

Archaeological Field Unit

**23 Green Street, Willingham, Cambridgeshire:
An Archaeological Evaluation by Trial Trenching
and Excavation**

Steve Hickling

February 2005

Cambridgeshire County Council

Report No. 783

Commissioned by *H. C. Moss (Builders) Ltd*



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SUMMARY

During January 2005 the Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Field Unit was called on to carry out an archaeological evaluation by trial trenching in advance of the construction of a small residential development.

This archaeological investigation revealed a brief period of medieval occupation in the 13th-14th century, characterised by structural features at the street frontage and a ditch marking the rear of the plot. Occupation seems to have ceased after the 14th century until the 17th or 18th century when activity starts again, characterised by ditches, postholes and pits.

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Drawing Conventions

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

**23 Green Street, Willingham, Cambridgeshire:
An Archaeological Evaluation by Trial Trenching and Excavation
TL 40857026**

1 INTRODUCTION

During mid January 2005 the Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Field Unit (AFU) conducted an archaeological evaluation by trial trenching at 23 Green Street, Willingham, Cambridgeshire. Subsequently a small area at the street front was opened-up for excavation. The work was carried out at the request of H.C.Moss (Builders) Ltd in order to fulfil a brief issued by Andy Thomas, Principal Archaeologist, Land Use and Planning, Cambridgeshire County Council, in advance of a residential development of five new houses.

The site is located on the east side of Green Street, between the junction with Rampton End and Green End.

2 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

According to the British Geological Survey Map (Sheets 187 and 188, Huntingdon and Cambridge) the site lays on second terrace river gravels and Ampthill Clays.

The topography is flat, at a height of approximately 7m OD. The village is situated to the south of the River Great Ouse.

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

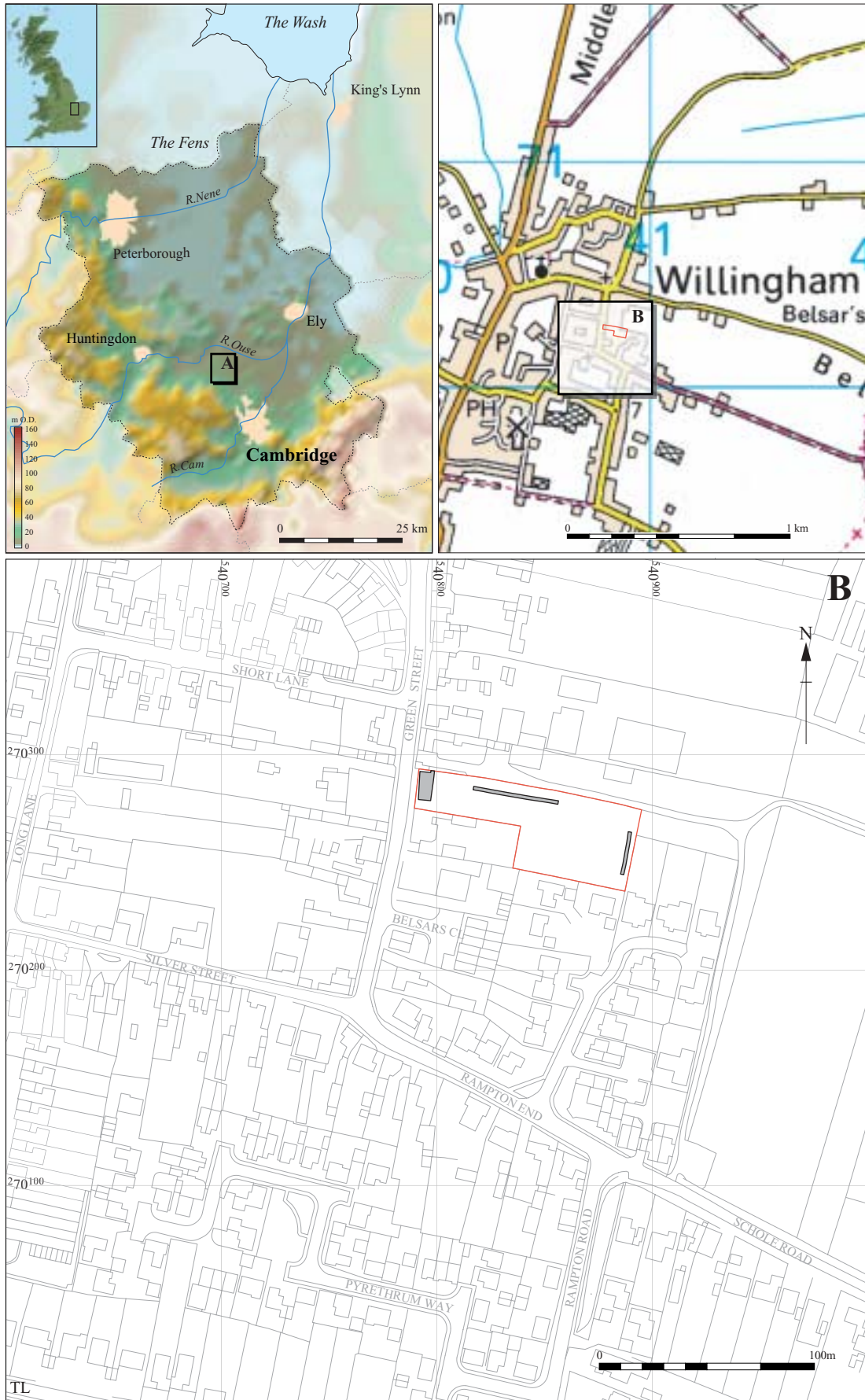
The first edition Ordnance Survey map (1885) shows the development area as built up at the street frontage and wooded at the rear.

3.1 Prehistoric

To the north of the village in Middle Fen, two polished Neolithic flint axes have been found (SMR 05599 and 05733).

A Bronze Age ring-ditch was recorded 1km to the north-east of the village (SMR 05781).

Belsars Hill is located to the east of the village adjacent to the Aldreth



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Figure 1 Location of trenches with development area outlined in red

causeway, linking the Isle of Ely with the mainland. It is not dated, but is assumed to be Iron Age (SMR 01770). Iron age and Roman crop marks have been noted at Milking Hills Corner to the north-east of the village (SMR 05776b & c). Excavations here by the Fenland Survey produced late Iron Age features, possibly settlement related (SMR 07976). An area of dark occupation soils have been recorded here, yielding pottery of late Iron Age and Roman dates (SMR 08600 and 08600a). Crop marks of seven square Iron Age type barrows and one circular one have been noted 1.3km north of the village (SMR 10935 and 10936). A small area of dark soil to the south of the village has yielded Iron Age and Roman pottery sherds (SMR 08615 and 08615a).

3.2 Roman

To the north-west of the village, along West Fen Road, a scatter of Roman pottery has been recorded (SMR 01892). One kilometre to the north-west of the village lies an extensive area of crop marks, dated by pottery to the 2nd and 3rd centuries (SMR 02576, 02108, 03635 and 07752). A large amount of Roman pottery, building materials and crop marks are recorded to the north of the above site at West Fen Farm and along the fen edge (SMR 03634, 03636, 03637, 03638, 03639, 03640, 05877 and 05878). 0.2km to the south of West Fen Farm is a possible villa site (SMR 10982). A 3rd century Roman coin hoard has also been found close by (SMR 05882). 3km to the east of the village are more enclosure and settlement crop marks, dated by pottery to the Roman period (SMR 05262). To the south-east of the village coins and pottery dated to the Roman period (mid 2nd to mid 4th century) have been recorded (SMR 05563, 05564 and 05565). More Roman pottery has been found on the northern edge of the village (SMR 05602, 05603 and 05604). Between the village and Belsars Hill, more Roman pottery, querns and building material have been found (SMR 05729 and 08606). Roman pottery suggesting a burial has been found by the Aldreth Causeway 2.5km to the north-east of the village (SMR 05732). More Roman pottery and features have been found to the south-east of Milking Hills Corner (SMR 05776, 05736, 05742, 05853, 06065, 06065a, 06065b, 06066a, 08600a, 08604 and 08605). Roman pottery and quern stones and metalwork have been found to the east of Belsars Hill (SMR 05746, 05747, 05748 and 05784). At Glebe Farm, 3km to the north-east of the village more Roman pottery (of the 2nd to 4th centuries) and quern stones have been found (SMR 05763 and 05789). 2km to the north of the village are more crop marks, pottery and a possible occupation site of Roman date, together with possible square barrows (SMR 05770, 05770a, 05775, 05786, 08611, 08612 and 08613). 0.7km to the north of Belsars Hill, more Roman (2nd to 4th century) pottery, quern stones and metal work in an area of dark soil has been recorded (SMR 05791, 05792, 08607, 08608 and 08609). 1.5km to the north of Milking Hills Corner are the crop marks of a possible Roman temple site (SMR 10938). On the southern edge of the village, a pit containing Roman coins, pewter plates and other finds are recorded (SMR 11162). Adjacent to the present development area, a Roman coin of Gratian was found (SMR 05730).

3.3 Anglo-Saxon

Fragments of an Anglo-Saxon stone cross are visible in the walls of the church, which is first mentioned in the 9th century (SMR 05794a). Late Saxon pottery has been found half-way between the village and Belsars Hill (SMR 08606a). Two Saxo-Norman lead vats were discovered by metal detector at Half Moon Bridge, Smithey Fen, 3km to the north-east of the village (SMR 05782). Somewhere in the parish, a Saxon cemetery was excavated in 1993. The following year, a ceramic money pot was discovered containing thousands of late Saxon coins (SMR 11781a).

3.4 Medieval

A small amount of medieval pottery has been found at the site to the south of Milking Hills Corner (SMR 05776a). The parish church of St Mary and All Saints dates to the 13th and 14th centuries, but contains fragments of Norman masonry (SMR 05794). 0.3km to the north of Glebe Farm, late medieval and post-medieval sherds have been found (SMR 08599 and 08599a).

3.5 Previous Archaeological Investigations

An evaluation behind 76 High Street revealed no archaeological features, but did yield pottery dated from the 16th century and later and horseshoes dated as late 15th to 16th century (Bailey, 2003).

A large excavation at the High Street (Connor and Robinson, 1997) revealed a wealth of early to middle Saxon settlement evidence including post built structures and late Saxon pits and ditches relating to properties fronting Church Street.

A watching brief conducted at the parish church revealed no archaeological features (Hatton, 1998).

An evaluation at land off Rampton Road in 2001 (to the south of the site) produced a few residual Iron Age, Roman and medieval pottery sherds and some post medieval features (SMR MCB15868). Another evaluation next door in 1999 produced two undated ditches.

An evaluation at the corner of Short Lane and Green Street in 1999 revealed no archaeological features (Prosser and Seddon, 2000).

3.6 Recent History

23 Green Street was purchased by Stanley Jeeps in November 1927 for £900 and included 12 acres of land down Priest Lane (oldwillingham.com). It consisted of two late Victorian cottages knocked through to create one house on the street front, with land and sheds to the rear. It appears that many of the properties down Green Street were also attached to smallholdings.

4 METHODOLOGY

Three trial trenches were opened, 1.6m wide and 20m, 40m and 12m long. An open area 13m long and 6m wide was subsequently opened around the trench near the street front. The stripping was done using the backhoe of a JCB wheeled excavator fitted with a toothless ditching bucket, under archaeological supervision. The topsoil was stripped off to the level of the natural geology or the archaeological horizons.

The exposed surfaces were cleaned in order to clarify any features or deposits. All exposed features and deposits were excavated and recorded according to AFU standards and practises.

5 RESULTS

(Full descriptions of layers and fills are to be found in Appendix 1).

5.1 Trench 1

Initial topsoil stripping of this trench revealed two east to west orientated ditches, features **2** and **4**. Ditch **2** was 0.6m wide and 0.45m deep with steep sides and a concave base. Its' fill, (1), was a pale grey silty clay with rare charcoal, gravel and chalk. Glass and brick found in it suggest a recent date. Ditch **4** was 0.7m wide and 0.25m deep with a concave base, dated to the late 18th century by pottery. Its' fill, (3), was a grey-brown clayey silt with rare gravel. These were both cut through a layer of subsoil, layer 5, a creamy grey



Plate 1 Trench 1 viewed from the north

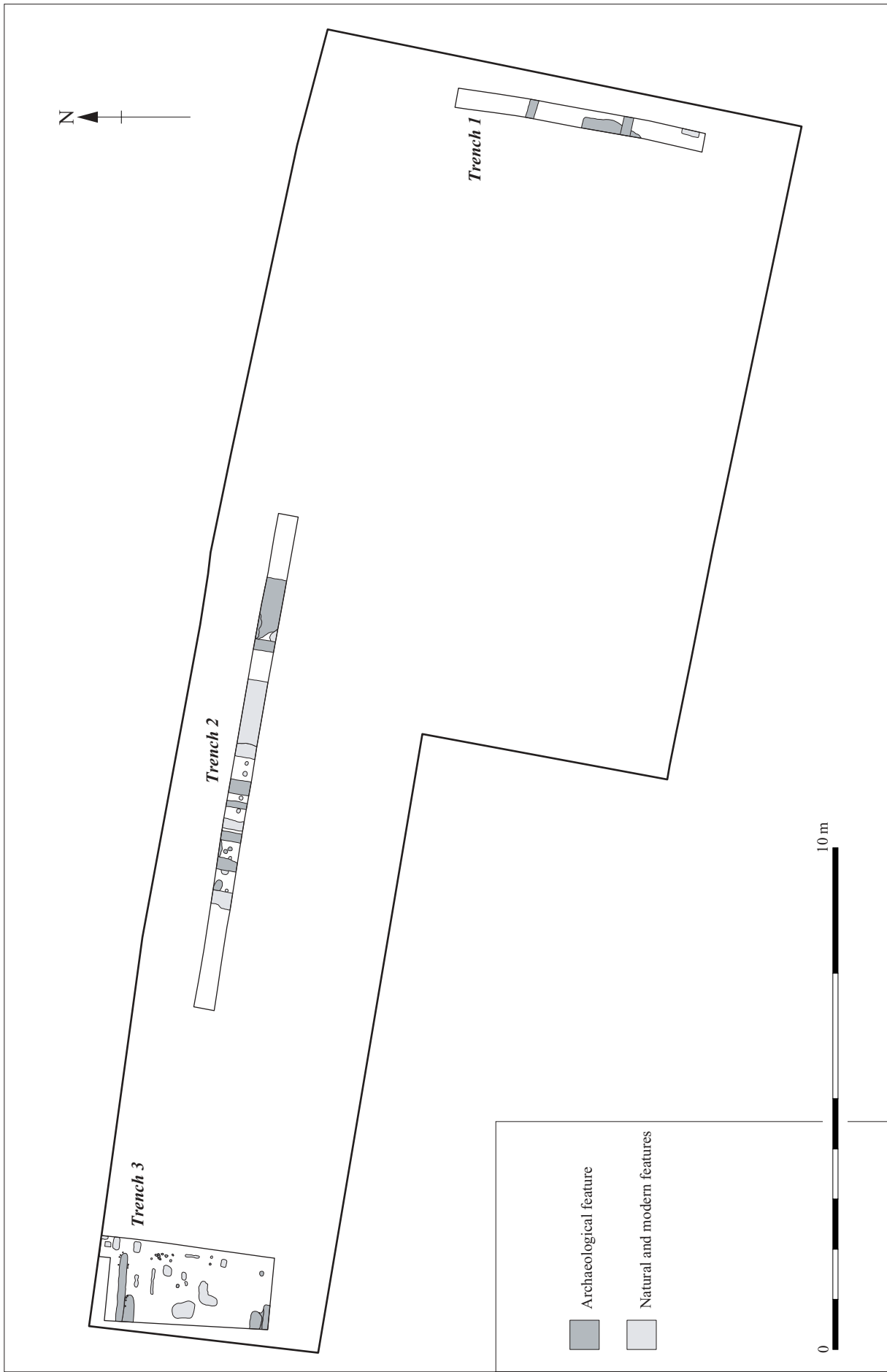


Figure 2 Development area with location of trenches

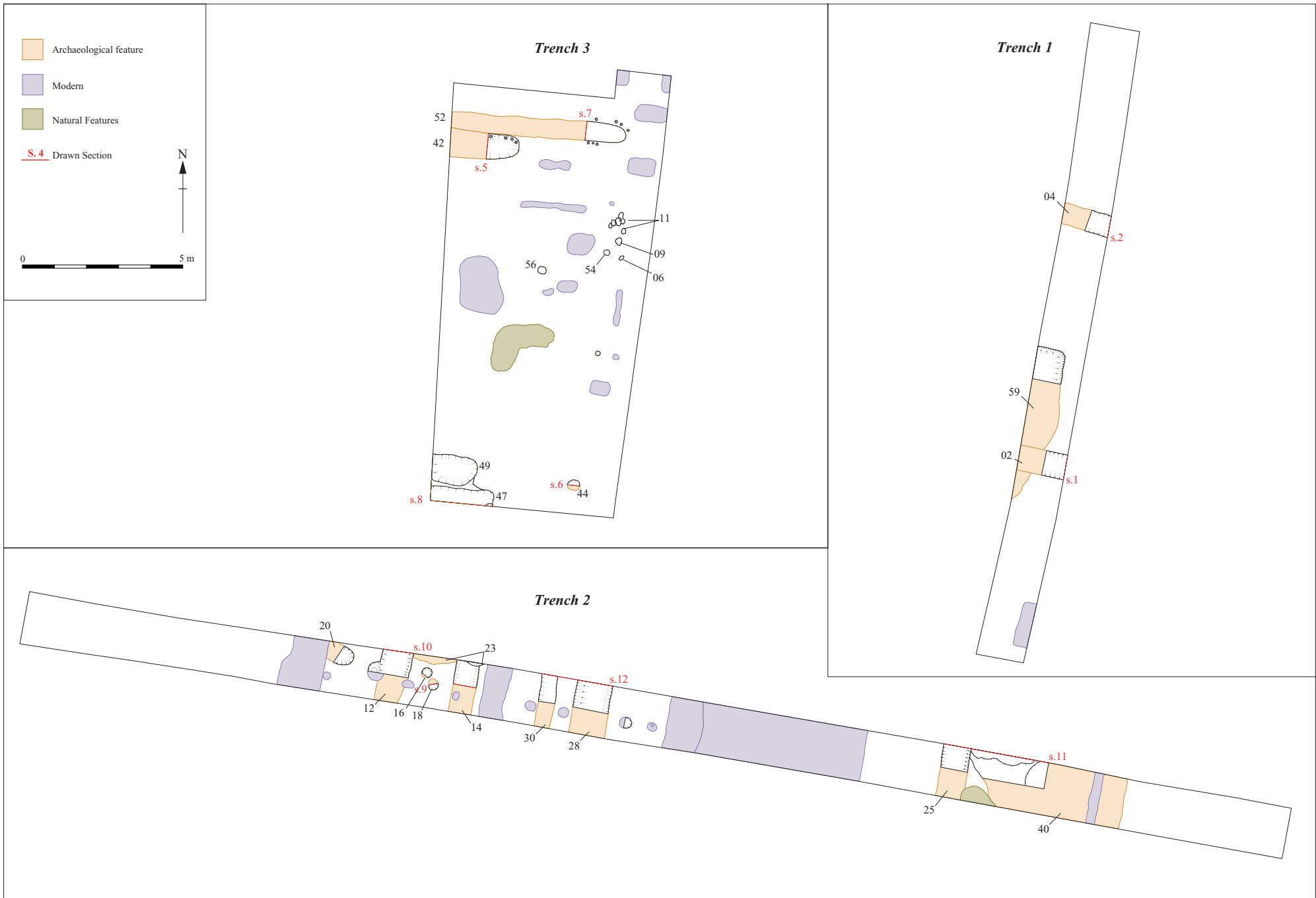


Figure 3 Excavation Trenches

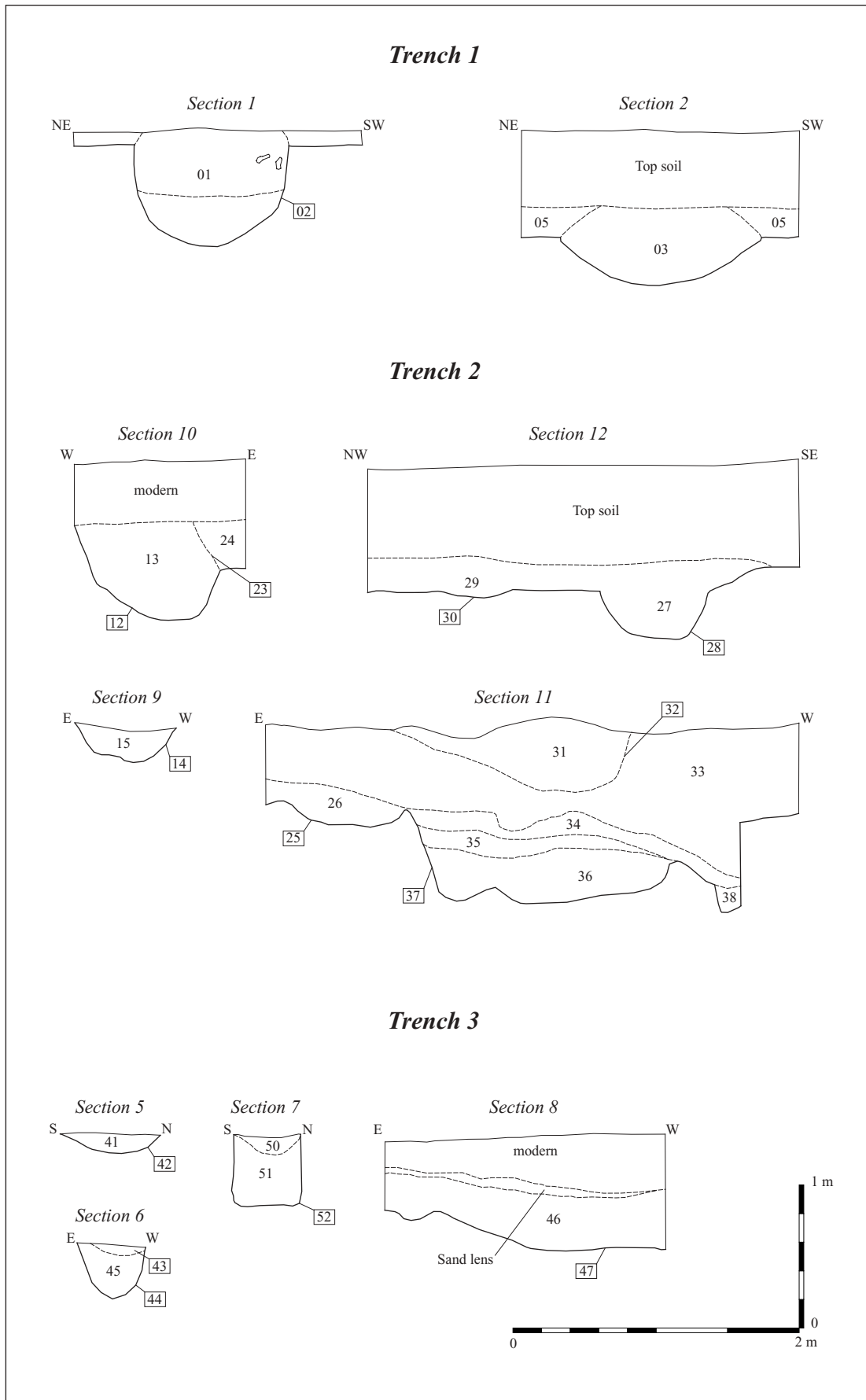


Figure 4 Section drawings

silty clay. Layer 5 masked a large pit, **59**, of which only a small portion was visible in the trench. This was a large, shallow (c.0.3m deep) pit, whose fill, (61), was very similar to layer 5 and contained no finds. Layer 5 produced a silver penny, probably of 14th century date.

5.2 Trench 2

Modern

This trench produced a wealth of modern features, including a large rubbish pit, **23**, heavily truncated by the edge of the trench, containing glass, organic materials and pottery dated to the late 18th century. At the east end of the trench was a large quarry pit, **40**, filled by (33), a mid grey clayey sand with gravel and brick fragments. This was cut through earlier quarry pits, **37** and **39**, producing brick, glass and pottery of 19th century date. **37** was filled by, starting at the base, (36), a dark grey clayey sand with moderate gravel, (35), a mid grey clayey sand with rare brick and glass fragments, and (34), a mid orangey yellow silty sand with moderate gravel. Also present were three north to south oriented ditches containing 19th century or later masonry, a large pit full of pig bones, again of modern date and an east to west orientated line of postholes.

Post-medieval

Two features of post medieval date were discovered, a shallow posthole, **18**, filled by (19), a mid grey sandy clay with occasional gravel and rare charcoal, dated by pottery to 1500-1800 and a large ditch, **28**, north to south aligned, filled by (27), a yellowish brown sandy clay with frequent gravel, dated by pottery to the 17th century.

Medieval

One medieval feature has been identified, a large north to south orientated ditch, **12**, filled with (13), a mid greenish grey sandy clay with occasional gravel and rare charcoal, dated by pottery to 1200-1400.

Undated

Two shallow ditches, **14** and **25**, both north to south aligned, one small but deep posthole, **16**, and one shallow pit, **20**, remain undated.



Plate 2 Trench 2 viewed from the east

5.2 Trench 3 and Open Area

Trench 3 was extended to give a small open area after medieval remains were encountered. This gave a large area adjacent to the street front. The medieval remains amounted to two possible gravel quarries, **47** and **49**, of which, **49** was 0.6m deep and **47** only 0.35m deep. **47** was filled by (46), a mid-dark brown sandy clay with moderate gravel and occasional charcoal. **49** was filled by (48), a mid-dark brown sandy clay with moderate gravel and occasional charcoal. These yielded pottery of c.1200-1350. Also present was a large posthole, **44**, which was filled by (45), a greyish orange silty sand with common gravel, producing pottery of 13th-14th century date. Another posthole, **56**, was filled by (55), a mid grey silty clay with small stones which was undated. A concentration of postholes, **6**, **9**, **11** and **54**. Feature **11** was, in fact, a group of seven intercutting postholes, all with similar fills, (10), a brownish grey sandy silt with frequent gravel producing pottery dating to 1150-1400. Posthole **9**, filled by (8), a pale brownish grey sandy silt with frequent gravel, used a piece of slag as a post pad. Finally there were two east to west aligned linear features, **42** and **52** which were both associated with stake holes around their edges which may have been wall foundations. Feature **52** was 0.45m wide and 0.53m deep containing compacted layers of gravel, (51), with a softer layer,(50) of mid grey silty clay at the top. Medieval pottery was found during the initial surface cleaning of this area. A line drawn between the east end of **52** and posthole **44** would be parallel with the street front. Linear feature **42** was much shallower at 0.11m deep and its fill, (41), was a light greyish brown silty clay, without compaction.

A number of modern features, pits and wall lines/drains were encountered, as well as a crescent shaped natural feature, perhaps representing periglacial activity.



Plate 3 Wall foundation 52

6 DISCUSSION

It was previously thought that development in this part of the village took place from the 17th century onwards (Thomas 2004), however this view may now have to be revised. Although the number of medieval features discovered was low, their nature, the number of finds and the local topography (see below), suggest occupation here in the 13th or 14th century. Occupation ceased in the late medieval period, perhaps to reappear in the 17th or 18th century. The nature of the archaeology is consistent with buildings on the street front, represented by postholes and possible wall lines (trench 3) and a ditch marking the rear of the plot (ditch 12, trench 2). Occupation probably spread into this area as a result of late 13th century population pressure, ceasing when the Black Death relieved that pressure. Interestingly, the silver coin found in trench 1 dates to this period.

A brief examination of the OS map of the village reveals that the properties on this side of Green Street appear to have frontages based on a one chain width (21 yards). Both 23 Green Street and the properties either side share this frontage measurement. The chain was a very common width for new plots in the medieval period (Hickling 2001).

7 CONCLUSION

This archaeological investigation revealed a brief period of medieval occupation on the street frontage in the 13th-14th century, characterised by structural features at the street frontage and a ditch marking the rear of the plot. Occupation seems to have disappeared after the 14th century until the 17th or 18th century when activity starts again, characterised by ditches, postholes and pits.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank H. C. Moss (Builders) Ltd who commissioned and funded the archaeological work. The project was managed by Judith Roberts. The fieldwork was carried out by Steve Hickling, Dave Andrews, Tom Eley and Dennis Payne who also conducted a metal detector survey and reported on the small finds, Carole Fletcher assessed the pottery and Carlos Silva provided the illustrations.

The brief for archaeological works was written by Andy Thomas, County Archaeology Office, while his colleague, Kasia Gdaniec, visited the site and monitored the evaluation.

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Cambridgeshire County Historic Environment Record

<http://Oldwillingham.com>

Appendix 1 Context Data

Context Number	Type	Trench	Description	Date
1	Fill of 2	1	Light grey silty clay with charcoal	
2	Ditch	1	East to west oriented, 'U' shaped	
3	Fill of 4	1	Grey-brown silty clay, rare gravel	Late 18 th c.
4	Ditch	1	East to west orientated	
5	Subsoil	1	Over whole trench	14 th c.
6	Posthole	3	Circular, 25cm in diameter, 10cm deep	
7	Fill of 7	3	Grey-brown sandy silt	
8	Fill of 9	3	Pale brown-grey sandy silt, frequent gravel	
9	Posthole	3	Circular, 24cm in diameter, 18cm deep	
10	Fill of 11	3	Brown-grey sandy silt, frequent gravel	1150-1400
11	Postholes	3	Approx 7 intercutting postholes	
12	Ditch	2	North to south orientated, 'U' shaped	
13	Fill of 12	2	Greenish grey sandy clay with charcoal	1200-1400
14	Ditch	2	North to south orientated, 'U' shaped	
15	Fill of 14	2	Dark grey-brown sandy clay with charcoal	
16	Posthole	2	Circular, 29cm in diameter, 31cm deep	
17	Fill of 16	2	Grey-brown clayey sand with stone packing	
18	Posthole?	2	Circular, 33cm in diameter, 5cm deep	
19	Fill of 18	2	Grey sandy clay with charcoal	1500-1800
20	Pit	2	Oval and only 9cm deep	
21	Fill of 20	2	Grey-brown clayey sand, ash and brick	
22	Layer	2	Unstratified finds	1150-1350
23	Pit	2	Truncated by edge of trench	
24	Fill of 23	2	Full of modern rubbish	Late 18 th c.
25	Ditch	2	North to south orientated, 'U' shaped	
26	Fill of 25	2	Grey clayey sand with gravel	
27	Fill of 28	2	Yellowy brown sandy clay, frequent gravel	1600-1700
28	Ditch	2	North to south orientated, 'U' shaped	
29	Fill of 30	2	Yellowy brown sandy clay, frequent gravel	
30	Gully	2	North to south orientated, 'U' shaped	
31	Fill of 32	2	Dark grey-brown silty sand with brick fragments	
32	Pit	2	Caught in section only	
33	Fill of 40	2	Grey clayey sand with gravel and brick fragments	
34	Fill of 37	2	Orangey yellow silty sand with gravel	
35	Fill of 37	2	Grey clayey sand with brick and glass	
36	Fill of 37	2	Dark grey clayey sand with gravel	19 th c.
37	Pit	2	Possible gravel pit, truncated by edge of trench	
38	Fill of 39	2	Grey clayey sand with gravel	
39	Pit	2	Possible gravel pit, in base of pit 40	
40	Pit	2	Possible gravel pit. Irregular shape	
41	Fill of 42	3	Pale grey brown silty clay	
42	Ditch	3	East to west orientated with stake holes around the edge. Only 11cm deep and shallow sided.	
43	Fill of 44	3	Pale grey silty clay	1200-1400
44	Posthole	3	Oval, 45cm by 30cm, 37cm deep	
45	Fill of 44	3	Mottled orange and grey silty sand with gravel	
46	Fill of 47	3	Dark grey sandy clay with charcoal and gravel	1200-1350
47	Pit	3	Quarry pit, Oval, 35cm deep	
48	Fill of 49	3	Dark grey sandy clay with charcoal and gravel	

49	Pit	3	Deep quarry pit, 60cm deep.	
50	Fill of 52	3	Grey silty clay with gravel	
51	Fill of 52	3	Orangey brown sand with gravel. Compacted	
52	Foundation	3	East to west orientated possible foundation. Stake holes around the edge. Vertically sided and flat bottomed.	
53	Fill of 54	3	Grey silty clay with gravel	
54	Posthole	3	Circular, 15cm in diameter, 40cm deep	
55	Fill of 56	3	Grey silty clay with gravel	
56	Posthole	3	Oval, 25cm by 17cm, 17cm deep	
57	Fill of 58	3	Grey silty clay with gravel	
58	Posthole	3	Circular, 17cm in diameter, 10cm deep	
59	Pit	1	Possible gravel pit, truncated by edge of trench	
60	Layer	2	Unstratified finds	
61	Fill of 59	1	Creamy grey sandy clay with gravel	

Appendix 2 Finds Data

1. Pottery by Carole Fletcher

Introduction and Background

The evaluation at 23 Green Street, Willingham produced a small pottery assemblage of only 38 sherds, weighing 0.627kg. Of the 62 contexts recorded, 11 contained pottery. The material from the topsoil and any unstratified material are included in these totals.

Ceramic fabric abbreviations used in the following text are:

Bone China	BCHIN
Late Medieval Reduced ware	LMR
Medieval Ely or Ely type wares	MEL/MELT
Post-medieval Black Glazed ware	PMBL
Post-medieval Red ware	PMR
Transfer Printed ware	TRANS

Methodology

The basic guidance in *Management of Archaeological Projects* (English Heritage 1991) has been adhered to along with the MPRG documents (MPRG 1998 and 2001). *Guidance for the processing and publication of medieval pottery from excavations* (Blake and Davey, 1983) acts as a standard.

Spot dating was carried out using the AFU's in-house system based on that used at the Museum of London. Fabric classification has been carried out for all previously described types. New types have been given descriptive identifiers. All sherds have been counted, classified and weighed. Sherds warranting possible been identified, as have possible cross-fits.

All the pottery has been spot dated on a context by context basis; this information was entered directly onto a full quantification database (Access 2000). Full quantification of the assemblage on a context by context basis was carried out with reference to the previously mentioned documents, and the results added to the Access 2000 database.

The AFU curates the pottery and archive until formal deposition of the site archive.

EVALUATION

The trenches and open area were machine excavated with further excavation carried out by hand and selection made through standard sampling procedures on a feature by feature basis. There are not expected to be any inherent biases. Where bulk samples have been processed for environmental remains, there has been no recovery of pottery.

THE ASSEMBLAGE

Fieldwork generated a small assemblage of 38 sherds (0.633kg) of pottery. This material consists of a moderately abraded pottery with the majority assemblage including unstratified material dated to the mid twelfth to mid fifteenth century. There is no Saxo-Norman material and the remaining sherds with the exception of a single residual Roman grey ware sherd, are post-medieval or post AD1700.

The medieval material was recovered from pits, post holes and ditches while the post-medieval pottery was recovered from quarry or gravel pits, a relatively modern rubbish pit and a shallow posthole. Only jar and jug sherds were recognised in medieval MELT fabrics, the later post-medieval material is mainly PMR or PMBL jar sherds with some fragments of eighteenth century refined white earthen ware including a TRANS bowl and a jar lid. The most unusual sherd in the assemblage is a small, undecorated BCHIN saucer from a Victorian child's tea set.

The assemblage was small, has no complete vessels, and full statistical analysis is not viable. The majority of the medieval and post medieval material was manufactured relatively locally in Cambridgeshire and Essex. The material is moderately abraded, suggesting some reworking of the material after initial deposition. The character of the assemblage suggests the medieval and post medieval material derive originally from a domestic context. No preservation bias has been recognised and no long-term storage problems are likely. The assemblage offers little potential for further study.

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Appendix

Ceramic fabric abbreviations used in the following table are:

Bone China	BCHIN
Colchester Type ware (Fabric 21)	COLT
Medieval Ely or Ely type wares	MEL/MELT
Olitic Shelly ware	OSHW
Post-medieval Black Glazed ware	PMBL
Post-medieval Red ware	PMR
Shelly ware	SHW

Spot Dates

Context	Fabric	Number of Sherds	Weight in kg	Spot dating Date Range
3	BCHIN	1	0.002	Late 18th century
	LMR	1	0.005	
10	MELT	11	0.067	1150-1400
13	MELT	1	0.069	1200-1400
19	PMR	1	0.011	1500-1800
22	SHW	1	0.018	1150-1350
24	TRANS	1	0.033	Late 18th century
	White Earthen ware	1	0.029	
	PMR	2	0.029	
29	PMBL	2	0.084	1600-1700
	PMR	5	0.065	
36	White Earthen ware	1	0.002	19th century
43	MELT	2	0.108	1200-1400
46	MEL	2	0.014	1200-1350
	MELT	2	0.028	
	OSHW	1	0.023	
	ROMAN	1	0.009	
	SHW	1	0.017	
99999	COLT	1	0.009	1400-1600
	LMR	1	0.012	

2. **Small Finds** by Dennis Payne

The assemblage consists of few metal finds of a mixed date range from the medieval to post-medieval periods.

Coins

Two coins were retrieved from unstratified locations, the most important of which is a silver penny of Edward I (1272-1307) of the Long cross variety. It is a common type and appears to be in good condition, suggesting little use at the time of its loss. The second coin was halfpenny of early twentieth century date and of little archaeological value.

Small finds

A small copper alloy bell measuring 33mm in circumference was found in trench 2. This bell has an incised line around its body and a lobe pierced for suspension – the clanger is no longer present. A date of between the 17th-18th centuries is likely, stylistically it does not appear to be medieval, but could be as early as the 16th century – purpose unknown.

A small copper alloy fork was located from the spoil of trench 1 and appears to be a small 19th century pickle fork.

Summary

The Edward coin and the small finds prove occupation on this site from at least the late 13th century through to the Victorian period.



Plate 4 Edward I penny obverse



Plate 5 Edward I penny reverse

3 Slag

One lump of slag was retrieved from context 8, being used as a post pad. This is an iron-rich lump from the base of a small furnace. The underside has vegetation impressions

4 Brick

Five contexts yielded brick or tile fragments and are assumed to be post-medieval. The contexts were 10, 13, 15, 29 and 34.

5 Animal Bone *by Steve Hickling*

Context Number	Description
3	<i>1 large mammal (horse or cow) leg bone fragment 1 pig (?) leg bone fragment 1 possible rabbit leg bone fragment 1 unidentified fragment</i>
26	<i>Small leg bone fragment</i>
46	<i>Small mammal rib fragment</i>

This is a small assemblage, with no further research potential.