Test pit excavation within occupied settlements in East Anglia in 2005
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This paper introduces a new project which is focusing on the archaeological investigation of medieval rural settlements which are still inhabited, and summarises the results of work of four sites in the first year of the project.

Although rural settlement has long been a core area of research for medieval archaeology, attention until recently has focussed largely on deserted (or extensively shrunked) nucleated villages, with currently-occupied rural settlements (hereafter CORS) tending to be either neglected or subject only to non-invasive investigation such as plan analysis, earthwork survey or documentary research (Lewis et al 2001). Sub-surface investigation is in most cases reactive and limited to observations or minor excavations carried out in advance of small-scale development. In many cases these fail to record any evidence for medieval activity. Despite the recent energetic intellectual expansion of rural settlement studies to encompass the study of CORS in projects such as Shapwick (Aston & Gerrard 1999) and Whittlewood (Dyer, 1999; Page and Jones 2000; Jones and Page 2001; 2003a; 2003b) it still remains true that many more deserted and shrunked medieval settlements have benefited from proactive archaeological excavation that is the case for currently-inhabited sites. This problem is compounded, of course, by the fact that most medieval settlements were not permanently abandoned, so that the majority of our evidence is at present derived from a minority subset of medieval settlements – deserted and very shrunked sites. CORS also, of course cover significant extents of land where little is known about the archaeology from any period. In 2005 a new project from the University of Cambridge linked the need to expand our knowledge of CORS with the apparently unconnected need to raise the numbers of young people going to university. The resultant Higher Education Field Academy (HEFA) programme was piloted in 2005 when excavation was carried out in four CORS in East Anglia by nearly 150 secondary school pupils.

The concept of the HEFA project as one which could jointly pursue both educational and research objectives developed out of a widening-participation programme run begun by the author from the University of Cambridge Department of Archaeology in 2004. The success of this suggested that it might be possible to develop a more ambitious scheme which could give participants the chance not just to increase their enthusiasm for education at higher levels, but also to acquire and develop, in a more sustained and substantial way, some of the skills, experience, motivation and confidence needed to succeed in actually fulfilling their newly-raised ambitions. Such a scheme would give participants the chance to complete, from start to finish, a piece of independent original work, of a type completely new to them, which would involve the learning of new skills, employing a range of different learning methods, including practical, technical and analytical skills, and culminate in a formally-assessed written element which would provide enduring and tangible evidence of achievement. It was also considered vital that such work should have real academic value, to allow participants to develop confidence in their abilities to cope and contribute at undergraduate level. The work-scheme should require no previous knowledge or experience, thus placing all participants on an equal initial footing.

Archaeology is well-placed to provide programmes which can meet the requirements of both educational/outreach and academic/research agendas without compromising the needs of either, and it seemed apparent that the research and educational agendas outlined above could be pursued jointly in the excavation of test pits within CORS. This could provide archaeologically-desirable short-term team-based project work that could be carried out with a degree of independence by those with no previous archaeological experience. The latter point had been demonstrated in previous test-pit excavations by members of the public, (Lewis 2003; Taylor 2003; Cooper and Priest 2003) which had demonstrated that archaeologically-inexperienced people could, provided with appropriate support, carry out test pit excavations which would yield useful results with a day or two’s digging. Funds to develop and trial the HEFA scheme was provided by the Higher Education Academy and Aimhigher, a national organisation tasked with raising university participation rates amongst currently under-represented groups; and in 2005 a pilot series of three HEFA courses took place involving pupils from Cambridgeshire schools. Following the successful completion of these, a fourth HEFA took place in Hertfordshire, with 13 more requested across East Anglia in 2006 and more planned for subsequent years.

Methodology1
Setting up and running the HEFA scheme successfully inevitably requires a number of different educational, archaeological and logistical goals to be met. Aimhigher staff liaise with schools to recruit suitable pupils with high academic ability but about whose progression to higher education there is doubt,
usually because there is no prior experience on higher education amongst close family members. Sites for investigation by HEFA must be geographically within target areas where progression to university is low. Once these are established, HEFA works through contacts both within and beyond the archaeological profession, particularly through local museums and/or rural historical or archaeological societies, to find a coordinator in that area who is willing and able to arrange access for excavation to a number of different properties within a CORS well-known to them. This settlement must be considered likely to have been in existence in some form or other in the medieval period for it to be a suitable candidate. In most cases, the presence of at least one building of medieval date (usually a church) is adequate, but this is by no means essential. Relying primarily on educational and practical criteria to select CORS for HEFA investigation effectively provides a randomising mechanism within the sampling strategy.

Pupils excavate their test pit under adult (but not usually archaeologically-experienced) supervision, following the instructions detailed in the HEFA Handbook, prepared within the Department of Archaeology, in a series of 10cm spits or contexts, to a maximum depth of 1.2m. All but the most intractable spoil is sieved for finds using a standard mesh, and pottery and other finds are identified promptly by experts who are on site for the duration of the Field Academy and make frequent visits to each test pit, during which they also provide advice and check that the excavation is being carried out and recorded to the required standard. Once the excavation is completed, pupils draw sections, take soil samples from each context for phosphate analysis, then backfill and replace the removed turf to restore the site. Pupils are sent copies of the records they made for their test pit to enable them to write it up, which is submitted during a follow-up day in the University of Cambridge, when a group session involves pupils in the collation, assessment and mapping of the collective results of all the test pits dug in the course of their HEFA. Submitted reports are copied and assessed in the University and the originals returned to pupils with comments and a certificate to mark their achievement in completing the course. The archaeological records, finds2 and soil samples are retained by the University of Cambridge for analysis, formal writing-up, archiving and submission to SMRs and HERs, and will form the basis of further research into the origins and development of rural settlement.

Results

The Higher Education Field Academy in East Anglia in 2005 involved excavation of a series of 1-metre square test pits within the gardens and open spaces in four CORS in Cambridgeshire, Norfolk and Hertfordshire (figure 1). More than 130 pupils and around 40 teachers from a dozen different schools in Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire were involved in the excavation of nearly 40 test pits. This report is not the place for detailed discussion of the aspirational and educational success of the HEFA project, but it should perhaps be noted that feedback was extremely positive, with 71% of pupils rating it excellent or good and 90% enjoyed it as much, more or much more than they expected to. Feedback from school staff has also been excellent. This shows that the HEFA programme is capable of providing young people and opinion-formers within education with a very positive learning experience associated with rural settlement studies, potentially an important factor in shaping attitudes in the future.

Figure 1: Location map of southern England showing the locations of the 4 CORS sites investigated by the HEFA project in 2005.

A more detailed report on the results of the HEA test pitting in these settlements, incorporating work future years, will be published in due course, but a brief summary of work in 2005 is included below.

Plate 1: Test pit TSC/03/05 Terrington St Clement under excavation, with HEFA students and teacher wielding a range of tools used by them to conduct their test pit excavation
Terrington St Clement (NGR 555180 320420)

Terrington St Clement today is a large, irregular, sprawling village around 8km west of King’s Lynn in the Fenland region of west Norfolk. It lies on peat and alluvial and marine deposits at around 3m OD but now protected from inundation by a sea bank known as Roman Bank, 1km north of the church. Previously it has been subject to some historical research by local historians resident in the village (Terrington St Clement History Group 2005), while archaeological investigation has most notably included field walking during the Fenland Survey (Silvester, 1988), although this largely excluded the area around the present settlement (ibid., 36-7).

Terrington St Clement was the first site to be investigated by HEFA. A total of nine test pits were excavated in July 2005 (figure 2), one dug by one of the property owners, (at the same time and using the same HEFA handbook and recording system), the other eight were dug by 28 year 9 pupils (mostly aged 14). The main focus of HEFA attention in this large village was on the eastern side of the settlement, north and south of the church, although one ‘outlier’ was sited c. 1500m to the west, on the top of Roman Bank. This produced only pottery of Victorian and later date, relating to occupation of one of the cottages sites on top of the bank. Of more interest was late Anglo-Saxon pottery which was found in lower, undisturbed layers of the three test pits north of the church (TP 05/4, 05/5 and 05/8), including Thetford Ware and Stamford Ware, also found in TP 05/7 immediately west of the church. TP 05/7 also revealed undisturbed early levels, in this case containing medieval pottery (Grimston Ware, dating to c. AD 1080 and 1400) and a floor surface with slight traces of a post hole. Undisturbed levels with Grimston Ware were also present in 05/50, south-west of the church. One very abraded sherd of Grimston Ware in TP 05/2, found 20-30cm below the surface, appears more likely to have been associated with manuring, suggesting that this northern-most part of the present village was under cultivation in the Middle Ages. None of the test

Plate 2: All finds from Terrington St Clement test pit TSC/05/07 context 7 (60-70cm below surface), including 8 sherds of Grimston Ware.

Figure 2: Terrington St Clement, Norfolk, showing the locations and numbers of the test pits excavated in July 2005.
pits north of the church produced pottery post-dating c. 1550.

Taken together, the evidence from the 2005 test pits indicates that the areas both north and south of the church were in occupation from the late Anglo-Saxon period until perhaps the later Middle Ages, possibly as a planned row settlement along the line of the present Church Street. This itself suggests that the most likely date for the construction of Roman Bank (known, despite the name, not to be Roman as these levels are buried beneath c. 2m of post-Roman silts) is around the 9th or 10th century AD, as occupation north of the church would not have been possible before the construction of the bank. Further HEFA-derived work in the future in Terrington St Clement will aim to investigate other parts of the village including looking at possible manorial sites within the area of the current settlement.

Ufford (NGR 509380 304080)

Ufford today is a small linear village lying on limestone at between 21m and 46m OD, approximately 10km north-west of Peterborough. Prior to HEFA, the only known archaeological finds comprised a concentration of Roman material, including a silver spoon, discovered casually by the landowner in an arable field south-west of the church (recorded in the SMR for Peterborough Unitary Authority). The history of Ufford was reviewed in an early volume of the Victoria County History (Serjeanston and Adkins 1996) and more recently, in a less academic format, by a local resident (Gosling 2000).

Fourteen test pits were dug by HEFA pupils in Ufford in September 2005. Roman pottery, abraded and clearly derived from ploughsoil, were discovered in the upper levels of TPs 05/12 and 05/13 in the south of the village near to the earlier find-spot of Roman material, confirming occupation at this date in this most elevated part of the settlement. Evidence for activity in the late Anglo-Saxon period came from opposite ends of the village, including a couple of sherds of Stamford Ware from TP 05/7, in the garden of Ufford Farm at the far northern extremity of the present settlement. Although these came from relatively high levels which also produced pottery of Victorian and later date, their presence is nonetheless potentially significant, and this area will be investigated further in the future. Particularly notable also was the absence of any evidence for occupation.

Figure 3: Ufford, Peterborough Unitary Authority, showing the locations and numbers of the test pits excavated in September 2005.
in the area east of Ufford Hall which appeared on superficial examination likely to be one of shrinkage, as it contained earthworks comprising platforms and hollows suggesting of former house sites divided by low linear features reminiscent of toft boundaries, in a block between two areas of current occupation. However, TP 05/14, 05/6 and 05/15 all revealed the same pattern, with an almost total absence of cultural material (except for slag) above natural. In fact, none of the test pits between 05/3 and 05/7 produced any evidence for activity predating the later post-medieval. Initial inferences must include the possibility that Ufford in the late Anglo-Saxon, and possibly right through the Middle Ages, was arranged as two separate small foci of settlement, rather existing as the planned linear village which is evident today.

**Houghton and Wyton (NGR 528110 272500)**

Houghton and Wyton are small villages now conjoined to form a single nucleated settlement, sited on alluvial gravel between 5m and 10m OD close to the northern banks of the River Ouse 4km east of Huntingdon in Cambridgeshire. Prior to HEFA, the area had received no significant archaeological attention, although a Romano-British cemetery lies a little to the north of the village on Houghton Hill (Page et al 1932) while the history of the villages has been reviewed some time ago by the Victoria County History (ibid.).

Nine test pits were excavated by HEFA students in 2005 (figure 4), with a further two dug by children attending the primary school in the village, using the HEFA instructions and recording system to investigate sites (05/P and 05/A) within their school grounds, located west of the church in Houghton. Most attention in 2005 focused on Houghton, with further work mostly in Wyton planned for 2006. Alone of the four sites investigated by HEFA in 2005, Houghton and Wyton produced evidence for prehistoric activity in the form of struck flint, close to the river flood plain. Two of the test pits (05/4 and 05/P), also both fairly close to the edge of the flood plain, also produced Roman pottery. Late Anglo-Saxon activity in the form of Thetford Ware was
Mill Green (NGR)

Mill Green is today a small hamlet, lying at c. 60m OD either side of the river Lea c. 3km north-east of Hatfield in Hertfordshire. Mill Green has no church, and its only claim to medieval antecedence comes from the presence of the eponymous mill, now a museum. Most of the surviving fabric of this structure is 18th century, although some 16th century timberwork is visible inside the building (Kirby, 1990). No earlier fabric is known, but the present building is generally considered to occupy the site of a medieval mill, one of four held by the abbot of Ely at Hatfield in Domesday Book (ibid., 2). The actual extent of any medieval occupation was however completely unknown before the HEFA investigation over the last two days of November 2005.

found in TP 05/5 and 05/P, and also recovered by HEFA from 05/R, a c. 1m x 1.2m hole which was rather fortuitously being dug by a local authority employee in the centre of the road leading north from the church in Houghton, while the HEFA investigations were taking place. Post-Conquest medieval pottery in the form of shelly and sandy wares, were found in the majority of the 2005 test pits (05/2, 05/3, 05/4, 05/5, 05/7, 05/8, 05/P and 05/A), although the single abraded sherd from TP 05/3 seems likely to indicate agricultural use of this north-eastern part of the present settlement rather than occupation, a suggestion apparently reinforced by the absence of medieval material from TP 05/1 or 05/9. In contrast to the large quantity of high medieval material is the paucity of late medieval and early post-medieval pottery, which may hint at contraction in this period, although such a suggestion must remain very tentative, based as it is on negative evidence from a relatively small number of test pits.

Undeterred by the frosty starts to each day, nine test pits were excavated by HEFA participants (figure 5). The contrast with the other HEFA sites was extreme: no pre-medieval material was recovered from any of the test pits, and only one produced any finds dating to any time within the medieval period. This comprised a single sherd of London Ware (AD1150-late C15th) which was found in the top layer of TP 05 2, a mixed context which also yielded material of post-medieval and Victorian and later date: given this, it is impossible to exclude the possibility that this sherd was brought onto this site in the relatively recent past. Even if the London Ware sherd does in
fact originally derive from the location in which it was found, it is notable that TP 05/2 is the furthest of all the 2005 test pits from the mill site itself. None of the other test pits produced any material earlier than c. 1550, a date which does of course correlate well with that of the earliest known surviving fabric of the mill building. This does not, of course, completely exclude the possibility that a mill and/or associated settlement existed here in the Middle Ages, but it must cast doubt on that assertion. However, two of the test pits did not go very deep (05/6 was inadvertently sited on top of a late Victorian/early 20th century rubbish pit, which provided a wonderful range of finds for the students, but prevented excavation to any significant depth, while 05/9 was started late in the course of the HEFA after the 05/8 team encountered natural). The possibility that excavation of further test pits might reveal more secure evidence for medieval occupation in the area can not be excluded.

Conclusions
The success of the educational and aspirational aims of the HEFA project has been demonstrated by the extremely positive feedback students have provided, which show very significant positive changes in attitudes to higher education. This feedback shows also that HEFA has provided the participants (students and teachers alike) with a very positive experience associated with heritage, and with medieval settlement studies in particular.

In terms of archaeological results, it seems clear already that the HEFA model of test pit excavation within currently-occupied rural settlements can and does produce new and useful archaeological evidence. It has demonstrated its capability both to reveal new settlement foci (as at Ufford Farm) and question pre-existing assumptions about known settlements, both in terms of their date (eg Mill Green) and their layout (eg Ufford). Future work will build on these achievements: the test pits excavated by HEFA in 2005 are just the first in this programme of educational investigation which will continue in 2006 and beyond, both on the sites summarised above and others in Cambridgeshire, Hertfordshire, Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex, and Bedfordshire.

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Notes
1 Further information about the process of test pit investigation on HEFA courses, with accompanying images, is available at http://www.arch.cam.ac.uk/eca/fa/testpits
2 Finds are retained by the University of Cambridge unless their return is requested by the property owners, in which case they are returned following completion of post-exavcation and analysis.

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