

Archaeological Field Unit

**Undated Post-Roman Boundaries at 507-509 Coldham's Lane,  
Cambridge: An Archaeological Evaluation**

S Kenney

2000

**Cambridgeshire County Council**

Report No. A174

*Commissioned by Barber Casanovas Ruffles on behalf of Semitool Europe Ltd*

# **Undated Post-Roman Boundaries at 507-509 Coldham's Lane, Cambridge: An Archaeological Evaluation**

Scott Kenney

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Editor: Mark Hinman  
Illustrator: Scott Kenney

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Cambridgeshire County Council  
Fulbourn Community Centre  
Haggis Gap, Fulbourn  
Cambridgeshire CB1 5HD  
Tel (01223) 881614  
Fax (01223) 880946

Arch.Field.Unit@libraries.camcnty.gov.uk  
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## **SUMMARY**

*Between the 14th and 15th of November 2000, the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council conducted an archaeological evaluation on land at 507-509 Coldham's Lane, Cambridge, Cambridgeshire (TL4860/5750). The work was commissioned by Barber Casanovas Ruffles on behalf of Semitool Europe Ltd.*

*Four trenches with a total length of 160m were opened, constituting a 5% sample of the development area. Archaeological features were found in the two trenches nearest to Coldham's Lane, and these consisted of ditches, gullies and a pit. The only dating evidence recovered was a handful of heavily abraded Roman pottery sherds which came from the pit in Trench 1. A single sherd of medieval pot was recovered from the upper fill of the same pit, a possible sealing deposit.*

## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

<b>1. INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2. GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>3. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>4. METHODOLOGY</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>5. RESULTS</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>6. DISCUSSION</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>7. RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Maps consulted</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Appendix A Context list</b>	<b>9</b>

## **LIST OF FIGURES**

<b>Figure 1</b> Site location	<b>2</b>
<b>Figure 2</b> Trench plans and sections	<b>5</b>

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TL 4860/5750**

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

Between the 14th and 15th November 2000, the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council (AFU) carried out an archaeological evaluation on land at 507-509 Coldham's Lane, Cambridge (TL 4860/5750). The work was carried out at the request of Semitool Europe Ltd and was in response to a brief set by the County Archaeology Office (CAO); it was supervised on-site by the author.

The site lies between Coldham's Lane to the south, Rosemary Lane to the west and Church End to the north. It is irregular and approximately 0.58ha in area. The buildings that had been standing on the site were demolished and the rubble removed before the evaluation took place, with one exception, which was levelled but the foundations left in situ.

The presence of archaeological remains was considered likely by the CAO on the basis of information contained in the County Sites and Monuments Record (SMR). It records Roman finds and medieval ridge and furrow.

Four trenches with a total length of 160m were opened by a JCB with a toothless ditching bucket and subsequently hand cleaned where appropriate, photographed, and base planned by hand.

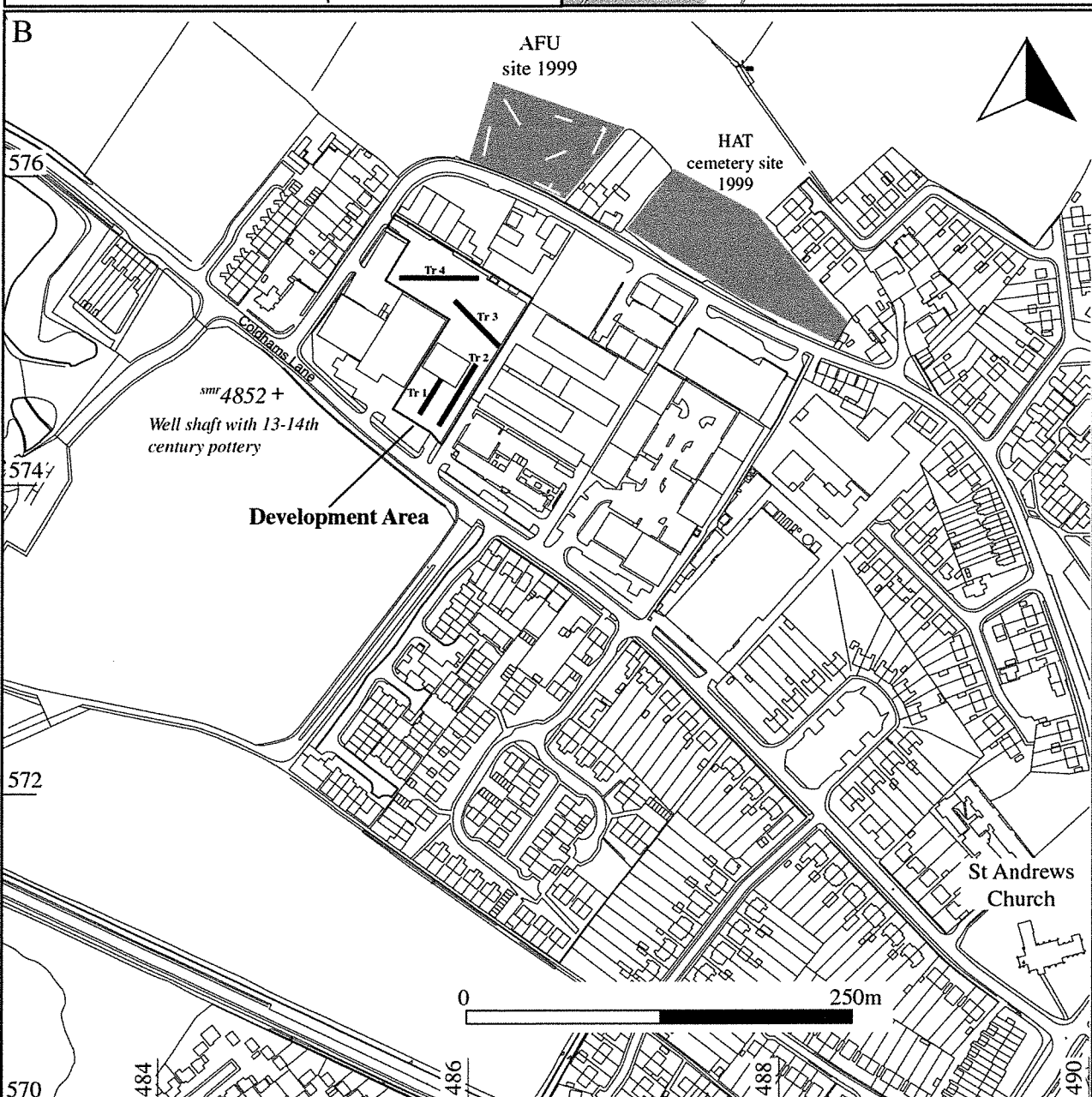
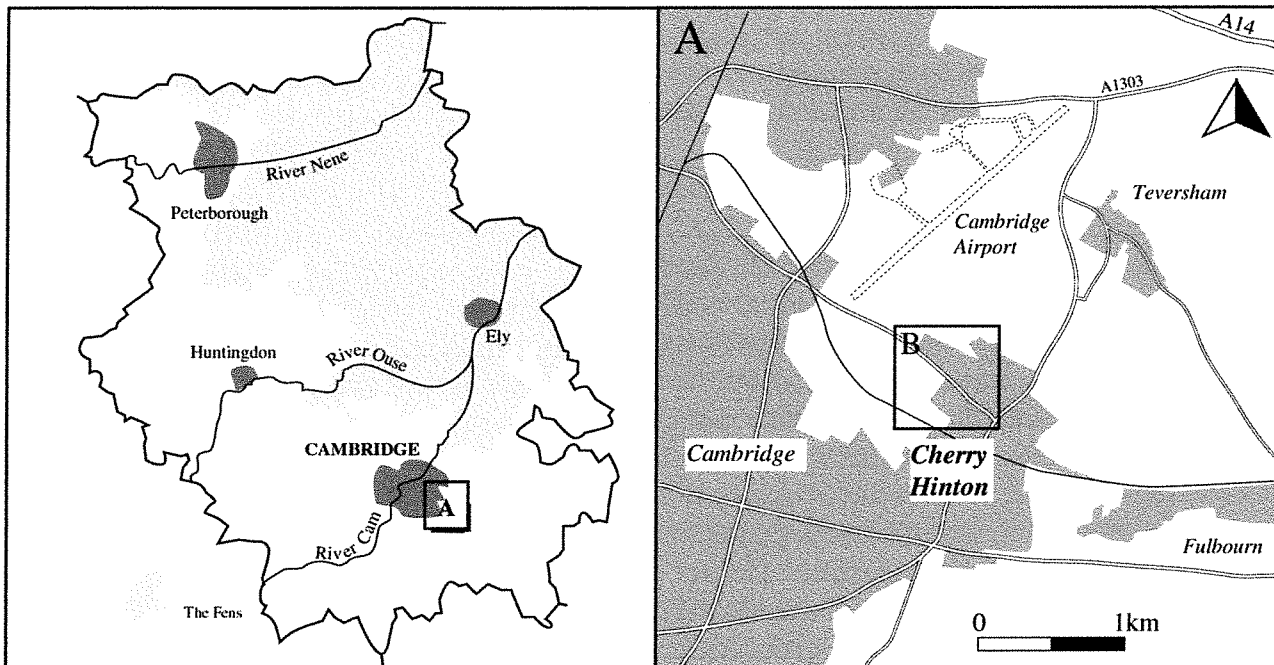
Two of the trenches proved to contain no features of any date, while the remaining two contained ditches, gullies and a pit. Roman pottery from the latter has been classed as residual.

Weather conditions during the fieldwork were somewhat precipitous, but the contrast between features and natural was strong, and there were no other factors that are likely to have had an adverse effect upon context recognition. Accordingly, the confidence rating to be applied to the results is judged to be high.

## **2 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY**

### **2.1 Geology**

The site lies on the Lower beds of the Lower Chalk according to the British Geological Survey.



**Figure 1** Site location

## **2.2 Topography**

The front of the site is located on some of the higher ground in the area at around 19m AOD. The ground naturally falls away towards Church End, which is at around 15m AOD.

## **3 HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND**

A comprehensive study of the area was undertaken in 1999 by Hertfordshire Archaeological Trust (HAT) which includes the general background to the present site (Doel, 1999). In brief, there is no evidence for early prehistoric remains within the immediate environment of the site, although the location lies within a rich area of later prehistoric activity; Bronze Age remains are known from Fulbourn Hospital and War Ditches at 1km and 3km respectively from the site. Iron Age settlement is known at Greenhouse Farm to the north, and is also present at the fort and cemetery to War Ditches. Roman settlement is known from various locations within a 2km radius from the site. An Anglo-Saxon burial is recorded from the cement works 0.5km to the south-west. The post-conquest church of St Andrews 0.5km to the south-east demonstrates the site's proximity to one of the medieval foci of Cherry Hinton village.

Cherry Hinton is in fact situated on the springline at the junction of various ancient routes, and would therefore have been a prime location for early settlement. Coldham's Lane would have been used as a route through Coldham's common to Hinton and on to Fulbourn from early medieval times if not earlier. The road layout of Church End and Coldham's Lane suggests a classic medieval pattern of high street and back street with the church at its south-eastern end; quite possibly the site of Uphall Manor would have been at the opposite end, and therefore closer to the present site.

Excavations in 1999 at 69-115 Church End by HAT discovered over six hundred and sixty burials as well as a small wooden building, very probably that of a church. The form and context of the church and cemetery would fit with a late Saxon date, and possibly one with Middle Saxon origins. Small churches with attendant cemeteries were attached to manors at such a period, but the parish graveyard would have moved to St Andrews when the stone church was built in the post-conquest period.

An evaluation was undertaken by the AFU on land adjacent to 63 Church End at the same time as the HAT excavations were ongoing. This investigation revealed Late Saxon boundary ditches and other settlement features. Additionally, some Middle Saxon pottery was also recovered (Kenney, 1999).

The place-name of Hinton is possibly derived from the name for a monastic community (Reaney 1943, 141). If this were true then the monastery would have been a Saxon foundation as the village is mentioned in Domesday.

Coldham's Common is first mentioned in 1310, and Coldham's Lane in 1386.

## **4 METHODOLOGY**

Placement of the trenches was restricted by one of the buildings remaining on site, and by the developer's request to specifically evaluate those areas affected by the impact of the proposed development.

Four trenches were opened using a mechanical excavator with a 1.8m toothless ditching bucket, under the supervision of an archaeologist (see Fig. 1).

The trenches were cleaned by hand where appropriate, photographed, and base planned by hand at a scale of 1:100.

## **5 RESULTS**

### **5.1 Trench 1**

Trench 1 was 25m long and contained three features. Up to 0.8m of modern makeup overlay the features.

Ditch 3, oriented NE-SW, was 2.5m wide and 0.75m deep. It contained three fills, 2, 14 and 15. Upper fill 14 was a dark grey silty clay with moderate small stones. Below this was 15, a light grey redeposited chalk. The lower fill, 2, was a very dark grey silty clay with moderate small stones. A single fragment of worked flint was recovered from fill 2.

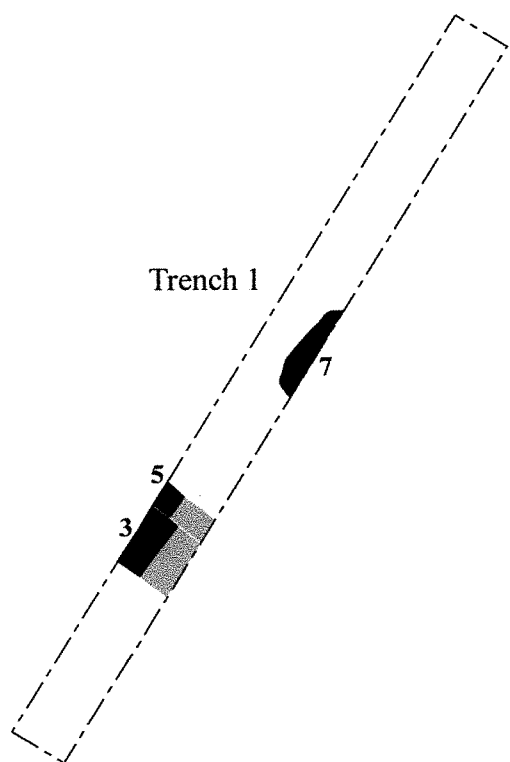
Gully 5, oriented NE-SW, was 0.7m wide and 0.5m deep. It contained a single fill, 4, a dark grey silty clay with moderate small stones. No finds were recovered from this fill.

Pit 7 was more than 3.0 m long, 0.7m wide and 1.2m deep. It contained at least four fills, 6, 16, 17 and 18. The upper fill, 16 was a very dark grey clay. Below this was 6, a dark grey silty clay with moderate small stones and strong brown ferrous streaks. Below this was 17, a greyish brown silty sandy clay with frequent small stones. Around the edges of the feature and below 17 was 18, a light grey redeposited chalk. Heavily abraded Roman pottery and a worked flint flake were recovered from fill 6. A single sherd of less abraded medieval pottery was recovered from fill 16.

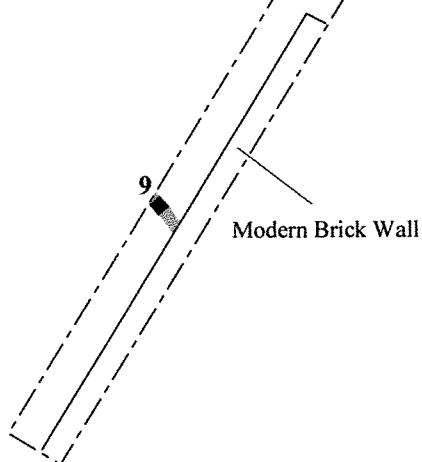
The features were all cut through the subsoil, 19, a grey silty clay.



0 10m



Trench 1

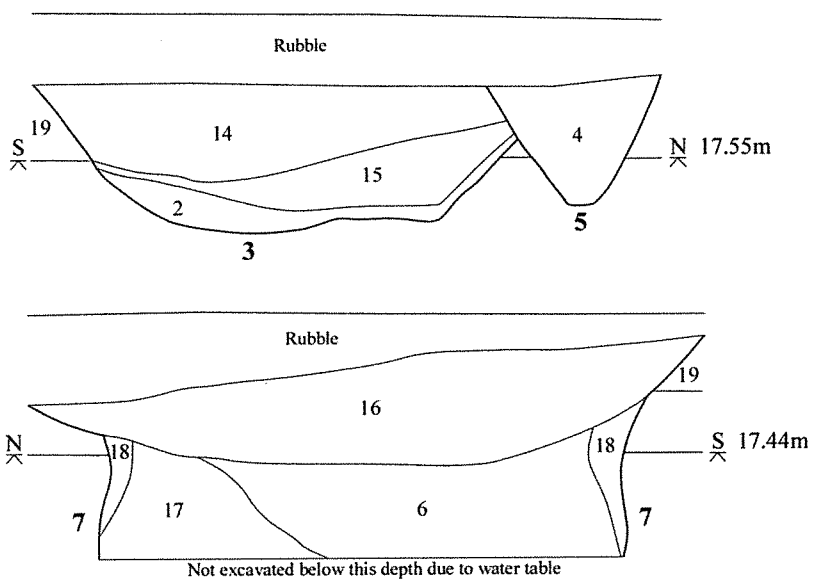


Trench 2

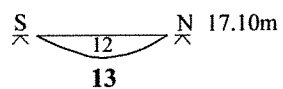
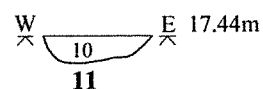
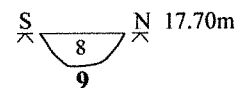
Key



Excavated/unexcavated features



0 2m



**Figure 2** Trench plans and sections

## **5.2 Trench 2**

Trench 2 was 45m long and contained three features. In this trench, a maximum of 0.6m of modern makeup overlay the features.

Gully 9 was 0.46m wide, 0.18m deep and at least 1.4m long. It contained a single fill, 8, a dark grey silty clay with moderate small stones. No finds were recovered from this fill.

Gully 11 was 0.15m deep, 0.6m wide and at least 0.9m long. It contained a single fill, 12, a yellowish brown sandy silty clay with occasional small stones. No finds were recovered from this fill.

Gully 13 was 0.12m deep, 0.7m wide and at least 1.3m long and. It contained a single fill, 14, a light yellowish brown sandy silty clay with occasional small stones. No finds were recovered from this fill.

## **5.3 Trench 3**

Trench 3 was 40m long and contained no archaeology. In this trench, a maximum of 0.4m of modern makeup overlay the natural chalk.

## **5.4 Trench 4**

Trench 4 was 50m long and contained no archaeology. In this trench, a maximum of 0.3m of modern makeup overlay the natural chalk.

# **6 DISCUSSION**

The aim of the project was to establish the character, date, state of preservation, and extent of any archaeological remains within the site.

Despite the proximity of the site to the extensive Saxon remains found only 150m to the north-east, no archaeology of any date was found in the two trenches closest to Church End. Although it is immediately apparent when visiting the site that there has been extensive landscaping, including raising the ground level around the remaining building in the middle, it is unlikely to have completely removed any surviving archaeology in the area of Trenches 3 and 4. The ground surface around these two trenches has clearly been reduced to the level of the natural chalk, but is still at a similar height to the adjacent road on Rosemary Lane. Any archaeology in this area would have been clearly visible, but no such features were found.

The ditch and gullies found in Trenches 1 and 2 appear to run roughly parallel to the present route of Coldham's Lane, and probably represent medieval property boundaries. It is intriguing therefore that the only datable material recovered from the lower fills of pit 7 was Roman in date, albeit heavily abraded. Pit 7 appears to have been capped by clay deposit 16, which contained a single sherd of medieval pottery. This presents the interesting possibility that the features may in fact be Anglo-Saxon in date, perhaps contemporary with those found on the north side of Church End.

Of particular interest is the intact stratigraphic sequence and possible restatement of a boundary represented by ditch 3, gully 5 and the subsoil layer 19. Since ditch 3 does not continue through to Trench 2, it must either turn or terminate, which would imply that a corner or an entrance exists between Trenches 1 and 2. Gully 9 is probably not a continuation of 5, and points towards pit 7, which itself marks the northern limit of the survival of subsoil 19; beyond this point, the layer has probably been removed by the landscaping process.

Environmental samples taken from ditch 3 and pit 7 revealed very little, containing no discernible seeds or tiny animal bones. Snails from both features indicate a mixture of wet and dry conditions consistent with seasonal variations in the water table causing intermittent standing water.

No structural evidence was located during the evaluation, but given the distance of the trenches from the roadside, it is still possible that the remains of buildings may be preserved closer to Coldham's Lane.

## **7 RECOMMENDATIONS**

Any further work on this site would enhance the present level of understanding of settlement patterns in this area, in particular the inception of development along Coldham's Lane as distinct from Church End. The shift in Middle and Late Saxon settlement patterns is a particularly important topic as set out in the Regional Research Framework (Brown & Glazebrook 2000).

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The author wishes to thank Semitool Europe Ltd for funding the work, the site staff Tony Baker and Chris Montague, and Mark Hinman for managing the project. This project was carried out in response to a brief drawn up by the County Archaeology Office.

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Ordnance Survey 1:25000 Pathfinder sheet 1004, Cambridge and Balsham, 1987

Ordnance Survey digital map TL4857, revised March 2000

British Geological Survey 1:50000, sheet 188, Cambridge, Drift Edition, 1974

## Appendix A Context list

Trench No	Context No	Fill of	Filled by	Context type
All	1	-	-	Modern demolition layer
1	2	3	-	Ditch fill
1	3	-	2, 14, 15	Ditch cut
1	4	5	-	Ditch fill
1	5	-	4	Ditch cut
1	6	7	-	Pit fill
1	7	-	6, 16, 17, 18	Pit cut
2	8	9	-	Ditch fill
2	9	-	8	Ditch cut
2	10	11	-	Gully fill
2	11	-	10	Gully cut
2	12	13	-	Gully fill
2	13	-	12	Gully cut
1	14	3	-	Ditch fill
1	15	3	-	Redeposited chalk
1	16	7	-	Pit fill
1	17	7	-	Pit fill
1	18	7	-	Redeposited chalk



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The Archaeological Field Unit  
Fulbourn Community Centre  
Haggis Gap  
Fulbourn  
Cambridge CB1 5HD  
Tel (01223) 881614  
Fax (01223) 880946