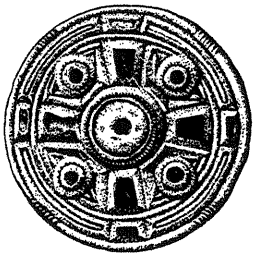

Archaeological Field Unit

Prehistoric features on land south of Foxton recreation ground

Judith Roberts

1998

Cambridgeshire County Council

Report No. A141

Commissioned by Cambridgeshire County Council Property Management Services

Prehistoric features on land south of Foxton recreation ground

(TL 4120 4815)

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Report No A141

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SUMMARY

In October 1998 the Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Field Unit carried out work in response to a brief for archaeological evaluation of land south of the recreation ground, High Street, Foxton (TL 4120 4815) following a planning application by Property Management Services. An initial desktop survey considered cartographic, textual and aerial photographic evidence. The only known archaeological remains located were traces of a lane leading south from the High Street. It was suggested that a back lane may run from the hollow way east – west across the development area.

Following the desktop assessment intrusive evaluation was carried out to determine the presence and extent of surviving archaeological remains. Five trenches were excavated and revealed only two features: a ditch running approximately north-east–south-west and a large pit immediately to its south. No artefacts were recovered from these features, although they were sealed by undisturbed colluvium which may have its origins in a phase of neolithic tree clearance. A prehistoric date for these features is therefore suggested. No evidence of an east-west back lane was found in the development area.

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LIST OF FIGURES

Prehistoric features on land south of Foxton recreation ground
(TL 4120 4815)

INTRODUCTION

A brief for an archaeological evaluation was issued by Cambridgeshire County Council County Archaeology Office (Simon Kaner, 1998), following a planning application (no. 8/0921/98). The application was made by Cambridgeshire County Council Property Management Services who wish to build a replacement primary school, community hall and pavilion at Foxton. The site covers an area of approximately 0.9ha. A specification was prepared by William Wall and work was carried out by the staff of the Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeology Field Unit.

The presence of prehistoric, Roman, Anglo-Saxon and medieval activity in the vicinity and the archaeological potential of the site was highlighted by the brief for archaeological evaluation.

The brief requested an assessment of documentary evidence and replotting of aerial photographic evidence, followed by review and field evaluation of areas of high archaeological potential.

A documentary assessment was carried out in October 1998 by the Archaeological Field Unit. An aerial photographic assessment was commissioned from Air Photo Services (Appendix I). Between 23rd and 26th November, following review with the CAO, five evaluation trenches were opened which targeted the 'footprint' of the proposed building and areas of archaeological potential.

GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

The site lies on Lower Chalk overlying Melbourn Rock and Totternhoe Stone, just south of an area of 1st and 2nd terrace gravels (BGS 1952). Chalk was encountered over most of the site but gravels were revealed in the north-western part. The ground slopes gently from 20.179m OD in the south-eastern corner of the site to approximately 18mOD in the north-western corner. The village is south of the River Cam, or Rhee, to the west of Hoffer Brook and to the east of Shepreth/Foxton Brook. The valley of the river Cam is two miles wide between Chapel Hill, Barrington and West Hill, Foxton (Widdowson 1973). The tributaries of the Cam or Rhee are fed from the springline on the chalk 'uplands'. The development land until recently has been agricultural with no documentary evidence for any building on the site although a farmyard and stackyard was located immediately to the west of the proposed development site. The cartographic study included the British Geological Survey map for the area, modern 1:25,000 and 1:50,000 Ordnance Survey maps, 1810 pre-Enclosure map, 1830 Enclosure map, 1st edition OS 1887, 2nd edition OS 1903, 1938 OS .

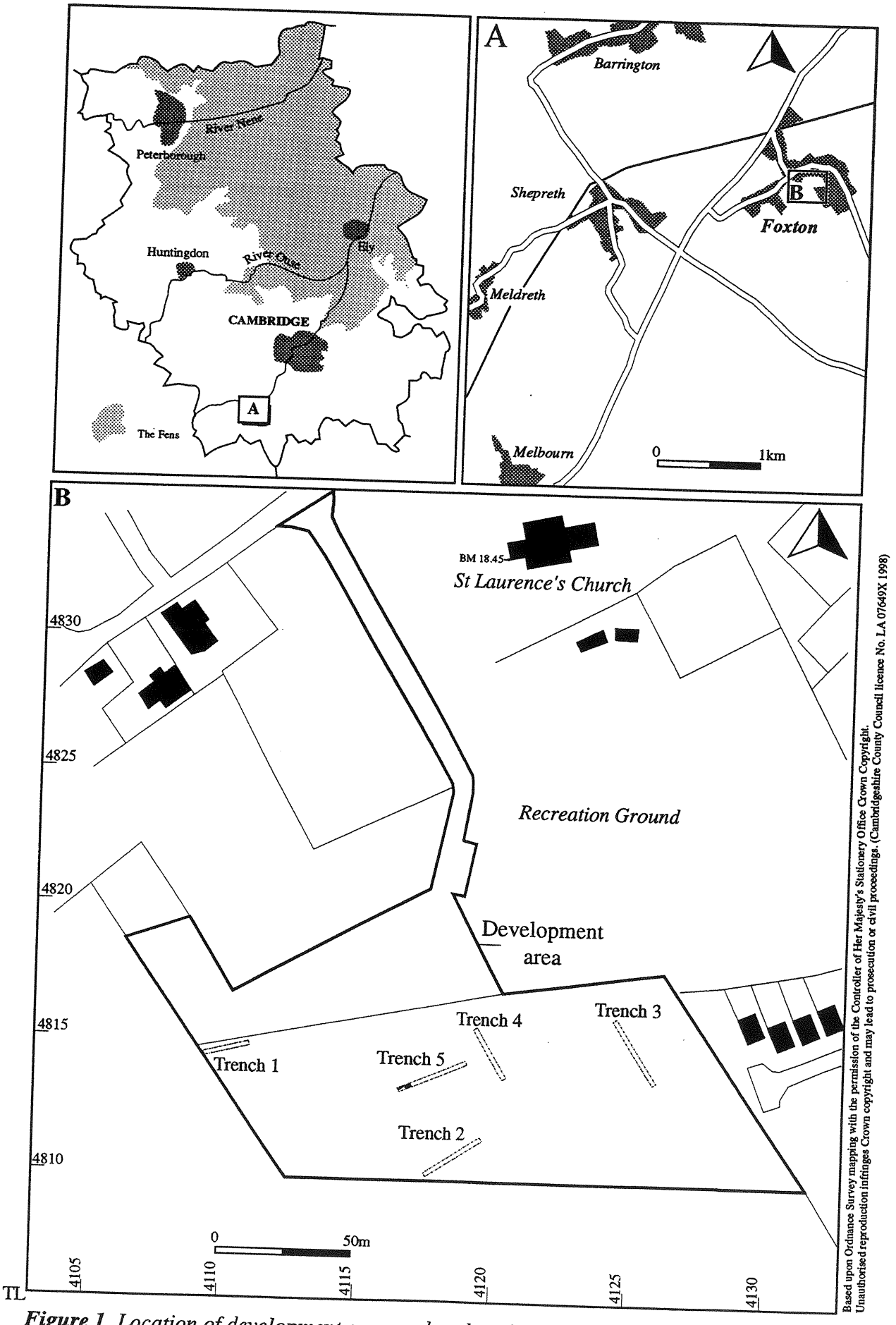

Figure 1 *Location of development area and archaeological trenches*

ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Iron Age occupation of the river valleys in south-west Cambridgeshire is characterised by settlements paired on either side of a ford. Foxton and Barrington are an example of this type of settlement pattern. A similar system was followed in the Roman and medieval period (Taylor 1973). The valley of the Rhee or Cam was on the edge of the territory of the Trinovantes and was ruled from Colchester. With their defeat the Cam valley was open to Rome (Widdowson 1973). Romano-British farmsteads in this area were scattered along the springlines and along the Icknield Way.

The presence of extensive cropmarks (including those associated with substantial Iron Age and Roman rural settlement excavated in 1993 (Macaulay 1995)) to the south and west of the present site suggests considerable prehistoric and early historic activity in the area.

Pagan Saxon cemeteries have also been found along the major river valleys (Taylor 1973) in South Cambridgeshire and a Saxon cemetery has been identified in the eastern part of the Cam valley at Foxton. The river crossing at Foxton, near the present Foxton Bridge, was used in historic times by people crossing from Barrington to access Foxton meadow as grazing land. Osier beds are known in Foxton as is coprolite digging (Widdowson 1973).

The name Foxton is first mentioned in the Domesday survey as Foxetune (EPNS 1973), interpreted as 'Farm where foxes abound'. The name appears to have changed by 1396 to Foxston and again by 1549 to Faxton. To the north of the development site is Bury Farm (Parker 1975), known in 1622 as Foxton Burye and Berry Close in 1840, suggesting a manorial site (burh).

The present village of Foxton was built along a brook, which is now filled in, and the former parish boundaries were the Cam or Rhee, Hoffer Brook, Shepreth Brook and the old Fowlmere Road. The open fields were enclosed following an Award made in 1830 (VCH 1982).

The site falls within the boundary of Herod's Farm and it has been suggested (Malim 1990) that soil marks of small rectangles and a track along the south side of the village are the remains of medieval houses along a back lane (running almost parallel to the High Street). The report suggests the village has shrunk and that the former back lane was the southern boundary to a village green forming a settlement pattern similar to that seen at Barrington and Haslingfield. The aerial photographic assessment failed to identify earthworks or soil marks in the area of the proposed development (Appendix 1). In pasture to the south of the High Street a pronounced hollow way and several house platforms survive as upstanding features (Kemp 1994).

Archaeological recording was carried out 50m to the west and just over 100m to the north of the subject site (Kemp 1994). This work failed to reveal archaeological features but the trenches were set over 10m back from the High Street and were less than 1m wide. Trenching revealed topsoil overlying grey brown silty sandy clay with a high chalk component. The maximum depth of trenches was 0.7m.

Less than 1km to the west a gas pipeline (Maynard *et al* 1994) revealed a small quantity of neolithic pottery and worked flint. Late to middle Iron Age features were

also recorded but the majority of features in this area appear to date to the first century AD with fewer second and third century features and an increase in activity in the fourth century including an inhumation cemetery which was in use between AD250-400. Limited evidence of fifth century AD occupation was found in the area.

Middle to late nineteenth century cartographic evidence indicates the High Street in its present location with property boundaries extending south towards (but not onto) the subject site.

METHODOLOGY

The primary objective of the project was to evaluate the character, date, extent and state of preservation of archaeological remains on the site.

In addition, the evaluation sought to

- Identify the depositional and structural sequence present on site
- Place the site in its historical and archaeological context within a local framework.
- Provide recommendations and suggestions to mitigate the impact of the development.

Following a preliminary desk-based assessment and review of known archaeological information from the site, five evaluation trenches were excavated. Their locations were arranged in order to investigate the possible back lane which may have extended onto the western part of the site, the possible extension of the hollow way running south from the High Street into the north-western part of the site, and to sample the footprint of the proposed building.

The modern ground surface and subsoil were removed by machine to a depth where natural chalk deposits were noted, between 0.45m and 0.9m below the present ground surface. Trenches were selectively cleaned and planned and features excavated by hand.

Archaeological trenches and features were recorded using a Zeiss RecElta 15 Total Station, and a digital base plan of the site was produced with Prosurveyor mapping software. Archaeological features were partially excavated and recorded using the pro-forma recording sheets of the Archaeological Field Unit. Features were planned at a scale of 1:20. Sections and profiles across excavated features were drawn at a scale of 1:10 or 1:20, as appropriate. A written record of all excavated features was made on single context recording sheets and the drawn and written record was supplemented by monochrome and colour photographs. Site records and artefacts are currently held at the AFU offices in Fulbourn under the site code FOXHS98. In this report fill numbers are shown in plain text and cut numbers in bold. Conditions for excavation and recording were variable, wet weather prevented excavation on one day.

The project archive for the evaluation consists of the design brief for an archaeological evaluation (produced on 21st July 1998 by the Simon Kaner,

Cambridgeshire County Council County Archaeology Office); a specification created in response to that brief by William Wall; correspondence with the County Archaeology Office and client, copy maps and information from the Cambridgeshire County Council Sites and Monuments Record. A standard AFU archive has been produced and the paper archive is stored at the AFU offices, Fulbourn, the material archive is stored in the short term at the AFU office, Fulbourn and in the long term will be deposited at the County Council store at Landbeach under the site code FOXHS98.

RESULTS

Trench 1

Trench 1 was 16m long, running in an approximately south-west–north-east direction. The topsoil (0.2m thick) was a dark brown silty clay, overlying an olive brown chalky gravelly subsoil (0.18m thick) . The base of the trench was mainly chalk with sandy gravel patches with plough marks visible along the length of the trench, running parallel to the adjacent hedgeline. Animal bones were recovered from a small pit which extended beyond the edge of the trench. These bones were articulated and included the skull, legs and feet of a calf. This animal was probably buried during the post-medieval period, given its location and state of preservation, and no further work on the bones is recommended at present.

Trench 2

Trench 2 was 25m long, ran approximately south-west–north-east and contained 0.25m of topsoil and 0.2m of fine silty colluvium with very few small flint fragments and very occasional larger flint pebbles. The base of the trench exposed undisturbed chalk with no features cut into it.

Trench 3

This trench was 28m long, oriented south-east–north-west, with 0.28m of topsoil and 0.25m of fine silty colluvium at the northern end and 0.3m of topsoil and 0.36m of colluvium at the southern end. The base of the trench was undisturbed chalk with no features cut into it.

Trench 4

Trench 4 was 20m long, oriented approximately north-west–south-east, with 0.3m of topsoil and 0.6m of fine silty colluvium. The base of the trench was undisturbed chalk with no cut features.

Trench 5

This trench was 26.5m long and oriented approximately south-west–north-east. The topsoil was approximately 0.3m deep and the subsoil 0.6m deep. This trench contained two features at its western end and a dark organic and snail rich deposit towards the eastern end of the trench. The western end of this trench was widened to determine the extent of the features. A shallow linear feature, **2**, running approximately south-west–north-east extended beyond the western and northern edges of the trench. This was 0.64m wide, 0.12m deep and contained a single fill, 1, which was indistinguishable from the overlying subsoil. No artefactual material was recovered from this feature. The adjacent pit, **4**, was over 1.8m wide and 0.8m deep with steep, almost vertical sides and a concave base. Again, the single fill, 3, was indistinguishable from the overlying subsoil, with very few small sub-angular flints and fragments of chalk and contained no artefactual material. No stratigraphic relationship was distinguishable between ditch **2** and pit **4**, although the features appeared to respect each other.

DISCUSSION

The aims of this study were to highlight the potential for preservation of archaeological remains on the subject site and to identify the nature of any remains that may be affected by the proposed development.

The development involves considerable construction work on site including excavation of trenches for foundations and services. The potential impact on surviving archaeological features or material might be considerable. It was important, both locally and nationally, to assess the preservation of remains on the shallow soils over the chalklands and identify the effect of agriculture and the development on any surviving features or material remains.

The Sites and Monuments Record (SMR no. 4159) notes medieval pottery on the development site but none was noted whilst walking over the field or during the intrusive evaluation although fragments of post-medieval brick, tile and pottery were visible on the surface. Aerial photographic plotting failed to identify the features revealed in Trench 5, presumably these were masked by colluvium.

The key research issues specific to the site relate to the medieval settlement of Foxton and the Iron Age and Roman occupation of the area generally. Intrusive evaluation failed to reveal the presence of a 'back lane' or any medieval occupation of the site. The features suggest prehistoric occupation of the subject site, but this is enigmatic and no dating material was found. No buried soils were noted. It is possible that colluviation started during a phase of neolithic tree clearance on the chalk upland to the south. Soils would have become less stable, and colluviation would have continued during subsequent periods when the chalklands were under cultivation.

The results of this evaluation have been largely negative, suggesting that, apart from the possible prehistoric features in Trench 5, little of archaeological interest survives on the site. Context recognition was not affected by weather, soil conditions, staff morale, site access or methodology. This negative result is therefore likely to be an

accurate evaluation of the archaeology of the site. The area of the site adjacent to the High Street itself, however, was not available for evaluation by this project. There is still, therefore, potential for archaeological remains to exist here.

CONCLUSIONS

The evaluation identified the depositional sequence present on site as being mainly chalk, with small patches of gravel in the west, overlaid by largely undisturbed colluvium and approximately 0.3m of topsoil. The features revealed by trenching are probably prehistoric and are slightly truncated. The exact nature and function of these features can only be determined by further work on this part of the site.

It is clear that this land was not within the settlement of Foxton during the medieval and post-medieval period but suggests rather that it has been agricultural since its prehistoric occupation.

It is unlikely that the buildings on the evaluation site will have an impact on major archaeological remains. The presence of potentially prehistoric occupation within the footprint of the proposed building may require mitigatory monitoring. It is possible that medieval remains will be encountered during work along the roadway close to the High Street and it is recommended that further archaeological work is carried out when this land is available.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank Property Management Services (Michael Vanoli) who commissioned the work and provided much useful information. Thanks also to Carole Fletcher who worked on site under adverse conditions, to Steve Kemp who carried out the Total Station Survey, Jon Cane who prepared the illustration and William Wall, Project Manager. The work on site was monitored by Andy Thomas, Cambridgeshire County Council Assistant Development Control Officer and Dr. Tim Reynolds, Senior Archaeologist, Sites and Monuments Record. The draft report was commented on by Simon Kaner, Development Control Officer.

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Victoria History of the Counties of England: *Cambridgeshire*, Vol. VIII South–west Cambridgeshire: Armingford and Thriplow hundreds 1982

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Maps: 1810 pre-Enclosure map
1830 Enclosure map
1st edition OS 1887
2nd edition OS 1903
1938 OS

APPENDIX 1

FOXTON COMMUNITY PROJECT, CENTRED TL413482, CAMBRIDGESHIRE: AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHIC APPRAISAL

SUMMARY

This appraisal of aerial photographs examined an area of some 0.9 hectares (centred TL413482) in order to identify and accurately map archaeological and natural features.

No definite archaeological features were identified in, or adjacent to, the assessment area.

No mapping was prepared and it is recommended that no further examination of aerial photographs is undertaken for this assessment.

FOXTON COMMUNITY PROJECT,
CENTRED TL413482,
CAMBRIDGESHIRE:
AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHIC APPRAISAL

Rog Palmer MA MIFA

INTRODUCTION

This appraisal of aerial photographs was commissioned to examine an area of some 0.9 hectares (centred TL413482) in order to identify and accurately map archaeological and natural features. Mapping, if relevant, was to be at 1:2500.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND NATURAL FEATURES FROM AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHS

In suitable cultivated soils, sub-surface archaeological features – including ditches, banks, pits, walls or foundations – may be recorded from the air in different ways in different seasons. In spring and summer these may show through their effect on crops growing above them. Such indications tend to be at their most visible in ripe cereal crops, in June or July in this part of Britain, although their appearance cannot accurately be predicted and their absence cannot be taken to imply evidence of archaeological absence. In winter months, when the soil is bare or crop cover is thin (when viewed from above), features may show by virtue of their different soils. Upstanding remains are also best recorded in winter months when vegetation is sparse and the low angle of the sun helps pick out slight differences of height and slope.

Grass rarely shows such marks but instead may reveal sub-surface features through the withering of the plants above them. This may occur towards the end of very dry summers and usually indicates the presence of buried walls or foundations. Such dry summers occurred in Britain in 1949, 1959, 1975, 1976, 1984, 1989 and 1990 (Bewley 1994, 25) and more recently in 1995 and 1996. This does not imply that every grass field will reveal its buried remains on these dates as local variations in weather and field management will affect parching. However, it does provide a list of years in which photographs taken from, say, mid July to the end of August may prove informative.

The most informative aerial photographs of archaeological subjects tend to be those resulting from specialist reconnaissance. This activity is usually undertaken by an experienced archaeological observer who will fly at seasons and times of day when optimum results are expected. Oblique photographs, taken using a hand-held camera, are the usual product of such investigation. Although oblique photographs are able to provide a very detailed view, they are biased in providing a record that is mainly of features noticed by the observer, understood, and thought to be of archaeological relevance. To be able to map accurately from these photographs it is necessary that they have been taken from a sufficient height to include surrounding control information.

Vertical photographs cover the whole of Britain and can provide scenes on a series of dates between (usually) 1946-7 and the present. Unfortunately these vertical surveys are not necessarily flown at times of year that are best to record the crop and soil responses that may be seen above sub-surface features. Vertical photographs are taken by a camera fixed inside an aircraft and adjusted to take a series of overlapping views that can be examined stereoscopically. They are often of relatively small scale and their interpretation requires higher perceptive powers and a more cautious approach than that necessary for examination of obliques. Use of these small-scale images can also lead to errors of location and size when they are rectified or re-scaled to match a larger map scale.

PHOTO INTERPRETATION AND MAPPING

Photographs examined

Cover searches were obtained from the Cambridge University Collection of Aerial Photographs (CUCAP), Cambridgeshire Record Office (CRO) and the National Library of Air Photographs (NLAP), Swindon. Photographs included those resulting from specialist archaeological reconnaissance and routine vertical surveys.

Photographs consulted are listed in the Appendix to this report.

Base maps

A paper base map at a scale of 1:10000 was provided by the client.

Photo interpretation and mapping

Photographs were examined by eye and under slight (1.5x) magnification, viewing them as stereoscopic pairs when possible. Notes and sketch indications were made on a working copy of the 1:10000 map but no illustration has been prepared for this appraisal.

COMMENTARY

Soils

The Soil Survey of England and Wales (SSEW 1983) shows the area to be situated on chalk (series 342d).

Archaeological features

No definite archaeological features were identified in, or adjacent to, the assessment area.

The Foxton area is within the band of clearly-marked medieval headlands that covers the Cambridgeshire chalk east of its boundary with Hertfordshire. One possible headland was visible on some photographs and would cross the assessment area on a north-west to south-east axis.

However, this alignment is duplicated by modern boundaries and the suggested headland may be a post-medieval land division. This later date is supported, to an extent, by the first edition OS map (draft at 2 inches to the mile in CRO) which shows then-current boundaries extending south of the village on, and perpendicular to, this alignment.

Photographs taken in 1969 show crop-marked patterned ground and a ring ditch north of the village. These indicate, in general terms, that photography was at a time of year when such changes may indicate sub-surface archaeological features. None was seen in the assessment area. Similarly, those taken in 1977 show soil-marked features on the chalk with clarity. The suggested headland was identified on those prints, but no other features significant to the present development. Obliques taken in 1972 of the assessment area appear to show only a series of plough envelopes and (possibly) recent boundaries.

Land use

In general terms, land south of the village has been in arable use since 1946 while those fields south of the High Street have tended to be pasture. The recreation ground, in use by 1962, was formerly divided north-south(±) by a well-established hedge which was removed by 1953 (although still retained as a land division). The allotment gardens are recent: that plot having formerly had a range of uses including pasture and (probably) small-holdings. Former boundaries existed south of Herods Farm (TL41064814) and the land immediately east of the modern salient (TL41104812: the western part of the development area) has been used for hay stacks between 1946 and 1988. The aerial photographs showed no evidence of any archaeological features, nor any sign of former village earthworks, in the pasture fields south of the High Street.

The apparent long-term arable use of the chalk, and the possibility of a relatively shallow depth of top-soil, make it likely that any sub-surface archaeological features will show plough damage.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that no further examination of aerial photographs is undertaken for this assessment.

REFERENCES

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APPENDIX

Aerial photographs examined

Source: Cambridge University Collection of Aerial Photographs

Oblique photographs

BKY 11-14	21 October 1972

Vertical photographs

RC8-CK 65-66	16 November 1977	1:10000
RC8-CK 81-84	16 November 1977	1:10000
RC8-JO 133-135	2 July 1987	1:10000
RC8-KnBE 20	12 July 1988	1:10000

Source: Cambridgeshire Record Office

Vertical photographs

106G/UK/1635: 4414-4415	9 July 1946	1:10000
F21.58/1119: 0082-0083	11 May 1953	1:10000
Fairey: 100535-100536	late summer 1949	1:6000
BKS: Run 18: 565841-2	late summer 1962	1:10000
MAL/69069: 138, 140	22 July 1969	1:10500
MAL/69069: 176- 178	22 July 1969	1:10500

Source: National Library of Air Photographs (cover search 66299899)

Specialist collection

TL4147/2/28-29	15 April 1977
TL4148/1	undated, probably 1930s
TL4148/2/437-438	10 August 1978
TL4148/3-4	15 July 1983

Vertical collection

OS/67145: 34-35	5 June 1967	1:7500
MAL/68038: 55-57	2 June 1968	1:11000
MAL/68038: 95-96	2 June 1968	1:11000
MAL/69053: 60-61	8 June 1969	1:10500
MAL/69054: 102	9 June 1969	1:10500
MAL/69069: 138-139	22 July 1969	1:10500
OS/74186: 157-159	22 July 1974	1:7500
OS/74187: 226-228	22 July 1974	1:7500

APPENDIX 2

Sites and Monuments records consulted:

The following record numbers are in the vicinity of the site:

SMR no.	description
3990	Bronze-age palstave
4159	undated soil marks, enclosure, pottery and stray finds
8624	enclosure and trackway
8985	undated ditch and trackway
10264	Roman brooch
10264a	Anglo-Saxon brooch
10264b	medieval coin, ampulla
10264c	post-medieval powder flask
10264d	undated rings
10265	Bronze-age axe
10265a	Roman finds
10265b	Anglo-Saxon brooch
10265c	medieval finds
10265d	post-medieval flask
10265e	undated chape
10266	Roman coin and brooch
10266a	Anglo-Saxon finds
10266b	medieval coins
10266c	post-medieval finds
10268	undated buckle
10418	post-medieval dovecote (1796)
11562	worked flint, prehistoric scraper
11563	Roman coin
11563a	possible medieval coins
11672	undated building material

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