



Archaeological Field Unit

**Medieval Remains at 19 West End Road, Maxey:
An Archaeological Evaluation.**

Steve Hickling

April 2005

Cambridgeshire County Council

Report No. 796

Commissioned by Accent and Wilkinson on behalf of Elton Homes Ltd

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SUMMARY

At the end of March 2005 the Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Field Unit was called on to carry out an archaeological evaluation by trial trenching at 19 West End Road, Maxey in advance of a small residential development.











This site can be split into two distinct areas; the street frontage and the rear of the area. The street frontage shows intense activity in the period 1150-1350, with ditches and small quarry pits. A wall may date to this period, but may just post-date it, in comparison with a similar site at Willow Brook Farm, Maxey. The rear of the development area appears to have been arable. The field to the north of the development area still has ridge and furrow earthworks, which probably extended south into the development area. These have been flattened in the development area, but an east to west aligned earthwork here is probably a former headland. This headland is adjacent to and on the same orientation as several medieval ditches representing the rear of the street front plots.

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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	
Deposit Number	117
Ordnance Datum	18.45m ODN X

Plans

Limit of Excavation	
Deposit - Conjectured	
Natural Features	
Intrusion/Truncation	
Sondages/Machine Strip	
Illustrated Section	
Archaeological feature	
Excavated slots	
Modern	
Natural feature	
Stone wall	
Drawn section	
Cut Number	118

Medieval Remains at 19 West End Road, Maxey: An Archaeological Evaluation.

(TF 1257 0831)

1 INTRODUCTION

At the end of March 2005, the Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Field Unit (AFU) conducted an archaeological evaluation by trial trenching at 19 West End Road, Maxey. The work was carried out at the request of Accent and Wilkinson on behalf of Elton Homes Ltd in order to fulfil a Brief for Archaeological Investigation issued by Ben Robinson of the Peterborough City Council Archaeological Service (PCCAS; Robinson 2005).

The site is located on the edge of one of the foci of settlement in the parish of Maxey, 600m south-west of the castle and 700m north-east of the parish church. The proposed development (planning application 04/00748/FUL) of this site includes four new dwellings, access roads and a refurbishment of the existing cottage. The Brief called for 100m of trenching to evaluate any archaeological remains on the site.

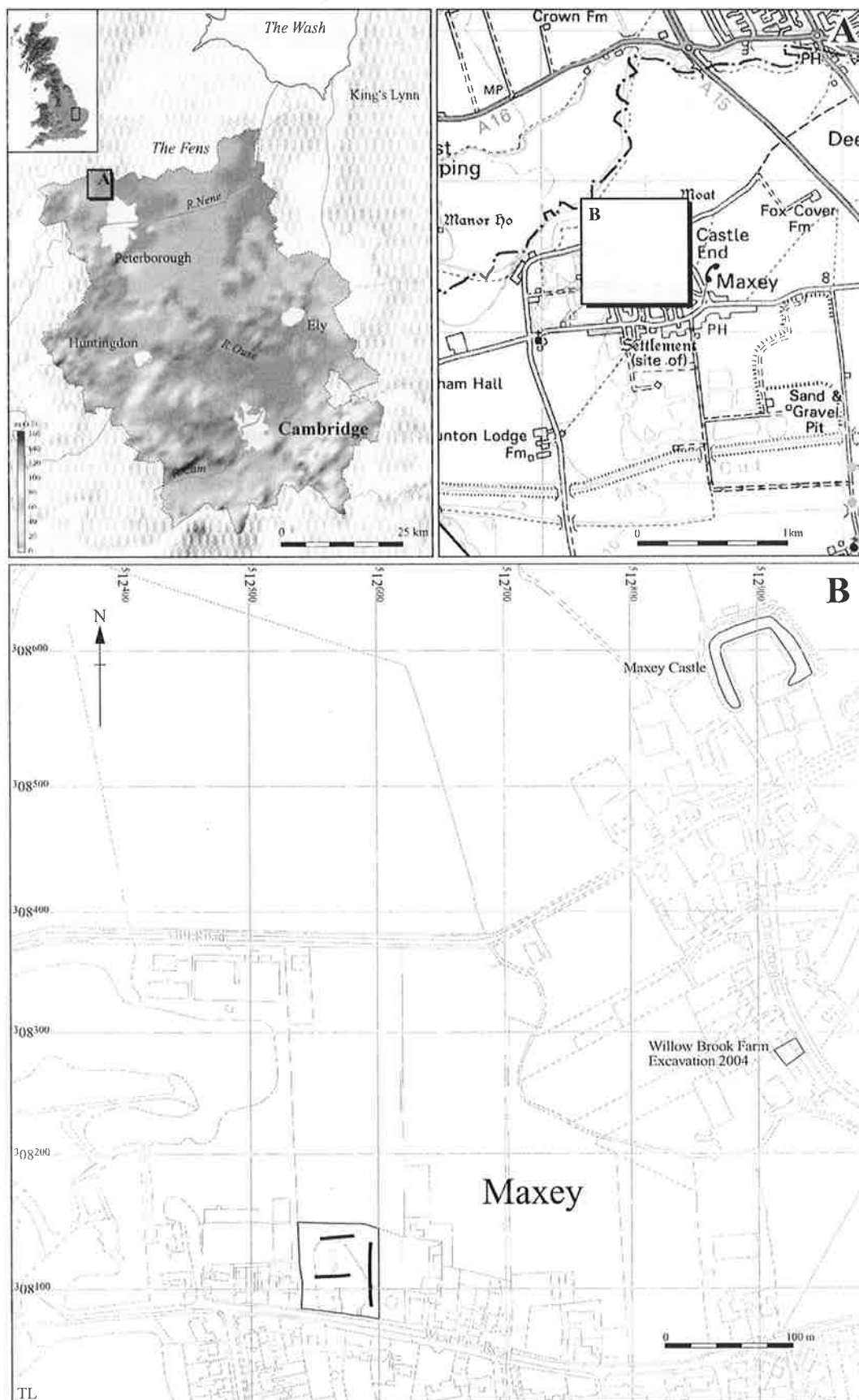
2 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

According to the British Geological Survey Map (Peterborough, Sheet 158, 1:50,000), Maxey is situated upon alluvial deposits overlaying river terrace gravels and Kellaways Clay. It was found, on excavation, that 0.3m of sandy clay overlay gravel.

The development site is at the northern edge of the modern village, 3km southwest of Market Deeping and 8km northwest of Peterborough. The site is flat, at a height of approximately 11m OD.

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Prehistoric, Roman, Saxon and medieval remains are recorded in the Peterborough City Council Historic Environment Record (HER) for the surrounding area and there is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM 23404)



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Figure 1 Location of excavated area (black) and development area (red)

some 600m to the north-east of the development site.

Archaeological studies in the area have indicated an Early Neolithic presence with an organised and ceremonial landscape nearby, between the rivers Welland and Nene. There was considerable forest clearance in the area by the late 4th millennium BC with seasonal pastures and cereal growing. The extension of cleared areas allowed organisation of the land for the alignment and construction of monuments in the vicinity over a period of at least 1000 years. Extensive archaeological investigation in the surrounding areas, threatened by gravel extraction, has identified the archaeological importance of this region (Connor, forthcoming).

The proximity of King Street to the west and the construction of Car Dyke (2km to the north-east) in the early 2nd century allowed greater movement of agricultural produce and other material between the fens and upland regions. Excavations in the area suggest a hierarchy of settlement types with local farmsteads (eg Maxey East Field, Lyndon Farm and Plant's Farm), villas (eg Helpston) and on a regional scale larger sites such as the settlement at Stonea, in the fens, and the expanding Roman town of Durobivae 11km to the south, on Ermine Street. Work at Maxey supports this settlement model, with evidence for small, rural, Iron Age and Romano-British settlements with local trade links evident in the ceramics. Excavations 500m to the north-east, at the Coal Yard (Connor forthcoming) revealed limited evidence for Roman activity during the Roman period.

Two manors at Maxey are mentioned by an Anglo-Saxon charter. These were given by Bishop Aethelwold to the monastery at Medeshamstede (Peterborough) c963. One has been suggested in the area between the church and the modern village (Addyman 1964). Early editions of the Ordnance Survey map show Lolham as a separate small settlement, with its own mill.

In the medieval period, West End was one of the foci of settlement at Maxey. The other foci are located at Nunton and Lolham to the west, the area around the 11th-12th century St Peters church (now isolated to the west of the village), the modern hamlet of Castle End, and at Deeping Gate, 2km to the north-east. Excavations at the Coal Yard site (Connor forthcoming) at Castle End show considerable activity in the vicinity of the present development site between the 11th and 15th century. Occupation at the Coal Yard site consisted of timber buildings on at least two adjacent properties fronting onto the Castle End Road. There was evidence for further timber buildings to the south, possibly associated with a second street, close to the present development site. There also appeared to be industrial or craft activities involving water on the site. There was evidence of burning and demolition followed by construction of stone buildings in the 13th and 14th centuries. Further work at Castle End (Hickling 2003 and 2005) has revealed similar remains of a similar date at the southern edge of the hamlet.

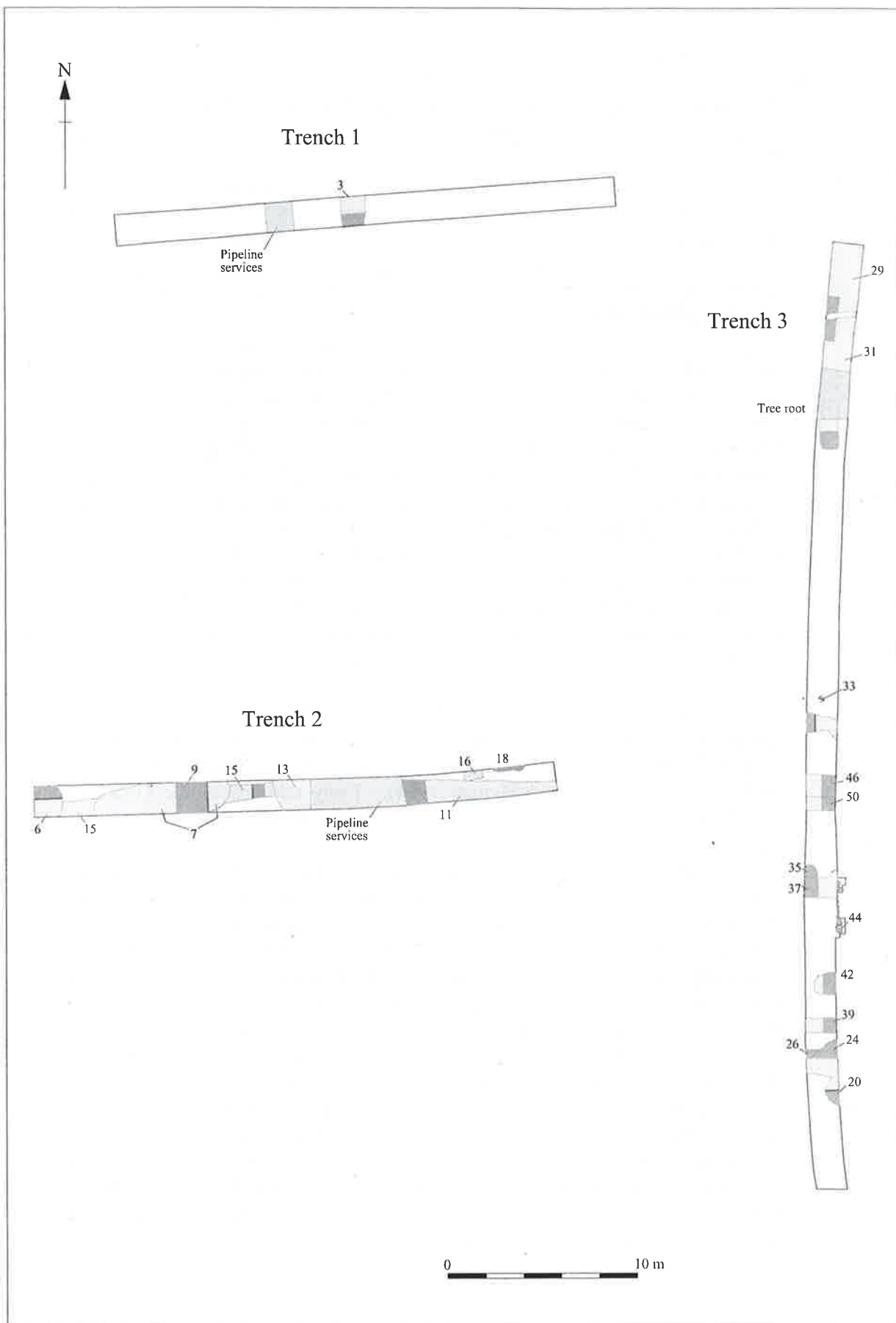


Figure 2 Evaluation trenches.

The HER shows that the existing cottage at 19 West End Road is 17th-18th century in date (HER 50988). A house two doors to the east is of 18th century date (HER 50989), while The Old Vicarage, to the south-east, is medieval in origin (HER 50721). The field to the north of the development site contains upstanding ridge and furrow earthworks. These once extended into the development site, but are now flattened except for an east to west linear mound, which was probably a headland.

4 METHODOLOGY

Three trial trenches were excavated using a JCB fitted with a 1.6m wide toothless ditching bucket, under archaeological supervision. The topsoil and subsoil was stripped down to the level of the archaeological horizons or the natural geology, whichever appeared first.

The exposed surfaces were cleaned in order to clarify any features or deposits. All exposed features and deposits were excavated and recorded according to AFU standards and practises. Sections were drawn at a scale of 1:20 and trench plans at 1:50.

Full context data is presented in the Results section and in Appendix 1.

5 RESULTS

Trench 1

This trench, in the northern part of the site contained 0.3m of topsoil over a mid brown sandy clay with occasional gravel. It was 26.6m long and 1.6m wide, oriented approximately east to west. A modern ditch crossed the trench in a north to south direction 8m from the western end of the trench. This was approximately 1.5m wide and contained a dark brown sandy silt with moderate gravel and modern brick fragments. Just over 2.5m to the east was another ditch (3) (1.25m wide and less than 0.05m deep) which was also on a north to south orientation. Its fill, 4, was amid brown sandy clay with occasional gravel, identical to the subsoil above (layer 2).

Trench 2

This trench, in the central part of the site, was 27.6m long and oriented approximately east to west. This trench contained a number of features.

Feature 9 was a quarry pit which was 6.5m long and over 0.82m deep and contained a grey brown silty clay with fragments of limestone and gravel and 17th-century pottery. Its lower fill (8) was sampled for environmental remains (see Appendix 3). This was cutting ditch 11/15, an east to west aligned

boundary visible along the whole length of the trench. It was in excess of 1.2m wide and 0.5m deep, containing a mid brown silty clay (fills 10 and 14). It was dated by pottery to 1150-1350.

Pit 6 cut this ditch at the western edge of the trench. Only a small portion of this pit was visible, but it was vertically sided and flat-bottomed, 0.8m in depth. Its fill (5) was a brown silty clay and pottery dated to 1150-1350.

At the eastern end of the trench, pit 18 was clipped by the edge of the trench. This was to the north of ditch 11/15 and was steep sided and contained a mid brown silty clay (fill 17) with 14th-century pottery.

Trench 3

Trench 3 in the eastern part of the site was 50m long and oriented approximately north to south.

At the northern end of the trench were two large quarry pits, adjacent to each other, but not cutting, suggesting that they were near contemporary. Pit 29 had concave sides and was in excess of 0.8m deep and 3.5m wide. Its fill (30) was a mid brown sandy clay with lenses of gravel and a fragment of abraded medieval pottery.

Pit 31 had steeper sides and in excess of 0.50m deep. No finds were recovered from its mid brown sandy clay fill (32).

Working south along the trench the next archaeological feature was a small, square posthole (33) with vertical sides and a flat bottom. No finds were recovered from its fill (34).

Ditch 46 was east to west aligned, 1.16m wide and in excess of 0.9m deep. It had vertical sides but was not bottomed. Its fill (45) was a mid brown silty clay with pottery dating to 1150-1350.

This ditch was cutting an earlier ditch on the same alignment; ditch 48, which was filled with an orangey brown silty clay (47).

Ditch 50 had a similar alignment, but was 0.12m deep and 0.7m wide, filled with a light orangey brown silty clay (49).

Feature 35 was a shallow, flat-bottomed pit, containing a dark brown sandy clay (fill 36) and pottery dating to 1200-1350. This was cut by an east to west aligned ditch (37), U-shaped in profile and only 20cm deep. It was filled with a mid brown sandy clay with gravel (38), occasional charcoal and occasional limestone fragments with pottery dating to 1150-1350.

Overlaying this ditch (37) was a wall (44) comprising a single course of squared limestone blocks. Upon further investigation, this wall was found to be only one block thick.

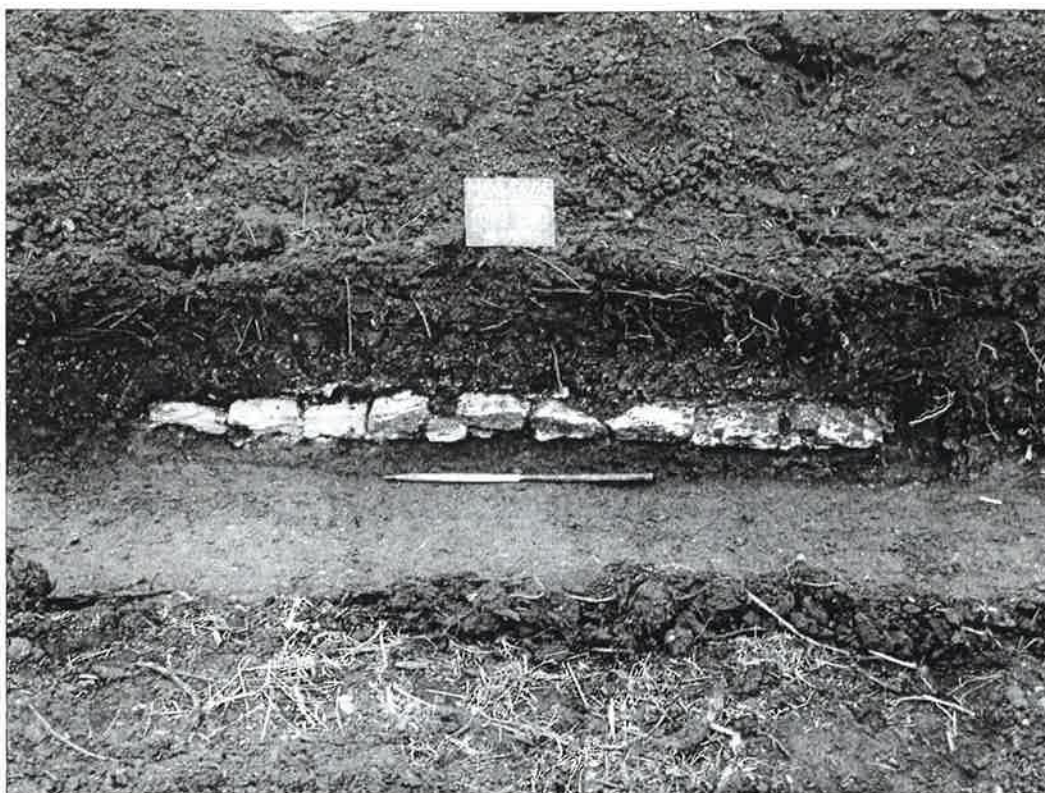


Plate 1. Wall 44

Pit 42 was oval in shape, 1m wide and 0.34m in depth. It was filled with a mid brown silty clay (41) with gravel and pottery dated to 1150-1350.

Ditch 39 was again east to west aligned, 0.86m wide and 0.26m deep with a U-shaped profile. Its fill (40) was a mid to dark brown sandy clay with moderate gravel and occasional charcoal.

Ditch 26 was again east to west orientated, 0.16m deep and 1.2m wide, filled with a gravelly mid brown silty clay (25).

This ditch was cut by pit 24, probably another quarry pit, 0.75m deep and 2m wide. This had three fills: Primary fill (23) was a mid orangey brown silty clay with fine gravel, overlain by (22) a mid brown silty clay with very frequent gravel and pottery dated to 1150-1350. The top fill (21) was a mid greyish brown silty clay.

Pit 24 was cutting an earlier pit (28) of which there was not much remaining. Its fill (27) was a mid greyish brown silty clay with a little gravel and lenses of orangey brown material.

Feature 20 was a quarry (0.65m wide and 0.52m deep) with steep sides and an irregular flat base. Its fill (19) was a mid brown silty clay with a little gravel and pottery dated to 1150-1350.

6 DISCUSSION

This site shows intense domestic occupation at the street front up until the late 14th century. Occupation is then absent until the 17th century when quarrying activity resumed and the present cottage was built.

Comparisons with recent work in the neighbouring hamlet of Castle End (Hickling 2005), 200m to the north-east are strong. There, although settlement starts a little earlier (900-1150), the same pattern is followed, with intense activity in the period 1150-1350 followed by a decline until the period 1450-1630. Despite this, building in stone only occurred after 1350, suggesting that although activity was less intense, it was more permanent and possibly of higher status than before.

It is tempting on this site, to date the wall (44) as 1350-1450. This feature is known stratigraphically to post date ditch 37, dated to 1150-1350, and stylistic comparisons can be drawn to walls dated to 1350-1450 at Castle End (Hickling 2005).

7 CONCLUSIONS

This site can be split into two distinct areas; the street frontage and the rear of the area. The street frontage shows intense activity in the period 1150-1350, with ditches and small quarry pits. Wall 44 possibly dates to this period, but may just post-date it, in comparison with a similar site at Castle End. The rear of the development area appears to have been arable. The field to the north of the development area still has ridge and furrow earthworks, which probably extended south into the development area. They have been flattened in the development area, but an east to west aligned earthwork here is probably a former headland. This headland is adjacent to and on the same orientation as several medieval ditches representing the rear of the street front plots.

Sampling of pit 9 (Appendix 3), dated to the 17th century, revealed domestic refuse containing grain, chaff and mussel shell, as well as a fine iron pin.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank Accent and Wilkinson, on behalf of Elton Homes Ltd, who commissioned and funded the archaeological work. The project was managed by Judith Roberts. Thanks are due to Spencer Cooper and Dennis Payne who assisted in the fieldwork. Dennis Payne also conducted

a metal detector survey of the site. Carlos Silva prepared the illustrations, while Carole Fletcher examined the pottery.

The brief for archaeological works was written by Ben Robinson, Peterborough City Council Archaeology Service, who visited the site and monitored the evaluation.

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APPENDIX 1: Context Data

Context Number	Feature	Trench	Description	Date
1	Layer	1	Topsoil	Modern
2	Layer	1	Subsoil	
3	Ditch	1	North to south orientated	
4	3	1		
5	6	2		1150-1350
6	Pit	2	Quarry pit	1150-1350
7	9	2		
8	9	2		1600-1700
9	Pit	2	Quarry pit	1600-1700
10	11	2		1150-1350
11	Ditch	2	Same as 15. East to west aligned	1150-1350
12	11	2		
13	Pit	2	Unexcavated modern feature	
14	15	2		1150-1250
15	Ditch	2	Same as 11	1150-1250
16	Pit	2	Unexcavated modern feature	
17	18	2		1300-1400
18	Pit	2	Quarry pit	1300-1400
19	20	3		1150-1350
20	Pit	3	Quarry pit	1150-1350
21	24	3		
22	24	3		1150-1350
23	24	3		
24	Pit	3	Quarry pit	1150-1350
25	26	3		
26	Ditch	3	East to west aligned	
27	28	3		
28	Pit	3	Quarry pit	
29	Pit	3	Quarry pit	1150-1350+
30	29	3		1150-1350+
31	Pit	3	Quarry Pit	
32	31	3		
33	Posthole	3		
34	33	3		
35	Pit	3	Shallow pit	1200-1350
36	35	3		1200-1350
37	Ditch	3	East to west aligned	1150-1350
38	37	3		1150-1350
39	Ditch	3	East to west aligned	
40	39	3		
41	42	3		1150-1350
42	Pit	3	Quarry pit	1150-1350
43	Layer	3	Subsoil below wall 44	
44	Masonry	3	Possible dwarf wall	
45	46	3		1150-1350
46	Ditch	3	Large boundary ditch, east to west aligned	1150-1350
47	48	3		
48	Ditch	3	East to west aligned	
49	50	3		
50	Ditch	3	East to west aligned	
51	U/S	3	Finds from above wall 44	

APPENDIX 2: Pottery Spot Dates

by Carole Fletcher and Paul Spoerry

Context Number	Feature	Description	Date
99999	Un stratified	Post medieval red wares, Bourne B, Bourne D and Essex sandy ware.	1450-1650
5	6	Northamptonshire shelly wares	1150-1350
8	9	Bourne D and Staffordshire	1600-1700
10	11	Northamptonshire shelly wares, Stamford and unknown	1150-1350
14	15	Developed Stamford	1150-1250
17	18	Northamptonshire shelly ware and Bourne B	1300-1400
19	20	Northamptonshire shelly ware and Stamford ware	1150-1350
22	24	Northamptonshire shelly ware	1150-1350
30	29	Northamptonshire shelly ware	1150-1350
36	35	Northamptonshire shelly ware, Bourne B and Bourne D (probably intrusive)	1200-1350
38	37	Northamptonshire shelly ware	1150-1350
41	42	Northamptonshire shelly ware and developed Stamford ware	1150-1350
45	46	Northamptonshire shelly ware	1150-1350

APPENDIX 3: Environmental Appraisal

by Rachel Fosberry

Introduction and Methods

A single ten-litre bulk sample was taken from context 8, the fill of a large pit (9) dating to the 17th century and was submitted for an initial appraisal. The sample was 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.

Results

The residue contains several small bones, a single fragment of burnt bone, a few fragments of mussel shell, a single sherd of pottery and a very fine iron pin.

The flot contains numerous charred cereal grains, mostly wheat with some barley and oat/rye grains. Preservation is by charring and is generally poor to moderate with the majority of the grains being puffed and fragmented. A few culm nodes and a single rachis fragment are also present.

Charred weed seeds include *Lithospermum arvense* (Field Gromwell) *Vicia/Lathyrus* (vetch/pea), *Medicago lupulina* (Black Medick) and *Rumex crispus* (Curled Dock). Modern contaminants in the form of rootlets are also present.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The plant remains recovered from this sample are dominated by the grains of crop plants, namely cereals (wheat, barley, and oats/rye). The poor preservation of the majority of the grains resulting in a honeycomb texture is characteristic of severe or repeated charring at high temperatures and/ or for a long period of time. The grains may have been accidentally burnt while being dried prior to storage or during cooking over open fires.

Cereal chaff in the form of culms nodes and rachis internode fragments and seeds of arable weeds are present in low numbers and would have originally been associated with the crops when harvested. These seeds/chaff fragments are of similar size to the cereal grains and would be the last contaminants to be picked out by hand during secondary crop processing prior to consumption.

Smaller seeds present include segetal taxa such as dock, vetch and medick, which may be indicative of ground disturbed by pit digging.

The other dietary remains of fragments of animal bone and mussel shells along with the charred grain are probably derived from the deposition of small quantities of burnt domestic refuse.

APPENDIX 4: Animal Bone

by Steve Hickling

Context	Description	Date
8	<i>Cow/horse leg (with butchery marks) and foot bones and probable jaw fragments</i>	1600-1700
17	<i>3 fragments of unknown skull</i>	1300-1400
40	<i>Long bone fragment from sheep or pig, wild boar tusk</i>	
41	<i>3 fragments, rib, long bone and possibly lower jaw. Sheep/pig(?)</i>	1150-1350
45	<i>Sheep(?) tarsal fragment</i>	1150-1350

The assemblage is small, but interesting in that it suggests a move from sheep to cow rearing. This shift is not reflected at Willow Brook Farm (Hickling 2005), so may be result of small assemblage.



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