

Archaeological Field Unit

**The Haycock Hotel, Wansford,
Archaeological Monitoring**

A. Hatton

1997

Cambridgeshire County Council

Report No. B4

Commissioned by Arcadian Hotels (UK). Ltd.

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THE HAYCOCK HOTEL, WANSFORD, ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING

By Andrew Hatton

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INTRODUCTION

Between November 1996 and March 1997 a series of four visits were made to the Haycock Hotel (TF 076 991) in order to monitor ground works prior to the construction of a new conservatory, additional bedroom units, and new drainage work (Fig.1). The work was carried out by members of the Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Field Unit on behalf of Arcadian Hotels (UK). Limited. The archaeological investigation was undertaken in accordance with a brief set by the archaeological section of Cambridgeshire County council (Louise Austin 1996).

BACKGROUND

Within the vicinity of the Haycock Hotel a number of prehistoric stray finds (worked flint etc.) have been recovered, which provides evidence for the prehistoric activity expected in such a river terrace location (SMR 130, 166). The discovery of a single Bronze Age burial (SMR 121) to the south of the development area raises the possibility for further funerary/ritual activity in the locality.

The large number of SMR entries relating to the Romano-British finds (SMR 170, 177, 1570, 1571, 7856 etc.) in the area reflects the intensive Roman development of the local landscape and its situation within the Nene valley pottery production area; home of a major component of the later Roman pottery industry. Scheduled Ancient monument (Camb 137; SMR 122), a Romano-British building and/or industrial sites lies 200m to the south-east of the hotel. Two Saxon spearheads (SMR 129, 120a) have been found in the vicinity, the latter dated to the c.10th.

The nearby Church of St. Mary incorporates Late Saxon features, suggesting there was a pre-conquest settlement focus there. Wansford is noted (as 'Wylmesford') as early as 972-92 AD (A. Mawer and F.M. Stenton. 1969). The bridge at Wansford is noted as early as

Site Plan

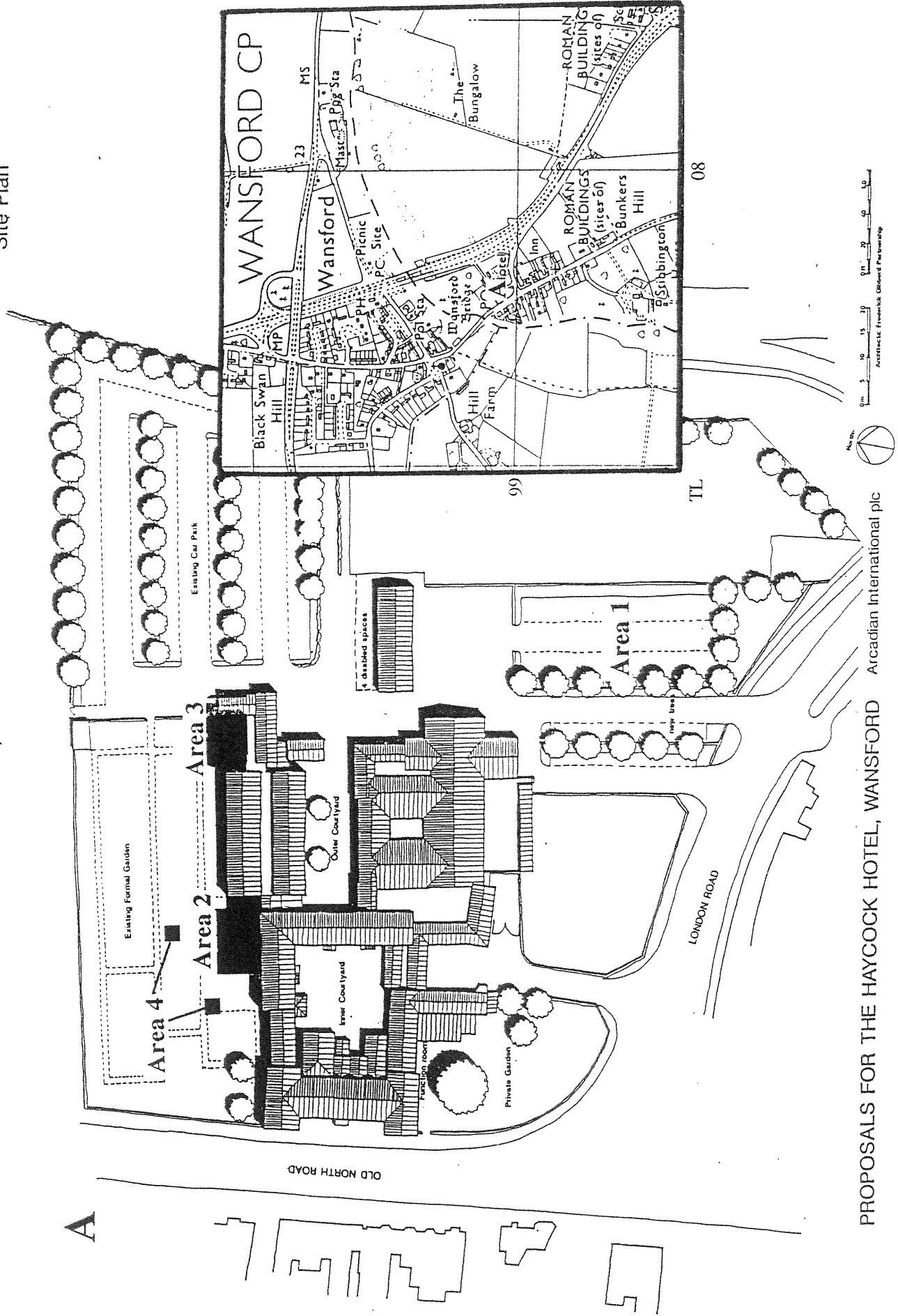


Figure 1 Location plan and areas of archaeological monitoring

the early c.13th and roads converging on the crossing caused Wansford to develop as a posting town in the c.18th to c.19th (VCH Northants, vol II, 537). The Haycock Inn too owed its prosperity to this situation, a flourishing barge trade adding to the passing traffic of the roads (ibid). The inn is thought to date to the early 17th century, later additions reflecting its conversion to a private residence during the nineteenth century and its subsequent re-conversion to an inn (SMR 128).

METHODOLOGY

All the areas for development were mechanically excavated, a process that was either observed archaeologically during excavation or at the end of the excavation. Written context records were supplemented by photographs as necessary. Excavation spoil was scanned for artefacts.

RESULTS

Area 1: The car park was built within a limestone wall enclosed paddock at the south end of the hotel complex (Fig. 1). A thin turf and topsoil layer (0.25m) was removed to expose the very weathered upper interface of the Lincolnshire Limestone. The absence of superficial river gravel deposits and lack of thick soil cover may imply previous clearance and landscaping in this area. Occasional brick rubble, bottle glass scrap iron (all modern in origin) lay beneath the turf and within a small pit (1 metre in diameter). The partial skeletal remains of a horse which had been placed in a pit located below the turf in the south-west corner of the area were also observed. No other finds were noted during stripping or during examination of the excavation spoil. No other features were noted. A slight rise in the natural necessitated excavation to a maximum depth of c. 300mm into the limestone over parts of the area in order to create a level surface for the car park.

Area 2: The site visit was carried out to observe the foundation trenches which were excavated prior to pile driving which preceded the construction of a new 'buffet' conservatory (Fig.1). Unfortunately, the lack of prior warning of the excavation of the foundation trenches, meant that this process was not observed however the exposed sections were recorded. An area comprising of two rectangles (11.5m x 9m and 6m x 4m) was excavated and a substantial layer of limestone chipping's, were deposited.

The trench was excavated to a depth of c. 800mm (300mm of topsoil overlay 500mm of alluvium a mid-brown sandy silt). The north-west facing section revealed the lower brick courses of the present building, the remaining 3 sections were devoid of any archaeological features or artefacts. The depositing of the limestone chipping prevented any observation of the lower subsoil's and potentially any archaeological features present beneath the alluvium. No artefacts were noted in section or retrieved from the excavated spoil.

Area 3: The site visit was to observe the trench excavation for the new bedroom block (Fig. 1). Once again the excavation was not observed.

The area excavated measured 10.5m x 9m to a depth of c.800mm (300mm of topsoil overlay 500mm of alluvium, as above). The north-west facing section revealed the lower brick courses of the present building c.17th century, the remaining 3 sections were devoid of any archaeological features or artefacts.

Area 4: The site visit was to observe the excavation of two soak-aways (Fig.1), the first located c. 15m to the north-west of the new conservatory and the second located c.10m to the west of the conservatory.

The first of the soak-aways measured 2x2m and was excavated to a depth of 2m. Unfortunately, the unstable nature of the alluvial subsoil meant that the sides of the pit had to be rapidly shored which prevented the description of variations in the alluvial deposits or identifying archaeological features.

The second of the soak-aways measured 2.5 x 2.5m and had a depth of 2.3m, and its excavation was observed fully. The east facing section of the soak-away pit revealed a topsoil depth of 250mm overlaying alluvium (as above). A depth of 2.3m the gravel deposits of the river terrace were uncovered at which point the excavation of the pit ceased. No archaeological features or artefacts were identified during the excavation of the soak-away pit.

CONCLUSION

The lack of archaeological evidence from any of the areas observed during the investigation and the accumulation of alluvial silt suggests that the location was prone to flooding during late prehistoric and early historic periods. It is worth noting that the early settlement centre, as indicated by the church, together with many of the noted stray finds were located on the higher ground to the north-west of the Haycock Hotel and River Nene.

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