

119 Ely Road, Littleport, Cambridgeshire

An Archaeological Evaluation



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**119 Ely Road, Littleport, Cambridgeshire:
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**With contributions from
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An archaeological evaluation was undertaken by a team from Cambridge Archaeological Unit on behalf of TJD Building Contractors on a site at 119 Ely Road, Littleport, Cambridgeshire, centred on TL 5641 8560. The results from this evaluation revealed no archaeology or artefacts from the prehistoric or later periods, however, three pits dating to the Medieval and Post-Medieval Periods were sample and recorded.

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Figure 1. Location map

Introduction

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken at 119 Ely Road, Littleport, Cambridgeshire (TL 5641 8560), on a proposed development site on behalf of TJD Building Contractors. The area was set back from the main road, located on the edge of the island, on which Littleport is located. Two trenches were excavated to assess the nature and survival of archaeological deposits providing a 5% sample of the total development area.

Methodology

The trenches were stripped of topsoil with a 360° tracked excavator and toothless ditching bucket under the careful supervisions of an experienced archaeologist. The unit modified version of MoLAS recording system was used; features were planned at 1:50, with sections drawn at 1:10. Pits were either half-sectioned or box sectioned to determine distinct stratigraphic episodes. Archaeological features were assigned a unique number (e.g. F.001; bolded upon introduction within the text) and each stratigraphically distinct episode (e.g. a cut, a fill) was recorded with a unique context number (e.g. [001]). The site was surveyed into the Ordnance Survey Grid and Ordnance Datum by means of a RTK GPS unit.

Topography, Geology and Archaeological Background

The site is located on the eastern periphery of the island, within 0.5km of the Fen Edge, (towards the east), the underlying geology consists of glacial sand and gravel over Kimmeridge Clay. The western part of the area under investigation is 18.38m OD and slopes downwards towards the east (17.09m OD).

Evidence of occupation and activity in the landscape during the Late Neolithic and Bronze Age periods on the Littleport island comprises of lithic scatters and find spots adjacent to the Fen Edge upon the higher ground. Soil and crop marks highlighting three ring-ditches could possibly represent the remains of barrows and indicate some form of settlement/occupation (Lucas, 1998). There is no evidence of Iron Age activity other than a small assemblage of pottery, (Hall, 1996).

Recent evaluation and excavations have taken place between Grange Lane (500m north) and Parson's Lane (1200m north). Here Romano-British activity is moderately represented by the presence of settlement features and field systems concentrated towards the northern area of the island, dated to 3rd-4th Century AD (Lucas, 1998). Artefacts recovered during a CCAFU evaluation included glass, pottery and box tile (Roberts 1997) providing evidence for a broad swathe of (probably) settlement related occupation, which appears to extend southwards of Grange Lane.

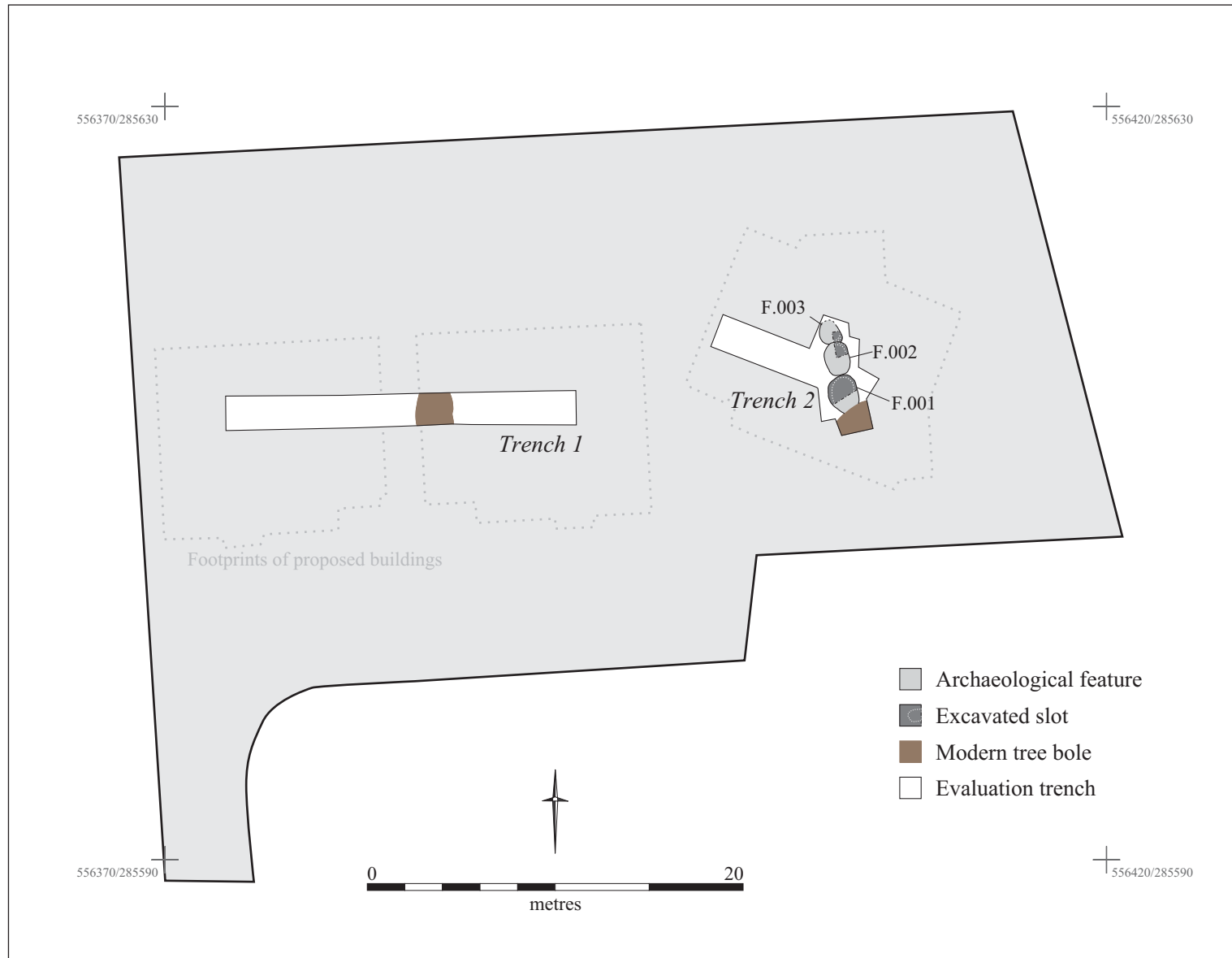


Figure 2. Plan of trenches

Activity relating to the medieval and post-medieval periods in the area was confined to scatters of pottery, probably from the process of manuring. The main focus of medieval settlement was towards the north, and the area in the vicinity of the present site primarily used for agricultural activities. More recently, a survey during the 1990's for the Defence of Britain Project provided information regarding the construction of a bombing decoy 1.2km to the east (TL 584 852). A series of pill boxes, gun emplacements and an anti-tank ditch (Osborne 2002).

Results

The overburden of topsoil consisted of sandy loam with areas of modern rubble inclusions, (concentrated around Trench 1) and multiple root systems from trees and shrubs were evident throughout. The profile and depth of the topsoil can be seen in Table 1, below. The depth generally decreased towards the south, where the area is truncated due to previous housing development. The height at the centre of Trench 1 was slightly increased due to the presence of modern material (bricks and concrete slabs). Ground water was encountered almost immediately upon excavation, which slightly hampered the excavation of the features.

	Orientation	Depth of overburden	Depth of trench
Trench 1	east	0.73m	0.76m
	centre	0.88m	0.90m
	west	0.74m	0.84m
Trench 2	west	0.68m	0.75m
	east	0.47m	0.52m

Table 1: Soil profile

Trench 1

Trench 1 was on an east-west alignment and was 18.60m in length, 1.80m wide and excavated to a depth of between 0.76m to 0.90m. There was no evidence of archaeological features or dateable artefacts recovered.

Trench 2

This trench was on a northwest-southeast alignment and 8.80m in length, and between 0.52m and 0.75m deep. The southern end of the trench was extended towards the north and south to ascertain the validity and extent of two features initially encountered. This revealed the presence of three pits in close proximity to each other.

F.001 was a shallow oval pit that was cut by a modern tree throw towards the west. It produced a single piece of pottery dated to 14th-15th century and consisted of one fill.

[001] firm to semi-friable dark grey/brown sandy silt with frequent gravel inclusions and rare to occasional medium to large patches of orange sand and moderate root system.

[002] cut 1.52m wide and 1.90m+ in length and 0.35m deep with steep/vertical sides with concave break of slope and flat base.

F.002 was a shallow oval pit that cut F.003 (another similar pit). It produced one piece of pottery, dated to 18th-19th century and one piece of animal bone and had one fill.

[003] firm to friable dark brown/grey sandy silt with occasional gravel inclusions and moderate root system.

[004] cut 1.30m wide and 1.80m in length and 0.30m deep with steep concave/straight sides with sharp concave break of slope and flat base.

F.003 was a shallow oval pit that was cut by F.002, consisted of a single fill and produced no artefacts.

[005] firm to friable mid to dark brown/grey sandy silt with occasional gravel inclusions and occasional root system.

[006] cut 1.10m wide and 1.45m+ in length and 0.33m deep with steep straight/concave sides with sharp concave break of slope and flat base.

Discussion

This investigation produced little evidence of archaeological activity, the three pits observed relating to a fairly late ephemeral medieval landscape. However, due to the small assemblage of pottery, it can be suggested that these may be residual features due to the disturbance of fairly modern trees and shrubbery. The Romano-British settlement towards the north appears not to reach within the vicinity of this area.

Acknowledgements

The evaluation was organised by Tim Drayton, Project Manager of TJD Building Contractors. The archaeology was excavated and interpreted by Emma Rees and Jacqui Hutton and the trenches were surveyed by Jane Matthews. The machine excavation was conducted with great care by Ron from Newmarket Plant Hire. Alison Dickens managed the Project, Jason Hawkes sorted and catalogued the finds and Jane Matthews assisted with the illustrations.

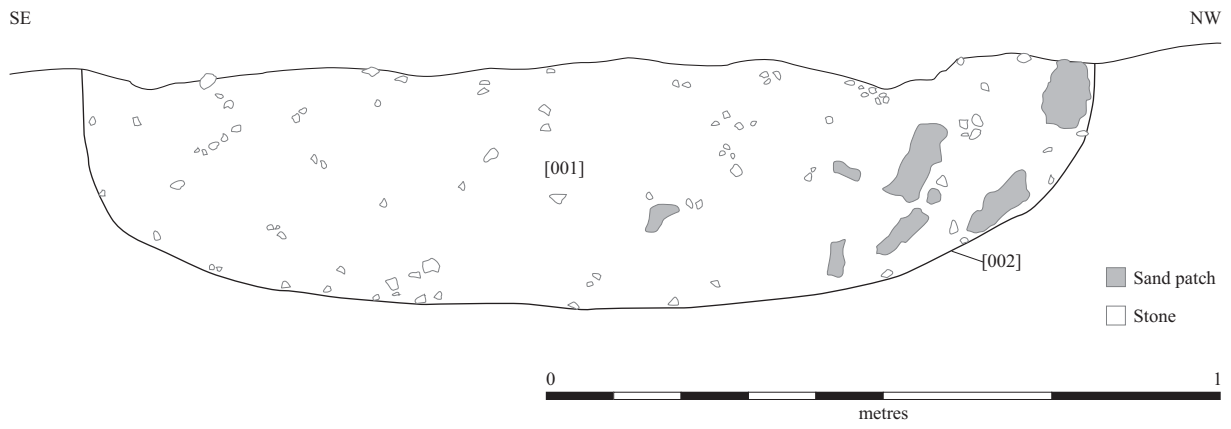


Figure 3. Section drawing and photograph of F.001

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Appendix

Pottery Report

By Craig Cessford and Jacqui Hutton

Two pieces of pottery were recovered from this evaluation. From F.001, a single piece of medieval coarseware, dating to the 14th-15th century, weighed 18g and had no signs of abrasions. The second piece of pot weighed 19g, recovered from F.002, was glazed red earthenware with abraded edges. The fabric and glaze suggests that this is dated to 18th-19th century. As this is a small assemblage, it must be taken into consideration that these artefacts could be residual.

Faunal Remains

By Vida Rajkovača

Only one piece of animal bone was recovered and recorded. It was a fragment of unidentified large mammal (cattle sized) sacral vertebrae (sacrum). No pathology, gnaw or cut marks was observed.

Cat No	Quantity	Weight	Code	Context No.	Feature No.
1	1	18	PT	1	1
2	1	19	PT	3	2
3	1	26	BN	3	2

Table 2: List of artefacts