

Archaeological Field Unit

**Land at Sutton Road, Leverington, Cambridgeshire:
An Archaeological Evaluation**

Scott Kenney

April 2005

Cambridgeshire County Council

Report No. 803

Commissioned by Construct Reason Limited

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An Archaeological Evaluation
TF 4510/1090**

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SUMMARY

The Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council conducted an archaeological evaluation on 1.3ha of land at Sutton Road, Leverington, Cambridgeshire (TF 4510/1090), in advance of a proposed housing development.

The evaluation revealed a layer of redeposited and undifferentiated silt of variable thickness across the whole site. No archaeology was found, either within the silt layer or sealed beneath it.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Between the 5th and 7th of April 2005, an archaeological evaluation was undertaken by Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Field Unit (AFU) on a plot of land at Sutton Road, Leverington, Cambridgeshire (TF 4510/1090) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Construct Reason Limited in response to a brief set by the Cambridgeshire Archaeology Planning & Countryside Advice (CAPCA), in advance of a new housing development.

The site is located to the west of the historic town of Wisbech, close to the historic village of Leverington. It lies only 100m east of the medieval sea defence, known locally as the Roman Bank (SAM 51) and 0.5km west of the present course of the River Nene. The site is located in an area of rich known archaeology.

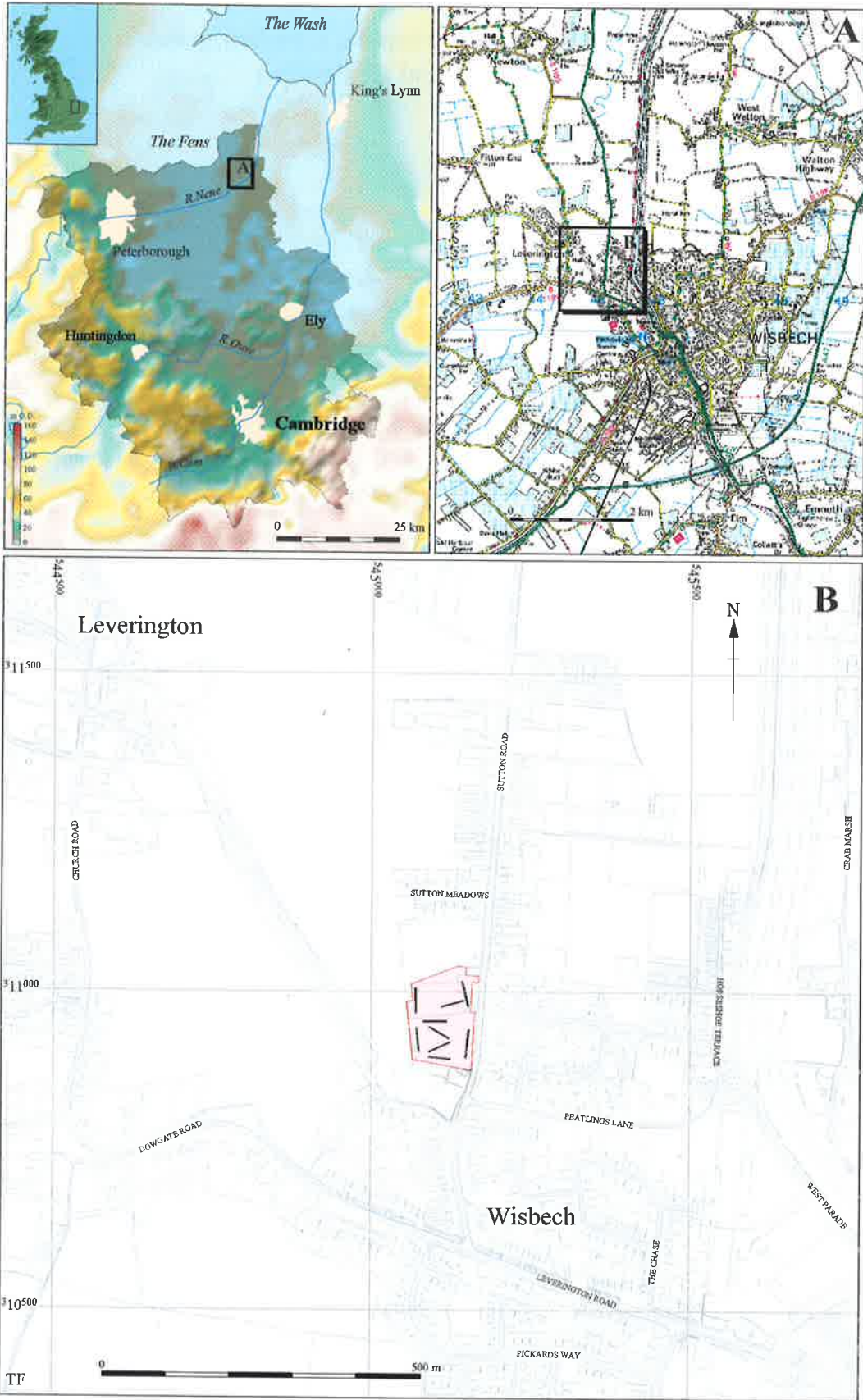
The proposed development includes the construction of 23 new houses with associated access roads and services within an approximate area of 1.3 hectares.

Due to the high archaeological potential of the site, CAPCA advised that an archaeological evaluation of this site was necessary. The presence of archaeological remains was considered likely on the basis of information contained in the Cambridgeshire Historic Environment Record (CHER), which records Roman and medieval remains to the west of the site.

2 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

2.1 Geology

According to the British Geological Survey, the site lies on the Flandrian Terrington Beds, an Iron Age/Early Roman marine inundation deposit, overlying the Jurassic Ampthill Clay. The Terrington Beds are characterised as younger saltmarsh and tidal creek deposits composed of silty clay and sandy silt (BGS 1995).



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Figure 1 Location of evaluation trenches (black) and development area (red).

2.2 Topography

The town of Wisbech is situated approximately 64km north of Cambridge, and the town centre is flanked on the west side by the River Nene and was, until recently, defined on the east side by the disused Wisbech Canal (now the A 1101/Falcon Road). The town was originally situated where the Wellstream joined the Wysbeck, now part of the Nene.

The development area lies outside the village of Leverington itself, outwith the medieval sea defences known erroneously as 'Roman Bank', and at a height of 3-4m OD.

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

3.1 Archaeological Background

Roman

Rabbit Hill, a scheduled monument to the south of the Wisbech Road, is a Roman Barrow (CHER 04104, SAM 264). Another tumulus to the north, previously thought to be Bronze Age, is now considered more likely also to be Roman in date, given that the area would have been too wet during the prehistoric period (CHER 04003, SAM 265).

Medieval

Aside from the Sea Bank mentioned above (CHER 04448), medieval pottery and a saltern were found to the north-east at Church End during the construction of a new bungalow (CHER 03960). To the north-west of Little Dowgate, the Hospital of St John the Baptist was built in 1487, the name of which survives, as in so many places, in the name Spitalfields.

Post-Medieval

A medieval or post-medieval windmill was marked on the 1843 Inclosure Map, to the north-west but no other references to it exist (CHER 03974).

3.2 Historical Background

Lying 1km north-west of Wisbech, Leverington was not mentioned in Domesday, and the first reference to it is c.1130, with the current spelling. The name is derived from a personal name '*Leofhere*', with the common suffix 'ington' meaning 'farm of'. However, the 'ington' name is itself an Early Saxon form even if it is not recorded until 1130 (Reaney 1943). It is a very attenuated village with development along several roads, as well as along the original Nene frontage. Most of the northern part is relatively modern and it appears that the church was once quite isolated.

The hamlet of Gorefield meaning 'fen field' arose along a track west from Leverington church and is part of the same civil parish. The route of this track may have originally been more direct than that of the modern road. The present parish of Parson Drove was originally part of Leverington.

The earthwork known as 'Roman Bank' within the parish (and 'Sea Bank' elsewhere) is misnamed in the former label, as it is now thought to be a medieval construction (Hall 1977). Waterlogged timbers removed from beneath the bank have been radiocarbon dated to AD 1250±40 years, which may indicate a response to documented flooding in 1251 (Hall 1996). One of the modern fields retains the name Sea Field, which may refer to 'the field next to the sea'.

Wisbech owes its existence to its situation at the point where the Well Stream joined the 'Wysbeck' the stream from which the town derived its name. Wisbech is first referenced as a grant to the abbey at Ely c1000AD from the East Anglian Bishop *Aelfwine*. The scale and nature of Saxon occupation is unknown but a manor is currently thought to have been located on the west bank of the 'Wysbeck' due to the siting there of the Old Market which is presumed to have pre-Norman origins (Pugh 1953, 240).

Periodic flooding hampered the growth of Wisbech, the most devastating example being the sea flood of 1236, the effects of which were still apparent in 1251. The Well Stream (latterly the Wisbech Canal from 1794 and now the course of the A1101) carried the main outfall of the Great Ouse, the diversion of the Great Ouse to its present course via Kings Lynn c.1300 after violent storms and the later cutting of Moreton's Leam in 1478 reduced the importance of this river to the town. The 'Wysbeck' on the other hand has now swollen into the main River Nene. These factors prevented the town from becoming one of the great English ports of the Middle Ages.

The cutting of Moreton's Leam in 1478 from Peterborough to Guyhirn improved the flow of the Nene with a consequent increase in trade: previously the Nene was prone to silting and was only navigable in small vessels. The town became a corporate borough in 1549 and by the early 18th century was becoming a major port.

4 METHODOLOGY

Nine trenches were opened by a 360° mechanical excavator using a flat-bladed ditching bucket 2.0m wide, under the supervision of an archaeologist. Originally, it was proposed to excavate ten trenches, however this proved impossible due to limitations of space and the presence of trees with preservation orders in the northern part of the site. The total length of the trenches was 345.5m and constitutes a 5.3% sample of the development area.

5 RESULTS

5.1 Trench 1

Trench 1 was 45m long, running N-S, and contained no archaeology. 0.3-0.35mm of very dark brownish grey sandy clay silt topsoil overlay 0.9-1.2m of homogenous pale brown sandy silt.

5.1 Trench 2

Trench 2 was 35m long, running E-W, and contained no archaeology. 0.3-0.35mm of very dark brownish grey sandy clay silt topsoil overlay 0.3-0.5m of homogenous pale brown sandy silt.

5.1 Trench 3

Trench 3 was 36m long, running NE-SW, and contained no archaeology. 0.3-0.35mm of very dark brownish grey sandy clay silt topsoil overlay 0.3-0.5m of homogenous pale brown sandy silt.

5.1 Trench 4

Trench 4 was 36.5m long, running NW-SE, and contained no archaeology. 0.3-0.35mm of very dark brownish grey sandy clay silt topsoil overlay 0.4-0.8m of homogenous pale brown sandy silt.

5.1 Trench 5

Trench 5 was 37.5 long, running E-W, and contained no archaeology. 0.3-0.35mm of very dark brownish grey sandy clay silt topsoil overlay 0.7-0.9m of homogenous pale brown sandy silt.

5.1 Trench 6

Trench 6 was 38.5m long, running N-S, and contained no archaeology. 0.3-0.35mm of very dark brownish grey sandy clay silt topsoil overlay 0.4-0.6m of homogenous pale brown sandy silt.

5.1 Trench 7

Trench 7 was 40m long, running N-S, and contained no archaeology. 0.3-0.35mm of very dark brownish grey sandy clay silt topsoil overlay 0.6-1.0m of homogenous pale brown sandy silt.

5.1 Trench 8

Trench 8 was 37m long, running E-W, and contained no archaeology. 0.3-0.35m of very dark brownish grey sandy clay silt topsoil overlay 0.7-0.9m of homogenous pale brown sandy silt.

5.1 Trench 9

Trench 9 was 40m long, running N-S, and contained no archaeology. 0.3-0.35m of very dark brownish grey sandy clay silt topsoil overlay 0.3-0.6m of homogenous pale brown sandy silt.

6 DISCUSSION

Given the location of the site on the seaward side of the medieval flood defence known as 'Roman Bank', it is not surprising to find a substantial, seemingly homogenous layer of clay sandy silt overlying the natural Terrington Beds. This is probably the result of decades, if not centuries of inundation, which would have constantly reworked the existing silts, producing the undifferentiated deposit that was observed in every trench.

The absence of any stray finds from within the reworked silt might indicate that there was limited or no utilisation of this marginal land beyond the flood defences, since it was probably covered with water on numerous occasions each year, not necessarily in a predictable manner.

7 CONCLUSIONS

The objective of the project was to establish the character, date, state of preservation and extent of any archaeological remains within the site in advance of development. The evaluation has been successful in these aims.

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The brief for archaeological works was written by Kasia Gdaniec, CAPCA.

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