
Review: Borderlands
The Archaeology of the Addenbrooke's Environs, South Cambridge
by Christopher Evans, with Duncan Mackay and Leo Webley

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Cambridge, Cambridge Archaeological Unit Landscapes Archives: New Archaeologies of the Cambridge Region (1). 2008. 212pp, 108 black & white figures, some colour plates, 50 tables. ISBN 978-0-9544824-7-3 pb (£25)

Published in 2008, *Borderlands* heralded the analysis of multi-period settlement evidence recovered from a series of major planning related investigation campaigns in southern Cambridgeshire. Though widely reviewed in national journals and magazines at that time, this book on Cambridge's local archaeology had unfortunately slipped through the PCAS review section, an oversight that required redress given the valuable contribution that it has made to regional research.

With a primary focus on the expansion area of Addenbrooke's Hospital's Biomedical Campus since 2000, the results of wider landscape evaluations in the four allocated areas for the city's housing growth: the Cambridge Southern Fringe sites of Clay Farm, Glebe Farm, the Bell School and Trumpington Meadows along with a number of other development-led investigations, provided the opportunity to illustrate in some detail land use dating from the later Bronze Age through to the Saxon period, though with a focus on the dominant later Iron Age and Roman settlement patterns. As will be described, this seminal analysis of the archaeology of the Addenbrooke's environs constitutes an important reference in British archaeology for investigators of clay landscapes, of field methods and of the historiography of the 'archaeologies' of southern Cambridgeshire.

Divided into four chapters, the first depicts the history of local research and describes the endeavours of two former curators of the Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Cambridge. *Borderlands'* contextual setting uses Sir Cyril Fox's doctoral thesis, *The Archaeology of the Cambridge Region*, published in 1923, whose careful work remains widely used by local researchers to this day. Fox amassed and plotted the distribution of artefact collections, monuments and sites and discussed them, among other things, in terms of their physiographic setting, the implications of which led him to divide his 44 square mile study area (centred

on Cambridge) into 'primary settlement' or 'secondary settlement' areas: fertile, free-draining light soils on porous substrates with flowing water courses for the former, densely wooded clay and chalk plains, with large areas of drift till deposits for the latter. Centred on the Cambridge Southern Fringe, the investigation results gained through excavation and large landscape evaluation campaigns allowed Evans, Mackay and Webley to test Fox's geographic settlement determinism in roughly the same area and, furthermore, to re-appraise his northern limit of the distinctive late Iron Age Aylesford-Swarling ('Belgic') zone, using the large evidence base acquired over the last 85 years of investigation. While Fox's distribution of settlements, and his conclusion that few sites would ever be found on the heavy clay soils, can now be significantly challenged in the light of current archaeological evidence gained mainly through planning-related excavation, we find that the plotting of subsequent late Iron Age material culture, notably 'prestige goods', does not much deviate from that published in 1923. Curator Mary Cra'ster's excavations at the then 'New' Addenbrooke's Hospital in the 1960s are also described, and although conducted very much under rescue conditions the results of her investigation of an enclosed late Iron Age settlement shaped an understanding of the character of local pre-Roman settlement that remained in place and unchallenged until recently.

Chapter 2, the largest in the book, presents the evidence from the main excavations at Addenbrooke's: the three-hectare excavation of the 'Hutchison Site'. Here the main occupation phases, the material culture, environmental and economic evidence is described from features and deposits dating from the late Bronze Age through to the seventh/eighth century AD. The dominant period of occupation dates from the late first century BC to the later first century AD and is characterised by an evolving arrangement of field and settlement enclosures, within some of which were rectangular buildings, laid out in respect of increasingly formalised roads; a cemetery, wells and an important new Conquest period kiln site: 11 kilns of six distinct types producing around half of the total assemblage of Late Iron Age and Romano-British pe-

riod ceramics (c. 273kg – 20,876 sherds). High levels of residual diagnostic artefacts occurring in later features serve to display the level of intensity of and, indirectly, the locations of earlier settlement. Plotting the residual material helped the authors to achieve their main objective of teasing apart the feature evidence to attempt to clarify the morphology of the settlements, ultimately assisting in “distinguishing what *The Conquest* meant in the local landscape” (p.40) – the crux of the investigation’s objectives. From the pottery evidence we learn that ‘handmade vessels’ (by which ones assumes ‘coil/slab-built’ is meant) in the kiln fabric continued to be made alongside wheel-thrown forms in the post-Conquest period, demonstrating that the Romanisation of the local traditions took a decade or more to establish – similar to evidence found at the Greenhouse Farm site near Marshall’s airport where further kilns were found just over a decade ago. Fulsome comparison of the site’s rectangular buildings, settlement axes, the cemetery evidence and the emerging road network with other sites in the vicinity of those newly examined around Addenbrooke’s – at War Ditches, Clay Farm, Vicar’s Farm and the villa site at Great Shelford – begin to define the organisation of people in the landscape, and while a re-organisation of their governance and changing cultural attitudes over time is apparent in both material repertoires and the aspect of ‘sites’, the earlier Later Bronze Age axial trends seem to persist to some degree, like a running stitch through the main ditch systems.

The Saxon evidence in this review of the book should not be overlooked: it is well developed and unexpected in its artefact repertoire, while conforming to the typical low pottery density (relative to earlier periods) common to Cambridgeshire’s Saxon period.

Spatial data and the site morphology of various sites is examined in the third chapter, where short descriptions of many later prehistoric and Romano-British sites in the environs of the Southern Fringe sites, together with those in other areas of Cambridgeshire’s chalk downs and clay plains, are discussed. Evans’ hallmark tenacity with distribution plotting of data from old and new archives is seen at its best in this chapter in which not only are the character of Conquest period settlement and burial rites discussed, but the articulation of the density of Neolithic, Bronze Age, Iron Age, Roman and Saxon occupation sites and settlements on what Fox had termed ‘secondary settlement areas’ overturns former notions of the intractability of these landscapes for much other than pasture fields and light density settlement.

Combining a suite of non-intrusive surveys (rectification of air photographs, geophysical surveys, metal detections and fieldwalking/ ploughzone artefact testing) with trenching, the Longstanton landscape evaluation (650 ha) in the strategic planning site of a proposed new (eco-)town, “Northstowe”, furnished the historic environment record with 36 new sites of significant proportions and with artefact repertoires and site characteristics that match any

site in the “primary settlement areas” of the gravel terraces and at the fen edge. The last decade saw an unprecedented increase in multi-disciplinary landscape appraisals as developers lodged numerous environmental impact assessments with their planning applications to local authorities in response to the last Government’s agenda for regional residential expansion. Mostly greenfield developments, their locations on the clay plains to the south and west of Cambridge enabled similarly unprecedented archaeological exploration of these landscapes of unknown potential, which were in full swing when new analysis of archaeological evidence on the clays in Leicestershire was published by Patrick Clay (aptly named; Clay 2002). As a consequence of the increase in evaluations, the number of new archaeological sites in South Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire districts multiplied exponentially (“today there is a lot more past”: p.7), the bulk of which will not see publication perhaps for another decade – perhaps longer given current economic circumstances. Evans and his colleagues, however, understood the value of publishing survey results - to wire this evidence into the evolving regional research framework and the cognition of archaeologists working in Cambridgeshire, and to provide the background against which detailed excavation evidence can be compared and contrasted. Using the excavation evidence as templates for site definition along with air photo-mapped cropmark sites, evaluation survey site densities have been modelled and intervals between sites, mainly of Iron Age and Roman date, have emerged: 2.8 sites per sq km for the Iron Age and 1.9 for the Roman (see table 3.2 and pp.181ff), or at intervals between 300m and 500m. These are then viewed against Fox’s distribution maps and other valuable published analyses (e.g. Kirby and Oosthuizen 2000), but regrettably did not consider wider evidence of the up-to-date county Historic Environment Record – a minor criticism. That aside, it is as plain as the clay is hard to excavate that prehistoric to Saxon settlement occurred in high densities on all geological types in the Cambridge region, and it remains for future work to continue to commit to the study of the environmental and economic base of these sites to compare with those in the Great Ouse and Cam river valleys: to decipher their trading, resources and socio-political relationships to each other.

The ultimate chapter discusses evidence of the earliest settlement period evident in the survey area and depicts the presence and development of large, almost monumental, Middle Bronze Age ditched enclosures in the environs of Addenbrooke’s and the Southern Fringe area. Contemporary field systems at Clay Farm to the west of Addenbrooke’s endured into the Iron Age, when began the process of their modification and re-orientation to fit a new model of landscape organisation, peaking in the period before and after the Roman Conquest. What is interesting in this study of land-use progression is that Evans *et al*’s research endorses Fox’s conclusions of 1923, which seem to remain true today: that the limit of the

Aylesford-Swarling 'culture' seems to have been the Cambridge area. This is, again, in the process of being tested, as the major excavations in the growth development areas of Trumpington Meadows, just east of the River Cam, and Clay Farm (between Trumpington and the Addenbrooke's campus) are currently in progress. What has been learned from the survey methodology, and is propounded in this last section of the book, is that a determined effort to consistently interrogate soils of the plough zone, test cropmark and geophysical evidence, build phased land-use/site base plans based on detailed artefact studies will assist in focusing robust research agenda for future excavations that will enable the elucidation of the complexity of these past landscapes to emerge.

Borderlands is a well illustrated book, with clear, unfussy line drawings, computer graphics and photographs by the Unit's team of illustrators. These are complemented by selected reproductions of antiquarian views of the rural Cambridge landscape, air photographs of the pre-Addenbrooke's Hospital landscape showing its former short and long-term land-uses, and photos of Mary Cra'ster's 1967 investigations of the Iron Age and Roman settlement ahead of the construction of the first hospital buildings. What sets it apart from so many books of its kind is the use of insets and enlarged figure captions: departures and asides that pack the book with additional information that adds great value to the main story. Here there are short site summaries of excavations conducted long ago, and there are accounts of fairs, military occupation and biographies of archaeologists who themselves were part of the enquiry of this area. One inset carries an account of excavations of prehistoric and Roman houses and enclosures at Rectory Farm, Great Shelford, by John Alexander (and other notable Cambridge colleagues) an old friend and collaborator of Evans, to whom the book is dedicated. There is no index – lamented by this author whose copy is now beset with ribbons and tags marking key pages and passages, but that shortfall is off-set by a good array of absolute dates, most helpful for artefact chronologies and the key changes and structures within the sites (and probably kept the book at an affordable price!). The closing sentences of *Borderlands* inform us that the fieldwork projects described within it "mark a threshold in the region's practices and, certainly, today these are exciting times in archaeology". Written at some point prior to publication in 2008, we must hold that thought through these straitened times and determine to engage with these sites with the enthusiasm and sense of enquiry as that displayed in these pages by Evans, Mackay, Webley and their colleagues who contributed to the book, to add the requested nuances and make the inevitable corrections to the story that they have begun to tell.

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