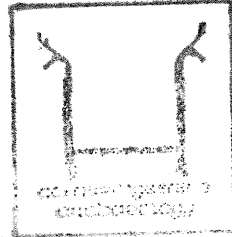
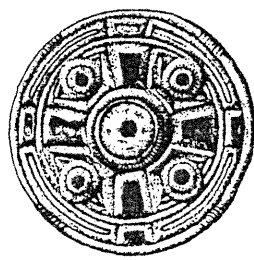


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**SAXON AND MEDIEVAL OCCUPATION AT ST MARY'S LODGE, ELY:
A RECORDING BRIEF**

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May 2000

Cambridgeshire County Council

Report No. 171

Commissioned by Ruddle Wilkinson (Architects)

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2000

Editor: Tim Malim, BA



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Summary

A watching brief between November 1993 and March 1994 during redevelopment of St Mary's Lodge, Ely, allowed some record to be made of archaeological deposits observed within foundation trenches for new building works. In spite of the fact that the working conditions and opportunities provided by the limited keyhole areas exposed were not ideal, important evidence for early medieval Ely was discovered. Of particular note was the first recorded occurrence of Ipswich ware (700-850AD) associated with a beam slot. This could tie in with a Middle Saxon monastic foundation, or secular settlement, known from documentary sources to have been situated in the vicinity. Pits with Late Saxon and medieval pottery and a quantity of animal bone were also found indicative of "rear of tenement" character, perhaps suggesting that the street front shifted northwards during the later medieval period. A sherd of Bronze Age pottery and some residual Roman pottery demonstrates activity for both periods within the area of St Mary's Lodge.

The present work shows that important stratigraphic and artefactual evidence is well preserved even within the immediate environs of a substantial building that has undergone considerable rebuilding on a number of occasions in the recent past. The archaeological response required by the planning condition was on this occasion, however, insufficient to record the archaeology to the standard expected of post-PPG16 times. It highlights the need for more robust intervention to be allowed for archaeologists on future development sites in the historic core of Ely.

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SAXON AND MEDIEVAL OCCUPATION AT ST MARY'S LODGE, ELY: A RECORDING BRIEF

1 INTRODUCTION

Between 30/11/93 and 3/3/94 Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Field Unit (AFU) carried out a recording brief during the redevelopment of St Mary's Lodge, St Mary's Street, Ely. The work was carried out to satisfy a planning condition prior to development.

2 SITE BACKGROUND

2.1 Planning Background

The development works entailed the refurbishment of St Mary's Lodge with the construction of a small extension, and the creation of an access road and a car parking area to the rear of the property.

Given the known archaeological background of the site (below), the possibility of there being medieval and earlier remains within the application area determined the requirements for a recording brief.

The work was carried out by the AFU on behalf of Ruddle Wilkinson Ltd (Architects) in accordance with a brief produced by Mr. Tony Hurley, Development Control Officer, Archaeology Section, Cambridgeshire County Council (September 1993).

2.2 Site Location

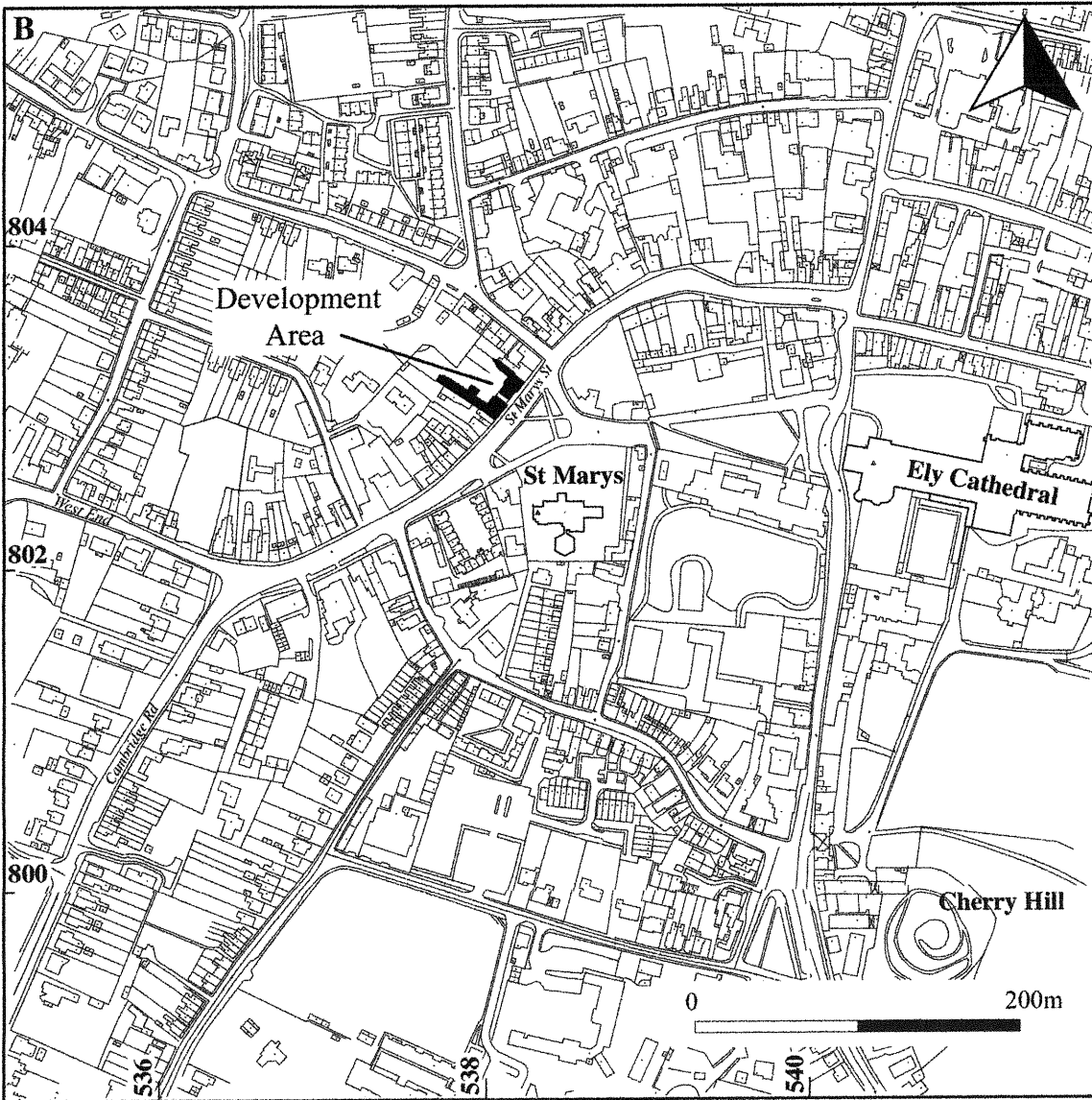
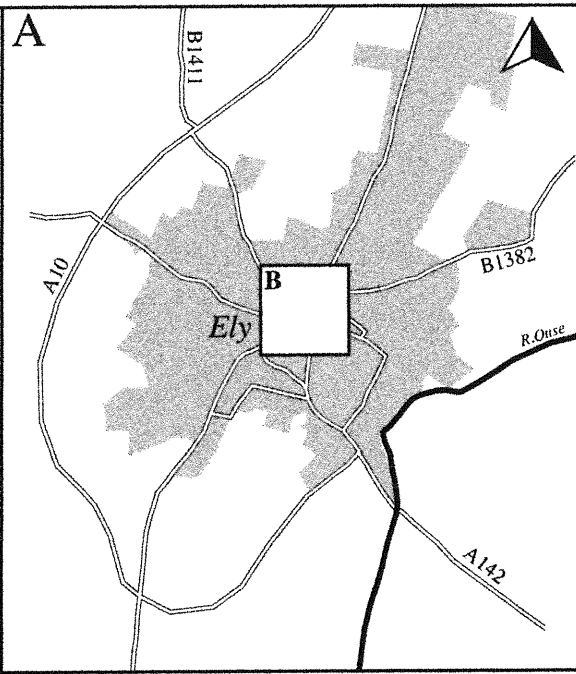
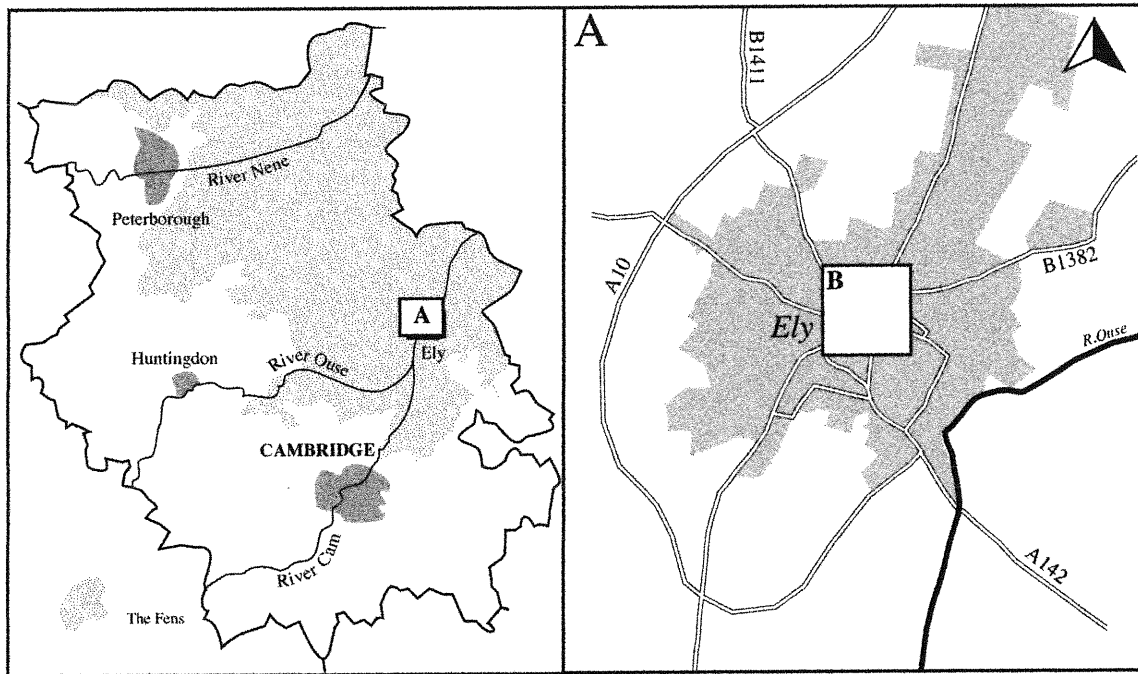
Centred at TL 5379/8032, the development site lies to the rear of St Mary's Lodge (18th-19th century), close to the western entrance to the Abbey Precinct and adjacent to the area that is thought to be the location of the Late Saxon 'village green' (Taylor 1975). The layout of the properties along the frontage of St Mary's Street is likely to be medieval in origin (**Fig.1**).

2.3 Geology

St Mary's Lodge lies on an outcrop of Cretaceous Lower Greensand at c. 20m OD. This deposit caps the Ely highland in the area occupied by the west (highest) portion of the city and is overlain by chalky boulder clay over the south-west portion of the city. The latter is partially overlain by glacial sands and gravels that extend along the Witchford road almost to Cherry Hill (BGS 1980, Sheet 173).

2.4 Historical and Archaeological Background

Prehistoric activity in the area, denoted by Bronze Age funerary remains and surface lithic scatters, for instance, shows a bias towards this northern portion of the Ely highland and fen edge (Hall & Coles 1994). The presence of cultivation marks recently revealed at Brays Lane, and attributed to the Neolithic Period (Hunter 1991), corroborates the evidence of a prehistoric preference for the malleable soils on this part of the highland.



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Figure 1 Site Location Map

The late Iron Age and Romano-British presence in the city, hinted at by residual finds, is as yet ill defined. It would be reasonable to assume that the character of the soil here has shaped the pattern of exploitation and that settlement remains should be eventually discovered within, or at the periphery of, the easily worked sand-derived soils.

The site lies within 100m of the projected line of a Roman road (the medieval 'Stanweye' and later Cambridge Road). More significantly, it may fall on the periphery of the 'village green' where a planned market could have been planted as part of the re-foundation of Etheldreda's abbey (c. 970) (Taylor 1975). It is reasonable to assume that some elements of the 'rural' late Saxon settlement of Ely, described by the Domesday survey (AD 1086) (Rumble 1981), would be partly based on this market layout. There is little other than the urban topography to add weight to this hypothesis. The odd reversed 'D' shape described by St Mary's Street, Silver Street and The Gallery, encompassing St Mary's Green and Palace Green, might easily instead reflect the bounds of an early monastic enclosure.

Despite the possible creation of a new market area to the north of the abbey precinct and what amounts to the development of a 12th-13th century 'new' town around this area and in the lower part of the city near to the river, St Mary's Street remained an important thoroughfare. It later became part of a well-developed suburb of the medieval town. In the early 15th century tenements lined St Mary's Street (between Downham Road and Lynn Road) and clustered the lanes leading from it towards 'le Westfen' and 'Dounham' (Little Downham). Those parallel lanes to its north, i.e. 'Catteslane' (Chapel Street) and 'Akermanstrete' (Egremont Street) (Calendar of Patent Rolls, Henry V, Mem. 5-1, 192-194), were also developed.

The 'village green' appears to have remained open except for the construction of a Chantry and quarters for its incumbents around the middle of the 13th century. By the early 17th century, however, encroachment was apparent in the north east portion of the 'green'. At this time formal gardens and strip cultivation are depicted behind the built-up St Mary's Street frontage (Speed Map of 1610).

Bidwell's highly detailed map of the city in 1851 shows a narrow building with a carriageway and two long wings on the site of the west wing of the later St Mary's Lodge. The east wing of this ancient looking building was demolished and the area appears as an open yard in 1885. What later became the east wing of the Lodge was in fact a building within a separate property, which was bounded by a wall (County Record Office 1888 Ordnance Survey Sheet XXVI.10).

3 OBJECTIVES

The development works represented an opportunity to test the hypothesis that the area under investigation was the nucleus of the late Saxon secular

settlement at Ely, and seed of the modern City. It also provided an opportunity to examine the nature of archaeological deposits in this poorly reconnoitred area of the city, and thus help in the mapping of archaeological deposit character.

4 METHODS (Fig. 2)

Monitoring visits were intermittently undertaken during the development works to inspect trenches being dug for foundation underpinning as well as for an entirely new set of foundations. Observation and recording were mostly based on the exposed sections of the contractor's machine-dug trenches (0.60m wide by 0.30m deep) (Trenches A, B, C, D, E, G, H and I). However, a small area (1.3m x 2m) on the street front was excavated in plan over a three hour period (Trench F).

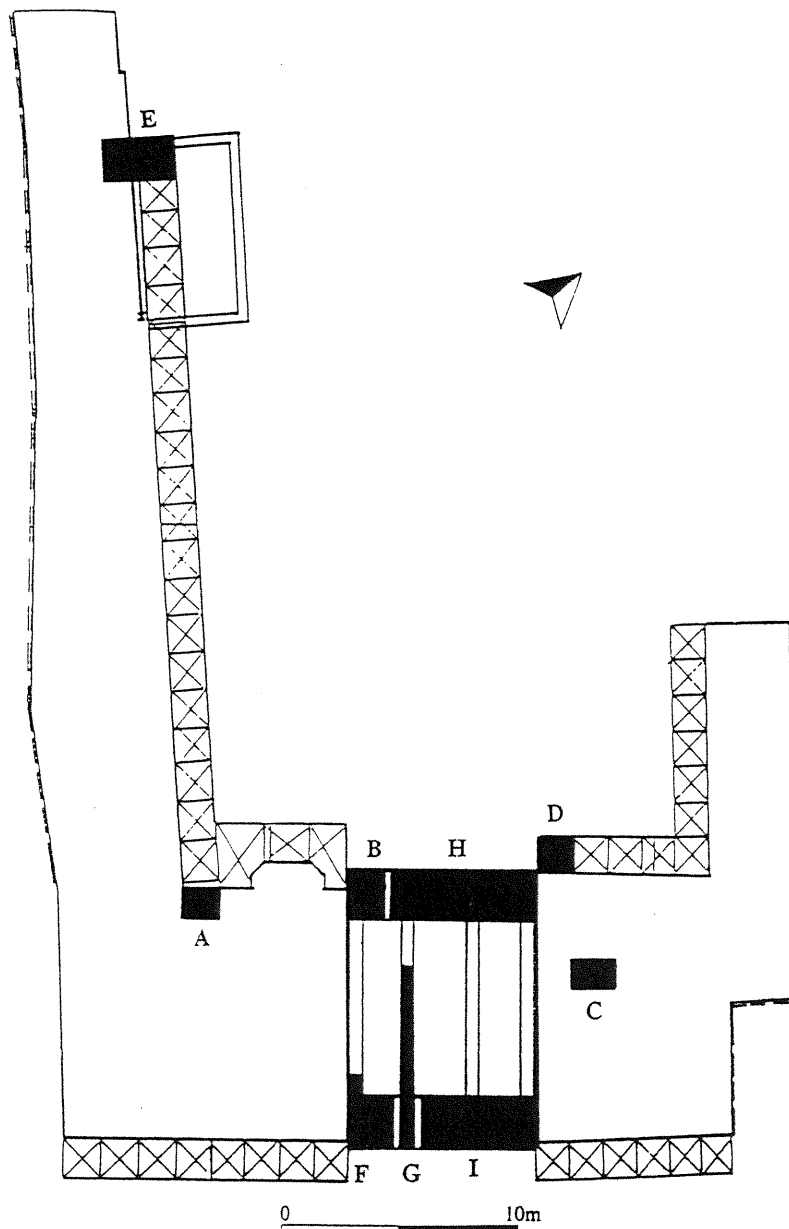


Fig. 2 Location of Monitored Trenches

5 RESULTS (Figs. 3-8)

The relative isolation of the intermittent observations (in both spatial and temporal terms) led to a fragmented view of the archaeological deposits across the site. Nevertheless, important information on deposit survival in the area was obtained. Therefore, a useful indication of the sequence of activity on the site may be tentatively reconstructed.

The underpinning trenches dug adjacent to, and underneath, the existing building's walls encountered their foundation trenches, and in most cases were not open long enough for the detailed investigation of the remaining portions of intact stratigraphy. The brick foundations for the previous link building between wings were encountered, but had only disturbed a small proportion of the available area. A basement beneath the west wing obviously had a more severe effect on archaeological deposit survival.

The Lower Greensand geology was encountered at a minimum depth of approximately 0.7m below ground level (or, at 19.20m OD) near the St Mary's Street front of the property and at 1.50m below ground level (or, at 18.77m OD) towards the rear of the property (Trench E).

At the latter location an occasional charcoal-flecked greyish brown silty clay some 45cm deep (8) was overlain by a grey brown silty clay (7) from which one small sherd of medieval pottery was recovered. Above this were mortar and rubble spreads, (5) and (6), undoubtedly associated with the construction of the 19th century west wing of the Lodge and/or the demolition of previously existing buildings (**Fig. 3**).

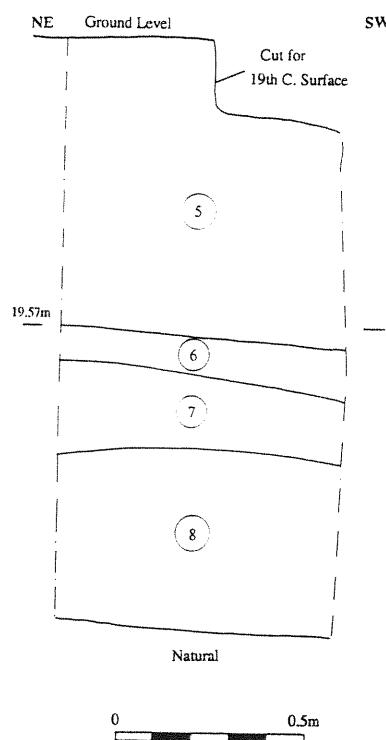


Fig. 3 Trench E, North West Facing Section

In contrast, the groundwork on the street front was much more extensive, facilitating a far better view of deposit character in this area. The earliest features encountered were clusters of pits (see Trenches B, F, H and I).

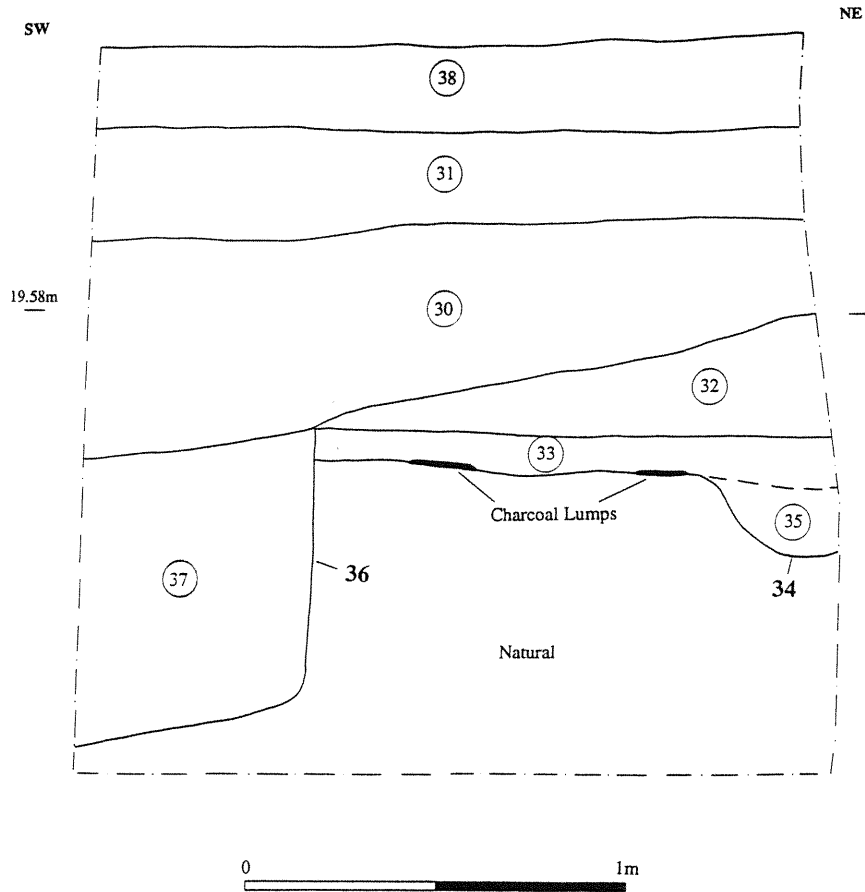


Fig. 4 Trench H, South East Facing Section

In Trench H (**Fig. 4**) pit [34] yielded no dateable artefacts. However, it was sealed by a soil (33) which was in turn cut by a large straight-sided pit [36] with pottery (local quartz sand-tempered coarsewares) dating to between 1150 and 1350. The development of soil and in-filling of small pit [34] suggests a considerable lapse of time between its excavation and that of pit [36] during the medieval period.

In Trench I (**Fig. 5**) pit [56] was sealed by (54), possibly the same as (33) (above), and contained only some very small, abraded sherds of Romano-British pottery, and a spall of brick or soft tile.

Pits [45], [46], [48], and [50] observed in the street front section were devoid of dateable artefacts but again may be ascribed a late medieval or early post-

medieval date on the basis of their location. A similar date may be assigned to a dump deposit sealing pit [36] in Trench H (above). The gravel and sand of pavement make-up to a depth of *c.* 60cm were observed in the street front section of Trench I, and brick rubble ballast for the modern access road was encountered to a similar depth between the building's wings.

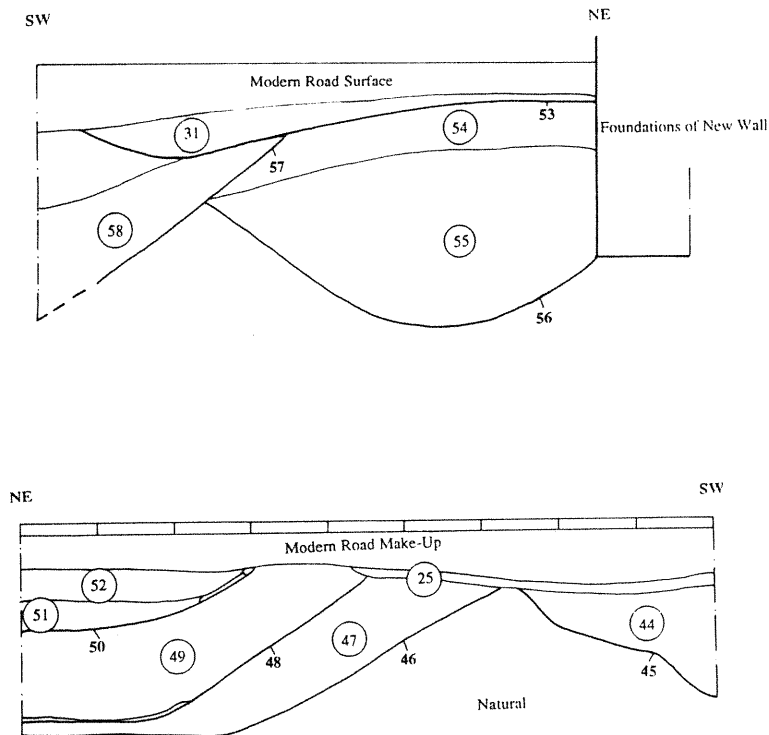
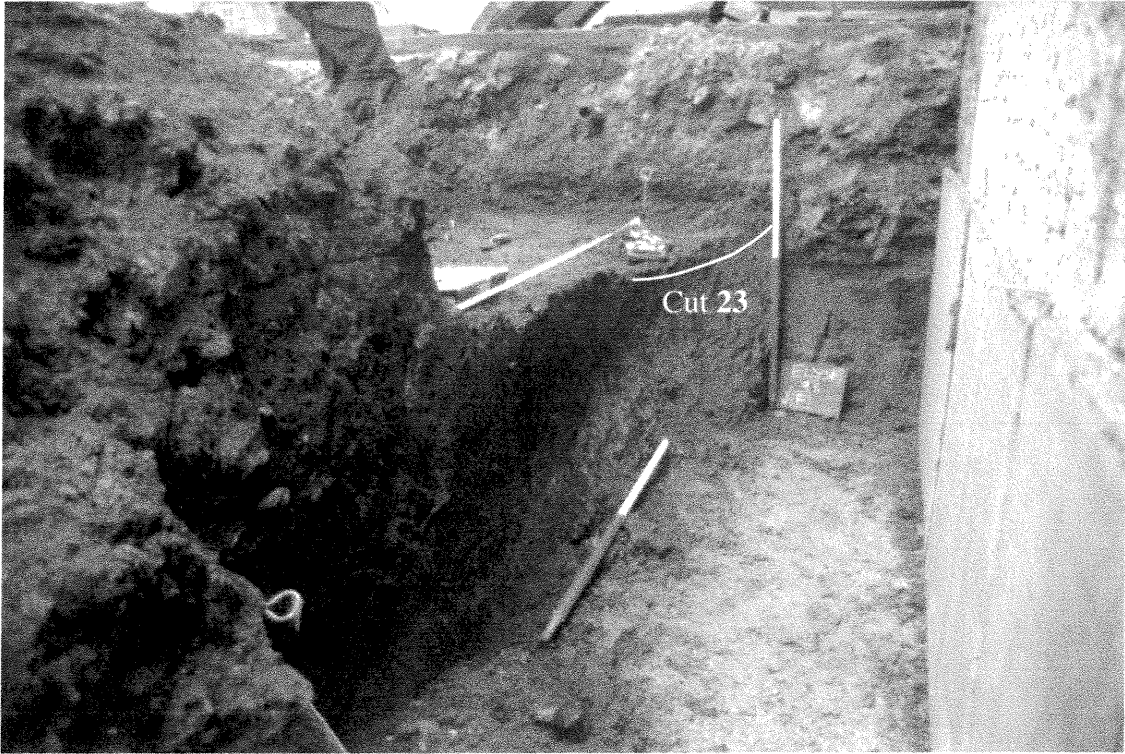


Fig. 5 Trench I, South East Facing Section (above) and North West Facing Section (below). No Scale.

In Trench F (Pls. Ia and Ib, Figs. 6a, 6b and 7) pit [20], though yielding no datable material, and having no direct stratigraphic relationship with closely dated deposits, may belong to this early phase of pitting. It was truncated by pit [17] that contained pottery dated to the 13th century.



Pl. 1a Trench F, South West Facing Section (See fig. 6a)

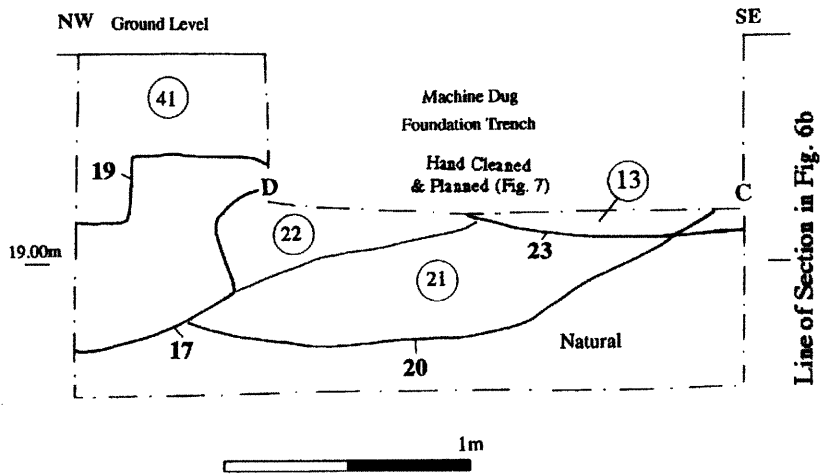
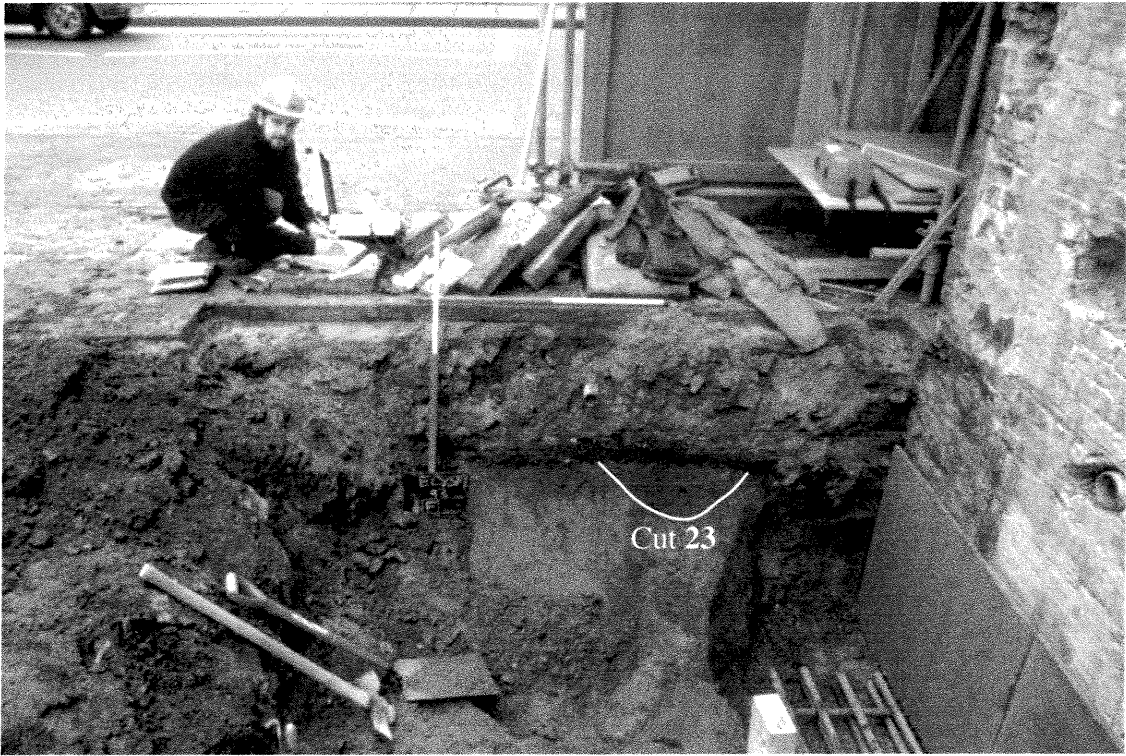


Figure 6a Trench F, South Facing Section



Pl. 1b Trench F, North West Facing Section (See fig.6b)

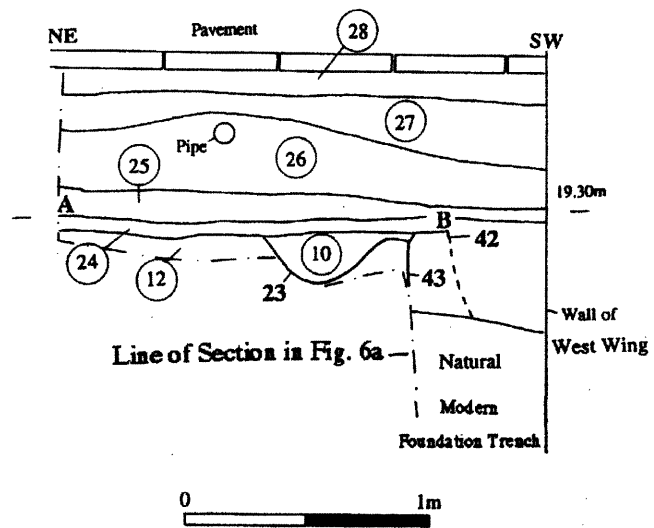


Fig. 6b Trench F, North West Facing Section

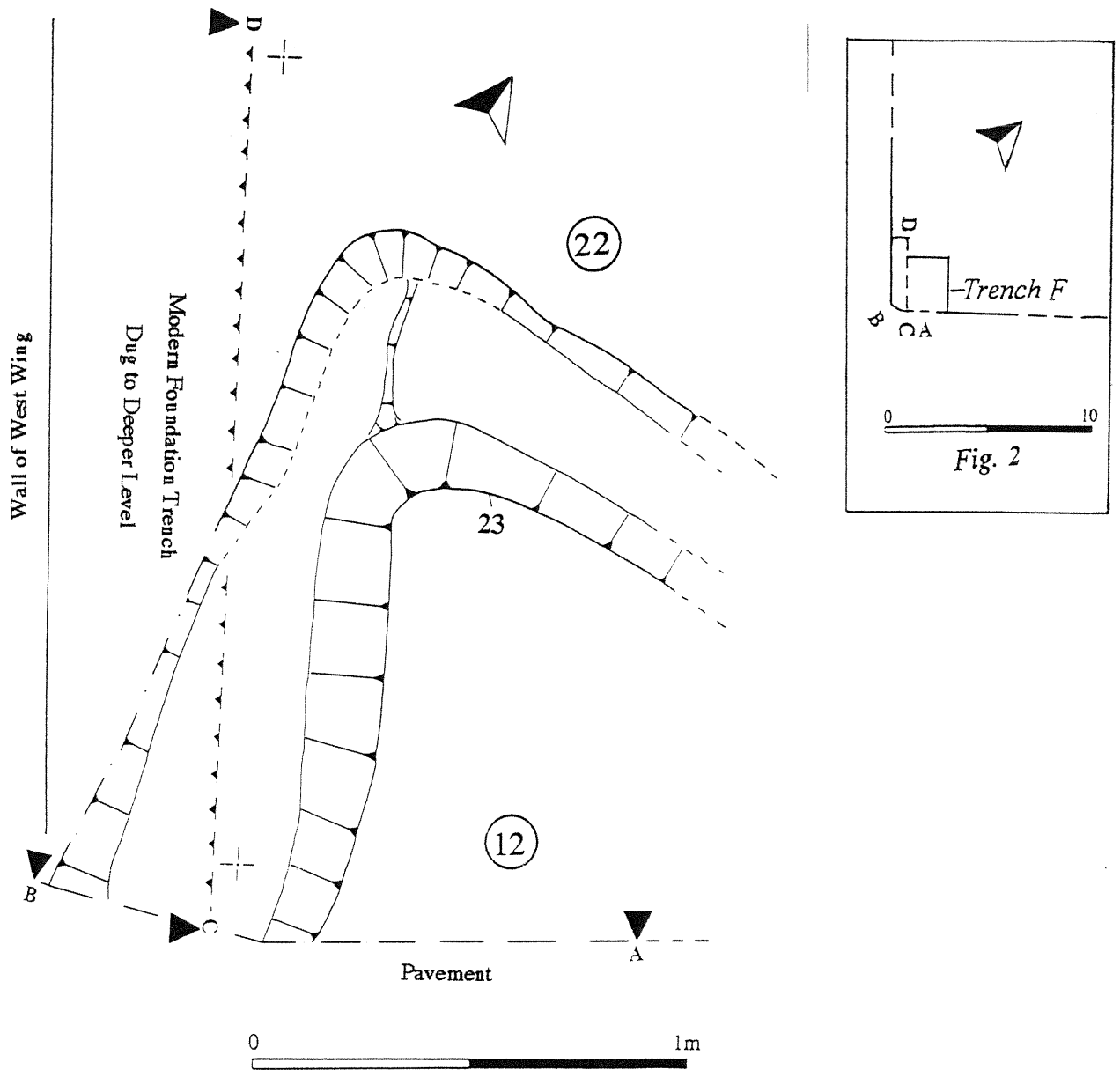


Fig. 7 Trench F, Detail Plan of Gully [23]

A very limited trial excavation rapidly carried out in Trench F revealed an 'L'-shaped flat-bottomed gully [23] interpreted as a robbed out sill beam-slot dug for two abutting beams. Its fills (13) and (10), essentially contemporary, yielded much animal bone and one sherd of Ipswich Ware. Unfortunately, the contexts with which it was directly associated could not re-inforce its ascribed mid-Saxon date: it cut (12), a thin deposit containing a single Romano-British Grey Ware sherd. It should also be noted, however, that medieval pit [17], only 1m away, was cut from at least 0.18m higher, which must imply a significant difference in date between the two features.

In Trench B a cluster of later medieval pits [2], [17], [36] and possibly [57] was also noted at the street front end of the site (Fig. 8).

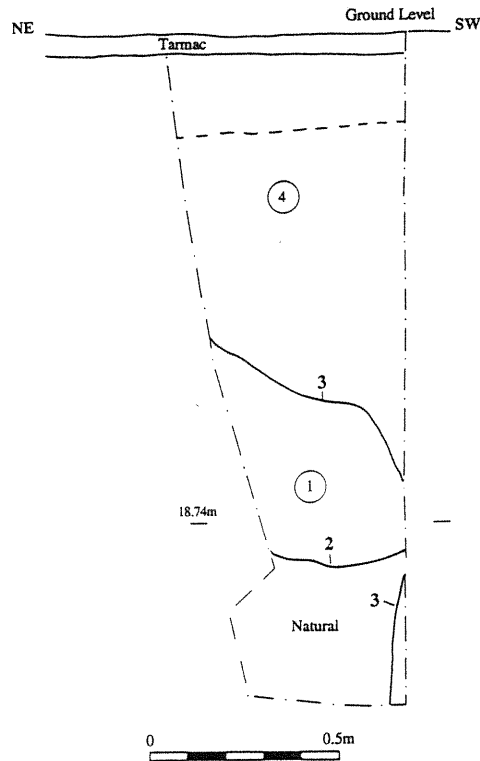


Fig. 8 Trench B, North West Facing Section

6 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The methods of data recovery employed on this site, confined as they were largely to the examination of machine excavated trench sections, left much to be desired. Though some disturbance to archaeological deposits had occurred across the site due to the cutting of modern foundation trenches, there remained a fairly intact and interesting medieval site until present development works began. The rapid excavation in plan of a small area on the street front revealed a beam slot (the type of feature likely to be missed in hurriedly recorded sections) and thus demonstrated the potential of the site, and indeed this historic street front as a whole.

The lack of clear-cut stratigraphic relationships between the earlier features encountered during the recording brief and the paucity of datable material retrieved have conspired to present a frustratingly limited view of the archaeology of this area.

A large residual sherd of flint tempered pottery extends activity in the immediate area back to the Bronze Age and conforms with the cluster of prehistoric activity noted at this north end of the Ely highland. However, no features of this date were observed. Similarly, a Romano-British presence near by is attested by a few residual sherds in medieval features, though again no contexts could be definitely ascribed this date, and the paucity of such material suggests a low level of activity.

The Ipswich ware sherd is an important find as it is one of a very few physical traces of any presence for the documented mid-Saxon (monastic) settlement in

the vicinity. The dangers of dating the grubbed-out beam slot with a single sherd are obvious enough but its stratigraphic situation combined with the lack of ceramic material from underlying pits (and pits close by) must favour an assignation to the ceramically-challenged cultures of the early and mid Saxon period rather than to the Romano-British and medieval.

The presence of medieval pitting so close to the street front suggests that St Mary's Street shifted northwards towards the rear of the property during the later medieval or early post-medieval period to overlie the traces of earlier street-front structures. Alternatively, the area remained free of dwellings and despite its street front position was of 'rear of tenement' character during the medieval period. The former suggestion is difficult to sustain given that the 'village green' to the south would have been far more susceptible to shifting road alignments in the face of property encroachment, but may explain the curious step in the street front near Lynn Road. This however, could also be easily explained as a result of encroachment of the type described above.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Appendix 1: A Comment on the Pottery (by Paul Spoerry)

The local late medieval coarse wares, recently tied down to a production site at Potters Lane, Ely (Robinson & Spoerry, forthcoming), were well represented across the site.

Medieval wares from further afield included two sherds of developed Stamford ware (hard white fabric and mottled green glaze) and a sherd of Sible Hedingham Ware.

Two sherds of St Neots Ware were also recovered. One is a large rim sherd from a bowl (unstratified context) and the other, a residual sherd from a small medieval pit.

Finally, one of the deposits contained a sherd of Ipswich Ware. This is thick walled, with external sooting implying a cooking vessel that cannot be attributed to a specific form. It dates to the period AD 700-850 and therefore represents a rare indication of deposits relating to Middle Saxon Ely.

Appendix 2: The Animal Bone (by Lorraine Higbee)

Trench	Context No	Type	Animal	Skeletal element
F	10	Beam slot fill	Bird	Sternum
			Sheep/goat	2 molars, L & R mandible, Mandible frag. (J), Distal humerus (J), Proximal tibia (J), Proximal femur (J), R. tibia, Distal metatarsal
	13	Beam slot fill	Cattle	Horn core, 1 thoracic vertebrae, ? radius(diaphysis only), L. phalange, Distal femur (J), Proximal tibia (J), Distal epiphysis of tibia (J)
			Sheep/goat	1 molar
	18	Pit fill	Cattle	? talus
			Sheep/goat	R mandible, ? R tibia (J)
	21	Pit fill	Pig	? proximal femur
	22	Pit fill	Cattle	? R proximal femur
			Sheep/goat	? proximal tibia L mandible, 2 molars

Skeletal elements identified. 66 unidentifiable fragments, mostly rib and diaphyseal fragments.
(J) = Juvenile, L & R = Left and Right.

The majority of the faunal remains come from contexts (10) and (13), a grubbed-out beam slot, and are either sheep/goat (*Ovis/Capris*) or cattle (*Bos*). A high percentage of these remains are long bone fragments, and unfused epiphyses from juvenile individuals. This is especially true of the sheep/goat remains, and would suggest that these animals were kept for meat rather than wool. The only other animal present in the faunal remains from context (10) is a fragment of a bird (*Ave*) sternum.

Other contexts which have produced faunal remains are (18), (21), (22) all pit fills. Juvenile sheep/goat and cattle are also heavily represented in the faunal remains from these contexts. The only exception is a possible fragment of pig (*Sus*) proximal femur from context (18). However, this is only a very tentative identification based upon the angle of inclination of the remnant Fossa trochanterica, which is steep in *Sus* and helps to differentiate it from Sheep/goat in the absence of the femoral head, as in this instance.

