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Archaeological Field Unit

**Late Medieval Features at 1, Cheyney Street, Steeple  
Morden, Cambridgeshire  
An Archaeological Evaluation  
(TL 2862 4254)**

Taleyna Fletcher

2004

**Cambridgeshire County Council**

Report No. 719

Commissioned by *J. Augsburger (Ladyheath Properties Ltd)*



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**Late Medieval Features at 1, Cheyney Street, Steeple Morden,  
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An Archaeological Evaluation  
(TL 2862 4254)**

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May 2004

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## SUMMARY

*On 27th March 2004, the Archaeological Field Unit (AFU) of Cambridgeshire County Council conducted an archaeological evaluation on land at the rear of 1, Cheyney Street, in the centre of the village of Steeple Morden, Cambridgeshire. The investigation area comprised one trench, 15m in length, within the proposed development area of two residential dwellings. The trench revealed a ditch terminus, the edges of a large pond or quarry pit and a single posthole. One sherd of late medieval pottery was recovered, from the ditch terminus; all features are thought to have been contemporary on the basis of the nature and characteristics of the deposits contained within them.*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION	1
2	GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY	1
3	ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND	1
4	METHODOLOGY	3
5	RESULTS	4
6	DISCUSSION	6
7	CONCLUSION	7
	ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	7
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	7
	LIST OF FIGURES	
	Figure 1 Site Location	2
	Figure 2 Trench Plan and Section Drawing	5
	LIST OF APPENDICES	
	Appendix 1: Environmental Assessment, by Rachel Fosberry	9
	Appendix 2: Pottery Assessment, by Carole Fletcher	11
	Appendix 3: Context Table	13
	Appendix 4: Finds Quantification Table	13

# Drawing Conventions

## Sections

Limit of Excavation	-----
Cut	—————
Cut - Conjectured	-----
Soil Horizon	-----
Soil Horizon - Conjectured	-----
Intrusion/Truncation	-----
Top of Natural	—————
Top Surface	—————
Break in Section	-----
Cut Number	<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">118</span>
Deposit Number	117
Ordnance Datum	$\frac{18.45\text{m}}{\times}$ ODN

## Plans

Limit of Excavation	—————
Deposit - Conjectured	-----
Natural Features	-----
Intrusion/Truncation	-----
Sondages/Machine Strip	-----
Illustrated Section	<span style="color: red;">S.14</span> ———
Archaeological Deposit	<span style="background-color: yellow; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; width: 20px; height: 10px;"></span>
Excavated Slot	<span style="background-color: lightblue; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; width: 20px; height: 10px;"></span>
Cut Number	118

**Late Medieval Features at 1, Cheyney Street, Steeple Morden, Cambridgeshire**  
**An Archaeological Evaluation**  
**(TL 2862 4254)**

**1 INTRODUCTION**

On 27th March 2004 an archaeological evaluation was undertaken on land at the rear of 1, Cheyney Street, Steeple Morden, Cambridgeshire (TL 2862 4254) by the Archaeological Field Unit (AFU) of Cambridgeshire County Council. The project was commissioned by Mr J. Augsburg of Ladyheath Properties Ltd in advance of the construction of two residential dwellings. The site was located in the centre of the historical village of Steeple Morden to the east of Steeple Morden Primary School and less than 60m to the north-east of SS Peter and Paul Church (SMR CB2881) in an area of high archaeological potential. The work was carried out in accordance with a Brief issued by Andy Thomas, Principal Archaeologist, Land Use and Planning, Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeology Section (Thomas 2004) and a specification produced by the AFU (Macaulay 2004).

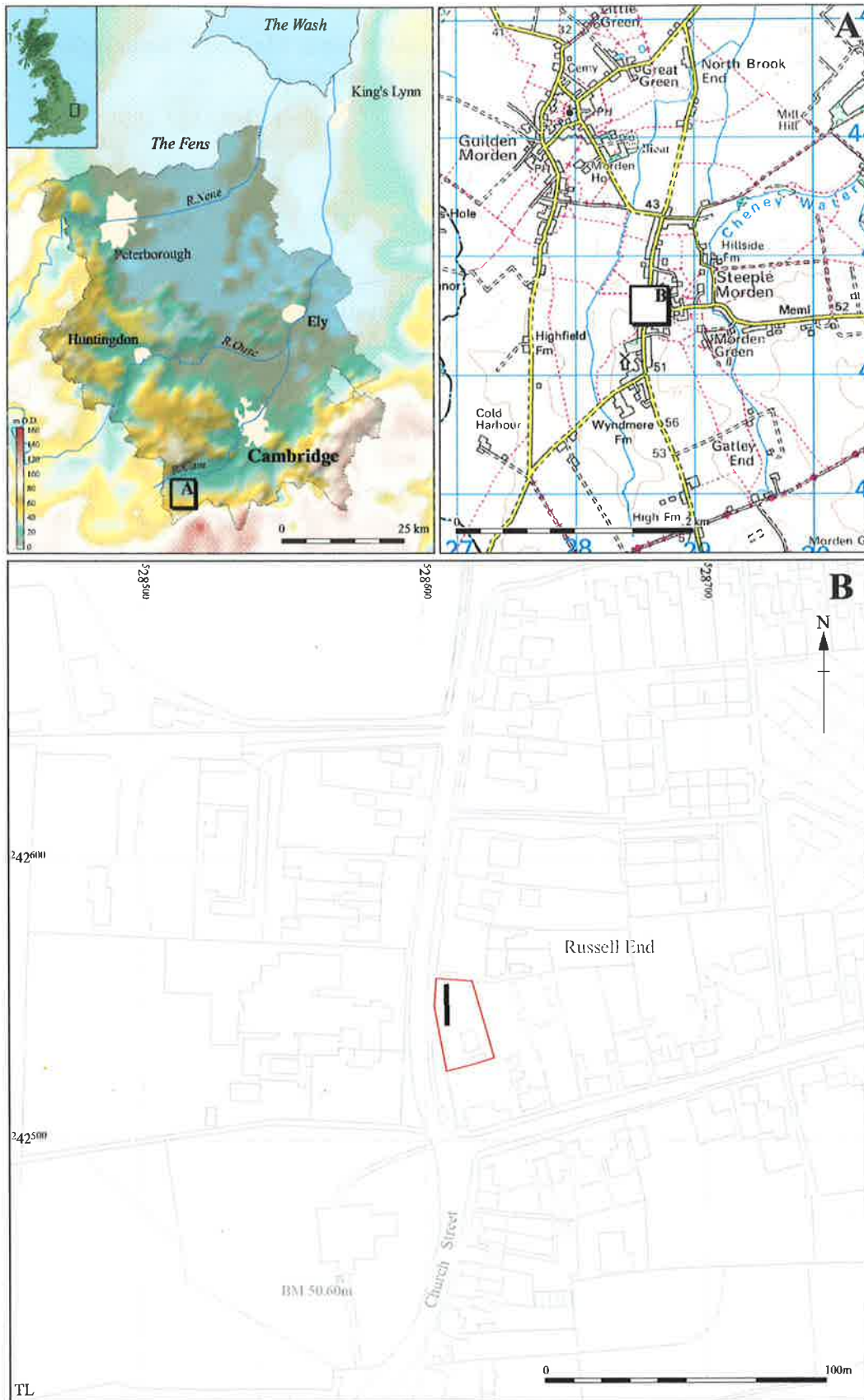
The evaluation revealed the presence of a ditch terminus, the edges of a large pond or quarry pit and a single posthole. All features are thought to have been contemporary on the basis of the nature and characteristics of the deposits contained within them. All features are believed to date to the late medieval period.

**2 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY**

Steeple Morden is in south-western Cambridgeshire close to the Hertfordshire border, 8km north-west of Royston. The site is in the centre of Steeple Morden on the Lower Beds (known as Chalk Marl) of the Cretaceous Lower Chalk ridge of south Cambridgeshire (British Geological Survey, 1976), at a height of approximately 49m OD. To the north the village lies on the Upper Beds of the Lower Chalk.

**3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

Recent archaeological fieldwork in close proximity to the site, to the north west at 15-17 Hay Street (Grant and Wilkins 2002; Rudge 2002/2004), and adjacent to the site at the primary school (Kenney 2001), has revealed the



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**Figure 1** Location of trench with the development area outlined (red)



presence of a large number of features of archaeological interest, including ditches and enclosures of Romano-British date.

Archaeological work at 15-17 Hay Street (Grant and Wilkins 2002) revealed the presence of archaeological features sealed beneath 0.5-0.6m of topsoil and mature subsoil. These features were dated to the Romano-British period and included ditches and narrow curvilinear features together with pits and postholes indicative of occupation of the site during this period. Further investigations (Rudge 2002/2004) revealed a large ditch dated to the Romano-British period containing significant amounts of pottery.

Investigations to the west (in the playground of the primary school) produced similar evidence for occupation sealed beneath approximately 0.50m of overburden. The features encountered were ditches (one running north-north-east to south-south-east and the other on an east to west alignment) and would appear, at least in one instance, to be continuations of features found in the later evaluations at 15 and 17 Hay Street.

#### 4 METHODOLOGY

A single 15m long trench was excavated to the north of the current building occupying the development area. Orientated on a north to south alignment, the trench was located close to the property's boundary wall and parallel to Church Street.

The trench was excavated using a 180 degree mechanical excavator with a flat bladed ditching bucket. The machine continued to remove overburden and deposits until reaching the interface between the soil horizons and the natural chalk marl, the level at which archaeological features were encountered. The position of the trench was determined by a trench location plan which was pre-approved by the Cambridgeshire Archaeology Office (Fig.1).

After machining, the trench was cleaned in order to fully expose the archaeological features and to understand their extent and any relationships within the trench. All features were hand excavated with the exception of 07 which, due to its size and difficulties encountered from rising water levels, was sectioned using the mechanical excavator. The spoil from it was scanned for finds. All features were recorded using the AFU standard contextual recording system. The trench was planned at a scale of 1:20 and sections were drawn at 1:10. Colour print, colour slide and monochrome photographs were taken as well as digital photographs using a Canon A10 Digital camera. Environmental samples were also taken where necessary. The spoil heap was scanned visually for artefacts.

In this report deposit numbers are shown in plain text and cut numbers are in **bold text**.

## 5 RESULTS

Trench 1 was 14.60m long and 1.60m wide, and was excavated to a depth of approximately 0.90m. The trench was aligned approximately north to south. The work was continuously hampered by the level of the water table which caused flooding in most features. Within the trench one posthole, one possible ditch terminus and the edge of a large pit or pond were identified.

Three basic stratigraphic layers were encountered within the trench (Fig. 2, Section 1). The upper layer consisted of dark brown topsoil (08), up to 0.40m in thickness, with occasional root disturbance, post-medieval ceramic fragments and animal bones. Underlying this was a deposit of mid to dark brown silty subsoil (09), with a maximum depth of .055m containing very occasional inclusions of pottery and animal bone. A third layer was encountered, but not present throughout the trench. This was a layer of mixed chalky marl and light grey brown soil with a maximum depth of 0.10m and contained no inclusions (10).

### Pond / pit 07

This large feature was the earliest feature encountered in the trench. It was not fully revealed in plan, but measured at least 12m in length and 1.60m wide within the trench. An excavated section through this feature revealed that it had a steep, abrupt edge, which then shallowed out to become a more gradual slope towards a flat base. This feature, thought to be the edge of a pond or quarry pit, had a maximum depth of 0.46m and contained two deposits. The lower deposit (06) was a light grey brown silty clay with occasional medium sized flint stones, plant roots and charcoal flecks. This layer had a maximum thickness of 0.46m and no artefacts were retrieved from it.

The second, upper fill recorded within this slot (05) was a dark brown silty clay with no obvious inclusions. This deposit had a maximum recorded depth of 0.22m and no artefacts were retrieved. A single 10 litre environmental soil sample was taken from this deposit for analysis of environmental evidence (Appendix 1). From this sample, several wheat grains were identified as well as species of weeds of elderberry and bramble. Several varieties of snails were noted and may suggest that this feature held water for some time, either as its function or after being left open, or it is a result of the location on this very wet and waterlogged site. Pieces of large animal bone were also recovered. The northern edge of this feature was truncated by ditch terminus 02.

### Ditch terminus 02

This feature was not fully exposed in plan, but appears have been the terminus of a north to south orientated ditch. A section at the terminus was excavated to reveal very steep sloping edges and a flat base with a minimum width of

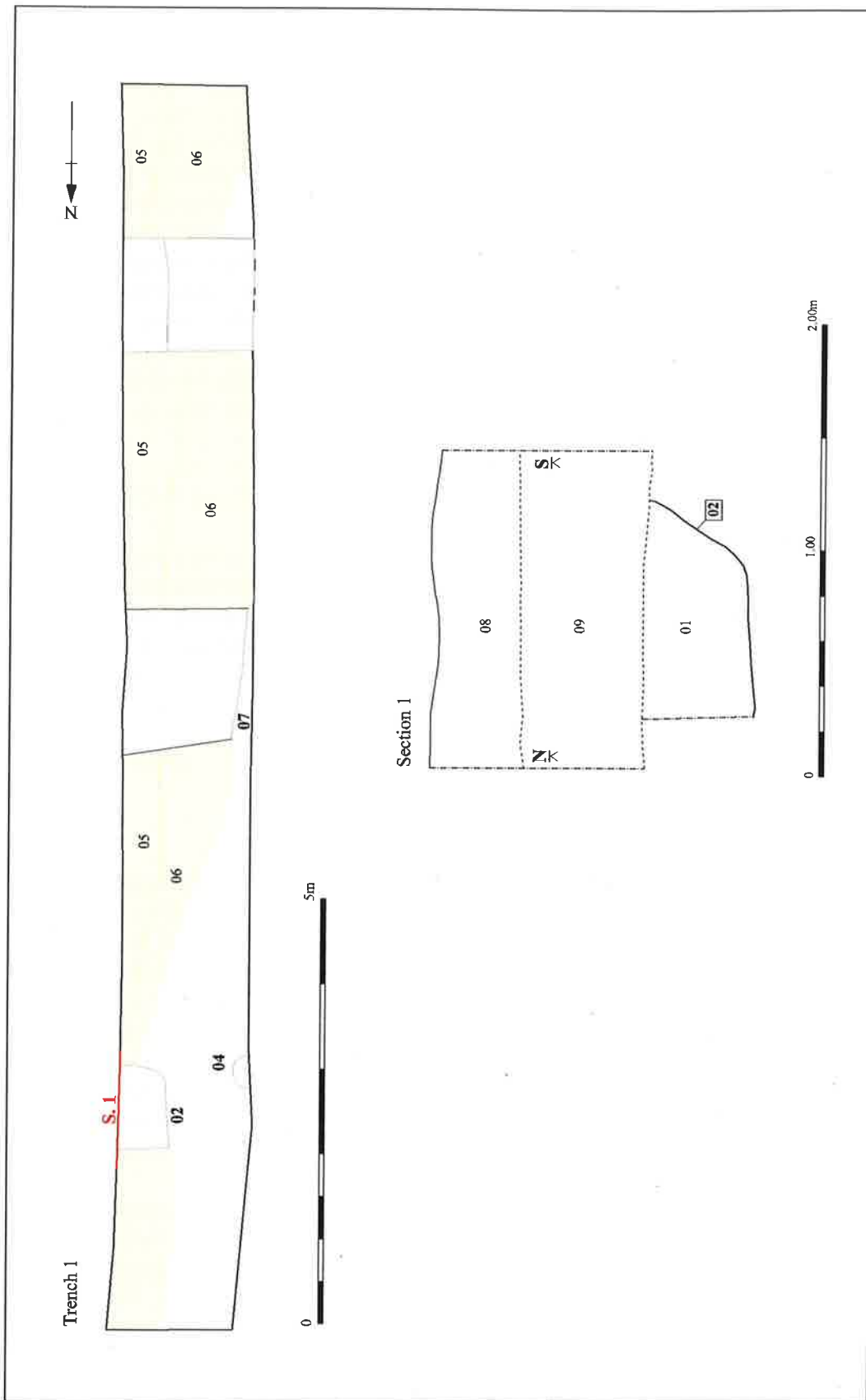


Figure 2 Trench plan and section drawing

0.51m and a depth of 0.44m (Fig.2, Section 1). This feature contained a single deposit (01), of light grey brown with very occasional patches of yellowish green sand and inclusions of occasional flint stones and rare charcoal flecks. This deposit also included two sherds of glazed pottery which were both identified as being from a Colchester type ware bowl dated to the 15th to 16th century (Appendix 2). Fragments of roof tile, large animal bone and oyster shell were also recovered from this fill. A single 10-litre environmental soil sample was taken from this deposit for analysis of environmental evidence (Appendix 1). The sample contained several bones from a small animal, probably rodent and a single charred wheat grain was also identified. A notable amount of charcoal was also recorded within the sample as well as additional large animal bone. Several varieties of snails were identified which may suggest this feature held water for some time, either as its function or after being left open or it is a result of the location on this very wet and waterlogged site.

#### Posthole 04

This feature was not fully exposed in plan, but appeared to be a posthole, with moderately steep sloping edges and a rounded base. This feature had a width of 0.34m, a maximum depth of 0.16m. Its fill was a light grey brown silty clay with a sandy chalky mottling (03). Occasional small stones were recorded within the fill, but no artefacts were retrieved.

## 6 DISCUSSION

This evaluation has identified the presence of archaeological remains on the site dating to the late medieval period and two features for which a date could not be established. Work in the surrounding area has identified the presence of features of Romano-British date, none of which were located within this evaluation trench. Ditch 02, which terminated within this trench, was securely dated to the late medieval period. This indicates the presence of some activity from this period in the area, not yet identified by work in the vicinity.

Although posthole 04 was undated, its presence does suggest that there may have been a post structure (such as a building or fenceline) within the area.

It is difficult to establish a function for the large feature (07), given that its shape and dimensions could not be established in plan. Two possible interpretations can be offered at this stage. The natural chalk material on this site would be particularly good for use in clunch-built structures, this being a popular constructional material during the medieval period. Feature 07 might therefore represent the remains of a quarry pit for chalk extraction. Whatever the function of this large feature, having fallen out of use it appears to have been left to silt up.

## 7 CONCLUSION

The objective of the fieldwork was to establish the character, date, extent and state of preservation of any archaeological remains within the area of the proposed development, and to this effect the work was successful. A large feature, probably a pond or quarry pit was identified together with a posthole and a late medieval ditch terminus which was aligned north to south. This, considered alongside recent work within the surrounding area, suggests that well preserved archaeological remains of late medieval (as well as Romano-British) date survive within the village core.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank Mr J. Augsburger who commissioned and funded the archaeological work. The project was managed by Stephen Macaulay. Thanks to Rachel Fosberry for the environmental processing and analysis, Carole Fletcher for find quantification and spot dating, Crane Begg for preparing the illustrations and also to Andy Thomas of the County Archaeology Office who wrote the brief for works and monitored the evaluation.

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## APPENDIX 1: APPRAISAL OF ENVIRONMENTAL SAMPLES

by Rachel Fosberry

### 1 INTRODUCTION AND METHOD

Bulk samples were taken from two pits within the evaluation area and were processed for the recovery of charred plant remains, dating evidence and any other artefactual evidence that might be present. Both samples emitted a cess-like smell on excavation and had yellow/green staining. It was therefore possible that preservation by mineralisation may have occurred.

Ten litres of each soil sample was pre-treated with Decon-90 prior to being processed by bucket flotation, the flot being collected in a 0.5mm mesh and the residues retained in a 1.0mm sieve.

The flot was allowed to air-dry prior to examination under a binocular microscope at x16 magnification. The wet residue was scanned by eye and any artefacts were removed and reunited with the hand-excavated finds.

### 2 RESULTS

#### Sample 1, Context 1

The flot contains several tiny bones; possibly rodent but not fish bones. Charcoal is present and there is a single charred wheat grain. No charred weed seeds are present however there are a few seeds of *Silene* sp. (Campion) that appear to be modern.

Several varieties of snails are present.

The residue contains several large pieces of large animal bones. A substantial amount of charcoal has remained in the residue.

#### Sample 2, Context 6

The flot contains 9 wheat grains of variable preservation by charring. One is beautifully preserved but the others are mainly fragmented and degraded. The only weed seeds present are those of *Sambucus nigra* (elderberry) and *Rubus* sp. (bramble). Although of modern appearance, these seeds are extremely robust and survive for extremely long periods in the soil.

The residue contained a few large animal bones and several spherical mineralised objects that closely resemble rabbit droppings. Several varieties of snails are present.

### 3 CONCLUSION

The residues both require a secondary flotation once they have dried in order to retrieve maximum information about these samples (not performed due to time constraints). At time of writing, limited conclusions can be made. Both samples contain domestic refuse in the form of animal bone and charred grain, although the low density of charred plant macrofossils in these samples precludes the identification of any specific activity that may be associated with the features.



## **APPENDIX 2: POTTERY ASSESSMENT**

by Carole Fletcher

### **1 METHODOLOGY**

The basic guidance in MAP2 has been adhered to (English Heritage 1991) In addition the MPRG documents *Guidance for the processing and publication of medieval pottery from excavations* (Blake and Davey, 1983) and *A guide to the classification of medieval ceramic forms* (MPRG, 1998) act as a standard.

Spot dating was carried out using the AFU's in-house system based on that used at the Museum of London. Fabric classification has been carried out for all previously described types. New types have been given descriptive identifiers, but full fabric descriptions using binocular microscope and x20 magnification have yet to be carried out for these. All sherds have been counted classified, and weighed.

All the pottery has been spot dated on a context by context basis; this information was entered directly onto a quantification database (Access 2000), which allows for the appending of further data.

The AFU curates the pottery and archive until formal deposition of the site archive.

### **2 EVALUATION**

The trench was machine excavated with further excavation carried out by hand and selection made through standard sampling procedures on a feature by feature basis. There are not expected to be any inherent biases. Where bulk samples have been processed for environmental remains, there has been no recovery of pottery.

### **3 THE ASSEMBLAGE**

The fieldwork generated 3 sherds (0.059kg) of pottery. This material consists of a moderately abraded base sherd with a thin clear lead glaze over part of the interior from a Colchester type ware bowl dated to the 15th to 16th century, and a small spalled sherd with a single spot of internal glaze possibly from the

same Colchester type ware vessel. The third piece of pottery is an unstratified sherd of post-medieval red ware. No preservation bias has been recognised and no long-term storage problems are likely. The assemblage offers little potential for further study.

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Blake, H., and Davey, P., 1983, *Guidelines for the Processing and Publications of Medieval Pottery from Excavations*, Directorate of Ancient Monuments and Historic Buildings Occas. Pap. 5

English Heritage, 1991, *Management of Archaeological Projects* (MAP2)

Medieval Pottery Research Group, 1998, *A Guide to the Classification of Medieval Ceramic Forms*, Medieval Pottery Research Group Occas. Pap. 1

**APPENDIX 3: CONTEXT TABLE**

<b>Context Number</b>	<b>Fill / Cut</b>	<b>Fill Of / Type</b>	<b>Finds</b>
<b>01</b>	Fill	Fill of <b>02</b>	Pot, tile, oyster shell and animal bone
<b>02</b>	Cut	Ditch ?	
<b>03</b>	Fill	Fill of <b>03</b>	None
<b>04</b>	Cut	Posthole	
<b>05</b>	Fill	Fill of <b>07</b>	None
<b>06</b>	Fill	Fill of <b>07</b>	None
<b>07</b>	Cut	Pond / Quarry Pit ?	
<b>08</b>	Layer	Topsoil	None
<b>09</b>	Layer	Subsoil	None
<b>10</b>	Layer	Lower subsoil	None

**APPENDIX 4: FINDS QUANTIFICATION TABLE**

<b>Context Number</b>	<b>Animal Bone (kg)</b>	<b>Pottery (kg)</b>	<b>Tile (kg)</b>	<b>Shell (kg)</b>
<b>01</b>	<b>0.157</b>	<b>0.039</b>	<b>0.019</b>	<b>0.007</b>
<b>99999 (unstratified)</b>		<b>0.016</b>	<b>0.106</b>	



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