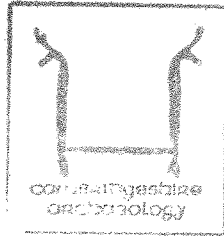
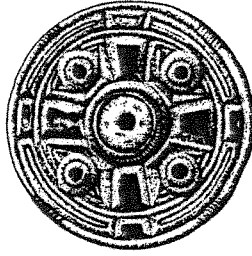


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Archaeological Field Unit

Eames Garden Centre, Eye Road, Peterborough: An Archaeological Evaluation

A Hatton

1999

Cambridgeshire County Council

Report No. B49

Commissioned by Persimmon Homes (East Midlands) Ltd

Summary

During December 1998 and February 1999 an archaeological evaluation was undertaken at Eames Garden Centre, Eye Road, Peterborough (TF 2120 0081) by Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeology Field Unit in advance of a residential development. A desktop study carried out before the fieldwork drew attention to the site's high archaeological potential, and highlighted the fact that the presumed course of the Roman Car Dyke lay along its western boundary. It was considered possible that the site might contain either a segment of Car Dyke itself, or possibly evidence of canal-side activities connected with it.

In spite of this, the evaluation uncovered only minimal remains. A stone-lined kiln or oven and an oval pit of uncertain function were found but neither contained any dating evidence. A sewer trench dug across Eye Road was monitored but did not reveal any traces of Car Dyke, although there was a lot of disturbance from previous service trenches.

The paucity of remains uncovered, however, was probably not due to an absence of activity in the past but, more likely, to the high degree of disturbance caused by previous construction work undertaken on the site in the recent past.

**Eames Garden Centre, Eye Road, Peterborough:
An Archaeological Evaluation**

1 INTRODUCTION

During December 1998 and February 1999 an archaeological evaluation was undertaken at Eames Garden Centre, Eye Road, Peterborough (TF 2120 0081) in advance of a residential development. The work was carried out by Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeology Field Unit according to a design brief drawn up by Simon Kaner of Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeology Office in March, 1998. In April 1998, Peterborough City Council became a unitary authority with its own Archaeology Service. The project was therefore monitored by Ben Robinson of Peterborough City Council Archaeology Service.

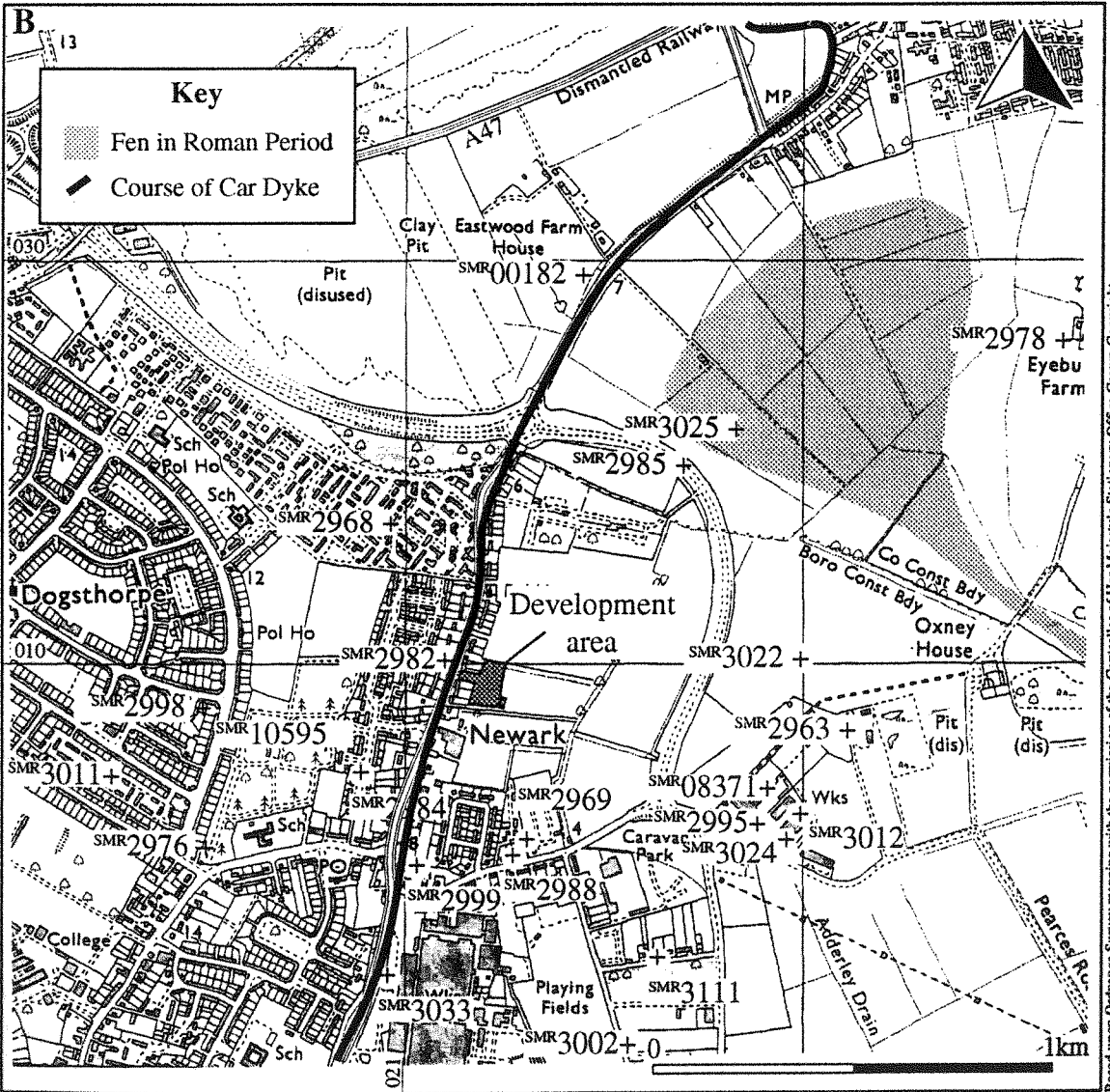
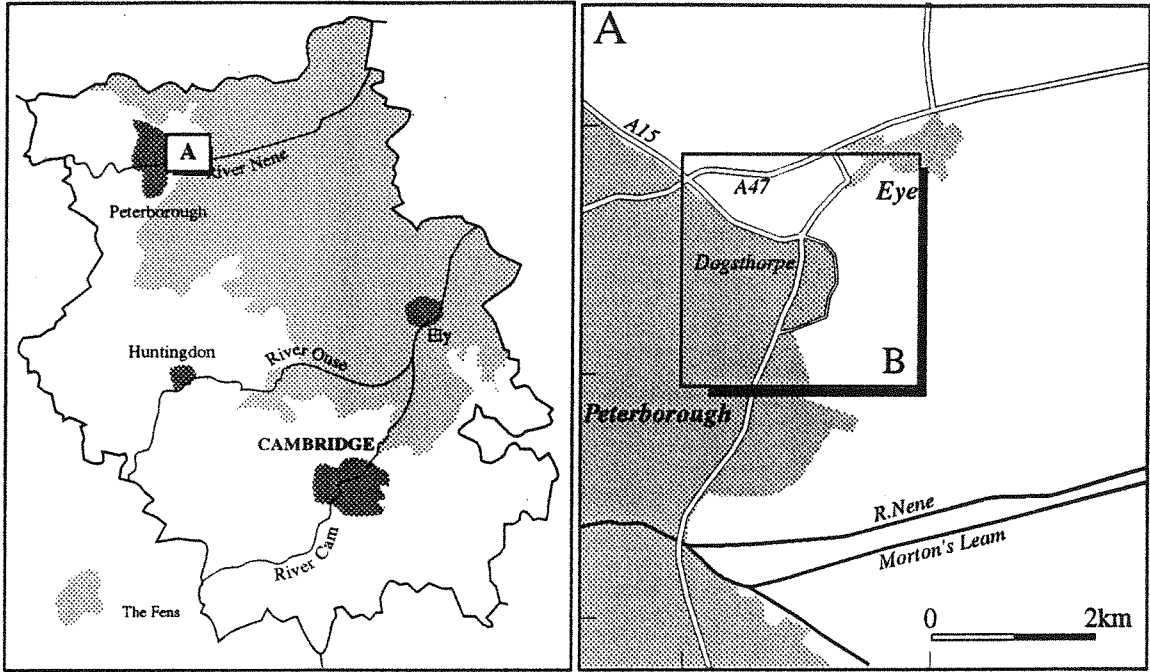
All the intrusive archaeological work at the site was undertaken following a Desktop Study, which included an aerial photographic appraisal (Roberts 1998). This showed that the area around the site was of high archaeological potential, and that the main archaeological interest of the site itself lay in its proximity to the nationally important Roman canal, Car Dyke.

The intrusive evaluation took place in three phases to accommodate various stages of de-construction and construction of the subject site. A series of evaluation trenches were excavated in order to assess the presence/absence and quality (i.e. degree of preservation) of any archaeological remains (Phase 1). The areas available for trenching in Phase 1 were limited owing to the site's continuing use as an actively trading business. Further evaluation trenches were dug after the removal of a number of glasshouses associated with the garden centre (Phase 2). Finally, the excavation of service trenches across Eye Road was monitored in order to seek traces of the Car Dyke which may have run along the same alignment as the road (Phase 3).

2 GEOLOGY, TOPOGRAPHY AND RECENT LAND USE

The underlying geology of the area consists of Oxford Clays, with islands of March Gravels, and fen skirt-land to the east of the site (BGS 158). The present ground surface is at an elevation of c. 5.5m OD. Newark Hill lies to the west of the site; here the height of the land drops to the south and east. The surrounding area is fairly level, rising gently to the west.

The land has been farmed at least since the medieval period and the desktop study revealed evidence of ridge and furrow agriculture, much of which has been ploughed



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out. In more recent years the area has been used as a garden centre with associated glass houses and plant display areas.

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

As noted above, a desktop study was carried out in advance of the intrusive phases of this evaluation (Roberts 1998). The desktop report contains information on the previously-known archaeology of the site and also an assessment of the existing aerial photographic evidence. The reader is referred to that work for detailed information. In summary, however, the desktop showed the high density of archaeological sites in the area around Eames Garden Centre, but did not uncover any known remains within the subject site itself. Records of Roman burials on the site (SMR 10087) appear to have been erroneously plotted and this SMR number has now been re-assigned. The main archaeological feature of the area is Car Dyke, a partly artificial, partly natural canal which runs from Newborough, southwards past Eye and towards the eastern edge of Peterborough at Newark. Traces of Car Dyke (SMR no. 2982) were noted in 1955 along the western edge of Eye Road, which forms the western boundary of the development site. The purpose of Car Dyke is discussed in the Fenland Survey (Hall 1987, 28) which suggests it was used as a catchwater drain in this area, protecting summer grazing land, rather than as a canal for transporting fen produce. A considerable amount of research has been carried out on the stretches of Car Dyke to the north, in Lincolnshire (Simmons and Cope-Faulkner 1997). It was considered possible that the site might contain, at its western extremity, either a segment of Car Dyke itself, or possibly other earthworks or evidence of canal-side activities connected with Car Dyke.

4 METHODOLOGY

A mechanical excavator with a toothless ditching bucket was used to excavate the trenches which varied in length from 30m to 20m, with a constant width, however, of 1.5m. Trench 2 was extended to expose a feature which had been identified during the initial excavation. The removal of the topsoil revealed a subsoil with no signs of archaeological activity. It was therefore removed down to the top of the natural which consisted of decayed Oxford Clay mixed with sandy silts. Where archaeological features were encountered, standard recording systems were employed in accordance with the Design Brief.

Only limited areas of the site could be evaluated in Phase 1, as the site was still in use as a garden centre open to the public. A second phase of evaluation was therefore

undertaken after the closure of the garden centre and the demolition of its glasshouses and buildings. During Phase 2, further trenches were excavated in the southern half of the site, and trench 2 was extended still further in order to look for features associated with that uncovered in Phase 1. A third phase of evaluation followed, during which the excavation of a large manhole-pit together with a pipe-trench was monitored as both were located on Eye Road, on the presumed route of the Roman Car Dyke.

5 RESULTS

PHASE 1

Trench 1 (fig 2)

Trench 1 was 25m long and ran approximately east-west. Together with Trench 2 it was located at the lowest part of the subject site in order to identify any archaeological activity that may have been present near the fen-edge.

The trench section revealed a dark brown topsoil (0.2m in depth) which consisted of silty clay mixed with modern burnt material (i.e. ash) and fragments of modern brick. The topsoil sat immediately on top of a mid-brown subsoil (0.2m in depth). This latter contained fragments of modern brick together with occasional small flint nodules. The removal of the subsoil exposed the natural decayed Oxford Clay into which narrow trenches for field-drains had been dug. No archaeology was present in the excavated trench.

Trench 2 (fig 2)

Trench 2 was 20m long trench and ran approximately east-west. Two additions were made to it in order to investigate a feature (feature 1) which had only been partially exposed in the original trench.

The stratigraphic sequence in section was virtually the same as in Trench 1, the only difference being the depth of the subsoil which had increased to 0.25m. The removal of the subsoil exposed the natural geology (see above), together with what appeared to be a small circular pit: further investigation revealed it to be a kiln with a slightly irregular figure-of-eight shape.



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Figure 2 Trench Location

Feature 1: The Kiln

In plan the kiln had the shape of a figure-of-eight with the easterly end being smaller than the westerly end. A total of two sections were excavated across the feature in order to determine possible differences between the two halves. The eastern half of the feature was found to have a width of 0.58m and a depth of 0.11m. The fill consisted of a dark-grey silty clay with a high content of daub and charcoal flecks. The presence of daub and charcoal would suggest that this half of the feature was where the fire was set when the kiln was in use.

The western half of the feature was found to have a width of 0.85m and a depth of 0.18m. The fill consisted of a light grey-brown silty clay with fragments of burnt sandstone. Following the removal of the fill, it was found to have been lined both along the sides and the base with thin sandstone blocks of uncertain, possibly structural, function. The overall length of the feature was 1.6m.

Trench 3 (Fig 2)

Trench 3 was 20m long and ran in a north-south direction, at a right-angle to trenches 1 and 2. It was positioned in order to examine the flattest area of the site. The excavation of the first 10m of the trench, however, revealed a large amount of modern rubble that was used as foundation material for a car park. The remaining 10m of the trench showed in section that the topsoil had been replaced by silty sand mixed with modern rubble which sat immediately on top of the natural to make a form of hard standing. No archaeological features were observed in this trench.

Trench 4 (fig 2)

Trench 4 was 30m long and ran in an east-west direction. The trench was positioned in order to identify and investigate any possible remains of bank material associated with the Roman Car Dyke, which was presumed to run under the present Eye Road.

The section of the excavated trench showed that at the western end the topsoil (0.13m in depth) consisted of a dark grey brown silty clay. The topsoil sat immediately on top of a dark brown silty clay buried soil (0.07m in depth) that contained fragments of burnt wood and flecks of charcoal. Below the buried soil was the mid-brown silty clay subsoil (0.13m in depth) over the natural decayed Oxford clay.

A segment of the section examined at the eastern end of the trench showed the same stratigraphic sequence but with each deposit varying in thickness: the topsoil had a depth of 0.2m, the buried soil had a depth of 0.22m and the subsoil was 0.07m deep

The increased depth of the deposits at the eastern, i.e. downhill, end of the trench could indicate a degree of soil creep occurring over many years.

It was assumed that the buried soil represented the remains of the bank associated with the Roman Car Dyke. However, as the machine-cut pipe trench (see below) later showed, this may not have been the case.

PHASE 2

Phase 2 of the archaeological evaluation was conducted following the removal of various buildings associated with the garden centre.

Trench 2 (fig 2)

The original length of Trench 2 was extended further. The new extension revealed the presence of a pit (feature 2) of uncertain function. Within the remaining area of the extension no further archaeological features were identified.

Feature 2 was shown in plan to be almost oval with a width of 0.72m, a total length of 2.2m and a depth of 0.11m, with the excavated segment being 1.1m long. There was only one fill, a very dark brown silty clay with no large inclusions and occasional small inclusions. No artefacts were recovered from it.

Trench 5 (fig 2)

Trench 5 was 23m long and ran in a north-south direction. It was located along the gravel trackway that surrounded the development site. The reason for the location of Trench 5 was the expected greater potential for the survival of archaeological remains away from the area where the buildings associated with the garden centre had stood.

The section of the excavated trench showed 0.1m of pea-grit gravēl which was the hardstanding for the trackway, together with 0.2m of topsoil. This consisted of a very dark-brown silty clay above 0.07m of subsoil (mid-brown silty clay). Immediately below the latter was the natural decayed Oxford Clay. No archaeological features were identified in the trench.

Trenches 6 & 7 (fig 2)

Trenches 6 and 7 ran in a north-south direction with Trench 6 being 13m in length and Trench 7 being 16m in length. The reduced length of the former was due to a live water-pipe encountered during the excavation of trench 6. Both trenches were located

within the footprints of the demolished glass houses which had been part of the garden centre complex. The two trenches revealed the same stratigraphic sequence. This consisted of 0.3m of modern brick rubble above 0.15m of subsoil, a mid-brown silty clay, which sat immediately on top of the natural decayed Oxford Clay. No archaeological features were identified in either trench.

Trenches 8 & 9 (fig 2)

Both trench 8 and 9 ran in an east-west direction and both were 18m in length. As with Trenches 1 and 2 (above), Trenches 8 and 9 were located in the lowest part of the site in order to identify any archaeological activity at the point where the land drops off towards the fen.

The stratigraphic sequence shown in the section was the same for both trenches: the first 0.1m consisted of pea-grit gravel as this was an area where plants were displayed. Immediately below the pea-grit was a dark brown topsoil. The topsoil was 0.1m deep at the western end of the trenches and increased gradually in an easterly direction finally achieving a depth of 0.25m at the eastern end of both trenches. Below the topsoil was a thin layer of subsoil (0.1m in depth) of constant thickness in both trenches. The natural geology exposed was decayed Oxford Clay. As with Trench 4, the section seems to indicate a degree of soil creep down to the fen-edge hence the increase in the topsoil depth. No archaeological features were identified in either of the two trenches.

PHASE 3

During the later half of February 1999 excavation of a large pit to house a manhole was scheduled together with a pipe-trench to link the sewerage system of the new housing estate to the main sewer. As the main excavation work would reach a depth of 5.5m and was to take place across the Eye Road, it was considered a good opportunity to observe a cross section across the Roman Car Dyke.

The Manhole Pit (fig 2)

To accommodate a new manhole a pit 2m x 2m and approximately 5.5m deep had to be excavated; this would allow for the observation of the Car Dyke in section. However, on excavation of the pit it was discovered that a large amount of disturbance had occurred during the laying down of other services which would have removed any trace of the dyke under this particular section of the road. As a consequence this part of the observation was abandoned.

The Pipe Trench (fig 2)

The course of the pipe-trench was across the Eye Road and down the new access road to the site of the new development. The trench was excavated to a depth of 5.5m at the point where the manhole was located. It gradually decreased in depth as it approached the subject site. There the maximum depth was *c.* 1m. During the excavation of the trench across the Eye Road, a total of 15 services were encountered which had obliterated most stratigraphic sequence to a depth of 1.5m. Where the stratigraphic sequence had not been destroyed it was possible to see the general make-up of the underlying geology still present under the modern road surface.

Although the stratigraphy was reasonably clear there was no sign of any cut feature that could be described as the Car Dyke. This may suggest that the dyke was in fact located further to the west, and that the modern Eye Road runs parallel to, and not directly on top of, the dyke.

6 DISCUSSION

All the background research indicated that the site was located within a rich archaeological landscape, with the proximity to the fen-edge providing suitable conditions for prehistoric activity. The presence of the Roman Car Dyke, also considered to be a focus for activity, made the potential for the presence of archaeological remains high. However, despite the excavation of 10 evaluation trenches (including the sewerage pipe-trench) only two features were identified, a kiln and a small oval shallow pit neither of which produced any dating evidence.

The apparent absence of evidence for further archaeological activity on the site is surprising. The area today is rather wet. It is therefore possible that the main focus of occupation was located to the north of the two features identified, i.e. where the land rises and form a flat 'plateau'. Unfortunately, at the time of phase 1 of the evaluation, the flat portion of land in the northern part of the site was still being used as a car park and as a consequence could not be trenched. It was later discovered during phase 2 that the foundation material used to create a stable surface for the car park covered an area of 20m x 15m and was at least 0.6m deep; thus, any archaeological evidence that may have once existed in this area had probably already been destroyed.

7 CONCLUSION

The results from the archaeological evaluation were poor. However, this is probably not due to an absence of activity in the past but, more likely, to the high degree of disturbance caused by the construction works which were undertaken on the site over many years.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Adrian Evans of Persimmon Homes (East Midlands) Ltd for commissioning the project, and for his help and co-operation during the work. The project was monitored for Peterborough City Council Archaeology Service by Ben Robinson, and was carried out according to a design brief written by Simon Kaner of Cambridgeshire County Council County Archaeology Office. The project was managed for the Archaeological Field Unit by William Wall, who also edited the report, and the illustrations were drawn by Jon Cane.

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- Simmons, B. and Cope-Faulkner, P. 1997 *The Lincolnshire Car Dyke. Past work, management options and future possibilities.* APS Report no. 51/97

APPENDIX 1: SMR entries in the area of the site

SMR No.	Date	Type
1039	Medieval	moat, house, etc.
1040	Medieval	moat, etc.
2963	Bronze Age	settlement
2964		cauldron
2968	Medieval	ridge and furrow
2969	Roman	pot
2976	Palaeolithic	flint
2977	Mesolithic	flint
2978	Mesolithic	flint
2982	Roman	Dyke
2984	Roman	settlement
2985	Bronze / Iron Age	settlement, mound
2987	Roman	Tile
2988	Roman	pot
2995		arrowhead
2998	Neolithic	axe
2999	Neo / Bronze Age	flint
3002	Bronze Age	barrow
3011	Iron Age	coin
3012	Bronze Age	pot
3024	Post-Med	flint works
3025	Iron Age	settlement
3033	Medieval	chapel
3111	Bronze Age	barrow
3159	Roman	Tile
8225	Mesolithic	hammer
8226	Bronze Age	spear
8247	Palaeolithic	flints
8371		crop marks
8376		crop marks
8377		fen edge
8426		RD?
10595	Iron Age	excavation
10595	Roman	excavation



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