

THISTLEY GREEN, WEST ROW, SUFFOLK

An Archaeological Excavation



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**Thistley Green, West Row, Suffolk:
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An archaeological excavation was undertaken in May 2007 on 0.0036 ha of land on the south-eastern side of Chairfen Road, at Green Farm, Thistley Green, West Row, Suffolk (TL 6613 7614). The site was located within a chalk landscape at 3.001m – 3.187m OD, in an area of known prehistoric activity. However, no archaeological features were recorded in the machine excavated 6m by 6m area, which was situated on ploughed ground.

Introduction

An archaeological excavation was carried out as a condition of planning consent on the south-eastern side of Chairfen Road at Green Farm, Thistley Green, West Row, Suffolk (TL 6613 7614) on 2nd May 2007. The project was undertaken by the Cambridge Archaeological Unit (CAU) on behalf of O2 (UK) Ltd. prior to the construction of an antennae and dish tower on a 6 square metre base. The site code is MNL581-07.

Geology and Topography

The proposed development area (PDA) was on 0.0036 ha of arable farmland north of the River Lark, west of Mildenhall and north-east of Isleham (Figure 1). The site is between 3.001m OD and 3.187m OD with an underlying geology of calcareous loamy silt over chalk.

Archaeological Background

The PDA lies within a landscape of archaeological potential, with the possibility of exposing evidence of activity ranging from the Mesolithic and Neolithic (Brown & Murphy 1997) to the Saxon period; there is a comparatively frequent occurrence of Middle and Late Bronze Age metalwork in the landscape (Gurney & Healy 1991). A surviving buried soil was also identified to the southwest of the PDA, which highlights the potential for good preservation at the site.

A flint found to the south west of the PDA provides possible evidence for Mesolithic activity in the area, whilst worked flint scatters to the north of the PDA provide broader evidence for prehistoric activity. Traces of Neolithic activity are more plentiful; a range of lithics including axeheads, a polished flint knife and an earlier Neolithic leaf shaped arrowhead have been found to the south and southwest of the PDA (MNL 149 – MSF8983, MNL 252 – MSF11470, MNL 124 – MSF11652, MNL 292 – MSF11686, MNL 124 – MSF11652) and a Late Neolithic transverse arrowhead to the southwest (MNL 299 – MSF11697).

Evidence for Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age activity is provided by querns (MNL 019 – MSF8771 to the west), lithics, which include a Beaker barbed and tanged arrowhead (MNL 292 – MSF11687, to the northwest), and Beaker pottery south of the PDA (MNL 383 – MSF12934). Evidence for burnt flint mounds has also been identified to the north, northwest, south, southwest and southeast of the PDA (e.g. MNL 378 – MSF12929, MNL 372 – MSF12922, MNL 382 – MSF12933, MNL 369 – MSF12918 and MNL 016 – MSF12911). Features have been found in association with these burnt flint sites; a possible Bronze Age land surface and large cooking pit (MNL 124-MSF8944) and a withy-lined trough at Swales Fen (Martin 1998).

Further evidence for Bronze Age activity is supplied by metal artefacts; Middle Bronze Age bronze palstaves and spearheads (MNL 054 – MSF8821), (MNL 056 – MSF8823), (MNL 118 – MSF8937) and Late Bronze Age swords, and knives (MNL 076 – MSF8891), (MNL 085 – MSF8900) with a vast hoard found near Isleham to the south of the PDA (Britton 1960). The metalwork has been found towards the fen edge/river valley in a loose

northwest-southeast band south of the PDA. A potential settlement site on the fen-edge was excavated to the southeast of the PDA (Martin & Murphy 1988), whilst Bronze Age lithics have been found to the south and west (MNL 252 – MSF11656), (MNL 149 – MSF8984) and (MNL 155 – MSF8994).

Archaeological activity that post dates the Bronze Age is restricted to the north, northwest and northeast of the PDA, potentially because the ground to the south towards the River Lark became increasingly wet. Iron Age pottery has been found (MNL 370 – MSF12919), whilst evidence for Roman activity is provided by Roman metalwork, including a Colchester derivative brooch (MNL Misc. – MSF15495), and a hoard of Late Roman silver found at Mildenhall (The Mildenhall Treasure). A Romano-British Scheduled Ancient Monument is also located northeast of the PDA. Finally, evidence for the Saxon period comes in the form of a coin, found to the northeast of the site (MNL529 – MSF 21251).

Methodology

A field walking survey was carried out prior to the excavation of the PDA, alongside a metal detecting survey, which comprised detecting the ground surface as well as detecting spits once machining was underway.

The site was defined as a 6m by 6m square, a total area of 36 square metres (Figures 2 and 4), which amounted to a 100% sample of the PDA (0.0036 ha). However, a standoff of 1.95m was established on the western corner to avoid overhanging trees in accordance with NJUG guidelines, reducing the excavation area to approximately 31.63 square metres (0.0031 ha), 88% of the PDA. The trench was scanned prior to excavation using a cable avoidance tool (CAT) to avoid damage to any unknown services. Excavation was carried out in spits using a 1.5m wide toothless ditching bucket under the supervision of an experienced archaeologist

All finds were retained from site and a photographic record was taken. A section was drawn at 1:10 using the CAU modified version of Museum of London system to show the depth of the topsoil and subsoil (Figure 3). The trench was then surveyed into the OS grid using a GPS system.

Health and safety was conducted on site in accordance with guidelines in the SCAUM manual *Health and Safety in Field Archaeology* and by CAU risk assessment.

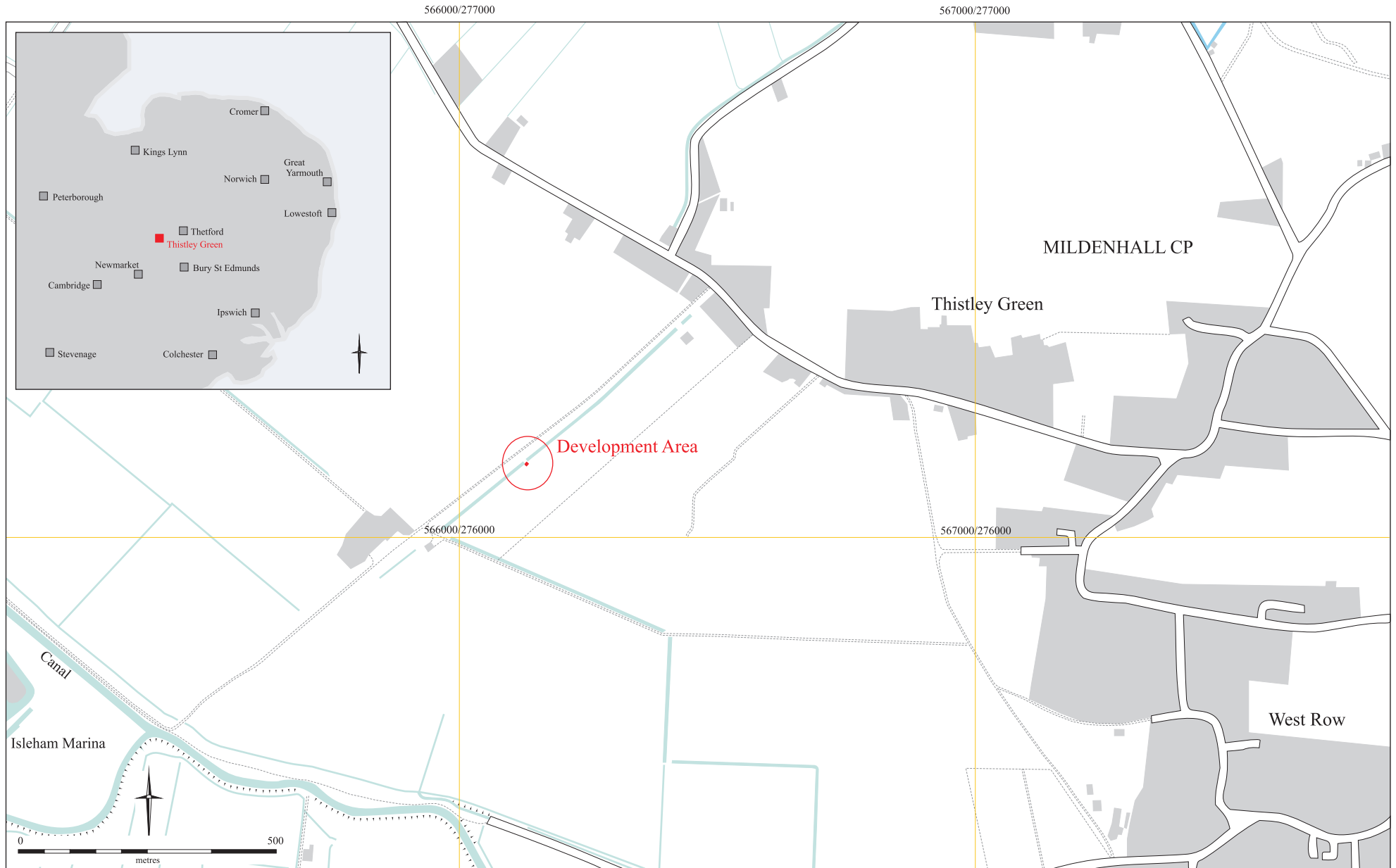


Figure 1. Location map

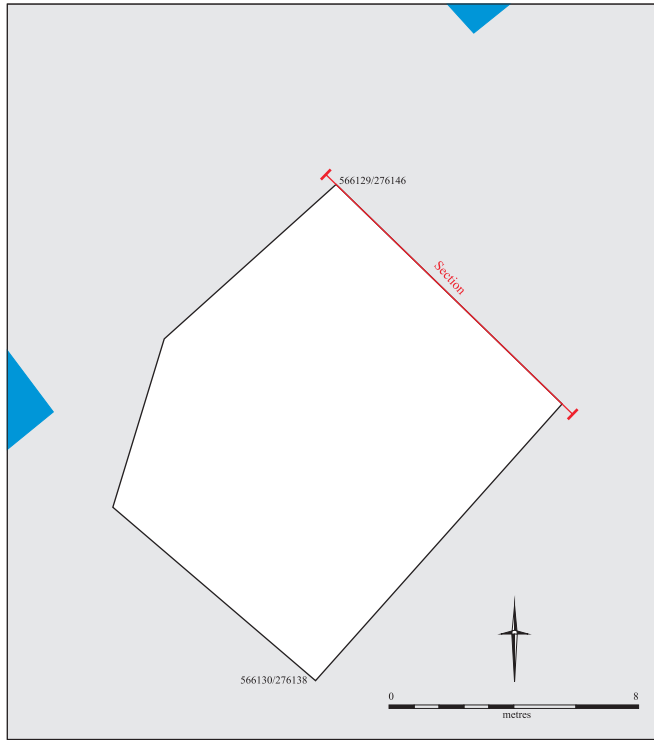


Figure 2. Plan of excavation area

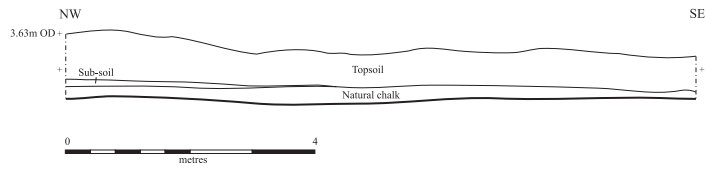


Figure 3. Section of excavation area



Figure 4. Photograph of excavation area facing NE

Excavation Results

No archaeological features were identified in the excavation area. The depth of the overburden was between 0.35m – 0.55m (see Table 1 and Figure 3), the natural geology was chalk and the excavation area was situated on arable farmland currently used for growing sugar beat. The topsoil was pale greyish-brown chalky silt with moderate inclusions of small and medium (4mm – 50mm) sub-angular and rounded flints with an average depth of 0.31m. The subsoil was a pale yellowish grey chalky silt with occasional, very small (2mm – 10mm) rounded flint inclusions with an average depth of 0.04m. One chronologically non-diagnostic worked flint was found in the topsoil, providing limited evidence for prehistoric activity.

Corner	Depth (m)	Height (m)OD
North	0.53	3.0964
East	0.35	3.1126
South	0.51	3.0008
West (1)	0.55	3.0236
West (2)	0.53	3.1874

Table 1: Trench Summary

Discussion

The absence of any archaeological features exposed in the PDA was surprising in the context of the evidence for archaeological activity in the surrounding area. However the majority of the known archaeological activity was located towards the river Lark or further north/north-west. The PDA is situated on slightly higher ground away from the river and is therefore just outside the loose concentration of archaeology. Another consideration for the lack of archaeology identified is the size of the PDA itself, as it was only 31.63 square metres.

Acknowledgements

The project was successfully completed with the assistance of Vida Rajkovaca. Bryan Crossan produced the graphics. Thanks are extended to Mr's Peachy for the on site access. Jess Tipper, Archaeologist at SCCAS/CT monitored the project and the project manager was Emma Beadsmoore. Lattenbury Services machine excavated the site.

Appendix – Lithics (Emma Beadsmoore)

A single (2g) chronologically non-diagnostic fragment of a tertiary flake was recovered from the site. The flake was damaged and residual in the topsoil.

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