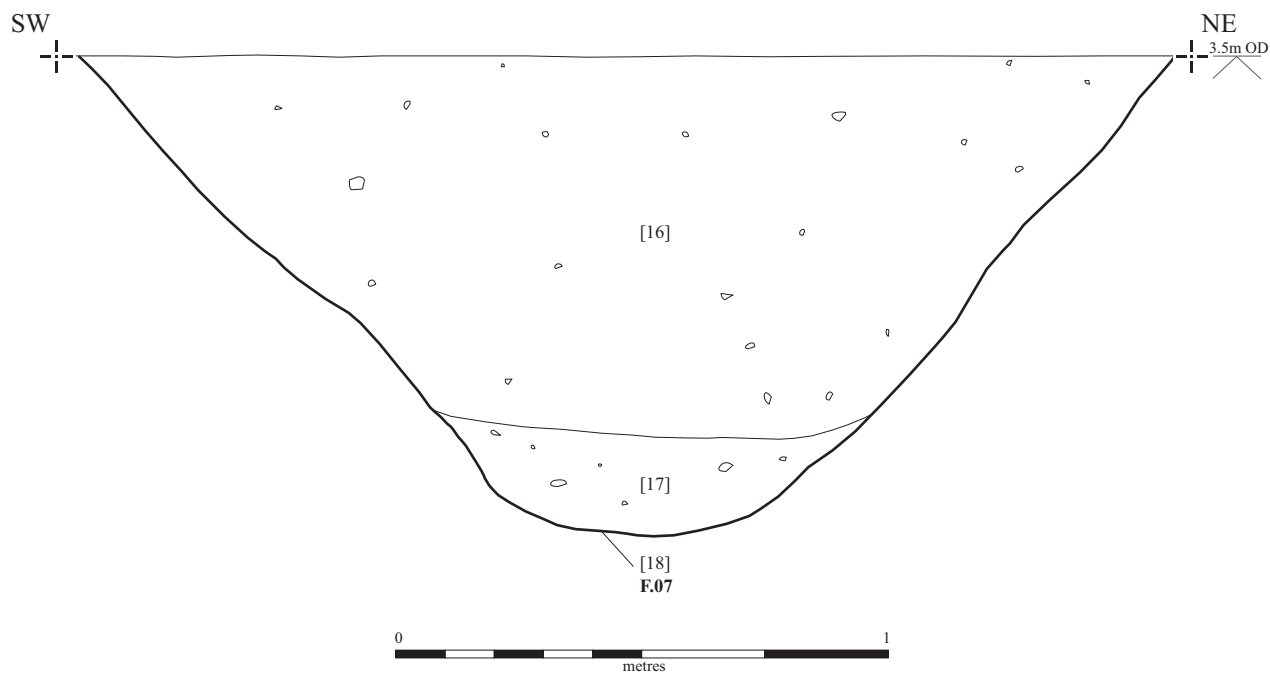


Figure 3. Section of F.07 in Trench 6 (above) and Photograph of Romano-British ditch F.05 (below).

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OASIS ID: cambridg3-135277

Project details

Project name	Overcote Farm, Over, Cambridgeshire An Archaeological Evaluation Assessment
Short description of the project	Cambridge Archaeological Unit undertook an archaeological evaluation at Overcote Farm, Over, Cambridgeshire, between the 1st and 3rd October 2012. Within the evaluation trenches a substantial probable prehistoric ditch, a smaller Romano-British ditch and a series of small, shallow post-medieval pits were identified and recorded.
Project dates	Start: 01-10-2012 End: 03-10-2012
Previous/future work	No / Not known
Type of project	Field evaluation
Site status	Local Authority Designated Archaeological Area
Current Land use	Cultivated Land 4 - Character Undetermined
Monument type	DITCH Uncertain
Monument type	DITCH Roman
Monument type	PITS Post Medieval
Significant Finds	POTT Roman
Methods & techniques	"Geophysical Survey","Sample Trenches","Targeted Trenches"
Development type	Rural commercial
Prompt	Direction from Local Planning Authority - PPS
Position in the planning process	After full determination (eg. As a condition)
Solid geology	Unknown
Drift geology	RIVER TERRACE DEPOSITS
Techniques	Magnetometry

Project location

Country	England
Site location	CAMBRIDGESHIRE HUNTINGDONSHIRE HOLYWELL CUM NEEDINGWORTH Overcote Farm, Over, Cambridgeshire
Postcode	PE27 4TN
Study area	1.40 Hectares
Site coordinates	TL 3494 7177 52 0 52 19 37 N 000 01 10 W Point
Height OD / Depth	Min: 3.40m Max: 4.50m

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	Emma Beadsmoore
Project supervisor	Matthew Collins
Type of sponsor/funding body	Landowner
Name of sponsor/funding body	Acorus Rural Property Services Ltd.

Project archives

Physical Archive recipient	Cambridge Archaeological Unit
Physical Archive ID	OFO 12
Physical Contents	"Ceramics","Worked stone/lithics"
Digital Archive recipient	Cambridge Archaeological Unit
Digital Archive ID	OFO 12
Digital Contents	"none"
Digital Media available	"GIS","Images raster / digital photography","Survey"
Paper Archive recipient	Cambridge Archaeological Unit
Paper Archive ID	OFO 12
Paper Contents	"none"
Paper Media available	"Correspondence","Drawing","Map","Notebook - Excavation',' Research',' General Notes","Plan","Report","Section","Survey ","Unpublished Text"

Project bibliography 1

Publication type	Grey literature (unpublished document/manuscript)
Title	Overcote Farm, Over, Cambridgeshire An Archaeological Evaluation Assessment
Author(s)/Editor(s)	Collins, M.

Other bibliographic details 1226

Date 2012

Issuer or publisher CAU

Place of issue or publication CAU

Description A4 Booklet. Pdf.

Entered by Matthew Collins (mc459@cam.ac.uk)

Entered on 9 October 2012

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