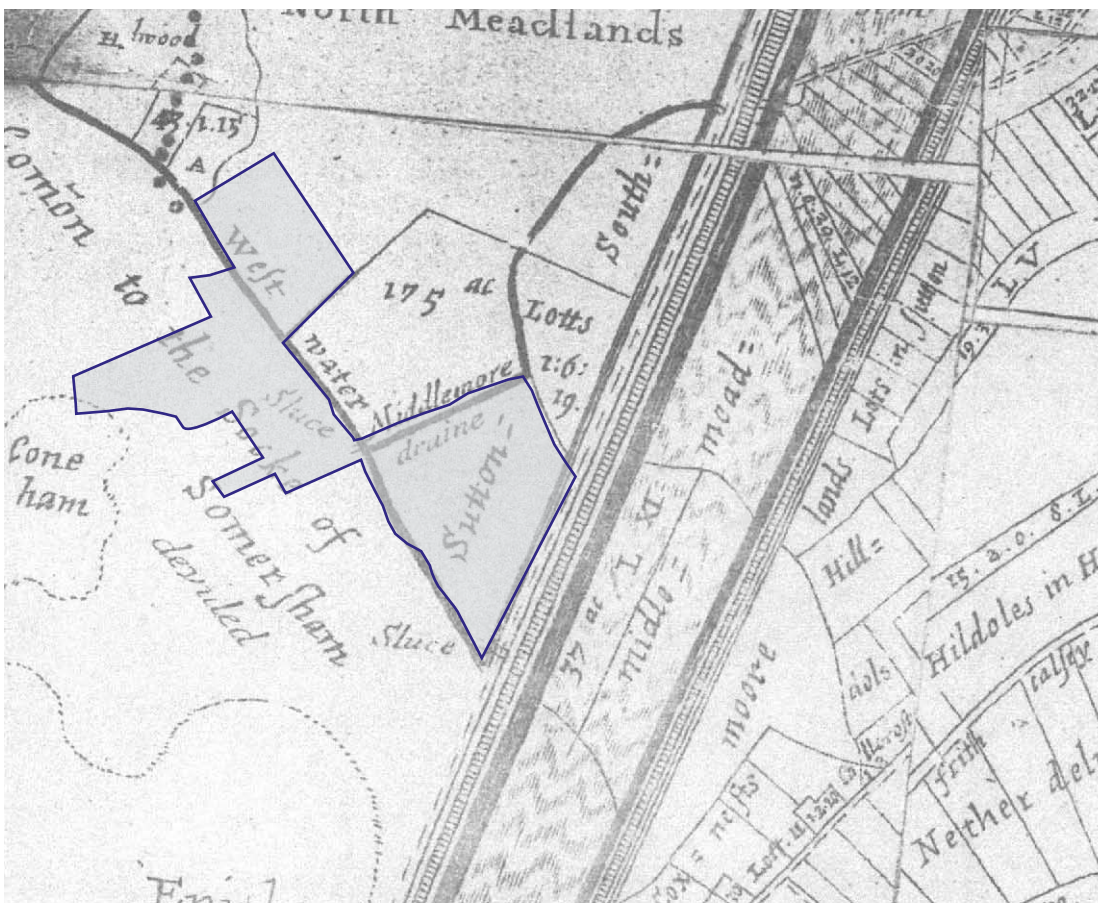


Bridge Farm, Earith, Cambs

An Archaeological Desk Based Assessment



Leo Webley

CAMBRIDGE ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT
UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE



Bridge Farm, Earith, Cambridgeshire:
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Graphics by M. Abbott

Cambridge Archaeological Unit
University of Cambridge
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Introduction

This desktop assessment has been commissioned by in advance of a planning application for gravel quarrying. The purpose of the report is to collate and summarise the known and potential archaeology of the proposed development area and its environs, and to assess the likely character, quality and preservation of the archaeological remains within the development area itself. A gazetteer of sites and findspots can be found in the Appendix; gazetteer entries are cited in the text in bold (e.g. **26**).

Location and Topography of the Development Area

The development area is comprised of 86ha straddling the artificial watercourse known as the Cranbrook Drain (centred TL 392 774), falling within Bluntisham cum Earith and Sutton parishes. The ground surface is situated at between 1m and 3m OD. The western part of the area lies on a shelf of first terrace gravels, while the eastern part consists of peat fenland, with a strip of alluvium along the Cranbrook Drain (fig. 1). Those zones with alluvial or peat covering would have been marshland, with (seasonally) open water in places, from later prehistory until the 17th century AD. Aerial photographs show three roddons (relict river channels) in the peat within or immediately adjacent to the development area, all of which run north-eastwards (fig. 3). The largest is the former course of the River Ouse, which still forms a modern field boundary along the southeastern border of the study area. The southern boundary of the development area is formed by the Old Bedford Low Bank, an earthwork associated with the mid-17th century Old Bedford River. The whole of the development area is currently agricultural land, with no buildings present.

Sources Used

The report has collated all the available information concerning the known and potential archaeological remains within the development area and its immediate environs. The sources consulted include:

- The Cambridgeshire County Council Sites and Monuments Record
- Aerial photographs. Air Photo Services have previously been commissioned to map the cropmarks within and around the development area: see Palmer in Webley and Evans 2004
- Written information, including site excavation reports, pertaining to the archaeology of the surrounding area
- The Fenland Survey report for Sutton parish (Hall 1996)

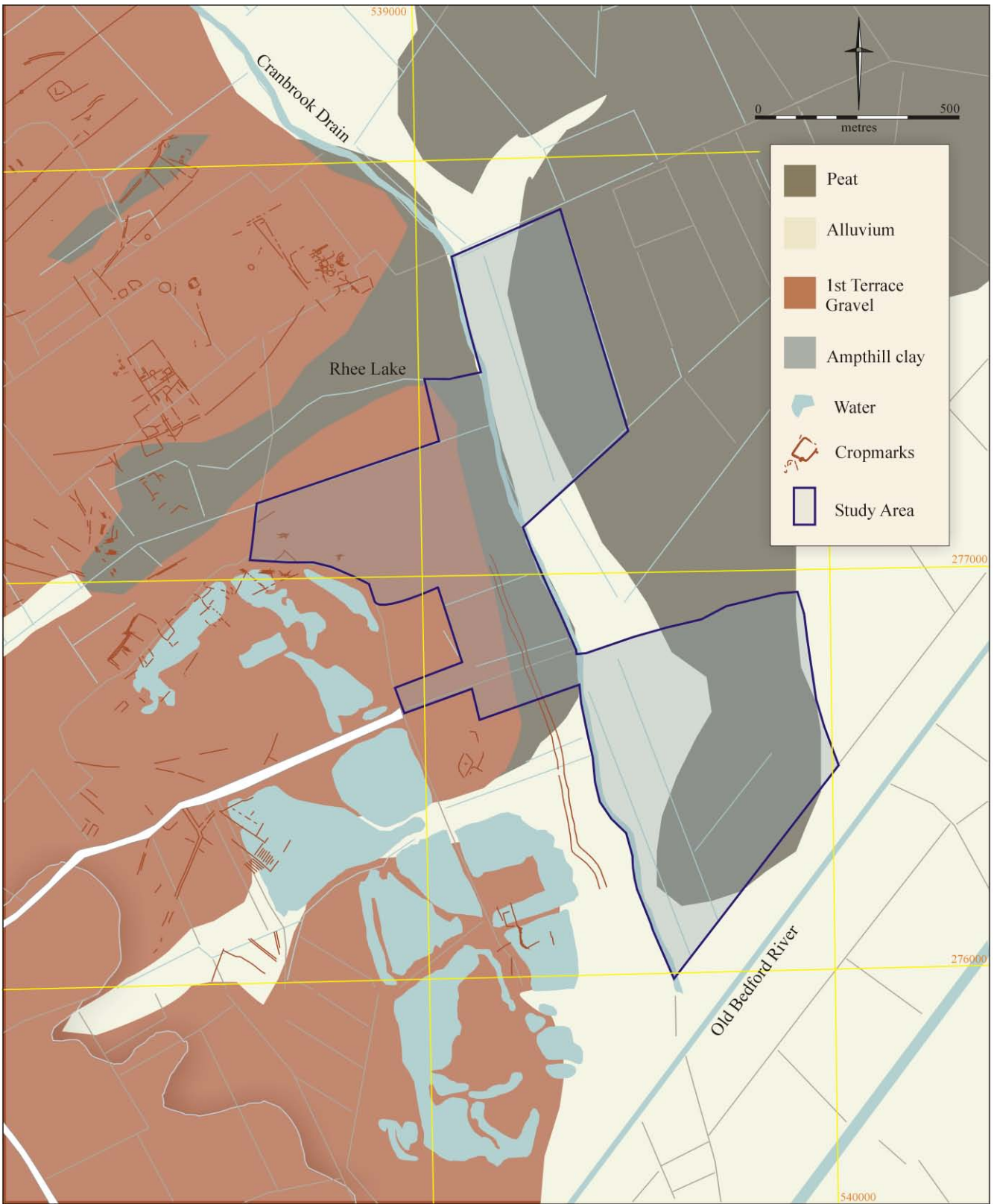


Figure 1. Geology and Topography

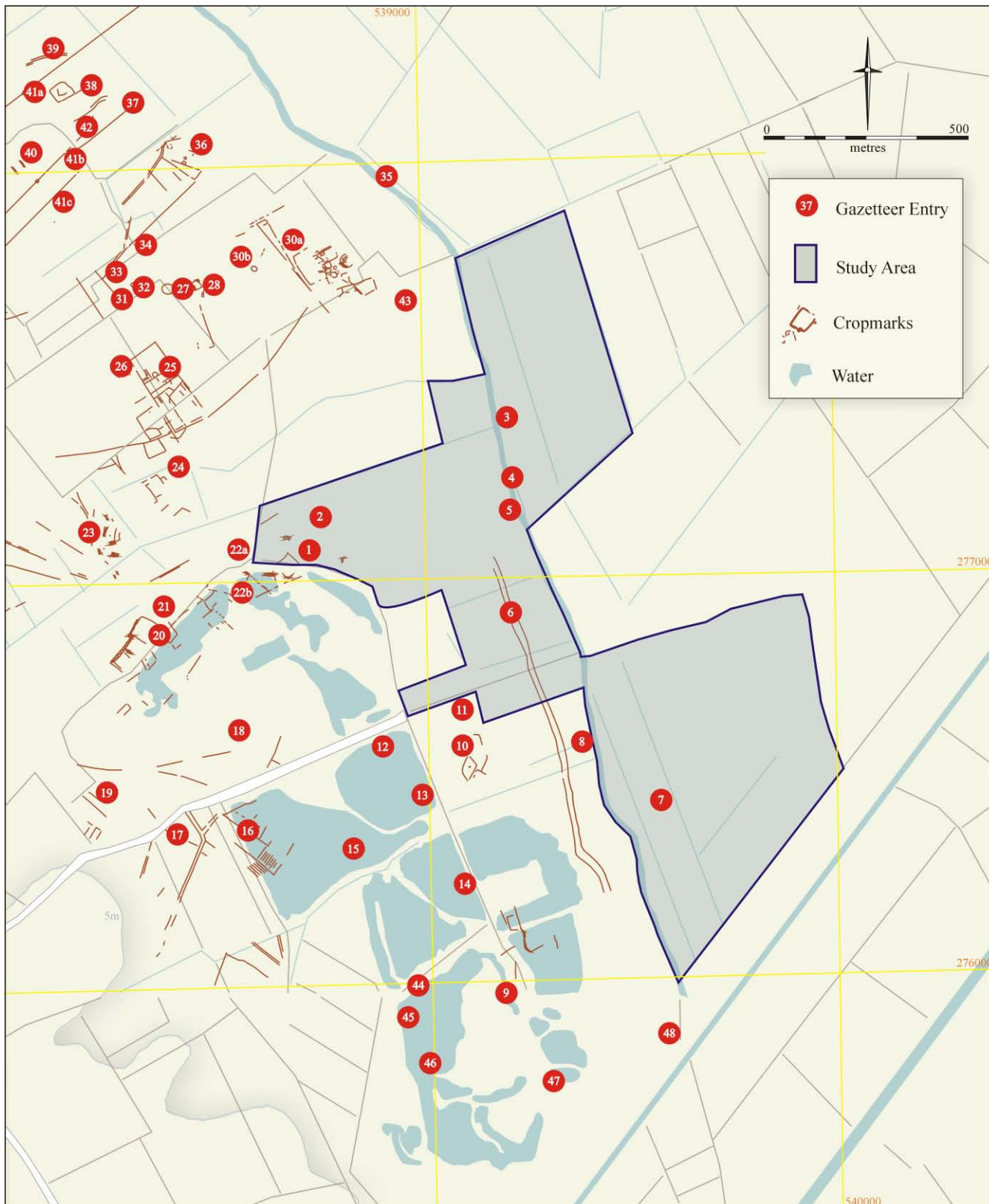


Figure 2. Gazetteer map

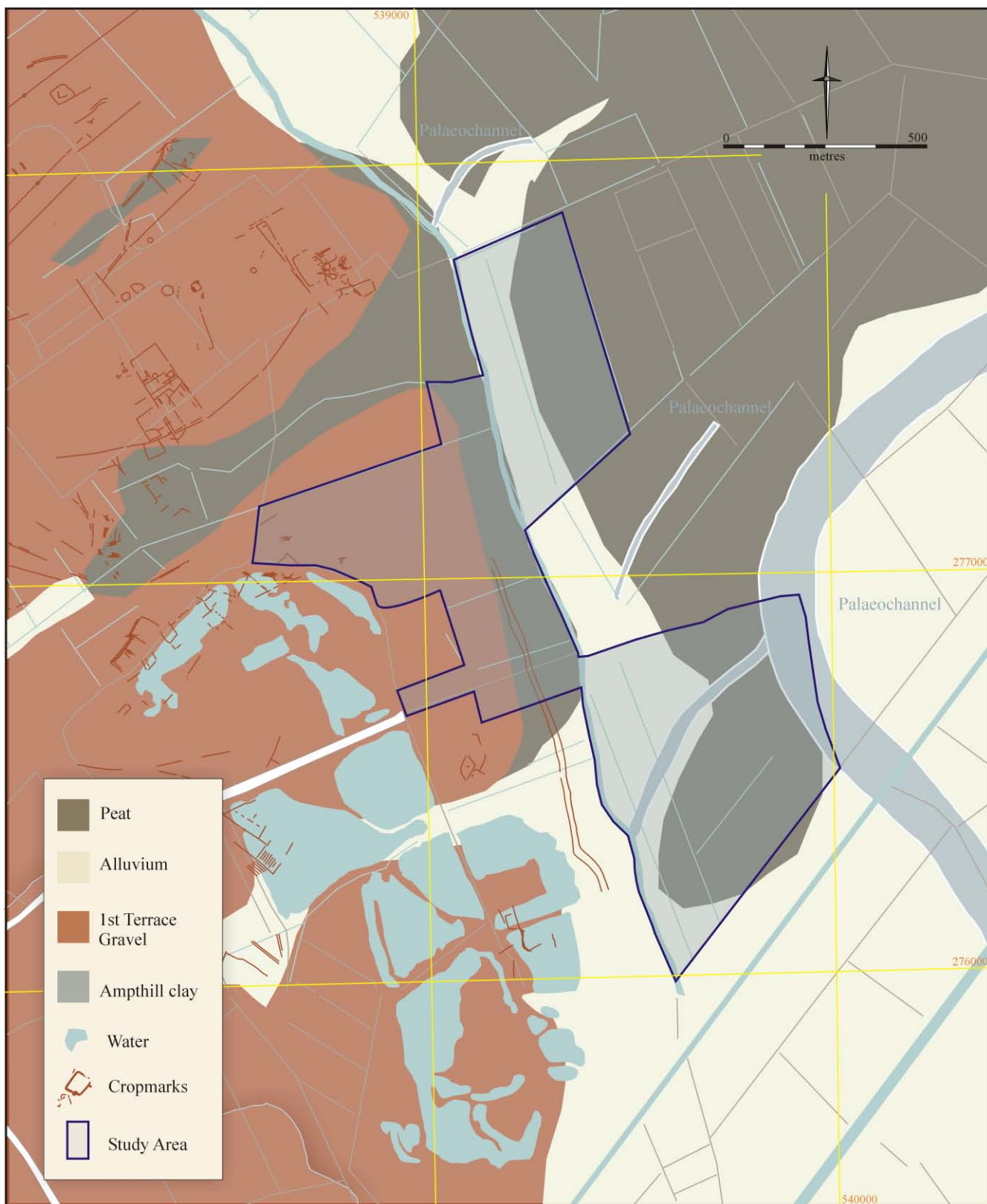


Figure 3. Palaeochannels

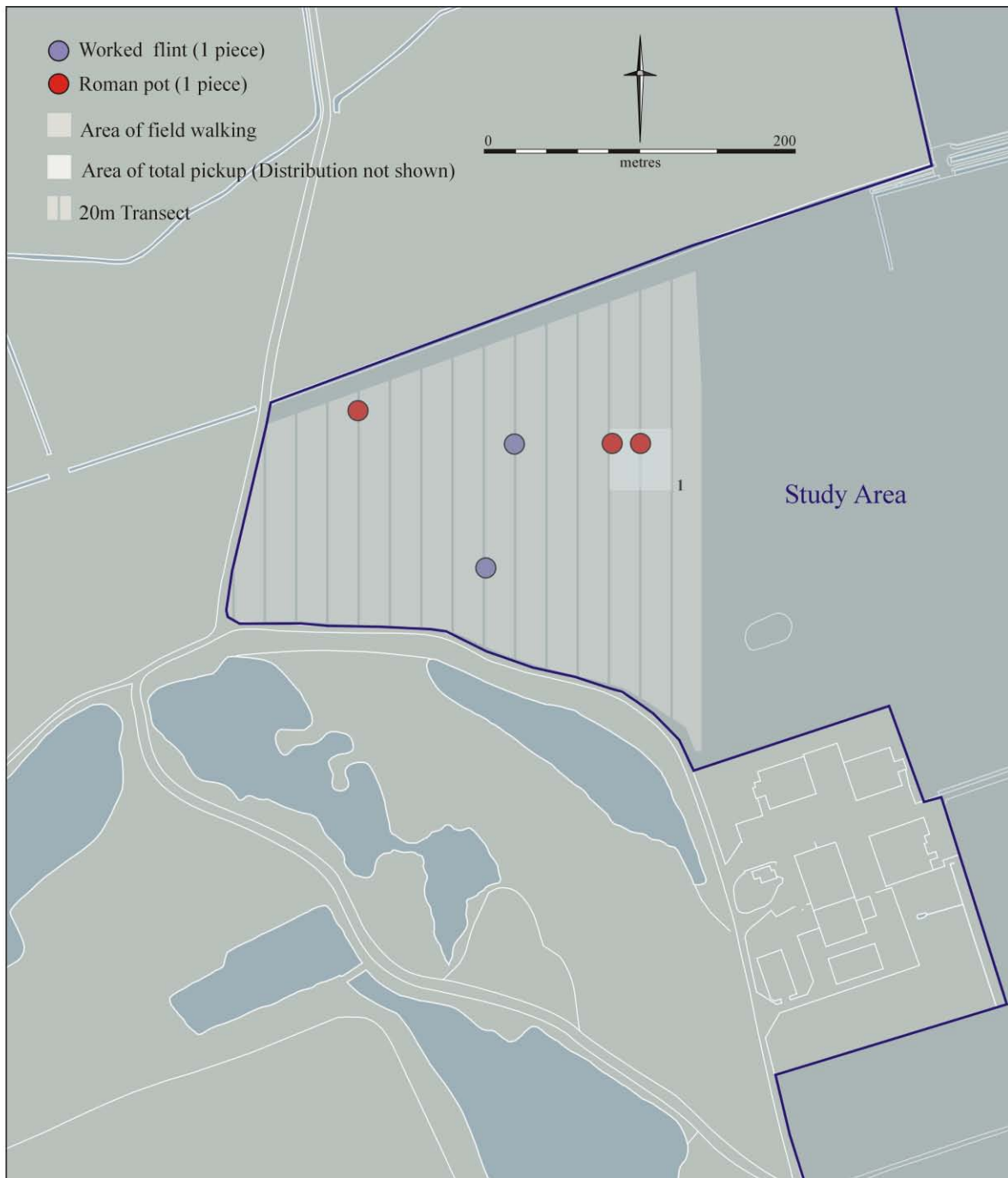


Figure 4. Fieldwalking survey of Western part of Study area, 2004

- Cartographic sources, including O.S. Map Series 1810 to present

Previous Archaeological Work

No formal archaeological excavations have taken place within the development area. However, field survey has taken place in two parts of it. Sutton parish, including the eastern part of the development area, was covered by the fieldwalking work of the Fenland Survey; no sites were identified within our area of interest (Hall 1996). More recently, a portion of the western part of the development area was surveyed in April 2004 by the CAU. This involved fieldwalking in transects to give 10% coverage, with one selected 40 by 40m square subjected to total pick-up combined with a metal-detecting survey (fig. 4). Finds were sparse, consisting of two worked flints, three sherds of Roman pottery and small amounts of post-Medieval material (Whalley 2004).

More intensive archaeological work has occurred on the gravel terrace immediately to the west of the development area. This includes small-scale excavations of Iron Age and Roman settlements carried out from the 1920s to 1970s, and a series of larger scale investigations by the CAU from the mid 1990s onwards of the prehistoric and Roman landscape of the present Earith gravel quarry. The results of these investigations are considered in the next section.

Results

The known archaeology of the development area and its environs, as shown on figure 2, can be summarised by period as follows.

Palaeolithic and Mesolithic

Palaeolithic flint implements have been recovered from the gravels at four locations in the environs (**14, 15, 36, 45**). No Mesolithic finds are known in the area.

Neolithic and Bronze Age

No sites of this period are known from the development area. The two worked flints recovered from the 2004 fieldwalking in the west of the development area (**2**) suggest no more than a 'background' presence in the landscape.

More tangible evidence of settlement comes from CAU investigations on the gravels to the west of the development area. At The Holme, Neolithic pits and Bronze Age occupation including a field system, roundhouses and two cremations have been uncovered (**18**). At Langdale Hale, Neolithic pits and later Bronze Age posthole structures were found (**25b, 26**), and Colne Fen Sites III/IV yielded Neolithic and Bronze Age pits and a Bronze Age ring ditch (**36a**). One further possible Bronze Age ring ditch is visible on aerial photographs immediately to the east of the study area (**22**).

Iron Age

Again, there is no evidence for settlement of this period within the development area, but settlements have been excavated on the gravels to the west. Investigations by the CAU in the present quarry area have uncovered two Middle-Late Iron Age settlement complexes with enclosures and roundhouses at Colne Fen Sites I/II and III/IV (**36a**, **38a**). An earlier excavation by S. Alexander in the quarry area, at the so-called Plant Site, uncovered part of a further settlement that yielded pottery, Late Iron Age coins, a shale bracelet and bronze fibulae (**30a**); three Late Iron Age bronze linch pins had previously been found close to the site (**30b**). Later Iron Age settlement evidence is also known from further along the fen edge to the northwest, outside the mapped area, at The Camp Ground (Regan forthcoming) and at Knobb's Farm, Somersham (Wills forthcoming). The evidence thus indicates fairly dense later Iron Age usage of the fen-edge gravels in the local area.

Roman

The most important feature of this period is the Cranbrook Drain (or Colne Ditch), an artificial watercourse that flows in a north-northwesterly direction across the centre of the development area. This runs between the former course of the River Ouse to the south and the Somersham River to the north. It is likely to have been a Roman canal or drainage work, and part of the same waterway system as the Car Dyke, which was constructed by the mid second century AD. Although the Cranbrook Drain has never been securely dated, Roman pottery has been recovered from or adjacent to it at three points within the development area (**3**, **5**, **8**), and from one further point to the north (**35**). Although the SMR records most of these pottery finds as being directly associated with the present Cranbrook Drain, it seems that the original route of the southern part of this watercourse lay 50-100m to the modern route, being clearly visible as a cropmark (**6**). Whether the original course kinked to the east to join the present course northwards or continued its parallel route is unclear.

The only other certain evidence for Romano-British activity within the development area is the three sherds of Roman pottery recovered from the 2004 fieldwalking, all coarsewares which could not be closely dated (**2**). These are suggestive of agricultural activity rather than a settlement. It is possible that fragmentary linear cropmarks in this area represent part of a Romano-British field system (**1**).

Meanwhile, several Roman settlements are known from the gravels in the surrounding area. A large farmstead complex of 1st-4th century date with an associated field system has been excavated by the CAU at Langdale Hale in the current quarry area (**25**), while just to the northwest of the mapped area a large, densely occupied settlement bordering on 'small town' status has been excavated at The Camp Ground (Regan 2001 and forthcoming). Field system ditches and agricultural features have been found at various other places within the quarry (**18**, **36a**, **36c**, **38a**). Further south, earlier small-scale excavations of Roman settlements have taken place at Earith Fen Drove (**10**), where 2nd-4th century pottery, tile, building stone and an inhumation were recovered, at Parnells Ground (**16**, **17**), where ditches, pits and pottery were

found, and at The Meadows (9, 46), where finds included four pottery kilns, one of which dated to the 3rd-4th century AD and produced coarseware vessels. The evidence thus indicates intensive Romano-British settlement and agricultural activity on the fen edge gravels.

Anglo-Saxon and Medieval

Following the late/post-Roman marine transgression, much of the present fen-edge in Cambridgeshire was abandoned for settlement until post-Medieval times. No Anglo-Saxon or Medieval sites or findspots are known from the development area or its environs. The Medieval villages of Colne and Bluntisham lay over 2km away to the west and southwest respectively (the village of Earith being an essentially post-Medieval development). It is notable that while ridge and furrow fields can be seen on aerial photographs to the west of the mapped area (Palmer in Webley and Evans 2004), all are significantly higher than the development area, lying above the 5m contour.

Post-Medieval

Fen drainage works took place in the area during the 17th century, with the Old Bedford River at the southern edge of the development area dating from the 1630s. The present pattern of agricultural fields within the local area post-dates these drainage works. Moore's map of 1658 depicts no buildings within the development area (fig. 5), a situation that persists on the draft 6" OS map of 1810 and the first edition OS map of 1889-90. The 1928 OS map depicts a solitary building to the east of the Cranbrook Drain, no longer standing today (7). One relic of the Second World War is situated immediately to the northwest of the development area in the form of a bombing decoy for RAF Wyton (43).

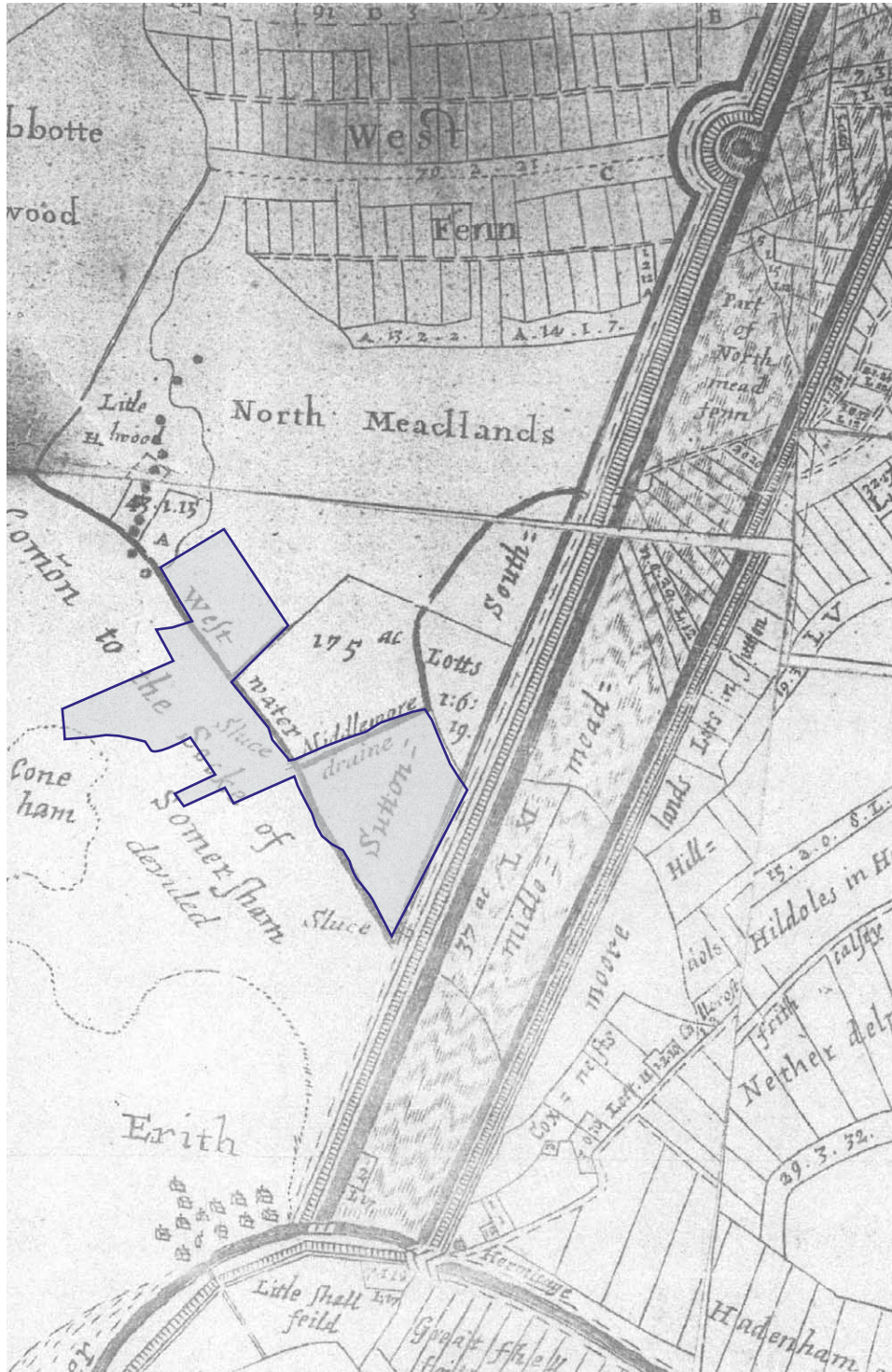


Figure 5. Extract from Moore's map of 1658, with study area superimposed (n.b. Study area distorted to fit)

Discussion

Within the development area, known archaeology comes from two zones: the gravel terrace at the western edge of the area, and the Cranbrook Drain corridor. The peat fen, meanwhile, is a blank zone in terms of current knowledge. These three zones will be discussed in turn below.

The Gravel Terrace

As outlined above, a series of excavations have shown dense later Iron Age and Romano-British settlement on the fen edge across the Earith, Colne and Somersham area. Neolithic and Bronze Age occupation has also been found in several places. The potential for prehistoric and Roman archaeology on the gravels within the development area is thus clear, although direct evidence for this in the form of cropmarks is much sparser than in the areas further to the west and northwest. The only cropmarks to be seen are a group of fragmentary linears present within the western apex of the development area (1). The notably small assemblage produced from fieldwalking this area - two worked flints and three Roman sherds - leaves the date and function of these cropmarks open, although it makes it unlikely that there was a significant Romano-British settlement here. The cropmarks could well form part of a Romano-British field system, similar to those observed elsewhere along the fen edge. An earlier date is possible, however, particularly in the light of the Bronze Age field system recently discovered 300m to the southwest at The Holme. With reference to the gravel terrace as a whole, it should be stressed that the Neolithic and Bronze Age settlements uncovered in the course of the CAU investigations in the current quarry area had little or no prior cropmark register. The paucity of evidence for prehistoric sites within the development area should thus not necessarily be taken as evidence for absence.

The Cranbrook Drain Corridor

The Cranbrook Drain is the most significant known archaeological feature within the development area. Any programme of excavation should as a priority set out to determine the exact course of the Drain in antiquity, the dating of its construction and subsequent development, and its function - was it primarily a drainage work, or a canal, or both? It would also be of interest to elucidate the relationship of the Drain with the Rhee Lake, a fen embayment that branches off westwards from the Cranbrook Drain corridor, which could also have formed part of the Roman canal network. Beyond these issues, the most significant aspect of the Cranbrook Drain is the good potential for survival of waterlogged organic remains. These could potentially include wooden revetment structures, jetties or docking facilities, and even boats.

The Peat Fen

The low-lying fen zone in the eastern part of the development area is entirely lacking in known archaeology. This absence is likely to be at least partly real, as the area

would have been uninhabitable wetland from the later Bronze Age until the 17th century AD. The work of the Fenland Survey has shown that the edge of the Fen Clay deposits - laid down by marine flooding during the later Neolithic and Early Bronze Age - would border the eastern side of the development area (Hall 1996, fig. 3; Waller 1994; cf. Evans & Hodder forthcoming). This flooding is likely to have extended further west along the courses of palaeochannels and low ground depressions. Investigations at Foulmire Fen to the east of the development area (Evans & Hodder forthcoming) have shown that this 'still-water' flooding has good potential to preserve Mesolithic and earlier Neolithic sites. Roddons within the development area, and especially the margin of the main Ouse palaeo-channel, are likely to have been affected by such flooding and thus have the potential for Mesolithic and Neolithic archaeology. The fen deposits are also a repository of important palaeo-environmental evidence, which should be investigated as part of any programme of archaeological work.

Conclusion

To summarise, the most significant known archaeological feature within the development area is the Cranbrook Drain. Investigation of this would elucidate Roman systems of transport and drainage in the fenland, and could yield important waterlogged remains. The gravel terraces to the west of the Drain have the potential for prehistoric and Roman settlement, although no sites as such can be identified from the available evidence. Finally, the peat fen to the east of the Drain has the potential for deep-buried Mesolithic and earlier Neolithic sites, and could also yield useful palaeo-environmental evidence; remains from the later prehistoric period onwards are unlikely. Significant post-Roman finds are not anticipated anywhere within the development area.

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Appendix: Site Gazetteer

No.	SMR No.	NGR (all in TL)	Date	Notes
1	-	3870 7707	?	Fragmentary rectilinear cropmarks - field system?
2	-	387 771	Prehistoric, Roman	Fieldwalking: 2 worked flints, 3 sherds of Roman pottery
3	3568	392 774	Roman	4th century Nene Valley flagon
4	3746	3921 7727	?	Stone net sinkers
5	3569	392 772	Roman	Samian cup
6	-	3860 7810	Roman	Cropmark: course of Cranbrook Drain/Car Dyke
7	-	3957 7648	Post-Med.	Building shown on 1928 OS map, no longer standing
8	3570	394 266	Roman	Pottery
9	907	391 759	Roman	Excavation: pottery kiln (Green 1954)
10	2645	391 766	Roman	Settlement (2-4 C) excavated 1963-5 - pottery, tile, building stone; skeleton with bronze ring, bangle and 3rd C coin excavated 1962 (White 1967)
11	9925	391 767	?	Cropmarks - no further details
12	1887	389 766	Roman	Pottery
13	6193	390 765	Roman	Bronze statuette
14	1786	391 763	Palaeo.	Flint scatter, including axe
15	1682	3885 7635	Palaeo.	Flake tool
16	1735	385 764/ 387 764	Roman	Parnell's Ground Roman settlement, excavated by Tebbutt - earthworks, ditches, pits, pottery.
17	1886	384 764	Roman	Settlement - pits, ditches, pottery, beehive quern
18	-	3840 7650	Neolithic, Bronze Age, Iron Age, Roman	Excavation (Evans and Patten 2003) – Bronze Age field system and roundhouses; two Bronze Age cremations; Neolithic pits; Early Iron Age pit-well; two rectilinear Romano-British enclosures; inhumation, probably Roman.
19	-	3822 7646	Roman?	Cropmarks: possible enclosures/field systems
20a	-	3840 7690	Iron Age/ Roman	Cropmarks: rectilinear enclosures
20b	-	3827 7685	Prehistoric/ Roman	Finds scatter: Roman pottery, worked flint
20c	-	3837 7687	Iron Age	Watching brief by CAU: later Iron Age pottery recovered from enclosure ditches (Regan 2003)
21	-	-	Prehistoric	Fieldwalking: 4 worked flints
22a	-	3856 7710	Roman?	Cropmarks observed on ground: possible field system and pits
22b	-	3859 7698	Prehistoric?	Cropmark: possible ring-ditch, c. 15m diameter (Evans and Patten 2003, 66)
23	-	3820 7720	Roman?	Cropmarks: field boundary ditches? Watching brief by CAU: no finds (Regan 2003)
24	-	3840 7730	Roman?	Cropmarks: possible enclosure and part of a field system
25a	15456	3840 7750	Roman	Langdale Hale Roman settlement (2-4 C), excavated by H. Mytum in 1977 and CAU in 1999 (Regan 2003).
25b	15455	3819 7739	Bronze Age, Roman	Excavation by CAU (Regan 2003) - later Bronze Age posthole structures; Roman field system ditches connecting with 1a.
26	15456	3830 7760	Neolithic	Pits excavated by CAU 1999 (as 1a)
27a	-	3841 7774	?	Cropmark: circular enclosure
27b	-	3843 7772	?	Cropmark: part of north-south aligned field system
27c	-	3843 7771	?	Cropmark: corner of field system
28a	-	3848 7775	Post-Med.	Cropmark: square enclosure; excavation, H. C. Mytum 1977 - modern quarrying
28b	-	3849 7773	?	Cropmark: part of double-ditch or drove
28c	-	3852 7770	?	Cropmark: corner of field system
29	-	3862 7779	Post-Med.	Cropmark: circular, possibly a pond
30a	3745/	388 778	Prehistoric;	Later Iron Age and Early Roman settlement, excavated

	8812		Iron Age- Roman	1976 (S. Alexander). Pottery, cremation, shale bracelet, 3 bronze fibulae. Also surface finds of flint, bronze brooch, Late Iron Age coins.
30b	1791	3861 7778	Iron Age	Three bronze linch pins, early 1st century AD
31	-	3830 7772	?	Cropmark: rectilinear enclosure
32	-	3834 7775	?	Cropmark: enclosure
33	-	3830 7790	?	Cropmark: double-ditched drove
34	-	3837 7786	?	Cropmark: circular enclosure
35	3571	386 781	Roman	Pottery (2nd century Samian cup and 4th century Nene Valley jug) and stone net sinkers dredged up in 1937
36a	-	3845 7805	Neolithic, Bronze Age, Iron Age, Roman	Excavation by CAU (Regan and Evans 2000)/cropmark SMR 08815: Neolithic/Bronze Age pits; Bronze Age ring ditch; Iron Age settlement with enclosure ditches and roundhouses (5th C. BC - 1st C. AD); Roman field system ditches
36b	-	3840 7810	Palaeo., Neolithic, Bronze Age, Iron Age, Roman	Finds scatter - Palaeolithic hand axe and substantial quantities of flint, mostly debitage and miscellaneous retouched pieces dating to the earlier Neolithic with some earlier Bronze Age flints (including a leaf and transverse arrowhead); Late Iron Age and Roman pot
36c	-	3846 7789	Roman	Excavation by CAU (Regan and Evans 2000): C-shaped enclosure and circular gully, with probable agricultural function
37	-	3823 7820	?	Cropmark: double-ditched drove
38a	8815	3815 7823	Iron Age, Roman	Excavation (Regan and Evans 1998) / former cropmark SMR 08815: Two Middle-Late Iron Age enclosures containing roundhouses, and associated ditch systems; Roman ditch system
38b	-	3810 7820	Neolithic, Bronze Age, Iron Age	Finds scatter - later Neolithic and Early Bronze Age worked flint present but few diagnostic pieces; Iron Age pot and burnt stone
38c	-	3820 7820	Prehistoric?	Skeleton (possibly crouched) - juvenile 10-15 years old
39	-	3810 7830	?	Cropmark: double-ditch /drove
40	-	3803 7805	?	Cropmark: southern end of drove.
41a	-	3805 7822	Post-Med.	Cropmark: pond and field boundary.
41b	-	3808 7800	Post-Med.	Cropmark: pond and field boundary.
41c	-	3816 7800	Post-Med.	Cropmark: field boundary.
42	-	3819 7805	Iron Age	Excavation by CAU (Knight and MacFadyen 1998): later Iron Age roundhouse, pits and ditches
43	15178	3894 7765	Post-Med.	Bombing decoy for RAF Wyton
44	3321	390 760	Roman	Wooden 'box' or well (CCC parish files)
45	2542	391 759	Palaeolithic	Flint implements
46	1937	390 758	Roman	Pottery
47	8814	393 758	?	Cropmarks: enclosure and 'ring ditch'
48	3547	397 759	Post-Med.	Old toll house