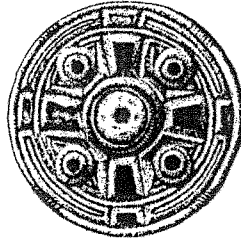


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**Post Medieval Ditches at Cloverfield
Drive/Townsend, Soham
An Archaeological Evaluation**

Spencer Cooper

September 2002

Cambridgeshire County Council

Report No. B106.

Commissioned by Cofton Ltd.

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Editor S.Macaulay
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Report No. B.106

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SUMMARY

Between 2nd September and 4th September, an archaeological evaluation was undertaken on 1.3 hectares of land immediately to the northwest of the modern village of Soham (TL 5867460), by staff of the Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeology Unit. The project was commissioned by Cofton Ltd in advance of a proposed residential development and is part of larger evaluation work carried out in the area, notably land to the south of the subject site. 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 Spencer Cooper and the project was managed by Stephen Macaulay.

The results of the evaluation revealed ditches of a post-medieval field system which relate to the draining of the Soham mere. No features or artefacts earlier than post-medieval were identified within the subject site.

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**Post-Medieval Ditches at Cloverfield Drive/Townsend, Soham:
An Archaeological Evaluation
(TL 5867 7460)**

1 INTRODUCTION

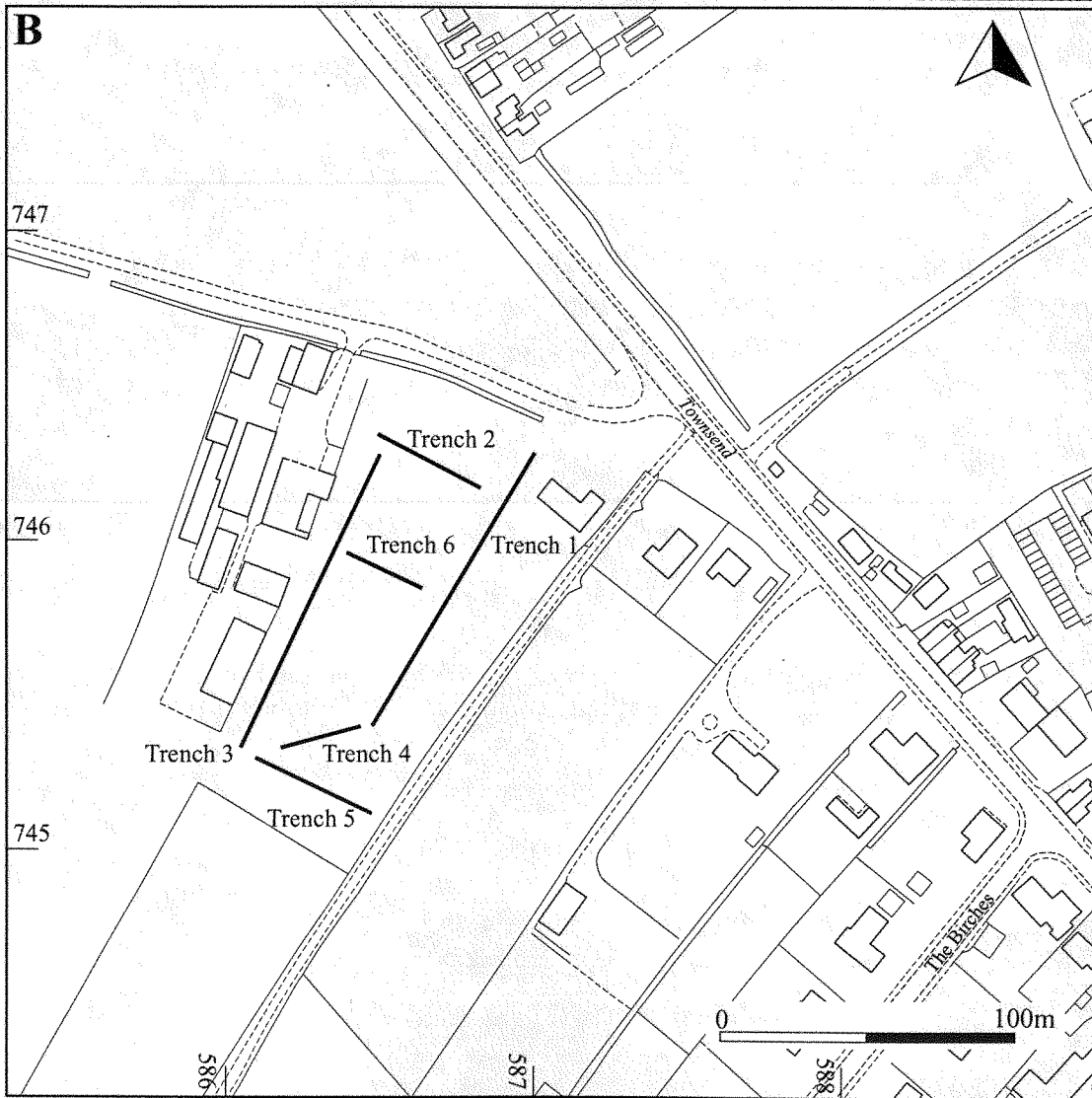
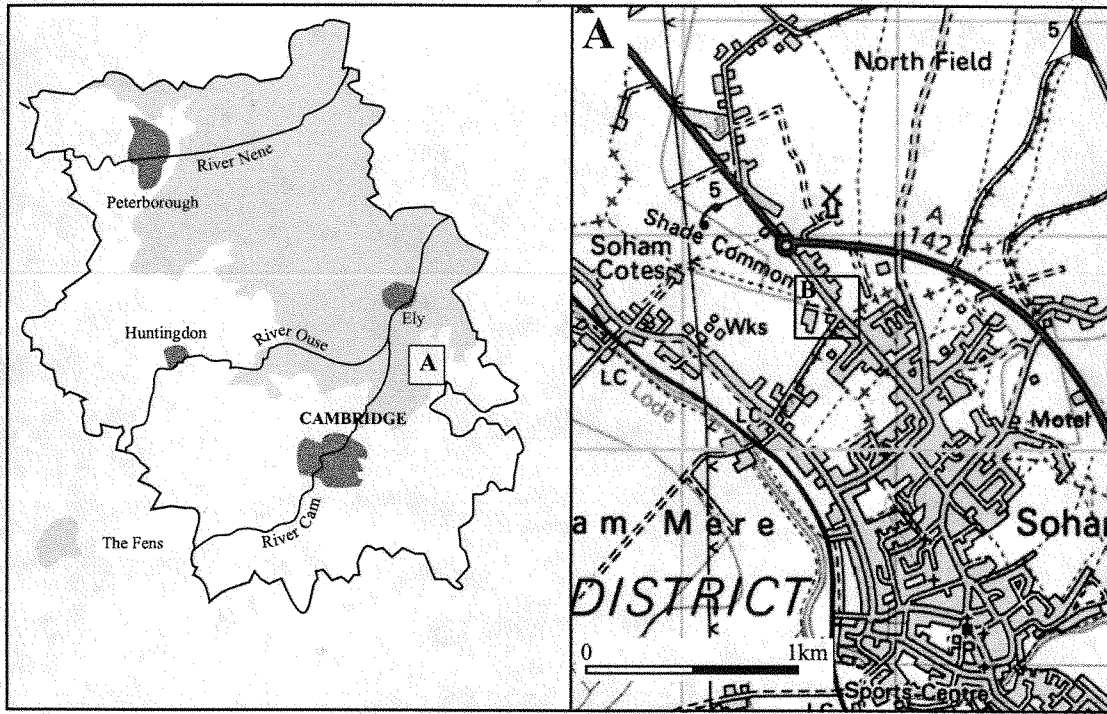
Between 2nd September and 4th September 2002, an archaeological evaluation was undertaken on 1.3 hectares of land immediately to the northwest of the modern village of Soham (TL 5867 7460), by staff of the Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeology Unit. The project was commissioned by Cofton Ltd in advance of a proposed residential development vehicular access and public open space. 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 Spencer Cooper and the project was managed by Stephen Macaulay.

2 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

Soham is situated on a peninsular of land (Bedfordshire Lower Chalk and 3rd Terrace Gravels) which projects northwest into the fens (10m+ OD) from Fordham. The site is on the boundary of the 3rd Terrace Gravels and the Gault Clay, which lies to the northwest of Soham at the 5m contour. The development area is covered, in part, by alluvium, which in turn seals the 3rd Terrace gravels.

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The SMR maps and records show no archaeological remains within and immediately adjacent to the proposed development area. Indeed there is no recorded find within 500m of the development area. Those that do exist (Cloverfield Drive, Soham, An archaeological Desktop Study, AFU Report A149, Fig. 2) lie mostly to the southeast, within Soham Village itself and further to the south and east. Further remains lie to the north, with the complex of prehistoric sites associated with Broad Hill (Hall 1996) and to the west on the Wicken side of Soham Mere. Close to Wicken a number of prehistoric and Roman sites have been recorded on the sands. Medieval ridge and furrow was recorded on the site in the 1940s but is not now evident.



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Figure 1 Site Location Plan

Prehistoric

The Fen-edge around Soham, and the nearby Snail valley, have a long history of human activity (Hall 1996: 72-81). Prehistoric finds in the vicinity include mesolithic tranchet axes (Cambs SMR 07077, 07098), neolithic flint and polished axes (SMR 11019) as well as Bronze Age artefacts (SMR 07101, 11019a) and potential ring-ditches (SMR 07102). The Fenland Survey (Hall 1996) records most prehistoric remains have been recovered from the Greensands to the north and west of Soham, extending from Fordham/Isleham and drift sands to the east. To the north of the site Hall records the Board Hill complex, which contains neolithic, bronze Age, iron Age and Roman remains on the fen edge. To the west of Soham Mere, close to Wicken and Padney, a number of neolithic and bronze Age sites and artefact scatters have been identified on the lighter sandy soils (SMR 07037, 07039, 07040, 07041, 07044, 07061, 07061a, 07482, 09230).

Roman

The area around Soham (and Wicken) contains a number of Roman sites which the Fenland Survey suggest indicate intensive fen-edge activity, perhaps attracted by the proximity of the River Cam and nearby crossing point at Fordey (Hall 1996). Roman burials are known within Soham (SMR 07086, 07100), although the majority of Roman sites are located to the south and south-east of the village, towards a possible Villa site. These Roman features are located on the lighter soils at Soham, Wicken and Padney, dating generally to the 2nd-4th century; the accepted date for increased Romanisation in the fens. Cropmarks on the sands have indicated enclosures and trackways.

Medieval

There is a striking concentration of early Anglo-Saxon activity which includes a number of cemetery sites in and around the core of Soham. One of these appears to have lain in the vicinity of St Andrew's Church (SMR 07123a). Other burial sites have been discovered southeast of the village (SMR 07027) and along Fordham Road, which might have been the remains of a ploughed-out barrow (Lethbridge 1933). Pagan Anglo-Saxon barrows are rare in Cambridgeshire, although one was excavated last century in Bottisham (Taylor 1981:113). From Angle Common, to the west of the village, Anglo-Saxon spearheads have been recovered (SMR 07093, 07094). These, however date to the Late Saxon period (10th century) and may not be associated with a burial site.

The early historical significance of Soham is attested mainly by the foundation of a monastery in the 7th century AD by St Felix, first bishop of the East Angles, who was buried here (VCH II, 141). Although the site of this is not known, it is generally believed to have lain where the medieval church now stands.

Soham appears to have been at the centre of the See for a short while until it was relocated to Dunwich (SMR 7124). In the area around White Hart Lane the remains of human burials have been recorded, potentially part of a major burial ground belonging to the abbey during the 7th to 9th centuries (Robinson 1995). The monastery was subsequently destroyed, along with the many other religious foundations in the area, during the late 9th century Danish invasions of East Anglia. Unlike nearby Ely, it was not re-established during the 10th century round of local refoundations (VCH II, 142). The manor of Soham, in fact, was among those given to the abbey at Ely, shortly after the latter's refoundation, by the earldorman Brithnoth (Conybeare 1897, 71). By the time of Domesday, the Abbot of Ely held 1/2 hide of land in Soham (VCH I, 364) but the manor was largely a royal estate, held by William I as it had been by Edward the Confessor.

The Fenland Survey states that there is no settlement activity away from the village cores of Soham and Wicken (Hall 1996:79). To date the only evidence of occupation in Soham is in this local, supported by the results of archaeological evaluations in the grounds of Soham County Primary School (Bray 1991), immediately east of the later excavation at Pratt Street (Hatton & Last 1997). Both sites, located close to the medieval church, identified pits, postholes and ditches containing animal bone, fired clay (remains of wattle walling) and pottery, dating to the 10th-13th centuries.

Post-medieval

The fields around Soham were not enclosed and persist today as a remnant of the medieval field pattern. In North Field a few single-acre strips still survive today. There are a number of windmills (SMR 06945, 07095) and pumps for the drainage channels recorded (SMR 06947, 06948, 06949). Soham Mere was not drained until the 19th century.

Soham Mere

Finally, Soham Mere must be considered. Marine flooding, which deposited 'fen clay' occurred mainly in the 3rd millennium BC. This marine phase was followed by extensive peat growth, with a whitish shell marl forming possibly in the Roman period. The Mere survived as an expanse of water until drained in the 19th century, David Hall suggests that the marls will be of medieval or later date (Hall 1996:72) and may be encountered in the land around the 19th century extent of the mere.

The Site

The 1999 evaluation (Hatton & Macaulay 1999) demonstrated the survival of remains of prehistoric to medieval date to the south of the development area. Archaeological remains were identified in all but two (out of 12) of the evaluation trenches. Occupation remains dating from the 12th century onwards was found in trenches 1 and 2, whilst other features across the site appear to

represent field systems and a variety of other culturally derived remains suggesting that the area has been occupied from prehistoric times. Although archaeological features have been identified across the majority of the site there is a clear concentration of deposits to the east on the higher gravel terrace. Away from this higher ground the nature and density of remains decreases although both prehistoric and Romano-British features were recorded in these areas. The discovery of medieval occupation in 1999 evaluation trenches 1 and 2 is interesting given the distance from the known medieval core of the village of Soham. The reason for this settlement here may relate to the proximity of the medieval mere.

4 METHODOLOGY

A series of six trenches totalling 343m in length and 2m wide was excavated using a 360° excavator with a toothless ditching bucket (representing a 5.3% sample). The trenches were located across the area of the proposed development 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 gravel or clay deposits were noted, between 0.40m and 0.90m below the present ground surface. 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 aid the recovery of artefacts.

5 RESULTS

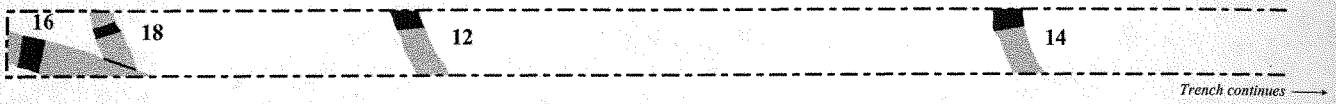
The topsoil was composed of a dark grey silty clay, which varied in depth across the site from 0.45–0.50m. The subsoil was grey green silty clay and alluvial in character. The subsoil varied from 0.35–0.50m across the development area.

Trench 1 (see fig2)

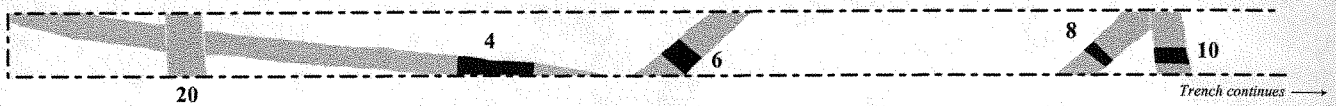
Trench 1 was 99.9m long and 1.0m deep and ran on a northeast-southwest alignment. A number of ditches were identified in the northern part of the trench. In the northern end of the trench ditch 16 truncated ditch 18.

Ditch 18 was 0.90m wide and 0.23m deep and ran on an east-west alignment. It contained a single fill 17 a light brown silty clay which produced a single sherd of post medieval pottery.

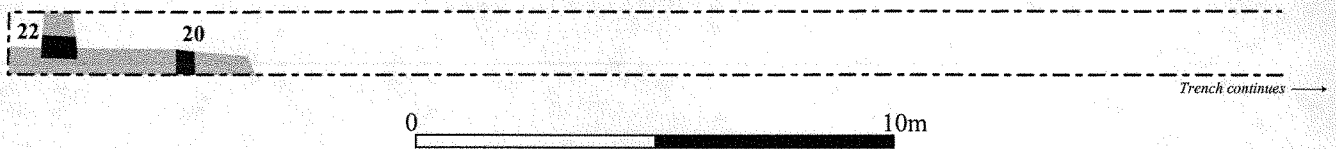
Trench 1



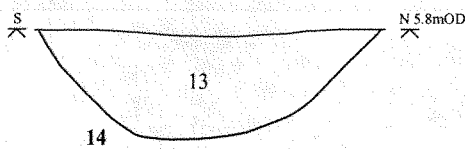
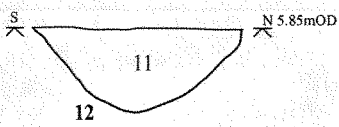
Trench 2



Trench 3



Trench 1 Sections



Trench 2 Sections

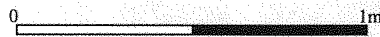
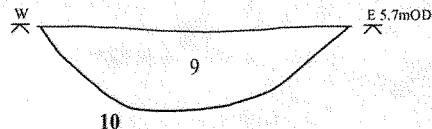
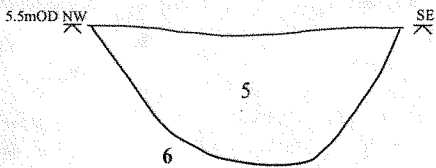


Figure 2 Trench plans (top) and selected sections (below)

Ditch 16 was 0.90m wide and 0.30m deep and ran on an north-south alignment. It contained a single fill, 15 a light brown silty clay and produced no artefacts.

Ditch 14 was 0.70m wide and 0.30m deep and ran on an east-west alignment. It contained a single fill, 13 a greyish brown silty clay and produced no artefacts.

Ditch 12 was 0.60m wide and 0.25 deep and ran on an east-west alignment. It contained a single fill 11 a greyish brown silty clay and produced no artefacts.

Trench 2 (see fig2)

Trench 2 was 48m long and 0.9m deep and ran on an east-west alignment. A number of ditches were revealed in the western part of the trench. Ditch 4 was truncated by ditch 20 (see Trench 3 for description). Ditch 4 was 0.50m wide and 0.20m deep and ran on an east-west alignment. It contained a single fill 3 a light brown silty clay and produced no artefacts. Ditch 20 was 0.90m wide and 0.30m deep and ran on a north-south alignment. Ditch 6 located in the centre of the trench was 0.90m wide and 0.40m deep. It contained a single fill 5 a light brown silty clay and produced no artefacts. In the eastern part of the trench ditch 10 cut ditch 8. Ditch 10 was 0.90m wide and 0.22 m deep and ran on a north-south alignment. This ditch consisted of a single fill 9, a light brownish silty clay. Ditch 8 was 0.90m wide and 0.30m deep and ran on a northeast-southwest alignment. It contained a single fill 7, a light brown silty clay and produced no artefacts.

Trench 3 (see fig 2)

Trench 3 was 100m long and 0.85 m deep long and ran on a northeast-southwest alignment. Two ditches were revealed in the northern part of the trench. Ditch 20 truncated ditch 22. Ditch 20 was 0.90m wide and 0.30m deep and ran on a north-south alignment (also through Trench 2). It contained a single fill a light brown silty clay and produced no artefacts. Ditch 22 was 0.50m wide and 0.20m deep and ran on an east-west alignment. It contained a single fill 21, a light brown silty clay and produced no artefacts.

Trench 4

Trench 4 was 25m long and 0.85 m deep and was aligned northeast-southwest. No archaeological features were identified in this trench.

Trench 5.

Trench 5 was 50m long and 0.85 m deep long and ran on an east-west alignment. No archaeological features were identified in this trench.

Trench 6.

Trench 6 was 20m long and 0.85 m deep long and ran on an east-west alignment. No archaeological features were identified in this trench.

6 DISCUSSION

The evaluation revealed linear ditches which shared a number of characteristics in terms of size, profile, nature of fills and an absence of artefacts. A small fragment of post-medieval brick was recovered from ditch 18 in trench 1. It is possible that many of the ditches revealed in trenches 1, 2 and 3 form part of a post-medieval drainage/field system. It is notable there was a lack of medieval material encountered within the ditches indicating that the medieval settlement was not within the evaluation area or nearby.

7 CONCLUSION

The results of the evaluation revealed ditches of a post-medieval field system which may relate to the draining of the Soham Mere. No features or artefacts earlier than post medieval were identified within the subject site.

This project helps to refine the model for the archaeology of Soham in this vicinity. It reinstates the results of the 1999 evaluation that suggest that away from the gravel terrace (higher dry ground), the density of archaeological remains is very low. A similar pattern of post-medieval field system ditches was identified in the 1999 evaluation (away from the gravel terrace) and these were of identical size and character (Macaulay 1999).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank Croft Limited who commissioned and funded the work. The project was managed by Stephen Macaulay and the site was monitored by Jeremy Parsons of the CAO.

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