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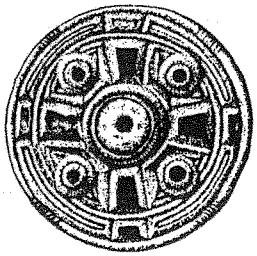

Archaeological Field Unit

Frank's Farm, Elm: An Archaeological Evaluation

S Kenney

2000

Cambridgeshire County Council

Report No. B74

Commissioned by Geoff Beel Consultancy

Frank's Farm, Elm: An Archaeological Evaluation

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SUMMARY

Between 14th and 22nd August 2000, the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council (AFU) carried out an archaeological evaluation on land at Frank's Farm, Elm parish, just to the north-west of March (TF 4451/0020).

Although the development area was close to several known Roman sites, no archaeological features were found in any of the four trenches excavated.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Between 14th and 22nd August 2000, the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council (AFU) carried out an archaeological evaluation on land at Frank's Farm, Elm parish, just to the north-west of March (TF 4451/0020). The work was carried out at the request of Geoff Beel Consultancy on behalf of the farmer, Mr Henry Deptford, in advance of the construction of a new agricultural reservoir, and was in response to a brief set by the County Archaeology Office (CAO).

The site lies to the north of the Twenty Foot River, west of Stag's Holt, and north-east of Frank's Farm itself. The proposed development area is a regular parallelogram, bounded to the north and west by minor dykes. The area affected by the development proposals covers approximately 2.46 ha.

The presence of archaeological remains was considered probable by the CAO on the basis of information contained in the County Sites and Monuments Record (SMR). It records several Roman finds and cropmarks from the vicinity.

Four linear trenches were opened by machine, and subsequently hand cleaned where appropriate, photographed, and base planned. No archaeological features or deposits were encountered in any of the trenches.

2 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

2.1 Geology

According to the British Geological Survey (BGS), the underlying geology of the development area is Nordelph Peat, which in turn overlies the silty clays of the Terrington Beds, both of which are Flandrian in date. During the evaluation, it was found that a layer of alluvium overlies the peat in this area; this is consistent with the wider BGS picture of local stratigraphy.

2.2 Topography

The site is located in a particularly flat and low-lying area of the Fens, and is only just above sea level at 0.1-0.3m OD. Silt roddons, locally referred to as 'hills' can be observed in the surrounding fields as low ridges, often extending for several hundred metres or more across the landscape.

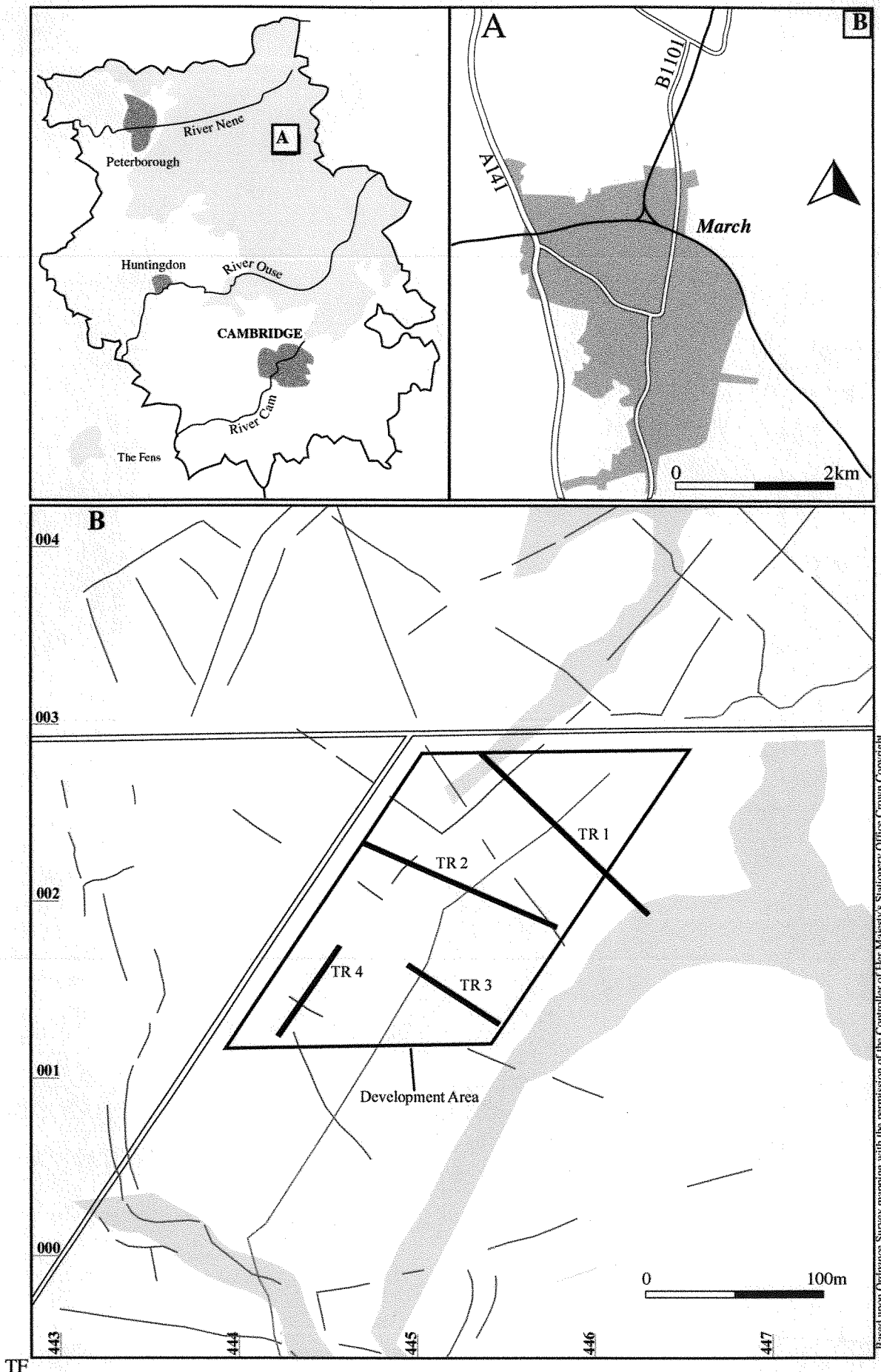

Figure 1 *Location Map (Archaeology shown in red, roddons in yellow tone, old watercourses in blue)*

3 HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

3.1 Historical Background

Elm is first written of as *Eolum* and *Elm*, perhaps meaning 'at the elm' c. 973 (Reaney 1943), but is not mentioned in the Domesday Book. There is presently no evidence that the area around Frank's Farm was settled between the Roman period and the nineteenth century. The area of the site has the name Livermere, which is first recorded in 1221 as *Liuermere*, the etymology of which remains uncertain. Other names in the area, such as Crowmere, Creekgall Fen and Mere Grounds are obvious references to the wet conditions which would have persisted until the creation of the Twenty Foot River. It would appear, although there is no direct evidence, that Coldham's Bank to the west was separating the hamlets of Coldham and Waldersea from seasonally flooded land to the east.

3.2 Archaeological Background

Several sites of Roman finds (SMR 03875, 07941), settlement cropmarks (SMR 04171, 08887, 08889) and salterns (SMR 06106, 10533) have been found close to the subject area, all within 600m.

The Fen Causeway crosses the northern part of the March island some 2km to the south of the site.

The Twenty Foot River appears as the Elm River on a map of 1592, and was probably constructed during the medieval period, despite its straightness.

3.3 Aerial Photographic Survey (fig 1)

Rog Palmer of Air Photo Services carried out replotting of aerial photographs for the site. His report suggested that several archaeological ditches would cross the development area, and these are shown along with the trench locations and the development area on figure 1.

4 METHODOLOGY

Using the development proposals in conjunction with the AP study, a scheme of intrusive trenching was devised to test the archaeological potential of the observed cropmarks.

Four trenches with a total length of 368m, of which 333m were within the development area, were opened using a mechanical excavator with a 1.9m toothless ditching bucket, under the supervision of an archaeologist (see fig. 1). This constitutes a 2.5% sample of the area.

The topsoil and any surviving alluvium were removed first to determine whether any features were visible cutting through at that level, and then if nothing was seen, the Nordelph Peat was removed to determine whether it sealed any prehistoric features.

The trenches were cleaned by hand where appropriate, photographed, base planned and located with reference to the Ordnance Survey and Datum.

5 RESULTS

The depositional sequence was the same in every trench although it was not always possible to see the alluvium from which the topsoil was derived, and it is apparent from these observations that the alluvium is thicker in the northern part of the site.

The topsoil was a dark grey silty clay with very occasional rounded stones up to 50mm. Below this was the intermittently appearing alluvium from which the topsoil was derived. The alluvium was a dark grey silty clay with frequent lenses of yellowish brown, strong brown and yellowish red sandy silts; the lower interface with the peat was generally level but betrayed some evidence of turbidity and displayed occasional unevenness which might indicate shallow channels. Sealed beneath this was the peat, reddish black in colour with an upper interface that tended towards pure black and was slightly firmer. Finally, the peat sealed a dark greenish grey silty clay with evidence of a reed-bed having formed upon it. In trenches 2 and 3, there were some small patches of flint gravel evident, apparently peeping through from beneath the clay.

5.1 Trench 1

Trench 1 was 130m long, of which 95m were within the development area, and contained no archaeology. At the north-west end of the trench, 0.3m of topsoil overlay 0.3m of alluvium, which in turn sealed 0.4m of peat; at the opposite end, the topsoil remained unchanged, while the alluvium had increased to 0.4m and the peat had increased to 0.55m.

The feature described in the AP survey as an old field drain, ditch or stream and shown in blue on figure 1, was observed in trench 1 but not in the others. It had been open as a ditch in living memory and the farmer's son recalled backfilling it some fifteen years previously.

Near to the south-eastern end of the trench, a log approximately 0.25m in diameter and at least 1.5m long was uncovered, buried in the upper surface of the clay below the peat. The log had its bark still intact and showed no signs of having been worked in any way. It may have originally been in the peat and gradually sunk through it over hundreds or perhaps thousands of years.

5.2 Trench 2

Trench 2 was 117m long and contained no archaeology. At the west end of the trench, 0.35m of topsoil overlay 0.55m of peat; at the opposite end, 0.2m of alluvium lay between the topsoil, which had increased slightly to 0.4m and the peat, which had decreased to 0.4m.

5.3 Trench 3

Trench 3 was 61m long and contained no archaeology. At the west end of the trench, 0.3m of topsoil overlay 0.15m of alluvium, which in turn sealed 0.6m of peat; at the opposite end, the topsoil increased to 0.4m, while the alluvium had remained constant and the peat had decreased to 0.5m.

5.4 Trench 4

Trench 4 was 60m long and contained no archaeology. At the north end of the trench, 0.3m of topsoil overlay 0.5m of peat; at the opposite end, 0.1m of alluvium lay between the topsoil and the peat.

6 DISCUSSION

Despite the SMR entries in the immediate surroundings, and the observed cropmarks, no archaeological features were found in any of the trenches. Subtle variations in the thickness of the alluvium were observed to correspond, albeit poorly, to some of the cropmarks in trenches 1 and 4, but not in the other two.

7 RECOMMENDATIONS

No further archaeological works are recommended before construction of the reservoir takes place.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author wishes to thank Mr Henry Deptford for funding the project and for his interest, Geoff Beel for commissioning the work on behalf of Mr Deptford and liason with the AFU. Dr Paul Spoerry was the Project Manager for the AFU and Tim Malim edited the report. Jon Cane gave invaluable advice on the illustration. This project was carried out in response to a brief drawn up by the County Archaeology Office.

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