Archaeological Field Unit

Rectory Farm, Hardwick: an archaeological evaluation

Judith Roberts

November 1999

Cambridgeshire County Council

Report No. B64

Commissioned by Beechdale Homes PLC
Rectory Farm, Hardwick: 
an archaeological evaluation

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SUMMARY

An archaeological evaluation of a 1.1ha site at Rectory Farm, Hardwick was undertaken by the Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Field Unit in November 1999. A single trench was dug within the footprint of the proposed new building. No clear evidence for Saxon or medieval settlement on the area was discovered in spite of the presence of the church and medieval earthworks nearby.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 1
GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY 1
ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND 1
METHODOLOGY AND CONSTRAINTS 3
RESULTS 3
DISCUSSION 3
CONCLUSIONS 4
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS 4
BIBLIOGRAPHY 4

APPENDIX 1

SMR SITES IN AND AROUND THE PARISH OF HARDWICK 5

ILLUSTRATION

Figure 1 Site location plan 2
Rectory Farm, Hardwick: an archaeological evaluation (TL 373 587)

INTRODUCTION

In November 1999 the Archaeological Field Unit (AFU) of Cambridgeshire County Council undertook an evaluation to reveal archaeological remains at Rectory Farm, Hardwick (TL373/587) (Fig. 1). The work was carried out on behalf of Beechdale Homes PLC before development of the land for housing.

GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

The 1.1ha site lies on Boulder Clay (British Geological Survey 1978), at approximately 58m OD. The land slopes steeply from the north-west. The topography has been modified considerably with deposits of soil and rubbish to level the site and make a track. The topsoil had been stripped before archaeological work was carried out. This had been deposited on the western part of the site.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The village of Hardwick lies approximately eight kilometres west of Cambridge and today has two separate focal points. The original village, roughly in the centre of the parish, is about 1.6km south of the Cambridge to St. Neots road and was focused around a central green until enclosure after 1836. A newer settlement has grown up along the St. Neots road since the 1930s. Hardwick is mentioned in 1050 as Hardwicc, although manorial lands are known from the tenth century. The name derives from the Old English for 'sheep farm' (Reaney 1943).

Evidence for early occupation of the village can be seen in earthworks (SMR no. 3226) which may be of Iron Age or Roman date. Occupation continued into the early medieval period with a small cross surviving in the churchyard (SMR no. 3252).

A 'public watering place' close to the church and centre of the village is marked on the Hardwick Enclosure Map of 1837. This may have been an important element in the development of the village and became the focus of the village green.

The manor at Hardwick was said to have been given to Ely priory in 991, a gift from Ealdorman Beorthnoth before a battle against the invading Danes. Ely's rights were confirmed in the eleventh century by Edward the Confessor and remained effective until 1600 when the manor was taken by Elizabeth I. In 1610 James I gave the lands back into private ownership and it passed through various owners (including Lancelot 'Capability' Brown in 1770). By the nineteenth century the manor was much reduced
Figure 1 Site Location Plan
and was known as Victoria Farm – perhaps the site of the present Victoria Farm at the northern end of the old village, close to the church and green.

An un-named moated site at the southern end of the old village (SMR no. 1100) still exists as an earthwork. Early land divisions and ridge and furrow agriculture are visible around the village. The village has communications via the Port Way to the east and west and small paths joining the St. Neots road in the north. The soils are relatively heavy and agriculture has been a mainstay of the village until recent years.

METHODOLOGY AND CONSTRAINTS

Agricultural buildings in the northern part of the site had been demolished and the farmhouse was in process of demolition. A range of barns is being retained for conversion. The area to be sampled was restricted to the footprint of the proposed new building. The development is not expected to have an impact on the rest of the site and consequently it was not evaluated.

The total area opened by machine was approximately 38.5 sq.m. The trench was planned, photographed and recorded using the standard techniques of the AFU. Modern intrusive features, such as ditches and dumped deposits, were recorded in plan but not excavated by hand.

RESULTS

A single trench (24m long and 1.6m wide) was opened by machine. The southern part revealed 0.3m of subsoil over clay with chalk flecks. Two features were noted in this part of the trench: a possible posthole (0.3m diameter and 0.13m deep) which contained a grey brown silty clay fill and no artefactual material; and a narrow gully (0.3m wide) with a grey brown silty clay fill. This ran south-west–north-east across the trench and the excavated segment contained a single piece of peg tile.

To the north there was evidence of considerable modern disturbance and a trackway having been laid and repaired. The deposit was a dark brown clay silt, 0.42m deep, with very few stones. This was sealed by a layer, 0.3m deep, of redeposited clay which in turn was covered in gravel and hard-core. Finds from the lower deposit included aluminium wall ties, plastic strips, broken slates, brick and coal. It would appear that this part of the site has been built up and used as a track to provide access up a steep slope to the northern and western part of the site.

DISCUSSION

Documentary research suggested that the development area was close to but beyond the core of the medieval village. There was no evidence of prehistoric or Roman
occupation (masked by ridge and furrow) on the heavy clay lands in this part of
Hardwick.

The conditions were dry and cut features were clearly visible in the sub-soil and
natural geology. It is likely that had medieval or earlier features existed on the site
they would have been identified.

CONCLUSIONS

The absence of medieval or earlier remains and high level of modern disturbance
across the site suggest that further work is unlikely to provide further information on
the early occupation of Hardwick.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank Beechdale Homes Ltd. which funded the project, Paul
Spoerry, Project Manager and Jon Cane for the illustrations. The project was
monitored by Andy Thomas of the County Council Archaeology Office
(Development Control).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Reaney, P.H., 1943 The Place-Names of Cambridgeshire and the Isle of Ely
Taylor, A., 1997 Archaeology of Cambridgeshire: South West Cambridgeshire
1973, Oxford
APPENDIX 1

SMR SITES IN AND AROUND THE PARISH OF HARDWICK

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<th>Type</th>
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(Highlighted records are those mentioned in the text above.)