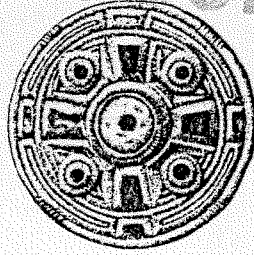


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Archaeological Field Unit

An Archaeological Evaluation
at
Sweetings Road, Godmanchester

N Oakey

1995

Cambridgeshire County Council

Report No. A 64

Commissioned By Galliford Sears Homes Ltd

**An Archaeological Evaluation
at
Sweetings Road, Godmanchester**

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1995

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Report No A 64

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SUMMARY

In January - February 1995 the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council carried out an archaeological evaluation at Sweetings Road, Godmanchester (TL 247/697). This was done on behalf of Galliford Sears Homes Ltd prior to a proposed housing development.

An earthworks survey was completed of the remains of a medieval or post-medieval ridge-and-furrow field system and indicated that the original layout had undergone rearrangement at some period. The earthworks had been truncated to the north by post-medieval gravel pitting.

Sample trenches confirmed the arrangements of furrows visible as earthworks and also supported the hypothesis of rearrangement. Between seven and nine ditches and other features proved to pre-date, and be truncated by, the ridge-and-furrow, but no dating evidence was found for them.

A small concentration of worked flint and badly-abraded, possibly prehistoric, pottery may indicate a focus of late Neolithic or Early Bronze Age activity on the site, but all the artefacts were recovered from disturbed, later contexts.

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AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION AT SWEETINGS ROAD, GODMANCHESTER

1. INTRODUCTION

In January and February 1995, the Archaeological Field Unit (AFU) of Cambridgeshire County Council carried out an archaeological evaluation at Sweetings Road, Godmanchester (TL 247/697, *Figure 1*) on behalf of Galliford Sears Homes Ltd. The scheme of work was based on a design brief produced by the County Archaeology Office (CAO) and the findings of a Desk-Top Survey commissioned by Twigden Homes from the Cambridge Archaeological Unit, University of Cambridge (Dickens 1993).

This evaluation complemented work undertaken during 1994 in an adjoining field to the north (Macaulay 1994) where the results indicated that extensive post-medieval gravel pitting had destroyed most of the earlier archaeological deposits.

The field under examination in 1995 contained earthworks indicative of medieval ridge-and-furrow cultivation which had been recorded in the Cambridgeshire Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) as SMR: 10122. Although medieval agriculture was likely to have caused some damage to earlier archaeological deposits, the survival of the earthworks indicated that the intensive disturbance caused by gravel pitting had not been as thorough in this field.

2. TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

The site covers an area of *c*2.5 ha and is roughly square in shape. The relief was irregular. In addition to the visible earthworks of ridge-and-furrow, the north-east corner of the site comprised a flat-bottomed depression *c*1m deep (11m AOD). The central area of the field was flat (12m AOD), rising steeply (by 3m) to the south. The slope continued to rise south beyond the limits of the area for investigation.

The geology of the area is based on the First and Second Terrace River gravels of the Great Ouse Valley with Oxford Clay to the south. The field was under pasture at the time of the evaluation.

3. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The history and development of the town of Godmanchester have been outlined by H J M Green (Green 1977) and more recently by Dr Gerald A Wait and S P Macaulay (Macaulay 1994). It is not proposed to rehearse this information here, but it should be noted that the nuclei of the Romano-British and Medieval settlements were more than 600m north of the evaluation site. The extra-mural cemeteries of the Romano-British settlement are known to have extended to within 200m of the site.

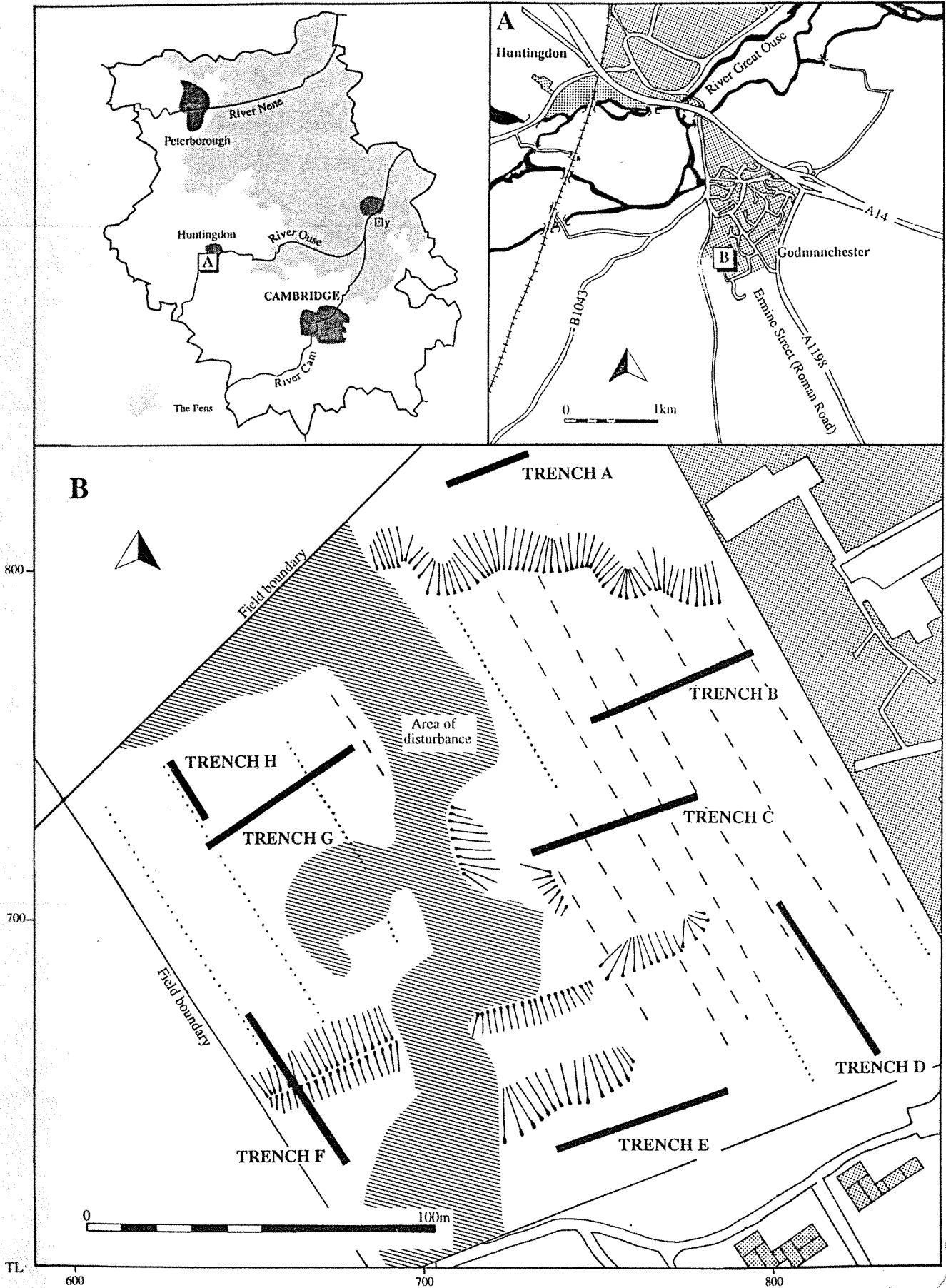


Figure 1 Sweetings Road, Godmanchester. Location plan

Ridge & furrow

Macaulay's excavations uncovered graves and archaeological features of Romano-British date c175m north of the site described in this report, but most of the intervening area had been riddled with post-medieval gravel pitting and any earlier archaeological deposits destroyed.

4. METHODOLOGY

The evaluation was designed to determine the location, extent, date, character, condition, significance and quality of any surviving archaeological remains liable to be threatened by the proposed development. This would involve the mapping and recording of an adequate representative sample of archaeological remains and, where appropriate, the collection of artefactual and environmental samples.

To this end, the project comprised two phases, an earthwork survey and a programme of trenching.

4.1 Earthwork Survey

A survey of the visible earthworks was carried out using a Zeiss Recelta 15 Total Station Theodolite and AIC Pro-Surveyor software to produce a contour plot and a plan of the earthworks (*Figure 1*).

4.2 Trenching

A series of eight trenches (A - H) totalling 345m was located to investigate the earthwork features and other topographical anomalies. The north-western corner of the field was covered with a builder's compound and was not available for investigation. A tarmaced road had been laid roughly north to south across the field and was flanked by spoil-heaps and stores of building materials, rendering it also unavailable for archaeological evaluation.

Trenching was undertaken by a Komatsu 120 tracked excavator using a toothless, 1.80m wide ditching bucket. Topsoil and plough-sorted subsoil were removed down to the level of undisturbed naturally-laid deposits, where archaeological features were exposed. The trenches were then cleaned and selective excavation of cut features took place to establish their form and obtain dating evidence. These were planned and recorded according to the Archaeology Field Unit's standard single context recording system. This followed the same methodology used on previous AFU excavations in Godmanchester and allows for effective cross-referencing and comparative analysis.

All site records and artefacts are held currently at the AFU headquarters at Fulbourn and stored under the site code GOD SW 95.

5. RESULTS

5.1 Earthwork Survey by Ben Robinson

The earthwork survey was limited by areas of modern disturbance and clutter (notably a tarmac access road which bisected the site) but nevertheless revealed the remnants of a ridge and furrow system, characteristic of medieval and post-medieval open field cultivation (*Figure 1*). Ridges were aligned with the natural slope of the local area (NNE to SSW) and thus conformed with the alignment of the more pronounced ridge and furrow preserved in a small field off London Street to the east, and less well preserved ridge and furrow in the field immediately to the west.

At the northern end of the field the ridge and furrow was truncated by a scarp (0.60 - 1.00m deep). This appeared to define the edge of the quarried area which was located by a previous evaluation (Macaulay 1994). At the southern edge of the subject field the natural slope was at its most pronounced. A ridge was apparent at the foot of this slope. It was raised up only a few centimetres on its up-slope side but fell away 0.40 - 0.60m down-slope and was also apparent in the field to the west (not surveyed). Its relationship with a ridge near the west boundary of the field suggests that it formed a headland. At its east end, however, the ridge was overlain by ridge and furrow. A subtle contour variation suggests that it originally extended to the east boundary of the field or beyond.

The remnants of two broad ridges (10m from centre of ridge to centre of furrow) survived to a height of 30cm (from top of ridge to bottom of furrow) at their most pronounced in the west portion of the field. Two further broad ridges (9m wide, 25 - 30cm high) were observed at the eastern margin of the field, but were separated from the former by very slight, narrower gauge ridge and furrow (5 - 6m wide, 10 - 20cm high).

The variation in width of the ridge and furrow, and the establishment of a narrower gauge variety over the postulated headland, indicates a change in configuration of the original field system. Narrow ridge and furrow such as this may reflect the impact of post-medieval agrarian developments in the area. Further documentary research may establish the history of tenure of the furlongs in this area, and perhaps reveal the incentives behind their re-configuration.

5.2 Trenching

All trenches revealed a paucity of identifiable archaeological features. Very few artefacts were recovered from topsoil stripping during machine excavation, casual examination of spoil-heaps, or a more thorough search of the spoil from Trench C after the heap had been allowed to weather for eleven days.

Modern ceramic field drains were observed (and accidentally broken) in Trenches C, D and E and penetration into natural sands or gravels by plough furrows was seen in Trenches B, C, D and G. In each case these corresponded with furrows visible as earthworks.

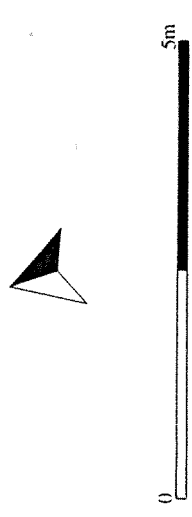
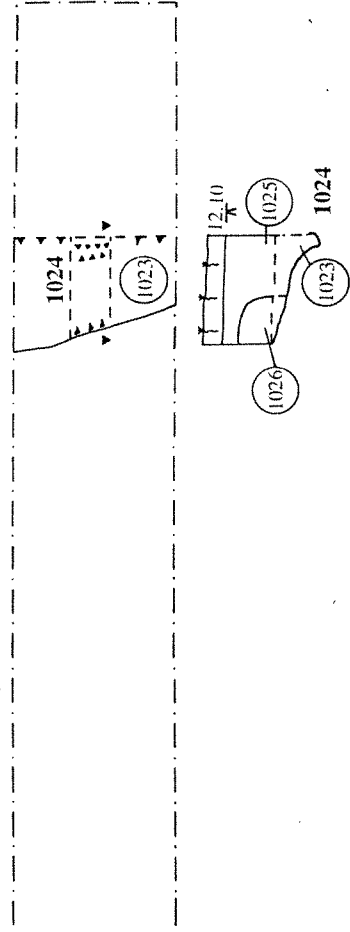
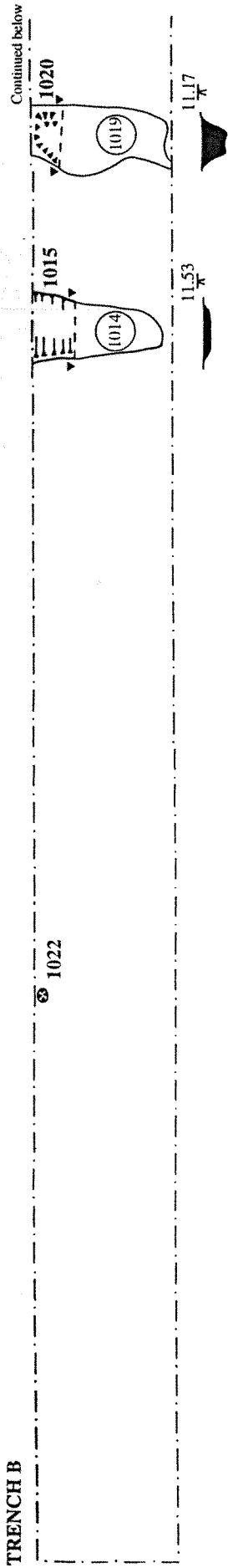


Figure 2 Trench B

The topsoil, a dark brown silty clay, varied in depth from 0.15 - 0.30m and underlying it over most of the site was a dark greyish-brown, slightly silty, sandy clay which represents a plough-sorted subsoil. This material was as much as 0.89m thick at the west end of Trench G and this location also represents the deepest accumulation of cultivated soil (1.20m) over naturally-laid material. The level and nature of the natural material varied across the site and will be separately described for each trench.

Trench A (*Figure 1*) was 25m long and located to investigate the flat-bottomed depression visible as an earthwork in the north-west corner of the site. A depth of 0.25 - 0.37m of topsoil was removed and directly overlaid brownish-yellow gravel which stretched for the whole length of the trench. It is probable that the depression represents an area quarried for gravel.

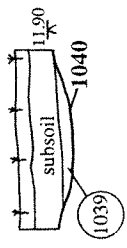
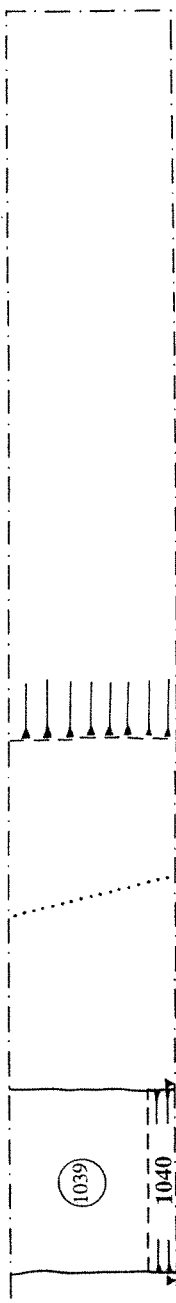
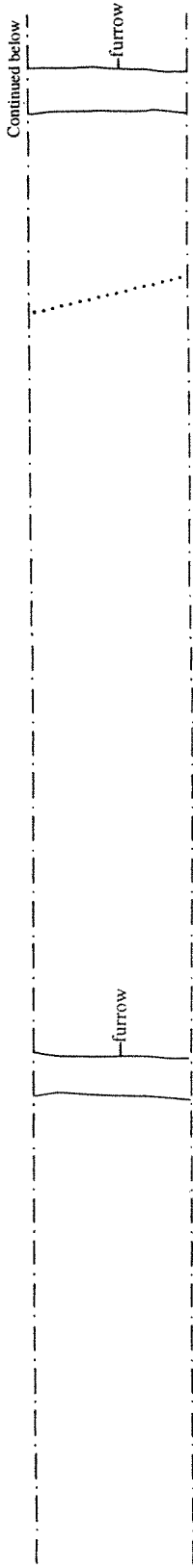
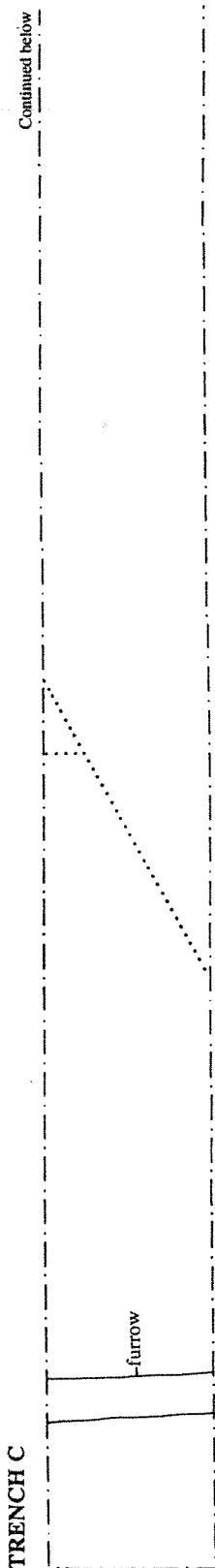
Trench B (*Figure 2*) extended 50m east/west across four ridges of the ridge-and-furrow system. Natural gravel and dark yellowish-brown sand were sealed below 0.67 - 0.88m depth of topsoil and subsoil (1026). In isolation towards the west end of the trench was flat-based, steep-sided circular post- or stake-hole **1022**. It was 0.15m in diameter and the sandy clay fill (1021) yielded no datable artefacts but contained a concentration of charcoal flecks, which may represent the remains of a burnt post. Steep-sided linear ditch **1020**, 0.62m wide and 0.33m deep, ran north/south across the trench, but the fill (1019) again yielded no finds.

Fill 1014 contained three flakes of struck flint and one flint tool which had been backed and retouched (late Neolithic or Early Bronze Age in date). It also contained five very abraded sherds of pottery which may be of the same date, but the deposit and cut **1015** were very shallow and aligned on one of the furrows of the earthwork system. Horseshoe-shaped cut **1017** containing fill 1016 (two late Neolithic or Early Bronze Age flakes of struck flint) was on the line of the next furrow eastwards and both **1015** and **1017** are interpreted as the base of plough furrows.

The most recent feature in the trench was ditch **1024** which was uncovered at the eastern extremity of Trench B and could be only partially examined. The cut contained fill 1023/1025 and was cut through the subsoil. It is interpreted as a backfilled ditch along the east side of the field and may date from the enclosure of the medieval open-field system at some time in the post-medieval period. A flint scraper of late Neolithic or Early Bronze Age date was recovered from the south-facing section of the trench close to, or in, the fill of ditch **1024** and three sherds of pottery (possibly prehistoric) were recovered from fill 1023.

Trench C (*Figure 3*) was positioned to the south and west of Trench B, perpendicular to the ridge-and-furrow. It was 50m long and dark yellowish-brown natural sandy clay occurred below up to 0.69m depth of topsoil and subsoil. The only features visible were three field drains and four north/south linear cuts. The latter were interpreted as the base of plough furrows and this was confirmed by sample excavation of the most westerly example, **1040**, which proved to be only 0.15m deep and contained no artefacts.

Trench D (*Figure 4*) was aligned north/south and positioned along one of the ridges of the earthworks where it ran down the slope from the south end of the site. This resulted in a combined depth of topsoil and subsoil which varied from 0.28 - 0.79m. The exposed natural varied in that for twelve metres at the southern end of the trench (ie encompassing the slope) it comprised a blue-grey clay, while over the remainder of the trench it was formed of dark



Key
..... field drain



Figure 3 Trench C

yellowish-brown sandy clay. The interface of the two types of natural coincided with the break of slope and was a confused area (1036) with the different naturals interleaving both with each other and with a medium brown sandy silty clay which was very similar in texture and colour to the subsoil (1028). The skull of an animal, possibly a fox, was recovered and five pieces of tile (four post-medieval and one possibly Romano-British) were found while cleaning over this area (1027). It is probable that the stratigraphy of this area has been confused by colluvium washed down the slope.

At the north end of Trench D a pit or the butt end of an east/west ditch, **1038**, was uncovered. The fill, an olive brown clay (1037), contained no artefacts. Further south, close to the break of slope, two linear east/west ditches, **1029** and **1035**, crossed the trench and the butt end of a third, **1030**, extruded from the west-facing section. Cut **1035** had been severely truncated by a later feature and its fill (1034) was barren, but both **1029** and **1030** were filled with subsoil 1028. It also filled shallow north/south cut **1031** which was exposed for a distance of 15.60m running alongside the eastern edge of Trench D. This was cut by a modern field drain (not on plan) and may be a furrow. Although running on the same alignment as the ridge-and-furrow earthworks it did not align with any of the extant furrows and supports the theory that the cultivation system is made up of several phases. The relationship of any of these phases to the series of east/west ditches revealed in Trench D is unclear, but the concentration of cuts **1029**, **1030** and **1035** at the break of slope suggests that they may have been designed to aid drainage along a natural topographical boundary.

Ditch **1033** also ran east/west in this concentration of ditches. It was earlier than the field drain, but had almost obliterated backfilled ditch **1035**. The fill (1032) was very similar to subsoil 1028, and it only contained one sherd of modern porcelain.

Trench E (*Figure 1*) was on the highest point of the field under investigation, but the ground continued to rise south of the site. This meant that the trench was permanently underwater as rainwater ran off the higher ground, into the four field drains that crossed Trench E, and out through the broken ceramic pipes. The depth of topsoil and subsoil varied from 0.71 - 0.82m and came down on to a clay natural which retained the water. A number of possible north/south linears were noted crossing the trench during machining, but it proved impossible to plan or excavate these features.

At the western end of the site Trench F was positioned to cross a possible east/west ridge and run down the slope in the south-west corner of the field. However, during machining it became apparent that there was a spring line c15 - 18m from the south end of the trench. Much of the surrounding area was waterlogged and Trench F quickly filled with water, but not before observation of the machine-cleaned natural had failed to reveal any potential archaeological features.

As already mentioned, Trench G (*Figure 5*) contained the greatest depth of topsoil and subsoil (1.20m), but the dark yellowish-brown silty sandy clay natural was only cut by three features. One proved to be the shallow remains of a plough furrow, but cuts **1009** and **1011** ran parallel in a north-west/south-east direction. The fills (1008 and 1010) were very similar and neither produced any artefacts, but **1011** survived to a much greater depth than its neighbour.

It is possible that ditch **1013** in Trench H (*Figure 5*) may be a continuation of **1009** or **1011** as it was on a similar alignment, had a similar fill (1012) and

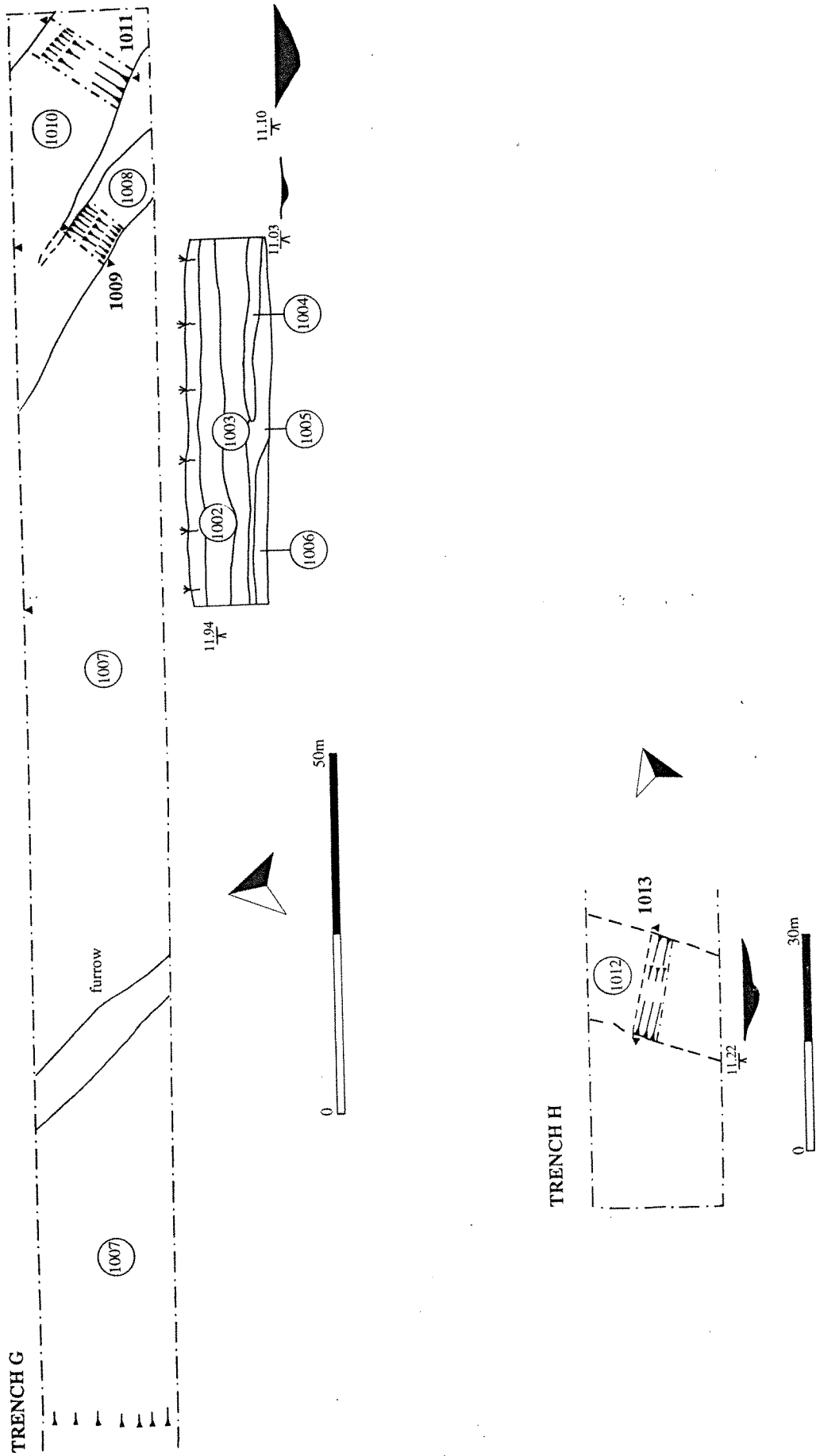


Figure 5 Trenches G and H

profile, and was equally barren. The alignment and stratigraphic position of the ditches in Trenches G and H indicate that they pre-date the medieval ridge-and-furrow.

6. DISCUSSION

It is apparent that the extant earthworks of ridge-and-furrow cultivation, partially truncated by post-medieval gravel pitting, represent the major evidence of previous activities on the site. Both of these activities have had a detrimental effect on earlier remains and no buried soil horizons survived within the sampled areas. Often ridge-and-furrow earthworks preserve earlier features, but in this case the intensity and depth of ploughing have disturbed most evidence of earlier activity.

Surviving archaeology features were represented by negative features cut into the natural and many of those revealed conformed with the alignments of plough furrows represented by the earthworks. Some variation, notably in Trench D, indicated that some rearrangement had taken place in the field system, a theory postulated on the basis of the upstanding earthworks. The relationship between the east/west ditches in Trench D and the agricultural regime remains unclear.

A number of cut features can be diagnosed as pre-dating the ridge-and-furrow on the basis of form, anomalous alignment and stratigraphic relationships. These include the post- or stake-hole in Trench B and the ditches in Trenches G and H, but the fills of these features produced no dating evidence. The paucity of artefacts was noticeable all across the evaluated area and even the sampled plough furrows produced no artefactual evidence diagnostic of a medieval or post-medieval field system.

A number of worked flint flakes and tools were recovered, but they all appeared to be redeposited. They were compatible with a date in the late Neolithic or Early Bronze Age and a number of badly abraded sherds of possibly Bronze Age date (putative identification only) were recovered from the same area or contexts. It may be significant that, of the ten items of worked flint, two were recovered from Trench G and one from a builder's spoilheap, but seven came from Trench B. Also, all the sherds of possible prehistoric pottery came from the same trench. However, all the material seemed to be redeposited and no archaeological features could be isolated as definitely deriving from the prehistoric period. This late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age material may best be characterised as localised background material with little evidence of a well-preserved focus of prehistoric activity or settlement.

7. CONCLUSIONS

This evaluation exercise has surveyed the earthworks at Sweetings Road, Godmanchester and has established that evidence of earlier archaeological activity on this site is both sparse and severely truncated by the medieval and later agricultural and extractive activities.

The trenching programme has supported the hypothesis formulated as a result of the earthwork survey, namely that the open field system had undergone rearrangement on at least one occasion.

Evidence of earlier activity included a number of isolated, truncated, deeply-buried ditches, but no intelligible ditch system could be reconstructed.

Artefactual evidence for late Neolithic or Early Bronze Age activity was concentrated in the vicinity of Trench B, but all the artefacts had been redeposited in later deposits and no features of prehistoric date could be positively identified.

The archaeological features and artefacts, therefore, have minimal research potential and it is felt that future development on the site is unlikely to cause damage to significant archaeological deposits. However, it may be considered necessary to carry out an archaeological watching brief during ground disturbance in the vicinity of the concentration of prehistoric artefacts identified in Trench B. Such an operation may produce evidence of the activity which produced these objects.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author wishes to thank Galliford Sears Homes Ltd for commissioning and funding this project and for arranging temporary office accommodation. Further accommodation was hired from Landsman (Co-Ownership) Ltd of Buckden and the trenches were opened and backfilled by machinery and drivers from Huntingdon Plant Hire. Tony Hurley, Development Control Officer of the County Archaeological Office, composed the brief for archaeological evaluation.

At the Archaeology Field Unit, Ben Robinson was the Project Manager and he, together with Stephanie Leith and Paul Spoerry, carried out the earthwork survey. Niall Oakey was the Project Officer and carried out the trenching phase with excavators Malin Holst, Steve Membery and Judith Roberts. Illustrations for this report were produced by Melodie Paice.

The author is grateful for advice on the artefacts to colleagues Phil Copleston, Steve Kemp and Tim Malim.

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Appendix A - Context List GODSW 95

Trench B

<u>Cntxt</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Nature</u>	<u>Finds</u>	<u>Above</u>	<u>Below</u>
1014	Fill of med furrow [1015]	Dark yellowish brown (10YR 4/6) sandy clay	?Prehist pot Worked flint?	1015	1026
1015	Med furrow	Shallow, linear cut	-	Natural	1014
1016	Fill of med plough disturbance	Brown (10YR 4/3) silty sandy clay	Worked flint	1017	1026
1017	Med plough disturbance	Horseshoe-shaped cut	-	Natural	1016
1018	Cleaning layer	Mixed topsoil and subsoil	Flint scraper	-	-
1019	Fill of linear cut [1020]	Dark yellowish brown (10YR 3/4) sandy clay	None	1020	1026
1020	Linear cut	Steep-sided irregular linear cut	-	Natural	1019
1021	Fill of post- or stake-hole [1022]	Brown (10YR 4/3) sandy clay	None	1022	1026
1023	Fill of post-med ditch [1024]	Dark brown (10YR 3/3) silty sandy clay	?Prehist pot	1024	T'psoil
1024	Post-med ditch	Sloping sides, flat-bottomed, linear cut	-	1026	1023, 1025
1025	Fill of post-med ditch [1024]	Dark olive brown (2.5YR 3/3) silty, sandy clay	None	1024	T'psoil
1026	Plough-sorted subsoil	Dark yellowish-brown (10YR 4/4) sandy clay	None	1014, 1016, 1019, 1021	1024

Trench C

<u>Cntxt</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Nature</u>	<u>Finds</u>	<u>Above</u>	<u>Below</u>
1039	Fill of med furrow [1040]	Brown (10YR 4/3) sandy clay	None	1040	1041
1040	Med furrow	Shallow linear cut	-	Natural	1039
1041	Spoil heap	Mixed topsoil and subsoil	RB pot	1039	n/a

Trench D

<u>Cntxt</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Nature</u>	<u>Finds</u>	<u>Above</u>	<u>Below</u>
1027	Cleaning layer	Mixed	Post-med + RB pot Shale/coal	1036	n/a
1028	Subsoil and fill of linear ditches [1029], [1030], [1031], [1037]	Dark greyish brown (10YR 4/2), slightly silty and sandy clay	Post-med tile	1029, 1030, 1031, 1037	n/a



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