

Jones Boatyard, St Ives, Cambridgeshire

An Archaeological Evaluation



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Cambridge Archaeological Unit carried out an archaeological evaluation through a programme of test pits and trial trenching at Jones Boatyard, St Ives Cambridgeshire in May 2008. The test pit survey identified two palaeochannels including a probable former course for the River Great Ouse, whilst the trial trenching revealed a single medium sized pit dated to the Beaker period. The evaluation has provided evidence to suggest the site has a long history of being utilised for agricultural purposes and as a water meadow, because of the shifting nature of the river and vulnerability to frequent flooding.

Introduction

An archaeological evaluation was carried out by Cambridge Archaeology Unit (CAU) between the 19th and 23rd of May 2008 on land off Low Road, St Ives, Cambridgeshire, in advance of a proposed extension to the marina at Jones Boatyard. Commissioned by Jones Boatyard, the evaluation aimed to establish the presence, date, state of preservation and significance of any archaeological remains. The evaluation was carried out and this report was written in accordance with an archaeological specification written by the CAU (Beadsmoore 2008) in response to a brief by Cambridgeshire Archaeology Planning Countryside Advice (CAPCA). It was approved and monitored by an Archaeological Officer from CAPCA.

Location, topography and geology

The Proposed Development Area (PDA) is c.2.5 hectares in size, 1.7 hectares of which would be excavated to depth for the proposed new marina. The PDA is located on meadow land adjacent to the river Great Ouse, c.1km south of St Ives town centre and centred on NGR 531375/270343 (Figure 1). Underlying geology is 1st Terrace river gravels (British Geological Survey 1975) whilst the site sloped upwards slightly from a height of 5.1m OD along the western edge of the PDA to 5.7m along the eastern edge, closest to the river.

Archaeological Background

Evidence for archaeological activity within the PDA is quite limited, however stray finds from the surrounding area have been dated from the prehistoric through to the Roman period and include a Palaeolithic Axe (CHER 01685), bronze spearheads (CHER 11788), Iron Age pottery (CHER 08169) and Roman finds (CHER 03599).

Slightly further away, to the south of the PDA, extensive cropmarks have been identified that appear to include a series of enclosures and a trackway (CHER 09165). On land off Meadow Lane, St Ives approximately 1km northeast of the PDA on the opposite side of the river, a CAU excavation revealed significant archaeological remains almost extending down to the current edge of the river Great Ouse (Pollard 1995). The remains included two Iron Age pit alignments and a partial Roman field system with evidence for Roman settlement activity in the form of midden pits. The evidence from the site at Meadow Lane shows the potential for Roman and prehistoric archaeology within this type of marginal landscape.

Evidence for medieval and post medieval activity on land fronting the river Great Ouse is quite limited, however early post medieval maps of the area between St Ives and Over (including the PDA) note this land as being primarily water meadow (Pollard 1995).

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Figure 1. Location map

Methodology

Evaluation of the PDA was carried out in two phases. Phase one consisted of a test pit survey across the whole site, the results of which led immediately to phase two, which comprised of a trench based evaluation. The trenches were confined to the 1.7 hectares that would be excavated to depth, in light of the results of the test pit survey.

Topsoil and underlying deposits were removed under archaeological supervision with a tracked 360° machine using a 2.0m wide toothless ditching bucket. Excavation of archaeological features was carried out using hand tools. The recording followed a CAU modified MoLAS system (Spence 1990); whereby feature numbers, F. were assigned to stratigraphic events, and numbers (fill), or [cut] to individual contexts. The trench plans were drawn at 1:50 and sections at 1:10. An environmental sample was taken from pit F.1 in Trench 7. A digital photographic archive was also compiled. All work was carried out in strict accordance with statutory Health and Safety legislation and with the recommendations of SCAUM (Allen and Holt 2002). The site code is JBY '08.

A total of 16, 2m x 2m, test pits were machine excavated (Figure 2). They were digitally photographed and the sections were recorded whilst the spoil was metal detected and scanned for finds. As a result of the test pit survey, 8 trenches totalling 310m in length were machine excavated (Figure 2), giving a sample by area of 3.6%. Buried soil deposits, where located, were sampled for artefacts.

Archive

Two contexts from one feature were identified and recorded and several artefacts including pot and worked flint were recovered. A bulk environmental sample was also taken. The documentary records and accompanying artefacts have been assembled into a catalogued archive in line with Appendix 6 of MAP2 (English Heritage 1991), and are being stored at the Cambridge Archaeology Unit offices.

Results

Phase one – Test pits

The 16 test pits identified significant changes within the underlying deposits. Test pits 1, 8 and 16 revealed the presence of a probable former channel of the river Great Ouse. The test pits showed the former channel approximately following the course of the current Low Road on a northwest-southeast alignment. A further, shallower, palaeochannel was also identified in test pit 13. Elsewhere, test pits showed the varying depth of alluvial deposits across the site with those closer to the river generally being shallower than those further away. This corresponded with the presence/absence of gravel underlying the alluvial deposits, with the shallower test pits closest to the river showing underlying gravel, whilst those further away showing sand and sandy clay marl. The only finds recovered were several sherds of post

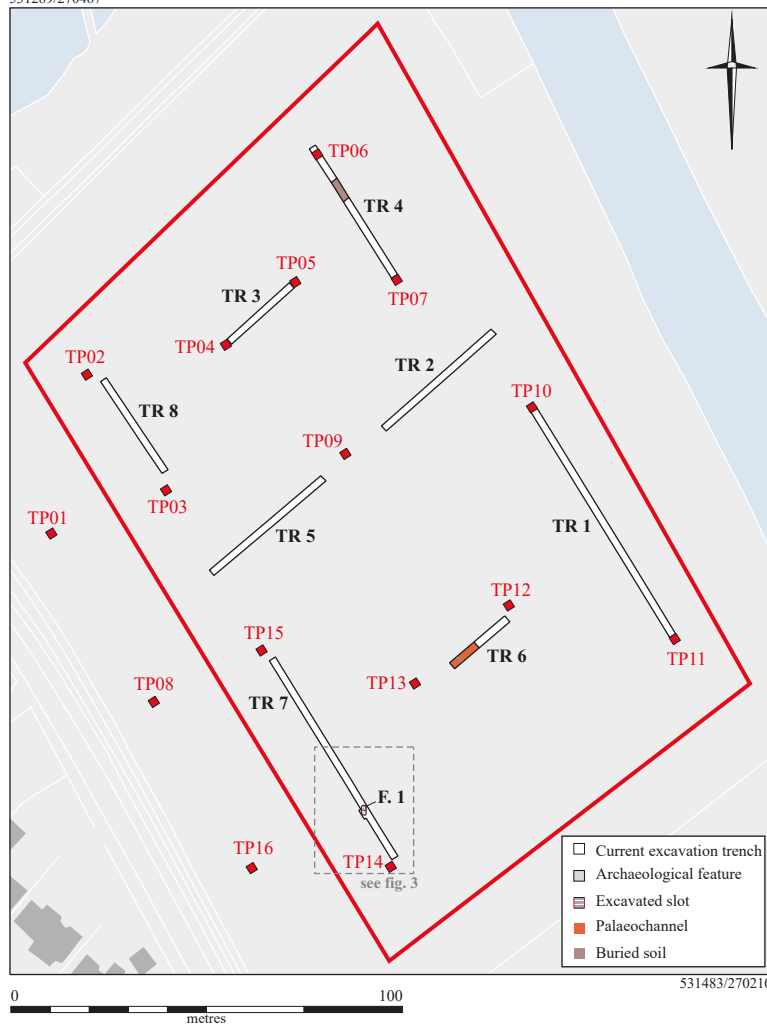
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Figure 2. Test pit and Trench plan

medieval pot and fragments of clay pipe, all from the topsoil layer. Table 1 shows a summary of the test pit survey.

Test Pit No.	Modern Ground Surface (OD)	Depth (m)	Channel Deposits	Finds
1	5.1m	4	Yes	No
2	5.4m	1	No	No
3	5.4m	1.2	No	Yes
4	5.5m	1.6	No	Yes
5	5.5m	1.4	No	No
6	5.6m	1.1	No	No
7	5.7m	1.1	No	Yes
8	5.3m	>2.0	Yes	No
9	5.4m	1.15	No	No
10	5.7m	1.3	No	No
11	5.8m	1.4	No	No
12	5.3m	1.6	No	No
13	5.0m	2.1	Yes	No
14	5.3m	1.2	No	No
15	5.3m	1.1	No	No
16	5.3m	2.7	Yes	No

Table 1 – Test Pit Summary

Phase two – Trial trenching

The eight trenches were laid out on either a northwest-southeast or northeast-southwest alignment and totalled 310m in length. All of the trenches had a similar sequence of deposits with moderately thick clayey topsoil overlaying a band of dark blueish grey alluvial clay and a brownish, sandy alluvial clay. Gravel predominantly underlay these deposits on the slightly higher ground adjacent to the river (Trenches 1, 2, 4 and 6), however this changed quite abruptly to uniform sand with clay marl patches on the lower ground in Trenches 3, 5, 7 and 8. A single pit dated to the Beaker period was exposed and excavated in Trench 7 and a small area of buried soil was identified in Trench 4; however no other archaeology was identified, apart from the presence of small quantities of post medieval pot sherds and clay pipe fragments within the topsoil of most trenches. A trench summary can be seen in Table 2.

Trench 1

Trench 1 was 68m in length on a northwest-southeast alignment. Topsoil was up to 0.44m deep and underlying deposits were up to 1.01m deep. No archaeology was present.

Trench 2

Trench 2 was 37m in length on a northwest-southeast alignment. Topsoil was up to 0.40m deep and underlying deposits were up to 0.85m deep. No archaeology was present.

Trench 3

Trench 3 was 19m in total length on a northeast-southwest alignment. This trench was cut short and backfilled straight away due to adverse soil conditions leading to the sides becoming unsafe and collapsing. Topsoil was up to 0.40m deep and underlying deposits were up to 1.20m deep. No archaeology was present.

Trench 4

Trench 4 was 37m in length on a northwest-southeast alignment. Topsoil was up to 0.32m deep and underlying deposits were up to 0.73m deep. No archaeology was present, however, an area of buried soil, approximately 6m in length, survived towards the northwest end of the trench (Figure 2). A buried soil sample was sifted by hand but no artefacts were recovered.

Trench 5

Trench 5 was 39m in length on a northeast-southwest alignment. Topsoil was up to 0.40m deep and underlying deposits were up to 1.05m deep. Two tree throws were identified and tested, however no artefacts were recovered and no other archaeology was present.

Trench 6

Trench 6 was 20m in length on a northeast-southwest alignment. Topsoil was up to 0.39m deep and underlying deposits were up to 1.25m deep. No archaeology was present; however the edge of a palaeochannel on a northwest-southeast alignment was exposed towards the southwest end of the trench.

Trench 7

Trench 7 was 59m in length on a northwest-southeast alignment. Topsoil was up to 0.30m deep and underlying deposits were up to 0.62m deep. A medium sized sub-rectangular pit (Figure 3) dated to the Beaker period was located towards the southeast end of the trench, which contained a small number of pot sherds and worked flints (see Appendices 2 and 3). A bulk environmental sample was also taken from the feature and showed a small quantity of occupation debris became incorporated into it during the infilling process (Appendix 1).

F.1 Sub rectangular pit. Cut [10], fill [9]. Length 2.50m, width 1.16m, depth 0.40m, with steeply sloping sides leading to a slightly rounded base. Fill was well compacted, mottled greyish orange/brown sandy silt clay with occasional flecks of charcoal.

Trench 8

Trench 8 was 29m in length on a northwest-southeast alignment. Topsoil was up to 0.36m deep and underlying deposits were up to 0.85m deep. No archaeology was present.

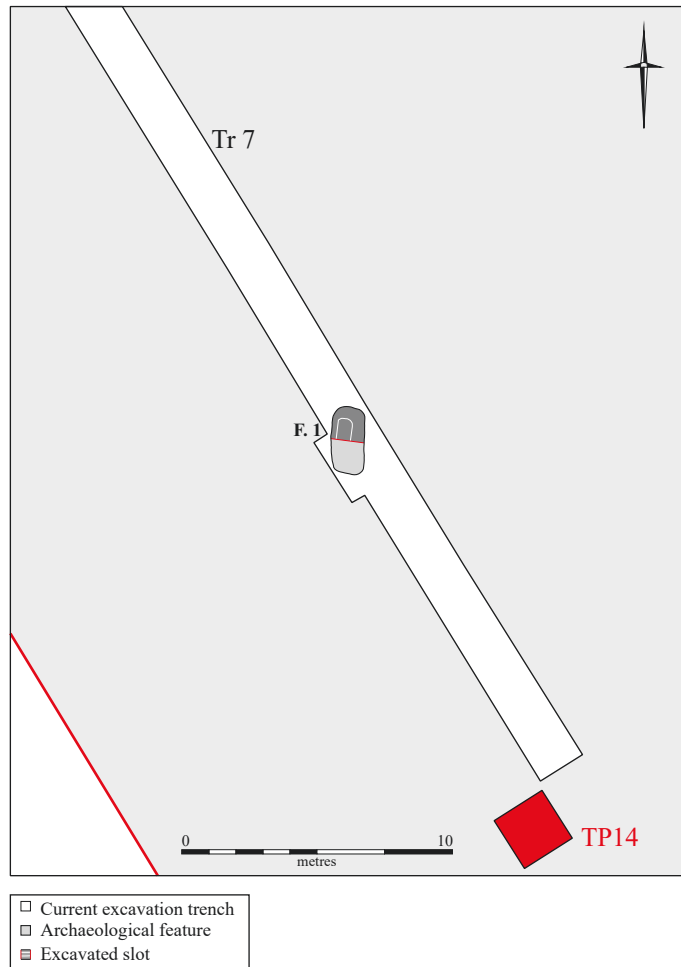


Figure 3. Plan and photo of Feature 1

Trench	Orientation	Length (m)	Depth (m)	Buried Soil	Archaeology
1	NW-SE	68	1.25 NW - 1.30 SE	No	No
2	NE-SW	38.5	1.20 NE - 1.25 SW	No	No
3	NE-SW	19	1.40 NE - 1.60 NW	No	No
4	NW-SE	37	0.95 NW - 1.05 SE	Yes	No
5	NE-SW	39	1.45 NE - 1.0 SW	No	No
6	NE-SW	20	1.30 NE - 1.60 SW	No	No
7	NW-SE	59	1.0 NW - 1.0 SE	No	Yes
8	NW-SE	29	0.95 NW - 1.20 SE	No	No

Table 2 – Trench Summary

Discussion

The Beaker pit identified in Trench 7 indicates the site was utilised in prehistory, however, the small number of finds, and relatively poor environmental results suggest it was some distance from any formal settlement, or other, related activity. Furthermore, the lack of other features in nearby trenches suggests the pit is probably an isolated event.

Layers of alluvium lying across the PDA suggest the site has been subjected to repeated flooding over a long period of time. Also the presence of two palaeochannels within the PDA, one of which was 4m deep and probably a former channel for the river Great Ouse, suggests the river's course has altered quite dramatically and is now at least 150m east of its former course. Therefore the lack of archaeology within the PDA can probably be attributed to the fact this land has been prone to regular flooding and shifting river patterns, and was therefore an undesirable place for settlement, but ideal perhaps for water meadow and limited agricultural usages such as grazing and haymaking.

This site has helped to confirm that alluvium does not mask the significant cropmarks seen to the south of the PDA (CHER 09165), which do not extend this far north. Therefore the site has helped define an area with very little archaeological activity within a known archaeological landscape.

Acknowledgements

The work was commissioned by Jones Boatyard and the site was monitored by Andy Thomas (CAPCA). Emma Beadsmoore was project manager and thanks go to Emma Rees for assisting the author. Donald Horne surveyed the test pits and trenches and Bryan Crossan produced the report graphics. Specialist reports were prepared by Rachel Ballantyne (environmental), Emma Beadsmoore (flint) and Mark Knight (pot).

Appendix 1

Environmental remains - Rachel Ballantyne

One sample was submitted from fill [9] in beaker pit F.1, after having been flotation sieved by Dan Britton using a modified version of the Siraf tank (Williams 1973) at the CAU. The flot was >300µm and the heavy residue >1mm; both fractions were sorted dry using a Leica MS5 (x6.3 – x50) binocular microscope for the entire flot and 1–4mm components of the heavy residue.

Fill [9] F.1 includes one tiny flint flake and a burnt flint fragment. There is also a low amount of wood charcoal, which is quantified in the results table below, and two small charred concretions. These finds suggest that a low amount of occupation debris became incorporated into F.9 during its infilling. No further work is recommended upon this assemblage.

Sample	<2>
Context	[9]
Feature	F.1
Feature type	beaker pit
Sample volume / litres	9
Fraction of sample sorted	1/1
PLANT REMAINS	
total volume of charcoal/ ml.	< 1
>4mm charcoal	+
2–4mm charcoal	+
1–2mm charcoal	++
charred concretion	-
untransformed, probably intrusive, roots	+
OTHER ARTEFACTS	
worked flint	-
burnt flint	-

Table 3: Results of the environmental bulk sample, Jones Boatyard, St Ives (JBY08)

KEY: - 1 or 2 items, + less than 10 items, ++ 10 to 50 items

Appendix 2

Flint – Emma Beadsmore

A total of 6 (<31g) flints were recovered from the site, from one feature, F. 1. The small assemblage comprises flint working waste, including a core, chunk and several waste flakes. The core is irregular yet comparatively thoroughly worked down, whilst two of the flakes are narrow and relatively systematically manufactured. Although the assemblage is small and not clearly chronologically diagnostic, the material is comparable to Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age assemblages and compatible with the Beaker pottery also recovered from F. 1.

Appendix 3

Pottery – *Mark Knight*

A single feature (F.1) produced an assemblage of 11 sherds of prehistoric pottery weighing a total of 12g. All of the fragments were body sherds and only one was decorated (a single fingertip-pinch or ‘crowsfoot’ impression). All shared the same fabric (medium hard with frequent small grog) and all of the pieces appeared abraded. The combination of fabric and decoration suggests that the assemblage belongs to the Early Bronze Age and probably represents the extremely fragmented remains of a rusticated Beaker.

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