



Archaeological Field Unit

**Saxon and Medieval Remains at 8 Market Street,
Soham, Cambridgeshire.**

Spencer Cooper

October 2004

Cambridgeshire County Council

Report No. 764

Commissioned by ANS Development

Saxon and Medieval Remains at 8 Market Street, Soham, Cambridgeshire:

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Editor: Aileen Connor
Illustrator: Crane Begg.

With contributions by R.Fosberry and C.Fletcher



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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





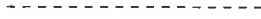














Between October 13th and 15th 2004 an archaeological evaluation was undertaken at 8 Market St, Soham Cambridgeshire (TL 5942 7326) by staff of the Archaeological Field Unit (AFU) of Cambridgeshire County Council. The proposed development includes the construction of four townhouses with parking and services following the demolition of an existing garage. The project was commissioned by ANS Development. A brief was issued by Kasia Gdaniec (Planning application number E/03/00845) of the Archaeology Office, Cambridgeshire County Council.

A single trench was located to evaluate the archaeological potential of the site. Evidence for a Late Saxon building was encountered in the form of a beamslot and a posthole. Subsequently a property boundary was defined and re-established in the 12th to 13th centuries by intercutting ditches. Large pits were dug at about the same time.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION	1
2	GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY	1
3	ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND	1
4	METHODOLOGY	5
5	RESULTS	5
6	DISCUSSION	7
7	CONCLUSION	8
	ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	10
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	10
	MAPS CONSULTED	11
	LIST OF FIGURES	
	Figure 1. Location map showing trenches	2
	Figure 2. Trench1 plan and section	6
	LIST OF APPENDICES	
	The Finds by Carole Fletcher	10
	Environmental Remains by R. Fosberry	11

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 
Top Surface 	Excavated Slot 
Break in Section 	Cut Number 118
Cut Number 	
Deposit Number 117	
Ordnance Datum $\frac{18.45m}{X}$ ODN	
Stone Inclusions 	

**Saxon and Medieval Remains at 8 Market Street, Soham, Cambridgeshire;
(TL 5942 7326)**

1 INTRODUCTION

Between the 13th and 15th October 2004 an archaeological evaluation was undertaken at 8 Market Street, Soham, Cambridgeshire (TL 5942 7326) by staff of the Archaeological Field Unit (AFU) of Cambridgeshire County Council. The proposed development includes the construction of residential flats. The project was commissioned by ANS Development. A brief was issued by Kasia Gdaniec (Planning application no E/03/00259) of the Archaeology Office, Cambridgeshire County Council.

From the outset it was anticipated that this evaluation would identify activities associated with the historic core of Soham. In view of the proximity of the alleged site of the Saxon monastery of St Felix there was a strong likelihood that Saxon remains would be encountered within the development area.

2 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

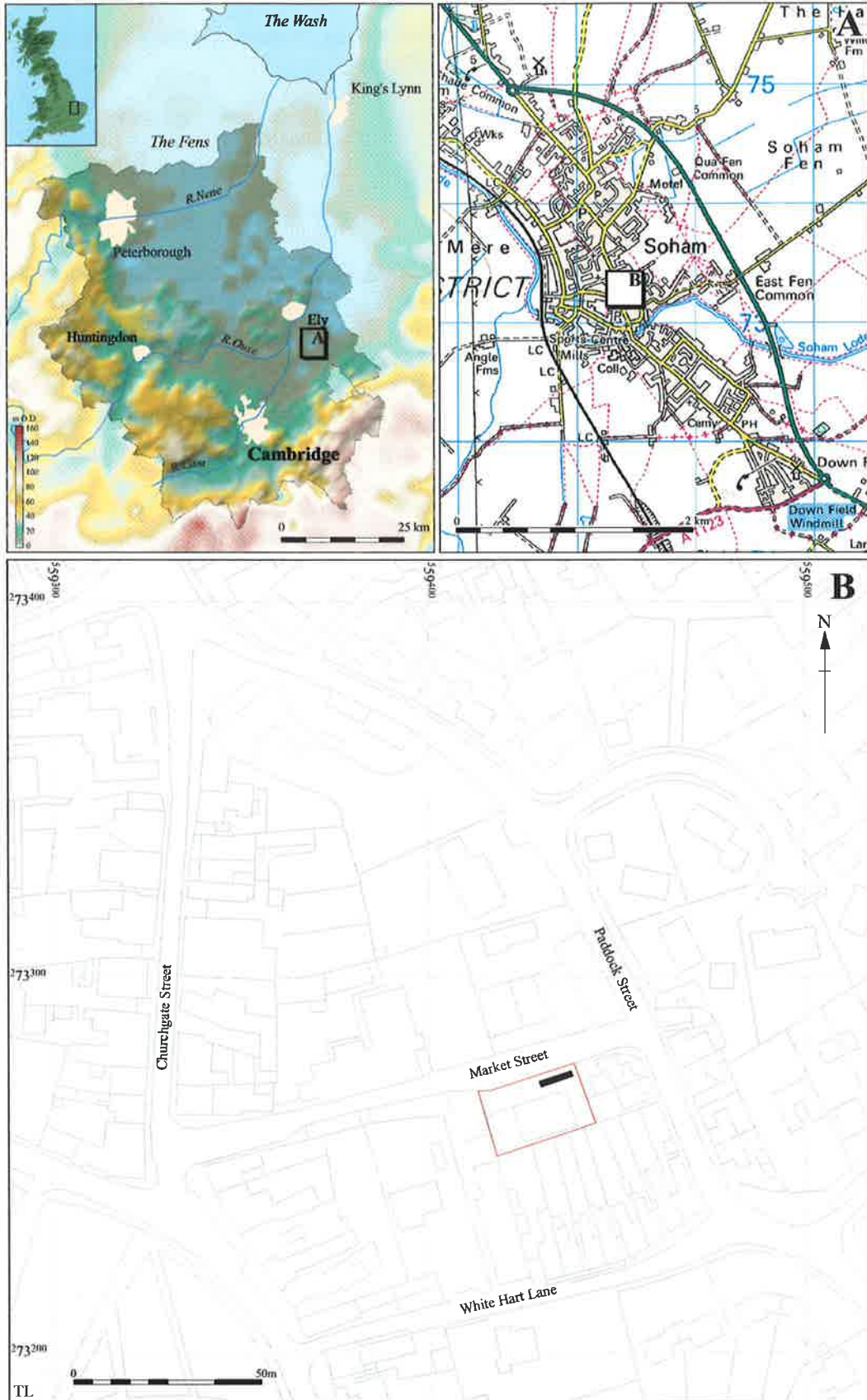
The village of Soham is located on an irregular peninsula of Bedford Lower Chalk and 3rd terrace river gravel, which projects north-west from Fordham into the Fens, between the Isleham embayment and the former Soham Mere (British Geological Survey, Sheet 188). The nearest benchmark was located on St Andrews church at 10.76m OD.

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The site (within the Saxon core of Soham), lies close to the alleged site of the monastery of St Felix, first Bishop of the East Saxons (SMR CB8593). The monastery was plundered and razed by the Danes in the later 9th century AD.

3.1 Archaeological Evidence

Known archaeological remains in the vicinity occur at White Hart Lane, with the location of two human burial grounds; one interpreted as the displaced charnel remains of the monastic cemetery (SMR CB 13882) and seven inhumations, perhaps of Roman date (SMR CB 8413).



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

Iron Age features were found to the south of the subject site, on Clay Lane and possibly represent an enclosure (Nichol 2002).

The Fen-edge around Soham and the Snail Valley has a long history of human activity. Mesolithic and Neolithic remains have been recorded to the north-west of Broad Hill, where a large quantity of worked flints, including axes, knives and scrapers, were recovered (Hall 1996). Immediately to the north-east of the village of Soham the SMR lists Mesolithic to Late Bronze Age stray finds, namely lithic artefacts (SMR 07077, 07098, 07101, 07102, 11019 and 11019a). A number of Neolithic and Bronze Age sites and artefacts scatters have been located on the light sandy soils to the west of Soham Mere (SMR 07037, 07039, 07040, 07041, 07044, 07061, 07061a, 07482, 09230). The evidence for later prehistoric (Iron Age) activity in and around Soham is scanty. One site has been located on the hilltop at Henney, on the periphery of Stuntney and Ely where Iron Age remains are fairly common (Hall 1996).

Coins of Roman date have been found approximately 350m to the south-east of the subject site (SMR 07097). Human skeletal remains of possible Roman date have been found in the area of White Hart Lane which lies approximately 100m to the south of the subject site. Roman pottery associated with a skull is recorded as having been found less than 200m to the north of the subject site.

Cropmarks dating to the later Roman period have been identified to the south and south-east of Soham, and interpreted as representing a probable villa (Site 2, 3rd-4th century), and farmsteads/industrial sites (Hall 1996). Roman occupation appears to have occurred during the 2nd-4th century, the traditional date for Romanisation in the Fens. As in prehistoric times, Roman sites are located on the light sandy soils at Soham, Wicken and Padney, probably attracted by the presence of the River Cam and the nearby crossing point at Fordey.

Archaeological remains dating to the Anglo-Saxon period are documented from Pratt Street (SMR 11886), Station Road (SMR 11985) and St Andrews house (Atkins 2004).

Early Saxon occupation at Soham is documented by funerary remains from three cemeteries. Burials were discovered in the church graveyard (TL 5998 7239) where grave-goods and stray finds included brooches, several beads and spearheads (Fox 1923) (SMR 01723a), and pottery (SMR 11386). Another cemetery was located at the Soham/Fordham Waterworks during excavations conducted in the 1930s (Lethbridge 1933). Some 23 furnished inhumations (and 2 cremations) were identified and assigned to the 6th-7th century. Further Anglo-Saxon human skeletal remains (SMR 11789) were uncovered in the rear garden of a house located on White Hart Lane. Evidence suggested that they were not *in situ*, and may have originally belonged to the same cemetery as the burials from the church graveyard (Robinson 1995).

Present day Soham is Early Saxon in origin. According to Reaney (1943), the place name is derived from the Old English *Soegan Hamm* or 'swampy' settlement or enclosure. 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 1887). 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. The sub circular pattern of roads around the centre of the village suggests a religious precinct (Oosthuizen 2000).

Soham is thought to have held an unchartered market before the 12th century. (Ridout 2000).

Evidence for occupation during the Late Saxon-Early Norman period has emerged through recent excavations. At 9-13 Pratt Street, an archaeological evaluation revealed shallow gullies, a posthole and a large pit containing 11th to 12th century sherds of Thetford Ware (Hatton and Last 1994). Evaluation trenches at the rear of 38 Station Road produced evidence of ditches dating from the 10th to 12th centuries (Heawood 1997). An archaeological evaluation was conducted at Soham County Infant's School, where several ditches were revealed. The features contained an assemblage of pottery sherds (10th to 13th century), predominantly St Neots and Thetford type ware (Bray 1991).

Excavation to the west of the subject site in the vicinity of Clay Street (Nichol 2001, 2002, Atkins 2004) has identified evidence for activity from the Late Saxon period to 20th century.

Most recently evidence for medieval occupation has been uncovered at Cloverfield Drive (Mortimer Forthcoming).

3.2 Cartographic Evidence

Palmers 1656 map (CRO SOH 65605) shows that in the 17th century Market Street was not yet in existence and that a large boundary ditch occupied the subject site. However, the 1845 Tithe map depicts Market Street running on its current alignment and a number of buildings in the development area. The 1886 first edition Ordnance Survey map depicts a similar scene with buildings occupying the development area.

4 METHODOLOGY

A mechanical excavator with 1.6m wide flat-bladed ditching bucket was used to excavate one trench (15m long) under archaeological supervision. The trench was planned at 1:20 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 an individual number. Monochrome and colour photographs were taken of trenches and features. In the following text cut numbers are presented in **bold** and deposit numbers in plain text.

5 RESULTS (Fig. 1 and 2)

5.1 Trench 1 (Fig. 2)

Trench 1 was 9m long and 1.10m deep and located on an approximately west-south-west to east-north-east alignment.

Medieval and earlier deposits consisting of intercutting ditches and pits were sealed by post-medieval and modern deposits consisting of make-up layers and a modern tarmac surface.

Beamslot **18** is likely to have been the earliest feature based on its stratigraphic relationships and its north-west to south-east orientation which is at variance to other linear features. The feature was more than 0.60 m long, 0.30 wide and 0.07m deep. It contained a single sherd of Thetford ware pottery, suggesting a late Saxon date for its construction. Beamslot **18** was cut by ditch **12**.

Posthole 7 was located adjacent to and approximately contiguous with **18**. It was circular, 0.24m in diameter and 0.09m deep with a flat base. No finds were recovered from its dark greyish brown silty clay fill 6.

A series of intercutting ditches (**12**, **14**, and **16**) were located in the centre of trench 1, on a north to south orientation.

The earliest ditch in the sequence was ditch **12**. Ditch **12** was 0.55m wide and 0.40m deep and was filled by 11, a dark grey silty clay. Finds from this fill included Saxon pottery, animal bone and fragments of wheat grains and fat hen from sample 2. Ditch **12** truncated beamslot **18** and was truncated by ditch **14**.

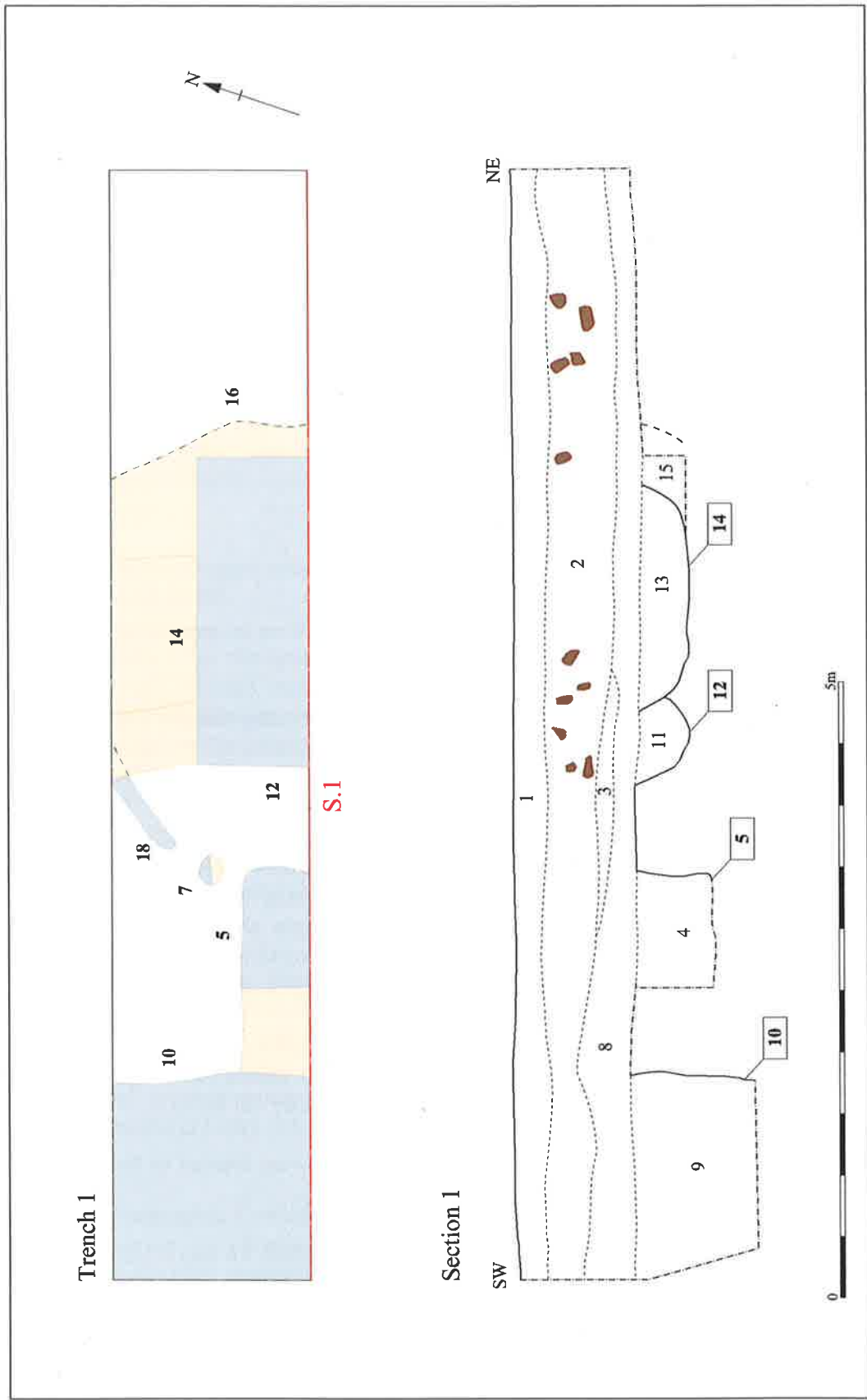


Figure 2 Trench 1 plan and section

Ditch 16 was at least 0.55m wide and more than 0.40m deep, it was filled by 15, a dark grey silty clay. Finds from this fill include 12th to 13th century pottery.

Ditch 14 was 1.30m wide and 0.40m deep. It was filled by 13, a dark greyish brown silty clay which contained 12th to 13th century pottery. Ditch 14 truncated ditch 16.

In the western corner of the trench and on the same alignment as ditches 12, 14 and 16, were two large features 5 and 10.

Pit/ditch 5 was orientated on an east to west alignment and was at least 1m wide and more than 0.58m deep, its vertical sides suggest that it may have been a pit, although the possibility that it was a ditch can not be ruled out. It was filled by 4, a dark grey silty clay which contained 13th century pottery and animal bones. It was truncated by pit/ditch 10.

Pit/ditch 10 was orientated on a north to south alignment and was more than 1.50m wide and at least 1.10m deep, its vertical sides suggest that it was more likely to have been a pit, although the possibility that it was a large ditch should not be ruled out. It was filled by 9, a dark grey silty clay that contained 12th to 13th century pottery and wheat and oat seeds in sample 3. It truncated pit/ditch 5.

Layer 8 sealed all of the features, it varied in thickness from 0.20m to 0.40m and consisted of a dark grey silty clay. No artefacts were recovered from this deposit. Layer 8 was sealed by layer 3.

Layer 3 varied in thickness from 0.40m to 0.45m and consisted of dark grey silty clay. Victorian bricks and associated rubble were contained in this layer. Layer 3 was sealed by layer 2.

Layer 2 varied in thickness from 0.20m to 0.55m and was a light grey silty clay which contained a large amount of modern building material. Layer 2 was sealed layer 1.

Layer 1 was between 0.20m and 0.25m thick and consisted of tarmac and gravel.

6 DISCUSSION

6.1 General

The evaluation revealed intercutting medieval and early medieval features sealed by post-medieval and modern layers.

6.2 Anglo-Saxon

Residual Early Saxon (possibly Iron Age) pottery in later features implies local activity in the Early Saxon period or earlier.

A beamslot, **18**, and a posthole, **7**, are evidence for a possible Late Saxon building.

Ditch **12** also contained Late Saxon pottery and may represent a property boundary running on a north to south axis. However, this ditch truncated beamslot **18**, which suggests that there was more than one phase of activity within the Saxon period. Alternatively the pottery may be residual, having derived from the Saxon building phase.

6.3 Medieval

Ditches **12**, **14**, and **16** may represent a property boundary first cut in the late Saxon or early medieval period and subsequently re-established throughout the 12th and 13th centuries. The ditches are orientated at right-angles to and respecting Market Street, although the latter does not appear to have been established until after 1656 (p4).

Although pit/ditch **5 and 10** may represent property boundaries they are more likely to be pits, although their vertical sides suggest they may be the remains of a cellared building, other possibilities include a craft or industrial related purpose, or possibly for the extraction of gravel. Further investigation would be needed to establish their purpose.

6.4 Post-Medieval and Modern

The ground was raised in the post-medieval and modern periods, possibly due to the high water table that was encountered during excavations.

7 CONCLUSION

The objectives of the project were to establish the character, date, state of preservation and extent of any archaeological remains that survived on the subject site. These objectives have been met by the evaluation.

The evaluation has revealed that the level of preservation of archaeological deposits is good with Saxon and medieval features surviving at a depth of 1m below the present ground surface.

The ceramic evidence suggests that the features are predominantly 12th–13th century with a significant Late Saxon component and a residual Early Saxon or Iron Age presence.

This evaluation has made an important contribution to the understanding of the development of Soham. The most notable outcome is the evidence for Late Saxon building remains.

Further investigations within the development area would certainly help to elucidate the form and function of the possible Late Saxon building.

The site has the potential to contribute to research themes such as the origin and early development of villages in south Cambridgeshire and the study of change during transition periods such as Late Saxon /Early Medieval. Finds may help to contribute towards an understanding of the local crafts and industries. Any surviving environmental remains may contribute to the study of diet and economy of medieval semi-urban populations.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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MAPS CONSULTED

Soham 1656, CRO SOH 65605

Tithe Map 1845, CRO P142/27/1

1890 1st Edition Ordnance Survey Map Sheet XXX.16

APPENDIX 1: THE FINDS by Carole Fletcher

The finds have been quantified and catalogued using an ACCESS database. Quantities by weight in kilograms are listed in the table below.

Context	Cut	Pottery	Animal Bone	Spot date	Comments
4	5	0.07	0.021	12 th Century	
9	10	0.009		12-13 th century	Residual Early Saxon/Iron Age
11	12	0.386	0.202	9 th -10 th century	Residual Early Saxon/Iron Age
13	14	0.033	0.028	12 th -13 th century	Residual Saxon/ Iron Age
15	16	0.018		12 th century	Residual 9 th -10 th century
17	18	0.013		9-10 th century	

The Pottery

Thirty-nine sherds of pottery were recovered from six contexts. Of the six contexts, two were assigned a Late Saxon date while four were of 12th to 13th century date. The majority of the sherds were Thetford and Medieval Sandy Wares although there were also a small number of Early Saxon (or possibly Iron Age) and Stamford Wares found as a residual component of later

assemblages. The Late Saxon pottery was found associated with a possible beamslot **18** that may represent the earliest phase of activity identified. Similar pottery was found in ditch **12**, but may have been residual.

The Animal Bones

The animal bone assemblage is too small to be able to make any meaningful comments.

Conclusion

The small size of the finds assemblage makes it difficult to generalise about activity on the site. However it would appear that the assemblage is domestic in nature, and that dates of the assemblage range from Late Saxon to 12th-13th century.

APPENDIX 2: ENVIRONMENTAL REMAINS by R.Fosberry

Introduction and methods

Three samples were collected and 10 litres of each sample were 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 nylon mesh and the residue was washed through a 1mm sieve. Both flot and residue were allowed to air dry. The dried residue was passed through 5mm and 2mm sieves and a magnet was dragged through each resulting fraction prior to sorting for artefacts. Any artefacts present were noted and reintegrated with the hand-excavated finds. The flot was examined under a binocular microscope at x16 magnification.

Results

The botanical remains in the sample mainly consist of charcoal and a small assemblage of cereal grains and weed seeds. Preservation is by charring and is generally poor to moderate. The results are shown in the table below.

Sample	Context	Cereal (indeterminate)	Wheat	Vicia sp (vetch)	Chenopodium (fat hen)	Rumex (dock)	Poaceae (oats?)	Galium sp (Cleavers)	Residue
1	4		4	1	2				Small fragment of shiny metal – possibly intrusive. Fragments of burnt and unburnt bone
2	11	7			2	1			Bone, pottery
3	9		8				1	2	pottery

Conclusion

All three samples contained charred cereal grains. Charred cereals are a common occurrence on most archaeological sites as grains were often accidentally burnt while being dried prior to storage or during cooking over open fires. The poor preservation and fragmentation of the grains recovered suggest that they have been disturbed due to truncation and intercutting of the features sampled.

Sample 1, Context 4 contained a glume base of Spelt wheat which is commonly found during the Iron Age/Roman periods. The weed seeds recovered all indicate disturbed/waste ground. The assemblage recovered probably represents a general scatter of burnt debris in disturbed features rather than discrete deposits.



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