

**An archaeological assessment by fieldwalking and metal detecting of
land at Fairstead, King's Lynn, Norfolk**

Mary Alexander

Cambridge Archaeological Unit
University of Cambridge
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Background

Circumstances of the Project

This project was commissioned by Wilcon Homes Ltd to assess the archaeological potential of the development area (centred TL 640 190). The report is written in response to the *Brief for Archaeological Evaluation by Field Survey and Trial Trenching at Fairstead, Kings Lynn, Norfolk* (Gurney 2000). The work was carried out on 9th-10th October and 16th-17th October 2001. The County Numbers allocated to the project begin at 1 and the site code is 36320.

Planning application for the northern part of the site has already been submitted (99/1367/0). Planning Permissions may be granted for housing and industrial use subject to the following archaeological condition. No development shall take place within the application site until the applicant or their agent or successor in title has secured the implementation of a programme of archaeological work in accordance with a written scheme of investigation which has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority, Norfolk.

This report discusses the findings of the second phase of the project, following the Desktop survey (Garrow 2000).

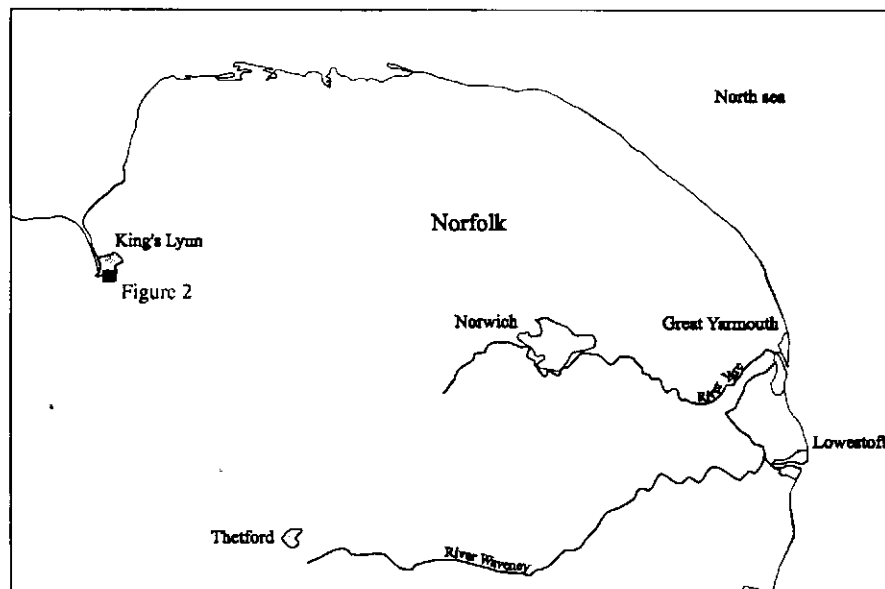


Figure 1. Site location

Topography, geology and land use

The development area covers approximately 30 hectares and is located at Fairstead, on the south-eastern outskirts of King's Lynn. The site is situated on low-lying ground at a height of less than 5m OD. The slight valley in which it lies would once have been a small finger of fen, extending south-eastwards from the area now occupied by King's Lynn out towards the higher land to the east. The underlying geology is sandstone, covered by glaciofluvial drift (SSEW 1983). The western part of the area is covered by a Flandrian marine deposit with slight meandering rises

representing extinct watercourses, as plotted by the aerial photographic assessment. The site is currently divided by a ditch into two fields. The eastern side of the eastern field (Field B) rises to about the 5m contour where a knoll of sandy pre-Flandrian soil is exposed.

The land has been put to agricultural use with a small area of former woodland to the north and a small rectangular reservoir at the centre of the site.

Brief history of the site

Archaeological information concerning the site and its environs has been researched and discussed in detail in the Desktop Assessment (Garrow 2000). The findings of that report are summarised below.

The earliest map that shows the site in any detail dates to 1789. Faden's map of Norfolk shows the area as open fields. The site continued to be farmed to the present day and no buildings are recorded within the development area.

The aerial photographic assessment did not find evidence of archaeological activity within the area although traces of medieval ridge and furrow were recorded in a small number of fields around and adjoining the assessed area.

The finds recorded on the SMR database for the area cover a wide range of periods. Several finds spots of Paleolithic and Neolithic flints have been recovered from the wider study area and Bronze Age flint scatters were recorded within the study area but not from the site itself. Finds from the Roman period suggest the area was densely settled during this period, although no finds spots of this date are recorded within the development area.

The medieval period produced the largest number of finds spots. King's Lynn was a major port during the medieval period, and although Fairstead lies beyond the limits of the medieval town, it still appears to be an area rich in medieval archaeology. Several sites of considerable archaeological importance lie within the study area including a chapel and moat, adjacent to the southern edge of the site, and 500m to the east of the site lie a deserted medieval village and a ruined Norman church. Next to these, three bloomeries have been located.

Several medieval pottery scatters are recorded across the study area, some accompanied by other finds such as metalworking debris, buckles, etc. With the exception of a small patch of ridge and furrow, no find spots of this date fall within the development area.

Fieldwalking Investigation

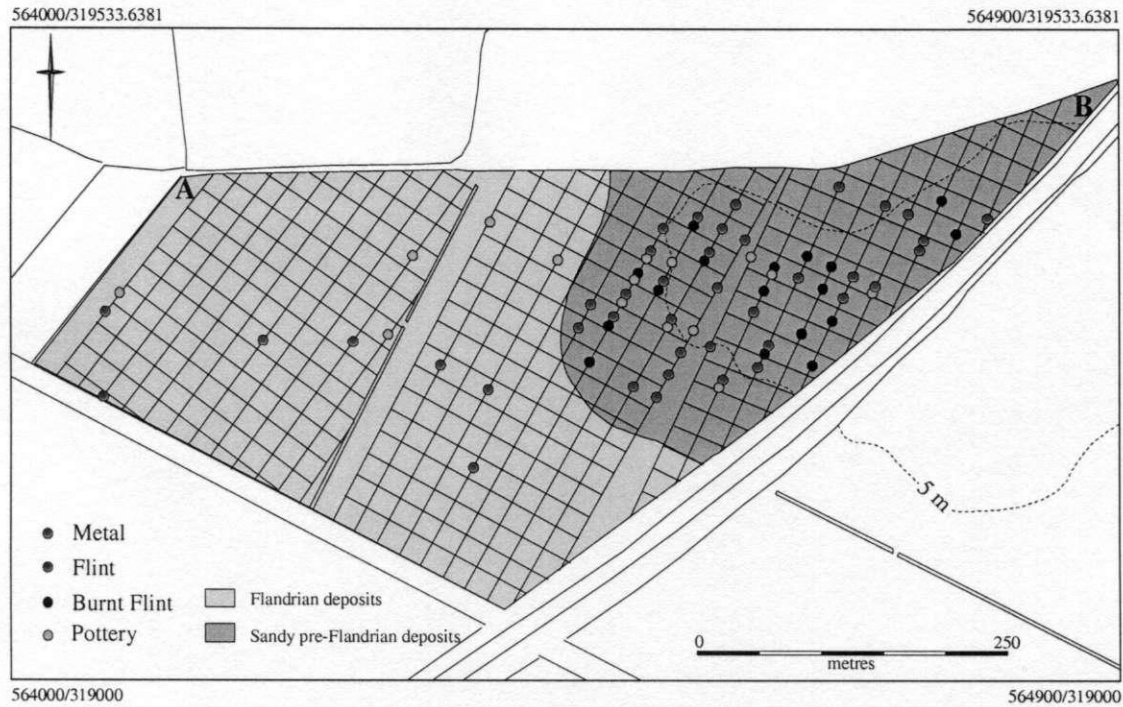


Figure 2. Distribution of Finds

Methodology

Both fields (Fields A and B) were walked in transects set 20 m apart numbered 1-32 from west to east. Transect 1 was parallel to the west edge of field A and transect 11 was truncated by the drain on the east. Transect 12 was realigned to be parallel to the western side of Field B. Transects 22-32 were reset on a slightly different alignment as there was uncertainty about marking pegs being moved overnight by third parties.

Each transect had finds of flint, pottery and metal collected in 20m lengths along a walking line 2m wide, so achieving a 10 percent sample. Each bag of finds was labeled with a context number. After washing and drying, the artifacts were identified and listed on a data-base. Each context was plotted on a plan at the 1:2500 scale and the data digitized.

Surface condition

Daylight conditions for searching were good. The Flandrian deposits were in fair, but adequate, weathered condition for identifying finds. The sandy knoll was in excellent condition with a slight growth of groundsel picking out where the sand content was greatest and which coincided with the main extent of lithic finds.

Results

The flint assemblage was identified by Chantal Conneller, the pottery by David Hall, and the metal finds by Andrew Hall.

Prehistoric

No pottery was recovered, and so the prehistoric period is represented entirely by burnt and worked flint.

A small assemblage of 29 pieces of worked flint and 19 pieces of burnt flint was recovered from the site. The majority of the flints were concentrated on the sandy higher, eastern, part of Field B, mainly on the north-western side of the knoll. The scatter thinned out on the east, where there was slightly more fire-cracked flint.

The assemblage is of mixed date, spanning several millennia. Five patinated and/or stained pieces may date to the Palaeolithic. One of these is a fragment of what may be an Upper Palaeolithic endscraper, though the fragmentary nature of this piece precludes a definite identification. This was associated with a small amount of pre-Flandrian soil that may have been ploughed out from a rise in the subsoil base in Field A. A small number of pieces date to the Neolithic. These include four fine flakes, a blade fragment and a blade manufactured from a reworked polished axe. Early Bronze Age material is represented by a thumbnail scraper and possibly also a retouched flake with some evidence for preparation. The remainder of the material is Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age in date. This material is crudely flaked from multi-platform cores, using a hard hammer. One extensively retouched scraper, made on an irregular flake, a scraper made on a very thick flake and a notch made on a natural pot-lid fracture date from this period.

The source of flint utilized appears to have varied over this timespan. Patination and red staining makes it difficult to gauge the original appearance of the flint used during the Palaeolithic, but the Neolithic and Early Bronze Age workers employed a brown/honey coloured material. During the Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age a black gravel flint was used.

Category	No.	%
<i>Tools:</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>34.5</i>
Notch	1	3.4
Scraper	5	17.2
Flaked piece	1	3.4
Retouched	3	10.3
<i>Debitage:</i>	<i>19</i>	<i>65.5</i>
Blade	2	6.9
Flake/fragment	15	51.7
Core	1	3.4
Core tablet	1	3.4
Total	29	100

Post-Medieval

8 sherds of post-medieval pottery were recovered, predominantly dated to the 19th century. The north-west corner of Field B had a line of late post-medieval pottery that seems to be a track made within the woodland that existed there until recently.

Metal Detecting Survey

A metal detecting survey was undertaken in good conditions by Cambridge Archaeological Unit archaeologist Andrew Hall, an experienced metal-detector with 12 years experience. The survey was carried out on the same transects as the fieldwalking, and walked in the same direction. A *Tesoro Laser Rapier* motion detector, was used, with the iron discrimination turned off. This detector has some degree of iron discrimination built in, and therefore small iron, such as nails did not produce a signal. All finds were retained, with exception of modern scrap, and finds of historical or archaeological significance were plotted.

In line with paragraph 3.14 of the *County Standards for Field Archaeology in Norfolk* (Norfolk Museums Service 1998), iron objects were discriminated against and artefacts of no archaeological significance were discarded. A large proportion of the metal finds excavated were modern rubbish, which was especially concentrated along the northern boundary adjacent to the Fairstead estate, near the roadside to the south east and on the crest of the hill. This consisted mainly of aluminium drinks cans, milk bottle tops, screw tops, offcuts of copper pipe, and other general domestic waste. In addition 18 fragments of lead were recovered but not plotted. These were mainly cut fragments of flashing, and small irregular shaped lumps. A large number of these were found alongside the railway track, which formed the southern boundary. Several large pieces of iron were excavated but not kept, these included plough shares, other pieces of farm machinery, horseshoes, and large nails and bolts.

Ground Conditions

Within the low lying western field, the conditions were moderate. The ground surface, although ploughed, was still uneven thus reducing the soil surface area covered with each sweep. Large piles of straw were also located within the field, however they only obscured a very small proportion of the total ground surface area. Soil conditions improved dramatically as the survey reached the sandy soil of the higher ground to the east. This soil had broken down completely during the recent rain and provided a flat surface.

Results

Metalwork of archaeological or historical interest was very sparse within the area surveyed. A total of eight finds were plotted and detailed below:

- [6] Post Medieval Musket Ball
 [21] Two Pence coin dated 1971
 [78] Very worn, illegible half penny sized copper coin. 17th-18th century
 [118] Very worn, illegible farthing sized copper coin. 17th-18th century
 [157] Copper alloy, oval horse brass. Incised with initials? Georgian
 [296] Post Medieval Musket Ball
 [351] Post Medieval Musket Ball
 [384] Modern five Pence coin
 [392] Elizabeth 1st Threepence silver hammered coin. Third issue. Ermine mint mark. Date 1572.

Finds List

Context	Flint tool/flake	Fire cracked flint	Post-med pot	Metal finds	Date	Notes.
6			1			Tile, not kept
7				1	Post Med	Musket Ball
21				1	Modern	2 pence coin
78				1	Post Med	Very worn 17th-18th century cu alloy coin half penny size
114			3		19th	Three frags of white glazed earthenware
118				1	Post Med	Very worn 17th-18th century cu alloy coin, farthing size
125			1		19th	Rim of willow pattern plate
135			3		19th	2 white & 1 obsidian plus 2 bottle glass [1 blue, 1 green]
157				1	18th	Cu alloy oval horse harness decoration, incised decoration
182			1		18/19th	GRE panchion rim
185			2		19th	Blue and white
191		1				
212		1	1		19th	
222	1					
223	2					
237	1					
238	2					1 post-med glass, 19th
239		1	1		19th	White ware
240	1		2		19th	Pot one blue & white; other earthenware dish rim with internal white glaze
241	1	1				
243		1				
255		1				
257	2					
258	1	1				
275	1					
276	1	1				
277	1					
279	1		1		19th	Pot base of jar in redware with internal black glaze
282	1					
294	1					
296				1	Post med	Musket Ball

Context	Flint tool/flake	Fire cracked flint	Post-med pot	Metal finds	Date	Notes.
298			1		18/19?	Fragment of red roof tile
299	1					
300	2					
301	2					
312			1		18/19	Tile, not kept
316	2					
337		1	1		19th	White ware
338		1				
339	1					
342	2		1		18th	PM an abraded GRE bodysherd
347	1					
350		1				
351				1	Post Med	Musket Ball
354		1				
355	2					
362		1				
363		2				
365		1				
370	1					
373	1		1		17th	Frechen stoneware
374	1					
375		1				
377		1				
381	1					
384				1	Modern	Modern 5 pence coin
390		1				
392	1					
393				1	16th	Elizabeth 1st Threepence coin, silver
398		1				
402	2					

Summary

Over two-thirds of the site was covered in Flandrian deposits, which offered adequate conditions for field walking. Neither field had any pottery older than the late modern period. Roman sherds might have been expected on the Flandrian deposits and their absence suggests that the deposits may be of post-Roman date, as has been found elsewhere in the Norfolk Fenland.

The Flandrian deposits had few finds of any kind, with no metal and a only a few prehistoric flints and a small amount of post-medieval material. The most interesting find was the possible late Palaeolithic rolled flint, associated with a small amount of pre-Flandrian soil that may have been ploughed out from a rise in the subsoil base. Elsewhere the Flandrian deposits were not truncated by the plough, and no pre-Flandrian deposits were revealed in the cut section of the field ditch. The pre-Flandrian surface, which has the potential for early prehistoric remains, therefore appears to be more than 1.5m below modern ground surface in that area. The small concentration of Post-medieval pottery suggests the presence of a former trackway, through the recently cleared wooded area in Field B.

On the sandy higher, eastern, part of Field B, concentrated to the north-west of the rising ground was a minor collection of flints and burnt flint. The sample is small but covers a wide date range from Upper Palaeolithic to Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age.

Conditions for metal detecting on the Flandrian deposits were adequate, and were greatly improved on the higher outcrop of sandy soil. The majority of the metal finds were modern and their distribution reflects the proximity of the Fairstead estate. Low-level activity in the Post-medieval period was represented by a scatter of coins and musket balls.

References

Maps

1797 - *Faden's Map of Norfolk*

Bibliography

Garrow, D. 2000 *An Archaeological Desk-based Assessment of land at Fairstead, King's Lynn, Norfolk*. CAU report 390

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