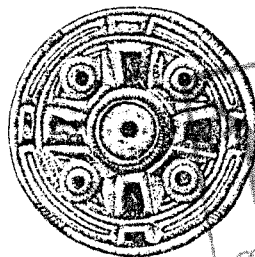


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An Archaeological Evaluation at The Perse School for Boys, Hills Road, Cambridge

S Leith

1996

Cambridgeshire County Council

Report No. A89

Commissioned By Saunders Boston Ltd on behalf of the Perse School

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The Perse School for Boys, Hills Road, Cambridge**

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SUMMARY

On April 10th, 1996 the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council carried out an evaluation of land at the Perse School for Boys, Hills Road, Cambridge (TL 4629/5570). The work was carried out for Saunders Boston Ltd on behalf of the Perse School, on the site of a proposed sports hall, swimming pool, and associated facilities.

Although close to the line of a Roman road, an analysis of aerial photographs and the present evaluation discovered no significant archaeological remains. Two postholes found in one of the five evaluation trenches were tentatively assigned to the post-medieval period associated with Truslove's Farm.

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AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION AT THE PERSE SCHOOL FOR BOYS, HILLS ROAD, CAMBRIDGE

INTRODUCTION

On April 10th, 1996 the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council carried out an evaluation of land at the Perse School for Boys, Hills Road, Cambridge (TL 4629/5570). The work was carried out for Saunders Boston Ltd on behalf of the Perse School, on the site of a proposed sports hall, swimming pool, and associated facilities (Fig 1).

The site is located to the south of central Cambridge, on Lower Chalk. The land is 16m above Ordnance Datum, and is used at present as a grassed playing field.

HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The site is located on the edge of the second terrace river gravels of the River Cam, in an area of intense occupation from the prehistoric period onwards. Cropmarks are visible to the south and west of the site, indicating occupation of probable prehistoric or Roman date. Those to the west (SMR 09596 and 09599) include a number of linear and ring-like features on the river gravels. The cropmarks to the south (09591) suggest a ditched enclosure and possible field system. Investigations at Addenbrooke's Hospital south of Long Road revealed an Iron Age settlement and some Romano-British remains (Cra'ster 1969).

A Roman road is reported to have run through the grounds of the Perse School, and it was apparently visible as a ridge until 1910 when it was levelled (Walker 1910, 166). According to Walker, the road would have run from a T-junction with Worts Causeway (a Roman road running east / west) near the New Addenbrooke's Hospital, north through the Perse School playing fields, across Luard Road and through the grounds of Homerton College, across Brooklands Avenue and the Botanical Gardens, to join the line of Regent Street at Hyde Park Corner (Fig 2). From this point north the modern road follows the line of the Roman road to the river crossing near Magdalene Bridge. Walker notes that this line is on slightly higher ground than the modern Hills Road, and suggests that the land to the east would have been marshland which occasionally flooded (*Ibid*, 167).

In 1910 Walker observed a section cut across the Roman road in the Perse School playing fields (*Ibid*, 166). The road was 12-15 feet wide, with a 9 inch hard-core of rammed chalk, 2.25 feet of gravel and earth, and more chalk above; the surface metalling had been robbed. A coin of Severus (AD 193-211) was found in a road-side ditch.

In 1952 another section was excavated across the Roman road within the Perse School grounds, located at TL 4626/5583 (see Fig 1) (RCHM 1959, 6). This showed flanking ditches 14.5 yards apart, but no metalling. An adjacent rubbish pit contained pottery of c AD 170-200.

Certain field boundaries visible on the draft 1st Edition OS map of 1810 may indicate the line of the Roman road (Fig 2). A line of trees which runs across the present Perse School playing fields may therefore mark the line of the road, however this would not coincide with the grid reference given for the 1952 excavation.

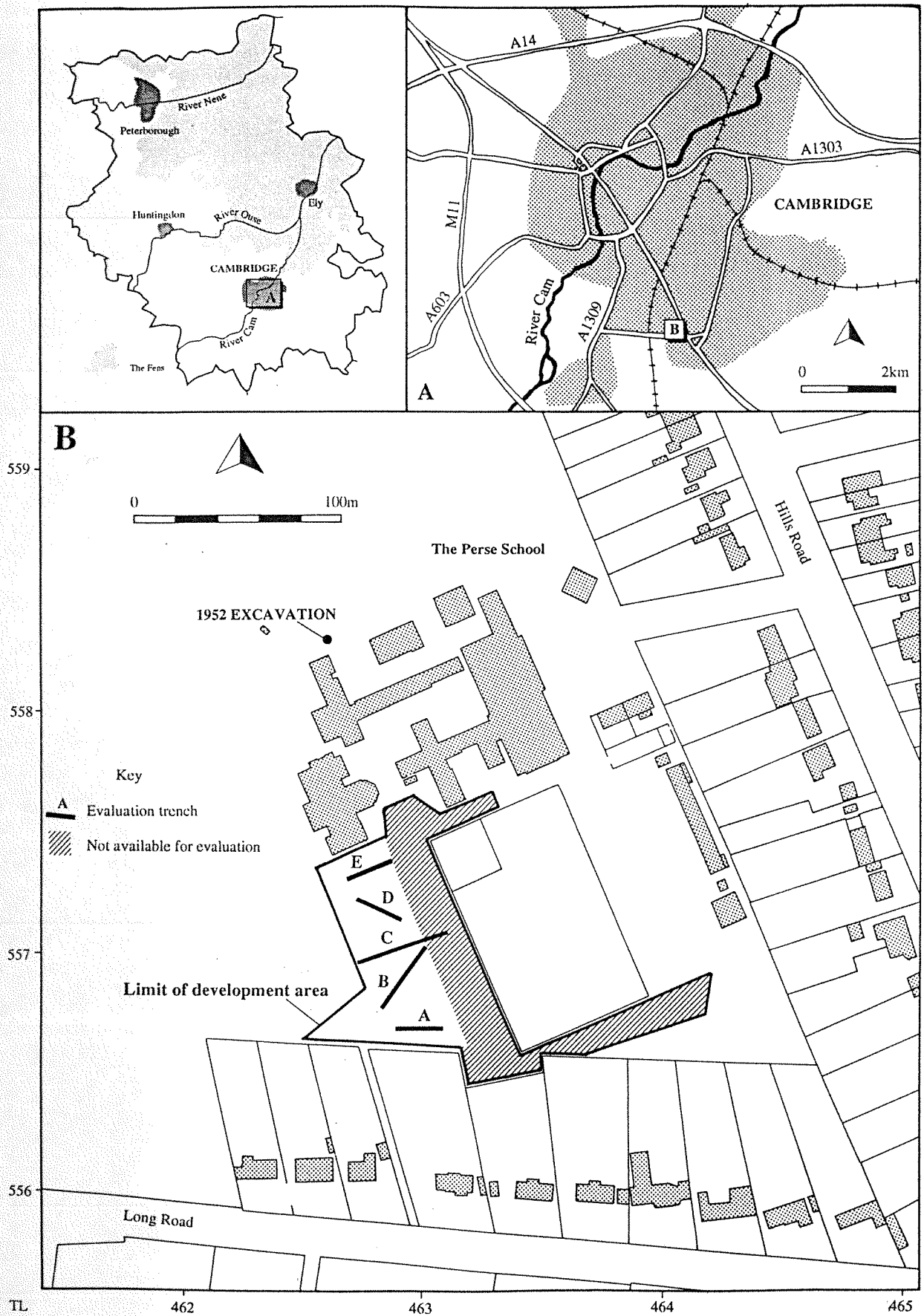


Figure 1 Site Location Plan

The site was part of Truslove's Farm in the early nineteenth century, which was later renamed Great Tithe Farm, and later Trinity Farm. The land continued to be used as arable until about 1950 when it was converted into grassed playing fields.

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 an appraisal of aerial photographic evidence as required by the brief (Appendix A), and a programme of linear trenching.

Five linear trenches were excavated, with a total length of 120m (Fig 1). These were mostly located in the western half of the development area as the other part was in use as a building contractor's compound. Trench C was extended into this area. The trenches were machine excavated using a JCB with a 1.5m wide toothless ditching bucket. The trenches were 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

Aerial Photographic Appraisal (Appendix A)

The site has been managed as a playing field since 1950, and under these conditions sub-surface features only become apparent in years of extreme drought. No photographs of appropriate date were available, and those which predate 1950 when the land was used as arable were not taken at the right time of year to show cropmarks. The photographs examined did not show any archaeological or natural features on the playing fields.

Trenching

The trenches were excavated to the level of natural clayey chalk beneath c 0.30m of topsoil. Trench A was excavated to 15.85m OD, and revealed two postholes situated about 10m apart. Posthole 3 was sub-square in plan, measuring 0.32m by 0.29m, and 0.14m deep. The sides were nearly vertical, tapering slightly to a flat base. The fill (2) was a greyish brown clayey silt with redeposited natural chalk, and contained no dating evidence. The posthole 5 was sub-circular in plan, measuring 0.28m by 0.25m, and 0.16m deep. The sides were nearly vertical, tapering slightly to a flat base. The fill (4) was the same as (2), and contained one small fragment of copper and two small fragments of coal coke or industrial residue.

Trenches B and C were excavated to a depth of 15.65m and 15.61m OD respectively. The only features revealed in these trenches were two field drains, aligned north / south. One of these was examined, and was 0.30m wide and a minimum of 0.25m deep. It had straight, vertical sides, and the fill contained fragments of modern brick and coal.

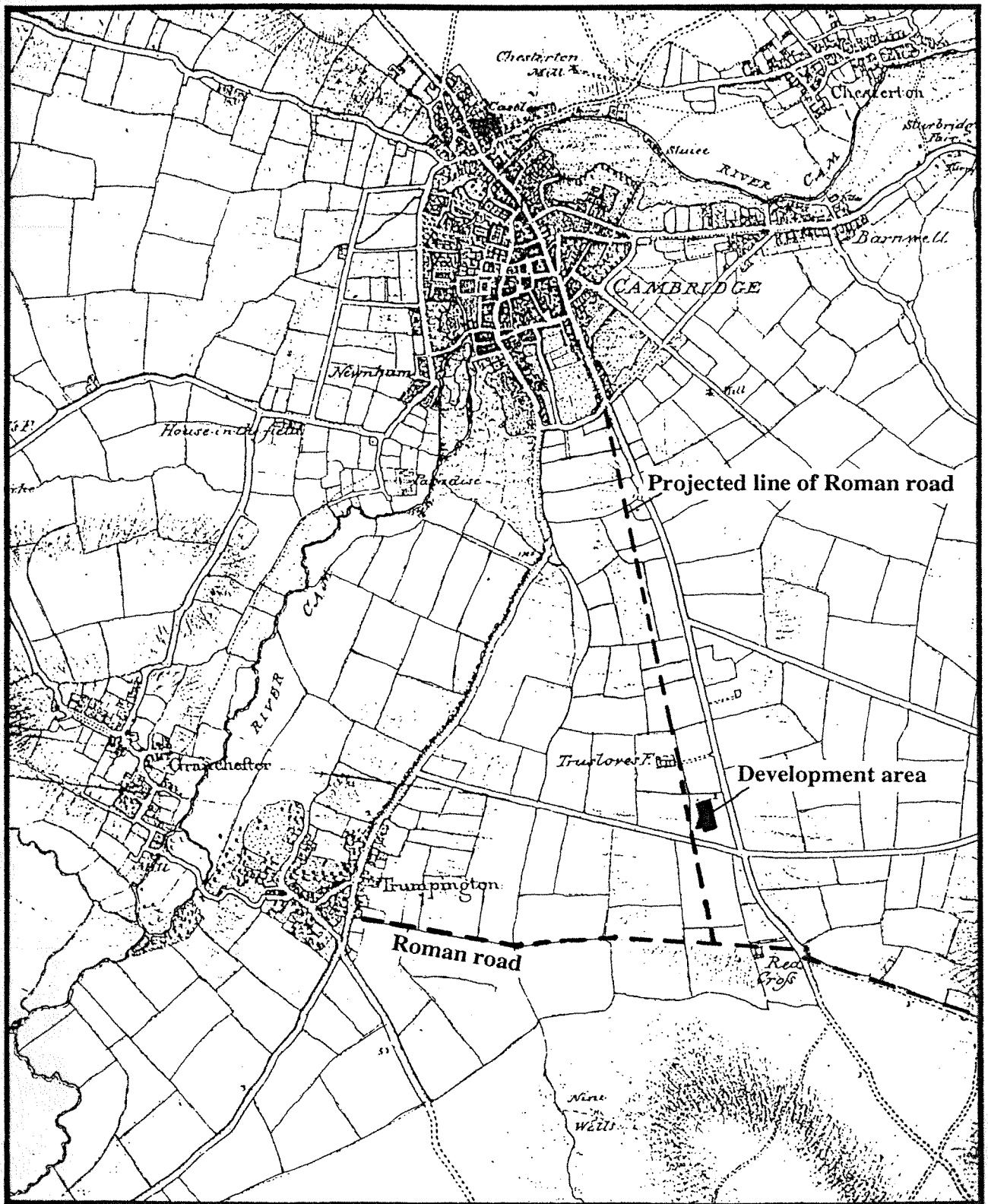


Figure 2 Draft of 1st Edition OS Map (1810) with Projected Line of Roman Road

Trenches D and E were excavated to a depth of 15.68m and 15.65m OD respectively. No archaeological features were revealed in these trenches.

DISCUSSION

The postholes revealed in Trench A are of unknown date, but it is probable that they date from the post-medieval period when the site was part of Truslove's Farm. All of the artefacts found in the topsoil were of post-medieval or modern date, and are probably derived from manuring of fields prior to 1950 when the playing fields were created.

No evidence of the Roman road or road-side ditches, or any other Roman activity, was revealed in the evaluation trenches. This suggests that the line of the road lies slightly to the west of the development area, and that the grid reference for the 1952 excavation is not accurate.

CONCLUSION

This evaluation has established that archaeological activity on this site is minimal, and probably of post-medieval date. The proposed development would not, therefore, have a significant impact on archaeological remains.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank Boston Saunders Ltd on behalf of the Perse School for Boys for commissioning this evaluation; Mr P Boston of Boston Saunders Ltd, Mr. R Aylmore of the Perse School, and Mr C Farthing of York Construction for their cooperation; Wendy Wilson for her assistance on site; Caroline Gait for her advice on the illustration; and Tim Malim for managing the project. This evaluation was conducted in response to a brief drawn up by the County Archaeology Office (Austin 1996).

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Historic Maps Consulted

Draft of 1st Edition OS Map, 1810, sheet 235

OS 2nd Edition Map, 1886, sheet XLVII.6

APPENDIX A

PERSE SCHOOL, HILLS ROAD, CAMBRIDGE: AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHIC APPRAISAL

Rog Palmer MA MIFA

INTRODUCTION

This appraisal was commissioned to examine aerial photographs of an area of some 0.5 hectares (centred TL46305570) in order to assess their potential for the identification of archaeological features and thus provide a guide for field evaluation. No mapping was to be undertaken.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL FEATURES FROM AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHS

Sub-surface archaeological features – including ditches, pits, walls or foundations, and banks – may be recorded from the air in different ways in different seasons. The majority of such photographs result from reconnaissance in spring or summer when features of natural and anthropogenic origin may show through their effect on crops growing above them. Such indications tend to be at their most visible in ripe cereal crops, generally in June or July in this part of Britain, although their appearance cannot accurately be predicted and their absence cannot be taken to imply evidence of archaeological absence. In winter months, when the soil is bare or crop cover is thin (when viewed from above) features may show by virtue of their different soils. Upstanding remains are also best recorded in winter months when vegetation is sparse and the low angle of the sun helps pick out slight differences of height and slope.

Sites under grass fields are less frequently recorded as pasture requires a much greater degree of stress (a deficiency in soil moisture content) before it responds to sub-surface differences. If these so-called 'parch marks' become visible it is usually only late in the summer in years of extreme droughts. In Britain those that affect the aerial photographic record are usually listed as 1949, 1959, 1975, 1976, 1984, 1989, 1990 (Bewley 1994, 25) and 1995 – although marks in grass sometimes have been recorded at other times.

For most of its photographed history, the field in question has been managed as a playing field with a close-cut and well-maintained surface. Under these conditions any sub-surface features are likely to make themselves apparent only in extreme drought years. Previous to this (before 1950), the field is recorded as being arable land and, as such, had the potential to show crop- and soil-marked features that may have been photographed if reconnaissance was carried out at suitable times.

PHOTO INTERPRETATION AND MAPPING

Cover searches were obtained from the Cambridge University Collection of Aerial Photographs (CUCAP) and the National Library of Air Photographs (NLAP), Swindon and included photographs resulting from specialist archaeological reconnaissance and routine vertical surveys.

Although the purpose of this appraisal was simply to evaluate the potential of the dates of photography for indicating archaeological features, most of the verticals held by CUCAP were scanned. In addition, some were examined as stereoscopic pairs using 1.5x magnification.

Obliques were not examined as none of the indexed six-figure NGRs coincided with the playing field.

All vertical photographs identified are listed in the Appendix to this report.

COMMENTARY

None of the CUCAP photographs pre-date use of the ground by the school and therefore photographs taken during the late summers in the years noted above were sought. There were none of appropriate dates in the collection and cursory examination showed no obvious archaeological or natural features anywhere on the playing fields. However, a brief history of the development of the playing fields could be noted. The tennis courts abutting the east side of the assessment area had been surfaced by 1982 while the assessment area was itself subjected to some activity in March 1991. This appeared to take the form of removal of some of the turf (or dumping material on it) and the creation of access ways around the site. By May 1992 the area was again grass, but had been left in a rough state and was not managed or mown like the remainder of the field.

The cover search request to NLAP asked for all photographs within a 500m radius of TL463558. This returned a listing of 55 vertical prints from 15 sorties on dates between 1945 and 1975. Those taken before 1950, when the land was arable, included three sorties flown in September (1945, 1946, 1947) and one in May (1946). From past experience it is rare that archaeological features have been recorded in September – cereals have been harvested although there is the possibility that beet may retain some crop differences if they developed earlier in the year – and May is similarly ‘archaeology free’ as the necessary stresses have not usually reached critical level that early in the growing season. It is, therefore, unlikely – although not impossible – that these photographs will show any archaeological features in, or close to, the assessment area.

Of the post 1950 sorties none were taken in the critical drought years and many were at times of year when archaeological responses are usually poor or absent.

An idea of the nature of some of the archaeological features in the area may be gained from an earlier assessment that included mapping of features south of Long Road (Cox and Palmer 1991).

RECOMMENDATION

It is unlikely that any of the aerial photographs identified from the two libraries consulted will offer any information about archaeological features in, or adjacent to, the assessment area. Further work on these is not recommended.

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- Bewley, R H, 1994. *Prehistoric Settlements*. Batsford/English Heritage, London.
- Cox, C and Palmer, R. 1991. *Cambridge Southern Relief Road: aerial photographic assessment*, for Cambs County Council.



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