Knights End, March, Cambridgeshire

An Archaeological Evaluation

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UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

LAND AT KNIGHT'S END ROAD, MARCH, CAMBRIDGESHIRE

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

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Cambridge Archaeological Unit
University of Cambridge

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Summary

An archaeological evaluation, comprising fieldsurvey and trial trenching was undertaken by Cambridge Archaeological Unit (CAU) to the north of Knight's End Road, March, Cambridgeshire. The fieldsurvey, comprising fieldwalking and metal detector survey, produced very few finds and no notable concentrations of artefacts. The artefacts present represent a 'background level' of prehistoric activity, consistent with a general presence throughout the landscape, and potential evidence of manuring for agriculture in the Roman period. The subsequent trial trenching revealed a number of modern and post-medieval agricultural features, and a number of ditches, which are potential components of a Roman field system.

INTRODUCTION

A fieldwalking and trial trench based archaeological evaluation was undertaken by Cambridge Archaeological Unit (CAU) in December 2013 and January 2014 on 2.35 ha of land north of Knights End Road (B1098) March, Cambridgeshire (centred on TL 4118 9509).

The project was undertaken in order to address a condition placed upon planning consent for the construction of housing at the site. Work was carried out in accordance with a project design specification (Beadsmoore 2013) produced by the CAU in response to a brief issued by Kasia Gdaniec of the Historic Environment Team, Cambridgeshire County Council.

The work was commissioned by Cannon Kirk Ltd.

Geology and Topography

The site is situated on the south western side of March, centred on national grid reference TL 4118 9509 at a height of 4.5m OD. The proposed development areas (PDA from here on) current landuse is partly turfed garden and partly ploughed field. The surrounding land is generally flat and largely used for agriculture. The underlying geology consists of Pleistocene till deposits (Boulder Clay) over the Jurassic Amptill Clay formation.

The site lies within the Cambridgeshire Fens, a low lying area, which over the last 10,000 years has been subject to dramatic geographical changes largely influenced by rising and falling sea levels. The PDA is on what was previously March Island, an elongated area of higher ground raised above the previous fenland environment. In the Mesolithic and Neolithic a major tidally influenced river channel and associated tributaries flowed just over 1km to the west and a similar but smaller river channel flowed to the east along the eastern flank of March Island. From the Middle Bronze Age onwards fresh water marsh encroached on low lying land, however, March Island remained raised above this environment.

Archaeological Background

The dramatic environmental changes the area has been subject to has in turn influenced the way people have previously occupied the land. Higher ground, such as March Island was consequently a focus for settlement throughout much of history and possibly prehistory; particularly notable is the evidence of Roman and Medieval settlement in close proximity to the PDA.

Prehistory

Evidence of early prehistoric activity is so far undiscovered in the vicinity of the PDA, perhaps on account of the clayey soils being too heavy to attract early

prehistoric activity (Hall 1992). The nearest evidence is from Gaul Road, to the north west, where Mesolithic and Neolithic flint scatters suggest occupation on the sandy soils near the former river channel (Wymer 1977, Hall 1987). An Early Neolithic pit was also discovered on slightly higher ground nearby (Tabor 2011).

The earliest evidence of occupation close to the PDA comes from the small excavation at 12 Jobs Lane (Adams 2008), where an Early Bronze Age pit was discovered containing Beaker pottery and other domestic artefacts. From the same period a Dolerite Axe Hammer and 2 flint implements were discovered in the graveyard at St Wendreda's Church.

A number of relatively significant Iron Age discoveries have been made in the locality of the PDA, notably two coin hoards, one of which is potentially associated with a round house (Jackson and Pottery 1996). There is also evidence of Iron Age activity at Neale Wade College (Gilmour 2009), St Wendreda's Church Hall (Mellor 2006) and 9 Church Street (Grassam 2004), however this is solely based on the discoveries of residual artefacts. The most compelling evidence of Iron Age activity is from 23-33 Wimblington Road (Atkins 2004), roughly 400m to the south west of the PDA. The extensive settlement identified at this site is considered to have been established around 300BC.

Roman

The site at 23-33 Wimblington Road (Atkins 2004) mentioned above is the most convincing evidence of Roman activity in the area. The site consists of a farmstead or possible villa with rubbish pits and other possible structures. The settlement is associated with a field system and ditched enclosures (Atkins 2004). A Roman ditch, which may also be part of the same field system, was discovered at an evaluation at 12 Jobs Lane (Adams 2008). Besides settlement evidence, there is also evidence of Roman industrial activity in the area in the form of a possible quarry pit for the extraction of gravels (Kemp 1999). This is located at Calvary Park about 1km from the PDA.

Other Roman activity in the locality of the PDA comes from a number of chance finds consisting of two coin hoards both deposited inside ceramic vessels, and a further two finds of smaller quantities of coins and other metal objects. Again both of these are associated with pots.

Saxon, Medieval and Post Medieval

Very little is understood about March in the Saxon period. It is believed St Wendreda's Church has Saxon origins and that there was some form of settlement nearby (Astbury 1973), however, no trace of this has been discovered. The only artefacts dating to this period from March are a Bronze brooch and another unidentified bronze object. These were both discovered at Calvary Park to the north east of the PDA.

Within close proximity to the PDA are two up-standing Medieval structures. A Wayside Cross near Calvary Park and the Church of St Wendreda. Excavation in the graveyard of St Wendreda's Church revealed evidence of 12th-13th Century occupation pre-dating the graveyard (Mellor 2006). Roughly 400m to the west of the PDA are the remnants of a shrunken medieval village, identified in the Fenland Project (Hall 1987) as a scatter of 11th-16th Century artefacts and some denuded earthworks. There is also further evidence of medieval settlement at Neale Wade College where excavations revealed potential settlement plot divisions (Gilmour 2009). Evidence of medieval industrial activity is also present in the area at Calvary Park where gravel extraction pits were discovered (Kemp 1999). In the immediate vicinity of the PDA is evidence of medieval ridge and furrow cultivation; it is believed this form of cultivation extended across a much wider area including the PDA (Hall 1987). Further indication of medieval activity in the area comes from a number of chance finds. These include a silver coin and a belt ring and buckle.

Following the medieval period the PDA and immediate vicinity remained farmland. A number of post-medieval houses and other buildings still remain. Of particular note is the remnant of The March Sconce, a Civil War earthen fortification, now a scheduled ancient monument.

METHODOLOGY

The project comprised a combination of two methods; fieldsurvey through fieldwalking and a metal detector survey followed by trial trench excavation.

Fieldwalking

Within the PDA only the ploughed field making up the western part of the site was suitable for fieldwalking. Within this field, fieldwalking was undertaken along transects spaced at 20m intervals, which were located using an advanced Global Positioning System (GPS). Artefacts were collected according to 20m units along each transect.

Metal Detectior Survey

Metal detecting was carried out in the same area as the fieldwalking and using the same transect spacing. The artefacts were recorded at their actual location along the transect.

Trial Trenching

The trial trenching programme comprised eight trenches, a total of 400m of trenching. Trenches were located in order to provide even coverage of the PDA. The fieldwalking results did not influence the location of the trenches given the lack of significant finds.

Trial trenches were excavated using a tracked 360° excavator fitted with a toothless bucket and operating under direct archaeological supervision at all times. Trenches were located using GPS with Ordnance Datum (OD) heights obtained. Potential archaeological features were planned at a scale of 1:50 and subsequently sample excavated with all archaeological finds retained. A written record of archaeological features was created using the CAU recording system (a modification of the MoLAS system) and sections drawn at an appropriate scale.

The work was carried out in full accordance with the IFA's Standard Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluations.

RESULTS

Fieldwalking and Metal Detector Survey

Weather conditions were overcast throughout the fieldwalking and metal detector survey. The area in which the fieldwalking took place was recently ploughed and a very short crop of wheat was beginning to show through the plough soil. On the whole the ground surface visibility over the field was good. Small area in the very north and south of the field was left fallow. These areas were not fieldwalked.

A total of thirteen artefacts were collected from the fieldwalking. The finds assemblage comprises five sherds of Roman pottery and seven flint implements. The flint assemblage is made up of a single tool, a piecer, and six waste flakes. The entire assemblage appears Bronze Age (Beadsmore, this report).

A high quantity of post-medieval brick and tile were observed during fieldwalking but not collected.

Nine artefacts were recorded during metal detecting, all of which were 19th Century or later (Table 3). These artefacts were discarded after identification.

The fieldwalking survey produced very few finds and no notable concentrations of artefacts, which was consistent with the results of Hall's (1987) survey. The quantity of flint recovered can be considered consistent with 'background levels' present in the area, which indicates no more than a general Bronze Age occupation across the wider landscape. The Roman pottery is likely to be the residue of manuring agricultural land with the detritus of everyday life, which could potentially be related to the farmstead at Wimblington Road. The post-medieval finds could also represent a continuation of this practice but in more recent times.

Trial Trenching

The trial trenching revealed a heavy clay plough soil (0.30-0.40m thick). This sealed a brown grey clay silt subsoil (0.30-0.60m thick). These deposits were consistent in all trenches except Trench 4 and the north eastern end of Trench 1 where a thin turf and topsoil sealed an unaerated modern plough soil.

A total of ten features were recorded. The majority of these were post-medieval or modern (**F.1**, **F.4**, **F.5**, **F.6**, **F.9** and **F.10**). The other features (**F.2**, **F.3**, **F.7** and **F.8**) were all ditches, and despite investigation remain undated. A number of tree throws and natural geological hollows were excavated none of which produced any artefacts.

Modern and Post-Medieval Features

F.1, F.5 and F.9 (Trenches 2, 7 and 6 respectively) all appear to be the same ditch, which would seem to be a field boundary formerly subdividing the contemporary field in two. This would account for the irregular shape of the current field (Figure 1). Examination of historical maps from 1889 to present cannot support this notion; however the 18th and early 19th Century artefacts (Table 1) from the probable extant field boundary suggest it was backfilled prior to 1889.

The remaining post-medieval and modern features comprised, a field drain (F.4, Trench 2), a pit containing 19th artefacts (F6, Trench 7) (Table 1) and what appeared to be a large pit (F10, Trench 1) backfilled with plough soil and a high frequency of 20th Century artefacts including large concrete fragments, steel piping and barbed wire. All the artefacts from these features were discarded after identification.

Undated Features

This group of features consisted of four relatively narrow and shallow ditches (F.2, F.3, F.7 & F.8) all in-filled with brown grey clay silt. No artefacts were recovered from these features. F.7 and F.8 located in Trench 7 consisted of an east-west aligned ditch (F.8), which terminates in respect of its north-south aligned counterpart (F.7). F.2 and F.3 are located in Trench 2, both are aligned north-south. All these ditches share a similar form, fill consistency and appear to share the same co-axial alignment; hence it seems likely they form part of a broader ditch complex.

DISCUSSION

Of the limited results produced by the evaluation, the probable ditch system represented by F.2, F.3, F.7 and F.8 is of most significance, but also is the most enigmatic in terms of establishing its age and use. To help understand this probable ditch system the sites wider context needs to be taken into account.

To the southeast lies the site of 23-33 Wimblington Road, a recently excavated Roman farmstead with associated field system (Atkins 2004). Recent investigation into Roman farmsteads in southern Cambridgeshire has suggested their associated field systems and paddock enclosures can extend on average around 500m from the settlement core (Evans with Mackay and Webbley 2008). If this model is applied to the Wimblington Road farmstead its field systems can be expected to stretch beyond Knight's End Road, therefore the ditch system discovered in the PDA could potential be a part of the Wimblington Road site. This notion is supported by the discovery of Roman pottery during fieldwalking, which may potentially be the residue of

'manuring' or improving of the associated fields with cultural debris. The general lack of artefacts on this site may be due to the site's distance from the settlement foci at Wimblington Road.

STATEMENT OF POTENTIAL

In summary the evaluation has revealed only a limited presence on the site in the prehistoric period if not more precisely the Bronze Age, which compliments the limited understanding of the landscape in the period. It has also identified a number of post-medieval and modern agricultural features. Of more significance, the evaluation has identified a related complex of ditches as the outer component of a field system centred on the Roman farmstead at Wimblington Road, however this is not supported by conclusive evidence. Any further understanding of the potential field system at Knights End Road may be difficult to establish as this evaluation has demonstrated that its component ditches are seemingly devoid of artefacts.

Acknowledgements

The work was commissioned for Canon Kirk Ltd. Fieldwalking was carried out by Alasdair Wright and John Moller, whilst Matt Wood carried out the Metal Detector Survey. The Trial Trenching was carried out Alasdair Wright and assisted by Lizzie Middleton. John Moller was also responsible for field survey and Bryan Crossan was responsible for graphics. The project was managed by Emma Beadsmore.

SPECIALIST STUDIES

Post-medieval Pottery and Glass – *Richard Newman*

Feature	Context	Fabric	Date
5	108	glass medicine bottle fragment x2	19th
5	108	brick	early 19th C
6	110	brick fragment	early 18th C.
9	121	staffordshire white salt glazed stone ware	18th C.
9	121	lead glazed earthen ware	18th C.
9	121	glazed red earthen ware	16th-19th C.

Table 1 – Post-medieval Pottery and Glass.

Roman Pottery – *Grahame Appleby*

Five abraded sherds of pottery (33g) were collected during fieldwalking, one rim sherd and four body sherds. All had a pinky buff exterior colour and dark grey internal colour. They were all of a hard, coarse sand tempered fabric.

Location	Date	Weight (g)	Sherds
60B	Roman	2	1
20B	Roman	10	1
100A	Roman	8	1
160B	Roman	13	1

Table 2 – Pottery from Fieldwalking.

Metal Finds

Location	Type	Date
A116	sash window pulley, copper alloy	19th/early 20th C.
B146	pipe off cut, copper	19th-20th C.
A141	Shrapnel, copper alloy	20th C. WWI/WWII
48E	plaque from horse harness, copper alloy	19th C.
D162	buckle from horse harness, copper alloy	19th C.
B40	rivet, copper	post-medieval
C65	eyelet, copper	19th/20th C.
B63	vessel fragment, lead alloy	post-medieval
A53	rivet, copper	19th/20th C.

Table 3 – Finds from Metal Detector Survey.

Flint Report – Emma Beadsmoore

A total of seven flints were recovered from the field walking at Knights End Road, March. The flint is listed by type and transect number in Table 1.

Transect	Type						Totals
	burnt chunk	chunk	secondary flake	tertiary flake	irregular core	Piercer	
B60				1			1
B140			1				1
B180	1						1
C40					2		2
D40		1					1
E80						1	1
Sub totals	1	1	1	1	2	1	7

Table 4 – Worked Flint from Fieldwalking

The assemblage comprises largely of flint working waste, which is plough damaged and often fragmentary, with no visible signs of systematic flint reduction. One tool was amongst the material, a piercer. The expedient nature of the assemblage suggests that the bulk of the material is later prehistoric, probably Bronze Age.

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APPENDIX

Feature	Feature type	Context	Context Type	Width (m)	Length (m)	Depth (m)	Trench	Orientation	Date
1	Ditch	100	f				2	N-S	post-med.
		101	c	1.5		0.38			
2	Ditch	102	f				2	N-S	
		103	c	1.1		0.22			
3	Ditch	104	f				2	N-S	
		105	c	1.35		0.45			
4	Field Drain	106	f				2		post-med./modern
		107	c	0.78		0.58		N-S	
5	Ditch	108	f				7	N-S	
		109	c	1.9		0.45			
6	Pit	110	f				7		post-med./modern
		111	f						
		112	c	1.7	2.2	0.6			
7	Ditch	113	f				7	N-S	
		114	c	0.65		0.2			
8	Ditch	115	f				7	E-W	
		116	c	0.7		0.2			
		117	f						
		118	c	0.65		0.2			
		119	f						
		120	c	0.6		0.18			
9	Ditch	121	f				6	N-S	post-med.
		122	c	1.9					
10	Pit			6.3			1		modern

Table 5 – List of Features.

Trench 1		
Desription	**Max. Topsoil Depth (m)**	0.4
Trench revealed a single modern feature (F10).	**Max. Subsoil Depth (m)**	0.6
	Length (m)	50
	Width (m)	2
	Orientation	NE-SW

Trench 2		
Desription	**Max. Topsoil Depth (m)**	0.45
Trench revealed a probable post-medieval field boundary (F1) and two earlier ditch (F2 and 3).	**Max. Subsoil Depth (m)**	0.4
	Length (m)	50
	Width (m)	2
	Orientation	E-W

Trench 3		
Desription	**Max. Topsoil Depth (m)**	0.4
Trench revealed no archaeology.	**Max. Subsoil Depth (m)**	0.3
	Length (m)	50
	Width (m)	2
	Orientation	N-S

Trench 4		
Desription	**Max. Topsoil Depth (m)**	0.45
Trench revealed no archaeology. 5-10cm's of turf and topsoil sat over a modern agricultural soil.	**Max. Subsoil Depth (m)**	0.35
	Length (m)	50
	Width (m)	2
	Orientation	N-S

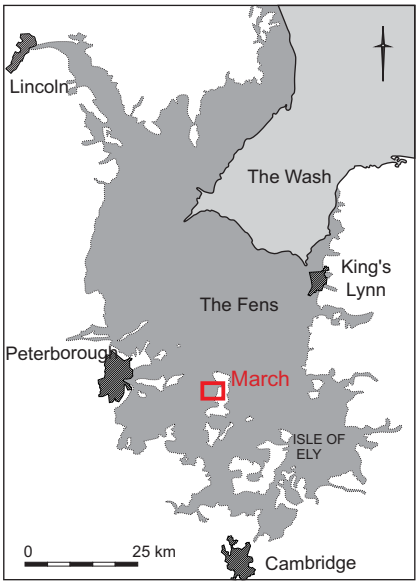
Trench 5		
Desription	**Max. Topsoil Depth (m)**	0.4
Trench revealed no archaeology.	**Max. Subsoil Depth (m)**	0.4
	Length (m)	50
	Width (m)	2
	Orientation	N-S

Trench 6		
Desription	**Max. Topsoil Depth (m)**	0.35
Trench revealed a possible post-medieval field boundary (F9).	**Max. Subsoil Depth (m)**	0.35
	Length (m)	50
	Width (m)	2
	Orientation	NW-SE

Trench 7		
Desription	**Max. Topsoil Depth (m)**	0.4
Trench revealed post-medieval pit (F6), possible field boundary (F5) and earlier ditch system (F7 and 8).	**Max. Subsoil Depth (m)**	0.35
	Length (m)	50
	Width (m)	2
	Orientation	E-W

Trench 8		
Desription	**Max. Topsoil Depth (m)**	0.35
Trench revealed no archaeology.	**Max. Subsoil Depth (m)**	0.3
	Length (m)	50
	Width (m)	2
	Orientation	N-S

Table 6 – List of Trenches.



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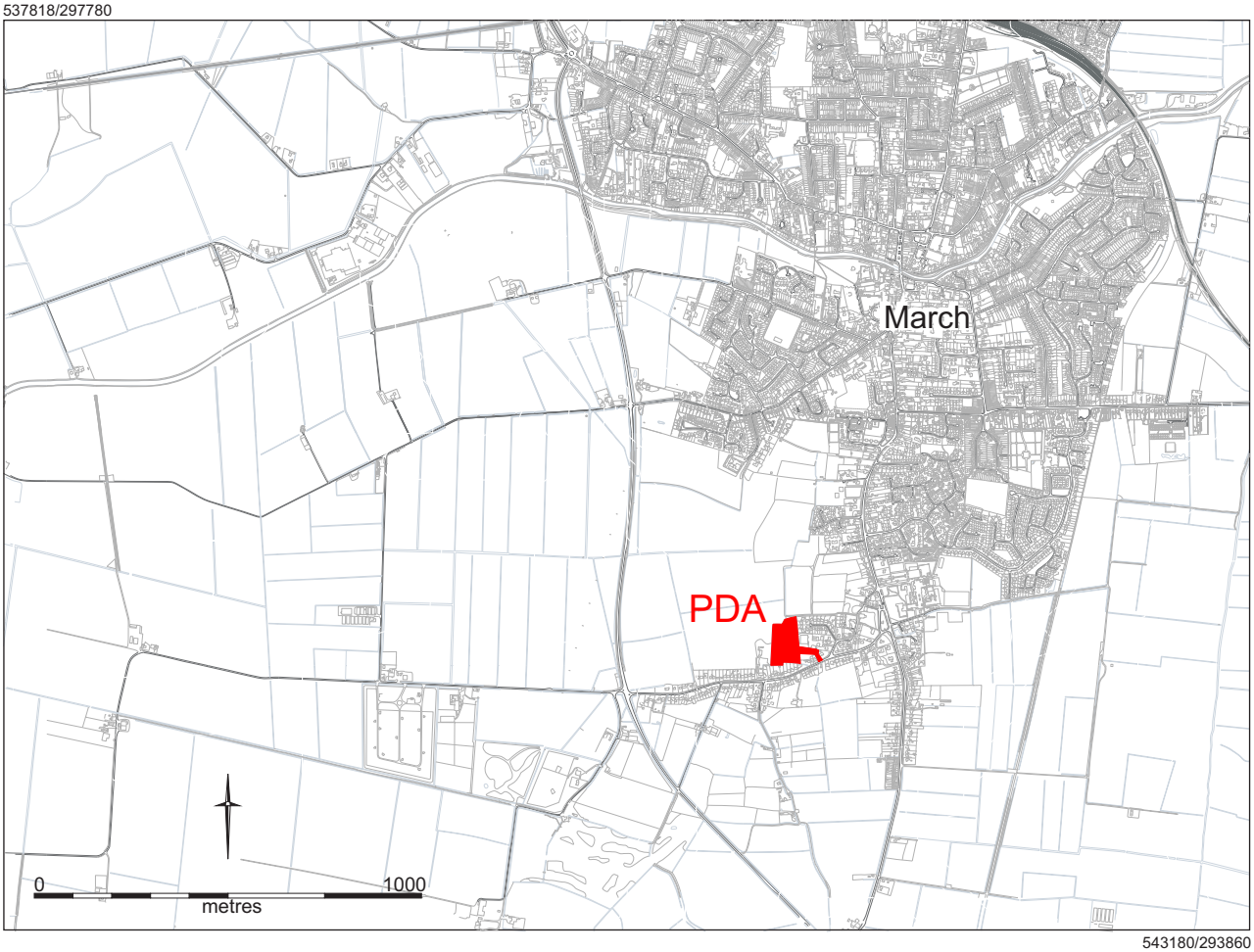

543180/293860

Figure 1. Location map

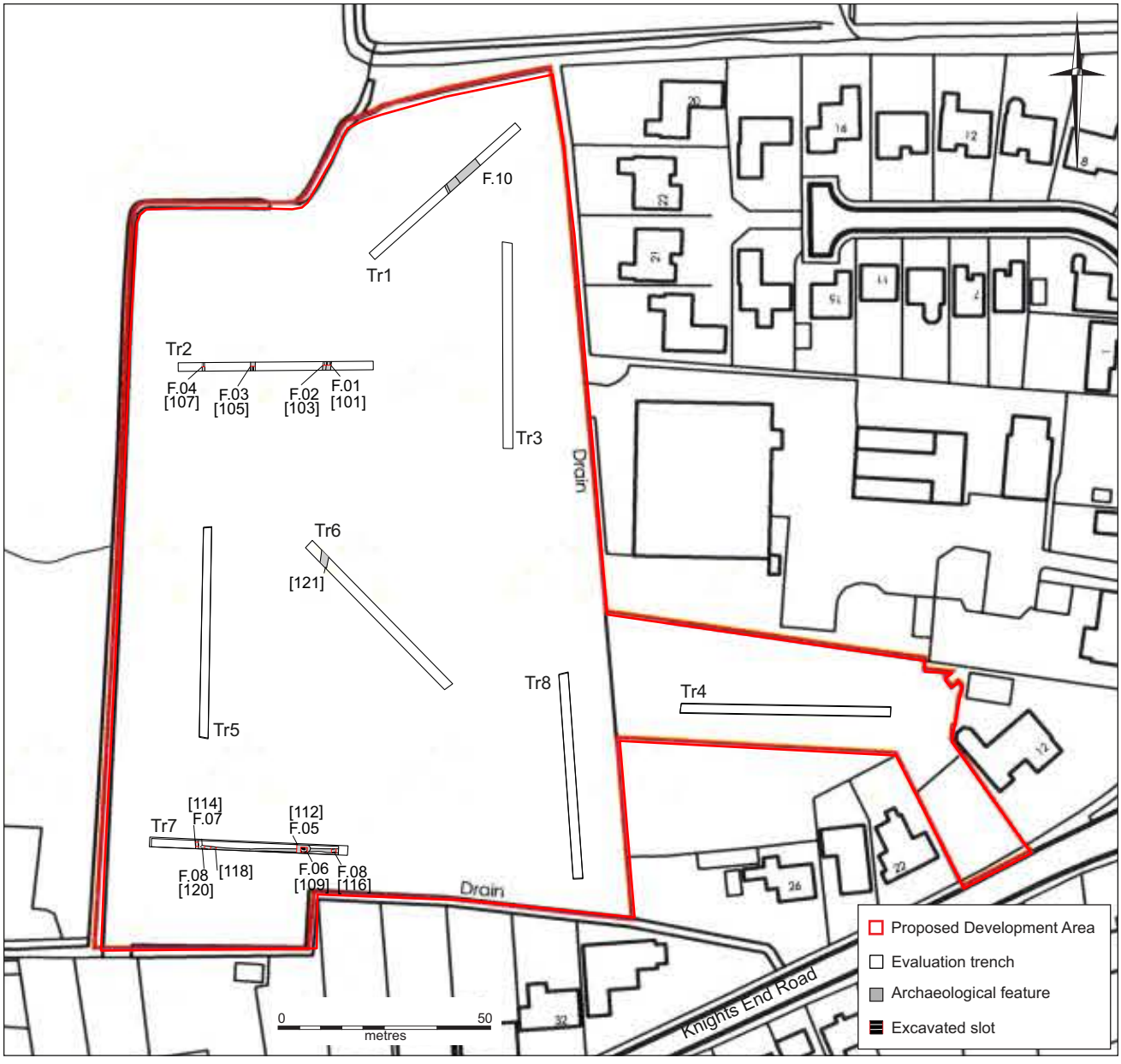

Figure 2. Trench Plan.

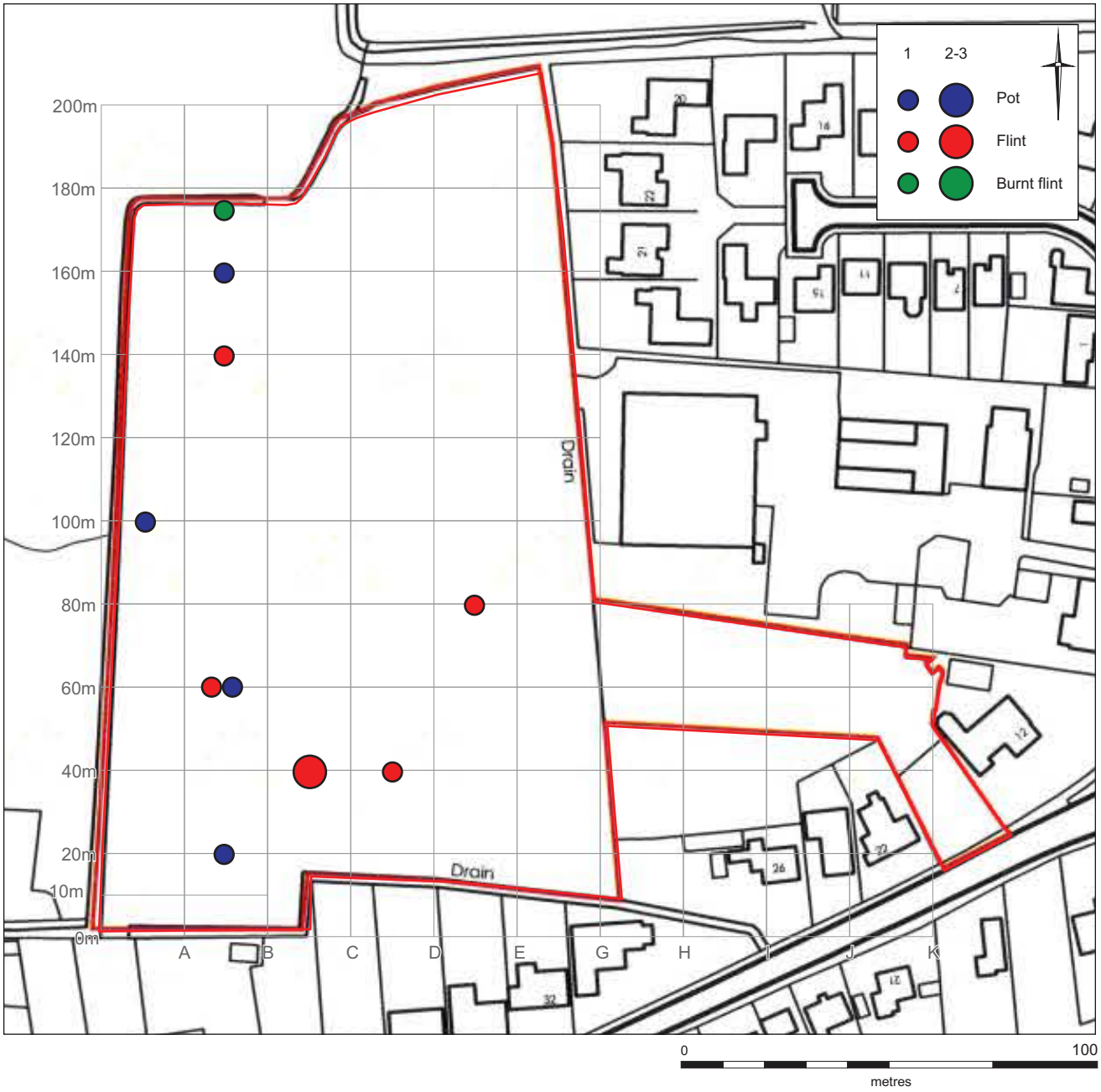

Figure 3. Finds distribution plots.

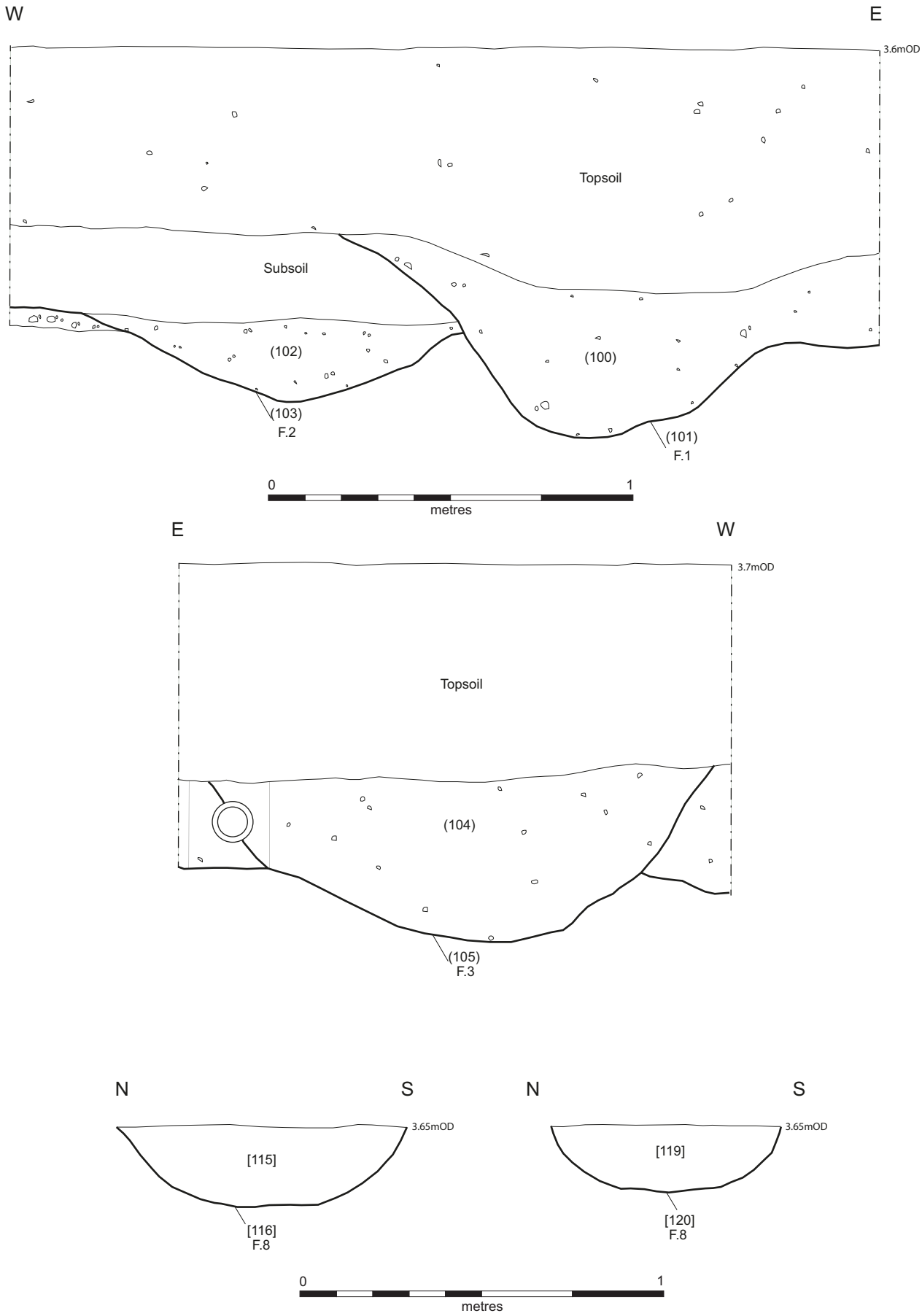

Figure 4. Sections of F.1, F.2, F.3 and F.8.

Figure 5. Photograph of F.3 in Trench 2.

OASIS DATA COLLECTION FORM: England

Printable version

OASIS ID: cambridg3-169354

Project details

Project name	Knight's End Road
Short description of the project	An archaeological fieldwalking and metal detector survey was undertaken by Cambridge Archaeological Unit (CAU) to the north of Knight's End Road, March, Cambridgeshire. The fieldwalking and metal detector survey produced very few finds and no notable concentrations of artefacts. The artefacts present represent a 'background level' of prehistoric activity, consistent with a general presence throughout the landscape, and potential evidence of manuring for agriculture in the Roman period. The subsequent trial trenching revealed a number of modern and post-medieval agricultural features, and a number of ditches, which are potential components of a Roman field system.
Project dates	Start: 18-12-2013 End: 16-01-2014
Previous/future work	No / Not known
Any associated project reference codes	KEM13 - Sitecode
Any associated project reference codes	KEM14 - Sitecode
Any associated project reference codes	ECB4079 - HER event no.
Type of project	Field evaluation
Site status	None
Current Land use	Cultivated Land 3 - Operations to a depth more than 0.25m
Monument type	DITCHES Uncertain
Significant Finds	POTTERY Roman
Significant Finds	FLINT Early Neolithic
Methods & techniques	"Fieldwalking","Metal Detectors","Sample Trenches"
Development type	Housing estate
Prompt	Direction from Local Planning Authority - PPS
Position in the planning process	Not known / Not recorded

Project location

Country	England
Site location	CAMBRIDGESHIRE FENLAND MARCH Knight's End Road
Study area	2.35 Hectares
Site coordinates	TL 4118 9509 52.5349630109 0.0817250626396 52 32 05 N 000 04 54 E Point
Height OD / Depth	Min: 4.50m 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	Alasdair Wright
Type of sponsor/funding body	Developer
Name of sponsor/funding body	Canon Kirk Ltd

Project archives

Physical Archive recipient	Cambridge Archaeological Unit
Physical Contents	"Ceramics","Worked stone/lithics"
Digital Archive recipient	Cambridge Archaeological Unit
Digital Contents	"Ceramics","Glass","Metal"
Digital Media available	"Images raster / digital photography","Spreadsheets","Survey","Text"
Paper Archive recipient	Cambridge Archaeological Unit
Paper Media available	"Context sheet","Drawing","Plan","Report","Section","Unpublished Text"

Project bibliography 1

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