Parkside Fire and Rescue Station, Cambridge

An Archaeological Test Pit

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PARKSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE STATION, CAMBRIDGE

An Archaeological Test Pit Investigation

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Summary

A single test pit, measuring 2m by 2m in extent, was excavated in the car park of the Parkside Fire and Rescue station in July 2010 in advance of redevelopment. A relatively well preserved archaeological sequence was revealed, at the base of which a large quarry pit of medieval or earlier date was identified, the top of which lay at 1.5 metres below current ground level. This was overlain by a layer of ploughsoil containing post-medieval material, which was in turn sealed beneath the remnants of a 19th century formal garden. Finally, the sequence was capped by modern overburden, including material derived from the demolition of a prestigious 19th century villa.

Introduction

The Cambridge Archaeological Unit (CAU) undertook a test-pit based evaluation within 0.54ha area of land located in the southern part of Cambridge, Cambridgeshire, on the 8th of July 2010. The Proposed Development Area (PDA) is situated on the northern edge of Parker's Piece, immediately to the west of East Road; it is bounded to the north by Warkworth Terrace, to the west by Cambridge Central Police Station and to the south and east by an external property boundary. The site, which currently houses an active Fire and Rescue Station, is centred on TL5469 5828 and lies approximately 500m to the southeast of the historic core of the town (see Figure 1). A single test-pit, measuring 2m by 2m in extent, was excavated within the PDA, the express intention being simply to determine whether archaeological remains could survive beneath the existing development rather than model those remains in any great detail. The test-pit was situated towards the northern end of a large concrete covered car park (see Figure 2), where it was carefully positioned so as to avoid the large number of services which are present further to the south. The project, which followed the specification issued by the CAU (Dickens 2010), was monitored by Andy Thomas, Development Control Archaeologist at Cambridgeshire Archaeology Planning and Countryside Advice (CAPCA). It was commissioned by Tim Austin of E. C. Harris, on behalf of Grosvenor Developments Ltd, in advance of redevelopment.

Methodology

Service plans had been supplied and prior to excavation, the area was visually inspected and CAT scanned. Modern deposits, including layers of concrete, hardcore and 19th century garden soil, were then broken out and removed by a 360° mechanical excavator using a 1.8m wide toothless bucket. All archaeological deposits were recorded using the CAU modified version of the MoLAS system (Spence 1994); base plans were drawn at a scale of 1:20, whilst sections were drawn at a scale of 1:10. Context numbers are indicated within the text by square brackets (*e.g.* **[01]**). The photographic archive consists of a series of digital images.

Landscape and Geology

The PDA is situated upon 3rd Terrace river gravels (British Geological Survey, Sheet 188). Due to a regular pattern of contours inserted to facilitate the drainage of the car park surface, the current ground level varies between 12.52m OD to 12.77m OD. A band of orangey yellow natural sand was encountered at 11.27m OD.

Historical and archaeological background

The historical and archaeological background of the site has been covered in depth in a previous desktop assessment (Dickens & Appleby 2010), whilst the wider background of Cambridge is reviewed in several published sources (*e.g.* Cam 1959; Lobel 1975; Bryan 1999; Taylor 1999). This information is not therefore reproduced here in full. Nevertheless, it is necessary to briefly outline the background of the town in order to place the PDA securely within its wider context.

Little is known of the earliest inhabitants of the area. Although there is diffuse evidence of Prehistoric occupation and activity, most notably of Iron Age date,

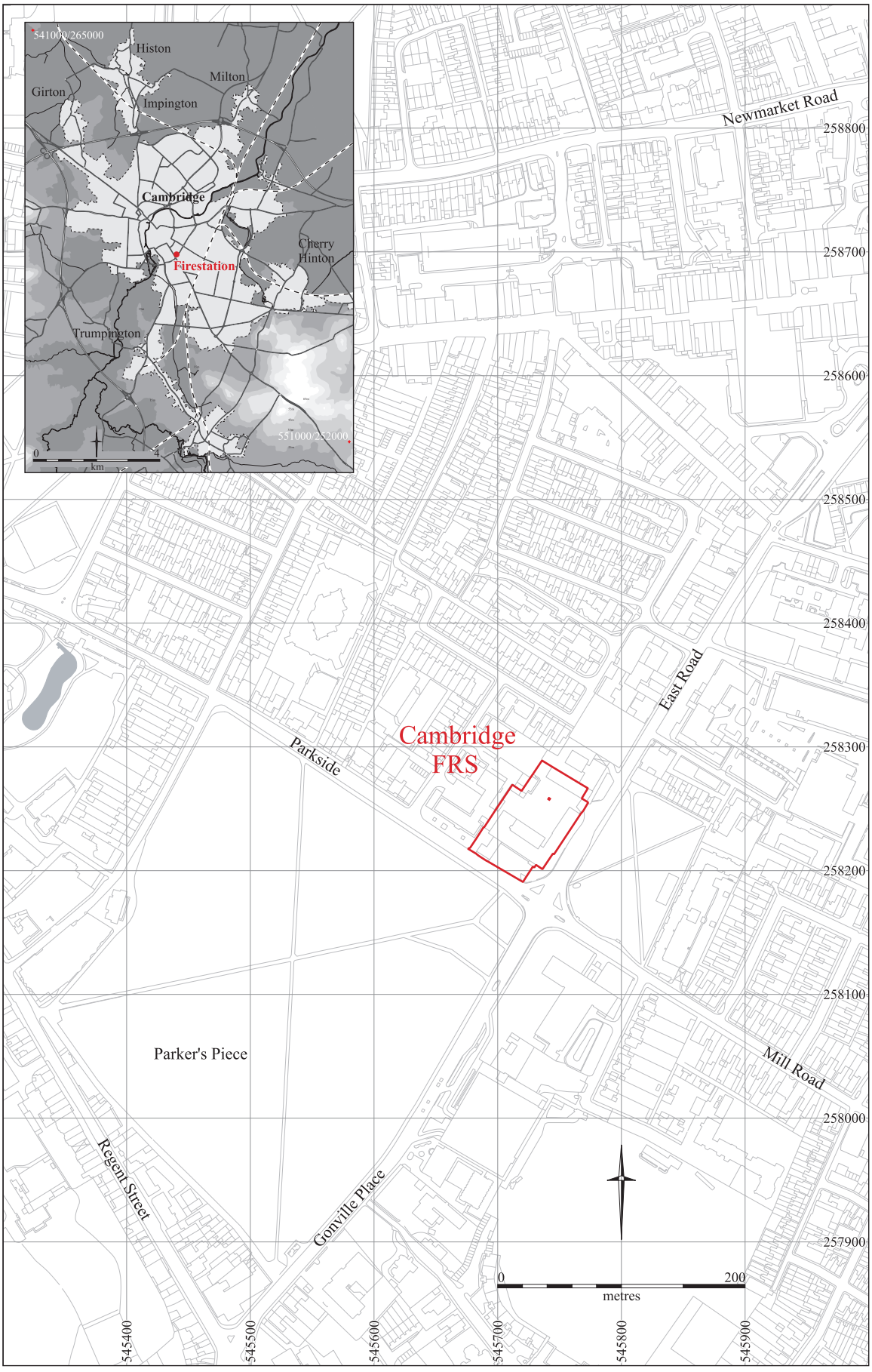

Figure 1. Location map

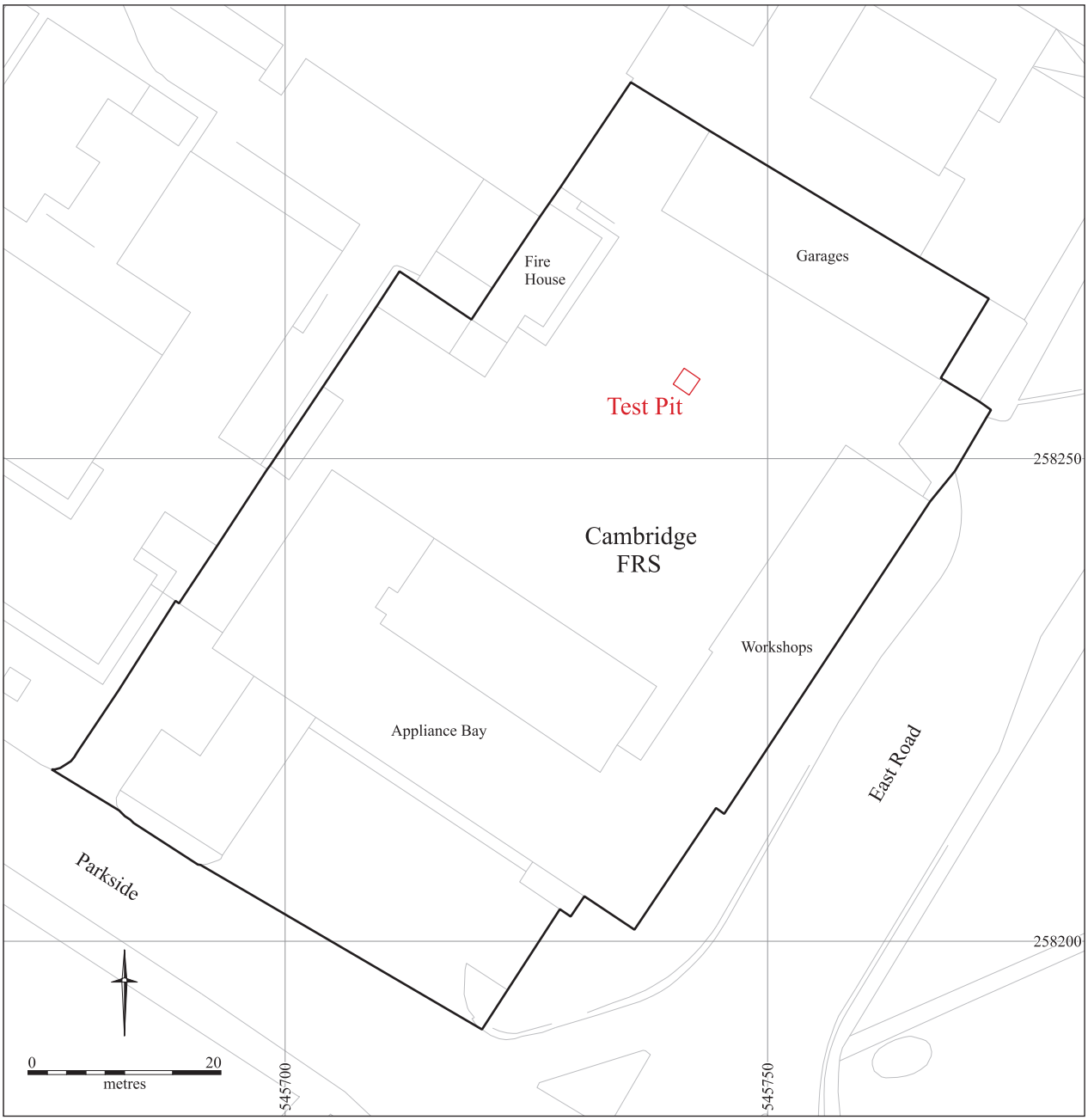

Figure 2. Location of test pit within Cambridge Firestation

located to the south and west of the town (*e.g.* Evans 1996; Evans *et al* 2009) no intensive large-scale settlement has yet been identified. Occupation appears instead to have begun in earnest shortly after the Roman invasion in AD43, with the accepted picture of Cambridge during this period being one of a settlement centred almost exclusively upon the Castle Hill area (*e.g.* Alexander & Pullinger 1999). Recent fieldwork, however, is demonstrating that this interpretation is somewhat limited, with significant settlement having been detected to the west of the presumed centre (Lucas & Whittaker 2001). Finds from this period have also been made to the southeast and there is certainly evidence of Roman activity on the riverfront (Dickens 1996) and the Park Street/Jesus Lane area (Alexander *et al* 2004), as well as a contemporary suburb situated alongside the southern approach to the town (Newman 2008b). It is therefore clear that the extent of Roman settlement on the southern bank of the Cam was greater than has generally been supposed and that the southern hinterland of the town was extensive, although it remains poorly understood. The only recorded Roman find in the vicinity of the PDA, however, is a coin that was discovered on the site of the Parkside Swimming Baths in 1961 (Dickens & Appleby 2010, 10).

Following the decline of Roman town during the 5th century the level of occupation in the area appears to have temporarily decreased, as the evidence for Early Saxon (*c.*410-700) activity in and around Cambridge primarily comprises material recovered during the 19th century from pagan cemeteries situated on the outskirts of the city (see Dodwell *et al* 2004; Cessford with Dickens 2005). Very little occupational evidence from this period has yet been identified, with the exception of a small 6th to 7th century settlement that was recently excavated on the western bank of the Cam around a kilometre to the south of the former Roman town (Dodwell *et al* 2004). Middle to Late Saxon (*c.*700-900) activity, in contrast, appears to have been primarily refocused upon the Castle Hill area, where a 7th to 9th century execution cemetery has recently been investigated (Cessford with Dickens 2005; Cessford *et al* 2007). By the mid 9th century it is clear that some form of settlement had been re-established in the area, as this was occupied by the Viking Great Army in 875, and the region was incorporated into the Danelaw from *c.*886 until its conquest by Edward the Elder in *c.*917 (Cam 1934, 39; Lobel 1975, 3). The town appears to have remained an "economically viable backwater" up until the mid 10th century (Hines 1999, 136); following this date, however, it emerged as a significant urban centre. By the late 10th century a mint had been established (Lobel 1975, 3) and the town was being linked to a group of important trading centres including Norwich, Thetford and Ipswich (Fairweather 2005), thereby emphasising the central role played by river trade in its rapid economic growth. Indeed by the beginning of the 13th century Cambridge acted as the leading inland port in the county, through which goods and services were disseminated to many of the surrounding regional towns (Cam 1934, 43).

By this time the town was probably already enclosed by an extensive boundary work that later became known as the King's Ditch. Although the eponymous 'king' is usually interpreted as being either John (1167-1216), who repaid the bailiffs of Cambridge the costs of enclosing of the city in 1215, or Henry III (1207-72), who paid for its refortification in 1267 (Cooper 1842-53), a recent radio-carbon determination derived from the basal fill of the ditch at the Grand Arcade site indicates that the boundary was at least partially extant by the late 11th or early 12th century (Craig Cessford, *pers comm.*). Yet by the Late medieval period, Cambridge's

role as a dominant port was long since over (Bryan 1999, 97); indeed, the economic wealth of the town was no longer based upon river-borne trade, but was instead largely centred around the University (which had been founded in 1209). The expansion of this institution had greatly benefited from royal investment, especially from the 15th century onwards (*ibid*, 94-6), and its growth was also given significant impetus by the Dissolution of the Monasteries in 1536-40 since many of the disbanded religious houses were subsequently converted into Colleges (Willis & Clark 1886). Notably, the gradual expansion of Cambridge from the 10th century onwards (and the concomitant rise in the local population) led to the development of ever more extensive fields systems to the west and east of the town (see further Hall & Ravensdale 1976; Hesse 2007); it is within the northeast portion of the latter of these field systems – known as the East, or Barnwell, Fields – that the current site lies. Following the inclosure of the area in the early 19th century, the PDA became amalgamated into Cambridge's growing suburban fringe (see Bryan & Wise 2005).

Investigation Results

(Figure 3)

The upper portion of the test pit sequence contained three deposits that were directly associated with the construction of the Fire and Rescue station in 1963/64. The uppermost of these three consisted of **[001]**, a layer of reinforced creamy white concrete which measured 0.33m in depth. This constituted the surface of the present day car park. Beneath the concrete lay **[002]**, a loosely compacted levelling/foundation deposit of friable yellow sandy mortar containing very frequent brick and rubble fragments. The latter included a number of machine-cut moulded sandstone fragments (measuring a maximum of 280mm by 240mm by 100mm), whilst amongst the former several moulded path-edging and wall-coping fragments were identified. In addition, numerous machine-made shallowly frogged yellow brick fragments were also present, many of which were still partially mortared together. Given the nature of its constituent elements, therefore, this deposit appears to represent rubble derived from the demolition of a relatively prestigious 19th century building (or series of buildings). Overall, [002] measured 0.30m in depth. Finally, the hardcore overlay **[003]**, a relatively firm dark black organic silt deposit with occasional clay building material (CBM) and charcoal fleck inclusions; this measured 0.17m deep. The widespread presence of partially rotted organic matter within this deposit indicates that it is likely to represent the clearance or levelling of a garden area prior to the fire station's construction.

Remnants of the garden from which this vegetation probably derived were identified in a second horizon that lay sealed beneath – and, significantly, remained apparently untruncated by – the later demolition activity. This horticultural phase principally consisted of deposit **[006]**, a layer of mid to dark brown humic clay silt with occasional to frequent gravel and charcoal fleck inclusions, which measured 0.25m thick. This garden soil had also been truncated by a northeast-southwest aligned linear feature, the cut of which – **[005]** – had moderately sloping concave sides and a flat base; it measured 2m+ long by 1.34m+ wide and 0.23m deep. This feature contained banded deposit **[004]**, which consisted of an upper lens of firmly compacted orange sandy gravels 0.05m thick overlying a deeper deposit of moderately compacted mid to pale brown silty pea grit with occasional CBM fragment inclusions 0.19m thick. It appears most likely that the feature represents the

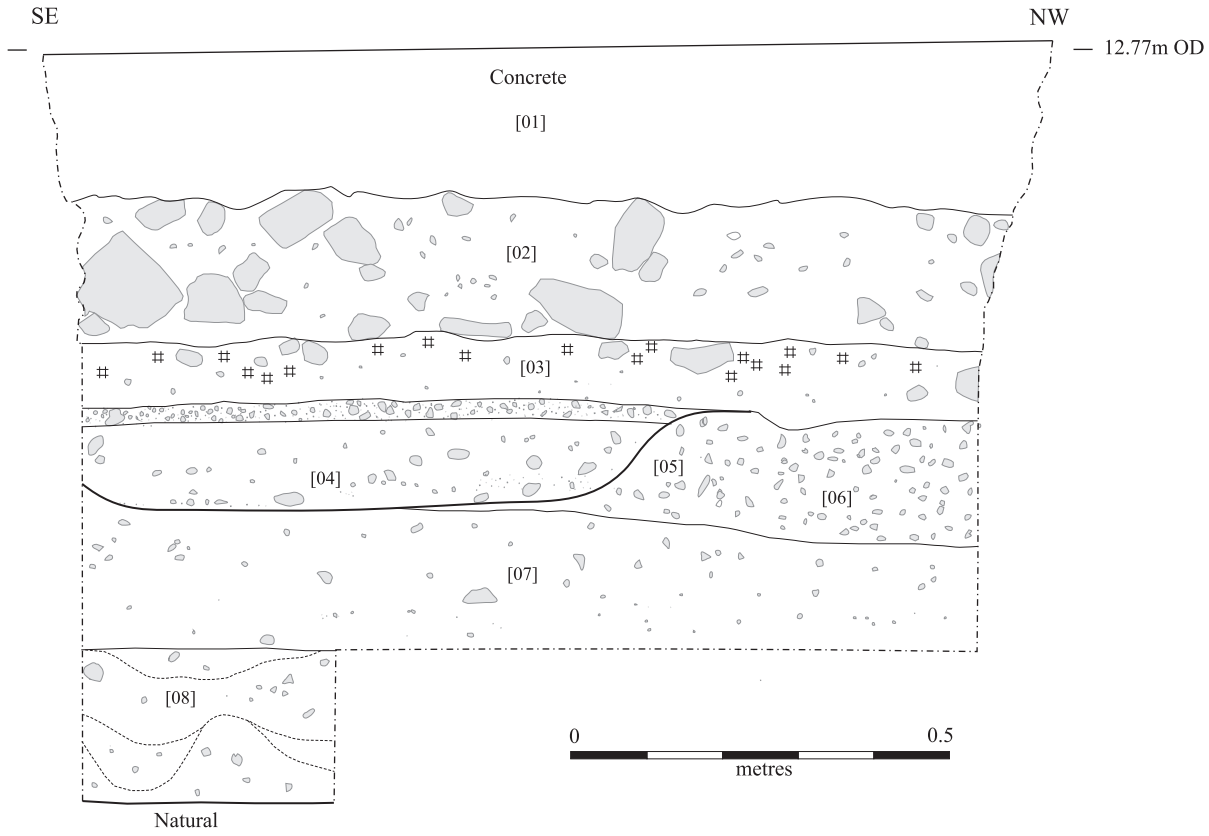

Figure 3. Section and photograph of archaeological test pit.

remnant of a formal garden path, although it is also possible that the gravels comprised hardcore situated at the base of a bedding trench or similar planting feature. This evidence, taken in conjunction with the recovery of ornate path-edging and wall-coping tile fragments from demolition deposit [002], implies that the garden was laid out in a relatively formal manner. Although undated, deposits [004] – [006] are most probably 19th or early 20th century in origin.

Sealed beneath the horticultural soil, a third horizon of activity was identified. This consisted of layer **[007]**, a relatively firm mid brown sandy clay silt deposit with occasional gravel and rare charcoal fleck inclusions that measured 0.29m thick. Two sherds of Glazed Red Earthenware (of 16th/17th century date; Edwards & Hall 1997) and two fragments of clay pipe stem (dating to post-1580; Oswald 1975) were recovered from this material, which was noticeably less humic than the overlying garden deposits. A number of plough scars were also faintly visible at the deposit's base (see the photograph on the cover of this report). This indicates that [007] comprised an agricultural ploughsoil, most probably a well-worked remnant derived from the medieval fieldsystems which are known to have extended across this area. Underneath the ploughsoil, the fourth and final horizon to be identified within the test pit consisted of sub-soil layer **[008]**, a banded and lensed deposit of mid to pale orangey brown sandy silt with discrete lenses of fine bright orange natural sand plus rare poorly sorted gravel and charcoal fleck inclusions. Because of the depth of the overlying deposits, and the instability of the modern hardcore projecting from the section, this layer was investigated via the excavation of a 0.5m by 0.5m hand-dug slot in the southeast corner of the test pit. It was found to be 0.31m deep. Prior to backfilling, the opportunity was taken to remove the remainder of [008] by machine, and this revealed the presence of a large feature – measuring at least 2m+ by 1.42m+ in extent and 0.50m+ deep – which covered the majority of the test pit's base. Unfortunately, with its upper surface lying at 1.5m+ below the present ground level, the pit was situated at too great a depth to allow safe re-entry and excavation by hand. It was therefore sample excavated by machine, but – despite the up-cast material being separated from the remainder of the spoil and visually inspected – no datable material was recovered, and few details of the feature's form could be determined. The feature was not bottomed, but it could be established that it continued to a depth of more than 2 metres below current ground level.

Discussion

Despite the limitations placed upon the scale of the investigations by the depth of overburden encountered at the site, the cut feature identified at the base of the archaeological sequence can be determined to be medieval or earlier in date on stratigraphic grounds. This raises two principal possibilities as to its origin.

Firstly, a number of Roman features have previously been identified within the surrounding southern hinterland of Cambridge (though the majority of these are located between 0.5 and 1.5km from the present site). Perhaps most significantly, with regard to the size and fill type of the feature investigated, a number of gravel quarry pits of this date have been identified at the Old Cattle Market and CB1 Development sites, where it has been suggested that they may have related to extraction activity associated with the construction and/or maintenance of the '*Via Devana*' (or Cambridge to Godmanchester road) (Mackay 2001, 24; Mackay 2006,

17-18; Slater 2010, 17). Although the precise route of this road is not known, it appears to have broadly followed the course of present day Hills Road (*c.f.* Walker 1910) and thus lay some distance to the west of the current site. Elsewhere within the area, a small number of Roman features have also been encountered at the Unilever, Brooklands and Homerton College sites (Dickens 1999, 7-9; Armour 2002, 12-13; Alexander 1997, 5-7; Webb & Dickens 2006, 10), although the relatively dispersed nature of these features – and the paucity of material remains encountered within them – indicates that they were all situated within the outlying rural hinterland of the town at this time. The dominant impression of this part of Cambridge during the Roman period is one of a series of scattered rural farmsteads, many of which appear to have been situated along the aforementioned road within an otherwise relatively unoccupied hinterland (see also Evans *et al* 2009).

This pattern indicates that the probability of encountering Roman features at the Parkside Fire and Rescue station site is slight. Much more certain, however, is the fact that – from at least the 11th century onwards – the PDA was situated within the eastern agricultural fringe of the burgeoning town. Whilst much less intensively studied than the West Fields of Cambridge (see, for example, Maitland 1898; Hall & Ravensdale 1976), the documentary evidence relating to the development of the contemporary East Fields has also been subject to historical analysis (Stokes 1915; Hesse 2007). This work has demonstrated that the field network developed from probable pre-Conquest origins, apparently doubling in size between the 11th and 14th centuries (Hesse 2007, 156-58).

The PDA thus originally formed part of a belt of common pasture/moorland surrounding the eastern fringe of Cambridge, upon which open arable fields were quickly established. These provided demesne lands for the Augustinian priory at Barnwell from the early 12th century until its dissolution in 1538, (Clark 1891). Prior to the intensive agricultural use of the area, however, it is likely that naturally occurring resources – such as the underlying gravel strata – were exploited. Indeed, this would fit very well with a previously identified pattern whereby an advancing 'fringe' of gravel extraction activity appears to have gradually extended outwards from the town during the medieval period. This phenomenon has already been identified at several sites situated within the West Fields (*e.g.* Newman 2008a, 14; Newman 2010, 93-96), and is highly likely to have occurred in the East Fields also. The 'out-sourcing' of gravel in this way was probably rendered necessary because at many sites located within the historic core of the town all of the immediately available sources of the material appear to have been exhausted by the end of the 13th century. In this context, it is noteworthy that East Road – which is situated immediately to the west of the site – was formerly known as '*Gravel Pit Road*', a name which remained in use until at least 1806 (Stokes 1915, 59-60).

Upon enclosure in 1807 the PDA comprised part of two adjoining allotments that were awarded to Peterhouse College, who sub-let them to Emmanuel College and a Rev. H. Bullen (Dickens & Appleby 2010, 8). At this time, the area appears to have remained open agricultural land. The very process of enclosure led to the attendant possibility of marked suburban expansion, however (see Bryan & Wise 2005, 202-3), and by 1830 the southeastern corner of the site was occupied by Peters Field (or Petersfield) House. Baker's map of 1830 depicts this as a large property, with a sweeping driveway to the front and formal gardens at the rear (see Dickens &

Appleby 2010, Figure 4). The house remained standing until the clearance of the site in 1963/64, providing a clear context for both the high status 19th century building materials recovered from demolition deposit [002] and the remains of the formal garden represented by [004] to [006]. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, a number of additional buildings, representing the creation of at least one further property, were also constructed within the PDA (see the Ordnance Survey 1888, 1903, 1927 and 1938 maps; Dickens & Appleby 2010, Figures 7-11).

In summary, the archaeological sequence revealed within the test pit excavated at the Parkside Fire and Rescue station is typical of those encountered elsewhere within the southern hinterland of the town, though the degree of preservation encountered in the car park / yard area was higher than expected. Modern deposits and overburden were found to seal, and not truncate, the archaeological strata, with the result that a greater than anticipated depth of material was present. The limited nature of this exercise, however, cannot the determine the extent of this material across the wider site.

Acknowledgments

The project was commissioned by Tim Austin of E. C. Harris, on behalf of Grosvenor Developments Ltd., and the fieldwork was monitored by Andy Thomas, Development Control Archaeologist at Cambridgeshire Archaeology Planning and Countryside Advice (CAPCA). The project was managed for the CAU by Alison Dickens and Robin Standring, and the evaluation was undertaken by Richard Newman. The graphics were produced by Bryan Crossan and Andy Hall, and the machining and reinstatement of the test pit was undertaken by Lattenbury Services.

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OASIS FORM

OASIS ID: cambridg3-80356	
Project details	
Project name	Parkside Fire and Rescue Station, Cambridge
Short description of the project	A single test pit, measuring 2m by 2m in extent, was excavated in the car park of the Parkside Fire and Rescue station in July 2010 in advance of redevelopment. A relatively well preserved archaeological sequence was revealed, at the base of which a large quarry pit of medieval or earlier date was identified. This was overlain by a layer of ploughsoil containing post-medieval material, which was in turn sealed beneath the remnants of a 19th century formal garden. Finally, the sequence was capped by modern overburden, including material derived from the demolition of a prestigious 19th century villa.
Project dates	Start: 08-07-2010 End: 08-07-2010
Previous/future work	No / Not known
Any associated project reference codes	ECB 3428 - HER event no.
Any associated project reference codes	PFR 10 - Site code
Type of project	Field evaluation
Site status	None
Current Land use	Other 2 - In use as a building
Monument type	QUARRY PIT Medieval
Monument type	GARDEN PATH Modern
Methods & techniques	'Test Pits'
Development type	Urban residential (e.g. flats, houses, 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 Parkside Fire and Rescue Station
Postcode	CB1 1JF
Study area	4.00 Square metres
Site coordinates	TL 4569 5828 52.2030389273 0.132184670882 52 12 10 N 000 07 55 E Point
Height OD / Depth	Min: 11.27m Max: 11.27m

Project creators	
Name of Organisation	Cambridge Archaeological Unit
Project brief originator	Local Authority Archaeologist and/or Planning Authority/advisory body
Project design originator	Alison Dickens
Project director/manager	Robin Standring
Project supervisor	Richard Newman
Type of sponsor/funding body	Developer
Name of sponsor/funding body	Grosvenor Developments, Ltd.
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Physical Archive ID	PFR 10
Physical Contents	'Ceramics'
Digital Archive recipient	Cambridge Archaeological Unit
Digital Archive ID	PFR 10
Digital Contents	'none'
Digital Media available	'Text'
Paper Archive recipient	Cambridge Archaeological Unit
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Paper Media available	'Context sheet','Photograph','Plan','Report'
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