

RAF Lakenheath 06 End Approach Lighting Project ERL 227

Archaeological Monitoring Report

SCCAS Report No. 2012/118

Client: Defence Infrastructure Organisation

Author: Simon Cass

August 2012

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HER Information

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Any opinions expressed in this report about the need for further archaeological work are those of the Field Projects Team alone. Ultimately the need for further work will be determined by the Local Planning Authority and its Archaeological Advisors when a planning application is registered. Suffolk County Council's archaeological contracting services cannot accept responsibility for inconvenience caused to the clients should the Planning Authority take a different view to that expressed in the report.

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Summary

Visits were made over eight days to observe the foundations for new runway approach lights at the south-west end of RAF Lakenheath's main runway. The excavated areas for five foundations were observed, as well as a length of the new electricity cable trench route, and the exposed stratigraphy was recorded by measured sketches and short context descriptions. A known dried peat deposit was encountered in most of the footings, but natural geology was only encountered in one footing at the south-west extent of the new lights.

1. Introduction and archaeological background

As part of the ongoing engineering and improvement/maintenance works being carried out at RAF Lakenheath, a programme of replacement of the runway approach lights at the south-western end of Runway 06 was undertaken in July-August 2012. The work area passes through an area of archaeological interest, around part of the airfield known to intersect with a deposit of dried peat around Caudle Common.

Several finds and deposits of archaeological importance have been encountered and recorded at RAF Lakenheath, most recently during an extension to the sewage treatment works a short distance to the south-east of the approach lights which revealed deposits of Roman and Saxon date, linked to the occupation of this area during both periods.

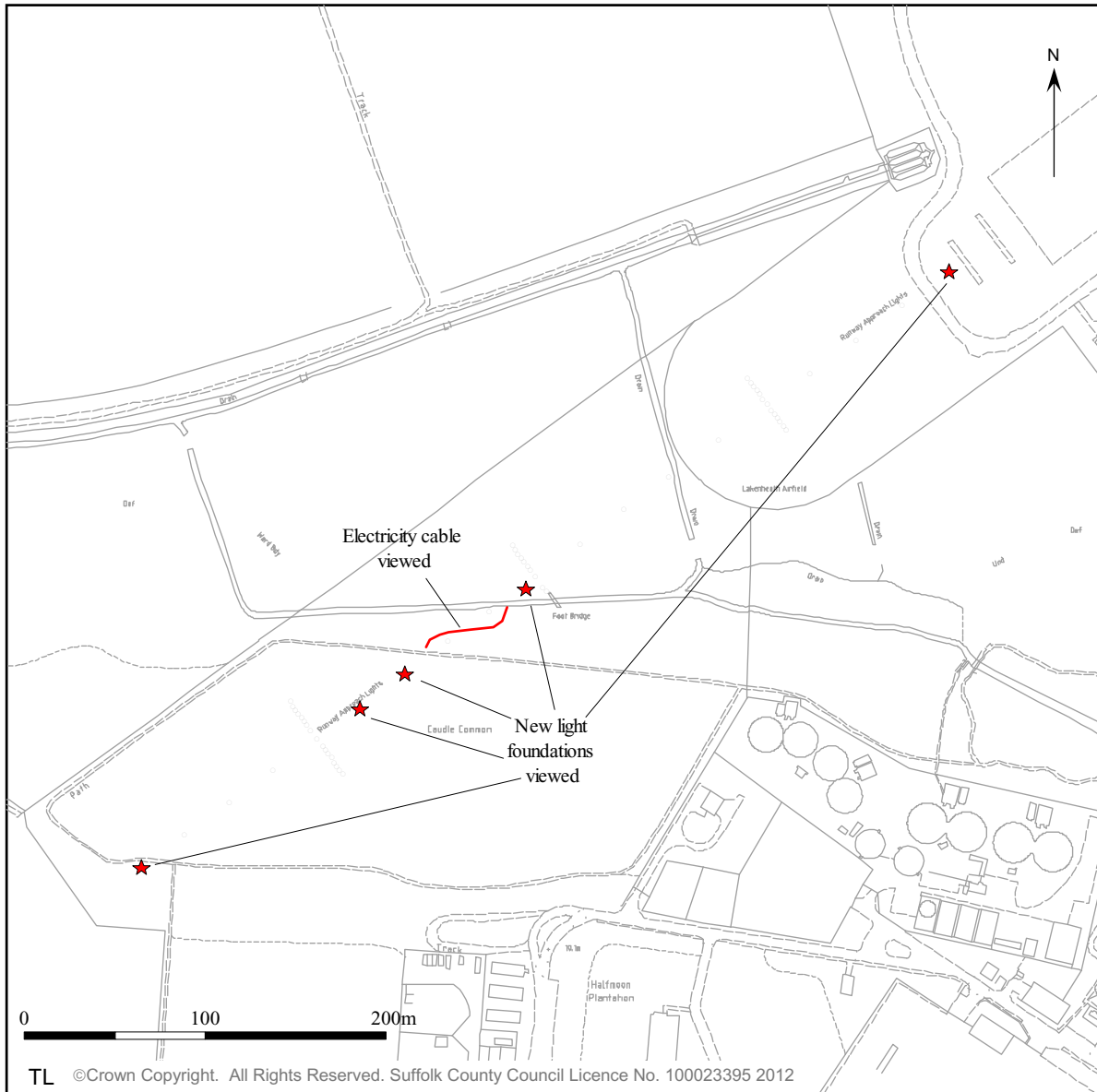
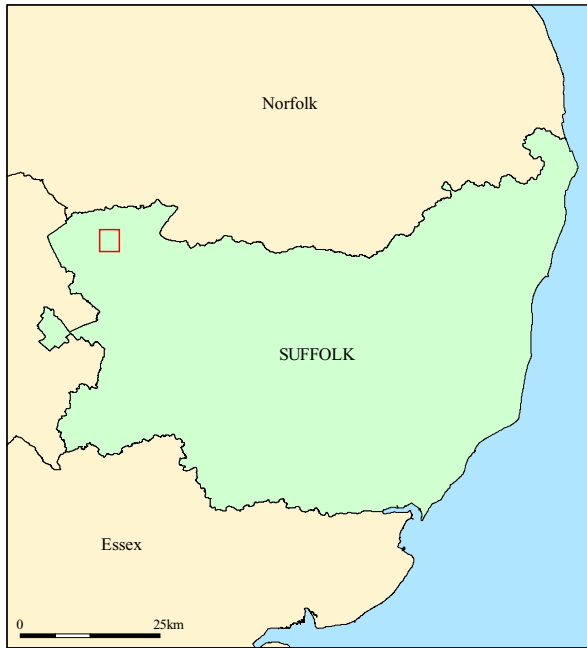


Figure 1. Site location map, showing observed footings (red)

2. Methodology

The site was visited regularly during the period between the 19th and 27th of July 2012 to observe the new footings for the replacement landing light arrays. The aim of the archaeological monitoring was to record any archaeological features and/or deposits that may be exposed during the groundwork phase of the works, in particular to investigate the extents of the dried peat layer known to exist in the area around Caudle Common and the end of the runway area. The locations of the excavated holes were confirmed to be as specified in the site plans and any significant stratigraphy exposed was recorded by measured sketches and detailed context descriptions. Photographs were not taken, due to the sensitive location of the site environs.

3. Results

3.1 Introduction

The areas observed and recorded were numbered according to those shown on a document already produced by VolkerFitzpatrick (Drawing no.: GIAL06/1/701 – Pit and Duct Layout), with light 30 being the south-western extent and light 11 just before the end of the tarmac runway overrun area. The stratigraphy of the individual footings observed will be provided in reversed numerical order, starting at the footing for light 30.

3.2 Observed stratigraphy

Footing 30 was a cross-shaped foundation with total measurements 4.7m wide (northwest/southeast) by 2.5m long (northeast/southwest) and the individual footing measurements were 0.8m deep x 0.7m wide. The exposed stratigraphy consisted of 0.4m of mid greyish brown sandy silt topsoil over 0.2m of mid brownish yellow silty sand subsoil. Natural mid yellow soft sands were seen at the lowest 0.2m of the footing before excavation halted.

Footings 25 and 24 were the same design as that of No. 30 above, but the stratigraphy observed consisted of approximately 0.3m of greyish brown sandy silt topsoil over 0.5m of mid brownish yellow silty sand subsoil with occasional lenses of more yellowy sand towards the base of the footing. It is possible that this deposit represents the outer boundary of the desiccated peats. It seems likely that, although not directly exposed by the excavated footings, natural geological deposits lie not too much further below the base of the footing.

A short segment of the route of the new electricity cable (between lights. 23 and 22) was observed during excavation. At this point the cable trench between lights 22-18 was already excavated and backfilled. The cable trench was 0.75m deep by 0.35m wide and the exposed stratigraphy consisted of 0.4m of mid brown silty sand topsoil over 0.35m+ of dark brown silty/organic sands – interpreted as the desiccated peat deposit known to be in this area. Natural sands were not encountered within this trench.

Footing 21 was of different design to the previous excavations - it was a rectangular footing measuring 1.5m long (southwest/northeast) by 1m wide (northwest/southeast) and encountered existing electricity cables at 0.8m below surface which halted further excavation. The exposed stratigraphy was entirely composed of soft dried peaty deposits (dark brown soft organic silts).

Footing 11 was excavated and observed during a break in flight operations due to its location immediately adjacent to the runway. It was the same pattern as footing 30, and the stratigraphy observed consisted of 0.2m dark greyish brown soft sandy silt topsoil over 0.1m of mid reddish brown soft sandy silt with occasional rounded flints – interpreted as an imported subsoil. Below this was up to 0.5m of redeposited sandy gravels (mid creamy brown silty with c. 50% gravels) which sealed the buried dried peaty deposit (just visible at base of footing). An existing poured concrete footing was discovered running through the centre of the new footing at a depth of 0.5m below the current surface level and appears to be related to either the existing approach light system or a preceding version (the currently used cables for the approach lights were sat directly above this concrete but there may have been earlier cables below).

4. Discussion

The observed stratigraphy from the footings and cable trench confirms the presence of the desiccated peat deposit and gives an example of its extent in this area of the airbase, likely to extend to the vicinity of lights 24 and 25, and deepen towards light 21 at the base of the slope down from the high ground to the south-west. The area around the runway is also shown to have a significantly disturbed profile, with the top 0.8m of soil being man-made or redeposited. This may be as a result of attempts to flatten out the runway area prior to previous runway extensions. No archaeologically relevant artefacts were recovered during the monitoring works.

5. Archive deposition

Paper and photographic archive: SCCAS Bury St Edmunds

Digital archive: SCCAS R:\Environmental Protection\Conservation\Archaeology\
Archive\Eriswell\ERL 227 Monitoring

Digital photographic archive: None

Finds and environmental archive: None

6. Acknowledgements

The fieldwork was carried out by Simon Cass and the project was managed and directed by Jo Caruth, who also provided advice during the production of the report.

The report illustrations were created by Simon Cass and the report was edited by Jo Caruth.

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