

Archaeological Field Unit

**Eynesbury C of E Primary School, St Neots:
An Archaeological Evaluation**

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2003

Cambridgeshire County Council

Report No. B114

Commissioned by Mouchel Property Services
on behalf of Cambridgeshire County Council

**Eynesbury C of E Primary School, St Neots:
An Archaeological Evaluation
(TL 1827/5989)**

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April 2003

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SUMMARY

In April 2003, the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council conducted an archaeological evaluation on 0.018ha of land at Eynesbury C of E Primary School, St Neots, Cambridgeshire (TL 1827/5989). This was in advance of the construction of a new nursery building on the site of the previous temporary facility.

A single trench was opened by machine but contained no archaeology. There was evidence of the ground having been extensively made up, possibly part of the landscaping process undertaken during construction of the school in the 1960's.

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1 INTRODUCTION

On the 23rd of April 2003, the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council (AFU) conducted an archaeological evaluation on land at Eynesbury C of E Primary School, St Neots (TL 1827/5989). The work was carried out at the request of Mouchel Property Services on behalf of Cambridgeshire County Council, in response to a brief set by Andy Thomas of the County Archaeology Office (CAO), and dated September 9th 2002. The evaluation was conducted in advance of the construction of a new nursery building and an extension to the computer room.

The site lies on the western side of Eynesbury. It consists of two areas, both roughly rectangular in plan and 0.018ha in total area. Only the larger area was evaluated due to the presence of services in the smaller one.

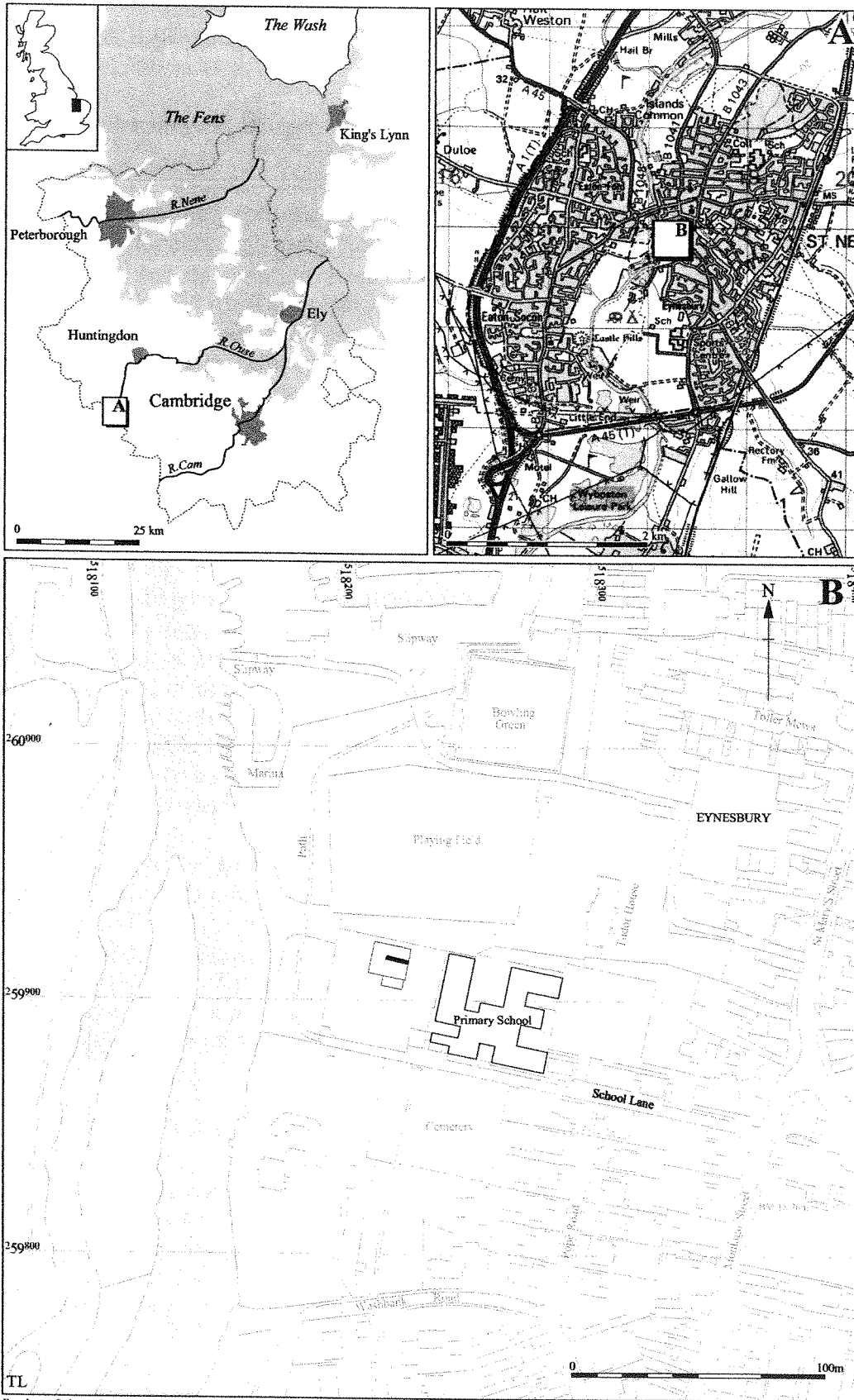
The presence of archaeological remains was considered possible by the CAO on the basis of information contained in the County Sites and Monuments Record (SMR). It records Prehistoric, Roman, and medieval finds in the vicinity of the site.

Weather conditions during the fieldwork were fine, and there were no factors that are likely to have had an adverse effect upon context recognition. Accordingly, the confidence rating to be applied to the results is judged to be high.

2 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

According to the British Geological Survey, the site lies on Pleistocene First/Second Terrace River Gravels. In this area, the River Gravels overlie Boulder Clay, which in turn overlie Upper Jurassic Oxford Clay (BGS 1975).

The site lies at around 15.5mOD, being generally flat across its extent, the land rising only slightly to around 16.2mOD on Berkley Street to the east. To the west is the river Great Ouse.



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Figure 1 Location of Development Area (outlined in red) and evaluation trench (shown as solid black).

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

3.1 Archaeological Background

The site is located within the valley of the River Great Ouse and is in close proximity to a considerable number of archaeological finds dating from the prehistoric through to the Roman, and medieval periods. The Cambridgeshire Sites and Monuments Record identifies extensive prehistoric settlement, funerary and ritual sites known by both aerial photography and archaeological investigation (e.g. SMR no's 550, 567a, 567c, 8405a & CB322 etc.). Later archaeology include a possible Roman Legionary fort (Coneygeare Common) and Pagan Saxon funerary urns to the south (SMR 392).

3.2 Previous Archaeological Work

The site lies to the north of a number of known archaeological sites centred upon the present day Community College, and investigated by the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council and Wessex Archaeology. These include a Roman settlement immediately to the east of the college buildings and Bronze Age remains under the present day school all-weather pitch. Prehistoric settlement and burial evidence has also been recorded to the west and south; these include the remains of a Neolithic cursus and possible long barrow, Bronze Age field systems and barrows, and an Iron Age pit alignment (Alexander 1993; Kemp 1993, 1996, 1997; Macaulay 1994, Wessex Archaeology 2001).

Closer to the present site, Birmingham University's Archaeological Unit have done several pieces of work to the north and north-east (SMR 11511, 11919, 15258, 11871, CB14643), which revealed medieval remains. To the south-east in Berkley Street, Hertfordshire Archaeology found a single undated gully (CB14995). The SMR also locates a single entry within the grounds of the school itself, a probable Iron Age house recorded in 1963, possibly during the construction of the buildings (SMR 00395).

3.3 Historical Background

The name Eynesbury is first recorded as *Eanulfesbirig*, meaning 'Eanwulf's Burgh' in around 1000, and in the Domesday Book of 1086 as *Einuluesberie*. The first recorded instance of the modern spelling is in 1316 (Mawer & Stenton 1943). At Domesday, Eynesbury probably included the modern parishes of St Neots Urban and Rural, Eynesbury, Eynesbury Hardwick and possibly Abbotsley. St Neots parish was created some time after 1113, when one of the manors was granted to the Priory of St Neots, while Abbotsley became a separate parish around 1138 (VCH).

4 METHODOLOGY

A single trench with a total length of 9m was opened by a JCB using a flat-bladed 1.5m wide ditching bucket, under the supervision of an archaeologist (see Fig 1). This constitutes a 7.5% sample of the total development area.

The trench was cleaned by hand, planned and photographed, and recorded using the AFU's single context recording system. The trench was tied in three-dimensionally to Ordnance Survey mapping.

5 RESULTS

5.1 Trench 1

Trench 1 was 9m long and was oriented roughly E-W. It contained no archaeology. Up to 0.5m of dark greyish brown sandy silt topsoil overlay up to 1.4m of mixed strong brown silty sand and gravel, fine sands, and very dark grey clay sandy silts. Undecayed wood was recovered, along with modern brick and tile fragments, from a depth of 1.4m below ground level.

6 DISCUSSION

The extensive disturbed deposits encountered in Trench 1 are probably due to landscaping works carried out during the construction of the Primary School in the 1960's. To the west of the school grounds, the riverbank is noticeably sloped, and there is other evidence of modification to the local topography around the buildings themselves.

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 in advance of development. Information from the evaluation will allow an assessment of the proposed development's archaeological implications and to inform an appropriate mitigation strategy.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank Cambridgeshire County Council who funded the archaeological work. Stephen Macaulay managed the project for the AFU and edited the report.

The brief for archaeological works was written by Andy Thomas of the CAO.

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