



In the Footsteps of Fox

Cambridge Archaeology Field Group

Introduction

CAFG was formed in 1978 to carry out practical archaeology in the Cambridge region. Our main activity has been fieldwalking, focusing on a ca. 20 km radius of Cambridge. This covers much of the region studied by Fox in his early investigations. Fox classified the land as being either ‘afforested’ (poorly drained) or ‘open’ (well drained), with the expectation that the afforested areas would show little evidence of human settlement or activity until at least the 7th century (Fox, 1923).

In this poster we plot finds from Childerley (afforested, clayland) and Fulbourn (open, chalkland) on geological maps, and we see how our results compare with Fox’s expectations.

Methods

We walked fields in transects 10 m apart, and recorded the position of each item collected using hand-held GPS. We selected fields based on factors such as accessibility and permission of farmers and landowners.

As our methods were not selected on the basis of a particular hypothesis, they provide a relatively blank canvas, allowing the surface finds to speak for themselves.

Worked flint (ranging from Mesolithic to Bronze Age – see Fig. 3 for some examples) and the occasional sherds of Bronze Age and Iron Age pottery were used as proxies for ‘prehistoric’ activity, while pottery alone was used as a proxy for activity from the Roman and later periods. Early/Mid Anglo-Saxon pottery is from ca. 450 – 850 CE and Late Saxon/SaxoNorman from ca. 850 – 1200 CE.

Results and Discussion

Fig 1a shows a significant scatter of worked flint (94 pieces over 935 ha) from the mainly clay site at Childerley. There is, however, a greater density of finds from the chalk site at Fulbourn (Fig. 2a), with 575 finds from 213 ha. The greater activity on the chalkland is in line with Fox’s expectations.

However, during the Roman period we find the opposite: more evidence of activity on the claylands of Childerley (596 pieces) than at

Fulbourn (88 pieces) (Figs. 1b and 2b), despite the proximity of the Fulbourn site to a Roman road (Via Devana). Moreover, concentrations in the pottery scatter at Childerley (Fig. 1b) together with CBM (not shown) suggest areas of settlement. Both Childerley and Fulbourn show greatly reduced activity in early/mid Saxon times, with only one piece of pottery at Fulbourn from the whole of the Saxon period (Fig. 2c). At Childerley, activity increases significantly in later Saxon times (Fig. 1c) as expected: but this is on clayland not chalk.

In summary, our results sometimes agree with Fox’s expectations and sometimes not; but this is perhaps not surprising and is in line with increasing knowledge of the archaeology of the Cambridge region since Fox’s day (Evans et al. 2023). Limitations of the study include the unequal areas of the sites, the degradation of pottery in the plough soil, and the vagaries of fieldwalking (Evans, 2008).

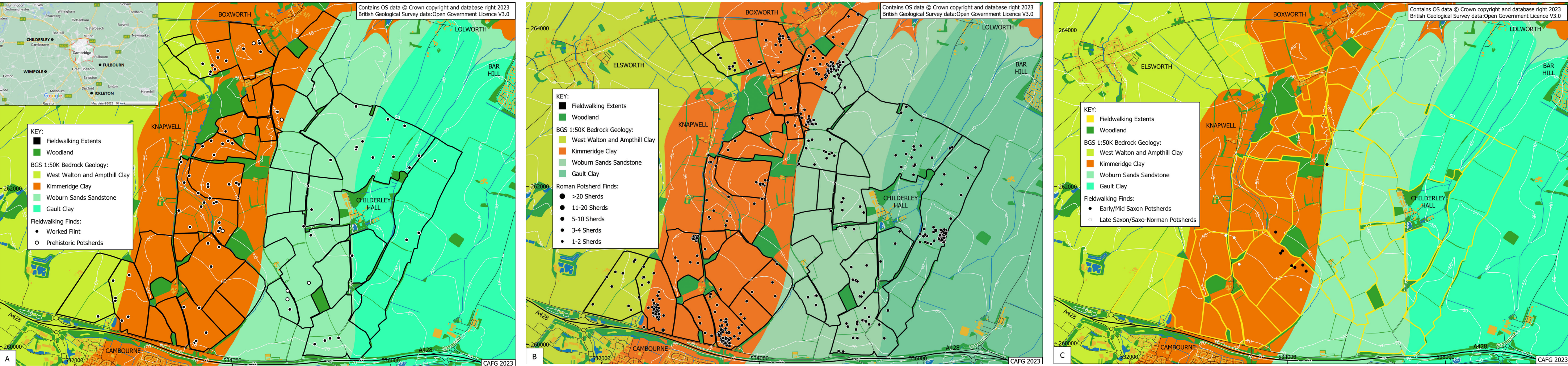


Fig.1 Fieldwalking finds from Childerley: (A) Prehistoric, (B) Roman, (C) Early-Mid Saxon and Late Saxon-SaxoNorman

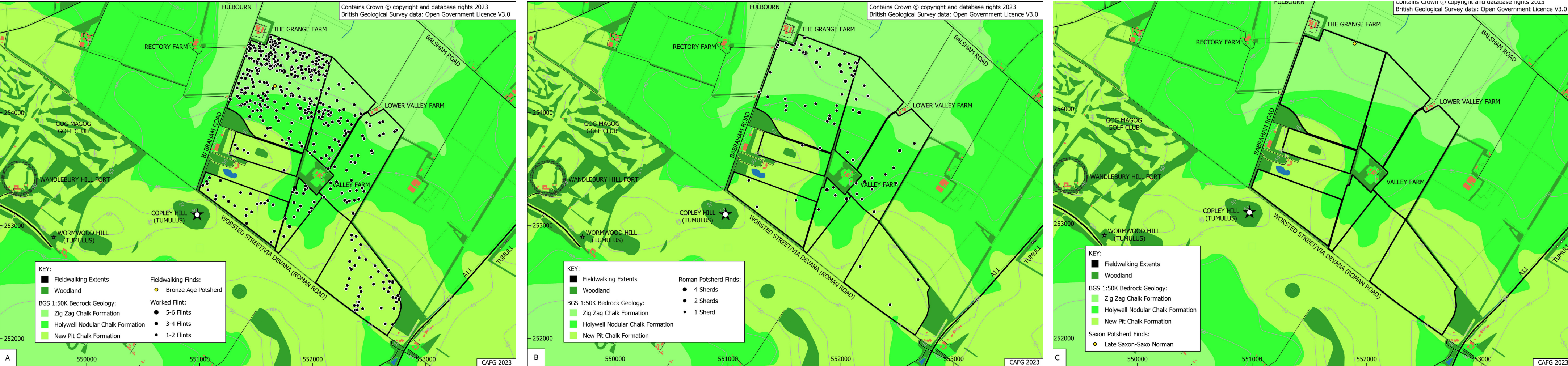


Fig.2 Fieldwalking finds from Fulbourn: (A) Prehistoric, (B) Roman, (C) Early-Mid Saxon and Late Saxon-SaxoNorman

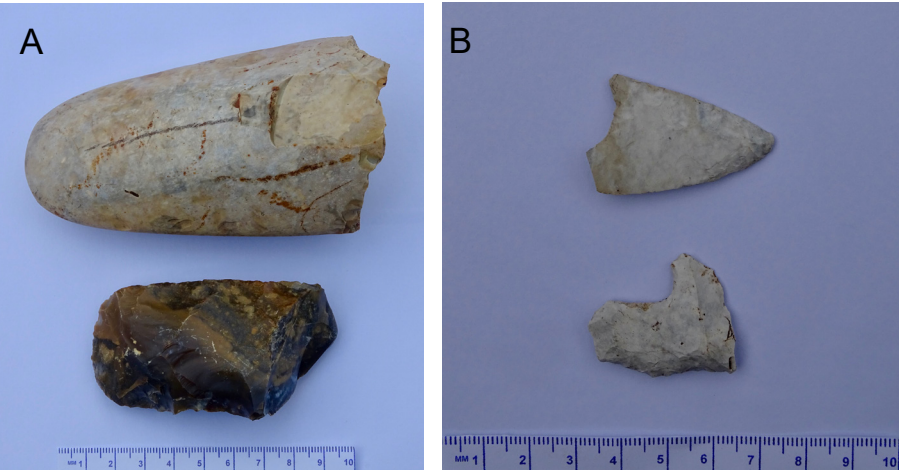
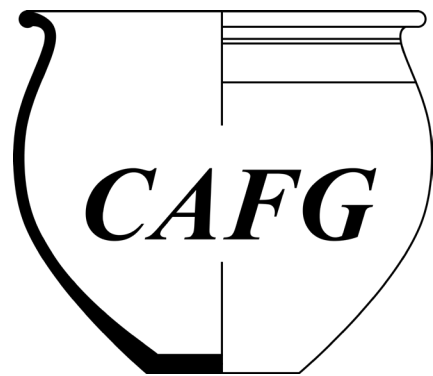


Fig. 3 Flint implements from Fulbourn



Acknowledgements

Pottery was analysed by Paul Blinkhorn and flint by Lawrence Billington (Oxford Archaeology East). We are grateful for financial assistance for pottery and flint identification from Cambridge Antiquarian Society, the Council for British Archaeology East and the McDonald Institute, and to the National Trust and local farmers for access to land.



Council for
British Archaeology
East



References

Fox, C 1923. The Archaeology of the Cambridge Region. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp xxiii and 275.
Evans, C., 2008. Concluding Discussion – Scattered Evidence, in C. Evans, D. Mackay & L. Webley (ed.) Borderlands: 187- 200. Cambridge: Cambridge Archaeological Unit.
Evans, C., O. Aldred & A. Cooper. 2023. Dense pasts: settlement archaeology after Fox’s The Archaeology of the Cambridge Region. Antiquity: doi.org/10.15184/auq.2023.99

Fox’s Personality and Legacy

