An Undated Ditch
to the rear of
No. 10 Park Lane
Little Downham
Cambridgeshire

Archaeological
Evaluation Report

Client: Norman and Nicholas Ltd

OA East Report No: 1263
OASIS No: Oxfordar3-102184
NGR: TL 5201 8394
An Undated Ditch to the rear of No. 10 Park Lane, Little Downham, Cambridgeshire

Archaeological Evaluation

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Report Date: June 2011
Report Number: 1263

Site Name: Rear of No. 10 Park Lane, Little Downham

HER Event No: ECB 3585

Date of Works: May 2011

Client Name: Norman and Nicholas Ltd

Client Ref: 13112

Planning Ref: 04/00831/OUT

Grid Ref: TL 5201 8394

Site Code: DOWPALL11

Finance Code: DOWPALL11

Receiving Body: CCC Stores, Landbeach

Accession No:

Prepared by: Rob Atkins

Position: Project Officer

Date: June 2011

Checked by: Richard Mortimer

Position: Senior Project Manager

Signed:

[Signature]

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Summary

On 12th May 2011 Oxford Archaeology East conducted an archaeological evaluation on the site of a new residential development comprising four new houses to the rear of No. 10 Park Lane, Little Downham (TL 5201 8394). The archaeological work comprised a 7m long evaluation trench within which a single undated ditch was identified aligned roughly north to south. It is likely the ditch was part of a Roman field system which was found adjacent to the east of the site in a previous archaeological evaluation (Cooper 2007).
1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work

1.1.1 An archaeological evaluation was conducted at the rear of No. 10 Park Lane, Little Downham, Cambridgeshire (Figs. 1 and 2). This archaeological evaluation was undertaken in accordance with a Brief issued by Dan McConnell (McConnell 2010) of Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC; Planning Application [04/00831/OUT]), supplemented by a Specification prepared by OA East (Morgan 2011).

1.1.2 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 Policy Statement 5: Planning for the Historic Environment (Department for Communities and Local Government 2010). 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.

1.1.3 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 has mapped the development area's drift geology as Boulder Clay (Till) overlaying Kimmeridge Clay (BGS 1980). The evaluation trench uncovered boulder clay consisting of a light brown clay with some small chalk pieces within which were occasional small yellow-brown silty clay patches.

1.2.2 The village of Little Downham is located approximately 4km to the north-west of Ely, on a 15-20m high knoll. The current development area is located on fairly flat land within the back plot of No. 10, over than 50m to the south of Park Lane.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background (Not illustrated)

1.3.1 The sand and gravel resources of the knoll top have been periodically exploited for building and road materials, during which activities a number of prehistoric and Roman sites have been destroyed or partly backfilled into the later quarry pits. Evidence of this was recently found during evaluation work ahead of development 400m to the south-east of the current site at Cannon Street/Pond Lane. Here, Roman pottery and Neolithic flints were found as residual material backfilled into late medieval and post-medieval extraction pits (CHER MCB 17493; Grassam et al 2004). Similarly prehistoric flints were found in post-medieval extraction pits 200m to the south at Oak Farm, Cannon Street (CHER MCB 17064; Woolhouse and Schofield 2006). This adds to material uncovered during extraction at the beginning of the 20th century when workmen found Bronze Age Collared Urn cremations at Hopkins Pit, 300m to the south-west of the application area (CHER 07340; Lethbridge 1930; Hall 1996, site 4). A few years later a Beaker was found in a nearby location (Lethbridge et al 1935).

1.3.2 The glacial sand resource was deposited in a linear E-W band on the ridge of high land on which Little Downham is located, the northern end of which is demarcated by Main Street. It is unlikely that quarrying extended into the northern part of the village, where boulder clay-based substrates occur. To the north of Main Street, 500m to the east of the site, a Late Mesolithic flint scatter was found within a buried land surface during an evaluation at Feoffees Primary school (CHER 11905; Last 1996). This evaluation
recovered a few sherds of later prehistoric and Roman pottery, which may suggest a settlement of this date was located nearby. Another Iron Age to Roman settlement was found c.500m to the west of the current site where two adjacent pottery concentrations were identified during field walking (Hall 1996, site 3).

1.3.3 Close by a Roman field system was uncovered in an evaluation adjacent to the south and south-east of the current site (Fig. 1; CHER MCB 17853; Cooper 2007). A number of sparse features were revealed within the five evaluation trenches, comprising a paddock type arrangement in trench 1 with equally spaced ditches aligned north to south. Field boundary ditches were found in all trenches. Only five Roman pottery sherds (67g) were recovered from these features suggesting that the focus of domestic settlement lay beyond the evaluation area.

1.3.4 A Saxon cemetery was found in the vicinity of the application site (CHER 07150). Exposed at various times between the 1880s and 1930s, possibly during the construction of the Baptist Church and in connection with Chamber's Pit. It has never been fully excavated, but other shallow graves occur 230m to the east of the development area (on the west side of Nos. 4 and 6 Chapel Lane; Hall 1996, site U1). At No. 85 Park Lane, to the north-west of the site boundary, further inhumations were found which were either of Roman or Saxon date.

1.3.5 By the 12th century, a Bishop's Palace had been established some 300m to the north-west of the current site, which by the 14th century had a 250 acre park (CHER 07154). The palace was rebuilt in the 15th century by Bishop Alcock and a large series of fish ponds occupied the land to the south of the palace (MCB 1346; Hall 1996, site 13; Spoerry 2006). Evidently a desirable palace for the Bishops of Ely, it can be assumed that a sizeable secular community thrived in the village, owing its fortunes to its ecclesiastical masters.

1.3.6 The current development site probably lay beyond the medieval village, with the medieval church being located more than 500m to the east, fronting onto the main road through the village. This road extended from Ely to Coveney; with the site located c.80m to the north of this road. No medieval features (or pottery) were found in the adjacent evaluation to the east/south-east (Cooper 2007), suggesting that the site lay within the field system of the medieval settlement.

1.3.7 The 1" Ordnance Survey map published in 1836 (map sheet 54) shows that Little Downham was essentially a linear village with most buildings along one main road (now called Main Street). The site is within a large field bounded by a route way to the north (now called Park Lane). This situation does not change for the next 100 years with the 1st Edition (1886), 2nd Edition (1902) and 3rd Edition (1927) OS maps showing the same details. The 1952/3 OS map has houses for the first time to the south of, and fronting onto, Park Lane. These houses still stand and the site is to the rear of No. 10.

1.4 Acknowledgements
1.4.1 The author would like to thank the client, Norman and Nicholas Ltd, for funding the project. Richard Mortimer managed the project for OA East and the fieldwork was carried out by Rob Atkins. Rachel Clarke edited the report and the illustrations were drawn by Andy Corrigan.
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 7m long trench be located within a 294 m² plot to the rear of No. 10 where a house, adjacent to the east, is being constructed with its footings already built (Fig. 3). Within the planning application there were three further houses to be built but these were not part of the archaeological requirement for the site. At the time of the evaluation, two of these houses (to the south of the trench) were nearly complete although construction of the third (to the west) had not yet begun.

2.2.2 The machine excavation of the trench was carried out under constant archaeological supervision with a tracked Kabotta type excavator using a toothless ditching bucket. The archaeological feature and deposits were recorded using OA East's pro-forma sheets. The site plan and section were recorded at 1:50 and 1:10 respectively and photographs were taken of the single feature uncovered and other deposits. The work took place during warm sunny weather. No artefacts were recovered and no environmental samples were taken due to the sterile nature of the site's only feature.
3 RESULTS

3.1 Trench 1 (Fig. 3)

3.1.1 A single trench was excavated adjacent to the west and roughly parallel to the partly constructed house (Fig. 2). This trench was exposed for 7.8m and was aligned roughly north-east to south-west. A single undated shallow ditch (5) was revealed within the southern part of the trench orientated roughly north to south and was roughly perpendicular to Park Lane. It measured 0.7m wide and 0.22m deep with steep (c.60°) sides and a flat base (Fig. 3, S.1). The ditch was filled with a single sterile deposit (4), which consisted of a mid grey slightly orangey brown silty clay. This fill had virtually no inclusions except very rare small stones or charcoal flecks.

3.1.2 Ditch 5 was sealed by a possible former topsoil layer (3), 0.15m thick, which compromised a mid brown silty clay with very few inclusions. Overlying this layer was a probable modern make up layer (2). This was a dark grey brown silty clay between 0.10m and 0.14m thick with very small brick fragments and very rare small stones collectively compromised <1% of the total deposit. This layer in turn was sealed by a very recent make up deposit (1) which was 0.5m thick on the southern side and 0.3m thick near the north baulk. This layer consisted of a dark grey brown loam containing large quantities of 20th century machine frogged brick, frequent tarmac and other modern inclusions.
4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

4.1 Overview
4.1.1 The evaluation revealed a single undated shallow sterile ditch. This ditch, which was orientated perpendicular to Park Lane, was similar in size, shape and alignment to many of the Roman features found at the adjacent archaeological evaluation to the east (Cooper 2007). It is likely this feature is part of this Roman field system.

4.1.2 All maps up to 1952/3 show the current site as being part of a large field. The site is located at least 80m to the north of the main village road and the evidence seems to suggest it lies is beyond the medieval settlement, possibly within its open field system.

4.2 Significance
4.2.1 The evaluation results indicate that the Roman field system probably extended further to the west into the current site. It is uncertain where the domestic centre associated with the field system was located, or its overall size.

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. BIBLIOGRAPHY


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### Project Details

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- Annotated Sketch
- Augering
- Dendrochronological Survey
- Documentary Search
- Environmental Sampling
- Fieldwalking
- Geophysical Survey
- Grab-Sampling
- Gravity-Core
- Laser Scanning
- Measured Survey
- Metal Detectors
- Phosphate Survey
- Photogrammetric Survey
- Photographic 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

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- Geophysics
- Images
- Illustrations
- Moving Image
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- Text
- Virtual Reality

### Paper Media

- Aerial Photos
- Context Sheet
- Correspondence
- Diary
- Drawing
- Manuscript
- Map
- Matrices
- Microfilm
- Misc.
- Research/Notes
- Photos
- Plans
- Report
- Sections
- Survey
Figure 1: Site location with development area outlined red
Figure 2: Location of the trench (black) within the development area (outlined red), showing new buildings (green)
Figure 3: Trench plan and section drawing

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