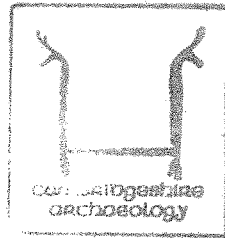
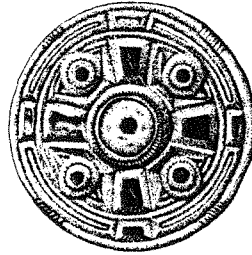


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An Undated Ditch, Pits and Possible Building Foundation at 100 High Street, Somersham. A Basic Archaeological Investigation.

Aileen Connor

1998

Cambridgeshire County Council

Report No. B022

Commissioned By TW Lumley Ltd.

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Summary

Subsequent to an archaeological evaluation to the rear of 100 High Street (TL 358 779) in 1996 a Brief for a basic archaeological investigation was issued to record any archaeological features found in excavations for development at the front of the property. To this end, archaeological monitoring took place at 100 High Street to coincide with the excavation of two sewer trenches. The trenches showed that the ground had been made up in the later post-medieval period by up to 1.50 metres. Sealed beneath the make up, evidence for a ditch adjacent and parallel with the High Street, pits and a possible beam slot were found, but no dating evidence relating to these features was recovered.

1 INTRODUCTION

In December 1997, a sewer trench (trench 1) was excavated through hardstanding to the east of 100 High street, Somersham, as part of the work to provide services to a new housing development at the rear of 100 High Street. The sewer trench was 19.3 metres long by 0.8 metres wide. A manhole was excavated at the High Street end of the trench, and a second manhole was excavated at approximately 25 metres to the south of the High Street. A second sewer trench was excavated to join the main sewer to the rear of 100 High Street. This second trench was excavated in February 1998. The trenches were excavated using a wheeled mechanical excavator with narrow bucket under constant observation by an archaeologist.

Due to the narrowness and depth of the trenches, it was not possible to enter the trenches, but only to observe features and check spoil for finds as the trench was excavated. Trench 1 had to be shored as it was excavated since the subsoil and geology through which it cut was soft sand and extremely unstable. Trench 2 did not suffer from the same problems, although it was similarly deep and it was not possible to enter the trench. Measured sketches and photographs were therefore used to record the presence of archaeological features.

2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The site under investigation lies in an area of rich archaeological potential. Neolithic, Bronze Age, Iron Age and Roman sites and finds have been found nearby (Roberts, 1996).

The name of the village may derive from either a personal name ('Sumor's homestead') or from a 'homestead of the south mere' (Mawer and Stenton, 1969, 222-223). The manor of Somersham was acquired by the abbey of Ely in 991, and became part of the bishop's endowment in 1109 (Page et al, 1974). The medieval bishop's palace with associated moat, fishponds and deer park (SAM 199) lies on the southern edge of the village. The medieval church and site of the medieval rectory lies to the east of the development site (SMR 0609, 03565).

The village stands on higher ground, rising from the fen edge in the north, and extends along the roads from Huntingdon and St.Ives to Earith and Chatteris. The High Street is crossed in the middle of the village by a road from the south, which now only leads to the former site of the palace of the bishops of Ely, a medieval market was held at the crossing.

The area to the rear of 100 High Street was archaeologically evaluated in 1996 by the Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Field Unit (Roberts 1996). The evaluation concluded that features relating to the rear of medieval

street front properties survived in those trenches placed nearest to the High Street, and that the medieval activity decreased on the lower land to the south.

The suggestion that Somersham was re-organised during the medieval period was discussed in the evaluation report (Roberts 1996), where it was proposed that the presence of a pre 1100 AD ditch suggests that properties may already have existed on the High Street by this date. It was thought that further work on the High Street area of the development site may help to confirm the date when the High Street was established as a focus of settlement.

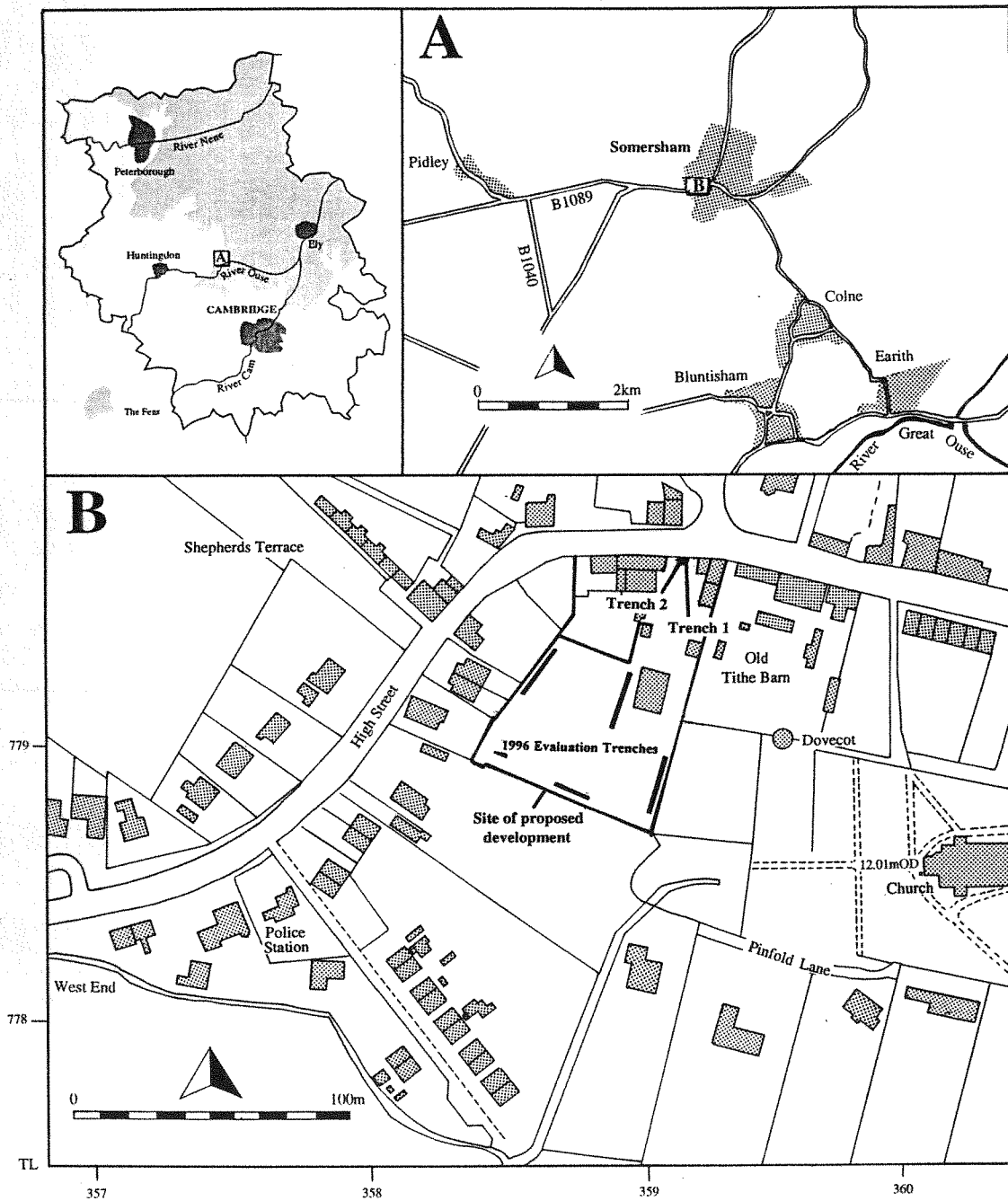


Figure 1 Location Maps

3 RESULTS

Trench 1

Four archaeological features, a deposit, and evidence of more recent structures were observed within trench 1.

Structure 10, the brick foundations and brick floor of a ?Victorian building only recently demolished was observed at the northern end of the sewer trench adjacent to the High Street. Demolition of the western end of this building had been necessary since it had been suffering from severe subsidence. The brick floor was a single brick thick laid on a bed of mortar, approximately 0.05m thick. Seals layer 3.

Structure 11. To the south lay evidence for a second brick built structure. The Brick foundations for a wall were uncovered on a similar north-south alignment to 10 above. It is not certain what this wall may have related to. The foundations apparently cut layer 3.

Layer 3. Sealed beneath context 10 and ?cut by context 11 was a soft light yellowish brown medium sand with frequent grits and moderate pebbles. Finds of green bottle glass, brick, tile and post-medieval pottery were observed within the deposit and later discarded. The deposit was observed along the entire length of the sewer trench (just over 19m) and across its entire width (0.80m). It varied in depth from approximately 0.30m at the northern (High Street) end to 1.50m deep approximately midway along the sewer trench and 1.20m deep at the southern end of the trench. The deposit would seem to be a layer of makeup used to level the ground close to the High Street just prior to building, perhaps in the 18th or 19th century. Context 3 sealed ?ditch 9, ?pits 5 and 7 and ?slot 4.

Cut 9, filled by 8. At the northern, High Street end of the sewer trench a ?linear cut feature 9 was observed backfilled with a very loose soft dark greyish brown sandy fill. A building (11) had been built over the fill and had subsequently subsided over the feature. During excavation of the Sewer trench, the portion which ran through this feature was extremely unstable and the sides collapsed into the trench. The east-west orientated feature had a wide U shaped profile and was 1.20m deep by at least 2m wide, and its northern edge was not observed within the sewer trench.

It is possible that this feature was a large roadside ditch, possibly for drainage. Local anecdotal evidence suggests that the Village drain once ran along the south side of the High Street, and this feature may be a remnant of a phase of the village drain.

Cut 4, filled by 1. Two metres to the south of ?ditch 9, was an east-west orientated linear feature, 0.40m wide x 0.40m deep with a flat based, vertical sided profile. The feature was observed running across the entire width of the trench (0.80m wide). It was filled by a soft yellowish brown sand with no finds. The feature was sealed beneath 0.90m thickness of make up, 3. It lay

parallel with the modern street frontage and approximately 9m to the south of the current roadside Kerb. Although containing no dating evidence it was certainly earlier than the 18th or 19th century make up and may perhaps be interpreted as evidence of a beam slot for a timber-walled building. The feature cut into natural soft sand.

Cut 5, filled by 2. Ten metres to the south of the beam slot, 4, was a circular or subcircular feature 5, the feature was 1.30m wide and described a perfect semi circle in the natural sand. It was sealed beneath approximately 1.30m thickness of 3. The feature was at least 0.60m deep with vertical sides. Its base was not reached. It contained 2, a soft yellowish brown sand with no finds. The feature may have been a pit or well, it was cut into natural soft sand.

Cut 7, filled by 6. One metre to the south of pit 5 was a second possible pit. This feature was less well defined but larger than 5. It was sealed beneath 3 and cut into soft natural sand, no finds were recovered from its fill.

Trench 2

The second sewer trench was much shorter than the first at approximately 11 metres long, in addition it was excavated at an angle of approximately 45 degrees to trench 1. Two features were observed in trench 2. A large cut feature at the north end and a brick feature, possibly a cellar or more likely a cess-pit at the south end of the trench.

Cut 12, filled by 13. At the northern, High Street end of trench 2 a possible linear cut feature was observed backfilled with a very loose soft dark greyish brown sandy fill. The east-west orientated feature had a wide U shaped profile and was 1.20m deep by at least 2m wide, its northern edge was not observed within the sewer trench.

It is possible that this feature was a large roadside ditch, possibly for drainage. Local anecdotal evidence suggests that the Village drain once ran along the south side of the High Street, and this feature may be a remnant of a phase of the village drain.

The feature is almost certainly the same as 9, observed to the east in trench 2.

Structure 14. A brick structure, possibly a drain or part of a cellar was observed towards the southern end of trench 2. The structure was 1.20 metres wide (north-south) and lay above a dark grey clay filled vertical sided cut which may be an associated foundation trench.

Layer 15 was a soft light yellowish brown medium sand with frequent grits and moderate pebbles. Finds, brick and tile were observed within the deposit and later discarded. The deposit was observed along the entire length of the sewer trench (just over 11m) and across its entire width (0.80m). It varied in depth from approximately 0.30 metres at the northern (High Street) end to 0.70 metres at the southern end. Layer 15 was almost certainly the same as layer 3 in Trench 1.

Layer 16. Approximately 3 metres from the northern end of trench 2, a layer of large cobbles was observed sealed beneath the modern tarmac surface. The cobbles formed a compact surface approximately 2 metres wide. This cobbled surface was probably associated with Victorian buildings along the High Street.

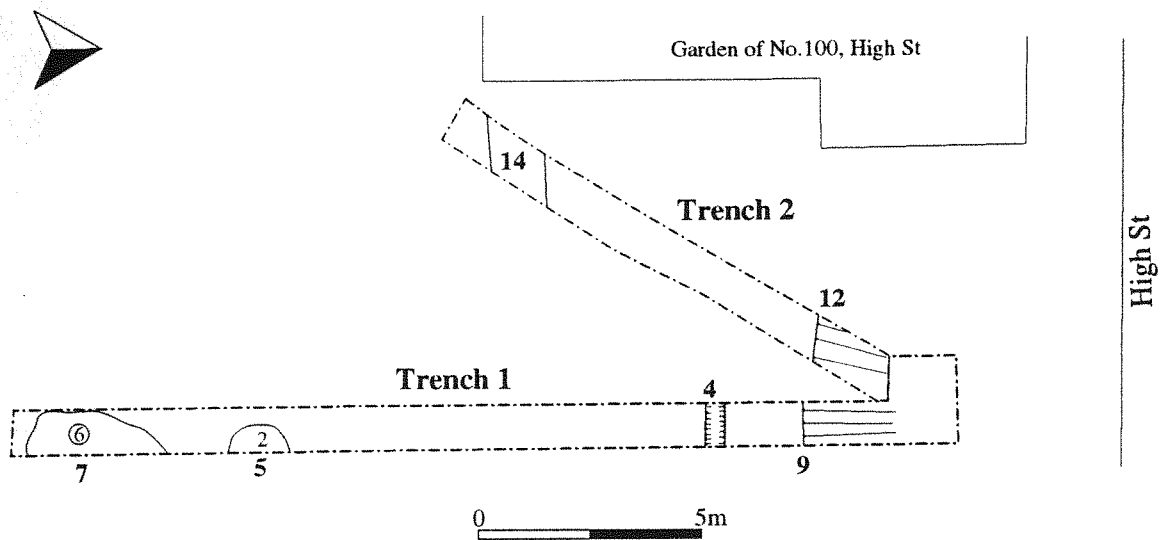


Figure 2 Location of Archaeological Features in the Sewer Trenches

4 CONCLUSIONS

Observation of new sewer trenches at 100 High Street have shown that archaeological features are present sealed beneath a varying thickness of post-medieval makeup. The features, such as the slot 4, and pits 5 and 7 would seem to be associated with buildings which may have fronted the High Street. A ditch, 9, may have been part of the village drain.

Unfortunately no dating evidence was recovered from any of the features. Only the makeup layer, 3, contained finds dating to the later post-medieval period. Unfortunately it was not possible from this work to establish when the High Street became the main focus for building activity.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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