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Archaeological Field Unit

Medieval Settlement Remains at West Street, Isleham: An Archaeological Monitoring Brief.

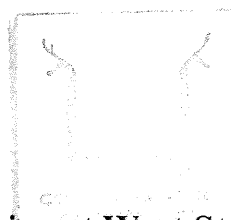
Stephen Macaulay

2000

Cambridgeshire County Council

Report No. 175

Commissioned by Upware Marina Ltd.



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Stephen Macaulay BA, MPhil, AIFA

October 2000

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SUMMARY

Between December 1st 1999 and 26th June 2000, an archaeological monitoring brief was undertaken on 0.81 hectares of land of West Street, Isleham (TL 6400 7405), by staff of the Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Field Unit. The work was carried out during the construction of 5 houses and associated services on the site as part of a mitigation strategy to preserve the majority of the archaeology on the site beneath the buildings.

Sixteen trenches were monitored and recorded across the site, during nine visits, to determine the presence or absence of archaeological remains. The subsequent investigation of the trenches revealed archaeological features in all trenches, although many were only partially visible. A large boundary ditch was recorded running northwest-southeast, along with a number of smaller ditches which would have formed smaller property boundaries in the medieval period. In addition a number of horticultural beds or terracing was also observed. Notably no remains of Monastic origin were observed. These findings confirmed the results of the evaluation carried out in 1997, which also identified these and other remains. Although additional individual features were discovered during the monitoring brief, these did not alter the understanding of the site significantly.

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**Medieval Settlement remains at West Street, Isleham:
An Archaeological Monitoring Brief
(TL 6415 7430)**

1 INTRODUCTION

Between December 1st 1999 and 26th June 2000, an archaeological monitoring brief was undertaken on 0.81 hectares of land off West Street, Isleham, by staff of the Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Field Unit. The project was commissioned by Upware Marina Ltd (J.R. Foreman), during the construction of 5 houses within the development area. The work was carried out according to a brief for basic archaeological investigation issued by Cambridgeshire County Council County Archaeology Office (Thomas 1999). Stephen Macaulay undertook the project.

2 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

The village of Isleham is located on the southeastern fen-edge and lies on the Lower Chalk ridge of south Cambridgeshire. The height of land around Isleham ranges from 7m OD rising to 18m OD, in the south of the parish. The site lies in the centre of the village of Isleham behind the corner of West Street and Little London Lane. The site has recently been populated with fruit trees and was unmanaged arable land prior to the development. Before this the site was used as a market garden.

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Prehistoric

The Sites and Monuments Record has a record of extensive lithic scatters and finds spots along the western edge of Isleham. The Fenland Survey (Hall 1996) also records artefacts scatters (lithic) along the Isleham peninsula. This density of lithic artefact finds has not been mirrored towards the centre of the village, although this cannot be seen a proof that this material does not survive beneath sealed deposits.

Romano-British

Roman remains in the area are rich, including the Villa and Temple remains (SMR No: 05704) to the west of Isleham village. Archaeology of this period has not been discovered within the core of Isleham village itself.

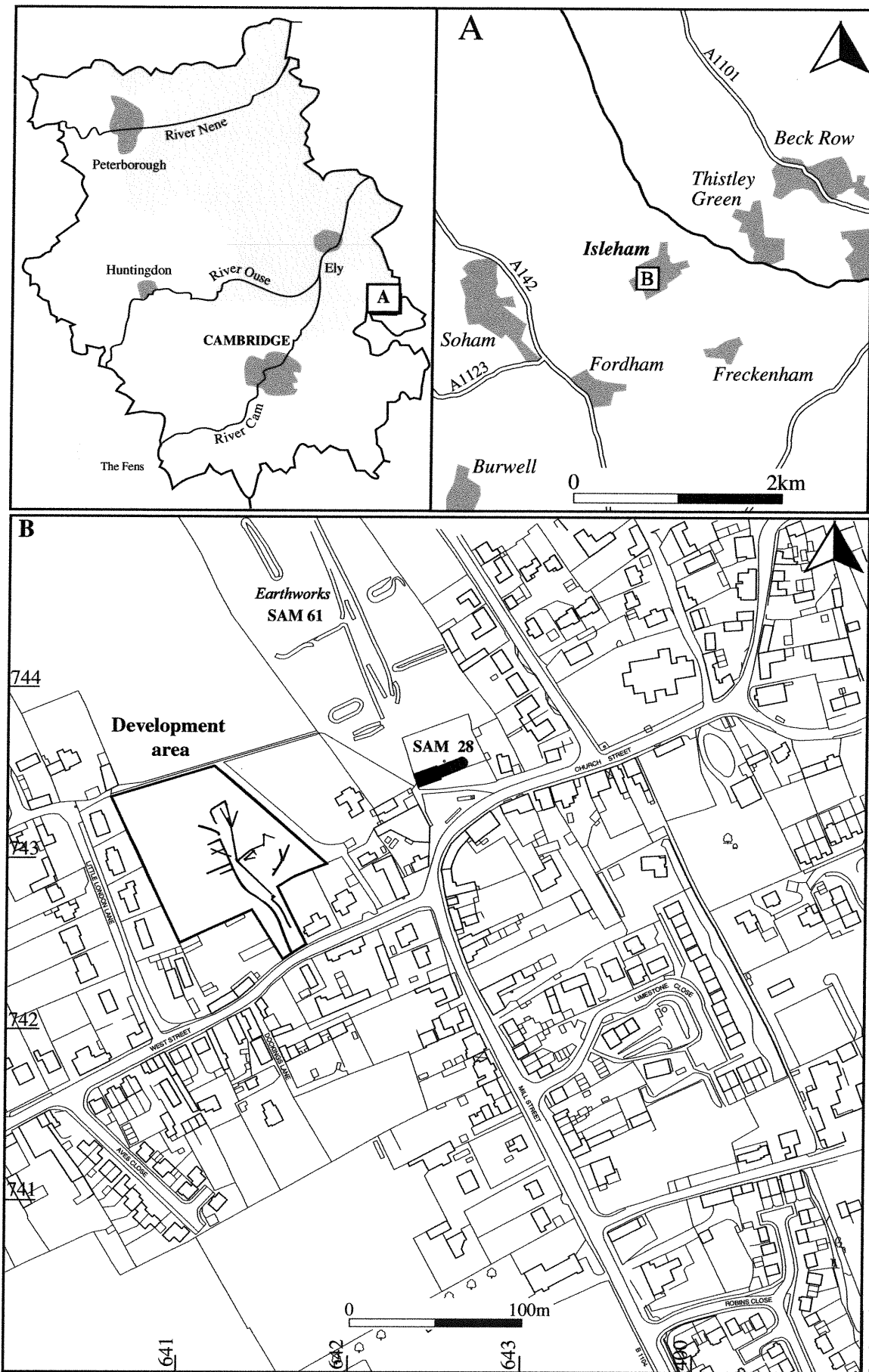


Figure 1 Site Location Map showing position of trenches

Medieval

The Benedictine Priory church of St Margaret (SAM 28) is linked to extensive earthworks (SAM 61) which lie to the north of Isleham Priory. Similar earthworks of medieval date are located to the west of the investigation area (and Isleham Priory) off Little London Lane at Hall Farm and may have extended along the southern side of Church Street and West Street (Hall 1996). Isleham Priory was founded in 1090 by Count Alan of Brittany with monks from the Abbey of St Jacut, also from Brittany, and confirmed by Pope Alexander III in 1163 (Haigh 1988). The establishment did not persist, with the clerics moving to Linton Priory by the middle of the 13th century. The Priory became a manor from this time. In 1414 the buildings came into the ownership of Pembroke Hall with the church being converted into a barn. To the north of Little London Lane there is a quay, thought to be one of at least three across the northern part of the village. John Puller's Plan of Isleham (1787-1790) shows the site (12 West Street) boundaries to be much as they are today.

Recent Archaeological Work

The site was the subject of an archaeological evaluation conducted by the Cambridge Archaeology Unit (CAU) in 1998. This comprised a Desktop assessment (M. Knight 1997) and trial trenching (M. Knight 1997. CAU Report Number 246). The archaeological evaluation demonstrated the survival of buried features of medieval date relating to the Benedictine Priory. This includes a number of linear features (ditches) containing 13th and 14th century ceramics. Importantly a wide ditch (CAU=F21), presumed to be the western boundary of the Priory, was investigated which ran north-south across the site. This ditch appears to be on the same alignment as medieval earthworks (a hollow way) associated with the Priory, which lie to the east of the site. Interestingly the infilling of this ditch in the 13th century concurs with the accepted date of abandonment of the Priory. Other linear features within the site appear to delimit internal boundaries and land plots, again relating to the Priory. Additional archaeological features include robbed wall foundations and a cesspit (containing butchered animal bone and 14th century pottery). Finally, the evaluation identified remains on the site that pre-date the medieval features and include a buried soil, discovered to the north of the investigation area, of an undetermined Prehistoric date (Knight 1997).

4 METHODOLOGY

The archaeological evaluation carried out in 1997 (Knight 1997) recorded the presence of medieval remains, characterised by ditches (property plots and a large boundary feature), robbed wall foundations as well as a number of pits and postholes. These features are thought to have been linked to the earthworks associated with the Priory to the north and east of the site. Due to the extensive nature of these remains and the good levels of preservation the County Archaeology Office developed a mitigation strategy designed to protect these

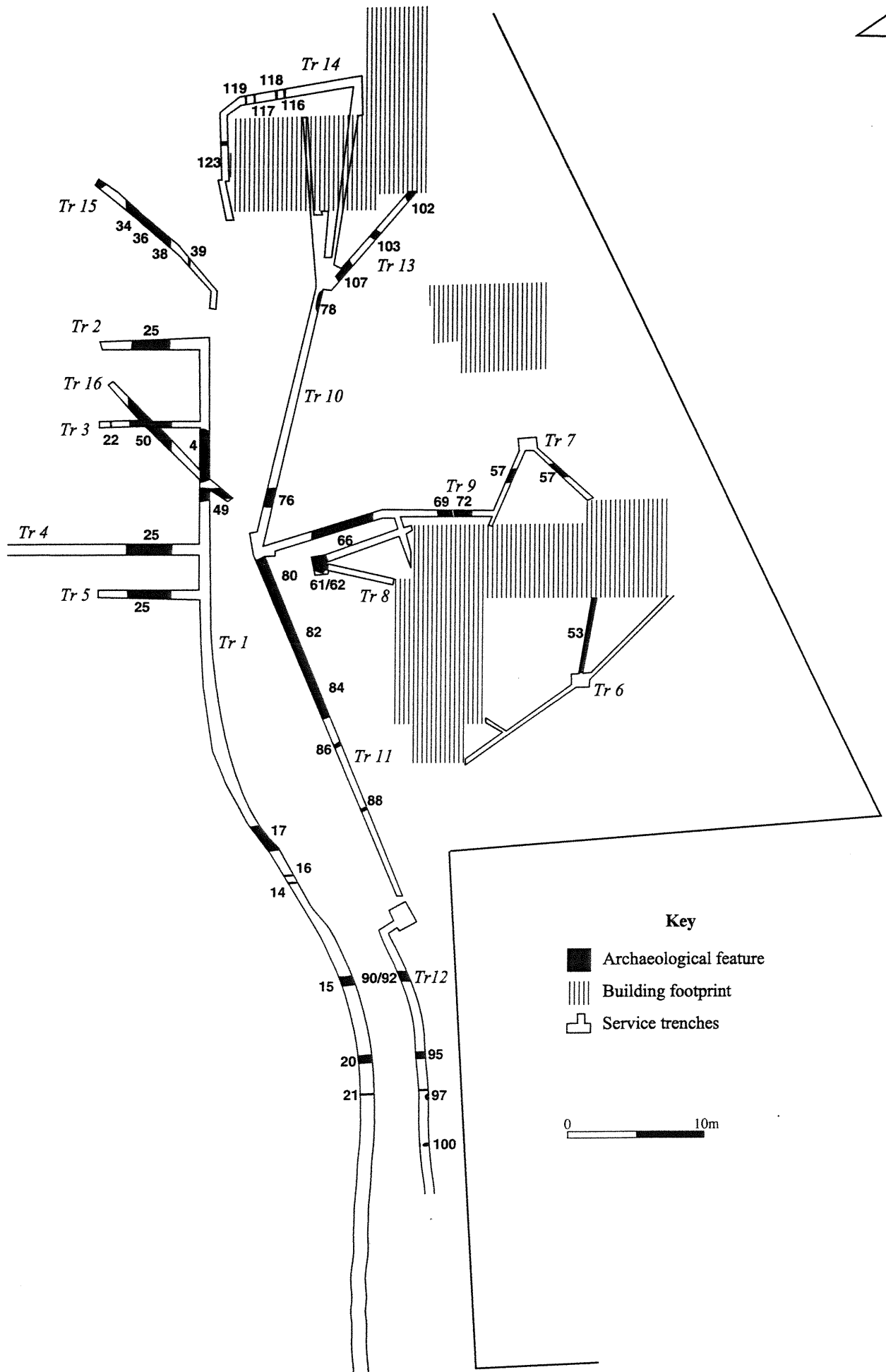


Figure 2 Location of trenches showing building footprints (hatched) and recorded archaeological features (black)

remains. This included the raising of building foundations and limiting deep piling, to prevent damage to buried features within the eastern half of the site and the demarcation of a corridor to preserve the Priory boundary ditch in-situ. The western side of the site, beyond the boundary ditch, was not regarded as archaeologically significant. The purpose of the monitoring brief was to record any archaeological remains present in the service and utility trenches, which were to be excavated across the eastern half of the site, and could not be preserved.

A total of 16 service trenches were monitored and recorded, totalling approximately 350m. The trenches were opened using a JCB mechanical excavator using a toothed ditching bucket (0.30m wide). The trench sections were cleaned and all archaeological features were recorded. Features were excavated where possible. Trench spoil and the excavated surfaces of trenches were scanned by eye in order to obtain artefacts.

Archaeological trenches and features were recorded by hand and planned at 1:50 and added to the existing site engineer's plans. Trenches that contained archaeological features were planned by hand. Archaeological features were recorded using the pro-forma recording sheets of the Archaeological Field Unit. All trenches excavated during the evaluation were described, giving details of topsoil and subsoil depths and the natural geology visible in the base of the trench.

5 RESULTS

Trench 1

Trench 1 was approximately 80m long, 0.50m wide and 0.90m deep, and was orientated broadly northwest-southeast. Topsoil (where remaining) was a dark grey-brown silty clay (001) with chalk flecks and occasional gravel pebbles between 0.30-0.50m deep. In general the top 0.20m was a hardcore mix (002) replacing the topsoil which was removed in summer 1999. Where the subsoil, a grey brown chalky silt, (028) remained this corresponded to the garden soil recorded in the CAU assessment = [26]. The natural geology observed consisted of chalk (003). The trench had been heavily disturbed for the last 15m to the south adjacent to West Street. Although the trench was 0.90m deep, by the time the observation commenced the bottom 0.30m was filled with a water pipe and gravel backfill.

A number of archaeological features were recorded including ditches and wall foundations originally identified in the CAU evaluation.

Cut 004, 1.6m+ wide, 0.40m+ deep, partially observed shallow pit, gently sloping sides with a rounded base, contained 7 fills;
Fill 005, a light grey-brown silty clay fill, few stones. No finds recovered.

Fill 009, a very blocky chalky fill, a re-deposited natural/weathering fill. No finds recovered.

Fill 006, a mixed light grey-brown silty clay and re-deposited chalk natural or weathering fill. No finds recovered.

Fill 008, a light grey-brown silty clay fill, few stones. No finds recovered.

Fill 007, a grey-brown silty clay fill. No finds recovered.

Fill 010, a grey-brown clayey silt with chalky inclusions. No finds recovered.

Fill 011, a dark grey-brown silty clay. No finds recovered.

Cut 013, only partially observed posthole, 0.15m wide, 0.20m deep, with steep sides and a flat base, contained a single fill;

Fill 014 a light grey-brown silty clay with chalk inclusions. No finds recovered.

Cut 015, c.1m wide, c0.40m deep, linear ditch with a V shaped profile, contained one fill;

Fill 016, a dark grey-brown silty clay with frequent chalk inclusions. No finds recovered.

Cut 017 (CAU=F16), c2m wide, c0.40m+ deep (recorded obliquely), irregular linear with a stepped profile and a flat base, contained two fills;

Fill 018, a light grey-brown silty clay with frequent chalk inclusions. No finds recovered. (CAU=[20])

Fill 019, re-deposited chalk natural possibly deliberate bank infill. No finds recovered.

Cut 020, Post-Medieval stone/rubble wall foundation.

Cut 021, Post-Medieval brick lined drain.

Trench 2

Trench 2 was c7m long, 0.60m wide and was 0.40m deep and ran northeast-southwest. The topsoil had been completely removed and replaced by c0.20m of hardcore mix.

The boundary ditch was observed in this trench and a pit at the far southwest end. To the east (Priory side) of this ditch were remnants of bank material potentially sealing a buried soil.

Cut 025 (CAU=F21), c3.5m+ wide, 0.50m+ deep, broad U shaped nw-se ditch, contained one fill;

Fill 024, a pale grey-brown clayey silt with frequent chalk frags and rare charcoal flecks. No finds recovered.

Layer 026, chalk deposit, interpreted as re-deposited bank material lying to the east of ditch **025**. This layer seals a possible buried soil 027.

Fill 027, a light grey-brown silty clay with common chalk frags. No finds recovered. Interpreted as a buried soil beneath the bank 026 of boundary ditch **025**.

Cut 023, 1.2m+ wide, 0.40m deep, steep sided pit, observed only in section, contained one fill;
Fill 022, a light grey-brown silty clay. No finds recovered.

Trench 3

Trench 3 was c10m long, 0.60m wide and was 0.60m deep and ran northeast-southwest. The topsoil had been completely removed and replaced by c0.20m of hardcore mix.

The boundary ditch was observed in this trench (see Trench 2 above), although no bank or buried soil were observed. No other archaeology was recorded.

Cut 025 (see above)

Trench 4

Trench 4 was c20m long, 0.60m wide and was up to 1m deep and ran northeast-southwest. The topsoil had been completely removed and replaced by c0.20m of hardcore mix on the northeast half.

The boundary ditch was observed in this trench (see Trench 2 above), although no bank or buried soil were observed. No other archaeology was recorded.

Cut 025 (see above)

Trench 5

Trench 5 was c8m long, 0.60m wide and was 0.30m deep and ran northeast-southwest. The topsoil had been completely removed and replaced by c0.20m of hardcore mix.

The boundary ditch was observed in this trench (see Trench 2 above), although no bank or buried soil were observed. No other archaeology was recorded.

Cut 025 (see above)

Trench 6

Trench 6 was c28m long, 0.30m wide and was 0.60m deep and ran broadly north-south. The trench was irregular shaped with a square sump in the middle. The depth of topsoil, a dark grey-brown silty clay (001) with chalk flecks and occasional gravel pebbles remaining, was 0.12m, with hardcore and foundation

material lying above. Subsoil (051) a pale brown chalky silt with chalk frags and gravel, depth was 0.22m and this ran across the whole trench.

The only archaeological feature observed was a shallow flat-based pit **053**, which has been interpreted as a horticultural or lazy bed, potentially terraced. Similar features (CAU=F6 & F7) were identified in the earlier archaeological assessment.

Cut 053, 1m+ wide, unknown length, 0.35m+ deep, a flat based shallow pit type feature, contained one fill;

Fill 052, a pale grey-brown chalky silt with chalk flecks. No finds recovered.

Trench 7

Trench 7 was c14m long, 0.30m wide and was 0.60m deep, with two sections running north-south and east-west. The trench was irregular shaped with a square sump in the middle. No topsoil remained, with 0.35m of building debris for building foundations overlying a layer of subsoil (051) a pale brown chalky silt with chalk frags and gravel, depth was 0.19m and this ran across the whole trench.

A single northeast-southwest ditch was observed in both trench arms (see fig?) which have been interpreted as a plot or property feature. It continues to the south into Trench 10 (**Cut 076**) and Trench 16 (**Cut 049**). This feature was not observed in the earlier assessment.

Cut 057 (same as **076**), 1.4m wide, 28m+ long, 0.48m deep, a linear ditch with a V shaped profile and rounded base. Contained 3 fills;

Fill 058, a very pale brown, very chalky silt, weathering fill. No finds recovered.

Fill 055, faintly bluish grey chalky silt. No finds recovered.

Fill 054, a mid-pale greyish brown, chalky silt. No finds recovered.

Trench 8

Trench 8 was c14m long, 0.30m wide and was 0.60m deep, with two sections running north-south and northeast-southwest. The trench was irregular shaped with a square sump in the middle. Topsoil remained to a depth of 0.25m this overlay a modern garden soil (064), which is a mix of topsoil and subsoil. This may equate to the medieval garden/plough soil (CAU=[26]) recorded in the evaluation.

Two partially excavated features were observed within the sump hole (only in section). These features were pits or possible ditches, the alignment was not possible to determine. These features are close to two irregular linears excavated in the evaluation (CAU=F10 & F11).

Cut 061, 1.8m+ wide, 1m+ long, 0.40m deep, broad linear ditch or pit with a flat base. Truncates **062**. Contained 2 fills;

Fill 063, a pale brown mottled grey chalky silt fill. No finds recovered.
Fill 059, a pale brownish grey chalky silt with occasional chalky flecks. A single sherd of medieval pottery (Thetford ware 13th/14th century) was recovered.

Cut 062, 0.60m+ wide, unknown length, 0.28m+ deep, a ditch butt end or pit, only viewed in section, truncated by **061**. Contained 1 fill;
Fill 060, a pale faintly blueish grey, chalky silt with chalk fragments. No finds recovered.

Trench 9

Trench 9 was c19m long, up to 0.50m wide and up to 0.90m deep, broadly running northeast-southwest. Topsoil remained to a depth of 0.40m this overlay a modern garden soil (064), which is a mix of topsoil and subsoil. This may equate to the medieval garden/plough soil (CAU=[26]) recorded in the evaluation.

Two northwest-south east linears were identified and these equate to similar ditches observed during the evaluation (CAU=F3, F4 & F5?). The narrower linear **069** are on the same alignment as the existing walled boundary to the east and may also be an earlier property boundary. In addition medieval terracing (horticultural lazy beds) was recorded and this also was detected during the evaluation (CAU=F6, F7, F12 & F13).

Cut 069, 1.45m wide, 0.30m+ long, 0.50m deep, linear ditch with a flat base, steep sides gradual at the top (CAU=F3 or F5), may also be same as **103** in Trench 13, contained 2 fills;
Fill 068, a pale brown-grey chalky silt with chalk frags. No finds recovered.
Fill 067, a very pale brown-grey very chalky silt with frequent chalk frags. No finds recovered.

Cut 072, 1.75m+ wide, 0.30m+ long, 0.60m+ deep, steep sided V shaped linear, not bottomed (CAU=F4), interpreted as a robber trench, contained 2 fills;
Fill 071, a very pale brown-grey very chalky silt with frequent chalk frags. No finds recovered.
Fill 070, a pale brown-grey chalky silt. No finds recovered.

Cut 066, 0.50m+ wide, 8.8m+ long, 0.50m deep, large rectangular pit with steep sides and an irregular flat base, interpreted as horticultural/lazy bed (CAU=F6, F7, F12 or F13), contained 1 fill;
Fill 065, a pale brown-grey chalky silt. No finds recovered.

Trench 10

Trench 10 was c20m long, up to 0.50m wide and up to 0.90m deep, running north-south. Topsoil only remained mixed with modern hardcore to a depth of 0.22m these overlays natural chalk.

A northeast-southwest linear **076** (same as **057** in Trench 7) was revealed and a pit or ditch butt **078** end to the north (CAU=F9).

Cut 076 (same as **057**), c1m+ wide, 28m+ long, 0.50m deep, a linear ditch with a V shaped profile and rounded base. Contained 3 fills;

Fill 075, a very pale grey brown, chalky silt, basal fill. No finds recovered.

Fill 074, pale grey-brown chalky silt. No finds recovered.

Fill 073, a mid-pale brown-grey, very chalky silt. No finds recovered.

Cut 078, 0.30m+ wide, 3.25m long, 0.40m+ deep, large sub-circular pit with very steep sides and a rounded base (CAU=F9), contained 1 fill;

Fill 077, a pale grey-brown chalky silt. No finds recovered.

Trench 11

Trench 11 was c27m long, 0.50m wide and 0.75m deep, running east-west. Topsoil only remained mixed with modern hardcore up to a depth of 0.50m these overlays natural chalk.

Two narrow linears were revealed running northeast-southwest (CAU=F16/F25 & F14) and a group of 3 rectangular pits (**Cuts 080, 082, 084**) which appear to be the same as those in Trench 9 (**Cut 066**) and in the earlier evaluation (CAU=F12 & F13).

Cut 080, 0.50m+ wide, 4.5m+ long (oblique), 0.35m deep, an irregular rectangular shallow flat based pit with steep sides, interpreted as a horticultural or lazy bed, contained a single fill;

Fill 079, a pale brown-grey very chalky silt with occasional chalk frags. No finds recovered.

Cut 082, 0.50m+ wide, 3.65m+ long (oblique), 0.45m deep, an irregular rectangular shallow flat based pit with steep sides, interpreted as a horticultural or lazy bed, contained a single fill;

Fill 081, a pale brown-grey very chalky silt with occasional chalk frags. No finds recovered.

Cut 084, 0.50m+ wide, 3.25m+ long (oblique), 0.40m deep, an irregular rectangular shallow flat based pit with steep sides, interpreted as a horticultural or lazy bed, contained a single fill;

Fill 083, a pale brown-grey very chalky silt with occasional chalk frags. No finds recovered.

Cut 086, 1.7m+ wide, unknown length, 0.27m deep, flat based pit, contained 1 fill (CAU=F16/F25);

Fill 085, a pale grey with brownish patches, very chalky silt. No finds recovered.

Cut 088, 1m wide, 0.50m+ long, 0.40m deep, narrow, irregular U shaped ditch, contained one fill (CAU=F14);
Fill 087, a mid pale brown-grey very chalky silt. No finds recovered.

Trench 12

Trench 12 was c20m long, 0.30m wide and 0.80m deep, curved running broadly east-west. Very little topsoil remained (c0.15m deep) and only in places, modern hardcore overlay the trench up to a depth of 0.40m. Beneath this was a cultivation soil 093 & 094, which lay over natural chalk.

Three medieval ditches were revealed running northeast-southwest and Post-Medieval wall foundations and a brick lined drain were also present (see Trench 1).

Cut 090, 0.35m diameter, 0.30m deep, a sub-circular pit or posthole, contained one fill;
Fill 089, a grey-brown silty chalk. No finds recovered.

Cut 092, 1.7m wide, unknown length, 0.55m deep, linear running northeast-southwest not fully excavated, same as **015**, contained one fill;
Fill 091, a mid dark grey-brown chalky and slightly sandy silt with frequent chalk frags. No finds recovered.

Cut 095 Post-Medieval stone/rubble wall foundation & Post-Medieval brick lined drain.

Cut 097, 1.35m wide, unknown length, 0.18m deep, irregular pit with a flat base, contained one fill;
Fill 096, a very pale brown silty chalk. No finds recovered.

Cut 100, 1.35m wide, 0.50m+ long, 0.30m+ deep, truncated by modern backfilling, northeast-southwest ditch (boundary?), only partially observed, contained at least two fills;
Fill 099, pale brown silty chalk, with frequent chalk frags. No finds recovered.
Fill 098, pale grey-brown silty chalk. No finds recovered.

Trench 13

Trench 13 was c37m long, 0.30m wide and 0.75m deep, irregular trench with three sections running north-south, northnorthwest-southsoutheast and northwest-southeast. Very little topsoil remained (c0.15m deep) and only in places, modern hardcore overlay the trench up to a depth of 0.30m. Beneath this was natural chalk.

Two ditches, running broadly east-west was observed and ditch **103** may be the same as ditch **069** in Trench 9 (CAU=F4). In addition more medieval terracing **107** for horticulture was identified.

Cut 103, 1.6m+ wide, 0.38m+ deep, ditch only partly revealed in the trench, contained one fill;

Fill 102, a pale brown-grey very chalky silt with occasional chalk and flint nodules and rare charcoal flecks. No finds recovered.

Cut 105, c1m wide, 0.26m deep, linear ditch with steep sides and a flat base, Post-Medieval/modern date, contained one fill;

Fill 104, a brown-grey chalky sandy silt with frequent chalk frags. No finds recovered.

Cut 107, unknown width and depth, 0.38m deep, an irregular rectangular shallow flat based pit with steep sides, interpreted as a horticultural or lazy bed, contained a single fill;

Fill 106, a pale brown-grey very chalky silt with occasional chalk frags. No finds recovered.

Trench 14

Trench 14 was c19m long, 0.30m wide and 1m deep, irregular L shaped trench with three sections running north-south and east-west. Topsoil had been entirely removed and replaced by modern hardcore to a depth of 0.30m. Beneath this was a cultivation or plough soil, which lay over the natural chalk.

Three ditch and fence boundaries were observed two running northwest-southeast and one running northeast-southwest, forming co-axial plots and aligned with the large priory boundary ditch **050** (CAU=F21).

Cut 116, 0.65m wide, 0.30m+ long, 0.28m deep, linear ditch with concave sides and a rounded base, probable fence/boundary (see **117** below), contained one fill;

Fill 112, a pale brown-grey chalky silt with moderate chalk frags and charcoal flecks. No finds recovered.

Cut 117, 0.28m diameter, 0.24m deep, sub-circular posthole with steep sides, fence line of boundary (see **116** above), contained one fill;

Fill 113, a pale brown-grey chalky silt with moderate chalk frags and charcoal flecks. No finds recovered.

Cut 118, 0.40m wide, 0.30m+ long, 0.36m deep, narrow linear ditch slot with steep almost vertical sides and a narrow flat base, probable fence/boundary, contained one fill;

Fill 114, a pale brown-grey chalky silt mottled towards the base with moderate chalk frags and charcoal flecks. No finds recovered.

Cut 119, 0.80m diameter, 0.20m deep, sub-circular pit/posthole with shallow sides, contained one fill;

Fill 115, a pale brown-grey chalky silt with moderate chalk frags and charcoal flecks. No finds recovered.

Cut 121, 0.38m diameter, 0.20m deep, sub-circular posthole with steep sides, fence line of boundary (see **123** below), contained one fill;

Fill 120, a very pale brown-grey slightly silty chalk. No finds recovered.

Cut 123, 0.70m wide, 0.30m+ long, 0.25m deep, linear ditch with concave sides and a rounded base, probable fence/boundary (see **121** above), contained one fill;

Fill 122, a pale brown-grey chalky silt. No finds recovered.

Trench 15

Trench 15 was c12m long, 0.30m wide and 0.75m deep, running east-west. Topsoil depth was up to 0.24m lying over subsoil (028) which was 0.20m deep. Beneath this was the natural chalk.

The Priory boundary ditch **034** (same as **025**, **050** and CAU=F21) was observed on the same northwest-southeast alignment. A portion of a pit or ditch **030** was observed in the far western end of the trench.

Cut 030, 0.30m+ wide, 1.5m+ long, 0.20m deep, partially observed pit or ditch with a flat base and shallow profile, contained one fill;

Fill 029, a very pale brown chalky silt. No finds recovered.

Cut 034 (Same as **025**, CAU=F21), c2.45m+ wide, 0.60m+ deep, broad U shaped nw-se ditch, contained three fill;

Fill 033, a pale grey very chalky silt with frequent chalk frags. No finds recovered.

Fill 032, a pale grey chalky silt. No finds recovered.

Fill 031, pale grey-brown chalky silt. No finds recovered.

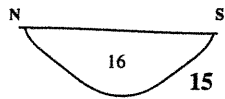
Cut 036, 1.05m wide, 0.30m+ long, 0.25m deep

Fill 035 (same as 026), a pale grey-brown very chalky silt deposit, interpreted as bank material lying to the east of ditch **025**.

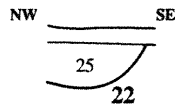
Cut 038, 1.40m wide, 0.30m+ long, 0.25m deep

Fill 037 (same as 026), a pale brown-grey very chalky silt deposit, interpreted as bank material lying to the east of ditch **025**.

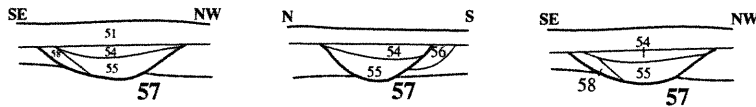
Trench 1



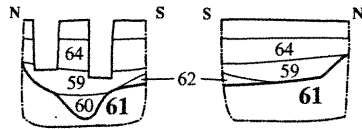
Trench 3



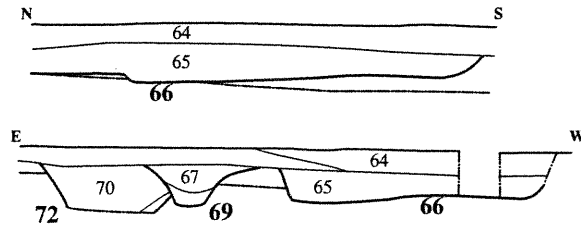
Trench 7



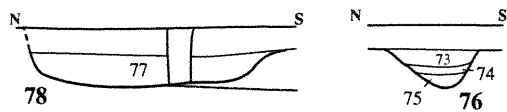
Trench 8



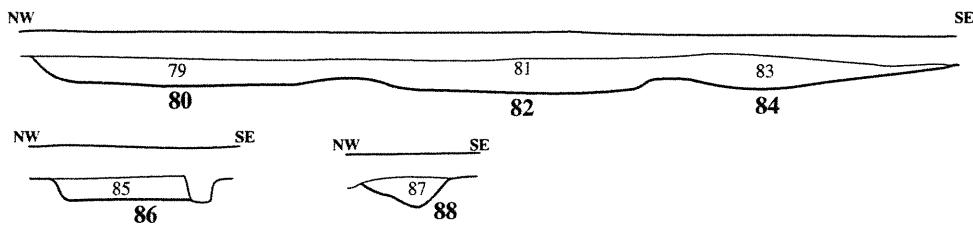
Trench 9



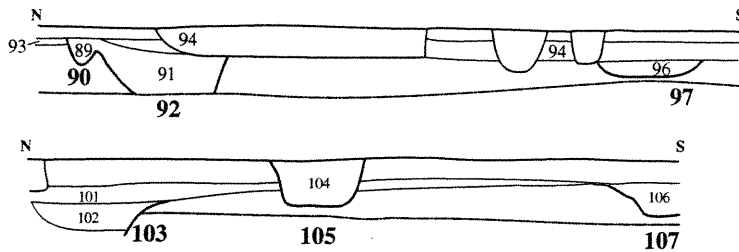
Trench 10



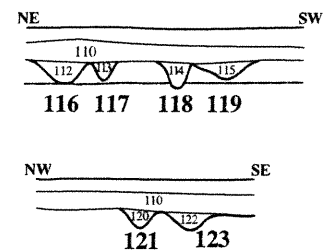
Trench 11



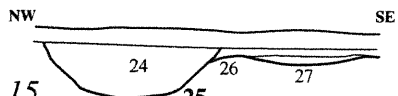
Trench 12



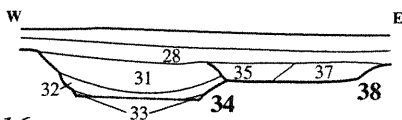
Trench 14



Trench 5



Trench 15



Trench 16

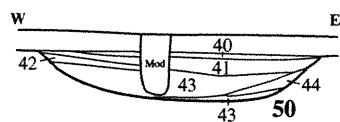


Figure 3 Sections

Trench 16

Trench 16 was c12m long, 0.30m wide and up to 1m deep, running east-west. Topsoil depth was up to 0.24m lying over subsoil (028) which was 0.20m deep. Beneath this was the natural chalk.

The Priory boundary ditch **050** was present running northwest-southeast (same as **025**, **034** and CAU=F21). At the far eastern end of the trench was a northeast-southwest orientated ditch **049** (same as **057** Trench 7 and **076** Trench 10).

Cut 049 (same as **057** and **076**), 1m+ wide, 0.60m+ long, 0.48m deep, a linear ditch with a V shaped profile and flat base. Contained two fills;
Fill 048, a pale grey, very chalky silt, basal fill. No finds recovered.
Fill 047, very pale brown very chalky silt. No finds recovered.

Cut 050 (same as **025** and **034** CAU=F21).

6 DISCUSSION

The full understanding and interpretation of the medieval activity on the site cannot be fully determined from results of an evaluation and the observation of narrow service trenches. The information garnered here can only add in part to the results of the evaluation carried out in 1997. This previous investigation located the presence of the large ditch that had been interpreted as a boundary feature for the Priory (Knight 1997). This feature was again recorded and its alignment confirmed that the orientation is similar to the earthworks surrounding the Priory, north of the site (Fig 4a). A note of caution should be raised, concerning the interpretation of this ditch as a precinct boundary. Isleham Priory was a small short-lived house. The location of the church suggests that the convent was almost certainly immediately to the north. The site lies 100m to the west-southwest, probably well beyond the precinct, with secular/lay non-religious buildings within the outer court at most (Dr Paul Sperry medieval specialist pers. comm.).

In addition the CAU evaluation located a number of isolated ditches and the remnants of medieval agricultural practices, notably horticultural beds. The observation of the service trenches has extended the limit of a number of ditches and has also identified a number of slots and postholes that may be fence lines. These ditch alignments form rectilinear enclosures, lying to the north of the boundary ditch, i.e. within former precinct environs during the manorial phase. The boundaries these ditches mark appear to persist beyond the medieval period with another large ditch **069** (CAU=F4) set on the same northwest-southeast alignment as the existing walled boundary which runs back

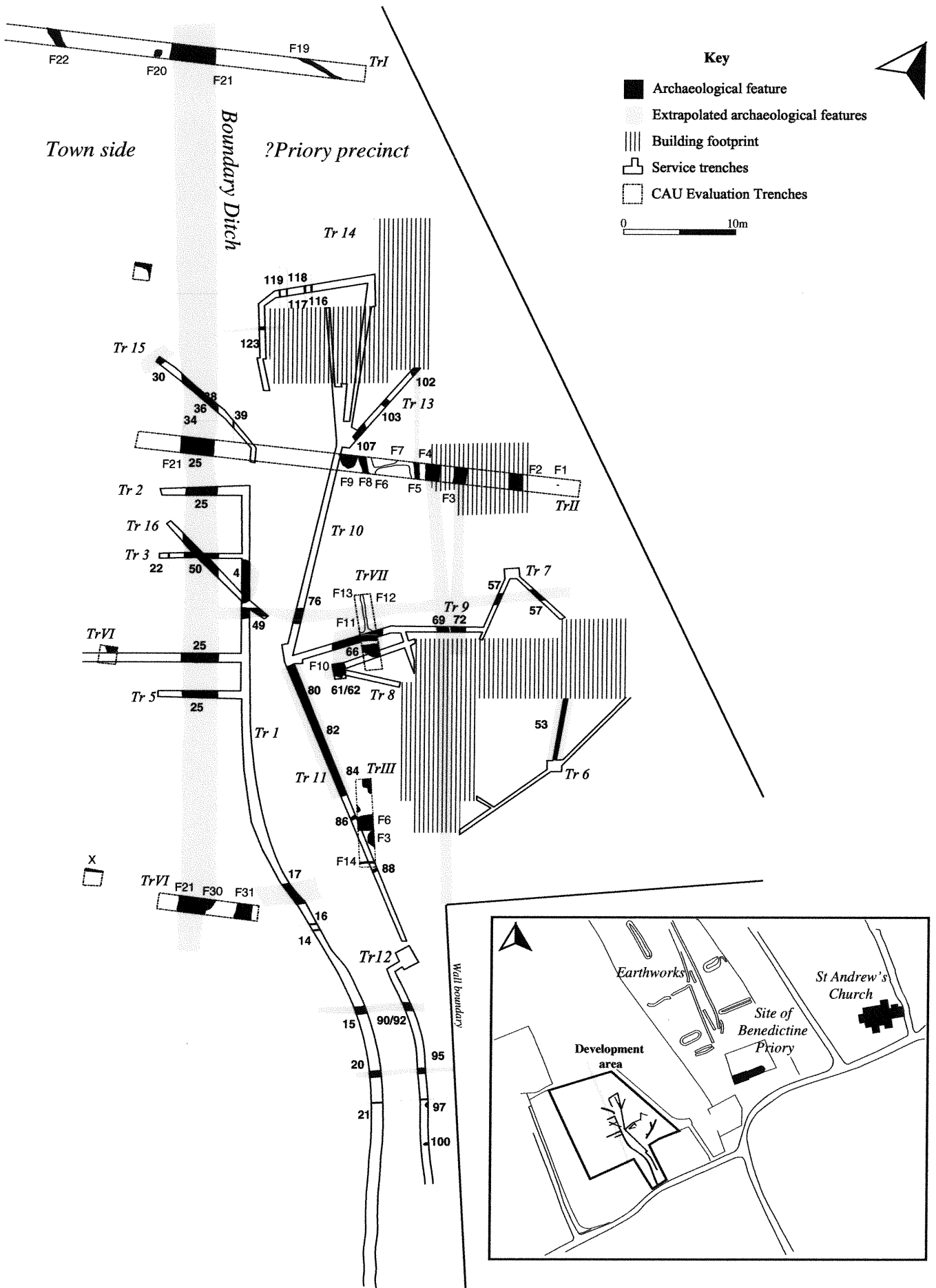


Figure 4 Composite plan showing recorded features, results of CAU evaluation trenching (Trench numbers in italics and features with F prefix) and suggested courses of linear features. The inset shows the relationship of the development area to the medieval priory.

perpendicular from West Street. (Fig 1 & 4). These plots run parallel and perpendicular to the Priory boundary ditch.

The large boundary ditch (CAU=F21) was identified in 6 Trenches (2-5, 15 & 16). The ditch **025** in Trench 2 was well preserved and bank material (026) was recorded on the northern side. This bank appeared to seal a thin medieval buried soil layer (027). Although no dating material was recovered from the ditch during this observation, material from the evaluation dates the ditch infill to the 13th century, which coincides with the abandonment of the Priory (Knight 1997).

Two boundary ditches were picked up in trenches 7, 9 & 10 to the north of the large Priory or Manorial boundary ditch **025**, running perpendicular with **057** and parallel to **069**. Ditch **069** was recorded in the evaluation (CAU=F4). These features are likely to be agricultural enclosures, which were aligned perpendicular to the boundary ditch **025**.

A number of smaller ditches (**116**, **119** & **123** in Trench 14), which were associated with fence or palisade slots (**118**) and postholes (**117**) were also observed. These also ran perpendicular and parallel to the large boundary ditch **025** and are small enclosures, probably for gardens or similar sub-divisions of the plots.

Several large flat rectangular pits (**053**, **066**, **080**, **082** & **084**), of unclear function, but interpreted as lazy beds for horticultural purposes, were recorded. These match similar features from the Cambridge University evaluation (CAU=F6, F7, F12 & F13).

Despite a number of archaeological features being identified only a single sherd of medieval pottery (13th/14th century) was recovered. Very few features were fully excavated, most being recorded in section and many of these were only partially observed. Topsoil, subsoil and trench spoil was scanned for artefacts, however the extent of modern disturbance for foundations and general development resulted in very great disturbance across the entire site.

The nature of the project makes practically any predictions concerning areas of particularly dense or rich archaeology worthless. Features were recorded from all 16 trenches excavated. The medieval agricultural or horticultural terracing was located to the north of the boundary ditch, surviving where the modern overburden was greatest. The smaller property or enclosure ditches were also located to the north of the boundary ditch, however, no spatial patterning beyond this can be attempted. What is clear is that beneath the housing development evidence of economic and agricultural practices relating to medieval Isleham survive, most probably its later Manor, and its associated settlement. No evidence has been recorded of "Monastic" remains.

7 CONCLUSION

The objectives of the project, set out by the CAO Brief, were to ensure that any archaeological features exposed during ground works were recorded and interpreted. This information could then be added to the results of the previous evaluation report to create a record of the archaeology of the site to be preserved along with the buried remains still protected in-situ.

The project has been successful in achieving its primary objective. Archaeological remains were identified in all 16 trenches observed, confirming that the area beneath the housing developed was an important medieval settlement. Beyond this it has not been possible to add any additional information to that obtained from the evaluation carried out in 1998 by the Cambridge Archaeological Unit. This investigation discovered medieval remains of enclosures, horticultural features and boundary features, including robbed wall foundations. The present investigation has confirmed these findings but has not altered the overall interpretation. The project has therefore not been able to further the understanding of the archaeology at West Street, Isleham.

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