

Archaeological Field Unit

## **Sea Bank at Walpole St Andrew, Norfolk**

Spencer Cooper

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**Cambridgeshire County Council**

Report No. N21

Commissioned by Mr Patrick Burke

**Crown Farm, Walpole St Andrew, Norfolk**  
**An Archaeological Watching Brief.**  
**TF 509 189**

Spencer Cooper

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Editor: S.N. Kemp B.A MSc AIFA.  
Illustrator : J. Cane BA.



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©Archaeological Field Unit  
Cambridgeshire County Council  
Fulbourn Community Centre  
Haggis Gap, Fulbourn  
Cambridgeshire CB1 5HD  
Tel (01223) 881614  
Fax (01223) 880946

Arch.Field.Unit@cambridgeshire.gov.uk  
<http://www.edweb.camcnty.gov.uk/afu/>

## *SUMMARY*

*On February 28<sup>th</sup> 2002, the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council undertook an Archaeological Monitoring and Recording Brief at Crown Farm, Walpole St Andrew. The development comprised the construction of two vehicle passing bays along a road which follows the course of a medieval sea bank. No archaeological features or artefacts were encountered in the two excavated trenches. The trenches revealed a layer of topsoil overlying a layer of subsoil, the subsoil profile was only partially exposed.*

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Crown Farm, Walpole St Andrew, Norfolk;  
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**1 INTRODUCTION**

On February 28<sup>th</sup> 2002, the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council undertook an Archaeological Monitoring and Recording Brief at Crown Farm, St Andrews Walpole. The development consisted of two passing bays along a roadway. The foundations trenches for the passing bays were located on top of a medieval sea bank. The site is located within an area known as the Marshlands.

**2 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY**

The geology of Walpole St Andrew consists of reclaimed marine silts. The trenches were located on the medieval Sea Bank at 5m OD.

**3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

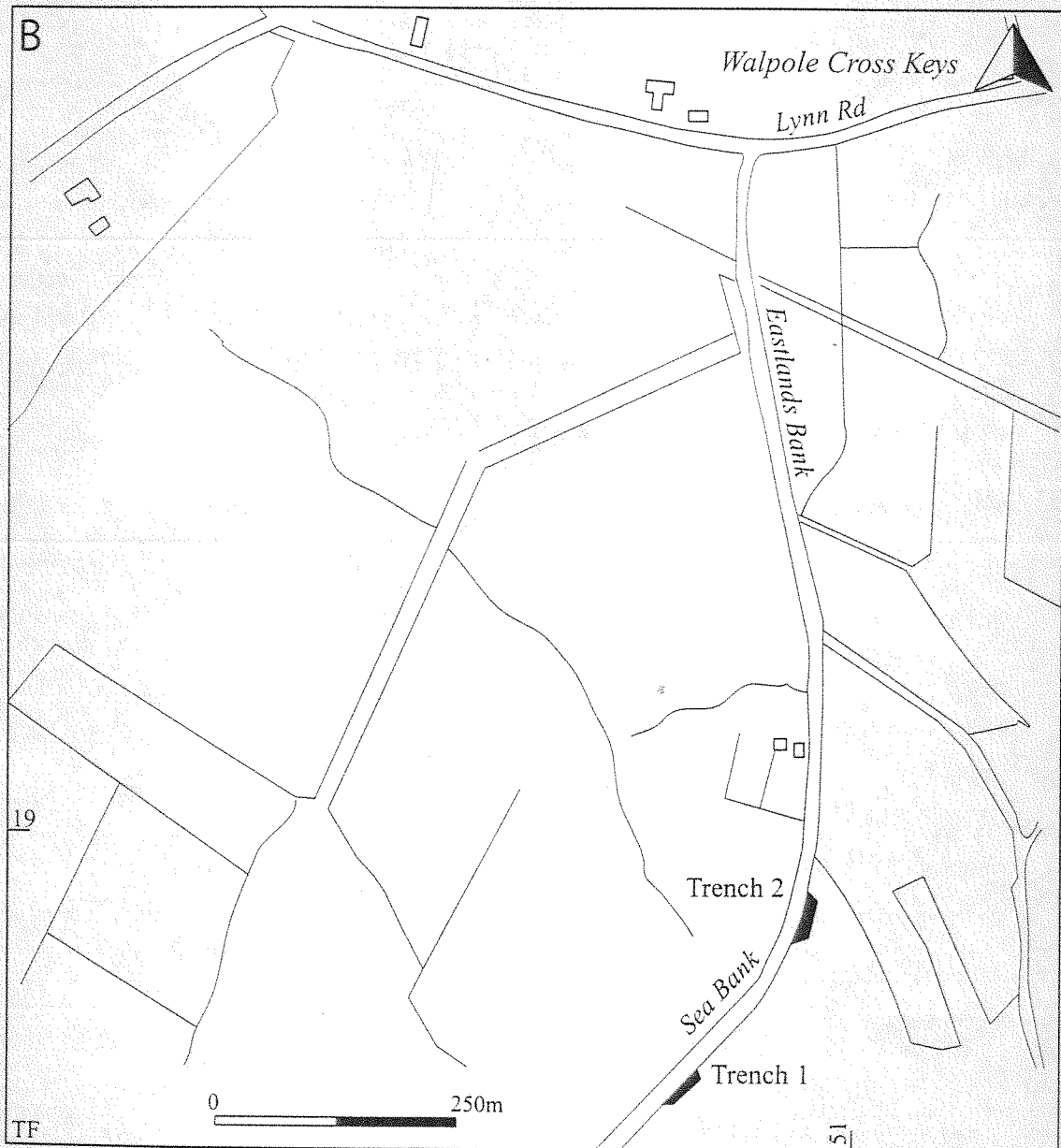
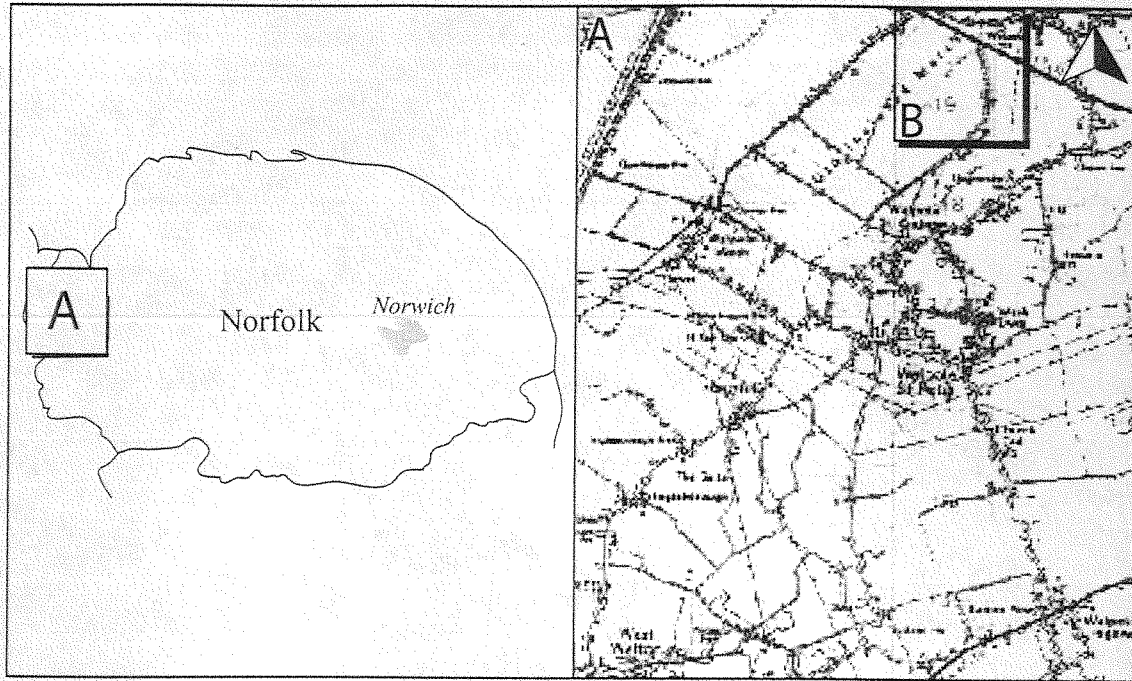
**Roman**

Roman activity within Walpole St Andrew is represented by pottery recovered from field walking conducted for the Fenland Project Survey (Silvester, 1988). Three small spreads of pottery just to the north of the village revealed a possible Roman settlement.

**Saxon and Medieval**

The Sea Bank or the 'Roman' bank ran completely around the wash and now stands 3m high in places. The antiquarian William Dugdale called it the Roman Bank, there is however no evidence for a Roman origin. The bank may originally have been constructed in the 13<sup>th</sup> century during an intensive period of land reclamation within the marshlands.

The development area is located in the Marshlands, an area which was particularly prosperous in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. At the time of the Norman Conquest this was one of the poorest areas in England, yet by 1334 AD it appears to have become one of the richest. Population levels had in some areas increased by five or ten fold at this time (Ravensdale and Muir, 1984).



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Figure 1 Location plan

The medieval prosperity has been fossilised in a number of splendid churches at Terrington, Wiggenhall and Walpole. Furthermore, statistical evidence highlights prosperity. In the county of Norfolk the assessments of taxes in the year 1334 show that apart from Yarmouth the places with the highest assessments lay in the western portion of Freebridge Hundred and thus Terrington, Wiggenhall and Walpole (Darby, 1974).

#### **4 METHODOLOGY**

Two foundation trenches were excavated under archaeological supervision for the passing places. The trenches were opened by a JCB with a 2m wide, flat bladed ditching bucket. The length of trenching was 30m in total. After machining was completed the trenches were photographed and recorded using the AFU's standard recording system. The spoil from the trenches were scanned by eye in order to obtain artefacts.

#### **5 RESULTS (Figure 1)**

##### **Trench 1**

Trench 1 was located on an east-west alignment on the Sea Bank. It was 15m long, 1.7m wide and 0.45m deep. No archaeological features were encountered in this trench. Topsoil consisted of a dark grey silty clay and was 0.20m deep. This sealed brown silt subsoil, which was over 0.25m deep, the base of the subsoil was not reached.

##### **Trench 2**

Trench 2 was located on an east-west alignment on the Sea Bank. It was 15m long, 1.7m wide and 0.45m deep. No archaeological features were encountered in this trench. Topsoil consisted of a dark grey silty clay and was 0.20m deep. This sealed brown silt subsoil, which was over 0.25m deep, the base of the subsoil was not reached.

#### **6 DISCUSSION**

The trenching was not deep enough to encounter any archaeological remains which might have either given indications about the construction of the Sea Bank or activities which may have been undertaken along its course. The deposits revealed are post-medieval or possibly modern in origin. There was no evidence within these limited investigations to indicate whether or not the Sea Bank was medieval in date.

## 7 CONCLUSION

The absence of visible and significant archaeological remains was undoubtedly due to the shallow nature of the trial trenches. No artefacts were recovered from either of the layers encountered.

All deposits within the investigation areas were modern or post-medieval in origin composed of a developed topsoil and subsoil which overlay a constructed bank. It is most likely that the Sea Bank is a composite structure which has developed from the medieval period onward.

## 8 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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