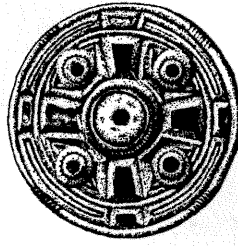


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Archaeological Field Unit

**Saxo-Norman Features at Beechwood Avenue,
Bottisham, Cambridgeshire:
An Archaeological Evaluation**

Rob Atkins

August 2003

Cambridgeshire County Council

Report No. A229

Commissioned by CCJ Estates Ltd

**Saxo-Norman Features at Beechwood Avenue,
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Rob Atkins

2003

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with contributions by Carole Fletcher and Steve Hickling



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SUMMARY

Between the 21st July and 22nd July 2003 the Archaeological Field Unit (AFU) of Cambridgeshire County Council conducted an archaeological evaluation at 82-84 Beechwood Avenue, Bottisham, Cambridgeshire (TL5443/6065) in advance of construction of four houses.

Three trenches (total length 33.60m) were excavated within the proposed development area (0.12ha). A few Saxo-Norman features were uncovered consisting of a possible well and a domestic rubbish pit. These may represent features in plots behind former property(ies) fronting the High Street. Possibly contemporary with these features was an undated east-west boundary ditch which ran at right angles to the High Street.

There were no later medieval features or artefacts found on the site. In recent times, possibly during the nineteenth century, the site was disturbed and earlier remains were truncated. The site was subsequently levelled with redeposited layers sealing the natural geology. The layers may be upcast remains from nearby quarrying. A nineteenth century east to west boundary ditch was also uncovered.

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**Saxo-Norman Features at Beechwood Avenue,
Bottisham, Cambridgeshire:
An Archaeological Evaluation
(TL 5443/6065)**

1 INTRODUCTION

An archaeological evaluation was carried out at Beechwood Avenue, Bottisham, Cambridgeshire (TL5443/6065) to fulfil requirements of a planning application (02/00324/FUL) to construct four houses. CCJ Estates Ltd funded the project. The evaluation was carried out by the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council between 21st July and 22nd July 2003.

The Brief for archaeological work was dated 9th June 2003 (Thomas 2003). The archaeological objectives for the evaluation were recorded in the specification for the site (Roberts 2003). These objectives were to establish the character, date, state of preservation and extent of any archaeological remains within the proposed development area.

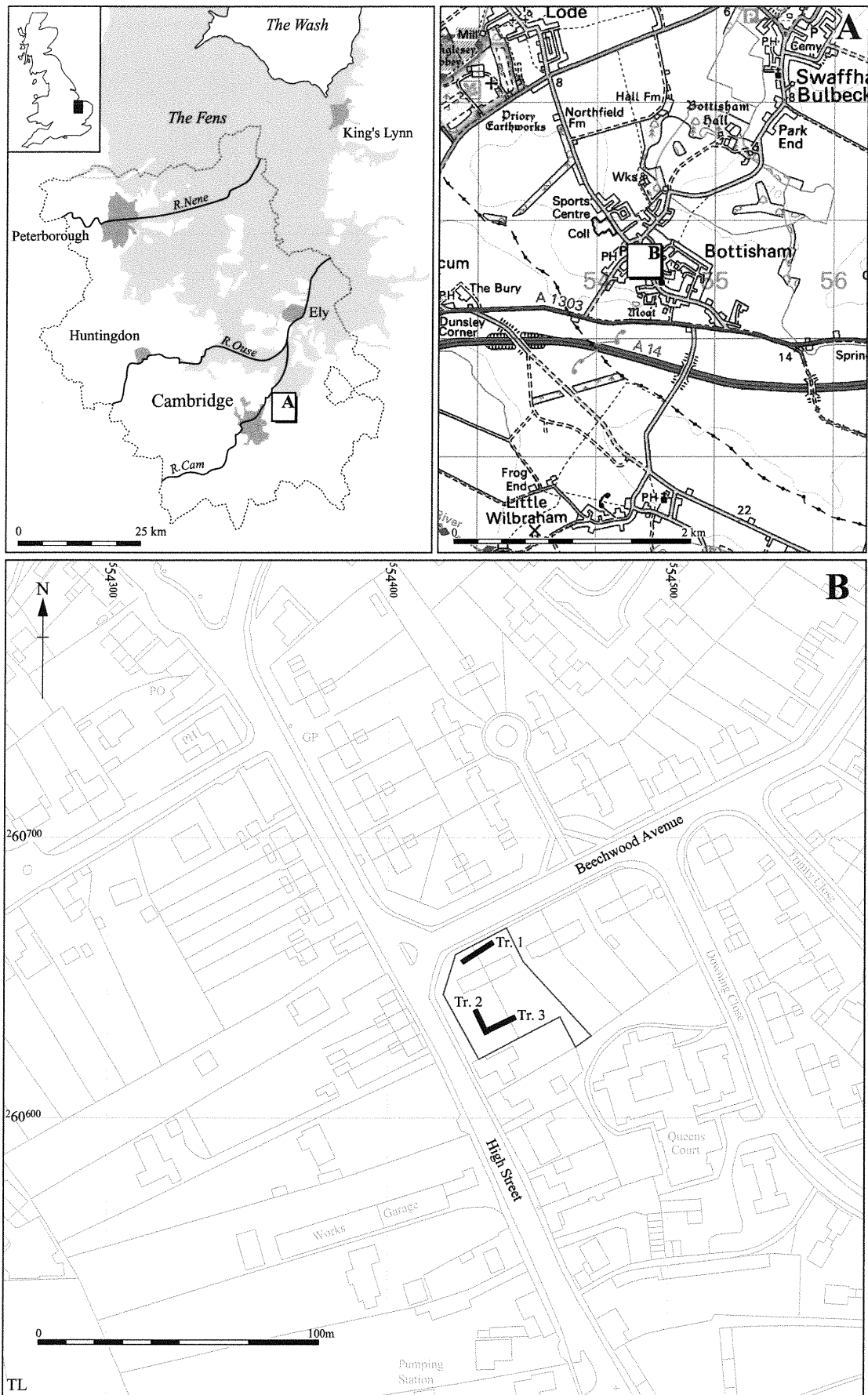
This specification and the proposed location of the archaeological trenches were approved by the Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeology Office before the start of the evaluation.

2 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

The site is recorded as being on Lower Chalk (BGS 1974). In trench 1 the natural geology consisted of chalk bedrock with a few flint nodules. In trenches 2 and 3 the natural geology consisted of mixed orange sand and chalk with flint nodules. The site was on level land at 12.10m AOD.

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Numerous prehistoric flint tools and artefacts have been found scattered in and around the village, although there are no concentrations of artefacts. The nearest prehistoric finds (SMR 06595) were flint flakes recovered c.180m to the south of the subject site. The site lies c.250m to the south of a Roman villa revealed through archaeological investigations (McDonald 2000 and Kenney 2002).



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Figure 1 Location of Trenches with Development Area outlined.

The name Bottisham is first recorded in 1060 as Bodekesham and as Bodichessham in the Domesday survey of 1086 when the population of the parish was recorded as 51 (37 peasants and 14 *servi*) as part of a single ten hide manor. An interpretation of the name is 'Boduc's farm'. The parish may have originated as at least three hamlets, so the population for Bottisham itself is uncertain. By the thirteenth century there were at least six separate settlements of various sizes within the parish. The total population of the parish had increased greatly by 1279, when c.140 resident landholders were recorded, with at least 76 messuages and 11 cottages. Numbers fell sharply in 1349 (VCH 2002, 192). By 1563 the parish had 104 households. Bottisham's common fields were enclosed in 1808.

The subject site itself in the core of the historic village of Bottisham, 200m north of the present thirteenth century Holy Trinity Church (though the church is at least Norman in origin). The development area is on the north-eastern side of the High Street which presumably was an medieval route way. The later nineteenth century and early twentieth century maps show the subject site as part of an open field (1845 1" Ordnance Survey, 1887 1st Edition OS, 1902 2nd Edition OS and 1926 3rd Edition OS). The 1972 map shows the site as 82-84 Beechwood Avenue.

4 METHODOLOGY (Figs 1 and 2)

A mechanical excavator (with a 1.6m wide flat-bladed ditching bucket) was used to excavate three trial trenches under archaeological supervision (Figs. 1 and 2). The location of trenches 2 and 3 were changed slightly to avoid mature fruit trees and leave access for the mechanical excavator. A total of 33.6m of trench was excavated providing a 4% sample of the site (c.0.12ha). The trenches were planned at 1:50 and sections drawn at 1:20. All features and deposits were recorded using the AFU single context system. Each distinct cut, fill, and layer was allocated individual numbers with trench 1 starting at 100, trench 2 at 200 and trench 3 at 300. In the text cut numbers are in **bold** and deposit numbers are in plain text. Monochrome and colour photographs were taken. All features were investigated.

5 RESULTS (Fig 2)

Trench 1

Trench 1 was 13.10m long and ran roughly east to west, parallel to Beechwood Avenue. There was a 0.25m thick topsoil layer 101, comprising a dark grey brown clayey silty sand. This sealed layer 102, 0.35m thick at the western end of the trench and extending to 0.55m thick at the eastern end. It was a mid orange brown silty sand with some redeposited chalk fragments.

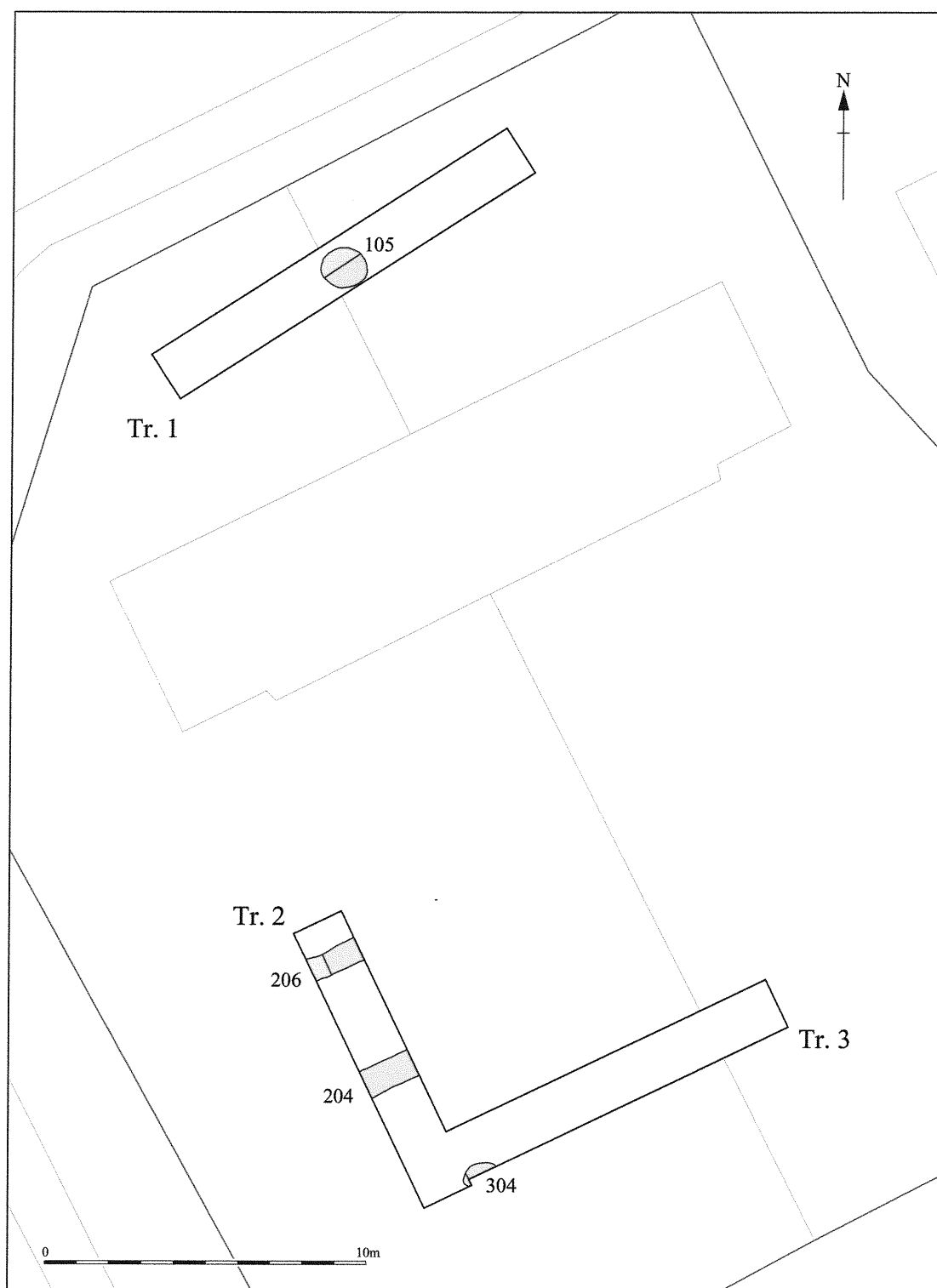


Figure 2 *Trench plans*

Layer 102 sealed a probable well or quarry pit, **105**, cut into natural chalk bedrock. The well was sub-circular in shape, 1.38m in diameter and over 1.79m deep. It had vertical sides which were slightly undercutting in parts. It was backfilled with at least two layers (103 and 104). The former was a dark yellowish brown sandy silt fill with a little clay. There was a little redeposited natural chalk which was <2% of the total fill. Three Saxo-Norman sherds, five animal bone fragments, a flint waste flake and an oyster shell were recovered from the well. Layer 104 was the same as 103 except there was no redeposited chalk.

Trench 2

Trench 2 was 9.50m long and ran roughly north to south parallel to the High Street. Below topsoil (201) there was an east-west ditch **204**. Ditch **204** was a right angles to the High Street, it was 0.90m wide and 0.68m deep with very steep sides, c.80°, and a flatish base. It was filled with mostly redeposited chalk, loose flint and c. nineteenth century brick. Ditch **204** cut levelling layer (202) which also contained some nineteenth century brick pieces. This layer (202) sealed east-west boundary ditch, **206**, which ran at right angles to the High Street and parallel to **204**. It was 0.85m wide and 0.22m deep with gentle sides, c.30°, and a slightly concave base. The ditch was filled with a light orange brown sandy silt which only contained three animal bone fragments.

Trench 3

Trench 3 was 11m long, at right angles to trench 2, and ran roughly east to west. Below the topsoil (301), there were two levelling layers (302 and 303). Layer 302 was between 0.26m and 0.66m thick and consisted of a redeposited chalk. Layer 303, a lens up to 0.26m thick, was a mid to dark brown silty sand with some redeposited chalk fragments. This layer sealed a pit, **304**, which was partly within the trench. Pit **304** was 1.30m long and 0.30m thick with gentle/moderate sides, c.40°. It was filled with a light to mid orange brown silty sand. A sherd of St. Neots ware, a residual Roman sherd and a mussel shell was recovered from the fill.

6 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Only a single, residual, Romano-British pottery sherd was recovered from the evaluation which implies that the Roman villa complex did not extend into the development area.

Saxo-Norman features were uncovered showing that the site was within the medieval settlement of Bottisham. There has been recent truncation on the site

so it is uncertain if only large negative features survived. The area evaluated may be behind the original road frontage buildings, with the well and pit representing backplot features. An undated east–west ditch may be contemporary, and it could be a former plot boundary ditch dug at right angles to the High Street.

The lack of later medieval and early post-medieval features, or any artefacts, may mean the site was outside later medieval Bottisham. We know from documentary evidence that Bottisham declined in size in the fourteenth century, at the same time as the country was affected by plague, famine and wars.

In the recent times, probably the nineteenth century, there has been disturbance to the site which resulted the truncation of earlier remains and levelling layer(s) sealing the natural geology. The layers may be upcast of nearby quarrying. A nineteenth century east to west ditch, possibly a boundary, was also uncovered.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank CCJ Estates Ltd for commissioning the work, especially Robert Willis who gave helpful advice. Grant Miller drove the JCB and helped excavation on the site. Judith Roberts managed the project and the illustrations were produced by Crane Begg.

The Brief for archaeological work was written by Andy Thomas, Principal Archaeologist, Land Use and Planning and Kasia Gdaniec, Development Control Officer, from the County Archaeology Office (CAO) monitored the evaluation.

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APPENDIX A FINDS

Pottery by Carol Fletcher

One Roman sherd and five Saxo-Norman pottery sherds, totalling 82g, were recovered from two features within the evaluation.

There were two St. Neots ware sherds (inturned rim bowl) and two Thetford ware sherds from pit or well 103. This pottery is dated as 900-1150 AD, although the form may date to the latter part of this period, after c.1000 AD. A sherd of St. Neots ware and a residual Roman sandy ware sherd were recovered from fill 303.

Worked Stone by Steve Hickling

A worked flint waste flake with signs of wear down one edge was recovered from fill or well 103.

Animal Bone by Steve Hickling




Six animal bone fragments were recovered from two features within the evaluation.

In Saxo-Norman pit or well fill 103 there were five bone fragments. Three cattle bones (tooth, hip and foot), a sheep/goat bone and a fragment from a small mammal. From the fill (205) of undated ditch (206) there was a bird bone.

Shell

A mussel shell was recovered from pit or well fill 303 and an oyster shell from fill 103.

Drawing Conventions

Sections	Plans
Limit of Excavation -----	Limit of Excavation _____
Cut _____	Deposit - Conjectured -----
Cut - Conjectured -----	Natural Features
Soil Horizon -----	Intrusion/Truncation -----
Soil Horizon - Conjectured	Sondages/Machine Strip -----
Intrusion/Truncation -----	Illustrated Section _____ S.14
Top of Natural _____	Excavated Slot 
Top Surface _____	Archaeological Deposit 
Break in Section -----	Cut Number 118
Cut Number 	
Deposit Number 117	
Ordinance Datum 18.45m OD N X	



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