The Old Coal Yard and Exhibition Centre
Re-development at the Railworld Site, Peterborough

Archaeological Evaluation Report

April 2009

Client: Almaren PLC

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The Old Coal Yard and Exhibition Centre re-development at the Railworld Site, Peterborough

Pre-Determination Evaluation

By Alexandra Pickstone BA AlFA

Editor: Richard Mortimer MIfA

Illustrator: Crane Begg Bsc (Hons)

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Oxford Archaeology East,
15 Trafalgar Way,
Bar Hill,
Cambridge,
CB23 8SQ

t: 01223 850500
f: 01223 850599
e: oaeast@thehumanjourney.net
w: http://thehumanjourney.net/oaeast

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Summary

On April 1st and 2nd 2009 Oxford Archaeology East carried out a pre-determination evaluation at the Old Coal Yard and the Railworld site. Three test pits were excavated by machine, two on the north side of the river and one on the south.

The test pits revealed between 1.6m and 4.8m of made ground beneath which were peat and alluvial clay deposits. The upper peaty layer was dated to the second half of the 19th century when the land would have been modified to accommodate the railway. The earlier peat and alluvial layers remain undated and represent deposits laid down by the River Nene.

No archaeological features were identified within the test pits.
1 **INTRODUCTION**

1.1 **Location and scope of work**

1.1.1 An archaeological pre-determination evaluation was conducted at over two separate areas, either side of the River Nene in Peterborough town centre. The first Railworld site (RW1) was irregular in shape and lay to the South of the River Nene. It was bounded by Oundle road (A605) to the south, the River Nene to the north, the Woodston Reach Path and Cycle track to the west and the railway line to the east. The site is currently used as an exhibition centre and museum and is located next door to the Nene Valley Railway.

1.1.2 The RW1 development covered an area of approximately 1ha and was centred at TL 1885 9813. The second development area (RW2) lay to the north of the River Nene on part of the former Coal Yard. It was roughly a quarter circle shape and was bounded by River Lane to the north and west and the River Nene to the south. The RW2 development area covered an area of 2.1ha and was centred at TL 1870 9826.

1.1.3 The work was designed to assist in defining the character and state of preservation of any archaeological remains within the proposed redevelopment area, in accordance with the guidelines set out in *Planning and Policy Guidance 16 - Archaeology and Planning* (Department of the Environment 1990). The results will enable decisions to be made by Ben Robinson of Peterborough City Council Archaeology Service on behalf of the Local Planning Authority, with regard to the treatment of any archaeological remains found as well as the potential for further evaluation and subsequent methodologies.

1.1.4 The site archive is currently held by OA East and will be deposited with Peterborough Museum in due course.

1.2 **Geology and topography**

1.2.1 The sites lie at a height of approximately 5m OD, however, this is not a natural ground level as deep deposits of modern material have built up the areas both north and south of the river. The underlying geology comprises of alluvium (with peat layers interspersed) below the made ground. (British Geological Survey 1984, Sheet 158).

1.3 **Archaeological and historical background**

*Palaeolithic to Iron Age (40,000BC – AD43)*

1.3.1 Evidence of prehistoric activity in the immediate vicinity is scarce and generally confined to stray finds and a few datable features. Stray finds include a ‘fossilised antler carved into an axe’ (PHER 1396) found on the RW2 development site itself. A single sherd of Late Bronze Age pottery (PHER 01665a) was recovered from the river silts during the 1950 excavation of a probable Early Iron Age dug-out canoe (PHER 01665). Neolithic Peterborough Ware and worked flint were found in a scatter of pits and gullies at an excavation carried out at The Walnuts, Oundle road (PHER 51221). 400m to the north west of the RW2 site a prehistoric flint knife was discovered (PHER 01398), also to the northwest just outside of the search area, Neolithic barbed and tanged arrowheads were found just south of Thorpe Road (PHER 01358 and PHER 01400). Other pre-historic features found nearby have been dated more ambiguously;
ditches and a single pit were discovered at the Marshall’s Garage site 2000-2003 (PHer 51105/51214), these have been tentatively dated to the prehistoric period due to the leached nature of their fills.

Roman (AD43 – 450)

1.3.2 The site lies within the Nene Valley, an area known to be rich in Roman remains including settlements at Castor, Durobrivae and Longthorpe. A Romano-British settlement site is believed to have existed to the northwest of the development area in the area of Bridge Street; nine 2nd century coins were discovered here along with Nene valley ware pottery (PHer 8762). Stray finds in the area include Roman coins found during the construction of the railway line (PHer 1444), five mid 2nd to mid 3rd century coins found in the area of the Manor House, New Fletton (PHer 1617) and on the RW2 development itself a fragment of Roman Castor pottery (PHer 1396a).

Saxon (AD450 – 1066)

1.3.3 No evidence of Saxon occupation has been found within the search area. However a monastery was established within Peterborough during the Mid Saxon period and while the date of its foundation is not certain, Bede’s history of the English church suggest a date of around AD 653 to 699 (Mackreth 1994 in Cooper, 1998). This may well have been located in close proximity to a Mercian royal centre (op. cit.) and there is little doubt that this monastery at ‘Medeshamstede’, the first to be constructed within Mercian Lands, quickly became a most important centre in both religious and secular life. The destruction of the monastery by the Danes in AD 870 is unlikely to have been as catastrophic as later writers made out, as the monastery continued as a successful house into the late Saxon period (Mackreth 1984).

1.3.4 The late Saxon period in Peterborough saw the construction of set defences, enclosing the early church and some of it associated buildings (Mackreth 1984 and 1994), although traditionally Peterborough has not been recognised as a Danish or Edwardian burghal location. A substantial stone-built wall foundation, around 2m thick, has been identified at two points on the north side of the shaded area in Figure 3, and this appears to have been cut into an earlier revetted bank. Using this information Mackreth has proposed the full circuit as shown, based on field observation and cartographic study together with an unpublished trench at the southern end of the east side which found vestiges of a wall cut into a bank (op. cit. 1994, 14) and another unpublished trench on the southern side which found a rampart and two stages of ditch (Don Mackreth Pers. Comm.).

1.3.5 The historical context within which the burghal defences are proposed hinges on the fact that by AD 1006, in his life of St Aethelwold, Aelfric states that ‘the monastery by the Nene that Aethelwold re-founded was once called Medeshamstede, but was now called Burgh’ (quoted in Mackreth 1984, 16). This is the origin of the second part of the name of the town of Peterborough (Spoerry and Hinman, 1998).

Medieval (1066 – 1500)

1.3.6 The new town of Peterborough was laid out in the first half of the 12th century, just to the west of the Saxon burgh and vill (Ben Robinson, pers. comm.) While there is a large amount of documentary information regarding the cathedral and its construction,
it lies at a sufficient distance from the development sites not to have an impact upon the land use itself.

1.3.7 The RW1 site lies close to the Oundle Road, the meandering course of which served the historic settlements of Yaxley, Farcey, Stanground, Fletton, Woodston, Botolph Bridge and Orton Longueville forming a loop within the two arms of the Nene, rejoining Ermine Street at Alwalton. Even though the Oundle Road connects many small settlements along its route, direct access to Peterborough from south of the Nene before the end of the 11th century (or maybe even later) could only be achieved by ferry (Hatton 2004).

1.3.8 During the 16th century ‘The Bridge Fair’ was held on 50 acres of land south of the River Nene, within the parish of Fletton (Page, Proby & Ladds 1974). The site is still the location of the modern Peterborough Fairs, indicating continuity of usage over the centuries. Further documentary evidence for fairs was sought at the Peterborough HER but no further information was gained (Rebecca Casa-Hatton. pers. comm.)

1.3.9 Archaeological remains in close proximity to the site consist of evidence of tree felling and a roadway laid across the floodplain at TL 1914/9838 discovered during excavations within the medieval town (HER 01391) 350m to the north east of the development sites. No evidence of occupation before the 12th century was found, however the site does show a complicated and slow development taking place over the next 300 years, involving at least two sets of ditches and the gradual colonisation of the plot by buildings.

1.3.10 Nearby stray finds to the development sites include a 13th to 14th century key (HER 1395) found just to the north of the RW2 site. This is probably just a casual loss but indicates that the site was subject to activity in the 13th to 14th century. Further to the east near to Bridge Street, several medieval artefacts have been found including a harness and an iron key, both 14th century and a pair of scissors dated to the 15th century. To the northwest an Edward I farthing was found (HER 1399).

1.3.11 Excavations between 1975 and 1976 carried out at the land between 78 and 84 Bridge Street (HER 01655), demonstrated that the area was initially wooded, probably with willow and alder. Prior to the 12th century a channel had been cut through the silts, possibly for drainage or boat access alongside a causeway that marks the early route of Bridge Street. The channel had been revetted with wattle against a bordering clay bank. The earliest timber building on the site dates to the 12th century. Over the next 300 hundred years further timber structures were constructed, some encroaching on the in-filled channel course. There was a continual build-up of structures and floors at the street side so that an artificial mound was created. During the 15th or 16th century buildings with stone footings were constructed and there is evidence for a jettied timber framed house on the street front. This building survived in a mutilated condition until 1928. From at least the 16th century much of the length of the plot was built up. The whole site began to become level with the height of the street front when stone was used as the main building material.

1.3.12 Two medieval coffin-lids were found within the churchyard of St Augustine of Canterbury church (HER 51159). The church itself (HER 51158) displays signs of alteration during the medieval period. The north wall of the Chancel has the remains of a 14th century doorway. In the southern transept there is a window of three stepped lancet lights dating to circa 1300. The southern arcade dates to the 14th or 15th century and the church also contains a 13th century font.
1.3.13 A nearby riverside excavation at 130 Bridge Street was carried out in 2002-2003 (PHER 51274). Two trenches were excavated and revealed a line of upright timbers set along the edge of the River Nene and into an in-filled palaeochannel that contained 13th century artefacts. The timbers were unsuitable for dendrochronology but were sealed beneath horizons containing 15th century material. The timbers may have formed a structure to protect the bridgehead from the effects of tidal scouring or alternatively they could have formed a section of wharf. The in-filled river channel material to their rear indicates that a degree of land reclamation and perhaps channel straightening took place in the medieval period.

1.3.14 Excavations at Regency Way, 600m to the northwest and slightly outside of the search area, revealed a possible medieval limekiln (PHER 01630)

1.3.15 Evidence for Medieval ridge and furrow (PHER 51262), long since removed by modern development, lies just south of the development areas. 180m from the rivers edge. Although slightly further away from the river edge than the proposed development it is significant as it displays in its earlier presence that land close to the River Nene was not waterlogged during the medieval period.

*Post Medieval and Modern (1500 - 1970)*

1.3.16 The chief source of post medieval information for the development areas derives from Ordnance Survey maps and the main influence within the search area comes from the construction of Peterborough’s railway lines.

1.3.17 In 1827 a scheme had been proposed for a London-York railway, but it was not followed through. In 1844 a trunk route plan was revived by the London & York Railway, supported by Edmund Denison, MP for the West Riding of Yorkshire and William Cubitt as engineer. The plan proposed a main line from London via Hitchin, Peterborough and Grantham, a loop line from Peterborough to Bawtry south of Doncaster via Boston and Lincoln, and branch lines to Sheffield and Wakefield.

1.3.18 This basically became the core of the future Great Northern Railway. Under the 1923 Grouping, it became part of the London & North Eastern Railway.

1.3.19 The modern railway line forms the eastern boundary of the RW1 development site. To the immediate south of the site runs the Nene valley railway, a short length of the original London, Midlands and Scottish Railway. This originally formed the first railway to arrive in Peterborough from Blisworth, via Northampton, Thrapston, Oundle and Wansford with the very first passenger train along the Nene Valley departing Peterborough at 7 o’clock on Monday 2nd June 1845. The Nene Valley railway of today is the eastern section of this line (Unknown, 2008).

1.3.20 Clearly marked on the 1886 OS map, the RW1 development site had an ‘Engine Shed’ for this railway line built on it called the Woodston Locomotive depot (Plate 1) and by 1900 there was a substantial number of railway sidings, a ‘Tank’ and a turntable installed on the site. The engine shed and sidings are present until the 1967-78 OS map where they are no longer visible and appear to have been demolished around 1965. The land is currently being used as a museum and exhibition centre called Railworld. Part of the Woodston Locomotive Shed brick floor remains, currently in Railworld’s Car Park, also 3/4 of the original turntable pit has been exposed (Turner, pers comm.).

1.3.21 The main body of the RW2 site shows little cartographic evidence of any development. The land immediately to the east formed part of the Great Northern railway line as
outlined above, and contained a large number of railway sidings. Drainage channels can be seen on the 1808 Hills map, dividing the land into two separate areas.

1.3.22 A coal yard was constructed circa 1948 in the southeastern corner of the site, being demolished in the 1970's. All that remains of the coal yard is part of the conveyor belt, which goes under the March to Ely Railway Line. Also, close to the eastern fence with the main line, is a small platelayers hut, which is still present and used as a boiler room (Turner, pers. comm. 2008)

1.3.23 Recent Aerial photography (1998) shows that the site has been partially stripped of topsoil at some point, however for what reason this was undertaken is unknown.

1.3.24 Other post medieval activity within the search area has been recorded on the PHER; a 17th century vase and wine bottle were discovered during bridge excavations in 1931 (PHER 200), glazed and unglazed pottery was discovered at the Power Station in 1950 (PHER 4127) and during excavations between 1975-1976 on the west side of Bridge Street a 17th century donkey mill was discovered (PHER 1655a).

1.4 Acknowledgements

1.4.1 The author would like to thank Dean Elsworth of Almaren PLC for commissioning the works. Thanks are also due to Peter Fearn from Railworld, Nick from LOC Plant Hire, David Brown assisted on site and Lucy Offord provided the survey. The project was managed and report edited by Richard Mortimer. Crane Begg provided the illustrations. Ben Robinson of Peterborough City Council Archaeology Service monitored the investigations.
2 AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

2.1.1 The objective of this pre-determination evaluation was to determine as far as reasonably possible the nature, quality, condition and state of preservation of any surviving archaeological deposits within the development areas. The evaluation does not attempt to characterise the potential for archaeological remains across the areas but to characterise the later deposits that may seal them.

2.2 Methodology

2.2.1 Three test pits were excavated, one in RW1 and two in RW2. The test pits were excavated to below the modern make-up layers, which varied from 2.5m to 5m in depth. Due to the depth of the trenches, the ingress of water and the unstable modern material, all archaeological recording was conducted from the top of the trench only.

2.2.2 Machine excavation was carried out under constant archaeological supervision with a 360° excavator using a toothed bucket to excavate through the modern make-up layers and a toothless ditching bucket on the archaeological deposits below.

2.2.3 The trenches were located and levels taken by Lucy Offord using a Leica 1200 GPS.

2.2.4 Spoil was scanned with a metal detector and searched by hand for archaeological finds. All metal-detected and hand-collected finds were retained for inspection, other than those which were obviously modern.

2.2.5 All archaeological features and deposits were recorded using OA East’s pro-forma sheets. Trench locations, plans and sections were recorded at appropriate scales and colour and monochrome and digital photographs were taken of all deposits.

2.2.6 A borehole survey conducted in 2004 and 2008 across the two sites will be consulted and comparisons made with results from the test pits.

2.2.7 No environmental samples were taken from the test pits as the majority of the layers were post-medieval to modern in date and others remained undated.

2.2.8 A high voltage overhead cable was located on RW1 running on a southwest to northeast alignment. A high voltage underground cable was located on RW2 along the southern edge of site running along an east to west alignment. Both of these services affected the position of the test pits. The afore mentioned depth of modern make-up and water ingress also defined the methodology. These services aside, site access was generally good.
3 RESULTS

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 The results will be discussed by test pit alongside the appropriate (nearest) borehole (Figs 2 & 3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Test Pit 1 (RW1)</th>
<th>Test Pit 2 (RW2)</th>
<th>Test Pit 3 (RW2)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Dimensions</td>
<td>3m x 3m</td>
<td>4m x 4m</td>
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<td>Thickness of Made Ground</td>
<td>1.6m</td>
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*Table 1: Test pit dimensions and levels*

3.2 Test Pit 1 (Fig. 3 & Plate 1)

3.2.1 Located in the northern half of RW1 adjacent to the cycleway and to the east of a culvert which extends underneath the Railworld car park area. The test pit was located 25m to the north of the high voltage overhead cables which ran across this area.

3.2.2 Test Pit 1 contained 1.6m of modern material including the car park surface and various deposits of brick rubble and demolition material (Layer 1). The upper hard core layer (1a) was well-compacted but the brick demolition material beneath (1b) was loose and unstable.

3.2.3 Beneath the made ground were five layers (Layers 2 to 6) of peat and alluvial deposits excavated to a total depth of 1.8m. The excavated material was sorted for finds but none of the layers contained any dating evidence, with the exception of a modern leather strap and wood fragments at the interface with Layer 1 above which were noted and discarded.

Layer 2 was approximately 0.4m thick and consisted of dark brown clayey peat with grey-green alluvial clay lenses.

Layer 3 was a very dark brown silty peat c. 0.1m thick.

Layer 4 was a mid grey-brown silty clay with peat inclusions c. 0.4m thick.

Layer 5 was a very dark reddish-brown silty peat c. 0.2m thick.

Layer 6 was a light grey-brown silty clay alluvial river deposit 0.8m thick to the limit of excavation.

3.2.4 Borehole WS3 lay adjacent to this test pit. This borehole contained 1.7m of made ground above a slightly organic clay with some decayed organic matter. This is likely to represent Layer 4 however no evidence for Layers 2 and 3 were identified in WS3. The borehole measured 2m deep.

3.3 Test Pit 2 (Fig. 3 & Plate 2)

3.3.1 Located in the southwestern part of RW2 on an area of low ground to the north of a high voltage underground cable.

3.3.2 Test Pit 2 contained 2.6m of modern overburden comprising three layers of brick rubble and demolition material (Layer 7). This was very unstable material and caused the
sides of the test pit to partially collapse. Beneath Layer 7 were three layers of peat and alluvial deposits measuring a total of 1.4m to the limit of excavation.

Layer 8 was approximately 0.6m thick and consisted of very dark brown-grey sandy peat with frequent visible reeds and organic material. This layer contained a small assemblage (5 sherds) of post AD 1850 pottery (Alasdair Brookes, pers. comm.)

Layer 9 was a greyish dark orange alluvial clay c. 0.6m thick.

Layer 10 was a dark reddish brown clayey peat c. 0.1m thick to the limit of excavation.

3.3.3 Borehole BH2 was located approximately 50m to the south of Test Pit 2. This borehole contained 3.7m of made ground, over 1m more than the test pit, but was much closer to the modern river course. Clay and peat layers were encountered beneath this although they are not directly comparable.

3.4 Test Pit 3 (Fig. 3 & Plates 3 and 4)

3.4.1 Located in the northeastern area of RW2 opposite the visitor centre on the north side of the river.

3.4.2 Test Pit 3 comprised of 4.8m of modern material in up to seven layers (Layers 11a - 11g). Modern plastic bags and sheets were visible at least as far down as Layer 11f. The five uppermost layers comprised of firm stable dumps of mixed soils, crushed brick and dirty gravels. The lower layers were less stable with bricks, large concrete pieces and plastic waste. The lowest modern layer contained very compacted brick rubble which was difficult to break through with the machine. The trench was excavated to the upper horizon of Layer 12.

Layer 12 was a very dark brown clayey peat.

3.4.3 Borehole WS201 lay approximately 25m northeast of this test pit. This borehole contained 3.5m of made ground with a soft to firm dark brown clayey peat beneath, broadly comparable to the findings in this test pit though with the natural surface encountered considerably higher.
4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

4.1 Test Pits

4.1.1 No archaeological features were identified within the test pits. The only finds recovered were late 19th century in date and were recovered from a peat layer (8) in Test Pit 2. This upper peat layer represents the preserved remains of the surface vegetation of the area extant in the 19th century at the time the railways were constructed. The peat and alluvial layers directly below this upper peat are the result of the meandering and braided nature of the river and its floodplain prior to its complete canalisation and development of the riverbank in the late 19th to 20th centuries. The upper peat layers are fairly uniform in that they occur between 2.85m OD and 3.7m OD. The lowest level of the upper peat was recorded in Test Pit 3, at the greatest distance from the river – this could suggest that this area lies within a lower-lying part of the flood plain, perhaps within an earlier meander, however, it could also be a result of compaction by the massive quantities of modern dumped material above.

4.1.2 The alluvial clays and peat deposits laid down prior to the upper peat level remain undated.

4.1.3 Taking that that the upper peat layer is post medieval in date, the potential medieval remains/ horizon on this site could therefore lie at a maximum height of between 2.8m OD to 3.3m OD. This equates to 2m below current ground level in Test Pit 1, 3.2m in Test Pit 2 and over 4.8m in Test Pit 3.

4.2 Significance

4.2.1 This pre-determination evaluation has contributed to a greater understanding of the depth and character of the modern made ground as well as providing dating of the upper peat deposits.

4.3 Recommendations

4.3.1 Recommendations for any future work based upon this report will be made by the Ben Robinson from Peterborough City Council Archaeology Service.
## APPENDIX A. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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<tr>
<th>Author(s)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Cooper, S</td>
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<td>‘An Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment of Peterborough, West Square, bus Station’, AFU report No. A132</td>
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<td>Spoerry, P., Hinman, M.</td>
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<td>The Still, Peterborough: Medieval remains between Cumbergate and Westgate, Archaeological Field Unit Monograph number One</td>
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**APPENDIX B. OASIS REPORT FORM**

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- [x] Annotated Sketch
- [ ] Augering
- [ ] Dendrochronological Survey
- [ ] Documentary Search
- [ ] Environmental Sampling
- [ ] Fieldwalking
- [ ] Geophysical Survey
- [ ] Grab-Sampling
- [ ] Gravity-Core
- [ ] Laser Scanning
- [ ] Measured Survey
- [ ] Metal Detectors
- [ ] Photographic Survey
- [ ] Photogrammetric Survey
- [ ] Rectified Photography
- [ ] Remote Operated Vehicle Survey
- [ ] Sample Trenches
- [ ] Survey/Recording Of Fabric/Structure
- [ ] Targeted Trenches
- [x] Test Pits
- [ ] Topographic Survey
- [ ] Vibro-core
- [ ] Visual Inspection (Initial Site Visit)

**Monument Types/Significant Finds & Their Periods**

List feature types using the NMR Monument Type Thesaurus and significant finds using the MDA Object type Thesaurus together with their respective periods. If no features/finds were found, please state “none”.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monument</th>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Object</th>
<th>Period</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Layer</td>
<td>Post Medieval 1540 to 1901</td>
<td>Pottery</td>
<td>Post Medieval 1540 to 1901</td>
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<tr>
<td>Layer</td>
<td>Uncertain</td>
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<td>Select period...</td>
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**Project Location**

- County: Cambridgeshire
- District: Peterborough
- Parish: Peterborough
- HER: Peterborough Museum (PCCAS)
- Study Area: 3.6ha

**Site Address (including postcode if possible)**

- Railworld, Oundle Road, Peterborough, PE2 9NR
- River Lane, Peterborough, PE3 6HR

**National Grid Reference**: TL 1880 9812
### Project Originators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>OA EAST</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Project Brief Originator</td>
<td>Peterborough Museum (PCCAS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Design Originator</td>
<td>Richard Mortimer, OA East</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Manager</td>
<td>Richard Mortimer, OA East</td>
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<tr>
<td>Supervisor</td>
<td>Alexandra Pickstone</td>
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### Project Archives

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<th>Digital Archive</th>
<th>Paper Archive</th>
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<td>PET RAW 09</td>
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#### Archive Contents/Media

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#### Digital Media

- Database
- GIS
- Geophysics
- Images
- Illustrations
- Moving Image
- Spreadsheets
- Survey
- Text
- Virtual Reality

#### Paper Media

- Aerial Photos
- Context Sheet
- Correspondence
- Diary
- Drawing
- Manuscript
- Map
- Matrices
- Microfilm
- Misc.
- Research/Notes
- Photos
- Plans
- Report
- Sections
- Survey

### Notes:

Ceramics (5 sherds late 19th C pottery) examined and recorded by specialist and then discarded.
Figure 1 Location of the study areas outlined (red)
Figure 2: Location of Test Pits and Boreholes
Figure 3: Representative sections of the test pits and their closest boreholes
Plate 1: Test Pit 1
Plate 3: Test Pit 3
Plate 4: Test Pit 4