



Archaeological Field Unit

**Early Medieval Features at Newton County Primary
School, Eltisley, Cambridgeshire; An Archaeological
Evaluation**

Rob Atkins

2003

Cambridgeshire County Council

Report No. A223

Commissioned by Cambridgeshire County Council

**Early Medieval Features at Newton County Primary School, Eltisley,
Cambridgeshire; An Archaeological Evaluation**

Rob Atkins BSocSc, PGDipArch, AIFA

2003

Editor: Stephen Macaulay BA, MPhil, AIFA and Dr Paul Spoerry MIFA

Illustrator: Crane Begg BSc



Report No.A223

©Archaeological Field Unit
Cambridgeshire County Council
Fulbourn Community Centre
Haggis Gap, Fulbourn
Cambridgeshire CB1 5HD
Tel (01223) 5762014
Fax (01223) 880946

Arch.field.unit@cambridgeshire.gov.uk
<http://edweb.camcnty.gov.uk/afu>

SUMMARY

On the 27th and 28th May 2003 the Archaeological Field Unit (AFU) of Cambridgeshire County Council conducted an archaeological evaluation at Newton County Primary School, Eltisley, Cambridgeshire (TL 2724/5951) in advance of construction of a school hall.


An eight metre long trench was mechanically excavated within the proposed development area (c.150m²). Directly below topsoil and subsoil there were at least two phases of archaeological features. The earliest features were a north-south ditch and a pit cutting natural clay (both did not produce clear dating evidence). The pit contained a fragment of human hipbone. A large early medieval pit, c.1200-1300AD, cut both these features. It was backfilled with large amounts of charred cereal grains; wheat, moderate amounts of oats and possibly rye, weed seeds and others. An adjacent early medieval north-south ditch may be contemporary with this pit.

The archaeology may represent back plots to either houses fronting the roadway to Caxton or the route way to the moated manor to the east of the site. The land seems to have become fields in the later medieval/post-medieval period as the archaeological features were sealed by former ridge and furrow. This ridge and furrow was removed when the school was built.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION	1
2 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY	1
3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND	3
3.1 Introduction	
3.2 Archaeological Remains	
3.3 Historical Background - Documents	
4 METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS	7
5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS	9
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	
BIBLIOGRAPHY	
APPENDIX A FINDS	
LIST OF FIGURES	
Figure 1 Location of Trench with Development Area outlined	2
Figure 2 Map of Eltisley Parish showing SMR numbers, ridge and Furrow, Moated sites and greens	4
Figure 3 Trench Plan and sections	8

Drawing Conventions

Sections	Plans
Limit of Excavation -----	Limit of Excavation _____
Cut _____	Deposit - Conjectured -----
Cut - Conjectured -----	Natural Features
Soil Horizon -----	Intrusion/Truncation -----
Soil Horizon - Conjectured	Sondages/Machine Strip -----
Intrusion/Truncation -----	Illustrated Section _____ S.14
Top of Natural _____	Archaeological Deposit 
Top Surface _____	Cut Number 118
Break in Section -----	
Cut Number 118	
Deposit Number 117	
Ordnance Datum $\frac{18.45\text{m}}{\times}$ ODN	

**Early Medieval Features at Newton County Primary School, Eltisley,
Cambridgeshire; An Archaeological Evaluation
(TL 2724/5951)**

1 INTRODUCTION

An archaeological evaluation was carried out at Newton County Primary School, Eltisley, Cambridgeshire (TL 2724/5951) to fulfil requirements of a planning application (S/0682/02/F) in advance of a proposed new school hall. Mouchel Property Services initiated the project (on behalf of Cambridgeshire County Council). A visit to the County Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) as part of the evaluation took place on 28th May 2003. The evaluation was carried out by the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council on 27th and 28th May 2003.

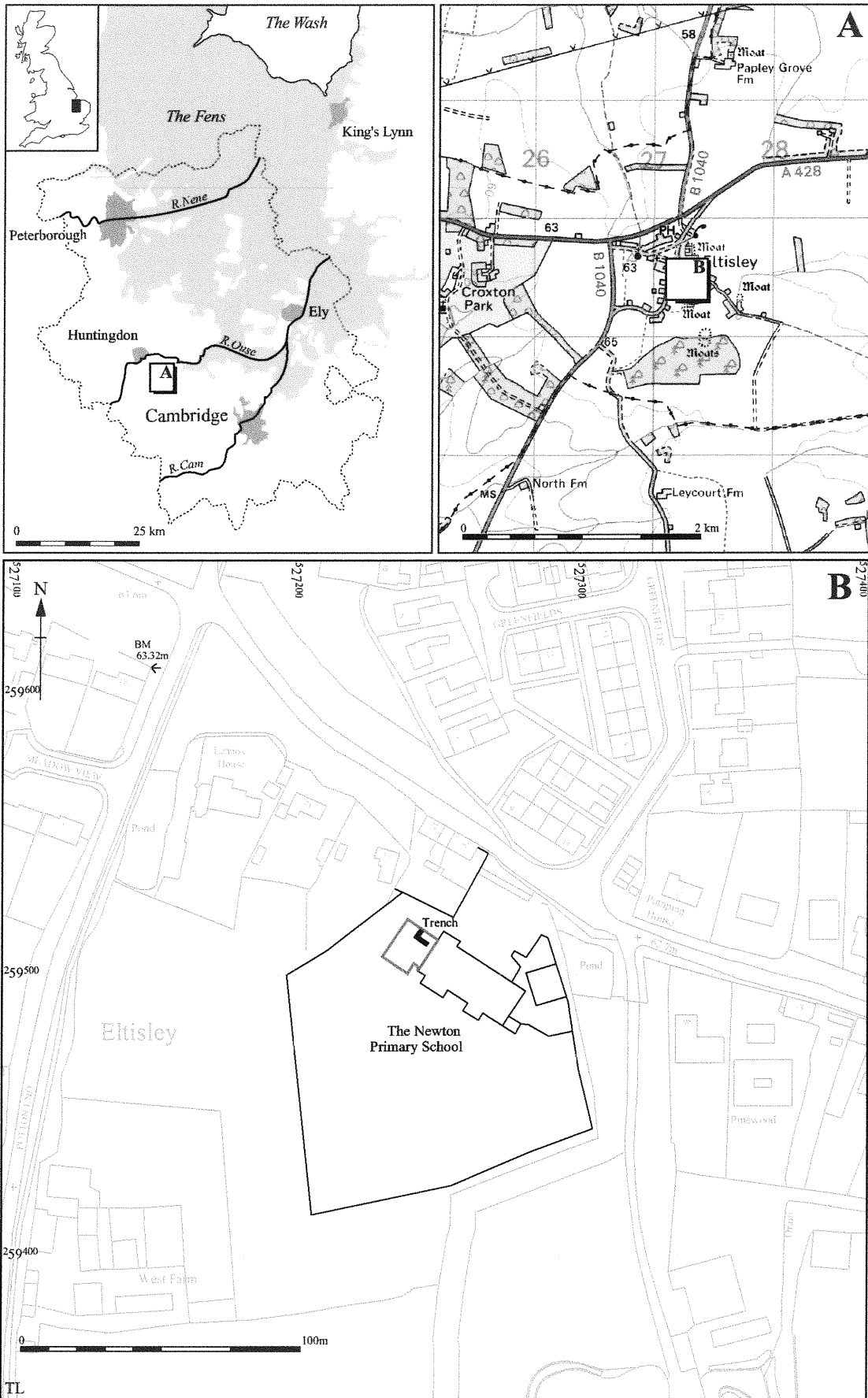
The archaeological objectives of the site were recorded in the specification for the site (Macaulay 2003). These objectives were to establish the character, date, state of preservation and extent of any archaeological remains within the proposed development area. The evaluation report was to include a suitable level of documentary research to set the results in their geographical, topographical, archaeological and historical context.

This specification and the proposed location of the archaeological trench were approved by the Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeology Office before the start of the evaluation.

2 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

The development area lies in the centre of the village of Eltisley. The natural drift geology has been recorded as glacial deposits of boulder clay (BGS 1975). Pockets of sand and gravel of varying size (referred to as till) has been recorded in the boulder clay in Eltisley Parish (Edmonds and Dinham 1965). Within the evaluation trench the natural subsoil consisted mostly of yellow/orange boulder clay though there were patches of sands and gravels.

Eltisley occupies a plateau of watersheds dividing streams which flow south-east to the Bourn Brook, west to the upper Ouse at St. Neots and north to the lower Ouse at St. Ives. The ground level at the evaluation was 63.40m AOD. The trench was excavated through fairly flat ground though there is a very gentle slope downwards to the north.



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 2003)

Figure 1 Location of Trench with Development Area outlined.

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND (Fig 1)

3.1 Introduction

In accordance with the specification for the site (Macaulay 2003), archaeological and historical sources were consulted at the archives of the Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Field Unit and Cambridgeshire Sites and Monuments Record (SMR). These have recorded previous archaeological work, any archaeological finds reported and the historic documentation for the area. The parish and village have witnessed no archaeological evaluations or excavations and only one watching brief which found nothing when two bungalows were built at Church End (SMR 11498).

The lack of any major post-medieval and modern development has meant that the roads and general layout of Medieval Eltisley seem to have survived. Earthworks of at least four moated sites as well as a few former houses survive as 'humps and bumps' in the ground. This implies that Eltisley has reduced in size from a high point in the medieval period (Fig 2). In addition, parts of a few late medieval and early post-medieval buildings still exist in the village and they give a clue to the layout of the former medieval settlement.

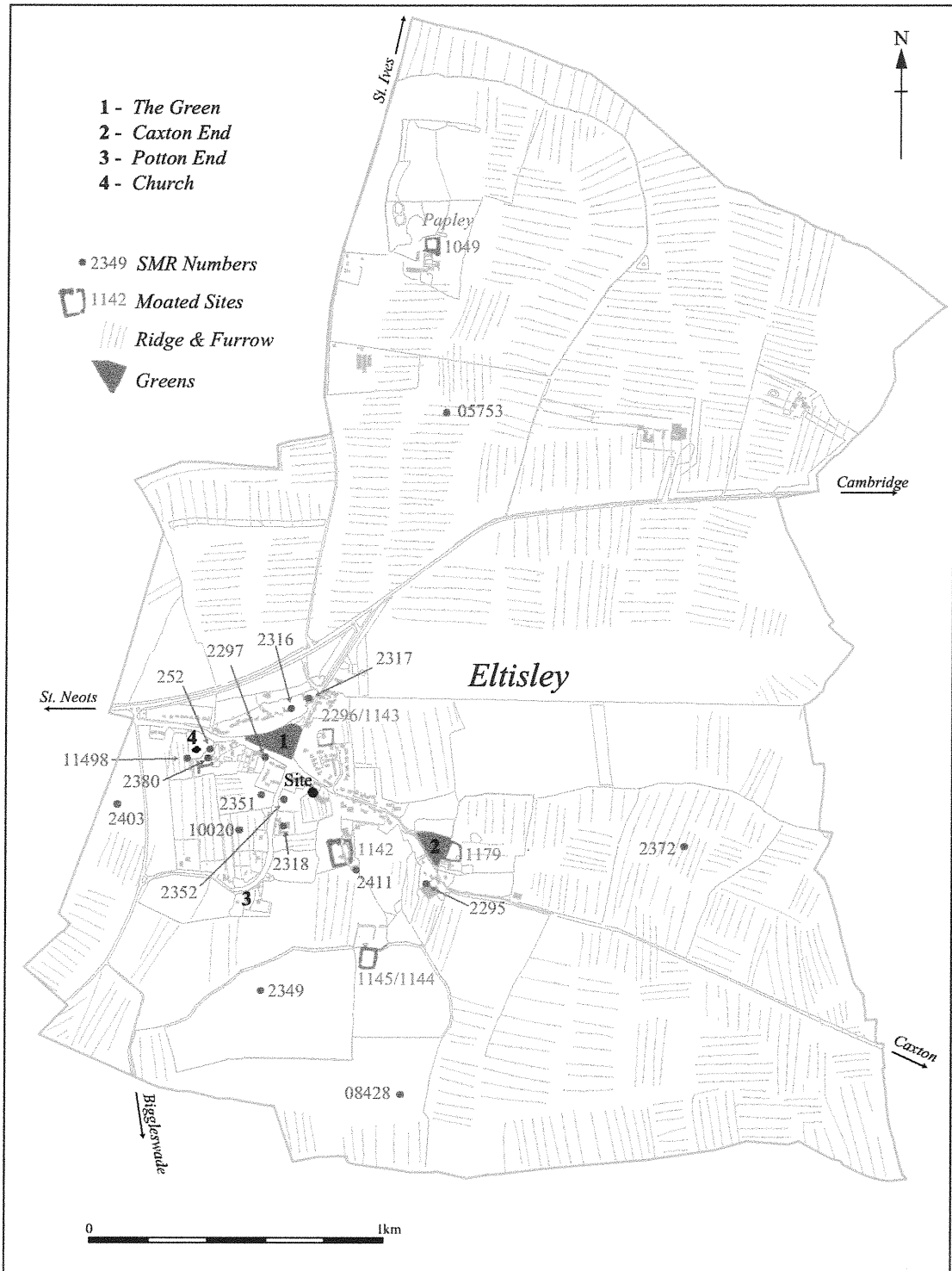
3.2 Archaeological remains

Prehistoric and Roman

Other than prehistoric track ways (thought to stem from the present day Village Green), no prehistoric finds have been recorded within the Eltisley Parish. Similarly there are no known Roman finds within the parish. It has been speculated that a Roman Road ran from Cambridge to Ermine Street (A1) at Caxton Gibbet and continued via Eltisley and Croxton (Malim 2000, Ch. 21).

Medieval

Eltisley is centred on a medieval green at the junction between the Cambridge to St. Neots Road and the Biggleswade to St. Ives Road (Fig 2). There was a further roadway from The Green leading eastwards to Caxton (Fig 2). The church is situated by The Green site on the roadway to St. Neots. It has architectural features dating from c.1200AD. The Green itself is faced by several buildings dating from the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries suggesting says VCH that this was probably the main settlement area for medieval Eltisley (VCH 1973, 47). There are earthworks, including former medieval house platforms, adjacent to the west of the road to Biggleswade (SMR 2351 and 10020; Fig 2). That medieval houses were located along this road to Potton End raises the possibility that there were also houses along the other roads (Fig 2).



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 2003)

Figure 2 Map of Eltisley Parish showing SMR numbers, Ridge and furrow, Moated sites and greens. (After RCHME 1968, with additions)

Along the Caxton route there was a second green at Caxton End with a moated site adjacent and to the east, implying another centre of population (SMR 1179; Fig 2). It is uncertain whether the Caxton End represented a separate medieval focus, or resulted from later expansion of the original village nucleus. Two 17th and 18th century houses presently front the south side of the route way (RCHME 1968, 90) though it is not known if medieval structures also did this. This route way may have formerly been a major thoroughfare as in the 15th century it seems to have been referred to as the king's highway from St. Neots to Caxton (VCH 1973, 47).

The evaluation site lies c.100m to the east of the main road junction, along the Caxton roadway and c.35m to the south of it. A moated site presently called Manor Farm which has remains of a hall within it dating from the late medieval period (SMR 1142; Scheduled Monument (SM 33274)) lies c.160m further to the south of the site. It has a causeway entrance on the north side of Manor Farm moat implying the existence of a north-south route either predating or merging into the road to Caxton (Casa-Hatton 2002). The 1865 1" map has a track way leading from the Causeway entrance to Caxton Roadway c.40m to the east of the site. The place-name 'Manor Farm' may indicate an early origin for this site and it could be the site of the original manor (VCH 1973, 49; Casa-Hatton 2002).

A medieval pottery handle has been recorded c.40m to the west of the site though there is some doubt to the exact location of it (SMR 2352).

Ridge and furrow earthworks have survived as cropmarks and covered most of the parish up to recent times (RCHME 1968, 96). This ridge and furrow was plotted by the RCHME and drawn (Fig 2). They recorded that the ridge and furrow overlay the development site implying it was a field in perhaps the late medieval/post-medieval period. This ridge and furrow went right up to the road implying at least in this area and in this period there was no buildings fronting the road (Fig 2). The ridge and furrow does not presently survive on the site, probably due to it being levelled/removed when the present school was built post 1968.

3.3 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND - DOCUMENTS

Saxon (Fig 2)

The Domesday book (1086) records Eltisley as *Hecteslei* meaning 'Wood (leah) of Elti'. This suggests an Anglo-Saxon settlement in a wooded area (VCH 1973, 46). The Domesday book records that Eltisley in Edward The Confessor's time formed part of the estates of Earl Alfgar who died in c.1062 and was one of the 12 vills of the royal Hundred of Longstowe. In 1086, 27 peasants were recorded at Eltisley. Since only heads of households are recorded historians have argued that these figures need multiplying by a factor of four or five to arrive at an estimate of population. This would mean that in

1086 there is likely to have been between 108 and 135 people in the village. Although only rated as 3 hides, it had land for 9 ploughs and was valued at £13 (same as the rate valued in Edward the Confessor's time) - one of the most valuable in the Longstowe hundred. This all implies that by the time of the Domesday book Eltisle was already a well-established settlement.

Tradition has it that a 10th century Saxon nunnery was founded at Eltisle and was transferred to Hinchbrooke after the Norman Conquest. Pandionia, daughter of a Scottish king, took refuge in the nunnery (Haigh 1988). The site of this possible nunnery is unknown, if it ever existed (RCHME 1963, 90). On early OS maps the site of the nunnery, (also referred to as Eltisle Abbey) is located to the south of the church which is dedicated to St. Pandionia and St. John the Baptist. This is not proven and it has also been argued that it was located at Papley Grove (Haigh 1988).

Medieval

In 1086 Eltisle appears to have been held as a single manor (VCH 1973, 52). The Normans gave the estate of Eltisle to the canons of the Cathedral of St Mary, Bayeux (Calvados). The canons may have lost these lands by 1088 (VCH 1973, 47-8). In the middle of the twelfth century Niel bishop of Ely confirmed grants of land made by Roger de Mowbray whose family had obtained Eltisle. The manor became known as Stowe in the fourteenth century. It was acquired and sold many times in the course of the medieval and post-medieval periods. It has been suggested that the original manor house may be on the same location as the present Manor Farm moat (SMR 1142a; see above).

Eltisle had apparently been divided into two fields in the late 12th and early 13th century (probably East and North) and by the 14th century there were three (Papley, Middle and East) (VCH 1973, 53). This splitting up of Eltisle may be due to the fact that by 1279, there were three manors (including the above). Musters manor is known from 1202 though it had been absorbed into the principal manor of Eltisle in the 14th century and the whereabouts of the manor house is unknown. There was a manor at Papley which originated in a series of grants of land in Eltisle and Caxton made to Hinchbrooke between the mid-12th and early 14th century (Fig 2). The moated site is presumably the manor house (SMR 1049). In this period in Eltisle there were several large farms held in freehold. A couple of these moated sites may belong to these farms.

Eltisle, despite the splitting up into new manors and other land parcels, continued to be relatively wealthy with 40 villagers paying tax in 1327 and 136 adults paying poll tax in 1377, which was the third highest population in the hundred. This is a significantly greater population than that calculated for 1086, implying an expansion in population in the 12th and 13th centuries. This is in line with national population growth in this period. There was a relative decline in population in Eltisle in the later medieval and post-medieval periods (VCH 1973, 47).

Eltisley itself seems to have had at least two main centres of population. A document of 1456 distinguishes between dwellings in 'le Estende' and 'le Upende' (VCH 1973, 47). The former is Caxton End (formerly called East End) while the later is presumably around The Green and the church.

It has been suggested that cereal farming predominated in Eltisley (VCH 1973, 52). In 1334 the lessee of Papley paid Hinchingsbrooke Priory 27 quarters of corn a year, half being barley and the remainder oats. In 1384-5 the render had been reduced to 20 quarters of grain, mostly wheat and dredge (VCH 1973, 52-3). There was apparently no large-scale livestock farming, although trespass by steers and sheep were presented in court in the period 1402-20.

4 METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS (Figs 1 and 3)

A mechanical excavator with a 1.6m wide flat-bladed ditching bucket was used to excavate the trial trench under archaeological supervision (Fig 3). The trench location was changed for health and safety reasons so it did not go through a hard surfaced school playing area. It was placed in the only area of grass within the proposed development. An 'L'-shaped trench was excavated through the topsoil and subsoil directly onto archaeological features. The topsoil (1) comprised a very dark grey brown loamy clay up to 0.46m thick. The subsoil was a light to medium grey brown loam with a lot of clay about 0.26m thick and contained an early post-medieval pottery sherd.

There were at least two phases of features in the trench. There was an undated north-south ditch (10) 0.80m wide and 0.22m deep and filled with fairly sterile looking soil (9) of light yellow grey-brown sandy clay. Possibly contemporary was a large pit (6) which was partly in the north baulk of the trench and had been backfilled with a similar fill to ditch (10). The pit was 1.46m in length, 0.90m+ wide and 0.72m+ deep with steep edges (Fig 3, S1). It was not bottomed for health and safety reasons. It was not dated although part of a human hipbone and two animal bone fragments were recovered from its backfill (5).

Cutting both ditch (10) and pit (6) was a large pit (8), located partly in the south baulk of the trench (Fig 3, S2). The pit was 2.60m in length, 1.50m+ wide and 0.94m+ deep with steep to nearly vertical edges. The pit was also not bottomed for health and safety reasons. Its fill (7) comprised steep tip lines implying the pit had been backfilled quickly. Around the entire edge of the pit was a 0.08m-0.10m thick and more than 0.90m deep charcoal lense. The remainder of the fill was mixed, comprising mostly a mid-grey brown sandy clay with some yellow-orange sand patches, some charcoal patches and frequent charcoal flecking as well as some flecks of burnt clay. There were a few burnt limestone pieces less than 0.15m in length. Four sherds of pottery from the pit included residual Saxo-Norman sherds as well as an early medieval sherd dated to c.1200-1300AD.

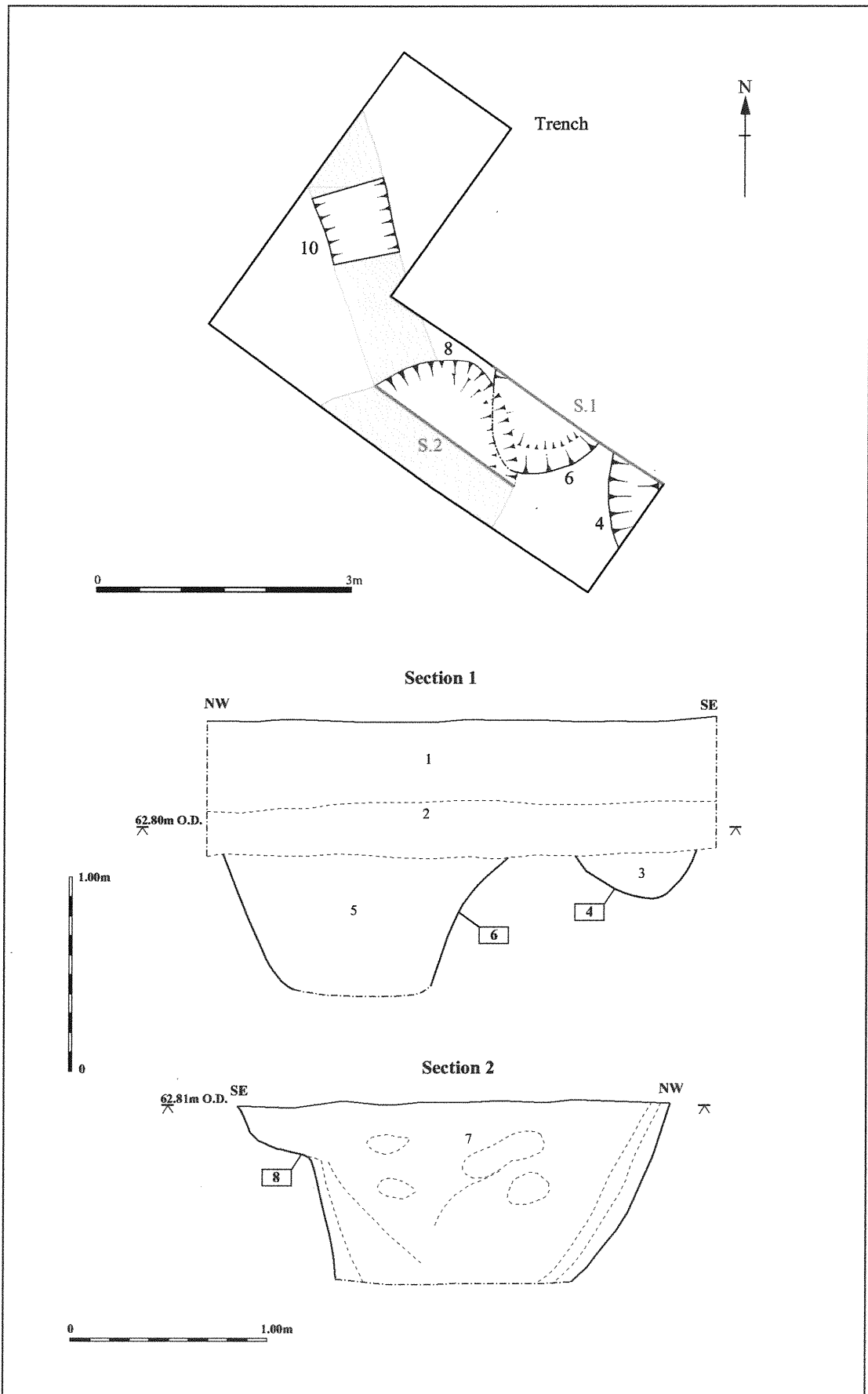


Figure 3 Plane and sections of trench

Fragments of a lava quern were also recovered. A soil sample from the fill produced a large amount of burnt cereal grains predominantly wheat, moderate amounts of oats and probably other types including rye.

A north-south ditch (4) in the eastern corner of the trench was possibly contemporary with pit (8). It was 0.62m wide and 0.24m deep with a slightly rounded base (Fig 3, S2). Its fill was a light grey-brown sandy clay which contained a sherd of early medieval pottery c.1150-1350AD.

5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The evaluation discovered four archaeological features dating to at least two separate phases in a small trench 8m in length. This seems to imply there is likely to be a dense survival of archaeological remains across the proposed development area. The archaeological remains have survived with little truncation from later activity on the site. Bone and environmental preservation are both good.

The earlier phase consist of an undated ditch and pit. The second phase features were dated to perhaps the 13th century. Residual Saxo-Norman pottery found in these features may mean that activity/occupation on the site started in the late Saxon period. Both ditches head towards the roadway leading from Eltisley to Caxton and may represent plot boundaries. It is possible that the archaeology represents back plots to houses fronting this roadway. Alternatively the archaeological features may relate to the former route way c.40m to the east leading from the roadway to Manor Farm Moat. This moated site is thought to be the main manor of Eltisley and has parts of a late medieval hall surviving within its banks.

The evidence of a large amount of charred grain, especially wheat but also oats and possibly rye and others shows that processing of cereals seems to have taken place in the vicinity. This cereal evidence ties in with the documentary evidence that Eltisley was primarily concerned with cereal growing in the medieval period. The presence of these charred cereals may suggest that a malting and baking house was located nearby. Malting ovens were common in the medieval period; at Raunds (Northants), a small deserted village, there were four malt houses (malting various cereals) all constructed around the middle of the 13th century and all in detached buildings at the rear of tenements (Chapman forthcoming).

The survival of part of a human hipbone is unusual. The church is c.500m to the east suggesting that it is unlikely to have found its way from that source. It is thus possible that there are burial(s) closer to the evaluation.

It seems that the site was used as open fields in the later medieval period. The sub soil (2) may represent the survival of ridge and furrow which existed on the site until the school was built about 30 years ago. The village is known to

have declined in size as house platform earthworks remain in other parts of the village as 'humps and bumps'. The lack of later medieval pottery in features suggests that we can tentatively assign the abandonment of occupation in this part of Eltisley to the 14th century. Nationally, in this century we know that population in England halved due to famines, plagues and wars.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank Huntingdon Plant hire for supplying the JCB during the evaluation. Stephen Macaulay managed the project. The illustrations were produced by Crane Begg.

Andy Thomas, Development Control Officer, from the County Archaeology Office (CAO) monitored the evaluation. Sarah Poppy kindly supplied information from the SMR.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

British Geological Survey. 1975. *Geological Maps of England and Wales*. Drift Edition. Map Sheet 187.

Casa-Hatton, R. 2002. Eltisley Parish, Cambridgeshire: A Desktop Study. Archaeological Field Unit Report No. 202.

Chapman, A. forthcoming. West Cotton: a study of medieval settlement dynamics. Excavations at West Cotton, Raunds, Northamptonshire 1985-9. English Heritage Archaeological Report.

Edmonds, E. A. and C. H. Dinham. 1965. *Geology of the Country around Huntingdon and Biggleswade*.

Haigh, D. 1988. *The Religious Houses of Cambridgeshire*. Cambridgeshire County Council.

Kirby, T. and S. Oosthuizen (eds) 2000. *An Atlas of Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire History*.

Macaulay, S. 2003. Specification for Archaeological Evaluation: Newton County Primary School. Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Field Unit dated 20th May 2003.

Malim, T. 2000. "Roman Communications" in T. Kirby and S. Oosthuizen (eds.)

RCHME 1968. Royal Commission of the Historic Monuments of England. Volume one West Cambridgeshire. London

VCH. 1975. A History of Cambridgeshire and the Isle of Ely Volume V. Oxford University Press.

Watts, M. 2002. The archaeology of Mills and Milling. Tempus. Stroud.

APPENDIX A FINDS

Pottery Identified by Carole Fletcher and Paul Spoerry

Eight pottery sherds weighing 64g was found in the evaluation. Two sherds was recovered from ditch (3) including a probable Rockingham Forrest sandy ware c.1150-1350AD and a residual Saxo-Norman St. Neots ware sherd. Four sherds were recovered from pit (7) including a rim sherd from a developed St. Neots ware bowl c.1200-c.1300AD as well as three residual Saxo-Norman St. Neots ware sherds. From the subsoil (2) there was a medieval pottery sherd as well as an early post-medieval red ware piece.

Stone By Rob Atkins

A small part (105g) of a German lava quern stone was recovered from pit fill (7). Lava querns were traded fairly constantly from the Roman period to the 13th/14th century when homemade milling became more profitable and the use of cheaper local stones became widespread (Watts 2002, 98-99).

Human Bone By Jeni Keen

A single small fragment of proximal humerus (hip) was recovered from context (5).

Animal bone By Jeni Keen

Three Pieces of animal bone were recovered from the evaluation. All were well preserved although in a fragmentary state. A young cattle ulna showed signs of weathering in the form of cracking and root markings from context (3). A probable knife mark on the anterior superior portion of the bone also denotes butchery and is typical of a dismemberment point. A fragment of a young cow ulna was recorded from context (5). Gnawing was observed on this piece of bone, and there was also evidence of butchery with a skinning mark on the posterior medial aspect of the bone. One other piece of bone without any distinguishable marks was recovered and is likely to be a shaft fragment from a medium to large sized mammal.

Charred Plant Remains By Rachel Fosberry

A single 10 litre bulk sample was taken from context 7, a pit-fill dating to circa 1200-1300AD. The sample was soaked in the deflocculant, Decon-90, prior to being processed by bucket flotation. The flot was collected in a 0.5mm mesh and the residue was retained in a 1.0mm sieve. The flot was allowed to air dry prior to examination under a binocular microscope at x14 magnification.

The flot was of a substantial volume (115ml) and contained large quantities of wheat grains, moderate amounts of oats, a few possible rye grains and weed seeds including *Anthemis cotula*, *Chenopodium* sp, *Rumex* sp, and *Polygonum* sp. Other seeds were tentatively identified as *Prunella vulgaris*, *Medicago/trifolium* and pea/vetch. Moderate amounts of fine charcoal fragments (possibly burnt grass) were also present.

Preservation was by charring but was generally poor. The cereal grains were puffed and abraded and many of the weeds had lost their seed coats. This poor preservation is most likely due to the conditions of burning i.e. at high temperature than poor conditions for preservation on site. The presence of a range of charred material indicates that there is good potential for further archaeobotanical study from this site and it is recommended that a detailed sampling strategy should be considered if further excavation is to take place.



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