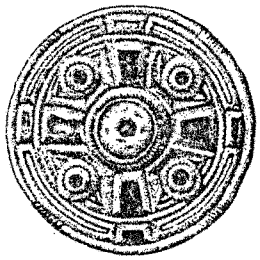
cambridgeshire archaeology
ARCHAEOLOGY FIELD OFFICE
FULBOURN COMMUNITY CENTRE
HAGGIS GAP, FULBOURN
CAMBRIDGE CB1 5HD Tel: 881614
(Fax



Archaeological Field Unit

An Archaeological Evaluation at The King's School, Ely

S Leith

1996

Cambridgeshire County Council

Report No. A80

Commissioned By Purcell Miller Tritton & Partners on behalf of the King's School

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Editor B Robinson BSc, MA

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Archaeological Field Unit
Cambridgeshire County Council
Fulbourn Community Centre
Haggis Gap, Fulbourn
Cambridgeshire CB1 5HD
Tel (01223) 881614
Fax (01223) 880946

SUMMARY

In November, 1995 the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council carried out an archaeological evaluation of land at the Barton Farm site of the King's School, Ely (TL 5376/7984). The work was carried out for Purcell Miller Tritton and Partners on behalf of the King's School, in advance of a proposed extension to the Junior School.

An earthwork survey was completed of the remains of a medieval ridge and furrow field system. Documentary evidence suggests that this field was enclosed and turned over to pasture in the late medieval period.

Evaluation trenching revealed a linear ditch which predated, and was truncated by, the ridge and furrow. No dating evidence was recovered from this feature.

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INTRODUCTION

Between November 24th and November 29th, 1995 the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council carried out an archaeological evaluation of land at the Barton Farm site of the King's School, Ely (TL 5376/7984). The work was carried out for Purcell Miller Tritton and Partners on behalf of the King's School, in advance of a proposed extension to the Junior School.

The site lies on Boulder Clay, on land sloping from 24m OD in the south to 22m in the north. The land is used at present as a sports field, and contains earthworks indicative of medieval ridge and furrow cultivation.

HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

Evidence of Neolithic and Bronze Age activity has been found on the lighter soils of the Ely highland and on the fen edge in this area (Hall forthcoming; Robinson 1994, 4). These fertile soils were preferred to the heavier clay soils found elsewhere on the highland, and the proximity of the fen allowed the exploitation of a valuable variety of resources. Recent work by the Cambridge Archaeological Unit about 1km south-west of the evaluation site, revealed a distribution of artefacts indicating late Neolithic / early Bronze Age occupation on the fen edge to the south-west of the Ely highland (Alexander 1994).

Iron Age activity appears to be concentrated on the northern end of the Ely highland, and stray finds of Roman date have been found within the city (Robinson 1994, 5).

The site lies outside the developed areas of the medieval town of Ely, and it was originally part of Ely's open or common fields. The common field system was in existence in this region by at least the fourteenth century (Taylor 1975, 92). Broad open lands were divided into large fields cultivated in common in the form of long, narrow strips. The remnants of this form of cultivation are still visible in the evaluation area as earthworks of ridge and furrow.

The evaluation area is adjacent to the site of Barton Farm. This farm was part of the manor of Barton, which was already in existence by 1109 when it became part of the bishop of Ely's endowment (Owen 1993, 11). When the episcopal see was created in 1109, the bishop's charter spoke of granting tithes of his 'Manor of Barton' to the prior and convent (Pugh 1953, 47). At this time, the property of the monastery was divided between the convent and the bishop. This inevitably led to complaints, and the monks claimed that the bishop had kept all the best manors for himself (Salzman 1948, 204). This no doubt included Ely Barton, which was later known as the 'paramount manor' (Pugh 1953, 48).

In the fifteenth century, Barton Farm was held on lease by the bishop's bailiff, and at the time of the dissolution it was leased by Nicholas Steward. At the close of the Civil War, it was sold to Richard Cromwell (the Protector's son), but it later returned to the episcopal estate, and was henceforth leased.

The field which included the evaluation area appears to have been enclosed and become part of Barton Farm during the later medieval period. A document recording an enquiry

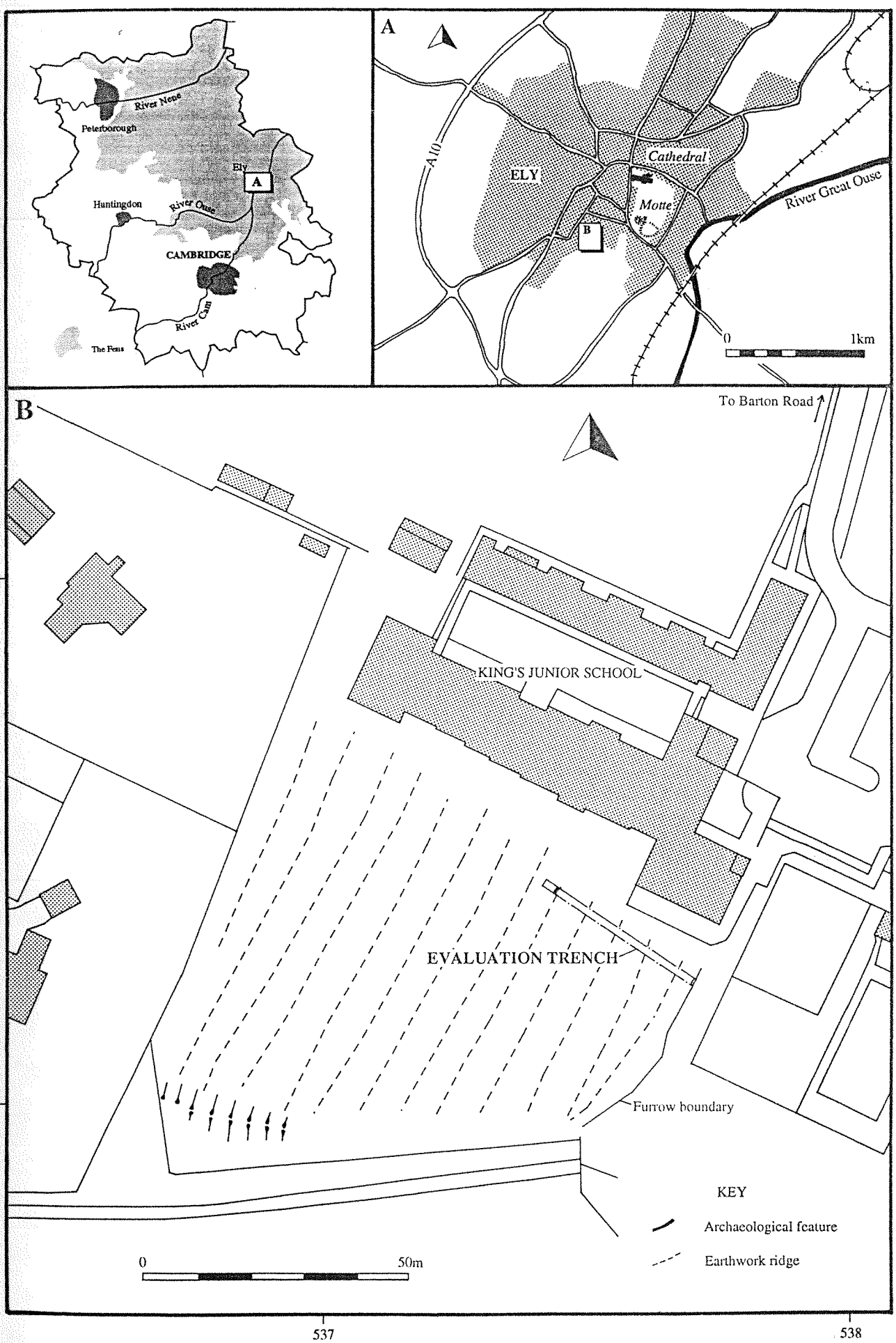

Figure 1 *Site Location Plan and Earthwork Survey*

into enclosure of arable land for pasture in 1548 includes complaints about Barton Farm (Palmer 1936). The bishop's bailiff is recorded to have enclosed parts of the Barton manor in the late fifteenth century (Palmer 1936, 372). This included 'Tylekyln Close' and 'Gravell Pytte Close'. The latter probably refers to the field immediately to the south of the evaluation area, which is named 'Barton Pitts' on the eighteenth century plan of Barton Farm (CRO R65/16). This field is now part of the golf course, and irregular depressions which correspond to quarrying are still visible. Until its enclosure, this was common land used by the public for digging sand and gravel for the upkeep of roads (Holmes & Rouse 1972, 47).

A further episode of enclosure at Barton Farm was undertaken by Nicholas Steward in the first half of the sixteenth century. He was interested in sheep farming, and to this end he enclosed more land. He added to the farm by enclosing part of the adjoining Cawdle Fen and encroaching on the highway (Palmer 1936, 377).

It is probable that the field which included the evaluation area was enclosed and had already become part of Barton Farm by this time. This was certainly the case by the late eighteenth century when it was named 'Ash Close' and marked as pasture on the plan of Barton Farm.

Barton Farm continued to be leased until 1971 when the Church Commissioners sold the land, partly to the King's School, and partly to the City of Ely Golf Club.

METHODOLOGY

The evaluation was intended to determine the location, extent, date, character, condition, significance and quality of any surviving archaeological remains liable to be threatened by the proposed development. This would involve the mapping and recording of an adequate representative sample of archaeological remains and, where appropriate, the collection of artefactual and environmental samples.

To this end, the project comprised two phases: an earthwork survey and a programme of trenching.

Earthwork Survey

An earthwork survey was conducted of the remnants of the ridge and furrow field system. This survey was carried out using a Zeiss Recelta 15 Total Station Theodolite and AIC Pro-surveyor software to produce a plan of the earthworks (Figure 1).

The earthwork survey was used as an opportunity to involve some of the students from King's Junior School. An exercise using a Total Station Theodolite and a Plane Table allowed the students to compare surveying methods, and gave them an introduction to the archaeology of the local area.

Trenching

The trenching was intended to determine whether earlier archaeological remains existed beneath the upstanding earthworks, and to determine the character, date, and state of preservation of any remains revealed. A single linear trench 35m long was located in the area of the proposed extension (Figure 1). It was machine excavated using a JCB with a 1.5m wide toothless ditching bucket. The trench was then cleaned and photographed, and the archaeological features revealed were sample excavated. These were planned

and recorded according to the Archaeological Field Unit's standard single context recording system.

RESULTS

Earthwork Survey

The earthwork survey recorded the remnants of a ridge and furrow field system, characteristic of medieval open field cultivation (Figure 1). The ridges were aligned with the natural slope of the local area (south-south-west to north-north-east), and measured *c* 6m to 7m wide between furrows. The difference in height between the top of the ridges and the base of the furrows was *c* 0.20m. The ridges followed a slight reverse S curve, which is typical of medieval strip farming.

The easternmost furrow curved slightly towards the south-west, and appeared to correspond with a boundary visible on maps as early as the late eighteenth century (Plan of Barton Farm, CRO R65/16). This boundary may have persisted until 1971 when the land was purchased by the King's School.

To the south-west, the ridge and furrow ended at a bank which is at present planted with trees. This bank did not appear to be a headland, but a boundary which post-dated the ridge and furrow.

Trenching

The trench was excavated to the natural clay beneath the ridge and furrow, to a depth of 22.05m OD at the east end of the trench, and 22.26m at the west end..

A narrow linear feature was revealed, **2**, which predated, and was truncated by, the ridge and furrow. It was aligned north-north-east to south-south-west, on the same alignment as the ridge and furrow. It was straight with parallel sides, and measured 0.50m wide and 0.20m deep. The profile was roughly U-shaped, with the base sloping down towards the east. The fill, (1), was a compact yellowish brown silty sandy clay which contained no dating evidence.

The soil profile showed *c* 0.10m of turf and topsoil overlying a layer of dark greyish brown sandy clay silt (8). This layer varied from 0.10m to 0.20m thick, being thickest where it corresponded with the furrows of the medieval cultivation. This layer has been interpreted as a post-medieval or modern ploughsoil. It contained a few fragments of tile, one peg tile, one sherd of very abraded Roman pottery, one of post-1600 red ware, one of local late medieval Ely ware, animal bone, and oyster shell.

This recent ploughsoil overlay the relict ploughsoil of the ridge and furrow. This was a layer 0.20m to 0.40m thick, of yellowish brown silty sandy clay (3). This layer contained one tile fragment (possibly Roman), one pottery sherd of possible Saxon date, and one worked flint. The furrows had cut into the natural clay slightly, but the shape of the ridge and furrow at its lower horizon was not as pronounced as might have been expected.

The easternmost furrow mentioned above was at least 0.10m deeper than the others, and it was cut along its length by a modern linear trench with straight vertical sides, possibly a services trench. This implies that this boundary was still visible or in use until fairly recently.

DISCUSSION

The extant earthworks of medieval ridge and furrow cultivation represent the major evidence of previous activity on the site. The only earlier feature revealed within the evaluation trench was a linear ditch of unknown date which, like the later ridge and furrow, was aligned with the slope. This ditch might represent an earlier boundary, and it is possible that the ridge and furrow was laid out following its alignment. The degree of truncation to this feature suggests that any evidence of earlier activity in this field will have been disturbed by the medieval cultivation.

The width of the ridges at 6 to 7m is somewhat narrow in comparison with many medieval ridge and furrow sites in Cambridgeshire. For example, those recorded recently in Godmanchester and in Little Thetford measured *c* 10m wide (Oakey 1995, 4; Gdaniec 1994, fig 2), and those at Upherds Lane, Ely measured 7.5m to 8m wide (Taylor-Wilson 1992, 15). The ridges at Longstanton, at 7m wide, were similar to those at the King's School, and these sites may be more characteristic of the Midlands type of ridge and furrow system (Evans 1991, 44; Hall 1984, 48).

This part of the open fields of Ely appears to have been enclosed and turned over to pasture in the late medieval period. The soil profile revealed in the evaluation trench showed that at some point in the post-medieval or modern periods this field was ploughed for a limited time. This resulted in the slightly flattened, ploughed-down appearance of the ridge and furrow earthworks. The easternmost furrow appears to have persisted as a boundary until recently, suggesting a continuity of land boundaries from the medieval to modern periods.

CONCLUSION

This evaluation has provided a survey of the earthworks at the Barton Farm site of the King's School, Ely, and has established that evidence of earlier archaeological activity on this site is both minimal and truncated by medieval cultivation. The proposed development would not, therefore, have a significant impact on archaeological remains.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank Purcell Miller Tritton and Partners on behalf of the King's School for commissioning this evaluation, Mr. Anderson and Mr Ayers of the King's School for their cooperation, Wendy Wilson for her assistance on site, Paul Spoerry for spot dating the pottery, Caroline Gait for her advice on the illustration, and Ben Robinson for managing the project. This evaluation was conducted in response to a brief drawn up by the County Archaeology Office (Louise Austin, October 1995).

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Plan of Barton Farm, late 18th century, CRO R65/16

OS Draft 1" Map, 1811

Ely Tithe Apportionment Map, 1846, CRO 439/P14

OS Map (First edition), 1887

APPENDIX A - Context List ELY BF 95

Cntxt	*Description*	*Nature*	*Finds*	*Above*	*Below*
1	Fill of linear cut 2	Yellowish brown (10YR 4/6) silty sandy clay	None	2	3
2	Linear cut	Straight linear cut with u-shaped profile	-	5	1
3	Med ploughsoil	Yellowish brown (10YR 5/4) silty sandy clay	1 tile fragment (Ro?), 1 pot sherd (Saxon), 1 worked flint	1	8
4	Same as 6 and 8	-	-	-	-
5	Natural	Greyish brown (10YR 5/2) clay	None	-	2
6	Turf and topsoil	Dark greyish brown (10YR 4/2) sandy clay silt	None	9	-
7	Fill of furrow boundary	Dark greyish brown (10YR 4/2) sandy clay silt	Modern and post-med pot	8	10
8	Ploughsoil	Dark greyish brown (10YR 4/2) sandy clay silt	Tile fragments, 1 Ro pot sherd, 1 late med sherd, 1 post-med sherd, animal bone, oyster shell	3	7
9	Fill of linear cut 10	Mixed dark greyish brown (10YR 4/2) sandy silty clay and redeposited natural clay	Modern pot, brick, iron fragments	10	6
10	Linear cut	Straight linear cut with vertical sides	-	7	9

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Fulbourn Community Centre
Haggis Gap
Fulbourn
Cambridge CB1 5HD
Tel (01223) 881614
Fax (01223) 880946