

Archaeological Excavation at The Old School, Feltwell, Norfolk (40913 FWL)

Initial Summary of Results, Progress Report and Proposed Timetable

Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeology Field Unit October 2006

Introduction

Excavation by Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeology Field Unit was carried out between the 29th August and the 2nd October 2006. Five areas (A – E) were opened, varying in area from 12m by 8m to 30m by 10m. Archaeology was encountered in all areas, varying from moderately dense to very dense. Some areas contained relatively complex sequences of activity that suggest multiple phases of occupation. The archaeology primarily consists of ditches, pits, gullies and structural remains forming enclosures, boundaries and buildings. At this stage it is not possible to determine the full sequence of activity. Superimposition of features made reconstruction of their original form very difficult and the finds are currently being processed. However, it is possible to provide a cursory summary of the extent and nature of the archaeology.

Results

This brief description will be presented on an area-by-area basis. Where possible connections between areas will be discussed and approximate date ranges will be suggested.

Area A

Area A was sited at the western side of the development area and was positioned over evaluation trench 3. The northern end of the area was dominated by a number of large intercutting Romano-British pits covering an area of approximately 8m square. The construction of these pits had created a hollow 0.3m to 0.5m below the level of the archaeology to the south; this hollow was subsequently sealed by the deposition subsoil masking their presence. Their function is uncertain; they were cut through the upper silt and eroded chalk natural layers but stopped when solid chalk was encountered. This would suggest that they were not originally extraction pits. They were later backfilled with domestic refuse but this is likely to be a secondary activity.

5m to the south of this cluster is the northern limit of a dense cluster of archaeological features that extended across the remainder of the area. The sequence of activity suggests several phases of occupation. The majority of the features recorded in this area were large pits and ditches and were probably Romano-British in date. There is a suggestion from the pottery that some features may be mid to late Saxon but this is uncertain at present. Some of the pits had undercut sides and might have been for grain storage. The ditches were predominantly aligned east to west and might have formed part of enclosures. It is possible that the southern most ditch in this area continued to the east before turning to the south as a north to south ditch recorded in Area D. This would therefore form the northeast corner of a

rectilinear ditched enclosure, enclosing an area to the southwest of the development area. A small number of intercutting narrow, shallow gullies were recorded on this same east to west alignment just to the north. They were too insubstantial to form an effective boundary but might have been temporary marking out features or possibly drainage channels.

In this area there were also a number of smaller pits of uncertain function and several postholes. The postholes tended to be in clusters but no structures were clearly identified. One of the posthole clusters had evidence for modification with the insertion of later posts and planks within the earlier settings suggesting prolonged occupation. Dating the posthole clusters is difficult at this stage, it is possible that they were late Roman but it is likely that they were Saxon. At the southern limit of the area was a short stretch of a Roman ?flue lined with fired clay; this channel had originally been capped with a reused Romano-British floor tile which had evidence for scorching on its underside. Too little of this feature survived to be certain of its origin but its possible that it was associated with a heating system or that it was part of an industrial feature, perhaps an oven or kiln.

Area B

This area contained a sequence of activity spanning the early Roman to Saxon period. The level of intercutting and reuse was such that it was not possible to define all features clearly in plan. However, it is possible to describe a preliminary sequence of events. There were a number of early pits and irregular ditches that might have been contemporary with a 6m wide north to south aligned boundary on the eastern side of the area. This boundary was composed of a number of intercutting ditches and pits suggesting modification over a long period of time. These features might have been constructed in the early Roman period on the basis of the pottery. The western side of this boundary and the some of the early pits were truncated by the construction of a substantial (recut) rectilinear enclosure ditch. This enclosure may have continued to the south into Area E and probably formed part of a larger rectilinear enclosure system, beyond the limits of the excavated area. A number of pits and small beam slots/gullies in this area might have been in use at the same time as the enclosure based on their alignments and preliminary dates. After the enclosure ditch had gone out of use a substantial Roman-British building was constructed over its southwest corner. Two substantial foundations were constructed over the old ditch, one was a 1m square foundation pad the other was rectangular measuring 4.5m by 0.9m aligned north-north-east to south-south-west, forming the ?east side of a possible building. Both were filled with rammed chalk to form a stable foundation and could have supported considerable weight. A similar square foundation pad was recorded against the northern baulk suggesting that this putative structure continued in that direction. Their date and function is uncertain, but they were believed to be mid to late Roman on the basis of the stratigraphy. The footings were truncated by another series of intercutting pits all believed to be Roman in date. These pits might have been contemporary with the construction of west-south-west to east-north-east aligned ditch seen only in this area which was in turn truncated by large undercut Romano-British

?grain storage pits similar to those seen in Area A. One of these storage pits was superimposed by a mortared flint wall footing extending 1.5m from the western baulk into the area. The variance in its construction suggested that it was probably not part of the same construction as the rammed chalk footings. A small number of postholes and shallow rectilinear ?beamslots were recorded in the area which are believed to have been Saxon in date, possibly from the 10th to 11th century AD. A Medieval boundary ditch was recorded running from its terminal in Area E into Area B on an east to west alignment, no other features of this date were identified in this area. An 0.3m deep layer of subsoil accumulated over the area before the construction in the post medieval period of a small rectilinear structure on a north-north-west to south-south-east orientation. Only the chalk block and flint footings of this building survived, some post-medieval tile fragments were retrieved from the footings suggesting a 19th century date for its construction. Modern service trenches disturbed 3m at the very eastern end of the area and this area was not investigated further. A small number of modern (19th to 20th century) pits were recorded in this area.

Area C

Three features were recorded in this area. A large 4.5m wide ditch oriented north-east to south-west dominated the small excavation area; this undated feature was truncated by a Romano-British pit of uncertain function. The ditch was believed to continue to the north into Area E where it terminated very close to the south baulk. A large sub rectangular ?pit was recorded in the south-east corner of the area, its function is uncertain.

Area D

This area contained a Saxon sunken featured building, truncated by evaluation trench 6 and a modern open pit containing a large ?oil tank. This structure had a compacted chalk floor laid over an earlier Romano-British pit; there was evidence for a small hearth on this floor. To the east of the structure was an area of disturbance suggesting activity immediately outside the building caused by people or animals moving around in wet conditions. The west side of this building was aligned with a small north to south oriented ditch. Despite this coincidence the ditch is currently thought to be Roman in date and to be the continuation of the ditch seen in Area A. Two large postholes and a ditch terminal in this area also suggest continued activity to the south-west beyond the limit of excavation.

Area E

This area corresponds with the proposed new road and as such is irregular in plan. The archaeology here was less dense but links well with Areas A, B and C. The southern limit of a number of large intercutting pits was recorded at the northern end of the area. Their location and form in plan suggests that they could have been the continuation of activity seen at the northern end of Area A. The large north to south oriented boundary seen in Area B continues

here with evidence for a large ditch terminal, indicating a possible segmented boundary and later continuation of the boundary as narrower shallower ditches continuing across the excavated area. Again these boundary features are believed to be Roman in date. The rectilinear enclosure in Area B and its offset ditches continued into this area. The large ditch in Area C might have been associated with large boundary in Areas B/E.

A second Saxon sunken featured building was recorded in this area. It was smaller than the feature in Area D at approximately 3m by 2m. It had two deep postholes centrally placed in its short sides, both raked slightly towards the centre of the structure. A sub-rectangular hollow on its southern side with an associated posthole and small pit are believed to be contemporary with it and might form some kind of entrance. This feature contained pottery preliminarily dated to the 10th to 11th century AD. Similar pottery was retrieved from a small shallow square pit located 20m to the east of the structure. A third possible sunken featured building was recorded to the south of this pit, however, too little survived within the excavated area to be certain of its identification.

On the east side of the large boundary was a small rectilinear structure composed of beam slots on its northern and western sides and postholes on its southern side. Its eastern side lay beyond the limit of excavation. This structure might have had a sunken floor backfilled with chalky rubble. This structure is not well dated but may also have been Saxon.

The medieval ditch seen in Area B continued into Area E terminating close to the remains of a hedge line, set at right angles to it. A wider hedge line cut by a very large modern pit was also probably medieval in date.

Conclusion

This description is based on the understanding of the site formed during excavation. Much of it is tentative and will be subject to change in light of analysis. The large baulks between the areas mean that it is difficult to determine the organization and development of the site as a whole. Despite this it has been possible to expand upon the information gained from the evaluation. It is now possible to suggest that occupation started at some point in the early to mid Roman period and was continuous till the 4th century at least. Following this there may have been a hiatus with occupation starting again in the mid to late Saxon period (10th –11th century?). Medieval activity appears to be restricted to a number of north to south aligned hedge lines associated with a small east to west aligned ditch.

The Archive

The records generated by the excavation have all been cross-referenced and checked for internal consistency. The context records and finds catalogued are in process of being entered on to an Access Database. All Records and finds are kept under the site code 40913 FWL.

The Excavation generated the following records:

508 Context Records

24 pencil drawn plans on pre-gridded permatrace

120 pencil drawn sections on pre-gridded permatrace

12 Environmental Sample Records

13 Photographic Record sheets

8 Monochrome Films, 5 Colour slide films, X digital photographs

5 Matrix Sheets (one per area)

Finds and environmental materials

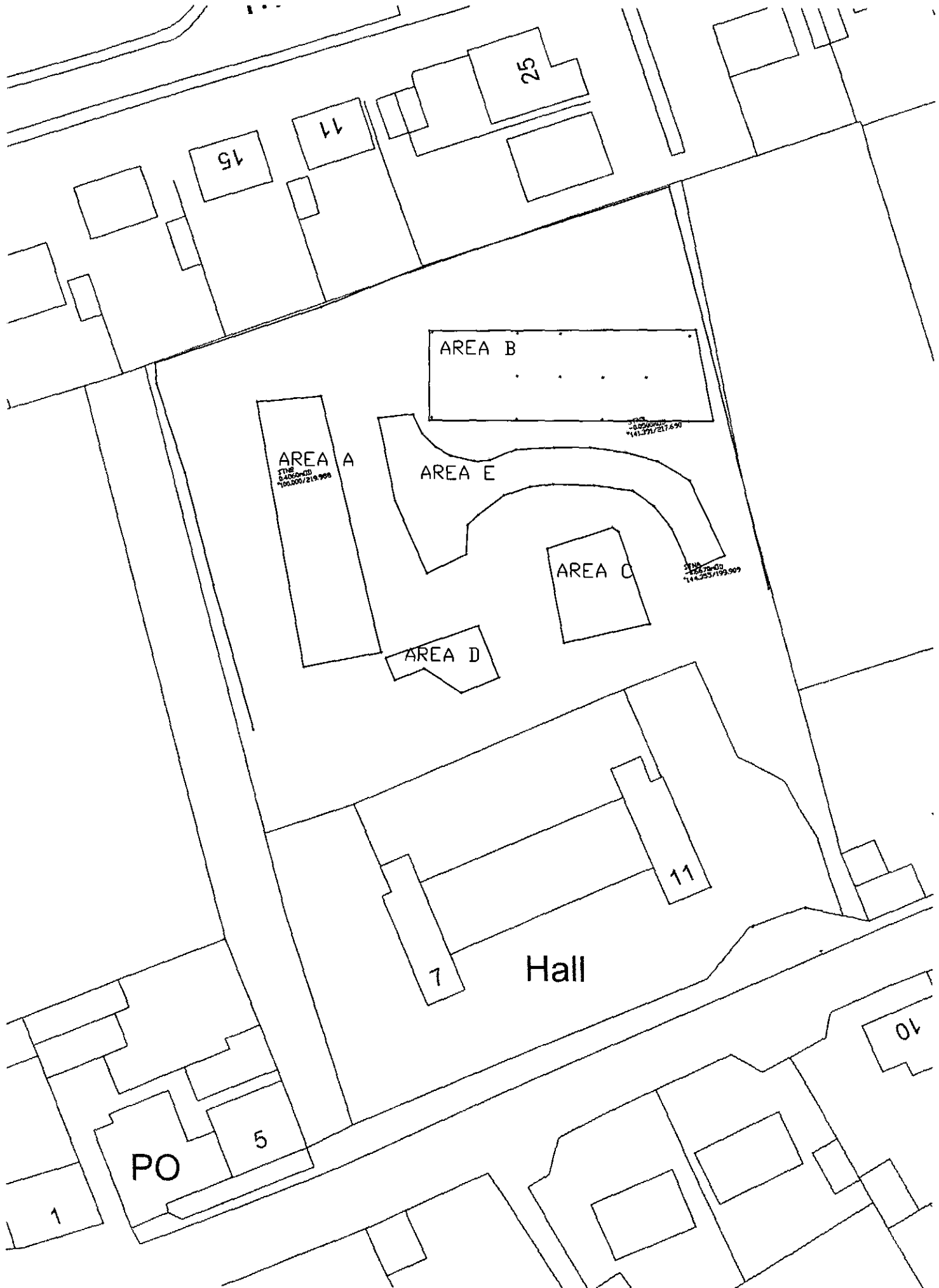
64kg of finds were retrieved (four storage crates); this moderately large assemblage consists primarily of pottery, ceramic building material and animal bone. The finds are currently being processed, and will be assessed by relevant specialists when they have been cleaned and catalogued.

26 finds have been recorded as small finds, these have been sent to Nina Crummy for identification, they include, Roman coins, Iron, copper alloy and lead objects and a small number of worked flint fragments.

Timetable

The following dates are estimates

Site Records checked/cross-referenced	Done
Plans/Sections Digitised	October 20th
Completion of finds processing/cataloguing	October 31st
Completion of database	Mid November
Small Finds Report	Mid November
Pottery Report	End November
Animal Bones Report	Mid December
Environmental Report	Mid December
Building Materials Report	End November
Report on other finds (as necessary)	Mid December
Stratigraphic/structural report	Mid December
Post Excavation Assessment Report and Updated Research Design	End December



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AREA B

AREA A
THE 84056-03
*100.000/219.998

AREA E

AREA C
3.00000000
*144.255/199.509

AREA D

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Hall

PO

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