

Archaeological Field Unit

Medieval and Post-Medieval Features on Land to the Rear of 3 and 5 Long Furlong, Over

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2000

Cambridgeshire County Council

Report No. A170

Commissioned by Roger Driver Partnership on behalf of Mrs. Wolfe and Mr. Ingle

**Medieval and Post-Medieval features on Land to the Rear of
3 and 5 Long Furlong, Over
(TL 3771 7036)**

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SUMMARY

In October 2000 the Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Field Unit carried out work in response to a brief for archaeological evaluation of land to the rear of 3 and 5 Long Furlong, Over (TL 3771 7036) following a planning application by Roger Driver Partnership. An initial desk-based assessment considered cartographic and textual evidence.

Following the desk-based assessment intrusive evaluation was carried out to determine the presence and extent of surviving archaeological remains. Five trenches were excavated and revealed two ditches.

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INTRODUCTION

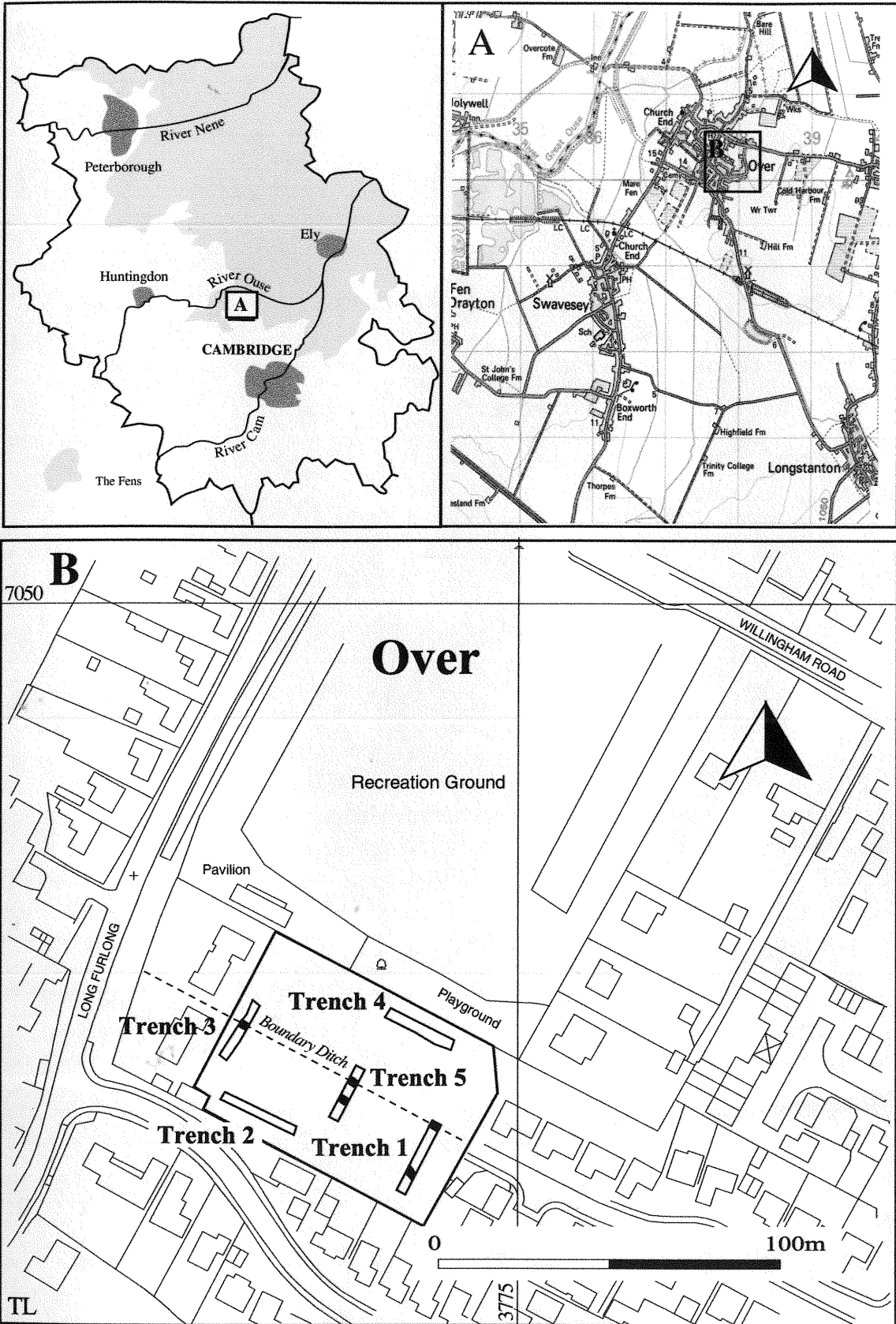
A brief for an archaeological evaluation was issued by Cambridgeshire County Council County Archaeology Office (Simon Kaner, 2000), following a planning application (no. S/1085/99/0). The application was made by Roger Driver Partnership, on behalf of Mrs. Wolfe and Mr. P. Ingle, for residential development. The site covers an area of approximately 4124m². A specification was prepared by Judith Roberts and work was carried out by the staff of the Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeology Field Unit.

The high archaeological potential of the site was highlighted by the brief for archaeological evaluation. The brief requested an assessment of documentary evidence and replotting of aerial photographic evidence, followed by review and field evaluation of areas of high archaeological potential.

A documentary assessment was carried out in October 2000 by staff of the Archaeological Field Unit. An aerial photographic assessment was considered but following consultation with Rog Palmer of Air Photo Services it was decided that reassessment of aerial photographs would not be useful in this instance. Between 17th and 20th October, 2000 five evaluation trenches were opened which targeted the areas of archaeological potential.

GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

The site lies on Ampthill Clay (BGS sheet 205). Clays with some gravel were encountered over most of the site. The ground slopes gently down from south-west to north-east and lies at approximately 11mOD. The village overlooks the fens of the Ouse valley, bounded by a quite abrupt scarp slope to the north-east and east and slopes down to Swavesey in the south. It is 14 kilometres north-north-east of Cambridge. The flat, northern-half of the parish is below 5mOD and mostly has fertile soils, overlying river gravels in Bare Fen, and clay and silts elsewhere. Peat beds cover the parish in the north-east. The south-eastern part of the parish is higher, and lies mainly on clay and glacial gravel above 25mOD. The Ouse forms the western boundary of the parish and many ditches drain into it. Until the sixteenth century the northern boundary of the parish was unclear, formed roughly by the fens between Over and Willingham. Other boundaries follow old route ways.



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Figure 1 Site location map showing trenches with archaeological features

ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The present straggling village contains two nuclei of settlement which have grown together. The church of St. Mary occupies a gravel knoll at the north-western corner of the village overlooking the fens. This settlement focus is known as Church End. The second focus is at Over End and may originally have formed a square green lined by houses on the north-east and south-west sides, now High Street and West Street.

Over, with its access to seasonally flooded fen has been occupied since the earliest prehistoric times and gravel workings in the parish have produced palaeolithic stone tools, although these are likely to have been redeposited through fluvial action. Mesolithic and neolithic flints have been found (SMR 1497, 3729 and 11783) and during dredging neolithic pottery and flints were recovered (SMR 3932). All of these have been found in the fen surrounding the village.

A large number of Bronze Age barrows have been identified from finds and cropmarks/earthworks – these include SMR nos: 3726 (five round barrows), 3727 (two round barrows), 3728 (three round barrows), 3731 (a single barrow) and 4074 and 4075 both of which are circular cropmarks which have been interpreted as ploughed out barrows. Occupation sites have also been found (SMR nos. 1497a and 3729) which produced worked flint and Bronze Age pottery. Again all of the Bronze Age sites appear to be located on the fenland around the present settlement.

The fertility of the fenland in the parish is attested by the number of cropmark and settlement sites attributed to the Iron Age and Roman period. Many of these sites occupy the fen to the north and east of the present village of Over. Iron Age settlement sites include SMR nos. 284, 2108, 3729, 3931 and 3933. A stray find of an Iron Age coin is also recorded (SMR 3725) but this may have been found in association with a hoard of Roman coins as the precise location of the hoard is not recorded. Roman sites recorded on the Sites and Monuments Record include stray finds, inhumations and occupation evidence and are too numerous to be listed in this report. Few of the find sites are close to the present settlement although a Roman coin (SMR 3693) was found less than one kilometre to the east of the development site and other Roman remains are recorded close to Church End (SMR nos. 3597 and 11577). A large number of earthwork and cropmark sites are recorded and it has not been able to date these, other than suggesting a date based on their morphology. Apart from those which are obviously related to the medieval agricultural system (ridge and furrow and field boundaries) there are numerous enclosures, ditches and trackways in the fen to the north and east of the present settlement.

A range of earthworks have been noted in the village. The pattern of the post-medieval fields survives at Church End (in the modern property boundaries), west of the Overcote Road and south of the High Street. These may date from the 17th century enclosure of part of the parish. Existing fields have southern boundaries along the line of the old Back Lane (SMR 11262). A hollow way and track survive at the junction of Long Lane, leading north from Over into the fens, and the track following Dockerel Brook to the east (SMR 11263).

Irregular earthworks are associated with SMR 8893, including a crop mark of a double ditched enclosure, track ways and ditches, north of the High Street. The evidence is still visible in gardens, allotments and surrounding fields. Similarly earthworks are visible in a garden opposite the church at Church End (SMR 11265).

Over is mentioned in the Domesday Book (in 1086) as *Ouer*, and thereafter in various forms including *Owver*, *Oura*, *Ofre* and *Hovere*, and refers to the 'bank of the river (i.e. of the Ouse) (Reaney 1943).

A manor is documented at Over in 986 when it was left to a kinswoman of St Oswald, founder of Ramsey Abbey (VCH 1989). In 1044 it passed to the bishop of Dorchester, a former monk of Ramsey who gave it to the Abbey. The abbot of Ramsey was licensed in 1254 to build a chapel at his manor house to the west of Station Road at Berry Close (SMR 11264). All traces of the manor house had gone by 1575. The manor remained in the custody of the Abbey until the Dissolution, when it was taken by the Crown. The Crown retained the manor until 1619 when it was given, by James I, to the Duke of Buckingham (George Villiers). Chatteris Abbey also held land at Over until the Dissolution, in 1538. A small manor was held by the Fynor family until the fourteenth century when it passed to the Caldecote line and in the fifteenth century it passed to Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. Various other manors held small pieces of land in Over during the medieval period. In 1628 the fen commons east of Ouse fen bank were enclosed. The open fen and remaining fen common were enclosed in 1837.

The parish church of St. Mary was mentioned in 1178 and the living was one of the most valuable in Ramsey's rural deanery. A medieval rectory stood to the north-east of the church in 1327, but the current rectory dates to the eighteenth century.

The parish has always been agricultural with orchards and a little woodland. Market gardening became more important in the 20th century. Gravel extraction and brickworks are also known from the parish in recent centuries. Drainage of the fen provided more land, particularly for grazing and agriculture. Communication via the waterways has always been important for the village economy but the medieval route from Earith to Over still exists as an earthwork to the west of Station Road (SMR 11266). Cereals were processed in at least four windmills in the parish (SMR nos. 824, 2420, 3447 and 11578) and there are records of at least one dovecote (SMR 10447). In the recent past much of the southern part of the parish was covered by fruit trees and the subject site was a pear orchard.

The population of Over increased rapidly from 35 peasants in 1086 to 140 tenants in the thirteenth century and by the sixteenth century was reputedly the most populous village in Cambridgeshire outside the Isle of Ely. A few medieval buildings still exist in the village, including Chain House (SMR 11270).

METHODOLOGY

The primary objective of the project was to evaluate the character, date, extent and state of preservation of archaeological remains on the site.

In addition, the evaluation sought to

- Identify the depositional and structural sequence present on site
- Place the site in its historical and archaeological context within a local framework.

- Provide recommendations and suggestions to mitigate the impact of the development.

Following a preliminary desk-based assessment and review of information regarding the site, five evaluation trenches were excavated. Their position was designed to investigate the possible property boundary which may have extended onto the western part of the site (from Long Furlong) and to provide a general sample of the proposed development site.

The modern ground surface and subsoil were removed by machine to a depth where natural clay deposits were noted, between 0.2m and 0.25m below the present ground surface. Trenches were selectively cleaned and planned and features excavated by hand.

Archaeological features were partially excavated and recorded using the pro-forma recording sheets of the Archaeological Field Unit. Features were planned at a scale of 1:20. Sections and profiles across excavated features were drawn at a scale of 1:10 or 1:20, as appropriate. A written record of all excavated features was made on single context recording sheets and the drawn and written record was supplemented by monochrome and colour photographs. Site records and artefacts are currently held at the AFU offices in Fulbourn under the site code OVELF00. In this report fill numbers are shown in plain text and cut numbers in bold. Conditions for excavation and recording were variable, wet weather prevented excavation on one day.

The project archive for the evaluation consists of the design brief for an archaeological evaluation (produced on 10th October 2000 by the Simon Kaner, Cambridgeshire County Council County Archaeology Office); a specification created in response to that brief by Judith Roberts; correspondence with the County Archaeology Office and client, copy maps and information from the Cambridgeshire County Council Sites and Monuments Record. A standard AFU archive has been produced and the paper archive is stored at the AFU offices, Fulbourn, the material archive is stored in the short term at the AFU office, Fulbourn and in the long term will be deposited at the County Council store at Landbeach under the site code OVELF00.

RESULTS

Trench 1

Trench 1 was 15m long, running in an approximately north-east-south-west direction. The topsoil (0.23m thick) was a very dark brown silty clay. The subsoil (0.2m thick) was a light brown silty clay. The base of the trench was mainly clay with sandy gravel patches. Two cut features were noted in the base of the trench. Ditch 4 (1.5m wide and 0.28m deep) contained a single fill, 3, which was a dark brown silty clay with small, abraded sherds of seventeenth and eighteenth century pottery and a heavily patinated shard of glass.

Ditch 6 (approximately 1m wide and 0.26m deep) had been cut through the subsoil and into the natural clay below. Its fill, 5, was a grey brown silty clay and contained

one very abraded sherd of late medieval pottery and two sherds of abraded, glazed, eighteenth century pottery and a fragment of clay pipe.

Trench 2

Trench 2 was 16m long, ran approximately north-west–south-east and contained 0.23m of topsoil and 0.12m of subsoil. The base of the trench exposed clay with patches of sandy gravel. Patches of heavy root disturbance were noted in the southern part of the trench and a rabbit burrow towards the middle of the trench. There were no cut features in this trench.

Trench 3

This trench was 16m long, oriented north-east–south-west, with 0.19m of topsoil and 0.15m of subsoil. The base of the trench was undisturbed clay with sandy gravel patches and contained a single cut feature. This appears to be the shallow remnant of a boundary ditch or fence line which is a continuation of the property boundary between 3 and 5 Long Furlong.

Trench 4

Trench 4 was 15m long, oriented approximately north-west–south-east, with 0.2m of topsoil and 0.16m of subsoil. The base of the trench was clay with patches of sandy gravel. Root and animal activity was noted but there were no cut features.

Trench 5

This trench was 19m long and oriented approximately north-east–south-west. The topsoil was approximately 0.22m deep and the subsoil 0.27m thick in the north-eastern end and 0.06m thick in the south-western end. This trench contained two cut features. Both were linear and aligned north-west–south-east. Ditch 1, (1.3m wide and 0.15m deep), in the northern part of the trench was cut through the subsoil and into the underlying clay. The fill (2) of this feature was a greyish brown silty clay with occasional gravels. This would appear to be a continuation of the boundary seen in trenches 1 and 3. The other feature was a continuation of the ditch excavated in trench 1. There was no evidence for a continuation of this ditch in trench 3.

DISCUSSION

The aims of this study were to highlight the potential for preservation of archaeological remains on the subject site and to identify the nature of any remains that may be affected by the proposed development.

The development involves considerable construction work on site including excavation of trenches for foundations, services and a road.

The key research issues specific to the site relate to the edge of the medieval settlement of Over and the Iron Age and Roman occupation of the parish generally. Evaluation trenches revealed the presence of a boundary ditch crossing the site from east to west. The features suggest the site was used in the medieval and post medieval period for agriculture, horticulture or arboriculture. No buried soils were noted.

The results of this evaluation have been largely negative, suggesting that, apart from the possible medieval and post-medieval ditches in Trenches 1, 3 and 5 little of archaeological interest survives on the site. Context recognition was not affected by weather, soil conditions, staff morale, site access or methodology. This negative result is therefore likely to be an accurate evaluation of the archaeology of the site.

CONCLUSIONS

The evaluation identified the depositional sequence present on site as being mainly clay, with small patches of gravel, overlaid by largely undisturbed subsoil and approximately 0.25m of topsoil. Removal of the pear trees which still exist over much of the site will cause some disturbance.

It is clear that this land was not within the settlement of Over during the medieval and post-medieval period but suggests rather that it was peripheral to the settlement and has been used for agriculture for many centuries.

It is unlikely that the development on the evaluation site will have an impact on archaeological remains.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank Roger Driver Partnership who commissioned the work on behalf of Mrs. Wolfe and Mr. Ingle. Thanks also to Chris Montague who worked on site, Jon Cane who prepared the illustration and Judith Roberts who edited the report. The Brief was written by Jeremy Parsons, Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Information Officer who also monitored the work on site.

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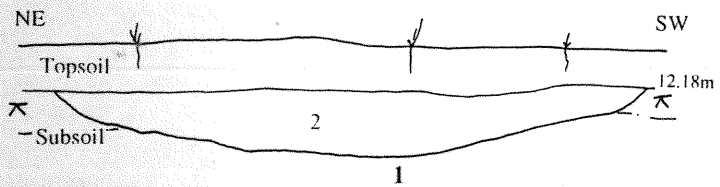
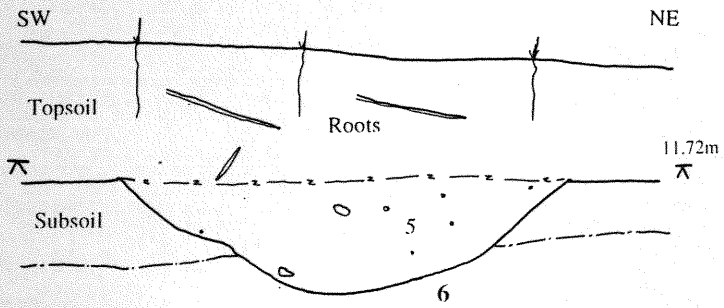
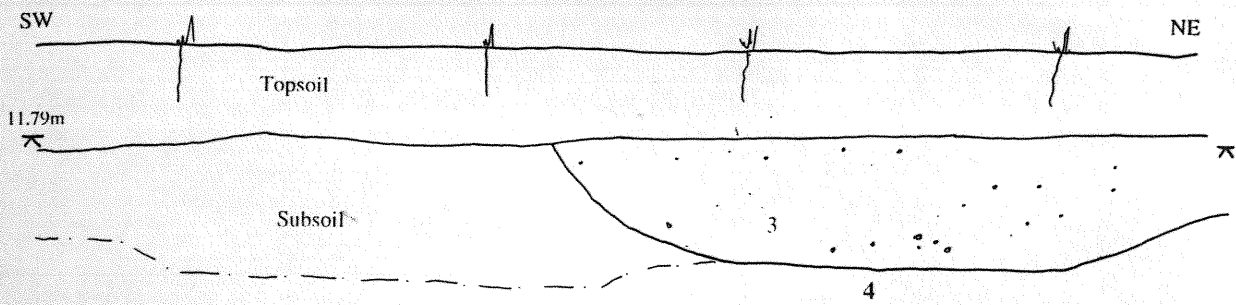


Figure 2 Sections through excavated features



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