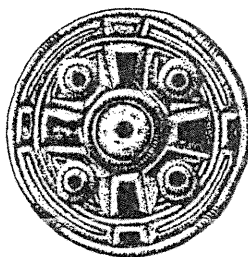


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Archaeological Field Unit

**Post Medieval Darlands, Maltmas Drove, Friday
Bridge, Elm: An Archaeological Evaluation**

Joe Abrams
January 2002

Cambridgeshire County Council

Report No. A198
Property and Procurement Division, Cambridgeshire County Council

**Post-medieval Darlands, Maltmas Drove, Friday Bridge, Elm:
An Archaeological Evaluation**

TF 4640 0450

Joe Abrams BA, AIFA

2002

Editor: Judith Roberts MA
Illustrator: Leomie Willoughby-Ellis MA



Report No. A198

©Archaeological Field Unit
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

An archaeological evaluation was carried out at Maltmas Drove, Friday Bridge, Elm (TL 4640 0450) to inform the planning process in advance of the construction domestic dwellings and associated works. The work was carried out by the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council between 7th January and 10th January 2002.

A total of six trenches were excavated, five contained archaeological features. These were all ditches, which produced no dating material. Parallel ditches of the type encountered on the site are known in this area and are referred to as dielands or darlands, agricultural drainage features in use from the medieval period through the post-medieval period.

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An Archaeological Evaluation**

NGR TF 4640 0450

1 INTRODUCTION

An archaeological evaluation was carried out at Maltmas Drove, Friday Bridge, Elm (TF 4640 0450) to inform the planning process in advance of the construction of domestic dwellings and associated works. The work was carried out by the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council between 7th January and 10th January 2002.

2 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

Friday Bridge is about 4 kilometres south of Wisbech and lies within the parish of Elm. The underlying geology is Terrington Beds (silty clay and sandy silt) Flandrian deposits (British Geological Survey 1995).

The site lies c200m southwest of the clock tower at the centre of the village. The site slopes slightly from north to south. The height above ordnance datum was 3.58m OD adjacent to Trench 6 (north), 3.25m OD adjacent to Trench 4 (central), and 3.20m OD adjacent to Trench 1 (south).

The subject site was bordered on its north-western edge by Maltmas Drove, on its north-eastern edge by Rookery Farm and on its south-eastern and south-western edge by fields belonging to Rookery Farm.

3 HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

3.1 Historical Background

Valuable information relating to the vicinity of the subject site was gained through reference to the documentary and cartographic sources and archaeological databases (Cambridgeshire County Sites and Monuments Record – SMR). Further information on the historical background of Friday Bridge was kindly supplied by Jane Hubbard, Curator, Wisbech Museum.

At the present time Friday Bridge exists because of its proximity to the rich agricultural land, which lies around it and is made cultivable by the complex network of drainage channels and pumps. Many cropmarks are recorded on

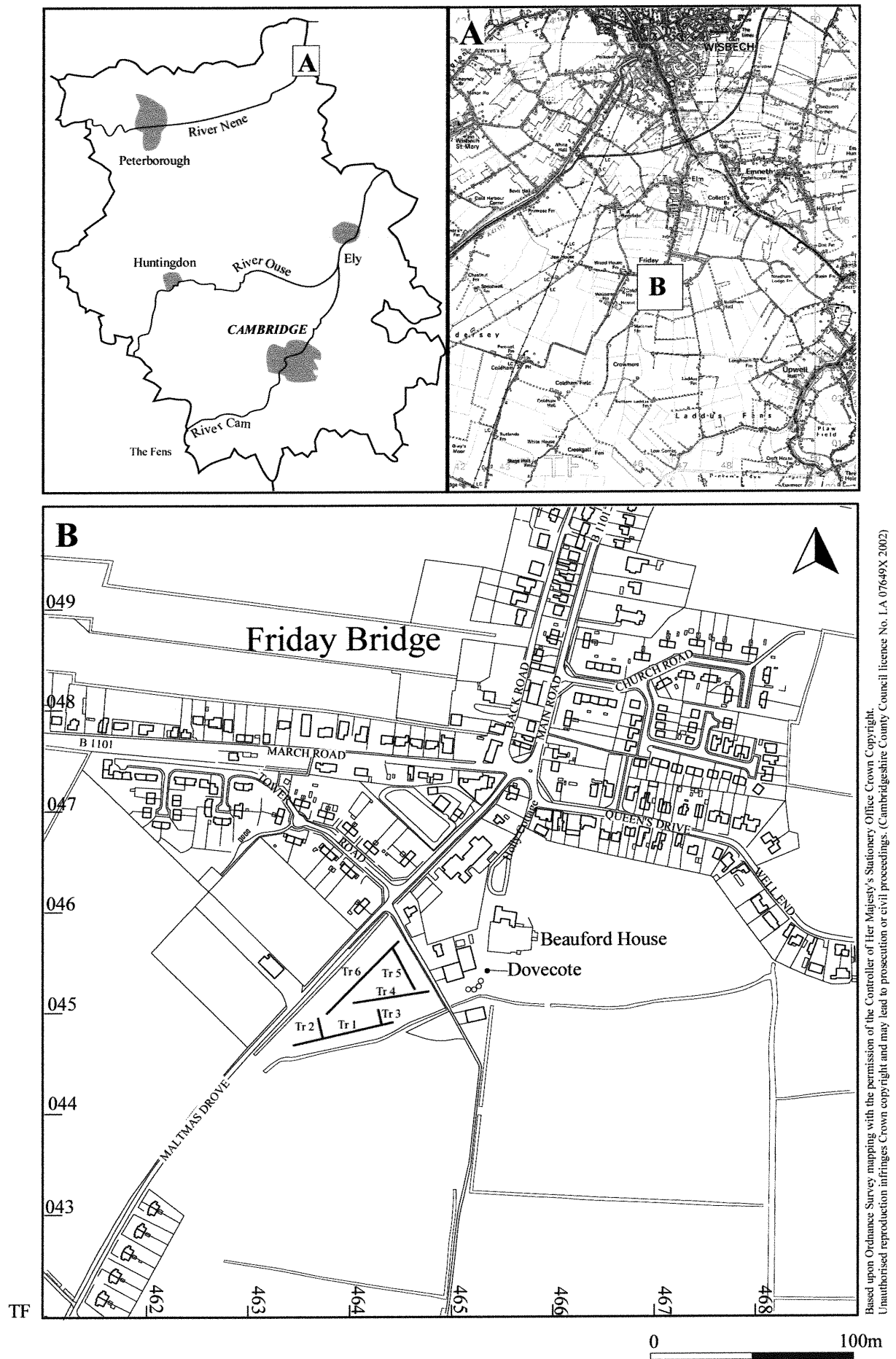


Figure 1 Site Location Map. Evaluation trenches are shown in black.

the SMR in this region and stray finds (see below – Section 3.2) suggest that this region has been exploited since prehistoric times for its rich environmental resources. The current settlement of Friday Bridge has its origins in the medieval period. Its name derives from the old English *Fridayesbrugg*, likely to be associated with monks fishing for Friday fare as with *Fridayweyr*, Haddenham and *Fridaylake*, Whittlesey (Reaney 1943). Within easy reach of the port of Wisbech, produce from this agriculturally rich area would have been traded through markets at Wisbech on to other population centres.

Friday Bridge lies within the parish of Elm which itself may have older origins suggested by its name. It is thought to derive from the name of the Germanic people *Ilwan*, a tribe originally living on the river Vistula. Other incidences of place names in Cambridgeshire deriving from Germanic roots include the Swaffhams near Cambridge, named after the *Swaefe* tribe (Reaney 1943).

During the medieval period several drainage channels were cut in the Wisbech region of the Fens. In the parish of Elm one of these channels diverted water from the River Nene through Friday Bridge to the vill and then on to the Great Ouse. There is no longer water in this channel as later networks of dykes and channels have superseded it, however the stonework of a bridge still exists under the present road in Friday Bridge under which the channel flowed until the 1880s (Hall 1996).

During the evaluation the author noted that there was a partly derelict Dovecote on land belonging to Rookery Farm adjacent to the subject site. With the co-operation of the landowner (Peter Edgley), it was possible to get a photographic record of the dovecote and associated large house also currently unused (Plate 1). Dovecotes have a long history in Britain being introduced by the Romans (*columbaria*), and subsequently re-introduced by the Normans, the dovecote was the medieval counterpart of these earlier structures.

These buildings were used to house large numbers of pigeons in individual ‘pigeon holes’ built into the internal structure of the walls. Pigeon meat provided a welcome alternative to salted beef and other preserved foodstuffs during the winter months. This was particularly important prior to the introduction of the turnip to Britain, which enabled livestock farmers to keep larger numbers of their stock alive through the winter, thus providing a source of fresh meat. Only the wealthy members of society used dovecotes and it was considered a privilege to be able to maintain one. For poorer members of society, particularly farmers, pigeons were a pest as they fed on crops, however during the medieval period a person could be hung for killing a pigeon belonging to a lord of the manor (Jeevar 1977).

The dovecote in Friday Bridge is significant in several ways. Firstly, it is a circular structure of which there are only three others in Cambridgeshire. It is identical in style to an eighteenth century example recorded in Somersham churchyard, (Jeevar 1977, p.43). Secondly dovecotes are extremely rare in the Fenland region in comparison with the rest of the county. The brickwork and style of this structure suggest that it derives from the eighteenth century and is associated with the large, now unused, Beauford House with which it shares



Beauford House



Dovecote



Interior of Dovecote

Plate 1 The Dovecote at Rookery Farm, Friday Bridge, Elm.

similar brickwork and is associated. An eighteenth century date is supported by its similarity to the documented example from Somersham churchyard. It should be noted that the keeping of dovecotes was at its peak during this period.

On the Hundred Map of Wisbech, 1649 AD, Beauford House is referred to as Bewforth Hall, therefore the subject site lies c200m from a very significant late medieval and post medieval residence and finding features from this period was considered a high possibility.

Amongst the other notable buildings within the vicinity of Friday Bridge is Needham Hall (1400m east of the subject site). A concentrated series of over 30 circular undated cropmarks (SMR 09711) are recorded on land belonging to the owners of Needham Hall. But the house itself has been the scene of historic events, most notably perhaps the arrival of Oliver Cromwell during the Civil War. He is reputed to have refused to have the best bedroom, preferring to spend the night on the kitchen table, observing that the next night he may have to spend the night in an open field. The table was preserved and a plaque was put on the spot in his honour (Walker and Craddock 1849).

Needham Hall was taken down in 1804, the current building of that name was erected close to its site.

3.2 Archaeological Background

Romano-British (AD 43-410)

A scatter of Roman pottery (SMR 03940) was recovered c50m southeast of the subject site. This consisted of a variety of 4th century coarse wares, 3rd to 4th century colour coated wares and one sherd of Antonine samian. Further evidence from this period is recorded c1000m east of the subject site (SMR 04249). Roman pottery sherds were recorded in association with an area of 'dark earth', this is very likely to indicate the presence of archaeological features in this area.

Due to the proximity of the subject site to SMR nos. 03940, 04249 finding artefacts from this period were considered a high possibility.

Medieval (AD 1066-1520)

A lead, pointed oval, seal matrix with 8-leafed motif (SMR 08971) was found c500m north-east of the subject site.

The proximity of the subject site to the medieval village of Friday Bridge and particularly to Bewforth Hall (see above – Section 3.1), finding artefacts from this period were considered a high possibility.

Undated

Two undated ditches (SMR 10542) recorded from aerial photographs and added to the SMR as being “dubious”, are recorded c150m to the south of the subject site in the field adjacent to it.

Two undated parallel straight double ditched tracks, one with short perpendicular side ditches (SMR 10695) were recorded c1000m south east of the subject site. These continue in a broadly north-south alignment for c1000m. Adjacent to this and also c1000m south east of the subject site are several circular cropmarks (SMR 09704).

4 METHODOLOGY

Six trenches totalling 355.50m in length, were located within the area of the proposed development site. This gave a 4.73% (568 square metres) sample of the affected area. Topsoil and modern overburden were removed using a wheeled mechanical excavator with a 1.60m wide flat bladed ditching bucket. This was carried out under the full-time supervision of an archaeologist. Trenches were located to give a representative sample of the available area.

After machining each trench was photographed. Archaeological features were excavated by hand in order to determine date and character. The AFU's single context based recording system was used to record all the archaeological features and deposits, sections were hand drawn at a scale of 1:10 for features, and 1:50 in the case of entire evaluation trench sections. Plans were hand-drawn at a scale of 1:50. In addition all the spoil heaps from the trenches were scanned for artefacts by eye and a metal detector was used to scan for metal artefacts.

In this report deposit numbers are shown in plain text and cut numbers are in **bold** text. Detailed descriptions of the character and morphology of each feature are listed below the main text for each Trench.

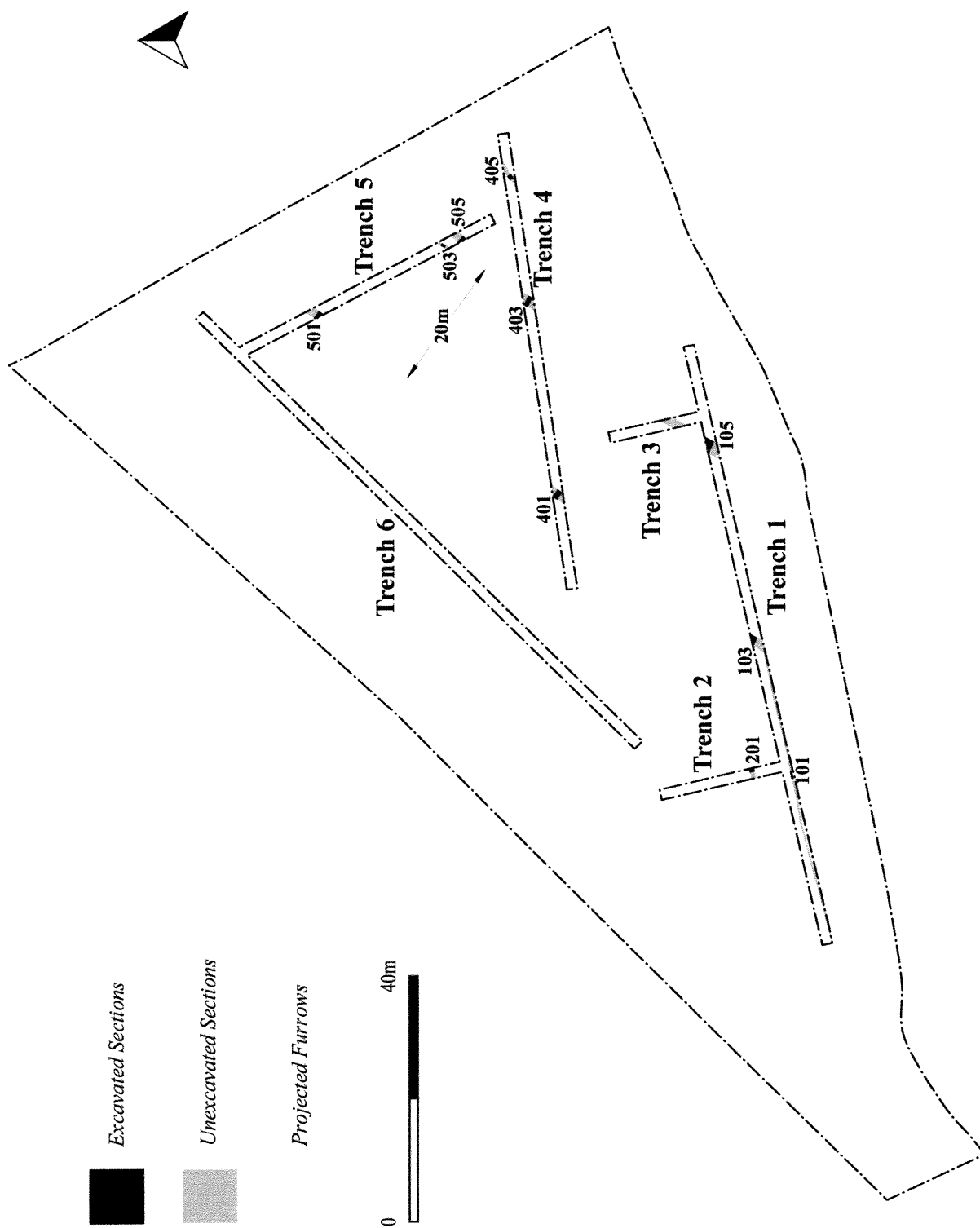


Figure 2 Detail of Trenches 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6

5 RESULTS

5.1 Detail of layers in trenches 1 to 6

The topsoil 1 was a blackish/dark brown silty clay layer 0.10m to 0.25m deep, with occasional modern brick and tile fragments and occasional fine rounded pebbles. Below this was subsoil 2 a mid dark brown clay layer 0.30m deep with no inclusions. Both topsoil 1 and subsoil 2 occurred in all 6 trenches.

The natural geological layer 4 varied from reddish mid grey clay in the western part of the subject site to yellowish mid orange silty sand in the eastern half of the subject site closer to the village core. This was encountered at a depth of 0.30m to 0.60m below the present ground level.

5.2 Trench 1

Trench 1 was 100m long 1.60m wide and 0.44m to 0.63m deep and aligned west-south-west to east-north-east (Fig 2). Trench 1 contained three archaeological features cutting into the natural geology.

Ditch **101** contained one fill 100, from which no artefactual material was recovered. Ditch **101** is aligned east-north-east to south-west-south parallel to ditch **201** in Trench 2. These two linear features are 5.50m apart, and their alignment matches that of the present day field boundary, 12 metres south of Trench 1. It is thought that these are contemporary post-medieval furrows.

It is possible that features **101/201** were the same as **405/503** to the east in trenches 4 and 5 respectively (Fig 2). Features **405/503** also ran parallel with one another. They were not on exactly the same alignment but were very similar in character and morphology and were located a similar distance apart (see below - Section 5.4)

Ditch **101** was stratigraphically later than **103**. The fact that it aligned with the present day field boundary to the south-west suggested it may be a relatively late feature, and its stratigraphic relationship with **103** provides further evidence to suggest a late date.

Ditch **103** contained one fill 102, from which no artefactual material was recovered. Ditch **103** was aligned north-east to south-west and was very likely to be the same feature as ditch **401** (Trench 4), and ditch **501** (Trench 5) which were aligned identically (see Fig 2) and with which it shared identical morphology and character.

Ditch **105** contained one fill 104 from which no artefactual material was recovered. Ditch **105** was aligned north-east to south-west and was very likely to be the same feature as **301** (Trench 3), **403** (Trench 4) and **505** (Trench 5) which all shared an identical alignment (Fig 2) and shared identical morphology and character.

101, 0.25m wide, 0.10m deep, linear in plan, convex sides, narrow slightly convex base, east-north-east west-south-west alignment, contained one fill:
Fill 100, mid/dark blueish grey clay, no inclusions.

103, 1.55m wide, 0.30m deep, linear in plan, near vertical flat sides, flat base, north-east to south-west alignment, contained one fill:
Fill 102, dark greyish brown clay, no inclusions.

105, 2.00m wide, 0.35m deep, linear in plan, near vertical flat sides, flat base, north-east to south-west alignment, contained one fill:
Fill 104, dark greyish brown, no inclusions.

5.3 Trench 2

Trench 2 was 20.00m long 1.60m wide and 0.39 to 0.45m deep and aligned south-east-south to north-west-north (Fig.2). Trench 2 contained one feature cutting into the natural geology.

Ditch **201** contained one fill 200, from which no artefactual material was recovered. Ditch **201** was aligned east-north-east to south-west-south parallel to ditch **101** in Trench 1. These two linear features were 5.50m apart, and their alignment matches that of the present day field boundary 12 metres south of Trench 1. It is thought that these were contemporary post-medieval furrows.

201, 0.80m wide, 0.30m deep, linear in plan, concave sides, flat base, east-north-east west-south-west alignment, contained one fill:
Fill 200, dark greyish brown silty clay, no inclusions.

5.4 Trench 3

Trench 3 was 15.00m long 1.60m wide and 0.42m to 0.50m deep, aligned south-east-south to north-west-north (Fig.2). Trench 3 contained one archaeological feature cutting into the natural geology.

Ditch **301** was not excavated as it aligned perfectly with **105** only c10 metres to the south and is assumed to be the same feature. Ditch **301** contained one visible fill 300, from which no artefactual material was recovered. Ditch **301** was aligned north-east to south-west and is very likely to have been the same feature as **105** (Trench 1), **403** (Trench 4) and **505** (Trench 5). These features are all aligned identically (Fig 2) and shared identical morphology and character.

301, 2.00m wide, linear in plan, north-east to south-west alignment, contained one visible fill:
Fill 300, dark greyish brown clay, no inclusions.

5.5 Trench 4

Trench 4 was 75.00m long 1.60m wide and 0.42m to 0.44m deep, and aligned south-west-south to north-east-north (Fig.2). Trench 4 contained three archaeological features cutting into the natural geology.

Ditch **401** contained one fill 400 from which no artefactual material was recovered, this feature was likely to have been part of the same ditch feature as **103** (Trench 1) and **501** (Trench 5). See Section 5.1 above and Fig 2 for more information.

Ditch **403** contained one fill 402 from which no artefactual material was recovered, this feature was likely to have been part of the same feature as **105** (Trench 1), **301** (Trench 3) and **505** (Trench 5). See Section 5.1 above and Fig 2 for more information.

Ditch **405** contained one fill 404 from which no artefactual material was recovered, this feature is aligned north-east to south-west and ran parallel to ditch **503** in Trench 5. Both features were similar in character and morphology and may be related. Although these features are undated by artefactual evidence it is considered likely that they were post-medieval furrows similar to features **101** and **201** (see above - Section 5.1).

401, 1.35m wide, 0.30m deep, linear shape in plan, near vertical sides, flat base, north-east to south-west alignment, contained one fill:
Fill 400, dark greyish brown clay.

403, 1.55m wide, 0.21m deep, linear shape in plan, near vertical concave sides, flat base, north-east to south-west alignment, contained one fill:
Fill 402, dark greyish brown clay.

405, 0.65m wide, 0.35m deep, linear shape in plan, near vertical sides, flat base, north-east to south-west alignment, contained one fill:
Fill 404, dark greyish brown clay.

5.6 Trench 5

Trench 5 was 45.50m long 1.60m wide and 0.45m deep, and aligned north-west to south-east (Fig.2). Trench 5 contained three archaeological features recorded cutting into the natural geology.

Ditch **501** contained one fill 500 from which one piece of animal bone was recovered, this feature was likely to have been part of the same feature as **103** (Trench 1) and **401** (Trench 4). See Section 5.1 above and Fig 2 for more information.

Ditch **503** contained one fill 502 from which no artefactual material was recovered. This feature was aligned north-east to south-west and ran parallel to ditch **405** in Trench 4. Both features share similarities in character and morphology and may be related. Although these features are undated by artefactual evidence it is considered likely that they were post-medieval furrows, similar to features **101** and **201** (see above - Section 5.1).

Ditch **505** contained one fill 504 from which one piece of animal bone was recovered. This feature was likely to have been part of the same ditch as **105** (Trench 1), **301** (Trench 3) and **403** (Trench 4). See Section 5.1 above and Fig 2 for more information.

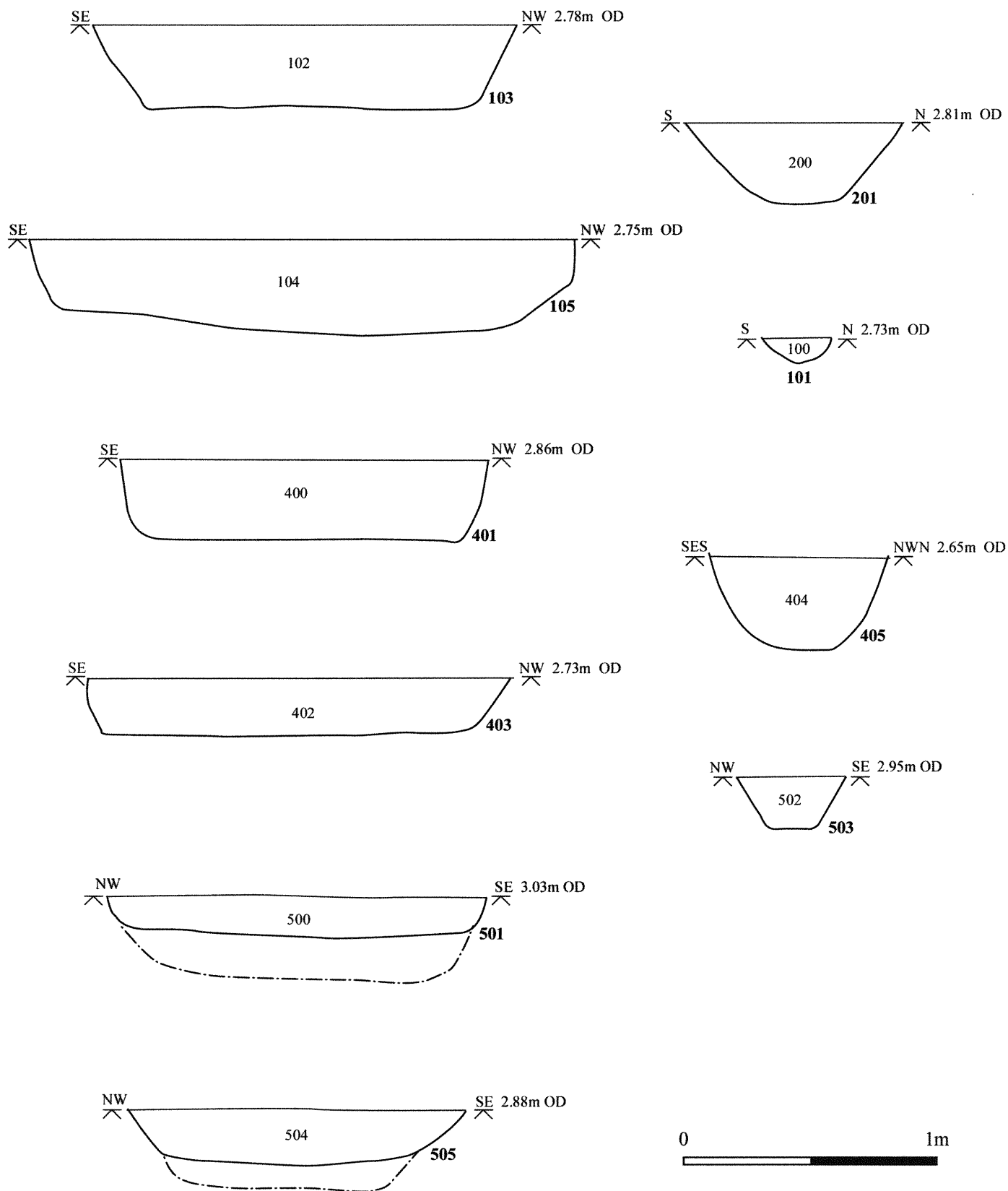


Figure 3 Selected Section Drawings

501, 1.36m wide, 0.15m deep, linear shape in plan, near vertical sides in plan, flat base, north-east to south-west alignment, contained one fill:
Fill 500, dark grey clay.

503, 0.40m wide, 0.20m deep, linear shape in plan, steep flat sides, flat base, north-east to south-west alignment, contained one fill:
Fill 502, mid grey clay.

505, 1.25m wide, 0.20m deep, linear shape in plan, steep flat sides, flat base, north-east to south-west alignment, contained one fill:
Fill 504, dark grey clay.

5.7 Trench 6

Trench 6 was 100m long 1.60m wide and 0.48m deep, and aligned north-east to south-west (Fig.2). Trench 6 contained no archaeological features.

6 DISCUSSION

Two phases of activity were identified on the site. No artefactual dating material was available for any of these features. Both phases involved ditches, which appear to be running parallel to one another.

Phase 1 consists of ditch slots **103/401/501** and **105/301/403/505**. These ran parallel to one another aligned north-east to south-west towards the centre of the village. They are c20m apart (Fig 2). This distance is very significant in providing an interpretation of the likely date and function of these features. Such features have been recorded as part of the Fenland survey (Hall and Coles 1994). The “whole area of medieval dryland appears to have been divided into strip fields. The strips were bounded by dykes and not ridged up; the widths commonly varied from 12 to 20m” (Hall and Coles 1994, p.146). Such a description fits the ditches recorded and described above.

Further evidence is provided by eighteenth and nineteenth century maps of Elm showing strip fields (kept in the archives of Wisbech museum (and reproduced in Hall and Coles, p.147).

The SMR records the possible existence of two parallel ditches (SMR 10542) 150m to the south in the adjacent field to the subject site. It is likely that the features picked up during the evaluation are part of the same parallel ditch alignment.

Also, an evaluation undertaken by the AFU in Wisbech (Kemp 1995) recorded evidence of just such parallel features in that case spaced 12m apart.

Finally, anecdotal evidence gathered from the current farmer, and lifelong resident at Rookery Farm (Peter Edgley *pers comm.*), revealed that even up to the latter part of the twentieth century farmers in Friday Bridge had often

individually farmed narrow, two acre, strips of land. This would be comparable to a strip roughly 20m x 800m (0.8 ha/2 acres), which roughly corresponds with the area contained within ditch features **103/401/501** and **105/301/403/505**. Although it should be pointed out that these features may extend beyond the boundaries of the site.

The second phase consists of **101**, **201**, **405** and **503**. Ditch **101**, was stratigraphically later than ditch **103**, and shared a very similar character, morphology and alignment with **201**, **405** and **503**.

7 CONCLUSION

Although the subject site lies within a landscape containing many significant cropmarks and stray archaeological finds it is suggested that the archaeological features encountered at Friday Bridge are most likely to be medieval or post medieval agricultural ditches, known locally as darlands (Cambridgeshire), dielands or darlings (Lincolnshire).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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The project was carried out in response to a brief written by Jeremy Parsons from the County Archaeology Office (Development Control), who visited and monitored the site.

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Tithe Map 1841. A plan of The New and Ancient Enclosures in the Parish of Elm

Ordnance Survey Map 1886. 1st Edition. Wisbech Division

Ordnance Survey Map 1903. 2nd Edition. Wisbech Division

Appendix 1 - Context List

Trench No	Context No	Fill of	Filled by	Context type
1/2/3/4/5/6/7/12	1	-	-	Topsoil layer
1/2/3/4/5/6/7/12	2	-	-	Subsoil layer
1/2/3/4/5/6/7/12	3	-	-	Natural geology
1	100	101	-	Ditch fill
1	101	-	100	Ditch cut
1	102	103	-	Ditch fill
1	103	-	102	Ditch cut
1	104	105	-	Ditch fill
1	105	-	104	Ditch cut
2	200	201	-	Ditch fill
2	201	-	200	Ditch cut
3	300	301	-	Ditch fill
3	301	-	300	Ditch cut
4	400	401	-	Ditch fill
4	401	-	400	Ditch cut
4	402	403	-	Ditch fill
4	403	-	402	Ditch fill
4	404	405	-	Ditch cut
4	405	-	404	Ditch fill
5	500	501	-	Ditch fill
5	501	-	500	Ditch cut
5	502	503	-	Ditch fill
5	503	-	502	Ditch cut
5	504	505	-	Ditch fill
5	505	-	504	Ditch cut

Appendix 2 - Finds List

Context	Finds category	Date/description	Quantity
500	Bone	Animal	1 piece
504	Bone	Animal	1 piece



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