



In the Footsteps of Fox Pt.2

Cambridge Archaeology Field Group

Introduction

In the second of our posters on fieldwalking in the Cambridge region, we present results from two further sites with contrasting geology. The Wimpole Estate offers a contrasting geology of both clay and chalk (Fig. 1), whereas Ickleton lies entirely on chalk (Fig. 2). In the spirit of Fox, we investigate how geology relates to evidence for human activity, and indicate how this in turn relates to Fox’s expectation of little activity on claylands before the mid 7th century (Fox, 1923). Our methods were as described in Part 1. Worked flint plus the occasional sherds of Bronze Age and Iron Age pottery were used as proxies for ‘prehistoric’ activity and pottery alone for the Roman and Saxon periods.

Results and Discussion

At Wimpole the distribution of prehistoric artefacts, mainly flint, is clearly related to the geology (Fig. 1A.) Of note are the two concentrations of prehistoric (mainly Iron Age) pottery on the edge of the chalk outcrop. Very few prehistoric artefacts came from the clay areas, in line with Fox’s expectations.

Roman pottery was found over most of the fields walked (Fig. 1B). In contrast to prehistoric times, there was significant activity on the clay. The high density of Roman pottery is not surprising as the estate is bordered by two Roman roads, the A1198 (Ermine Street) and the A603. Previous work (Horton et al. 1994) revealed a settlement of Roman date near where the two roads intersect. Evidence for human activity greatly reduces in the Early and Middle Saxon periods, with activity increasing significantly from Late Saxon times (Fig. 1C). This mirrors our finding at Childerley and Fulbourn (see Part 1), although at Wimpole the density of Late Saxon pottery is much higher. In the area walked at Wimpole, all the Saxon pottery is confined to the edge of the chalk outcrop; none was found on clay.

All fields walked at Ickleton are on chalk (Fig. 2). As might be expected, we found a significant scatter of worked flint (Fig. 2A), with a total of 125 pieces from 130 ha, a higher density of finds than at Wimpole (83 pieces from 566 ha).

A light scatter of Roman pottery was found over all fields walked, but the density was significantly less than at Wimpole and mirrors the situation at Childerley and Fulbourn (Part 1), where the former site (clay) had a higher density of Roman pottery than the latter (chalk), contrary to Fox. As is the case at Wimpole, evidence for human activity greatly decreases in Saxon times, with only four pieces from the whole of the Saxon period. However, one should bear in mind the reduced usage of pottery in the Early Saxon period and its lower survival rate in the plough soil (Glenn, 1978).

As at Childerley and Fulbourn (see Part 1), our results sometimes agree with Fox’s expectations and sometimes not. This is perhaps not surprising, given the great increase in archaeological knowledge of the region since Fox’s day. (Aldred et al., 2023). Fox, who encouraged further research and fully accepted that some of his conclusions may become obsolete (Scott-Fox, 2002), would not have been surprised.

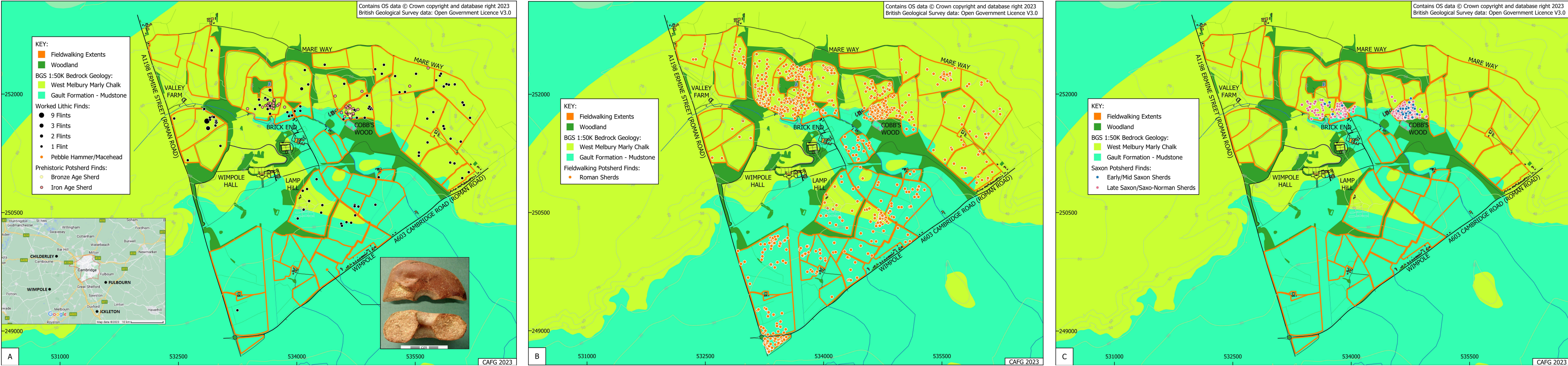


Fig.1 Fieldwalking finds from Wimpole: (A) Prehistoric, (B) Roman, (C) Early-Mid Saxon and Late Saxon-SaxoNorman

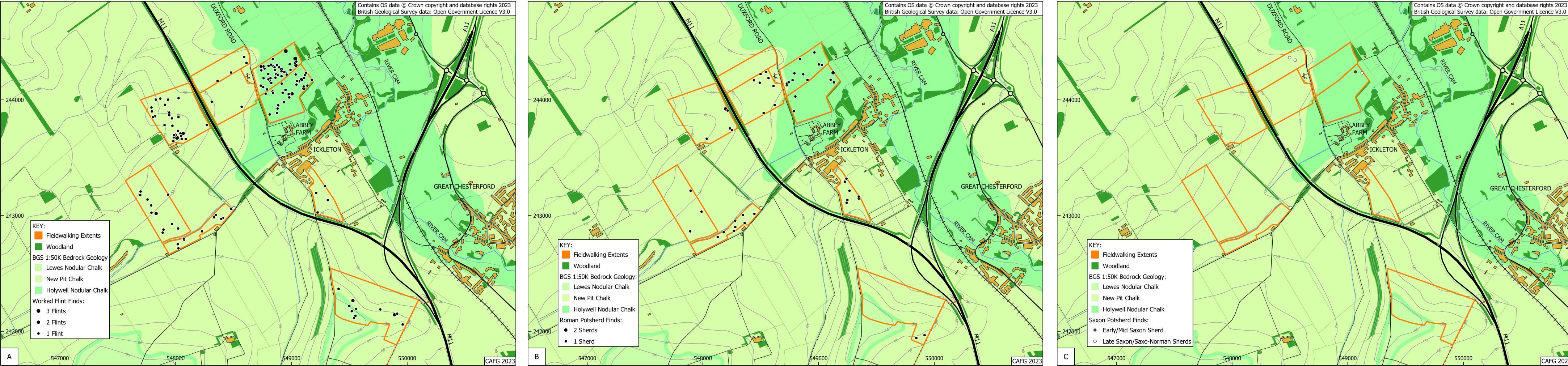


Fig.2 Fieldwalking finds from Ickleton: (A) Prehistoric, (B) Roman, (C) Early-Mid Saxon and Late Saxon-SaxoNorman

References

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