

CAMBRIDGE INDEPENDENT ARCHAEOLOGY – CIA9 (MW12)

Report on Excavation of a garden at 22 Mere Way Cambridge

Report by W Hughes

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Summary

The excavation was made because Mere Way is on the reputed line of the Roman road from the Castle Hill Cambridge fort/settlement to Ely.

No Roman feature or finds were revealed, only modern pottery, plastic, iron nails and glass.

The site seems to have had extensive levelling and re-distribution of earth when the house was built in the 1950's as a layer of clay of this re-distribution was found overlaying a natural sandy/gravel in which a broken Bronze Age flint arrowhead was found at a depth of 7 cm into this natural.

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Excavation

The site was selected as it is a house on the modern road which is considered to be on the alignment of the Roman road out from the Roman fort at Castle Hill heading for Ely, and that there had been numerous Roman finds in the locality ranging from a Villa to a tomb and coins. Therefore, it was possible that further Roman remains might be found. See list of references for previous finds recorded on HER of Cambridge County Council. The excavation was made in March 2012.

The site was in the back garden (Figs 1 Site plan, Fig 2 Trench plan). Mere Way alignment is approximately 25 degrees East of North. No 22 is on North West side of road.

Initially area A3 was dug as a test trench to gauge what was possibly there.

This revealed only modern finds. On the surface was a clay pipe stem which presumably was deposited either in the 19th or early 20th century and brought to the surface by gardening. In the top 28 cm of plough there were a few fragments of charcoal, 2 possibly worked flints, a bit of plastic, 1 modern pottery, bits of modern brick, piece of un-identified iron. Then at the fairly sharp transition to a lighter brown earth the density of these charcoal fragments was much higher. In the layer 28 to 38cm there were more fragments of charcoal, 1 piece of coke, 1 piece of coal, and a few fragments of modern brick. At 38cm depth there was sandy gravel which was initially thought to be in situ natural (Fig 4).

Although this trench did not have any Roman features or finds, it was decided to excavate the 3 x 3 metre area ABC 1-3.

This area was taken down keeping the excavation substantially at the same level. In general, a depth of 30 to 35cm was reached.

Only modern objects were found. (Details in Finds section and spreadsheet Fig 12)

Whilst excavating area B3 it was discovered that the layer at 38 cm depth previously thought to be natural was actually on top of dark brown heavy clay. A sondage was dug in it to approximately 10 cms depth, and sondages were also dug in areas A2 and C3 where a similar clay layer was also exposed.

Therefore, excavation in all the areas was halted, and the sondage in B3 was enlarged and dug down further. This revealed that the clay layer was 20 cm thick and contained small fragments of modern brick, and at the bottom was a small fragment of modern pottery (Fig 8). Then underneath was a very sandy gravel layer which was dug for a further 7 cm. At this level a broken Bronze Age flint arrowhead (Fig 5, 6) was found alongside small fragments of stone with some sort of black accretion (Fig 7). This accretion has been indentified by a geologist from Cambridge University as resulting from leaching over a period of many years of naturally occurring mineral compounds from layers above. Fig 3 is a section drawing of this sondage and above. Fig 9 is view to south west.

It was therefore decided that as the clay layer and the thin gravel layer above it had been re-deposited by builders when the house was built in the 1950's that we were unlikely to find any original features from the Roman times. So the excavation was terminated.

Finds

Details are in spreadsheet Fig 12.

The most significant find was a broken Bronze Age flint arrowhead found in the layer beneath the clay layer when the sondage was dug in trench area B3 to determine the thickness of the clay layer (Figs 5, 6).

Additionally, only modern objects were found and a selection of these is shown in Figs 10 & 11.

As well as those illustrated there were also nails, an aluminium milk bottle top and a plastic golf tee.

The find of charcoal was presumably distributed over the garden from a bonfire as a soil improver.

Dating from the pottery finds would indicate a 20th century date. The plastics would narrow the date range to the 1950's, but a little research on the model and make of the die cast metal toy car would enable a date of production to be within +/- a couple of years, and destruction and deposition to probably +/- five years.

Therefore, all of the finds are of a type that are consistent with the age of the house, with perhaps the one piece of black & white transfer print pottery in area C3 being older (Fig 10).

Conclusion

Although no Roman features or finds came to light, at least the dig may be classified as good negative evidence for the presence of Roman features. The chance find of the Bronze Age arrowhead gives some indication that animals were hunted in this area in that prehistoric period.

The results might have been better if an excavation nearer to the road had been possible, where a possible side ditch might have been revealed. This would have helped confirm the alignment of the Roman road which has still to be definitely identified.

Acknowledgements

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Adam Lister drew all the drawings and provided computer copies.

Members of the team were

Peter Cornelissen, Jacqueline Hayward, Adam Lister, Robert Skeen, Peter Thompson.

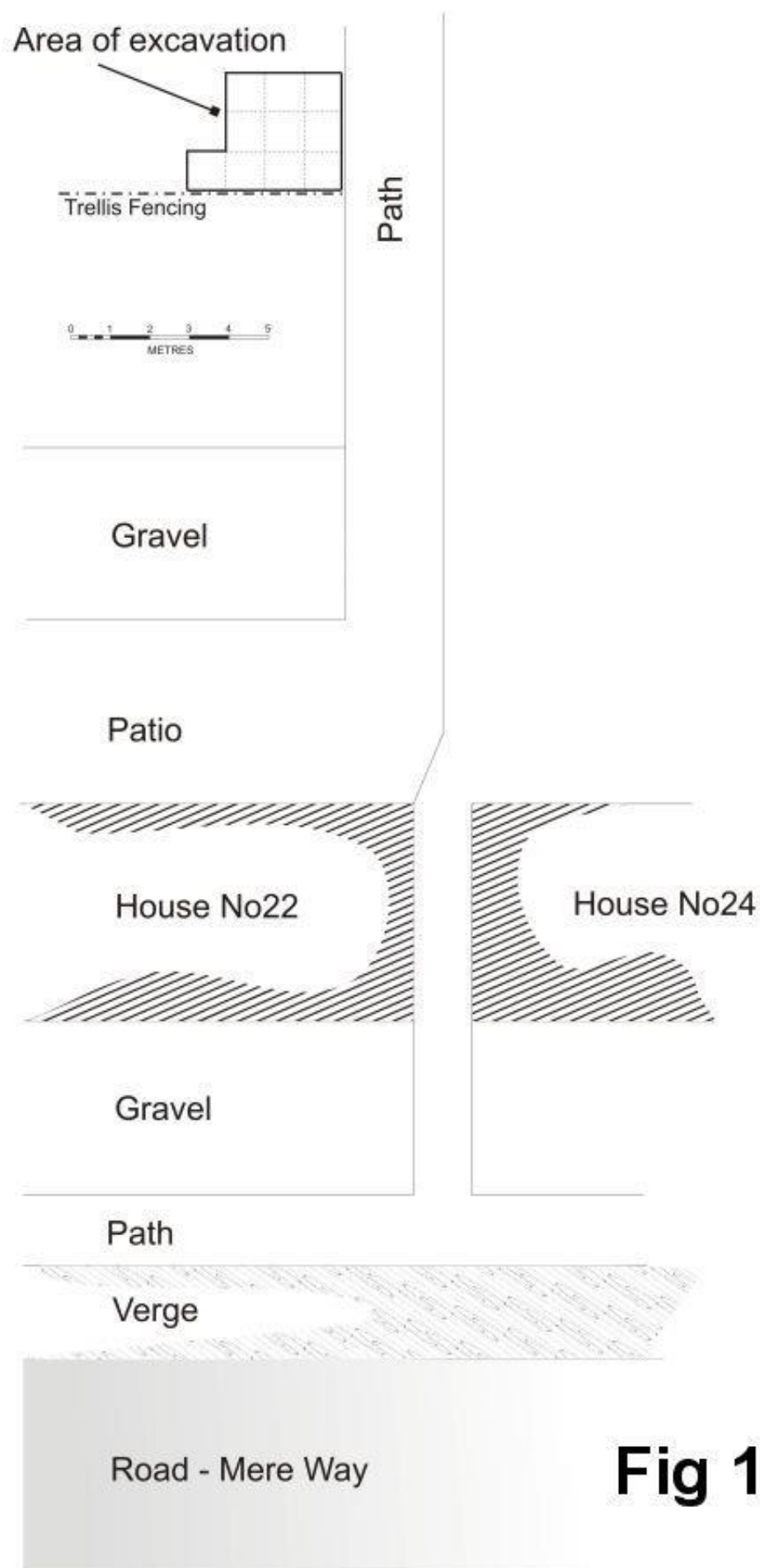
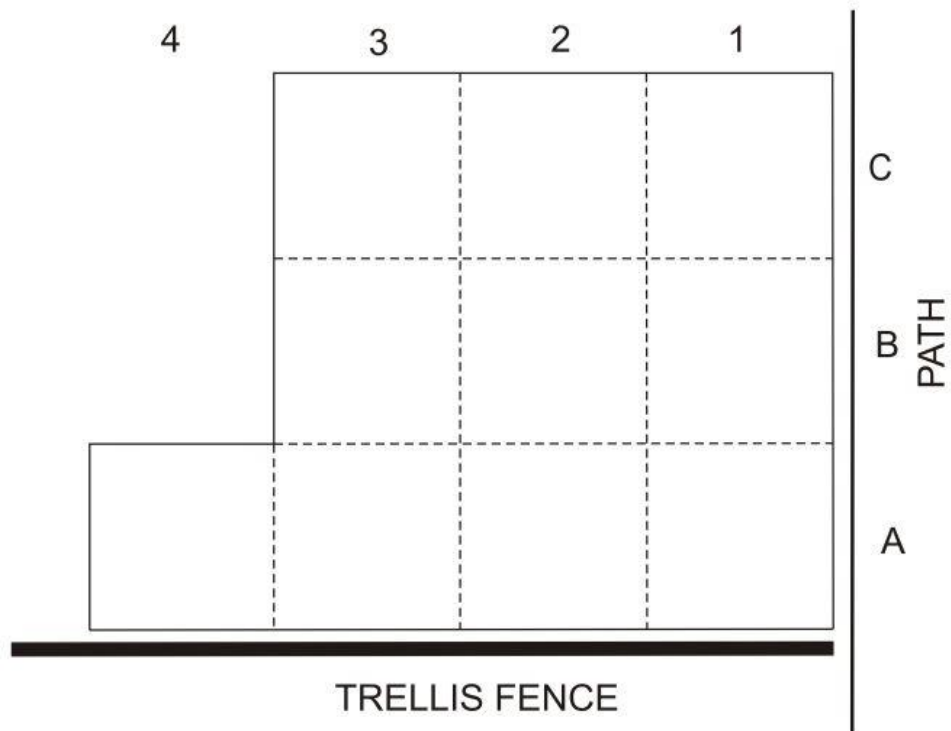
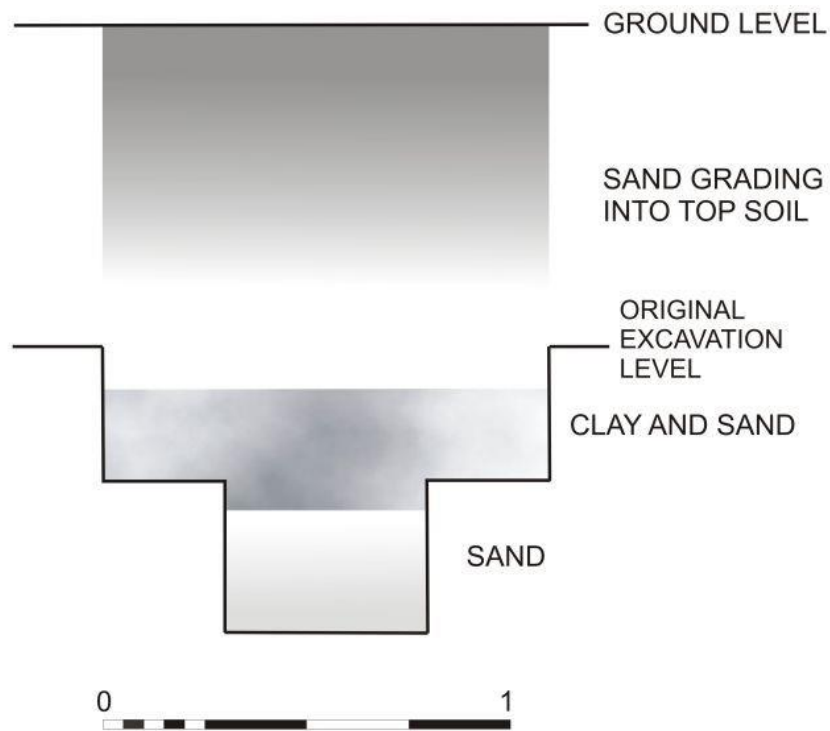


Fig 1



Trench plan & grid Fig 2



Section of trench B3 & sondage
view to south west

Fig 3





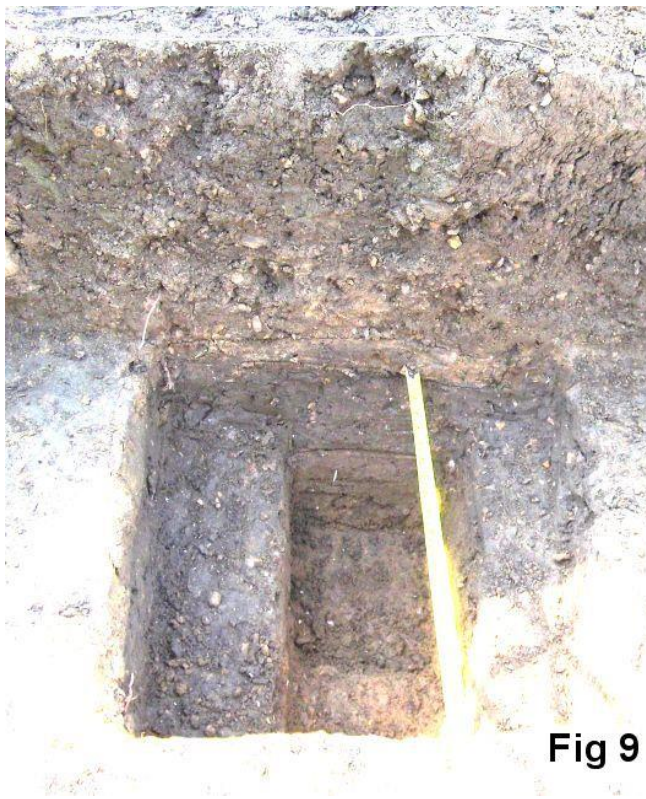


Fig 9

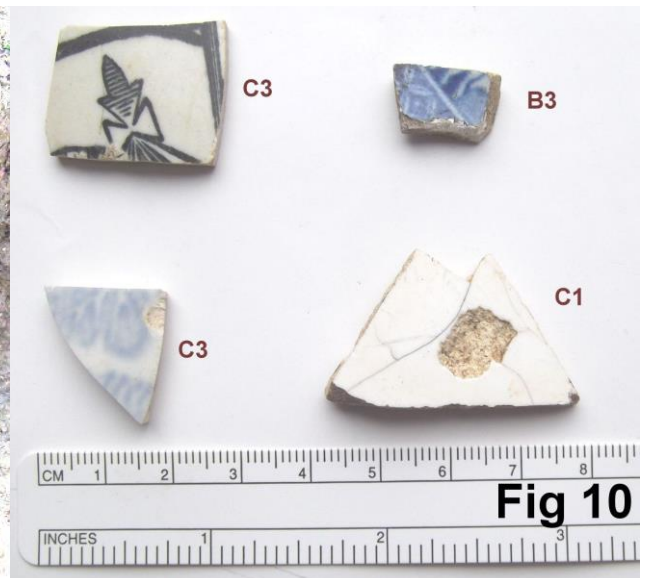


Fig 10

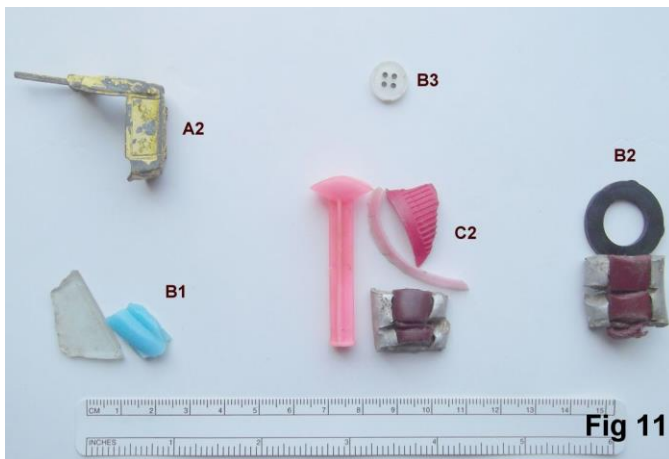


Fig 11