

King's Hedges Triangle Site, King's Hedges Road, Cambridge

Archaeological Excavation for the 33kv Reinforcement Scheme



Adam Slater

CAMBRIDGE ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT
UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE



**KING'S HEDGES TRIANGLE, HISTON ROAD
CAMBRIDGE.**

An Archaeological Evaluation

Adam Slater

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Introduction

The archaeological excavation was undertaken on the 30th and 31st of January 2007 as a condition of planning permission in advance of the construction of a new electricity substation on the King's Hedges Triangle site, as part of the 33kv reinforcement scheme for Cambridge. The client was Adrian Salt and Pang Limited, Planning Consultants on behalf of EDF. The excavation was carried out in accordance with a project design approved and monitored by the County Archaeological Office (CAO) of Cambridgeshire County Council (Dickens 2006). The agreed method was to strip in its entirety the footprint of the proposed building.

Site Location and Topography

The site lies on the north side of Cambridge between King's Hedges Road and the former railway line, site centred at TL45911 61783. It is immediately south of Cambridge Regional College and immediately east of the new Arbury Park residential development. It is a very flat area and lies at around 12m OD towards the edge of the third terrace gravels and clay plain situated along the northern side of Cambridge.

Archaeological background

Several sites of archaeological significance have been identified and investigated in the vicinity of the triangle site. The known sites demonstrate a definite bias towards the Romano-British period, with indications of extensive Iron Age occupation also being revealed and occasional Post-medieval activity.

Iron Age

The only recorded Iron Age material identified in the vicinity of the triangle site, 1000m to the west, was at Arbury Camp where large circular enclosure was excavated in 1990, 1995 and 2002 (Evans 1991a, and Knight 2005). Iron Age pits and ditches have also been found during evaluations at Kings Hedges School (Lisboa 1994 & 1995, Clarke 2005). At Manor Farm in North Arbury, a succession of Early Iron Age (Woodbury) to Belgic (Late Iron Age) settlements to the north and east of Northfield Way (Alexander *et al* 1969; Wilkes & Elrington 1978) have been excavated. The 1969 preliminary report on the excavations at Arbury Road also refers to a single Late Iron Age coin recorded from the 'Arbury Road [HER 05422A], although its find spot identifies it as coming from the Manor Farm/ Kings Hedges area (Browne 1974).

Roman

Archaeological evidence of Roman occupation of the area immediately surrounding the triangle site has been more frequent: At King's Hedges School, 350m to the south, was a Roman villa, set amongst fields and paddocks and occupied from the second century onwards. Associated with this settlement were many graves (Lisboa 1995, Clarke 2005).

More significantly part of the metalled surface of Akemen Street, the Roman road that forms the western boundary of the larger field in which the Kings Hedges Triangle site sits was revealed in 1990, along with eastern roadside ditch, one substantial and several smaller pits and over 100 large sherds of Roman pottery (Evans 1991b). The closest identified feature to the triangle building was a single ditch, also dated to the Roman period (*ibid*) identified to the south and running northwards towards the excavation area. Projection of this line suggested it might appear within the new building footprint area.

Other Romano-British sites have been found in the general area associated with the line of Akemen Street, including Arbury Road villa, a range of houses in continuous use from about AD130 until at least AD400. However, evaluation trenches in advance of the construction of part of the Cambridge Regional College, 125m to the north of the triangle, revealed no archaeological features (Patten 2003), suggesting that although the areas of Romano-British occupation are often dense with archaeology, large areas with no archaeological material also exist.

Methodology

A 360° tracked machine with a 2m wide toothless, ditching bucket removed all the topsoil and subsoil across the building footprint to expose the natural geology, sands and gravel, a total area of 800 square metres. An area of modern disturbance at the western end of the footprint, containing a high voltage electric cable, with a total area of 56 square metres was not stripped for safety reasons.

For environmental reasons outlined in the planning permission the area was stripped in two parts with firstly the eastern 35m of the site stripped of top and the material stockpiled at the western end. After inspection of the cleared area, the loose material was returned to the eastern part of the site, and the western area was stripped and inspected.

All work was carried out in strict accordance with statutory Health and Safety legislation and with the recommendations of SCAUM (Allen and Holt 2002). The site code was KHT 07 (ECB2512).

Results

A total area of 800 square metres was stripped down to the geological natural. Throughout the site the topsoil was a mid grey to brown sandy silty clay with high levels of root disturbance and occasional fragments of post medieval pottery, a maximum of 0.45m in depth. This overlay subsoil consisting of moderately compacted mid to light brown sandy clay with moderately high concentrations of loose angular gravels and very common disturbance by roots and animal activity. The top and sub-soil across the entire evaluated area was between 0.65 and 0.8m in depth and the natural was a light brown gravelly, sandy, clay with occasional patches of friable, mid to light brown sand.

No archaeological features were present within the stripped area.

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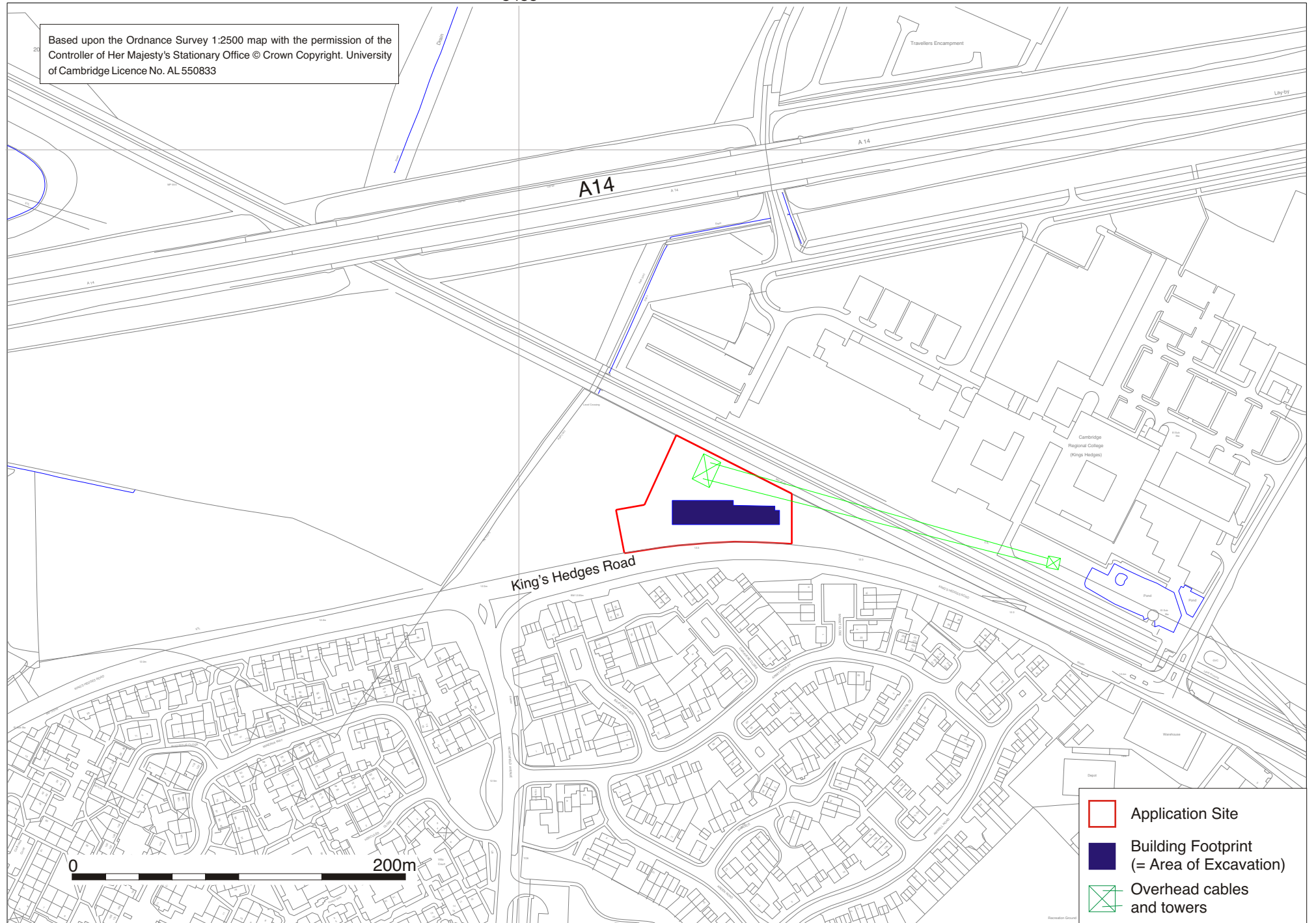


Figure 1: Location of Excavation Area at King's Hedges Triangle

Conclusion

Given the known archaeology of the vicinity and particularly the 1991 observations made on the perimeter ditch (Evans 1991b) it is perhaps initially surprising that there was no archaeology observed during the stripping. However, this pattern of presence or absence and little in between seems to be typical of this landscape as presently understood. Where archaeology is encountered, such as the concentration of Iron Age archaeology identified to the west of the triangle site, and the extensive Romano-British occupation identified to the south and west, it is unambiguous. Elsewhere, though, for example in the wider vicinity of the Arbury ringwork or in the 2003 evaluation, 125m to the northeast of the PDA there has been an absence of archaeological material (Patten 2003). Past landscapes do consist of areas of activity and areas that have been referred to as “empty quarters”. The exposure at the triangle site is too small to make such definitive statements as that (for example the site could easily sit within the spaces of a field system with no evidence of the boundaries), but is a further indication of the intermittent nature of some aspects of past landscape use.

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