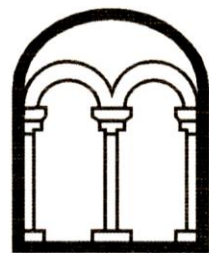


**THICKTHORN FARM
HOUGHTON CONQUEST
BEDFORDSHIRE**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL OBSERVATION,
INVESTIGATION, RECORDING, ANALYSIS AND
PUBLICATION**

Albion
archaeology



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Prepared for:
The Environmental Partnership Ltd

On behalf of:
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Preface

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Acknowledgements

The project was monitored on behalf of the Local Planning Authority by Hannah Firth (Central Bedfordshire Council Archaeologist). The fieldwork was undertaken by Kathy Pilkinton (Project Supervisor). This report has been prepared by Kathy Pilkinton. The project was managed by Iain Leslie (Project Manager). All Albion projects are under the overall management of Drew Shotliff (Operations Manager).

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1.0	12/12/2018	n/a

Key Terms

The following terms or abbreviations are used throughout this report:

CBC	Central Bedfordshire Council
CIfA	Chartered Institute for Archaeologists
CBCA	Central Bedfordshire Council Archaeologist
PDA	Permitted development area



Non-Technical Summary

Central Bedfordshire Council granted planning permission (CB/17/02575/OUT) for a mixed-use development on Land East of Ampthill Road and North of Bedford Road surrounding Great Thickthorn Farm, Houghton Conquest.

Due to the potentially sensitive nature of the archaeological remains identified within the permitted development area (PDA) the CBC Archaeologist requested archaeological monitoring of eight boreholes within the eastern part of the site.

The Wixams is a new town that has been under construction since early 2007. It lies to the south of Bedford and north of Houghton Conquest and straddles the local authorities of Bedford Borough Council and Central Bedfordshire Council. The permitted development area (PDA) lies to the south of Wixams wholly within Central Bedfordshire. It comprises an area of c.69ha to the south of Thickthorn Lane and to the east of the B530 Ampthill Road. The site is currently unused agricultural land. Great Thickthorn Farm itself is not part of the PDA.

The PDA is centred on Great Thickthorn Farm at grid reference TL 0443 4288. Houghton Conquest lies on low-lying but gently undulating land at the foot of the Greensand Ridge. The land drops further into the Marston Vale to the west and towards Bedford to the north. Great Thickthorn Farm lies on a gentle NW-facing slope and two knolls of higher land are located to its east.

The boreholes were monitored so that any archaeological deposits encountered during the work could be investigated and recorded or, in the case of exceptional remains (such as human remains), protected by moving the location of the borehole.

Excavation took place on 22nd November 2018. The boreholes were hand-dug to a depth of c.0.5m revealing topsoil and natural geological deposits. Each borehole measured 0.2m in diameter and was initially excavated with a shovel and a posthole digger under the supervision of the attending archaeologist.

Topsoil, which was c.0.3m thick, comprised brown-grey silty clay. Below this subsoil, c.0.1m thick, comprised mid-orange-brown silty clay. This overlay natural geological deposits comprising grey-orange clay.

No archaeological deposits were encountered.

Monitoring of the boreholes produced no remains of archaeological significance. However, archaeological deposits have already been identified within the PDA and the lack of archaeological deposits can be accounted for by the limited area revealed during excavation of the boreholes rather than the absence of archaeological remains in this part of the PDA.

Monitoring and careful positioning of the boreholes fully mitigated any potential damage to significant archaeological remains.



1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 *Planning Background*

Central Bedfordshire Council granted planning permission (CB/17/02575/OUT) for a mixed-use development on Land East of Ampthill Road and North of Bedford Road surrounding Great Thickthorn Farm, Houghton Conquest.

Due to the potentially sensitive nature of the archaeological remains identified within the permitted development area (PDA) the CBC Archaeologist requested archaeological monitoring of eight boreholes within the eastern part of the site (Figure 1).

1.2 *Site Location and Description*

The Wixams is a new town that has been under construction since early 2007. It lies to the south of Bedford and north of Houghton Conquest and straddles the local authorities of Bedford Borough Council and Central Bedfordshire Council. The PDA lies to the south of Wixams wholly within Central Bedfordshire. It comprises an area of c.69ha to the south of Thickthorn Lane and to the east of the B530 Ampthill Road. The site is currently unused agricultural land. Great Thickthorn Farm itself is not part of the PDA.

Houghton Conquest lies on low-lying but gently undulating land at the foot of the Greensand Ridge. The land drops further into the Marston Vale to the west and towards Bedford to the north. Great Thickthorn Farm lies on a gentle NW-facing slope and two knolls of higher land are located to its east.

The underlying geology is clay comprised of Peterborough Member mudstone and Stewartby Member and Weymouth Member mudstone with no drift geology recorded (British Geological Survey 2016). The PDA is centred on Great Thickthorn Farm at grid reference TL 0443 4288.

1.3 *Archaeological Background*

The archaeological and historical background to the PDA has been considered in full within a Heritage Statement (Albion Archaeology 2017). The known heritage assets identified within the PDA are summarised below.

Geophysical survey and trial trenching have been undertaken on the PDA. On the basis of the results of that work it was possible to define four areas of known archaeological heritage assets within the PDA (Figure 1).

1.3.1 *Area A – Late Iron Age / Roman farmstead*

In Area A, the settlement evidence predominantly comprised ditched enclosures; pits, postholes and a pond were also present. The settlement featured two core areas of more densely clustered features, as well as more peripheral zones where features were fewer and generally contained fewer artefacts and ecofacts — reflecting lower levels of domestic activity. The finds assemblage, which included pottery, animal bone, ceramic building material and five coins, suggests that the settlement was established in the late Iron Age and may have persisted



into the 4th century AD. A small quantity of Saxon pottery may indicate more sporadic activity into the 5th century.

1.3.2 Area B – Late Iron Age / early Roman farmstead

A second settlement was identified, c.170m north-east of Area A. It was similar in character and also predominantly comprised ditched enclosures with occasional pits and postholes. A possible pond was identified as well as features that probably represent the line of a former trackway. In addition, on the northern periphery of the settlement (Trench 78), evidence for a small cremation cemetery (typical of those found on rural sites of this date) was identified. The finds assemblage included pottery, animal bone and ceramic building material. In this case the datable artefacts suggest that the settlement was predominantly late Iron Age to early Roman (2nd century AD) in date.

1.3.3 Area C – Possible medieval / post-medieval activity focus

The only possible evidence for medieval activity (other than the ridge and furrow cultivation described below) was found in Trench 80. It comprised a ditch and a possible pit that produced small amounts (90g) of abraded, early medieval pottery. The presence of medieval furrows within the trench, as well as the abraded nature of the pottery may suggest that these finds are residual and that the features themselves are actually later in date. The ditches may relate to enclosures identified on the 1802 and 1809 maps.

1.3.4 Area D – Dispersed undated, medieval, post-medieval and modern agricultural features

The remainder of the PDA did not contain any further evidence for settlement activity. The majority of the PDA presented evidence for medieval ridge and furrow cultivation with varying levels of survival. Post-medieval field systems were evidenced by ditched boundaries often corresponding with cartographic evidence. In addition, there were sporadic instances of undated ditches, pits and a possible pond, spread across the PDA. There was no evidence within the geophysical survey to suggest that these features represented well-defined enclosure systems or other settlement-related activity and, like the medieval and post-medieval features within Area D, are most likely associated with agricultural field systems



2. METHODOLOGY AND OBJECTIVES

The methodological approach to the project is summarised below. A full methodology is provided in the Method Statement (Albion 2018).

2.1 Methodological Standards

The project adhered throughout to the standards set out in the following documents:

• Albion Archaeology	<i>Procedures Manual: Volume 1 Fieldwork</i> (3rd edn, 2017).
• Bedford Borough Council	<i>Preparing Archaeological Archives for Deposition in Registered Museums in Bedford</i> (ver. 2.8, 2010)
• CfA	<i>Charter and by-law; Code of conduct</i> (2014)
	<i>Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief</i> (2014)
	<i>Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials</i> (2014)
• EAA	<i>Standards for Field Archaeology in the East of England</i> (2003)
• Historic England	<i>Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment (MoRPHE) Project Managers' Guide</i> (2015)
	<i>Environmental Archaeology: A guide to the theory and practice of methods, from sampling and recovery to post-excavation</i> , (2nd edn, 2011)

The project archive will be deposited at The Higgins Art Gallery & Museum, Bedford (accession number BEDFM 2016.74). Details of the project and its findings will be submitted to the OASIS database (reference no.: albionar1-264569) in accordance with the guidelines issued by Historic England and the Archaeology Data Service.

2.2 Project Objectives

The boreholes were monitored so that any archaeological deposits encountered during the work could be investigated and recorded or, in the case of exceptional remains (such as human remains), protected by moving the location of the borehole.



3. RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

All deposits revealed during the monitoring are summarised below and shown on Figures 2 and 3.

Excavation took place on 22nd November 2018. The boreholes were hand-dug to a depth of *c.*0.5m revealing topsoil and natural geological deposits. Each borehole measured 0.2m in diameter and was initially excavated with a shovel and a posthole digger under the supervision of the attending archaeologist.

Topsoil, which was *c.*0.3m thick, comprised brown-grey silty clay. Below this subsoil, *c.*0.1m thick, comprised mid-orange-brown silty clay. This overlay natural geological deposits comprising grey-orange clay.

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4. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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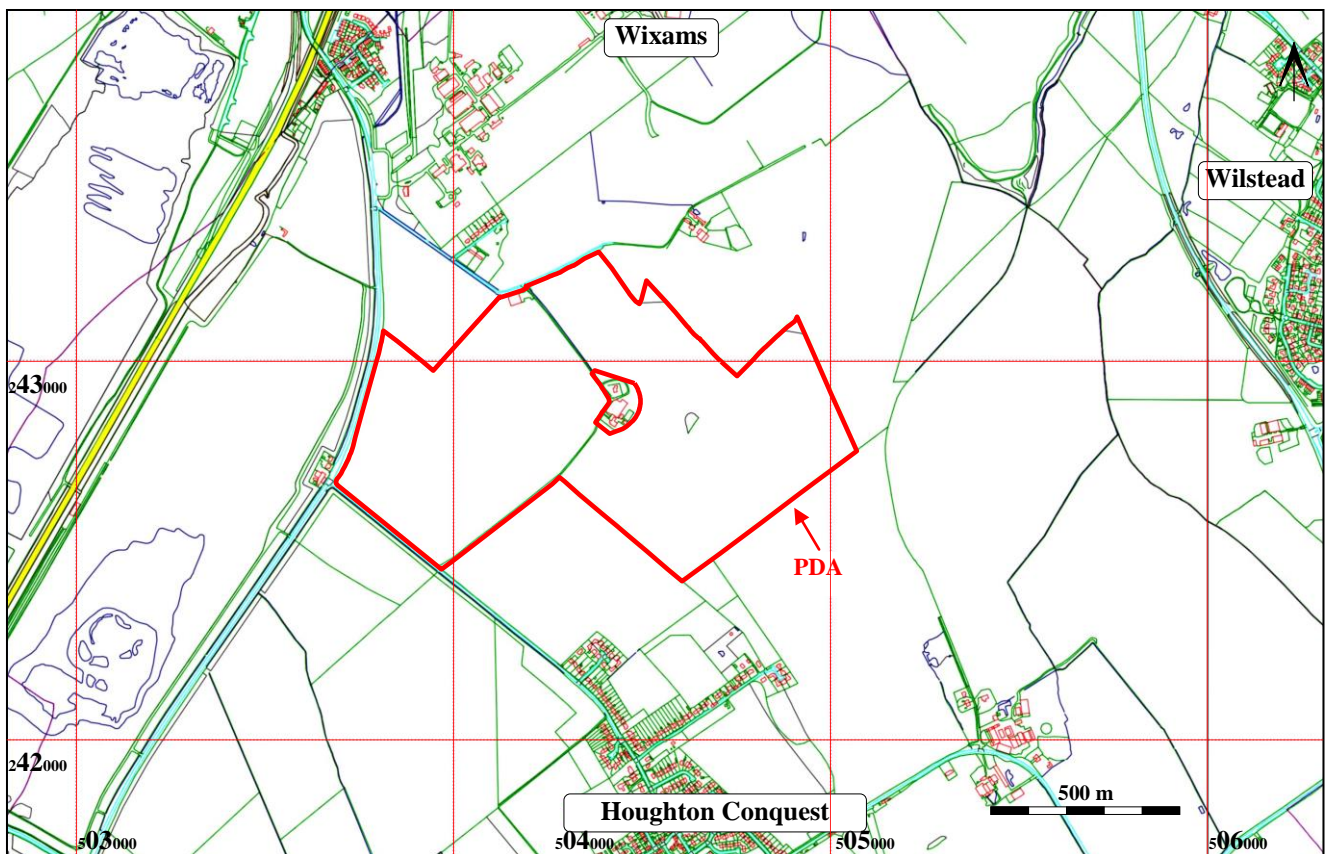
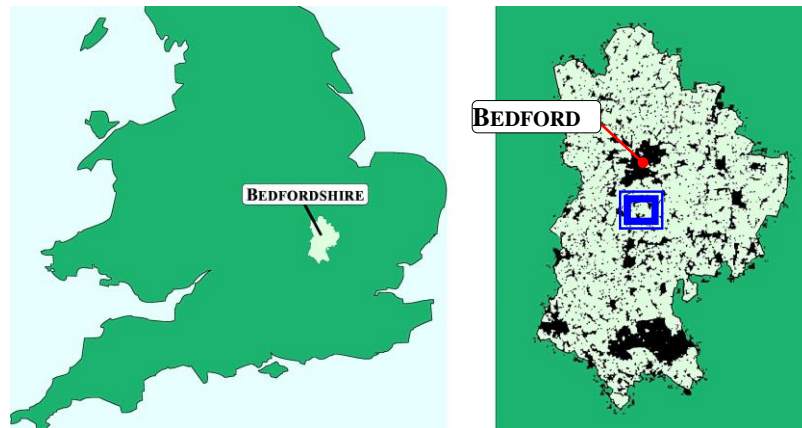


Figure 1: Site location plan

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Figure 2: Location of boreholes



Hand-dug portion of Borehole 1
(40cm scale)



Hand-dug portion of Borehole 3
(40cm scale)



Arisings from Borehole 6

Figure 3: Photographs

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