

Archaeological Field Unit

**Land south of London Lane, Great Paxton, Cambridgeshire:
An Archaeological Desktop Assessment**

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2001

Cambridgeshire County Council

Report No. A175

Commissioned by Persimmon Homes (East Midlands) Limited

**Land south of London Lane, Great Paxton, Cambridgeshire:
An Archaeological Desktop Assessment**

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SUMMARY

The proposed development, covering an area of approximately 5.53 ha (TL 2102/6350), lies to the south of London Lane in the village of Great Paxton, Cambridgeshire. The proposed development involves construction of houses and related services by Persimmon Homes (East Midlands) Limited. The site lies in an area of potentially rich archaeological remains. There are Roman, Anglo-Saxon and medieval remains in the vicinity but nothing is known from the site itself. The site appears to have been agricultural over the last two centuries and remains so. Apart from a few structures added along the south side of London Lane, there does not appear to have been any development during the past century. The evidence of past activity to the north and west and the lack of recent development implies a high potential for preservation of any remains on the site.

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**Land south of London Lane, Great Paxton, Cambridgeshire:
An Archaeological Desk-Top Assessment
(TL 2102/6350)**

1 INTRODUCTION

This study was commissioned by Persimmon Homes (East Midlands) Limited in advance of a proposed residential development. The assessment aims to define the archaeological potential of the land likely to be affected by the development. It has been compiled by the author in response to a design brief for archaeological evaluation written by Andy Thomas, Development Control Officer, County Archaeology Office (CAO), dated 24th March, 1999. This brief is older than the six month expiry time usually given by the CAO, however, Andy Thomas has stated that the terms of the brief still apply.

The site, an irregular area of approximately 5.53ha, is located to the south of London Lane which runs eastwards off High Street. The site is centred on TL 2102/6350.

2 TOPOGRAPHICAL AND GEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The site lies within the village of Great Paxton to the north-east of St Neots. It slopes upwards in a north-easterly direction from around 15mOD at Low Farm to around 28mOD at London Lane.

According to the British Geological Survey, the area is located just to the east of the edge of the first and second terrace gravels of the River Great Ouse. The site itself lies on Glacial Boulder Clay which in turn overlies the Pleistocene gravels mentioned above, although in the extreme south-west of the development area, a small outcropping of the Oxford Clay reaches the surface. The Upper Jurassic Oxford Clays are the underlying solid geology across a wide area in this region.

3 METHODOLOGY

The aim of this desk-top assessment is to provide information concerning the location, extent, survival and significance of the known archaeological remains in the vicinity and on the site, as well as assessing the potential for further archaeological remains to survive.

In order to map the potential for archaeology at Great Paxton the investigation concentrated on the accessible archaeological and historical resources held by Huntingdon Record Office (HRO), the Cambridgeshire Sites and Monuments Record

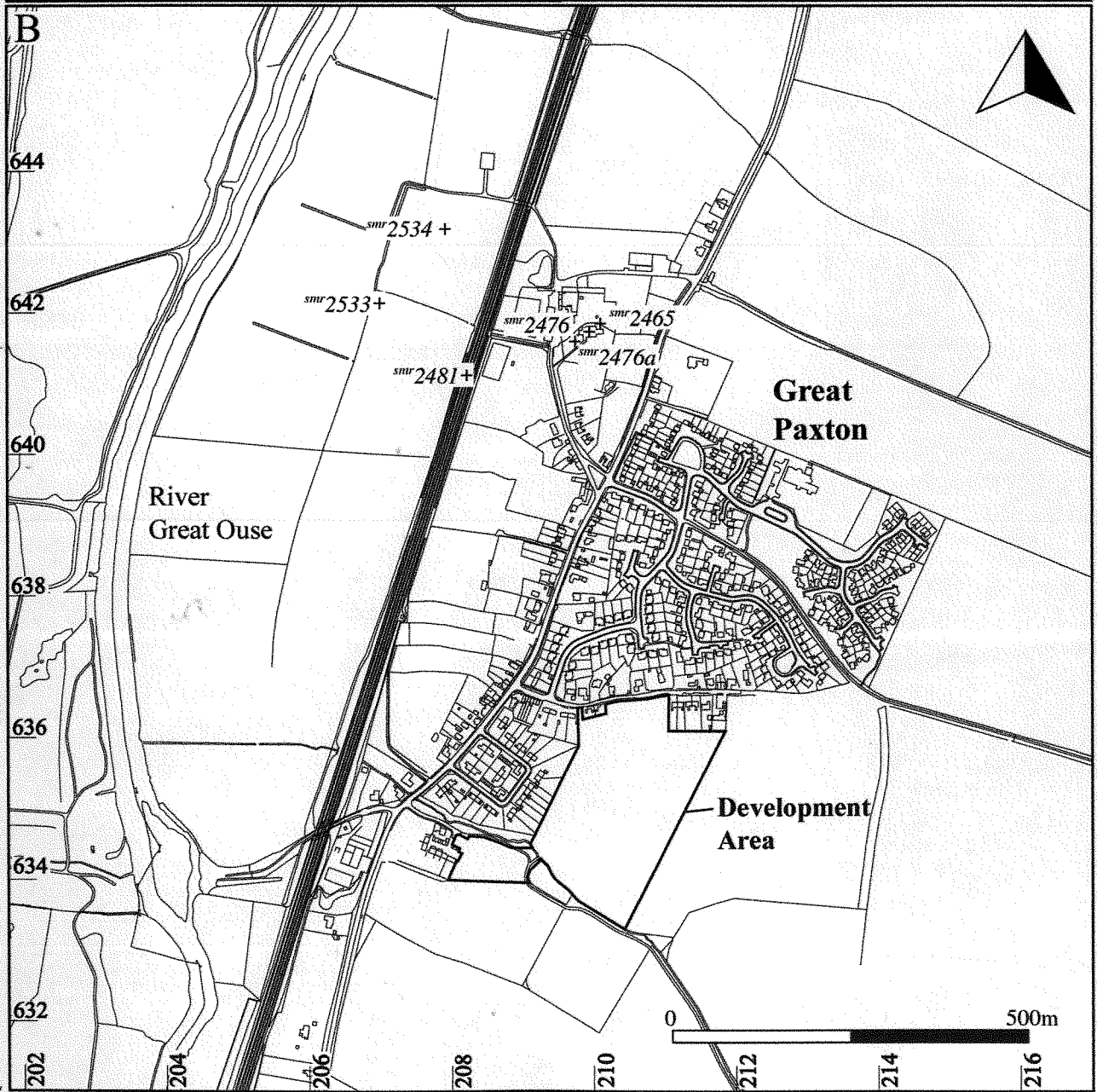
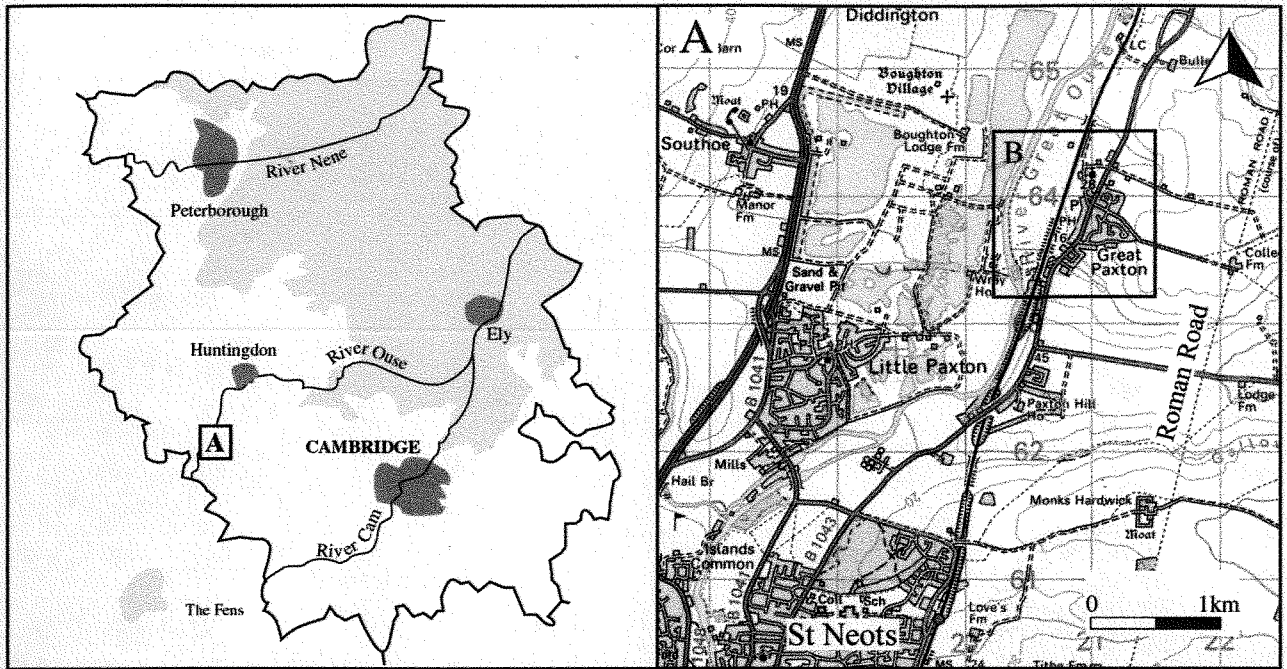


Figure 1 Site location map

Based upon Ordnance Survey mapping with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationary Office Crown Copyright. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. (Cambridgeshire County Council licence No. LA 07649X 1999)

(SMR) and documentary sources held by the CCC Archaeological Field Unit. Aerial photographic assessment was carried out by Rog Palmer, Air Photo Services, to meet the requirements of the design brief for archaeological evaluation (see Appendix A). No previously unknown archaeological features were identified in, or close to, the assessment area.

The known archaeological resource was investigated through the County's Sites and Monuments Record held by Cambridgeshire County Council. Additional published resources such as the Victoria County Histories and the Royal Commission inventory for the parish were examined. Reports and archives on excavations carried out in and around Great Paxton were consulted.

The historical records held at the HRO in Huntingdon were investigated. The Office holds copies of the Enclosure Award. This work was supplemented by consultation of the Ordnance Survey maps of the area (see Fig 2). The modern landscape appears to retain some boundaries and holdings set out in the medieval period and perhaps dating from earlier periods.

No geotechnical survey has been undertaken or is known to the client, thus it has not been possible to assess the condition and status of buried deposits or confirm local geological conditions.

4 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Prehistoric

There have been no finds of prehistoric artefacts from the immediate vicinity of Great Paxton, however, Neolithic and Bronze Age flints were recovered from an area south-west of Paxton Hill House (SMR 2571), 1km south of the village. On the western side of the river Great Ouse, there are extensive prehistoric remains which have been investigated during gravel extraction, but these do not fall within the purview of this assessment.

Roman

A Roman road ran approximately 1km to the east of the village, the line of which is shown on the Ordnance Survey 1:50000 map. According to Margary, this ran from Braughing to Godmanchester via Baldock, where the Icknield Way crosses it (Margary 1967). The road is known to pass through College Farm, Great Paxton.

Roman finds were discovered along the line of the railway during its construction in 1849 (SMR 2481).

Anglo-Saxon

The most significant remains of this period are undoubtedly those at Holy Trinity Church (SMR 2476), which stands just to the north of the village, adjacent to Manor Farm. Although it contains additions, a significant portion of the building is Late Saxon, with a number of unusual features (Cobbett & Fox 1924). A recent survey of the building during renovation works revealed hitherto undiscovered external details including possible Saxon roof alignments (Hatton & Heawood 1993). There also seems to be good documentary evidence that the structure was erected by Edward the Confessor and was a Minster (Kirby & Oosthuizen 2000).

250m to the west across the railway line, an excavation was carried out in 1934 which revealed the bases of limekilns and an Anglo-Saxon ditch (SMR 2534). The excavators drew the wholly plausible conclusion that the features were associated with the construction of the Late Saxon Minster (Lethbridge & Tebbutt 1935).

Just to the south of the limekilns, in 1820 and 1830, human bones including twenty perfect skulls, had been found during agricultural works. When the railway cutting was being dug in 1849, further bones were found, including many complete skeletons. These discoveries led eventually to excavations being carried out by CF Tebbutt in 1931, at which time several incomplete skeletons and stray bones were recovered (SMR 2533). It is thought that these finds represent an Anglo-Saxon graveyard, possibly associated with the nearby Minster.

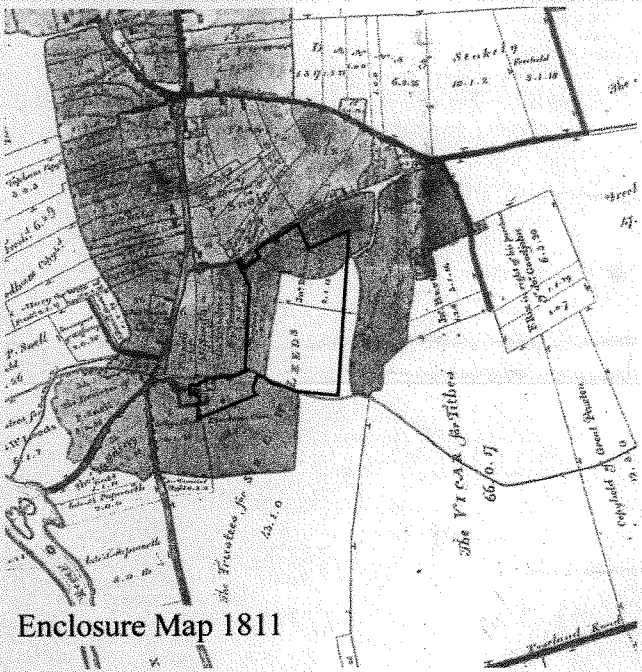
Medieval

Domesday records the church in the village (VCH) and gives the name as *Parchestune* and *Pachstone*. A probable derivation of the name is 'farm of or by the enclosure' (Mawer & Stenton 1926).

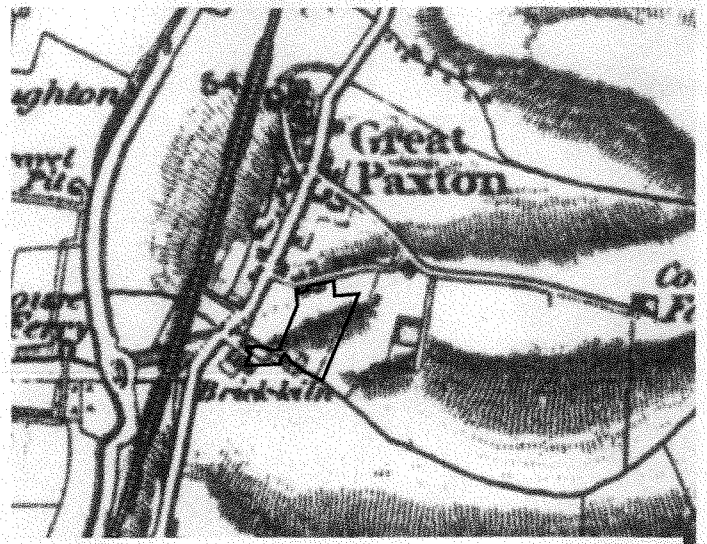
At Domesday in 1086 the manor of Great Paxton was held by Countess Judith, but at some time between 1215 and 1230 it was divided in half. The first part was known as Great Paxton or De La Haye Manor, and is recorded up to 1811. The second half continued to be known as Great Paxton Manor, and can be traced until 1379. One hide of land owned by the church in 1086 became known as Rectory Manor and is last mentioned in 1652. It seems probable that, of these three, De La Haye's Manor is the one which gave its name to Manor Farm, which lies immediately adjacent to the church.

A fishery in the Ouse is mentioned in a document relating to both De La Haye and Great Paxton Manors in 1279 and in sale and transfer documents relating to the former until 1700. River Lane, which leads from the main street down to the island in the Ouse, may have been the route to this fishery.

Holy Trinity Church was added to and remodelled between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries (SMR 2476). During restoration work in 1880, a cross base and broken shaft were discovered, apparently built into the wall. These now stand in the churchyard, and although undated, may be medieval (SMR 2476a).



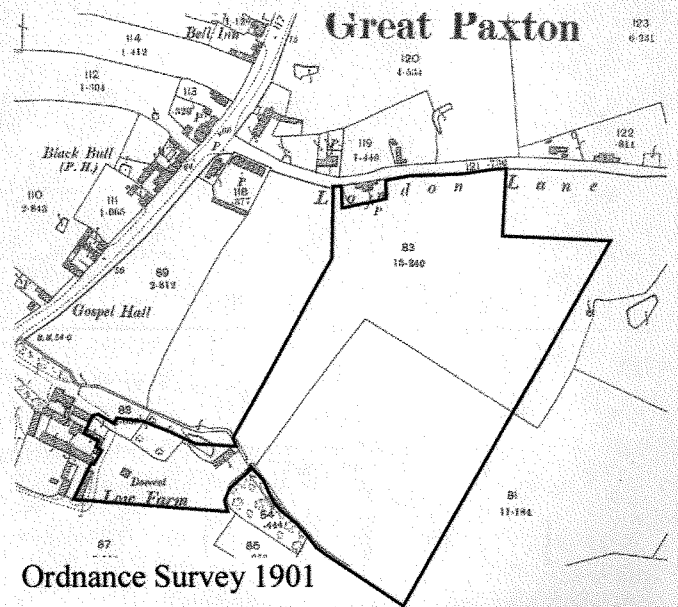
Enclosure Map 1811



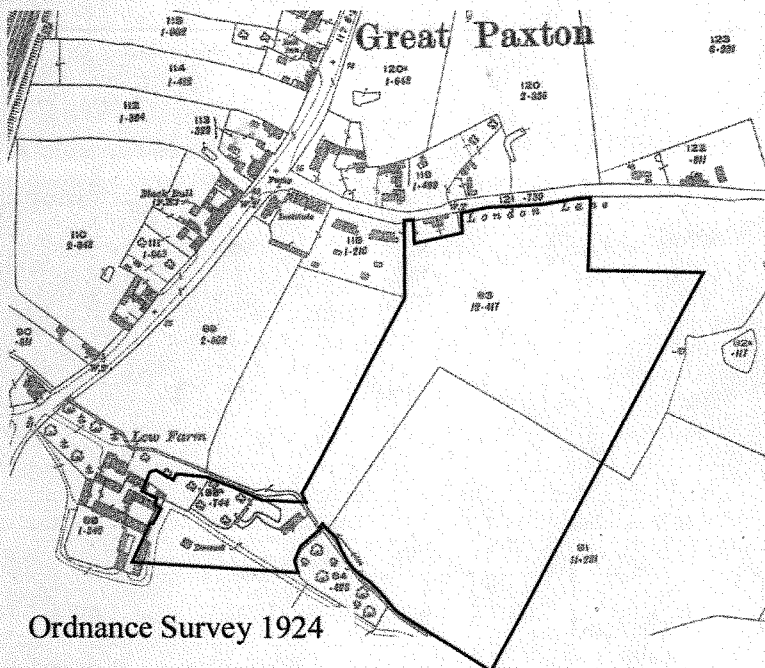
Ordnance Survey First Edition 1835, revised 1865



Ordnance Survey 1887



Ordnance Survey 1901



Ordnance Survey 1924



1998 Aerial Photograph

Figure 2 The development area on historic maps and a recent aerial photograph

A large quantity of medieval pottery was found in the garden of Manor Farm, at a depth of two feet (SMR 2465), which suggests that it may have been in a rubbish pit.

Although Low Farm contains no medieval fabric, it may be that its location is that of one of the other Manors and that this area was another nucleus of the village in the post-Conquest period.

Post-medieval

The Royal Commission volume on Huntingdonshire mentions seventeenth century cottages as surviving in Main Street, Adam's Lane and London Lane, the triangle of roads which form the heart of the post-medieval village (RCHME 1926).

The historical mapping of Great Paxton shows some important changes to the medieval village. To the west of the development area, and up to the edge of it, there are the narrow strips of crofts shown on the 1811 Enclosure map. Also on the 1811 map is the first mention of a dovecote, standing as it does in Dove-house Close, adjacent to buildings, which although unnamed on the map, must be those of Low Farm. Since none of these buildings were included in the Royal Commission survey, which has an end date of 1700, they must have been constructed after this date, but before 1811. Of further interest is the fact that much of the development area lies within land which is already enclosed by the time of the Award.

A later map shows River Lane leading to a ferry across the Ouse, a Brick-kiln at the southern end of Main Street, and the line of the newly-constructed railway (OS 1835/1865). On the 1887 Ordnance Survey, land parcels for two of the earlier crofts are still in evidence, as are trees which indicate other former boundaries. By 1901, the trees had disappeared, along with one of the former boundaries. The dovecote at Low Farm vanishes at some point after 1926, by which time the housing estate at Brookside had been constructed to the west of the development area.

London Lane is shown as joining Adam's Lane at its eastern end from 1811 to 1865, but thereafter stops short and only continues as a footpath.

The majority of the site appears to have remained under an agricultural regime right up to the present day.

5 ARCHAEOLOGICAL POTENTIAL

The Great and Little Paxton area is rich in archaeological remains of all periods. From the study of historical records and known archaeological remains it is clear that the development site has the potential for survival of archaeological deposits. The absence of recorded remains in the vicinity should not be interpreted, at this stage, as an indication of the absence of archaeological remains on the site.

Despite a lack of prehistoric finds from the village, it lies in a landscape rich in remains of this period. The brook to the south of the development area, although formalised as a drain by the time of the Enclosure map in 1811, probably represents the greatest potential for finding hitherto undiscovered prehistoric remains in the parish.

From at least the Late Saxon period onwards, Great Paxton has been the site of continuous occupation, probably beginning close to the church and gradually moving southwards, expanding around the triangle of roads mentioned previously. One Manor in 1086 became three, eventually becoming one again when two were lost from the historical record.

In the post-medieval period, some but not all of the traces of the earlier medieval land-use pattern were eliminated, and the development area encompasses part of this changed landscape. It appears that a quarry was dug, presumably to extract the local clay, in the northern part of the subject area. This has been suggested by the Aerial Photographic study and may be related to the brick-kiln, although it does not appear on contemporary maps.

The Aerial Photographic report also shows some of the former land divisions which existed within and outside the development area. It further indicates a narrow region of deeper soil crossing the subject site which may relate to ancient topographic features and could mask prehistoric archaeology.

6 IMPACT OF PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

Given the requirements of a residential development and the depths of ground work, the proposed development will have a major impact on any buried archaeological remains on the site. No details of present soil depth or ground water are yet available, although it is usual to do borehole tests in advance of such development. Although the aerial photographic report states that no cropmarks are visible, the author clearly states that this is in no way a firm indicator of negative archaeological potential (Palmer 2000, Appendix A).

Proposals for mitigation strategies are beyond the scope of this report. The site has moderate archaeological potential but preservation by record or *in situ* may be considered, depending on the precise nature of the development. Deep deposits may be preserved through architectural or engineering measures. Given the nature of the site, intrusive evaluation may uncover extensive remains or demonstrate that no archaeology exists. Without physical investigation this cannot be predicted, in spite of the documentary research already carried out.

7 CONCLUSIONS

The archaeological potential of the development at Great Paxton can be described thus:

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|------------------|
| • Mesolithic, Neolithic, Bronze Age | low/unknown |
| • Iron Age/Romano-British | moderate/unknown |
| • Anglo Saxon | moderate/unknown |
| • medieval | moderate/unknown |
| • post-medieval | high/known |

The study has demonstrated that the subject site lies within a rich archaeological landscape, surrounded by sites of Roman, Saxon and medieval date, albeit not in the immediate vicinity. Whilst no archaeological sites or finds are known from the subject site itself, its archaeological potential may be considered moderate. If archaeology is encountered on the site, conditions for preservation are likely to range from good to very good.

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2000

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APPENDIX A

LAND AT GREAT PAXTON, CENTRED TL210635, CAMBRIDGESHIRE: AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHIC ASSESSMENT

SUMMARY

This assessment of aerial photographs examined an area of some 5.6 hectares (centred TL210635) in order to identify and accurately map archaeological and natural features.

No archaeological features were identified within, or closely adjacent to, the Assessment Area.

Evidence of former landuse has been identified and mapped.

Some accumulation of soil has occurred in valley bottoms.

Photo interpretation and mapping was at 1:2500 level.

**LAND AT GREAT PAXTON,
CENTRED TL210635,
CAMBRIDGESHIRE:
AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHIC ASSESSMENT**

Rog Palmer MA MIFA with DOTT. SSA Cinzia Bacilieri

INTRODUCTION

This assessment of aerial photographs was commissioned to examine an area of some 5.6 hectares (centred TL210635) in order to identify and accurately map archaeological and natural features. The level of interpretation and mapping was to be at 1:2500.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND NATURAL FEATURES FROM AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHS

In suitable cultivated soils, sub-surface archaeological features – including ditches, banks, pits, walls or foundations – may be recorded from the air in different ways in different seasons. In spring and summer these may show through their effect on crops growing above them. Such indications tend to be at their most visible in ripe cereal crops, 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, which may survive in unploughed grassland, 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.

The clays of this assessment area do not readily allow differences in soil depths to be reflected in growing crops although they can become visible late in a growing season in extremely dry summers. Similarly, natural features may not be identified although more humic deposits in dry valleys may show as different coloured soils on winter photographs. The visible edges and extents of deep soil areas tend to vary from year to year with the amount of ground moisture content.

The most immediately informative aerial photographs of archaeological subjects tend to be those resulting from specialist reconnaissance. This activity is usually undertaken by an experienced archaeological observer who will fly at seasons and times of day when optimum results are expected. Oblique photographs, taken using a hand-held camera, are the usual product of such investigation. Although oblique photographs are able to provide a very detailed view, they are biased in providing a record that is mainly of features noticed by the observer, understood, and thought to be of archaeological relevance. To be able to map accurately from these photographs it is necessary that they have been taken from a sufficient height to include surrounding control information.

Vertical photographs cover the whole of Britain and can provide scenes on a series of dates between (usually) 1946-7 and the present. Unfortunately these vertical surveys are not necessarily flown at times of year that are best to record the crop and soil responses that may be seen above sub-surface features. Vertical photographs are taken by a camera fixed inside an aircraft and adjusted to take a series of overlapping views that can be examined stereoscopically. They are often of relatively small scale and their interpretation requires higher perceptive powers and a more cautious approach than that necessary for examination of obliques. Use of these small-scale images can also lead to errors of location and size when they are rectified or re-scaled to match a larger map scale.

PHOTO INTERPRETATION AND MAPPING

Photographs examined

Cover searches were obtained from the Cambridge University Collection of Aerial Photographs (CUCAP) and the National Monuments Record: Air Photographs (NMRAP), Swindon. Stephen Coleman (Bedfordshire Historic Environment Record) provided scanned copies, via the internet, of parts of two vertical photographs taken in the dry summer of 1996. These recorded the area at a time of maximum crop response over buried features.

All photographs examined were from routine vertical surveys as held by CUCAP and from Bedfordshire HER. The NMRAP cover search listed a further 14 vertical prints dating from 1946. None was taken at appropriate times of year and, due to the short timescale required for completion of this assessment, they were not examined.

Photographs consulted are listed in the Appendix to this report.

Base maps

Digital data at a survey scale of 1:2500 were provided by the client.

Study area

Photographs were examined in detail for an area extending at least 100 metres beyond the assessment area.

Photo interpretation and mapping

All interpretations were made on screen using transformed images of appropriate photographs. This was necessary because of the format of the Bedfordshire HER verticals and was continued with the one CUCAP photograph that showed natural features at their best.

Transformations were made using AirPhoto software (Scollar 1998) and the transformed files were set as a background layers in AutoCAD Map, where features were overdrawn using standard conventions. The illustration in this report has been printed to fit a page and is not at a standard scale. A digital copy has been provided to the client.

Accuracy

AirPhoto computes values for mismatches of control points on the photograph and map. In all transformations prepared for this assessment the mean mismatches were less than $\pm 1.70\text{m}$. These mismatches can be less than the survey accuracy of the base maps themselves and users should be aware of the published figures for the accuracy of large scale maps and thus the need to relate these mismatches to the Expected Accuracy of the Ordnance Survey maps from which control information was taken (OS 2000).

All transformations showed a misplacement between map and air photographs of the position of one field boundary (the angled ditch between TL21096320 and TL21376336). This may be erroneously mapped by Ordnance Survey and ought not to be used as a fixed point for field planning.

COMMENTARY

Soils

The Soil Survey of England and Wales (SSEW 1983) shows the area to be on the western edge of the clayland of west Cambridgeshire on 'chalky till' (soil association 411d). Crops on such soils are notoriously poor respondents to sub-surface depth differences unless photographed during times of extreme drought.

Archaeological features

No archaeological features were identified within the Assessment Area. The closest possible feature – a small D-shaped enclosure – is some 150m south of the Study area at TL20736316.

Former land divisions?

Within the study area, but mostly to the south and east, are sinuous features, apparently triple ditched (but see below) whose only logical explanation seems to be that they show the pattern of former land divisions. To help make sense of them, they have been mapped over a greater area than was strictly necessary – but their origin and purpose remains no more than guesswork. They pay no attention to present-day boundaries except in the vicinity of the stream at TL211631.

These features are recorded only on the 1996 photographs and show as darker lines which are assumed to indicate deeper soil – hence their apparent triple-ditched form. However, if they are former boundaries, the central feature only may be a ditch, with the outside lines showing a plough-formed accumulation of soil. Such patterns can be seen to edge many modern fields and show similar spacing. However, it is not expected that anything of such an ephemeral nature would remain visible after many years of different cultivation – and the CUCAP photographs show there to have been no significant change to the modern (mapped) field pattern since 1977.

Two small features lie at and beyond the south-east corner of the Study Area. Both were recorded only in 1996 when they appeared as light coloured central areas surrounded by a darker line – possibly a ditch. Surrounding each feature were traces of external parallel lines. An initial explanation was that these showed the sites of former quarries and that the bounding lines indicated breaks in slope. Stereoscopic examination of other prints showed there to be no height differences at these points and the origin of these features is unknown.

Explanation: 'former land divisions?'

I asked Stephen Coleman, Bedfordshire HER, if he would examine the original prints and was prepared to comment on the apparent triple ditched features. His reply, dated 13 December 2000 (after completion of my report), is appended here with his permission.

This triple linear feature intrigued me when I scanned the photos since it does continue eastwards and then south again and thus cuts across at least three fields. However, on closer inspection using a stereoscope it is quite clearly cut into the crop. The two outer lines are each pairs of wheel tracks, exactly the same as normal tramlines, but between these is a single dark line. Only the latter seems to go straight through hedgerows in three locations at least! Interestingly the crop on one side of the dark line is nearly always greener than on the other. There are also three "island" features created the same way. The crop within these is lighter, presumably ripper.

As far as I can tell these fields were planted and initially sprayed in the usual way. The single sinuous dark line comes next, for whatever reason, and then seems to be respected, not crossed, by subsequent sprayings, just as if it was a field boundary. This would also account for the different state of the crop either side of the dark line. The apparent triple feature was thus created by three separate acts, two certainly of "agricultural" origin but the other a mystery. Colleagues here are also puzzled.

Non-archaeological features

Within the Assessment Area is a straight-edged extent of darker soil. This shows on more than one date and may indicate an earlier field which had been differently cultivated to most of its neighbours. Possibly the field was permanent pasture until recently and the dark soil shows there to be a higher humic content than on land which has been longer in arable use.

That dark soil is cut on its eastern side by the edge of a quarried area. This shows as uneven and disturbed ground and presumably remains from hand-cut extraction. A smaller area in the north of the dark soil shows similarly and may also indicate early quarrying.

The undulating ground south of Great Paxton shows bands of darker soil along the bottom of the lowest ground. These may indicate former watercourses or show the accumulation of colluvium on the valley bottoms. One passes through the Assessment Area.

Land use

On all dates of photography, all fields in the Assessment Area have been in arable use. One field in the Study Area, that centred TL20756345, has been pasture with buildings.

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APPENDIX

Aerial photographs examined

Source: Bedfordshire Historic Environment Record

Vertical photographs

Run 20: 1744	18 July 1996	1:10000
Run 21: 1753	18 July 1996	1:10000

Source: Cambridge University Collection of Aerial Photographs

Oblique photographs

None covered the area

Vertical photographs

RC8-BS 8-10	8 April 1977	1:13500
RC8-CC 109-110	2 July 1977	1:15200
RC8-CX 135-136	13 May 1979	1:21000
RC8-CX 141-142	13 May 1979	1:21000
RC8-EH 242-243	14 April 1982	1:10000
RC8-EI 81-84	11 May 1982	1:10000
RC8-KnBG 120, 122	12 June 1988	1:10000
RC8-KnBG 228	12 June 1988	1:10000

Source: National Monuments Record: Air Photographs

Most informative photographs

Run 20: 1744, Run 21: 1753
RC8-CX 141

TERMS AND CONDITIONS

Air Photo Services have produced this assessment for their clients, Cambridgeshire Archaeological Field Unit, subject to the following conditions:

Air Photo Services will be answerable only for those transcriptions, plans, documentary records and written reports that it submits to the clients, and not for the accuracy of any edited or re-drawn versions of that material that may subsequently be produced by the clients or any other of their agents.

That transcriptions, documentation, and textual reports presented within this assessment report shall be explicitly identified as the work of Air Photo Services.

Air Photo Services has consulted only those aerial photographs specified. It cannot guarantee that further aerial photographs of archaeological significance do not exist in collections that were not examined.

Due to the nature of aerial photographic evidence, Air Photo Services cannot guarantee that there may not be further archaeological features found during ground survey which are not visible on aerial photographs or that apparently 'blank' areas will not contain masked archaeological evidence.

We suggest that if a period of 6 months or more elapses between compilation of this report and field evaluation new searches are made in appropriate photo libraries. Examination of any newly acquired photographs is recommended.

That the original working documents (being interpretation overlays, control information, and digital data files) will remain the property of Air Photo Services and be securely retained by it for a period of three years from the completion date of this assessment after which only the digital files may be retained.

It is requested that a copy of this report be lodged with the relevant Sites and Monuments Record within six months of the completion of the archaeological evaluation.

Copyright of this report and the illustrations within and relevant to it is held by Air Photo Services © 2000 who reserve the right to use or publish any material resulting from this assessment.

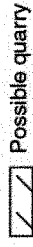
Land at Great Paxton Cambridgeshire

Features interpreted from aerial photographs

Former land divisions?



Quarry



Possible quarry



Dark soil



Deeper soil

Study area

Assessment area



Original photo interpretation and mapping at 1:2500.
Source photos from CUCAP and Bedfordshire HER.
Air Photo Services - December 2000
(Greatpaxton1.dwg)

APPENDIX B

Sites and Monuments Record Gazetteer for Great Paxton

SMR no	Grid ref. TL	Period	Description
2465	2101/6421	medieval	pottery
2476	2100/6417	Saxon/medieval	Minster
2476a	2097/6416	undated	cross base and shaft
2481	207-/639-	Roman	pottery
2533	2079/6415	Saxon	graveyard
2534	2073/6424	Saxon	lime-kilns
2571	202-/621-	Neolithic/Bronze Age	flint scatter



**Cambridgeshire
County Council**

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