

Swineshead Village Hall, Swineshead, Bedfordshire

Archaeological Observation, Investigation, Recording and Analysis



Simon Timberlake

**CAMBRIDGE ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT
UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE**



Swineshead Village Hall, Swineshead, Bedfordshire
Archaeological Observation, Investigation, Recording and Analysis

Simon Timberlake

Cambridge Archaeology Unit
University of Cambridge
February 2012

Report No. 1072

BEDFM 2011.89

On Tuesday 24th January archaeological monitoring work was undertaken at the Village Hall in Swineshead, Bedfordshire in advance of the planned extension to the rear of the building. An area of approximately 14 square metres was excavated down to the interface between the subsoil layers and natural, but no archaeological features were found. However, two sherds of 12th-13th and 13th-15th century AD pottery were recovered from the upper subsoil layer, significant in that these are one of the very few bits of material evidence for Medieval settlement in the area of the High Street. At the base of the sub-soil some truncated fragments of a palaeosol appear to have survived which contains traces of strewn and perhaps redeposited burnt stone and charcoal, perhaps an indication of still earlier settlement.

Introduction

Archaeological monitoring and recording was undertaken to the rear of the existing village hall at Swineshead, Bedfordshire (NGR 505855 265828) during the course of digging the footprint for an extension to this single storey building on Tuesday 24th January 2012. The area being monitored amounted to only 13.95 square metres; an 8.5m x 0.9-3m L-shaped trench between 0.6 – 0.7m deep which was dug on the lawn abutting the existing demolished rear end of the hall.

Site location and topography

The village hall is slightly set back from the High Street on a 0.8ha plot, the ground here being relatively level at approximately 46.5m AOD.

Geology

The underlying geology in this area consists of Boulder Clay with thin deposits of Glacial Gravel and Terrace Gravels in the river valleys overlying the Oxford Clay (BGS 1975). At Swineshead a thin stony gravel overlies a diamicton consisting of mixed Boulder Clay and Gravel.

Archaeological background

Prehistoric activity has been identified to the south of the village in the form of a ring ditch (HER 1501); with potential prehistoric enclosures to the north (HER 16625), north-west (HER 15021) and west (HER 15071).

Romano-British settlement here has also been identified to the north of the village where an enclosure (HER 344) has yielded pottery, tile and slag.

Most significant perhaps for the location of the village hall within the centre of this village was the identification of Anglo-Saxon burials (HER 8979) within the St. Nicholas' Parish Churchyard, the site of these finds lying just 40m to the west of the proposed development at TL 057658 (see SBD10543 - *Bedfordshire Magazine*, p304).

However, Medieval earthworks (HER 5081) are recorded at a distance of 200m to the south-east of here associated with a Medieval farmhouse, with enclosures, ridge and furrow cultivation and a hollow way. Other ridge and furrow has been identified to the south (HER 8232) and to the north (HER 5492) of the village. A number of Postmedieval 16th-18th century brick and timber frame buildings are to be found close to the village centre, some of these along the High Street (The Five Bells, Manor Farmhouse, Lower Farmhouse, Close Cottage etc).

Aims and Objectives

Archaeological monitoring was undertaken with the aims of determining the location, extent, date, character, condition, significance and quality of any surviving archaeological remains exposed by this examination of the footprint for the proposed extension.

The objectives were to undertake detailed recording, and if necessary sample excavation of any archaeological features revealed, with particular attention to the evidence for Anglo-Saxon or Medieval occupation, or other relevant research issues highlighted for Bedfordshire archaeology in the regional research framework (Oake et al. 20007). Recording was to include an assessment of the presence and degree of truncation of buried deposits, as well as the presence or absence of a palaeosol horizon, and the sampling of deposits within any buried (negative) features.

Methodology

The footprint area for the foundations was stripped of the topsoil and subsoil layers down to the natural under close archaeological supervision. Machining was carried out using a 7-ton 360° excavator fitted with a 1.2m wide ditching bucket; the topsoil being removed first, followed by a series of sub-soil layers, down to a maximum depth of 0.8m. Within the sub-soil layers the contents of each bucket was spread out on the spoil heaps either side of the trench and examined for the presence of finds, visually and by metal detector. A plan was drawn-up of the trench along with a representative section through the topsoil and subsoil layers, drawn at a scale of 1:10, the layers being recorded using an amended version of the Museum of London context system (Spence 1994). A scaled photographic (digital colour) record was also undertaken following the cleaning of the trench base and section. Finds were bagged and labelled, then washed and re-bagged within the CAU Finds Department before being examined by an in-house specialist.

Results

No archaeological features were revealed within the c.14 square metres of trench excavated, although a thick (up to 0.5m) sequence of subsoil (002 – 004) was identified which may have included on its base (at the interface with the natural) the remnants of a partly truncated palaeosol or ‘B’ horizon (004). The latter included scattered traces of degraded burnt (red) sandstone (and or burnt clay) with spots of ash and the occasional smear of charcoal amongst flattened waterworn (sandstone + quartzite) pebbles and more angular flint nodules. These were not thought to be in situ. remains, but rather evidence of former occupation activity within this general area. Significantly there was no evidence for pottery or any other cultural material in this horizon.

From the upper subsoil (002) some fragments of bone, tile and two sherds of abraded pot (subsequently identified as being of Medieval origin) were recovered. Modern brick and tile was ubiquitous within the lower topsoil (001), but was rare below this. Only some fragments of brick and tile were noted within the subsoil (002), suggesting that these were for the most part intrusive at this level.

A 1m wide section (0.7 – 0.75m deep) through the topsoil and subsoil was recorded against the north-eastern edge of the excavation:

0 – 13-15cms	upper humic horizon + turf including laid brick path. Turf and dark grey sandy silt with much coal and some charcoal fragments, alongside brick waste.
15 – 20-33cms	lower humic horizon (001) consisting of brown – dark grey silt with inclusion of small fragments of brick and coal and occasional sherds of china and clay pipe fragments
20 – 40-42cms	upper subsoil horizon (002) consisting of a mid-brown to orange fine silt with some sand and gravel component, small waterworn brick particles, charcoal, and rarely (Medieval) pot. This includes a layer of stones settled on the irregular base.
40 – 60-63cms	lower subsoil horizon (003) consisting of a mid-brown to darker brown to dark orange sandy silt which is sterile throughout, except for the base where there is an imersistent layer of flattened waterworn (stone) pebbles (50-100mm) alongside smaller pieces of sub-angular flint, and rarely crumbs of degraded burnt sandstone or clay
60 – 70 cms	basal subsoil or palaeosol (004) consisting of an orange to olive green silt with sandy and clay-rich lenses and occasional ‘smears’ of ash and charcoal or degraded burnt (red) sandstone or clay towards its base
c.70cms	natural (gravel with clay patches)

Discussion

It is difficult to say much about the archaeology which lies beneath the site of the village hall and grounds based simply on the sampling and monitoring of this very small area. Nevertheless, there were indications of Medieval occupation (perhaps dwellings) nearby in the form of pottery recovered from the subsoil. Unfortunately it was not possible to determine whether this represented a distinct horizon (at around 30-40 cms depth) at which we should expect to find Medieval archaeology if *in situ*. features such as pits and ditches had been present. In all probability the answer to this is no, given the rather abraded nature of these sherds, and the possibilities here of residuality and re-deposition.

Although there seemed to be little evidence for disturbance here associated with the construction of the village hall, signs of earlier disturbance is suggested by the apparent truncation of an early palaeosol horizon which seems have been the main source of the occasional strewn hearth material found at depths of between 0.6 and 0.7m below ground surface; a layer otherwise devoid of cultural material. It is tempting to suggest this might be indicative of prehistoric occupation somewhere in the vicinity, although anything conclusive is lacking.

It is perhaps interesting that the probable date represented by the recovered pottery sherds is 13th-century; a date earlier than that of the nearby 14th-15th century parish church of St. Nicholas, and considerably earlier than any of the other surviving buildings along the High Street, the oldest of which are 16th -17th century in origin (e.g. Lower Farmhouse, The Five Bells and Manor Farmhouse). In fact, no Medieval buildings or Medieval finds are recorded for the HER entry for Swineshead Medieval village (HER 17087), suggesting that this tiny amount of pottery recovered from beneath the Village Hall represents the earliest domestic evidence for this Medieval settlement.

Meanwhile, the lack of Anglo-Saxon ceramics or other culturally identifiable finds from this excavation might be taken to imply the absence of continuation of Anglo-

Saxon activity in this direction, but this must remain inconclusive. What we can say, is that if there had been a continuation of burials into this area (given the relatively shallow depth of this trench) we would have expected to have picked these up.

Conclusion

The current investigation does not suggest the presence of archaeology within the immediate area, but it does imply the presence of Medieval and an earlier phase of activity/ occupation nearby, perhaps even within a 10-20m radius of the site. This find of 12th-15th century pottery, although not *in situ*, is significant, given that it is perhaps the earliest evidence for the Medieval village of Swineshead.

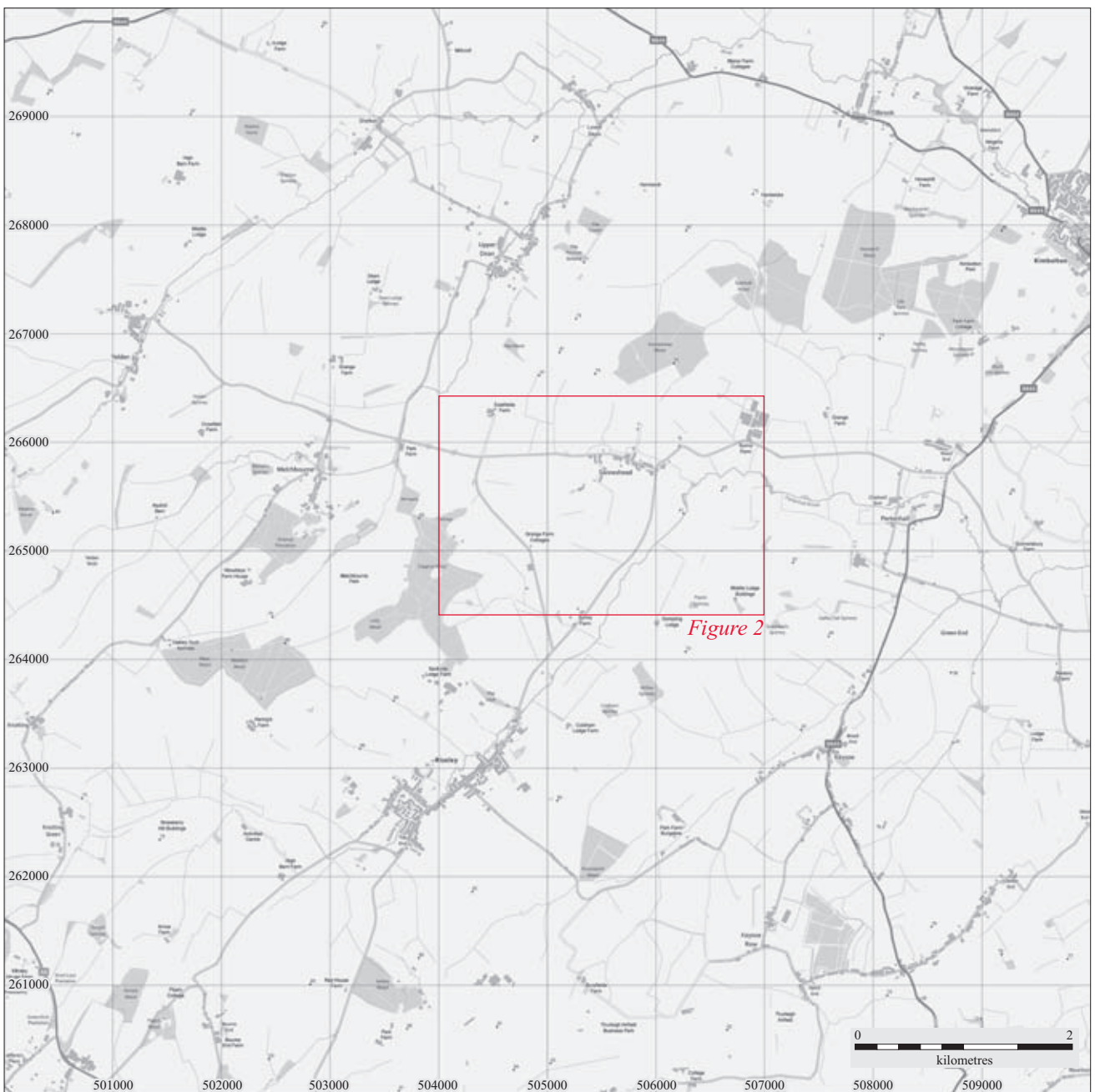
Acknowledgements

The archaeological monitoring work was carried out at the behest of Jennifer Leishman on behalf of the Swineshead Village Hall Management Committee, the architectural contractor being John Willcock of John Willcock Architects. Machine excavation on site was undertaken by Lee Farrer of E.Farrer & Son Building Contractors, the work being supervised by Simon Timberlake (CAU). Emma Beadsmoore was CAU Project Manager, whilst the illustration, section and other graphics work was produced by Vikki Herring. The archaeological monitoring of this project was undertaken by Geoff Saunders, the Historic Environment Team Officer of Bedford Borough Council.

References

Oake, M.M., Luke, M., Dawson, M., Edgeworth, M. & Murphy, P. 2007
Bedfordshire archaeology. Research and archaeology: Resource assessment, research agenda and strategy. *Bedfordshire Archaeology*, Monograph No.9

Saunders, G. 2010 Brief for a programme of archaeological observation, investigation recording, analysis and publication. Swineshead Village Hall, High Street, Swineshead, Bedfordshire



Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right 2012

Figure 1. Location map

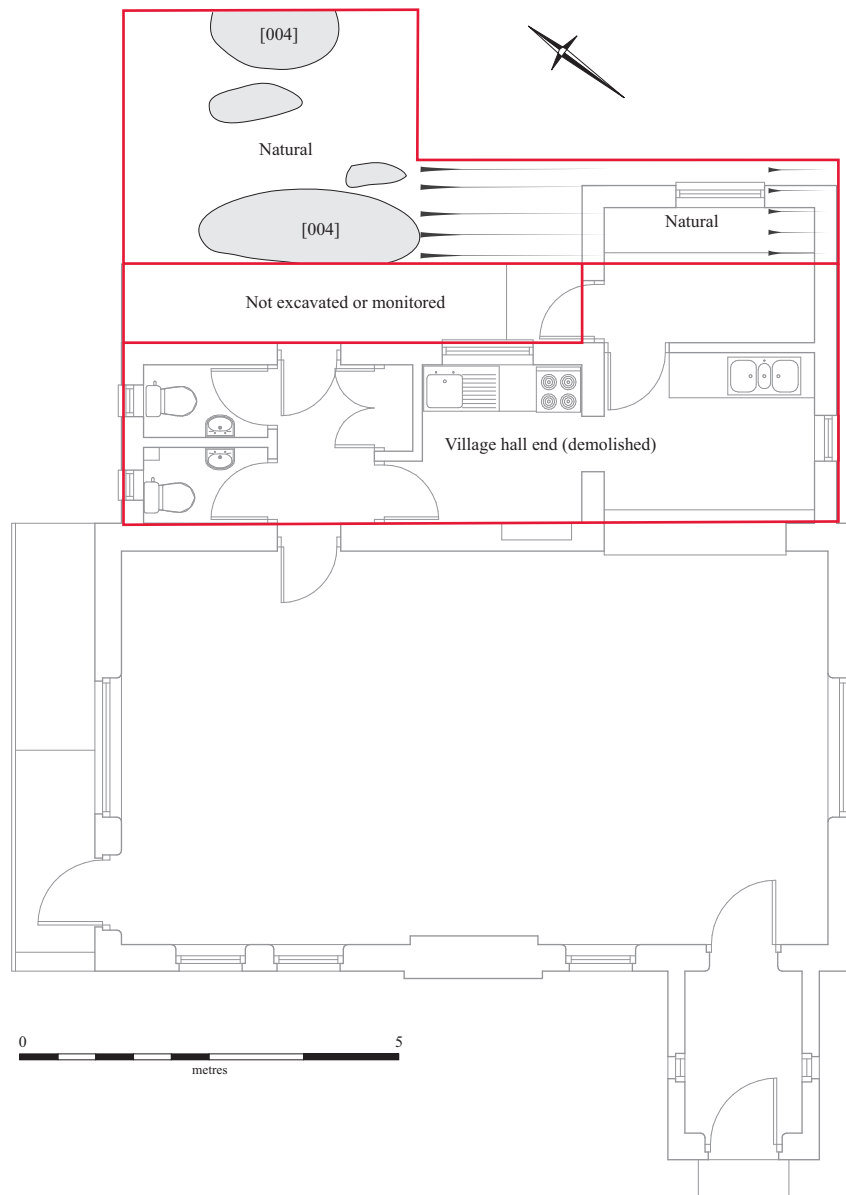
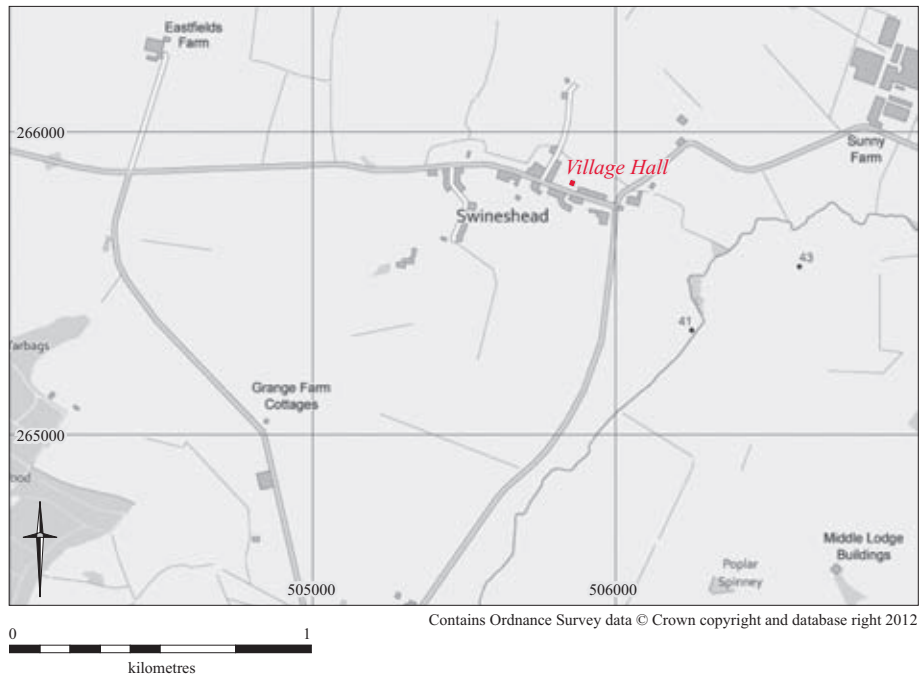


Figure 2. Site plan overlaid on pre-development village hall



Figure 3. Section on NE side of trench through sub-soil.

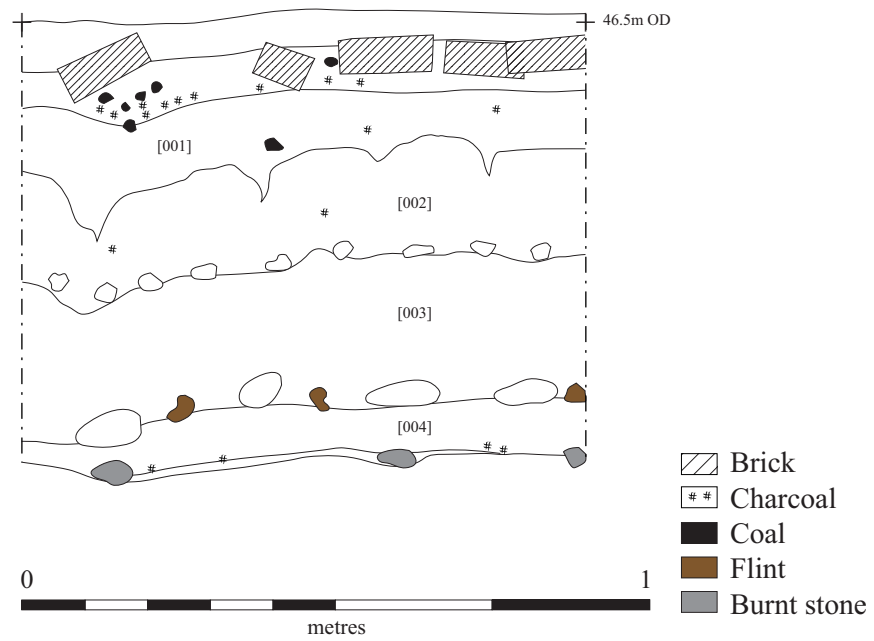


Figure 4. Section drawing of NE side of trench through sub-soil.



Figure 5. Archaeological trench revealing fragments of basal subsoil (paleosol with burnt material showing pink) over natural.

OASIS DATA COLLECTION FORM: England

[List of Projects](#) | [Manage Projects](#) | [Search Projects](#) | [New project](#) | [Change your details](#) | [HER coverage](#) | [Change country](#) | [Log out](#)

Printable version

OASIS ID: cambridg3-118633

Project details

Project name	Swineshead Village Hall, Bedfordshire
Short description of the project	On Tuesday 24th January archaeological monitoring work was undertaken at the Village Hall in Swineshead, Bedfordshire in advance of the planned extension to the rear of the building. An area of approximately 14 square metres was excavated down to the interface between the subsoil layers and natural, but no archaeological features were found. However, two sherds of 12th-13th and 13th-15th century AD pottery were recovered from the upper subsoil layer, significant in that these are one of the very few bits of material evidence for Medieval settlement in the area of the High Street. At the base of the sub-soil some truncated fragments of a palaeosol appear to have survived which contains traces of strewn and perhaps redeposited burnt stone and charcoal, perhaps an indication of still earlier settlement.
Project dates	Start: 24-01-2012 End: 24-01-2012
Previous/future work	No / No
Any associated project reference codes	BEDFM 2011.89 - HER event no.
Any associated project reference codes	3-11863 - NMR No.
Type of project	Recording project
Site status	None
Current Land use	Community Service 1 - Community Buildings
Monument type	NONE None
Significant Finds	POTTERY Medieval
Significant Finds	BURNT STONE Uncertain
Investigation type	'Part Excavation','Watching Brief'
Prompt	Direction from Local Planning Authority - PPG16

Project location

Country	England
Site location	BEDFORDSHIRE BEDFORD SWINESHEAD Swineshead Village Hall. High Street, Swineshead
Postcode	MK442AA
Study area	14.00 Square metres
Site coordinates	TL 50581 26551 51.9166666667 0.189722222222 51 55 00 N 000 11 23 E Point
Height OD / Depth	Min: 46.50m Max: 46.50m

Project creators

Name of Organisation	Cambridge Archaeological Unit
Project brief originator	Local Authority Archaeologist and/or Planning Authority/advisory body
Project design originator	Emma Beadsmoore
Project director/manager	Emma Beadsmoore
Project supervisor	Simon Timberlake
Type of sponsor/funding body	Parish Council
Name of sponsor/funding body	Swineshead Parish Council

Project archives

Physical Archive recipient	Bedford Borough Council
Physical Archive ID	BEDFM 2011.89
Physical Contents	'Ceramics','other'
Digital Archive recipient	Bedford Borough Council
Digital Archive ID	BEDFM 2011.89
Digital Contents	'Stratigraphic','Survey'
Digital Media available	'Images raster / digital photography','Survey','Text'
Paper Archive recipient	Bedford Borough Council
Paper Archive ID	BEDFM 2011.89
Paper Contents	'Stratigraphic','Survey'
Paper Media available	'Context sheet','Correspondence','Notebook - Excavation',' Research',' General Notes','Photograph','Plan','Report','Section','Survey '

Project bibliography**1**

Publication type	Grey literature (unpublished document/manuscript)
------------------	---

Title	Swineshead Village Hall, Swineshead, Bedfordshire Archaeological Observation, Investigation, Recording and Analysis
Author(s)/Editor(s)	Timberlake, S.
Other bibliographic details	Report no. 1072
Date	2012
Issuer or publisher	Cambridge Archaeological Unit
Place of issue or publication	University of Cambridge
Description	8 page report incl. title page, 5 figures, references and Oasis form; bound and as pdf version

Entered by	Simon Timberlake (st410@cam.ac.uk)
Entered on	1 February 2012

OASIS:

Please e-mail [English Heritage](#) for OASIS help and advice

© ADS 1996-2006 Created by [Jo Gilham and Jen Mitcham](#), email Last modified Friday 3 February 2006

Cite only: <http://www.oasis.ac.uk/form/print.cfm> for this page