

Archaeological Field Unit

Ely City Centre Redevelopment: An Archaeological Desktop Study

Ecn Robinson

1994

Cambridgeshire County Council

Report No. 108

Commissioned By Barber, Casanovas, Ruffles Ltd

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SUMMARY

This study attempts to define the archaeological potential of an area within the historic core of the City of Ely (centred on TL 543/804) and thus to determine the potential impact of its proposed re-development. The subject area is bounded by Newnham Street (to the west and north), Bray's Lane (to the east) and the Market Place (to the south). The study is largely based on existing sources. Two excavations have been carried out within the subject area in recent years and a number of documentary sources refer to medieval activity here. This evidence has been used to define an archaeological character model for the area.

The lighter soils on this part of fen 'highland' at Ely are known to have attracted settlement from the late Neolithic/ early Bronze Age. Excavation has revealed agricultural and settlement remains of this period within the subject area. Evidence of earlier occupation is unlikely to be represented by anything other than residual artefacts in later deposits. During the late Iron Age, Romano-British and Saxon periods the area probably lay within field systems which supported settlement centres in the environs of the subject area.

Tenements were established in the southern half of the subject area (the Market Place) after the establishment of a large market area in the 12th or 13th century. These may have been preceded by tenements on Newnham Street, which certainly contained important dwellings by the mid 13th century. The Market Place street front became heavily developed during the medieval period, probably comprising shops and traders' quarters. Part of the interior of the subject area formed the grounds of Bray's manor, and was largely given over to gardens and orchards until this century.

Well-stratified archaeological deposits have been found in good states of preservation across the subject area, though good organic survival may be anticipated only in localised features such as wells. The archaeological deposits are probably most intense behind the Market Place properties.

The subject area has been shown to have excellent archaeological potential. It contains deposits and features crucial to the investigation of the origins and character of the medieval town at Ely, to the economy of its Fenland hinterland and to the study of English urbanism generally.

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The following study attempts to define the archaeological character of an area within the historic core of the City of Ely and the potential impact of its proposed re-development. The subject area is bounded by Newnham Street to the north and west and by the Market Place and Bray's Lane to the south and east respectively (*Figure 1*).
- 1.2 The study was commissioned by Barber, Casanovas, Ruffles Ltd at the request of Cambridgeshire County Archaeology Office, and conforms to the specifications laid out in 'Archaeological Brief for Carrying Out a Desk-Top Study: Ely, Central Area Development' drawn up by that office. The development proposal comprises the complete re-development of the subject area, including the demolition of the Post Office and the Club Mews on the Market Place, a property on Newnham Street and buildings behind Newnham Street. The existing Waitrose car park will be extended, and storage and retail units erected (*Figure 12*). All development details have been supplied in advance of the determination of foundation and service trench requirements.
- 1.3 The subject area, together with the Market Place, was the subject of an archaeological desk-top study carried out in advance of the White Hart and Market Place refurbishments and the Waitrose development. The study examined the archaeological and historical context for the central area of the city based on the information then available (Ferris & Leech 1989). Since then two archaeological excavations have been carried out within the subject area, which have provided new and important insights into the archaeological character of this area.
- 1.4 The first of these was carried out in advance of the Waitrose development and is hereafter referred to as the 'Bray's Lane' site (Hunter 1991a). The second was carried out at the rear of the White Hart, hereafter referred to as the 'White Hart' site (Jones & Ratkai 1992; Jones 1994). This (evaluation) excavation was followed by observation and salvage recording during the construction of foundation trenches. Two further archaeological observations have been made in the subject area (*Figure 2*).
- 1.5 The discussion also draws upon documentary and cartographic evidence relating to the subject area. Several surveys of the medieval town survive. These are discussed in the Victoria County History Volume IV for Cambridgeshire (Pugh 1953) and have been analysed in recent years by Dorothy Owen; her work forms the basis for much of the discussion on the documented character of the subject area (below). All documentary and cartographic sources are cited as used.

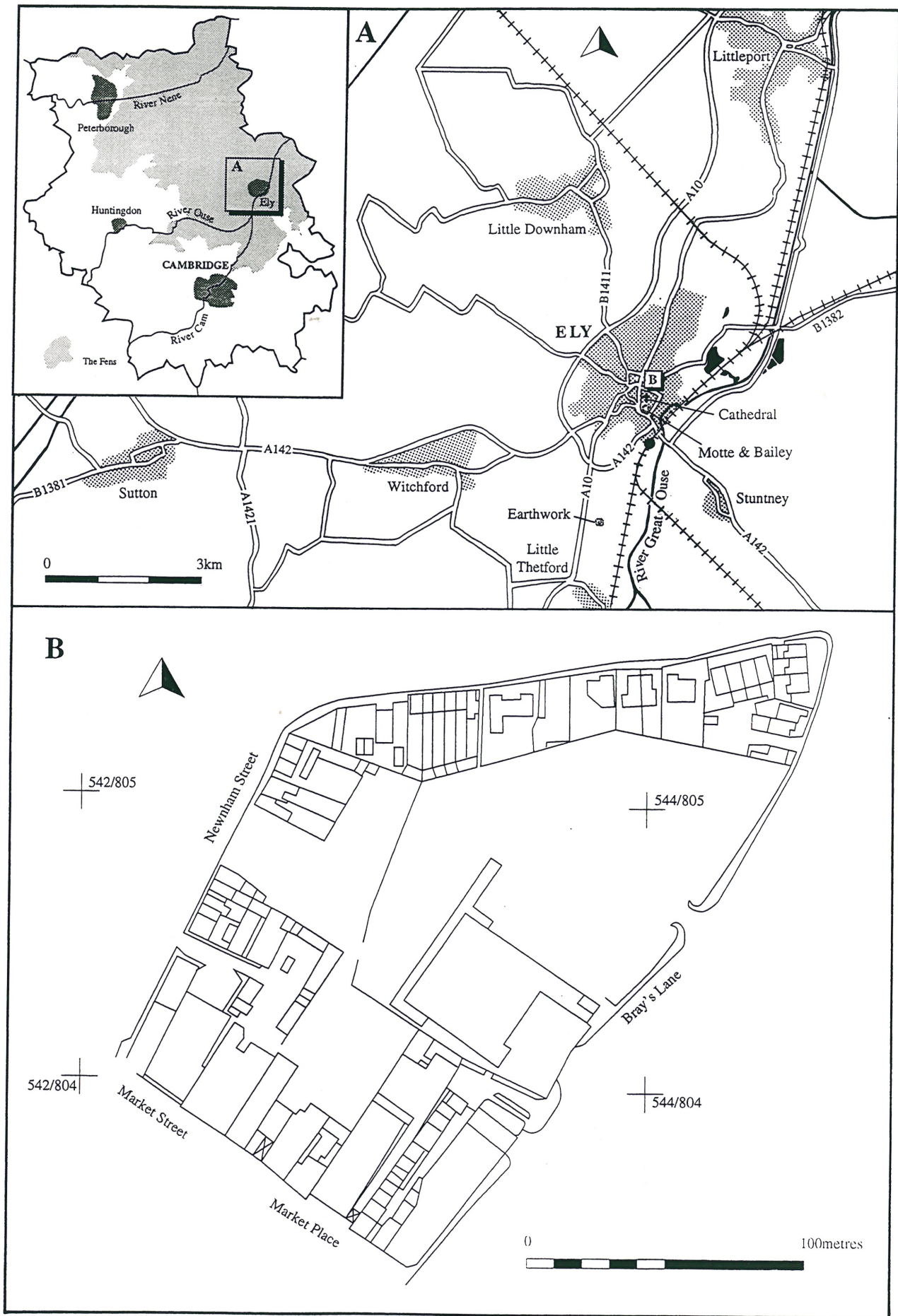


Figure 1 The subject area

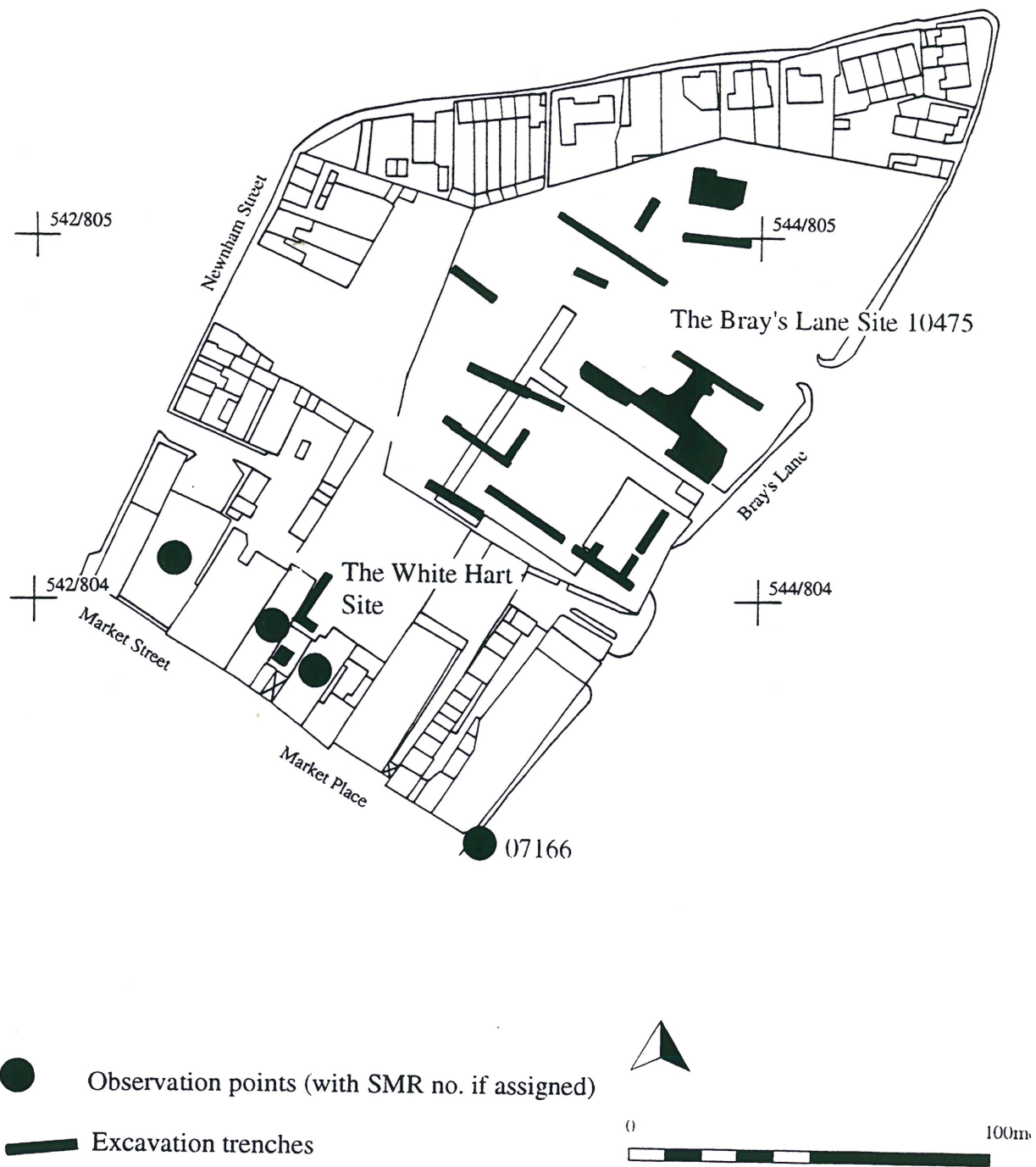


Figure 2 Archaeological excavations and observations

2 THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORIC CHARACTER OF THE SUBJECT AREA

2.1 Geology, Topography and Early Settlement

2.1.1 Ely is situated at the eastern edge of a large outcrop of Jurassic Kimmeridge and Ampthill Clays, which in this area protrudes from the fen at c 0 m OD to height of over 20m OD. Most of the city rests upon a capping of Cretaceous Lower Greensand (or Woburn Sand), a pebbly sand which weathers to grey, greenish yellow or yellowish brown. This deposit is overlain by Chalky-Jurassic Boulder Clay to the north of the city, a deposit which also extends almost to the cathedral from Witchford to the south. In this southern area the Boulder Clay is associated with an outcrop of glacial sands and gravels (Gallois 1988, 65-66).

2.1.2 During Flandrian times (the last 10,000 years) the lower parts of the fen basin have been subjected to continuous freshwater incursion and a sequence of marine transgressions which, until checked by drainage and reclamation campaigns, resulted in an extensive, though by no means homogeneous, wetland environment. Since the late Bronze Age, up until the extensive reclamation campaigns of the 17th century and later, the highland at Ely formed a large irregular island. It was connected to the fen edge of the 'mainland' only by waterways, artificial causeways and transitory paths.

2.1.3 The subject area rests on Lower Greensand at c 21m OD, overlooking an expanse of peat fen which separates Ely from the highland at Stuntney to the east.

2.1.4 Finds dating from the Palaeolithic have been recovered in the environs of Ely, and Mesolithic 'sites' are also known here, however, none are known in close proximity to the subject area. Whilst this does not indicate a lack of activity in subject area during these periods (and may be considered a consequence of the low 'visibility' of such remains), it may be anticipated that subsequent attrition to this part of the highland (*cf* below) will have limited the evidence of such activity to a small amount of residual material only. It is therefore not considered further.

2.2 Late Prehistoric and Romano-British (up to c 5th century AD)

2.2.1 Occupation during the Neolithic and Bronze Age periods throughout the region is generally characterised by settlements (now usually represented by surface ceramic and lithic scatters), and burial mounds which nestled close to the developing fen edge. Here the favourable soils and other resources of the fen basin could be readily exploited. Some activity on the northern part of the Ely highland, however, is also known. Such activity indicates a preference for the lighter Lower Greensand-derived soils here, over the heavier clay soils prevalent elsewhere on the highland.

2.2.2 A Beaker period cemetery was disturbed by quarrying at Springhead Lane (a few hundred metres to the east of the subject area) during the early years of this

century (O'Reilly 1928, 105). The Bray's Lane excavation yielded evidence for late Neolithic/early Bronze Age activity in the form of a few pit/ditch features, one of which was suggestive of the eavesdrip gully of a house, and two distinct phases of plough marks and associated buried soil (Hunter 1991a, 2-3).

2.2.3 Fieldwork in the region has demonstrated a similar concentration of Iron Age activity at the northern end of the Ely highland as is apparent for the Bronze Age (Hall & Coles 1994, 66; 93). A Roman road, originating at Cambridge, traverses the area (Margary 1973, 209). Its line is approximated by the A10 to the south of the city, and by the Littleport Road to the north. Evidence for Iron Age and Romano-British settlement at Ely has been supplied by chance artefact discoveries (Elvington 1978; SMR) and by key-hole excavation near the cathedral (Hunter 1991b, 3-4). The character of both Iron Age and Romano-British settlement, however, remains obscure, although there is no evidence to suggest a centre here of any greater importance than those others dispersed across the highland.

2.2.4 The ditched boundaries of enclosed fields or paddocks of late Iron Age/ early Romano-British date were investigated at the Bray's Lane site. The paucity of cultural material within them suggested that they were not near to a settlement focus (Hunter 1991a, 4); an interpretation supported by the absence of residual material of this period at the White Hart site.

2.3 Saxon & Early Medieval (5th to 12th century)

2.3.1 Ely's name derives from the Saxon 'eel island' or 'eel district' (Reaney 1943, 214; Pugh 1953, 28). Early Anglo-Saxon settlement in the area is further indicated by inhumation cemeteries to the north at High Barns and south of the present city at Witchford Airfield. The name 'Newnham', later a suburb of the medieval town, suggests an early-mid Saxon presence in the vicinity of the of the subject area (Meaney pers. comm.); perhaps referring to, or replacing, a settlement associated with the cemetery at High Barns. Tradition asserts that Etheldreda's 7th century abbey lay within Ely, possibly near the present cathedral, having moved there from a short-lived site to the south (Sherly-Price & Latham 1968, 239-241; Garmonsway 1972, 34). The history of this double abbey throughout the 9th and most of the 10th centuries remains obscure. The original foundation may have succumbed to Danish aggression, though a community of priests is said to have been there at its re-foundation in the later 10th century (Bentham 1771, 68-69; Ridyard 1988, 181-185).

2.3.2 It has been suggested that the late Saxon settlement at Ely was based upon a planned market to the west of the re-founded abbey, now largely occupied by the Palace Green (Aston & Bond 1976, 76; Taylor 1975, 246). Recent excavations have confirmed a late Saxon presence on the periphery of the postulated market area (Robinson forthcoming), and have located further foci (albeit perhaps of small scale) at Upherds Lane (Taylor-Wilson 1992, 24) and the Paddock (Holton-Krayenbuhl 1988, 119-124).

2.3.3 The absence of cultural material within two enclosure/drainage ditches of Middle or late Saxon date investigated at the Bray's Lane site led the excavator to consider that associated settlement was located some distance away (Hunter 1991a, 5). At the White Hart site the Late Saxon period was represented only by a few residual sherds, suggestive of agricultural manuring (Jones 1994, 135). The subject area probably lay within a field system supporting one of the known, or hitherto unrecorded, settlement centres at this time, as it had probably done so during the Iron Age, Romano-British and early Saxon periods.

2.4 Medieval (12th to 14th century)

2.4.1 Settlement at Ely remained rural in character up to and beyond the conquest (Rumble 1981, 5-57). The construction of the cathedral and creation of the bishopric in 1109, however, served as catalysts for the development of the medieval town. Improvements in Fenland communications, principally the canalisation of the Great Ouse in the (?) 12th century (Fowler 1934, 23) which linked the town to the seaport at Lynn, facilitated Ely's development as an important centre for trade and contact.

2.4.2 The market area to the north of the cathedral formed one area of urban development during the Middle Ages with another concentration of activity behind the hithes on the Great Ouse. It is likely that this large market place (defined by Market Street to the north and the High street to the south, of which the present Market Place formed the east end) was laid out some time in the 12th century or early 13th century (Pugh 1953, 36). 'Neuenham' (Newnham - first recorded in 1195 though older in origin), straddling the Prickwillow Road to the north of the subject area, became an episcopal holding containing a mill (Owen 1993, 12-15). The Bishop also held a vineyard to the east of the market place, located in the vicinity of the present day lane named the 'Vineyards' (*cf* Robinson 1993, *Figure 9*) for an interpretation of the layout of the medieval town).

2.4.3 Ecclesiastical records relating to the 13th and 14th centuries (Owen pers. comm.) mention messuages at Newnham, and in the 'broad lane to Newnham' (the present day Newnham Street, bordering the subject area). Of particular note is the reference to two dwellings with large gates on the north/west side of Newnham Street in the demesne survey of the Bishopric of 1222 (Owen 1993, 20) and of a messuage with 'great gates' (on the south/east side of Newnham Street) in a rental of 1251 (EDR D2/6/2/1). A walled tenement butting on Newnham Street is also noted at this time (BL Egerton MS 3047, f.150v). The specific mention of a 'stone house next to the street of Newnham' in the mid 13th century (EDC 1/A/2 - Almoner's Cartulary) must indicate that the majority of dwellings in this area were timber-framed at this date. Bray's manor (discussed further below) lay on or near Bray's Lane (Chapman 1907, 146).

2.4.4 Whilst initial development of the market area seems to have been concentrated along its southern edge and centre (Owen 1993, 12; Pugh 1953, 36) it is

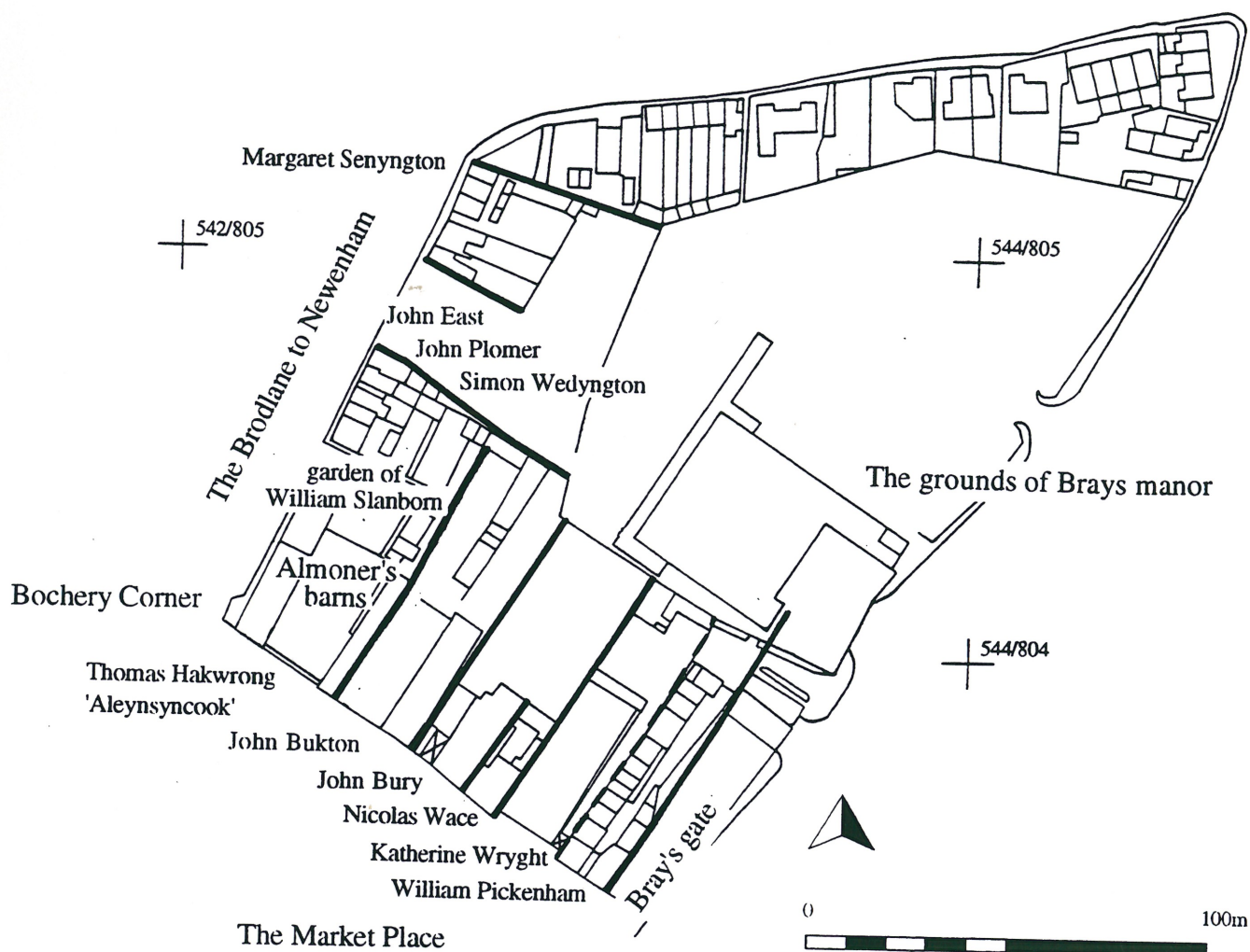
reasonable to assume that the development of its northern periphery was not long in coming. This assumption is supported by the archaeological evidence revealed at the White Hart.

- 2.4.5** Excavations here determined that a period of cultivation, terminating in the 12th or 13th century, was succeeded by the creation of ditched boundaries on a north to south alignment (that is laid out from the Market Place), and the erection (and eventual dismantling) of a timber-frame building (Jones 1994, 118-121). Similar activity might have occurred anywhere along the Newnham Street and Market Place street fronts at this time and reflects the extra tenements required by a settlement whose population had grown threefold since 1086 (Pugh 1953, 37).
- 2.4.6** The Bray's Lane excavation provides a broadly contemporary picture of the interior of the subject area as being divided into small fields. The earliest ditched boundaries, dated by pottery to the 11th or 12th century, were orientated north-east to south-west and contained material implying proximity to dwellings towards the north/south portion of Newnham Street. Further ditched boundaries were dated to the 13th century. A well, found towards the northern boundary of the subject area, hints at occupation on the east/west portion of Newnham Street at this date. Ditched boundaries on a north to south alignment at the southern end of the site appear to conform to the rear boundaries of Market Place properties. They contained dark fills suggestive of dumped organic domestic or industrial refuse (Hunter 1991a, 5-9; pers. comm.).
- 2.4.7** The evidence for 11th or 12th century property boundaries might indicate that Newnham Street has earlier origins than the Market Place, perhaps as a thoroughfare from the abbey precinct to the road leading towards the grange and hithe at 'Turbutsey'. Alternatively this could simply be a reflection of the current lack of precision with which local post-conquest pottery can be dated (Jones 1994, 132; Hall 1992).

2.5 Later Medieval (14th to 16th century)

- 2.5.1** A comprehensive survey was made of Ely in 1417 to clarify the ownership of fees belonging to the Bishop and Prior. The survey visited each property, street by street, recording the name of the occupiers and sometimes their trade (BL Cotton Vespasian A XIX ff.61-102, arbitration of 1417). The following discussion of that part of the document relevant to the subject area is based on a transcription supplied by Dorothy Owen (Owen pers. comm.).
- 2.5.2** Newnham Street is defined as extending from its opening onto the market place ('Bochery Corner' - named from the butcher's shambles in the market place) as far as the Bishop's old mill on the road to 'Turbutsey' (Prickwillow Road). This mill may have been either of the two depicted on Speed's map (*Figure 5*) or the one which surmounted a mound still visible in the cemetery off Prickwillow Road. Thirteen tenements are recorded on the south/east side of this street. Twenty-three tenements are recorded on its north/west side.

- 2.5.3 The outer gates of Bray's fronted onto the market place. Its grounds lay beyond the street front, bounded by the Bishop's vineyard to the east, extending into the subject area to the west. 'Brayes Lane', noted in 1561 (Reaney 1943, 215) is probably the formalization of a track which developed from this gateway. A 13th century deed establishes rights of access through the 'great gates' for a beneficiary of the Bray family (Chapman 1907, 145) and probably initiates its eventual development as a public right of way.
- 2.5.4 Eighteen tenements are listed on the north side of the market place. They fall within an area which extends from the gate to the Bishop's vineyard (approximated by the present day lane 'The Vineyards'?) to a house occupied by Thomas Hakewrong (on the corner of Market Street and Newnham Street?). Of these, six are given with dimensions in 'perches' and 'rods' (elsewhere in the survey feet and inches are also mentioned). Whilst the exact meaning and dimensions of the 'Ely perch and rod' are not known, it seems apparent that both are being used as a unit of length rather than area, and that the rod expresses a sub-division of the perch (perhaps something like 1/4 or 1/6). Further, it is implied that only those (six) tenements which lie on the street front have been given dimensions, the remainder probably lie to the rear, with access from the street front via narrow lanes.
- 2.5.5 The medieval perch is known to have varied significantly from place to place and consequently there is no guarantee that the following interpretation of its use here is entirely correct. Taking the perch as a standard 5.5 yards, however, and the rod at approximately 1 yard, some of the tenement widths conform very closely to existing property boundaries (notably those formed by historic buildings on the Market Place), boundaries shown on a nineteenth century map (*Figure 6*) and in three cases pre-15th century boundaries located by excavation (see Jones 1994, Fig. 4; Hunter 1991a; unpublished site plan). An interpretation of tenement locations, property boundaries and of the configuration of this area generally in the early 15th century is presented in *Figure 3* (only the names of those tenants holding street front properties are given). It indicates a very well-developed portion of the medieval town.
- 2.5.6 Excavated evidence at the White Hart site pointed to a return to cultivation, probably gardening, towards the rear of this Market Place property in the 14th century (Jones 1994, 121). At the Bray's Lane site the corresponding establishment of a garden or orchard environment, complete re-organisation of the field layout and evidence for building demolition was attributed to a change of ownership; an interpretation suggested by documentary evidence (Hunter 1991a, 11). Bray's manor passed into ecclesiastical hands, probably merging with another Ely manor, during the 14th century (Pugh 1953,48).
- 2.5.7 Closer to the Market Place street front on the White Hart site, the gardening phase was curtailed by the construction of a cluster of small clay-lined (? bread) ovens (Jones 1994, 122). It is to be expected that many of the rear yards of properties bordering the Market Place were given over to the craft and industrial activities at this time. Two of the tenement holders (one Newnham Street, one on the



*Figure 3 15th century property boundaries
 (only street-front tenement holders are shown. No interpretation has been
 given for Newnham Street to the north of the subject area)*

Market Place) mentioned in the 1417 survey are identified as butchers. It might also be expected that such persons as the glazier, carpenter, sauce-maker, dyer, quilter, plumber mentioned in an earlier survey (Pugh 1953, 37) also plied their trades around the market area.

2.5.8 At least two buildings bordering the subject area contain fabric dating to the later medieval period. The White Hart (Listed Grade II) contains evidence of its origin as a 15th century, two storey jettied building (HBR 07562, RCMHE 1991). Adjacent to this building, No. 1 Market Place (Listed Grade II) incorporates a late 13th or early 14th century common rafter (?) crown post roof (Addition to schedule of Listed buildings, Cambridgeshire County Council Conservation Group, 1991).

2.5.9 The subject area can be zoned in terms of its medieval character (*Figure 4*). The boundaries given are not of course absolute, nor do they suggest that the whole of a zone was given over to its assigned activities at one time. They nevertheless help to express the character of the medieval archaeological evidence likely to be encountered across the subject area.

2.6 Post-Medieval (16th to 18th century)

2.6.1 The gardening phase at the rear of the White Hart in the later Middle Ages was curtailed by the plot's use as a stone mason's yard during the 16th century. Excavations revealed an abundance of stone debris, rubbish pits and one, or possibly two, mortar mixing pits (Jones 1994, 121-124). This evidence for new development, provides an interesting foil to the image of a town which seems to have lost some of its medieval zeal, and one which was suffering the demolition of some of its monastic buildings (Pugh 1953, 40).

2.6.2 The best portrait of the character of the subject area in the post-medieval period is provided by John Speed's map of the city of c 1610 (*Figure 5*). Bray's Lane is partially developed (with a cluster of houses near its market place opening) whilst the Market Place street front and Newnham Street are continuously developed; the latter as far as its junction with Bray's Lane. The interior of the subject area is shown as being divided into eight enclosed fields, four of which appear to be orchards. Two buildings lie on a track traversing the area.

2.6.3 Whilst some degree of stylisation in the mapping of the city has occurred (the houses on built up streets are uniform and are shown without rear plots) care has been taken to distinguish between orchards, formal gardens and strip fields throughout the city and there are no good grounds to doubt the spirit of the depiction of the subject area.

2.6.4 Excavation has revealed that the last phase of substantial below-ground disturbance on the Bray's Lane site was represented by large (perhaps over 20m in length and c 3m in width) rapidly back-filled quarry pits. These, dug to extract sand, were aligned north to south on earlier property boundaries (Hunter 1991a, 13) and were confined to the southern portion of the Bray's Lane site.



Figure 4 Medieval activity zones

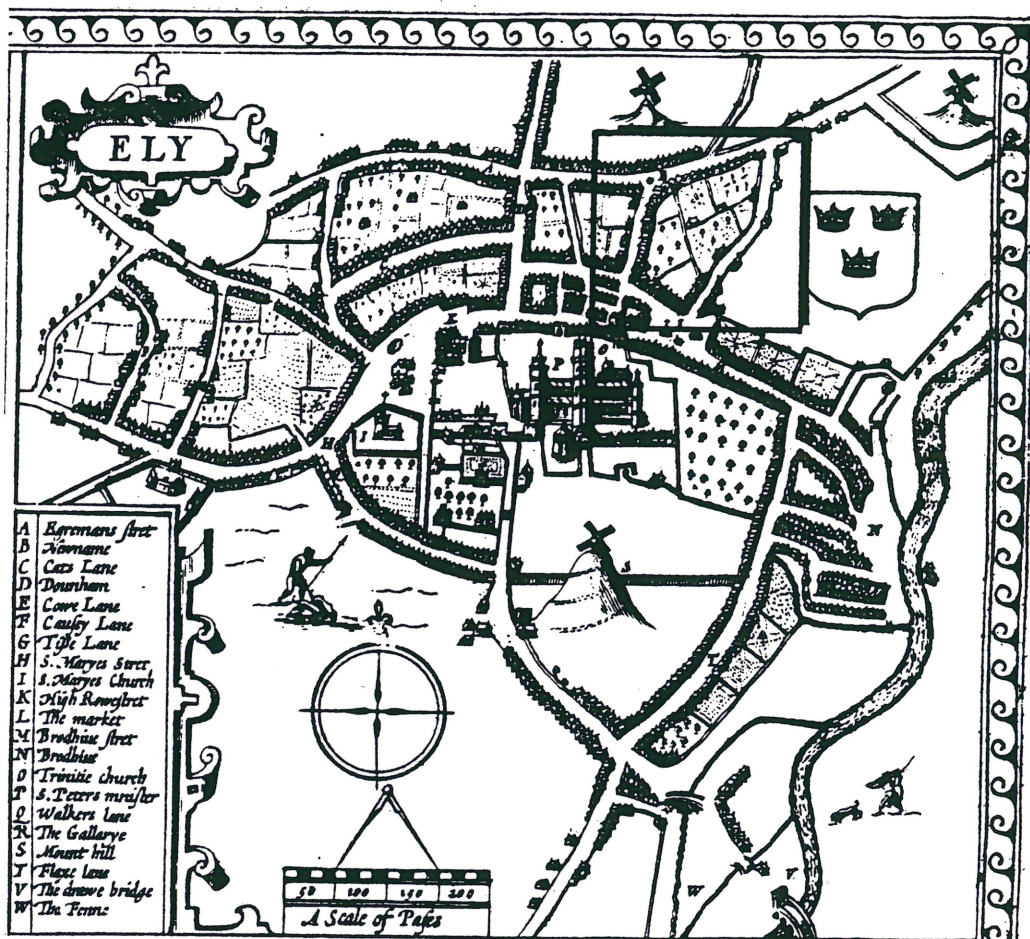


Figure 5 John Speed's map of the City of Ely c 1610 (the subject area is framed)

2.6.5 The medieval buildings of the street front continued to be altered throughout the post-medieval period, as witnessed by the fabric of No.1 and the White Hart. The latter acquired brick outbuildings during its conversion to a coaching Inn, of which a survivor is the recently surveyed brick barn (Fearne 1994). The Club Inn (HBR 07564) and No. 5 Market Place (Pugh 1953, 31) also contain fabric from this period.

2.7 Modern

2.7.1 Improving communications from the 18th century onwards and the construction of the railways during the 19th century, restored Ely's role as a market centre (Pugh 1953, 42-47); a role which had declined due to the dispersal of monastic estates, the 17th drainage campaigns and resultant loss of many of the traditional fen resources.

2.7.2 The Bidwell map of Ely (Cambridgeshire County Record Office) shows the subject area as it was in 1851 (Figure 6). The north-east portion of the area, now occupied by Waitrose and car park, was a walled cattle market with a single small



Figure 6 An extract from Bidwell's map, 1851

brick building. The rear plots of the street front properties have part brick gip sheds and stables clustered against their boundaries. With the exception of an access road leading from Newnham Street into the subject area from the west, all surfaces on the interior of the subject area appear to have been unmetalled.

2.7.3 The 1888 Ordnance Survey map (Cambridgeshire County Record Office, xxxvi.10) depicts an orchard to the north of the Cattle Market (now the Waitrose car park). There are gardens on the corner of Newnham and Market streets and behind the street-front properties in the north-west corner of the subject area. To the rear of the White Hart the bowling green - 'a favourite place of resort in the season' - (Clements 1868, 51-52) is shown.

2.7.4 The construction of a pig market in the north-west corner of the subject area (at the turn of the century) and Needham Crescent during the inter-war years, mark the end of this rural enclave (*Figure 7*).

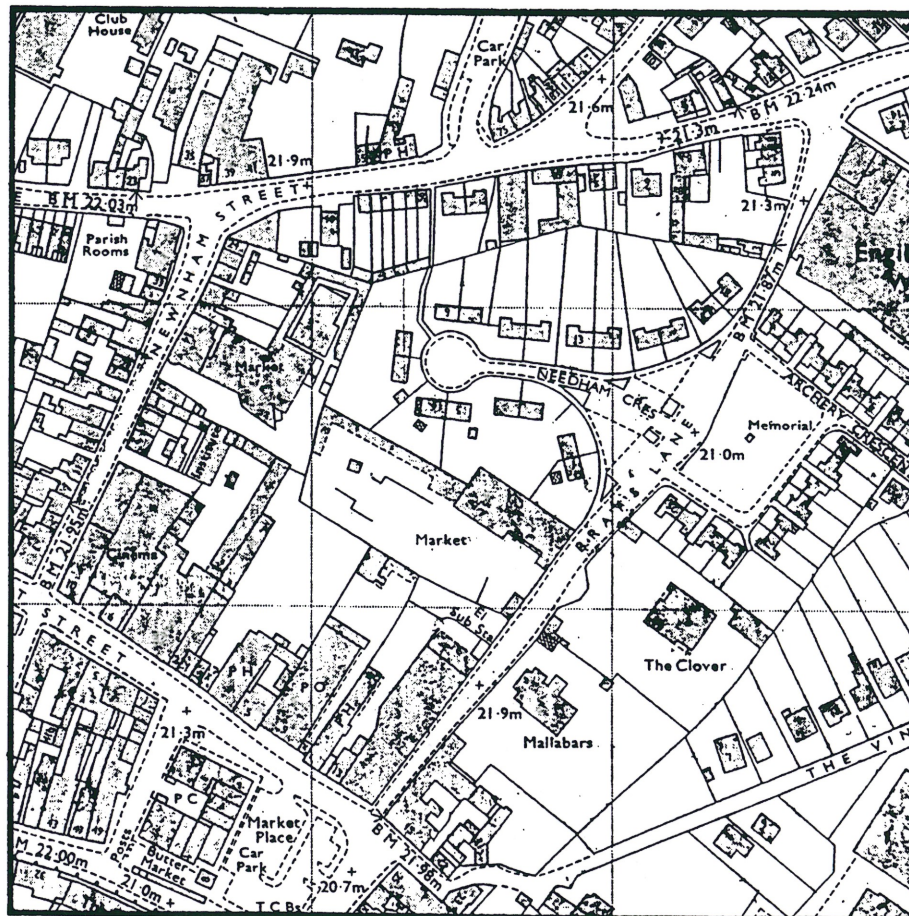


Figure 7 The subject area prior to the Market Street and Waitrose developments

2.7.5 The cattle market, Needham Crescent and the pig market have now been demolished. Recent developments have included the construction of the Waitrose

supermarket, re-development at the White Hart, the Club Inn, and the demolition of the 'Rex' cinema (and its replacement by Boots) at the south-west corner of the subject area. Most of the subject area is now covered by hard-standing (*Figure 10*).

- 2.7.6 The city remains a commercial centre for the local area, a role which the Local Authority is keen to promote (East Cambridgeshire District Council 1988, 2), and is a developing centre for tourism and leisure. The decline in agricultural and ancillary industry is being offset by these activities and by the introduction of light and high-technology industries.

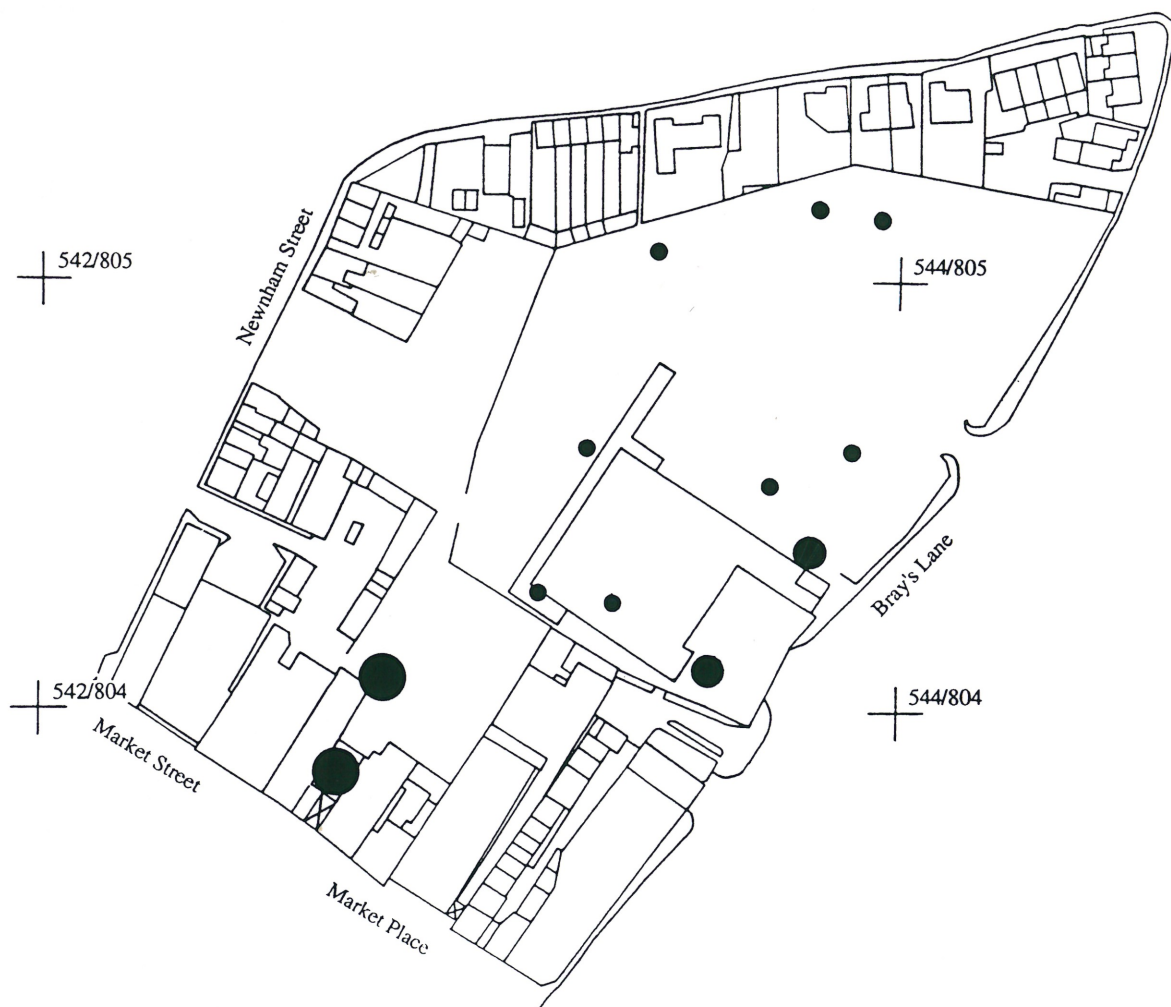
3 THE SURVIVAL AND PHYSICAL CHARACTER OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL DEPOSITS

- 3.1 Having addressed the range of activity known to have (and likely to have), occurred across the subject area since prehistoric times, it remains to discuss the physical character of the hitherto encountered evidence and thus to anticipate the characteristics of archaeological deposits elsewhere within the subject area.

3.2 Deposit Depth

- 3.2.1 The interior of the subject area has been given over to cultivation, orchards and gardens for a considerable period of time. Bounded by structures, this has resulted in the accumulation of agricultural deposits, rather than their dispersal (which would be expected on other, less enclosed, areas of cultivated highland).
- 3.2.2 The periphery of the subject area to the south (and probably to a lesser extent to the west and north) has been subjected to the deposit accretions, caused by continuous dumping, building and re-building, characteristic of historic urban environments (*cf* Carver 1989, *passim*).
- 3.2.3 The Waitrose site yielded four main horizons (which were not necessarily common to all excavation trenches). These were (after French 1991):
- i) a topsoil 'A' horizon (post-medieval/modern) composed of an homogeneous dark greyish-brown silty-clay loam up to 60 cm thick;
 - ii) a 'B' horizon (medieval/post-medieval) composed of an homogeneous brown sandy-silt loam (a possible former ploughsoil exhibiting traces of broad ridge and furrow) up to 55 cm thick;
 - iii) a buried soil (prehistoric) composed of an homogeneous orangey-brown to greyish-brown loamy sand up to 30 cm thick and cut by plough marks;

- iv) an orangey-brown sand subsoil (Lower Greensand - natural).
- 3.2.4** Excluding modern hard-core surfaces, total deposit depth varied between 65 and 135 cm.
- 3.2.5** The White Hart site revealed the following horizons (after Jones & Ratkai 1992):
- i) a post-medieval cobble yard surface and levelling-up soil of up to 50 cm thick;
 - ii) gravel and crushed stone (early post-medieval stone working debris) up to 35 cm thick;
 - iii) a mid-brown clay-silt (late medieval) gardening soil up to 50 cm thick;
 - iv) a homogeneous buff-orange silt-sand (12th-13th century) cultivation soil up to 30 cm thick;
 - v) sand with occasional weathered fragments of sandstone (Lower Greensand - natural).
- 3.2.6** Total deposit depth (excluding modern tarmac surface) was c 165 cm.
- 3.2.7** A programme of augering was not undertaken as part of the present study due to the restrictive nature of current ground cover and present use of the area (*cf* *Figure 10*). No controlled geotechnical information, (other than that acquired through archaeological investigation and described above) was available for the subject area. It is recommended that engineers' boreholes or test pits dug in advance of development should be monitored by archaeologists, in order to chart the stratigraphic character of the hitherto unexplored regions of the subject area.
- 3.2.8** Observation during the demolition of the 'Rex' cinema at the south-west corner of the subject area could not establish the deposit depth here (Holton-Krayenbuhl pers. comm.), although the survival of post-medieval structures (in turn suggesting good medieval deposit survival in this area) was noted. The recovery of medieval pottery from deposits one metre below street level at the south-east corner of the subject area (SMR 01766; *Figure 2*), although without stratigraphic context, does seem to re-iterate the anticipated deposit depth in this area.
- 3.2.9** A deposit depth map, which may be used to extrapolate deposit depth for those hitherto unexplored regions of the subject area, is given on *Figure 8*.



Deposit Depth Excluding Modern Surfaces

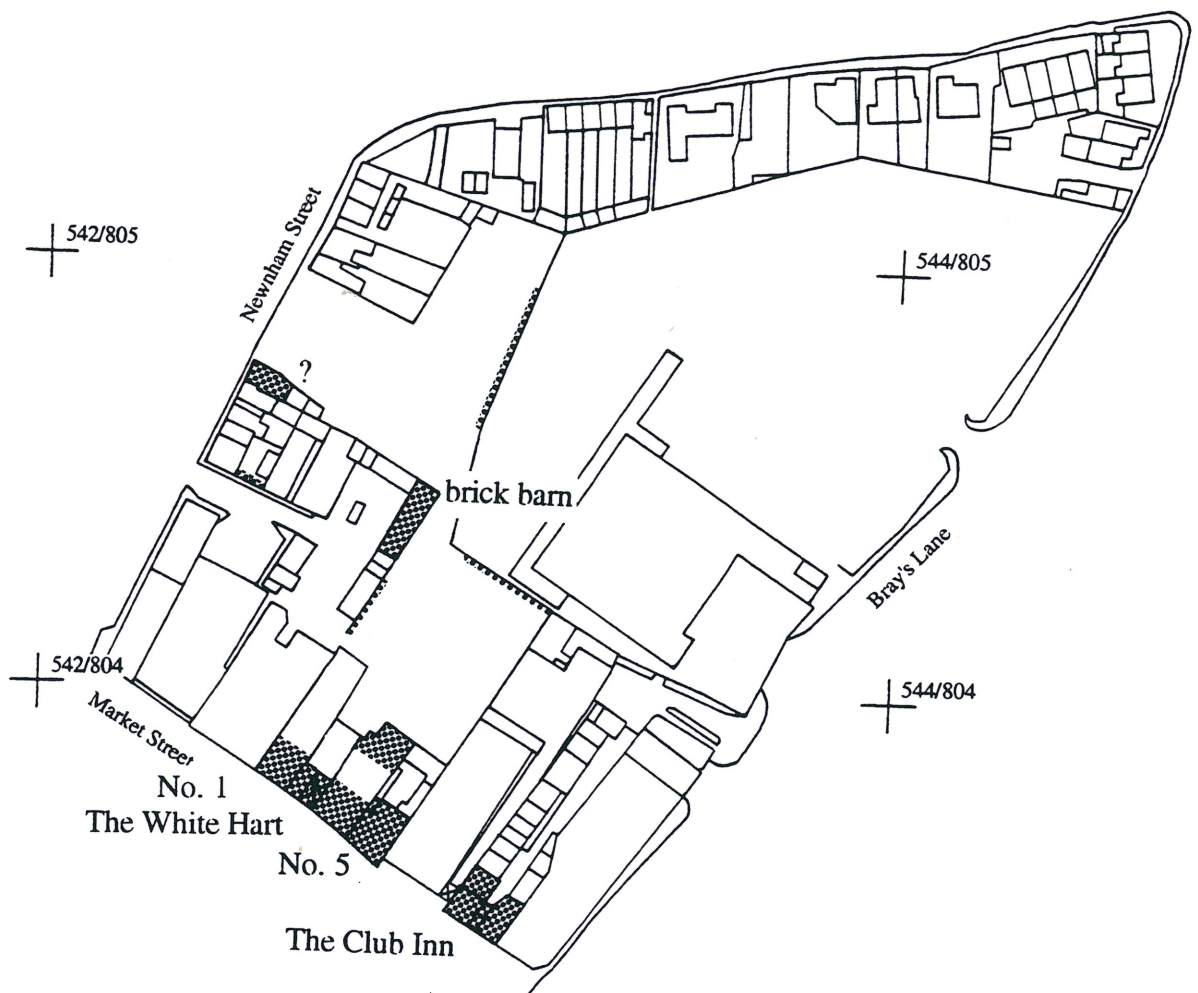
- 0.5 - 1.0m
- 1.0m - 1.5m
- 1.5m - 2m



Figure 8 Depth of archaeological deposits

3.3 State of Preservation

- 3.3.1 The historic cultivation of the site in aiding deposit formation has also, paradoxically, resulted in the truncation of upstanding features. It is expected that within the interior of the subject area few medieval (and earlier) upstanding features or intact surfaces will have survived.
- 3.3.2 The presence of a buried soil and remains as vulnerable as prehistoric plough marks, revealed in two small pockets on the Bray's Lane site, however, was an accident of preservation which could have been repeated anywhere across the interior of the subject area.
- 3.3.3 Excavation has shown that negative features (pits, ditches, gullies) survive with varying degrees of truncation. The survival of medieval timber-frame building footprints (in the form of beam slots) has been proved at the White Hart site, and on other heavily street fronts in the city (for example, Robinson 1994) and should be anticipated in the subject area.
- 3.3.4 The general stratigraphic pattern suggested by the two excavations is likely to prevail across the entire subject area: sparse (rural/urban) feature distribution on the interior of the subject area becoming denser (urban) towards its south, (and probably to a lesser extent) west and north edges.
- 3.3.5 The free-draining subsoil will have resulted in generally poor organic preservation across the subject area. Charred plant remains (and a few 'uncharred' remains - possible contaminants) were found to survive at the White Hart site. These, together with faunal remains such as the small bones and fish scales, also recovered at the White Hart site (Jones 1994, 133), and mollusc shells will have to form the basis for any environmental and economic analysis of the area. Nevertheless, there remains a possibility of encountering better organic survival (of both macro and micro-botanical remains) in less well drained or otherwise anaerobic pockets, such as at the bottom of deep features (French pers. comm.). Hazelnut shells were noted in a medieval well at the Bray's Lane site (Hunter pers. comm.)
- 3.3.6 The recent discovery of medieval fabric within No. 1 Market Place demonstrates the ability of apparently modern or post-medieval buildings to disguise their earlier origins. The survival of hitherto unknown timber frame structures (or indeed early brick or stone structures) encased in later brick buildings, is highly likely within the central area of the city. A Newnham Street property and the brick barn to the rear of the White Hart (*Figure 9*) are to be demolished. Part of the Club Mews (attached to the Club Inn) and the Post Office, adjacent to No. 5 Market Place (Listed Grade II) are also to be demolished. This process may expose (and potentially damage) some of the fabric of the adjoining historic buildings. All of the above buildings would repay examination (at least) and analysis, if appropriate, prior to and during any structural alteration.





-  Standing building with medieval/early post medieval structure
-  Walls containing re-used medieval masonry



Figure 9 Historic structures

3.3.7 Several 19th century walls within the subject area, and the post-medieval barn contain re-used medieval masonry (*Figure 9*). This may have been quarried from buildings (perhaps monastic or manorial) on, or near to, the subject area and should be recovered and recorded during dismantling. Such work should be carried out in liaison with the Ely and District Archaeological Society who are carrying out a survey of historic walls within the city.

3.4 Modern Disturbance

3.4.1 The 'light' buildings erected in the backyards of the street front properties in post-medieval/early modern times (*Figures 5,6,7*) are unlikely to have caused substantial below-ground disturbance. Excavation has established that even the construction of Needham Crescent had little effect on the earlier archaeological deposits (Hunter pers. comm.) as they were sealed by thick cultivation/garden soils. The excavation of post-medieval quarry pits (paragraph 2.6.4) resulted in significant disturbance to earlier archaeological features. They were revealed in the five most southerly excavation trenches at the Bray's Lane site, but do not appear to extend further to the north. Their full extent to the south and west is unknown; clearly their continuation in these directions has some bearing on the archaeological potential of the immediate area.

3.4.2 The construction of the Waitrose supermarket and car park led to extensive disturbance to archaeological remains. Ground disturbance also took place during the recent construction of the tarmac area behind the Market Place properties (Walker pers. comm.). The effect of this, and of the construction of (for example) the pig market's concrete surfaces, on the archaeological potential of the area cannot be accurately determined. Given the deposit depth in the subject area, however, such development is likely to have been superficial; with disturbance confined to the uppermost (and therefore least significant) deposits (paragraphs 3.2.3 & 3.2.5).

3.4.3 The excavation of cellars destroys earlier archaeological deposits and, if extensive enough, may reduce the potential for surviving 'islands' of archaeology between cellar walls. A rapid cellar survey conducted for this report revealed a lack of known cellars under the Market Place properties (*Figure 10*). This contrasts with the frequency of known cellars under High Street properties (Robinson 1993; *Figure 10*) and suggests that one or two historic cellars beneath the newest shops (and perhaps the Post Office) have been in-filled and forgotten.

4 THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL IMPORTANCE OF THE SUBJECT AREA

4.1 The Neolithic/early Bronze Age plough marks and buried soil known to have survived in pockets on the Bray's Lane site are the earliest physical evidence for the cultivation of the Ely highland. Such remains, though generally rare across the region, are especially so on the highland. Their presence here is an accident

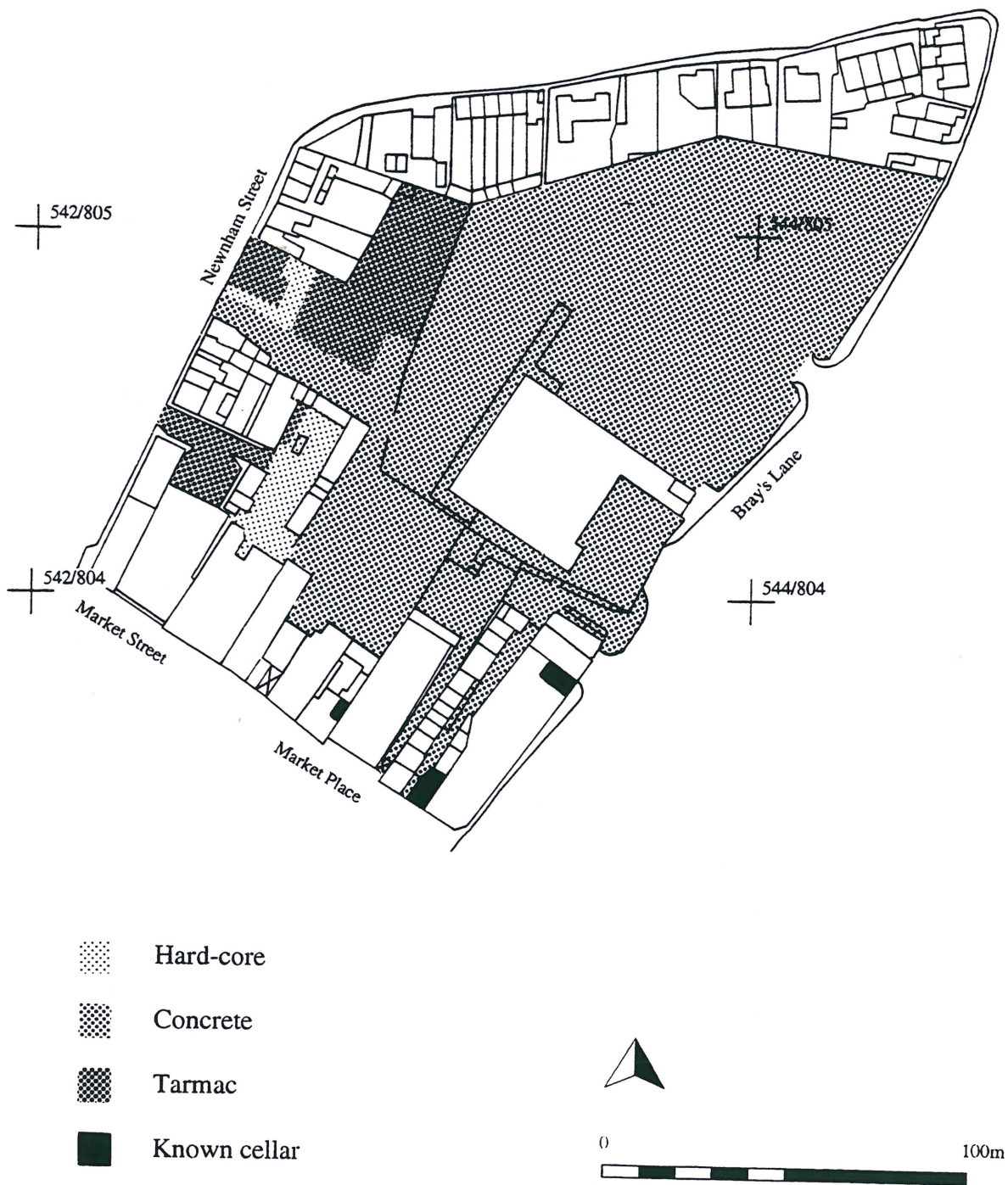
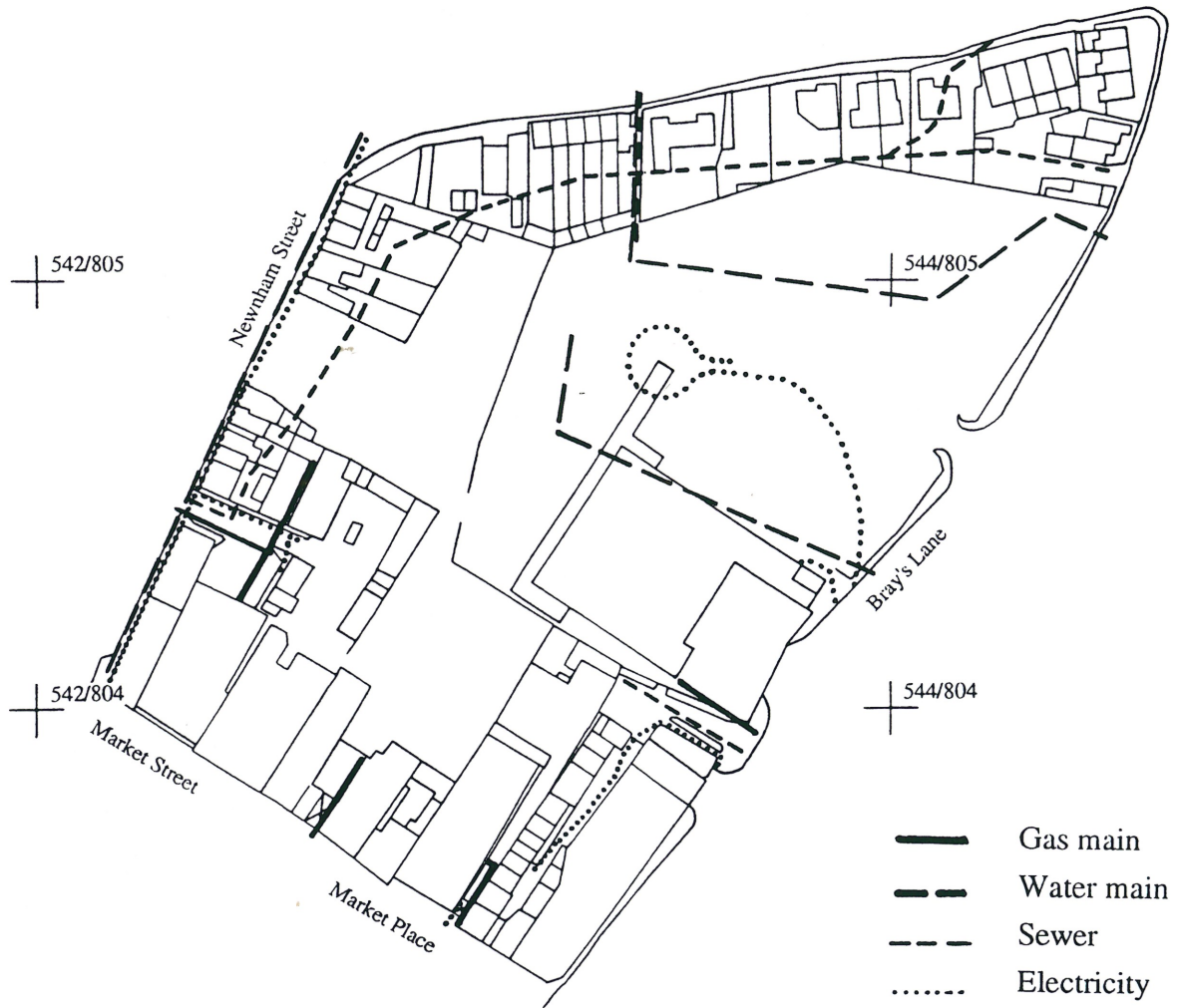


Figure 10 Present ground cover (and Market Place cellars)



This drawing is based upon information obtained from Anglia Water Services Ltd., Eastern Electricity & British Gas.

The positions of mains must be considered approximate. Small service pipes, private sewers and drains are not shown.

The relevant authorities must be contacted prior to commencement of groundworks.



Figure 11 Services

of preservation caused by the semi-urban depositional characteristics of the interior of the subject area.

- 4.2 The enormous potential for such remains to yield information regarding the character of prehistoric agriculture on the highland, and thus to provide a valuable opportunity for comparison with the lowland regimes already examined in the region, should be a major consideration for any conservation or investigative mitigation proposals. Investigative strategies should be geared towards the secure dating, micromorphological analysis and establishment of the full extent of such remains (French 1991).
- 4.3 The presence of Neolithic/early Bronze Age structures on the Bray's Lane site is, however, a reminder of the potential for encountering of other forms of prehistoric land use within the subject area. Their existence here raises parallel conservation and research issues to those of the agricultural remains (above). Few settlements of this period in the region are known through anything other than surface artefact scatters (Hall & Coles 1994, 65) and these tend to cluster on the fen edge. Only a handful of sites are known on the Ely highland and few of these are likely to have survived modern agriculture and development in a good state of preservation.
- 4.4 During the late Iron Age, Roman, Saxon and early medieval periods the clay soils of the highland could have been more ably cultivated than before. Nevertheless, the characteristics of the lighter soils on this part of the Ely highland would have been apparent to the farmers of these periods and this may have resulted in a specialist or more intensive exploitation of them. The subject area has been shown to contain field boundary/drainage ditches spanning these periods. Although limited by the generally poor survival of palaeoenvironmental indicators, such remains nevertheless offer the potential to support the analysis of one the most stable areas of the fen environment during these periods; the historic perception and exploitation of which bears comparison with the evidence for agricultural practices for these periods on the lower-lying land.
- 4.5 Well-stratified medieval urban deposits, such as those which may be expected within the subject area, are representative of the range of activity which has taken place in the area, and more importantly, capture the sequence of development and change which occurred at the heart of the medieval town.
- 4.6 The establishment of the large market area to the north of the cathedral and associated laying out of tenements on an apparently 'green field' site during the 12th or 13th century marks a deliberate shift of emphasis away from the old market to the west of the abbey and a concerted effort to establish a new commercial centre. The impetus for such a development may have been supplied by the newly-installed bishops who would have sought opportunities to exploit England's expanding market economy and boost the revenues from their holdings.

- 4.7 As such Ely, despite its earlier origins, bears comparison with those other newly created market-based towns and suburbs of the 12th and 13th centuries; many of which were similarly inspired by ecclesiastical landlords.
- 4.8 Bray's Lane was probably not established before the late medieval period. The Market Place and Newnham Street frontages were, however, established early on and were increasingly developed throughout the medieval period. The situation of the former properties (bordering the commercial centre of the town) suggests that many would have comprised traders' quarters and incorporated shop fronts. Many of the commercial and industrial activities, such as those represented by the ovens towards the rear of the White Hart and those named in medieval surveys, are likely to be represented by structures and deposits to the rear of other Market Place properties.
- 4.9 The interior of the subject area, which remained undeveloped and given over to gardens and orchards until this century, well reflects the rural character of many English medieval towns, and in particular the lack of urban growth at Ely during the post-medieval period.
- 4.10 A framework for the future investigation of this area of the medieval town may be partly constructed from questions arising from the results of the two excavations carried out within the subject area and with reference to the documentary evidence examined thus far. Foremost amongst these are questions as to the structure and degree of medieval planning behind the development of this part of the town (incorporating the market area, vineyards and suburb of Newnham). Was it a piece of authoritarian town planning laid out as a unit, or was its establishment, (albeit under the episcopal wing) more 'organic'? Examination of the uniformity and contemporaneity of the original tenement plots (some boundaries of which have already been exposed) would establish this.
- 4.11 Ely, as well as being a political and religious centre, was also a pivotal market centre in the medieval Fenland economy. The subject area, close to the commercial centre of the town, will contain important information regarding the character of its Fenland hinterland, and the relationships of this hinterland with the wider medieval world.
- 4.12 The archaeological deposits of the subject area hold the potential to elucidate the much needed local medieval pottery chronologies (Hall 1992, 11-12). Building on Stephani Ratkai's work (Jones 1994) and on the assemblages generated by other recent investigations in Ely, the parochial character of pottery here - an apparent anomaly given the medieval town's known exotic imports and widespread trading links (Pugh 1953, 39-40) should be examined further.
- 4.13 Examination of the dietary aspects of the tenement holders' refuse in this area would facilitate the analyses of consumption patterns stemming from the surrounding Fenland resources, and their effect upon the presence of imported foodstuffs. In combination with the documentary evidence, and in the light of investigations at King's Lynn, Lincoln, York and Norwich (Ijzereef 1989, 41-53;

O'Connor 1989, 21-22) here we have the potential to approach questions such as the significance of fish in diet as a status indicator (Morris 1991), and the dietary differences between lay and ecclesiastical communities.

- 4.14 It is essential that any new investigations enhance, rather than merely, confirm information obtained from the previous excavations. The topics discussed above may only be approached through well-considered open area excavation, which for the medieval period must be carried out in combination with the study of documentary sources and analysis of adjacent standing buildings. Only in this way will any destructive investigation necessitated by new development, result in a meaningful informational return.

5 THE POTENTIAL IMPACT OF THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

- 5.1 The proposed development impacts upon a large and important portion of medieval town at Ely, and a significant part of a fen highland landscape known to have been a focus for settlement and agriculture from the late Neolithic/early Bronze Age.
- 5.2 Any excavations below c 20 cm on the south and west periphery of the subject area (broadly conforming to the outermost two zones on *Figure 4*) and c 50 cm on the interior of the subject area (broadly conforming to the innermost zone on *Figure 4*) has the potential to destroy significant archaeological deposits.
- 5.3 The excavation of service and foundation trenches and pile supports (which may be anticipated in such developments but which have not yet been defined), though resulting in more confined areas of destruction than wholesale ground level reduction, nevertheless poses a significant threat to archaeological remains of this area. This threat is at its greatest on the periphery of the subject area where, due to the anticipated high (urban) archaeological feature density, such intervention has a greater potential to destroy the stratigraphic relationships crucial to the interpretation of urban archaeological deposits.
- 5.4 Similarly, heavy contractors' plant has the potential to destroy (by rutting or compaction) loose urban archaeological deposits.
- 5.5 Units H, I and K (*Figure 12*) are sufficiently close to standing historic buildings to impact upon any surviving below-ground features (representative of parts of the building which have not survived as standing structures) which may be crucial to the determination of the building's development.
- 5.6 It can be seen from the interpretation of medieval activity given on *Figures 3* and *4*, that the bulk of the proposed development is concentrated on the 'rear-yard' areas which contain those remains (such as refuse filled pits, plot boundary ditches and buildings) most likely to elucidate the development and character of medieval settlement at this part of the town.

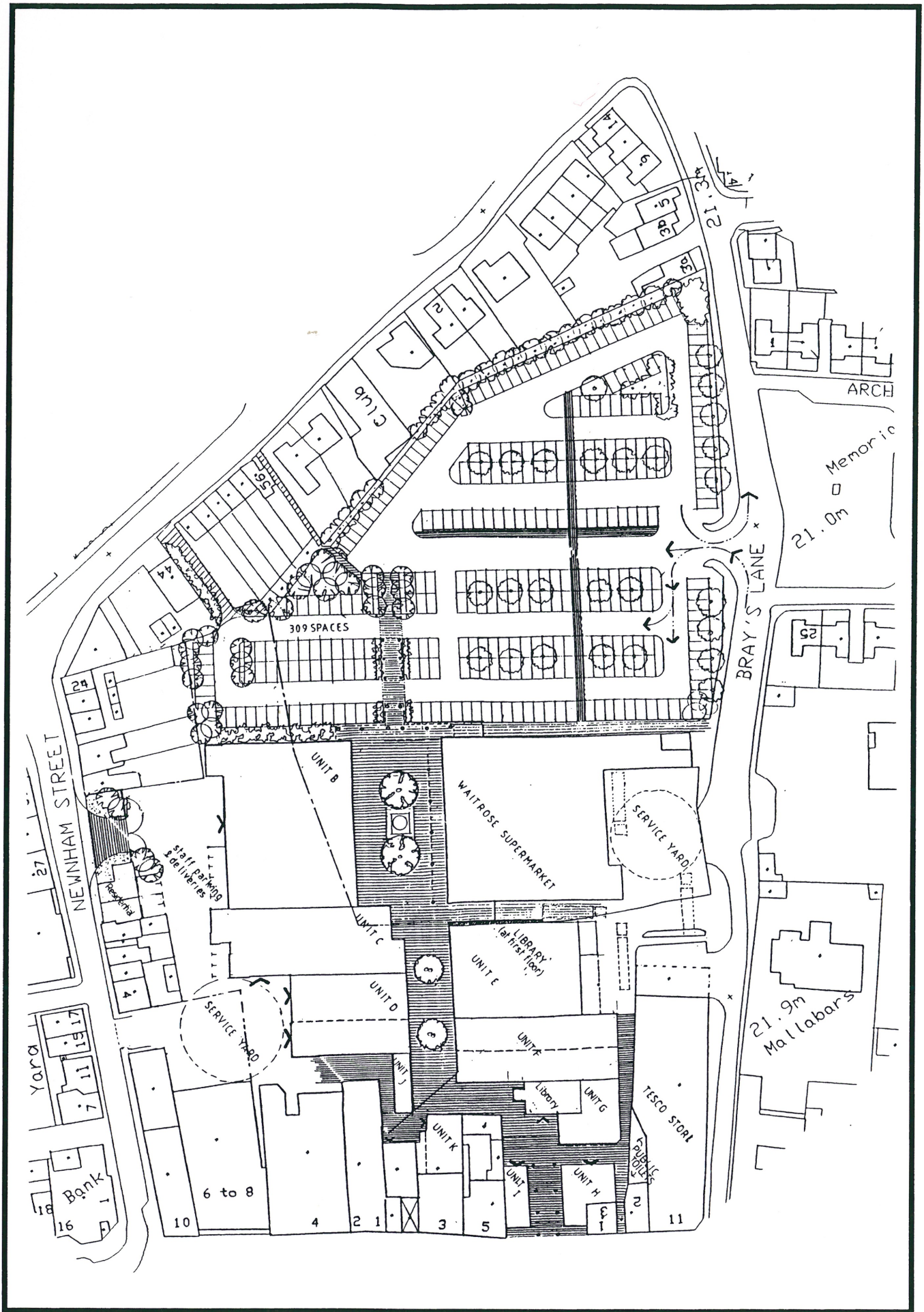


Figure 12 Proposed development (after Barber, Casanovas, Ruffles Ltd.)

6 CONCLUSION

- 6.1 Ely's attraction as a commercial and tourist centre is partly based on its historic origin as an important religious foundation, place of pilgrimage, military refuge and its role as a Fenland market centre. Some of this history is reflected in its urban topography and in the surviving urban fabric. The role of such physical manifestations of the past in establishing and helping to maintain a sense of place in a developing city is well appreciated (Crosby 1970, 107). The greater part of the evidence for the historic character of Ely, however, lies buried beneath its pavements. This evidence has not only an academic interest, but also has a vital part to play in the promotion of an historic identity for the city.
- 6.2 The success of archaeology in establishing an identity for historic towns is well illustrated at places such as York, where thorough investigative programmes have made a huge contribution to the civic and economic development of the city. East Cambridgeshire District Council have a stated aim to 'increase understanding of the historical development of Ely and its surroundings' and have 'recognised the 'value and importance of archaeological features within the Ely area' (East Cambridgeshire District Council 1988, Policy C20).
- 6.3 The subject area contains archaeological remains which pre-date the establishment of the City of Ely and important information regarding its inception and development as a town. Such information is not only of regional interest, reflecting the Fenland hinterland and its associations with the wider medieval world, but is of national importance, dating to a period when the seeds of English urbanism were sown.
- 6.4 The archaeological remains within the subject area should not be seen as an obstacle to development, but as an asset to the city. As such they must be preserved for posterity, or allowed to relate a narrative which will contribute to the appreciation and understanding of a unique historic city, and in turn serve as a basis for its continued development and prosperity.

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