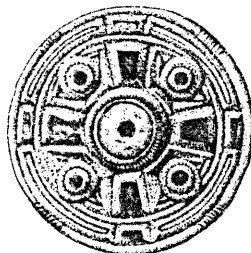


ARCHAEOLOGY FIELD OFFICE  
FULBURN COMMUNITY CENTRE  
HAGGIS GAP, FULBURN  
CAMBRIDGE CB1 5HD Tel: 01223 351111  
(Fax)



Archaeological Field Unit

## Land Off Oundle Road, Alwalton, Peterborough: An Archaeological Evaluation

Simon Bray

February 1998

**Cambridgeshire County Council**

Report No. B19

*Commissioned By The Bell Slater Partnership*

**Land Off Oundle Road, Alwalton, Peterborough:  
An Archaeological Evaluation**

---

Simon Bray

February 1998

Editor: William Wall BA  
Illustrator: Jon Cane BA

*Report No B19*

© Archaeological Field Unit  
Cambridgeshire County Council  
Fulbourn Community Centre  
Haggis Gap, Fulbourn  
Cambridgeshire CB1 5HD  
Tel (01223) 881614  
Fax (01223) 880946

## SUMMARY

*In January 1998 the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council evaluated 2.53 hectares of pasture land in the parish of Alwalton, Peterborough (TL13709584). The work was commissioned by The Bell Slater Partnership in response to a design brief the County Archaeological Office following a planning proposal for the site.*

*The site is located in a historical landscape, with the Roman town of Water Newton/Durobrivae 1500m to the west, and bordering the site to the north, the Ailsworth to King's Cliffe Roman road. An Anglo-Saxon cemetery lies to the north-east and the site of five Bronze-Age burial mounds (SAM 193) to the east. In addition the County's Sites and Monuments Record shows numerous stray Roman finds along the course of the Roman road.*

*The works revealed no archaeological activity earlier than ridge and furrow agriculture. This was discovered aligned in at least three directions, east to west, north-west to south-east, and north-north-west to south-south-east, in divisions of land known as gores. To the north-east of the development area a large possible pond or low-lying swampy area was identified. Artefacts recovered from this feature suggests a 20th century date for its infilling.*

*The notable absence of finds from any period is surprising considering the site's proximity to known archaeological sites of Bronze Age to medieval date. Despite the minimal results however, the evaluation has enhanced our knowledge of the landscape around Peterborough, suggesting that in the area of the site, only low levels of activity took place. Although the site was ploughed in the Middle Ages, before this it may simply have been pasture, wasteland or open space.*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>1 INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2 TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>4 METHODOLOGY</b>	<b>3</b>
4.1 Air Photographic Reassessment and Replotting	3
4.2 Geophysical Survey	4
4.3 Trial Trenching	4
4.4 Metal Detector Survey	4
<b>5 RESULTS</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>6 DISCUSSION</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>LIST OF FIGURES</b>	
<b>Figure 1</b> Location plan showing position of trenches	<b>2</b>

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

From the 26th to 29th January 1998 the Archaeological Field Unit carried out an evaluation of 2.53 hectares of pasture land in Alwalton parish (TL1370/9584, *Figure 1*). The work was commissioned by The Bell Slater Partnership in response to a design brief set by the County Archaeological Office to a planning proposal on the site.

The site is located in an archaeologically rich landscape. Five Bronze Age burial mounds (SAM 193) are immediately to the east. The Roman town of Water Newton/*Durobrivae* is located 1500m to the west, and the Ailsworth to King's Cliffe Roman road borders the northern edge of the site. An Anglo-Saxon cemetery is located 500m to the north-east. No previously-known archaeological remains lay within the site itself apart from levelled ridges and furrows of former agricultural cultivation. These were only identified during the re-assessment of aerial photographs. Since the ridge and furrow could however have masked earlier activity, and in consideration of the surrounding archaeological remains, the site held sufficient archaeological potential to justify further investigations.

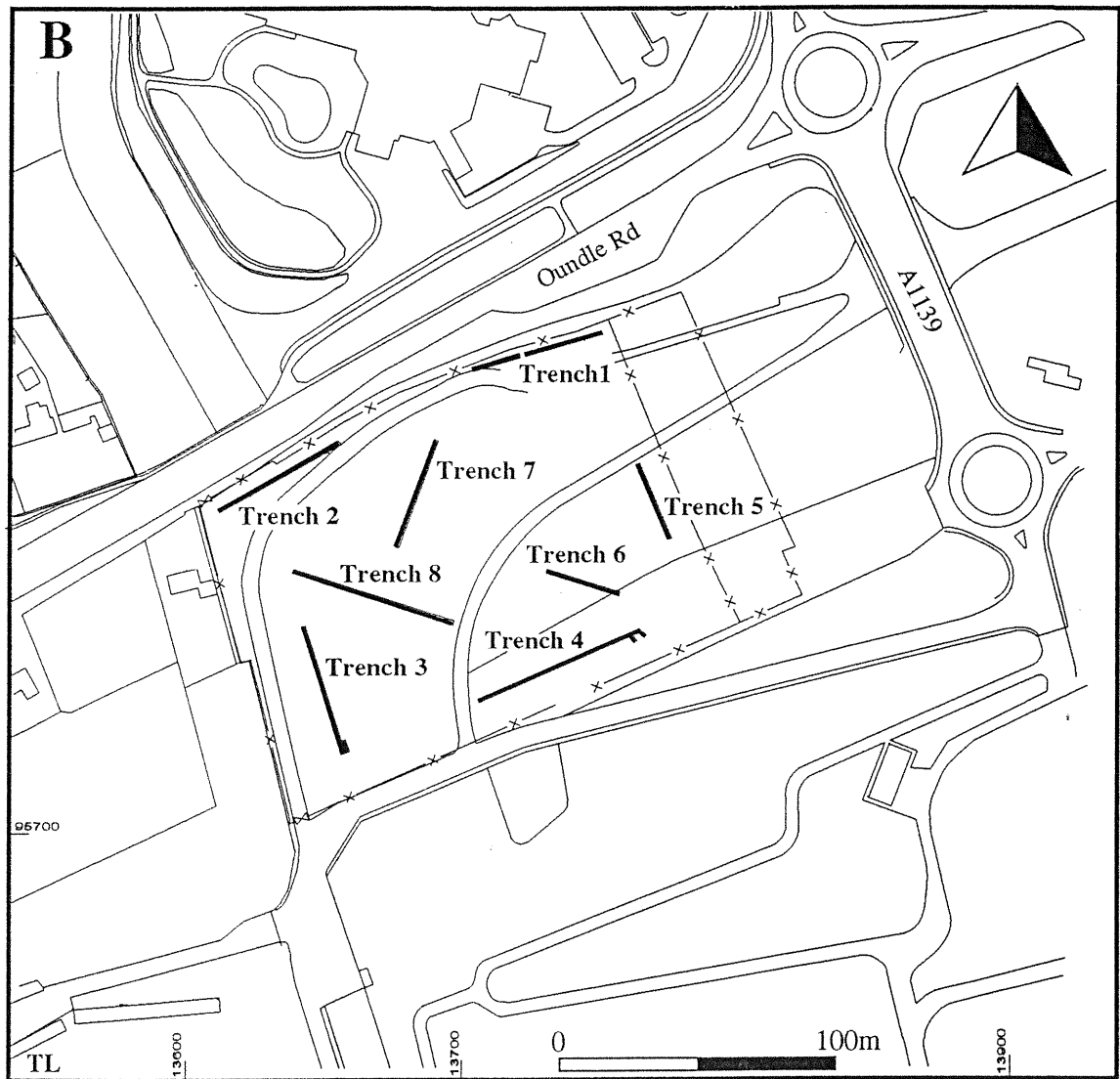
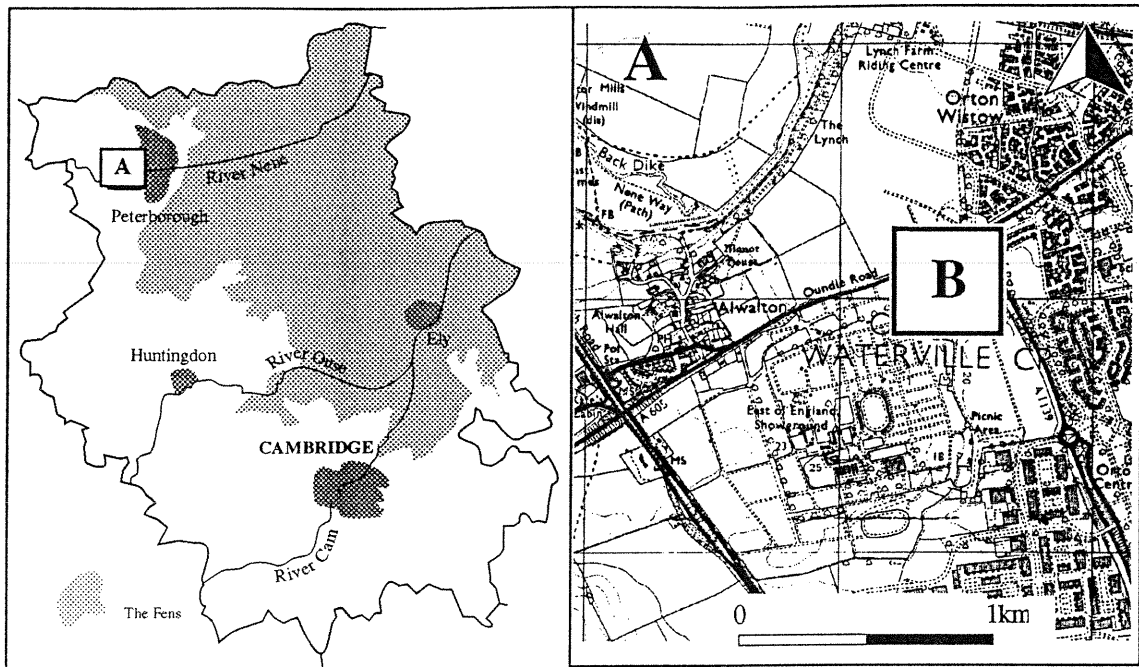
## **2 TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY**

Located on the south-eastern edge of the village of Alwalton, 6 miles to the south-west of Peterborough; the site is situated on the interface of third gravel terrace of the River Nene and the Oxford Clay.

Bordered to the south by the East of England showground, and to the north by the A605 the site has been levelled and managed as pasture land for at least the last 25 years, functioning occasionally as overflow car parking for the showground (Palmer 1998).

## **3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

The village of Alwalton has now been largely assimilated into the conurbation of Peterborough (*Figure 1*). The derivation of the name is unclear but can certainly be traced back to the 10th century when it is recorded as 'Aethelwoldington', as 'Alwoltune' in the 11th century, 'Alewaltone' in the 12th to 14th centuries, finally becoming Alwalton in the 17th century (VCH, 1967).



Based upon Ordnance Survey mapping with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationary Office Crown Copyright. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. (Cambridgeshire County Council licence No. LA 07649X 1998)

**Figure 1** Site Location plan showing position of trenches

The Cambridgeshire Sites and Monuments Record shows that the site is located within an archaeologically rich landscape with most periods represented, although primarily dominated by Roman activity. The nearby Roman town and adjacent Roman road have been noted above, and in Alwalton itself the remains of a Roman building (SMR No. 00912) and burials (SMR No. 05714) have been recorded.

The site is bordered to the north by the Ailsworth to King's Cliffe Roman road (Margary 1967) along the course of which frequent isolated Roman finds are recorded.

The prehistoric period is represented by two Bronze Age swords (SMR No.'s 01612 & 01995) found along the course of the River Nene, and a barrow cemetery (SAM 193) 500m to the east of the site, still surviving as upstanding earthworks.

Located 500m to the north-east of the site is an Anglo-Saxon cemetery (SMR No. 00917). A manorial site in Alwalton itself represents continued settlement of the area into the later medieval period.

In 955 AD King Eadred granted 5 hides of land here to his thegn Aelfsige, passing soon afterwards to the Abbey of Peterborough which held Alwalton until the Norman Conquest. The manor house, now a farmhouse, is located a quarter of a mile to the north-west of the site.

The manor appeared to have been prosperous as by 1086 there were two mills recorded, increasing to three by 1125. The church is not mentioned in the Domesday book, but by the end of the 12th century there was a stone built church that was altered about 1300 and extensively re-built during the 15th century.

The parish was inclosed in 1805 under a private act of Parliament and an inclosure map of 1809 shows the area divided into separate fields.

## **4 METHODOLOGY**

### **4.1 Air Photographic Reassessment and Replotting**

Reassessment of air photographic evidence for the site was undertaken by Air Photo Services of Cambridge in order to identify archaeological features prior to field evaluation. Photographs examined at the Cambridge University Collection of Aerial Photographs showed the land to have been pasture, with earthwork ridge and furrow, then levelled and managed as grassland associated with the East of England showground. In view of this no other photographs were examined, as both types of landuse usually mask any indications of pre-medieval features. No mapping was undertaken. A full report on the aerial photographic assessment is available in the site archive (Palmer 1998).

## 4.2 Geophysical Survey

A geophysical survey of the site had been proposed in the initial project design but after initial investigations it was felt that it would not be productive to complete a detailed survey for two main reasons. Firstly, the depth of the ridge and furrow would weaken the readings given by any potential underlying archaeological features. Secondly, the quantity of modern metallic debris on the site, ring-pulls, coins etc., probably resulting from the site's use as a car park would produce such a density of background noise as to mask any geophysical anomalies. In addition, as most of the site lay on clay, geophysical anomalies were likely to be weak to begin with (Dr Mark Noel pers comm).

## 4.3 Trial Trenching

A total of 410m of linear trenching was excavated within the development area to provide a 2.5% sample of the site (*Figure 1*). Eight separate trenches were opened using a JCB-type wheeled excavator with a 1.6m wide toothless ditching bucket.

Trenches 1 and 2 were aligned approximately east to west next to the course of the Roman road, primarily to identify any roadside activity.

Trenches 3 to 6 were positioned around the remaining perimeters of the site. Trenches 6 to 8 were positioned in the centre of the field (*Figure 1*).

Excluding the remains of ridge and furrow, five features were recorded. Sample excavation of all features was undertaken to try to obtain representative dating and environmental evidence. Features were recorded using the Archaeological Field Unit's standard recording system. A base plan was produced using a Zeiss Rec Elta Total Station.

## 4.4 Metal Detector Survey

A detailed metal detector survey was completed over the whole site, in particular concentrating on the excavated trenches and spoil heaps. No artefacts were recovered. A more general sweep over the field revealed nothing other than modern coinage and drink can ring-pulls.

## 5 RESULTS

Eight trenches were placed in the field. Oxford Clay was found in the bases of all the trenches. Archaeological features were found in trenches 1, 2, 4 and 7.

The remains of ridge and furrow agriculture was found in all the trenches apart from 1, and 2. Three separate episodes of medieval farming were identified, one aligned east to west was recorded in trenches 3, 5, 6, and 8. One in trench



4 was aligned north-west to south-east, and another in trench 7 was aligned north-north-west to south-south-east. The practise of filling in odd-shaped areas of land is not uncommon and the resulting triangular shaped land divisions are known as 'gores' (Hall 1982).

The ridge and furrow was found to have been levelled out across the site, possibly when the area was used as an overflow car park for the East of England showground.

All the trenches had similar profiles with topsoil, 1, to a uniform depth of 0.20m, overlaying the subsoil, 2. In trenches 1 and 2 a layer of gravel, 10, was found overlying the topsoil with a thin turf layer having formed over it. This has been interpreted as makeup deposited to level the site for use as a carpark.

**Trench 1** was 50m long, 1.6m wide and machined to a depth of 0.5m. It was aligned south-south-west to north-north-east and positioned parallel to the Roman road. A single feature, 25, was found aligned east to west running along the length of the trench.

Linear feature **25** (11). The feature was orientated east to west and was between 0.25m and 0.6m wide and 0.7m deep with gently sloping concave sides and a flat base. It was found to have irregular sides narrowing at points, and was sealed by the subsoil, 2. The fill, 11, was a dark yellowish brown silty clay with occasional small rounded stones. A single iron nail was recovered from the fill. The feature has been interpreted as a hedgeline, possibly grubbed out during the widening of the A605.

**Trench 2** was 50m long, 1.6m wide and aligned south-south-west to north-north-east. It was machined to a depth of 0.65m at the western end, and 0.35m at the east end. A single feature, 26, was found covering the majority of the trench.

Pit/Pond? **26** (3). The feature was at least 1.6m wide and greater than 45m in length, and 1m in depth. It had steep sides and contained a single fill, 3. This was an olive slightly silty clay with occasional medium angular stones and root inclusions. A few pieces of 20th century china, glass and a horseshoe were recovered from the fill.

**Trench 3** was 50m long, 1.6m wide and machined to a depth of 0.5m and was aligned north-north-west to south-south-east. Evidence for medieval agriculture was recorded as furrows aligned east to west, and spaced 10m apart. No other archaeological features were identified in the trench.

**Trench 4** was 80m long, 1.6m wide and machined to a depth of 0.5m and aligned south-west to north-east. Evidence for ridge and furrow was recorded aligned north-north-east to south-south-west. A single large oval pit, 14, more than 6m in length and 2m wide and 2.35m deep was found at the eastern end of the trench. The feature had vertical sides and a flat base and a variety of 20th

century debris was recovered from the fill, including iron work, bricks and plastic. It has been interpreted as a recent machine excavated rubbish pit.

**Trench 5** was 45m long, 1.6m wide and machined to a depth of 0.5m and was aligned north-west to south-east. Evidence for ridge and furrow was recorded aligned approximately east to west and 10m apart. No other archaeological activity was found.

**Trench 6** was 35m long, 1.6m wide and machined to a depth of 0.6m and aligned north-north-west to south-south-east. Evidence for ridge and furrow was found aligned south-south-east to north-north-west. In addition two linear features were recorded, 16 and 21.

**Ditch 16** (20), (23). A shallow linear feature aligned north-east to south-west, 0.95m wide and 0.13m deep with concave sides and base. The primary fill was 23, a dark yellowish brown compact silty clay with occasional small rounded stones. This was overlaid by 20, a dark yellowish brown firm silty clay with infrequent small rounded stones. No artefacts were recovered from either of the fills. The feature has been interpreted as a hedgeline.

**Ditch 21** (22), (24). A shallow linear feature aligned east to west, 0.53m wide and 0.11m deep, with concave sides and base. The primary fill was 22, a yellowish brown compact silty clay with very occasional small rounded stones. This was overlaid by 24, a dark yellowish brown firm silty clay with occasional rounded stones. No artefacts were recovered from either of the fills. The feature has been interpreted as a hedgeline.

**Trench 7** was 40m long, 1.6m wide and machined to a depth of 0.6m and aligned north-north-east to south-south-west. Ridge and furrow was recorded in the trench, aligned north-east to south-west. In addition a corner of a single shallow linear feature, 12, was recorded.

**Ditch 12** (9). A shallow linear 0.80m wide and 0.15m deep with concave sides and a flat base. In plan the feature was found to be turning at right-angles. It was filled by 9, a light olive brown silty clay with occasional medium sub-angular stones and charcoal flecks. No artefacts were recovered.

**Trench 8** was 60m long, 1.6m wide and machined to a depth of 0.45m and aligned north-west to south-east. Ridge and furrow was recorded aligned east to west. No other archaeological activity was found.

## 6 DISCUSSION

Before the fieldwork all the background research had shown that the site was set in a rich archaeological and historical landscape, with the valley of the River Nene providing a focus for activity during the prehistoric period. The absence

of known archaeological activity on the site was thought to be attributable to the presence of ridge and furrow masking any remains from earlier periods.

In fact the medieval agriculture represents the only phase of ancient development on the site, suggesting that before the inclosures in 1805 the field had been left as either pasture or wasteland. Even when the site was brought into agriculture it was in piecemeal development of gores suggesting that at that point it was marginal land, perhaps prone to flooding.

The total absence of any medieval or Roman finds whatsoever is surprising in view of the proximity of the site to areas of dense Roman and medieval activity in Alwalton village itself and especially around Water Newton/*Durobrivae*. The fact that even the metal detector survey failed to locate a single Roman coin is all the more surprising given the presence of the adjacent Roman road. Equally, the absence of any medieval finds, metal work or pottery is strange with the manor and medieval village located close to the site; one might have expected to find material spread with manure, for example.

The minimal results in terms of finds produced by the evaluation has nevertheless enhanced our knowledge of the landscape around Peterborough. The land that forms the site at Alwalton has been pasture or grassland since its last ploughing, probably in the late medieval period. Before this, it appears not to have been used particularly intensively, the absence of finds that might be associated with manuring, suggesting that it may not even have been cultivated as arable. The piecemeal medieval ploughing of the site as gores perhaps suggests it was then seen as marginal land. Its use before then was most probably as rough pasture, wasteland or open space.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank Jim Hunt of The Bell Slater Partnership for commissioning the evaluation, Will Wall as project manager for editing the report, Tim Reynolds for his help in searching the Sites and Monuments Record, and Jon Cane who produced the illustrations used in the report. Finally, thanks to Andrew Hatton for his assistance on site and Steve Critchley for conducting the metal detector survey. This project was carried out according to a design brief written by Simon Kaner of the County Archaeological Office - Development Control.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Hall D 1982, *Medieval Fields*, Shire Archaeology, Aylesbury.

Margary I.D 1967, *Roman Roads in Britain*, London.

Palmer 1998, *East of England Showground, Alwalton, Cambridgeshire: An Aerial Photographic Assessment*, Air Photo Services report No: 1998/04, Cambridge.

VCH 1967, *The Victoria County History of Huntingdonshire*, (ed. Pugh R.G)VCH, Vol. II, pp. 133-136



Cambridgeshire  
County Council

Archaeology

The Archaeological Field Unit  
Fulbourn Community Centre  
Haggis Gap  
Fulbourn  
Cambridge CB1 5HD  
Tel (01223) 881614  
Fax (01223) 880946