

231 to 247 Milton Road, Cambridge

An Archaeological Evaluation



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Summary

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken by Cambridge Archaeological Unit (CAU) in the gardens behind 231-247 Milton Road, Cambridge in advance of the construction of a new housing development. The evaluation produced evidence of medieval ridge and furrow agriculture and revealed a number of post-medieval gravel quarries.

INTRODUCTION

The Cambridge Archaeological Unit (CAU) undertook a trench-based evaluation within a 500m² area of land located in the gardens behind 231-247 Milton Road, Cambridge on the 17th and the 20th January 2014.

The evaluation designed to assess the potential impact of the proposed development scheme on archaeological remains. The investigation was carried out on behalf Laragh House Developments Ltd/Enterprise Property Group Ltd. The work was undertaken in accordance with a specification produced Emma Beadsmore of the CAU in response to a brief issued by Dan McConnell of the Cambridgeshire Historic Environment Team.

Geology and Topography

The Proposed Development Area (PDA from here on) is situated in the northern part of Cambridge centred on national grid reference TL 464 607. The PDA is currently the former rear gardens of a number of properties on Milton Road. It is largely turfed and in parts over grown with trees and other vegetation. The PDA is surrounded by residential housing and is generally flat at a height of 10m OD, however to some extent the land appears to have been artificially levelled for the construction of the contemporary houses.

The underlying geology consists of pre-Flandrian 2nd terrace river gravels over the Early Cretaceous Gault Clay formation.

Archaeological Context

Prehistoric Background

The earliest recorded evidence of archaeological activity in this area is Lower Palaeolithic in date. In the early 20th century, three abraded handaxes were recovered during gravel extraction activity conducted some 400m to the northeast on Milton Road. In addition, a Bronze Age hoard, along with a number of Iron Age pits, were also encountered within quarries situated in this same area. No other evidence for prehistoric activity is recorded in the vicinity.

Historical Background

In contrast, extensive Romano-British activity, including the location of a probable villa and associated field system is known just over 500m to the west of the PDA, in the Arbury Road area (Lisboa 1995). In closer proximity to the PDA an archaeological evaluation was undertaken at the Manor Community College, which is situated approximately 600m to the west of the PDA, in 2000 (Reynolds 2000). Within the single trench that was excavated at this site, an undated ditch and palisade trench were identified. These features were also interpreted as being most probably Roman in date. Nevertheless, a recent evaluation conducted in 2008 only 400m to the west, at the Ranc Care Homes site, encountered no archaeological remains of any period (Collins 2008).

Around a kilometre to the south of the PDA is situated the previous medieval village of Chesterton. The earliest definite evidence of settlement activity in the village is Late Saxon in date. Subsequently a settlement then developed through the medieval period, which was situated within an extensive open-field agricultural hinterland (Cessford with Dickens 2004). The present site was located within these open fields, small areas of poorly defined ridge and furrow, aligned on a southwest to northeast alignment, has previously been recorded approximately 250m to the west of the PDA (Anon. 1984), and 150m immediately to the north at Woodhead Drive (Newman 2011). The open fields were finally enclosed in 1808, and at this time Milton Road was also established as a turnpike leading to Ely. Subsequently, during the later 19th century, the area gradually became incorporated into suburban Cambridge.

METHODOLOGY

The trial trenching programme comprised seven trenches, a total of 125m of trenching amounting to a 2.5% sample of the PDA. Trenches were located in order to provide even coverage of the PDA, however the trenches were to some degree located to avoid large tree stumps and a tennis court in the former property of 239 Milton Road.

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

The trial trenching revealed a dark grey sand silt turf and topsoil, which incorporated frequent rooting and much leaf litter. This deposit was the garden soil contemporary with the properties on Milton Road. This soil sealed a previous formation, which consisted of a dark brown grey sitly unaerated previous plough soil and associated orange brown silt sand subsoil, which appeared to be a former agricultural soil in use prior to the encroachment of suburban Cambridge in the early 20th century. This former soil formation varied in depth across the PDA, which appears to be a result of truncation to level the previous contours of the land for construction of the contemporary houses.

This sequence of deposits was only interrupted by what appear to be remnant furrows (F2 and F3) in Trench 2, and a number of post-medieval gravel quarries (F1) in Trench 1.

The potential furrows (F2 and 3) are located in the south eastern end of Trench 2. They survive only as a shallow remnant in the deeper subsoils present in this area of the PDA, however they were only noticeable in section (see Figure 3). They appear to run roughly northeast-southwest, are approximately 4m wide and survive to a depth of no greater than 0.25m. Elsewhere in the PDA they appear to be entirely truncated by subsequent ploughing.

A number of probable gravel quarries were discovered in the eastern end of Trench 1. They were orientated northeast-southwest in broad strips roughly 4m in width. One of these quarries was excavated (F1)(see Figure 4). It was 1.50m deep and backfilled with a sequence of grey brown sand silt material (100) derived from subsoils and fine sand and pea grit deposit (101), which appears to be the by-product or waste gravels from the quarrying and sorting process. This sequence of fills appeared to be replicated in the other unexcavated quarries in Trench 1. Fragments of post-medieval brick and tile were recovered from the lower fills of F1.

DISCUSSION

As previously outlined, the PDA lies within an area, which had seen limited activity until the Roman period. When it is believed the PDA was situated within agricultural land associated with the known settlement near Arbury Road (Lisboa 1995), however no archaeological evidence has yet confirmed this notion.

Following the Roman period nearby settlements at Cambridge and Chesterton developed, becoming thoroughly established in the medieval period. These settlements are known to be surrounded by a well studied agricultural hinterland, which is understood to be divided into two large scale medieval field systems, the east and west fields of Cambridge. Unfortunately the PDA lies between these known agricultural zones. This area is thought to be medieval farmland, however evidence of ridge and furrow exists at Woodhead Drive (Newman 2011) and at a further site just to its west (Anon. 1984), which seem to support this notion as does the presence of potential ridge and furrow uncovered during this current investigation.

This evaluation also revealed a number of gravel quarries, which appear to be characteristic of the strip type extraction found elsewhere in Cambridge. Such features are better typified at sites such as Parkside Fire and Rescue Station (Newman 2011) and North West Cambridge (Evans and Newman 2010). Strip quarrying became established in the 17th century, replacing a more *ad hoc* medieval method of gravel extraction (Newman 2011). Given the need for gravel in the construction of the burgeoning urban core of Cambridge, and that more centrally located resources were becoming exhausted, strip quarrying is generally found encroaching on agricultural land outside the cities former medieval boundary (Hall and Ravensdale 1976), which in turn may influence the form of strip quarrying in that furrows were utilised to define individual quarry strips (Newman 2011). This appears to be the case at Milton Road as the strip quarries in Trench 1 appear to be aligned identically to the furrows in Trench 2, furthermore, their widths of the furrows and quarries are equally as comparable. In terms of date the material from F1, suggests the quarry was backfilled

in or after the 17th century, again in accordance with the accepted date for strip quarrying.

In summary, this evaluation has expanded on the previous understanding of this part of Cambridge confirming there is little occupation or activity until the medieval period when the PDA formed part of the agricultural hinterland of Cambridge. Subsequently the PDA to Cambridge became utilised for gravel extraction.

Acknowledgements

The investigation was commissioned by Laragh House Developments Ltd/Enterprise Property Group Ltd. The fieldwork was carried out by Alasdair Wright and Lizzie Middleton. John Moller was responsible for field survey and Bryan Crossan was responsible for the graphics. The project was managed by Emma Beadsmore.

SPECIALIST STUDIES

Post-Medieval Ceramics – *Craig Cessford*

| Context | Material | Date | Weight (g) |
|---------|----------------|-------------------|------------|
| 101 | Brick Fragment | 17th-18th Century | 88 |
| 101 | Brick Fragment | 17th-18th Century | 74 |
| 101 | Tile Fragment | 17th-19th Century | 24 |

Table 1 – Finds from Post-Medieval Quarry Pit F1.

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Hall, C and Ravendales, J 1976 *The West Fields of Cambridge*, Cambridge Antiquarian Records Society Volume III

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Newman, R 2011 *Parkside Fire and Rescue Station, Cambridge: An Archaeological Evaluation* Cambridge Archaeological Unit Report 1049

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Anonymous 1984. *Ridge and furrow: A study of Remains in the City of Cambridge surveyed in 1984*, RCAHM.

APPENDIX

| Trench 1 | | | | | | |
|---|------------|--------------------------------|--------------|-----------|-----------|---------------|
| Description | | Max. Topsoil Depth (m) | | | 0.4 | |
| Trench revealed a number of post-medieval gravel quarries, which truncate the subsoil sequence. | | Max. Subsoils Depth (m) | | | 0.5 | |
| | | Length (m) | | | 25 | |
| | | Width (m) | | | 1.6 | |
| | | Orientation | | | NW-SE | |
| Feature | Type | Context | Context Type | Width (m) | Depth (m) | Date |
| 1 | Quarry Pit | 100 | Fill | 2.95 | 1.5 | post-medieval |
| | | 101 | Fill | | | |
| | | 102 | Cut | | | |

| Trench 2 | | | | | | |
|---|--------|--------------------------------|--------------|-----------|-----------|------------------------|
| Description | | Max. Topsoil Depth (m) | | | 0.3 | |
| A number of potential furrows survived within the subsoil sequence at the SE end of the trench. | | Max. Subsoils Depth (m) | | | 0.8 | |
| | | Length (m) | | | 15 | |
| | | Width (m) | | | 1.6 | |
| | | Orientation | | | NW-SE | |
| Feature | Type | Context | Context Type | Width (m) | Depth (m) | Date |
| 2 | Furrow | 103 | Fill | 4.25 | 0.25 | medieval/post-medieval |
| | | 104 | Cut | | | |
| 3 | Furrow | 105 | Fill | 3.75 | 0.2 | medieval/post-medieval |
| | | 106 | Fill | | | |
| | | 107 | Cut | | | |

| Trench 3 | | | |
|---|--|--------------------------------|-------|
| Description | | Max. Topsoil Depth (m) | 0.3 |
| General topsoil and subsoil sequence. No archaeology. | | Max. Subsoils Depth (m) | 0.6 |
| | | Length (m) | 25 |
| | | Width (m) | 1.6 |
| | | Orientation | NE-SW |

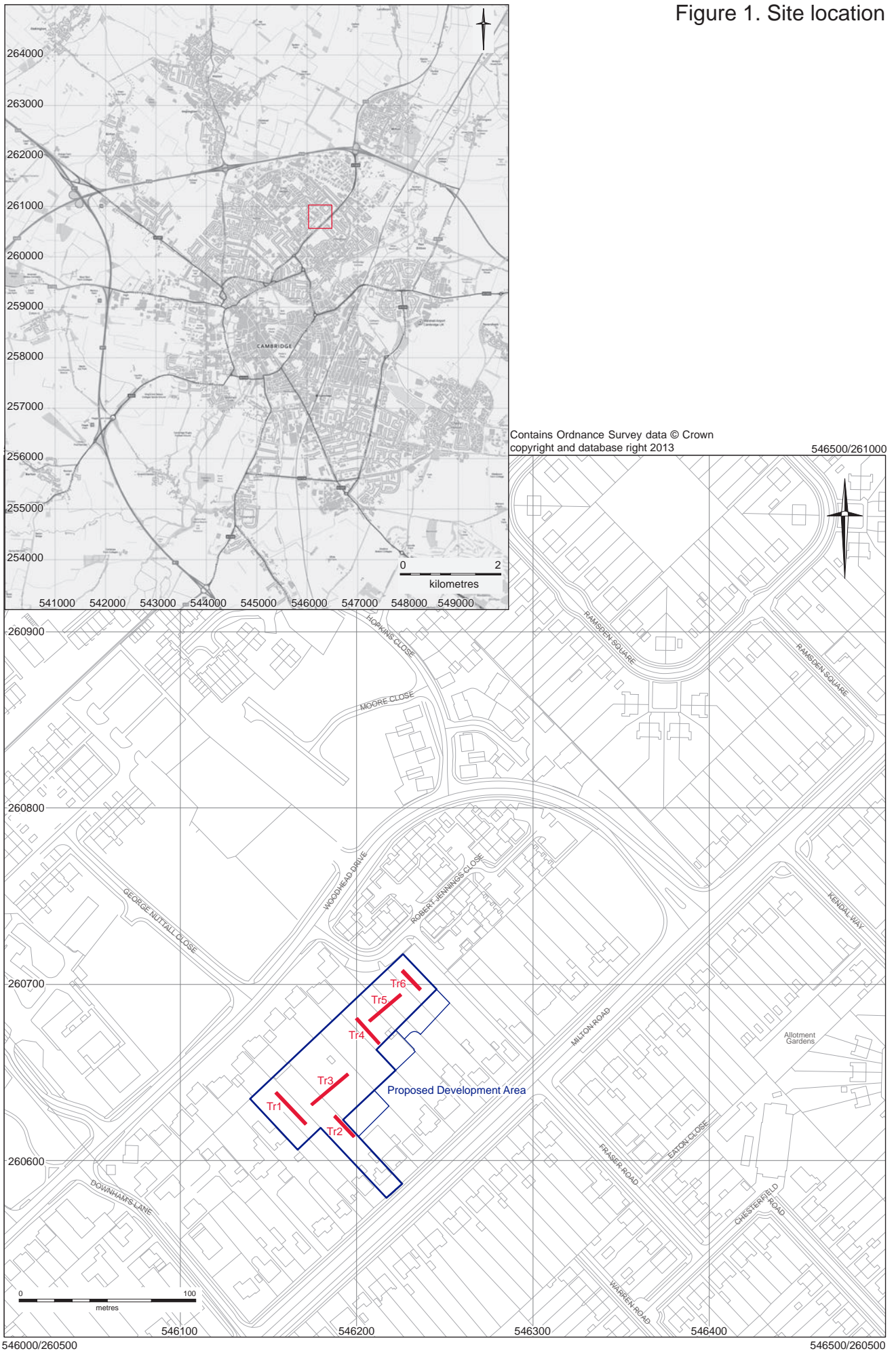
| Trench 4 | | | |
|---|--|--------------------------------|-------|
| Description | | Max. Topsoil Depth (m) | 0.35 |
| General topsoil and subsoil sequence. No archaeology. | | Max. Subsoils Depth (m) | 0.5 |
| | | Length (m) | 19 |
| | | Width (m) | 1.6 |
| | | Orientation | NW-SE |

| Trench 5 | | | |
|--|--|--------------------------------|-------|
| Description | | Max. Topsoil Depth (m) | 0.35 |
| General topsoil and subsoil sequence. No archaeology. Some truncation of subsoils at NE end of trench. | | Max. Subsoils Depth (m) | 0.55 |
| | | Length (m) | 25 |
| | | Width (m) | 1.6 |
| | | Orientation | NE-SW |

| Trench 6 | | |
|---|--------------------------------|-------|
| Description | Max. Topsoil Depth (m) | 0.3 |
| General topsoil and subsoil sequence. No archaeology. Truncation of subsoils observed. Subsoil depth ranges from 1m in NW to 0.45m in SE. | Max. Subsoils Depth (m) | 1.0 |
| | Length (m) | 15 |
| | Width (m) | 1.6 |
| | Orientation | NW-SE |

Table 2 – Trench and Feature Descriptions

Figure 1. Site location



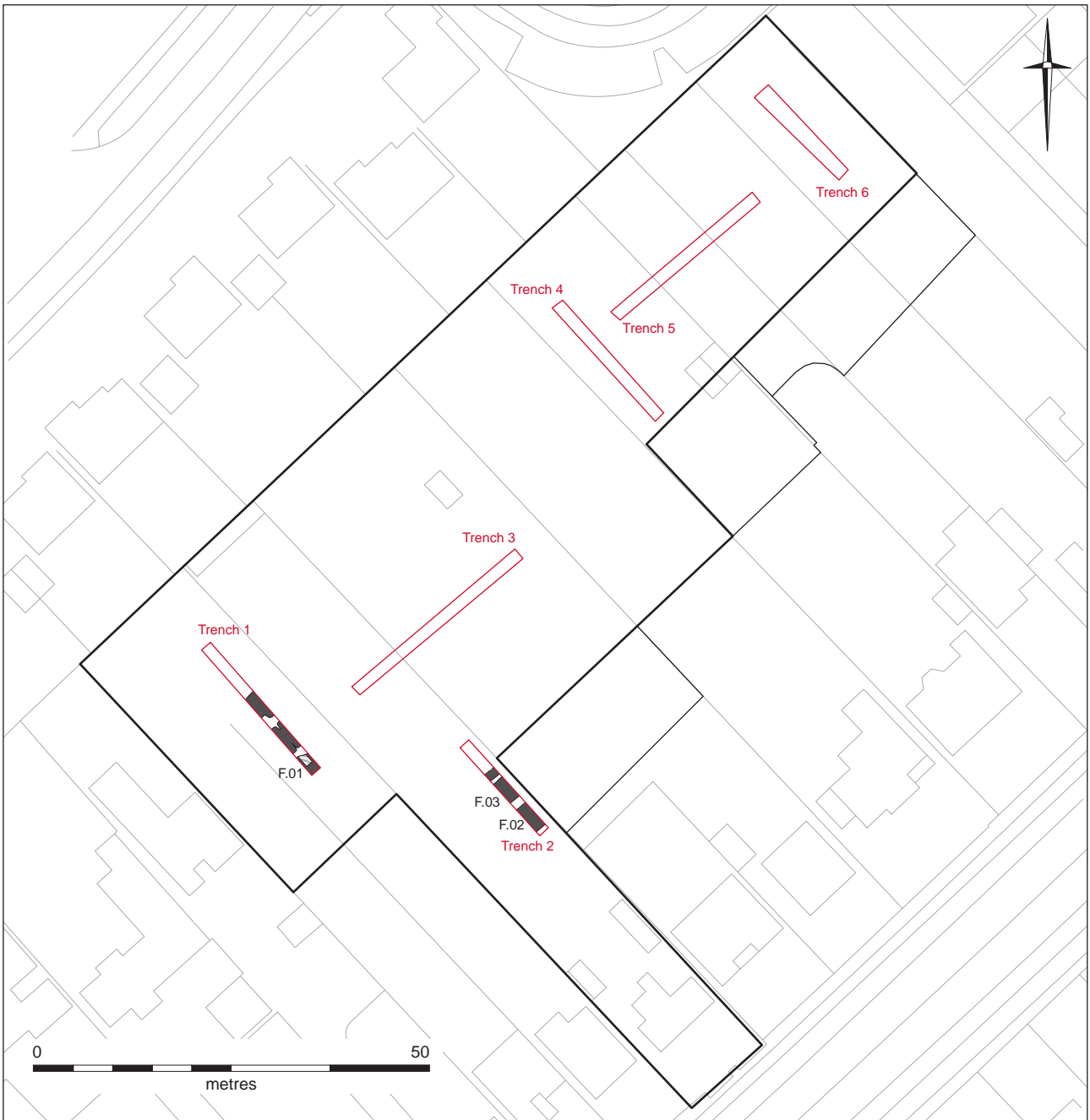


Figure 2. Trench Plan

Trench 2.

NW

SE

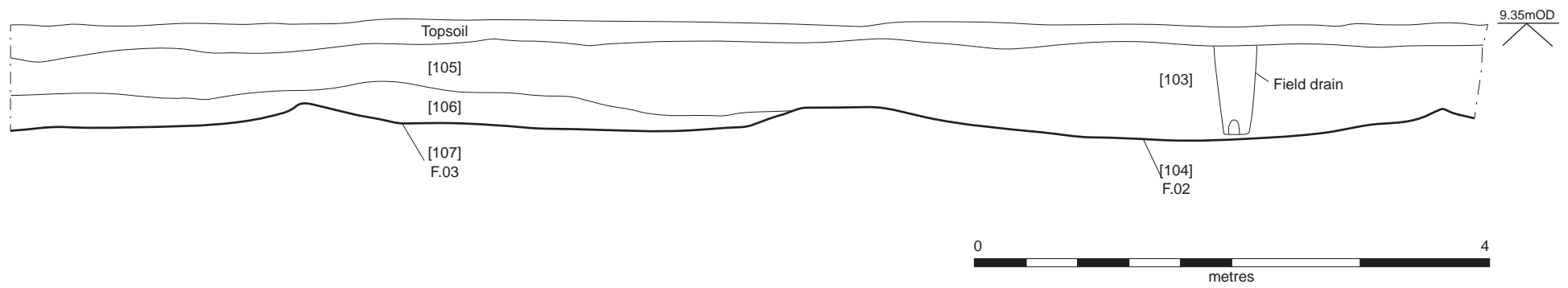


Figure 3. Section of F.02 and F.03 in Trench 2



Figure 4. Photograph of F.1, Trench 1

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OASIS ID: cambridg3-171828

Project details

| | |
|--|--|
| Project name | 231 247 Milton Road, Cambridge |
| Short description of the project | An archaeological evaluation was undertaken by Cambridge Archaeological Unit (CAU) in the gardens behind 231-247 Milton Road, Cambridge preceding the construction of a new housing development. The evaluation produced no archaeology prior to the medieval period. Of this date evidence of ridge and furrow agriculture was encountered as were a number of post-medieval gravel quarries. |
| Project dates | Start: 17-01-2014 End: 20-01-2014 |
| Previous/future work | No / Not known |
| Any associated project reference codes | MIR13 - Sitecode |
| Any associated project reference codes | ECB 4008 - HER event no. |
| Type of project | Field evaluation |
| Site status | None |
| Current Land use | Residential 1 - General Residential |
| Monument type | RIDGE AND FURROW Medieval |
| Monument type | GRAVEL QUARRY Post Medieval |
| Methods & techniques | "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 |
| | CAMBRIDGESHIRE CAMBRIDGE CAMBRIDGE 231-247 Milton Road, |

Site location Cambridge
 Study area 500.00 Square metres
 Site coordinates TL 464 607 52.2245942272 0.143614619417 52 13 28 N 000 08 37 E Line

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 Laragh House Developments Ltd/Enterprise Property Group Ltd

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Physical Archive Exists? No

Digital Archive recipient Cambridge Archaeological Unit

Digital Contents "Ceramics"

Digital Media available "Images raster / digital photography", "Spreadsheets", "Text"

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Paper Contents "Ceramics"

Paper Media available "Context sheet", "Drawing", "Plan", "Report", "Section"

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