CCC AFU Report Number 849

Undated Field System Remains at Little Paxton Quarry, Cambridgeshire.

Archaeological Evaluation

Steve Hickling
December 2005
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CCC AFU Report Number 849

Undated Field systems at Little Paxton Quarry, Cambridgeshire.

Archaeological Evaluation

Steve Hickling BA MA

Site Code: PXL LPQ 05
CHER Event Number: ECB 2116
Date of works: 13th-14th December 2005 and 4th-9th January 2005
Grid Ref: TL 195 637

Editor: Elizabeth Shepherd Popescu BA MIFA
Illustrator: Crane Begg BSc
Summary

An archaeological evaluation at Little Paxton Quarry, although producing few finds, has identified this area as agricultural land with at least three phases of field systems.

The earliest system identified is a pre-medieval enclosed field system laid out on a different alignment to the other two and so far undated, but potentially prehistoric (the excavations by the Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit to the north identified elements of an Iron Age/Roman field system).

The medieval (?) open field (represented by the furrows in trench 6) was orientated on the cardinal compass points and was probably part of a southern field belonging to Boughton.

The most recent are the present enclosed fields, aligned like the ridge and furrow.
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## Drawing Conventions

### Sections

- Limit of Excavation
- Cut
- Cut-Conjectured
- Soil Horizon
- Soil Horizon - Conjectured
- Intrusion/Truncation
- Top of Natural
- Top Surface
- Break in Section/
  Limit of Section Drawing

### Plans

- Limit of Excavation
- Deposit - Conjectured
- Natural Features
- Intrusion/Truncation
- Sondages/Machine Strip
- Illustrated Section
  - Archaeological Deposit
  - Excavated Slot
  - Modern Deposit
  - Natural Deposit
  - Ridge and Furrow
- Cut Number
  - 111
  - 117
  - 18.45m OD N
  - Stone
1 Introduction

This exercise is the latest stage of extensive archaeological investigations which have been taking place as the quarry expands. Much of the previous work has been done by the Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU).

This archaeological evaluation was undertaken in accordance with a Brief issued by Andy Thomas of the Cambridgeshire Archaeology, Planning and Countryside Advice team (CAPCA), supplemented by a Specification prepared by Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Field Unit (CCC AFU).

The work was designed to assist in defining the character and extent of any archaeological remains within the proposed redevelopment area, in accordance with the guidelines set out in Planning and Policy Guidance 16 - Archaeology and Planning (Department of the Environment 1990). The results will enable decisions to be made by CAPCA, on behalf of the Local Planning Authority, with regard to the treatment of any archaeological remains found.

The site archive is currently held by CCC AFU and will be deposited with the appropriate county stores in due course under the site code PXL LPQ 05.

2 Geology and Topography

The site overlies first or second terrace river gravels (British Geological Survey 1975). The topography is flat, at a height of 13.5 to 14.5m OD. The River Ouse runs 0.75km to the east, while the A1 (Great North Road) lies 0.5km to the west. On excavation, the natural geology appeared to be interleaved layers of silt and gravel.

3 Archaeological and Historical Background

3.1 Prehistoric

Between Diddington (1.5km to the north north-west) and the Broughton deserted medieval village (500m to the north) lie a large complex of features discovered by aerial photography and geophysical survey. They appear to comprise enclosures and ring ditches (Jones 2000).
Figure 1: Location of trenches (black) with the development area outlined (red)
3.2 Roman

To the east of Little Paxton, Roman settlement remains, burials and a quay on the banks of the Ouse have been excavated (Greenfield 1968).

3.3 Anglo-Saxon

Also to the east, Great Paxton boasts a church with some fine late Saxon remains (Hatton and Heawood 1993). In Little Paxton domestic remains of the 9th to 11th centuries have been excavated as well as earlier burials (Addyman 1969).

3.4 Medieval

The medieval settlement of Little Paxton lies beneath the modern village. The parish church dates to the late 12th century (Alexander 1992b).

Some 500m to the north of the development area lie the remains (earthworks) of the deserted village of Boughton (Scheduled Ancient Monument 162).

Ridge and furrow cropmarks lie 1.1km north of the development area (CHER MCB6984) together with a possible windmill mound.

The earthworks of a house platform and more ridge and furrow (CHER MCB12067) lie 1km to the north. To the west of this lay the earthworks of more deserted house plots until they were recently levelled (CHER MCB13351), with adjacent ridge and furrow (CHER MCB13352). More ridge and furrow and house plot earthworks lie adjacent to the east of this (CHER MCB13353 and MCB13354). Ridge and furrow cropmarks lie to the west of the A1 (CHER MCB13650). All these earthworks and cropmarks appear to be the remains of medieval Diddington, now much shrunken, and the fields of deserted Boughton.

3.6 Recent Archaeological Fieldwork


Extensive excavations by BUFAU, following geophysical and trial trenching exercises, produced evidence of activity from the Mesolithic to the Roman periods. Mesolithic activity was confined to a few stray flints. The earliest features were a group of Late Neolithic to Early Bronze Age pits. Two Bronze Age huts were discovered. A series of Iron Age enclosures and settlement remains including hearths and hut circles were succeeded by a Roman farmstead. Also present was a
possible Iron Age square barrow and a possible Roman ritual site (Jones 2000).

**Diddington to Priory Hill Pipeline 1992**

An archaeological assessment was carried out on three sites along the route of a pipeline. One of these sites was on the south-western edge of the present development area. Two ditches and a gravel quarry pit were discovered; one of the ditches dated to the 1st century AD. Another site was located to the north-west of the development area, adjacent to the A1, but no archaeological features were discovered (Alexander 1992a).

**Great North Road, Little Paxton 1992**

An archaeological assessment by fieldwalking and trial trenching took place between the modern A1 and the old Great North Road, to the west of Little Paxton. Late Neolithic to Bronze Age activity was recorded, with ditches and possible structural features (Alexander 1992b).

4 **Methodology**

The objective of this evaluation was to determine as far as reasonably possible the presence/absence, location, nature, extent, date, quality, condition and significance of any surviving archaeological deposits within the development area.

The Brief required that 8 trenches totalling 750m in length should be investigated.

Machine excavation was carried out under constant archaeological supervision with a tracked 360° tracked excavator using a toothless ditching bucket.

Spoil, exposed surfaces and features were scanned with a metal detector. All metal-detected and hand-collected finds were retained for inspection, other than those which were obviously modern.

After a visit by Andy Thomas, a pale yellowy cream clayey silt layer was removed by machine down to the level of the gravel that the quarry will be exploiting. Although no features were present at this level, due to the effects of weathering, several features at the original level were recorded. Depths of the topsoil and this silt layer are given in Appendix 2.
All archaeological features and deposits were recorded using CCC AFU's *pro-forma* sheets. Trench locations, plans and sections were recorded at appropriate scales and colour and monochrome photographs were taken of all relevant features and deposits.

No environmental samples were taken.

Most of the site was ploughed and harrowed agricultural land and the weather was mainly cold and dry.

## 5 Results

(Further context details can be found in Appendix 1.)

### 5.1 Trench 1

This trench was 100.5m long and 2m wide, aligned east to west. Some 0.45m of ploughsoil was removed to reveal the natural subsoil, a pale yellowy cream clayey silt with occasional gravel. Two features were discovered:

- Feature 1 was oval with a very pale fill (2).
- Feature 3 was truncated by the edge of the trench, but was probably oval and had a very pale fill (4).

Both these features were probably natural tree throw holes.

### 5.2 Trench 2

This trench was 99.6m long and 2m wide, aligned north to south. Some 0.4m of ploughsoil was removed to reveal the natural subsoil, a pale yellowy cream clayey silt with occasional gravel. Only two features was discovered:

- Ditch 5 was a small south-west to north-east aligned ditch with a very pale fill (6) containing a small proportion of charcoal.
- Ditch 18 was aligned south-east to north-west and had a pale greyish brown fill (19).

### 5.3 Trench 3

This trench was 100m long and 1.9m wide, aligned north to south. Some 0.4m of ploughsoil was removed to reveal the natural subsoil, a pale yellowy cream clayey silt with occasional gravel. Only one archaeological feature was discovered:
Figure 2: Trench plans
Ditch 7 was aligned north-west to south-east and had a pale fill (8) with no inclusions.

Several natural features were also present suggestive of tree roots and tree throw holes. One of these, 33, contained a large amount of charcoal and burnt earth (35) dumped into it. Its other fills, 34 and 37, suggested that the hole was open for sometime and was infilled naturally.

5.4 Trench 4

This trench was 99.5m long and 2m wide, aligned east to west. Some 0.35m of ploughsoil was removed to reveal the natural subsoil, a pale yellowy cream clayey silt with occasional gravel. Three features were discovered:

Ditch 9 was aligned north-east to south-west and had a pale brown sandy clay fill (10) with occasional gravel.

Ditch 11 was aligned north-east to south-west and had a pale brown sandy clay fill (12) with occasional charcoal.

Ditch 20 was also aligned north-east to south-west and had a mid brownish-grey sandy silt fill (21) with occasional gravel.

Several natural features were also present, suggestive of tree roots and tree throw holes.

5.5 Trench 5

This trench was 100m long and 2m wide, aligned east to west. Some 0.45m of ploughsoil was removed to reveal the natural subsoil, a pale cream clayey silt with patches of fine gravel. Two features were discovered:

Ditch 13 was aligned south south-west to north north-east and had a mid grey fill (14) with rare gravel.

Ditch 38 was aligned south south-west to north north-east and had a pale greyish brown sandy silt fill (39) with occasional gravel.

5.6 Trench 6

This trench was 102m long and 1.9m wide, aligned north to south. Some 0.4m of ploughsoil was removed to reveal the natural subsoil, a pale yellowy cream clayey silt with occasional gravel. Six east to west
Figure 3: Section drawings

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orientated furrows were discovered. These were up to 3m wide, but very shallow. Three were investigated, 23, 25 and 27.

One ditch and one pit were also present.

Ditch 15 was aligned west north-west to east south-east. It was 1.5m wide and 0.46m deep with dark fills (16 and 17) containing one sherd of post-medieval pottery.

Pit 30 was probably circular in plan, 2.65m wide and had two fills. 29, a brownish mid grey clayey silt was above 28 was a light brown clayey silt.

5.7 Trench 7

This trench was 51m long and 2m wide, aligned north-east to south-west. Some 0.4-0.25m of ploughsoil was removed to reveal the natural subsoil, a pale yellowy cream clayey silt with occasional gravel. No archaeological features were present.

5.8 Trench 8

This trench was 100m long and 2m wide, aligned north to south. Some 0.4-0.45m of ploughsoil was removed to reveal the natural subsoil, a pale yellowy cream clayey silt with occasional gravel. No definite archaeological features were present, although there was an ephemeral feature suggestive of the base of a ploughed out ditch aligned south-west to north-east.

6 Conclusions

Considering the wealth of archaeological remains excavated elsewhere in the quarry (Jones 2000), the lack of remains uncovered in this evaluation is surprising. The ditches probably represent a field system predating the medieval(?) ridge and furrow remains which are on a different alignment. These ditches had very pale fills with very little cultural material within them, suggesting an early date and a lack of settlement close by. This area probably remained agricultural, while the areas to the north saw the development of Iron Age and Roman farmsteads and medieval villages. The ridge and furrow remains at the northern edge of the development area (Trench 6) have been previously recognised as cropmarks and are probably the remains of the southern open field belonging to the village of Boughton.
The layer of silt removed at the request of Andy Thomas was thought not to be masking any archaeological deposits. All the features discovered, including natural tree throws, were cut from above the silt. However, during evaluation work to the north (Cromie 2005, appendix D) a layer of orange brown silty clay, 0.12-0.4m deep was found to be sealing all the Iron Age and Roman archaeology. A testpitting survey (Cromie 2005, appendix E) over the whole site, including that to the north of this development area, revealed a slight difference between the northern silty layer and the silty layer recorded in this report. The northern silty layer was predominately sandy clay loams and medium clay loams, while to the south it was described as heavy clay loam. It is possible that the two layers have different origins and dates.

Recommendations for any future work based upon this report will be made by the County Archaeology Office.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Entec UK Ltd who commissioned and funded the archaeological work. The project was managed by Dr Paul Spoerry. Adam Loeden, Tom Eley and Gareth Rees assisted with the fieldwork, Crane Begg completed the illustrations. This report was edited by Liz Popescu.

The brief for archaeological works was written by Andy Thomas, who visited the site and monitored the evaluation.
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<td>1992a</td>
<td><em>Diddington to Priory Hill Pipeline – An Archaeological Assessment</em> CCC AFU Rep. 74</td>
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<td>Alexander, M.</td>
<td>1992b</td>
<td><em>Prehistoric Settlement Great North Road, Little Paxton</em> CCC AFU Rep. 78</td>
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<td>Cromie, I.</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td><em>Little Paxton Quarry: The Creation of Wetland and Reedbed Habitat Areas, including Agricultural Restoration, through Extraction of Sand, Gravel and Clay at Little Paxton near St Neots, Cambridgeshire</em> Entec UK Ltd</td>
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<td>Hatton, B. and Heawood, R.</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td><em>The North Clerestory Wall, Holy Trinity Church, Great Paxton: Photogrammetric Recording</em> CCC AFU Rep. 76</td>
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### Appendix 1: Context Data

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<td>Fill of 001</td>
<td>Pale orangey grey sandy clay with occasional gravel and charcoal</td>
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<td>016</td>
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<td>017</td>
<td>Base fill of 015</td>
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<td>Fill of 023</td>
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<td>Furrow</td>
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<td>South</td>
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Appendix 2: Depths of Overburden

This appendix states the depths of the plough soil and natural silt for the ends of each trench.
Cambridgeshire County Council's **Archaeological Field Unit** undertakes a wide range of work throughout the county and across the eastern region.

Our key purpose is to increase understanding of the rich heritage of the region.

We are keenly competitive, working to the highest professional standards in a broad range of service areas. We work in partnership with contractors and local communities.

We undertake or provide:

- surveys, assessments, evaluations and excavations
- popular and academic publications
- illustration and design services
- heritage and conservation management
- education and outreach services
- volunteer, training and work experience opportunities
- partnership projects with community groups and research bodies

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