



Archaeological Field Unit

**Medieval and Post-Medieval Finds From  
The Farmland Museum, Denny Abbey,  
Waterbeach, Cambridgeshire:  
Archaeological Monitoring**

Dennis Payne

November 2004

**Cambridgeshire County Council**

Report No. 766

*Commissioned by British Telecom*

**Medieval and Post-Medieval Finds From  
The Farmland Museum, Denny Abbey,  
Waterbeach, Cambridgeshire:  
Archaeological Monitoring  
(TL 492/685)**

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## SUMMARY

*Archaeological monitoring was undertaken on the 7<sup>th</sup>- 8<sup>th</sup> of October 2004 at the Farmland Museum in the grounds of Denny Abbey, Waterbeach, Cambridgeshire (TL 492/685), by a member of staff from the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council (AFU). The work was carried out in advance of telephone pole provision/replacement.*

*Four poles were replaced into existing holes along the access road to the abbey and a new fifth pole was inserted, requiring some excavation next to the main barn (now part of the Farmland Museum) on the site of the abbey itself. No archaeology was recorded in the holes inspected during the replacement of poles along the access road, however, archaeology was recorded in a small trench excavated next to the barn for the new pole. This included a probable midden (rubbish dump), dating from the late medieval or early post-medieval periods.*

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**Medieval and Post-Medieval Finds From  
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Archaeological Monitoring  
(TL 492 685)**

**1 INTRODUCTION**

On the 7th and 8th of October 2004 the Archaeological Field Unit (AFU) of Cambridgeshire County council undertook archaeological monitoring of telephone pole erection along the access road to Denny Abbey and adjacent to the main barn, now part of the Farmland Museum. The work was commissioned by British Telecom.

The property is in the care of English Heritage and protected as a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM 13219). The work was carried out under Scheduled Monument Consent, in accordance with the Ancient Monument and Archaeological Area Act of 1979.

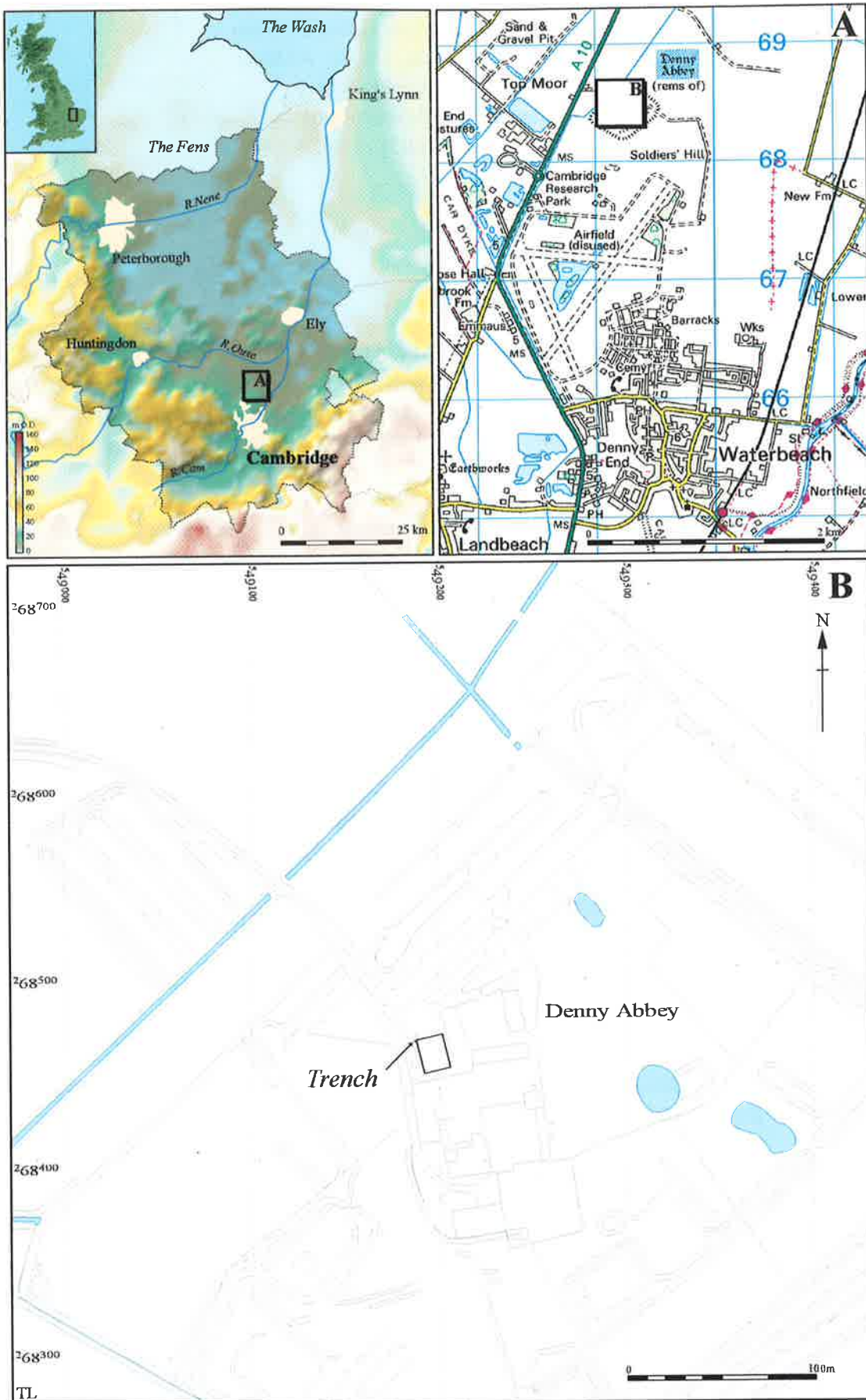
The objective of the monitoring was to ascertain the presence of any archaeology within the vacant holes prior to new pole reinsertions and within the excavated area for the new site of a carrier pole adjacent to the main barn.

Four vacant holes were exposed prior to new poles being replaced; in all four no archaeology was noted. However, the trench excavated close to the barn for the site of the new pole revealed archaeology in the form of a layer from a midden deposit.

**2 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY**

The British Geological Survey maps the area as lying partly on second terrace river gravels and Cretaceous Gault Clay (BGS 1974).

The site is located on a gravel island rising above the surrounding fenland, just to the north of Waterbeach, some four miles north of the city of Cambridge. A spot height on the road close to the new pole has a value of 5.8m OD.



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**Figure 1** Location of foundation trench.

### 3      **ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

A number of archaeological finds have been made in the vicinity of the abbey, not only from the medieval period, but also from the Roman period: Roman pottery has been recovered in a field to the south of the abbey (SMR 11565), while earthworks and crop marks of a Romano British settlement are recorded from the same location (SMR 09659). Medieval and post-medieval finds include pottery sherds (SMR 11867), and occupation debris found to the east of the abbey dates to the post-medieval period (SMR 11566A) Also recorded are pottery sherds of medieval date (SMR 11566) from the same location, a medieval midden to the east of the abbey (SMR 09658), and a further midden 100m to the west (SMR 09657).

The nearby settlements of Landbeach and Waterbeach were collectively known as *Beche* in the Domesday Book, and as *Inbeche* and *Utbeche* respectively by AD1250. The differentiation into Land- and Water- came later and derives from their topographical positions (Reaney 1943). Denny Abbey was founded in the 12th century and was occupied successively by Benedictine monks, Knights Templars and Franciscan nuns. There are considerable remains of a 12th church, later converted to domestic use, a refectory dating from the 14<sup>th</sup> century stands to the north of the site of what would have been the cloisters for the abbey. In 1539 the site and its possessions were granted to Edward Erlington. Most of the monastic buildings were demolished in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The remaining buildings including the nave of the twelfth century church were incorporated into a farmhouse and the refectory became a barn (Wright & Lewis 1989).

Previous archaeological work at Denny Abbey include a small excavation between 1968 and 1975 (ECB 477) and a watching brief (Roberts 1997).

### 4      **METHODOLOGY**

The aim of the archaeological monitoring was to attempt to establish the character, date, state of preservation and extent of any archaeological remains within the locations of the proposed telephone pole replacement/provision, along the access road and next to the main barn of the Farmland Museum.

A fifth pole was a new provision requiring a small trench to be dug by hand. After the trench had been initially excavated by hand prior to augering, it was cleaned, photographed and recorded using the AFU standard contextual recording system.

## 5 RESULTS

### 5.1 Replacements for existing telephone poles

Four existing telegraph poles were removed from their positions along the access road leaving a hole some 40cm wide by 1.8m in depth (for locations of poles see British Telecom Survey Officer Report 1). No archaeology was observed in any of the four locations.

### 5.2 Trench for new pole

The trench for the new pole was excavated 0.84m in length by 0.40m in width and to a depth of 0.45m, revealing topsoil 1 consisting of a disturbed dark greyish brown 'garden' soil with bricks and concrete fragments. It was 15cm in depth and also contained oyster shells, pottery, brick fragments and animal bone. The bone, pottery, brick and oyster shell had probably been disturbed from context 2, a layer directly below the topsoil. A subsoil horizon was undetermined.

Context 2 had a maximum thickness of 0.27m and consisted of a mid to light brown silty clay. It contained oyster shell, pottery and bone. This was indicative of a layer/fill from a midden (rubbish dump); the pottery from this layer indicates a date in the late medieval to early post-medieval period (15th-17th centuries). Below this was context 3.

Context 3 had a maximum thickness of 0.15m and consisted of a light brown friable sandy clay containing no finds. Below this was context 4.

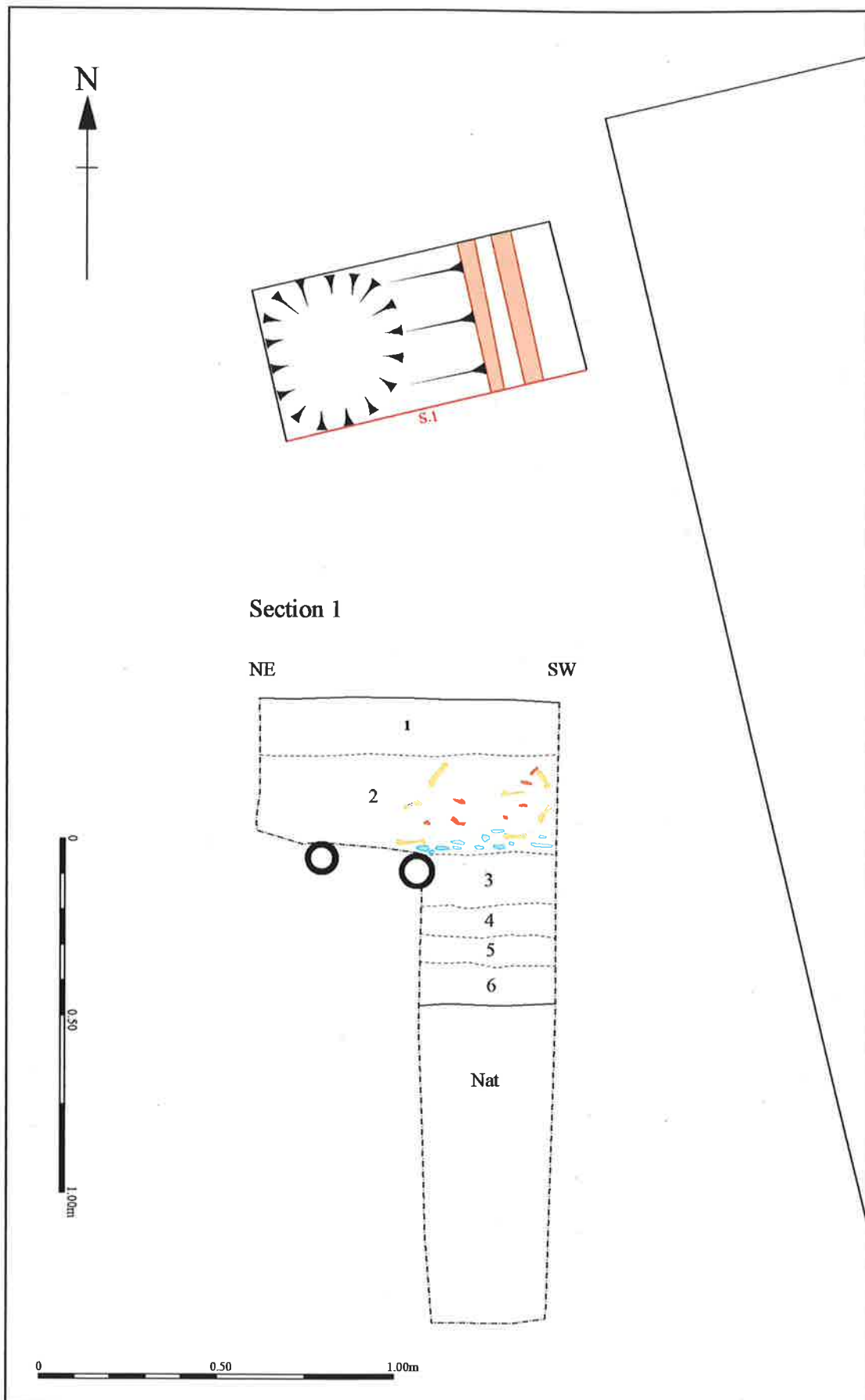
Context 4 had a maximum thickness of 0.08m and consisted of mid-dark brown silty clay with occasional stones. Below this was context 5.

Context 5 had a maximum thickness of 0.08m and consisted of light brown silty clay with very pale lenses containing nodules of chalk. Below this was context 6.

Context 6 had a maximum thickness of 0.12m and consisted of mid-brown silty clay with occasional stones. Below this was undisturbed natural geology.

The natural geology consisted of second terrace river gravels. Due to the narrowness of the augering it was difficult to ascertain the true upper horizon of the natural, but was deemed to be approximately one meter from the surface of the trench.





**Figure 2** *Plan and section*

## 6 DISCUSSION

The erection of replacement telephone poles allowed only a restricted view of any buried remains. However, the new pole erected by the main barn did allow for archaeological investigation to be carried out, albeit in a limited fashion. The deposits encountered in the new pole trench are indicative of rubbish disposal, perhaps in a pit. Since no edges to a cut were found, it is also possible that the layers formed part of a freestanding midden.

## 7 CONCLUSIONS

The aims of this monitoring were to highlight the potential for the preservation of archaeological remains on the subject site and to identify any remains that may be affected by the proposed development.

This monitoring has successfully shown that no archaeology was compromised along the access road due to the fact that further excavation was not necessary for the replacement poles. The monitoring has also highlighted the existence of a possible midden to the south west of the main barn, and adds to our understanding of waste disposal in the late medieval to early post-medieval periods.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank British Telecom who commissioned and funded the archaeological work. This project was managed for the AFU by Stephen Macaulay. Thanks also go to Crane Begg for the illustrations.

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