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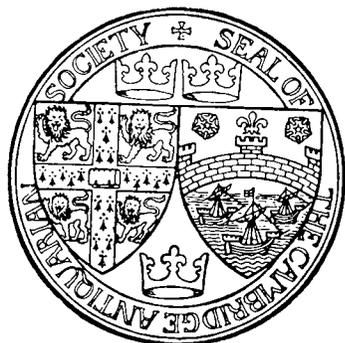
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EXCAVATIONS ON THE Paddock, ELY, CAMBS.

ANNE HOLTON-KRAYENBUHL

INTRODUCTION

The Paddock (TL 542801) lies on sloping ground to the east of Ely cathedral. The ground surface is noticeably irregular, but aerial photographs do not reveal any cropmarks.

In 1985, the site was due to be covered by a housing development and when investigated by machine-dug trenches yielded evidence for late Saxon activity (A. Taylor, *pers. comm.*). The purpose of the present excavations, which took place from 10th to 18th May 1986, was to investigate further some of the features that had been observed.

Twenty-one volunteers participated in the excavations which were organised by the Ely and District Archaeological Society.

THE EXCAVATIONS

Three trenches were dug at the lower, SE end of the Paddock within an area of c. 100m². In two of the trenches (A and B), segments of ditch observed in 1985 were located and further examined. The third trench (C) was dug with the aim of establishing the relationship between the ditch segments found in trenches A and B (Fig. 1).

Trench A

This trench contained part of a ditch that had been recut. The infilled ditch and associated ground surface were covered by a clay layer over which lay cultivated soil. Six phases were observed:

Phase 1: A flat-bottomed ditch had been cut into the natural Greensand. It was at least 0.4m wide at its base and about 0.6m deep. The SW edge was not defined and the NE edge had probably been cut by the later ditch (Fig. 2). A 1m long stretch of base was excavated.

Phase 2: The ditch infilled with silty clay relatively slowly and probably under waterlogged conditions. The clay contained much charcoal and sherds of St. Neots and Thetford ware of pre-Conquest date, most of which were barely abraded. Two fragments of animal bone were also found.

The duration of this phase may be deduced from the rate at which the ditch silted up, and the pottery evidence suggests that this took place some time in the century preceding the Conquest.

Phase 3: The flat-bottomed ditch had partially silted up when a narrower V-profile ditch was cut, on roughly the same alignment. It was c. 1.20m wide and c. 0.4m deep at its apex. A two metre long stretch was defined, running in a NW-SE direction.

Phase 4: The V-profile ditch infilled with silt loam which was slightly organic and contained much domestic refuse. The maximum depth of the filling was 0.35m. A few pre-Conquest sherds were found at the bottom of the filling, together with some oyster and mussel shell. The upper part of the filling contained sherds of post-Conquest C11-C12 St. Neots and Thetford ware. A decorated spindle whorl of fired clay was also found (Fig. 4). There were many fragments of domestic animal bone: traces of butchery were observed on some of the bone and two had been gnawed. Other finds included fragments of oyster and mussel shell, two lumps of burnt daub, a small fragment of lava millstone, and pieces of limestone roof tile, one of which had a perforation for a peg. Many of the finds were charred.

The domestic nature of the secondary filling suggests the presence of a settlement nearby whose inhabitants dumped their refuse in the ditch, and pottery evidence suggests that this occurred in the latter part of C11, and possibly early C12.

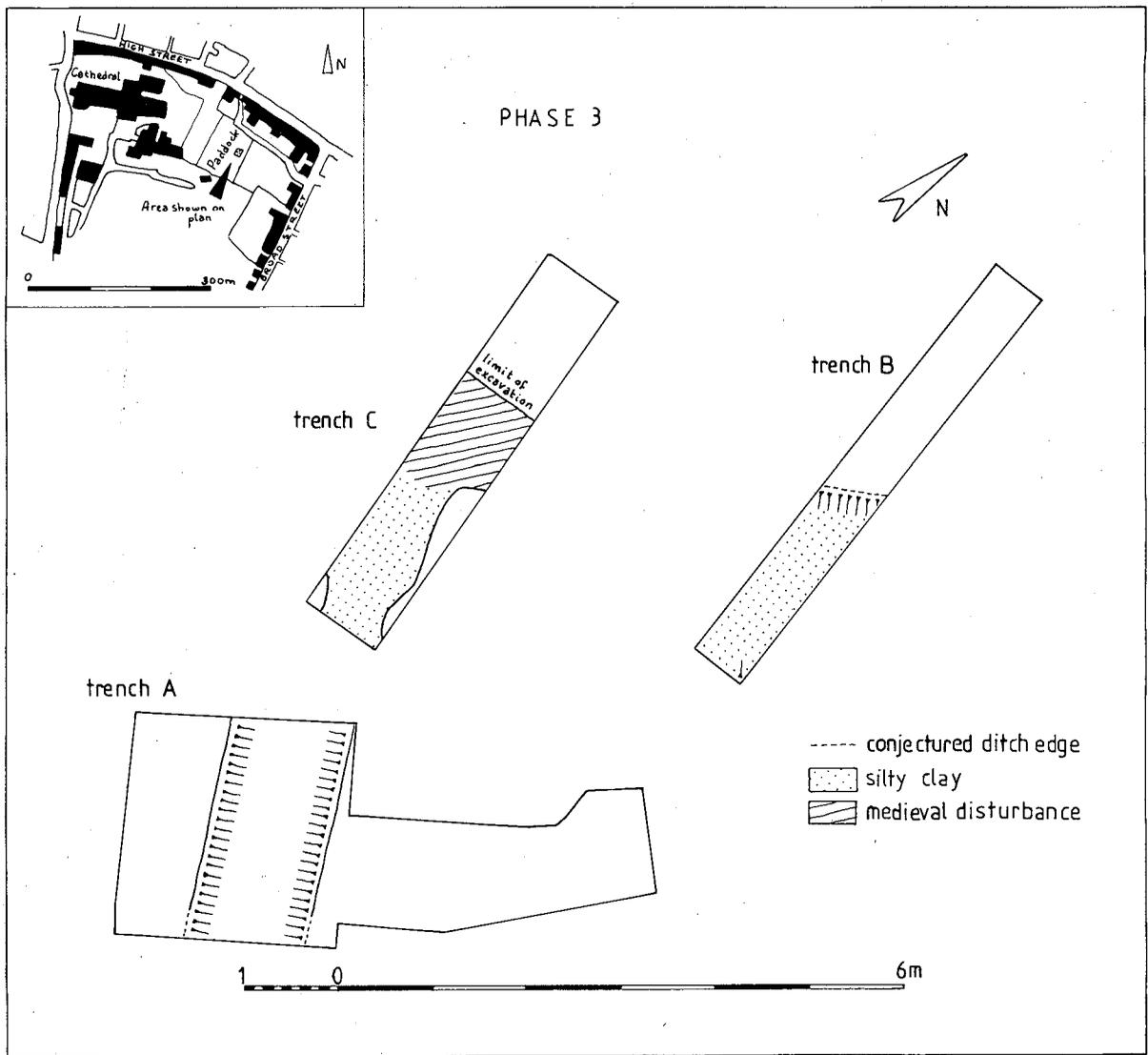


Figure 1. The Paddock, Ely, site plan.

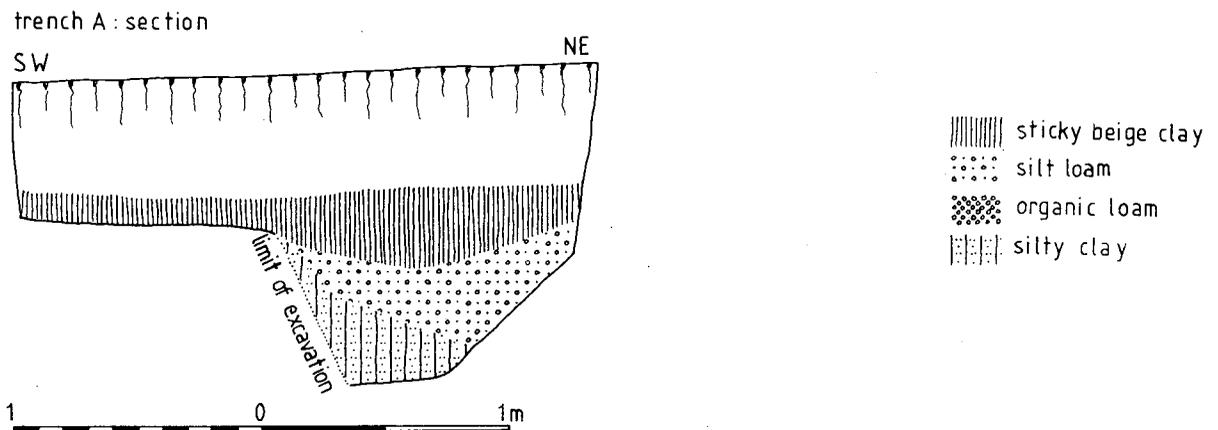


Figure 2. Trench A: NW section.

Phase 5: A layer of sticky yellow-beige clay, 0.1–0.3m thick, was deposited over the whole area. It contained pockets of sand and pebbles. There were a few sherds of C13–C14 pottery and a few very small fragments of pottery of an earlier date, including a small fragment of Samian ware. Some animal bone was also found, as well as a few pieces of limestone roof tile.

This layer was probably deposited over a short period, and the limited amount of pottery evidence would point to a date in C14. Since clay would not have been transported to improve either soil or drainage, this layer probably represents soil containing some occupational debris which was brought here from another site.

Phase 6: The top *c.* 0.5m layer of soil was of medium brown colour and typical of cultivated garden soil. Finds included pottery and tile, mainly of C17–C20 date, clay pipe fragments and lumps of C17–C18 coal.

The excavation of features in this trench was carried out under satisfactory conditions and it was possible to determine phases in the evolution of these features. When dealing with the findings from trenches B and C, reference will be made to the phases noted in trench A.

Trench B

The outline of a U-profile ditch was defined in the sections (Fig. 3).

The ditch which had been cut into the natural Greensand was *c.* 2.45m wide and *c.*

0.6m deep. It ran in an approximately NE–SW direction. The ditch initially infilled with silty clay containing occasional flecks of charcoal. Overlying this primary filling was a secondary filling of organic loam, *c.* 0.1m deep. One small fragment of Thetford ware rim was found in this layer, and a few small fragments of charred bone. No other finds were recovered from this trench.

Lentils of sticky yellow-beige clay were deposited over the edges of the almost completely infilled ditch. The upper horizon (0.5–0.7m deep) consisted of medium brown garden soil.

In view of the lack of dating evidence, it is only possible to suggest, by analogy with the findings from trench A, that the ditch located in trench B may be contemporary with the phase 1 ditch, and that the primary and secondary fillings may be contemporary with phases 2 and 4 respectively. The clay lentils were probably deposited at the same time as the clay layer of phase 5, while the upper horizon may be ascribed to phase 6.

Trench C

A segment of possible ditch was found, truncated at its N end by a later disturbance. Lack of time prevented excavation of the earlier phases and poor light hampered the detailed observation of features.

The top 0.1m of ditch filling was excavated: it also partly overlay the ditch edges at the S end of the trench and consisted of silty clay which may have been waterlogged.

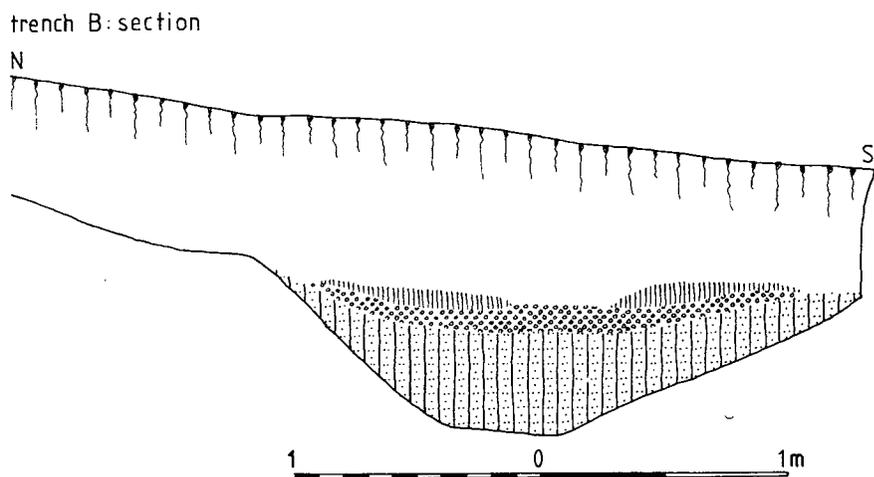


Figure 3. Trench B: E section.

Some sherds of pre-Conquest St. Neots and Thetford ware were found in the silty clay, as well as fragments of bone, some of which were charred. Silty loam then accumulated over the infilled ditch. This layer contained a few small sherds of C11–C13 pottery.

The N end of the ditch had been intersected by a feature, possibly a pit. It had been filled with silt loam and sticky yellow-beige clay containing pockets of sand. The sticky clay deposit which extended over the S edge of the pit contained a few C11–C14 sherds and many small fragments of animal bone.

Soil then accumulated over the whole area (0.5–0.7m deep). It had been much cultivated, and pottery and other finds of late Saxon to C20 date were found intermixed.

The findings from this trench were inconclusive. The segment of ditch was not an obvious continuation of the ditch in trench A. The excavated ditch filling yielded material similar to that found in the primary filling of the ditch in trench A, and analysis of the silty clay deposit suggested the possibility that this was ditch upcast. It is therefore suggested that the excavated ditch fill in trench C consisted of material derived from the redigging of ditches, deposited within a short time-span, and possibly contemporary with phase 3. Consequently, the ditch in trench C would belong to an earlier phase in the ditch system.

The sticky clay infill from the pit was of a similar nature to the clay deposit described in trench A, phase 5, and probably contemporary with it. The upper horizon accumulated in phase 6.

DISCUSSION

The limitations of the excavation must be borne in mind when considering the interpretation of the site.

The evidence suggests two periods and types of land-use:

- I. Represented by phases 1–4, in C11, when ditches and associated domestic refuse suggest the presence of a settlement in the vicinity.
- II. Represented by phases 5 and 6, from C12 to the present day when the site was open ground and had been cultivated, for part of this time at least.

The trenches dug by machine in 1985 had

also yielded evidence for ditches and other features in the upper, W part of the Paddock, and some C11–C12 pottery had been found.

Since the Paddock lies in the vicinity of the cathedral and claustral buildings, the archaeological evidence must be considered within the context of the history of the monastery at Ely.

The monastery was refounded in AD 970 and, in the course of the following century, acquired an extensive estate, part of which was lost after the Norman Conquest and Hereward's revolt. The Normans showed a more positive interest in Ely from 1080 when an attempt was made to restore to the Abbey lands confiscated after the Conquest and the rebuilding of the cathedral was begun.

In 1109, the diocese of Ely was created, and over half of the monastic estate was eventually made over to the bishop. In the middle years of C12, Ely was again the centre of a revolt, and the process of division of the monastic estate was probably completed towards the end of C12 (Miller 1953; *Victoria County History, Cambs. ii*).

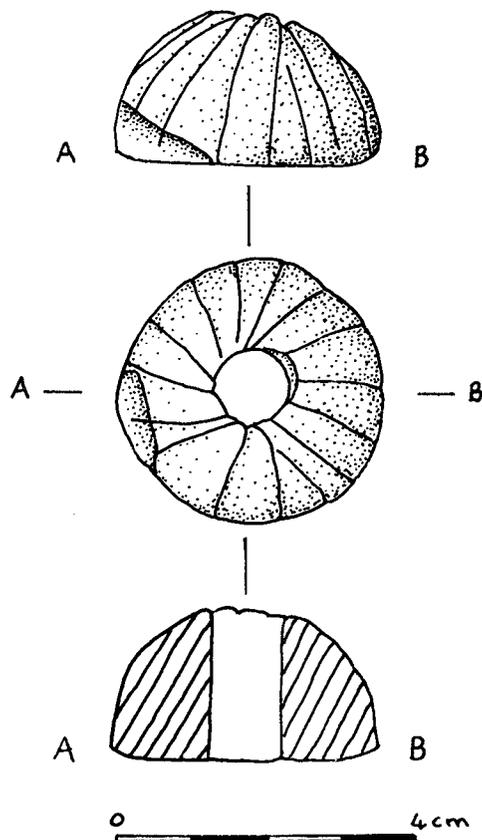


Figure 4. Fired clay spindle whorl from trench A, phase 4.

Documentary evidence shows that by the latter part of C13, the monastic enclosure included a garden that was adjacent to some of the tenements lining the S side of Forehill, i.e. on or around the Paddock (Liber M, *passim*). A reference to gardens and orchards laid out around the monastery at the time of the C10 refoundation does not indicate precise location (Liber Eliensis II, 54).

There was renewed building activity in C14 when the octagon and the Lady Chapel were built.

From this historical survey, it may be seen that the ditches on the Paddock were dug some time after the refoundation of the monastery. Both the pottery evidence in the primary ditch filling and the historical background suggest that the ditch in trench A was recut before Ely suffered the consequences of the Norman Conquest. The duration of the period between the two phases of ditch digging may be deduced from the rate at which the original ditch silted up. The secondary ditch filling accumulated in the latter half of C11 and possibly early C12.

It is likely that the ditches served to drain the land, as well as marking some sort of boundary. These boundaries do not seem to correspond with later ones. The presence of ditches implies a community active enough to undertake the work, possibly under the control of the monastery. The finds suggest domestic rather than monastic activity.

The change in land-use probably occurred c. 1100. The Norman involvement in Ely and the creation of the see must have led to considerable changes in property holding. Expansion of monastic and cathedral precincts was taking place elsewhere at about this time (e.g. Canterbury, Gloucester) and it is suggested that the site of the Paddock became part of the monastic enclosure in C12, although the earliest documentary evidence for this dates from C13.

The uneven deposit of sticky clay must have been dumped on the site and the limited pottery evidence suggests a date in C14. It is

suggested that this deposit of clay may be upcast from the foundations for buildings erected in the monastic precincts in C14, and that the irregularity in the modern ground surface may have originated at that time.

The upper horizon consisted of a depth of cultivated soil which is consistent with the documentary evidence.

CONCLUSION

The excavations have yielded evidence for late Saxon occupation in the neighbourhood of a Saxon monastery. As the features excavated lay under a depth of cultivated soil, it is possible that a part of the late Saxon landscape may have survived on the Paddock. The site has now been preserved from development for 99 years. It would therefore be possible to seek further information regarding the ditch plan through geophysical methods.

Acknowledgements

I should like to thank those who took part in the excavation or contributed to the post-excavation work, and in particular Mr. D.N. Hall and Dr. C.A.I. French. Thanks are also due to Miss A. Taylor for providing information about the 1985 findings, and to the Dean and Chapter of Ely Cathedral for permitting the excavations on the Paddock.

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