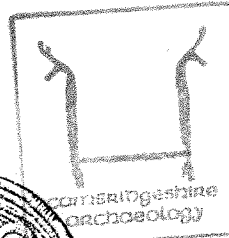
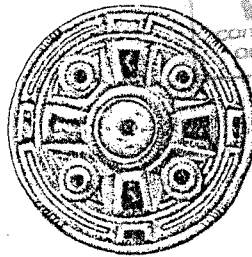


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Archaeological Field Unit

Feoffees School, Main Street, Little Downham An Archaeological Desktop Assessment

Judith Roberts

1996

Cambridgeshire County Council

Report No. A84

Commissioned By Property Management Services, Cambridgeshire County Council

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An Archaeological Desktop Assessment**

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SUMMARY

The study was undertaken to attempt to define the archaeological potential of land at the rear of Feoffes Primary School, Main Street, Little Downham (TL 5249 8419) and to determine the potential impact of the proposed development on land to the north of the existing school buildings. The site is located approximately 4km to the north west of Ely within the area of the medieval village and is currently used as a playing field. This study is based on a site visit, historical and cartographic sources and existing air photographs.

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**FEOFFEES SCHOOL, MAIN STREET, DOWNHAM
AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL DESKTOP ASSESSMENT
(TL 5249/8419)**

1 INTRODUCTION

The desk-top study was commissioned by Property Management Services of Cambridgeshire County Council in response to a brief issued by the Archaeology Section (Development Control Office) of the County Council following a planning application to build a replacement school to the north of existing school buildings. The brief required the archaeological character of the site to be identified and the potential impact of development proposals (including associated access, services and landscaping) to be established.

The site covers an area of approximately 1.3ha located at the rear of Feoffees Primary School which fronts on to the historic main street of Little Downham (see Figure 1) and immediately to the south of the boundary of a medieval deer park belonging to the Bishop of Ely's Palace.

2 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

The site lies on an area of upland within the fens (a ridge at approximately 15m OD) comprised of glacial sands and gravel overlying Boulder Clay which in turn overlies Kimmeridge Clay (BGS Sheet 173). Little Downham is situated on one of several ridges extending north and westwards from Ely. To the north of the Downham ridge is a fringe of clayey skirtland. The areas of upland in the fen were formerly islands isolated by undrained marshes. They provided some permanent pasture when the seasonal pastures on the fens were inundated, a stable basis for arable regimes, horticulture and settlement from the medieval period onwards. Drainage of the fens around Downham was locally organised until 1258 but thereafter was part of a more formal drainage scheme (Coleman 1984). From the seventeenth century fenland drainage became effective and the marshland, with intermittent summer grazing, changed to predominantly arable agriculture. The strip of fine textured soils along the crest of the ridge from Ely to Little Downham (between 12 and 18m OD), formerly supporting orchards, was not suitable for intensive arable farming but more suited to mixed agriculture with some pasture (Seale 1975). Much of the agricultural land on and around the ridge is currently arable.

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE SITE

3.1 Prehistoric

Mesolithic and Neolithic occupation of the fens and fen uplands is attested around Little Downham by stone tools and the debris from tool manufacture recorded on the County Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) (SMR Nos. 7137, 7146, 7151, 7152, 7153, 7159, 11761, 11762), and discovered during the Fenland Project field survey (Hall and Coles 1994). These finds come both from the Downham

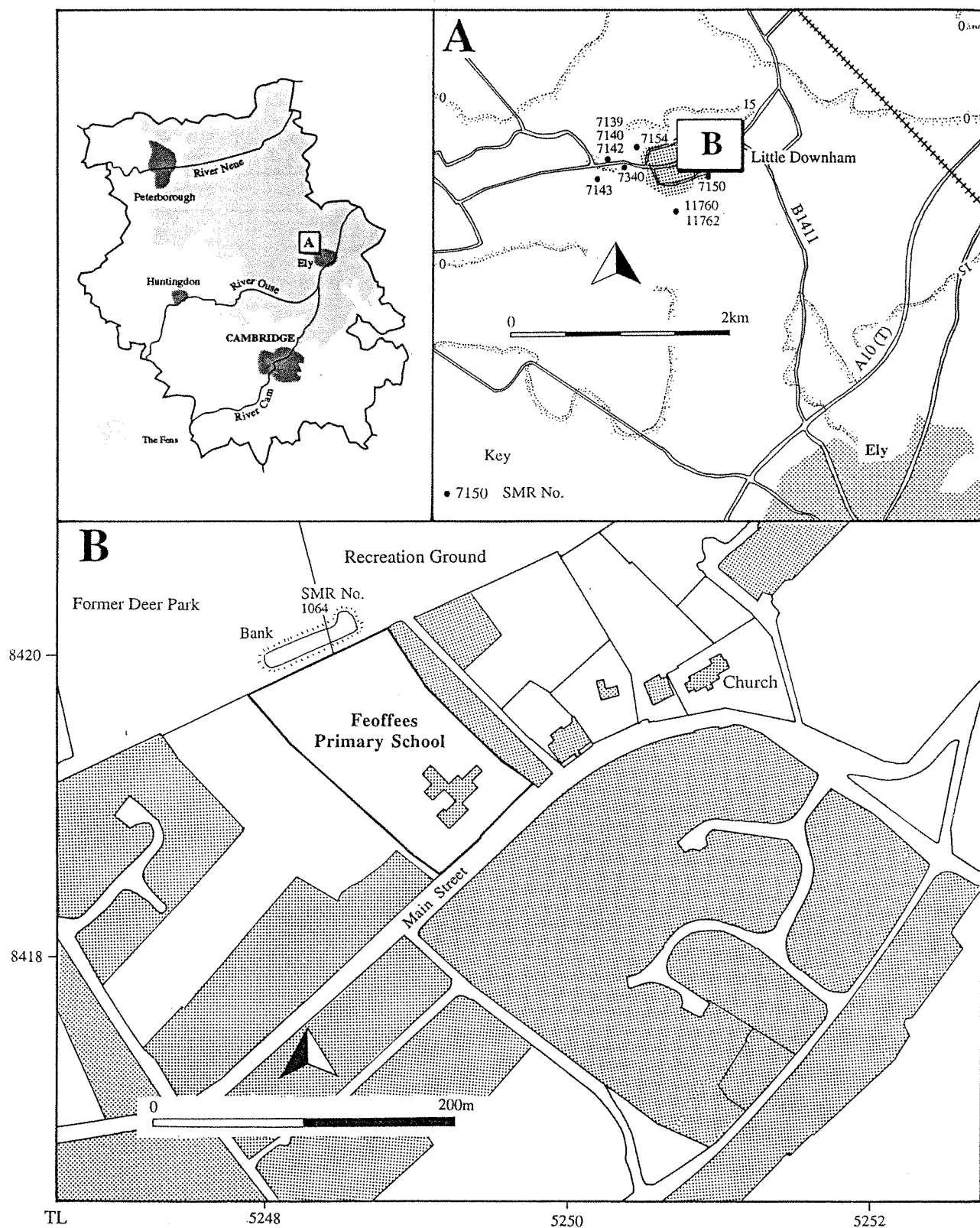


Figure 1 Location map

upland and surrounding fen but there is as yet no concentration of finds suggesting more than just periodic use of the area. A single stone hammer of prehistoric date is also recorded (SMR No. 7147) in the fenland to the north of the study area.

There is much stronger evidence of use of the fen islands and the fen edge during the Bronze Age with burial mounds evident on the higher land, on spurs and false crests where they could be seen from the valley and fen edge occupation sites (Taylor 1973). The SMR indicates the site of a Bronze Age burial mound at the western end of the village, discovered during mineral extraction (SMR No. 7340). Other stray Bronze Age finds and crop marks interpreted as of Bronze Age date have been noted in the vicinity (SMR Nos. 7130, 7131, 7133, 7134, 7138, 7145, 7182).

3.2 Iron Age and Romano-British

Iron Age finds indicate settlement on the surrounding fen islands, as at Wardy Hill, Coveney (Evans 1992) to the south west of Little Downham. The number of Iron Age sites in the fens decreases from a relatively high number known to date to the early Iron Age to far fewer Late Iron Age sites (although the defensive works and associated settlement at Wardy Hill have been dated to the later part of the Iron Age, 1st century BC - early part of the 1st century AD). The decreasing number of Iron Age sites over time has been attributed to the fenlands becoming wetter and the extent of the marshland increasing (evidenced by the deposition of peat on the low lying land) (Taylor 1973). A quantity of Roman pottery was found beyond the western extremity of the village (above the 15m contour) during 1929 (SMR No. 7143) and in the fields to the south east (SMR No. 11761) but there is no clear evidence for Roman occupation of this part of the fen uplands.

3.3 Anglo-Saxon

The name of Little Downham derives from the Anglo-Saxon *dun* (meaning down or hill) and *ham* (an enclosure) (Skeat 1911), the 'Little' is a late addition to avoid confusion with Downham Market (in Norfolk) (Reaney 1943). Burials attributed to the Anglo-Saxon period on the basis of an association with a small-long brooch and a bronze pin were found in 1928 and 1934 (SMR No. 7150). At least six individuals have been identified. No finds other than burials have been reported. The presence of a possible cemetery indicates settlement on the upland which could be of either a nucleated or a dispersed nature but there is no indication that it would have occupied the present village site. A further, single, inhumation is also recorded to the west of the village (SMR No. 7142) but there is no supporting evidence for its precise dating. A stray Anglo-Saxon find (a copper alloy girdle hanger) was found during metal detecting in the arable land to the south of the village (SMR No. 11762b).

3.4 Medieval

Early records relate to the purchase of land at Downham by Aethelwold and Abbot Brithnoth for the monastery of Ely in c. 970. Subsequent records confirm the fact that lands at Downham formed part of the demesne of Ely (Pugh 1953, 90-96). After the foundation of the See of Ely land was allotted to the Bishop and the manor house at Little Downham became one of the main episcopal palaces and a popular residence amongst the Bishops. By the mid thirteenth century the manor comprised almost eleven square miles made up largely of a 250 acre deer park and two large fen lakes. The village was nucleated to the south of the parkland with

considerable dependence on sheep farming and the wool trade using the seasonal fenland pastures (Haigh 1988). Drainage and reclamation of the fen was undertaken during the second half of the thirteenth century and more land was put under the plough. Fruit trees and vines were grown on the upland. Epidemics in the early fourteenth century and the Black Death in the middle of the century brought about a major reduction in the population, dilapidation of the village and ruination of the manor house and associated dovecote and orchard (Coleman 1984).

3.5 Post-Medieval and modern

The village recovered during the fifteenth century and between 1486 - 1500 the Bishop's Palace was almost completely rebuilt. During the Commonwealth the estate was seized and sold. The settlement remained compact, built up along the main street with narrow backways to the rear of properties. The park continued to occupy the same area but the Palace was damaged during the Civil War and was largely demolished by the end of the eighteenth century. A farmhouse built during the nineteenth century incorporated the remains of the fifteenth century walls. The boundary bank and ditch, together with a pond (SMR No. 1064) on the southern side of the former deer park continued to be visible (Inclosure Map 1844 and 2nd Edition OS Map) into the twentieth century. As would be expected medieval pottery and coins (SMR Nos. 11760 and 11762c) have been found in and around the village.

The Inclosure Maps show a considerable pond in the north eastern corner of the land at the rear of Feoffees Primary School but this is reduced in size by the turn of the century (OS Map 1902). The maps also indicate buildings (agricultural rather than dwellings) in the south western corner and property boundaries and fence lines across the land. The Inclosure Map indicates the property was owned by Daniel Jones (see Figure 2) and there was a substantial house in the south eastern corner. The original Feoffees' School is now used as a Village Centre (Downham-in-the-Isle - The Village and Church) and 1851 Gazetteer records that the school was held in the ancient Guildhall. Pevsner (1970) states that original school is of late eighteenth century construction and the Victoria County History indicates that the feoffees of the Town Lands of Downham opened the school in 1779 in the village workhouse which was traditionally the site of the guildhall. It is likely that medieval properties extended along the street in this area, beyond the earlier Feoffees School (the guildhall), eastwards to the present site which was close to the centre of the medieval and post-medieval settlement.

The present Feoffees Primary School comprises single storey, flat roofed, weather boarded buildings dating to the second half of the 20th century. The present buildings stand back from the main street and west of the original school building.

4 POTENTIAL SURVIVAL OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL DEPOSITS

There is no indication that the land to the rear of Feoffees School has been built on and it is likely that during the past it was either used for pasture, fruit growing or arable and in more recent years as a school playing field. The main impact of buildings has been concentrated along the street front and to the east of the property, along School Lane. Nineteenth century agricultural buildings occupied the south western corner of the area with associated boundaries and fence lines. The north eastern part of the site has been a pond and the 2nd Edition OS Map shows a moat, bank and pond relating to the deer park immediately to the north of

the present property boundary (outside the proposed development area). The Inclosure Map 1844 indicates a large pond at the northern end of the site and OS Map and Inclosure Map show various boundary changes across the southern and eastern portion of the site which may be represented as fence lines, shallow ditches or drains or even hedge lines.

Post-medieval mineral extraction (at the western end of the village) and brick kilns (100m north east of the church) are recorded but it is not clear whether any form of quarrying took place on the site and if so how much it may have affected earlier features.

A visit to the site failed to reveal the presence of earthworks although the ground surface appears uneven. There is some evidence for 'terracing' although this may be a result of levelling in the recent past to produce the playing field. Tree planting across the site may also have affected the preservation of underlying archaeological features. The earthwork, marked as a moat, on earlier OS maps is now barely visible other than as a slight bump in the ground surface to the north of the proposed development area.

An aerial photographic assessment carried out as part of the study (see Appendix) showed possible evidence of medieval ridge and furrow crossing two fields to the north-west of the assessment area but other features revealed by the aerial photographs have been interpreted as relating to either agricultural activity or natural anomalies. The site has been photographed under managed grass which rarely reflects sub-soil anomalies suggesting that features may be present that have not been detected from the air.

Any archaeological remains are likely to survive as negative features beneath the present topsoil.

5 ARCHAEOLOGICAL POTENTIAL

The site appears to have been relatively undisturbed (with the exception of some levelling to create the playing field and tree planting), since the early medieval period and it is possible that prehistoric remains, particularly Bronze Age, and possibly Iron Age, may be preserved. The evidence for Anglo-Saxon occupation of the upland is currently only in the form of inhumations but it is likely (from the presence of a cemetery and place-name evidence) that there was occupation on the ridge in the immediate post-Roman period.

The archaeological potential of the site, therefore, lies in: i) the possible preservation of prehistoric remains; ii) in the location of the Anglo-Saxon settlement; iii) increasing understanding of the area beyond the boundaries of the medieval deer park; iv) and understanding the layout of the medieval buildings along the street front.

6 IMPACT OF THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

Detailed plans have not yet been submitted indicating the precise location of the proposed development but it is known it will be to the rear of the present building and thus away from the historic street front. The excavation of building foundations, service trenches and access routes will disturb and truncate any

features beneath the topsoil and possibly along the historic street front. The extent of the damage will depend on the depth of disturbance but it is likely to be considerable given the shallow nature of the soils on the ridge.

7 RECOMMENDATIONS

Test pitting or evaluation trenching in the area likely to be disturbed by the services, routeways and foundations would determine the character, date, extent and state of any archaeological remains. In all events groundwork should be monitored to ensure any remains disturbed during the development are fully recorded.

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SUMMARY OF SITES AND MONUMENTS RECORDS SHOWN ON FIGURE 1

SMR No.	Description	Location	Period
1064	Earthwork & pond	524 842	Medieval
7139	Wind pump & mill	516 839	Medieval/Post-medieval
7140	Wind pump & mill	514 839	Medieval/Post-medieval
7142	Burial	516 839	Anglo-Saxon?
7143	Pottery	517 837	Roman
7150	Burials	523 838	Roman? Anglo-Saxon?
7154	Building & Earthworks	519 842	Medieval
7340	Barrow	518 838	Bronze Age
11760	11th century coins	525 835	
11761	Metal detecting finds	523 835	Neolithic, Bronze Age, Roman, Medieval
11762	Metal detecting finds	524 836	Neolithic, Bronze Age, Saxon, Medieval

SUMMARY OF OTHER SMR ENTRIES FOR THE PARISH OF LITTLE DOWNHAM

7129	Pottery	503 836	Medieval
7130	Rapier	500 858	Bronze Age
7131	Flint scrapers	509 856	Bronze Age
7132	Windmill	501 864	Post-medieval
7133	Ring ditch	504 860	Bronze Age?
7134	Ring ditch	507 860	Bronze Age?
7135	Ring ditch	500 881	Unclassified
7137	Stone axe	508 884	Neolithic
7138	Socketed axe	509 883	Bronze Age
7144	Windmill	516 863	Post-medieval
7145	Socketed axe	511 883	Bronze Age
7146	Flint arrowhead	513 884	Neolithic
7147	Stone hammer	517 899	Prehistoric
7149	Windmill	521 838	Post-medieval
7151	Worked flint	523 849	Neolithic
7152	Axe	52- 84-	Neolithic
7153	Axe and flakes	522 855	Neolithic
7159	Axe and flakes	524 855	Mesolithic
7173	Enclosure	525 833	
7182	Spearhead	533 852	Bronze Age
7340	Barrow	518 838	Bronze Age
11581	Enclosure/trackway	526 814	
11785	Burial	526 842	

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**FEOFFEES PRIMARY SCHOOL,
LITTLE DOWNHAM, CAMBRIDGESHIRE
FIELD CENTRED TL525841**

AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHIC APPRAISAL

REPORT No: R87

JANUARY 1996

COMMISSIONED BY

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD UNIT
CAMBRIDGESHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
FULBOURN COMMUNITY CENTRE
HAGGIS GAP
FULBOURN
CAMBRIDGE CB1 5HD**

PARTNERS: ROG PALMER MA MIFA CHRIS COX MA MIFA

Archaeological consultants for aerial photographic interpretation, accurate mapping and oblique aerial photography

FEOFFEES PRIMARY SCHOOL, LITTLE DOWNHAM, CAMBRIDGESHIRE

FIELD CENTRED TL525841

AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHIC APPRAISAL

Rog Palmer MA MIFA

This appraisal of aerial photographs was commissioned to examine the playing field of Feoffees Primary School (centred TL525841) and its immediate environs in order to identify and accurately map archaeological and natural features and thus provide a context for field evaluation. The brief requested mapping, if relevant, at 1:2500.

Previous work in the area as part of the Fenland Survey suggested that little was likely to be identified on the aerial photographs and a two stages of work were proposed to Cambridgeshire Archaeological Field Unit and accepted. Stage one was to examine photographs available in Cambridge collections and, if it appeared worthwhile, to follow that with examination of any material held at the National Library of Air Photographs (NLAP), Swindon.

Aerial photographs from the Cambridge University Collection of Aerial Photographs and Cambridgeshire Record Office were examined. All were vertical photographs resulting from surveys on three dates between 1969 and 1988. An additional two flights dated 1945 or 1946 were shown on the Record Office index but prints for these could not be located. Photographs examined are listed at the end of this note.

Aerial observation has shown that any well-maintained playing field is likely to produce crop-marked information only at times of extreme drought. Neither of the summer surveys (1969 and 1988) coincided with such occasions and no archaeological information was identified within the assessment area. Some nearby fields were planted with cereal crops which showed crop-marked patterns – but these were due to field drains or caused by that year's agricultural activities. No archaeological evidence was apparent among these marks and little of such character is known on the soils in the Little Downham area (from reference to maps compiled during the Fenland Survey).

Photographs taken in March 1982 show tentative indications of what may be medieval ridge and furrow crossing two fields (centred TL522842) north-west of the assessment area. Elsewhere on those photographs there is evidence of recent land drains, agricultural marks and some natural features.

The earliest photographs examined showed there to have been a small water course – dry by 1969 and surviving as a shallow linear depression – which presumably drained off the island towards the north. This was recorded in the field centred TL524843 (also a playing field) which abuts the north side of the assessment area and it may have crossed the north-eastern part of the school field. This water course is much less distinct on later photographs.

Other than the possible ridge and furrow, none of the adjacent fields show any evidence of archaeological features that may continue into the assessment area. However, this view is

somewhat blinkered as fields to the west are allotments, those to the east are in domestic use, the village of Little Downham extends south of the area, while one of the fields abutting its northern boundary is a playing field. Other than in the school field itself, it is only the arable fields north of the village that offer any potential for indicating archaeological features that may be present in the assessment area.

Field work for the Fenland Survey led to the identification of a number of sites around Little Downham (Hall forthcoming). Many of these sites were of early prehistoric date and it has become apparent that most such sites did not leave traces that can now be recorded on aerial photographs. This, plus the fact that the field in question has only been photographed under managed grass, allow the possibility that features may be present that have not, maybe cannot, be detected from the air.

No mapping was undertaken for this appraisal. The poor response within the assessment field and in the area in general plus the fact that much of the immediately adjacent land is part of the modern village leads to the recommendation that no further examination of aerial photographs (ie those at NLAP, Swindon) be undertaken for this site.

Reference

Hall, D.N., forthcoming. *The Fenland Project, Number 10: The Isle of Ely and Wisbech. East Anglian Archaeol.*

Aerial photographs examined

Source: Cambridge University Collection of Aerial Photographs

Vertical photographs

RC8-EB 241-243	24 March 1982	1:10000
RC8-EG 278-279	25 March 1982	1:10000
RC8-KnBK 136	13 June 1988	1:10000

Source: Cambridgeshire County Council Record Office

Vertical photographs

Meridian 59/69: 015-017	10 June 1969	1:10000
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