

# Cambridge County Scout Camp Site, Church Lane, Little Abington

An Archaeological Evaluation



Richard Newman

CAMBRIDGE ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT  
UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE



**The Cambridgeshire County Scout Camp  
Site, Church Lane, Little Abington:  
An Archaeological Evaluation**

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## Summary

*Four trenches were excavated at the Cambridgeshire County Scout Camp Site, Church Lane, Little Abington on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of August 2011. They covered a combined total of 35.2m<sup>2</sup> in area. A single archaeological feature, which comprised an undated linear gully or ditch, was encountered. Both the location and orientation of this feature – which followed the boundary between the natural gravels to the north and the chalk marl to the south – indicate that it may have been deliberately situated so as to demarcate the boundary between these two geological zones. This change may have had important implications with regard to the agricultural potential of the two areas. Overlying the sub-soil horizon in each trench was a layer of well-worked horticultural soil. Although undated, this appears most likely to be medieval in origin. Subsequently, in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, the ground level across the eastern side of the PDA was artificially raised and a range of buildings were constructed. These structures, many of which are still standing, are directly associated with the establishment of the Cambridgeshire County Scout Camp. Finally, additional features related to this most recent phase in the site's usage were also identified, including a rubble-filled soakaway and a flat-laid brick surface.*

## **Introduction**

An archaeological evaluation was conducted by the Cambridge Archaeological Unit (CAU) at the Cambridgeshire County Scout Camp site, Church Lane, Little Abington, on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of August 2011. The Proposed Development Area (PDA), which is centred on TL 5318 4911, is situated towards the centre of the village, to the rear of a number of modern domestic properties (see Figure 1). At present, a number of single-storey structures – which provide accommodation, teaching, toilet and shower facilities for the camp – occupy the majority of the proposed development area. A total of four trenches, covering a combined area of 32.5m<sup>2</sup>, were excavated at the site. These were positioned as close as practicably possible to the footprints of the proposed replacement structures, although it should be noted that access to the precise locations themselves was not always achievable. The project followed the specification issued by the CAU (Dickens 2011) and was monitored by Dan McConnell, Development Control Archaeologist at Cambridgeshire Historic Environment Team (formerly CAPCA). The work was commissioned in advance of submission of a planning application for proposed redevelopment of the campsite's facilities.

### *Landscape and Geology*

The Cambridgeshire County Scout Camp site is situated upon a gentle south facing slope, which drops away from medieval Church Lane down to the River Granta (see Figure 1). Geologically, the uppermost, northern portion of the area is comprised of a glacially-derived head or drift gravel deposit. This overlies solid chalk to the south, which is in turn overlain by alluvial silt in the valley bottom (British Geological Survey, Sheet 188). Topographically, within the PDA the present surface height lies at c. 33m OD.

### *Methodology*

During the course of the evaluation, topsoil and subsoil layers were removed by a 360° mechanical excavator with a 1.0m wide toothless bucket; this material was then visually inspected and metal detected. Following this, all archaeological features were excavated by hand and recorded using the CAU-modified version of the MoLAS system (Spence 1994). Base plans were drawn at a scale of 1:50, whilst sections were drawn at a scale of 1:10. A digital photographic archive was also compiled. Throughout the following text, context numbers are indicated by square brackets (e.g. [100]).

### *Historical and Archaeological Background*

A number of archaeological investigations have previously been undertaken within the wider environs of the PDA. Most significantly, this includes work at the Four Wentways roundabout to the northwest (Barclay & Williamson 1994; Ginns, Harris & Woolhouse 2005) and at Granta Park to the west (Kemp 1999; Dickens 2004a; Dickens 2004b; Armour 2006). In both of these locations, a range of predominately Later Prehistoric features were encountered. At the former site, two Bronze Age round barrows were investigated. At the latter, scatters of Mesolithic to Early Bronze Age worked flint were recovered, along with 60 Middle Iron Age pits, a small quantity of residual Roman pottery and a medieval ditch associated with the remnants of ridge and furrow agriculture. These results are complemented by the presence of

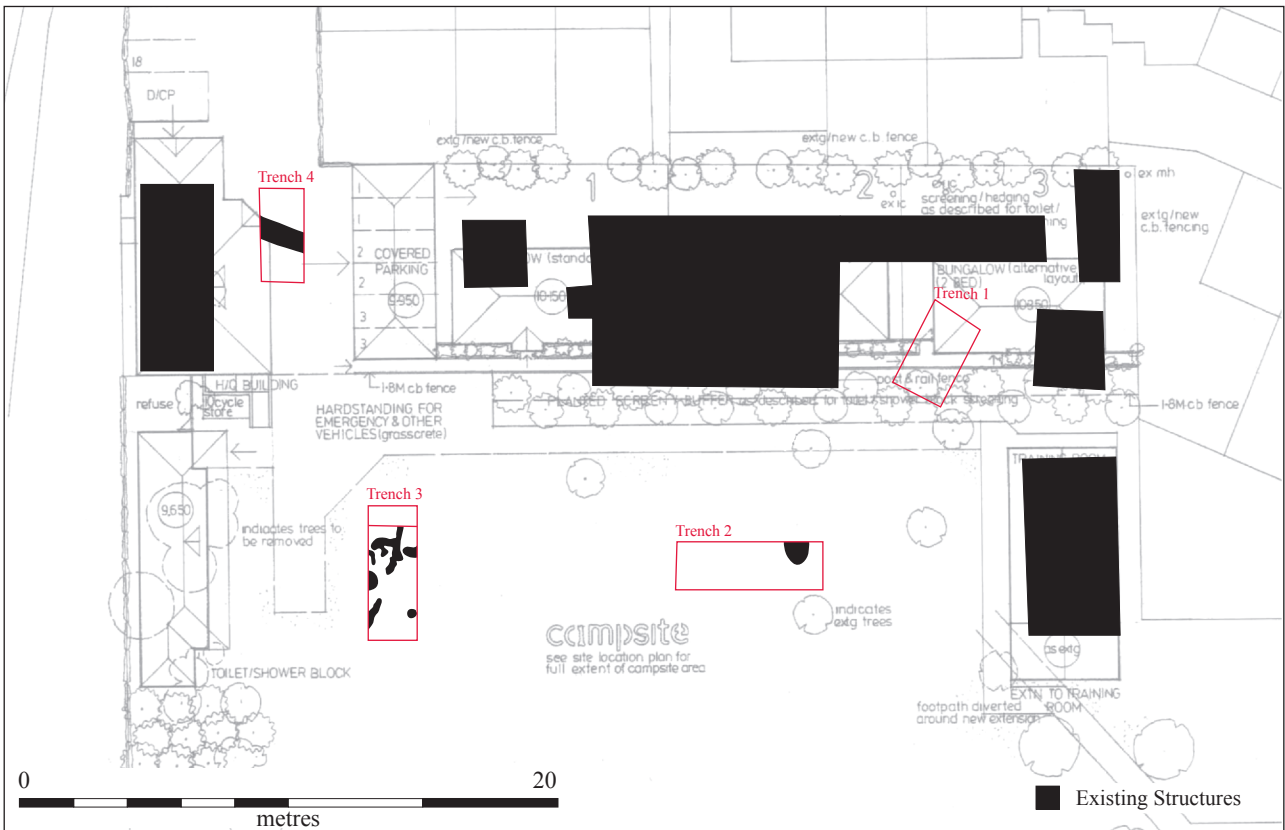
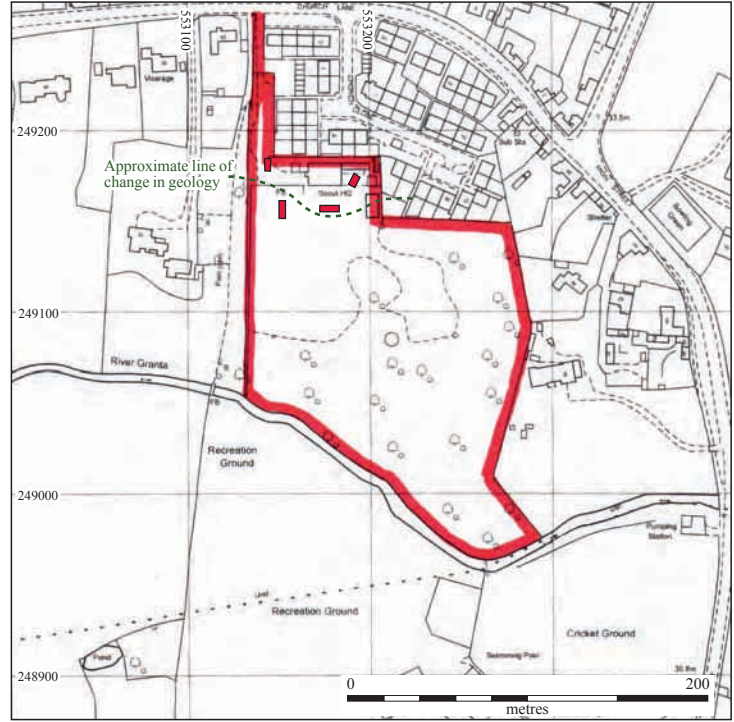


Figure 1. Site location and trench layout

further round barrows and a number of enclosures in the area that have been identified via cropmark evidence (Palmer 2004).

Historically, there is known to have been a Late Saxon manor at Little Abington and also at neighbouring Great Abington (Wright 1978, 6-7). Immediately prior to the Norman Conquest, the manor of Little Abington was held by Eddeva the Fair. At Domesday, the population of this settlement comprised 16 peasants and 4 bondsmen; in addition, sufficient woodland was included in the demesne to accommodate 20 pigs (*ibid.*, 3). Over the course of the next three centuries the village prospered. Elements of the parish church of St Mary the Virgin potentially date to *c.* 1100, although the majority of the standing structure is 13<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> century in date (*ibid.*, 17; CHER ref: MCB14842). Subsequently, however, in common with many English villages in the later 14<sup>th</sup> century, the settlement contracted markedly. The church became increasingly isolated as the principal focus of occupation moved further to the west. The location of the former settlement is now marked by a series of earthworks (CHER ref: 06194). In 1590, the manor of Little Abington was combined by marriage with that of neighbouring Great Abington. The former site was abandoned at this time, and its precise location is now unknown (*ibid.*, 15). During the post-medieval period the village remained primarily agricultural in focus, and its open fields were finally inclosed in 1801 (*ibid.*, 3).

## Results

The four trenches were situated as close to the footprints of the proposed new buildings as practicably possible (see Figure 2). Only in Trenches 1 and 4, however, was it possible to evaluate directly portions of the affected areas themselves. The two remaining trenches – Trenches 2 and 3 – were offset from the proposed structures by several metres due to the presence of live services, mature trees and standing buildings. In addition, the extents of Trenches 2 and 4 were also curtailed because live cables were encountered at depth that had not been detected during the preliminary CAT scan; further excavation in these locations was therefore halted. Nevertheless, despite these caveats, a number of results were obtained from the evaluation. In the first instance, it is clear that the PDA is positioned across a boundary in the underlying geology; at this point the glacial gravels to the north (which were encountered in Trenches 1, 2 and 4) transition onto chalk marl to the south (as encountered in Trench 3). This change may have had important implications with regard to the agricultural potential of the two areas. Secondly, only a single archaeological feature was encountered. This consisted of an undated linear gully or ditch, which was identified in Trench 4. Both the location and orientation of this feature – which contained relatively sterile eroded sub-soil, and produced no material culture – indicate that it may have been deliberately situated so as to demarcate the boundary between the two geological zones. Unfortunately, despite the fact that elements of this same sub-soil deposit were encountered in all four trenches, no datable material was recovered from this layer in any location. Overlying the sub-soil horizon in each instance was a layer of well-worked horticultural soil. This again contained no datable material culture, but is very likely to be medieval in origin as the PDA is known to have lain within the immediate environs of the medieval village. Subsequently, in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, the ground level across the eastern side of the PDA was artificially raised and a range of buildings were constructed. These structures, many of which are still standing, are directly associated with the



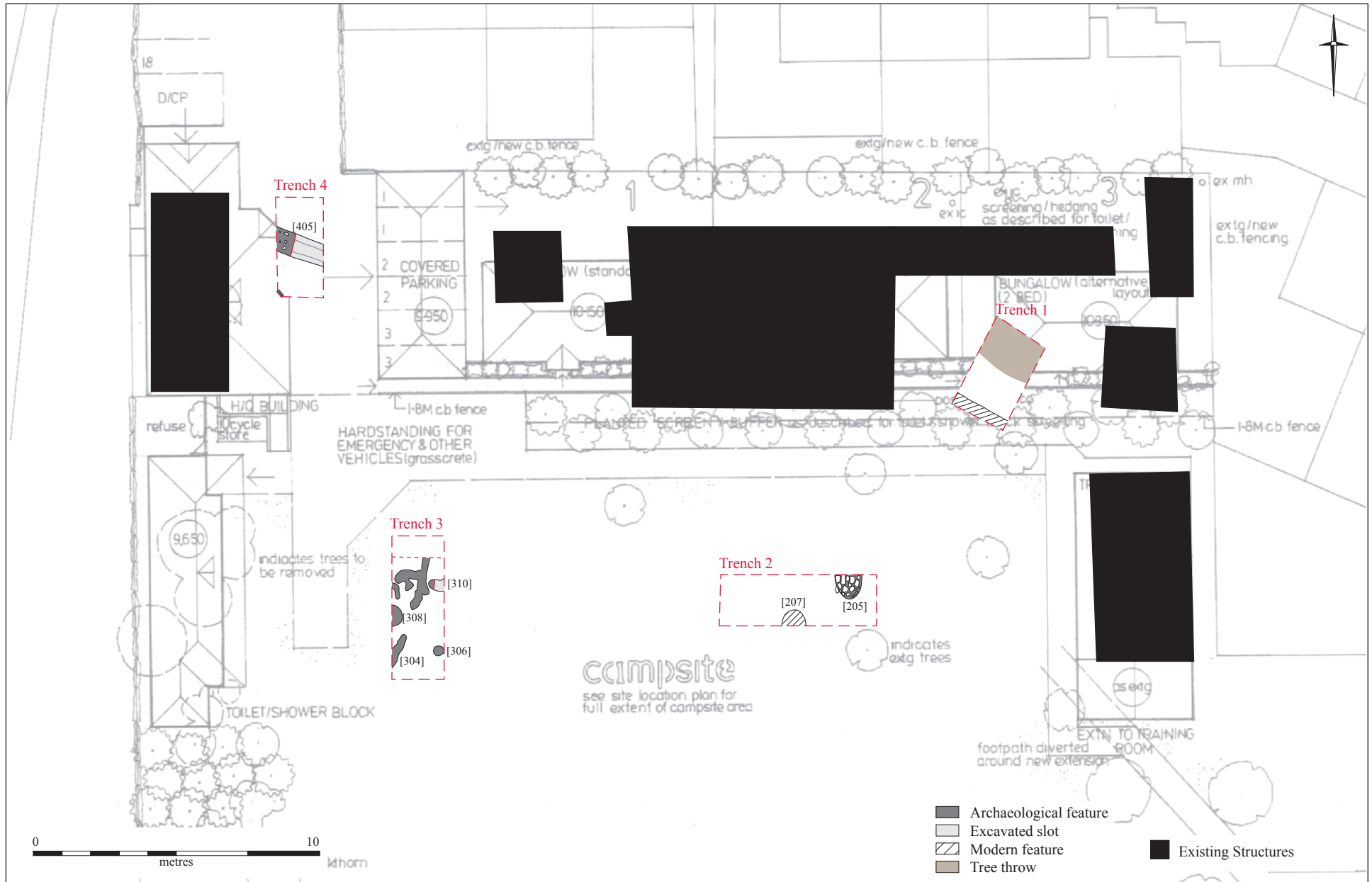


Figure 2. Trench plan



Figure 3. Trench 2, north facing section





Figure 4. Trench 3, facing north, with west facing section below

establishment of the Cambridgeshire County Scout Camp. Finally, additional features related to this most recent phase in the site's usage were also identified, including a rubble-filled soakaway in Trench 2 and a flat-laid brick surface in Trench 4.

#### *Trench 1*

This trench was located towards the eastern side of the PDA. It was positioned a little way to the south of the extant shower block, and partially extended into the footprint of the proposed new structure. Trench 1 measured 3.70m by 2.0m in extent, and was excavated to a depth of 0.70m. The excavation of this trench was stopped short when a large tree stump and a live electricity service were encountered; for this reason, only the northeastern portion of the trench was opened. The natural in this location (encountered at a depth of 0.63m) consisted of mixed yellowish orange coarse sand with occasional gravel and flint nodule inclusions. Above this lay [103], a 0.09m thick layer of firmly compacted mid to pale greyish brown sandy silt sub-soil with occasional to frequent chalk, charcoal and gravel inclusions. This was then overlain in turn by [102], a layer of mid to dark brownish grey humic sandy silt horticultural soil with occasional to frequent chalk fleck inclusions that measured 0.22m thick. Neither deposit contained any datable material culture. Subsequently, above [102] made-ground deposit [101] was introduced. This consisted of mid to dark brown sandy silt that contained frequent CBM fragment and flint nodule inclusions. This material was heavily bioturbated, and measured 0.28m thick. Finally, the uppermost element in the sequence comprised dark brown humic topsoil deposit [100], which measured 0.08m thick.

#### *Trench 2*

This trench was located towards the centre of the PDA. It was positioned a short distance to the south of the main headquarters building, but fell outside the footprint of the proposed replacement structure. Trench 2 measured 5.45m by 1.80m in extent, and was excavated to a depth of 0.93m. The natural in this location, (encountered at a depth of 0.80m) consisted of mixed yellowish orange coarse sandy gravels with occasional flint nodule inclusions. Above this lay [203], a 0.24m thick layer of firmly compacted mid to pale greyish brown sandy silt sub-soil with occasional to frequent chalk, charcoal and gravel inclusions (see Figure 3). This was then overlain in turn by [202], a layer of mid to dark brownish grey humic sandy silt horticultural soil with occasional to frequent chalk fleck inclusions that measured 0.27m thick. Neither deposit contained any datable material culture. Subsequently, above [202] made-ground deposit [201] was introduced. This consisted of mid to dark brown sandy silt that contained frequent CBM fragment and flint nodule inclusions. The material was heavily bioturbated, and measured 0.30m thick. Cut into [201], and therefore dating to the mid to late 20<sup>th</sup> century, were two discrete features (these were not numbered, as they contained no material culture). The first feature, which measured 0.90m by 0.85m in extent, contained CBM and concrete fragment hardcore and clearly functioned as a soakaway for a nearby gutter. It is situated at the eastern end of the trench. The second, which measured 0.80m by 0.60m in extent and was situated towards the western end of the trench, also exclusively contained hardcore but did not appear to be associated with a downpipe. It may well therefore have been created as a refuse pit associated with the construction of the adjacent Scout Hut. Finally, the uppermost element in the sequence comprised dark brown humic topsoil deposit [200], which measured 0.11m thick.

#### *Trench 3*

This trench was located towards the western side of the PDA. It was positioned a short distance to the east of the proposed new shower block, as the site of the building itself was occupied by a number of mature trees. Trench 3 measured 5.00m by 1.80m in extent, and was excavated to a depth of 0.55m. The natural in this location (encountered at a depth of 0.47m) consisted of mixed creamy white chalk marl with occasional gravel and flint nodule inclusions. Here, the earliest activity to be encountered was represented by a series of irregular tree-boles/tree-throws (see Figure 4). Four of these features were investigated, although none of them contained datable material and no evidence of anthropogenic involvement in their creation was encountered. Their cuts – [310], [308], [306] and [304] – varied between 0.32m and 1.17m+ by 0.37m and 0.67m+ in





Figure 5. West facing section, Trench 4

extent, and between 0.18m and 0.25m in depth. Each had an irregular, moderately sloping concave profile. Their fills – [309], [307], [305] and [303] respectively – consisted of uniform deposits of mid brownish grey sandy silt with occasional to frequent chalk fleck and gravel inclusions. These tree-boles were overlain by [302], a layer of firmly compacted mid to pale brownish grey sandy silt sub-soil with occasional to frequent chalk fleck inclusions, which measured 0.23m thick. This was then overlain in turn by [301], a layer of mid to dark brownish grey humic sandy silt horticultural soil with occasional to frequent chalk fleck inclusions that measured 0.18m thick. Neither deposit contained any datable material culture. Finally, the uppermost element in the sequence comprised dark brown humic topsoil deposit [300], which measured 0.10m thick.

#### *Trench 4*

This trench was located towards the western side of the PDA. It was positioned a short distance to the west of the present woodstore, and predominately lay within the footprint of a proposed new structure. Trench 4 measured 3.50m by 1.80m in extent, and was excavated to a depth of 1.02m. The excavation in this location was stopped short when a live telecommunication cable was encountered, and only the northern portion of the trench was opened. The natural in this location (encountered at a depth of 0.65m) consisted of mottled pale orangey brown sandy gravel with occasional flint nodule inclusions. Above this lay [406], a 0.20m thick layer of firmly compacted mid to pale greyish brown sandy silt sub-soil deposit with occasional to frequent chalk fleck and gravel inclusions. This layer had been truncated by a north-northwest to south-southeast aligned gully/ditch (see Figure 5). The cut of this feature – [405], which measured 1.68m+ by 1.22m in extent and 0.36m deep – had moderately sloping concave sides and a relatively flat base. It was filled with [404], a relatively sterile deposit of mid to pale greyish brown sandy silt eroded sub-soil with occasional to frequent chalk fleck and gravel inclusions. This gully was subsequently overlain by [403], a layer of mid to dark brownish grey humic sandy silt horticultural soil with occasional to frequent chalk fleck inclusions that measured 0.39m thick. Above this layer, flat-laid brick surface [402] was encountered. This was comprised of unmortared engineering bricks, each of which bore an incised diamond pattern, that had been laid in a herringbone pattern. This surface was most probably associated with the initial, mid 20<sup>th</sup> century establishment of the car park associated with the adjacent County Scout Camp. Above [402] lay banded deposits [401] and [400]. These comprised subsequent resurfacings of the car park area, and consisted of crushed tarmac fragments and gravel hardcore respectively. They measured 0.15m and 0.06m deep.

## **Discussion**

It is clear from the results of this evaluation that the PDA has not been previously been subject to intense anthropogenic activity. Indeed, only a single archaeological feature – a north-northwest to south-southeast aligned gully/ditch in Trench 4 – was identified. Given both its location and orientation, which closely correspond with changes in the underlying geology and topography, it is likely that this feature served to demarcate the limit of the more attractive, freely-draining agricultural land to the north. Unfortunately, due to the absence of any associated material culture, its date is unclear. Nevertheless, the absence of humic horticultural material within the matrix of its fill – which solely consisted of eroded sub-soil – strongly suggests that it is pre-medieval in origin. Furthermore, the aforementioned dearth of material culture, when taken in conjunction with the low incidence of charcoal, indicates that it was situated at some distance from any contemporary locus of occupation. This pattern of marginal, fringe activity also appears to have continued into the medieval period. Although it is known that the core settlement zone of Little Abington was situated in much closer proximity to the site at this time, it is likely that any direct occupational activity occurred further to the north, higher up the gravel ridge and thus closer to the medieval highway. The PDA itself was most probably incorporated into the village's agricultural hinterland. As the archaeological and cartographic evidence reveals, it was to remain in similar use until the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century (see Dickens 2004a, figs. 5-7).

Indeed, its marginal status is underlined by the total absence of even residual pre-20<sup>th</sup> century material culture. By the late 1960s, however, the village was expanding markedly, with numerous domestic properties being constructed immediately to the north, and the PDA itself was converted into the County Scout Camp.

Somewhat ironically, perhaps, it may be this, the most recent phase in the site's history, which holds the greatest degree of archaeological potential. This is because the subject of 20<sup>th</sup> century camping is now in and of itself a field of increasing archaeological interest (*e.g.* Beck *et al.* 2004; Hicks 2009).

#### *Acknowledgments*

The evaluation was directed by Richard Newman, and was undertaken in the field with the assistance of Jacqui Hutton. The project was managed for the CAU by Alison Dickens and monitored by Dan McConnell, Development Control Archaeologist at Cambridgeshire Historic Environment Team (formerly CAPCA). The graphics for this report were produced by Vicky Herring. Our thanks are extended to Barry Wallman, the Cambridgeshire County Scout Camp's Site Manager, for his friendly assistance on site.



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### Project details

Project name	County Scout Camp, Little Abington
Short description of the project	Four trenches were excavated at the Cambridgeshire County Scout Camp Site, Church Lane, Little Abington on the 22nd of August 2011. They covered a combined total of 35.2m <sup>2</sup> in area. A single archaeological feature, which comprised an undated linear gully or ditch, was encountered. Both the location and orientation of this feature - which followed the boundary between the natural gravels to the north and the chalk marl to the south - indicate that it may have been deliberately situated so as to demarcate the boundary between these two geological zones. This change may have had important implications with regard to the agricultural potential of the two areas. Overlying the sub-soil horizon in each trench was a layer of well-worked horticultural soil. Although undated, this appears most likely to be medieval in origin. Subsequently, in the mid 20th century, the ground level across the eastern side of the PDA was artificially raised and a range of buildings were constructed. These structures, many of which are still standing, are directly associated with the establishment of the Cambridgeshire County Scout Camp. Finally, additional features related to this most recent phase in the site's usage were also identified, including a rubble-filled soakaway and a flat-laid brick surface.
Project dates	Start: 22-08-2011 End: 22-08-2011
Previous/future work	No / No
Any associated project reference codes	ECB3668 - HER event no.
Any associated project reference codes	ASC11 - Contracting Unit No.
Type of project	Field evaluation
Site status	None
Current Land use	Other 2 - In use as a building
Monument type	LINEAR GULLY Uncertain
Significant Finds	N/A None

Methods & techniques	'Sample Trenches'
Development type	Amenity area (e.g. public open space)
Prompt	Direction from Local Planning Authority - PPS
Position in the planning process	Pre-application

### Project location

Country	England
Site location	CAMBRIDGESHIRE SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE LITTLE ABINGTON County Scout Campsite
Postcode	CB21 6BH
Study area	512.00 Square metres
Site coordinates	TL 5318 4911 52.1186139746 0.237575292795 52 07 07 N 000 14 15 E Point
Height OD / Depth	Min: 33.00m Max: 33.00m

### Project creators

Name of Organisation	Cambridge Archaeological Unit
Project brief originator	Local Authority Archaeologist and/or Planning Authority/advisory body
Project design originator	Alison Dickens
Project director/manager	Alison Dickens
Project supervisor	Richard Newman
Type of sponsor/funding body	Landowner
Name of sponsor/funding body	Cambridge Scout Association

### Project archives

Physical Archive Exists?	No
Digital Archive Exists?	No
Paper Archive recipient	Cambridge Archaeological Unit
Paper Archive ID	ASC11
Paper Contents	'none'
Paper Media available	'Drawing','Photograph','Plan','Report','Section'

**Project  
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