

Alconbury Flood Alleviation Scheme Alconbury Cambridgeshire



Archaeological Watching Brief Report



December 2006

Client: Royal Haskoning

Issue N^o: 1
OA Job N^o: 3469
NGR: TL 175 770

Client Name: Royal Haskoning

Client Ref No:

Document Title: Alconbury Flood Alleviation Scheme, Alconbury,
Cambridgeshire

Document Type: Watching Brief

Issue Number: 1

National Grid Reference: TL 175 770
Planning Reference:

OA Job Number: 3469
Site Code: CAMAF06
Invoice Code: CAMAFWB
Receiving Museum: TBC
Museum Accession No: TBC

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Date: 5th December 2006

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Date: 00th January 2004

Document File Location \\Server1\Smallworks\PROJECTS\Cambridgeshire
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**Alconbury Flood Alleviation Scheme, Alconbury,
Cambridgeshire**

NGR: TL 175 770

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SUMMARY

On the 4th of December 2006 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at Alconbury, Cambridgeshire (NGR: TL 175 770). The watching brief was commissioned by Royal Haskoning UK Ltd on behalf of the Environment Agency, to be carried out during the ground investigation for the Alconbury Flood Alleviation Scheme. The watching brief revealed modern made ground overlying natural clay and gravels. No archaeological features were uncovered.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

- 1.1.1 On the 4th of December 2006 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at Alconbury, Cambridgeshire (NGR: TL 175 770) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Royal Haskoning UK Ltd, on behalf of the Environment Agency, as part of ground investigations for the Alconbury Flood Alleviation Scheme.
- 1.1.2 A verbal consultation took place between OA and Phil Catherall, the Environmental Agency Archaeologist, detailing how OA would carry out the watching brief project.

1.2 Location and geology

- 1.2.1 The site is located along Alconbury Brook, running eastwards from the north-west of the village of Alconbury Weston to south-east end of Alconbury village. The villages of Alconbury and Alconbury Weston are located to the north-west of Cambridge, adjacent to the A1(M) motorway (NGR: TL 175 770) (Fig. 1).
- 1.2.2 The site is generally undulating farm land and flat common grounds within the villages. The underlying geology is Alluvium and Terrace deposits which overlie Oxford Clay (BGS sheet 187). The site lies at an average of 32 m OD.

2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- 2.1.1 The following history is taken from *Alconbury* and *Alconbury Weston* by Martin Edwards (Edwards, 2005a and 2005b), unless otherwise stated.
- 2.1.2 The church of SS Peter and Paul is located towards the northern end of the village of Alconbury and consists of a chancel, nave, north aisle, south aisle, west tower and south porch. The walls are made of stone rubble, some of them coursed, and the others mixed with flint; all have stone dressings. The roofs of the church are covered with lead.
- 2.1.3 The church is not mentioned in the Domesday survey of 1086, but the early stones built into the walls indicate a stone church here in the 12th century. A low western tower was added to the church in the 13th century as well as works to the chancel, the

south aisle and the tower and belfry. Further works and additions were carried out in the following centuries, culminating in the 16th century when the nave was re-roofed.

- 2.1.4 There is a long narrow green in the centre of Alconbury village which is mentioned in 1327; the Alconbury Brook flows through the green and is spanned by a 15th century bridge with four pointed chamfered arches (Pevsner, 1968). The housing in the village is a mix of buildings from the 17th and 18th centuries, but much modern housing has been built during the late 20th century.
- 2.1.5 Weybridge lies to the south of the parish and is the survival of the King's Forest of that name. A farm of that name stood here on a moated site, and was built in the latter part of the 16th century.
- 2.1.6 The Great North Road passed over the brook at the south-east end of the village of Alconbury Weston by a brick bridge, and a footpath crosses the brook at the north-west end by a bridge with a timber superstructure. A Cross is mentioned here in 1278-9.
- 2.1.7 A weekly market on Thursday and a yearly fair on the vigil, feast and morrow of St John the Baptist and the six days following, was granted to John de Segrave and his heirs for the Manor of Wood Weston (Alconbury Weston) in 1304. This fair was later transferred to Alconbury. The fair was abolished in 1872 when it was said to have been held for "pedlars' wares"; the remembrance of it still survives in the village feast on 24th June, still called 'The Fair'.
- 2.1.8 In Hermitage Wood, east of Alconbury Weston, there is a moated site; whether this has any relation to the hermitage which existed at Alconbury Weston in the 14th century, is uncertain. It has been suggested that there was a chapel dedicated to St Anne at Alconbury Hill, but evidence of it has yet to be found.

3 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Aims

- 3.1.1 To determine the existence or absence of any archaeological remains; and should they be present, to ensure their preservation by record to the highest possible standard.
- 3.1.2 To make available the results of the investigation.

3.2 Watching brief methodology

- 3.2.1 The watching brief was conducted during the machine excavation of five test pits (Fig. 2).

- 3.2.2 Photographs were taken using colour slide and black and white print film. A general photographic record of the work was also made. Recording followed procedures detailed in the *OA Field Manual* (ed. D Wilkinson, 1992).

4 RESULTS

4.1 Description of deposits

Test Pit 1

- 4.1.1 The natural Oxford clay (103), a deposit of light to dark bluish grey clay was encountered at approximately 1.4 m below the ground surface. This was overlain by a 0.5 m thick layer of natural mid brown clayey gravel (102), which was in turn overlain by a 0.75 m layer of mid brown silty clay (101) a deposit of made ground. Overlying this was a 0.25 m thick layer of blackish clayey silt (100), the present ground surface and turf. No archaeology was uncovered within this test pit.

Test Pit 2

- 4.1.2 The natural geology, a mid brown clayey gravel (202) was encountered at approximately 0.65 m below the ground surface. This was overlain by a 0.4 m thick layer of mid brown silty clay (201) a deposit of made ground, which was in turn overlain by a 0.25 m thick layer of blackish clayey silt (200), the present ground surface and turf. No archaeology was uncovered within this test pit.

Test Pit 3

- 4.1.3 The natural Oxford clay (303), a deposit of light to dark bluish grey clay was encountered at approximately 2 m below the ground surface. This was overlain by a 1 m thick layer of natural mid brownish grey clayey gravel (302), which was in turn overlain by a 0.8 m layer of mid greyish brown silty clay (301) a deposit of made ground. Overlying this was a 0.2 m thick layer of blackish clayey silt (300), the present ground surface and turf. No archaeology was uncovered within this test pit.

Test Pit 4

- 4.1.4 The natural geology, a deposit of light to dark bluish grey clay with lenses of mid brown clayey gravel (402) was encountered at approximately 0.5 m below the ground surface. This was overlain by a 0.3 m thick layer of mid brown silty gravel (401), a layer of made ground, which was in turn overlain by a 0.2 m layer of blackish clayey silt (400), the present ground surface and turf. No archaeology was uncovered within this test pit.

Test Pit 5

- 4.1.5 The natural geology, a deposit of mid to dark grey silty clay (502) was encountered at approximately 0.9 m below the ground surface. This was overlain by a 0.6 m thick layer of mid greyish brown silty rubble (501), a modern deposit of made ground.

Overlying this was a 0.3 m thick layer of blackish clayey silt (500), the present ground surface and turf. No archaeology was uncovered within this test pit.

4.2 **Finds**

4.2.1 No finds were recovered from site.

4.3 **Palaeo-environmental remains**

4.3.1 No deposits suitable for palaeo-environmental sampling were identified during the course of the watching brief.

5 **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

5.1.1 All the test pits encountered natural geology and were overlain by a modern build up deposit varying between 0.8 and 0.3 m in thickness. The presence of this made ground deposit (a mixture of re-deposited silts and rubble) suggests that the area has been previously 'improved', probably as an earlier attempt at flood alleviation measures at the Alconbury Brook.

5.1.2 No archaeological features were uncovered during the course of the watching brief.

APPENDICES**APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY**

<i>Context</i> <i>t</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Thickness</i> <i>(m)</i>	<i>Comments</i>
100	Topsoil	0.25	Topsoil
101	Layer	0.65	Modern build up
102	Natural	0.5	Gravels
103	Natural	>1.1	Oxford clay
200	Topsoil	0.25	Topsoil
201	Layer	0.4	Modern build up
202	Natural	>1.85	Gravels
300	Topsoil	0.2	Topsoil
301	Layer	0.8	Modern build up
302	Natural	1.0	Gravels
303	Natural	>0.5	Oxford clay
400	Topsoil	0.2	Topsoil
401	Layer	0.3	Modern build up
402	Natural	>2.0	Mix of gravel and clays
500	Topsoil	0.3	Topsoil
501	Layer	0.6	Modern build up
502	Natural	>1.6	Mix of gravel and clays

APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

Edwards, M, 2005a *Alconbury*

(<http://www.genuki.org.uk/big/eng/HUN/Alconbury/#MilitaryHistory>)

Edwards, M, 2005b *Alconbury Weston*

(<http://www.genuki.org.uk/big/eng/HUN/AlconburyWeston/index.html>)

IFA, 2001 *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs*

OAU, 1992 *Fieldwork Manual* (ed. D. Wilkinson)

Pevsner, N, 1968 *The Buildings of England: Bedfordshire, Huntingdon and Peterborough*
Penguin books, Middlesex.

APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: Alconbury Flood Alleviation Scheme, Alconbury, Cambridgeshire

Site code: CAMAF06

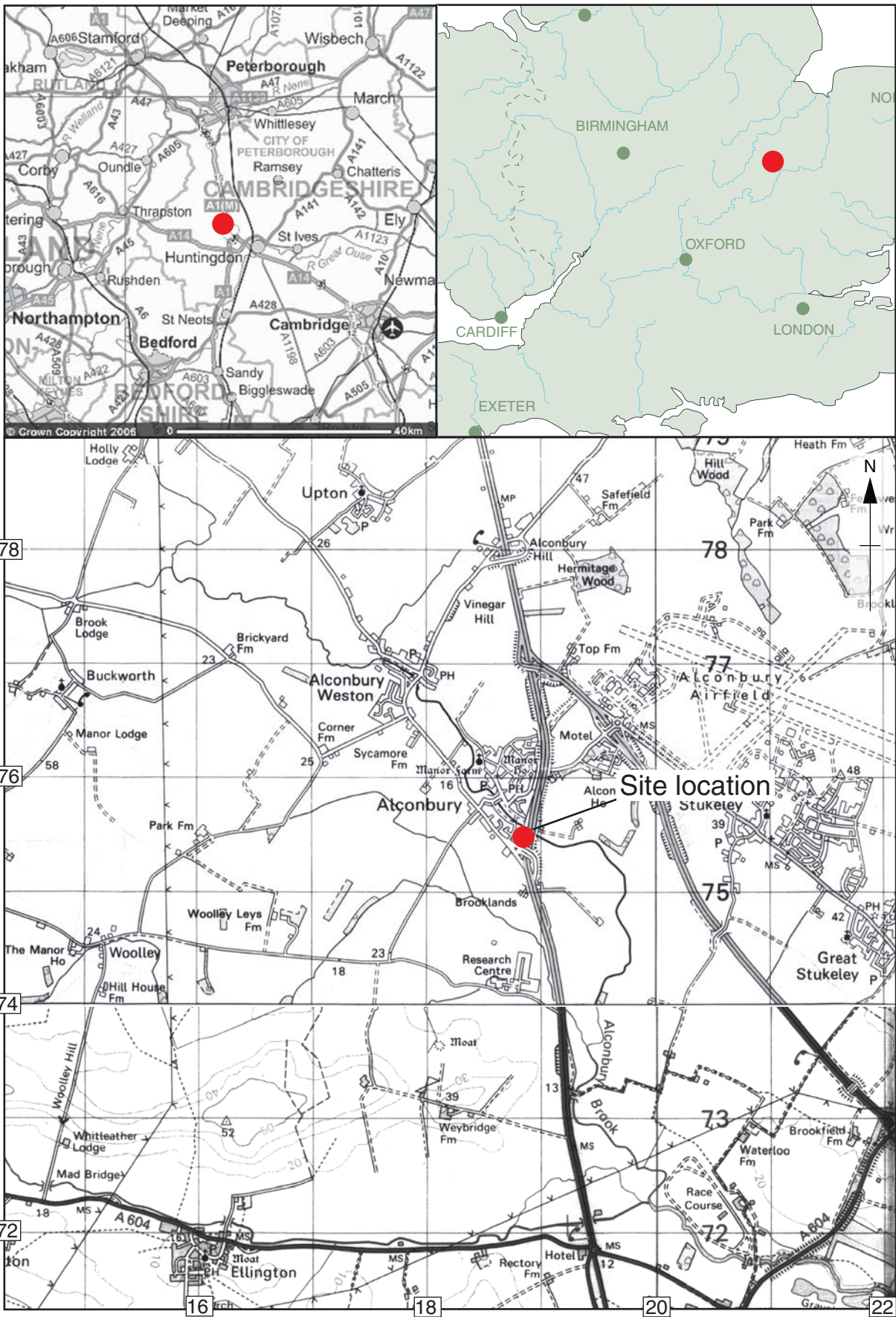
Grid reference: TL 175 770

Type of watching brief: Monitoring of five test pits

Date and duration of project: 1 day. The 4th of December 2006

Summary of results: Modern build up overlying natural gravels and clays. No archaeology was uncovered

Location of archive: The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with the appropriate museum service in due course



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Figure 1: Site location



Figure 2: Test Pit Locations



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