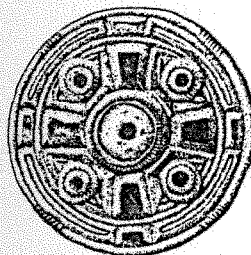


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Archaeological Field Unit

An Archaeological Evaluation at Hill Farm, Holywell

S. Leith

1995

Cambridgeshire County Council

Report No. A73

Commissioned by Cambridgeshire County Council Property Department

**An Archaeological Evaluation at
Hill Farm, Holywell**

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Editor T. Malim

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SUMMARY

Between the 6th and 10th of November, 1995, the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council carried out an archaeological evaluation of land at Hill Farm, Holywell (TL 3395/7082 and TL 3410/7130). This work was part of a development proposal by the Cambridgeshire County Council Property Department. In the five trenches excavated by machine, no archaeological features earlier than the post-medieval period were found. However, evidence of post-medieval gravel extraction was recorded adjacent to Back Lane, Holywell.

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AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION AT HILL FARM, HOLYWELL

INTRODUCTION

Between the 6th and 10th of November, 1995, the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council carried out an archaeological evaluation of land at Hill Farm, Holywell (TL 3395/7082 and TL 3410/7130). This work was part of a development proposal by the Cambridgeshire County Council Property Department. The proposed development involves the construction of two dwellings within the village of Holywell, on the corner of Back Lane and Mill Way, and of a recreation ground, sports pavilion, and associated facilities in the northern part of the farm (Fig 1).

BACKGROUND

The subject site lies on third terrace gravels of the Ouse valley, about 500m to the north of the River Ouse. The land is used as arable fields at present. The land slopes gently from about 12m OD in the northern area, to 10m OD in the southern area.

The river gravels in the area have yielded occasional stray finds of early prehistoric date, including a Palaeolithic hand axe found 150m to the south of the subject site. Stray finds of Neolithic or Bronze Age date are more frequent, and include a Neolithic macehead and several Neolithic or Bronze Age worked flints found during gravel extraction 150m to the west of the subject site. These finds may suggest agricultural sites located on the river terraces. Sites of 'ritual' activity from this period, represented by barrow burials, are found to the east of the subject site. This includes cropmarks of three ring ditches c 1km to the east of the southern development area, and of one ring ditch c 1km to the north-east of the northern area. Recent work by the Cambridge Archaeological Unit in advance of gravel quarrying has identified Neolithic and Bronze Age settlement c 2.5km to the north-east of the subject site.

Romano-British activity appears to have centred on large agricultural estates with buildings both on the river terraces and higher up on the clays to the north. Two areas of cropmarks on Hill Farm, one adjacent to the northern subject site, contain field boundaries and enclosures, and may date to this period (Fig 1). Numerous stray finds of Roman pottery and coins have been found within the area of the village.

Anglo-Saxon evidence appears absent from the SMR, but the Holy Well may have been a centre for religious activity during this period. Medieval settlement was centred on the area of the present village, with strip farming conducted on the land surrounding the village. Cropmarks of ridge and furrow field systems are visible to the north-east of the subject site.

METHODOLOGY

Five trenches, two in the northern area and three in the southern area, were opened using a JCB with a 1.6m toothless ditching bucket (Fig 1). They were photographed and some hand cleaning was carried out. Samples of the sections of the trenches were cleaned and the soil profiles recorded by section drawing.

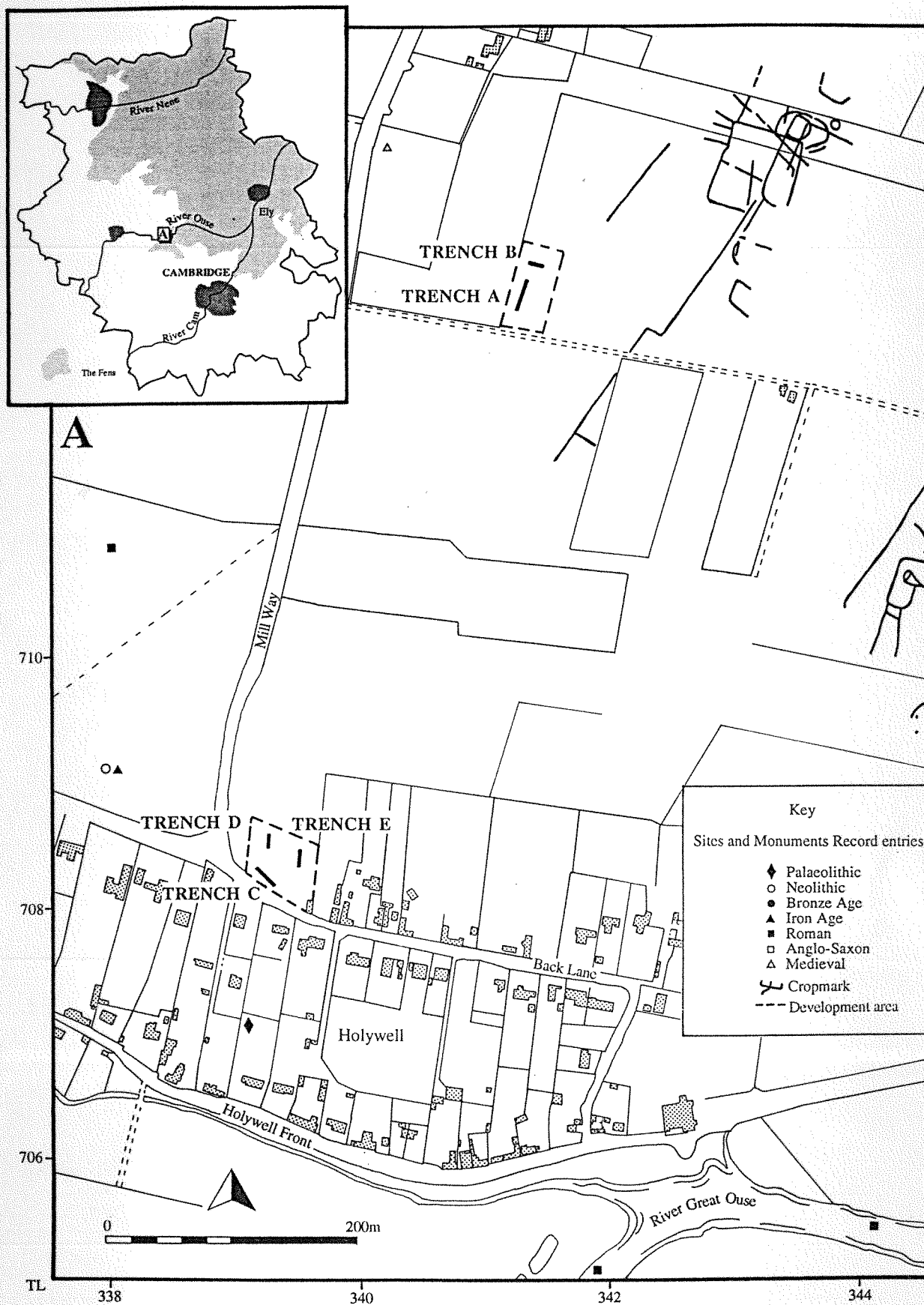


Figure 1 Site Location Plan

In Trench C a large feature was revealed, and a section was machine excavated through it. This was recorded using the standard techniques of the Archaeological Field Unit.

RESULTS

The ploughsoil, a dark brown sandy clay silt with occasional gravel, was c 0.35m deep in both development areas. It overlay the natural gravels and orange brown silty sands of the third terrace river gravels.

In Trench A, a linear feature of geological origin was revealed. It contained an orange brown sandy silt, with dark brown mottling. This feature corresponds with a periglacial crack mapped recently from aerial photographs by Rog Palmer (Appendix in Heawood, 1995).

The only archaeological feature revealed, located in Trench C, measured 8.5m wide and 1.6m deep. It had straight, steep sides and flat base. The fills were very homogenous dark yellowish brown sandy clay silts, with occasional gravel and a few lenses of gravel. At a depth of 1.25m, two sherds of post-medieval pottery were found, which date from the 17th to 19th centuries (P Spoerry, pers. comm.). This feature has been interpreted as a post-medieval gravel quarry.

CONCLUSIONS

The present development sites lie within an archaeologically rich landscape. The recent reassessment of aerial photographs undertaken by Rog Palmer showed the cropmarks to the east of the northern development area to be a series of ditched features (Appendix in Heawood, 1995). These may be part of a prehistoric or Romano-British settlement system. A second set of cropmarks on Hill Farm which show square and rectangular enclosures may also represent settlement features (Malim 1990, 67). However, these cropmarks do not extend into the development areas, and no evidence of occupation earlier than the post-medieval period was encountered within the evaluation trenches.

The gravel quarry revealed in the southern development area is one of several quarries in the immediate area. One lies in the same field, c 150m to the north of the development area, and one in the field to the west of Mill Lane. These were presumably excavated to extract gravel for road building in the area of the village of Holywell, in the post-medieval and modern periods.

RECOMMENDATIONS

No further archaeological works are recommended before the development currently proposed takes place.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank the Cambridgeshire County Council Property Department for commissioning this evaluation, Scott Kenney for his assistance on site, Caroline Gait for her advice on the illustration, and Tim Malim for managing the project. This evaluation was conducted in response to a brief prepared by the County Archaeology Office.

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