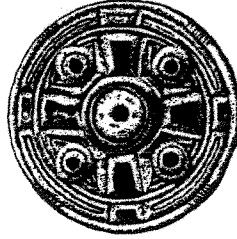


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Archaeological Field Unit

**Land off Holt Fen Little Thetford:
An Archaeological Evaluation**

A. Hatton and S.N.Kemp

2001

Cambridgeshire County Council

Report No. B80

Commissioned by Hinkins Partnership

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An Archaeological Evaluation**

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SUMMARY

Archaeological evaluations of the former allotment land off Holt Fen Road, Little Thetford were completed on the 19th December 2000.

Machine cut trenches and desk-based research were undertaken to investigate the archaeological potential of land prior to the construction of three houses. No archaeological remains other than a single, modern, pit were encountered during fieldwork

Lying at about 4m OD it would appear that for the historic and prehistoric period this area has been marginal to settlement, probably being too wet for occupation.

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**LAND OFF HOLT FEN ROAD, LITTLE THETFORD:
AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION**

(TL 5340 7601)

1 INTRODUCTION

On the 19th of December 2000 the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council (AFU) undertook an archaeological evaluation on land located on the south-eastern edge of the village of Little Thetford (TL 5340 7601). Four evaluation trenches were mechanically excavated to inform on the archaeological potential of the area prior to the construction of three dwellings with garages and their associated ground works. The archaeological investigation was carried out on behalf of Hinkins Partnership, in accordance with the specification (AFU NOV242/00) which was written in response to a Brief issued by the County Archaeology Office (Kaner 30/10/00). The objectives of the brief were to determine the location, extent, date, character, condition, significance and quality of any surviving archaeological remains liable to be threatened by the proposed development.

2 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

The development area is centred on NGR TL 5340 7601 and is situated on geology of Kimmeridge Clays and occasional outcrops of gravel. The site lies below the 5m contour and the course of the Thetford Catchwater. Little Thetford village rises to 6m OD at Thetford Corner. At 500m to the east of the development area lies the River Cam.

At the time of the archaeological investigation the development site comprised an irregular area of grassed open land with allotments and paddocks for horses covering some 0.2 ha .

3 HISTORIC BACKGROUND

Research in advance of the evaluation showed that no archaeology was known from the development area. The earliest evidence for landuse around Little Thetford dates from the Late Bronze Age. Remains from this period lying close to the development site included a timber-crossing over the River Ouse between Barway and Little Thetford. The crossing was found 500m to the south east of the site. During excavation of the timber structure (SMR 06955) coarse hand-made pottery resembling Deveril-Rimbury forms of Late Bronze Age or Early Iron Age date were found (Lethbridge 1934).

Major excavations were undertaken by the Cambridge Archaeological Unit at TL 529764 which identified late Iron Age and Romano-British settlement and tile kilns (SMR 09873) only 400m to the Northwest of the site (*Hinman pers. comm.*). Undated cropmarks may also provide evidence for late prehistoric/Roman activity (SMR 10273 and 11177) in the vicinity. Anglo-Saxon occupation both within and in the immediate vicinity of Little Thetford is sparse. By contrast, evidence for medieval activity is reasonably well represented in the form of ridge and furrow (SMR 09783a and 09783b), and a former chapel (SMR 06955) located 300m south of the development site. Finally, cropmarks located about 1km to the south-west of the development area may be the remains of a deserted medieval village (SMR 09226). Like many of the medieval village cores within the Fens and along the River Cam these remains are found above the 5m contour.

4 METHODOLOGY

Four linear trenches, totaling 80m in length were excavated within the proposed development area. Trenches were opened using a mechanical excavator (JCB) with a 1.6m wide flat-bladed ditching-bucket under. The excavation of the trenches was conducted under the supervision of an archaeologist.

The trenches were located across the site in order to achieve 5% coverage of the development area. Trenches were excavated to verify the results of the archaeological desk-based studies outlined above.



Figure 1. Site Location

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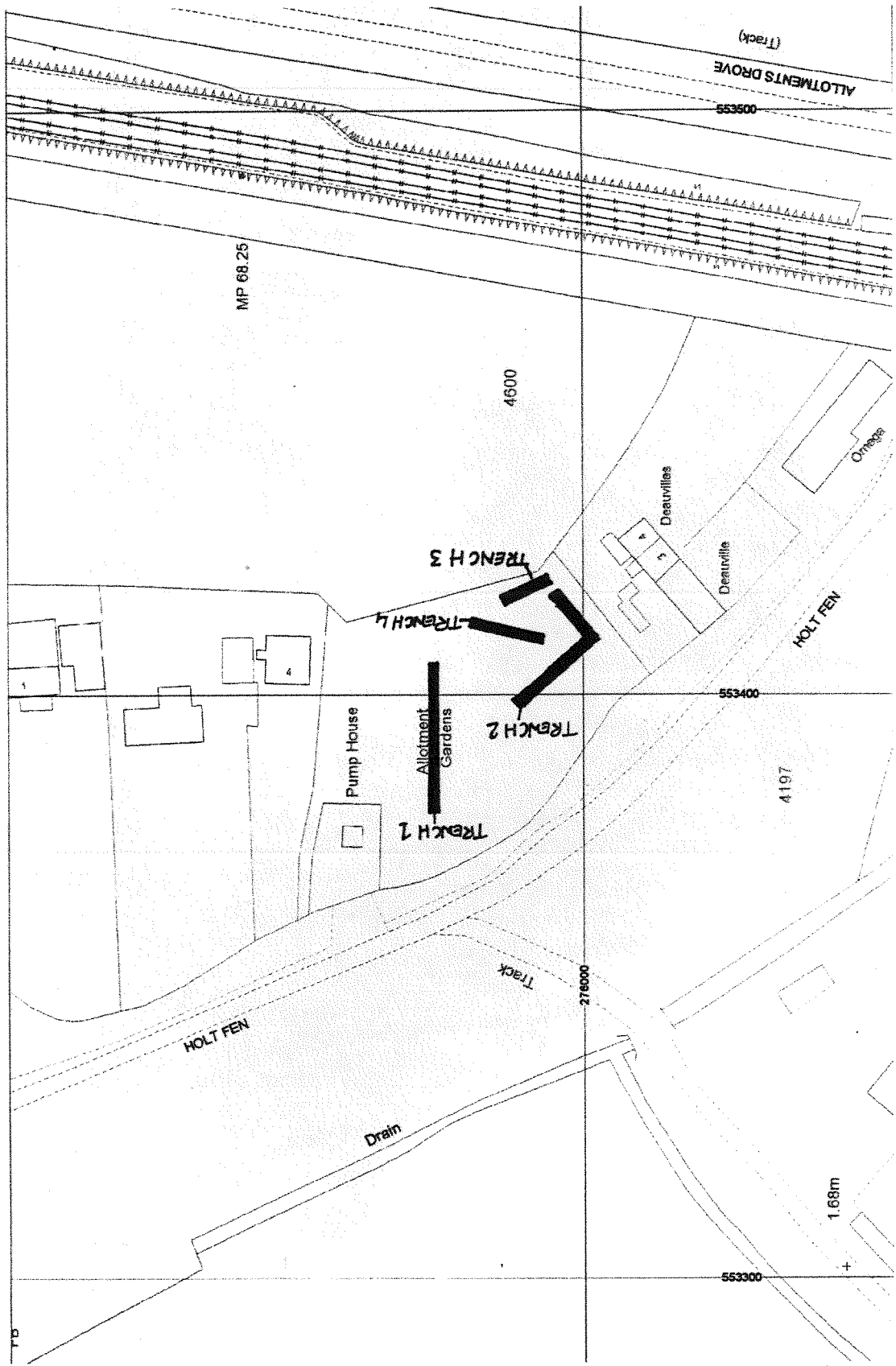


Figure 2 Trench Location plan

Restrictions to the trenching strategy were imposed by a sewer-pipe that ran parallel to the northern perimeter of the site, and by overhead electric cables flanking the western boundary. A safety cordon around these services was observed, reducing the area that could be safely investigated. A sufficient sample of the field was still investigated in order to fulfil the Brief. The work was inspected and agreed to be satisfactory by Jeremy Parsons from the County Archaeology Office and on behalf of the Planning Authority.

The standard AFU 'proforma' recording system was used to record the exposed deposits. A general scale plan of the site was also produced in order to show the location of the trenches within the area under investigation. Finally, a photographic record was compiled.

5 RESULTS

Trench 1

Trench 1 was 28m long and ran east-west. The trench section revealed a very dark brown peaty topsoil. This was some 0.33m deep at the western end, decreasing to 0.30m to the East. Removal of the topsoil exposed the natural geology consisting of decayed Kimmeridge Clay. No archaeological features or deposits were present within the excavated trench.

Trench 2

Trench 2 was L-shaped, with the north-west/south-east segment measuring 22m in length, and the north-east/south-west segment measuring 9.5m in length.

At the north-western end of the trench the section revealed a very dark brown peaty topsoil (0.30m in depth) which overlay natural decayed Kimmeridge Clay which contained pockets of sandy gravel. Towards the north-eastern end of the trench the depth of the topsoil increased gradually to a maximum depth of 0.42m.

A large pit filled was found between the North-South and East-West arms of

Trench 2. The pit was filled with a mid-brown sandy silt soil 0.25m deep. Within this deposit were fragments of brick and sherds of pottery dated to the 1920s were recovered indicating a modern date to the feature.

Trench 3

Trench 3 was 7m long and ran south-east/north-west. The trench section revealed a very dark brown peaty topsoil, 0.50m in depth at the south-eastern end, and decreasing to 0.45m at the north-western end. Removal of the topsoil exposed the natural geology consisting of decayed Kimmeridge Clay mixed with pockets of sandy gravels. No other archaeological features or deposits were present in the excavated trench.

Trench 4

Trench 4 was 11m long and ran south-west/north-east. The trench section revealed a very dark brown peaty topsoil 0.50m deep at the south-western end, decreasing to 0.43m at the north-eastern end. Removal of the topsoil exposed further evidence of the large pit identified in Trench 2 (see above). The natural geology consisted of decayed Kimmeridge Clay with pockets of sandy gravels. No archaeological features or deposits were present in the excavated trench.

6 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Only one modern feature of about 10m in diameter was found during the evaluation. The apparent absence of other archaeological features within the subject area is consistent with the desk-based analysis of the archaeological and historical context of the site. The absence of ancient archaeological features and the peaty soil suggest that the area has always been beyond the area of settlement and probably formed part of an area of wetland or pasture adjacent to the river. Before the Saxon period, Grunty Fen which lies on the western side of Little Thetford was covered in peat up to the 3m contour and the early formation of peat in the area is confirmed by buried sites and stratified Bronze Age metalwork (Hall 1996; 71). This evidence suggests that the development area

has always lain on the margins of wet and dry land during the historic and prehistoric periods.

The modern disturbance identified within Trenches 2 and 4 could be attributed to small-scale gravel extraction which took place on the margins of Little Thetford during the last century. It has been suggested that gravel extraction was conducted on a seasonal basis due to the marshy conditions of land which were susceptible to periodic flooding by the River Cam (J. Turner *pers. comm.*).

The above investigations have shown that there is unlikely to be any archaeological implications for this development. There is always the potential for some remains to survive on the northern part of the site and within areas not evaluated because of the various safety restrictions. However, the absence of any artefacts in the soil or archaeological features in any of the trenches suggests that the likelihood of disturbing archaeological remains in this area is low.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The archaeological evaluation was commissioned by Hinkins Partnership. The Brief was provided by Simon Kaner of the County Archaeology Office. Thanks are due to members of the AFU and, in particular, to Rebecca Casa-Hatton for her assistance on-site and Stephen Kemp (Project Officer) for his invaluable help in respect to this report.

Finally, I would like to thank Mr John Taylor, Chairman of Little Thetford Parish Council, for his invaluable assistance in the interpretation of the history of the site.

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