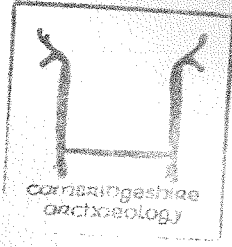
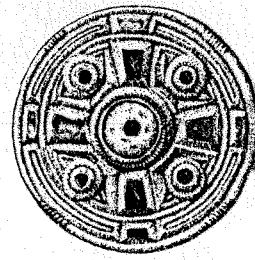


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Archaeological Evaluation of the Medieval cultivation remains at School Lane, Alconbury.

S.N. Kemp

1998

Cambridgeshire County Council

Report No. A125

Commissioned By McLean Homes North London Ltd

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School Lane, Alconbury.**

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1998

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Report No A125

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**Archaeological Evaluation of the Medieval cultivation remains at
School Lane, Alconbury. ALC SL98. TL186762.**

1. INTRODUCTION

The land to the west of School Lane, Alconbury has received outline planning permission for residential development. Planning permission was dependent on the implementation of a programme of archaeological work the results of which are outlined within this report.

2. ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

i) Sites and Monuments Record.

The SMR indicates the presence of ridge and furrow (SMR 10505) and house platforms (SMR 09036) within the development area. These remains were recorded by Etchells-Butler in 1979 who described the earthworks as northwest-southeast ridge and furrow lying on the northern side of the site (SMR Parish files). On the southern side indistinct remains of a house platform were seen in 1979, although partially obscured by farm buildings.

Northeast-southwest orientated ridge and furrow (SMR 10503) was present to the north of the evaluation field, whilst additional traces of the medieval field system lay behind (SMR 10504) and to the northwest of the school (SMR 10504).

The church (St. Peter and Paul) and Manor Farm lie about 100m to the southwest of the site. The church chancel dates to 1250 although much of the material has been reused from a twelfth century building, this indicates the antiquity of the eastern side of the village. A post-medieval barn and manor house of 17th century date lies at Manor Farm (SMR 00803 & 00804). Medieval earthworks (SMR 00795) which are believed to include house platforms are known from a field lying to the south of the church. Also to the south of the church and within the bow of the river lie earthworks which would appear to relate to drainage activities. Southwest of this field (TL18507585) lie earthworks platforms which resemble the remains of house platforms, however, there was no access to the field.

Earlier archaeological remains include stray finds of Mesolithic, Neolithic, Iron Age and Roman date from fields which surround the existing village, however, finds from outside the village are generally sparse. A recent evaluation at Spring Cottage Farm recognised medieval and post-medieval activity including a possible trackway and a continuation of the medieval cultivation system to the north of the brook and south of the School Lane development area.

ii) Earthwork Survey.

An earthwork survey was undertaken within the development area to record, classify and locate the remains in order to assist in the formulation of the trenching design.



Figure 1 Trench location

The earthworks occur in several forms; see location plan B.

1. Northwest-southeast aligned ridge and furrow. Ridges are upstanding by about 0.30-0.40m. Towards the southern end of the site the ridge and furrow are less pronounced.
2. Linear ridge along the eastern boundary which continues the course of the existing fence alignments.
3. Irregular hollows located on the southern side of the site. One of these is a triangular shaped feature which is depicted on the 1791 enclosure map as a pond. An irregular bank lies on the southern side of this depression which is presumably the feature referred to a house platform by the SMR. Another hollow lies to the southeast. This is larger and less well defined and may indicate a continuation of the pond depicted on the 1791 enclosure map or be related to later garden or farm yard activities

iii) **Aerial Photographic Survey.**

Aerial photographic research was undertaken by Air Photoservices of Cambridge.

Poorly defined traces of ridge and furrow running northwest to southeast can be recognised on the aerial photographs, however, generally the coverage is poor and consists of vertical photographs. Three north-south orientated strips tentatively described as ridge and furrow by Air Photo Services were seen to lie in the northwest corner of the site. Within the existing earthworks a single bank runs along the western hedge and overlies the ridge and furrow, this bank is probably related to the modern field boundary.

iv) **Cartographic and Documentary Research.**

Few historic documents are presently available within Cambridgeshire for this site. Cartographic material consulted included the Ordnance Survey maps and the 1791 enclosure map. Secondary documentary sources which include the Victoria County History were also used.

The earliest map accessed during this search was the 1791 enclosure map, on which a pond or quarry is marked within the development area. This is the northern most irregular feature mentioned above (location plan B). No other features are marked on the enclosure map.

The pond is recorded on Ordnance Survey maps up to and was filled in prior to 1978. No other buildings or earthworks were marked within the development area on the OS maps drawn up between 1891 and 1984.

v) **Research Conclusions**

Medieval and post-medieval archaeology in the area is evidenced by the presence of ridge and furrow. The pond was in existence by 1791 and cuts through the remains of the ridge and furrow. The platform to the south of the pond is likely to be a spoil heap associated with this episode or possibly with the construction of the barns whilst the depression to the east may relate to farm yard or garden activities.

Remains of earlier periods, particularly those of prehistoric date, are common along the course of the Alconbury Brook. Archaeology other than those already recorded were therefore likely to lie concealed beneath the ridge and furrow which was subsequently

evaluated using linear trenching. Beneath the ridge and furrow there was the potential for the survival of prehistoric, Roman and possibly early Saxon remains, although the Saxon and early medieval settlement probably lay further to the south.

3. EVALUATION

The evaluation trenching was based on the results of the desk based research outlined above. Trenches were therefore targeted on the pond, areas of disturbance recognisable within the medieval earthworks and to assess for the presence of archaeology beneath medieval cultivation remains.

Eight machine-cut trenches were excavated within the development area and covered 4% of the total surface area. Where appropriate these were excavated to expose the natural clay geology; this lay at between 0.66m below ground surface at the top of the slope in the south of the development area and 0.79m in the north. Subsoil depth varied between 0.30m and 0.68m dependent on the location within a medieval strip (ridge) and the topography of the area. The soil profile appeared to be disturbed throughout and there was no evidence for a buried soil within any of the ridges or for the presence of colluvial deposits which may have masked archaeological layers.

Trenches 1 to 3 were excavated to evaluate the pond, platform and adjacent earthworks indicative of disturbance. Trench 1 confirmed the presence of the pond which was backfilled with refuse and capped with clay. Trench 2 cut across the platform which lies to the south of the pond. This mound included brick building material and is modern in date. Trench 3 was located in an area of low lying land to the east of the pond. No archaeology was found within this area, the depression within which this trench was placed is reflected in the shallow depth of subsoil. These earthworks would appear to indicate some landscaping within this part of the field which may relate to garden or farm yard activities, or possibly to the extraction of clay used to cap the pond.

Trenches 4, 5 and 6 were located to cut through the ridge and furrow and evaluate the underlying geology for the presence of archaeology. None were encountered. Sherds of post-medieval pottery were recovered from within the ridges.

Trench 7 was located on the eastern side of the site where the ridge and furrow had been disturbed. Beneath the bank which continued the existing property boundaries lay the western edge of a quarry pit. The quarry extended about 20m east of the bank. No archaeology was present.

4. CONCLUSION

The archaeology present within the development area consisted of medieval earthworks indicative of cultivation and the remains of a post medieval pond. No earlier remains were encountered.

The SMR records suggest that medieval cultivation took place largely on the clay lands, with pasture and meadows next to the river (SMR 10507), whilst the medieval village

was probably located on land adjacent to the Alconbury Brook (SMR 00795). During this period the village may have extended up to the church.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank McLean Homes North London Limited for commissioning this study.

I would also like to thank Bob Hatton and Wendy Wilson who assisted in the fieldwork and John Cane who completed the report illustrations.

This study was prepared in response to a brief drawn up by the County Archaeology Office.



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