
Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society

(incorporating the Cambs and Hunts Archaeological Society)

Volume XCII
for 2003



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Summaries of papers presented at the Spring Conference

9 March 2001, Lady Mitchell Hall, Cambridge: *Ely – archaeology, architecture, and historical perspectives*

THE CONDUIT: *local history and archaeology organisations and events*

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**Volume XCII
for 2003**

Editor Alison Taylor

Published by the Cambridge Antiquarian Society 2003

ISSN 0309-3606

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Contents

An Iron Age and Romano-British settlement at Prickwillow Road, Ely, Cambridgeshire: Excavations 1999–2000 Rob Atkins and Andy Mudd	5
A Late Migration/Final Phase cemetery at Water Lane, Melbourn Holly Duncan, Corinne Duhig and Mark Phillips	57
A medieval and post-medieval street frontage: Investigations at Forehill, Ely Mary Alexander	135
Conservators of the River Cam, 1702–2002 Michael Chisholm	183
Sir Robert Cotton and the Round Hill, Conington Christopher Taylor	201
Fieldwork in Cambridgeshire 2002	215
Summaries of papers presented at the Spring Conference 8 March 2003, Lady Mitchell Hall, Cambridge: <i>Cambridgeshire, a land of plenty</i>	225
<i>Index</i>	229
Abbreviations	236
THE CONDUIT: local history and archaeology organisations, societies and events	237

Editorial

These Proceedings have a more strongly archaeological bias than normal, though still reflecting only a minute portion of archaeological discoveries in Cambridgeshire, as the 'Fieldwork' section makes clear. This bias does mean we can afford a very substantial volume, because the reports attract grant-aid, but rest assured that there is no intention to ignore local history and architecture in the future. 'Fieldwork in Cambridgeshire 2002' was in itself rather problematic this year, as the County Council decided they could neither grant-aid it as in previous years nor supply data in a publishable format. With help from the excavating units and a County Council list we think we have constructed a reasonable record, but are aware there could be gaps.

Including *Conduit* as part of the *Proceedings* was well received last year, and was far cheaper than separate publications, so we have continued with this format, which was only possible thanks to considerable work by Sue Oosthuizen and Vicky Faupel. This catalogue of future events, accounts of our Annual Conference plus the huge amount of work in Fieldwork in Cambridgeshire give an impressive picture of lively and productive work routinely carried out in Cambridgeshire by amateurs and professionals alike.

Alison Taylor

Joyce Pullinger

Last year saw the sudden death of Joyce Pullinger, who will be long remembered in Cambridge Antiquarian Society. She was active in its affairs for 26 years and, almost single-handedly over that period maintained its reputation for carrying out and publishing field research in and around Cambridge. In the days before full-time archaeologists were employed in local units she saved and published much evidence that would otherwise have been destroyed. She may well prove to have been the last of those who, troubled by the wholesale destruction of archaeological sites equipped themselves to locate, excavate and publish unrestricted by governmental restrictions or the need for formal qualifications.

She was born at Middleton St. George Co. Durham, the youngest of the four children. At the outbreak of war she went first to relations in Kelso and then to the Hunmanby Hall School. Allergies forced her to abandon a proposed career in nursing, and in 1948 she married John Pullinger, withdrawing from a course of study at the Froebel College, in Bedford.

It was only after 1960 that the care of a large family (she had eight children) allowed her to develop a career in archaeology. The skills she developed and the results she obtained show it to have been much more than a hobby or part-time interest. Her achievements fall into two periods, between 1961 and '87 in and around Cambridge and 1987-2002 in Gwent. When living at Orwell and in Cambridge she was an active member of the Society, attending courses on Landscape Studies and showing, in the University's Field Archaeology Training Excavations, a marked aptitude for fieldwork. This was especially noted in the 1960-65 excavations between Castle Street and Shelly Row inside the walled Roman settlement. Here she made a major contribution by organising around her other members of the Society and excavating the 2nd - 3rd century shrine. She found herself especially attracted to ceramics and under the guidance of Rex Hull, Curator of Colchester Museum and a leading authority on Roman pottery, she became adept at its interpretation and dating. Her outstanding achievement however came when development east of Castle Street, still within the Roman walls, took place. Here only limited research had been possible before the destruction of the existing buildings and the construction of the new. Voluntarily for over two years Joyce carried out the essential daily watching brief and the negotiating with building contractors which enabled her to locate and test-evaluate, with the help of the Society's field group, evidence of Roman occupation. The results were published by the Society in 2000 in our joint volume on Roman Cambridge. In the years before 1987 she became increasingly involved in the affairs of the Society, serving on its council and as a vice-president. She also undertook various local projects, most notably at Teversham with Pat White, and on sites to be destroyed by the M11 motorway. Nationally she was elected to the Council for British Archaeology and was active in the Roman Pottery Research Group.

When she and her husband moved in 1987 to Stroath near Chepstow there was no diminution in her concern for archaeological rescue work. She and John, whose surveying and photographic skills had long supported her, were founder-members of the (Forest of) Dean Archaeological Group, and located, excavated and arranged the scheduling and preservation of a previously unknown megalithic tomb and other sites.

As one with whom she worked closely for many years I had many opportunities to observe her ability and dedication. She continued the tradition of those who, like Cyril Fox forty years earlier, demonstrated when they came to be field archaeologists in their thirties and forties that they could contribute as much if not more than those with longer service but less local knowledge. Her achievements should long be an inspiration to those, who like the present Cambridge Archaeological Field Group, wish to carry out field research in ways and in areas beyond the remit of professional units.

John Alexander

Summaries of papers presented at the Spring Conference
8 March 2003, Lady Mitchell Hall, Cambridge

Cambridgeshire, a land of plenty

Derek Booth

Cambridgeshire in context: changing patterns of arable farming from the middle ages to the 19th century

Cambridgeshire, in terms of its landscape and agrarian history, is something of a transitional zone – in part East Anglian, in part Midland. The south and west of the county are often considered part of the champion Midlands but, although open fields were extensive here in the middle ages and often fairly ‘regular’ in nature, they often achieved this form at a relatively late date and the settlement pattern included many dispersed elements. The environmental factors which encouraged emergence of ‘champion’ landscapes were present, but in muted form. In the southeast of the county, on the clay plateau extending into East Anglia, rather different agrarian and environmental factors encouraged development of a more dispersed pattern of settlement, associated with ‘irregular’ open fields and enclosures. The Fens remained a world apart, exploited amongst other things for thatching materials, litter, fodder and grazing, with arable farming restricted to the various ‘islands’.

In the 15th, 16th and 17th centuries arable land use declined on some of the clay soils in the county and pasture expanded. But during the ‘agricultural revolution’ the county followed an East Anglian rather than a Midland path. As the arable open fields of Northamptonshire, Leicestershire, and north Buckinghamshire were steadily laid to grass, Cambridgeshire remained a largely arable county: evidence of ridge and furrow – open field plough ridges preserved under pasture – is thus comparatively rare, and concentrated towards the west. Enclosure, and new crops and rotations, transformed farming on the light chalk soils in the south of the county, while the claylands in the south east – like those of Suffolk and Norfolk – became intensively arable as underdrainage came into widespread use: much of the old-enclosed field pattern was ‘rationalised’ and many hedges were realigned or removed. Above all, from the early 19th century the drainage of the fens was steadily improved, and arable acreage expanded.

All this was part of a wider transformation in the geography of English agriculture. In the course of the ‘agricultural revolution’ period the complex mosaic of farming regions which had characterised early modern England was broken down, and was replaced by a new and simpler pattern, similar in many ways to that which exists today. Arable farming was increasingly concentrated in the east of England, pasture in the Midlands and west, a development with important consequences for agricultural productivity.

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Transport and the rural economy since 1750

Commercial agriculture depends on distribution and marketing arrangements, regionally, nationally and internationally. In 1750, at least half of Cambridgeshire’s produce was consumed outside the county, with London and the towns of Yorkshire and the North-East exerting the major demand. The 18th century saw major improvements in the county’s transport infrastructure, especially its road network: most main roads had been turnpiked by 1770, and Parliamentary Enclosure led to a dramatic redrawing of the local road network by 1830. River improvement was slower and less certain, and transport tended to take second place to the interests of fen drainage, and the improvement of the Ouse and Nene outfalls, although helping coastal shipping (and contributing greatly to the prosperity of Wisbech and Lynn), had unforeseen consequences on the upper reaches of the rivers.

Unfortunately, analysis of traffic patterns is fraught with problems. Coastal shipping is relatively easy, as Port Books (and, from the 1820s, published Shipping Returns in the local press) list vessels, destinations or points of origin, and cargoes carried. The voluminous records of Turnpike Trustees and Navigation Commissioners, however, were accounting rather

than commercial records: total receipts were all that mattered and except on rare occasions the nature of road and river traffic – and their relative shares of the market – remain elusive.

Between 1845 and 1880, the railways took over virtually all long-distance agricultural traffic (although waterways and roads remained important for local collection), and also meant a widening of markets for the region's farmers, especially the new ability to supply the Midlands and the North-West, which had been inaccessible by water. Mills, maltings and cattle markets moved to railside locations, and the marshalling yards at March (supplemented by the Whitemoor complex) became the nerve centres of East Anglian freight, a role they retained until the 1980s. Fruit and market gardening gained especially, with fast transit times and the provision of specialised rolling stock. Additionally, the railways made possible the expansion of the extractive industries (cement in South Cambridgeshire, and brick-making at Whittlesey and Fletton) from 1880 onwards.

Effectively monopoly providers in 1914, the railways were slow to adjust to changed circumstances between the wars. The lorry (whether steam or motor) offered cheaper rates and the ability to deliver directly from farm to consumer. Consequently, the most profitable traffic had been creamed-off by 1939 (witnessed by the very large number of Fenland-based road hauliers), although both railways and waterways benefited from the post-1925 expansion of sugar beet production, supplying the new factories at Ely and Wisingson.

Since the 1950s, agriculture has become almost exclusively road-orientated, helped by the newly-metalled Fenland roads that resulted from the second world war, construction of the motorway and dual-carriageway trunk road networks and the demands of supermarket chains (and their suppliers) for 'just-in-time' deliveries that the roads can offer but the railways (so far) have found difficult to achieve.

Tony Kirby
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Nuts, bones, pots and stones – the ingredients of prehistoric Cambridgeshire

Every now and then, when the light is just right, the prehistoric landscape can be seen breaking through Cambridgeshire's thick historical blanket, and as its flat fields sprout ancient earthworks we are reminded of a different topography that was once inhabited by a different people. Strange things made and used at the time when these earthworks were being constructed are regularly brought to the surface by ploughing and it is their very difference that makes them stand out against the debris of more recent times.

Over the past couple of decades, large parts of

Cambridgeshire have been developed (housing, quarries etc) and planning laws have often required the developers to fund archaeological investigations before they start work. As a result, the scale of development has to an extent been equalled by the scale of excavation leading to vast tracts of Cambridgeshire's buried landscape being opened for investigation. The sheer size of the projects has brought about a particular way of thinking, which places an emphasis upon understanding how particular spaces came to be transformed or forgotten over time. At quarry sites in particular, the historical blanket has been lifted and archaeologists have been able to visit the spaces once frequented by prehistoric peoples. Pits, houses, burials, boundaries and monuments have been found in relationship to each other illustrating complex histories spanning broad periods of time. These complex histories can be related to different kinds of inhabitation of these spaces. For instance, a place to stop and camp in the late Neolithic may be just a small part of a large fieldsystem by the Middle Bronze Age.

Nuts, bones, pots and stones – the ingredients of prehistoric Cambridgeshire described some of these spaces using quarry sites located along the Welland, Nene and Ouse valleys. This process involved interpretation of how things were made, how they were used, how they came to be incorporated into the landscape, and ultimately, what this might tell us about being prehistoric.

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Designs on the Black Fens, 1000–2000

During the second millennium, the Black Fens were seized on repeatedly by developers. Successive schemes revealed contemporary demands in the surrounding country. At one time and another, the principal proponents were either outsiders or local. Most projects entailed investment in engineering; but physical geographic impediments proved ever more frustrating.

From the beginning of the millennium summer pastures were major assets, attracting herds from both marshland and uplands. Manors and monasteries progressively asserted themselves over the pastures. The abbeys exploited the fisheries too and sponsored local schemes of drainage for arable. Both for draining and for transporting produce from or across the Fens, canals large and small were cut during the middle ages; but development seems to have flagged with national economic contraction in the 14th century.

Rising Tudor population prompted new efforts to control flooding, both locally and, sponsored by metropolitan investors responding to urban markets, at regional scale. The first major schemes, at the southern limits of the silt fens, were superseded by the Bedford project for draining the entire Great Level.

The latter underwent two phases: intended originally to secure pasture, by 1649 it was for the even more ambitious purpose of creating arable. Huge drains and fields were scored across the mire. Local resistance was quelled but dreams of vast model estates faded as national growth slackened again and even avid local farmers lost control of first their soil and then the rivers. Yet they managed to maintain agriculture and finally took up the call for 'improvement' during the inflations of 1794–1821. Regional development was resumed and the Victorians intensified and diversified production for their burgeoning cities.

By the 1900s, floods were increasing; but the second world war prompted fresh appreciation of the Fens' agricultural value. The regional system of flood defences, developed from 1937 to 1968, included diversion of water to Essex. Yet, as the millennium closed, with a market regulated for the European 'community' of suppliers, and worries about rising tides, fields were hollowed into gravel pits and covered by housing estates and industrial parks for new colonists. Catering for 'green' demand among the latter, there are even plans to restore wetlands.

Nicholas James

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Smallholdings for the unemployed in inter-war Cambridgeshire: the Land Settlement Association in Cambridgeshire 1935 to 1982

During the 1930s two estates of smallholdings were created in Cambridgeshire by the Land Settlement Association (LSA) for unemployed men, some of whom were coal miners from the North of England. These were at Fen Drayton where 54 holdings were created on 302 acres of land and at Great Abington where 62 holdings were created on 686 acres. Development started at Fen Drayton in December 1935 and at Great Abington in August 1936. In September 1939 the scheme for unemployed men was halted and, instead, men with agricultural experience were let holdings in order to maximise food production as part of the war effort. In 1948 the LSA became part of statutory smallholdings policy, with the same aim as the County Council statutory smallholding scheme, to provide the 'first rung on the farming ladder' for those with agricultural experience. After a turbulent post war history, including two Government Committees of Enquiry, the scheme was wound up in 1982.

The LSA's original plan was to settle a few hundred men on estates of agricultural smallholdings based on horticulture, pigs and chickens. In May 1935 the LSA became the main agent for rapidly extending the scheme as part of the Government's Special Areas policy. It was under this policy that the estates at Fen Drayton and Great Abington were established. By the outbreak of war 1100 small holdings created on 21 estates, in total covered 11,063 acres nationwide. 1728

men had been moved to the estates as trainees, together with perhaps 6500 others, including wives and children. For about half it was not a success, but at the outbreak of war 850 men remained (400 as tenants). Though only two estates were established in Cambridgeshire eight more were established in neighbouring counties.

The creation of these estates, this extraordinary transfer of men both geographically hundreds of miles and between industrial sectors, raises themes more familiar elsewhere in the world than in rural England: 'Back to the land', land reform and the creation of small farms. The LSA was not, however, a response to spontaneous demands for land. It was promoted by those who believe that post-industrial society in the UK meant a permanent surplus of men from heavy engineering occupations, coal miners, shipyard workers and engineers. The only alternative to permanent unemployment and perhaps social unrest was a return to the land.

The County Council statutory smallholdings scheme created isolated holdings, as demand arose. The LSA believed that smallholdings could succeed if they were established in estates (also referred to as colonies or groups) focused on a central farm, to which the settlers were linked by a system of compulsory cooperation.

The experience of the Land Settlement Association estates provides insights for those today that see the creation of smallholdings as a means of intensifying agriculture, re-populating the countryside or as the basis for a utopian ideal.

Peter Clarke

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Chivers and Son: fruit farmers and manufacturers of preserves

Fen-edge Cambridgeshire survived the agricultural cereal depressions of the 19th century by falling back on its traditional fruit-growing and market gardening skills. The Chivers family exploited this niche.

By 1870 Stephen Chivers, dissatisfied with the vagaries of northern market prices, opened a wholesale depot in Bradford. This was run by his sons, William, 18 and John, 13, who were quick to realise their principal customers were jam-makers. A trial batch was made in a disused stable abutting an Impington barn in 1873. In 1875 this successful enterprise was transferred to a purpose built factory adjacent to Histon station. Except for stone jars, parchment and string they were self sufficient, Stephen's 700 acres (employing 45 men and boys) supplying the fruit.

In 1885 seasonal production was abandoned, when new products such as marmalade, jellies, lemon curd, custard powder and Christmas puddings were introduced. Additional soft fruit purchased locally and citrus from Spain enabled the company to employ 440 people by 1893. Industrial jam making was new. Backup departments rapidly evolved. Under the chief en-

gineer Charles Lack many tasks were mechanised, and Chivers was probably the first firm in Britain to generate their own electricity. Their greatest technological leap came with the new field of canning. Reports from America had been impressive, so Charles Lack went there to investigate. He saw the potential, and encouraged Chivers to invest in the first large-scale bottling and canning facility in Europe. Bottling began in 1980, canning in 1983.

In the next forty years employment at Chivers increased tenfold, with product diversification and innovative advertising. By 1939 they farmed 8000 acres and employed 4000, with back-up departments employing engineers, builders, blacksmiths, coopers, electricians, mechanics, coach-builders, chemists, artists and salesmen.

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Proceedings Volume XCII, 2003

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Contents

An Iron Age and Romano-British settlement at Prickwillow Road, Ely, Cambridgeshire: Excavations 1999–2000 Rob Atkins and Andy Mudd	5
A Late Migration/Final Phase cemetery at Water Lane, Melbourn Holly Duncan, Corinne Duhig and Mark Phillips	57
A medieval and post-medieval street frontage: Investigations at Forehill, Ely Mary Alexander	135
Conservators of the River Cam, 1702–2002 Michael Chisholm	183
Sir Robert Cotton and the Round Hill, Conington Christopher Taylor	201
Fieldwork in Cambridgeshire 2002	215
Summaries of papers presented at the Spring Conference 8 March 2003, Lady Mitchell Hall, Cambridge: <i>Cambridgeshire</i>	225
<i>Index</i>	229
<i>Abbreviations</i>	236
THE CONDUIT: local history and archaeology organisations, societies and events	237