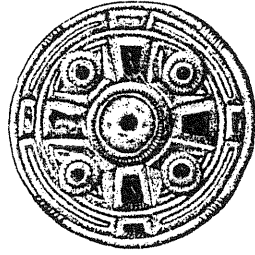


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Archaeological Field Unit

Castor Primary School, Castor, Peterborough:
Basic Archaeological Monitoring

William Wall BA

1997

Cambridgeshire County Council

Report No. B9

Commissioned By Castor Primary School and Cambridgeshire County Council

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Editor Tim Malim BA

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SUMMARY

On 26th August and 28th and 29th October 1997, foundation holes for the installation of play equipment and trenches for the foundations of a new access ramp were dug in the playground and playing field of Castor Primary School, Stocks Hill, Castor, Peterborough. As the site is a Scheduled Ancient Monument, an archaeologist from Cambridgeshire County Council's Archaeology Field Unit monitored the works. On the playing field, none of the holes penetrated sufficiently deeply to encounter undisturbed archaeological layers, the maximum depth being 0.60m. Small quantities of Roman pottery and building materials were, however, found in the spoil. Of the two trenches for the ramp foundations, the southernmost (trench 1) was only 0.50m deep and did not encounter archaeological remains. In trench 2 a single feature was recorded approximately 0.50m below the surface of the playing field or 0.80m below the playground, which had been made up to about 0.40m above the level of playing field in the recent past. The single feature was a pit containing charcoal and burnt daub fragments, some of which retained impressions of interwoven sticks or wattles. No other finds were recovered from the pit or from either of the trenches.

**Castor Primary School, Castor, Peterborough: Basic Archaeological Monitoring
(TL 125/985)**

1 INTRODUCTION

Cambridgeshire County Council's Archaeological Field Unit conducted basic archaeological monitoring at Castor Primary School, Stocks Hill, Castor, Peterborough on 26th August and 28th and 29th October 1997. The investigation was commissioned by Ms C. Marriage, the headteacher, on behalf of Castor Primary School and Mr A. Hatfield of Cambridgeshire County Council Property Management Services. The work was designed to meet the requirements of a design brief produced by the County Archaeology Office - Development Control (Kaner 1997). It took the form of a basic monitoring of groundworks in the school playground and on the school playing field. These works involved excavation of a total of twenty-two foundation holes for the construction of six items of play equipment in the school playing field (26th August) and removal of the existing concrete steps leading from the school playground down onto the playing field and excavation of two trenches for the foundations for a new ramp (28th and 29th October).

The removal of turf and laying of concrete slabs in a bed of sand in two other areas of the school playground were not thought to involve any potential disturbance to archaeological layers and therefore were not part of this investigation.

2 TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

The village of Castor lies on the western outskirts of Peterborough, Cambridgeshire, approximately 5km south-west of the junction between the A1 and A47 roads. The land rises gently up from about 8 m OD beside the River Nene just to the south of the village, towards the higher ground north of Castor, where it reaches 35m OD. The Primary School lies at the centre of the village at the junction of Stocks Hill and Peterborough Road. The school playing field lies beside Peterborough Road south of the school playground and school buildings, which are immediately adjacent to the churchyard of St Kyneburga's church. The land rises gently from the road, past the school and northwards towards the church, which is at a height of about 17m OD.

Geologically, the site lies at the interface of the first and second terrace gravels of the river Nene and the lower Lincolnshire limestone. The present landuse over most of the site is as a grass playing field for the school, with a tarmac-surfaced playground on a higher level around the school buildings themselves.

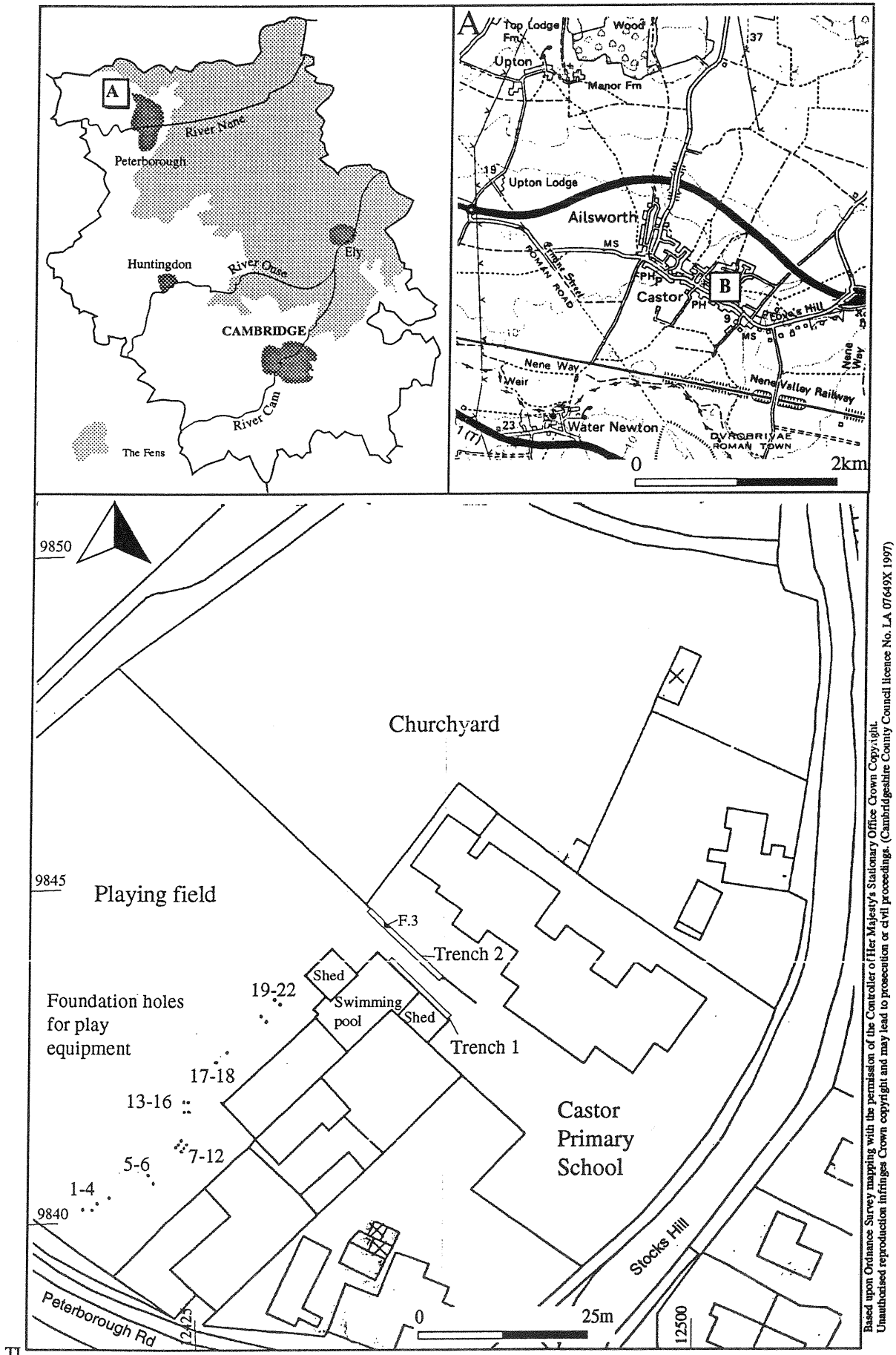


Figure 1 Site location plan showing position of trenches and foundation holes

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3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

Most of the centre of Castor village is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM 93). The area around Castor and the nearby Roman town of Durobrivae at Water Newton have been the subject of several previous archaeological investigations most notably those of Artis in the 1820's . The present school playing field is probably one of the sites where Artis excavated (see SMR 01873). The buildings discovered here by Artis and others probably represent a series of detached houses erected around 250 AD on terraces in the hillside, facing south around a rectangular court or garden. Many of the rooms had hypocaust heating systems and painted wall plaster. It is likely that the whole complex can be regarded as a "praetorium" or official building, which included mosaics, hypocausts, a temple and baths. Parts of the masonry of this complex can still be seen, incorporated into later walls to the north of the church. However, not all of the remains noted by Artis were accurately plotted (Samuels 1997).

The church itself, dedicated to St Kyneburga who founded a nunnery in Castor in the mid-seventh century, dates from the 12th Century and retains much of its original structure. Saxon sculptures are still to be found inside the church. Excavations in the churchyard and in houses adjacent to it north of the school have revealed middle Saxon occupation, including sunken-featured buildings.

In 1991, an excavation was conducted within the school playground itself, in advance of construction of an extension to the school buildings (Meadows unpub.). Four trenches were excavated and recorded revealing a robbed-out wall of probable Roman date and a single Roman inhumation. These excavations also showed that a considerable amount of levelling of the ground had taken place during the construction of the school buildings; below these layers was a buried soil containing artefacts dating from the Roman period to the 19th century, suggesting that the area had been cultivated in the recent past. The Roman archaeology lay below these cultivation layers, at a depth of approximately 0.50 - 0.70m below the present ground surface at about 10.70m OD.

Photographs dating from the ?1960's in the possession of Ms Marriage the headteacher reinforce the idea of cultivation here in the recent past as they show that the area of the present school playing field was then a market garden, with two large glasshouses in the south-east corner.

4 METHODOLOGY

The main objective of the investigation was to ensure that any archaeological features exposed during the construction work were adequately recorded and that any artefactual material discovered was recorded and analysed appropriately.

On 26th August, during the hand-excavation of the foundation holes for play equipment, each hole was examined for archaeological remains as it was dug and the resulting spoil was searched by hand for artefacts. The locations of the holes were recorded and appear on fig. 1. The layers exposed were recorded using the AFU's standard single context recording system and one of the holes was photographed to record the section..

On 28th and 29th October, during the construction of the new ramp down from the playground to the playing field, machine excavation by the contractors of the foundation trenches for the ramp sidewalls was observed by an archaeologist. The trench bases and sides were hand-cleaned in selected areas where archaeological remains were suspected. The single archaeological feature observed was hand-excavated and recorded. The feature was photographed and a section drawn. The trench spoil was searched by eye and with a metal detector in order to maximise the possibilities for recovering artefacts.

5 RESULTS

None of the holes dug for the play equipment were deep enough to reach intact archaeological layers. Holes 1 and 4 were oblong in plan, 0.25m wide, 0.60m long and 0.45m deep; holes 2 and 3 were L-shaped, with the long side of the L 0.70m long, 0.25m wide and 0.45m deep; all other holes were circular, 0.30m in diameter and ranged in depth from 0.40 to 0.60m. The same profile was observed in each one, with 0.30m of dark brown sandy silty clay topsoil (1) overlying a lower horizon (2) which was a dark yellowish-brown sandy silty clay containing frequent angular fragments of weathered limestone. None of the holes penetrated to a sufficient depth to show the lower boundary of layer 2.

A few fragments of tile and brick came from the topsoil (layer 1), whilst the lower layer (2) produced a little over 1kg of Roman building materials, 6 sherds of Roman pottery and a total of 218g of animal bone. The latter came from holes 17, 19 and 22 which lie towards the north side of the playing field nearest the school.

Two trenches were dug for foundations of the side walls of the ramp to the playing field. Trench 1 was 0.60m wide, 13m long and 0.50m deep. It ran north-east - south-west along the north side of the shed and fenced-off area associated with the school swimming pool, about 10m south of the school building itself. It was dug into a uniform topsoil layer identical with layer 1 identified in the play equipment holes to the south. The trench was not deep enough to reach the bottom of this layer. No archaeological features or finds of any kind were encountered in this trench.

Trench 2 was dug along the southern edge of the school playground and ran south-east from the south-eastern end of the churchyard wall for 15m. It was 0.50m wide. At this point the playground is about 0.40m above the level of the playing field; in removing the existing concrete steps down to the playing field and digging this trench, the continuation of the concrete foundation for the

churchyard wall, which must previously have continued into the area of the school grounds was observed. This extended for the full length of trench 2. After breaking this out and removing it, the trench was dug down to level about 0.40m below the level of the playing field, which was about 0.80m below the surface of the school playground.

The south-facing side of the trench showed that beneath the tarmac of the playground lay about 0.80m of undifferentiated topsoil-like material, identical with layer 1 seen in trench 1 and over the playing field. This is interpreted as make-up for the construction of the playground.

A single feature (3) was encountered in the base of the trench, about 4m south-east of the north-western end of the trench. On excavation, this proved to be a shallow pit 1.72m long, 0.48m wide and 0.48m deep where it was observable in the trench. Its southern edge was semi-circular in plan, but to the north it continued under the school playground. The fill (4) was a dark brown silty clay containing frequent fragments of charcoal. From this came 5.5kg of fired clay material which contained impressions of interwoven sticks or wattles. This is interpreted as daub from the wall of a wattle-and-daub building. No pottery or other artefacts were recovered from this fill.

Feature (3) was cut into a layer (5), a brown silty clay containing occasional limestone fragments, which formed the base of the trench and underlay the make-up for the playground and the topsoil of the playing field at this point. No artefacts were recovered from this layer.

Metal detector searches of the trenches and trench spoil failed to locate any artefacts earlier than the 19th century.

6 CONCLUSION

The minimal scale of the works involved in this development severely limit the archaeological results that can be reported. Nevertheless the work has revealed some information about the nature of deposits on the site and the depth at which any future works might encounter archaeological remains. It is clear that in the playing field area, cultivation in the recent past has disturbed any surviving archaeological layers down to a depth of at least 0.60m below the present ground surface. Any future works that penetrate no deeper than this are unlikely to encounter undisturbed archaeological deposits. It is also the case, however, that any ground disturbance on this important site will produce ancient artefacts, even if the work is on a very small scale.

Around the school buildings themselves, it seems that the ground has been made up in order to construct the school and the playground, and intact archaeology lies between 0.50 and 0.80m below the present surface of the playground, at between 10.30 and 10.60m OD.

The finds of building materials from the holes on the playing field consist of fragments of Roman brick and both roof and hypocaust tile. They probably derive from a nearby Roman building of high status, having a hypocaust system and a tiled roof. The pottery sherds recovered are fragments of Roman domestic vessels, which were probably associated with the serving and preparation of food on or near the site. The animal bone assemblage is likewise domestic in character (Copleston pers. comm.).

The single feature recorded in trench 2 probably represents a pit dug or reused for disposal of debris resulting from the destruction of a timber building.

Finds and records are held at the AFU office in Fulbourn, Cambridge, under the site code CASPS97.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank Cathy Marriage, the headteacher of Castor Primary School, for her help and interest, Andrew Hatfield of the property management services department of Cambridgeshire County Council for commissioning the second part of the work and Phil Coplestone of the AFU who processed and catalogued the finds. The project was carried out in response to a design brief written by Simon Kaner of the County Archaeology Office - Development Control.

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Appendix A

List of Contexts

Context	Trench	Type	Description
1		Layer	dark brown sandy silty clay topsoil - extends over whole playing field?
2		Layer	Dark yellowish-brown subsoil - underlies (1)
3	2	Cut	Pit, sub-circular in plan, gently sloping sides, flat base
4	2	Layer	Fill of (3), dark brown silty clay - frequent charcoal fragments
5	2	Layer	underlies (3) - brown silty clay

Appendix B

Site Locations			Ceramics				Organics		Totals
Context Number	Trench Number	Hole Number	Pottery	Pottery Sherds	Tile & Brick	Daub	Animal Bone	Shell	Total Weights by Context
1		10			868				868
2			19	1					19
2		2	3	2					3
2		5			482				482
2		13			568				568
2		17			68		42		110
2		19	13	2	415		34		462
2		22	9	1			142	7	158
4	2					5521			5521
Total Weights by Finds Type			44	6	2401	5521	218	7	8191
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