



Archaeological Field Unit

**Land to the rear of Manor Farm House, High Street,
Fen Drayton: An Archaeological Evaluation**

Steve Hickling

December 2004

Cambridgeshire County Council

Report No. 773

Commissioned by Mrs P.H. Newport



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SUMMARY

In December 2004, the Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Field Unit (CCC AFU) conducted an archaeological evaluation by trial trenching on land to the rear of Manor Farm House, Fen Drayton in advance of the construction of a new dwelling.












Two trenches were opened, revealing a modern pit and land drain, as well as a possible ditch (which had been recut), which remains undated. This possible ditch is probably medieval or earlier. Beneath the ploughsoil was a layer of subsoil suggesting that the area was under arable agriculture in the post-medieval and possibly medieval periods.

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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	
Deposit Number	117
Ordnance Datum	 18.45m ODN

Plans

Limit of Excavation	
Deposit - Conjectured	
Natural Features	
Intrusion/Truncation	
Sondages/Machine Strip	
Illustrated Section	
Archaeological Deposit	
Excavated Slot	
Modern Deposit	
Cut Number	118

Land to the rear of Manor Farm House, High Street, Fen Drayton:
An Archaeological Evaluation
TL 3378 6826

1 INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of December 2004, the Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Field Unit (CCC AFU) conducted an archaeological evaluation by trial trenching at land to the rear of Manor Farm House, Fen Drayton. The work was carried out on behalf of Mrs P.H. Newport in order to fulfil a Brief for Archaeological Investigation issued by Andy Thomas, Principal Archaeologist, Land Use and Planning, County Archaeology Office, Cambridgeshire County Council.

The site lies close to the historic core of the village, 150m to the west of the parish church. The proposed development (planning application S/2522/03/F) includes the construction of one dwelling within an area of 0.07ha. A total of 23m of trenching was investigated.

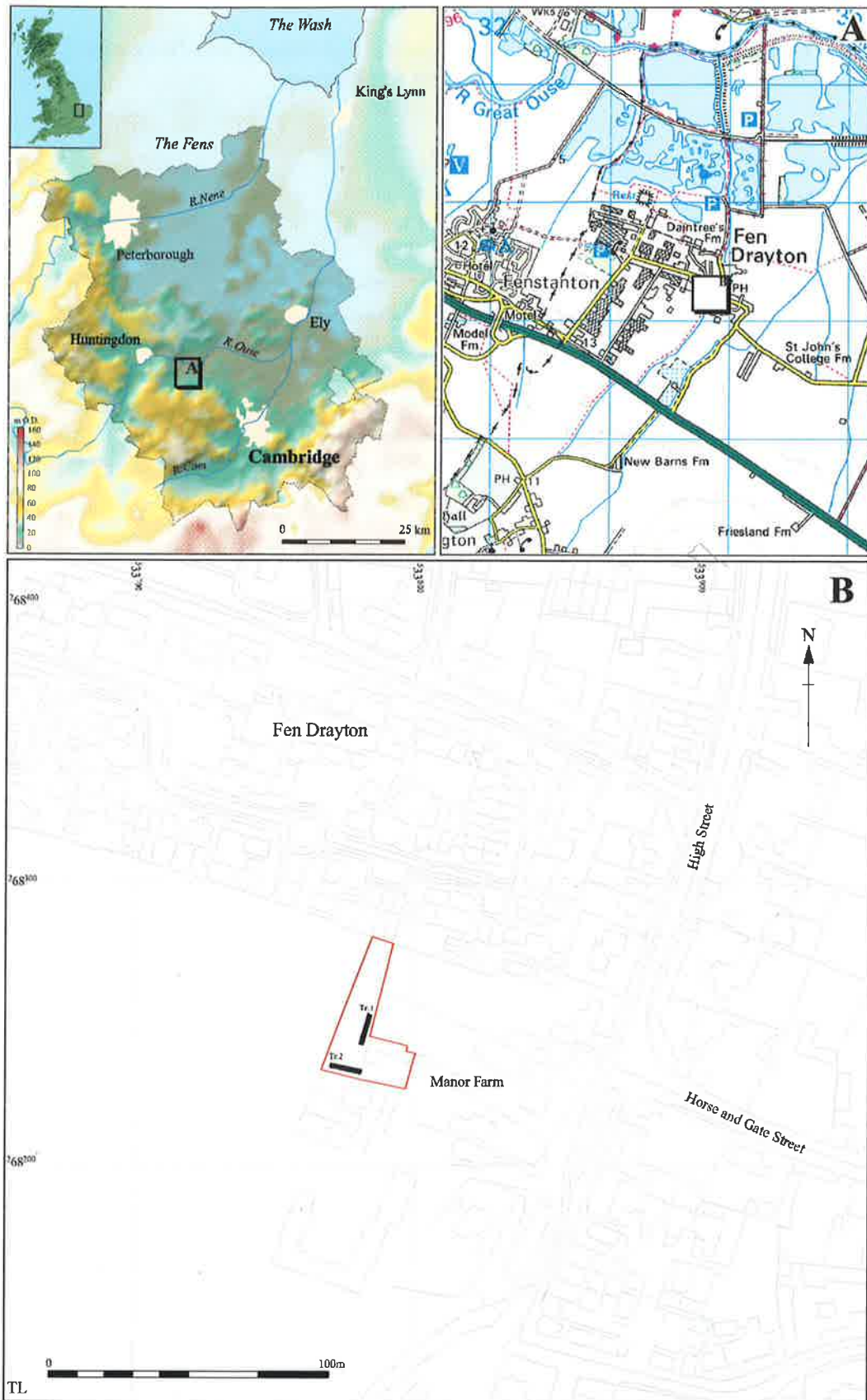
2 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

The site lies on 3rd Terrace Gravels (British Geological Survey Sheet 187, Huntingdon) at a height of c.8m OD.

The village is on a low gravel peninsular in the floodplain of the River Ouse, 1km to the north of the Cambridge to Godmanchester Roman road, now the A14.

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Two Bronze Age barrows are recorded, one to the west of the village (SMR 03328), and one destroyed by the gravels workings to the north (SMR 03492).
- 3.2 There are cropmarks (visible from the air) immediately to the west of the site, which indicate enclosures and trackways of a probable late prehistoric or Roman date (SRM 08829). Another cropmark complex some 400m to the north-east is also presumed to date from this period and suggests that the area was densely settled over 2000 years ago. Roman remains are recorded around the village. To the north of the village (SMR 03647A) 4th century timber



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

buildings, pits and ditches were excavated in 1959 and Roman remains were found in the gravel works to the north (SMR 01426, 03643, 03730). A range of other Roman remains have been found in the modern village (SMR 03473 pottery; SMRs 03330 and 03495 Roman burials), and to the south (SMR 09666 cropmarks of enclosures).

- 3.3 Saxo-Norman pottery has been found to the north-west of the village (SMR 03641). The site is located 150m to the west of the parish church of St Mary which was in existence by 1184 (SMR No CB14837). In the early 14th century the chancel was re-built and the three stage tower was added. The village centre is rich in 17th-18th century cottages. To the east of the High Street is a line of substantial farmhouses, perhaps built for yoeman graziers.
- 3.4 Recent fieldwork by the Cambridge Archaeological Unit on the adjacent Wilderspin Garage site identified continuation of the Roman field system and finds relating to Romano-British settlement activity. These finds also included later medieval remains (SMR CB1422).

4 METHODOLOGY

Two trenches were excavated (Fig. 1) by a JCB with a 1.6m wide, toothless ditching bucket, under archaeological supervision. The topsoil and subsoil were stripped down to the level of the natural geology.

The exposed surfaces were cleaned in order to clarify any features or deposits. All exposed features and deposits were excavated and recorded according to CCC AFU standards and practises.

5 RESULTS

5.1 Trench 1

This trench was 11.5m long and c. 0.6m deep, aligned north to south (Figs. 1 and 2). Three features were noted: a modern service trench, possibly a land drain and two possible east to west oriented ditches, one being a recut of the other. The recut (feature 5) was over 4m wide and up to 1m deep, filled with a mid brown gravely sand (fill 6). No datable finds were recovered, however, two fragments of sheep bone and a number of mussel shells were encountered. This ditch was cutting an earlier ditch (feature 7), only the base of which was visible. This ditch was 1.25m deep and filled with a dark brown gravely sand (fill 8). All these features were sealed by a mid brown sandy gravel subsoil (layer 4).

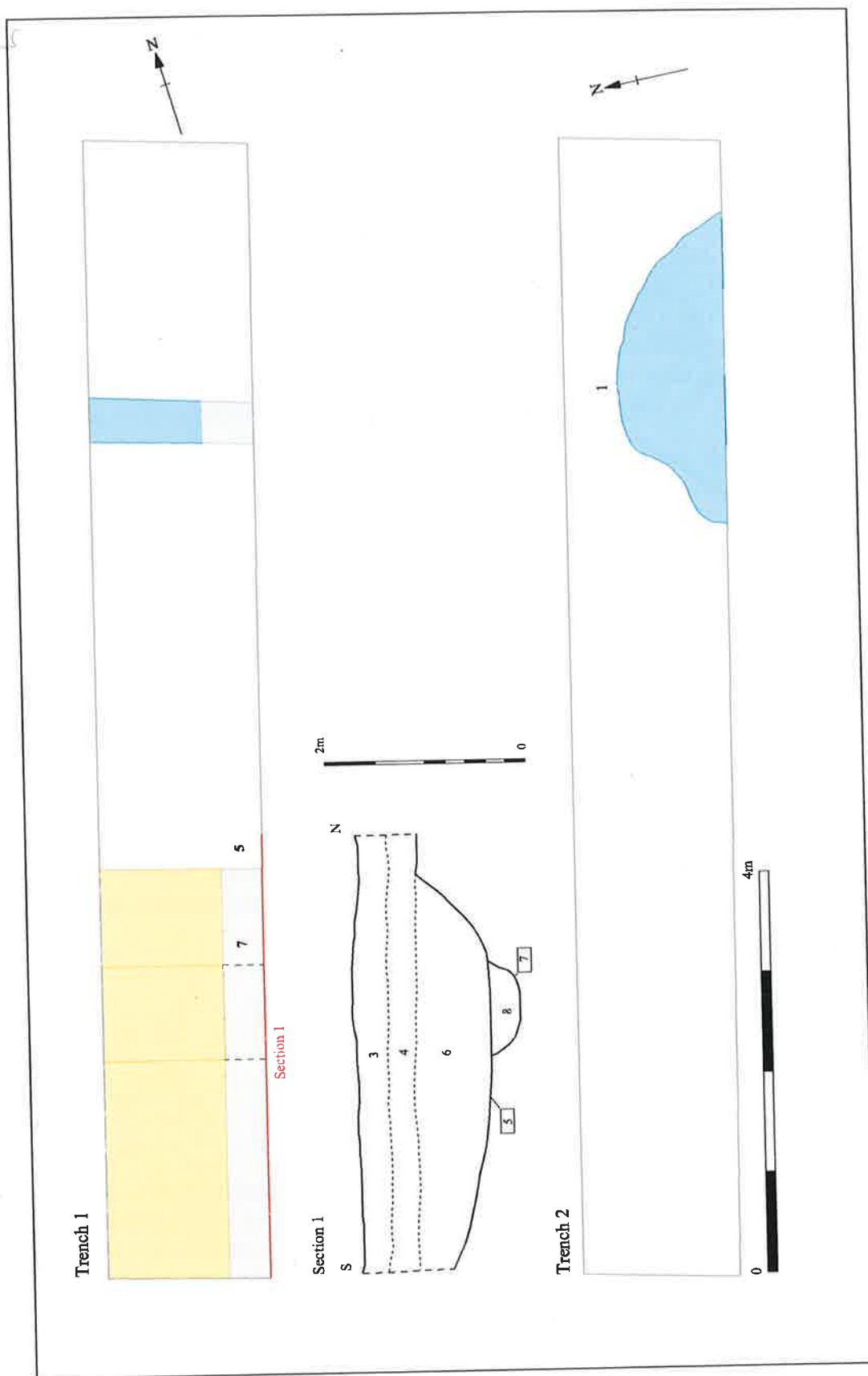


Figure 2 Trench plans and section



Plate 1 Trench 1 from the south, showing ditches 5 and 7

5.1 Trench 2

This trench was again 11.5m long and c. 0.6m deep, orientated east to west. Only one feature was noted - a large 19th-20th century pit (feature 1), containing frogged bricks, coal and tile fragments. This pit cut through the subsoil (layer 4).



Plate 2 Trench 2 from the east, showing pit 1

6 DISCUSSION

The subsoil probably represents medieval and post-medieval arable agriculture. Any features sealed by this, such as possible ditches 5 and 7 probably date to the medieval period or earlier. The Roman site recorded just to the south (SMR CB1422) suggests that these features may date to that period. However, the name of the site (Manor Farm House) suggests a possible high status medieval site close by, with which these ditches may be associated. Their orientation, perpendicular to the modern High Street, also indicates a medieval date.

7 CONCLUSION

The objective of the evaluation was to establish the character, date, state of preservation and extent of any archaeological remain. Only two archaeologically important features were found in a good state of preservation sealed below subsoil, but their character and date were not established. The lack of finds may suggest that when in use it was not closely associated with occupation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank Mr. and Mrs. Newport who commissioned and funded the archaeological work. Judith Roberts managed the project and Alexandra Howe produced the illustrations.

Andy Thomas, County Archaeology Office, who monitored the evaluation, wrote the brief for archaeological works.

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