

The Ouse Washes Habitat Creation Project, Coveney



Archaeological Monitoring and Recording Report



September 2015

Client: Environment Agency

OA East Report No: 1832

OASIS No: oxfordar3-229166

NGR: TL 4656 8278

The Ouse Washes habitat creation project, Coveney, Cambridgeshire


Archaeological Monitoring and Recording

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Summary

Between August and November 2014, Oxford Archaeology East (OA East) undertook an archaeological monitoring and recording exercise on a 200 hectare redevelopment of land to the north of Jerusalem Drove, Coveney, Cambridgeshire (TL 4656 8278).

The monitoring concentrated on soil removal from an area approximately nine hectares in size ahead of the construction of a reservoir. Observation was also carried out on the excavation of a new open-ditch drain.

The overall aim of the redevelopment is to create a wet grassland habitat area for bird species which have been affected by the deterioration of the Ouse Washes.

During the archaeological monitoring no archaeological features or artefacts were recovered.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work

- 1.1.1 OA East were commissioned to undertake an archaeological monitoring and recording exercise across 200 hectares of land off Jerusalem Drove, near Wardy Hill, Coveney, Cambridgeshire (Fig. 1).
- 1.1.2 The key groundworks associated with this phase of the project consisted of the construction of a winter water storage reservoir on land previously subjected to archaeological evaluation (see Fletcher 2013), capable of storing around 500 thousand cubic metres of water; together with associated pumping systems, feeder drains, field drains and infield foot drains.
- 1.1.3 The Environment Agency requested archaeological monitoring on those parts of the scheme deemed to be sensitive, in order to satisfy a planning condition and to meet the Environment Agency's assessment of environmental risk. All archaeological works were undertaken in accordance with a Specification prepared by OA East (Sperry 2014).
- 1.1.4 The aim of the overall scheme proposes to create a wet grassland habitat area in order to meet the ecological requirements for those species negatively affected by deterioration of the Ouse Washes; namely breeding black-tailed godwit, snipe and ruff and wintering wigeon (Fletcher 2013).
- 1.1.5 The work was designed to assist in defining the character and extent of any archaeological remains within the proposed redevelopment area, in accordance with the guidelines set out in *National Planning Policy Framework* (Department for Communities and Local Government March 2012). The results will enable decisions to be made by CCC, on behalf of the Local Planning Authority, with regard to the treatment of any archaeological remains found.
- 1.1.6 The site archive is currently held by OA East and will be deposited with the appropriate county stores in due course.

1.2 Geology, topography and land use

- 1.2.1 The following information is taken from the 2010 watching brief (Heistermann 2011).
- 1.2.2 The site is located in the southern part of the Fenland Basin, on low-lying ground at the north-western edge of the former Isle of Ely and is immediately east of the New Bedford River (Ouse or Hundred Foot Washes).
- 1.2.3 The elevation at the site decreases from approximately 0m OD in the south to approximately -1m OD in the north. The surrounding villages of Wardy Hill, Mepal, Coveney and Pymore are situated at a higher elevation than the surrounding fenland. The site is situated within a rural location with surrounding land use being predominantly agricultural. The City of Ely is located approximately 9km to the east.
- 1.2.4 Most of the area is a drained and cultivated former peat fen. The topsoil is mainly peat derived and represents a fertile easy to farm soil. Both of these deposits are however wasting away as a result of the drainage and farming. The area is accessed by wide, regularly laid out dirt tracks, called droves. They are accompanied by deep drainage ditches on either side and raised slightly above the surroundings. The droves are usually slightly raised due to wastage of peat on the surrounding arable land.

- 1.2.5 The surface geology of the site is predominantly mapped as Holocene (Nordelf) peat (BGS sheet 173), although a swathe of alluvium is present associated with the Washes to the east. No Holocene deposits are mapped on the higher ground to the south of the site where there are outcrops of Jurassic Ampthill Clay and Kimmeridge Clay. It is likely that shallow Holocene peat deposits once extended further into the margins of these areas. Discrete deposits of Pleistocene river gravels and fluvial glacial deposits are noted skirting the fen edge and are likely to extend beneath the Holocene sequences within the site.

1.3 Previous archaeological works

Watching Brief (Heistermann 2011)

- 1.3.1 In October 2010, OA East undertook a watching brief on eight geotechnical boreholes and seven test pits across the site. No archaeological features or artefacts were observed during the works. The sedimentary sequences recorded in the interventions broadly comprised a relatively shallow Holocene peat of probable Bronze Age and later date, overlying a complex of late Devensian deposits related to cold climate solifluction, fluvial and aeolian processes. In places these deposits overlay fluvial gravels of Pleistocene age above the bedrock geology of Ampthill Clay. A discrete organic horizon lying at a depth within the Pleistocene sequence may have related to temperate stage deposits known to exist in the area, either the Ipswichian Interglacial or Devensian Late Glacial Interstadial.

Field evaluation (Fletcher 2013)

- 1.3.2 Between November and December 2012, OA East undertook a field-walking exercise followed by a trial trench evaluation on 29 hectares of land within the overall 200 hectare development. Other than post-medieval boundary ditches and a possible small ring ditch gully representing what is likely to be a broadly contemporary shelter, similar to a shieling, the archaeological evaluation did not identify any surviving significant remains.
- 1.3.3 The absence of artefacts from a sampling of both top and subsoil layers as well as during the field-walking stage would support the suggestion that it is unlikely that there was ever any settlement on or nearby the site. This can probably be attributed to its flat, isolated nature within the landscape as well as the wet soil conditions of the low-lying land.

1.4 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.4.1 The following is taken from the desk-based assessment, which formed part of the evaluation report (Fletcher 2013).

Mesolithic (c.10,000-4000BC) and Neolithic (c.4000-2500BC)

- 1.4.2 Traces of prehistoric occupation were recovered during the Fenland Survey (Hall 1996, 46). Within 100m of the site boundary two Mesolithic flint scatters were identified (Witcham Sites 1 and 2; MCB 9406, 9404). The assemblages included blades, micro-blade cores, core tools, a microlith and fire-cracked flint. Site 2 also produced a scalene triangle and piece of polished Neolithic axe. Site 1 continued into the Neolithic period producing a piece of pottery, bone fragments, as well as worked flint (MCB 9407).
- 1.4.3 A minor scatter of Neolithic flintwork, a few blades and cores, was also found on a sand rise west of Wardy Hill (Coveney Site 5; MCB 12864). The Fenland Survey identified

similar Mesolithic and Neolithic artefact scatters including two sites to the north-east at Way Head (Coveney Sites 3 and 4).

Bronze Age (c.2500-800BC)

- 1.4.4 Evidence of later prehistoric activity in the form of flint scatters and cut features has been recorded in the higher clays of the western side of the Isle of Ely, largely as a result of more recent investigations caused by commercial development. The evidence suggests low-level usage probably reflecting seasonal visits during the Neolithic and Bronze Age (Evans 2003, 8). For example, archaeological investigations have revealed the remains of Neolithic and Early Bronze Age field systems at Block Fen, Chatteris, on the other side of Ouse Washes (MCB 16715, 17892, 17538).

Iron Age (c.800BC-AD43) and Romano-British (c.AD43-410)

- 1.4.5 Substantial evidence for Iron Age and Roman occupation was recorded during the Fenland Survey across the northern part of the Isle of Ely, and particularly on the higher ground of the Wardy Hill environs (Hall 1996, fig. 88). This includes the Late Iron Age Wardy Hill ringwork (Evans 2003; Coveney Site 1 in Hall 1996; MCB11309), as well as a number of other crop mark sites in the vicinity that may date to the Iron Age or Roman period. As well as cropmarks, a number of Roman finds point to Roman occupation in the area including settlement remains near Witcham (MCB 9400).

Anglo-Saxon (c.410-1066)

- 1.4.6 The only evidence of Anglo-Saxon activity recorded within the search area is some metalwork found near Mepal by a metal detectorist (MCB 16264).

Medieval (c.1066-1500)

- 1.4.7 During the medieval period the land within the site was under the ownership of the Prior and Convent of Ely, apart from Witcham Gravel which was common fen (Pugh 1967, 3). Settlement was focussed on the higher ground of Coveney, Witcham and Wardy Hill and there is no evidence for medieval activity on the site itself in this period.

Post-medieval to modern (c.1500-present)

- 1.4.8 Cartographic evidence shows that the site was open fenland until the 1830s. From this point in time drainage enabled the land to be brought from fenland into arable use.
- 1.4.9 Post-medieval earthworks are recorded in Coveney village including a windmill mound and fishponds (MCB 7119). Listed Buildings in the area include Fortrey's Hall, Mepal, a modest 17th century house of part brick and part timber frame construction, which has been used as a farmhouse since at least 1808. It was built by Samuel Fortrey, a London merchant who was a refugee from the Spanish Netherlands. He helped create the Bedford Level, which runs close to the front of Fortrey's Hall (MCB 7169).
- 1.4.10 A World War II searchlight and pillbox can be found in Wardy Hill (MCB 15194) and further pillboxes and a gun emplacement (now destroyed) were also located at Welches Dam (MCB 16474).

1.5 Acknowledgements

- 1.5.1 The author would like to extend thanks to the Environment Agency for commissioning and funding the work. The fieldwork was undertaken by Graeme Clarke. Particular thanks go to Brendan Saunders of Jacksons for his on-site cooperation.

2 AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

Aims

- 2.1.1 The objective of this archaeological monitoring and recording exercise was to determine as far as reasonably possible the presence/absence, location, nature, extent, date, quality, condition and significance of any surviving archaeological deposits within the development area.

Methodology

- 2.1.2 The archaeological monitoring was carried out through a series of site visits in order to supervise the removal of soil and the digging of new drainage ditches across the site. All machine excavation was carried out by 360° mechanical excavators using toothless ditching buckets.
- 2.1.3 Spoil, exposed surfaces and features were scanned visually for artefacts. All hand-collected finds were retained for inspection, other than those which were obviously modern.
- 2.1.4 All archaeological features and deposits were recorded using OA East's *pro-forma* sheets. Trench locations, plans and sections were recorded at appropriate scales and digital photographs were taken of all relevant features and deposits.

3 RESULTS

Introduction

- 3.1.1 The monitored works involved the supervision of earth removal across the area of the new reservoir (Plate 1); as well as the observation of the digging of a new east-west drain along Jerusalem Drove (Plate 2) and the cleaning out of an extant north-south ditch which was located to the immediate west of the reservoir.

Results

- 3.1.2 Initial observance was carried out across the area of the new reservoir. A thin, peat-rich soil horizon was evident beneath the topsoil and directly overlay the natural geology. No features of archaeological origin or finds were observed.
- 3.1.3 The excavation of the new drain adjacent to Jerusalem Drove did not highlight any archaeological remains or artefacts. As with the reservoir area, the stratigraphic sequence consisted of natural silt and clay geology overlain by a thin layer of peat and topsoil.

4 CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1.1 This exercise in archaeological monitoring and recording has not produced anything of archaeological interest. No features or artefacts were identified.
- 4.1.2 The absence of artefacts from the topsoil and peat horizon would support the suggestion that it is unlikely that there was ever any settlement on or near the site and given the flat, isolated nature of the site within the landscape as well as the wet soil conditions of the low-lying land, this is of no great surprise.
- 4.1.3 Recommendations for any future work based upon this report will be made by the County Archaeology Office.

APPENDIX A. BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Evans, C. 2003 *Power and Island Communities: Excavations at the Wardy Hill Ringwork, Coveney, Ely*. EAA 103
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APPENDIX B. OASIS REPORT FORM

All fields are required unless they are not applicable.

Project Details

OASIS Number	oxfordar3-229166			
Project Name	Ouse Washes habitat creation project, Coveney, Cambridgeshire			
Project Dates (fieldwork)	Start	18-08-2014	Finish	21-11-2014
Previous Work (by OA East)	Yes		Future Work	Unknown

Project Reference Codes

Site Code	COVOUS14	Planning App. No.	13/00478/ESF
HER No.	ECB 4558	Related HER/OASIS No.	ECB3919/oxfordar3-141616

Type of Project/Techniques Used

Prompt	Environmental Assessment regulations Schedule 2 projects (Discretionary)
Development Type	Other

Please select all techniques used:

<input type="checkbox"/> Aerial Photography - interpretation	<input type="checkbox"/> Grab-Sampling	<input type="checkbox"/> Remote Operated Vehicle Survey
<input type="checkbox"/> Aerial Photography - new	<input type="checkbox"/> Gravity-Core	<input type="checkbox"/> Sample Trenches
<input type="checkbox"/> Annotated Sketch	<input type="checkbox"/> Laser Scanning	<input type="checkbox"/> Survey/Recording Of Fabric/Structure
<input type="checkbox"/> Augering	<input type="checkbox"/> Measured Survey	<input type="checkbox"/> Targeted Trenches
<input type="checkbox"/> Dendrochronological Survey	<input type="checkbox"/> Metal Detectors	<input type="checkbox"/> Test Pits
<input type="checkbox"/> Documentary Search	<input type="checkbox"/> Phosphate Survey	<input type="checkbox"/> Topographic Survey
<input type="checkbox"/> Environmental Sampling	<input type="checkbox"/> Photogrammetric Survey	<input type="checkbox"/> Vibro-core
<input type="checkbox"/> Fieldwalking	<input type="checkbox"/> Photographic Survey	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Visual Inspection (Initial Site Visit)
<input type="checkbox"/> Geophysical Survey	<input type="checkbox"/> Rectified Photography	

Monument Types/Significant Finds & Their Periods

List feature types using the [NMR Monument Type Thesaurus](#) and significant finds using the [MDA Object type Thesaurus](#) together with their respective periods. If no features/finds were found, please state "none".

Monument	Period	Object	Period
	None		None
	None		None
	None		None

Project Location

County	Cambridgeshire	Site Address (including postcode if possible)
District	East Cambridgeshire	Land north of Jerusalem Drive Wardy Hill, Coveney CB6 2DD
Parish	Coveney	
HER	Cambridge	
Study Area	200 hectares	National Grid Reference TL 4656 8278

Project Originators

Organisation	OA EAST
Project Brief Originator	-
Project Design Originator	Paul Spoerry
Project Manager	Paul Spoerry
Supervisor	Graeme Clarke

Project Archives

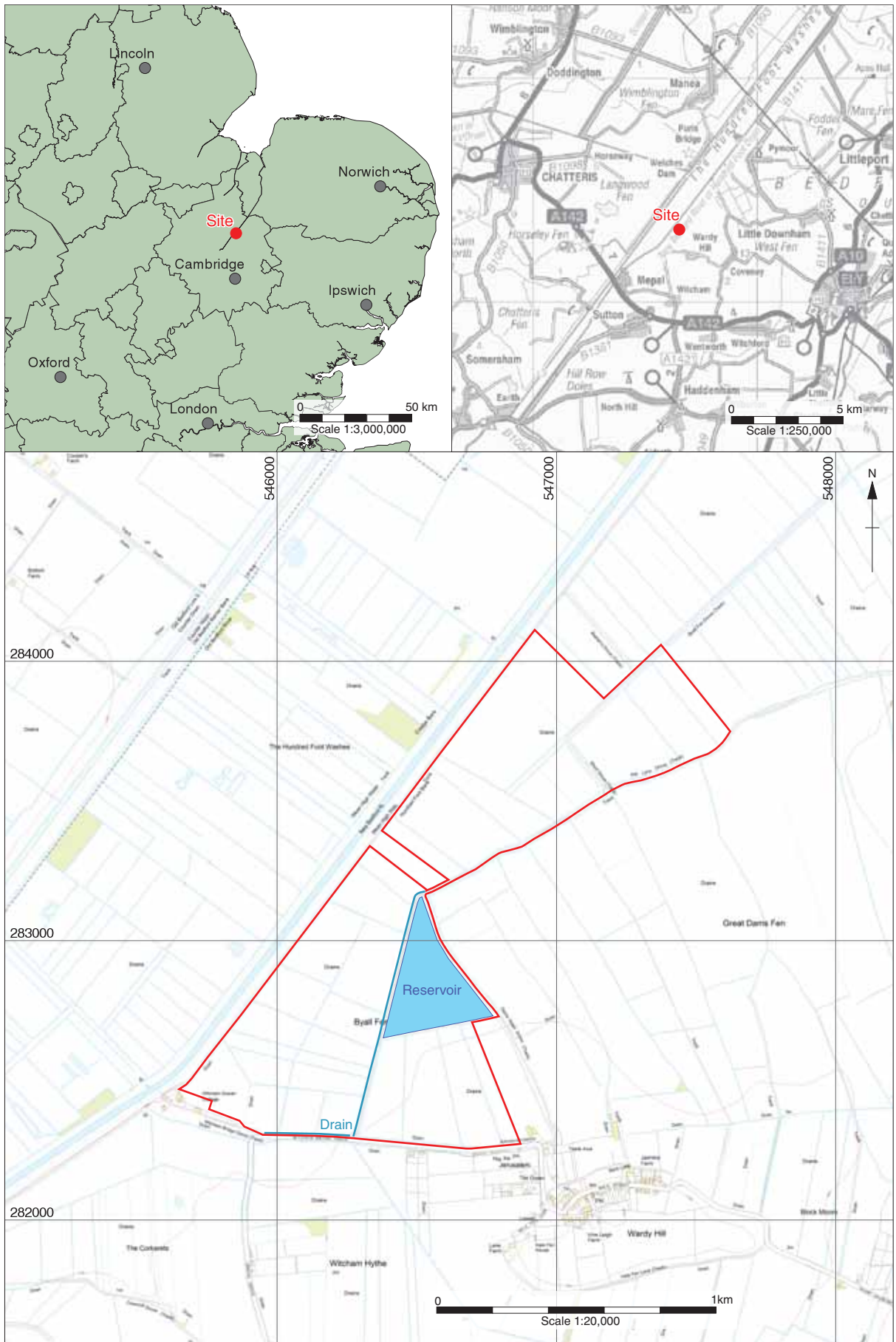
Physical Archive	Digital Archive	Paper Archive
CCC Store	OA East	CCC Store
ECB 4558	COVOUS14	ECB 4558

Archive Contents/Media

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Ceramics	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Environmental	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Glass	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Human Bones	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Industrial	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Metal	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Worked Stone/Lithic	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
None	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Digital Media	Paper Media
<input type="checkbox"/> Database	<input type="checkbox"/> Aerial Photos
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<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Images	<input type="checkbox"/> Diary
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Illustrations	<input type="checkbox"/> Drawing
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<input type="checkbox"/> Spreadsheets	<input type="checkbox"/> Map
<input type="checkbox"/> Survey	<input type="checkbox"/> Matrices
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	<input type="checkbox"/> Photos
	<input type="checkbox"/> Plans
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Report
	<input type="checkbox"/> Sections
	<input type="checkbox"/> Survey

Notes:



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Figure 1: Site location (red) with monitored areas (blue)



Plate 1: Topsoil strip across reservoir



Plate 2: Extant ditch with topsoil strip for new drain



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