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Archaeological Field Unit

**Medieval Structures to the rear of
28-32 High Street, Melbourn**

Andrew Hatton

2002

Cambridgeshire County Council

Report No. 210

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**Medieval Structures to the rear of
28-32 High Street, Melbourn
(TL 38336 44907)**

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2002

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SUMMARY

Between the 25th and 29th of November 2002 an archaeological excavation was carried out by staff from the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council on land to the rear of 28-32 High Street, Melbourn in advance of development including construction of three houses with associated access and services.

The first two phases of activity are represented by postholes, ditches and pits dated to the medieval period. One group of postholes form a structure that may have been a house, with the remaining postholes forming a fenced enclosure. The ditches and pits attributed to this period appear to be associated with the possible structure and may have been used for the disposal of domestic debris.

The third phase of activity is represented by a large drainage ditch (dated to the early post-medieval period) possibly taking water away from properties along the street front.

The fourth phase of activity is represented by a single feature that may have been a foundation trench, which contained fragments of brick.

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**Medieval Structures to the rear of 28-32 High Street, Melbourn
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1 INTRODUCTION

Between the 25th and 29th of November 2002 an archaeological excavation was carried out by staff from the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council on land to the rear of 28-32 High Street, Melbourn (an area of approximately 0.29ha) in advance of development. The development includes construction of three houses with associated access and services (Fig. 1). The land is to the rear of a listed building (28 High Street, LB3139), which is being renovated, and a former petrol station.

The area of excavation was restricted to 100sqm due to the presence of deep tanks associated with the garage and workshops at the southern end of the site. The northern end of the site was found to be devoid of significant archaeological remains during the evaluation (Roberts 2002).

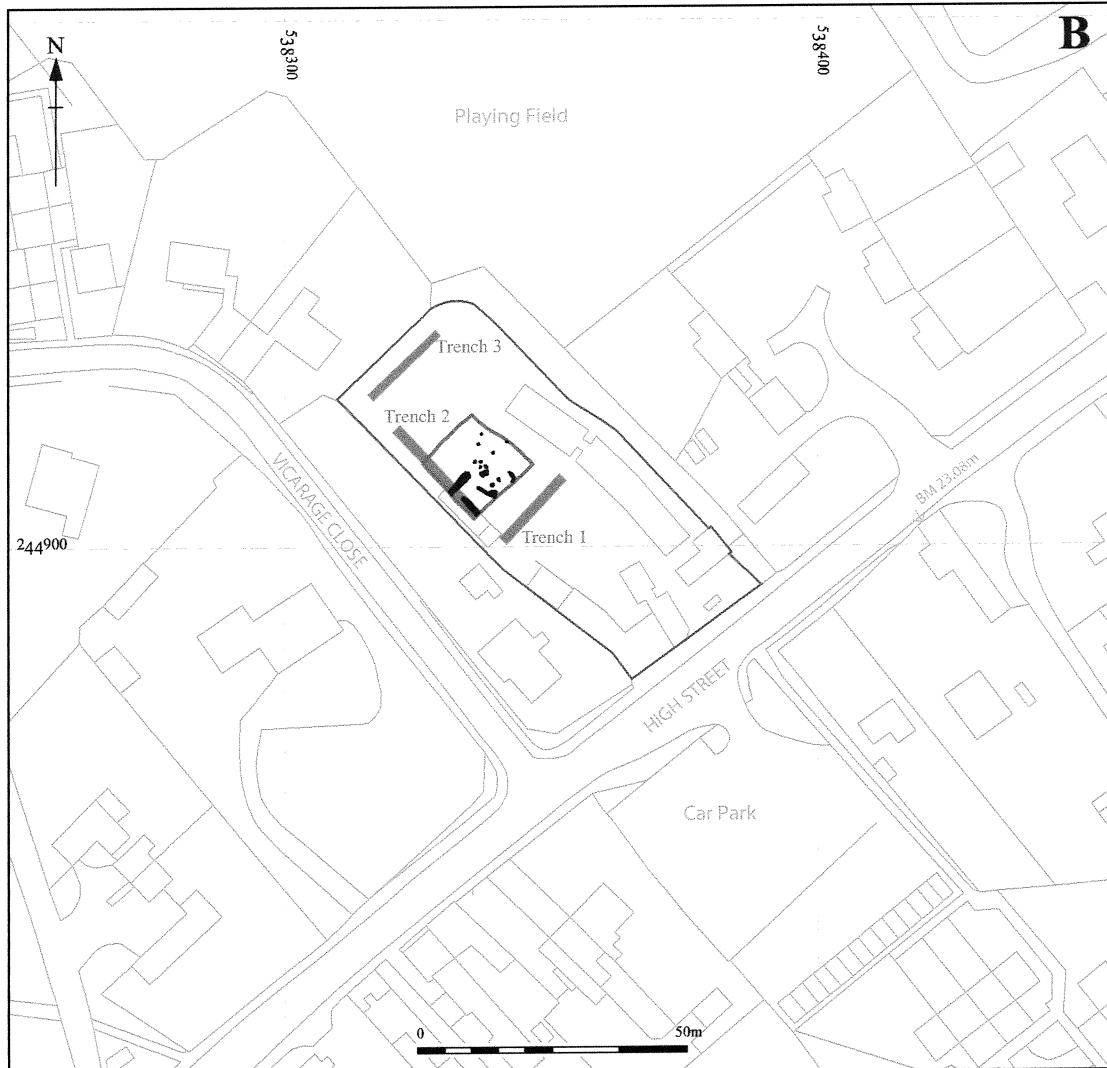
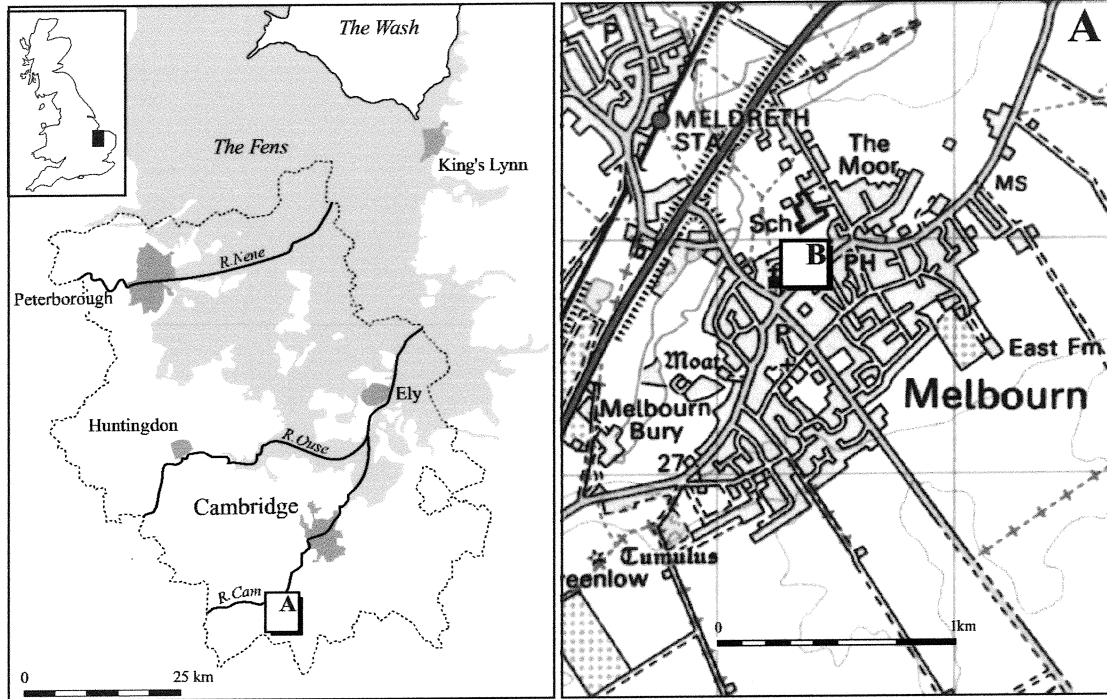
2 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

The area is on Lower Chalk (close to the junction between Melbourn Rock and Totternhoe stone) at a height of approximately 23m OD.

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Information regarding the site and the surrounding area was obtained from the Cambridgeshire County Council Sites and Monuments Record and from sources held at the Archaeological Field Unit.

A considerable number of archaeological remains have been found in the parish of Melbourn. These include a possible neolithic enclosure or henge near New Farm (SMR no. 3195), described as a circular enclosure with interrupted ditch and internal pit circle and a wide entrance flanked by ring ditches (Kirby and Oosthuizen 2000), and various Bronze Age barrows (SMR nos. 3124, 3125, 3149, 3171 and 3172) and enclosures (SMR no. 3165 and 3434). Iron Age and Roman settlement and burial monuments around the parish have been identified through aerial photography of cropmarks and soilmarks. Ancient trackways (Ashwell Street and the Icknield Way), both romanised, pass through the parish (Erlington 1982). Many of the Anglo Saxon and medieval



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Figure 1 Location of Evaluation Trenches (shaded), Excavated Area (green) and Development Area (red).

finds come from closer to the village itself suggesting that settlement has been concentrated in this area in the historic period (SMR no. 8665).

Recent excavation has revealed an Anglo-Saxon cemetery (including early Christian period graves). This has been dated to the early seventh century, perhaps related to the nearby Minster at Meldreth (Taylor 1997).

The place name – *mel* or *meld* – has variously been interpreted as deriving from the name for fat hen (eaten as a vegetable in the early medieval period) or relating to barrows or mounds, or being named after a personal name (Reaney, 1943).

The site is in the medieval core of the village. The thirteenth century parish church of All Saints (SMR no. 3115) lies 100m to the west and Lordship Farm medieval manor and moat (SMR no. 1993) lies 100m to the east. Saxon and medieval pottery has been recovered immediately west of the site (SMR no. 8665).

The royal estate at Melbourn was given to Ely in 970, which retained it until Dissolution. The concentration of moated sites at Melbourn implied rivalry between households. The Argentines manor house stood at Lordship Farm where part of the damaged moated enclosure is still visible. The house within the moated site contains fourteenth century timbers. A hall, thatched chamber, chapel, kitchen, granary and brewhouse surrounded by the moat are recorded (Taylor 1997).

The listed building, 28 High Street, is recorded as dating from c. 1770 and having been variously used as a house, a dairy and a public house. Recent work in the house suggests certain elements may date back to the seventeenth century (Cambridgeshire Listed Buildings No. 003139).

4 METHODOLOGY

Where excavation was required all soil in the designated area above the archaeological horizon was removed with a mechanical excavator under archaeological supervision. Archaeological features were excavated by hand and features/deposits were recorded using the Archaeological Field Unit single context system. Each distinct cut and fill was allocated an individual number, the cut/feature numbers are given in bold and the fill/deposit numbers are given in plan text. Features were planned by hand.

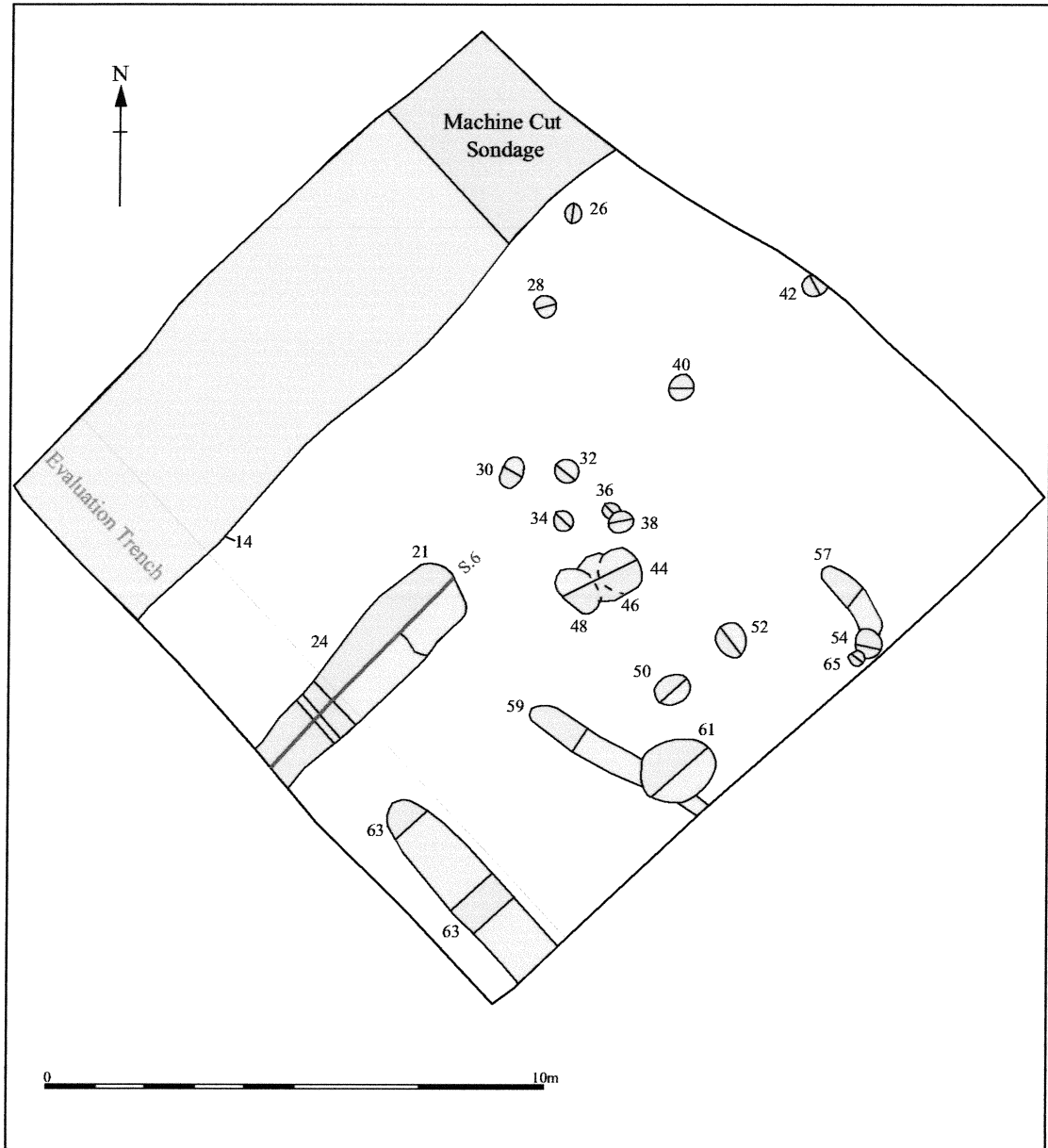


Figure 2 Plan of excavated features

5 RESULTS

Detailed information on the pottery, environmental and faunal analysis are in the Appendices. Full specialist reports will be placed with the archive.

Phase 1: Medieval Structure and Drainage System

This phase comprises elements of a structure together with a drainage system.

Group 1: Medieval Structure (Figs. 2 and 3)

This group consists of 11 postholes **42, 40, 32, 36, 38, 44, 46, 50, 52, 54** and **65**, as well as a single foundation trench **57**. Although a number of the postholes together with the foundation ditch were found to be inter-cutting they have been placed with the same group as they were considered to have been excavated within a limited period and form a single structure. Differences in the deposit colour can be attributed to degrees of contamination caused by the overlying modern deposits.

Posthole **42** (0.40m wide and 0.06m deep) circular in plan, moderate sides and concave base. Fill 41, mid-brown clayey silt with occasional small chalk inclusions, contained no artefactual material.

Posthole **40** (0.35m wide and 0.05m deep) circular in plan, moderate sides and concave base. Fill 39, pale brown clayey silt with occasional small chalk inclusions, contained no artefactual material.

Posthole **32** (0.38m wide and 0.12m deep) circular in plan, moderate sides and concave base. Fill 31, pale brown clayey silt with occasional small chalk inclusions, contained no artefactual material.

Posthole **36** (0.16m wide and 0.11m deep) circular in plan, moderate sides and concave base. Fill 35, pale brown clayey silt with occasional small chalk inclusions, truncated by **38**. 35 contained no artefactual material.

Posthole **38** (0.38m wide and 0.12m deep) circular in plan, moderate sides and concave base, truncated 35. Fill 37, pale brown clayey silt with occasional small chalk inclusions, contained no artefactual material.

Posthole **44** (0.37m wide and 0.07m deep) circular in plan, moderate sides and concave base. Fill 43, pale brown clayey silt with occasional small chalk inclusions, contained no artefactual material. The stratigraphic relationship between postholes **44** and **46** could not be determined due to the homogeneous nature of deposits 43 and 45.

Posthole **46** (0.38m wide and 0.10m deep) circular in plan, moderate sides and concave base. Fill 45, pale brown clayey silt with occasional small chalk

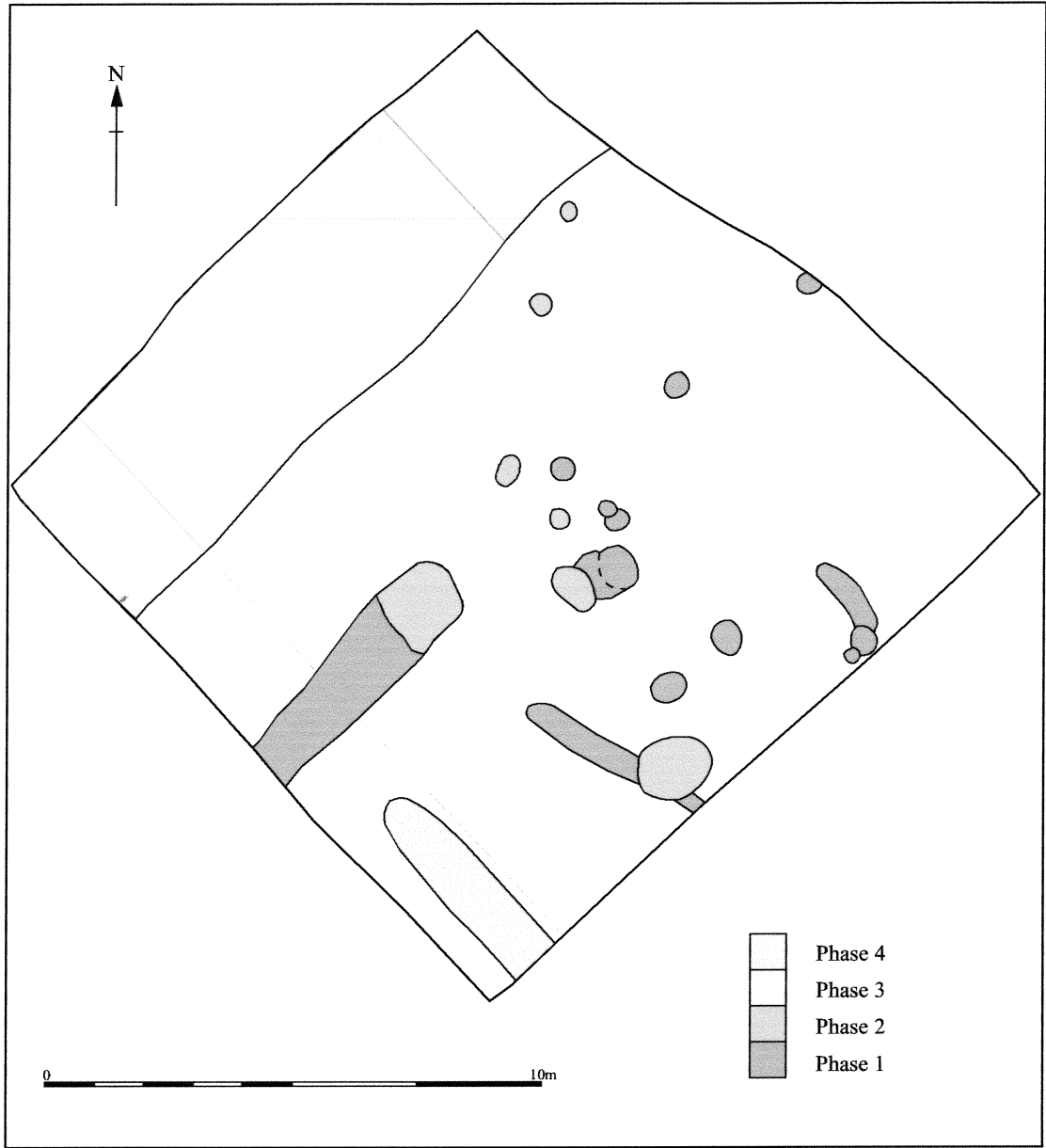


Figure 3 Phase plan

inclusions, contained no artefactual material. The stratigraphic relationship of postholes **46** and **44** could not be determined due to the homogeneous nature of deposits **45** and **43**.

Posthole **50** (0.50m wide and 0.14m deep) circular in plan, steep sides and concave base. Fill **49**, pale brown clayey silt with occasional small chalk inclusions, contained no artefactual material.

Posthole **52** (0.54m wide and 0.14m deep) circular in plan, moderate sides and concave base. Fill **51**, pale brown clayey silt with occasional small chalk inclusions, contained no artefactual material.

Posthole **54** (0.35m wide and 0.28m deep) circular in plan, steep sides and concave base, truncates **56**. Fill **53**, greyish brown clayey silt with occasional small chalk inclusions, truncated by **65**, contained no artefactual material.

Posthole **65** (0.35m wide and 0.28m deep) circular in plan, steep sides and concave base, truncates **53**. Fill **55**, greyish brown clayey silt with occasional small chalk inclusions, contained no artefactual material.

Ditch **57** (1m long, 0.35m wide and 0.10m deep) curvilinear in plan, moderate sides and concave base. Fill **56**, light grey clayey silt with occasional flecks of charcoal, truncated by **54**, contained no artefactual material.

Discussion

The postholes indicate the footprint of a post-built structure. Foundation trench **57**, as well as postholes **54** and **65** suggest the entrance to the structure, possibly a porch. Only one side of the entrance was observed during the excavation. The other side has been removed by modern disturbance.

Group 2: Drainage Ditches (Fig. 2, 3 and 4)

This group includes two drainage ditches, **24** and **59**, in the southern half of the site.

Ditch **24** (1m wide, 3.50m long and 0.25m deep) (same as **1**, excavated during the evaluation stage, see Roberts 2002) aligned north-east/south-west, had steep sides and flat base. Ditch **24** contained two fills with the basal fill consisting of dark greyish brown silty clay, **23** with occasional small chalk blocks. This fill contained sherds of twelfth century pottery as well as fragments of animal bone. Above this lay **22**, light brown silty clay with occasional small chalk blocks, truncated by **21** (see group 4), which contained no artefactual material. The environmental sample produced charred grain and a few seeds of *Sambucus nigra* (Elder).

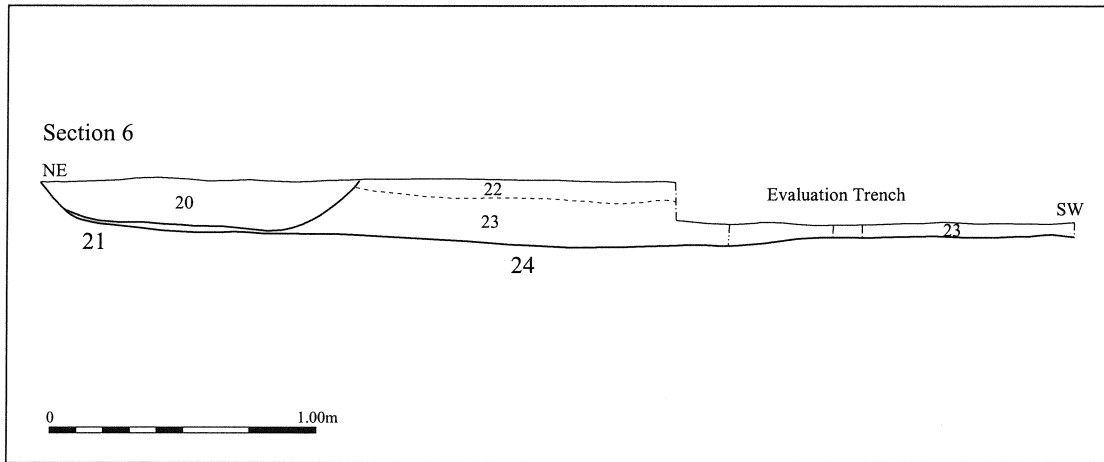


Figure 4 Section across drainage ditch and rubbish pit.

Ditch **59** (over 2.8m long, 0.35m wide and 0.11m deep) aligned north-west/south-east, had steep sides and flat base. Fill 58, pale brown clayey silt with occasional small chalk inclusions, contained a single sherd of heavily abraded Roman pottery.

Discussion

The relationship of the two ditches **24** and **59** to the possible post-built structure (see Group 1) suggests that they both functioned as drainage channels. The difference in the deposits indicates that **24** was more likely to have been a channel for the disposal of domestic waste, whereas the deposit within **59** showed no evidence of organic remains and may have been kept clear for drainage.

Phase 2: Medieval

This phase includes elements of a possible fence line as well as two pits.

Group 3: Possible Fence Line (Figs. 2 and 3)

This group consists of five postholes **26**, **28**, **30**, **34** and **48** extending in a southerly direction for a distance of 9m.

Posthole **26** (0.28m wide and 0.06 m deep) circular in plan, steep sides and concave base. Fill 25, dark greyish brown clayey silt with occasional small chalk inclusions, contained no artefactual material.

Posthole **28** (0.26m wide and 0.10m deep) circular in plan, steep sides and concave base. Fill 27, dark greyish brown clayey silt with occasional small chalk inclusions, contained no artefactual material.

Posthole **30** (0.36m wide and 0.15m deep) circular in plan, steep sides and concave base. Fill 29, dark greyish brown clayey silt with occasional small chalk inclusions, contained no artefactual material.

Posthole **34** (0.30m wide and 0.09m deep) circular in plan, steep sides and concave base. Fill 33, dark greyish brown clayey silt with occasional small chalk inclusions, contained no artefactual material.

Posthole **48** (0.50m wide and 0.18m deep) circular in plan, steep sides and concave base. Fill 47, dark greyish brown clayey silt with occasional small chalk inclusions, contained no artefactual material.

Drawing Conventions

Sections	Plans
Limit of Excavation -----	Limit of Excavation _____
Cut _____	Deposit - Conjectured -----
Cut - Conjectured -----	Natural Features
Soil Horizon -----	Intrusion/Truncation -----
Soil Horizon - Conjectured	Sondages/Machine Strip -----
Intrusion/Truncation -----	Illustrated Section _____ S.14
Top of Natural _____	Deposit
Top Surface _____	Excavated Slot
Break in Section -----	Cut Number 118
Cut Number 118	
Deposit Number 117	
Ordnance Datum $\frac{18.45\text{m ODN}}{\times}$	

Discussion

The alignment of the postholes appears to form a slight curve. This suggests that the postholes are part of a circular enclosure or kraal for livestock.

Group 4: Pitting Activity (Fig. 2, 3 and 4)

This group consists of two pits **21** and **61** in the southern half of the site.

Pit **21** (1.20m long, 1.0m wide and 0.17m deep) sub-square in plan, moderate sides and flat base. Fill 20, mid-grey silty clay with occasional small chalk blocks. The fill contained sherds of twelfth century pottery and fragments of animal bone. The environmental sample produced charred grain, a single grain of barley and a few seeds of *Sambucus nigra* (Elder).

Pit **61** (1.20m long, 1.0m wide and 0.30m deep) oval in plan, moderate sides and concave base. Pit **61** contained two fills with the basal fill consisting of mid-grey clayey silt, 60, with occasional small blocks of chalk, which contained no artefactual material. Above this was deposit 64, greyish brown clayey silt with occasional small chalk blocks. The fill contained sherds of twelfth century pottery.

Discussion

The two pits identified in this group may have been rubbish pits outside the structure and fenced enclosure (see Groups 1 and 3).

Period Discussion – Phases 1 and 2

Information on land use during the medieval period indicates occupation and elements of animal husbandry between the tenth and twelfth centuries. This is indicated through the presence of postholes, which define a rectangular post-built structure. Rubbish pits and drainage channels, which contained domestic debris, further reinforce the idea of occupation. Animals may have been kept in the post-built enclosure close to the structure.

Phase 3: Early Post-medieval

This phase is represented by a large drainage ditch

Group 5: Drainage Ditch (Figs. 2 and 3)

Ditch **14**, was excavated during the evaluation stage and produced early post-medieval red ware (sixteenth-seventeenth century) (Roberts 2002).

Phase 4: Post-medieval

This phase is represented by a single foundation trench

Group 6: Foundation Trench (Figs. 2 and 3)

This group consists of a trench, **63**, in the southern corner of the site.

Foundation trench **63** (over 3m long, 1.10m wide and 0.16m deep) (same as **8**, excavated during the evaluation stage, see Roberts 2002) aligned north-west–south-east, had moderate sides and flat base. Fill **62**, grey clayey silt with occasional chalks blocks, contained fragments of brick and clay pipe, dated to the eighteenth century, as well as animal bone.

Discussion

The evaluation stage revealed a high degree of truncation beyond the south-eastern baulk, which would have removed all evidence that could have enabled an accurate interpretation of **63**. However, the presence of a small amount of brick rubble may point to this feature being a foundation trench.

6 CONCLUSION

The excavation to the rear of 28-32 High Street, Melbourn, has produced archaeological remains from the medieval and post-medieval periods. The investigation identified structural remains located away from the High Street and north-east of the church, suggesting that occupation was not confined to the main thoroughfares of the settlement. Based on this new information it may be possible to suggest that the settlement core to the south-west of the church, suggested by Taylor (Taylor 1997) needs to be revised to include the area immediately to the north-east of the church.

The large ditch **14**, running parallel to the High Street, was dug in the early post-medieval period. This suggests that the ditch may have formed the rear boundary of properties fronting on to the road, one of which may have been 28 High Street.

Later post-medieval activity on the site was restricted to the investigation of a single foundation trench.

It is unfortunate that the site (so close to the centre of the village) has been intensively re-developed during the twentieth century. Inevitably there has been extensive modern destruction of earlier features, but a small area of undisturbed land contained medieval and post-medieval features, the investigation of which has added to knowledge of Melbourn's development.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank Plum Developments who commissioned and funded the archaeological work. Thanks also to Chris Montague who worked on the site. Judith Roberts managed the site and Crane Begg prepared the illustrations.

The brief for archaeological works was written by Andy Thomas, County Archaeology Office, and the site was monitored by Kasia Gdaniec, Development Control Officer.

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Appendix I Medieval Pottery (By Dr. Paul Spoerry)

This assemblage is mostly of quite fragmented medieval pottery, with the occasional sherd dated to the late medieval period.

Context Number	Number of sherds	Fabric Type	Date AD
2	7	Early micaceous Essex medieval sandy ware	1100-1200
	3	St. Neots type ware (quite late)	1000-1200
	4	Sandy ware sherds: could be Essex type but possibly one or more Thetford ware	1000-1200
	1	Abraded micaceous sandy fabric with clear/yellow lead glaze	1150
15	6	Slightly micaceous red sandy ware with internal clear glaze	1400-1600
18	1	Thick-walled grey ware: chalk temper	1000-1200
20	19	Early micaceous Essex medieval sandy ware	1050-1200
23	26	Grimston-Thetford ware storage vessel	1000-1150
	28	Early micaceous Essex medieval sandy ware	1100-1200
	2	Medieval Ely ware	1150 (?)
47	1	Early micaceous Essex medieval sandy ware	1050-1200
	1	Developed Stamford ware	1150-1250
58	1	Early micaceous Essex medieval sandy ware	1000-1200
62	1	Early micaceous Essex medieval sandy ware	1000-1200
64	1	Early micaceous Essex medieval grey ware (Hedingham Grey ware)	1100-1300

1 INTRODUCTION

A small assemblage of 21 bones from six contexts was analysed from the site. Because of the small size of the sample little can be reported from the bones on farming practices and animal use on the site.

The material was reasonably well preserved but carried evidence of cracking and weathering, as well as gnawing on two of the bones. This indicates that some of the material was left uncovered to the elements for some time before burial.

2 METHODOLOGY

Species representations were recorded using both the NISP (Reitz and Wing 1999) and MNI techniques (O'Connor 2000). Ageing analysis was not carried out due to the lack of bone that can be used in this analysis. The use of such techniques is always fraught with inconsistencies, biases and methodological problems. For a review of these problems see O'Connor (2000).

3 RESULTS

It should be noted that small sample sizes could lead to unreliable interpretation.

3.1 Species Representation

Only three species were identified within the assemblage. Horse represented by a calcaneus, humerus, scapula and molar. A metacarpal, metatarsal, calcaneus and a tibia represented cattle, and lastly one canine represented pig. Three fragments of bone were recorded as unidentified mammal. If NISP counts are used then horse is by far the most dominant species, however MNI analysis shows there to be only one individual per species, all near or at adult age.

3.2 Mortality Profile and Butchery Analysis

A mortality profile of the animals represented could not be carried out. It was also not possible to use the teeth in the analysis. The sample in general is too small to draw any conclusions. However, from the development and state of the two cow metapodials, it would seem likely that they are from separate individuals.

Butchery was recorded on four bones, which is quite high given the size of the assemblage. All were chop marks and are likely to represent dismemberment points. It is interesting that the horse calcaneus showed butchery, this in itself is quite unusual.

4 CONCLUSION

The sample from the High Street, Melbourn (MEB HS 02) was very small and has limited value for analysis and interpretation. In summary, horse was by far the most dominant species, but cattle was also equally well represented. Mortality profiles could not be carried out. Butchery was recorded.

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Appendix III Environmental Remains (By Rachel Fosberry)

Two 10-litre bulk samples were submitted for assessment of their environmental potential. The samples were subjected to bucket flotation, the residue was retained in a 1.0mm mesh and the flot was collected in a 0.5mm mesh. The flot was air dried and examined under a binocular microscope X14.

Both samples contained macrobotanical material that had been preserved by charring and also by waterlogging. Sample 1, (20, Phase 1) contained a moderate amount of charred wheat and a single grain of barley. The grains were puffed and distorted making identification difficult. A few seeds of *Sambucus nigra* (Elder) were also present and had been preserved by waterlogging.

Sample 2, (23, Phase 3) was very similar to sample 1 and also contained charred grain that was puffed, distorted and waterlogged *Sambucus nigra*. One other unidentified waterlogged seed was present.

It is difficult to draw any conclusions from two such similar samples other than to say that charred grain was present indicating food production nearby and that, at some stage, the features had been waterlogged.

Appendix IV Context List

Context No	Fill of	Filled by	Context type	Description
20	21		Pit fill	Mid-grey silty clay deposit
21		20	Pit	Sub-square, moderate sides, flat base
22	24		Ditch fill	Light brown silty clay deposit
23	24		Ditch fill	Dark greyish brown silty clay deposit
24		22, 23	Ditch	Linear, steep sides, flat base
25	26		Posthole fill	Dark greyish brown silty clay deposit
26		25	Posthole	Circular, steep sides, concave base
27	28		Posthole fill	Dark greyish brown silty clay deposit
28		27	Posthole	Circular, steep sides, concave base
29	30		Posthole fill	Dark greyish brown silty clay deposit
30		29	Posthole	Circular, steep sides, concave base
31	32		Posthole fill	Pale brown clayey silt deposit
32		31	Posthole	Circular, moderate sides, concave base
33	34		Posthole fill	Dark greyish brown silty clay deposit
34		33	Posthole	Circular, steep sides, concave base
35	36		Posthole fill	Pale brown clayey silt deposit
36		35	Posthole	Circular, moderate sides, concave base
37	38		Posthole fill	Pale brown clayey silt deposit
38		37	Posthole	Circular, moderate sides, concave base
39	40		Posthole fill	Pale brown clayey silt deposit
40		39	Posthole	Circular, moderate sides, concave base
41	42		Posthole fill	Mid-brown clayey silt deposit
42		41	Posthole	Circular, moderate sides, concave base
43	44		Posthole fill	Pale brown clayey silt deposit
44		43	Posthole	Circular, moderate sides, concave base
45	46		Posthole fill	Pale brown clayey silt deposit
46		45	Posthole	Circular, moderate sides, concave base
47	48		Posthole fill	Dark greyish brown silty clay deposit
48		47	Posthole	Circular, steep sides, concave base
49	50		Posthole fill	Pale brown clayey silt deposit
50		49	Posthole	Circular, steep sides, concave base
51	52		Posthole fill	Pale brown clayey silt deposit
52		51	Posthole	Circular, moderate sides, concave base
53	54		Posthole fill	Greyish brown clayey silt deposit
54		53	Posthole	Circular, moderate sides, concave base
55	65		Posthole fill	Greyish brown clayey silt deposit
56	57		Ditch fill	Light grey clayey silt deposit
57		56	Ditch	Curvilinear, moderate sides, concave base
58	59		Ditch fill	Pale brown clayey silt deposit
59		58	Ditch	Linear, steep sides, concave base
60	61		Pit fill	Mid-grey clayey silt deposit
61		60, 64	Pit	Oval, moderate sides, concave base
62	63		Ditch fill	Grey clayey silt deposit
63		62	Ditch	Linear, moderate sides, concave base
64		61	Pit fill	Greyish brown clayey silt deposit
65		55	Posthole	Circular, steep sides, concave base

