

CCC AFU Report Number 912

**Millfield Primary School,
Littleport, Cambridgeshire**

An Archaeological Evaluation

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Summary

On the 24th and 25th of October 2006 the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council conducted an archaeological evaluation within the area of a proposed development at Millfield Primary School, Littleport, Cambridgeshire. The development comprises an extension of the school building.

Two trenches were excavated, totalling 28m in length. Two features were recorded; a shallow Roman pit and a field drain aligned east to west.

Datable artefactual material was recovered from the topsoil – this consisted of a few very heavily abraded Romano-British pottery sherds and a few fragments of 18th/19th century material including clay pipe and pottery. Artefacts were also retrieved from the subsoil and from the pit, dating it to the 2nd-4th centuries AD.

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Drawing Conventions

Sections	Plans
Limit of Excavation	Limit of Excavation
Cut	Deposit - Conjectured
Cut-Conjectured	Natural Features
Deposit Horizon	Sondages/Machine Strip
Deposit Horizon - Conjectured	Intrusion/Truncation
Intrusion/Truncation	Illustrated Section S.14
Top Surface/Top of Natural	Archaeological Deposit
Break in Section/ Limit of Section Drawing	Archaeological Feature
Natural Deposit	Excavated Slot
Cut Number	Cut Number 118
Deposit Number 117	
Ordnance Datum $\frac{18.45\text{m OD}}{\times}$	
Inclusions	

1 Introduction

This archaeological evaluation was undertaken in accordance with a Brief issued by Kasia Gdaniec of the Cambridgeshire Archaeology, Planning and Countryside Advice team (CAPCA; Planning Application E/03014/06/CC), supplemented by a Specification prepared by Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Field Unit (CCC AFU).

The work was designed to assist in defining the character and extent of any archaeological remains within the proposed development 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 in due course.

2 Geology and Topography

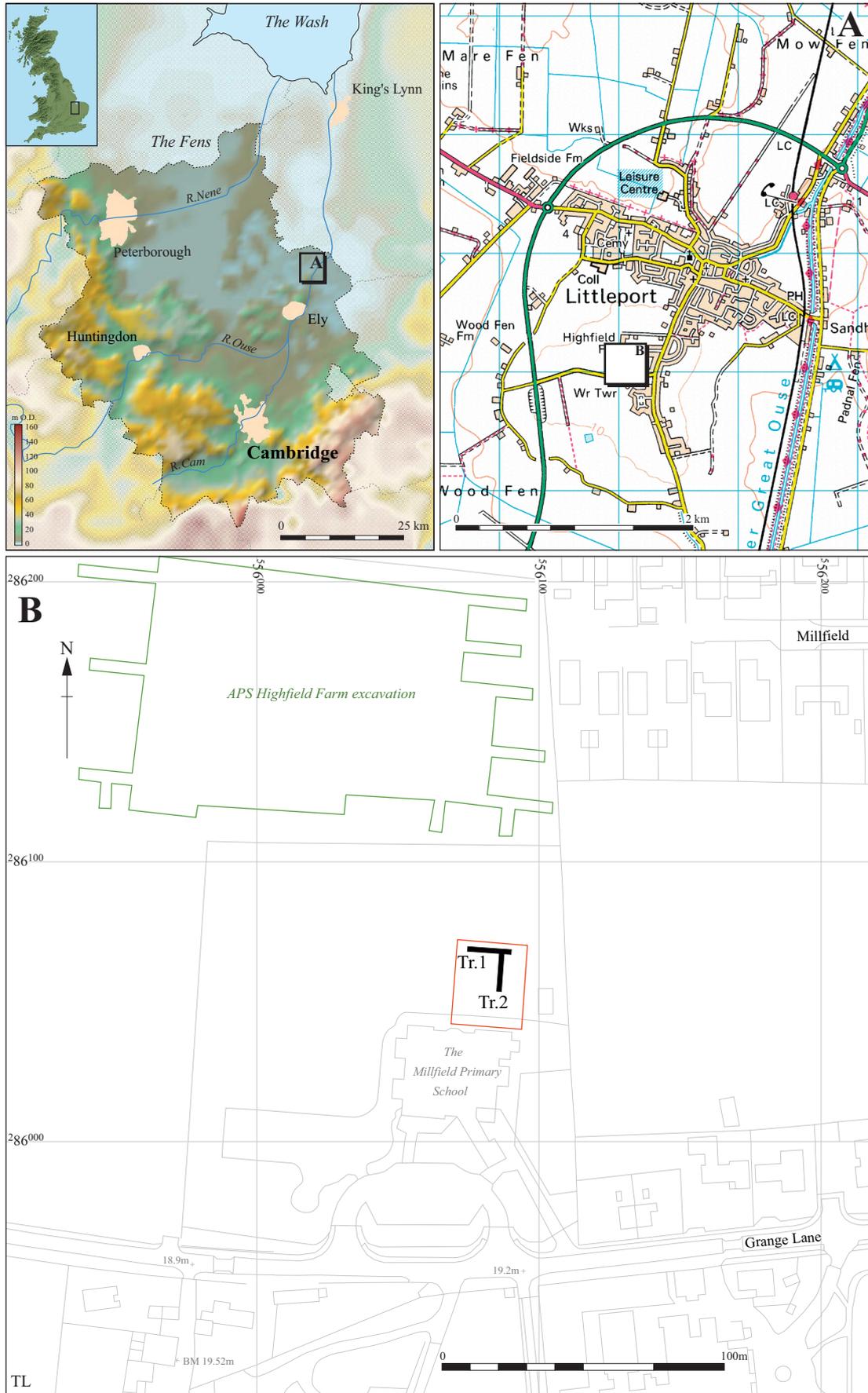
The site lies on boulder clay (Till) with Kimmeridge Clay to the north and Glacial Sand and Gravel to the south (BGS Sheet No. 173).

3 Archaeological and Historical Background

3.1 Prehistoric

Prehistoric remains have been recorded on the north and northwest side of Littleport Island including a Bronze settlement site at Plantation Farm (CHER CB141). Two sparse Bronze Age lithic scatters have also been recorded approximately 1km and 2km to the southwest of the subject site (Hall 1996 Fig.11 sites 17 and 18). An extensive evaluation followed by open area excavation has been carried out at Highfield Farm to the north of the site by Archaeological Project Services (APS) and has revealed occupation deposits surrounding a ponded area of intensively inter-cutting pits and evidence of dispersed settlement dating from the Neolithic and Bronze Age periods (Dymond 1999; Unpublished 2006).

The Iron Age is very poorly represented with only two sites recorded in the whole parish, both located approximately 3km to the northwest of Littleport Island at Butchers Hill.



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

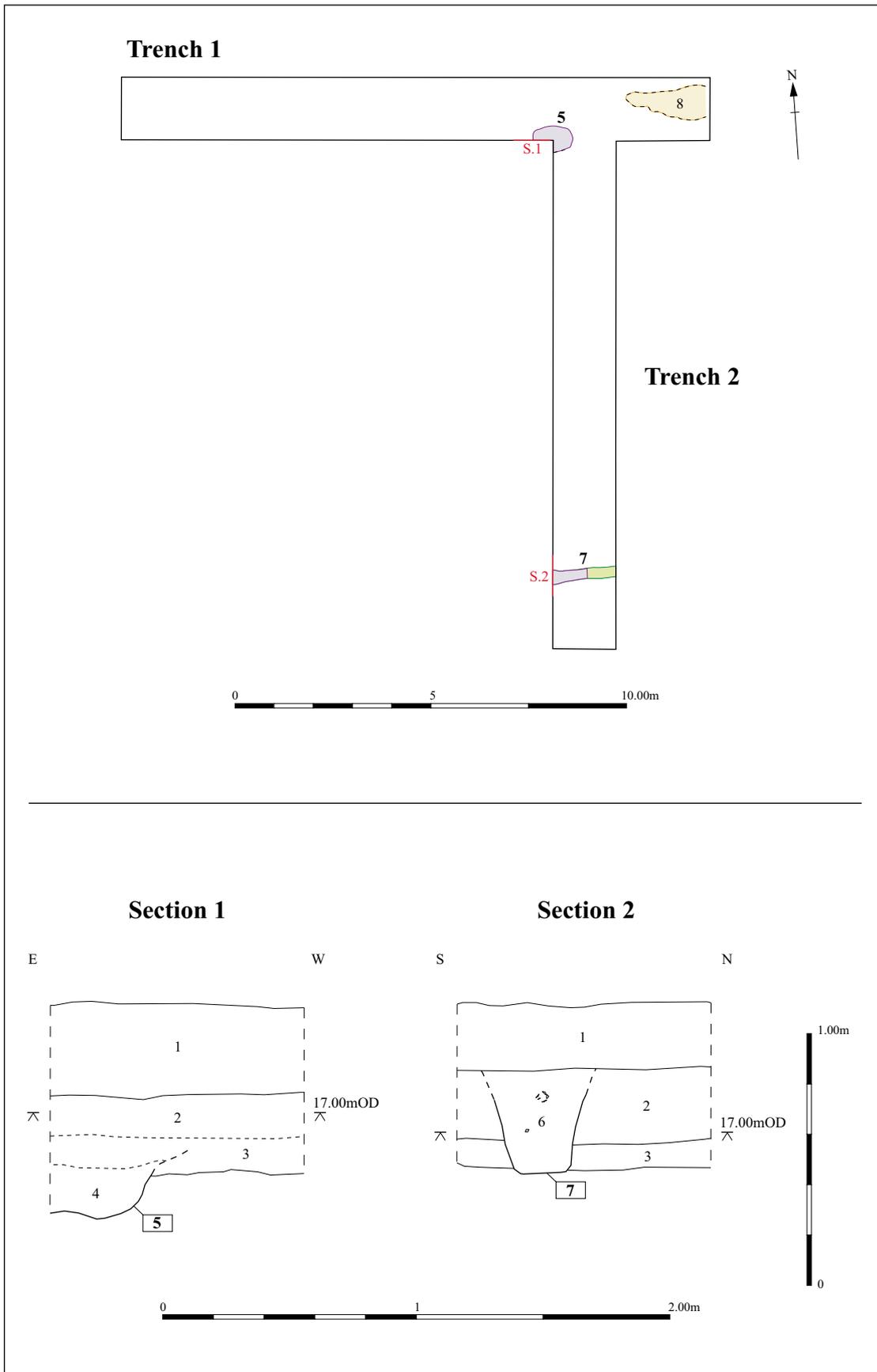


Figure 2: Trench plans and section drawings

3.2 Roman

Roman remains from Camel Road saltern are adjacent to the south side of the Old Croft River (CHER CB 139 and 140) 200m to the north of the subject site (Macaulay 2002). There are potentially as many as 30 saltern sites along the Old Croft River (*ibid*). The Roman road of Akeman Street is thought to run through Littleport, however, no trace of the road has yet been found north of Ely. Recent excavations by APS at Highfield Farm have revealed a concentrated area of Romano-British activity approximately 100m north of the boundary with Millfield Primary School (Dymond 1999; APS unpublished 2006).

Surrounded by (probable) contemporary field enclosures extending to the north and west, a multi-phase sub-rectangular ditched enclosure contained a series of intercutting pits, a possible post-built structure and a sunken floored building with identifiable floor layers and a wood-lined tank. Waterlogged material was also recovered from this and from a number of the surrounding pits. The Romano-British features, which continued beyond the southern boundary of the excavated area, appeared to lie in a slight natural hollow.

3.3 Saxon

Saxon occupation at Littleport may have been based around the hithe where the Old Croft ran close to the island (Macaulay 2002). A Saxon cemetery was excavated by APS to the north of the Romano-British occupation area. It was found to contain ninety-seven burials, including three horse burials and five urned cremations (APS unpublished 2006).

3.4 Medieval

The Domesday Book (1086) records a *vill* and it is assumed that the present town covers part (if not all) of the medieval centre.

3.5 Modern

In recent times the Ordnance Survey First Edition map of 1890 shows that Littleport's historic street pattern remains the same today.

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 (Gdaniec 2006) required that a minimum of 5% of the development area should be subject to trial trenching.

The evaluation area covers approximately 750 sq m. Two trenches were excavated totalling 28m in length (45 sq m), equalling a 6% sample. Machine excavation was carried out to the depth of archaeological features or deposits under constant archaeological supervision with a 13 tonne 360-degree excavator using a 1.60m wide toothless ditching bucket. A plan of the proposed trenching strategy was sent to CAPCA for approval before trenching began.

Trench 1 was aligned east to west and was 15m long. Trench 2 was aligned north to south and was 13m long. Topsoil and subsoil were kept separate on either side of the trenches to facilitate high quality reinstatement.

Both trenches were pumped out and backfilled after completion of archaeological work.

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 digital photographs were taken of all relevant features and deposits.

4.1 Environmental Samples

One environmental sample was taken from the single feature recorded.

4.2 Site Conditions

Machining the trenches to the depth of archaeological features revealed a perched aquifer and both trenches began to flood as soon as they were opened. A pump was called in to drain the water, allowing rapid investigation of the features to take place.

5 Results

The topsoil (1) was a very fine rich mid brown, soft silty loam. It was quite plastic and virtually inclusion free. It was 0.35m deep along the length of Trench 1 and 0.28m deep in Trench 2.

The subsoil (2) was a mid grey-brown, very fine clay silt with occasional medium gravel inclusions and was 0.17m deep in Trench 1, deeper (to maximum 0.28m) in Trench 2.

A third layer (3), a merging zone between subsoil and natural levels, was recorded as 0.10m deep in both trenches. It was similar to the subsoil, but with a stronger clay and sand mix. This layer may

represent a lower B horizon soil - an old land surface deposit not fully worked into the medieval and modern subsoil.

The underlying natural subsoil was a yellowish fine clay sand.

5.1 Trench 1

One archaeological feature was recorded within the trench – a small pit (5) situated against the southern baulk of the trench. Its dimensions at the machined level were approximately 1m x 0.75m and 0.20m deep. The single fill (4) was a mid grey sandy silt. Eleven large and unabraded Roman pottery sherds were recovered from this feature, dating to the 2nd to 4th century AD.

At the eastern end of the trench there was an amorphous spread of darker grey subsoil (context 8 – part of layer 3) that produced 2 sherds of 2nd-4th century Roman pottery and 3 pieces of animal bone.

5.2 Trench 2

A feature at the southern end of the trench was excavated and identified as a field drain (cut 7, fill 6). A single sherd of 18th century glazed red earthenware was recovered from the fill.

5.3 Topsoil and Subsoil Finds

Finds from the topsoil consisted of eight sherds of heavily abraded Roman pottery and a single piece of struck flint. There was also one piece of clay pipe stem. The majority of topsoil and subsoil finds were recovered from Trench 1.

The subsoil finds consisted of one sherd of Roman grey ware, one worked flint, and a piece of bone with butchery marks.

6 Discussion and Conclusions

The single pit can be dated to the 2nd to 4th centuries AD, the main period of Romano-British activity in the fens. The relatively small dimensions of the feature, and the difficult visibility and working conditions did not allow a full understanding of the nature of the pit. However, along with the presence of other Roman pits and features 100m to the north, it suggests at least a limited continuation of the Romano-British occupation surfaces and features recorded at Highfield Farm.

Topsoil and subsoil finds were relatively sparse. A lack of finds from the medieval period suggests that the area was under pastoral use during this time.

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

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank Cambridgeshire County Council who commissioned and funded the archaeological work. The site staff were the authors. Stephen Macaulay managed the project and spot-dated the pottery.

The brief for archaeological works was written by Kasia Gdaniec, who monitored the evaluation.

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Appendix 1: Finds Summary

Context	Cut no.	Feature	Description	Qty	Wt (g)	Date Range
1		Topsoil	Clay pipe stem	1	4	1800- 1900
1		Topsoil	Glazed red earthenware	2	41	1600- 1800
1		Topsoil	Roman pottery	4	40	2nd –4th century
1		Topsoil	C.B.M fragments	4	24	Roman – post-med
1		Topsoil	Struck flint	1	6	Bronze Age?
2		Subsoil	Roman pottery	1	55	2nd to 4th century
2		Subsoil	Cattle heel bone with butchery mark.	1	42	unknown
2		Subsoil	Struck flint	1	2	Neolithic or Bronze Age
4	5	Pit	Roman pottery	11	281	2nd to 4th century
4	5	Pit	C.B.M fragments	2	16	2nd to 4th century
4	5	Pit	Sheep tibia	1	18	2nd to 4th century
6	7	Field Drain	Glazed red earthenware	1	14	1600- 1800
8		Spread	Roman pottery	2	40	2nd to 4th century
8		Spread	Animal bone, including fragment of cattle jaw	3	127	2nd to 4th century

Table 1: Finds summary

Appendix 2: Roman Pottery

By Stephen Macaulay

The assemblage consists of fifteen large well-preserved sherds of Roman pottery (weighing a total of 425g).

It is composed almost entirely of coarse ware pottery from nearby (Norfolk and Cambridgeshire) domestic sources. The exceptions are the fine ware fabrics which, although rare include Nene Valley Colour Coat (13g) and Central Gaulish Samian (Antonine, 10g) of 1st –2nd century AD date. Otherwise Grey and Oxidised (Grey) Sandy wares dominate, with some shelly wares also present.

The assemblage consists of jars, bowls and cooking pots and is a typical domestic/kitchen assemblage of average to low status.

The range and variety is dominated by the classic domestic coarse wares for Romano-British sites of this period and locality (Grey Wares, Shelly and Oxidised Sandy Wares), with Nar Valley ware being present from the potteries to the east in Norfolk.

The date range of the assemblage is the 2nd to 4th centuries AD, from the diagnostic Grey Sandy wares and Nene Valley Colour Coats (GCS, NVCC).

The assemblage is of some significance due to its proximity to the nearby excavation at Highfield Farm (APS) which identified a large Roman rural settlement site. The assemblage discussed here will relate directly to this investigation.

Type	Weight (g)
Grey Ware	182
Grey Sandy Ware	59
Oxidised Grey Sandy Ware	51
Shelly Wares	21
Nar Valley GW	89
Nene Valley Colour Coat	13
Central Gaulish Samian	10
Total	425

Table 2: Pottery types and fabrics within the assemblage

Context	Weight (g)	Pottery type	Vessel	Decoration	Body or Rim	Spot Date
01	40	OGSW, CGS, NVCC	Jars, bowls, flagon	none	Body & rim	2nd-4th C AD
02	60	GW	Jar	none	Body	2nd-4th C AD
04	284	GSW, OGSW, SW, Nar Valley, GW	Jars, Bowls, Pinched necked Flagon (Colchester)	none	Body & Rim	2nd-4th C AD
08	41	GSW	jar	none	Body	2nd-4th C AD
Totals	425					

GW = Grey Ware, GSW = Grey Sandy Ware, OGSW = Oxidised Grey Sandy Ware, SW = Shelly Ware, NVCC = Nene Valley Colour Coat, CGS = Central Gaulish Samian

Table 3: The assemblage by context

Appendix 3: Environmental Remains

By Rachel Fosberry

1 Introduction and Methods

A single bulk sample was taken from pit fill 4 in order to assess the quality of preservation of plant remains and their potential to provide useful data as part of further archaeological investigations.

The ten-litre sample was processed by tank flotation for the recovery of charred plant remains, dating evidence and any other artefactual evidence that might be present. The flot was collected in a 0.5mm nylon mesh and the residue was washed through a 1mm sieve. Both flot and residue were allowed to air dry. The dried residue was passed through 5mm and 2mm sieves and a magnet was dragged through each resulting fraction prior to sorting for artefacts. Any artefacts present were noted and reintegrated with the hand-excavated finds. The flot was examined under a binocular microscope at x16 magnification.

2 Results

Both residue and flot were devoid of any artefacts or plant remains.

3 Conclusions and Recommendations

No further work required.



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