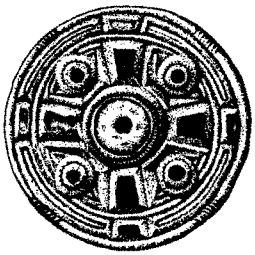

Archaeological Field Unit

Fieldwalking on Land East of St Neots Cambridgeshire

Sam Whitehead

September 2002

Cambridgeshire County Council

Report No. A208

Commissioned by CPM Environmental Planning and Design on behalf of JJ Gallagher Ltd

Fieldwalking on Land East of St Neots Cambridgeshire

Sam Whitehead.

2002

Editor: Mark Hinman
Illustrators: Sue Holden and Emily Oakes

Report No. A208

Cambridgeshire County Council
Fulbourn Community Centre
Haggis Gap, Fulbourn
Cambridgeshire CB1 5HD
Tel (01223) 881614
Fax (01223) 880946

Arch.Field.Unit@cambridgeshire.gov.uk
http://edweb.camcnty.gov.uk/afu

SUMMARY

From the 27th to the 30th of August 2002 the Archaeological Field Unit (AFU) of Cambridge County Council conducted a fieldwalking investigation of 51 hectares of ploughed arable land to the east of St Neots Cambridgeshire. The report was commissioned by CPM Environmental Planning and Design on behalf of JJ Gallagher Ltd. This investigation was carried out following a desk based assessment, (CPM 1998) and geophysical survey, (WYAS 2002) in order to add to the current level of information available relating to the character, date and possible extent of those archaeological remains present within the proposed development area

The investigation revealed traces of a human presence in this area from the Neolithic to modern times, as well as a concentration of artefactual material within the south western quadrant of the study area indicative of settlement related activity dateable to the Romano-British period.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF APPENDICES

Fieldwalking on Land East of St Neots
TL 202/607

1 INTRODUCTION

The Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council was commissioned by CPM Environmental Planning and Design (CPM) on behalf of JJ Gallagher Ltd to carry out a programme of fieldwalking on land to the east of St Neots (*fig. 1*) utilising the Essex Method (Meddlycott and Germany, 1994).

2 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

The geology of the site consists of Oxford Clay and Kellaway Beds overlain by Chalky Till of the Hanslope Association. River terrace gravels are present within the northwestern corner of the site.

The land of the site is between 20 and 40m AOD, rising from the south to the north.

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Prior to fieldwalking an archaeological desk-based assessment was carried out, (CPM 1998), encompassing the current study area. This identified finds and sites dating from the prehistoric to the post-medieval periods although none of the noted sites was located within the bounds of the current study area.

Prior to fieldwalking a geophysical (fluxgate gradiometer) survey was carried out, (WYAS, 2002), within the current area of investigation. The survey comprised magnetic scanning of the whole site followed by detailed sample survey totalling 8 hectares. Two typologically different archaeological sites were identified within the western half of the site. Evidence for ridge and furrow activity was identified in other parts of the site.

Figure 1 *Site Location Plan*

4 METHODOLOGY

A suitable level of documentary research and geophysical survey has already been undertaken by CPM and WYAS respectively. The results of the fieldwalking survey are presented with reference to existing information from historical sources, previous archaeological finds and geophysical survey in the vicinity

Prior to fieldwalking the study area was ploughed and left to weather for three weeks to optimise artefact retrieval

The site was divided into units of one hectare, defined with reference to the Ordnance Survey grid. Each one hectare transect was identified by a letter from A-J increasing alphabetically from west to east (*Figure 2*). The site was further sub-divided into 20m transects aligned north-south and numbered from 1-5 from west to east within each of the lettered one hectare blocks A-J.

Key grid points were located prior to the commencement of fieldwalking using a combination of total station and global positioning system survey.

Each 20m transect was walked from south to north across the full extent of the study area providing a 10% coverage as described within the 'Essex Method' (*op cit.*).

All categories of artefactual material were hand collected from the surface of the ploughsoil and bagged at 20m intervals from a pre-established baseline and labelled accordingly (ie A1:20m).

Metal detectorists were also employed to enhance the results of the fielwalking survey through the retrieval of small metal objects such as Roman coins which would otherwise have been extremely difficult to recover from fieldwalking alone. When found these objects were given small finds numbers and located on gridded plans of the fields walked, see fig 5.

Recording

All categories of artefactual material were quantified according to type and date. The number of individual sherds and their weight were noted by transect for each 20m unit and recorded on an Access database

The results of the fieldwalking exercise have been presented graphically by period, type and count as appropriate in relation to both the topographic and geophysical survey data currently available, see figs 2 - 6.

The categories that have not been represented graphically are post medieval pottery, slags, glass, bone, clay pipe, slate, shell and post medieval tile all of which have been recorded by count, located on the gridded map of the site and archived.

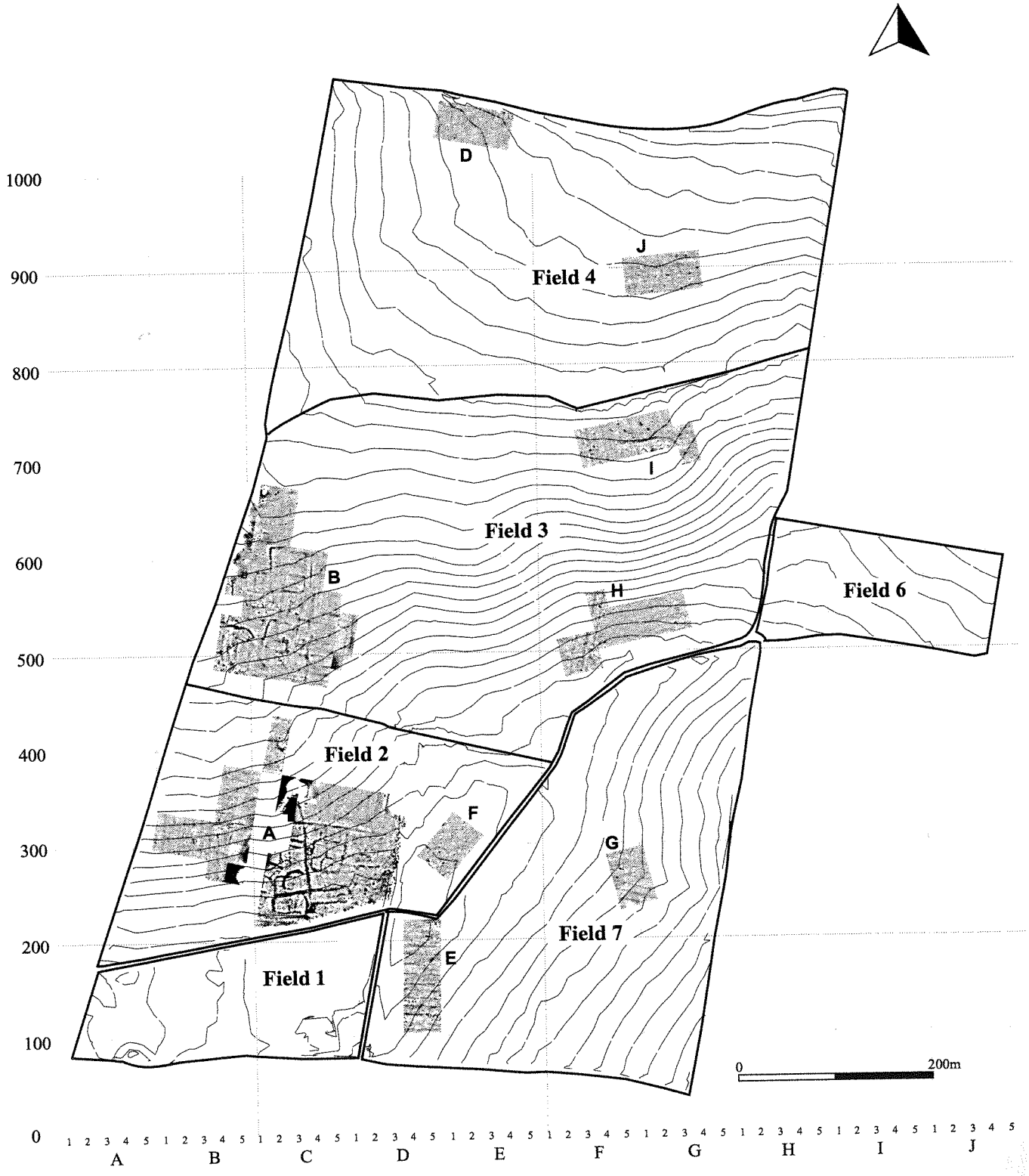

Figure 2 *Field walking grid and WYAS Geophysical survey areas (A-J)*

The metal artefacts recovered by the detectorists have been allocated small finds numbers located on the gridded map of the site and represented on fig 5.

Specialists have been consulted as necessary for artefactual identification.

5 RESULTS

The area of investigation was approximately 1km north to south, 600 m east to west and comprised of 8 fields. However, fields 1 and 6 were unavailable at the time of walking and Field 5 was omitted from the study at the request of the farm manager. The remaining area totalled 50.4 ha.

The study area was walked in three days during which there was no rain and a mixture of sunny and overcast conditions.

The topsoil in each of the fields was a mid-dark greyish brown silty clay containing moderate quantities of mixed gravels and pebbles, some of which have possibly been introduced to the fields to lighten the soil.

General information pertaining to each field is listed below, the results of the fieldwalking are illustrated in figures 3-6

Field 1

Field 1 was the lowest lying of the fields in the south-west of the study area, total size 1.32 ha.

This field was waist deep in thistles at the time of walking and therefore was necessarily omitted from the study.

Field 2

Field 2 was located on the western boundary of the study area immediately to the north of Field 1, total size 6.04ha.

This field was walked in bright sunny conditions the only slight hindrances being some weed growth and east–west ploughing, which given the clayey soils made the surface uneven.

Field 2 yielded by far the largest artefactual assemblage from the study area. The sheltered, low lying location and close proximity to the Little Ouse, the main watercourse to the west of the study area, may have contributed to the evident popularity of this locale.

The geophysical survey also revealed a number of potentially archaeologically significant responses in the south-east of this field which appear to constitute an enclosure system, (WYAS 2002).

Field 3

Field 3 was the largest of the fields, located in the middle of the study area, total size 17.4 ha, the land rises steadily from south to north.

The field was walked in overcast conditions the only hindrances being the east-west ploughing which was apparently deeper than the other fields producing very uneven conditions underfoot as well as causing some shadowing, and the presence of a loose spread of dumped modern building materials around the southern edge of the field.

While the presence of traces of ridge and furrow were not evident from aerial photographs, light and dark bands possibly indicative of ridge and furrow were visible in this recently ploughed field running east-west. Partially intact ridges could have a masking effect, protecting and sealing underlying archaeological remains and preventing the exposure of artefacts which would otherwise have been ploughed out of the soil. Some evidence of ridge and furrow systems has shown up on the geophysical surveys carried out in Field 7.

It must also be noted that the geophysical survey, (WYAS 2002), revealed a weak anomaly running north–south from the present southern boundary to the east of this field which corresponds to a former field boundary evident on the 1890 ordnance survey map.

The former field boundary is also picked up again in the north-east of this field while to south-west of Field 3 interconnecting linear anomalies characteristic of infilled ditches forming enclosures were noted which may well relate to those apparent in Field 2 to the south, (WYAS, 2002).

Field 4

Encompassing the entire northern boundary of the study area Field 4 covered 15.4 ha. The land rises gradually from the south and the east to a flat ridge beginning at the northern boundary of the study area.

The field was walked in bright sunny conditions, the only hindrance being the unevenness caused by the east-west ploughing of the clayey soils and the associated shadowing caused by the combination of this and the sunny conditions.

The results of the geophysical survey of this field were negative except for the possibility of a NNE-SSW field boundary to the west of this field as indicated on the 1890 ordnance survey map of this area.

It was however noted that the southern boundary of this field is approximately 1.5m higher than the northern boundary of Field 3 and the ditch that separates the two fields is banked 1m higher on the north side, this seems likely to be a lynchet formed by a long standing field boundary.

Field 5

Field 5 was omitted from the study area at the request of the farm manager.

Field 6

To the west of the study area, Field 6 was planted with maize and therefore not walked.

Field 7

In the south-east corner of the study area Field 7 was 10.52 ha in size and on low lying ground that gently slopes from the south-east to the north-west.

The field was walked in sunny conditions the only hindrances being the east-west ploughing and a large quantity of modern glass slags throughout, presumably introduced to lighten the clay.

It must also be noted that the field had been heavily detected prior to our arrival and evidence of fresh pitting could be seen. Given the poverty of metal artefacts encountered by our own metal detecting staff and the proximity of this field to the main road, it would seem likely that this land has been scanned by local detectorists.

The geophysical survey revealed traces of ridge and furrow in the centre of Field 7 slightly to the east and other possible ridge and furrow in the south-west corner of this field, although no evidence of this was to be seen on the surface of the field.

Field 8

This was the first of the fields to be walked, the smallest at 0.94 ha and the only field to be ploughed in a north-south direction. Field 8 was also the only flat field that was walked, being bordered to the south and west by a small stream, Fox Brook.

The only slight hindrances encountered were small patches of weeds in the central and western parts of this field and a large spread of modern rubbish dumped over the north-western corner of the field near to the present farm buildings.

Due to the proximity of this field to the farm track and main road it would seem likely that this field has also been the subject of local detectorists attentions.

The geophysical survey results for this field were negative with no evidence of the continuation of the enclosure system that was identified to the West in Field 2, (WYAS 2002).

DISCUSSION

From the area of investigation finds were recovered spanning the Neolithic to modern periods. The distribution of the artefactual assemblages from within the study area have been examined by period.

Prehistoric

As can be seen from figure 1, 8 pieces of flint were recovered from all the fields investigated; this assemblage comprised of 3 flint scrapers and 5 flakes of Neolithic date and is judged to comprise a residual background scatter.

From the small finds a bronze age copper alloy ring fragment was also identified.

Roman Ceramics

The Roman pottery recovered was concentrated in the southern half of Field 2, and with the exception of two sherds from Transect C. In particular the concentration was based within the 1 hectare grid C 200-300, corresponding with the highest density of features evident from the geophysical survey, (WYAS 2002).

Additional sherds were recovered slightly to the west of this concentration within Transect B and a short distance to the north in Field 3 six sherds were recovered from Transect C, between 460 and 600m. Those sherds found in Field 3 can be probably be associated with the presence of ditches which were identified in the geophysical survey, (WYAS 2002) and are believed to be a continuation of the enclosure systems located in Field 2.

The Romano British pottery recovered was a mixed assemblage consisting of coarse and fine wares including nene-valley colour coat, samian, greywares, shelly wares and a piece of imitation samian.

All the Roman pottery was highly abraded and was therefore deemed to have been within the ploughsoil for a long period of time, therefore if any of the sherds found were ploughed from an archaeological context it was certainly not in recent years

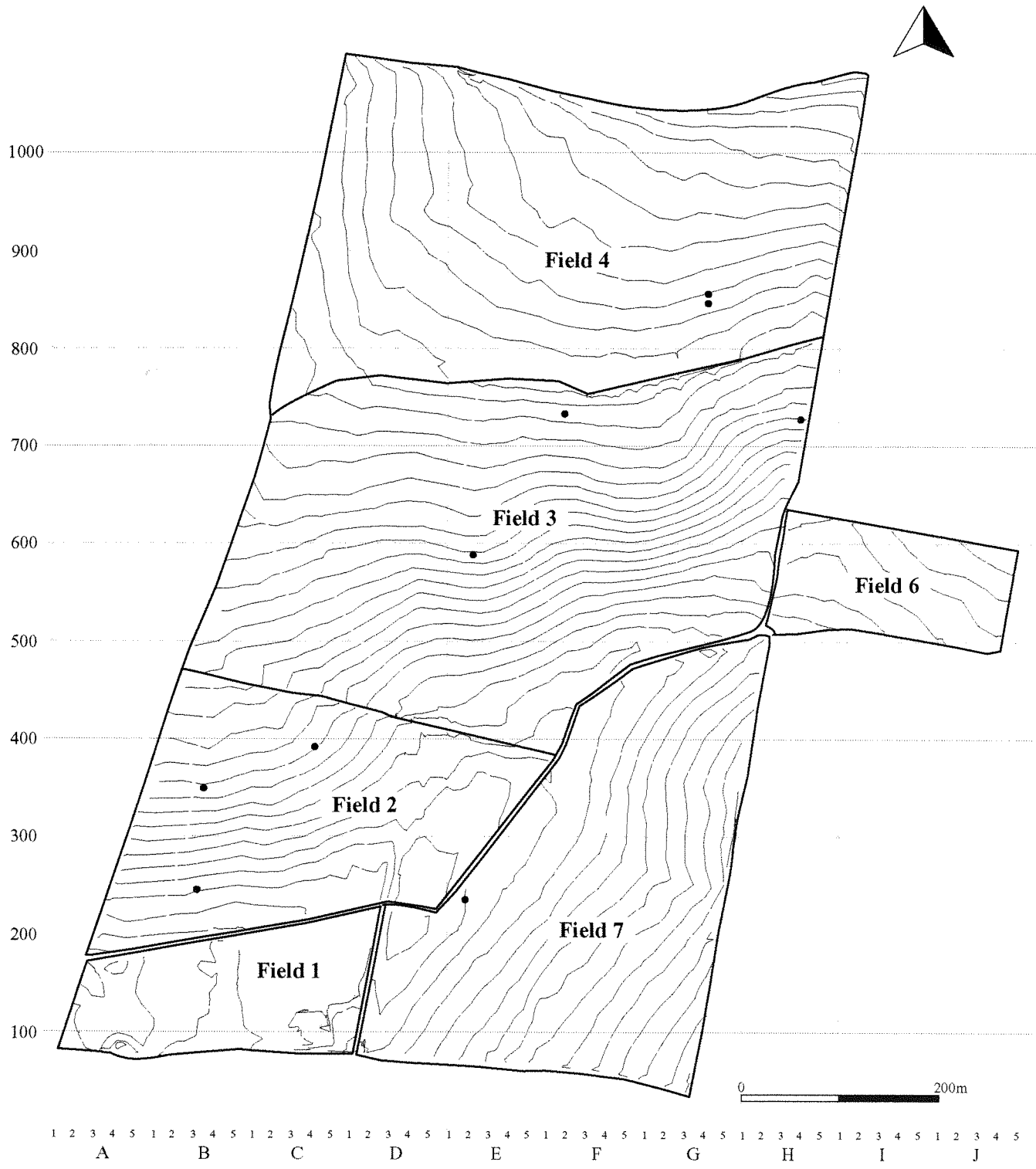

Figure 3 *Flint findspots from fieldwalking*

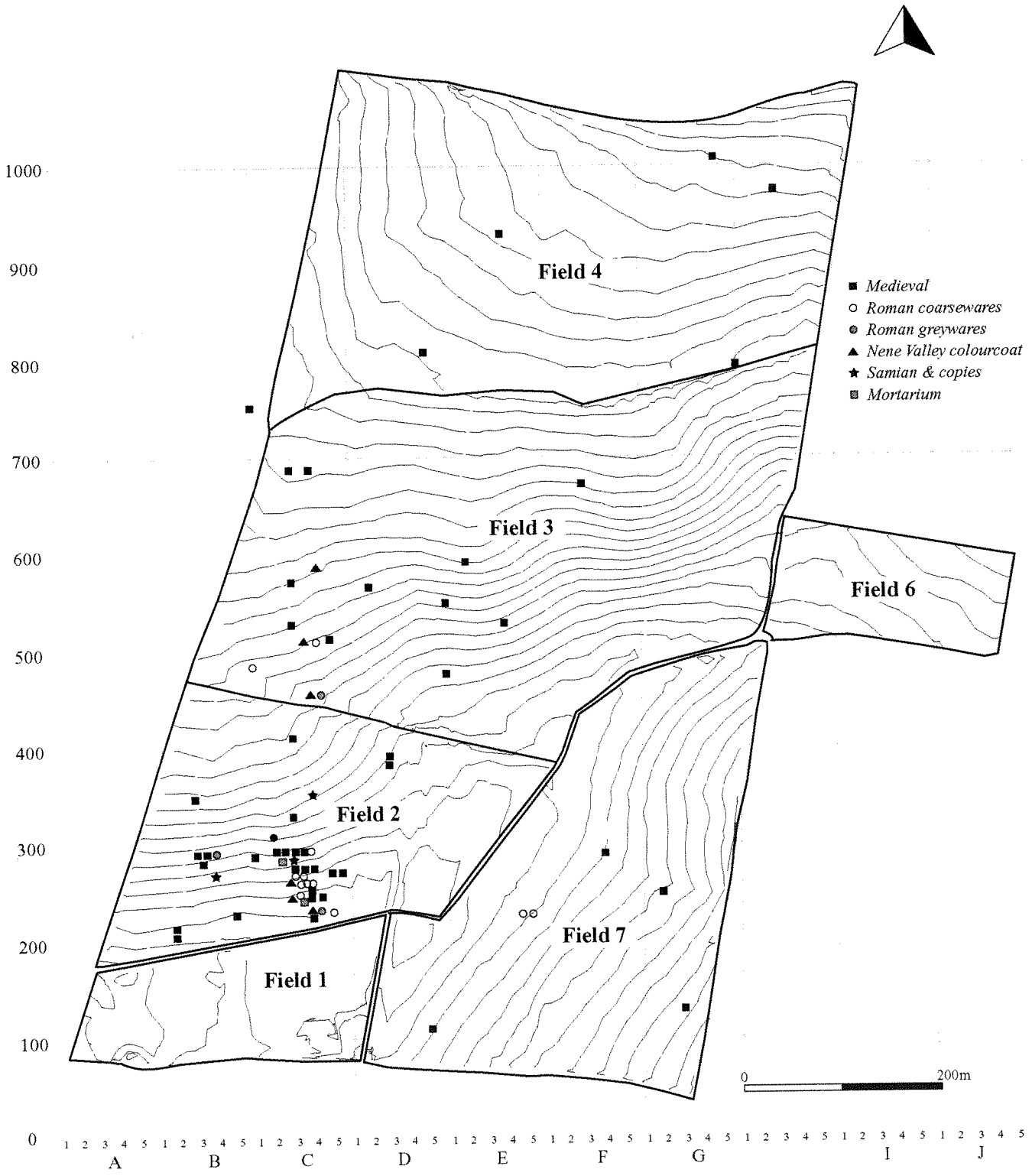

Figure 4 *Pottery findspots from fieldwalking*

Roman Metalwork

Roman small finds of note included a small Roman brooch of 3rd century date a Roman steelyard weight and eleven coins all of 3rd and 4th century date.

The entire assemblage of Roman small finds (See Appendix I), as with the pottery, were recovered from the southern half of the of the area of investigation, with the main concentration being located within Field 2, adjoining and immediately to the west of the main concentration of pottery, and again in the general area of the possible enclosure ditches revealed by the geophysical survey, (WYAS 2002).

Five small finds of Roman provenance were also recovered from just north of the south-east boundary of Field 3. However despite the presence of an old field boundary in this area as revealed by the geophysical survey, (WYAS 2002), the complete absence of Roman pottery in this area may suggest this was chance scatter.

Medieval Ceramics

The greatest concentrations of medieval pottery fall within Field 2 and the western half of Field 3, as can be seen by *fig 4*. One would suspect that this pattern which mirrors the distribution of the Roman pottery is due to increased manuring of these two areas, possibly an indicator that these locations are the oldest farmland within the area investigated and were at one time close to or part of a former settlement indicated by the enclosure ditches, (WYAS 2002).

Medieval pottery occurred in every field investigated except Field 8, although other than the one concentration mentioned it was sparsely and evenly spread and of no real significance other than suggesting general manuring of these areas.

Medieval Metalwork

There were few medieval small finds, the most noteworthy being an iron purse frame and an iron tanged knife blade (See Appendix I). There was no apparent pattern for the distribution of the low density of artefacts as can be seen in fig 5.

Post-Medieval / Modern

There was a large quantity of post-medieval tile, as well as some post-medieval and modern pottery and glass that was spread evenly across the entire area of investigation. As has been mentioned previously (*see Recording p.3*) these and the lower densities of evenly spread clay pipe, slag, bone, shell and slate have been counted, plotted and these illustrations have been archived.

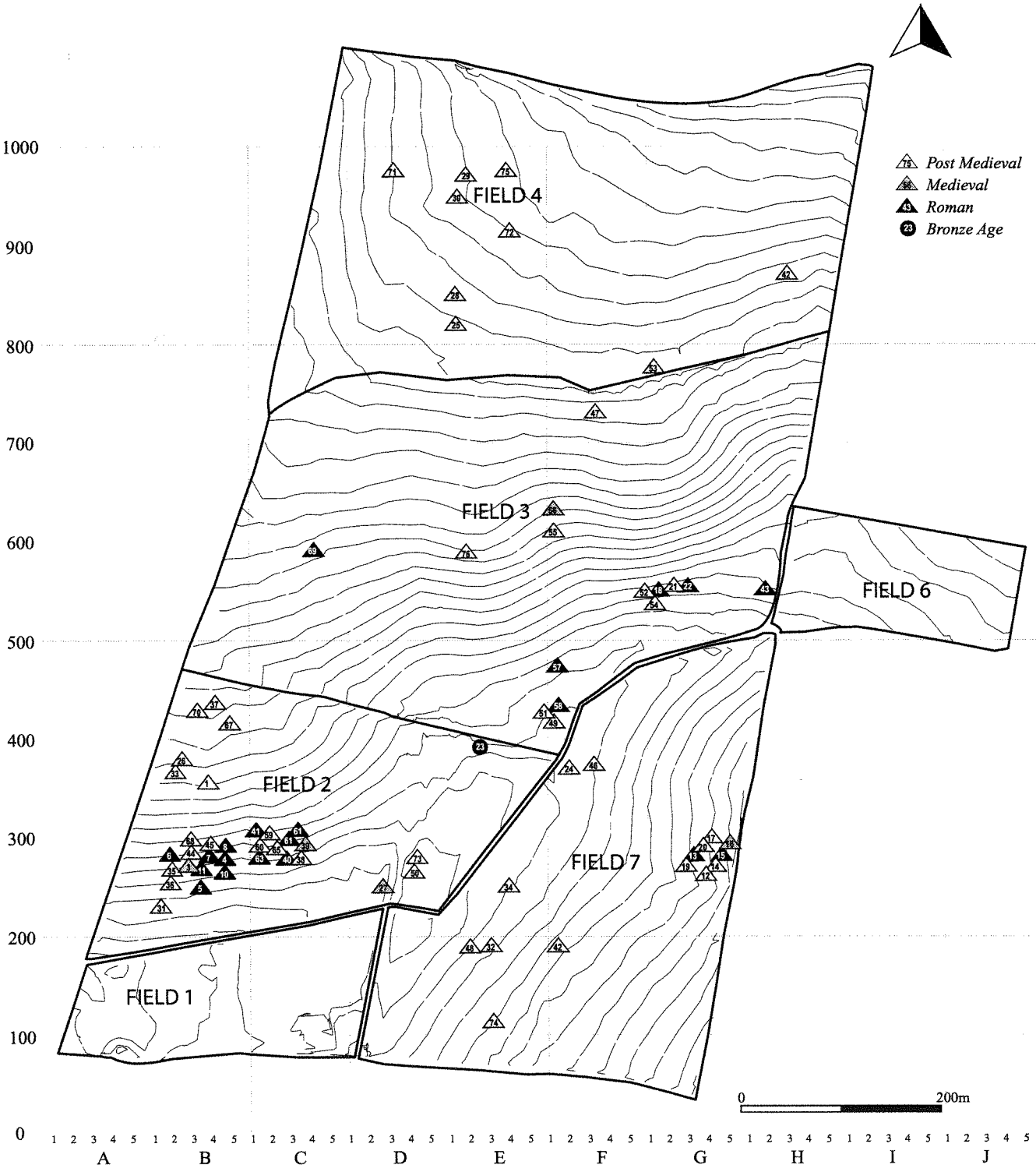

Figure 5 *Small Find findspots from fieldwalking*

Figure 6 *Detail of Field 2 showing (above) results of WYAS magnetometer survey and (below) WYAS interpretation of magnetometer results overlain by findspots of Roman and medieval pottery by type.*

The even distribution and abraded nature of these assemblages indicates that the presence of this material can be ascribed to the practice of manuring of the clayey soils of the fields investigated.

CONCLUSIONS

From the results the following conclusions can be drawn:

The land evaluated has been used by humans to some degree from the Neolithic through to modern times, with finds being provenanced from the Neolithic, Bronze Age, Roman, medieval, post-medieval and modern times.

Given the lynchet evident on the southern boundary of Field 4,the presence of ridge and furrow, that can be seen in Field 3 and on the geophysical survey in Field 7 (WYAS 2002), and the site wide manuring that includes medieval pottery, the land seems to have had an agricultural focus for a considerable period of time

There is a particular concentration of finds from an area in the south of Field 2 where over 50% of the Roman small finds were recovered and within one hectare of Field 2 60% of the Roman pottery was recovered. A further less dense concentration of aretefacts is located in the south-west of Field 3.

The particularly dense concentration of finds from the southern area of Field 2 and the lesser concentration in Field 3, in combination with the evidence of enclosure ditches from the geophysical survey, (WYAS 2002), which cover this area it seems probable that a settlement site of later Roman date, or certainly land in close proximity to a settlement has been identified.

Further Conclusions

To put the results of this project into context it is necessary to consider the merits of fieldwalking as an archaeological technique.

It has been well documented, (for example Hey & Lacey 2001) that fieldwalking, when employed in isolation, has proved to be a poor technique at evaluating sites, especially concerning issues of site layout, extent and state of preservation. This technique is more useful in highlighting the presence of areas of intense activity, this is especially true of sites where durable artefacts such as Neolithic/Bronze flintwork or Roman / medieval ceramics are present. The technique has proven less successful as a tool for identifying the presence of less durable artefact categories such as prehistoric and earlier Saxon ceramics and consequently activity from these periods may be under represented within the results of such projects.

Given that the area of investigation was under arable land and that the archaeological horizon was in close proximity to the modern surface the technique of fieldwalking was ideally suited to the aims of this project, this is especially true considering that no sites have previously been located on this land as evidenced by the desk based assessment (CPM 1998).

In combination with the results of the geophysical survey and metal detecting, the fieldwalking of this site has been successful in locating a potential settlement site and certainly a site of concentrated human activity from the Roman period onwards, that was hitherto unknown.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank CPM who commissioned the report on behalf of JJ Gallagher Ltd. The project was managed by Mark Hinman, Sue Holden and Emily Oakes prepared the illustrations and the small finds were identified by Chris Montague. The Specification was approved by Jeremy Parsons of the County Archaeology Office. Thanks are also due to the field team and detectorists who worked extremely hard to walk the study area within a very short timespan.

Bibliography

CPM.1998, Land at St Neots, Cambridgeshire. :An Archaeological Assessment

Hey, G. & Lacey, M. 2001, Evaluation of Archaeological Decision-making Processes and Sampling Strategies Kent, County Council.

Medlycott, M. & Germany, M. 1994, Archaeological fieldwalking in Essex, 1985-1993:Interim Results, Essex Archaeology. And History. 25 14-27.

WYAS, 2002, Land at St. Neots Cambridgeshire, Geophysical Survey, Report No.1016.

APPENDIX I Small Finds List

No.	Field	Transect	Northing	Material	Description
1	2	B4	360	Cu alloy	Jeton, German. 16th C
2	2	C		Cu alloy	Cu belt fastener ? 18th/19th C
3	2	D1	240	Cu alloy	Ag. Silver halfpenny. Edward II - III
4	2	B4	300	Cu alloy	Roman coin. Ae/4 - very worn
5	2	B4	300	Cu alloy	Roman coin. 3rd C. Barbarous radiate - very worn
6	2	B4	300	Cu alloy	George III halfpenny. 18th C worn
7	2	B4	300	Cu alloy	Local 17th C farthing token
8	2	B4	300	Cu alloy	Roman coin 4th C Ae/4 very worn
9	2	B2	320	Cu	Cu alloy object
10	2	B3	310	Cu	A/4. Constantine I (330 - 346 AD) Commemorative issue.
11	2	B3	310	Cu	Roman coin. Barbarous radiate. 230-270 AD. (Tetricius - Claudius Gothicus)
12	2	B2	300	Cu	George III Farthing
13	2	B4	310		Steelyard Weight - Roman
14	7	G5	300	Fe	Rectangular in section, pointed, but thicker end flattened with a hole pierced through.
15	7	G5	300	Cu alloy	Small Roman brooch, 3rd C, Dolphin type
16	7	G5	300	Bone	Piece of bone c. 2.5cm long, with part cut away
17	7	G5	300	Pb	Musket ball/Rifle shot. 17th/18th C
18	3	G	560	Cu alloy	Coin
19	3	G	560	Pb	Lead token. 18th/19th Century
20	3	G	560	Pb	Lead token. 17th/18th Century
21	3	G	560	Cu alloy	Piece of bronze. Possibly Bronze Age
22	3	G	560	Cu alloy	A/4. 4th C. Worn
23	8	E2	380	Cu alloy	Cu Fragment of bracelet ? Bronze Age/ Roman
24	8	E2	380	Cu alloy	Pb object Modern 19th/20th C. Furniture catch.
25	4	E1	820	Fe	Fe horseshoe. 8th /19th C.
26	4	B		Pb	17th century pewter buckle fragment.
27	2	C3	260	Fe	Fe purse frame. 14th - 15th C
28	4	E1	860	Fe	Large nail. Roman ?
29	4	E1	980	Fe	Nail. Building 18th/19th C
30	4	E1	1060	Fe	Horseshoe. 18th/19th C
31	2	B1	240	Fe	Nail. 18th/19th C
32	7	E3	200	Fe	Slag/dross ?
33	3	G	580	Cu alloy	Cu. Drawer handle fragment. 18th/19th C.
34	7	E4	260	Fe	Fe horseshoe. 8th /19th C.
35	2	B4		Cu alloy	Harness ring. 17th/18th C ?
36	2	B4		Pb	Pb - lead musket/ pistol shot. 17th/18th C.
37	2	B5	440	Fe	File - engineering
38	2	C1	300	Cu alloy	Cu button. 18th/19th C. Fastener missing
39	2	C1	300	Cu alloy	German jeton. 16th C. very worn
40	2	C1	300	Cu alloy	Roman coin. Ae/4. Constantine I. Romulus and Remus. 4th C. 330-346AD. Commemorative issue
41	2	C1	300	Cu alloy	Roman coin fragment. 2nd/3rd C. Very worn.
42	4	H3	880	Fe	Nail. 18th/19th C.
43	3	H2	560	Cu alloy	Pewter button. 18th/19th C.
44	2	B3	300	Fe	Nail. 18th/19th C.
45	2	B3	300	Fe	19th/20th C farm machinery
46	7	F2	380	Fe	object - 19th/20th C.
47	3	F3	740	Fe	Nail
48	7	E2	200	Fe	Fe object - modern
49	7	F1	420	Fe	Nail - building.
50	8	D4	280	Cu alloy	Cu lid, gilt - Elizabeth Arden, London 19th/20th C.
51	3	F1	420	Fe	File - engineering.
52	3	G1	540	Cu alloy	Pimple button 17th/18th C.
53	3	G1	780	Fe	object
54	3	G1	540	Fe	object - nail ?
55	3	F1	620	Pb	Musket/Rifle shot. 17th/18th C.
56	3	F1	640	Pb	Lead pot mend - Medieval - Roman ?
57	3	F1	470	Cu alloy	Fragment of bronze - 19th/20th C.
58	3	F1	440	Pb	lead dross
59	2	C	300	Cu alloy	Copper alloy strip/rivet. Medieval ?
60	2	C	300	Pb	Pot mend - Roman/medieval.
61	2	C	300	Pb	Spindle whorl - Roman/Medieval.
62	2	C	300	Fe	Knife blade - tanged - 15th/16th C ?.
63	2	C	300	Cu alloy	Decorated strip - Roman ?
64	3	C		Cu alloy	object
65	3	C		Cu alloy	Punched strip ? 18th/19th C.?
66	3	C		Cu alloy	Modern furniture accessory
67	2	B5	420	Fe	object
68	2	B3	300	Fe	Nail. 18th/19th C.
69	3	C4	600	Cu alloy	Roman coin Ae/3. 3rd/4th century.
70	2	B5	260	Pb	Lead weight.
71	4	D3	980	Stone	Roman roof tile
72	4	E4	920	Fe	Nail - building. 18th/19th C.
73	8	D4	280	Fe	object - Building staple ?
74	7	E3	120	Fe	Nail
75	4	E4	980	Fe	Nail - building. 18th/19th C.
76	3	E2	600	Pb	lead dross
77	2	A5	240	Cu alloy	Cu alloy strip. 18th/19th C.
78	1	F1	200	Fe	Fe ring - farm machinery. 19th/20th C.

REGISTERED • ORGANISATION •
IFA

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