Undated drainage ditches on land off Kingfisher Drive, Soham, Cambridgeshire

Archaeological Evaluation Report

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Undated drainage ditches on land off Kingfisher Drive, Soham, Cambridgeshire

Archaeological Evaluation

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Summary

Between 16th and 19th October 2012 Oxford Archaeology East conducted an archaeological evaluation on land off Kingfisher Drive on the outskirts of the north-west side of Soham in East Cambridgeshire. The work was carried out in advance of development of the site for construction of a new primary school (Soham 3rd Primary).

The evaluation consisted of thirteen 50m long machine excavated trenches within the footprint of the proposed school buildings, playing field and access road. Although the weather conditions were good, with almost constant sunshine and only a little rain, surface water which had already hampered the harvest of the crop was a constant issue. The surface water which was sitting within the top and subsoil filled the open trenches overnight. This did not prevent identification of archaeological features which were only present in the “dry trenches” on the slightly raised ground.

A total of three undated ditches were recorded during the evaluation, all of which were located in trenches at the south-western end of the site which was slightly higher and drier. The ditches were on two different alignments; two parallel ditches in a north west to south east alignment and one larger ditch on a north to south alignment. Given the different orientations, these are not thought to be related or contemporary and have been interpreted as drainage ditches. The absence of any domestic waste such as pottery or animal bone would indicate that there is unlikely to be any nearby occupation and the position of the site on low, wet ground is an obvious indication for the absence of settlement related activity.

The nearest known settlement was recorded on land approximately 500m to the south east during an excavation at Cloverfield Drive, Soham in 2004 (Mortimer 2006). The site lay at between 6m and 7.5mOD where remains from the Bronze Age, Roman, Saxon, Medieval and Post-Medieval periods were all recorded. However, as part of the 2004 investigations an additional area (Area C) was also investigated which was located less than 200m to the south-west of the current site. Here, only a series of post-medieval furrows were recorded on a north-east to south-west alignment and the lack of any earlier features here also supports the suggestion that the investigation site is, and has always been too low and wet to support settlement or other activities.
1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work

1.1.1 An archaeological evaluation was conducted on land between Kingfisher Drive and The Shade on the north west side of Soham (TL 5860 7474; Figure 1). The development area, referred to from here on as “the site” lies approximately 1.25km from the historic core of Soham and is positioned on the edge of the urban expansion (Figure 1). The site comprised a single field which, up to the time of the investigations had been used for growing wheat. There was unrestricted access to all parts of the site.

1.1.2 This archaeological evaluation was undertaken in response to a Brief from Cambridgeshire County Council’s Historic Environment Team (Gdaniec 2012), supplemented by a Specification prepared by OA East (Macaulay 2012). The Specification included a proposed trench design which was approved prior to the start of the works.

1.1.3 The proposed development includes the construction of new a school building, access road and car parking, hard and soft landscaping, new services, a hard play area and access paths across the site (Planning Application No.E0300612CC). In addition there will be playing fields with associated drainage. The evaluation consisted of thirteen 50m machine excavated trenches within the footprint of the proposed school buildings, playing field and access road.

1.1.4 The site archive is currently held by OA East and will be deposited with the appropriate county stores in due course.

1.2 Geology and topography

1.2.1 The British Geological Survey records that the site is situated on 3rd terrace river gravels which overlie and interface between Gault Clay and West Melbury Marly Chalk bedrock (1981). In reality, only Gault clay was encountered on site. The site is relatively flat and lies at around 3-3.5m OD.

1.3 Acknowledgements

1.3.1 The author would like to thank Faithful & Gould who commissioned the work on behalf of Cambridgeshire County Council. Thanks to Toby Mills and Simon Carter in particular. The site was excavated by the author, assisted by David Brown. Thanks are also expressed to Severine Bezie (illustrations) and Rachel Fosberry (environmental analysis). Thanks also to Mick Bates and Nick Richardson of LOC Plant Hire who excavated and back-filled the trenches under extremely wet and difficult conditions. The project was managed by Stephen Macaulay, the author carried out all site survey and Kasia Gdaniec of Cambridgeshire County Council’s Historic Environment Team monitored the work.
2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Prehistoric

2.1.1 The fen-edge around Soham and the Snail Valley have a long history of human activity. Sites and findspots in the immediate vicinity include Mesolithic and Neolithic remains recorded to the northwest of Broad Hill, where a large quantity of worked flints, including axes, knives and scrapers, were recovered (Hall 1996). Both to the north-east of the village and in the vicinity of the development area the Cambridgeshire Historic Environment Record (CHER) records Neolithic artefacts at MCB8560, 12952, 12953 and 14568 and a Late Bronze Age brooch at MCB12953. An evaluation in the town centre at St Andrew's House, produced a single Bronze Age ditch (Casa Hatton 2000). Closer to the site, archaeological investigations in advance of residential development at Cloverfield Drive in 2004 (Mortimer 2006) (CHER ECB2139) recorded Bronze Age occupation and field systems.

2.1.2 Evidence of later prehistoric, Iron Age, activity in and around Soham is relatively scarce. A site was located on the hilltop at Henney, on the periphery of Stuntney (Hall 1996). Iron Age features were found to the south of the development area, on Clay Street and may represent an enclosure (Nichol 2002) and a large evaluation at the Fordham Road allotments produced settlement remains dating to the Late Bronze Age or Early Iron Age (Connor 2001). Further remains were recorded in Soham itself at St Andrew's House (Atkins 2004a).

Roman

2.1.3 Coins of Roman date have been found south-east of the site (MCB8554), in the vicinity of an undated ring ditch (MCB8561). Human skeletal remains of possible Roman date have been found in the area of White Hart Lane (MCB8413). Closer to the development area, 100m to the northwest, further Roman finds were noted (MCB8559). The evaluation at Fordham Road allotments also produced Romano-British settlement remains (Connor 2001).

Anglo-Saxon and Medieval

2.1.4 Early Saxon occupation at Soham is attested by funerary remains from three cemeteries. Burials were discovered in the church graveyard (TL 5998 7239) where grave goods and stray finds included brooches, several beads and spearheads (Fox 1923). Another cemetery was located at the Soham/Fordham Waterworks during excavations conducted in the 1930s (Lethbridge 1933). Some 23 furnished inhumations (and 2 cremations) were identified and assigned to the 6th-7th century. Further Anglo-Saxon human skeletal remains (MCB 13882) were uncovered in the rear garden of a house located on White Hart Lane. Evidence suggested that they were not in situ, and may have originally belonged to the same cemetery as the burials from the church graveyard (Robinson 1995).

2.1.5 Present day Soham is Early Saxon in origin. According to Reaney, the place name is derived from the Old English Soegan Hamm or 'swampy' settlement or enclosure (Reaney 1943). Further, 12th century, documentary sources refer to the foundation in the 7th century AD of a monastery by St Felix, first bishop of the East Angles, who was buried in Soham. The monastery was destroyed during the Danish invasions of East Anglia (late 9th century) along with many other religious foundations in the area, never to be re-established (Salzman 1948). As yet there has been no definite archaeological
evidence for Middle Saxon activity in Soham, though a single sherd of Ipswich ware was recovered during excavations at St Andrew's House (Atkins 2004a).

2.1.6 The manor of Soham was given to Ely Abbey shortly after the re-foundation of the latter in the 10th century (Conybeare 1897). The exact location of the monastery is unknown, although it is possible that the Parish church of St Andrew's (late 12th century) was founded on the site of its Saxon predecessor. The sub circular pattern of roads around the centre of the village may suggest a religious precinct (Oosthuizen 2000).

2.1.7 Evidence for occupation during the Saxo-Norman period has emerged through recent excavations. At Nos 9-13 Pratt Street an archaeological evaluation revealed shallow gullies, a posthole and a large pit containing 11th or 12th century Thetford Ware (Hatton and Last 1994). Evaluation trenches at the rear of No. 38 Station Road produced evidence of ditches dating from the 10th to 12th centuries (Heawood 1997). An evaluation conducted at Soham County Infant's School revealed several ditches containing 10th to 13th century assemblages, predominantly St Neots and Thetford type ware (Bray 1991).

2.1.8 The remains from the Infant's School (and from High Street/Clay Street) represent a major phase of development and prosperity that is attested by the construction of St Andrew's Church in the late 12th century (Hatton & Last 1997). Soham is also thought to have held an unchartered market before the 12th century (Ridout 2000).

2.1.9 Evaluations in the town centre at St Andrew's House (Casa Hatton 2000), Market Street (Cooper 2004b) and Clay Street (Atkins 2004a) produced medieval (12th to 16th century) pits, ditches and posthole structures. A small evaluation at Ten Bell Lane produced one late medieval quarry pit and some undated ditches (Atkins 2004b) and another at Brook Dam Lane recorded a single medieval pit and a post-medieval ditch (Cooper 2004a).

2.1.10 Part of a small hamlet spanning the medieval to post-medieval and modern periods was excavated at Thorn Street, between Cloverfield Drive and Mereside, Soham (Mortimer 2006). The area apparently lay under pasture until it was settled in the medieval expansion of the 12th century and large field-wells of the Bronze Age, Romano-British and possibly Anglo-Saxon periods were found. In the second half of the 12th century, house plots were set out around the junction of Thorn Street - the road from Soham - and Thorn Street Lane, an off-shoot leading to Soham Mere. Ditches, quarry pits, wells and some building remains survive from this early period. Deep wells and pits within the house plots, dating from the 15th and 16th centuries, contained large and fresh pottery assemblages, alongside well-preserved wooden objects and leather shoes. At least one of the large pits may have been used for retting hemp.

2.1.11 Beyond the town centre little work has been undertaken, however, at Brook Street, in a similar location south-east of the centre as Cloverfield Drive is to the northwest, evaluation has revealed a broadly comparable sequence of occupation (MCB15241). An initial phase of pits and ditches dated to the Early Medieval (mid 12th to mid 14th century), a second phase to the Late Medieval (mid 14th to mid 16th century) and a third to the Post-Medieval (mid 16th century to present). There was sufficient evidence to suggest that domestic structures had occupied the plot since at least the 14th century with the last of these buildings, from c. 1910 still standing.

2.1.12 Fieldwalking of the route of the Soham bypass identified medieval settlement, approximately 500m east of the proposed development site (Townsend area).

Post-Medieval
2.1.13 Very little specifically post-medieval archaeological work has been undertaken in the area, but pits and ditches have been recorded at Market Street (Cooper 2004b), Clay Street (Atkins 2004a), Brook Dam Lane (Cooper 2004a) and Brook Street (Bailey 2006). A late 19th century brick kiln is recorded 500m north of Soham Bypass.

2.1.14 The large-scale drainage of the fenlands around the Isle of Ely began in 1629 and were undertaken initially by Vermuyden and subsequently by a string of other engineers. The main drain at this early stage was the Old Bedford River (dating from 1630). Parallel to this, to the south, runs the Hundred-foot Drain (or New Bedford river) constructed after 1649. An 18th century windmill (MCB8381) is known 500m north of Soham bypass.

2.1.15 Much of the impetus for the fen drainage of the 16th and 17th centuries came with changes in land ownership after the Reformation with many large church estates being broken into smaller holdings. Areas like those around Soham had been effectively isolated by the Fens until the Bedford Rivers and the main Denver Sluice were constructed. Following this drainage large areas of the fen were reclaimed and ploughed and agriculture replaced the (in part seasonal) grazing lands the fenland had previously supported. This move away from grazing to arable farming in turn created a greater need for agricultural labour.
3 AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Aims
3.1.1 The objective of this evaluation was to determine as far as reasonably possible the presence/absence, location, nature, extent, date, quality, condition and significance of any surviving archaeological deposits within the development area.

3.2 Methodology
3.2.1 Thirteen trenches were excavated, all of which were 50m in length. They were set out across the development area within the footprint of the proposed new access road, buildings and playing field (Figures 1 and 2).

3.2.2 Machine excavation was carried out under constant archaeological supervision with a tracked 360° excavator using a 2m wide toothless ditching bucket. Topsoil and subsoil were stored separately and re-instated during back-filling at the end of the evaluation.

3.2.3 A Leica GPS 1200 system was used by the author to lay out the trenches using ordnance survey co-ordinates, according to the pre-agreed trench plan.

3.2.4 All archaeological features and deposits were recorded using OA East's pro-forma sheets. Trench plans and sections were recorded at appropriate scales and monochrome photographs were taken of all relevant features and deposits supplemented by digital photographs using an Olympus M760 7.1 mega pixel camera.

3.2.5 Two environmental samples were collected from two of the three ditches encountered.

3.3 Site Conditions
3.3.1 Although the weather conditions were good with almost constant sunshine and only a little rain, surface water which had already hampered the harvest of the crop was a constant issue. The surface water which was sitting within the top and subsoil filled the open trenches overnight. This did not prevent identification of archaeological features which were only present in the "dry trenches" on the slightly raised ground. However, excavation of features was hindered by a constant ingress of water from the watertable below.

3.3.2 During back-filling, a diesel-powered pump was used to remove water from the trenches to allow the reinstatement of soil.
4 Results

4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 Results are presented in the following sections, numerically by trench. Basic trench information is summarised in Table 1.

4.1.2 Figures 1 and 2 show the location of all trenches, Figure 3 provides a detailed plan of those trenches containing ditches and their projected continuation and Figure 4 provides section drawings of the ditches recorded.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trench No.</th>
<th>Orientation</th>
<th>Length (m)</th>
<th>Topsoil max depth (m)</th>
<th>Subsoil max depth (m)</th>
<th>Summary</th>
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<td>WNW-ESE</td>
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<td>0.27</td>
<td>0.11</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>0.31</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>No archaeology present</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>NNE-SW</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>No archaeology present</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>NE-SW</td>
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<td>0.13</td>
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<td>7</td>
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<td>0.13</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>NNE-SSW</td>
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<td>0.32</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>No archaeology present</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>NNE-SSW</td>
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<td>10</td>
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<td>0.1</td>
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<td>NW-SE</td>
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<td>0.12</td>
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<td>5 and 6</td>
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<td>50</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.14</td>
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</tr>
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</table>

Table 1: Trench Summary

4.2 Trench Descriptions

Trenches 1-9

4.2.1 No archaeological features were recorded within these trenches

Trench 10

4.2.2 Trench 10 formed a “T” shape with Trench 11 and contained two parallel ditches on a north-west to south-east alignment (Figures 2 and 3). Both ditches were investigated in 1m slots and neither contained any dating evidence.

- Ditch 06 was linear in plan, orientated north west to south east and continued beyond the trench edges (Plate 4) It measured 0.59m wide and 0.10m deep with moderate sloping edges and a flat base (Figure 4, Section 2). It contained a single fill. Fill 05 was a
firm yellowish brown, silty clay with occasional small stone inclusions. No datable finds were retrieved from this deposit. A 10 litre soil sample was taken for analysis which was devoid of plant remains other than modern rootlets.

- **Ditch 04** was linear in plan, orientated north west to south east and continued beyond the trench edges (Plate 3). This ditch was recorded continuing into Trench 11 (Figure 3). It measured 0.40m wide and 0.16m deep with steep sloping edges and a flat base (Figure 4, Section 1). It contained a single fill. Fill 03 was a firm yellowish brown, silty clay with occasional small stone inclusions. No datable finds were retrieved from this deposit.

**Trench 11**

4.2.3 Trench 11 formed a “T” shape with Trench 10 and contained a single ditch which is most likely the continuation of ditch **04** recorded in Trench 10 (Figures 2 and 3). This ditch was investigated in a 1m slot, no dating evidence was recovered.

- **Ditch 02** was linear in plan, orientated north west to south east and continued beyond the trench edges. It measured 0.41m wide and 0.13m deep with steep sloping edges and a flat base. It contained a single fill. Fill 01 was a firm yellowish brown, silty clay with occasional small stone inclusions. No datable finds were retrieved from this deposit. A 10 litre soil sample was taken for analysis which was devoid of plant remains other than modern rootlets.

**Trench 12**

4.2.4 Trench 12 formed a “T” shape with Trench 13 and contained a single ditch (Figures 2 and 3). This ditch was investigated in a 1m slot, no dating evidence was recovered.

- **Ditch 08** was linear in plan, orientated approximately north to south and continuing beyond the trench edges (Figures 2 and 3) (Plates 5 and 6). It had gradual sloping edges and a rounded base (Figure 4, Section 3). This ditch contained a single fill. Fill 07 was a mid-dark grey brown silty clay with occasional small flint stone inclusions. A 10 litre soil sample was taken for analysis which was devoid of plant remains other than modern rootlets.

**Trench 13**

4.2.5 No archaeological features were recorded within this trench.

4.3 **Finds Summary**

4.3.1 No artefacts were recovered from this site.

4.4 **Environmental Summary**

4.4.1 Two 10 litre samples were taken from two of the three features in order to assess the quality of preservation of plant remains. Both samples were devoid of plant remains other than modern rootlets (Appendix B).
5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Discussion

5.1.1 A total of three distinct features, all ditches were recorded during the evaluation, all of which were located at the south-western end of the site. Although there was no obvious change in topography, this part of the site must have been slightly higher as denoted by the slower in-fill of water into the trenches once opened and left overnight. The recorded height on features at this part of the site was around 3.17m-3.44m OD and water was encountered during their excavation. The rest of the site did not contain any evidence of archaeological or agricultural drainage features from any period.

5.1.2 The ditches encountered were on two different alignments; two parallel ditches in a north west to south east alignment and one lager ditch on a north to south alignment. Given the different orientations, these are not thought to be related or contemporary.

5.1.3 Unfortunately there was no dating evidence recovered nor any indication of date, function or other environmental indicators from the soil samples taken. The absence of any domestic waste such as pottery or animal bone would indicate that there is unlikely to be any nearby occupation and the position of the site on low, wet ground is an obvious indication for the absence of settlement related activity.

5.1.4 The nearest know settlement was recorded on land to approximately 500m to the south east during an excavation in 2004 (Mortimer 2006). The site lay at between 6m and 7.5mOD where remains from the Bronze Age, Roman, Saxon, Medieval and Post-Medieval periods were all recorded. However, as part of the 2004 investigations an additional area (Area C) was also investigated which was located less than 200m to the south-west of the current site. Here, only a series of post-medieval furrows were recorded on a north-east to south west alignment and the lack of any earlier features here also supports the suggestion that the investigation site is and has always been too low and therefore wet to support settlement or other activities.

5.2 Conclusions

5.2.1 The evaluation has been successful in achieving the project aims: to determine as far as reasonably possible the presence/absence, location, nature, extent, date, quality, condition and significance of any surviving archaeological deposits within the development area. It has identified surviving archaeological evidence for activity on the south-eastern side of the site where the ground is slightly higher and drier. The features encountered are likely to relate to drainage.
# Appendix A. Bibliography

<table>
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<td>Reaney, P.H.</td>
<td>1943</td>
<td>The Place Names of Cambridgeshire and the Isle of Ely, English Place Names Society volume XIX (Cambridgeshire University Press)</td>
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APPENDIX B. ENVIRONMENTAL REMAINS

By Rachel Fosberry

B.1 Introduction and Methods

B.1.1 Two bulk samples were taken from features within the evaluated areas of the site at the Soham Primary School, Cambridge in order to assess the quality of preservation of plant remains and their potential to provide useful data as part of further archaeological investigations. The features sampled were undated ditches.

B.1.2 One bucket (up to ten litres) of each bulk sample was processed by water flotation (using a modified Siraff three-tank system) for the recovery of charred plant remains, dating evidence and any other artefactual evidence that might be present. The flot was collected in a 0.3mm nylon mesh and the residue was washed through a 0.5mm sieve. Both flot and residue were allowed to air dry. The dried residue was passed through 5mm and 2mm sieves and a magnet was dragged through each resulting fraction prior to sorting for artefacts. Any artefacts present were noted and reintegrated with the hand-excavated finds. The flot was examined under a binocular microscope at x16 magnification.

B.2 Results

B.2.1 All of the samples were devoid of plant remains other than modern rootlets. A single struck flint was noted in Sample 2, fill 07 of ditch 08.

B.3 Discussion

B.3.1 It is unusual for an assemblage not to produce any plant remains. It is most likely that the ditches were dug for drainage and were not near any form of settlement.

B.4 Further Work and Methods Statement

B.4.1 If further excavations are planned for this area, it is recommended that a schedule for targeted environmental sampling should be appended to the updated project design.
## APPENDIX C. OASIS REPORT FORM

### Project Details

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### Please select all techniques used:

- [ ] Aerial Photography - interpretation
- [ ] Aerial Photography - new
- [ ] Annotated Sketch
- [ ] Augering
- [ ] Dendrochronological Survey
- [ ] Documentary Search
- [ ] Environmental Sampling
- [ ] Fieldwalking
- [ ] Geophysical Survey
- [ ] Grab-Sampling
- [ ] Gravity-Core
- [ ] Laser Scanning
- [ ] Measured Survey
- [ ] Metal Detectors
- [ ] Phosphate Survey
- [ ] Photogrammetric Survey
- [ ] Photographic Survey
- [x] Rectified Photography
- [x] Remote Operated Vehicle Survey
- [ ] Sample Trenches
- [ ] Survey/Recording Of Fabric/Structure
- [ ] Targeted Trenches
- [ ] 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".

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<td>Bronze Age -2.5k to -700</td>
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© Oxford Archaeology East  Page 17 of 18  Report Number 1417
## Project Originators

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<td>Stephen Macaulay</td>
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<td>Project Manager</td>
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<td>Supervisor</td>
<td>Taleyna Fletcher</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
Figure 1: Site location with trenches (black) and development area outlined (red)
Figure 2: Location of trenches
Figure 3: Plan of trenches with archaeology and projected continuation
Figure 4: Section drawings
Plate 1: Trench 1, from south west

Plate 2: Trench 5, from south west