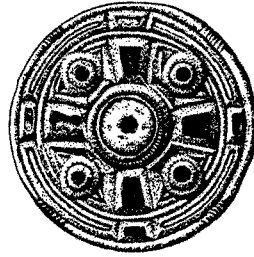


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Archaeological Field Unit

Medieval and Later Deposits at 54 Broad Street, Ely:  
An Archaeological Recording Brief

S. Bray & J. Last

1997

**Cambridgeshire County Council**

Report No A110

*Commissioned By Mr M. Grey*

**Medieval and Later Deposits at 54 Broad Street, Ely:  
An Archaeological Recording Brief**

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1997

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*Report No A110*

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## **SUMMARY**

*On the 5th and 7th March 1996 the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council completed a recording brief during the excavation of three foundation trenches at the rear of No. 54 Broad Street, Ely (TL 5434/8002). The work was commissioned by Mr M. Grey.*

*The trenches were excavated by hand by the developer to a depth of 4.6m OD. The work revealed that the upper layers consisted of post-medieval rubble, which possibly formed a sequence of yard surfaces.*

*Beneath the post-medieval deposits was a series of layers, the lower three of which were waterlogged. These contained medieval pottery, animal bone, mussel shells and a leather shoe sole, material which spans a date range between the twelfth and sixteenth centuries AD. The waterlogged layers could represent the fills of a large pit or ditch which periodically contained standing water.*

*No structural remains were encountered in the trenches but the artefacts recovered during the work represent a domestic rubbish assemblage, suggesting that the site at 54 Broad Street has contained dwellings since at least the fourteenth century. However, the work did not reach the base of archaeological deposits.*

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# **MEDIEVAL AND LATER DEPOSITS AT 54 BROAD STREET, ELY (TL 5434/8002): AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORDING BRIEF**

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

On the 5th and 7th March 1996 the Archaeological Field Unit (AFU) of Cambridgeshire County Council completed a recording brief during the excavation of foundation trenches for an extension to a shop at 54 Broad Street, Ely.

The work was commissioned by Mr. M. Grey and undertaken in response to a brief set by the County Archaeology Office to determine the nature, depth and preservation of archaeological remains. It was also hoped to be able to establish a date for the earliest activity in this location on Broad Street, and thereby provide a comparison for the documentary sources.

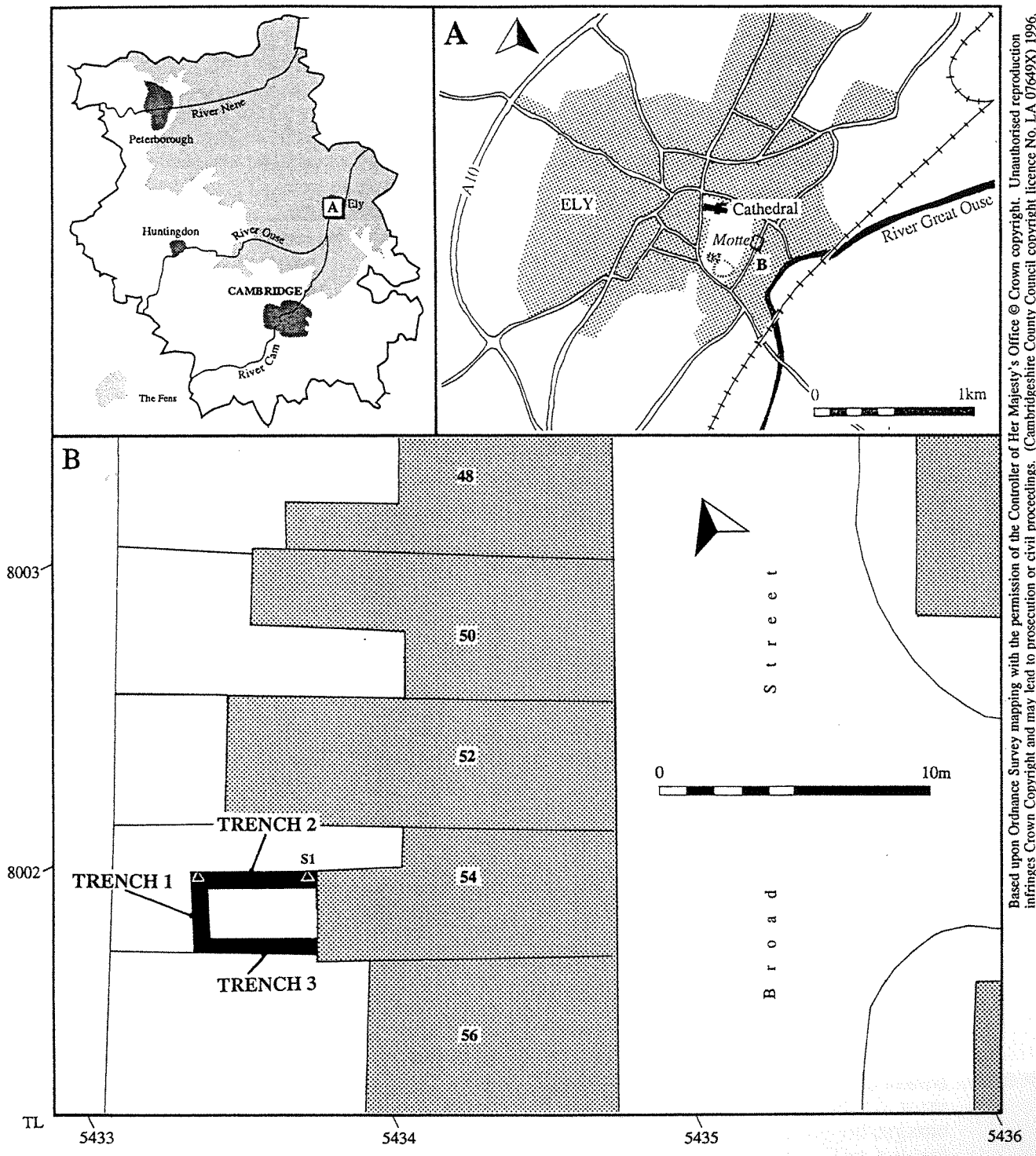
## **2 TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY**

The site lies on the edge of the Isle of Ely, on the north side of Broad Street, at a height of 6.91m OD (Fig. 1). The underlying geology of the site comprises Kimmeridge clay, capped by Lower Greensand and Boulder clay, which forms part of the Fen highland on which the City of Ely rests. The original course of the River Ouse ran further east (below the hamlet of Stuntney) and was established in its present artificial course some time during the early medieval period.

## **3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

The site lies at the foot of the high ground on which the cathedral and monastic buildings are situated. The name Broad Street originates from the medieval 'Brodlane', a thoroughfare which seems to have developed from a track at the southern boundary of the prior's vineyard and monastic precinct. Development in this area was first noted in the late twelfth century when two messuages here were conveyed by the abbey. Other early development along this side of Broad Street included a monastic coal store and a horse mill (Owen 1993, 16-17). A number of dwellings on Broad Street are noted in a thirteenth century rental. This document also introduces many of the lanes (e.g. 'Flexlane', 'Auntresdale', 'Baldokeslane', 'Barkereslane') which ran between Broad Street and the river, some of which defined the structure of this part of town into modern times (ibid, 19).

More light is thrown on the development of Broad Street by an arbitration survey of the town carried out during the early years of the fifteenth century (Calendar of Patent Rolls, Henry V, Membranes 5-1). A great many tenements, some containing more than one dwelling and a few of which are empty, are noted on the west side of the street. Tenements abutted the vineyard, whose gate is once again mentioned. A 'stank' (a ditch or pond) is also noted (ibid 187-188). The east side of Broad Street (from 'Brodelanesende' to 'Castelhithe') and the previously mentioned lanes were also well-developed by this time.



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Figure 1 Site location plan, showing position of trenches

John Speed's map of c 1610 depicts a continuously built-up Broad Street. None of the properties on the west side are shown as possessing gardens, suggesting that any encroachment into the former monastic enclosure was minimal. A large orchard is shown behind the street front on the corner of Broad Street and Forehill. A ditch (the 'stank'?) runs from a culvert near the monastic buildings, along the west boundary of the orchard, down the slope to Broad Street.

The 1888 1:2500 Ordnance Survey map shows the present no. 54 Broad Street with a small rear yard bordering a large orchard. The county Historic Buildings Record describes no. 54 as an early nineteenth century Gault brick stuccoed house and shop front (HBR 07488). It is Listed at Grade II.

There are two recorded archaeological observations near to no. 54, which refer to finds of post-medieval pottery (Cambs SMR 8183), and a post-medieval yard surface (8187). Recent excavations at Forehill, Lisle Lane, Potters Lane, Station Road and Jubilee Terrace (Wait 1993; Oakey 1995; Robinson 1995; Oakey 1996) have revealed excellent survival of medieval deposits and structures across this lower-lying part of the town. Very little prehistoric and Romano-British material has been noted at this 'lower end' of the city; indeed, the only finds recovered from these excavations which pre-date the Late Saxon period are residual in nature.

#### 4 METHODOLOGY

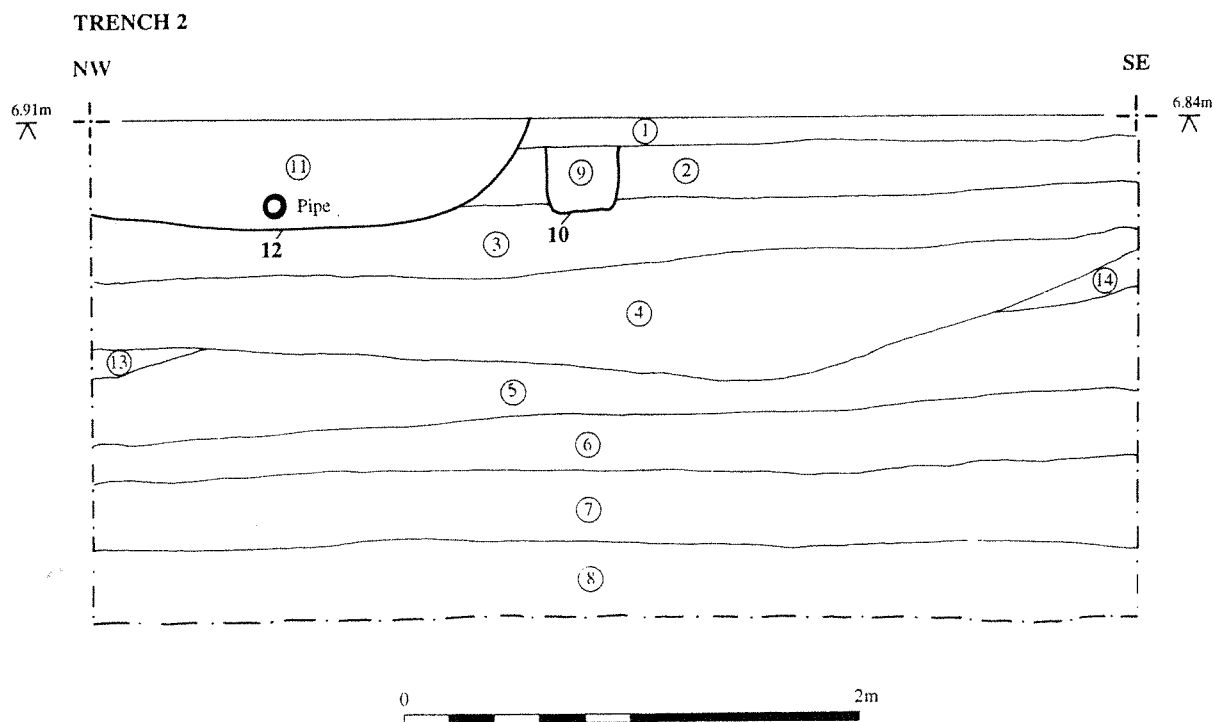
Three trenches (I-III) defining an area of 4.6 x 3m were excavated by hand by the developer as foundations for the extension to the existing building (Fig. 1). The trenches were 0.60m wide and 1.9m deep.

Common layers were found in all three trenches. A section in each trench was cleaned and recorded, and sections were drawn of Trenches I and III where later re-cuts were noted in their upper portions. Attempts were made to recover datable artefacts from the observed layers, and samples to test for the survival of environmental indicators were taken from three waterlogged organic layers.

#### 5 RESULTS

The common layers recorded in each of the excavated trenches (Fig 2) consisted of a series of probable yard make-up deposits (2, 3, 4 and 5), which were truncated by two modern pipe trenches (10 and 12). Three waterlogged organic layers (6, 7 and 8) were recorded beneath the upper deposits. The natural geology was not reached in any of the trenches.

Layer 1 consisted of concrete slabs which cover the whole area of the yard and form the most recent ground surface. It was identified in all the trenches and recorded as 16 in Trench III. This layer was cut by sewage pipe trench 12, which was a linear feature orientated approximately north to south, and measuring 1.9m wide and 0.25m deep. It had steep sides and a slightly concave base, and was filled by 11, a loose, gritty, silty clay with frequent small (<=30mm) angular stones. A ceramic sewage pipe was found in the base of the cut, which led to an outside toilet.



**Figure 2** West-facing section through deposits in Trench I

Layer 2 was a dark greyish brown, loose, stony, silty clay, c. 0.34m thick. No finds were recovered. This layer was identified in all trenches and recorded as 17 in Trench III. Layer 2 was truncated by 10, which was a linear feature aligned approximately north-west to south-east. It measured 0.34m wide and 0.28m deep with straight sides and a flat base. It was filled by 9, a compact yellow concreted deposit, containing no finds.

Layer 3 was a dark brown, loose, stony, silty clay, c. 0.40m deep. It was identified in all the trenches and recorded as 18 in Trench III. A sherd of glazed post-medieval pottery was recovered from this layer in Trench III (Appendix B).

Layer 4 was a dark olive grey, firm, slightly silty clay with occasional mussel shells, tile and animal bone fragments. It was identified in all the trenches and recorded as 19 in Trench III, from which an abraded fragment of medieval pottery was recovered (Appendix B), although this piece could be residual. Layer 4 sealed deposits 13 and 14.

Layer 13 was a compact, olive yellow silty clay, 0.56m wide and only c. 0.14m thick. It was identified in all the trenches and recorded as 21 in Trench III, from which a piece of green-glazed medieval pot was recovered (Appendix B). Layer 14 was a similarly compact, pale olive silty clay, c. 0.18m thick and 0.6m wide. It was recorded at the opposite end of the section from 13, suggesting that these deposits once formed a continuous layer, subsequently truncated by a large feature. Layer 14 was also identified in all three trenches, and was recorded as 20 in Trench III. No artefacts were recovered from 14 or 20.

Layer 5 was a dark grey, loose, silty clay with occasional rounded stones. It was 0.40m thick. This layer was identified in all the trenches and recorded as 22 in Trench III. Two fragments of medieval glazed pottery were recovered (Appendix B).



Layer 6 was an olive, compact, organic silty clay, 0.20m thick, containing frequent fragments of waterlogged wood and reeds. It was identified in all the trenches and recorded as 23 in Trench III. An animal bone fragment and the waterlogged end of a wooden stake were recovered from this layer.

Layer 7 was a black, compact, organic silty peat, c. 0.34m deep, containing large flint nodules and frequent fragments of waterlogged wood and reeds. It was identified in all the trenches and recorded as 24 in Trench III. Animal bones and the sole of a leather shoe were recovered from this layer.

Layer 8 was a very dark grey, firm, homogeneous, slightly silty clay with occasional small (c. 20mm) angular stones. Mussel shells and a single large medieval rim sherd were recovered during flotation (Appendices B & C). The layer seems to be derived from water-borne silts and could represent waterlogged deposits laid down during episodes of flooding.

## 6 DISCUSSION

The recording brief at Broad Street, Ely, has indicated continued activity on the site since at least the mid-fourteenth century, the latest date for the potsherd from layer 5. It has also demonstrated that archaeological layers extend down below 4.6m OD, the depth of the foundation trenches, so development probably began somewhat earlier, as the documentary sources suggest. The presence of an unstratified sherd perhaps of twelfth to thirteenth century date also supports this assertion (Appendix B).

Common deposits were found in all the trenches with the upper layers (1/16, 2/17 and 3/18) appearing to date to the post-medieval period, possibly representing sequential yard surfaces. All the pottery recovered from the underlying less stony, dry deposits (4/19, 5/22, 13/21 and 14/20) was medieval in date, spanning the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries, but some of this could be residual since medieval sherds were also recovered from layer 3.

Three waterlogged layers (6, 7 and 8) were found beneath these deposits. Material recovered from these lower layers includes a single large sherd with a date range also between 1200 and 1500. The upper two waterlogged layers, 6 and 7, were found to contain a large amount of waterlogged wood and reeds as well as some preserved leather. Although the lowest layer, 8, was waterlogged when excavated, organic material within it had apparently been allowed to decompose, suggesting that it was deposited during drier conditions or had dried out before the overlying waterlogged layers were deposited (Appendix C).

The absence from the waterlogged layers of plant species characteristic of a wet environment suggest these deposits may form part of the fill of a larger feature, perhaps a ditch or pit, which contained water only periodically.

Since no structural remains were identified, the work suggests that the site has been an open area since at least the fourteenth century, probably functioning as a yard during the post-medieval period. The generally large and unabraded condition of the ceramic material suggests that it comes from a primary refuse context, possibly from a building on the original Broad Street frontage.

Although a small piece of work, the recording brief at Broad Street has re-emphasised the need to examine works of any scale in Ely seriously, since taken

together they help to build a more comprehensive picture of settlement development and ceramic typology (see Appendix B).

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Simon Bray would like to thank the developer, Mike Grey, for funding the project; the contractor, Chris Beck, for his help and patience throughout the fieldwork; the project manager, Ben Robinson, for editing the report; Duncan Schlee for providing the environmental report; Paul Spoerry for the pottery analysis and Bob Hatton for producing the illustrations.

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APPENDIX A

LIST OF CONTEXTS

Tr.	Cat.	Nature of deposit	Depth	Munsell	Same as	Same as	Same as	Below	Below	Above	Above
I & II	01	layer	>=0.14	grey/brown	016			012		09	
	02	layer	>=0.24	10yr 4/2	017			012	010	03	
	03	layer	>=0.30	10yr 3/3	018			02		04	
	04	layer	>=0.36	5y 3/2	019			03		013	014
	05	layer	>=0.40	5y 4/1	022			013	014	06	
	06	layer	>=0.02	5y 4/3	023			05		07	
	07	layer	>=0.34	5y 2.5	024			06		08	
	08	layer	>0.15	5y 3/1	025			07		????	
	09	fill	0.28	yellow				01		010	
	010	cut	0.28					09		02	
	011	fill	>=0.25	10yr 4/4						012	
	012	cut	>=0.25					011		01	
	013	layer	>=0.12	5y 6/6	014	020	021	04		05	
	014	layer	>=0.18	5y 6/4	013	020	021	04		05	
III	015	wall								016	
	016	layer	<=0.04	yellow	01					026	
	017	layer	>=0.34	10yr 4/2	02			027		018	
	018	layer	>=0.34	10yr 3/3	03			017		019	
	019	layer	>=0.04	5y 3/2	04			018		020	021
	020	layer	>=0.14	5y 6/4	013	014	021	019		022	
	021	layer	>=0.14	5y 6/6	013	014	020	019		023	
	022	layer	>=0.18	5y 4/1	05			020	021	023	
	023	layer	>=0.02	5y 4/3	06			022		024	
	024	layer	>=0.22	5y 2.5/1	07			023		025	
	025	layer	>0.16	5y 3/1	08			024		????	

## APPENDIX B

### POTTERY ANALYSIS FROM ELY BROAD STREET (ELYBS96)

by P. Spoerry

The Ely Broad Street assemblage consists of 34 sherds, although 25 of these are from unstratified contexts. There is too little pottery for any meaningful quantification but the assemblage is worthy of detailed notes.

#### Pottery From Stratified Contexts

Pottery type codes

MEL Medieval Ely ware  
 LMEL Late Medieval Ely ware  
 CMEL Calcareous Ely ware  
 BRILL Brill/Boarstall fine ware  
 CSTN Cistercian type ware  
 ESSO Essex hard, coarse orange ware.

Cxt.	Pot Type	No. of Sherds	Form	Date range from Cxt.	Notes
1	ESSO	1	Jug	1400-1550	Unglazed
3	LMEL	1		1350-1500	Hard-fired body sherd; ?external black slip
	MEL	1	Deep Platter		Sooted; shallow form
5	BRILL	1	Jug	1200-1350	Body sherd with external glaze & Fe-lines
8	?MEL	1	Bowl	1200-1500	Triangular seated rim; soft fabric like Grimston soft ware
18	CSTN	1	Cup	1480-1600	Probably Babylon product
19	MEL	1		1200-1500	
21	MEL	1	Jug	1200-1500	External green glaze over possible slip
22	CMEL	1	Jug	1200-1500	Jug rim, possibly seated; external green glaze (over-fired)

#### Unstratified Pottery

##### Trench 2

Nine sherds of a Grimston strip-decorated jug with thick green glaze. It has a bridge spout and twisted handle, and dates to 1250-1350, due to its highly decorated style.

Six sherds of a MEL jug with external green glaze over ?sprig and strip decoration. Perhaps local imitation of Grimston.

One sherd of a ?MEL straight-sided bowl with flat-topped rim. The coarse grey fabric is an unusual variant and could be from elsewhere.

One sherd of post-medieval English stoneware (1700-1900).

One glazed sherd of an orange sandy ware bowl. 1400-1600?

One grey, sandy flat base. Probably an import and most likely a Paffrath greyware, although not the most common vessel type. Otherwise perhaps a North French gritty ware, possibly dating to 1100-1300.

### *Trench 3*

Two sherds of MEL jugs, one with ?combing under glaze.

One sherd of MEL bowl with internal glaze and sooting.

One MEL body sherd.

One sherd of an ESSO angled bowl of 1400-1550, with internal limescale.

One sherd of an ESSO jug strap handle with splashes of clear glaze (1400-1550).

### **Concluding Remarks**

This assemblage is surprising because of the well-preserved pieces of a highly decorated Grimston jug (1250-1350). The good condition of these pieces suggests that they have come from a primary refuse context. In addition the local products, made in imitation of Grimston types, are very interesting and add to a growing body of sherds illustrating this trait in Ely.

The triangular bowl rim from Context 8 is of a type which has parallels at Kings Lynn. The fabric, although appearing similar to medieval Ely ware, is rather more soft. This is very like so-called Grimston soft ware, described at Kings Lynn but now believed to be made in west Norfolk or Cambridgeshire. It may be the first good example of this type from Ely.

Brill products are unsurprising and have been seen in Ely before, but the presence of late medieval Essex hard orange pottery, like fabric 21 from Colchester Castle, has not been observed in the City before. Substantial amounts of earlier Essex products (Sible Hedingham) have been seen at Jubilee Terrace and it is significant that the later material is also appearing.

The possible Paffrath ware base is also interesting as it may be a rare vessel type. Paffrath ware (in the more common ladle form) is already known in Ely at Jubilee Terrace.

This interesting little group re-emphasises the need to treat small observation recording seriously as it helps build up a more comprehensive picture, both spatially and temporally.

## APPENDIX C

### AN ASSESSMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL SAMPLES FROM ELY BROAD STREET (ELYBS96)

by D. Schlee

Four 10 litre samples were taken from three different deposits in Trench 2:

Sample No.	Context No.	Context Type	Trench No.	Sample Vol.
1	6	Layer	2	10L
2	7	Layer	2	10L
3	8	Layer (natural?)	2	10L
4	7	Layer	2	10L

Layers 6 and 7 were both waterlogged deposits with a high organic content. Layer 8 was a moist silty clay, thought to be a natural deposit possibly relating to episodes of flooding. A second sample was taken from around a leather shoe sole in layer 7, in the hope of finding further fragments. The samples were processed using a standard flotation tank and the resulting flots and heavy residues were scanned for seeds, other plant parts and any other inclusions.

#### Results

##### *Sample 1*

This contained large quantities of wood fragments, twigs, bark, leaves, moss, and probable reeds and grass stems. Seeds of *Atriplex*, *Polygonum*, chenopodium, *agrostemma githargo*, and *Carex* were present in low numbers amongst the bulk of organic material. In addition, insect remains, oyster and mussel shells were present.

##### *Samples 2 and 4*

Both these samples were taken from deposit 7. They contained the same basic range of seeds and organic remains as were present in sample 1. Like sample 1, they also contained insect remains and mussel and oyster shells but sample 2 also contained bird egg shell fragments (perhaps chicken), a few charred bread wheat grains and some probable waterlogged cereal straw nodes.

##### *Sample 3*

This was taken from deposit 8 at the base of the exposed section in order to ascertain whether or not it represented a sequence of natural deposits from flooding events. The sample again contained wood, bark, twigs leaf and moss fragments and insect remains, but in much lower quantities than in the overlying deposits. Pot fragments and mussel shells were also present.

#### Discussion

Sample 1 contains large quantities of organic matter preserved by waterlogging. Apart from the presence of mussel and oyster shells, however, the range of plant seeds and the dominant quantities of wood fragments and twigs suggest a

largely naturally-accumulated deposit, possibly derived from a hedge and other plants growing in the vicinity.

Samples 2 and 4 consisted of essentially the same material as sample 1, but with a larger component derived from the disposal of domestic debris. The quantity and range of artefacts with a probable domestic origin is not, however, very large and again may simply represent a small part of what is otherwise a naturally-accumulated deposit.

Although layer 8 was thought during excavation to be an archaeologically sterile natural deposit, sample 3 did contain pot fragments, mussel shells and a similar organic component to the other samples. The quantity of the organic component in comparison to the other samples was significantly smaller and no seeds were recovered. This may suggest that layer 8 may originally have been similar to layers 6 and 7 (with a high organic component) but that the conditions for preservation were significantly different when this layer was deposited. Whereas waterlogging has preserved the organic material in the later deposits, layer 8 may have been subject to drier conditions, or to only periodic waterlogging, with the result that the bulk of the organic matter has decomposed. None of the plant species represented in the samples are characteristic of a wet environment, suggesting that when the layers were initially deposited conditions in the locality were drier.

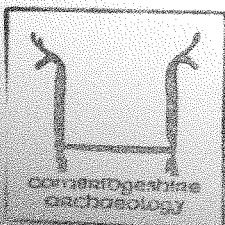
The possibility of changes in the water table, with wetter conditions developing after the initial deposition of archaeological material, may reflect differences in land use in the immediate vicinity or may be a consequence of more general changes in activities around the edge of the drier ground.

APPENDIX D

FINDS QUANTIFICATION

<b>ELY, BROAD STREET 1996 - Finds Types By Context</b>									
<b>Trench/ Location</b>	<b>Context</b>	<b>Pottery weight (g)</b>	<b>Pottery Count</b>	<b>Tile/Brick weight (g)</b>	<b>Flint weight (g)</b>	<b>Flint Count</b>	<b>A. Bone weight (g)</b>	<b>Shell weight (g)</b>	<b>Total Weight by Context (g)</b>
u/s		313	6				42		355
u/s	over 7	618	19	207			506	68	1399
2	1	21	1	329					350
2	3	81	2	63			3		147
2	4			159					159
2	5	8	1						8
2	6						26		26
2	7				363	1			363
2	8	51	1				32		83
3	18	19	1						19
3	19	23	1						23
3	21	28	1						28
3	22	24	1						24
3	24						174		174
<b>Total Weights by Finds Type</b>		<b>1186</b>	<b>34 sherds</b>	<b>758</b>	<b>363</b>	<b>1 fragm.</b>	<b>783</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>3158</b>





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