



Cambridge Archaeology Field Group

Fieldwalking on the Childerley Estate,  
Cambridgeshire

Autumn 2015 to Spring 2016

Fourth interim report

## Summary

*Field walking on the Childerley estate of the Jenkins family from September 2015 until the end of April 2016 has not revealed any signs of settlement activity in the areas covered. The weather over the period was poor but the area walked included some of the fields set aside for spring barley planting – Great Park (area not covered in January 2015), Winney Hill and Coldharbour. 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. A concentration of burnt flint, usually thought to be of Neolithic or Bronze Age date, in the Great Park suggests that area should be re-examined. Further field walking on other areas of the estate, such as Belham Hill where aerial photography survey indicates settlement traces, 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 owners, the Jenkins family, gave CAFG permission to walk their fields in 2009. Thanks to their continuing agreement and support, we have now surveyed a substantial portion of the estate.

Preliminary reports were produced in 2011, early 2014 and early 2015 that covered the results from 2009 to 2015. 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 2015, field walking has been carried out on the fields to the area south of the main house and in the far south-west of the estate. These had been prepared and planted with spring barley planting. The inclement weather had resulted in a saturated surface which made field walking less than ideal. 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 2015/6, 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 various places. 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 the remainder of CHL007 (Great Park) and CHL008 for Winney Hill and Coldharbour. (For further explanation of field walking see the article on [www.cafg.net](http://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 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. However, the small numbers of finds we recovered does not indicate any significant settlement activity in the areas walked. Widely dispersed finds usually indicate manuring or other agricultural practices. The concentration of limestone slag found previously is most likely an effort to condition the heavy soil. 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 2016.

Site code	Childerley Estate Date	Pottery					Tess	Brick/Tile			Glass	Flint	
		Pr/Sax	Rom	Med	PMed	Unc		Rom	PMed	Metal		Struck	Burnt
CHL007	29/11/2015			1	11	1			7	1		1	20
CHL008	06/12/2015		1		7	1			4	1			
	20/12/2015				2	1			1			1	
	03/01/2016		1	4	4	2			1		2		
	10/01/2016		1		6	1			10	1			
	17/01/2016			3	4	1			8				
Total			3	8	34	7			31	3	2	2	20

### Prehistoric (to 50AD)

No sherds of pottery have been assigned to this period. The two pieces of struck flint are well separated and not indicative of any settlement. However the cluster of burnt flint on the Great Park, covering perhaps 10m square, is interesting because of its close proximity to the probable Neolithic [3000 – 2000BC] polished flint axe head found previously. The burnt flint is a significant find in itself, being more suggestive of a human settlement site.

### Roman period

There were no concentrations of Roman finds of any sort found in the fields walked this session. The three pieces of Roman pottery are indicative of a probable manuring scatter rather than settlement. The total lack of any Roman brick/tile reinforces the absence of any settlement in this area of the estate. This lack of Roman finds is interesting given that, over an area of the size walked and with the Roman finds south of the A428 in Cambourne, we might expect to find some evidence of at least one Roman settlement.

### Medieval

There was only one very small concentration of medieval pottery to the north of the Coldharbour field but it is not enough to suggest a settlement site. There is little likelihood that they came from the site of Little

Childerley which is too far away but the Historic England aerial and lidar interpretation does indicate a likely settlement nearby in Belham Hill. Its date is unclear – it may be from the Iron Age to the medieval period. This will be investigated as part of our on-going survey of the south-west corner of the estate.



Figure 1. Combined aerial photo/Lidar interpretation of landscape features in Belham Hill.

#### Post-medieval

There was a small group of post-medieval material near the western boundary of the Coldharbour field, near to the neighbouring Coldharbour Farm buildings. This is unlikely to be material used to fill a damp patch in the field but could be rubbish thrown over the field boundary from the farm.

#### Small finds

Very few interesting items have been found this time but the burnt flint cluster is significant.



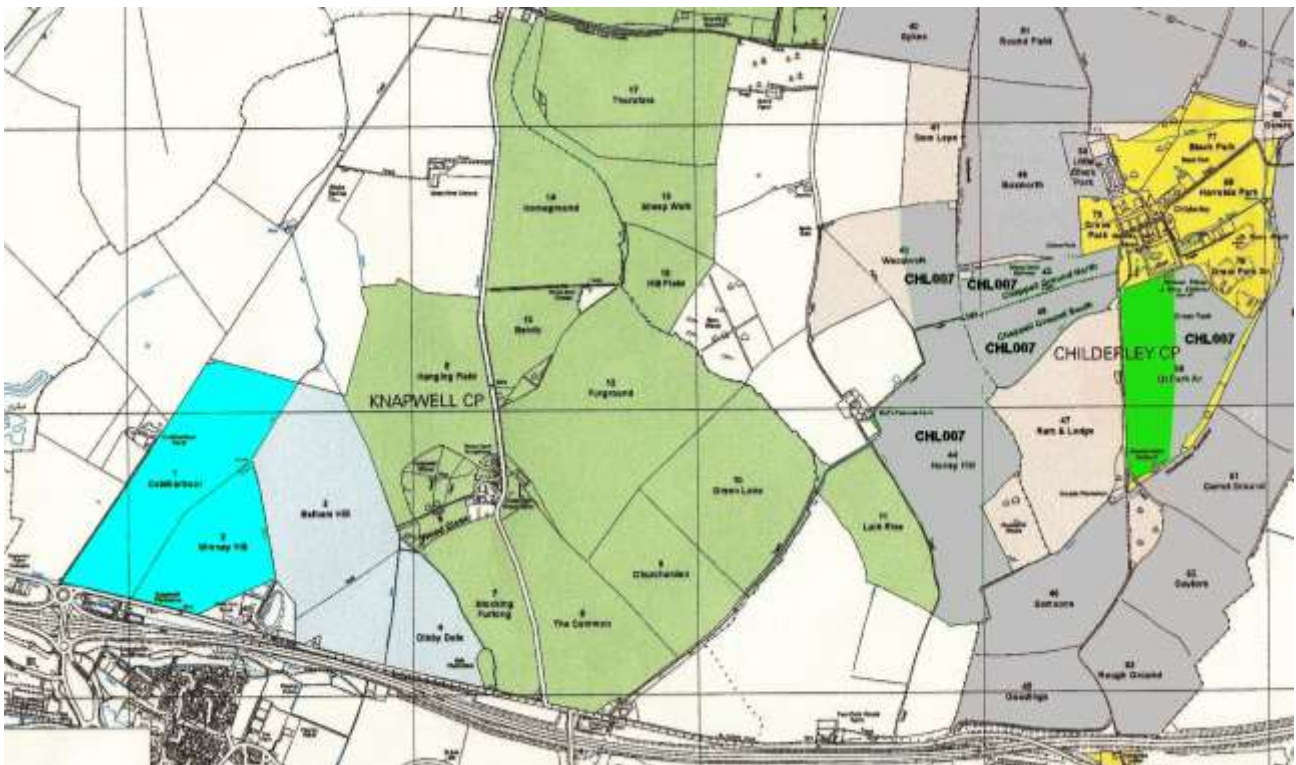
Photograph 1. View of some of the burnt flint from Great Park



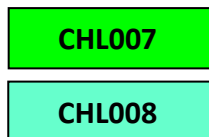
The only interesting metal find was this small domed lead washer. Initially it was thought that it could be a lead loom weight but its small size makes this unlikely unless it had a specific use.

### Discussion

Fieldwalking up to April 2016, shown on the map below, has not revealed any sites suggestive of settlement activity. The small overall number of finds appears to indicate that there is little activity in this corner of the estate, although further work on the Belham Hill area may well produce evidence of more settlement there.



Fields walked Sept 2015 – April 2016



Fields walked previously



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. Little pre-historic or early/middle Saxon pottery survives in any quantity whereas Roman, Medieval and Post-Medieval pottery may well survive in good condition. Worked flints will 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 cultivated and exposed to rain for some time. This season has seen less than ideal weather conditions but the low crop growth means it is unlikely that any large concentrations of pottery from any period have been missed.

Terry Dymott

### **Acknowledgements**

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