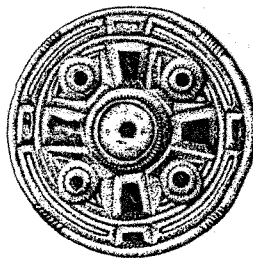


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Archaeological Field Unit

Archaeological Watching Brief at Land off West Street,
Great Gransden, Cambridgeshire

T P Denham

1996

Cambridgeshire County Council

Report No. A97

Commissioned By Mr. I. Holdsworth and Mr. R. Tring

**Archaeological Watching Brief at Land off West Street, Great Gransden,
Cambridgeshire (TL 267 559)**

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1996

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Archaeological Watching Brief at Land off West Street, Great Gransden, Cambridgeshire (TL 267 559)

Summary

A utility trench and foundation trenches for two houses and a garage on land off West Street, Great Gransden were inspected during June, 1996. Two features were identified: a shallow pit and a possible ditch. No artefacts were present and consequently the features have not been dated.

1 INTRODUCTION

The Archaeological Field Unit, Cambridgeshire County Council conducted an archaeological watching brief during the excavation of a utility trench and foundations for two houses and a garage. The property was located west off West Street and north of Meadow Road in the western part of Great Gransden (TL 267 559). The work was contracted by Mr. Ian Holdsworth and Mr. Richard Tring, the land developers. The archaeological investigations were conducted in accordance with a design brief drafted by Ms. Louise Austin, Archaeology Section, Cambridgeshire County Council.

2 ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

The project site, constituting approximately 0.6 hectares, was located on Ladies Hill on land which slopes to the south and west. The site consisted of a utility trench extending from West Street into a field, and the foundations for two houses and a garage within the field (*Figure 1*). The ground surface was relatively level and grass-covered. The underlying geology is boulder clay.

Mr. Holdsworth indicated that the land had been previously used for market gardening for several decades.

3 BACKGROUND

was apparent that there was potential to encounter finds from a number of periods.

A Bronze Age barbed and tanged flint arrowhead with pottery and charcoal were found during the course of a small excavation in Great Gransden (SMR 2400) and a stray, single Iron Age gold coin has been found (SMR 2407). Given the paucity of prehistoric finds, however, it was unlikely that archaeological remains from these periods would be encountered during the current investigation.

In the western portion of the village, a Roman presence has been inferred from finds of pottery and coins (SMR 2399A and 2408). Considerable evidence exists for Roman activity in the surrounding area including: shears, nail, coin, key and pottery found at Hardwick in the north of the parish (SMR 2410); and a Roman inhumation burial 1.5km further west along Gransden Brook (SMR 2392).

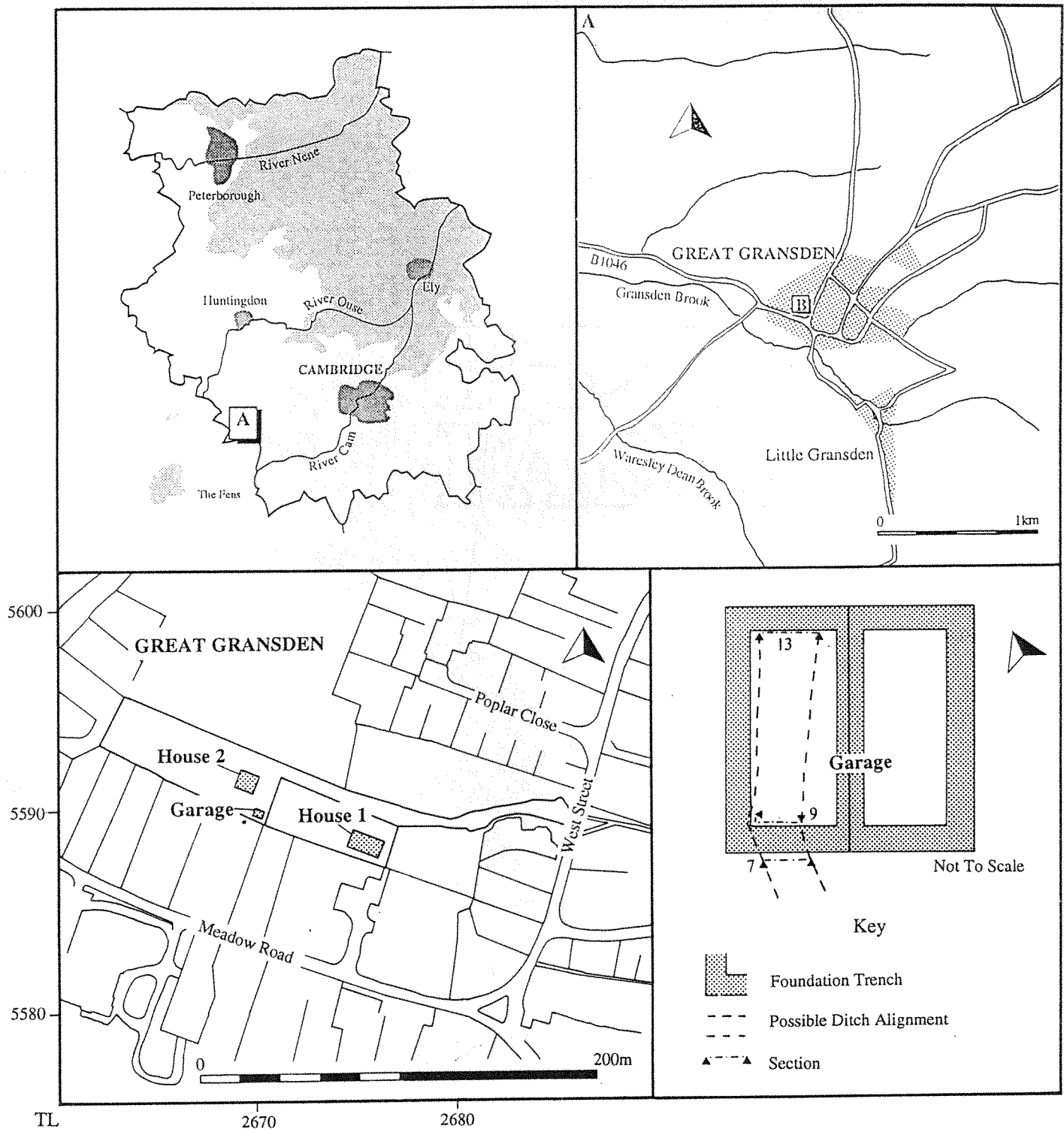


Figure 1 - Location Map

No finds attributable to the Anglo-Saxon period have been documented within the present day settlement although the village name is descended from the eleventh century. Based on the village morphology, however, Holst has suggested that the original core of the Anglo-Saxon settlement was located in the vicinity of St. Bartholomew's Church (SMR 10345), Rippington manorial site (SMR 2319) and the moated site on Rectory Farm (SMR 1141). She argues that the original Saxon settlement was probably located near Gransden Brook and cites occupation evidence from elsewhere in the valley to support her argument (Holst 1994:1). The medieval settlement subsequently developed northwards around an oval green. Given this model of settlement growth it was unlikely that Anglo-Saxon remains would be present on the project site.

There are a number of historical records pertaining to Great Gransden from the twelfth century onwards (Page *et al.* 1932: 296-302). A number of medieval and post medieval sites still exist as earthworks or standing buildings within the village, including three moated sites (SMR 938, 1141, 2319). Two pottery scatters have been found within the village (SMR 2401 and 2409), and one of these, a scatter of medieval and post-medieval pottery, including some Lyveden Ware, was found on West Street to the north of the project site (SMR 2401). There are also a number of post-medieval sites including houses, barns and a windmill (SMR 2315, 2319, 2399B). Cropmarks representing medieval and post medieval ridge and furrow cultivation have been documented on the slopes around the village.

Of particular significance for the present study is a seventeenth century house with gabled cross-wings lying adjacent to the utility trench line (RCHME 1926: 122). On the 1835 Ordnance Survey of the area, no structures or boundaries were marked within the project field.

Based on the distribution of archaeological finds to date, and the proposed model for the settlement's development, it was unlikely that any sites predating the medieval period would be encountered during the watching brief. It was possible that medieval and/or post-medieval settlement remains would be present, particularly in the vicinity of the seventeenth century house, and property boundaries and agricultural remains from those periods could be located in the field.

4 METHODOLOGY

Following excavation of the utility trench and foundations, all exposed surfaces were inspected by an archaeologist prior to backfilling. The faces of the exposed trenches were cleaned using a trowel, as necessary.

The location, description and stratigraphic relationship of each feature were recorded in accordance with the Archaeological Field Unit's single context recording system. Features were excavated in the event that suitable *in situ* deposits were present and trench conditions allowed for safe excavation.

5 RESULTS

Utility Trench

During the excavation of the utility trench no archaeological features or deposits were encountered. The utility trench section from West Street to the field boundary contained stratigraphy which had been heavily disturbed by the installation of previous electrical and sewer lines. This disturbance had

destroyed any remains which may have been associated with the seventeenth century house to the north. The section within the field contained approximately 0.2m of topsoil directly overlying the clay. This general stratigraphic pattern was present across the site except for slight variations in topsoil thickness. No clear pattern to this variability could be discerned.

House Foundations

The two house foundations were largely devoid of archaeological features except for the presence of a depression in Mr. Dring's house foundation (House 2). This feature (Cut 3) was asymmetric and shallow with gently sloping sides. It measured 0.7m wide and 0.2m deep, its deepest point being slightly to the northwest of centre. The depression cut into the underlying clay (4). It was located underneath the topsoil (1) which was 0.38m thick over the feature. The fill appeared to have the same general composition as the topsoil except that it had a massive as opposed to a subangular blocky structure (Fill 2). No similar features were visible in adjacent or opposing trench faces. The feature has been interpreted to be a shallow pit of unknown age or function, although it could possibly be a natural depression.

Garage Foundation

The excavation of the garage foundation revealed an alignment of cuts which were visible in four trench walls. The foundation trench depth, over 3m along the south-western side, hindered the excavation and recording of the features. The features exposed are described below.

Cut 7 was exposed in the north-east facing wall of a trench section. It was approximately 1.26m wide at the top and 0.46m deep, forming a gently concave depression. The depression cut into the underlying clay (4). Feature 7 was partially filled with topsoil (Fill 5) which overlay a more homogeneous, massively structured clay matrix which had some charcoal flecking (Fill 6).

Cut 9 was exposed in the south-west and north-west facing walls on the corner between two trenches. In the south-western face, the depression was 1.15m wide at the top and 0.41m deep at its maximum depth (0.5m in from the corner). In the northwest facing wall the feature was 0.22m deep at the corner and rose up to the topsoil 0.32m in from the corner. The unstable nature of the trench face and extensive smearing during trench excavation made the delimitation of this feature problematic. The feature contained only a single fill (Fill 10) which exhibited the same properties as the topsoil and was notable by the dense concentration of roots within.

Cut 13 was visible in the north-east facing wall of the foundation trench. It was visible as a relatively flat based depression which was 1.34m wide at the top and approximately 0.3m wide at the base. It attained a maximum depth of 0.38m. The base of the depression had a slight concentration of flint and chalk pebbles and cobbles. The feature fill (Fill 12) consisted of a dark brown clay which was less blocky in structure than the overlying topsoil (11).

The alignment of Cuts 7, 9 and 13 and the nature of their fills suggest that they may represent a former ditch. Fills 6 and 12 were similar, whereas Fill 10 resembled the topsoil. The variation within Fill 10 may be attributable to root disturbance which has removed any trace of a former underlying fill. This possible ditch either terminated or had been ploughed out further north-east since it was not present in the trench face opposing Cut 13. The absence of finds from within the feature fills (excavated back from the trench faces) and the non-correspondence of the alignment to a known documented property boundary preclude the dating of the feature.

6 CONCLUSION

The archaeological excavations which accompanied the excavation of a utility trench and foundation trenches on a property off West Street, Great Gransden encountered two features which have been tentatively identified as a shallow pit and a possible ditch. The features cannot be assigned to discrete historical periods due to the absence of any artefacts or supporting information.

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