

Archaeological Field Unit

**An Archaeological Evaluation at No.1 The Waits,
St Ives, Cambridgeshire**

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Cambridgeshire**

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2004

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SUMMARY

On the 6th of January 2004, an archaeological evaluation was undertaken on land to the rear of Burleigh House, (TL311714) by staff of the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council. The proposed development involved the construction of three new dwellings. The work was carried out in accordance with a Brief for an archaeological evaluation issued by Kasia Gdaniec of the Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Service (Planning Application No H/00/1854FUL).

The evaluation revealed a number of undated and modern postholes, as well as a number of modern and post-medieval layers associated with the garden of Burleigh House.

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Drawing Conventions

Sections

Limit of Excavation -----
Cut -----
Cut - Conjectured -----
Soil Horizon -----
Soil Horizon - Conjectured -----
Intrusion/Truncation -----
Top of Natural -----
Top Surface -----
Break in Section -----
Cut Number 118
Deposit Number 117
Ordnance Datum 18.45m ODN

Plans

Limit of Excavation -----
Deposit - Conjectured -----
Natural Features -----
Intrusion/Truncation -----
Sondages/Machine Strip -----
Illustrated Section S.14
Deposit 
Excavated Slot 
Cut Number 118

An Archaeological Evaluation at 1 Waits, St Ives (TL311714)

1 INTRODUCTION

On the 6th of January 2004 an archaeological evaluation was undertaken on land to the rear of Burleigh House, No.1 The Waits, St Ives (NGR TL311714) by staff of the Archaeological Field Unit (AFU) of Cambridgeshire County Council. The proposed development involved the construction of three dwellings. The project was commissioned by Hunts Construction and was carried out in accordance with a brief for an archaeological evaluation issued by Andy Thomas of the Cambridge County Council Archaeological (Planning Application H/01/01029/FUL&H02 00011FUL).

From the outset it was hoped that this evaluation would raise issues concerning the development of medieval St Ives and aid the construction of a deposit model for this part of the town. Of particular relevance to this evaluation was an investigation 100m to the west at the corner of the Waits and Ramsey which uncovered Saxo/Norman, medieval and post-medieval occupation.

2 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

The site is on land some 100m north-east of the current canalised edge of the Back Water at a height of approximately 7m OD. The geology of the site is first and second terrace gravels.

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

3.1 General

3.1.1 Prehistoric

The gravel terraces of the Great Ouse in the locality of St Ives have provided evidence of significant prehistoric activity in the area. Stray finds spanning the Palaeolithic to Neolithic periods are well documented (Cambridgeshire Sites and Monuments Record). They include numerous finds from the gravel pits to the north of the subject site. These finds span the Palaeolithic to the Iron Age (SMR 2029, 1916, 1961, 1425, 1489, 1669 and 3595). Recent excavations also in advance of gravel extraction to the east of the town have revealed funerary monuments, field systems, boundaries and settlement of later prehistoric date (Cambs. SMR; Evans *et al* 1997, 171-188).

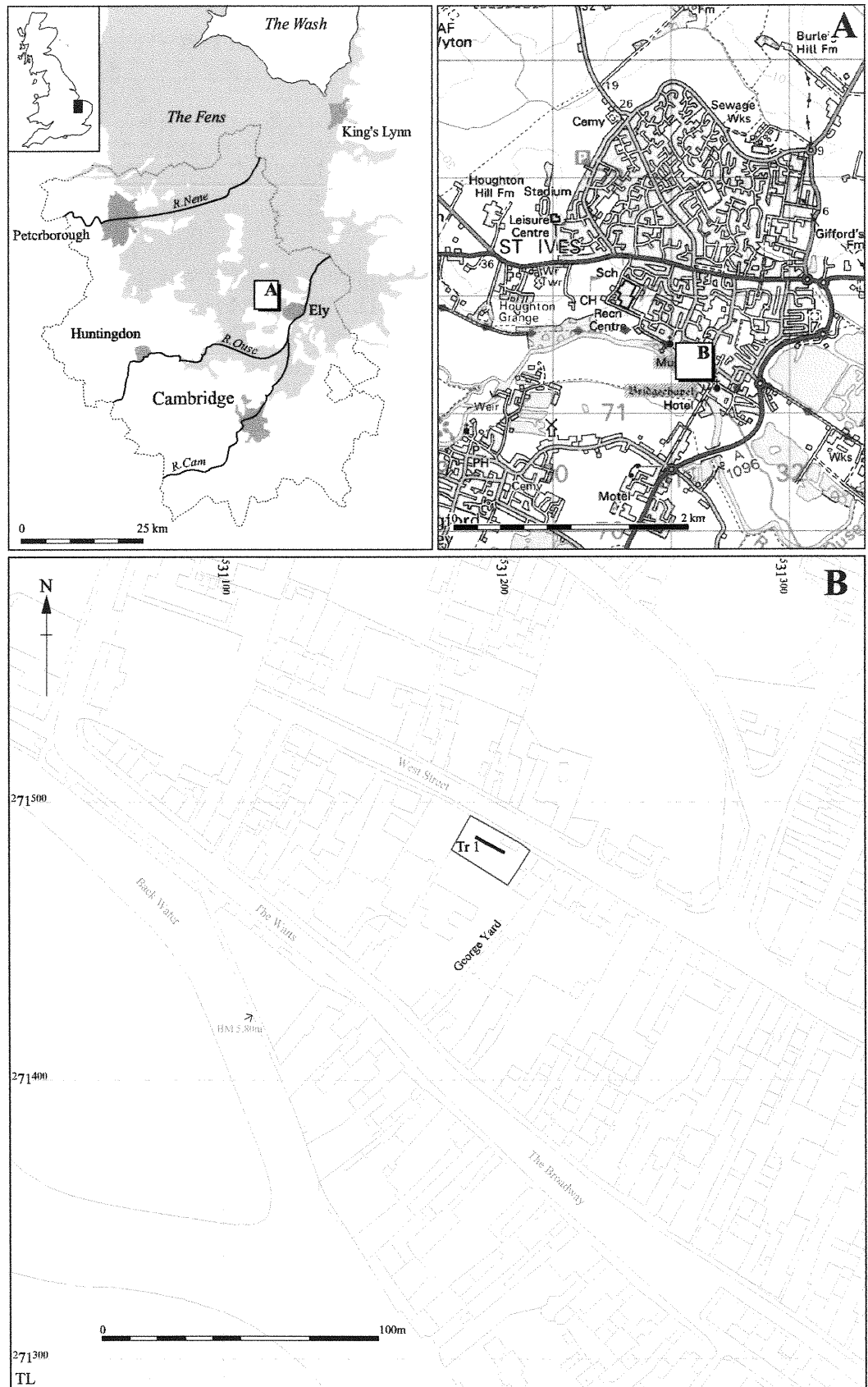


Figure 1 Location of Trench (black) with Development Area outlined (red)

3.1.2 Roman

The Great Ouse valley also provided attractive settlement locations for this period. St Ives lies c.0.7km from the significant Roman town of *Durovigutum* (Godmanchester), and villas were located along the river valley.

Within St Ives excavations adjacent to Priory Road at 'The Priory' (a 19th-century house thought to be located on the site of the medieval priory; see below), have provided evidence of Romano-British settlement within the historic medieval core of the town. An excavation in the 1940s, which focussed on the Priory barn walls, revealed earlier foundations and a pottery sequence dating to the Romano-British period (1st-4th centuries AD), suggestive of settlement activity (Green 1958). More recent excavations at the Priory have provided further evidence of settlement in the form of a ditched enclosure encompassing several pits and a posthole structure. Romano-British pottery comprising local and imported wares was recovered, as well as more high status finds such as mosaic tile (Murray 1997).

The most well known find which is likely to be of this period is the stone coffin and skeletal remains which were attributed to the fabled St Ive (or Ivo), a bishop of Persia, from which the town derives its current name (see below). It is far more likely that the remains discovered by Saxon ploughmen were of a Romano-Britain.

3.1.3 Anglo-Saxon

It is likely that the Anglo-Saxon settlement of Slepe (as St Ives was originally known) derives its name from its location. Slepe means 'muddy low lying ground by the river' in Old English (Mawer & Stenton 1969, 222). It was probably located around the parish church, which lies south of the subject site. It is probable that the settlement was already present by the time of the Domesday Book (Page, Proby & Ladds 1932). It is presumed that these buildings were constructed on the site of earlier Anglo-Saxon predecessors, around which the Saxon village would have been located (Burn-Murdoch 2000). The district of the town called the Green extends north of the parish church along the road to Ramsey and has a sinuous shape reminiscent of organically derived settlement. This was probably the main part of the pre-Conquest village (Spoerry, unpublished).

The focus of settlement activity was to move in the early medieval period to the part of the town known as the 'Street', which runs east west from the parish church parallel to the river. The street layout and property boundaries here have a more structured appearance, and it has been suggested that this part of the town was medieval in origin (Page, Proby & Ladds 1932). However, recent work off Priory Road (Murray 1997), recorded the presence of a *grubenhäuser* (sunken building) containing pottery sherds dateable to AD 400-900. Work at Wellington Street (Cooper 1999) also recorded evidence of Anglo-Saxon activity in this area, in the form of sealed deposits containing pottery sherds dating from AD 900-1150. Both projects challenge current

ideas concerning the development of the pre-Conquest settlement of St Ives, suggesting that they may need revision.

3.1.4 *Medieval*

Slepe (later St Ives) was a holding of Ramsey Abbey since the late 10th century. It was raised to fame following the discovery of a stone coffin and skeletal remains, which were attributed to St Ive (or St Ivo) by Abbot Ednoth (992-1008). Ednoth established a cell of the abbey with its own church dedicated to the honour of St Ive. This was located near to the site of the 'saints grave', from which a health giving spring is said to have arisen. It is thought that this may have been located on or close to The Priory excavations discussed above. It was later replaced after a fire in 1207 destroyed it.

The medieval Priory was built on the same site and consecrated in 1238, continuing in use until the Dissolution in 1539. Its exact location is unknown although the Cambridgeshire SMR records that it is likely to have been located on the site where a 19th-century house (The Priory) preserves its name. The grounds of this property have been subject to excavations, which have revealed the presence of medieval features, notably a huge ditch likely to be a demarcation of the Priory estate (Murray 1997). Medieval masonry has also been noted in the garden of the Priory (Cambs SMR 03594) and in surrounding properties. The Priory and the activities of its sponsors at Ramsey Abbey are fundamental to the formation of the historic medieval core of St Ives, which gives great significance to any remains relating to it.

The main reasons for establishing a Priory on the site are less likely to be connected with the unlikely tale of St Ive, and the associated tales of healing springs, and more likely to be economical. The story of St Ive was used to raise the profile of this profitable smallholding, which grew to be an important medieval market of international renown in the cloth trade. French merchants in Douai recorded it as being in their list of five major English markets in 1258 (Hudson 1989). This had been made possible by the granting of an annual eight day Easter Fair in AD1110 and the establishment of a 600m long market area running parallel to the river from the parish church in the north-east to the Priory in the south-west.

Traffic on the Ramsey to Potton Road was compelled to pass through the market, while the Ouse River meant that national and international trade links could be encouraged (Page, Proby & Ladds 1932). The economic success of St Ives led to the economic eclipse of Huntingdon further downstream, a process that was encouraged by the construction of mill weirs on the Ouse between the two. It appears that these weirs impeded the traffic of goods to Huntingdon: the contemporary protests of the authorities are documented (Spoerry, unpublished), although the owners of these mills (at Ramsey Abbey) were unmoved by their plight. It has been suggested this was part of a deliberate plan to increase the success of their investment in St Ives to the detriment of surrounding competitors such as Huntingdon. The very existence

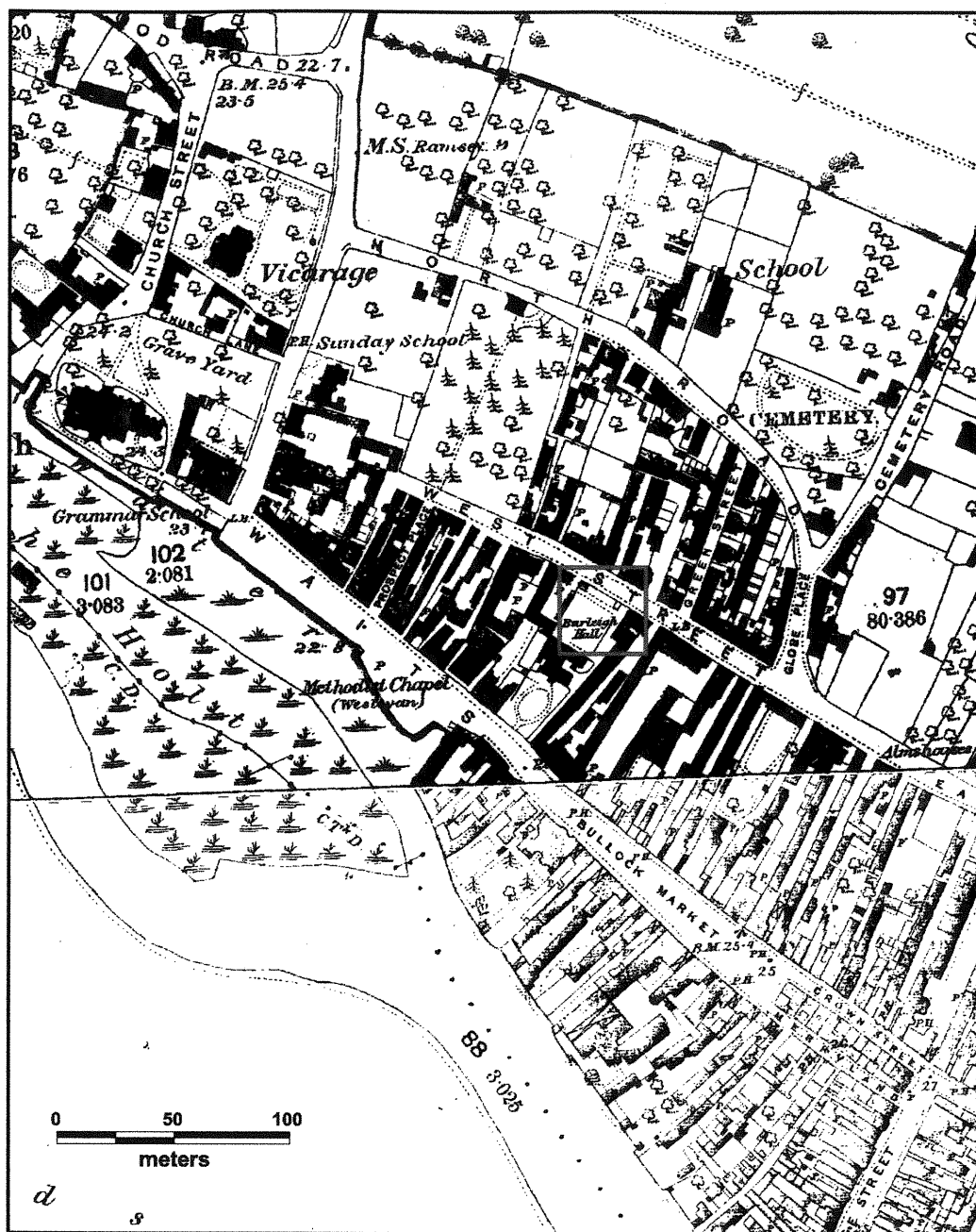


Figure 2 Map of South West St. Ives taken from Huntingdonshire OS Series 1 (1882-7)

of the historic core of St Ives is therefore intrinsically linked to the town's medieval priory.

3.1.5 *Post-Medieval*

The medieval fair declined in significance and was abandoned in 1511. This was largely due to the decline in trade with French merchants due to the Hundred Years War (Spoerry, unpublished). The town continued as a market centre of local importance, but it never regained its former significance as a centre for the international cloth trade. A fire devastated the town in 1689, after which rebuilding took place. A weekly cattle market then grew in importance and, by 1800 it was regarded as second only to Smithfield (Hudson 1989). This important trade, much of which was with Ireland, was developed further with the coming of the railway in the 19th century. However, a new cattle market twelve miles away in Cambridge opened in 1886 and triggered a decline in the significance of trade in St Ives.

3.2 **Site Specific**

A recent archaeological investigation 100m to the west (Keir *et al* 2003) uncovered areas of surviving medieval land surfaces and post-medieval features. Anglo-Saxon/Saxo-Norman occupation is hinted at by the presence of hand made wares and Thetford Ware pottery.

The cartographic sources add very little information about the development of the subject site. The O/S First Edition 1882 (Fig. 2) depicts two buildings, which are probably outbuildings relating to the garden of Burleigh House.

4 **METHODOLOGY**

Prior to the commencement of fieldwork the AFU conducted a desktop and cartographic review of the development area including a review of historical data, previous archaeological work and an examination of all available SMR entries. A single trench 12m in length and 0.95 m deep was excavated using a mini digger with a 1.2m toothless ditching bucket. After machining was completed the trench was recorded using the AFU standard archaeological recording system

5 **RESULTS**

Trench 1 was located on an east-west alignment and was 12m long 1.2m wide and 0.95m deep (Fig. 3).

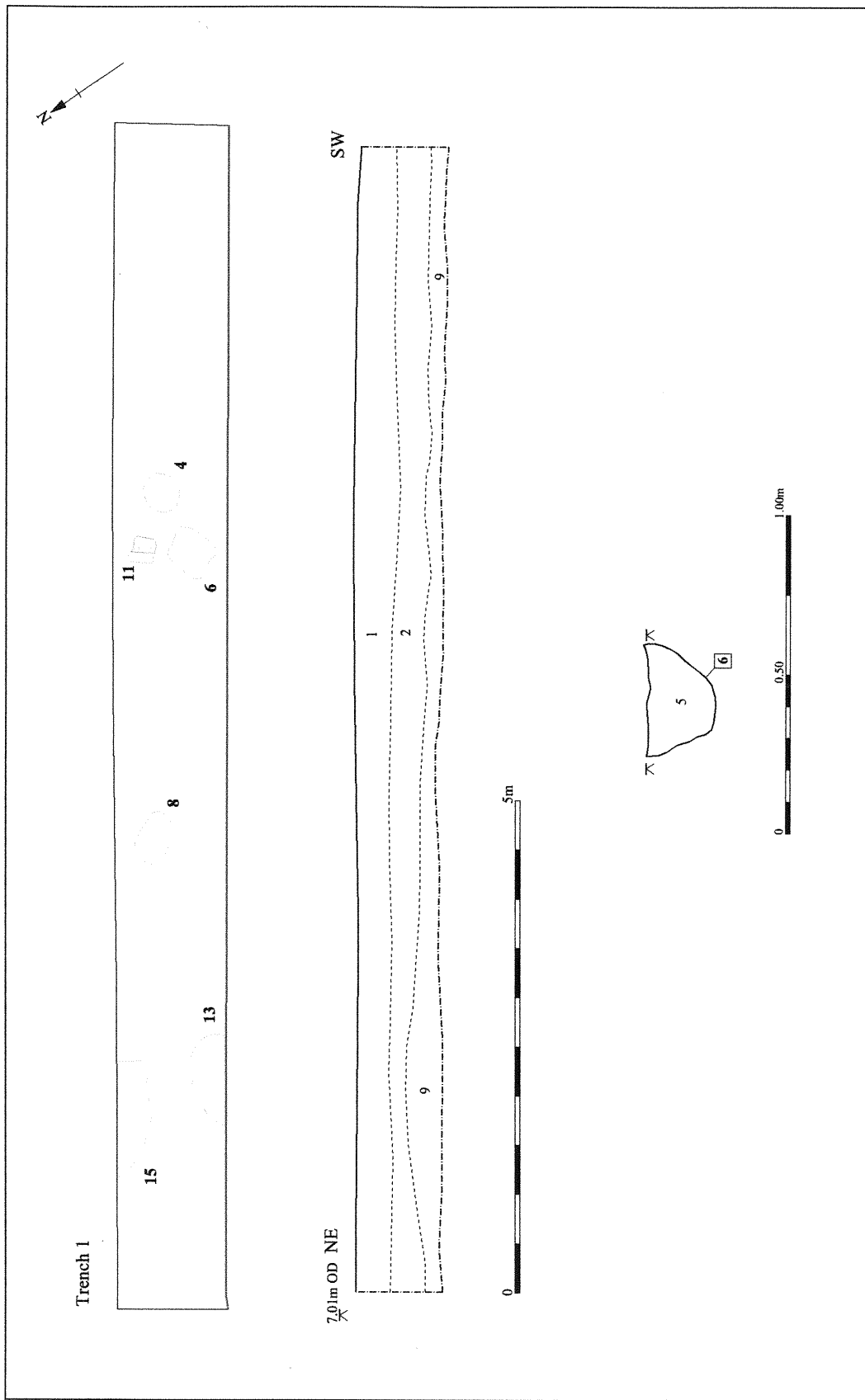


Figure 3 Trench Plan and Sections

Layer 1 was 0.4m deep and composed of black silty clay, which contained a large quantity of modern brick and other building material. Layer 2 varied from 0.15-30 in depth and consisted of a mid brown clay silt. Layer 3 varied from 0.15-0.25m in depth and was composed of light brown clayed silt with a moderate amount of gravel. Layer 9 varied from 0.30-0.40m in depth and consisted of light brown silty clay. All features were cut into natural and sealed by layer 9.

Posthole 4 was 0.32m wide and 0.14m deep and contained a single fill (3) consisting of greyish brown sandy silt. No finds were recovered.

Posthole 6 was 0.38m wide and 0.25m deep and contained a single fill (5) of dark brown silty clay from which a small fragment of animal bone was recovered.

Posthole 11 was 0.25m wide and 0.10m deep and contained a single fill (10) of dark grey silty clay from which one piece of modern slate was recovered.

Natural feature 8 was 0.30m wide and 0.16 m deep and contained a single fill (7) of brownish grey silt. No finds were recovered.

Pit 13 was 0.2m deep and had a slightly irregular base. It contained a single fill (12) of dark grey silty clay. No finds were recovered.

Natural feature 15 was 0.95m wide and 0.15m deep and contained a single fill (14) of dark grey sandy silt. No finds were recovered.

6 DISCUSSION

The evaluation demonstrated an absence of artefacts and archaeological features. From the six features encountered only postholes 4, 6, and 11 appear to have been archaeological. The remaining features (7 13 and 15) were slightly irregular and may have been natural or garden features. Few finds were recovered, although posthole 11 produced modern slate.

Layers 1 and 2 were garden soils, while layer 9 may have been some form of occupational layer or alluvial.

7 CONCLUSION

The results of the evaluation indicate an absence of medieval remains and artefacts in the development area. This is surprising considering its location

and the proximity of a major Saxo-Norman site 100m to the west. Despite the absence of medieval remains the results of this evaluation will aid the construction of a deposit model for medieval St Ives.

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Maps Consulted

First Edition 1888 OS map



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