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CCC AFU Report Number 841

**Prehistoric Remains at Land off
Weatherall's Close, Soham,
Cambridgeshire**

Archaeological Evaluation

Steve Hickling

November 2005

Cover Images

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Roman corn dryer, Duxford	Guided walk along Devil's Dyke
Bronze Age shaft, Fordham Bypass	Medieval well, Soham
Human burial, Barrington Anglo-Saxon Cemetery	Timbers from a medieval well, Soham
Blue enamelled bead, Barrington	Bed burial reconstruction, Barrington Anglo-Saxon Cemetery
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Archaeological Evaluation

Steve Hickling BA MA

Site Code: SOH WEC 05
CHER Event Number: ECB 2089
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Summary

On the 7th and 8th of November 2005, the Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Field Unit conducted an archaeological evaluation on land at Weatherall's Close, Soham, in advance of the construction of new houses.

Although very little archaeological material was discovered during this exercise, it does shed light on the development of the agricultural landscape around Soham.

Between the topsoil and the natural geology was a layer of subsoil, probably originating with medieval ridge and furrow agriculture.

The one ditch discovered was probably part of a Late Bronze Age or Early Iron Age field-system. Its orientation is not the same as similar ditches found at Ten Bell Lane (Atkins 2004), and totally different to the probable medieval ridge and furrow which covered the site.

There was no evidence that the medieval core of Soham extended this far out.

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Drawing Conventions

Sections	Plans
Limit of Excavation	Limit of Excavation
Cut	Deposit - Conjectured
Cut - Conjectured	Natural Features
Soil Horizon	Intrusion/Truncation
Soil Horizon - Conjectured	Sondages/Machine Strip
Intrusion/Truncation	Illustrated Section
Top of Natural	Deposit
Top Surface	Excavated Slot
Break in Section	Modern
Cut Number 118	Furrow
Deposit Number 117	Cut Number 118
Ordnance Datum $\frac{18.45m}{\times}$ ODN	

1 Introduction

This archaeological evaluation was undertaken in accordance with a Brief issued by Andy Thomas of the Cambridgeshire Archaeology, Planning and Countryside Advice team (CAPCA), supplemented by a Specification prepared by Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Field Unit (CCC AFU).

The development consists of 22 housing plots with associated services (see Fig.1).

The work was designed to assist in defining the character and extent of any archaeological remains within the proposed redevelopment area, in accordance with the guidelines set out in *Planning and Policy Guidance 16 - Archaeology and Planning* (Department of the Environment 1990). The results will enable decisions to be made by CAPCA, on behalf of the Local Planning Authority, with regard to the treatment of any archaeological remains found.

The site archive is currently held by CCC AFU and will be deposited with the appropriate county stores.

2 Geology and Topography

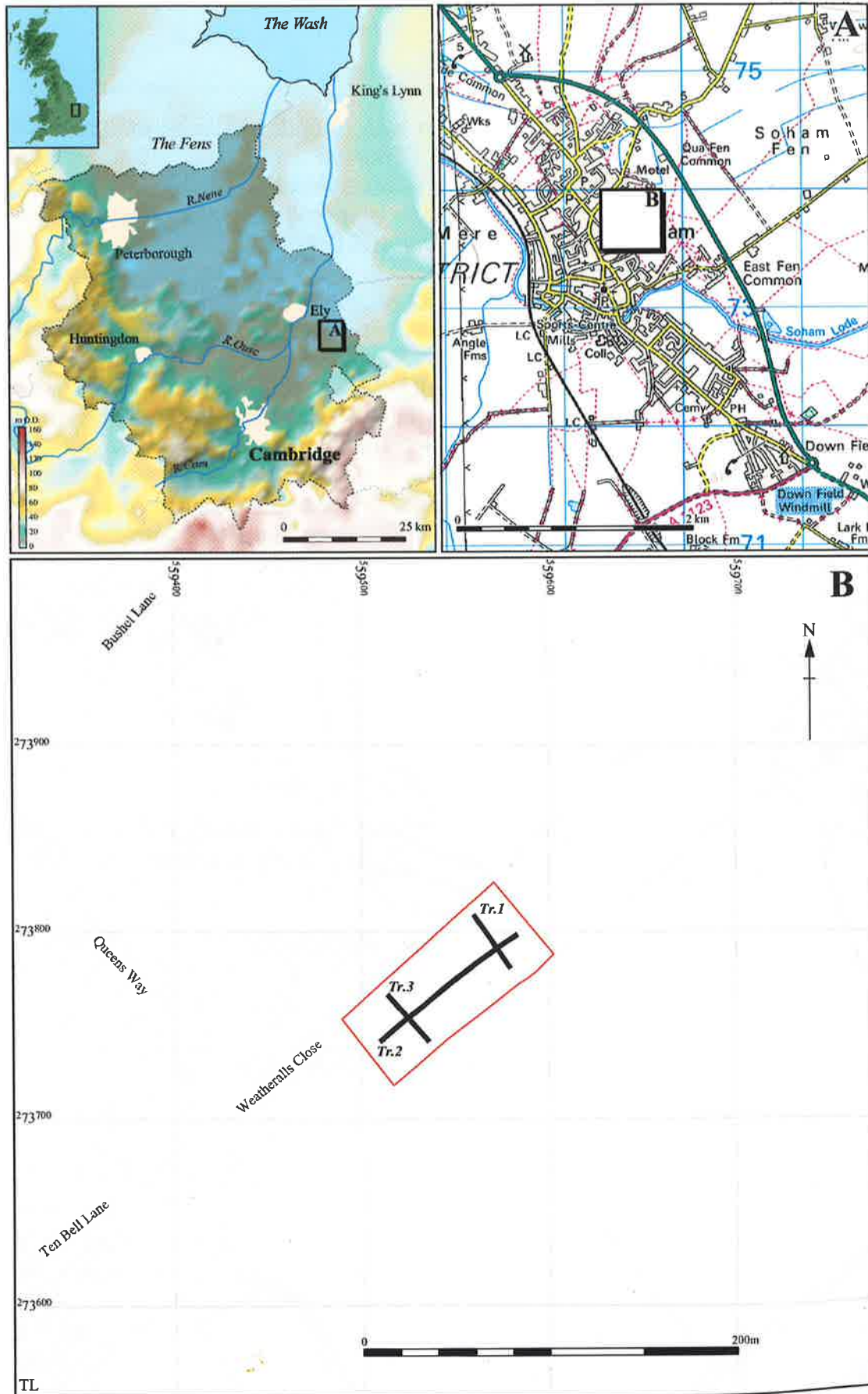
The site overlies 2nd terrace gravel (British Geological Survey 1981). The natural geology exposed on site being a mix of sand, silt and gravel with chalk rich patches.

The site was flat, lying at a height of c.7.5m OD.

3 Archaeological and Historical Background

3.1 Prehistoric

The Fen-edge around Soham and the Snail Valley has a long history of human activity. Mesolithic and Neolithic remains have been recorded to the north-west of Broad Hill, where a large quantity of worked flints, including axes, knives and scrapers, were recovered (Hall 1996). Immediately to the north-east of the village of Soham and in the vicinity of this site the HER records Neolithic to Late Bronze Age stray finds, namely lithic artefacts (MCB8560, 12952, 12953 and 14568) and a Late Bronze Age brooch (MCB12953).



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

The evidence for later prehistoric (Iron Age) activity in and around Soham is, however, limited. One site has been located on the hilltop at Henney, on the periphery of Stuntney and Ely where Iron Age remains are fairly common (Hall 1996). Iron Age features were found to the south-west of the site, on Clay Lane and possibly represent an enclosure (Nichol 2002).

3.2 Roman

Coins of Roman date have been found south-east of the site (MCB8554), not far from an undated ring ditch (MCB8561). Human skeletal remains of possible Roman date have been found in the area of White Hart Lane (MCB8413). Closer to the site, at 100m to the north-west, Roman finds have been noted (MCB8559).

3.3 Anglo-Saxon

Early Saxon occupation at Soham is documented by funerary remains from three cemeteries. Burials were discovered in the church graveyard (TL 5998 7239) where grave-goods and stray finds included brooches, several beads and spearheads (Fox 1923). Another cemetery was located at the Soham/Fordham Waterworks during excavations conducted in the 1930s (Lethbridge 1933). Some 23 furnished inhumations (and 2 cremations) were identified and assigned to the 6th-7th century. Further Anglo-Saxon human skeletal remains (MCB 13882) were uncovered in the rear garden of a house located on White Hart Lane. Evidence suggested that they were not *in situ*, and may have originally belonged to the same cemetery as the burials from the church graveyard (Robinson 1995).

Present day Soham is Early Saxon in origin. According to Reaney, the place name is derived from the Old English *Soegan Hamm* or 'swampy' settlement or enclosure (Reaney 1943).

Further documentary sources refer to the foundation in the 7th-century AD of a monastery by St Felix, first bishop of the East Angles, who was buried in Soham. The monastery was destroyed during the Danish invasions of East Anglia (late 9th century) along with many other religious foundations in the area, never to be re-established (Salzman 1948). As yet there has been no archaeological evidence for Middle Saxon activity in Soham (Atkins 2004). The manor of Soham was given to Ely Abbey shortly after the re-foundation of the latter in the 10th century (Conybeare 1897). The exact location of the monastery is unknown, although it is possible that the parish church of St Andrew's (late 12th century) was founded on the site of the Saxon predecessor.

The sub-circular pattern of roads around the centre of the village suggests a religious precinct (Oosthuizen 2000).

Soham is thought to have held an unchartered market before the 12th century (Ridout 2000).

Evidence for occupation during the Late Saxon-Early Norman period has emerged through recent excavations. At Nos 9-13 Pratt Street, 300m south-west of the site, an archaeological evaluation revealed shallow gullies, a posthole and a large pit containing 11th-to 12th-century sherds of Thetford type ware (Hatton and Last 1997).

Evaluation trenches at the rear of No. 38 Station Road produced evidence of ditches dating from the 10th to 12th centuries (Heawood 1997).

An archaeological evaluation was conducted at Soham County Infant's School, where several ditches were revealed. The features contained an assemblage of pottery sherds (10th to 13th century), predominantly St Neots and Thetford type ware (Bray 1991).

The remains from the Infant's School (and from High Street/Clay Street) represent a major phase of development and prosperity that is attested by the construction of St Andrew's Church in the late 12th century (Hatton and Last 1997).

3.4 Recent Archaeological Fieldwork

An evaluation at St Andrews House, Soham, produced a Bronze Age ditch, a Saxo-Norman ditch and medieval (13th to post-medieval) pits, ditches and postholes (Casa Hatton 2000).

A large evaluation at the Fordham Road allotments produced settlement remains dating to the Late Bronze Age or Early Iron Age and the Roman periods (Connor 2001).

An evaluation at Clay Street produced a few Early Iron Age features, with some Saxo-Norman pits and ditches and 13th to 14th century ditches, pits and a posthole structure (Atkins 2004a).

A small evaluation at Ten Bell Lane produced one late medieval quarry pit and some undated ditches (Atkins 2004b).

Another small evaluation at Brook Dam Lane produced one possibly medieval pit and a post-medieval ditch (Cooper 2004a).

A small evaluation on Market Street, close to the centre of the town produced evidence of a late Saxon building and 12th to 13th century pits and ditches (Cooper 2004b).

A large excavation at Cloverfield Drive (Mortimer and Hickling forthcoming) revealed medieval settlement and earlier field boundaries and water holes.

3.5 Archaeological Potential

In light of the above, there is considerable potential that archaeological remains of Neolithic to Roman periods lie scattered across this part of the island, as witnessed by stray finds and cropmarks. The focus of Late Saxon to medieval settlement is known from fieldwork to have extended to within 100m of the south-western edge of the site. It is quite possible that evidence for related activity in this period will also be found.

4 Methodology

The objective of this evaluation was to determine as far as reasonably possible the presence/absence, location, nature, extent, date, quality, condition and significance of any surviving archaeological deposits within the development area.

The Brief required that 5% of the development area should be evaluated. A total of 160m of trenching was opened, totalling 336m².

Machine excavation was carried out under constant archaeological supervision with a tracked 20-ton 360°-type excavator using a toothless ditching bucket.

Spoil, exposed surfaces and features were scanned with a metal detector. All metal-detected and hand-collected finds were retained for inspection, other than those which were obviously modern.

All archaeological features and deposits were recorded using CCC AFU's *pro-forma* sheets. Trench locations, plans and sections were recorded at appropriate scales and colour and monochrome photographs were taken of all relevant features and deposits.

No environmental samples were taken.

Site conditions were difficult, with extensive flooding.

5 Results

(Fig.2, Plates 1-3)

All the trenches suffered heavily from flooding. Fortunately the features were excavated during the machining phase, before flooding became problematic. They were recorded in a flooded state.

5.1 Trench 1

Trench 1 was 34m long and 2.1m wide, aligned north-west to south-east. A total of 0.3-0.35m of topsoil and 0.43-0.5m of subsoil had to be removed to reveal the archaeological horizons. Two features were noted; a furrow running the length of the trench and a modern pipe trench.



Plate 1: Trench 1

5.2 Trench 2

Trench 2 was 93m long and 2.1m wide, aligned south-west to north-east. Some 0.3-0.35m of topsoil and at least 0.25m of subsoil had to be removed to reveal the archaeological horizons. Only one feature was present, a small ditch (1) aligned north-east to south-west, 0.5m wide and 0.13m deep. Its fill (2) was a pale brown sandy silt with occasional flint gravel. It yielded one small sherd of probable Early Iron Age pottery.

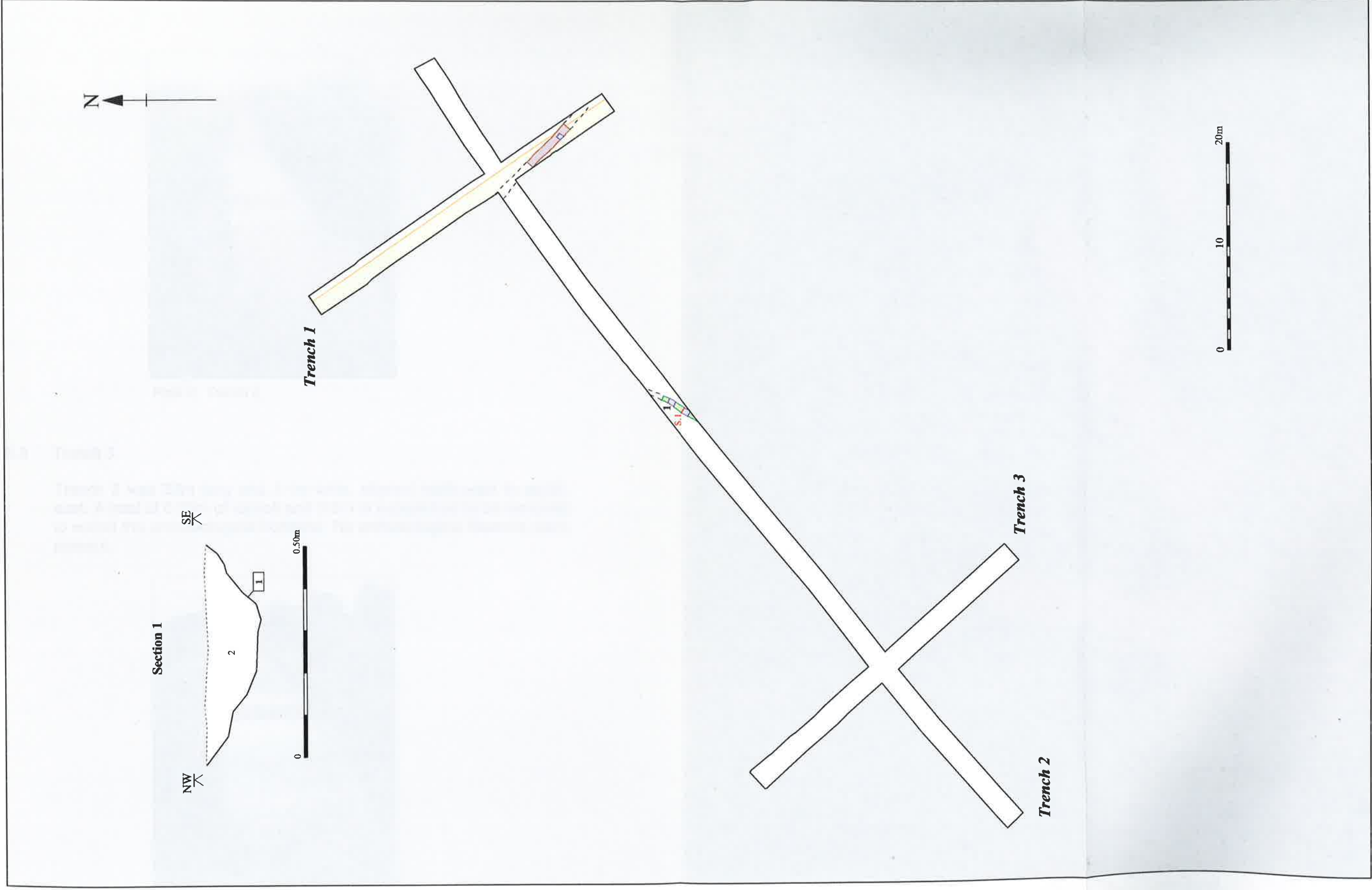


Figure 2: Trench plans and Section drawing



Plate 2: Trench 2

5.3 Trench 3

Trench 3 was 33m long and 2.1m wide, aligned north-west to south-east. A total of 0.25m of topsoil and 0.3m of subsoil had to be removed to reveal the archaeological horizons. No archaeological features were present.



Plate 3: Trench 3

6 Conclusions

Although very little archaeological material was discovered during this evaluation, it does shed light on the development of the agricultural landscape around Soham.

Ditch 1 was probably part of a Late Bronze Age or Early Iron Age fieldsystem. Its orientation is not the same as similar ditches found at Ten Bell Lane (Atkins 2004), and totally different to the probable medieval ridge and furrow which covered the site (compare with the furrow in Trench 1, Fig.2).

There was no evidence that the medieval core of Soham extended this far out.

Recommendations for any future work based upon this report will be made by the County Archaeology Office.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Oxbury and Company who commissioned and funded the archaeological work. The project was managed by Paul Spoerry. Tristan Adfield assisted with the fieldwork, while Séverine Bézie completed the illustrations and Elizabeth Shepherd Popescu edited this report.

The brief for archaeological works was written by Andy Thomas, who visited the site and monitored the evaluation.

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