

Archaeological Field Unit

**Medieval Agricultural Features
At Ely Community College:
An Archaeological Evaluation**

G.D.Bailey

August 2003

Cambridgeshire County Council

Report No. A236

Commissioned by Mouchel Property Services

**Medieval Agricultural Features
At Ely Community College:
An Archaeological Evaluation**

G.D.Bailey BSc

2003

Editor S. P Macaulay BA, MPhil, AIFA
Illustrator C.Begg, BSc



Report No. A236

©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

The Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council undertook an archaeological evaluation in advance of a school building development and the construction of tennis courts, and an all weather pitch, on playing fields to the rear of Ely Community College between 24th July and 5th August 2003. The work was commissioned by Mouchel Property Services on behalf of Cambridge County Council.

The evaluation revealed that the area of proposed development had been subject to two phases of medieval/ post-medieval agricultural activity. The earlier phase comprised a series of relatively small ditches, seemingly part of a small enclosure. They were masked by a later phase of post-medieval ridge and furrow field system. The archaeological features of the earlier phase survived at a depth of 0.60m to 1.06m below the modern ground surface. The ridge and furrow was evident on the surface as subtle, fairly regular undulations running WNW-ESE.

Pottery recovered from the features in trench 8 indicates a date range of mid 11th to early 15th century for the agricultural enclosure. Other finds retrieved from the topsoil date from the 15th-18th centuries. It is clear that the site has been used primarily for agriculture from the medieval period until the construction of the Community College in the 20th century.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY	1
ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND	1
METHODOLOGY	2
RESULTS	4
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS	5
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	9
BIBLIOGRAPHY	9
Appendix 1 - Context List	11
LIST OF FIGURES	
Figure 1 - Site & Trench Location Map	2
Figure 2 - Plan of Trenches 8,9,10	4
Figure 3 - Sections 16-19	8

**Medieval Agricultural Features at Ely Community College:
An Archaeological Evaluation
TL 5372 8110**

1 INTRODUCTION

Between 24th July and 5th August 2003, an archaeological evaluation was undertaken at Ely Community College, Downham Road, Ely (TL 5372 8110). The proposed development area covers approximately 1.08 ha.

The project was commissioned by Mouchel Property Services on behalf of Cambridge County Council. Staff of the Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Field Unit undertook the evaluation. The work was carried out according to the brief issued by the Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeology Office (Thomas 2003). The work was supervised on site by the author and managed by Stephen Macaulay.

The proposed development included three elements; the construction of a new sports building; a new tennis court and a new all-weather synthetic pitch.

2 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

The Institute of Geological Sciences map shows the local geology consisting of Kimmeridge Clay, the site being located on the northwestern edge of the Isle of Ely. The site is presently occupied by school grounds and had been landscaped in an attempt to level the ridge and furrow and provide a level playing field. The adjacent school building (sixth form) was built within the last ten years.

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The earliest evidence for occupation on the summit of the Ely island is in the form of Neolithic flint artefacts from the Bray's Lane excavation (SMR 10475a). Bronze Age features were also found on the same site (SMR 10475b).

Later occupation from the Iron Age was uncovered just southeast of the Cathedral (Hunter 1991). The Iron Age features consisted of substantial enclosure ditches and probable eaves drainage/ house gullies, with few other



Based upon Ordnance Survey mapping with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office Crown Copyright. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. (Cambridgeshire County Council licence No. LA 07649X 2003)

Figure 1 Location of Trenches with Development Area outlined.

features. The material recovered from these features consisted of pottery with 'early' and 'late' characteristics, two phases of Iron Age occupation were identified stratigraphically (Mudd 2000).

Further extensive Iron Age, Roman and Saxon occupation has been revealed by excavations at West Fen Road during 1999-2000 (Evans & Knight, 2000, Masser & Evans, 1999, Mortimer, 2000, Regan, 2000 and Regan forthcoming). Middle and late Saxon pottery was found at 2 West End, just to the southwest of the present site (Kenney 1999). A very similar assemblage was recovered from the excavation at the former Red, White and Blue public house, Chief's Street (Kenney, forthcoming). A middle Saxon presence has recently been identified during excavations at Broad Street (Alexander, forthcoming). Late Saxon pottery was found in the earliest features during investigations at Upherds Lane (Taylor-Wilson 1992). A single sherd of middle Saxon pottery along with late Saxon pottery was found at St Mary's Lodge in St Mary's Street (Robinson 2000). Late Saxon pottery was also found at Chapel Street (Hinman 1996). What is not known is the exact extent and form of middle and late Saxon Ely. Recent work within the city at West End and Chief's Street has revealed a middle Saxon presence in this area. Excavations at the Lady Chapel produced an important assemblage of mid-late Saxon ceramic (Regan forthcoming).

Excavations at West Fen Road have also produced evidence of this period, suggesting that the area around Etheldreda's monastic foundation was not the only focus of settlement at this time. Numerous excavations in Ely have produced medieval finds, and evidence has been found in several locations of surviving fragments of medieval structures. Some standing buildings have medieval fabric within them, including the farm buildings at the northern end of St John's road, formerly the hospitals of St John the Baptist and St Mary Magdelene (SMR 07342, a, b, c, SMR 08435).

Ely is well known as a pottery production centre in the medieval and post-medieval periods, and quantities of the local wares have been recovered from sites all over the city. Over the past few years, several production sites have been examined and the local wares are currently the subject of detailed analysis, (Spoerry, forthcoming).

The site is located in the northern part of the historic city of Ely. Recent archaeological investigations to the west of the site have discovered extensive remains dating to the Iron Age and Saxon periods (SMR No CB74). These relate to settlements discovered from full archaeological excavation (rather than stray finds) and represent some of the most important archaeological discoveries found on the Isle of Ely. In addition further archaeological investigations to the southwest have revealed extensive evidence of Saxon and

Saxo-Norman settlement (SMR CB66) as well as remains of earlier Roman occupation (SMR CB68).

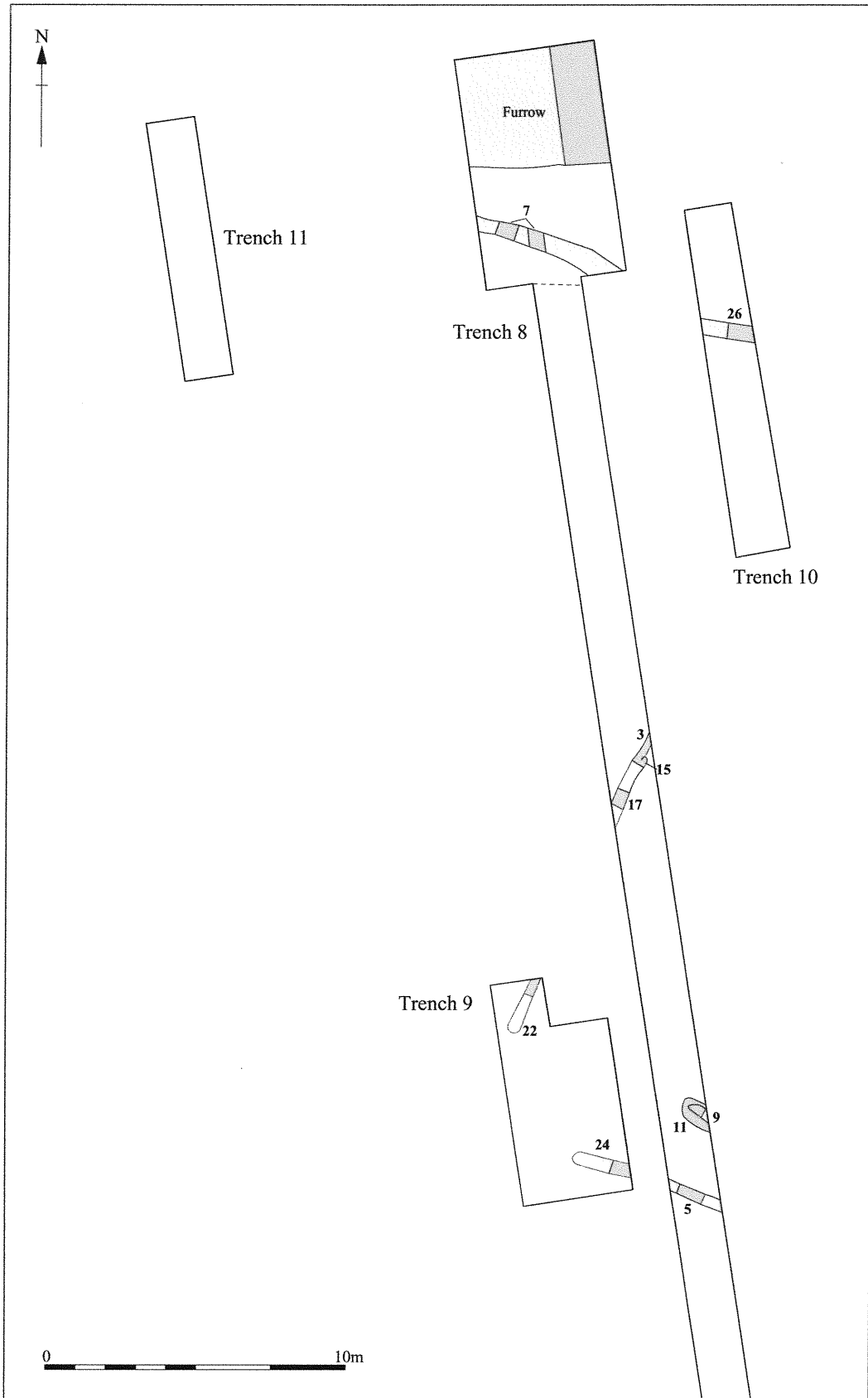


Figure 2 Detail plan of the northern end of Trench 8 and Trenches 9, 10 and 11

Medieval ridge and furrow, covering all of the playing fields, was clear from the geophysical survey (Masters, P., 2003) carried out prior to trenching.

4 METHODOLOGY

The site lies in the northwest part of playing fields belonging to the City of Ely Community College. The County Archaeological Office initially required trenching totalling 300m, a 5% sample of the proposed development area.

All trenches were excavated using a wheeled JCB with a 1.60m wide toothless ditching bucket under archaeological supervision. A wheeled machine was used in preference to a tracked vehicle due to the sensitive nature of the access route ie paths, kerbs and grassy areas which constitute access between college buildings. Trenches were opened within the footprint of the proposed area of development.

Following meetings and instructions from the County Archaeology Office, the trenching area was extended to investigate the extent and nature of exposed features in trenches 7 and 8. An additional trench (11) was opened where a rainwater attenuation tank was to be located.

A disused high voltage electricity line ran across the southern part of site. Its location and alignment were confirmed when the service trench was exposed in trench 3. Further trenching in the area was relocated so as to avoid any additional exposure of the buried power cable.

All 11 trenches were cut to a depth of approximately 0.60m, exposing the natural geology and any archaeological features. During and following machining the trenches were checked for archaeological remains. Artefacts within the topsoil and subsoil were retained for record and comparison. All potential features were cleaned by hand to establish their nature and enable an assessment of their character. At several points a sondage was cut to confirm the sometimes-complex geological sequence.

Every trench and archaeological feature was recorded, drawn and photographed to the standards of the Archaeological Field Unit. Certain features were excavated to retrieve dating evidence, ascertain their character and assess the depth of archaeological deposits. Vertical soil profiles were drawn at either end of each trench. A detailed plan of each trench was drawn and the location of the trenches planned using a Total Station Theodolite. Recording conditions were generally good, with the exception of some heavy shadows due to clear skies and very strong sunlight.

5 RESULTS

There was an extensive land drainage system across the site suggesting that the land has been prone to saturation and investment in drainage was needed. The land drains have caused extensive damage to the buried archaeological remains and did make some of the interpretations troublesome.

The northernmost trenches (7 and 8) contained several relatively small ditches. The northern end of trench 8 was extended to verify the extent of archaeological features initially uncovered. Another two trenches were opened, one each to the east and west of trench 8 to confirm the continuation and orientation of the ditches. The pottery fragments retrieved from ditches in trenches 8, 9 and 10, has been dated to the medieval period (1050-1400AD).

The majority of the trenching undertaken revealed very few archaeological features other than the ridge and furrow. Extensive disturbance of the archaeological features had occurred from land drains and mole drains. Most of these were partially excavated to confirm them as such. Unfortunately the high amount of land drain disturbance made any conclusions derivable from artefacts retrieved from the topsoil or during machining unsafe. A complete copper-alloy pin with decoration was excavated from the fill of a land drain in trench 4 in context 38. This was the only small find recovered from the site; unfortunately it was from a deposit of unsecured provenance.

A full list of archaeological deposits is contained in Appendix 1. Those trenches, which contained archaeological features¹, are described below.

Trench 7

This trench had a couple of potential features, which ultimately turned out to be either furrow bases or geological in nature. The location of this trench also gave it the potential of having the continuations of ditches 5 and 7+13. Unfortunately the SW end of the trench may have been a few metres too far north to catch ditch 5, if indeed it did continue on the same alignment. The NE end of trench 7 could have picked up ditches 7 and 13. Their absence indicates that they either terminate or turn prior to reaching trench 7.

Trench 8

Trench 8 runs 45.75m north to south towards the northern end of site. 11m from the southern end, a shallow ditch 5 was revealed running NW to SE. This ditch was found to extend and butt end in Trench 9 to the northwest (=24). 2.5m to the north another, similar ditch were exposed. The profile of this ditch showed that this ditch, 9 was *possibly* truncated by another slightly

¹ Other than the ubiquitous ridge and furrow field system

larger ditch (11). The termination of these two ditches was so close that it can be reasonably concluded 11 is a re-cut of 9. To the north of these ditches was a similar ditch running perpendicular to 5.. This ditch 17 was a re-cut of an earlier linear 3 and included a butt end within the trench 15. This ditch ran southwest-northeast and also extended into Trench 9 (=22). These features formed part of an enclosure. Medieval Ely (1250-1400) ware pottery was recovered from the fills of ditches of this field system.

The northern end of Trench 8 was extended and widened to determine the continuation of ditches in Trench 8 and 10. This revealed that ditch 7 was overlain by a thin Post-Medieval 'buried soil' layer (19) which relates to the ridge and furrow system which runs east-west across the site and which seals the medieval ditches of the earlier agricultural field system.

Trench 9 (see Fig 2)

The first of the additional trenches (9), measuring 7.30m north to south was positioned to the west of trench 8. It was opened to locate the potential continuations of ditches 5 and 17. Their extrapolated position was consistent with what was found through excavation. The ditches (24 and 22 respectively) maintained their size and alignment, both terminating in butt-ends 4.5m apart, creating what could have been an enclosure entranceway.

Trench 10

Measuring 11.50m long, aligned north south and lying 13m to the southeast of northern end of Trench 8. This trench was opened to ascertain the extent and alignment of ditches 3 and 7. The continuation of ditch 7 (26) was exposed as expected, running from ENE to WSW and whilst not *exactly* aligned with 7 was similar and comparable in dimensions to give a good confidence rating as the same feature. Ditch 3, expected from the SE was absent in this trench. The alignment of the ditch in trench 8 would, if this trench were relatively straight, presume it would appear in this trench. It thus must have either terminated (similar to 15) or have made a significant turn, to the east or south. This has implications for the layout of the potential enclosure (see Trench 9).

6 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The evidence suggests that the dominant archaeological features on this site comprises of a post medieval ridge and furrow field system (which may have medieval elements). This was suggested from the geophysical survey and to some extent on the ground, as subtle subsidence has occurred since levelling of the field in the late 20th century.

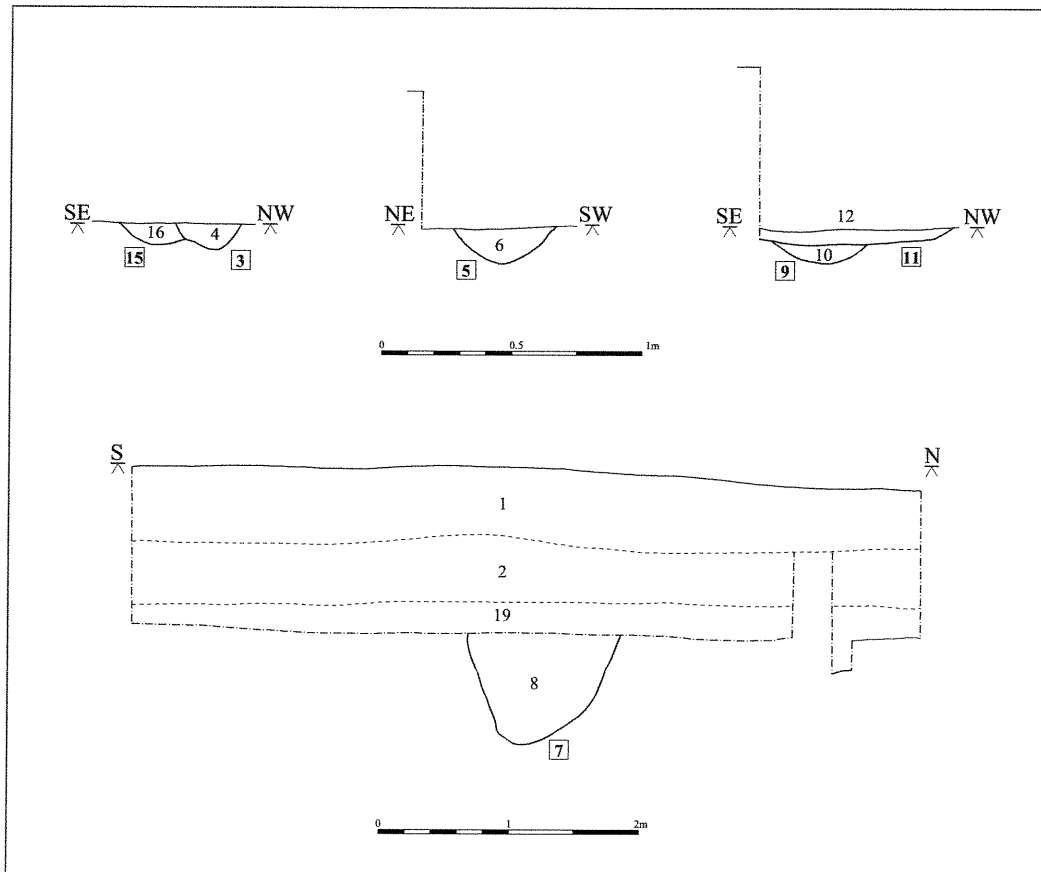


Figure 3 Trench 8 sections

A medieval field system (3,5,7,9,11,15,17,22,24,26) pre-dates all the ridge and furrow. This was confirmed from both stratigraphical relationships and artefact dating. These earlier features are masked by the ridge and furrow and were not detected by the geophysical survey. The finds indicate, according to the spot dating, of features being 1050 to 1400AD. The earliest pottery retrieved was a very small amount, and as it conflicts with the underlying deposits date and the other features one could conclude it as residual. This is also interesting as it implies an even earlier element to the site than the ditches indicate, however no features were recorded.

The presence of a “buried soil” deposit in the profile (deposit 19) indicates a period of abandonment of the site following the infilling of the earlier medieval ditches (7 and 13). This soil was only subtly different from the overlying deposit so may not have been visible, or indeed present, in the other trenches. It did contain post-medieval pottery and is linked to the formation of the later ridge and furrow across the site.

In conclusion, it is apparent that the investigation area has been in agricultural use from at least the medieval period and confirms this land to the northwest of Ely was most probably marginal. The findings appear to indicate that the very extensive archaeological remains of prehistoric and Saxon (SMR No CB74) date to the south do not extend this far north (and west).

The evaluation proved that the area of proposed development had been subject to two phases of medieval field system. The earlier phase comprised a series of relatively small ditches, perhaps forming an enclosure. They were masked by a later and much more extensive phase of ridge and furrow field system. The archaeological features of the earlier phase survived at a depth of 0.60m to 1.06m. The ridge and furrow was evident on the surface as subtle, fairly regular undulations running WNW-ESE.

The finds recovered from the features in trench 8 indicates a date of mid 11th century to early 15th century for pottery from secure contexts. Other finds retrieved from the topsoil date from this period up to the 18th century. The conclusion is that this site was primarily agricultural in nature until the late 20th century when the Community College was built.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank Mouchel who commissioned the project and Cambridge County Council who funded the archaeological work. The project was managed by Stephen Macaulay (AFU). Thanks also to Christopher Montague for his excavation and metal detection work and Crane Begg for the computerised illustrations. The brief for archaeological works was written by Kasia Gdaneic, County Archaeology Office, who visited the site and monitored the evaluation.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Cambridgeshire Sites and Monument Record.

Institute of Geological Sciences. Ely Sheet 173

Masters, P. (2003). *Fluxgate Gradiometer Survey: Land at City of Ely Community College, Ely, Cambridge*

APPENDIX 1 - Context List

Context No.	Trench	Context Type	Context Description	Finds
1	All	Topsoil	Mid-dark brown sandy clay silt	
2	All	Subsoil	Mid yellowish brown sandy clay silt	
3	8	Cut of Ditch	U-shaped ditch. Runs ne-sw. 0.25m wide, 0.10m deep, 3m+ long?	
4	8	Fill of [3]	Mid greyish brown gritty silt. Rare chalk fragments	Pottery: small abraded Med Ely ware frag (1150-1400) – residual. Other; pig teeth & bone, oyster shell
5	8	Cut of Ditch	U-shaped ditch Runs nw-se. 0.38m wide, 0.13m deep, 2m+ long.	
6	8	Fill of [5]	Mid greyish brown silt. Occasional small stones and Rare chalk fragments	
7	8	Cut of Ditch	V-shaped ditch. Runs nw-se. 0.29m wide, 0.22m deep, 2m+ long.	
8	8	Fill of [7]	Mid greyish brown gritty silt. Occasional small stones	Ridge tile (Mid 13 th C), Pottery; several sherds, all Med Ely Ware including Ely ware jug rim (1250-1400),
9	8	Cut of Ditch	U-shaped ditch. Runs nw-se.. 0.36m wide, 0.07m deep (truncated),	
10	8	Fill of [9]	Mid greyish brown gritty silt. Rare chalk fragments	Pottery; Med Ely ware frag (1250-1400)
11	8	Cut of Ditch	Wide U shaped ditch. 0.80m wide, 0.05M+? deep, butt end. Cuts 9.	
12	8	Fill of [11]	Mid greyish brown gritty silt. Rare chalk fragments	Pottery: 2 sherds of coarse (handmade?) shell & flint temper local (1050-1200).
13	8	Cut of Ditch	Broad stepped ditch with flattish base. 0.75m+ wide, 0.20m deep.	
14	8	Fill of [13]	Mid brown silt. Occasional small stones	
15	8	Cut of Ditch	Terminus of U-shaped ditch. 0.25m wide, 2.3m+ long.	
16	8	Fill of [15]	Mid greyish brown gritty silt. Rare chalk fragments	
17	8	Cut of Ditch	U-shaped ditch. 0.50m wide , 0.22m deep. recut	
18	8	Fill of [17]	Mid-dark brown sandy clay silt	
19	8	P/Med Buried Soil	Mid greyish brown silt. Occasional small stones	Pottery: Glazed red ware (17 th -18 th C), loop handled dish.
20	8	Cut of Ditch	(Number not used)	
21	8	Fill of [20]	(Number not used)	
22	9	Cut of Ditch	U-shaped ditch. See 17.	
23	9	Fill of	Mid-dark brown sandy clay silt. Rare	Fe nail.

		[22]	chalk fragments	
24	9	Cut of Ditch	U-shaped ditch See 5.	
25	9	Fill of [24]	Mid greyish brown silt. Occasional small stones and Rare chalk fragments	
26	10	Cut of Ditch	U-shaped ditch. See 7.	
27	10	Fill of [26]	Mid greyish brown gritty silt. Occasional small stones	Pottery: v.abraded orange sandy ware (residual Roman?)
28	1	Topsoil	Mid-dark brown sandy clay silt	Pottery: English stoneware (18 th C), Essex Trail slip redware (15 th -16 th C)
29	2	Topsoil	Mid-dark brown sandy clay silt	P/Med button.
30	3	Topsoil	Mid-dark brown sandy clay silt	Pottery: Black basalt ware (late 18 th -19 th C), decorated jug.
31	4	Topsoil	Mid-dark brown sandy clay silt	Pottery: Staffordshire white salt-glazed stone ware (1720-1780). Babylon TYG base (17 th C)
32	5	Topsoil	Mid-dark brown sandy clay silt	
33	6	Topsoil	Mid-dark brown sandy clay silt	
34	7	Topsoil	Mid-dark brown sandy clay silt	Pottery & Tile: 19 th C assemblage.
35	8	Topsoil	Mid-dark brown sandy clay silt	Pottery; Bone China frags (1780+)
36	9	Topsoil	Mid-dark brown sandy clay silt	
37	10	Topsoil	Mid-dark brown sandy clay silt	
38	4	Fill of Land Drain	Dark greyish brown silty clay	P/Med pin.



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