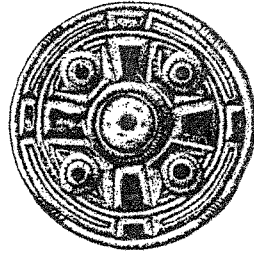


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Archaeological Field Unit

**Church Farmhouse Barns, Comberton:  
An Archaeological Evaluation**

Judith Roberts

December 2002

**Cambridgeshire County Council**

Report No. B112

Commissioned by David Pitts Architects on behalf of Dr. & Mrs. R. J. Dickinson

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2002

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## **SUMMARY**

*On the 28th November 2002 an archaeological evaluation was carried out by staff from the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council at Church Farmhouse Barns, Comberton, in advance of development.*

*The ground level has been greatly reduced, probably in post-medieval times. No archaeological deposits were noted in the evaluation trenches.*

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**Church Farmhouse Barns, The Causeway, Comberton:  
An archaeological evaluation  
(TL 38368 55573)**

## **INTRODUCTION**

On the 28th November 2002 an archaeological evaluation was carried out by staff from the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council on land at Church Farmhouse Barn, Comberton in advance of development including conversion of the barn with associated road and services. The land is to the rear of a listed building (SMR no. 3368).

The proposed development involves a barn conversion, construction of a garage, two greenhouses, a store extension, a terrace and a landscaped kitchen garden within an approximate area of 0.0675m. The land available for evaluation is restricted by the existing buildings and services. The development will take place between the Grade II listed building (SMR no. 3368) and the parish church of St. Mary.

## **GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY**

The site is on a ridge of boulder clay overlying Gault clay at a height of approximately 33m OD. The land slopes fairly steeply down to the north where the main part of the village runs along the east-west road which follows a patch of terrace gravels.

The site has been heavily truncated and is approximately one metre lower than the surrounding land in the churchyard to the south and Church Farmhouse.

## **ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

The site is on the southern outskirts of the modern village of Comberton, less than 50m to the north of the church of St. Mary (SMR no. 351a).

Prehistoric finds from the parish have been found on the gravels along Bourn Brook (to the south). Crop marks seen in aerial photographs have been interpreted as Iron Age but this has yet to be confirmed by finds or excavation.

The Roman road – Lot Way – runs just south of the church and two Roman villas have been identified in the valley of Bourn Brook. To the west of the development site a Roman barrow was excavated but nothing was found in the barrow. A few Roman artefacts were found nearby.



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**Figure 1** Location of trenches with Development Area outlined.

The medieval church of St. Mary's is built on a high point away from the main part of the village and it has been suggested the late Roman villa and Roman road may have influenced the position of the church (Taylor 1997). Two of the manors in the parish lie between the church and the present village and there is little evidence for the migration of the village. Primary settlement may have occurred along the spit of river gravel where the present east-west street runs. There are properties dating from the thirteenth century in this part of the village.

There is no evidence for a religious building predating the thirteenth century church on the ridge to the south of the village and much of the church was rebuilt in the fourteenth century. A church is, however, recorded as related to Burdeleys manor (between the present church and the village) before 1100.

Church Farmhouse, to the north of the development site, was built in the late seventeenth/early eighteenth century and probably replaced the parson's former dwelling which was used by Barnwell Priory as its farmstead. In 1339 the prior had a hall and grange there (RCHME 1968).

Medieval earthworks (SMR 9225) consisting of ridge and furrow and a possible pond or platform, lie to the west of the buildings clustered around the church.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Two trenches (total length 18.75m) were excavated to the south of Church Farmhouse. The trenches provided over a 5% sample of the available area. Modern overburden was removed using a wheeled mechanical excavator with a flat bladed ditching bucket (1.8m wide). This was carried out under the supervision of an archaeologist. Trenches were located to give a representative sample of the available area including the recently demolished buildings in order to test how badly the post-medieval construction had truncated archaeological deposits.

The trenches were cleaned and planned. The AFU's single context recording system was used to record all features and deposits. Sections were drawn at an appropriate scale and trenches planned at 1:50. Colour slides and black and white photographs were taken of the trenches and surrounding buildings.

In this report deposit numbers are shown in plain text and cut numbers in bold. Descriptions of the character and morphology of deposits are listed in the main text for each trench.

## RESULTS

Trench 1 (12.2m long) was oriented approximately north-south and positioned 1.6m from the wall surrounding the churchyard. There was no topsoil or subsoil visible in the trench section and it was noted that the ground level in the churchyard was over a metre higher than that in the farmyard. The only feature in Trench 1 was a glazed drain which runs from the barn on the eastern boundary of the site to a soakaway in the western part of the site.

Trench 2 (6.5m long) was oriented approximately east-west and positioned within the footprint of the extension of the barn and thus within the area likely to be affected by the proposed development. A cobbled layer was exposed along the trench, 0.25m below the present ground surface. This layer was penetrated by a modern intrusion which contained a dark silty clay with fragments of brick and slate. This was just beyond the previous western limit of the barn (visible as relatively modern footings). The cobbled layer appears to have been part of the floor of the barn. No earlier deposits or features were noted in this trench.

In both trenches the bulk of the deposit removed by machine was made up of a mottled grey and orange sandy clay with large flints. The south-western part of the yard contained standing water and the southern end of trench 1 filled with water. Water seeped into the slot created when the modern footing was removed in Trench 2.

## CONCLUSION

The heavily truncated nature of the site and the absence of any pre-modern features indicates that the present ground surface was lowered when the barns that occupy the site were built in the past two centuries.

Medieval activity close to the church and Church Farmhouse is known but evidence for it no longer exists (if it ever did) on the present development site. It is likely that the site has been used as a farmyard since the medieval period and there is no evidence for earlier activity in the area.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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The brief for archaeological works was written by Andy Thomas, County Archaeology Office. Kasia Gdaniec of the CAO monitored the evaluation.

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