Archaeological Evaluation at Highfields School, Downham Rd, Ely.

Archaeological Evaluation

By John Diffey BA

With contributions by Richard Mortimer

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Report Date: October 2014
Report Number: 1695
Site Name: Highfields School, Downham Rd, Ely
HER Event No: 4286
Date of Works: 28th October 2014
Client Name: Borras Construction Ltd. For Highfields School
Client Ref: 17264
Planning Ref: TBC
Grid Ref: TL 5386 8089
Site Code: ELYHIS14
Finance Code: ELYHIS14
Receiving Body: CCC Stores

Accession No:
Prepared by: John Diffey
Position: Assistant Supervisor
Date: 29/10/2014

Checked by: Stephen Macaulay
Position: Senior Project Manager
Date: 11/11/14
Signed: [Signature]

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Summary

On the 28th of October 2014 an archaeological evaluation took place at Highfield Special School, Ely. A single trench was excavated immediately east of the school building. Although no archaeological features were encountered the evaluation identified a layer of buried soil which contained pottery dating to the Late Iron Age and Early Roman periods.
1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work
1.1.1 An archaeological evaluation was conducted at Highfield Special School, Ely.
1.1.2 This archaeological evaluation was undertaken in accordance with a Brief issued by Andy Thomas of Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC; Planning Application), supplemented by a Specification prepared by OA East.
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 National Planning Policy Framework (Department for Communities and Local Government March 2012). 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 British Geological Survey indicates that the solid geology of the site comprises Kimmeridge Clay Formations. On site the geology encountered comprised layers of sands, sandy silts and sandy clays (described further below) and are more likely to represent superficial deposits of glacial till and outwash sands and gravels of the Oadby Member type. The site is lies at 14m OD on a very slight north-west facing slope.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

From Wiseman 2014
1.3.1 The site lies on the northern edge of the Isle of Ely, which appears to have been in continual use for farming since the Neolithic, until urban development over the last thirty years.
1.3.2 The main archaeological information for areas immediately around the Highfields School site come from aerial photographs, fieldwalking, and four evaluations: a single trench at the Highfields School (MCB17963), at Chevington Place (CHER10097); 11 trenches on the playing fields south of the College (MCB15798), and 35 trenches on 20 hectares north of the College (MCB15536).

Prehistoric
1.3.3 Bronze Age pottery was recovered from an isolated pit north of the College, 400 metres north of the site (MCB15536).
1.3.4 A small prehistoric or Romano-British ditch was found at the west end of the Highfields School, possibly forming part of a Bronze Age field system (MCB17963).

Medieval
1.3.5 The site lies about 500 metres north of the core of medieval Ely. The areas immediately around the Highfields School have produced a number of medieval finds (CHER10097, 16086).
1.3.6 A small medieval field system and enclosures dating to 1000-1400 were excavated on the playing fields (MCB15798). This was sealed by later ridge and furrow, which has also been identified to the north and east of the College (MCB 10097, 17963, 15536) – although it has all been levelled to create the playing fields.

1.4 Acknowledgements
1.4.1 The Author would like to thank Borras Construction Ltd and Highfields School for commissioning the works and Alex Day for his work on site.
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 The Brief required that a programme of linear trial trenching and/or test pitting be implemented to adequately sample the threatened available area.

2.2.2 Machine excavation was carried out under constant archaeological supervision with a rubber tracked mini digger 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 On site conditions were good however the limited size of the area available for excavation and the physical limits of working safely within that area made it impossible to excavate a trench of the proposed size. Thus a single trench 5m x 2m was excavated in the centre of the area available.

3 **RESULTS**

3.1 **Introduction**

3.1.1 The results below are ordered stratigraphically from earliest to latest deposits.

3.2 **Trench 1**

3.2.1 With the removal of topsoil and subsoil trench 1 was machined to a depth of 0.4-0.6m. This initial strip revealed no natural geology so two test pits were excavated by hand through the deposits in the base of the trench to reach the natural below.

3.2.2 The natural geology was reached at a depth of 13.15mOD in the southern test pit and rose to the north to a height of 13.41mOD in the northern test pit. Excavation through this layer was carried out to ensure that it was a sterile natural deposit. This excavation revealed the natural to be made up of layers of sands, silts and clays described below.

3.2.3 Layer (006) was reached at a level of 12.86m in the southern test-pit and rose slightly to 13.01m in the northern test-pit it consisted of a mix of light grey and bright reddish yellow sands and gravels with protrusions of dark grey clay (Kimmeridge Clay formation). This layer was in turn overlain by (005) which consisted of a 0.16m thick layer of light yellowy grey soft sandy silt containing frequent flecks of manganese. Deposit (005) was overlain by (004), a layer of soft light reddish yellow sandy clay containing occasional small sub-angular flint stones. This layer was found to be 0.14m thick in the southern test-pit but thickened to 0.24m in the northern test-pit. All of the deposits described above are thought to represent superficial geological deposits most likely glacial in origin.
3.2.4 The natural glacial layers described above were overlain by (003) a 0.1-0.15m thick layer which extended across the whole of the excavated area. This layer comprised a soft mid brownish grey sandy clay with very occasional small sub-angular flint stones. This layer also showed signs of bioturbation acting on it in the past in the form of faint root traces within the deposit. This deposits upper boundary set the level of the initial machining within the trench. It is thought that this layer may represent a buried soil. Two pieces of pottery, piece of animal bone and an animal tooth were recovered from this deposit during excavation of the two test-pits and initial analysis suggests that one sherd of pottery dates to the Iron Age while the second dates to the first half of the 1st century AD (S. Wadeson BA 2014. Pers. Comm.).

3.2.5 The possible buried soil was overlain by a 0.1-0.3m thick layer of subsoil (002) comprising a soft mid yellowish grey sandy clay containing frequent small sub-rounded flint and chalk stones, frequent pieces of ceramic building material (CBM), charcoal lumps, slag and coal. The subsoil was overlain by a 0.3m thick layer of topsoil comprising a soft dark greyish brown sandy clay containing frequent small sub-rounded flint and chalk stones, large pieces of CBM, charcoal lumps and coal.

3.3 Finds Summary
3.3.1 The only finds recovered from site came from the buried soil layer (003) and consist of two pieces of pottery a fragment of animal bone and an animal tooth. Of the two pieces of pottery, one is dated to the Iron Age period and the second dating to the first half of the 1st century AD or Late Iron Age / Early Roman period. Of the animal remains the bone fragment was identified as a piece of cattle phalanx while the tooth was identified as a cattle first molar. (C. Faine MA, Msc, AlfA 2014. Pers. Comm.)

4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

4.1 Interpretation
4.1.1 With the limited size of the trench interpretation of the findings on site is difficult. No Archaeological features were identified however the presence of a buried soil and the later prehistoric date of the pottery found within it increases the archaeological potential of the site and the potential of archaeological features within the development site. Within the limited excavation area it would appear that the deposits recorded including the buried soil are deepest at the southern end of the site and thus thin or rise to the north. It is possible that a natural hollow toward the south of the trench may have led to the preservation of the buried soil however the size of the possible hollow or extent of the buried soil were impossible to determine with the spacial restrictions of the site.

4.2 Significance
4.2.1 The results of the evaluation have shown that although there is the potential for the presence of archaeological deposits and artefacts within the development area the lack of any specific features may limit the significance of these findings and the sites importance to the archaeological record.

4.3 Recommendations
4.3.1 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


http://mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain/home.html viewed 29/10/2014

http://www.heritagegateway.org.uk/Gateway/Results.aspx viewed 29/10/2014
APPENDIX C. OASIS REPORT FORM

All fields are required unless they are not applicable.

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Please select all techniques used:

- Aerial Photography - interpretation
- Aerial Photography - new
- Annotated Sketch
- Augering
- Buried Soil Horizon
- Documentary Search
- Environmental Sampling
- Fieldwalking
- Geophysical Survey
- Grab-Sampling
- Gravity-Core
- Laser Scanning
- Measured Survey
- Metal Detectors
- Photographic Survey
- Photogrammetric Survey
- Rectified Photography
- 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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**Digital Media**

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

**Paper Media**

- Aerial Photos
- X Context Sheet
- Correspondence
- Diary
- Drawing
- Manuscript
- Map
- Matrices
- Microfilm
- Misc.
- Research/Notes
- Photos
- X Plans
- X Report
- X Sections
- Survey
Figure 1: Site location showing archaeological trenches (black) in development area (red)
Figure 2: Trench plan and section
Plate 1: Site Overview

Plate 2: Trench 1 from west