

Roman and Saxon Court, Coneygree Road, Stanground, Peterborough

An Archaeological Evaluation.



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An Archaeological Evaluation at Roman and Saxon Court, Coneygree Road, Stanground

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with Anne de Vareilles

Illustrations by Bryan Crossan

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Summary

From 5th to 8th March 2012 an archaeological trench based evaluation was undertaken at Roman and Saxon Court, Stanground (centred on TL 20775 97018) extending over c. 1ha. The work was commissioned by Davis Langdon on behalf of Cross Keys Homes in response to a request from the Peterborough City Council Archaeological Services (PCCAS). Within an area of known Roman activity a series of boundary ditches were identified, one of which formed an enclosure around two cremations.

INTRODUCTION

An archaeological investigation was undertaken on behalf of Cross Keys Homes. The investigation was commissioned to define the scope of any archaeological activity on land at Roman and Saxon Court, Coneygree Road, Stanground (centred on TL 20775 97018) extending over an area of c. 1ha. (Figure 1). This work was a response to a request from the Peterborough City Council Archaeological Service (PCCAS) to provide information on any potential heritage assets of archaeological interest on the site through a trenched evaluation (Casa Hatton 2011). The project followed a specification set out by the Cambridge Archaeological Unit (Beadsmoore 2011).

The site is located north of Coneygree Road, within Stanground on the southeast edge of Peterborough. The geology comprises Oxford clay overlain by Second Terrace river gravels (www.bgs.co.uk), with the site situated at 11m AOD. The Proposed Development Area (PDA) was situated within an area originally occupied by Roman and Saxon Court, a retirement home. To the north, south, and west is post-war housing, while to the east are allotments. At the time of the evaluation the retirement home buildings had been demolished and the associated trees left standing. An earthen bank had been formed around the inner perimeter of the site, from demolition material and subsoil.

Archaeological Background

An assessment of the archaeological background for the area has been detailed in the desk top assessments for Stanground College (Appleby 2008a) and more relevantly Magna Park (Appleby 2008b). The reader is referred to these for a more detailed assessment of the known archaeology in the area.

Stanground is sited on the western edge of the Flag Fen basin, an area rich in prehistoric archaeology with notable sites identified at Flag Fen (Pryor 2001), Bradley Fen (Gibson and Knight 2006) and Must Farm (Gibson *et al.* 2010). These sites attest to lowland activity and responses to changes in the environment with activity recorded in, beneath, and along the edge of the fen. The PDA is located c. 300m south of the fen edge on higher ground at 11m AOD with evidence for prehistoric activity recorded throughout Stanground. Stray finds of Neolithic flint implements have been recovered to the south (HER no.'s 02953 and 50514) while Bronze Age pottery is recorded to the northwest (HER no. 03150) and south (HER no. 50403) of the PDA, along with a Bronze Age handaxe or palstave (HER no. 02950) and a sword (HER no. 02937) to the southeast. Prior to the construction of the Stanground bypass to the southeast of the PDA a Bronze Age Urnfield cemetery of 19 cremation burial was excavated (Taylor & Aaronson 2006, Kenny 2007).

Roman activity is widespread across Stanground with the Historic Environment Record (HER) containing 18 separate records for the immediate area ranging from stray pottery and coin finds to evidence for pottery production and settlement. Of relevance to the PDA is the record of a Roman pottery kiln, road, settlement, and wharf (HER no.'s 03130 and 03153) c. 50m to the north. The kiln site is recorded as having been found in 1908 along with the remains of a wharf and road 'covered' in potsherds close to the kilns. Roman pottery kilns were also excavated to the east of the PDA at Park Farm in 1965 and 1967 (HER no. 03128). A watching brief was undertaken on the Park Farm site in 1989 when the remains of a rectilinear beam-slot structure were identified, along with ditches containing large amounts of pottery, kiln debris and ash (Dannell *et al.* 1993).

During the Medieval period the village of Stanground was focused on the church of St. John the Baptist to the north east of the PDA. During this period the PDA was in an area of open fields which were used for the grazing of sheep. Within the immediate area were rabbit warrens and it is from these that the name Coneygree Road is derived (an enclosure of managed rabbit warrens), while to the east were deer parks (modern day Park Farm). It was not until the post-war period and the rise of Peterborough as a New Town that this area was developed.

Methodology

Seven trenches were excavated totalling 92.94m. These were all dug using a 360° tracked machine with a toothless ditching bucket and supervised by an experienced archaeologist. The trenches were excavated down to a level where archaeological features were visible, these were planned and hand excavated by skilled archaeologists.

Trench sheets were completed for all of the trenches to record section profiles and geological variances. These were accompanied by scale plans of all archaeological features (at 1:50) and the recording of excavated features with sections drawn at a scale of 1:10 which were complimented by digital photographs. The Unit-modified version of the Museum of London Archaeological Service (MoLAS) recording system was employed throughout with all excavated stratigraphic events assigned feature numbers (F.#) and all contexts assigned individual numbers ([context #]). The PDA was fixed to the Ordnance Survey (OS) grid and a contour survey undertaken with a Global Positioning System (GPS). The Site was identified as RSC12.

RESULTS

The PDA had undergone varying levels of truncation as a result of the building of the retirement home and its subsequent demolition. The southwest corner of the site, outside of the earthen bank, had been untouched. Trench 1 was cut through this area and, although no archaeological features were present, the topsoil and subsoil profiles indicated that there had been no disturbance or truncation within this grassy area (Figure 2).

The central portion of the site had undergone heavy truncation and there were no traces of topsoil or subsoil in this area, with the subsoil appearing to have been utilised to form the surrounding bank. Four of the excavated trenches were cut in this area of the site, Trenches 2,

3, 4, and 5. There was no cover over these trenches with only sections of two trenches, 4 and 5, having topsoil and subsoil, otherwise the natural had been exposed during, and weathered since, the demolition. Despite this, within Trench 2 was the remnant of a pit (F.4) that was 1.10m in diameter and survived to a depth of 0.16m. There was no artefact material within the feature; however, based upon the nature of the archaeology encountered elsewhere this has been tentatively dated to the Roman period. In Trench 5 two linear features were recorded; the terminal of a northwest southeast ditch F.5, and a section of ditch on the same alignment, F.6. The section of F.6 had been truncated and was also cut by a series of foundation walls, as a result only a small section was excavated, and here the ditch was 0.65m wide and 0.15m deep. The terminal of a separate linear feature, F.5 was the southeast end of a ditch 0.65m wide and 0.26m deep. As with the pit, there was no datable material from either of these features, but the shared alignment of these linear features is the same as that of those associated with Roman features in Trench 6.

Trenches 6 and 7 were sited within the eastern portion of the site, in an area of grass and trees. Both of these trenches showed that this area had not undergone truncation, but that the level of the ground here had been raised. Below the current turf was a deposit of made ground *c.* 0.64m thick formed by dumps of soil, small quantities of building material, and charcoal and waste material spreads. This deposit sat atop the original topsoil compressing it to a thickness of *c.* 0.09m, and this sealed a subsoil *c.* 0.25m thick, as a result the archaeology exposed within Trench 6 was well preserved. Two ditches, F.1 and F.3 were recorded within Trench 6. Located towards the northeast end of the trench F.3 was orientated northwest-southeast on a similar alignment to F.5 and F.6 in Trench 5, and perpendicular to F.1. A single sherd of un-diagnostic pottery was recovered from the feature. Towards the southwest end of Trench 6, F.1 was orientated northeast-southwest and extended into Trench 7 where it turned to the southeast. This was the only feature of note in Trench 7, which was dominated by a foundation wall which cut along the length of the trench. The two linear features in Trench 6 were wider than those in Trench 5 with F.1 1.31m wide and 0.45m deep, and F.3 0.70m wide and 0.27m deep. That F.1 appeared to turn in Trench 7 would suggest that it was part of the northwest corner of an enclosure, and within it, located at the southwest end of Trench 6, was a cremation F.2. The cremation was left unexcavated; however, in amongst the cremated bone were fragments of probable Roman pottery. The pottery did not appear to have contained the cremated material, but was rather mixed in with it, fragments of a vessel burnt with the body? To the southeast of this cremation, and just visible within the edge section of the trench, was the edge of a second possible cremation.

DISCUSSION

The evaluation at Roman and Saxon Court has shown that, despite the presence of a retirement home and its subsequent demolition, there are areas of undisturbed ground which sealed and preserved elements of a Roman landscape, typical of the surrounding area. The removal of the subsoil that protected the archaeology has had an obviously detrimental effect and it is unlikely few small discrete features would have survived, although, as the evaluation has shown, larger features such as pits and ditch lines are still identifiable. Fortunately, the human remains recorded within Trench 6 appear to have been protected by the overlying deposits.

That Roman archaeology was encountered within the PDA is hardly surprising. The Roman kiln and associated road and wharf recorded in 1908 was sited to the northeast of the site, *c.*

50m adjacent to the PDA attesting to the presence of Roman occupation within this area of Stanground. The two cremations indicated in Trench 6 suggest the possibility of some form of cremation cemetery bounded by an enclosure ditch F.1. The presence of sterile deposits within the ditch and the absence of any material culture would suggest that if there is a cremation cemetery here it was small and short lived. The linear features identified elsewhere on the site would have been part of a series of enclosures or boundaries, which could have formed a series of field system ditches derived from the activity around the wharf and road to the north.

APPENDIX

Assessment of Bulk Environmental Samples from RSC.12

Anne de Vareilles

Methodology

Two samples from Roman ditches were taken and processed using an Ankara-type flotation machine. The flots were collected in 300µm aperture meshes and the remaining heavy residues washed over a 1mm mesh. Both the flots and heavy residues were dried indoors prior to analysis. The flots were quickly scanned under a low power binocular microscope (6x-40x magnification). J. Hutton scanned through the small heavy residues; neither ecofacts nor artefacts were present.

Results and Discussion

Twenty litres of soil from F.1 [1] and 19L from F.5 [7] produced very small flots composed of small comminuted charcoal (all <4mm), fresh, intrusive rootlets and goosefoot seeds, with no cereal remains of any sort. A small grass seed (1mm long) and a sheep's sorrel seed (*Rumex acetosella*) were found in F.1. These tiny, fragile seeds suggest that the absence of other carbonised plant remains is not a consequence of adverse preservation conditions.

Although negative results from two samples cannot be conclusive, it is apparent that no archaeobotanical connection between the enclosure ditches and the nearby Romano-British settlement (HER no.'s 03130 and 03153) was found. However, plant remains should be sampled for in other features, as the level of preservation is promising.

Trench Descriptions

Trench 1		
General Description Trench 1 was located within an area which had not been developed upon, therefore the topsoil and subsoil were undisturbed. No archaeological features were present. The natural was clay.	Orientation	NW-SE
	Avg. Topsoil Depth (m)	0.30
	Avg. Subsoil Depth (m)	0.17
	Width (m)	1.80
	Length (m)	15.00

Trench 2							
General Description There was no surviving topsoil or subsoil and much of the trench showed evidence of disturbance during the demolition of the previous buildings. A single pit was present towards the SW end of the trench.	Orientation		NE-SW				
	Avg. Topsoil Depth (m)		-				
	Avg. Subsoil Depth (m)		-				
	Width (m)		1.80				
	Length (m)		11.50				
Contexts							
Feature No.	Feature Type	Context No.	Cut/Fill/Layer	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Selected Artefacts	Comments
4	Pit	5	Fill				
		6	Cut	1.10	0.60		

Trench 3		
General Description There was no surviving topsoil or subsoil and much of the trench showed evidence of disturbance during the demolition of the previous buildings. Building foundations were present but no archaeological features.	Orientation	NE-SW
	Avg. Topsoil Depth (m)	-
	Avg. Subsoil Depth (m)	-
	Width (m)	1.80
	Length (m)	14.00

Trench 4		
General Description Topsoil and subsoil survived at the NE end of the trench where a single foundation wall and service was present. The SW end of the trench was within an area of disturbance where the topsoil and subsoil had been removed. No archaeological features were present.	Orientation	NE-SW
	Avg. Topsoil Depth (m)	0.31
	Avg. Subsoil Depth (m)	0.15
	Width (m)	1.80
	Length (m)	19.00

Trench 5							
General Description Topsoil and subsoil survived at the SW end of the trench where it was sealed by 0.3m of made ground, while the NE end the topsoil had been truncated. The terminal of a linear feature and a linear feature were recorded.	Orientation		NW-SE				
	Avg. Topsoil Depth (m)		0.20				
	Avg. Subsoil Depth (m)		0.18				
	Width (m)		1.80				
	Length (m)		19.00				
Feature No.	Feature Type	Context No.	Cut/Fill/Layer	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Selected Artefacts	Comments
5	Linear	7	Fill				SE terminal of a ditch
		8	Cut	0.65	0.26		
6	Linear	9	Fill				
		10	Cut	0.65	0.15		

Trench 6		
General Description	Orientation	NE-SW

A well preserved trench with a layer of made ground sealing the original topsoil and subsoil. Two linear features were recorded and a cremation.						Avg. Topsoil Depth (m)	0.55
						Avg. Subsoil Depth (m)	0.25
						Width (m)	1.80
						Length (m)	25.00
Feature No.	Feature Type	Context No.	Cut/Fill/Layer	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Selected Artefacts	Comments
1	Linear	1	Fill				
		2	Cut	1.31	0.45		
2	Cremation			0.40			Unexcavated
3	Linear	3	Fill				
		4	Cut	0.70	0.27		

Trench 7		
General Description	Orientation	NW-SE
This trench was attached to Trench 6 and had a similar depth of made ground overlying a buried topsoil and subsoil. A modern drain cut through the majority of the trench. A single linear feature was recorded in the trench as a continuation of F.1 but was left unexcavated.	Avg. Topsoil Depth (m)	0.60
	Avg. Subsoil Depth (m)	0.27
	Width (m)	1.80
	Length (m)	9.44

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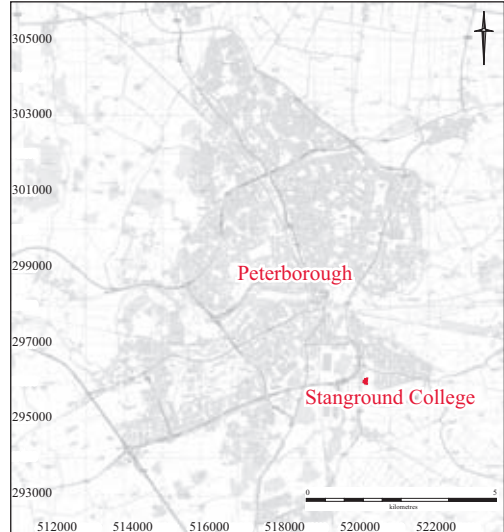


Figure 1. Location map.

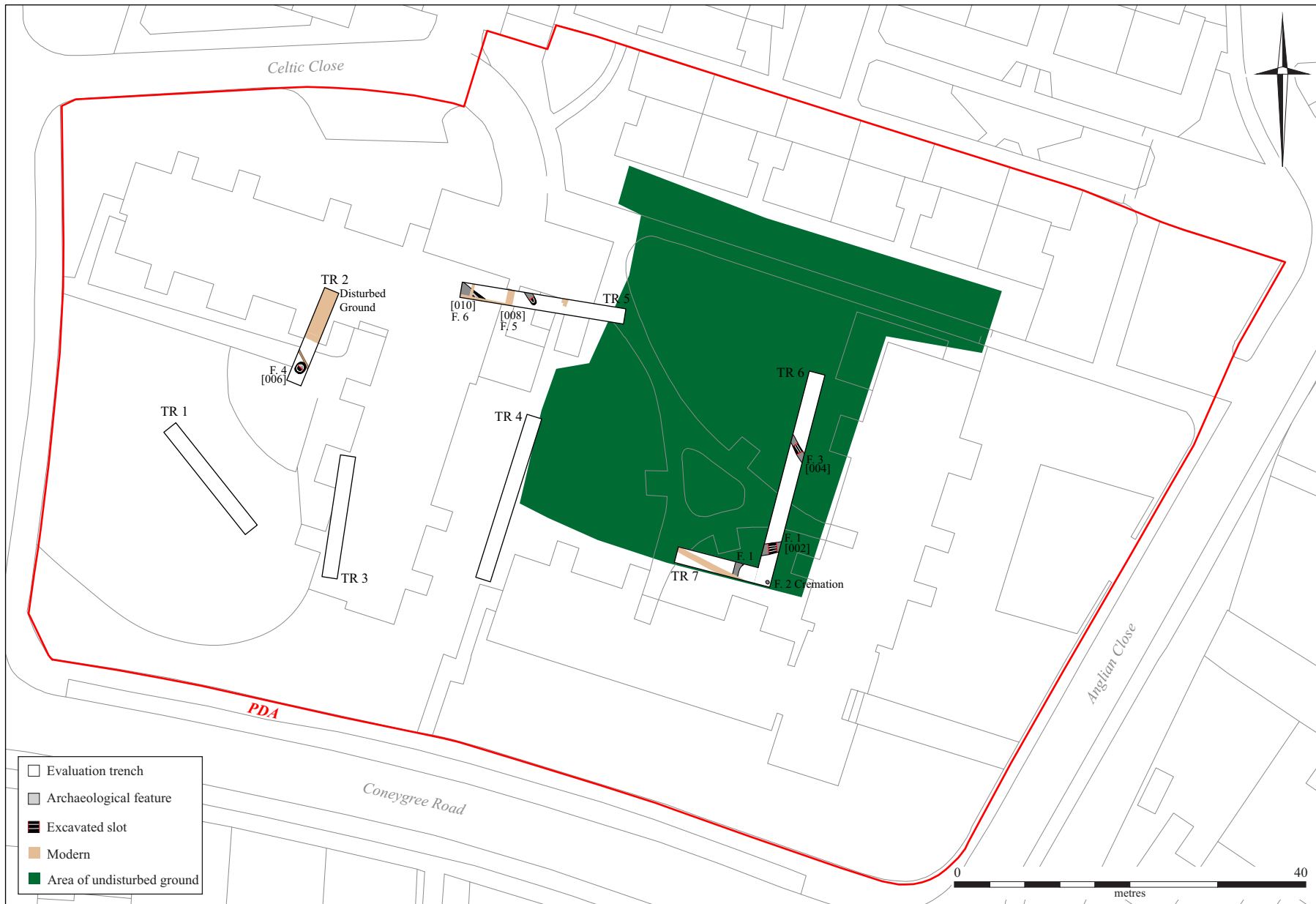


Figure 2. Trench Plan.

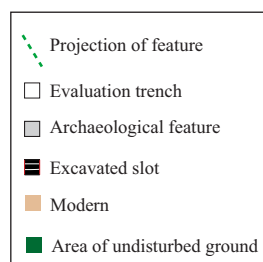


Figure 3. Main archaeological features and projected orientations.



Figure 4. Photograph of cremation in Trench 6 and Trench 2 showing level of disturbance.

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Project details

Project name	An Archaeological Evaluation at Roman and Saxon Court, Coneygree Road, Stanground
Short description of the project	From 5th to 8th March 2012 an archaeological trench based evaluation was undertaken at Roman and Saxon Court, Stanground (centred on TL 20775 97018) extending over c. 1ha. The work was commissioned by Davis Langdon on behalf of Cross Keys Homes in response to a request from the Peterborough City Council Archaeological Services (PCCAS). Within an area of known Roman activity a series of boundary ditches were identified, one of which formed an enclosure around two cremations.
Project dates	Start: 05-03-2012 End: 09-03-2012
Previous/future work	No / Yes
Any associated project reference codes	RSC12 - Sitecode
Any associated project reference codes	11/00107/FUL - Planning Application No.
Type of project	Field evaluation
Site status	None
Current Land use	Vacant Land 1 - Vacant land previously developed
Monument type	CREMATION Roman
Monument type	DITCHED ENCLOSURE Roman
Monument type	DITCH Uncertain
Monument type	PIT Uncertain
Significant Finds	POTTERY Uncertain
Methods & techniques	'Sample Trenches'
Development type	Housing estate

Prompt Direction from Local Planning Authority - PPS

Position in the planning process Pre-application

Project location

Country England

Site location CAMBRIDGESHIRE PETERBOROUGH STANGROUND NORTH Roman and Saxon Court

Postcode PE2 8LA

Study area 1.00 Hectares

Site coordinates TL 20775 97018 52.5572074738 -0.218277454631 52 33 25 N 000 13 05
W Point

Height OD / Depth Min: 11.00m Max: 11.00m

Project creators

Name of Organisation Cambridge Archaeological Unit

Project brief originator Unitary Authority Archaeologist

Project design originator Emma Beadsmoore

Project director/manager Emma Beadsmoore

Project supervisor Ricky Patten

Type of sponsor/funding body Developer

Name of sponsor/funding body Cross Keys Homes

Project archives

Physical Archive recipient Cambridge Archaeological Unit

Physical Contents 'Ceramics','Environmental'

Digital Archive recipient Cambridge Archaeological Unit

Digital Contents 'Survey'

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

Paper Archive recipient Cambridge Archaeological Unit

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

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