cambridgeshire archaeology
archaeological field unit

CCC AFU Report Number 849

Undated Field System Remains at Little Paxton Quarry, Cambridgeshire.

Archaeological Evaluation

Steve Hickling

December 2005

Cambridgeshire County Council
Environment & Community Services

Commissioned by Entec UK Ltd

Cover Images

Machine stripping, Soham	On-site surveying
Roman corn dryer, Duxford	Guided walk along Devil's Dyke
Bronze Age shaft, Fordham Bypass	Medieval well, Soham
Human burial, Barrington Anglo-Saxon Cemetery	Timbers from a medieval well, Soham
Blue enamelled bead, Barrington	Bed burial reconstruction, Barrington Anglo-Saxon Cemetery
Aethusa cynapium 'Fool's parsley'	Medieval tanning pits, Huntingdon Town Centre
Digging in the snow, Huntingdon Town Centre	Beaker vessel
Face painting at Hinchingbrooke Iron Age Farm	Environmental analysis
Research and publication	Monument Management, Barrow Hills

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Archaeological Evaluation

Steve Hickling BA MA

Site Code: PXL LPQ 05
CHER Event Number: ECB 2116
Date of works: 13th-14th December 2005 and 4th-9th January 2005
Grid Ref: TL 195 637

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Summary

An archaeological evaluation at Little Paxton Quarry, although producing few finds, has identified this area as agricultural land with at least three phases of field systems.

The earliest system identified is a pre-medieval enclosed field system laid out on a different alignment to the other two and so far undated, but potentially prehistoric (the excavations by the Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit to the north identified elements of an Iron Age/Roman field system).

The medieval(?) open field (represented by the furrows in trench 6) was orientated on the cardinal compass points and was probably part of a southern field belonging to Boughton.

The most recent are the present enclosed fields, aligned like the ridge and furrow.

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Ordnence Datum 18.45m OD N

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1 Introduction

This exercise is the latest stage of extensive archaeological investigations which have been taking place as the quarry expands. Much of the previous work has been done by the Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU).

This archaeological evaluation was undertaken in accordance with a Brief issued by Andy Thomas of the Cambridgeshire Archaeology, Planning and Countryside Advice team (CAPCA), supplemented by a Specification prepared by Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Field Unit (CCC AFU).

The work was designed to assist in defining the character and extent of any archaeological remains within the proposed redevelopment area, in accordance with the guidelines set out in *Planning and Policy Guidance 16 - Archaeology and Planning* (Department of the Environment 1990). The results will enable decisions to be made by CAPCA, on behalf of the Local Planning Authority, with regard to the treatment of any archaeological remains found.

The site archive is currently held by CCC AFU and will be deposited with the appropriate county stores in due course under the site code PXL LPQ 05.

2 Geology and Topography

The site overlies first or second terrace river gravels (British Geological Survey 1975). The topography is flat, at a height of 13.5 to 14.5m OD. The River Ouse runs 0.75km to the east, while the A1 (Great North Road) lies 0.5km to the west. On excavation, the natural geology appeared to be interleaved layers of silt and gravel.

3 Archaeological and Historical Background

3.1 Prehistoric

Between Diddington (1.5km to the north north-west) and the Broughton deserted medieval village (500m to the north) lie a large complex of features discovered by aerial photography and geophysical survey. They appear to comprise enclosures and ring ditches (Jones 2000).

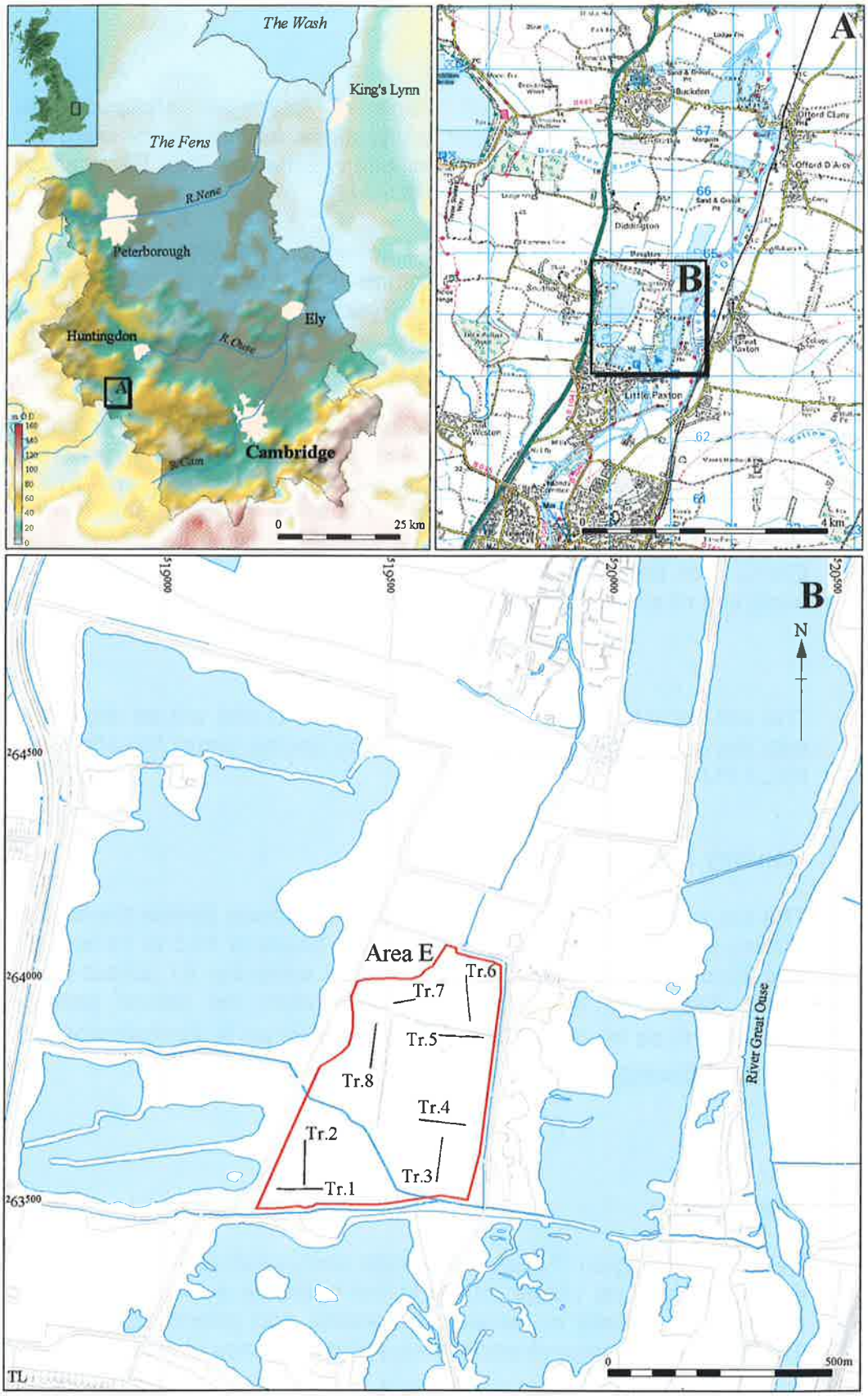

Figure 1: Location of trenches (black) with the development area outlined (red)

3.2 Roman

To the east of Little Paxton, Roman settlement remains, burials and a quay on the banks of the Ouse have been excavated (Greenfield 1968).

3.3 Anglo-Saxon

Also to the east, Great Paxton boasts a church with some fine late Saxon remains (Hatton and Heawood 1993). In Little Paxton domestic remains of the 9th to 11th centuries have been excavated as well as earlier burials (Addyman 1969).

3.4 Medieval

The medieval settlement of Little Paxton lies beneath the modern village. The parish church dates to the late 12th century (Alexander 1992b).

Some 500m to the north of the development area lie the remains (earthworks) of the deserted village of Boughton (Scheduled Ancient Monument 162).

Ridge and furrow cropmarks lie 1.1km north of the development area (CHER MCB6984) together with a possible windmill mound.

The earthworks of a house platform and more ridge and furrow (CHER MCB12067) lie 1km to the north. To the west of this lay the earthworks of more deserted house plots until they were recently levelled (CHER MCB13351), with adjacent ridge and furrow (CHER MCB13352). More ridge and furrow and house plot earthworks lie adjacent to the east of this (CHER MCB13353 and MCB13354). Ridge and furrow cropmarks lie to the west of the A1 (CHER MCB13650). All these earthworks and cropmarks appear to be the remains of medieval Diddington, now much shrunken, and the fields of deserted Boughton.

3.6 Recent Archaeological Fieldwork

Little Paxton Quarry 1992 to 1998.

Extensive excavations by BUFAU, following geophysical and trial trenching exercises, produced evidence of activity from the Mesolithic to the Roman periods. Mesolithic activity was confined to a few stray flints. The earliest features were a group of Late Neolithic to Early Bronze Age pits. Two Bronze Age huts were discovered. A series of Iron Age enclosures and settlement remains including hearths and hut circles were succeeded by a Roman farmstead. Also present was a

possible Iron Age square barrow and a possible Roman ritual site (Jones 2000).

Diddington to Priory Hill Pipeline 1992

An archaeological assessment was carried out on three sites along the route of a pipeline. One of these sites was on the south-western edge of the present development area. Two ditches and a gravel quarry pit were discovered; one of the ditches dated to the 1st century AD. Another site was located to the north-west of the development area, adjacent to the A1, but no archaeological features were discovered Alexander 1992a).

Great North Road, Little Paxton 1992

An archaeological assessment by fieldwalking and trial trenching took place between the modern A1 and the old Great North Road, to the west of Little Paxton. Late Neolithic to Bronze Age activity was recorded, with ditches and possible structural features (Alexander 1992b).

4 Methodology

The objective of this evaluation was to determine as far as reasonably possible the presence/absence, location, nature, extent, date, quality, condition and significance of any surviving archaeological deposits within the development area.

The Brief required that 8 trenches totalling 750m in length should be investigated.

Machine excavation was carried out under constant archaeological supervision with a tracked 360° tracked excavator using a toothless ditching bucket.

Spoil, exposed surfaces and features were scanned with a metal detector. All metal-detected and hand-collected finds were retained for inspection, other than those which were obviously modern.

After a visit by Andy Thomas, a pale yellowy cream clayey silt layer was removed by machine down to the level of the gravel that the quarry will be exploiting. Although no features were present at this level, due to the effects of weathering, several features at the original level were recorded. Depths of the topsoil and this silt layer are given in Appendix 2.

All archaeological features and deposits were recorded using CCC AFU's *pro-forma* sheets. Trench locations, plans and sections were recorded at appropriate scales and colour and monochrome photographs were taken of all relevant features and deposits.

No environmental samples were taken.

Most of the site was plough and harrowed agricultural land and the weather was mainly cold and dry.

5 Results

(Further context details can be found in Appendix 1.)

5.1 Trench 1

This trench was 100.5m long and 2m wide, aligned east to west. Some 0.45m of ploughsoil was removed to reveal the natural subsoil, a pale yellowy cream clayey silt with occasional gravel. Two features were discovered:

Feature **1** was oval with a very pale fill (2).

Feature **3** was truncated by the edge of the trench, but was probably oval and had a very pale fill (4).

Both these features were probably natural tree throw holes.

5.2 Trench 2

This trench was 99.6m long and 2m wide, aligned north to south. Some 0.4m of ploughsoil was removed to reveal the natural subsoil, a pale yellowy cream clayey silt with occasional gravel. Only two features was discovered:

Ditch **5** was a small south-west to north-east aligned ditch with a very pale fill (6) containing a small proportion of charcoal.

Ditch **18** was aligned south-east to north-west and had a pale greyish brown fill (19).

5.3 Trench 3

This trench was 100m long and 1.9m wide, aligned north to south. Some 0.4m of ploughsoil was removed to reveal the natural subsoil, a pale yellowy cream clayey silt with occasional gravel. Only one archaeological feature was discovered:

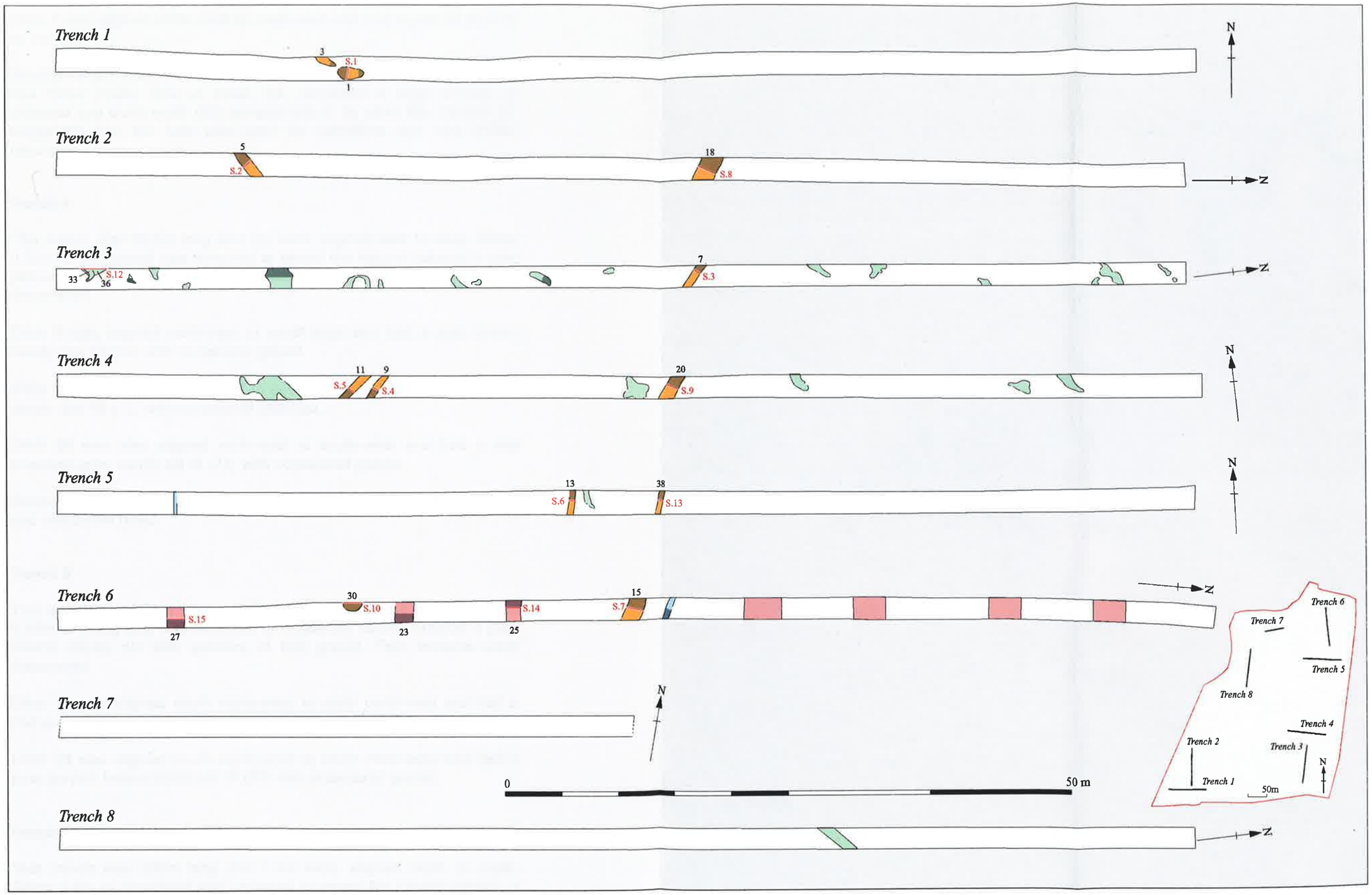

Figure 2: Trench plans

Ditch **7** was aligned north-west to south-east and had a pale fill (8) with no inclusions.

Several natural features were also present suggestive of tree roots and tree throw holes. One of these, **33**, contained a large amount of charcoal and burnt earth (35) dumped into it. Its other fills, 34 and 37, suggested that the hole was open for sometime and was infilled naturally.

5.4 Trench 4

This trench was 99.5m long and 2m wide, aligned east to west. Some 0.35m of ploughsoil was removed to reveal the natural subsoil, a pale yellowy cream clayey silt with occasional gravel. Three features were discovered:

Ditch **9** was aligned north-east to south-west and had a pale brown sandy clay fill (10) with occasional gravel.

Ditch **11** was aligned north-east to south-west and had a pale brown sandy clay fill (12) with occasional charcoal.

Ditch **20** was also aligned north-east to south-west and had a mid brownish-grey sandy silt fill (21) with occasional gravel.

Several natural features were also present, suggestive of tree roots and tree throw holes.

5.5 Trench 5

This trench was 100m long and 2m wide, aligned east to west. Some 0.45m of ploughsoil was removed to reveal the natural subsoil, a pale cream clayey silt with patches of fine gravel. Two features were discovered:

Ditch **13** was aligned south south-west to north north-east and had a mid grey fill (14) with rare gravel.

Ditch **38** was aligned south south-west to north north-east and had a pale greyish brown sandy silt fill (39) with occasional gravel.

5.6 Trench 6

This trench was 102m long and 1.9m wide, aligned north to south. Some 0.4m of ploughsoil was removed to reveal the natural subsoil, a pale yellowy cream clayey silt with occasional gravel. Six east to west

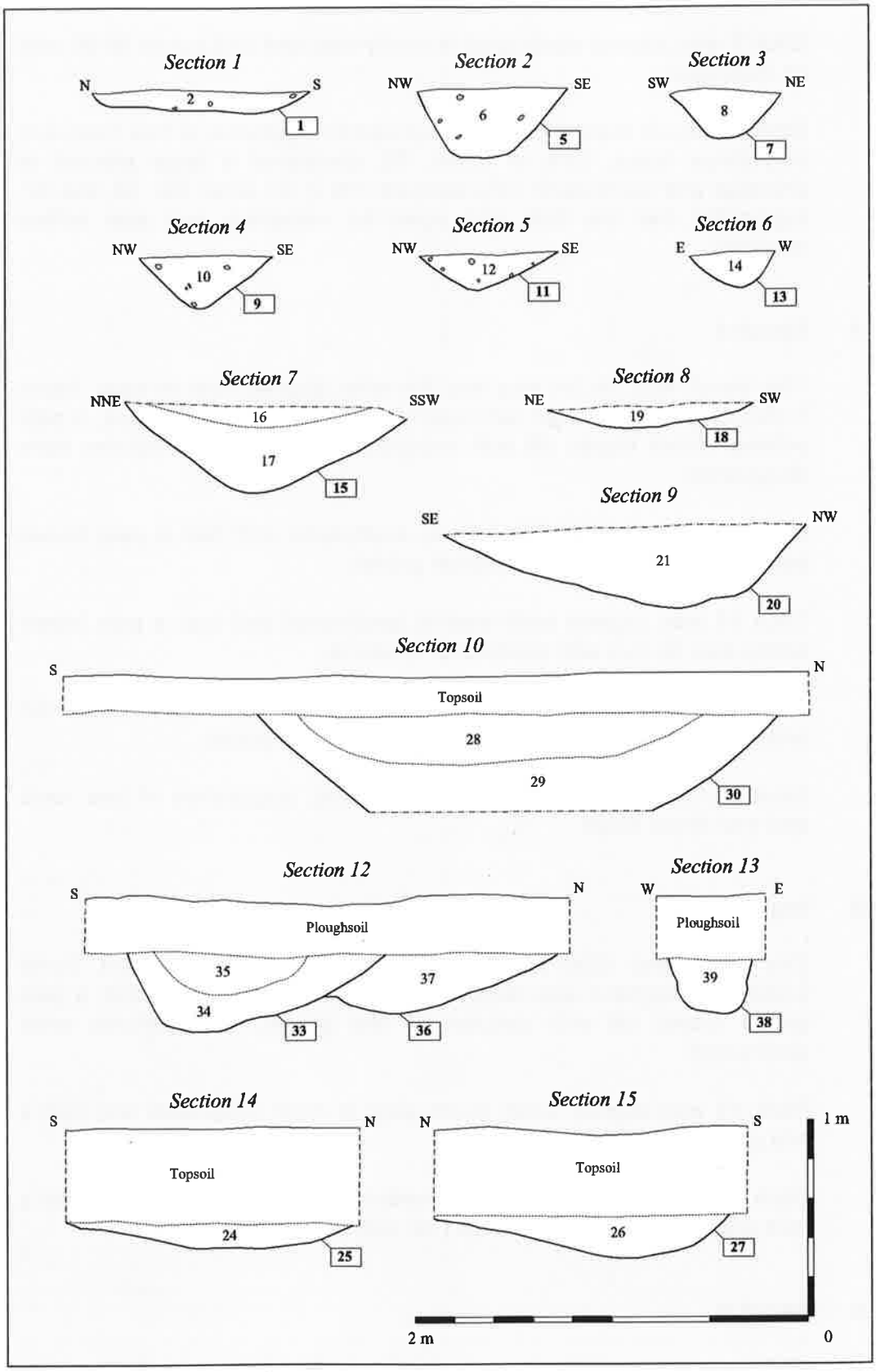

Figure 3: Section drawings

orientated furrows were discovered. These were up to 3m wide, but very shallow. Three were investigated, **23**, **25** and **27**.

One ditch and one pit were also present.

Ditch **15** was aligned west north-west to east south-east. It was 1.5m wide and 0.46m deep with dark fills (16 and 17) containing one sherd of post-medieval pottery.

Pit **30** was probably circular in plan, 2.65m wide and had two fills. 29, a brownish mid grey clayey silt was above 28 was a light brown clayey silt.

5.7 Trench 7

This trench was 51m long and 2m wide, aligned north-east to south-west. Some 0.4-0.25m of ploughsoil was removed to reveal the natural subsoil, a pale yellowy cream clayey silt with occasional gravel. No archaeological features were present.

5.8 Trench 8

This trench was 100m long and 2m wide, aligned north to south. Some 0.4-0.45m of ploughsoil was removed to reveal the natural subsoil, a pale yellowy cream clayey silt with occasional gravel. No definite archaeological features were present, although there was an ephemeral feature suggestive of the base of a ploughed out ditch aligned south-west to north-east.

6 Conclusions

Considering the wealth of archaeological remains excavated elsewhere in the quarry (Jones 2000), the lack of remains uncovered in this evaluation is surprising. The ditches probably represent a field system predating the medieval(?) ridge and furrow remains which are on a different alignment. These ditches had very pale fills with very little cultural material within them, suggesting an early date and a lack of settlement close by. This area probably remained agricultural, while the areas to the north saw the development of Iron Age and Roman farmsteads and medieval villages. The ridge and furrow remains at the northern edge of the development area (Trench 6) have been previously recognised as cropmarks and are probably the remains of the southern open field belonging to the village of Boughton.

The layer of silt removed at the request of Andy Thomas was thought not to be masking any archaeological deposits. All the features discovered, including natural tree throws, were cut from above the silt. However, during evaluation work to the north (Cromie 2005, appendix D) a layer of orange brown silty clay, 0.12-0.4m deep was found to be sealing all the Iron Age and Roman archaeology. A testpitting survey (Cromie 2005, appendix E) over the whole site, including that to the north of this development area, revealed a slight difference between the northern silty layer and the silty layer recorded in this report. The northern silty layer was predominately sandy clay loams and medium clay loams, while to the south it was described as heavy clay loam. It is possible that the two layers have different origins and dates.

Recommendations for any future work based upon this report will be made by the County Archaeology Office.

Acknowledgements

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The brief for archaeological works was written by Andy Thomas, who visited the site and monitored the evaluation.

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Appendix 1: Context Data

Context	Type	Description	Date
001	Tree throw	Oval, 2.3m long, 1.15m wide and 0.14m deep	
002	Fill of **001**	Pale orangey grey sandy clay with occasional gravel and charcoal	
003	Tree throw	Oval, truncated by edge of trench, but 0.9m wide and 0.15m deep	
004	Fill of **003**	Pale orangey grey sandy clay	
005	Ditch	0.8m wide and 0.4m deep, aligned north-east to south-west	
006	Fill of **005**	Pale brownish grey sandy clay with occasional charcoal	
007	Ditch	0.56m wide and 0.27m deep. Aligned south-east to north-west	
008	Fill of **007**	Orangey grey silt with no inclusions	
009	Ditch	0.7m wide and 0.25m deep, aligned north-east to south-west	
010	Fill of **009**	Pale brownish grey sandy clay with occasional gravel	
011	Ditch	0.65m wide and 0.16m deep. Aligned north-east to south-west	
012	Fill of **011**	Pale brown sandy clay with occasional gravel and charcoal	
013	Ditch	0.4m wide and 0.18m deep. Aligned south south-west to north north-east	
014	Fill of **013**	Mid grey silt with rare gravel	
015	Ditch	1.5m wide and 0.48m deep. Aligned west north-west to east south-east	
016	Top fill of **015**	Dark brown clayey silt with occasional gravel	Post-Medieval
017	Base fill of **015**	Mid brown clayey silt with occasional gravel	
018	Ditch	1.06m wide and 0.11m deep, aligned north-west to south-east	
019	Fill of **018**	Pale greyish brown sandy silt with occasional gravel	
020	Ditch	0.94m wide and 0.21m deep, aligned north-east to south-west	
021	Fill of **020**	Mid brownish grey sandy silt with occasional gravel	
022	Fill of **023**	Light brown clayey silt	
023	Furrow	1.55m wide, aligned east to west	
024	Fill of **025**	Light brown clayey silt	
025	Furrow	1.5m wide and 0.12m deep, aligned east to west	
026	Fill of **027**	Light brown clayey silt	
027	Furrow	1.5m wide and 0.22m deep, aligned east to west	
028	Fill of **030**	Pale brown clayey silt	
029	Fill of **030**	Mid brownish grey clayey silt	
030	Pit	Circular, 1.85m wide and in excess of 0.5m deep	
033	Tree throw	1.3m wide and 0.4m deep. Cresent shaped	
034	Fill of **033**	Dark grey silt with occasional charcoal	
035	Fill of **033**	Dark grey silt with occasional charcoal and moderate burnt earth	
036	Tree throw?	Possibly part of **033**	

037	Fill of **036**	Mid grey silt, no inclusions	
038	Ditch	0.42m wide and 0.27m deep, aligned north north-east to south south-west	
039	Fill of **038**	Pale greyish brown sandy silt, occasional gravel	

Appendix 2: Depths of Overburden

This appendix states the depths of the plough soil and natural silt for the ends of each trench.

Trench	Trench end	Ploughsoil	Silt layer
1	West East	0.45m 0.45m	0.6m 0.45m
2	South North	0.35m 0.4m	0.6m 0.35m
3	South North	0.4m 0.34m	0.35m 0.4m
4	West East	0.35m 0.3m	0.5m 0.22m
5	East West	0.46m 0.4m	0.05m 0.35m
6	South North	0.4m 0.36m	0.45m 0.4m
7	North-east South-west	0.3m 0.25m	0.22m 0.77m
8	North South	0.45m 0.38m	0.2m 0.45m

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