

Archaeological Field Unit

**76 High Street, Willingham:  
An Archaeological Evaluation**

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September 2003

**Cambridgeshire County Council**

Report No. B118

Commissioned by Whitfields Associates



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**76 High Street, Willingham:  
An Archaeological Evaluation  
TL 4016 7005**

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## SUMMARY

*On the 27th and 29<sup>th</sup> October 2003 an archaeological evaluation was undertaken on land to the southwest of 76 High Street, Willingham, Cambridgeshire (TL 4016 7005) by staff of the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council.*

*The site had good potential for Saxon and medieval remains due to its location adjacent to the junction of the Willingham High Street and Over Road. No recognisable archaeological features were observed, although three sherds of early post-medieval pottery, a horse jaw and 3 late medieval horseshoes were found in make-up deposits.*

*Sealed beneath a 0.6m thick layer of modern overburden were layers of silt. The earliest feature was a possible paleo-channel, an ancient watercourse, which may have been responsible for the build up of subsequent layers of these silts as flood material.*

*Pottery recovered from the evaluation was dated as from the 16th century and later. The horseshoes also recovered were dated as late 15th to 16th century. This implies that the soils containing most of these artefacts were deposited within a century of one another.*

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# **76 High Street, Willingham: An Archaeological Evaluation**

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

On the 27<sup>th</sup> October 2003 an archaeological evaluation was undertaken on land to the southwest of 76 High Street, Willingham, Cambridgeshire (TL 4016 7005) by staff of the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council.

The project was commissioned by Whitfields Associates in advance of the construction of two semi-detached houses and a bridged driveway. The work was carried out in accordance with a Brief issued by Andy Thomas of the Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeology Office.

## **2 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY**

The Institute of Geological Sciences (Huntingdon: Sheet 187, Cambridge: Sheet 188) show the development site lies on the edge of natural river terrace gravels in an area of high archaeological potential. The site is located on the junction of Willingham High Street and Over Road on relatively flat land. The current ground surface is approximately 4mOD at the western end of the trench, dropping off gradually by 0.25m to the eastern end. The height of the natural geology within the excavated trench was approximately 3mOD at the western end of the trench, with a similar drop off as the ground level. One difference being a deeper section where a possible paleo-channel exists.

An active drainage ditch approximately 2m wide was situated 3m to the north of and ran parallel to the evaluation trench.

## **3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

The development area is located in an area of known archaeology; predominately early Medieval (Saxon) settlement remains. Recent archaeological investigations in the village centre have uncovered extensive evidence of the Saxon and medieval development of Willingham (Cambs SMR CB 1114, CB748, CB15003). In addition later post-medieval (16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> Century) property boundaries have been recorded.

#### 4 METHODOLOGY

A single trench 24m long and 1.6m wide was excavated using a JCB with a toothless bucket under the supervision of a suitably experienced archaeologist. The position of the trench was determined by an active drainage ditch and existing buildings. Following machining the trench was cleaned photographed and recorded using the AFU standard recording system. The spoil heaps were visually scanned for artefacts.

**Figure 1**      *Site Location Plan*



## 5 RESULTS

The soil profile consisted of a mid brownish grey clay silt topsoil overlying up to six, often ill-defined, deposits, which in turn seal natural river terrace gravels. The ground has a high level of root disturbance throughout. This was in contrast to the lack of any obvious animal disturbance in the fairly compacted soils.

### Trench 1

A single trench was excavated on a roughly northwest-southeast alignment a few metres north of the Over Road.

Cut 13 defined a possible river channel, which runs across the trench, roughly east to west. On the western side, the cut was consistent with an ancient watercourse cutting through the gravels. A gravel outcrop suggested the eastern edge of 13. Chasing this edge beyond the gravel outcrop proved fruitless. Further investigation showed that deposit 12 was not restricted to cut 13 just much thicker here than elsewhere, 0.35m as opposed to 0.10m. It was the only deposit within 13 and therefore represents the earliest soil formation exposed during the evaluation.

The horizons between subsequent layers were often ill defined, the major differences being soil compaction and the presence of a greenish colouring which was much more apparent in the lower deposit. The deposits 4, 5, 6, 10, 11 all had this and it may indicate a cess element, which became increasingly conspicuous with increased depth. This colour shift may be due, in part, to soil moisture content enhancing the colours. The lower deposits were noticeably moister than the parched upper deposits due to percolation of water through the underlying gravel. The trench's depth and proximity to the active ditch would account for this up welling. The natural deposit did show an inclination down towards the north i.e. towards the existing drainage ditch. This may indicate that this deposit was formed as an earlier fill of a similar drainage ditch. 6 and 11 represent the lowest deposit overlying the natural clay 7 and 12, which was a thin, root rich deposit, and natural marl gravel 8 and 14.

The first deposit below the modern topsoil 1 comprised a mixed layer of building rubble and imported topsoil 2 and 9 (the additional number represents the deposit at another point along the trench, this system is continued below). This deposit contained occasional brick, tile, pottery and animal bone. The pottery comprised willow pattern type pottery. Below this layer, greyish brown silty clay 3 was uncovered. This deposit was clearly defined, unlike the deposit further to the east where it was within rubble layer 9.

## 6 DISCUSSION

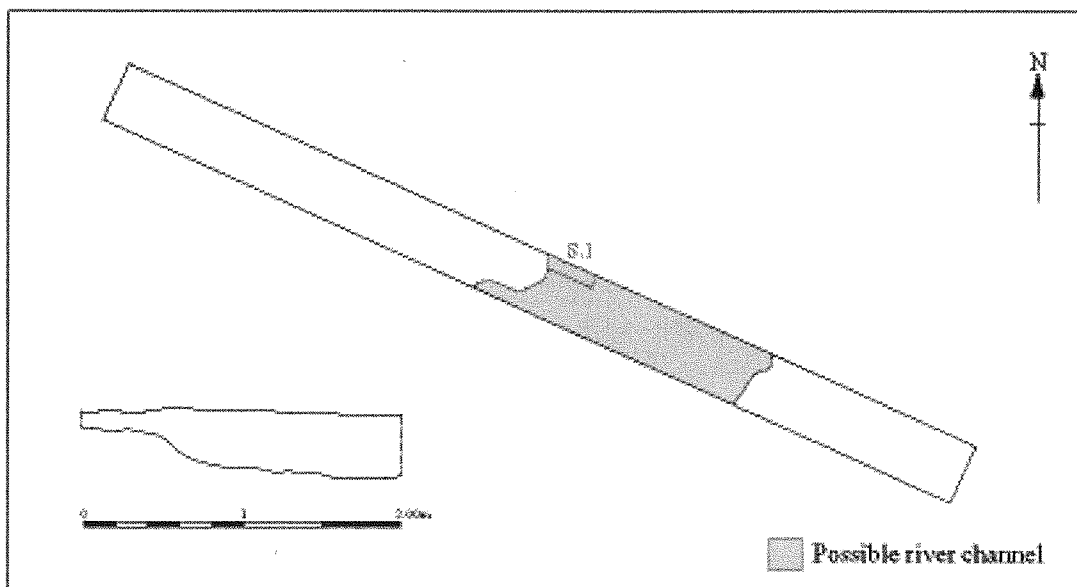
The active drainage ditch may have been dug as a roadside ditch. This is supported by evidence from the 1853 Inclosure Map that shows the ditch parallel to the Over Road

before turning south to run along the rear of properties off the High Street. The 1841 Tithe Map shows that the junction of the Over Road and the High Street was somewhat broader and that buildings on the site correspond fairly well with the evaluation trench location. The presence of buildings would also explain the soil compaction noted during excavation.

The lower deposits 7 and 12 may indicate the course of a postglacial watercourse. This is based on its relationship to the underlying gravels and absence of any artefact evidence to the contrary.

Deposit 11 was sealed between 10 above and 12 below. It was the most significant deposit in terms of finds, having several horse related artefacts in it; teeth, rib fragments and horseshoes. As these finds were located in a relatively confined space one might conclude they are derived from a dumping episode of refuse.

The upper deposits 1, 2 and 9 uncovered in the evaluation represent a relatively modern build up of either domestic debris from No. 76 High Street and / or make up layers for the Over road prior to it relocating a few metres to the south. The upper deposits were extremely compacted and bereft of the normal aeration associated with animal activity, an unlikely occurrence if the area has been used solely as a garden.



*Figure 2 Plan of evaluation trench and section through part of possible river channel.*

## **7 CONCLUSION**

In spite of the plots proximity to the junction of Willingham High Street and Over Road, the limited artefact retrieval and lack of any recognisable archaeological features makes interpretation somewhat difficult. The area may have been dedicated to (natural or minimally managed) drainage rather than habitation. The compaction of the upper soils and the absence of normal soil fauna may point towards the supposition that the site was a previous route for the Over Road.

The status of the deposits 4, 5, 6, 10, 11 is unclear as they obviously contain products of human activity but are not in any clearly defined feature. This may be due to the feature that they are within being very large and the limited extent to which they were revealed by the trench. Alternatively they may represent make-up layers for the road mentioned above.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The author would like to thank Whitfield Associates who commissioned and funded the archaeological work. The project was managed by Aileen Connor. Also thanks to the illustrator Jon Cane.

The brief for archaeological works was written by Andy Thomas, County Archaeology Office, the site was visited and monitored by Kasia Gdaniec.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

The Institute of Geological Sciences: Huntingdon: Sheet 187

The Institute of Geological Sciences: Cambridge: Sheet 188

County Record Office Q/RDc 77 Inclosure Map 1853

County Record Office P 177/27/3: Tithe Map 1841

# APPENDIX 1

## Context List

| Context No. | Context Type                                    | Context Description   | Finds  |
|-------------|---|---|--|
| 1           | Topsoil   | mid brownish grey slightly clay silt. Max.thickness 0.32m         | Occasional coke, 20 <sup>th</sup> century pottery and animal bone fragments  |
| 2           | Dump layer-construction material and soil       | Pale greyish brown clay silt. Max.thickness 0.32m                 | Occasional coke and modern brick fragments   |
| 3           | Layer   | Pale greyish brown silty clay. Max.thickness 0.20m                | Occasional coke fragments  |
| 4           | Layer   | mid greenish grey silty clay. Max.thickness 0.20m                 | Occasional coke fragments  |
| 5           | Layer   | mid greenish brown grey clay. Max.thickness 0.16m                 | Occasional coke fragments  |
| 6           | Layer   | mid grey brown clay. Max.thickness 0.10m                          | None   |
| 7           | Natural post glacial deposit                    | Bluish grey clay. Max.thickness 0.10m                             | None   |
| 8           | Natural   | White and yellowish brown marl and sandy gravel                   | None   |
| 9           | Dump layer-mixed construction material and soil | Pale greyish brown clay silt. Max.thickness 0.28m                 | Two different types of pottery rim sherds of post-medieval redware. Occasional coke fragments. One course brick wall-no foundation                                     |
| 10          | Layer   | dark greyish brown silty clay. Max.thickness 0.20m                | Occasional coke fragments  |
| 11          | Layer   | mid greyish brown silty clay. Max.thickness 0.22m                 | Two complete and one partial horseshoes. Several horse teeth and partial rib fragments. One pottery post-medieval redware fragment (handle). Occasional coke fragments |
| 12          | Natural post glacial deposit                    | mid brownish grey gravelly clay. Max.thickness 0.35m              | None   |
| 13          | Cut of potential water channel                  | Straight sided* (west side only) feature running NE-SW. Width:6m+ | None   |
| 14          | Natural   | White and yellowish brown marl and sandy gravel                   | None   |