

Archaeological Field Unit

Medieval and Post Medieval Remains at Mitchell's Farm, Wilburton: An Archaeological Evaluation

Spencer Cooper and Aileen Connor

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Commissioned by L.J. Gawn Associates for the Trustees of B.S.Pell (Deceased)

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SUMMARY

Between the 13th and 18th October 2000 the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council carried out an archaeological evaluation land on Mitchell's Farm, School Lane Wilburton (TL484748). The work was commissioned by L. J. Gawn Associates for the Trustees of B.S.Pell (Deceased). The proposed development includes the construction of seven new dwellings with associated access and services within a total area of 0.56 hectares.

The evaluation revealed probable medieval occupation in the north eastern part of the site in the form of post holes and ditches containing Ely Ware pottery (1200-1350 AD). Post-medieval deposits including structural remains and field boundaries were revealed in the northern and central parts of the site. The southern part of the development area was largely given over to cultivation throughout the medieval and post medieval periods.

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Medieval and Post-Medieval Remains at Mitchells Farm, Wilburton: An Archaeological Evaluation (TL484748)

1 INTRODUCTION

Between the 13th and 18th October 2000 the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council carried out an archaeological evaluation of land at Mitchell's Farm, School Lane Wilburton (TL484748). The work was commissioned by L. J. Gawn Associates for the Trustees of B.S.Pell (deceased). The proposed development includes the construction of seven new dwellings with associated access and services within a total area of 0.56 hectares. The evaluation was undertaken in response to a Brief issued by the County Archaeology Office of Cambridgeshire County Council (A. Thomas July 10th 2000).

The evaluation comprised a preliminary desktop study (Cooper 2000) and an intrusive investigation. The results of the desktop study are reported on in AFU report No.B78, the results of the intrusive investigation are reported on here.

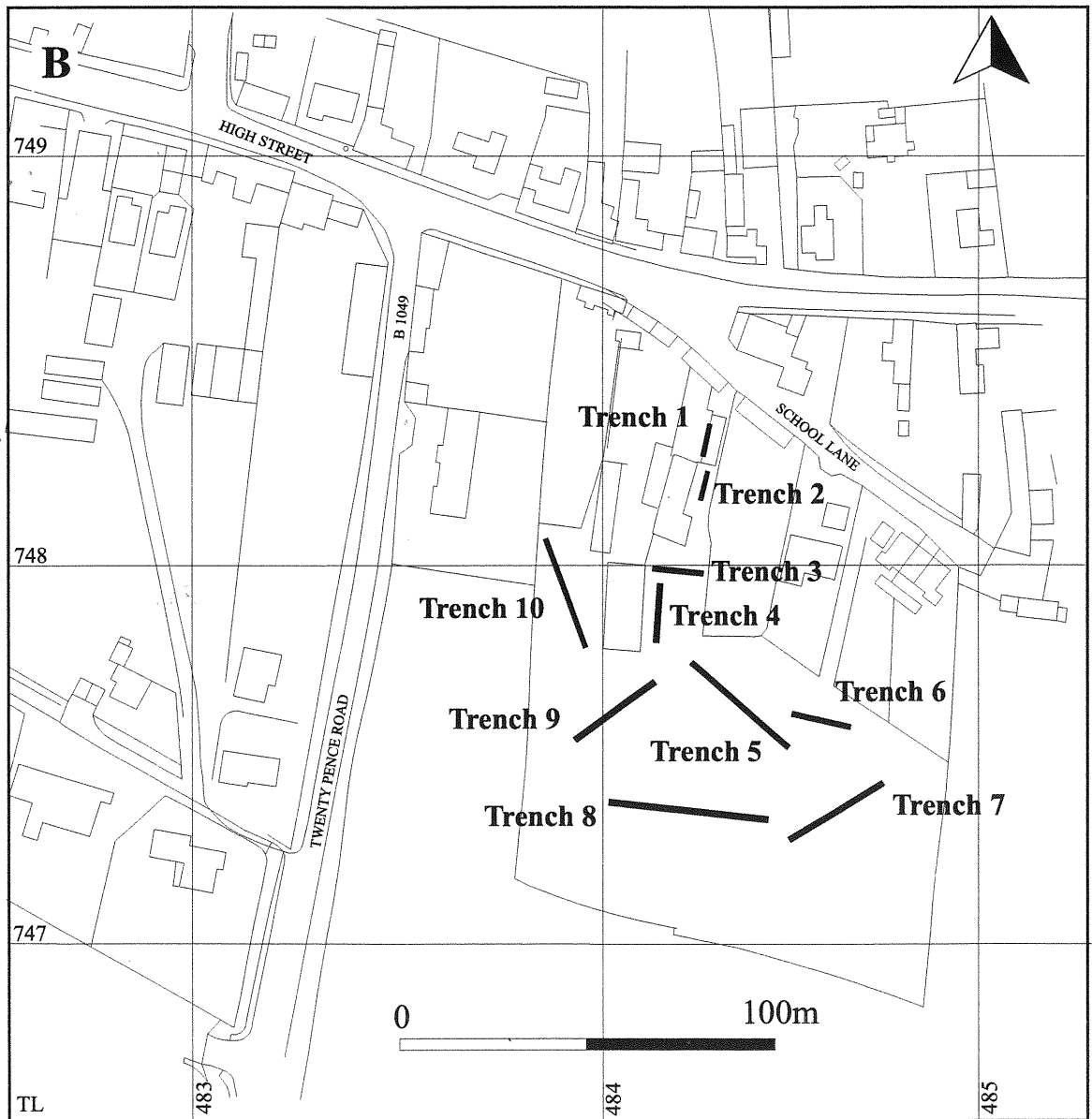
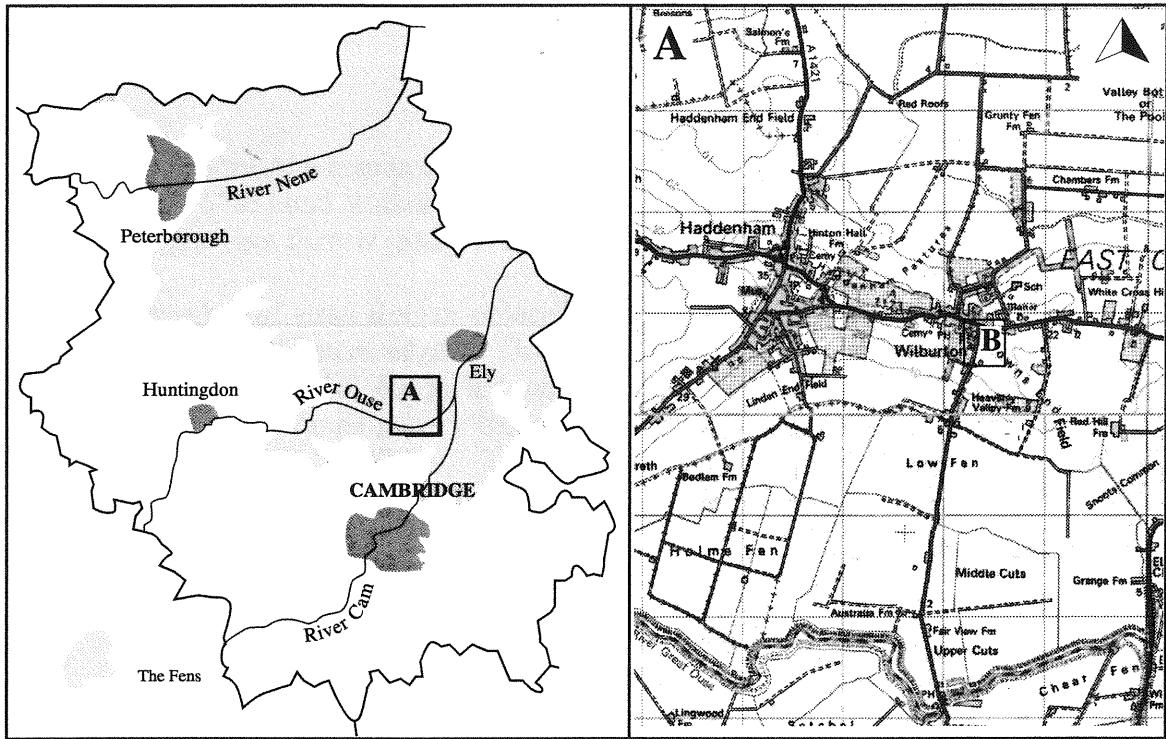
2 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

Wilburton village is situated on the Lower Green sand 'uplands' which form the Haddenham Ridge, and the terrace river gravels of the valley. The subject site is located within the medieval historic core on the junction of the High St and School Lane. The nearest Bench Mark (22.35m) on the corner of 43 High Street was used to transfer Ordnance Datum levels to the site. The site itself is relatively level, archaeological deposits were encountered at between 21.50 and 21.90m above Ordnance Datum.

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The archaeological and historical background is summarised below, the full report can be found in AFU report B78 (Cooper 2000).

In a wider context Wilburton is situated on the Haddenham Ridge on a narrow band of Greensand which was attractive to medieval and possibly earlier settlement (Hall, 1996). The clay and fen areas which cover much of the parish were probably much less attractive to settlement. The parish is best known for the



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Figure 1 Site Location Plan

late Bronze Age hoards of metalwork discovered in the 19th century in Grunty Fen (SMR 5785) and Wilburton Rush Fen (SMR 5717). Pottery (SMR 5894) and a ploughed out barrow (SMR 5827) have also been found.

A number of stray Roman objects including pottery and coins have been found around the southern edge of Grunty Fen to the north of the subject site (SMR 5601, 5626, 5726, 6965) but not enough to indicate whether there was any settlement. Roman pottery has also been found nearer to the subject site to the south east (SMR 5755). To the south west a group of mounds has been speculatively attributed to the Roman period but would seem equally likely to be post-medieval (SMR 5939).

Other than the church which was probably Norman in origin but was rebuilt and has a late 13th century tower and chancel arch, there are few medieval remains in Wilburton. The parish was allotted to the Bishops of Ely in 1109, along with neighbouring Haddenham and Stretham and there was certainly a manor house on the site of the Burystead, a late Elizabethan brick house a short distance to the north east of the subject site.

The Mitchell's Farm site is located in a potentially archaeologically sensitive part of Wilburton. There was every reason to suppose that the site would reveal evidence of medieval activity given its proximity to the probable medieval School Lane and the adjacent 16th Century Tithe House.

The first known reference to Mitchell's Farm was in the Lay Subsidy Rolls of 1523 AD (Reaney 1943). Mitchell's Farm along with other farms in Wilburton including Martins and Mingays Farm were associated with the families of William Martin (1840AD), John Mingay (1676AD) and William Mitchell (1523 AD).

An evaluation undertaken by Aileen Connor at Warren Lodge Farm Wilburton in July 2000 revealed Medieval property boundaries. These property boundaries were identified in trenches 1,2 and 6, and are likely to represent hedgerows or ditches along earlier property divisions. There was a hint of ridge and furrow cultivation in trench 4

The Tithe Map of 1823 shows School Lane as continuing in a NW-SE direction beyond the village towards an area of fields called Towns End. School Lane was not the only lane to follow this orientation, to the south were two other lanes on the same orientation and travelling towards the same area. These were Stone Lane and Gravel Pit Marches, the three lanes were approximately equidistant and seem to be aligned perpendicular to Twenty Pence Lane (B1049) which is the main road into Wilburton from the south. A number of buildings are shown on the map to fall within the development area.

The first edition Ordnance Survey map of 1887 shows that the development area

had been subdivided into two plots with two buildings on the School lane frontage and two long buildings set back from the frontage. On this map School lane terminates before it reaches the east end of the village.

4 METHODOLOGY

Following background documentary study (Cooper 2000), a series of 10 trenches totalling 195m in length, and 1.6m in width, were excavated using a JCB with a toothless ditching bucket. The locations of the trenches are shown in Figure 1. After machining was completed each trench was cleaned by hand and photographed and recorded using the AFU standard archaeological recording system. In addition all of the spoil heaps from the trenches were scanned visually for artefacts.

5 RESULTS (Fig.2)

Common layers topsoil 1 and subsoil 2 were present in all trenches. The topsoil consisted of dark greyish brown sandy silt and varied in depth from 0.28m to 0.45m across the site. The subsoil consisted of dark brown silty sand and varied in depth from 0.10m to 0.25m across the site.

5.1 Trench 1

Trench 1 was 8m long 0.65m deep and located in the northern part of the site close to School Lane. It was located in this area to investigate possible features relating to a medieval frontage. Two ditches and five post holes were present, the ditches and two of the post holes contained post-medieval finds, the remaining three post holes contained no artefacts, although post hole 51 was later than ditch 6 and must be post medieval in date. All of the post holes were very similar in character and are likely to be associated with each other, it can therefore be assumed that all of the features in this trench were post medieval in date.

Ditch 4 was 0.30m wide and 0.12 m deep and contained a single fill 3. Fill 3 was a brownish grey silty sand with occasional gravel. Finds from this context included modern brick.

Ditch 6 had concave sides and ran on an east-west alignment. It was 0.40m wide and 0.20m deep and contained a single fill 5 which was a dark grey sandy silt. Finds from this context included post medieval brick and a residual medieval sherd.

Post hole 51 was not excavated, it cut ditch 6.

Post hole 8 had concave sides and was 0.50m wide and 0.30m deep. It contained one fill 7 which was composed of a dark grey sandy silt and produced post medieval brick and glass.

Post hole 10 was 0.24 m wide and 0.08m deep. It contained one fill 9 a dark grey sandy silt and

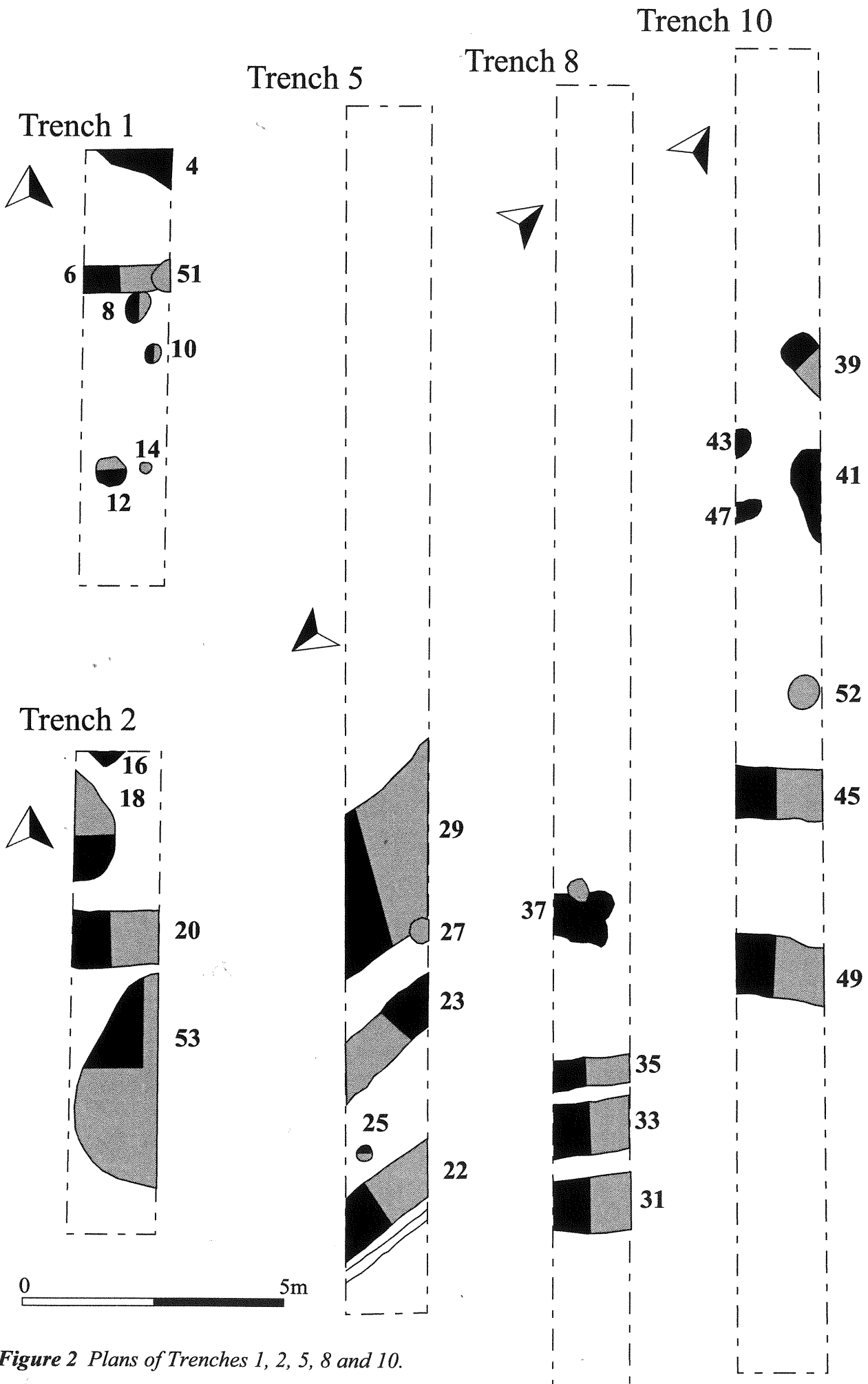


Figure 2 Plans of Trenches 1, 2, 5, 8 and 10.

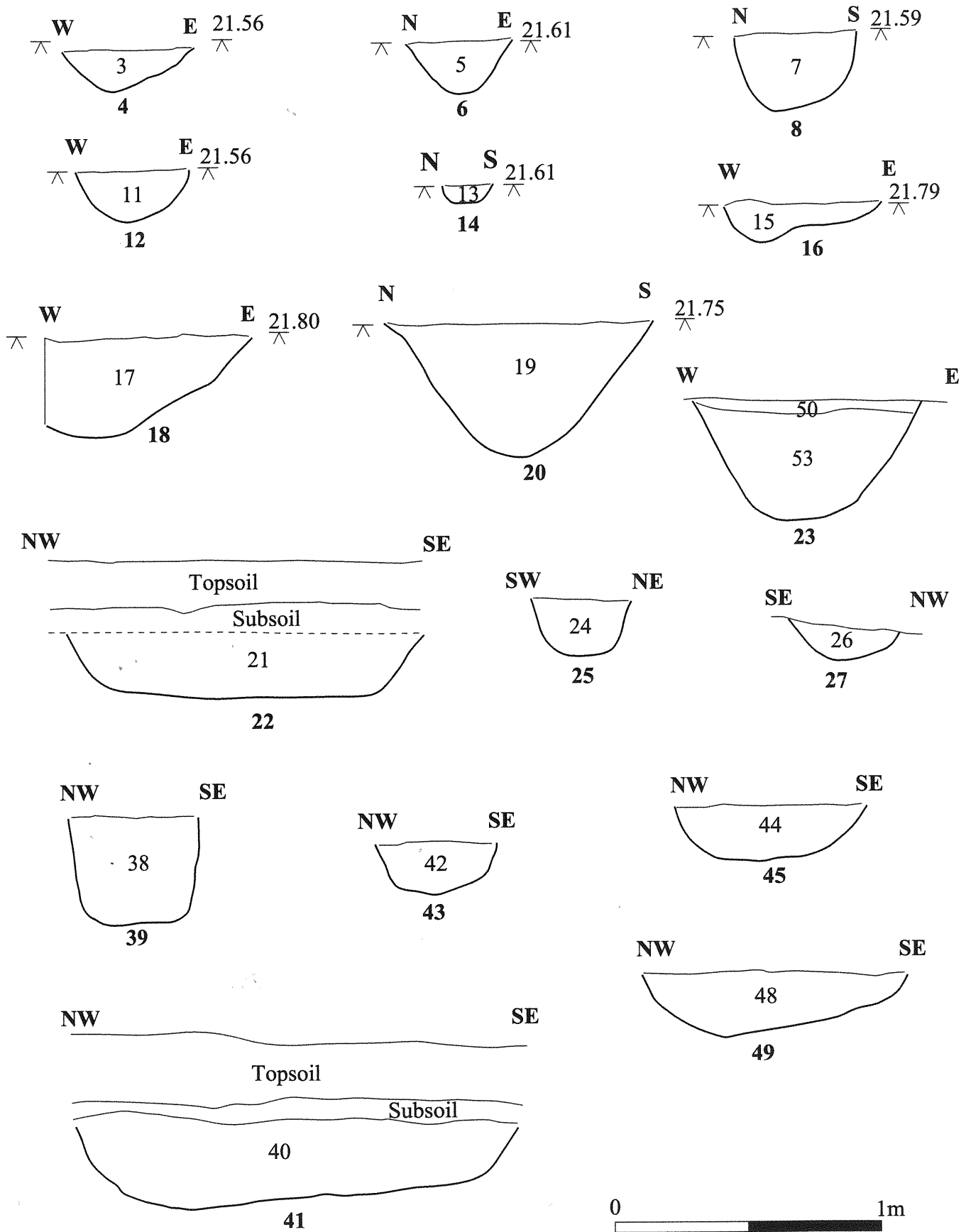


Figure 3 Sections Through Selected Excavated Features

produced no artefacts.

Post hole **12** measured 0.45 m wide and 0.20m deep and contained one fill 11. Fill 11 was a dark grey silty sand and contained post medieval artefacts.

Post hole **14** was 0.15m wide and 0.05 deep and contained a single fill 13. Fill 13 was a dark grey sandy silt and produced no artefacts

5.2 Trench 2

Trench 2 was 9m long and 0.61m deep and positioned on a north-south alignment. One post hole **16**, two pits **18** and **55**, and a ditch **20** were uncovered. Post hole **16** and pit **55** both contained post medieval finds, ditch **20** and pit **18** may be medieval in date since they both contained pottery dating to the period 1200-1350 AD, although ditch 20 was parallel with, and very similar in character to ditch 6 in trench 1 which contained post-medieval pottery.

Post hole **16** was 0.60m wide and 0.12m deep and contained a single fill 15. Fill 15 was a dark grey sandy silt with occasional roots. Finds from this context included post medieval bricks and glass.

Pit **18** had concave sides 1.50m wide and 0.35 m deep and contained a single fill 17 which was composed of a dark grey sandy silt. A sherd of medieval pottery dating to 1200-1350 AD was recovered from fill 17.

Ditch **20** ran on an east west alignment and was 0.90m wide and 0.50m deep. It contained a dark brown sandy silt and produced a sherd of medieval pottery.

Pit **55** was 1.5m wide and 0.15m deep. It contained a single fill 54, a dark grey silty sand which produced modern brick.

5.3 Trench 3

Trench 3 was 13m long and 0.65m deep and was located on an east-west alignment. No archaeological features were present in this trench.

5.4 Trench 4

Trench 4 was 23m long and 0.40m deep and was located on a north-south alignment. No archaeological features were present in this trench.

5.5 Trench 5

Trench 5 was 22.8m long and 0.38m deep and was located on a north-west/south east alignment. Three ditches and two post holes were uncovered in the north west corner of the trench. All of the features were post-medieval in date.

Ditch **22** was concave with a flat base and ran on a north south alignment. It measured 0.95m wide and 0.20m deep. It was filled by 21, a brownish yellow sandy silt containing post-medieval brick.

Post hole **25** was 0.36m wide and 0.22m deep. It contained a mid brown silty sand fill with

occasional gravel. Finds from this context included post medieval pottery and brick. Ditch 23 was concave with a sloping base and ran on a north-south alignment. This ditch was 1.50m wide and 0.80m deep and contained two fills 53 and 50. Lower fill 53 was a brown silty sandy with occasional charcoal. Finds from this context included post medieval brick and pottery. Upper fill 50 was composed of a mid greyish brown silty sand and was 0.05m deep. Post hole 27 was 0.40m wide and 0.12m deep and contained a single fill 26. Fill 26 was composed of a mid greyish brown silty sand. Post hole 27 cut ditch 29. Ditch 29 ran on a north south alignment and measured 2.60m wide and 0.30m deep. It contained a single fill 28, a brown silty sand. Finds from this context included post medieval brick and a sherd of residual possible prehistoric pottery. The feature is likely to be a remnant of ridge and furrow cultivation.

5.6 Trench 6

Trench 6 was 11.70m long and 0.53m deep and was located on an east-west alignment. No archaeological features were present in this trench.

5.7 Trench 7

Trench 7 was 26.30m long and 0.53m deep and was located on a north-east/south-west alignment. No archaeological features were present in this trench.

5.8 Trench 8

Trench 8 was 24.70m long and 0.51m deep and was located on an east-west alignment. Three post-medieval ditches and a possibly medieval hearth or bonfire were identified in the eastern part of the trench.

Ditch 31 was on a north-south alignment and was 1.00m wide and 0.28m deep. It contained a single fill 30, a yellowish brown silty sand with occasional fragments of post medieval brick.

Ditch 33 ran on a north-south alignment and measured 1m wide and 0.35m deep. This ditch contained a single 32 which was composed of an orange brown silty sand. Fragments of post medieval brick and a possible prehistoric sherd were recovered from this context.

Ditch 35 ran on a north south alignment and contained one fill 34. Fill 34 was composed of a yellowish brown silty sand.

Hearth/bonfire 37 was irregular in plan and had an irregular base. This feature measured 1.50m by 1.0m and was 0.20m deep. It was filled by a single fill 36, a dark grey silty sand with a frequent amount of charcoal and burnt stones. Hearth material and medieval roof tiles were recovered from this fill.

5.9 Trench 9

Trench 9 was 11.70m long and 0.53m deep and was located on an east-west alignment. No archaeological features were present in this trench.

5.10 Trench 10

Trench 10 was 25m long and 0.65m deep and was located on a north-west/south-east alignment. Four pits and two ditches were present in this trench. Two of the pits contained post-medieval finds, the remaining features contained no dateable artefacts.

Pit 39 was subcircular, 0.50m wide and 0.40m deep and had concave sides with sloping base. It contained a single fill 38 a dark grey silty sand with frequent animal bone.

Pit 41 was subcircular and was 0.50m wide, 1.50m long and 0.35 m deep. Fill 40 was composed of a dark brown silty sand. Finds from this context include post medieval pottery and animal bone.

Pit 43 measured 0.40m wide and 0.10 m deep and had concave sides with a sloping base. It contained fill 42 a brown grey silty sand produced post medieval pottery.

Pit 47 was 0.30m and 0.10m deep with concave sides and a sloping base. It contained a single 46 fill dark brown sandy silt. No artefacts were recovered from this context.

Ditch 45 ran on a north-east/south-west alignment and had concave sides and a sloping base. It measured 0.70m wide and 0.20m deep and contained a brown sandy silt 44. No artefacts were recovered from this context.

Ditch 49 ran on a north-east/south-west alignment and had concave sides with a sloping base.

Pit 52 was identified to the north of ditch 45, it was not excavated.

6 DISCUSSION

The evaluation shows that medieval and post medieval remains are present in parts of the proposed development area. One probably residual prehistoric pottery sherd from trench 8 implies the presence of low level prehistoric activity. Trenches 2 and 8 provided evidence for medieval activity. Trenches 1, 8 and 10 provided evidence for post medieval activity. Trenches 3, 4, 6, 7 and 9 produced no archaeological features at all.

6.1 Medieval

The medieval remains were found in two locations, towards the north of the development area close to the probable medieval frontage and towards the south of the development area in what must have been the rear of medieval properties. Pit 18 (trench 2) was located towards the front of the development area, although it was still far enough back to have been located in the back yard of a property fronting onto School Lane. It contained relatively few finds and was quite shallow so is unlikely to have been used for rubbish. Post holes to the north of the pit contained post-medieval finds, however, it is possible that they represent the remains of a building constructed in the medieval period, but demolished more recently.

Ditch 20, in the same trench, may form part of a medieval property boundary

which defined the rear of a medieval plot which fronted onto School Lane. It should be noted, however, that this ditch was parallel with and remarkably similar in character to a post-medieval ditch in trench 1. The two ditches may have been part of the same system of land division or drainage, alternatively they may represent a shifting boundary over a period of time. Residual medieval pottery recovered from the topsoil in trench 1 certainly implies activity in medieval times which may have been subsequently obscured by more recent activity.

In the centre south of the development area a possible hearth or temporary bonfire 37 (trench 8) was found. This feature was relatively shallow but contained medieval roof tiles and fragments of hearth lining. Although there was evidence for burning in the fill from fragments of charcoal and burnt stone, there was little evidence for in-situ burning. The feature must, therefore, have been either a very temporary fire place, or perhaps the repository for hearth materials moved from elsewhere. Other than this one feature the southern area of the development area was largely devoid of archaeological features dating to the medieval period and is likely to have been given over to cultivation.

6.2 Post-Medieval

Post-medieval features were present in several of the excavated trenches. Trenches 1 and 2 showed that timber buildings had been present in the north area of the site near the School Lane frontage, although these may have had medieval origins. Ditch 4 and 6 which ran on an east-west alignment may represent a slightly shifting post medieval boundary.

The southern part of the development area was likely to be largely given over to cultivation in the post medieval period. Trenches 5, 8 and 10 represent this area and revealed a series of ditches possibly representing field boundaries or possibly ridge and furrow cultivation features. These ditches are on a similar alignment to the modern field boundaries.

7 CONCLUSION

The evaluation has identified the presence of probable medieval remains in the north eastern and central southern areas of the site. The medieval features located towards School Lane may be peripheral features such as pits and boundaries associated with a medieval property. Structural remains located in the same area may have had their origins in the medieval period, although finds directly relating to them were post-medieval in date. The single feature of possible medieval date found in trench 8 in the central southern area of the site is interesting, since it is within an area otherwise thought to have been given over to cultivation during this period.

Post medieval remains on the site followed a very similar pattern to the medieval. The evidence for structures was confined to the area nearest to School lane and features associated with cultivation and field boundaries was found in the southern part of the development area.

The evaluation implies that structural remains, possibly dating to the medieval period and certainly post medieval in date exist in the vicinity of trenches 1 and 2 in the north-eastern part of the development area. The remainder of the site would seem to have been given over to cultivation throughout the medieval and post medieval periods with the exception of one feature in trench 8 which appears to be an anomalous feature possibly associated with medieval craft activity.

8 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank L.J Gawn Associates for commissioning this study on behalf of the Trustees of B.S.Pell (deceased) and Dr Tim Reynolds, Senior Archaeologist at the County Sites and Monuments record for his assistance. Thanks are due to Aileen Connor for managing the project and Caroline Malim for the illustrations.

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Maps Consulted

Ordnance Survey 25inch 1888 sheet xvii Cambridgeshire County council
Tithe map of Wilburton 1823 CRO 5634

Appendix A List of Contexts

Context	Trench	Cut	Finds	Description
01	All	NA		Topsoil
02	All	NA		Subsoil
03	1	4	Modern brick and Glass	Fill of 4
04	1	4		Ditch
05	1	6	Victorian brick and Late Medieval Coarse Ware	Fill of 6
06	1	6		Ditch
07	1	8	Post medieval glass and brick	Fill of 8
08	1	8		Post hole
09	1	10		Fill of 10
10	1	10		Post hole
11	1	12	Modern brick	Fill of 12
12	1	12		Post hole
13	1	14		Fill of 14
14	1	14		Post hole
15	2	16	Post medieval brick and glass	Fill of 16
16	2	16		Post hole
17	2	18	Ely Ware 1200-1350AD.	Fill of 18
18	2	18		Pit
19	2	20	Leeched medieval pottery sherd	Fill of 20
20	2	20		Ditch
21	5	22	Post medieval brick.	Fill of 22
22	5	22		Ditch
23	5	23		Ditch
24	5	25	Post medieval pottery and brick	Fill of 25
25	5	25		Post hole
26	5	27		Fill of 27
27	5	27		Post hole
28	5	29	Modern brick and possible prehistoric pottery sherd.	Fill of 29
29	5	29		Ditch
30	8	31	Post medieval brick fragments	Fill of 31
31	8	31		Ditch
32	8	33	Handmade late Prehistoric sherd	Fill of 33
33	8	33		Ditch
34	8	35		Fill of 35
35	8	35		Ditch
36	8	37	Medieval or later tile and 9 fragments pottery.	Fill of 37
37	8	37		Hearth?
38	10	39	Animal bone	Fill of 39
39	10	39		Pit
40	10	41	Post medieval pottery and animal bone	Fill of 41
41	10	41		Pit
42	10	43	Post medieval pottery	Fill of 43
43	10	43		Pit
44	10	45		Fill of 45
45	10	45		Ditch
46	10	47		Fill of 47
47	10	47		Pit
48	10	49		Fill of 49
49	10	49		Ditch
50	5	23		Fill of 23
51	1	51		Post hole
52	10	52		Pit
53	5	23	Post medieval pottery sherd and animal bone.	Fill of 23
54	2	55	Modern brick	Fill of 55
55	2	55		Pit



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