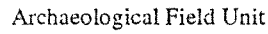


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May 1996

Report No. A 86

Commissioned By Anchorpoint Builders Ltd and the NHS Executive (Anglia & Oxford)

SUMMARY

Between the 22nd and 24th of April 1996 the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council undertook the preliminary evaluation of the site of an Old Health Centre (TL 5390 8046) situated on the south side of Chapel Street, Ely. The evaluation was commissioned by Anchorpoint Builders Ltd and the NHS Executive (Anglia & Oxford).

Two archaeological test pits were excavated on the street frontage. Excavation revealed the remains of two Late Saxon (900AD - 1150AD) rubbish pits sealed by early fourteenth century deposits in addition to an early medieval quarry pit containing a high level of residual Saxon material.

**Late Saxon and Medieval Features at Chapel Street, Ely.
An Archaeological Evaluation of the Site of The Old Health Centre.
ELYCS 96 TL 5390 / 8046**

1 INTRODUCTION

Between the 22nd and 24th of April 1996 the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council undertook the preliminary evaluation of the site of an old health centre (TL 5390 8046) situated on the south side of Chapel Street, Ely. The evaluation was commissioned by Anchorpoint Builders Ltd and the NHS Executive (Anglia & Oxford) in advance of the proposed development of the site for housing with associated gardens and car parking. The evaluation was undertaken in accordance with the Design Brief prepared by Louise Austin of the County Archaeology Office; Development Control.

2 TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

The site is situated within the core of the historic town, to the north of the cathedral precinct and to the west of the market place.

The site lies at c 20.50m OD. Naturally deposited lower greensand soils were observed only within Test Pit 2 and were truncated to a depth of 19.20m OD.

3 HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

Chapel Street, known as *Cattestret* as early as the mid 13th century formed part of a large medieval suburb to the north of the cathedral precinct.

Little is known about the development along Chapel Street throughout the 13th and 14th centuries, except a single reference to a tenement here in the 13th century (Owen 1993, 19).

By the early 15th century a detailed survey records a few tenements on its north side and twenty-eight on its south side. The Archdeacon's garden was also situated here, and a small lane also containing tenements is also noted here (Owen 1993, 25).

A find of large freshly broken sherds of late medieval pottery recovered from the site of the adjacent chapel provide the sole physical evidence of the streets medieval origins to date (SMR Ref: 07859).

By the early 17th century the street is depicted by Speed as being very well developed with gardens and orchards to the rear of the street front properties.

Later sources such as Bidwells map of 1851 and the Ordnance Survey of 1888 depict light brick structures including a stables and coach house standing on the frontage of the proposed development area.



Figure 1 Site Location Plan

4 METHODOLOGY

Two test pits both approximately 2m square were opened using a JCB with a toothed bucket to a depth of 1m, and then hand excavated.

The positioning, of the test pits and their final size was determined by the presence of live services and the proximity of the excavation to the street frontage.

All sections and the bases of the test pits were cleaned and recorded. Excavation of surviving deposits and features was undertaken to retrieve dating evidence. Photographs were taken and plan and section drawings made where appropriate.

All deposits were recorded using the Archaeology Field Units single context system.

All site records and artefacts are held currently at the AFU headquarters at Fulbourn and stored under the site code ELYCS 96.

5 RESULTS

Test Pit 1

Measuring 2.60m east - west by 2.00m north - south Test Pit 1 was located adjacent to the street frontage at the eastern end of the proposed development area (Fig 2).

Excavation reached a maximum depth of 19.44m OD with no natural deposits in evidence. The use of an auger revealed the survival of archaeological deposits to at least 19m OD.

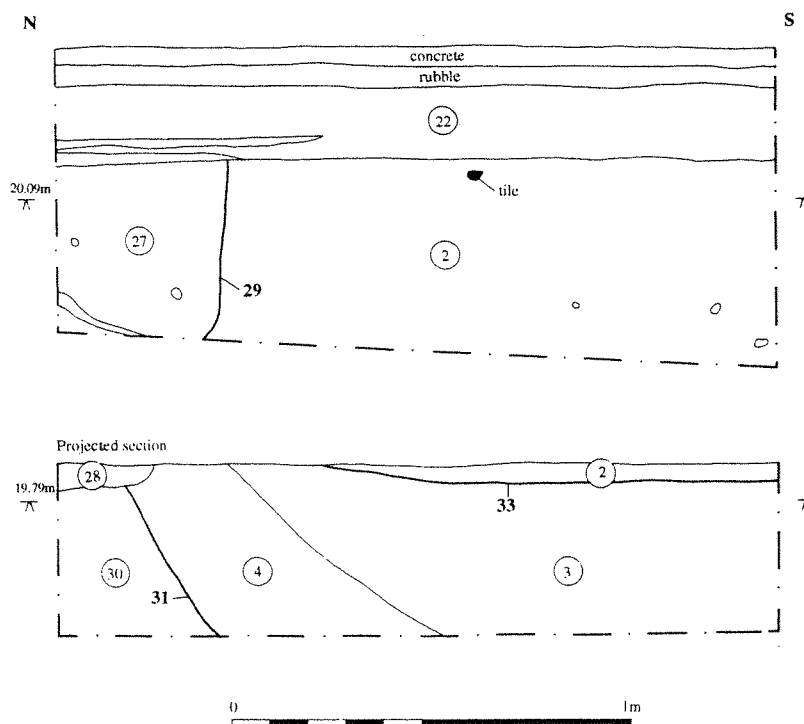


Figure 2 West facing section of Test Pit 1

The earliest surviving feature 31, (filled by (3), (4), & probably (30)) dates from the medieval period and appears to cover the entire base of the test pit extending beyond all four limits of excavation. Given the small size of the evaluation area it is difficult to ascribe a definite interpretation for this feature. However given its apparent depth and the angle of tip lines observed in section it seems likely that this is a backfilled quarry pit.

Examination of the pottery suggests a date range of between 1200AD - 1350AD although a significant quantity of Late Saxon material dating from between 900AD - 1150AD was also present particularly in context (4).

Stratigraphically, the next deposit in the archaeological sequence (2) is a layer of probable garden soil overlying a truncation horizon (33) created as a result of construction or landscaping. Truncation of medieval and early post medieval stratigraphy (33) appears to date from the 18th to 19th centuries AD and occurs to a depth of 19.80m OD.

The foundation of a north - south brick foundation (23) was observed running across the center of Test Pit 1 below the topsoil. This wall would appear to be part of one of the brick built outhouses shown on the Ordnance Survey map of 1888.

A brief description of all other recorded deposits (contexts 20 - 31 inc.) is included within Appendix 1.

Test pit 2

Measuring 2.20m east - west by 2.20m north - south, Test Pit 2 was located c 1m in front of the north western corner of the Health Centre. The southern section bounds the inspection shaft for the sewerage system associated with the Health Centre (Fig 3 & 4).

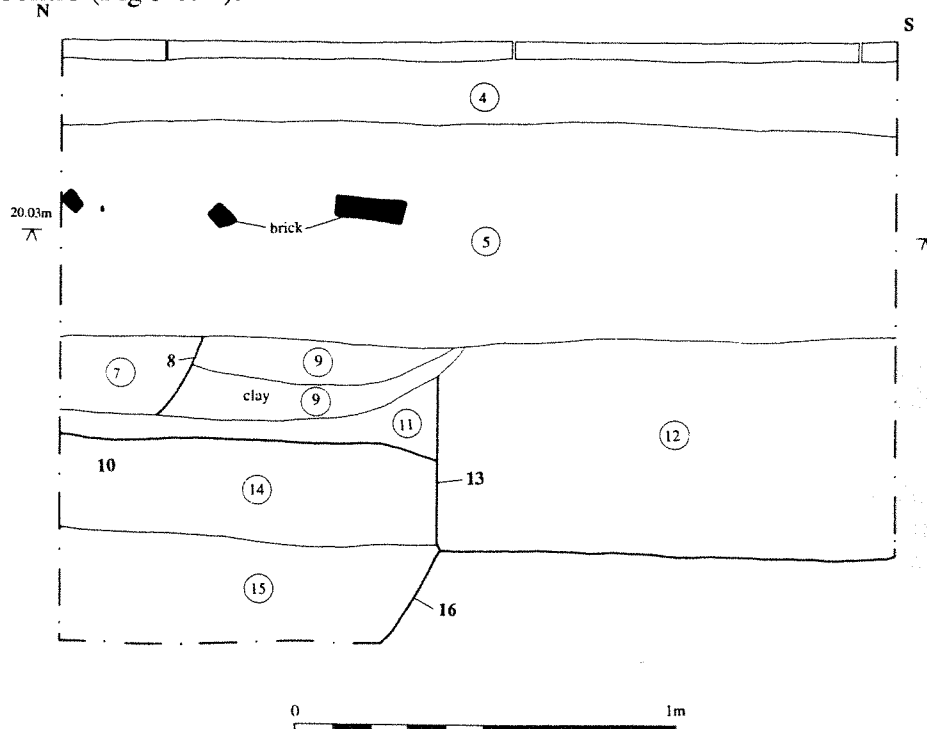


Figure 3 West facing section of Test Pit 2

Excavation reached a maximum depth of 18.95m OD with naturally deposited sandy silty clay occurring at 19.20m within the south eastern corner of the Test Pit.

Pit 16, fill (15), (Not fully excavated), extending into the north, east and west limits of excavation is dated to the Late Saxon period. The range of ceramic fabric types (which includes Thetford ware, St Neots ware and locally produced pottery) suggests a domestic usage and would indicate the presence of a settlement in the immediate vicinity.

Pit 18, fill (17), (Not fully excavated), contained no datable finds but did contain significant amounts of charcoal at the base of the fill.

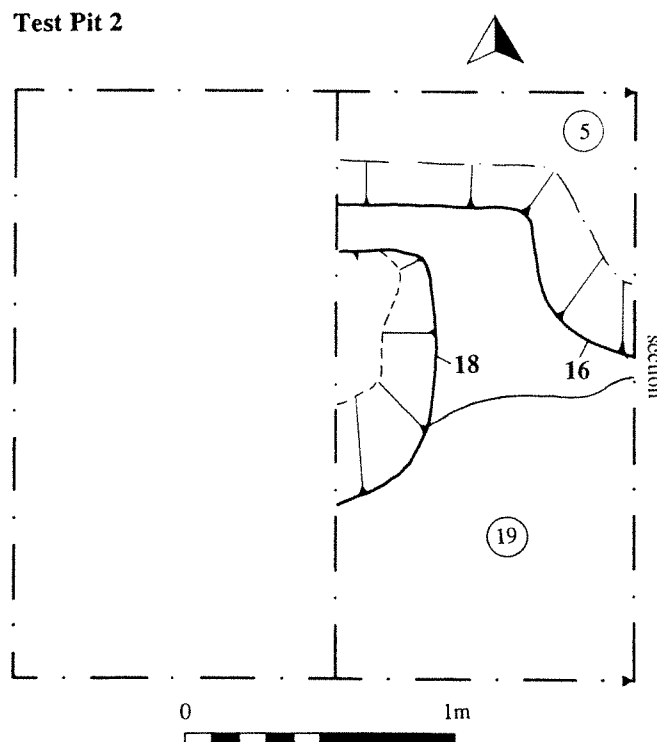


Figure 4 Plan of Test Pit 2

Both pits 16 and 18 were in turn sealed by a layer (14) of mid grey brown silty clay which was up to 0.30m thick. This layer dated to between 1200AD - 1300AD, probably represents garden soil or cultivation of some kind.

Layer (14) appears to have been truncated to a depth of 19.50m OD probably as a result of later construction along the Chapel Street frontage in the post - medieval period although given the limited size of the excavated area this is at present impossible to prove. No datable material was obtainable from these later deposits despite excavation of the sections of the test pit.

A second truncation horizon 6 is visible within Test Pit 2 at 19.80m OD and is clearly associated with the construction of the health centre directly to the south.

6 DISCUSSION

Despite the limited area available for the preliminary evaluation it is immediately clear that there is surviving evidence for a Late Saxon presence within the development area well sealed beneath Medieval deposits.

Within Test pit 1 a high level of residual Late Saxon pottery was recovered from Quarry Pit 31 confirming the late Saxon presence.

Two pits (16 & 18) dating from between 900AD to 1150AD were excavated within Test Pit 2 although the area available for excavation at this depth was only 1m by 2m. The material recovered from pit 16 indicates domestic usage.

The degree and extent of truncation across the development area caused by early medieval quarrying, post medieval construction, modern services and the building of the Health Centre currently occupying the site is at present unknown, though it is apparent that well preserved pockets of Late Saxon activity remain.

Consequently the potential of the site to enable the characterisation of an area of the Late Saxon settlement currently unrepresented within the archaeological record at Ely, remains high.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank Anchorpoint Builders Ltd. And the NHS Executive (Anglia & Oxford) for commissioning this evaluation and for providing the funding.

I would also like to thank Steve Kemp for his assistance with the excavation.

The project was managed by Ben Robinson, analysis of the pottery was conducted by Paul Spoerry and the report illustrations were prepared by Melodie Pace.

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APPENDIX A: Context Descriptions

Context No.	Cut No.	Test Pit	Type	Description
1		1	Unstrat.	Unstrat. Finds collection
2	31	1	Pit Fill	Grey brown sandy silt with occasional pot and bone.
3	31	1	Pit Fill	Brown clayey sandy silt with occasional sandstone & charcoal flecks.
4	31	2	Pit Fill	Brown clayey sandy silt with yellow brown sandy mottling, occasional oyster shell, pot & bone.
5		2	Layer	Dark grey brown silty clay with occasional brick & mortar fragments.
6	6	2	Cut	Truncation level associated with the construction of the Health Centre.
7	8	2	Ditch Fill	Mid brown fine clay silt with frequent articulated (Cattle) bones.
8	8	2	Ditch Cut	Heavily truncated ditch cut.
9		2	Layer	Make-up consisting of very dark grey brown silt overlying a mid blue grey gleyed clay.
10	10	2	Cut	Truncation horizon.
11		2	Layer	Dark grey brown silty clay make-up.
12	13	2	Pit Fill	Light yellowish white sandy mortar with frequent brick & tile.
13	13	2	Pit Cut	Vertical sides, base flat, seen in western limit of excavation.
14		2	Layer	Mid grey brown silty clay with occasional pot, bone, oyster, mussel & charcoal flecks.
15	16	2	Pit Fill	Mid - dark grey brown silty clay with mid yellowish brown mottling.
16	16	2	Pit Cut	Irregular in plan with steeply sloping sides, extending into the N, S & W limits of excavation.
17	18	2	Pit Fill	Mid yellowish brown silty clay with frequent charcoal towards the base of the fill & occasional bone.
18	18	2	Pit Cut	Irregular in plan with steeply sloping sides, base concave. Extends into the western limit of excavation.
19		2	Nat.	Mid orange brown sandy silty clay, frequent iron panning. Natural subsoil.
20		1	Layer	Dark grey brown silty sands with flint gravel. Topsoil / makeup.
21		1	Layer	Concrete overlying brick & tile rubble (max depth 0.17m)
22		1	Layer	Loose brown silty sand with c 40% brick tile & mortar fragments.

Context No.	Cut No.	Test Pit	Type	Description
23		1	Wall	Brick wall, width 0.22m extending N-S across the centre of TP 1 (bricks L 0.22m x W 0.115m x T 60mm.)
24	24	1	Cut	Construction horizon for wall 23 .
25	26	1	Wall	Limestone & brick foundation for wall 23 .
26	26	1	Wall Cut	Foundation cut with vertical sides and a flat base.
27	29	1	Ditch Fill	Brown sandy clay silts with moderate flint gravel, occasional charcoal flecks & shell fragments.
28	29	1	Ditch Fill	Yellowish brown silty sandy clay.
29	29	1	Ditch Cut	Linear steep sided cut running parallel with the road.
30		1	Layer	Compact dark grey brown sandy clay silt with occasional charcoal flecks.
31	31	1	Pit Cut	Possible quarry pit extent unknown.
32		2	Mod. Surface	Turf and path associated with the Health Centre.

APPENDIX B: Pottery Assessment

By Dr Paul Spoerry

Late Saxon and Medieval pottery was recovered from stratified deposits within both Test Pit 1 and Test Pit 2. In addition later deposits contained pottery dating from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries AD.

Test Pit 1

Contexts that are pre 1150

(4) Spot date 900-1150

6 sherds of St Neots Ware including one cooking pot rim, 1 sherd of Thetford Ware and 1 small sherd of Medieval Ely Ware. Despite the Late Saxon date ascribed to this context the ceramic assemblage is most likely to be residual as it is derived from quarry pit **31**. The possibility remains however, that the quarry dates from this period and that material in the upper fill (3) represents secondary deposition (M Hinman pers. comm.).

Contexts that are pre 1350

(3) Spot date 1200-1350

5 sherds of St Neots Ware including one cooking pot rim (900-1150), 1 sherd of Thetford Ware (900-1150), 9 sherds of Medieval Ely Ware (various) and 1 sherd of Medieval Ely Ware from an upright cooking pot. Upper fill of quarry pit **31**.

Contexts that are pre 1900

(2) Spot date 1700-1900

1 sherd of English Stoneware with Tiger glaze and 1 sherd of abraded Medieval Ely Ware.

(22) Spot date 1700-1900

Several sherds of Post Medieval Redware including some sherds from flowerpots!

Test Pit 2

Contexts that are pre 1150

(15) Spot date 900-1150

2 sherds of St Neots Ware, 1 sherd of Thetford Ware and 6 sherds of unknown origin in 3 fabrics. A Late Saxon assemblage indicative of domestic usage.

Contexts that are pre 1350

(14) Spot date 1200-1350

Residual Late Saxon pottery includes 6 sherds of St Neots Ware, 1 sherd of Thetford Ware, 1 sherd of Stamford Ware and 1 sherd of an unknown fabric, all dated to between 900-1150.

In addition 11 sherds of Medieval Ely Ware (including angled bowl and carinated bowl profiles and rims), 4 sherds of Medieval Ely Ware with stabbing and slashing decoration on the rim reminiscent of Thetford rouletting (1100-1350), 1 sherd of Developed Stamford Ware and 5 sherds of grey Thetford type ware.

This assemblage is similar to that from context 3 in Test Pit 1 although much larger.

CONCLUSION

The lack of excavated assemblages of artefactual material from Ely that date to the pre 13th century, and particularly the Late Saxon period, renders the potential and importance of these groups higher than their own inherent significance.

From the point of view of ceramic studies and also of economic / artefactual reconstruction in general, any opportunity to study further the "pre 1150" phases here, should be given high priority.



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