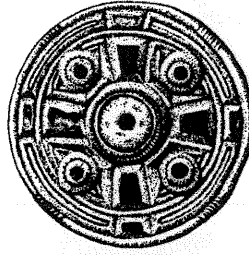


UNTIL THE ORIGINAL
TURNS UP



Archaeological Field Unit

**Medieval Drains and Boundaries to the rear of
28-32 High Street, Melbourn**

Judith Roberts

November 2002

Cambridgeshire County Council

Report No. A217

Commissioned by Plum Developments

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28-32 High Street, Melbourn**

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2002

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SUMMARY

On the 4th and 5th November 2002 an archaeological evaluation was carried out by staff from the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council on land to the rear of 28-32 High Street, Melbourn in advance of development.

Three trenches were excavated. One trench was heavily contaminated with modern building debris and hydrocarbons, one trench contained natural features and the third trench contained archaeological features. A series of ditches running parallel to the High Street appear to be drains or property boundaries containing material dating from the medieval and post-medieval periods.

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28-32 High Street, Melbourn
(TL 383 449)**

INTRODUCTION

On the 4th and 5th November 2002 an archaeological evaluation was carried out by staff from the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council on land to the rear of 28-32 High Street, Melbourn in advance of development including construction of three houses with associated road and services. The land is to the rear of a listed building (no. 28 High Street, LB3139), which is being renovated, and a former petrol station.

The proposed development involves construction of houses, services and an access road in an area of approximately 0.2900ha. The land available for evaluation is restricted by the deep tanks and modern disturbance at the southern end of the site. The development will take place to the rear of a Grade II listed building on a plot used in the recent past as workshops and a garage.

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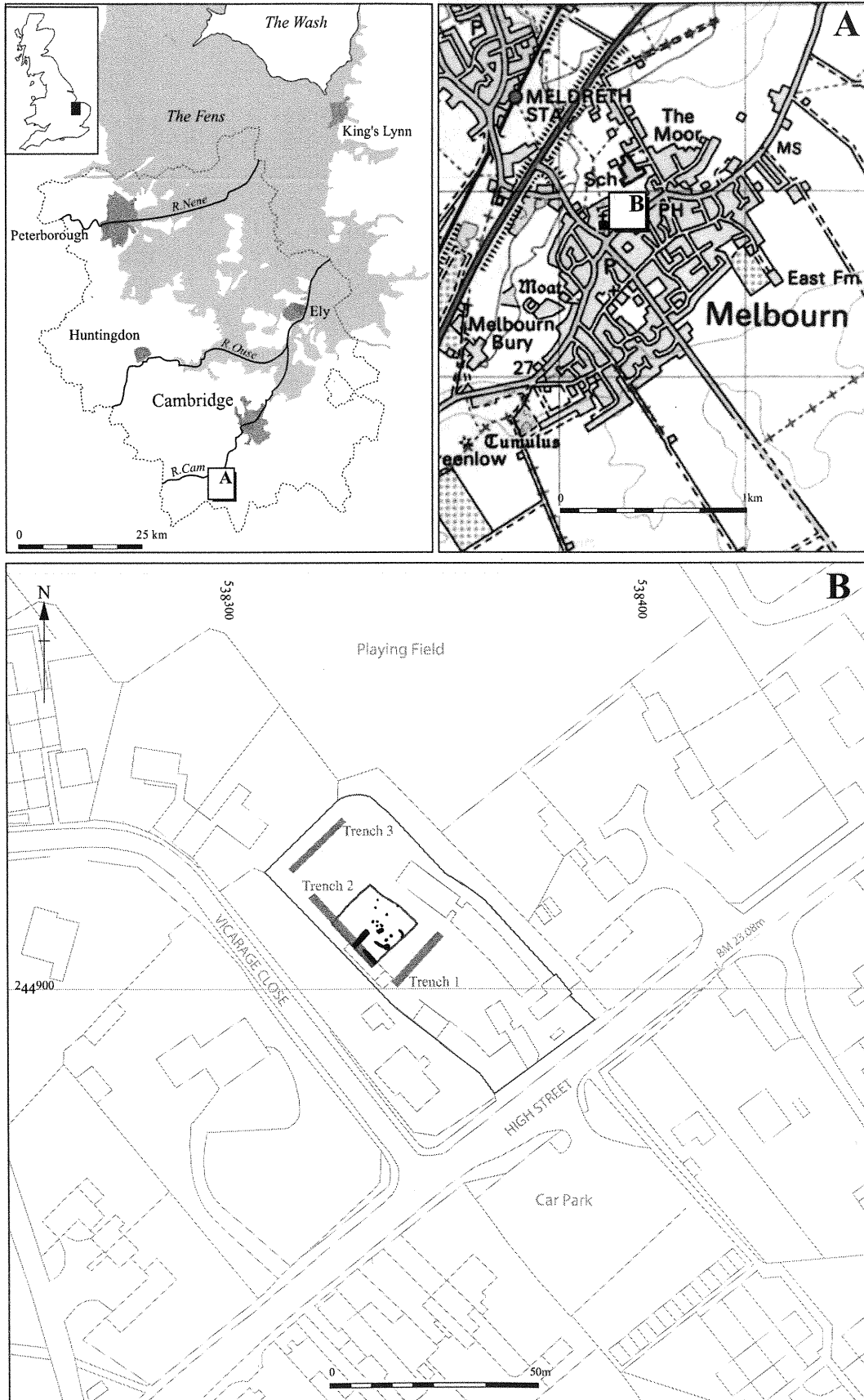
GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

The area is on Lower Chalk (close to the junction between Melbourn Rock and Totternhoe stone at a height of approximately 23m OD).

The development site occupies an area of approximately 2900 square metres. The area at the front of the property includes a listed building (see below) and a former garage

ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Information regarding the site and the surrounding area was obtained from the Cambridgeshire County Council Sites and Monuments Record and from sources held at the Archaeological Field Unit.



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Figure 1 Location of Evaluation Trenches (shaded), Excavated Area (green) and Development Area (red).

A considerable number of archaeological remains have been found in the parish of Melbourn. These range from a possible neolithic enclosure or henge near New Farm (SMR no. 3195, a circular enclosure with interrupted ditch and internal pit circle and a wide entrance flanked by ring ditches Kirby an Oosthuizen 2000), through various Bronze Age barrows (SMR nos. 3124, 3125, 3149, 3171 and 3172) and enclosures (SMR no. 3165 and 3434), Iron Age and Roman settlement and burial monuments around the parish have been identified through aerial photography of cropmarks and soilmarks. Ancient trackways (Ashwell Street and the Icknield Way), both Romanised, pass through the parish (Erlington 1982). Many of the Anglo Saxon and medieval finds come from closer to the village itself suggesting the settlement has been concentrated in this area in the historic period.

Recent excavation has revealed an Anglo-Saxon cemetery (including early Christian period graves). This has been dated to the early seventh century, perhaps related to the nearby minster at Meldreth

The place name – *mel* or *meld* – has variously been interpreted as deriving from the name for fat hen (eaten as a vegetable in the early medieval period) or relating to barrows or mounts, or being named after a personal name (Reaney, 1943).

The site is located in the medieval core of the village. The thirteenth century parish church of All Saints (Sites & Monuments Record no. 3115) lies 100m to the west and Lordship Farm medieval manor and moat (SMR no. 1993) lies 100m to the east. Saxon and medieval pottery has been recovered immediately west of the site (SMR no. 8665).

The royal estate at Melbourn was given to Ely in 970 which retained it until Dissolution. The concentration of moated sites at Melbourn implied rivalry between households. The Argentines manor house stood at Lordship Farm (to the east of the development site) where part of the damaged moated enclosure is still visible and the house within the moated site contains fourteenth century timbers. Records talk of a hall, thatched chamber, chapel, kitchen, granary and brewhouse surrounded by the moat (Taylor 1997).

The listed building, 32 High Street, is recorded as dating from c. 1770 and having been variously used as a house, a dairy and a public house. Recent work in the house suggests certain elements may date back to the seventeenth century.

METHODOLOGY

Three trenches (total length 57m) were excavated to the rear of the High Street properties and small business development. The trenches provided over a 5% sample of the available area. Topsoil and modern overburden were removed using a wheeled mechanical excavator with a flat bladed ditching bucket (1.8m wide). This was carried out under the supervision of an archaeologist. Trenches were located to give a representative sample of the available area including the recently demolished

buildings in order to test how badly the post-medieval construction had truncated archaeological deposits.

The trenches were cleaned and planned and a sample of selected features was excavated to determine the date and character of the site. The AFU's single context recording system was used to record all features and deposits. Sections were drawn at an appropriate scale and trenches planned at 1:50.

In this report deposit numbers are shown in plain text and cut numbers in bold. Descriptions of the character and morphology of features are listed in the main text for each trench.

RESULTS

All the features below were sealed by subsoil except the most recent disturbance from relatively modern building work and bioturbation.

Trench 1 (oriented north-east-south west) was 17m long. The south-western end (for approximately 8m) was disturbed by post-medieval foundations and building debris. The remainder of the trench was contaminated with diesel. This trench also filled with water and no archaeological investigation was undertaken on health and safety grounds.

Trench 2 (oriented north-west-south-east) was 22.5m long and contained seven archaeological features.

Pit 8 (extending beyond the south-eastern end of the trench) was over 1.25m long, 0.9m wide and 0.12m deep. The pale grey brown fill contained fragments of brick and a piece of rusted wire.

To the north was ditch 1 (0.95m wide and 0.16m deep, running approximately parallel to the High Street. This ditch had a gradually sloping southern edge and a stepped northern edge. The single fill, 2, was a dark brown clay silt with very rare flints and contained 14 sherds of pottery including Essex micaceous wares, Northampton shelly wares and Ely ware. The pottery from this features dates from the thirteenth to fourteenth century.

Two rounded pits extended beyond the western edge of the trench. Both pits (**10** and **12**) were approximately 0.6m wide and 0.05m deep. The very dark brown clay silt fills contained no finds and the proximity of trees along the boundary suggests these may be the result of root activity.

Ditch 14 (approximately 8m wide and over 0.6m deep) also ran parallel to the High Street. This contained two fills – the lower fill, 15, was a very dark brown slightly clay silt with a very high organic content and very occasional flint pebbles. Fragments of animal bone, sherds of early post-medieval red ware (sixteenth-seventeenth

century), and peg tile were recovered from this fill. Sealing fill 15 was fill 16 – a compact mid-orange brown silty clay with rare flint fragments. This fill extended to the south and was cut by pits 10 and 12.

To the north of ditch 14 was feature 19 which was either a large oval pit or the terminal end of a ditch. This feature was over 2m long, 2.3m wide and 0.53m deep and contained two fills. The lower fill, 18, was a dark brown/grey black silty clay with a very high organic content. This fill contained fragments of animal bone and a single undateable sherd. Sealing fill 18 was fill 17, a dark grey clay with orange red mottles which contained no artefactual material.

At the north-western end of the trench were two features, 3 and 5. Ditch 3 (oriented north-east-south-west) was 1.8m wide and 0.4m deep with straight sides and a flat base. The fill, 4, was a dark grey clay with orange mottles which contained no finds.

The feature at the end of the trench, 5, has been interpreted as a pond. It had gently sloping sides and a concave base which extended beyond the edge of the trench. The lowest fill, 7, contained quantities of discoloured animal bone (cattle, pig and sheep) and an organic rich peat-like substance which contained very little apart from decayed vegetation and a few seeds of various rushes (*Juncus* sp. and *Scirpus* sp.) and no charred material. No pottery or other dating material was recovered from this fill. The upper fill, 6, a dark grey clay with frequent orange red mottles and rare flint pebbles contained no finds.

Trench 3 (oriented north-east-south-west) was 18m long sloping down to the south-east where there was evidence that this end of the trench had been waterlogged, possibly the edge of a pond. The chalk natural in the base of the trench was discoloured in places and the discolourations were investigated but appeared to be the result of degradation through root action.

DISCUSSION

The features excavated all appear to relate to boundaries and water management and contain material dated to the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and the post-medieval period.

CONCLUSION

Medieval activity at Melbourn was concentrated along the High Street and the land to the rear of 28-32 would seem to have been garden/yard with a boundary running parallel to the High Street. Much of the land to the north of this boundary was wet in earlier periods and it may be that the moat at Lordship Farm was part of a water management scheme in the medieval and post-medieval periods.

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The brief for archaeological works was written by Andy Thomas, County Archaeology Office, who visited the site and monitored the evaluation.

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