

ALCONBURY WASTE TRANSFER SITE, STANGATE BUSINESS PARK, ALCONBURY

An Archaeological Evaluation



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Introduction

The archaeological evaluation, that is the subject of the report, was commissioned by Donarbon Waste Management to identify the archaeological potential of the proposed Alconbury Waste Transfer Site at Stangate Business Park and undertaken by the Cambridge Archaeological Unit (CAU) on the 26th September 2007. The proposed development area (PDA) is situated immediately east of the A1 and the Great North Road, Ermine Street and to the north of Huntingdon and Alconbury Airfield, centred on TL 187 788.

Geology and Topography

The PDA is sited on a plateau of slightly higher ground (c.47m OD) on the edge of the Fens and lies on Boulder Clay glacial deposits overlying Oxford Clay (Institute of Geological Sciences 1977). The nature of the natural topography on site is unclear due to the extent of the alterations from current and previous land use.

Archaeological and historical background

Evidence for prehistoric activity in the area is concentrated to the south and east along the Ouse valley in the form of ring ditches, henges and field boundaries (Malim 1994). Iron Age occupation sites are known to the north from excavations in Sawtry (Welsh 1994) and from Alconbury Airfield to the south (Macaulay 2000; Macaulay & Hatton 2001). Evidence for rural activity was identified in the form of field systems for agricultural and pastoral landscapes.

The PDA is adjacent to Ermine Street; a Roman road that extended from London, through Lincoln to York. Excavations along this road to the north and south of the PDA have yielded evidence for Roman settlement, including road side burials. Sites such as Upton to the west (Sutherland 1995), Sawtry (Welsh 1994), Alconbury Airfield (Macaulay 2000; Macaulay & Hatton 2001), land to the south of the village of Alconbury (Holst & Welsh 1995) and Great Stukeley to the south east (Macaulay 2000) have exposed boundary ditches, which suggests agricultural activities, cremation cemeteries and burial mounds either adjacent to or extending from the road. The Great North Road on the same alignment as Ermine Street, was a major route way during the medieval and post medieval periods, through to the present day. The PDA is situated north of known medieval villages of Alconbury, Little and Great Stukeley, south of Sawtry and west of Abbots Ripton (Macaulay 2000). Between these villages there is evidence of agricultural systems, such as at Upton, with drainage ditches and ridge and furrow field systems further north at Sawtry (Sutherland 1995; Welsh 1994).

A petrol station was located on the PDA before the current A1 was constructed and prior to the sites present use.





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|  | Date | 12/12/05 | Title Location Plan Alconbury Recycling & Transfer Facility | Drawing 5/1 |  |
| | Project No. | 05569323 | | | |
| | Created by | C.N. | | | |
| | File No. | 561080 R4 | | | |

Figure 1. Location map



Figure 2. Trench locations

Methodology

Two 35m trenches were sited on the line of the foundations for the proposed development and were excavated by a tracked 360° machine using a 2.0m wide toothless ditching bucket with topsoil and underlying deposits being removed under archaeological supervision. All work was carried out in strict accordance with statutory Health and Safety legislation and with the recommendations of SCAUM (Allen & Holt 2002). The site code is SBA 07.

Results

Trench 1

Trench one; aligned east-west was the northern of the two excavated. The trench consisted of 0.5m of hard core with 0.2m mixed hard core and clay interface. The natural is hard dark grey clay encountered between 0.65m and 0.8m. No archaeology was uncovered.



Figure 3: Trench 1 (looking east).

Trench 2

Trench two; aligned east-west was the southern of the two excavated trenches. The trench consisted of 0.7m of hard core onto hard dark grey brown natural clay encountered between 0.5m and 0.9m. No archaeology was uncovered.



Figure 4: Trench 2 (looking east).

Conclusions

No archaeological features were identified within the PDA. This is unusual given its location adjacent to Ermine Street but the archaeological evidence for occupation along this part of the road is very scattered with agricultural activity prevalent between known Roman and medieval settlements. The presence of the former petrol station could also account for the lack of archaeology, particularly as the hard core directly overlay natural, suggesting that past use of the PDA had heavily truncated the site.

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