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CAM ARC Report Number 1028

An Historic Building Survey at The Old Railway Station, Stoke Ferry, Norfolk

Building Survey

Andrew Corrigan

June 2008

Cambridgeshire County Council
Environment & Community Services

Commissioned by Russen & Turner

CAM ARC Report Number 1028

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Building Survey

Andrew Corrigan BA

Site Code: NHER 51548
CHER Event Number: N/A
Date of works: 6th May 2008
Grid Ref: TL 7064 9961

Status			
Author	Andrew Corrigan		
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Authorised By			

Editor: Taleyna Fletcher BA, AIFA
Illustrator: Andrew Corrigan BA

CAM ARC OASIS Report Form **OASIS Number:**
cambridg1-43055

PROJECT DETAILS				
Project name	An Historic Building Recording Survey at The Old railway Station, Stoke Ferry			
Short description	This historic building recording survey produced an EH level 1 photographic survey, as well as a brief description of the sites history and description and phasing of the buildings on the site.			
Project dates	Start	06-05-2008	End	06-05-2008
Previous work	No		Future work	unkown
Associated project reference codes	Site Code and HER number: NHER 51548; CAM ARC code: XNF ORS 08; Planning application number: 05.12590			
Type of project	Building Survey			
Site status	N/A			
Current land use (list all that apply)	Derelict land Industry – timber yard Offices Living accommodation			
Planned development	Redevelopment of existing structures and building new houses			
Monument types / period (list all that apply)				
Significant finds: Artefact type / period (list all that apply)	N/A			
PROJECT LOCATION				
County	Norfolk	Parish	Stoke Ferry	
HER for region	Norfolk			
Site address (including postcode)	The Old railway station, Stoke Ferry, Norfolk			
Study area (sq.m or ha)	Approximately 9400m²			
National grid reference	TL 7064 9961			
Height OD	Min OD	N/A	Max OD	N/A
PROJECT ORIGINATORS				
Organisation	CAM ARC			
Project brief originator	Norfolk Landscape Archaeology			
Project design originator	Toby Gane			
Director/supervisor	Andrew Corrigan			
Project manager	Toby Gane			
Sponsor or funding body	Russen & Turner			
ARCHIVES	**Location and accession number** (currently CAM ARC – to be forwarded to..)		**Content (e.g. pottery, animal bone, database, context sheets etc)**	
Physical	N/A			
Paper	Norfolk NHER 51548		Photographs, report, research	
Digital	Norfolk NHER 51548		Raster/vector images, report, plan	
BIBLIOGRAPHY				
Full title	An Historic Building recording Survey at The Old Railway Station, Stoke Ferry, Norfolk			
Author(s)	A. Corrigan			
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Summary

Stoke Ferry Station was the terminus of the Stoke Ferry Branch and was a small station designed to serve the local community through the provision of a passenger service and transportation into and out of the village for freight. Three of the original station buildings survive on the site, providing a good example of a small Victorian country train station.

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1 Introduction

This archaeological building survey was undertaken in accordance with a Brief issued by Edwin Rose of Norfolk Landscape Archaeology; Planning Application no. 05.2590, supplemented by a Specification prepared by CAM ARC, Cambridgeshire County Council (formerly Archaeological Field Unit).

The work was designed to assist in defining the character and condition of the historic fabric within the proposed redevelopment area of the site know as The Old Railway Station, Stoke Ferry, in accordance with the guidelines set out in *Planning and Policy Guidance 16 - Archaeology and Planning* (Department of the Environment 1990). The results will enable decisions to be made by NLA, on behalf of the Local Planning Authority, with regard to the treatment of any historic fabric found within the development area.

The site archive is currently held by CAM ARC and will be deposited with the appropriate county stores in due course.

2 Location, Geology and Topography

Stoke Ferry is located on the main road between Thetford and Downham Market, about 6.5 miles east-south-east of Downham Market (*see Figure 1*). The village is located on a ridge at the northern edge of the Fens just to the north west of a crossing point of the River Wissey, which has become the highest navigable point on the river.

The village of Stoke Ferry sits on a ridge of Diamicton Till and the site itself overlies sand and gravel river terrace deposits to the south (British Geological Survey Website - http://www.bgs.ac.uk/home.html or http://www.bgs.ac.uk/education/geology_of_britain/home.html).

3 Historical Background

3.1 The village of Stoke Ferry

For a more comprehensive history of the village of Stoke Ferry, see Coates, 1980, from which this section is derived.

Stoke Ferry is first mentioned in the Domesday Book where it is referred to as “Stoches” – the name possibly deriving from “Stow” (habitation) and “Ches” (by the water). It was historically the only place at which the River Wissey could be crossed for some distance, so the site was in use much before the Domesday Book. There have been

several pre-historic artefacts discovered in and near the river at the crossing point; these include an Iron Age sword.

A ferry operated the crossing point until the inhabitants grew tired of the high levy imposed by the Prior of Shouldham who owned the land at the time. This prompted the locals to build a bridge, which was demolished by the Prior in protest of his lost income, but a court forced him to re-build it in 1242. The Prior was granted a market and fair in Stoke Ferry in 1239, from whence the village grew in importance to the local agricultural community. Both ferries and various bridges have facilitated the crossing of the river ever since.

Industry in the area included the production of flour, malt and sugar. A late 18th/early 19th century windmill still stands (disused) in the village, but it is likely this replaced an earlier mill. Maltings operated at the wharf in Stoke Ferry from the early 19th century (the maltings and storehouses still stand), and also in nearby Whittington. The construction of a sugar factory at Wissington in the early 20th century (which still operates) meant that beet could be processed before leaving the area. The sugar factory had no solid road to it until Italian prisoners of war built one during the second world war, and so the factory relied upon the river and later the railway for transportation of its cargoes.

The Wissey has always been navigable to Stoke Ferry, and for centuries this was the only – and later, the easiest/cheapest – method of transporting goods in and out of the area due to the poor nature of the road system. Commodities produced in the area such as grain, beet, wool, seeds, ale, hides and later malt and sugar were all transported out of the area on the river for trade. Goods being brought to the area through the wharf at Stoke Ferry included fish, salt, pots, wine, building materials and later limestone for the production of sugar, although one of the main imports since *c.*1700 was coal.

The wharf brought prosperity brought to the area which peaked between 1750 and 1880, resulting in the village growing to the size of a small town and many craftsmen, merchants and farmers flourished. When rail links began extending in to East Anglia in the 19th century, the local agricultural, industrial and commercial communities in Stoke Ferry realised the prospects this could bring to their businesses. After an application from local farmers Parliament granted permission in 1879 for a branch line to be built, bringing hopes of further growth and prosperity to Stoke Ferry.

The village's transport links have ensured the survival of Stoke Ferry. The crossing point enabled road travel between Downham Market and Thetford and the fens to the South. The river enabled goods to be transported down river, giving the local community access to the vast network of waterways. Then the railway brought fast transportation for goods and people in and out of the area.

3.2 The Stoke Ferry Branch

For a more comprehensive history of The Stoke Ferry Branch, see Paye, 1982, from which most of this section is derived.

After several failed attempts to bring a railway through Stoke Ferry in the 1870's, local land owners met to discuss the possibility of building a local line from Stoke Ferry to meet the Great Eastern Railway (GER) to the east which ran from Ely to Lynn (the original station name at Kings Lynn). After negotiating with GER, in the latter part of 1878 a proposal was put together and presented to Parliament and plans drawn up and presented to the local authorities. In 1879 the proposal was agreed, and the local landowners – who set up a company called Downham and Stoke Ferry Railway – and GER reached an agreement over the construction and running of the Stoke Ferry Branch. The Downham and Stoke Ferry Railway funded and constructed the line, and the arrangement was that GER would work the line for 50% gross of the money received from passengers and transportation of goods. The line ran from Denver station, stopping at Ryston, Abbey and West Dereham and terminated at Stoke Ferry.

The board of directors appointed the engineers W. Stretford and J. A. Rodwell to design the line, and Mr John Waddell of Edinburgh to construct it. It wasn't until the end of 1880 that all final agreements, plans and arrangements relating to the Stoke Ferry Branch were reached. Construction, beginning in May 1881, was completed by June 1882 and on the 14th of that month the first train carrying the board of directors and the chairman of the GER made its way from Downham Market to Stoke Ferry, stopping at each station for inspection, and back again. After a few alterations in order to pass safety inspections, the line was opened on 1st August 1882.

The Stoke Ferry Branch served both passengers – providing links to Kings Lynn and to London via Downham – and the transportation of goods and livestock. The line was so successful that the board of directors put together proposals to extend the line another 5 miles to Gooderstone, and possibly even to Wymondham. These were submitted to Parliament by the end of 1882 and approved in 1883, but indecisiveness on how to tackle crossing the road and river at Stoke Ferry meant plans were put on hold. Attempts to continue with the extension re-occurred in 1884, after some of the land needed had been purchased, work began to prepare it. But by early 1885 the board of directors ceased work, as revenue from passengers and freight had not reached expected levels. Revenue continued to fall and Downham and Stoke Ferry Railway was absorbed into GER in 1897. Due to falling numbers the passenger service was discontinued from the 22nd September 1930. However, due to the sugar factory, freight transportation increased. In 1931 the status of the line was

downgraded to that of Light Railway, and only the occasional holiday or enthusiast train brought passengers to Stoke Ferry. The line had passed ownership as railway lines amalgamated, and ended up in the ownership of British Rail after nationalisation. Freight services ceased from Stoke Ferry on 19th July 1965 as a result of the Beeching Report, the line was abandoned between Wretton and Stoke Ferry and the track and sleepers eventually removed.

3.3 Stoke Ferry Station

For a more comprehensive history of The Stoke Ferry Branch, see Paye, 1982, from which most of this section is derived.

The contractors found building the Stoke Ferry station more difficult than the other stations on the line. A deep layer of peaty soil meant they had to excavate to a depth of 12 feet (3.7m) in order to construct firm foundations using hardcore, a cement/concrete bed and brick built piers and arches. The Stoke Ferry Branch construction began at Denver and worked east, therefore the construction of Stoke Ferry station would likely have occurred later during the period of May 1881 to June 1882.

The original structures consisted of (see *Figure 2*):

- A single platform (91.44m (300') in length)
- The station building (which incorporated the station master's house, ticket and postal offices and a canopy over part of the platform)
- Goods shed
- Coal shed
- Two cattle pens
- Loading dock and gauge
- A fixed crane (of 1 ton 10 cwt capacity)
- Cart weighbridge
- Weighing machine
- Signal box
- Water tower
- An engine shed (6.1m x 18.29m (20' x 60') in size)
- An old coach body was positioned opposite the station for additional accommodation (although it is unclear if this was there initially or was a later addition).

Plans for more amenities at Stoke Ferry station were abandoned: It was decided not to extend the siding to reach the wharf on the banks of the Wissey, as it was considered unnecessary for the expected amount of goods traffic. The initial plan to build a turntable was later scrapped due to lack of space. However, in 1883 an order was issued to the contractor to build extra accommodation, the location of which is unclear.

Later improvements included building a more solid road from the main road to the coal shed in 1883 after complaints that the original track was insufficient for the loads being transported there. Probably one of the biggest alterations was to extend the yard in 1893 (possibly to the south) in order to accommodate the growing traffic of timber. In 1911 repairs and painting were carried out to the station, goods shed and engine shed.

One point of interest in the stations history was the occasional royal visit from the Prince of Wales at the time (later King Edward VII), who would use the station to visit the nearby Oxburgh Hall.

Once the station fell into decline in the 20th century various elements of the station were removed. When passenger services ceased in 1930 the signal arms were no longer required and therefore removed. Due to economising after the withdrawal of passenger services the engine shed was closed in 1930 and later removed in 1935 (Hawkins and Reeve, 1987, 376). After the removal of the lines in 1965 the buildings were sold off, the cottages being used as homes and the goods shed used by a timber company. The function of the site has been as such until recently.

In recent history an office block was built adjacent to the station building, and an extension made to the goods shed. These were constructed sympathetically to blend in with the original buildings.

4 Methodology

The objective of this historic building recording was to determine as far as reasonably possible the presence, location, nature, extent, date, quality, condition and significance of any surviving historical fabric within the development area.

In accordance with the Brief issued by Norfolk Landscape Archaeology, a level 1 building recording programme was undertaken, meeting the requirements of RCHME.

Background research was carried out in order to present a brief historical background to the site as stipulated in the Specification for Historic Building Recording (Gane, 2008).

Monochrome photographs (supplemented by digital images) were taken of all exterior elevations and details in addition to general site shots placing the buildings in context. Some interior shots were taken to assess interior condition and features.

The site was easily accessible open and in reasonable condition, despite some vandalism, allowing for useful photographs to be taken of

most elevations. Some elevations where partially obscured by plant growth – such as the station platform – and views of the north, east and west elevations of buildings A/B were limited by poor access due to trees and plant growth. Buildings C and D where both locked, and building B had suffered damage due to squatters and the theft of piping resulting in flooding of the building and resulting damage. This meant that interior access was only possible to buildings A and F.

The images were then analysed in order to present a description of the buildings and interpret their phases and development, as stipulated in the Specification for Historic Building Recording (Gane, 2008).

5 Results

5.1 Building Descriptions and Development

The site comprises of five buildings, only four of which are located within the development area and only three of historical interest, all of which are described below in various detail in order for the site to be evaluated as a whole.

The buildings consist of (see *Figure 3*):

- The cottages (the west labelled “A”, the east labelled “B”)
- The station building (labelled “C”)
- A modern office building (labelled “D”)
- A modern storage unit (labelled “E”)
- The goods shed (labelled “F”)
- Other structures - the surviving platform, a metal shed and a porta cabin.

With the exception of the storage unit (E) all of the buildings have been built in a similar style, utilising several architectural features to enhance the appearance of the buildings. These features include; construction of white brick with several flush stringcourses of red brick (these stringcourses occur in line with other architectural features, like the base, mid-point and top of windows, and again at the highest point of segmental arches); high plinths; stepped and dentillated stringcourses under the eaves; windows with segmental arches formed in the brickwork of alternating fanned red and white brick – the alternating fanned brick is also used to create the effect of segmental arches over other windows/doors/openings that have square headed openings; and also blue slate tiled roofs with red ceramic ridge tiles. Alterations have taken place to the buildings, but most of the original fabric survives (see *Figure 3* for a phasing of the site)

Buildings A and B:

Buildings A (*Plate 1*) and B (*Plate 2*) are semi-detached cottages to the north of the station building. The cottages are two storeys high, with the second storey occupying the roof space, the roof taking the form of two gabled roofs joined by a central intersection (forming an "H" shape) in which are constructed two gabled dormer windows – one for each cottage. The wall between the cottages extends up and is topped by a course of black/red bricks, traversing the roofs of each cottage. Unlike the other buildings on the site, Building B has been tiled with grey (possibly ceramic) tiles and ridge tiles.

Both cottages have single storey extensions to the rear that look roughly contemporary with the building of the cottages. The extension to Building A has a flat roof that inclines towards the house and displays some of the architectural features as the other buildings (*Plate 3*). The extension to Building B is slightly bigger than that to Building A, it has a flat roof and again displays some of the architectural features seen on the other buildings, although the window is modern, having either been inserted or enlarged in recent times (*Plate 4*).

Unlike the other buildings, Building B has been roofed with grey tiles (possibly ceramic) and plain ridge tiles. Another point of decorative interest is the "fish scale" woodwork occupying the segmental arch above the largest lower floor south facing window of both building A and B (*Plate 5*). The buildings also retain most of their Queen Anne Revival style double-hung sash windows (Hall, 2005, 81).

Entrance to Building A was possible, revealing several original features, including a decorative dado rail in one (*Plate 6*) and Victorian fireplaces (*Plate 7*) in both upstairs rooms. Damage to the floor enabled the lower construction of the cottage to be viewed – the arches used to give stability to the structure mentioned above (*Plate 8*). Entrance to Building B was not possible due to vandalism. It is likely from inspection that both buildings have only ever been used for accommodation.

Building C:

Building C (*Plate 9*) was the station building, which again incorporates the architectural details mentioned at the beginning of this section of the report. The roof is gabled at single storey levels, with an unequal gabled T-plan roof to the second storey section (*Plate 10*). There is a single storey hip-roofed bay window on the south side of the building, extending onto the platform.

All windows and doors have been replaced with modern double glazed/PVC windows. A large window has been inserted on the east of the south side of the second storey between 1955 (Brodribb, 2000, 178) and 1959 (Adderson and Kenworthy, 2000, plate 47).

Several repairs/alterations have been made to this building, and are visible in the brickwork. The majority of these have occurred to the single storey section at the west end and to the lower storey of the west facing elevation of the central section (*Plate 11*). These include the blocking of a window, some reconstruction (indicated by the brightness of the white brick) and some rendering. There is also a small section of wall extending from the building to the west, indicating there was a previous structure in this location, possibly a place to store coal for the engines – this roofless structure and possibly an extension to the north of this west wing of the building are visible in a photograph taken in 1959 by R. M. Casserley (Paye, 1982, 31). There is a small opening with a wooden door hinged on two round-ended strap hinges on the west facing elevation (*Plate 12*). These date to the late 19th Century (Hall, 2005, 52) and so are probably contemporary to the construction of the building. One alteration, of which there is now only documentary evidence, is that this building once had two canopies that were removed during world war one. One extended south, the other north from the east end of the station building (Paye, 1982, 79).

Access was not possible to Building C, but it was visible that it had undergone modern refurbishment inside to adapt the building into offices, so it is unclear if any internal features remain.

Building D:

Building D (*Plate 13*) is situated directly east of the station building. The west end of this building (approximately 1/3 of the building) extends higher than the rest of the building, but there are only ground floor windows, indicating the whole building could be a single storey. The building is modern, having been sympathetically built using the architectural features seen on the original buildings on the site. The building has been used for offices, which is probably the purpose of its construction.

Building E:

Building E (*Plate 14*) is not located in the development area, but is considered here to enable all the buildings on site to be analysed together. The building is a large steel framed storage unit, which relates to the use of the site as a timber yard, and so has been constructed in recent times.

Building F:

Situated to the south of the station building, Building F (*Plate 15*) was originally the goods shed and since the dissolution of the Stoke Ferry Branch this building has, until very recently, been used as a workshop for the processing of timber. The building has been extended – probably when it was converted into a workshop – to encompass the north-east corner where previously the track emerged from the goods

shed (*Plate 16*). This extension has been designed sympathetically, and could have been carried out at the same time as the construction of the office building (Building D).

With the exception of the two windows in the north facing elevation of this extension and one large window that has been inserted on the west of the southern facing elevation, all windows retain original metal casements.

On the south facing elevation (*Plate 17*) a pair of large original wooden sliding doors survive (*Plate 18*), making it possible for goods to be unloaded through these at the correct height of the carriages. A similar sized opening has been bricked up to the west of this one (*Plate 19*), indicating that there would probably have been two of these openings to enable two goods carriages to be unloaded at any one time. The bricking-up of this opening has included a large window and a door. Protruding brickwork at the base level of these large sliding doors could have supported some form of platform onto which goods could have been moved from the carriages.

Much of the eastern end of the south facing elevation is covered in ivy, but it is clear from the blocking of an opening and some alterations to brickwork that changes have also taken place in this area. The base of this opening is at the same level as that of the large sliding doors, making it possible that any platform extended to this point and that this opening was once a door (*Plate 17*).

A modern corrugated lean-to shed has been built onto the west of Building F (*Plate 20*). It is clear from exterior views, and particularly interior views (*Plate 21*), that this was the location of a very large pair of wooden doors through which engines could pass. Parts of these doors remain because the lean-to shed has been constructed against them and the parts that were then enclosed have been sawn away.

The north facing elevation (*Plate 22*) has several supporting rectangular pilasters extending to just bellow the stepped/dentillated stringcourses of the eaves.

Access was possible to Building F, allowing some interior features to be viewed, but access was limited by large amounts of pigeon guano. It was possible to determine that the building has a king post and tusk tenon roof structure (*Plate 23*). The part of the original building that extended east from the southeast corner can still be seen (*Plate 24*), with steps up to the floor level that is in line with the base of the large sliding doors in the south elevation. Also visible in what was the north facing elevation of this part of the building are two further windows with original metal casements. No original machinery relating to the original use of the building was visible.

Other Structures:

There are several other structures on the site, including a modern porta cabin located on the platform to the immediate west of the station building (*Plate 9*) and a free standing metal shed just to the north of Building F (*Plates 16, 20 and 22*). The metal shed has no relation to the use of the site as a railway station, as it is situated where a siding ran past the goods shed (*Figure 2*). The shed contains decaying sawdust, and the pipes extending from the roof of the structure might indicate that this structure was for the purposes of sawdust extraction from Building F when it was in use as a timber workshop.

The only other structure relating to the sites use as a railway station is that of the platform (*Plate 9*), much of which remains in-situ. The remaining structure is 77.3m long; meaning approximately 1/6th of it has been removed. Although obscured by plant growth, the structural arches mentioned above are again visible (*Plate 25*). This structure extends approximately 12m west of the development area, sloping down to ground level over approximately the last 4m (*Plate 26*).

6 Conclusions

The Old Railway Station, Stoke Ferry is a fine example of a small Victorian country train station, with several original structures surviving, giving a glimpse into the bygone years of the industrial age.

Recommendations for any future work based upon this report will be made by the County Archaeology Office.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Russen & Turner who commissioned and funded the archaeological work, and Heather Wallis for carrying out the background research. The project was managed by Toby Gane.

The brief for archaeological works was written by Edwin Stone, Planning Advisory Archaeologist for Norfolk LPA.

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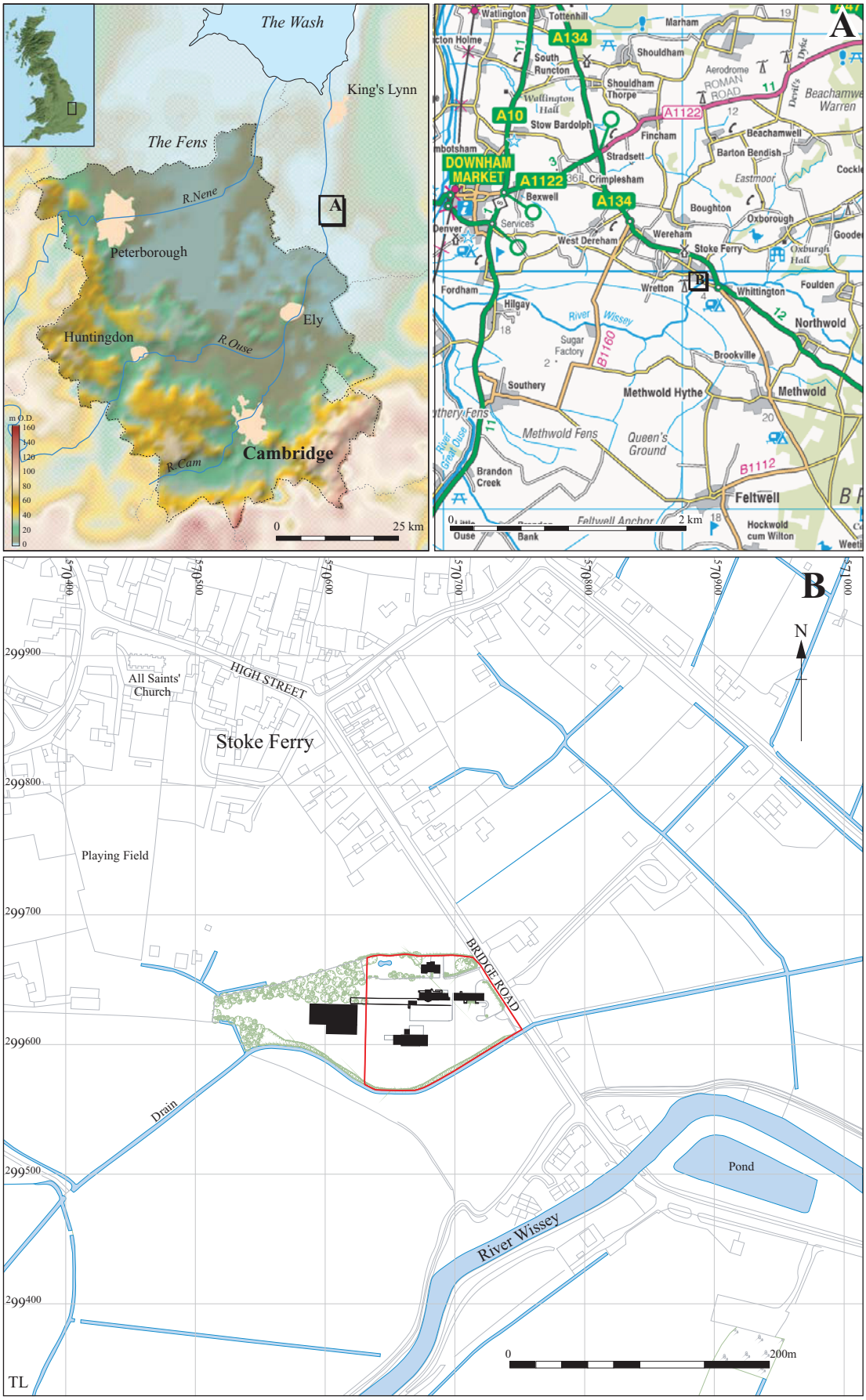


Figure 1: Location map with the development area outlined (red)

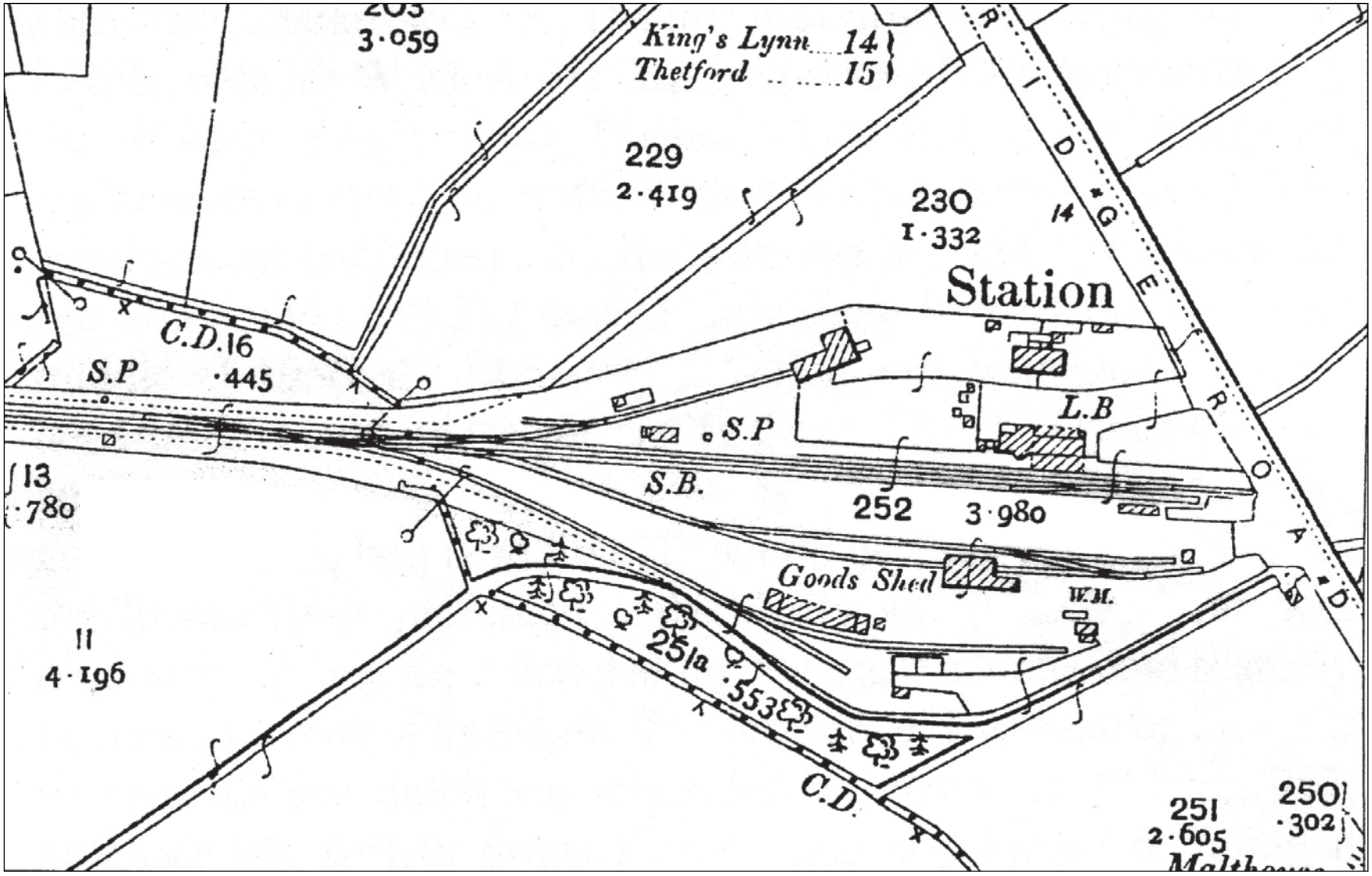


Figure 2: Ordnance Survey Map 1882

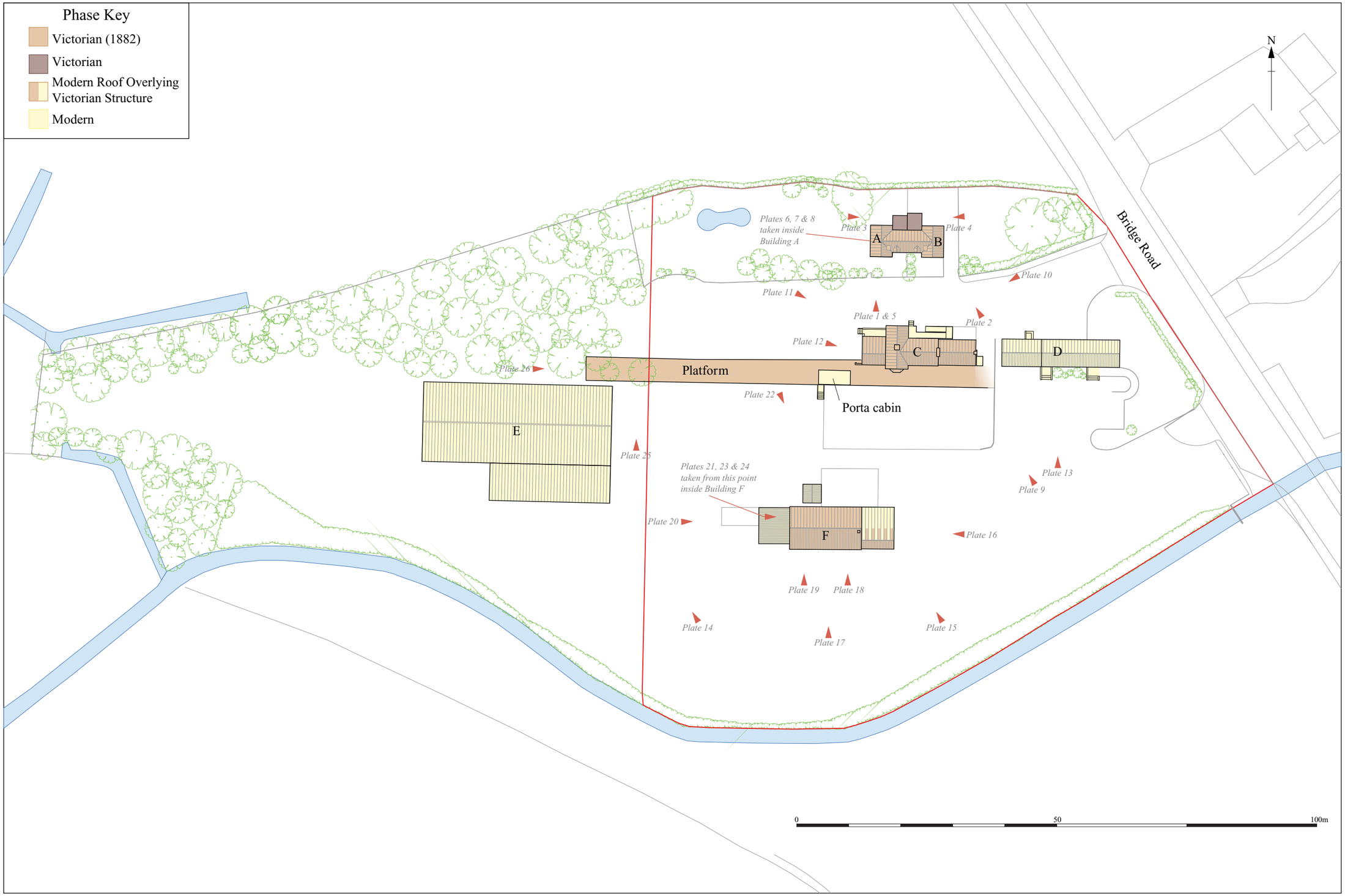


Figure 3: Site plan showing development area (red), structures, plate locations and phases (survey data supplied by Russen and Turner)

Plate 1: South facing elevation of Building A

Plate 2: South and east facing elevations of Building B

Plate 3: Extension (west facing elevation) to Building A

Plate 4: Extension (east facing elevation) to Building B

Plate 5: Detail of Large lower floor window, Building A

Plate 6: Dado rail in upper floor room of Building A

Plate 7: Fireplace in upper room of Building A

Plate 8: View under lower floor of Building A

Plate 9: South and east facing elevations of Building C

Plate 10: East and north facing elevations of Building C

Plate 11: West and north facing elevations of Building C

Plate 12: Detail of hatch in west elevation of Building C

Plate 13: South facing elevation of Building D

Plate 14: South and east facing elevations of Building E

Plate 15: South and east facing elevations of Building F

Plate 16: East facing elevation of Building F

Plate 17: South facing elevation of Building F

Plate 18: Detail of sliding wooden doors on south facing elevation of Building F

Plate 19: Blocked opening on south facing elevation of Building F

Plate 20: West facing elevation of Building F

Plate 21: Detail showing remains of wooden door at west end inside Building F

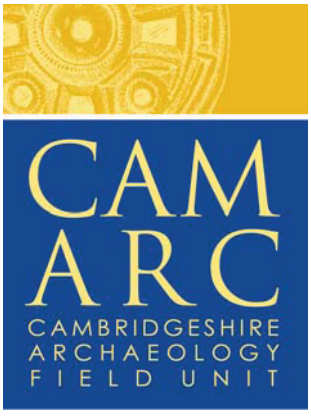
Plate 22: North facing elevation of Building F

Plate 23: Detail of king post and tusk tenon roof structure in Building F

Plate 24: View looking east of the interior of Building F

Plate 25: Part of the surviving platform

Plate 26: The west end of the surviving platform



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