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(incorporating the Cambs and Hunts Archaeological Society)

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Three Earthwork Surveys

Cambridge Archaeology Field Group

Susan C. May

During the 1980s the Cambridge Archaeology Field Group conducted three site surveys which have not yet been published widely. They are presented here as drawn plans with brief notes on documentary evidence and pottery finds. The three sites are at Cobbs Wood, Wimpole; Overhall Grove, Boxworth; and St Etheldreda's Church, Histon. Each site was surveyed using triangulation and offsets, and sections were taken with a dumpy level.

The first two sites appeared to be moated medieval homesteads, most probably manors. The Cobbs Wood site is one of the largest in western Cambridgeshire, containing about $1\frac{3}{4}$ a. within the primary moat and one acre in the attached enclosure, whereas the Overhall Grove site, with a moated area of about $\frac{1}{4}$ a., is amongst the smallest in the area.¹ The third site appeared to be the earthwork remains of a medieval church.

Cobbs Wood Moated Site, Wimpole, TL346516 (Figs.1-3)

This site is recorded by the Ordnance Survey and the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments,² but lacked a detailed survey because of the heavy tree cover. The Cambridge Archaeology Field Group attempted to rectify this in 1984, 1985 and 1988 following the removal of dead elms. The site lies within Cobbs Wood on the National Trust Wimpole Hall Estate, in the east of the parish, and is 37 m. above O.D., near the junction of lower (grey) chalk and gault clay.

¹ Royal Commission on Historical Monuments, *West Cambridgeshire* (London 1968) pp.lxi-v.

² *Ibid.* p.225 Monument 19 (written description only).

Survey (Figs.1-2)

The site has a double enclosure, ditch [T] being much the deepest and the remains of the principal moat, with [U] probably its continuation. These enclose a relatively flat sub-rectangular platform [V], not shown by the Ordnance Survey. The moat's banks are on the outside. There are also remnants of a bank ([W]) extending approximately southwards from and at right angles to this external bank. Ditch [X] on the west side is a more recent field boundary ditch.

The much narrower ditch [Y] had far less standing water than [T] and its spoil was deposited on the inside. The bank between the two 'moats' had recently been breached by contractors so that their relationship could not be tested. However, sections taken of the contractors' cut, [A1-A2], [B1-B2], showed the possible make-up of the bank.

The long ditches at the north of the site ([Z]) are nowhere near as large as [T] and probably not part of the original moat. No obvious signs of house remains were found.

Surface Finds (Fig.3)

Pottery of the eleventh to thirteenth centuries was recovered both inside and outside the moated enclosure, generally from land which had been disturbed in the removal of trees. Forty percent of the 132 sherds are St Neot's wares of eleventh- and twelfth-century forms, and include small pots and shallow bowls with everted rims.

Other items include a shoulder probably of twelfth-century Thetford ware with a horizontal band of rouletted fine lattice decoration (Fig.3[8]); one piece of yellow/buff glazed

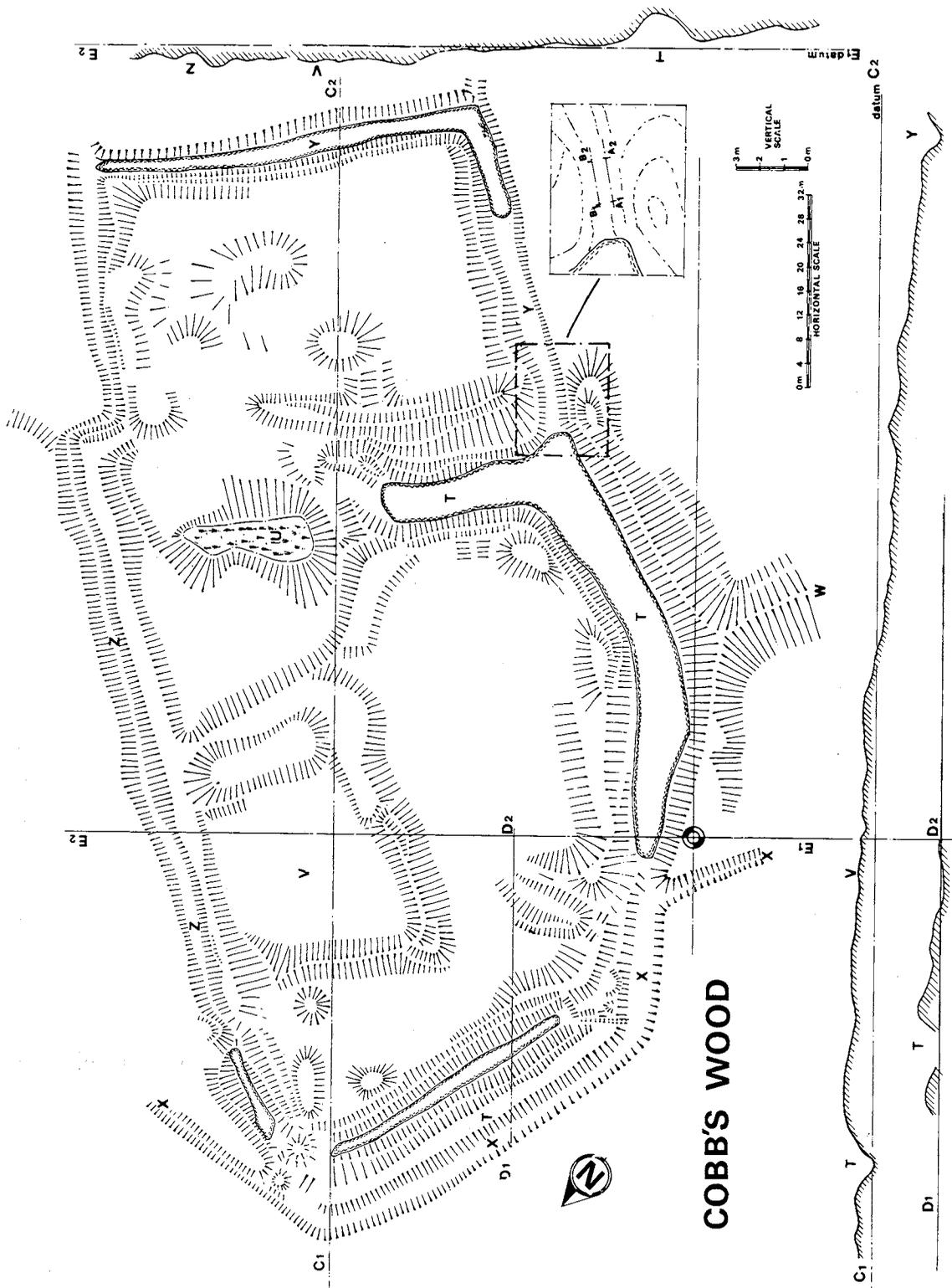


Figure 1. Cobb's Wood survey plan.

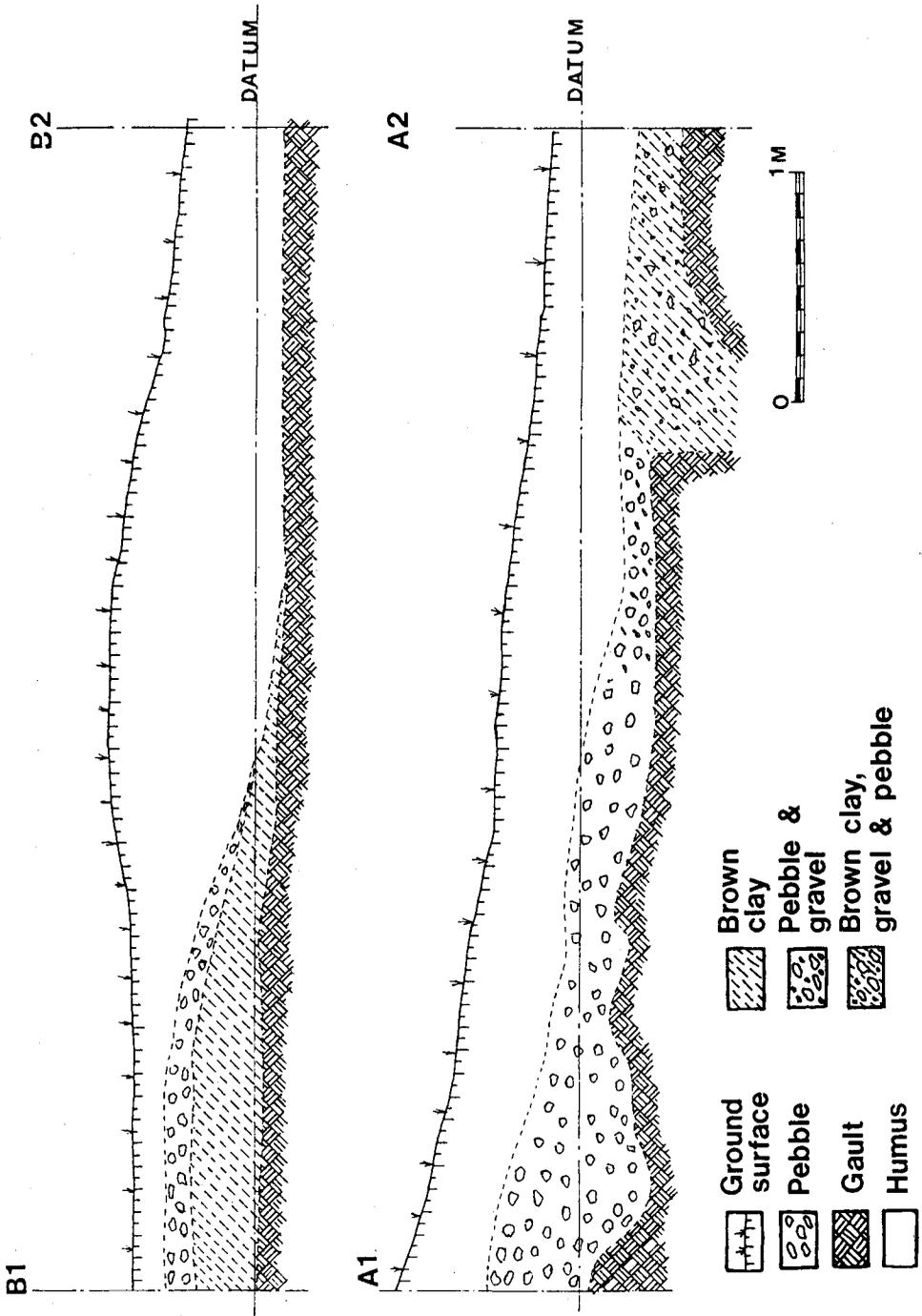


Figure 2. Cobb's Wood. Vertical stratigraphy sections A1-A2, B1-B2 (see insert Fig. 1).

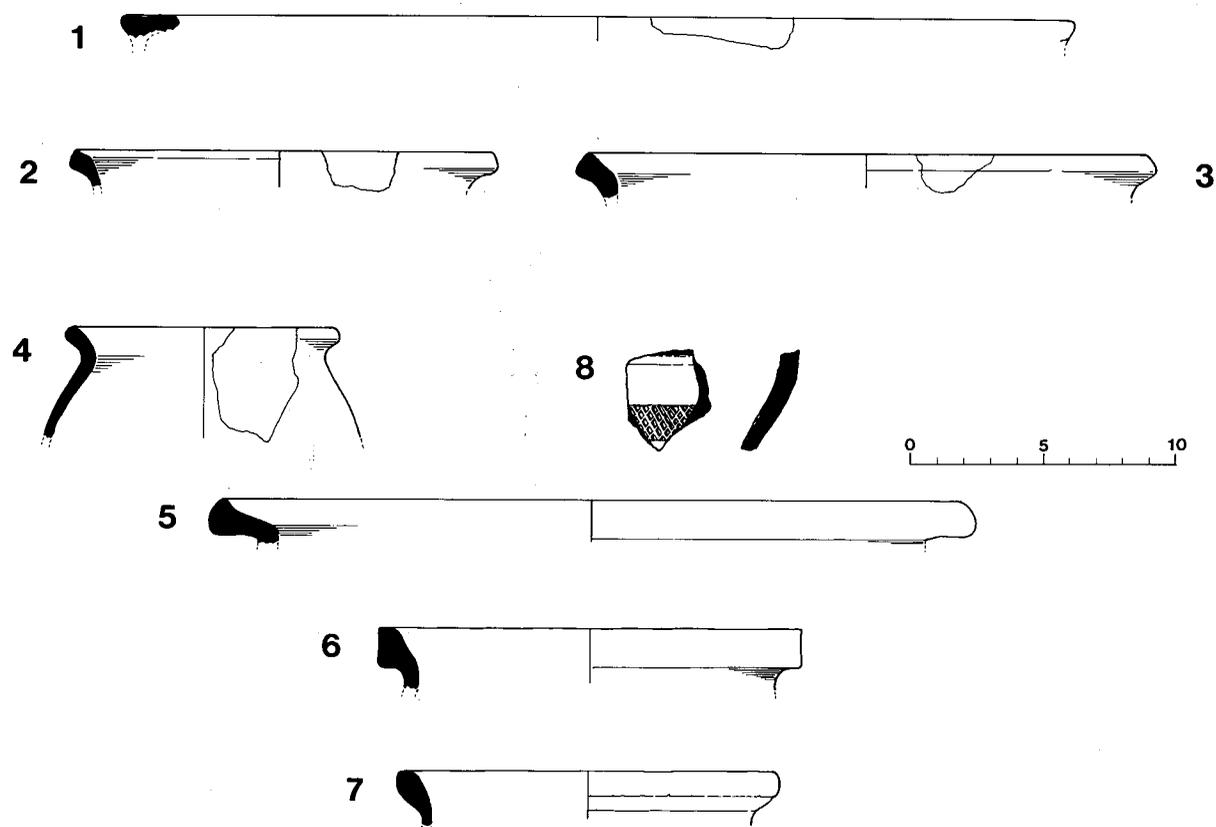


Figure 3. Cobb's Wood. Surface pottery finds.

ridge tile, possibly of the thirteenth century; and a small two tone (buff and orange on orange core) slipped and glazed piece similar to Sgraffiato ware and possibly from Heddingham. Three other glazed sherds may be fifteenth century or later. Most of the remainder are sandy wares of twelfth/thirteenth century date. Pottery of a similar type and date was found in the arable field to the north.

Figure 3 Details

1 Bowl of St Neot's ware with hammer-headed rim, dark grey fabric with purple brown surfaces.

2 Vessel of St Neot's ware with everted rim, flattened on the inside, dark grey fabric, light brown surfaces blackened on edge of rim.

3 Vessel of St Neot's ware with everted rim hollowed on inside, dark grey fabric, light brown surfaces blackened on edge of rim.

4 Vessel of St Neot's ware with simple everted rim, grey fabric, light brown surfaces. Shell inclusions fine.

5 Bowl of St Neot's ware with flanged rim hollowed on top, dark grey fabric and rim surfaces, buff under rim.

6 Vessel of St Neot's ware with everted rim squared and hollowed on outside, light grey fabric, light brown surfaces.

7 Vessel of St Neot's ware with everted rim thickened on outside, grey fabric throughout.

8 Shoulder, probably of twelfth-century Thetford ware, grey fabric.

Historical Evidence

The site may be associated with the lost settlement of Wratworth, which was recorded in the Domesday survey as having 32 inhabitants, but which had disappeared as a separate entity by 1279³ although a manor of Wratworth survived into the seventeenth century.⁴ Hare's 1638 map of Wimpole Manor

³ Victoria History of the Counties of England, *Cambridgeshire and the Isle of Ely*, Vol.5, ed. by C.R. Elrington (Oxford 1973) p.263.

⁴ Indenture, Cambridgeshire Record Office (CRO) R52/12/8/12a.

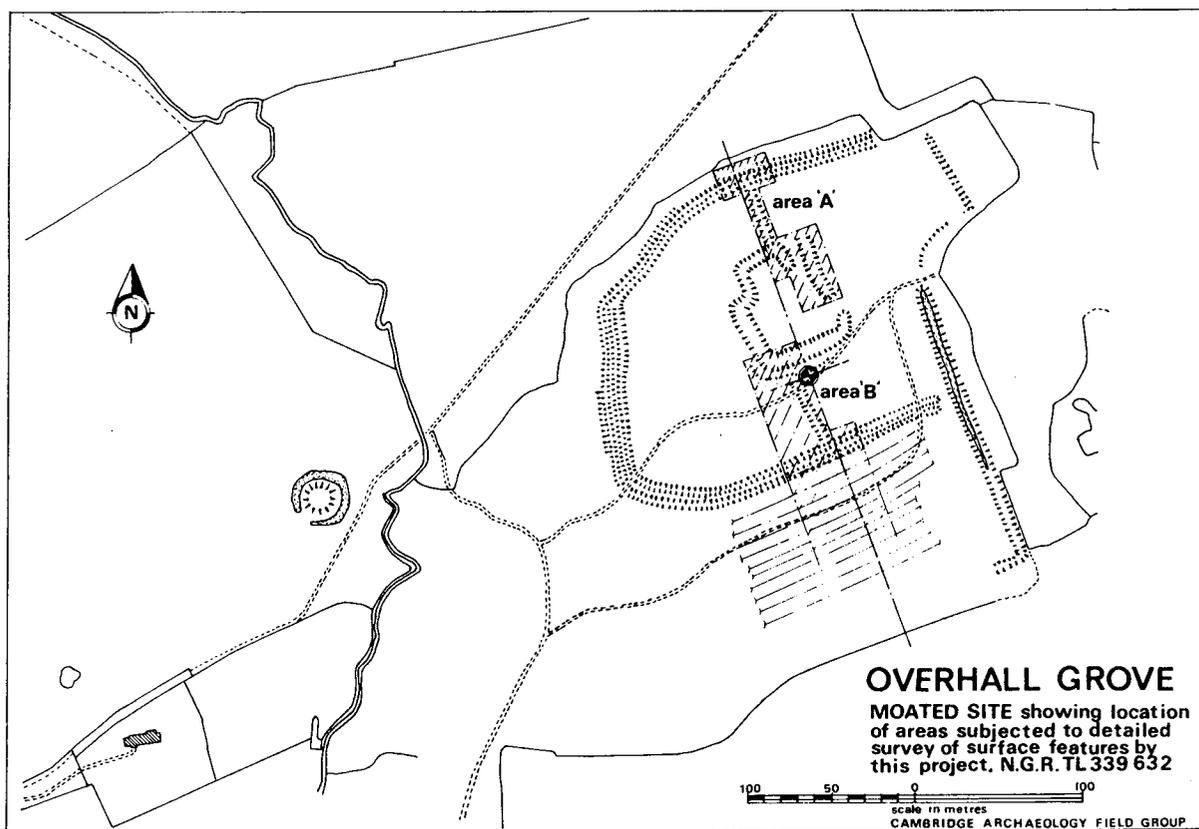


Figure 4. Overhall Grove. General survey map.

shows wooded enclosures called Cobbs and Ratford covering the area of Cobbs Wood, together with nearby enclosures called Great Cobbs, Francis and Walters.⁵ The Francis and Walter families each held the manor of Wratworth at different times, and the second manor held by the Francis family passed to the Cobbs by marriage in 1376.⁶ The Hare map also shows the area from Cobbs Wood to the north of Cobbs Wood Farm as existing enclosures, surrounded by open fields. The ditches shown as [Z] on the survey plan appear to correspond to land boundaries on this map. The moated site lies within the wooded area but was not indicated on the Hare or later maps until the second edition of the Ordnance Survey of 1903.

Overhall Grove Moated Site, Boxworth, TL339633 (Figs.4-7)

This site has been recorded by the Ordnance Survey and the Royal Commission on Historical

Monuments,⁷ and is a scheduled ancient monument. In 1984 the Group was asked by the County Archaeology Officer to attempt a detailed survey of cross-sections of the earthwork to examine the chronological relationship between the moat and the outer ditch, and this was carried out in 1984-6.

The site, owned by the Cambridgeshire and Bedfordshire Wildlife Trust, lies in a wood on a slope of boulder clay close to the boundary with Knapwell, and comprises a roughly rectangular moat surrounded by a larger enclosure contained on three sides by a double ditch.

Survey (Figs.4-6)

Area A had previously been thought to contain an original entrance at [a1], but the survey indicated that the moat carried through, creating a shape reflecting that of the north-western corner of the moat. The channel from the outer bank of the moat at [a2] to the outer ditch at [a3] is considerably shallower than either the moat or the ditch, and appears to be a later overflow channel. In Area B there is

⁵ CRO R77/1.

⁶ Victoria History of the Counties of England, *Cambridgeshire and the Isle of Ely*. Vol.5 p.266.

⁷ Royal Commission on Historical Monuments, *West Cambridgeshire* pp.30-1 Monument 15.

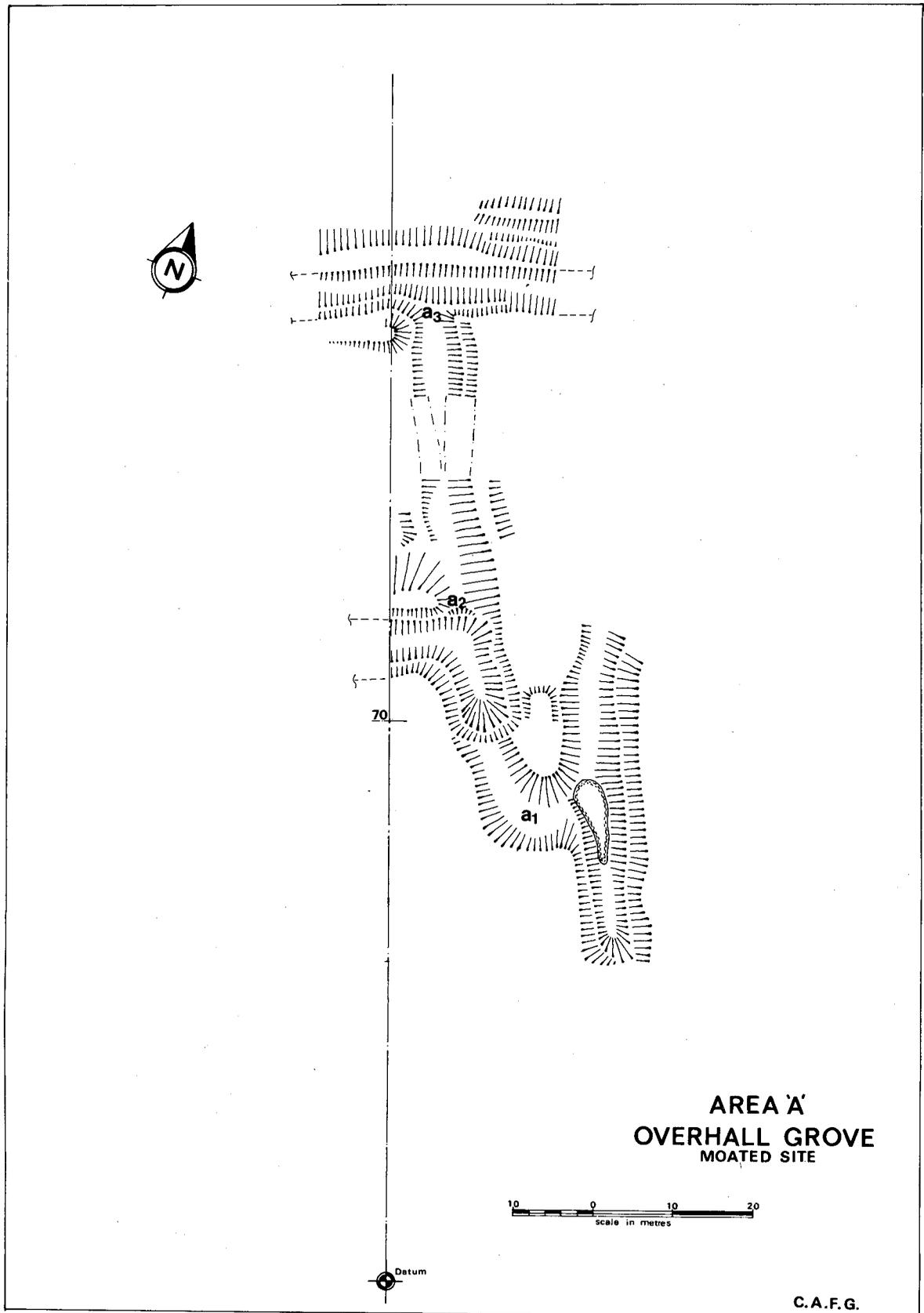


Figure 5. Overhall Grove. Area A survey map.

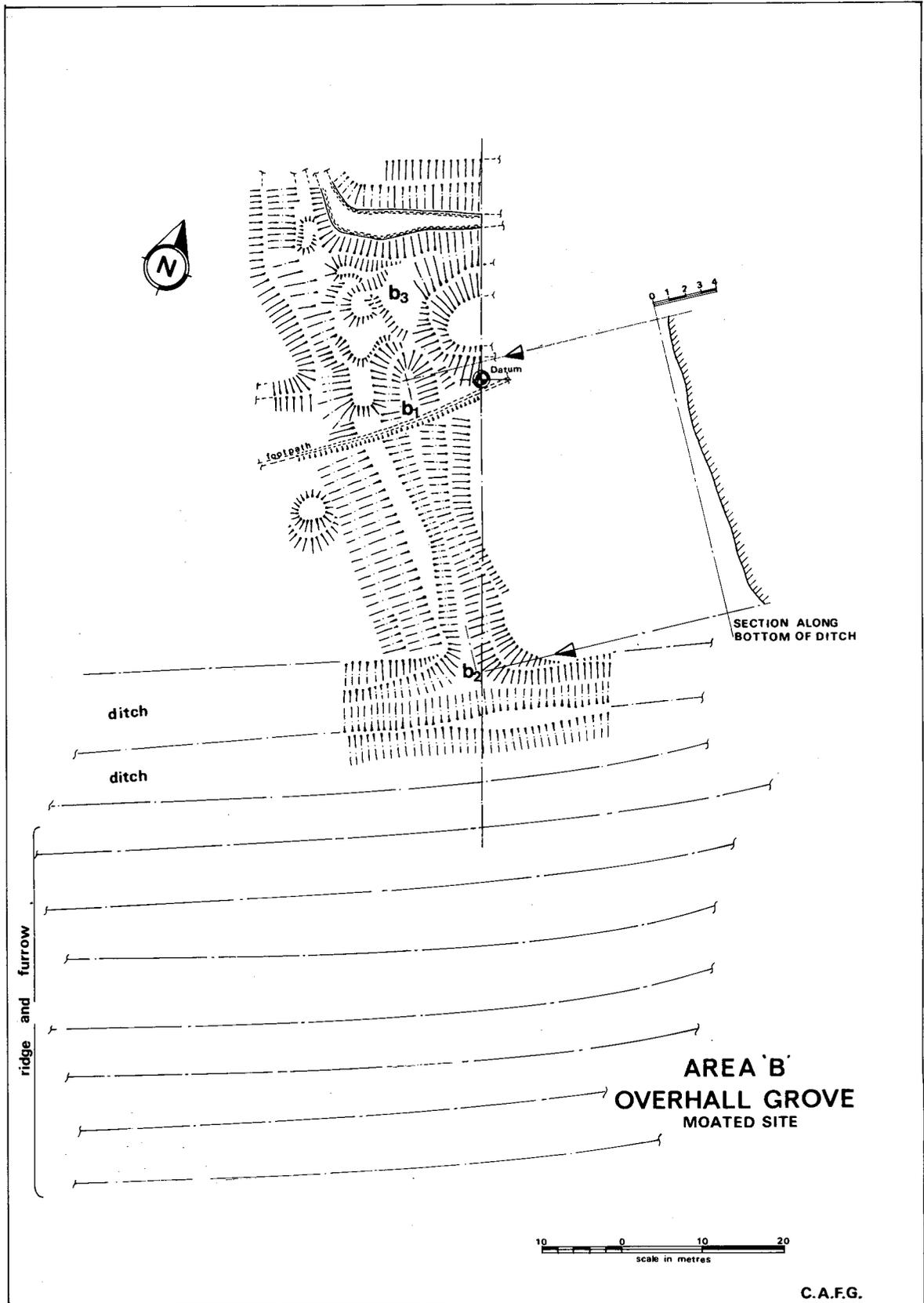


Figure 6. Overhall Grove. Area B survey map.

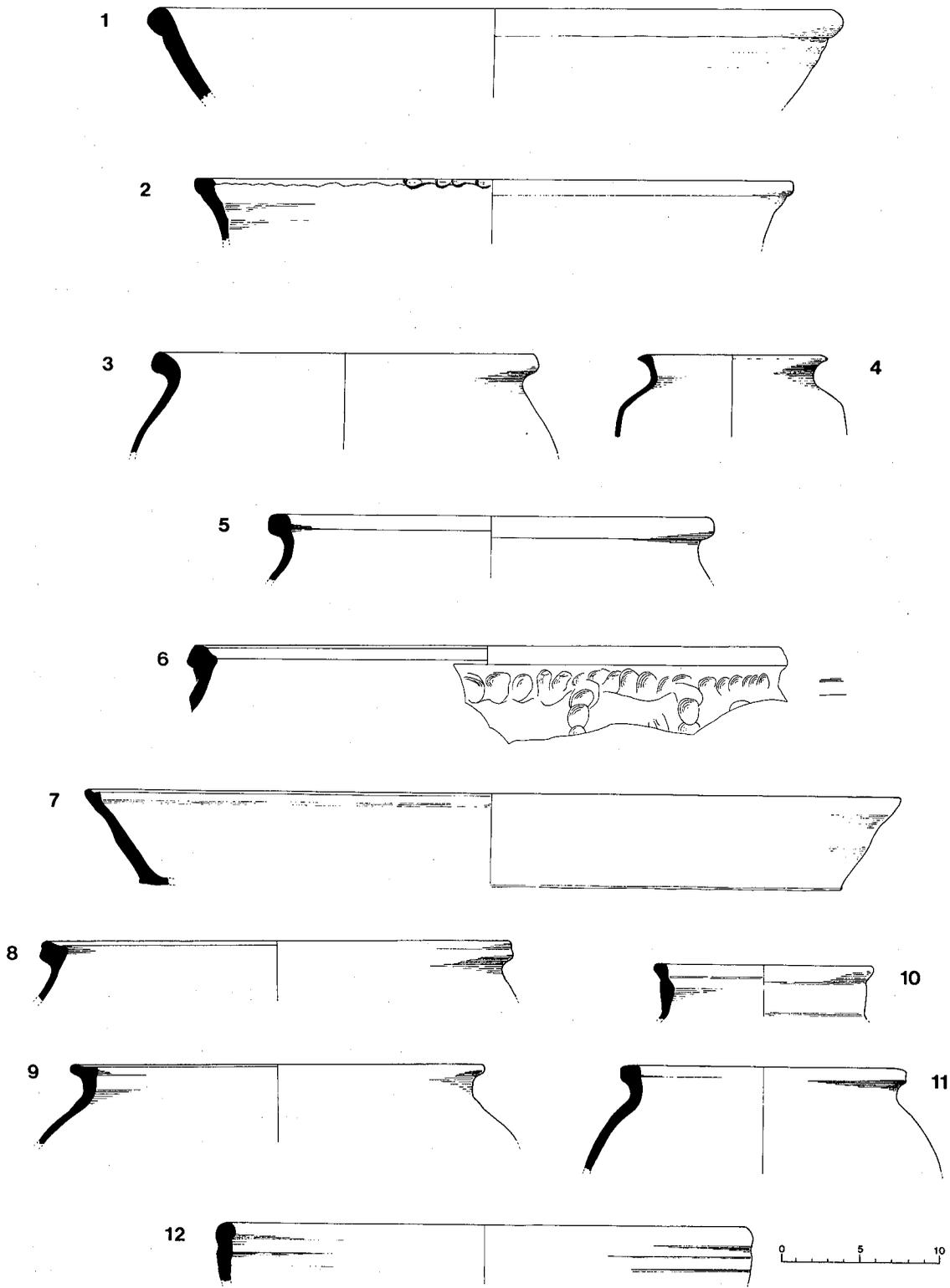


Figure 7. Overhall Grove. Surface finds.

a similar channel, [b1] to [b2], with the upper end stopped up, probably deliberately ([b3]). This area, however, had been extensively disturbed by badgers. No ridge-and-furrow was identified within the enclosure between the moat and the outer ditch, but it did occur immediately outside the outer double ditch on the southeast, running approximately parallel to it. Ridge-and-furrow was observed to be extensive within the wooded area but was not surveyed further.

Surface Finds (Fig.7)

Some 200 sherds of pottery dug up by badgers were found within the moated site and a fragment on its immediate outer edges, but none was found further out into the enclosure. Many are of such a large size as to suggest a rubbish dump as their provenance. They are largely of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, though some date from the fourteenth century. Seventy are shell-tempered and appear to be of developed St Neots type, including several pieces of a vessel 32 cm. in diameter at the rim with thumb-stripping horizontally underneath the rim and vertically down the body (Fig.7[6]). The 15 glazed sherds are considered to be mostly of the thirteenth century, several of Heddingham type. The remaining sand- or grit-tempered wares are generally of the thirteenth/fourteenth centuries including cooking pots with flat topped rims, and a rope twist handle. Twenty-one of the sherds are sooted or blackened.

Figure 7 Details

Shell-tempered rims

- 1 Bowl with thickened rim rounded and undercut on the outside, grey fabric, internal surface dark brown, external surface blackened and lumpy.
- 2 Bowl with thickened rim rounded on the outside with finger moulding on the inside edge, fabric red/brown with grey core, surfaces darker brown, shell inclusions sparse.
- 3 Vessel with everted rim thickened on the outside, grey fabric, surfaces light brown.
- 4 Vessel with everted subtriangular rim, dark grey fabric, light brown surfaces, variably darkened.

5 Vessel with everted thickened rim flattened on top and undercut inside and outside, light grey fabric, surfaces buff.

6 Vessel with angular thickened everted rim with horizontal thumb stripping on outside under rim and vertical thumb stripping at intervals, grey fabric, surfaces buff.

Unglazed rims, sandy fabric

7 Bowl with upright rim hollowed on inside, fabric red/brown with dark grey core, slight surface glitter.

8 Vessel with rectangular everted rim hollowed on top, fine light grey fabric with light brown surfaces.

9 Vessel with flanged rim flat-topped and slightly hollowed, hard grey fabric, surfaces light brown with blackening under rim.

10 Vessel with upright internally moulded rim, grey fabric, surface red/brown with slight glitter, blackening on outside and rim.

11 Vessel with flat-topped rectangular rim, grey fabric, surfaces light brown with slight glitter, variably blackened.

12 Bowl with upright rounded rim, undercut inside, some rilling on outside, fabric light brown with grey core, slight glitter.

Historical Evidence

The site is generally believed to be the site of Overhall Manor; the name was in use by about 1480.⁸ Botanical evidence indicates that the woodland is secondary, of the sixteenth century,⁹ and John Layer, writing in the first half of the seventeenth century, described the site of Overhall Manor as 'decayed'.¹⁰ The boundaries of the wood are much as are shown in a 1650 map of the parish¹¹ and in the inclosure award map of 1843,¹² but the maps give no indication of a moat, and the Ordnance Survey was not

⁸ Walter Rye (ed.), *Pedes finium: or, fines relating to the County of Cambridge, levied in the King's Court from the Seventh Year of Richard I to the End of the Reign of Richard III* (Cambridge 1891) p.157.

⁹ Information from the Cambridgeshire and Bedfordshire Wildlife Trust.

¹⁰ W.M. Palmer, *John Layer (1586-1640) of Shepreth, Cambridgeshire: A Seventeenth-Century Local Historian* (Cambridge 1935) p.98.

¹¹ CRO TR373/P1.

¹² CRO R60/24/2/P.

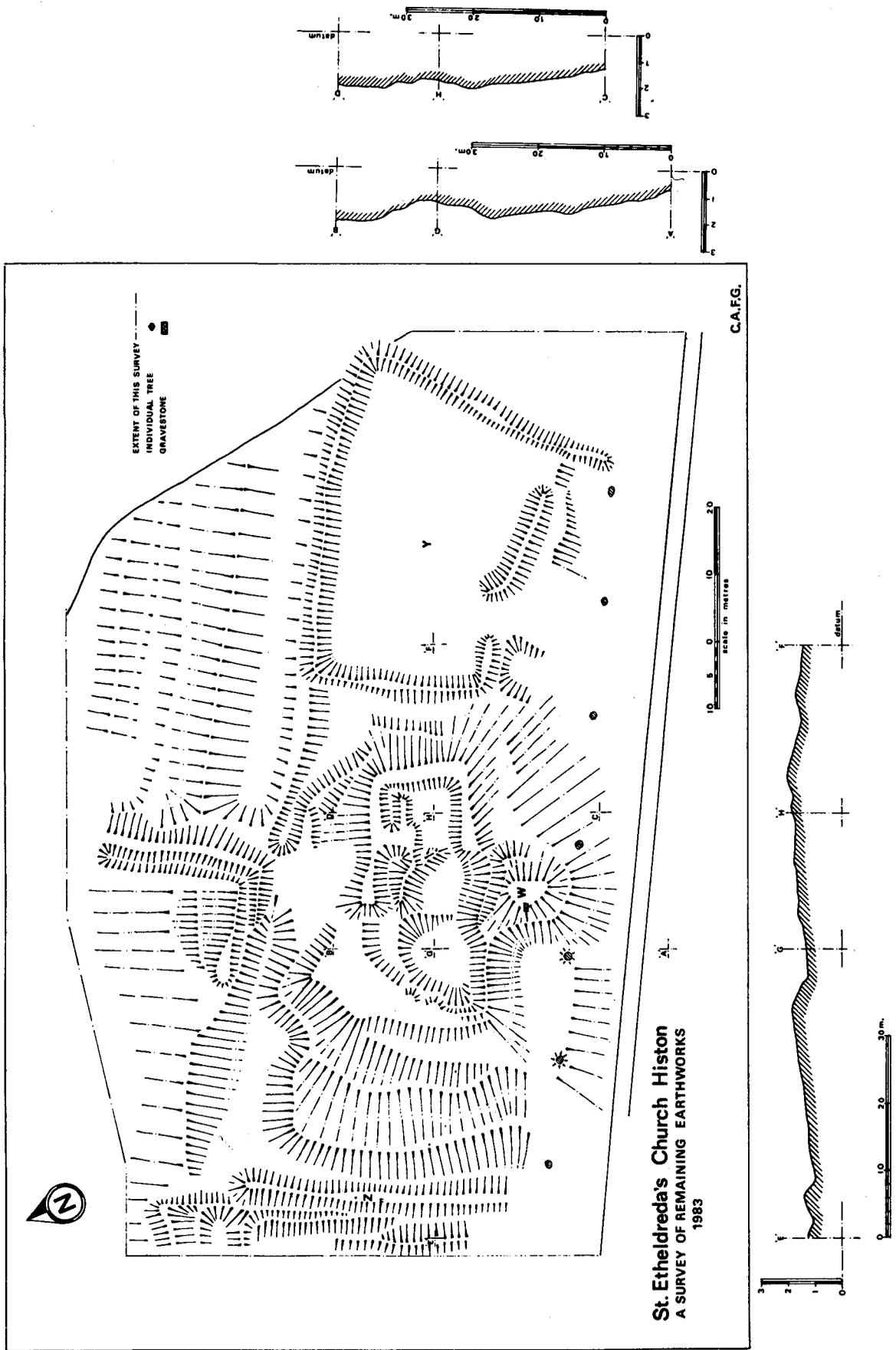


Figure 8. St Etheldreda's Church, Histon. Survey map.

aware of its existence until after 1900.¹³

**St Etheldreda's Church Site, Histon,
TL434640 (Fig.8)**

The site of this church exists only as earthworks in meadow at Abbey Farm, and is merely marked as a site by the Ordnance Survey. A gazetteer of 63 parish churches in Cambridgeshire that had gone out of use by 1982 indicated only four with no twentieth-century description, of which St Etheldreda's was one.¹⁴ Consequently, a full survey was undertaken in 1982-3.

Survey

The outline of the church walls surviving as banks between one-half and one metre high is indicated in the area [G] to [H], and seems likely to represent a simple chancel, nave and tower structure. The existence of a tower is evident from steeple bells recorded in 1552.¹⁵ The trapezoidal banked enclosure to the east of the church ([Y]) is understood to be an area levelled by the present owner's family. The linear bank to the west ([Z]) is thought to be the boundary of the churchyard, but the mound to the southeast of the church (W) is likely to be a tree mound despite the existence of a gravestone lying on it. Ridge-and-furrow remains can be seen to the northeast of the church beyond the limits of the churchyard and continue into a meadow further north, through which the path also continues.

Historical Evidence

In the middle ages Histon had two churches; the other was dedicated to St Andrew and still stands. They stood 200 m. apart at Church End and are shown on Saxton's map of 1576, Robert Morden's map of 1695 and Emmanuel Bowen's map of 1751;¹⁶ on the latter two maps, the churches are shown on either side of the main road. St Etheldreda's was in use by 1190 — a charter of William Bishop of Ely of that year refers to an annual pension from the church — and belonged to the Benedictine abbey of Eynsham.¹⁷ By 1588 the two churches were in effect united,¹⁸ and by the end of the sixteenth century St Etheldreda's was demolished,¹⁹ with the possible exception of the chancel.

No pottery was recovered from the site as it was down to grass.

Acknowledgments

The permission of the landowners — the National Trust (Cobbs Wood), the Cambridgeshire Wildlife Trust (Overhall Grove) and Mr Rowley (St Etheldreda's, Histon) — respectively, for access to their land is gratefully acknowledged, and thanks are also due to Mr Hoole of Cobbs Wood Farm for his cooperation and to David Hall for looking at the pottery.

¹³ T.M. Hughes, 'On some earthworks at Boxworth and Knapwell', *Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society* 10 (1903) pp.237-40.

¹⁴ Alison Taylor, 'Churches out of use in Cambridgeshire: a discussion, gazetteer and excavation on two sites', *Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society* 72 (1982-3) pp.30-8.

¹⁵ Victoria History of the Counties of England, *Cambridgeshire and the Isle of Ely*. Vol.9, ed. by A.P.M. Wright and C.P. Lewis (Oxford 1989) p.106 n. 57.

¹⁶ Christopher Saxton, *Counties of Northampton, Bedford, Cambridge, Huntingdon and Rutland* (1576); Robert Morden, *Cambridgeshire* (1695); Emmanuel Bowen, *An Accurate Map of Cambridgeshire Divided into its Hundreds* (1751).

¹⁷ Victoria History of the Counties of England, *Cambridgeshire and the Isle of Ely*. Vol.9 p.103.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* p.104.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* p.104; Cambridge University Library Ely Diocesan Records H3/48/Histon, no.2.

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