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Between River, Priory and Town: Excavations at the former Cambridge Regional College site, Brunswick, Cambridge

Rob Atkins with contributions by Peter Boardman, Steve Boreham, Nina Crummy, Antony Dickson, Chris Faine, Carole Fletcher and Rachel Fosberry. Illustrations by Andrew Corrigan, Gillian Greer and Adam Parsons

Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society CI pp. 7–22

Excavations on the south bank of the River Cam provided a rare opportunity to study preserved prehistoric, Roman and medieval land surfaces, flood deposits and hillwash, beneath which were Early Neolithic pits. During the medieval period, the land lay adjacent to Barnwell Priory, one of the wealthiest and most important religious establishments in East Anglia. Large quantities of imported soil were dumped here during the 13th to early 16th centuries, perhaps to facilitate farming or to improve access to the river. The dumped material contained a diverse assemblage of finds including book fittings and iron working waste.

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Late Bronze Age and Iron Age activity on the Littleport Fen Edge

Tom Woolhouse with a contribution from Martin Tingle and Rob Scaife. Illustrations by Charlotte Davies.

Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society CI pp. 23–30

Between June 2005 and February 2008, Archaeological Solutions carried out two stages of archaeological investigation on land adjoining 80 Wisbech Road, Littleport, Cambridgeshire (NGR TL 5608 8732), in advance of residential development. The site encompassed part of the former Fen edge on the north side of Littleport 'island'.

The investigations revealed three phases of activity, focused on the higher, drier southern part of the site. Scattered struck flint indicated sporadic activity during the early Neolithic (Phase 1), when this area was probably dry. In the late Bronze Age/ early Iron Age (Phase 2), numerous shallow pits, some containing pottery and occasional daub fragments, suggest the site lay within paddocks on the periphery of a settlement further to the south. Peat growth in the north of the site was well-developed by this time, having begun around the middle Bronze Age. Remains of two ditches, the larger of which ran down into the fen, suggest that similar agricultural land use continued into the late Iron Age (Phase 3). Part of a ?curated Mesolithic/ Neolithic quartzite pebble hammer was found in the upper fill of the larger ditch, close to its terminus. This might represent a deliberately-placed 'votive' deposit. Its deposition may have been associated with the rising water table, which was causing flooding on the site around this time and probably led to its abandonment soon after. Column samples contained well-preserved pollen evidence for later prehistoric environmental change and agriculture in this part of Littleport. A shift away from the predominantly dry conditions of the early prehistoric was evidenced by grasses, sedges and other reed swamp taxa. Bar a brief period of increased salinity and alluvial sedimentation during the middle Iron Age, thought to be associated with rising sea levels, these prolonged fresh water fen conditions provided a backdrop for a predominantly pastoral agricultural regime.

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War Ditches, Cherry Hinton: Revisiting an Iron Age Hillfort

Alexandra Pickstone and Richard Mortimer with Rachel Ballantyne, Barry Bishop, Christopher Bronk Ramsey, Matt Brudenell, Gordon Cook, Nina Crummy, Natasha Dodwell, Chris Faine, Alice Lyons, Peter Marshall, John Meadows and Elizabeth C. Stafford. Illustrations by Gillian Greer

Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society CI pp. 31–59

War Ditches is a large enclosure, lying on a spur of the Gog Magog hills to the south of Cambridge. Much of this originally circular monument was destroyed by chalk quarrying in the late 19th to mid 20th centuries, during which time a series of excavations was conducted, largely under the auspices of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society. Had the monument survived intact, it would undoubtedly have acquired scheduled status as one of the county's key prehistoric monuments.

Emergency archaeological work in 2009 was necessitated by ground works relating to the opening of the site to the public as a nature reserve. Excavation of a single large slot through the surviving ditch, in the area most at risk, was supplemented by test pits and auger surveys. Relatively large and well stratified finds and environmental assemblages were found which, allied with radiocarbon dating, have enabled the first accurate dating of the ditch infill sequence. It is now clear that the monument was constructed at the end of the 5th century BC or the beginning of the 4th century BC only to be destroyed before completion or shortly thereafter. The site was then abandoned until reoccupation in the middle of the 1st century BC. Final infilling of the upper part of the ditch probably occurred in the second half of the 1st century AD.

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Above the Fen Edge: Late Bronze Age to Early Iron Age Activity on land off Broadlands, Peterborough

Kate Nicholson with Jane Cowgill, Nina Crummy, Val Fryer, Rowena Gale, Andrew Peachey, Carina Phillips, Maisie Taylor, Peter Thompson and Martin Tingle. Illustrations by Caroline George and Tansy Collins.

Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society CI pp. 61–79

Excavations between 1998 and 2006 have revealed significant prehistoric activity on land off Broadlands, Peterborough (NGR TF 2142 0001), to the north of the well known Fengate sites. The main period of activity at this site was in the late Bronze Age to early Iron Age. This activity seems to have been primarily agricultural (pastoral) in nature, with features including a stockyard and two water-holes, one containing two preserved log ladders. A single crouched burial, dating to the early Iron Age and marked by a wooden post, was also present. Its location may have been influenced by the presence of a Beaker period barrow, c. 100m to its north-north-east, and/or by its position between the contemporary agricultural features and the edge of the fen. A middle Bronze Age field system and small-scale late Iron Age to early Romano-British activity was also recorded but is not presented herein.

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A Landscape Corridor: A14 Improvements Investigations

Christopher Evans and Robin Standring with Grahame Appleby, Ricky Patten and Adam Slater

Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society CI pp. 81–104

This work describes first-phase archaeological evaluation of a proposed route (29 km) for the A14 Ellington to Fen Ditton project in Cambridgeshire. Over 20 km of archaeological trenching, targeted after field-walking and aerial photography evaluation, was excavated. Twenty three sites are briefly described (with plans). The authors present their results in relation to topographical segments, from north to south: The Brampton Gravels, The Ouse River Valley, The Fenstanton Clays, and The Southern Clays. They suggest that there is a marked difference in site distribution-densities between the Brampton Terraces/Ouse River Valley segments and the southern clayland portion, with the former showing semi-continuous landscape-use with sites merging into one another whilst sites in the southern portion are more discrete. The northwestern area produced what is described as ‘the full temporal gamut’ with all periods from Mesolithic/Neolithic to Saxon times being represented, whilst the southern portion contained predominantly Iron Age and/or Romano-British sites. It is suggested that deep pit-wells facilitated the use of the inland clays, that the Middle Iron Age marks a significant stage in the colonisation of the clays and that settlement densities in the later Iron Age/Romano-British period may have exceeded those of the Medieval period. The authors emphasise the incomplete nature of their study and particularly stress the need for future work on a 3km long stretch of terrace gravels south of Fenstanton where topographical and geological considerations suggest high potential for a third pattern of early settlement/land-use.

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Addenbrooke’s Hospital Excavations, 2007 & 2010: The Last of the Cra’ster’s Enclosure

Christopher Evans, Jacqui Hutton and Simon Timberlake with contributions by Katie Anderson, Rachel Ballantyne, Matt Brudenell, Vida Rajkovača and Anne de Vareilles

Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society CI pp. 105–114

Excavations in the grounds of Addenbrooke’s Hospital, Cambridge during 2007 and 2010 provided an opportunity to re-examine and build on the findings of a rescue excavation in the same area directed by Mary Cra’ster in 1967, which had determined the presence an Iron Age enclosure. In the more recent excavations no wheel-turned wares occurred within the assemblage taken from the enclosure, clearly supporting a Middle/late Iron Age attribution and indicating that usage of the enclosure did not continue into the first century AD. The Cra’ster excavation had revealed some La Tène-decorated pottery but no further pottery of this type was recovered, implying that there are no grounds for seeing the enclosure as in any way ‘special’ and it must essentially be ranked as a fairly typical domestic compound of the period. Comparison of faunal assemblages, from the Bronze Age to the Saxon phase, found in this location with those from the nearby Hutchison site highlights the survival of a higher proportion of cattle bones compared with those from sheep/ovicaprids. Analysis of environmental samples attests to a largely open landscape with localised wet conditions. A projection of the alignment of ‘parallel ditches’ alongside the southern edge of the enclosure suggests that they may represent a Late Iron Age or Conquest period trackway corresponding to the route of the Roman road that was excavated along the southern side of the Hutchison Site. Despite working in very difficult conditions Cra’ster’s plotting of the key features seems to have been remarkably accurate.

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An Iron Age and Roman Settlement at Summersfield, Papworth Everard

Ricky Patten with contributions by Katie Anderson with Matt Brudenell, Grahame Appleby and Andrew Hall, David Hall, Vida Rajkovača, and Anne de Vareilles

Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society CI pp. 115–142

This paper details the excavation of a small rural settlement situated on a clay ridge at Summersfield, Papworth Everard. The ridgeline was first settled during the Iron Age, with the construction of five roundhouses and three enclosures. During the Late Iron Age/early Roman period the settlement developed further with a series of enclosures representing different forms of activity, including habitation, horticulture, crop processing, and the management of livestock. Possibly representing two distinct farmsteads, the settlement remains lay either side of a partially metalled routeway. Although this may have branched off the presumed route of Ermine Street, it is possible that this is the Roman road itself. There was a hiatus in activity from the end of the Roman period until the 10th century AD, when settlement to the north of the excavation area, centred on the church of St. Peter, encroached into Summersfield. Five separate enclosures and the remains of two structures located on the edge of the settlement were revealed. The focus of this paper will be on the Iron Age and Roman phases, revealing the character of the later prehistoric and Romano-British settlement on the clay lands; this further supports evidence from other recent excavations that have indicated that settlement was not confined to the river terraces.

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Romano-British Horningsea Ware kilns at 12 Pieces Lane, Waterbeach, Cambridgeshire

Andrew A. S. Newton and Andrew Peachey

Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society CI pp. 143–160

Excavation at 12, Pieces Lane, Waterbeach revealed two Romano-British pottery kilns of the Horningsea ware industry. These kilns add to the corpus of information regarding this industry in Cambridgeshire and increase understanding of the character of the industry and the sites at which this pottery was produced. Evidence from these kilns indicates that kiln form varied between the Horningsea production sites. The pottery assemblage recovered from, and in association with, these kilns suggests Horningsea ware production had begun in Waterbeach by the early 2nd century AD, earlier than previously thought. Evidence to indicate that earlier kilns may have existed at the site was recorded and this, coupled with the dateable evidence, suggests that the layout of the site was altered repeatedly with kilns being built, demolished and rebuilt several times over in approximately the same locations.

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William Hayward's 1604 map of the Fens

Michael Chisholm and Philip Stickler

Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society CI pp. 161–172

Hayward was commissioned to map the Fens and conduct a survey of land holdings, a cadastre, both of which he submitted to Commissioners of Sewers in 1605. They determined on a comprehensive drainage scheme for the peat fens that, although not implemented, closely resembled Vermuyden's scheme undertaken some decades later. The original map has been lost and we rely upon a 1727 manuscript copy of a 1618 copy of the 1604 document, at a scale of one inch to the mile. Scholars have not paid much attention to this seemingly incomplete map, largely, it would seem, because the purpose of the map as a planning tool has not been adequately recognised. Comparison with modern Ordnance Survey mapping shows that the 1604 map provides a commendably accurate representation of the waterways that can be matched and also the location of churches, which were presumably used for triangulation purposes. The map deserves to be more widely recognised as a valuable resource for studying the fenland waterways prior to the seventeenth century drainage works.

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The Rev William Lee (c. 1550–1617) Vicar of Stapleford, Cambridgeshire

Ian B Fallows

Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society CI pp. 173–178

“Very few brasses seem to have been laid down in the seventeenth century, and none are of any interest”
(Clayton 1969, 9).

A three-piece brass memorial plate commemorating the life of Rev William Lee (c. 1550–1617) is affixed to the chancel floor of Stapleford Church, of which he was incumbent 1574–1617. This memorial is described, its Latin and English inscription translated and explained. Discussion of its cryptic Latin message suggests that it is intended to offer insights into the anguished mind of a conscientious parish priest caught up in the throes of the Reformation.