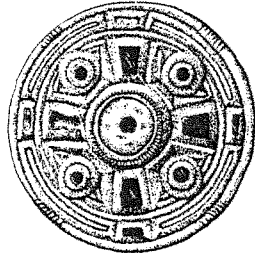


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Archaeological Field Unit

An Archaeological Evaluation at 58 Orchard Row, Soham

Spencer Cooper

2000

Cambridgeshire County Council

Report No. B71

Commissioned by Parkwell Construction

An Archaeological Evaluation at Orchard Row, Soham

Spencer Cooper HND, BA, MSocSci

May 2000

Editor Stephen Macaulay BA Hons MPhil, AIFA

Illustrator Caroline Malim BA, PGCE, MPhil



Report NoB71

©Archaeological Field Unit
Cambridgeshire County Council
Fulbourn Community Centre
Haggis Gap, Fulbourn
Cambridgeshire CB1 5HD
Tel (01223) 881614
Fax (01223) 880946

Arch.Field.Unit@libraries.camcnty.gov.uk
<http://www.camcnty.gov.uk/library/afu/index.htm>

SUMMARY

On May 10th 2000 the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council carried out an archaeological evaluation on land at 58 Orchard Row, Soham (TL 6053 7170) before the construction of 6 dwellings with associated services. Four trenches were excavated within the development area. No archaeological features were identified.

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Figure 1 Location of site and trenches.

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION AT 58 ORCHARD ROW, SOHAM.

1 INTRODUCTION

On May 10th 2000 the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council carried out an archaeological evaluation on land at 58 Orchard Row, Soham before the construction of 6 dwellings with associated services. The work was commissioned by Parkwell Construction Ltd. The evaluation was undertaken in accordance with Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Field Unit Specification (SPM Apr/99/11) drawn up by Stephen Macaulay in response to a design brief issued by Andy Thomas of the County Archaeology Office.

The site lies several hundred metres to the south east of the historic village of Soham.

2 TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

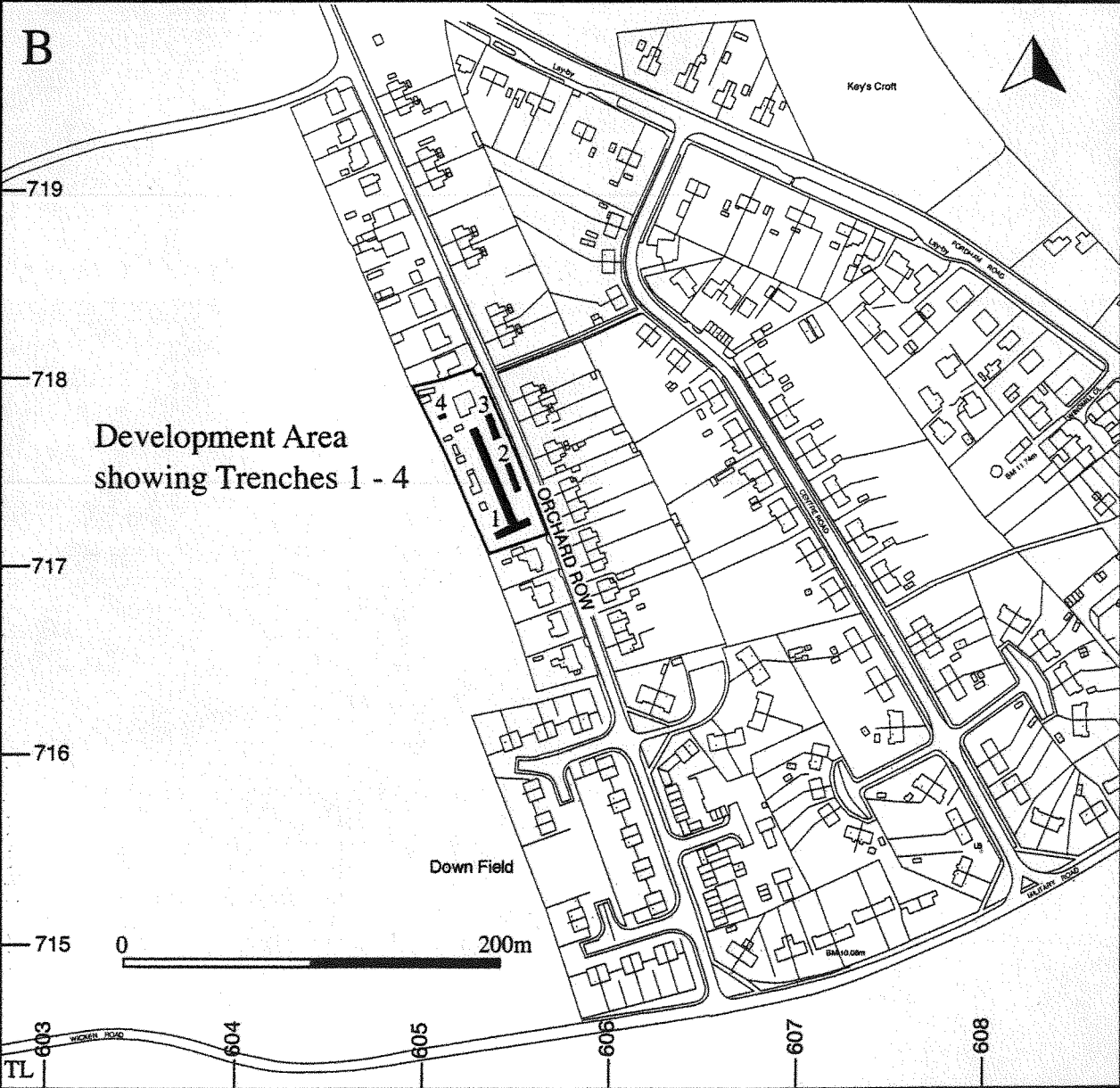
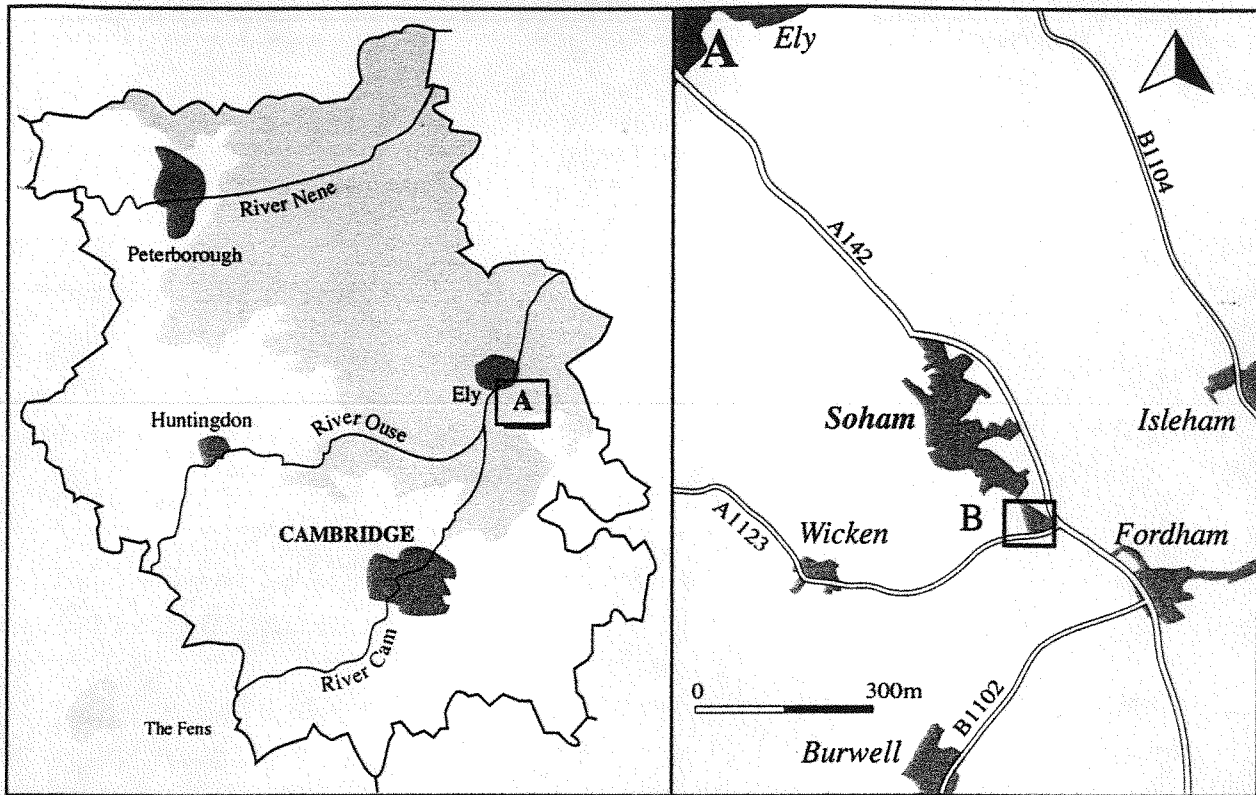
Soham is situated on a peninsular of slightly higher land - Bedfordshire Lower Chalk and 3rd Terrace Gravels which projects from Fordham north west into the fens at a height of around 10m OD from Fordham.

The development site is located on the Lower Chalk and lies close to the boundary of the 2nd Terrace Gravels and alluvium which run to the south of Soham.

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Fen edge around Soham and the nearby Snail valley have a long history of human activity (Hall 1996; 72-81). Prehistoric finds include Mesolithic tranchet axes, Neolithic flint scatters, Bronze Age pottery and lithics, as well as ring ditches. Pottery, probably Iron Age in date and Roman burials have been recorded within Soham. There are possible Iron Age and Roman burials within Soham and a large number of cropmark sites including a probable Roman villa lie to the east and south east of the site. There is a high level of early Anglo Saxon activity including a number of cemetery sites in and around Soham.

The early historical significance of Soham is attested by the foundation of a monastery in the 7th century by St Felix, first bishop of the East Angles, it is thought to be on the site of the medieval church.



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Figure 1 Site Location Plan

The Fenland Survey states that there is no settlement activity away from village cores of Soham and Wicken (Hall 1996). This appears to be confirmed at Soham by results of an archaeological evaluation in the grounds of Soham County Primary School (Bray 1991), immediately east of the later excavation at Pratt St (Hatton & Last 1997). Both sites located close to the medieval church, identified pits, postholes and ditches containing animal bone fired, fired clay and pottery dating to the 10th-13th centuries. However work undertaken to the north of Soham at Cloverfield Drive (Hatton & Macaulay 1999) uncovered Prehistoric, Roman and Medieval activity.

3.1 SMR Entries

The Cambridgeshire Sites and Monuments Record identified a number of archaeological finds in the fields surrounding the proposed development site. These include Bronze Age pottery (SMR Nos: 07492, 07493); Roman artefacts (SMR Nos: 07603a, 07604, 07120, 07121, 07586, 10142); and Anglo-Saxon finds (SMR Nos: 07603b, 07585, 07121a, 07586a) which include a nearby cemetery. Finally a medieval furlong boundary (SMR No: 10358) runs close to the site.

3.2 Documentary and Historical Records

The historical records held at the County Council's Record Office in Cambridge were investigated. It holds copies of the 1845 Tithe Map (surveyed 1841). This work was supplemented by the use of the subsequent detailed Ordnance Survey maps of the area (the 1 inch map published in 1886 and first maps from 1888 (XXX12 & XXX16). Interestingly no enclosure map exist for Soham, it being a rare example of unenclosed arable which survived well into the 20th century.

4 METHODOLOGY

Following background documentary study, a series of four trenches totalling 86m in length, and 1.6m in width, were excavated using a wheeled JCB with a toothless ditching bucket. A total of 4% of the development area was evaluated. The locations of the trenches are shown in Figure 1. After machining was completed each trench was cleaned by hand and photographed and recorded using the AFU standard archaeological recording system. In addition all of the spoil heaps from the trenches were scanned visually and with a metal detector to aid recovery of artefacts.

4 RESULTS

Trench 1

Trench 1 was T-shaped and located in the centre of the site. The north-south arm was 50m long and 0.60m deep whilst the east-west arm was 12m long. The topsoil consisted of a dark grey clay silt which was 0.35m deep. Directly below the topsoil was a subsoil which was 0.25m deep and contained no artefacts. No archaeological features were encountered in this trench.

Trench 2

Trench 2 was 14m long and 0.80m deep and was located on a north-south alignment. No archaeological features were encountered in this trench.

Trench 3

Trench 3 was 6m long and 1.2m deep and located on a north-south alignment. No archaeological features were encountered in this trench.

Trench 4

Trench 4 was 2m long and 1.2m deep and was located on an east-west alignment. No archaeological features were encountered in this trench.

6 Interpretation

A similar stratigraphic sequence was observed in all trenches. The sequence was composed of topsoil and subsoil. No archaeological features were identified in the four excavated trenches.

7 Conclusion

The results of this evaluation have not enhanced our understanding of occupation and activity on the Soham peninsular. No features or artefacts were identified within the four excavated trenches. The implications of this evidence are that there was no medieval occupation this far south of the historic core of Soham.

8 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author wishes to thank the developers for their co-operation, Andrew Thomas for monitoring on behalf of the CAO, Stephen Macaulay for managing the project and Caroline Malim for the illustration.

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The Archaeological Field Unit
Fulbourn Community Centre
Haggis Gap
Fulbourn
Cambridge CB1 5HD
Tel (01223) 881614
Fax (01223) 880946