

Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service Monitoring Report

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SMR-HGW014

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Upton Suffolk Farms, Herringswell

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Summary

Archaeological monitoring was required in conjunction with this project, the purpose of which was to lay high voltage electricity cables below ground. The cables were replacements for existing overhead lines and the route of the trenches approximately followed the existing line configuration.

The main contractors were EDF energy (John Reynolds) who were funding the monitoring process. Work was carried out under the direction of Ian Melville and Lena McCabe of Upton Suffolk Farms representing the landowners. Both parties were informed of the need for protection and possible intervention for the retrieval of archaeological information. Work commenced on 24th January 2006, it was estimated that it would require three days to complete the trench excavation. Two further visits were made to the site with trenching reaching completion on the 27th of January

The priorities of the archaeological monitoring were to ensure the protection of two scheduled barrows and to observe and record any additional archaeological information which may be revealed. Monitoring was particularly recommended by English Heritage and Suffolk County Council in view of the potential for barrow clusters.

Introduction

The site area falls within two arable farm fields less than 0.5km. south-west of the small village of Herringswell. This place-name has been interpreted as old English origin: 'the well or spring of the Hyrningas (the people dwelling at the corner or angle)'. The site is part of The Breckland Environmentally Sensitive Area designated by MAFF in 1988 within an area known to hold a dense distribution of probable Bronze Age barrows and ring ditches. The characteristically dry and sandy landscape has also seen specialised use in the form of sheep pasturing and rabbit warrening. More recently large areas have also been used as coniferous tree plantations which have often served to preserve earthworks relating to the former heathland landscape

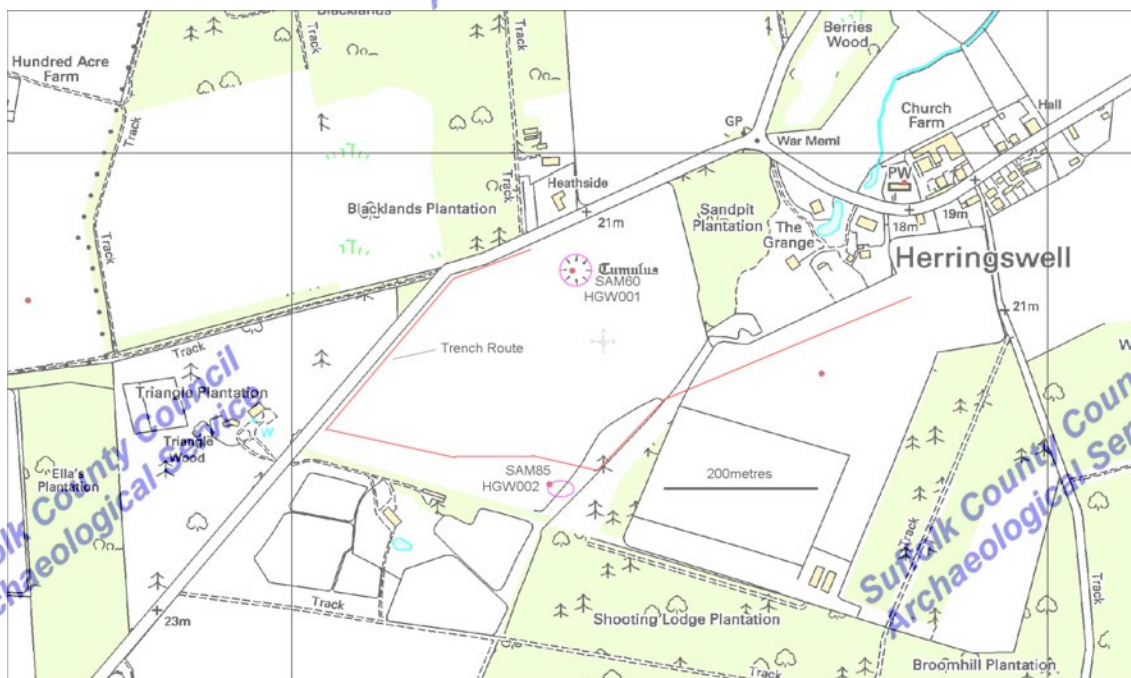
(Sussams, 1996). The scheduled barrows (SAM60/HGW001 and SAM85/HGW002), lie in a field centred on TL712697.

Methodology

The trench measured a total length of just over 1.2km. and was started from a point around 30metres to the west of barrow SAM66. From here the trench followed the line of the road south-west before turning to a south-easterly direction, towards barrow SAM85 around 50metres before the corner of the field. After a further 200metres the trench turned to more easterly direction and passed the barrow, leaving a clearance of 22metres. The final leg of the trench begun at a point just before the tree-line at the south-west edge of the field and continued north-east through a wooded area into the next field and ended around 100metres past The Grange.

The contractors had originally planned to excavate using a standard 180° digger with a toothless trenching bucket. However, within a few metres of starting it became clear that the exceptionally light and powdery sand would not hold firm long enough for any work to be carried out. The potential for collapse was further increased because the soil was exceptionally dry for January, even for the Breckland area. Work was abandoned until the following day with the arrival of a specialised pipe and cable laying machine. This equipment excavated a narrow 0.30m. wide trench while simultaneously laying the cable 1.2m. deep and backfilling in a single operation. Unfortunately this created virtually no visibility, in archaeological terms; it was therefore not possible to observe any additional information for this location.

Soil types and depths were recorded where larger areas were dug for the periodic jointing of the cables. The limited amount of up-cast soil which occurred was also inspected, but failed to produce any archaeological finds.



Conclusions

The soil profiles for this area were very variable, with around 0.20-0.30m. of top or plough-soil to the north, while to the south the depths were far more erratic from between 0.20-0.50m.. This is probably due to the wooded margins observed to the south of the site. The top-soil was very light loamy sand, pale brown in colour with few stones. The sub-soil was of mixed sands, banded in places and of light yellow to orange colours. The proportion of gravel and stone increased to the south of the site area.

The cable laying operation did not cause any damage or threat to the known archaeological features. No further archaeological features or material was observed during the completion of this project. There is some potential for site disturbance as a result of current and continuing use as an equestrian cross-country course.

References

Sussams, K., 1996 *The Breckland Archaeological Survey*, Suffolk County Council, Ipswich.

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