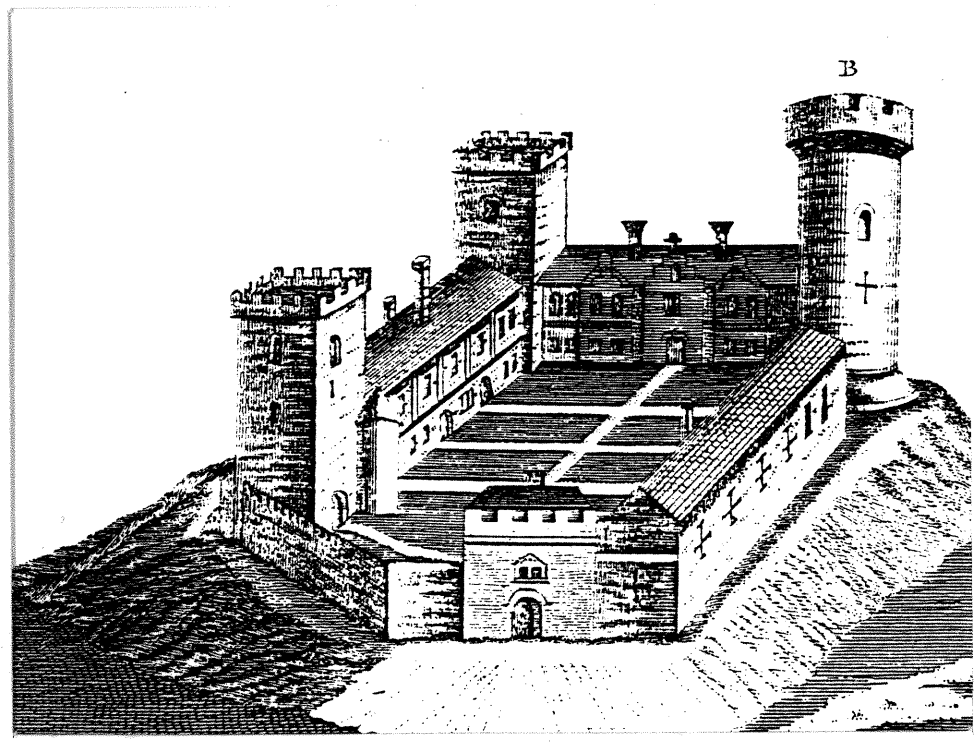


ARCHAEOLOGY FIELD OFFICE
FULBURN COMMUNITY CENTRE
HAGGIS GAP, FULBURN
CAMBRIDGE CB1 5HD Tel: 881614
(Fax 881678)

OFFICE COPY.

Shire Hall, Cambridge 1991 Car Park Extension



Cambridgeshire
County Council

Rural Strategy

SUMMARY

A trial excavation at Shire Hall, Cambridge, revealed a Romano-British ditch and occupation debris sealed by post-medieval and modern demolition layers.

INTRODUCTION

Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeology Section undertook a trial excavation on the proposed site of an extension to the existing visitors' car park at Shire Hall. The purpose of the excavation, funded by Cambridgeshire County Council, was to ascertain the extent and quality of archaeological features; to determine the likely effect that the proposed development would have on them; and to make recommendations on how best to ensure their preservation or recovery.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The chalk marl knoll known as Castle Hill is the highest point in Cambridge. Its dominance over the town and river Cam make it an obvious choice for any defensive or subduing presence. The Iron Age provides us with the earliest evidence of large and permanent settlement on the site, later giving way to the Roman town. Evidence for early Anglo-Saxon occupation of the site has been scant, the Roman town appears as a deserted ruin in 670, when a stone coffin found near to its walls was re-used as St. Etheldreda's tomb. By 1086 however there was obviously fairly extensive settlement on the site since the Domesday Book records that twenty-seven houses were destroyed to make way for the construction of a Norman castle. The castle, of the standard motte and bailey type, is typically situated for its genre, controlling the town and a river crossing. The motte, which survives, would have been surmounted at first by a wooden keep, the bailey, probably bounded by a deep ditch, extended towards the present Shire Hall. There may have been some subsequent re-modelling of the castle during unsettled periods in the late 11th and 12th centuries, but it is documented as proving ineffective in King Stephen's reign when Geoffrey de Mandeville freely sacked Cambridge, and in King John's reign when it promptly surrendered to the rebellious barons, suggesting that any modifications were insubstantial. In the late 13th century Edward I is documented as having spent over two-thousand pounds building a more imposing stone castle, of which no contemporary plan remains, but which seems to have consisted of a great hall surrounded by a curtain wall with towers. This building was subsequently used as a prison, from which many spectacular escapes are recorded, but during the last years of the 16th century the castle fell into decay. The stone was robbed for the building of colleges and churches in the town, until in 1606 the only part that remained of Edward's castle was a fragment of the curtain wall and the gatehouse; still in use as a prison.

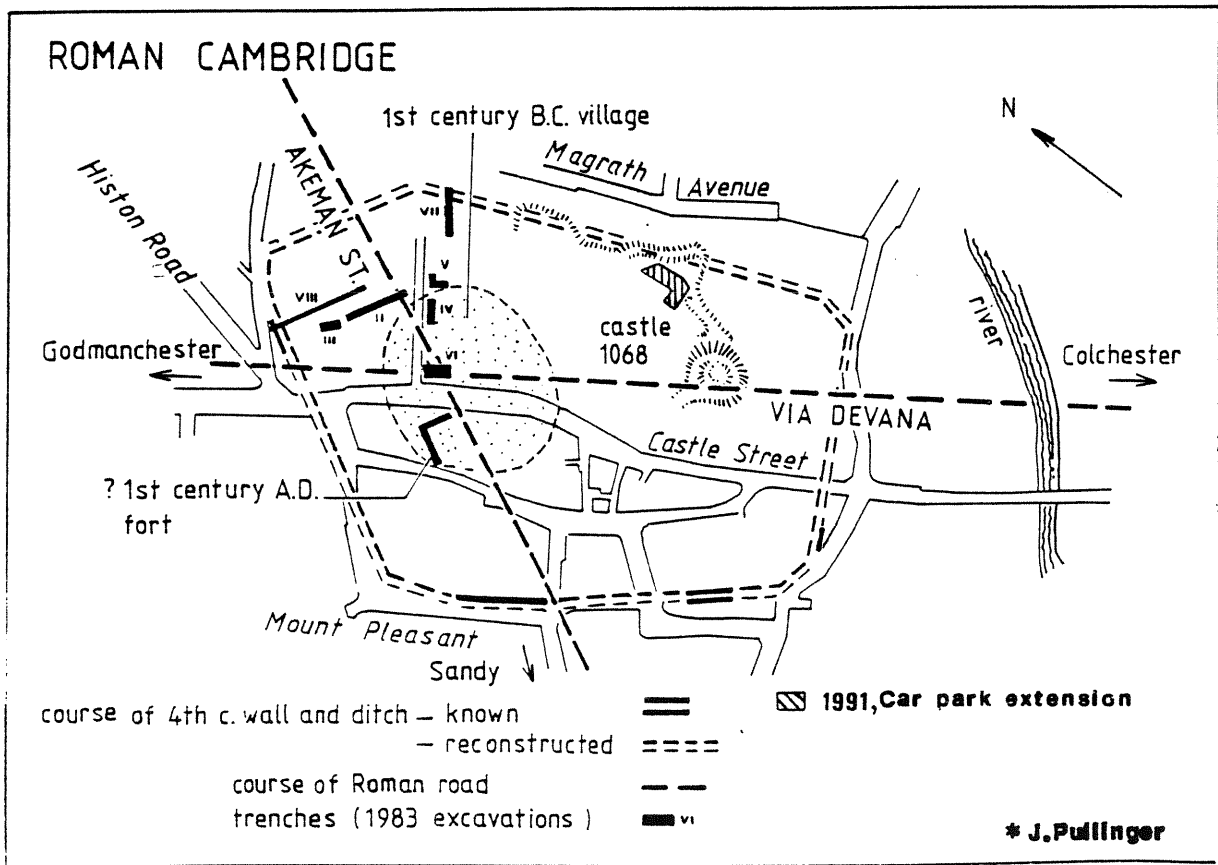
During the Civil War Cambridge was held for Parliament and the site of the former castle became central to the town's defences. Brick barrack blocks were built and the men of the garrison re-modelled the castle's surviving earthworks; it is known that, fifteen houses on the site were demolished, ditches were dug and characteristic Cromwellian angular bastions were added, though there is no surviving contemporary plan of the completed defences.

The threat posed by Royalist forces was short-lived and in 1647 the garrison was removed and the defences slighted. A prison was built in the 1820s on what is now a lawn in front of Shire Hall, and in 1848 the castle gate-house was demolished. A court house and Shire Hall building then occupied its site and the area of the castle grounds fronting Castle Street, but they too have since been demolished. The present Shire Hall was built in 1932.

Excavations in the area in recent years have been undertaken by T.C Lethbridge during the building of the present Shire Hall in 1932, J.Alexander 1956-64, J.Pullinger during construction of the Shire Hall car parks in 1983-84, and T.Malim during the construction of Clare College's hostel, 1989.



CAMSHCP91 LOCATION PLAN



METHOD OF EXCAVATION

The area proposed for development is a large one which potentially contains a plethora of archaeological features. The use of a mechanical digger, it was thought, would have caused too much disruption to the running of the existing car park and so it was decided that all digging should be by hand. It was necessary to determine the depth of significant features below ground surface and so the use of a number of test pits was preferred to the use of one or two strip trenches; in this way a sample of depth of surviving features could be obtained across the site in the time allotted. The test pits were all 2m X 2m squares and were dug to levels to just below those of the depth of intended car park foundations.

RESULTS

TEST PIT 1

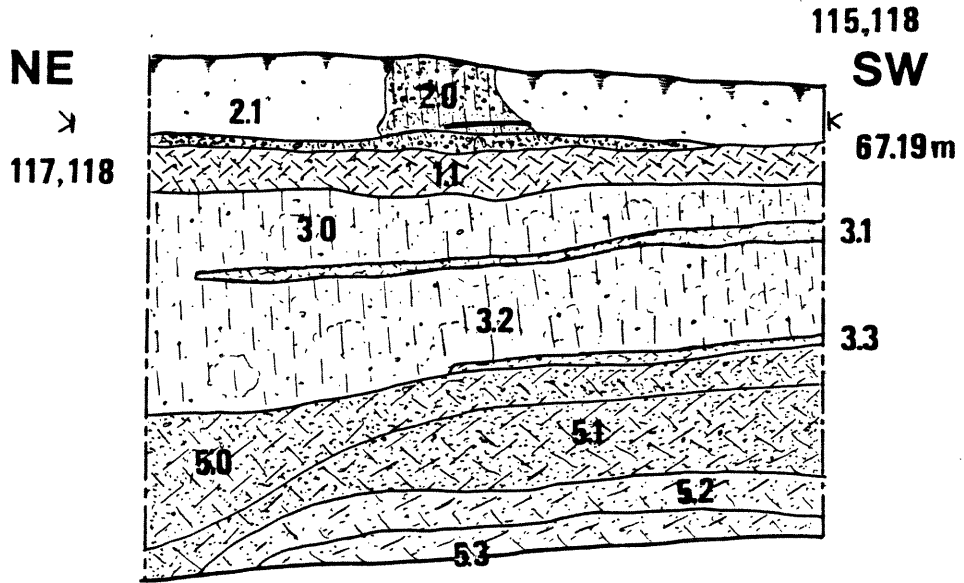
This was in fact the last pit to be opened and due to time constraints and lack of archaeological deposits only half its area (1m X 2m) was excavated fully. The topsoil, a loose light to mid-brown silty loam, extended to a depth of about 30cm below ground level and contained a moderate amount of small gravel chips (largely less than 1cm) and fragments of modern brick, glass, clay-pipe and pottery. Mixed in with the above were occasional small abraded sherds of diverse Romano-British pottery. A pit or ditch [30.0] cut from near the ground surface and sealed by the topsoil was comprised of a very loose dark almost peat-like fill containing cinders, large lumps of slag, bone, scrap iron and modern pottery and glass; it is probably a result of recent landscaping. Extending from below the topsoil at least to a depth of 80cm was a layer of light grey/brown clayey silt [31.0] containing frequent flecks of clunch, occasional lumps of charcoal, a few small sherds of glazed early 20th century pottery, brick fragments and glass; this layer corresponded to [3.0] in test pit 2 and was not bottomed as it extended deeper than the proposed foundations; it seems to be a result of the demolition of prison buildings et al earlier this century.

TEST PIT 2

This was the first pit to be opened and was placed to obtain an idea of the extent of the old library building, which could be seen as a cropmark in the grass, and gauge its impact on the layers beneath. The foundations [2.0] were found to be very insubstantial being sealed by the topsoil and extending only to a depth of 30 cm. Layer [3.0] extended to 90 cm below ground level and is a result of early 20th century demolition and deliberate levelling, probably due to landscaping of the grounds for the present Shire Hall. The destruction of clunch structures is indicated by a band of rubble [3.1].

Below [3.0] the recovered potsherds were exclusively RB, dates ranging from the 2nd century in [5.3] to 4th century in [5.0]. [5.0] also contained a radiate (barbarous ?) antoninianus of Tetricus I (270-273) and a bronze buckle pin. These layers would seem to be undisturbed RB occupation deposits, probably comprising the fill of a ditch (note sloping profile of section). However the constraints of time did not allow us to investigate their nature further; a similar stratigraphy can be observed in photographs taken in 1984 of trenching prior to construction of the existing visitors' car park. Proximity to buildings is indicated by brick fragments, mortar, tegula fragments, opus signinum and in the earliest context daub with a wattle impression. The pottery recovered was split fairly evenly between fine wares and coarse wares; mostly from the large local potteries of Horningsea and the Nene Valley (see pottery report).

TR. 2 SECTION NW FACING



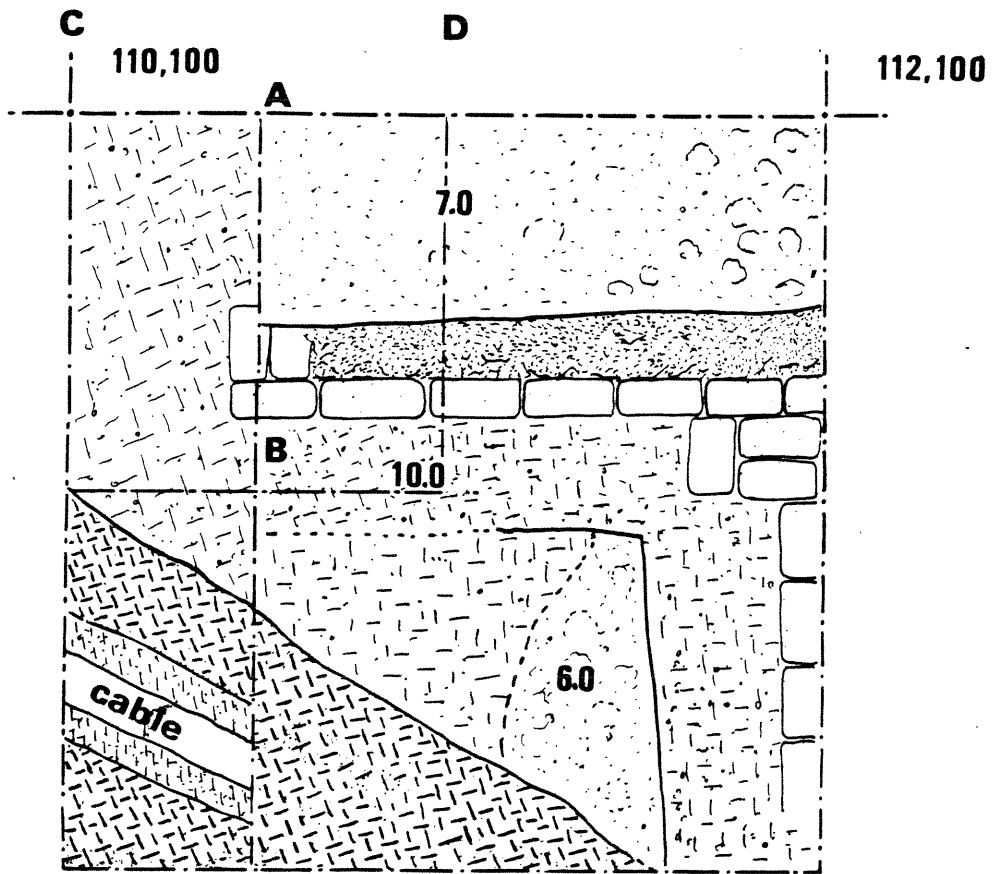
0 1m

TEST PIT 3

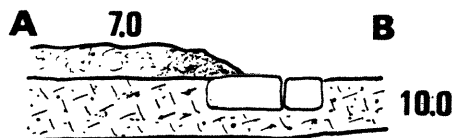
The position of this pit was chosen in order to try and pick up any remaining part of the bank which still survives as a large earthwork but which terminates abruptly before entering the area of concern. It is supposed that this surviving bank was extensively re-modelled to form part of the Civil War defences; adjacent to it is the site of a triangular corner bastion. The bank's projected line would isolate this corner from the centre of the defences, thus if the bank was a part of the earlier castle which survived until the middle of the 17th century it was almost certainly then removed.

At a depth 35 cm below ground surface the remains of the prison garden's greenhouse were encountered. These comprised of a foundation trench (or levelled area at least) [10.0], a single layer of bricks, and a demolition layer [7.0]. It is marked on the O.S. map of 1888 and presumably was a low sided brick wall structure surmounted by wood frame and glass. A high voltage cable cut through the area so digging to a greater depth was limited to 1m x 1m; in this reduced-sized pit there was no sign of the bank. In this area the greenhouse had affected the strata down to 60 cm below ground level. [22.0], [23.0] and [25.0] did not contain sufficient dating material to come to any firm conclusions as to their origin (Romano-British potsherds were present throughout most layers over the area of excavation) though they compare with [17.0], [24.0] and [29.0] respectively in test pit 5.

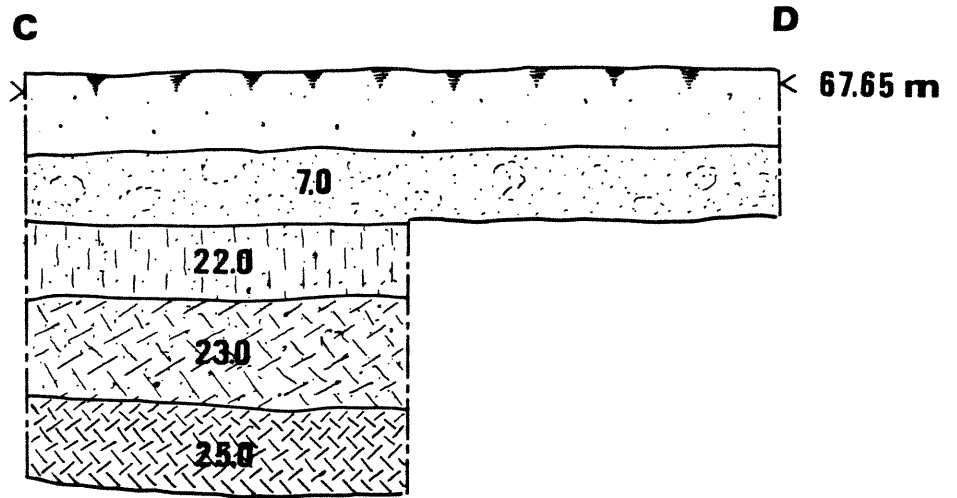
TP. 3 PLAN

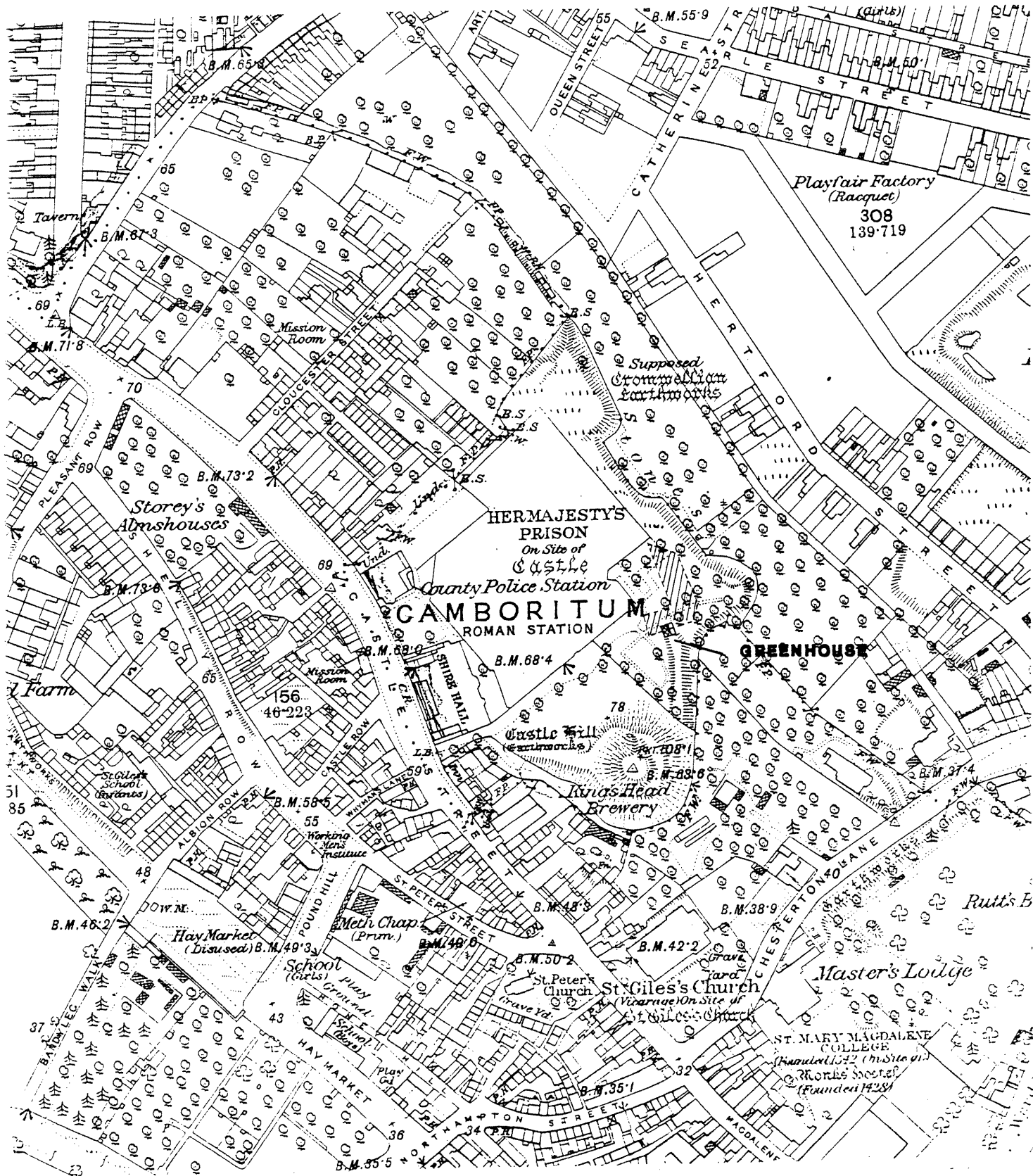


SECTION



SECTION





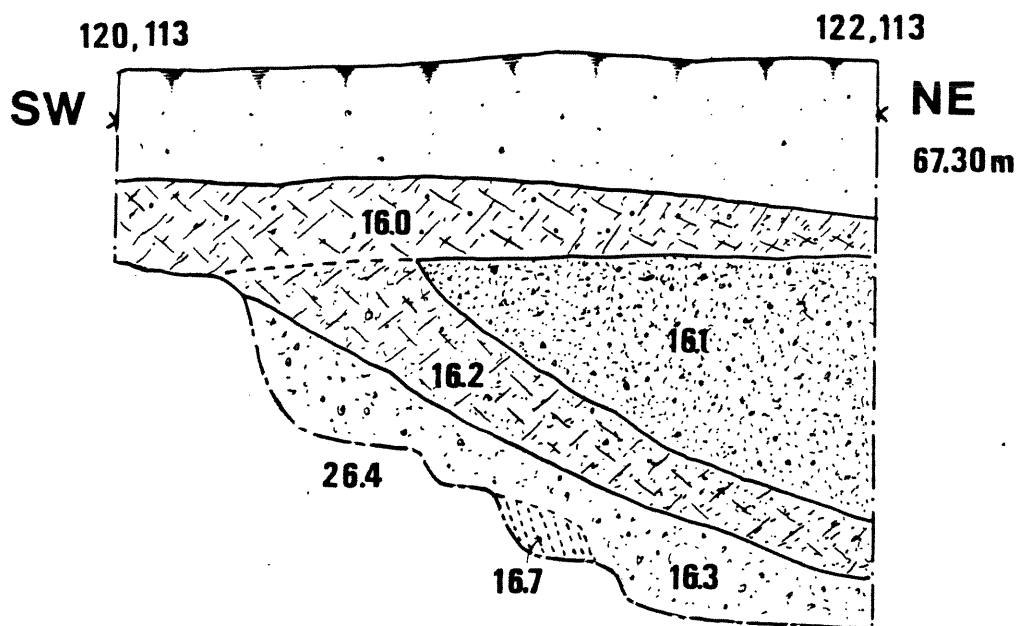
////// Area of investigation

O.S. 1888

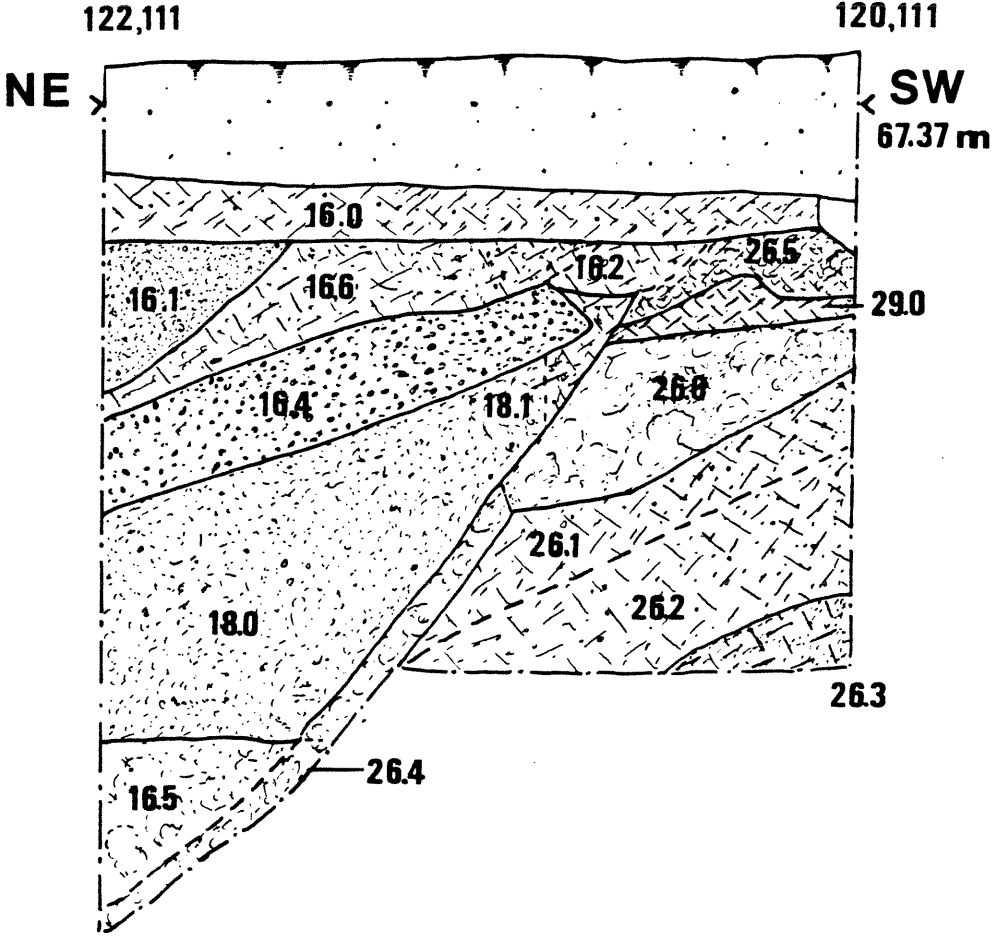
TEST PIT 4

In this test pit modern disturbance was limited to 50 cm below ground level. Below this was [16.0] which contained clay pipe, post-medieval glazed ware and RB pot sherds, and which is probably a result of the cultivation the prison garden. The removal of this layer revealed [26.0] and [16.1]. [26.0] was a white clayey chalk marl with a humus mottled surface caused by root and worm action, it was at first taken to be a natural deposit and attention was turned to the excavation of [16.1] and subsequent layers which all appeared to be cut into it. [26.0] was then removed and found to be a layer of upcast natural the slumping of which into the ditch [16.0] is represented by [26.4]. Ditches photographed in 1983 show a similar sequence, some also show lines of post holes (forming a palisade ?) along the steep ditch side. Here similarly the upcast [26.4] is cut by a post hole [16.7]. It is likely that the ditch is quite substantial (> 2m in depth) though we could not bottom it, or determine its full width (again probably > 2m extending to the north-east); it would therefore have made an effective boundary or livestock retainer. If the wall of the Roman town made use of the natural contour of the hill (as is presumed), our ditch would have been very close and quite parallel to it; perhaps then it is the rear boundary of a property at the outer limit of the town. Layers [26.1], [26.2] and [26.3] are a result of RB occupation prior to the cutting of the ditch.

TP.4 SECTION SE FACING



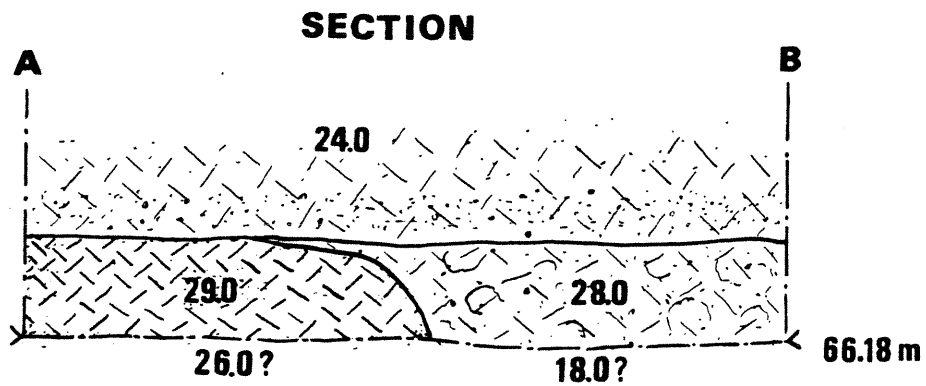
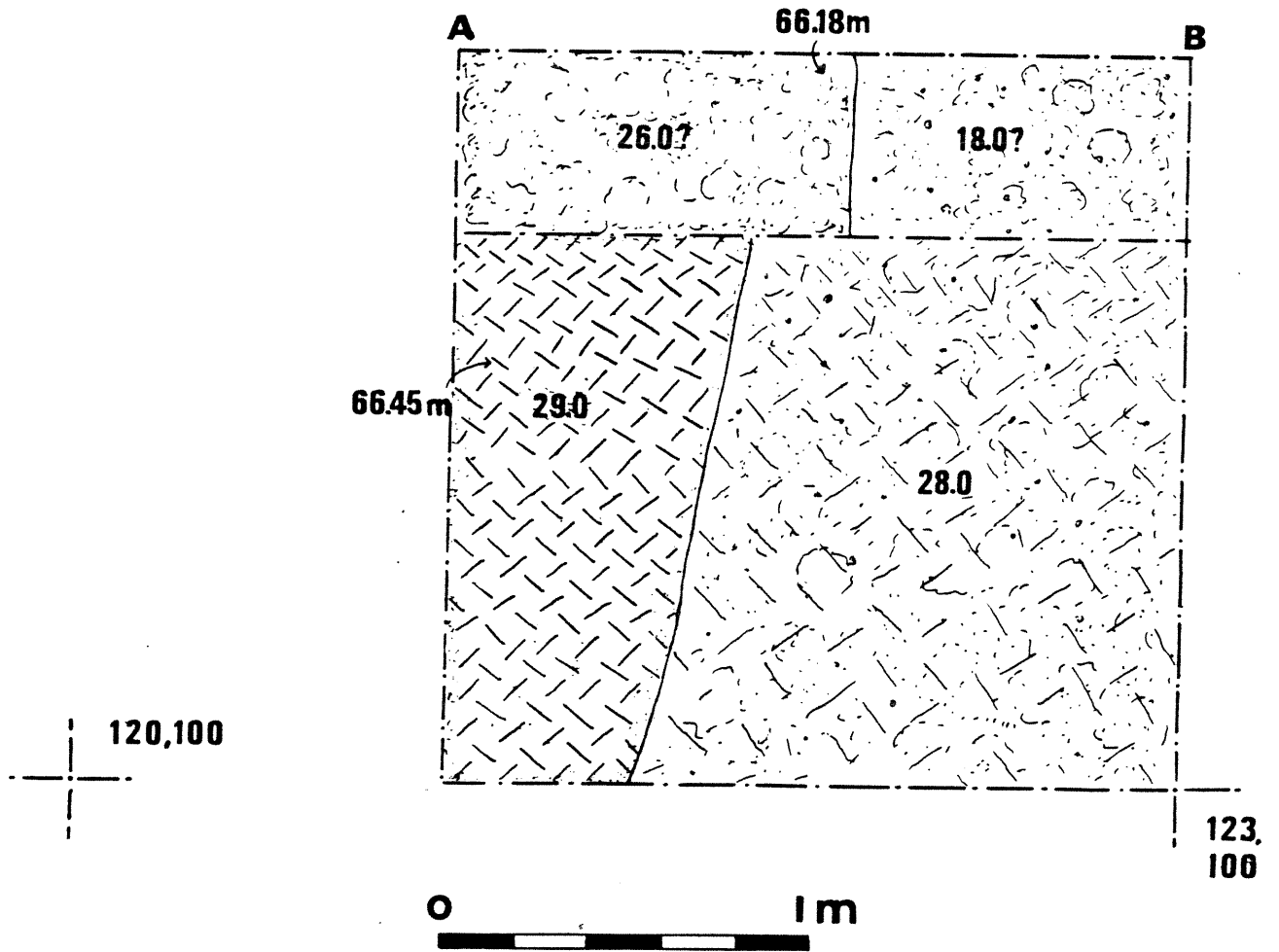
TP.4 SECTION NW FACING



TEST PIT 5

This pit was placed to try and confirm the direction and linearity of the large ditch encountered in test pit 4. [17.0], [19.0], [20.0] and [24.0] would all seem to be the result of post-medieval demolition. [29.0] (see test pit 4) was discovered at 90 cm below ground level. Two clay pipe fragments, which may well have been intrusively packed into the top of [29.0] after any truncating or levelling operation may also indicate that this layer does not in fact form part of the RB ditch at all. Beneath [29.0] a layer which corresponds to [26.0] in test pit 4 was revealed. Adjacent to this [28.0] which is comparable to [18.0] in test pit 4 and may form the uppermost surviving RB fill of the ditch. Generally, the proximity and comparability to the feature encountered in test pit 4 suggests that we have picked up the same feature in this test pit, further along its length.

TP.5 PLAN



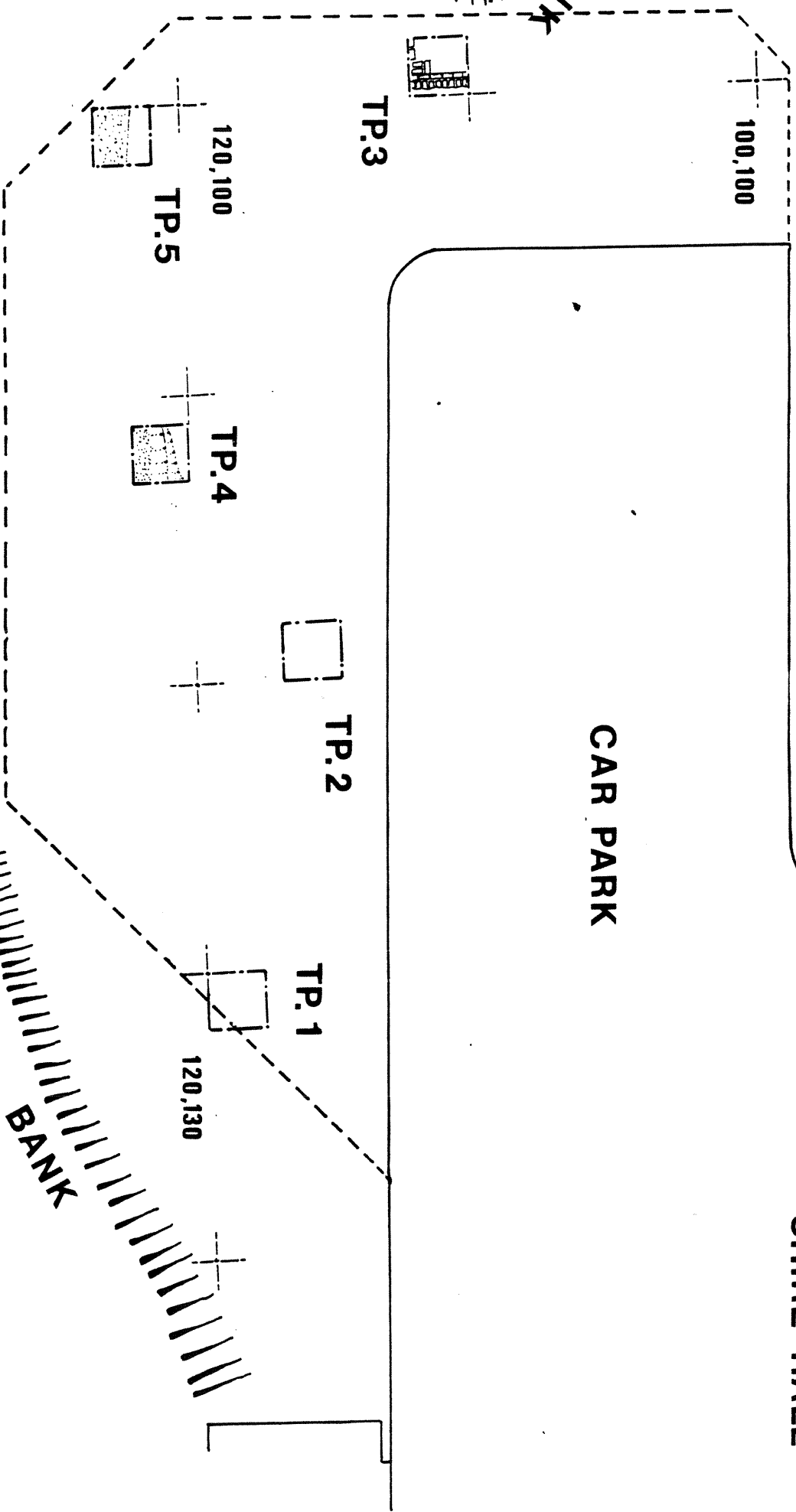
TRENCH LOCATION PLAN

SHIRE HALL

CAR PARK

BANK

BANK



100,100

120,100

120,130



POTTERY FROM THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS AT
SHIRE HALL CAR PARK, CAMBRIDGE JANUARY 1991

Gavin Lucas

SUMMARY

The pottery sherds from two of the test pits which contained features were examined, using a hand lens (x8 magnification) to identify inclusions; there were a total of 89 sherds in all, with several rims and some distinctive body sherds, which was sufficient to date and in some cases source the pottery assemblage. About a third of the sherds were from Horningsea, and just over a quarter were shell-tempered ware; fine wares were represented by Oxford, Nene Valley, Hadham and East Gaulish Samian, as well as some local Gallo-Belgic sherds. The general date range extends from the late first century AD to the fourth century, however the different contexts were more or less chronologically divisible:

Test Pit 2 - Apart from the top layer [5.0], which has much 4th century material, and [5.1] which is a mixture, the other features [5.2] and [5.3] are datable to the 2nd century.

Test Pit 4 - Features [26] and [16] both exhibit a similar range of late 1st/early 2nd to 3rd/4th century and 3rd to 5th respectively, while [18] is probably 2nd century.

Clearly then, Test Pit 2 contains early features (2nd century) while Test Pit 4 is later (4th century). There is also quite a lot of building material in the contexts which might suggest a building or wall nearby.

ANALYSIS

TEST PIT 2

[5.0] 2 joining tegular fragments, 1 brick fragment and 1 mortar lump. 1 sherd from an Oxford red colour-coated imitation Samian mortaria (Young type C100); 4th century. 4 sherds from the Nene Valley (three with colour-coats, one of which is from a rouletted beaker). 12 sherds of late shell-tempered ware, one broadly undercut rim: 4th century. 5 coarse grey ware sherds from Horningsea, one rim (triangular) from a bowl (1) and one shoulder sherd from a (narrow-necked ?) jar with vertical burnished lines and horizontally burnished neck (2): these forms suggest an earlier rather than a later date. 1 sherd of Black Burnished ware (Category I from Dorset). 1 sherd of imitation Samian (very similar to the bowl found with the Jesus Lane wasters), but possibly from Oxford: post 250 AD.

As a whole, the pottery consists of medium-sized sherds, mostly well worn but not very abraded; it is predominantly late pottery (4th century), except for the Horningsea grey wares, which are either residual or representative of a conservative tradition (the chronology of the Horningsea type series is not well known).

[5.1] 3 fragments of worked stone, 2 oyster shells, 1 lump of opus signinum, 1 brick fragment. 1 sherd of self-coloured ware

from the Nene Valley - base of a jar. 1 sherd of colour-coated ware - fine grey to buff fabric with a lustrous grey coat; possibly from the Nene Valley. 2 sherds of (late ?) shell-tempered ware (one from a storage jar). 3 sherds of coarse grey ware from Horningsea (one combed sherd from a storage jar). 1 sherd of a reddish-brown, finely burnished fabric, very fine texture with abundant dark particles, moderate mica and occasional larger grains; possibly from the Cherry Hinton kilns; late 1st/early 2nd century.

Most of the pottery consists of medium to small-sized sherds which are slightly abraded - later rather than earlier date, though quite a mixed assemblage.

[5.2] 1 brick fragment, 1 burnt stone, 1 worked(?) stone, 1 oyster shell. 1 sherd of shell-gritted ware - a fairly hard dark grey fabric with orange to brown surfaces, moderate medium to fine shell/calcite and occasional medium round translucent quartz grains temper, with sparse mica and abundant very fine dark particles; subtly distinct from later shell-tempered ware in that the shell is more finely crushed, there is more sand in the temper and the fabric is more micaceous and hard; it is probably an early type. 1 sherd of a hard, dark grey-brown fabric with abundant fine calcite and translucent rounded quartz granules and medium mica; a smooth, burnished(?) black surface with spaced groups of (at least ten) finely incised vertical lines; probably London Ware, late 1st/early 2nd century (1). 6 sherds of coarse grey ware from Horningsea (one combed and white slipped from a storage jar, one with vertical shoulder burnished lines (cf. context [5.0]), one with closely spaced horizontal burnishing strokes, and one everted, internally ledged rim with grooved neck cordon, burnished all over externally and just at the top of the rim internally (2)). 2 grey ware sherds (one with everted, internally ledged rim and the other perhaps from a folded beaker - cf. [5.3]) - probably from Horningsea. 1 sherd of a very fine textured, dark grey fabric with abundant very fine dark particles, moderate mica and occasional fine to medium calcite; pinkish-buff surface with burnished exterior - rim form suggests a carinated bowl with roulette decoration, perhaps imitation of samian drag.30 : a local Gallo-Belgic vessel, later 1st/early 2nd century, perhaps from Cherry Hinton or further such as Verulamium (3). 3 sherds of a dark grey fabric with buff-brown surface on one side, probably handmade - moderate medium to coarse rounded to sub-angular translucent quartz grains, moderate fine mica, occasional coarse angular calcite: a local late Iron Age/early Romano-British ware.

Generally medium to small sherds, slightly abraded, which on the whole suggest a late 1st to early 2nd century date.

[5.3] 1 large fragment of daub with wattle impression, 2 brick fragments, 1 iron stud. 4 sherds of Horningsea ware (including one everted and cordoned rim from a storage jar, one shoulder sherd with spaced groups of vertical combing (at least 10 teeth)). 1 grey ware sherd from an indented beaker - fabric resembles Horningsea, yet this form is not known from here. 1 sherd of white fabric from a mortaria - rim with flange missing, greatly abraded; probably Nene Valley. 1 sherd of Samian, probably from Trier (AD 125-260) and possibly Drag.37/38 - no abrasion or wear.

Medium sized sherds, slightly abraded in general though well-worn (except for the Samian) - probably 2nd century date.

TEST PIT 4

[18.0] 1 sherd of early (?) shell-tempered ware - base of a jar. 2 grey ware sherds, (probably from Horningsea) one has spaced horizontal pairs of incised lines, the other is a bowl rim (1). Medium to large sherds, slightly abraded, probably early 2nd century.

[16.1] 1 oyster shell. 1 green glass fragment with two scored lines. 1 small grey ware sherd. 1 sherd of Oxford red colour-coated imitation Samian, Drag.38 with traces of white painted scrolls on flange (Young type C52) : late 4th century date.

Well worn and abraded sherds - late 4th century date.

[16.1] 1 large sherd of sandy red ware, from a storage jar - has a large air - bubble; local late ware. 3 sherds of late shell-tempered ware. 1 sherd of Horningsea, square rim bowl (late), well worn (1).

Medium sized sherds, little abrasion; probably 4th century date.

[16.3] 1 oyster shell, 1 lump of mortar, 1 iron nail and 1 piece of burnt daub. 1 sherd of Oxford red colour coated imitation Samian mortarium (Young type C100), burnt and very abraded : 4th century. 3 small, burnt and abraded coarse ware sherds.

Small, burnt and abraded sherds; 4th century date.

[16.5] 2 burnished sherds from a Horningsea storage jar (probably the same vessel). Worn but not very abraded.

[16.6] 8 fragments of tile - very fine buff-pink to orange-pink fabric with no visible inclusions except grass temper; very vesicular surface with traces of mortar (or white slip?). 1 sherd of late shell tempered ware (flared rim) (1). 2 small sherds of coarse grey ware. 1 sherd of Oxford sandy fabric with a pink slip (single-fluted handle). 1 sherd of Oxford red colour coated ware (rim of bowl with rouletting). 2 (intrusive?) sherds of post-medieval glazed earthenware.

In general, very small and abraded sherds - probably a late date 3rd to 4th century.

[26.1]/[26.4] 1 burnt sandstone fragment, 4 fragments of bone shaft and 1 pig premolar. 4 sherds of Horningsea ware. 1 sherd of a late shell-tempered ware (rim) (1). 1 small sherd, probably Hadham orange ware. Not very abraded in general; later date - 4th century ?

[26.0] 1 burnt, worked stone, 1 oyster, 1 fragment of a flint blade core (?), 1 piece of daub, and 2 fragments of combed tile/brick. 2 sherds of Horningsea ware, white slipped, one combed - from storage jars.

Small, abraded sherds in general.

[26.1] 1 brick fragment and 3 worked stones (one of which is burnt). 7 fragments of grass-tempered tile (cf. 16.6). 1 sherd of Hadham orange ware (footring) (1). 1 sherd of Horningsea ware, a large everted, burnished rim from a storage jar with oblique combing on the shoulder (2). 1 sherd in a dark grey fabric with a pinkish-buff surface, abundant medium sized sub-angular translucent quartz grains, moderate fine mica and occasional medium sized calcite.

Sherds are worn but not generally worn or abraded. A later date
- 3rd to 4th century.

[26.2] 1 oyster shell and 1 brick fragment. 1 sherd of
Horningsea ware from a storage jar with spaced vertical combed
lines (5 teeth) (1). 1 sherd of shell-gritted ware (cf. 5.2),
with sooty black outer surface.

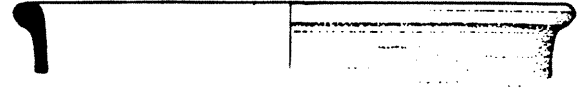
Large sherds, not very abraded - perhaps early : 2nd to 3rd
century.

[26.3] 1 iron linch pin and 1 sherd of shell-gritted ware,
medium sized and not too abraded.

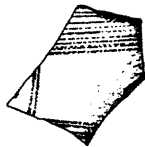
CAMSHCP91 POTTERY



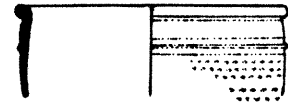
(5.0) 2



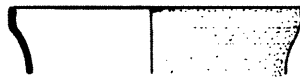
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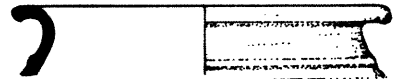
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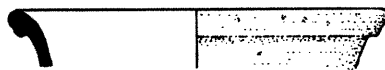
(5.2) 3



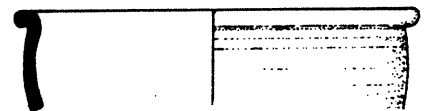
(18.0) 1



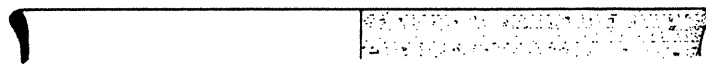
(5.2) 2



(26.1)(26.4) 1



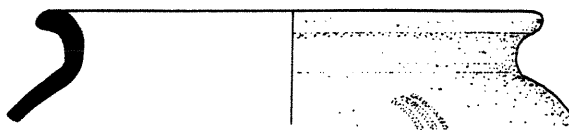
(16.1) 1



(16.6) 1



(26.1) 1



(26.1) 2

SCALE
RIMS 1:4
BODY SHERDS 1:2



(26.2) 1

BONE FROM THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION AT
SHIRE HALL CAR PARK, CAMBRIDGE JANUARY 1991

The assemblage from the contexts of interest consists of only 50 pieces, consequently it is too small to note anything beyond species present and whether butchery has occurred.

TEST PIT 2

[5.0] Bos (jaw), Sus (1st phalanx)

[5.1] Canis (left humerus; vertebra), Caprovis (horn core, butchered; tibia, gnawing), Bos (femur, young cow), Sus (scapula, butchered)

[5.2] Sus (jaw, adult), Equus (1st phalanx; incisor), Caprovis (right radius, butchered, gnawing; left metatarsal, butchered, gnawing; rib), aves (deformed claw)

[5.3] Bos (molar), Caprovis (metatarsal, butchered)

TEST PIT 4

[16.1] Caprovis (metatarsal, gnawed; jaw fragment; scapula), Bos (1st phalanx; scapula; jaw fragment), Human tibia

[16.2] Sus (deciduous tooth)

[16.3] Bos (femur, butchered), Caprovis (rib, butchered)

[26.0] Equus (tooth), Bos (scapula; radius)

[26.1] Caprovis (jaw), Canis (vertebra), Bos (pelvis)

[26.3] Sus, Bos (butchered)

CAMSHCP91 SMALL FINDS



(5.0)

BRONZE BUCKLE PIN

SCALE 1:1



(5.0)

**ANTONINIANUS OF TETRICUS I
270-273 AD**

CONCLUSIONS

The features encountered in the test pits (notably test pits 2 and 4) show that well preserved Romano-British layers probably extend beneath the entire proposed area of development. The nature of these features will only be revealed by full excavation and comparison with those encountered during the large scale excavations of 1983-84 (the report of which remains unpublished) but it can be said that they undoubtedly form a part of the remains of the walled Romano-British town; the ditch encountered in test pit 4 may well indeed be part of the boundary, laying as it does close to and parallel to the suspected site of the wall, though it is more probably the boundary to a property within the town walls. The constraints imposed by this type of assessment did not allow us to investigate this further or to ascertain whether the RB occupation overlays prehistoric phases of activity, though this seems likely from the displaced pottery encountered.

There was a notable absence of material from the period spanning the end of Roman Britain to the 18th century. Much demolition, levelling and quarrying of the site is known to have occurred at many times throughout history, culminating with the demolition of the 19th century prison and other buildings, the building of Shire Hall (and indeed its car parks) and the landscaping of its grounds. It is likely that in the area investigated at least, the layers formed in this period were subsequently truncated, we may otherwise expected to have found evidence of late Saxon occupation, features connected with the Norman and medieval castle, and from the Cromwellian modifications.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The proposed car park will destroy the stratigraphy to a considerable depth across the site particularly in the areas covered by soakaways and gullies. It is therefore recommended that either i) a full excavation over the entire area should proceed the building of the car park in order to record what is potentially an interesting and important area of the Romano-British town of Cambridge, or ii) that the car park is modified so that its foundations extend no deeper than 50 cm from ground surface across the site to preserve the RB layers. In this case a controlled watching brief should be maintained by the archaeologists during building with time allowed for the recording (and limited excavation if necessary) of features encountered. The drainage channels and soakaways because of their extra depth will require special attention.

The archaeological information gleaned from this area will supplement the work already carried out in recent years across the Shire Hall area, expanding our knowledge of the Romano-British town and adding generally to the knowledge we have of the development of the city of Cambridge.