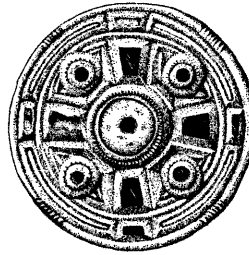


Library Copy

OFFICE COPY



Archaeological Field Unit

Medieval Hearths and Pits at 3/3a Lynn Road, Ely

S Kenney

November 1998

Cambridgeshire County Council

Report No. A140

Commissioned By B&S Developments Ltd

Medieval Hearths and Pits at 3/3a Lynn Road, Ely

Scott Kenney

November 1998

Editor Dr. Paul Spoerry, PhD
Illustrator Jon Cane BA

Report No A140

©Archaeological Field Unit
Cambridgeshire County Council
Fulbourn Community Centre
Haggis Gap, Fulbourn
Cambridgeshire CB1 5HD
Tel (01223) 881614
Fax (01223) 880946

SUMMARY

Between the 3rd and 6th of November 1998, the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council conducted an archaeological evaluation on land at 3/3a Lynn Road, Ely, Cambridgeshire (TL5402/8041). The work was commissioned by B&S Developments Ltd.

Extensive medieval archaeology, mostly dated by pottery to the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, was found in the two trenches excavated, and several different types of features were briefly examined. These included at least three hearths in trench 2, and a probable cess pit in trench 1. No unequivocal evidence of structures was found, but it is likely that this type of remains exist on the site, outside the area of investigation, or sealed beneath the deposits observed in this evaluation.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY	1
3. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND	3
4. METHODOLOGY	4
5. RESULTS	4
6. DISCUSSION	7
7. RECOMMENDATIONS	8
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	8
BIBLIOGRAPHY	9
Maps consulted	9
LIST OF FIGURES	
Figure 1 Site Location Map	2
Figure 2 Plans of trenches 1 and 2	6

Medieval Hearths and Pits at 3/3a Lynn Road, Ely

1 INTRODUCTION

Between 3rd and 6th November 1998, the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council (AFU) carried out an archaeological evaluation on land at 3/3a Lynn Road, Ely (TL5402/8041). The work was carried out at the request of B&S Developments Ltd, in advance of a proposed town house and office development, and was in response to a brief set by the County Archaeology Office (CAO).

The site lies in the centre of Ely, 120m north of the west door of the cathedral and 50m south of the medieval gaol. The area affected by the development proposals covers approximately 380m². Until recent demolition took place, there was a Victorian building standing on part of the site.

The presence of archaeological remains was considered likely by the CAO, on the basis of the site's location in the centre of the city, and information contained in the County Sites and Monuments Record (SMR).

Two trenches with a total length of c19m were opened by machine, and subsequently hand cleaned, photographed, and base planned.

Both trenches were found to be filled with medieval layers and cut features. Trench 2 also showed evidence of hearths and floors, and cut features extending down to at least 18.75m OD at the rear of the property.

2 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

2.1 Geology

According to the British Geological Survey, the centre of the city lies on the Lower Greensand which caps the Ely island, the bulk of which is composed of Kimmeridge Clay. However, on the site there is a layer of Boulder Clay over the Greensand and this has also been observed during other excavations in the vicinity.

2.2 Topography

The site is located on the highest ground on the island of Ely, a plateau at about 20.5m OD. The benchmark used during this evaluation has a value of 21.1m and is situated on the Lamb Hotel.

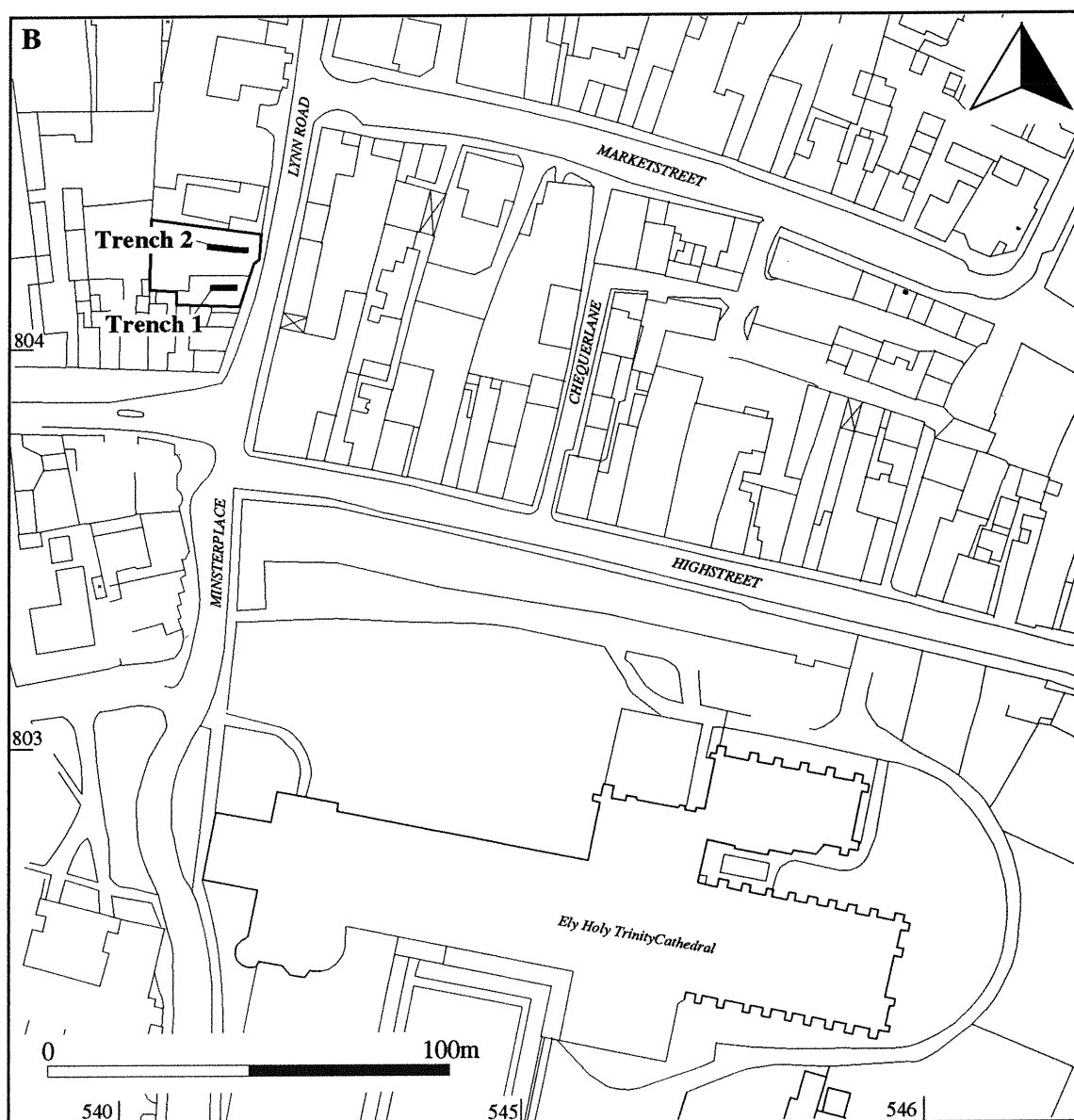
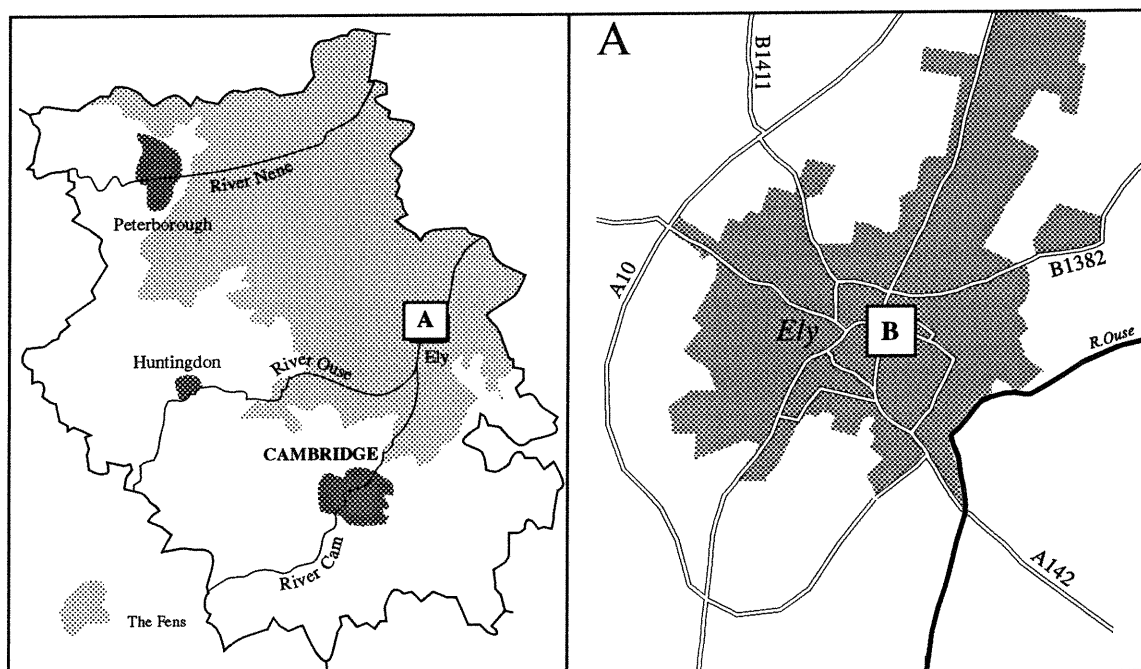


Figure 1 Site Location Map

3 HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

3.1 Historical Background

Lying 23km north-northeast of Cambridge on the river Great Ouse, Ely was mentioned in Domesday Book as a small agricultural settlement. Its development as an important medieval town began after the construction of the cathedral, built on the site of an earlier monastery, and the canalisation of the river, which provided important trade links. Lynn Road has existed in some form since at least the early medieval period.

3.2 Archaeological Background

Numerous excavations in Ely have produced medieval finds, and evidence has been found in several locations of medieval structures. Some standing buildings have medieval fabric within them, and the Cathedral itself dates from the 1080s.

The location, size and form of middle Saxon Ely are not known, but the early monastery probably lies within the general area of the later Cathedral (Robinson 1994). The site under evaluation is believed to lie close to the general area of late Saxon settlement, perhaps adjacent to a classic 'trumpet-shaped market area around the west gate of the re-founded Saxon monastery (map in Robinson 1993, and Robinson 1994). Late Saxon pottery has been recovered from this part of the town, at St Marys Lodge (Robinson unpub.), but the layout of streets and buildings is unknown for this period.

The date of first creation and/or construction of the properties along the west side of this southern part of Lynn Road is not known. The generally accepted model places the market place creation in the twelfth century and this location could have formed the western edge of that market area (Robinson 1993 and 1994). Market infill may have occurred quite quickly and this implies that the creation of medieval-style burgage properties along the western side of Lynn Road might have taken place in the twelfth or thirteenth centuries; it may even have been an integral part of the design of the new borough in the twelfth century.

Ely is known as a pottery production centre in the medieval and post-medieval periods, and quantities of the local wares have been recovered from locations all over the city. This site is well away from that quarter of the town; however, craft and mercantile activities are to be expected relating to frontage buildings and their associated back yards throughout the medieval period.

The location of the site, so close to the heart of the ancient city and adjacent to one of the main through routes, suggests a very high archaeological potential for all centuries since the settlement and routeway existed here.

4 METHODOLOGY

Before beginning work on site, a desktop study was undertaken to ascertain the full extent of known archaeological data for the area. The desktop study revealed general rather than specific information about the historical and archaeological background of the site.

Two trenches were opened using a mechanical excavator with a 1.5m toothless ditching bucket, under the supervision of an archaeologist (see fig. 1). The trenches were cleaned by hand, photographed, and base planned at a scale of 1:20. Features were sample excavated by hand in Trench 1 and two sondages were dug in Trench 2; both strategies were intended to determine the dating and depth of archaeological deposits.

5 RESULTS

5.1 Trench 1

Trench 1 was 7.4m long and contained numerous archaeological features. 0.25m of modern rubble overlay between 0.05 and 0.25m of clay and mortar lenses containing Post-medieval pottery, tile and brick fragments. Due to the irregular and sloping nature of these lenses, growing thicker towards the south, machining somewhat truncated the medieval features at the northwestern corner of the trench. Several Post-medieval features were also cut from below these lenses and they included a brick foundation similar to the one seen in trench 2. A sewer pipe trench also cut across the eastern end of the trench. Three modern square postholes revealed little in preview when excavated.

Only a limited amount of sample excavation could be carried out without substantial impact on the sequence, and within the time available, and like trench 2, it was not possible to determine the stratigraphic relationships between many of the observed deposits. Two features were positively identified as a shallow linear, and a probable cess pit, respectively.

The linear appeared fairly straight in plan, although due to the similarity between many of the deposits, its edge was not clear for its entire 6.3m length. It contained several fills, including a hard, compact gravelly layer only 0.05m thick. The linear feature excavated as 20 in the western end section of the trench is probably the same feature. Neither this section nor a section rapidly excavated further east can be certain to have revealed the true depth of the feature. However, the shape of the deposits removed tends to suggest a relatively flat base.

North of the linear at the west end of the trench was pit 15, partly within the baulk. It had overall dimensions of 1.1m x 0.8m deep x at least 0.5m, and contained numerous fills. Fill 11, a dark brown clayey silt contained several

sherds of medieval Ely Ware spotted dated to 1200-1350. Some of the upper fills had the characteristic green tinge usually associated with cess pits.

Another deposit within the trench containing notable finds was 16, a very dark greyish brown clayey silt, containing several sherds of medieval Ely Ware spotted dated to 1200-1350. From its shape in plan, it could be inferred that the deposit had been truncated by three other features to the east, west and south, but again, this is not certain.

Nowhere within this trench was any form of natural identified and the vertical extent of the archaeology remains unknown. In plan, 90% of the area of the trench consists of medieval or probable medieval deposits.

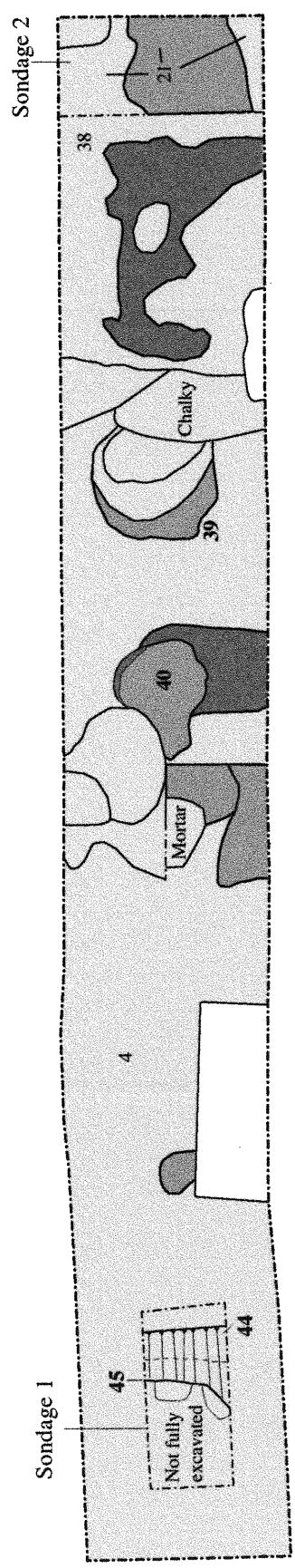
In plan, 95% of the area of the trench consists of medieval or probable medieval deposits.

5.2 Trench 2

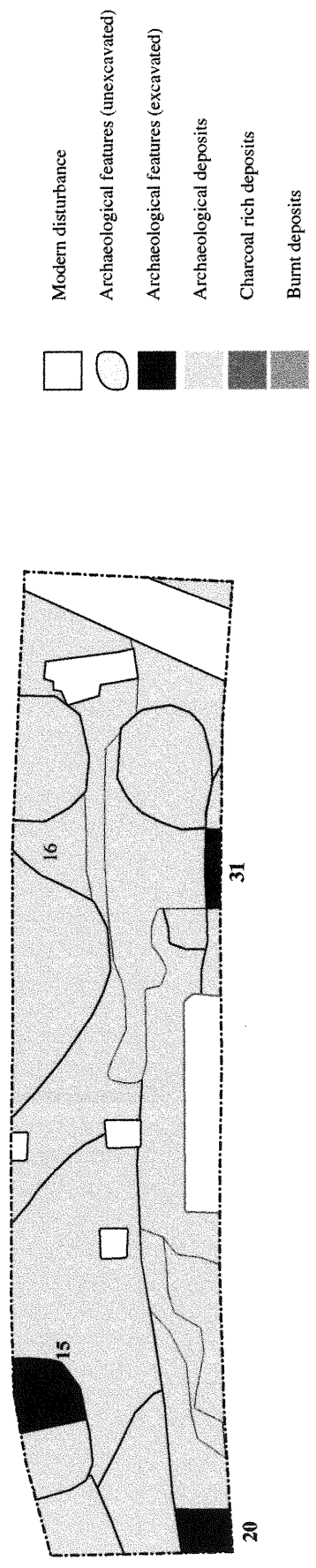
Trench 2 was 10.8m long and contained several archaeological features and layers. During machining, 0.25m of modern rubble was removed revealing a very patchy red, dusky red and reddish black burnt layer only 0.01m thick. This layer contained fragments of brick and tile which have been dated as post-medieval. It was also cut by a Victorian brick structure, possibly part of a cellar, which had been backfilled with loose rubble. Below this layer was a homogenous olive brown sandy clay silt layer 0.2m thick containing similar finds. The removal of this deposit revealed another thin intermittent ashy and burnt layer. This in turn sealed the features, which were clarified once the trench had been hand cleaned. Cleaning at this level produced numerous sherds of medieval Ely Ware which have been spotted dated to 1200-1350.

Two distinct and coherent features were identified, as well as a number of vague patches and thin ashy spreads. The features had the appearance of hearths or possible oven bases. In consultation with the CAO, it was decided not to excavate them during the evaluation, but to record them as fully as possible. All the contexts in this trench contained occasional charcoal flecks, except where noted in individual descriptions.

To the east was hearth 39, 0.9m x at least 0.8m, which was partially obscured by a chalky patch of olive brown sandy clay silt. Beyond that the stratigraphy becomes uncertain. It is possible to speculate on the structure of 39 on the basis of the plan and from previously excavated examples. From the near concentric appearance of the contexts within the limits of 39, it can be inferred that the feature has a broadly concave shape, with the inner fills overlying the outer ones. Since the outer fill is a dusky red and reddish black sandy clay silt, this is probably the burnt base of the feature.



Trench 2



Trench 1



Figure 3 Plan of Trenches 1 and 2

West of 39 was another, slightly different hearth, 40, approximately 0.7m x 0.6m. This had a hard ashy surface, and its stratigraphy is much more ambiguous than 39. Partial excavation on the periphery of the feature revealed a tantalising glimpse of further complexity yet to be explored. A fragment of unburnt mortar floor was exposed, as well as a further burnt hard surface below this. Interleaved between these harder layers were thin deposits of olive brown sandy clay silt.

Broadly speaking, it appears that these features overlie layer 4, a fairly uniform olive brown sandy clay silt with very occasional charcoal flecks, although without further investigation this cannot be proven. 4 appeared to extend the full length and width of the trench. Two separate sondages were dug through 4, one at either end of the trench, in an attempt to ascertain the nature and extent of the underlying deposits, if they existed.

Sondage 1, at the west end of the trench, was 1.4m long and 0.6m wide, and located where there appeared to be no features overlying or cutting 4. Removal of layer 4, up to 0.2m thick, revealed layer 5, up to 0.3m thick, identical in appearance to 4, but slightly gritty, much firmer and less sticky. Below 5 was 43, a soft, light olive brown sandy silt containing numerous small fragments of sandstone. This appeared to be the fill of a small N-S linear feature, 44, with irregular sides and a concave base, 0.8m wide, 0.5m deep and at least 0.6m long. 44 cut the edge of 22, a firm, slightly sticky dark grey silty clay containing flecks and patches of olive yellow sandy clay, identical to the natural Boulder Clay. Excavation of 22 ceased at 18.75m OD, and the fill was at least 0.55m wide and 0.45m deep. It appeared to be the upper fill of a feature, 45, but from the tiny portion revealed by excavation, it was impossible to determine the nature of the cut. Pottery recovered from 22 has been spotdated to 1200-1350. In the side of this sondage, natural Boulder Clay was identified at a depth of 0.5m below the level at which machining ceased.

Sondage 2, at the east end of the trench, was very shallow, due to encountering surface 21, a hard, almost flat plane across at least two deposits, one of which was very burnt. Assuming stratigraphic continuity along the length of the trench, the deposit over 21, assigned context 38, was probably the same as 4, but this has yet to be proven. At this point, the deposit was 0.05m thick.

6 DISCUSSION

As expected, the site has produced a wealth of medieval domestic debris; what is surprising is that little evidence emerged of structures on either plot. Also, the marked differences in the depositional sequence in the two trenches is notable. On another site in a lower location, the homogenous olive deposit masking the features in trench 2 might be interpreted as alluvium, but on the top of a hill in Ely this is extremely unlikely.

This site appears to demonstrate different depositional sequences for the properties on 3 and 3a Lynn Road with the boundary between them hidden below the access road.. This implies that this sub-division of the original numbered plots had already occurred by the thirteenth to fourteenth century date assigned to the pottery recovered from these features.

This may indicate that the land on the west side of Lynn Road, at the west end of what was the medieval marketplace, came to be developed early in the growth of post-Conquest Ely, with the original numbered plots being subdivided within a century or two of the market place being laid out.

The lack of definite structural evidence is, however, puzzling, although the surface discovered in trench 2's sondage 2 hints at the complexity yet to be uncovered, and may constitute the floor inside a building. Stratigraphically, this would imply that the hearths or oven bases were later than that putative structure, possibly being used when the building had fallen or been knocked down. There are the tantalising ashy layers, but they are insubstantial, and a timber framed structure once burnt, usually leaves greater traces. No burnt daub or plaster was found on the site, for instance.

Trench 1 presents other problems; is the linear feature a foundation trench? Where is the dwelling which belongs to the cess pit? Are all the other deposits really a series of intercutting pits? The limited scope of this evaluation has been such that it is possible from the evidence only to frame further questions and suggest avenues of research. What it is possible to say is that extensive medieval deposits exist on the site in a good state of preservation, and that an opportunity to expand the state of knowledge of medieval Ely has presented itself, if 'preservation by record' is deemed the most appropriate way forward.

7 RECOMMENDATIONS

It has been suggested by the client that the suspended floors of the proposed new buildings would not impinge upon the archaeological deposits revealed during this evaluation. If this were the case then, within the footprint, only the footings would cause damage. The key factor under consideration is therefore the extent of footings and other impacts, such as service trenches and general surface churning during a winter groundworks campaign, and whether the excavation recording of only those deposits under primary threat can be achieved in isolation of, and without severe detriment to, the surrounding sequence.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author wishes to thank B & S Developments Ltd for funding the project; Dr Paul Spoerry, the Project Manager; the site staff- Carole Fletcher. This

project was carried out in response to a brief drawn up by the County Archaeology Office.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Cambridgeshire Sites and Monuments Record (SMR)

- Pugh RB ,(ed), 1953, *A History of the County of Cambridge and the Isle of Ely*, Vol IV, The University of London Institute for Historical Research
- Reaney PH , 1943, *The Place-Names of Cambridgeshire and the Isle of Ely*, English Place-Name Society No 19, Cambridge
- Robinson B, 1993, *Archaeological Resource Management Strategies: A New Framework for Development-Led Archaeology in Towns*, Univ. of York MA thesis.
- Robinson B, 1994, *Ely City Centre Redevelopment: An Archaeological Desktop Report*. CCC AFU Arch. Report No. 108.
- Robinson B, unpub., *Archaeological recording at St Marys Lodge, Ely 1993*, CCC AFU unpub. MS.
- Rumble A , (ed), *The Domesday Book*, 7-8, 11, 14, Phillimore, 1981
- Taylor CC , 1973, *The Cambridgeshire Landscape*,

Maps consulted

Ordnance Survey of Cambridgeshire, Draft 1", 1811

Ordnance Survey 1:25000 Pathfinder sheet 941, Ely (North) and Littleport, 1988

British Geological Survey 1:50000, sheet 173, Ely, Solid and Drift Edition, 1980



Cambridgeshire
County Council
Archaeology

The Archaeological Field Unit
Fulbourn Community Centre
Haggis Gap
Fulbourn
Cambridge CB1 5HD
Tel (01223) 881614
Fax (01223) 880946