

# Gretton School, Girton, Cambridge

An Archaeological Evaluation



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**GRETTON SCHOOL  
Girton, Cambridge.**

**An Archaeological Evaluation**

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University of Cambridge

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<i>Summary</i>	<b>i</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1</b>
Location, Topography and Geology	1
Archaeological Background	1
Methodology	2
<b>RESULTS</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>DISCUSSION</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>STATEMENT OF POTENTIAL</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>5</b>

## *Summary*

*A trial trench based archaeological evaluation was undertaken by Cambridge Archaeological Unit (CAU) at Gretton School on the northern edge of Girton village off Manor Farm Road (TL 4241 6275) in September 2015. The only archaeological features recorded by the trial trenching comprise a shallow NW-SE ditch and a possible ditch terminus; the former is likely to be mid- to late Bronze Age in origin.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

A trial trench based archaeological evaluation was undertaken by Cambridge Archaeological Unit (CAU) at Gretton School on the northern edge of Girton village off Manor Farm Road (TL 4241 6275) in September 2015. The proposed development area (PDA) covers 0.09ha; within which, a single 25m by 2m trench was located in order to target the site of a single multi-use games area.

The project was undertaken in order to address a condition placed upon planning consent for the construction of the single multi-use games area. Work was carried out in accordance with a project design specification (Beadsmoore 2015) produced by the CAU in response to a brief issued by Gemma Stewart of the Historic Environment Team, Cambridgeshire County Council. The project archive will be deposited in the Cambridgeshire Archaeology store.

The work was commissioned by Gretton School.

### **Location, Topography and Geology**

The proposed development area (PDA) is located on the northern edge of Girton, off Manor Farm Road, centred at National Grid Reference TL 4241 6275. The site is flat, grassed and located towards the western end of Gretton School's open area playing field. The PDA is at an average of c. 14.6m AOD, whilst the underlying geology is Gault formation.

### **Archaeological Background**

The PDA lies within an area of high archaeological potential and whilst no material culture has been reported from the site itself and no prior archaeological investigations have taken place within its boundaries, there are sites and spot finds in a 1km vicinity dating from early prehistory to the present day.

#### *Early prehistory*

A handaxe dating to the Palaeolithic period (c. 600,000 years ago) was recovered from Searles Pit approximately 0.25 miles to the south of the PDA (Stewart, 2015).

#### *Later prehistory*

Isolated stray finds, such as a polished Neolithic axe 0.40 miles to the north east of the PDA are recorded in the surrounding area indicating a Mesolithic and Neolithic presence. Bronze Age evidence is characterised by unstratified spot finds that include a polished axe head and the remains of a settlement located at the N.I.A.B. Research Centre, Park Farm (approximately 0.6 miles east of the PDA); this is distinguished by a four post structure and an eighteen post sub-circular structure, indicative of small scale or seasonal flux occupation, (Murrell, 2008).

In the wider area, there is significant evidence for Bronze Age occupation approximately 1 mile south of the PDA at the North West Cambridge development

site, where three distinct areas of open settlement and enclosures were exposed, (Evans, C., *et al* 2013).

Evidence for the Iron Age is highlighted by spot finds of pottery and animal bone to the south of the PDA and a Middle Iron Age curvilinear ditch at Park Farm indicating agricultural activity, (Murrell, 2008). Further outside the PDA, a defensive Late Iron Age Ring Fort approximately 2 miles to the south east at Arbury, (Evans & Knight 2008) provides evidence for occupation during the middle to later Bronze Age.

#### *Romano-British*

Isolated Roman pottery scatters have been recorded in the vicinity near St. Andrews Church and at Home Field. Residual sherds of 2<sup>nd</sup> -4th century Greyware pottery were also collected from the field surface and from within a post-medieval furrow at Park Farm, (Murrell, 2008). Dumped midden deposits and ditch features provide evidence for Romano-British occupation at the North West Cambridge Development site, which also projects a Roman route way heading north towards Girton (Evans, C., *et al* 2013).

#### *Medieval*

Late Saxon pottery is evident within the vicinity from two test pits along Girton High Street (Blinkhorn, 2009, Lewis, 2010). Mid Saxon settlement features are also in evidence, including re-cut ditches south of the PDA representing former field or enclosure boundaries, (Murray, 2006). Medieval ridge and furrow earthworks are recorded to the west and a medieval trackway and enclosures are visible as crop marks to the north-east (Stewart, 2015). Anglo-Saxon cemeteries at Girton College (approximately 1.1 miles south of the PDA) and Oakington (approximately 1.3 miles to the north west of the PDA) provide further evidence for a significant presence during the medieval period.

### **Methodology**

A single 25m trench was located in the centre of the PDA (Figure 1). It was excavated using a rubber tracked 360° excavator fitted with a toothless bucket and operating under direct archaeological supervision at all times. Trenches were located using an advanced Global Positioning System (GPS) with Ordnance Datum (OD) heights obtained. Potential archaeological features were sample excavated by hand with all archaeological finds retained. Spoil was metal-detected for finds. A 90 litre bucket sampling strategy of both the topsoil and subsoil spoil was carried out along the length of the trench. 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

The trial trench revealed a soil sequence, which was consistent across the PDA and comprised turf and topsoil 0.22–0.36m thick overlying very firm sandy silt subsoil 0.33–0.38m thick. The underlying natural geology comprised a mottled/mixed deposit of light orangey brown/ blue grey sandy clay with occasional small stones.

The only definite archaeological feature encountered was a NW-SE orientated ditch (**F.01**) in the northern end of the trench (see Figure 2). The ditch measured 0.90m wide by 0.38m in depth (see Figure 3 and Plate 01). A single abraded pottery sherd was recovered from its primary deposit (**01**). Weighing 6g and approximately 7mm diameter, it has been identified as mid to late Bronze Age in origin, (Mark Knight, 2015 pers. comm, 02 September). A proximal humerus from a cow was found in the upper fill (**02**). The bone was recovered in a fragmented state and was assessed as having been chopped mid-shaft with butchery marks around the humeral head, consistent with gross disarticulation from the glenoid cavity of the scapula, (Vida Radjkovaca, 2015 pers.comm, 04 September).

A possible ditch terminus (**F.02**) was recorded 0.70m south of F.01, measuring 0.84m wide and 0.18m in depth. Its single deposit (**03**) yielded no cultural material. The fill was pale and the edge poorly defined suggesting the feature could also be a tree throw.

90 litre bucket sampling of the topsoil and subsoil yielded a multi phased characterisation of material culture from a modern Lego brick to Roman Greyware, all almost exclusively from the topsoil.

## DISCUSSION

The only identifiable archaeological feature recorded within the evaluation trench comprised a NW-SE ditch, likely to form part of a Bronze Age enclosure or field system. Activity from this period has been recorded in the surrounding area, notably at the N.I.A.B. Research Centre to the east, and the North West Cambridge Development site to the south; the latter's extensive excavations exposed distinct areas of open settlement and enclosures. It is worthwhile noting that both these Bronze Age sites are located on river gravel terraces, being easier to work than the Gault clay soils seen within the PDA, which may have been too heavy for traditional tools of the time, (Murrell, 2008). This can suggest that the vicinity of the PDA was marginal in terms of agriculture and might only have seen seasonal occupation during this period.

Roman pottery from the bucket sampling is not indicative of a settlement but is possible evidence of agricultural or transitory activity via the projected north-south Roman route way in the vicinity of the PDA.

## **STATEMENT OF POTENTIAL**

The results of the trial trench evaluation suggest that the archaeological potential of the site is low. Given the presence of a single ditch and lack of any other positively identified archaeological features, it appears likely that prior to its current function the PDA has only ever been utilised periodically.

## **Acknowledgements**

The work was commissioned by Gretton School and the CAU are grateful for the cooperation of the school's buildings manager and Freeland Rees Roberts Architects. Mechanical excavation was carried out by Lattenbury Services. The project was managed by Emma Beadsmoore and monitored by Gemma Stewart of the Cambridgeshire Historic Environment Team. The author was assisted on site by Dan Britton and the site survey was undertaken by Johnathan Moller. The report graphics are the work of Bryan Crossan.



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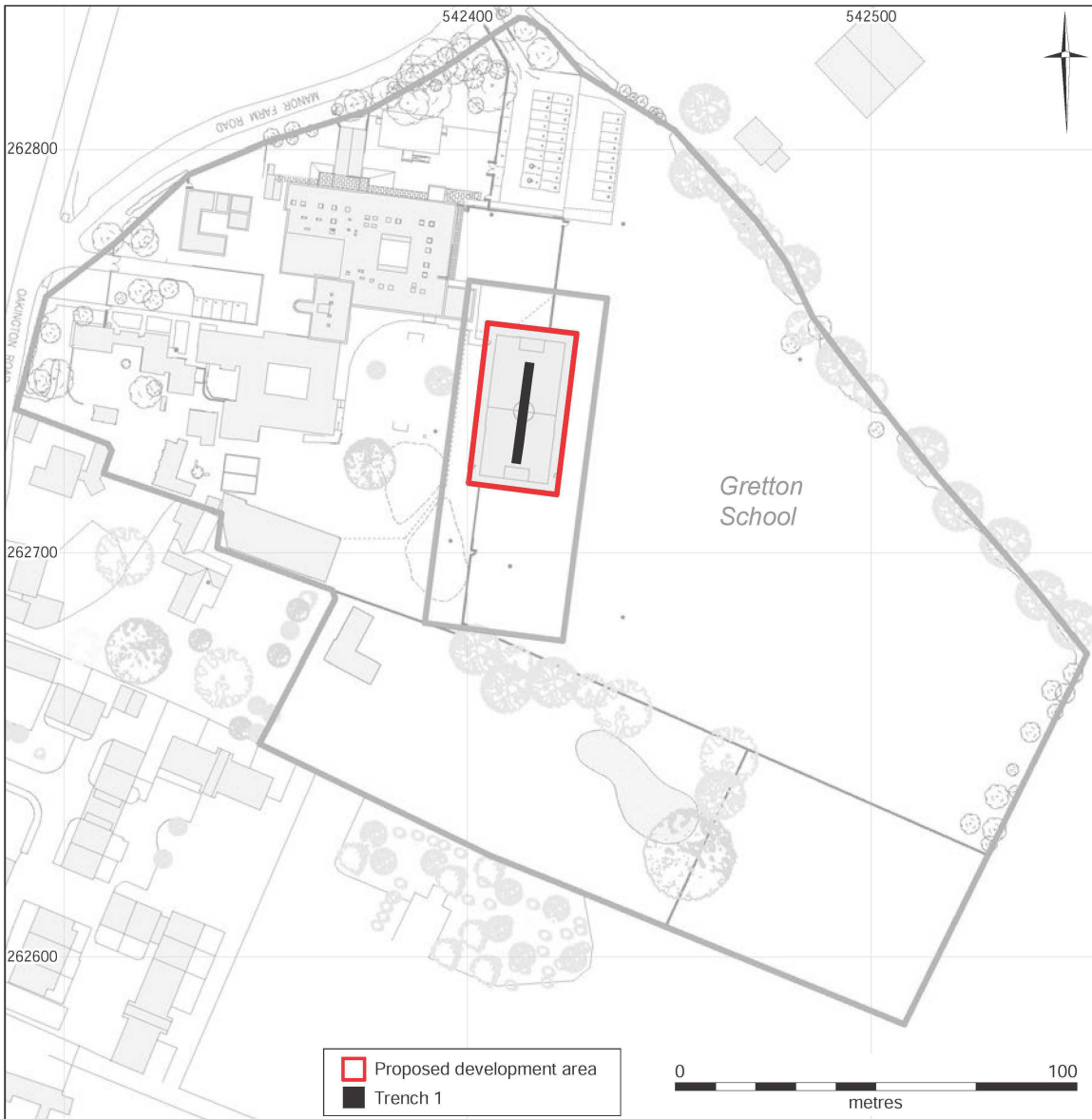
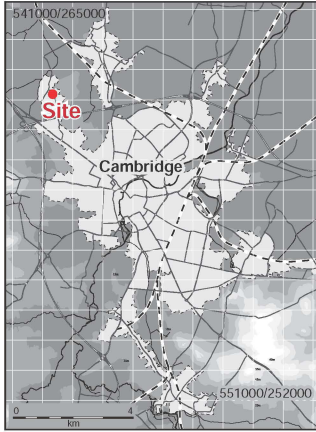
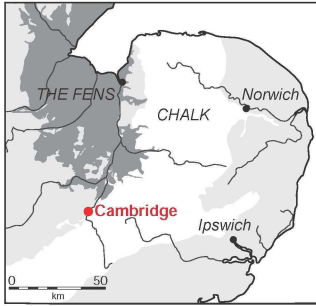


Figure 1. Location map

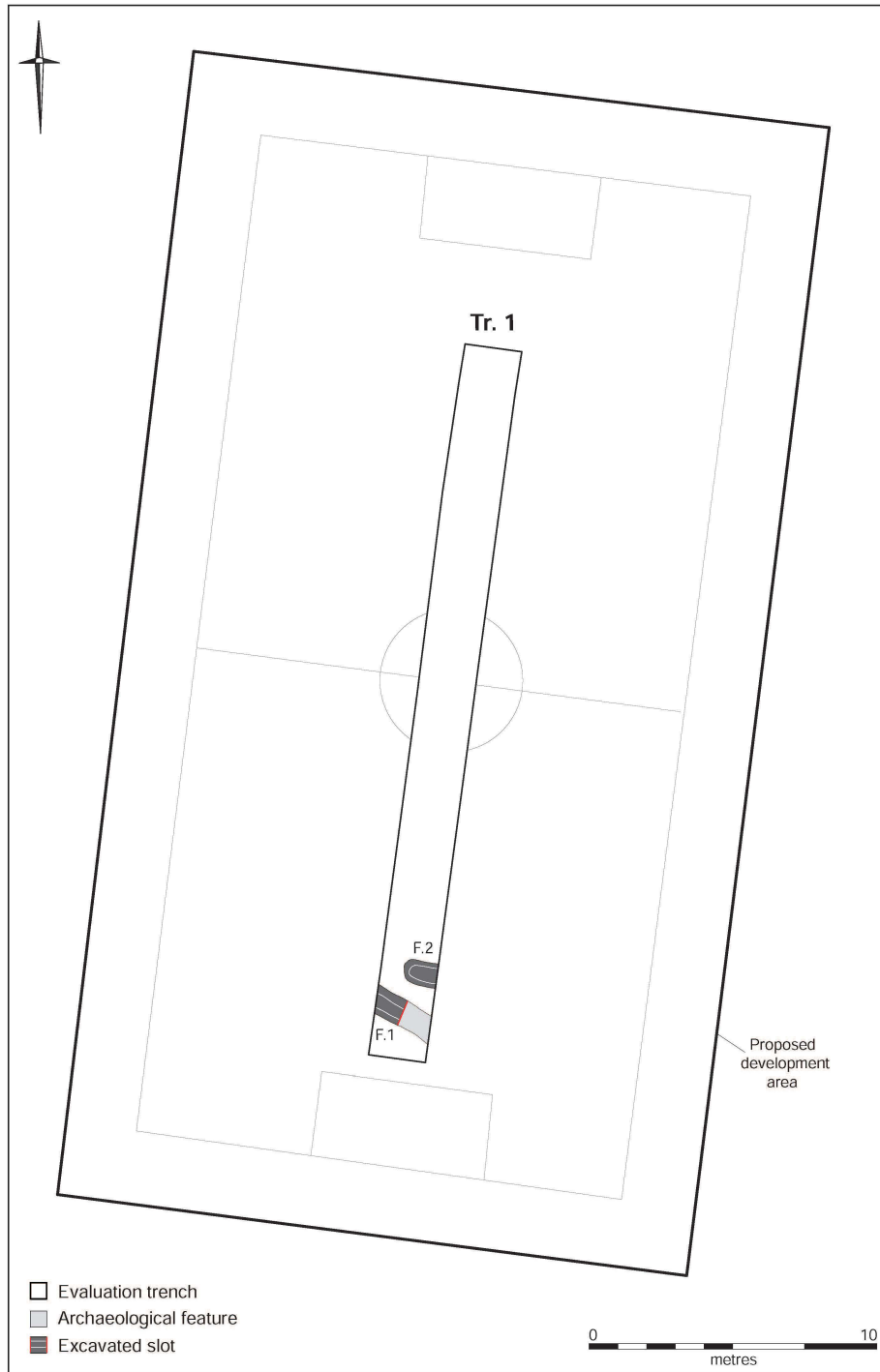


Figure 2. Trench plan

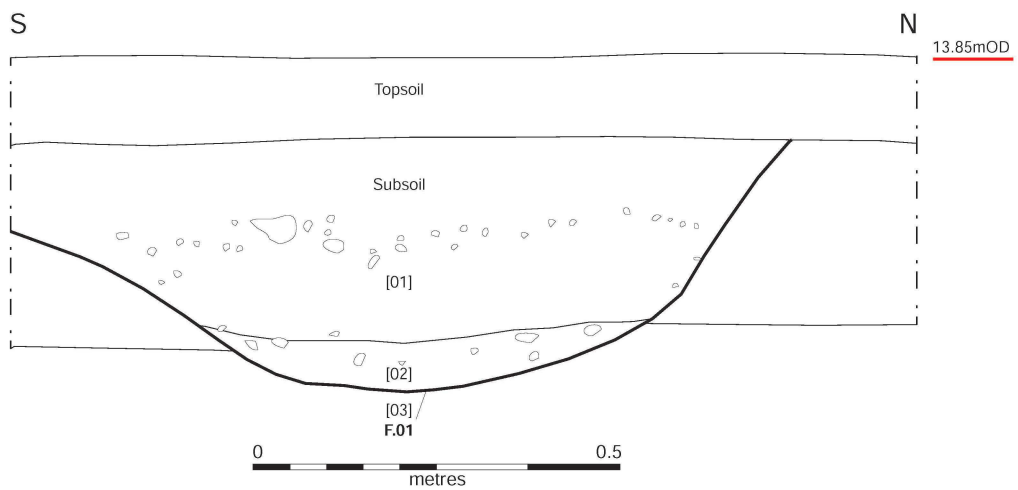


Figure 3. Section of F.01

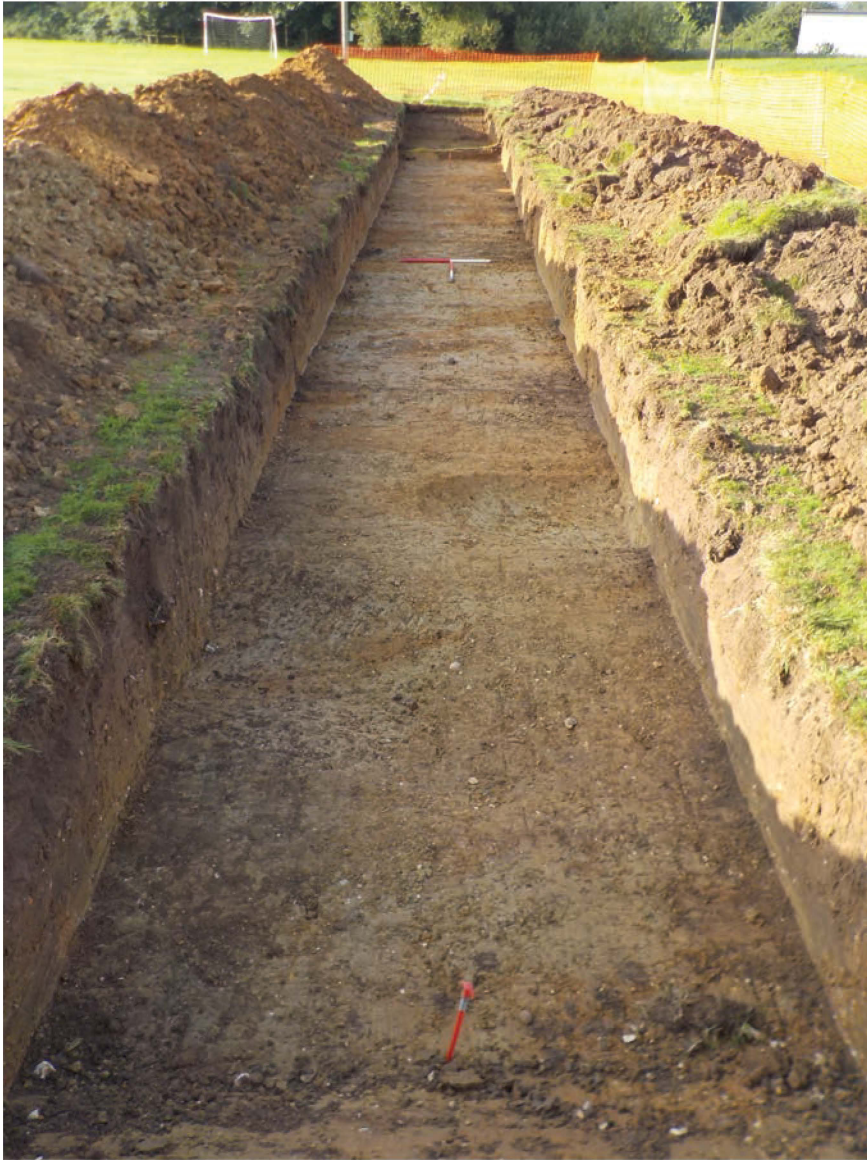


Figure 3. Photographs of Trench 1 looking North (left) and Feature 1 looking East (right)

## Trench descriptions

Trench 01											
General Description							Orientation			North South	
Trench contains a NE-SW orientated ditch and a possible E-W ditch terminus. A firm sandy silt mid grey topsoil overlies a firm/compact mid browny-grey sandy silt sub-soil, which in-turn overlies a compact, mottled mid orangey-brown sandy clay. Deposit interfaces are diffuse.							Avg. Topsoil Depth (m)			0.27m	
							Avg. Total Lower Deposits Depth (m)			0.35	
							Width (m)			1.80	
							Length (m)			25.00	
Feature No.	Feature Type	Context No.	Type	Shape	Sides	Base	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Selected Artefacts	Comments
1	Linear ditch	1	F						Grey brown sand silt	BONE (Cattle: proximal humerus, butchered)	NW-SE running ditch
		2	F						Grey orange brown sand silt clay	POT (abraded/rolled) mid to late Bronze Age.	
		3	C	Linear	Gradual	Concave	0.90	0.38			
2	Ditch?	4	F						Blue brown grey silt sand clay	NONE	Possible shallow ditch terminus or a tree throw.
		5	C	Linear	Gradual	Concave	0.84	0.18			

Bucket Sampling				
Sample No.	size (ltr)	Layer	Location	Artefact Characterisation
1	15	sub-soil	1m north	No finds
2	15	sub-soil	4m north	No finds
3	15	sub-soil	7m north	Tile
4	15	sub-soil	17m north	No finds
5	15	sub-soil	18m north	No finds
6	15	sub-soil	24m north	Tile, fragment of shale coal
7	15	Top-soil	0.5m south	Tile, red Lego brick
8	15	Top-soil	4m south	Tile, fragment of shale coal
9	15	Top-soil	8m south	Small fragment of melted blue glass, two sherds of Roman coarse fabric greyware (2nd-4th century AD)
10	15	Top-soil	12m south	One small sherd of Roman oxidised coarse fabric greyware (2nd-4th century AD)
11	15	Top-soil	17m south	Small CBM fragment
12	15	Top-soil	22m south	No finds
<b>Topsoil</b>	Dark grey silt sand			
<b>Subsoil</b>	Brown grey sand silt			

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### Project details

Project name	Gretton School, Girton, Cambridge. An Archaeological Evaluatio
Short description of the project	A trial trench based archaeological evaluation was undertaken by Cambridge Archaeological Unit (CAU) at Gretton School on the northern edge of Girton village off Manor Farm Road (TL 4241 6275) in September 2015. The only archaeological features recorded by the trial trenching comprise a shallow NW-SE ditch and a possible ditch terminus; the former is likely to be mid- to late Bronze Age in origin.
Project dates	Start: 01-09-2015 End: 02-09-2015
Previous/future work	No / No
Any associated project reference codes	ECB4529 - HER event no.
Any associated project reference codes	GTS15 - Sitecode
Type of project	Field evaluation
Current Land use	Other 14 - Recreational usage
Monument type	DITCH Middle Bronze Age
Significant Finds	POTTERY Middle Bronze Age
Methods & techniques	""Metal Detectors"" , ""Targeted Trenches""
Development type	Small-scale (e.g. single house, etc.)
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 Gretton School
Postcode	CB3 0RX
Study area	0.09 Hectares

Site coordinates TL 6274 4239 52.055502868041 0.373889402391 52 03 19 N 000 22 26 E Point  
 Lat/Long Datum 520320N 0002226E  
 (other)  
 Height OD / Min: 13.87m Max: 14.28m  
 Depth

### 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 Developer  
 Name of sponsor/funding body Gretton School

### Project archives

Physical Archive recipient Cambridgeshire County Archaeology Store  
 Physical Archive ID GTS15  
 Physical Contents "Animal Bones","Ceramics","Glass","Worked stone/lithics","other"  
 Digital Archive recipient Cambridgeshire County Archaeology Store  
 Digital Archive ID GTS15  
 Digital Contents "Animal Bones","Ceramics","Glass","Worked stone/lithics","other"  
 Digital Media available "GIS","Images raster / digital photography","Survey","Text"  
 Paper Archive recipient Cambridgeshire County Archaeology Store  
 Paper Archive ID GTS15  
 Paper Contents "Animal Bones","Ceramics","Glass","Worked stone/lithics","other"  
 Paper Media available "Drawing","Report","Section","Survey "

### Project bibliography 1

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