

SEDGEFORD HISTORICAL AND ARCHÆOLOGICAL RESEARCH PROJECT

FIRST INTERIM REPORT

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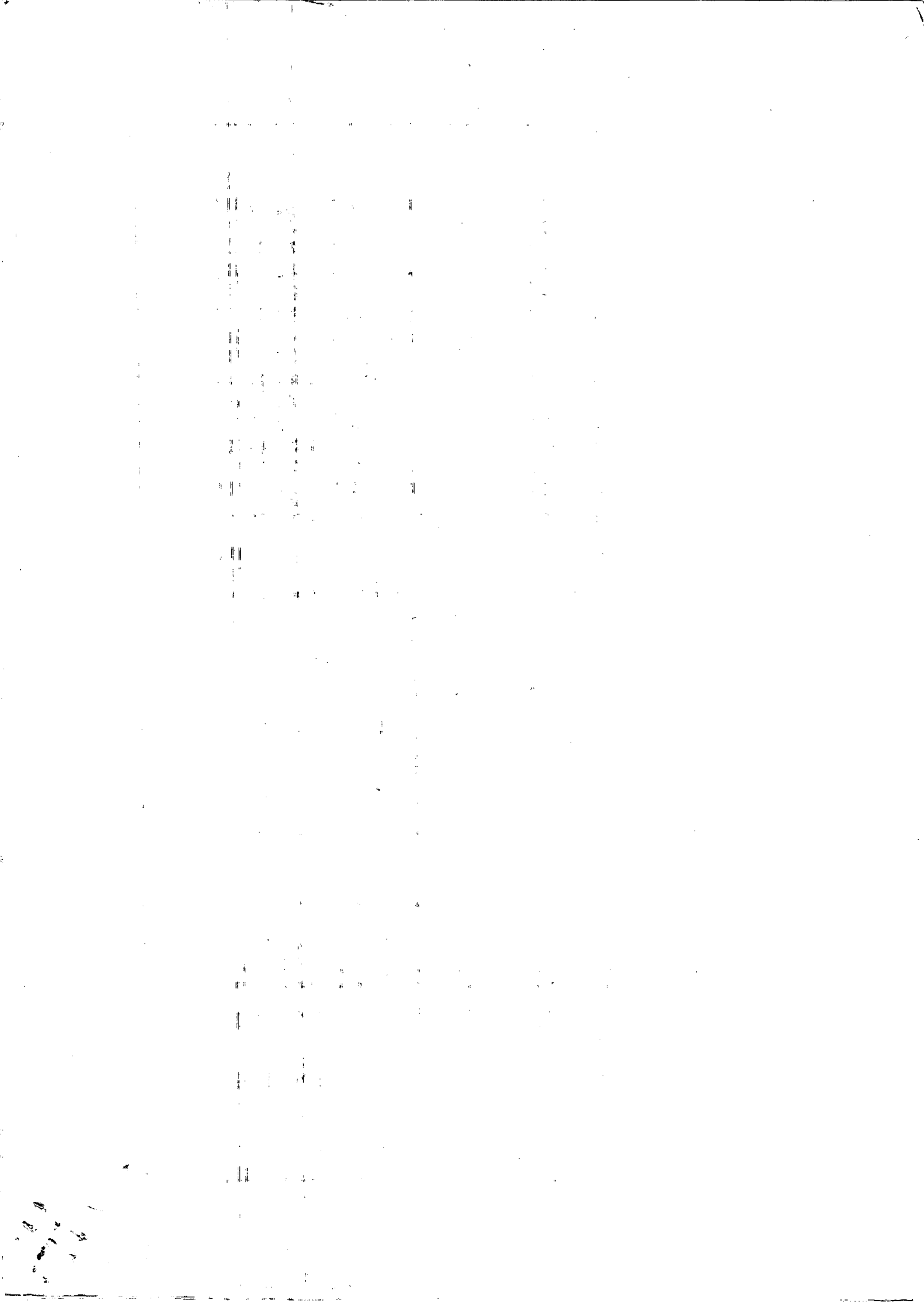


Edited by Neil Faulkner

Introduction

by Neil Faulkner

This is a long-term, multi-period, research project to investigate human settlement and land-use in a north-west Norfolk parish. A full range of historical and archaeological techniques are used: archive and cartographic research; field reconnaissance; field walking and metal detecting; field survey; standing building recording; geophysical survey; air-photographic reconnaissance; archaeo-environmental research; exploratory test-pitting and large-scale open-area excavation. Work is concentrated in a six-week summer season, but many activities such as historical research, field walking and post excavation, take place the rest of the year. The project is an exercise in democratic archaeology; it is run by lecturers and post-graduates; it provides training for undergraduate diggers; it welcomes all local volunteers; it allows open access to the site for all visitors; it aims for local curation and display of material; and, on a shoe-string budget, it is almost entirely dependent on generous contributions in kind from the local community.



Field-historical Research

by Steve Barnett and Janet Hammond.

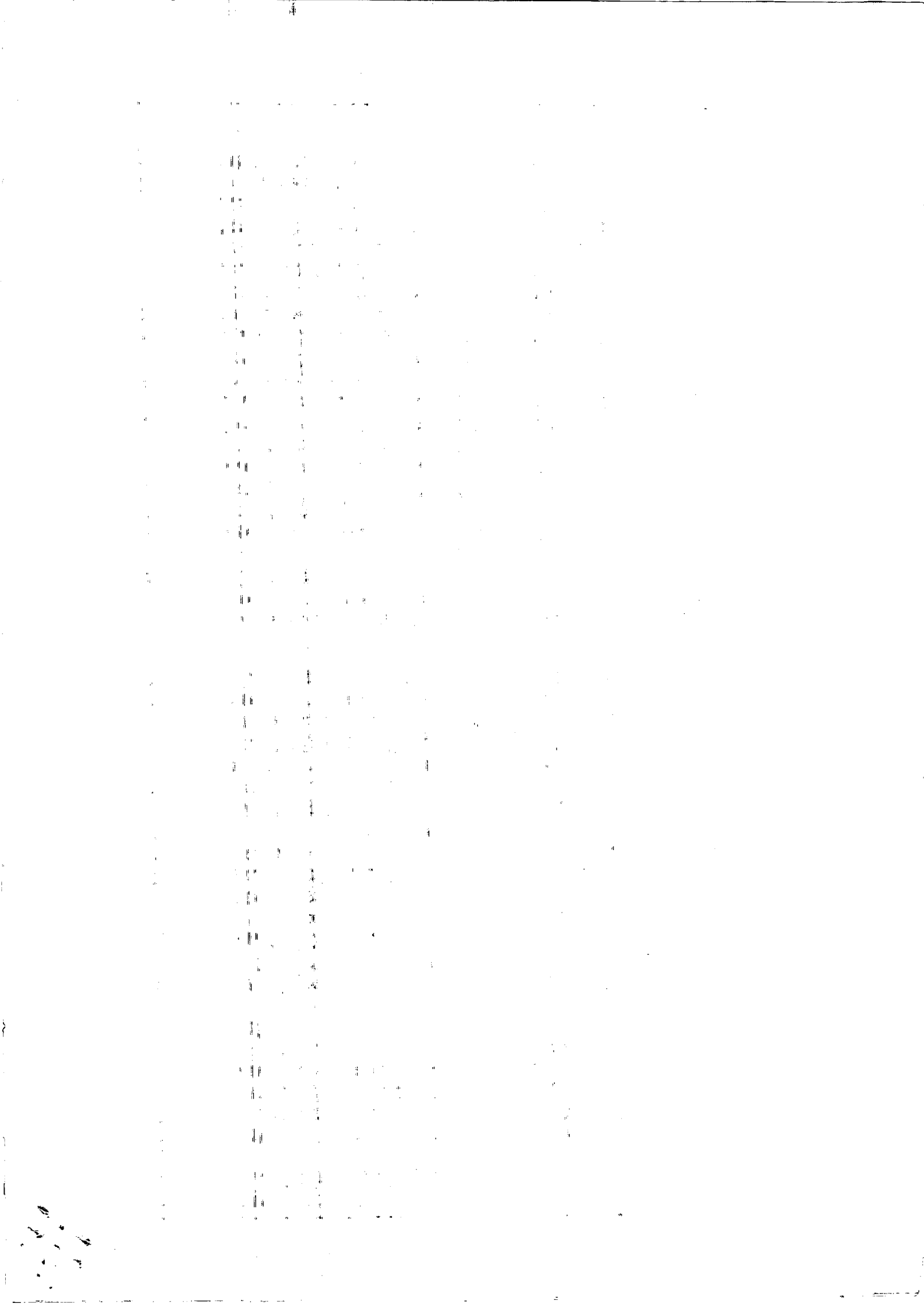
This season's work has shown the importance of the river and its environs to the medieval economy of Sedgeford. Riverine resources were exploited for food, materials for building and for other domestic usages. Documents from the twelfth century onwards also imply the use of the river for transport and trade to and from the port of Heacham and farther afield.

The location of two recorded moated courts at the Priory Manor of Sedgeford is being ascertained by field-reconnaissance, air-photography, resistivity-survey, and a seventeenth century estate map. Reconnaissance near the deserted medieval hamlet of Eaton has revealed possible canals linking Eaton and Sedgeford. Nearby there are also the remains of a medieval undershot mill with a by-pass lock - important for determining the maximum size of punts used in river navigation. Next season will see further investigation of the construction and management of the manorial Reeddam, an artificial lake stocked with pike where a commercially important crop of reed was grown. Another priority will be to increase our understanding of river transport at Sedgeford and its relationship with coastal ports and fenland river systems. We await archaeological evidence to pinpoint buildings mentioned in the written record, and to build a picture of Saxon river usage at 'Old Sedgeford' south of the river.

Archaeo-environmental Research

by Stacey Hennessy

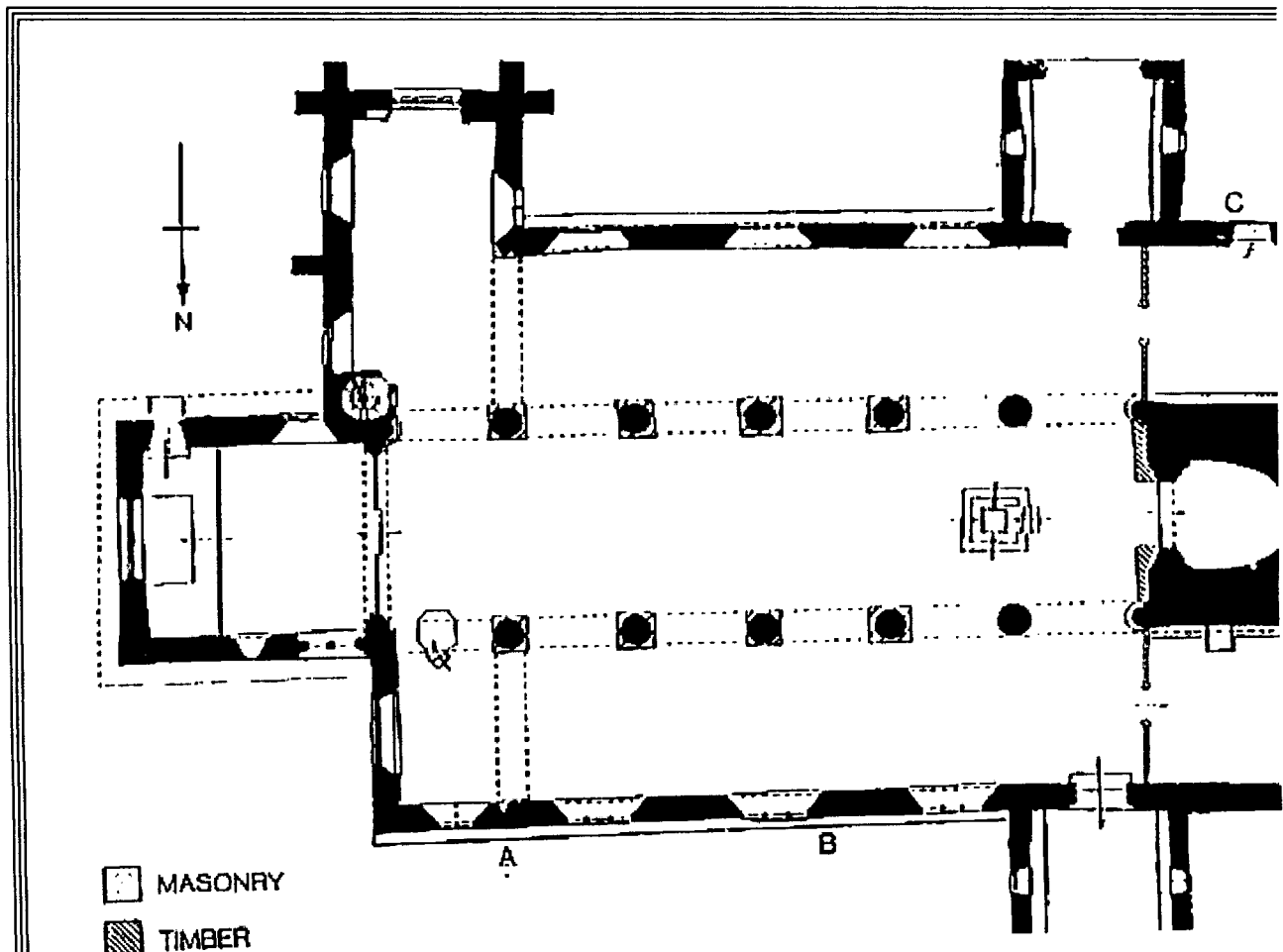
Work this season was directed towards a feasibility study that would allow efficient targeting of all future environmental input to the project. Effort, therefore, focused on the collection of bulk soil and sediment samples from three distinct landscapes within the river valley system, namely, the natural chalk downland, the glacial sands and gravels, and the complex sequence of peats and silts along the river channel itself. Results of analyses are still awaited. However one elementary factor, discernible in the field, is worth noting here in brief. The micro-environment which has developed along the banks of the river can be viewed as an intricate relationship between natural events and human intervention. Of particular note is a homogeneous layer of calcareous clay within the river sequence which would appear to have been laid down in a single event. The most likely cause would be a flood after the initial damming of the river in the construction of the Reeddam. Modification of the channel has resulted in silting and the subsequent development of a wet woodland. It is just such examples of the interaction between past inhabitants and the natural environment which will be explored in greater detail in future seasons.

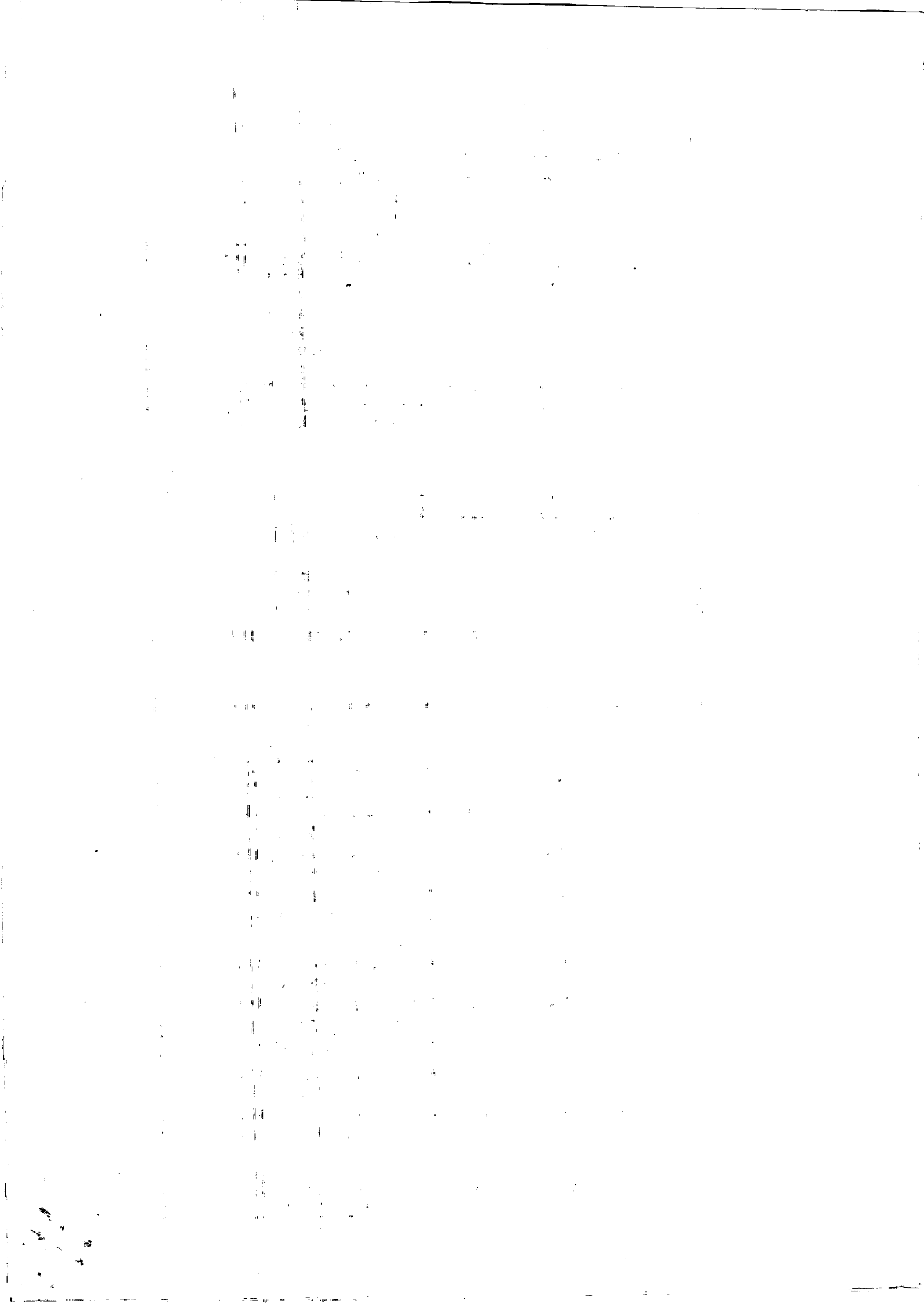


The Parish Church of St Mary the Virgin
by Susan Fielding.

This season started a long-term recording on Sedge-ford church in order to produce a complete structural history. The work consisted of a gravestone survey, the beginning of a stone-by-stone record, a ground plan (see below), and general recording of other features. The grave-stone survey involved a written and visual record of each stone within the cemetery. Those dated range from 1700-1890 (after which a new cemetery came into use). The main concentration came in 1790-1800 and 1840-1880. Not all graves could be dated or sexed, but the frequency of males was slightly higher than females at 66 to 51.

Only seven children were present compared with 106 adults; all were male. The church consists of many architectural phases, mainly High Medieval. The earliest feature is the round tower, containing two triangular headed windows, one of which is now blocked off. This may suggest a foundation date in the late Saxon period, but there are reasons to suspect that the tower is actually early Norman (late 11th-early 12th century). Much of the rest dates in style to the 13th-15th centuries, with possible rebuilding in the Tudor period.





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Floor Plan of the Church of St. Mary the Virgin, surveyed during the 1996 season.

Test Pitting and Geophysical Survey at West Hall

by Andrea Cox and Peter Carnell.

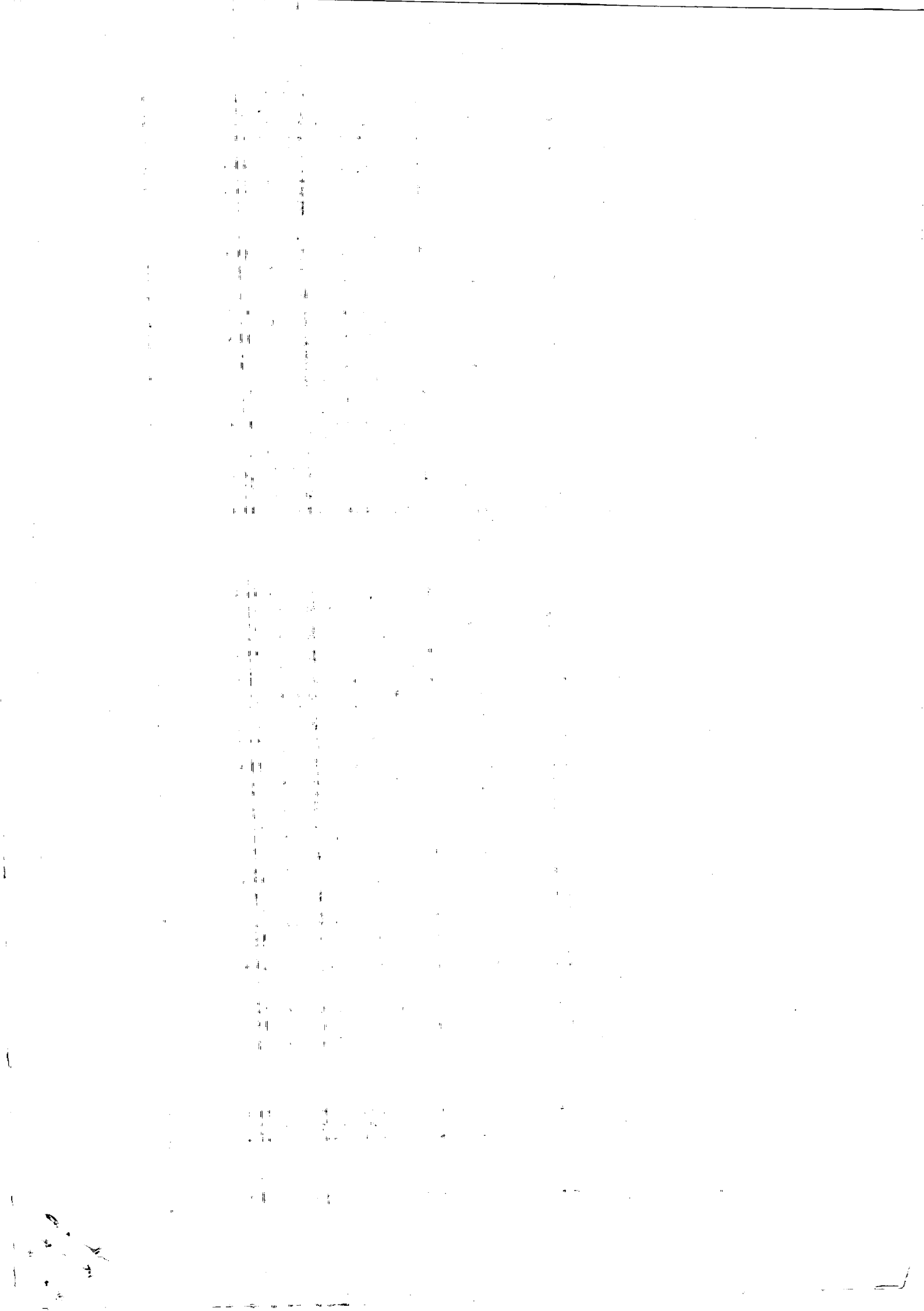
West Hall paddock lies south of the church and west of West Hall farm. Random-test-pitting and an electrical resistivity survey were undertaken. Four trenches were excavated. Trenches 1 & 2 revealed deep occupation deposits, (pot, bone and shell), and also a peaty deposit containing preserved plant remains. Trench 3 yielded a wall with collapsed painted plaster and a cobbled surface to its north. Trench 4 was abandoned due to time restrictions. With such small scale excavations interpretations remain largely conjectural. However, the wall represents a collapsed structure, the surface perhaps a track, and the pottery suggests Saxo-Norman to later medieval dates. Two resistivity surveys were conducted. The high density survey in the paddock revealed a complex structure beneath the soil: the road/wall (before excavation), large rectangular features and distinct wetter 'pits'. Two higher conductivity areas astride the road/wall may suggest a gateway. All of the above possibly relates to the medieval manor complex, while the survey east of the farm showed a linear feature whose width, position and gradient suggest the southern arm of the moat. False-colour imaging and 3D correlations of the geophysics and the excavations should further improve visualization of the site.

The Late-Saxon Christian Cemetery on the Boneyard

by Nicholas Cooke and Andrew Gardner.

The main focus of the season's work was the preliminary investigation of a field, close to Sedgeford but south of the river, known locally as 'Boneyard'. Excavations in 1957-58 by Dr. Peter Jewell had revealed evidence of Middle and Late Saxon occupation and a Late-Saxon Christian inhumation cemetery. This season a 20m x 15m trench was opened up between the two areas of known inhumation with the aim of investigating the cemetery further. In addition to burials, the excavations also revealed a complex series of ditches, gullies and pits dating from the Middle-Saxon to Early-Medieval periods.

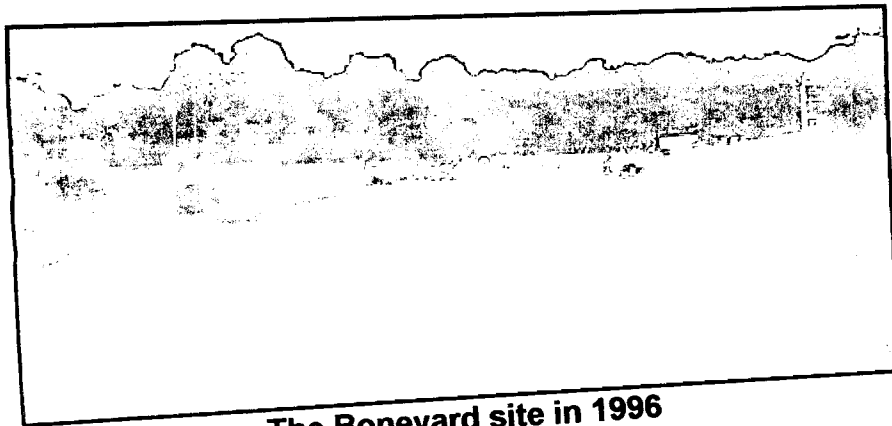
Middle-Saxon features. Preliminary analysis suggests at least three phases of Middle-Saxon linear features, the latest of which is a V-shaped ditch aligned NW-SE and over 1.4m deep. Three rubbish pits were found, the largest of which contained an unusual deposit: the upper half of a high quality Ipswich ware pitcher had been used as an ad hoc container, with a base and sides of raw clay. Within it were two distinct burnt



deposits.

Late-Saxon/Saxo-Norman features. Excavation in the western half of the site uncovered a portion of the cemetery. This appeared to be bounded by a shallow gully running W-E across the site. In all 19 skeletons were uncovered, with 15 being fully excavated. All lay W-E in a supine position. They were all cut into the top of a layer of natural orange subsoil, but grave-cuts were often difficult to identify given the nature of the surrounding matrix. The density of inhumations was greater further down the slope, and in some cases coffin nails were present. Five small pits were also dated to this period.

Early-Medieval features. The dominant feature of this period is a large N-S ditch, possibly associated with the south-ern ditch of the Reeddam. This ditch clearly truncated the cemetery, as its fill contained disturbed human remains. The fill of this ditch was in turn cut by a stone packed gully (possibly a footing trench), which was in turn cut by a narrow E-W gully. The only other feature of the period was a small pit. Excavations in 1997 will focus further on the cemetery and on defining the extent of the two large ditches.

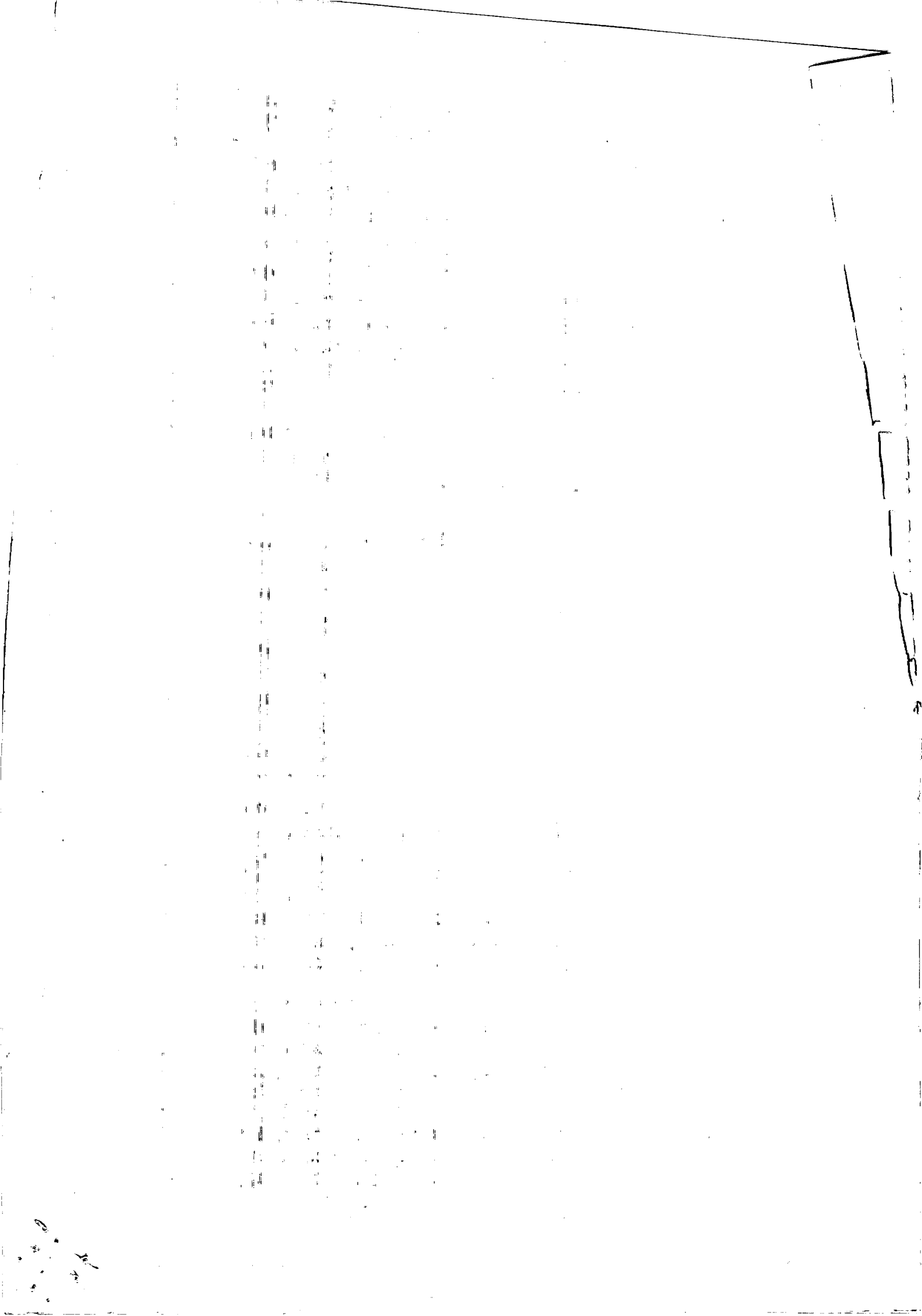


The Boneyard site in 1996

Test-pitting in the Reeddam by Gabor Thomas

In total five test-pits were excavated in the area of the Medieval Reeddam situated in the valley bottom south of the current river channel and north of Boneyard. All but one (test-pit 2) were excavated to the natural subsoil, revealing a clear sequence of deposits across much of the site. This included a Middle-Saxon occupation level characterized by rubbish deposits containing large quantities of Ipswich-ware pottery and animal bone. Other diagnostic artifacts from this phase included several fragments of bone comb. This was immediately overlain by an archaeologically sterile, chalky-clay deposit of variable thickness, possibly associated with the original construction of the Reeddam in the thirteenth century.

The Middle-Saxon midden deposits in turn overlaid an earlier phase of activity represented by archaeological features which include small



ditches and gullies cut into the natural subsoil. One of the most interesting features of this phase, a large pit over a metre in depth and filled with layers of rammed chalk and flint packing, was possibly the foundation or footing for a substantial timber structure. The dating of this phase is uncertain, but a shallow pit from one of the test-pits contained a decorated fragment of a late Iron Age flanged bowl.

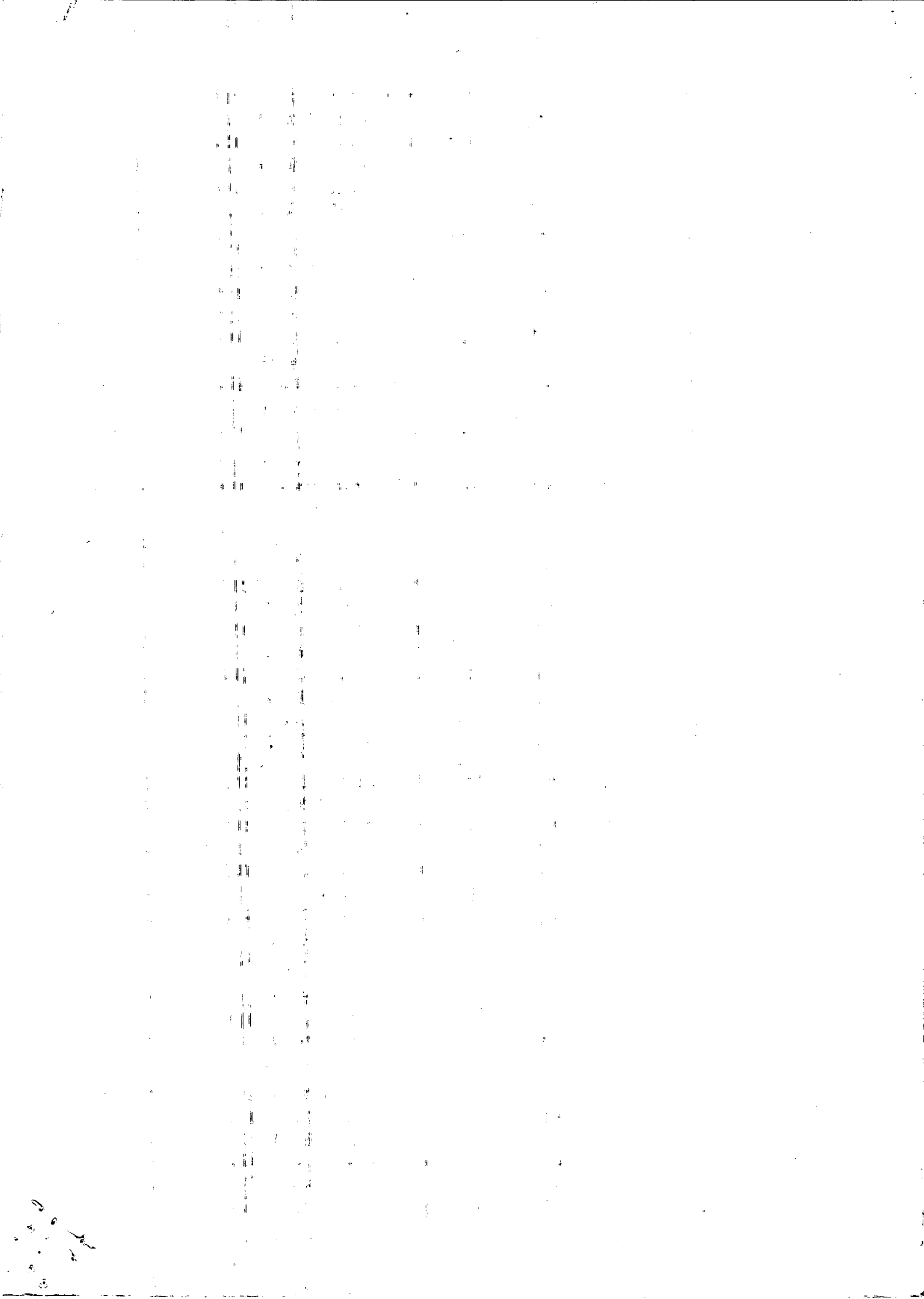
The Boneyard Skeletons

by Raoul Bull, Meredith Thompson and Russell Wigglesworth.

In addition to a large quantity of fragmentary, unarticulated human bone, 13 relatively complete undisturbed skeletons were excavated. Preliminary study suggests 12 adults, exhibiting a reasonable degree of sexual difference, and one juvenile aged 8-9, for whom gender identification was impossible. Very little pathology was evident, with the exception of four possible cases of osteoarthritis in older individuals (three of the lumbar spine and one of the radial articulation of the right elbow). There was no evidence for other pathological conditions or trauma. It was noted that, as a rule, the individuals buried were quite tall in stature. There were three instances of isolated in situ articulated leg, ankle and foot bones, where the remainder of the skeleton had not survived. The skeletons were generally well preserved, although there was some loss of cortical bone, and signs of later disturbance. The teeth examined had extensive wear on their occlusal surfaces, and dentine exposures would probably have occurred within a few years of eruption. Decay was not common and when found was generally associated with impacted wisdom teeth. Abscesses were associated with exposed dentine from wear as opposed to dental decay. Gum disease was stable, although large calceous deposits were very common.

Results and Prospects

Work this year was concentrated in the river valley near Sedgeford. This area turned out to be rich in archaeological evidence for the Middle-Saxon period onwards. South of the river, on Boneyard and the Reeddam, we have evidence for an extensive Middle/Late-Saxon settlement (now perhaps better defined by preliminary results from the field-walking and metal detecting survey), a substantial Saxo-Norman cemetery, and large-scale hydraulic engineering to develop the river for communications, irrigation and resources in the medieval period. These results, combined with evidence at the church and West Hall may indicate a shift of settlement focus from Middle-Late Saxon 'Old Sedgeford' south of the river to Saxo-Norman and later medieval 'New Sedgeford' north of the river. This raises a host of related questions which will be the focus of work in the Boneyard, Reeddam, and church/West Hall areas in 1997 and probably for some years to come. A second major feature of the project henceforward will be the Downland Survey, an exploration by non-destructive methods of the fields on the



chalk uplands SW & NE of the river valley. These are being investigated by air photography (by RAF Marham), by field walking and metal detecting, and by electrical resistivity (which we hope to motorize). The firm foundation given to the project in its first year will also enable us to increase opportunities for education, training and practical experience for students, volunteers and visitors in the 1997 season.

Acknowledgements

In addition to the authors above, the 1996 SHARP Team included Edward Biddulph, Jo Dullaghan, Timothy Haines and Peter Inker. The project runs on the generosity and support of numerous institutions and individuals including Anglian Water, Bernard and Susan Campbell, the Gordon Childe Fund, W Hammond (Contractors), the Institute of Archaeology, the John Jarrold Trust, Bill Milligan at the Castle Museum, the Norfolk Archaeological and Historical Research Group, Norfolk Landscape Archaeology (esp. Andrew Rogerson), Ros Palmer and the Lynn Museum, Andrew and Katherine Ramsay, the Roman Research Trust, the Royal Air Force (Marham), St Mary's University College, the vicar, churchwardens and parishioners of the church of St Mary the Virgin, Sedgeford, and the landowners and farm managers of the Sedgeford Hall and Ken Hill estates. Grateful thanks are also due to the many students, volunteers, visitors and friends who have contributed in countless ways to the success of the project but are too numerous to mention.



