

**Saxo-Norman and Medieval ditches at New Cross  
Farm, Landbeach: An Archaeological Evaluation**

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*Cambridgeshire County Council*

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Landbeach: An Archaeological Evaluation**

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## SUMMARY

*On the 10<sup>th</sup> October 2002, an archaeological evaluation was undertaken on land within the centre of the village of Landbeach, at New Cross Farm (TL 47519 65185), by staff of the Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeology Unit. The project was commissioned by Steve Watts in advance of a proposed office and garage development. The work was carried out according to a brief for archaeological evaluation issued by Cambridgeshire County Council County Archaeology Office. The work was supervised on site by Tony Baker and the project was managed by Stephen Macaulay.*

*The results of the evaluation (within a 7.2m long trench) revealed three ditches and a single posthole. Pottery recovered from these features date them to the Saxo-Norman (900-1150 AD) period. In addition these features were beneath an eroded gravel layer, interpreted as a possible trackway or courtyard surface. This was also of medieval date (1150-1350), with pottery fragments being recovered from the fill.*

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Landbeach: An Archaeological Evaluation  
(TL 47519 65185)**

**1 INTRODUCTION**

On the 10<sup>th</sup> October 2002, an archaeological evaluation was undertaken on land within the centre of the village of Landbeach, at New Cross Farm (TL 47519 65185), by staff of the Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeology Unit. The project was commissioned by Steve Watts in advance of a proposed office and garage development. The work was carried out according to a brief for archaeological evaluation issued by Cambridgeshire County Council County Archaeology Office. The work was supervised on site by Tony Baker and the project was managed by Stephen Macaulay.

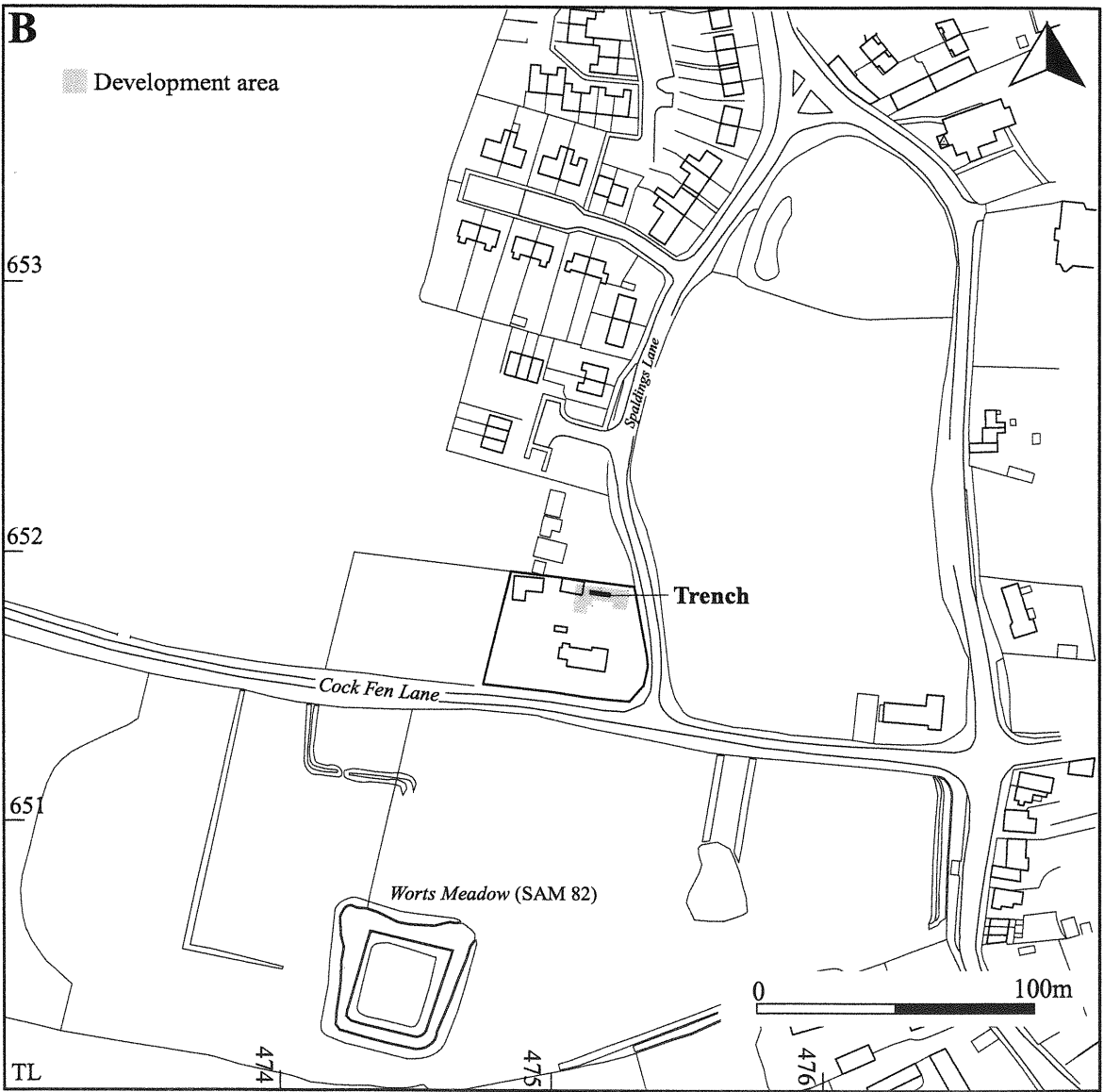
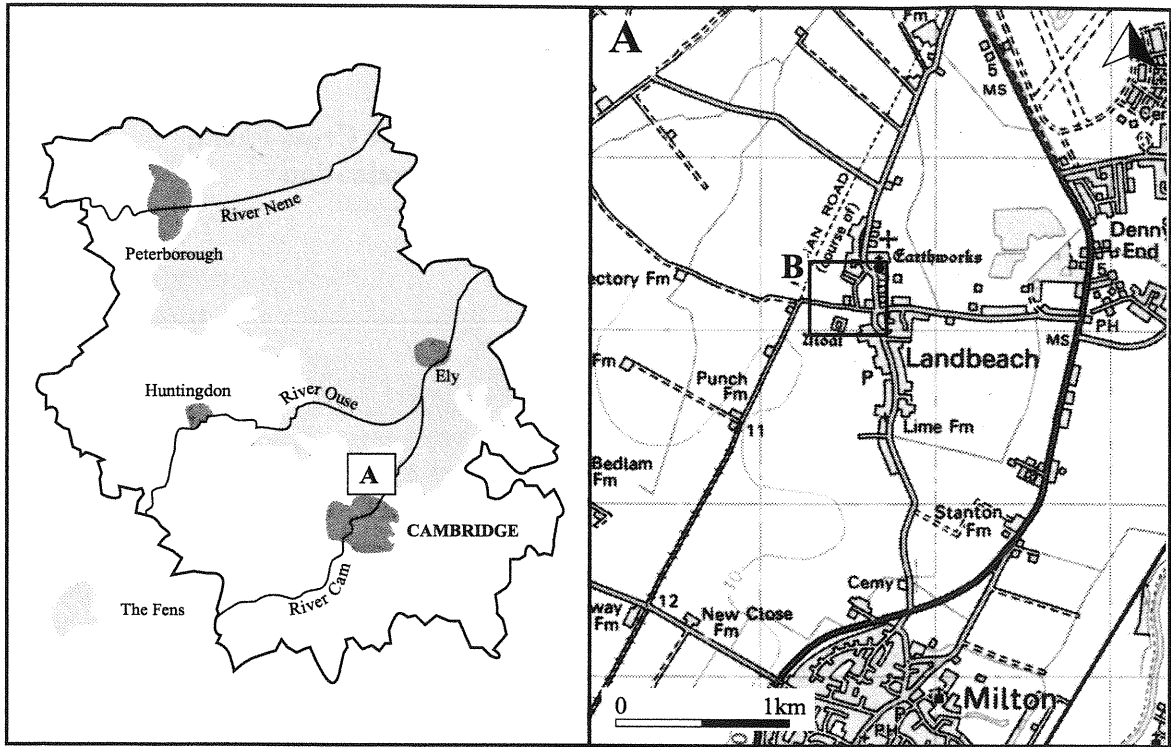
**2 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY**

Landbeach lies on the edge of the fen which mostly lies to the north in High Fen and Frith Fen. High Fen has now mostly been quarried away for gravel. (Hall 1996 p127). To the west of the village is Roman Akeman Street and to the east is the Car Dyke, a Roman canal. These two route ways meet just to the north of Landbeach, which is itself the location of two medieval manors and hythes, continuing its importance as a communication link after the Roman period.

**3 HISTORICAL & ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND**

**3.1 Prehistoric**

There is very little early prehistoric activity documented for Landbeach, only two Neolithic axes (smr05234 and smr05347) have been recorded. Later prehistoric activity is also largely undocumented, apart from a few Iron Age pottery sherds (smr08594a). There are several undated crop mark sites recorded in the parish, some of which may have their origins in prehistory. This was confirmed in 1998 at Limes Farm, where excavations revealed a middle Iron Age settlement on what was presumed to have been a Roman-British site (Connor forthcoming).



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Figure 1 Site Location Plan

### 3.2 Roman

The Roman remains in the area to the north of Cambridge are relatively well documented, and the archaeological remains from Landbeach are almost all Roman, and sited on the well drained gravels (Hall 1996). Roman Akeman Street, now known as Mere Way along part of its length, forms the south-west and north-east parish boundaries. This road was the major route between Cambridge and Ely. Several sections of the road have been excavated across the road, including a section dug by Mr J Bromwich in 1950 (smr5346). To the east in the parish of Waterbeach is the Car Dyke, a Roman canal which has had a number of sections excavated across it (Macaulay 1994 and 1997). The nearby parish of Horningsea is the location of a large number of 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> century pottery kilns (smr05546)

A series of crop marks has been recorded in Landbeach (sites 4-10 in Hall 1996), most of which lie to the north, in and close to the edge of the Fens. Reports of finds dating to the 2<sup>nd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> centuries, coupled with the form of the crop marks has influenced the suggestion that these are all Roman in date.

Fenland Survey sites 4 and 5 are the subject of this report. Site 4 is the complex lying to the south-west from which finds including lava quern fragments, oyster shells, Horningsea and other Romano-British pottery has been recorded. A drainage ditch dug in about 1960 is reported to have uncovered kiln bars which were sent to the Fitzwilliam museum (smr11567, Hall 1996). Few artefacts have been recorded from the vicinity of Site 5 crop marks and it has been suggested that this complex and the outlying ditches of Site 4 were for stock rearing (Hall 1996).

### 3.3 Saxon

There is very little documented Saxon activity, although an Anglo-Saxon brooch has been recorded (smr5357). Waterbeach on the other hand has much documented Anglo-Saxon activity including evidence of settlement. The nearby parish of Chesterton has been identified as the location for an early Saxon royal estate (Haslam, 1984).

### 3.4 Medieval and Post-medieval

Landbeach was first mentioned in Domesday as *Utbeche*, *Ut* meaning the outlying part from the main settlement (Waterbeach), and *beche* meaning a stream. Landbeach is on slightly higher and drier ground than Waterbeach and is thought that Landbeach may have first been used for winter grazing by the people of Waterbeach. Jack Ravensdale (1974) has recorded the Medieval development of Landbeach in great detail.

Landbeach had two main medieval manors, the principal of which was Chamberlains (located to the northeast) and the other Bray's (now Worts Meadow), located immediately to the south of the development site. Chamberlains contain surviving earthworks of trackways, ridge and furrow, hythes and a standing Tith Barn. Both are scheduled Ancient Monuments (Sam 82 both sites).

The area of the excavation is located immediately to the north of the Manor of Brays (Worts Meadow) and Cockfen Lane, which runs west to join the route of Akeman Street Roman road. Worts Meadow (SAM 82) is also the site of a shrunken medieval village with earthworks detailing house platforms, trackways, a pond and ridge and furrow, as well as the manorial moat.

#### **4 METHODOLOGY**

A single trench 7.2m long (1.5m wide x 0.60m deep) was excavated using a JCB excavator with a toothless ditching bucket under the supervision of an archaeologist. The trench was located across the area of the proposed development (within the building footprint) in order to obtain maximum coverage thus increasing the possibility of discovering any archaeological features.

The modern ground surface and subsoil were removed to a depth where the natural clay deposits were noted. Where potential features were encountered a process of cleaning and excavation took place followed by planning where appropriate. Trench spoil and the excavated surfaces of trenches were scanned by eye in order to obtain artefacts.

#### **5 RESULTS (see Fig 2)**

The uppermost layer 1 was comprised of modern rubble (100-200mm deep) which formed the driveway for the existing garage. Beneath this at the western end of the trench was a homogenous deposit 3 up to 400mm thick of mid grey brown clayey silt with occasional stones and charcoal fleck, which directly overlay the pale olive grey natural clay. This layer 3 was most probably a former cultivation soil and contained a few abraded sherds of medieval pottery and a fragment of whetstone. It thinned to the east and merged with a more friable topsoil layer 2 a dark grey brown clay loam (up to 130mm deep). This reduction of the depth of cultivation to the eastern half of the trench resulted in the preservation of further layers below topsoil.

The latest of these 4 consisted of 150mm of paler mottled orange and yellow-brown clayey sandy silt (colluvial deposit?). This deposit overlay 5 a 100mm thick deposit of compact calcarious gravels which varied between 15-60mm in



depth within 100mm depth. Medieval pottery was recovered from this layer and it is probable that it was a yard surface. Archaeological features of Saxo-Norman and medieval date lay beneath this layer.

A group of shallow north-south linear features were recorded beneath 5. The fills of these features 6, 9 & 11 were all very similar, a very dark grey silty clay with occasional stones and charcoal flecks. All contained pottery and fragments of animal bone. It was not possible to determine the stratigraphical relationship between these features, however the nature of the fills might suggest that they are broadly contemporary (Figure 2 gives a predictive model)..

Ditch 8 was 0.60m wide and 0.22m deep with a flat bottomed base and ran on a north-south alignment. It contained two fills 7 a brown-yellow clay and produced no artefacts and upper fill 6 a very dark grey silty clay with occasional stones and charcoal flecks. It contained Saxo-Norman pottery (c900-1150 AD) and animal bone.

Ditch 10 was 0.50m wide and 0.20m deep, very steep sided with a flat base and ran on a north-south alignment with a square butt end to the south within the trench. It contained a single fill 9 a very dark grey silty clay with occasional stones and charcoal flecks. It contained Saxo-Norman pottery and animal bone.

Ditch 12 was 0.56m wide and 0.16m deep, heavily truncated with a rounded base and ran on a north-south alignment. It contained a single fill 11 a very dark grey silty clay with occasional stones and charcoal flecks. It contained Saxo-Norman pottery and animal bone.

Lying to the west of these ditches was another north-south linear feature 14.

Ditch 14 was 0.80m wide and 0.18m deep, broad U shape and ran on a north-south alignment. It also butt ended within the trench. It contained a single fill 13 a paler grey clayey silt. It contained a single sherd of medieval or perhaps Saxo-Norman pottery.

To the west a posthole and ditch were only partially observed in the trench.

Posthole 16 was 0.25m diameter and 0.130m deep. It contained a single fill 15 a mid grey brown clayey silt. It contained no finds.

Ditch 18 was 0.35m wide and 0.08m deep, shallow with a flat base and ran on a northeast-southwest alignment. It contained a single fill 17 a mid grey silty clay with occasional stones and charcoal flecks. It contained Saxo-Norman pottery and fragments of lava quern (Saxo-Norman).

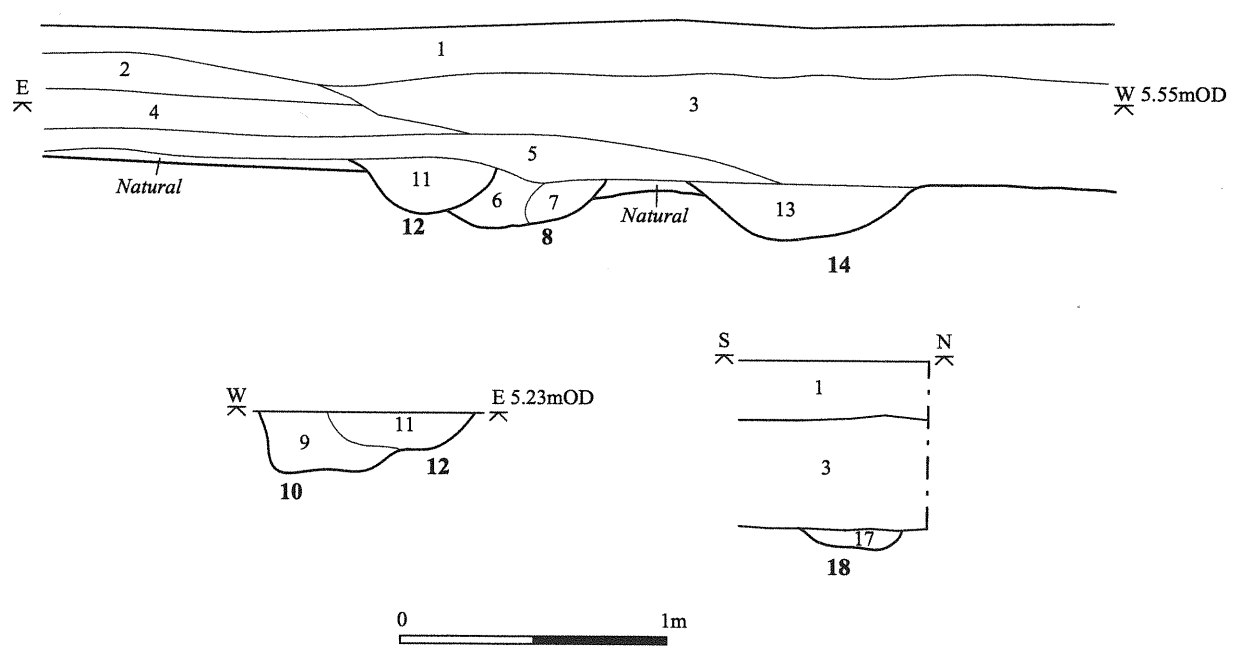
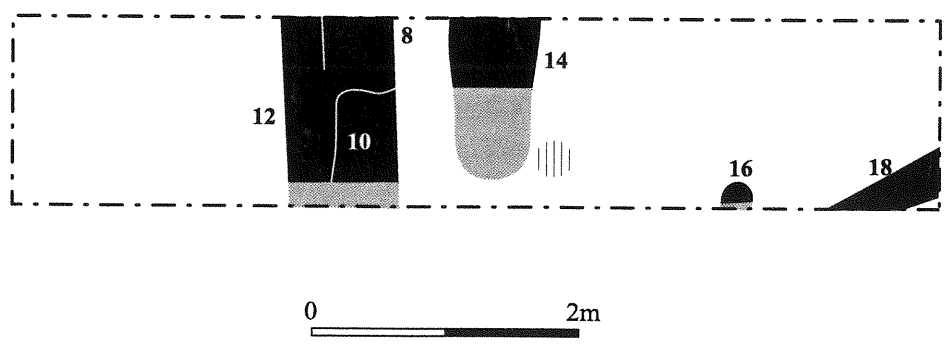


Figure 2 Trench 1: Plan and Sections

## **6 DISCUSSION**

The evaluation revealed a number of ditches and a single posthole all of which date to the Saxo-Norman period. These features although truncated are well preserved, sealed beneath over 500mm of overburden, which includes a modern rubble layer and cultivation horizon. Almost all features contained dateable material and in such a small sample this represents a high proportion. The exact nature of function of the ditches is impossible to determine at this stage, although an agricultural purpose would seem most probable. The posthole and narrowness of the ditches might indicate structures, however the degree of truncation prevents any certain predictions, however the alignments (at least 2) do suggest different phases and perhaps purposes.

## **7 CONCLUSION**

The objective of the project was to establish the character, date, state of preservation and extent of any archaeological remains within the site in advance of development. Information from the evaluation will allow an assessment of the proposed development's archaeological implications and to inform an appropriate mitigation strategy.

The project has been successful in achieving its objectives. Significant Saxo-Norman archaeology has been identified and in some density given the very small nature of the evaluation (5 cut features and a surface within 7.2m trench). These remains seem likely to relate to the early medieval settlement and development of Landbeach.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The author would like to thank Mr Steve Watts who commissioned and funded the work. Tony Baker supervised the site work. The project was managed by Stephen Macaulay and the site was monitored Jeremy Parsons of the CAO.

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