

**Marriots Yard, Ramsey,
An Archaeological Recording Brief**

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SUMMARY

During January and February 1996 a basic recording evaluation was carried out by of the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council at Marriots Yard, Newtown Road, Ramsey. This was in response to a brief compiled for the clients J.M. & M. Armstrong, (Planning app. no. H0976/95) by the County Archaeology Office.

Although the site held archaeological potential due to its location on an important trade route, the Great Whyte, no archaeologically significant material or deposits were evident when the topsoil stripping and the foundation trenching was observed.

MARRIOTS YARD, RAMSEY, AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORDING BRIEF

INTRODUCTION

During January and February 1996 a watching brief was carried out on behalf of Mr. J.M. & Mrs. J. Armstrong at a site just off Marriots Yard Ramsey (TL 287 853), to observe and record archaeological evidence uncovered during ground preparations prior to the construction of a number dwellings on the site. The work was conducted in the presence of an archaeologist from the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council.

GEOLOGY

The Soil Survey of England and Wales 1:50 000 map shows the town of Ramsey lying on a complex sequence of geology. The underlying strata are Jurassic and Cretaceous Clay with overlying Fen Peat occurring in an limited area covering the north of the town. This peat exists due to the low lying area around the Great Whyte. The site itself lies on the Fen Peat and close to the waterway.

BACKGROUND

The origins of Ramsey date back to the establishment of Ramsey abbey in 949 AD. The sources state that this was initially in the form of a hermitage and a wooden chapel, with a stone church being built some 25 years later.

The parish church of St. Thomas a Becket located at the eastern end of the town just to the south of the Church Green, was originally built between 1180-1190, as either a hospital, infirmary or a guest house for the abbey. The wealth of the abbey in this period, which quickly led to a growth in both the size and prosperity of Ramsey town, is manifest in the size and grandeur of this building. The new found success of the town was recognised in 1267 when the Abbot obtained a grant from Henry III to hold a Wednesday market.

The street plan of the town appears to have changed little over the time, with the original approach to the town and Abbey represented by High Street. The market place, a focal

point of the town, was located in the area between High Street and Little Whyte and included the Island site. This area was probably developed at a date prior to the 15th century (Page 1932), but was destroyed by fire in 1636. Further expansion of the town occurred along the route of the Great Whyte to the north of the market place but again a fire in 1731 apparently destroyed all of the then existing structures. After the fire, formalised plots were laid out producing the street pattern seen on the 1926 RCHM map, which to a large extent is still in evidence today. The site itself lies within this comparatively late settled area, which may well have been subject to activity in earlier centuries as the canalised stream that previously ran the length of the Great Whyte represented an important local trade route.

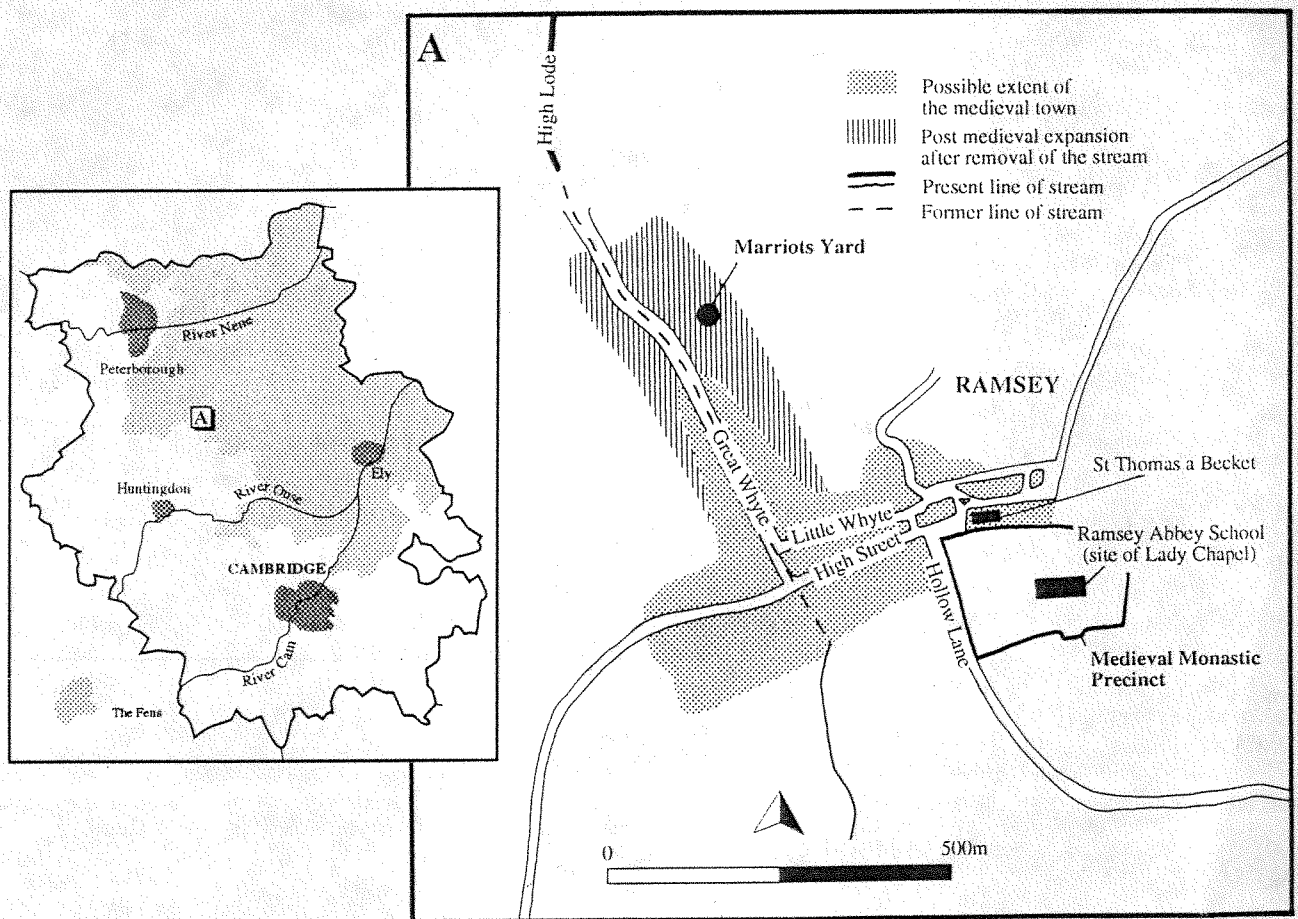


Figure 1 Site Location Plan

METHODOLOGY

In the higher area of the development site, (located at the south-west end), ground-stripping by a mechanical excavator took place to a depth of *c.*150-200mm which involved the removal of topsoil from an area of *c.*25x15m. Removal of a non-

underpinned concrete surface which covered the eastern end of the site produced a level slightly lower than that required by the client. Therefore the soil overburden removed earlier was utilised as levelling material. This entailed the redeposition, (by spreading) of soil by the mechanical excavator until the correct level was obtained. Latterly the pile-driving operation commenced followed by the excavation of the house foundation trenches, which varied in depth from between 800mm at the south-western end of the site to 500mm at the north-western end.

RESULTS

Material such as pottery and other artefact classes are generally expected to occur within the topsoil when buried archaeological deposits are disturbed by later activity. However, observation of topsoil stripping and examination of the spoil removed from the south-west area produced no residual or archaeologically significant artefactual evidence. As the stripping did not involve the revealing of, or interference with, subsoil no features indicative of archaeological activity were evident on the exposed surface. This latter was composed of the same topsoil material as removed by the mechanical excavator. The removal of the concrete surface also failed to achieve a sufficient depth to expose any archaeologically significant surfaces and only further modern topsoil was revealed. Thus no anthropogenic features pre-dating the concrete were observed during the stripping process. The pile-driving process did not facilitate observation. Excavation of the foundation trenches revealed no archaeological evidence in any form, the primary reason being the considerable depth of peat topsoil across the site, which exceeded the depth of the trenches.

CONCLUSION

The excavation of the foundation trenches revealed no archaeological activity, which is not unsurprising due to the low lying nature of the land around the Great Whyte and the presence of Fen Peat which would not be able to support a building of any great size. It must also be noted that the site lies at least 20m from the edge or bank of the Great Whyte and, as a consequence archaeological remains of post-medieval Ramsey's expansion period may be located within the aforementioned 20m boundary. Although the groundworks on the site revealed no archaeological activity, this does not signify that buried archaeological deposits are not present, as these may underlie the topsoil layer and remain intact due to the protective effect of the depth of soil now present.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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