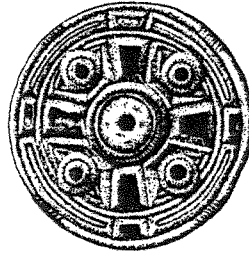


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Archaeological Field Unit
**35 Peterborough Road, Castor: An Archaeological
Watching Brief**

Joe Abrams

September 2000

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Cambridgeshire County Council

Report No. B 75
Commissioned by Mr J Lister

35 Peterborough Road, Castor: An Archaeological Watching Brief

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2000

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SUMMARY

On the 7 September 2000, an archaeological Monitoring and Recording brief was undertaken at 35 Peterborough Road, Castor, Cambridgeshire (TL 1248 9835). The development consisted of the demolition of outbuildings and excavation of foundation trenches for extensions at the front and rear of the dwelling.

One Trench at the rear of the property contained a pit feature, which produced no artefacts. The Trench at the front of the house contained no archaeological features at all.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY	1
ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND	1
METHODOLOGY	3
RESULTS	4
CONCLUSION	8
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	8
BIBLIOGRAPHY	8
LIST OF FIGURES	
Figure 1 - Site Location Plan	2
Figure 2 - Plan of trenches	
Section of Trench 1A	6
Figure 3 - Photograph of oolitic limestone head	7

**35 Peterborough Road, Castor: An Archaeological Watching Brief
NGR TL 1248 9835**

1 INTRODUCTION

On the 7 September 2000, an archaeological Monitoring and Recording brief was undertaken at 35 Peterborough Road, Castor, Cambridgeshire (TL 1248 9835). The development consisted of the demolition of outbuildings and excavation of foundation trenches for extensions at the front and rear of the dwelling. The Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Field Unit undertook the work. Mr J Lister commissioned the project. The work was carried out according to a brief for archaeological monitoring and recording issued by Peterborough City Council Archaeological Service (Robinson 2000).

2 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

The site lies at the base of a southwest facing hillside (the hill rises to around 23m above Ordnance Datum) with a benchmark of 9.59m above Ordnance Datum on an adjacent property. Also, a spot height of 9.03m above Ordnance Datum on the road directly in front of the house.

Castor is on the interface between the clay-capped limestone 'uplands' which form the northern boundary of the Nene valley and the terrace gravels of the valley.

Recent work to the north suggested there is an area of hill wash creating deposits of up to 1.5m (Hatton 2000). This was backed up by results at 35 Peterborough Road. As the geology in both Trench 1 (A/B/C) and Trench 2 (A/B/C) was silt hill wash deposits. The natural clay deposits were only reached in Trench 1A at a depth of 1.10m, (see Fig 2) despite trenches 1B and 1C being excavated to a depth of 1.30m. This suggests that hill wash deposits are indeed up to a depth of 1.50m in this area.

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The subject site lies in the centre of Castor village, immediately south of the Peterborough Road junction with Stocks Hill. A Roman building complex (Scheduled Monument Peterborough 93) has been identified to the north at Castor Primary School.

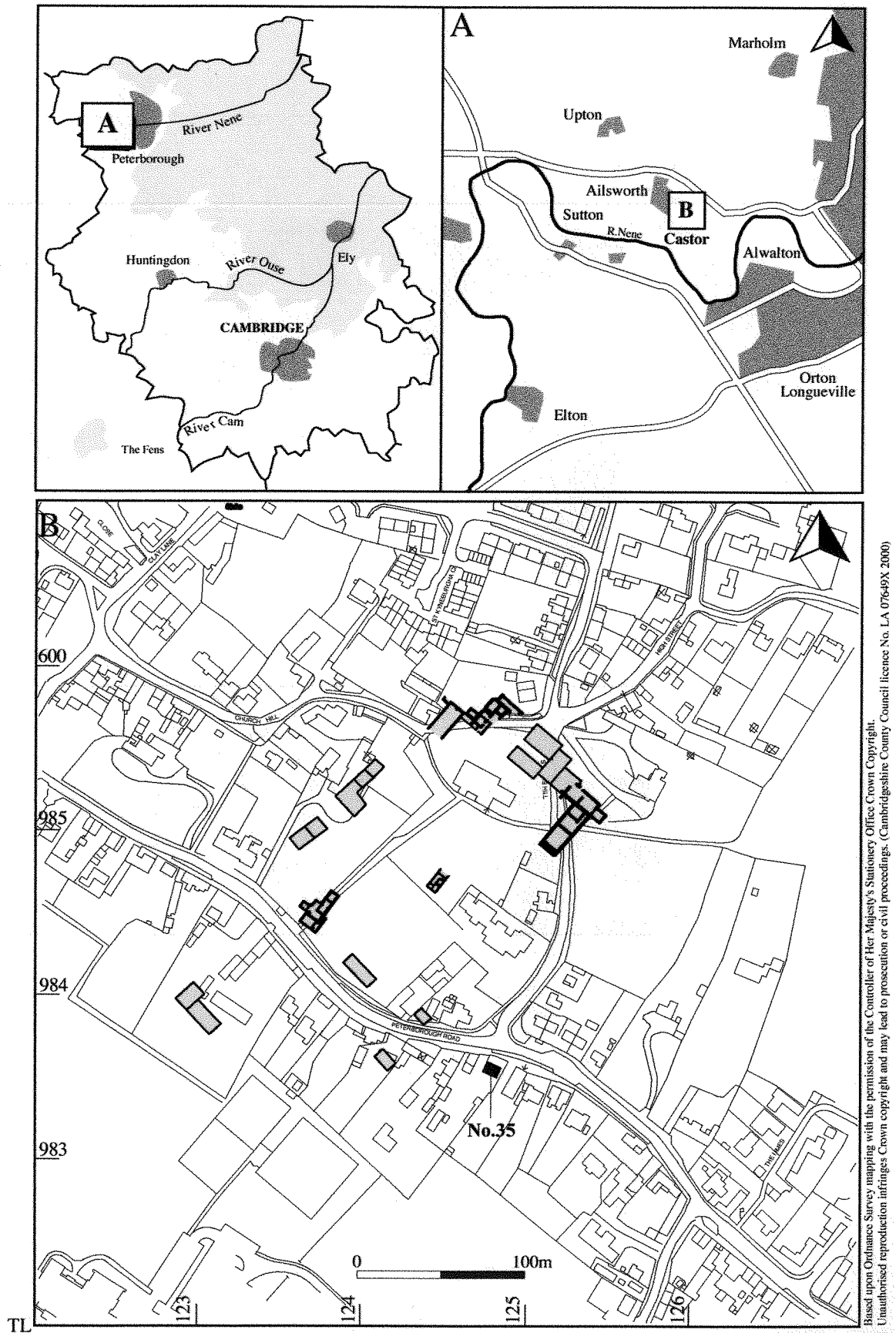


Figure 1 Site location showing position of Roman building remains (after Mackreth, 1995)

Prehistory

Little evidence of prehistoric activity has been reported from the village, although a residual flint barbed and tanged arrowhead was recorded during excavations at Castor Primary School (Meadows 1991). Also, there are prehistoric funerary monuments recorded in the Nene valley.

Romano-British

The abundance of Romano-British archaeology in the Lower Nene valley is well known and the area around Castor was one of the most intensively developed areas of Roman Britain.

High status Roman buildings were excavated in the vicinity of Castor Primary School and church during the nineteenth century. Subsequent work (Mackreth 1984, Meadows 1991, Wall 1997) has provided information on the monumentality of the complex and terracing of the hillside.

Archaeological work at the primary school (just to the north of the site) identified areas of Romano-British settlement and hill wash deposits.

Post-Roman and Medieval

The high status buildings appear to have continued in use into the Anglo-Saxon period and evidence of post-Roman agriculture was identified in recent work to the north of the development site (Hatton 2000). Castor has been associated with the seventh century nunnery of St. Kyneburgha. Excavation at Elmlea, immediately north of the church, has produced middle Saxon material consistent with monastic occupation and further middle Saxon remains are known to the south of the church (Green et al 1988). As an important holding of Peterborough Abbey, Castor was a large and apparently successful village.

4 METHODOLOGY

A desk-based assessment of known archaeological information for the primary school just north of the site (Robinson 1999), and the evaluation report for work carried out at the primary school (Hatton 2000), both provided valuable sources of information on the area that the foundation trenches would be located. They suggested a high probability that they would disturb remains of a Romano British settlement.

Two Trenches (1, 2) each consisting of three segments (1 A/B/C, 2 A/B/C) were excavated in order to provide foundation trenches for extensions at the front and rear of the dwelling. Trench 1 at the rear of the dwelling totalled

15.25m in length and was excavated to a depth of 1.25m to 1.30m in depth and a width of c0.40m. Trench 2 at the front of the dwelling totalled 6.60m in length and was excavated to a depth of 0.40m and a width of 0.40m to 0.60m. The excavation was carried out using a wheeled mechanical excavator with a ditching bucket, in the presence of an archaeologist.

The trenching resulted in the removal of topsoil and deposits of silt, which made up the subsoil. The natural geology varied from silts, which occurred in all trenches, and clay which was revealed in only a limited section of Trench 1A. The trench bases and sections were cleaned by hand to determine the presence of archaeological deposits. Trench spoil was scanned by eye in order to obtain artefacts.

After machining each Trench was photographed. The AFU's single context based recording system was used to record the archaeological feature and deposit. Sections and plans of both Trenches were hand drawn at a scale of 1:20.

5 RESULTS

Trench 1 (A/B/C)

Trench 1 consists of three segments 1A, 1B and 1C (see Fig 2). All three contained topsoil layer 104 a mid brown layer of fine sand material it contained some modern building material inclusions (brick and mortar pieces). This varied in depth from 0.20m to 0.50m in depth. Below this was 105 this also occurred in all three segments of Trench 1. It was an orange-ish brown silt deposit. This varied from 0.50m to 0.80m in depth before the base of the trench was reached and is likely to be the same pre Roman hill wash deposit encountered on the recent excavations on the primary school site and recorded at similar depths there.

1A was orientated slightly northeast-south west and totals 5.0m in length with a depth of 1.25m. There was a layer of made ground 103 which extended from the northern end of the trench for 4.60m it had a depth of 0.60m tapering to the south, and was associated with the now demolished outbuilding. This layer was black containing abraded coal and post-medieval ceramic building material. Presumably it had acted as a levelling/ foundation layer for the outbuilding. The topsoil in 1A was 104 this existed only in the southern part of the trench where it had been unaffected by the construction of the outbuilding. Below these two layers, 105 an orange-ish brown silt deposit occurred. This had a depth of 0.50m in the north of the Trench and 0.70m depth in the south. Cut into this layer pit 101 was recorded in the east facing section of Trench 1A (see Fig 2) this was sealed below the made ground layer 103. Pit 101 had a width in section of 1.24m and its steep sides reached a depth of 0.60m. Contained within this feature was deposit 102, a mid brown silty sand deposit which contained occasional pieces of natural stone and

charcoal pieces. No artefactual evidence was recovered directly from the pit, however, the presence of a piece of clay pipe in the spoil associated with the pit and the post medieval appearance of the feature suggest it was not of major archaeological significance. Below layer 105 was layer 106, this was a white-ish light grey clay layer and part of the natural geology which we would expect to find in this area. This was visible for only the first 0.2m of the northern part of 1A; it had a depth of 0.20m before the base of the Trench was reached.

1B was orientated slightly northwest-southeast and totals 5.25m in length and 1.30m in depth. It contained topsoil layer 104 which had a consistent depth of 0.50m and was uncontaminated by building material in this section. This is likely to be due to the fact that the out building had not effected soil in this area. Below this was layer 105, which had a consistent depth of 0.80m. No archaeological features were encountered.

1C was orientated slightly northeast-southwest and totals 5.0m in length and 1.20m - 1.30m in depth. It contained topsoil layer 104 which had been truncated and compacted by an area of concrete hard standing and hard-core foundation to a depth of 0.20m. This had reduced the depth of topsoil in this segment of Trench 1 to 0.20m. In the northern end of 1C a foundation trench for the original dwelling truncated 104. Below this was layer 105, which had a consistent depth of 0.80m. No archaeological features were encountered.

Trench 2 (A/B/C)

Trench 2 consists of three segments 2A, 2B and 2C (see Fig 2). All three contained topsoil layer 104 a mid brown layer of fine sand material it contained some modern building material inclusions (brick and mortar pieces). This had a depth of 0.20m. Below this was 105, which also occurred in all three segments of Trench 2. It was an orange-ish brown silt deposit. This had a depth of 0.20m before the base of the trench was reached and is likely to be the same silt hill wash deposit encountered on the recent excavations at the primary school site and recorded at similar depths there.

2A was orientated slightly northeast-southwest and had a length of 1.60m. 2B was orientated east-west and was 3.40m in length. 2C was orientated slightly northeast-southwest and had a length of 1.60m. All three had a depth of 0.40m. No archaeological features at all were encountered in Trench 2 (A/B/C).

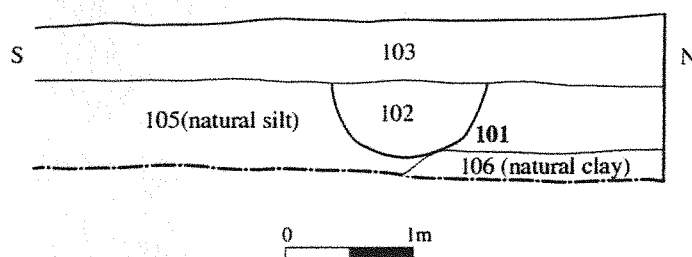
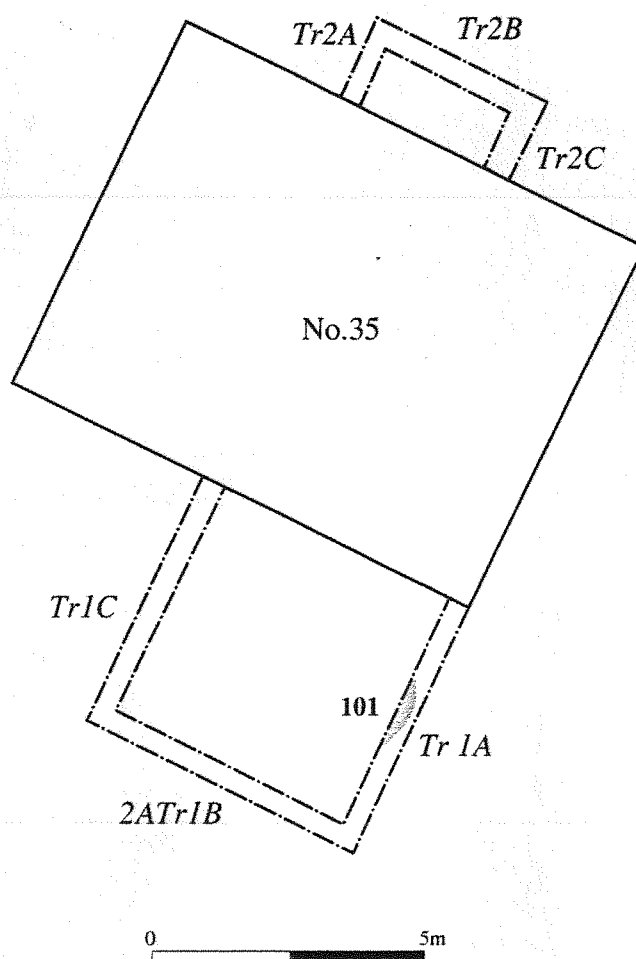


Figure 2 (Above) Plan of trenches
(Below) Section of Trench 1A

Surface Finds

A carved stone (oolitic limestone) head was found immediately east of, and adjacent to Trench 1A. This measured 250mm length, 140mm width and 120mm depth. The carving technique used for this has given it some important and unusual features. The nose was accentuated, making it a very prominent feature. Also, the face has an elongated appearance (see Fig 3). Whereas most known examples have a more flat profile.

The head is of unknown provenance as it was found out of context. Although its close proximity to very considerable Roman building remains (see Fig 1), meant that initially a Roman date could not be ruled out, however, several publications were consulted for examples of Romano-Celtic carved heads, and the above features do not conform to other known examples (James 1993, Fowler 1990, Green 1986). This suggests a medieval or post-medieval date may be likely for the carving.

The fact that the back of the head has been deliberately carved at an angle may suggest that the head was originally mounted on a masonry door frame, or on the corner of a building, such as is often seen in medieval church buildings.

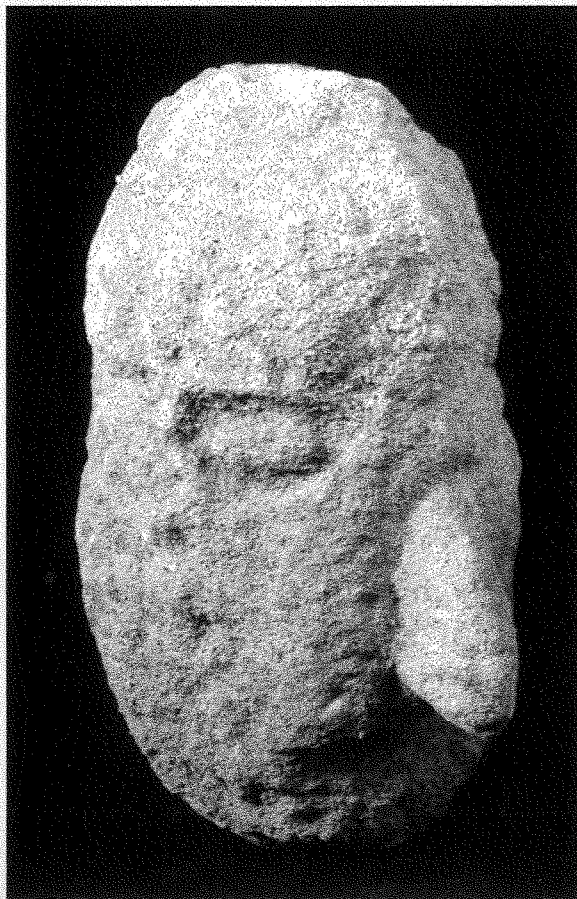


Figure 3 Photograph of oolitic limestone head

6 CONCLUSION

The objectives of the project were to establish the character, date, state of preservation and extent of any archaeological remains within the foundation Trenches of the subject site. One archaeological feature and deposit was encountered which was of unknown provenance but is likely to have been Post Medieval. It is to be expected that this area would produce archaeological remains, however, due to the very limited size of the trenching involved in this project none were picked up on the subject site. It is likely given the position of the site within an area of such archaeological sensitivity that any future ground disturbing developments on or in the vicinity of it would have a high probability of encountering important archaeological remains. During this watching brief pre Roman hill wash was encountered in all trenches to depths of up to 1.30m. Natural clay was encountered at a depth of 1.08m below the present ground surface, however this was only encountered in trench 1A, despite other trenches being excavated to a depth of 1.30m.

7 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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The project was carried out and the report prepared in response to a brief written by Ben Robinson from the Peterborough City Council Archaeological Service, who visited and monitored the site.

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