Cambridge Archaeology Field Group

Fieldwalking on the Childerley Estate, Cambridgeshire

Autumn 2014 to Spring 2015

Third interim report

Summary

Field walking on the Childerley estate of Martin Jenkins up until the end of April 2015 has not revealed any signs of settlement activity in the areas covered. The area walked included the main fields set aside for spring barley planting – Chappell Ground (North and South), Honey Hill and substantial portions of the Great Park and Woodwalk fields. The small number of finds recovered have been sorted by CAFG members into a number of broad date categories, these could be better defined after examination by suitable experts. Further field walking on other areas of the estate may well produce evidence for additional settlement sites.

Introduction

Cambridge Archaeology Field Group (CAFG) members have been carrying out field walking surveys since 1980, with an emphasis on the clay lands of west Cambridgeshire. As part of this continuing study of the distribution of settlements of all periods, one target area was the large Childerley estate whose owner, Mr Martin Jenkins, gave CAFG permission to walk his fields in 2009. Thanks to his continuing agreement and support, we have now surveyed a substantial portion of the estate.
Preliminary reports were produced in 2011 and early 2014 that covered the results from 2009 to 2014. These demonstrated three areas of concentrated Roman period activity in fields to the north and east of main house (TL 346 627, TL 349 635 and TL 362 613). The probable site of part of the deserted medieval hamlet of Little Childerley (TL 354 619) was also suggested by a concentration of finds to the north-west. There was a general spread of post medieval pottery, brick and tile over much of the estate.
Since the autumn of 2014, field walking has been carried out on the fields to the west and south of the main house. These had been left in a fallow condition awaiting spring barley planting. This had resulted in a surface partially concealed by weed growth and re-growth of the previous crop.
It is the results of this work that will be reported here.

Location and topography

The Childerley estate lies mainly in the parish of Childerley but extends westwards into the parish of Boxworth. The eastern boundary of the estate corresponds to the parish boundary with Dry Drayton while to the north is the parish of Lolworth. The southern boundary is marked by the modern A428 road from Cambridge to St Neots, while the town of Cambridge itself lies about 9km (5 miles) to the east.

The estate consists of a heavy clay soil which is derived from boulder clay overlying chalk and, as seen during the wet winter/early spring of 2014/5, can become waterlogged very easily. The ground falls from c70m high in the south to 45m in the north-east of the estate. Three drains carry what would have originally been three small streams leading from the south-west to the north-east. To the west of the estate a somewhat larger stream system drains the area between Boxworth and Knapwell.

Fields are mostly separated by hedges and there is a small amount of woodland in Woodwalk Spinney and Honeyhill Wood.

The main house and associated farm buildings of the Childerley estate are all that remains of the medieval site of Great Childerley and its park, while visible signs of the site of nearby hamlet of Little Childerley have completely disappeared.

Aims

Field walking of large areas of agricultural land in places not previously examined by other workers can potentially reveal evidence, usually in the form of pottery finds, indicating human activity and the presence of settlements. The mapping of this evidence will increase the understanding of earlier land use and how the landscape has developed from pre-historic to modern times.

Methodology

This field walking has been carried out using our standard method, where members walk a series of transects at 10m intervals across the field. Finds are bagged at intervals of no more than 20m apart and the position of the find points is recorded using a hand held eTrex GPS. The site code allocated to the season's work here was CHL007.
(For further explanation of field walking see the article on www.cafg.net).

Results

All finds have been washed then categorised into broad date periods, based on identification by CAFG members. We are reasonably confident in identifying Roman, Medieval and Post-medieval fabrics and forms but those assigned to the 'Unclassified' column need an expert opinion in order to classify them. Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age pottery is hard to tell from Early/Middle Saxon pottery due to the similarity in the fabric but we are sure none was found during this session of field walking. Major concentrations of finds in one area and from any of these periods probably indicates settlement at that time but the interpretation of the small numbers of finds we recovered is more problematic. Dispersed finds of the same type are usually more indicative of manuring or other agricultural practices. The concentration of slag found in Honey Hill may well be of this type.
The finds are summarised in the table below. The dates indicate when the field walking was carried out and the map in the appendix shows the area walked up to end of April 2015.

Site code	**Childerley Estate**	Pottery						B/T				Flint	
	Date	Pr/Sax	Rom	Med	PMed	Unc	Tess	Rom	PMed	Metal	Glass	Struck	Burnt
CHL007	11/01/2015				43				35	1	2		
	18/01/2015			4	9				5	1		1	
	25/01/2015				5				12		1		
	01/02/2015			1	10							1	1
	08/02/2015				4				1				
	22/02/2015			1	3								
	01/03/2015		2			1							
	08/03/2015								5			1	
	26/04/2015				4	2			6		1	1	1
	Total		2	6	78	3			64	2	4	4	2

Prehistoric (to 50AD)
No sherds of pottery have been assigned to this period. The two pieces of burnt flint are well separated and not indicative of any settlement. The probable Neolithic [3000 – 2000BC] polished flint axe head is a significant find in itself but was not associated with any settlement evidence and is an isolated find.

Roman period
There were no concentrations of Roman finds of any sort, pottery or building materials, found in the fields we walked this session. The two pieces of Roman pottery are indicative of a probable manuring scatter rather than settlement. This lack of Roman finds is interesting in that, over an area of the size we have walked, we would normally expect to find some evidence of at least one Roman settlement (based on previous findings on the estate).

Medieval
There was only one very small concentration of medieval pottery in Chappell Ground North but it is not enough to suggest a settlement site, possibly they came from the site of Little Childerley which lies just to

the north of this field. A small number of pieces of Niedermendig lava quernstone were recovered spread over Honey Hill but, due to the long-lived use of this material, specific dating is not possible.

Post-medieval
There was a concentration of post-medieval material as a discrete cluster near the north boundary of the Great Park, close to a bridge over the moat. This could be material used to fill a damp patch in the field but seems more likely to be rubbish thrown over the field boundary from the area of the main house. Another concentration of mostly modern brick and tile on Woodwalk field looks to have been used to fill a damp area of the field.

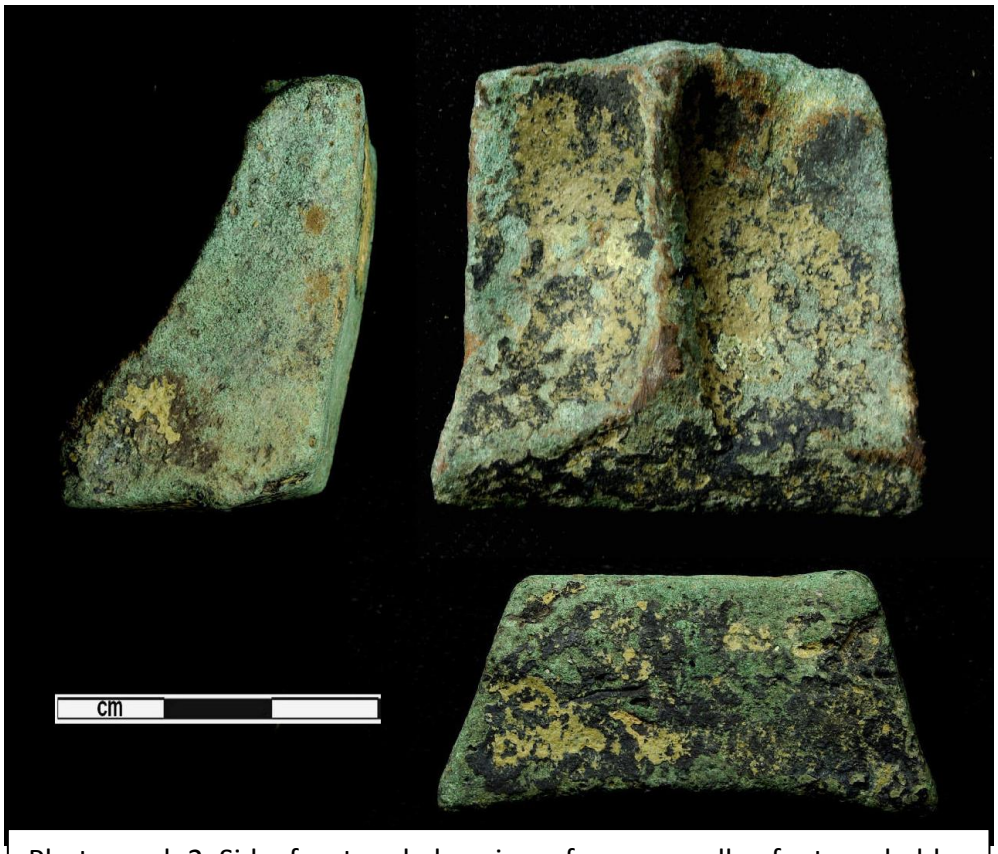
Small finds
A few interesting items have been found.
One exceptional piece is the polished flint axe head shown here.

Photograph 1. Side and plan view of a polished flint axe, probably of the Neolithic period.

The broken blade end has a patina which suggests that it was broken in ancient times. It is believed to be of Neolithic date but awaits examination by an expert on flints of this period.

Another unusual find on Chappell Field North was the broken foot from a probable bronze cooking vessel or cauldron, shown here. A number of similar finds are listed on the Portable Antiquities website (see item

coded LVPL-C9BFFD for example) and are all dated to the Medieval period.



Photograph 2. Side, front and plan view of a copper alloy foot, probably from a cooking pot or cauldron.

Finally, we have the questions raised by the significant quantities of slag-like material, as shown in the photograph here, that were recovered from all over Honey Hill field.

Photograph 3. View of a piece of slag-like material, showing the variable size of the gas vesicles.

Most pieces have the characteristic appearance shown here, with no bubbles evident at its base but bubbles of increasing size as you move to the surface. The piece shown here has vertical sides and a curved base, suggesting it had been run off from the kiln or furnace down a shaped channel.

This other piece shown here has fewer gas bubbles but does contain spherules of most likely iron oxide.

Photograph 4. View of a piece of slag-like material containing spheres of an iron-rich material.

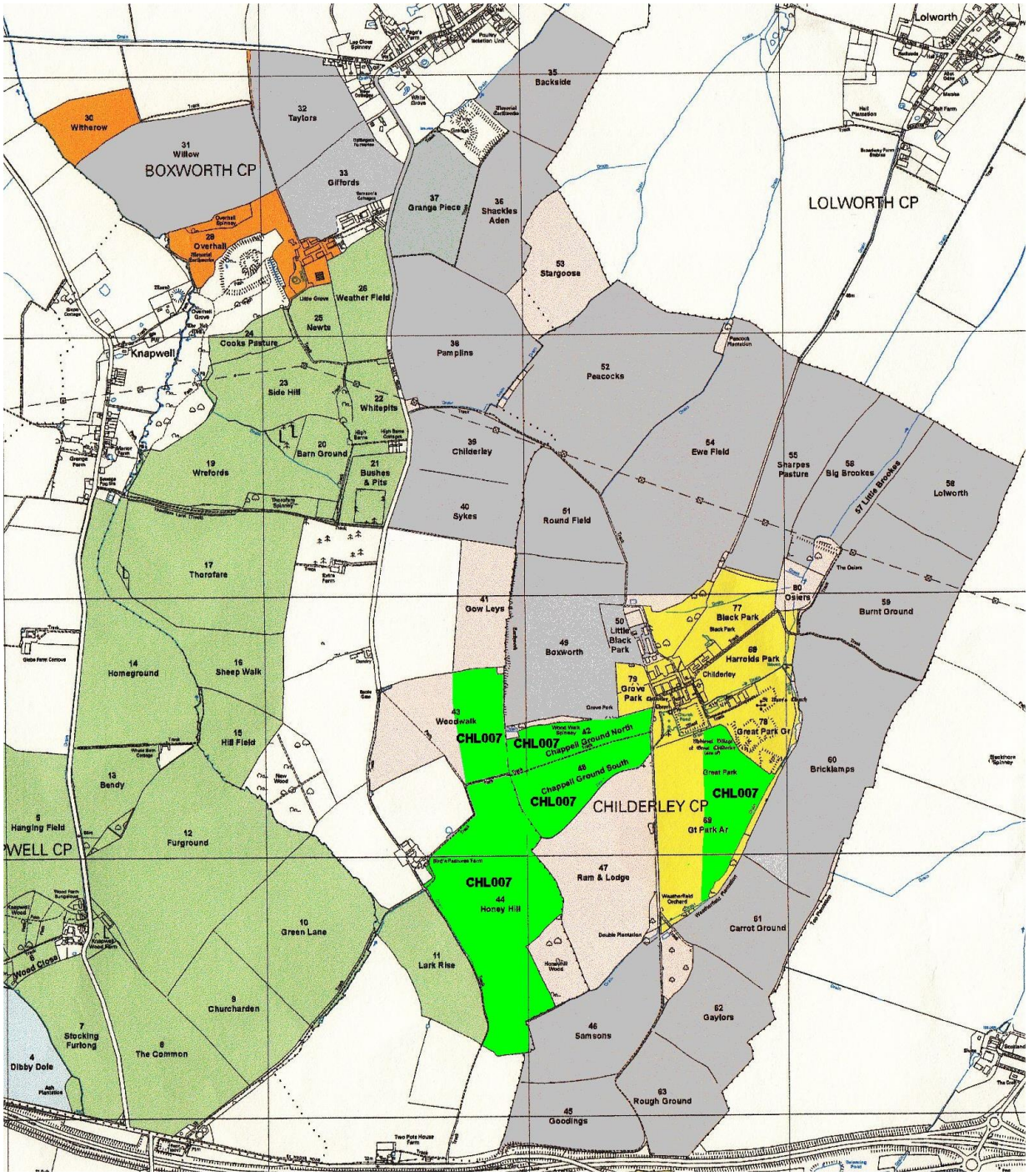
The pieces are a uniform light grey in colour, this suggests that it is not ancient slag because this is usually highly coloured due to the inefficient extraction processes of the time. Testing the slag material with dilute acid produced bubbles of gas suggesting it contains a high percentage of limestone.
We will learn more if we can find an expert to give their opinion on the finds but the feeling is that the slag is some sort of blast furnace slag put on the land due to its high lime content. There are numerous reports of ground-up blast furnace slag being used as a soil improver.

Discussion

Fieldwalking up to April 2015 has not revealed any sites suggestive of settlement activity. The small number of finds have been sorted into broad date categories but further work on the estate may well produce evidence of more settlement sites.

Fieldwalking suffers from some limitations, for example pottery has to have been well fired to survive being rolled around in the top soil under cultivation. It is extremely fortunate when pre-historic or early/middle Saxon pottery survives in any quantity whereas pottery from the Roman, Medieval and Post-Medieval periods may well survive in good condition. Humanly worked flints are very likely to survive but they are difficult to recognise, particularly where there are large numbers of natural flints on the surface. The condition of the soil surface will also effect recovery, the ideal state is when the top soil has been ploughed, cultivated and exposed to rain for some time. This season has seen less than ideal weather and surface

conditions but it is felt that any large concentrations of pottery from any period are unlikely to have been missed.



Fields walked Sept 2014 – April 2015 **CHL007** Fields walked previously

Acknowledgements

Many thanks go to Mr Martin Jenkins and family for their continuing support of our field walking programme on the Childerley Estate.