



Archaeological Field Unit

**An Archaeological Evaluation at Ailwyn Community
School, Ramsey, Cambridgeshire.**

Spencer Cooper

2004

Cambridgeshire County Council

Report No. 748
Commissioned by Resources Directorate
Property & Procurement, Cambridgeshire County Council

An Archaeological Evaluation at Ailwyn Community School, Ramsey, Cambridgeshire:

Spencer Cooper

July 2004

Editor: Aileen Connor
Illustrator: Sam Whitehead

With contributions by Rachael Fosberry



Report No. 748

©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

Between July 21st and 23rd 2004 an archaeological evaluation was undertaken at Ailwyn Community School Ramsey, Cambridgeshire (TL 2948 8489) by staff of the Archaeological Field Unit (AFU) of Cambridgeshire County Council. The proposed development includes the construction of a new science block on an existing hard play area and the relocation of the hard play area to the east. The project was commissioned by Property and Procurement, Cambridgeshire County Council and was carried out in accordance with a pre-planning brief issued by Kasia Gdaniec of the Archaeology Office, Cambridgeshire County Council.

The only definable feature in the evaluation was a large undated ditch uncovered in trench 4. Due to lack of dating it is difficult to ascertain the exact function of the ditch but it maybe a boundary ditch or a drainage ditch.

The evaluation has made a limited contribution to the understanding of archaeology of Ramsey Abbey and has demonstrated that this site was on marginal land on the outer limits of Medieval Ramsey.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION	1
2	GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY	1
3	ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND	1
4	METHODOLOGY	4
5	RESULTS	4
6	DISCUSSION	6
7	CONCLUSION	7
	ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	8
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	8
	LIST OF FIGURES	
	Figure 1. Location map showing trenches.	2
	Figure 2. Sections of trenches.	5
	LIST OF APPENDICES	
	Finds Quantification	8
	Environmental Appraisal	9

**An Archaeological Evaluation at Ailwyn Community School, Ramsey,
Cambridgeshire; (TL 2948 8489)**

1 INTRODUCTION

Between July 21st and 23rd 2004 an archaeological evaluation was undertaken at Ailwyn Community School, Ramsey, Cambridgeshire (TL 2948 8489) by staff of the Archaeological Field Unit (AFU) of Cambridgeshire County Council. The proposed development includes the construction of a new science block on an existing hard play area and the relocation of the hard play area to the east. The project was commissioned by Property and Procurement (Dean Clark), Cambridgeshire County Council and was carried out in accordance with a pre-planning brief issued by Kasia Gdaniec of the Archaeology Office, Cambridgeshire County Council.

From the outset it was hoped that this evaluation would identify activities associated with the outer precinct of Ramsey Abbey. In view of the close proximity of a medieval tile kiln to the development area there is some potential for medieval industrial/craft activities.

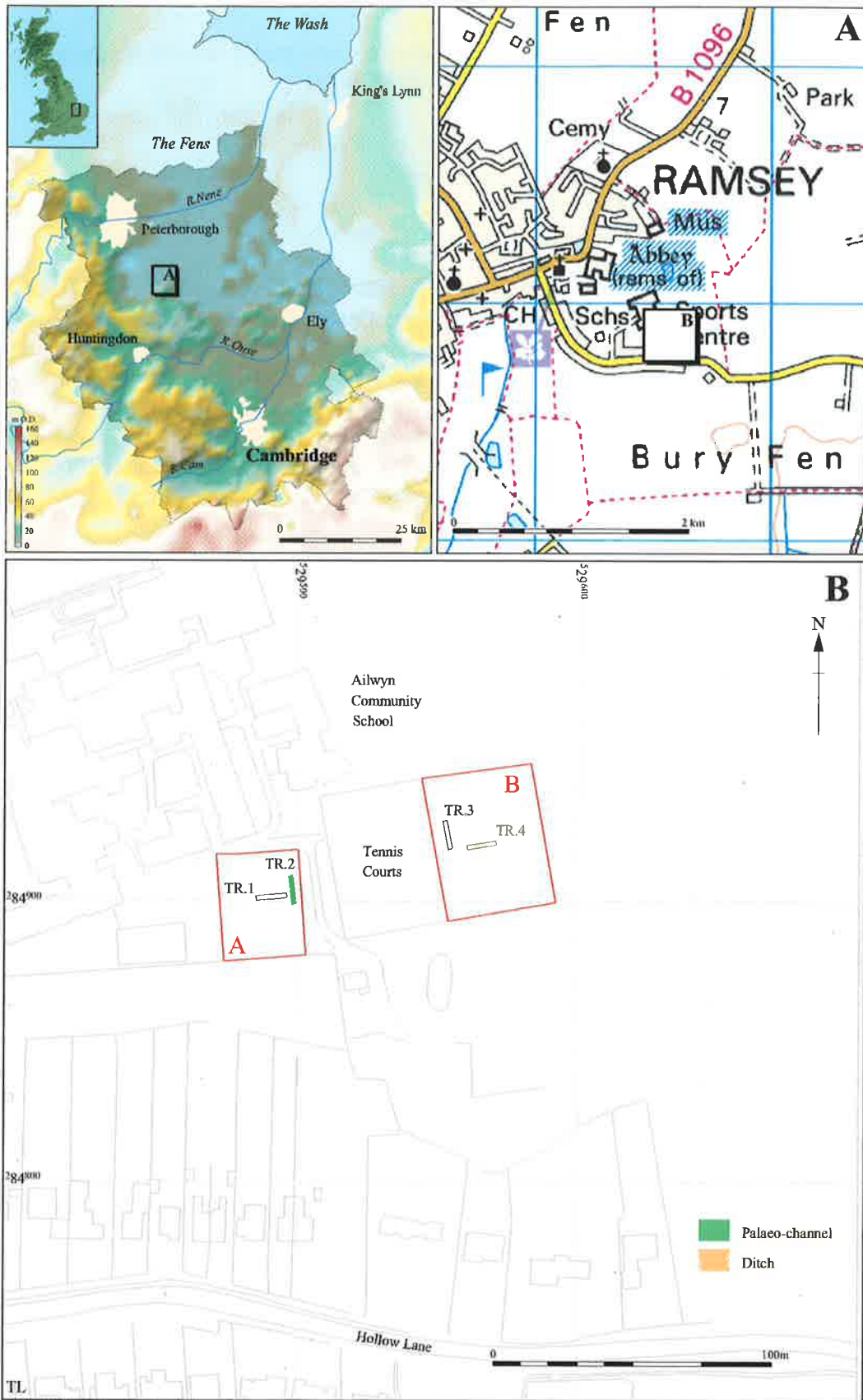
2 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

The site lies on the south-eastern side of the fen peninsula approximately 150m north of Hollow Lane which defined the medieval edge of the dry land. The site is situated on the March gravels (BGS, 1995). The nearest benchmark was 6.6m OD north-west of the development area on St Thomas a Becket's Church.

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The site lies to the south-east of Ramsey Abbey Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM 114) and conservation area.

Although a Palaeolithic axe was discovered in Victoria Road, Ramsey (Hall 1992), this is seen as a chance glacial find, and no other significant Prehistoric finds have been recorded on Ramsey island (Hall 1992). The exception to this is a Bronze Age barrow group, which lies 3km north of Ramsey Abbey, located along the classic spur protruding into the fens.



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 117649X 2003)

Figure 1 Location of trenches showing paleo-channel and large ditch with development areas outlined (red).

The site is located in the grounds of the important Benedictine monastery of Ramsey Abbey and the 1998 investigation (Macaulay, 1999) represented the first significant archaeological work conducted within the environs of the monastic precinct. Other investigative work has centred on the historical documentation of the Abbey and this has been considerable.

The present knowledge of the archaeology of the Abbey is limited. Following the Abbey's dissolution in 1539, most of the buildings were demolished. The accurate location of the monastic buildings, including the Cloisters, Abbey church and Inner/Outer Court boundaries are not known, such was the scale of the demolition. Various theories persist, based upon the interpretation of these surviving buildings. These include the present day Parish Church of St. Thomas a Becket, thought to be the original infirmary built in 1180-90, however this may also have been the guest house (*hospital*); the 16th century gate house and the 13th century chapel, known as the 'Lady Chapel' which is incorporated into the cellars of the present school building known as Abbey House, itself a 16th century house.

Ramsey Abbey was founded as a regular Benedictine monastery in AD 969 by Ailwyn (foster brother to King Edgar), and by AD 974 a wooden church was recorded and dedicated. Substantial land grants led to the church becoming one of the richest not only in the fens, but in the country and was to earn the name of "Ramsey the Golden". The abbey continued to flourish throughout the 11th century, surviving both the Danish invasion and Norman Conquest. In the 12th century the monastic buildings and the church were rebuilt using stone from Barnack (nr Peterborough). It was also in the 12th century that the monastery was seized by the Essex Baron Geoffrey de Mandeville, in the period known as the 'Anarchy' (1140-4), who fortified it, however his son abandoned the abbey shortly after Geoffrey's death in 1143. The abbey continued to flourish up to its dissolution in 1539, when its land, titles and buildings were bought by the Cromwell family who saw to its destruction. Much of the abbey stone is known to have been used to build several Cambridge Colleges (Kings, Trinity, Gonville & Caius) as well as the gate house at Hinchingsbrooke House.

In 1998 and 2002 archaeological excavations were undertaken within the grounds of the Abbey School (Macaulay, S.P. 1999 (amended 2002), *Ramsey Abbey School, Ramsey, PXA & UPD*, AFU CCC Report PXA 12 and Cooper, S & Macaulay, S.P. 2002 *Ramsey Abbey School, Ramsey* summary statement). This investigation uncovered remains from the late Saxon or Saxo-Norman period (10th-11th century AD), a 12th century (probable Anarchy) fortification ditch, 12th-14th century medieval buildings and a lode/canal with associated cranes, loading areas and drainage features. Later demolition and masonry fragments were also recovered pertaining to the Abbey's dissolution in the 16th century.

Within the vicinity of the development area there are records (Eames, E.S 1980) of a medieval tile kiln (Ramsey Abbey was renowned for its decorated

tiles) excavated in the 1960's. In 1966 a kiln was discovered in the grounds of the Ailwyn School and was excavated by Elizabeth Eames, John Cherry and master/pupils of the school. The exact location of this is not known but local rumours (David Cozens pers. Comm.) place it in the playing fields to the east of trenches 3 and 4.

4 METHODOLOGY

A mechanical excavator (with 1.6m wide flat-bladed ditching bucket) was used to excavate four trial trenches under archaeological supervision (Trenches 1-4). A total of 40m of trench was excavated, a c.5% sample of the site. The trenches and sections were drawn at 1:20. All features and deposits were recorded using the AFU single context system. Each distinct cut, fill and layer was allocated an individual number. In the following text cut numbers are presented in **bold** and deposit numbers in plain text.

Monochrome and colour photographs were taken. All the trenches including the spoil heaps were metal detected by Dennis Payne.

5 RESULTS

Trench 1 (Fig 2)

Trench 1 was 10m long and 0.7m deep and located on an east to west alignment. The trench was machined to a depth of 0.7m below surface level where excavation ceased due to the presence of water. A sondage was excavated in the western part of the trench to the depth of 0.90m revealing natural gravel.

The gravel was overlaid by layer 12, a dark grey silty clay with frequent amount of driftwood fragments. This layer was 0.40m thick and contained no artefacts. It was overlaid by layer 11.

Layer 11 was a dark greyish brown which was 0.25m and contained bricks and mortar. It was overlaid by layer 13.

Layer 13 was 0.25m thick and consisted of tarmac and make up for the tarmac.

Trench 2 (Fig 2)

Trench 2 was 10m long, 1.1m deep and located on a north to south alignment. The earliest deposit encountered in this trench was layer 9. Layer 9 was composed of a greenish brown silty clay which was 0.72m thick.

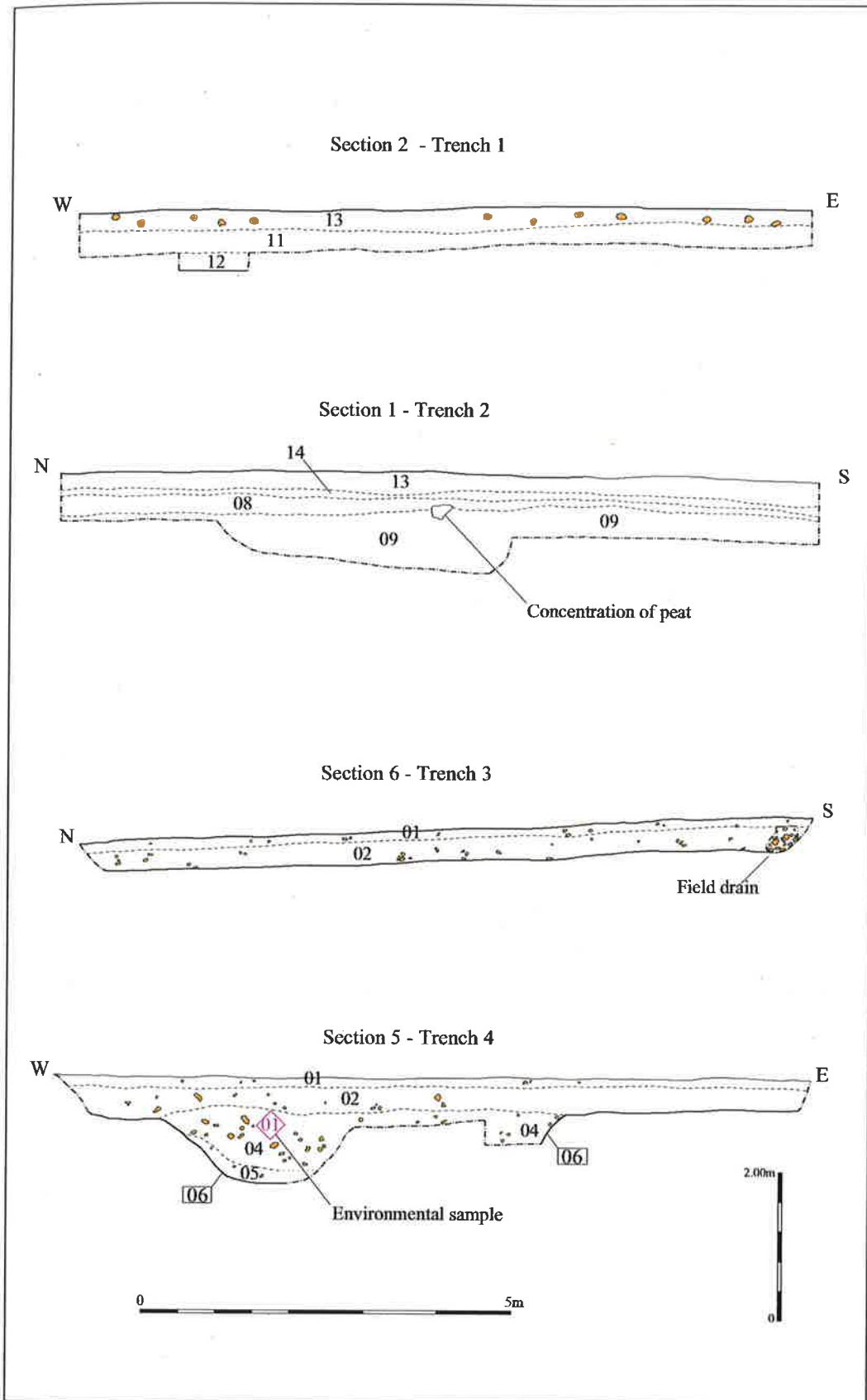


Figure 2 Trench Sections

Layer 8 was sealed by layer 9.

Layer 9 was a dark brownish grey which was 0.34m thick and contained Late Medieval /early post-medieval bricks, fragments of animal bone and worked Barnack limestone. It was sealed by layer 14.

Layer 14 was a yellowish brown silty clay which was 0.10m deep. It was sealed by layer 15.

Layer 15 was 0.25m thick and consisted of tarmac and associated makeup.

Trench 3 (Fig. 5)

Trench 3 was 10m long 0.50 m deep and located on a north to south alignment. No archaeological features were encountered within this trench. The topsoil 1 was 0.18m thick and was a greyish dark brown clayey silt. The subsoil 2 was a mid brown clayey silt which was 0.3 m deep. It contained late medieval/post medieval bricks a sherd of Roman pottery and a sherd of medieval pottery (Grimston Ware AD 1200-1500).

Trench 4

Trench 4 was 10m long and 0.70m deep and located on an east to west alignment. A large ditch, 6 was revealed in the western part of the trench. Ditch 6 was 5.30m wide and over 1m deep and contained at least two fills (4 and 5). Fill 4 was a light brownish silty clay which was 0.82m thick. Fill 5 was yellowish pale blue clay that was 0.20m thick. No artefacts were recovered from this ditch. This ditch may represent a boundary ditch or a drainage ditch. The base of the feature was not exposed due to the high water table.

6 DISCUSSION

Trench 1 and 2

All deposits encountered are water lain in character and either represent fills of a water channel or deposits within a fen/marsh environment. The presence of fen deposits would be of some interest since it would aid us in defining the limits of the Medieval Abbey. Furthermore the presence of a large water channel would not be unexpected, as channels have been identified, in previous archaeological investigations (Macaulay, 1999) undertaken at Ramsey Abbey.

Trench 3

No archaeological features were identified within this trench. The most notable observation being the lack of water lain deposits.

Trench 4

A large undated ditch (5m wide) was observed in trench 4 which may represent a boundary ditch or a drainage ditch. Two sherds of pottery were recovered dating from the Roman and medieval period.

7 CONCLUSION

The primary aim of the evaluation was to identify medieval tile kiln remains relating to the industrial sector of Ramsey Abbey. The evaluation revealed no traces of medieval tile kilns. Despite the paucity of evidence the evaluation has made a limited contribution to the understanding of archaeology of Ramsey Abbey. The evaluation has contributed to mapping the archaeological remains of Ramsey Abbey and aids us in constructing the layout of the medieval Abbey.

The absence of archaeological remains within the development area is linked to the fact that the subject area is at the periphery of the Abbey complex on the fen edge.

The only definable feature in the evaluation was a large undated ditch uncovered in trench 4. Due to the lack of dating evidence it is difficult to ascertain exact function of ditch but it maybe a boundary ditch or a drainage ditch.

The presence of water lain deposits in trenches 1 and 2 may represent the edge of the gravel island and the fen. Alternatively the deposits may represent a large water channel that would have led into the eastern part of the Abbey complex.

The low density of finds and features encountered within the evaluation is surprising considering the proximity of a known medieval tile kiln. A small quantity of Late medieval/post-medieval brick and tile were recovered from trenches 1, 2 and 4. A Roman sherd and medieval sherd were recovered from the subsoil in trench 4. The presence of residual Roman pottery from the subsoil implies activity in the Roman period which may have been obscured by medieval and more recent activity.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank Dean Clark and Shivtel Oria of Property and Procurement, Cambridgeshire County Council who commissioned and funded the archaeological work. The project was managed by Stephen Macaulay and Aileen Connor. The project staff consisted of Dennis Payne and David Brown. Dennis Payne metal detected the site. The illustrations were drawn by Sam Whitehead. The Brief for archaeological works was written by Kasia Gdaniec, County Archaeology Office.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

British Geological Survey (BGS), 1995, *Ramsey Sheet 172 Solid and Drift Geology*.

Cooper, S & Macaulay, S.P. 2002 *Ramsey Abbey School, Ramsey* summary statement.

Eames, E.S 1980. *Medieval Lead Glazed Earthenware Floor Tiles in the Dept of Medieval and Later Antiquities* British Museum Catalogue Vol.

Hall, D., 1992, *The Fenland Project, Number 6: The South-Western Cambridge Fenlands*, E. Anglian Archaeol. 56

Macaulay, S.P., 1999, *Ramsey Abbey School, Ramsey, PXA and UPD*, Cambridgeshire County Council. Archaeol. Field Unit Report PXA 12.

APPENDIX 1: THE FINDS

Context	Object	Weight in kg	Comments
2	Ceramic Building Material	0.43	
2	Tile	1.08	
2	Pottery	0.05	1 sherd Roman Amphora handle? 1 sherd glazed Grimston Ware 1200-1500 AD
9	Ceramic Building Material	1.93	
9	Tile	0.06	
9	Animal Bone	0.02	
9	Brick	0.72	
9	Stone	7.08	3 fragments rough hewn Barnack limestone

**Environmental appraisal of samples from Ailwyn School, Ramsey.
by Rachael Fosberry.**

1. Introduction and methods

Samples were taken from across the excavated area and 4 were submitted for an initial appraisal. 10 litres of each sample were processed by bucket flotation for the recovery of charred plant remains, dating evidence and any other artefactual evidence that might be present. The flot was collected in a 0.5mm nylon mesh and the residue was washed through a 1mm sieve. Both flot and residue were allowed to air dry. The dried residue was passed through 5mm and 2mm sieves and a magnet was dragged through each resulting fraction prior to sorting for artefacts. Any artefacts present were noted and reintegrated with the hand-excavated finds. The flot was examined under a binocular microscope at x16 magnification and the presence of any plant remains or other artefacts are noted on Table 1

2. Results

The results are recorded in Table 1.

Samples 1, 2 and 3 are waterlogged. Sample 1 contains a few flecks of charcoal, Sample 2 contains a single nettle seed (*Urtica sp.*) and Sample 3 contains a substantial amount (600ml) of waterlogged wood. A sub-sample of wood has been retained and refrigerated in case future work is required. Sample 4 contained small charcoal fragments. No artefacts were recovered from the residues.

3. Conclusions and recommendations

A sub-sample of wood from Sample 3 has been retained and refrigerated in case future work (e.g. species id or radiocarbon dating) is required.

The presence of charcoal in two of the samples shows that there is potential for preservation by charring however no environmental information can be deduced from these samples. No further work is required.

Table 1

Sample Number	Context Number	Cut Number	Feature Type	Sample Size	Comments	Volume processed	Volume remaining	Flot Volume (ml)	Preservation	Snails from flot	Charcoal <2mm	Other (from flot)
1	4	6	channel	20		10	10	5	Waterlogged	+	+	800 Nothing recovered
2	12	0	layer	20		10	10	7	Waterlogged			Single nettle seed Urtica sp
3	8	10	channel	20	Sample of wood refrigerated. Samples consists 50% wood. Fragments up to 7 cm x 3cm	10	10	150	Waterlogged			1200 600ml wood
4	9	10	channel	20		10	10	11	Charred		++	800 Nothing recovered



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