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Archaeological Excavations at the old Coal Yard

On the evening of Thursday 22 April 1999 the **Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Field Unit** held a visitors 'Open Day' at the site of their investigative dig at the old coal yard off Mill Road/Castle End Road, Maxey.



The site, destined for three new houses, had been the subject of an archaeological dig prior to building work starting over the previous 3 - 4 weeks. Such excavation work is now part of the Planning Guidelines for areas of known archaeological significance - of which Maxey is one - and is funded by the developers of the new dwellings.

The four person field unit team consisting of Aileen Connor, Tony Baker, Rebecca Hatton & Bob Hatton worked in liaison with Ben Robinson, the Sites, Monuments and Planning Officer at the Peterborough Museum, during the course of the excavation.

All four team members were on hand to guide some 30 or so curious Maxey residents around the various trenches, pits and artefacts uncovered during their period on site.





The 'crowd' gathers prior to the guided tour around the coal yard 'dig'.

According to Aileen Connor there is always an element of uncertainty about what may or may not be found. The expectation was that the dig could yield anything from the Neolithic to the Medieval period, but one could never be sure until it was completed.

In the end, the Field Team unearthed evidence of dwellings covering three periods of the area's history. These were:

950 AD - 1150 AD (approx.)

Found a number of 'Post Holes' indicating rectangular buildings made of wood.

1250's AD - 1350's AD (approx.)

Found Stone foundations close to previous wooden structures showing the migration over time to stone built dwellings.

1400's AD + (approx.)

Evidence of stone built houses fronting onto a 5 metre wide 'street' constructed of locally quarried pea-gravel mixed with indigenous heavy clay to offer a harder wearing surface.

Other parts of the site shows evidence of 'Double Post Holes' suggesting that existing dwellings were repaired 'in-situ' when the structural integrity of the building was compromised by, say, rotting wood in original posts, etc.



Many fragments of pottery from 950's - 1150's were discovered. Much of it was finished with a distinctive green tinged copper alloy glaze and identified as 'Stamford Ware', its area of manufacture.

Many pits had been dug to quarry the local pea-gravel. These in turn were often used as either 'cess' pits or, as in one excavated example, lined with stone and non-porous clay to become a water storage area. These is considerable evidence to suggest that a sophisticated series of waterways and sluices existed. The Field Team's best guess is for use as wool production area - perhaps for washing of fleeces, etc.

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Become a Friend of the Archaeological Field Unit

Details of how to join and a list of published material based on excavations in Cambridgeshire can be obtained by writing to:

Nicola Gifford Cowan

The Archaeological Field Unit

Fulbourn Community Centre

Haggis Gap

Fulbourn

Cambridge

CB1 5HD



Cambridgeshire County Council Use this link to the Field Unit's web site:

<http://www.camcnty.gov.uk/library/afu/index.htm>

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