

Clay Farm House, Cambridge.

An Archaeological Evaluation.



Matthew Collins

CAMBRIDGE ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT
UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE



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Matthew Collins

Illustrations by Bryan Crossan

Cambridge Archaeological Unit
University of Cambridge
Department of Archaeology

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Non Technical Summary

Cambridge Archaeological Unit undertook an archaeological evaluation on land at Clay Farm House, Long Road, Cambridge between the 28th and 30th of April 2010. Two trenches were excavated and a single modern linear feature containing an articulated cow was present but no earlier archaeological activity was identified.

Introduction

An archaeological evaluation was carried out by the Cambridge Archaeological Unit (CAU) between the 28th to the 30th April 2010 on land adjacent to Clay Farm House, Long Road Cambridge (see Figures 1 and 2) in advance of the construction of six dwellings. Commissioned by Mr Pemberton, 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 2010) in response to a brief by Cambridgeshire Archaeology Planning Countryside Advice (CAPCA). It was approved and monitored by Andy Thomas, Senior Archaeological Officer from CAPCA.

Location, topography and geology

The development area is centred on TL 4501 5564, and extends over 0.21ha. The site is currently under rough pasture with Long Road directly to the north, open farmland to the east and existing dwellings and gardens to the south and west (see Figure 1). The modern ground surface of the development area averages 16.36m OD and the underlying geology is West Melbury Marly Chalk Formation overlain by riverine 3rd Terrace sand and gravel.

Archaeological Background

The fields adjacent to the development area have been extensively evaluated by the CAU over the preceding few years and evaluation trenches (see Figure 1) directly to the east showed evidence for a possible Roman road or trackway which may pass through the area. Whilst just to the south, further trenching revealed evidence for a probable Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age settlement (Evans, Mackay & Patten 2005).

Medieval agricultural furrows have been observed in the fields to the east and south, and Clay Farm House itself is a Grade II listed early 19th century building, whilst some of the surviving buildings associated with this farm are thought to date from the 17th and 18th centuries. Aerial photographs and late 19th and early 20th century maps show the presence of further farm buildings occupying the eastern part of the development area and a sheep wash along the western edge which has left a distinctive hollow in the ground suggesting any potential archaeology within that part of the site would have been impacted upon or lost.

Evidence for a network of features associated with the World War II defence of Cambridge have also been identified to the east of the development area and include searchlight positions and anti-aircraft emplacements, although it is probable these did not extend this far west (Evans, Mackay & Patton 2005).

Methodology

Evaluation of the development area was carried out by excavating two trenches totalling 55.5m in length (4.2% of the site area). The trenches were placed in order to avoid the known sheep wash and the arsenic contaminated soil around it (ST Consult 2010).

Topsoil and underlying deposits were removed under archaeological supervision with a wheeled JCB vehicle using a 1.6m wide ditching bucket. Topsoil was scanned by eye for finds, but because of the quantity of post medieval and modern disturbance and material within underlying deposits, a metal detecting survey was deemed inappropriate. Excavation of the archaeological feature was carried out using hand tools and was half sectioned. 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 individual sections at 1:10. All work was carried out in strict accordance with statutory Health and Safety legislation and with the recommendations of SCAUM (Allen & Holt 2007) and in accordance with a site specific risk assessment and the CAU Health & Safety policy. The site code was CFH 10 and CHER number is ECB3359

Archive

Three contexts from a single feature were excavated and recorded and a digital photographic archive was compiled. A data sheet recording general information for each trench was also generated and these records have been assembled into a catalogued archive in line with Appendix 6 of MAP2 (English Heritage) and are being stored at the CAU offices.

Results

The two trenches (see Figure 2) showed much of the site has a thick layer of built-up/made ground across it consisting of compacted brick, clinker, cinder ash, other rubble and also Victorian pottery, nails and glass. The compacted nature of this layer suggests it was a yard surface probably associated with the farm buildings and sheep wash formally occupying part of the development area.

Trench One

Trench One was 29.5m long on a north-south orientation. Topsoil was only present at the north end of the trench and was up to 0.3m deep, whilst the remainder of the trench had a thin turf layer upto 0.15m deep overlaying built-up/made ground. Underlying the topsoil was an orangey brown silty sand subsoil upto 0.6m deep, whilst the built-up/made ground underlying the turf was up to 0.5m deep. A thin layer of surviving subsoil upto 0.15m deep was present underneath this layer suggesting the underlying geology had not been severely impacted by the later activity. A single modern linear feature, **F.1**, was present towards the north end of the trench and this contained an articulated cow together with modern pottery, glass and nails.

Trench Two

Trench Two was 26m long on an east-west alignment. A turf layer up to 0.2m deep was present overlaying the built-up/made ground layer which was up to 0.5m deep, and a thin subsoil upto 0.25m deep survived below these overlying deposits. A treethrow was identified towards the east end of the trench and was sample excavated but no artefacts were recovered.

Discussion

The site has clearly been heavily disturbed by farm related activity within the late post medieval and modern periods, as evidenced by the significant area of built up/made ground and the lack of a proper topsoil. This activity could have removed some archaeological evidence, for instance the archaeological evaluation just to the east of the development area found significant numbers of residual worked flint in the topsoil layer (Evans, Mackay & Patten), whereas none were found on this site.

However, the underlying geology was relatively undisturbed suggesting archaeological features which cut into this would have been at least partially preserved. Consequently the lack of archaeology in the trenches suggests the possible Roman road or trackway is located further to the south and the Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age settlement seen to the south did not extend this far north. Therefore the site was probably utilised only for agricultural purposes until the late post medieval/modern period when several farm buildings, the sheep wash and a possible farmyard were built within the development area.

Acknowledgements

The work was commissioned by Mr C. Pemberton and the site was monitored by Andy Thomas (CAPCA). Emma Beadsmore was the project manager and thanks go to Hayley Roberts for assisting the author on site and Donald Horne for surveying the trenches.

References

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Figure 1. Location Plan

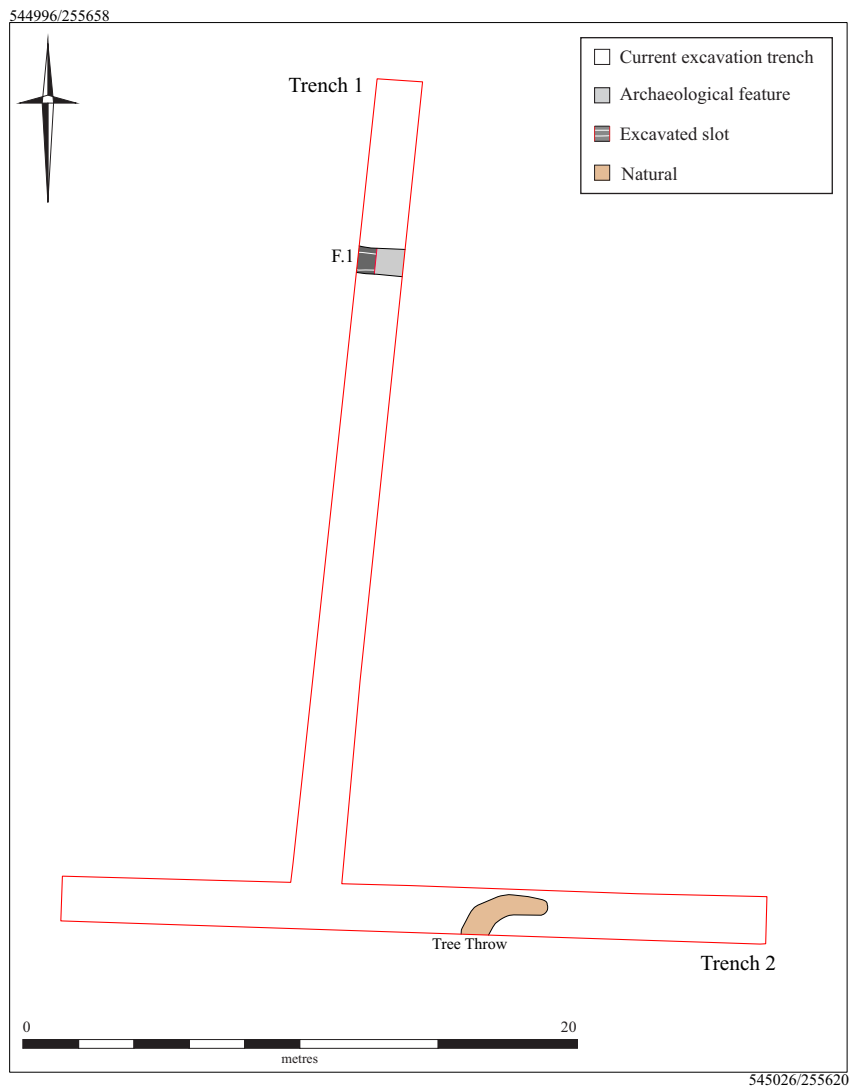
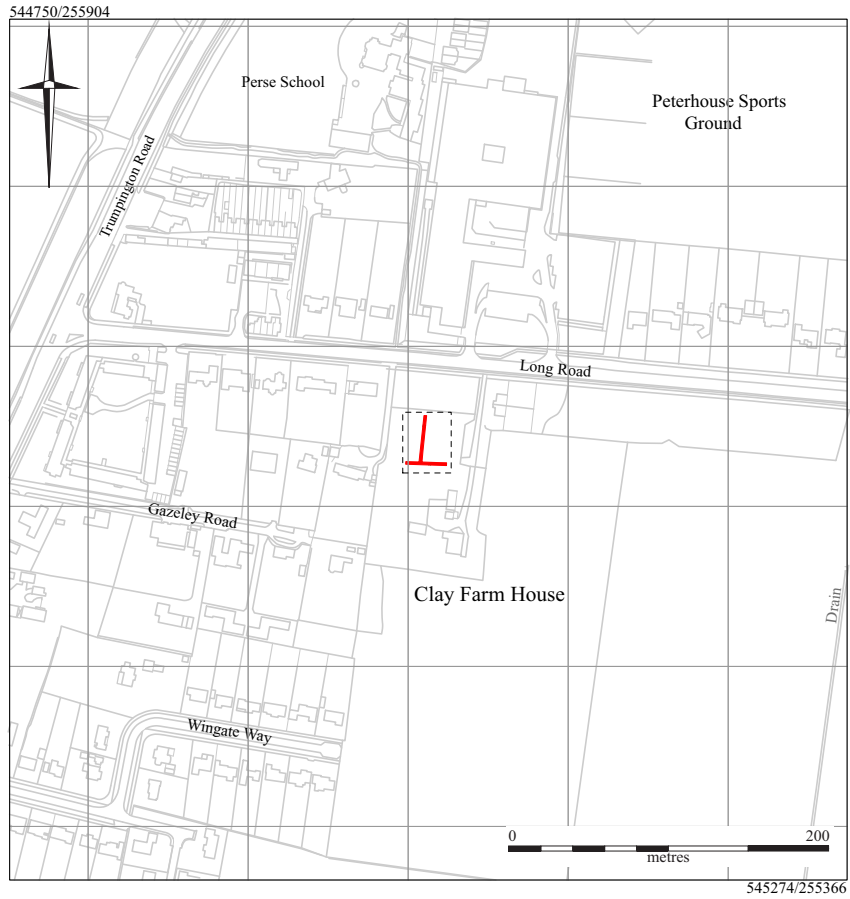


Figure 2. Location Plan (top) and Trench Plan.