



Great Fen Archaeology Group

Field Walk at Engine Farm

4/11/2014

5/11/2014

The Great Fen is delivered by:



Bedfordshire
Cambridgeshire
Northamptonshire



Registered charity number: 1000412

LOTTERY FUNDED

Great Fen Archaeology Group

Field Walk at Engine Farm, 4th/5th November 2014

- Introduction and Aims
- Methods
- Results
- Discussion
- Conclusions, future work

Introduction and Aims

Land at Engine Farm (National Grid Ref TL 2280 8990 See map below)) was being cleared after the last crop had been harvested, in preparation for restoration and grass seeding as part of the Great Fen project. The field cleared was situated on the south bank of the old Whittlesea Mere, drained for agriculture in the middle of the 19th century, the field was on the calcareous marl bed of the old mere. The farmer, Mr J Bliss, had reported turning over various items each year with the plough and had collected many of these items. A preliminary 'casual' walk over the field in August 2014 showed that there were pieces of pottery, shells etc on the surface. It was felt that further investigation before the grass mixture was sown was worthwhile, to discover whether there was any evidence of earlier activity at this site, and also as a training opportunity in field-walking techniques for Great Fen staff, volunteers and members of other local groups.



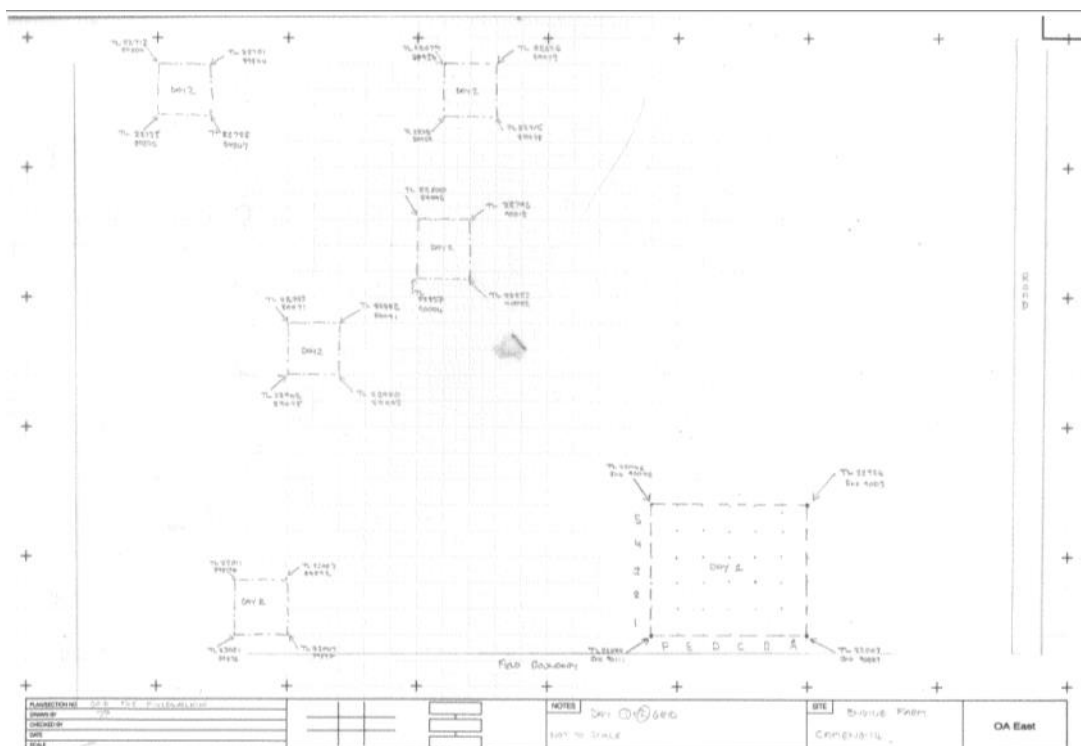
Map of field used for field walking at Engine Farm

Methods

The Great Fen's Archaeology group already had links with Jigsaw Cambridgeshire Community Archaeology Project, which would provide professional training and advice. Jigsaw is based at Oxford Archaeology East, and trains local history and archaeological societies in excavation, artefact identification, recording and historical research. About 30 people attended the two-day event. Attendees were drawn from the Great Fen Archaeology Group, Archaeology Cambridgeshire East and Sawtry History Society as well as Great Fen staff.

Jo Richards, the Jigsaw Community Archaeology Officer, arranged the training sessions. Two additional staff from Oxford Archaeology East, James Fairbairn and Paddy Lambert, were enthusiastic trainers, teaching the principles of field-walking and the practicalities of setting out 20x20 grid squares, walking the squares and then collecting any finds in labelled bags. Due to the size of the field (over 32 hectares) it was impossible to walk all of the area so the field was sampled. GPS references were taken for each area of sampling.

We walked 40 squares, so 16000 square metres in total.



Sketch map of grids walked at Engine Farm



Field Walks at Engine Farm

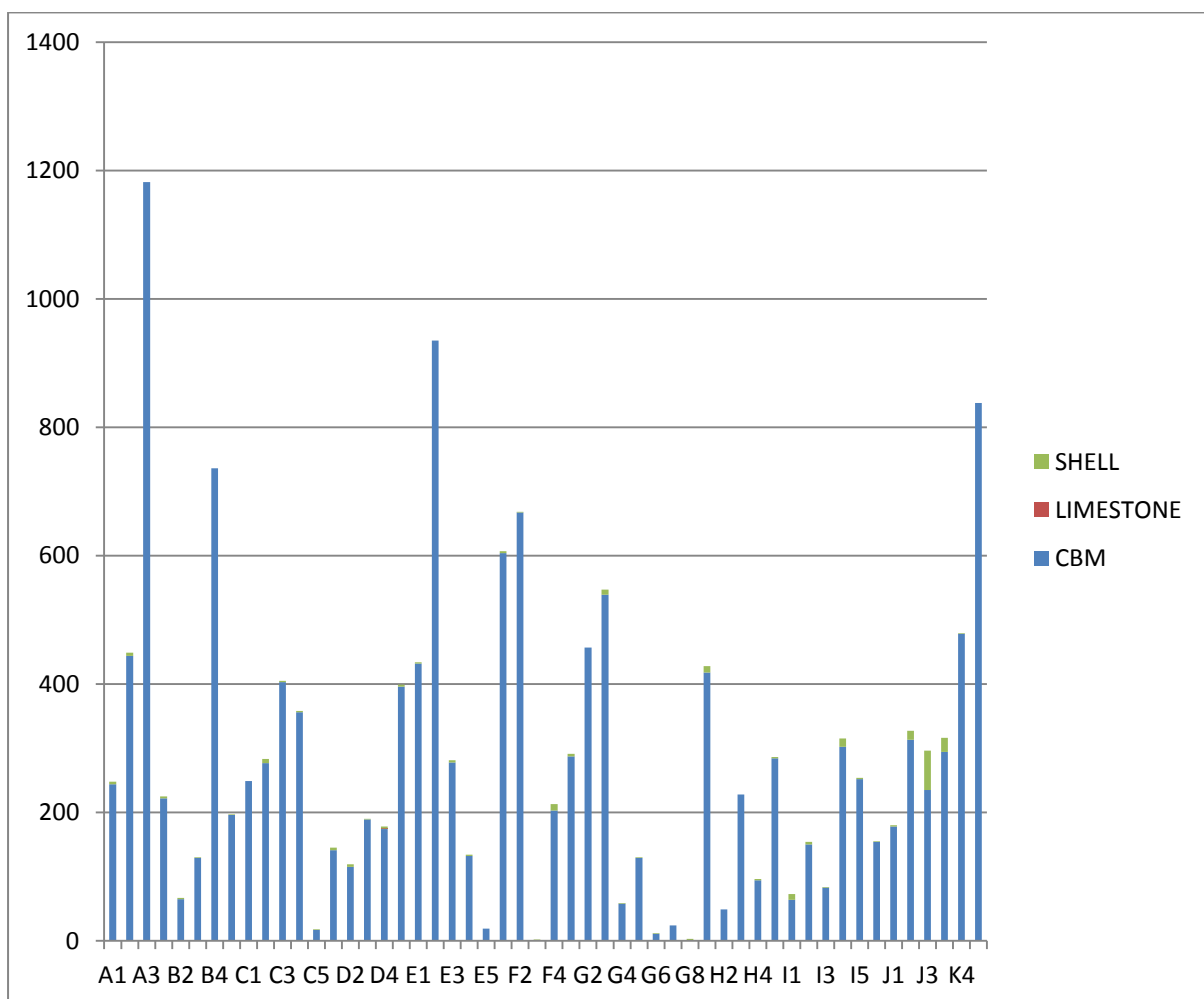
Results



Washing the finds.

The bags of finds were examined in November 2014, with advice and assistance from Jo. Ceramic building material, of a uniform red fabric, was checked, weighed for each grid square and discarded (Please see table below). The CBM can be attributed to Post-Medieval manure scatters over the field, and to demolition spread from small Post Medieval walls or buildings.

All other finds were washed. When they have been quantified, they will be plotted digitally on a map of the site. Rick Kelly, of the Warboys Archaeology Project has agreed to run a workshop session in January 2015 to explain this process.



Quantity of Ceramic Building Material (CBM), Shell and Limestone found on the Field Walks

Engine Farm Field-walking: Data from Squares (see map)				
GRID	CBM	LIMESTONE	SHELL	OTHER
A1	244		4	
A2	444		5	
A3	1182		0	
B1	222		3	
B2	65		2	
B3	129		1	
B4	736		0	
B5	196		1	
C1	249		0	
C2	277		6	
C3	403		2	
C4	356		2	
C5	17		1	
D1	141		4	
D2	115		4	
D3	189	1035 x 1	1	
D4	174	1	3	
D5	396		3	
E1	432		2	
E2	935		0	
E3	278		3	
E4	132		2	
E5	19		0	
F1	604		3	
F2	667		1	
F3	0		2	
F4	203		10	
G1	287		4	
G2	457		0	
G3	539		8	
G4	58		1	
G5	129		1	
G6	11		1	
G7	24		0	
G8	0		3	
H1	418		10	
H2	49		0	
H3	228		0	
H4	94		2	
H5	284		2	
I1	64		9	
I2	150		4	
I3	83		1	

I4	302		13	
I5	252		2	
I6	154		1	
J1	178		2	
J2	313		14	
J3	235		61	
J4	294		22	
K4	478		1	
K5	838		0	

Discussion

The finds (see three images below) have yet to have full analysis, but initial findings indicate evidence of Roman activity in the immediate area, without obvious concentration within distinct areas of the field. Several fragments of Roman rotary quern were found, made from volcanic basalt *lava* probably imported from the Rhine area. The querns were used for grinding food materials, particularly wheat. An igneous rock such as basalt has a naturally rough surface, but grains do not come off easily, so grits do not get into the flour.



We found three pieces of Roman kiln furniture from a Roman 'updraft' kiln. These kiln bars were used to separate the pots or tiles in the kiln. Surprisingly, no Roman pottery or tile was represented in the field-walking finds.



There is an excellent English Heritage paper available online, which gives much more information about this type of kiln:



<https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/publications/iha-roman-medieval-pottery-tile-production/romanmedievalpotterytile.pdf>

John Bliss, the farmer, has also found Roman material nearby, including a complete Grey Ware pot that he brought to show us. He has agreed to come to a future GFAG meeting, to look at local maps with the group and share his knowledge.



Selection of finds collected by John Bliss

Conclusion, future work

This initial training will enable the Great Fen Archaeology Group to carry out fieldwalking as the opportunity arises, on ploughed and rolled fields in other areas of the Reserve, as they are taken out of arable cultivation. The GFAG will have access to further free training sessions, with other Jigsaw groups, as part of the Jigsaw 2015 Training Programme.

<http://www.jigsawcambs.org/>