CAMBRIAN ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROJECTS LTD.

Ince Marsh, Helsby
Cheshire

Archaeological Evaluation

By
Chris E Smith Ba (Hons) AIFA

CAP Report No. 457

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

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Prepared for:
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RSKENSR Group

CAP Report No: 457

Project No: **799**

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Non Technical Summary

This report results from work undertaken by Cambrian Archaeological Projects Ltd (CAP) for RSKENSR Group on land at Ince Marsh, Helsby, Cheshire. This report draws upon the results gained by the excavation of ten evaluation trenches, providing a five percent sample, on the site of proposed development.

1 Introduction

1.1 Location and scope of work

1.1.1 In August 2006 Cambrian Archaeological Projects (CAP) carried out a pre-determinate archaeological evaluation of a proposed development site on land at Ince Marsh, Helsby, Cheshire (Fig 1).

1.1.2 This was in respect of a planning application for development (Planning ref: 2006/111 & 125) and an archaeological specification agreed with Mark Leah (Historic Environment Planning Officer, Cheshire County Council) and RSKENSR Group.

1.1.3 The assessment area is centred on national grid ref: SJ46374 76469 (Fig 1).

1.1.4 Previous archaeological work in the area consists of a desk based assessment carried out by Peel Environmental Ltd. The assessment shows the presence of a post medieval/19th century farmstead (Grinsome farm) in the middle of the assessment area and also highlighted a possible Viking element to the landscape within local place names (Grinsome Fm, Holme Fm).

1.1.5 As an addition to the project the sites of two known sluice gates close to the Manchester Ship Canal were also to be visited and inspected.

1.2 Geology and topography

1.2.1 The underlying solid geology of the Ince Marsh area is primarily made up of undifferentiated Permian and Triassic sandstones including 'Bunter' and Keuper' (British Geological Survey, 2001).

1.2.2 The assessment area is located on an area of slightly higher ground projecting from what, prior to land reclamation, would have been marshland. The assessment area is the highest projection from the marshland for approximately 1.5 kilometres in each direction. This natural projection of land may have acted as a focal point for settlement

before the construction of Grinsome Farm as it allows good all round vistas combined with well drained land underfoot. The landscape which now surrounds the assessment area is one of mixed industry and agriculture. Power stations, refineries and various works plants surround the local area with the Manchester Ship Canal also being located to the north. Agriculture, both arable and pastoral, is still maintained within the fields surrounding the assessment area.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

1.3.1 As a desk based assessment of the study area has previously been carried out by Peel Environment Ltd it is not the aim of this report to duplicate this work. Rather a succinct review of the information is presented here.

1.3.2 The desk based assessment highlighted the presence of an isolated find of a Bronze Age looped spearhead from the area although the exact details are not recorded. A Roman presence in the area is possible at a non scheduled enclosure within the assessment area (RSK Site 22) and at a small recorded fort on a small area of raised ground close to the estuary (RSK Site 19). Given the Roman activity in Chester, some degree of presence in the surrounding landscape is certain. Two sites within the study area suggest a Viking influence: Grinsome Farm (RSK Site 25) and Holme Farm (RSK Site 26). Grinsome is from the Old Norse, Grin reflects the personal name *Grimr* and *Some* reflects *Holmr* meaning Island or Meadow. Holme, similarly derives its name from *Holmr* (Environment Statement, 2006).

1.3.3 The majority of the known archaeological sites within the assessment area date from the post medieval period and relate to the growth of industry, transport and associated infrastructure around the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries (Environment Statement, 2006).

1.3.4 A full account of the Archaeological and Historical background of the assessment area and surrounding landscape is laid out in the Environment Statement (2006).

2 Aims and Objectives

2.1 Field Evaluation

2.1.1 To establish the presence/absence of archaeological remains within the proposal area.

2.1.2 To determine the extent, condition, nature, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains present.

2.1.3 To establish the ecofactual and environmental potential of archaeological deposits and features

2.1.4 To appraise the likely impact of the proposal on any surviving archaeological deposits and if appropriate to make suggestions for a mitigation strategy or, where areas contain archaeology of national importance, for preservation *in situ.*

2.2 Site Visit

2.2.1 To establish the presence/absence of the sluice gates in the area of the Manchester Ship canal

2.2.2 To determine the extent, condition, nature, character, quality and date of any standing remains present.

2.2.3 To appraise the likely impact of the proposal on any standing remains and if appropriate to make suggestions for a mitigation strategy or, where areas contain archaeology of national importance, for preservation *in situ.*

3 Methodology

3.1 Evaluation

3.1.1 The evaluation consisted of ten machine-excavated trenches measuring 30 metres by 2 metres. A JCB 2CX mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless bucket removed the overburden under close archaeological supervision.

3.1.2 Project Officer Chris E Smith (AIFA) and project assistants Ian Davies, Peter Jones and Nick Edwards undertook the evaluation under the overall direction of Kevin Blockley (MIFA). The trenches were cleaned by hand with plans and sample sections being recorded and drawn at scales of 1:10, 1:20 or 1:50. All trenches were photographed using 35mm black and white print film, 35mm colour slide film and high resolution digital photography.

3.1.3 All areas of trenching were located subject to reference against service plans. Each proposed trench location was also subject to a cable avoiding tool (CAT) survey.

3.1.4 All works were undertaken in accordance with both the IFA's *Standards and Guidance: for an archaeological evaluation* and current Health and Safety legislation.

3.2 Finds

3.2.1 Finds were recovered by hand during the course of the excavation and bagged by context.

3.3 Palaeo-environmental evidence

3.3.1 No deposits suited to environmental sampling were located during the evaluation.

3.3 Site Visit

3.3.1 The visit to the area of the sluice gates was undertaken initially as a field walkover with any standing remains being recorded photographically in the first instance.

4 Evaluation Results

4.1 Soils and ground conditions

4.1.1 Generally the site and weather conditions were mixed throughout the course of the evaluation, turning from dry, bright conditions to torrential rain and thunderstorms as time progressed.

4.2 Distribution of deposits

4.2.1 The topsoils and subsoils were not of a uniform distribution over the surface of the trenches and varied in their depth. In areas of agriculture topsoil was found to give only an average of *c.* 0.3m of cover to bedrock natural whereas in areas of grassland top and subsoils were found to be much deeper.

4.3 Descriptions

4.31 Trench 1

4.31.1 Trench 1 measured 30 x 2 metres, was aligned on a north west – south east axis and was located on the top of the natural rise close to the site of the demolished Grinsome Farm.

Overburden was removed by mechanical excavator under archaeological supervision. The topsoil deposit (101) was found to be extremely thin (0.2m) and composed of dark brown/black silt. Beneath (101) was a thin layer of degraded sandstone covering the natural sandstone bedrock (106). Two post holes [103] & [105] were found cut into the natural bedrock although owing to the presence of clinker and barbed wire within one and the remains of a post within the other, both of these were deemed to be relatively modern. No features of archaeological interest were located within this trench.

4.32 **Trench 2**

4.32.1 Trench 2 measured 30 x 2 metres, was aligned on a north east – south west axis and was located on the top of the natural rise close to the site of the demolished Grinsome Farm. Overburden was removed by mechanical excavator under archaeological supervision. The topsoil deposit (201) was approximately 0.3m thick and was made up of dark brown/black silt plough soil. Similarly, trench 2 also contained a deposit of degraded sandstone natural located above the natural bedrock (204). No features of archaeological interest were located within this trench.

4.33 **Trench 3**

4.33.1 Trench 3 measured 35 x 2 metres, was aligned on a north – south axis and was located on the northern face of the slope of the natural rise close to the site of the demolished Grinsome Farm. Overburden was removed by mechanical excavator under archaeological supervision. Topsoil in trench 3 (301) was found to be extremely shallow (0.3m) with natural sandstone bedrock (302) located immediately beneath. The noticeable lack of soil depth seems likely to be due to the natural slope in topography with water run-off and soil creep processes keeping the soil depth shallow. No features of archaeological interest were located within this trench.

4.34 **Trench 4**

4.34.1 Trench 4 measured 35 x 2 metres, was aligned on a north east – south west axis and was located on the top of the natural rise close to the site of the demolished Grinsome Farm. Overburden was removed by mechanical excavator under archaeological supervision. Topsoil in trench 4 (401) was slightly deeper than that encountered in trenches 1, 2 & 3. It measured 0.35m deep on average with a thicker layer of degraded natural beneath

before solid natural bedrock was reached (402). No features of archaeological interest were located within this trench.

4.35 **Trench 5**

4.35.1 Trench 5 (See Fig 4, Plates 1 & 2) measured 35 x 2 metres, was aligned on an east – west axis and was located on the south east slope of the natural rise, close to the site of the demolished Grinsome Farm. Overburden was removed by mechanical excavator under archaeological supervision. Removal of topsoil (501) in trench 5 revealed a compact red/brown sandy subsoil (506) containing charcoal flecks. The layer was apparently not cut through and appeared undisturbed. Beneath (506) was the solid sandstone bedrock (507). This was located over the base of the entire trench although it was cut through in certain places. [503] was a small rectangular pit cut into the natural bedrock containing a single uniform fill (504) of uncertain date. Located immediately in the top of this fill was a small piece of degraded silver foil from a cigarette packet. Although it came from the upper layers of the fill it is likely to indicate that the pit is largely modern. A small post hole [505] was located close to the pit although this too was of uncertain date.

4.36 **Trench 6**

4.36.1 Trench 6 (See Fig 5) measured 30 x 2 metres, was aligned on an east – west axis and was located on the south east slope of the natural rise, approximately 100m from the site of the demolished Grinsome Farm and close to the base of the natural slope. Overburden was removed by mechanical excavator under archaeological supervision. As with the majority of other trenches the removal of topsoil (601) revealed a degraded layer of natural sandstone located immediately above solid natural bedrock (608). A thin layer of sandy red/brown subsoil material was present over small areas of the trench. The bedrock was found to have been cut through by three postholes [603] [605] & [607], possibly in a curvilinear/semicircular arrangement. The postholes were found to contain single uniform fills and to be relatively shallow. No finds or other dating evidence was located. The eastern end of trench 6 was located close to the base of the slope in what would previously have been marshland. This was reflected in the natural sandy deposits located at the eastern end of the trench which bore evidence of bioturbation.

4.37 **Trench 7**

4.37.1 Trench 7 measured 30 x 2 metres, was aligned on a north east – south west axis and was located on the base of the north slope of the natural rise, approximately 100m from the site of the demolished Grinsome Farm. A ditch/drain is evident running across the field to the north of the assessment area, trench 7 was located so as to investigate the possible continuation of this drain into the assessment area. Overburden was removed by mechanical excavator under archaeological supervision. Topsoil (701) was found to be deeper at the base of slope measuring approximately 0.4m deep in trench 7. A compact red/brown subsoil (702) was again encountered above a sandy deposit similar to that located at the eastern end of trench 6. Solid bedrock was not encountered in this trench owing to the presence of deep degraded sandstone deposits with possible areas of bioturbation. Water run-off from the natural slope seems likely to have deposited large amounts of this compact sand deposit at the slopes base. No cuts through the sandy deposit were evident with the exception of one modern ceramic land drain. No features of archaeological interest were located in this trench. Plate 3 is presented as an example of shallow bedrock in the area.

4.38 **Trench 8**

4.38.1 Trench 8 (Plate 3) measured 30 x 2 metres, was aligned on an east – west axis and was located on the south west slope of the natural rise in a field currently under maize crop, approximately 100m from the site of the demolished Grinsome Farm and close to the base of the natural slope. Overburden was removed by mechanical excavator under archaeological supervision. Topsoil in trench 8 (801) was found to be similar to that in most other trenches, 0.3 – 0.4m deep before a compact layer of red/brown degraded sandstone natural was encountered. A compact brown sandy subsoil material was present in certain areas of the trench although this was mostly clean and undisturbed. No features of archaeological interest were located in this trench. Plate 4 is presented as an example of shallow bedrock in the area.

4.39 **Trench 9**

4.39.1 Trench 9 measured 30 x 2 metres, was aligned on an east – west axis and was located on the south west slope of the natural rise in a field currently under maize crop, approximately 100m from the site of the demolished Grinsome Farm and close to the base of the natural slope. Overburden was removed by mechanical excavator under archaeological supervision. Stratigraphically trench 9 was similar to trench 8, shallow

topsoil (901) on top of degraded natural bedrock (902). An area of darker material was noted at the eastern end of the trench. This was taken to be a service cut as it contained modern plastic fragments as well as sacking material. The fill was found to be made up of redeposited natural and small graded gravel stones. Owing to the propensity of large services in the area excavation was halted at this level. No features of archaeological interest were located in this trench.

4.40 **Trench 10**

4.40.1 Trench 10 measured 15 x 2 metres, was aligned on an north east – south west axis and was located on the southern slope of the natural rise in a field currently under maize crop, approximately 100m from the site of the demolished Grinsome. Overburden was removed by mechanical excavator under archaeological supervision. Owing to major services within this area it was deemed rational to half the size of this trench. A 5% sample of the area was maintained by extending trenches three, four and five by an extra 5 metres each. Removal of topsoil (1001) revealed a red/brown compact subsoil material (1002) with no apparent cuts made through it. Beneath (1002) was found a compact layer of degraded natural sandstone (1003). No features of archaeological interest were located in this trench.

5 Finds

5.1.1 A small amount of finds were recovered during the course of the evaluation, primarily made up of modern ceramic and glass fragments.

5.1.2 Present on site were two metal detectorists from the Crewe and Nantwich Metal Detectorists Club. All excavated spoil was surveyed by the detectorists and a general sweep of the assessment area was also carried out. A small amount of scrap iron fragments, likely associated with agriculture, was located as well as one small fragment of bronze.

6 Site Visit Results

6.1 **Sluice Gates**

6.1.1 The visit to the area of the sluices was undertaken in order to ascertain whether or not they still survive. Of the two sluice sites only one still exists. It stands in extremely boggy ground and is currently very overgrown. This made it extremely difficult to photograph although some plates are presented herein (Plates 5&6).

7 Discussion and Interpretation

7.1 Reliability of field investigation

7.1.1 The evaluation was generally unhampered by any modern building or agricultural activity although the presence of numerous services within the assessment area did a great deal to hamper proceedings on site by largely dictating the location of trenches.

7.1.2 The overall findings of the evaluation were somewhat inconsistent with the activity suggested by the known land use of the area. The lack of archaeological activity centred on Grinsome Farm was rather unexpected. A distinct lack of both features and material culture make it difficult to suggest occupation on the natural rise prior to the construction of Grinsome Farm.

7.2 Overall interpretation

7.2.1 The overall interpretation gained from the evaluation must be that any cut features are likely to survive well owing to them being cut into bedrock. Any ploughing on the hill is therefore forced to remain shallow, thus protecting any features. The fact that few features of this nature were located during the course of the evaluation suggests that either the majority of activity has been concentrated on the area of Grinsome Farm or that very little occupational activity has taken place. Although the evaluation revealed a few cut features, i.e. a pit and some postholes, these were located away from the centre of the rise and are of uncertain date. Without dating evidence it is difficult to interpret the possible use/meaning of these features in isolation.

7.3 Significance

7.3.1 It was expected that the natural rise on which the evaluation trenches were located would have been a focus for activity from prehistory to the Viking period, from which it is likely that the Norse place name evidence arises. The lack of activity uncovered by the evaluation is therefore unexpected and significant in itself. It seems likely, however, that any substantial activity on the rise would have taken place within the area of Grinsome Farm itself, surmounting the peak of the rise and offering the best all round vistas.

7.3.2 A phase of further mitigation will be required for the area of the sluice gate prior to development.

8 Acknowledgements

8.1.1 Thanks to Pete Jones, Ian Davies and Nick Edwards (CAP) for their on site assistance. Thanks to Mark Leah for his monitoring site visit. Thanks are also due to Jim Evans (Kemira) and Adam Foss for their help regarding services. Thanks to those members of the Crewe and Nantwich Metal Detectorists club who were present on site. Finally, many thanks are due to Kathryn Blythe (RSK) for her site visits, help with services and general liasing.

9 Bibliography and references

British Geological Survey. 2001, 4th Edition. Solid Geology Map, UK South Sheet.

Environment Statement, 2006: *Ince Resource Recovery Park – Environment Statement, peel Environmental Ince Ltd, January 2006, Section 11 Archaeology and Heritage*.

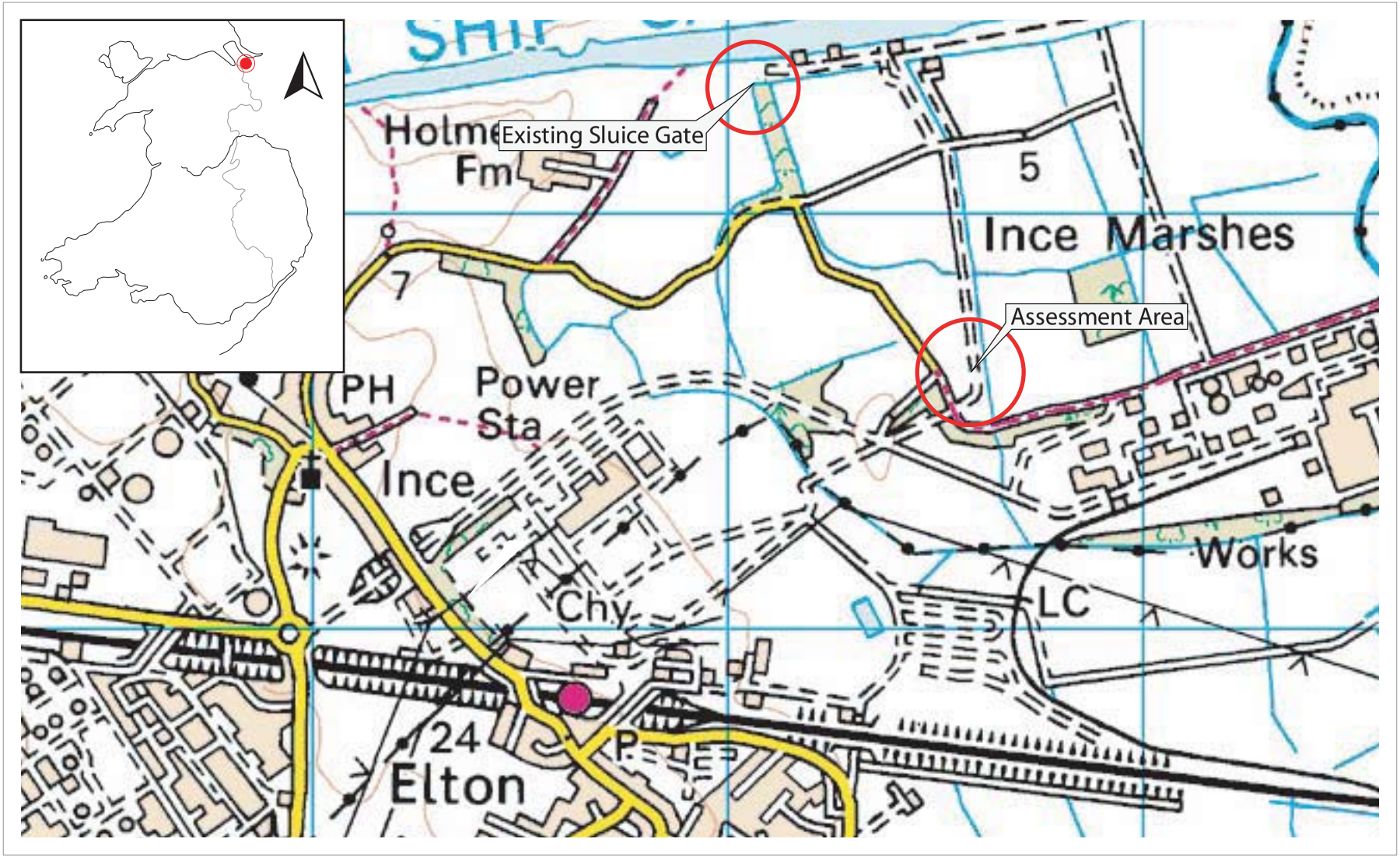


Fig 01: Map showing locations of assessment area & sluice gate

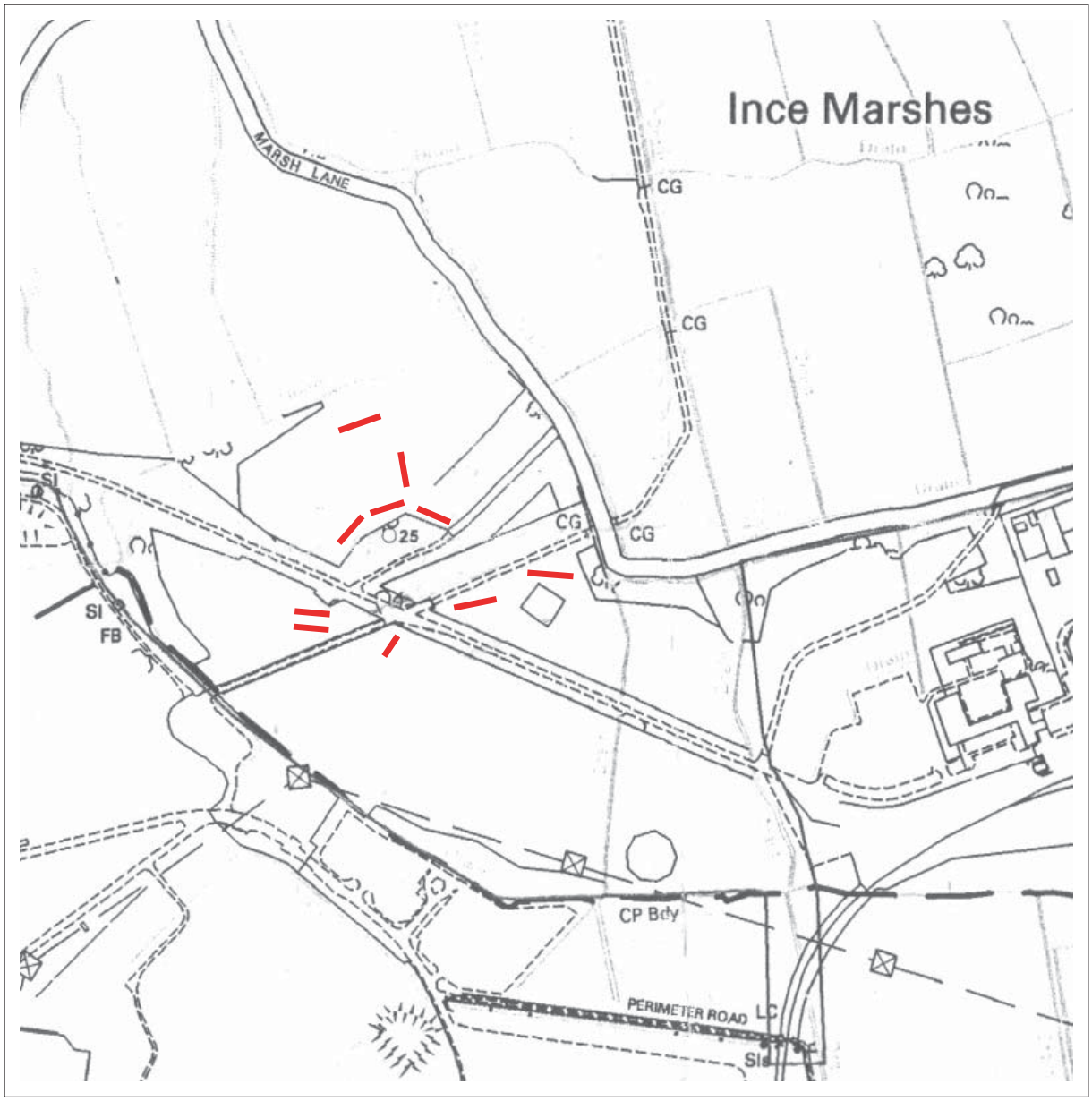
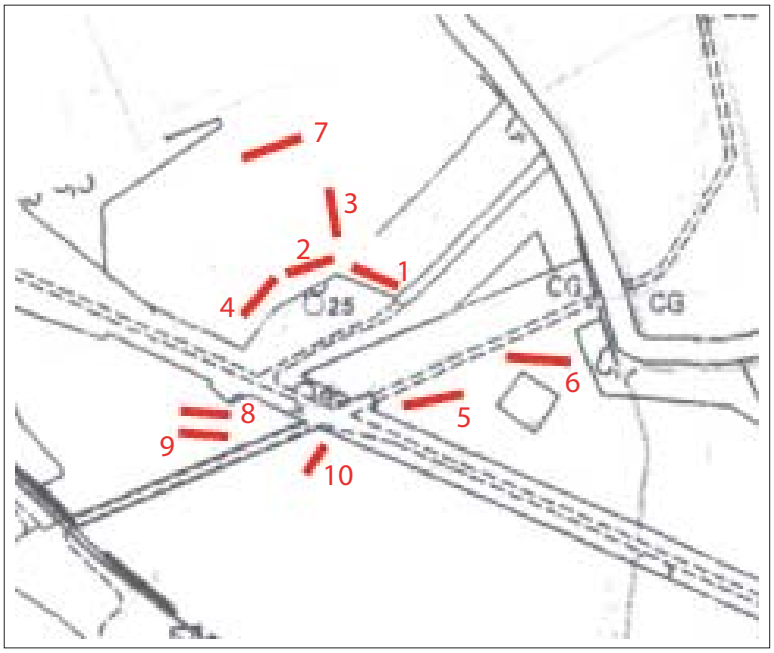


Fig 2 (Above) Trench locations in wider setting

Fig 3 (Right) Trench locations and numbers



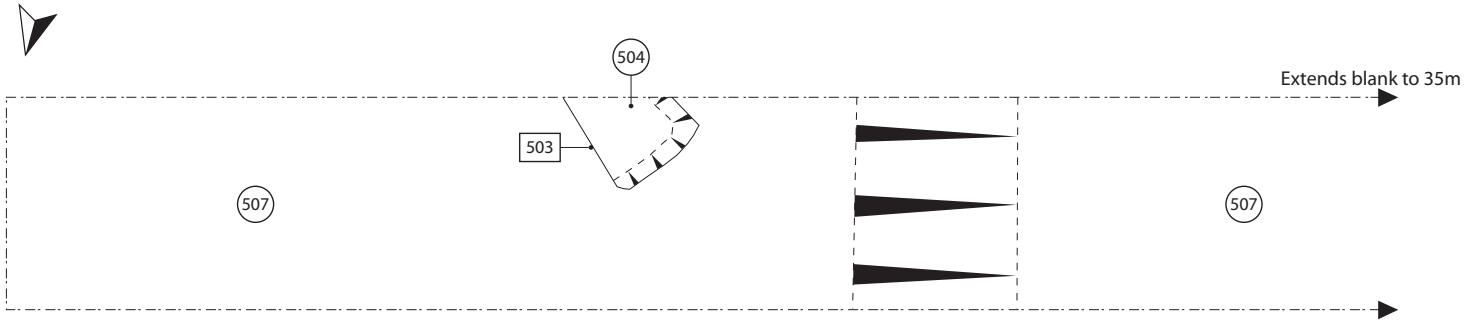


Fig 4: Plan of trench 5 with pit cut [503]

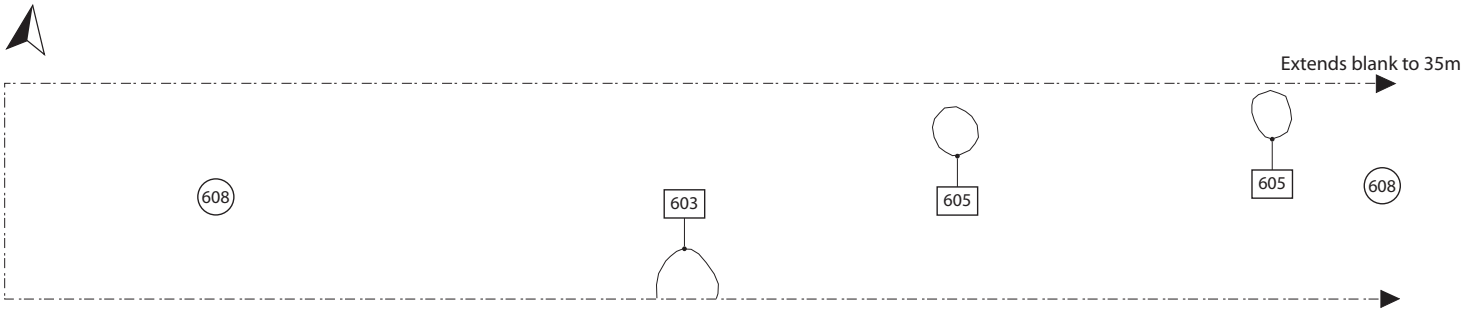


Fig 5: Plan of trench 6 with postholes [603], [605] & [607]

Plate 01: View along trench 5, looking west. Note bedrock

Plate 02: View of rock cut pit [003], scale 1 x 1m & 1 x .25m

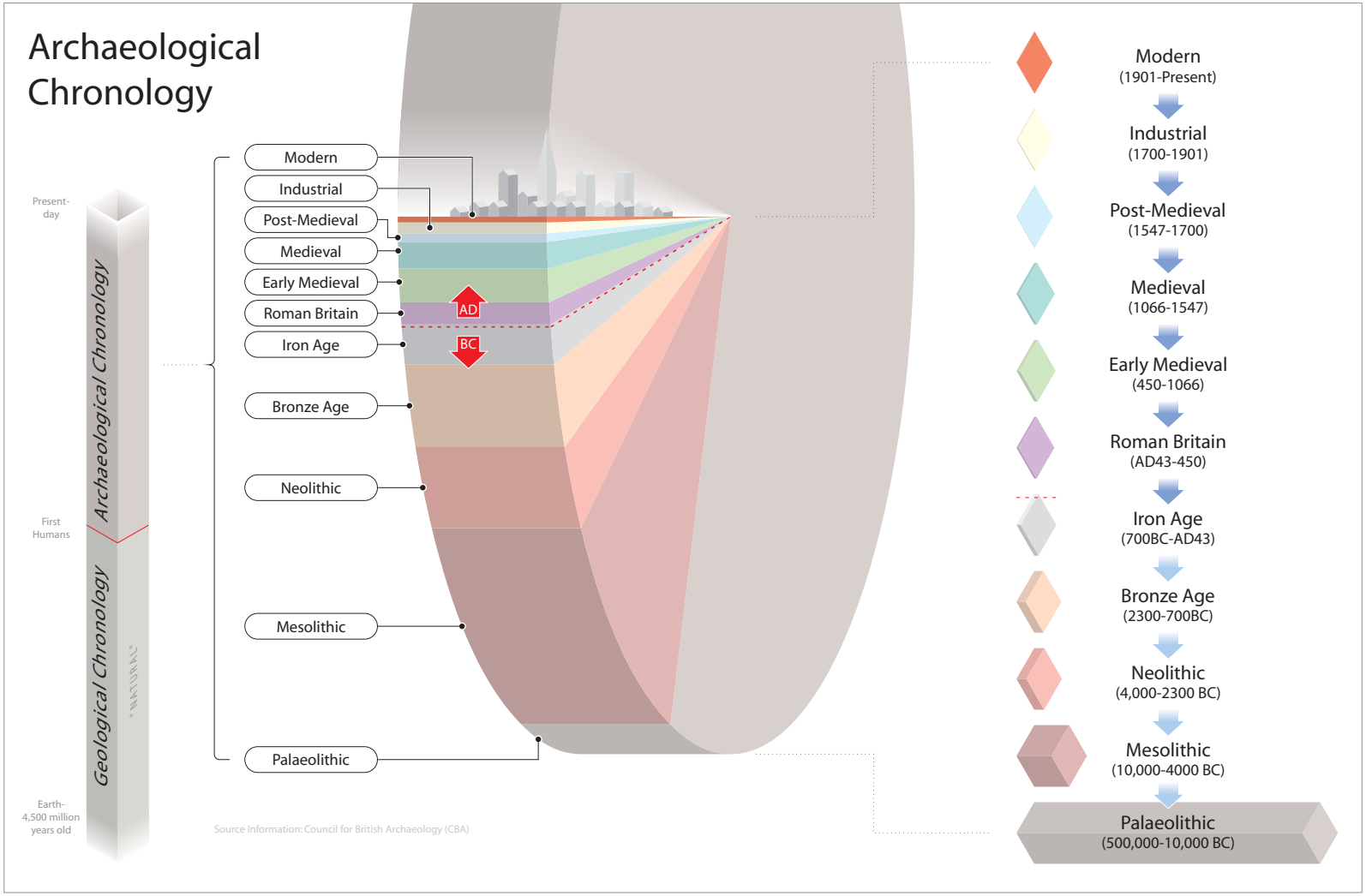
Plate 03: South facing sample section of Trench 7, note degraded bedrock above solid bedrock. 1 x 1m scale

Plate 04: View along Trench 8. Note presence of bedrock at shallow depth

Plate 05: Oblique frontal view of surviving sluice gate

Plate 06: Oblique frontal view of surviving sluice gate

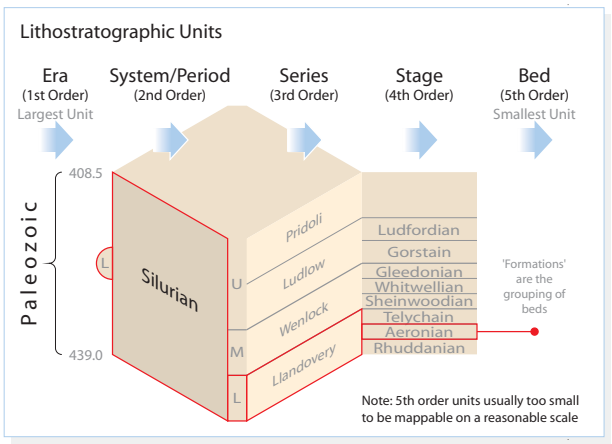
APPENDIX I:
Archaeological Chronolgy

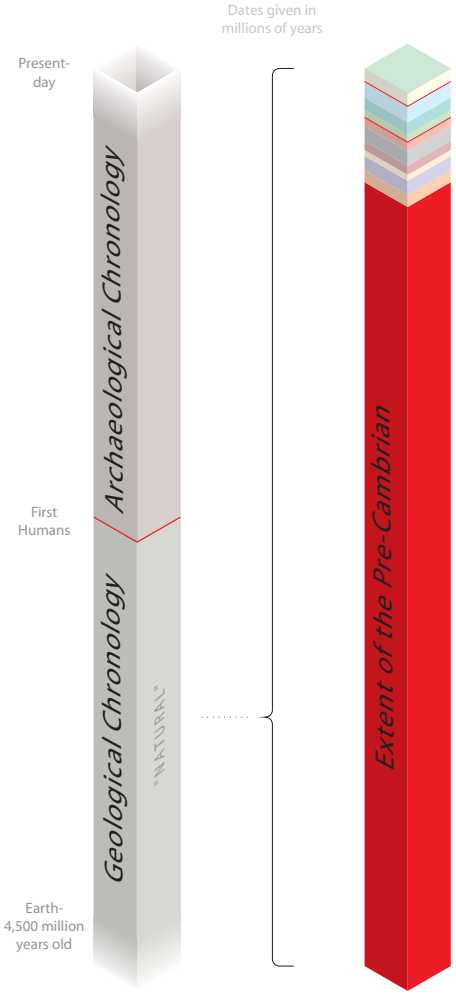


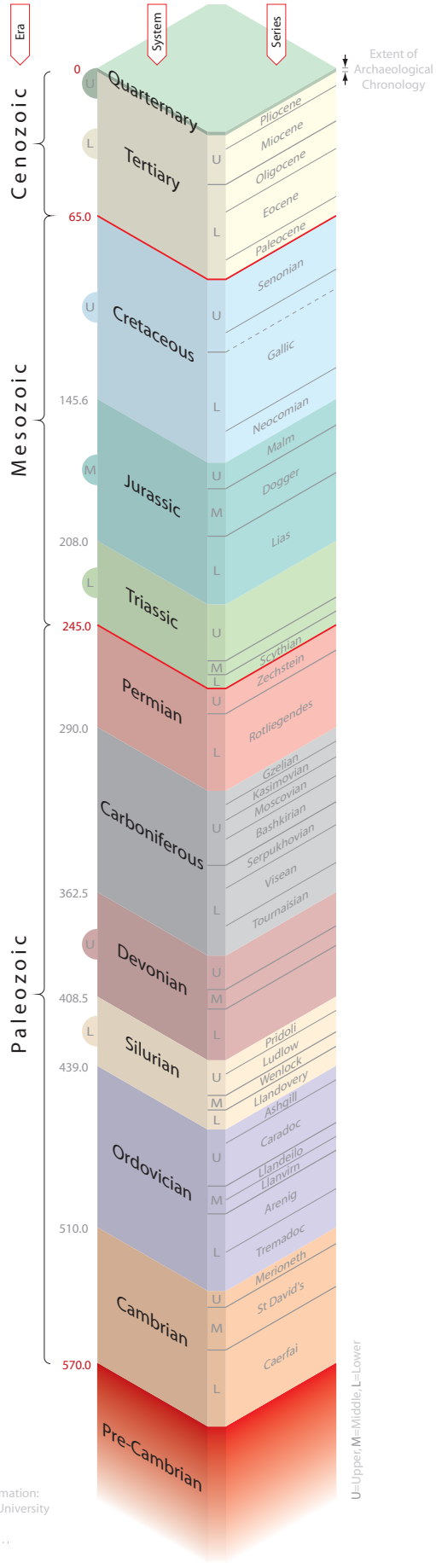
Chronological Divisions

APPENDIX II:
Geological Chronolgy

Geological Chronology







Source Information: Cambridge University Press

Chronological Divisions

APPENDIX III:
Archive Cover Sheet

ARCHIVE COVER SHEET

Ince Marsh, Helsby, Cheshire

Site Name:	Ince Marsh, Helsby, Cheshire
Site Code:	IM/06/EVAL
PRN:	-
NPRN:	-
SAM:	-
Other Ref No:	Planning Ref: 2006/111 & 125
NGR:	NGR SJ46374 76469
Site Type:	Post Medieval Farm/Norse Place name
Project Type:	Field Evaluation
Project Officer:	Chris E Smith
Project Dates:	August 2006
Categories Present:	20th / 21st Century
Location of Original Archive:	CAPLtd
Location of duplicate Archives:	-
Number of Finds Boxes:	1
Location of Finds:	-
Museum Reference:	-
Copyright:	CAPLtd
Restrictions to access:	None

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