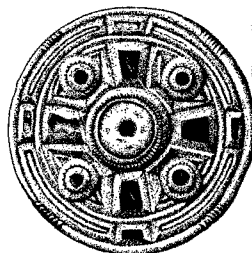


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(CONTRIBUTIONS)



Archaeological Field Unit

The Welding Institute, Abington Park, Great Abington:
an Archaeological Desk-top Study

S Leith

1997

Cambridgeshire County Council

Report No. A105

Commissioned By EP Associates Ltd on behalf of the Welding Institute

**The Welding Institute, Abington Park, Great Abington:
an Archaeological Desk-top Study**

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1997

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Report No A105

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SUMMARY

This study attempts to define the archaeological potential of land at Abington Park, Great Abington (TL 522 488) and to determine the potential impact of development proposals. The proposed development area covers c 20 hectares to the west of Abington Hall, bounded by the River Granta to the north, the Pampisford Road to the south, and the A11 to the west.

The site has great potential for archaeological remains, in particular from the late prehistoric, Roman, and Saxon periods. Evidence for settlement from these periods has been found along the valley of the Granta within the vicinity of the study area.

During the medieval period, the area was part of Great Abington's open fields, and the strips of ridge and furrow are shown on a map of 1687. This area was probably included in the landscape created by Humphry Repton around Abington Hall in about 1800. The tree belts around the periphery of the site probably date to this time.

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**THE WELDING INSTITUTE, ABINGTON PARK, GREAT ABINGTON:
AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL DESK-TOP STUDY**

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This desk-top study was commissioned by EP Associates Ltd on behalf of The Welding Institute in order to define the archaeological character of land at Abington Park and to define the potential impact of development proposals.
- 1.2 The subject site is located within the parish of Great Abington, to the west of Abington Hall (TL 522 488). The proposed development area covers *c* 20 hectares, bounded by the River Granta to the north, the Pampisford Road to the south, and the A11 to the west (Figure 1).

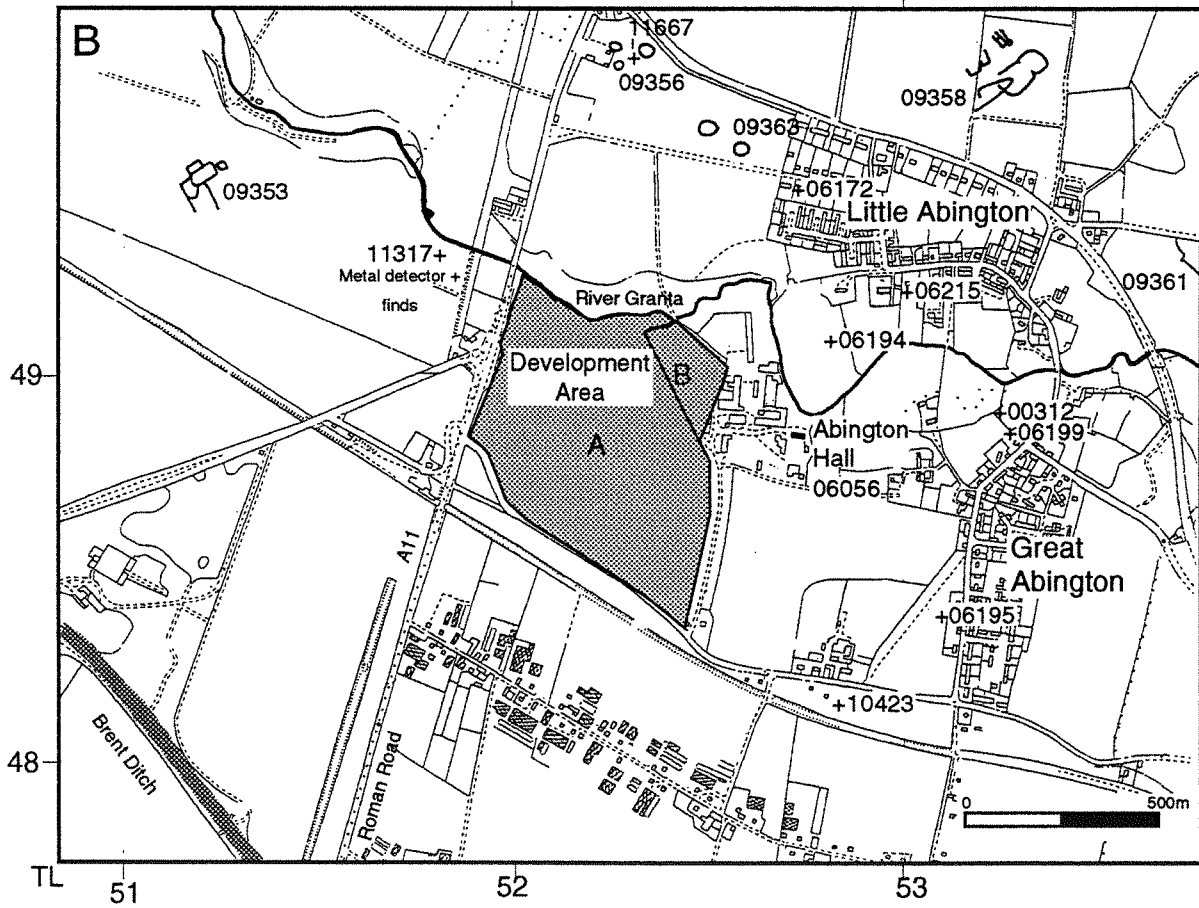
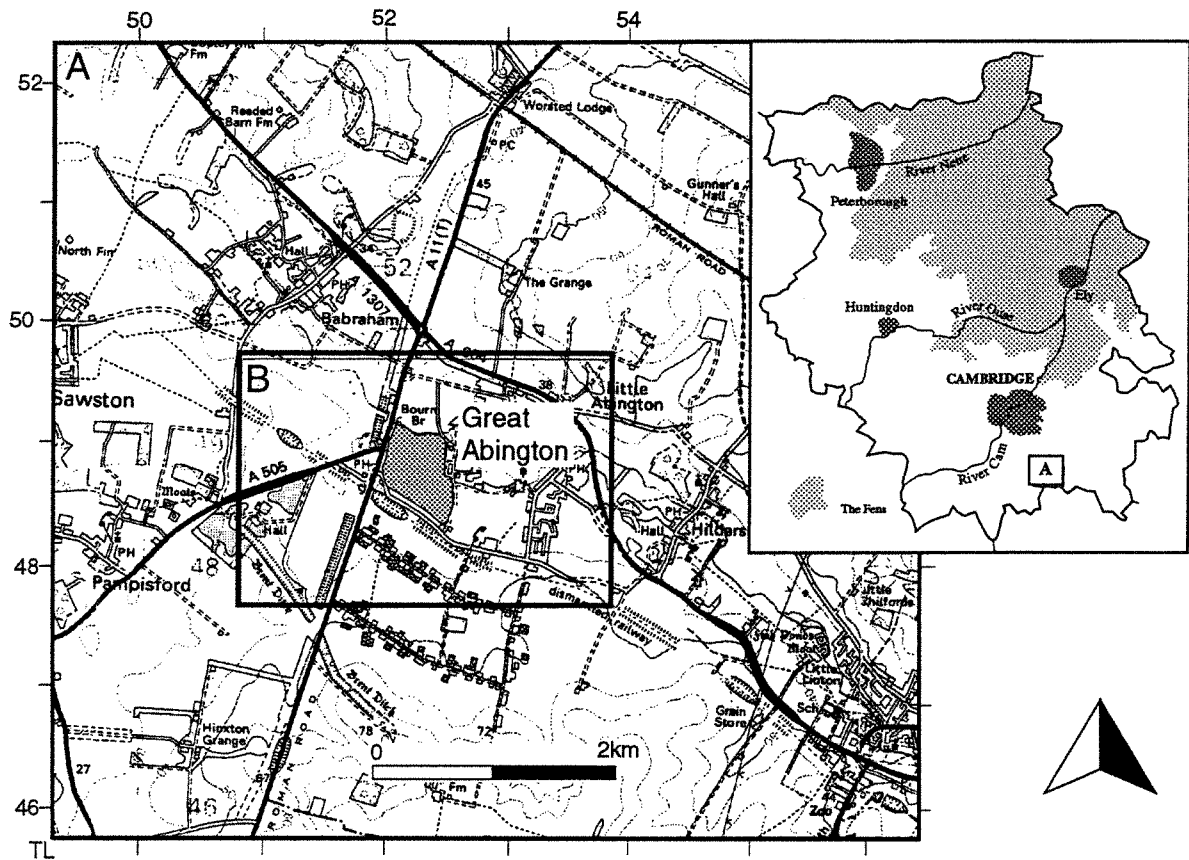
2 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

- 2.1 The site lies on the south side of the River Granta, on ground that slopes sharply from a high point in the south-west part of the development area, to the river valley, from about 38m above Ordnance Datum to about 32m. The topography of the area reflects the underlying geology. The north part of the area lies on the 1st and 2nd terrace river gravels of the Granta. The higher ground in the south-west part of the site lies on chalky boulder clay, and the south-east part is on the Middle Chalk.
- 2.2 The development area is comprised of two fields, marked A and B on Figure 1. At present, Field A is used as arable, and Field B is a playing field.

3 THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORIC CHARACTER OF THE STUDY AREA

3.1 Early Settlement

- 3.1.1 In this region, prehistoric settlement seems to have been concentrated on the river gravels along the Granta. Excavations were undertaken recently next to the river at Bourn Bridge, 500m to the north-west of the subject site (SMR 11317). A Palaeolithic hand-axe was recovered during fieldwalking, as well as a high density of Neolithic and Bronze Age worked flint. The latter included many cores, large early core-trimming flakes, tools, and burnt flint, which indicates both industrial activity and settlement. Bronze Age pottery was also recovered during fieldwalking. Excavation revealed both burnt and worked flint, including a fine early Neolithic blade. A cobble-packed grave was found in the lower alluvium, within a possible ditch system, however no dating evidence was associated with it. The excavations also revealed a pit and several ditches near the river which contained Iron Age pottery (Evans 1993b).



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Figure 1 Site location plan, with SMR information

3.1.2 Numerous ring ditches (ploughed-out barrows) have been recorded on the chalk ridge to the north of Abington. Cropmarks of several ring ditches are found about 700m to the north of the study area (SMR 09356, 09363). Excavations at Four Wentways confirmed a Bronze Age date for two ploughed-out barrows (SMR 11667). No funerary evidence associated with the barrows was found, but the barrow ditches produced evidence of flint working, as well as some Iron Age and Roman sherds (Barclay & Williams 1994).

3.2 Roman

3.2.1 The study area is bounded to the west by a Roman road, which is followed at this point by the old A11. It is likely that this road represents a 'Romanised' length of an Icknield Way track (Margary 1973, 200). This route formed an important link between the northern East Anglian coast and the Thames valley. The presence of a series of linear earthworks running across the line of this route, intended to control or impede movement along the corridor, gives an indication of the importance of this route. Of the four dykes within Cambridgeshire, Devil's Ditch, Fleam Dyke, and Bran Ditch have been dated by controlled excavation to the post-Roman period. Brent Ditch, which is located 1.5km to the south of the study area, has recently been demonstrated to post-date the late second century (Robinson 1992).

3.2.2 During the excavations at Bourn Bridge (SMR 11317), two settlement areas of Roman date were indicated by scatters of pottery. One of these areas also revealed ditches, pits and postholes (Evans 1993b). In addition, several ditches of a Romano-British field system were found. These suggested large sub-rectangular fields, probably used for pasture (Pollard 1996).

3.2.3 Roman pottery has been found within Great Abington near the school, 1km to the east of the study area, and may be an indication of settlement (SMR 00312, 06199). This is near a field marked on an 18th century strip map as *Sunken Church Field*. Smith states that this may refer to a Roman villa or house because of the 'coins and oyster shells which have been found in the vicinity' (Smith 1952, 2).

3.2.4 As in the prehistoric period, evidence of Roman settlement and agriculture has been found along the river valley near the study area. It is likely that remains of settlement and field systems similar to those found at Bourn Bridge occur all along the gravel terraces in this region. Likewise, the cropmarks of rectilinear enclosures 1km to the north-west and north-east of the study area may be Romano-British in origin (SMR 09353, 09358).

3.3 Saxon

3.3.1 Recent excavations at Bourn Bridge, Hinxton Hall and Hinxton Quarry revealed Saxon settlements, suggesting that the river valleys in this area are dotted with small hamlets of this date. The settlement at Bourn Bridge dated to the Early Saxon period (sixth to seventh century) and was established within the relict Roman field system. It consisted of seven sunken-featured buildings and numerous pits and hollows (Pollard 1996).

3.3.2 During the widening of the A11, metal detectorists found a number of Saxon artefacts next to the river at Bourn Bridge. As well as 'some bones' and 'dark brown/black pottery sherds', which were not collected, the finds included a wrist clasp (6th to 7th century), a florid

cruciform brooch (6th to 10th century), a small long-brooch (6th century), a strap end (9th to 10th century), a knife blade, and a possible rapier tip (Ben Robinson, pers. comm.). This type of artefact is often associated with Saxon cemeteries, although it could also indicate settlement. Saxon pottery was also found near the school in Great Abington (SMR 00312).

- 3.3.3 The name of Abington is first recorded as *Abintone* or *Abintona* in 1086 in the Domesday Book. However, this name has Saxon origins, and means 'Abba's farm' (Reaney 1943, 99). Palmer, referring to a map of 1603 of Great Abington, mentions a mill of *Saxemere* 'on the river near the Hall' (Palmer 1924, 19). This name also occurs as *Saxmere* in the Assizes of 1260 (Reaney, 128). The name probably means 'Saxe's boundary', Saxe being a common Anglo-Saxon name. However, it is also possible that it refers to 'a Saxon boundary' (Ibid.). The boundary in question could be either the line of the old A11, as Roman roads were often used as boundaries (as in the Mere Way), or to the river itself. The name is another clear indication of Saxon settlement within the area.

3.4 Medieval

- 3.4.1 At the time of the Conquest, Domesday records that 6 hides (720 acres) at Great Abington were held by Wluuin (Ulwin or Wulfwin), a thane of King Edward. However, all his lands were confiscated and granted to Aubrey de Vere, Earl of Oxford. Palmer states that Ulwin's house was where Abington Hall now stands, however he gives no evidence or reference for this statement (Palmer 1924, 15). The Earls of Oxford held the manor at Great Abington until 1600 when it was sold.

- 3.4.2 The Hundred Rolls of 1279 describes Abington Hall as consisting of one large room, 40 to 50 feet long and open to the rafters, with a raised stage at one end. To the south a door opened into the solar. The Hall, with gardens, orchard, and outbuildings, was enclosed within a moat which covered 5 acres, and which was made partly by a canal coming from the river near the church (Palmer 1924, 21). The canal is visible on both the 1716 map of the Great Abington estate, and on the draft Enclosure map of 1801 (Figure 2). The canal may have been straightened c 1710 (Elrington 1978, 3).

3.5 The Possible Medieval Park

- 3.5.1 The brief for this study states that 'the site lies within an area of archaeological potential being the site of a medieval deer park dating to at least the 12th century' (Austin 1996). However, recent research by Dr. T. Way demonstrates that there is little or no evidence for a medieval park on the site, although a park may have been located on the south border of the parish (Way 1994, 108-10; Way 1997).

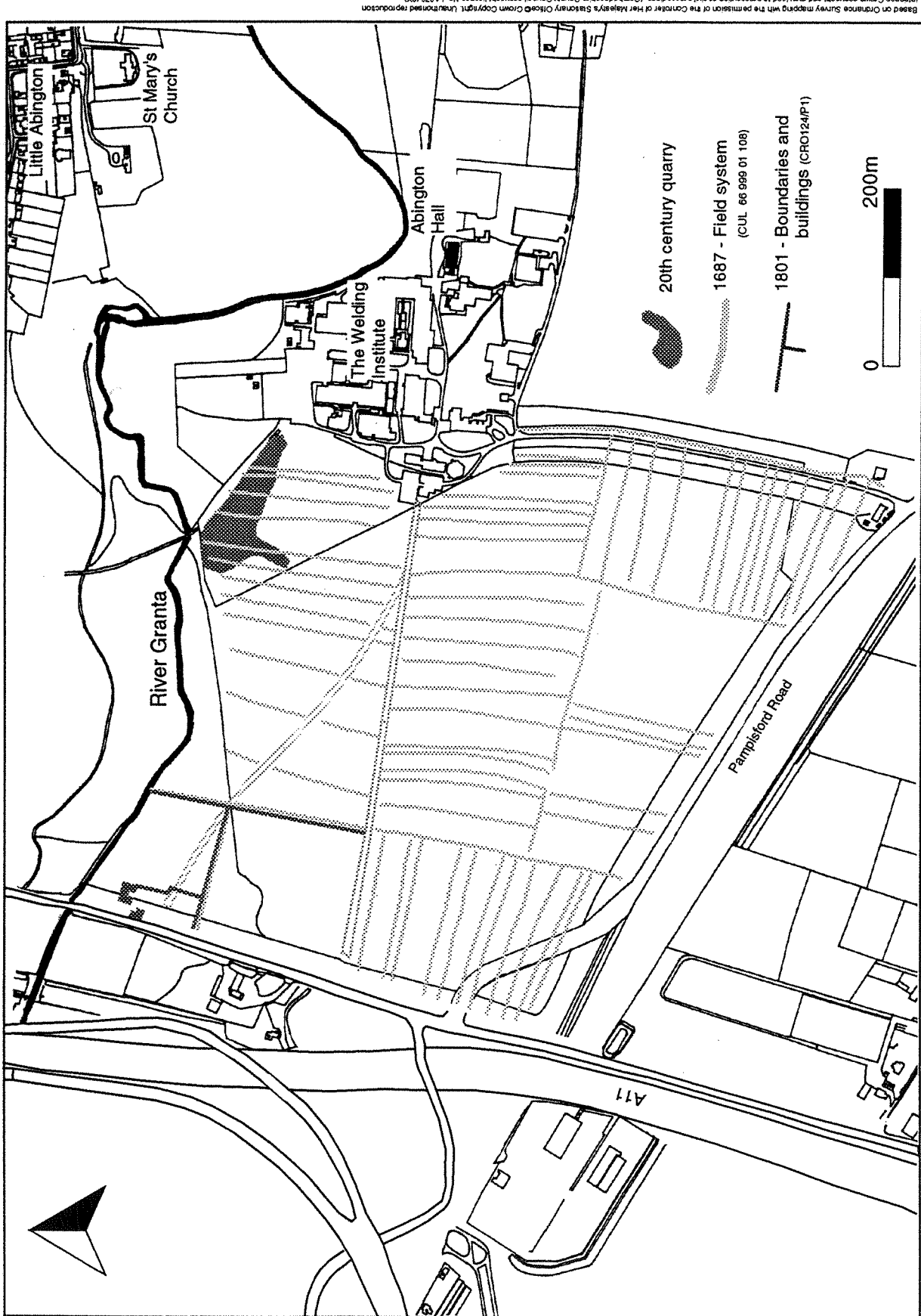
- 3.5.2 The belief that a medieval park was located within the immediate vicinity of Abington Hall probably originated with Palmer. In his parish history of Abington, he refers to a thirteenth century account of 'oaks and ashes in Abington Park' being cut and taken away by feuding royalists (Palmer 1924, 16). Unfortunately Palmer gives no reference for this account. Other references to William de Parco holding the estate in 1330 have also been used to suggest the presence of a park within the parish at that date. However, there are two records of William de Parco's holdings at this date, and neither refers to a park in Great Abington. The name 'de Parco' could have come from any of his many holdings in the Cambridge and

Suffolk areas.

- 3.5.3 There is no record of a park in Great Abington in the Hundred Rolls of 1279. This is particularly significant, as parklands were usually recorded in the Hundred Rolls for Cambridge. Thirteenth century references to a woodland called 'Abington Grove' on the southern parish boundary may suggest a park in this area. However, there is little firm evidence to suggest that any park was found within the parish during the medieval period. There is certainly no evidence for a park within the close vicinity of the present Hall and village.

3.6 Post-medieval and Modern

- 3.6.1 From the early seventeenth century onwards there is very good documentary evidence for the landscape of the parish of Great Abington. A terrier of 1603 and a map of Great Abington in 1687 indicate that at least by the early seventeenth century, the study area was part of the West Field, one of Great Abington's three open fields. However, records as early as the fourteenth century indicate that Great Abington was being cultivated on a triennial rotation, as part of the open field system (Elrington 1978, 10). Broad open lands were divided into large fields cultivated in common in the form of long, narrow strips. The remnants of this medieval cultivation is still visible in places as ridges and furrows, where they have escaped destruction by modern ploughing.
- 3.6.2 Within the study area, no ridge and furrow survives in the form of earthworks, but the strips are shown on the 1687 map (Figure 3). This map also shows two tracks or roads running across the study area. One ran from Bourn Bridge diagonally across the study area towards the Hall. It is probably this road which was called Hall Lane, which Palmer describes, from the map of 1603, as going from the village to the church, past the Hall and ending at Bourn Bridge (Palmer 1924, 19). The other road ran at right angles to the London Road (the old A11) towards the Hall, converging with Hall Lane. The western part of this road up to the Hall was still in use at the time of Enclosure in 1801 (Figure 2), and is still visible within the study area as a cropmark on aerial photographs.
- 3.6.3 In 1664, Abington Hall is recorded as a substantial house with 24 hearths, and by 1716 it consisted of five bays (Elrington 1978, 6). The house was rebuilt in 1712, and the present building, built in the late 18th century, incorporates parts of this earlier building.
- 3.6.4 The 1716 map of the Abington Hall estate shows the north-west corner of the study area marked as 'Gravel Pit Piece'. Sometime after 1750, this became the site of the White Hart inn, which had been enlarged from a toll cottage. The inn was run by the Lagden family, whose name is preserved in the name of Lagden's Grove. The inn was closed sometime after 1797 (Elrington 1978, 4).
- 3.6.5 Between 1801 and 1803 the parish of Great Abington was the subject of an 'Enclosure Award' and the cultivated strips within the open fields were amalgamated into blocks to be held individually. The manor was held at that time by John Mortlock, who acquired most of the land within the parish at the time of Enclosure. This included the study area which was allotted to Mortlock in a single block of 87 acres (Figure 2).
- 3.6.6 At about this time, the grounds around Abington Hall were landscaped by Humphry Repton, and it is likely that the landscaping extended into the study area. The tree belts on the south



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Figure 3 Plan of the study area showing field system from the 1687 Map of Great Abington (CUL 66.999.01-108) and boundaries and buildings from the 1801 Draft Enclosure Map (CRO 124/P1)

and west edges of the development area, as well as Lagden's Grove in the north-west corner, may date to the Repton period. Figure 4 shows a view of Abington Hall in about 1800.

3.6.7 In 1929 the Hall was sold and the estate was broken up, and both fields within the study area left the estate. Field B was the site of a gravel quarry after this time, which was then used for rubbish dumping before 1950 (Figure 3). Field B was bought back by the Welding Institute about 20 years ago, at which time it was made into a playing field. Field A was purchased by Pampisford Hall in 1929, and was only bought back by the Welding Institute in 1996 (Dr. G. Salter, pers. comm.).

3.6.8 During World War II, the Hall and estate were occupied by British military forces. The British Welding Research Association (now the Welding Institute) purchased the Hall and 24 acres of grounds in 1946, and several buildings have since been constructed to the west of the Hall.



Figure 4 View of Abington Hall from the south c 1800 (Cambs Coll. Y.Abi.J.42299)

4 THE POTENTIAL SURVIVAL OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL DEPOSITS

4.1 In the two areas of gravel quarrying, in the north part of Field B, and in Lagden's Grove in the north-west corner of Field A, any archaeology will have been completely destroyed during gravel extraction.

4.2 When Field B was made into a playing field, it was levelled slightly, but the ground still slopes towards the river. To the south of Field B, the ground level has been built up, higher

than the adjacent Field A, to create a parking area and helipad. Some horizontal truncation of archaeological deposits due to landscaping is likely in the south part of Field B, but inspection of the site suggests that the impact on the archaeology may be minimal.

- 4.3 Field A has been an arable field since 1929, and it is therefore likely that any archaeological deposits will have suffered some horizontal truncation due to ploughing. However, it is difficult to estimate the degree of truncation without opening any testpits. The medieval cultivation is likely to have penetrated deeper into the subsoil in the furrows, but similarly the ridges will have protected any underlying archaeology.
- 4.4 The study area was probably included in Repton's landscape of *c* 1800, however it is unlikely that this involved much ground disturbance within the study area. Tree planting around the edges of the area will have had some impact on archaeological deposits.
- 4.5 In summary, within Field A, any archaeological deposits are likely to survive as negative features beneath the ploughsoil. Similarly, archaeological deposits may also survive within the south part of Field B.

5 THE POTENTIAL IMPACT OF THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

- 5.1 Any excavation below the ploughsoil in Field A or the topsoil in Field B has the potential to destroy archaeological deposits, except in the two areas of quarrying.
- 5.2 The greatest impact will be within the building zones and the lake (the south half of the lake extends beyond the quarry), where any underlying archaeology will be destroyed (Figure 5).
- 5.3 The proposed car parks and access roads may not threaten underlying archaeology if ground disturbance is limited to a depth of less than the ploughsoil or topsoil. However, tree planting within the 'parking groves' will have an impact.
- 5.4 The excavation of service and foundation trenches poses a significant threat to any surviving archaeological remains.
- 5.5 Any landscaping which involves the excavation of a greater depth than the ploughsoil or topsoil poses the same threat. Movement of plant in wet conditions could also damage archaeology.

6 THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL POTENTIAL OF THE STUDY AREA

- 6.1 The valley of the Granta within the vicinity of the study area has been demonstrated to be the site of settlement from the late prehistoric through to the Roman and Saxon periods. It is therefore highly likely that archaeological remains exist within the study area.

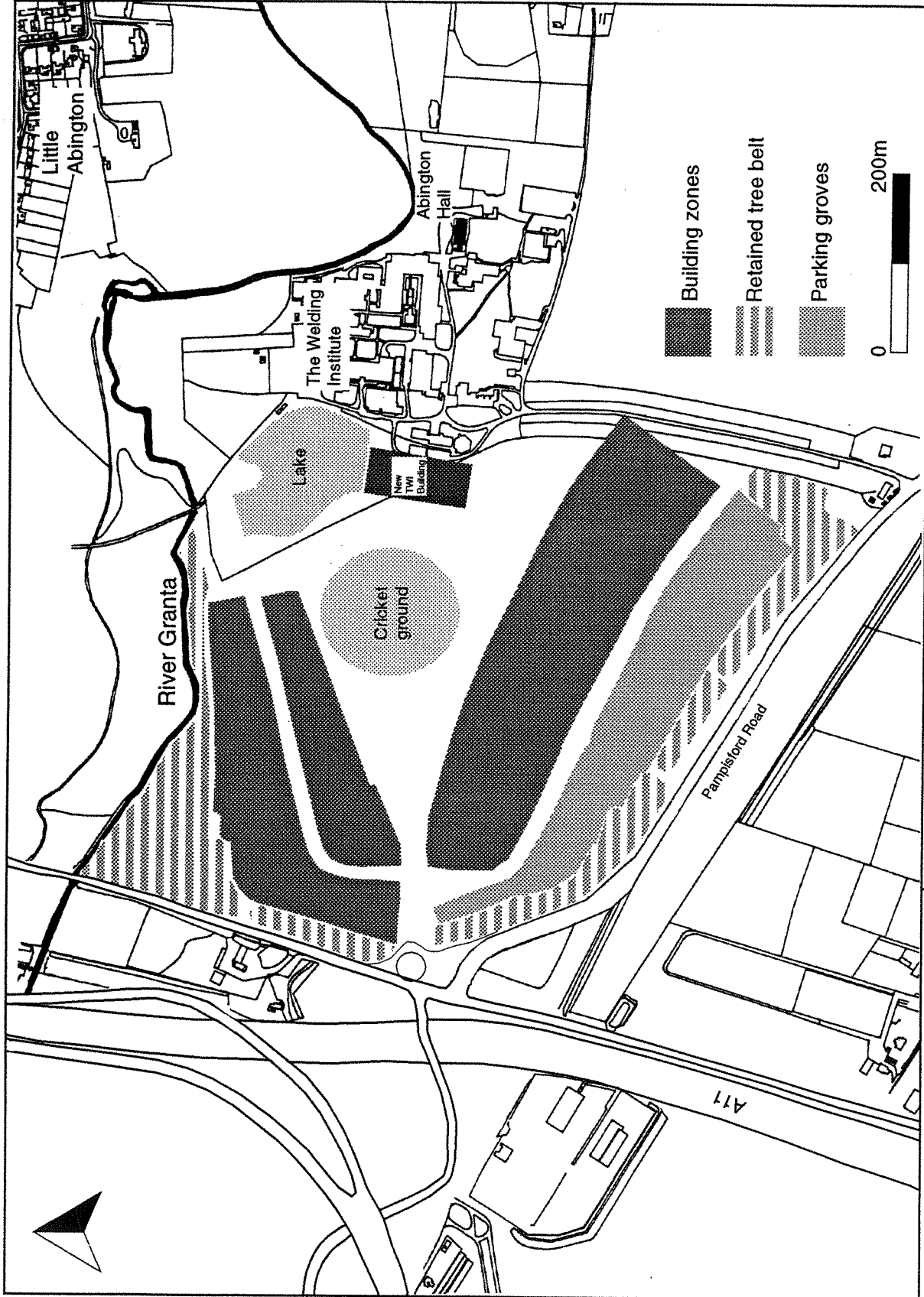


Figure 5 Plan of study area showing proposed development (from EP Associates 'Layout of Abington Park')

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- 6.2 The excavations at Bourn Bridge, and further afield at Hinxton Quarry and Hinxton Hall, have shown that the gravel terraces along the river's edge were a preferred location for settlement in the later prehistoric and Saxon periods. During the Roman period, the gravel terraces were the site of both agriculture and settlement. The north part of the study area, on the low-lying gravel terraces next to the river, therefore has great potential for remains of prehistoric, Roman, or Saxon date.
- 6.3 The cropmarks of ring-ditches to the north of the study area suggest that the chalk ridge was the location of funerary monuments during the Bronze Age. The land to the south of the river which rises onto the chalk may have also been the site of barrows during this period. This would include the south-east part of the study area.
- 6.4 The underlying boulder clay in the south-west part of the study area might suggest that this area is less likely to have been used for settlement in the past. However, this is the highest ground within the study area, and it occupies a strategic position adjacent to the Roman road and overlooking the important junction where the road crosses the river at Bourn Bridge. Therefore, the possibility of archaeological remains within this part of the site cannot be ruled out at this stage.
- 6.5 There is unlikely to be any medieval or later archaeology, apart from cultivation remains and tracks, within the study area. Little remains of the Repton landscape, however the tree belts and Lagden's Grove, which may date from this time, will not be threatened by the proposed development.

7 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 The area of the quarry in the north part of Field B and the tree belts which will be retained will not need any further archaeological work.
- 7.2 Geophysical survey, using magnetometer to map sub-surface features, is recommended for the main areas of potential impact. Sample areas to be surveyed are recommended on the parts of the site where underlying chalk and gravel should give reliable results. On the clay, where the technique may be less productive, a test area should be surveyed.
- 7.3 Aerial photographs were consulted as part of this study, and showed a cropmark of the track shown on the 1801 map. Cropmarks of medieval ridge and furrow cultivation often obscure any earlier, underlying archaeology. A reassessment of aerial photographs is only likely to show the medieval strips of ridge and furrow and the tracks which appear on the 1687 map, and is therefore not recommended for this site.
- 7.4 Following the geophysical survey, a limited programme of linear trenching and test-pitting is recommended to confirm and interpret the geophysical anomalies with potential archaeological origin. This would also provide a test sample where no geophysical survey was carried out. In the area of underlying boulder clay, assuming limited success with the geophysical survey, linear trenches covering a 2% sample of the area is recommended.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Map of the Manor Farm of Abington Hall, 1716 CUL Maps bb.53(1) 93.63

OS Draft 1" Map, 1799 sheet 146

Draft Enclosure Map, 1801 CRO 124/P1

Enclosure Map, 1803 CUL Maps 66.53(1) 93.8

OS Map, 1885 sheet LV.9



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