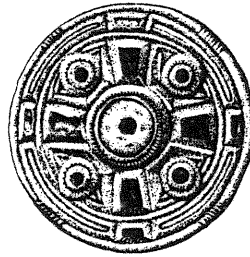


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Archaeological Field Unit

Land off Third Drove, Fengate, Peterborough:
An Archaeological Desktop Study

W. Wall and A. Hatton

1998

Cambridgeshire County Council

Report No. A135

Commissioned By Mr. M. Walters

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An Archaeological Desktop Study**

W Wall, BA
A Hatton, HND, BSc

1998

Editor T Malim BA
Illustrator J Cane BA

Report No A135

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Cambridgeshire County Council
Fulbourn Community Centre
Haggis Gap, Fulbourn
Cambridgeshire CB1 5HD
Tel (01223) 881614
Fax (01223) 880946

SUMMARY

This study attempts to define the archaeological potential of land off Third Drove, Fengate, Peterborough (TL 2135 9866) and to determine the likely impact of any development proposals. The study area covers c. 0.34 hectares, bordered by Fengate to the north-west and by Third Drove to the south-east.

The site lies in a rich archaeological landscape, surrounded by sites where previous archaeological investigation has taken place. The results of previous work suggest that the site is likely to have a tremendous archaeological potential, and could contain remains dating from the later Neolithic through to the Bronze Age, Iron Age and Roman periods. A buried fen "inlet" and watercourse, which has a high potential for earlier Neolithic or even Mesolithic occupation, may approach the site from the north-east.

Although no archaeological sites or finds are known from within the subject site itself, there are equally no known sources of truncation or destruction of archaeological deposits. The preservation of any archaeological remains that do exist within the site is likely to be very good.

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**LAND OFF THIRD DROVE, FENGATE, PETERBOROUGH:
AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL DESKTOP STUDY
(TL 2135 9866)**

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This desktop study was commissioned by Mr M. Walters of Walters Office World in order to define the archaeological potential of an area of land off Third Drove, Fengate, Peterborough, as part of the planning process concerning the sale and possible development of the site. It was carried out in accordance with a specification drawn up by W. Wall in response to a design brief written by Ben Robinson of the Peterborough City Council Archaeological Service.
- 1.2 The subject site is located to the south-east of the City of Peterborough and comprises about 0.34 hectares of land, bordered by Fengate (formerly known as Storey's Bar Road) to the north-west and by Third Drove to the south-east. The present landuse of the site is as rough grassland. The site is centred on TL 2135 9866.

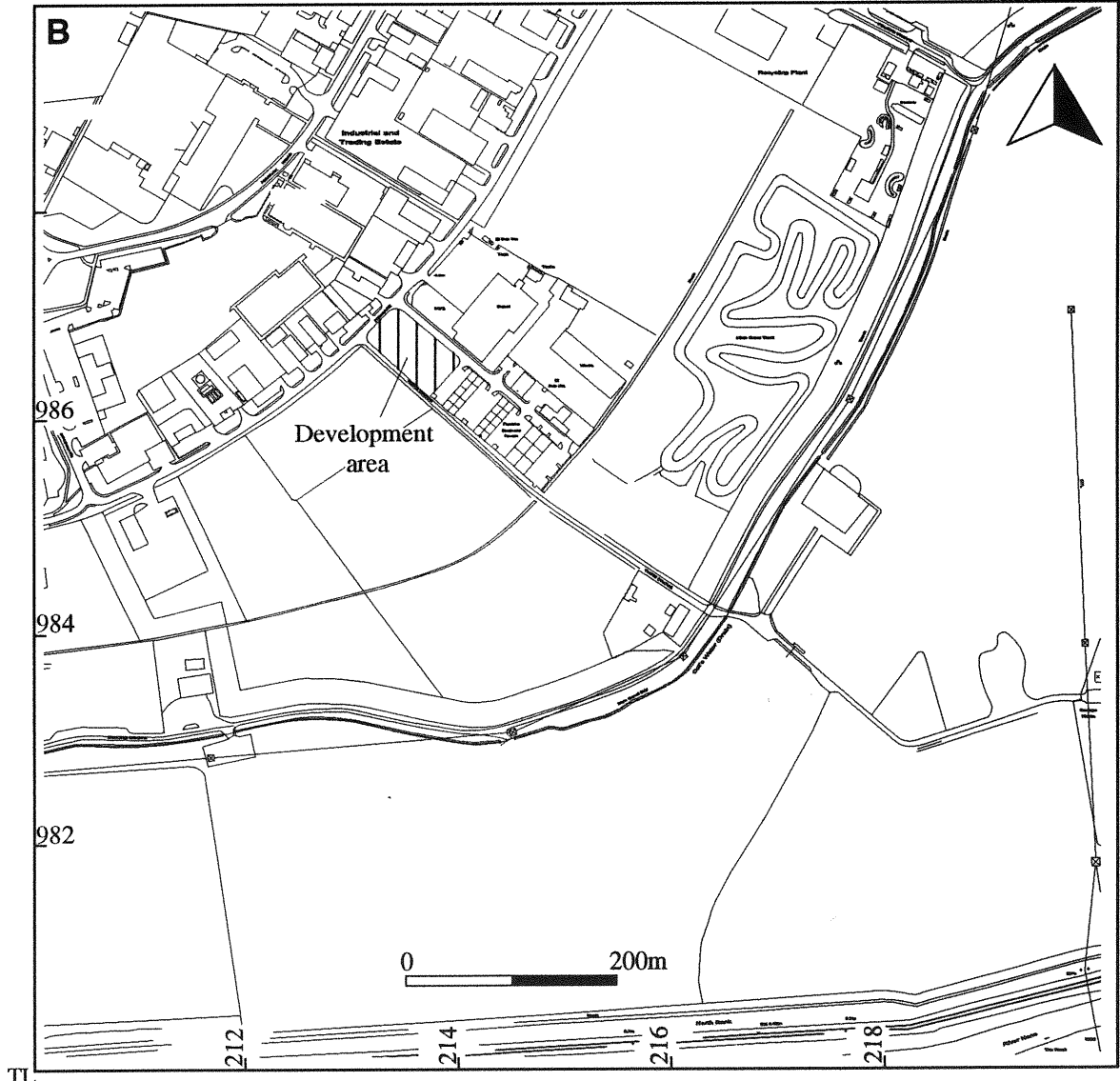
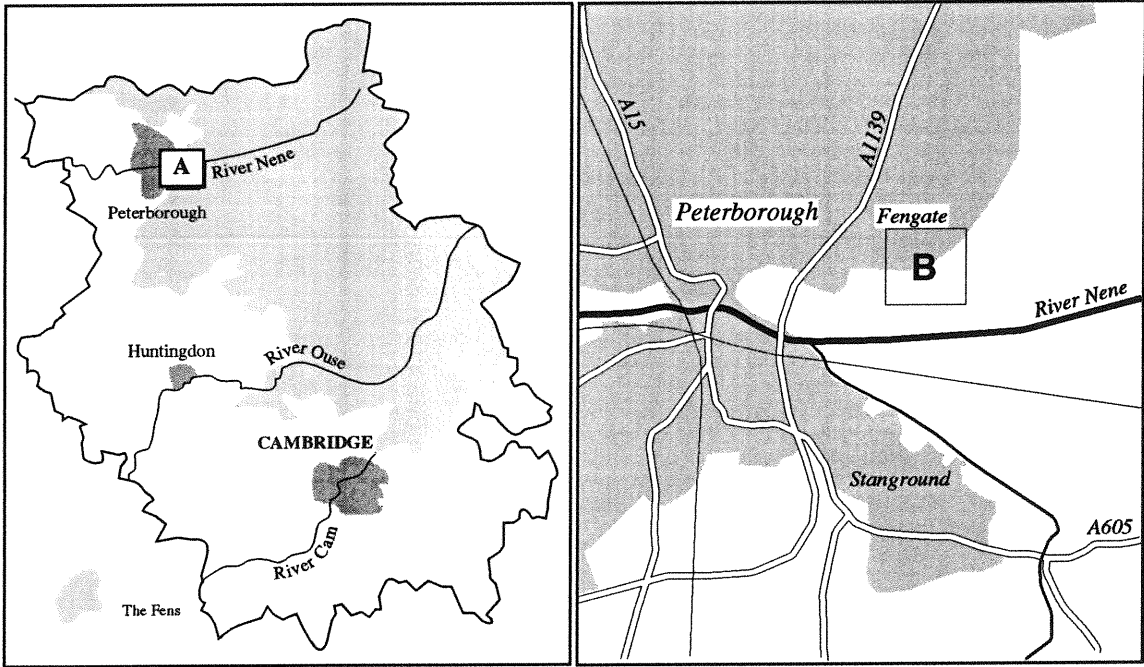
2 TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

- 2.1 The site lies on the first terrace gravels of the River Nene. An archaeological evaluation of land off Third Drove carried out by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit in 1998 incorporated trial trenches which came within 100m of the subject site (fig. 2). Trench 1 of that evaluation uncovered a natural subsoil close to the subject site which consisted of a red sand and gravel mix (Cuttler 1998)

3 THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

3.1 General

The subject site lies within a rich and well-researched archaeological landscape, well established as one of national importance. This importance comes from two factors; the first is its apparent attractiveness to early settlers, resulting in intensive exploitation of the landscape from the early Neolithic to the Roman period. The second is the exceptional conditions for the preservation of archaeological deposits that occur here. These factors have been recently summarised by Dr Francis Pryor in the report on the BUFAU evaluation of land off Third Drove referred to above (Pryor in Cuttler 1998).



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Figure 1 Location plan

- 3.1.1 The attractiveness of the Fengate area lies in its location between two different ecosystems - the dry one of the gravel terrace, and the upland and woodland beyond it to the west, and the wetland one of the fen proper. The dry land of the fen-edge remained flood-free, but was close enough to the fen to allow ready exploitation of the many resources it offered to early farmers. These included food, in the form of fish and wildfowl, fuel, timber, animal fodder such as grazing or hay, as well as other resources such as salt.
- 3.1.2 Many factors combine at Fengate to create remarkable conditions for the preservation of archaeological deposits. The area went largely out of intensive arable cultivation in the late 1960's, before the general adoption of archaeologically-damaging farming techniques, so that many fields have not been heavily deep-ploughed. The onset of wetter conditions and alluviation from the 3rd century onwards discouraged later occupation, which might otherwise have obliterated the traces of earlier settlements. The covering of alluvium has also protected underlying sites from plough damage, with the result that large areas of ancient soils are preserved intact. Soil conditions, moreover, are generally favourable and indicators of former environments such as pollen, macrobotanical and insect remains survive well.
- 3.1.3 A large amount of archaeological fieldwork and research has been undertaken in the Fengate area and much of this has been published in detail. Accordingly, this study will confine itself to a brief summary of what is known about the archaeological background of the area, in order to set the subject site within its context. Several previous archaeological investigations have taken place very close to the subject site. The results of these specific interventions will be summarised in more detail, since their proximity to the subject site gives them greater relevance. The general account that follows draws heavily on the published works of Dr Francis Pryor (Pryor 1974; 1978; 1980; 1982; 1984; 1991).

3.2 Early Neolithic

- 3.2.1 Apart from a few flints found by workman at the turn of the Century, there is little evidence of Mesolithic occupation at Fengate. The earliest settlement would appear to be early Neolithic, and the fen-edge was first occupied by people living a broadly Neolithic way of life sometime before 4000 BC. Fengate "site 11", excavated in the late 1960's, was an earlier Neolithic mortuary enclosure which lay about 600m north of the subject site. Between it and Third Drove lay further sites of similar date, including two separate mortuary structures: the Padholme Road "house" and a second probable mortuary structure excavated at the Co-op site in 1997 (Gibson 1998). A multiple burial found during excavation of the Cat's Water subsite is also of earlier Neolithic date.
- 3.2.2 The common alignment of these broadly contemporary features lead Pryor to suggest that the earlier Neolithic landscape of Fengate was organised and laid out in a deliberate fashion. The alignment, though consistent, was different from

that of the later Neolithic/Bronze Age landscape, which was laid out at right-angles to the nearby fen. The earlier Neolithic alignment seems instead to be orientated to an "inlet", partly defined by the 2m contour, which was identified in the BUFAU evaluation just to the north-east of the subject site (Cuttler 1998). This alignment of surviving features of the earlier Neolithic landscape on the inlet may demonstrate that the latter was a contemporary feature, in the same way that it demonstrates that the nearby fen was not, but only began to encroach in the late Neolithic/Bronze Age. The significance of this for the assessment of the present site will be discussed below.

3.3 Later Neolithic/ Early Bronze Age

- 3.3.1 One of the most significant discoveries at Fengate is of an organised landscape, based upon ditched droveways and rectangular fields, and laid out along, and at right-angles to the contemporary fen-edge. This alignment represented a radical reorganisation of the landscape from the preceding earlier Neolithic, and appears to have been laid out in the late Neolithic or early Bronze Age and to have stayed in use for about a millennium. Dispersed among the fields and trackways of this landscape were the remains of contemporary roundhouses. That the land was already being divided up in this way in the later Neolithic is suggested by the results of the Storey's Bar Road subsite excavations, where a settlement producing late Neolithic Grooved Ware pottery was uncovered, together with contemporary ditched fields. These earlier fields were parallel to the later, Bronze Age trackways and foreshadowed their alignment.

3.4 Bronze Age

- 3.4.1 Although intensive occupation of a domestic character has been found from the earlier Bronze Age, there is a distinct lack of ritual or ceremonial sites from this period. This imbalance of evidence towards the mundane is spectacularly redressed in the later Bronze Age. Excavations at the Power Station subsite have produced very large numbers of Bronze Age artefacts, many of them defaced or broken, which had been apparently deliberately deposited beside and amongst the posts of a massive timber alignment. This ran out from what was dry land in the Bronze Age, across the Flag Fen basin, then under water, to Northey Island. In the middle of the "bay" lay a massive timber platform.
- 3.4.2 The precise nature of the Flag Fen timber platform is debated, but it probably had a symbolic or ritual purpose. This ritual focus seems to have begun in the Middle Bronze Age, but ran on until the later Bronze Age at least. The timber alignment across the fen was both a ceremonial focus and a boundary. It was also clearly linked to the fen-edge landscape, since one of the droveways of that system joins up with its western landfall. It is possible that whatever rites took place at Flag Fen were linked with increased social tension, brought about by rising population and simultaneously-rising water levels. Perhaps the enemy being propitiated beyond the Flag Fen posts was the sea itself, since in the succeeding Iron Age huge areas of fen were inundated by saltwater.

3.5 Iron Age

- 3.5.1 The major Iron Age site at Fengate is the Cat's Water subsite, which lies some 200m north-east of the subject site. Here, a settlement was excavated over an area of about a hectare. Occupation began around 300 BC and continued into the Roman period. The cropmarks of a ditched droveway leading to the site can clearly be seen on aerial photographs. The cropmark plot in figure 2 shows this droveway, running diagonally across the alignment of the earlier droveway system. This may reflect a change from the livestock-dominated economy of the Bronze Age, where access to the rich grazing of the fen was all-important, to a system where cereal growing on the higher, drier land away from the fen played a greater part. The fen was in any case wetter now than earlier, and the fen-edge had advanced from its Neolithic and Bronze Age boundaries.
- 3.5.2 Evidence of Iron Age occupation was also found south-west of the subject site in an investigation at the so-called Depot site carried out by the CAU in 1992 (Evans 1992). Ditches of a field system and a spread of occupation debris were found. The field system was related by the excavator to the Iron Age settlement at the Cat's Water subsite.

3.6 Roman

- 3.6.1 The major Roman feature of Fengate is the fen causeway Roman road. This ran from the Roman town of *Durobrivae* at Water Newton to the fen-edge at Fengate. It shows on aerial photographs as a distinct cropmark running across the gravel terrace and out into the fen north of the Cat's Water subsite, about 500m north of Third Drove. It ran across the fens to Northey island, and thence from gravel island to gravel island to its eastern landfall at Denver in Norfolk. The road is generally thought to have been built as part of the crushing of the Boudiccan revolt of 60/61 AD.

3.7 Saxon and Medieval

- 3.7.1 From the 3rd Century AD, widespread freshwater flooding occurred throughout southern Fenland, depositing the alluvium which sealed and protected the earlier sites of Fengate. Wetter conditions discouraged permanent settlement, and although the fen was still no doubt exploited, for summer grazing and winter protein (fish, wildfowl, etc.), people lived on the higher and drier ground further west.

3.8 Previous Archaeological Investigations (Figure 2)

- 3.8.1 Two previous archaeological investigations have taken place within 100m of the subject site. A series of security trenches were also dug on the land immediately opposite the site to the south-west of Third Drove. These trenches were

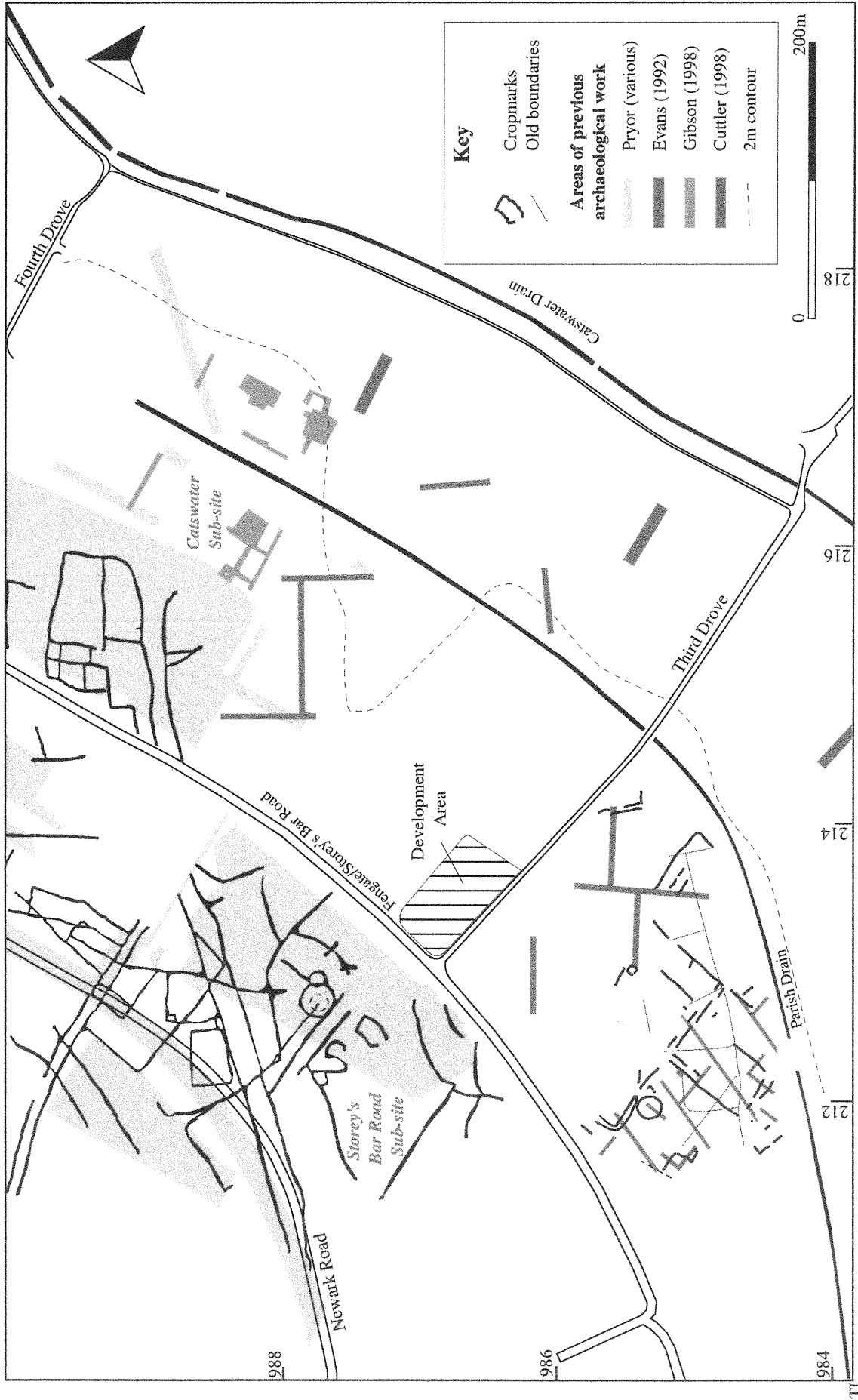


Figure 2 Plan showing cropmarks and previous archaeological investigations in relation to the development area

recorded archaeologically and reveal valuable evidence about soil conditions close to the subject site.

3.8.2 Storey's Bar Road Subsite (Pryor 1978)

The Storey's Bar Road subsite is particularly significant when examining the subject site, since it lies just across the road (now called Fengate) to the north-west (fig. 2). Indeed, in a photograph of the site in Pryor's *English Heritage Book of Flag Fen*, the subject site can be seen on the other side of the road (Pryor 1991, fig. 30). The late Neolithic ditched fields here have already been alluded to above. Two areas of settlement were also found on the site which could be divided up into two phases. The earliest lay in the southern corner of the site and was defined by a rectilinear enclosure. Here, pits and postholes of a late Neolithic settlement contained sherds of Grooved Ware. A second, later enclosure lay in the north-west corner of the site and incorporated a large ring-ditch. The later phases of the ring ditch incorporated cremations and two burials. A later quarry pit dug around 1000 BC contained the waterlogged remains of an alder log, notched to form a ladder.

3.8.3. Land Off Third Drove (Cuttler 1998)

Archaeological evaluation carried out by BUFAU in 1998 incorporated trial trenching of land to the south-west, south-east and north-east of the subject site. Occupation ranging from the earlier Neolithic to the later Iron Age was uncovered. The trenches nearest to the subject site (trenches 1 -4) revealed a scatter of pits, post-holes and related features, dated to the second millennium BC. It is possible that these finds represent a contemporary and later development of the Grooved Ware settlement of the Storey's Bar Road subsite, which lies less than 100m to the north of Cuttler's trench 1. If so it would be one of the largest of the known Late Neolithic/ Early Bronze Age settlements in England. All features in trench 1 were sealed by a buried soil, in turn sealed by a layer of alluvium 0.22m thick. Preservation in this area is therefore likely to be excellent. This settlement is described by Pryor as "of undoubted national importance" (Pryor in Cuttler 1998).

3.8.4. The possibility that this important settlement extends into the subject site is very real. Preservation on the subject site may well be as good as that shown here.

3.8.5. Trial trenching by BUFAU to the north-east, east and south-east of the subject site showed the irregular nature of the fen-edge here during the Neolithic and Bronze Age. An "inlet", roughly defined by the 2m contour, was a feature of the buried land surface in this area. This inlet may have been eroded by a succession of watercourses in Pleistocene or Flandrian times. Such a landscape feature would have been very suitable for occupation from Mesolithic times onwards, and the area of this buried inlet and watercourse must be considered to have very high archaeological potential. As noted above, the earlier Neolithic landscape alignment at Fengate seems to be orientated on this inlet, suggesting that it was a feature of the landscape at least as early as this. If it follows the 2m contour, the inlet would run south-east from the area of the BUFAU trenches towards the subject site.

3.8.6. **Security Trench Survey**

A series of seven security trenches were dug around the edges of derelict/development sites in Fengate in 1994 and 1995, to prevent access by travellers. These were cleaned up to reveal sections, which were recorded archaeologically. Trenches 1 - 4 were dug around the edges of the plot of land lying immediately south-west of Third Drove. Trench 1 lay along the north-eastern edge of this plot, just across the road from the subject site (Pryor 1997: fig. 3 and see above, fig. 2).

3.8.7. The soil profile revealed in trench 1 showed topsoil overlying c0.20m of alluvium, in turn overlying a buried soil. This is in general agreement with the findings of the BUFAU evaluation (Cutler 1998), and the trench lies even nearer to the subject site, probably within 10 - 20m.

4 **THE ARCHAEOLOGY AND HISTORY OF THE SUBJECT SITE**

4.1 **Known Archaeological Remains**

4.1.1 There are no known archaeological remains within the boundaries of the subject site. No chance finds are known to have come from it, and although the surrounding area has an abundance of cropmarks, none show within the site itself. This is in spite of the fact that several known cropmark features approach the subject site very closely, and their alignments are such that, were they to be prolonged, they would cross it. Furthermore, nothing is known for certain about the depositional circumstances prevailing on the subject site, or its soil profile. A site visit was made as part of this study, but no useful information was gleaned, since the ditches surrounding the site were too overgrown (the visit was made in July) to permit easy examination.

4.1.2 This absence of direct evidence, however, cannot be taken as evidence of absence. There are many reasons why potential archaeological remains existing on the subject site might not reveal their presence, for example, on aerial photographs. Cropmarks will not show where the landuse or cropping regime is unsuitable, or when weather conditions are unsuitable at the time of flying. Moreover, alluvium may cover the site, masking and protecting the earlier archaeology, which will therefore show no trace of its presence, either on the surface or from the air.

4.1.3 **Historic maps**

Historic maps held at Peterborough City Museum and Art Gallery were consulted as part of this study, with a view to reconstructing the former landuse across the site. One of the main aims of this work was to seek possible evidence of the truncation or destruction of ancient deposits by more recent forms of landuse, such as buildings or quarrying.

- 4.1.4 Although quarries in particular are shown on old maps in many parts of Fengate, none were found within the area of the site itself. No evidence was found of former buildings on the site

5 THE POTENTIAL FOR THE SURVIVAL OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL DEPOSITS

- 5.1 The archaeological potential of the whole Fengate area including the subject site has in fact already been assessed as part of the English Heritage *Peterborough East* volume (Pryor 1997). Figure 5 of this work shows the subject site as a built up area, which, of course, it is not. The area adjacent to the subject site on the south-western side of Third Drove (i.e. the area of the security trenches 1 to 4) was also assessed, however, and this assessment of potential is very likely to apply just across the road on the subject site. The archaeological potential here was scored as 3-4 (Pryor 1997 p24). The meaning of these scores in terms of archaeological preservation are as follows:

AP 3 Alluvium present within modern topsoil, but it cannot be seen as a distinctive layer on its own. Perhaps pan-busted (deep ploughed) once or twice. A few surface finds. Good survival of sub-surface features; water table wells and deeper ditches likely to be at least partially waterlogged.

AP4 Protective layer of alluvium (at least 15cm?) therefore little or no modern plough-damage. Most/all subsoil features survive, as well as (truncated) mounds and banks alongside ditches. Substantial waterlogging of most ditches etc. Post tips will probably survive in post holes. Wattlework or brushwood at crossing places in ditches etc. No surface finds. (Pryor 1997 p22)

- 5.2 The present study has not identified any possible sources of truncation or destruction of archaeological deposits on the subject site. Therefore, preservational conditions are very likely to be as noted above. Under these circumstances, in spite of the lack of direct evidence of archaeological remains within the subject site itself, one should heed Pryor's statement that, in Fengate, if archaeological remains *could* survive, then they probably *do* survive (Pryor 1997 p25).

6 THE POTENTIAL IMPACT OF PROPOSED DEVELOPMENTS

- 6.1 Any development that involves excavation or groundwork of more than minimal depth is likely to affect archaeological remains that potentially exist on the subject site. This means that all building foundations, service trenches and access roads are likely to have an archaeological impact. Since there is also potential for the site to contain deep features with waterlogged deposits, any work that

affects or alters the existing drainage regime, such as de-watering or drainage improvement, is also likely to have an impact.

- 6.2 Mitigation of the impact of any development on the archaeology is considered to be beyond the scope of this report. Nevertheless, it may be possible to mitigate such impact in several ways. Excavation, or "preservation by record" of any archaeological remains on the site would be one method of mitigation. If substantial, well-preserved and possibly waterlogged remains do indeed exist on the site, however, this could prove very costly. Engineering or building design solutions to mitigate the impact, such as pile-supported or rafted foundations may also be possible. In the absence of any direct evidence of the depth at which archaeological deposits may exist on the site, however, it is impossible to assess what the impact of any specific development proposal might be. Determining the depositional circumstances and soil profile, along with the presence or absence of archaeological remains and their extent, character and date, is likely to be a central task of any future intrusive evaluation of the site.

7 CONCLUSION

- 7.1 This study has demonstrated that the subject site lies within a rich archaeological landscape, surrounded by sites which archaeological investigation has shown contain evidence of intensive exploitation of the landscape from the earlier Neolithic onwards. Whilst no archaeological sites or finds are known from the subject site itself, its archaeological potential is high. No sources of truncation or destruction of archaeological deposits were located within the site, and the conditions for the preservation of any archaeological remains here is likely to be very good.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Ordnance Survey 25-inch 1927 Edition, Northamptonshire, Sheet VIII.12

Tithe Map of 1821, recording 1811 Tithe Award



Cambridgeshire
County Council

Archaeology

The Archaeological Field Unit
Fulbourn Community Centre
Haggis Gap
Fulbourn
Cambridge CB1 5HD
Tel (01223) 881614
Fax (01223) 880946