

Summary

- A programme of archaeological trial trenching was undertaken in advance of residential development on land at Homelands, High Road, Guyhirn, Cambridgeshire.
- The site is situated close to known areas of Romano-British settlement activity.
- Five trenches were excavated, exposing a series of probable former drainage and boundary features of post-medieval to modern date, and layers of peat and alluvium deposited prior to the large scale drainage of the area.

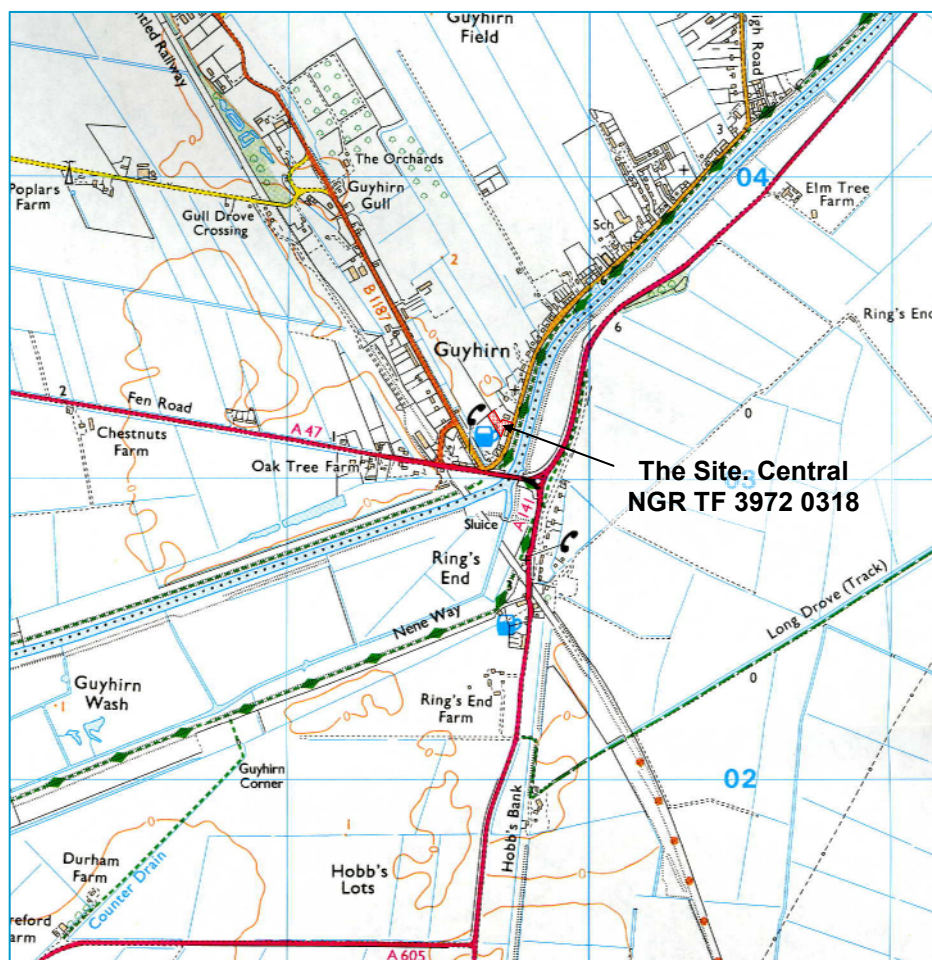


Figure 1: Site location at scale 1:25,000

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Allen Archaeological Associates was commissioned by Skuna Corp Ltd. to carry out a programme of archaeological trial trenching in advance of a residential development on land at Homelands, High Road, Guyhirn, Cambridgeshire.
- 1.2 The fieldwork, recording and reporting conforms to current national guidelines, as set out in the Institute for Field Archaeologists '*Standards and guidance for archaeological field evaluations*' (IFA 1999), and the regional standards defined in '*Standards for field archaeology in the East of England*' (Gurney 2003). The methodology for this project conforms to a brief prepared by Cambridgeshire Archaeology Planning and Countryside Advice (hereafter CAPCA) (Gdaniec 2006), and a specification prepared by this company (Clay 2006).
- 1.3 The archive will be submitted to Cambridgeshire County Archaeological Store within six months of the completion of the project.

2.0 Site location and description

- 2.1 The village of Guyhirn is a small ribbon development in the Cambridgeshire Fens, approximately 9km south-west of Wisbech. The site is an irregular block of land of approximately 0.2ha, at the south end of the village, on the west side of High Road.
- 2.2 The site is currently occupied by a single residential property, with associated access, garden areas and outbuildings, including a large glass greenhouse and an aviary. There is a small grassed paddock at the northernmost end of the development area. The site centres on NGR TF 3972 0318, and lies at a height of between 0m and 1m above Ordnance Datum.
- 2.3 The local geology comprises drift deposits of the Terrington Beds, alluvial silts that were laid down by repeated marine transgressions. The underlying solid geology is Undifferentiated West Walton Formation and Ampthill Clay Formation (British Geological Survey 1984).

3.0 Planning background

- 3.1 A planning application was submitted to Fenland District Council (Ref. F/YR06/0966/F), for the demolition of existing structures and the construction of 11 new residential properties with garages and associated services. As one of the conditions of the planning permission, CAPCA (who advise Fenland District Council on archaeological planning matters) recommended that an archaeological evaluation be carried out on the site in order to provide information concerning the potential impact of the development upon the archaeological resource. A brief was produced by CAPCA outlining the requirements of this evaluation (Gdaniec 2006).

4.0 Archaeological and historical background

- 4.1 In the prehistoric period, much of the area would have been subject to repeated episodes of marine transgression, and as such unsuitable for permanent occupation, although such remains may lie buried at some depth.
- 4.2 Romano-British settlement activity has been identified at Guyhirn Gull, 1km to the north-west, comprising building remains, pottery, and field systems (Gdaniec 2006). A Roman road is also believed to have followed a roddon, running north – south through Guyhirn, from high land on March island connecting to another road further north. To the south-west of the site, earthworks for

a possible inland harbour have been identified, on a roddon of the former course of the Nene and Ouse, associated with pottery of 2nd and 3rd century date (Malim 2005).

- 4.3 There is no evidence of Anglo-Saxon activity in the area, and Guyhirn does not appear in the Domesday Book, indicating that the area was not inhabited during the Early Middle Ages. The place name however, can be traced back to at least 1275, and during the construction of the existing parish church of St. Mary Magdalene in 1877, evidence of a much earlier establishment was identified (<http://www.guyhirn-online.org.uk/history.htm>). This is believed to be the chapel that was founded by John de Reddik in 1337 (Pugh 2002).
- 4.4 Guyhirn lies at a point where the tidal flow inland along the Nene meets the freshwater flowing towards the sea, and was critical to the drainage of the region. An early, but ultimately unsuccessful attempt at drainage was made by the Bishop of Ely, John Morton, in 1478. He began the construction of a major drainage dyke named Morton's Leam, which runs broadly parallel to the Nene for 12 miles from Stanground to Guyhirn, where it turns north to join the Nene. Bishop Morton also built a tower at Ring's End, just to the south of Guyhirn, in order to watch his men working on the excavation of the drain (Darby 1983).
- 4.5 Further attempts at drainage were made in the early 17th century, financed by the 4th Earl of Bedford and undertaken by the Dutch engineer Cornelius Vermuyden. The works proved unsuccessful as the drainage of the region led to rapid peat shrinkage and a reduction in the level of the ground, causing extensive flooding over the newly drained areas. The reduction of the ground level by peat shrinkage has left the drains and canalised rivers running higher than the surrounding ground surface, necessitating large scale embankment, and artificial drainage by pumps, powered initially by wind, then steam, and now electricity (Salzman 1948).

5.0 Methodology

- 5.1 The programme of trial trenching entailed the excavation of five trenches, each 1.6m wide. One trench was 20m long, two trenches were 12m long and two trenches were 10m long. The locations of the trenches were agreed in advance with CAPCA and are shown on figure 2.
- 5.2 Machine excavation of the trenches was carried out using a 3CX JCB excavator fitted with a 1.6m wide toothless dykeing bucket. Topsoil and subsoil deposits were removed in spits not exceeding 0.1m in depth, under close archaeological supervision, until the first archaeologically significant horizon was exposed. Further excavation was then carried out by hand.
- 5.3 Archaeological features were sample excavated in order to determine their depth, profile, orientation and where possible, date and function. This comprised:
 - 1m wide slots across the full profile of all ditches, gullies and other linear features
 - A 50% sample of discrete features such as pits and postholes of up to 1m diameter
 - A 25% sample of discrete features such as pits and postholes in excess of 1m diameter
 - Intersections of all linear features, where the relationship was not visible in plan
- 5.4 A full written record of all archaeological features and deposits was made on standard Allen Archaeological Associates context sheets, accompanied by plan and section drawings at scales 1:50 and 1:20. A full colour photographic record was also maintained, and selected prints have been included as an appendix to this report (Appendix 1).
- 5.5 The fieldwork was carried out by a team of four experienced field archaeologists, supervised by the author. It was undertaken over a period of three days, Monday 8th to Wednesday 10th January 2007.

6.0 Results

6.1 Trench 1

- 6.1.1 The uppermost deposit in the trench was a 0.45m deep topsoil deposit, 100, comprising a brown/grey clayey silt. This sealed a subsoil layer 101, which was up to 0.35m deep. This deposit produced two sherds of Colne Ware pottery of 15th – 17th century date and a fragment of 17th – 19th century handmade brick. Below 101 was an alluvial deposit of grey/brown clayey silt, 105, between 0.05 and 0.3m deep, sealing a further alluvial layer, 106 of a darker grey/brown clayey silt up to 0.2m deep.
- 6.1.2 A peat deposit containing frequent large wood fragments, 102, was exposed below alluvial layers 105 and 106. A slot excavated through the peat showed it to be up to 0.2m deep, and resting upon a blue-grey clay, 107, indicating deposition of sediment by slow moving or standing water.
- 6.1.3 A single possible feature was identified in the trench. A slot excavated through it showed it to be little more than a thin spread of grey/brown clayey silt, 103, separating alluvial deposits 105 and 106.

6.2 Trench 2

- 6.2.1 The topsoil in this trench, 200, was a dark grey/brown silty clay. It was 0.15m deep at the south end of the trench and 0.5m deep at the north end, where it incorporated lenses of small gravel and frequent fragments of brick rubble and mortar, possibly relating to former buildings on the site. The underlying deposit was a 0.3 – 0.5m deep layer of dark brown silty clay, 208, interpreted as a buried ground surface.
- 6.2.2 Below 208 was an alluvial deposit of greyish yellow clayey silt, 201. It was cut by a linear feature, 206, that meandered slightly on a broadly north – south alignment along the length of the trench. Only the western edge of the feature was exposed within the trench, which was moderately steep with a slight break of slope to a concave base. The maximum dimensions of the excavated section were 1.05m wide and 0.55m deep. The ditch was filled by a silting deposit of grey/brown silty clay, 205, containing occasional brick fragments. It was not possible to ascertain if the feature also cut layer 208.
- 6.2.3 Ditch 206 was cut by another broadly north – south aligned linear feature, 204, containing a large ceramic pipe. The fill of the ditch, 203 was predominantly loose demolition rubble, including brick, tile, concrete, electrical wire, carpet and other modern debris. It was sealed directly below the modern topsoil, 200.
- 6.2.4 Two slots were excavated across linear features 204 and 206. The excavated sections also exposed a sequence of deposits underlying alluvial deposit 201. Immediately below 201 was 207, a light grey brown clayey silt that was 0.25m deep in both hand excavated slots, but was not apparent in the machine excavated slot at the north end of the trench. It was interpreted as a natural alluvial deposit.
- 6.2.5 Below 201 and 207 was a 0.45m deep layer of very dark brown peat, 202, which in turn sealed a layer of grey clay, 209, identical to that exposed in Trench 1.

6.3 Trench 3

- 6.3.1 No archaeological features or artefacts were exposed in this trench. The stratigraphy comprised a 0.35m deep topsoil deposit, 300, which sealed a yellow/brown alluvial silt layer, 301. A hand excavated slot through this material showed it to be a c.0.5m deep laminated deposit, reflecting successive episodes of waterborne deposition. Occasional lenses of clay were observed within these laminations. This sealed a grey slightly silty clay, 302, representing an earlier phase of waterborne deposition.

6.4 Trench 4

- 6.4.1 The uppermost deposit comprised a deep topsoil layer 400, which was between 0.5 and 0.7m deep. This overlay a brown/grey clayey silt subsoil, 401, which gradually increased in depth from c.0.1m deep at the north end of the trench, to 0.5m at the south end of the trench.
- 6.4.2 At the north end of the trench, 401 sealed a layer of yellow/brown clayey silt, 404, similar to deposits 201 and 301 in Trenches 2 and 3 respectively. This was cut by a large cut feature of indeterminate size and shape, 405, of which only its northern edge could be clearly defined. A slot was excavated through the feature to determine its profile, which was moderately steep. Further excavation was precluded by the high water table and flooding derived from a broken ceramic land drain. The feature was filled by a brown/grey clayey silt, 402, with the overlying subsoil slumped into the top of the feature.
- 6.4.3 A machine excavated slot at the south end of the trench exposed a layer of dark brown peaty silt with frequent organic inclusions, 403, which was sealed by layer 402. The extent of the flooding in the trench made it unclear whether 403 was a fill of the large cut feature 405, or an earlier deposit.

6.5 Trench 5

- 6.5.1 Two topsoil or garden soil deposits were exposed in Trench 5. The most recent was 502, a layer of dark grey/brown slightly clayey silt with frequent small gravel. It was 0.33m deep at the south-west end of the trench, and gradually tapered away after 7.6m. It is likely to have been deposited as a ground raising and levelling deposit, and possibly to aid drainage.
- 6.5.2 The earlier topsoil layer, 503, was a dark brown/grey clayey silt, between 0.25 and 0.35m deep. At the north-east end of the trench it sealed a natural alluvial deposit of brown/yellow silt, 504. This was cut by a linear feature, 500, running on a broadly north – south alignment, containing a natural silting deposit of brown/grey silt, 501.
- 6.5.3 In the remainder of the trench, 503 sealed a layer of brown/grey silt, 505, identical to 501. It seems likely that this deposit was infilling a large cut feature similar to that in Trench 4. Flooding of the trench however, prevented further investigation.

7.0 Discussion and conclusion

- 7.1 The evaluation exposed only limited evidence of archaeological activity, and that identified was either undated or of early modern date. At the north end of the site, Trenches 1 and 3 exposed a sequence of natural deposits reflecting the repeated transgressions and regressions of floodwaters prior to extensive drainage of the region. These episodes were largely undated, although artefacts spanning the 15th – 19th centuries were recovered from the subsoil layer in Trench 1.
- 7.2 A similar sequence of natural deposits were identified in Trench 2, where they had been cut by a drainage/boundary feature, which had in turn been cut by a modern drain. The drainage/boundary feature appears on the First Edition Ordnance Survey Map (1888) of the site (figure 8), connecting with a wider system of land drainage to the north of the site that is still functioning.
- 7.3 Trenches 4 and 5 exposed what appeared to be two large silt filled drainage features. The date of these features is unknown, but they may represent works associated with one of the episodes of drainage that have taken place in the region. Major works in the area include the excavation of Morton's Leam in 1478, and the Peakirk Drain, which was excavated in 1631. This latter drain runs along the line of the modern A47 road, and originally joined the Nene at the same point as Morton's Leam, just to the south of the site. The canalisation of this stretch of the Nene itself was carried out in 1728 (Salzman 1948). It is not clear which, if any, of these phases of drainage the features exposed in Trenches 4 and 5 are related to; however the evaluation has provided evidence of this area's crucial role in the drainage of the wider landscape.

8.0 Effectiveness of methodology

- 8.1 The trial trenching methodology employed was appropriate to the scale and nature of the development. Excessive flooding, particularly in Trenches 4 and 5 limited detailed investigation of some features, although it was still possible to demonstrate that the proposed development area has little archaeological potential.

9.0 Acknowledgements

- 9.1 Allen Archaeological Associates would like to thank Skuna Corp Ltd. for this commission. The author would also like to thank the site staff; Alex Beeby, Phil Chavasse and Richard Woolley.

10.0 References

- Clay C., 2006, *Specification for an archaeological evaluation by trial excavation: Land north-east of Faraday Road Business Park, Wisbech Road, Littleport, Cambridgeshire*, Allen Archaeological Associates
- British Geological Survey, 1984. *Peterborough. England and Wales Sheet 158. Solid and Drift Geology. 1:50000 Provisional Series*. Keyworth, Nottingham: British Geological Survey
- Darby H.C., 1983, *The Changing Fenland*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge
- Gdaniec K., 2006, *Brief for archaeological evaluation*, CAPCA
- I.F.A., 1999, *Standards and guidance for archaeological field evaluations*, Institute of Field Archaeologists, Reading.
- Malim T., 2005, *Stonea and the Roman fens*, Tempus Publishing Limited, Stroud
- Pugh R.B. (ed.), 2002, *The Victoria History of the County of Cambridge and the Isle of Ely: Volume 4*, Oxford University Press, London
- Salzman L.F (ed.), 1948, *Victoria History of the Counties of England. A history of Cambridge and the Isle of Ely. Volume II*, Oxford University Press, London
- Williams A. & Martin G.H., 1992, *Domesday Book: A complete translation*, Alecto Historical Editions, London

11.0 Site archive

- 11.1 The documentary and physical archive is currently in the possession of Allen Archaeological Associates. It will be submitted to Cambridgeshire County Archaeological Store within six months.

Appendix 1: Colour Plates



Plate 1: The development area, looking north-west.



Plate 2: Trench 1, looking east-north-east. The peat layer is visible in the foreground, with a slot excavated through it to expose the underlying clay.



Plate 3: Trench 2, pre-excavation, looking north. The backfill of the modern sewer trench is visible along the east side of the trench.



Plate 4: A slot through ditch 206, cutting through the underlying silty clay and peat layers.



Plate 5: A slot through alluvial layer 301 in Trench 3 showing the laminated banding in the deposit and the underlying clay. Looking north.



Plate 6: Trench 4 pre-excitation, looking north, showing the extent of the flooding in the trench



Plate 7: Slot through the edge of the possible drainage feature 405, looking west.



Plate 8: Ditch 500, Trench 5, looking west. The shot also shows the flooding at the south end of the trench that precluded investigation of the possible drainage feature.

*Please note: north arrow has been positioned incorrectly and points west.

Appendix 2: Pottery and CBM report

Anne Boyle
Archaeological Project Services

Pottery

context	cname	full name	sub fabric	form type	sherds	vessels	weight	part	description	date
101	CONC	Colne ware fabric C	slightly sandy	bowl	2	1	34	base	flakes; internal glaze over white slip; ? ID or Bourne D ware	15th to 17th

CBM

context	cname	full name	fabric	frags	weight	description	date
101	BRK	Brick	vitrified fine sandy	1	23	near corner; handmade; salt surfaces; slop moulded ?; uneven arises; sunken margin	17th to 19th

Appendix 3: List of archaeological contexts

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Description</i>
Trench 1		
100	Layer	Brown/grey clayey silt. Topsoil
101	Layer	Grey/brown clayey silt. Subsoil
102	Layer	Peat layer
103	Layer	Dark grey/brown clayey silt lens
104	-	Number not used
105	Layer	Grey/brown clayey silt. Alluvial deposit
106	Layer	Dark grey/brown clayey silt. Alluvial deposit
107	Layer	Blue/grey clay. Alluvial deposit
Trench 2		
200	Layer	Brown/grey clayey silt. Topsoil
201	Layer	Grey/yellow silty clay. Alluvial deposit
202	Layer	Peat layer
203	Fill	Modern demolition rubble. Backfill of 204
204	Cut	Cut for modern sewage pipe/drain. Contains 203
205	Fill	Grey/brown silty clay. Natural silting of 206
206	Cut	N-S aligned ditch. Drain/boundary feature
207	Layer	Light grey/brown clayey silt. Alluvial deposit
208	Layer	Dark brown silty clay. Possible former ground surface
209	Layer	Light grey clay. Alluvial deposit
Trench 3		
300	Layer	Brown/grey clayey silt. Topsoil
301	Layer	Yellow/brown silt. Alluvial deposit
302	Layer	Grey slightly silty clay. Alluvial deposit
Trench 4		
400	Layer	Brown/grey clayey silt. Topsoil
401	Layer	Brown/grey clayey silt. Subsoil
402	Fill	Brown/grey clayey silt. Natural silting of 405
403	Layer	Dark brown peaty silt with frequent organic inclusions. Possible fill of 405
404	Layer	Yellow/brown clayey silt. Alluvial deposit
405	Cut	Cut for possible large drainage feature. Contains 402, possibly 403
Trench 5		
500	Cut	N-S aligned linear feature. Contains 503
501	Fill	Brown/grey silt. Natural silting of 500
502	Layer	Dark grey/brown slightly clayey silt, frequent small gravel. Garden soil and ground raising/levelling deposit
503	Layer	Dark brown/grey clayey silt. Former topsoil below 502
504	Layer	Brown/yellow silt. Alluvial deposit
505	Layer/Fill?	Brown/grey silt. Possible infilling of large drainage feature

Appendix 4: OASIS Summary Form

OASIS ID: allenarc1-23635

Project details

Project name

Archaeological Evaluation Report. Trial trenching at Homelands, High Road, Guyhirn, Cambridgeshire

Short description of the project

Trial trenching in advance of residential development (5 trenches, 1 x 20m, 2 x 12m, 2 x 10m).

Project dates

Start: 08-01-2007 End: 10-01-2007

Previous/future work

No / Not known

Any associated project reference codes

F/YR06/0966/F - Planning Application No.

Any associated project reference codes

ECB2477 - Museum accession ID

Type of project

Field evaluation

Site status

None

Current Land use

Residential 1 - General Residential

Monument type

FIELD BOUNDARY Uncertain

Monument type

DITCHES Uncertain

Significant Finds

POTTERY Post Medieval

Methods & techniques

'Sample Trenches'

Development type

Rural residential

Prompt

Planning condition

Position in the planning process

After full determination (eg. As a condition)

Project location

Country

England

Site location

CAMBRIDGESHIRE FENLAND WISBECH ST MARY Homelands, High Road, Guyhirn, Cambridgeshire

Postcode

PE13 4XX

Study area
0.20 Hectares

Site coordinates
TF 3972 0318 52.6080292695 0.063623236051 52 36 28 N 000 03 49 E Point

Height OD
Min: 0m Max: 1.00m

Project creators

Name of Organisation
Allen Archaeological Associates

Project brief originator
Local Authority Archaeologist and/or Planning Authority/advisory body

Project design originator
Chris Clay

Project director/manager
Chris Clay

Project supervisor
Chris Clay

Type of sponsor/funding body
Developer

Name of sponsor/funding body
Skuna Corp. Ltd.

Project archives

Physical Archive recipient
Cambridgeshire County Archaeological Store

Physical Archive ID
ECB2477

Physical Contents
'Ceramics'

Digital Archive recipient
Cambridgeshire County Archaeological Store

Digital Archive ID
ECB2477

Digital Contents
'none'

Digital Media available
'Images raster / digital photography'

Paper Archive recipient
The Collection, Lincoln

Paper Archive ID
ECB2477

Paper Contents
'none'

Paper Media available
'Context sheet','Drawing','Miscellaneous Material','Plan','Report','Section'

Project bibliography 1

Publication type
Grey literature (unpublished document/manuscript)
Title
Archaeological evaluation report. Trial trenching at Homelands, High Road, Guyhirn, Cambridgeshire

Author(s)/Editor(s)
Clay, C.

Date
2007

Issuer or publisher
Allen Archaeological Associates

Place of issue or publication
Lincoln

Entered by
Chris Clay (allenarchaeology@btconnect.com)
Entered on
9 February 2007