

The Cambridgeshire Archaeological Committee

by Alison Taylor

The CAC was set up in 1973 to co-ordinate archaeological activities throughout the new County and to ensure co-operation with planning authorities on archaeological matters. The first chairman was Professor Glyn Daniel (subsequently Dr John Alexander) with Dr Alexander (later Dr Kate Pretty) as secretary. Committee members represent the archaeological interests within Cambridgeshire — museums, local societies, University, NVRC, DoE and the planning authorities. As well as acting as an advisory service, policy-making body and talking shop, the Committee is able to apply for and administer grants and thus to employ officers and to initiate excavations. In November 1974 I was appointed as a county archaeological officer and in October 1976 David Hall became the Fenland field officer. Our latest appointment is Francis Pryor, well known to *Durobrivae* readers for his work at Fengate, as field officer for the Welland Valley.

My main initial function was to set up a county-wide sites-and-monuments record so that all archaeological data (stray finds, excavations, crop-marks or earthworks) could be plotted on standard map and file cards, which could be consulted and duplicated whenever necessary. This record now holds about 5000 cards and is increasing all the time. Apart from its archaeological research value it is vital for the protection of sites by scheduling, for advising planners and other public bodies involved in land-use, for satisfying public enquiries and for deciding on excavation priorities. I am also responsible for emergency excavations, when sites unexpectedly come to light and for watching construction work in areas of archaeological potential.

David Hall's brief as Fenland field officer was to make an assessment of ancient settlement patterns and landscapes in the Fens. Over the past two years he has concentrated on a selection of varied geological areas within which he has walked each field and mapped the archaeological results. Scatters of flints, pottery and other occupation debris, roddons (extinct waterways) and occasionally even slight earthworks are giving many new and surprising results on the pre-drainage history of this area.

Settlements, salt-industries and round barrows are the principal discoveries, well over 100 new sites so far. In addition, observation of soil types in relation to dated archaeological remains has enabled him to identify the limits of the Fens at various periods. The areas so far examined are the silt fens around Elm and Newton, clay and gravel fen edges at Eye, Holme, Ramsey and Warboys, the chalk fen edge around Burwell and Swaffham and fen islands at Manea, Wimblington and Haddenham. About 50000 acres have been examined so far, and over the next three years the Cambridgeshire Fens will have received systematic and detailed work that can be paralleled in few other regions.

In October 1978 the Manpower Services Commission approved the appointment of 6 unemployed graduates to work for a year for the CAC. We now have three archaeologists who are doing measured surveys of mediaeval earthworks, checking on Scheduled Monuments and processing finds from recent excavations. They have examined a Roman cemetery at Horningsea disturbed by ploughing and recorded a large Roman settlement, including a kiln, that was unexpectedly uncovered by a gravel quarry near Godmanchester. Two archivists are cataloguing documentary records and old maps so that all information relevant to archaeology can be found in parish files. A clerical assistant is keeping the sites-and-monuments record up to date. Between them they have also fitted out a house for use as an archaeological centre and store.

Over the last five years the CAC has concentrated on organisation, recording, protection of sites, public relations, emergency excavations and fieldwork, but we have managed a few larger-scale excavations. Michael Green works on sites in Godmanchester twice a year, an Iron-Age and Romano-British settlement was excavated at Colne and there was exploratory work on crop-marks at Girton, a moat at Hardwick and a henge at Elton. The latter site looks very promising and a larger dig will take place there in 1979 which will be reported in *Durobrivae* in due course.

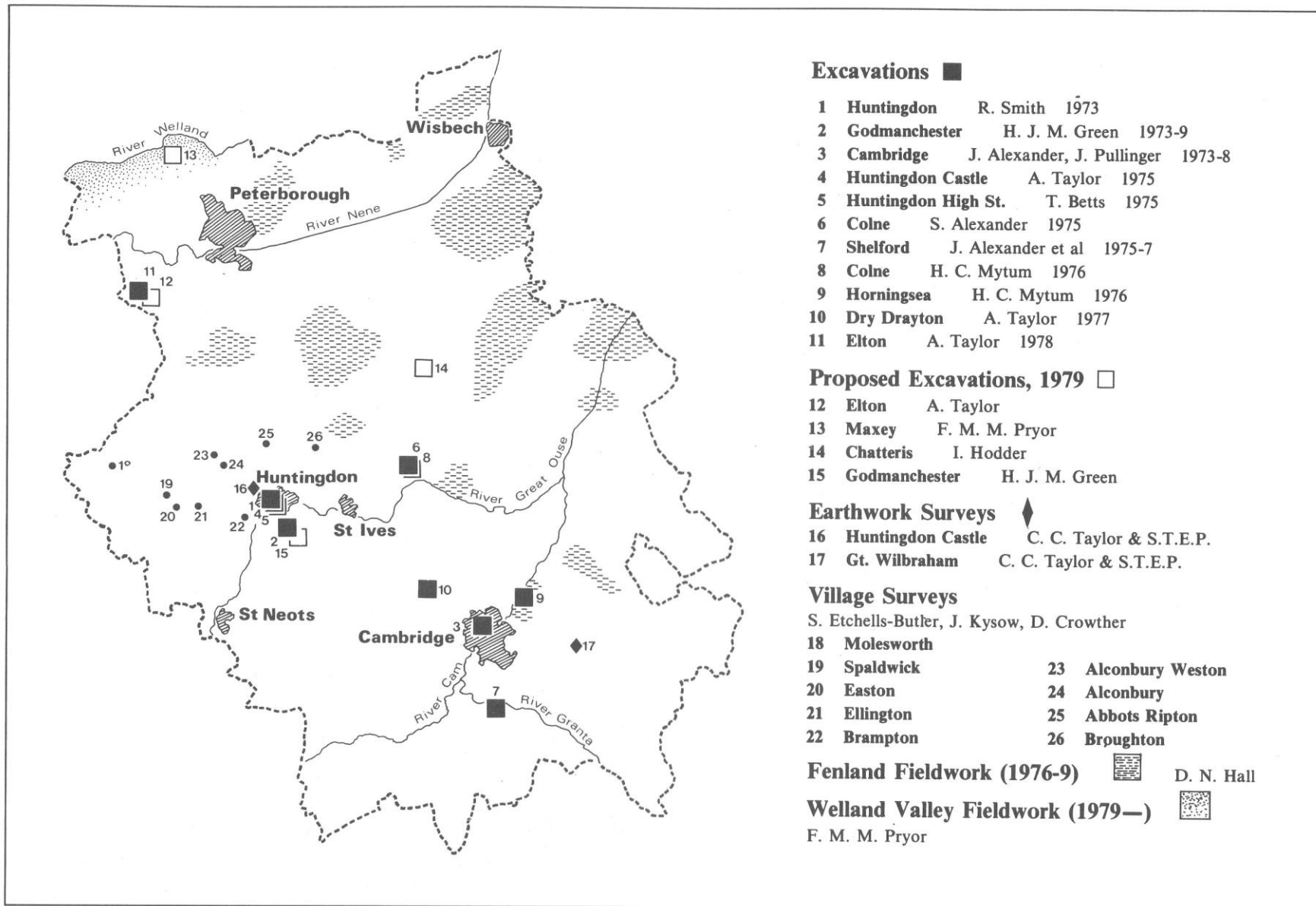


Fig 9 The Fieldwork Programme of the CAC (1973-March 1979)