

OFFICE COPY.



Archaeological Field Unit

**Iron Age and Medieval Activity at 14 Parkhall Road  
Somersham.**

Spencer Cooper

March 2000

**Cambridgeshire County Council**

Report No.A157

*Commissioned by T.W.Lumley*

Iron Age and Medieval Activity at 14 Parkhall Road  
Somersham.

Spencer Cooper HND,BA,MSoc Sci

2000

Editor J.Roberts MA  
Illustrator J.Cane BA

With Contributions by P.Spoerry BTech,PhD



Report No A157

©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  
<http://www.camcnty.gov.uk/library/afu/index.htm>

## SUMMARY

*Between 21st and 23rd February 2000 an evaluation was carried out at 14 Parkhall Road, Somersham (TL 3610 7815) by the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council on behalf of T.W. Lumley. Trenches revealed Iron Age ditches and a medieval rubbish pit.*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>1 INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO THE SITE</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>4 METHOD</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>5 RESULTS</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>6 DISCUSSION</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>7 CONCLUSIONS</b>	
<b>8 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>9 BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	<b>8</b>
APPENDIX I - Context List	9
APPENDIX II -Pottery Spot dating	9

## LIST OF FIGURES

<b>Figure 1</b> Site location plan	<b>2</b>
<b>Figure 2</b> Trench Plan	<b>3</b>
<b>Figure 3</b> Section drawings of excavated features	<b>5</b>
<b>Figure 4</b> Jeffrey's 1768 map of Huntingdonshire	<b>6</b>

## **Iron Age and Medieval Activity at 14 Parkhall Road, Somersham (TL 3610 7815)**

### **1 INTRODUCTION**

Between February 21st and February 23rd 2000 an evaluation was carried out at 14 Parkhall Road, Somersham (TL 3610 7815) by the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council on behalf of T.W Lumley Ltd. The proposed development includes the construction of ten houses and associated groundworks in area of 0.64 hectares. The evaluation was undertaken in accordance with a Brief produced by Simon Kaner of the County Archaeology Office and to a specification approved by that office.

The site lies 500m to the north of the historic core of the village and it formerly contained a private house with associated gardens. Although no archaeological remains are known from the site it is possible that the buried remains of prehistoric or Roman date may have survived.

### **2 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY**

The northern and eastern part of the parish is low-lying fenland (at or near sea level), rising towards the south and west to over 25m OD. The soils are clays and gravels overlying a bed of Oxford Clay. There are gravel pits and brickworks to the north of the village. Much of the land in the parish is arable, with pasture, particularly in the area of the former Deer Park. Formerly there was a fair amount of woodland and orchard but this has been considerably reduced in recent years.

### **3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

The site is located to the north of the medieval core of Somersham. Roman remains have been found just to the south of the site (SMR 1453) and Bronze Age and Neolithic axes to the north-east (SMR 3605 and 1750). Iron Age pottery and a knife blade (SMR 01789) was recovered from a trench exposed while gravel digging at Parkhall Rd. SMR No 01789 does not appear on the SMR map because no accurate grid reference was provided for the finds. Around 300m to the east of the subject site Iron Age pottery has been recovered (SMR 1454)

The name of the village may derive either from a personal name (Sumor's homestead), or from a 'homestead of the south mere' (Mawer and Stenton, 1969, 222-223) and can be traced back to approximately the tenth century. The manor of Somersham was acquired by the abbey of Ely in 991, and became part of the bishop's endowment in 1109 (Page *et al*, 1974). On the southern edge of the village lies the site of the medieval bishop's palace and associated moat, fishponds and deer park (SAM 199). The medieval church and site of the medieval rectory lie to the south of the development site (SMR Nos. 0609 and 3565).

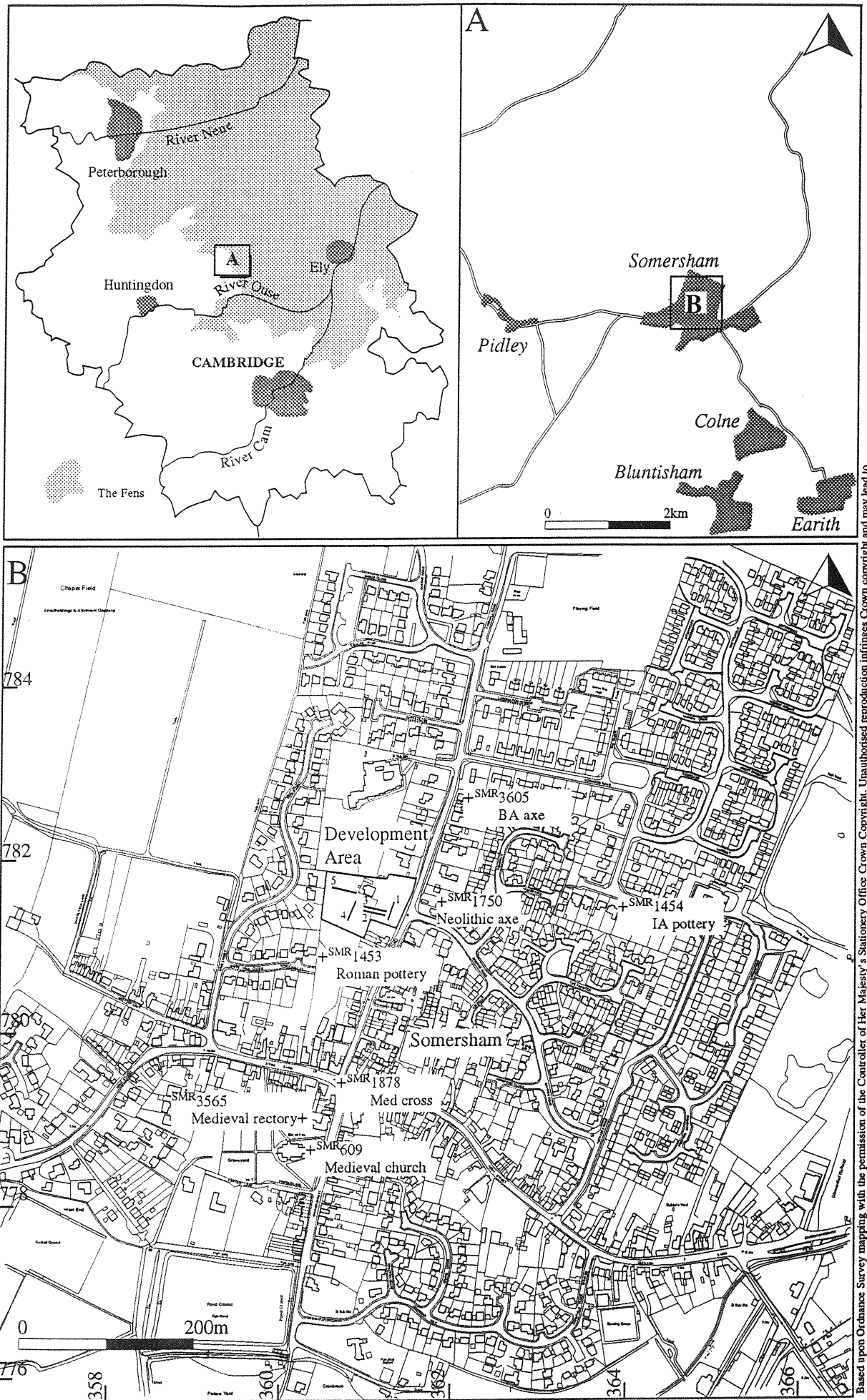


Figure 1 Site and trench location plan

Based upon Ordnance Survey mapping with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office. Crown Copyright. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. (Cambridgeshire County Council licence No. LA 07649X 2000)



Figure 2 Trench plans showing archaeological features (excavated sections are shown in black).

The village stands on higher ground, rising from the fen edge in the north, and extends along the high road from Huntingdon and St. Ives to Chatteris. The High Street is crossed in the middle of the village by a road from the south, which now only leads to the former site of the palace of the bishops of Ely, but which formerly joined Bluntisham Heath road, forming the approach to the palace from the south (Page, *ibid*). A medieval market was held at the crossing. Taylor (1989, 211-224) suggests that the village was relocated and the High Street moved northwards, possibly between 1109 and 1190. The church was rebuilt in the mid-thirteenth century and Taylor considers all the relocation and building was completed by 1279. The development site lies to the north of the medieval market place and the present High Street.

A number of small archaeological investigations have taken place in Somersham in recent years. In March 1996 an evaluation was carried out at 100 High Street, Somersham (TL3585 7788) by the Archaeological Field Unit (AFU) of Cambridgeshire County Council (Roberts 1996). Trenching revealed medieval property boundaries and a rubbish pit. In 1998 the AFU undertook archaeological monitoring at 100 High Street to coincide with the excavation of two sewer trenches (Connor 1998). The trenches showed that the ground had been made up in the later post-medieval period by up to 1.50m. Sealed beneath the make-up was evidence for a ditch adjacent and parallel to the High Street. Pits and possible beam slots were found but no dating evidence relating to these features was recovered.

#### 4 METHODOLOGY

Before the start of fieldwork the AFU conducted a documentary and cartographic review of the development area including a review of historical data, previous archaeological work and an examination of all available SMR entries.

Five trenches, totalling 110m in length, were excavated using a JCB with a toothless ditching bucket. 3% of the development area was evaluated by trenching (Fig. 2). All trenches were 1.6m wide and to a depth where the first terrace gravels were encountered. After machining each trench was cleaned by hand, photographed and recorded using the AFU standard archaeological recording system. In this report deposit numbers are shown in plain text and cut numbers are in bold text. In addition all the spoil heaps from the trenches were scanned for artefacts by eye.

#### 5 RESULTS

Within Trench 1 a medieval pit and an undated ditch were identified. Trenches 4 and 5 revealed Iron Age ditches in the western part of the development site.

##### **Trench 1**

Trench 1 was 21.50m long, 0.80m deep and ran on a north-south alignment (see Fig.2) It was located in the eastern part of the development area in order to test for possible medieval roadside occupation. The topsoil, 1, was composed of a dark brown clay silt, 0.80m deep. In the northern part of the trench a possible pit, 5, was encountered. Pit 5 was 0.50m deep and extended into the eastern part of

the trench. It contained one fill, 4, which was a brown silty clay and produced medieval pottery and animal bone. To the south of Pit 5 was ditch 16. Ditch 16 ran on an east–west alignment and contained one fill, 15. Fill 15 was a brown silty clay and contained no artefacts.

### Trench 2

Trench 2 was 20m long, 0.90m deep and ran on an east–west alignment(see Fig1). The topsoil, 6, was a dark brown clay silt and was 0.90m deep. In the western part of the trench a pit, 8, was encountered. Pit 8 was 0.50m deep and extended into the eastern part of the trench (see Fig 3). It contained one fill, 7, a brown silty clay which contained modern brick.

### Trench 3

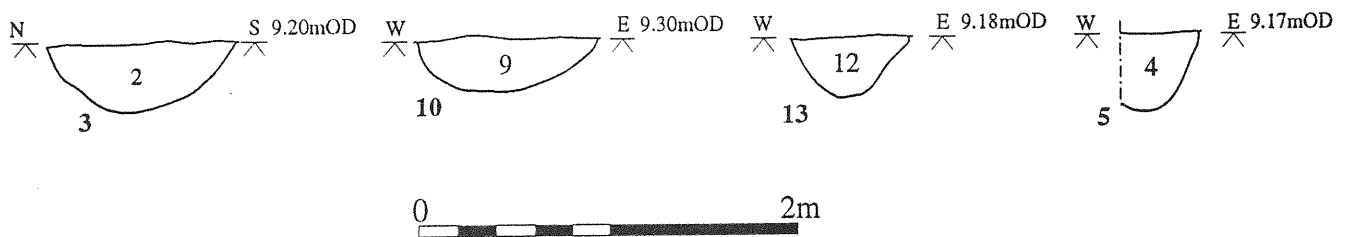
Trench 3, 23m long and 0.80m deep, ran on an east–west alignment (see Fig2). The topsoil, 6, was a dark brown clay silt which varied in depth from 0.80m–0.90m.

### Trench 4

Trench 4, 22m long and 0.7m deep, was positioned on a north–south alignment (see Fig2). In the southern part of the trench ditches 10 and 3 were revealed. Ditch 3 ran on a north–south alignment. Ditch 3, 0.80m wide and 0.30m deep, contained fill 2, a dark brown silty clay (see Fig3).. Finds from this context included Late Iron Age pottery and animal bone. Ditch 10, 0.80m wide and 0.40m deep, ran on an east–west alignment. It contained one fill 9, a dark brown silty clay which produced no artefacts.

### Trench 5

Trench 5, 30m long and 0.80m deep, ran on an east–west alignment in the western part of the development site. The terminus of a ditch, 13, was identified in the centre of the trench. Ditch 13 was 0.70m wide and 0.35 m wide. It contained a single fill, 12, a light brown silty clay which produced pottery dating from the middle to late Iron Age.



*Figure 3 Section drawings of excavated features*



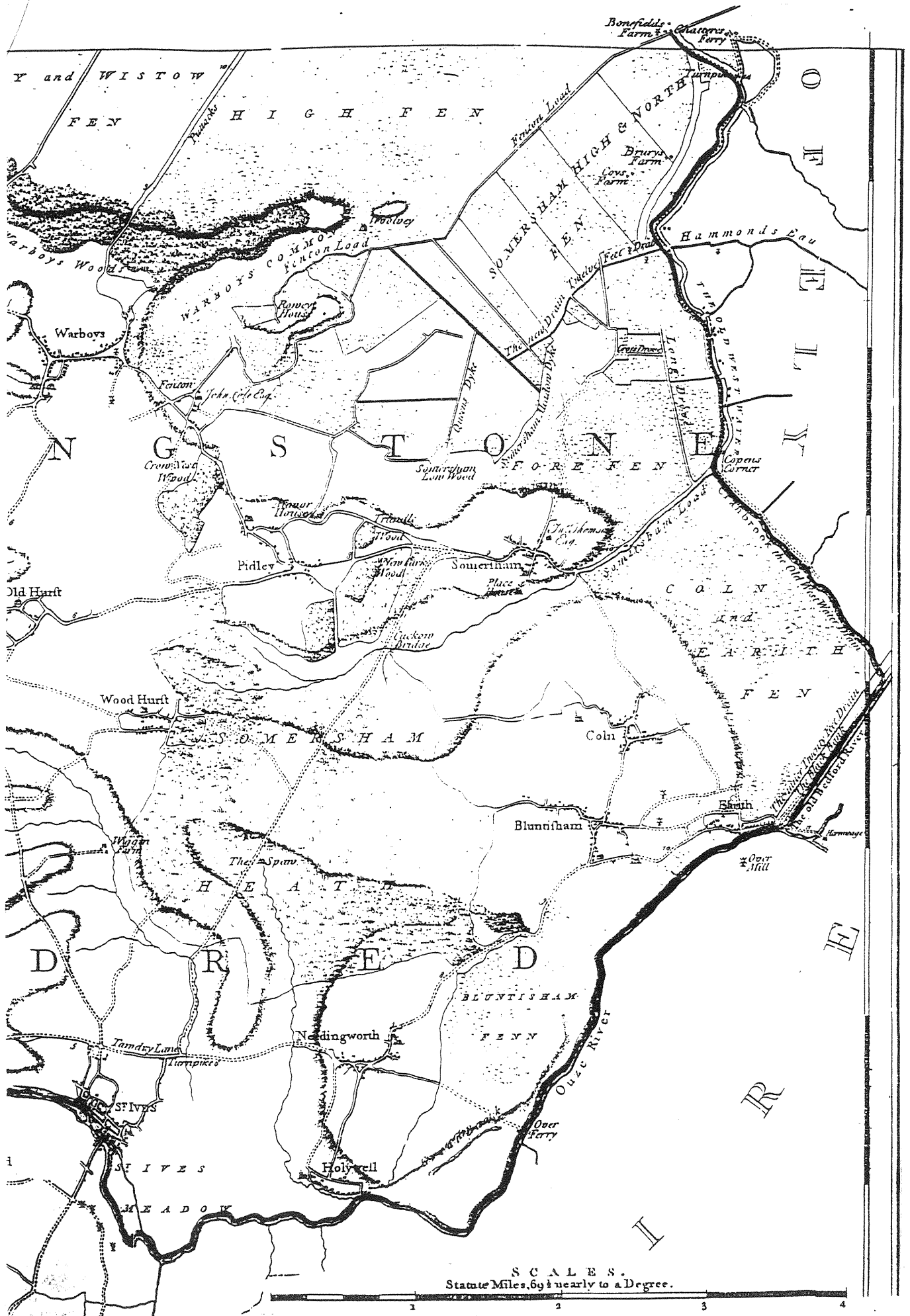


Figure 4 Jeffery's 1768 map of Huntingdonshire

## **6 DISCUSSION**

### **Trench 1**

The medieval pit located in the centre of trench 1 may represent the proximity of the trench to Parkhall Road. Jeffrey's map (see Fig 4) shows this as a routeway to Chatteris in the post medieval period. It may be the case that this routeway had its origins in the medieval period.

### **Trench 2**

A modern pit was encountered in the eastern part of the trench.

### **Trench 3**

No archaeological features were encountered within this trench.

### **Trench 4**

Two ditches **10** and **3** were revealed in the northern part of the trench. Ditch **10** ran on a north-west-south-east alignment and produced pottery dating from middle to late Iron Age. Furthermore this feature produced a substantial amount of animal bone. It seems likely that Ditch **10** represents an Iron Age field boundary.

### **Trench 5**

The possible butt end of Ditch **13**, which produced pottery dating from middle to late Iron Age, may represent the terminus of a Ditch.

## **7 CONCLUSION**

The evidence of a middle to late Iron Age ditch system in the western part of the site has underlined the potential for Iron Age occupation in the Somersham area. A considerable number of Iron Age sites are known in the area as well as at Earith and Chatteris. Further work in the western part of the development site would determine the extent of Iron Age occupation in this part of Somersham.

A medieval pit and an undated ditch were revealed in trench 1. These findings may relate to roadside development as Parkhall Rd mirrors the line of a possible medieval routeway to Chatteris.

The Iron Age finds from Parkhall Rd at St Ives museum included a knife blade and Iron Age pottery. This may indicate the possibility of a reasonably high status settlement in the vicinity of the subject site.

## 8 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank T.W. Lumley for commissioning the work. Thanks also to Diane Walls for her work on site, to Jon Cane for the illustrations and Judith Roberts for managing the project. The work was carried out and the report prepared in response to a brief issued by the County Archaeology Office (Development Control).

## 9. BIBLIOGRAPHY

Connor, A, 1998 *An Undated Ditch, Pits and Possible Building Foundation at 100 High Street, Somersham: A Basic Archaeological Investigation*. Cambridgeshire County Council Report No. B022

Hall, D, and Coles, J, 1994 *Fenland Survey: An Essay in Landscape and Persistence*, English Heritage Archaeological Report 1

Mawer, A, and Stenton, F M, 1969 *The Place Names of Bedfordshire and Huntingdonshire*, *English Place Name Society*, III, Cambridge

Page, W, Proby, G and Inskip Ladds, S. (Eds), 1974 *The Victoria History of the County of Huntingdon*, III, London

Roberts, J, 1995 *Medieval Property Boundaries and Rubbish Pits to the South of High Street, Somersham*. Cambridgeshire County Council Report No. A092.

Taylor. C C , 1989 *Somersham Palace, Cambridgeshire: A Medieval Landscape for Pleasure?* in Bowden, M. Mackay, D, and P Topping, Eds, *From Cornwall to Caithness: Some Aspects of British Field Archaeology*, BAR British Series 209

Maps consulted

Ordnance Survey Map 1927 Huntingdonshire Sheet XIX.2  
Thomas Jeffreys 1756 map of the County of Huntingdon

## APPENDIX A

### Context list

- 01 Topsoil 0.80m deep, dark brown clay silt with occasional pebbles
- 02 Fill of Ditch 3, dark brown silty clay with occasional pebbles
- 03 Cut of Ditch 2 0.80m wide 0.30m deep was concave with sloping base
- 04 Fill of Pit 5 brown silty clay with occasional pebbles
- 05 Cut of Ditch 2 wide 0.60m deep was concave with sloping base
- 06 Topsoil 0.70m deep, dark brown clay silt with occasional pebbles
- 07 Fill of Pit dark brown silty clay with occasional pebbles
- 08 Cut of Ditch 2 0.80m wide 0.30m deep was concave with sloping base
- 09 Fill of Ditch 1m wide 0.40m deep brown silty clay
- 10 Cut Ditch 1m wide 0.40m was concave with sloping base
- 11 Topsoil 0.80m deep dark brown silty clay
- 12 Fill of Ditch light brown silty clay with occasional pebbles
- 13 Cut of Ditch 0.80m wide concave with sloping base
- 14 Topsoil 0.80m deep dark brown silty clay
- 15 Fill of Ditch dark brown silty clay with occasional pebbles
- 16 Cut of Ditch 0.25m deep

## APPENDIX B

### Pottery Spot dating

Dr Paul Spoerry

Context	Material	Date
02	1 sherd of East Midland Scored ware	300 BC-1st century AD
02	1 combed sherd of unknown origin.	unknown
04	1 sherd of Ely ware	1200-1400AD
04	1 sherd of Ely ware	1200-1400AD
12	1 sherd of East Midland Scored ware	300 BC-1st century AD
12	10 sherds of handmade pottery	Late Iron Age



Cambridgeshire  
County Council

Education, Libraries  
and Heritage

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