

Must Farm, Whittlesey 2010

Phase 3 Archaeological Investigations



Interim Statement

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Must Farm 2010 Phase 3 'Watching Brief'

Phase 3 can be separated into three areas and essentially three feature sets: Area 1 - Bank & ditch and burnt mound (north of the drain), Area 2 - Barrow and fence-lines (south of the drain) and Area 3 - Metalling and burnt soil (lower 'terrace' and east of the ramp). Areas 1 and 2 represented the same landscape 'terrace' (situated between 0.00 to -0.50m OD) but were divided by a 50m wide temporary baulk that protected an 'active' drain that crossed the site. Area 3 covered the southern extent or lower step of Phase 3 (situated between -0.50 to -3.00m OD) as well as a small 'wedge' situated between the northern edge of the palaeochannel area and a large quarry access ramp. The principal difference between Areas 1 and 2, and Area 3, was the overlying deposit sequence. Areas 1 and 2 were covered by a simple two fold peat and plough-soil sequence that measured between 0.50 to 1.00m in depth whilst Area 3 was buried beneath a full fen-sequence of lower peat, fen clay, upper peat and plough-soil that measured up to 4.30m in depth. Silt filled channels or small roddons intersected the fen sequence within Area 3.

Area 1

The buried soil within Area 1 was patchy and thin (0.15-0.25m thick) but in places maintained an intact 'brown earth' profile. The horizon produced very few surface finds and the majority of the hand-sorted sample squares produced no finds at all. The dearth of artefacts was contrasted by a well-preserved section of bank and ditch (equivalent to the boundary first located at the 'Silt Lagoon' and Bradley Fen Farm excavations; Gibson & Knight 2006) and a burnt stone mound with accompanying watering hole. Preserved wooden posts forming part of fence-line as well as two four-post structures were also investigated.

The bank and ditch feature was elevated from the rest of the features by the initial accumulation of peat through which the ditch cut and onto which the bank material was deposited. Unlike previous encounters with this feature, here the boundary was discontinuous or interrupted by a series of small breaks or causeways. Similarly, the feature also differed in that the 'brushwood' interface that was found beneath the bank along the earlier sections was, by comparison, less well preserved. Traces of wood were visible but most pieces were desiccated and altogether more difficult to articulate. The profile of the bank and ditch was very well preserved however, and as before, animal hoof prints were visible along and within the ditch profile. No artefacts were located within the feature although, traces of an earlier post-built boundary was made evident by the preserved bases of wooden stakes truncated by the ditch.

The burnt mound was characterised by a charcoal-rich matrix of soil and fragments of fire-cracked sandstone river pebbles. Its accompanying watering hole was waterlogged and retained a small stake-built structure or lining towards its base. Incredibly, the original up-cast or gravel spoil heap generated when this feature was made was still present along its south-eastern edge.

A short post or stake-alignment was recognised disappearing into the southern limit of Area 1, which judging by its location should join up with a similar alignment excavated within Area 2.

Area 2

A barrow was the main feature of Area 2. The monument comprised a central mound surrounded by a penannular ditch that was oval in plan (25.60 x 22.80m) and oriented south-westwards. The mound survived to a maximum height of 45cm and was made up of oxidised re-deposited buried soil capped or fringed by re-deposited gravels. The barrow was located on the -0.2m contour and the top of the mound reached +0.5m OD. Evidence for an external bank was indicated by a spill of gravels around the outer circumference of the ditch. An 'empty' upright pot (plain Ebbsfleet-style Peterborough Ware) was found close to the centre of the monument. An absence of a cut suggested that the pot was placed directly beneath the mound as it was being constructed. The actual centre of the monument was marked by a single crouched inhumation, buried on its left side and facing towards the entranceway of the encompassing ditch. Antler and mineralised animal bone, occasional flints and rare pieces of pottery from the confines of the ditch represented the only other significant finds from barrow. The association of Peterborough Ware pottery with an oval-shaped monument situates this feature within the same category as the oval-barrow found in the 2004 evaluation (Site 2; Evans et al 2004). Significantly both monuments shared the same terrace-edge locations albeit separated by about 500m.

South of the barrow, and along the terrace edge, was a fence-line made up of single wooden stakes spaced about 50cm apart and inserted into the upper profile of the buried soil. The alignment was identical in character to the eastern alignment found in the 2009 Phase 2 investigations (dated to 2200-1950 Cal BC). A shorter cross boundary was located close to the northern edge of Area 2. The fills of a large sub-circular pit that cut through the main fence-line produced a large slab of rusticated Beaker as well as two of the stakes it had uprooted.

In comparison with Area 1 surface finds were common and the buried soil test-squares produced relatively high quantities of worked flints, animal bone and potsherds.

Area 3

A continuation of the metallised surface first identified in Phase 2 (Tabor 2010) was traced along the edge of the lower 'terrace' at about -2.00 to -2.90m OD. The surface comprised a mixture of rounded river pebbles, re-deposited gravel and burnt gravels (as indicated by heat crazing and pronounced changes in colour). The metallising survived as a thin covering spread on top of the truncated and exposed gravel natural that in places also showed signs of being heat affected. Pieces of butchered animal bone and occasional pieces of worked flint dotted the surface of the metallising. A small cluster of pits (which adjoined a pit excavated in 2009) situated along the northern extent of the surface produced a faunal assemblage indistinguishable to the one found on top of the metallising. The pits also yielded a decorated rim sherd of an Etton-style Mildenhall pot (circa. 3700-3500 BC).

A jet black soil (silty clay) replete with pieces of burnt, sometimes calcined, natural gravel covered the ground immediately south of the metallised area. The horizon was made black by comminuted charcoal and anything that came into to contact with this

deposit was also stained black. Heat affected natural lay beneath this horizon although on the eastern side of the quarry access ramp a large area of heavily burnt buried soil had been preserved below this deposit. Coloured deep orange, red and pinks the buried soil had the appearance of a soil that had been transformed by an 'industrial' scale fire. In places its upper profile had been turned into slabs of burnt 'clay' and the intensity of heat had been as such that the underlying natural gravels were crazed and turned red and purple. No artefacts were found but there appeared to be an indirect relationship between this burning event and the establishment of the metalling (i.e. ?clearance by fire– erosion – metalling).

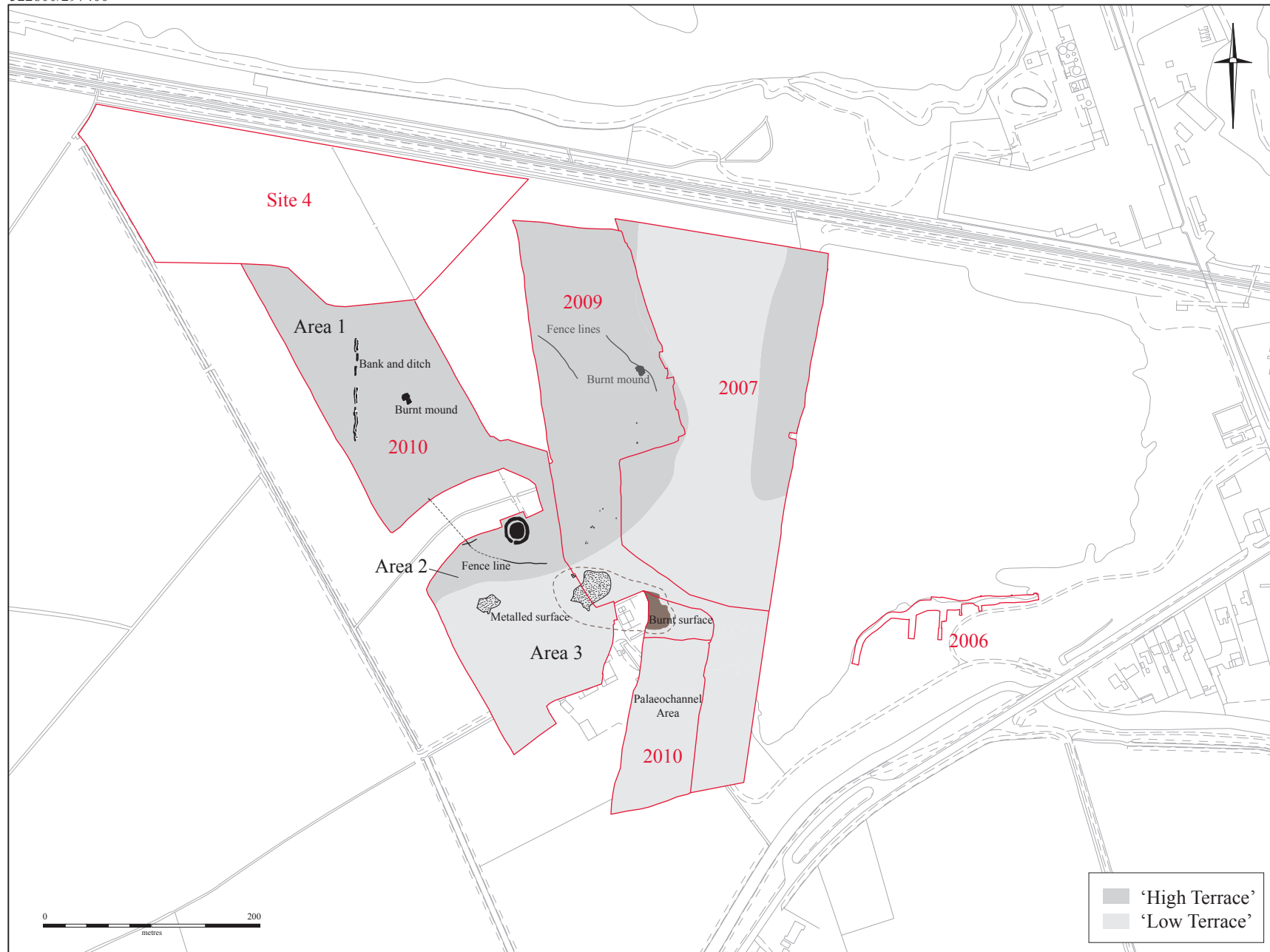


Figure 1. Area location