

Car Dyke, Eye Road, Peterborough

An Archaeological Evaluation



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CAR DYKE, EYE ROAD, PETERBOROUGH:

Archaeological Evaluation

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Summary

The Cambridge Archaeological Unit (CAU) undertook an archaeological earthwork survey and evaluation of an unscheduled part of the Car Dyke in advance of road widening at Eye Road, near Peterborough on behalf of Peterborough City Council. The earthwork survey revealed a relict channel which was subsequently shown by archaeological evaluation test pits to be of late post medieval date. No evidence of earlier features was found.

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Introduction

The Cambridge Archaeological Unit (CAU) undertook the archaeological earthwork survey and archaeological evaluation of on an unscheduled part of the Car Dyke in advance of road widening of a 199m stretch of road centred on TF 214 017 along the Eye Road at Peterborough, between January and April 2010. The evaluation was commissioned by Atkins Ltd. acting for Peterborough City Council with the aim of establishing and recording the presence, date, condition and significance of any archaeological remains. The evaluation was carried out in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) produced by the CAU (Standring 2010). The WSI was approved and work monitored by Peterborough City Council Archaeological Service (PCCAS).

Location and Topography

The site comprises a 4512sq.m road-side section of the (unscheduled) Car Dyke on the north-eastern side of Peterborough where it runs in a north-easterly direction parallel with the Eye Road (A47 T). The site is situated on deposits of alluvium adjacent to beds of Oxford clay to the north-west (British Geological Survey, Sheet 158)

Archaeological and Historical Background

Archaeological investigations over a long period in this area have revealed an important archaeological landscape, combining exceptionally well-preserved evidence of prehistoric and Roman activity and environmental change in the near and wider vicinities (Patten 2009, Pryor 2001, Webley 2008, Evans 2009). The main features of the Fengate landscape include a second millennium BC enclosure/field system with drove ways and dispersed settlement; a later Bronze Age timber alignment and platform; later Iron Age and Romano-British settlement; and a major Roman road. Significant finds at Eye quarry in recent years include activity and settlement spanning the Late Neolithic to Roman period, including extensive Middle and Later Bronze Age settlement activity, including structures and a series of wells containing preserved timbers including a log ladder and trough (Patten 2009). Within vicinity of the Car Dyke and the proposed work areas, Roman finds have been made suggesting a nearby settlement on the western side of the dyke within c.100m (HER 51291, 51472,) including two inhumations (HER 0182). Adjacent to Parnwell Way to the south east, records of a Bronze Age Saltern and settlement demonstrate the potential of 'fen edge' activity during this period.

The Car Dyke has been interpreted traditionally as a waterway of Roman origin, commencing at the River Cam near Waterbeach and continuing along the western edge of the fens to Washingborough just to the east of Lincoln.

The Car Dyke survives as a waterway in places and as a series of earthworks or cropmarks, in various states of preservation (with its central course still conjectured). Built as a series of cuts over a total length of c. 122km with causeways and sharp bends (Macaulay & Reynolds 1996; Macaulay *forthcoming a & b*), the Car Dyke is formed from two distinct sections linking natural waterways. The northern, Lincolnshire, Car Dyke extends for approximately 90km connecting the River Nene at Peterborough, crossing the Welland, to the River Witham at Lincoln, closely

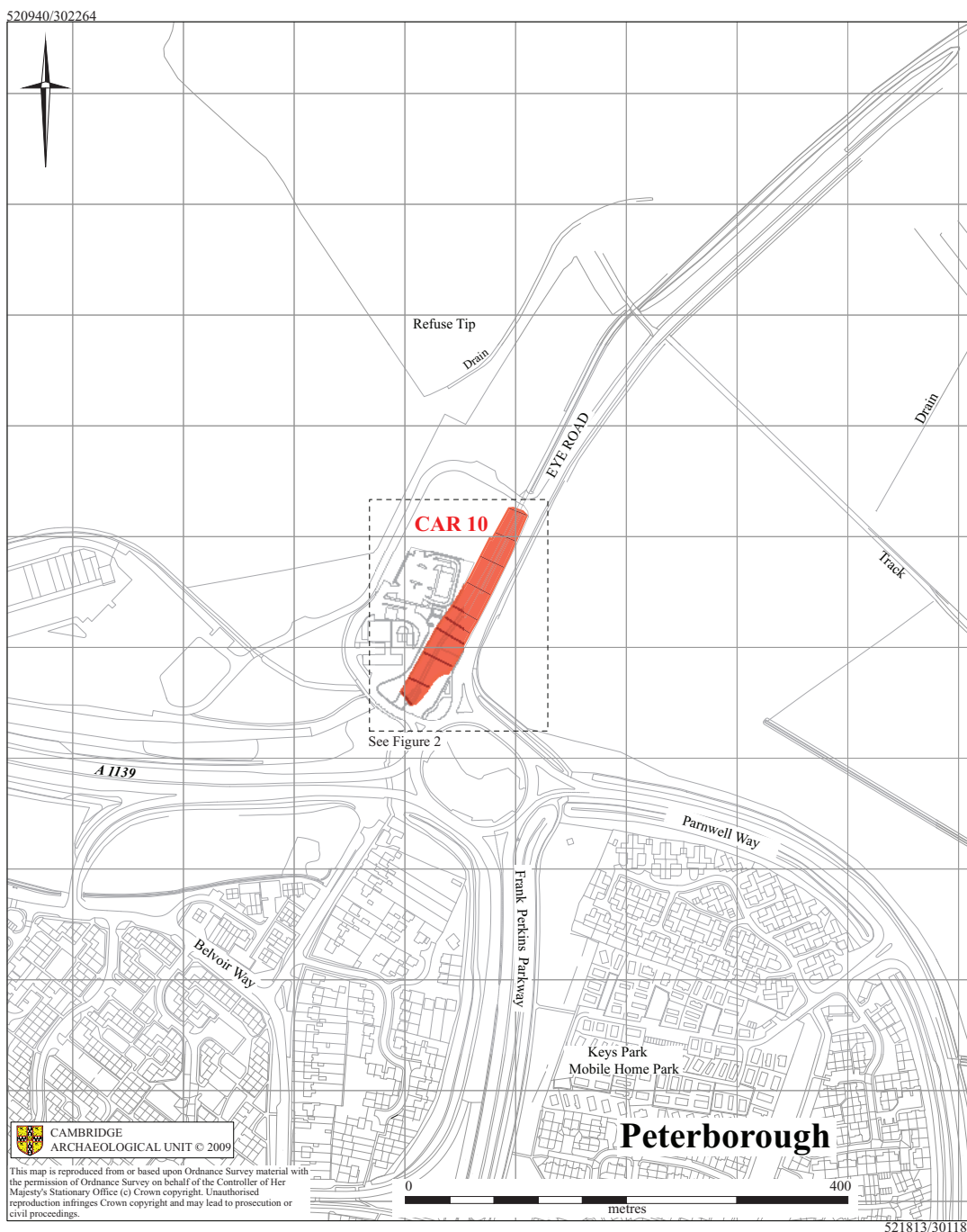
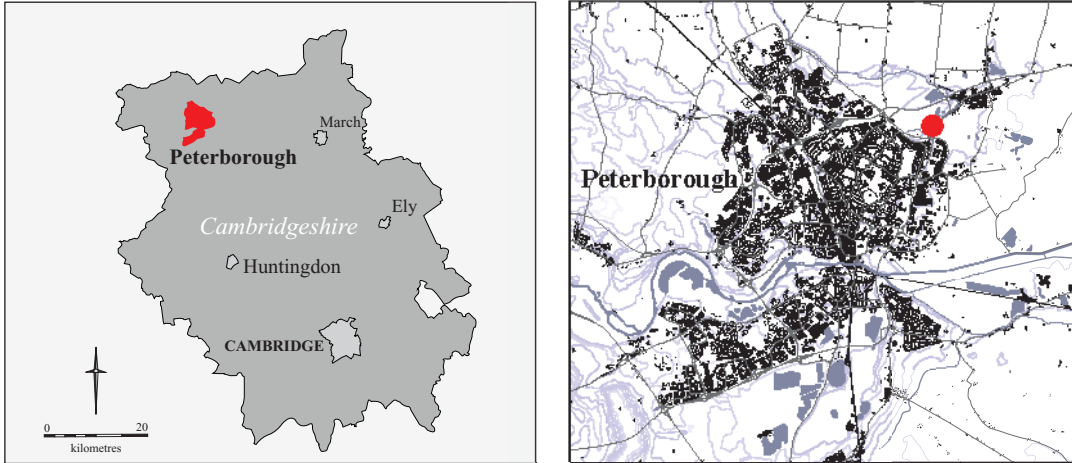


Figure 1. Location map.

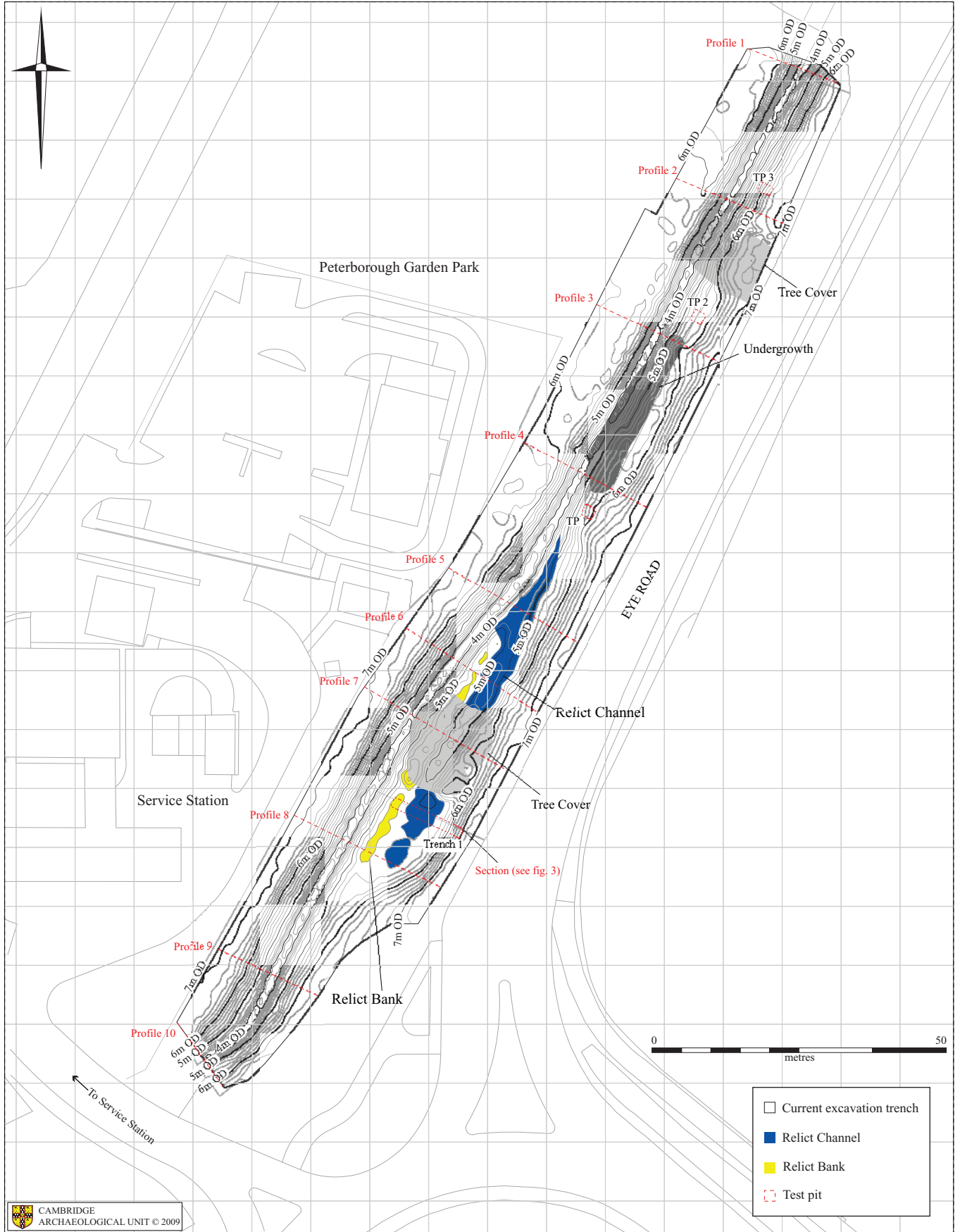


Figure 2. Plan showing earthwork survey and evaluation trenches (see also Appendix 2.)

following the 7.5m contour. The southern, Cambridgeshire Car Dyke - its lengths are variously entitled Cnut's Dyke, Colne Ditch and The Old Tillage - links the River Cam between Horningsea and Waterbeach, in a series of straight cuts via a small tributary to the Great Ouse north of Setchel Lodge Farm (TL 460 712) 8km to the north-west.

In 1712, the historian John Morton suggested that the Car Dyke was constructed by the Romans for drainage of the fens and as a navigable canal. Stukeley, in his *Itinerarium Curiosum* of 1724, identified its northern length as a Roman supply canal and, only subsequently in his *Paleographia* (1734), traced its southern, Cambridgeshire route. Although accepted as a canal by subsequent historians and other researchers (e.g. Babington 1883, 105-110; Fowler 1933, 118-23; see also Bull 1904 and Evelyn-White 1904), alternative interpretations have been offered, notably that it was a catchwater (Hall 1985; Simmons 1975, 1979; Pryor 1978; Fox 1923) or was constructed as part of large-scale drainage works for the development of a Fenland Imperial Estate (see below). Macaulay & Reynolds 1993 discuss the possibility of the two segments having different functions (favouring the Cambridge section as a canal) and that whilst having an initial function once constructed the waterway may have served other functions. More recently, it has been argued the Car Dyke formed a political and symbolic boundary (Mackreth 1996).

Methodology

Earthwork Survey (Donald Horne)

An earthwork survey was conducted on the 5th Feb 2010 using a Leica GPS 500 base station and rover, to record 5244 measurements which were then post-processed to achieve a 3D accuracy of +/- 50mm. The area was walked in transects perpendicular to the dyke, on both banks in turn, at spacing of 1-2m. Points were taken every 0.5m and at any break of slope within the 0.5m intervals. The base of the dyke itself was walked in one transect along its length, as to cross it numerous times proved impossible. Undergrowth and tree cover inhibited access and satellite signal meaning approximately 415m² of 4686m² could not be surveyed. However, extrapolation of the contours during the processing of the data seemed to satisfactorily fill these missing areas.

The surveys were processed using Leica GeoOffice, using synchronous RINEX data downloaded from the Ordnance Survey website (www.gps.gov.uk). The contour plots were produced in Golden Software Surfer and then exported to Autodesk Map 3D, from which profiles of the dyke were created.

Evaluation trenching

A 15m trench and three test pits were excavated on the eastern (Eye Road) side of the Dyke in order to target results from the earthwork survey and provide an interval sample along the length of the Dyke which was to be affected by road widening works. It was hoped that these test pits would be able to cut through obvious modern surface disturbance in order to understand if there were any remains of relict banks or channel surviving that were associated with the Roman Car Dyke.



Figure 3a. Photograph of Trench 1.

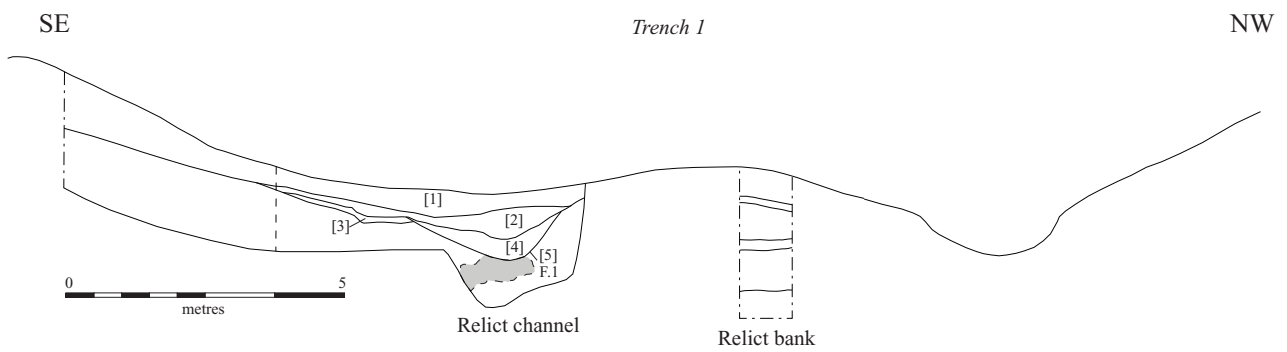


Figure 3b. Section of Trench 1.

The trench and test pit excavation was carried out by a tracked 360° machine using a 2.0m wide toothless bucket under archaeological supervision by CAU staff. Any potential archaeological features were investigated and treated in accordance with the WSI drawn up by the CAU (Standing 2010). The recording was carried out following the CAU modified MOLAS system of archaeological site recording. All work was carried out in accordance with statutory Health and Safety legislation and with the recommendations of SCAUM (Allen & Holt 2005).

The site code is CAR 10

Results (Appendix 1)

Following removal of scrub, an earthwork survey was completed during January 2010 (Appendix 2). The survey revealed a regular machine-cut profile on the western side of the ditch and a changeable profile on the eastern (Eye Road). The remains of an earlier channel and embankment were found extending for c. 70m at the southern end of the current ditch, suggesting past canalisation at the southern end. The well established tree growing on top of an associated embankment suggested that it was perhaps more than 100 years old.

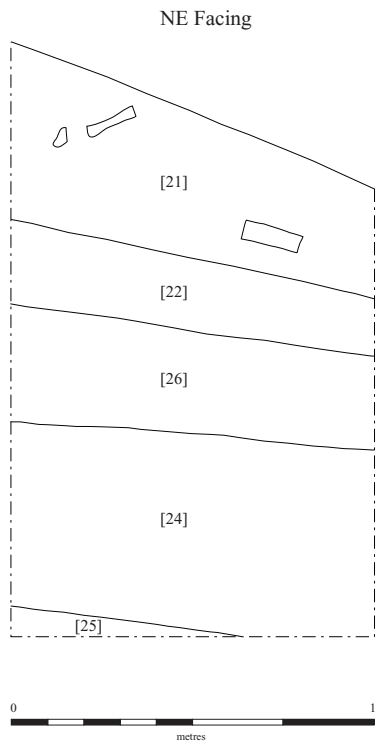
In April 2010, the cutting of an exploratory trench and three test pits on the eastern side of the relict channel revealed a channel heavily contaminated by modern debris and material no earlier than the late post medieval period. The earliest (18th - 19th c.) stoneware material recovered from the channel was re-deposited in layers above others containing modern material. No earlier cuts or earlier buried soils were noted. A thin lens of material [003] that appeared to be cut by the relict channel [005] was noted, however this contained similar late post medieval material to the fills within the channel. The upper surfaces and layers of Trench 1 and Test Pit 1 were contaminated with material from road construction including kerb stones, Test Pit 3 the most northerly excavated had contamination from the construction of an adjacent bridge in the upper layers. Beneath the relict bank at a depth of 2.00m the top of a waterlogged peat layer [011] was encountered sealed by a blue grey clay [010] (see Vareilles in Appendix 3).

Discussion

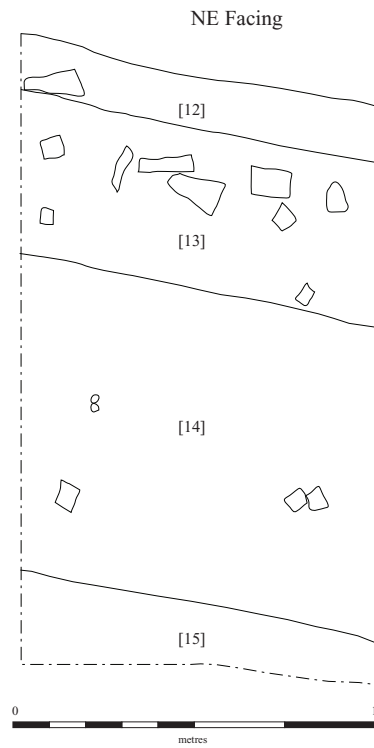
The thin lens of material [003] that appeared to be cut by the relict channel [005] may suggest a re-cutting of the channel or at least an episode of “cleaning out”, however material recovered from this layer was still of a late post medieval date. If the channel had an earlier medieval or even Roman origin it is possible that later more extensive re-cutting of the channel had removed all traces of the original cut and in that context it is worth considering what the likely dimensions of the original Car Dyke would be.

In Phillips (1970) the following description is given for a typical section of the Car Dyke; *“A frequently recurring set of horizontal measurements is 45ft (13m) for each bank and 45ft (13m) for the space between, of which 15ft (4.5m) is channel, and 15ft (4.5m) each berm (see, eg. TF 14 SE). When ploughed each bank spreads to cover the berm, and may be as much as 80ft (24m) wide.”*

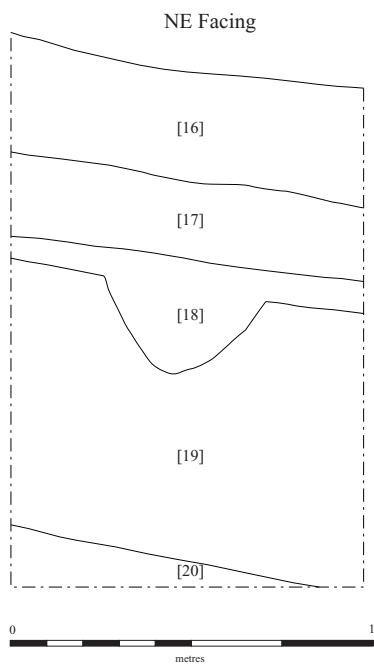
To the north of the area investigated on the South-Western edge of Borough Fen the Car Dyke is described as having an overall width of 40m, with 2m high banks and the



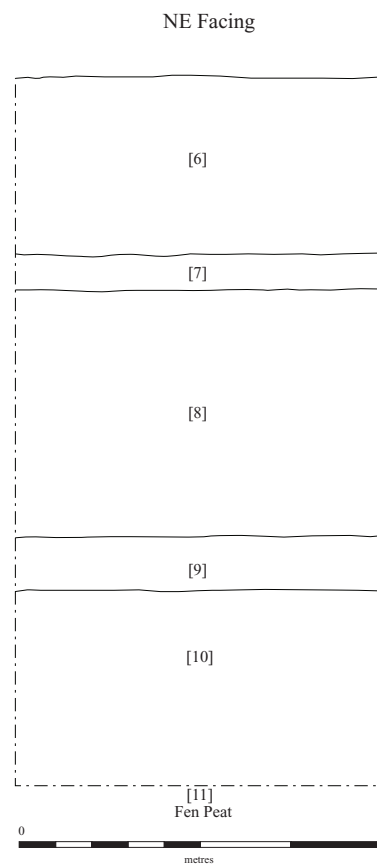
Test Pit 1.



Test Pit 2.



Test Pit 3.



Trench 1 Relict Bank

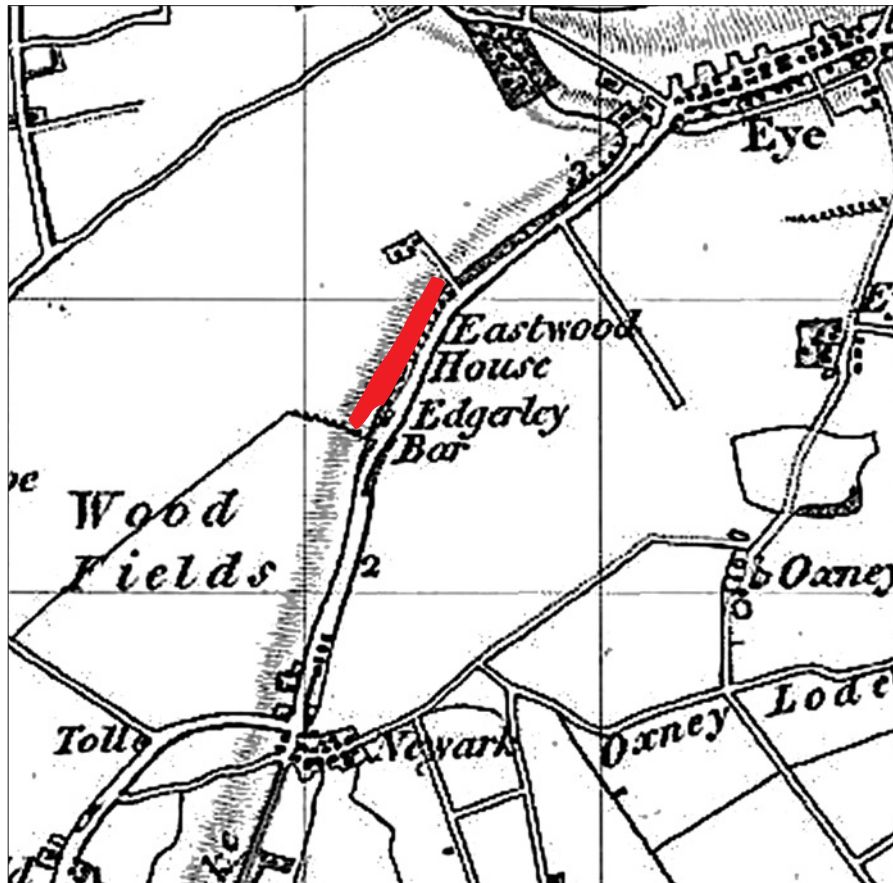
Figure 4. Test Pit sections.

ditch being 3-4m in depth and 10m wide (Hall 1987). Hall mentions that the incorporation of that section of the Car Dyke into the present fen drainage network since the 17th century is likely to have resulted in it being “dug out” with little of the original structure remaining. Along this section at nearby Werrington material recovered from dredging in 1956 included ceramic material dating to the 2nd to 4th centuries (Phillips *ibid*). Other sections of the Car Dyke have also produced further evidence of Roman origins for the water course (Macaulay & Reynolds 1996).

Sections across the Car Dyke at Baston (Thorpe & Zeffertt 1988) on the Lincolnshire section and at Waterbeach (Macaulay *ibid*) at the southern end of the Cambridgeshire section, show profiles with a more complex stratigraphy than that seen at the Eye road site. Although it cannot be conclusive, the absence of early material and the close relationship of the layers containing late post medieval material to the natural clay layers, suggest the present cut is of late post medieval origin. Later dredging and cleaning out of an early channel could result in the absence of early material, however the dimensions and profile of the section of relict channel investigated do appear to be smaller and less complex than those sections of the Car Dyke that have produced Roman material and are accepted as Roman in origin.

The 1830 OS map (Figure 5a) depicts the Car Dyke as an open water channel to the south of the village of Newark (now part of Peterborough’s suburbs) but appearing to have been covered over by a road between the village and a point just to the south of the area of investigation. At this point a channel appears to the west of the road to Eye similar to the current arrangement of road and channel. The apparent covering over of the channel to the south at Newark by the road does suggest that the Car Dyke has been modified in the locality and may extend to the area of investigation. On the OS 1830 Map the road from Newark to Eye is shown as a broad road considerably wider than adjacent roads, this could just reflect its function as a main road alternatively it could reflect its construction. It is possible that an earlier silted up channel with raised banks (typical of sections of the Car Dyke) was filled in by digging a drainage cut adjacent to it and using the up cast material to infill the old channel and create a new raised road surface suitable for the conditions in the Fenland area. It is possible that this could be the cause of the disappearance of the Car Dyke between Newark and the evaluation area as shown on the 1830 OS map. If the relict channel is a relatively new drainage cut with the earlier cut being covered over by the Eye road, then the absence of early material and the less complex stratigraphic profile could easily be accounted for. The re-cutting of the channel at this point could also account for the results encountered, however the smaller dimensions of the relict channel in comparison to other established Roman sections suggests that the former may be more likely. Since at present there is no archaeological confirmation that an earlier channel exists under the Eye Road, the notion that the road is covering the earlier channel of the Car Dyke should only remain conjectural until further evidence is available.

The analysis of the water logged peat material from beneath the relict bank suggests a fenland carr environment (Appendix 3), typical of the “edge of fen” that the site is located within. The plant remains (e.g. Willow and Sedge) could have come from a disused water channel, however the stratigraphy encountered would seem to favour an explanation of an existing fen environment buried by the bank rather than deposits within a channel fill. The peat looked to be reasonably ‘fresh’ further suggesting that this was not more ancient i.e. Roman deposits.



1830 OS map



1978 OS map

PDA

Figure 5. Historic Maps

The 1978 OS map shows a distinct alteration in the course of the channel as it approaches the Parkway and Eye road roundabout matching the start of the relict channel (earlier 20th century maps show no such divergence). It must be presumed that the abandonment of the “relict” section of the channel was due to the construction of the roundabout in the mid 1970’s with the current course of the channel having its origin at this point. The extensive contamination of the upper layers of both the Trench and Test Pits suggests that the construction work associated with both the roundabout and bridge to the north involved final phases of “ground improvement” or reshaping to restore the shape of the channel after the works.

Conclusion

The relict channel that was surveyed and investigated would appear to be the result of a diversion of the course of the “Car Dyke” during the construction of the roundabout for the A47 T and Parkway roads. The current evaluation revealed no evidence for earlier cuts or land surfaces other than fen peat of comparatively recent date.

Despite adjacent land producing evidence of Roman occupation of the area (HER 51291, 51472, 0182) no such material was recovered from the area of investigation – either as cut features or the ‘background noise’ of discarded pottery or tile. It would seem most likely that the putative Roman canal has either been removed by later re-cutting of the channel or that the earlier channel has been concealed by construction of a road over the earlier channel (now underneath the Eye Road) possibly being constructed during the late medieval to post medieval period. The actual cut of the relict channel can only be dated to the late post medieval period, with the section falling out of use as a channel during the mid 1970’s. To resolve the question of the origin and course of the channel at this point would perhaps require a fuller profile of the “Car Dyke” at a point less disturbed by recent construction activity. The precise course and location of an earlier channel can still only remain conjectural at present.

Acknowledgements

The work was commissioned by Peterborough City Council and the site was monitored by Rebecca Casa-Hatton on behalf Peterborough City Council Archaeological Service. Mark Hewson managed the project for Atkins Ltd. and Robin Standring was the project manager for CAU. Donald Horne conducted the earthwork survey, Bryan Crossan digitized the plans and prepared the graphics. Frankie Cox and Donald Horne assisted on site. Anne de Vareilles analysed the environmental remains. Chris Evans and Grahame Appleby provided background information and made helpful comments on the status of the Car Dyke.

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Appendix 1 : Trench and Test Pit Descriptions

Trench 1 (521333, 301696 – 521345,301691)

An east to west aligned trench bisecting the relict channel of “car dyke”. Length 15m. Width 2m

Section across relict channel

[1] A dark grey silty loam with frequent small sub angular gravel inclusions, large lumps of clay, brick rubble and road debris. A made up ground contaminated with debris from road construction work.

Depth 0.00-0.40m

[2] A very dark greyish brown loamy clay with a moderate frequency of small to medium sized gravel inclusion, occasional modern domestic debris (glass, plastic) and decayed organic material (roots). The layer represents an accumulation of recent silting and backfilling of the relic channel then rapidly buried by the made up ground [1] resulting from a phase of road construction. Depth 0.20-0.80m

[3] A greyish brown silty clay with occasional reddish brown mottling, occasional small gravel inclusions and late post medieval (Victorian ?) domestic debris. A thin lens of material on mid side slope of channel cut. Depth 0.50-0.60m

[4] A grey silty clay with occasional reddish brown mottling, occasional small gravel inclusions, decayed organic material (roots) and late post medieval (Victorian ?) domestic debris. Material filling base of channel cut. Depth 0.80-1.20m

[5] A broad moderately steep sloping cut of a channel with a concave base. Depth 1.20m

[Natural] A blue grey clay with occasional reddish brown mottling. 1.20m +

Section across relict bank. Bank separating relict channel and current drainage channel.

[6] A dark grey clay loam with occasional small sub angular gravel inclusions, occasional modern domestic debris (glass, plastic) and decayed organic material (roots). The layer represents an accumulation of recent silting and backfilling of the relic channel. Depth 0.00-0.50m

[7] A brown silty clay with occasional small gravel inclusions. Depth 0.50-0.60m

[8] A pale reddish brown clay with orange brown mottling. Depth 0.60-1.30m

[9] A blueish grey clay with patches of black organic staining and mottling. Depth 1.30-1.45m

[10] A blue grey clay. Depth 1.45-2.00m

[11] A black organic rich peat layer with frequent root and tree debris. Depth 2.00+

Test Pit 1 (521367,301746)

Dimensions 2x2m

[12] A dark brownish grey clayey silt with frequent small sub angular gravel inclusions, brick rubble and domestic debris. A made up ground contaminated with modern debris. A topsoil contaminated with modern debris. Depth 0.00-0.15m

[13] A very dark brownish grey silty sandy clay with frequent small gravel inclusions, brick rubble and some masonry fragments. Depth 0.15-0.60m

[14] A mid orange brown sandy clay with occasional small gravel inclusions and occasional brick fragments. Depth 0.60-1.45m

[15] A blue grey clay. Depth 1.45m-1.70m+

Test Pit 2 (521386,301780)

Dimensions 2x2m

[16] A dark brownish grey clayey silt with frequent small sub angular gravel inclusions, brick rubble and domestic debris. A topsoil contaminated with modern debris. Depth 0.00-0.35m

[17] A very dark greyish brown clayey silt with occasional small gravel inclusions. Depth 0.35-0.55m

[18] An orange brown sandy clay with a moderate frequency of small gravel inclusions and tree root disturbance. Depth 0.55-0.65m

[19] A brownish grey sandy clay with occasional small gravel inclusions. Depth 0.65-1.35m

[20] A blue grey clay. Depth 1.35-1.55m+

Test Pit 3 (521397, 301802)

Dimensions 2x2m

[21] A dark yellowish grey clay with occasional small gravel inclusions and frequent modern rubble and debris. A made up ground contaminated with modern debris from adjacent bridge construction. Depth 0.00-0.50m

[22] A very dark brownish grey sandy clay with occasional gravel inclusions. Depth 0.50-0.75m

[23] A dark greyish brown sandy clay with occasional small gravel inclusions. Depth 0.75-1.05m

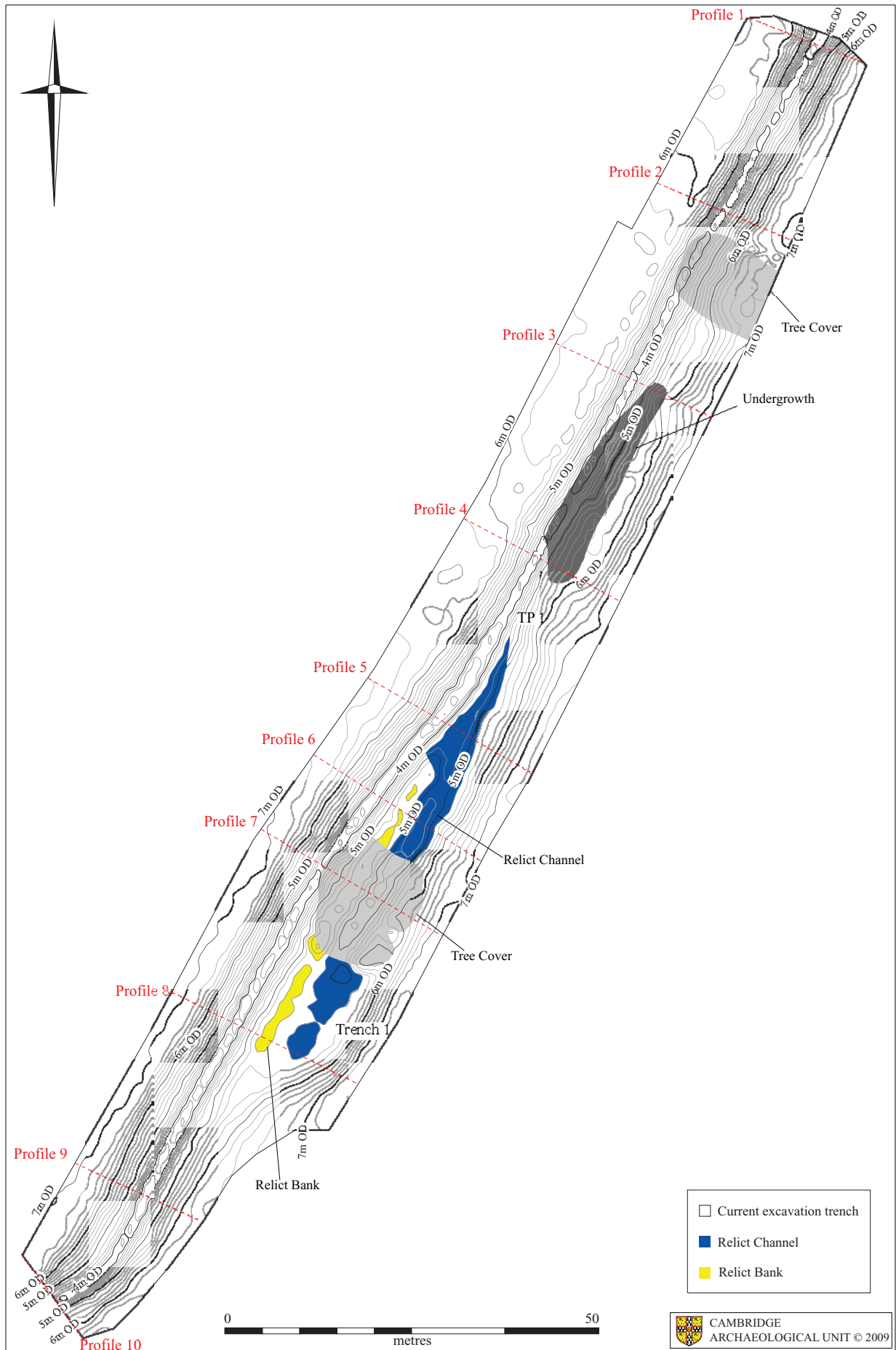
[24] An orange brown clay with occasional small gravel inclusions. Depth 1.05-1.60m

[25] A blue grey clay. Depth 1.60m+

Appendix 2: Results of Earthwork Survey

An earthwork survey was conducted on the 5th Feb 2010 using a Leica GPS 500 base station and rover, to record 5244 measurements which were then post-processed to achieve a 3D accuracy of +/- 50mm. The area was walked in transects perpendicular to the dyke, on both banks in turn, at spacing of 1-2m. Points were taken every 0.5m and at any break of slope within the 0.5m intervals. The base of the dyke itself was walked in one transect along its length, as to cross it numerous times proved impossible. Undergrowth and tree cover inhibited access and satellite signal meaning approximately 415m² of 4686m² could not be surveyed. However, extrapolation of the contours during the processing of the data seemed to satisfactorily fill these missing areas.

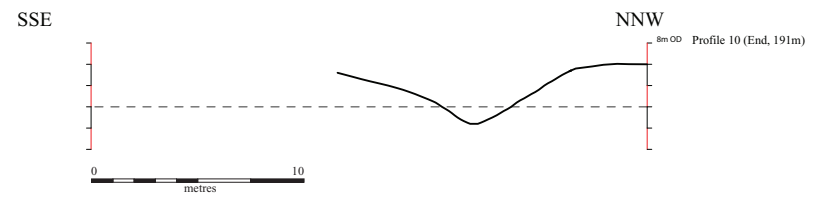
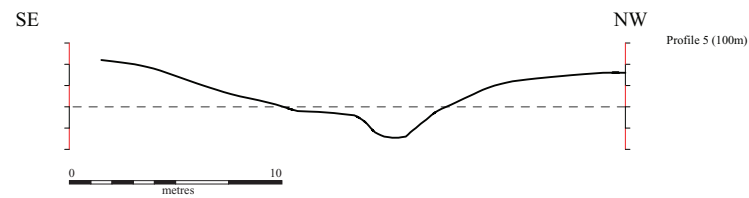
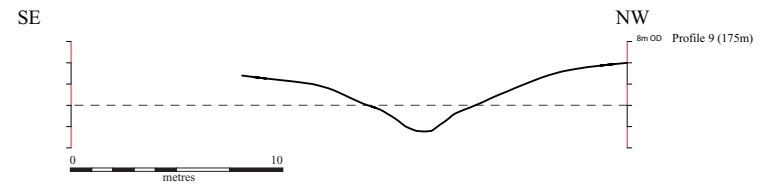
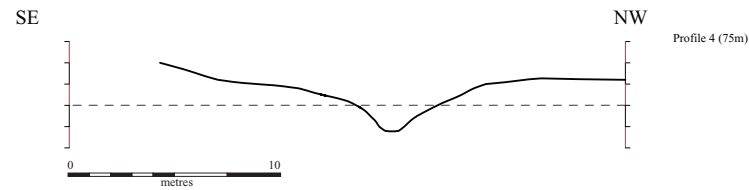
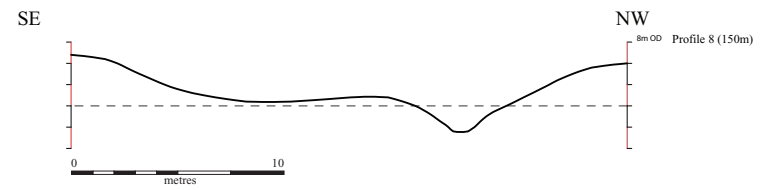
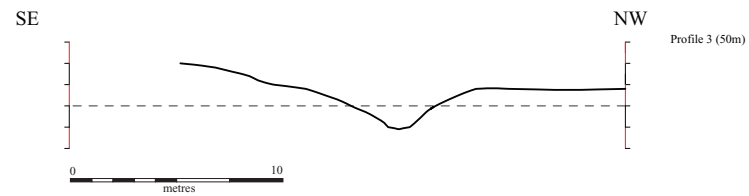
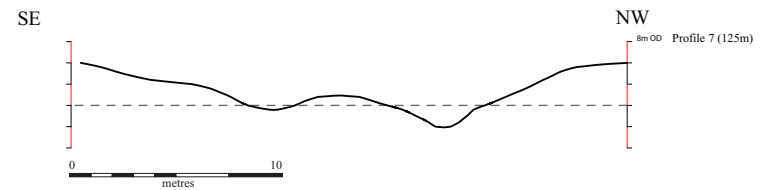
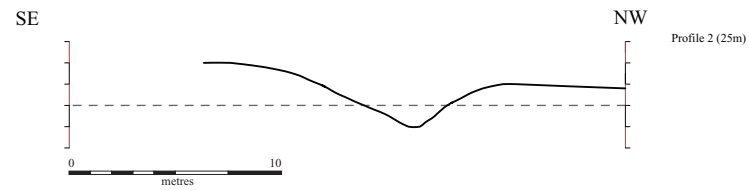
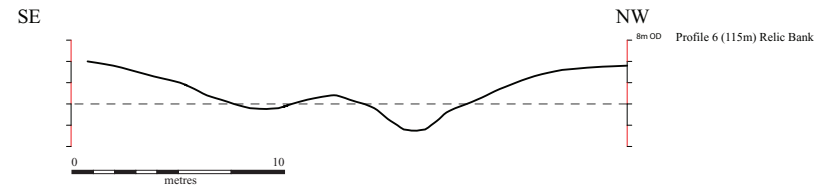
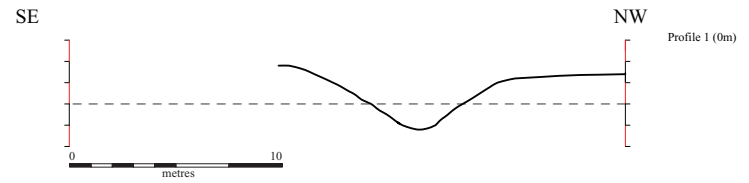
The surveys were processed using Leica GeoOffice, using synchronous RINEX data downloaded from the Ordnance Survey website (www.gps.gov.uk). The contour plots were produced in Golden Software Surfer and then exported to Autodesk Map 3D, from which profiles of the dyke were created.



Appendix 2a. Plan of Earthworks survey.

Profiles Of Car Dyke

(Strating at North-East End. Profile Given app every 25m)



Appendix 3: Environmental Sample

Assessment of Bulk Environmental Sample from CAR.10

Anne de Vareilles

Methodology

The bulk soil sample taken from the peat in trench 1 was sub-sampled to 500ml and wet-sieved under tap water with a 300µm aperture mesh. As the sample generated a large flot only half was sorted under a low power binocular microscope (6x-40x magnification). Identifications were made using the reference collection of the G. Pitt-Rivers Laboratory, university of Cambridge. Nomenclature follows Stace (1997). All environmental remains are listed in table 1

Preservation

The sample was waterlogged but contained few wild plant seeds. The flot was largely composed of >2mm fragments of decomposing wood, and lumps of compressed, amorphous organic matter. Despite the clear paucity in seeds the peat looks relatively fresh (unlike prehistoric peat analysed from the Anglian fens), though it must have suffered episodes of drying out.

Results and Conclusion

As is shown in table1 the range and quantity of seeds found in half of the 500ml sample is low. Wood fragments, leaves, buds, willow bracts, hazel nut shell (*Corylus avellana*) and dogwood seeds (*Cornus sanguinea*) indicate a healthy presence of trees and shrubs. Most of the other plants are wetland species, such as the sedges (*Carex* spp.), duckweed (*Lemna* sp.) and water-dropwort (*Oenanthe aquatica*), and indicate that trees did not form a dense woodland cover. The plants recovered appear to be a partial representation of an historic fenland carr environment.

Table1: Plant macro-remains from the bulk soil sample

Sample number		
Context		[11]
Trench		1
Phase / Date		
Sample volume - millilitres		500
Flot fraction examined -%		50
<i>Urtica dioica</i> L.	Common Nettle	-
<i>Corylus avellana</i> L.	Hazel-nut shell fragment	-
<i>Salix</i> sp.	Willow bract	+
<i>Rubus</i> sp.	Bramble	+
<i>Epilobium</i> sp.	Willowherbs	-
<i>Cornus sanguinea</i> L.	Dogwood	+
<i>Oenanthe aquatica</i> (L.) Poir.	Fine-leaved water-dropwort	++
<i>Solanum dulcamara</i> L.	Bittersweet	+
<i>Lycopus europaeus</i> L.	Gipsywort	-
<i>Lemna</i> sp.	Duckweeds	+
large trilete <i>Carex</i> sp.	triangular Sedge seed	+
lenticular <i>Carex</i> sp.	flat Sedge seed	+
Indeterminate bud		+
Indeterminate dicot leaf fragments		++
decomposing wood fragments		+++

All plant remains are waterlogged

Key: '-' 1 or 2; '+' <10; '++' 10-50; '+++' >50 items

Appendix 4 : Oasis Data Collection Form
OASIS DATA COLLECTION FORM: England

OASIS ID: cambridg3-78475

Project details

Project name Car Dyke, Eye Road, Peterborough: Archaeological Evaluation

Short description of the project The Cambridge Archaeological Unit (CAU) undertook an archaeological earthwork survey and evaluation of an unscheduled part of the Car Dyke in advance of road widening at Eye Road, near Peterborough on behalf of Peterborough City Council. The earthwork survey revealed a relict channel which was subsequently shown by archaeological evaluation test pits to be of late post medieval date. No evidence of earlier features was found.

Project dates Start: 19-04-2010 End: 23-04-2010

Previous/future work No / Not known

Any associated project reference codes CAR10 - Sitecode

Type of project Field evaluation

Site status None

Current Land use Open Fresh Water 1 - Running water

Monument type DRAINAGE DITCH Post Medieval

Significant Finds CERAMIC Post Medieval

Methods & techniques 'Test Pits'

Development type Road scheme (new and widening)

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 PETERBOROUGH EYE Car Dyke, Eye Road

Study area 4512.00 Square metres

Site coordinates TF 21299 01654 52.5987519066 -0.208853642929 52 35 55 N 000 12 31 W Line

Site coordinates TF 21400 01825 52.6002659839 -0.207300282802 52 36 00 N 000 12 26 W Line

Height OD / Depth Min: 5.36m Max: 6.50m

Project creators

Name of Organisation Cambridge Archaeological Unit

Project brief originator Local Authority Archaeologist and/or Planning Authority/advisory body

Project design originator Robin Standring

Project director/manager Robin Standring

Project supervisor David Webb

Type of sponsor/funding body Developer

Name of sponsor/funding body Atkins Ltd

Project archives

Physical Archive recipient Cambridge Archaeological Unit

Physical Archive ID CAR10

Physical Contents 'Ceramics','Glass'

Digital Archive recipient Cambridge Archaeological Unit

Digital Archive ID CAR10

Digital Contents 'Stratigraphic','Survey'

Digital Media available 'Images raster / digital photography','Survey'

Paper Archive recipient Cambridge Archaeological Unit

Paper Archive ID CAR10

Paper Contents 'Stratigraphic','Survey'

Paper Media available 'Context sheet','Notebook - Excavation',' Research',' General Notes','Plan','Section','Survey'

Project bibliography 1

Publication type Grey literature (unpublished document/manuscript)

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