

# University Health Centre, Hughes Hall Gresham Road, Cambridge

An Archaeological Evaluation



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Gresham Road, Cambridge**

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Illustrations by Vicki Herring

**Cambridge Archaeological Unit**  
University of Cambridge

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## *Summary*

*An archaeological evaluation was undertaken by Cambridge Archaeological Unit (CAU) at the proposed site of new student accommodation for Hughes Hall at Gresham Road, Cambridge. The fieldwork comprised trial trenching and a watching brief of building foundations, which revealed only made ground relating to the building of the former University Health Care Centre and an undisturbed soil profile indicating the potential for archaeological remains in the adjacent area.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

In May 2015 Cambridge Archaeological Unit (CAU) undertook a trench-based evaluation within a 0.15ha area of land to the east of the historic centre of Cambridge. The Proposed Development Area (PDA) is located on the former site of the University Health Centre and is centred at National Grid Reference TL 45838 57831 (Figure 1). The PDA is bounded to the north by Fenner's Cricket and Sports ground, to the south by Gresham Road, to the east by the University Lawn Tennis Club, and to the west by residential flats.

The evaluation was designed to assess the potential impact of the proposed construction of new student accommodation for Hughes Hall on archaeological remains. The investigation was carried out on behalf of Hughes Hall. The work was undertaken in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation produced by Emma Beadsmoore (2015) of the CAU in response to a brief issued by Kasia Gdaniec of the Cambridgeshire Historic Environment Team.

### **Geology and Topography**

The PDA was formerly the site of the University Health Centre buildings, which were in the process of demolition, and a small lawned area with several large trees to the north side. The surrounding area consists of residential buildings and streets to the west and south and University sports facilities to the north and east. The PDA is at approximately 13m OD and the underlying geology consists of 4th terrace Cam river gravels over Gault (BGS GeoIndex accessed May 2015).

### **Archaeological Context**

The historical and archaeological background of the site has been covered in depth in a previous desktop assessment (Dickens & Appleby 2014), whilst the wider background of Cambridge is reviewed in several published sources (e.g. Cam 1959; Lobel 1975; Taylor 1999). This information is not therefore reproduced here in full. Nevertheless, it is necessary to briefly outline the background of the area in order to place the PDA securely within its wider context.

#### *Prehistory*

There is no real evidence available to aid discussion of the prehistoric in this area of Cambridge. Although little is known of the area's earliest inhabitants, there is diffuse evidence of Prehistoric occupation recorded in the immediate vicinity, including a Palaeolithic axe and a Neolithic polished stone axe, though both of these have unreliable provenance (Dickens & Appleby 2014).

#### *Roman*

Roman settlement of Cambridge appears to have been centred on the Castle Hill area (Alexander & Pullinger 2000), though finds from this period have also been made in the lower town and other settlement has been investigated in the Addenbrookes vicinity (Evans *et al.* 2008)

Few Roman features have previously been identified within the immediate vicinity. Gravel quarry pits identified at the Old Cattle Market and CB1 Development sites may have related to the construction and/or maintenance of the nearby '*Via Devana*',

or Cambridge to Godmanchester road (Mackay 2001, 24; Mackay 2006, 17-18; Slater 2010, 17) which broadly followed the course of present day Hills Road (*cf.* Walker 1910, 166-7; RCHM(E) 1959, 6) and thus lay approximately 500m to the south of the PDA. The relatively dispersed nature of these features, coupled with a paucity of material remains, indicates that they were situated in the rural hinterland of the town at this time.

### *Medieval*

The Medieval town lay at the centre of a three-field system, two of which formed the town's common fields (Cam 1934, Lobel 1975, Hesse 2007). The PDA lies within the common Barnwell Fields to the east of the town, between Mill Road to the north and Hills Road to the south. There is no evidence to suggest that the site was other than rural at this time. In the immediate vicinity of the PDA few sites have been recorded with Medieval material or features and none with a great intensity of archaeology. The scant archaeological evidence of this period is restricted to gravel extraction pits at Parkside Fire Station (Newman 2010), extant remains of ridge and furrow on Parker's Piece adjoining Queen Anne Terrace (HER Ref 10102), medieval pottery found near the entrance to Downing College on Regent Street (Browne 1974), and Dawe's Cross which stood at the junction of Lensfield Road and Hills Road (Stokes 1917),

### *Post-medieval and 20th century*

The PDA was not inclosed until 1807 and remained agricultural land until 1848 when it became part of the area used for the University of Cambridge's cricket ground. The cricket pitch is still in use today though some of the land set aside in 1848 for the use of the Cambridge University Cricket Club has subsequently been developed. The original pavilion, built in the 1870s and demolished in the 1970s, was situated less than 100m to the west where there are now residential buildings and the University Health Centre was built on the site in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Further Post-medieval activity is evident in the immediate vicinity: at Parkside Fire Station there were a large number of 17th century gravel extraction pits (Newman 2010); Civil War defences consisting of a bank and ditch enclosing the town ran across Parkers Piece (Osborne 1990); and the New Town Gaol was built in the late 1820s (Salzman 1948) on the site now occupied by Cambridge YMCA, less than 500m from the PDA.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The trial trenching programme comprised 2 trenches, a total of 13m of trenching. Trenches were located in order to avoid trees, known services and standing buildings yet provide an even coverage of the PDA (Figure 2). 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.

No potential archaeological features were encountered but a written record of trench profiles and stratigraphy was created using the CAU recording system (a modification of the MoLAS system) and sections drawn at an appropriate scale.

Two further site visits occurred subsequent to the trial trenching on 28<sup>th</sup> May and 2<sup>nd</sup> June. Observation of machined excavation of the area outside of the building footprint was undertaken.

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

## **RESULTS**

Both trenches revealed a dark brown silty topsoil, between 0.20m and 0.40m deep, beneath the turf horizon. This sits on top of a made ground levelling layer of gravel and stone mixed with orange/brown silts relating to the construction of the University Health Centre. Beneath this modern horizon, a relatively intact soil profile remains for much of the length of both trenches. This is disturbed only by a modern land drain at the southeast extreme of Trench 1 and a modern trench in the southwest end of Trench 2. The preserved soil profile consists of 0.25m of dark brown silt topsoil and between 0.24m and 0.40m of orange/brown fine silt subsoil. No archaeological features or artefacts were in evidence and nothing relating to Fenner's Cricket Ground could be identified.

During the two further site visits, observation of machined excavation of the area outside of the building footprint was undertaken but no further information could be gleaned due to health and safety restrictions disbaring a close inspection of profiles and a significant amount of modern disturbance to the area, presumably related to the construction of the University Health Centre. No archaeological features or finds could be identified (see Figure 3).

## **DISCUSSION**

The lack of archaeology encountered within the evaluation area was not altogether unexpected as the area was open fields previous to inclosure and then more latterly a sports field in an area believed to have only sparse prehistoric activity. It is worthwhile, however, to note that the intact soil profile beneath the modern horizon suggests that archaeological features could have been well preserved in the PDA in areas undisturbed by the footprint and services of the University Health Centre. The cricket pitch to the north of the PDA may also exhibit a preserved soil profile, in which case archaeological features could be encountered there.

### *Acknowledgements*

The investigation was carried out on behalf of Hughes Hall. The fieldwork was carried out by Leanne Zeki and Francesca Mazzilli. Jon Moller was responsible for field survey and Vicki Herring was responsible for the graphics. The project was managed by Emma Beadsmoore and monitored by Kasia Gdaniec of Cambridgeshire Historic Environment.

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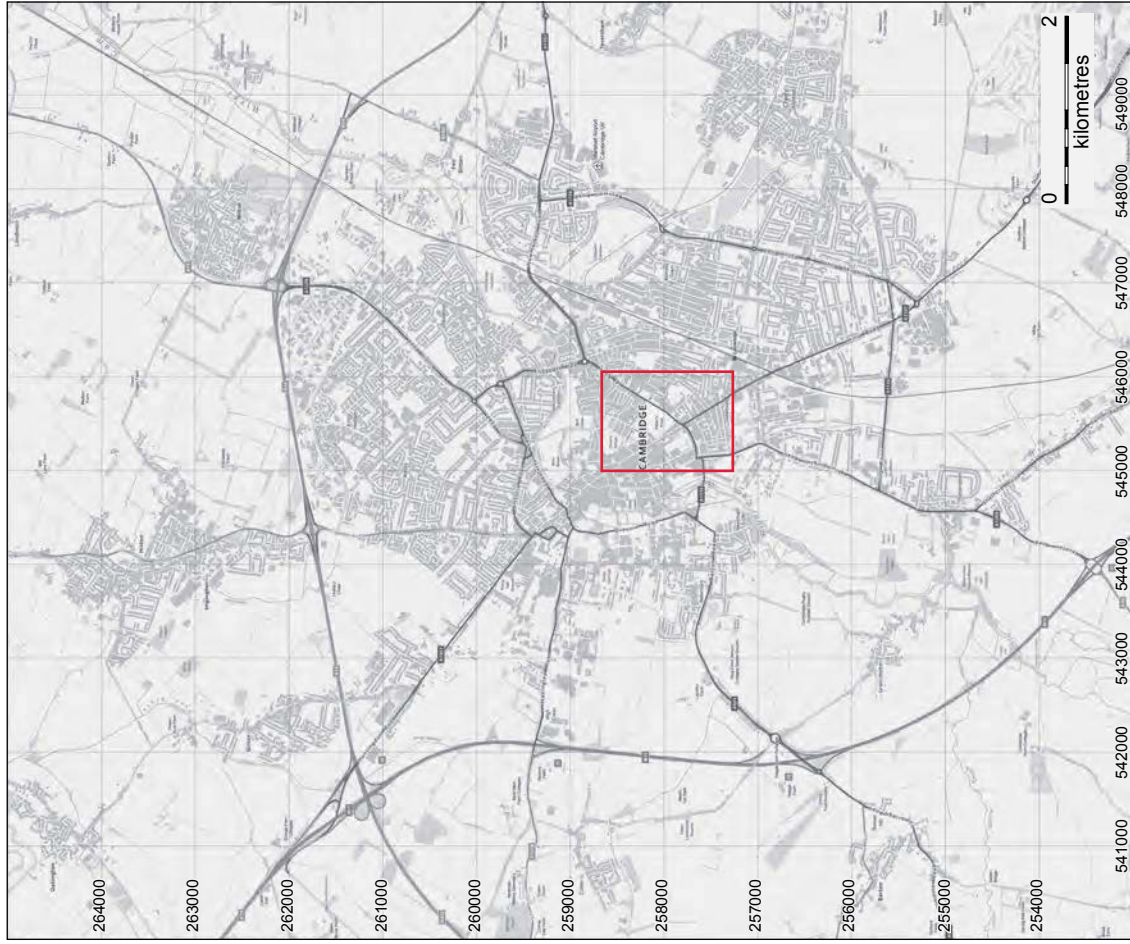
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## TRENCH INDEX

Trench 1			
<b>Length (m)</b>	6.7	<b>Topsoil depth (m)</b>	0.40
<b>Width (m)</b>	1.8	<b>Made Ground depth (m)</b>	0.21
<b>Orientation</b>	NW-SE	<b>Preserved topsoil depth (m)</b>	0.25
		<b>Preserved subsoil</b>	0.24
			

Trench 2			
<b>Length (m)</b>	6.6	<b>Topsoil depth (m)</b>	0.20
<b>Width (m)</b>	1.8	<b>Made Ground depth (m)</b>	0.12
<b>Orientation</b>	NE-SW	<b>Preserved topsoil depth (m)</b>	0.25
		<b>Preserved subsoil</b>	0.35
			



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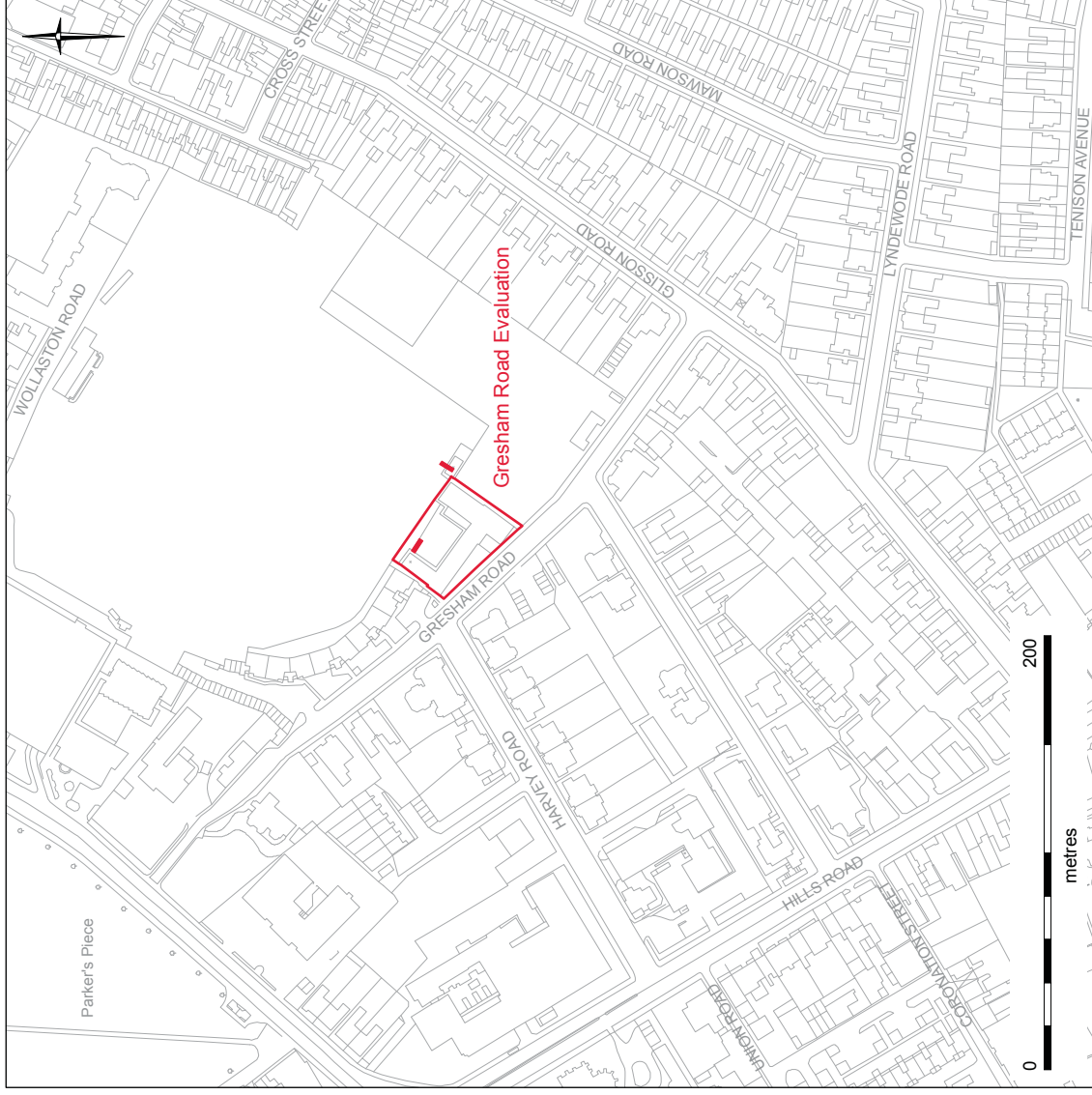


Figure 1. Site location

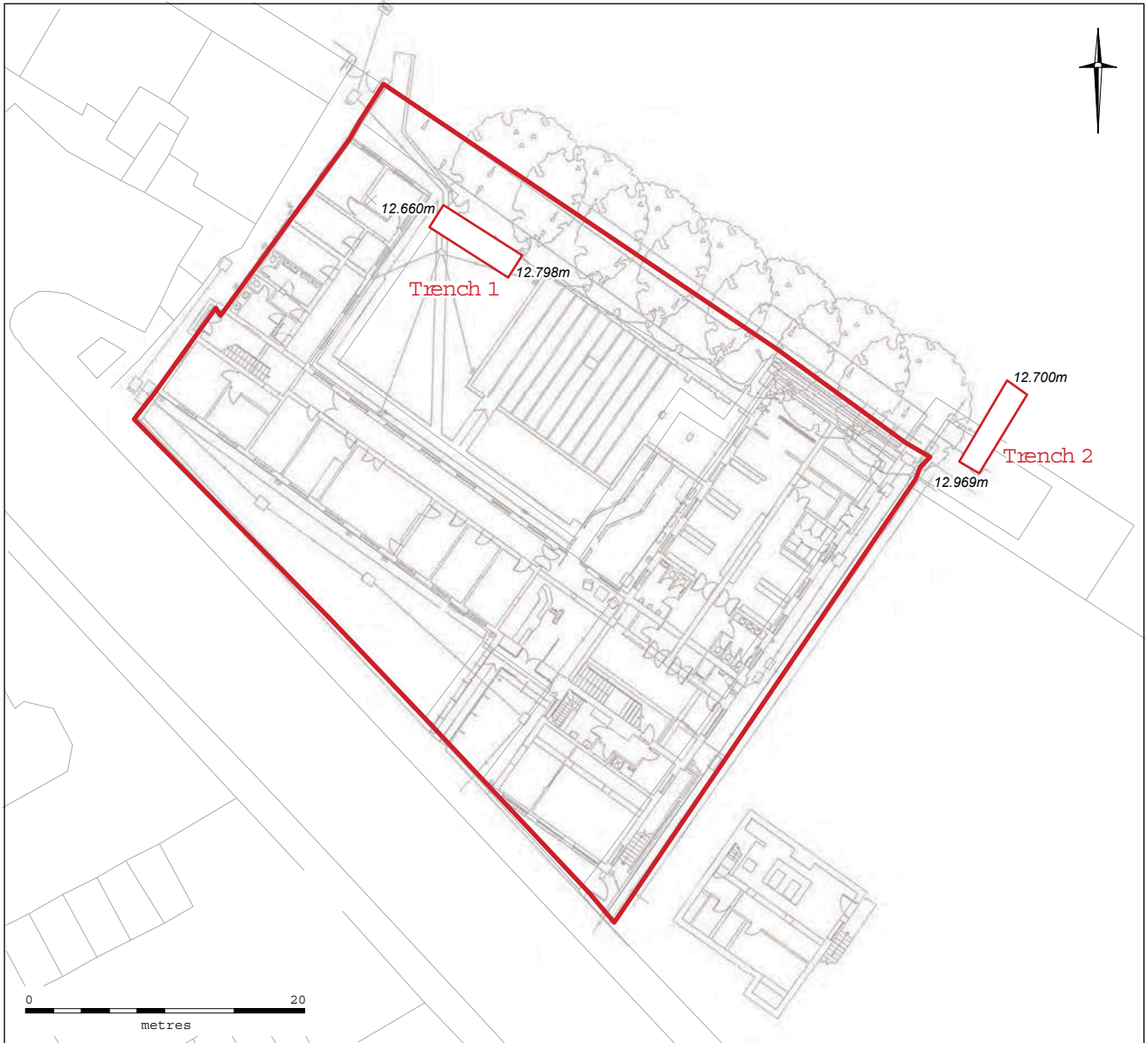


Figure Trench location plan



Figure 3. Photographs of additional monitoring

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### Project details

Project name	An Archaeological Evaluation at University Health Centre, Hughes Hall, Gresham Road, Cambridge
Short description of the project	An archaeological evaluation was undertaken by Cambridge Archaeological Unit (CAU) at the proposed site of new student accommodation for Hughes Hall at Gresham Road, Cambridge. The fieldwork comprised trial trenching and a watching brief of building foundations, which revealed only made ground relating to the building of the former University Health Care Centre and an undisturbed soil profile indicating the potential for archaeological remains in the adjacent area.
Project dates	Start: 20-05-2015 End: 02-06-2015
Previous/future work	No / No
Any associated project reference codes	GRC15 - Sitecode
Any associated project reference codes	ECB4410 - HER event no.
Type of project	Field evaluation
Site status	None
Current Land use	Other 2 - In use as a building
Current Land use	Other 14 - Recreational usage
Monument type	NONE None
Monument type	NONE None
Significant Finds	NONE None
Significant Finds	NONE None
Methods & techniques	"Sample Trenches","Visual Inspection"
Development type	Student Accommodation
Prompt	Direction from Local Planning Authority - PPG16
Position in the planning process	After full determination (eg. As a condition)

**Project location**

Country	England
Site location	CAMBRIDGESHIRE CAMBRIDGE CAMBRIDGE University Health Centre, Hughes Hall, Gresham Road
Postcode	CB1 2EH
Study area	0.15 Hectares
Site coordinates	TL 45838 57831 52.1989653442 0.134155689579 52 11 56 N 000 08 02 E Point
Height OD / Depth	Min: 13.00m Max: 13.00m

**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	Leanne Zeki
Type of sponsor/funding body	Developer
Name of sponsor/funding body	Hughes Hall

**Project archives**

Physical Archive Exists?	No
Digital Archive recipient	Cambridgeshire County Archaeology Store
Digital Archive ID	GRC15
Digital Contents	"none"
Digital Media available	"Images raster / digital photography","Images vector","Text"
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Paper Archive ID	GRC15
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