

# New Farm, Landbeach

An Archaeological Evaluation



Ricky Patten

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*Illustrations by Bryan Crossan*

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## **Summary**

*On the 9<sup>th</sup> December 2013 a series of small archaeological trenches were excavated at New Farm, Landbeach (centred on TL 478 665), totalling 66m. The work was commissioned by James Matthews in response to a request from the Cambridgeshire Historic Environment Team (CHET). Two parallel ditches were recorded during the evaluation in Trench 3, situated on the projected line of Akeman Street, the Roman Road. The two ditches were 11m apart on their inside edge with evidence of a 'B' horizon soil between them, but no evidence for metallurgy or other form of road surface.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken on behalf of James Matthews. The evaluation was commissioned to define the scope of any archaeological activity at New Farm, Landbeach (centred on TL 478 665) as a result of the construction of a reservoir (Figure 1). This work was in response to a request from the Cambridgeshire Historic Environment Team (CHET) to provide information on any potential heritage assets of archaeological interest on the site. The project followed a specification set out by the Cambridge Archaeological Unit (Beadsmoore 2013).

The site is located to the north of Landbeach, between Waterbeach and Cottenham, Cambridgeshire. The geology comprises Second Terrace River Gravels (IGS Sheet 188). The Development Area (DA) was situated within farmland and consisted of two areas, A and B. Area A was the site of the recently constructed reservoir, while Area B was the location of the gravel storage mound.

## **Archaeological Background**

The evaluation was in an area of known archaeological activity. Prehistoric activity, in particular from the Mesolithic to Early Bronze Age, is well documented in the surrounding landscape. A Neolithic flint scatter was identified at Gravel Diggers Farm, potentially associated with a number of pits containing worked wood, bone and burnt flint and sited alongside a palaeochannel (Oswald 1992). Further Bronze Age remains, including settlement and a number of potential barrows, have been recorded to the south at Milton and Stow-Cum-Quay Fen. Iron Age activity is recorded to the west of Landbeach, where fieldsystems with Iron Age origins, have been excavated along pipeline/cable routes between Histon and Waterbeach (Dickens et al 2005) and Cottenham and Landbeach (Hall 1999). Iron Age field systems and settlement have also been excavated to the south at Milton (Diez 2005).

Romano-British activity dominates the archaeological record, with the evaluation located at the juncture between two key Roman communication routes, Akeman

Street (CHER 05766, CHER 05346) and the Car Dyke canal (CHER 09823, MCB 16776). As a consequence, much of the known archaeology dates to the Roman period (Figure 2). Akeman Street was a Roman road that connected Ermine Street with Cambridge, before extending further northeast to Ely then on to Denver. The projected route of the road comes through Area B of the development and to the north continues along the line of the present day A10. The Car Dyke, situated to the north of the development area, is thought to be a Roman canal, although its exact use is debated. As well as these Roman routeways, extensive settlement evidence is recorded throughout the surrounding area with fieldsystems, drove ways and settlement enclosures visible as cropmarks on aerial photographs. A well preserved Romano-British settlement has also been identified at Bullocks Haste, Cottenham, and evidence of enclosures, drove ways and paddocks have been encountered along the cable/pipeline routes between Histon and Waterbeach (Dickens et al. 2005) and Cottenham and Landbeach (Hall 1999). The former site of a Romano-British temple has been identified to the east, with its location and plan known only from cropmarks; it was quarried away in 1980. Excavations at the Waste Management Park have identified a fieldsystem with associated drove way and settlement related activity, including a midden along with evidence of 2<sup>nd</sup> to late 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD occupation (Masser 2000; Ranson 2008; Tabor 2010).

There is little evidence for Medieval activity. Seasonal flooding of the fens and the subsequent neglect of Roman drainage systems resulted in a retreat from the fen-edge following the end of the Romano-British period. As such Saxon and Medieval settlement activity in the area is largely focused around the present day villages of Waterbeach and Cottenham, and the monastery at Denny Abbey founded as a Benedictine monastery in the 12<sup>th</sup> century AD before becoming a Franciscan convent in the 14<sup>th</sup> century AD, until the dissolution.

## **Methodology**

The evaluation was undertaken after the construction of the reservoir with three trenches excavated in strategic locations. Two trenches were sited around the reservoir itself in Area A, one to the west and a second to the south. The third trench was situated in Area B where the mineral from the reservoir was stored (Figure 3). This trench was situated to investigate the projected route of Akeman Street, as determined from aerial photographs.

The trenches were all excavated using a small 360° tracked mini-digger with a toothless ditching bucket and supervised by an experienced archaeologist. They were excavated down to a level where archaeological features were visible; these were planned and hand excavated. Trench sheets were completed for all of the trenches to record section profiles and geological variances and were accompanied by scale plans of all archaeological features (at 1:50) and the recording of excavated features with sections drawn at a scale of 1:10, complimented by digital

photographs. The Unit-modified version of the Museum of London (MoL) recording system was employed throughout with all excavated stratigraphic events assigned feature numbers (F.#) and all contexts assigned individual numbers ([context #]). The DA was fixed to the Ordnance Survey (OS) grid and a contour survey undertaken with a Global Positioning System (GPS). The Site was identified as NFL13.

## RESULTS

Both of the trenches in Area A (1 and 2) were sterile of archaeological features, with clean terrace gravel natural substrate and few geological variances. The trenches were 0.37m and 0.30m deep respectively with a well formed topsoil and very little evidence for a subsoil horizon. This was all indicative of continued agricultural use prior to the construction of the reservoir.

The upper soil profile in Trench 3 in Area B was similar to that in Area A; however the exposed natural substrate was much more mixed with silt filled geological features evident throughout the trench. All of these possible features were either excavated or partially excavated but had no consistency to their forms, with the silt fills homogenous and clean throughout. Two ditches were recorded, **F.1** and **F.2**, cutting across the width of the trench, aligned northeast-southwest parallel to each other. Ditch F.1 was 2.3m wide and 1.3m deep; however, in the trench section it was possible to trace it higher up, where it was 3m wide. The ditch was steep sided with an irregular profile that was stepped along its northern edge (Figure 4). The primary deposit was dark grey clean silt [10] that was sealed by a series of natural slumpings [09] and redeposited natural [08] that had been deposited along the northern edge of the feature. There was then a second series of clean silt deposits ([05], [06], and [07]) that suggest the ditch was maintained, or at least still in use, for a further period of time before finally silting up with sandy silt deposits forming, [03] and [04]. It is possible that after the deposition of the redeposited natural the ditch was abandoned prior to being recut, but the presence of a recut was not confirmed. No material culture was recovered from any of the deposits, even with a survey of the trench spoil. The second ditch F.2 had a similar depositional history, although on a smaller scale. The ditch was 1.60m wide and 1.05m deep with a series of natural siltings and slumpings ([14], [15], [16], and [17]) prior to the inclusion of the redeposited natural [13], there was then only a single silting episode [12]. These two ditches were approximately 11m apart and between them was a pale grey silt 'subsoil' or 'B' horizon; this horizon had only survived between the two ditches suggesting that a surface of some kind had protected it. The grey silt was most likely preserved beneath a road surface, such as metalling, that has long been denuded. The ditches are most likely part of a routeway or road identified traversing the field at this point visible from aerial photographs and thought to be Akeman Street.

## DISCUSSION

The mitigating evaluation undertaken here revealed little archaeological evidence. In Area A the two trenches provided no evidence for any form of human activity, while Trench 3 in Area B was the only place archaeological features were encountered.

The two ditches and an area of preserved 'B' horizon clearly indicate the presence of some form of road, especially when combined with the aerial photographic evidence (Malim 2005, 138). The absence of any material culture from either ditch, however, means that it is not possible to date it and therefore definitively confirm its Roman origin. The road was large, approximately 16m across, from outer edge and 11m internally, with ditches in excess of 1m deep from the archaeological level and much deeper when truncation is factored in. There was no evidence for the road surface either in the trench section above the grey silt or in either ditch, with no trace of an agger or metalling slumping into them, although the preservation of the grey silt does suggest that some form of a surface did exist.

The road was located on the projected line of Akeman Street that ran from Cambridge to Ely along a peninsula of dry land. Excavations at Impington and Landbeach showed that it had a 10m wide gravelled agger between two ditches set 14m apart (Malim 2005, 137). The 'B' horizon between the ditches at New Farm probably survives as a result of a similar gravelled agger that no longer survives. The excavated examples suggest that the agger was narrower than the space defined by the ditches, and if this was the case here at New Farm then it is conceivable no traces would be present in them. The road itself was large in comparison to typical Roman roads, although they could vary considerably (Chevallier 1989, 88; Margary 1955, 15). The typical width of a minor road was 4.5m to 5.5m, with important roads being between 9m and 13m (Chevallier 1989, 88, Margary 1955, 15). With a width of 11m, Akeman Street as encountered at New Farm would be considered a major road, comparable to Ermine Street and the Via Devana.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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## TRENCH DESCRIPTIONS

Trench 1		
<b>General Description</b>	<b>Orientation</b>	NW-SE
No archaeological features were recorded in this trench	<b>Avg. Topsoil Depth (m)</b>	0.30
	<b>Avg. Subsoil Depth (m)</b>	0.07
	<b>Width (m)</b>	1.00
	<b>Length (m)</b>	20

Trench 2		
<b>General Description</b>	<b>Orientation</b>	NW-SE
No archaeological features were recorded in this trench	<b>Avg. Topsoil Depth (m)</b>	0.30
	<b>Avg. Subsoil Depth (m)</b>	-
	<b>Width (m)</b>	1.00
	<b>Length (m)</b>	15

Trench 3							
<b>General Description</b>						<b>Orientation</b>	NW-SE
A single ditch was recorded with no finds present						<b>Avg. Topsoil Depth (m)</b>	0.35
						<b>Avg. Subsoil Depth (m)</b>	0.13
						<b>Width (m)</b>	1.00
						<b>Length (m)</b>	31
Feature No.	Feature Type	Context No.	Cut/Fill/ Layer	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Fill Description	Comments
01	Ditch	03	Fill			Mid brown sandy silt	Northern 'roadside' ditch
		04	Fill			Mid grey brown sandy silt	
		05	Fill			Mid grey silt	
		06	Fill			Orange grey clayey silt	
		07	Fill			Pale-mid grey clayey silt	
		08	Fill			Redeposited natural	
		09	Fill			Orange grey gravelly silt	
		10	Fill			Dark grey silt	
		11	Cut	2.30	1.30		
02	Ditch	12	Fill			Mid grey brown sandy silt	Southern 'roadside' ditch
		13	Fill			Redeposited natural	
		14	Fill			Pale grey sandy silt	
		15	Fill			Orange grey marl, gravel, and sand matrix	
		16	Fill			Orange yellow sand	
		17	Fill			Grey brown sandy silt	
				18	Cut	1.60	

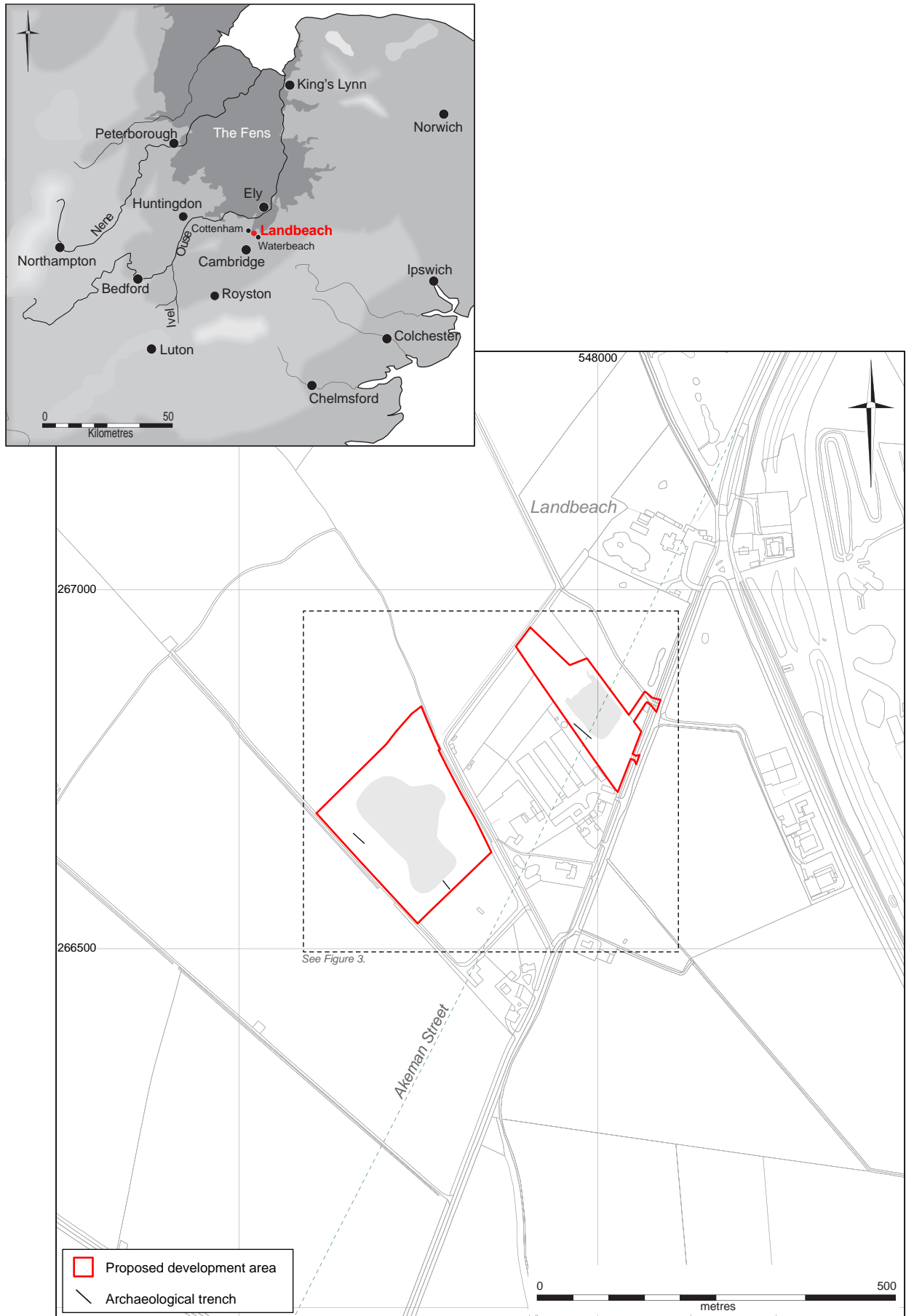


Figure 1. Location Plan.



Figure 2. Major Roman routeways in the southern fens.

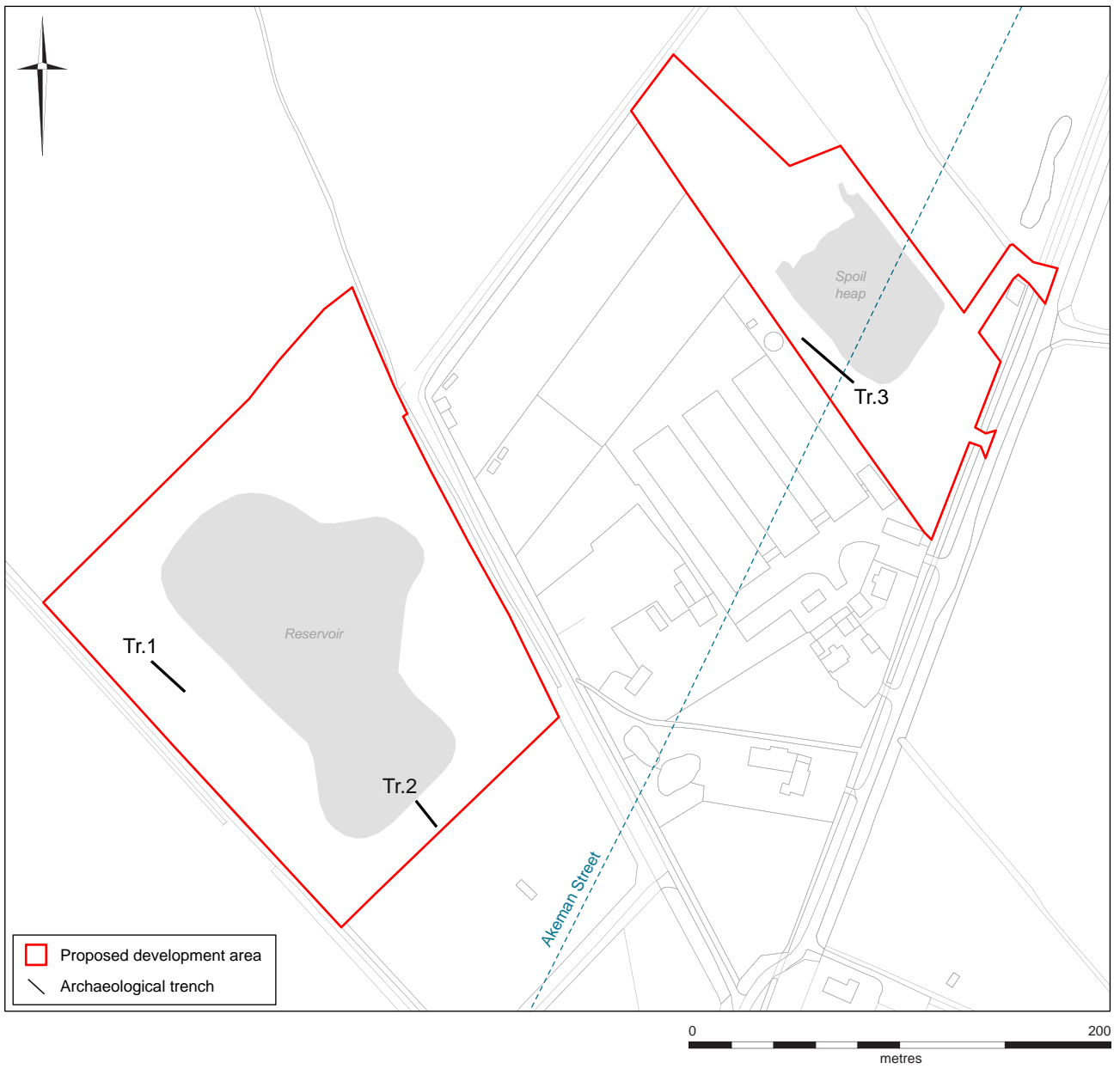


Figure 3. Trench Plan.

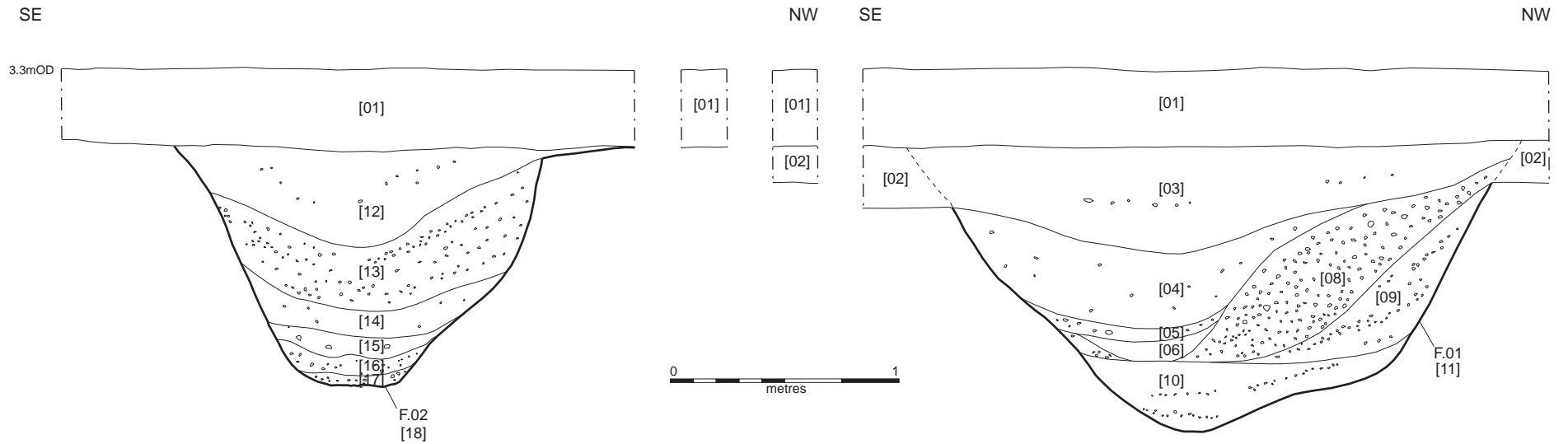
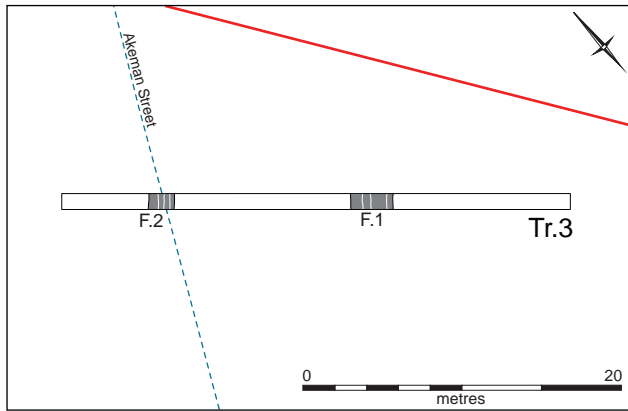


Figure 4. Plan (top) and sections (bottom) of F.01 and F.02, in Trench 3.

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### Project details

Project name	New Farm Landbeach
Short description of the project	On the 9th December 2013 a series of small archaeological trenches were excavated at New Farm, Landbeach (centred on TL 478 665), totalling 66m. The work was commissioned by James Matthews in response to a request from the Cambridgeshire Historic Environment Team (CHET). Two parallel ditches were recorded during the evaluation in Trench 3, situated on the projected line of Akeman Street, the Roman Road. The two ditches were 11m apart on their inside edge with evidence of a 'B' horizon soil between them, but no evidence for metalling or other form of road surface.
Project dates	Start: 09-12-2013 End: 11-12-2013
Previous/future work	Yes / Not known
Any associated project reference codes	NFL13 - Sitecode
Any associated project reference codes	ECB3978 - HER event no.
Type of project	Field evaluation
Site status	None
Current Land use	Cultivated Land 1 - Minimal cultivation
Monument type	ROAD Roman
Significant Finds	NONE None
Methods & techniques	"Targeted Trenches"
Development type	Farm infrastructure (e.g. barns, grain stores, equipment stores, etc.)
Prompt	Direction from Local Planning Authority - PPS
Position in the planning process	Not known / Not recorded

### Project location

Country	England
Site location	CAMBRIDGESHIRE SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE LANDBEACH New Farm

Postcode CB25 9FH  
 Study area 0 Kilometres  
 Site coordinates TL 478 665 52.2763317487 0.166636384724 52 16 34 N 000 09 59 E Point

### Project creators

Name of Organisation Cambridge Archaeological Unit  
 Project brief originator Local Planning Authority (with/without advice from County/District Archaeologist)  
 Project design originator Emma Beadsmoore  
 Project director/manager Emma Beadsmoore  
 Project supervisor Ricky Patten

### Project archives

Physical Archive Exists? No  
 Digital Archive recipient Cambridge Archaeological Unit  
 Digital Contents "none"  
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 Paper Contents "none"  
 Paper Media available "Context sheet","Plan","Section","Survey "

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