

Archaeological Investigation at the Chemistry for Health Centre, University of Cambridge



Matt Wood

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Illustrations by Jane Matthews

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SUMMARY

Trenching evaluation on the site of a new basemented building on Union Road, Cambridge revealed evidence of very low levels of activity from at least the medieval period onwards. Though there are four small features recorded as possible earlier pits, they are most likely natural silt patches or tree throws and contained no finds. Medieval agricultural activity in this area, as it becomes part of the Cambridge East Fields, is signified by a furrow running East-West across site, which contained a sherd of late medieval green glazed pottery. This was followed by a period of intensive post medieval activity. Following enclosure in 1807, this part of Cambridge was rapidly built up. The 1888 OS map shows a row of houses occupying the street frontage of the site, all of which were demolished by the mid-1970s.

INTRODUCTION

The site comprises the proposed construction of a new basemented building (c.800 square meters) for the Chemistry for Health Centre immediately beside the Unilever Centre at the Department of Chemistry on Union Road, Cambridge. The initial brief was to machine strip deposits to the top of the gravels over the whole area. This was revised after initial machining of the area to a depth of 900mm (reaching the top of medieval agricultural soils) uncovered no visible archaeology or material culture. It was then agreed with the County Archaeologist and the client that 3 trenches (c.66 square meters) would sufficiently evaluate the site; these were carried out by the Cambridge Archaeological Unit (CAU) on behalf of the University of Cambridge on the 7th-8th March 2016. The site lies on river terrace gravels on the south side of Cambridge (TL454576) at approximately 18m OD.

Archaeological and Historical background

The Archaeological background of the wider area has been recently reviewed in a desk-top study (Brittain 2013). The only finding of immediate relevance is that trial trenching occurred in 1999 on the Unilever Centre plot, immediately west of the current development. This uncovered a substantial ditch and comparatively minor gully with evidence of Roman activity (Dickens 1999).

During the English Civil War, Cambridge was the headquarters of the Parliamentary Eastern Association. In 1643 the city was fortified, the castle rebuilt and a fort complete with bank and ditch constructed (MCB17288). The defensive works ran parallel to Fen Causeway and Lensfield Road, across Parker's Piece, Parkside, Emmanuel Road, Four Lamps and Victoria Avenue.

Terraced housing, first depicted on Bakers' map of 1830, existed along the 'frontage' of Union Road. The first edition O.S. map of 1888 shows buildings and associated gardens/backlots within the carpark area. Dating to the early 19th century development of 'Newtown', the houses existed until the 1950s-70's when they were gradually demolished to build the current car park.

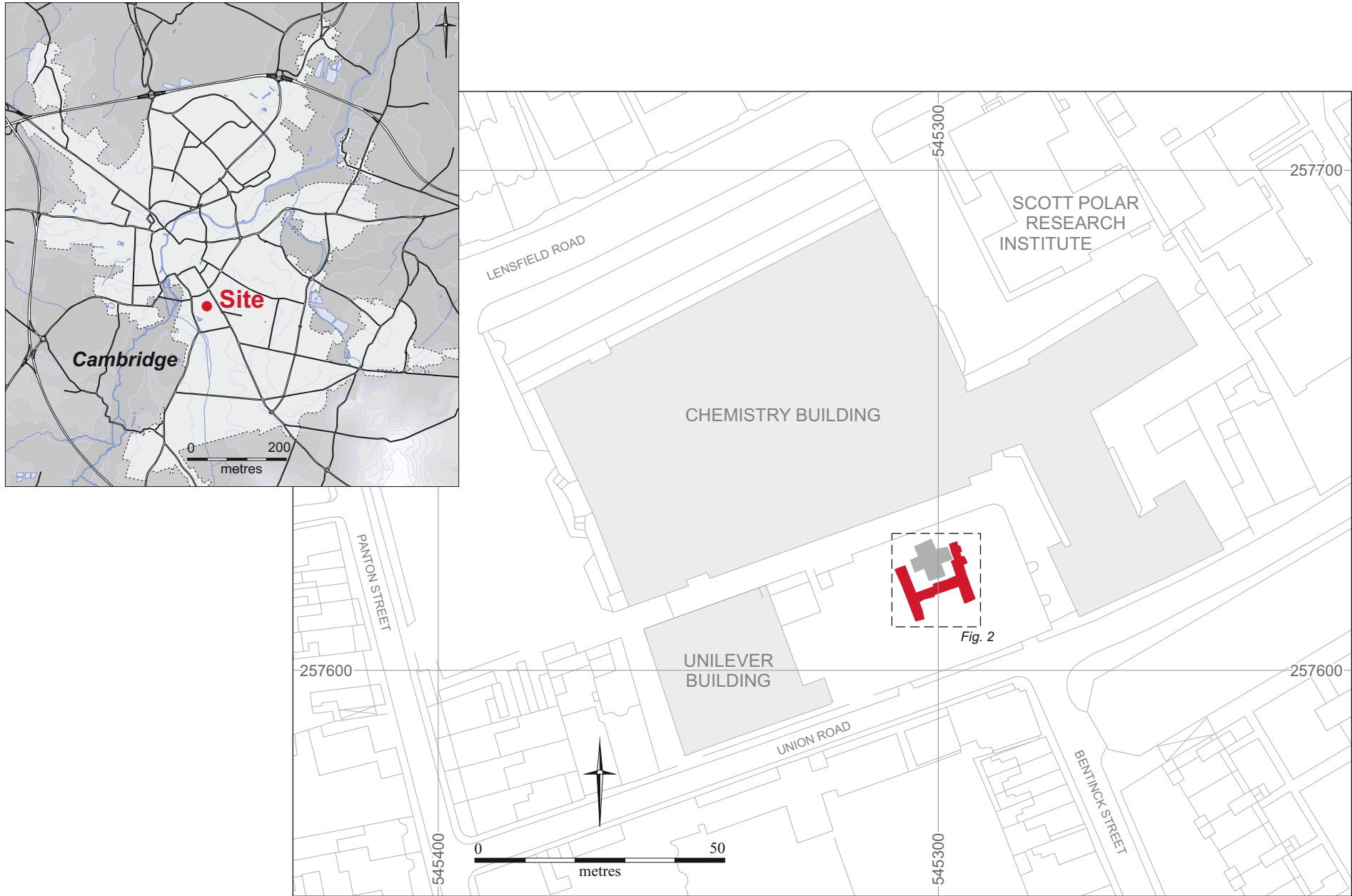


Figure 1. Location plan

Methodology

Mechanical excavation of the area was carried out using a 360° tracked excavator with a 1.5m wide toothless trenching bucket, supplied by the sub-contractor, Kier, and operated by a suitably experienced driver, under the direction of an experienced archaeologist. The area of the trenches was reduced to the top of the gravels by machine, prior to excavation by hand. Features and layers were recorded using the CAU modified Museum of London Archaeology Service system (Spence 1994). Sections were drawn at a scale of 1:10, features and trenches were digitally planned and located using a GPS staff. None of the archaeological features encountered warranted environmental sampling.

All work was carried out in strict accordance with statutory Health and Safety legislation, the recommendations of FAME (Allen & Holt 2010) and in accordance with a site specific risk assessment (Evans 2016) and the general CAU Health and Safety policy. The CAU site code was CHM16.

RESULTS

The investigation identified four possible early features (F.2, F.4-6), though none contained any finds and their nature suggests they may be natural silt patches or tree throws rather than archaeological features, as well as one furrow (F.3), containing a single sherd of late medieval pottery (14th-15th century) weighing 4g. The furrow was either dug into or possibly covered by a 200mm thick layer of medieval agricultural soil (F.1) covering much of the area. This was in turn covered by a 550mm thick layer of intercutting post medieval features and deposits (F.7), from which a copper alloy thimble and a stamped fragment of clay pipe stem (manufactured by Samuel Wilkinson *c.* 1762-87) were recovered. This was all capped by 400mm thick of modern tarmac and build up deposits (F.8) of the carpark itself.

CONCLUSION

The evaluation of the site revealed no archaeology of importance. Although early activity is known from the area, there is no evidence within the site of any significant archaeology. There is no evidence of a continuation of the Roman activity identified at the Unilever Centre or any trace of the Civil War defences.

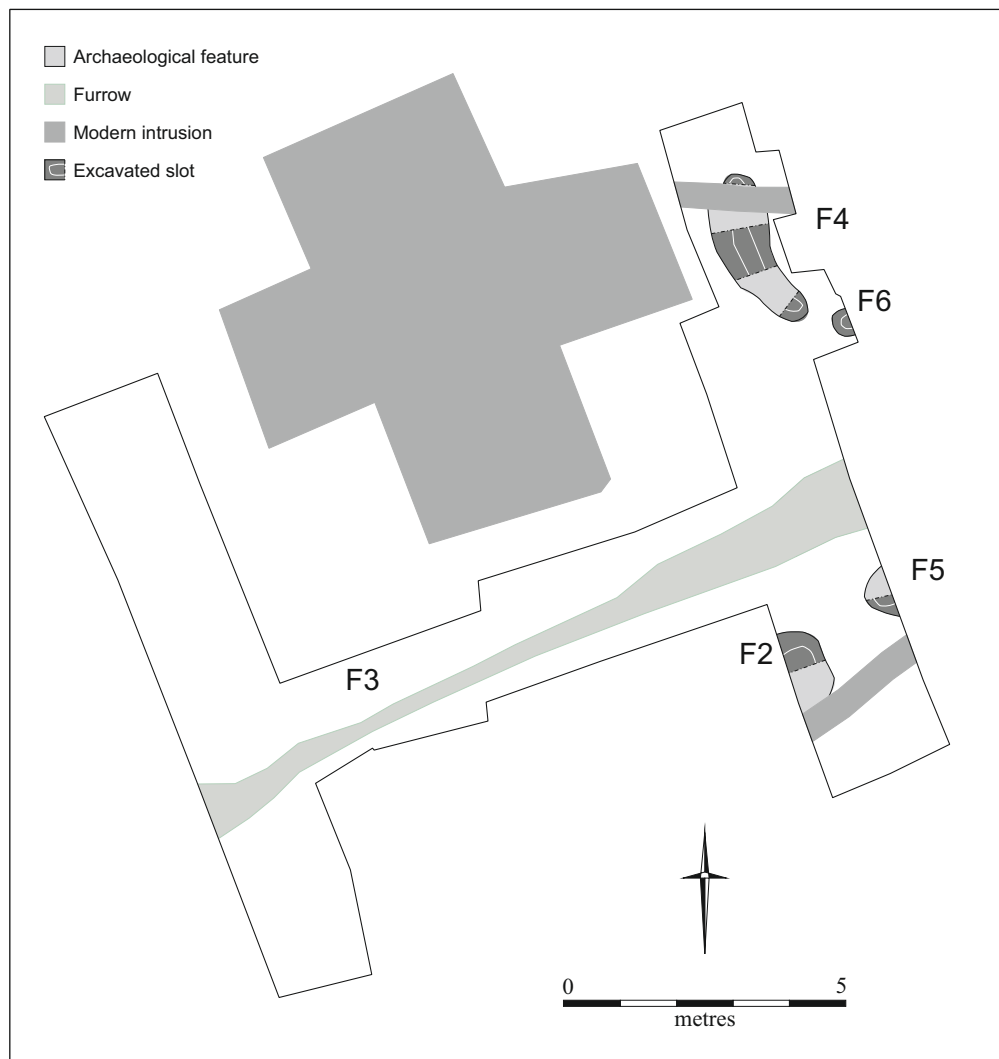


Figure 2. Site plan



Figure 3. Eastern Trench, looking north

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The work was commissioned by Chris Garner on behalf of the University of Cambridge. We are grateful for the on-site assistance of the sub-contractor Kier. The fieldwork was monitored by Kasia Gdaniec, Senior Archaeologist with the Cambridgeshire County Council. Chris Evans was the Project Manager for the Cambridge Archaeological Unit, and the excavation was undertaken by the author. The site was surveyed by Jonathan Moller and the report graphics were produced by Jane Matthews.

REFERENCES

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OASIS FORM

OASIS ID: cambridg3-247021

Project dates	07-03-2016 to 08-03-2016
Project reference code	CHM16 - Sitecode
Type of project	Field evaluation
Current Land use	Other 3 - Built over
Monument type	FURROW Medieval
Significant Finds	POTTERY Medieval
Methods & techniques	"Targeted Trenches"
Development type	Urban commercial (e.g. offices, shops, banks, etc.)
Prompt	Direction from Local Planning Authority - PPG16
Position in the planning process	After full determination (eg. As a condition)

Project location:	England, CAMBRIDGESHIRE, CAMBRIDGE, Chemistry for Health Centre, CB2 1EW
Study area	800 Square metres
Site coordinates	TL 454 576 52.197005768266 0.127651744593 52 11 49 N 000 07 39 E Point
Height OD / Depth	Min: 18m Max: 18m

Project creators	
Name of Organisation	Cambridge Archaeological Unit
Project brief originator	City/Nat. Park/District/Borough archaeologist
Project design manager	Christopher Evans
Project supervisor	Matthew Wood
Type of sponsor/funding body	Developer
Name of sponsor/funding body	University of Cambridge

Project archives	
Archive ID	CHM16
Archive recipient	Cambridge Archaeological Unit
Physical Contents	"Ceramics"
Digital Contents	"none"
Digital Media available	"Images raster / digital photography","Text"
Paper Contents	"none"
Paper Media available	"Context sheet","Photograph","Plan","Section"

Entered by Marcus Brittain (mb654@cam.ac.uk) on 31 March 2016