St Neots Community College

Archaeological Evaluation

By Chris Thatcher BA

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Illustrator: Andrew Corrigan

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Site Name: St Neots Community College
HER Event No: ECB3156
Date of Works: April 2009
Client Name: Capita Architecture for CCC
Client Ref:
Planning Ref:
Grid Ref: TL 1839 5899
Site Code: STN COM 09
Finance Code: STN COM 09
Receiving Body: CCC Stores
Accession No:

Prepared by: Chris Thatcher
Position: Project Officer
Date: 21 April 2009

Checked by: Richard Mortimer
Position: Project Manager
Date: 12/05/09
Signed:

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Summary

On 7th April 2009 OA East conducted an archaeological evaluation at St Neots Community College, St Neots, centred on TL 1839 5899. The proposal was for the development of the Community Centre facilities within the grounds of the existing college.

Initially two trenches were to be excavated. One 10m x 2m and the second 5m x 2m. However, due to the very high density of modern services crossing the development area a single 10m x 2m trench was excavated with a second phase of work to be undertaken once the site had been cleared of modern services, prior to development.

A significant level of modern make-up was recorded throughout the trench, which varied in depth between 0.62m and 0.57m from north to south. The modern soil deposits sealed a 0.25m thick layer of dark grey brown sandy silt that appeared to form a layer of earlier topsoil, probably buried during the construction or landscaping of the College grounds. The underlying geology comprised silty gravel deposits. No archaeological features were recorded during the evaluation.
1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work

1.1.1 An archaeological evaluation was conducted at St Neots Community College, St Neots, centred on TL 1839 5899. The proposal was for the development of the Community Centre facilities within the grounds of the existing college.

1.1.2 This archaeological evaluation was undertaken in accordance with a Brief issued by Andy Thomas of Cambridgeshire County Council, supplemented by a Specification prepared by OA East (formerly Cambridgeshire County Council's CAM ARC).

1.1.3 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 CCC, on behalf of the Local Planning Authority, with regard to the treatment of any archaeological remains found.

1.1.4 The site archive is currently held by OA East and will be deposited with the appropriate county stores in due course.

1.2 Geology and topography

1.2.1 The site lies on 1st and 2nd River Terrace deposits to the south-west of the historic core of St Neots, close to the flood plain of the River Great Ouse.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

1.3.1 The background for this report is drawn from the Specification produced for the project (Drummond Murray, 2009). Cambridgeshire Historic Environment Record identifies extensive prehistoric monumental, funerary, ritual and settlement sites in the surrounding area, known through both aerial photography and archaeological investigation (e.g. CHER nos: 550, 567a, 567c, 8405a and CB322 etc.). Later archaeology includes a possible Roman Legionary fort (Coneygeare Common) and Pagan Saxon funerary urns to the south (CHER 392).

1.3.2 Several phases of work have previously been undertaken in and around the school. Excavations in the grounds of the Community College revealed a Roman settlement, dating from the late 3rd century and possibly continuing into the 5th century, which consisted of stone buildings, ditches and pits immediately to the east of the college buildings. Bronze Age remains were also recorded under the present all-weather pitch.

1.3.3 Cropmark evidence and archaeological work have shown that the area to the south of the school was part of an extensive ritual landscape with a cursus monument some 700m long and 300m wide. This landscape consisted of monuments dating from c.4000BC through into the Iron Age of c.700 BC (CHER Nos. 376, 381, 447, 6150 and 11671).

1.3.4 Prehistoric settlement and burial evidence has also been recorded to the north, west and south of the site. These were excavated by both CCC AFU and Wessex Archaeology.

1.3.5 The most extensive archaeological investigation relevant to the subject site is the work undertaken between July 2000 and January 2001 by Wessex Archaeology. This site lay...
to the south of the subject site and covered an area of 12ha, revealing remains of a ritual ceremonial and funerary complex dating from the Neolithic and Bronze Age, as well as evidence for Romano-British land use and Saxon occupation. The prehistoric complex contained two Early Neolithic cursus monuments which dated from c.4000BC. A Neolithic long barrow with placed deposits that included human and animal remains as well as artefacts, radiocarbon dated to 2900B. A possible undated double enclosure is believed to represent another Neolithic ritual or funerary monument while discrete Neolithic pits containing placed deposits were also observed.

1.3.6 Later funerary activity included an Early Bronze Age urned cremation burial and a small number of unburned cremation burials, at least one of which was of Middle Bronze Age date. A large enclosure made up of 440 Late Bronze Age /Early Iron Age pits may also have been of ritual significance. In addition evidence for Late Bronze Age metalworking was uncovered.

1.3.7 In the Romano-British period the site was part of an agricultural landscape as evidenced by field boundaries and associated stock management and droveways.

1.3.8 This site also provided evidence for Saxon occupation including sunken featured buildings recorded in the western part of the site. These dated to the 7th century AD. A small number of associated features were excavated including a pit and smithing furnace.

1.4 Acknowledgements

1.4.1 The author would like to thank Margherita Cesca of Capita Architecture who commissioned and funded the project and Andy Thomas who monitored the archaeological works. The project was managed by Richard Mortimer. Fieldwork was undertaken by the author.
2 AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims
2.1.1 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.

2.2 Methodology
2.2.1 It was originally determined that two trenches would be excavated. One 10m x 2m and the second 5m x 2m. However, due to the profusion of modern services crossing the development area a single 10m x 2m trench was excavated initially with a second phase of work to be undertaken once the site has been cleared of modern services, prior to construction of the new building.

2.2.2 Machine excavation was carried out under constant archaeological supervision with a wheeled JCB-type excavator using a toothless ditching bucket.

2.2.3 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.

2.2.4 All archaeological features and deposits were recorded using OA East'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.

2.2.5 A single 10L environmental sample was taken from the lowest horizon visible in the trench.

2.2.6 Conditions on site were bright and dry, the ground was very compacted, with a significant level of modern make-up recorded throughout the trench.
3 RESULTS

3.1 Trench 1
3.1.1 A single trench measuring 10m x 2m was excavated within the development area. This varied in depth between 0.62m and 0.57m from north to south. Silty gravel natural deposits were recorded along the whole length of the base of the trench.

3.1.2 The soil sequence was sealed by a 0.10m thick layer of mid grey brown modern topsoil (100), which overlay a layer of orange silty gravel (101) and a mid grey brown stony gravel layer laid down as a modern levelling deposit.

3.1.3 Lying below the modern soil deposits was a 0.25m thick layer of dark grey brown sandy silt that appeared to form a layer of earlier topsoil, probably buried during the construction or landscaping of the College grounds.

3.1.4 No archaeological features were recorded during the evaluation.

3.2 Finds Summary
3.2.1 No archaeological finds or artefacts were recovered during the course of the excavation despite concerted effort, chiefly directed at the basal soil layer.
4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

4.1 Conclusions
4.1.1 No pre-modern features or deposits were recorded during the evaluation. The basal layer within the sequence appears to represent a recently buried topsoil. No subsoils/ploughsoils were recorded beneath this layer, which directly overlay plough-truncated natural silty gravels.

4.2 Recommendations
4.2.1 Recommendations for any future work based upon this report will be made by the County Archaeology Office.
APPENDIX A. TRENCH DESCRIPTIONS AND CONTEXT INVENTORY

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APPENDIX B. BIBLIOGRAPHY

Kenney, Scott 2002  A Prehistoric Ditch at Ernulf Community College, Eynesbury, St Neots: An Archaeological Evaluation

Drummond-Murray, James 2009  Specification for Archaeological Evaluation at St Neots Community College

Thomas, Andy 2009  Brief for an Archaeological Evaluation at St Neots Community College
APPENDIX C. OASIS REPORT FORM
All fields are required unless they are not applicable.

**Project Details**

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**Please select all techniques used:**

- [ ] Aerial Photography - interpretation
- [ ] Aerial Photography - new
- [ ] Annotated Sketch
- [ ] Augering
- [ ] Dendrochronological Survey
- [ ] Documentary Search
- [ ] Environmental Sampling
- [ ] Fieldwalking
- [ ] Geophysical Survey
- [ ] Grab-Sampling
- [ ] Gravity-Core
- [ ] Laser Scanning
- [ ] Measured Survey
- [ ] Metal Detectors
- [ ] Photographic Survey
- [ ] Photogrammetric Survey
- [x] Remote Operated Vehicle Survey
- [ ] Sample Trenches
- [ ] Survey/Recording Of Fabric/Structure
- [ ] Targeted Trenches
- [ ] Test Pits
- [ ] Topographic Survey
- [ ] Vibro-core
- [ ] Visual Inspection (Initial Site Visit)

**Monument Types/Significant Finds & Their Periods**

List feature types using the NMR Monument Type Thesaurus and significant finds using the MDA Object type Thesaurus together with their respective periods. If no features/finds were found, please state “none”.

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<td>Andy Thomas</td>
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<td>Project Design Originator</td>
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## Digital Media

- Database
- GIS
- Geophysics
- Images
- Illustrations
- Moving Image
- Spreadsheets
- Survey
- Text
- Virtual Reality

## Paper Media

- Aerial Photos
- Context Sheet
- Correspondence
- Diary
- Drawing
- Manuscript
- Map
- Matrices
- Microfilm
- Misc.
- Research/Notes
- Photos
- Plans
- Report
- Sections
- Survey

### Notes:

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Figure 1: Location of trench with the development area outlined (red)
Figure 2: Excavation plan at 1:250
Figure 3: Section Drawings at 1:10
Plate 1: Soil Profile