

Pastures Farm, Caxton, Cambridgeshire

An Archaeological Evaluation



Matthew Collins

CAMBRIDGE ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT
UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE



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Matthew Collins

Cambridge Archaeological Unit
University of Cambridge
Department of Archaeology

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Introduction

An archaeological evaluation was carried out by Cambridge Archaeological Unit (CAU) on the 16th April 2008 on land at Pastures Farm, Caxton, Cambridgeshire, as a predetermination to the building of a new agricultural storage building. Commissioned by N and J Pearson 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 Pastures Farm site is located c. 2km northwest of the village of Caxton, Cambridgeshire and c. 1km southwest of Caxton Gibbet, where the A428 crosses the A1198 (Figure 1). The proposed development area (PDA) is 666m² in size and centred on NGR 529237/259999. The underlying geology is Boulder Clay (British Geological Survey, 1975) and the site sloped downwards slightly from a height of 59.8m OD in Trench 1 to a height of 59.6m in Trench 2.

Archaeological Background

To date, no prehistoric sites/activity have been identified in the immediate vicinity of Pastures Farm or the village of Caxton itself except for unstratified worked lithics discovered during excavations at SMR:10099 (Dickens 1994) and several Bronze Age flints found near to Caxton Gibbet (CHER 11873).

The PDA is situated near to a major Roman road (Ermine Street) that linked London (*Londinium*) with York (*Eboracum*). Consequently the site is within a landscape of Romano-British activity; however the only known nearby Roman settlement is a possible villa just west of Caxton village (Cambridgeshire County Council 2003).

Located northwest and directly adjacent to the PDA is a moated site probably established during the 12th century. Believed to be the location for the manor of Brockholts, the moat encompasses approximately two hectares and is generally 9m wide and up to 1.5m deep (Cambridge County Council 2003). The site is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM 33275) and the interior is currently occupied by two listed buildings, a farmhouse and converted dovecote, both of which are thought to date to the 18th century. This moated site is located near several similar features including SAM 27190, which is three interlinked moated enclosures with associated water features, fishponds and warren earthworks located approximately 1.5km southeast of the PDA (Cambridgeshire County Council 2003). Others include SAM 27190, SAM 55, SAM 33273, SAM 33274, CHER 01086 and CB 15405.

More recent remains of note is Caxton Gibbet, which stands on a small knoll just to the side of Ermine Street some 400m northeast of the PDA, where convicted criminals

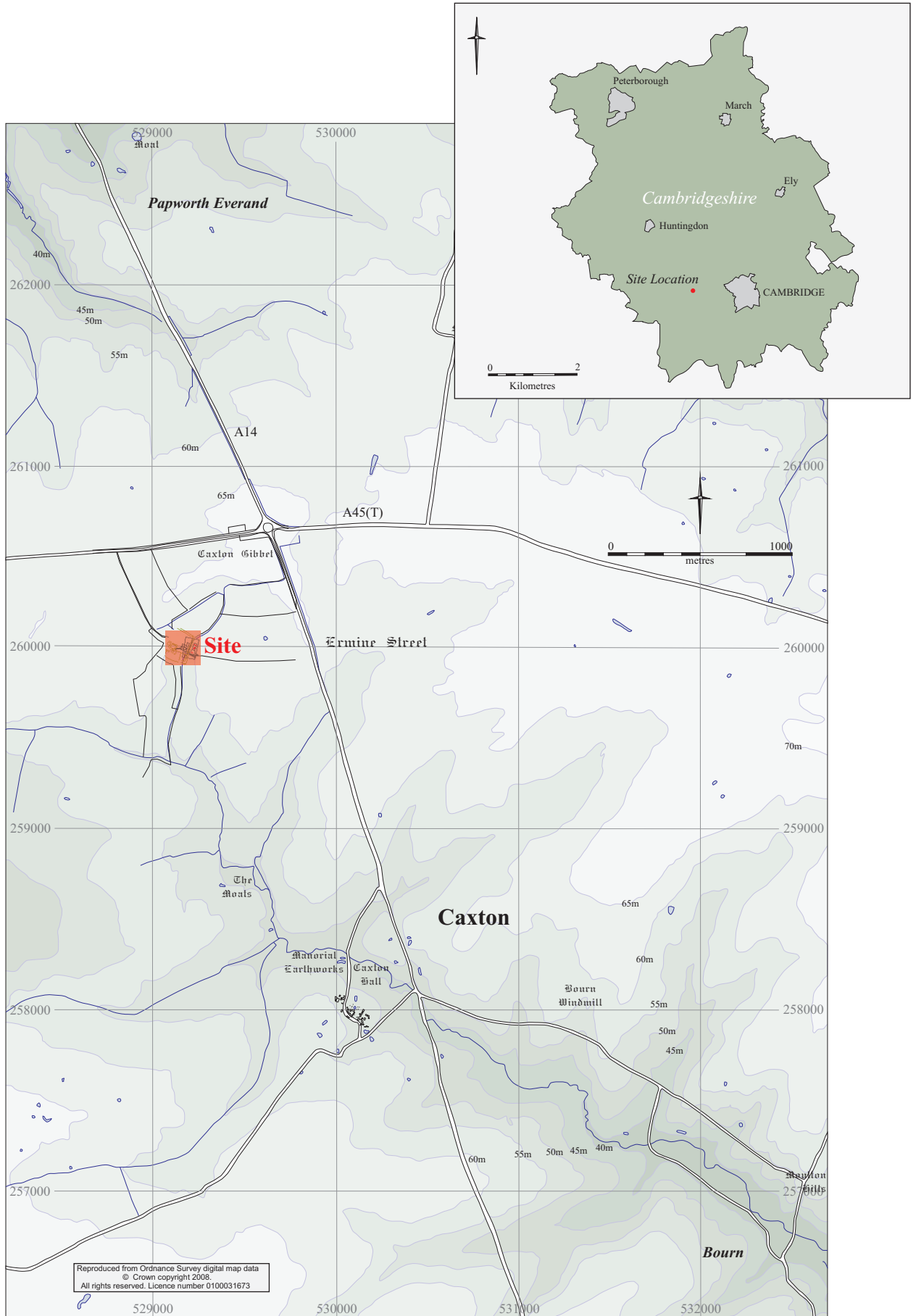


Figure 1. Location map

are known to have been were hanged in the 17th and 18th centuries (Whitehouse 2001).

Methodology

Two evaluation trenches totalling 19m in length were excavated by a tracked 360° machine using a 2.1m wide toothless ditching bucket, providing a 6% sample by area of the PDA (Figure 2).

Topsoil and underlying deposits were all removed under archaeological supervision and subsequently subjected to a metal detecting survey. 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 PFC '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

Neither of the two trenches contained archaeological features apart from a probable treethrow in Trench 2. A layer was underlying the topsoil and subsoil in both trenches that consisted of mid greyish brown silty clay. The layer identified beneath the subsoil could potentially be upcast from the nearby moat - spread into the field when it was either being constructed or cleaned out; no material culture was recovered from the deposit and it could not be dated. However, the layer is more likely to be colluvium (hillwash), which has collected at the base of a low grade natural slope within the field.

The metal detecting survey of the topsoil and underlying deposits also revealed no artefacts of any kind.

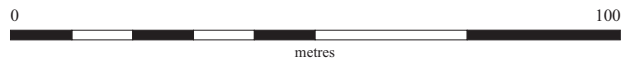
Trench 1

Trench 1 was 9.2m in length on a northwest-southeast alignment. Topsoil was an average depth of 0.33m, whilst the two underlying deposits averaged 0.24m and 0.25m respectively. No archaeology was present, although a modern field drain was identified at the southeast end of the trench.

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Figure 2. Trench plan



Trench 2

Trench 2 was 9.8m in length on a northeast-southwest alignment. Topsoil was an average depth of 0.32m and the two underlying deposits averaged 0.22m and 0.31m respectively. A probable treethrow was identified and tested and the field drain seen in Trench 1 was also present.

Discussion

The original entranceway into moated enclosure SAM 33275 is believed to be on the eastern side, some 25m southwest of the PDA (English Heritage 2000). Therefore, the lack of archaeology on the same side as the main entranceway would seem to suggest that domestic, settlement or industrial activity was kept within the confines of the moat. The surrounding area, including the PDA, was therefore probably utilised for agricultural purposes only.

In conclusion, this evaluation has contributed to our knowledge of the area by identifying an area of ‘negative archaeology’ within a known Romano-British and medieval landscape.

Acknowledgements

The work was commissioned by N and J Pearson and the site was monitored by Eliza Gore (CAPCA). Emma Beadsmoore was the project manager and thanks go to Andy Wheelen for assisting the author. Donald Horne surveyed the trenches and Bryan Crossan produced the report graphics.

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