

Archaeological Field Unit

**Kings Farm, Horningsea:
an archaeological evaluation**

Judith Roberts

August 1999

Cambridgeshire County Council

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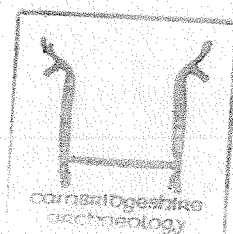
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1999

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SUMMARY

An archaeological evaluation of a 1.75ha site at Kings Farm, Horningsea was undertaken by the Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Field Unit in August 1999. Four trenches were dug and revealed remnants of tree clearance, modern disturbance and undated ditches. No clear evidence for occupation of the area was discovered.

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**Kings Farm, Horningsea:
an archaeological evaluation
(TL 499 628)**

1 INTRODUCTION

In August 1999 the Archaeological Field Unit (AFU) of Cambridgeshire County Council undertook an evaluation to reveal archaeological remains at Kings Farm, Horningsea (TL499 628) (Fig. 1). The work was carried out on behalf of County Farms Estate, Cambridgeshire County Council before construction of a reservoir.

2 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

The 1.75ha site lies on a peninsular of Lower Beds Chalk Marl, at its boundary with grey-blue Gault Clay (Sheet 188, British Geological Survey 1974), at a height of approximately 5mOD. The subject site is covered, in part, by alluvium, which in turn seals 1st and 2nd Terrace gravels. Test pits and boreholes confirmed that the site lies on the gravel terrace on the edge of the Horningsea peninsular. In the northern and eastern part of the site a thin layer of alluvium covers the gravel terrace.

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Cambridgeshire County Council Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) shows no archaeological remains within or adjacent to the reservoir site. Details of records in the surrounding area are given in a desk-top assessment of the site that was carried out in March 1999 (Macaulay 1999). Prehistoric lithic scatters and stray finds have been recovered from the gravels and a possible Bronze Age barrow is recorded to the north-east of the site.

The area is rich in Roman remains, including settlement and kiln sites. Alluvium close to Car Dyke has masked Roman sites closer to the Cam which have been revealed through excavation. The site also lies within an area of 'medieval fen' (Hall 1996) with ridge and furrow to the east and west. Medieval buildings and wharves are recorded in Horningsea to the south and west and at Eye Hall to the north.

Widespread post-medieval coprolite extraction was carried out in the area.

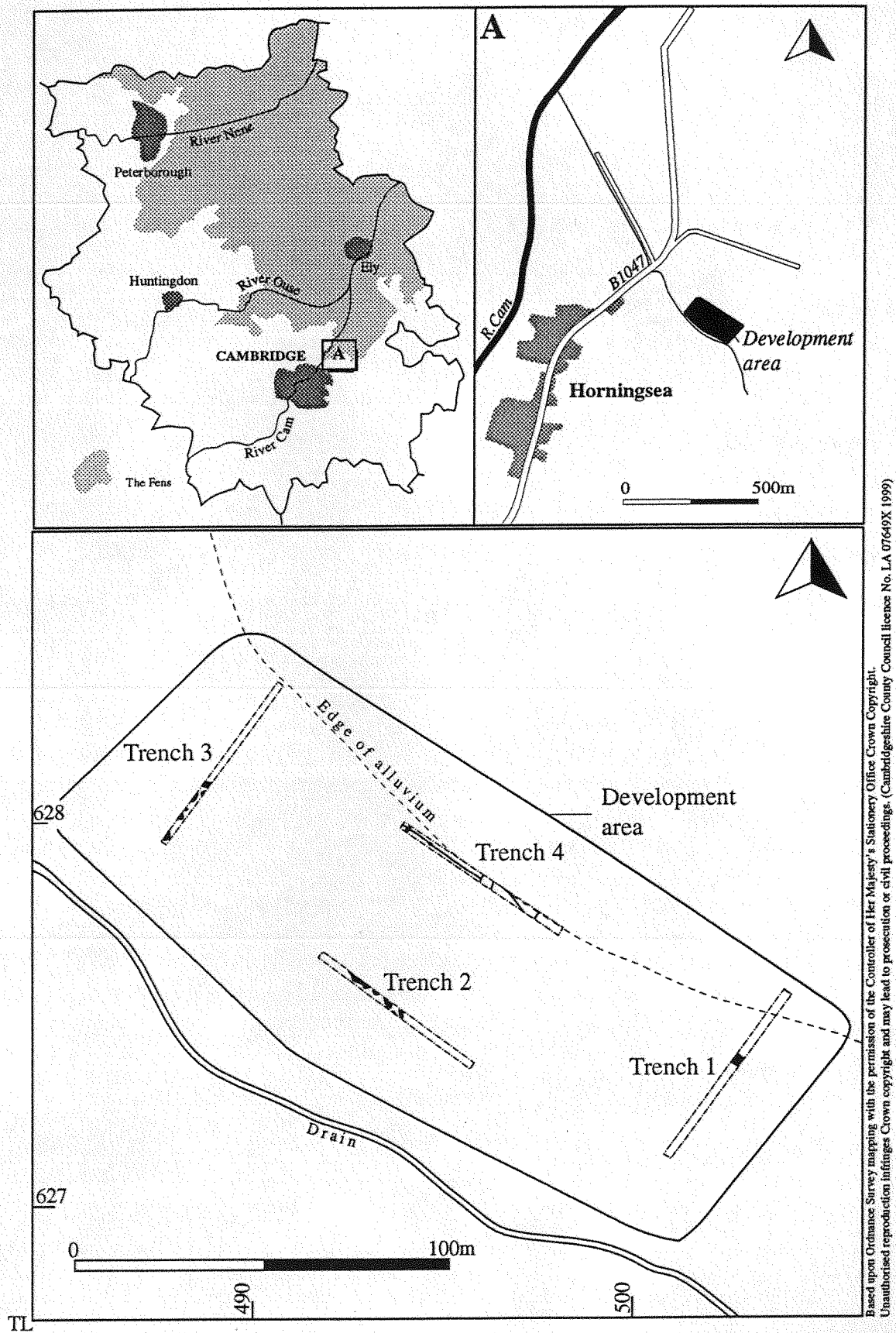


Figure 1 Site Location Plan

The desktop assessment highlighted the archaeological potential of the site as follows:

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|------------------|
| • Mesolithic/Neolithic/Bronze Age | low/unknown |
| • Roman | moderate/unknown |
| • Medieval | high/unknown. |

4 METHODOLOGY AND CONSTRAINTS

The subject site appears to have been under arable agriculture for many years and no archaeological remains had been identified by fieldwalking or aerial photography. The trenching strategy was designed to determine variations in depth of topsoil and alluvium and define, if possible, the edge of the alluvium, chalk, and gravel. The position of trenches was related to the area defined for the reservoir.

Over 200m of trench was opened by machine. Selected areas were cleaned and features excavated by hand. The trenches were planned, photographed and recorded using the standard techniques of the AFU. Modern intrusive features were recorded in plan but not excavated. Spoil was scanned by eye to determine the presence of artefacts in the plough soil.

5 RESULTS

5.1 Trench 1

Trench 1 (51.4m long) was located along the south-eastern edge of the site (see Fig. 1). There was 0.3m of topsoil at the northern end and 0.25m at the southern end and 0.2m of silty sandy subsoil overlying grey sandy gravel. The trench sloped south toward the drain which runs along the bottom of the shallow valley.

Cut into the gravels, 19.5m from the northern end of the trench, was a linear feature 2.4m wide and 0.6m deep with shallowly sloping sides and a concave base. The single fill of this feature was a dark sandy silt with virtually no gravel. No finds were recovered from the fill and it appeared to be cut from high in the stratigraphic sequence.

5.2 Trench 2

Trench 2 (48.2m long) was located along the south-western edge of the site. There was 0.2m of topsoil over a mixed sandy gravel subsoil and gravel

natural. Topsoil depth was 50-100mm deeper at the eastern end of the trench. Modern plough marks were visible in the base of the trench.

Irregular patches of grey silty sand were found along the trench with increased frequency towards the western end. Two of these patches were very dark and silty with a high percentage of charcoal but their irregular nature (both in plan and in section) suggests this part of the site contained trees which were cleared, possibly when the route of the drain was formalised along the bottom of the valley.

A grey sandy gravel linear feature (6.3m wide), 9.2m from the eastern end of the trench, appears to be a natural channel in the gravels running down the slope towards the drain.

5.3 Trench 3

Trench 3 (52.3m long) was dug parallel to the north-western edge of the proposed reservoir. This contained 0.2m of topsoil at the southern end, increasing to approximately 0.25m at the northern end of the trench. Four irregular silty sandy clay patches (similar to those noted in Trench 2) were found at the southern end of the trench. A linear feature, running east-west across the trench, was noted 18.2m from the southern end. This feature was over 0.5m deep with a dark grey slightly sandy silty fill with only occasional gravels. No finds were recovered from the feature and it was cut from high in the stratigraphic sequence. North of this feature the base of the trench was a mottled sandy gravel with creamy sandy patches.

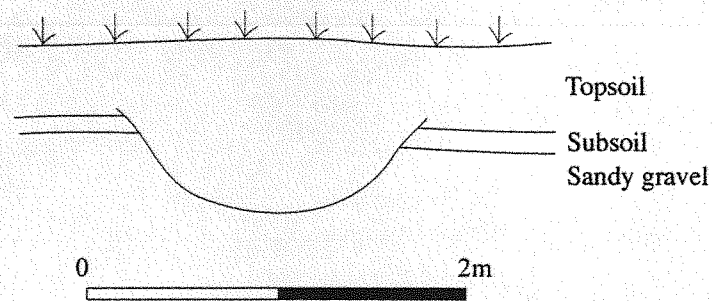


Figure 2 Schematic section of linear feature in Trench 3

5.4 Trench 4

Trench 4 (50.8m long) was dug parallel to the north-eastern edge of the reservoir. Along a distance of 24m in the western end of the trench a pale, straight anomaly was noted. This may be the result of pan-busting through the gravels in recent years. A narrow (0.4m wide) linear feature was noted running north-east-south-west across the trench. The edges sloped at 45° and it had a concave base. The single fill was a dark silt with occasional gravel. Two irregular dark silty sandy patches were noted at 8.5m and 11.7m respectively from the western end of the trench. These were shallow and no finds were recovered from them. A grey sandy gravel natural feature (similar to that seen in Trench 2) was noted running north-south across the trench. A spread of degraded, disarticulated bone (vertebral fragments of a large mammal, probably cow or horse) was found in a hollow in this grey sandy gravel feature.

A dark grey silty feature with occasional large (<50mm) fragments of gravel crossed the trench from west-north-west-east-south-east. No finds were recovered from this feature. At the eastern end of the trench (6.6m from the end) and extending beyond the southern edge a further feature ran along the remaining length of the trench. Excavation revealed this to be shallow and the fill contained no artefacts.

No artefacts were seen in the spoil from the trenches and none were noted when walking across the field. A few fragments of post-medieval building material were noted where the track crossed the drain.

6 DISCUSSION

Documentary research (Macaulay 1999) suggested that the subject site was beyond the core of the medieval village and not within the sphere of the Roman settlement. Evaluation trenches suggest that this area had been used for agriculture, if at all, during this period. Ploughing and pan-busting have cut into the underlying sub-soil and gravel. It appears that the valley bottom was lightly wooded in the past and that palaeochannels had flowed through the gravel in prehistory. The alluvial deposits do not extend very far onto the northern part of the subject site.

The conditions were warm and dry and cut features were clearly visible in the sub-soil and natural geology. It is likely that had medieval or earlier features existed on the site they would have been identifiable.

7 CONCLUSIONS

The absence of medieval or earlier remains in the plough soil or visible in the subsoil and the high level of modern disturbance across the site suggest that further work is unlikely to provide much information on the early occupation here. The very small amount of alluvium in the north-east suggests that there has been erosion of the valley floor. This may have reduced the survival of any prehistoric remains. It does, however, suggest that alluvium is not masking archaeological features on the site. Those features that were present appear to be cut into the alluvium and are cut from relatively high in the stratigraphic sequence.

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