

Newnham College, New Building

An Archaeological Evaluation



Benjamin Neil

**NEWNHAM COLLEGE
NEW BUILDING**

**An Archaeological Evaluation for the Replacement of the Strachey and
Fawcett buildings**

Benjamin J Neil

Illustrations by Bryan Crossan

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University of Cambridge

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Summary

Trial trench based archaeological evaluation and monitoring of geotechnical test pits was undertaken by the Cambridge Archaeological Unit (CAU) at Newnham College located off Sidgwick Avenue, adjacent to the Strachey and Fawcett buildings, (TL 4410 5770) in August 2015.

Introduction

A trial trench based archaeological evaluation and monitoring of geotechnical test pits was undertaken by the Cambridge Archaeological Unit (CAU) at Newnham College located off Sidgwick Avenue, adjacent to the Strachey and Fawcett buildings, (TL 4410 5770) from 24th-26th August 2015. The proposed development area (PDA) covers 0.26ha; within which, four trenches were located in order to target the site for new post-graduate accommodation. Geotechnical test-pits dug to assess the extent of existing foundations were also monitored.

The project was undertaken in response to a request from Cambridgeshire County Council Historic Environment Team, to provide information on potential archaeological activity within the footprint of the PDA. The evaluation comprised a total of 29 metres of 2 metre wide trenches. Work was carried out in accordance with a project design specification (Beadsmoore 2015) 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 Newnham College.

Location, Topography and Geology

The proposed development area (PDA) is located off Sidgwick Avenue, overlying the footprint of the Strachey and Fawcett buildings at Newnham College, centred at National Grid Reference TL 4410 5770. The site is at an average of c. 10m AOD, whilst the underlying geology is 2nd river terrace gravels.

Archaeological Background

Prehistory

Prehistoric activity is found in the vicinity and within the grounds of Newnham College. This activity includes spot finds of a Neolithic axe found to the south east of the PDA at Malting House Lane and a Neolithic scraper at Sheep's Green 0.3 miles to the south east (Browne 1974). Mesolithic/Neolithic flint tools including scrapers, blades and cores were found at the Ridley Hall site to the east of the PDA (Brittain, 2009, Lewis, Ranson & Collins, 2012).

Iron Age pottery has been found at Ridley Hall (Brittain, 2009) as well as early Iron Age ditches and pits (Lewis *et al*, 2012). A richly furnished Iron Age inhumation 0.25 miles south of the PDA within the grounds of St Mark's Church is evidenced by a Penannular brooch (Fox in Brittain, 2009).

Romano-British

The most ubiquitous archaeology recorded around the PDA is Roman and Saxon, with settlement and cemetery evidence each represented. Early Roman settlement activity has been identified at Ridley Hall evidenced by discrete open land plots, delineated by at least three northeast-southwest aligned ditches and two ditches oriented in an east-west direction, (Brittain, 2009). At the Newnham College Buttery, approximately 85 metres to the west of Trench 01 in the current PDA, excavations revealed evidence for an enclosed Roman farmstead occupied over a period extending from the 1st through to the 4th centuries AD (Webb et al. 2006). A tentative Roman date was given to possible boundary ditches at Selwyn College, (Regan, 2003) 0.13 miles north-west of the PDA.

A considerable amount of Roman pottery and other artefacts have been found within the grounds of Newnham College, catalogued by the University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology; the pottery includes fine wares such as Samian, Castor and New Forest Wares (Whittaker, 2000). There are also a number of Roman spot finds in the vicinity, including pottery, coins and other artefacts. In 1939, two graves containing a total of five burials were excavated in Newnham gardens which are commonly defined as Roman but an Anglo-Saxon date is also argued (Liversidge, 1977, Hills, 2010).

Medieval

Within the vicinity of the PDA, settlement data includes Saxon field boundary ditches, early and mid Saxon pottery, animal bone and quern stones, (Mackay, 2002). A possible large timber hall, *Grubenhäuser*, pits, loomweights and pottery provides strong settlement evidence at the Institute of Criminology site, 150 metres north of the PDA, (Armour *et al* 2003, Dodwell *et al* 2004). An Anglo-Saxon cemetery comprising 21 individuals was also excavated at Kings College Hostel 0.21 miles north of the PDA (Dodwell, 2001).

A possible Late Medieval cesspit and pond containing 14th-15th pottery were found at Newnham Road, (Timberlake, 2006), 0.17 miles to the south-east as well as two medieval pits at Newnham House, (Gdaniec, 1992) 0.15 miles east of the PDA. Redeposited medieval pottery was also found during excavations at Ridley Hall (Lewis *et al* 2012).

Post-Medieval

Excluding Newnham College's listed buildings, post-Medieval activity within the study area includes documentary evidence of a tannery and archaeological evidence of a post built structure at Ridley Hall (Brittain, 2009). Pit and bowl shaped features provide evidence of Post-Medieval activity at King's Garden Hostel, (Whittaker, 1999) as well as gravel quarries at Selwyn College, (Regan, 2003) and tobacco pipe spot finds at Millington road, 0.38 miles south of the PDA. (Scott, 1917).

Methodology

Four trenches were located within the footprint of the PDA (Figure 01). Trench 01 was located off Sedgwick Avenue in the Fawcett carpark, Trench 02 was adjacent to the porters lodge, Trench 03 in the grassed area south of a silver birch and Rosalind Franklin accommodation and Trench 04 in the grassed area between Newnham walk and the Strachey building. Due to challenges in access, Trenches 01 and 02 were excavated using a 7.5 tonne 360° excavator whilst Trenches 03 and 04 were excavated using 1.5 tonne 360° excavator; both excavators had rubber tracks, were fitted with a toothless bucket and operated under direct archaeological supervision at all times. Trenches 01 and 02 required additional measures of excavation to remove the brick inlaid carpark bay margins and tarmac, which necessitated a circular saw and pneumatic breaker; both were operated under archaeological supervision. Plywood boards were laid over grassed areas to minimise damage from excavator tracks and adjacent to trenches to aid spoil heap management. Turf was cut and rolled for Trenches 03 and 04 to satisfy reinstatement measures.

Due to the density of sub-surface services, a dedicated survey was undertaken by Subsight Services Limited to locate known and unknown utilities. This allowed trenches to be located whilst avoiding existing utilities using an advanced Global Positioning System (GPS). A representative of The Landscape Partnership oversaw the trenching in relation to tree root activity. Potential archaeological features were sample excavated via hand excavation with all archaeological finds retained.

A written and illustrated record of archaeological features and soil sequences was created using the CAU recording system (a modification of the MoLAS system). A digital photographic record of the programme was also maintained.

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

Results

Trench 01

Trench 01 contains four post medieval/modern features and one undefined feature of possible earlier archaeological origin. An average of 0.42m of made ground creates a level surface to overlie two perforated concrete features which overlie an average of 0.22m of demolition rubble. This in turn overlies natural. Test Pit 01 approximately 10m to the east reached a depth of 1.0m through made-up ground before reaching concrete.

Features **01** (see Plate 01) and **05** (see Plate 02) are singularly perforated concrete slabs of unknown function. The north-south dimension of both features is unknown, being limited by the width of the trial trench. The east-west dimension of **F.05** is 3.05m. The dimension of the apertures in **F.01** and **F.05** is approximately 1.05m in diameter. The thickness of the concrete

across both features appears consistent at 0.15m. Cleaning the deposit within the aperture of **F.01** determined it to be soft black, organic silt with significant rooting and frequent stone inclusions. **F.05** is seen to overlie **F.04** to the east and red brick and mortar demolition material to the west.

F.02 was presented as a possible discrete cut into the natural. However, it was sterile of any material culture and only 0.04m in depth.

F.03 (See plate 03) was seen as a well-defined curvilinear edge with a depositional sequence abutting the brick lining of **F.04**, 2.05m to the west. A depth of 0.60m was reached before having to stop, which characterised two deposits; **(01)** was variably loose and firm yellowish brown sandy silt with lenses of mid grey clay, all with occasional stones and CBM fragments. **(02)** was a firm mid grey clayey silt with occasional demolition debris (tile, brick and CBM fragments) with occasional charcoal flecks. The material culture found within this earlier deposit dates to the mid nineteenth century, with a whiskey bottle base fragment showing a stamped date of 1842.

F.04 (see Plate 04) is a red non-frogged brick built (projected) octagon feature, likely to be a water well. The walls are substantial being more than 9 courses in depth and approximately 0.5m thick. The internal aperture is infilled with concrete and its dimension is unknown, being precluded by **F.05**; however, it can be projected at being just over 1m in diameter. To the west of **F.05** is an undefined feature; its limitation is unknown. The fill **(04)** (see Plate 05) is distinguishable from that of **(02)** in **F.03**, in that it is largely sterile other than the distal end of a juvenile cattle humerus (Vida Radjkovaca, 2015 pers.comm, 10 September). A sondage was mechanically excavated to determine the depth of deposit but at 1.60m, was not bottomed.

Trench 02

Trench 02 (see Plate 06) was unexcavated due to concrete precluding its entire dimension. Borehole 01 located approximately 1m adjacent to the trench had to drill through 0.30m of concrete and a further 1.10m of made ground before reaching natural gravels. Test Pit 02, approximately 10m NE of Trench 02 established made-up ground over concrete foundations, which in turn sat on natural gravels at 1.25m.

Trench 03

Trench 03 (see Plate 07) revealed a soil sequence comprising topsoil 0.20m thick overlying made subsoil 0.30m thick. In the west end of the sequence, the subsoil overlies 0.50m demolition rubble. In the east, the subsoil overlies 0.20m of mixed limestone rubble and soil that in turn overlies 0.20m of organic soil. In the west, demolition rubble, including plastic shopping bags and squared timber is seen to backfill a feature cut into natural and is reasoned to be an activity contemporary to the construction of Strachey Building in 1968. Test Pit 04, approximately 8m west of Trench 03 reached 0.8m after establishing made-up ground over concrete, likely to be the roof of a basement.

Trench 04

Trench 04 (see Plate 08) revealed a soil sequence comprising topsoil averaging 0.22m thick overlying an average of 0.13m made ground comprising crushed brick and limestone with frequent pebbles and gravel. This in turn overlies an old, firm, mid brownish-grey top soil 0.40m thick that in turn overlies 0.45m of very firm light brownish-grey silty sand sub-soil, which contained a fragment of oyster shell.

F.06 was seen to be an east-west linear of indeterminate function; 0.10m-0.15m of the southern edge was revealed by the trench, thus remained unexcavated. **F.07** is a sub-circular feature with a poorly defined edge, worsened by the near exclusive blocky/crushed limestone/chalk fill. It is seen to cut **F.06** to the east and likewise remained unexcavated.

Test Pit 05, approximately 6m NE of Trench 04, established a topsoil and subsoil sequence to a 1m depth; a geotechnical soak-away slot between the test pit and trench was excavated through a topsoil and subsoil sequence and reached natural gravels at 1.50m. Borehole 02 approximately 6m to the west similarly reached natural gravels at 1.50m (see Figure 02 for Test Pit and Borehole locations).

Discussion

Trench 01

Although determining the true nature and date of the structural features in this trench is beyond the scope of this report, the following may be used as a basis for further investigation. **F.01** and **F.05** are unknown structures, but could relate to buildings illustrated on a 1927 and 1967 OS map, (see Figure 03).

Historical evidence provides some interesting clues in regard to **F.04**. The non-frogged red brick of this structure suggests contemporaneity with Newnham Hall (1875) and North Hall (1880). If one is to work with the principle that it is a water well, that few buildings in this period were connected to piped water gives credibility to its existence as a source of water. It is also worthwhile noting that establishing a water source would have been an important preliminary to construction, (2015, 9th September, retrieved from <http://tinyurl.com/p7y7uqh>) especially as Newnham Hall was located in open countryside and almost certainly had no existing infrastructure to utilise.

It is not unreasonable to suggest that it **F.03** was cut for the purpose of constructing **F.04**, supported by evidence of mid nineteenth century material culture within its earlier deposit. When Newnham Hall was constructed, scope for further extension was already in mind yet was undefined, (Gardener, 1921) which might explain why **F.04** (if contemporary) was located some 75m directly north of the east wing and why it appears non domestic in nature, possibly pre-empting larger scale demand. An 1888 historical OS map of the vicinity does not illustrate either a well or pump being present; however there are two small structures

approximately 15-18m to the east of the water well that could have conceivably housed a pump, (see Figure 03).

Determining a functional relationship and characterising a feature for deposit **(04)** was not possible due to the limitation of the trench dimensions. It can be suggested that like **F.03**, it represents the backfill for a pit to accommodate **F.04**. However, as mentioned in the results, the deposit, a firm, yellowish grey brown clayey silt exceeding a depth of 1.60m, is distinguishable from **(02)**, defined by its sterility so may be more archaeological in nature. That Roman enclosure ditches with depths of between 1.20m -1.30m excavated at the Buttery site are only 85 metres away might suggest a contemporary link.

Trenches 02, 03 and 04

The location and investigation into Trenches **02** and **03** demonstrate the extent to which the ground has been worked and the possibility that activities associated with the construction of the 1969 Strachey building may have truncated earlier archaeology. However, Trench **03** also shows the survival of an organic soil over natural gravels towards the eastern end of the trench; this may be indicative of old topsoil that predates the Strachey building and a corridor of archaeological potential before reaching the Rosalind Franklin building to the east.

The edge of linear **F.06** in Trench **04** provides an indication of an east-west aligned gully or ditch, cut by a sub-rounded discrete **F.07**. Neither feature was excavated due to the limited extent of the trench, thus phasing was not possible. Given the extensive Roman and Anglo-Saxon activity in the vicinity, it is not unreasonable to suggest that **F.06** may be contemporary to one of those periods.

Conclusion

The extent of modern disturbance across the PDA is palpable and expected given the urban nature of the site. This is in greatest evidence towards the north of the PDA, diminishing towards the south and east. Post medieval structural and artefactual remains, likely associated with earlier phases of Newnham College are in clear evidence within Trench **01**; however, a potentially large archaeological deposit survives and given its depth, may be part of a substantial Romano-British feature. Although Trench **02** is precluded by concrete, it is a reasonable belief that made up ground lies beneath, possibly to the depth of natural gravels; this is evidenced by Borehole 01, Test Pit 02 and 04 and the western part of Trench **03**, (approximately 13m directly south) and is likely to represent the construction phase of the Strachey building and subsequent works. However, the survival of organic soil over natural gravel towards the eastern end of Trench **03** appears to define the limitation of this modern disturbance and the indication of archaeological features beneath mostly undisturbed top and sub soils in Trench **04** suggests that there is a greater probability of archaeological survival towards the south of the PDA.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Newnham College for commissioning the work. Tree root activity was monitored by Michael Roseveare of The Landscape Partnership. Mechanical excavation and reinstatement was carried out by Lattenbury Services. The site was monitored by Kasia Gdaniec of the Cambridge Historic Environment Team (CHET). The CAU onsite team consisted of Ricky Patten, Sabrina Salmon and the author. Survey was undertaken by Donald Horne and graphics were prepared by Bryan Crossan. The project was managed by Emma Beadsmoore.

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Further reading

http://fet.uwe.ac.uk/conweb/house_ages/services/print.htm

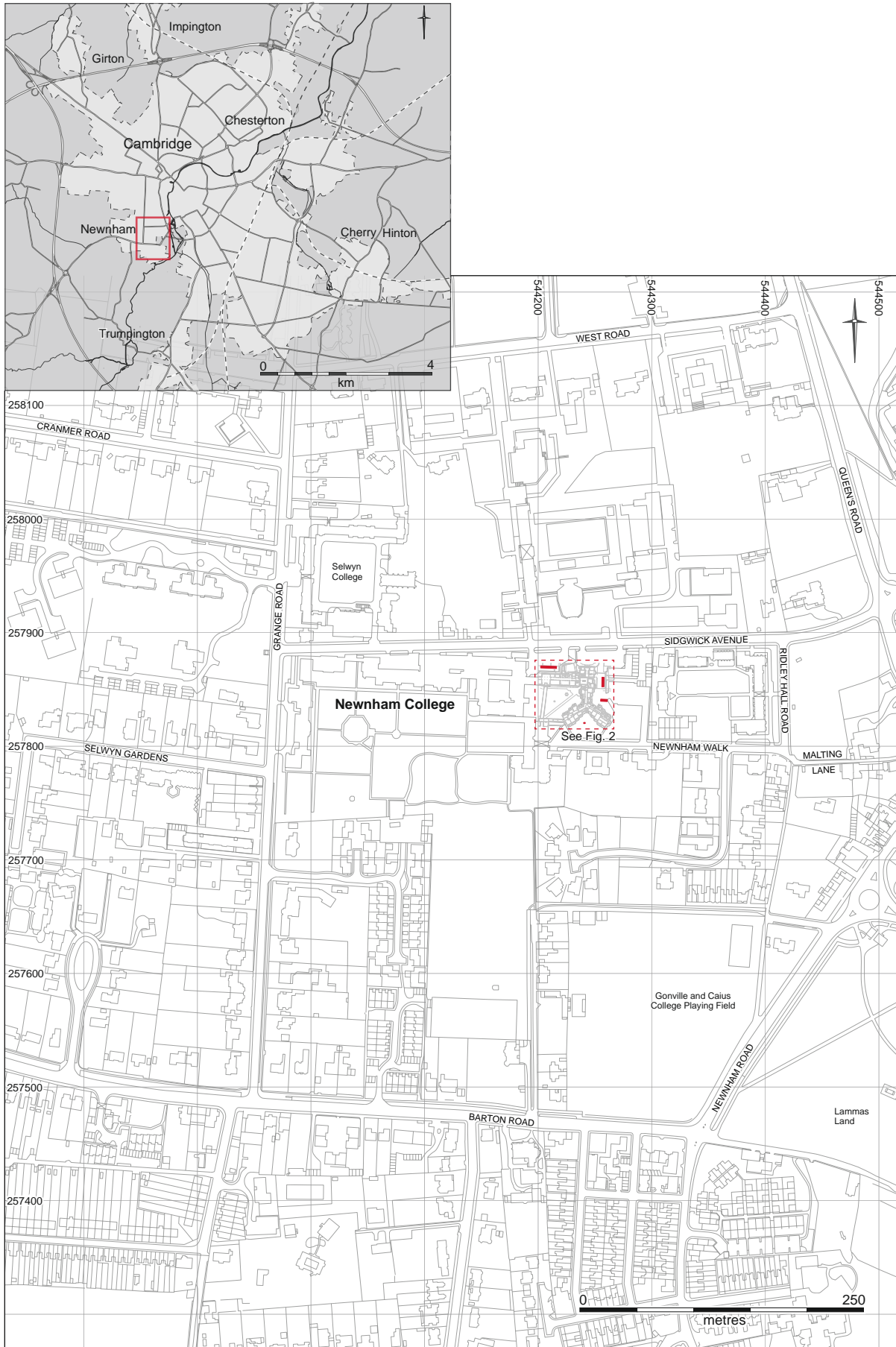


Figure 1. Site location

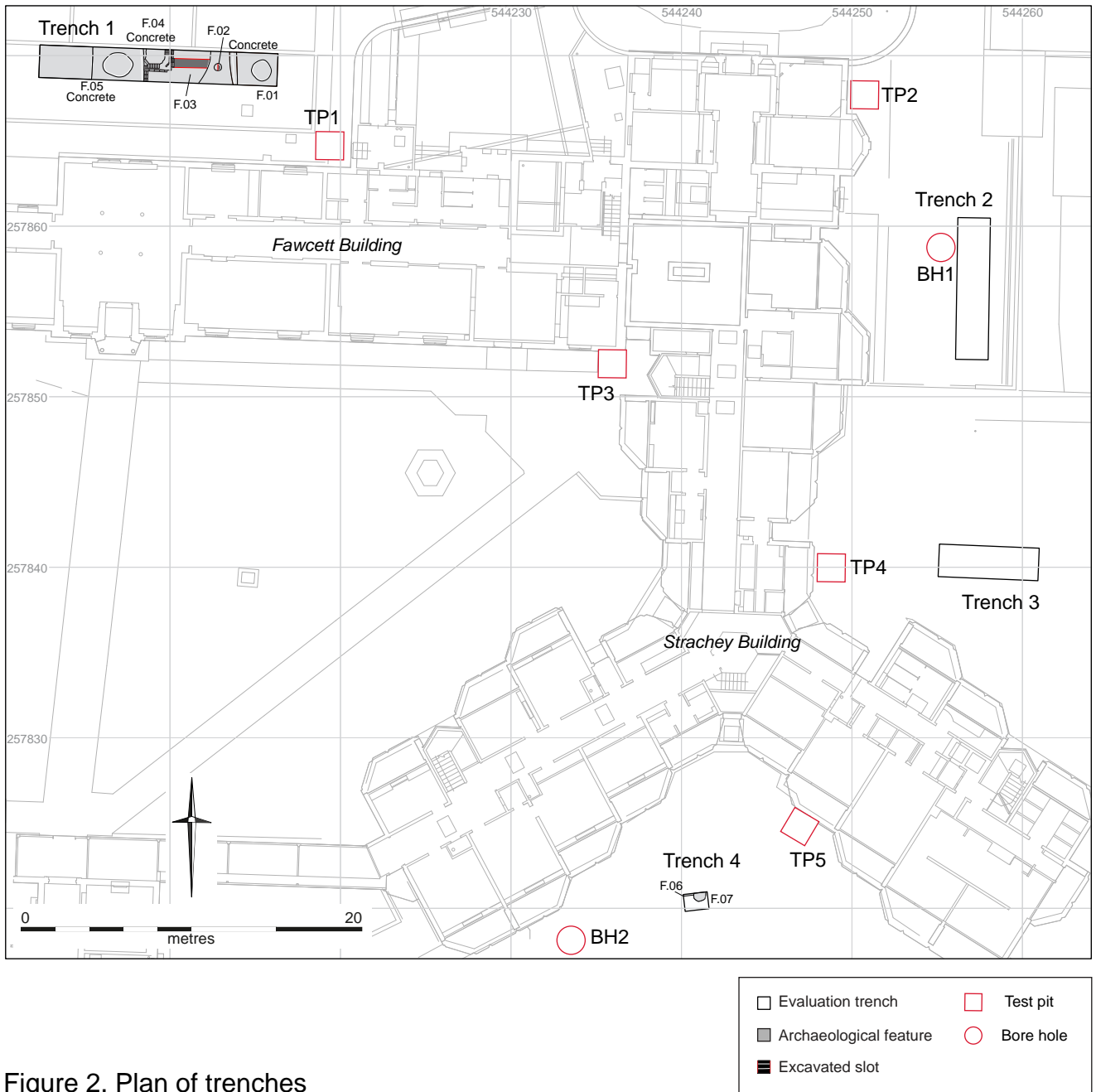
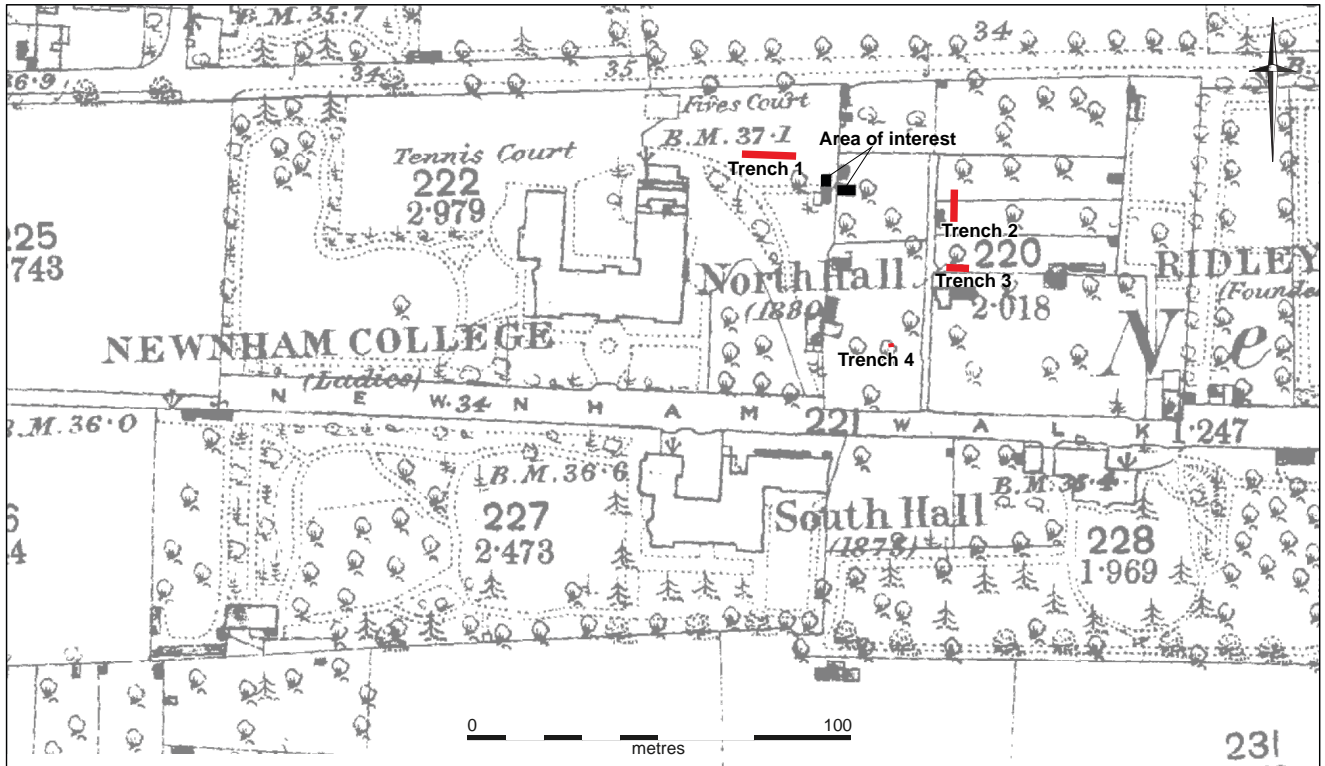
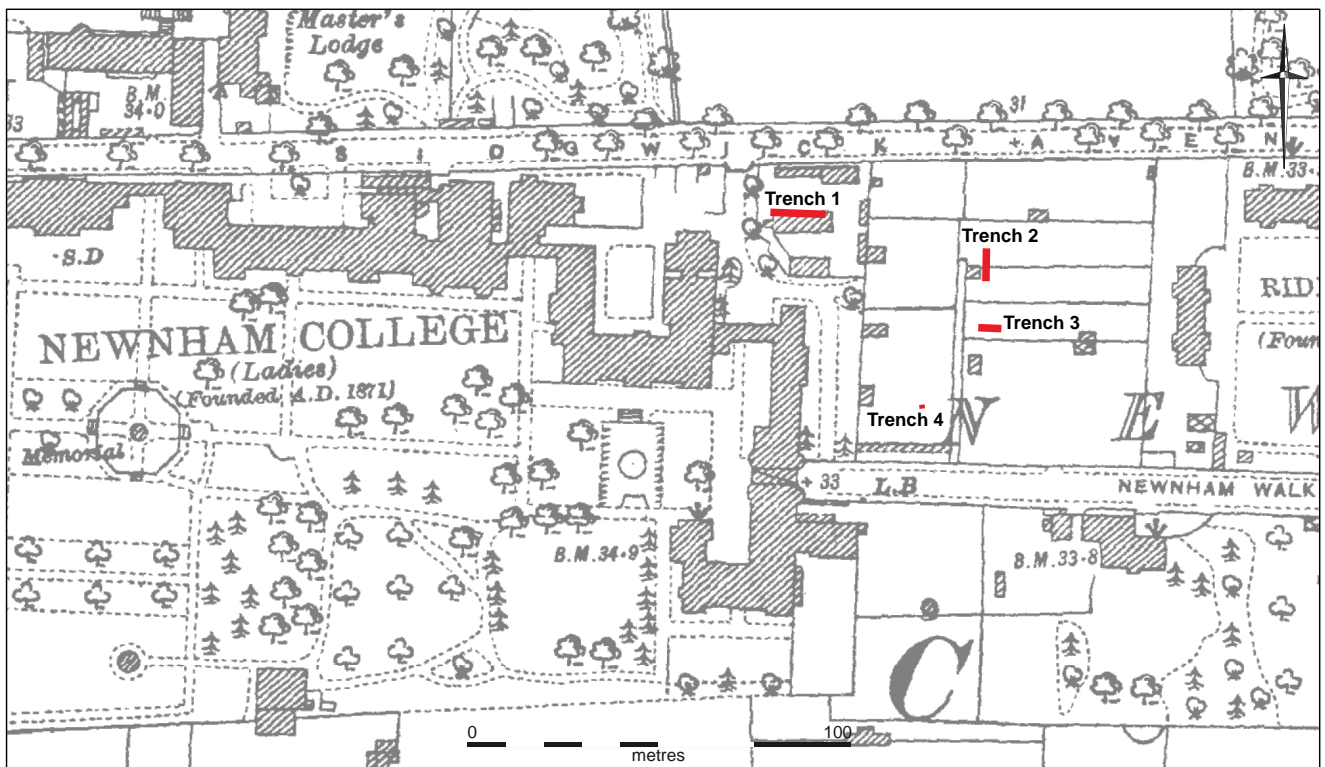


Figure 2. Plan of trenches

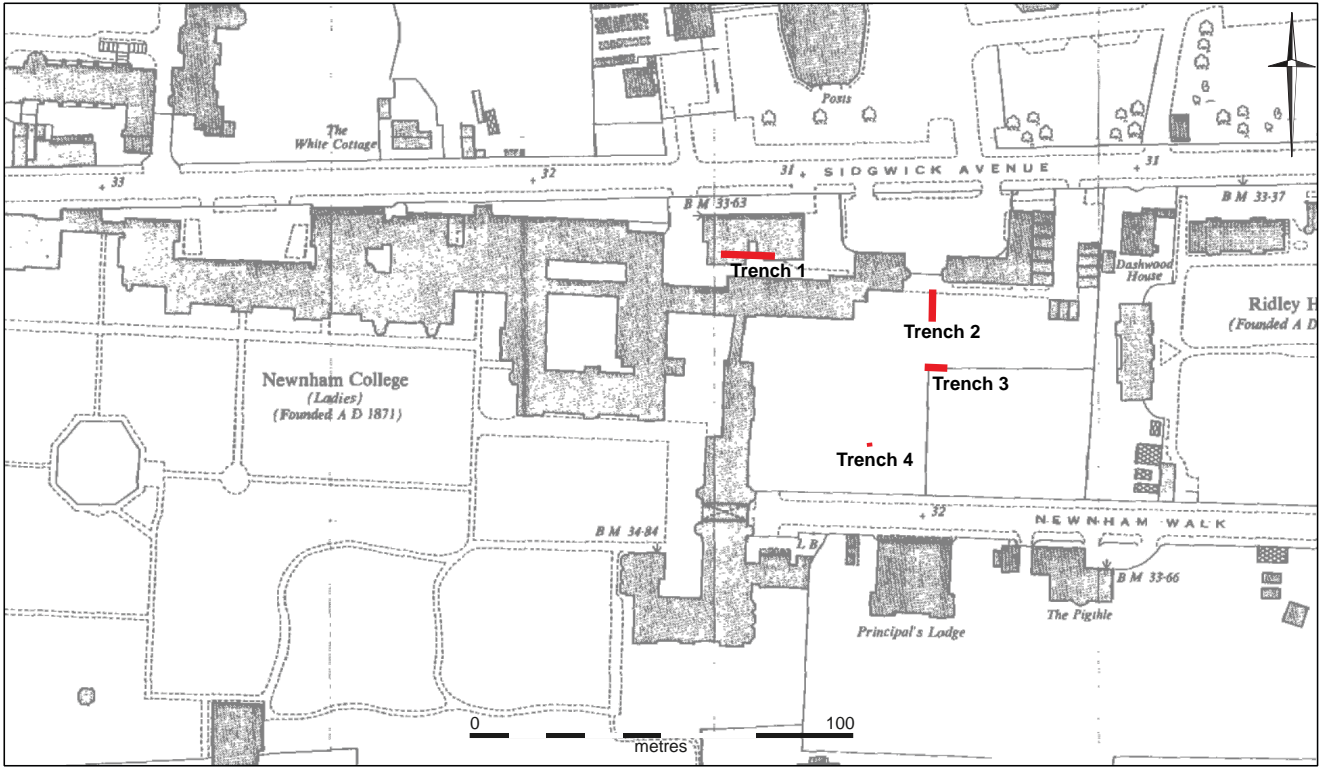


Newnham 1888



Newnham 1927

Figure 3. Historic map sequence



Newnham 1967

Figure 4. Historic map sequence



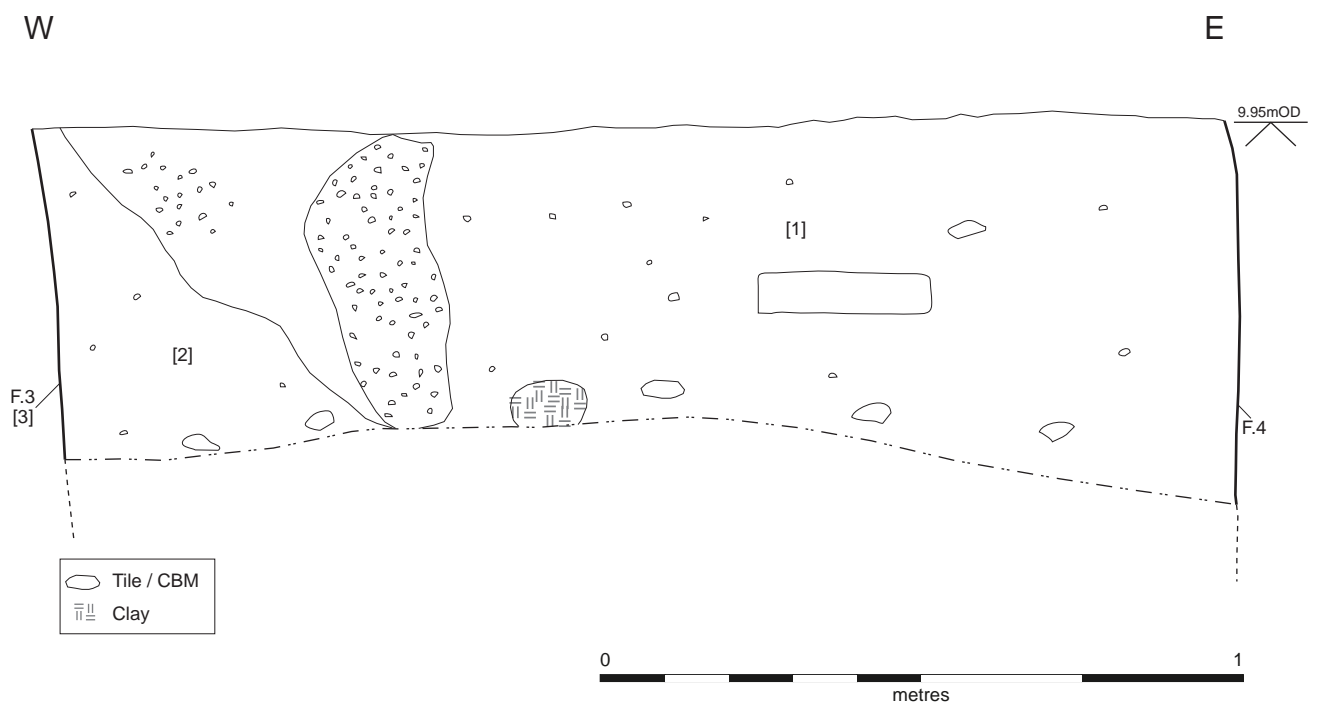
Plate 1. Perforated concrete slab F.01 in Trench 1 (looking South)



Plate 2. Perforated concrete slab F.05 in Trench 1 (looking South)



Plate 3. Section into F.03 showing brick built octagonal feature F.04 within Trench 1
Trench 1 (looking South)



Section of F.03 abutting brick built octagonal feature F.04



Plate 4. Brick built octagonal feature F.04 in Trench 1 (looking South)



Plate 5. Machine cut section through undefined feature in Trench 1 (looking South)



Plate 6. Trench 2, the concrete underlying the tarmac (looking South)



Plate 7. Trench 3 (looking East)



Plate 8. Trench 4 with F.06 and F.07 along the trench edge (looking North)

TRENCH DESCRIPTIONS

TRENCH 01							
General Description					Orientation		East-West
Trench contains four post medieval/modern features and one undefined feature of possible earlier archaeological origin. An average of 0.42m of made ground creates a level surface to overlie 2 concrete features 0.15m thick (features 1 &5) which overlie an average of 0.22m of demolition rubble. This in turn overlies a non-domestic non-frogged red brick built well feature and deposit (04) to the west.					Made ground (m)		0.42m
					Avg. Total Lower Deposits Depth (m)		greater than 1.60m
					Width (m)		2.00
					Length (m)		14.00
Description of made ground					Depth (m)	Comments	
Breedon Gravel (golden amber decorative self binding limestone)					0.16	Modern	
dark pinky brown sand and chipped gravel					0.26	Modern	
Geotextile matting						Modern	
Feature No.	Feature Type	Context No.	Cut/Fill/Layer	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Selected Artefacts	Comments
1	Structure			unknown	0.15	none	Concrete structure
2	Pit?	6	fill			none	shallow (truncated?) pit
		7	cut		0.04		
3	Pit?	1	fill		0.60	br, mr, tl, bt	Pit cut for the construction of F.04?
		2	fill		0.60	pt, gl, ws, tp, bn, bt,	
		3	cut		unknown		
4	Structure			unknown	unknown	none	non frogged, red brick octagonal structure
5	Structure			3.05	0.15	none	concrete structure
n/a		4	fill	unknownm	greater than 1.60	bn	possible ditch or pit

TRENCH 02		
General Description	Orientation	North South
Approximately 0.03m-0.05m of gravel overlying tarmac, which in turn overlies concrete. Bore Hole 02 approximately 1m adjacent to the trench, drilled through 0.30m of concrete.	Made ground (m)	Unknown
	Avg. Total Lower Deposits Depth (m)	Unknown
	Width (m)	1.85m
	Length (m)	8.00

TRENCH 03		
General Description	Orientation	East West
Topsoil 0.20m thick overlies made subsoil 0.30m thick. In the west end of the sequence, the subsoil overlies 0.50m demolition rubble. In the east, the subsoil overlies 0.20m of mixed limestone rubble and soil that in turn overlies 0.20m of organic soil. In the west, demolition rubble comprising plastic shopping bags and squared timber is seen to backfill a feature cut into natural.	Top Soil	0.20m
	Avg. Total Lower Deposits Depth (m)	0.90m
	Width (m)	1.85m
	Length (m)	4.00

TRENCH 04		
General Description	Orientation	East West
Topsoil averaging 0.22m thick overlies an average of 0.13m made ground comprising crushed brick and limestone with frequent pebbles and gravel. This in turn overlies an old, firm, mid brown-grey top soil 0.40m thick that in turn overlies 0.45m of very firm light brown-grey silty sand sub-soil.	Top Soil	0.20
	Avg. Total Lower Deposits Depth (m)	0.95
	Width (m)	1.85
	Length (m)	3.00

TESTPIT MONITORING DESCRIPTIONS

TEST PIT	SOIL TYPE	NATURAL	DEPTH	COMMENTS
1	Made ground	Not reached: precluded by concrete	1m	
2	Made ground	Gravel	1.25m	foundations sit on natural gravels; borehole 01 approx 10m SE reached natural gravels at 1.40m
3	Top soil	Not reached: precluded by brick structure	0.20m	
4	Made ground	Not reached: precluded by concrete, probably basement roof	0.8m	
5	Top soil, sub soil	Not reached	1m	Geotechnical soak-away slot in close proximity reached natural gravels at 1.50m

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OASIS ID: cambridg3-225037

Project details

Project name	Newnham Collge: An Archaeological Evaluation for the Replacement of the Strachey and Fawcett buildings
Short description of the project	Trial trench based archaeological evaluation and monitoring of geotechnical test pits was undertaken by the Cambridge Archaeological Unit (CAU) at Newnham College located off Sidgwick Avenue, adjacent to the Strachey and Fawcett buildings, (TL 4410 5770) in August 2015.
Project dates	Start: 24-08-2015 End: 26-08-2015
Previous/future work	Yes / Not known
Any associated project reference codes	ECB4528 - HER event no.
Any associated project reference codes	NCP15 - Sitecode
Type of project	Field evaluation
Current Land use	Residential 2 - Institutional and communal accommodation
Monument type	WELL Post Medieval
Significant Finds	GLASS Post Medieval
Significant Finds	CERAMICS Post Medieval
Methods & techniques	""Augering"", ""Metal Detectors"", ""Targeted Trenches"", ""Test Pits""
Development type	Urban residential (e.g. flats, houses, etc.)
Prompt	Planning condition
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 Newnham College

Postcode	CB3 9DF
Study area	0.26 Hectares
Site coordinates	TL 5769 4408 52.072151217924 0.301070832363 52 04 19 N 000 18 03 E Point
Lat/Long Datum (other)	520420N 0001804E
Height OD / Depth	Min: 9m Max: 10m

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	Benjamin Neil
Type of sponsor/funding body	Landowner
Name of sponsor/funding body	Newnham College

Project archives

Physical Archive recipient	Cambridgeshire County Archaeology Store
Physical Archive ID	NCP15
Physical Contents	"Animal Bones","Ceramics","Glass","Worked stone/lithics"
Digital Archive recipient	Cambridgeshire County Archaeology Store
Digital Archive ID	NCP15
Digital Contents	"Animal Bones","Ceramics","Glass","Worked stone/lithics"
Digital Media available	"GIS","Images raster / digital photography","Spreadsheets","Survey","Text"
Paper Archive recipient	Cambridgeshire County Archaeology Store
Paper Archive ID	NCP15
Paper Contents	"Animal Bones","Ceramics","Glass","Worked stone/lithics"
Paper Media available	"Context sheet","Drawing","Plan","Survey "

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