Northwest Cambridge: University Farm

An Archaeological Evaluation

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North West Cambridge: University Farm
Huntingdon Road, Girton
Cambridge

Preliminary Trial Trench Evaluation: 2008

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Abstract

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken by a team from Cambridge Archaeological Unit on behalf of Cambridge University Estates Management and Building Services on land belonging to University Farm, Cambridge. The archaeological investigation revealed Early Romano-British settlement features associated with a probable enclosure system and roadway. Earlier activity was revealed by a pit containing the near complete remnants of a Late Bronze Age pot and two Late Bronze Age or Iron Age ditches. Medieval and post-Medieval features representing ridge and furrow and former field boundaries were also identified.

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INTRODUCTION

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken on the proposed development area (PDA), an area of approximately 140ha, centred on TL 426 603 (fig. 1): This was located within farmland at University Farm, Huntingdon Road, Girton, Cambridge [CB3 0LH]. This work comprised a preliminary phase of evaluation in which twenty 1.80m wide trenches were excavated to a combined length of 968m (fig. 2) in order to broadly characterise the nature and survival of archaeological deposits. The area was under agricultural use and consisted of both recently harvested and ploughed fields.

The underlying geology of the site is Gault Clay, which forms the western and southern portions of the site. Running in a band across the site from north to south is an exposed ridge of Head and Observatory Gravels (fig. 3). The ridge represents a prominent feature in the landscape, rising to nearly 25m OD across the proposed development area. Utilisation of the finer sand and gravel deposits for quarrying is apparent from both aerial photographic evidence (Palmer 2001) and in the broken-up and undulating nature of the landscape.

Archaeological Background (extracted from the Desk-based Assessment; Redfern *et al.* 2008)

Known evidence for early prehistoric activity on gravels similar to those of the development area is well recognised (Reynolds 2000). However, the question of survival within this development area is affected by the extent of the gravel and coprolite extractions of the 19th and 20th centuries.

For the area of Gault clay, to the west, prehistoric evidence is relatively sparse, although this does not indicate an absence of human occupation (Evans 2003). Traditionally, it was believed that settlement of this period tended to favour the well-drained gravels rather than the heavy clay soils (Alexander 1996). Recent excavations at High Cross (Whittaker 2001), Vicar's Farm (Lucas & Whittaker 2001) and at several sites around Ely, on similar geology, have revealed flint scatters and features, proving a significant level of activity. Soils do become a factor when trying to identify these sites, with heavy clay soils masking archaeology from detection, especially via aerial photography. Potential significant early Prehistoric activity cannot be ruled out within the development area.

The finds from Marion Close (Mortimer & Evans 1996), High Cross (Whittaker 2001), Vicar's Farm (Lucas & Whittaker 2001) and from the wider area denote a substantial Iron Age presence. Trying to define the nature of settlement and the distribution of sites within this landscape is difficult. The known evidence is patchy; however, the potential for locating further elements of fieldsystem or settlement cannot be discounted.

For the Roman period, the known archaeology is well documented, not least with regard to the finds associated with the 19th and 20th century mineral extractions. The presence of the *Via Devana* Roman Road running to the north of the development area is of great significance. The potential for further, as yet undiscovered, features

adjacent to the road is considerable. Fieldsystems were often set out perpendicular to roads: Therefore, one might expect to encounter boundary ditches related to rural land management within the development area; however, the debate on the route and date of the Roman roads around Cambridge comes to bear on this question.

The projected New Hall route of the Roman road, further to the south than the line of the *Via Devana*/Huntingdon Road, would have run in a straight line through the area of Gravel Hill Farm and the Trinity Conduit Head (fig. 7). It would explain the large number of finds and the possibility that more Roman features lie in this area. This route would correspond with Margary's no. 231 to St. Neots (Margary 1967), suggested as the primary route to Cambridge in the 1st century AD, only later to be supplanted by a more northerly route in the 2nd century AD (Evans 1996). Further, recent work at Vicar's Farm has suggested that Trinity Conduit Head may have been active in the Roman period (Lucas & Whittaker 2001) and that the common religious associations with springs cannot be overlooked.

To the north, around the prominent position of Howes Close, the recorded barrows, inhumations and cremations indicate that this could be an area of Roman hinterland settlement, similar in type to that at Vicar's Farm. The Vicar's Farm site consisted of a regularly laid-out, rectilinear system of ditched enclosures and semi-open fields. Also revealed were an aisled building, a timber post circle and a number of quarry pits. At the settlement fringe were two cemeteries (inhumation and cremation) and across the site were a further five isolated burials. A droveway/trackway cut through the site and had a metalled path leading off it to the settlement core (Lucas & Whittaker 2001). Cemeteries of this period were commonly positioned along routeways outside the town boundaries. Excavations at New Hall (Evans 1996), to the east of the assessment area, give further insights into the development of the Roman hinterland of Cambridge.

For the Saxon period, further burial activity and the possible settlement associated with the Girton College cemetery site may be encountered. For the Medieval period, there is little evidence to suggest any activity other than agricultural workings and some gravel extraction in the area of University Farm (Gravel Hill Farm). The Medieval ploughing evidenced by the ridge-and-furrow, both in the development area itself and in the surrounding fields, may have had a detrimental impact on any known and potential earlier features.

Methodology

The trenches were excavated by a 360º tracked excavator with a toothless ditching bucket under the supervision of an experienced archaeologist. The trenches were located by an archaeological surveyor using a RTK GPS unit and recorded using the CAU modified version of the Museum of London system (Spence 1997). All trenches were planned at 1:50, with sections drawn at 1:10. Archaeological features were assigned a unique number (**F.14**) and each stratigraphically distinct episode was recorded with a unique context number ([034]).

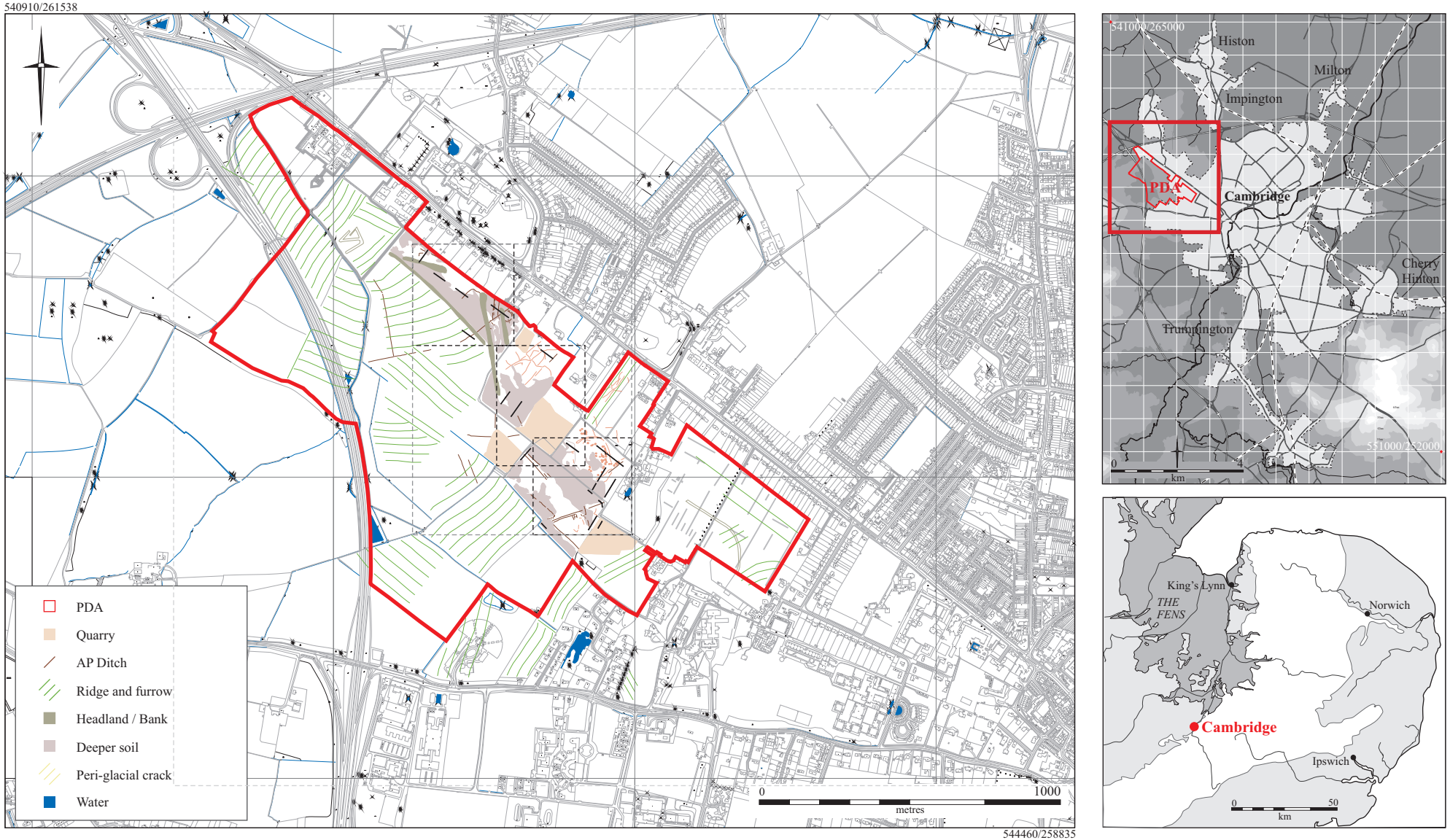

Figure 1. Location plan

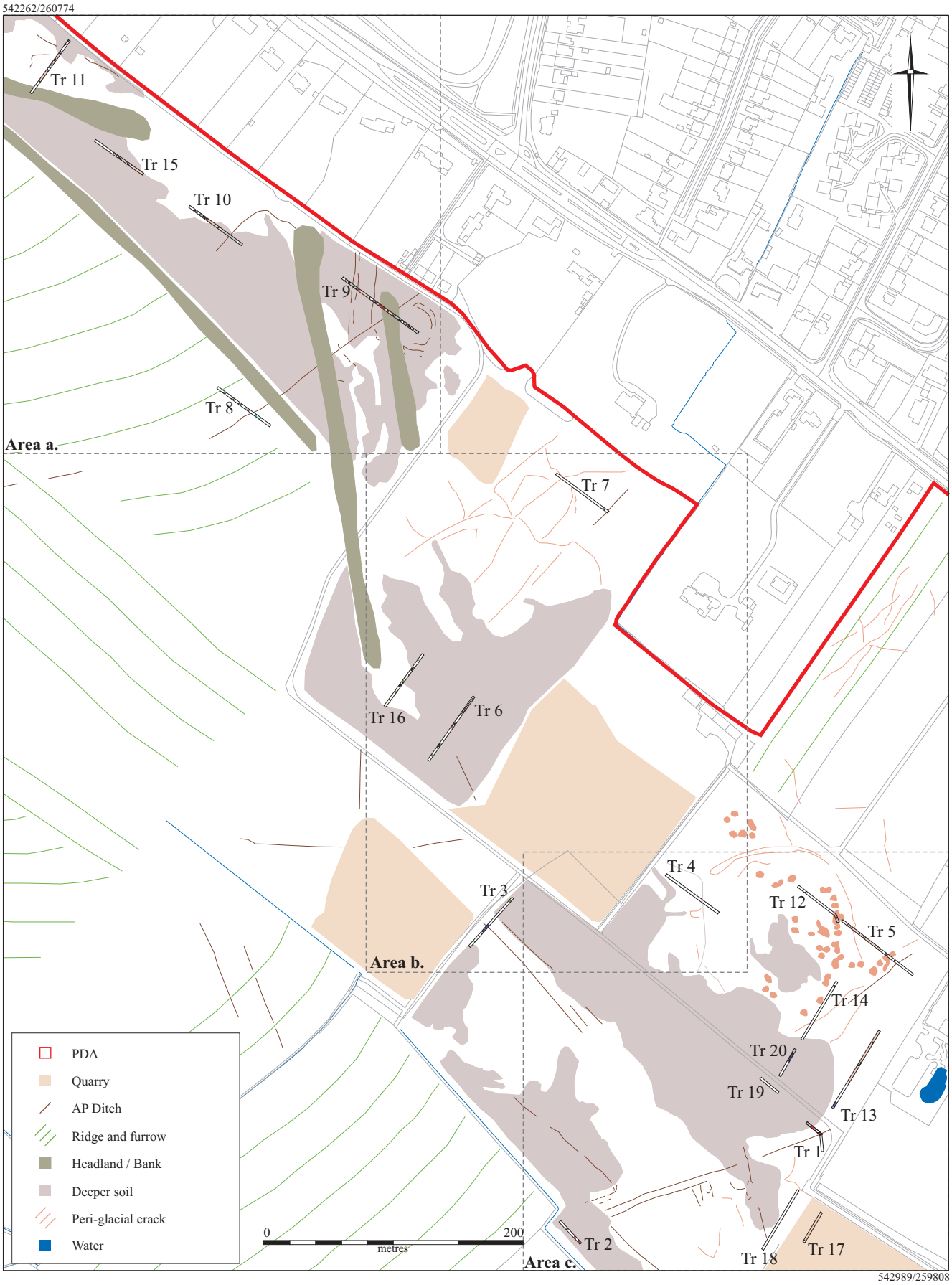

Figure 2. Trench Plan

RESULTS

Trench 1 (figs 2 & 5)

Trench 1 measured 28m in length and was positioned in the northeast corner of *Dry Field* to test a linear feature identified from aerial photography. The feature was aligned east-northeast to west-southwest and formed part of a possible fieldsystem and associated trackway. The central part of *Dry Field* was not available for trench sampling due to ongoing scientific experimentation. One large ditch (**F.09**) was identified which contained two potsherds and a flint dated from the Late Bronze Age to Iron Age, and which corresponded to the position of the cropmark. To the west of this feature was a thick layer of possible buried soil ([023]) from which Middle Iron Age potsherds were recovered. The natural geology was found beneath 0.10m of subsoil and up to 0.35m of ploughsoil.

F.09 – Ditch, aligned east-northeast to west-southwest and measuring 2.00m wide by 0.78m deep. Fill [018], a compacted mid to dark greyish brown clayey silt with occasional charcoal flecks and rare gravel inclusions. Two potsherds and one flint were recovered; Fill [019], a mid brown sandy silt with frequent gravel inclusions; Fill [020], a mid orange brown sandy silt with occasional gravel inclusions and charcoal flecks; Fill [021] a mid greyish brown silty clay of firm compaction with occasional gravel inclusions. Cut [022] was 'V'-shaped in profile with steep straight sides at 45° leading to a narrow rounded base through gradual breaks of slope.

Layer [023] was a mid greyish brown sandy silt with occasional to moderate amounts of gravel inclusions. The deposit was located in the western part of the trench and was 0.10m thick. A large body-sherd, crushed *in situ*, was found within this layer (in 32 pieces) and was dated to the Middle Iron Age.

Trench 2 (figs 2 & 5)

Trench 2 was 24m long and aligned northwest to southeast. It was located mid way along the southwest side of *Dry Field* to test the possible fieldsystem and associated trackway features identified from aerial photography. The eastern end of the trench was obscured by two modern service trenches for the Granta Network communications cables. The natural geology was covered by 0.10m of subsoil and up to 0.45m of ploughsoil; no archaeological features were identified.

Trench 3 (figs 2 & 4)

Trench 3 measured 50m in length and was aligned southwest to northeast along the northwest side of *Dry Field*. The trench was placed to locate and confirm a possible trackway aligned northwest to southeast which was identified through aerial photography as running across the centre of the field. Some traces of shallow quarrying were identified having been cut into the underlying sand and gravel geology, which was seen at a depth of up to 0.80m below the current land surface. One ditch (**F.14**) and an area of disturbed natural and possible coarse cobbling was identified in the position of the cropmark. The ditch yielded one post-Medieval potsherd, pegtile and oystershell.

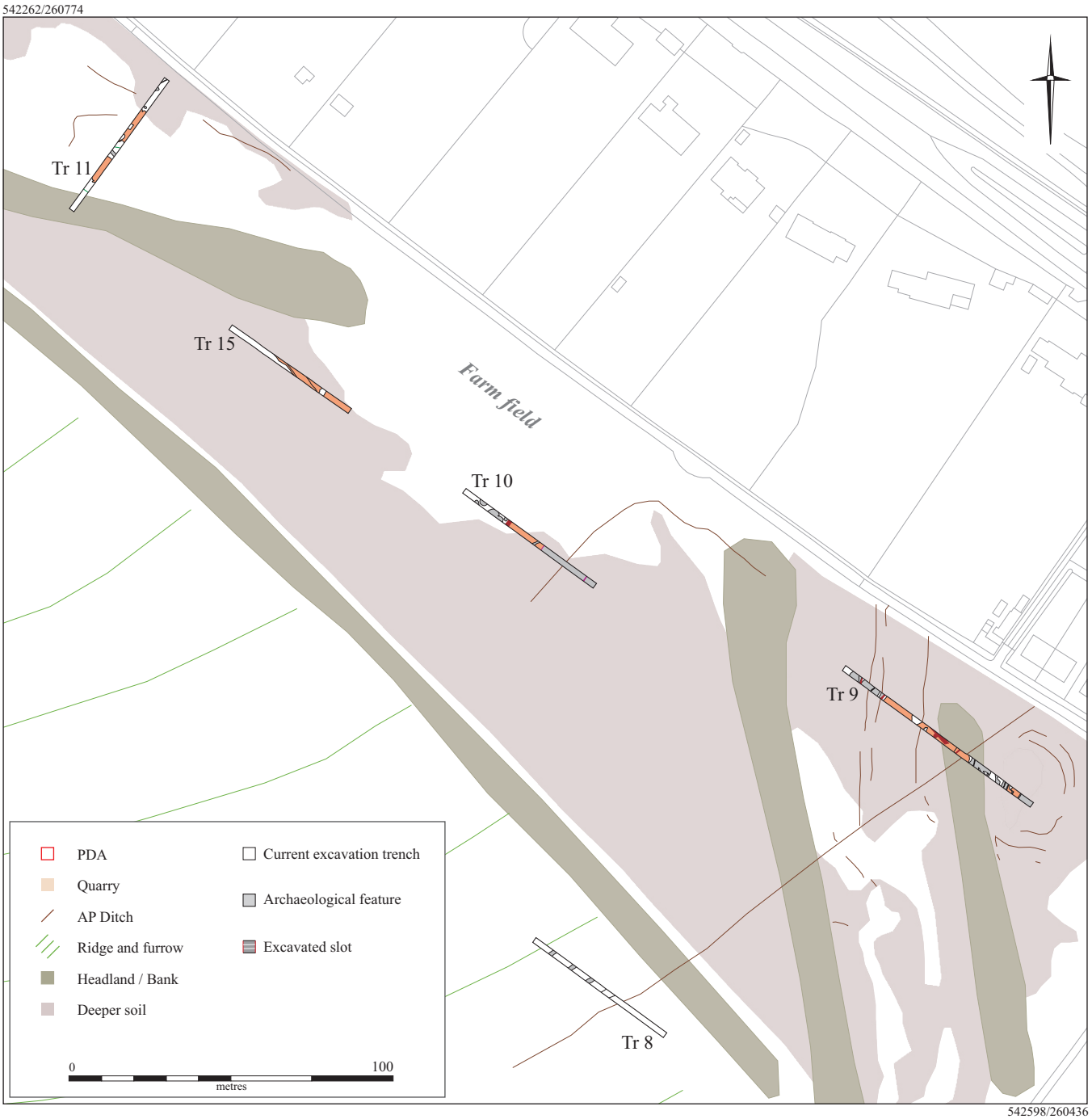

Figure 3. Area a

Trench 4 (figs 2 & 5)

Trench 4 was placed in the northwest side of *Cage Field* on a northwest to southeast alignment and measured 50m in length. Natural sand and gravel was found beneath 0.35m of ploughsoil and up to 0.15m of subsoil. No archaeological features or recent quarrying were identified.

Trench 5 (figs 2 & 5)

Trench 5 was cut towards the northeast corner of Cage Field on a northwest to southeast alignment and initially measured 50m in length but was later extended 18m to the west. The trench was sited to test a linear feature identified from the aerial photographs. However, it was discovered upon excavation that the whole length of the trench showed evidence of extensive quarrying. Two pits were dug to test the depth of the disturbance and these indicated truncation of the natural sand and gravel to a depth of at least 1.45m beneath 0.40m of ploughsoil. The eastern part of the trench showed evidence of having been quarried in linear strips with roughly 2m of natural remaining between each. No archaeological features or materials were recovered from the trench.

Trench 6 (figs 2 & 4)

Trench 6 was 50m in length, extended to 60m, and was located in the south-western quarter of *Bunkers Field* on a northeast to southwest alignment. The trench was placed to test a linear crop mark aligned north-northwest to south-southeast and an area of geological disturbance identified from aerial photographs. Natural sand and gravel geology was revealed beneath 0.40m of ploughsoil and up to 0.10m of subsoil. One ditch, two pits, a possible well and three linear gullies or possible beam slots were identified. The well feature produced a good assemblage of potsherds representing three vessels dated to the pre-Flavian period (43-68 AD). The other features produced small quantities of Late Iron Age or Early Romano-British potsherds.

F.01 – Ditch/Gully, aligned northwest to southeast and measuring 0.43m wide by 0.18m deep. Fill [001], a light yellowish grey silty sand with frequent gravel inclusions, no finds. Cut [002], linear in plan with shallow convex sides leading to a broad slightly rounded base through gradual breaks of slope.

F.03 – Pit, located between **F.07** and **F.12**, measured 1.00m in diameter by 0.30m deep. Fill [003], a yellowish grey moderately compacted fine sandy silt with moderately frequent gravel inclusions. Cut [004] was circular in plan and had shallow slightly convex sides, the southern being lightly stepped, leading to a narrow rounded base.

F.04 –Ditch Butt, aligned northwest to southeast and measuring 1.67m long by 0.80m wide and 0.25m deep. Fill [005] was a medium greyish brown sandy silt of moderate compaction with frequent large pebbles and occasional gravel inclusions becoming more frequent towards the base. One worked flint and eighteen potsherds of mid to late 1st century AD date were recovered. Cut [006] was 'U'-shaped in profile and linear in plan with moderately sloping straight sides leading to a flat base through gradual breaks of slope.

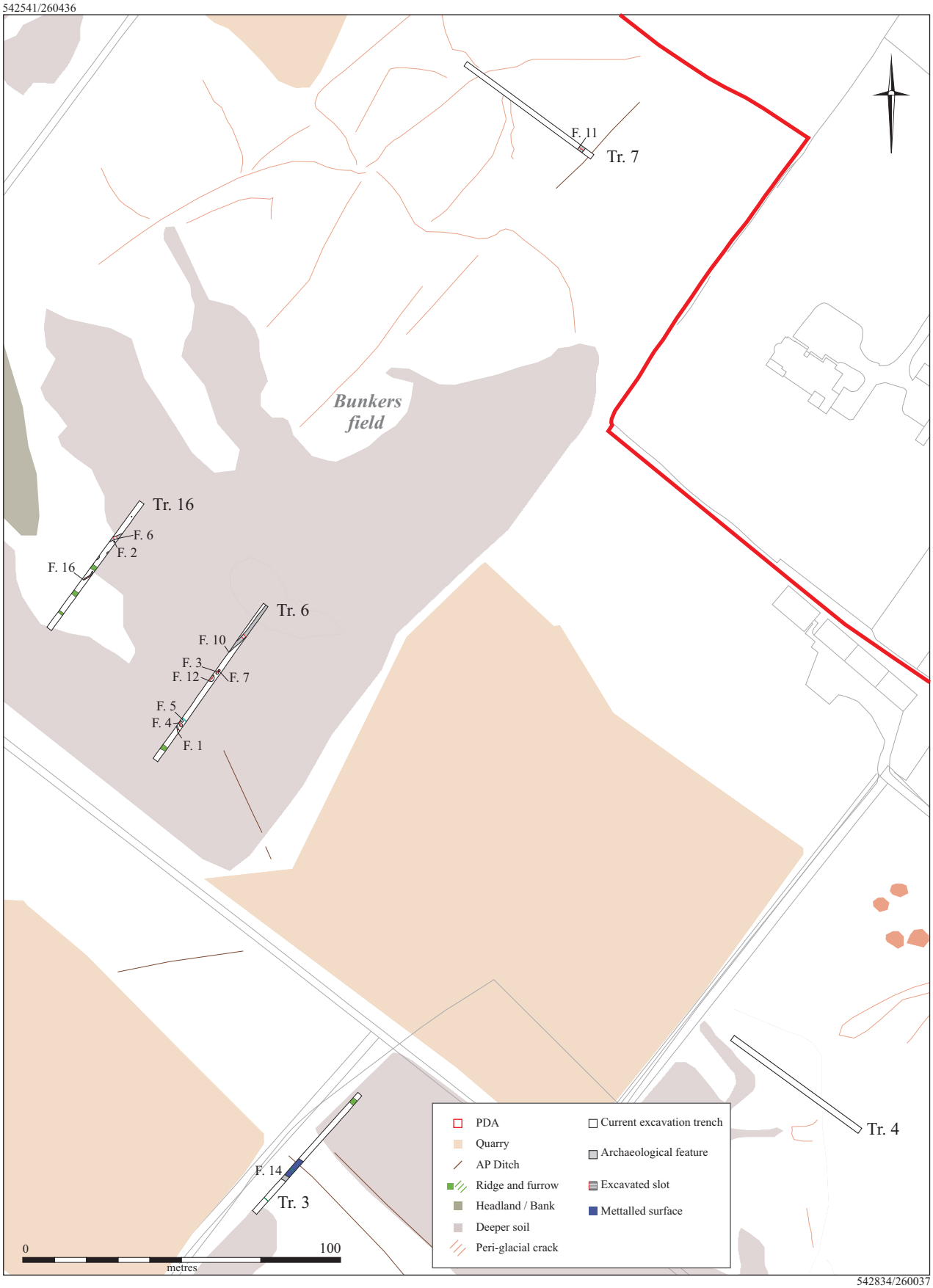

Figure 4. Area b

F.05 – Gully, measured 0.60m wide by 0.28m deep and was aligned northwest to southeast. Fill [007] was a mid greyish brown sandy silt of moderate compaction with frequent medium sized pebbles and gravel inclusions. Cut [008] was linear in plan with shallow straight sides leading to a slightly rounded base through gradual breaks of slope.

F.07 – Small Pit/Posthole, located to the north of F.03 and measuring 0.60m in diameter by 0.19m deep. Fill [014] was a mid brown sandy silt of firm compaction with frequent gravel inclusions. Four potsherds of Early Romano-British date were recovered. Cut [015] was circular in plan with steep slightly concave sides leading to a slightly rounded base through gradual breaks of slope.

F.10 – Ditch, measured 1.40m wide by 0.40m deep and was aligned roughly north to south with the southern end curving gently towards the south-southwest: Fill [024] was a mid yellowish brown sandy silt, firm and friable, with common irregular small to medium sized gravel and flints and occasional small sandy lenses. One small sherd of Iron Age pottery and 15 pieces of animal bone were recovered. Cut [025] was a gently curving linear in plan with moderately steep straight sides leading to an irregular base, possibly damaged through bioturbation.

F.12 – Well or large pit, largely obscured beneath the western baulk, probably circular overall but as seen measured 2.19m long by 1.11m wide and 0.80m deep. Fill [029] was a light yellowish brown slightly sandy silt of firm compaction with frequent large gravel inclusions and flecks of orange iron pan. One sherd of Late Iron Age to Early Romano-British pottery recovered. Fill [030] was a light orange brown sandy silt of moderate to firm compaction with occasional gravel inclusions, no finds. Fill [031] was largely waterlogged and of a light yellowish grey brown silts with rare large pebble inclusions. 39 sherds representing three pre-Flavian Romano-British vessels, one rubbing stone and one piece of animal bone were recovered. Cut [032] had steep convex sides leading to a rounded base through gradual breaks of slope.

Trench 7 (figs 2 & 4)

Trench 7 was located within the northeast quarter of *Bunkers Field* on a northwest to southeast alignment. Initially 50m in length the trench was extended to 75m and was placed to investigate an area of possibly geological features seen as cropmarks on the aerial photographs. Natural sand and gravels were encountered after removing 0.30m of ploughsoil and up to 0.15m of subsoil. A large ditch was identified on a northeast to southwest alignment; dated to the Early Romano-British period, this might represent a continuation of **F.10** from Trench 6.

F.11 – Ditch on a northeast to southwest alignment, measured 2.15m wide and 0.68m deep. Fill [026] was a firm mid brown sandy silt with common small to medium sized gravel inclusions. Fill [027] was a friable mid to slightly darker brown silty sand with frequent gravel, pea grit and small to medium sized flint inclusions. Two Early Romano-British potsherds, two worked flints and an animal bone fragment were recovered. Cut [028] had a wide 'U'-shaped profile with concave sides leading to a rounded base through imperceptible breaks of slope.

Trench 8 (figs 2 & 3)

Trench 8 was located towards the south-eastern corner of *Farm Field* in order to investigate a linear cropmark aligned northeast to southwest. The trench was 50m long and cut through up to 0.40m of ploughsoil and 0.15m of subsoil before revealing a mixed Gault clay natural. A post-Medieval ditch and five Medieval agricultural furrows were identified. This accorded well with the aerial photographic interpretation and the results from Trench 9.

Trench 9 (figs 2 & 3)

Trench 9 was located near the north-eastern corner of *Farm Field* in order to investigate a series of linear cropmarks aligned northeast to southwest or north to south and a semi-circular cropmark. The trench was 75m long and cut through 0.40m of ploughsoil and 0.10m of subsoil before revealing a fine sand natural which had been extensively quarried. A post-Medieval ditch and two large possible field drains or service trenches were identified. This fitted well with the aerial photographic interpretation and results from Trench 8.

Trench 10 (figs 2 & 3)

Trench 10 was placed in *Farm Field* on a northwest to southeast orientation in order to investigate a curving linear cropmark aligned southeast to northwest then northeast to southwest. The trench was 50m in length; it cut through 0.35m of ploughsoil and 0.10m of subsoil before revealing fine sand natural which had been extensively quarried. A probable modern service trench was identified, roughly corresponding to the position of the cropmark.

Trench 11 (figs 2 & 3)

Trench 11 was located near the north-western corner of *Farm Field* in order to investigate a linear cropmark aligned west-northwest to east-southeast. The trench was 50m long, and it cut through up to 0.45m of ploughsoil and 0.20m of subsoil before revealing a fine sand natural which had been extensively quarried. No features of archaeological interest were identified.

Trench 12 (figs 2 & 5)

Trench 12 was located towards the northeast corner of *Cage Field* on a northwest to southeast alignment and measured 42m in length. The trench was sited to identify the limit of quarrying in this area and to test a series of curving linear features identified from aerial photographs as of geological origin. The quarrying was found to extend only 4.00m into the eastern end of the trench before reverting back to undisturbed natural sand and gravel. This was covered by between 0.35m to 0.45m of ploughsoil and up to 0.10m of subsoil. No features of archaeological interest were identified.

Trench 13 (figs 2 & 5)

This measured 70m in length and ran parallel to the eastern hedgerow of *Cage Field*. The trench had been located to gauge the extent of quarrying identified in Trench 5 and this was established 21.50m from the southern end of the trench. There was between 0.40m and 0.45m depth of ploughsoil and up to 0.15m of subsoil. A metalled surface and flanking ditch were revealed at the southern edge of

the trench and were identified as a part of a trackway, the remaining portion lying beneath the ploughsoil. The metalled surface contained fragments of Iron Age pottery.

Layer [033] – Subsoil overlying [034], a friable mid reddish brown sandy silt.

Layer [034] – Metalled surface partially overlying [035]. This was a very firm aggregate of small to medium sized gravel and irregular and rounded pebbles in a dark grey silt matrix. Seven sherds of Iron Age pottery had been incorporated into the surface.

F.13 – Ditch, aligned northwest to southeast and measuring 0.35m wide by 0.26m. Fill [035] was a firm mid yellowish brown silt with frequent gravel inclusions. Cut [036] had a wide 'U'-shaped profile with concave sides leading to a rounded base through imperceptible breaks of slope.

Trench 14 (figs 2 & 5)

Trench 14 ran parallel to Trench 13 and the eastern hedgerow of *Cage Field* and was 52m long. It had been located to gauge the western extent of quarrying identified in Trenches 5 and 13. No quarrying was identified and, instead, there was 0.40m depth of ploughsoil and 0.10m of subsoil overlying natural sand and gravel deposits. One small undated pit was seen in the northern end of the trench.

F.20 – Pit, oval in plan, measuring 0.60m long, 0.55m wide by 0.12m deep. Fill [051] was a mid greyish brown sandy silt with occasional charcoal flecks, no finds recovered. Cut [052] had shallow concave sides leading to a rounded base through gradual breaks of slope.

Trench 15 (figs 2 & 3)

Trench 15 was 45m long and was located between Trenches 10 and 11 on *Farm Field* having been sited to gauge the extent of quarrying and potential survival of archaeological features. A fine sand natural was revealed in the western end of the trench beneath 0.45m of ploughsoil and up to 0.10m of subsoil. There was extensive quarrying evident within the eastern half of the trench and no archaeological features were identified.

Trench 16 (figs 2 & 4)

Trench 16 was located in the southern half of *Bunkers Field* and ran parallel to Trench 6 at a distance of 50m. The trench was 50m long and was sited in order to gauge the western extent of settlement suggested by the Early Romano-British features revealed within Trench 6. The results from this trench were somewhat mixed; a substantial Iron Age ditch was found on a northeast to southwest alignment, but was seemingly associated with this was small pit crammed with Late Bronze Age potsherds representing the remnants of a single vessel. A shallow undated curvilinear feature south of these features may represent a partially preserved drip gully.

F.02 – Pit, 0.42m diameter by 0.35m deep. Fill [009] was a mid brownish grey silty clay with moderate flint gravel, occasional flint nodules and frequent charcoal fragments. Deposit [010], a substantially complete (65 sherds) though broken up Late Bronze Age urn. Cut [011] was circular in plan with steep convex sides leading to a narrow rounded base through gradual breaks of slope.

F.06 – Ditch, aligned northeast to southwest and measuring 1.06m wide by 0.25m deep. Fill [012] was a firm mid brownish grey silty clay with frequent small to medium sized angular flint nodules, occasional flint gravel and rare rounded pebbles and charcoal. Three potsherds dated to the Iron Age, 19 animal bone fragments and one worked flint were recovered. Cut [013] had moderately steep slightly convex sides leading to a wide predominantly flat base through gradual breaks of slope.

F.15 – Deposit [039] was a shallow mid greyish brown sandy silt which contained one rim and handle fragment of a late Medieval jug; interpreted as a Medieval agricultural furrow.

F.16 – Curvilinear gully measuring approximately 4.00m long by 0.45m wide and 0.18m deep. Aligned roughly north to south. Fill [040] was a mid greyish brown sandy silt with common small irregular stones and gravel inclusions; rare charcoal, no finds. Cut [041] had shallow concave sides leading to a rounded base through imperceptible breaks of slope.

Trench 17 (figs 2 & 5)

Trench 17 was located close to the northwest corner of *Osier Field* and was placed in order to test the underlying geology and potential for archaeological remains in an area known to have been quarried. The trench measured 30m in length and revealed the natural formation beneath between 0.30-.40m of ploughsoil and 0.10m of subsoil. The discovery of mixed deposits demonstrated that, with the exception of 1.50m at the northern end of the trench, the remainder had been substantially disturbed.

Trench 18 (figs 2 & 5)

Trench 18 measured 53m long, aligned northeast to southwest and was located along the south-eastern edge of *Dry Field* in order to examine the extent of quarrying revealed in Trench 17. The northeast end of the trench showed natural sand and gravel for a length of 5.20m before evidence for quarrying was encountered. The ploughsoil was between 0.29m and 0.35m deep overlying patchy disturbed subsoil up to 0.15m thick. Two test pits were excavated to test the underlying geology. A band of Gault clay was located at the south-western end of the trench; no archaeological features were identified.

Trench 19 (figs 2 & 5)

Trench 19 was cut along the north-eastern side of *Dry Field* in order to test the underlying natural geology. This was a mixed deposit of Gault and sand and gravel seen beneath up to 0.40m of ploughsoil and 0.15m of subsoil. The trench was 17m in length and was orientated northwest to southeast; no archaeological features were identified.

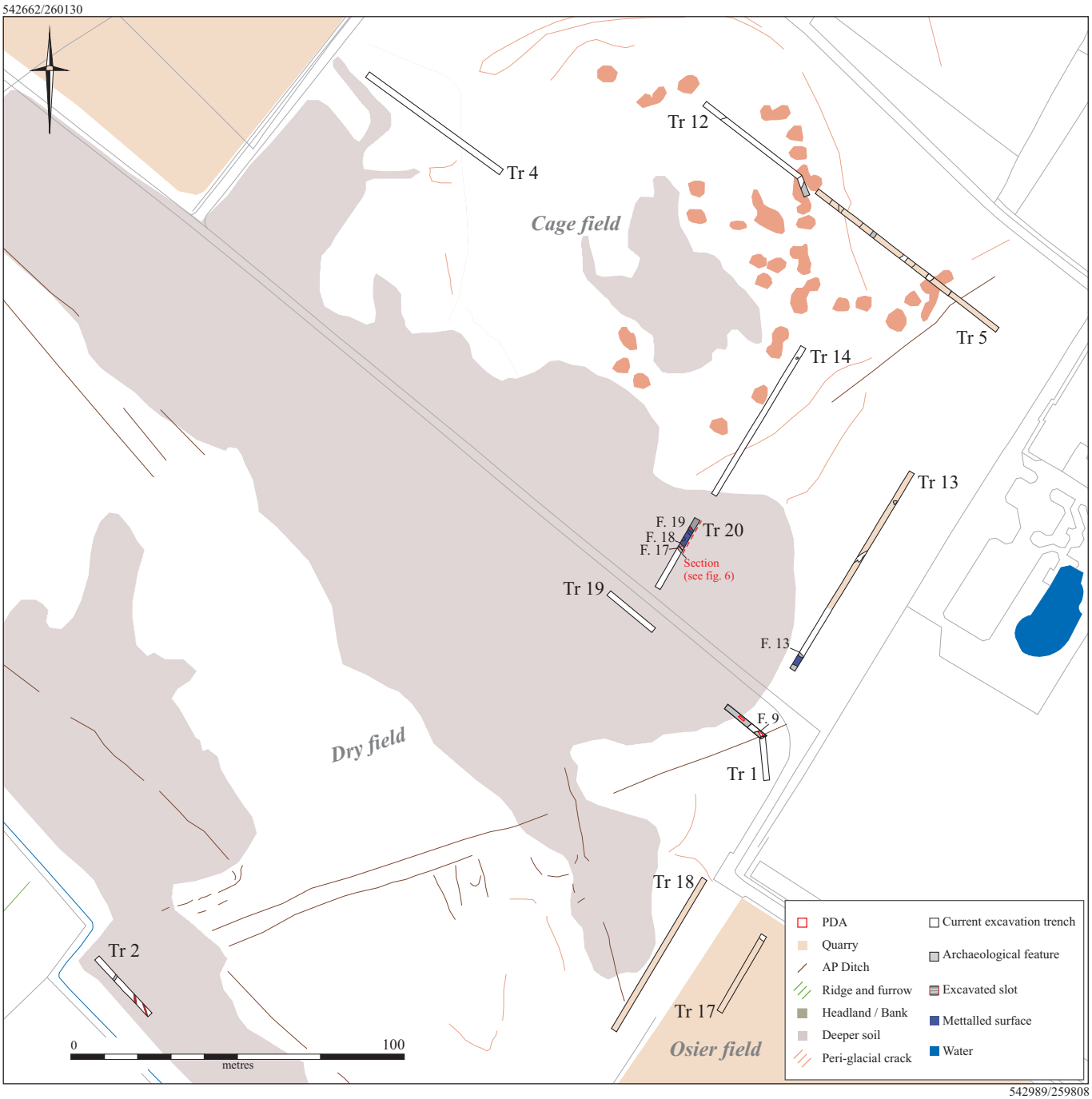

Figure 5. Area c

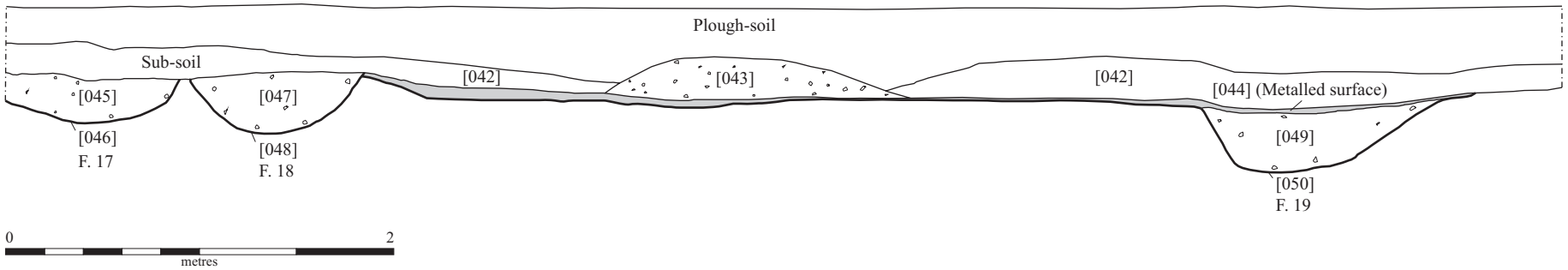

Figure 6. Section and photographs of F. 17, F. 18, F. 19

Trench 20 (figs 2, 5 & 6)

Trench 20 was located on the southern side of *Cage Field* in alignment with Trench 14 and on a northeast to southwest alignment parallel with Trench 13 (at a distance of 50m). It was sited to confirm the 'linearity' and alignment of the probable trackway in Trench 13. The trench was 28m long and revealed natural sand and gravel deposits beneath 0.35m of ploughsoil and up to 0.20m subsoil. The trackway was found 3.50m from the northern end of the trench; it measured approximately 7.00m wide at its' greatest extent from the southern edge of the southernmost ditch/gully to the furthest spread of metalling to the north. The northern ditch, **F.19**, appeared to have been deliberately backfilled and the metalled surface (layer [044]) extended across it. The southern ditch, **F.18**, had been allowed to silt naturally, although it appeared that a layer of metalling had slumped down its northern side. The ditch was re-established by a closely parallel small ditch or gully (**F.17**) to the south, from which rim sherds of Early Romano-British date were recovered. The subsoil covering the trackway also contained fragments of Early Romano-British pottery, a Type 22 socketed knife of Romano-British date (Manning, 1985) and a Cu alloy pin, found without a head.

Layer [042] – Subsoil; a mid greyish brown sandy silt with common small rounded pebbles and small angular gravel. Four sherds of Early Romano-British date, a socketed knife blade in four pieces and a 78mm long Cu alloy pin without a head were found close to the interface between this layer and Layer [044].

Layer [043] – Disturbed metalling; a mid to dark greyish brown sandy silt with frequent gravel and small rounded pebble inclusions.

Layer [044] – Metalled surface; compacted small rounded and angular stones, pebbles and gravel in a grey silty matrix.

F.17 – Ditch or gully, aligned northwest to southeast and measuring 0.70m wide by 0.22m deep. Fill [045] was a mid yellowish brown compacted sandy silt with occasional gravel inclusions. No finds. Cut [046] had shallow concave sides leading to a rounded base through imperceptible breaks of slope.

F.18 – Ditch, measured 0.80m wide by 0.30m deep and was aligned northwest to southeast. Fill [047], a mid yellowish brown sandy silt with common small rounded pebbles and gravel towards base of deposit, two Early Romano-British potsherds were recovered. Cut [048] was 'U'-shaped in profile with slightly concave sides leading to a rounded base through imperceptible breaks of slope.

F.19 – Ditch, covered by Layer [044], aligned northwest to southeast and measuring 0.95m wide by 0.30m deep. Fill [049] was a mid yellowish brown sandy silt with common angular flints, rounded pebbles and gravel inclusions, no finds. Cut [050] had straight, slightly convex sides leading to a flat base through gradual breaks of slope.

DISCUSSION

Quarrying and Survival

This preliminary trenching exercise has broadly confirmed the desktop and aerial photographic assessments. Gravel quarrying has been found to be more extensive than previously thought, effecting the eastern third of *Cage Field*, the adjoining parts of *Osier* and *Dry Field* and a considerable part of *Farm Field*. The extent of truncation varies, some parts of *Cage Field* having been quarried to a depth in excess of 1.80m below present land surface: In other places the truncation seems to have been less severe, with intrusion into the geology approximately 0.80m deep. However, it seems probable that in some of these areas the entire land surface has been reduced considerably, prior to reinstatement as farmland. This assumption is based on the presence of clear depressions and undulations across the fields trenched, in particular *Farm Field*, where the fine soft sands could easily have been removed in bulk, leaving only the deeper intrusions visible. The long time span of quarrying in this area (Redfern *et al.* 2008), and a corresponding lack of detailed records, means that the full extent of truncation remains uncertain. However, the additional absence of noticeably large quantities of cultural material intermixed with the quarry backfill deposits tends to suggest that, in the trenching assessment area at least, significant settlement features have not been destroyed. More ephemeral features, particularly those of earlier prehistory and the more 'remote' fieldsystems of the Bronze and Iron Ages may well have been obliterated without leaving any trace.

Prehistory

Away from the quarried areas, those features identified as being of the prehistoric period appeared relatively robust. Two Ditches seen in Trenches 1 and 16, which probably date to the Late Bronze Age or Early Iron Age were both aligned east to west. Associated with the ditch in Trench 16 was a small pit containing the near complete remnants of a coarse flint-tempered rrn of Late Bronze Age attribution. An almost identical potsherd was also recovered from the ditch in Trench 1, seemingly demonstrating direct association rather than a chance similarity of alignment. This fixes a common alignment for features of this period within the landscape so it is possible to extrapolate an overview from the aerial photographic evidence. From this it seems likely that the cropmarks identified in *Dry Field*, confirmed in Trench 1, are those of a prehistoric fieldsystem and possible trackway.

Romano-British

The discovery of an Early Romano-British road or trackway in Trenches 16 and 20 fits in well with the desktop assessment and previous excavations in this area. Whilst only partially revealed within Trench 16 as a ditch and metalled surface, the full extent was uncovered in Trench 20. This confirmed the 'linearity' necessary for a roadway interpretation (as opposed to yard surface or threshing floor) and also suggested northwest to southeast orientation of the route.

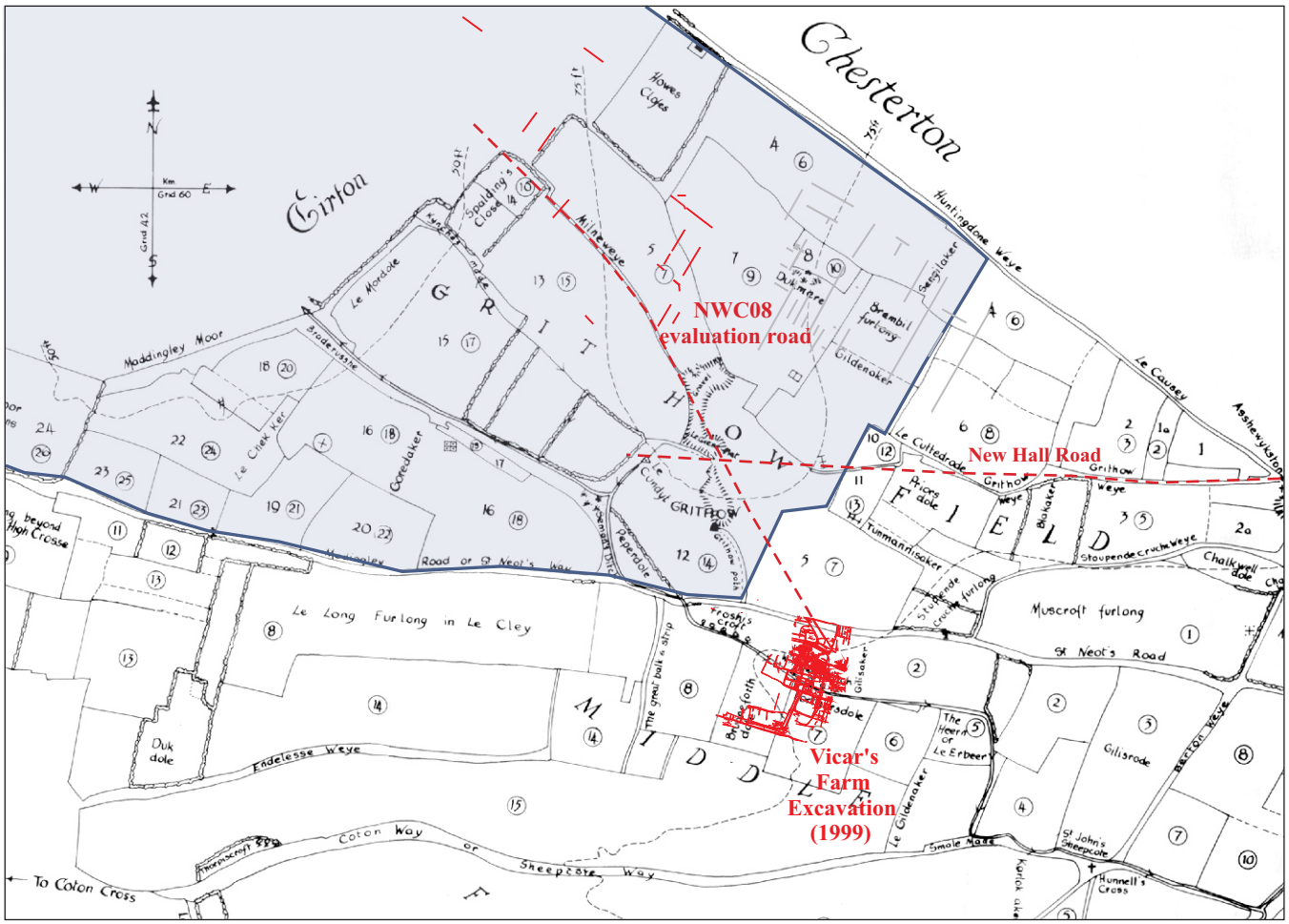

Figure 7. Theoretical Roman road alignments within medieval landscape (Hall & Ravensdale 1976)

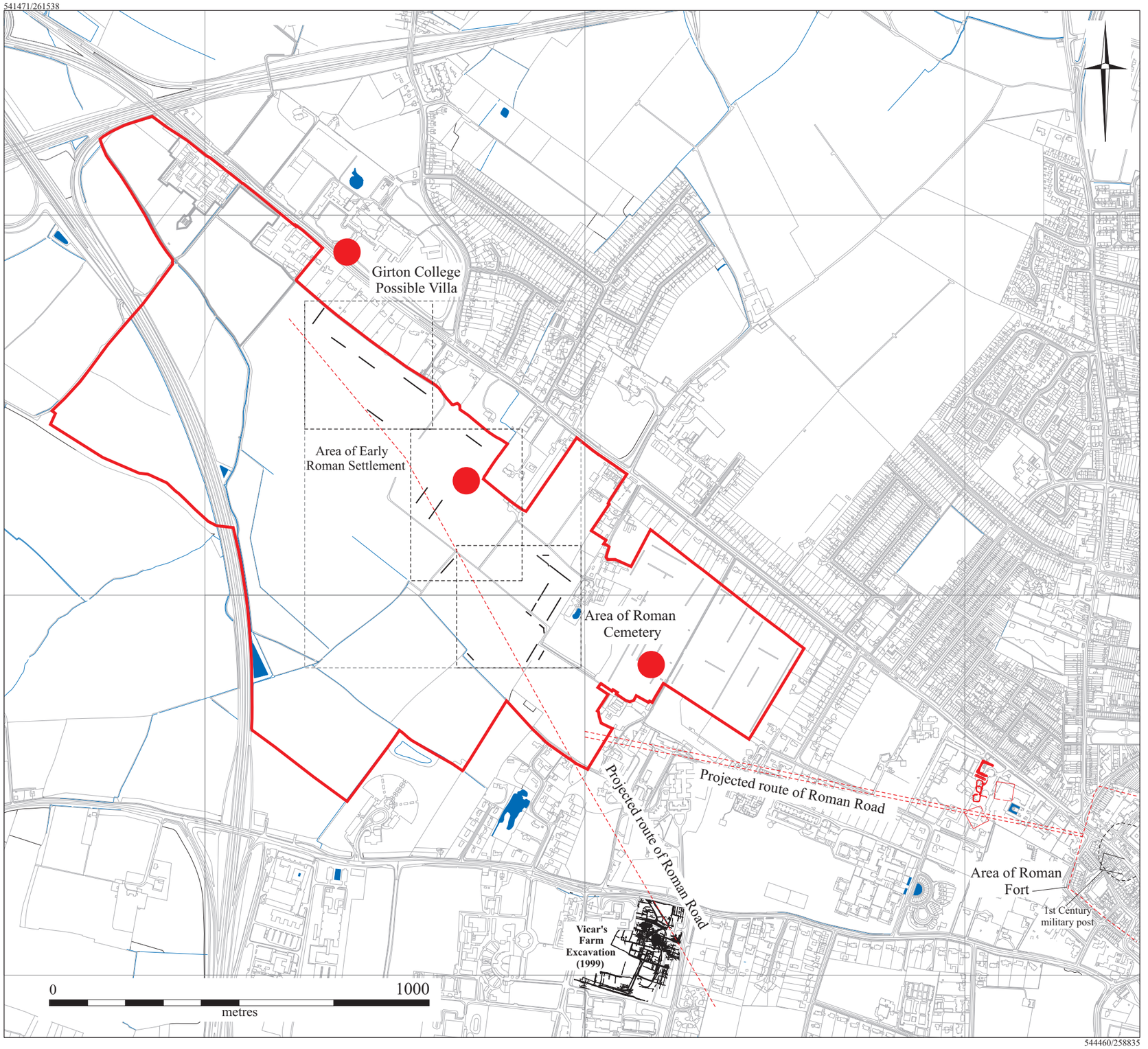

Figure 8. Roman interpretive plan

The road had been constructed by stripping off the topsoil and subsoil to the firm sand and gravel deposits underneath, then creating a raised gravel surface approximately five metres wide between two relatively small ditches. Sherds of Iron Age pottery found incorporated into the metalling and the Early Romano-British potsherds recovered from the ditches suggest its early post-Conquest foundation. While the southern flanking ditch was re-cut, the northern flanking ditch backfilling and subsequently the metalling was extended to cover it. This suggests that the track had a reasonably long lifespan. However, the formation of a compacted and well sorted subsoil over the metalling and ditches tends to suggest that the route eventually went out of use, or perhaps became grassed over. The subsoil overlying the metalled surface produced potsherds of Early Romano-British date, a Cu alloy pin and also a socketed knife of Manning type 22, examples of which are uncommon but not closely dateable, have been found as late as the 3rd century AD (Manning 1985: 116-118). It should be noted that finding two metal objects in such a small sample area might indicate an unusually rich pattern of loss along the trackway; consequently, any further work should take this into consideration, in particular the method of overburden removal onto the subsoil layer and metalling.

It appears that the track lies on an alignment that intersects with the cluster of Early Romano-British features in Trench 6, including a possible well which produced a fine assemblage of pre-Flavian potsherds. The presence of gullies, ditches, pits and postholes in this trench is highly suggestive of the presence of an Early Romano-British settlement. These are frequently found associated with rectilinear fields and paddocks aligned along a trackway (Armour 2008), and a cursory glance at the alignments suggest that this example may well fit the model. Of note are the linear cropmarks in the centre of *Bunkers Field* which follow the alignment set by the Romano-British ditch (F.10/F.11**)** in Trenches 6 and 7. These may well indicate a rectilinear fieldsystem associated with the settlement evidence from Trench 6.

There has been much recent discussion about the nature of the Cambridge hinterland, particularly with the New Hall Roman road and the Vicar's Farm trackways and how they relate to the development of the local system. It has been suggested that the main 'Via Devana' route putatively thought to be beneath Huntingdon Road is a secondary development (Evans 1996). The primary route to the west is thought to be that identified at the New Hall excavations and by Margery as Route 231, heading towards St Neots (Margery 1967).

Although it can only be tentatively suggested pending further detailed analysis, it seems probable that the orientation of the road fits in with the early trackway seen projecting to the northwest from the northern edge of the Romano-British farmstead at the Vicars Farm site (Lucas & Whittaker 2003). Further identification of the evaluation trackway is needed in order to positively link it to this road. Perhaps as interesting is the way in which the Roman system seems to have been echoed in the Medieval arrangement of the West Fields as recorded in the 'Corpus Terrier' of the mid 14th century and presented by Hall and Ravensdale (1976). The desktop evaluation hints at the similarity between the Grithow Waye alignment with the New Hall excavation road and this report now suggests a further similarity of alignment between Milne Waye and this new Roman road. Furthermore, the projected continuation of Milne Waye also fits with the more westerly Medieval

headland and fields identified by Palmer in *Farm Field* (in Redfern *et al*. 2008), suggesting an early laying-out date to the landscape.

Fitting the tentative Early Romano-British system to this pattern certainly makes an interesting proposition as it places the Romano-British cemetery site revealed in quarrying in 1863 (Babington 1863) at approximately the intersection of the New Hall road and the Milne Waye (evaluation) road, a common position for Roman burial grounds. Perhaps significantly it may explain why the cemetery appears further south than would be the case if it was accessed by a Roman road closer to the modern alignment of Huntingdon Road. The road also appears to pass close to the Romano-British remains revealed at Girton (Whittaker 2002).

Medieval and post-Medieval

The evaluation trenches have largely confirmed the aerial photographic assessment (Palmer 2001) and the West Fields analysis by Hall and Ravensdale (1976). The Medieval and post-Medieval field boundaries and ridge-and-furrow identified in Trenches 18, 16 and 3 closely correspond to these assessments. Of particular interest is the location of Trench 3 in *Spalding's Close,* which revealed the central enclosure ditch and rough ground or quarrying on the northern side; the rounded north-western corner of the close was also identified by Palmer.

ASSESSMENT

The evaluation, although relatively small in scope, has provided valuable insights into the early development and organisation of the Romano-British hinterland to the west and northwest of Cambridge. The discovery of the new stretch of trackway or road within the evaluation area will almost certainly have an impact into future studies of the subject. More work is necessary to confirm its projected westward path and possible relationship with the Medieval headland identified in the aerial photographs. The presence of Early Romano-British settlement and its association with the trackway also needs confirmation, in particular the area of cropmarks located in *Bunkers Field*. The potential prehistoric trackway and enclosure ditches located within *Dry Field* also requires further investigation when the field becomes available. Confirmation of the survival (or otherwise) of remains in *Osier Field* must be a priority due to the close presence of the Conduit Head. The conjoining of two Romano-British roadways (and the proposed cemetery opposite) all point to this being a primary nodal point in the landscape. Elsewhere the evidence for features of archaeological interest appears more limited; *Farm Field* and *Cage Field* are either heavily quarried or appear devoid of cultural material.

Finds Assemblages

The finds recovered from the evaluation were predominantly small in number and dispersed across the features. Animal bone was poorly represented in the assemblage: 40 fragmentary pieces were recovered with a total weight of only 160g, and many were non-diagnostic fragments of long bones. The pottery assemblage

numbered 182 sherds (3045g), of which 136 were from just three separate deposits. These were the Late Bronze Age pit in Trench 16 (65 sherds/1398g), the Early Romano-British well in Trench 6 (39 sherds/1039g) and the Middle Iron Age pottery found within Layer [023] in Trench 1 (32 sherds/200g). Considered overall, this tends to suggest intensive localised activity conducted over a relatively short timescale. Only eight pieces of worked flint were retrieved, these representing non-diagnostic working flakes (Beadsmore, *pers comm.*) As noted above, the potential for the recovery of further metalwork along the route of the Romano-British trackway should be explored and, if possible, a metal-detector survey undertaken.

APPENDIX 1: ROMAN POTTERY (Katie Anderson)

A small but significant quantity of Roman pottery was recovered from the evaluation. All of this material is Early Roman in date, with Feature 12 in particular yeilding large sherds from three separate vessels. These comprised sherds from a large oxidised flagon and two coarseware carinated bowls/jars, all of which are likely to date to the pre-Flavian period (AD43-68). Other features produced more minor quantities of pottery, which were also smaller in size, thus few vessel-forms could be identified. However, the fabrics suggest an Early Roman date.

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