



Archaeological Field Unit

**A Late Medieval Quarry Pit at Ten Bell Lane, Soham,
Cambridgeshire: An Archaeological Evaluation**

Rob Atkins

June 2004

Cambridgeshire County Council

Report No. 726

Commissioned by J. Jefford



Distribution List: Cambridgeshire & Peterborough

Site Name: Ten Bell Lane, Soham

Site Code: SOHTBL 04 Report No.: 726 Date Sent: June 04

Author(s) Relevant Specialists (please list:)

Client (how many copies?)

Project Archive

Office Library

Principal Archaeologist,
SMR Office, Room A108,
Castle Court, Shire Hall,
Castle Hill,
Cambridge CB3 OAP
Box No.: ELH1108

(already have done)

A. Baker,
Librarian,
Haddon Library,
Downing Street,
Cambridge CB2 3DZ

County Archivist,
County Records Office,
Room 001, Shire Hall,
Cambridge CB3 OAP
Box No.: RES 1009

Huntingdon Sites ONLY:

Local Studies Librarian,
Huntingdon Library,
Princess Street,
Huntingdon PE1 1RX

Chris Jakes,
Cambridgeshire Collection,
Central Library,
Lion Yard,
Cambridge CB2 3QD

Fenland Sites ONLY:

Local Studies Librarian,
Wisbech Library,
1 Ely Place,
Wisbech PE13 EU

Felicity Gilmour,
National Monument Record,
Kemble Drive,
Swindon SN2 2GZ

Peterborough Reports ONLY:

Ben Robinson,
x 2 Archaeological Officer,
Peterborough Museum & Art Gallery,
Priestgate,
Peterborough PE1 1LF

For English Heritage projects:

Philip Walker,
Inspector of Ancient Monuments,
English Heritage,
Brooklands,
24 Brooklands Avenue,
Cambridge CB2 2BU

**For DC funded reports via the
Cambs planning process send to:**

Andy Thomas,
x 3 Principal Archaeologist,
(inc. Land-Use Planning
SMR) Room A107, Castle Court,
Shire Hall, Castle Hill,
Cambridge CB3 OAP
Box No.: ELH1108

For English Heritage projects:

Chris Scull,
Archaeology Commissions,
English Heritage,
23 Savile Row,
London W1X 1AB

A Late Medieval Quarry Pit at Ten Bell Lane, Soham, Cambridgeshire: An Archaeological Evaluation

Rob Atkins

June 2004

Editor: Aileen Connor
Illustrator: Emily Oakes

With contributions by Carole Fletcher and Rachel Fosberry



Report No. 726

©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

Between the 22nd and 23rd April 2004 the Archaeological Field Unit (AFU) of Cambridgeshire County Council conducted an archaeological evaluation at Ten Bell Lane, Soham, Cambridgeshire (TL 5938 7364) in advance of construction of two houses.

Two trenches (total length 45.7m) were excavated within the proposed development area (852m²). One late medieval pit and two undated parallel shallow ditches 10.5m apart were uncovered. The pit may have been dug to extract sand. The ditches may represent burgage plot boundaries as they are orientated at right angles to Speed Lane, a former medieval street, 20m to the east of the site.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION	1
2	GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY	1
3	ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND	1
4	METHODOLOGY	6
5	RESULTS	9
6	DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS	10
	ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	10
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	11
	LIST OF FIGURES	
	Figure 1: Site Location	2
	Figure 2: Site location with SMR data	3
	Figure 3: 1656 Palmer Map of Soham	5
	Figure 4: Plan of trenches 1 and 2	7
	Figure 5: Sections of trenches 1 and 2	8
	LIST OF APPENDICES	
	Appendix 1: Finds	

**A Late Medieval quarry pit at Ten Bell Lane, Soham, Cambridgeshire: An
Archaeological Evaluation
(TL 5938 7364)**

1 INTRODUCTION

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken at Ten Bell Lane, Soham, Cambridgeshire (TL 5938 7364) in response to an archaeological condition placed on a planning application for the construction of four houses (03/01316/FUL). This investigation evaluated approximately one half of the subject site as part of the site is under separate ownership. J. Jefford funded the evaluation on the central plot. This evaluation was carried out by the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council on the 22nd and 23rd April 2004.

The brief for archaeological work was dated 12th March 2004 (Thomas 2004). The archaeological objectives for the evaluation were recorded in the specification for the site dated 25th March 2004 (Macaulay 2004). These objectives were to establish the character, date, state of preservation and extent of any archaeological remains within the proposed development area.

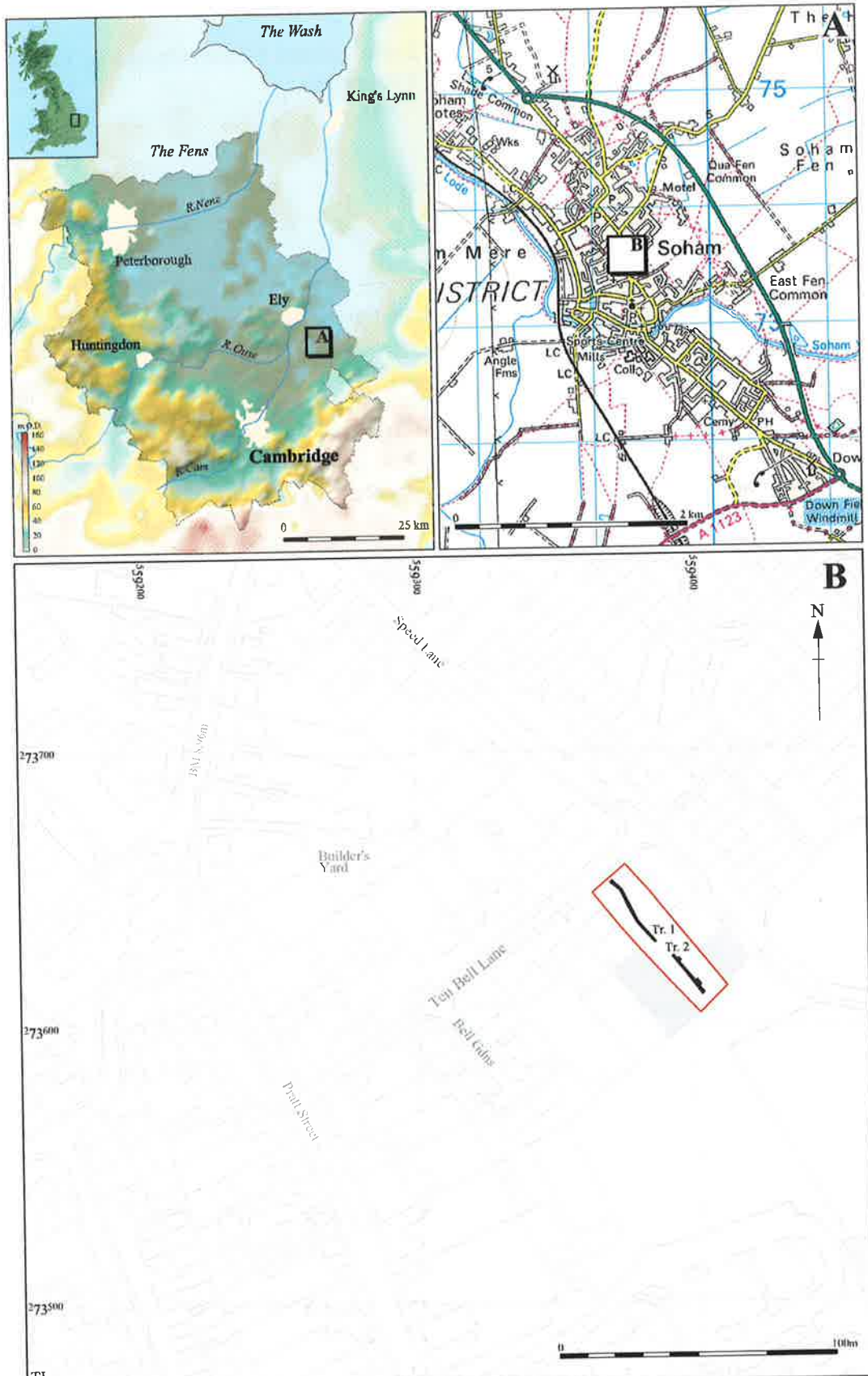
This specification and the proposed location of the archaeological trenches were approved by the Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Office before the start of the evaluation.

2 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

The site is recorded as being on the edge of 3rd Terrace River Gravels, with Lower Chalk directly to the south (BGS 1974). In both trenches 1 and 2 the natural geology consisted of bright orange sands/gravels mixed with a little clay and a few chalk patches. The site was on level ground at 8.20m AOD.

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Possible prehistoric features were present at 38 Station Road, 250m to the south-west of the subject site (Fig 2; SMR CB 14110). Bronze Age flint



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 trenches with the development area outlined (red) and land within planning application but not part of this evaluation (grey)

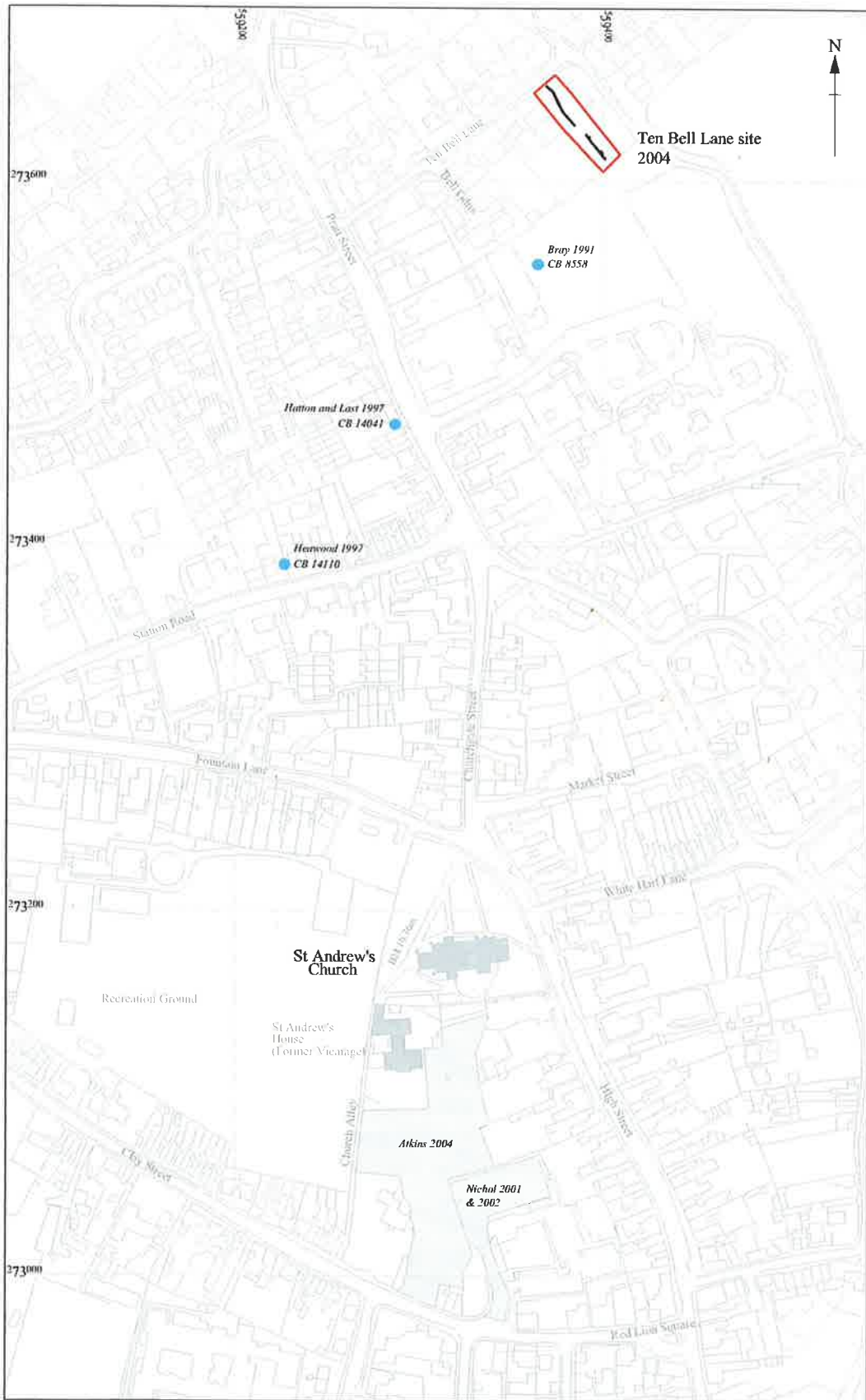


Figure 2 Location of development area (red) showing related SMR data (blue), buildings of historical significance (grey) and recent excavations (light grey)

implements were found 300m to the south-east of the subject site (SMR 07101). Less than 0.5km to the south-east of the subject site is a possible Bronze Age barrow (SMR 07102). An Early to Middle Iron Age settlement was partly excavated 500m to the south of the subject site (Atkins 2004; Nichol 2001 and 2002).

A Castor ware cordoned jar (1st or 2nd century AD) and skull were found 150m to the north (SMR 7100). Coins of Roman date have been found approximately 300m to the south-east of the subject site (SMR 07097).

The small market town of Soham is Early Saxon in origin. According to Reaney, the place name is derived from the Old English *Soegan Hamm* or 'swampy' settlement or enclosure (Reaney 1943). There is 12th century documentary evidence for an abbey built by St. Felix which was burnt in AD870 by the Danes. As yet there has been no archaeological evidence for Middle Saxon activity in Soham (Atkins 2004).

Further documentary sources refer to the foundation in the 7th century AD of a monastery by St. Felix, first bishop of the East Angles, who was buried in Soham. The monastery was destroyed during the Danish invasions of East Anglia (late 9th century) along with many other religious foundations in the area, never to be re-established (Salzman 1948). The manor of Soham was given to Ely abbey shortly after the re-foundation of the latter in the 10th century (Conybeare 1897). The exact location of the monastery is unknown, although it is possible that the Parish church of St Andrew's (late 12th century) was founded on the site of the Saxon predecessor. Soham is thought to have held a market (unchartered) before the 12th century. (Ridout 2000). The sub circular pattern of roads around the centre of the village suggests a religious precinct (Oosthuizen 2000).

Saxo-Norman and medieval remains have been found within 100m south-east of the site (Bray 1991; SMR CB 8558). Here, seven trenches were excavated in the grounds of Soham County Infants School. Beneath 0.75m of topsoil and subsoil, several ditches (possibly enclosures) were revealed containing nearly 50 sherds of 10th to 13th century pottery (predominantly St Neots and Thetford wares) as well as animal bone and some fired clay. It was thought that domestic occupation was either present or nearby. The northern limits to archaeological activity may have been established as no features were found in the northern part of the evaluation in either trench VII or the northern part of trench II.

Evidence for occupation during the late Saxon-early Norman period has emerged further away, 200m to the south-east at 9-13 Pratt Street, where an archaeological evaluation revealed shallow gullies, a posthole and a large pit containing 11th-12th century sherds of Thetford Ware (Hatton and Last 1997). At the rear of 38 Station Road, 250m to the south-east, there were ditches dating from the 10th to 12th centuries (Heawood 1997). Late Saxon to post-medieval finds have been uncovered 500m to the south (Atkins 2004; Nichol 2001 and 2002).

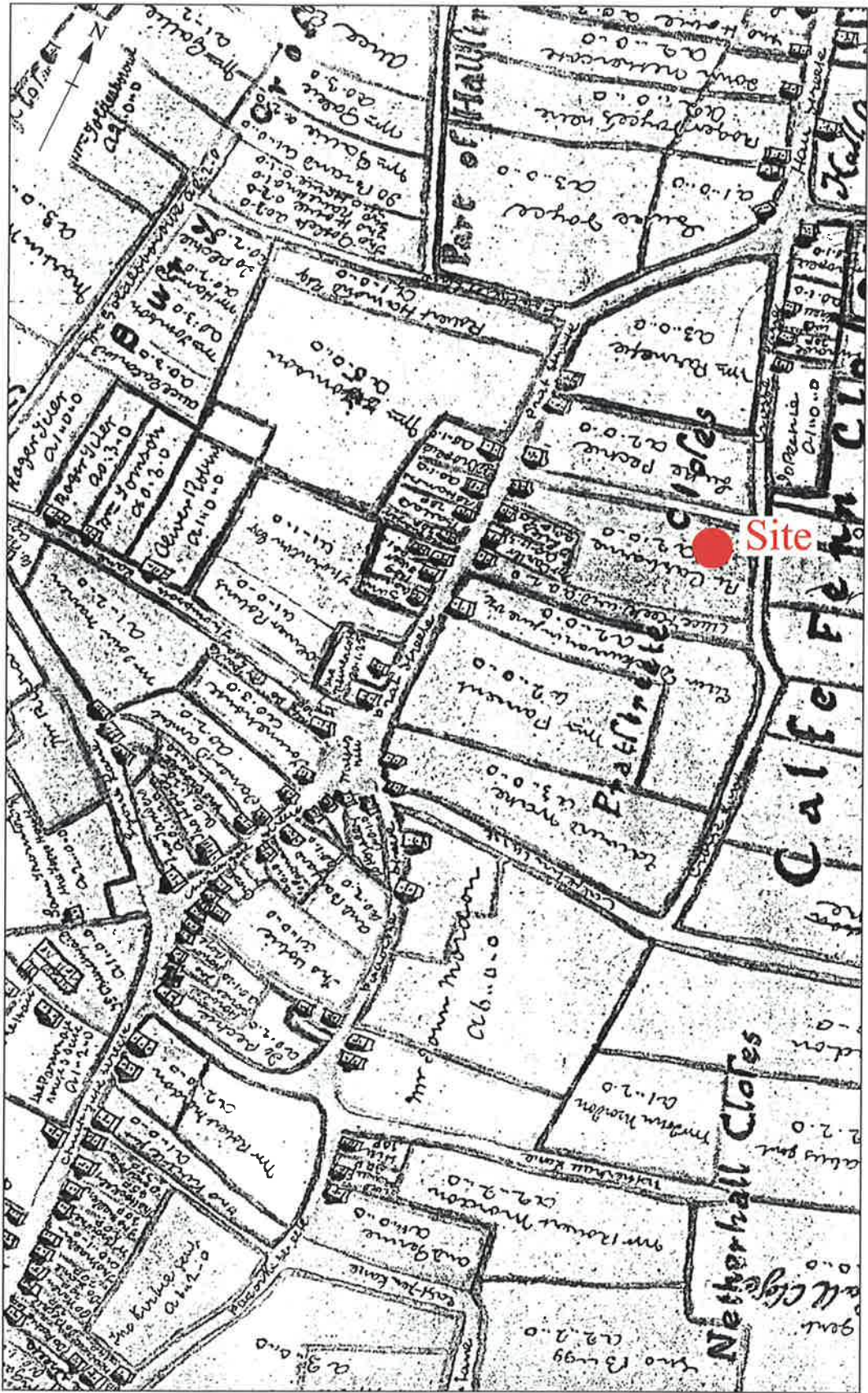


Figure 3 Extract from Palmer's 1656 map of Soham with site location (red)

Map evidence (1656, 1845, 1890 and 1902) shows that the site was within fields in the post-medieval period. The 1656 map (Fig 3; CRO SOH 65605) shows that the site fronted on an unnamed road (now Ten Bell Lane) within a large field belonging to Richard Casharne. It was to the rear of houses fronting Pratt Street and fronting on the west side of Crosse Lane (now called Speed Lane). The site was *c.*20m to the west of Crosse Lane. The 1845 Tithe Map shows this site was still within a field had been with trees marked on the map (CRO P142/27/1). The site was still next to the unnamed road. The trees are recorded on the development site on both the 1890 and 1902 Ordnance Survey Maps. The road was still unnamed on the 1890 1st Edition Ordnance Survey (OS Map Sheet XXX 16SE) though the 1902 2nd Edition Ordnance Survey calls it Swinton Street (OS Map Sheet XXX.16). Swinton Street was only called Ten Bell Lane in recent times.

4 METHODOLOGY

A mechanical excavator (with a one metre wide ditching bucket) was used to excavate two trenches under archaeological supervision (Figs. 1, 2 and 4). The proposed trench locations were moved due to the fact that the development was at present only to take the central plot of the planning application and therefore no trenches were located in areas to the north and south. Also, prior to the evaluation, foundations of the proposed haul road for the proposed two houses had been laid as well as some services. The site had also been cleared of foliage although some asbestos had been stacked with former animal hutches on the extreme north-west of the site adjacent to Ten Bell Lane. The archaeological trenches were located away from these obstacles.

Two trenches were excavated, trench 1 was 28.5m long and trench 2 was 17.2m long providing a 5% sample of the site (852m²). The trenches were widened where archaeological features were uncovered. The trenches were planned at 1:50 and sections drawn at 1:20. All features and deposits were recorded using the AFU single context system. Each distinct cut, fill, and layer was allocated individual numbers. The photographic record comprised monochrome and colour slides supplemented by digital images. In the text cut numbers are in **bold** and deposit numbers in plain text. All features were investigated.

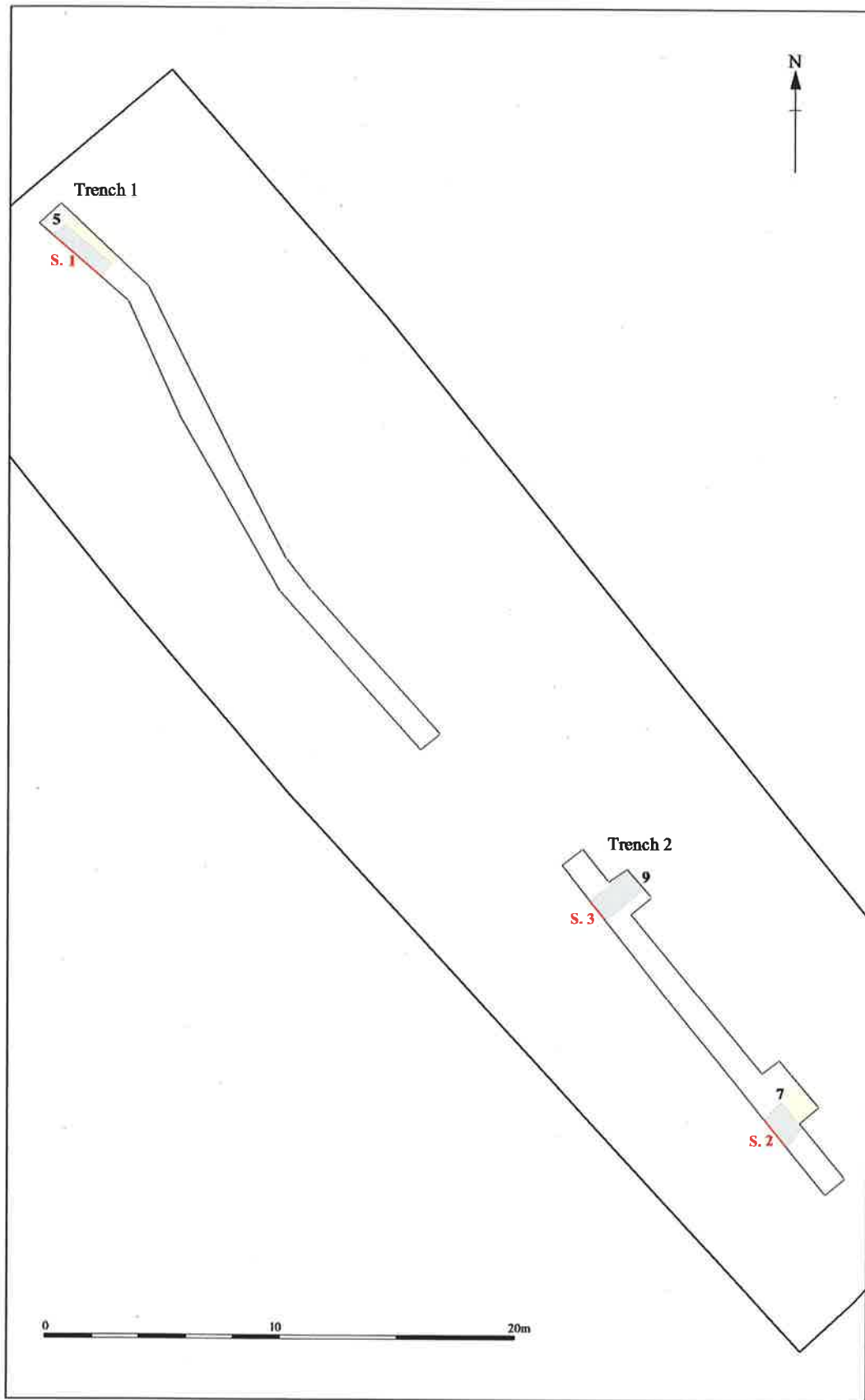


Figure 4 Trench 1 and 2 showing archaeological features

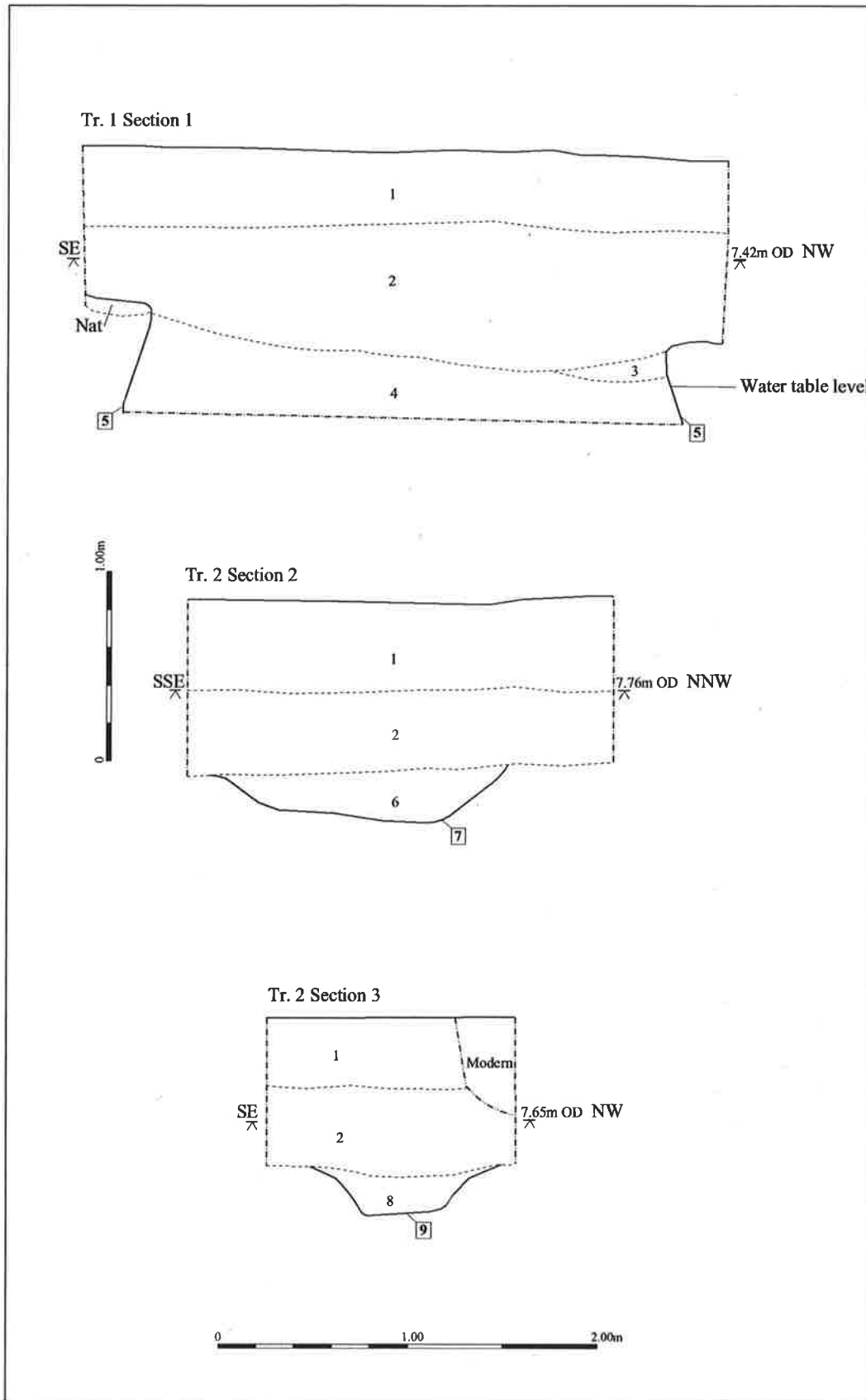


Figure 5 Section drawings

5 RESULTS (Figs 4 and 5)

Two trenches were excavated. Trench 1 was 28.5m long and was aligned roughly north to south at right angles to Ten Bell Lane (Fig 4). Trench 2 was 17.2m long and ran roughly north to south. A 0.4m thick layer of topsoil, 1, was observed along the length of both trenches. The topsoil comprised a dark grey brown very sandy silt containing occasional stones less than (<) 50mm in length with very occasional flecks of charcoal, coal, brick, chalk and mortar as well as a single post-medieval pottery sherd. The topsoil overlaid and sealed a layer of subsoil, 2. This layer was generally 0.30m to 0.42m thick across the site except where it infilled underlying hollows and undulations where it was up to 0.75m thick (Fig 5 S.1). The subsoil was a mid yellowish brown very sandy silt with a little clay. There were occasional stones and grits less than (<) 40mm in length with rare chalk, charcoal flecks and snail shells.

Trench 1

A single archaeological feature was observed in trench 1. This was 2.9m long and at least 1m wide and more than 0.87m deep (Fig 5 S1). The sides were straight edged and parallel 1.5m to the south of Ten Bell Lane. There was acute undercutting in both edges. For health and safety reasons excavation stopped at this point 1.4m below ground level. The high water table required two sondages to be cut into the excavated limit of the pit. These sondages were 0.3m deep and no natural was exposed in them showing that the quarry base had not been reached 1.7m below ground level.

There were at least two fills within the pit (3 and 4). The lower, earliest observed deposit comprised the bulk of the fill. It was a mid brownish orange very sandy silt with a very little clay. There were very occasional stones less than (<) 60mm in length. Finds were sparse within the fill although there were six abraded pottery sherds including four or five medieval sherds dated to AD 1200-1500. There was also a residual probable prehistoric sherd and a possible Roman sherd. Other finds included a roof tile fragment of probable late medieval date, bird bone and a small iron object. A soil sample from the fill found some charred grains including fat-hen seeds and a nutlet of Saw-sedge as well as snails.

The upper fill comprised a lense/slump of redeposited natural on the north-west side near the edge up to 0.14m thick and 0.7m wide becoming diffuse towards the centre of the feature. It was a bright brownish orange silty sand with a few inclusions of creamy and yellowish white silty clay and chalk.

Trench 2

Below the topsoil (1) and subsoil (2), there were two undated shallow ditches (7 and 9) running roughly parallel east to west 10.5m apart. They were 1.48m and 0.95m wide and 0.25m and 0.17m deep respectively with moderate edges

(Fig 5 S2 and S3). They were filled with a mid yellowish brown silty sand with a very little clay. A single waste flint flake was recovered from ditch 7.

6 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Nearby prehistoric activity is implied by the presence of residual finds in later features. A possible Roman site to the north does not extend into the site since only a residual pottery sherd was found.

This area of Soham probably remained undeveloped until the medieval period since no earlier finds or features have been found on the subject site. 10th to 13th century activity was uncovered on Brays 1991 evaluation just to the south of the site. It is possible that the two undated ditches (7 and 9) 10.5m apart and at right angles to Speed Lane (Crosse Lane on the 1656 map) were former medieval burgage plot boundaries. If these are burgage plots, the proposed site adjacent to the north, as yet not evaluated, may contain evidence of street frontage activity.

Any burgage plots must have gone out of use by the later medieval period since the 1656 map shows the site lies within a single large field with only a few houses fronting onto Crosse Lane to the north. This seems to be confirmed by a single late medieval quarry pit on the subject site coupled with a lack of post 13th century features on Bray's site.

The quarry pit implies that sand was being used nearby, possibly for resurfacing roads. Abraded pottery of different periods implies that the quarry pit was backfilled with soil which had been lying around for some time. A Saw-sedge nutlet found within a sample suggests the presence of thatch.

The 1656 Map and subsequent maps show the site was within fields until the last century. This confirms the lack of post-medieval disturbance found on the site during the evaluation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank J. Jefford who commissioned and funded the archaeological work. The project was managed by Aileen Connor and the excavation was carried out by Rob Atkins and Tony Baker. Illustrations were drawn by Emily Oakes and the finds and the soil sample were analysed by Carole Fletcher and Rachel Fosberry respectively.

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

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Atkins, R., 2004, *Iron Age and Saxo-Norman to Post-Medieval Remains on Land off Clay Street, Soham, Cambridgeshire*, Cambridgeshire County Council. Archaeol. Field Unit Report No.714 (unpublished)
- Bray, S., 1991, *Medieval Settlement at Pratt Street, Soham, Cambridgeshire* County Council. Archaeol. Field Unit Report No. 28 (unpublished)
- British Geological Survey (BGS)., 1974, *Geological Maps of England and Wales. Solid and Drift Edition, Map Sheet 188*
- Conybeare, E., 1897, *A History Of Cambridgeshire* (London)
- Hatton, A., and J Last., 1997, *Late Saxon Features at 9-13 Pratt Street, Soham: An Archaeological Evaluation*, Cambridgeshire County Council. Archaeol. Field Unit Report No. A107 (unpublished)
- Heawood, R., 1997, *Late Saxon/Norman Settlement Features at 38 Station Road, Soham: An Archaeological Investigation*, Cambridgeshire County Council. Archaeol. Field Unit Report No.142 (unpublished)
- Macaulay, S., 2004, *Specification for Archaeological Evaluation, Land Adjacent to 14 Ten Bell Lane, Soham, Cambridgeshire*
- Nichol, K., 2001, *Excavation at Clay Street, Soham, Cambridgeshire, 2000-2001: Post-Excavation Assessment and Research Design*, Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit Report No. 759.01 (unpublished)
- Nichol, K., 2002, *Excavation of a Saxon Enclosure off Clay Street, Soham, Cambridgeshire, 2000-2001*, Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit Report No. 759.02 (unpublished)
- Oosthuizen, 2000, *Anglo-Saxon Monasteries and Minsters in Kirby T and Oosthisen S An Atlas of Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire History*
- Reaney, P. H., 1943, *The Place Names of Cambridgeshire and the Isle of Ely*, English Place Name Society volume XIX (Cambridge University Press)
- Ridout, 2000, *Markets and Fairs in Kirby T and Oosthisen S An Atlas of Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire History*
- Salzman, L. F., (ed) 1948, *Victoria County History of Cambridgeshire and the Isle of Ely*, Volume 1 and 2

Thomas, A., 2004, Brief for Archaeological Evaluation, Cambridgeshire
County Council, County Archaeological Office

Maps used

Soham 1656, CRO SOH 65605

Tithe Map 1845, CRO P142/27/1

1890 1st Edition Ordnance Survey Map Sheet XXX.16

1902 2nd Edition Ordnance Survey Map Sheet XXX 16SE

APPENDIX 1 FINDS

Finds by Carole Fletcher

A very small collection of finds were recovered from the evaluation. This consisted of seven pottery sherds weighing 58g. Six sherds (35g) were from a trench 1 quarry pit 4. This comprised a ?prehistoric sherd (5g) hand made with quartz inclusions. The other five sherds were probably medieval in origin of Fen Sandy Ware type AD 1200-1500 (although possibly one sherd was Roman). There was a rim of a jar and five very abraded body sherds. A Post-medieval black glaze sherd 16th to 18th century date was found in the topsoil.

A probable late medieval roof tile fragment (19g) was found in trench 1 quarry pit 4 as well as a single bird/amphibian bone and a small conical-shaped iron object. An undiagnostic flint flake was found in trench 2 ditch 7.

Soil Sample by Rachel Fosberry

Introduction

A single 10-litre sample was processed by bucket flotation for the recovery of charred plant remains, dating evidence and any other artefactual evidence that might be present. The flot was 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.

Results:

The flot contains several cereal grains that have been preserved by charring. A few *Chenopodium* sp (fat-hen) seeds were present along with a nutlet of *Cladium mariscans* (Saw-sedge). At least three different species of snails are also present.

The residue contains a single bird/amphibian bone and a small conical-shaped iron object

Conclusion:

The sample submitted contains domestic waste in the form of burnt cereal grains and fat hen seeds (often used as a food supplement). The Saw-sedge nutlet possibly suggests the presence of thatch for which it was often used.

Limited conclusions can be made from a single environmental sample however it does show that there is potential for the retrieval of environmental information from samples from this site.



Cambridgeshire
County Council

Education, Libraries
and Heritage

The Archaeological Field Unit
Fulbourn Community Centre
Haggis Gap
Fulbourn
Cambridge CB1 5HD
Tel (01223) 576201
Fax (01223) 880946