

Archaeological Evaluation at West Fen Road, Ely: the
Cornwell bungalow site

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Summary

A trench-based evaluation was carried out on a 1026 square metre plot of land to the south of West Fen Road, Ely, that lies between areas of Iron Age, Roman, late Saxon and early Medieval occupation excavated during 1999 and the spring of 2000 to the north and south. A dense multi-period distribution of archaeological features was revealed by the evaluation, representing the continuation of the Iron Age /Roman and Late Saxon settlements into this area. Of particular note were a subsoil layer interpreted as a midden, possibly of Iron Age date, and a repeatedly recut ditched boundary which may define the northern limit to at least one phase of the late Saxon settlement. A buried ploughsoil developed after the abandonment of the Saxon settlement in the 13th century and was overlain by a rough cobbled surface of 13th-14th century date.

INTRODUCTION

Circumstances of the project

The work was carried out in advance of the proposed construction of a bungalow, on behalf of the landowner, Mrs Cornwell, according to a specification approved by the Cambridgeshire County Archaeological Office (Alexander 2000).

Topography and geology

The area evaluated is at present a garden, 1206 square metres in area, between two houses facing onto West Fen Road (TL 5529 2808, see figs.1 and 2). It lies on a geology of Kimmeridge clay, at an altitude of around 7m OD.

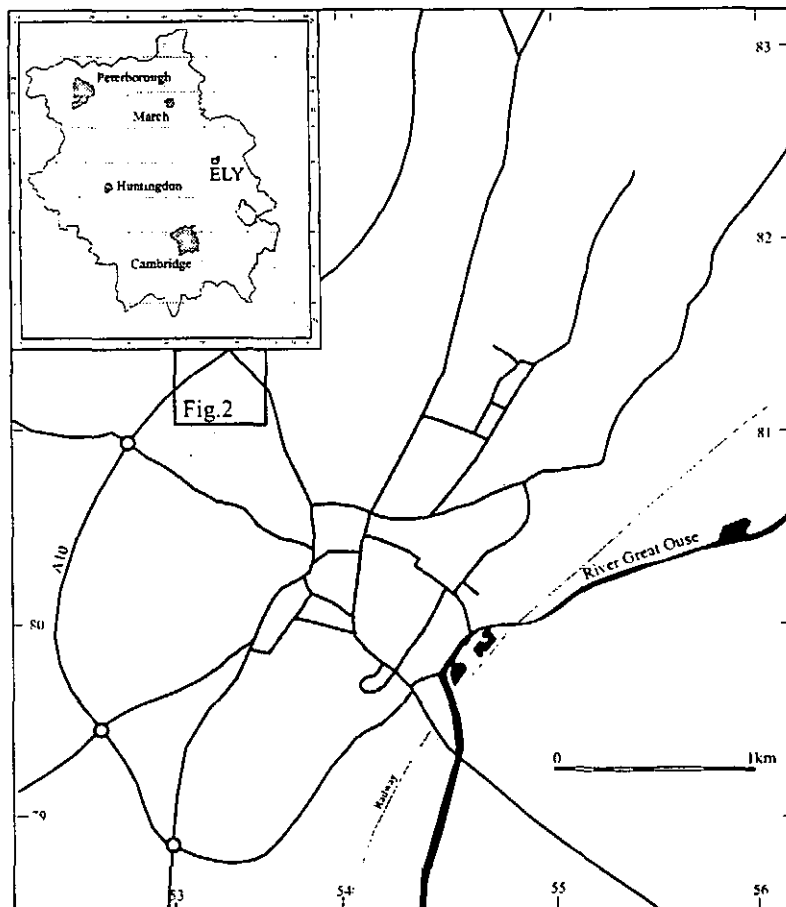


Figure 1: Site location

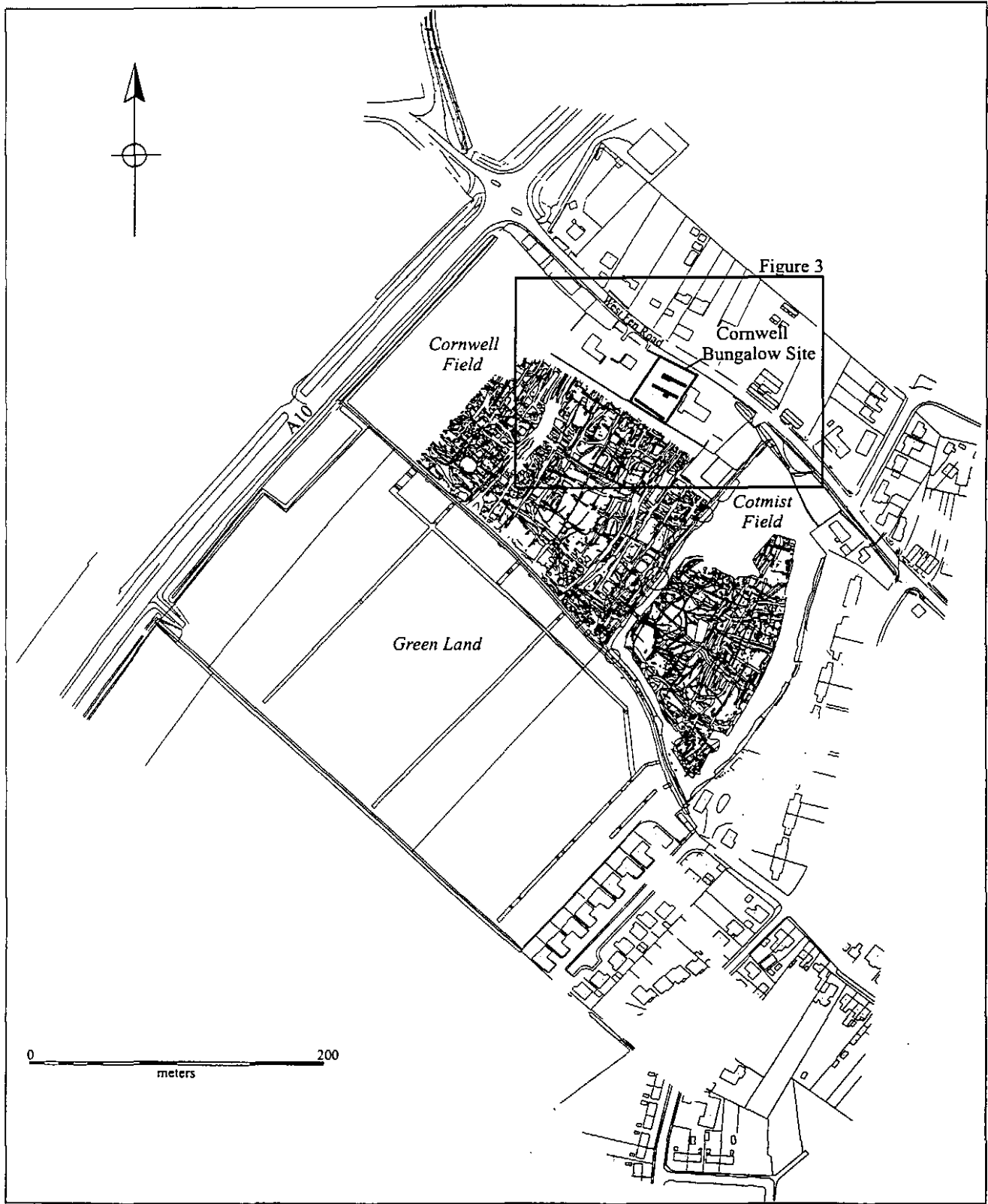


Figure 2 Site Location in relationship to previous work

Archaeological background

The southern limit of the evaluation area adjoins one of two fields (Cotmist and Cornwell land) on which archaeological excavation was carried out in advance of residential development throughout 1999 (see figs. 2 and 3). Post-excavation analysis of the results of this work is in progress, and an interim report of the evidence from Cotmist field (Mortimer 2000) describes the development and phasing of this site in broad terms as well as discussing the background to the site more fully. Further excavation has also been carried out on the north side of West Fen Road (Mudd 2000) and was still in progress at the time of the evaluation. A complex sequence of settlement activity was revealed right across the area, beginning in the Iron Age and continuing through to the medieval period. The bungalow site lies near the centre of both the Iron Age / Roman and Late Saxon settlements, in a position where archaeological features from both periods might be expected to overlap.

Iron Age features indicative of settlement activity, chiefly ditched enclosures and roundhouse gullies, are concentrated on the north side of Cornwell field, and continue in the area excavated to the north of West Fen Road. This activity continues into the Roman period, with the enclosures expanding to cover a larger area to the south.

A small quantity of hand-made Early or Middle Saxon pottery was identified from the previous excavations, forming a diffuse spread across the area. Identifying any definite Early Saxon features, however, and addressing the crucial issue of possible post-Roman continuity on the site, faces serious problems. Early Saxon settlement is usually of a relatively ephemeral nature, and would be easily missed beneath the exceptionally dense distribution of Late Saxon features covering the site. In addition, hand made Saxon pottery is notoriously difficult to distinguish from Iron Age types: some of the material currently identified as Saxon, both from this evaluation and from the larger excavations to the south, may on further analysis turn out to be Iron Age, and vice-versa (D. Hall pers.comm. and appendix).

The Middle Saxon period (mid-7th to mid-9th century) sees the introduction of the first mass-produced Saxon pottery type, Ipswich ware. A few features have been identified in Cotmist and Cornwell fields as belonging to this period, in which the origins of Ely as a town and religious centre lie, but this activity does not appear to have been very intense.

The Late Saxon period (mid-9th to mid-12th century) is marked by the introduction of new mass-produced pottery types, Thetford ware and St. Neots ware. Most of the features excavated dated to this period, reflecting the expansion of Ely into the West Fen Road area. The late Saxon settlement covers the whole of Cotmist and Cornwell fields, and also continues less intensively to the north of West Fen Road. To the south, it is delimited by the modern boundary to these fields, as evaluation trenches in the field beyond it

were almost devoid of archaeology (Regan 2000). Whether West Fen Road existed as the focus of the settlement at this period has hitherto been unclear.

The 12th century sees the introduction of Ely ware pottery, which supplemented and later replaced the late Saxon styles, and occurs in many of the later features on the site. Subsequently, at some point in the 13th century, the settlement was abandoned and largely turned over to arable: pottery styles dating to the 13th and 14th centuries, such as Grimston ware and Blackborough End ware, are only found associated with cobbled surfaces along the southern edge of the site.

Aims and objectives

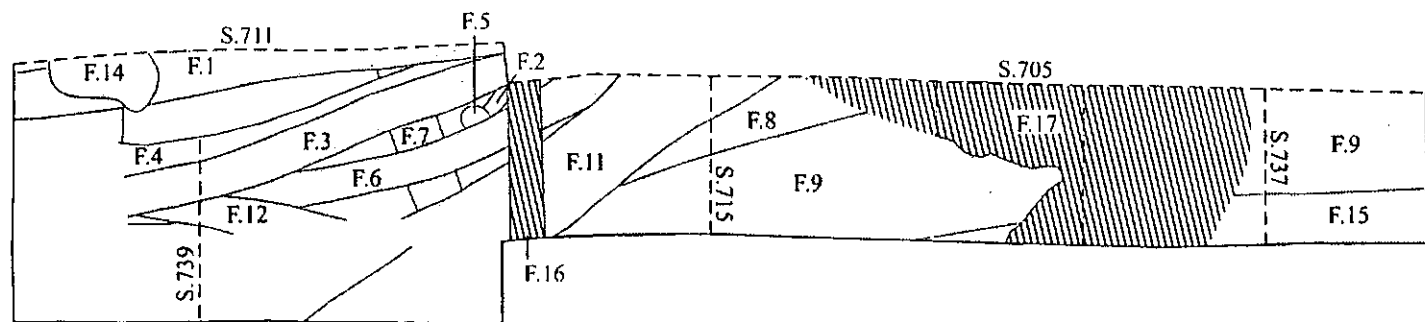
The density of features recorded in the adjacent fields left little room for doubt that this evaluation would reveal at least some Iron Age and Late Saxon archaeology. The main question to be considered, therefore, was whether the bungalow site contained anything significantly different from the large areas already studied, or afforded opportunities to study aspects of the evidence that might not have been fully explored elsewhere. One important question concerned the relationship of the site to West Fen Road: it is not clear at what date the route followed by the modern road became important, nor whether it structured the pattern of settlement in Roman or Medieval times. The bungalow site is the only area of land subjected to archaeological investigation that adjoins the road on its south side, and was expected to give some indication of whether the archaeological features respected the line of the road, or if any distinctive material suggesting a 'street frontage' was in evidence. That this might be the case was suggested by the presence of dark soil layers, representing midden deposits associated with intensive occupation, containing Late Saxon pottery, that appeared towards the northern limit of the 1999 excavations 10-20m further to the east; more information about the extent and nature of these deposits was considered of particular importance. Further outstanding questions concerned the possibility of Early and Middle Saxon material on the site, and particularly whether any material from the Roman features could indicate continued occupation in the Early Saxon period.





Methodology

To facilitate access for the machine, and to minimise damage to areas unaffected by the development, the specification of three 25 metre trenches was somewhat modified. The trenches, numbered 1 to 3 from south to north, were respectively shortened to 23.5m, 19m and 18m, and an additional 9m of trenching was used judgementslly to widen Trenches 2 and 3 at points of interest. Trenches were machined to the depth at which discrete cut features became visible: in Trenches 2 and 3, where rough cobbled surfaces were found at a higher level, sealing buried soil layers, the surfaces were left in situ for examination over 2 metres of the trench while being removed elsewhere, and all deposits that were machined out in this way were recorded in section.

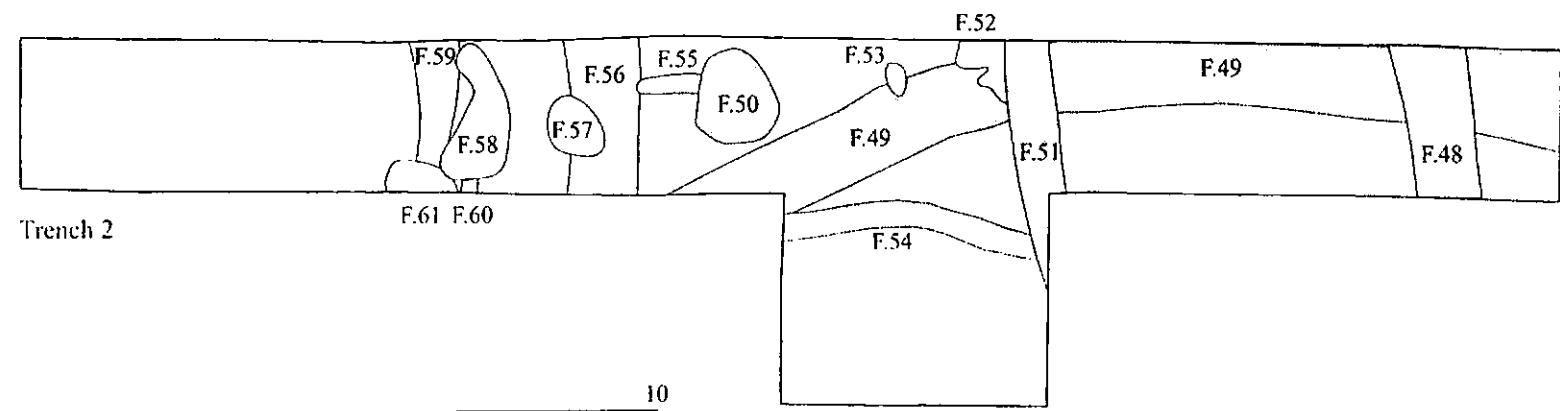
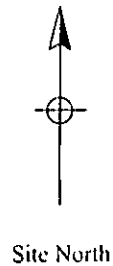


Figure 3 Site Plan showing adjacent features in Cornwell Field

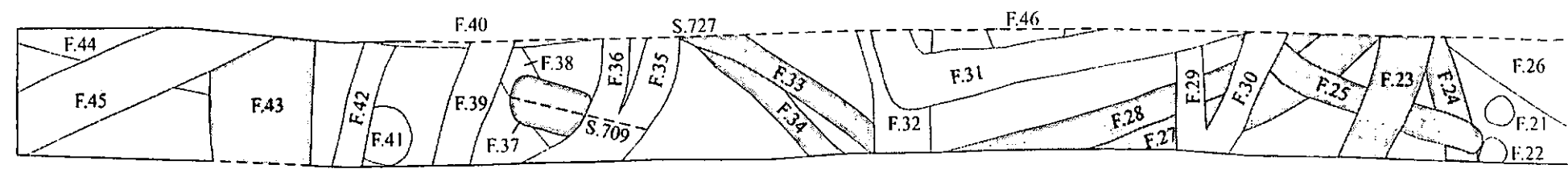
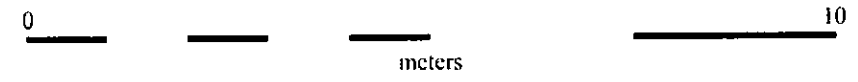


-  Medieval
-  Late Saxon
-  I.A./Roman
-  Unphased

Trench 3



Trench 2



Trench 1

Figure 4 Trench Plans

The trenches were planned at a scale of 1:20, and sections hand-excavated and drawn through all the features at 1:20, or at 1:10 where a greater level of detail was appropriate. Bulk samples were taken of any deposits judged to have good potential for the preservation of environmental evidence, and are currently being processed. The CAU-modified version of the MoLAS recording system (Spence 1990) was used throughout: all cuts and deposits were assigned context numbers (in square brackets in the text), which have subsequently been grouped together as numbered features for analysis and presentation. It is hoped that the evidence from this evaluation will eventually be integrated with that from the 1999 excavations on Cotmist and Cornwell fields immediately to the south, and accordingly the numbering sequence in use there has been continued, with context numbers for the evaluation beginning at [10,000], drawing numbers at 700 and environmental sample numbers at 200. Feature numbers within the overall sequence begin at F3001, but in this report will be referred to in abbreviated form, beginning at F1.

RESULTS OF THE EVALUATION

All three trenches contained a multi-period distribution of features comparable in density to that observed immediately to the south in Cornwell field. Given the complexity of the archaeology, it is difficult to relate features together between the trenches with any confidence. Therefore this description will cover the trenches separately, leaving discussion of general phasing of the site for the next section.

Trench 1

The southernmost trench was machined to an average depth of 0.6m, removing the topsoil and two layers of subsoil that could be seen beneath it (see fig.5), exposing the underlying natural clay substrata against which cut features could be discerned. A total of 26 ditches, pits and postholes were recorded, most of which produced pottery which, in combination with the stratigraphic relationships between them, enabled the majority to be broadly dated. The depths of features quoted are measured from the machined surface of the trench.

[10008], immediately underlying the topsoil, was a layer of mid greyish-brown silty clay, noticeably paler than the topsoil, varying from 0.05 to 0.15m thick. Beneath this, [10021] was a dark, blackish-grey layer 0.20m thick, darkest at the east end of the trench and becoming gradually paler and less distinct towards the west. Both layers contained large quantities of pottery, as well as fragments of animal bone, mussel shells and other material. A 0.5m x 0.5m sample square was hand-excavated through these layers in the north baulk of the trench at its east end, to collect a representative selection of finds. [10008] contained Thetford and Ely ware pottery, with nothing to suggest a date later than the 12th century. Of eleven sherds recovered from [10021], there were four definite and three possible Iron Age, three Roman, and one St. Neots ware, which on balance suggests a late Iron Age /early Roman date for this layer. [10008] is similar to subsoil layers seen in the other trenches, and is interpreted as a medieval ploughsoil, sealing all the archaeological features, its survival indicating a lack of post-medieval ploughing and excellent preservation conditions as a

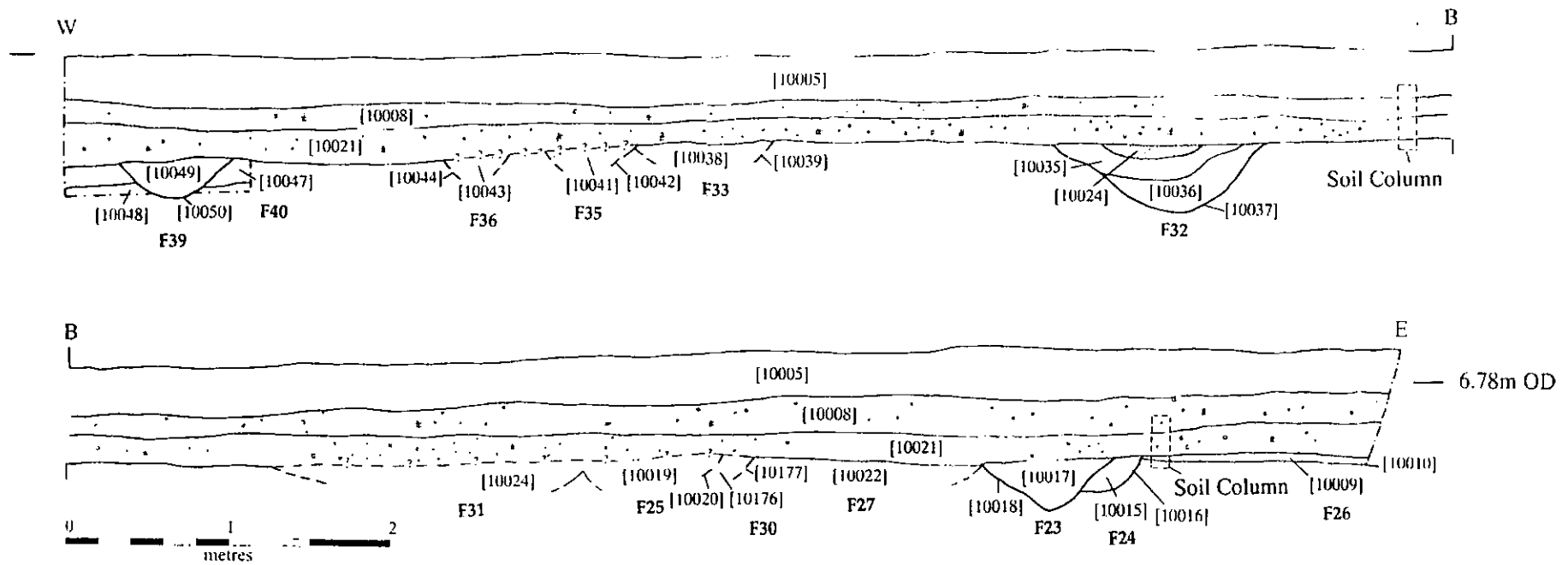


Figure 5: Section 727 (Trench 1)

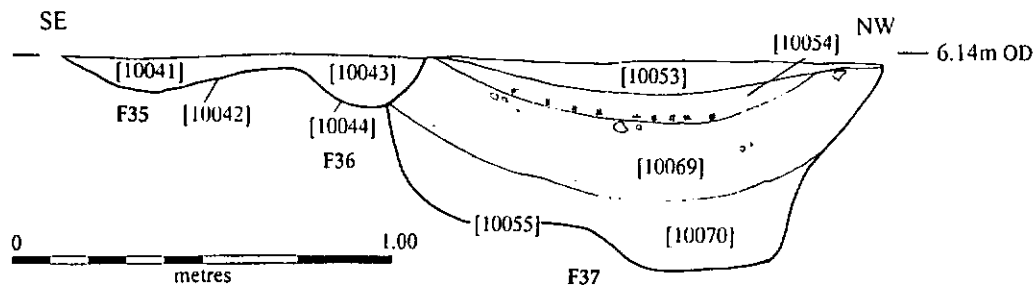


Figure 6: Section 709 (Trench 1)

result. This medieval ploughing was evidently not deep enough to disturb [10021], best understood as a 'dark earth' formed by intensive occupation and the accumulation of middens perhaps associated with the Iron Age / Roman settlement. As it was very similar in composition to many of the feature fills, it was not always possible to tell if ditches and pits were cutting [10021] or sealed by it. However, it does appear to seal some features which contained Late Saxon pottery, contradicting the evidence of the Iron Age material within [10021] which may, therefore, be residual. Two monolith samples taken through the soil profile for micromorphological analysis of these samples may resolve the nature of these layers when studied.

F23 is a slightly curving ditch running SSW-NNE, 0.8m wide, 0.3m deep, with a v-shaped profile and a dark, grey to black clayey silt fill. On its east side it cuts F24, a ditch running N-S and converging with F23, 0.45m wide and 0.15 m deep, with a yellowish-grey clay fill. Both these features are sealed by the 'dark earth' [10021], and contain Iron Age pottery. F24 cuts F26, a feature of unknown extent filling the north-east corner of the trench, less than 0.10m deep with a pale yellowish-brown silty clay fill. No finds were recovered from this shallow hollow, which may be natural in origin.

Two postholes, F21 and F22, were recorded in the east end of the trench. Both are between 0.40 and 0.50m in diameter, 0.12m deep, with dark greyish-brown clayey silt fills, and contain Ely ware pottery. F22 also contained a (residual) Saxon sherd.

F22 cuts the eastern terminus of a ditch F25 which runs along the trench for 4 metres, curving gradually round to the north-west before running into the section. 0.45m wide and 0.20m deep, with a deep u-shaped profile and dark grey, almost black fill, it produced two Iron Age and two Roman sherds. It cuts F24, but its relationship to F23, which has a very similar fill, is unclear.

F25 cuts 2 parallel ditches, F27 and F28, which run in a NE-SW direction. F27 is 0.70m wide and 0.30m deep, with a deep u-shaped profile; on its north side, it overlaps with F28, which is at least 0.40m wide but less than 0.10m deep. Both have identical mid-pale greyish brown silty clay fills, and contained Iron Age pottery. The 'dark earth' [10021] seals these ditches.

Two ditches, F29 and F30, cut across the top of F27 and F28. F29 runs N-S, 0.65m wide and 0.15m deep with a moderately rounded profile, converging with F30 which runs in a more NE-SW direction, 0.50m wide and 0.08m deep. Both contain similar fills, dark grey clayey silt with occasional patches of yellow redeposited clay, that suggest that they are contemporary. F29 contained Thetford, St. Neots and Ely ware pottery, while F30 was without finds but cuts F25, which further suggests a Late Saxon date.

Another ditch, F31, runs out of the north section of the trench in a WSW direction, cutting F29. It is 0.80m wide and 0.30m deep, with a steep u-shaped profile, and a dark grey, almost black clayey silt fill containing Ely ware pottery. After 6m it either terminates or turns a right angle and runs into the north section of the trench, over the top of ditch F32. A possible feature F46 was recorded, cut by F31 between it and the north section of the trench: this may be either a pit or a ditch which terminates beneath F31, as it could not be traced on its south side. It is 1.10m wide and 0.25m deep, and contains a yellowish-brown clayey silt fill, from which no finds were recovered.

F32, cut by the terminus of F31, runs N-S across the trench, 0.90m wide and 0.40m deep. The lower 0.20m of the cut was filled by [10036], a dark grey clayey silt containing significant quantities of charcoal, while [10035], consisting of redeposited natural clay mixed with dark grey clayey silt, filled the remainder, and appeared to be particularly concentrated on the west side. This upper fill probably represents the deliberate backfilling of a partially silted-up ditch, perhaps with material from an associated bank. [10036] contained Thetford and St. Neots ware pottery, as well as sherds that could be either Iron Age or Saxon. It was

recorded as sealed by the 'dark earth' [10021], which may therefore be much later than the finds from this layer would otherwise suggest.

Two ditches, F33 and F34, cross the trench to the west of F32 in a NW-SE direction, converging towards the NW. Both are 0.50m wide; F33 is only 0.06m deep while F34 is even shallower. Both contain indistinguishable mid-pale greyish-brown silty clay fills, very similar to those seen in F27 and F28. F33 contained Iron Age pottery, and is cut by ditch F32.

Two parallel ditches F35 and F36 enter the north side of the trench, where F35 cuts the merged fills of F33 and F34, and curve around to the SW. F35 is 0.60m wide, F36 is 0.40m wide, and neither is more than 0.10m deep. Both contain similar dark grey silty clay fills with moderate concentrations of charcoal and occasional patches of redeposited natural clay. F36 contained St. Neots and Ely ware sherds.

An oval pit F37 is cut by F36 (see fig.6). This measures 1.20m x 0.70m across, and is 0.40m deep at the east end, deepening abruptly to 0.50m at the west end, with steep or vertical sides. The lower 20cm of this cut is filled by [10070], dark grey clay with moderate charcoal and occasional yellowish clayey patches. Overlying this deposit, forming a layer 20cm thick, [10069] is a mid greyish brown clayey silt containing occasional flecks of charcoal but few other inclusions. This in turn is overlain by [10054], a layer up to 0.05m thick composed of pale yellowish silt and large fragments of red, burnt clay. This in turn is sealed beneath [10053], a layer of dark grey silty clay 0.06m deep. A possible interpretation of F37 is as a substantial post-setting, with the oval shape and deepening at one end perhaps explained by the addition of a second post, augmenting or replacing the first. After removal of the post(s), the hole silted up naturally. The burnt clay deposit in the top of the feature is probably unrelated to its primary use, and may be a dump of debris from a structure such as an oven or kiln. Four Roman grey ware sherds were recovered from [10069], and a sherd tentatively identified as part of a Thetford ware storage jar found in [10070] may (if all the other pottery in the feature is not residual) also be Roman.

A possible NW-SE ditch F38 is almost completely removed by F37, F36 and F39. It is 0.60m wide, no more than 0.05m deep, and contains a pale grey silty clay fill from which no finds were recovered.

F39, which cuts F38 to the west of F37, is a ditch running NNE-SSW, 0.70m wide and 0.23m deep, with a dark grey silty clay fill. Two Iron Age sherds were recovered from this feature. However, an early Medieval date is indicated by the fact that F39 cuts F40, an E-W linear feature of which all but the south edge is concealed in the north baulk of the trench. F40 has a grey clayey silt fill containing Ely ware sherds.

F42, a N-S ditch crossing the trench 1m further west, also cuts F40. It measures 0.60m wide and 0.20m deep, and has a greyish-brown clayey silt fill containing Ely ware, Thetford ware and Saxon pottery. It cuts F41, a pit or possible ditch terminal 0.68m wide and 0.14m deep, with a yellowish-brown clay fill from which no finds were recovered.

Less than 0.5m further west, ditch F43 crosses the trench in a N-S direction. Its primary cut measures 1.35m wide and 0.90m deep, and contains fill [10066], of pale greenish-grey clay. Two re-cuts were recorded towards the top of this fill, containing dark grey clayey silt fills [10062] and [10064]. These are sealed by [10061], a layer of redeposited natural clay up to 0.20m thick, which in turn underlies a thin layer of grey clayey silt [10060]. [10066] contained fragments of Iron Age or Roman type loomweight, while [10062] and [10064] produced a single Roman sherd and several fragments of a hard sandy fabric which could be either Saxon or Iron Age. A single sherd of Ipswich ware occurred in the topmost fill, [10060]. Either a Saxon or a Roman date is therefore possible, but the presence of definite Roman features in the area makes the latter more likely.

F43 is cut by a ditch F45 which crosses the west end of the trench in a WSW-ENE direction. This feature, shown in section in fig.10, is 0.80m wide and 0.40m deep, with a moderately v-shaped profile, and a fill of mid-grey silty clay, occasional patches of yellowish clay towards the top of the fill, and occasional flecks of charcoal. This contained Thetford ware pottery as well as a significant number of (presumably residual) Iron Age and Saxon sherds.

F45 also cuts a very shallow feature F44, possibly a ditch running in a WNW-ESE direction. Where this was sectioned to the NW of F45, it was only 0.08m deep, with a pale yellowish-grey fill, which produced no finds, and it could not be traced further to the east.

Trench 2

Machining in Trench 2 removed the topsoil and a layer of subsoil containing medieval pottery, similar to that encountered in Trench 1. A rough cobbled surface was revealed covering a small area, of 13th or 14th century date, beneath this subsoil layer. 15 cut features were also recorded, all apparently of late Saxon and early Medieval date, although residual Iron Age, Roman and possibly Saxon material was also found.

Immediately below the topsoil, and sealing all archaeological features, is a layer of mid greyish brown clayey silt [10003], between 0.10 and 0.15m thick. This deposit is similar to [10008], described in Trench 1, and undoubtedly represents its continuation. Pottery recovered from this layer included Grimston as well as Ely wares, indicating a 13th or 14th century date. There was no trace of a lower subsoil layer similar to the 'dark earth' [10021] that underlies [10008]. Over about 5 square metres of the trench, [10003] covered F47 (not illustrated), a rough cobbled surface similar to, and probably a part of, the cobbled surface F17 recorded in Trench 3, which will be discussed more fully below. The cobbles directly overlie the natural clay substrate and the fills of a number of features, notably F49, F53 and F54. About 1.5 square metres of F47 was cleaned and recorded in more detail before being removed, and an additional area of trench opened up to the south confirmed that the surface peters out just over 2m from the north edge of the trench.

A ditch F49 runs E-W along the east end of the trench, curving gently around to the south-west. The cut is 0.70m wide and 0.35m deep, containing a dark brownish-grey silty clay fill with occasional patches of redeposited yellow clay natural. Finds included St. Neots and Thetford ware pottery, and a sherd of possible Blackborough End ware which, if correctly identified, would suggest a post-12th century date; otherwise the feature would appear to be Late Saxon.

Several features cut F49: F48, at the east end of the trench, is a ditch running N-S, 0.50m wide and 0.15m deep, with a dark brownish-grey silty clay fill. It contains large quantities of Ely ware as well as a sherd of St. Neots ware and a (residual) fragment of a Roman mortarium. Further west, another N-S ditch F51 also cuts across F49; this is 0.60m wide and 0.26m deep, with a dark bluish-grey silty clay fill containing St. Neots ware in addition to one Saxon or Iron Age sherd. F51 cuts two other features which also both cut F49: F52 is an irregular hollow about 0.4m across and up to 0.20m deep, with a mid-dark greenish grey fill, which may simply be part of the fill of F49; and F54 is a gully 0.4m wide and 0.10m deep with a dark grey silty clay fill. F54 contains Ely ware and also a sherd of Lyveden ware which suggests a 12th century date for both it and, by implication, F51. One more feature cuts the north side of F49: F53 is a small oval posthole 0.40 x 0.20m across, 0.07m deep, with a dark brownish-grey clayey silt fill. It contained one fragment of what could be either Ely ware or Saxon pottery.

F50 is a subcircular pit 1m in diameter, and 0.35m deep, with steep sides and a gently rounded base. The fill is a dark brownish-grey silty clay, which contained Ely ware pottery. F50 cuts F55, a small gully running east for a short distance, which is no more than 0.20m wide and 0.07m deep, and has a fill of greyish-yellow clay. No finds were recovered from this feature. F55 terminates or just peters out next to F56, a N-S ditch 1.20m wide and 0.48m deep with a yellowish brown clayey silt fill. On its west side, F56 is cut by F57, an oval pit 0.70 x 0.50m across, 0.17m deep, with a greyish-yellow clay fill. No finds were recovered from either of these features, whose dates are entirely uncertain.

Four other undated features were recorded towards the west end of the trench. F59 is a N-S ditch 0.80m wide and 0.36m deep, with a pale brown silty clay fill. It is cut by F61, a feature partially hidden in the south baulk, possibly a pit, 0.70m wide and 0.11m deep, with a pale greyish-brown clay fill. A gully, F60, 0.32m wide and 0.26m deep with a yellowish brown clayey silt fill, runs out of the south side of the trench beside F61. Both F60 and F59 are overlain by F58, an irregular oval spread, up to 0.12m thick, of grey silt containing large concentrations of burnt clay, charcoal and ash, possibly peat ash. No finds were recovered from any of these features.

Trench 3

The medieval subsoil layer seen in the other trenches continues here, overlying a cobbled surface that covered part of the area of the trench. The cobbles overlie a deep layer of ploughsoil, which may represent a headland produced by medieval ploughing. Beneath this, machining revealed a continuous mass of features, which on excavation proved to be a series of overlapping ditches, predominantly running east-west along the length of the trench. Even though the trench was machined to a depth of between 0.7 and 0.8m, removing the tops of the ditch fills, very little variation could be seen to distinguish individual features even at this level. A number of sections were excavated across the trench, between which the ditch cuts revealed could be joined up with varying degrees of confidence. Most of these features contained early Medieval pottery suggesting a 12th century date. Significant quantities of Iron Age pottery were also recovered, the majority as residual material in later contexts, suggesting the former presence of Iron Age features truncated by the medieval ditches; only one ditch can be confidently assigned an Iron Age date.

The subsoil layers discussed below are shown in section in figs.7 & 8. Beneath the topsoil was a layer of mid greyish-brown silty clay [10001], 0.10-0.15m thick, similar to [10003] and [10008] as seen in the other trenches. The pottery recovered from this layer, including Grimston and Blackborough End ware as well as the usual Ely and St. Neots types, is also consistent with the interpretation offered for these deposits, namely a 13th-14th century ploughsoil. [10001] sealed a cobbled surface F17, of which a 2m length was left in situ for detailed recording while the remainder was machined out. The surface originally extended 1-2m to east and west of this area, perhaps further, as it was fairly patchy and ephemeral. It can be identified further west as [10110], a stony layer recorded in section 711 (fig.8). The area left in situ, [10002], consisted of a single layer of stones, mostly 50-100mm in size, predominantly flint nodules with some rounded pebbles and three fragments of Niedermendig lava quern. To the south, the layer contained a greater proportion of coarse gravel, while over much of the south-west corner of area left in situ it was sparse or absent. These characteristics – the use of variable local materials and the single, fairly insubstantial phase of construction – indicate perhaps a roughly cobbled yard rather than a more formal or significant feature such as a

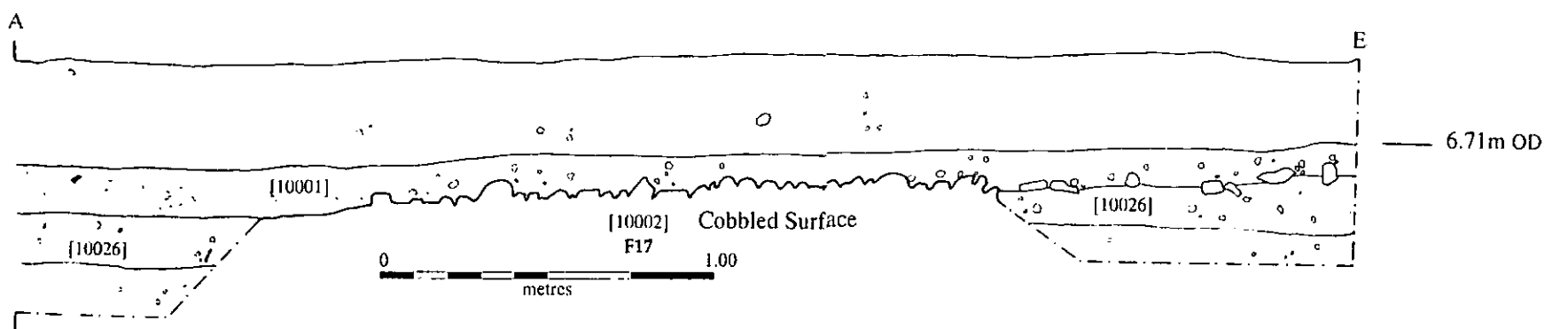
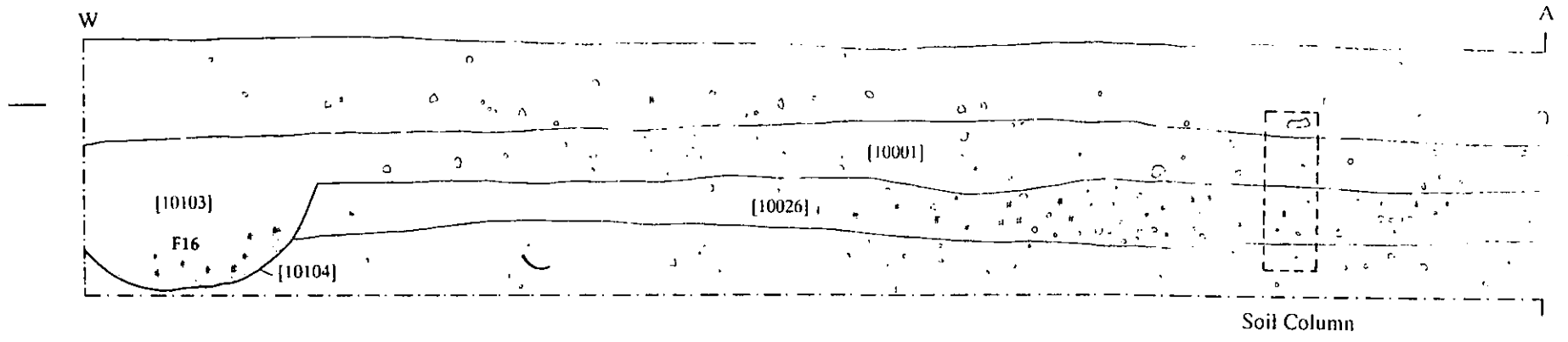


Figure 7: Section 705 (Trench 3)

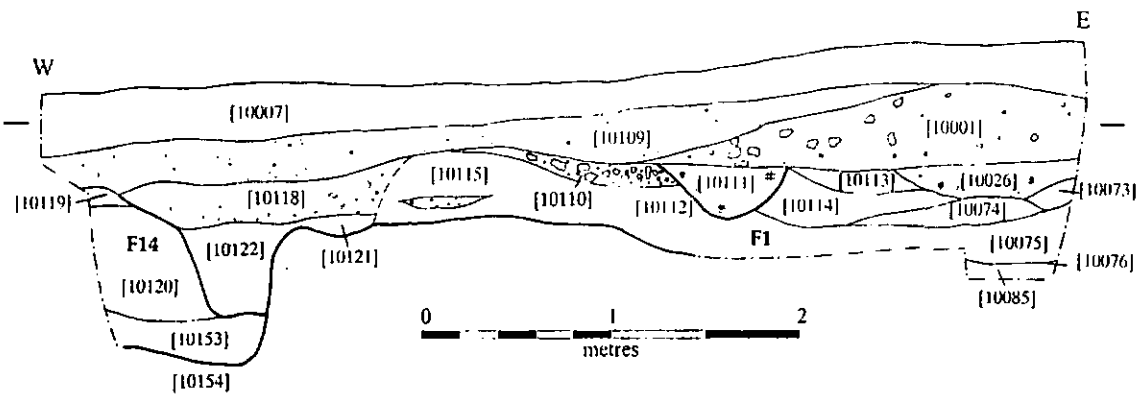


Figure 8: Section 711 (Trench 3)

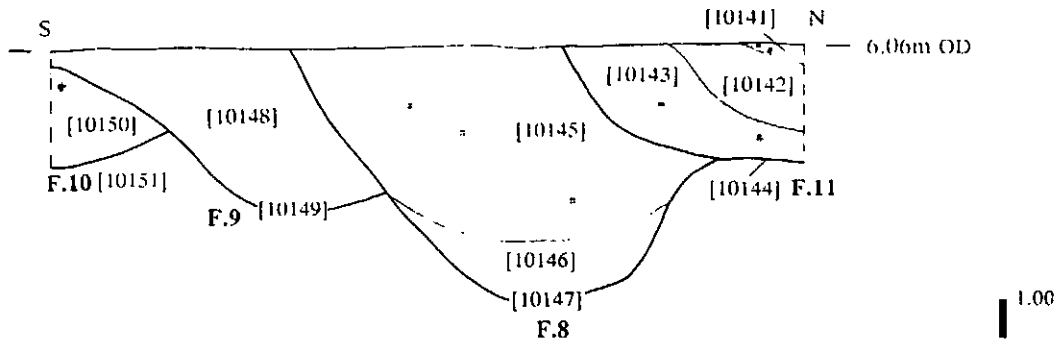


Figure 9: Section 715 (Trench 3)

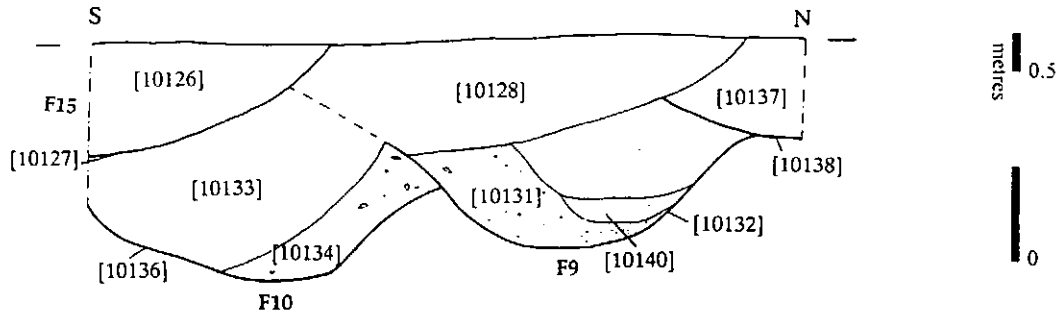


Figure 10: Section 737 (Trench 3)

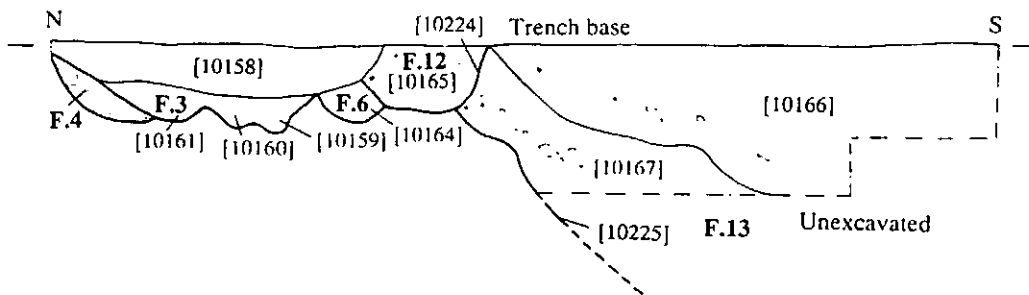


Figure 11: Section 739 (Trench 3)

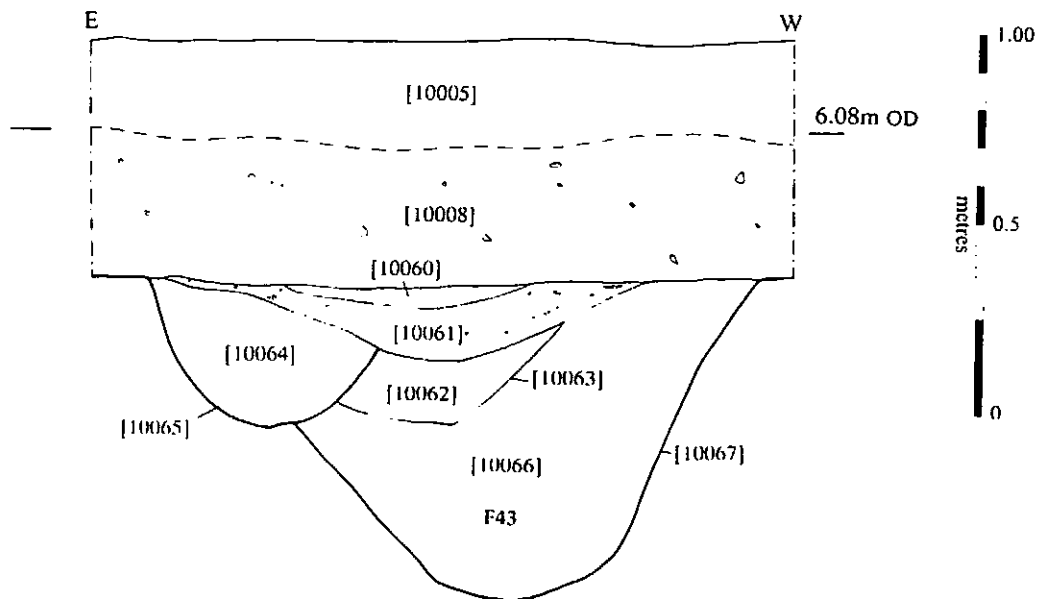


Figure 12: Section 708 (Trench 1)

road. The cobbled surface F47 in Trench 2 is of similar construction as F17, and is presumably associated with it.

[10002] overlies [10026], a layer of dark brownish grey silty clay 0.15-0.20m thick. It is deepest 3-4m west of the area of [10002] left in situ, where it is also darker, almost black, and contains quantities of charcoal and mussel shells. Superficially similar to the apparently Iron Age dark earth [10021] in Trench 1, [10026] however contained quantities of Grimston, Blackborough End and Ely wares, indicating a 13th-14th century date. It may be interpreted as a phase of ploughing following the disuse of the systems of ditches which it seals, after which, at some point in the 13th or 14th century, a part of the field was taken out of cultivation and covered with the cobbled surface F17. The presence of a deep build-up of soil beneath F17 contrasts with the situation of F47, where it is lacking and the cobbles overlie ditch fills more or less directly. [10026] may thus represent a headland associated with a medieval field system, where repeated turning of the plough at the end of the furlong caused soil to accumulate. Analysis of a monolith sample, taken through [10001] and [10026], may provide evidence of the origin of these layers.

One ditch, F16, which was entirely machined out but could be seen in section in both sides of the trench, appears to be contemporary with F17. Its cut, [10104], is 0.9m wide and 0.4m deep (measured from the base of the topsoil), with a mid-dark grey silt fill containing moderate concentrations of charcoal from which Stamford ware and 12th century sherds with a sandy fabric were taken. It could be seen to cut [10026], but merges with [10001] towards the top.

Investigation of the numerous features sealed by [10026] was hampered by the density of intercutting ditches, all of which had broadly similar mid grey silty clay fills that were often difficult to distinguish, and also by the flooding of the trenches with rain and groundwater which affected Trench 3 particularly severely owing to the depth of many of the features. Some uncertainties therefore remain in the following description, and a detailed account of the character of individual features is not always possible.

Three ditch cuts were recorded in section 737 (fig.10) in the east end of the trench, running E-W. The latest of these, F15, is seen here as [10027], partially exposed against the south side of the trench, at least 0.4m deep (all depths for the features described below are given from the base of layer [10026]), with a yellowish-grey clay silt fill containing Ely, St. Neots and Thetford ware sherds. This feature disappears entirely into the south section of the trench 2m further to the west.

On its north side, F15 cuts a parallel ditch, F9, recorded in section 737 as [10132]. This is at least 1.2m wide and 0.6m deep. Two possible postholes, [10139] (not illustrated) and [10140] (not illustrated), were recorded in the base of this feature, but their relationship to the main fill of the ditch was unclear. Ely and St. Neots ware sherds were recovered from the upper fills. F9 can also probably be identified as cut [10149] in section 715 (fig.9); further west it disappears into the south side of the trench.

In section 737, [10132] can be seen cutting another E-W ditch, not visible in plan at this point, with cut [10136]. This feature, F10, may correspond to the ditch [10151] cut by [10149] in section 715. In neither section was any pottery recovered from this feature.

Section 715 shows [10149] cut by a deeper, parallel ditch to the north, [10147], 1m wide and 0.7m deep, with a yellowish-grey clay fill. Iron Age scored ware, Roman, St. Neots and Thetford wares were recovered from this feature, although some of these probably derive from the other fills excavated in the section. This ditch, designated F8, can be tentatively identified in two other places to the west before it runs into the south section of the trench. Here, too, its fill contained Thetford wares combined with significant quantities of Iron Age and Roman pottery.

Section 715 also shows F8 cut by another ditch, [10144], on its north side. This ditch, F11, is shallower, 0.5m deep, and contains a lower fill [10143] of grey silty clay, sealed beneath a layer 0.2m thick of redeposited natural clay. This ditch therefore appears to have been deliberately backfilled at some point. [10143] contained a single Iron Age sherd. F11 can possibly be traced continuing to the west as a feature truncating F8 and disappearing into the south side of the trench.

Another ditch was identified cutting F11 at the point where the trench was widened at the west end. F19 (not illustrated) was mostly hidden in the section, and its full dimensions and continuation to the west were unclear. It contained Thetford ware and Roman pottery.

On its north side, F11 is cut by F6, an E-W ditch 0.4m deep, that contained Thetford and St. Neots ware pottery. This ditch also cuts a possible posthole F5, which in turn cuts a NE-SW gully 0.3m deep, F2. Neither of these features produced any pottery. F6 appears to be the same ditch recorded as [10223] in section 739 (fig.11). Here it is cut by another ditch, [10224], F12, which could not be traced elsewhere. To the south, [10224] cuts the fill of another ditch [10225], F13, which similarly could not be identified anywhere else and was only partially excavated due to the flooding of this end of the trench, but must be at least 0.5m deep. This feature was the only one in the trench to contain exclusively Iron Age pottery.

[10224] is cut by [10222], an E-W ditch 0.3m deep, which as F3 can be followed running for 4m to the west. In both the places it was sectioned, possible postholes were recorded cut into the base; these were all 0.05m or less deep, and their relationship to the upper fills of the ditch was not clear. A single sherd of Ely ware was recovered from this feature. In both places where F3 was sectioned, it was observed to be almost completely truncating a parallel ditch F4, 0.5m deep, with a much paler fill. This feature contained no finds.

F3 is cut by another ditch to the north, F1, which is 0.4m deep, and emerges into the trench from the north section at an oblique angle. It can be seen as [10075] and [10115] in section 711 (fig.8). One Thetford and one Blackborough End ware sherd were taken from the section here.

In the north-west corner of the trench, F1 is cut by F14, a pit 0.8m deep and at least 1.5m in diameter. This feature produced Ely ware pottery.

A single N-S ditch can be traced running across the trench, cut by F1, F3, F6 and F11. This feature, F7, is 0.4m deep, and produced sherds of St. Neots, Ely and Lyveden ware from the parts that were not truncated by other ditches. The position of this feature at the bottom of the stratigraphic sequence indicates a post-conquest date for most of the rest of the features in the trench, where this is not already indicated by the finds recovered from them.

The Finds

In common with the features in Cornwell and Cotmist fields, the evaluation trenches produced substantial assemblages of finds. 424 fragments of pottery were recovered, which have been examined and dated by David Hall (Appendix 1). The animal bone assemblage consisted of 322 fragments, weighing a total of 5.3kg, and was generally in a good state of preservation. Other finds included 26 fragments of tile, two pieces of slag, and three fragments of lava quern.

Environmental sampling

Seven bulk samples were taken for flotation from a representative selection of features, and are currently awaiting processing and interpretation. Ballantyne and Stevens (in Mortimer 2000) reported good preservation of charred plant remains in the samples taken from Cotmist field, and a similar potential may be expected for the bungalow site. Three column samples were taken through the subsoil layers encountered in Trenches 1 and 3, for micromorphological analysis which, when carried out, may shed a great deal of light on the circumstances in which these layers were formed and preserved.

DISCUSSION

The bungalow site has produced evidence for all the major periods seen in Cotmist and Cornwell fields, namely Late Iron Age /Roman; Late Saxon; and Early Medieval. Because of the density of features, and as post-excavation analysis of the results of the excavations in Cornwell field is still at an early stage, tracing the possible course of features between the trenches and into Cornwell field is too unreliable an exercise to be worthwhile; however it is clear that intensity of occupation continues uninterrupted into the evaluation area from further south. In addition, the evaluation suggests the presence of aspects of the evidence that were either not seen, or imperfectly understood, in previous excavations, namely the presence of 'dark earth' subsoil deposits, probably of Iron Age date; the relevance of the early medieval ditches seen in Trench 3 to the development of West Fen Road; and the possibility of Middle Saxon settlement in the area. The preservation of the archaeology is extremely good, the survival of the aforementioned dark earth showing that medieval ploughing has had little impact, and the land has remained largely undisturbed since that time.

Iron Age /Roman

The results of excavations to the north and south of West Fen Road suggest that the bungalow site lies in the middle of a Late Iron Age settlement showing continuity into the Roman period, and the results of the evaluation bear this out. At least seven Iron Age features, mostly small ditches that may represent internal settlement boundaries, were identified in Trench 1. Some of these, F23 and F24 in particular, contained very dark, organic fills with abundant bone and pottery, material undoubtedly derived from the debris of domestic activity. An interesting contrast can be seen between these and other Iron Age ditches such as F27, F28, F33, F34 and F43, which contain relatively pale, inorganic fills. These paler features may relate to an earlier phase during which the bungalow site was remote from the focus of occupation.

The dark subsoil layer [10021] appears, on the basis of the pottery dating, to relate to the latter of these Iron Age phases, in which dumps of

refuse from the settlement became incorporated into the soil and the fills of ditches excavated in the area. The dating of this layer is contradicted, however, by at least one ditch, F32, which contains Late Saxon pottery and yet is clearly sealed by [10021]. Dark midden deposits were observed in the northern limits of the excavations in Cornwell field, 20m or so to the east, which contained Ely ware pottery. A further level of ambiguity concerns the uncertainties over the identification of pottery fabrics which could be either Iron Age or Saxon. What appears as a single layer in the section of Trench 1 and elsewhere may turn out to be composed of several entirely unrelated midden deposits of different periods.

In the other two trenches, only one definite Iron Age feature, F13, was identified, but there was a great deal of residual material of this date in later features. F8, in particular, contains sufficiently large quantities to suggest that an Iron Age feature may in fact be present, but been missed or misinterpreted, amid the complexities of Trench 3. At least it is clear that one previously did exist, even if it has been obliterated by later activity. Some of the features in the western half of Trench 2, which remain undated, may be Iron Age, and residual pottery of Iron Age or Saxon date was present in F51.

A picture is emerging from the various excavations of this Iron Age settlement continuing, and perhaps expanding, in the Roman period. Two features, the ditch F25 and the pit or posthole F37, may be identified here. F25 contains Iron Age as well as Roman pottery, perhaps being a feature that spans the period when Roman pottery types were being introduced, or otherwise attesting to residuality. Four Roman sherds were recovered in an inspection of the spoil heap of Trench 1. In Trenches 2 and 3, residual material included a fragment of mortarium in F48, and sherds in F8 and F12.

Early and Middle Saxon

Major discontinuity, and much more ephemeral and shifting patterns of settlement, characterise this period throughout England, and this appears to be very much the case in the West Fen Road area. Two questions must be addressed here: was there any Early Saxon settlement within the substantial earthworks that must have survived at least in part from the Roman settlement? And what were the origins of the major Late Saxon settlement that subsequently developed on the same site?

Aside from the large number, perhaps the majority, of nominally Iron Age sherds that on typological grounds alone could equally well belong to the Early or Middle Saxon period, there is only one definite fragment of hand-made Saxon pottery, a residual sherd in F42. Given the potential for confusion with earlier features, and disturbance by later activity, an Early Saxon presence on the site must remain an unconfirmed possibility. Finding Saxon sherds stratified in the top of Roman ditches would perhaps supply the only unambiguous proof, but the few Roman features revealed by the evaluation did not allow this theory to be tested.

Occasional features containing Ipswich ware, attesting the origins of Late Saxon activity on the site prior to the mid-ninth century, were recorded elsewhere in the West Fen Road area, but only two sherds were identified from this evaluation, one from the spoil heap of Trench 1, and another from the topmost fill of the Iron Age ditch F43. Whatever part the area of West Fen Road played in the life of the emerging town of Ely in this period, it does not appear to have been the focus of intensive settlement, and it is only at a later date that it can be seen to have come into prominence.

Late Saxon

The majority of the features excavated can be assigned to this period, although almost all of these contain Ely ware and hence belong to the later, roughly 12th century, end of the period. Only F32 and F45 in Trench 1, and F49 in Trench 2, contained St. Neots and Thetford ware but were lacking Ely ware. It is perhaps notable that these potentially earlier features are all substantial ditches, in contrast to some of the smaller ditches, gullies, pits and postholes also present, which all contain Ely ware in addition to the earlier types. If such small features can be taken as indicative of the presence of domestic activity, the bungalow site may have been relatively peripheral to the settlement in its early stages, only becoming an immediate focus of occupation in the post-conquest period.

Certainly by the time Ely ware came into use, the ditches seen running the length of Trench 3 represented an important boundary, repeatedly reworked and maintained. Most of these ditches are relatively substantial, F8 for example measuring fully 1.5m deep below the surface of the topsoil. A similar agglomeration of parallel ditches was observed in Cornwell field, running north-south and cutting off the western third of the site. Consistent recutting of such a boundary indicates a relatively permanent limit to some unit of settlement space, in contrast to the confused mass of ditches which otherwise indicates constant change and rearrangement of the structure of the settlement. If West Fen Road was an important route out of Ely to the west at this time, this may represent a boundary between the road and the house plots and crofts making up the settlement to the south.

Medieval

At some point in the 13th century, the Saxon settlement was abandoned and turned over to arable cultivation, resulting in the ridge and furrow that still covered Cotmist field when work began in early 1999. This phase is represented on the bungalow site by the cobbled surfaces F17 and F47, which are extremely reminiscent of two areas covered with cobbles and gravel surfacing on the southern boundary of Cornwell field, also of 13th-14th century date. These surfaced areas are best explained as small yards on the edges of the fields, whose exact use remains obscure but presumably required a hard, dry surface. The buildup of topsoil beneath F17, interpreted as a

headland, implies a fairly lengthy phase of ploughing following the abandonment of the settlement before this surface was laid down.

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APPENDIX I

The Pottery (David Hall)

Preliminary spot-dating indicated the following dating of the sherds supplied.

Many contexts contain Iron Age sherds. This is in an unusual fabric, containing some sand and grits, similar to Saxon sherds. However [10005] contained a profile near the base of a pot that was definitely Iron Age. No black gritty or micaceous 'authentic' Saxon fabrics were recovered, so it seems that all the hand-made sherds are Iron Age. Several contexts produced Roman sherds, 10033, 10065, 10216, 10183 (a Horningsea rim) etc.

There were only a few possible Ipswich Ware sherds (10005, 10060, 10182) of Middle Saxon date (650-850). Saxon-Norman fabrics were present, mainly St Neots and Thetford Wares with a very few Stamford sherds. Some rim forms were small and of likely pre-Conquest date (10048, 10151). Thetford Wares include a pitcher spout and pieces of storage jar. Among the shelly wares was one of early Lyveden type (10217), probably 12th century.

Ely fabrics (12th century and later) occurred in many contexts, some with large sherds representing near complete profiles (10024 bowl, etc) as well as a rare Ely fabric jug spout and the usual stabbed handles. Other 12-13th century fabrics were thin black sandy sherds similar to material from Blackborough End, Norfolk.

A few sherds of Grimston Ware were recovered, one from a face jug. These would not date before the 13th century. There were very few fine-ware sherds, one similar to material from Newcastle that has been identified previously at King's Lynn.

Overall, the site yielded Iron Age and Roman material, and a very small amount of Middle Saxon sherds. The main floruit was Saxo-Norman and later, apparently finishing by the 14th century. The sherds therefore fit in well with neighbouring sites from West Fen Road.

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