

An Archaeological Evaluation on land adjacent to Great North Road, Little Paxton, Cambridgeshire



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**An Archaeological Evaluation on Land Adjacent to
Great North Road, Little Paxton, Cambridgeshire**

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Illustrations by Bryan Crossan

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Introduction

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken on land adjacent to Great North Road, Little Paxton in advance of the construction of a new water main by Anglian Water. The development area is centred at TL 183 624 and work was undertaken during late November 2010. Three Launch/Reception Pits (L/RP) were excavated along the proposed route of the pipe in order to determine the presence/absence of any archaeological remains and investigate their date, extent, character, significance and state of preservation. The investigations followed a project specification set out by the Cambridge Archaeological Unit (CAU) (Standring 2010) in response to a design brief that was issued by Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Service Conservation Team (CCAS/CT) (Thomas 2010). Three Launch/Reception Pits were positioned along the eastern edge of the field; two revealed archaeological features comprising a pit, a linear feature, a gully and a possible posthole.

Topography and Geology

The site was located on an area currently used as agricultural land which ran parallel to the Great North Road (B1041). The underlying geology comprised 1st and 2nd Terrace River gravels. The site lays approximately 600m from the current course of the River Great Ouse at a height of approximately 16.60m OD.

Archaeological and Historical Background

Abundant archaeology is known both within the development area and surrounding landscape from the prehistoric and Roman periods. The gravel terraces of the River Great Ouse are rich in settlement and funerary/ritual sites which have been previously investigated throughout time.

Within the immediate environs archaeological remains from the Neolithic and Bronze Age have been recorded that included a possible Neolithic hut/structure on the line of the A1 (CHER 00589) and a Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age settlement to the north near the junction of the A1 and Great North Road. The Neolithic structure was marked by postholes in a D shape with internal supports with two floor levels; one side cut away and possibly filled by straw leaving the other half of the floor raised. The entrance was to the north-west supported by two postholes that supported the turf-built structure. Artefacts included Peterborough Ware pottery and worked flint (Rudd 1968). The Late Neolithic/ Early Bronze Age settlement (CHER 10710) consisted of property and field boundaries and possible structures complimented with a rich flint artefact assemblage (Alexander 1992). In addition, a possible enclosure was recorded on aerial photographs that indicated a late prehistoric/Roman land use of the gravel terrace (CHER MCB 18803).

Methodology

The principle objective of the evaluation was to determine the presence, absence and extent and nature of archaeological activity and to assess the degree of preservation of any features and environmental remains.

Three archaeological trenches were machine excavated at launch / Reception pit locations using a mini-digger with a 0.90m wide toothless ditching bucket, which removed the overburden down to an archaeological level. All works were undertaken under the careful supervision of an experienced archaeologist. The unit modified

version of the MoLAS recording system was used; all relevant archaeological and geological features were planned at 1:20, with sections drawn at 1:10 and augmented by a colour digital imagery photographic record. Pits were at least half sectioned and linear features sampled at appropriate intervals. Archaeological features were assigned a unique number (e.g. **F.100**; bold upon introduction to the text) and each stratigraphically distinct episode (e.g. a cut, a fill) was recorded with a unique context number, (e.g. [001]).

The site was surveyed into the Ordnance Survey Grid and Ordnance Datum by means of an RTK GPS unit. All work was carried out with strict adherence to Health and Safety legislation and within the recommendations of SCAUM. A total of 4 features were identified during the evaluation with 10 separate contexts assigned. The artefacts and accompanying documentation have been compiled into a stable, cross-referenced and indexed archive in Accordance with Appendix 6 of MAP 2 (English Heritage 1991). The archive is currently stored at the offices of the Cambridge Archaeological Unit under the project code LPA 10, ECB 3487.

Results

The three Launch/Reception pits (L/RP) were located alongside the edge of the field adjacent to the modern draining ditch that ran parallel to the road where the drilling of the new water main was to take place (Figure 1). All of the L/RPs revealed evidence of subsoil; however L/RP 1 had evidence of extensive disturbance from tree roots and animal burrows which made the identification of features difficult. The remaining two had moderate root system intrusions.

Launch/Reception Pit 1

This was the southernmost trench that revealed extensive disturbance from tree roots in addition to the immediate vicinity of the adjacent modern field drainage ditch that resulted in mixed deposits (see Figure 2). The edge of the pit **F.1** was difficult to distinguish due to tree rooting and produced a small artefact assemblage that included worked flint, pottery and a worked stone; however due to their small size and condition these had no clear diagnostic attribution.

| Launch/Reception Pit 1 | | | | | | | |
|--|--------------|-------------|----------------|-----------|-----------|-------------------------------|-----------|
| General Description | | | | | | Orientation | E-W |
| This launch/reception pit had one potential archaeological feature; a pit F.1. There was evidence of extensive tree root disturbance. The natural geology was brown/orange gravel with silty patches that was overlain by a subsoil [13]; mid brown/orange sandy silt with moderate gravel inclusions. | | | | | | Avg. Topsoil Depth (m) | 0.30-0.40 |
| | | | | | | Avg. Subsoil Depth (m) | 0.13-0.14 |
| | | | | | | Approx. Width (m) | 2.20 |
| | | | | | | Length (m) | 1.80 |
| Contexts | | | | | | | |
| Feature No. | Feature Type | Context No. | Cut/Fill/Layer | Width (m) | Depth (m) | Artefacts | Comments |
| 1 | Pit | 1 | f | 0.85 | 0.3 | pottery, flint | Unknown |
| | | 2 | c | | | | |

Launch Reception Pit 2

No archaeological features were observed in this trench (see Figure 2).

| Launch/Reception Pit 2 | | |
|--|-------------------------------|------|
| General Description | Orientation | N-S |
| This launch/reception pit had no evidence of archaeological features. The natural geology was brown/orange gravel with silty patches that was overlain by a subsoil [13]; mid brown/orange sandy silt with moderate gravel inclusions. | Avg. Topsoil Depth (m) | 0.28 |
| | Avg. Subsoil Depth (m) | 0.12 |
| | Approx. Width (m) | 2.30 |
| | Length (m) | 2.00 |
| No features | | |

Launch/Reception Pit 3

There was evidence of three features in this L/RP that appeared to have been cut through the subsoil. **F.3**, a gully cut linear feature **F.4** and could have potentially been a field drainage ditch as it aligned to the edge of the field and plough scars that were evident during the machining of the L/RP. The linear **F.4** was the only clear feature uncovered during this investigation; however no artefacts were recovered in the 1.00m excavated section. The remainder of the exposed feature was excavated for sampling and potential artefact recovery purposes; no artefacts were found. The posthole **F.5** was not observed during the machining of the L/PR; this was recorded in section only (see Figure 3).

| Launch/Reception Pit 3 | | | | | | | |
|--|-------------------|-------------|-----------------|-------------------------------|-----------|-----------|----------|
| General Description | | | | Orientation | | E-W | |
| This launch/reception pit had two archaeological features; a gully/field drain F.3 , a linear F.4 and possible posthole F.5 . The natural geology was brown/orange gravel with silty patches that was overlain by a subsoil [8]; mid brown/orange sandy silt with | | | | Avg. Topsoil Depth (m) | | 0.30-0.40 | |
| | | | | Avg. Subsoil Depth (m) | | 0.13-0.14 | |
| | | | | Approx. Width (m) | | 2.20 | |
| | | | | Length (m) | | 1.80 | |
| Contexts | | | | | | | |
| Feature No. | Feature Type | Context No. | Cut/Fill/ Layer | Width (m) | Depth (m) | Artefacts | Comments |
| 3 | Gully/Field Drain | 6 | f | 0.21 | 0.24 | none | Unknown |
| | | 7 | c | | | | |
| 4 | Linear | 9 | f | 0.80 | 0.61 | none | Unknown |
| | | 10 | c | | | | |
| 5 | Posthole | 11 | f | 0.25 | 0.18 | none | Unknown |
| | | 12 | c | | | | |

Discussion

Background research on previously recorded prehistoric and Roman activity in the surrounding landscape highlighted the potential for archaeological features to be encountered during this investigation. The small size of the L/RPs only provided a small amount of archaeological evidence, although to get features in such small sample trenches does indicate the wider potential of this gravel terrace. The only clearly defined archaeological features were in L/RP 3 where there was a linear feature, a gully and a posthole. The pit in L/RP 1 was less well defined and produced the only artefactual evidence which had no distinguishing diagnostic features other than indicating a broad later prehistoric date for the pit.

The linear features (F.3 and F.4) were fairly shallow and probably did not represent major boundary ditches. It is possible that F.4 represents an internal field system ditch, the date of which is as yet unknown but appears to pre-date the small gully F.3 which is likely to be a post-medieval field drain. The posthole F.5 represented the only feature of its kind and there was no other evidence of further postholes to indicate whether this was an isolated feature or part of a structure that continued beyond the limits of the trench.

The presence of archaeological features in this investigation attested to the wider potential of the immediate environs and, in keeping with background information recorded in the Historic Environment Record and published for the wider Ouse Valley, indicates the strong archaeological potential of the gravel terraces around Little Paxton (Dawson 2000, Rudd 1968). Any further ground works within this field have a strong likelihood of encountering archaeological features.

To summarise, the investigation uncovered a pit of possible later prehistoric date with a further two undated linear features and posthole. These features within two of the three small launch/reception pits indicate the wider potential of archaeological activity on the gravel terrace at this location.

Acknowledgements

The project was funded by Anglian Water, monitored on behalf of Cambridgeshire County Council by and managed by Robin Standring. The archaeology was monitored and interpreted by the author. The area was surveyed by Bryan Crossan and digitised by Jane Mathews. Illanith Pongolini sorted and catalogued the finds and Bryan Crossan produced the illustrations.

Appendices

Specialist Reports

Flint Artefacts *Emma Beadsmoore*

A worked flint was recovered from F.1, a crudely struck, chronologically non-diagnostic but potentially later prehistoric secondary flake.

Prehistoric Pottery *Mark Knight*

A single piece of pottery was recovered from F.1, a pit. This was a very small fragment and had no diagnostic traits. The fabric of the pot suggested a later prehistoric date, perhaps Bronze Age.

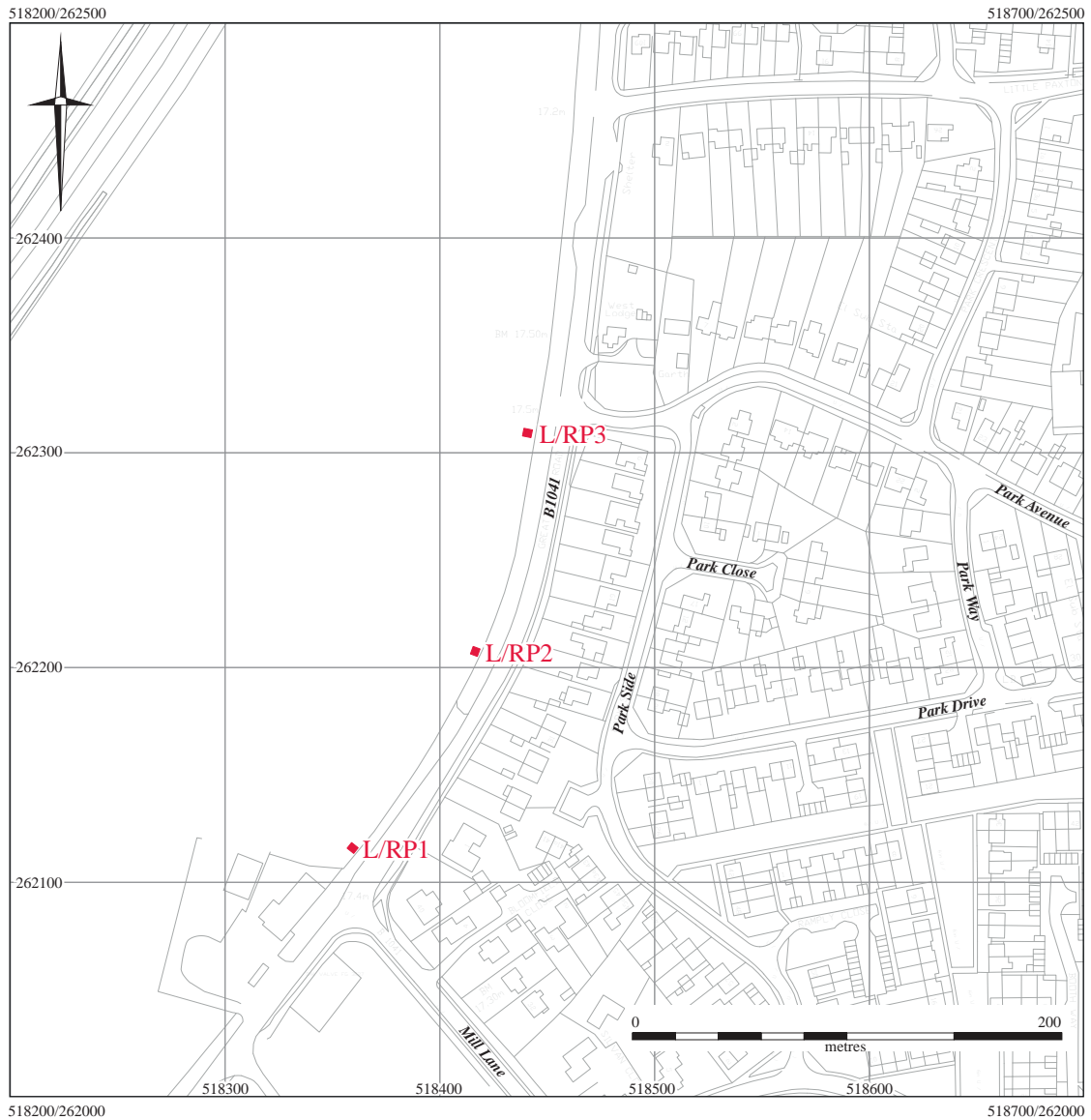
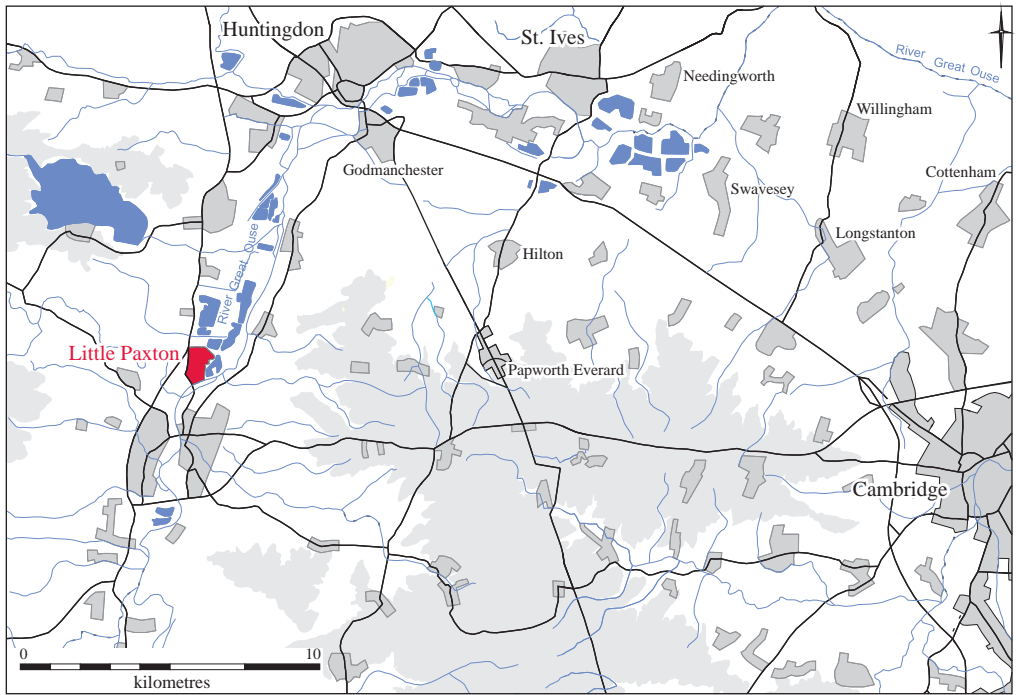


Figure 1. Location map of Test Pits at Little Paxton



Figure 2. Photographs of Test Pits L/RP1 (North-East facing, above) and L/RP2 (North-East facing, below)



Facing NE

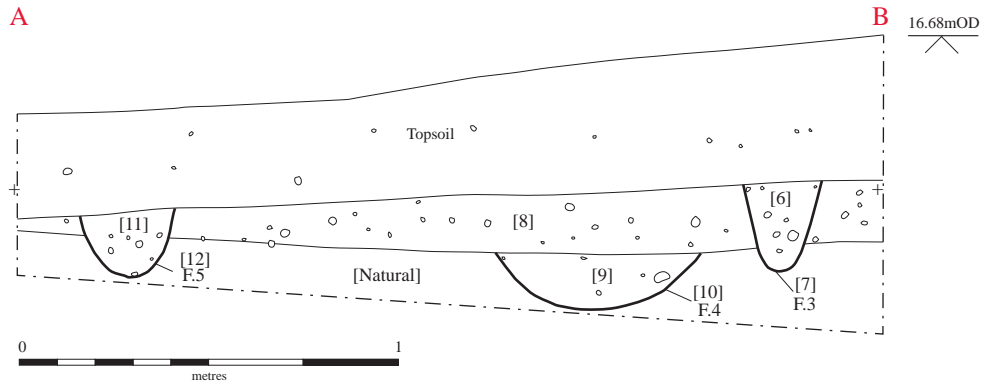
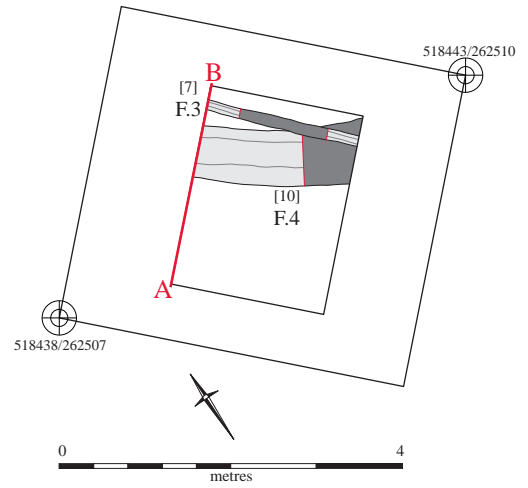


Figure 3. Photograph, plan and section of Test Pit L/RP3

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Project details

| | |
|--|---|
| Project name | An Archaeological Evaluation on Land Adjacent to Great North Road, Little Paxton, Cambridgeshire |
| Short description of the project | An archaeological evaluation was undertaken on land adjacent to Great North Road, Little Paxton in advance of the construction of a new water main by Anglian Water. Three Launch/Reception Pits were positioned along the eastern edge of the field; two revealed archaeological features comprising a pit, a linear feature, a gully and a possible posthole suggesting a Later Prehistoric date. |
| Project dates | Start: 29-11-2010 End: 29-11-2010 |
| Previous/future work | No / No |
| Any associated project reference codes | LPA 10 - Sitecode |
| Any associated project reference codes | ECB3487 - HER event no. |
| Type of project | Field evaluation |
| Site status | None |
| Current Land use | Cultivated Land 2 - Operations to a depth less than 0.25m |
| Monument type | PIT Late Prehistoric |
| Monument type | LINEAR Uncertain |
| Monument type | POSTHOLE Uncertain |
| Significant Finds | POTTERY Late Prehistoric |
| Significant Finds | FLINT Late Prehistoric |
| Methods & techniques | 'Test Pits' |
| Development type | Pipelines/cables (e.g. gas, electric, telephone, TV cable, water, sewage, drainage etc.) |

Prompt Direction from Local Planning Authority - PPG16

Position in the planning process After full determination (eg. As a condition)

Project location

Country England

Site location CAMBRIDGESHIRE HUNTINGDONSHIRE LITTLE PAXTON Adjacent to Great North Road

Postcode PE19 6NW

Study area 2.00 Hectares

Site coordinates TL 183 624 52.2466412106 -0.267007560491 52 14 47 N 000 16 01 W Point

Lat/Long Datum Unknown

Height OD / Depth Min: 16.50m Max: 16.60m

Project creators

Name of Organisation Cambridge Archaeological Unit

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

Project design originator Robin Standring

Project director/manager Robin Standring

Project supervisor Jacqui Hutton

Type of sponsor/funding body Water Authority/Company

Name of sponsor/funding body Anglian Water

Project archives

Physical Archive recipient Cambridge Archaeological Unit

Physical Archive ID LPA 10

Physical Contents 'Ceramics','Worked stone/lithics'

Digital Archive recipient Cambridge Archaeological Unit

Digital Archive ID LPA 10

Digital Contents 'Ceramics','Worked stone/lithics'

Digital Media available 'Images raster / digital photography','Spreadsheets','Text'

Paper Archive ID LPA 10

Paper Contents 'Ceramics','Worked stone/lithics'

Paper Media available 'Context sheet','Drawing','Photograph','Plan','Report','Section','Survey '

Project
bibliography 1

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