

PROCEEDINGS  
OF THE  
CAMBRIDGE ANTIQUARIAN  
SOCIETY

(INCORPORATING THE CAMBS & HUNTS  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY)



VOLUME LXVII

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IMRAY LAURIE NORIE AND WILSON

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## EXCAVATIONS AT HORNINGSEA, 1977

H. C. MYTUM

### INTRODUCTION

HORNINGSEA lies four miles north-east of Cambridge, to the east of the river Cam. The area had been much disturbed by coprolite digging, but in a field south of Eye Hall Farm a series of earthworks survived (TL 498636). The archaeological potential of the field has long been recognised, and two previous excavations have taken place there. In 1901 T. McKenny Hughes discovered an 18th-century brick well and trenched the large circular feature in the south-western part of the field, finding within it bones and Roman pottery.<sup>1</sup> Excavation again took place in 1911 when F. G. Walker uncovered a rectangular building made of nodules of flint held together by mortar. No finds were mentioned or illustrated in the text relating to this structure, but on the basis of its form it was assumed to be Roman.<sup>2</sup> A plan of the building appeared in the final report. The earthworks were subsequently mapped by the R.C.H.M. and amended by D. Hall immediately prior to the most recent excavations.<sup>3</sup>

When it was discovered that the earthworks were to be levelled, a trial excavation was arranged. The building examined in 1911 was still visible through the turf and it was to be re-excavated and its relationship to the surrounding earthworks ascertained. The work was carried out by the Cambridge University Archaeological Field Club in February 1977.

#### *The Excavation*

Three trenches were opened to expose the building investigated in 1911 and to section the adjacent earthworks. The only evidence of the previous excavations was inside the building to the west where disturbed soil reached below the topsoil and may have been where the previous excavators had dug to some depth (Fig. 1).

The building was shown to have been made of mortar with many flint nodules. Most surfaces of the walls were smooth, although the outer surface of the west wall showed some marks which could be interpreted as impressions left by shuttering used in its construction. Both the external and internal corners of the building were rounded, unlike those in the drawing of 1911, and the north wall was almost completely absent. Moreover, it was clear that this wall had never been present because the construction layer extended over the area where the wall should have lain. If the wall had been later removed, a robber trench should have been visible and this was not the case. The pottery from the

construction layer has been dated to the 18th century but unfortunately these were only body sherds and a fragment of clay pipe stem, and so could not be illustrated.

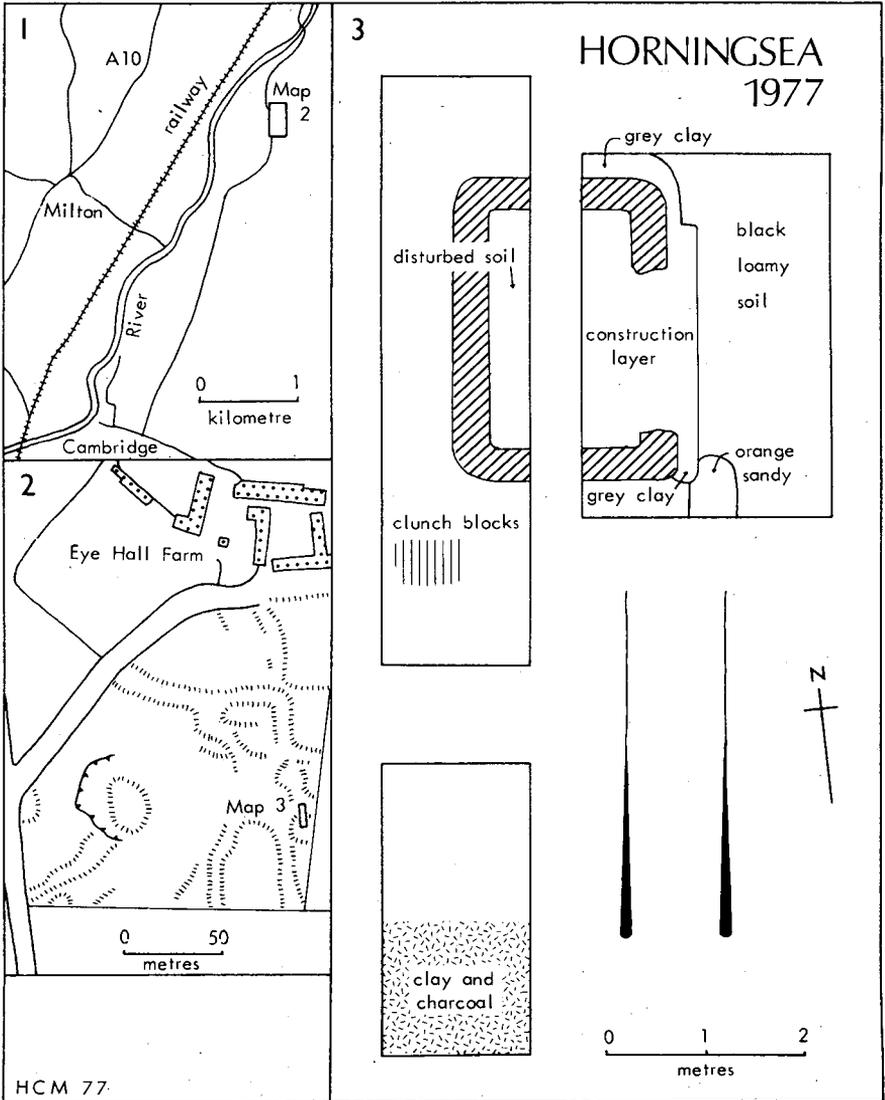


Fig. 1. Horningsea excavations, 1977.

The building seems to have been made by pouring mortar and flints into a frame with wood bent around it—hence the curved corners. A construction trench, full of grey-white clay, was visible on parts of the outer eastern and northern sides, but not on the west and south. Within the building was the construction layer of sandy soil with mortar, clay and flints. The foundations of the structure rested on the natural subsoil of orange pebbly clay, 40cm below the present ground surface. The superstructure of the building is totally unknown. The large opening on the eastern side, and the small size of the structure, suggest no obvious purpose. It bears no relationship in its siting to the surrounding earthworks. Date of demolition is not known but the building is not marked on a map of 1885 showing the Eye Hall Farm estate prior to its auction.

Outside the building to the east were found sherds of 13th-14th century date (Fig. 2, nos. 7-9), not in association with any structures, but in black loamy soil stratigraphically earlier than the building. The earthworks to the south produced a layer of mixed charcoal and clay on the flat top of the toft. A few medieval body sherds were recovered together with a fragment of daub and an iron knife (no. 12). In the loam beneath were found further medieval sherds, including one with specks of green glaze, and nos. 10, 11. At the foot of the slope were found a number of clunch blocks, some faced, which may have formed a revetment wall, running east-west along the northern side of a medieval house toft. The blocks were beneath a spread of small clunch fragments. This could be interpreted as a destruction layer, and may date the desertion of the toft to the 16th-17th century on the basis of the pottery within it (nos. 1-5).

There was little residual Roman pottery from the excavated area and it is likely that most of the earthworks were of medieval date. When the site was levelled, much Roman pottery and evidence of kilns could be seen, although confined to the circular earthwork in the south-west part of the field, previously examined by T. McKenny Hughes. Therefore the assumption that the other earthworks may be part of a deserted medieval village can still be upheld.

### *The Finds*

1. Hard orange fabric with blue-grey core. Thick shiny dark green glaze. Late 16th-early 17th century. Debris above clunch blocks.
2. Hard fabric with orange surface and blue-grey core. Debris above clunch blocks.
3. Orange-pink surface and grey core. Some white grits. Debris above clunch blocks.
4. Rhēnish stoneware with blotches of pale green glaze. 16th century. Debris above clunch blocks.
5. Hard pale grey fabric. Debris above clunch blocks.

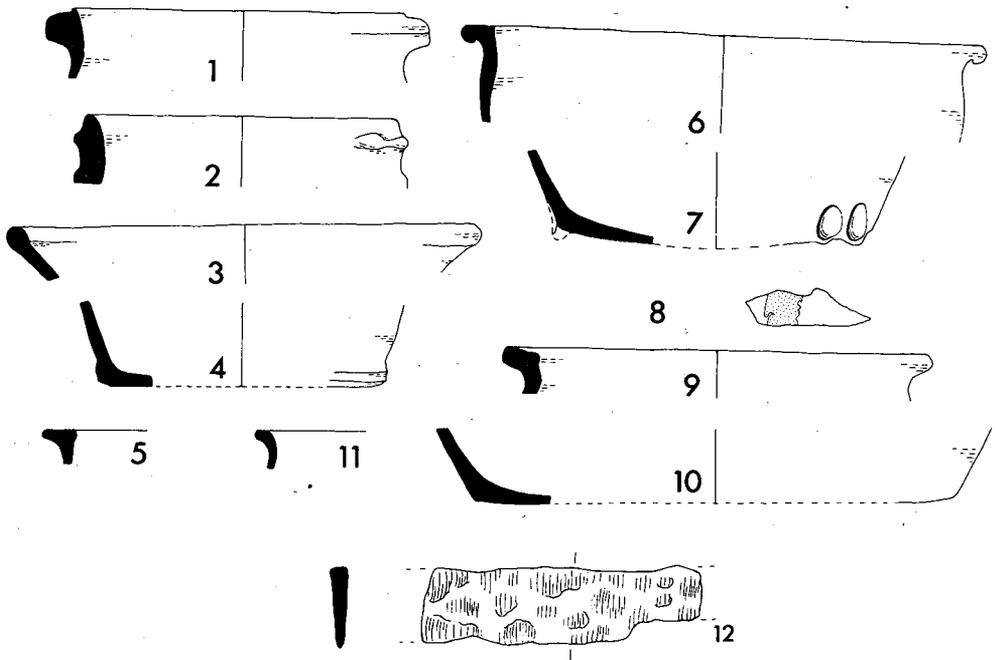


Fig. 2. Horningsea. Pottery (scale 1/4): 1-5 Sixteenth-seventeenth century; 6-11 Medieval. 12 Iron knife (scale 1/2).

6. Hard grey fabric with fine white grit and pinkish surface. Blotchy green glaze on inside. Topsoil.
7. Hard red fabric with a pair of thumb impressions. 14th century. Black loamy soil.
8. Hard grey sandy fabric. Dark green glaze with a stripe of dark brown glaze. 14th century. Black loamy soil.
9. Light grey fabric. Black loamy soil.
10. Hard grey-black fabric with some micaceous grains. Beneath spread of clay and charcoal.
11. Hard grey-black fabric with some micaceous grains. Beneath spread of clay and charcoal.
12. Iron knife with tang. Broken at both ends. Spread of clay and charcoal.

## SUMMARY

Excavation revealed a medieval house toft, possibly revetted by dressed clunch blocks. After desertion, a rectangular flint and mortar building with rounded corners and a large eastern doorway was constructed on the site, in no way related to the earlier earthworks. The building was securely dated to the 18th century, and was not Roman as previously stated.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The owner of Eye Hall Farm, Mr Gingell, kindly gave permission to excavate. Miss Taylor and Mr Hall, both of the Cambridgeshire Archaeological Committee, helped organise the excavation. The Faculty of Archaeology lent the tools and Dr Alexander allowed the use of his van for transport. Special thanks to all who helped on the excavation: Messrs Burkill, Buxton, Newman and Richards, and Miss Johnson and Mrs Putnam. Mr Gorman carried out the surveying and photography, and Miss Bird dealt with the finds. The drawings of the pottery and iron knife were prepared by Miss U. Mytum. Miss Cra'ster kindly helped with the dating of the pottery. The finds and records have been deposited in the Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Downing Street, Cambridge.

## NOTES FOR INTRODUCTION

1. *Proc.C.A.S.* X (1903), 188-194.
2. *Proc.C.A.S.* XVII (1913), 15-16.
3. *R.C.H.M.* (Eng.), *North-East Cambridgeshire* (1972), 73.



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