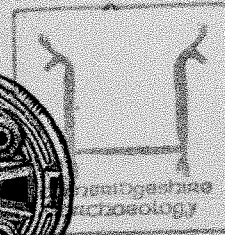
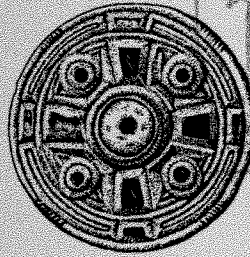


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ARCHAEOLOGY FIELD OFFICE
FULBOURN COMMUNITY CENTRE
HAGGIS GAP, FULBOURN
CAMBRIDGE CB1 5HD Tel: 601614
Fax

Archaeological Field Unit

An Archaeological Evaluation at Bridge Lane, Wimblington: The Medieval Hamlet of Eastwood

Ben Robinson BSc, MA

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Cambridgeshire County Council

Report No A27

Commissioned By Finnpace Ltd.

NON-TECHNICAL SUMMARY

An archaeological evaluation at Bridge Lane, Wimblington has revealed a late Iron Age ditch and traces of the medieval hamlet of Eastwood End. The ditch is an outlying remnant of a previously known Iron Age/Romano-British settlement, situated 100m to the south of the development site.

The development site is situated at the southern headland of a medieval field. The earliest medieval features on the site represent structures (possibly buildings) that were erected during the 14th-15th century. This activity was probably succeeded by a period of cultivation. Rubbish filled ditches, dated by pottery to the 16th and 17th centuries, indicate the proximity of dwellings at this date.

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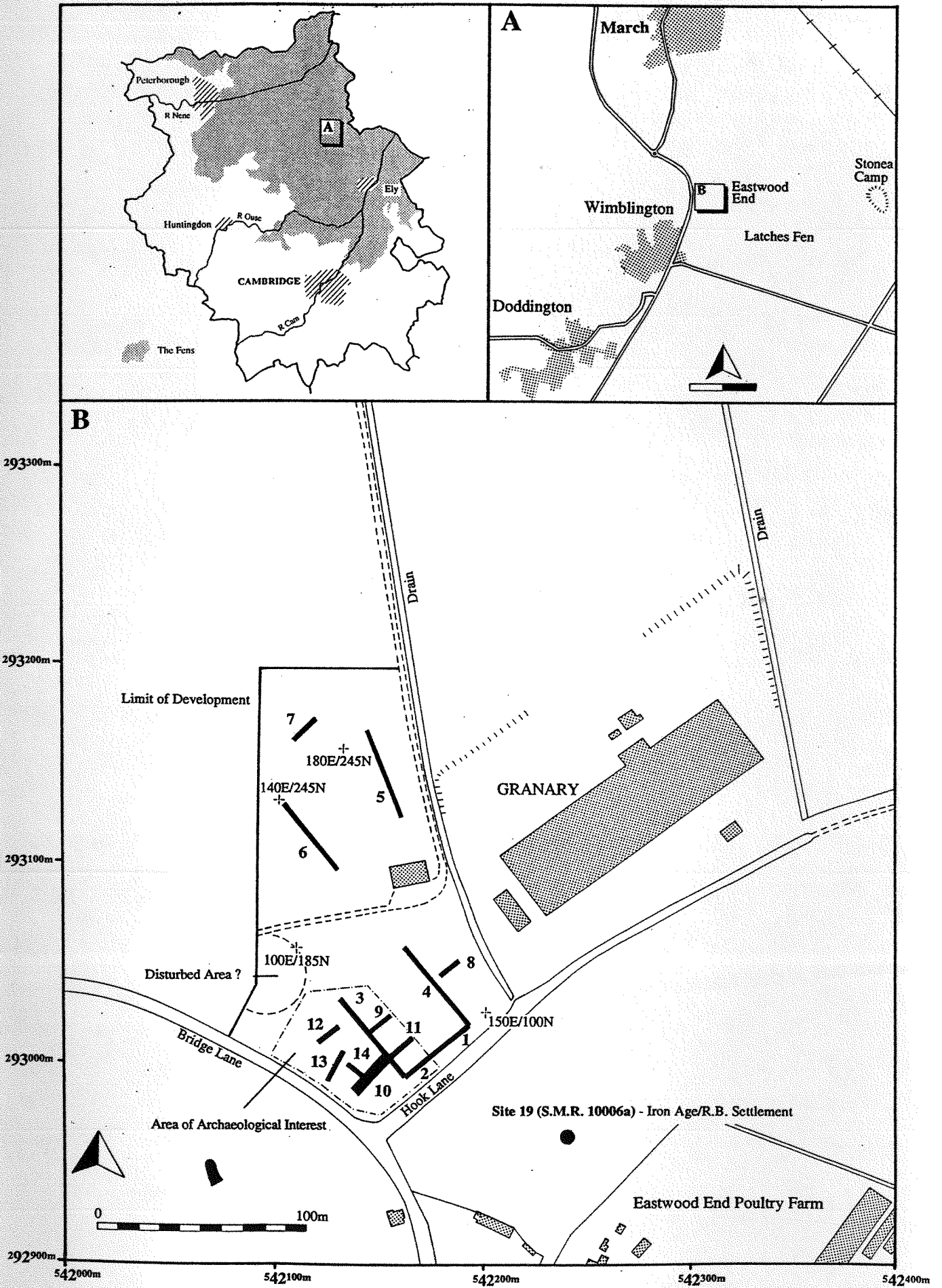


Figure 1: Location of site and evaluation trenches

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Between 13/12/93 and 23/12/93 Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Field Unit undertook an evaluation at Plot 2, Bridge Lane, Wimblington (TL 4215/9304). A further two trenches were opened during back-filling operations on 14/1/94. The evaluation was carried out on behalf of Finn pave Ltd. in order to help determine the archaeological implications of the proposed development of the site for stores, a car park and sewage treatment plant. It was carried out to a brief set by the County Archaeology Office, representatives of which made two monitoring visits during the evaluation.

2 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

2.1 The site lies approximately 400 m west of the fen edge at the eastern edge of March island. The underlying geology on this part of the island is of Ampthill clay overlain by boulder clay. The central part of the island is capped by March Gravels (probably fan deposits laid down at the edge of a sheltered marine bay). The subject site is situated a little to the east of these, overlooking a narrow expanse of peat fen between March and Stonea island. The peat in this part of the fen overlies the terraced gravels of a river valley (Gallois 1988, 67-73).

2.2 The fen edge at this part of the island does not seem to have varied considerably from the Neolithic period through to medieval times (Hall 1992, 66-73).

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

3.1 The environs of the development site have been the subject of surface collection surveys as part of the Fenland Project. The northern portion of the subject site (as defined by the east-west concrete track) was fieldwalked in 30 m transects under good conditions; no significant material was noted. The southern portion of the site was not available for survey at the time (Hall 1992, 65).

3.2 Recent excavations have been carried out at Stonea Grange (Potter & Jackson 1985, 9-14) and at Stonea Camp (Malim 1992).

3.3 The earliest evident human activity in the immediate area is represented by stray finds of one Mesolithic and one Neolithic axe a few hundred metres to the east of the subject site. However, it has been suggested that the heavy clay of the subject site is less likely to have supported early prehistoric settlement than the river terrace gravels to the south east now overlain by peat fen (Hall pers. comm.).

3.3 Wimblington Site 19 (S.M.R. 10006a) lies c. 100 m to the south of the subject site. Fieldwalking as part of the Fenland Project identified it as a small Iron Age and Romano-British settlement. Site 20 (S.M.R. 08984) a few hundred metres to the north is of similar character. Site 24 (00169) is a linear cropmark/soilmark feature traversing the fen between Wimblington and Stonea. It is either a canal or causeway, probably Roman in date, and has soilmarks suggestive of turbaries mid-way along its length. The gravelly agger of a Roman road is visible in ploughed fields to the north of the subject site, passing very close to Site 20. This would seem to be a highland continuation of the linear feature described above.

4 DOCUMENTARY HISTORY SUMMARY

4.1 'Wimblingetune' (Wimblington) and 'Dundingtune' (Doddington) are first recorded in the later 10th century (Reaney 1943, 265). The Domesday Survey does not

identify Wimblington or Eastwood End as hamlets within Doddington parish. However, these places, together with Benwick and March, were part of the very large parish of Doddington throughout the Middle Ages (Pugh 1953, 112-113). Their omission from the Domesday Book suggests that these places were of less note than March in the 11th century (12 villagers) which is identified as an outlier of the Parish at this time (Rumble 1981, 5,45).

4.2 Indeed, reference to 'Estwode' (Eastwood End) does not occur until 1251 (Reaney 1943, 265-266). It is at this time that much new assarting is recorded and the bolstering of the Bishop's manor of Doddington by 111 new tenants is documented (Taylor 1975, 104).

4.3 There are few direct references to Eastwood End throughout the medieval period, but its parent parish of Doddington is well served by documents (as befits one of the largest parishes in Cambridgeshire, an important manorial holding, and the site of one of the Bishop of Ely's palaces throughout the 14th and 15th centuries). These provide a good overview of the expansion and decline of the parish as a whole throughout this period.

4.4 A 17th century map of the area (untitled, though possibly the work of Ben Hare; C.R.O. R51/23/3) indicates dwellings (and the possible continuation in use of medieval tofts) abutting the development area to the south and to the west, along the line of the present day Bridge Lane. The development site clearly forms the western end of a large medieval field with its characteristic reversed 'S' shape and headland abutting Bridge Lane. Although the map displays some surrounding fields divided into their individual strips (which are presumably still cultivated) several fields, including this one, have undergone small-scale enclosure.

4.5 By the mid 19th century Eastwood End is recorded as comprising 100 houses (Gardner 1851, 212), a considerably larger hamlet than it is today. The O.S. map of 1885, however, shows a settlement of smaller proportions than that suggested by the survey. A farmhouse with outbuildings, a yard and pond lies partly within the development site, fronting onto Bridge Lane.

5 METHODS

5.1 The aim of the evaluation was to define the date, nature, extent and state of preservation of archaeological remains in the subject area, and thus to determine the likely impact of the proposed development upon them.

5.2 The subject site was covered by well established coarse grass and was thus unsuitable for surface collection surveys. It was decided that an adequate sample of the subject site could be made by trial trenching, and that this method would provide a more secure and cost-effective definition of archaeological features than geophysical survey could produce.

5.3 So as not to prejudice the detection of a fully ploughed out former land surface (or formerly upstanding features) the machine excavated topsoil from the trial trenches (a recent ploughsoil) was trowel sorted at 25 m intervals and artefact occurrence noted. Each sort represented the examination of 1.35 cubic metres of soil spread over an area of 2.5 m. The intention of this part of the survey was not to provide a detailed survey of ploughsoil artefact distributions, but to evaluate the potential of the ploughsoil so that a provision for its fuller investigation could be made, if required, at a further stage.

5.4 Trenches were initially sited (figure 1) to provide a good sample of the subject area (Trenches 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8), with further trenches excavated to explore located feature clusters (Trenches 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14).

5.5 The recent ploughsoil was removed by mechanical excavator. Skilful excavator driving left a clean enough surface to reveal archaeological features without further cleaning. Indeed, attempts to hoe clean resulted in a considerable loss of clarity. Areas where features were noted were tagged and trowel cleaned.

5.6 All located features were planned at 1:50. Excavated features (selected for excavation on the basis of examining a representative sample of the encountered features) were planned at 1:20 with section drawings at 1:10 or 1:20. Excavation was by trowel and mattock.

5.7 Cambridgeshire C.C. Archaeological Field Unit context forms were used. The written and drawn record was supplemented by colour and monochrome photographs.

5.8 In the following text archaeological contexts numbers are represented thus: cuts appear between square parentheses and deposits between round parentheses. The accompanying figures display cuts in bold text and deposits within a circle.

5.9 The written, artefactual and photographic archive is stored at the Archaeological Field Unit's offices at Fulbourn and is available for inspection.

6 RESULTS

6.1 The poorly draining boulder clay and topography of the site, combined with December's unusually high rainfall conspired to flood excavation trenches and thus to limit the depth to which features could be sectioned in a number of cases. Although a nuisance, this has not unduly affected the reliability of the results obtained.

6.2 14 trenches were dug and 50 contexts were recorded.

6.3 Ploughsoil Sample Survey

6.3.1 Generally, very little material was recovered by the ploughsoil survey. The only find of note was a mid (?) Neolithic flint knife from the eastern end of Trench 1. The distribution of early post-medieval pottery and undated brick and tile fragments corresponds with the location of plough truncated features of this date disclosed by trenching.

6.4 Trench 1

6.4.1 The boulder clay 'C' horizon (40) was encountered directly beneath 35-40 cm of recent ploughsoil (1). The surface of the boulder clay was plough scored and extensively mottled with root and worm holes. It comprised a yellowish brown silty sandy clay, and contained a moderate percentage of petrologically diverse stones and pebbles which varied in size and shape considerably (angular through to rounded).

6.4.2 No archaeological features were encountered.

6.5 Trench 2

6.5.1 A similar situation to that described in Trench 1 presented itself along most of the length of this trench. However, 5 m from its western edge a dark greyish brown silty clay containing occasional small charcoal flecks (17) was encountered immediately below the ploughsoil. A sondage revealed that this overlay the boulder clay (40) which sloped very gently downwards towards the west. It could not be determined whether this gradual slope was a natural topographic feature of the underlying boulder clay or the edge of a feature cut into it. A few centimetres from the eastern edge of (17) a circular

patch (25 cm in diameter) of light brown silty clay indicated the upper fill of a post hole or post pipe (52). This was not excavated.

6.6 Trench 3

6.6.1 Deposit (17) was again encountered below the ploughsoil. A sondage at the southern end of the trench determined that its depth was greater than 30 cm below the ploughsoil interface. Towards the northern end of the trench the deposit thinned out gradually.

6.7 Trench 4

6.7.1 Circa 35-40cm of recent ploughsoil overlay natural boulder clay. A single field drain ran north-south mid way along the trench. No other archaeological features were encountered.

6.8 Trench 5

6.8.1 Ploughsoil overlay natural boulder clay in the southern half of the trench. The northern portion of the trench contained a deposit which overlay the natural boulder clay and which had been truncated by recent ploughing. It was a yellowish brown silty clay (39) with a similar coarse component to that of the boulder clay. It was similarly plough scored and root and worm perforated, but was slightly less clayey and compact than the boulder clay. It was a maximum of 15 cm thick at the northern end of the trench, but thinned very gradually to extinction mid-way along the trench. It is possible that this deposit represents the plough truncated remnant of a 'B' horizon.

6.8.2 No features other than a modern steep sided north-south running mole drain cut and plough score lines were encountered.

6.9 Trench 6

6.9.1 This trench displayed the same plough-truncated natural boulder clay as was observed in Trench 5. Deposit (39) was again encountered, though this time it was limited to a band of 10 m or so at the northern end of the trench.

6.9.2 No cut features were observed.

6.10 Trench 7

6.10.1 No archaeological features were observed.

6.11 Trench 8

6.11.1 No archaeological features were observed.

6.12 Trench 9

6.12.1 The ploughsoil overlay an olive brown silty clay 10-15 cm thick (26). This contained occasional small charcoal flecks and was generally similar in character to (17). Deposit (26) overlay a short length of a (linear ?) ditch 2.6 m wide [25] (figure 2). A half-section revealed a gently sloping west edge and a flatish bottom (figure 3). Fills (28) and (29) contained a few small, abraded sherds of late Iron Age pottery, including part of a black burnished ware vessel, and a fragment from a horizontally grooved vessel of Belgic type.

6.12.2 This was the only confirmed Iron Age feature encountered within the subject site.

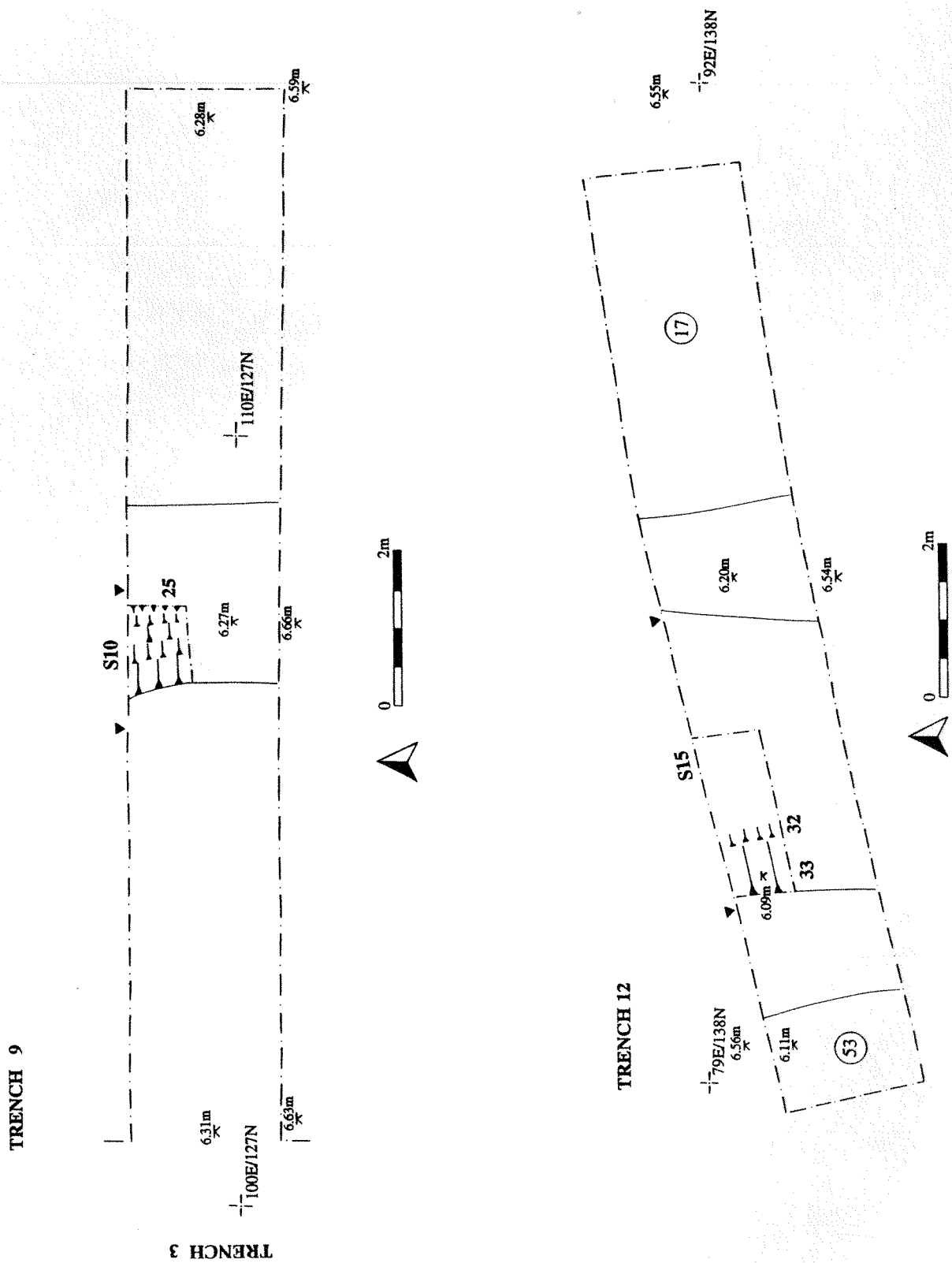


Figure 2: Plans of Trenches 9 & 12

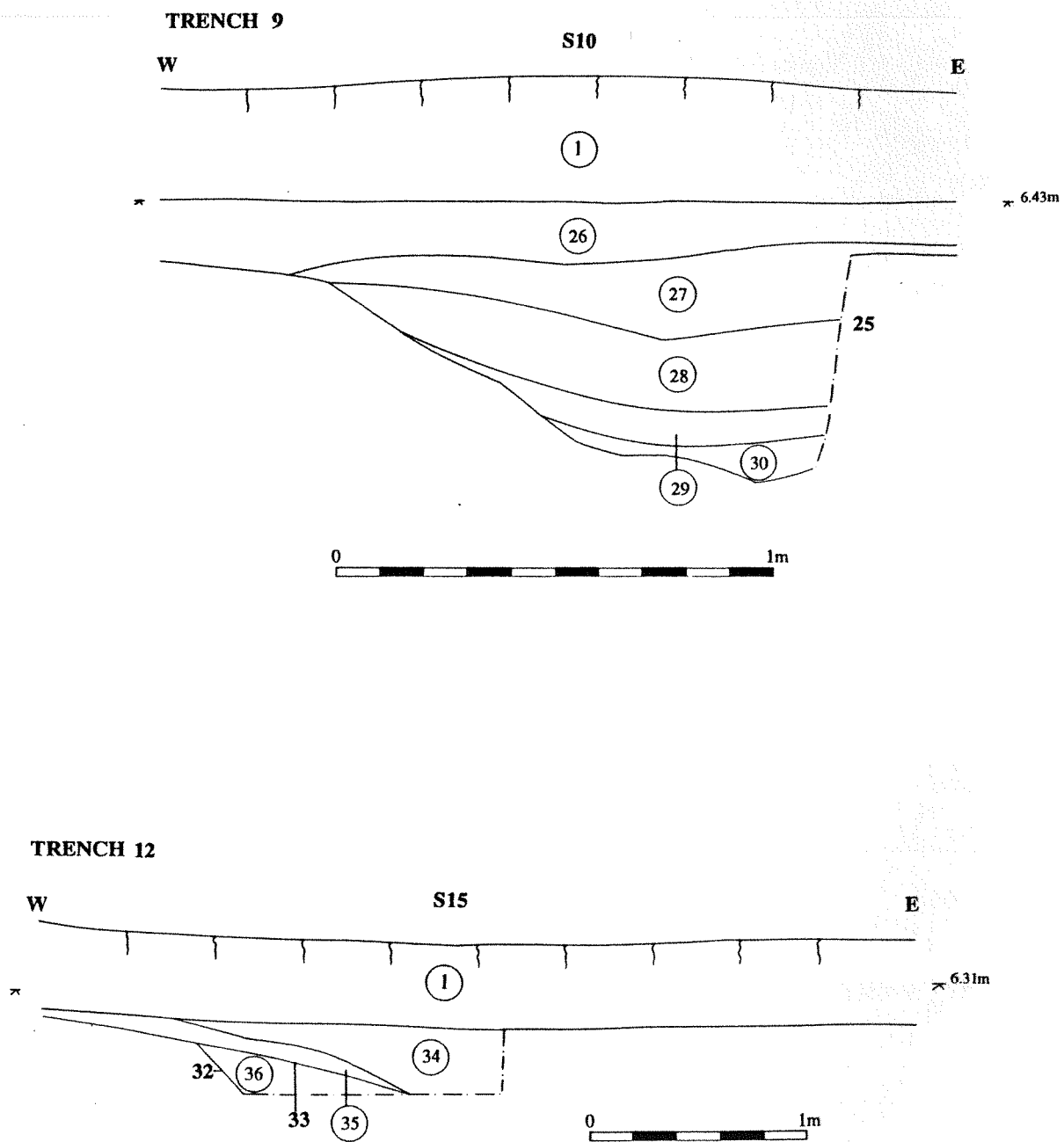


Figure 3: Sections through Iron Age and late medieval/early post-med.ditch

6.13 Trench 10

6.13.1 Deposit (17) was again encountered immediately below the recent ploughsoil, thinning out gradually at the trench's west end. No cut features were observed but early 15th century pottery was collected from the ploughsoil/(17) interface.

6.13.2 The trench was widened to 3.7m and deposit (17) was machined off (one bucket's width along the length of the trench) to reveal that the boulder clay natural sloped markedly from west to east. At the trench's east end the natural was overlain with over 1m of deposits. At the west end it was truncated by the ploughsoil. The east end of the trench rapidly filled with water and detailed observation or record could not be made. However, it is apparent that (17) is the uppermost deposit of a large hollow whose eastern edge was encountered in Trench 2 (see above) and that the sloping natural encountered in this trench is the west edge of the hollow (figure 5, section 16).

6.13.3 Deposit (17) sealed a cluster of discrete features of which four were sectioned (figure 4). [23] was found to be a flat-bottomed shallow linear gully which contained a single sheep femur. The lower fill of this feature was cut by [21], a similarly-shaped gully (figure 5) which contained two sherds of 14th century pottery and a sherd of hard orange sandy ware dating to the 15th century.

6.13.4 [24] was a shallow post hole containing no datable material. [13], an elongated pit or the butt end of a ditch was seen to be 45 cm deep with a 'u'-shaped profile. Its homogeneous olive brown clay fill (5) contained no finds (figure 5).

6.13.5 At the west end of Trench 10 a large ditch was encountered. Lower fills contained a sherd of 15th century green glazed pottery, oyster and cockleshell and an articulated pig skeleton (figure 5).

6.13.6 Several other features were exposed in plan but not examined further. These were all suggestive of post holes and gullies (figure 4).

6.14 Trench 11

6.14.1 Deposit (17) was again encountered. A sherd of 13th-14th century pottery, and a fragment of (Mesolithic ?) flint blade were recovered from its interface with the recent ploughsoil. No cut features were observed.

6.15 Trench 12

6.15.1 A north-south running linear ditch was half-sectioned, but could not be bottomed due to flooding (figure 2). Nevertheless, enough was excavated to demonstrate that it had been subjected to at least one re-cut [33]. Fills of the first cut [32] contained animal bone, oyster and cockle shell. Pottery included 15th century green-glazed Grimstone ware and, significantly, a large sherd of Cambridge Sgraffito ware. This pottery, probably produced in the late 14th or early 15th century (Hurst & Bushnell 1953, 21-26) is seldom found outside of Cambridge.

6.15.2 The fill of the re-cut also contained animal bone, 15th-16th century pottery, and the base of a 17th century Ely Babylon ware vessel.

6.15.3 The ditch had been truncated by the recent ploughing and was of unknown relationship to (17) which was encountered at the east end of the trench. The upper fill of another large feature (53) containing early post-medieval pottery was seen in the west end of the trench.

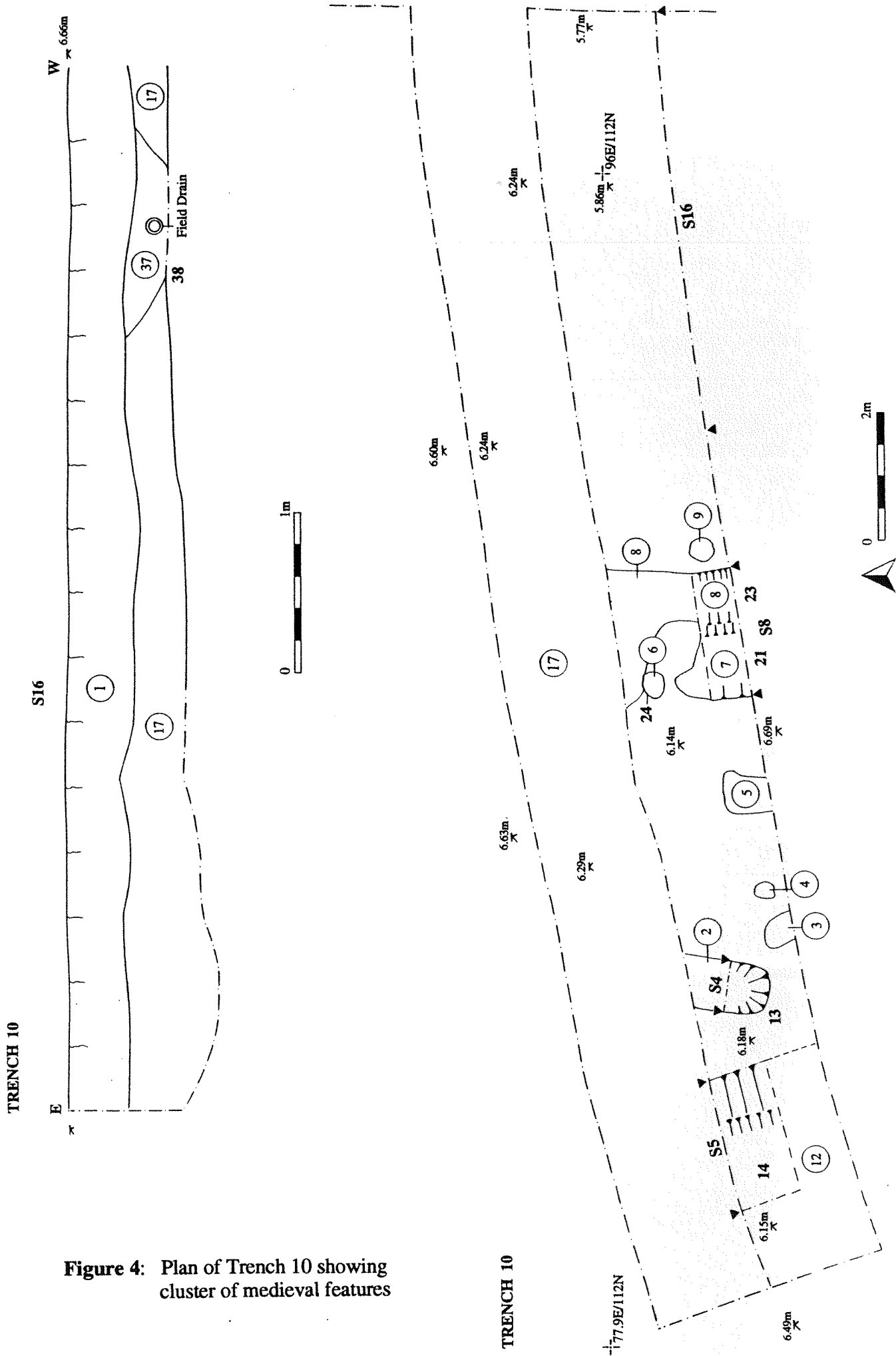
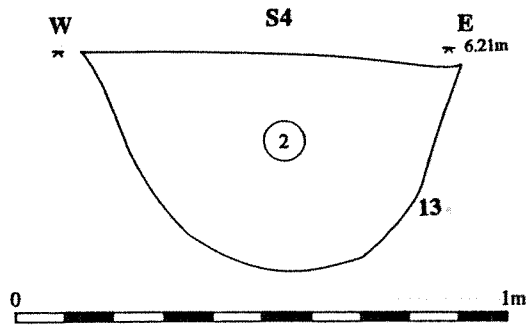
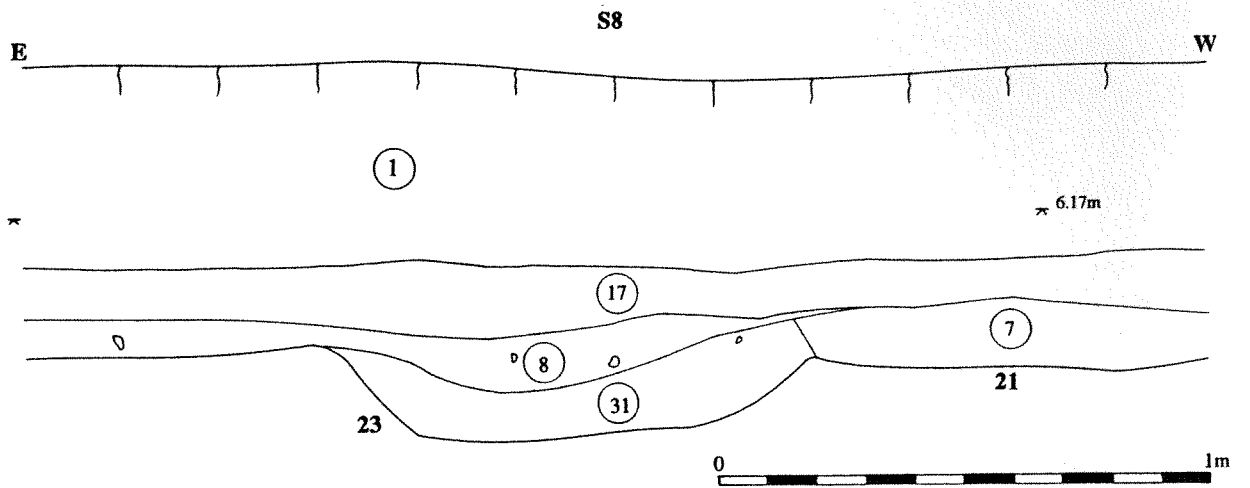


Figure 4: Plan of Trench 10 showing cluster of medieval features

TRENCH 10



TRENCH 10



TRENCH 10

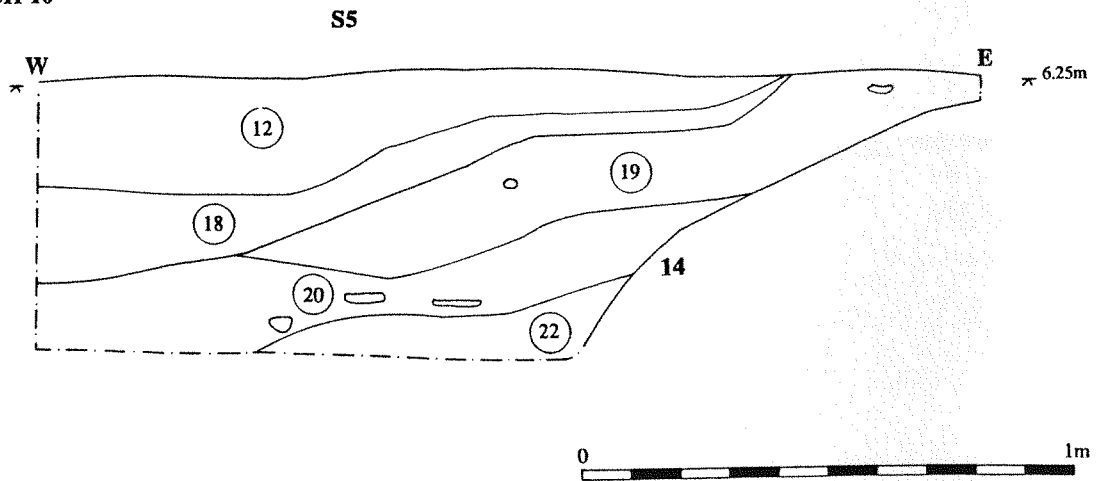


Figure 5: Sections through medieval gullies and ditches

6.16 Trench 13

6.16.1 This trench was opened to test for continuity of features into the area between trenches 10 and 12. A large pit or ditch was observed in plan, from whose upper fill (46) late 16th century glazed pottery was recovered. Two post holes were identified, a section through one producing a small sherd of 17th century pottery. At the east end of the trench the upper fill of a large feature was observed. It may be the continuation of ditch [32]/[34] encountered in trench 12 and here had been partly cut by a machine-dug geological test pit. These features were all cut into (49) an olive brown mottled silty clay of unknown depth. This contained spalls of fired clay and fragments of animal bone. It is highly likely that this corresponds to deposit (17) encountered elsewhere.

6.17 Trench 14

6.17.1 The trench was dug to test for the continuity of the feature cluster encountered in Trench 10. An olive brown silty clay (43) lay directly beneath recent ploughsoil, corresponding to (17) and (49). This was not fully bottomed but was demonstrated to be over 30 cm deep at the north end of the trench. It contained two sherds of 13th-14th century pottery.

6.17.2 At the southern end of the trench deposit (43) sealed two pit or gully like features one of which may have been a continuation of [13] in Trench 10. The upper fill of one of these deposits (44) contained a single sherd of 13th-14th century pottery.

7 INTERPRETATION

7.1 The two flint tools recovered from the ploughsoil (probably separated by a millennium or more in origin) do not indicate concentrated early prehistoric activity on the site, but are representative of the sort of background material expected on fen highlands.

7.2 The late Iron Age ditch is obviously an outlier of the settlement discovered by surface collection survey 100m to the south-east. The abraded nature of the pottery and animal bone may suggest that this feature is not near to the domestic core, or primary rubbish deposits of the settlement, but perhaps belongs to a bordering field or enclosure.

7.3 The large silt-filled hollow in the south-west corner of the site is of unconfirmed origin. It may well be a natural undulation in the surface of the boulder clay, or alternatively a deliberately excavated pond or quarry pit. The portion of the gently-sloping edge of this feature exposed in Trench 10 offered few clues as to whether it was a cut feature or not. Although its basal deposits could not be hand excavated (as was originally intended) animal bone was observed within them during machining, suggesting that whatever its origin, it was of some relevance to settlement in the vicinity.

7.4 The uppermost fill (17) of this hollow sealed undated features and pits and gullies containing pottery of the 14th and 15th centuries. Residual 13th-14th century pottery was recovered from the deposit and this, together with the shallow nature of many of the observed features, suggests that they have been truncated; perhaps by ploughing. Deposit (17) was only observed above the silt-filled hollow, elsewhere if it had existed at all, it had been entirely removed by later ploughing. Its interpretation as the remnant of a late medieval ploughsoil (surviving here only because it had accumulated in a hollow which has acted as a silt trap and thus protected it from later ploughing) is tentatively offered. Such an interpretation would need to be supported by micromorphological analysis of the soil.

7.5 If we accept (26),(43) and (49) as being essentially the same as (17) we may conclude that ploughing (on this part of the site at least) had ceased by the late 16th or 17th century when the ditch and post holes in Trench 13 were excavated through the old ploughsoil and the large hollow had become almost completely in-filled.

7.6 The earliest medieval features on site, those sealed by (17) and (43), are difficult to interpret precisely but certainly represent the truncated remains of 14th, 15th and perhaps even 13th century structures (possibly buildings). They are confined to the south-west corner of the site, abutting Bridge Lane, and consequently tie in well with Hall's suggestion for the location of one of the streets belonging to the medieval hamlet of Eastwood End (Hall 1992, 73).

7.7 The later features (those dating to the early post-medieval period) are full of large unabraded potsherds and other refuse (with a considerable amount of earlier residual material) which clearly indicate proximity to dwellings.

8 STATE OF PRESERVATION

8.1 The earliest medieval features may have been truncated by later medieval ploughing. They have been shielded from post-war ploughing by deposit (17) at the south-west corner of the site and although associated floors or ground surfaces are unlikely to have survived anywhere across the site, there is probably enough post-hole/gully evidence to facilitate the identification of buildings should they exist. The features are generally well-spaced and stratigraphically isolated (albeit below deposit (17)) which may hinder the stratigraphic identification of structural phases for the earliest medieval periods.

8.2 Early post-medieval features have been truncated by recent ploughing but still survive to a considerable depth.

8.3 Animal bone preservation for all periods was good. However, the wetness of the entire site experienced during excavation is of a seasonal nature. Even the base of the silted hollow did not support the constantly waterlogged, or otherwise anaerobic, conditions necessary for good organic preservation.

8.4 There is cartographic evidence to suggest that the portion of the site bordering the concrete track adjacent to the new bungalow was formerly the site of a 19th century pond. This area could not be examined during the evaluation because of standing water, but is assumed to be of very low archaeological potential.

9 POTENTIAL FOR RESEARCH

9.1 The picture which emerges of Romano-British settlement in the immediate area is one of Iron Age continuity rather than one of the Roman development of an unexploited landscape. Both Sites 19 and 20 (S.M.R. 10006a, 08984) have Iron Age origins, whilst at Stonea island itself the important Roman development is located close to an Iron Age centre. This conforms with the evidence for continuity in silt fen exploitation currently being examined in Lincolnshire.

9.2 Whilst at this site we are a little way from the centre of Site 19, we nevertheless have an opportunity to recover stratified and datable material belonging to that settlement and thus to provide a more reliable indication of date of origin than can be supplied by surface collection alone. Although there may be very few Iron Age features on the development site (and any excavations here will provide little more than a snap shot of Site 19) excavation will undoubtedly contribute to the Iron Age studies currently being carried out in the area.

9.3 Opportunities seldom arise to examine Fenland medieval villages. The constraints of topography usually ensure that later settlements are concentrated upon them, masking or obliterating the archaeological evidence. Here is a rare opportunity to examine part of a shifted or shrunken Fenland medieval hamlet. Furthermore it is a hamlet which belongs to a parish of considerable importance throughout the Middle Ages, and one for which documentary evidence can be linked with archaeological evidence.

9.4 The story told by remains encountered here can be compared with the documentary evidence for the status of the manorial estate, its expansion during the 13th century and its decline in the later 14th century. It should be possible, for example, to date the medieval field now occupied by the development site, to identify surrounding contemporary fields and thus, perhaps, to identify the results of documented 13th century assarting within the parish.

9.5 The recovery of medieval pottery from stratified deposits will help to better define Fenland pottery types, which are still poorly known. The presence of distinctive comparative material such as Sgraffito ware, Grimstone ware etc. will provide reference points for the interpretations made.

10 SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER ACTION

10.1 The proposed development as it stands will undoubtedly adversely affect an archaeological area of some significance at the south-west corner of the development site, namely, part of the medieval hamlet of Eastwood End and outlying remains from a nearby Iron Age site (figure 1).

10.2 There are two courses of action which could be followed to ensure that the development will not adversely affect the area's archaeological integrity:

i) preservation in situ - the development is modified to avoid the sensitive street frontage area (i.e. a strip bordering Bridge Lane) of the 'area of archaeological significance' as shown on figure 1;

ii) an archaeological excavation is made in order to sample record the area of 'archaeological significance' prior to its destruction.

10.3 The area of interest is not large and the nature of the remains do not pose any great difficulties for excavation. However, it should be noted that any archaeological excavations on this site should be carried out in dry conditions, or with facilities to adequately evacuate collected surface water.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank Finn pave Ltd. for their support of the archaeological evaluation at Bridge Lane.

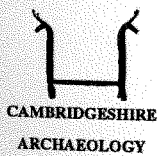
Thanks are also due to Jen Goode and Marlin Holst who worked stoically under the most difficult of conditions in the field and Erwin for some precision digger driving. Jen Goode also prepared most of the illustrations for the report and carried out other post-excavation tasks.

Mr David Hall of the Fenland Project kindly provided a spot analysis of the pottery assemblage.

Tim Malim provided comments on the text of this report and drew my attention to the untitled 17th century map of the area.

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Archaeological Field Unit
Fulbourn Community Centre
Haggis Gap
Fulbourn
Cambridge CB1 5HD
Tel (0223) 881614
Fax (0223) 880946



Cambridgeshire
County Council
Archaeology

The Archaeology Office
Rural Management
Department of Property
Stire Hall, Castle Hill
Cambridge CB3 0AP
Tel (0223) 317312
Fax (0223) 317341