

# Ranc Care Homes, Downham's Lane, Cambridge

An Archaeological Evaluation



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## **Summary**

*Cambridge Archaeological Unit carried out an archaeological evaluation comprising trial trenching at Downham's Lane, Cambridge in April 2008. Although a varying amount of disturbance and truncation due to the presence of foundations for a former school was encountered, the subsoil and underlying deposits were relatively undisturbed. However, no archaeological deposits or features were identified.*

## **Introduction**

An archaeological evaluation was carried out by Cambridge Archaeology Unit (CAU) on the 14<sup>th</sup> April 2008 on land off Downham's Lane, Cambridge as a condition of Planning Permission in advance of building works. Commissioned by Redworth Construction Ltd. the evaluation aimed to establish the presence, date, state of preservation and significance of any archaeological remains. The evaluation was carried out and this report was written in accordance with an archaeological specification written by the CAU (Beadsmoore 2008) in response to a brief by Cambridgeshire Archaeology Planning Countryside Advice (CAPCA). It was approved and monitored by an Archaeological Officer from CAPCA.

### *Location, topography and geology*

The Ranc Care Homes site is located c. 2km north-northeast of Cambridge city centre (Figure 1), on land formerly occupied by the Rees Thomas School and associated buildings. The centre of the proposed development area (PDA) is NGR 545877/260766 and the underlying geology is 3<sup>rd</sup> Terrace gravels with patches of Gault clay (British Geological Survey. 1978). The site sloped upwards slightly from a height of 11.60m OD at the northeast end to 12.10m at the west end.

### *Archaeological Background*

The archaeological background for the north area of Cambridge has been extensively covered in several evaluation and excavation reports (Lisboa 1995, Hounsall 2002, Timberlake 2006, Slater 2007) and will not be discussed in-depth here.

In brief however, the earliest known activity in the immediate vicinity of the PDA has been dated Roman. For example, in the grounds of Manor Community College directly to the southwest several ditches and a possible palisade were identified and attributed to the Roman period (CHER 16487). Further to the northwest lying next to the projected line of Roman road 'Akeman Street' was a villa with associated enclosure ditches and field systems centred on Kings Hedges Primary School (Lisboa 1995).

Evidence for nearby Saxon activity is quite limited and consists of stray finds collected south-southeast of the PDA (CHER 05480) whilst known medieval activity is limited to ridge and furrow to the east of site (CHER 10106) and a large pit or well found off Humphrey's Road just to the west (Timberlake 2006). Furthermore, Milton Road to the south and east is noted as the course of the turnpike road to Ely (CHER 05353).

More recent archaeological remains of significance near to the PDA are a WWII gun emplacement and searchlight battery off Arbury Road to the northwest (CB 15183), and two Anderson air raid shelters to the southwest (MCB 17097).





Figure 1. Location map

## *Methodology*

Five evaluation trenches totalling 108m in length were excavated by a tracked 360° machine using a 2.10m wide toothless ditching bucket, providing a 3.25% sample of the PDA (Figure 2).

Topsoil, rubble, tarmac and underlying deposits were all removed under archaeological supervision. Excavation of archaeological features was carried out using hand tools. The recording followed a CAU modified MoLAS system (Spence 1990); whereby feature numbers, F. were assigned to stratigraphic events, and numbers (fill), or [cut] to individual contexts. The trench plans were drawn at 1:50 and sections at 1:10. A digital photographic archive was also compiled. 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 is RCH '08.

## *Archive*

No features were recorded and no finds recovered. However a small digital photographic archive along with detailed trench datasheets was generated. The documentary records have been assembled into a catalogued archive in line with Appendix 6 of MAP2 (English Heritage 1991), and are being stored at the Cambridge Archaeology Unit offices.

## **Results**

None of the five trenches excavated contained archaeological layers or features. Four of the trenches (Trenches 2-5) were primarily located amongst a former car park and foundations for the school and bungalow that previously occupied the PDA. Consequently a varying amount of disturbance and truncation was encountered. Trench 1 was located on a former lawn and showed few signs of modern disturbance. Table 1 shows a trench summary.

### *Trench 1*

Trench 1 was 20.30m in length on a northwest-southeast alignment. Topsoil varied between 0.29m and 0.20m deep and underlying deposits were between 0.56m and 0.60m deep. No archaeology was present.

### *Trench 2*

Trench 2 was 23m in length on a northeast-southwest alignment. The upper deposit consisted of building rubble with an average depth of 0.46m that overlay truncated subsoil with an average depth of 0.15m. Three concrete foundations truncated the natural and several brick walls and deactivated service pipes were also encountered. No archaeology was present.

545819/260822



545930/260701

Figure 2. Trench plan

### *Trench 3*

Trench 3 was 19.70m in length on a northwest-south-east alignment. Topsoil and undisturbed underlying deposits survived at the northwest end of the trench with average depths of 0.32m and 0.44m respectively. Towards the southeast, foundations for the bungalow previously occupying this space were uncovered below a thin layer of building rubble, whilst the southeastern half of the trench showed a layer of building rubble averaging 0.25m deep overlaying a relatively undisturbed subsoil of 0.40m depth. No archaeology was present.

### *Trench 4*

Trench 4 was 19.50m in length on a northeast-southwest alignment. A tarmac car park and related layers, with a depth of 0.40m, overlay disturbed subsoil, with a depth of 0.10m, at the southwest end. Towards the northeast, the tarmac was replaced by building rubble with a depth of 0.15m. This overlay relatively undisturbed subsoil apart from where two concrete foundations had been laid. No archaeology was present.

### *Trench 5*

Trench 5 was 25.90m in length on a northwest-southeast alignment. The northwest end had to be offset from the rest of the trench due to the presence of a substantial concrete foundation. Upper deposit consisted of building rubble with an average depth of 0.32m. Underlying the rubble in the southeastern half of the trench was relatively undisturbed subsoil deposits 0.36m deep. The northwest half of the trench was heavily disturbed by foundations and deactivated service pipes with a depth of 0.40m. No archaeology was present.

<b>Trench</b>	<b>Orientation</b>	<b>Length (m)</b>	<b>Depth (m)</b>	<b>Modern Disturbance/Truncation</b>	<b>Archaeology</b>
1	NW-SE	20.3	0.85 NW - 0.80 SE	No	No
2	NE-SE	23	0.69 NE - 0.70 SW	Yes	No
3	NW-SE	19.7	0.76 NW - 0.60 SE	Yes	No
4	NE-SW	19.5	0.50 NE - 0.60 SW	Yes	No
5	NW-SE	25.9	0.70 NW - 0.70 SE	Yes	No

**Table 1** – Trench Summary

## **Discussion**

Although no archaeology was identified within the PDA this cannot be attributed solely to truncation by the former school. Four trenches showed truncation to varying degrees by concrete foundations, walls and services, yet the underlying natural and much of the subsoil deposits were still relatively undisturbed.

The PDA probably existed outside of the main area of local prehistoric and Roman activity and this evaluation has helped to confirm that the Roman presence, which is concentrated towards ‘Akeman Street’, does not extend into this area. Furthermore,



the site clearly falls outside of any activity that could be related to the former turnpike road to Ely.

The lack of evidence for any structures prior to the construction of the school and the lack of archaeological features or deposits suggests this land was probably primarily only utilized for agricultural purposes before the building of Arbury in the 1960's and 70's. Any potential ridge and furrow for would have been lost due to the former development.

In conclusion, this evaluation has contributed to our knowledge of Cambridge by confirming an area of 'negative archaeology'.

## **Acknowledgements**

The work was commissioned by Ranc Care Homes Ltd. and the site was monitored by Andy Thomas (CAPCA). Emma Beadsmoore was project manager and thanks go to Andy Whelan and Alasdair Wright for assisting the author. Donald Horne surveyed the trenches and Bryan Crossan produced the report graphics.

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