

Botanic House, Cambridge

An Archaeological Evaluation, Phase 1



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Non-Technical Summary

Cambridge Archaeological Unit undertook an evaluation at Botanic House between the 17th and 19th of May 2010. Four test-pits were excavated, two of which exposed Victorian basements whilst the other two demonstrated deep deposits of made and disturbed ground. No archaeology pre-dating the Victorian period was identified.

Introduction

An archaeological evaluation was carried out by Cambridge Archaeological Unit (CAU) between the 17th and 19th of May 2010 on land immediately surrounding Botanic House, Cambridge prior to the redevelopment of this area. Commissioned by Bidwells, on behalf of Pace Investments Ltd, the evaluation aimed to establish the presence, date, state of preservation and significance of any archaeological remains. The evaluation was carried out and this report written in accordance with an archaeological specification written by the CAU (Beadsmoore 2010) in response to a brief by Cambridgeshire County Council's Historic Environment Team (HET). It was approved and monitored by an Archaeological Officer from the HET.

Location, Topography and Geology

The development area is centred on TL 4576 5730 and located at the junction of Hills Road and Station Road, Central Cambridge (see Figure 1). The site is currently a substantial commercial building and is bordered by Hills Road to the east, car parking and further commercial property to the south and The Botanic Gardens to the west and north, covering c.68 ha. Underlying geology is a mixture of Lower Chalk and 2nd Terrace River Gravels (British Geological Survey) and ground level elevation averaged 13.95m OD.

Archaeological Background

Evidence for prehistoric activity within the vicinity is very limited, although stray worked flint was recovered from the nearby Catholic Church (CHER 05013) and residual Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age worked flint was recovered from Roman quarry pits approximately 100m south of the development area (Mackay 2006). Hills Road itself is purported to be the route of the Via Devana; the Roman Road which linked Cambridge with Colchester to the southeast and Godmanchester to the northwest (Evans, Mackay & Webley 2008) although limited evidence for Roman activity has been identified within the vicinity. This includes a Roman coin (CHER 04613) and pottery (CHER 04614) recovered from the adjacent Botanic Gardens and a probable Roman ditch and gully excavated 150m to the northwest (CHER CB1464).

Very little evidence of Saxon and medieval activity has been identified within the immediate area, although the medieval hospital of St. Anthony and St. Eloy was located near the corner of Lensfield Road approximately 150m to the north (CHER 04861).

Methodology

Evaluation of the development area was initially planned to be carried out by a single 15m trench along the northwest edge of the current building and a 2m x 2m hand dug test pit adjacent to the southeast corner of that building. However, the 15m trench was adapted to three test pits due to the presence of Victorian basements and deep made-ground deposits. Test-pits 2 and 3 were within a tarmac car park and required cutting with a floor saw using a water immersed blade. After cutting and removing the tarmac, the underlying deposits were excavated using a seven tonne rubber tracked 360° machine with a 1.3m wide ditching bucket.

No features were identified or recorded. Test-pits were planned at scale 1:50 and sections drawn at scale 1:10 and a digital photographic record was taken. All work was carried out in strict accordance with statutory Health and Safety legislation and with the recommendations of FAME (Allen & Holt 2010) and in accordance with a site specific risk assessment and the CAU Health & Safety policy. The CAU site code is BHC 10 and CHER number is ECB3336.

Archive

No archaeological features were recorded and no finds recovered. A data sheet recording the general information of each test-pit was generated and a digital photographic archive was compiled. These records have been assembled into a catalogued archive in line with Appendix 1 of MAP2 (English Heritage 1991) and are being stored at the CAU offices.

Results

No archaeological features or deposits dating prior to the Victorian period were identified in any of the four test-pits and although finds dating to the 19th and 20th century were present, none were recovered for further analysis. Table 1 gives a brief summary of each test-pit and Figure 3 shows photographs of Test-pits 1, 3 and 4.

Test-pit 1

TP.1 was 3.5m in length and was cut into a small area of shrubbery adjacent to the current structure. Underlying a thin layer of topsoil was a layer of hardcore and rubble 0.2m deep. Beneath this were a low voltage electric cable and two brick walls which appeared to form the corner of a basement. Between the walls was in-filled with a layer at least 1m deep consisting of building rubble, dark grey silt and 19th/20th rubbish.

Test-pit 2

TP.2 was 2.85m in length and cut into a tarmac car park just to the southwest of TP.1. Underlying the tarmac was a layer of hardcore and concrete which overlay further Victorian basements, because of their presence the test pit was excavated no deeper.

Test-pit 3

TP.3 was 2.35m in length and cut into the tarmac car park just to the southwest of TP.2. Underlying the tarmac and hardcore was a layer 0.39m deep of made-ground consisting of rubble mixed with grey sandy silt. This layer overlay a partially preserved subsoil 0.31m deep which was scanned by eye and metal detected for finds but none were identified. The underlying geology was Lower Chalk marl.

Test-pit 4

TP.4 was a 2m x 2m hand dug test-pit located adjacent to Hill's Road at the eastern end of the development area. Underlying the topsoil was a deep layer of made ground consisting of dark grey silty sand mixed with frequent building rubble at least 1.20m deep, with an electric cable was exposed within it. The underlying geology was not reached due to the depth of the made-ground deposit.

Test-pit	Topsoil (m)	Tarmac (m)	Concrete/Hardcore (m)	Made-ground (m)	Subsoil (m)	Ground Surface (m OD)	Notes
1	0.18	-	0.2	1.0	-	13.97	Within Victorian basement
2	-	0.11	0.37	-	-	13.95	Within Victorian basement (not bottomed)
3	-	0.11	0.41	0.39m	0.31	13.79	Made ground overlaying surviving subsoil
4	0.31	-	-	1.20	-	13.64	Not bottomed due to depth of made-ground

Table 1: Test-pit Summary

Discussion

The 1886 Ordnance Survey map of Cambridge (see Figure 2) shows TP.'s 1 and 2 are located within the footprint of Victorian buildings that previously occupied this part of the development area, which explains the presence of the basements seen here. TP.3 however was located within the back garden of one of these buildings and is therefore less truncated. TP.4 was located at the front of one of these buildings, but the depth of made-ground seen here suggests this part of the development area has been heavily truncated and modified.

The four test-pits show that the Phase 1 development area has been heavily truncated indicating that if there was archaeological activity here it would not have survived. Although, the lack of archaeology within the less truncated TP.3 indicates this area was not densely utilised prior to 19th century.

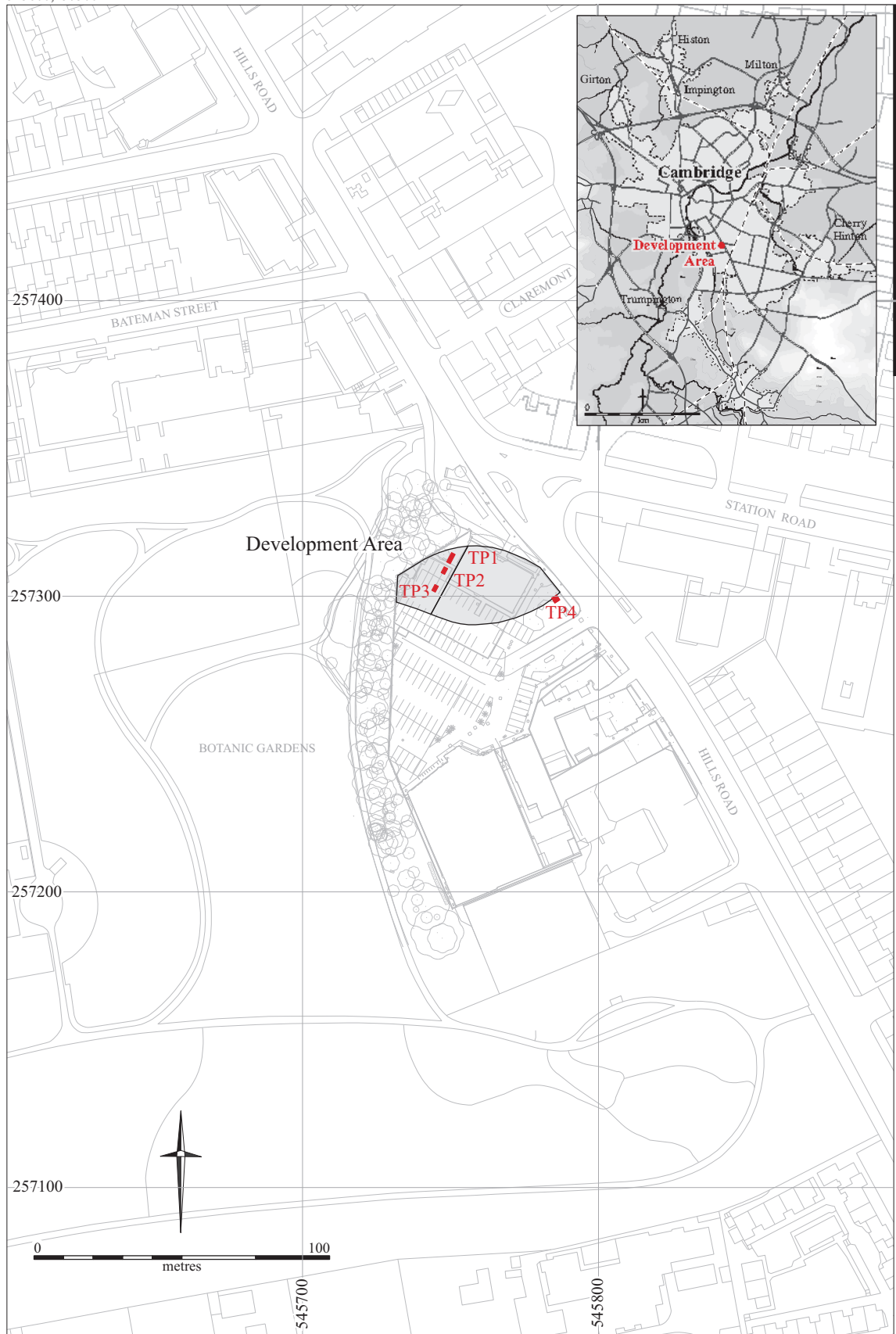
Acknowledgements

The work was commissioned by Bidwells on behalf of Pace Investments Ltd. and the site was monitored by Dan McConnell (HET). Emma Beadsmore was the project manager and thanks go to Shannon Hogan and Matt Wood for assisting the author on site and Donald Horne for surveying the test-pits.

References

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545600,257500



545900,257050

Figure 1. Location map

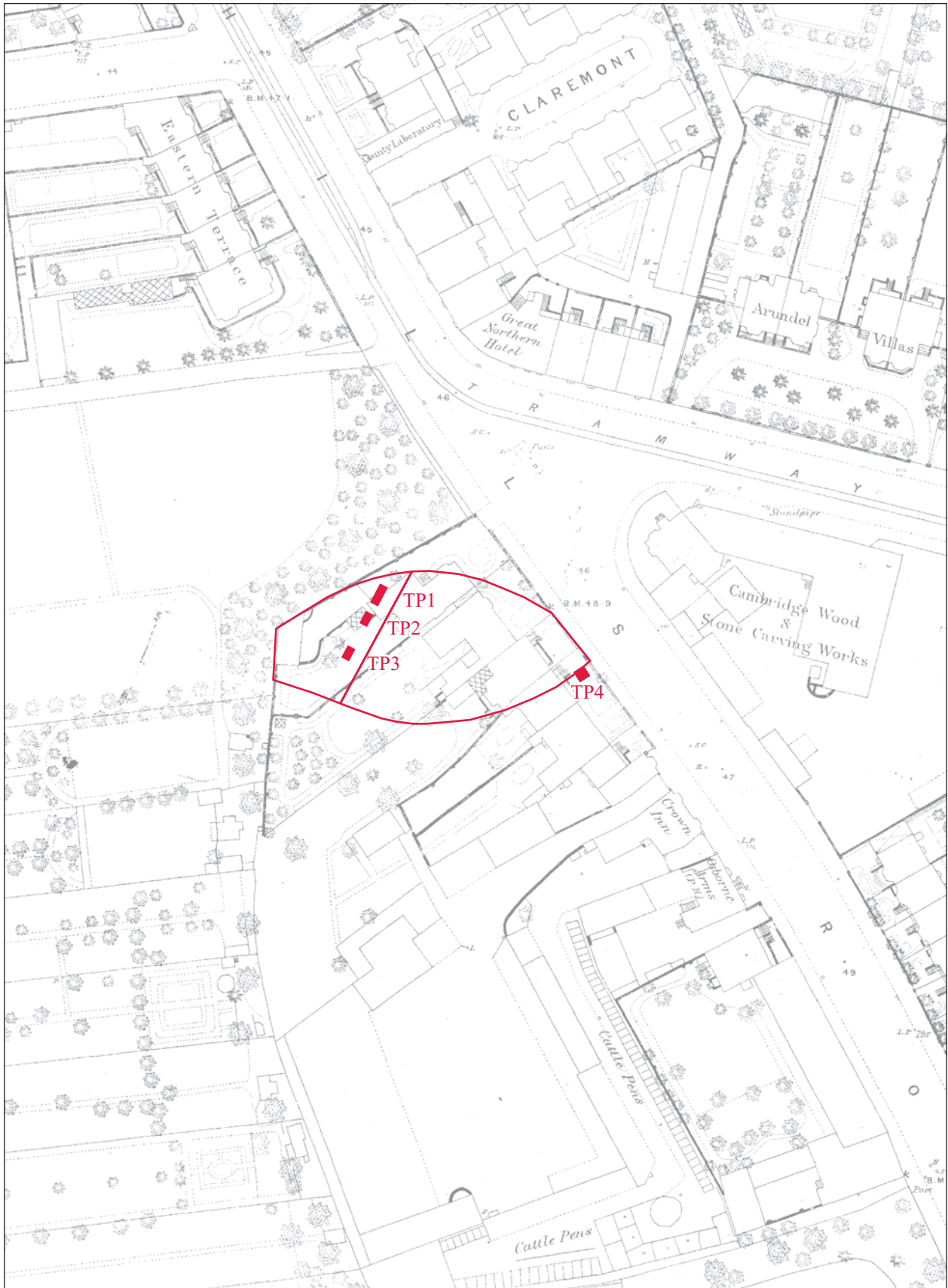


Figure 2. Test pits located on 1886 1st Edition Ordnance Survey map of Cambridge



Test pit 1



Test pit 3



Test pit 4

Figure 3. Photographs of Test pits 1, 3 and 4

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Project details

Project name	Botanic House, Cambridge An Archaeological Evaluation, Phase 1
Short description of the project	Cambridge Archaeological Unit undertook an evaluation at Botanic House between the 17th and 19th of May 2010. Four test-pits were excavated, two of which exposed Victorian basements whilst the other two demonstrated deep deposits of made and disturbed ground. No archaeology pre-dating the Victorian period was identified.
Project dates	Start: 17-05-2010 End: 19-05-2010
Previous/future work	No / No
Type of project	Field evaluation
Site status	Local Authority Designated Archaeological Area
Current Land use	Industry and Commerce 2 - Offices
Monument type	NONE None
Significant Finds	NONE None
Methods & techniques	'Test Pits'
Development type	Urban commercial (e.g. offices, shops, banks, etc.)
Prompt	Planning condition
Position in the planning process	After full determination (eg. As a condition)

Project location

Country	England
Site location	CAMBRIDGESHIRE CAMBRIDGE CAMBRIDGE Botanic House, Cambridge
Postcode	CB2 1JZ
Study area	0.68 Hectares
Site coordinates	TL 4576 5730 52.1942148979 0.132786637052 52 11 39 N 000 07 58 E Point
Height OD / Depth	Min: 13.64m Max: 13.97m

Project creators

Name of Organisation	Cambridge Archaeological Unit
Project brief originator	Local Authority Archaeologist and/or Planning Authority/advisory body
Project design originator	Emma Beadsmoore
Project director/ manager	Emma Beadsmoore
Project supervisor	Matthew Collins
Type of sponsor/ funding body	Developer
Name of sponsor/ funding body	Pace Investments Ltd.

Project archives

Physical Archive Exists?	No
Digital Archive recipient	Cambridge Archaeological Unit
Digital Archive ID	BHC 10
Digital Contents	'none'
Digital Media available	'GIS','Images raster / digital photography','Survey'
Paper Archive recipient	Cambridge Archaeological Unit
Paper Archive ID	BHC 10
Paper Contents	'none'
Paper Media available	'Correspondence','Diary','Drawing','Map','Miscellaneous Material','Notebook - Excavation',' Research',' General Notes','Photograph','Plan','Report','Survey','Unpublished Text'

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