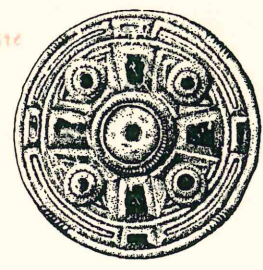


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Ryder's Farm

An Archaeological Investigation of a 13th Century Farmhouse in Swavesey, Cambridgeshire

Simon Bray

1993

Cambridgeshire Archaeology
Report No. 82

Commissioned By Mr. J. Dyer

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West Facing External Wall of Ryder's farm And 17th Century Barn (by T.Malim, 1993)

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Abstract

An excavation within a farmhouse in Swavesey (fig. 1) which dates to the mid-13th century was completed during January 1993 in advance of major alterations and restoration. A series of alterations and features were found which greatly increased the size and comfort of the house; these have been attributed to the mid-17th - early-18th century. The alterations included: a complex drainage system beneath the floor of the main hall, the infilling of some of the main structural walls with bricks, conversion into a two storey dwelling and construction of three extensions to the south and east of the main hall.

A thick, compact layer of deliberately deposited clay was found extending beneath the whole of the house. It has been interpreted as a house-platform laid during the initial phase of construction during the mid-13th century.

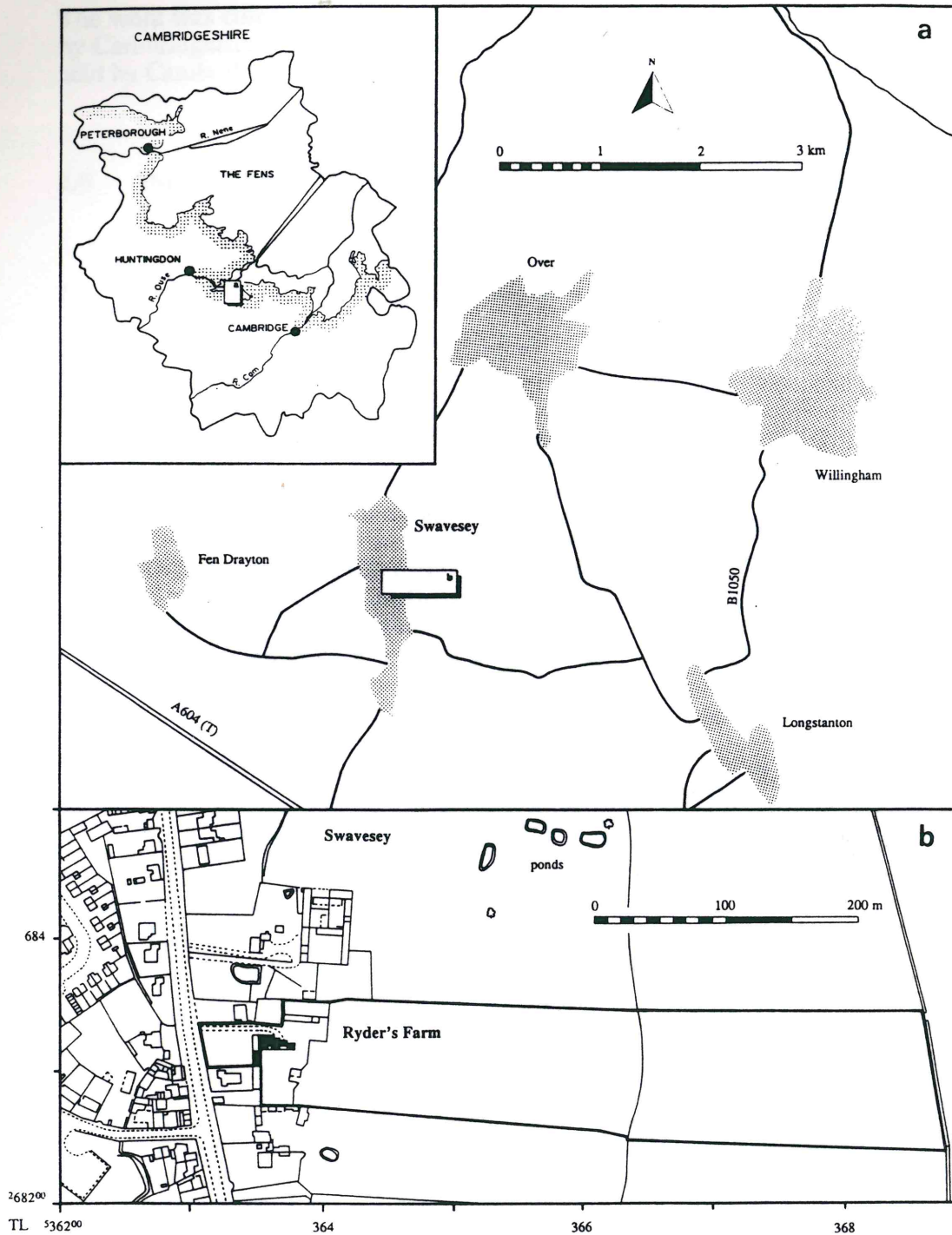


Figure 1 - Location of Site (by C. Begg)

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The building known as Ryder's Farm dates to the mid-late 13th century and is situated near the centre of Swavesey (fig. 1.(TL364384)). Identified as being a medieval Aisled hall with later extensions (Davis 1984) it is one of the oldest surviving houses in Cambridgeshire. It is currently undergoing restoration works and conversion to a family home entailing major structural alterations (2.1). As a condition of planning permission and listed building consent and archaeological assessment was required to evaluate any stratified deposits relating to the original medieval structure or earlier occupation.

The work was commissioned by the owner/developer, Mr. J. Dyer and was completed by Cambridgeshire Archaeology during January 1993. The site finds and archive are held by Cambridgeshire County Council's Archaeology Office.

2.0 IMPACT OF DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS AND PLANNED ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESPONSE

2.1 Phase I To substantially lower all internal floors

Stratigraphy associated with the original structure beneath the present floor was expected to be well preserved with few destructive elements present. Lowering the level of the floor will destroy any surviving features therefore it was important to examine these levels to identify the preservation of specific features expected in a medieval Aisled hall, e.g.

- 2.1.1 Evidence of a cross-passage.
- 2.1.2 Traces of a central hearth and a dais area.
- 2.1.3 Any contemporary sediments from beneath the floor containing evidence relating to the use of the building.
- 2.1.4 The location of one of the original timbers of the frame, since removed, to confirm the timber-framed structure inferred from the standing remains.

2.2 Phase II - Removal of a midden from around the north and west walls of the house

A midden provides a convenient window through which to chart the history of a site. The position of the midden at Ryder's Farm should greatly aid in determining the history of the site and in particular help to clarify the date of the collapse of the western external wall (fig. 2), the rubble of which possibly survives beneath later debris. A series of hand excavated testpits through the deposit will enable the stratigraphy of the midden and any earlier features to be recorded.

2.3 Phase III - Construction of two lakes to the east of the farmhouse and the excavation of an underground "games room" beneath a Late 17th century barn

The two lakes are to be located on fen-edge; a location which has been found to have a high potential for archaeological deposits, e.g. waterlogged remains, seeds, pollen, etc, which will be destroyed by the construction of the lakes. The excavation of a "games room" beneath the barn could reveal features associated with farmhouse or with earlier occupation. This phase of the development requires a watching brief with time for limited excavation and recording.

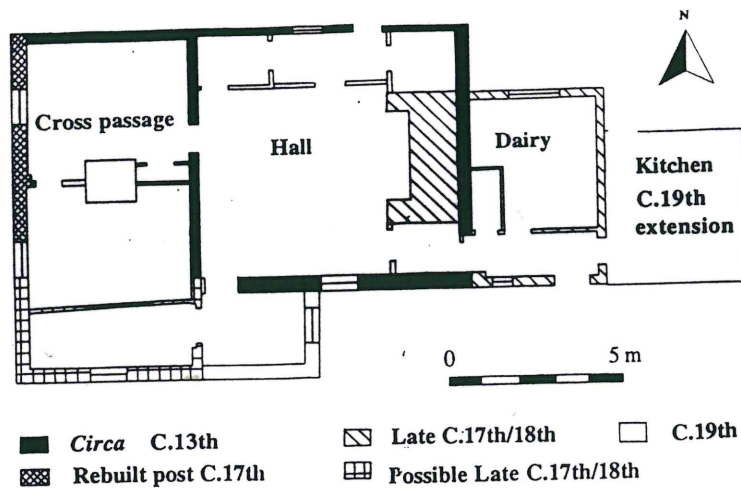


Figure 2 - Construction Phase Plan (by S. Leith)

3.0 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

3.1.1 The parish of Swavesey lies on fen-edge, approximately 12 miles to the north-west of Cambridge. The land falls from the south-west to north-east. A ridge of Upper Jurassic Ampthill Clay, approximately 18m od at the south-west end, runs down the centre of the parish towards the north-east. To the north of the ridge river gravels overlying the clay form two islands providing the focus for a planned town in the mid-13th century, and the core of the present village.

3.1.2 Ryder's Farm lies towards the southern end of the present village, mid-way along the ridge at a height of 7.74m od. To the north, west and east of the ridge is low-lying alluvial fenland.

4.0 BACKGROUND

4.1 History of Swavesey

Little is known of prehistoric Swavesey. The parish first comes to prominence during the early-11th century when it is recorded as the administrative centre of a large estate under the control of Count Alan (VCH, 1967). A Saxon-style church and a Benedictine priory were built on the northern-most gravel island. Variations in the length of the nave suggest that it was completed shortly after the Conquest by masons following traditional methods and style (Ravensdale, 1984). During the mid-13th century the church is found to double in size as part of the new town development. The existing parish church is built adjacent to the nave of the earlier church during the later medieval period.

The site of the original settlement appears as a deserted medieval village to the south of the present village at Boxworth End (Ravensdale, 1984). Reorganisation of the village occurred in the 13th century following the acquisition of the parish by Roger de la Zouch. A new planned town was built on one of the two gravel islands to the north-east of the parish with a castle, town wall and a port forming an integral part of the development. The castle is thought to be the third in a chain between Burwell and

Rampton in response to the anarchy of Stephen's reign, although the steepness of the mound and the lack of maintenance suggests a function more as a refuge during severe flooding.

The new town quickly became established as a successful commercial centre, a factor which protected the inhabitants from the successive depopulating occurrences documented throughout the Middle-Ages, and in fact stimulated growth in lean years elsewhere. Swavesey maintained a port of some sort until the early 20th century.

4.2 Ryder's Farm

The farm is located to the south of the town, outside the town wall. The farm has been shown to be of a date contemporary with the redevelopment of the town in the mid-13th century by its conformity in layout to the plan of the new town and by the recent dating of its crown-post.

Originally built by a burger, Ryder's Farm (fig. 3) demonstrates the prosperity of the area during the 13th century by its construction and during its history by several phases of redevelopment.

The present east-west range (fig. 2) represents the piecemeal development throughout the farm's history. The plan of the original structure (fig. 3) is comparable to two other 13th century Aisled halls at 'Manor Farm', Bourne (RCHM, 1968) and 'The Bury', Essex (Hewett, 1980). These buildings represent the transition period between the 13th and 14th centuries in technical advances in construction, with passing braces being superseded by crown-posts.

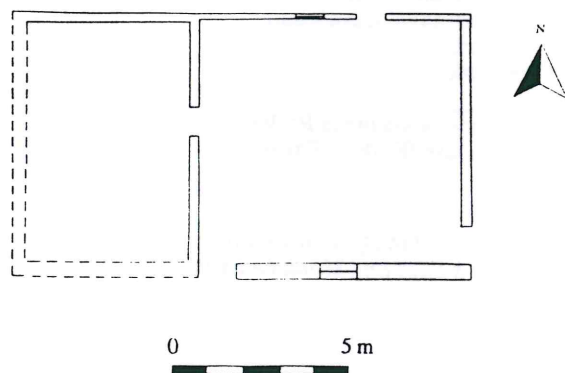


Figure 3 - Plan of Initial Phase of Farmhouse (by S. Leith)

The walls of the main hall are still timber-framed, infilled with reed and daub plaster work, although elsewhere in the building this has been replaced or cased by brickwork during the 17th-early 18th century. A chimney stack was inserted against the east wall of the hall (fig. 2) during this period, and at the same time a floor was inserted dividing the hall into two storeys (Davis, 1987).

During the late 17th-early 18th century the cross-wing was renovated and infilled with brickwork, around a timber-framed structure which possibly dates to the 15th-16th century (fig. 6).

Extensions during the late 17th-early 18th century are added to the east of the hall with construction of a dairy and a dovecote. To the south of the cross-wing a two storey

extension was built; in addition several barns are built, one of which partially remains to the south of the farmhouse.

A fire in the 19th century prompted the last phase of major development of the farmhouse: a kitchen at the eastern end of the house, a lean-to to the south (fig. 2) and an attic extension to the dairy are added.

4.3 Archaeology

The Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) for Cambridgeshire was consulted to identify reported archaeological remains within the confines of the village (table 1).

SMR NO.	DESCRIPTION OF ENTRY
296	Post-Medieval Windmill
1289	Post-Medieval Windmill
1772	Medieval Castle (enclosure, mound, moat, ridge & furrow)
3419	Medieval Church
3419c	Anglo-Saxon Church
3421	Spindle Whorl
3470	Undated Earthwork bank
3477	Roman Pottery
3478	Medieval Gravestone
3481	Roman Pottery & Quern
3483	Anglo-Saxon Pottery
3488	Benedictine Priory
3522	Bronze-Age?/Roman? Barrow
8294	Undated Cropmarks and Earthworks
8387	Roman Pottery
8427	Roman Pottery
8897	Cropmarks (The manor house)
9126	Cropmarks (fieldsystem & enclosures)
9127	Undated Cropmarks
9128	Undated Cropmarks
10457	Dovecote
10458	Early 18th century Dovecote at Ryder's Farm
10755	Medieval Farmhouse (Ryder's Farm)

Table 1

Sites and Individual Findspots within Swavesey Recorded on Cambridgeshire's Sites and Monuments Record

5.0 METHODOLOGY

5.1.1 Phase I Six trenches were hand excavated within the farmhouse. Four trenches (I,II,III,IV) were positioned within the medieval structure (fig. 4) to identify evidence of structural form. The main trench (I&II) were located within the main hall to record, if present, evidence of the hearth, cross-passage and evidence of the missing post (2.1).

5.1.2 Two further trenches (V,VI) were excavated within the later late 17th/18th century dairy (fig. 4), against the east external wall of the medieval hall. So positioned to locate any features associated with the construction of the original farmhouse and/or any features relating to earlier occupation of the site. Any features were planned, photographed and excavated utilising a sampling strategy. Archaeological deposits were recorded using Cambridgeshire Archaeology's single context recording system. In

addition to the photographs taken during the course of the excavation a black and white photographic survey of the internal structure of the house was completed.

5.1.3 During the course of the assessment inside the farmhouse work began on construction of the eastern most lake (2.3; Phase III). Two 3-ton bulldozers were used to remove the topsoil during which a very limited watching brief was maintained. The archaeological inspection was limited through time to watching the removal of the topsoil and examining the spoilheap for artefacts.

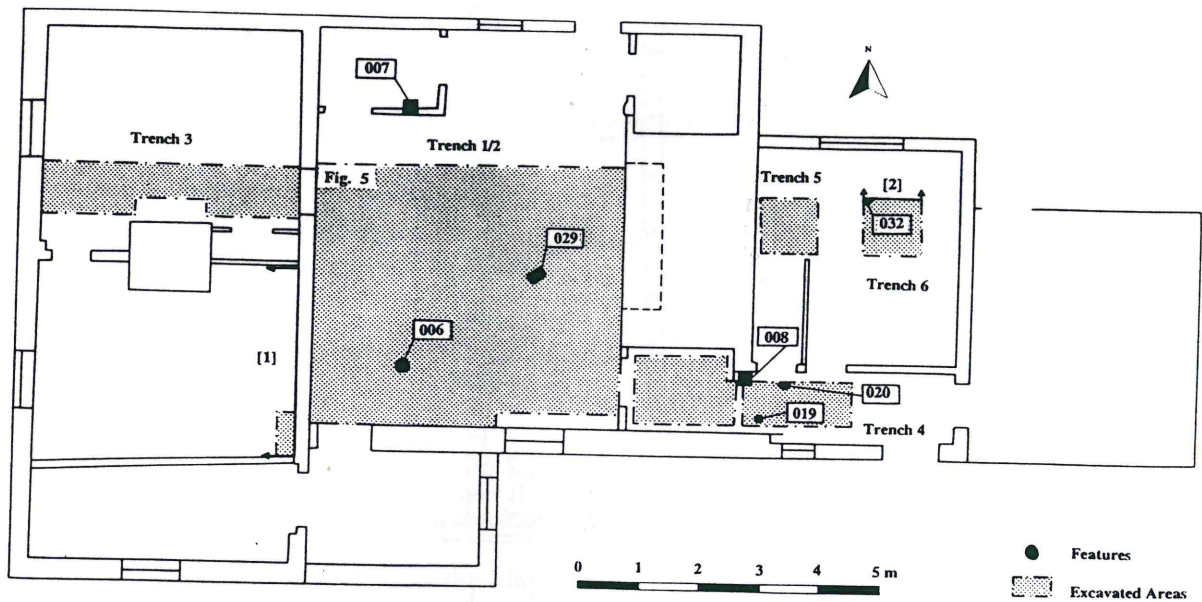


Figure 4 - Trench Location Plan (by C. Begg)

6.0 RESULTS

The internal evaluation at Ryder's Farm recognised archaeological deposits in all of the rooms examined. These consisted of features associated with the initial construction of the house and a major phase of renovation during the late 17th-early 18th century (Davis, 1987).

6.1 Mid 17th - Early 18th Century Features

In the main hall sealed beneath a late 18th century tiled floor and post-medieval rubble layer, a mid 17th century, efficient drainage system was identified (fig. 5). Aligned north/south the drains were on a slight gradient of approximately 1:30, draining from the higher ground in the north to the lower farmyard to the south. In installing the

drains the internal area of the hall had been levelled, destroying any medieval deposits that may have been present, such as the central hearth.



Figure 5 - Plan of Drains Beneath Floor of the Main Hall (by S. Macaulay)

A contemporary thin layer directly beneath the drains was recorded sealing a compact blue/grey clay layer. consisting of plaster and tile this layer is likely to represent demolition debris created during the refurbishment of the hall during the late 16th-early 17th century.

Wall foundations were found to be found shallow and insubstantial, consisting of brick, tile and cobble rubble resting on the compacted clay house-platform (fig. 6).

Extensions were added to the farmhouse to the east with the construction of a dairy. To the south of the cross-wing a two storey extension was added with deeper foundations (fig. 6). During this period the cross-wing is cased in field bricks and re-roofed with plain tiles; and in the main hall the central fireplace is replaced by a chimney stack against the east wall.

6.2 Mid 13th Century Features

A thick, compact blue/grey clay layer [004] was found in all rooms sealed beneath a modern floor makeup. Limited excavation through the clay in the corridor and the dairy (trenches IV, V & VI; fig. 4) found it to be a deposited layer containing large, unabraded sherds of 13th century pottery. This layer was found to seal an original ground surface, 10 cm thick, of disturbed natural subsoil (fig. 7).

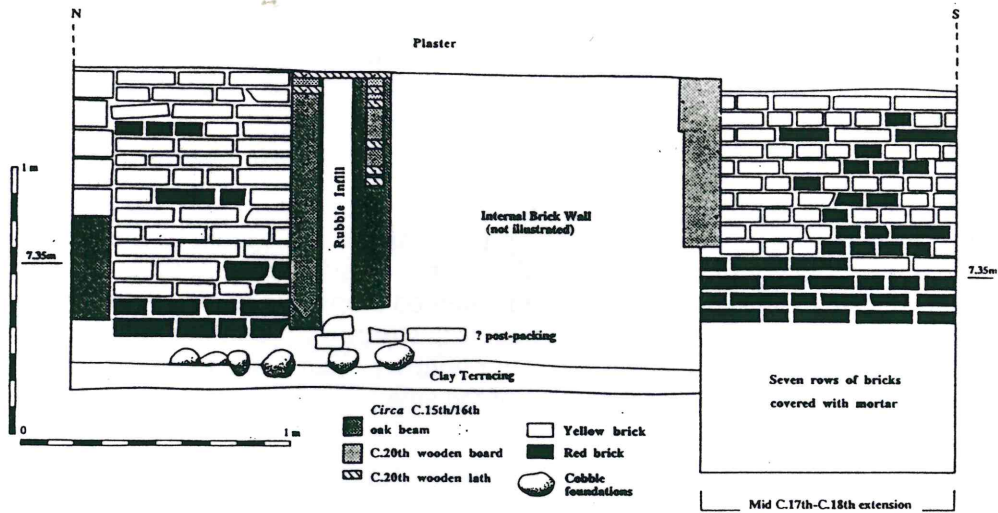


Figure 6 - West Facing Section of External Wall of Hall Showing Mid 17th - Early 18th Century Brick Infilling and 13th Century Cobble Foundations Over Clay House-Platform (by S. Leith)

Limited excavation through the clay deposit seems to suggest that prior to the initial construction of the farmhouse the ground surface was levelled to the natural subsoil and additional local clay mounded up to form a house-platform.

The high water level at the time of excavation made it impracticable to examine the clay terracing in any of the other rooms. A watching brief is thus felt necessary during the removal of the upper clay deposits in the remainder of the rooms in order to determine the validity of the terracing and presence of any earlier deposits.

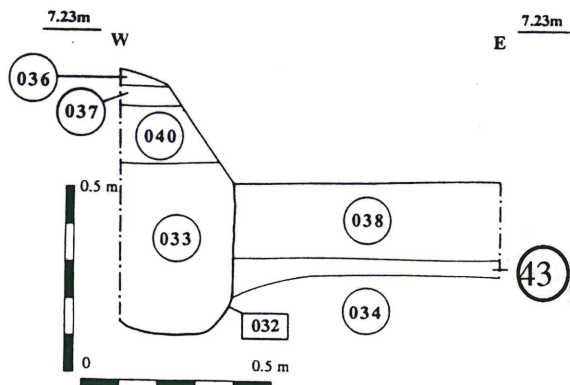


Figure 7 - South Facing Section Through Trench VI in Dairy Showing Posthole [032], 13th Century Clay House-Platform [038] & Original Ground Surface [043] (by S. Leith)

Three features were found to cut the clay terracing: two were recorded within the main hall (fig. 4). A 10 cm deep circular depression was found beneath a north-south supporting beam, possibly representing the post-pad of the missing post (2.1). A second feature recorded was a square-cut posthole, 30 cm deep, loosely filled by rubble from the demolition layer [028], indicating removal of the post during the generation of the rubble. Similar in shape to the two surviving structural posts (features [7&8]; fig. 4) this posthole is likely to have had an similar original function perhaps supporting a gallery removed in the 17th-18th century.

6.3 Undated Features

A posthole [020] and stakehole [019] (fig. 4) were recorded cutting the clay terracing in trench IV, immediately outside the original hall. Fairly insubstantial and undated they possibly represent fencing or a lean-to in the farmyard associated with the 13th century farmhouse.

6.3 Phase IIIa

The watching brief conducted during the construction of one of the eastern most lake did not produce any archaeological features or artefacts. A major factor seen to be contributing to these poor results is the method employed to excavate the lakes. Prior to the construction of the remaining lake it is strongly recommended that trenching be completed using a mechanical excavator with 1.6 metre wide toothless ditching bucket to determine the archaeological content of the area.

7.0 DISCUSSION

7.1 The initial phase of the archaeological evaluation at Ryder's Farm produced encouraging results. The insertion of the drains within the structure is without known parallel in Cambridgeshire and can be linked in period to other major alterations of the house: strengthening the walls, construction of extensions and a second storey and the possible removal of a gallery in the main hall. These events can be seen occurring in response to specific events during the late 17th - early 18th century. The drains are constructed to combat more frequent flooding caused by a deteriorating climate (Darby, 1974) and partial destruction of the fenland drainage system during the Civil War. An increase in population by 44% during this period in Swavesey (Spufford, 1979), supported by a buoyant economy puts pressure on available land and results in the upgrading of existing buildings, in this case Ryder's Farm.

7.2 Pottery recovered from the house-platform during the excavation supports an initial construction date of the house to the mid-13th century during the redevelopment of Swavesey by Roger de la Zouch. The depth of the platform can be seen as an attempt to combat excessive wetness and ground instability.

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Ken Welsh and Stephen Macaulay who worked on site.

Appendix A - List of Contexts

Ctx. No.	Description	Nature	Finds	Above	Below
001	Post-med floor makeup	light brown loose, sandy/silt/gravel	china, part of a torch		
002	Packing for drains (003)	loose yellow sandy/gravel		028	001
003	17th-18th c. floor drains		17th-18th drains	028	002
004	redeposited natural; as house-platform cut for drains [003]	mid grey/blue, compact clay	13th c. pottery	041	024,028, 040
005	cut of posthole?				028
006	surviving post				028
007	surviving post			010	
008	same as 001			028	009
009	same as 002		17th-18th c. drains	028	010
010	same as 003		freq. 18th-19th c. debris		004
011	modern floor makeup	mid brown, v. loose loam	Victorian bricks		
012	floorboard supports			015,042	
013	18th-19th c. tile floor			016	014
014		light, brown, loose gravel		017	016,042
015	floor makeup beneath tiles	firm silt		024	016
016	compact hard-core for 1st phase of tiles [041]	compact light yellow silt			027
017	cut of gully?				027
018	cut of stakehole				027
019	cut of posthole				027
020	fill of [018]	mid-brown compact silt/clay		024	
021	fill of [019]	mid-brown compact silt/clay		024	
022	fill of [020]	mid-brown compact silt/clay		024	
023	demolition layer, natural mix - same as 028	mid grey/blue compact clay	plaster, tile, mortar	026	
024	sandy gravel, lens within	mid-yellow, loose sandy gravel			
025	024			034	024
026	house-platform same as 004	mid grey/blue, compact clay			
027	modern concrete floor layer	white, compact		18,19,20, 24	
028	demolition layer, natural mix - same as 024	mid-grey/blue compact clay	plaster, tile, mortar	004	
029	cut of posthole				028
030	fill of [029]	loose rubble - same as [028]	1x13-14th c. pottery		
031	same as 026				040
032	cut of posthole			034	040
033	fill of posthole [032]	dark brown compact clay			004,026
034	natural	mid-yellow compact clay		002	042
035	ash deposit beneath Victorian fireplace	mid-dark grey fine silt			
036	modern floor makeup in dairy	dark brown silt		037	
037	modern floor makeup in dairy	dark yellow compact clay		040	036
038	medieval house-platform same as 004	mid-grey/blue compact clay		041	024,028, 040
039	cut of posthole [035]			002	042
040	post-med. demolition layer, similar to 028 & 024	mid-grey/blue compact clay	plaster, mortar, tile & brick	037	033,038
041	square cut modern tile floor, partially removed (corridor)			014	016
042	Victorian fireplace				035
043	Palaeosoil				038

GLOSSARY OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL TERMS

Anglo-Saxon. The period dating between the withdrawal of the Roman legions in 410 and the Norman invasion of 1066. Within this period several ethnic groups from northern Europe vied for control of the British Isles, including the Angles, Saxons, Jutes, Danes, and Norwegians. The latter two groups are collectively known as the Vikings and became involved in British politics from the eighth century, later than the others. The Vikings were successful in occupying a large part of the north and Midlands of England, before providing a King (Cnut) for the whole of England. For most of this time England was divided up into several kingdoms until Saxon resistance to Viking incursions led to the unification of England under Aethelstan and Alfred.

Artefact. Any object made by people. Generally, this word is used for finds such as pottery, stone tools, or metal objects, but it can be used in a much wider context in that the landscape we have today is a product of human activity and is thus an artefact itself.

Bronze Age. Prehistoric period c. 2000 - 700 BC when bronze was used for many types of tools and weapons.

Cropmarks. Archaeological features below the ploughsoil can affect the growth of sensitive crops through moisture retention or loss. For example, the growth of cereal crops over buried ditches or pits will encourage rapid growth leading to tall, dark coloured plants, whereas walls and roads will lead to stunting and faster yellowing of the crop. These discrepancies in crop growth can be easily detected from the air, and by taking photographs the cropmark patterns can be plotted onto maps and given provisional interpretation.

Deserted Medieval Village (DMV): For various reasons medieval settlements were sometimes abandoned or shifted in location. Earthworks of the old village can often be seen showing the position of house platforms, crofts, lanes, fields and ponds.

Earthworks: Archaeological features that are still extant above the ground as banks and ditches, platforms, roads, ponds, canals, etc. They were either constructed of soil or became covered by it later, leaving the archaeology showing in relief.

Enclosures: An area defined by a continuous surrounding ditch. These may be enclosures around human settlements, fields, or paddocks for stock. Rectilinear enclosures are ones with straight sides and corners, whilst curvilinear enclosures are ones with rounded sides.

Medieval: Historic period that begins with William the Conqueror's invasion in 1066.

Midden. A heap or stratum of refuse (broken pots and tools, ashes, food remains etc) normally found on the site of an ancient settlement.

Moat: In the medieval period enclosures *proliferated*. An area surrounded by water filled ditches would leave a platform or island on which to build a house. Several reasons have been suggested for these moated sites: defence in times of lawlessness, a ready source of water for the needs of the house and a anti-fire measure, a handy reservoir for fish and water-fowl, and in the response to the demands of fashion and prestige. These moated sites were often manors, and occasionally old manor houses are still found enclosed by their moat.

Modern: The period since modern industrialisation, roughly corresponding to 1800 onwards.

Natural: The local subsoil that is unaltered, in nature and location, by human activity.

Palaeosol. A preserved soil which does not owe its origin to the existing land surface.

Posthole. A hole dug to receive a post. They can also result from driving posts into the ground. The latter, however, do not have distinct fills such as packing and a post pipe. A post pipe is the fill of a posthole which formed in the place of a removed post.

Post-Medieval: This period is generally considered to date from 1500, and is not used for dates after about 1800.

Ridge and Furrow: Medieval cultivation techniques led to a phenomenon of corrugated fields. Strips of land were allotted to individuals and a furrow was left between one person's strip and the next, leading to a corrugated ridge and furrow effect. Ridge and furrow shows up as cropmarks on air photographs and more rarely as earthworks in pasture fields.

Ring-ditch: A continuous circular ditch which is all that remains of a ploughed out round barrow, or the drainage ditch (eavesdrip gully) that surrounded a round-house.

Roman: Historic period AD 43 - 410 when much of Britain was part of the Roman empire. The term Romano-British is now widely used to describe the people of this period, as few were Roman themselves, but they were a provincial manifestation of the empire developing in a unique way. AD 410 was the date the legions were withdrawn, but the Romano-British culture continued for some time into the 5th century in tandem with Anglo-Saxon migration.

Round barrow: A Bronze Age burial mound formed by heaping up earth over a central burial. They have several forms, including numbers of encircling ditches and can have many burials in them. The first burial is known as the primary burial, subsequent ones are referred to as secondary burials. It has been suggested that these burial mounds are a way of marking tribal territories, and they are often placed in prominent locations. They can occur in clusters known as 'barrow cemeteries'.

Sites and Monuments Record (SMR): A computer and paper database maintained by the County Archaeology Office of all known historic sites and individual findspots. This system can be applied in response to any query concerning the heritage of the county, e.g. the archaeology of a piece of land can be ascertained in response to a planning application and the archaeological requirement if needed can then be stated by the County Archaeologist.

Stratigraphy: Order and relative position of strata. Deposits in archaeological sites will be layered one on top of another, with the highest layer being the latest being the latest deposits, thus giving a chronological relationship to the layers and the artefacts within them. Features (such as ditches, pits, or walls) cut through these layers will obviously date to later events, and will in turn contain their own discrete sequence of deposits. On the other hand features that have been covered by layers are obviously earlier than the deposition of those layers that seal them.

Stakehole: As *posthole* but corresponding to a smaller piece of wood, usually forming an insubstantial structure.