

Archaeological Field Unit

**Land to the North-East of 7 Dock Road, Chatteris:  
an Archaeological Evaluation**

Judith Roberts

December 1999

**Cambridgeshire County Council**

Report No. B65

*Commissioned by Dawbarns Solicitors*

# **Land to the North-East of 7 Dock Road, Chatteris: an Archaeological Evaluation**

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## **SUMMARY**

*The proposed development, covering an area of approximately 0.52ha, lies to the north of the historic town of Chatteris. The development involves construction of twenty houses and related services. The site lies in an area of potentially rich archaeological remains. There are significant remains of all periods in the parish but nothing is known from the site itself. There does not appear to have been any development during the past century and recently it has been pasture. The density of past activity expected in such a fen-edge position and the lack of recent development implies a high potential for the site.*

## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>TOPOGRAPHICAL AND GEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>METHODOLOGY</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>RESULTS</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>CONCLUSIONS</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>REFERENCES CONSULTED</b>	<b>5</b>

## **APPENDIX I        SITES AND MONUMENTS GAZETTEER**

## **LIST OF FIGURES**

<b>Figure 1    Location map</b>	<b>2</b>
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**Land to the north-east of 7 Dock Road, Chatteris:  
a archaeological evaluation  
(TL3917 8690)**

## **INTRODUCTION**

This study was commissioned by Dawbarns Solicitors on behalf of their client, Mr. R. S. Knight, in advance of a proposed residential development. The evaluation aimed to record any archaeological remains on the land that are likely to be affected by the development. The work was carried out in response to a design brief for archaeological evaluation written by Andy Thomas, Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeology Office, dated August 16, 1999.

The site is located to the north of the historic town of Chatteris and comprises approximately 0.52 hectare of pasture. The site is centred on TL 3917 8690.

## **TOPOGRAPHICAL AND GEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND**

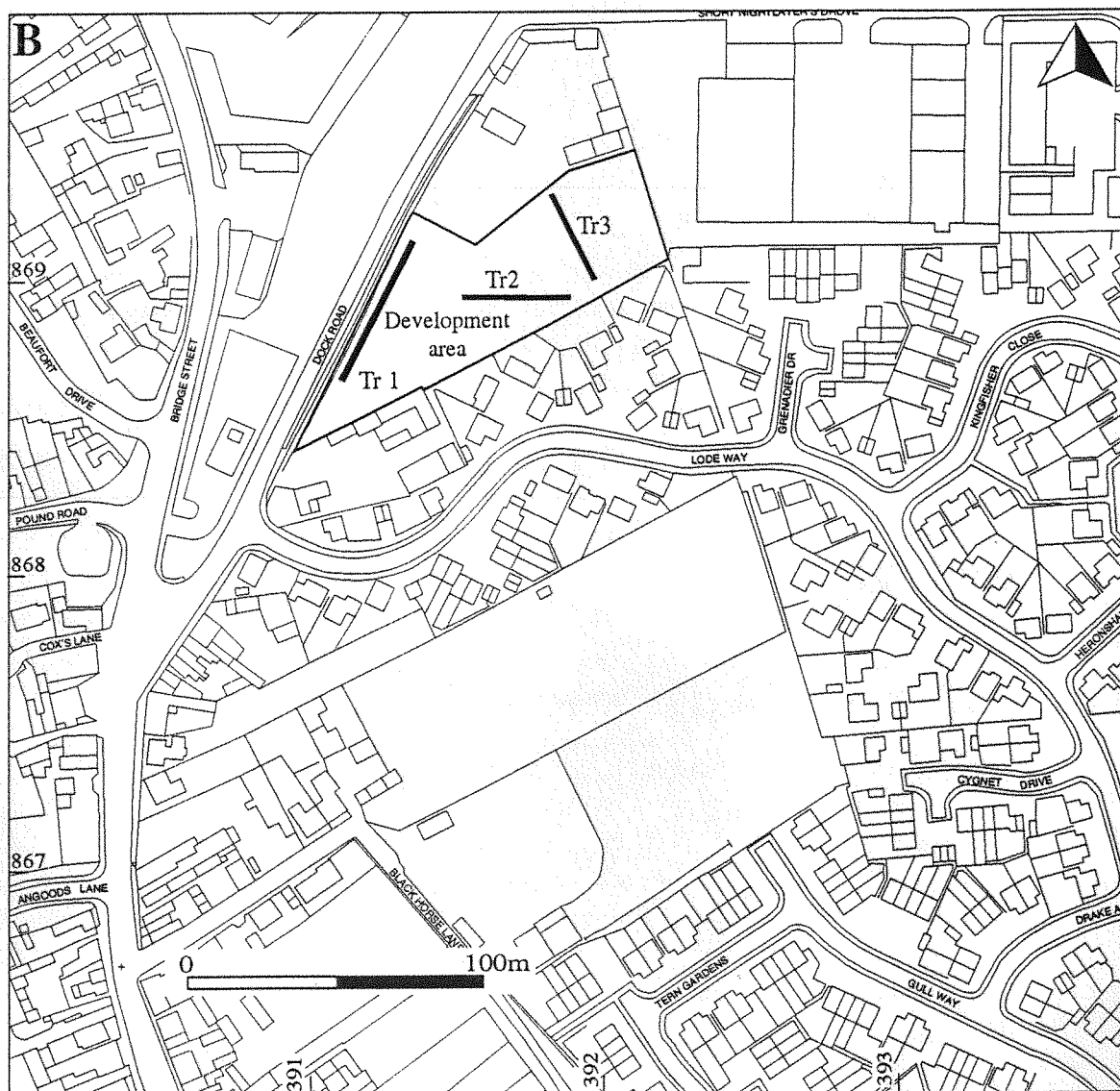
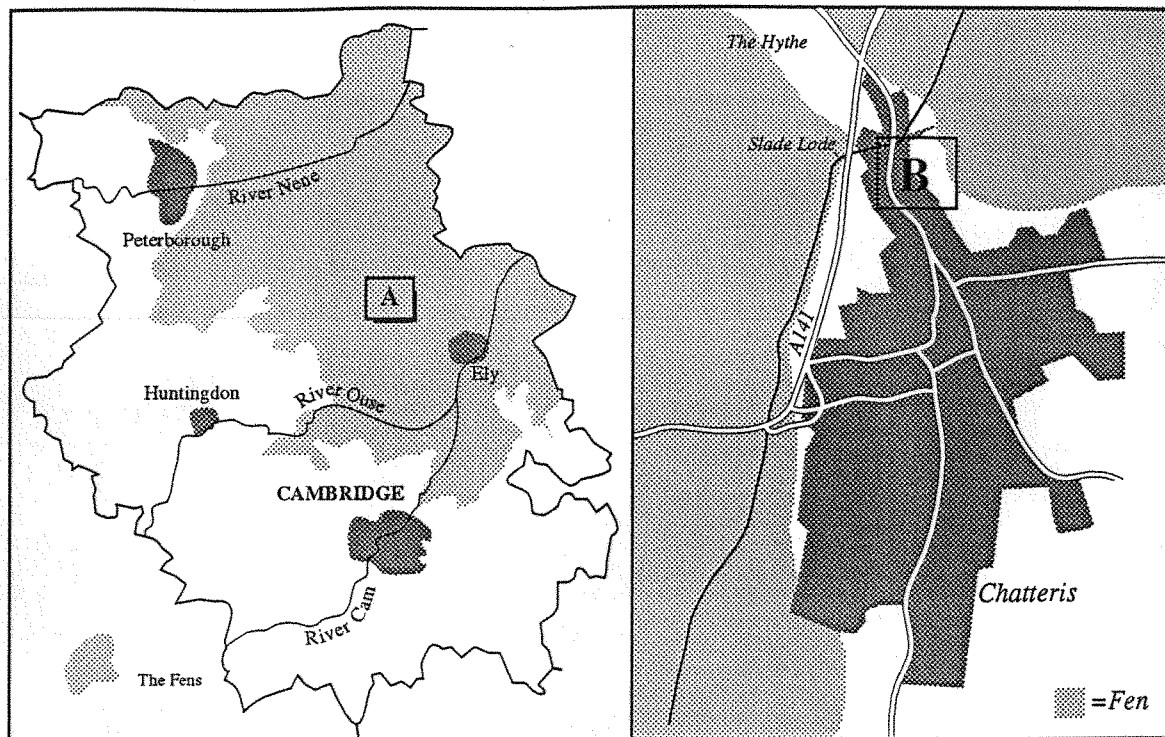
Chatteris is situated on an island of Ampthill clay with patches of March and terrace gravels. The island is surrounded with fen deposits, including peats sealed by marine clays laid down during the early Bronze Age. During the Bronze Age peat fen crept up the gentle slopes of Chatteris island and by the Iron Age peat covered an area approaching that of the medieval period (Hall 1992). Colluvium occurs at the medieval fen edge. Since the 17th century drainage most of the peat has wasted leaving tracts of gravelly skirt soils. The site lies at approximately 3m OD.

The development site appears to have been used for agriculture (mainly pasture) during recent centuries. Enclosure maps and early Ordnance Survey (1836 and 1926 respectively) do not show any development on the land other than that shown on modern OS maps.

## **ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

Chatteris lies 9 miles south of March and 12 miles north-west of Ely, on the main road between them. The road is known as Ireton's Way after the Civil War general who caused it to be constructed to convey troops from Chatteris to Ely (VCH 1953). The main industry of Chatteris was until recently related to agriculture.

During the neolithic period a major river channel with associated tributaries ran close to the northern edge of the island with tidal or intertidal marsh between the tributaries. Much of the island was dry land but the soils were too heavy to attract settlement (Hall 1992). Apart from a flint scatter and a neolithic axe to the west of the modern settlement and a polished axe from Delve Terrace (SMR no. 12004) the majority of



TL

Figure 1 Site Location Plan

finds (polished green-stone axes, flint scatters and pottery) and settlement evidence comes from the southern and eastern part of the island.

During the Bronze Age the peat fen encroached, covering the marine sediments. A considerable amount of Bronze Age metal work has been reported from Chatteris, possibly as a result of cemeteries being disturbed by agriculture. Much of the land at this time was relatively dry. A dispersed barrow-field is the chief monument, occupying the eastern half of the island (towards the fen edge), and comprises at least 15 barrows. Fewer settlement sites have been identified but these appear to be closer to the modern settlement, on the slightly higher ground (Hall 1992).

Intensive Iron Age occupation has been found in two areas with late Bronze Age and early Iron Age pottery forms. Smaller settlement sites of later Iron Age date have also been identified. Chatteris appears to have been an important area in the Roman period with several large sites, the local economy being based on stock rearing.

No Saxon remains have been identified by the Fenland Project survey around Chatteris island, away from the town. It is possible that the present town is built over the Saxon settlement. The main island was subjected to Midland-type strip cultivation, forming ridge-and furrow earthworks, but much of this has been ploughed out in recent years. The Fenland Survey identified ridge and furrow earthworks on the island, around the edge of the town, where peninsulae of higher land extended into the medieval fen (Hall 1992). Water communication to March and Elm were via Fenton Lode and Slade Lode during the thirteenth century. The medieval landing place (*hiþe*) was probably on Chatteris island north of or at Slade Lode, close to the development site. Place name research suggests that the island was wooded in the medieval period (Reaney 1943).

Two manors are known for Chatteris from the medieval period. Part of Chatteris was given to Ramsey Abbey by Athelstan Mannesson and confirmed in 974 by Edgar. A small nunnery was founded at Chatteris between 1006 and 1008 by Eadnoth, Abbot of Ramsey at the request of his sister Aelfwen who became the first prioress of the new house. The nunnery held estates in Suffolk, Hertfordshire and Cambridgeshire (approximately 1682 acres). A church at Chatteris was granted to the nunnery by Bishop Niel in the late twelfth century and confirmed by Prior Roger in the early thirteenth century. In the early fourteenth century the nunnery buildings were destroyed by fire. The church was rebuilt and dedicated in 1352 by the Bishop of Ely in the presence of the fifteen nuns currently living there. An inventory taken at the Dissolution shows the buildings included the guest chambers, guest hall (with buttery) and the nuns' buildings which included the college chamber, northern buttery, kitchen, bakehouse, brewhouse, the frater, the dorter, an old cell, a granary and a cart shed. The church had a north aisle and a vestry. None of the buildings survive and the site has been built over but some of the stone was re-used in buildings locally (Haigh 1988).

## METHODOLOGY

In order to map the potential for archaeology on the land to the north-east of 7 Dock Road, Chatteris the background investigation concentrated on the accessible archaeological and historical resources held by Cambridgeshire County Council.



Record Office and Sites and Monuments Record and documentary sources held by the CCC Archaeological Field Unit.

The known archaeological resource was investigated through the County's Sites and Monuments Record held by Cambridgeshire County Council. Additional published resources such as the Victoria County Histories, Fenland Research, Fenland Survey (covering the parish of Chatteris) and the Royal Commission inventory for the parish were examined. Reports and archives on excavations carried out in and around Chatteris during the past ten years by members of the Field Unit were consulted (Connor 1998, Kemp 1996).

The historical records held at the County Record Office in Cambridge were investigated. The Office holds copies of the Enclosure Award and associated maps. This work was supplemented by consultation of the Ordnance Survey maps of the area. The modern landscape appears to retain boundaries and holdings set out in the medieval period.

Background research was followed by field evaluation. Three trenches were excavated using a wheeled excavator with a 1.6m wide ditching bucket. The total area opened by machine was approximately 180 sq.m. The trenches were planned, photographed and recorded using the standard techniques of the AFU. Modern intrusive features, such as boreholes, were recorded in plan but not excavated.

## **RESULTS**

### **Trench 1**

Trench 1 (50m long) was oriented north-east-south-west and ran parallel to Dock Road. This trench was excavated to test for possible medieval road-side activity as the lode runs close by and a hythe or landing place is known to have existed just to the north-west. The top soil was 0.25m thick and sealed a thin silty clay subsoil (0.1m deep) which in turn sealed the natural clay. Field drains were noted crossing the trench in a north-easterly direction and at the northern part of the trench a water pipe followed a similar orientation. These features and a row of apple trees follow the orientation of a boundary which is recorded on the 1926 Ordnance Survey map.

### **Trench 2**

Trench 2 (35m long) was oriented approximately east-west and revealed a similar soil profile. No features were found in this trench.

### **Trench 3**

Trench 3 (30m long) was oriented north-west-south-east along a fence line that crossed the site. At the northern end of the trench a patch of clay was noted and this appears to be the result of modern activity, possibly a geological test-pit. No other features were found in this trench.

## CONCLUSION

The low-lying nature of the site (approximately 3m OD), the shallow depth of topsoil and heavy clay subsoil means it was unsuitable for cultivation or habitation and was probably prone to flooding from earliest times. The spoil heaps were scanned and apart from a few sherds of post-medieval pottery there were no finds from the site.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank Mr. Aitken of Dawbarns Solicitors who commissioned the work on behalf of their client Mr. R. G. Knight. The project was managed by Paul Sperry. Phil Church worked on site with the author and Jon Cane produced the illustrations.

The brief for archaeological work was written by Andy Thomas, County Archaeology Office, who also visited the site and monitored the evaluation.

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## APPENDIX I

### Sites and Monuments Record Gazetteer for the parish of Chatteris

SMR no	Grid ref. TL	Period	Description
1097	392/841	medieval	manor
1097 A	393/841	post-medieval	house
1377	419/855	Iron Age & Roman	coins
1500	384/837	undated	net sinker
1503	-	undated	quern
1504	386/856	undated	architectural fragment
1505	417/854	Iron Age	quern
1507	38/83	Iron Age	quern
1508	393/859	medieval	drain pipe
1509	392/853	post-medieval	pottery
1512	41/85	multi-period	finds scatter (field walking)
1513	382/879	Roman	pottery
1514	421/858	Bronze Age	axe
1515	418/864	Bronze Age	axe
1516	416/848	Bronze Age	palstave
1517	384/790	Bronze Age	palstave
1520	-	undated	weight
1523	-	undated	spindle whorl
1524	43/88	medieval	finds scatter
1527	434/885	Roman & medieval	pottery
1528	393/869	medieval	architectural fragment
1529	434/885	medieval	pottery
1530	434/885	undated	slag
1531	434/885	Roman & medieval	pottery
1532	41/85	post-medieval	finds scatter
1533	-	Roman	ingot
2026	39/84	Roman	ring
2026 a	39/84	undated	ring
3587	38/79	Bronze Age	axe
3665	380/814	post-medieval	documentary evidence
3666	384/853	post-medieval	wind mill
3671	375/871	neolithic	axe
3672	379/879	prehistoric	worked flint
3673	38/84	post-medieval	pottery
3674	385/847	Roman	pottery
3675	381/876	neolithic	axe
3677	385/892	neolithic	axe
3679	390/852	post-medieval	wind mill
3680	399/830	neolithic	axe
3681	392/812	post-medieval	wind mill
3682	380/884	Roman	coins
3683	39/86	neolithic	axe
3684	39/80	neolithic	axe hammer
3685	396/856	post-medieval	ice-house
3686	39/88	prehistoric	flint axe
3688	393/830	prehistoric	worked flint

3688 A	393/830	post-medieval	bolt head
3697	39/85	Bronze Age	spearhead and shield
3699	396/841	neolithic	settlement
3700	393/858	medieval	documentary evidence
3701	394/861	medieval & post-med	Church of St. Peter & St. Paul
3777	39/85	Bronze Age	rapier
3832	393/858	medieval	nunnery
3862	38/83	Anglo-Saxon	inhumation cemetery
3950	437/840	neolithic	polished axe
4068	428/825	Bronze Age	dagger
4494	413/853	Bronze Age	finds scatter
4495	420/860	Bronze Age	worked flint
4497	432/887	Iron Age	settlement
4498	434/884	Bronze Age	barrow
4499	438/881	Iron Age	settlement
4500	437/881	Roman	settlement
4501	442/881	Roman	settlement
4502	440/883	Roman	settlement
4504	443/884	Roman	kiln
4505	433/883	medieval	manorial site
4505 A	433/883	post-medieval	pottery
4506	433/883	neolithic/Bronze Age	barrow and worked flint
4508	432/883	Iron Age	settlement
4508	432/883	Iron Age/Roman	settlement
4508 A	432/883	medieval	pottery
5222	411/827	prehistoric	ring ditch, henge
5642	409/815	palaeolithic	worked flint
5675	39/82	neolithic	settlement
5804	405/852	Bronze Age	worked flint
5805	416/847	Bronze Age	axe hammer
5808	447/845	post-medieval	wind pump
5809	44/87	palaeolithic	worked flint
5810	445/875	mesolithic	worked flint
5811	442/888	neolithic	polished axe
5812	452/866	palaeolithic	acheulian axe
5813	410/850	Bronze Age	worked axe
5814	417/856	Roman	settlement
5815	481/855	Bronze Age	palstave
5816	410/866	Iron Age	pottery
5816 A	410/866	Roman	pottery
5816 B	410/866	undated	pot boiler
5817	418/855	Bronze Age	axe
5818	412/868	mesolithic	digging stick weight
5822	411/868	mesolithic	mace head
5824	427/842	neolithic	axe
5825	435/885	Roman	settlement
5828	437/839	Roman	settlement
5829	436/840	neolithic	axe
5830	435/876	Bronze Age	worked flint
5832	448/833	Bronze Age	pottery
5833	443/863	neolithic	axe
5834	446/863	prehistoric	polishing stone
5835	447/863	neolithic	polished axe

5836	458/843	post-medieval	wind pump
5863	40/84	medieval	ridge and furrow
5881	434/884	Bronze Age	inhumation barrow
5881 A	434/884	Roman	tile
5881 B	434/884	medieval	hermitage
5887	435/837	Bronze Age	inhumation barrow
5890	444/826	post-medieval	house
5895	40/82	neolithic	axe
5908	447/883	Bronze Age	pottery
5997	431/830	Bronze Age	round barrow
6054	43/85	Bronze Age	spearhead and shield
6055	43/85	neolithic	axe
6113	430/830	Bronze Age	round barrow
6792	442/862	Bronze Age	spearhead
6862	398/818	neolithic	pottery and bone
7943	3/8	Bronze Age	spearhead
7977	419/855	Roman	finds scatter
7977 a	419/855	Bronze Age	pottery and metal work
7977 b	419/855	Iron Age	settlement
7977 c	419/855	medieval	figurine
7979	36/86	Roman	coin
8038	37/88	neolithic	shafthole implement
8039	4/8	Bronze Age	palstave
8042	436/816	neolithic	polished axe
8266	43/86	Bronze Age	spearhead
8379	43/86	Bronze Age	spearhead
8412	446/860	neolithic	axe
8670	394/865	medieval	ridge and furrow
8771	401/854	post-medieval	building
8771 A	401/854	medieval	pottery and ridge and furrow
8771 B	401/854	prehistoric	worked flint
8792	420/855	prehistoric	field system
8793	411/850	Iron Age	finds scatter
8794	443/841	Bronze Age	barrow
8795	437/839	Bronze Age	barrow
8796	433/789	medieval	earthwork
8797	427/838	prehistoric	finds scatter
8798	420/847	undated	cropmark and finds scatter
8799	410/833	neolithic	enclosure and worked flint
8800	410/828	neolithic	finds scatter
8801	411/828	Bronze Age	barrow
8802	401/824	prehistoric	cropmark and finds scatter
8803	401/846	Roman	finds scatter
8817	405/836	undated	ring ditch
8818	436/838	undated	ring ditch
8888	424/834	neolithic	axe
8911	398/849	medieval	ridge and furrow
8912	390/830	undated	enclosure
8913	398/822	undated	ring ditch
8951	411/832	undated	enclosure
8952	413/831	undated	enclosure
8952 A	411/830	undated	ring ditch
8954	405/826	undated	enclosure

9461	411/828	undated	field boundary
9462	436/881	undated	ring ditch
9469	432/884	undated	field system
9470	433/890	undated	enclosure
9470 A	433/890	Bronze Age	worked flint
9471	444/881	undated	ring ditch
9472	418/853	Roman	enclosure
9473	435/888	undated	cropmark
9474	422/856	undated	ring ditch
9475	425/864	undated	enclosure
9476	430/885	undated	ring ditches
9477	436/855	undated	ring ditch
9478	438/855	Bronze Age	barrow and pottery
9479	430/861	undated	ring ditch
9480	438/874	undated	ring ditch
9481	401/858	undated	enclosure
9486	402/822	undated	ring ditch
9487	428/839	Roman	field system
9489	409/831	undated	cropmark
9490	449/842	undated	ring ditch
9567	420/853	Roman	metal detector finds
9567 A	420/853	Bronze Age	spearhead and axe
9567 B	420/853	undated	metal detector finds
9567 C	420/853	modern	metal detector finds
9670	382/877	undated	cropmark
9671	377/881	undated	soilmark
9861	403/860	medieval	ridge and furrow
10662	397/819	undated	ring ditch
10663	399/823	undated	ring ditch
10664	395/845	undated	enclosure
10665	403/826	undated	ring ditch
10666	409/826	undated	linear feature
10667	408/839	undated	field system
10668	411/829	undated	ring ditch
10669	412/828	undated	ring ditch
10670	416/829	undated	linear features
10671	412/830	undated	enclosure
10672	413/856	undated	enclosure
10673	414/854	undated	enclosure
10675	421/835	undated	linear feature
10676	426/838	undated	field system and track
10677	422/846	undated	field system
10678	421/850	undated	field system
10892	441/839	Bronze Age	worked flint
10893	413/849	Iron Age	settlement
10900	414/854	Iron Age	settlement
10900 A	414/854	Roman	settlement
10901	397/847	Bronze Age	settlement
10901 A	397/847	Anglo-Saxon	pottery
10904	392/833	Roman	settlement
10905	405/839	prehistoric	mound
10906	402/834	prehistoric	worked flint
10907	418/836	prehistoric	hearth and burnt flint

10909	389/835	prehistoric	worked flint
10910	396/822	Bronze Age	polished flint knife
11018	422/856	Iron Age	settlement
11036	379/867	prehistoric	flint scatter
11443	398/852	medieval	ridge and furrow
11461	406/867	medieval	ridge and furrow
11462	408/857	medieval	ridge and furrow
11463	408/861	medieval	ridge and furrow
11640	384/838	medieval	ridge and furrow
11641	384/841	medieval	ridge and furrow
11689	411/833	neolithic	enclosure
12004	395/858	neolithic	axe
12047	396/860	post-medieval	parkland



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