

Archaeological Field Unit

An Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment of
Peterborough, West Square, Bus Station

Spencer Cooper and Paul Spoerry

1998

Cambridgeshire County Council

Report No. A132

Commissioned By Patrick Ottaway, YAT, for Norwich Union

**An Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment of
Peterborough, West Square, Bus Station**

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SUMMARY

This study was undertaken to attempt to define the archaeological potential of Peterborough Bus Station which is located adjacent to the Queensgate Shopping centre and in-between the historic streets of Westgate and Cowgate. The study has been prepared for Norwich Union in relation to a proposed two storey retailing outlet above the existing bus station.

The desktop assessment has identified three zones of archaeological potential within the subject site. The historical and archaeological background suggests the area of greatest potential for medieval remains within the site is at the northern adjacent to Westgate. Within the central part of the site there is a strong likelihood of encountering post-medieval archaeological deposits associated with Workhouse Close. In the southern part of the site there is a strong likelihood encountering a post medieval grave yard.

Test pits and Boreholes undertaken on the site have shown that there is a strong possibility of at least 1.5 m to 2m of surviving stratigraphy across the site, a substantial part of which may be post-medieval in date.

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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This desk-based assessment was commissioned by Patrick Ottaway of York Archaeological Trust on behalf of Norwich Union. It assesses the archaeological potential of the site of the Peterborough Bus Station using the relevant archaeological and historical sources.

The development proposal comprises a number of piled foundations positioned across the site in order to facilitate the construction of a two storey unit above the existing bus station and either side of the existing bridge link between the John Lewis Department Store and Car Park.

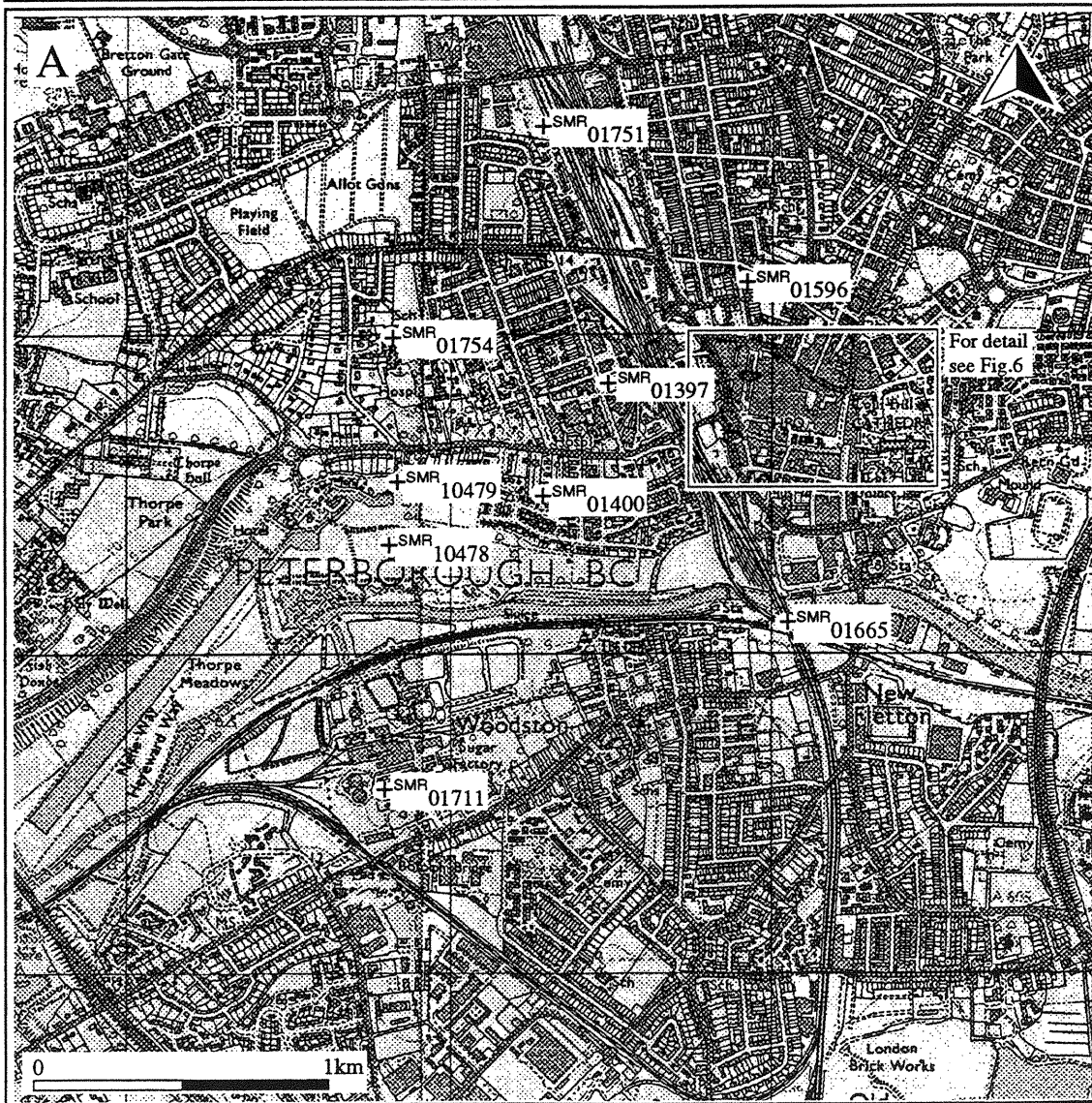
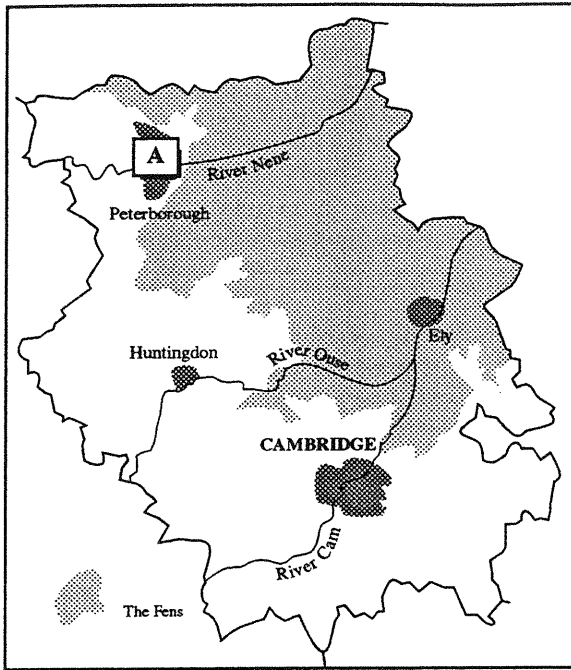
- 1.2 The study area is centred on grid reference TL185 987. Peterborough Bus Station lies adjacent to the Queensgate Centre and a multi-storey car park, the latter being entered off Westgate. The site is on the edge of the medieval town with its northern edge fronting onto Westgate and the southern end not quite extending to Cowgate. Both of these streets are known from medieval documents.
- 1.3 A number of archaeological excavations have been undertaken in close proximity to the subject site and these provide a benchmark for elucidating the archaeological potential of the study area.
- 1.4 The most recent large scale excavation was undertaken at the Still Public House (Spoerry and Hinman forthcoming) (TL19109880), 400m to the east of the subject site, which revealed medieval and post medieval remains.
- 1.5 Other observations and small scale excavations were undertaken in the 1970s at Exchange St and prior to the construction of the Queensgate centre.

Archaeological features encountered at the Queensgate Centre were mostly of a post medieval date.

Excavations at Exchange St, which is 500m north of the site, revealed a post-medieval industrial workshop.

2 TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

- 2.1 The site is located 2 km to the north-west of the River Nene and 1km west of the Cathedral and the historic core of Peterborough. The site occupies the area between the historic streets of Westgate to the north and Cowgate to the south. The site is bounded by the modern Queensgate Centre and lies within the modern city of Peterborough.
- 2.2 The underlying geology of the site comprises Cornbrash, limestone part of the Great Oolite group laid down during the Jurassic period. The Cornbrash, when weathered takes the form of a pale brown, limestone rubble. The top of the Cornbrash is marked by a persistent argillaceous horizon.



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Figure 1 Location map showing SMR numbers and development area

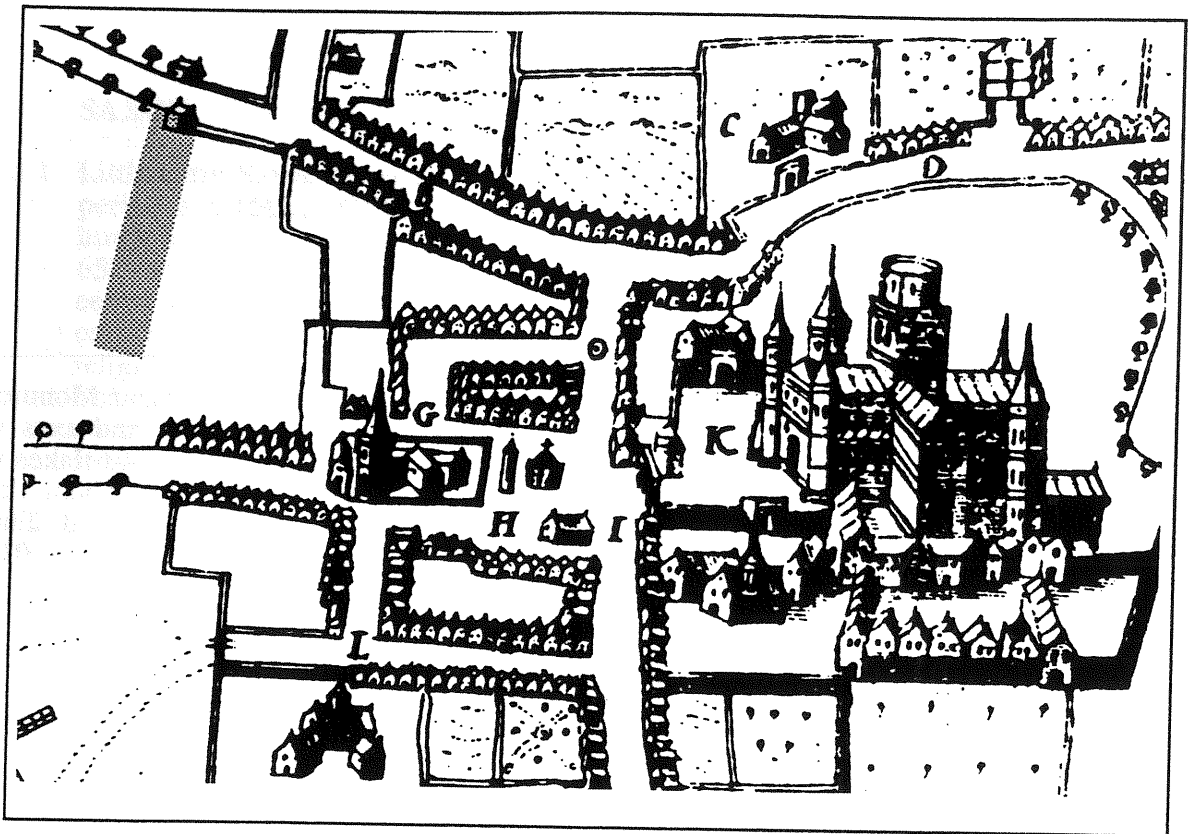


Figure 2 The site (shown shaded) and surrounding area as shown on Speed's Map, 1613

0 500m (approx)

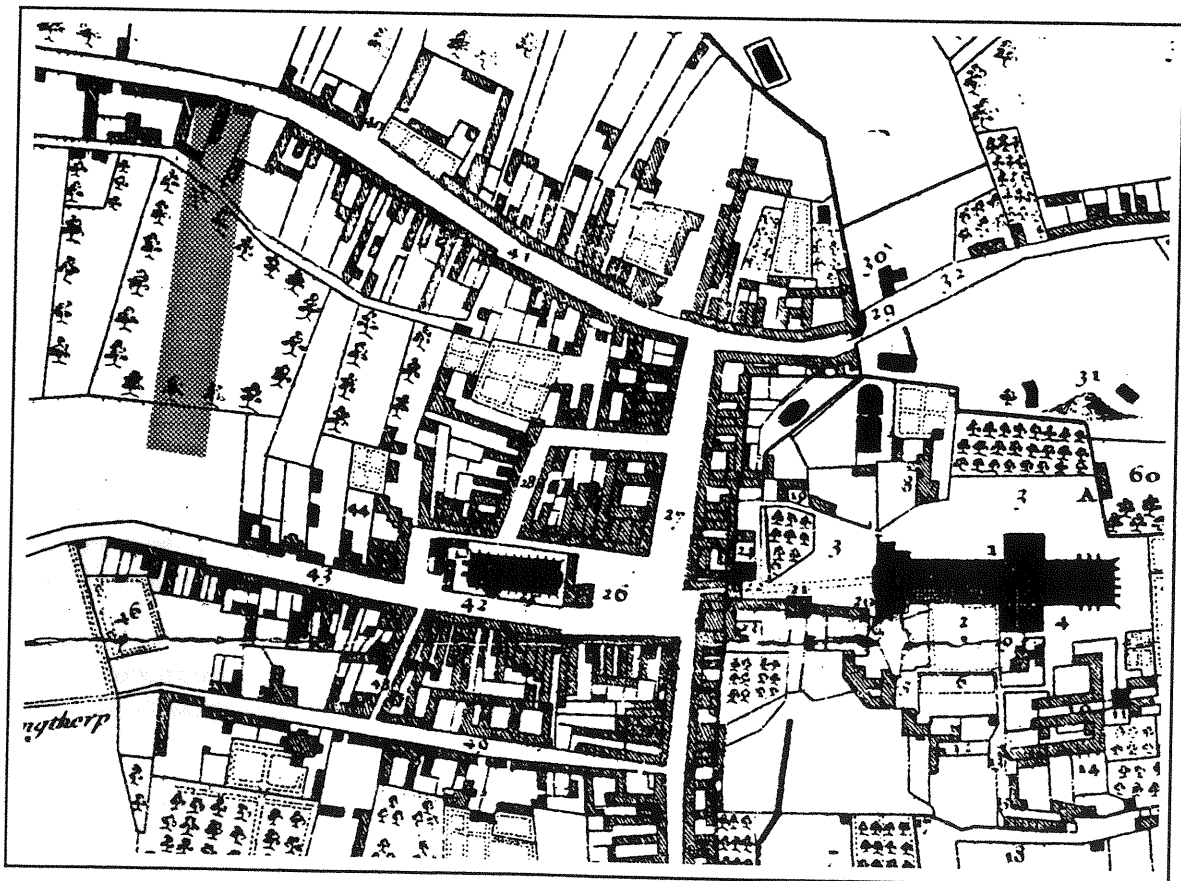


Figure 3 The site (shown shaded) and surrounding area as shown on Eyre's map, 1721

3 ARCHAEOLOGY AND HISTORY OF THE STUDY AREA

3.1 PREHISTORIC

- 3.1.1** There are no records on the Cambridgeshire County Council Sites and Monuments Record suggesting early prehistoric remains on the site but two hand axes were recovered from nearby Peterborough Common and a number of levallois flakes were found in Westwood Rd in 1908 (both SMR no **01596**; see Figure 1). About 1km to the west of the site a Neolithic arrowhead (SMR no **01754**) was discovered. Further Neolithic activity is represented by a number of flint arrowheads (SMR no. **01400**) found 2km south-west of the site.
- 3.1.2** An Iron Age settlement (SMR no **1711**) was found during gravel extraction 2km south west of the site during the early part of this century. Iron Age coins have also been found on the northern bank of the River Nene, (SMR nos **10479** and **10478**). An Iron Age boat is recorded 2km from the site and adjacent to the present crossing place of the Nene (SMR no **1665**).

3.2 ROMAN

- 3.2.1** The site lies within the Nene valley which is rich in Roman remains including Castor, Durobrivae and Longthorpe.
- 3.2.2** Roman burials were found at Midland Rd which is located 600m to the west of the site (SMR no **01397**). Excavations revealed Roman burials, horseshoes, bones and a number of inhumations arranged in a circle.
- 3.2.3** Less than 1km north of the site a large Roman settlement has been identified covering up to 80 acres on both sides of the railway tracks. Excavations between 1879 and 1885 (SMR no **01751**) revealed structures including a low embankment running EW, 40 ft wide with a ditch on the south side, a possible lime kiln and two stone-lined wells. A cemetery containing about 40 inhumation burials was also found. Traces of a wooden coffin were found associated with one of the skeletons from the cemetery.
- 3.2.4** Romano-British material has been recovered from a number of excavations in or around the Cathedral Precincts (Mackreth 1982, Mackreth 1988, and Meadows 1993).
- 3.2.5** The well documented fort of Longthorpe (Scheduled Ancient Monument **135**), with an associated Iron Age farm, lies less than 5km to the west of the site on the north bank of the Nene and further Roman remains have also been found here just south of the river. A fording place (SMR no **4321**) is known adjacent to the fort.
- 3.2.6** Excavations at the Still, 500m to the east of the subject site produced six abraded Roman coins but surprisingly little Roman pottery and tile (Spoerry and Hinman, forthcoming).

3.3 SAXON

- 3.3.1 Little early Saxon material is known from within the town but in the middle Saxon period a monastery was established. The date of this foundation is not certain however, Bede's History of the English Church suggests a foundation date of around 653-699 (Mackreth 1994). This may well have been located close to a Mercian Royal centre and is highly likely that this monastery at Medeshamstede, the first to be constructed within Mercian lands, quickly became an important centre in both religious and secular life. The monastery continued as a successful house into the late Saxon period with the archaeological evidence suggesting there are three phases of construction with ordered robbing of the earliest (middle Saxon) structure (Mackreth, 1984).
- 3.3.2 The early church and some of its associated buildings were enclosed in the late Saxon period by the construction of a set of defences (Mackreth 1982, Mackreth 1988, and Meadows 1993). A substantial stone-built wall foundation, around 2m thick, has been identified at two points and this appears to have been cut into an earlier revetted bank. Using this information Mackreth has proposed a full circuit based on field observation, cartographic study and an unpublished trench on the southern side which found a rampart and two stages of ditch. This defended enclosure lies several hundred metres east of the subject site.
- 3.3.3 A watching brief at 37-38 Long Causeway in 1988 produced evidence for the existence of late Saxon cultivation soil under upcast related to the creation of the precincts.

3.4 MEDIEVAL

- 3.4.1 The burh and vill were abandoned in the twelfth century, a new monastic church, the present Cathedral, and its precincts were built. The focus of the contemporary town appears to have shifted from the area of the former vill to an open area to the west of the main gate into the precincts. At this time a number of streets were probably defined including Cowgate and Westgate.
- 3.4.2 The more generally available cartographic sources for the site were examined in order to determine the site's historical context. The earliest map consulted was Speed's 1613 map of the town (see Figure 2) which is fairly pictorial and known to have many inaccuracies but gives a good impression of the town. This map shows narrow-fronted properties at the eastern end of Westgate with poorly defined burgage plots to the rear. In the western part of Westgate, where the study site is located, there is no development depicted except for one single property. Back Lane, the minor street that later ran east-west across the subject site, is not shown.
- 3.4.3 Eyre's map of Peterborough (1721) shows narrow-fronted properties along Westgate with regular burgage plots which may suggest medieval origins (see Figure 3). Within the study area there are several of these burgage-style properties fronting Westgate, all of which run southwards to Back Lane. This 'street' provided precisely that function, being the back lane for properties on the south side of Westgate, and did not have further frontage properties itself in 1721. It seems likely that there were none here in earlier centuries. Most of the rest of the subject site was probably open land at this time; the properties on the north side of Cowgate, which may have medieval origins, excepted.
- 3.4.4 The nearest extensively excavated site is the Still which is located to the east, adjacent to Cumbergate. This excavation revealed a sequence of occupation on the Cumbergate frontage dating from at least the thirteenth century until the surviving buildings were constructed in to the seventeenth century. Behind the frontage

quarrying for Cornbrash Limestone started some time in the 150 years before 1150 and continued into the thirteenth century, by which time it seems that the southern end of newly defined properties on the south side of Westgate appeared. Evidence of structures and domestic activity associated with these properties was revealed alongside rubbish pits and quarrying. A similar creation date is to be expected for the burgage-style properties also on the south side of Westgate and within the northern part of the subject site.

- 3.4.5 The archaeological evidence from observations prior to the development of the Queensgate Centre produced mostly post-medieval features with a small number of possible medieval features. (unpublished records held at Peterborough Museum) The observation was extremely limited by the lack of time and the narrowness of the trenches. The area of greatest archaeological interest lay in the eastern part of the development, the area nearest to the historic core and furthest from the subject site.
- 3.4.6 At 25-26 Long Causeway, some distance to the west of the subject site, archaeological excavation undertaken by B.U.A.F.A (Jones, 1996) revealed a broad ditch defining the western boundary of the monastic precinct and the construction of a stone footed building to the west of the ditch. In phase 2, 14th-15th centuries, the area adjoining the street frontages was occupied by further stone-footed buildings to the west of the ditch.

3.5 POST-MEDIEVAL

- 3.5.1 Speed's map of 1613 shows very little evidence of development within the study area or its environs. As stated above it shows one property in the eastern part of Westgate.
- 3.5.2 As stated above Eyre's map of Peterborough (1721) depicts a number of houses along Westgate which are within the subject site. It is difficult to determine the origins of these buildings but their shape suggests origins in the medieval period as burgages and this is continued in the post-medieval period as ribbon development along Westgate. To the rear of these properties, Back Lane is shown and to the south of this the open ground is subdivided into three plots. The larger of these 'closes' may be a garden or orchard. The southern part of the subject site may overlap slightly with the rear (northern end) of properties that fronted onto Cowgate.
- 3.5.3 The next cartographic source consulted was Hills map of 1802 (Fig 4) which shows several plots at the back of the houses marked as New Grave Yard and Workhouse Close. The former was the parish graveyard from around 1805 until 1855 (Richard Hillier pers. comm.). The latter contains the workhouse buildings but they do not lie within the proposed development area.
- 3.5.4 The Inclosure map of 1821 (not shown) reveals a very similar pattern, but with the infilling of Workhouse Close with houses and the burial ground to the south as before.
- 3.5.5 The 1886 25 inch O/S map (Figure 5) shows that by this point the burial ground had gone out of use and that the area in general was heavily built up with a timber yard and an Iron Works. This Ironworks at Queens St was one of the largest makers of Farm machinery in the East of England. The firm produced a variety of goods from institutional cooking and heating units to steam ploughs. When the depression in agriculture hit sales the ironworks turned to the manufacture of brick making machinery.

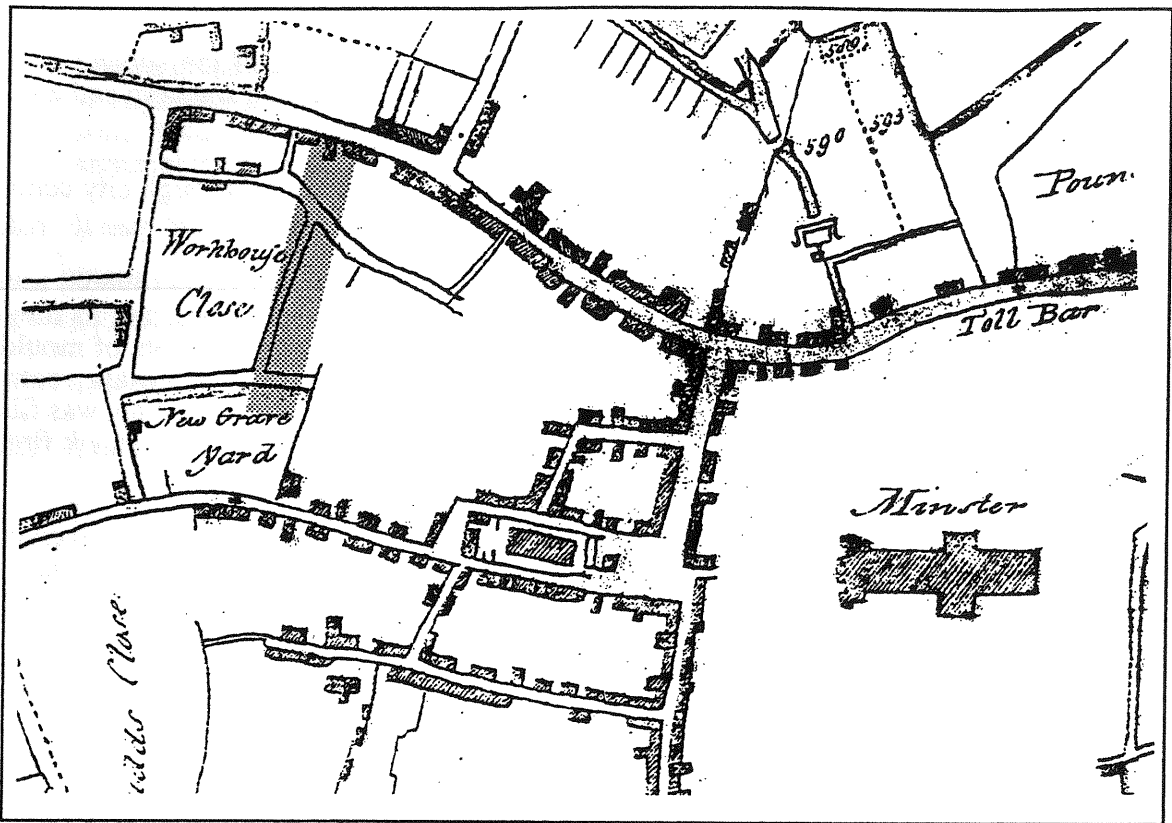


Figure 4 The site (shown shaded) and surrounding area as shown on Hill's map, 1808

0 500m

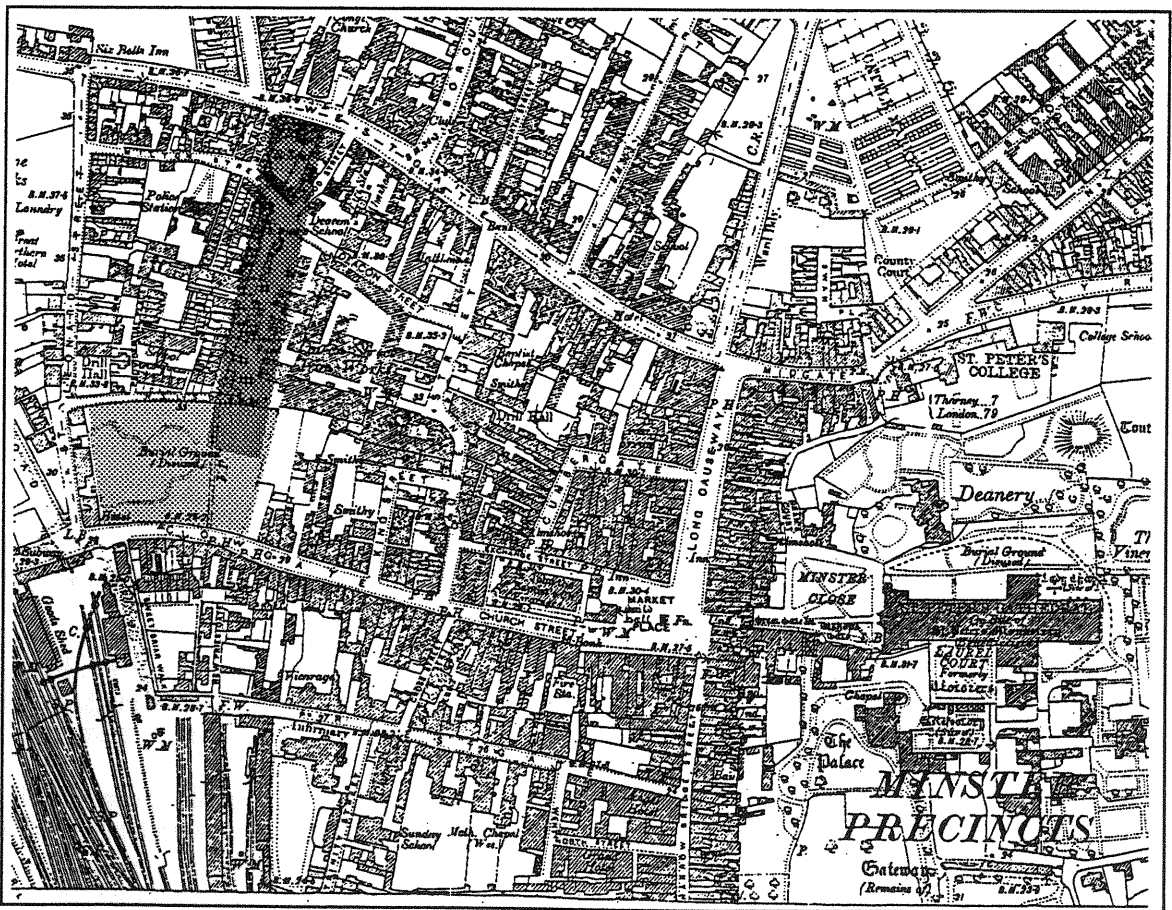


Figure 5 The site (shown shaded) and surrounding area as shown on the 1885 25 inch O/S map

3.5.6 The 1901 25 inch O/S map shows that at the northern end of the subject site there were two schools, to the east there was a timber yard and at the southern end there was the disused burial ground.

3.5.6 Most of the archaeology revealed in excavations within Peterborough city centre has been post-medieval in character:-

Excavations undertaken on the north side of Exchange Street (TL 19149868) revealed a building which seems to have been an industrial workshop for much of its life in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Bronze droplets and fragments of moulds for cauldrons or similar vessels were revealed. At a later date the main room was converted into domestic quarters. A well, which was behind the building, was filled in with pottery which suggested a date of 1700 for its demise. An inglenook fireplace with a bread oven was built against the north wall of the wing.

The observations of the Queensgate Development revealed a large number of late medieval and post medieval pits. In addition a number of stone and brick-lined wells of a post-medieval date were discovered. The area of greatest archaeological interest lay immediately north of Exchange St and little consideration was given to the presence of remains in the are of this site. During construction works at the disused burial ground, however, the presence of human remains necessitated screening of machine excavation from the public gaze (R. Hillier pers. comm.).

The excavations from the Still have provided us with a rather piecemeal evidence for domestic activity and a large number of features, including rubbish disposal in pits and re-used quarries in the post-medieval period. There is also evidence for formal gardens in the central part of the site which suggests a change of use in the 17th century.

4 POTENTIAL FOR SURVIVAL OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL DEPOSITS

4.1 DEPOSIT DEPTH

4.1.1 The survival of deposits within the area of development may have been affected by the original construction of the bus station. There is a noticeable height difference between the northern part of the site and the southern part of the site. Therefore there is a high probability that the uppermost deposits have been truncated by the construction of the Bus Station. Conversely the higher ground level evident at the northern end of the site may imply more complete deposit survival here.

4.1.2 Test pits undertaken by Geotechnical Engineering Limited show that 'made ground' was encountered at depths of at least two metres in the majority of the test pits. This might suggest that stratigraphy survives up to two metres deep across the central part of the site where piling is proposed.

4.1.3 The survival of up to 2 metres of stratigraphy, much of this of a post medieval date, would not be unlikely when considering that the site has been subjected to deposit accretions caused by dumping, building and rebuilding over several hundreds of years.

4.1.4 The observations of the Queensgate Centre site tend to confirm the potential depth of surviving stratigraphy. There are a number of features which are nearly 2m deep with an upper sealing layer 0.5m in depth.

4.1.5 Similarly the observations from the Still tend to confirm that there was over a metre of stratigraphy in many parts of the site This was composed of post medieval garden soil, structural deposits, dumping and in some areas the lower parts constituted archaeological material of a medieval date.

4.1.6 It may be, however, that much of this stratigraphy is of comparatively recent date.

4.2 SPATIAL DISTRIBUTION OF REMAINS.

The site can be divided into three zones:-

4.2.1 The northern part of the site fronting onto Westgate

The historical and archaeological background suggests the greatest area of potential for medieval remains within the site is at the northern end of the site at Westgate (which is one of the original medieval streets). Although Speed's map does not show any development Eyre's map depicts a number of buildings fronting onto Westgate.

4.2.2 The central part of the site

It may be anticipated that deposits of a post medieval character associated with structures and activities within Workhouse Close, depicted in Hills Map of 1802 and the Inclosure Map of 1821, will be encountered. Significant truncation of deposits in this area may have occurred.

4.2.3 The southern part of the site

Cartographic evidence shows that there is a strong likelihood that a post-medieval grave yard is within the study area.

5 POTENTIAL IMPACT OF THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

A proposal has been submitted for construction of a two storey retail unit above the existing Peterborough Bus Station, either side of the existing bridge between the John Lewis Department Store and Car Park. The proposed scheme of foundations for the retail premises with its piling and associated capping will destroy the underlying archaeology within the area of the caps to a depth of 2m, and below in respect of the piles.

The impact from piling will, however, be confined to the central part of the greater Bus Station site (see Figure 7). Thus, if there are no other impacts below current road/concrete slab level, then mitigation will be in respect of deposits confined to the central zone only (4.2.2 above).

6 CONCLUSIONS

6.1. The desk-based assessment has identified the archaeological potential of the area between Westgate and Cowgate. The historical and archaeological background suggests the greatest area of potential for medieval remains within the site is at the northern end at Westgate (which is one of the original medieval streets). Although Speed's map does not show any evidence of buildings Eyre's map depicts a number of

buildings fronting onto Westgate and it is possible that structures existed here earlier as well, particularly bearing in mind the fact that Speed's maps are known to be inaccurate and essentially pictorial.

- 6.2 The archaeological observations from the Queensgate Centre development tend to confirm that there is very little medieval occupation within the western part of the city and that most of the archaeology can be dated from the post-medieval period. This is likely to be the case across all of the site south of the historic Westgate properties zone.
- 6.3 It is highly likely that human burials will exist in the southern part of the site, although it is unlikely that they will be revealed in the pile cap holes, whilst other recent construction works may have severely disturbed these remains.
- 6.4 The potential for Roman and Prehistoric remains should not be ruled out considering there are a number of Roman sites within the vicinity of the study area and bearing in mind the site's position within the Nene valley generally.
- 6.5 The middle and late Saxon period settlement is believed to lie in the Cathedral precincts and areas further east, thus it is unlikely that remains will be discovered here.
- 6.6 Undoubtedly the most important research aspects of this study are:-

When do properties become established on the south side of Westgate?
How does this part of Peterborough develop in the medieval -post medieval transition period?

In addition, if the scheme impacts beyond the piles and pile caps evaluation will need to establish whether there are human remains from the post-medieval burial ground in the southern part of the site?

7 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 Given the variable archaeological potential of the site a limited programme of evaluation test pitting within the areas of impact from development seems appropriate. This should include the northern part of the site if secondary impacts were likely to result in excavation below 0.5m and the southern part of the site if any impacts below the roadway/foundation slab were proposed. Otherwise it should focus on the pile cap locations.
- 7.2 Two or three test pits approximately 2m x 3m to allow for stepping, should be located where pile caps are proposed to determine presence/ absence of archaeology and to establish overburden, and any deposit, depth.

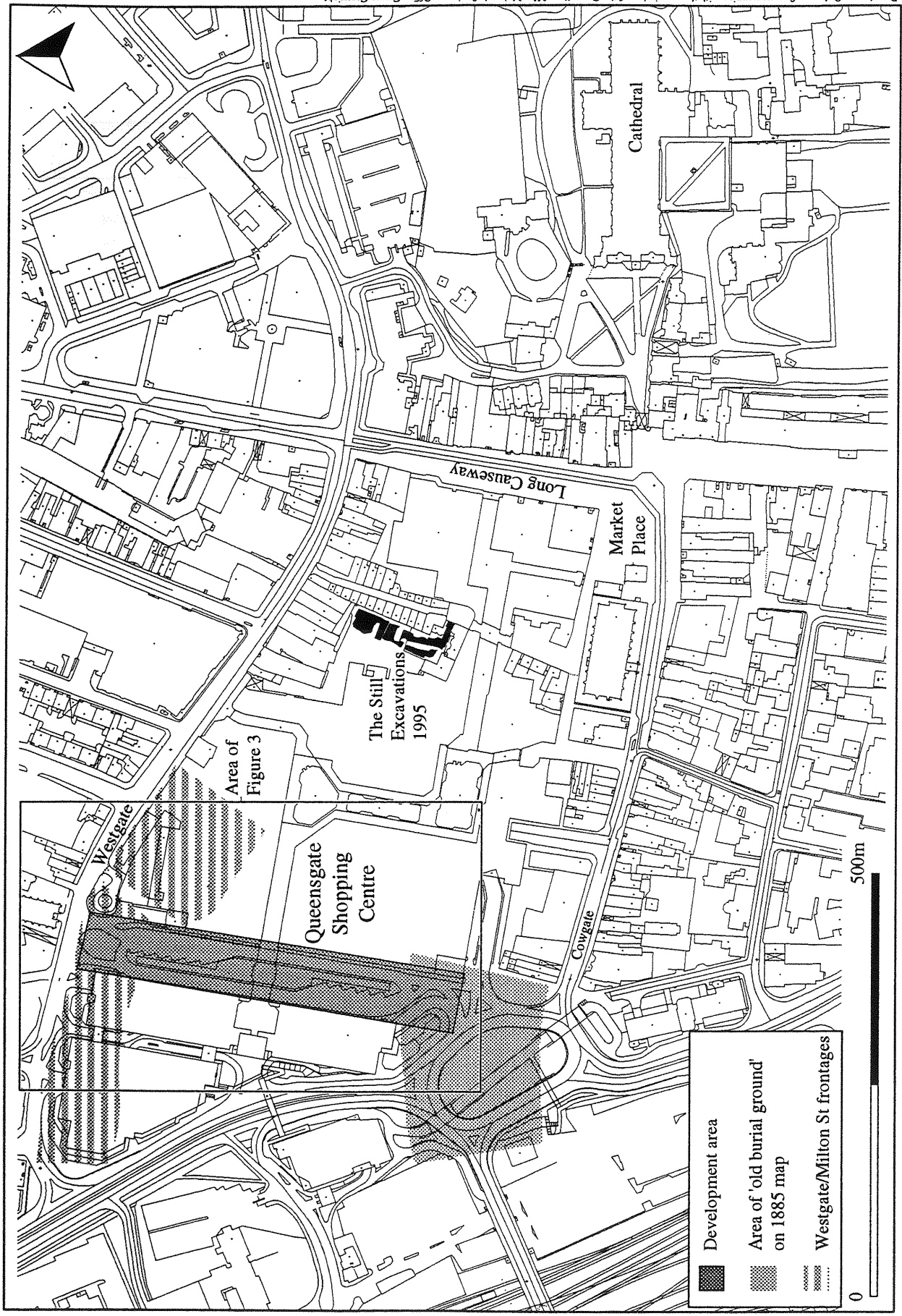
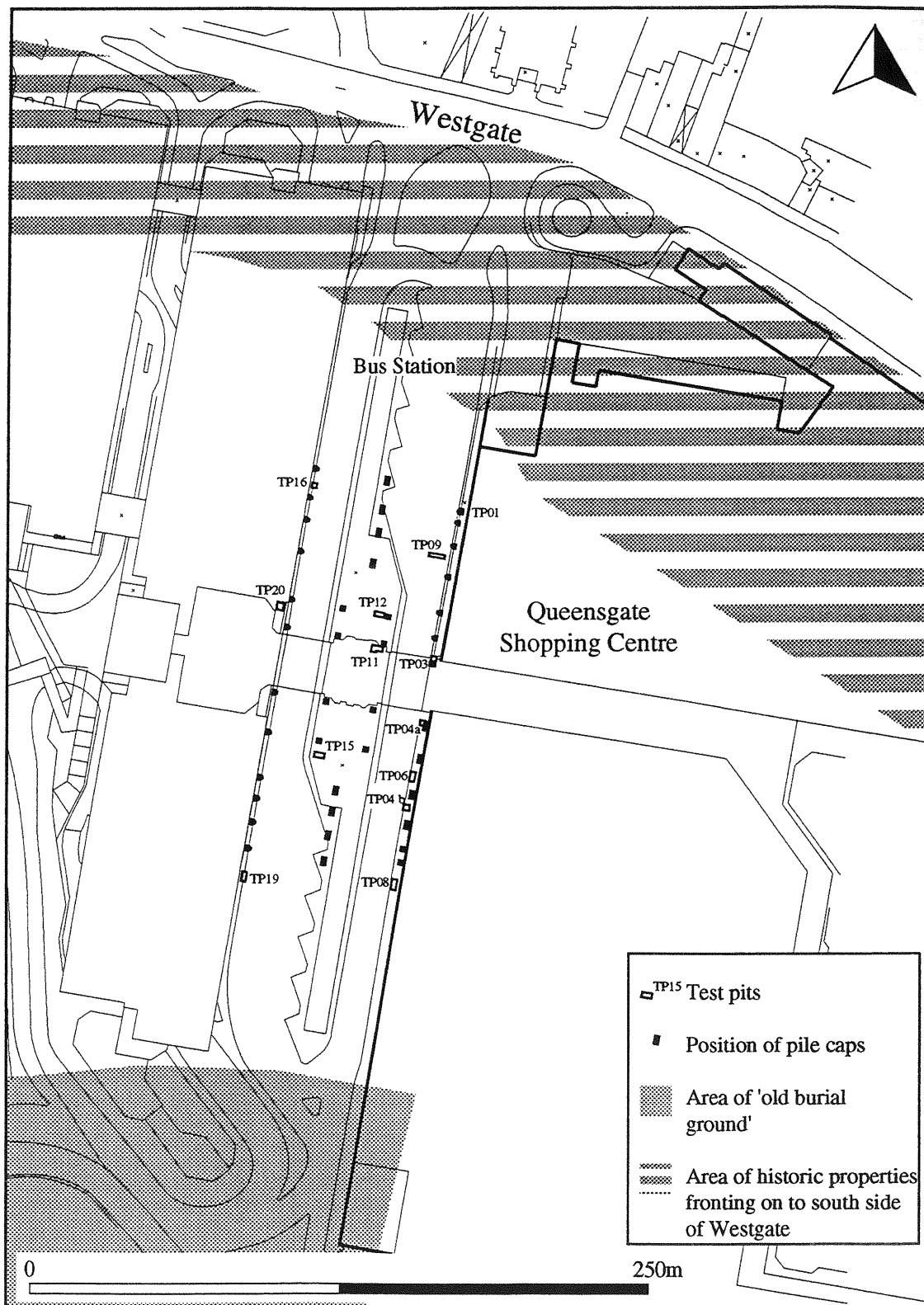


Figure 6 Modern map of the area around the site



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Figure 7 Site plan showing the areas of impact from piling and test pit locations

8 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Maps

Speeds map of Peterborough 1613.(held by Huntingdon Records Office)

Eyres map of Peterborough 1721 (held by Huntingdon Records Office)

Hills map of 1801. (held by Peterborough Museum)

Inclosure Map of 821 (held by Huntingdon Records Office)

1885 25 inch Ordnance Survey Map (held by Huntingdon Records Office)

1901 25 inch Ordnance Survey Map (held by CCC AFU)



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