

New Road, Chatteris, Cambridgeshire

An Archaeological Evaluation Assessment



Alasdair Wright

**LAND NORTH OF NEW ROAD, CHATTERIS,
CAMBRIDGESHIRE**

An Archaeological Evaluation

Alasdair Wright

with contributions by Craig Cessford and Grahame Appleby

Illustrations by Bryan Crossan

Cambridge Archaeological Unit
University of Cambridge

Event No. ECB 4078

Report No. 1200

December 2013

INTRODUCTION	1
Location, Topography and Geology	
Archaeological Background	
Methodology	
RESULTS	3
STATEMENT OF POTENTIAL	4
SPECIALIST STUDIES	5
REFERENCES	6
APPENDIX	7

Summary

A trial trench based archaeological evaluation was undertaken by Cambridge Archaeological Unit (CAU) on land north of New Road, Chatteris, Cambridgeshire (centred on TL 403 865) in December 2013. The proposed development area (PDA) comprises c. 1.3 ha.

A total of four archaeological features were recorded. Two of which are remnants of medieval ridge and furrow cultivation, and a further two which comprise a potential Roman trackway.

INTRODUCTION

A trial trench based archaeological evaluation was undertaken by Cambridge Archaeological Unit (CAU) in December 2013 on 1.3 ha of land north of New Road (B1098) and to the west of Isle of Ely Way (A142), Chatteris, Cambridgeshire (centred on TL 403 865).

The project was undertaken in order to address a condition placed upon planning consent for the construction of housing at the site. Work was carried out in accordance with a project design specification (Beadsmoore 2013) produced by the CAU in response to a brief issued by Dan McConnell of the Historic Environment Team, Cambridgeshire County Council.

The work was commissioned by Langwith Builders.

Location, Topography and Geology

The PDA is located immediately to the north of New Road (B1098) on the eastern periphery of the town of Chatteris (Figure 1). The site is otherwise bounded by open agricultural land, however, in contrast, at the time of investigation the PDA was under pasture.

The site lies on the eastern fringe of what was previously Chatteris island, an area of higher ground within former fen. Throughout early prehistory the area to the north and east of the site comprised tidal and intermediate marsh, while a major river channel and associated tributaries ran just to the north. From the Middle Bronze Age onwards this same area was subject to the encroachment of fresh water peat marsh (Hall 1992).

The PDA is situated at approximately 6m AOD and is on the whole flat. The underlying geology comprises March gravels over the Ampthill Clay Formation (BGS 1995).

Archaeological Background

The PDA lies within the East Anglian Fenland, the largest area of former coastal wetland in Britain (Waller 1994) and a rich archaeological landscape. Higher ground, such as Chatteris island was consequently a focus for settlement throughout much of history and prehistory; particularly notable are the Iron Age and Roman remains in the east and north-east of the 'island'.

Prehistoric

Evidence of early prehistoric activity within 1km of the PDA is limited, which is perhaps expected given Hall's (1992) notion that the clay soils of Chatteris island were too heavy to attract occupation in early prehistory, however, some evidence of occupation does exist. One Mesolithic perforated pebble macehead was recovered from farmland slightly west of the PDA, and two Neolithic axeheads have been discovered in Chatteris itself. More convincing evidence of occupation during the earlier prehistoric period comes from the excavation south of New Road in central

Chatteris, where several pits containing Early Bronze Age pottery were discovered (Cooper 2004). Further a field, more extensive Neolithic and Bronze Age sites, including artefact scatters and barrows have been identified by the Fenland Project along the southern edge of Chatteris 'island' (Hall 1992). Finally of potential earlier prehistoric date, is a circular enclosure identified from aerial photographs lying just to the south of the PDA. It measures 60m in diameter and has an entrance to the south. It is certainly possible this enclosure could be a Later Neolithic henge monument, however the cropmark is described merely as a trace, therefore it may not accurately represent the archaeology lying beneath the ground.

Evidence of later prehistoric activity is abundant, although not necessarily within the immediate vicinity of the PDA. At New Road in central Chatteris an archaeological evaluation identified three Iron Age burials and the remains of a post-built structure as well as ditches and pits (Thatcher 2006), while immediately to the south of this, further remains were recorded to the north of the Church of St. Peter and St. Paul in 2001 (Cooper 2004). Here, Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age features were recorded alongside Late Iron Age/Roman ditches, pits and postholes (ibid.). There is also evidence of Iron Age salt production from a recently excavated site at Fenland Way in western Chatteris (Hogan in prep.).

The most extensive evidence of later prehistoric activity lies to the east of the PDA. This activity is in the form of a number of Iron Age occupation sites and two cropmark complexes (Hall 1992) recorded by the Fenland Project. Of these, the site at Langwood Farm is one the largest later prehistoric 'open settlement' scatters recorded in Britain and extends over c. 10 ha (Evans 2003). Occupation remains dating from the Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age through to the Roman period are associated with significant quantities of artefacts including pottery and metalwork and clearly represent a major settlement complex.

Roman

Based on the remains recorded to the north of the Church of St. Peter and St. Paul, and the artefacts found to the north of New Road, Chatteris is thought to have had continuous occupation throughout the Roman period (Cooper 2004). This argument is only strengthened by the new discovery of Roman activity at Fenland Way (Hogan in prep.).

As in the Iron Age, major settlement during the Roman period appears to have been concentrated away from the centre of Chatteris to the east and northeast of the PDA, where settlements at Honey Hill and Langwood continued well into the Roman period. At Langwood, large quantities of artefacts as well as the remains of a stone building have been recorded (Evans 2003), while occupation debris, as well as paddock boundaries and a possible temple site, have been identified at Honey Hill by the Fenland Project (Hall 1992).

Medieval – present

Evidence of Saxon activity in the area is limited although post-built structures and pits dating to this period were recorded during the excavations to the north of the Church of St. Peter and St. Paul (Cooper 2004). Chatteris is recorded in the Domesday Survey

as comprising two main manors; prior to the dissolution, one belonged to Ramsey and the other to Ely and subsequently Chatteris Abbey. The abbey, established in c. 980 AD, is thought to have stood in Park Street where architectural stone fragments have been found. The parish Church of St. Peter and St. Paul was largely rebuilt in the 19th century but dates from the 12th century and retains some 14th century elements. In terms of archaeology no major Medieval settlement evidence has been recorded in the town.

During the Medieval and post-Medieval period the PDA and immediate vicinity is thought to have had been used extensively for cultivation given the remnants of nearby ridge and furrow, and documentary evidence stating in 1240 the surrounding land being broken or breached for agriculture (Hall 1992).

Methodology

The trial trenching programme comprised four trenches, a total of 200 m of trenching (Figure 2). Trenches were located in order to provide even coverage of the PDA.

Trial trenches were excavated using a tracked 360° excavator fitted with a toothless bucket and operating under direct archaeological supervision at all times. Trenches were located using an advanced Global Positioning System (GPS) with Ordnance Datum (OD) heights obtained. Potential archaeological features were planned at a scale of 1:50 and subsequently sample excavated with all archaeological finds retained. A written record of archaeological features was created using the CAU recording system (a modification of the MoLAS system) and sections drawn at an appropriate scale.

The work was carried out in full accordance with the IFA's Standard Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluations.

RESULTS

All trenches were excavated through the overlying soil formation to the upper horizon of the March gravels. The trenches revealed four features; two ditches in Trench 3 and two potential furrows in Trench 4.

Soil Formation

All four trenches revealed a largely uniform development of soils across the site. This comprised a dark grey organic silt top soil, ranging between 0.30-0.40m in depth, and a grey brown clay silt sub soil up to 0.23m in depth. The top soil appears to be a recent plough soil that has been left to pasture. The sub soil appears to be a largely plough truncated remnant of the previous soil formation.

Archaeological Features

The features in Trench 4 (F.3 and F.4, Figure 1) were not excavated as they were only visible in the side sections of the trench at the interface between the sub soil and March gravels leaving little trace of the features in plan. These features were both

linear and aligned north south. Both were 1.20m wide and roughly 0.05-0.10m deep. They were filled with a brown grey clay silt material, identical to the sub soil.

The features in Trench 3 (Figure 1) comprised two ditches F.1 (measuring 0.60m wide and 0.25m deep) and F.2 (measuring 0.45m wide and 0.22m deep) (Figure 2). They were both filled with a brown grey silt sand clay material similar to the sub soil. The ditches were aligned east west and parallel to each other spaced approximately 3.75m apart, which suggests they may form some sort of narrow trackway. One sherd of undiagnostic coarse ware pottery of potentially Roman or medieval date was recovered from the fill F.2 (see Cessford, this report) and a single fragment of Roman imbrex tile was recovered from F.1 (see Appleby, this report).

DISCUSSION

The site produced little in the way of archaeological remains, although evidence of two distinct phases of previous land use was recorded.

The first of these is represented by the archaeology in Trench 4. The broad shallow shape of these linear features indicates that they are probably furrows. Additional compelling evidence comes from Hall (1992), who remarks that in the medieval period the site was subject to north-south aligned ridge and furrow cultivation, F.3 and F.4 are on a comparable alignment.

The features in Trench 3 potentially represent some sort of narrow trackway. However, it is difficult to project the course of ditches beyond the boundaries of the trench, consequently, the possibility that the ditches were a part of land division system or drainage system should not be discounted.

The difficulty in dating the artefacts from F.1 and F.2 (Cessford, Appleby, this report) makes dating the features problematic. Given that the pottery in F.2 is potentially medieval, the ditches could be considered medieval or later, however, their total misalignment with the ridge and furrow in Trench 3 suggest a medieval or later date is less likely. The material recovered from the features potentially indicates the ditches were filling in during or after the Roman period and were probably in use around a similar time.

STATEMENT OF POTENTIAL

Despite the potential for some prehistoric and Roman archaeology to be present in the PDA the evaluation results revealed limited remains. Half of these remains are the trace remnants of medieval ridge and furrow cultivation, as the Fenland survey suggests (Hall 1992). The other archaeology revealed is a potential trackway containing a small quantity of ambiguous but possible Roman material. It is difficult to infer any serious activity or settlement from these remains. Trackways in nature are likely to link areas of any particular land use; furthermore, any intense sites of Roman activity are likely to be represented by cropmarks as at the nearby sites of Langwood Farm and Honeyhill.

Acknowledgements

The work was commissioned by Langwith Builders. Dan McConnell of CHET monitored the project. The trial trenching programme was directed by Mathew Collins who was assisted on site by Tim Lewis. John Moller was responsible for field survey and report graphics were produced by Bryan Crossan. The project was managed by Emma Beadsmoore.

SPECIALIST STUDIES

Pottery - *Craig Cessford*

A single small abraded body sherd of brown grey coarse fabric sand tempered pot. Largely undiagnostic, but probably Roman or 13th-15th Century.

Tile – *Grahame Appleby*

A single fragment of Roman Imbrex tile. Orangey buff in colour. Finger impressions on under side.

REFERENCES

British Geological Society. 1995, Cambridge, Solid and Drift Edition, Sheet 172

Evans, C. 2003. Britons and Roman at Chatteris: Investigations at Langwood Farm, Cambridgeshire. *Britannia*, Vol. 34, pp 175-264

Cooper, S. 2004. Multi-period Site at High Street, Chatteris: Post-Excavation Assessment and Updated Project Design. CCCAFU Report No.768

Hall, D. 1992. The Fenland Project No.6: The South-Western Cambridgeshire Fens. EAA Report No.56

Thatcher, C. 2006. Land off New Road, Chatteris, Cambridgeshire. Archaeological Evaluation. CAM ARC Report No. 868

Hogan, S. in preparation, Fenland Way, Chatteris, Cambridgeshire: An Archaeological Excavation, CAU Report

Waller, M. 1994. The Fenland Project No.9: Flandrian Environmental Change in Fenland. EAA Report No.70

APPENDIX

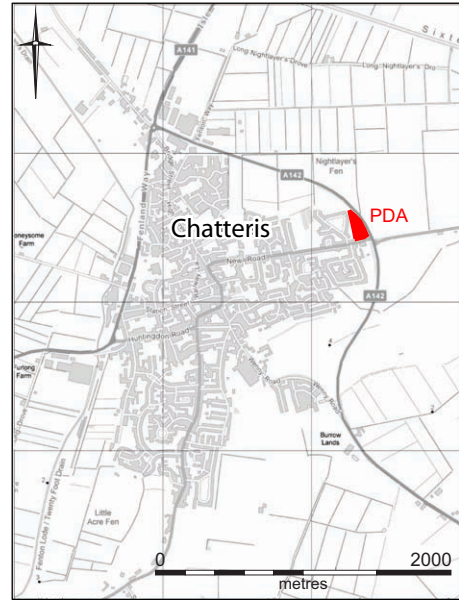
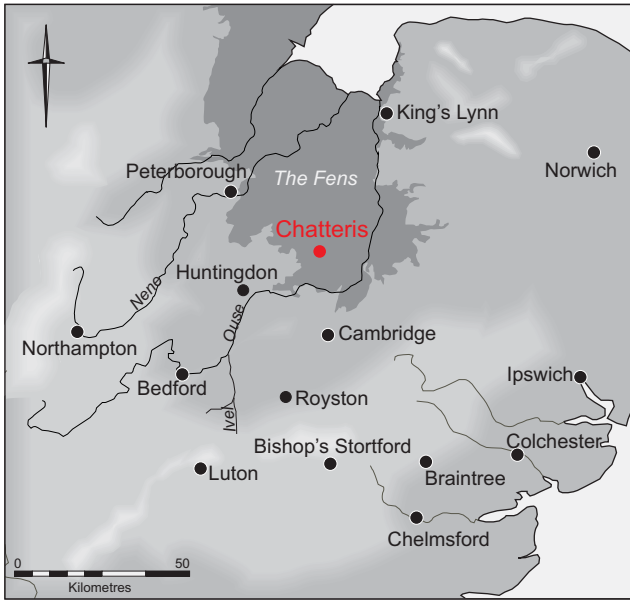
Trench and Feature descriptions

Trench 1		
Description	Max. Topsoil Depth (m)	0.3
Trench revealed a modern plough scar and no other archaeology. No subsoil was present.	Max. Subsoil Depth (m)	N/A
	Length (m)	50
	Width (m)	2
	Orientation	N-S

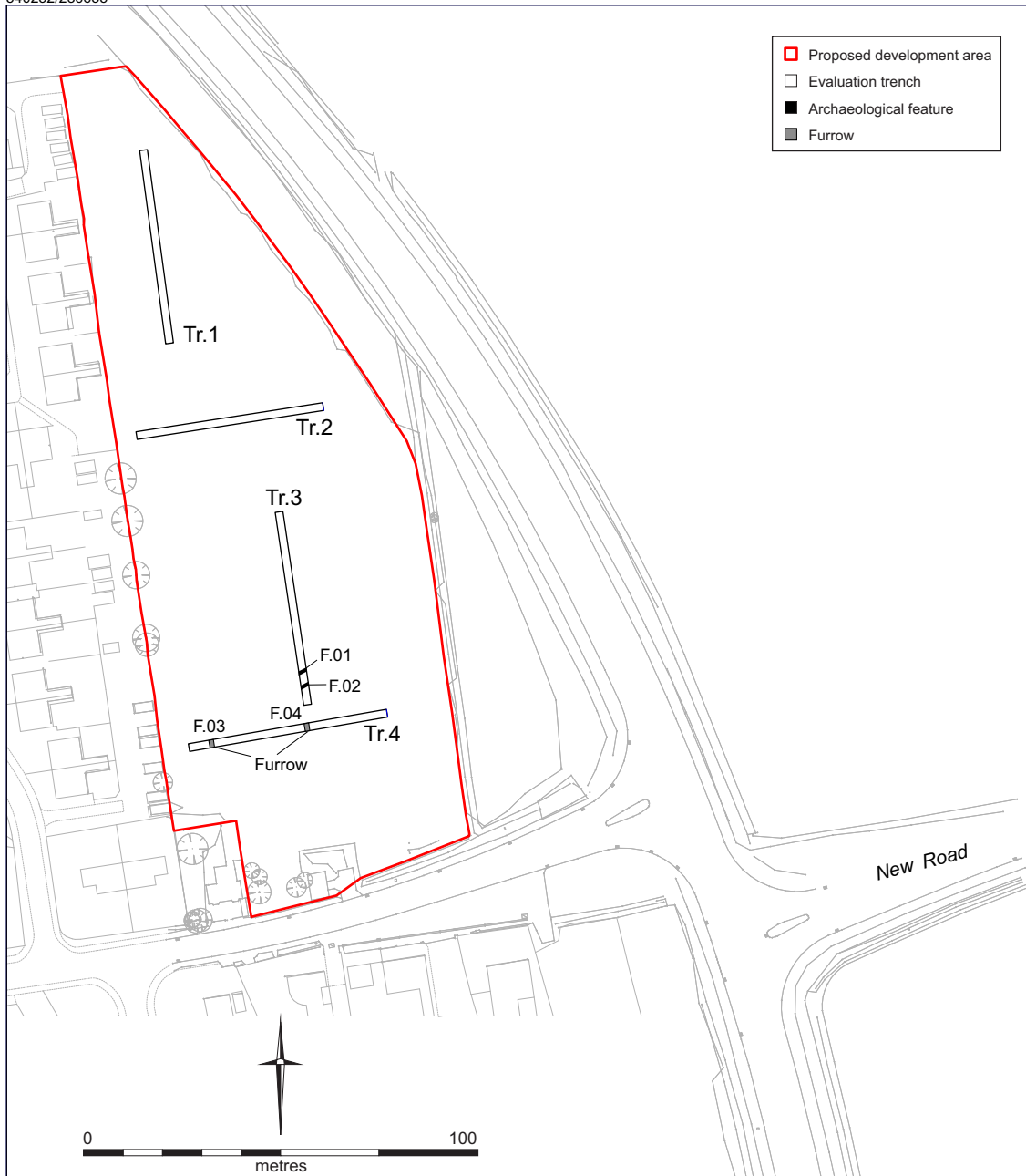
Trench 2		
Description	Max. Topsoil Depth (m)	0.38
Trench revealed no archaeology.	Max. Subsoil Depth (m)	0.1
	Length (m)	50
	Width (m)	2
	Orientation	E-W

Trench 3					
Description		Max. Topsoil Depth (m)		0.3	
Trench revealed two ditches F1 and F2, forming a possible trackway.		Max. Subsoil Depth (m)		0.15	
		Length (m)		50	
		Width (m)		2	
		Orientation		N-S	
Feature No.	Feature Type	Context No.	Context Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)
1	Ditch	1	Fill		
		2	Cut	0.6	0.25
2	Ditch	3	Fill		
		4	Cut	0.45	0.22

Trench 4					
Description		Max. Topsoil Depth (m)		0.4	
Trench revealed two possible furrows. The trench was excavated through the upper horizon of the natural gravels meaning the 'furrows' only appeared in the trench sections.		Max. Subsoil Depth (m)		0.23	
		Length (m)		51.5	
		Width (m)		2m	
		Orientation		E-W	
Feature No.	Feature Type	Context No.	Context Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)
3	Ditch	5	Fill		
		6	Cut	1.2	0.05
4	Ditch	7	Fill		
		8	Cut	1.2	0.1



540232/286635



540494/286335

Figure 1. Location plan.

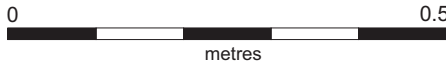
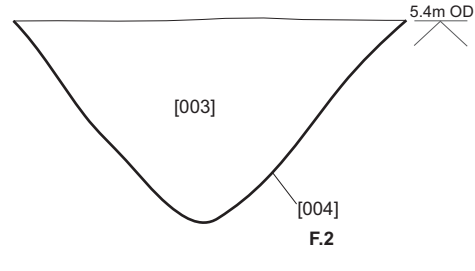
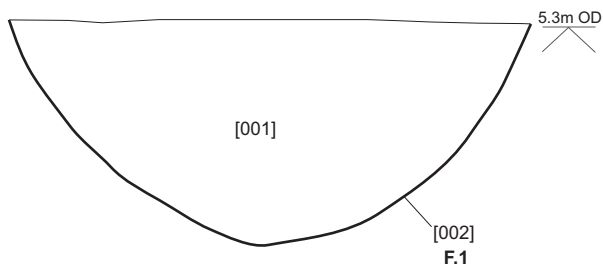


Figure 2. Photographs and sections of F.1 and F.2.

OASIS DATA COLLECTION FORM: England

[List of Projects](#) | [Manage Projects](#) | [Search Projects](#) | [New project](#) | [Change your details](#) | [HER coverage](#) | [Change country](#) | [Log out](#)

Printable version

OASIS ID: cambridg3-166965

Project details

Project name	Land North of New Road, Chatteris, Cambridgeshire: An Archaeological Evaluation
Short description of the project	A trial trench based archaeological evaluation was undertaken by Cambridge Archaeological Unit (CAU) on land north of New Road, Chatteris, Cambridgeshire (centred on TL 403 865) in December 2013. The proposed development area (PDA) comprises c. 1.3 ha. A total of four archaeological features were recorded. Two of which are remnants of medieval ridge and furrow cultivation, and a further two which amount to a potential Roman trackway.
Project dates	Start: 05-12-2013 End: 05-12-2013
Previous/future work	No / Not known
Any associated project reference codes	ECB4078 - Contracting Unit No.
Any associated project reference codes	NEC13 - Sitecode
Type of project	Field evaluation
Site status	None
Current Land use	Grassland Heathland 5 - Character undetermined
Monument type	RIDGE AND FURROW Medieval
Monument type	DITCHES Roman
Significant Finds	POTTERY Roman
Significant Finds	TILE Roman
Methods & techniques	""Sample Trenches""
Development type	Housing estate
Prompt	Direction from Local Planning Authority - PPS
Position in the planning process	Not known / Not recorded

Project location

Country	England
Site location	CAMBRIDGESHIRE FENLAND CHATTERIS New Road, Chatteris
Study area	1.30 Hectares
Site coordinates	TL 403 865 52 0 52 27 28 N 000 03 54 E Point
Lat/Long Datum	Unknown
Height OD / Depth	Min: 5.29m Max: 6.12m

Project creators

Name of Organisation	Cambridge Archaeological Unit
Project brief originator	Local Authority Archaeologist and/or Planning Authority/ advisory body
Project design originator	Emma Beadsmoore
Project director/manager	Emma Beadsmoore
Project supervisor	Matthew Collins
Type of sponsor/funding body	Developer
Name of sponsor/funding body	Langwith Builders

Project archives

Physical Archive recipient	Cambridge Archaeological Unit
Physical Archive ID	NEC13
Physical Contents	"Ceramics"
Digital Archive recipient	Cambridge Archaeological Unit
Digital Archive ID	NEC13
Digital Media available	"Spreadsheets","Text"
Paper Archive ID	NEC13
Paper Media available	"Context sheet","Plan","Section"

Project bibliography 1

Publication type	Grey literature (unpublished document/manuscript)
Title	Land North of New Road, Chatteris, Cambridgeshire: An Archaeological Evaluation
Author(s)/Editor(s)	Wright, A
Other bibliographic details	CAU Report No. 1200
Date	2013
Issuer or publisher	CAU
Place of issue or publication	Cambridge

Description A4 wire bound with plastic laminate front, 7 pages, 1 figure.

Entered by alasdair wright (ajw238@cam.ac.uk)

Entered on 18 December 2013

OASIS:

Please e-mail [English Heritage](#) for OASIS help and advice

© ADS 1996-2012 Created by [Jo Gilham and Jen Mitcham](#), email Last modified Wednesday 9 May 2012

Cite only: /export/home/web/oasis/form/print.cfm for this page