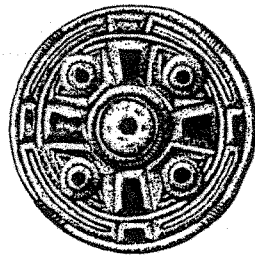


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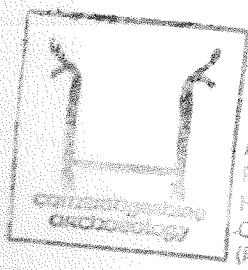


Archaeological Field Unit

**Post-Medieval Activity at Land off Stonald Road,
Whittlesey, Cambridgeshire:
An Archaeological Evaluation**

Rebecca Casa Hatton

2001



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Report No. B93

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September 2001

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SUMMARY

Between the 2nd of July 2001 and 4th September 2001, an archaeological evaluation was undertaken on 0.5 hectares of land off Stonald Road, Whittlesey, Peterborough (NGR TL 2655/9766) by staff of the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council. The work was carried out in advance of a proposed housing development.

A 'U' shaped trench was placed across the north-western portion of the proposed development site to ascertain the presence or absence of archaeological remains. Besides the evidence for post-medieval furrows, no other archaeological features were uncovered. Lack of early archaeological evidence is likely to be due to the location of the development site away from the fen edge where activity has been recorded, and from the core of the medieval settlement, south of the development area.

Trenches 2 and 3 were excavated in the southern part of the development area in order to locate the Roman road - Fen Causeway. Trench 2 revealed an undated post hole and Victorian remains were encountered in Trench 3. Lack of evidence from the present development site may suggest that the course of the Roman road lay further south, closer to the projected line along Stonald Road.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION	1
2	GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY	1
3	ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND	1
4	METHODOLOGY	6
5	RESULTS	6
6	DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS	8
	ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	8
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	9

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1	Site Location Plan	2
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**Land Off Stonald Road, Whittlesey, Cambridgeshire:
An Archaeological Evaluation
(NGR TL 2655/9766)**

1 INTRODUCTION

Between the 2nd of July 2001 and September 4th 2001, an archaeological evaluation was undertaken on 0.5 hectares of land off Stonald Road, Whittlesey, Cambridgeshire (TL 2665/9766) by staff of the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council. The project was commissioned by Myhill Properties Ltd. in advance of construction of dwellings, services and an access road along the eastern part of the evaluation site (Planning Application No. F/YR00/0668/0). The work was carried out in accordance with a Brief for Archaeological Evaluation issued by the Archaeology Officer of Cambridgeshire County Council (Thomas, 2001).

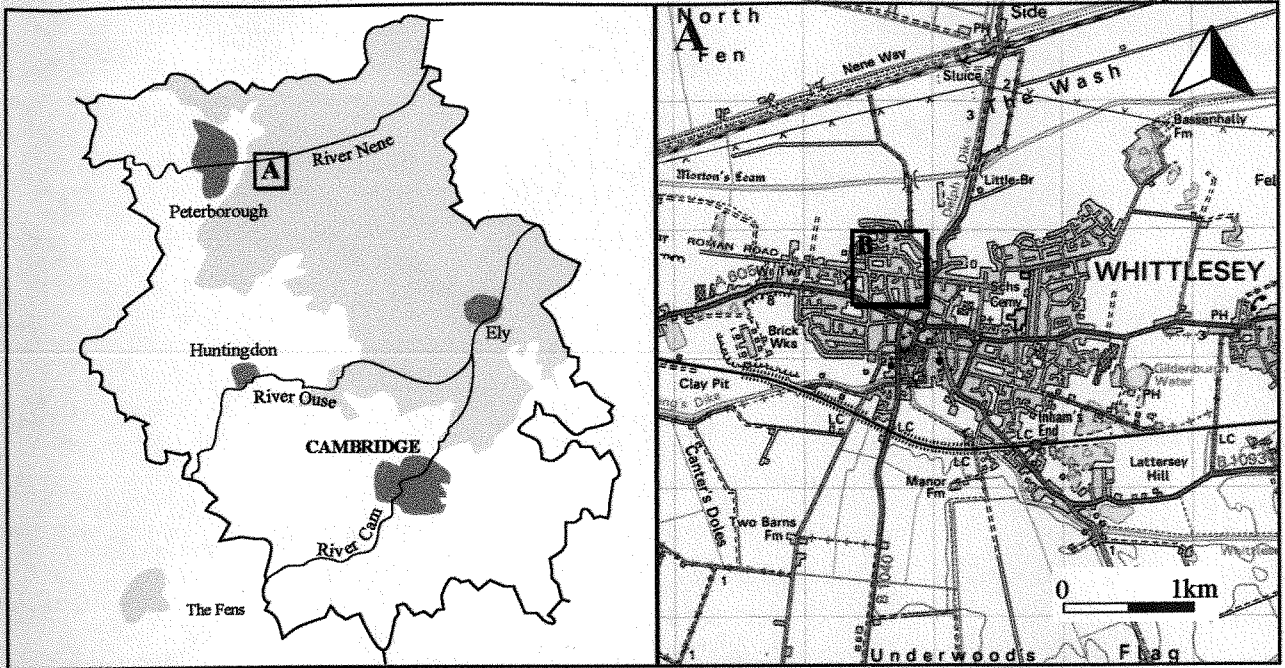
2 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

The underlying geology of the fen basin at Whittlesey consists of Jurassic Oxford Clay that crops out around the later (Pleistocene) March Gravels. The March Gravels consist of sand and gravel of marine/estuarine origin which form the first terrace deposits of the River Nene. The two gravel islands of Whittlesey (west island) and Eastrea with Coates and Eldernell (east island) are surrounded by Flandrian Lower Peat. Later marine transgression caused the deposition of silty clay Barroway Drove Beds. Barroway Drove clay is clearly exposed between Whittlesey and Eastrea (Horton 1989).

Whittlesey is a large parish consisting of 9010 hectares. The town is located *c.* 10km east of Peterborough and 15km west of March, in the north part of Cambridgeshire. The proposed development site lies to the north of Stonald Road, to the north-west of the historic centre (Fig. 1). At the time of the archaeological investigation it comprised a rectangular area of 0.5 hectares formerly used as a garden.

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In the early Mesolithic period the whole landscape was dry. During the Neolithic period small areas along deep channels and low-lying zones became waterlogged. Wet conditions caused the formation of Lower Peat. The early Bronze Age is represented by a rapid growth of peat over most of the



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Figure 1 Site location

Barroway Drove Beds. The contemporary fen would have covered the same areas as during the Neolithic period, the major change being represented by the formation of peat in the inactive Neolithic roddon system. By the Iron Age development of peat all over the fen was complete (Hall, 1987). During the post-Roman period rising water levels and flooding are well documented across the fens. Changed climatic conditions, together with the effects of intensified land use and a breakdown in both the natural and artificial drainage systems are among the factors which may have affected the fen environment. At the same time marine silting may have been responsible for the blocking of the Thorney channel, i.e. the major outlet of the river Nene. The southern peat-covered Barroway Drove Beds offered a better route to release water build-up. As a result, the Nene crossed the southern fenlands of Whittlesey.

Prehistoric

Prehistoric finds are known from the area around Whittlesey, their distribution along the fen-edge placing emphasis on the economic significance of the fen as an essential grazing resource. The early prehistoric presence is mainly represented by lithic scatters and stray finds.

The Bronze Age is characterised by both ritual activity and settlement. Barrow mounds have been identified at Eldernell and Suet Hill (to the south of Whittlesey).

Recent excavations between Whittlesey and Fengate to the west of the development site have revealed evidence for settlement that had previously gone undetected through traditional air reconnaissance and field surveys. Furthermore, the archaeological investigations have offered the opportunity to study the location of settlements in relation to the Bronze Age fen. At King's Dyke West excavations revealed the presence of a short-lived late Bronze Age open settlement consisting of five roundhouses, four-post structures and pits. A cluster of pits inside one of the houses contained remains of butchered lambs. Outside, there were pits with fragments of pottery and disarticulated pig bone. The same type pottery had been incorporated into the floors of the buildings, suggesting a link between the pits, the living spaces and the breaking of objects. The upland limit to the settlement distribution was around the 4m OD contour (Knight, 1999).

Further work at Bradley Fen also revealed evidence of early and late Bronze Age occupation in the form of pits, and postholes (representing round houses), respectively. The late Bronze Age settlement seems to have occupied a narrow belt between the 1.5m and 4m contours, which was beyond the southern and north-eastern limits of the evaluation site. Below the 1.5m contour and beyond the settlement belt, an isolated pocket of probable contemporary settlement features were identified, including a rectangular post-built structure (Knight, 2000b).

Iron Age

Evidence for Iron Age activity is represented by two adjacent occupation areas with unusual dark soil, animal bone fragments and sherds of pottery associated with possible hut sites (Hall, 1987, Site 13). Iron Age finds have also been reported from the brick clay quarry c. 2km to the west of the development site (Hall 1987, 57).

Roman

The projected course of the Roman Fen Causeway from Peterborough to Grandford near March crosses the north of Whittlesey. It enters the island from Flag Fen and Northey, where portions of the gravel road have been recorded. Further portions have been exposed at Eldernell and Eastrea, to the east of Whittlesey (Hall 1987, 57).

Recent excavations at Stonald Field, to the east of the present development site, have confirmed the route of the Roman road in the eastern portion of the parish. Dating evidence indicates that it was originally built in the first century AD, probably for military purposes. As time went by, the road began to attract occupation, as suggested by the presence of paddocks, enclosures, a pottery kiln and evidence for iron working around the fringes of the settlement (Mortimer, 1996; Knight, 2000). A large number of rural sites are visible as cropmarks along the Fen Causeway at both Whittlesey and Eastrea. Some of the cropmarks (Hall, 1987, Sites 7, 8, 9) were recently replotted. The re-assessment showed the presence of a possible marching camp at TL 3233/9882 (Palmer in Heawood, 1997). Roman material from the clay quarries and brick pits may represent more sites (Hall, 1987, 58) on the islands.

Excavations at Bradley Fen (above) revealed the course of a secondary route, parallel to the established course of the Fen Causeway, at Stonald Field. Earthwork remains of a field system further north are crossed by a trackway which aligns with the road found at Bradley Fen. This latter may have represented a possible alternative route to Fen Causeway. It corresponds with a trackway earthwork north of Moreton's Leam, which by-passes the settlement at Stonald Field (Knight, 2000). The track may join the route identified near Hall's Site 8 (Palmer in Heawood, 1997) where, compared with the traditional course, the Fen Causeway seems to turn sharply to the north at its landfall.

Saxon and Medieval

Saxon and early medieval Whittlesey remains elusive. No artefacts or sites of this period are known from Whittlesey. The nearest known possible Saxon settlement is located at Coates where *grubenhäuser*-like features are visible on aerial photographs (Hall, 1987, Site 22). In 1828, a cemetery was discovered in Bassenhally Field, to the north-east of the proposed development site. This contained seven inhumations on a west-east alignment (Hall, 1987, Site 23).

Sherds of medieval pottery occur all over the higher ground of the island,

possibly deriving from manuring.

The place-name of Whittlesey indicates a late Saxon origin, being recorded in c. 972 as *(W)itlesig*, meaning 'Wil(t)el's island', from a personal name (Reaney, 1943, 258). It has been suggested that the route formed by Wallcroft Road on the west, Stonald and Bassenhally Roads on the north and Cemetery Road and Inham's Lane on the east may represent the line of an earthen rampart and stockade associated with an early settlement (Pugh 1967, 123). However, Stonald Field is recorded in documents (from 1246) as *Littlestanhale* meaning 'field by the gravel nook' (Reaney, 1943, 262-3) and refers to the gravelly soils in the western part of the parish. Further topographic names indicate a dubious early origin for Whittlesey. The marshy area at King's Delph to the north-east of Stonald Road derives its name from Delph Dyke, a canal reputed to have been dug by King Canute.

Early historical records refer to two separate manors that belonged to Thorney (Whittlesey St Mary, acquired in 973) and Ely (Whittlesey St Andrew's acquired in c. 1000). The manor house immediately to the south of St Mary's church is of medieval origin, but was considerably modified during the seventeenth century (Pugh, 1967, *passim*).

Later medieval finds have been discovered from the central area of Whittlesey. The churches of St Andrew's and St Mary's also appear to be relatively late in date, having been erected during the thirteenth century.

The boundaries of the medieval fields survive as banks of the normal Midland type (Hall, 1987, 59). There are no visible remains of early ridge and furrow systems. Three main areas of open fields still retain their original names, Stonald Field (above), Bassenhally (*Bastenhale*, 1284), meaning 'nook by the limes' and Lattersey Field (*Latereshale*, 1285), a nook-name referring to a personal name). Bassenhally is the name of the road that is the continuation of Stonald Road towards the town.

Post-Medieval

The two prosperous parishes of St Mary's and St Andrew's were unified after the Dissolution. The economic importance of the town continued in the seventeenth century when Whittlesey ranked second among the towns of the Isle, Ely coming first. The right to hold a market was granted in 1715. Drainage of the fens started at the beginning of the eighteenth century followed by the enclosure of large portions of land. By the time of the 1840 Tithe Map more land had been enclosed, including the area to the east of the development site, by Delph Dyke. The final enclosure took place in 1840-1, the award being granted in 1844 (Pugh, 1967, 124 ff.). The Inclosure Map shows Stonald Road as 'The Eight Private Road', later referred to as 'Back Road West' in the Ordnance Survey Map of 1886. This latter also shows the development site has having been enclosed. Later editions of the Ordnance Survey show that the property boundaries do not appear to have undergone major alterations.

The SMR entries for Whittlesey correspond to the areas of known activity from the prehistoric period and show the progressive shifts of occupation in relation to the changed environmental conditions, from the prehistoric fenlands to the gravel island in historic times.

4 METHODOLOGY

The aim of the evaluation was to establish the presence or absence of archaeological remains within the area to be affected by development.

Three trenches were excavated using a mechanical excavator with a 1.6m wide toothless ditching bucket. The length of trenching was 98m. A 'U' shaped trench was located across the north-western portion of the site in order to obtain maximum coverage of the area available for trenching, thus increasing the possibility of discovering any archaeological features. Two trenches were excavated in the southern part of the site in order to locate the Fen Causeway.

The modern ground surface and subsoil (when present) were removed to a depth where the natural gravel and silt deposits were encountered, between 0.68m and 0.55m below the present ground surface.

A general plan of the site was produced to show the location of the trenches within the development area, and a photographic record compiled which consisted of colour slides, colour and monochrome prints. All trenches excavated during the evaluation were recorded, with details of topsoil, subsoil and natural geology. The recording system and the post-excavation procedures followed the standard AFU practice.

5 RESULTS (Fig. 1)

Trench 1A

Trench 1A (25.5m x 1.6m) ran north to south, parallel to the western boundary of the site. The removal of the topsoil to an average depth of 0.58m exposed remains of furrows and a small pit. The features had been cut into the natural gravel deposits.

Cut 02 (not excavated): west to east oriented furrow, at least 3m wide. It was filled with 01, a light brown silty deposit with frequent gravel inclusions. No finds were recovered from this feature.

Cut 06: west to east oriented furrow, 4.5m wide and 0.3m deep. It was filled with 05, a light brown silty deposit with frequent gravel inclusions. Small sherds of late medieval-transitional ware AD 1400-1600 (Paul Spoerry, pers.

comm.) were recovered from this fill.

Cut 08 (not excavated): west to east oriented furrow, at least 3m wide. It was filled with 07, a light brown silty deposit with frequent gravel inclusions. Small sherds of residual Roman pottery (Paul Spoerry, pers. comm.) were recovered from this fill.

Cut 04: small circular pit, 0.75m in diameter and 0.05m deep. It contained one fill, 03, a very dark greyish brown silty deposit that produced small sherds of possible late medieval pottery (Paul Spoerry, pers. comm.).

Trench 1B

Trench 1B (31m x 1.6m) stemmed from the north end of trench 1A, on a west to east alignment. The removal of the topsoil and subsoil (0.32m thick, only visible in the eastern portion of the trench) to an average depth of 0.56m exposed the natural silty clay.

No archaeological features and/or deposits were uncovered.

Trench 1C

Trench 1C (19m x 1.6m) stemmed from trench 1B and ran parallel to trench 1A. The removal of the topsoil between 0.32m thick (north end) and 0.53m thick (south end) exposed a thin layer of subsoil to a depth between 0.55m (north end) and 0.15m (south end). The subsoil sealed remains of furrows that represented the continuation of features 02 and 06 that had been exposed in Trench 1A.

The natural geology consisted of silt and gravel deposits.

Trench 2

Trench 2 was 7.2m long and 0.92m deep and ran on an east-west alignment. The topsoil 13 was dark grey silty clay, 0.40m deep. Subsoil 14 was light grey silt, 0.52m deep. In the western end of the trench a posthole 10 was encountered. Posthole 10 was 0.40m wide and 0.35m deep, and contained fill 9, a dark grey silty clay. No artefacts were recovered from this posthole although the presence of charcoal and burnt stone may suggest a prehistoric origin.

Trench 3

Trench 3 was a 'L' shaped, 8.6 m long on a north-south axis and 6.4 m long on an east-west axis. The removal of the topsoil to an average depth of 0.81m exposed post-medieval remains. Ditch 12, 0.60m wide and 0.55m deep, ran on a north-west-south-east alignment. It contained one fill, 11, a dark grey silty

clay which contained Victorian pottery. In the northern end of the trench a modern pit, 15, was revealed. Pit 15 (unexcavated) was 1.6m wide and contained a light brown silty clay. Modern brick was recovered from this feature.

Ditch 17 was 0.5m wide and contained a single fill, 18. Fill 18 was composed of dark grey silty clay and contained post-medieval brick.

6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The present evaluation has revealed remains of post-medieval furrows. Similar remains were uncovered to the west of the development site at land off Bassenhally Road (Patten, 2000). From cartographic evidence, most areas to the north of Stonald and Bassenhally Roads were common land that remained unenclosed until the end of the nineteenth century.

In trench 2 a single posthole was encountered which produced no artefacts. The fill of the posthole contained burnt gravel and charcoal, which may suggest that it is prehistoric in origin.

Absence of archaeological evidence is likely to be due to the location of the development site away from the fen edge where prehistoric activity has been recorded, and from the core of the medieval settlement, to the south.

The main feature near the development site is the Roman Fen Causeway, the projected line of which would run along Stonald Road. Roman occupation associated with Fen Causeway has been recorded to the west and east of the town, where portions have been excavated. Finds from the town itself may also be indicative of Roman activity, obliterated by later development and quarrying. Therefore, lack of Roman remains would reflect lack of activity in this period to the north of Stonald Road. The present evaluation site appears to have been used in the medieval and post-medieval periods for agriculture.

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The brief for archaeological evaluation was written by Andy Thomas, Acting Senior Archaeologist, County Archaeology Officer, who also monitored the evaluation.

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MAPS

Tithe Map of 1840 (CRO)

Inclosure Map of 1844 (CRO)

Ordnance Survey Map X. 15 1886 (CRO)



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