



Archaeological Field Unit

**Undated Ditches in the Grounds of Swaffham Prior  
Hall, Swaffham Prior:  
An Archaeological Evaluation**

A. Hatton

September 2004

**Cambridgeshire County Council**

Report No. 757

Commissioned by Miles Group on behalf of Mr M Cazenove.

**Undated ditches in the ground of Swaffham Prior Hall,  
Swaffham Prior:  
An Archaeological Evaluation**

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## **SUMMARY**

*On the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> of September 2004 the Archaeological Field Unit (AFU) of Cambridgeshire County Council conducted an archaeological evaluation on land to the rear of Swaffham Prior Hall (TL 5672 6438). The aim of the intervention was to record and assess the nature of any archaeological evidence encountered, given the subject sites location close to the medieval hall and known earthworks in the grounds also of this date. The work was commissioned by Miles Group on behalf of Mr M Cazenove in advance of the excavation of a lake.*

*Two trenches totalling 70m in length were opened by machine under archaeological supervision. Trench 1 contained two shallow ditches that may form two sides of a small enclosure. Alternatively the two ditches may be all that remains of grubbed-out hedge lines that one divided-up the landscape. No artefacts were recovered from either of the two ditches. Fragments of burnt flint as well as animal bone were recovered from peaty deposit located at the north-western end of the trench. It was not possible to date the peat layer, however a probable post-medieval date (rather than prehistoric) for the laying down of the peat is likely, given known peaty deposits.*

*Trench 2 contained no archaeological features or artefacts.*

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# Drawing Conventions

## Sections

Limit of Excavation	-----
Cut	—————
Cut - Conjectured	-----
Soil Horizon	-----
Soil Horizon - Conjectured	-----
Intrusion/Truncation	-----
Top of Natural	—————
Top Surface	—————
Break in Section	-----
Cut Number	118
Deposit Number	117
Ordnance Datum	18.45m ODN X

## Plans

Limit of Excavation	—————
Deposit - Conjectured	-----
Natural Features	-----
Intrusion/Truncation	-----
Sondages/Machine Strip	-----
Illustrated Section	S.14 —————
Archaeological Deposit	
Excavated Slot	
Peat Deposit	
Cut Number	118

# **Undated ditches in the ground of Swaffham Prior Hall, Swaffham Prior.**

(TL 5672 6438)

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

On the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> of September 2004 the Archaeological Field Unit (AFU) of Cambridgeshire County Council conducted an archaeological evaluation on land to the rear of Swaffham Prior Hall (TL 5672 6438).

The work was carried out at the request of Miles Group on behalf of the landowner Mr M Cazenove. The evaluation was conducted in advance of the excavation of a lake within an area of 2500m<sup>2</sup> (Fig. 1).

## **2 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY**

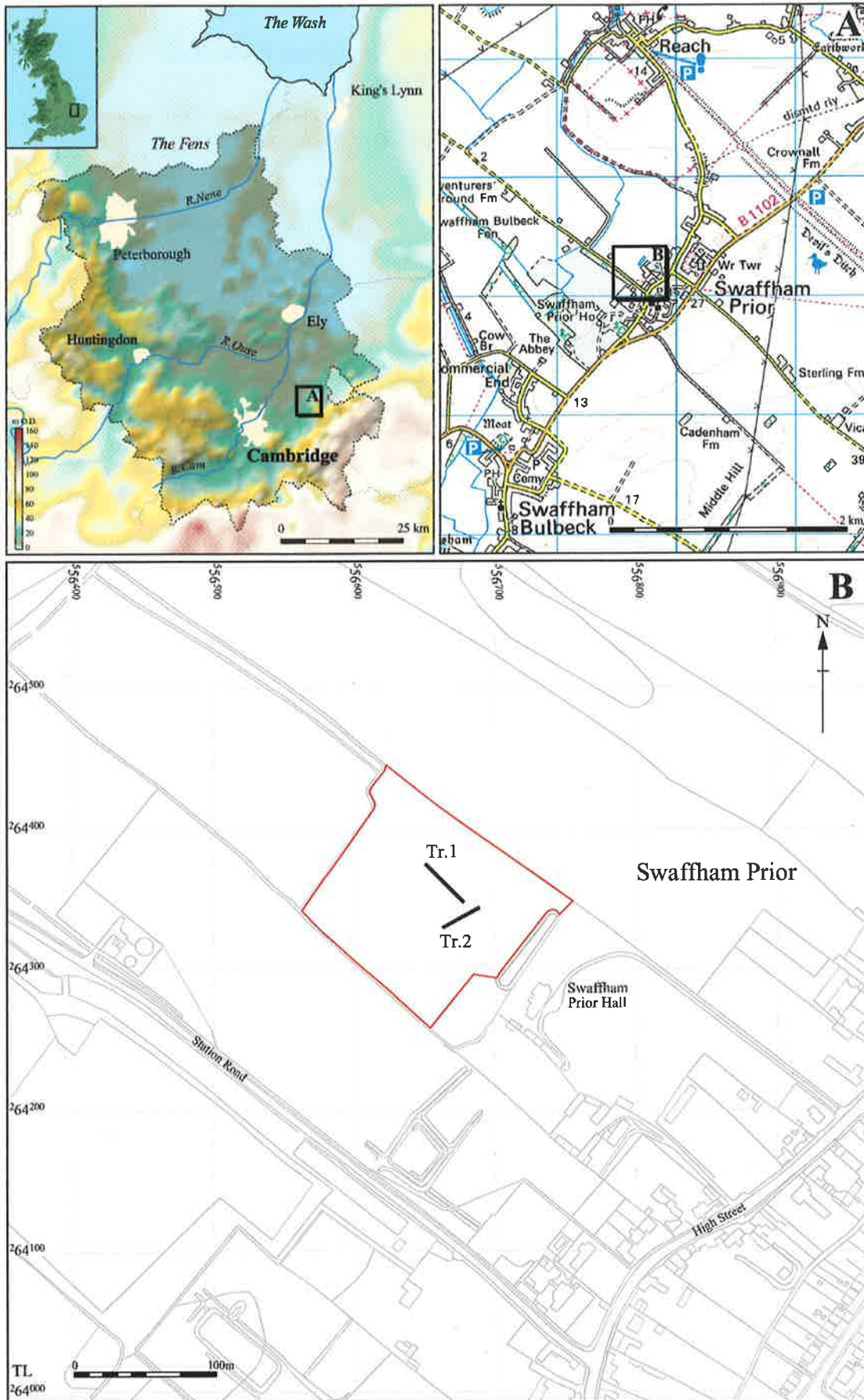
The solid geology consists of Lower Beds Chalk Marl (British Geological Survey sheet no. 188). The area to be excavated incorporates a slight undulation at a height of 10.5m OD, with the lower area of the site measuring approximately 9m OD.

## **3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

Information regarding the site and the surrounding area was obtained from the Cambridgeshire County Council Sites and Monuments Record and from sources held at the Archaeological Field Unit.

A considerable number of historical and archaeological remains together with artefacts have been found in the Parish of Swaffham Prior. These include prehistoric struck flints recovered from the Driest Fen located less than 1km to the north-east of the site (Hall, 1996). Other flint implements recovered from the area to the north and north-east include a flint scraper (SMR 06680), a number of flint cores and blades (SMR 06679), flint tools which include round scrapers, waste flakes and a small core (SMR 6833) and a Mesolithic pebble macehead (SMR 06681).

Excavations to the west of the subject site at the locally known site of 'Gallows Hill' produced evidence for a Romano-British Temple/Mausoleum and Anglo-Saxon Cemetery (Bray and Malim, 1998). Further evidence of



**Figure 1** Location of trenches with the development area outlined (red)

Roman activity in the area takes the form of a villa complex (SAM Camb 32) located at Reach to the north-west of the subject site. Partial excavation of the Fit 1 villa site found it to be a large ailed building of the winged corridor type with substantial walls of flint and Barnack sandstone quoins, and apsidal ends (Atkinson 1893; Browne 1978). The villa is one of a group forming a line on the fen-edge from Reach to Hunstanton, parallel to the course of the Inknield way and the Roman road, Peddars way (Margary 1967).

The north-east of the subject site is Devil's Dyke, the longest and most massive of a series of four dykes possibly dated to the Anglo-Saxon period located in southern Cambridgeshire. Traditionally Devil's Dyke has been seen as a defensive earthwork against attacks from the south-west, during the turbulent early 7<sup>th</sup> century, when conflict occurred between the expanding Midlands kingdom of Mercia under King Penda and the Anglians under Sigebert, Egric and later Anna (Wait 1992). An additional view concerning the usage of the dykes may be that they represent considerable obstacles across established routes acting as deterrents against cattle rustling and also a way of controlling trade (Bray and Malim 1998). All dykes lye across the Roman Road and Ickneld Way, a prehistoric trackway.

Excavation through Devil's Dyke in 1973 (Hope-Taylor 1976) confirmed a post AD 350 date of construction. More recently, in 1991, an excavation through Fleam Dyke provided material for a sequence of radio-carbon dates which showed that construction and use of the monument occurred immediately post Roman period (Malim *et el* 1997).

The place name 'Swaffham' derives from the Old English 'Swafham' meaning 'the Swabian Home – the tribal land of the Swaefe, a tribe from eastern Germany (Ekwall 1991). The earliest documented reference to the settlement dates to *circa* AD 907 (Reaney 1943), and it is recorded again in Domesday Book (1086)

The construction of the parish church of St. Mary (SMR 00323) started in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, re-furbished in the 15<sup>th</sup> century and again in the 19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> centuries. During the early 15<sup>th</sup> century the Church of St. Cyriac and Julitta was constructed within the graveyard of St. Mary's.

To the south-west of the subject site area a number of medieval earthwork remains. Located immediately north-east of Baldwin Manor Farm are the remains of an enclosure (SMR 06558) within which are located building platforms. A moated site is also visible at Goodwin Manor Farm (SMR 01134b). A further complex of earthworks are located approximately 200m to the south-west close to Swaffham Prior House. These earthworks (SMR 01426) consist of two conjoined square enclosures and with the exception of a raised internal bank contained no other visible features. The area of the investigation is located within a large enclosure (SMR 01132b) that was largely visible during the early 1970's. However, since the 1970's much of the ditch system has been either been ploughed-out or largely filled in leaving only a small segment of ditch to the south-east relatively intact.



Also located to the south-east is Swaffham Prior Hall (SMR 1132a), a 15<sup>th</sup> century timber framed construction with clunch walls. Various additions have been made to the hall right up until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, these included a rebuilt parlour (16<sup>th</sup> century) a drawing room (18<sup>th</sup> century) and a timber framed turret constructed to the rear of the hall during the early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (RCHM 1972).

#### 4 METHODOLOGY

Two trenches (70m long in total) were excavated using a mechanical excavator with a 2.5m ditching bucket, under the supervision of an archaeologist (Fig. 1). This provides a 5% sample of the 2500m<sup>2</sup> development area.

The trenches were cleaned by hand where appropriate, planned, photographed, and recorded using the AFU's single context recording system. The trenches were tied in three-dimensionally to Ordnance Survey Mapping.

Trench 1 was excavated across a slight rise in the landscape with a maximum height of 6.95m OD, whereas Trench 2 was located in the lowest point of the area investigated measured at 6.2m OD.

#### 5 RESULTS

##### **Trench 1 (Figs. 1 & 2)**

Trench 1 was 40m long x 2.5m wide and oriented north-west/south-east. It contained two shallow ditches. At the north-western end of the trench the section showed up to 0.32m of greyish brown topsoil (1) overlying 0.3m of mid-brown subsoil (2). The subsoil in turn sealed a layer of black peat (3), which ran up-slope along the trench for a distance of between 2 and 3m. Fragments of burnt (unworked) flint as well as animal bone were recovered from the peat. At the top of the rise mid-way along the trench both the topsoil and subsoil had decreased in thickness to 0.3m and 0.14m respectively. Beyond the mid-point the natural geology had a slight downward slope and at 24m from the north-western end of the trench peat was again identified in the base of the trench and continued to its end. The section at the south-eastern end of the trench showed topsoil thickness had increased to 0.36m and sealed a peat layer 0.2m thick.

Ditch 5 was 0.55m wide, over 3.2m long and 0.16m deep. It was straight and oriented north-south with moderate sides and a flat base. The fill 4 was mid-greyish brown silty chalk with occasional small flint inclusions. No artefacts were recovered from the fill.

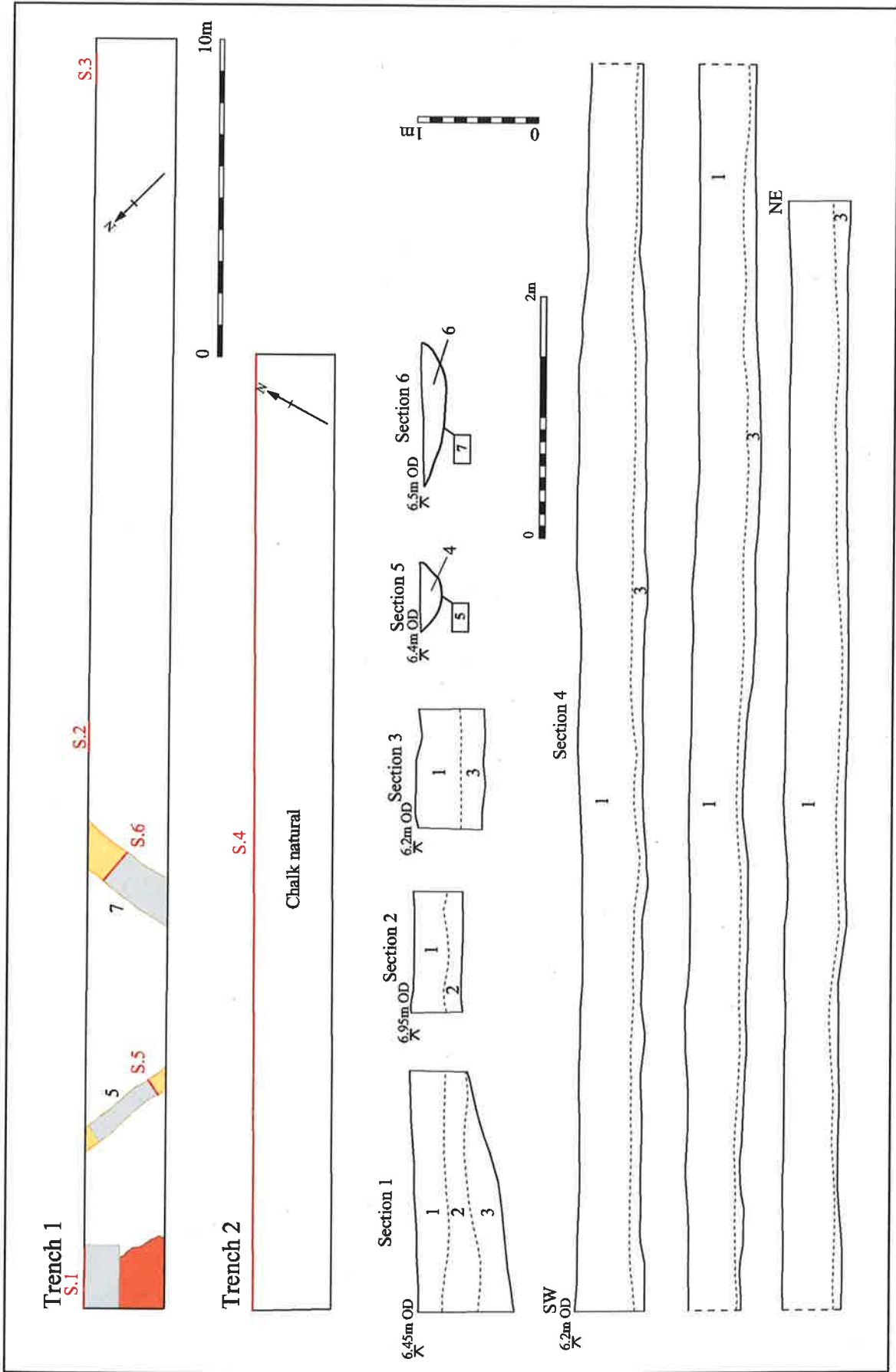


Figure 2 Trench plans and sections

Fig 2 Ditch 7 was 1.55m wide, over 3m long and 0.15m deep. It was straight and oriented east-west with moderate sides and a flat base. The fill 6 was mid-greyish brown silty chalk with occasional small flint inclusions. No artefacts were recovered from the fill.

### **Trench 2 (Figs. 1 & 2)**

Trench 2 was 30m long x 2.5m wide and oriented north-east/south-west. The section showed up to 0.4m of greyish brown topsoil sealing 0.1m of peat, which continued for the whole length of the trench. The base of the trench was found to be undisturbed chalk. There were no cut features in this trench.

## **6 DISCUSSION**

Trench 1 cut across a low chalk ridge on top of which was located two shallow ditches. These ditches may have formed two sides of an enclosure, alternatively they could be the remains of grubbed-out hedge lines which divided-up the landscape. At either end of trench a layer of peat was identified, the produced of continual water inundation. The peat layer at the north-eastern end of the trench produced on excavation, animal bone and fragments of burnt flint (unworked). A conclusive date for the laying down of the peat could not be arrived at, however, the unabridged condition of the animal bone does suggest a possible post-medieval date.

Trench 2 contained a layer of peat but no archaeological features.

## **7 CONCLUSIONS**

The aims of this study were to highlight the potential for preservation of archaeological remains on the subject site and to identify any remains that may be affected by the proposed development. The development involves the excavation of a lake.

The key issue specific to the site relate to its location to the medieval hall and earthworks. There was also the possibility that the sites location in relation to the fen edge may produces evidence of prehistoric activity as well as artefacts.

Only two undated ditches were identified and these are likely to be post-medieval in-date. No other archaeology was encountered within the development area.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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