

Archaeological Field Unit

**Kingfisher Way, Hinchingsbrooke Business Park,
Huntingdon: An Archaeological Evaluation**

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February 2005

Cambridgeshire County Council

Report No. 789

Commissioned by *Gladman Homes*

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Archaeological Evaluation**

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SUMMARY

Between the 21st and 23rd February 2005 the Archaeological Field Unit (AFU) of Cambridgeshire County Council conducted an archaeological evaluation on land off Kingfisher Way, Hinchingsbrooke Business Park, Hinchingsbrooke, Huntingdon (TL 2227 7267) in advance of the construction of office blocks, access roads and ancillary services/structures.

Five trenches (total length 219m) were excavated within the proposed area (1.4 hectares). All the trenches had to be stepped due to the recent dumping of a clay overburden between 0.8m and 2.6m thick which covered the site. Only one late post-medieval boundary ditch which partly cut a colluvium hillwash layer was uncovered. It ran roughly north to south and parallel to the existing eastern boundary of the site. This layer, between 0.2 to 0.4m thick, sealed the natural terrace gravels across the site. The original topsoil from the site had been removed from the site presumably when the clay was deposited on the site in recent times.

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**Kingfisher Way, Hinchingsbrooke Business Park, Huntingdon: An
Archaeological Evaluation
(TL 2227 7267)**

1 INTRODUCTION

An archaeological evaluation was carried out on land at Hinchingsbrooke Business Park, Kingfisher Way, Hinchingsbrooke, Huntingdon (TL 2227 7267) to fulfil the requirements of planning application H/02/02482/FUL. The application was to construct office blocks, access roads and ancillary services/structures. This evaluation was carried out by the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council between the 21st and 23rd February 2005.

The Brief for the archaeological work was dated 10th February 2005 (Gdaniec 2005). The archaeological objectives for the evaluation were recorded in the Specification for the site dated 16th February 2005 (Macaulay 2005). These objectives were to establish the character, date, state of preservation and extent of any archaeological remains within the proposed development area. The results of the evaluation were to be considered in the light of previous archaeological work within the immediate area.

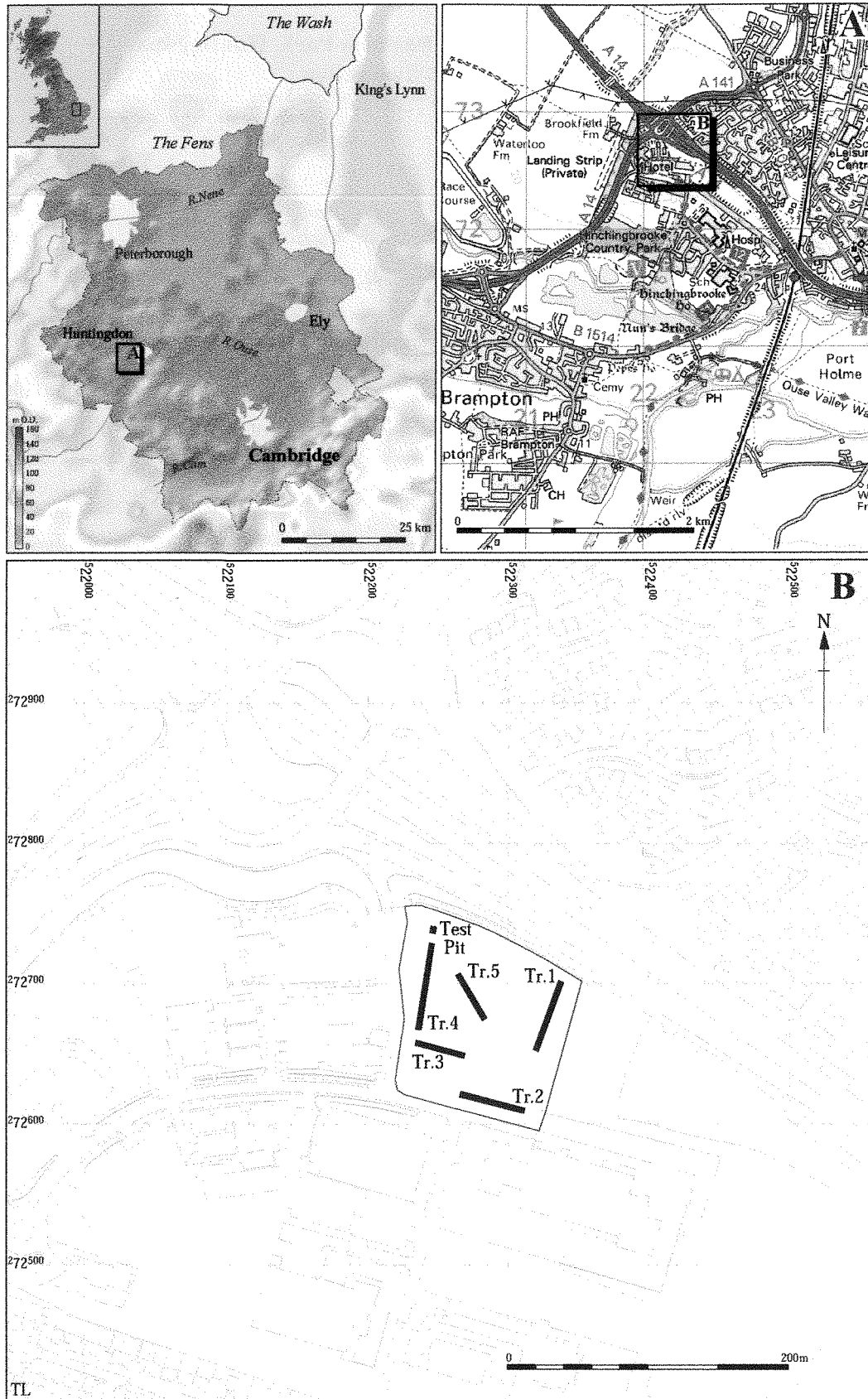
The Specification and the proposed location of the archaeological trenches were approved by Cambridgeshire Archaeology Planning and Countryside Advice (CAPCA).

2 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

The geology for the site has been mapped by the British Geological Survey as being at the junction of three different deposits (BGS 1975). Oxford clay with grey mudstones and infrequent stone bands were recorded running to the north and east, 1st and 2nd Terrace River Gravels to the north-west and Boulder clay to the south and south-west.

Boulder clay (Glacial deposits) was only found in the south-eastern part of trench 2. This was a light grey clay with some small chalk pieces. Natural in the remainder of trench 2 and over the rest of the site was a bright orange sand with some very small gravel pieces (Terrace River Gravels). There was the occasional green clay patch within the Terrace Gravels and the very rare large natural flint piece.

The site has been much disturbed in recent years. The topsoil and subsoil had been removed although the hillwash deposit sealing natural was not removed.



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

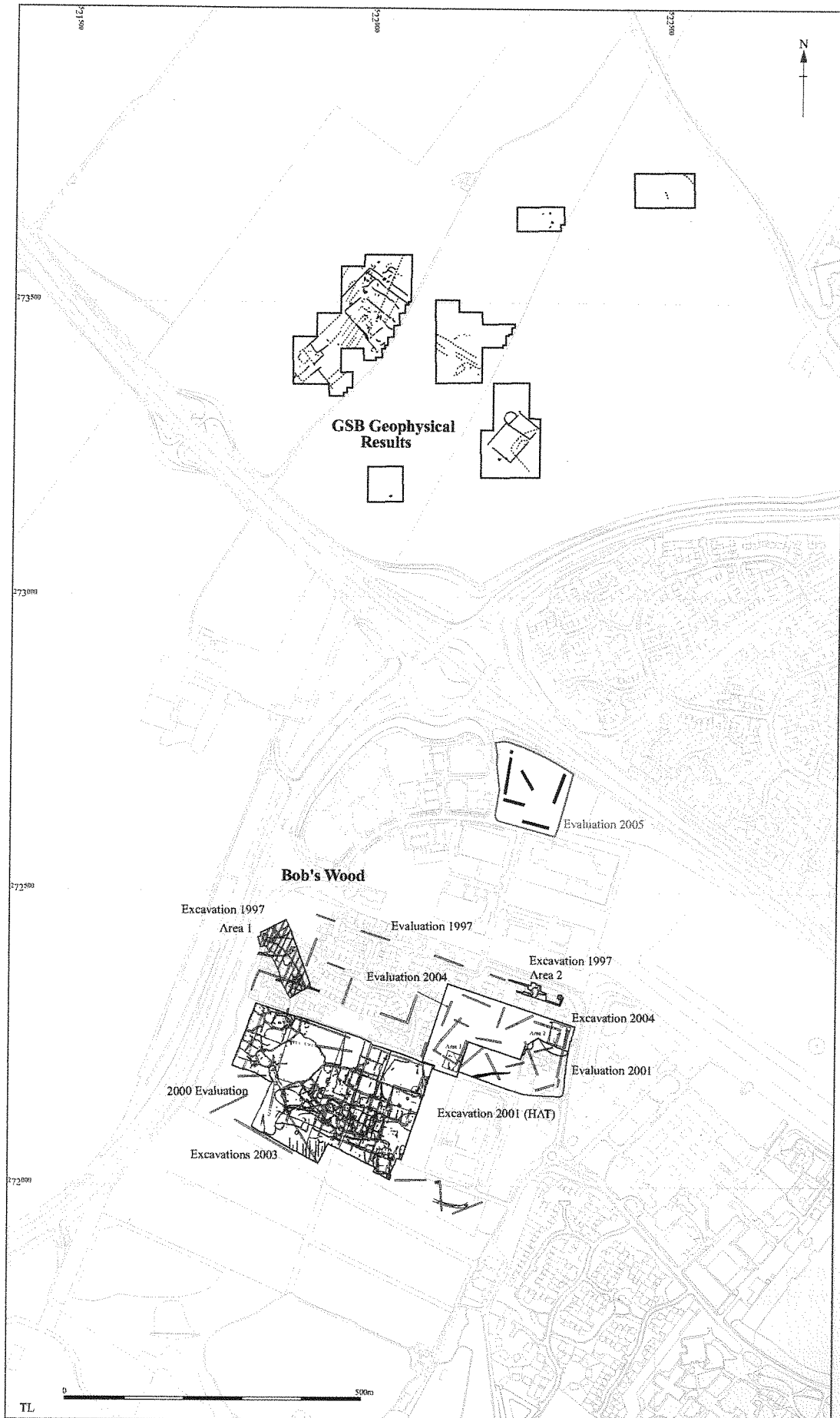


Figure 2 Evaluation site in relation to Bob's Wood and GSB geophysical results

A large redeposited clay natural had been spread across the site between 0.8m and 2.6m thick to create a flat ground. The evaluation revealed that there was a slight slope in the natural deposits with the ground dropping gradually from 12.6mOD on the north and north-eastern side of the site to 11.1mOD on the extreme north-western side.

The 1st Edition Ordnance Survey map (1890) shows the site was very near the base of a valley with a stream running east to west directly to the north of the site where the present A14 runs. Part of the Iron Age/Roman settlement at Bob's Wood was excavated, it lies at the crest of the hill (35mOD) 600m to the north of the site and continues down the north facing slope for more than 300m (29mOD) (Fig. 2). The features continue for an unknown extent towards the present development area. On the southern hill side there was another settlement between 500m and 1km to the north.

The hill upon which the Bob's Wood site is situated appears as a solitary, upstanding, geological feature at the juncture of three broad valleys. The importance of these valleys is evident by the range of prehistoric and later sites in the vicinity. The rivers and later roadways including Ermine Street and the A14 serve to emphasise the strategic location of the site at this ancient transport intersection.

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

3.1 Bob's Wood

The Bob's wood site lies c. 300m to 600m to the south of the present evaluation (Fig. 2). Here recent archaeological work was undertaken between 1997 and 2004 (Crank 2001; Fletcher 2004; Fletcher and Hinman 2004; Hinman 1997a and b, 2000 and 2004; Hinman and Cooper 2001:Fig. 2). The extent of this settlement has not been found. The investigations at Hinchbrooke to date have demonstrated the presence of remains of an Iron Age and Roman agricultural settlement with sparse earlier prehistoric remains.

3.2 GSB and Cotswold Archaeological Site

Archaeological work more than 500m to the north of the site found a prehistoric into Roman settlement site on the south slope of the hill overlooking the valley. (Fig. 2; JSAC 2003). There has been a partial geophysical survey undertaken by GSB and an evaluation on the eastern half of the site by Cotswold Archaeological trust.

3.3 Landscape overview

Palaeolithic

The major river systems within Cambridgeshire have been the focus for much of the prehistoric activity within the county. Palaeolithic remains have been found within the terrace gravels of the river system.

Neolithic

Late Neolithic and early Bronze Age ceremonial complexes have been found to the west of the site in Brampton (Scheduled Ancient Monument No. 121; Malim 1990 and 2000) and 3km to the south-east of the subject site at Rectory Farm, Godmanchester (McAvoy forthcoming). A further Late Neolithic/early Bronze Age site at Huntingdon Racecourse revealed field systems and an enclosure in Terrace Gravels (Macaulay 1993; Last and Macaulay 1996; Macaulay forthcoming). Excavations on Thrapston Road, situated 2km west of the subject site, found a series of parallel ditches interpreted as Neolithic territorial markers or field systems (Malim and Mitchell 1993).

Bronze Age

The area surrounding the site is similarly rich in Bronze Age remains. A Bronze Age triple ring ditch (Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) 02117) was uncovered during excavations immediately east of Thrapston Rd in 1966 before the construction of the Miller Way housing estate (White 1969) and a small pit on the area south of Thrapston Road (SMR 11176; Welsh 1993). Bronze Age field systems and a Bronze Age round barrow (burial monument) were uncovered during excavations at Huntingdon Racecourse (Macaulay 1993), situated 2km west of the site.

Iron Age and Roman

A number of other Iron Age sites have been identified including 1km south-west of the subject site there was a rectilinear enclosure (White 1969). Some were built on gravel terraces including Godmanchester, 3km from the subject site (Green 1977).

The proximity of Godmanchester, which is only 3km to the south-east of the development site, is significant since this town was a major focus for settlement during this time with outlying villas etc. (e.g at Rectory Farm, Godmanchester, 2.5km to the south-east of the present site (McAvoy forthcoming). Various people including Michael Green (1977) have attempted to locate the line of Ermine Street between Godmanchester and the northern edge of Huntingdon. It is assumed that Ermine Street lies close by probably to the north.

Medieval and Post-Medieval

The site was probably within strip fields of Huntingdon and doesn't seem to have been built on. In the 1st Edition Ordnance Survey map (1890) the site was a field, presumably part of Low Farm which was situated 50m to the east of the site.

4 METHODOLOGY

A mechanical excavator with a 1.8m wide ditching bucket was used to excavate five trenches under archaeological supervision (Fig. 1). A few of the trench locations were changed due to extremely deep overburden. All the trenches were stepped (giving a width of c.4m for each trench) in order to reach the natural. In all, 219m of trenching was excavated giving a 3% sample of the site's natural in the 1.4 hectare site (Table 1).

5 RESULTS

Only one trench had any archaeology within it and that was a post-medieval boundary ditch in the north end of trench 1 (3). The ditch ran roughly north to south roughly parallel to the field hedge to the east. It was partly sealed by the colluvium layer (2). The ditch was 0.4m wide and 0.28m deep with a slightly concave base. The ditch was filled with a light grey sandy clay with two post-medieval red ware sherds of 17th or 18th century date. There were a couple of small irregular shallow modern intrusions (4) in Trench 4 on the extreme western side. They cut the hillwash (colluvium) and one contained modern brick (20th century) and a post-medieval red ware sherd.

The hillwash (colluvium) (2), 0.2m-0.4m thick was a fairly clean light grey sandy clay colluvium layer which directly sealed the natural subsoil in all five trenches (table 1). It would have travelled from the hill directly to the south of the site. The modern overburden (1) was found between 0.8m and 2.6m thick across the site and consisted of redeposited natural boulder clay. It would have been deposited either from when the A14 was built in the 1980's or may have happened more recently and related from nearby construction of the business park.

Trenches	Length	Modern overburden	Hillwash
Trench 1	50.1m	0.8m (south side) to 2m (north side)	0.2m-0.4m
Trench 2	41m	1.2m	0.2m-0.3m
Trench 3	35m	1.2m-1.5m	0.3m

Trench 4 and test pit	60m	1.5m – 2.6m	0.35m-0.40m
Trench 5	33.5m	1.2m	0.35m

Table 1 Trench by length and depth

6 FINDS

6.1 Post-medieval pottery by Carole Fletcher

Three Post-Medieval Medieval Red Ware sherds (117g) were recovered from the evaluation. PMWR dates from the 15th centuries to the 18th centuries. The three sherds date to the later end of the period and were either 17th or 18th century in date. Two sherds (112g) were recovered from context (3) and were a base sherd from a jar and a handle from a bowl. There was a small body sherd (5g) from context (4).

6.2 Brick by Rob Atkins

Four brick fragments (95g) were recovered. An undatable fragment (12g) from (3) and 3 pieces from (4) including a clearly modern 20th century fragment.

7 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The subject site is within a very rich area for settlement/activity from the Neolithic period onwards with two known cursus, numerous later prehistoric and Roman sites (see section 3.3 above). The subject site itself would have been ideal for settlement but the site was not occupied at any stage. The site was at the valley bottom, on natural terrace gravels next to a stream (on the 1st Edition Ordnance Survey map adjacent to the north of the site). Flooding would not have been a problem as despite the relative low lying ground level, none of the trenches flooded even with the evaluation taking place in the middle of a wet February. Gravel terraces are also frequently used for settlement with a number of other Iron Age/Roman sites were built on gravel terraces in the area including Godmanchester, 3km from the subject site (Green 1977).

It is significant that both settlements opposite the evaluation site were situated on natural clays, at a time when prehistoric inhabitants seemed to prefer sands and gravel sub soils. Clay was generally avoided where possible with Iron Age occupation either only on the sand subsoil near to the clay or where settlement only expanded onto the clay at a later date. This can be seen at Ely, Prickwillow Road the Iron Age settlement only occupied higher sand/gravel

land above the clay subsoil with occupation only expanding down into the clay area in the 2nd century AD (Atkins and Mudd 2003, 49).

Clearly strategic location was the key reason for both settlements. The Iron Age/Roman settlements were both built on boulder clay on the crest of the hills/top of slopes directly to the north and south of the site. This can be clearly seen at Bob's Wood to the south where its location was on a solitary, hill at the juncture of three broad valleys.

Apart from a single late post-medieval boundary ditch, there was no archaeological features on the site evaluated. There was a layer of colluvium across the site. Topsoil and subsoil had been removed in recent times and a clay layer deposited across the site.

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The brief for archaeological works was written by Kasia Gdaniec, Cambridgeshire Archaeology Planning and Countryside Advice County Archaeology Office, who monitored the site.

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