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An Archaeological Earthwork Survey at Hinxton Hall

S Leith & P Spoerry

1995

Cambridgeshire County Council

Report No. A55

Commissioned by Fuller Peiser on behalf of The Wellcome Trust

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SUMMARY

On March 6 and 7, 1995 the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council carried out an earthwork survey at Hinxton Hall (TL 496/445). This work was part of site investigations for the proposed development of a sports pitch by Fuller Peiser on behalf of The Wellcome Trust.

The main area of earthworks is comprised of a hollow way, and a series of rectilinear enclosures and platforms adjacent to it. This hollow way corresponds to a track on the 1799 OS draft 1" map. Documentary evidence suggests occupation in this area in the seventeenth century, although the alignment of these earthworks, which is similar to that of the Late Saxon settlement, may suggest an earlier date.

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INTRODUCTION

On March 6 and 7, 1995 the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council carried out an earthwork survey at Hinxton Hall (TL 496/445). This work was part of site investigations for the proposed development of a sports pitch by Fuller Peiser on behalf of The Wellcome Trust.

The main area of earthworks is located in the western part of the parkland, to the south-south-east of the wood and adjacent to the River Cam. A few earthworks continue through the wooded area to the north, up to the old road to Ickleton and beyond it into an area of scrub. These areas were all incorporated into the Hinxton Hall park in the late eighteenth to mid nineteenth century, but they seem to have escaped being landscaped and were left largely as they were.

RESULTS (Fig 1)

The main area of earthworks to the south-south-east of the wood is comprised of a probable hollow way running north-north-west / south-south-east, and a number of ditches and banks which form a series of rectilinear enclosures to the west of the hollow way. At least two platforms were visible within these enclosures.

The rectilinear enclosures appear too small to indicate boundaries around arable fields, but are more likely to represent stock enclosures or occupation. Areas of nettles among the earthworks may indicate occupation or stock holding as these plants thrive on the resultant high level of phosphates present in the soil.

A narrow ditch runs north from the hollow way through the wood, but at an angle to the hollow way and enclosures. To the north it joins the ditch running along the south side of the old road to Ickleton which went out of use in the mid nineteenth century. The ditches on either side of this old road are wide and deep, and the one on the north side runs into a pond at its west end.

To the north of the old Ickleton road, in an area of scrub west of the parkland lakes, is a narrow ditch running north-north-west / south-south-east. A number of old shrubs and trees along this ditch may indicate that this was once a field boundary.

The survey did not reveal any evidence of irrigated water meadows or of medieval ridge and furrow field systems as had previously been suggested.

DISCUSSION

The area south of the old road to Ickleton is shown on the 1799 OS draft 1" Map (Fig 2) as a series of enclosed fields. On the 1831 Plan of the Hinxton Estate (Fig 3) and the 1833 Enclosure Map these fields are called "Bardhouse Closes", an area which was recorded as enclosed by 1698 (Wright 1978, 225). The parish register for Hinxton shows a family named Bard/Baird/Beard were present from 1623 to 1668 and again from 1830 to 1918. The name "Bardhouse Closes" suggests that this was a large close within or near to which was the family house (Way in Leith 1993a, 49-50).

The 1799 map shows a field boundary or trackway running north-north-west / south-south-east, from the old Ickleton road to Great Chesterford. The hollow way, which is

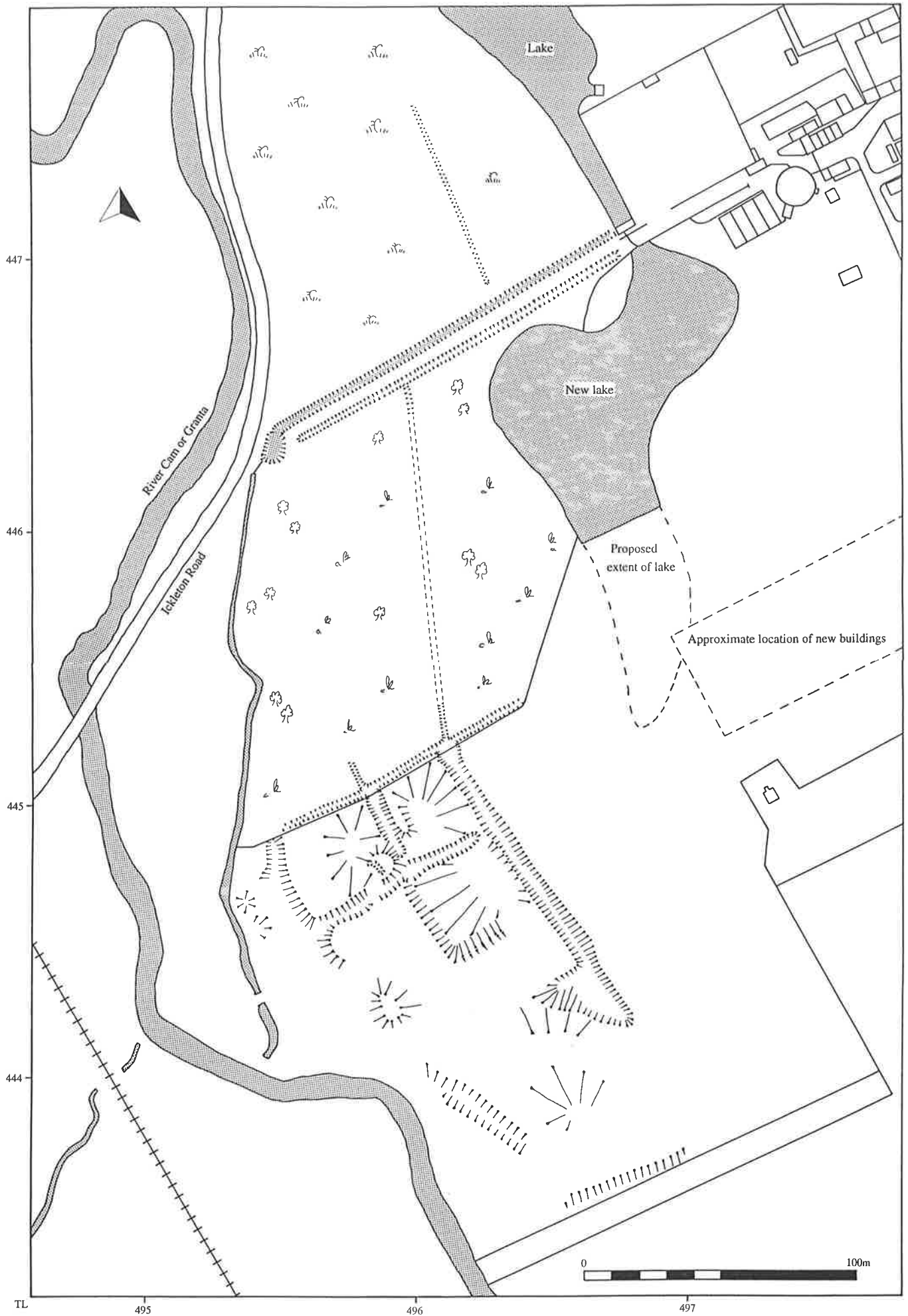


Figure 1 Plan of the Earthworks at Hinxtion Hall

extant as an earthwork, appears to be on the line of this track. This map shows a boundary running north-north-west from the old road to Ickleton, on the line of the extant ditch running through the area of scrub. This boundary is also shown on the OS map of 1899, where it is in line with field boundaries to the north-north-west and south-south-east of the Hinxton Hall park.

The road from Ickleton across the Cam at the crossing called Brockerton Ford on the 1833 map, is shown on that map and the 1831 map as turning abruptly to the north-east after the crossing, and then joining the straight portion of the old road to Ickleton where it leaves the river's edge. The 1799 map, however, shows the road continuing in a straight line from the ford to end in a 'T' at the track mentioned above. The course of this road is marked by a pronounced kink in the stream channel which runs to the east of the river. The road appears, therefore, to have been diverted between 1799 and 1831 to run around a small meadow adjacent to the Cam, named "The Holme" on the 1831 map, and "Brockerton Holme Meadow" on the 1833 map.

The small stream channel to the east of the Cam which forms the eastern boundary of Brockerton Holme Meadow, does not appear on the 1799 map, and probably also dates from 1799 to 1831. The 1831 map shows it as continuous with the ditch on the south side of the old Ickleton road and then turning at right angles to the south to feed into a rectangular pond. This part of the ditch was excavated during the work on the New Lake Site (Leith 1995). The stream channel and ditches therefore appear to be water management features dating from 1799 to 1831. Similarly, the ditch which runs along the north side of the old Ickleton road did not originally run into a pond at its west end, but is shown on the 1831 map as being fed with water from the Cam. To the east, the ditch ends in a brick sluice which feeds into the ornamental lake to the north. This lake also appears to be a feature created between 1799 and 1831.

During the eighteenth century, each owner of Hinxton Hall seems to have acquired land to add to the estate (Wright 1978, 224). Although the phase of emparkment which saw the High Street diverted around the park did not occur until the mid nineteenth century, there appears to have been an earlier phase of formal landscaping of the Hall environs, which included the creation of the ornamental lake opposite the Hall itself and the diversion of part of the road to Ickleton.

CONCLUSION

Documentary evidence suggests that the earthworks south-south-east of the wood may relate to seventeenth century occupation in this area implied by the field name Bardhouse Closes. The hollow way which exists as an earthwork clearly corresponds with the track on the 1799 map which runs from the old Ickleton road to Great Chesterford between the enclosed fields to the east and the river-side meadows to the west. The earthworks adjacent to the hollow way appear by their morphology to represent enclosures and activity or occupation platforms adjacent to the road line. It is therefore probable that the earthworks contain stratified archaeological material, and that this may date to the seventeenth century, although an earlier date is also possible.

All the earthworks (apart from the ditch running through the wood) and the old road to Ickleton, as well as field boundaries to the south-south-east of the Hinxton Hall park, are all on the same alignment. This alignment is clear on the 1799 map which shows a number of tracks, boundaries, and roads running north-north-west / south-south-east from Whittlesford through Hinxton to Great Chesterford. The most significant point is that this alignment is shared by the Late Saxon buildings and enclosure excavated in the southern part of the parkland in 1993-94. This land use pattern was therefore established by the Late Saxon period, but may reflect an earlier use of the landscape. Although it would be difficult to prove that the Roman field boundaries revealed in the New Lake Site share this alignment, they do indicate Roman agricultural activity in the

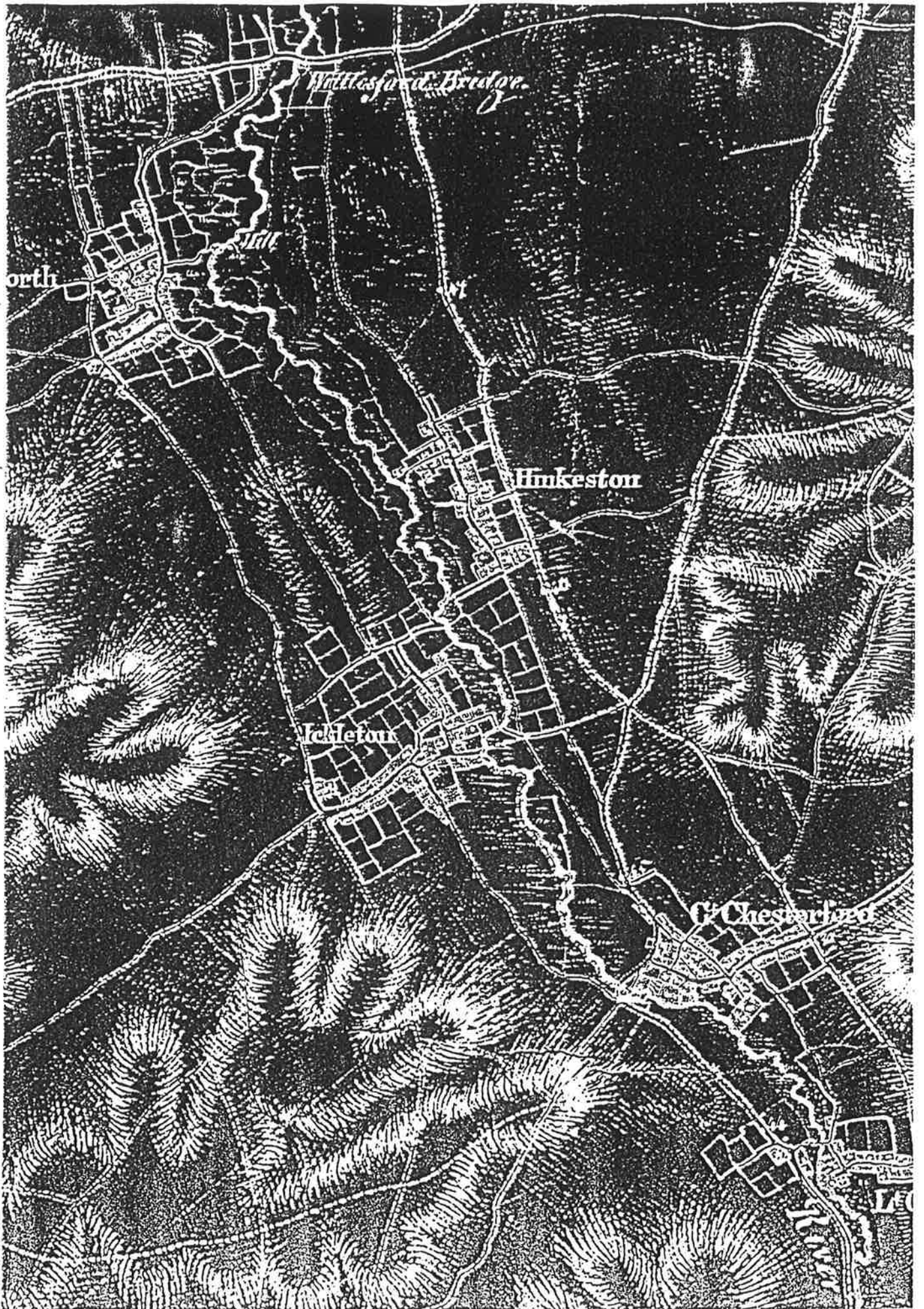


Figure 2 OS Draft 1" Map, 1799 sheet 147

*Plan of an Estate in the Parish of
Hinxton in the County of Cambridge.*

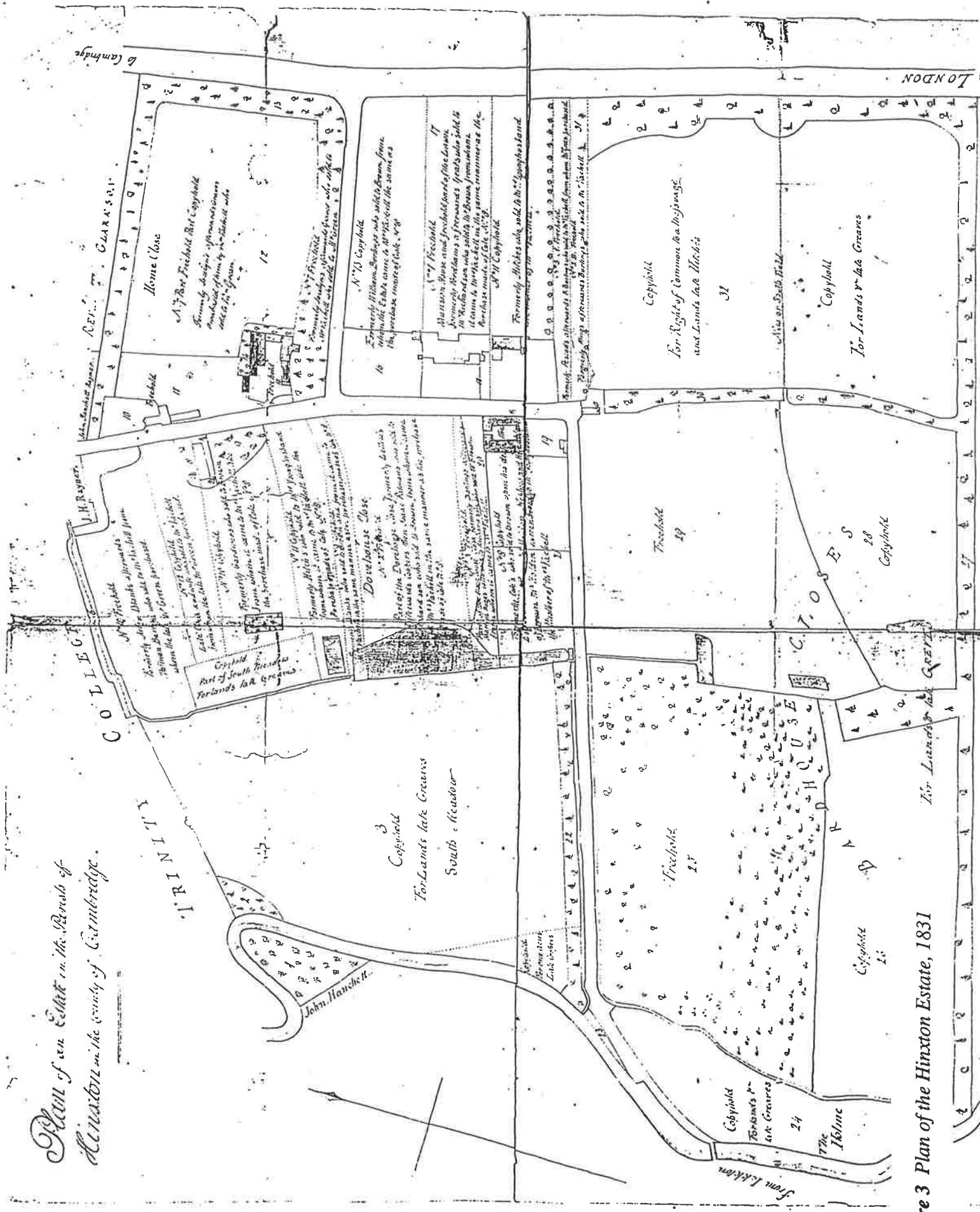


Figure 3 Plan of the Hinxton Estate, 1831

area, and they suggest settlement nearby. Evidence of Roman activity is expected to continue from the New Lake Site into the wood towards the Cam, and here evidence may exist to shed light on the continuity of land use patterns from the Roman period through to the Late Saxon, and into the post-medieval and modern periods.

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Maps consulted

- OS Draft 1", 1799 sheet 147
- Plan of land divisions in Hinxtton Estate, 1800 (CRO R57/24/1/57a)
- Plan of Hinxtton Estate, 1831 (CRO R57/24/1/57b)
- Enclosure Map, 1833 (CRO Q/RDc47)
- OS 1st Edition, 1899 (Sheet Lix NE)