



Archaeological Field Unit

**Land to the rear of the Coach House, Church Street,
Gamlingay, Cambridgeshire: An Archaeological
Evaluation**

Rachel Clarke

October 2004

Cambridgeshire County Council

Report No. 759

Commissioned by D.H. Barford + Co.

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SUMMARY

An archaeological evaluation, comprising three machine-excavated trenches, was undertaken by the Archaeological Field Unit (AFU) of Cambridgeshire County Council on the 13th September 2004 on land to the rear of The Coach House, Gamlingay. No archaeological features, or even residual finds, were present, suggesting that medieval settlement did not extend into this part of the town. Some evidence of landscaping was noted, probably associated with the construction of the barn/garages in the western part of the site. This area of land is likely to have been open fields to the rear of the Church Street frontage, located c. 80m to the south.

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An Archaeological Evaluation**

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1 INTRODUCTION

An archaeological evaluation, comprising machine trenching, was carried out on an area of land to the rear of the Coach House, Gamlingay in advance of a planning decision regarding the construction of four houses and associated garages. The proposed development also includes the demolition of an existing barn/garage, although this was still standing at the time of the evaluation. D.H. Barford + Co. commissioned the project, on behalf of Mr M. Giles, who funded the evaluation.

The evaluation was in response to a Brief from the Cambridgeshire County Archaeology Office (Gdaniec 2004), which stated that the site was located within an area of high archaeological potential. An archaeological condition was placed on planning consent, which required an archaeological assessment of the site. It was considered particularly likely that remains of medieval date may be present.

The main objective of the evaluation was to determine the location, extent, date, character, condition, significance and quality of any surviving archaeological remains likely to be affected by the proposed development. The Brief also required that a suitable level of documentary research be undertaken to set the site within its geographical, topographical, archaeological and historical context. The results of this, including a summary of the relevant County Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) entries are included below.

2 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

The site is located on relatively level ground (51.4m OD) to the north of Church Street, in the historic village of Gamlingay, in West Cambridgeshire (Fig. 1). The underlying geology of the site is Green and Brown sands and sandstones (BGS 1974, sheet 204). The area is currently a mixture of grass, undergrowth and trees, although at the time of the evaluation there were also several piles of general rubbish and the remains of a wooden shed. According to the current owner, the site was previously used as allotments (Mr Giles pers. comm.). A recent housing estate surrounds the site to the east and north, the latter area having previously been open fields. The Coach House and

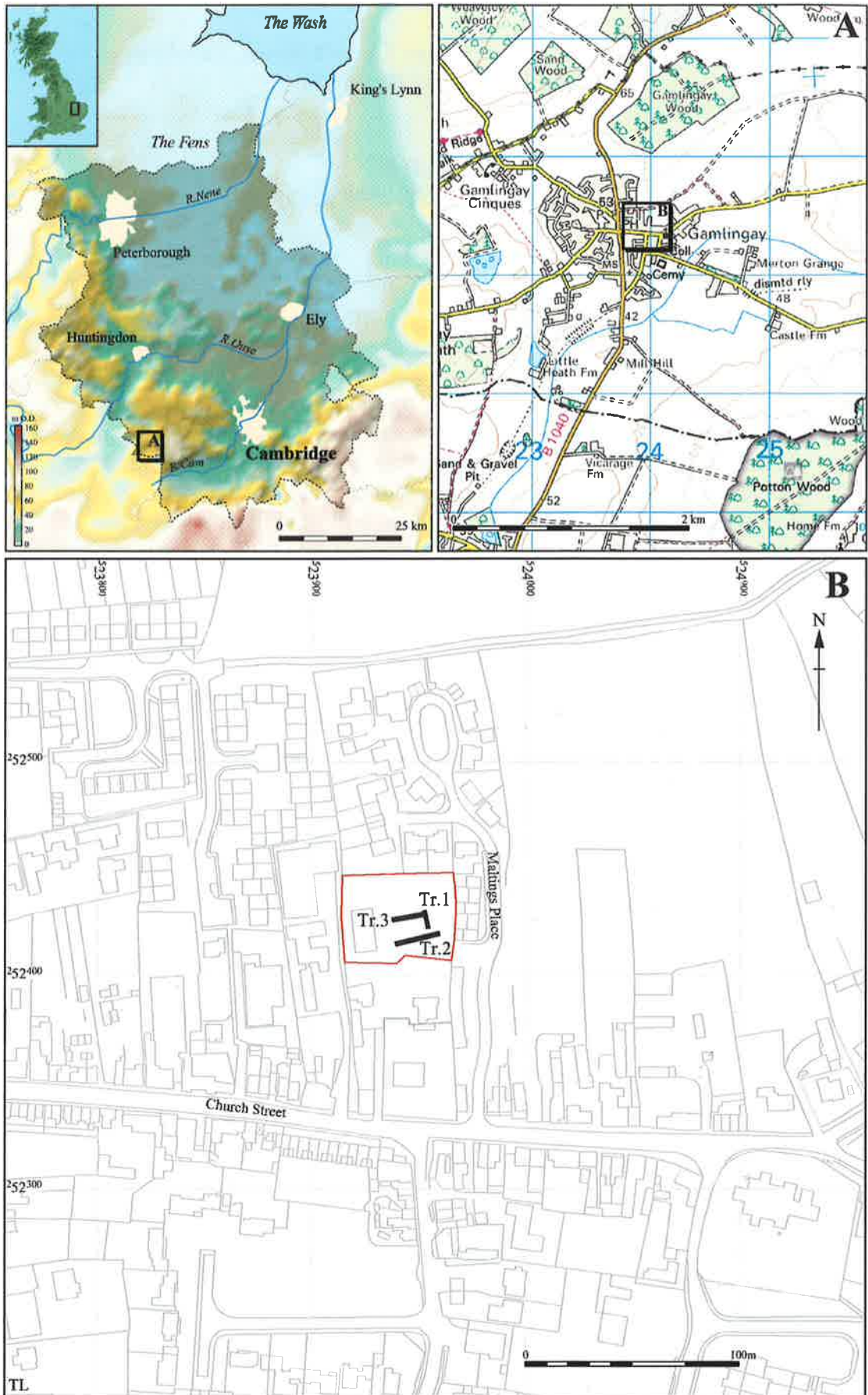


Figure 1 Location of trenches with the development area outlined (red)

associated buildings and gardens lie to the south, whilst the area to the west is built-up. The proposed development site comprises a roughly rectangular plot of approximately of 0.2 hectares in size (Fig. 1).

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The medieval village of Gamlingay probably originated around a triangular Green and is known to have had its own market located at the crossroads. The main medieval manor, Avenalls, passed to Merton College, Oxford in 1599, soon after which the village was devastated by fire. A detailed series of maps by T. Langdon were produced soon after this event, which provide important evidence for the topography of the town in this period. The layout of the modern town appears to have altered remarkably little from that recorded by Langdon (RCHM: Volume 1 West Cambridgeshire 1961, 99).

There are a number of known sites, finds spots and cropmarks in and around Gamlingay, although none are located within the development site itself. Several indications of prehistoric activity have been identified, including the discovery of Mesolithic flints found inside a moat at Dutter End (SMR 02336/MCB 2947). Palaeolithic implements (SMR 02386/MCB 3008), a Bronze Age palstave (SMR 02394/MCB 3017), flint tools (SMR 02395/MCB 3018) and two arrowheads (SMRs 02396/MCB 3019) have also been found in the vicinity. The remains of a Roman villa (SMR 02948) are located to the east of the development area, at Dutter End, and a Saxon farmstead and cemetery (SMR CB 14105) was discovered recently off Station Road to the south-east of the site.

The church, a Grade I listed building, located to the south-east of the site, appears to originate in the 13th century, and is likely to be on the site of an earlier building. Church Street, which runs *c.* 80m to the south of the site, is likely to be medieval in origin. Fragments of the medieval topography survive, such as moats (e.g. Merton Manor Farm, SMR 01139/MCB 1476), areas of wood and parkland, and there is extensive evidence of ridge and furrow surrounding the town. There are several buildings of interest that survive within the study area, including 'The Emplins' (SMR 02311/MCB 2922), which is likely to date from the 15th century, and a row of late 17th century Almshouses (SMR 02313/MCB2924) situated on the south side of Church Street, opposite the site entrance.

After 1600 AD the village gradually declined, although there were some changes in layout following enclosure in the 19th century, and there are many large, often detached, houses of 18th and 19th century date within the town. One of these is located at the frontage of Church Street, to the south of the development site, and a group of industrial buildings of 17th to 19th century date have recently been developed to the east of, and adjacent to, the site.



Figure 2 Trench plan showing current site conditions

4 METHODOLOGY

The area of evaluation was somewhat reduced from that envisaged in the original specification (Macaulay 2004), which proposed that the total length of evaluation trenching was to be 60m, providing a 5% sample of the whole development area. The presence of a large barn and associated access in the western part of the site, combined with a number of trees (many of which are to be retained), especially along the northern and eastern boundaries, and a large spoil heap in the northern part of the site meant that it was not possible to excavate the full 60m of trenching (Fig. 2). The original trenching strategy, which comprised two 1.6m-wide x 30m long trenches in a T-shape, was revised to three smaller 2m-wide trenches, giving a total length of *c.* 43m. This provided a sample of approximately 4.5% of the total area. The Cambridgeshire Archaeology Office was informed of the situation and subsequent change to the trench plan.

The trenches, which were positioned to avoid trees and other obstacles, were checked with a Cat Scanner prior to excavation. A wheeled mechanical excavator, equipped with a 1.6m-wide ditching bucket, initially cleared the site of vegetation and rubbish to allow safe excavation of the trenches, which were then machined under archaeological supervision. The trenches were excavated to the geological horizon, which was the same in all three trenches; these were then cleaned, photographed and recorded. No deposits suitable for environmental sampling were identified.

5 RESULTS

No archaeological features were identified in any of the three trenches, and no finds, other than occasional small, abraded brick and tile fragments (not retained) and very rare sherds of modern porcelain were noted in the topsoil during machining. The topsoil, a loose silty sand, became very thin (*c.* 0.12m) towards the west, suggesting some previous landscaping had occurred, possibly associated with the construction of the barn/garages. The natural subsoil/surface geology comprised fairly compact pale yellowish brown silty sand with gravelly patches and frequent ironstone. This was machined deeper in parts of the trenches to confirm that it was a natural deposit and did not seal earlier features or deposits. It was found to become increasingly 'cleaner' and sandier in some places (Trench 1, at a depth of 0.8m below the ground surface) and more compact and gravelly in others (Trench 2, at a depth of 0.48m below the ground surface). The nature and general similarity of this deposit in all three trenches indicates that it is geological, and it is consistent with the BGS data for this area (see above).



Plate 1 Trench 1



Plate 2 Trench 2



Plate 3 Trench 3



Plate.4 General shot of trenches from south-west

Trench 1

This trench measured 8m x 2m and was orientated approximately north-south in the eastern part of the development area. It was excavated to a depth of 0.48m at the northern end and 0.8m at the southern end; topsoil was an average thickness of 0.25m.

Trench 2

This trench measured 14.8m x 2m and was orientated north-east to south-west along the southern part of the development area, to the immediate south of trench 1. It was excavated to a depth of 0.48m at the western end, and 0.18m at the eastern end, where the topsoil was thinnest (0.12m).

Trench 3

This trench, which was joined to Trench 1 at its northern end, measured 14.8m x 2m, and was orientated approximately east to west along the northern part of the development area. It was excavated to a depth of 0.34m at the eastern end and 0.28m at the western end.

6 DISCUSSION

The absence of archaeological features, or even modern intrusions, is somewhat surprising given the high archaeological potential of the site. However, the site is located at some distance (80m) from the medieval street frontage, in an area that has apparently been allotments and gardens until recently, and is quite likely to have been open fields prior to this. There is some evidence of landscaping/levelling, as there is very little topsoil present in the western part of the site. This is unusual given the previous site-use (allotments/gardens), and may be related to the construction of the large barn/garages here. No record of archaeological investigations have been found for the recent housing development to the east and north of the current site, which might have shed further light on the past use of this part of the town.

7 CONCLUSIONS

The results of the evaluation suggest that medieval occupation did not extend into this part of the town, which is likely to have been open fields to the rear of the street frontage properties. However, the location and length of trenching was limited by the presence of a large barn, trees and other obstacles, and it is possible that archaeological remains are present in these areas that were inaccessible.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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The brief for archaeological works was written by Kasia Gdaniec, County Archaeology Office.

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- Royal Commission on Historical Monuments (England) *Volume 1: West Cambridgeshire*

APPENDIX 1: CONTEXT LIST

Context number	Description
1	Topsoil: Mid yellowish greyish brown silty sand with rare small subangular stones. Very occasional fragments of abraded brick and tile and rare modern porcelain sherds.
2	Natural: Pale yellowish brown silty sand with occasional small and medium stones (frequent ironstone nodules). Some areas of pure sand, and very compact sandy gravel.



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