

Archaeological Field Unit

**Transco Gas Pipeline at Huntingdon,  
Cambridgeshire.  
Archaeological monitoring and recording.**

Spencer Cooper

2002

**Cambridgeshire County Council**

Report No B95

Commissioned by Transco

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Year 2002

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## SUMMARY

*Between the 11<sup>th</sup> of April and 30<sup>th</sup> September 2001 an archaeological monitoring brief was undertaken within the centre of Huntingdon. The development consisted of a trench for a gas pipe in various locations within central Huntingdon. The work was undertaken by staff of the Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Field Unit and commissioned by Transco.*

*A number of evaluations and excavations have been undertaken in close proximity to the route of the pipe trench. These evaluations and excavations have enhanced our understanding of the development of medieval Huntingdon. From the outset it was hoped that the observations from this project in combination with results from previous excavation, would provide us with predictive deposit model for the archaeology of Huntingdon. Perhaps also may aid us in constructing topographical model for Huntingdon.*

*Unfortunately few significant archaeological deposits were encountered in over 800m of trenching. This is in the main because the trenching appears to have been located in areas of existing services. Artefacts were recovered from trench 19 and trench 20. Victorian remains were encountered in trenches 3 and 4.*

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Between the 11<sup>th</sup> of April and 30th September 2001 an archaeological monitoring brief was undertaken within the centre of Huntingdon. The development consisted of a pipe trench for a gas pipe in various locations within central Huntingdon. The work was undertaken by staff of the Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Field Unit and commissioned by Transco.

From the outset it was hoped that the observations from this project in combination with results from previous excavations would provide us with predictive deposit model for the archaeology of Huntingdon.

## 2 TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

The geology of the area is composed of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Terrace River gravels overlying Oxford clay. In the eastern side of the development the geology varies with 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> terrace river Gravels overlying Ampthill Clays.

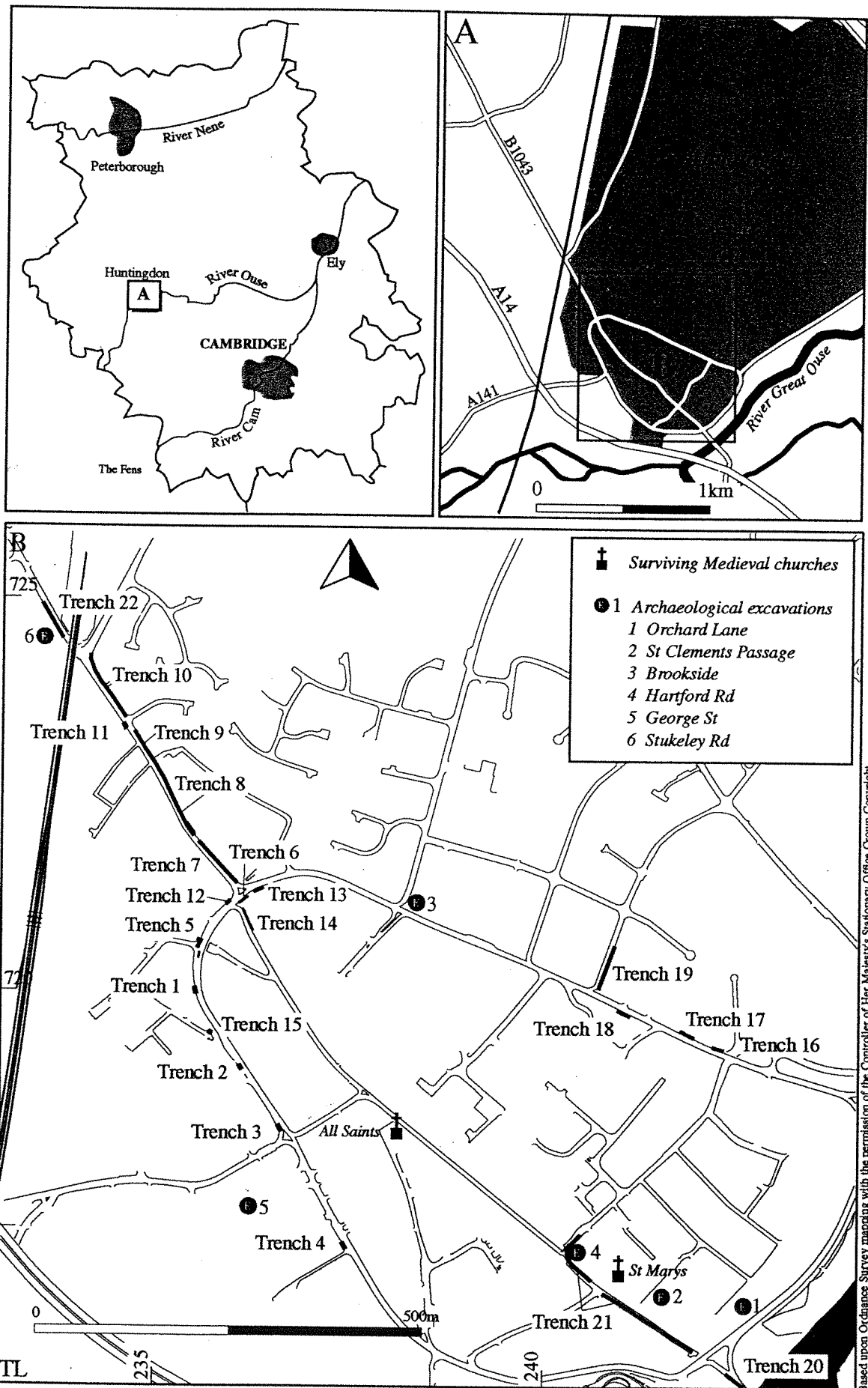
The route of the development can be divided up into four sections. Section 1:northwest part of the ring road. Section 2:Ermine St and Stukeley Rd. Section 3:High St and Medieval Bridge. Section 4:Nursery Rd and Priory Rd.

## 3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

### Archaeological Background

The development area is situated within the Ouse Valley, which is rich in prehistoric remains. During the late Neolithic and Bronze Age, major ritual complexes sprang up and evolved along the course of the Ouse and although much of the material culture does not survive these monuments are visible from the air as crop marks. These ceremonial complexes cover extensive territories and are distributed evenly across the landscape.

In the Roman period Huntingdon is seen as a suburb of Godmanchester and ribbon development northwards along Ermine Street from the river Ouse crossing along Ermine St. Evidence for Roman activity in Huntingdon derives from chance finds, mostly of some antiquity, and also from three key excavations that remain unpublished.



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Figure 1 Map of Huntingdon showing position of trenches

Huntingdon became an important population centre in the late Saxon period following the creation of a Danish and Later Edwardian burh. The Late Saxon settlement is believed to have covered much of the riverside and western parts of the later medieval town ( Spoerry, 2000).

Huntingdon appears to have developed successfully into the Post-conquest period there being over 250 taxable individuals listed in Domesday Book and as many as 16 Parish churches in existence by the 14th century. The town probably reached a peak in population around that time and the majority of remains on the site have been attributed to this period of greatest expansion being mostly of 13th century date and apparently short lived.

The middle part of the 14th century saw population collapse and great economic problems, plague and environmental changes being key factors. Huntingdon does appear to have had a bad experience of the plague around 1349, coupled with the problem of transportation restrictions downstream on the Ouse. The apparent loss of all but four of the 16 parish churches by the 16th century is the simplest historical demonstration of this: archaeological evidence also indicates contraction with large areas in cultivation even within the towns core in the late medieval period.

A number of evaluation and excavations have been undertaken in close proximity to the route of the pipe trench.

#### **Orchard Lane (In close proximity to trenches 20 and 21)**

Evaluation in 1994 and Excavation in 1995 (Oakey N, and Spoerry P,1997 )were carried out by the AFU, in advance of the development of the former Peacock builders yard on Orchard Lane only 70 m from the High St and close to the riverside. Human bone had been recorded during works in adjacent locations and it seemed likely that might this indicate the location of the burial ground of the lost church of St Clement known to have existed between St Mary's parish and the riverside in the medieval period.

Excavations revealed rubbish and cess pits dating to the period 900-1150 AD, along with evidence for property boundaries. One pit contained a large deposit of immature specimens of marine mollusc which had been dumped without being utilised for consumption.

The date that the burial ground was established is unclear. It was in existence in the 13<sup>th</sup> century and may have ceased to function before the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The excavation at Orchard Lane confirms that the riverside area was an active economic zone within the town in the 12th century.

**St Clements Passage (In close proximity to trench 21)**

In 1998 the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council undertook an excavation at St Clements Passage (Roberts,1999). Excavation revealed quarry pits, rubbish pits and deposits dating from the medieval and post-medieval periods a clay and wood lined pit was found in a group of similar features in the northern part of the site.

**9/10 George St (In close proximity to trench 4)**

An evaluation was carried out to the west of the development area at 9/10 George St in June 2000 by the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council (Cooper S, 2000). The evaluation revealed extensive 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> century quarrying, post-holes and pits.

**Brookside ( In close proximity to trench 19)**

Medieval activity perhaps representing suburban development immediately outside of the town ditch at Brookside (Cooper & Spoerry 1998)

**High Street /Hartford Rd Corner (In close proximity to trench 21)**

An evaluation carried out on the corner of Hartford Road and High St revealed medieval remains (Welsh, 1994). The evaluation revealed gravel surfaces rubbish pits and timber, and possibly stone, structures.

**Stukeley Rd (In close proximity to trench 22)**

Excavations by the AFU (Cooper and Spoerry forthcoming) revealed suburban ribbon development, activity of an interrupted nature in the 12<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, represented by the truncated foundations of timber buildings fronting onto Stukeley Rd.

The pipeline runs very close to a number of important historic buildings and sites.

**The Old River Bridge (In close proximity to trench 20)**

The bridge carrying Ermine St over the river Ouse was built of stone in AD 1332 with six arches. It is believed that the present stone bridge replaced an earlier timber bridge (VCH, 1932).

It is considered to be one of the finest of its kind in England and was constructed simultaneously at both ends by two different authorities, without much regard to direction. Fortunately, the two parts joined in the middle, but as they were not on the same axis there is a bend which has to be negotiated. Records described a



chapel on the east side which unlike the chapel at St Ives has not survived and no trace is left of its existence.

#### **St Mary's Church (In close proximity to trench 21)**

The church originates in the Norman period, but mostly rebuilt in the 13<sup>th</sup> century and its fine tower was the last major addition in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Part of the tower fell down in 1608 destroying the north aisle. It was rebuilt between AD1609 and 1620.

#### **Augustinian Priory of St Mary (In close proximity to trench 19)**

St Mary's Priory was built north of the town ditch around AD1086 and may have been located within a detached cemetery of the pre conquest collegiate church of St Mary(VCH,1932). The new priory was constructed shortly after 1086 by Estace and was substantially complete by the middle of the 12<sup>th</sup> century. In 1253 the priory held the original 2 hides of land with the church and the priory, whose buildings included the infirmary and sacristy, both located within the monastic enclosure. These two hides of land were bounded by the King's Ditch and the parishes of Stukeley and Hartford on the north east, by the Ouse to the south and by the High St on the west.

#### 4 **Methodology**

A number of pipe trenches were excavated under archaeological supervision. A mini digger using a toothless bucket opened trenches. The trenching in most places resulted in the removal of overburden. After machining was completed each trench was cleaned by hand and photographed and recorded using the AFU standard archaeological record system. Trench spoil was scanned by eye in order to obtain artefacts.

#### 5 **RESULTS**

##### **General**

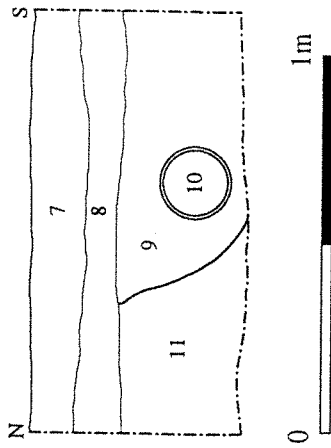
Few significant deposits were encountered in over 800m of trenching. The majority of trenching appears to have been located in areas of existing services resulting in sections showing only earlier modern disturbance. Artefacts were recovered from trench 19 and trench 20. Victorian remains were recovered from trenches 3 and 4.

All trench locations are shown on figure 1.

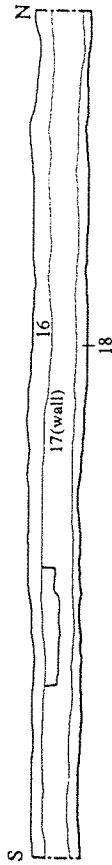
##### **Trench 1**

Trench 1 was 2.8m long, 0.8m wide and 1.10m deep. This trench was located on a north-south alignment and was situated in St Johns St in the western part of

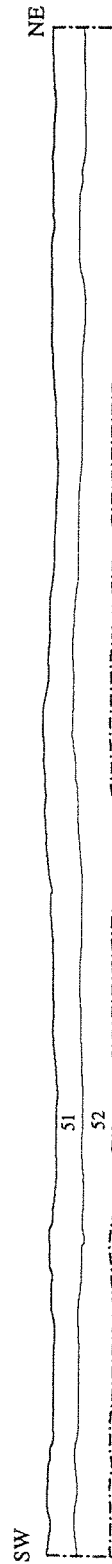
Trench 2



Trench 4



Trench 19



Trench 20

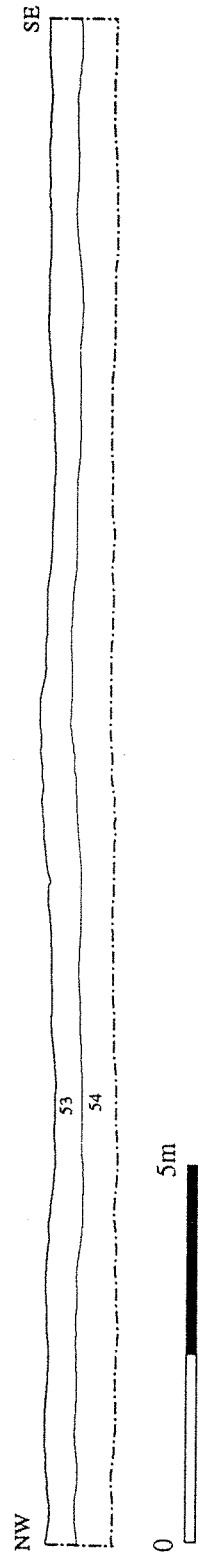


Figure 2 Sections

the town. No archaeological features were identified in this trench. No artefacts were recovered from this trench. Deposits consisted of a series of layers which made up the current road. Tarmac 1 was the uppermost deposit observed and was 0.20m deep. Layer 2 was 0.20m deep and composed of yellowish gravel. Layer 2 probably represents foundation material for the road. Layer 3 was 0.20m deep and was composed of sand. Layer 4 was 0.20m deep and composed of mid brown gravel. Layer 5 was 0.21m deep composed of yellowish gravel. The earliest deposit in the sequence was 6, a light yellowish sand which was 0.09m deep.

### **Trench 2 ( Section figure 2)**

Trench 2 was 2.20m long 0.8m wide and 1.10m deep. This trench was located to the south of trench 1 on St Johns St on the western side of the town. The trench revealed deposits relating to the construction of a sewer. No archaeological features were identified. No artefacts were recovered from this trench.

The latest deposit observed in trench 2 was layer 7. Layer 7 represents modern tarmac for the road and was 0.30m deep. Layer 8 was composed of a mid brown sandy gravel and was 0.30m deep. Context 9 was composed of a dark grey silty clay and was 0.50m deep. Fill 9 may represent backfill of a sewer trench. Fill 11 was composed of a dark grey silty clay and was 0.50m deep. This fill 11 may represent backfill of a sewer trench. Context 10 consisted of the brick drain for the sewer.

### **Trench 3**

Trench 3 was 5m long, 0.60m wide and 1.10m deep. No archaeological features were identified. No artefacts were recovered from this trench. All the contexts encountered in this trench were modern or Victorian in origin. The uppermost deposit observed was tarmac 12 which was 0.20m deep. Layer 13 was composed of modern gravel, which was 0.30m deep. A brick sewer 14 0.50m deep and 3m wide was sealed by gravel 13. Layer 15 was 0.60m deep and was composed of a dark grey silty clay.

### **Trench 4**

Trench 4 was located at the corner of St Johns St and George St in the south west part of the town. Trench 4 was 11m long, 0.60m wide and 0.7m m deep and ran on a north-south alignment. Layer 16 was 0.15m deep and composed of a tarmac modern path. Wall 17 was 0.40m deep and consisted of Victorian machine made bricks. Layer 18 was a dark grey silty clay and was 0.15m deep. Layer 18 represents foundation material for wall 17.

### **Trench 5**

Trench 5 was an L shaped trench located on Ferrars Rd. This trench was 4m long on a north south alignment, 2m long on an east-west alignment. This trench was 0.75m deep. No archaeological features were identified. No artefacts were recovered from this trench. All the deposits encountered relate to the modern road and associated make up layers. The latest deposit in the sequence was 19 a modern tarmac surface which was 0.20m deep. Layer 20, 0.20m deep was a gravel make up layer for the modern road. Layer 21 was 0.20m deep and was composed of a silty clay which contained modern brick. Layer 22 was composed of concrete which was 0.10m deep. The earliest deposit within the sequence was a 23 dark grey silty sand which was 0.05m deep.

### **Trench 6**

Trench 6 located on east-west alignment at the junction of Ermine St and High St This trench was 15m long, 0.60m wide and 0.9m deep. All the deposits encountered relate to the modern road and associated make up layers. No archaeological features were identified. No artefacts were recovered from this trench. Layer 24 consisted of tarmac, which was 0.20m deep. Layer 25 was a mortar and sand make up layer, which was 0.70 m deep.

### **Trench 7**

Trench 7 was located in Ermine St on a northwest-southeast alignment. It was 40m long 0.90m deep and 0.45m wide. Layer 26 was 0.40m deep and consisted of dark grey gravel. Layer 27 was a dark grey silty clay which was 0.30m deep and contained modern brick. Layer 28 was a light grey silty clay which was 0.20m deep.

### **Trench 8**

Trench 8 was located in Ermine St on a north west-southeast alignment. It was 36m long 0.90m deep and 0.40m wide. No archaeological features were identified. No artefacts were recovered from this trench. Layer 29 was 0.45m deep and consisted of dark grey gravel. Layer 30 was 0.45m deep and composed of a silty gravel with modern brick.

### **Trench 9**

Trench 9 was located in Ermine St on a northwest-southeast alignment. It was 170m long 0.95m deep and 0.40m wide. No archaeological features were identified. No artefacts were recovered from this trench. Layer 31 was 0.11m m deep and consisted of tarmac. Layer 32 was a silty sandy gravel which was 0.22m

deep. Layer 33 was 0.45 m deep and composed of a dark grey silt.

#### **Trench 10**

Trench 10 was located Ermine St on a northwest-southeast alignment. No archaeological features were identified. Deposits encountered in this trench were modern relating to the present road and services. No artefacts were recovered from this trench. It was 50m long 0.51 m deep and 0.37 m wide. Layer 33 was 0.11m deep and consisted of tarmac. Layer 34 was 0.20m deep and consisted of dark grey gravel. Layer 35 was a sandy gravel which was 0.20m deep.

#### **Trench 11**

Trench 11 was located at the junction of Merritts St and Ermine St. It was 2m long 0.90m deep and 0.50m wide. No archaeological features were identified. No artefacts were recovered from this trench. All deposits encountered were modern in origin. Layer 36 was 0.90 m deep and consisted of gravel.

#### **Trench 12**

Trench 12 was located in St Johns St on an east-west alignment. No archaeological features were identified. No artefacts were recovered from this trench. It was 1.7m long 0.45m wide and 0.35m deep. Layer 37 was 0.35m deep and consisted of yellowish gravel.

#### **Trench 13**

Trench 13 was located on the junction of High St and Ermine St. No archaeological features were identified. No artefacts were recovered from this trench. It was 4.1 m long 0.75m deep and 0.33m wide. Layer 38 was 0.15m deep and consisted of tarmac Layer 39 was 0.60 m deep and consisted of a dark grey silty clay which contained modern brick.

#### **Trench 14**

Trench 14 was located at the junction of the High St and the Ring road on a north west-southeast alignment. No archaeological features were identified. No artefacts were recovered from this trench. It was 10m long 0.90m deep and 0.45m wide. Layer 40 was 0.40m deep and consisted of dark grey gravel. Layer 41(0.50m deep) was a dark grey gravel.

### **Trench 15**

Trench 15 was located in St John's Rd on a northwest-southeast alignment. No archaeological features were identified. No artefacts were recovered from this trench was 3m long 0.70m wide and 0.75m deep. Layer 42 was a dark grey sandy silt which was 0.45m deep. Layer 43 was a yellowish gravel which was 0.30m deep.

### **Trench 16**

Trench 16 was located in north eastern part of the historic town on Nursery Rd. This trench was 3m long 0.75m wide and 0.75m deep. No artefacts were recovered from this trench. No archaeological features were identified. Layer 44 was a dark grey sandy silt which was 0.45m deep. Layer 45 was yellow gravel and 0.3m deep.

### **Trench 17**

Trench 17 was located on Nursery Rd on a north-south alignment. It was 5m long 0.90m deep and 0.78 m wide. No archaeological features were identified. No artefacts were recovered from this trench. Layer 46 was 0.40m deep and consisted of a dark grey sandy silt. Layer 47 was yellowish dark grey gravel which was 0.38m deep.

### **Trench 18**

Trench 18 was located in Nursery Rd on a north south alignment. It was 5m long 0.90m deep and 0.40m wide. Layer 48 was 0.40m deep and consisted of dark grey gravel. Layer 49 was 0.20m deep and composed of a dark brown silty clay.

### **Trench 19 (Section figure 2)**

Trench 19 was located on Priory Rd on an east west alignment. It was 70m long 0.90m deep and 0.40m wide. No archaeological features were identified. Layer 51 was 0.40m deep and consisted of dark grey gravel. Layer 52 (0.50 m deep) was a grey silty clay which contained animal bone.

### **Trench 20 (Section figure 2)**

Trench 20 was located in proximity to the Medieval Bridge at the crossing point Godmanchester and Huntingdon. It was 36m long 0.85m deep and 0.40m wide

and on a northwest-southeast alignment. Layer 53 was 0.40m deep and consisted of dark grey gravel. Layer 54(0.45 m deep) was a dark grey silty clay which contained animal bone. In some areas natural clay was identified alongside the base of the trench.

### **Trench 21**

Trench 20 was located along the High St and turns the corner into Hartford Rd. the southern part of the town. This trench was 240m long, 0.37m wide and 0.90m deep. No archaeological features were identified and no artefacts were recovered from this trench. Layer 55 was 0.40m deep and consisted of dark grey gravel. Layer 56 was a light brown sandy gravel which was 0.50m deep.

### **Trench 22**

Trench 22 was located on Stukeley Rd in the northern part of the town. This trench was 52m long and 0.37m wide. No archaeological features were identified and no artefacts were recovered from this trench. This trench revealed a number of service pipes within the trench and the deposits encountered probably represent backfill of service trenches. Layer 57 was a light brown sandy gravel which was 0.50m deep. Layer 58 was a dark grey silty clay which was 0.42m deep.

## **7 Discussion**

Pipe trenches were excavated through deposits, which were in the main the disturbed fills of earlier service trenches and were thus unlikely to contain any remains. Despite the lack of archaeological deposits observed, evidence from a number of trenches has provided us with useful a little information on the potential of deposit survival in two areas of Huntingdon.

Artefacts were recovered from trench 20 that was located in close proximity to the Old Bridge, which carried the Ermine St over the River Ouse. Layer 54 that contained animal bone may indicate that significant archaeological deposits may survive in this area. Any survival of deposits within the vicinity of the 14<sup>th</sup> century Old Bridge would be of considerable importance in answering questions about the character of Huntingdon's waterfront and chronology of the bridging points.

Animal Bone was recovered from trench 19 that was located in an area which is believed to have been part of the medieval priory of St Mary's. Layer 52 indicates that archaeological deposits may survive within this area.

Nonetheless the lack of finds and artefacts is surprising considering that a large

number of the trenches are located in the historic core of Huntingdon .

The area around trench 21, which was located in the High St, and Hartford Rd would be expected to be rich in archaeological remains. An evaluation undertaken at the corner of Hartford Rd and High St revealed medieval surfaces and pits. Unfortunately trench 21 revealed deposits which were related to the construction of the modern road or possible backfill of service trenches.

An evaluation undertaken at George St (50m to the south of trench 4) revealed 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> post-holes and quarry pits. Trench 4 revealed evidence of Victorian foundation material for a wall.

Trenches (10 and 11) located along Stukeley road and Ermine St surprisingly did not provide us with physical evidence for the route of the Roman Road. Unfortunately trenches 10 and 11 provided no evidence for Ermine St

## 7 Conclusion

The project has made a limited contribution to constructing a deposit model for the archaeology of Huntingdon. Survival of deposits and recovery of artefacts from waterfront zone near the Old Bridge and the area around Priory Rd are the most significant findings.

In general the lack of finds and artefacts is surprising considering that a large number of the trenches are located in the historic core of Huntingdon and close to a number of productive evaluation and excavations. The majority of the deposits encountered are modern in origin.

## 8 Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Transco for commissioning this study the County Sites and Monuments for their assistance. Thanks are also due to Jon Cane for the illustration Aileen Connor and Dr Paul Spoerry for managing the project.

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