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NO.45



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# ELY, HIGH BARNS

## AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT



Cambridgeshire  
County Council

Rural Strategy



10259, a

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# ELY, HIGH BARNES

- AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

TL550815

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1992

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Report no. 45



cambridgeshire  
archaeology

## **Abstract**

An archaeological evaluation was carried out over 4.25 acres of land due for residential development off Kings Avenue in Ely. Three hundred metres of trial trenching revealed no significant archaeological remains existing within the area but did identify a number of places where modern sub-soil disturbance and make-up of the land had taken place. Only five sherds of early pottery, four Iron Age and one Roman were recovered from the site, none of which can be related to any known features. These finds, along with the site archive are to be found at the Cambridgeshire County Councils Archaeology Office in Fulbourn.

## **Introduction**

In July 1991 an application for planning permission was submitted by Wilcon Homes Anglia Ltd to erect 59 residential houses on two sites totalling 4.87 acres of land situated off Kings Avenue, Bishopscroft (High Barns) Ely (see figure 1). Permission for the development was granted and the construction work was undertaken for the above agent by Wilcon Development Group Ltd.

Due to the size of this development and its location on high ground that forms a part of the historically important Isle of Ely, along with the number of important archaeological remains discovered within the High Barns area, an archaeological evaluation was considered necessary. This work was undertaken on the larger of the two development sites (approx. 4.25 acres) by staff of the Cambridgeshire Archaeology Office between the 12th and 19th of December 1991.

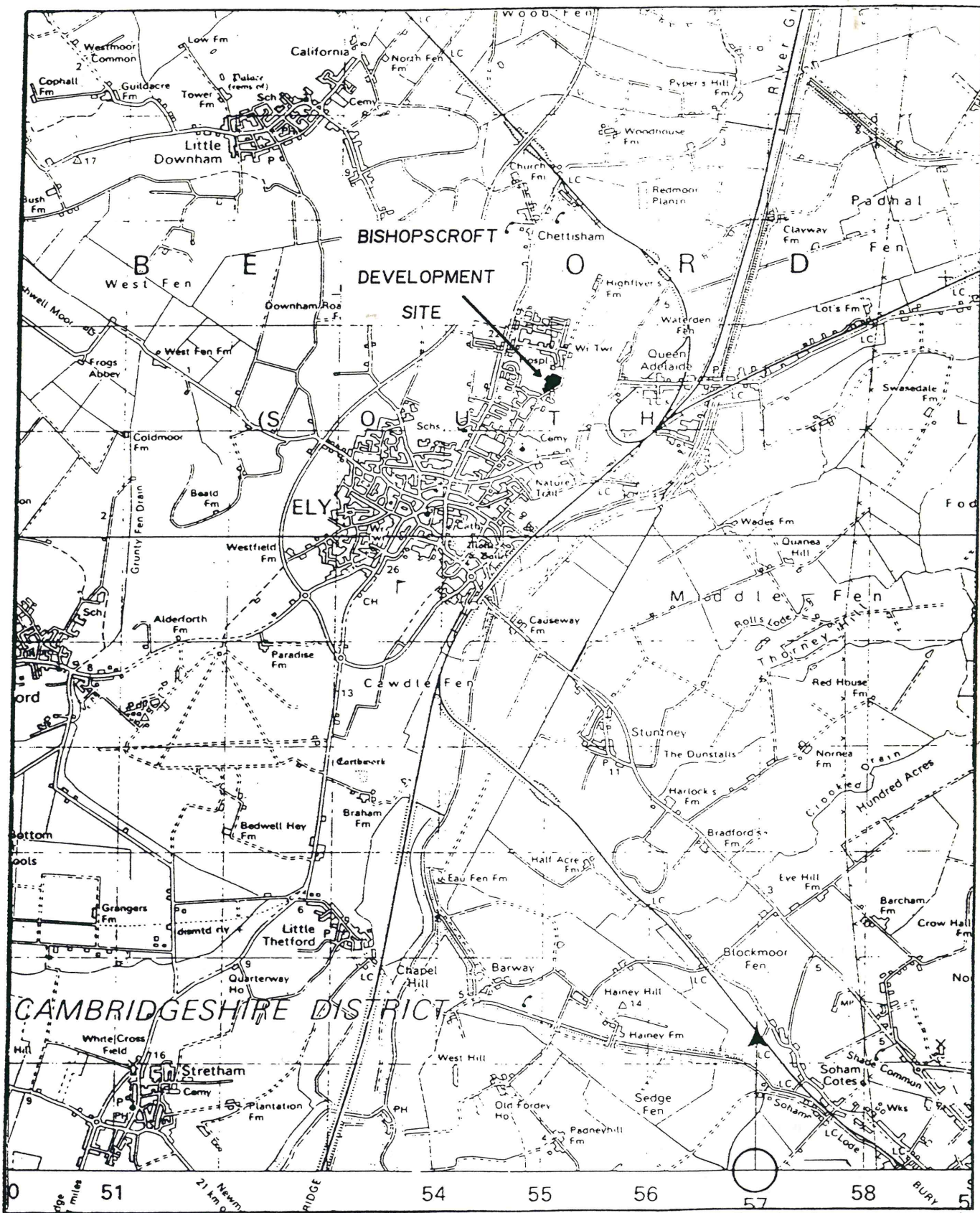
The disturbed nature of the site, due to construction activities, and the presence of large metal poles marking the developers grid rendered fieldwalking and geophysical survey unfeasible. Consequently the evaluation was conducted by means of excavation using 300 metres of machine cut trial trenching, representing approximately a 3% sample of the site, and preserving, by record, any archaeological remains discovered.

## **Site Location and Details**

The site of the Bishopscroft development is situated on high ground on the NE border of the historic city of Ely. It formed part of the original Isle of Ely and is situated on boulder clay which supports a soil of clayey sandy-silt that is slowly permeable and prone to wetness. The 1888 edition of the OS map for this area shows details of two ponds occurring within the large field of which this development site forms a part. This wetness limited the lands use in recent times to the cultivation of potatoes. In latter years much of the surrounding area come under development and consequently the site is bordered on its north, west and southern edges by residential housing, with arable fields lying to the east only.

No known records exist for archaeological remains being found on this site, however just to the NE of this area at TL 5503 8160 D.H. Trump (Proc. Cambridge. Antiq. Soc. Vol L11, p1) identified, in 1958, a beaker burial, uncovered by workmen laying drains for a housing development (Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) no 06136). A fine orange-buff paste beaker with comb-stamp decoration was recovered containing the bones of a child around nine years old. Just twenty yards away from this a flint scraper (SMR no 07186) also dated to the Bronze Age was recovered by Trump (ibid).

To the west, on the lower greensand, an enclosure cropmark at TL 552 816 of unknown date was destroyed by housing (SMR no 07177). A very important find occurred to the SW of the present development site (TL 547 812) in 1959, again during



Based upon Ordnance Survey Map No. (Edit): **143** For identification purposes only

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Cambridgeshire  
County Council

Department of Property  
Archaeology Section

LOCATION OF THE DEVELOPMENT  
SITE OF BISHOPSCROFT  
(HIGH BARNS) ELY

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PREPARED BY: G. HALEY DATE: 23 / 1 / 91

SCALE: 1 : 50,000

FIGURE 1

the cutting of a foundation trench for a housing development (SMR no 02074). Human bones, along with two gilt bronze, square-headed brooches, one small-long brooch, two shield bosses, a spear head and sword of Anglo-Saxon date were recovered and are now in Ely museum.

### **Archaeological Fieldwork**

Of the 4.87 acres proposed for development under this scheme only around 4.25 acres was available for evaluation at the present time. The remaining land, which is grassed and landscaped, forms a small site to the north of the area investigated and is part of the show house display, consequently it is not scheduled for development for a further two years. In view of this the evaluation did not consider this area under the present work..

As mentioned earlier in this report the existence of the developers 25 metre grid system and the disturbed nature of the site ruled out fieldwalking and geophysical survey. The goal of the work was therefore to achieve the best coverage of the site that could be obtained using 300 metres of linear trial trenching. Figure 2 shows the coverage achieved using six, 1.55 x 50 metre long trenches and their positions in relation to the developers grid.

### **Method Of Excavation**

A JCB was used to cut the trenches and remove the top-soil, along with any existing over-burden / disturbed deposits until either features were revealed or a clean sub-soil surface was exposed. Heavy frosts necessitated the use of a toothed bucket to break-up frozen top-soil before a 1.55 metre ditching bucket could be used to clean back along a smooth surface.

Following machining each trench was cleaned back by hand using hoes and trowels to expose a clean surface on which any extant features would be revealed. Where possible all exposed features were investigated by hand excavation and recorded both in section and on 1:200 plan (see figure 3). If a feature, on being investigated, proved to be modern no further work was carried out and the section was recorded to the depth at which work ceased.

The aims of the evaluation were to establish if any archaeological remains existed within the area to be developed; to record at what depth archaeological deposits occur and in what concentrations; the condition in which features and artefacts were preserved and their nature and date.

### **Results**

The following information describes the general characteristics of each trench, along with any contexts that occur within them. All depths are given from the ground surface as no Ordnance Survey bench mark was readily available. To establish a temporary bench mark on site from a OS bench-mark further away was deemed unnecessary in view of the lack of archaeological evidence.

#### Trench 1

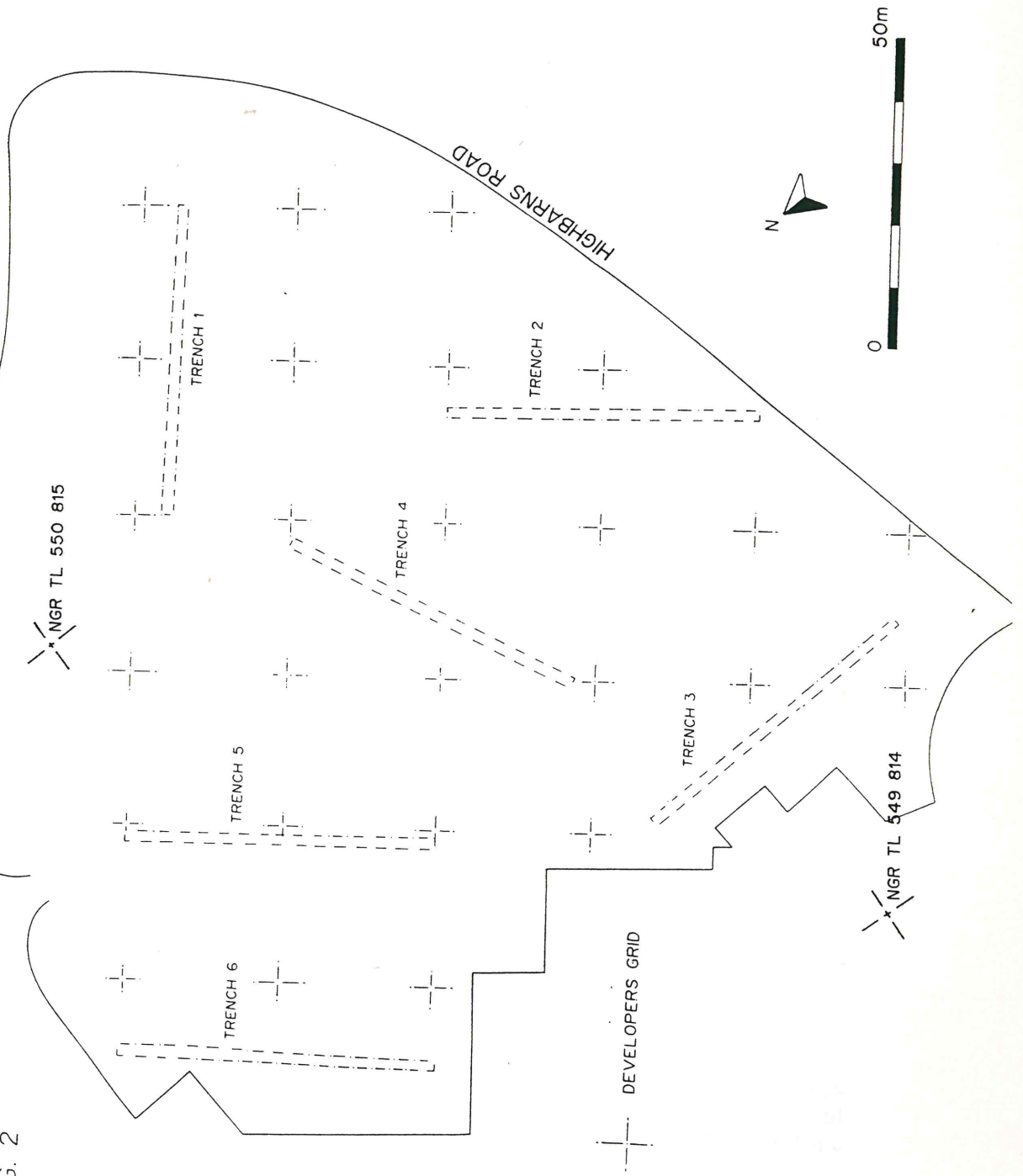
Orientation : NW - SE

Depth of trench from ground surface : NW end, N corner = 0.40 metres

KINGS AVENUE.

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FIG. 2



SE end, S corner = 0.33 metres  
N corner = 0.54 metres  
S corner = 0.44 metres  
= 0.69 metres

Maximum depth (approx. 9 metres from SE end)

Depth of top-soil = 0.15 to 0.25 metres

Munsell Descriptions : Top-soil = 10YR 3/2 (Very dark greyish brown)  
Sub-soil = 10YR 5/6 (Yellowish brown)

Textural Descriptions :

Top-soil. Clayey sandy-silt forming fine crumbs and containing occasional small sub-angular pieces of flint and fine and small roots.

Sub-soil. Sandy silt with occasional small sub-angular / sub-rounded flints. Some fine roots present.

Features Present : No archaeological or modern contexts identified.

Further Details : Having established that no archaeological remains were present the trench was excavated deeper to investigate the nature and extent of the underlying sub-soil.

## Trench 2

Orientation : NE - SW

Depth of trench from ground surface : NE end, W corner = 0.42 metres  
E corner = 0.33 metres  
SW end, W corner = 0.57 metres  
E corner = 0.62 metres  
= 0.65 metres

Maximum depth (SW end of trench)

Depth of top-soil = 0.20 to 0.30 metres

Munsell Descriptions : Top-soil = 10YR 4/3 (Brown to dark brown)  
Sub-soil = 10YR 5/6 (Yellowish brown)

Textural Descriptions :

Top-soil. Clayey sandy-silt, more clay content than in the soils of trench 1. Pieces of angular and sub-angular flint, small in size around 2 to 3 cm. Texture fine and crumbly. Some fine present.

Sub-soil. Clayey-silt displaying plastic properties when rolled in the hand. Occasional small pieces of angular and sub-angular flint. Fine root penetration occurring.

Features Present : (See figure 3)

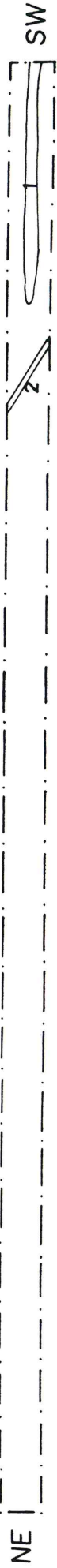
Context 1. Linear feature entering trench at SW end and terminating around 7 metres along its length. Fill consists of a loose and crumbly clayey-silt of munsell colour 10YR 3/2 (very dark greyish brown) Modern feature producing plastic at an excavated depth of 15 cm.

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FIG. 3



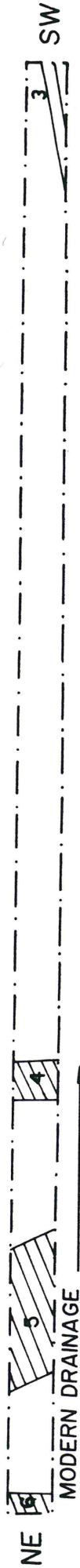
TRENCH 2



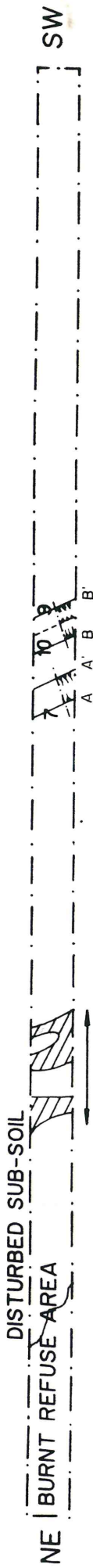
TRENCH 3



TRENCH 4



TRENCH 5



LOOSELY COMPACTED  
SAND & GRAVEL WITH  
MODERN BRICK, SOME BURNT



Context 2. Small linear feature running across trench at approx. 11 metres from SW end. Modern land drain with fill of compacted clay.

Further Details :

Land over the SW end of the trench was built-up with material from construction of the adjacent road.

Trench 3

Orientation : N - S

Depth of trench from ground surface : N end, E corner = 0.35 metres  
W corner = 0.45 metres  
S end, E corner = 0.23 metres  
W corner = 0.30 metres  
Maximum Depth (2 metres from N end) = 0.45 metres

Depth of top-soil = 0.20 to 0.25 metres

Munsell Descriptions : Top-soil = 10YR 3/3  
Sub-soil = 10YR 5/6

Textural Descriptions : Top-soil. Clayey sandy-silt forming fine crumbs and containing some small angular and sub-angular flints. Fine roots present.

Sub-soil. Silty-clay, very homogeneous material with plastic behaviour when rolled in hands.

Features Present : (See figure 3)

Context 13. Dark linear feature at middle of trench running roughly N-S. Unable to investigate due to water-logging of trench.

Context 14. Dark linear feature at middle of trench running parallel to context 13, again uninvestigated because of water-logging.

Further Details :

Land at the north end of the trench was made-up along its western edge for around 13 metres towards the south, to a thickness of 15 to 17cm. The trench became extensively water-logged after having rain over-night.

Trench 4

Orientation : NE - SW

Depth of trench from ground surface : NE end, E corner = 0.39 metres  
W corner = 0.39 metres  
SW end, E corner = 0.30 metres  
W corner = 0.30 metres  
Maximum Depth (2.3 metres from NE end of trench) = 0.48 metres

Depth of top soil = 0.20 to 0.26 metres

Munsell Descriptions : Top-soil = 10YR 3/2 (Very dark greyish brown)  
Sub-soil = 10YR 5/8 (Yellowish brown)

Textural Descriptions : Top-soil. Clayey-silt forming fine crumbs and containing small angular / sub-angular flints approximately 2 to 4 cm in size. Fine roots present.

Sub-soil. Homogeneous clayey-silt with occasional small sub-angular flints and fine roots.

Features Present : (See figure 3)

Context 3. Dark linear feature in SW end of trench, approximately 0.57 metres wide with straight sides. Contained modern tile-pipe.

Contexts 4, 5 and 6. Modern service trenches containing fill of building rubble, chalk lumps, gravel and grey clay.

Further Details :

Land to the NE end of the trench, out to about 20 metres has been made up with gravel and sub-soil to a maximum depth of 0.32 metres at 1 metre from the end of the trench.

### Trench 5

Orientation : NE - SW

Depth of trench from ground surface : NE end, E corner = 0.70 metres  
W corner = 0.70 metres  
SW end E corner = 0.18 metres  
W corner = 0.25 metres

Maximum Depth (2.3 metres from NE end of trench) = 0.87 metres

Depth of top-soil = 0.18 to 0.22 metres

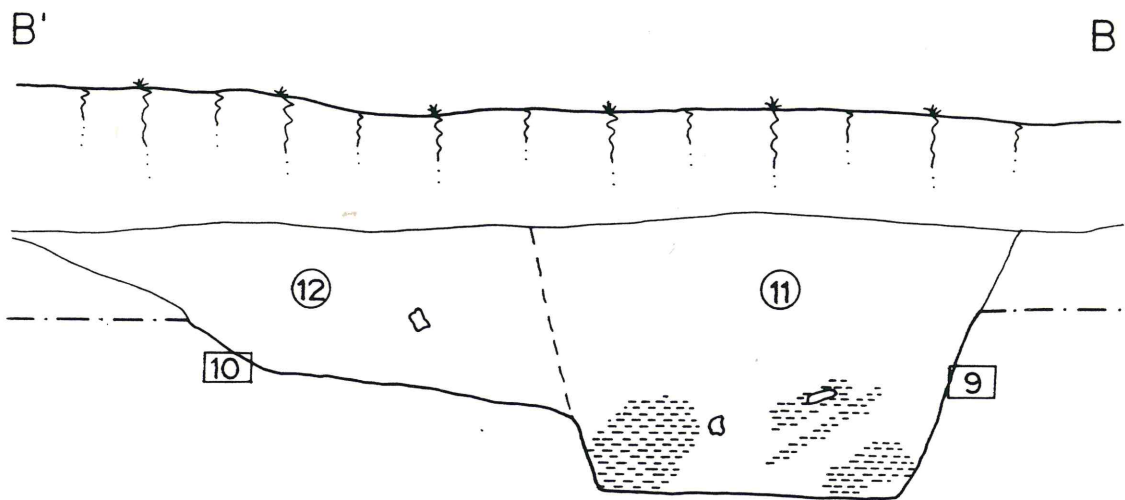
Munsell Descriptions : Top-soil = 10YR 3/3 (Dark brown)  
Sub-soil = 10YR 5/8 (Yellowish Brown)

Textural Descriptions : Top-soil. Clayey sandy-silt of fine crumbly texture and including a few small angular / sub-angular flints. Some fine roots present.

Sub-soil. Fine homogeneous material of clayey sandy-silt. Fine roots and flints as above.

Features Present : (See figure 3)

Context 7. Cut of linear feature displaying concave base and approximately 45 degree sides. Depth 0.30 metres and width 0.80 metres it crosses trench running E - W (see figure 4).



TOP SOIL



YELLOW / BROWN SILT



ORGANIC MATERIAL



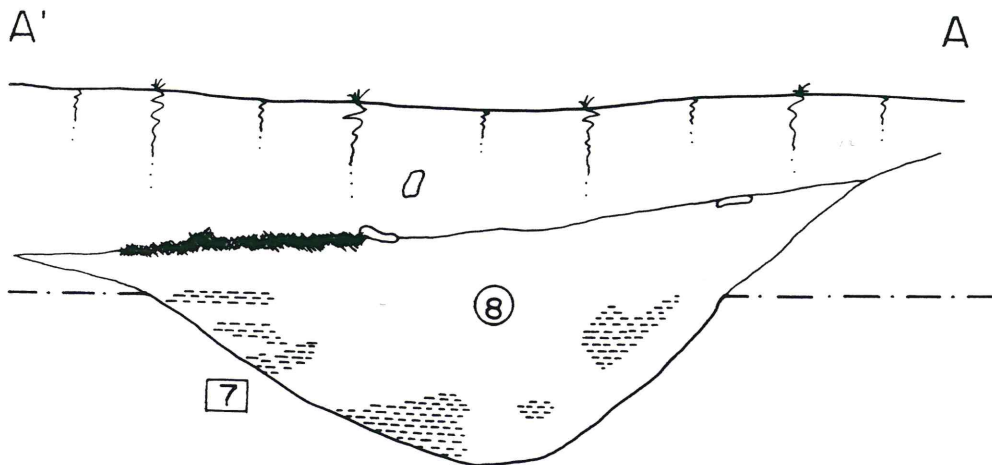
CUT NUMBER



FILL NUMBER

0

0.5m



0

0.5m



Context 8. Fill of context 7. Mottled brown and yellowish brown (10YR 4/3 and 10YR 5/4) clayey-silt with only occasional gravels < 1%.

Context 9. Cut of linear feature running across trench E -W. Width 0.62 metres and depth 0.35 metres, terminating in a flat base with steep sides 70-80 degrees (see figure 4).

Context 10. Linear feature cut by context 9 on NE side. Its NW side forms a slightly convex slope running into a gently sloping base around 0.20 metres in depth (see figure 4).

Context 11. Fill of cut 9. Mottled brown and yellow-brown (10YR 4/3 and 10YR 5/4) clayey sandy-silt with very occasional gravels < 1%. Mottling occurring in bottom 0.15 metres of fill.

Context 12. Fill of cut 10. Brown (10YR 4/3) sandy-silt with very little gravel < 1%.

Further Details :

No datable material was recovered from any of the above features even with further excavation of the remaining fill after sections were recorded. All produced some fragments of roof slate and some bits of coal with a piece of modern glass being recovered from the bottom of fill 8.

Around about the first 18 to 20 metres of the NE end of this trench has suffered considerable modern sub-soil disturbance and land make-up. At about 7 metres along the trench tree roots remain in-situ at a depth of 0.75 metres. This whole area shows extensive blacking due to burning and was used by the builders as a rubbish pit.

Trench 6

Orientation : NE - SW

Depth of trench from ground surface : NE end, E corner = 0.19 metres  
W corner = 0.22 metres  
SW end, E corner = 0.26 metres  
W corner = 0.25 metres  
Maximum Depth (3 metres from SW end) = 0.32 metres

Depth of top-soil = 0.14 to 0.25 metres

Munsell Descriptions : Top-soil = 10YR 3/2 (Very dark greyish brown)  
Sub-soil = 10YR 5/6 (Yellowish brown)

Textural Descriptions : Top-soil. Clayey sandy-silt containing small (1-4 cm) angular and sub-angular flints and fine roots

Sub-soil. Clayey sandy-silt with frequent angular and sub-angular small flints, also some small well rounded pebbles occurring and fine roots.

Further Details :

No archaeological or modern contexts identified.

### Finds

Only a few finds were recovered during the course of this work, all of which were collected during machining or whilst cleaning back the trenches and therefore cannot be associated with any known features. The few fragments of early pottery that were recovered seem to occur on the eastern part of site (see figure 2 and table below).

LOCATION	ARTIFACT
Trench 1	1 sherd of sand-tempered Iron Age pottery 1 sherd of sand tempered Roman pottery ?
Trench 2	2 sherds of Iron Age pottery
Trench 3	No finds recovered
Trench 4	1 sherd of Iron Age Pottery 1 unidentified sherd
Trench 5	1 knapped flint flake 1 sherd of black glazed Post-Medieval pottery
Trench 6	No finds recovered

Table 1. Finds from Bishopscroft, Ely ( TL 5500 8145)

### Discussion Of Results

The results from this work were, overall, very disappointing. Trenches 1 and 6 produced no features, either modern or archaeological, whilst extensive water-logging in trench 3 did not allow an investigation of features 13 and 14 to take place. Context 1 within trench 2 proved to be a modern feature, most probably associated with the construction of the adjacent road.

All contexts within trench 4 were again modern. Features 4, 5 and 6 are all very recent service trenches associated with the surrounding modern houses. A section across context 3 produced a number of large fragments of modern tile-pipe revealing it to be a field drain. The fragmented nature and orientation of this pipe-tile at right angles to the length of the feature indicated that previous sub-soil disturbance must have occurred within this area.

Trench 5 contained an area of considerable sub-soil disturbance extending from its NW end to cover almost half the trench's length. Further along cuts 7, 9 and 10 that were investigated by excavating and recording their sections produced no directly datable material from their fills but each did produce bits of coal and roof slate, along with a piece of modern glass from the bottom of fill 8 and therefore are most probably post-medieval in date.

The morphology of cuts 7 and 9 suggests that they were field ditches or possibly stream channels, which, most likely, were associated with the surface-water system we see on the 1888 OS map. Context 9 cuts both contexts 10 and 12 and probably represents the re-cutting of an older field ditch or stream channel, represented by cut 10. The nature of fills 8 and 11, with their irregular patches of yellow-brown silt would seem to suggest that these fills did not accumulate by gradual erosion and deposition but rather they were filled in purposefully, perhaps being replaced by underground drainage by means of tile-pipes. The two dark linear features running parallel to each other in trench 3, could, if investigation had been possible, proved to be of a similar nature.

### **Conclusion**

This evaluation was unable to prove the existence of any significant archaeological remains within the area of the Bishopscroft development site. It did, however, reveal the extensive disturbance to which the ground had been subjected, which could, in part, explain why so little archaeological remains were recovered.

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