

**Grange Farm, Easton,
Hunts. Cambridgeshire:
An Archaeological Desktop Study**

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1. The Project

This desktop study was commissioned by Ashtenne Residential Ltd. as the first phase of a two part archaeological evaluation ahead of a proposed small scale housing development at Grange Farm, Easton (Hunts.), Cambridgeshire (TL139 715). This is in response to an archaeological constraint placed on the planning permission by Cambridgeshire County Council.

The desktop phase will be followed by a field evaluation the results of which will be the subject of a separate report.

2. The Study Area

Topography

The site is generally flat and lies at about 19m AOD. It is located in the south east corner of the small village of Easton, seven miles west of Huntingdon. A narrow stream, contained on the southern side of the road at this point, flows from west to east immediately to the north of the site. The stream, which rises in Spaldwick, runs to Ellington. At the time of writing the part of the site due for redevelopment is occupied to the west and south east by rough scrub and in the central part by a large area of concrete and some brick built nineteenth century farm buildings. These are due for imminent demolition.

Geology

The area around the site is predominately glacial gravel deposits overlying Oxford clay. In the immediate vicinity, however, there appears to be a localised outcrop of boulder clay over the Oxford (Andrew Firebrace Partnership, Trial Pit Survey, October 1996).

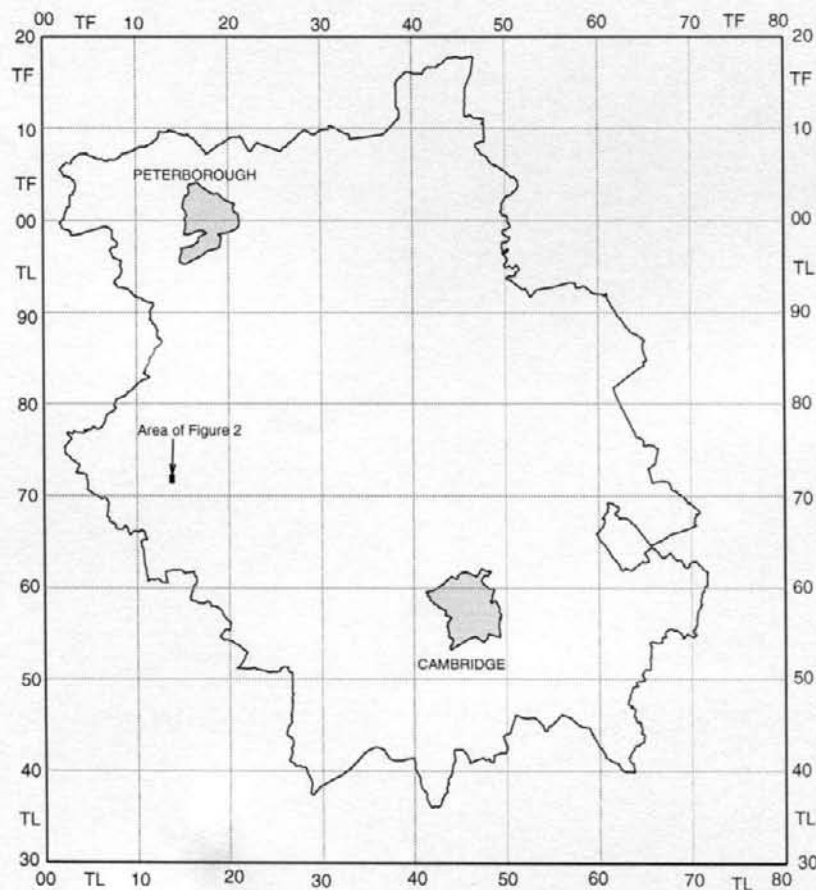


Figure 1 Location of Site in Cambridgeshire

4. The Archaeological Data

Sites and Monument Records

The primary source of information for archaeology is the County-based Sites and Monuments Record (SMR). This study is fortunate in that Cambridgeshire has a well maintained SMR.

Despite the value of the SMRs, they are inevitably biased towards certain types of information. The precursor to the SMRs was the Ordnance Survey, whose records were biased towards standing earthworks and single find spots. This emphasis has been recently supplanted by the use of the aerial photographic record, which in turn is biased towards lighter soils (e.g. river gravels) and arable land uses. The distribution of known sites may often reflect the activities of interested local amateur antiquarians and professional archaeologists. Historical sources are used to supplement the archaeological record, but do not always have a direct relation to the archaeology. Archaeology is always concerned with the unknown, and this is well illustrated by the continual discovery of new sites and the steady growth of SMRs. SMR sites in the immediate area of the site are shown on Figure 2.

Sites which are of national importance are designated *scheduled ancient monuments* (SAMs) and have statutory protection through the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act of 1979. There are no SAMs on or in the vicinity of the site.

The Archaeological Background

4.1 *Palaeolithic (Pre-8500BC)*

Until 12,000 years ago much of this area was under ice from the great Pleistocene glaciations. There were fluctuations in the spread of the ice sheets with long periods of retreat. Due to the last return of the ice sheets and the vast outwash from this last glacial advance, little is likely to survive of this period, in this area, in its primary context.

No finds are recorded from this period.

4.2 *Mesolithic (8500BC-4500BC)*

After the last glacial retreat, as the climate warmed and forests spread over much of Britain, subsistence was by hunting and gathering in the woodlands and along rivers and streams. Settlement was seasonal and transitory, and evidence is usually of scatters of diagnostic flints and associated middens (dumps of the refuse from hunting and gathering).

No finds are recorded from this period.

4.3 *Neolithic (4500BC-2200BC)*

The Neolithic was a period of great change throughout Britain. It saw the introduction of agriculture and pottery, and is best known by the many large monuments in the landscape (i.e. causewayed enclosures, long barrows, round barrows, henges, cuses, etc.).

There is one record in the SMR relating to material which may date to the Neolithic period (00735). A single utilised flint blade was found during field walking for a gas pipeline in 1976. The Victoria County History for Huntingdonshire also records "small surface implements, Neolithic or later, scarce", but no specific location is given (VC11(i) 1936; 216).

4.4 Bronze Age (2200BC-850BC)

Bronze Age occupation maintains many similarities with the Neolithic. Monumental structures were still built for burial, though at a more moderate scale. Agricultural practice and the general level of technology remained the same, but for the introduction of metal.

No finds are recorded from this period, however it is possible that ring ditches noted in aerial photographs have a later prehistoric date, though they may equally be Iron Age or later (SMR 10808; outside area of Figure 2).

4.5 Iron Age (850BC-AD42)

By the Iron Age there is significant evidence of a major change in settlement pattern and the material remains of everyday life. Population grew in lowland England throughout the Iron Age due to improvements in agricultural technology allowing the exploitation of the boulder clay and heavier soils. Settlement is still dispersed, but much more dense.

Late Iron Age features and pottery were found to the north west of the village during excavations on the line of the southern feeder gas pipeline (Catherall et al 1984: 15; SMR 02070). Three ditches contained late Iron Age pottery and some early Romano British sherds (outside area of Figure 2).

4.6 Roman (AD43-AD450)

The only certain Roman material in the vicinity is that recovered during excavation on the gas pipeline (see above, SMR record 02070). Cropmarks to the north (SMR 08386), however, may indicate the presence of an extensive Roman settlement (outside area of Figure 2).

4.7 Saxon (AD450-AD1066)

Easton's entry in the Domesday survey has been a matter of some controversy between historians, though the more modern references tend to presume that the "Estone" referred to in the Bedfordshire survey (apparently a place belonged to the survey of where it paid its geld rather than its geographical position) is this Easton and not Little Staughton in Bedfordshire as suggested in volume iii of the VCH (see below). The only archaeological evidence relating to this period are the features found during an archaeological evaluation of the lower part of field 145, c. 200m to the west of Grange Farm (SMR 10217; Gdaniec & Dickens 1992).

4.8 Medieval (1066-1485)

Most of the archaeological evidence extant in Easton belongs to the medieval period. Although five separate entries in the SMR refer to earthworks, there is actually a large degree of overlap between them (00730, 00731, 00732, 08658, 08659). An earthwork survey was carried out in the village in 1979. This showed quite extensive survival of general agricultural features such as ridge & furrow and ponds, with at least one hollow way, ditched enclosures and house platforms. Figure 2 gives a general impression of these remains. No earthworks were recorded in the Grange Farm block and there are certainly none evident at the present time.

The church of St. Peter (SMR 00730) whilst it may have been founded as early as 1250 (Inskip Ladds 1902: 9) is predominantly of 14th century and later build, although there are reused 12th century fragments in the north wall of the nave. No church was recorded for Easton in 1086, which again suggests it was a later foundation, apparently considerably later than the other three churches of the soke of Spaldwick of which Easton was a part (see below).

4.9 Post-Medieval (AD1485-Present)

The Post-Medieval period is mostly represented by the present built landscape. Most of the existing homes, farms and town centres are primarily the result of the last 400 years of development.

The VCH volume iii records that most of the houses and cottages in Easton date to the 17th century and are timber framed with thatched or tiled roofs (1936: 41). Grange Farm House is probably Monument 2 in the RCHM(E) inventory for the village for which the full entry reads "House about 60 yards east-south-east of the church, has been rebuilt, except for the central chimney which has grouped stacks". Grange Farm House is the only domestic building on the site on the OS 6" map of 1901.

Historical Evidence

Other than the few pages in the VCH and RCHM(E) volumes and Inskip Ladds' pamphlet of 1902 very little seems to have been written about the village of Easton. Its origins are obscure and its status at the time of the Domesday survey confused by the debate as to whether it is this Easton which is meant by references to "Estone" in the surveys of Huntingdonshire and Bedfordshire. In 1936 the author of the Easton section of the VCH (Vol iii) states categorically the "Estone" is in fact Little Staughton in Bedfordshire. Inskip Ladds in 1902, VCH (Vol i) in 1926 and the later translations of the Domesday survey, however, seem in no doubt that it is the Huntingdonshire Easton which is being referred to. There is a single entry in the Huntingdonshire account and several in the Bedfordshire one. This apparent oddity is explained by the presumption that a place belonged in the record where it paid geld.

Easton was a berewick of Spaldwick in 1086, when the soke (the villages of Easton, Stow Longa, Little Catsworth and Barham) belonged to the Abbot of Ely. It passed in 1109 to the Bishop of Lincoln who was granted a market in Spaldwick by Henry VI in 1439. In 1547 Edward VI forced Henry, Bishop of Lincoln, to exchange Spaldwick and the soke for land of lesser value. It stayed in crown hands for seventy or eighty years until, between 1626 and 1641 it was sold to Henry, Earl of Manchester, whose descendants remain Lords of the Manor (Inskip Ladds 1902: 11-12).

Easton has never had a large population. In 1847 the Kelly's Directory for the area records it at 186. The listed trades at that time include five farmers and a grazier, two pub landlords and a beer retailer, a tailor, a shoemaker, a wheelwright and blacksmith and the Parish Clerk (Kelly 1847: 1849). When compared with the Domesday description of the villages inhabitants the list is very similar. It seems unlikely that Easton has ever been anything grander than a small farming based village in rural Huntingdonshire.

5. Discussion

The one striking archaeological feature of Easton is the degree of preservation of medieval earthworks in and around it. In many larger settlements these have been destroyed by intensive agriculture or expansion of the settlement area. There is no real evidence in Easton of either great growth or shrinkage, although some of the earthworks do suggest the limited abandonment of some earlier properties, particularly to the north of the existing village, which may indicate a slight shift of focus over time. The church is a late foundation in comparison with the pre-Domesday date apparently confirmed for the village by the findings of the excavations in 1992 (Gdaniec & Dickens 1992). Its location on the southern edge may indicate that this side of the village had a greater significance in the earlier medieval period. Alternatively it may be a location governed more by the

divisions of land ownership within the village as a whole. There is no evidence to suggest at whose instigation the church was built.

Grange Farm itself lies on what amounts to a small "island" surrounded by roads, one of which separates it from the church. There is no direct evidence to support such a supposition, but it must be borne in mind that this may reflect a much older separation from the body of the village and perhaps indicate that the status of the site has been different in the past. No documentary evidence has been found to support the supposition, however, and the location may simply indicate the pragmatic use of a contained plot of land.

This study has not been able to identify any specific archaeological remains associated with the Grange Farm site. It is probable, however, that any archaeological features which do survive are likely to be well preserved, particularly to the eastern and western ends of the development area. As the 1992 excavations further along Church Road indicated, there is an early element to the village which is poorly understood and this may well be helped by any discoveries made on the Grange Farm site.

Bibliography

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Appendix 1
 Sites and Monuments Record Gazetteer

SMR No.	Period	NGR	Description
00735	prehistoric	TL138- 724-	Utilized flint blade found during fieldwalking course of gas pipeline in 1976.
02070	IA, Ro	TL134- 719-	3 ditches noted in pipetrench. Late IA and early RB pottery with single Nene Valley sherd (c125AD or later).
10217	Saxo-Norman	TL138- 717-	Excavation (in S of field 145) revealed a ditch and an oven associated with Saxo-Norman pottery suggesting there ma have been settlement in Easton earlier than had been supposed.
00730	medieval	TL1385 7157	St. Peter's Church. Evidence of reused 12th century stone in the N. wall of the nave. Main build 14th cent. with additions in 15th, 16th and later. South isle rebuilt 1902.
00731	medieval	TL138 717	Pond and associated earthworks in SW corner field 144. Major feature of this village are the earthworks to the N. of West Farm. In field 163 a terraced series of 5 ponds exist, linked by cuttings, disappearing into field 162. Linear N-S depression runs into pond complex at N end of field 163 and apparently associated with a ditched enclosure in SE corner of 169 within which are slight earthworks butting onto a brook to the E. Part of the enclosure ditch = 3 ponds (?later recuts), the lowest of which is still wet (1979). N-S ridge & furrow appears to underlie this complex, there being no evidence for a headland respecting the enclosure, by a hollow way, ridge & furrow runs up the roadside until field 170 where a pair of small properties enclosed by a ditch were noted on the S. side of the hollow way. The line of the hollow way is lost in field 146 where slight traces of ridge & furrow were noted as soil marks. In the middle of the village a large open space under grass exists (144) for the most part being ridge & furrow, except for a small open area between houses on "The Lane", which = earthworks. The ridge & furrow stops at the boundaries of 143 and 145 between which runs an E - W ditch. Traces of the N- S boundary ditch bisect this area and earthworks were noted in the western 'field' together with a pond(s). In the SW corner of 143 (now = a football pitch) a house platform was noted, around which was mutilated ridge & furrow. The remaining areas of Easton were blank except 147 = earthworks, 148 = ridge & furrow, 125 = ?earthworks. In general features are in good condition, though soil marks in ploughed fields are unclear.

00732	medieval	TL1382 7198	Entry as for 00731
08658	medieval	TL138- 721-	Area of ridge & furrow immediately to NW of Easton village. Associated with medieval fishponds and house platform (TL317- 719-). Other ridge & furrow to SE (08659), W (09856) and NW (09855). Area of earthworks TL135- 719- - TL137- 718- to TL137- 723- - TL139- 722-.
08659	medieval	TL138- 717-	Area of ridge & furrow on E. edge of Easton village. Associated with medieval fishpond and house platform (TL137- 716-). other ridge & furrow to the NW (08658). Area of earthworks TL137- 715- - TL140- 715- to TL137- 717- - TL140- 716-.
08386	unknown	TL130- 707-	Extensive cropmark site revealed by APs
10808	unknown	TL141-725-	2 ring ditches