

25 Crossway Hand, Whittlesey

An Archaeological Evaluation



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On 21st March 2011 the Cambridge Archaeological Unit carried out a small archaeological evaluation (15m of trenching) within the abandoned gardens of No.25 Crossway Hand, Whittlesey prior to the demolition of the existing house and the construction of three new houses. Trench 1 (7.5m) at the front of the house had no archaeology in it, whilst Trench 2 (7.5m) to the rear of the house exposed the base of one small (0.5m diameter) undated pit cut into the gravel, the latter with a single cobble of burnt stone in it. Some 3m (south) of the north end of this trench some animal bone and a 30 cm long fragment of burnt clay (similar to briquetage) was noted within the lower subsoil exposed in the west-facing section. No traces of Roman pottery or tile were recovered despite the proximity of this site (some 10-15m distant) from the Fen Causeway.

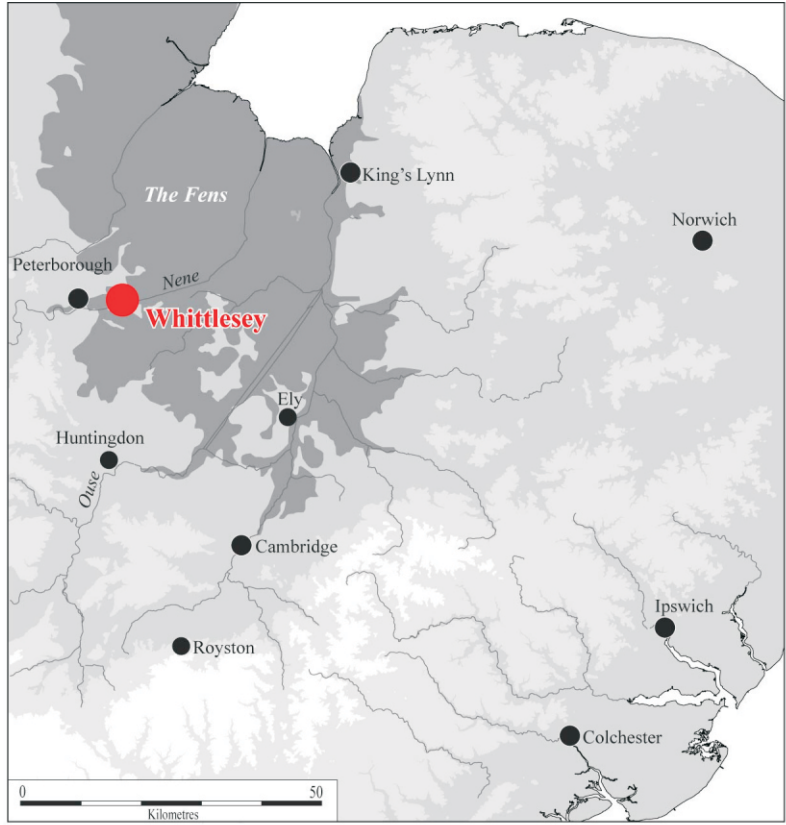


Figure 1. Location Plan



Figure 2. Trench Plan

Introduction

The archaeological evaluation was carried out on Monday 21st March 2011 as a condition of planning consent in advance of the construction of three houses within the gardens surrounding the detached and semi-derelict house No.25 Crossway Hand in Whittlesey (TL 2577 9770).

Geology and topography

The site elevation is at 5m AOD. The underlying geology at this point is the March Gravels (older marine/ estuarine sand and gravels) overlying Oxford Clay (BGS 1978). The latter forms the topographic high (ridge) between Peterborough and Whittlesey exploited by the causeway.

Archaeological background

The site immediately abuts on its northern side the projected route of the major E-W Roman route the Fen Causeway (HER No.MCB15033).

The western edge of Whittlesey island this would have been an important location both in prehistory and during the Roman period. Prehistoric sites in the area are largely clustered on the dry islands and fen edge locations within the fens. Work around Whittlesey, predominantly in advance of gravel extraction, has revealed extensive and often well preserved prehistoric remains (for example at Bradley Fen, King's Dyke and Must Farm – Evans *et al* 2005, Gibson & Knight 2002, Gibson & Knight 2006, Gibson *et al* 2009, Gibson 2009). Less than 500m distant lies the Early Bronze Age ring ditch at Stonald Field, Whittlesey (TL 262 979 [CHER 11047]). On the other hand the Roman road has not been archaeologically examined within the (500m) vicinity of the site, the only recorded Roman finds being coins from the nearby clay pits (TL 255 973 [CHER 01440]).

Aims and objectives

The main objective of the investigation was to establish the presence or absence of any surviving archaeological remains liable to be threatened by the proposed development, and also to identify possible 'sites' within the development area. Trenching here would help to establish the likely level of truncation of potential archaeological deposits and also the presence or absence of a buried palaeosol or 'B' horizon (Beadsmoore March 2011). Given the proximity to the Fen Causeway and the centre of Medieval Whittlesey, the most likely remains to be encountered are Roman or Medieval.

Methodology

Two 7.5m long and 1.5m wide trenches were dug within the cleared front and rear gardens of house; the closest trench to the southern edge of the projected Fen Causeway was to the rear (at c. 8m distant), the limit of this being dictated by the presence of the existing brick septic tank. The trenches were machine dug using a 1.5m wide ditching bucket. Both topsoil and subsoil were removed down to the top of the underlying gravel. The two trenches were sketch planned and photographed and the side sections logged (Trench 1) and drawn and recorded (W-facing section Trench 2 at 1:20), the single feature (in Trench 2) being cleaned and dug by hand (half sectioned and then drawn at 1:10). A small number of finds were collected from the

trenches themselves, whilst the spoil from the machining was also visually scanned and bucket sampled.

Results

Trench 1

Three horizons were identified above the level of the gravel and gravel and silt (natural). these consisted of a mid grey silty-sandy humic topsoil (A), a light brown to orange-grey sandy silt with 5% small flint gravel inclusions (upper sub-soil B), and a brown-orange stony sandy silt with >15% small-medium flint gravel pebbles (lower sub-soil C), At the south end of the trench the gravel was reached at 0.63m (A -0m; B - 0.4m; C -0.53m), at 4m the gravel was at 0.75m depth (B- 0.35m; C- 0.49m), whilst at the north end it was at 0.72m (B-0.17m; C- 0.49m). No archaeology was encountered in the trench, though at 4m from the south end in the E-facing section within horizon C was found a single piece of burnt stone (burnt sandstone).

Trench 2

The same stratigraphy of topsoil and subsoil (horizons A, B & C) overlying the natural consisting of gravel with cryoturbated clay lenses in it was encountered within Trench 2, though on this side of the property the soil was ever so slightly deeper (up to 0.90m deep at the north end and 0.7m deep at the south end), and the surface of the underlying gravel more uneven.

One archaeological feature, the base of a poorly defined sub-circular pit (F.1) 0.5-0.75m in diameter and c. 0.2m deep, was encountered cut into the top of the gravel some 1.5m from the northern end (Figure). The pit possessed a well-rounded concave base and contained two fills; an upper (001) consisting of a grey-orange sticky sandy clay with rare sub-rounded flint gravel and occasional rooting and with an inclusion of burnt stone, and (002) a lower thin fill of loosely compacted bright orange sticky clayey sand with rare sub-rounded gravel inclusions, but with no burnt stone or finds. A single large lump of broken sandstone, a burnt glacial cobble (weighing 1.32 kg) was recovered. Other than this there was no indication of a date or a purpose for this feature.

The only other find of archaeological interest was a partially broken-up 0.3m long slab (or lens) of reddish burnt silty clay which appears to have become included (redeposited) within the lower subsoil (C), some 3m – 3.5m from the northern end of the trench (and about 0.2m above the gravel). Alongside this were fragments of other burnt material, spots of charcoal, and 0.2m to the north, the broken-up fragments of a long bone of a large domesticate, possibly a cow (*V. Rajcovaca pers.com.*). A tiny abraded fragment of pot was also found, yet this was quite unidentifiable. The bright red burnt clay (the fragments totalling 0.8kg in weight and with pieces up to 20-30 mm thick) seem most likely to represent the small detached fragment of an oven or kiln, or else fragments of a crudely made container such as might be found within salt-making briquetage.

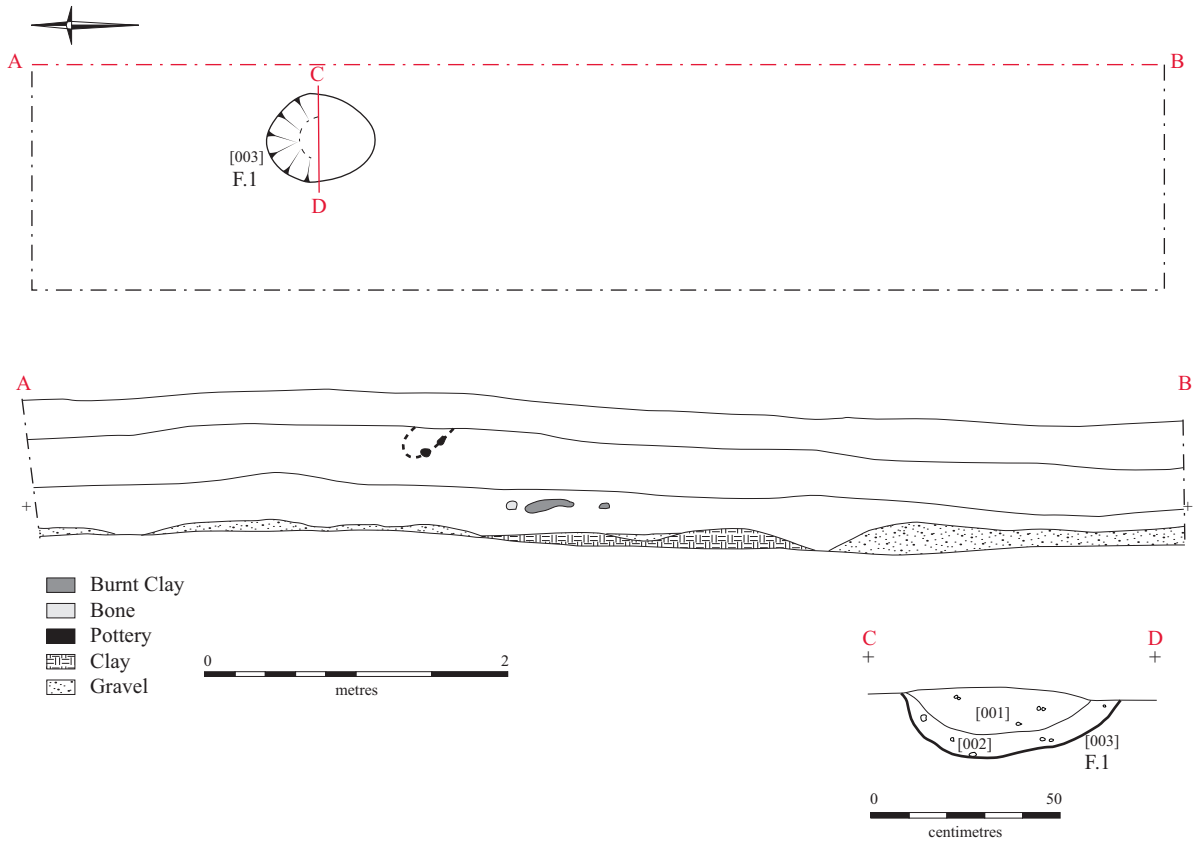


Figure 3. Plan of Trench 2 (Top) and sections in Trench 2 (Below)

Conclusions

The fairly insignificant archaeological remains and traces of activity uncovered at this site are more or less undateable, yet having said this, they are not particularly indicative of Roman or Medieval activity. The presence of burnt and cracked stone, and indeed of crude briquetage fired clay (if this is what it in fact represents) might imply a later prehistoric presence, but either way, the evidence for occupation is slight. Somewhat surprisingly, there are no indications whatsoever of the proximity of the Roman road and causeway.

Acknowledgements

Steve of T.U.P. Properties kindly facilitated our access to the site and also provided a machine and driver to dig the trenches. Leanne Zecki assisted with the archaeological work and Bryan Crossan (CAU) undertook the surveying. Emma Beadsmoore was CAU Project Manager. Dan McConnell (CAPCA) monitored the work for Cambridgeshire County Council.

References

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OASIS ID: cambridg3-97934

Project details

Project name	An archaeological evaluation at 25 Crossway Hand, Whittlesey
Short description of the project	On 21st March 2011 the Cambridge Archaeological Unit carried out a small archaeological evaluation (15m of trenching) within the abandoned gardens of No.25 Crossway Hand, Whittlesey prior to the demolition of the existing house and the construction of three new houses. Trench 1 (7.5m) at the front of the house had no archaeology in it, whilst Trench 2 (7.5m) to the rear of the house exposed the base of one small (0.5m diameter) undated pit cut into the gravel, the latter with a single cobble of burnt stone in it. Some 3m (south) of the north end of this trench some animal bone and a 30 cm long fragment of burnt clay (similar to briquetage) was noted within the lower subsoil exposed in the west-facing section. No traces of Roman pottery or tile were recovered despite the proximity of this site (some 10-15m distant) from the Fen Causeway.
Project dates	Start: 21-03-2011 End: 21-03-2011
Previous/future work	No / Not known
Any associated project reference codes	CHW11 - Sitecode
Any associated project reference codes	ECB3555 - HER event no.
Type of project	Field evaluation
Site status	None
Current Land use	Vacant Land 1 - Vacant land previously developed
Monument type	NONE None
Significant Finds	BURNT CLAY Late Prehistoric
Methods & techniques	'Sample Trenches'
Development type	Urban residential (e.g. flats, houses, etc.)
Prompt	Direction from Local Planning Authority - PPG16
Position in the planning process	After full determination (eg. As a condition)

Project location

Country	England
Site location	CAMBRIDGESHIRE PETERBOROUGH STANGROUND NORTH 25 Crossway Hand, Whittlesey
Postcode	PE7 1PB
Study area	700.00 Square metres
Site coordinates	TL 2578 9767 52.5619444444 -0.144166666667 52 33 43 N 000 08 39 W Point
Height OD / Depth	Min: 5.00m Max: 7.25m

Project creators

Name of Organisation	Cambridge Archaeological Unit
Project brief originator	Local Authority Archaeologist and/or Planning Authority/advisory body
Project design originator	Emma Beadsmoore
Project director/ manager	Emma Beadsmoore
Project supervisor	Simon Timberlake
Type of sponsor/ funding body	Landowner
Name of sponsor/ funding body	T.U.P. Properties

Project archives

Physical Archive recipient	Cambridge Archaeological Unit
Physical Archive ID	CHW11
Physical Contents	'Animal Bones','other'
Digital Archive recipient	Cambridge Archaeological Unit
Digital Archive ID	CHW11
Digital Contents	'Stratigraphic','Survey'
Digital Media available	'Images raster / digital photography','Survey','Text'
Paper Archive recipient	Cambridge Archaeological Unit
Paper Archive ID	CHW11
Paper Contents	'Stratigraphic','Survey'
Paper Media available	'Map','Photograph','Plan','Report','Section','Survey '

Project bibliography 1

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