

Archaeological Field Unit

**Hemingford Abbots Village Hall:
An Archaeological Evaluation**

Steve Hickling

June 2003

Cambridgeshire County Council

Report No. A250

Commissioned by David Pitts Chartered Architects

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An Archaeological Evaluation
(TL2828 7130)**

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Editor : Judith Roberts
Illustrator : Crane Begg



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©Archaeological Field Unit
Cambridgeshire County Council
Fulbourn Community Centre
Haggis Gap, Fulbourn
Cambridgeshire CB1 5HD
Tel (01223) 576201
Fax (01223) 880946

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

SUMMARY

The Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Field Unit conducted an archaeological evaluation by trial trenching in June 2003 at the village hall, Hemingford Abbots (TL28287130). The work was carried out in advance of the total rebuilding of the village hall.

Two trenches were excavated, revealing three features, all likely to be of late nineteenth century date or later.


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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 <input type="checkbox"/>
Top Surface _____	Excavated Slot <input type="checkbox"/>
Break in Section -----	Cut Number 118
Cut Number <input type="checkbox"/> 118	Modern 
Deposit Number 117	
Ordnance Datum $\frac{18.45m}{\times}$ ODN	

**Hemingford Abbots Village Hall:
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(TL2828 7130)**

1 INTRODUCTION

During early June 2003 the Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Field Unit (CCC AFU) conducted an archaeological evaluation by trial trenching at the village hall, High Street, Hemingford Abbots, Cambridgeshire (TL2828 7130). The work was carried out at the request of David Pitts Chartered Architects and was undertaken in order to fulfil a Brief for archaeological investigation issued by Andy Thomas, Principal Archaeologist, Land Use and Planning, Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeology Section.

The site is located within the historic core of the village of Hemingford Abbots, on the south side of the High Street and only 130m south of the twelfth century church of St Margaret. The proposed development (Planning application HO 1595/00) of this site includes the demolition of the old village hall (dating to the early 1920s) and construction of a new, larger village hall. An area totalling 40m² was investigated by excavating two trenches, 15m and 10m long.

2 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

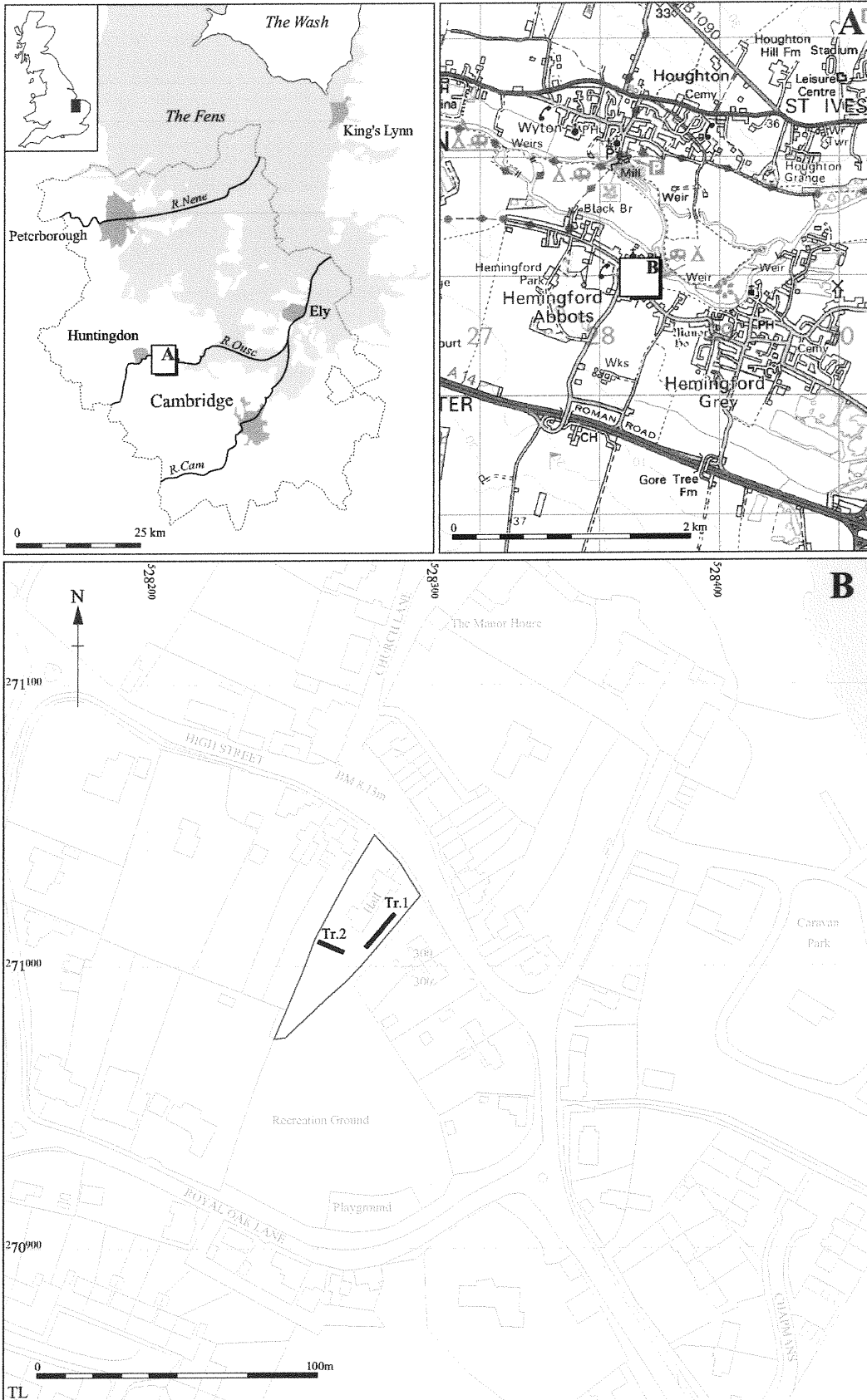
According to the British Geological Survey Map (Huntingdon, Sheet 187, 1:50,000), the village of Hemingford Abbots is situated upon the first gravel terrace of the river Ouse. Grey mudstone is present to the southwest of the village.

The village is located 3km to the west of St Ives and 4km east of Huntingdon, at a height of 7-8m OD, on the southern bank of the river Ouse.

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The development area lies within the core of the historic village of Hemingford Abbots. The village appears to have Anglo-Saxon origins, the name meaning the fording place of the people of Hema. In 974 land at Hemingford Abbots was granted to Ramsey Abbey by Ailwyn, Earl of East Anglia.

Prehistoric finds from the parish are mainly scatters of worked flints (Sites and Monuments Record numbers 1849 and 4067), although a concentration of flints has been found at the western end of the village (SMR 2748). Concentrations of neolithic



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Figure 1 Location of Trenches with Development Area outlined.

and Bronze Age finds have been located north of the river Ouse at Houghton and Wyton.

A third century Roman coffin (SMR 2579) and beaker were found 700m south of the village in 1889. Roman pottery and tile has also been found near the village, perhaps associated with a settlement near the Roman road (the *Via Devana*) to the south.

A church was recorded at Hemingford Abbots in the Domesday Survey, but the present church of St Margaret (SMR 10348) dates from the twelfth century with a thorough rebuilding in the thirteenth century and subsequent additions into the twentieth century. A medieval cross base is recorded (SMR 2686). There is a medieval moated site at the eastern end of the village (SMR 1058) close to the river Ouse. A watermill, dating to 1514 (SMR 2622), is also known from the parish. Medieval agriculture is suggested by ridge and furrow earthworks (SMRs 8735, 8753, 11426, 11427 and 11588) in the fields around the village.

Several historic buildings are present in the village; these include the manor house (SMR 2720) and barns (SMRs 2719 and 2721).

The topography of the road layout and the location of the historic buildings in the village, suggest that the central part of the village, bounded by Royal Oak Lane, West Street and High Street, may be an enclosed village green.

The village hall was constructed in the early 1920s using an old army surplus hut set on minimal foundations.

4 METHODOLOGY

Two trial trenches were excavated by the backhoe of a JCB fitted with a 1.6m wide toothless ditching bucket under archaeological supervision. The topsoil was stripped down to the level of the natural geology, where any cut features would become apparent.

The exposed surfaces were cleaned in order to clarify any features and deposits. All exposed features and deposits were excavated and recorded according to CCC AFU standards and practices. Sections were drawn at a scale of 1:20 and plans at 1:50.

5 RESULTS

Trench 1

Trench 1 was 15m long and 1.6m wide. Topsoil (approximately 0.3m deep) was mechanically stripped revealing two features (pits 2 and 5) cut into the natural gravel.

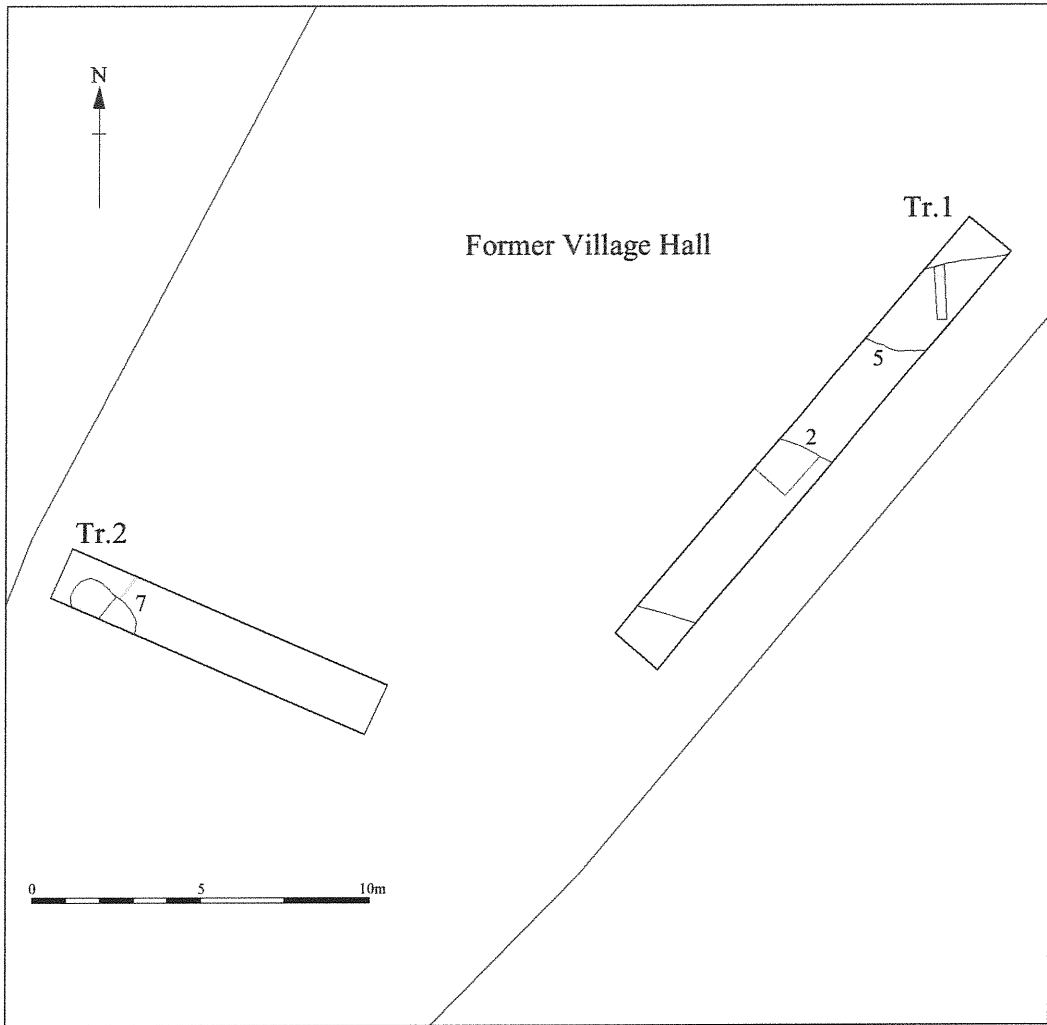


Figure 2 Trench Plan

Pit 2 was a large, shallow feature 6m wide and 0.54m deep with a flat base. It contained two fills, 3 and 4, which appeared to be contemporaneous. Fill 3 was a yellowy brown clayey silt containing gravel, charcoal and brick and mortar fragments. Fill 4 was a mid brown sandy silt with a great amount of brick and mortar fragments. A number of the brick fragments were 2.5 inch thick soft reds, without frogs and therefore likely to date from the late nineteenth century.

Pit 5 was very irregular and shallow (0.1m deep). Its fill, 6, was a mid grey-brown gravelly sandy silt with frequent mortar and brick fragments. This was undated but likely to be nineteenth to twentieth century.

All the features in this trench were sealed by the topsoil (layer 1).

Trench 2

Trench 2 was 10m long and 1.6m wide. Topsoil (up to 0.4m deep) was removed revealing the natural gravel. One pit was visible (feature 7), cut by a lead water pipe. The pit was oval in shape, 2.15m long and 0.2m deep. The fill, 8, was loose, dark brown gravelly silty sand containing a large quantity of bottles, pottery and bone. These finds could be dated to the late nineteenth or early twentieth century and probably represent deposition of domestic refuse. In section, this pit was seen to cut through the lower portion of the topsoil.

6 DISCUSSION

The features within the two trenches can be dated to the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries, perhaps predating the village hall. The backfills of pits 2 and 5 probably represent levelling deposits before construction of the hall, while pit 7 was used for domestic refuse disposal. No earlier deposits or finds were encountered. The depth of the topsoil suggests that it had been cultivated at some point before the building of the village hall.

7 CONCLUSION

The nature and dating of the features uncovered in this evaluation do not advance our understanding of the origins and development of the village of Hemingford Abbots. However, it may help to support the hypothesis that this central portion of the village (bounded by West Street, Royal Oak Lane and High Street) was once a village green. This would explain why there was no evidence of occupation earlier than the late nineteenth century.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank David Pitts Chartered Architects who commissioned and funded the archaeological work. The project was managed by Judith Roberts. Crane Begg of the CCC AFU provided the illustrations for this report. Thanks are also due to the many passers-by who offered their opinions, especially Mr R. Butterworth who showed a wealth of knowledge of the local history.

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

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