Fir's Farm, Caxton, Cambridgeshire
An Archaeological Desk Top Study

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1. The Project

The report was commissioned by D.H. Barford and Co., on behalf of the J.K. Millard & Sons, in response to a brief set by the Archaeology Section of Cambridgeshire County Council. The project consists of a desk-top study of the known and potential archaeology of the area around Firs Farm, Caxton, a total of 3.65ha. The development is divided into three areas:

Area A - Residential development.

Area B - Conversion and rebuilding of farm buildings and landscaping.

Area C - Demolition of buildings, conversions and landscaping.

2. The Study Area

2.1 Topography

The study area lies at about 50m OD. Areas A and B lie in the 'V' formed by the junction of Gransden Road and St. Peter's street. Area C is on the western side of St. Peter's street.

2.2 Geology

The site lies on boulder clay.

4. Historical background

The earliest documentary reference to the village of Caxton occurs in the Domesday Book of 1068 which records Caustone as home to 35 peasants (VCH: 26). The population was never very high, peaking in 1871 at 631. The Parish is noted for its moated sites, two (only one extant) within the study area and three others within a mile of the village. The modern village is strung out along Ermine Street, a Roman road which by the 13th century had regained its importance as a main route from London to the north (Taylor 1984: 160). This is reflected in the granting of a market charter to Baldwin de Freville in 1247 for a site by the road. This is no longer in use but is visible as a private garden. The charter suggests that by the 13th century the focus of importance for the village was already shifting from the area immediately around the church, where it seems the village was initially established, towards the main highway. At the end of the 14th century an oratory was licensed for the use of strangers passing through and scattered medieval references indicate that the village was a popular stopping place for travellers (VCH: 26). There were certainly inns near the market by the 14th century and the Crown Inn may be as early as 1489 (*ibid*). St. Peter's Street was part of a complex of lanes north and east of the church until at least the mid 18th century (*ibid*). By 1750 most of the

area around the church was divided into closes. Very little changed between then and the general inclosure in 1834 (VCH: 31).
Following the restoration Caxton was selected as the County toll point for the North Road Turnpike, this being established in 1663. Unfortunately for the authorities the gate was easily avoided by travelling via Peter Street and in 1668 it was moved to Arrington (RCHM: 35). Since the late 17th century the village largely declined with no regular market after 1839 (*op. cit.* : 32).

The main historical and archaeological interest of the village of Caxton lies in that shift from its original (and perhaps puzzling: Taylor, C.C. and R.M. Butler 1960) location around the church, north and east to the nearby main road. It is not immediately clear why the village was established in the earlier position. Evidence from other areas such as Stanstead in Essex and Raunds in Northamptonshire (cited by Meredith 1991) suggest that early and middle Saxon settlement tended to avoid the boulder clay. A tongue of Second Terrace gravels lies just to the south east of the village, but was ignored.

5. The Archaeological Data

5.1 Sites and Monument Records

The primary source of information used is the County-based Sites and Monuments Records (SMRs). Each county maintains its own SMR, largely based on its own criteria but incorporating guidelines set by The Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission (English Heritage) and the Royal Commission on the Historic Monuments of England (RCHM). 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. Resources for the systematic survey or excavation of sites have always been severely limited, so the majority of sites known in an SMR are of unknown extent, date or character. 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 rarely 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.

The SMR is most valuable for the extensive coverage of sites and the accuracy of location and supporting documentation. Its uses are limited by

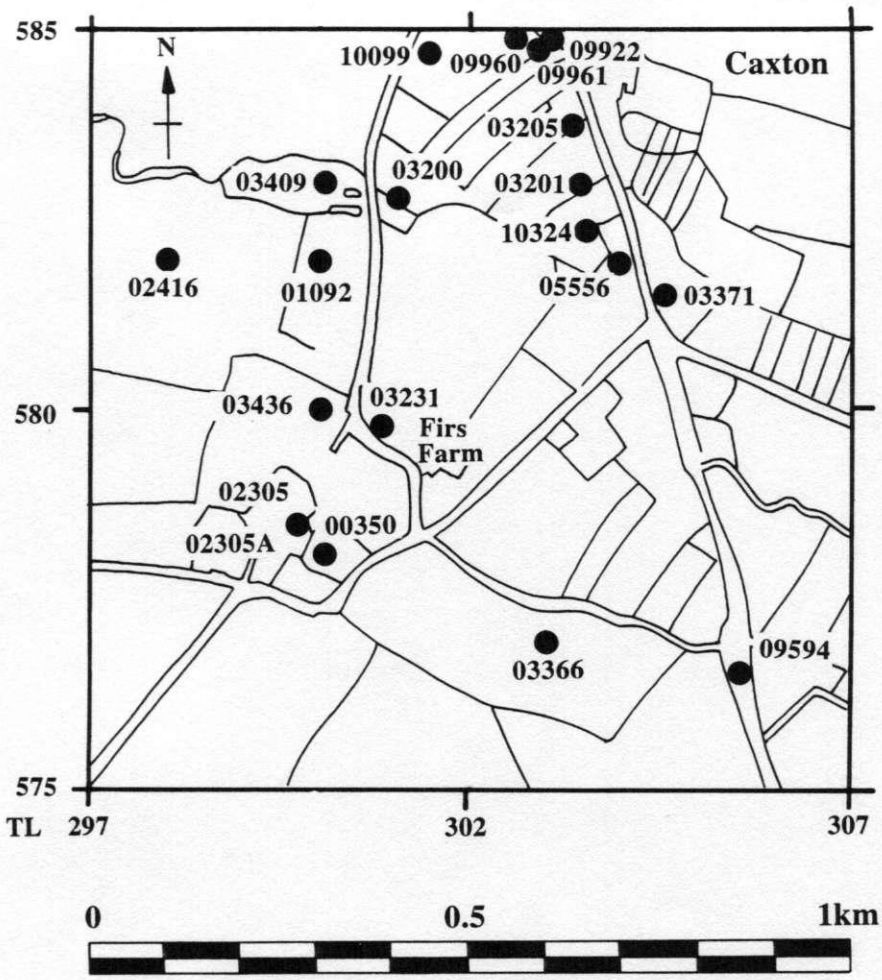


Figure 1 Recorded archaeology in the southern part of Caxton village. Scale 1: 10000

the biases to certain types of sites or land areas (e.g. soils susceptible to aerial photography), the lack of a systematic basis for the sample or for the systematic selection and assessment of sites (both of the latter two are biases within the archaeology itself). In summary, the SMR constitutes neither a comprehensive, nor random sample.

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 (and see also the Department of the Environment Planning Policy Guidance Note 16, *Archaeology and Planning*). There are, however, no SAMs within the present area of study.

5.2 The Archaeological Background

5.2.1 Prehistoric (Pre-8500BC - AD 42)

The only reference to prehistoric finds or activity in of the sources consulted is a single flint blade found during excavations at SMR: 10099

(see below). As noted above, however, these sources tend to be selective and biased therefore, though it is unlikely that prehistoric remains survive in the study area, it cannot be completely ruled out.

5.2.2 Roman (AD43-AD450)

The main feature in the vicinity dated to the Roman period is Ermine Street, the central street of the modern village. A mosaic pavement/cobbled floor is recorded at TL 298 582 (SMR: 02416). There are no details in the SMR record as to the nature of this site, when and why it was recorded, or of any references relating to it.

5.2.3 Saxon (AD450-AD1066)

It has been suggested that Caxton probably originated as a late Scandinavian settlement in a wooded area (VCH: 26). Caxton Moats (to the north-west of the study area) is reported to have revealed traces of Saxon or Norman occupation (PCAS 51: 42). No finds or sites from this period are recorded within the study area in the SMR or by the RCHME. Late Saxon or early medieval features were recorded in excavations at SMR: 10099 (see below) marking perhaps the boundary of an early settlement (Meredith 1991; Hunter 1991).

5.2.4 Medieval (AD1066-AD1485)

Ten medieval sites are recorded within the study area, most of which survive as earthworks relating to settlement or agricultural activity. The survival of ridge-and-furrow earthworks was ensured by the trend to enclosure. Ridge-and-furrow arises from the medieval practice of open-field cultivation where fields were divided into furlongs which survive in areas used as pasture (modern ploughing quickly destroys the earthworks). SMR: 01092 (TL 300 582) is a moated site claimed by Palmer as the manor house of the manor of Colne (Palmer, 1928). The site consists of a small moat, ponds and an enclosure to the south. The southern edge of the enclosure is immediately north of the northern edge of development area C (see later discussion). SMR: 05556 (TL 304 582) is no longer extant, but is shown on the 1830 - 1834 draft inclosure map. The site consists of ridge-and-furrow and two possible moated sites. SMR: 03366 (TL 303 577) make up the main block of what Taylor identifies as the remains of the earlier village. Now mostly ploughed out the earthworks were still visible in the 1960s, indicating two hollow-ways or 'streets', ridge-and-furrow, curving field boundaries and several closes. The northern block of these earthworks lie on the other side of Gransden Road to area A (see later discussion). Further closes, which existed in 1750 and are covered in ridge-and-furrow, are recorded at TL 300 583 (SMR: 03409). Further cultivation remains centred on TL 300 580 (SMR: 03436) consist of ridge-and-furrow in old enclosures. This outlying area was enclosed before 1750, the existing field pattern suggesting that this was done by furlongs from

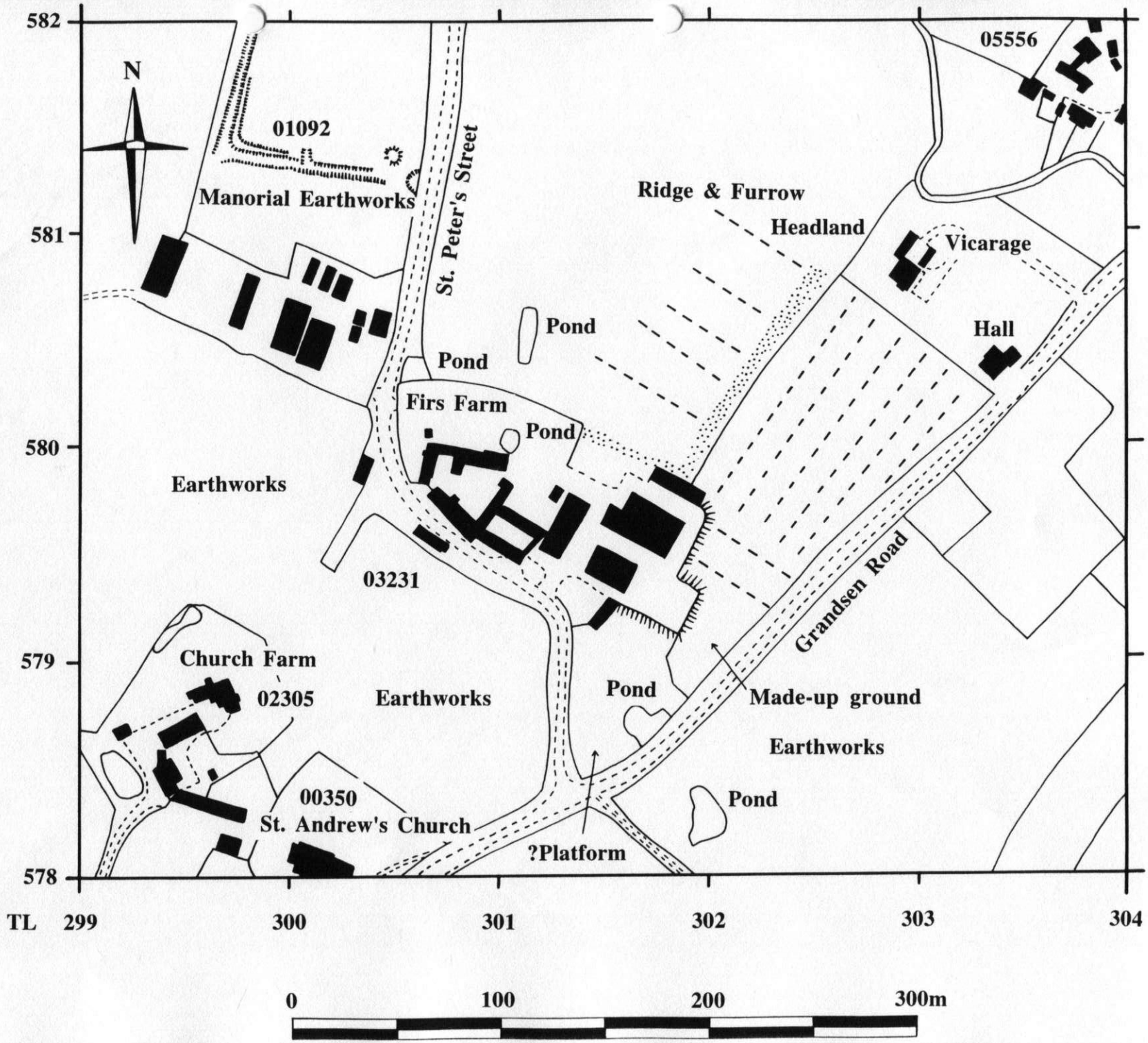


Figure 2 Known archaeology within the immediate vicinity of Fir's Farm.
Scale 1:2500

former open fields. SMR: 09922 and 09960 (around TL 303 585) are related areas of relict ridge-and-furrow, 09922 being well preserved.

The only certain house platform recorded on the SMR is 09961 (TL 3000 5781) within the garden of 95 Ermine Street (Taylor, C.C. July 1991 *Archaeological Investigation of Land at 95 Ermine St.*). The levelled platform, some 8m square, is described as being the possible site of a medieval or roman building. Immediately adjacent to Ermine Street and the cultivation earthworks 03366 is SMR: 09594 (TL 3057 5767), an earthwork identified as the remains of a rectangular building *c.* 20 x 15m, possibly a medieval croft or a post-medieval barn. House platforms have been identified at TL 3018 5855, just outside the study area, though they are not separately listed as such on the SMR. Excavations took place just to the south of these (TL 3015 5848), revealing early (Saxo-Norman) ditches preserved below the ridge-and-furrow (SMR: 10099; Meredith, 1991; Hunter, 1991).

St. Andrew's Church (SMR: 00350; TL 3000 5781) dates from at least the 11th century, though most of what is visible now is 14th and 15th century or later. This seems to have been the focal point of the early village, and now lies isolated to the south-west of the modern centre.

5.2.5 Post-Medieval (AD1485-Present);

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

Post-medieval sites singled out by the SMR are Church Farm (SMR: 02305; TL 2996 5788), Caxton Hall (SMR: 03200; TL 3010 5828); Manor Farm, formerly the George Inn (SMR: 03201; TL 3035 5830), Crown House, a former inn (SMR: 03205; TL 3034 5838) and Red Lion Farm, formerly an inn, (SMR: 03371; TL 3043 58160).

Firs Farm was formerly known as Tate's Farm, though not in the lifetime of the present owner who was born there. The main farm building is a two storey brick built house of 17th century origin with many 18th century and later alterations and additions. The house is not a listed building.

6. Discussion

Clearly any opportunity to investigate the early features of Caxton is invaluable. Most of the visible earthworks relate to later farming activities. The excavations at SMR: 10099 show how these may well mask earlier features.

6.1 Archaeological Potential of the Development Areas

Area A

This area has surviving ridge and furrow earthworks in the northern part, which are slight but still visible. Two survive oriented south-west to north-east, and there are six at right angles to the north of these oriented south-east to north-west. In the field to the north-west (outside the development area) the ridge and furrow runs south-east to north-west with a possible headland along the boundary with Area A. At the southern end of the field (now divided into two) is a large pond which is to be retained in the development. The 1902 OS map, however, shows a second smaller pond to the north-east of this which is now no longer visible. Most of the area between the large pond and the ridge and furrow is now obscured by a "levelling up" of soil deposited during construction of elements of the pig farm. This completely obscures any earthworks which may survive below. In the southernmost point of the grassed part of Area A the ground is uneven and rises noticeably towards the south. When observed this area was under rough pasture and it was not clear to what extent these "lumps and bumps" were due to later disturbances or whether they were potential house platforms or other features related to the early village. The RCHM 1960 field notes do not draw attention to any features in this field but do record that the area is 'disturbed'. The southern part of Area A is only the width of the road away from the areas noted by Taylor and Butler as containing the remains of the early village and lies between there and the early features excavated by Meredith and Hunter in 1991. The chances of early medieval or Saxon remains surviving within this field is therefore quite high.

Area B

The main feature of Area B is the 17th/18th century farmhouse. This is not a listed building and is being retained. Although this area is actually nearer to the church than Area A, any early features which may have been there are far less likely to have survived subsequent farm developments. In addition this part of the development requires only demolition and the conversion of recent buildings and so is unlikely to mean further damage to any surviving archaeology.

Area C

At present Area C is entirely under concrete and modern farm buildings. Clearly the last stage of advance towards the moated site SMR: 01092 is more recent than the 1973 OS revision, but the 1960 RCHM field notes do not indicate whether there was anything on the surface to show if the moat complex or associated features spread any further to the south than the upstanding earthworks. The buildings of the pig farm were on the whole constructed on rafted foundations which means that the chances of

archaeology surviving are good. However, unless the development requires the digging of new deep foundations (which I am lead to believe it does not), it is probable that the new work will not cause further damage to surviving below ground features.

6.2 Documentary Evidence

Most of the evidence discussed in this report has been obtained from secondary sources such as the VCH and RCHME volumes. A list of primary source documents derived from the MSC village lists volume is included as Appendix II. The *potential* of these documents to contribute to evaluation of the development site is difficult to determine without actually consulting them all and ascertaining which have application to this particular part of Caxton as opposed to the village as a whole. In terms of structural and boundary evidence the 1750 manor map and the 1834 Inclosure map are possibly the most valuable, these are referred to above.

8. Recommendations

Area A

As Area A has the strongest likelihood of producing worthwhile archaeology a full evaluation is proposed for this part of the development. Initially this would consist of a geophysical survey of the grassed part of the area. From these results a trench or test pitting strategy would be devised to determine the nature, date and survival of any archaeological features revealed.

Areas B and C

Because of the overlying concrete in both areas and the fact that, potentially, only slight damage may be done to any surviving archaeology, a formal assessment phase is not suggested in these areas. Instead it is proposed that a watching brief be maintained on any new foundations or services which are likely to extend down into undisturbed deposits.

9. Summary

The village of Caxton is an important one in terms of the study of the shift of settlement centres during and after the medieval period. In the light of this the present study suggests that the archaeological implications of the development at Firs Farm may well be significant in terms of demonstrating rather than presuming the nature of that shift. The only area where investigation would be practical, however, is the grassed part of Area A.

Bibliography

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Other Sources Consulted

The Cambridgeshire County Sites and Monuments Record

The RCHM field record notes on monuments 4, 23 and 24.

MSC nd *Village Sources* (A list of documents from several sources, held in the Cambridgeshire Collection; See Appendix II).

The 1902 OS Map of Caxton

Taylor C.C. and R.M. Butler 1960 Caxton: field notes (RCHME)

APPENDIX I

Gazetteer of SMR Sites in Study Area

SMR No.	NGR	Period	Description
00350	TL 3000 5781	Med/p.med/mod	**St. Andrew's Church**: the parish church is SW of the village and stands in the southern part of a roughly rectangular church yard bounded to the north by a ditch and to the south and west by a low bank. The earliest surviving features are 11th century.
01092	TL 300- 582-	Medieval	Moated site, claimed as the manor house of the manor of Colne, on the south side of Bourn Brook, to the west of Peter St. and 50 yds west of Caxton Hall. The remains consist of a small moat, ponds and an enclosure. The complex was out of use by 1750.
02305	TL 2996 5788	Post-Medieval	**Church Farm**: two story brick building with tiled roof. 16th and 17th century.
02305A	TL 2996 5788	Post-Medieval	17th century granary near Church Farm.
02416	TL 298- 582-	Roman	Mosaic pavement/cobbled floor
03200	TL 3010 5828	Post-medieval	**Caxton Hall**: 17th century building.
03201	TL 3035 5830	Post-medieval	**Manor Farm**: formerly the George Inn.
03205	TL 3034 5838	Post-medieval	**Crown House**: former Inn.
03231	TL 3008 5798	Post-medieval	**Firs Farm**: formerly Tate's Farm.
03366	TL 303- 577-	Medieval	Village remains around TL 303- 577-. The area between the church and Ermine St., flat on the south and sloping on the north gently NE to the Bourn Brook, is covered by two hollow-ways (A & B), with closes in between. (A) runs east from a road junction (TL 3013 5784) NE of the church to Ermine St. and for 500' beyond. It must have continued to Caxton End an Bourn. West of the main road it is 25' to 40' wide and up to 3' deep. The continuation east takes the form of a rutted track 20' wide. (B) runs parallel and to the south of (A) from a point (TL 3003 5773) south of the church for 440 yds before turning NE to meet (A). It is 30' to 50' wide and 6' deep, flat bottomed, in parts boggy and overgrown throughout. The length, running NE, 534' long, 20 - 25' wide and 3.5' deep. At 100' from the beginning of the hollow way a ramp 12' wide leads out of its south side into a field with remains of ridge and furrow.

SMR No.	NGR	Period	Description
03371	TL 3043 5816	Post-medieval	**Red Lion Farm**: formerly an inn, with yard and 18th century and later outbuildings.
03409	TL 300- 583-	Medieval	Three curving closes divided by banks 2' wide and 1' high. North of these are seven further closes. These existed in 1750 and are covered by ridge and furrow with no trace of house sites. Some buildings which stood west of Peter St. have been destroyed and a disturbed area of hollows and scarps around TL 300- 583- marks their site.
03412	TL 2040 5815 - 2990 5844		A third road, now disused and in part occupied by the Bourn Brook.
03436	TL 300- 580-	Medieval	Cultivation remains (not on OS) consist of ridge and furrow in old enclosures. R & F with ridges 60 to 200 yds long, 6 - 11 yds wide with headlands of 5 yds to 11 yds, is preserved on the W and SW of the village in old enclosures. The NW part of the Parish, W of Ermine Street, also has remains and traces in old enclosures. Here the ridge and furrow is from 70 - 500 yds long, 6 - 9 yds wide with headlands 7 - 9 yds wide. This outlying area was enclosed before 1750, the existing field pattern indicating that this was done by furlongs from former open fields. The great length of some of the ridges suggests that, in a late phase, some end on furlongs were ploughed as one.
05556	TL 304- 582-	Med/unknown	Ridge and furrow and two possible moated sites on the 1830-1834 draft Inclosure map. The moated sites each have one side of the moat remaining and traces of the other side. The northern most is oriented NNW - SSE. No scale on the map.
09594	TL 3057 5767	?med/?p. med	Earthwork, remains of rectangular building *c.* 20 x 15m, possible medieval croft or post-medieval barn Immediately adjacent to Ermine St. with adjacent cultivation earthworks (03366).
09922	TL 303- 585-	Medieval	Ridge and furrow in two blocks running N-S and E-W respectively. Good preservation.
09960	TL 3025 5850	Medieval	Relict cultivation earthworks extending into the lower part of garden of 95 Ermine St. (See also 9922 of which this is a part).

SMR No.	NGR	Period	Description
09961	TL 3029 5849	?Medieval	Within garden of 95 Ermine St., a levelled house platform immediately south of a landscaped pond. Poss. site of medieval or Roman building *c.* 8m x 8m.
10099	TL 3015 5848	Medieval	Excavated ditches below ridge and furrow.
10324	TL 3035 5825	Unknown	Spear head, stray find.

Appendix II

List of documents relating to Caxton:
Taken from the Village lists volume in the Cambridgeshire Collection

Key:

CUL	Cambridge University Library
PRO	Public Records Office
BM	British Museum
CRO	Cambridge Records Office
Bodl.	Bodliean Library
BRO	Bedford Records Office

Date	Description	Location
c. 1166	Grant to St Neots Priory	BM. C. tt. MS Faust. A. iv. f. 75
1245	Extent of 80 acres land	PRO. C 132/3 (6)
1299	Manor extent	PRO C. 133/87 (15)
13th cent.	Deeds, including rental of property once owned by St. Neots Priory	Gonville and Caius Drawer xxxii
1304-52	Deeds	BRO PR 256-9
1312	Manor extent	PRO C. 134/30 (10)
1312	Extent (summary) of 29 acres	PRO C. 134/30 (10)
1334	Grant of messuage by Adam le Smonour.	Bodl. Camb. Ch.53
1461	Grant of lands to John Ward	Bodl. Camb. Ch.54
1463/4	Grant of 9 acres	Bodl. Lib. Cambs. Ch. 54
15th-17thC.	Ref. to piece-meal enclosure	St. George's Chapel, Windsor, MSS. 25,49; MS xi/J/ii
1579	Terrier	Gonville and Caius - bound MS vol.
c. 16th cent	Fragment of a terrier	CRO L88/1
1615, 1662, 1700, 1809	Glebe terriers	CUL H/1/1-9
1657	Terrier of lands	CRO L88/3 (c)

Date	Description	Location
1662, 1700	Terriers	CUL. Ely Dioc. Rec. H/1
1750	Map of manor of Caxton	CUL Maps R.b10
1751	Terrier	Gonville and Caius - bound MS vol.
1778	Fine	BM. Add. 44755, 44756
1820	Survey	Caius Coll. Mus. xxxv 29
1830	Plan of part of Caxton	CUL.MS.Plans 220
1830	Plan of Church Farm - draft	CUL MS. Plan 221
c. 1830 - 1834	Draft Inclosure map	CRO 124/P39
1834	Inclosure Map	CRO Q/RD c49
1837	Estate map, northern part of parish	CRO 196/P9
1851-61	Deeds re house and land in wood field	BRO ST. uncat. 413
1857	Sale plan, Langstowe Hall Estate	CRO 296/SP 30
late 18th C	Map of parish lands	Gonville and Caius - map vol.
n.d.	Plans of area S.W. of village	Gonville and Caius Drawer xv
n.d.	Draft of demise of 210 acres	PRO E. 40/7385
n.d.	MS. map, survey of manor	Bodl. maps 22RMS c.17.70
n.d.	Indenture of lease of inn, copyhold lands, glebe lands	PRO E. 40/12628

Acknowledgements

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