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**The Northern Ha-ha at Hinxton Hall, Hinxton, Cambridgeshire:
An Archaeological Investigation**

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Commissioned by Fuller Peiser on behalf of The Wellcome Trust

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Introduction

Cambridgeshire County Council's Archaeological Field Unit conducted an archaeological investigation at Hinxtton Hall on 29th September 1997. The investigation was commissioned by Fuller Peiser on behalf of The Wellcome Trust, in order to fulfil a condition of the planning permission relating to ongoing reconstruction of the ha-ha to the north of the hall. The work was designed to meet the requirements of a brief produced by the County Archaeology Office (Kaner 1997). It took the form of a single machine cut trench across the ha-ha, partially silted up but still visible, at TL 5498/2449. The main objective was to ascertain the profile of the original ha-ha ditch.

Geology and Topography

The site lies on Cretaceous Middle Chalk, at a height of *c* 35m OD. It is close to the interface between the chalk and the 1st-2nd terrace gravels of the Cam, which flows *c* 300m to the west. Recent fieldwork nearby has shown that the surface of the chalk is here rather mixed, containing frequent flint nodules and silt filled periglacial features (Kenney 1996). The investigation area lies 38m to the north of Hinxtton Hall, a grade II* listed building originally constructed in the mid eighteenth century (Kenney 1996), to which the ha-ha relates. The hall now lies within the newly built Wellcome Trust Genome Campus, an international scientific research facility, but the parkland landscape surrounding the hall has been largely retained. The village of Hinxtton lies *c* 300m to the north.

Archaeological and Historical Background

The Hinxtton Hall estate has been the focus of major multi-period archaeological investigations by the Archaeological Field Unit. The results of open area excavation are being prepared for publication in a major archaeological report series, but a variety of other evaluations and surveys have been carried out between 1993 and 1996 (eg Leith 1993a, 1993b, Leith 1995a, 1995b, Leith and Sperry 1995, Kenney 1996). It has been demonstrated that the estate contained evidence of late Neolithic- Bronze Age activity, and was the site of significant settlement in the Anglo-Saxon and Saxo-Norman periods.

The ha-ha which is the subject of the present investigation is a part of the parkland landscape associated with Hinxtton Hall. The early grounds of the hall were very limited. A plan thought to date to approximately 1800 shows a pleasure ground immediately to the east of the hall, bounded by a plantation to the north (CRO R57/24/1/57(a), discussed by Way in Leith 1993a). Beyond the plantation, Burr Lane lay just to the north of the position of the present ha-ha, and beyond it lay several closes that were part of the village of Hinxtton. It thus seems unlikely that the ha-ha was built before 1800. A ha-ha was

intended to offer an uninterrupted view from the house, but at this time the view to the north was of a lane and parts of the village of Hinxton.

Between 1800 and 1831, the Hinxton Hall grounds underwent some limited expansion. A plan of the Hinxton estate in 1831 shows that the closes to the north-east of the house had been acquired and amalgamated to form a 'Home Close' (CRO 57/24/1/57(b), discussed by Way in Leith 1993a). However, the village street still extended up to the house from the north, with a series of crofts extending back from the street to the west. A lane was still shown in the position of the former Burr lane to the north of the house: again it seems unlikely that the ha-ha had been built.

The Hinxton Hall grounds were extended to their full extent between the enclosure of the parish in 1833, and the surveying of the OS First Edition Map of 1899 (Reproduced in Leith 1993a). The village high street was closed up to the north of the Hall, and considerable areas of land were acquired to the north-west, west, and south. The line of Burr Lane disappeared to the north-east of the hall, and the whole area was planted with widely spaced trees. This is the most plausible period for the creation of the ha-ha.

Evaluation trenches to the north excavated within *c* 80m of the ha-ha in 1996 revealed a number of pits with slate covered bases (Kenney 1996). These are thought to represent planting pits in which small trees or bushes would have been laid out in their pots in appropriate season. These features also date from the period of emparkment in the nineteenth century.

Methods

A single machine cut trench was excavated across the ha-ha in the western of the two locations suggested in the brief (Kaner 1997). It was excavated in the only location where the ha-ha was undisturbed and where the presence of trees did not prevent access. Only the base and northern profile of the ha-ha could be investigated by the trench. This was because the wall revetting the southern face of the ha-ha ditch still survived in situ and clearly could not be disturbed. The date of the wall is unknown. It was flint faced, and here had not been affected by the current development, except for the repair of the single course of bricks at the top.

After excavation of the trench, the base and sides were cleaned by hand and photographed. The east facing section was drawn at a scale of 1:20 and the cut of the ha-ha was drawn in plan at 1:20. Contexts were described using the Archaeological Field Unit's single context recording system.

Results

The original cut of the ha-ha was recorded in plan and section. It was 1.48m deep, measured from the top of the internal retaining wall, and 2.0m wide, measured outwards from the face of the retaining wall. Its northern edge was gently sloping, with a gradient just less than 1:2 (y:x). The base was flat.

The ha-ha was filled by a sterile, homogeneous deposit of brown sandy silt with occasional fine pebbles and chalk flecks. No finds were recovered. Within the fill, there were no lenses of weathered chalk. This may be a result of the shallow gradient of the north side of the ditch, and the fact that the south side was revetted. Deposits of dark greyish brown sandy subsoil and of loose topsoil had formed over the partially filled ditch. Both were extensively disturbed by tree and ivy roots, particularly the very loose topsoil. Between the fill of the ditch and the topsoil, part of a layer of medium subangular fragments of clean white chalk was observed. The chalk may have been dumped in the partially filled ditch, but its function is not clear.

Conclusion

The original profile the ha-ha to the north of Hinxton Hall has been established. It is probable that this parkland feature was built between 1833 and 1899. Its depth was such that it would have provided a sunken wall almost 1.5m high, to keep livestock out of the hall's gardens without impairing the view. The cut has not been traced up to the present ground surface to the south. This is almost certainly because the upper portion has been disturbed by bioturbation and the ongoing processes of soil formation.

Acknowledgements

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APPENDIX A

List of Contexts

| Context | Description | Nature |
|---------|-------------|--|
| 1 | Subsoil | 10YR 4/2 dark grayish brown sandy silt |
| 2 | Layer | Subangular medium fragments of chalk |
| 3 | Fill | 10YR 5/3 brown sandy silt |
| 4 | Cut | Linear, flat base, gentle north side |

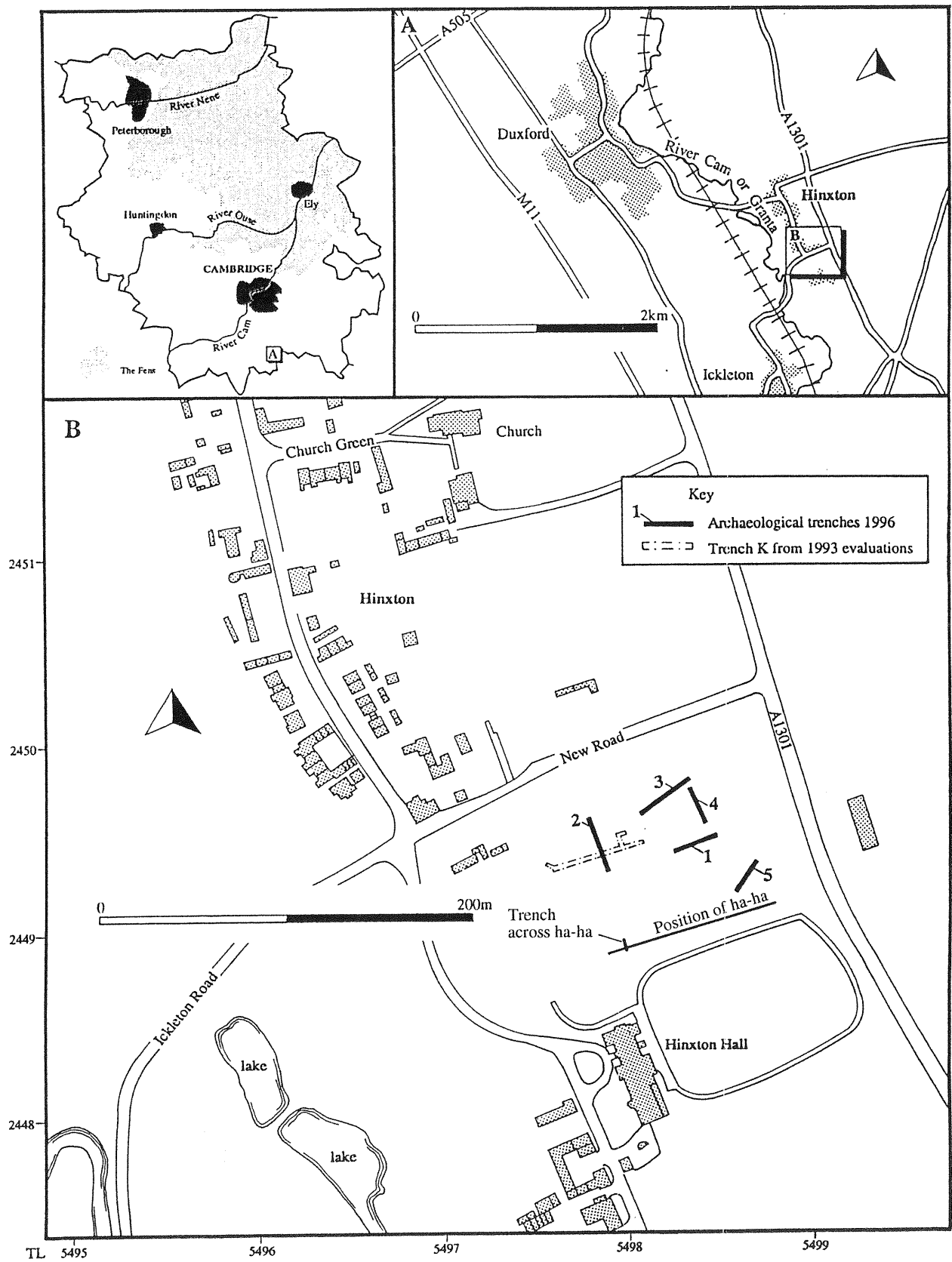


Figure 1 Location Map

East facing section

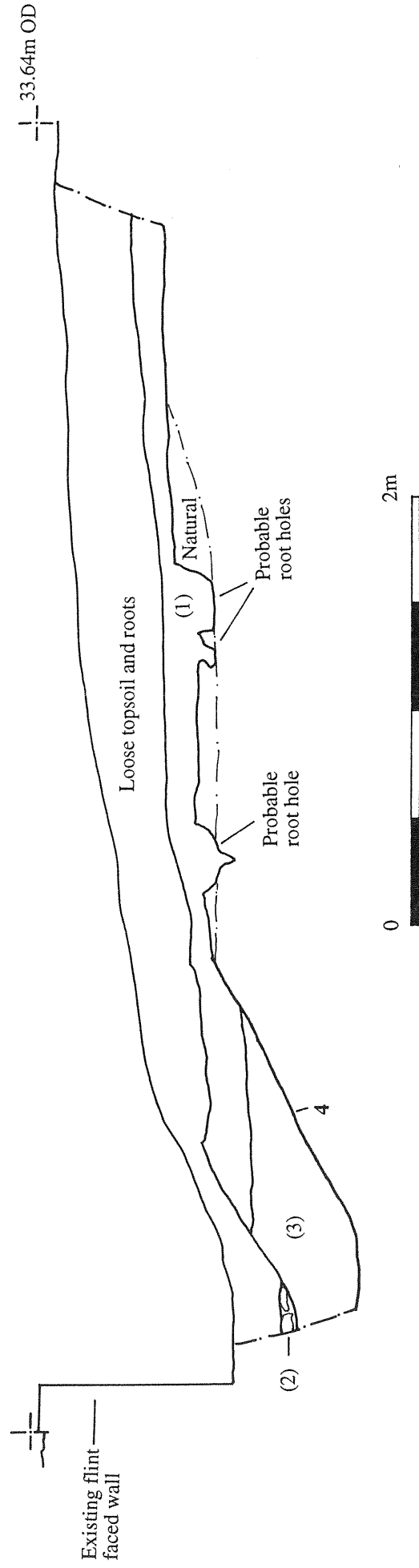


Figure 2 Section excavated across partially silted ha-ha ditch (east facing)