# Chesterton House, Chesterton, Cambridge

An Archaeological Evaluation



**Richard Newman** 





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**Richard Newman** 

With illustrations by Bryan Crossan

© Cambridge Archaeological Unit University of Cambridge Division of Archaeology June 2014 Report No. 1243 **Event number: ECB 4023** 

#### **Summary**

A trench-based evaluation, comprising a single trench covering 13.5sqm, was undertaken within the garden of Chesterton House, Chesterton, Cambridge. This revealed evidence for three phases of activity at the site. The earliest phase consisted of two undated postholes and a pit. As they were relatively substantial in scale, it is possible that the postholes comprised part of a Late Saxon/Saxo-Norman post-built structure. Any additional evidence pertaining to this period was removed during the 17<sup>th</sup> century, however, when an extensive horizon of gravel quarry pits – extending over 80% of the trench's area – was created. A fine hammer-struck silver half-crown of Charles II was associated with this phase, although a dearth of earlier material culture (even within residual contexts) indicates that occupation is unlikely to have occurred during the intervening Medieval period. Finally, around 1790 the sequence was capped by an extensive made-ground deposit that was associated with the establishment of Chesterton House itself.

# - Introduction -

An archaeological trench-based evaluation was conducted by the Cambridge Archaeological Unit (CAU) at Chesterton House, 7 Church Street, Chesterton, Cambridge, between the  $21^{st}$  and  $22^{nd}$  of May 2014. The Proposed Development Area (PDA), which is centred on TL 4612 5975, is situated on the suburban outskirts of the city (Figure 1). At present, the PDA – which covers an area of *c*. 470sqm, 185sqm of which will be directly affected by the proposed new building – comprises part of a landscaped garden directly associated with Chesterton House. This latter building is Grade II listed (CHER ref: 044954; English Heritage Building ID: 47410). The evaluation trench was located within the footprint of a proposed new structure (Figure 2). It measured 13.5sqm in extent; this equates to 7.3% of the directly affected area. The project followed the Written Scheme of Investigation issued by the CAU (Dickens 2014) and was monitored by Dan McConnell, Development Control Archaeologist at Cambridgeshire's Historic Environment Team (CHET). The work was commissioned by Matt Hare of Januarys on behalf of Mr and Mrs Dazeley.

### Landscape, Geology and Topography

Located at the head of Church Street, around 150m to the north of St Andrew's Church, the PDA lies on the western periphery of the Medieval core of Chesterton (Figure 1). Topographically, the site presently comprises a level lawn area whose surface height varies between 6.95m and 7.10m OD. Geologically, it is situated upon  $2^{nd}$  Terrace River Gravels overlying Gault Clay (British Geological Survey, Sheet 188). During the course of the evaluation, the highest surviving natural gravels were encountered at 6.36m OD; Gault clay was not reached.

#### Methodology

All topsoil and subsoil layers were removed by a  $360^{\circ}$  mechanical excavator using a 1.5m wide toothless bucket; this material was then visually inspected and metal detected. All archaeological features that were thus revealed were then excavated by hand and recorded using the CAU-modified version of the MoLAS system (Spence 1994). Base plans were drawn at a scale of 1:20, 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.* [101]) and feature numbers by the prefix F (*e.g.* F.01). All work was carried out with strict adherence to Health and Safety legislation and within the recommendations of FAME (Allen & Holt 2010). The sitecode for the excavation was CCH14 and the event number was ECB 4023.

#### Historical and Archaeological Background

The historical and archaeological background of Chesterton has been covered in depth in a recent desktop assessment (Cessford & Appleby 2011) and has also been discussed in a number of publications (Wright 1989; Taylor 1999, 121-26; Cessford with Dickens 2004; Mackay 2009). For this reason, the information will not be reiterated in detail here. Nevertheless, it is necessary to briefly outline the background of the area in order to place the site securely within its wider context. Historically, the royal *vill* of *Cestretone* was most probably founded in the 8<sup>th</sup> century when the area was subdivided from the newly established burh of Cambridge (Wright 1989, 5; Cessford with Dickens 2004, 125-26). A polyfocal settlement then developed, with dispersed foci complementing a postulated core situated in the vicinity of St Andrew's Church (ibid., 127). Subsequently, during the Post-Conquest period, the level of occupation expanded markedly. Concomitantly, a three-field system developed in association with the *vill* that was separate from the larger Liberty of Cambridge (Oosthuizen 2010). Chesterton's principal manor, which was assessed at 30 hides at Domesday (Otway-Ruthven 1938, 361), remained a royal demesne until 1294. Then, around 1200, it was granted in fee farm by King John to Barnwell Priory (Clark 1907, 75) and remained in the hands of the priory until the Dissolution; the occupants of the vill nevertheless insisted on their rights as tenants of ancient demesne as late as the 16<sup>th</sup> century (Harmon 2006). A second, smaller manor was also present in Chesterton. This was appropriated by the abbey of St Andrew. Vercelli (Italy) in 1227, and was maintained by them as a rectory until 1440 (Wright 1989, 17). Following the dissolution of Barnwell Priory in 1538, their former demesne lands were dispersed amongst several private and collegiate landowners (*ibid.*, 13-15). The *vill* nevertheless continued to expand during the Post-Medieval period and the rate of expansion increased exponentially following the enclosure of the area in 1838, when a substantial new suburb was established (Blackmore 1981; Bryan 1999).

Archaeologically, in addition to a number of small-scale evaluations and watching briefs, five moderately-sized excavations have previously been undertaken in Chesterton. The first of these was located at the junction of Scotland Road and Union Lane (Mackay 2009; Figure 1, 11). The second, at the former Sargeants Garage site, was situated on the western side of the junction of High Street and Union Lane (Alexander 1998; Hall 1999; Cessford with Dickens 2004; Figure 1, 6) while the third, at the former Wheatsheaf public house, was situated on the eastern side of the same junction (Masser 2000; Armour 2001; Cessford with Dickens 2004; Figure 1, 7). The fourth, at the former Yorkshire Grey public house (Figure 1, 8), was located some 450m to the northeast, on the northern side of the High Street (Mackay 2001a; Mackay 2001b; Cessford with Dickens 2004). Finally, the fifth took place close to the centre of the vill, at 169-73 High Street (Newman 2014; Figure 1, 18). Each of these excavations has revealed the presence of intensive archaeological sequences. Although limited evidence of Iron Age occupation was identified (Mackay 2009), intensive settlement activity primarily appears to have begun during the Late Saxon/Saxo-Norman period. Initially polyfocal in form, the settlement was reorganised during the 11<sup>th</sup>/12<sup>th</sup> century into a linear arrangement parallel to presentday Scotland Road (Cessford with Dickens 2004). Then, c. 1200, it was reorganised again, transferring to a linear arrangement parallel to the river (Newman 2014). This has remained its dominant form ever since.

Chesterton House itself was constructed at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, although – due to the extent of late 19<sup>th</sup> century alterations and extensions – little of the original structure now survives (RCHM(E) 1959, 384). It was originally built of grey Gault brick and was of two storeys with an attic. Externally, it had two elaborate doorways; one with a broken pediment over and the other with entablature and a dentil cornice. A wide range of outbuildings were also present, including an extant Grade II listed pigeon-loft; the extent of these former outbuildings is visible on Baker's map of 1830 (Figure 5). Associated with the house was an extensive landscaped garden.

# - Results -

A relatively intensive array of features was encountered at the site (Figures 2 and 3). These can be subdivided into three distinct phases of activity. The earliest of these phases had been heavily truncated, whilst the latest solely consisted of a substantial landscaping deposit. The majority of features therefore pertained to Phase 2, an extensive horizon of Post-Medieval gravel extraction pits.

In the first instance, Phase 1 was represented by the remnants of two postholes and a pit (F.06, F.07 and F.05 respectively). All three of these features were undated. Stratigraphically, however, the postholes comprised the earliest elements in the sequence. Near identical in terms of both their form and fill, it is likely that these features were directly contemporary. Their size, allied with their close physical proximity, indicates that they may well have been structural in origin; an interpretation that is also supported by their location relative to the nearby High Street. Yet the limited scale of the exposure, exacerbated by the extent of later truncation, precludes certainty with regard to their original function. Although F.06 and F.07 contained no datable material culture, their sub-soil rich fills indicate that they are likely to have been relatively early in origin as it is probable that a dark, humic ploughsoil deposit began to be generated in the hinterland of Chesterton by c. 1200 at the latest (Oosthuizen 2010).

Postholes **F.06** and **F.07** were sub-oval in form. Their cuts, **[117]** and **[120]**, had near vertical sides and rounded bases; they varied between 0.59m and 0.60m in length, 0.38m+ and 0.57m in width and 0.53m+ and 0.55m+ in depth. Their uppermost fills, **[115]** and **[118]**, consisted of firmly compacted mid to pale greyish brown sandy silt deposits, with frequent gravel inclusions. Their basal fills, **[116]** and **[119]**, consisted of firmly compacted mid reddish brown silty sand deposits, with frequent gravel inclusions.

The remaining Phase 1 feature, pit **F.05**, contained much darker fills than its predecessors, although once again no material culture was recovered. Indeed, overall the very low level of residual Medieval material culture that was encountered – which consisted of only two abraded sherds of coarseware – indicates that the site was not subject to intensive occupation during this period. It is therefore possible that **F.05** represents instead the commencement of the succeeding Phase 2 episode of intensive quarrying activity (although both its morphology and its fill-type were quite distinct from those of the later extraction pits).

Pit F.05 was sub-oval in form. Its cut, [114], had steeply sloping sides; the base was not reached due to it extending below a safe excavation depth. It measured 1.28m+ in length, 0.86m+ in width and 0.48m+ in depth. Its uppermost fill, [112], consisted of a firmly compacted dark reddish brown sandy silt deposit, with frequent gravel inclusions. Its basal deposit, [113], consisted of a firmly compacted dark greyish brown sandy silt deposit, with frequent gravel inclusions.

A minimum of four gravel quarries were identified (F.01, F.02, F.03 and F.04). All four appear to have comprised 'strip-quarries'; a feature-type that is typified by an elongated, sub-rectangular form and close parallel alignment. This distinctive shape was created via a process of worm-like excavation, during which waste material was discarded to the rear of an ever advancing working-face. In effect, therefore, such features represent the vestiges of an early form of open-cast mining. For this reason, strip-quarries are frequently associated with large-scale, often commercial gravel extraction. The earliest of these quarries on stratigraphic grounds was F.03 and the latest F.01. Of the group, only the latter produced any datable material. This included

a hammer-struck silver half-crown of 1660-62 (Figure 4), along with a small quantity of contemporary ceramic and clay tobacco pipe fragments. The assemblage therefore provides an effective *terminus ante quem* for this episode of quarrying activity, which – given its nature – is likely to have been relatively temporally discrete.

Gravel quarries F.01, F.02, F.03 and F.04 varied between 2.58m+ and 2.98m+ in length by a minimum of 1.5m+ in width. In each instance, they contained very similar banded deposits of relatively firm mid to dark orangey brown sandy silt, with occasional to frequent gravel and ceramic building material (CBM) inclusions. In general, they also had steeply sloping to near vertical sides leading to relatively flat bases and varied in depth between 0.22m+ and 0.68m+. All four quarries appear to have targeted a particulary fine layer within the underlying  $2^{nd}$  Terrace river gravels. It thus appears highly likely, especially given both their density and profusion within the excavated trench, that many additional examples of this feature-type are present across the remainder of the PDA.

Overlying the gravel quarries, and capping the preceding archaeological sequence, was a substantial layer of made-ground ([101]; Figure 2). This material – which represents the third and final phase in the sequence – was almost certainly associated with the landscaping of the grounds of Chesterton House following its construction *c*. 1790. It contained a small quantity of material culture of  $17^{\text{th}}/18^{\text{th}}$  century date.

Layer [101] consisted of a relatively friable mid to dark reddish brown sandy clay silt deposit, with occasional gravel and CBM inclusions. It measured 0.40m thick. It was overlain in turn by modern topsoil deposit [100], which measured 0.34m thick.

# - Material Culture -

A small assemblage of material culture was recovered. This group – which includes metalwork, pottery and clay tobacco pipe – has been subdivided by material type and is discussed in detail below.

#### Metalwork

Two metal items were recovered; a 17<sup>th</sup> century silver half-crown and a 17<sup>th</sup>/18<sup>th</sup> century copper alloy escutcheon. In detail, they comprised:

**F.01 [102] <09>**. A silver hammer-struck half-crown of Charles II, dated 1660-62 (Figure 4). The obverse bears a crowned bust in profile with an inner circle and the numerals XXX (30). The reverse has a square shield on a cross fleury, with an inner circle and the legend CHRISTO • AVSPICE • REGNO. It thus most probably belongs to the third of four issues of this type; the last English hammer-struck coinage (Morrieson 1919). The obverse is well worn and the coin has been partially clipped. It measures 34mm in diameter and weighs 15g.

[101] < 08>. A copper alloy relief-decorated escutcheon. It is relatively small and elaborate in form, and appears most likely to have been attached to a box or chest. The decoration is foliate in nature, with a simple border and central stem design. It measures 26mm in length by a maximum of 8mm in width, and weighs 1g.

#### Pottery

A small pottery assemblage, consisting of only seven sherds weighing 139g, was recovered. The earliest material – which comprised two residual sherds of  $13^{th}-15^{th}$  century grey coarseware, weighing 27g – was derived from quarry pit **F.01**. This feature also contained a sherd of Frechen stoneware, weighing 25g, and a sherd of glazed red earthenware, weighing 46g, both of which are most probably  $17^{th}$  century in date. Three additional sherds of glazed red earthenware, weighing 53g, were also recovered from  $18^{th}$  century garden soil layer **[101]**. This combination of evidence indicates that a relatively low level of Medieval activity occurred at the site, and also suggests that the principal period of gravel extraction took place during the  $17^{th}$  century.

#### Clay Tobacco Pipe

Two stem fragments were recovered from [105], F.01. In general, the presence of clay tobacco pipe fragments in a context indicates a date between late  $16^{th}$  to early  $20^{th}$  centuries (*c*. 1580-1910); only bowls can be more closely dated on typological grounds (Oswald 1975). The date of these particular fragments is therefore unclear.

#### Additional Material

A small quantity of faunal remains – comprising four fragments, weighing 88g – was recovered. This assemblage, which was predominately derived from **F.01**, is too small for meaningful interpretation to be derived.

# - Discussion -

Due to the extent of later truncation, very little can now be determined with certainty of the earliest phase of activity at the site. Some general conclusions can be drawn, however, both from the nature of the features that have survived and the paucity of material culture that was associated with them. Firstly, it appears likely that any potential occupation was relatively early in date. This is suggested by the subsoil-like nature of the fills within postholes **F.06** and **F.07** and also by the type of building of which they appear to have formed a part. Medieval earth-fast post-built structures had a typical lifespan of only around twenty to forty years (Bowsher et al. 2007, 317-18; Horsman et al. 1988). Moreover, such buildings were widely superseded by structures utilising an earth-fast sill beam technique during the late 12<sup>th</sup> century (Walker 1999), stimulated by the re-adoption of sawing as a technique c. 1180 (Schofield & Vince 2003, 109). It is therefore highly probable that, were such a post-built building to have been present, it would have been mid 12<sup>th</sup> century or earlier in origin. This evidence also accords with what is known of the wider pattern of early occupation in Chesterton. Initially polyfocal in form, it has been suggested that one potential foci of the 8<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> century settlement was located in the vicinity of St Andrew's Church, around 150m to the south of the PDA (Cessford with Dickens 2004). During the 11<sup>th</sup>/12<sup>th</sup> century, however, the focus is known to have shifted to a more nucleated arrangement oriented parallel to present-day Scotland Road (ibid.). This shift would account for the marked absence of 12<sup>th</sup> century and later ceramics at the present site (with the small quantity of Medieval material that was encountered potentially having been introduced via background agricultural activity).

Unfortunately, the scale of the subsequent Phase 2 gravel extraction horizon means that it is highly unlikely any meaningful number of Phase 1 features has survived. Over 80% of the surface area within the evaluation trench had been affected by quarrying activity (Figure 2). As a result, across the remainder of the area almost all trace of any earlier features is likely to have been removed. Most probably created during the second half of the  $17^{th}$  century, the presence of these quarries indicates that the area continued to remain a relatively marginal space at this date. A similar pattern of extraction-related activity, of broadly contemporary origin, has previously been identified to both the north – at 132 Scotland Road (Patten 2003; Figure 1, 9) – and east – at 208 Green End Road (Newman 2011a; Figure 1, 17) – of Chesterton's former Medieval core. This distribution complements a much broader pattern of  $17^{th}$  century extraction activity, as highly comparable features have also been identified on both the western – Kavli Institute for Cosmology site (Newman 2008) – and southern – Parkside Fire Station site (Newman 2011b) – outskirts of Cambridge. Thus, throughout the Medieval and Post-Medieval periods the PDA appears to have

comprised a relatively peripheral, unoccupied area. This pattern altered dramatically during the late  $18^{th}$  century, when Chesterton House was established, although this had very little direct archaeological impact upon the site. Overall, therefore, despite circumstantial evidence pointing towards a possible Late Saxon/Saxo-Norman phase of activity, the scale of Post-Medieval quarrying – allied with the peripheral nature of the area throughout the succeeding 800 years – renders its further archaeological potential minimal.

#### Acknowledgments

The project was commissioned by Matt Hare of Januarys on behalf of Mr and Mrs Dazeley. It was monitored by Dan McConnell, Development Control Archaeologist at Cambridgeshire's Historic Environment Team (CHET) and managed for the CAU by Emma Beadsmoore. The fieldwork was directed by Richard Newman and undertaken with the assistance of Joseph Berry. The site was surveyed by Jon Moller, while the graphics for this report were produced by Bryan Crossan. The finds processing was managed by Justin Wiles.

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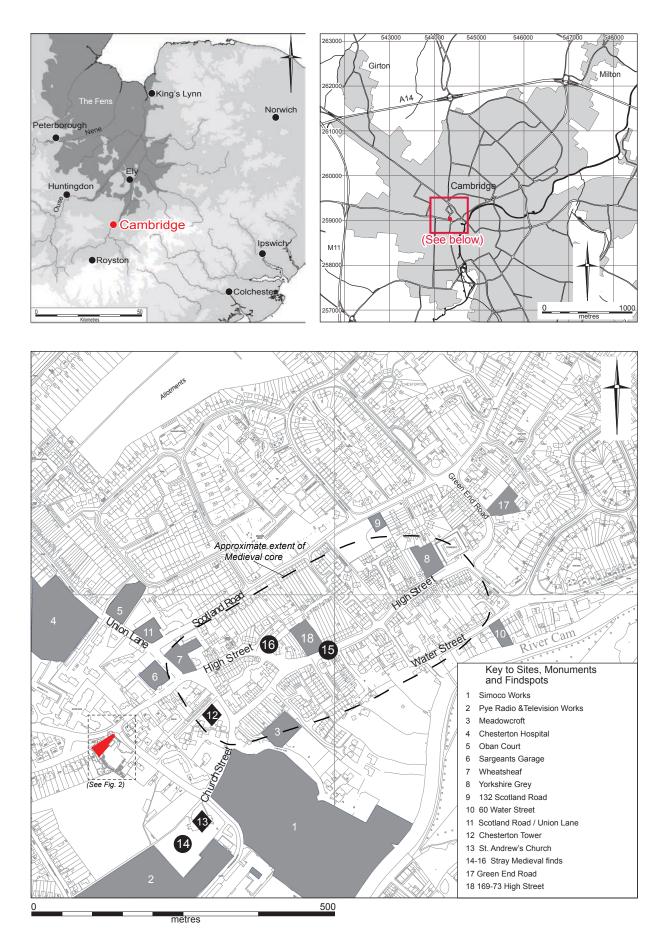
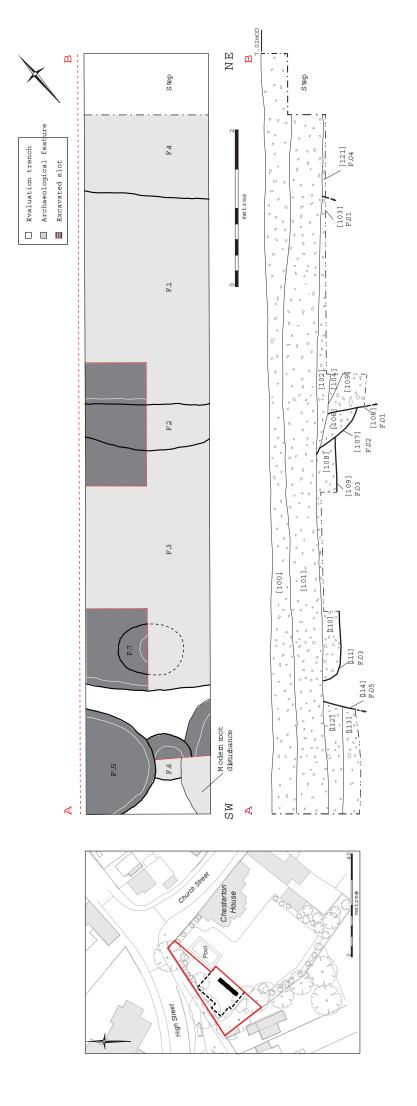


Figure 1. Location of investigation



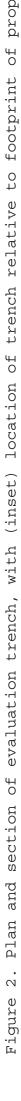




Figure 3.05 and. 06, facing northwest (left) and the relationship wear ing northwest (right)



Figure 4. Hammer struck silver half crown of 1660-62

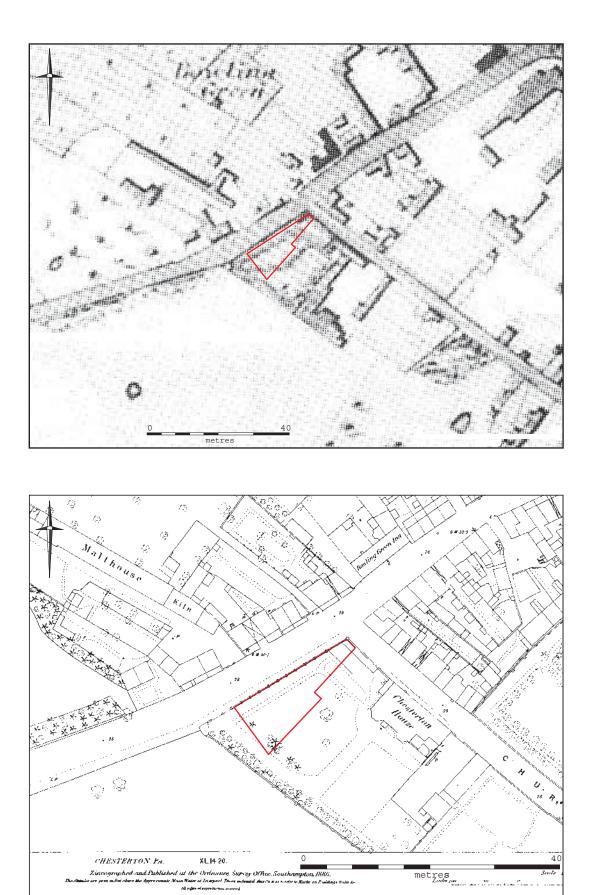


Figure 5. Bakemap of 1830 (top) and the 1st Edition Ordnance Survey map of

# - Oasis Form -

Oasis ID: cambridg3-181554		
Project Details		
Project name	Chesterton House, Cambridge	
Short description of the project	A trench-based evaluation, comprising a single trench covering 13.5sqm, was undertaken within the garden of Chesterton House, Chesterton, Cambridge. This revealed evidence for three phases of activity at the site. The earliest phase consisted of two undated postholes and a pit. As they were relatively substantial in scale, it is possible that the postholes comprised part of a Late Saxon/Saxo-Norman post-built structure. Any additional evidence pertaining to this period was removed during the 17 <sup>th</sup> century, however, when an extensive horizon of gravel quarry pits - extending over 80% of the trench's area - was created. A fine hammerstruck silver half-crown of Charles II was associated with this phase, although a dearth of earlier material culture (even within residual contexts) indicates that occupation is unlikely to have occurred during the intervening medieval period. Finally, around 1790 the sequence was capped by an extensive made-ground deposit that was associated with the establishment of Chesterton House itself.	
Project dates	Start: 21-05-2014 end: 22-05-2014	
Previous/future work	No / not known	
Any associated project reference codes	ECB 4203 - HER Event no.	
Any associated project reference codes	CCH14 - sitecode	
Type of project	Field evaluation	
Site status	Listed building	
Current land use	Other 5 - garden	
Monument type	Postholes Early Medieval	
Monument type	Quarry pits Post Medieval	
Significant finds	Silver half-crown Post Medieval	
Methods & techniques	"Sample trenches"	
Development type	Small-scale (e.g. Single house, etc.)	
Prompt	Direction from local planning authority - pps	
Position in the planning process	After full determination (eg. As a condition)	

Project Location		
Country	England	
Site location	Cambridgeshire Cambridge Cambridge Chesterton House, Chesterton	
Postcode	CB4 1DT	
Study area	470.00 square metres	
Site coordinates	Tl 4612 5975 52.216132933 0.139107565125 52 12 58 n 000 08 20 e point	
Height od / depth	Min: 6.36m max: 6.36m	
Project Creators		
Name of organisation	Cambridge Archaeological Unit	
Project brief originator	Local planning authority (with/without advice from county/district archaeologist)	
Project design originator	Alison Dickens	
Project director/manager	Emma Beadsmoore	
Project supervisor	Richard Newman	
Type of sponsor/funding body	Developer	
Name of sponsor/funding body	Mr and Mrs Dazeley	
Project Archives		
Physical archive recipient	Cambridgeshire county archaeology store	
Physical contents	"Animal bones", "ceramics", "metal"	
Digital archive recipient	Cambridgeshire county archaeology store	
Digital media available	"Spreadsheets"	
Paper archive recipient	Cambridgeshire county archaeology store	
Paper contents	"Animal bones", "ceramics", "metal"	
Paper media available	"Context sheet", "photograph", "plan", "section", "survey "	

Project Bibliography		
Publication type	Grey literature (unpublished document/manuscript)	
Title	Chesterton House, Chesterton, Cambridge: An Archaeological Evaluation	
Author(s)/editor(s)	Newman, R.	
Other bibliographic details	Cambridge Archaeological Unit Report No. 1243	
Date	2014	
Issuer or publisher	Cambridge Archaeological Unit	
Place of issue or publication	Cambridge	
Description	An A4 wire-bound document, with a plastic laminate cover. It is 16 pages long and has 5 illustrations. Also a PDF file of the same	
Entered by	Richard Newman (rn276@cam.ac.uk)	
Entered on	16 June 2014	