

Archaeological Field Unit

**IRON AGE PITS AND POST-MEDIEVAL DITCHES:
ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION AT 90 GLEBE ROAD, CAMBRIDGE.**

Aileen Connor

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**Iron Age Pits and Post-Medieval Ditches:
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Edited by Tim Malim
Illustrated by Jon Cane and Caroline Malim



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

Arch.Field.Unit@libraries.camcnty.gov.uk
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SUMMARY

An archaeological evaluation was carried out by the Archaeological Field Unit in the grounds of 90 Glebe Road, Cambridge between 10th and 14th April 2000. The work was carried out on behalf of Berkeley Homes (Eastern) Limited.

Six trenches were placed within the proposed development area. Trench 5 contained a small number of archaeological features of Middle Iron Age date. The remaining trenches all contained ditches, some of which were dated by finds to the post-medieval period although a number contained no dating evidence. These latter features may be inferred to be post-medieval based on their alignments.

The middle Iron Age activity may continue beyond the impact area of the development to the south and west of the evaluation trenches.

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IRON AGE PITS AND POST-MEDIEVAL DITCHES: ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION AT 90 GLEBE ROAD, CAMBRIDGE.

1 INTRODUCTION

A scheme of archaeological work is required as a condition of planning consent for the construction of housing at 90 Glebe Road, Cambridge. The first stage of this work was an archaeological desk-top report carried out in response to a Brief set by the County Archaeology Office (Roberts, 2000). The second stage of this work was an archaeological evaluation. The Archaeological Field unit of Cambridgeshire County Council undertook this second stage of work between the 10th and 14th of April 2000. This report details the results of the second stage of investigation.

2 GEOLOGY & TOPOGRAPHY

Glebe Road is located on lower chalk (Worssam & Taylor 1969). The site is located at TL 447 559, the nearest Benchmark is on Hills Road at 15.7m OD. The site is generally level, and surrounded by trees, including several that are subject to tree preservation orders (fig. 1). It was not possible to gain access to the north area of the site due to the presence of a former school building in the process of being demolished. The remainder of the area was covered in grass and scrub.

3 HISTORICAL & ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

A desk based assessment (Roberts 2000) concluded that the site lies within a rich archaeological landscape, surrounded by sites of prehistoric and Roman date, although not within the immediate vicinity. No archaeological sites or finds were known from the site itself, although given the surrounding landscape the potential for finding archaeological remains was considered to be moderate.

4 METHODOLOGY & CONSTRAINTS

Six 1.6m wide trenches were placed within the area of the proposed housing development using a wheeled mechanical excavator with a flat bladed ditching bucket. The land belonged to the Perse school and a school building, several outhouses and areas of scrub and trees were present on the site until the present development. The evaluation was concurrent with the demolition of the school and other buildings and the removal of scrub and some trees. A number of trees are subject to tree preservation orders and these were fenced off. Evaluation trenches were therefore positioned with regard to these

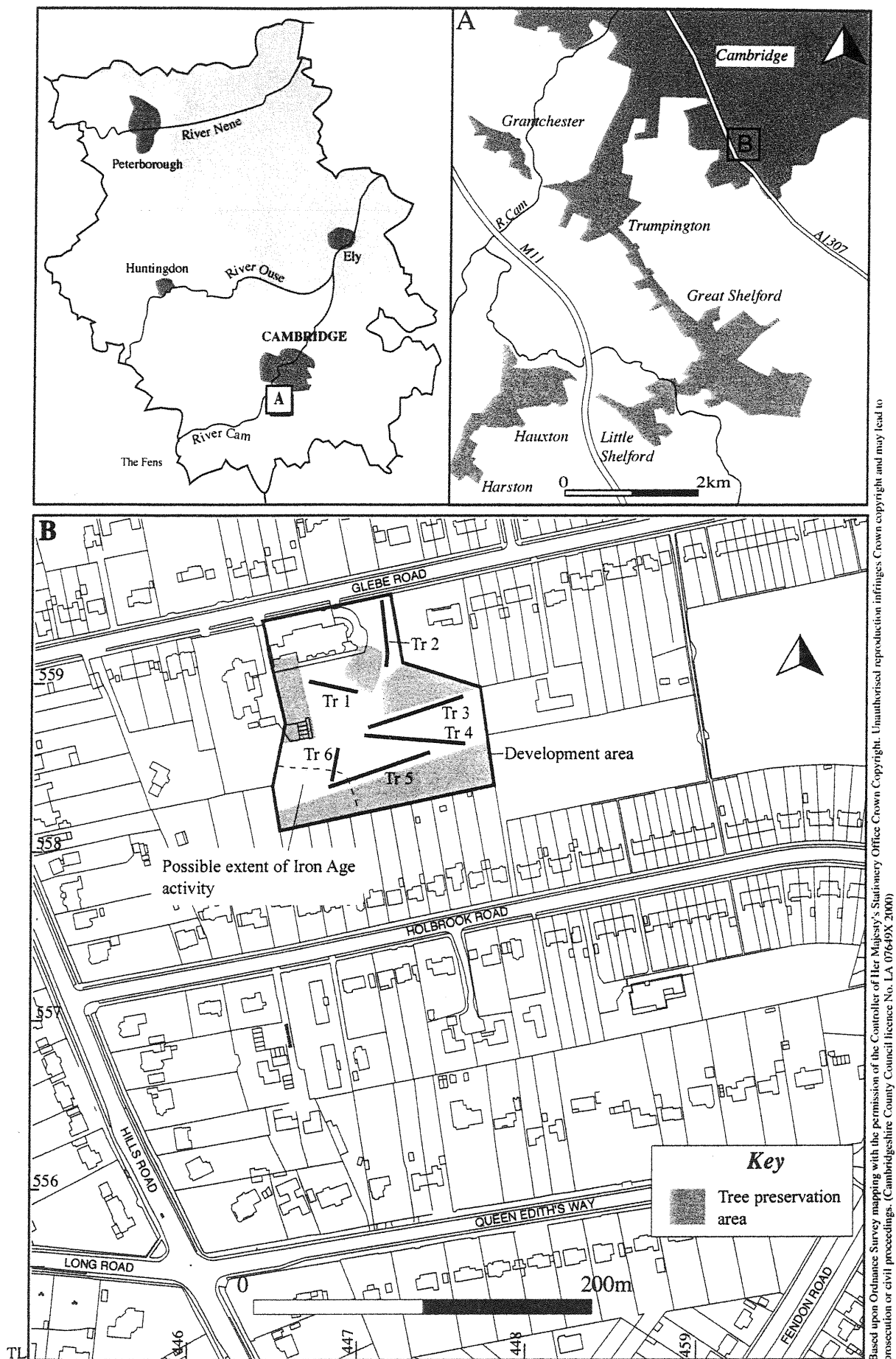


Figure 1 Site location

constraints. The total length of trenching was 268m, amounting to 429 square metres which was over 3% of the 1.3 hectare subject site (Fig.1).

Groundwater was very high on the site and trenches were subject to flooding, the natural geology was made extremely sticky by these conditions and excavation was therefore difficult.

5 RESULTS

Trench 1

Trench 1 was 30m long on an approximately east west orientation. Three ditches were located within the trench, two on a south-west north-east orientation and a third on a south-east north-west orientation. Three small irregular pits or possible post holes were also present in this trench. No finds were recovered from any of these features. The ditches in trench 1 may be part of an early ditch system.

Topsoil 101 was 0.3m thick overlying subsoil 102, 0.4m thick. 102 sealed the following features.

Pit **105** was a sub-circular feature, approximately 1m long, 0.5m wide and less than 1.1m deep. It was filled by 103, a dark greyish brown slightly silty chalky clay with occasional gravel, and 104, a mid to light slightly brownish grey chalky clay with occasional gravel. No finds were recovered. The feature may be the base of a post hole, although its irregular shape and shallow depth suggest it may have had a natural origin.

Pit **107** was an irregular feature, approximately 0.5m in diameter and less than 0.1m deep. It was filled by 106, a pale grey gritty sandy clay with moderate gravel. No finds were recovered. The feature may represent the base of a post hole, although its irregular shape and shallow depth suggest that it may have had a natural origin.

Ditch **111** was 1.5m wide, 0.4m deep and at least 1.6m long. It had moderately steeply sloping sides and a concave base. It was filled by 108, a light greyish brown faintly sandy clay with occasional faint brown mottles, 109 a mid brownish grey faintly silty clay with rare mollusc shells and 110, a pale grey clay with occasional darker grey mottling and very occasional small gravel stones. Ditch **111** was on a similar alignment to ditch 206 in trench 2 and may be part of the same ditch complex.

Possible ditch **113** was very truncated by ditch 111 and may represent an earlier cut of the same ditch. It was filled by 112, a pale grey firm clay with very occasional small gravel stones.

Ditch **115** was 1.4m wide, 0.12m deep and at least 1.6m long. It was filled by 114, a very pale grey slightly silty and faintly sandy clay with moderate mollusc shells and no finds. The ditch was on the same alignment as ditch 111 and ditch 206, it may be part of the same complex, although it was very shallow and different in profile, and may be the remnant of ridge and furrow.

Feature **117** was a very irregular depression, it was filled by 116, a mid grey gritty deposit which probably had a natural origin.

Pit **118** was a small circular feature, 0.4m in diameter and 0.15 m deep, it was filled by 119, a faintly greyish mid brown slightly chalky clay with occasional

small gravel. The feature may be the base of a post hole, although it was poorly defined and may have had a natural origin.

Gully **121** was 0.4m wide, less than 0.1m deep and at least 0.8m long. It had a gentle U shaped profile and was filled by 120, a mid greyish brown chalky clay with occasional gravel and small mollusc shells. The feature appeared to terminate within the trench, it was apparently not aligned with anything else nearby.

Trench 2

Trench 2 was 40 m long on an approximately north-south orientation. Its north end was located close to Glebe Road and 6m from the east boundary of the subject site. It curved slightly at its southern end to avoid a tree preservation order. One feature was observed within the trench, a ditch on an approximately south-west north-east orientation, this may be part of the same undated system as the ditches observed in trench 1.

Topsoil 201 was 0.3m thick overlying subsoil 202, 0.3m thick. The subsoil sealed ditch **206**.

Ditch **206** was 1.1m wide, 0.45m deep and at least 1.6m long, with a gradual U shaped profile. It was filled by 203, which was similar to the subsoil, a pale brown clay with frequent mottles of redeposited natural, 204, a pale greyish brown greasy chalky silty clay with occasional small mollusc shells and rare charcoal flecks, and 205 a pale brownish grey chalky clay with some very pale yellowish grey mottles. The ditch was on a similar alignment to those observed in trench 2 and may be part of the same undated complex.

Trench 3

Trench 3 was 60m long on an approximately east west orientation. Three ditches, a land drain and two pits, one probably natural in origin were located in the trench.

Topsoil 301 was 0.3m thick overlying subsoil 302, which was 0.15m thick.

Ditch **304** was 0.65m wide, at least 1m long and 0.34m deep it was filled by 303, a dark grey firm clay with moderate small mollusc shells. The feature appeared to terminate within the trench, a tenuous post hole was located immediately to the north of the feature, this was extremely shallow and irregular in shape. No finds were recovered from the feature, its alignment was similar to that of ditches located in trenches 1 and 2 and the feature may tentatively be associated with that ditch system.

Ditch **306** was 1.80m wide, 0.30m deep and at least 1.60m long. It had gently sloping sides and a flat base sharply deepening towards the centre. It was filled by 305 a mid brown clay. No finds were recovered from the feature, its character and alignment suggest that it may be the remnant of ridge and furrow, possibly continuing to the south into trench 4.

Pit **308** was cut by ditch **306**. It was approximately 0.7m in diameter and 0.35m deep, it had steep sides and a slightly irregular base. It was filled by 307, a very dark grey clay with moderate small mollusc shells. No finds were present, it was not possible to assign any date to the feature, although given the

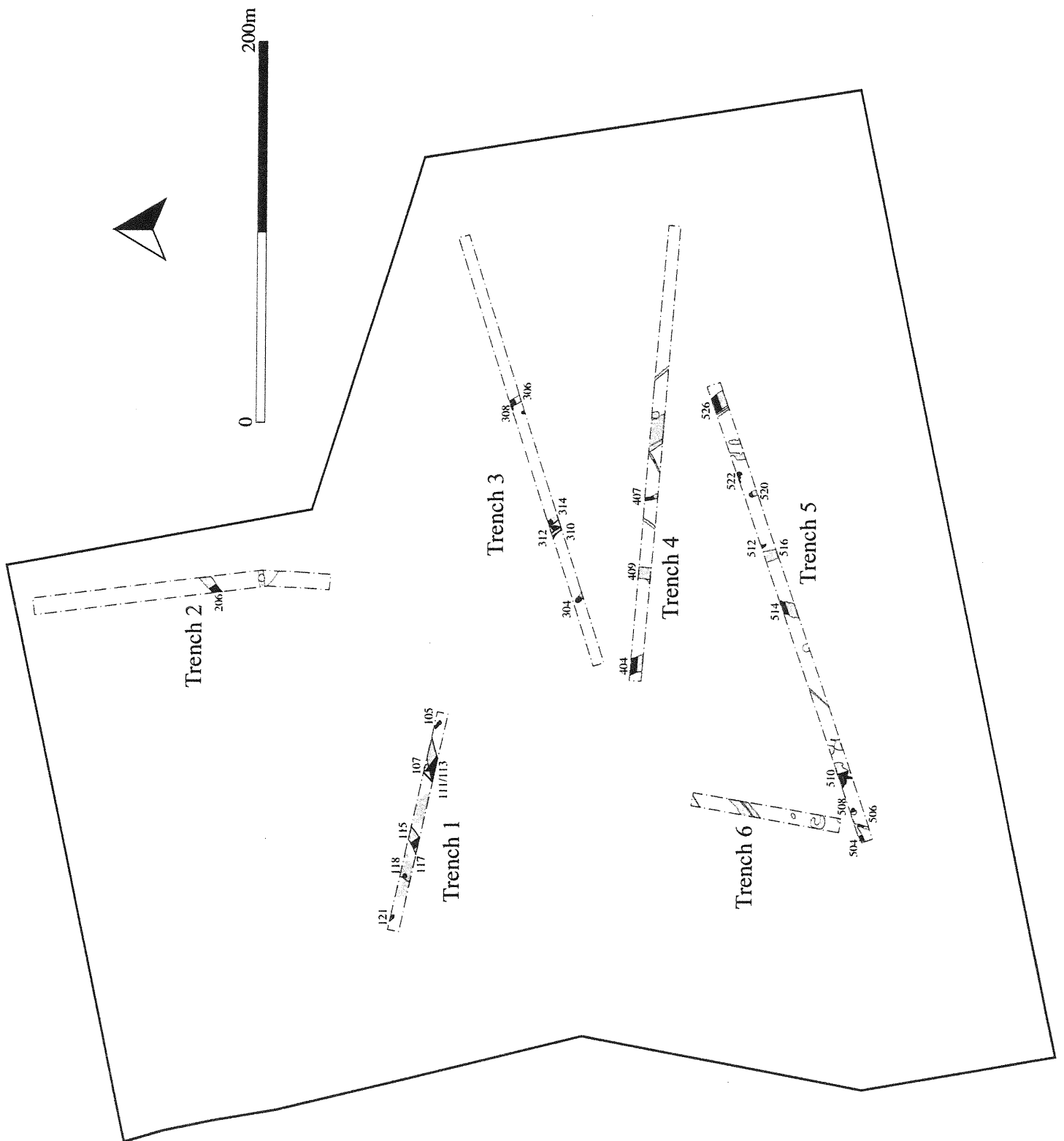


Figure 2 Plan of excavated trenches

presence of middle Iron Age features to the south-west it is possible that the feature belongs to the same phase of activity.

Land drain **310** was 0.35m wide, at least 0.20m deep and at least 1.6m long. It was filled by 309, a mid to light brown sandy clay.

Pit **312** was very irregular in shape with moderately gently sloping sides and irregular base. It was filled by 311, mixed redeposited natural nearly black greasy organic clay with no finds. It was cut by **310**. The nature of the fill and irregular shape suggest that the feature had a natural origin.

Ditch **314** was 1.6m wide, at least 0.3m deep and at least 1.6m wide. It was filled by 313, a mid to pale brown sandy clay with no finds. The ditch was on a similar alignment to others in trenches 4 and 5 and may be a remnant of ridge and furrow.

Trench 4

Trench 4 was 60m long and between 0.5 and 0.6m deep. Eight linear features were located within the trench, four of these were post medieval land drains, and two were post-medieval ditches. The remaining two features, **404** and **407**, contained no dating evidence but were on the same alignment as one of the post-medieval ditches and can be assumed to be associated with it.

Topsoil 401 was 0.35m thick overlying subsoil 402 which was 0.3m thick. 402 was cut by a chalk filled ditch **409**, it sealed the remaining features.

Ditch **404** was 1.65m wide and 0.5m deep. It had a moderately steep side on the east and more gently sloping on the west side, it had a flat based irregular U shaped profile. It was filled by firm dark grey clay 403, with frequent molluscs, occasional charcoal and small gravel stones. The upper fill, 405, was very similar to the overlying subsoil 402. No finds were recovered from the excavated section.

Ditch or gully **407** was 0.5m wide and less than 0.1m deep with a very shallow gentle U shaped profile. It was filled by very mixed and mottled pale grey clay, redeposited natural 406. No finds were recovered from the excavated section.

Ditch **409** was 1.5m wide and at least 0.3m deep, it was not fully excavated. The feature was filled with redeposited chalk 408 which contained fragments of modern pottery. It cut through sub-soil 402 and was probably post-medieval in date.

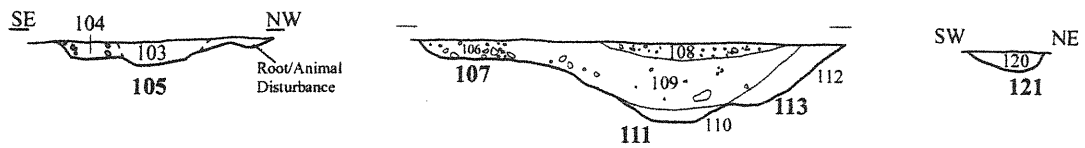
Trench 5

Trench 5 was 60m long and 0.5m deep. Two land drains and two post-medieval ditches were located within the trench. Several ambiguous features which were probably caused by root disturbance were also present in this trench. One small pit, a narrow ditch and a shallow irregular pit at the west end of the trench may be Iron Age in date. Small abraded fragments of Middle Iron Age pottery were found in both of the pits.

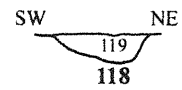
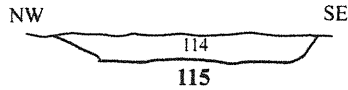
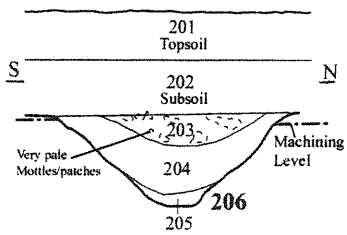
Topsoil 501 was 0.25m deep, it overlay subsoil 502 which was 0.32m deep.

Ditch **504** was 0.60m wide, at least 3m long and 0.22m deep. It had moderately steep sides, a flat base and U shaped profile. It was filled by 503, a

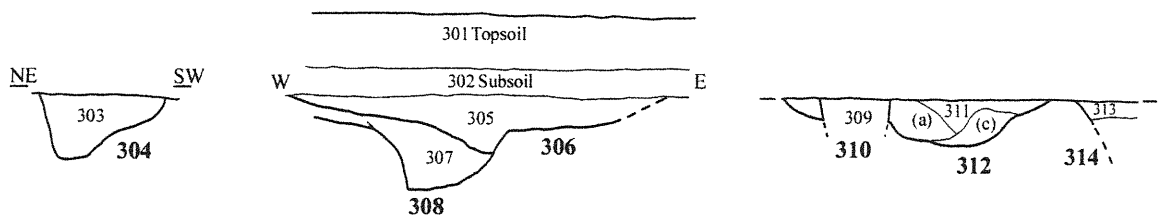
Trench 1



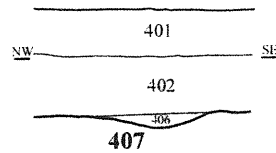
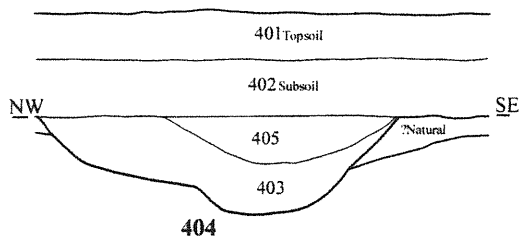
Trench 2



Trench 3



Trench 4



Trench 5

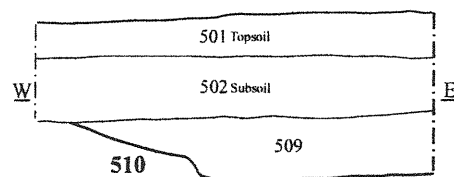
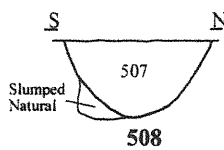
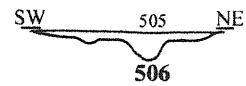
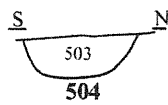


Figure 3 Sections

mid grey brown sandy clay with frequent tiny mollusc shells, rare charcoal flecks and no finds. It was sealed beneath subsoil 502 and cut into natural chalk.

Possible post hole **506** was 0.40m diameter and 0.16m deep. It was sub-circular with steep sides and a rounded base with a V shaped profile. It was filled by 505, a very pale greyish brown clay with moderate manganese flecks and rare small mollusc shells. No finds were recovered, the feature was ambiguous and may have a natural origin.

Pit **508** was 0.80m diameter and 0.40m deep. It had moderately steep sides and a rounded base with a sloping U shaped profile. It was filled by 507 a dark grey very slightly sandy clay with more clay towards the base and evidence that the sides had slumped on its southern edge. A small group of pottery sherds was located towards the base of the pit.

Pit **510** was an irregularly shaped feature, approximately 3m wide, at least 1m long and 0.3m deep. It had an irregular base with gently sloping, uneven sides. It was filled by 509, a mid grey clay with frequent small mollusc shells and two small sherds of pottery which may have belonged to the same vessel as the pottery found in 507.

Possible pit **512** was a circular feature, approximately 1m in diameter. Its depth and shape in profile are unknown as it was not excavated. It was filled by 511, a pale brown clay with moderate mollusc shells.

Possible ditch **514** was 1.6m wide, at least 2m long and less than 0.10m deep. It was a shallow irregular linear feature with very irregular sides and base. It was filled by 513, a mid grey clay with rare mollusc shells and no finds.

Ditch **516** was 1.4m wide, at least 1.6m long and at least 0.35m deep. The ditch cut through subsoil 502 and was filled by redeposited chalk 515. Post-medieval tile and pottery from the fill indicate a post-medieval, probably very recent date for the feature.

Feature **518** was 0.50m wide and at least 0.70m long, it was very irregular in shape and was filled by 517, a mottled yellowish brown and grey clay. The feature probably had a natural origin.

Feature **520** was 0.6m wide, at least 1m long and 0.05m deep. It was filled by 519, a mottled grey clay.

Feature **522** was a shallow, irregular pit filled by dark grey organic clay, it is likely to have had a natural origin.

Deposits 523 and 524 were very dark grey organic clays forming irregular patches. They are likely to have had a natural origin.

Ditch **526** was 1.8m wide, at least 1.6m long and at least 0.3m deep. It was filled by 525, a mid yellowish brown slightly sandy clay very similar to 502, clay tobacco pipe, and post-medieval pottery was found in the fill. The ditch is certainly post-medieval in date.

Trench 6

Trench 6 was excavated in order to test the extent of the Iron Age features at the west end of trench 5. One possible post hole and an area of root disturbance was located at the south end of the trench, two land drains and a linear feature, possibly the remains of ridge and furrow, on the same alignment were located towards the north end of the trench.

6 DISCUSSION

Middle Iron Age Activity

Demonstrably middle Iron Age features were present in the westernmost 15 metres of trench 5 in the south-west corner of the subject site. This activity may continue a few metres to the north into trench 6, where possible post holes were present, but no dating evidence. It is possible that the evidence for Iron Age activity continues to the south and west of the trenches. There was only a very limited pottery assemblage and other finds were absent. The pottery sherds were small and moderately abraded, but came from fills of features and are therefore likely to indicate the presence of nearby small scale settlement of Iron Age date. This activity may be part of the wider Iron Age landscape demonstrated by numerous cropmark sites in the vicinity, and known hill forts at Wandlebury and War Ditches (SMR 4830 and 4963). Rescue excavations were carried out to the south of Long Road in 1967 which showed that substantial Iron Age settlement was located nearby (Cra'ster 1969).

Undated Features

Ditches were present in all of the evaluation trenches, two alignments were observed. Ditches on a near north south and east west alignment appeared to be regularly spaced at approximately 8 metres apart, where these were excavated they were found to be generally shallow, broad features. No dating evidence was associated with them, although several field drains were noted on a similar alignment. The regular spacing and association of field drains suggests that these features may be the last vestige of a system of medieval ridge and furrow cultivation. The first edition ordnance survey does not appear to share the same alignment with these ditches.

The second ditch alignment observed was south-west to north-east. This alignment was particularly noticeable in trenches 1 and 2 to-wards the north of the subject site. The ditches were over a metre wide and had relatively steep sides to an almost V shaped profile. Smaller ditch features at the west end of trenches 3 and 5 had a similar alignment and may be part of the same ditch system. No dating evidence or finds of any kind were found in any of these features. The features clearly represent a ditch system, however, it is not possible to ascertain even a broad date for the system, although it is likely to be earlier than the putative medieval ridge and furrow system.

Post-medieval ditches

Two ditches were certainly post-medieval in date, these were both on a similar alignment to the putative ridge and furrow cultivation, and may be a continuation of that system into the post-medieval period.

7 CONCLUSIONS

Although features were present in most of the trenches excavated, these were largely undated ditches. Where dating evidence was found it demonstrated features to be post-medieval in date.

One trench had demonstrably Middle Iron Age features, this was trench 5 in the south-west area of the site, further trenching suggested that the activity did not continue to the north but that it may continue to the south and west. South of the trench is a tree preservation area and as such will not be affected by the development scheme, the area to the west, however, may be subject to ground works and as such may require further archaeological investigation.

9 ARCHIVE

The complete archive is currently stored at the AFU offices at Fulbourn Community Centre, Haggis Gap, Fulbourn under the code CAM GR 00.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Andrew Thomas of the County Archaeology Office supplied the Brief. Aileen Connor and Tony Baker undertook the fieldwork for the AFU.

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APPENDIX 1

List of Finds

Trench No.	Context No.	Description	No. of Sherds	Weight in grams
3	311	Post-medieval pottery	1	1
5	507	Iron-Age pottery	22	85
5	509	Iron-Age pottery	2	13
5	525	Post-medieval pottery	1	3
5	525	Field drain	5	64
5	525	Post-medieval glass	2	18
5	525	Clay tobacco pipe	1	1

APPENDIX 2

List of Contexts

Trench No.	Context No.	Fill of	Filled by	Context type
1	101	NA	NA	Topsoil
1	102	NA	NA	Subsoil
1	103	105	NA	Pit fill
1	104	105	NA	Pit fill
1	105	NA	103, 104	Pit cut
1	106	107	NA	Pit fill
1	107	NA	106	Pit cut
1	108	111	NA	Ditch fill
1	109	111	NA	Ditch fill
1	110	111	NA	Ditch fill
1	111	NA	108, 109, 110	Ditch cut
1	112	113	NA	Ditch fill
1	113	NA	112	Ditch cut
1	114	115	NA	Ditch fill
1	115	NA	114	Ditch cut
1	116	117	NA	Feature fill
1	117	NA	116	Feature cut
1	118	NA	119	Pit cut
1	119	118	NA	Pit fill
1	120	121	NA	Gully fill
1	121	NA	120	Gully cut
2	201	NA	NA	Topsoil
2	202	NA	NA	Subsoil
2	203	206	NA	Ditch fill
2	204	206	NA	Ditch fill
2	205	206	NA	Ditch fill
2	206	NA	203, 204, 205	Ditch cut
3	301	NA	NA	Topsoil
3	302	NA	NA	Subsoil
3	303	304	NA	Ditch fill
3	304	NA	303	Ditch cut
3	305	306	NA	Ditch fill
3	306	NA	305	Ditch cut
3	307	308	NA	Pit fill
3	308	NA	307	Pit cut
3	309	310	NA	Land drain fill
3	310	NA	309	Land drain cut
3	311	312	NA	Pit fill
3	312	NA	311	Pit cut
3	313	314	NA	Ditch fill

Trench No.	Context No.	Fill of	Filled by	Context type
3	314	NA	313	Ditch cut
4	401	NA	NA	Topsoil
4	402	NA	NA	Subsoil
4	403	404	NA	Ditch fill
4	404	NA	403, 405	Ditch cut
4	405	404	NA	Ditch fill
4	406	407	NA	Ditch fill
4	407	NA	406	Ditch cut
4	408	409	NA	Ditch fill
4	409	NA	408	Ditch cut
5	501	NA	NA	Topsoil
5	502	NA	NA	Subsoil
5	503	504	NA	Ditch fill
5	504	NA	503	Ditch cut
5	505	506	NA	Post hole fill
5	506	NA	505	Post hole cut
5	507	508	NA	Post hole fill
5	508	NA	507	Pit cut
5	509	510	NA	Post hole fill
5	510	NA	509	Pit cut
5	511	512	NA	Pit fill
5	512	NA	511	Pit cut
5	513	514	NA	Ditch fill
5	514	NA	513	Ditch cut
5	515	516	NA	Ditch fill
5	516	NA	515	Ditch cut
5	517	518	NA	Feature fill
5	518	NA	517	Feature cut
5	519	520	NA	Feature fill
5	520	NA	519	Feature cut
5	521	522	NA	Feature fill
5	522	NA	521	Feature cut
5	523	NA	NA	Natural deposit
5	524	NA	NA	Natural deposit
5	525	526	NA	Ditch fill
5	526	NA	525	Ditch cut



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Fulbourn Community Centre
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