

Archaeological Field Unit

Archaeological Evaluation at 26/28 Church Street,
Great Gransden

Malin Holst

1994

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Report No. A44

Commissioned By Connolly Homes Plc.

**Archaeological Evaluation at 26/28 Church Street
Great Gransden
(TL 234/557)**

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SUMMARY

In November 1994 the Archaeology Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council carried out an archaeological evaluation of two plots of land in Church Street, Great Gransden, (TL 234/557) prior to the construction of two houses and garages.

Three trenches were opened using a mechanical excavator. The only evidence of human activity on site was a rubble deposit, which appeared to be no more than one hundred years in age.

1 INTRODUCTION

Mr. Charlton from Connolly Homes Plc. approached the Archaeology Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council for an archaeological assessment of the site of 26/28 Church Street prior to buying the plot for development purposes for which permission was granted subject to an archaeological condition.

The site consists of part of an old orchard, which is now largely overgrown. A garage is situated on the western side of the eastern plot, though it appears to be abandoned.

2 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

The underlying geology consists of Boulder clay (British Geological Survey 1932). The site lies at 55m OD, at the brow of a hill. There is a bank on the north-eastern side of the plot and the land is generally sloping south-westwards.

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The site is located on the brow of a hill, just 300m north-east of the present church and the site of a medieval manor. Due to the site's proximity to this village focus, it was thought that some remains of medieval activity may be found at 26/28 Church Street.

Evidence for occupation in the parish of Great Gransden can be followed back to the Bronze Age. The SMR records a barbed and tanged flint arrow head from this period being found during the course of a small excavation in Great Gransden. The only record of Iron Age occupation of the area stems from the stray find of an Iron Age gold coin. There is, however, considerable evidence for Roman activity in the area, such as Roman coins, pottery, nails, shears, keys, a quern, building material and even a Roman inhumation burial at 'Bull's Bridge', Bullby Hill. Almost all Roman material consists of stray finds which were discovered at different locations in and around the village.

There are indications of Anglo-Saxon occupation in the valley near Gransden Brook, such as building materials and pottery. This evidence may suggest that Anglo-Saxon occupation existed close to the stream. Certainly the stream, and the Rippington manorial site, plus the adjacent site on which the church of St. Bartholomew's now stands, appear to represent the main focus of the early village. There may also have been a Moated Manor at nearby Rectory Farm. The later village appears to have spread northwards around an oval green.

4 METHODOLOGY

Following research of the SMR records of Great Gransden, it was decided that possible archaeological deposits should be examined and recorded by excavating three linear trenches with a mechanical excavator, using a 1.6m

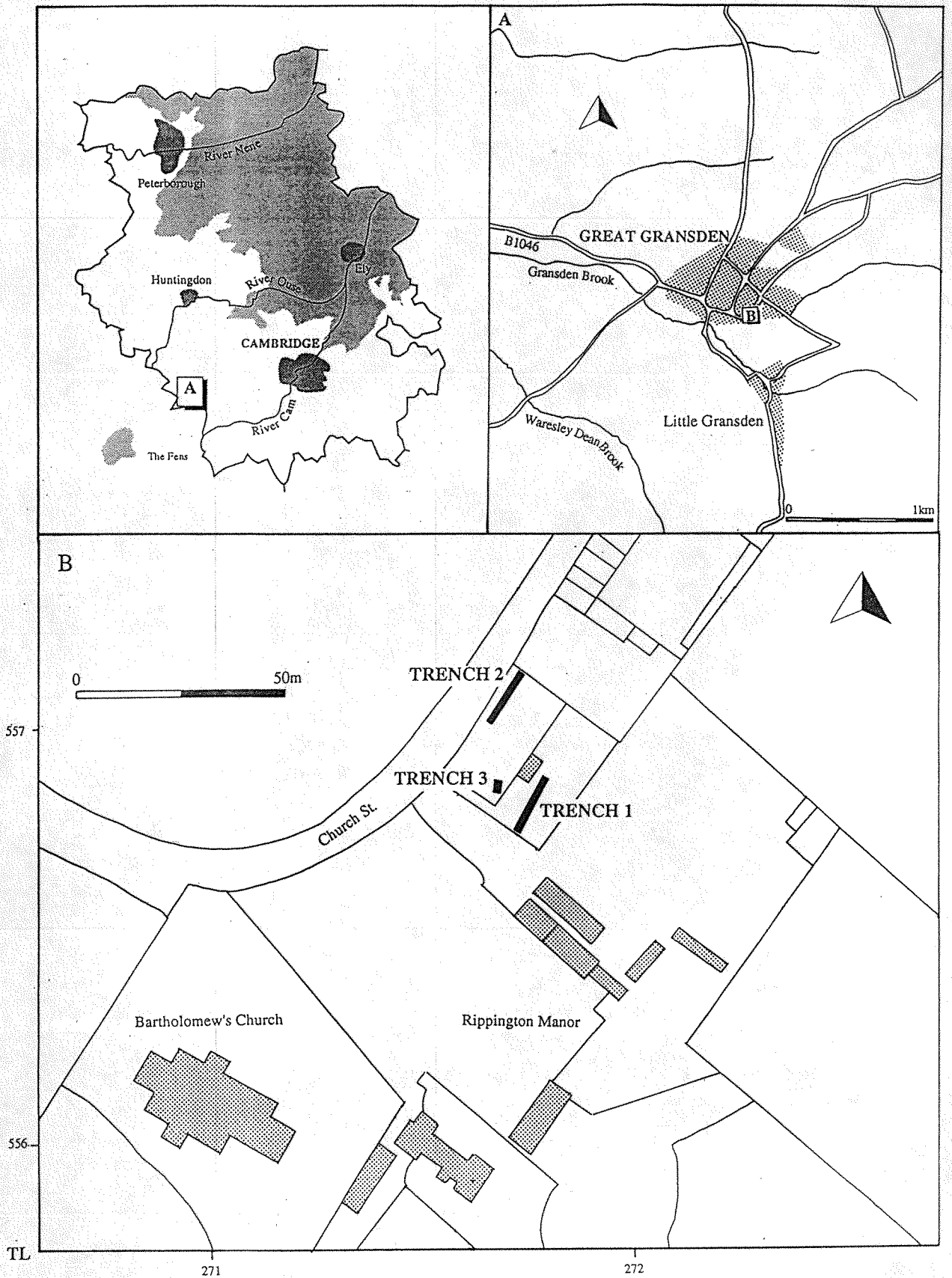


Figure 1 Location Plan

toothless ditching bucket. Two of the trenches were 14m long and the third one was 3m in length. They were positioned parallel to the road, apart from the smaller trench, which was excavated obliquely to the road in the southern corner of the western plot. The machine was monitored by an archaeologist in order to identify any archaeological features revealed. All three trenches were photographed and sample sections were drawn of Trench 1 and Trench 2. Due to the absence of archaeological features, the trenches were backfilled as soon as they had been recorded.

5 RESULTS

The topsoil was generally very thin across the site and it thus appeared to have been formed only very recently. It lay on top of a thicker rubble deposit, which was mainly concentrated in Trench 1 in the eastern plot. This deposit consisted of very mixed sands, gravel and clays, as well as red and yellow bricks, scraps of metal, and some concrete. This deposit overlay an older turf and topsoil, which was situated directly on top of the natural clay.

The topsoil was slightly thicker in Trench 2 and overlay a 0.30m thick layer of clayey sand, which appeared to be an earlier garden soil. Trench 2 cut across a bank on the northern side of the site, which proved to be natural in origin. Two linear cuts were found running parallel to each other in a south-east to north-westerly direction in the centre of Trench 2. They consisted of an older brick-lined field drain, which had later been replaced by a ceramic drain.

The profile in Trench 3 consisted of a 0.20m thick layer of topsoil, on top of the natural clay.

6 CONCLUSIONS

Although only around 300m from the present church, and even closer to the medieval manor, no evidence of any medieval or earlier activity was found. The only archaeological features consisted of two ceramic field drains, which are probably of late nineteenth century origin. During this period they were laid in large numbers and are frequently found on archaeological sites.

The large quantity of modern material found beneath the topsoil suggests that the area has either been used as an unofficial dumping ground in recent years, or dumping has deliberately taken place to raise the natural ground level.

The lack of archaeology in these trenches is surprising considering their location close to a supposed historic village core. It is possible, however, that this site formed part of the land holding around Rippington Manor, and thus, despite representing prime frontage onto Church Street, the plot was never released for building.

7 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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