

*BIRMINGHAM UNIVERSITY
FIELD ARCHAEOLOGY UNIT*

**LITTLE PAXTON QUARRY, DIDDINGTON,
CAMBRIDGESHIRE
Phase 3 Evaluation 1998**

Field 5 (South)

B.U.F.A.U.



Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit
Project No. 219.10
June 1998

Little Paxton Quarry, Diddington, Cambridgeshire
Phase 3 Evaluation 1998
Field 5 (South)

by
Lucie Dingwall and Alex Jones

with contributions by
Lynne Bevan, Annette Hancocks and Ann Woodward

For further information please contact:
Simon Buteux, Iain Ferris or Peter Leach (Directors)
Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit
The University of Birmingham
Edgbaston
Birmingham B15 2TT
Tel: 0121 414 5513
Fax: 0121 414 5516
E-Mail: BUFAU@bham.ac.uk
Web Address: <http://www.bham.ac.uk/BUFAU/>

LITTLE PAXTON QUARRY, DIDDINGTON, CAMBRIDGESHIRE
Phase 3 Evaluation 1998, Field 5 (South)

Contents

1.0	Summary
2.0	Introduction
3.0	Methodology
4.0	The site and its setting
5.0	Results
6.0	Specialist reports
7.0	Discussion
8.0	Implications and proposals
9.0	Acknowledgements
10.0	References

Figures

1	Location of Little Paxton and the site
2	Little Paxton quarry: Phase 3 area and Field 5, with trial trenches (crop-marked features by Air Photo Services Ltd.)
3	Trial-trenches, with simplified plan of the main features
4	Sections: Trenches 6, 8 and 9

Tables

1	Artifacts from sieving
2	Romano-British pottery

LITTLE PAXTON QUARRY, DIDDINGTON, CAMBRIDGESHIRE

Phase 3 Evaluation, Field 5 (South)

1.0: SUMMARY

The archaeological potential of an area proposed for gravel extraction was tested by an archaeological evaluation involving targeted trial-trenching.

A very low density of artifacts was recovered from sample sieving of the ploughsoil. Trial-trenching identified ditched field boundaries of probable Iron Age or Romano-British date. No evidence was found of the possible crop-marked ring-ditch recorded within the area evaluated.

2.0: INTRODUCTION

This report describes the results of testing of the artifactual content of the ploughsoil, and trial-trenching, in the southern part of Field 5 (hereinafter called 'the site', centred on NGR TL 202659: Figs. 1 and 2) within the Phase 3 area at Little Paxton Quarry, Diddington, Cambridgeshire. The work was undertaken by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU) on behalf of Bardon Aggregates Limited in April 1998. The methodology adopted follows a specification prepared by BUFAU (BUFAU 1998).

The purpose of the evaluation was to define the location, extent, date, character, condition, significance and quality of any archaeological remains on the site, in order to permit the formulation of an archaeological mitigation strategy, if appropriate. The objective of testing the artifactual content of the ploughsoil was to recover evidence of pre-Iron Age activity. The aim of trial trenching was to test the character of the identified crop-marked features (Fig. 2), the area of possible alluvial cover in the east of the site, the area in the west of the site which contained the greatest concentrations of fieldwalking finds, and also those areas for which no archaeological information was available.

The results of air photograph analysis and fieldwalking of Field 5 are described in separate reports (Air Photo Services 1998 and Bevan 1998).

3.0: METHODOLOGY

3.1: Trial Trenching

A total of nine trenches was excavated (Figs. 2 and 3). A 360 degree excavator with a toothless ditching bucket was used to remove the ploughsoil, under archaeological

supervision. Where a B-horizon soil or alluvium was encountered below the ploughsoil, machining ceased at this level and the machined surface was examined for archaeological features. Once it was ascertained that none was present, mechanical stripping continued until the uppermost horizon of the gravel subsoil was exposed. This subsoil horizon was manually cleaned as necessary, and a representative sample of the features present was hand-excavated. No sampling for charred plant remains was undertaken because of the paucity of the dating evidence.

Recording was by means of pro-forma record cards for contexts and features, supplemented by plans (scale 1:50) and sections (scale 1:20), monochrome print and colour slide photography.

3.2: Testing of the artifactual content of the ploughsoil

This was achieved by hand sieving (or sorting with a trowel where the ploughsoil was too wet for sieving) approximately 1 cubic metre of ploughsoil at set points along each trench. Trenches 1-5 and 7-9 were sampled at 8m and 16m, measuring from either the west or the south, depending on the trench alignment. Trench 6 was sampled at 10m, 25m and 40m from south to north, and the east-west aligned arm of Trench 6 was sampled at 10m. In Trenches 1, 6, 7 and 9 the B-horizon soil overlying the gravel was removed and sieved separately. A similar procedure was carried out with the alluvial deposit in Trench 8.

4.0: THE SITE AND ITS SETTING

This evaluation forms the first part of the evaluation of the Phase 3 area within the overall quarry concession. The Phase 1 and 2 areas of the quarry were evaluated in 1992 (Leach 1992, Jones 1992). A series of excavations undertaken since that date in advance of quarrying (Jones and Ferris 1994, Jones 1995, Jones in press, Jones forthcoming) have investigated settlement and activity dating from the Neolithic to the Romano-British periods. Neolithic activity is represented by clusters of small pits, possibly forming pit circles (Area B: Jones 1995, fig. 3), and by flint artifacts found extensively within the topsoil. Two roughly circular features, also in Area B, may have formed eaves-drip gullies surrounding huts measuring 15m and 8m in diameter. The Mid-Late Iron Age is represented by farmstead enclosures (Area B), further enclosures examined by trial-trenching (Jones 1992) adjoining the southeastern boundary of the Phase 3 area, and by a probable Iron Age square barrow (Jones in press). Romano-British activity was focused towards the south of the quarry (Area A: Jones and Ferris 1994) and comprised a 'ladder' enclosure containing traces of timber-framed buildings, wells and a possible 'drinking trough', all dating to the 3rd-4th centuries.

This on-going programme of excavation is intended to determine the changing function and economy of the area, in particular focusing upon the potential for future comparison of structural and economic data from the four discrete Iron Age foci. Integrated analysis of settlement patterning is also intended to contribute towards a

broader, multi-period, landscape-based study of changes in settlement in the Great Ouse Valley.

5.0: RESULTS

5.1: Trial-trenching (Figs. 2 and 3)

Trenches 1-3 were positioned to examine the western margin of the site, where a greater concentration of flint artifacts was noted during fieldwalking (Bevan 1998). Trenches 4-5 and 7-9 were located to test areas as widely as possible for which no archaeological information was available. Trenches 8 and 9 in the east of the site tested an area of suspected alluvium. Trench 6 was positioned to test the possible crop-marked ring-ditch. All trenches measured 2m in width, with the exception of the north-south aligned arm of Trench 6 which was extended to a width of 4m for greater clarity in feature definition.

Trench 1 (Fig. 3)

Trench 1 measured 25m in length, and was aligned east-west. The gravel subsoil (1001) was recorded at a depth of 0.5m below the modern surface. Cutting the subsoil at the eastern end of the trench was a shallow, northwest-southeast aligned gully (F123), 0.25m wide and 0.16m deep. A rounded, pit-like feature (F124) at the west end of the trench was also half-sectioned, but proved to be of natural origin. The subsoil and features F123 and F124 were overlain by a B-horizon soil (1005), overlain by 0.3m of ploughsoil (1000).

Trench 2 (Fig. 3)

Trench 2 measured 25m in length, and was aligned north-south. The gravel subsoil (2003) was recorded at a depth of 0.3m below the modern surface. Cutting the subsoil at the southern end of the trench were two shallow linear features (F114 and F115), both aligned northwest-southeast, measuring an average of 0.4m in width and less than 0.08m in depth. The subsoil and features F114 and F115 were overlain by 0.3m of ploughsoil (2000).

Trench 3 (not illustrated)

Trench 3 measured 25m in length, and was aligned east-west. The gravel subsoil was recorded at a depth of 0.35m below the modern surface. Cutting the gravel in the centre of the trench were two very truncated post-hole-like features (F125 and F126: not illustrated), approximately 0.3m in diameter and less than 0.1m deep. The subsoil and features F125 and F126 were overlain by the ploughsoil (3000).

Trench 4 (Not illustrated)

Trench 4 measured 25m in length, and was aligned east-west. The gravel subsoil (4005) was recorded at a depth of 0.3m below the modern surface. Cutting the gravel

at the western end of the trench was a north-south aligned ditch (F100), 0.8m wide and 0.18m deep. Three discrete, pit-like features (F101-F103: not illustrated) which may have been either archaeological or natural were half-sectioned, but no conclusive proof of origin was obtained. The subsoil and features F100-F103 were overlain by the ploughsoil (4000).

Two sherds of Late Bronze Age or Iron Age pottery were recovered from feature F100, and a further sherd of Neolithic-Early Bronze Age date, was recovered from topsoil sieving.

Trench 5 (Fig. 3)

Trench 5 measured 25m in length, and was aligned east-west. The gravel subsoil (5006) was recorded at a depth of 0.3m below the modern surface. Cutting the gravel were two shallow linear features (F117 and F121), approximately 0.7m wide and 0.15m deep. One small ditch or gully in the centre of the trench was aligned north-south (F117). A second, aligned northwest-southeast, lay at the eastern end of the trench (F121). Between these two linear features were three possible shallow pit or post-hole-like features (F118-F120: not illustrated), measuring 0.4-0.5m in diameter and less than 0.1m in depth. The subsoil, and features F117-F121 were sealed by the ploughsoil (5000).

Trench 6 (Figs, 3 and 4)

Trench 6 was T-shaped in plan. It measured 50m in length (north-south), and was subsequently extended by an east-west aligned trench measuring 20m in length. The gravel subsoil (6015) was recorded at a maximum depth of 0.55m below the modern surface. A total of six linear ditches or gullies was identified cutting the subsoil. Four of these features were aligned approximately southwest-northeast (F110, F112, F132 and F133), one was aligned northwest-southeast (F122) and one was aligned north-south (F113). The latter, a roughly U-shaped ditch, was the most substantial feature, 1.6m wide, 0.4m deep and was backfilled with sandy silt (6004). The two ditches in the centre of the trench (F132, cutting feature F133) were the least substantial. Both had similar dimensions (0.18m wide and 0.12m deep) and similar fills of grey sandy silt (6013 and 6014 respectively). The other three ditches (F110, F112 and F122) all had comparable dimensions (between 0.8 and 0.9m wide and 0.2-0.3m deep), and sandy silty fills (6001, 6003 and 6006 respectively). Two shallow pit or post-hole-like features (F129 and F130: not illustrated) were also identified in the east-west arm of the trench. They were 0.4 and 0.6m in diameter respectively and 0.1m deep. The only other possible features in this trench were patches of light coloured silt, which when tested by half-sectioning proved to be natural in origin, possibly tree-throws and hollows. The subsoil, and the backfilled features were overlain by 0.25m of silty-soil (6016), interpreted as a B-horizon soil, which measured 0.25m in depth in the north of the trench, diminishing in depth southwards. In the north of the trench, layer 6016 was overlain by 0.3m of ploughsoil (6000), which directly overlay the subsoil in the south of the trench.

Three sherds of Romano-British pottery were recovered from the fill of the southernmost feature (F112, 6003).

Trench 7 (Fig.3)

Trench 7 measured 25m in length, and was aligned east-west. The gravel subsoil (7002) was recorded at a depth of 0.45m below the modern surface. It was sealed by a layer of silty soil (7001), measuring 0.15m in depth, interpreted as a B-horizon soil. Above was the topsoil (7000), here measuring 0.3m in depth.

No archaeological features were identified in this trench, and no finds were collected.

Trench 8 (Figs. 3 and 4)

Trench 8 measured 25m in length, and was aligned east-west. The gravel subsoil (8004) was recorded at a depth of 0.9m below the modern surface. The subsoil was cut by two linear features. The westernmost (F134) was a possible (unexcavated) ditch measuring 0.4m in width. The easternmost feature (F128) was a ditch, 1.2m wide, 0.25m deep and backfilled with blue-grey silty clay (8001). The subsoil and features F128 and F134 were overlain by 0.5m of silt-clay alluvium (8005), which was sealed in the east of the trench by a dump of clay-soil (8006), possibly derived from the cleaning-out of the adjoining ditched field boundary. Above was 0.4m of ploughsoil (8000).

Trench 9 (Figs. 3 and 4)

Trench 9 measured 25m in length, and was aligned north-south. The gravel subsoil (9007) was recorded at a depth of 0.35m below the modern surface. Cutting the subsoil in the centre of the trench was a post-hole (F109, 9006), 0.3m in diameter, which was cut by a southwest-northeast aligned ditch (F107), approximately 0.2m deep and filled with grey sandy silt (9004). Cutting the latter feature was a second ditch (F106), 0.7m wide, 0.25m deep and filled with brown, silty clay (9003). At the southern end of the trench was a southwest-northeast aligned gully (F104), 0.5m wide and 0.2m deep, and further to the north was a small post-hole (F105), 0.16m in diameter, 0.25m deep and filled with charcoal-rich silt (9002). No finds were recovered from any of these features. The subsoil, and features F104-F107 were overlain by 0.15m of silty soil (9008), interpreted as a B-soil horizon, which was recorded beneath the modern ploughsoil (9000), here measuring 0.2m in depth.

5.2: Testing of the artifactual content of the ploughsoil

The level of artifacts recovered from the ploughsoil, B-horizon soils and alluvium was relatively low, although this may partly be attributable to the difficulty of sieving very wet ploughsoil. Table 1 below quantifies the material recovered.

TABLE 1: Artifacts from sieving

Tr/ layer	Location (0m at W or S)	Artifact	Quantity
1 (1000)	16m	Fired clay	2
1 (1005)	16m	Iron nail	1
1 (1005)	16m	Flint flake	1
3 (3000)	8m	Flint flakes	2
4 (4000)	16m	Prehistoric pot	1
4 (4000)	16m	Flint flake	1
5 (5000)	8m	Post-med pot	1
5 (5000)	8m	Flint flake	1
5 (5000)	16m	Roman pot	1
5 (5000)	16m	Flint flakes	3
6 (6000)	10m	Flint flake	1
7 (7000)	8m	Flint flakes	3
7 (7001)	8m	Roman pot	1
9 (9008)	8m	Flint flake	1

6.0: SPECIALIST REPORTS

6.1: Flint by Lynne Bevan

A total of 28 items of humanly-struck flint was recovered from sieving and hand-excavation, comprising two scrapers, two blades, a retouched flake, and 23 flakes. Of the retouched items, only the retouched flake came from a specific feature (F122). The scrapers and blades were unstratified surface finds. Small quantities of flakes were recovered from Trenches 1 (3), 3 (1), 4 (1), 5 (4), 6 (1), 7 (3) and 9 (7). Three further flakes were unstratified surface finds.

The raw material used was pebble flint of an unpredictable quality with a high incidence of burning and re-cortication, probably obtained from a local river gravel source, as has been discovered during previous work at the quarry. While the presence of flint tools and flakes denotes some low-level of activity during prehistory, there is a complete absence of any chronologically-diagnostic material. However, the general shape of the flakes is suggestive of a later prehistoric (Neolithic to Bronze Age) date, but this small collection does not indicate activity of any longevity in the area. This assemblage is fairly typical of flint recovered from the quarry, which tends to be of Neolithic and Bronze Age date, and to contain few chronologically-diagnostic elements.

6.2: Prehistoric pottery by Ann Woodward

Trench 4, feature F100 (4001)

Rim x1, wall x1. Sandy micaceous matrix with moderate density of medium to large platy shell and crushed gravel inclusions. Simple rim. Probably Late Bronze Age or Iron Age.

Trench 4, topsoil sieving.

Small wall sherd x1. Soft, laminated fabric with large shell and gravel inclusions. Possibly Late Neolithic or Early Bronze Age.

6.3: Romano-British pottery by Annette Hancocks

A total of seven sherds of Romano-British pottery was recovered. Of these, four sherds were unstratified. Two base angles and a rim sherd were the only diagnostic material recovered. Most of the material appears to be of early-2nd century date and in a badly abraded condition. Trench 6 produced the most material, three stratified sherds.

TABLE 2: Romano-British pottery

Trench	Feature Context	No. of sherds
5	From sieving: U/S	1
6	U/S	2
6	F112 (6003)	3
7	From sieving: U/S	1

6.4: Copper alloy mount by Lynne Bevan

A copper alloy mount with a crescentic-shaped terminal and a circular-sectioned base was recovered as a surface find. This object is probably of Roman date.

7.0: DISCUSSION

No trace of the possible crop-marked ring-ditch was identified, despite the widening of Trench 6 to 4m, and the examination of an additional, contiguous, east-west aligned trench. It is unlikely therefore that the crop-marked feature was 'missed' in this T-shaped trench. Other, similar crop-marked features (e.g. Area C, Jones in press fig. 3) have not been identifiable by area excavation, and it may be suggested that these features have been ploughed-out since they were recorded by aerial photography. Alternatively, it is possible that the crop-marked feature represented a localised change in the composition of the topsoil or subsoil.

A sherd of Late Neolithic or Bronze Age pottery was recovered from the topsoil in Trench 4. Two sherds of Late Bronze Age or Iron Age pottery from the fill of feature F100 in Trench 4 might be intrusive. The majority of the flint artifacts recovered from fieldwalking were Early-Late Bronze Age in date. No datable features of Neolithic or Bronze Age date have been found by trial-trenching along the western margin of the site, which produced a concentration of flint finds during fieldwalking, or, indeed, from elsewhere within the site. Extensive evaluation and excavation of other areas in the quarry concession suggests that no features associated with the topsoil flint scatters have survived plough disturbance. Some features of Neolithic-Bronze Age date have been found in the quarry (e.g. Jones 1995, fig. 3), and in its immediate

environs (Evans 1996). The limited quantity of flint finds from topsoil sieving within Field 5 perhaps mirrors the limited number of similar artifacts found from fieldwalking (Bevan 1998).

The majority of the features encountered in the evaluation were small ditches or gullies, which may be interpreted as field boundaries. These boundaries followed a number of orientations. Most of the boundaries were orientated either northwest-southeast (F114, F115, F123, F121, F122 (Trenches 1-2, 5-6), or southwest-northeast (F110, F112, F132/3, F106/7 F128 and F104 (Trenches 6, 8 and 9). Slight differences in alignment may be noted in the latter group (e.g. between F110/F112 and F132/3 (Trench 6), and between F128 (Trench 8) and other roughly similarly aligned boundaries. North-south ditches (F100, F113 and F117) were recorded in Trenches 4-6. Examination of crop-marked features within the site (Fig. 2) suggests that the southwest-northeast and northwest-southeast alignments may have been extensive. At least two phases of field systems are identifiable here, represented by the alignments defined, with the evidence from Trenches 4-6 suggesting a degree of spatial overlap.

Although little dating evidence was obtained at evaluation it may be suggested that these field boundaries belong to the Iron Age and Romano-British periods. By analogy with the evidence from an area to the southeast of the site (Field 2, Jones 1992, fig. 2) it may be suggested that the north-south aligned boundaries are of Romano-British date, and the remainder are Iron Age in date. The Iron Age field systems may have been associated with settlement in Field 2 to the southeast of the site (currently under excavation), and to the east of the site (Fig. 2; Evans 1996, fig. 00).

Few other features were identified. Possible post-holes or small pits were sampled in Trenches 3-6 and 9, but all were very severely truncated, and some may not have been anthropogenic in origin. These features could not be related to any identifiable structures within the areas investigated, nor was there evidence found of other structural features such as eaves-drip gullies surrounding hut circles. The very low level of finds recovered overall suggests a very low level of activity here, which is consistent with the interpretation of the features identified these mainly comprising field systems.

8.0: IMPLICATIONS AND PROPOSALS

8.1: Implications

No trace of the possible crop-marked ring-ditch, or any other possibly associated features, was found. The low density of finds of Neolithic and Bronze Age date from fieldwalking and this evaluation suggests a very low level of activity in the vicinity.

The majority of the features identified may be interpreted as ditched field boundaries, spanning the Iron Age and Romano-British periods, probably associated with settlements to the southeast and east of the site. Although few possible structural features were identified within the site, the field boundaries identified are nevertheless

a significant component of the Iron Age and Romano-British landscapes. In the context of a landscape-based research project such as Little Paxton, the recovery of a plan of the diverse layouts, and the recovery of further dating evidence, would contribute to an understanding of the economy of the area in the late prehistoric and Romano-British periods, as well as to the changes in the layout of features associated with settlement.

8.2: Proposals

A recording brief during/after topsoil stripping is proposed over the area of the site.

The aims of the recording brief would be:

- to recover a ground-plan of the various field system components, and
- to recover dating evidence.

The recording brief would be undertaken in three stages:

- The monitoring of topsoil stripping by an archaeologist, to ensure a clean surface suitable for the identification of archaeological features is obtained.
- Base planning of features identified using a Total Station EDM linked to a computer-based mapping system (Penmap).
- Sampling of the ditches and other features by hand-excavation sufficient to elucidate the sequence of intercutting features, and to recover datable artifacts and samples for environmental analysis. Discrete features would also be sampled by hand-excavation.

9.0: ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The project was sponsored by Bardon Aggregates Limited. The fieldwork was supervised by Lucie Dingwall, with the assistance of Julie Candy, Mary Duncan, Rebecca Hardy, John La Niece, Chris Patrick and Dan Waterfall. It was monitored for Cambridgeshire County Council by Louise Austin and by Iain Ferris for BUFAU, who also edited this report. The illustrations were prepared by Nigel Dodds.

10.0: REFERENCES

Air Photo Services. 1998. *Little Paxton, Cambridgeshire. Aerial Photographic Assessment: Update to 1998. Archaeology.* Air Photo Services Report 9798/07.

Bevan, L. 1998. *Little Paxton Quarry, Diddington, Cambridgeshire: Field 5 Fieldwalking 1998.* BUFAU Report No. 219.09

BUFAU. 1998. *Little Paxton Quarry, Phase 3 Area. Archaeological Specification.*

Evans, C. 1996. The Excavation of a Ring-Ditch Complex at Diddington, near Huntingdon, with a Discussion of Second Millennium BC Pyre Burial and Regional

Cremation Practices. *Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society*, LXXXV, 11-26.

Jones, A. E. and Ferris, I. M. 1994. Archaeological Excavations at Little Paxton, Diddington, Cambridgeshire, 1992-3: First Interim Report; The Romano-British Period. *Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society*, LXXXII, 55-66.

Jones, A. E. 1992. *Little Paxton Quarry, Diddington, Cambridgeshire, Phase 2 Archaeological Assessment*. BUFAU Report No. 223.

Jones, A. E. 1995. Little Paxton Quarry, Diddington, Cambridgeshire: Archaeological Excavations 1992-3. Second Interim Report: The Southwest Area. Settlement and Activity from the Neolithic to the Iron Age. *Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society*, LXXXIII, 7-22.

Jones, A. E. in press. An Iron Age Square Barrow at Diddington, Cambridgeshire. Third Interim Report of Excavations at Little Paxton Quarry, 1996. *Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society*, LXXXVI.

Jones, A. E. forthcoming. Little Paxton, Diddington, Cambridgeshire: A River Valley Landscape. Papers from the Great Ouse Valley Conference, 1995. *Bedfordshire County Council, Archaeology Section*.

Leach, P. J. 1992. *Little Paxton Quarry, Diddington, Cambridgeshire. Archaeological Assessment, Phase 1*. BUFAU Report No. 219.