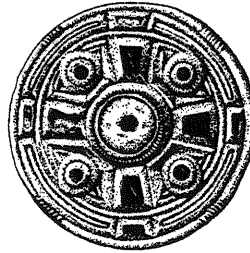


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Archaeological Field Unit

Medieval Features near Chatteris Abbey. An Archaeological  
Evaluation at 23 South Park Street, Chatteris.

Aileen Connor

1998

Cambridgeshire County Council

Report No. A129

*Commissioned By Headley Stokes Associates on behalf of Mr & Mrs FJ Brown*

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### *Summary*

*An archaeological evaluation at 23 South Park Street, Chatteris (TL393 857) has shown that possible medieval features survive towards the rear of the property, but that the front of the property has been largely disturbed by 19th and 20th century drains, cess-pits and levelling. The property is close to Chatteris Priory, and fragments of the Priory walls still survive along parts of South Park Street, therefore the site may be within the precincts of the Priory. The features found were much truncated but include possible structural features such as a post hole and an L shaped gully. Two large sherds of unabraded medieval pottery were recovered from these features (7 and 30) which were clearly sealed beneath a later deposit.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken at 23 South Park Street, Chatteris (TL393 857) during February 1998 by the Cambridgeshire County Council, Archaeological Field Unit. The evaluation was part of a scheme of work required by the County Archaeology Office to fulfil a planning condition in advance of the redevelopment of the site as housing. There follows a summary of the archaeological information gathered about the site in order to help determine the scope of any further work which the CAO may require to fulfill the archaeological planning condition.

## 2. ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

23 South Park Street lies within the precincts of Chatteris Priory, the Benedictine Nunnery of St. Mary. Haigh (1988) describes the Nunnery as founded between 1006 and 1008 AD by the Abbot of Ramsey at the request of his sister Aelfwen, who became the first prioress. The house remained small, however, and was eventually given to the monastery at Ely. The nunnery buildings were burnt down in the fourteenth century, and were rebuilt. The nunnery was sold and all the buildings except the church were pulled down at the Dissolution in 1538. A lengthier history of the Priory is found in the VCH for Cambridgeshire (VCH Vol. 2). Stone walls, possibly relating to the southern boundary of the priory are standing along the north side of South Park Street, including part of No.23. Archaeological deposits relating to the medieval period are therefore of particular significance, since they may directly relate to the priory.

## 3. METHODS AND CONSTRAINTS

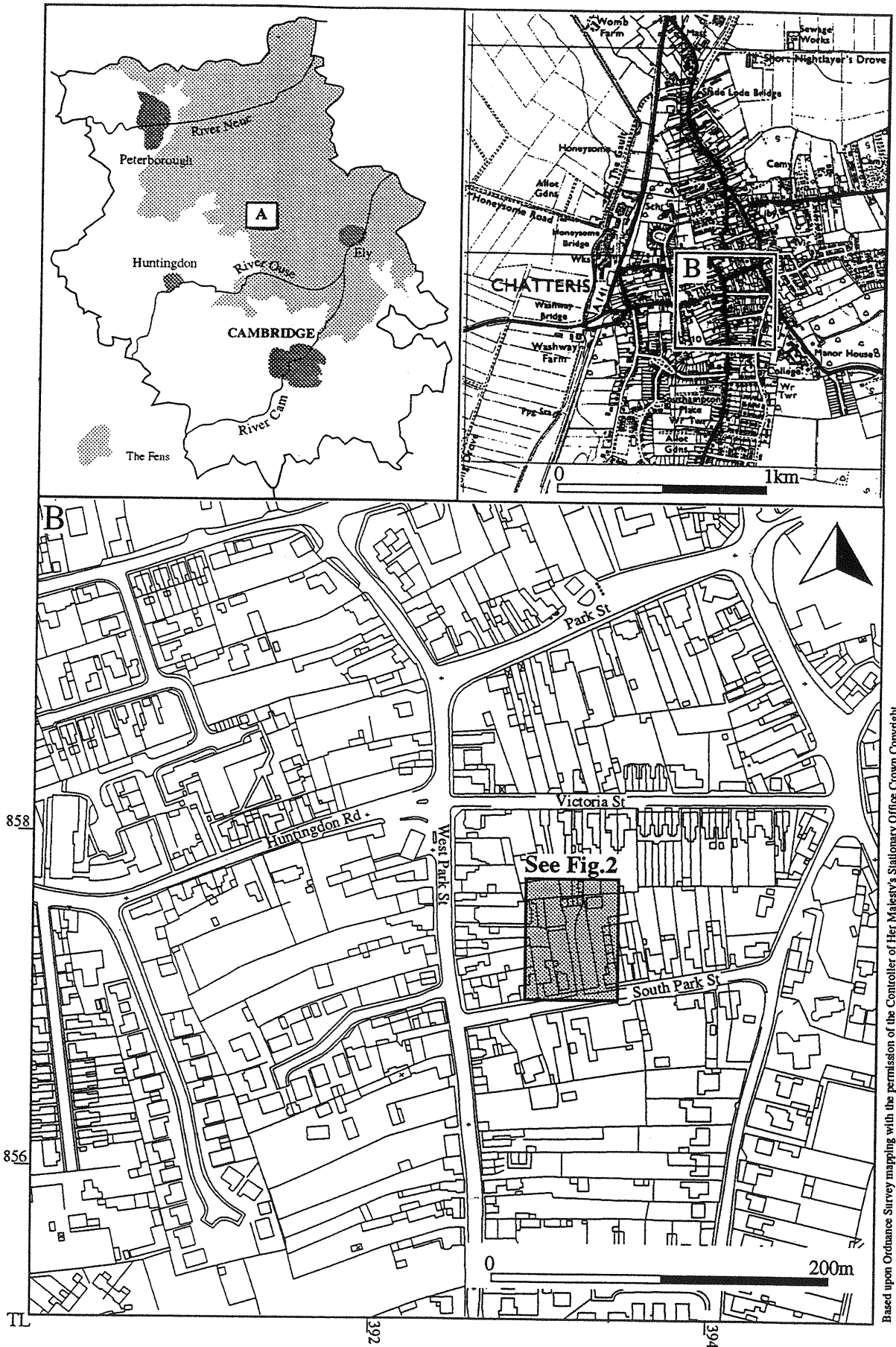
Four trenches totalling an area of 99 square metres were machine excavated within the 1144 square metre area of the proposed development, a total of approximately 8 percent.

The present ground surface was fairly level at 9.50 metres OD, a derelict house was still standing on the south-west of the property and garages were located to the rear of the property.

Archaeological features were sampled by hand excavated sections. Sections were drawn at a scale of 1:10 and plans of excavated features were drawn at 1:20. An overall trench plan was produced using a Total Station Surveying Instrument.

A search of the Sites and Monuments Record and the County Records Office was made to provide the historical and archaeological context to the site.

The trenches varied in depth from 0.80 metres to 1.40 metres, 8.70 to 8.10 metres OD all the trenches suffered from standing water making excavation and recording difficult, but trenches 2 and 4 were the worst affected. It was not possible to place a trench with 10 metres of the Street frontage for a number of reasons; at the west of the plot, No. 23 is still standing, although in a state of delapidation, the centre of the plot has the access into the site, and it would, therefore, have been impactical to place a trench there and the east of the plot is bounded by a stone wall, possibly belonging to the priory, or containing reused stones from the priory, finally the proposed development includes a house on the east side of the plot at the front and the developer did not wish the foundations of this house to be affected by trenching.



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Figure 1 Site Location Maps



Figure 2 Location of Trenches and Archaeological Features

#### 4. RESULTS

All four trenches showed signs of earlier activity on the site, however, the period of activity in trenches 2, 3 and 4 was relatively recent, belonging to the 19th or 20th century and probably relates to the house that still stands on the plot, including a large cess-pit which cut into approximately half the length of trench 2 and the north of trench 3, as well as numerous drains and sewer pipes in trenches 3 and 4. Trench 1 showed evidence of 19th or 20th century activity in the southern half of the trench, where the ground appeared to have been levelled and made up with layers of gravel, and brick rubble. The north end of this trench, however, did contain a number of features of potential interest, including several which may be dated to the medieval period.

##### 4.1 Archaeological Features within Trench 1

Trench 1 was 1.6 metres wide by 20 metres long by 0.80m deep at its north end and 1.25 metres at its south end. The machined deposits, 1, 2 and 8 were recent makeups and topsoil, as were 13 and 14, layers of compacted gravel containing recent brick and tile fragments at the north end of the trench. A tram depot was located on the site at the beginning of the 20th century, and the compacted makeup deposits may relate to this period.

Several post holes and a ditch have also been dated to this 19th or 20th century period.

##### 4.2 Possible medieval features

Layer 8 sealed five features towards the north of Trench 1 which may be medieval in date:

Possible post hole or small pit 5 contained animal bone only, but its proximity to other possible medieval structural features suggests a possible association.

Possible pit or shallow ditch terminus 10, contained tiny unidentifiable fragments of tile like material, but no other finds, it truncated an L shaped linear feature, 7, 30,

Possible structural feature, 7 & 30 was a shallow L shaped linear feature containing animal bone and two sherds of medieval pottery, probably a developed St Neots Ware dating to between 1100 and 1400 AD, or possibly a little earlier.

Gully 21 to the south of 7 & 30 was a linear feature of similar depth, width and orientation to 7. The feature was truncated by 17 a post-medieval ditch.

Pit or animal burrow 26 was an extremely shallow, amorphous feature truncated by 21, its interpretation is uncertain.

#### 5. CONCLUSIONS

It is clear from this evaluation that approximately the southern two thirds of the area in question has been disturbed in recent centuries. It is possible that isolated patches of the Nunnery survive, but the trenching indicated that any preservation in this area of earlier deposits would be very limited. The most northerly third of the site, however, had evidence of surviving, although truncated, possible medieval features, approximately 0.80 metres below the present land surface, at 8.65 metres OD. Preliminary dating of the pottery from one of these features suggests a date between 1100 and 1400 AD, and the morphology and character of the features suggests they may have had a structural purpose. The location and date of the features suggests that they may be associated with the medieval priory of Chatteris. Further excavation may help to clarify the function and purpose of these features and may help ascertain any association with the medieval priory.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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