

**EVOLUTION OF A
COMMUNITY:
THE COLONISATION OF A
CLAY INLAND LANDSCAPE**

**NEOLITHIC TO POST-MEDIEVAL
REMAINS EXCAVATED BETWEEN 1995
AND 2011 AT LONGSTANTON IN
CAMBRIDGESHIRE**

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Dedicated to the staff of Birmingham Archaeology and BUFAU
1976-2011

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FIGURE 0.1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION TAKING PLACE ALONGSIDE THE LONGSTANTON WEST DEVELOPMENT

Abstract

Between 1995 and 2011 Birmingham Archaeology (formerly BUFAU) undertook a series of excavations at Longstanton West, 9km to the north-west of Cambridge, in advance of a major building and development programme. Informed by questions raised within the Regional Research Agenda, the project has made a significant contribution to charting the emergence of a Cambridgeshire clayland settlement and its community over six millennia.

Whilst the earliest permanent settlement dates to the Late Bronze Age, human activity at Longstanton extends back into the Mesolithic period. By the Late Neolithic, evidence indicates that the locality may have been part of a religious landscape that included a possible barrow site and ritual pit deposits. However, it is probable that following the Late Neolithic, a hiatus in the use of the site lasted until the Late Bronze Age. The subsequent prehistoric settlement, which is traced through its Iron Age phases, may be characterised as a small, modest and inward-looking community, albeit with an intensification of activity in the Late Iron Age, immediately prior to the Roman conquest. There are indications that the landscape organisation created during the Late Iron Age, of boundaries and alignments, continued into the subsequent Romano-British settlement, and there is no evidence of any significant disjuncture in this period of transition. The phases investigated in the Birmingham Archaeology excavations appear to have been at the periphery of the main Romano-British period activity in this locality.

An Anglo-Saxon presence is first signalled by a group of seventh-century burials, but it is not until the Late Anglo-Saxon period that there is incontrovertible archaeological evidence for settlement and landscape management. The character of the seventh-century burials is consistent with 'traditional lay cemeteries' and they are here discussed within the context of 'final phase' cemeteries and the possible influence of visible prehistoric features within the local landscape. The ten inhumations and single cremation were subject to osteological examination, producing rare evidence for infectious disease and trauma alongside more commonly seen age-related joint disease and dental disease.

The Late Anglo-Saxon settlement, which for the greater part continued into the medieval period, was characterised by rectilinear enclosures, widely dispersed across the excavated area. The strong sense of continuities across the Conquest period survive into the thirteenth century, by which time there is evidence that the earlier Anglo-Saxon arrangements were being removed. The highly localised farming community that characterised the prehistoric phases of the site is seen to have become much more diverse and wider-ranging by the medieval period, pursuing a range of agricultural and small-scale industrial activities. The excavations of the Anglo-Saxon and medieval rural settlement produced over 9,000 sherds of Anglo-Saxon and medieval pottery, together with portable metal, worked bone and stone objects, metalworking waste and animal bone, which, with the archaeobotanical assemblage from the site, creates a profile over time of the life and livelihood of this community.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Contributions from

E. J. Ramsey, E. P. Baldwin

Project Background

Evidence for the movement of people from the fen edge and river valleys into the clay lands of eastern England appears to be increasing and has become a growing area of research (Medlycott 2011, 84). The opportunity of studying such an environment and investigating the human activities that took place there became available 9 km to the north-west of Cambridge. In 1995 Birmingham

Archaeology (as BUFAU prior to 2003) began a programme of archaeological work in the Longstanton West development area, which continued in stages until the final excavation was completed in 2011.

The site is located 4 km from the edge of the Fenlands at the interface between Third Terrace gravels and Ampthill Clay, between 9.5m OD and 5m OD (Figure 1.1). The majority of the excavations were situated on the clay with

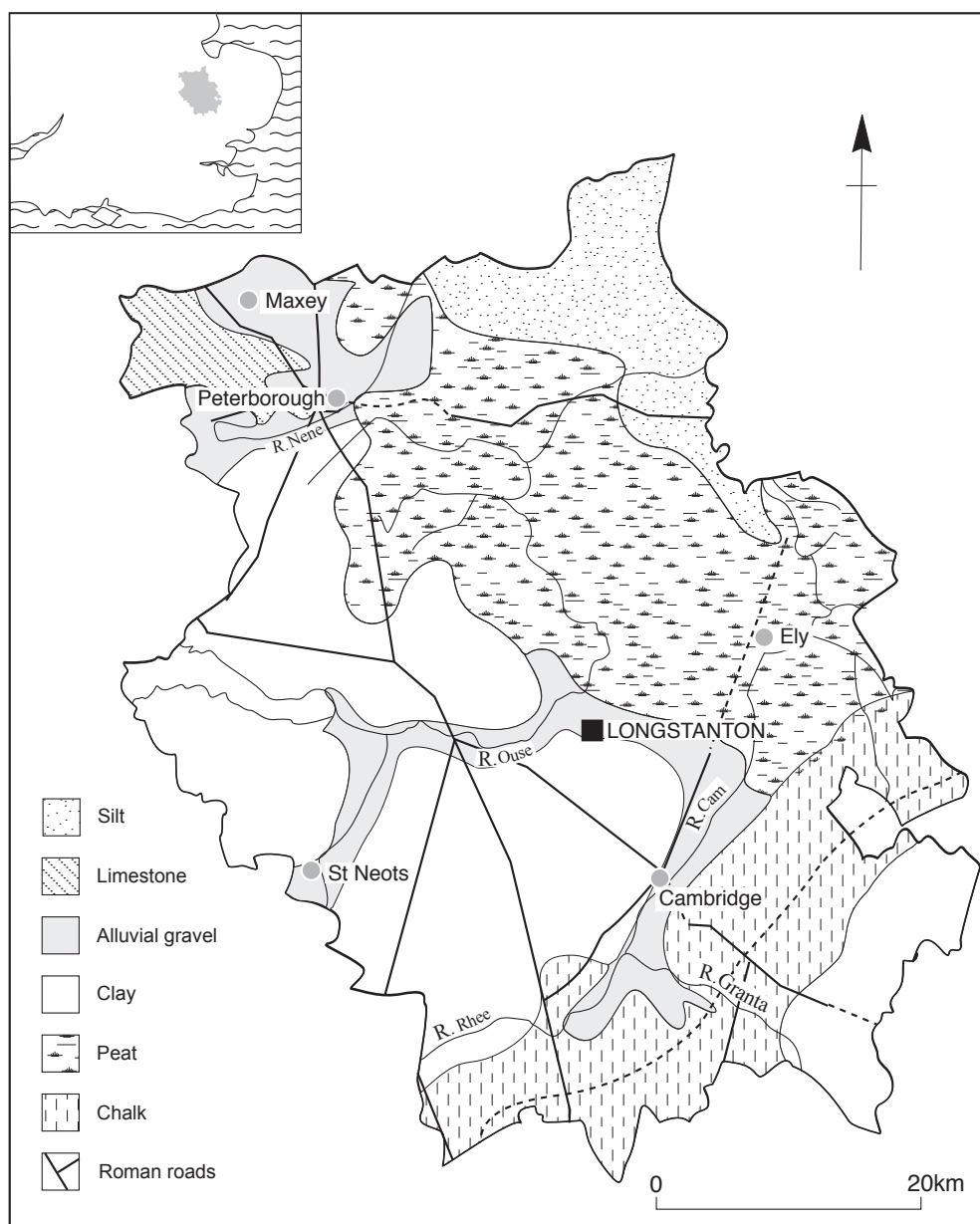


FIGURE 1.1 LOCATION OF LONGSTANTON AND THE GEOLOGY OF CAMBRIDGESHIRE

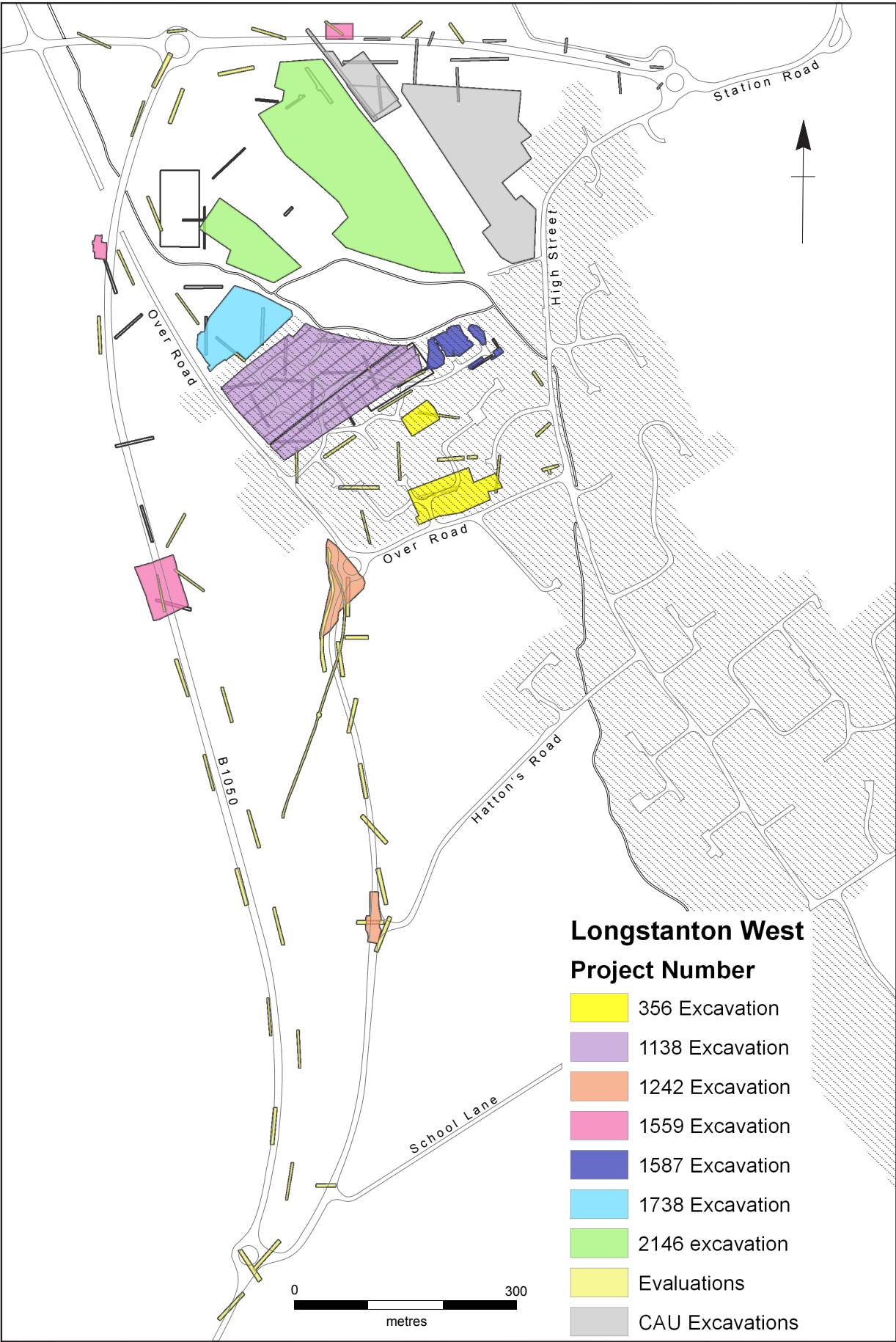


FIGURE 1.2 THE LONGSTANTON WEST ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS

only the northern extent of the site occupying a low gravel terrace. Longstanton village lies on a slightly raised gravel ridge about 1 km wide in an area otherwise dominated by clay lands, apart from small patches of alluvium in the north-west and greensand to the south, and is surrounded by a largely flat arable landscape.

The programme of archaeological work was carried out over a 16-year period in advance of the commencement of each phase of the building development, which comprised an expansion of village housing, a bypass road and recreational areas. The projects were funded by Beazer Homes, Cofton Limited, Gallaghers Limited, Taylor Wimpy, Twidgen Homes and Kier Partnership Homes (details in Appendix 1). In total, approximately 50ha were subject to archaeological investigation, encompassing a desk-based assessment, three geophysical surveys, six

evaluations and seven subsequent excavations (Figure 1.2 and Appendix 1).

The potential benefit of combining the results of all the fieldwork was realised by Dr Richard Cuttler who managed the Longstanton archaeological projects between 1999 and 2009. The resulting publication proposal detailed the amalgamation of all the archaeological results into a single integrated volume (Paul and Cuttler 2010). The results of subsequent interventions (evaluation 2069, excavation 2146, and geophysical surveys 2029 and 2051) have been analysed alongside the earlier results (six evaluations followed by six excavations; sites 1138, 1242, 1559, 1587 and 1987 with 1738) including the earliest excavation (Site 356), which has been separately published (Ellis and Rátkai 2001). The published results have been included within this monograph in order to further inform the



FIGURE 1.3 GEOPHYSICAL SURVEY RESULTS

interpretation of the site as a whole, while some alteration to the original interpretations have been possible given the wealth of additional information now available.

The Archaeology of the Longstanton area

The environs of Longstanton have been the subject of multiple desk-based assessments, an aerial photographic survey (Cox and Deegan 1995), geophysical surveys, evaluations and excavations (Appendix 1).

Non- invasive Archaeology

Several phases of geophysical survey (Barker 1996; Baldwin 2010; Baldwin 2013) have been undertaken, where the initial magnetometer and resistivity surveys were positioned to coincide with concentrations of flint and pottery recovered during field walking. To the north of Green End a potential rectilinear ditch system was revealed as well as a large sub-circular feature, while to the east, linear ditch-like features and numerous anomalies suggested intercutting settlement features (Barker 1996), which determined the location of the earliest evaluation and excavations (Site 356). The more recent magnetometer surveys were carried out on the northern portion of the study area.

In total 6.4 ha of farm land (Baldwin 2010) and 1 ha of fallow ground (Baldwin 2013) were subject to magnetometer survey, which revealed the probable south-west corner of an enclosure formerly excavated and identified as Romano-British (Patten and Evans 2005) within Site 2029 (Figure 1.3). Significantly, a large and previously unknown adjacent enclosure was discovered. A series of possible field systems on two different alignments, one possibly associated with the new enclosure was also noted. An area of concentrated activity was also evident along the eastern half of the feature, including where it cut, or was cut by, the previously identified Romano-British enclosure.

Two long linear features were noted running through the central survey area, one of which coincided with part of a field boundary documented in nineteenth-century mapping. At the southern extent of the Site 2029 survey area, a possible settlement area, or area of intense activity, was observed orientated along the edge of a present-day drain. This comprised several concentrations of ditch-like anomalies interspersed with a range of pit-like responses.

The subsequent survey over the adjacent area of fallow ground (Site 2151, Figure 1.3) was successful in delineating the southern extent of this activity where it reappeared on the southern bank of the present-day drain. Sets of widely-spaced ridge and furrow, grouped perpendicularly to one another throughout the survey area, reflect medieval land use.

Sixteen years of Archaeological Excavation at Longstanton West

The majority of the Longstanton West development area has been evaluated in stages (Figure 1.2) beginning in 1997 with

the evaluation of the area subsequently excavated as Site 356 (Mould 1997). Evidence for pits and gullies of Saxo-Norman origin were revealed, to be replaced by medieval ditches and back-plot activity fronting onto Over Road. A scattering of Iron Age features was also revealed. To the north and west, the evaluation of the land at Home Farm (Site 699) uncovered further evidence for continuous occupation from the Middle to Late Anglo-Saxon period through to the medieval, evidenced by pits, ditches and gullies with concentrations of activity located close to Over Road. Pottery evidence suggested that the site was abandoned in the fifteenth century with only small quantities of post-medieval artefacts recovered. A concentration of Iron Age pottery was excavated within one of the western trenches while small quantities of Iron Age pottery were recovered from test pits to the north of the study area; scatters of flint across the evaluation indicate episodic use of the site in early prehistory (Cutler 2000).

In 2002 the southern end of the study area was evaluated in advance of the construction of a new haul road to allow plant access to the Longstanton West development. Late Iron Age features were encountered in the southern trenches, including a large ditch and several pits. Late Anglo-Saxon and medieval pits, ditches and gullies were recorded in the northern trenches, heavily truncated by medieval ridge and furrow (Duncan 2002). A watching brief undertaken on a trench at the northern end of the haul road also recorded several medieval features (Burrows *et al* 2004). The resulting excavations (Site 2142, Areas 1 and 2) have been assessed (Paul 2008) and are detailed in the following chapters.

The central portion of the site was re-evaluated (Site 1099) in 2003, revealing Late Anglo-Saxon and medieval settlement evidence close to Over Road, possibly relating to the former medieval hamlet of Green End (Cutler and Duncan 2003). The remainder of the site appeared to be characterised by Anglo-Saxon and medieval ditches and gullies, suggesting that agricultural practices dominated the area. The resulting excavations (sites 1138, 1587 and 1987 including 1738) have been assessed (Bain *et al*. 2005; Paul 2007; Burrows and Paul 2010) in preparation for inclusion in this book.

The western and northern extremes of the Longstanton West development were evaluated along the line of the proposed Bypass route (Site 1525) in 2006 (Burrows and Colls 2006) when three areas of prehistoric activity were identified. Significant concentrations of Neolithic features were located in one of the western trenches with a second area of Neolithic activity indicated within one of the most northerly trenches. Late prehistoric activity in the form of ditches and pits of Iron Age date were identified in a further trench to the west of the study area. The subsequent work (Site 1559, areas 6, 7 and 8) forms part of the Longstanton West excavations and have been assessed (Paul and Cutler 2008).

Land at the northern extent of the study area, previously the subject of geophysical survey, was evaluated in 2010

(Site 2069) and provided evidence for archaeological remains dating from the Neolithic through to the post-medieval period (Burrows 2010). Isolated features containing both Neolithic and Bronze age pottery were uncovered and the upper fill of a crouched inhumation contained several sherds of Bronze Age pottery. Flint tools reminiscent of the Neolithic or possibly Mesolithic periods were also recovered from the site and although these finds may be residual they do serve to highlight the continued occupation or use of the site from perhaps the Neolithic period to the present.

The pottery retrieved from the sections through the enclosure ditch visible on the geophysics results indicated a Middle to Late Iron Age date for the feature. Several gullies were excavated, possibly representing internal divisions, perhaps defining space within the enclosure or demarcating stock boundaries from human habitation. The evaluation illustrated that the site was re-occupied during the Late Anglo-Saxon period. The geophysical survey had revealed a network of linear features on the east side of the site generally aligned northwest–southeast and northeast–southwest. With the exception of the plough furrows, the evidence relating to the medieval period was entirely confined to the southern area of the site, in the lower lying ground. A number of northeast–southwest aligned linear features were excavated and proved to represent a series of ditches and plough furrows. The finds retrieved from these features indicated that the southern area of the site had been utilised for agricultural activity during the medieval period. The subsequent excavations of the area (Site 2146) have been assessed (Paul and Mann 2012) and the results are discussed in the following chapters.

Excavations at Striplands Farm by Cambridge Archaeological Unit established the presence of an enclosure dating to the Romano-British period (Patten and Evans 2005) situated against the eastern edge of Site 2146, the south-west corner of which can be seen on the geophysics slightly overlapping with the Iron Age enclosure. Further excavations at Striplands Farm revealed a significant but dispersed area of Late Bronze Age settlement including pit wells which contained preserved log ladders and two socketed axe heads; also a small paddock enclosure which has been interpreted as representing episodes of short-stay resource procurement (Patten and Evans 2005). The Romano-British enclosure and Iron Age activity was concentrated on the gravels on the higher ground whereas the Saxo-Norman core of paddock type enclosures and quarrying pits was located to the south, next to the High Street. During the evaluation of Striplands Farm (Patten 2004) a single spread of material in the area immediately east of Site 2146 containing Early Anglo-Saxon pottery was recorded as a potential *Grubenhäuser*.

Fieldwork to the east of Striplands Farm, at Hatton's Farm, identified three areas of Late Iron Age and Romano-British activity (Evans 1991) mainly corresponding with concentrations of cropmarks visible on the aerial

photographs. Field walking in the parish of Longstanton (Beardsmore 2004) collected artefactual evidence indicating activity from the Late Mesolithic to the present day. The follow-up evaluation (Evans and Mackay 2004) recorded a sustained Romano-British settlement dating from the second to fourth centuries AD with enclosures and paddocks containing internal structures, interspersed with Late Iron Age archaeology. Aerial photographs, together with evidence collected during field walking that includes pottery and an eighth-century *sceatta*, or silver penny, suggested the potential for Anglo-Saxon settlement including several *Grubenhäuser*, or sunken-featured buildings (SFBs).

The Village of Longstanton

The earliest documentary reference to Longstanton appears in Domesday Book, confirming its presence before the Norman Conquest, at which time it was known as 'Stantune' or 'Stantone'. In addition, the *Inquisitio Comitatus Cantabrigiensis*, of similar date, records 'Stantona' (DB Cambs 14.58, 22.1, 32.30; Salzman 1938, 426).

By the later thirteenth century the two forms of 'Stantone' and 'Staunton' were in use (Feudal Aids I, 138; Taxatio 1291, 120b, 168b) and in the *Rotuli Hundredorum* of 1279–80 the vill appears as 'Stanton' (RH ii, 460a). It was also during the thirteenth century that the place name of 'Long Stanton' was adopted, appearing in the Fine Rolls by 1230 (Dryburgh and Hartland 2008, 14/206) and in the inquisition post mortem of Christiana de Furnivall who died in 1271 (CIPM ii, Edward I, No 374; cf. also c. 1302–1303, 'Longa Stantone', FA 148; 1316, 'Longstaunton', FA 152). The addition of this prefix was presumably prompted by a need to distinguish this vill from Fen Stanton, but it seems probable that it was also intended to be descriptive of the settlement itself, suggesting that by the 1230s the vill was already stretched out along a long straight street, the High Street, surrounded by its open fields. Initial desk-based assessment (Jones 1995) and an aerial photographic assessment (Cox 1995) also suggested that the village developed along the High Street, with three open fields, while by the mid thirteenth century there was also a small medieval hamlet at Green End.

The place name, in its original Old English form, may be interpreted as meaning 'tūn on stony ground' (cf. Ekwall 1964, 438), that is, a farmstead on stony ground, or 'stony settlement', a name that perhaps reflects the location of the present village on a raised gravel ridge and lending weight to a supposition that the 'name-giving' and establishment of the settlement ran closely together. The heavier gravel terraces that characterise this area are similarly consistent with the placename.

The medieval settlement lay within two parishes, All Saints' and Saint Michael's, the boundaries of which, it is supposed, were determined by the tenurial pattern associated with the manors of Longstanton (Wright and Lewis 1989, 220). These two parishes were present by

1217 (Wright and Lewis 1989, 231), and were probably reflected in the 1230s when the vill was described as ‘Stanton’ and ‘the other Stanton’ (Wright and Lewis 1989, 220). There is no evidence that these parishes are of pre-Conquest date and they may be the product of the tenurial re-organisation that is reflected in Domesday Book. All Saints’ Church stands at the centre of the present village, while St Michael’s Church is located to the south. The two parishes were united in 1953 to create the present civil parish of Longstanton (Wright and Lewis 1989, 220).

Project Aims and Research Themes

The evidence from previous investigations at Longstanton indicated a high potential for significant occupation within the study area from early prehistory onwards. Hence, investigations at Longstanton West were focused primarily on understanding the landscape evolution of this area of Cambridgeshire through the identification and recording of archaeological remains in order to assess how the site fits into local and regional settlement patterns. The assessment reports for each individual excavation proposed a set of research objectives, which have since been reassessed in light of the decision to publish all the results together. In addition to the broader theme, three specific research aims relating to the Longstanton West excavations were defined from within the context of the Research Agenda for Cambridgeshire (Medlycott 2011).

Aim 1: Establish the chronology of occupation on a clay edge landscape

The research framework for the eastern counties (Medlycott 2011, 84) highlights the challenges in understanding the chronology and processes of change through the archaeology of the region. In particular, whilst broad chronologies are understood, the specifics for different periods are less well known. Hence, the project aimed to obtain detailed information relating to chronology, in particular, the project sought to address the following questions:

- What is the chronological range of human activity on the site?
- What evidence is there for continuity of settlement at the site? Specifically; are there any periods where there is no evidence for occupation? Was the Iron Age/ Roman transition period seamless or is there evidence for change?

Aim 2: Establish the social and economic basis for the human use of the site during the prehistoric periods

The excavations at Longstanton provide an opportunity to investigate the earliest activities that took place within an inland landscape and analyse the reasons why humans began to firstly visit the area, and eventually settled there. The importance of inter-relationships between sites and material remains has been highlighted as an important theme within the research agenda (Medlycott 2011).

Specifically the project aimed to answer the following questions:

- Were there any specific activity areas and to what extent were they significant during the Neolithic period?
- Is there any evidence for ritual activity at the site and how was the landscape utilised by the early visitors?
- How does the pre-historic use of the site fit within regional settlement patterns?
- Identify patterns of continuity within the site of Longstanton West and the evidence for changes in the site economy

Aim 3: Contribute to our understanding of the development of the village of Longstanton and the life and livelihoods of the communities living there.

With a particular focus on the Anglo-Saxon and medieval phases of the site, the Longstanton West excavations have afforded an opportunity to consider a number of the research themes identified for the East of England (Medycott 2011) particularly in relation to settlement and landscape. Central to these interests are the origins and development of the different medieval rural settlement types and the factors that shaped them. Transformations in settlement type and form across the Anglo-Saxon period and their impact upon successor medieval settlements and landscape are therefore key areas for research.

- In an area where the identification of Anglo-Saxon settlement sites can be difficult, sites that span the transition between the Roman and Anglo-Saxon periods have the potential to inform on the dynamic of that transition with regard to settlement type and morphology. What can the extensive programme of work at Longstanton add to this debate?
- What evidence can the excavations at Longstanton reveal about the extent and nature of any Late Anglo-Saxon landscape reorganisation (for example, village nucleation and the development of field systems) and did this have any the implications for the organisation of the medieval landscape? What was the nature of the settlement and what is the relationship between the Late Anglo-Saxon settlement and landscape of Longstanton and its medieval successor?
- What forms do Anglo-Saxon and medieval farms take?
- Palaeoenvironmental sampling is crucial to establishing how the landscape was used, and how this developed over time. The excavations will afford an opportunity to investigate the landscape and economic context of the site and its environs through the retrieval and study of animal bones and charred plant remains.
- The excavations at Longstanton West, alongside documentary and cartographic sources, will enable a further consideration of the tenor of life and

livelihood in the medieval settlement and some of the factors that helped to shape it. The sites under excavation will thus be placed in this wider context.

More broadly, excavations on rural medieval settlement sites have the potential to contribute to a range of other research themes, such as what can be determined on the relationship between churches and settlement sites; what can be seen of the relationship between towns and their hinterlands; and what can be added to our knowledge of the Anglo-Saxon and medieval pottery industries?

Mapping Aims onto Methods

The aims outlined above comprise the assessment of human occupation and other activities within the area, the refinement of chronology and the development of the landscape and economy of Longstanton. This range of aims required a multi-faceted approach that comprised a combination of interpretation of the excavation results, analysis by finds specialists and palaeoenvironmental research. The specifics of the different approaches used within the project can be explored in relation to each of the aims.

Aim 1: Chronology of occupation on a clay edge landscape

In approaching the chronology of occupation, a major consideration was the sheer quantity of data compiled during the 19 separate projects with a total of over 5000 individual contexts recorded. In order to adequately enable meaningful analysis of the excavated archaeology and material remains the Longstanton GIS project was established. The project involved the creation of one overarching database and the digitisation of each and every feature excavated during the 16 years of investigations into shapefiles (a full methodology can be found within Appendix 2). This allowed the information regarding the individual contexts themselves to be visualised within the GIS project. Linking the shapefiles to individual features and contexts allowed the information held within the database to be used to visualise and analyse the excavation results across site boundaries.

In order to better understand the chronology of the site and to have the potential for investigating the more subtle phasing within periods, a range of relative dating methods were used. In addition to stratigraphic analysis, all finds, including lithics, ceramics, animal bone, portable finds and building materials were analysed by specialists and the results integrated into the GIS.

Aim 2: Establish the social and economic basis for the human use of the site during the prehistoric periods

The objectives were to understand the human use of the Longstanton West landscape, the economic or ritualistic activities, and any significance placed on the area through the study of the archaeology and material remains. To achieve this all finds were analysed by specialists and

integrated with the excavation results. The finds-specific results (such as sherd count, weight, and date) were amalgamated with the overarching project database at context level, allowing the material remains to be mapped and analysed within the GIS project.

Aim 3: To contribute to our understanding of the development of the village of Longstanton and the life and livelihoods of the communities living there.

The core objectives of this aim were firstly to investigate the extent and nature of any Late Anglo-Saxon landscape reorganisation and the relationship between the Late Anglo-Saxon settlement and landscape of Longstanton and its medieval successor; secondly, to investigate life and livelihood in the Anglo-Saxon and medieval settlement, and the landscape and economic context of the site and its environs.

To address these objectives, in addition to the close stratigraphic analysis of excavated features, a programme of onsite and laboratory based palaeoenvironmental approaches were used; laboratory methods including the analysis of pollen, coleoptera, charcoal and plant macrofossils sampled from different locations and depths across the site. This programme of work sits alongside the important contributions made from the retrieval and study of animal bones, ceramics, portable finds and slag by specialists. Setting the results of the Longstanton West excavations in context has also drawn significantly on cartographic analysis and on a review of the documentary evidence relating to medieval Longstanton.

The specifications of the excavation, GIS project and specialist methodologies are detailed within Appendix 2.

Arrangement of the Report

This book details the results of the Longstanton Project. Overall, it pulls together the results of geophysical surveys and 16 years of excavation to provide a narrative of activities within the area. In particular, it presents these results in relation to the three aims outlined above.

This book is divided into three parts. Part 1 (chapters 2–5) covers the prehistoric to Roman archaeology at the site and begins with an overview of the results of the excavations, presented chronologically (chapter 2). The prehistoric and Roman finds, comprising lithics, portable finds and ceramics, are presented over the next two chapters (chapters 3–4), followed by an integrated discussion of the results placed within their regional context (chapter 5).

Part 2 (chapters 6–12) is devoted to the post-Roman, medieval and post-medieval archaeology of the site. The majority of the material discussed relates to the Anglo-Saxon and medieval periods, and this section commences with a chronological review of the sites that contribute to these phases in Longstanton West. The unexpected discovery of seventh-century burials is set in context (chapter 7)

and the possible origins of the medieval settlement are considered. Documentary and cartographic evidence joins with the archaeology to present an overview of settlement and economy in Anglo-Saxon and medieval Longstanton, providing a wider canvas against which the results of the Longstanton West excavations may be interpreted and understood (chapter 8). Detailed discussions of the finds from these and later phases, including ceramics, portable

finds, stone, metalworking debris, animal bone and charred plant remains, are presented over three chapters (chapters 9–11), followed in turn by a closing discussion (chapter 12).

Part 3 of this report summarises in an integrated discussion the principal outcomes of the Longstanton West excavations in terms of the agenda set for the project and their wider significance for the region.