

Compass House, Cambridge

An Archaeological Evaluation



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**Compass House, East Road,
Cambridge**

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Event No. ECB4479

Planning Application No. 15/0149/FUL

Report No. 1304

September 2015

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Summary

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken by Cambridge Archaeological Unit (CAU) at the proposed site of a two storey extension and infilling of the undercroft for Anglia Ruskin University at Compass House, East Road, Cambridge. The fieldwork comprised trial trenching, which revealed Post-Medieval quarrying features and modern disturbance relating to the construction of the extant buildings.

INTRODUCTION

In July 2015 Cambridge Archaeological Unit (CAU) undertook a trench-based evaluation within a 0.099ha area of land to the east of the historic centre of Cambridge. The Proposed Development Area (PDA) is located on the site of Compass House, East Road and is centred at National Grid Reference TL 46116 58806. The PDA is bound to the north by Maid's Causeway, to the south and east by East Road, and to the west by commercial buildings.

The evaluation was designed to assess the potential impact of the proposed construction of a two storey extension and infilling of an undercroft in a programme of development for Anglia Ruskin University on archaeological remains. The investigation was carried out on behalf of Anglia Ruskin University. The work was undertaken in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation produced by Emma Beadsmoore (2015) of the CAU in response to a brief issued by Gemma Stewart of the Cambridgeshire Historic Environment Team.

Geology and Topography

The PDA is the site of Compass House, a four-storey office building and car parking space constructed in the 1980s, and acquired by Anglia Ruskin University for development (Fig.1). The PDA is situated on the outskirts of modern Cambridge's city centre, the neighbourhood being part of the city's eastward urban expansion in the 18th and 19th centuries, formerly the site of several consecutive small scale industries throughout the Post-Medieval/Modern period, including a brewery and a brickworks. The immediate surrounding area consists of commercial buildings to the west and busy city streets to the east, north and south. The PDA is at approximately 11m OD and the underlying geology consists of 3rd terrace Cam river gravel deposits over Gault formation (BGS GeoIndex accessed August 2015).

Archaeological Context

The historical and archaeological background of the site has been covered in depth in a previous desktop assessment (Appleby 2015), whilst the wider background of Cambridge is reviewed in several published sources (e.g. Cam 1959; Lobel 1975; Taylor 1999). This information is not therefore reproduced here in full. Nevertheless, it is necessary to briefly outline the background of the area in order to place the PDA securely within its wider context.

Prehistoric and Romano British

There is only sparse evidence available to aid discussion of prehistoric activity in this area of Cambridge. Diffuse evidence of prehistoric occupation is recorded in the immediate vicinity, including Palaeolithic implements, Mesolithic and Neolithic flint, and prehistoric features, though these are scattered (Appleby 2015). In the vicinity of the PDA, Roman artefacts and features occur in small amounts in conjunction with later prehistoric finds and features on sites situated on Newmarket Road c.450m to the east of the PDA. These probably relate to agricultural activity and attest to a low level presence in this area, which is regarded as a rural hinterland during the period (Newman 2013). Roman settlement of Cambridge appears to have been centred on the

Castle Hill area (Alexander & Pullinger 2000) 1 mile to the northwest, though finds from this period have also been made in the lower town and other settlement has been investigated in the Addenbrookes vicinity (Evans *et al.* 2008).

Medieval

Investigations at the Eastern Gate Hotel site revealed a 6th century ditch and Anglo-Saxon cruciform brooch and loom weight, which hint at a possible settlement or cemetery in the vicinity. However, more latterly the area returned to agricultural use. The Medieval town of Cambridge lay at the centre of a three-field system, two of which formed the town's common fields (Cam 1934, Lobel 1975, Hesse 2007). The PDA lies within the common Barnwell Fields to the east of the town, between Mill Road to the north and Hills Road to the south. There is no evidence to suggest that the site was other than rural at this time. In the immediate vicinity of the PDA there is a widespread scatter of Medieval activity, especially in association with Barnwell Priory, the precinct of which is within 100m to the northeast. At Eastern Gate Hotel, a dislocated settlement associated with the priory dates to 13th and 14th centuries (Newman 2013).

Post-medieval and 20th century

Following the dissolution of the Barnwell Priory in 1538, allotments of common land and fields were appropriated by the colleges and private individuals (Taylor 1999), though it is unclear how this affected the PDA itself. The PDA presumably remained agricultural or common land until inclosure in 1807. Urbanisation and extension of Cambridge followed inclosure and the area saw the construction of a number of buildings including a brewery and a brickworks (Appleby 2015). This process of development accelerated in the later 19th and early 20th century with maps showing several phases of construction, reconfiguration and demolition up to the extant building completed in the 1980s. Evidence of quarrying activities in the immediate vicinity throughout this period and a 19th century brickworks situated directly to the east of the PDA suggest that clay and gravel pits may have been dug in the area.

METHODOLOGY

The trial trenching programme comprised 3 trenches, a total of 31m of trenching, covering 5% of the proposed development area. Trenches were located in order to avoid known services and standing buildings, target presumed areas of least disturbance (carparking areas), yet provide an even coverage of the PDA (Fig. 2). Trial trenches were excavated using a combination of 360° excavator with 1.60m toothless ditching bucket and mini-digger fitted with a 0.8m wide toothless bucket operating under direct archaeological supervision at all times. Trenches were located using measurements from known points as GPS location was not a viable option.

Potential archaeological features were planned at a scale of 1:25 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. Metal-detection of potential archaeological features took place.

The work was carried out in full accordance with the CIFA's Standard Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluations. The project archive will be deposited in the Cambridgeshire Archaeology store.

RESULTS

All three trenches revealed a layer of hardcore, between 0.40m and 0.55m deep, beneath the tarmac surface. This sits on top of a made ground levelling layer of compacted rubble and gravel mixed with dark brown/orange brown silts which is only disturbed by the very modern features (e.g. the footing for undercroft support of the extant building in Trench 3) and is therefore presumed to relate to the latest phase of construction. Beneath this modern horizon in Trench 1 and Trench 3 there are areas of yellow natural sands and gravels and features cut into these. Trench 2, however, revealed no natural geology, consisting entirely of redeposited material in patches and layers beneath the upper made ground layer.

Five large extraction pits in Trench 1 (F1, F2, F3, F4 & F5) and a further pit in Trench 3 (F7) attest to a continuation of Post-Medieval quarrying activities into the PDA from surrounding areas. Manual excavation of F1 and F2 recovered a small number of artefacts but could not prove the depth or profile of these features due to health and safety restrictions on excavation depths. Machine excavation of F3, F4 and F5 was undertaken to at least record a maximum depth of F5, which was recorded as 1.55m beneath an overburden of 0.55m. Contexts were recorded from outside of the trench for the lower parts of these three features but as they seemed identical in composition, colour and compaction to the backfill observed above them this should not have resulted in any inaccuracy.

One final potential archaeological cut feature revealed by the trenching program is F6, a smaller pit, which is cut by F7 and also the modern footprint of the extant building, making it potentially the earliest feature to be exposed. However the similar artefact assemblage of animal bone, brick and tile suggests that this feature is still probably Post-Medieval in date.

In the patches of redeposited material in Trench 2 a sondage was dug targeted via metal-detecting to a maximum depth of 0.35m below an overburden of 0.95m. This revealed four different contexts but no evidence of cut features. All four layers contained artefacts but one 15th century pottery sherd in the uppermost material in combination with Modern nails and other metal in the lowest marly context attest to the thoroughly churned up nature of these redeposited contexts. Also from this sondage, both the freshness of the bone (pers. comm. Vida Rajkovaca) and small size of the oyster shell (pers. comm. Grahame Appleby) support a Post-Medieval date.

DISCUSSION

The evidence for quarrying activity in the proposed development area is not unexpected but does extend the known area for Post-Medieval gravel and sand extraction on the eastern outskirts of Cambridge. The depth and shape of F5 which was the only pit machine excavated to its maximum depth show similarities with other

Post-Medieval quarry pits in the area for example at Land off Auckland Road site (Timberland 2012) and at the former Cambridge Regional College Site, Brunswick (Atkins 2011), which can presumably be extended to the other extraction pits F1, F2, F3, F4, & F7.

The only other potential archaeological cut feature, F6, can also be attributed to the Post-Medieval period though it is possibly the earliest feature revealed. This suggests that there is little or no archaeology pre-dating the Post-Medieval period.

The lack of any archaeological features pre-dating the Post-Medieval period in the trenched area is likely due to large areas being disturbed by Post-Medieval quarrying and also the modern disturbance relating to the extant building and services. Redeposited material to a depth of at least 1.2m in Trench 2 suggests that some areas may have been levelled in the Modern period with large amounts of material, possibly deriving from clearance of a previous phase of land-use on the site but which may have been imported for that purpose.

Acknowledgements

The investigation was carried out on behalf of Anglia Ruskin University. The fieldwork was carried out by Leanne Zeki and Guiseppina Mutri. Brian Crossan was responsible for the graphics. The project was managed by Emma Beadsmoore and monitored by Gemma Stewart of Cambridgeshire Historic Environment.

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 Proposed development area


Figure 1. Site Location





Figure 2. Trench plan

TRENCH AND CONTEXT INDEX

Trench 1								
Length (m)		13.10		Topsoil depth (m)		0		
Width (m)		1.60		Hard Core depth (m)		0.41		
Orientation		E-W		Made Ground depth (m)		0.08 -0.20		
Avg Trench depth (m)		0.85		Max. Sondage depth (m)		2.10		
Features (n=5): F1, F2, F3, F4, F5.				5 post-Medieval intercutting quarry pits containing brick, tile, coal and bone. Machine testing through F5 indicates a depth of at least 1.55m beneath an overburden depth of 0.55m.				
								
Feature	Type	Context	Type	Description	Shape	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Period
1	Quarry Pit	100	Fill	Slump of natural sands and gravels				Post-Medieval
		101	Fill	Backfill of mixed silts, gravels and sands				
		102	Cut	Vertical sides, unknown base.	Sub-rounded	2.60	>0.55	
2	Quarry Pit	103	Fill	Backfill of mixed silts, gravels and sands				Post-Medieval
		104	Cut	Very steep/vertical sides, unknown base	Sub-rounded	>2.75	0.67	
3	Quarry Pit	115	Fill	Backfill of mixed silts and gravels				Post-Medieval
		116	Cut	Very steep/vertical sides, unknown base	Sub-rounded	>2.07	>0.65	
4	Quarry Pit	117	Fill	Backfill of mixed silts and gravels				Post-Medieval
		118	Cut	Mostly vertical sides, with gentle break of slope to irregular base.	Sub-rounded	>2.75	>0.65	
5	Quarry Pit	119	Fill	Backfill of mixed silts, gravels and rubble				Post-Medieval
		120	Cut	Very steep/vertical sides, with gentle break of slope to flat base.	Sub-rounded	>3.35	1.55	

Trench 2								
Length (m)	6.50	Topsoil depth (m)	0					
Width (m)	1.60	Hard Core depth (m)	0.40					
Orientation	N-S	Made Ground depth (m)	<0.55					
Avg Trench depth (m)	1.20	Max. Sondage depth (m)	0.35					
Features (n=0)		No natural geology and no features. Entirely made ground with patches of redeposited material in layers indicating dumped backfill. Backfill contains Medieval pot, post-Medieval/Modern oyster shell, Modern iron and animal bone in mixed contexts.						
								
Feature	Type	Context	Type	Description	Shape	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Period
n/a	n/a	105	Layer	Made ground of mixed gravels, silts and rubble.	Irregular	~1.90	>0.35	Modern
n/a	n/a	106	Layer	Redeposited mixed silts, gravels and sands with high charcoal content.	Irregular	~1.90	0.18	Modern
n/a	n/a	107	Layer	Redeposited silty marl.	Irregular	~1.90	0.07	Modern
n/a	n/a	108	Layer	Redeposited gravels and sands.	Irregular	~1.90	0.30	Modern
n/a	n/a	109	Layer	Redeposited silty marl.	Irregular	~1.90	>0.05	Modern

Trench 3								
Length (m)	11.50	Topsoil depth (m)	0					
Width (m)	1.60	Hard Core depth (m)	0.50-0.55					
Orientation	N-S	Made Ground depth (m)	0.08-0.10					
Avg Trench depth (m)	1.20	Max. Sondage depth (m)	1.55					
Features (n=2): F6, F7.		Post-Medieval/Modern pits filled with homogeneous garden soil or silty backfill containing post-Medieval brick and animal bone. Cut by Modern cut for concrete pad relating to construction of extant building.						
								
Feature	Type	Context	Type	Description	Shape	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Period
6	Pit	110	Fill	Backfill of garden soil containing small amounts of rubble and marl				Post-Medieval
		111	Cut	Very steep straight sides, unknown base.	Sub-rounded	1.35	>0.82	
7	Quarry Pit	112	Fill	Backfill of mixed silts, gravels and sands with small amounts of rubble				Post-Medieval
		113	Fill	Backfill of mixed silts, gravels and clay				
		114	Cut	Straight, moderately steep sides, base unknown.	Sub-rounded	>1.87	>.87	

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Project details

Project name	Archaeological evaluation at Compass House, East Road, Cambridge
Short description of the project	An archaeological evaluation was undertaken by Cambridge Archaeological Unit (CAU) at the proposed site of a two storey extension and infilling of the undercroft for Anglia Ruskin University at Compass House, East Road, Cambridge. The fieldwork comprised trial trenching, which revealed Post-Medieval quarrying features and modern disturbance relating to the construction of the extant buildings.
Project dates	Start: 07-07-2015 End: 09-07-2015
Previous/future work	No / No
Any associated project reference codes	ARU15 - Sitecode
Any associated project reference codes	ECB4479 - HER event no.
Type of project	Field evaluation
Site status	None
Current Land use	Industry and Commerce 2 - Offices
Monument type	EXTRACTIVE PIT Post Medieval
Monument type	PIT Uncertain
Significant Finds	SHERD Post Medieval
Significant Finds	ANIMAL BONE Post Medieval
Significant Finds	NAIL Post Medieval
Methods & techniques	"Measured Survey","Sample Trenches"
Development type	Large/ medium scale extensions to existing structures (e.g. church, school, hospitals, law courts, etc.)
Prompt	Direction from Local Planning Authority - PPS
Position in the planning process	After full determination (eg. As a condition)

Project location

Country	England
Site location	CAMBRIDGESHIRE CAMBRIDGE CAMBRIDGE Compass House, East Road, Cambridge
Postcode	CB1 2TX
Study area	0.1 Hectares
Site coordinates	TL 46116 58806 52.207652041558 0.138641514715 52 12 27 N 000 08 19 E Point
Height OD / Depth	Min: 11m Max: 11m

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	Leanne Zeki
Type of sponsor/funding body	Developer
Name of sponsor/funding body	Anglia Ruskin University

Project archives

Physical Archive recipient	Cambridgeshire County Archaeology Store
Physical Archive ID	ARU15
Physical Contents	"Animal Bones","Ceramics","Metal"
Digital Archive recipient	Cambridgeshire County Archaeology Store
Digital Archive ID	ARU15
Digital Contents	"Animal Bones","Ceramics","Metal","Survey"
Digital Media available	"Images raster / digital photography","Survey","Text"
Paper Archive recipient	Cambridgeshire County Archaeology Store
Paper Archive ID	ARU15
Paper Contents	"Animal Bones","Ceramics","Metal","Stratigraphic","Survey"
Paper Media available	"Context sheet","Drawing","Plan","Report","Section","Survey "

**Project
bibliography 1**

Publication type	Grey literature (unpublished document/manuscript)
Title	Compass House, East Road, Cambridge: An Archaeological Evaluation
Author(s)/Editor(s)	Zeki, L
Date	2015
Issuer or publisher	CAU
Place of issue or publication	Cambridge
Description	A4 wire ound with plastic laminate front, 11 pages, 2 colour plates
Entered by	Leanne Zeki (lz235@cam.ac.uk)
Entered on	15 September 2015

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