

Archaeological Field Unit

Howes Close, Cambridge: An Archaeological Evaluation

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**Howes Close, Cambridge:
An Archaeological Evaluation**
(TL 4315 6055)

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SUMMARY

On 5th March 2001 staff of the Archaeological Field Unit (AFU) of Cambridgeshire County Council conducted an archaeological evaluation on land at Howes Close, Cambridge (TL 4315 6055) in advance of a proposed hotel development. The area is situated within an historical landscape that includes Roman and Saxon cemeteries in the vicinity (Girton College), and remains of the medieval hamlet of Howes immediately to the north-east

Three linear trenches totalling 31.5m were mechanically excavated. The site produced no archaeological evidence. The absence of archaeological features could be the result of extensive modern disturbance in the form of landscaping and levelling associated with the extant Howes House.

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Howes Close, Cambridge: An Archaeological Evaluation (TI4315 6055)

1. INTRODUCTION

On 5th March 2001 staff of the Archaeological Field Unit (AFU) of Cambridgeshire County Council conducted an archaeological evaluation on land at Howes Close, Cambridge (TL 4315 6055) in advance of the construction of an hotel complex (Fig. 1).

2. SITE BACKGROUND

The archaeological work aimed to investigate areas to be affected by extensions and alterations to existing buildings of the hotel complex (Planning App. No. S0817/00F). Given the known archaeological background of the area under investigation (below), the Archaeology Officer of Cambridgeshire County Council (CAO) made recommendations to the District Planning Authority for an archaeological evaluation to be undertaken.

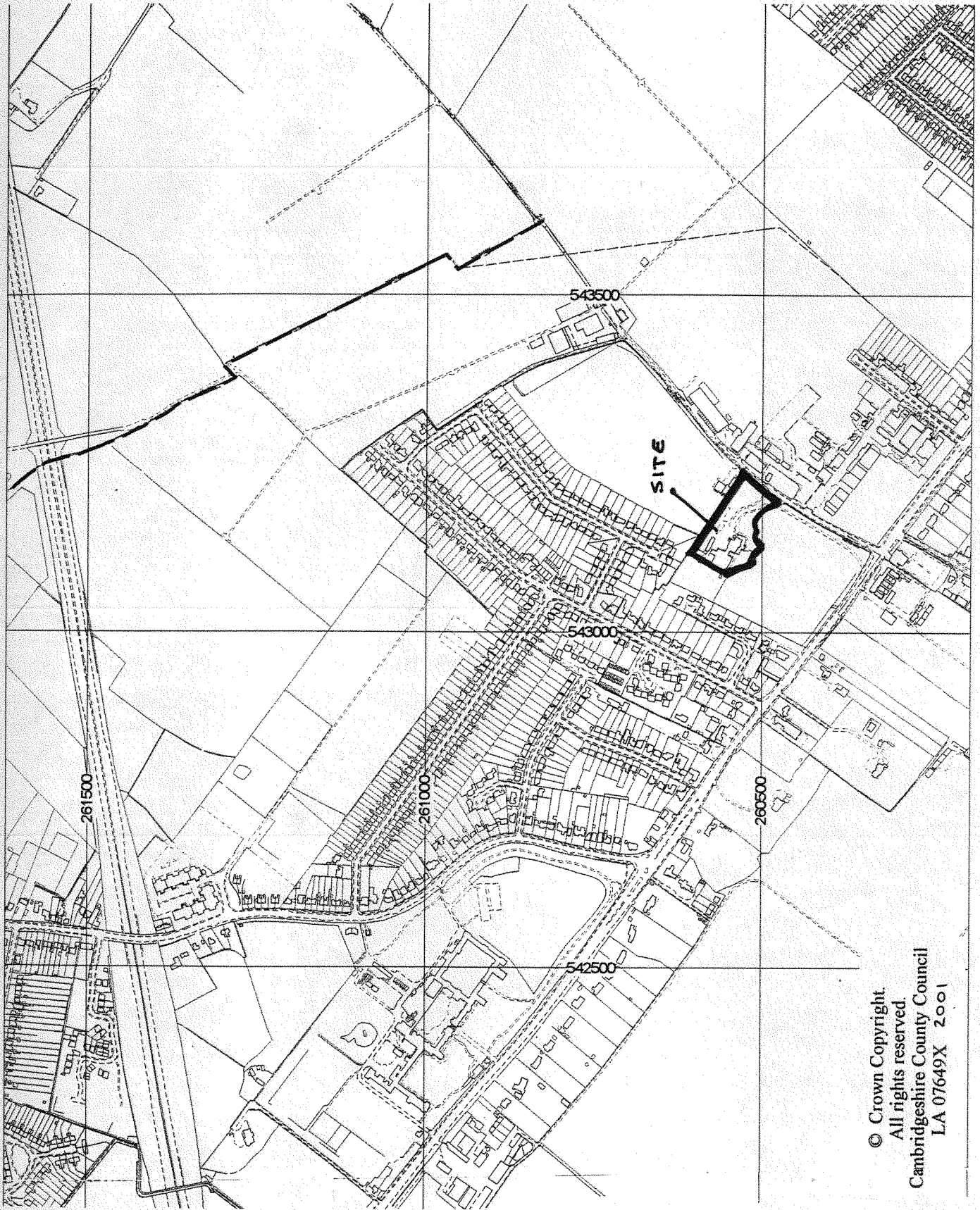
The work was carried out by the AFU for APS Project Management Ltd., on behalf of Cassel Hotel, in accordance to a Design Brief issued by the CAO (Thomas, 4 September 2000). The nature of the work was outlined in a Specification (Kemp SEP 141/00) which was submitted to the CAO prior to the evaluation.

The archaeological work was supervised on site by Rebecca Casa Hatton and managed by Steve Kemp (Project Officer).

3. GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

The development site is located on the western edge of Cambridge, 2km from Castle Hill and 1.5km east of the village of Girton. It lies off White House Lane and close to the junction of Whitehouse Lane with the A1307/ Huntingdon Road. The site comprises a fenced rectangular area of some 1875sqm, lying at an height of 15m OD. Within the fenced area are extant buildings, a tarred trackway leading to a tarred parking area near the northern boundary. To the north and south are playing fields (Fig. 1).

The site is situated on gault clay which overlies sandy clays on Lower Greensand (Worssam *et al.* 1969, 33, BGS Sheet 188).



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Fig. 1: Location Plan

4 HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The development site is situated in an area of known archaeological and historical interest.

For the present report a documentary search within 1km radius was undertaken. Information was obtained from the Sites and Monument Record Office in Cambridge (SMR). Records of finds and excavations, together with historical maps and overlay maps of aerial photographs were consulted and combined with relevant historical and archaeological information from documentary sources.

Prehistoric

Early prehistoric activity from the Palaeolithic period is documented by stray finds, namely lithic implements. Lithic implements have been found to the south (SMR5301: stone objects, SMR05299: Palaeolithic flint and an hand-axe, SMR05300: stone objects), and west (SMR 05169: Neolithic axe) of the development site, their recovery being mainly associated with quarrying activity. Further prehistoric artefacts have been found to the north-west of the development site in the parish of Girton.

Roman

The earliest feature of the Roman landscape was the road leading north-west from Cambridge to Godmanchester (modern Huntingdon Road). During the construction of Huntingdon Road in 1745 a barrow of uncertain date (Roman?) was destroyed (SMR05178). More securely dated are the two coffined inhumations (SMR07902) and cremation burials (SMR05186) found along the west side of the road, south of the development site. Additional burials were uncovered during ground-work at Girton College in the late nineteenth century (SMR05274a). These consisted of both inhumations and cremations. In addition, there were fragments of a sculptured torso and a lion, together with debris, i.e. bricks, hypocaust and roof tiles, from a building (a bath-house?) pre-dating the cemetery.

Besides the evidence for funerary activity, stray finds may also indicate Roman activity in areas not immediately adjacent to the road. In particular, a coin of Marcus Aurelius (SMR08712) was found some 700m to the south-east of the development site.

Finally, cropmarks visible on aerial photographs are located to the west of the road. These consist of linear features, large enclosures/paddocks and parallel pit alignments (SMR09534, SMR09528, SMR09529). Although undated, their proximity to the Roman Road would be consistent with the presence of a small nucleated roadside settlement and associated cemeteries.

Saxon

Saxon Girton is well known from the discovery of furnished inhumations and urned cremation burials from Girton College (SMR05274 and SMR10160), in the same location as the Roman cemetery. Occupation debris adjacent to the church at Girton may offer further evidence of Saxon occupation Taylor 2000, Ch. 24).

Medieval

Girton is known as *Grittune* or *Gretton(e)* (1060), possibly deriving its name from the Old English *greot* and *tun* meaning 'gravel-farm' (Reaney 1943, 177). It is referenced in Domesday Book as a manor of Ramsey Abbey. After the Dissolution both the rectory church and the manors at Girton were granted to the Hindes family at Madingley and to their heirs until the early nineteenth century.

Howes Hamlet is first mentioned in 1279 and first recorded in 1219. The name seems to be associated with either *hoh* (from the Old English for 'mound') or *haugr* (from the Old Norse for 'barrow') (Reaney 1943, 177). Its crofts and closes extended into Impington, Chesterton and Cambridge.

The deserted hamlet has been traditionally located in the north-west end of Grithowe Field (Reaney, 1943, 177) at Howes Close (SMR 00184), immediately beyond the north boundary of the development site. Earthwork remains of medieval field-systems (ridge and furrow) associated with the hamlet are known to be located some 700m to the north-east of the site (SMR 05466).

Post-Medieval

Howes Hamlet was not recorded as such after 1600. By the time of the Enclosure Act (1813) most of its closes had become part of one of the Girton manors (Wright & Lewis 1989, 115 ff.).

Howe House (SMR05482) situated in Howes' Close is recorded as Howhouse Farm in 1895. It stood by the side of *Howes House*, an inn which was demolished in the later part of the nineteenth century (Wright & Lewis 1989, 115 ff.).

Modern

The site lies within the boundaries of Cambridge. The historical parish of Girton, however, covered an area that extended towards Madingley. In 1953 land that included the ancient hamlet of Howes was added from Impington to Girton. In 1985 the south-west boundary of Girton was altered to follow the M11 route, causing a net loss of territory.

Modern activity on site was represented by phases of garden-landscaping around Howes House, and by levelling associated with the construction of a parking area near the northern boundary of the development site.

5. METHODOLOGY

The objective of the evaluation was to establish the presence/absence, nature and degree of preservation of archaeological features and deposits likely to be affected by ground-works during the refurbishment of the hotel complex. To this aim, three linear trenches totalling 31.5m were located in the area of the proposed building footprint (Fig. 2). The modern topsoil was removed to the top of the geological clays by means of a mechanical excavator with a 1.60m wide toothless ditching bucket. Natural deposits were encountered at a depth between 0.30m and 0.50m below the present ground surface.

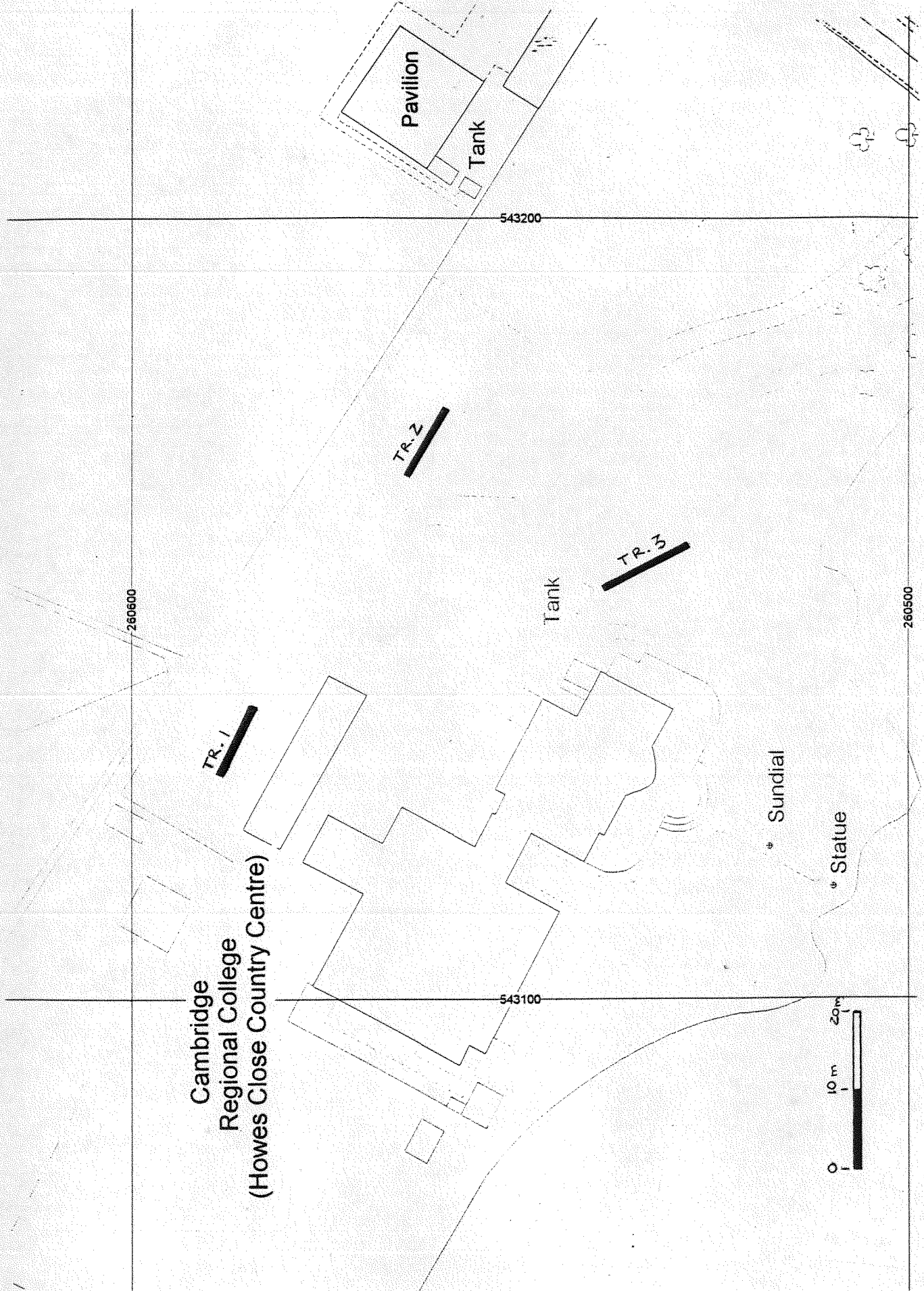


Fig. 2: Location of Trenches

A general location plan was produced to show the position of the trenches within the development site. In addition, a photographic record was compiled which consisted of colour slides, and colour and monochrome prints.

The recording system and the post-excavation procedures followed the standard AFU practice in compliance with the IFA guidance policy.

6. RESULTS

Trench 1

Trench 1 (10m x 1.60m), west-east aligned, was located in the north-west corner of the development site and to the north of a modern building (Fig. 2). The removal of tarmac (0.10m thick) and stone rubble (0.25m thick) exposed the natural clay. The depth of the trench increased in the centre where a depression some 0.90m deep (a pit?) had been in-filled with tarmac and debris.

No archaeological features were uncovered, undoubtedly due to the high degree of modern truncation caused during the construction of the parking area.

Trench 2

Trench 2 (10m x 1.60m), west-east aligned, was located to the east of Trench 1 (Fig. 2). The removal of tarmac (0.10m thick) and stone rubble bedding (0.10m thick) exposed a dark grey clay in-fill that contained modern building debris. The natural geology consisted of light grey clay. The depth of the trench was consistent throughout, having been artificially levelled.

As with Trench 1, no archaeological features were uncovered, undoubtedly due to the high degree of modern truncation caused during the construction of the parking area.

Trench 3

Trench 3 (11.5m x 1.60m), north-west to south-east aligned, was located to the east of Howes House, in the south-east of the proposed development area (Fig. 2). The removal of the topsoil (0.30m thick) exposed the natural clay. As with Trench 2, the depth of Trench 3 was consistent throughout. The surrounding area seems to have been artificially levelled when the gardens of Howes House were re-landscaped sometime in the course of the nineteenth or twentieth century.

No archaeological features were uncovered, undoubtedly due to the high degree of modern disturbance caused by landscaping activities.

7. CONCLUSIONS

The objective of the project was to establish the character, date, state of preservation and extent of any archaeological remains within the site prior to development.

The evaluation produced negative results. However, recent interventions such as the construction of car parking areas and earlier garden landscaping destroyed any potential archaeological remains. In particular, evidence for the medieval field-system associated with Howes Hamlet would have been obliterated by modern truncation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank APS Project Management Ltd and their clients Cassel Hotel for commissioning the work.

The work was carried out in response to a design brief issued by Andy Thomas of CAO, who monitored the work. The project was managed by Steve Kemp (Project Officer) and Tim Malim (Field Unit Manager) who also edited the present report.

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MAPS

OS Map 1967, TL 46SW, 25 inch and 6 inch to the mile.

OS Map 1983, TL 46SW, 1:10,000

OS Map 1983, TL46SW, 1:10,000 (overlay of air photographs)

BGS Sheet 188 1:50000



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