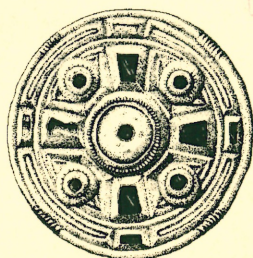




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Prehistoric, Roman and Medieval Landuse at Barford Road,
Eynesbury, St Neots.

Steve Kemp BA MSc AIFA

1997

Cambridgeshire County Council

Report No. 134

Commissioned By Tesco Stores Ltd.

**Prehistoric, Roman and Medieval Landuse at Barford Road,
Eynesbury, St Neots.**

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1997

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SUMMARY

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken in 1993 at the Tesco's site of Barford Road, Eynesbury, St Neots which identified a series of prehistoric monuments related to a ritual landscape identified by aerial photography. In 1994 excavations were designed to cover the major areas of disturbance to the archaeology which would result from the construction of a Tesco's superstore, ancillary buildings and roundabout.

Evidence for Palaeolithic, Mesolithic and Neolithic activity in the development area was found to be absent, although artefacts from these periods have been found close by. Late Neolithic or Bronze Age remains identified during the earlier work proved to be spatially restricted, and apart from a single pit presumed to be associated with the monument identified in 1993. It has been shown that other Bronze Age remains do not extend into the development area. The absence of any occupation suggests that the interrupted ring ditch is a component of the late Neolithic-Bronze Age ritual landscape preserved within the surrounding area.

A number of tree bole and root disturbance features were encountered on the site indicating that this area was once wooded. These features were observed to pre-date the archaeology indicating that the area may have been cleared in the early Neolithic.

A further group of archaeological features were discovered during these excavations which consisted of a series of ditches on three alignments. Two of these ditches are a continuation of the late Romano-British trackway identified in 1993 and visible on the aerial photographs. The other alignments, which are not visible on the aerial photographs, appear to pre-date the trackway and although not synchronous, probably represent field boundaries which evolved following the demise of the ritual landscape. These field boundaries may indicate the return of arable agriculture to the area following a long period of intermittent flooding. Evidence for medieval cultivation was gained from historical documents, aerial photographs and within the excavated trenches where the furrows of the cultivation strips cut into the Terrace Gravels.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|-----------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| M# | Master (Feature) Number ; used to link cuts and fills of the same feature or a complex of associated features |
| # | Cut Number |
| # | Fill Number |
| CAO | County Archaeology Office |
| CUCAP | Cambridge University Committee for Aerial Photography |
| OD | Ordnance Datum |
| SMR | Sites and Monuments Record |

Prehistoric, Roman and Medieval Landuse at Barford Road, Eynesbury, St Neots

1 INTRODUCTION

Archaeological excavations at Barford Road, Eynesbury, St Neots were undertaken by the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC) on behalf of Tesco Stores Ltd. Work was undertaken in accordance with the Brief prepared by the County Archaeological Office (CAO) Development Control in consultation with Archaeological and Historical Services, Tesco's Archaeological Consultant. Excavations followed a scheme designed to mitigate against the impact of the construction of a Tesco's superstore and as a result of an archaeological evaluation undertaken on the site in 1993 (Kemp 1993).

Fieldwork in 1993 exposed an interrupted ring ditch of possible hengi-form enclosure type which is located on the northern fringes of the development area (Kemp 1993). Other trenches revealed the late Roman trackway identified on aerial photographs and a small enclosure, the latter apparently beneath a significant depth of alluvium. This initial work seemed to suggest that the aerial photographic evidence was an accurate reflection of the type of archaeology expected to be encountered within the development programme and indicated that further excavations were required to record any archaeological deposits threatened by the development.

Following this field evaluation the CAO recommended further archaeological work in order to retrieve archaeological, artefactual and ecofactual remains from the site prior to the development. For this second stage of work two main areas of archaeological research were defined by the CAO and Tesco's archaeological consultant. These areas of interest were defined as:

- i) Anthropogenic activities associated with the interrupted ring ditch.
- ii) Landscape development and human response within this proximal riverine environment.

In order to retrieve this information a specification and research design were prepared by the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council based on the Brief. A plan defining the extent of the investigation area was prepared by Woods Hardwick on behalf of Tesco's archaeological consultant.

2 GEOLOGICAL AND TOPOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND

The development area lies within the floodplain of the River Great Ouse, approximately 500m east of the present river channel. The land rises from 15m OD within the development area, to 35m OD 0.5km south eastwards and 50m OD 1km to the south. Exposures of Boulder Clay and Oxford Clay demarcate the eastern extent of the Ouse valley.



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Figure 1 Site Location Plan.

The location of the site and the presence of well sorted fine-grained sediments suggests that deposition within the development area has been strongly influenced by overbank flow and alluvial sedimentation in the post-glacial period. As a result of the deposition of alluvium, it was recognised that there was the potential for the preservation of a wide suite of archaeological and environmental deposits which in many areas would be obscured from detection by remote sensing techniques such as aerial photographic reconnaissance and geophysical survey. The evaluation also showed that beyond the ancient infilled channel which cuts through the development area the alluvial deposits were shallow and disturbed by ploughing.

The site lies on the 1st and 2nd Terrace Gravels of the Great Ouse Valley. Although seen as the base to the archaeological stratigraphy, these gravels are known to contain Palaeolithic artefacts elsewhere in the Ouse Valley. Sections excavated through these gravel deposits during test pitting prior to construction, indicated the presence of a former braided channel environment. Although such channels are not typically suitable for the preservation of in-situ Palaeolithic activity areas, gravel bars and proximal backswamp and floodplain areas associated with such riverine environments attracted human activity.

A river system is a dynamic entity prone to migration and incision dependent on former and prevailing environmental conditions it is therefore necessary to understand that the zone of potential preservation is likely to shift over time. A clear example of alterations in the river course is shown in the vicinity of the site where one of the surviving cursus enclosures is cut by the present course of the Great Ouse River, which is unlikely to have been the case during its construction in the Neolithic period.

Beneath the Terrace Gravels lie the Anglian Tills also known as the Boulder Clay. Palaeolithic archaeology dating prior to Anglian glacial period, approximately 450,000 years BP, if originally present was probably stripped away by the Anglian ice sheets (Jones and Keen 1993). Below these sediments the British Geological Survey records the presence of the Oxford Clays.

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Before these excavations were undertaken the archaeology of the development site was assessed by trial trenching, aerial photography and cartographic research (Kemp 1993, Palmer 1993, Way 1993). These techniques were used to examine the nature, extent and condition of archaeological remains known to lie within or immediately adjacent to the development area.

3.1 Early Prehistoric Archaeology

Cambridgeshire's Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) lists the presence of Mesolithic, Neolithic and Bronze Age activities in the immediate vicinity of the development area. The earliest archaeological remains encountered during the 1993 work were probably of late Neolithic or Bronze Age date. These consisted

of a ring ditch of possible hengi-form type up to 15m in diameter (Kemp 1993). The ring ditch was generally shallow with a slightly concave base, although, on the south west side one segment was found to contain postholes on a staggered grid. A pit, possibly associated with the ring ditch lay external to the enclosing ditch (Fig. 2).

Aerial photographs indicate considerable prehistoric activity adjacent to the development area, as shown in Figure 1 and on Plate 1. These early prehistoric remains can be grouped together as part of a 'ritual' landscape which includes pit alignments, ring ditches, which were formerly burial mounds enclosed by ditches, and cursus enclosures. These monuments typically date to the late Neolithic and Bronze Age (Parker-Pearson 1993). It is apparent from its context Neolithic and Bronze Age landscape that this ring ditch forms a single component of this wider prehistoric ritual complex.

As indicated earlier, more mundane activity centres, such as flint knapping sites also occur adjacent to the development area, whilst Herne found evidence for Neolithic occupation prior to the construction of the barrow he excavated in 1984 (Herne unpub).

3.2 Iron Age and Roman Archaeology

No Iron Age remains were recognised within the development area during the evaluation, although the SMR and aerial photographic records indicate the presence of a late Iron Age and Romano-British settlement to the east of Barford Road (Palmer 1993). Other Roman settlements lie to the north of the site at Ernulf

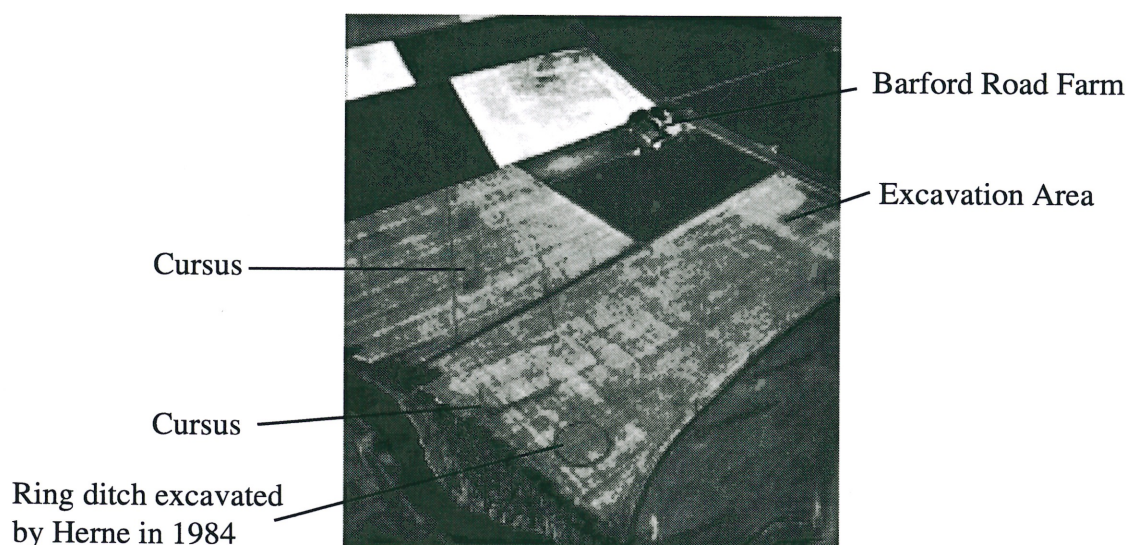


Plate 1 View of the investigation area. Aerial Photograph from the south-west showing some of the cropmarks of the Neolithic and Bronze Age ritual landscape to the West of Barford Road Farm, Eynesbury in 1960 (CUCAP ACA89). (Cambridge University Collection of Air Photographs: copyright reserved).

School, Eynesbury and at Little End on the western side of the River Great Ouse (Alexander 1993). Although these remains may not have been occupied at the same time, the density of sites suggests an intensively occupied landscape which included field systems, trackways, roads, farmsteads and villas occupying the floodplain of the Ouse Valley.

A trackway extends from the Romano-British settlement located to the east of the site, through the development area, and towards the river where it meets a north-south aligned trackway (Fig. 1). Interruptions to the parallel ditches which demarcate the trackway preclude their interpretation as drainage ditches and suggested that they provided access to an Iron Age or Romano-British field system.

The absence of obvious drainage ditches and the indication of intensive human activity within an area adjacent to the River Great Ouse could indicate dry ground conditions throughout the prehistoric and historic periods. However, archaeological excavations and environmental analysis indicates the probability of seasonal alluviation during the Bronze Age and medieval periods which may have affected land use strategies (Alexander 1992 a and b, French unpub, Macaulay 1994, Malim and Mitchell 1993). It is possible the risk of flooding was much reduced by Iron Age and Roman times or that a river management strategy which involved the construction of canals and/or levees was designed to mitigate against seasonal flooding and protect settlements which in vulnerable locations on the floodplain, however, such evidence is unknown from the St Neots area. It is probable that episodes of alluviation in this area reflect a combination of rainfall rates and land management policies upstream, particularly during periods of pioneering agriculture, would have affected the quantity of sediment held within the river



Plate 2 Aerial photograph from the west showing the cropmarks of an Iron Age and Romano-British settlement lying to the east of Barford Road, Eynesbury in 1959 (YK11). (Cambridge University Collection of Air Photographs: copyright reserved).

system. The refining of the alluvial chronology for the area is necessary in order to improve our knowledge of the land management history of this, and adjacent areas of the Great Ouse floodplain.

3.3 Anglo-Saxon, Medieval and Post-Medieval Archaeology

No Saxon remains have been recovered from the development area. During the course of the evaluations in 1993 information was supplied by the CAO as to the location of an Anglo-Saxon cemetery recently discovered by a local metal detectorist. Trenches were excavated as part of the evaluation (Fig. 1) adjacent to the A428 roundabout and Barford Road to confirm the existence of such remains. This area proved to be devoid of archaeology. Subsequent discussions with the metal detectorist indicated that the cemetery exists close to the Bell Farm round about, Little End (TL 169/579). Excavations by Herne in 1984 found five pagan burials (7th century at latest) cut into a Bronze Age burial mound which lies to the west of the development area (Herne unpub).

The absence of Anglo-Saxon settlement remains in the area could suggest that they presently lie beneath existing settlements as has been shown by excavations in Eynesbury and Eaton Socon.

To the west of the development area lies another series of parallel ditches which are suspected to be a trackway (Fig. 1). Aerial photographs indicate a slightly sinuous course of a north south orientated trackway. The sinuous form of this trackway may indicate an association with the medieval cultivation system. The Earl of Sandwich's map of 1757 illustrates this north south route as a baulk known as Middle Path in the 1550-1600 Glebe terrier and the Balk in 1757 (Way 1993). There is no reference to an east-west orientated trackway cutting through the strip cultivation system on either map indicating that the east-west Romano-British trackway had been abandoned by this point in time. It is not common for baulks within the medieval field system to be marked by parallel ditches, and as the Romano-British trackway joins this baulk a period of continuity may be intimated. It is therefore possible that the Balk (Middle Path) follows the course of an earlier Romano-British trackway and that the medieval and post-medieval landscapes inherited this trackway, and utilised the surviving linear earthwork as a field boundary within the developing landscape.

Evidence for medieval activity in the vicinity of the site comes from traces of ridge and furrow recorded during the 1993 evaluation (Kemp 1993). Field evidence indicates that strips were aligned east-west within Trench B, this is corroborated by estate maps of the eighteenth century, where the field is known as Sand Field (Way 1993). Given the evidence for prehistoric flooding and alluviation it is interesting to note that the majority of the strips within the open field are aligned east-west, extending down towards the river, which could indicate an initial drainage function to the strip layout. The north-south orientation of strips adjacent to Barford Road, which is the main alignment expected within the development area, however would not have allowed direct discharge of flood waters to meadow land and river as the area was bounded to the west by the baulk

known as the Balk or Middle Path. This could indicate that during the medieval or post-medieval period strips within Sand Field were less prone to flooding than strips further to the west and therefore less likely to be abandoned during periods of high rainfall.

The division between the east west and north south alignments shown on the 1757 map persisted up until at least 1887 within the development area. It is possible that a headland separated these two alignments which survived as a field boundary when the area was enclosed in 1800. No evidence for this headland survives within the field.

At enclosure in 1800 allotments within Sand Field, were under arable cultivation (Way 1993). Barford Farm is not recorded on the enclosure map of 1800 or any earlier maps of the area held by the Huntingdon Record Office. The Farm was known as Eynesbury Fields in 1882 (OS Hunts XXV-15), and must have been constructed sometime between 1800 and 1882.

The archaeological and historical evidence to date suggests that this area was extensively utilised by human agencies over several thousand years since the late Neolithic or Bronze Age for purposes other than settlement. During much of this time the local landscape has been dominated by agricultural activity.

4 METHODOLOGY

The aims of the archaeological excavations as outlined in the Brief were to:

- i) fully record archaeological remains prior to destruction by the proposed development.
- ii) sample and analyse environmental deposits disturbed by the development and understand the local environmental setting.
- iii) To examine human impact on, and utilisation of, the landscape.

Three trenches were opened using a 360° tracked excavator with a 0.9 or 1.8m wide toothless bucket. These trenches were laid out in accordance with plans defining the investigation provided by Tesco's archaeological consultant. The trenching plan was designed to cover areas which would suffer the greatest impact of the development and to record archaeological remains which lay on the margins of the development area. Terms and conditions for archaeological work were detailed in a contract prepared by Tesco's solicitors, Berwin Leighton.

Two trenches were excavated perpendicular to each other by machine over the proposed location of the superstore (Fig. 1). The specification had intimated that 100m of trenching would be undertaken with a 1.8m wide bucket (i.e. 180 sq. m), but as trenching was inhibited by extremely dry soil conditions a 0.90m wide bucket was used to excavate a 1.40m wide trench providing 177 sq.m of trenching within the superstore footprint. During the course of machining excavations of Trench 3 were further impeded by heavy rain. These problems were made known

to the CAO during the course of the machining in case further work was required.

Trench 3 was machine excavated in accordance with the Brief and plans prepared by the CAO and Archaeological and Historical Services, Salisbury. Due to the paucity of archaeological remains within the investigation area machining was curtailed on the advice of the CAO following consultation with Archaeological and Historical Services. An area of 3207 sq m was stripped of topsoil and subsoil as opposed to 6225 sq m defined by the Brief in order to record and recover archaeological remains within the development area and adjacent to the ring ditch. In total an area of 3384 sq m was stripped in preparation for hand excavation.

5 RESULTS

Trench 1

Length 65m

Excavated to a maximum depth of 0.80m

Excavation of Trench 1 initially began with a 1.8m wide bucket, however, due to the high soil strength of the alluvium resulting from a combination of fine sediments and particularly dry soil conditions it became necessary to use a 0.90m wide bucket to excavate a trench of 1.40m wide.

The topsoil and alluvium were excavated in spits down on to the Terrace Gravels as no archaeology was encountered at a higher level.

Trench 2

Length 63m

Excavated to a maximum depth of 0.80m

Excavation of Trench 2 was undertaken using a 0.90m wide bucket as described under Trench 1.

No archaeological features were encountered. However, north-south orientated furrows were observed cutting in to the Terrace Gravels. The ridge and furrow was surprisingly narrow, up to 5m across, penetrating up to 0.25m into the Terrace Gravels.

Remnants of a buried soil could be vaguely defined within the ridges of the medieval cultivation where these deposits had not been disturbed by modern ploughing. However, field observations by Dr CAI French of Cambridge University indicated that the potential for soil micromorphological analysis was minimal due to the degree of medieval and modern plough disturbance.

Trench 3

Maximum lengths of 83 east-west and 87m north-south.
Excavated to a maximum depth of 0.52m

An area of 3,207 sq m was stripped of topsoil and subsoil in order to investigate and record the interrupted ring ditch and associated features recognised during earlier site investigations (Kemp 1993). The investigation area was surveyed and located using plans supplied by Archaeological and Historical Services. This area included an area to the east and south of the ring ditch as indicated in Figure 2.

Machine excavation levels had to be adjusted when crossing the line of the irrigation pipe which crosses the site. At this point only the topsoil was removed, with the full depth of excavation continued south of the pipeline.

An area of 4m in width and 52m in length was excavated to the south of the ring ditch crossing the area proposed for the petrol station (Figure 2 and 4). As explained earlier due to a paucity of archaeology machine excavation was halted following the exposure of 3,207 sq m of the investigation area with Trench 3.

The archaeological and natural features are numbered in chronological order

Context Description and Interpretation

No.

'Natural' sands and gravels, largely composed of flint and quartzite pebbles in a medium to coarse sand matrix. The Third Terrace Gravels.

21

Depth 0 - 0.45m

Alluvial subsoil composed of clayey sandy silts. In the main topsoil of 0.30m in depth either overlay natural sands and gravels or a disturbed alluvial deposit of up to 0.12m in depth. In places an undisturbed alluvial deposit of about 0.10m in depth, which become deeper within the palaeochannel existed beneath the disturbed alluvium. A maximum machine depth of 0.52m was achieved.

During machine excavation infilled tree bole and root features were observed at the junction between the disturbed and undisturbed alluvium. During selective cleaning no archaeology was revealed and therefore this deposit was removed by machine to reveal the Terrace Gravels. At this point the archaeology was visible, it also became apparent that the archaeological remains cut across the tree bole features which were recognised at a higher level in the stratigraphic sequence. This evidence suggests that at least two major episodes of alluvial activity occurred within the area, one early post-glacial deposit into which the trees took root and the other Bronze Age in date as recognised during the 1993 evaluations and the 1984 excavations by Herne (Herne unpub, Kemp 1993).

The low visibility of any archaeological remains within the alluvium may be accounted for by the alluvium being the source of the ditch fills and therefore the archaeology was very difficult to distinguish from the background sediments, and that the complexity of hydrological and biogenic activity within the area has diffused the boundaries between the feature infill and alluvial deposits.

M13

14,15; 16,17; 18, 19

Width 0.70m Depth 0.15m Length >20.20m

M13 was undated on completion of these excavations. This feature was overlain by the disturbed alluvial deposit and cuts through the alluvium.

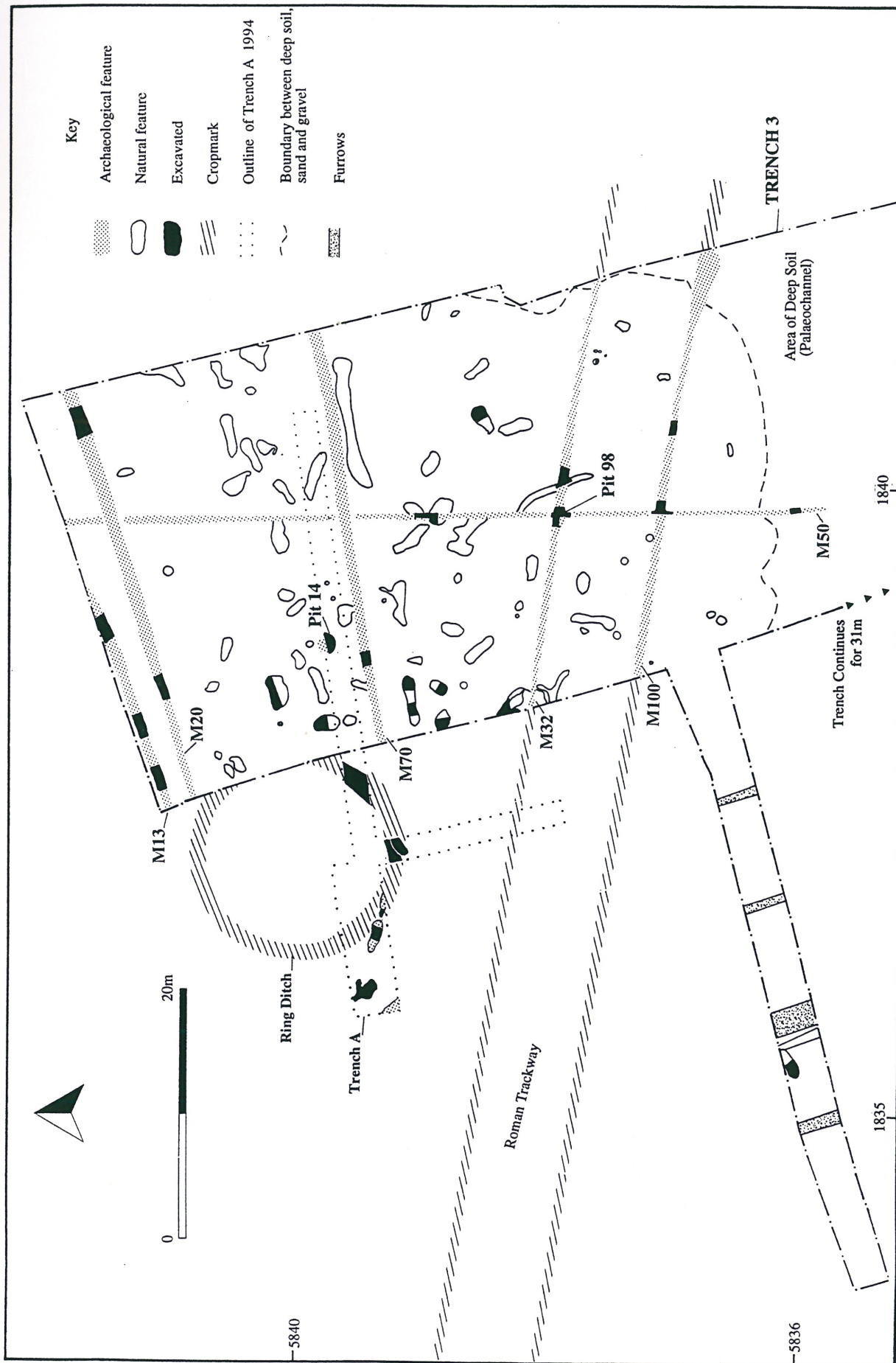


Figure 2 Plan of Trench 3 showing excavated features and cropmarks.

No. Description and Interpretation

East-west orientated curvilinear lying on the northern edge of Trench 3. A very shallow, flat-based ditch with slightly concave basal edges. This feature lies directly below the topsoil, cutting into the terrace gravels, and is filled with brown to yellow brown (10YR 5/4-5/6) sandy clayey silts with a high proportion of sub-angular flint gravels up to 0.07m in maximum length. Although three segments were excavated through the ditch no finds were recovered. This ditch has no stratigraphic relationships with any of the other features recognised within the trench, the feature therefore remained undated.

Unfortunately, this ditch did not feature on any of the aerial photographs and therefore its full extent and nature remain unknown. However, given the proximity of this shallow ditch to prehistoric settlement remains it could be the remains of a prehistoric enclosure, possibly of Iron Age date, related to agriculture.

M50

48,49; 51, 55, 52; 89, 90; 104, 105

Width 0.34m Depth 0.16m Length >61m

Based on cut relationships **M50** proved to be one of the earliest linear ditches within the excavation area. This feature cuts through the alluvium.

North-south orientated linear ditch cut by **M20**, **M32**, **M70**, and probably **M100** although pit **98** cuts through both ditches at their intersection. **M50** was clearly seen to cut through the alluvium and various tree boles. The relationship between this feature and **M13** is unknown. Four segments were excavated through **M50**, which proved to be a shallow U-shaped ditch with a slightly concave base. Levels on the base of the ditch indicate that it dips slightly southwards at a rate of 1:150. This may suggest that this ditch had a drainage function leading across the infilled palaeochannel which lay on the southern side of the investigation area and possibly into a contemporary channel which lay further to the south.

M50 was filled with silty clays and clayey sandy silts which were yellow brown in colour (10YR 4/4). Occasional sub-rounded flint and quartzite gravels of 0.05m in maximum length. No finds were recovered.

This shallow north-south orientated linear ditch is probably the remnants of an Iron Age or Romano-British field system which is not visible on the aerial photographs.

M20

22, 23; 45, 46

Width <1.73m Depth 0.12m Length >34m

More recent than **M50**. Cuts the alluvium.

East-west orientated ditch cutting through **M50** and lying directly below the topsoil. The excavation of two segments showed the ditch to be shallow and flat based, with irregular slightly concave sides. The ditch is filled with a yellow brown (10YR 4/6) to light brown (2.5YR 4/4) sandy silts and clays, with a high percentage of flint gravel (30%) up to 0.02m in maximum length. No finds were recovered.

A shallow ditch, which is probably the remnants of a boundary to the Romano-British field system. **M20** ditch runs almost parallel with **M70** and both ditches seem to converge on the ring ditch. This ditch does not appear on any of the aerial photographs.

M70

45, 46

Width 0.80m Depth 0.17m Length >34m

More recent than **M50**. Cuts the alluvium.

No. Description and Interpretation

East-west orientated ditch cutting through **M50** and lying directly below the topsoil. Excavation showed the ditch to have a slightly concave base and sides. The ditch was filled with yellow brown (10R 4/6) clay and sand with occasional flint gravel up to 0.04m in maximum length. No finds were recovered.

A shallow ditch, which is probably the remnants of a boundary to the Romano-British field system. **M70** ditch runs almost parallel with **M20** and both ditches seem to converge on the ring ditch. This ditch does not appear on any of the aerial photographs.

M32

60, 62,61; 82, 83

Width 0.40-0.90m -- Depth 0.47m Length >34.5m
More recent than **M50**. Cuts the alluvium.

Northeast-southwest orientated ditch of variable width, being between 0.40 and 0.90m wide. The widest point occurs at the junction between **M32** and **M50**. Unlike **M100** no pit occurs at the intersection between these two ditches. It would appear that this widening results from **M32** cutting through the fill of **M50** a deposit more susceptible to erosion than the terrace gravels, or that the ditch was overcut at this point during its original excavation. **M32** is filled with yellow brown (10YR 5/6 - 5/8) clayey sandy silts and clayey silts, with occasional flint gravels up to 0.05 in maximum length which lay at the base of the ditch. No finds were recovered, however, excavation in 1993 indicated a late Roman, or more recent date, for the infilling of this ditch.

M32 is the northern boundary ditch to a Romano-British trackway visible cropmarks which can be seen in Figures 1 and 2. This trackway may have connected the settlement located to the east of the development area with other Romano-British settlements to the north via a north-south trackway which lies to the west of the development area. The interruptions to the trackways which are visible on the aerial photographs may have given access to adjacent fields.

M100

106,107; 110, 112, 111

Width 0.50- 0.70m Depth 0.47 Length >34.5m
Cut by pit **98**. Cuts the alluvium.

Northeast southwest orientated ditch, between 0.50m and 0.70m wide which runs parallel to **M32**. The ditch is a shallow U-shaped ditch filled with dark greyish brown (10YR 4/2) silty clay, with a small sand component, and occasional sub-angular flint gravels of up to 0.04m in maximum dimension. The relationship between **M100** and **M50** has been removed by the insertion of pit **98**. It is believed that **M100** is the more recent of the two cuts as it runs parallel to **M32**, forming the southern ditch to the trackway shown on the aerial photographs. No finds were recovered.

M100 is the southern boundary ditch to a Romano-British trackway visible as cropmarks and can be seen in Figures 1 and 2. This trackway may connect the settlement located to the east of the development area with other Romano-British settlements to the north via a north-south trackway which lies to the west of the development area. The interruptions to the trackways which are visible on the aerial photographs may have given access to adjacent fields.

98, 99, 101
Diameter 1.0m Depth 0.50m
Cuts **M50** and **M100**.

Sub-circular pit located at the junction between **M50** and **M100** This is a pit with steep,

No. Description and Interpretation

concave sides and a flat base. The feature is filled with a dark yellowish brown (10YR 4/6) clayey silt with occasional flint gravels of up to 0.10m in maximum length. No finds were recovered.

6 DISCUSSION

Evidence for Palaeolithic and Mesolithic activity in the development area was absent. Recording works on the Terrace Gravels during construction works was not part of the Brief, even though, along the course of the Ouse Valley the terrace gravel deposits have commonly been the source of Palaeolithic artefacts. No such finds were reported by the construction team.

In 1993 an interrupted ring ditch with entrances on its northeastern and southwestern sides was partially excavated following identification from aerial photographs. Associated pits and post structures were identified as lying adjacent to this Bronze Age monument. At the time this archaeology was believed to be the ploughed out remains of either a Neolithic hengi-form monument or a round barrow of Bronze Age date (Kemp 1993).

Dateable Neolithic and Bronze Age activity proved to be largely absent in 1994, including the interrupted ring ditch and associated deposits which were suspected to lie within the development area as shown in Figure 2. It is important to note that the ring ditch was not encountered during the course of this phase of works, although a pit observed during the 1993 evaluation was again identified during the present programme of work.

Having confirmed the location of the ring ditch on the basis of pit 14, Figure 2, it is clear that the area defined for investigation would have provided access only to the eastern side of the ring ditch. No evidence for the ring ditch was encountered, however, but as noted in the evaluation report the ring ditch was a very shallow feature cutting only 0.25m into the gravels and was barely discernible on its eastern side (Kemp 1993, 4). Sections around the edge of Trench 3 were checked to verify the absence of the ring ditch and a number of natural features excavated to confirm their nature. As can be seen in Figure 2 no curvilinear pattern of natural features, which could have been interpreted by Air Photo Services as a ring ditch was evident within the investigation area.

Against the northern section of the trench lay a curvilinear ditch (**M13**) which remained undated, but could be one of the earliest ditches on site. This may be the remains of a prehistoric enclosure associated with one of the early settlements described in Section 3.

Another early feature within the excavation area of 1994 was **M50**, which was found to cut through the area of deeper soil lying on the southern side of Trench 3. The stratigraphic evidence discussed below suggests that this ditch was partially infilled when the Romano-British trackway was laid out. **M50** therefore

probably represents a boundary ditch to a late prehistoric or early Romano-British field, which went out of use during the realignment of the Romano-British field system which is discussed below.

M50 is cut by the other two alignments, the east-west ditches **M20** and **M70**, and the northwest-southeast ditches **M32** and **M100**. No finds were recovered from either of these alignments, however, in 1993 Roman pottery was found within **M32**. **M20** and **M70** appear to respect the Bronze Age ring ditch which was identified in 1993, and could have terminated at this point. These ditches are believed to be the remnants of late prehistoric or Romano-British field boundaries, which seem to have created a small parcel of land leading up to, and including, an upstanding barrow. This was presumably an area where it was not possible to plough and may have acted as a focus for one of the late Iron Age or Romano-British field systems. It is surprising that such a long narrow corridor delineating the barrow was marked out. This could suggest that this barrow and/or the corridor had a certain significance to the Iron Age or Romano-British populations which is not represented in the archaeological record.

The intersection between **M50** and **M100** has been removed by the imposition of pit **98** on the stratigraphy. This may indicate that both **M50**, **M100** and probably **M32** were visible, although probably largely infilled, at this time. In which case, **M50** would have resulted in a linear depression at right angles to the parallel trackway boundary ditches (**M32** and **M100**) and crossing the trackway. However, the different fills within the two ditches systems (**M32/M100** and **M50**) and the absence of pitting at the junction between **M50** and **M32**, possibly indicates that **M50** was only visible on the southern intersection and had been infilled across the trackway. Alternatively the placement of pit **98** was fortuitous. Pit **98** is likely to represent the archaeological remains of a marker post along the course of the trackway. Without any additional evidence for such posts within the development or evaluation areas it is difficult to be clear on the function of these posts, however on such a trackway close to settlement such posts are quite likely to identify property or field boundaries.

The parallel ditches **M32** and **M100** represent a Roman-British trackway leading westwards away from the settlement shown in Figure 1 (Kemp 1993). The interruptions to these ditches apparent on the air photographs and recorded in the 1993 evaluation have been interpreted as providing access to the Roman field system. However, excavations have shown that these ditches are not visible where they cut across areas of deep alluvial soils and therefore not all of the interruptions represent gateways into adjacent fields. It is therefore possible that some of these interruptions in the ditches reflect areas of deeper soil and have been obscured as cropmarks. Unfortunately, given the incomplete nature of the aerial photographic record and the evidence for the restructuring of the late prehistoric and Romano-British field systems it would be inappropriate to attempt to estimate the size of either the late Prehistoric or Romano-British fields and use this information to suggest the nature of the agricultural economy or the social interaction of adjacent communities.

Figure 2 shows a number of north-northwest to south-southeast aligned features along the western extension to Trench 3, these appear to be furrows associated

with medieval cultivation. These strips can be seen on the Estate map of the Earl of Sandwich drawn in 1757 (Huntingdon Record Office MD2 maps 20+21, Way 1993). East-west orientated ridge and furrow was recorded in Trench B during the evaluation. It is apparent that the boundary separating these two furlongs should have crossed the investigation area, particularly as this land division survived until at least 1882. Such a boundary can commonly preserve the remains of a buried soil, beneath the ridge of soil that tends to build up in such areas, but, in this case the absence of any earthwork within the field indicates that this ridge has been levelled and any buried soil subsequently destroyed by ploughing.

Results from the evaluation, excavation and aerial photographic research suggests that alluviation is largely a prehistoric phenomenon occurring prior to the laying out of the Iron Age/Romano-British field system and after the development of the late Neolithic/Bronze Age ritual landscape. Excavations in adjacent areas have also shown prehistoric monuments to underlie alluvial sediments (Herne unpub, Macaulay 1994). The observation that tree root remains, which suggest a wooded landscape prior to the Neolithic, penetrated into a basal alluvial deposit indicates an earlier phase of alluviation which spread beyond the excavation area and may have been in association with flood deposits emanating from the infilled palaeochannel which cuts through the development area.

Detailed soil micromorphological analysis undertaken by Dr French on the late Neolithic buried soil which was preserved beneath the barrow excavated in 1984 indicates that the area was under stable woodland conditions during the Neolithic (French unpub). This forest was cleared and disturbed by cultivation prior to the construction of the barrow excavated by Herne in 1984. These results are consistent with findings within our recent excavations. French also identified periodic alluviation following the development of the ritual landscape indicating that episodes of flooding had an influence on the local landscape over a long period of time.

French suggests that increasing seasonal wetness in the early Bronze Age made this area more marginal and therefore less suitable for arable cultivation. Marginalisation may therefore have influenced the decision to use the area as a ritual landscape (French unpub).

7 CONCLUSION

Although no Neolithic or Bronze Age remains were recovered during these excavations, this area was part of a wider prehistoric landscape within which prehistoric populations were very active as shown by the presence of settlement remains and ritual monuments in the surrounding areas. Archaeological remains adjacent to the development area consist of cursus enclosures and ring ditches indicative of a 'ritual' landscape. Prior to the development of the late Neolithic/Bronze Age ritual landscape this stretch of land alongside the River Great Ouse was settled by Neolithic populations who farmed the land subsequent to an episode of tree clearance, although, no evidence was found during these excavations

which relate to the clearance of the earlier woodland by human agencies.

The archaeological evidence from the 1994 excavations presented within this report largely consists of Roman or pre-medieval landscape features which include trackways and field systems. Settlement remains dating to these periods lie to the east and north of the development area (Kemp 1993, Alexander 1993, Palmer 1993). Elements of the Saxon landscape lie to the southwest (Herne unpub) and at Eynesbury, St Neots and Eaton Socon. The arable field systems which formed part of the Earl of Sandwich's estate form the remnants of the medieval landscape apparent in this area.

The absence of archaeological features can be misleading when judging the relative importance of a piece of land to the local population. In all of these periods, the local population would have been utilising this part of their landscape, firstly for agricultural purposes before the later construction of the Bronze Age monuments which were used for ceremonial purposes associated with death and burial. By the late Iron Age the land had been returned to agricultural use, an activity which commonly leaves little evidence other than field boundaries, occasional pitting, ploughmarks or the development of ridge and furrow in the medieval period.

Due to the disruption of the archaeological and natural sequence by ploughing an analysis of the affects of alluviation on the local landscape and the response by the contemporary population to flooding has been difficult to assess. Results from these excavations suggest that a major period of alluviation occurred at sometime during the prehistoric period and probably initiated the human landuse response which led to the creation of the surrounding ritual landscape.

One of the major influences on the development of the archaeological landscape is the riverine regime. This has affected the landuse strategy and caused a change from settlement/agricultural to ritual and then later a return to a solely agricultural landuse along this gravel terrace. The economic and social strategies of the local population that would also have had a bearing on the activities undertaken on this piece of land. It is believed that the risk of flooding also influenced the orientation of strips within the medieval open field.

The surviving remains of former landscapes also appear to have had a major influence on the development of the local landscape. For example, within the development area we have seen how a barrow has been used as a marker within the Late Iron Age and early Roman periods and possibly as a pivotal point to their early field systems. In addition it is suspected that the Romano-British trackway system had a major influence on the layout of the medieval field system.

The mitigation strategy proposed following the archaeological evaluations undertaken in 1993 was seen through to completion with the preservation by record of the major archaeological features lying within the zone of disturbance identified by the County Archaeological Office and Tesco's archaeological consultant. The interrupted ring ditch identified in 1993 proved to be largely outside of the development zone and in the main unaffected by the construction activities. Where the ring ditch should have impinged on the development zone

the monument appears to have already been ploughed out. The condition of the ring ditch in 1994 should not have been too surprising given the results of the 1993 evaluation and the absence of the ring ditch on aerial photographs since 1959.

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