

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit

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**LAND TO THE REAR OF
THE GEORGE PUBLIC HOUSE,
HIGH STREET, BUCKDEN, CAMBRIDGESHIRE**

An Archaeological Evaluation 1995

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1.0: SUMMARY

This report describes the results of an archaeological evaluation employing trial-trenching, in advance of an application for a proposed housing development on land to the rear of the George public house, High Street, Buckden, Cambridgeshire (hereinafter referred to as the study area).

Two features of possible medieval date were recorded. No datable evidence of earlier activity was observed.

2.0: INTRODUCTION

This report outlines the results of an archaeological evaluation of approximately 0.4 hectares of overgrown land located to the rear of the George public house, High Street, Buckden, Cambridgeshire (centred on NGR. SK 22830140: Fig 1). The work was undertaken in September 1995 by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit, on behalf of Dean Homes Limited.

In accordance with the guide-lines laid down in Planning Policy Guidance note 16 (November 1990), a recommendation for an archaeological evaluation was made by the County Archaeology Office of Cambridgeshire County Council in advance of a proposed housing development. The methodology of this evaluation conforms to an evaluation brief prepared by the County Archaeology Office of Cambridgeshire County Council (Austin 1995).

The purpose of the evaluation was to determine the location, extent, date, character, significance and quality of any archaeological remains which may be affected by the proposed development and to provide a basis for a series of recommendations to mitigate the impact of the development.

This report provides a detailed description of the preliminary results of trial-trenching, and a summary account of the information obtained during the preliminary desk-based assessment.

3.0: THE STUDY AREA AND ITS SETTING

The study area presently comprises an area of overgrown former orchard, containing a number of fruit trees, located to the west of the George Public House. The George is located at the junction between Church Street and High Street.

The earliest available map of the area, the enclosure map of 1813 indicates that the site was formerly divided into two plots of land, by a boundary aligned west-east. The only building recorded on these plots is The George public house, built on the Church Street frontage. The First Edition Ordnance Survey map of 1887 indicates that the George had been extended westwards along the Church Street frontage, and outbuildings had been constructed further to the rear, within the study area. These outbuildings included a malthouse to the west of the study area, shown on the Ordnance Survey map of 1901.

Although the find-spots of some artifacts of prehistoric and Roman date are recorded in the vicinity of Buckden, most of the information recorded in the Cambridgeshire Sites and Monuments Record relates to features and buildings of post-Roman date. A boat-shaped building (SMR No. 651), located just to the south of the study area, was dated to the 11th century. A number of medieval moated sites (e.g. SMR Nos. 647, 673, 534) are recorded in the area surrounding the village of Buckden. The timber-framed manor house (SMR No. 658a) is located in Church Street, to the east of the study area. It has been suggested (VCH 1932) that the village was the residence of the Bishop of Lincoln by the time of the Norman Conquest, because the manor was held in demesne at that time. The Bishop of Lincoln's Palace (SMR No. 653), is perhaps the most important survivor of the medieval village, albeit extensively re-built. The adjoining church of St. Mary (SMR No. 5073) is described in the Domesday survey of 1086, but mainly comprises a 15th century rebuild, with later additions.

The George Public House (SMR No. 674) is of brick and half-timbered construction, which was originally an early 18th century coaching inn. A brick dovecote of 17-18th century date (SMR No. 10390), located within the northern boundary of the study area, was demolished between 1926 and the present.

4.0: TRIAL TRENCHING RESULTS

A total of six trial trenches were located to sample the study area as widely as possible. This trenching totalled almost 96 square metres, amounting to nearly 2 percent of the study area. In all trenches the overburden was removed by a mechanical excavator to expose the uppermost levels of the natural subsoil. The machined surface was then hand-cleaned to define any archaeological features present, which were sampled by hand-excavation.

Recording was by means of pre-printed pro-forma recording sheets for contexts and features, supplemented by scale drawings, plans, sections, and photographs, which are all held in the archive.

Trench 1

Trench 1 measured 10 metres in length, and was aligned east-west (Fig. 1). The uppermost horizon of the subsoil (1002), revealed by hand cleaning of the base of the machined trench, was a light orange/brown sandy clay, containing abundant fragments of natural flint. This was sealed by a layer of light brown silt with clay (1001). Evident to a depth of 0.44m, layer 1001 contained occasional sub-rounded stones and fragments of broken brick. This in turn was sealed by a layer of dark brown topsoil at a depth of 0.30m.

Interpretation

No finds were recovered, and no features of archaeological interest were evident in Trench 1.

Trench 2

Trench 2 measured 10m in length and was aligned north-south (Fig 1). The uppermost horizon of the subsoil (2002), was a light orange/brown sandy clay, containing fragments of natural flint. This was sealed by a layer of light brown silt with clay (2001) evident to a depth of 0.28m. The dark brown topsoil in Trench 2 measured approximately 0.30m deep.

Interpretation

No finds were recovered, and no features of archaeological interest were evident in Trench 2.

Trench 3

Trench 3 measured 10m in length and was aligned north-south. The uppermost subsoil horizon was a light orange/brown sandy clay, containing fragments of natural flint. This was cut by a shallow linear feature (F300), with steep sides and a flat base. Measuring approximately 0.52m wide and 0.18m deep, Feature F300 appeared to be filled and sealed by layer 3001. Pottery and bone were recovered from the fill F300. Located at the southern end of Trench 3 was a shallow circular feature (F301), approximately 0.55m across and 0.14m deep, with steep sides and a flat base. F301 again appeared to be filled by, and sealed by layer 3001. Evident to a depth of approximately 0.30m, layer 3001 consisted of a light brown silt with clay. This was sealed by a fine, dark brown silt at a depth of 0.33m.

Interpretation

Feature F300 may represent a former property boundary. Sherds recovered from the fill suggest a possible medieval date. The function of Feature F301 is uncertain, although it may be of a similar date to Feature F300.

Trench 4

Trench 4 measured approximately 10m in length and was aligned east-west. The orange/brown sandy clay subsoil (4002), was cut by a linear feature orientated east-west (F400). With gently sloping sides and a flat base, F400 measured approximately 0.60m in width and 0.08m deep. No finds were recovered from this feature. Filling and sealing Feature F400, was a layer of light brown silt with clay (4001), evident to a depth of 0.34m. This contained two sherds of undated grey ware pottery. The dark brown topsoil in Trench 4 measured approximately 0.30m deep.

Interpretation

The two body sherds of 'grey ware pottery are difficult to date, although may possibly be medieval or Roman. The orientation of Feature F400 suggests it may relate to a former property boundary.

Trench 5

Trench 5 measured 10.5m in length and was aligned north-south. The uppermost subsoil horizon (5004), was a light orange/brown, compact sandy clay, containing fragments of natural flint. This was cut by a linear feature F500, aligned northwest-southeast. With steep sides and a rounded base, Feature F500 measured approximately 0.80m in width and 0.26m in depth. The compact, medium brown, silt clay fill (5002) of Feature F500 contained no datable evidence. This was sealed by a layer of medium brown silt with clay (5001), which contained fragments of red brick for a depth of 0.28m. A layer of large rounded cobbles (5003), apparent in the northern end of the trench rested on a thin layer of gravel (5005), both of which overlay Layer 5001. These were cut by a feature containing modern building material. Remains of a recent building were also noted in the southern end of the trench.

Interpretation

Feature F500 has an undetermined date, although its northwest-southeast alignment suggests it may pre-date medieval boundary plots. The layer of cobbles (5003) are almost certainly post-medieval in origin. A sondage measuring 0.50m by 0.60m was cut through F500 into the natural subsoil, showing that the natural sandy clay (5004), remained consistent for at least a further 0.40m.

Trench 6

Trench 6 measured 9.5m in length and was orientated east-west. The trench was located slightly to the south of its original intended location, and was cut in a Z shape to avoid nearby trees. The uppermost horizon of the subsoil (6002), was a light orange/brown sandy clay, which was overlain by a medium brown, silt with clay (6001), evident to a depth of 0.36m. The topsoil in Trench 6 was a fine dark brown silt, evident to a depth of 0.30m.

Interpretation

No finds were recovered, and no features of archaeological interest were evident in Trench 6.

5.0: THE FINDS by Lynne Bevan

The finds comprise two small flakes of light brown pebble flint from Layer 2001 and Feature F300 respectively. Five sherds of medieval pottery were recovered, one from layer 2001 and four from Feature F300. The sherd from Layer 2001 was a body sherd from a cooking pot of a coarse reduced fabric. The sherds from Feature F300 included a base sherd of sandy orange fabric from a partially green-glazed vessel, and three fragments of a reduced shell tempered ware. Feature F400 produced two abraded body sherds of possible Roman pottery, having a reduced grey fabric.

6.0: DISCUSSION

A linear feature (F500) is the only feature which may represent activity pre-dating the medieval period, however, the origin of this feature cannot be determined due to the lack of artifacts recovered. The only medieval activity identified, appears to be a possible boundary ditch (F300), identified in Trench 3, which contained four sherds of medieval pottery. Feature F300 appears to correspond to a boundary on the 1901 Ordnance Survey map, and may be a continuation of an original medieval property boundary. It seems likely that the linear feature F400 is another boundary ditch, and may have a medieval origin similar to Feature F300. Trenches 1, 2 and 6 showed little archaeological potential.

Medieval settlements are often pre-dated by earlier settlements lying on the periphery of the main focus of occupation. No such activity was identified by this evaluation, however future work in other areas of Buckden may provide a more complete picture of past activity in the vicinity. The slight evidence of medieval ditches could represent the back-plots of properties on the main road (former A1) street frontage to the east.

7.0 IMPLICATIONS AND PROPOSALS

Due to the paucity of datable artifacts and the largely negative results produced by trial-trenching, further detailed archaeological investigation within the study area may not be worthwhile.

8.0: ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project was commissioned by Dean Homes Limited. The fieldwork was monitored for BUFAU by Peter Leach and by Bob Sydes, for Cambridgeshire County Council. The trial-trenching was supervised by Richard Cuttler with the assistance of Bob Burrows. The report was edited by Peter Leach and the drawing was prepared by Richard Cuttler. The staff of Huntingdonshire Record Office are thanked for their assistance, and Louise Austin is thanked for help with the Cambridgeshire County Sites and Monuments Record consultation.

9.0: REFERENCE

VCH 1932. Huntingdonshire, Vol 2.

MAP SOURCES

Huntingdonshire Record Office, Huntingdon

Buckden Enclosure plan, 1813.

Ordnance Survey 25 inch/mile, 1887

Ordnance Survey 25 inch/mile, 1901

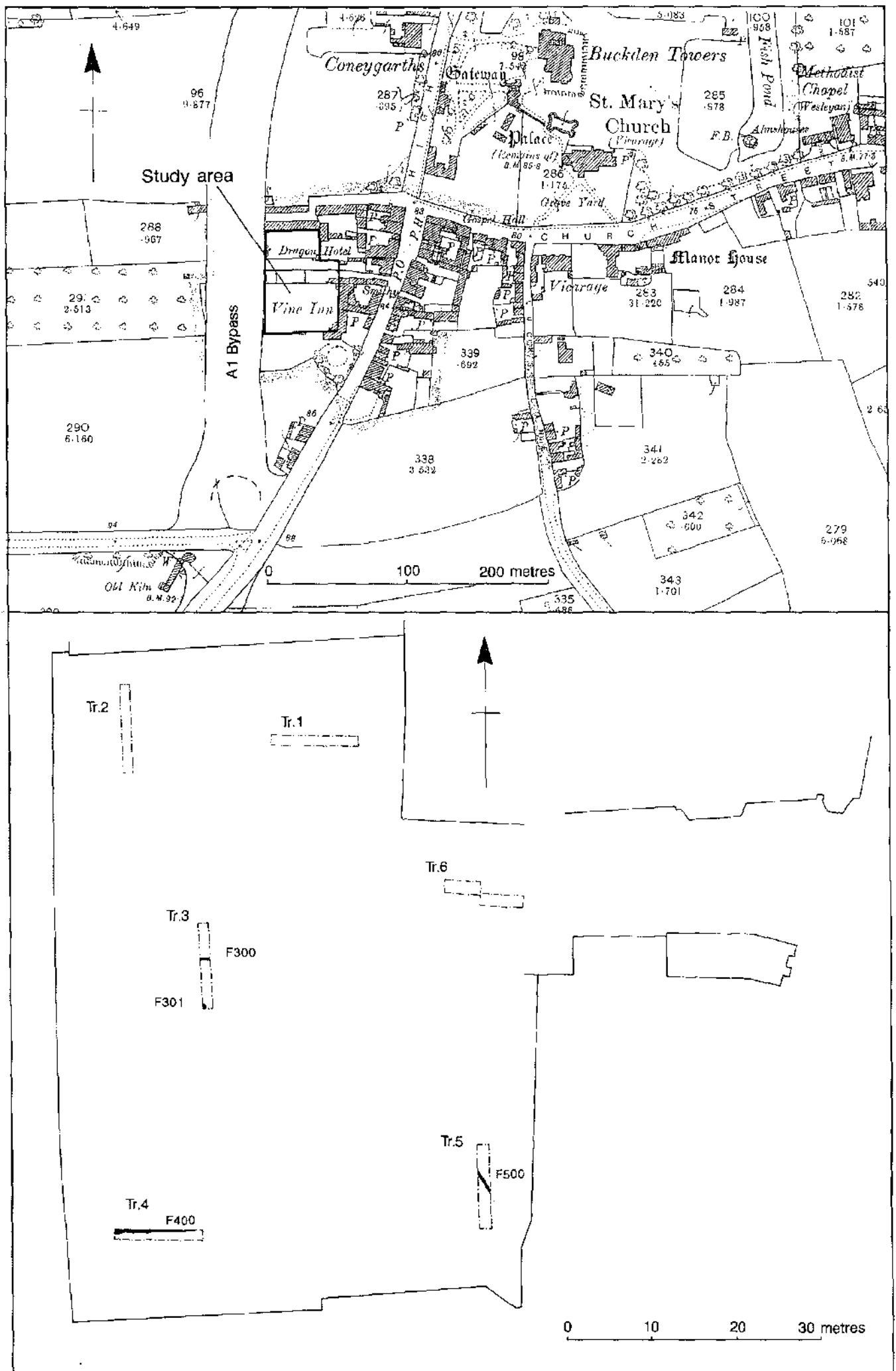


Figure 1