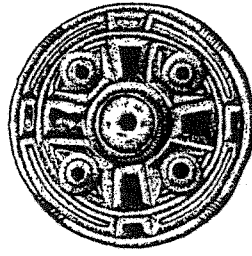


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Archaeological Field Unit

**Site 'T', Newark Road, Peterborough:  
An Archaeological Evaluation  
(NGR TL 2163 9982)**

R. Casa Hatton

1999

**Cambridgeshire County Council**

Report No. B62

*Commissioned by ST. Piercy RSB Ltd*

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R. Casa Hatton

28 November 1999

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## **SUMMARY**

*In September 1999 the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council conducted an archaeological evaluation on land adjacent to Newark Road, Peterborough in advance of the construction of a warehouse/office complex. The aim of the intervention was to record and assess the nature of any archaeological evidence encountered prior to ground works and hence to assess the potential for surviving remains. Given the presence of a known Neolithic/Bronze Age settlement to the south of the development area, together with well-preserved field-systems and scatters of lithic artefacts and pottery to the north-west, particular attention was paid to the identification and interpretation of deposits (namely buried soils) and features in the context of what seems to have been a rich prehistoric landscape near the Fen Edge.*

*During the archaeological investigation, sequences of levelling and modern disturbance were observed. However, no positive evidence was recovered of early land use.*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>1.</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2.</b>	<b>Site Background</b>	<b>1</b>
2.1	Planning Background	1
2.2	Site Location	1
2.3	Topography and Geology	3
2.4	Historical and Archaeological Background	3
<b>3</b>	<b>Methodology</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Results</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Discussion and Conclusions</b>	<b>7</b>
	<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>8</b>
	<b>References</b>	<b>8</b>

## LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. 1	Site Location	2
Fig. 2	South Facing Section of Trench 2	7

**SITE 'T', NEWARK ROAD, PETERBOROUGH:  
AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION  
(NGR TL 2163 9982)**

**1 INTRODUCTION**

During September 1999 the Archaeological Field Unit (AFU) of Cambridgeshire County Council undertook an archaeological evaluation on land (Site 'T') off Newark Road, Peterborough. The work was carried out to satisfy a planning condition in advance of development of the land.

**2. SITE BACKGROUND**

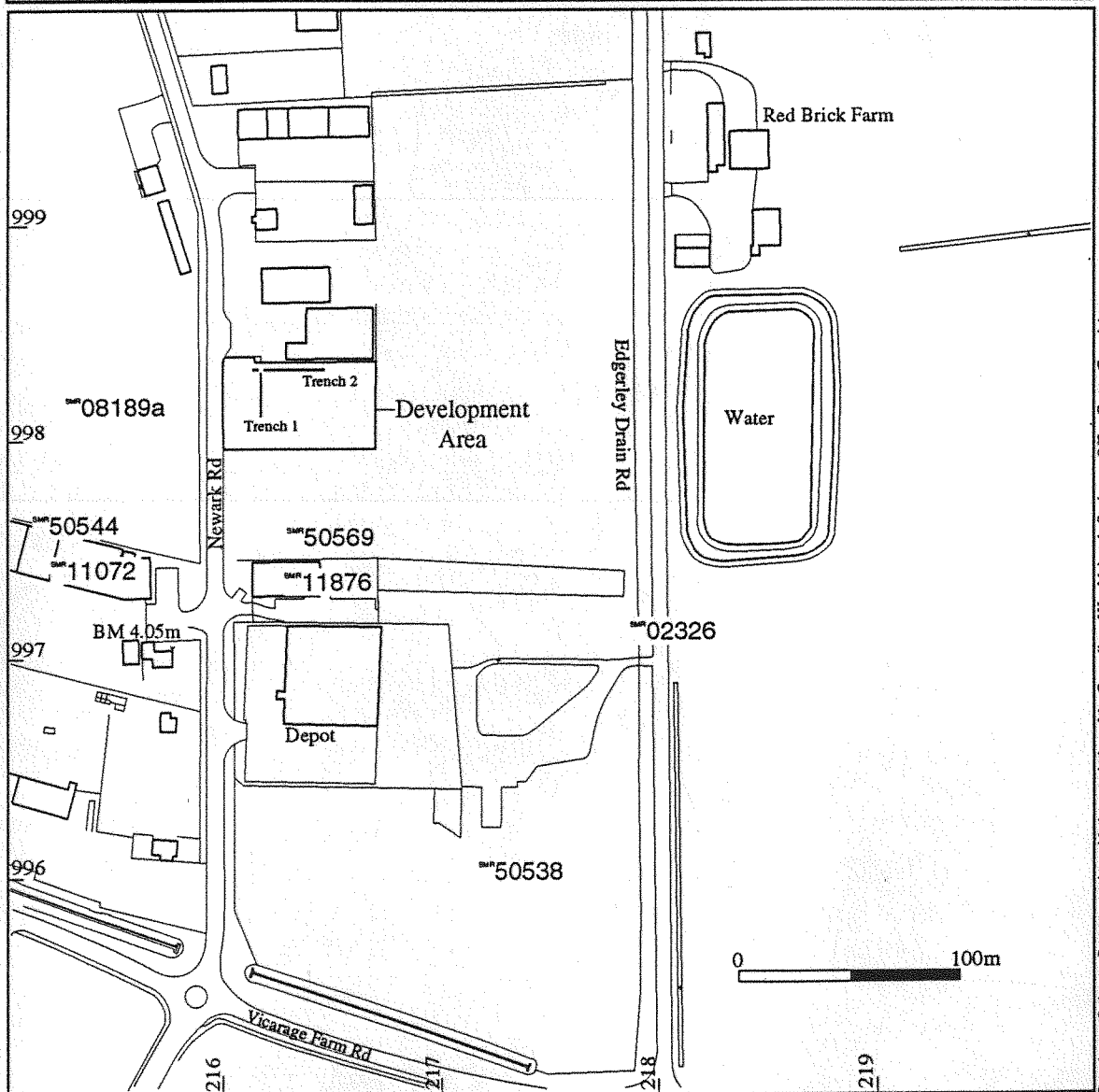
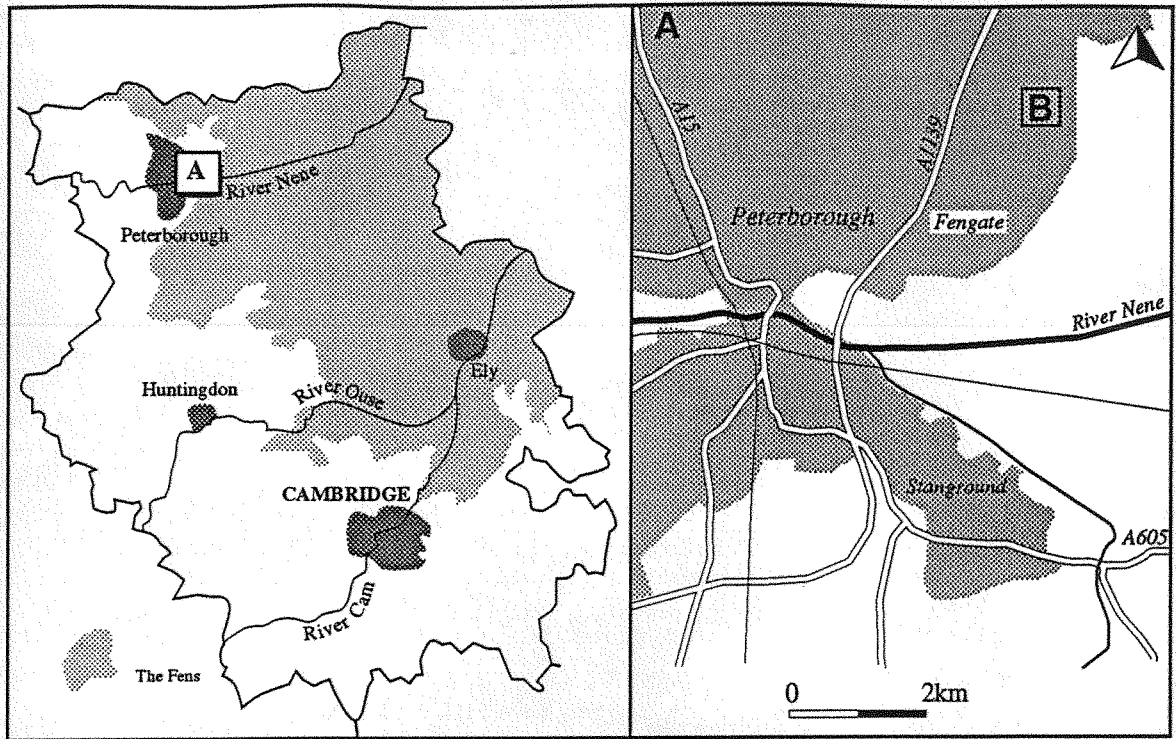
**2.1 Planning Background**

The proposed development entailed the construction of a warehouse/office building with allocated car-parking spaces and services. Given the known archaeological background of the area (below), the possibility of there being Neolithic/Bronze Age and later archaeological remains within the application area determined the requirement for an evaluation.

The work was carried out by the AFU on behalf of Gotch Pearson Architects and Surveyors for ST. Piercy RSB Ltd, in accordance with a brief produced by Mr. Ben Robinson of Peterborough City Council Archaeological Services (PCCAS), Peterborough Museum and Art Gallery (16 July 1999).

**2.2 Site Location**

Newark Road is located to the south-east of the City of Peterborough. Site 'T' is situated off the east side of Newark Road, opposite the play ground to the west. To the north and south there are developed industrial plots. To the east an area of open grassland extends towards Edgerley Drain Road and beyond (Fig. 1).



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Figure 1 Site Location Plan showing location of archaeological trenches in relation to development area.



### 2.3 Topography and Geology

At the time of the archaeological investigation the development site comprised a rectangular area of grassed open land covering *circa* 2500 square metres. The north and south perimeters were bounded by fence lines associated with the developed industrial plots.

Centred on NGR TL 2163 9982 at an average height of 3.7m AOD, the evaluation area is situated near Fengate, on the side of the former Fen edge, where the first gravel terrace of the River Nene gives way to Flandrian alluvial and peat deposits. These fill the low-lying basin between the Fengate area and the higher grounds at Northey Island to the east. The solid geology comprises limestone and Kellaways Clay and Sand, and Oxford Clay (Horton 1989, BGS Sheet 158).

### 2.4 Historical & Archaeological Background

The Fengate area is located between two different exploitable ecosystems - the dry gravel terrace with the uplands and woodland behind it to the west, and the wetland to the east - which have attracted settlers from the Neolithic period onwards. The general account that follows is based mainly on the published works of Dr. Francis Pryor (Pryor 1974, 1978, 1982, 1984, 1991).

The earliest evidence for occupation would appear to be Early Neolithic, starting sometime before 4000 BC. Remains of this period consist primarily of mortuary enclosures and structures, as at the Co-op Site (Gibson 1998) and at the Cat's Water subsite (Pryor 1984), which appear to have been organised and laid out in a deliberate fashion, i.e. oriented to an 'inlet' partly defined by a 2m contour (Cutler 1998).

During the Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age the landscape underwent a radical reorganisation and domestication, as suggested by the appearance of round-houses dispersed within ditched droveways and sheep-runs, together with rectangular field-systems laid out parallel and at right angles to the contemporary Fen edge. Evidence for re-organisation of the landscape during the later Neolithic/Early Bronze Age has emerged at a number of sites in the Fengate area, namely Fourth Drove, Newark Road, Storey's Bar Road subsite, Power Station site (Pryor 1978; 1980, 1992, 1996), Vicarage Farm Road (below), and the Broadlands (below).

In the course of the Middle Bronze Age a major ceremonial focus/boundary appeared in the landscape. It consisted of a massive timber alignment with defaced and broken artefacts which had been deposited beside and amongst the posts. The alignment ran out from the dry land, across the Flag Fen basin (then under water), to Northey Island. In the middle of the bay lay a massive ritual timber platform.

During the Iron Age vast areas of the Fen started to be inundated by salt water. The advancement of the Fen-Edge brought about a change from the live-stock dominated economy of the Bronze Age where access to the rich grazing of the Fens was of paramount importance, to a system based on cereal growing on the higher and drier land. This change is testified by the alignment of the new droveways which cut across the earlier system, as at the Cat's Water subsite and Depot Site (Pryor 1984; Evans 1992).

No evidence has emerged for occupation of the Fengate area in Roman times, the major feature in the landscape being represented by the fen causeway road (visible as earth-work and crop-mark), possibly built following the Boudiccan revolt of AD 60-61. The road runs from *Durobrivae* (near Water Newton), across the Fen edge at Fengate, to Northey Island and hence to Denver in Norfolk.

From the 3rd century, widespread freshwater flooding occurred throughout the southern Fenland causing the deposition of alluvium over the earlier levels of occupation. Wetter conditions discouraged permanent settlement which by then had moved on the higher and drier ground further to the west. Nonetheless, the fen continued to be exploited for its resources (fish, wild fowl, grass for summer grazing, etc.)

Fengate has been the subject of extensive environmental research and archaeological investigations which has benefited (and is still benefiting) from excavations and surveys. The development site itself falls within a well preserved area where much archaeological activity has been undertaken, and results published, in recent times. The following works are particularly relevant to the context of Site 'T', Newark Road.

- Aerial Photographic Assessment (Cox 1998) and subsequent archaeological evaluation (Vaughan *et al.* 1998) on land between Newark Road and Vicarage Farm Road (formerly Flag Fen Farm) (PCC SMR 50538, TL 2170 9958). The archaeological evaluation revealed the presence of peat ('fen soil') within an inlet flanked by rising natural gravels, and a sandy silty clay palaeosol horizon. This sealed well preserved archaeological features (domestic Beaker pottery and later field ditches) entailing Bronze Age occupation.



- Excavation on land off Third Drove (Cutler 1998).
- A photographic survey of the area between Fengate and Northey (Palmer and Cox 1999).
- Excavation on land off the Broadlands PCC SMR 50541, TL 2145 0050): the excavation revealed the presence of prehistoric pits and post-holes associated with Bronze Age field ditches. The features contained sparse finds, badly preserved pottery and struck flint (Vaughan & Last 1999).

The Peterborough City Council Sites and Monuments Record (PCC SMR) and the files of the PCCAS also record a number of archaeological sites and finds in the proximity of the area under investigation. These can be summarised as follows.

- PCC SMR 11072 (TL 2151 9973), to the south-west of the development site: the entry refers to the excavation of a linear ditch on a north-east to south-west alignment, almost certainly part of the Bronze Age Fengate field-system.
- PCC SMR 50544 (TL 2147 9975): the entry refers to the excavation of a linear ditch on a north-east to south-west alignment, possibly the continuation of the features at TL 2151 9973 (above).
- PCC SMR 8189 and 8189a (TL 215- 998-), opposite the development site, off the west side of Newark Road: the entry refers to cropmarks visible in aerial photography which are described as representing hut circles, field boundaries, a rectangular enclosure north-west to south-east oriented, a trackway on the same alignment as the rectangular enclosure and a 'U' shaped enclosure, probably part of the same system as the ditch above.
- PCC SMR 02326, to the east of the development site, off Edgerley Drain Road: the entry refers to undated cropmarks visible in aerial photography which are described as representing a west to east oriented track and part of an enclosure.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

Due to the site's position in an area of archaeological potential, with particular reference to the evidence for prehistoric occupation (above), the aim of the evaluation was to determine the presence/absence and quality (i.e. degree of preservation and significance) of archaeological remains within the subject site.

Two evaluation trenches (Trench 1 and Trench 2) were excavated using a toothless ditching bucket 1.60m wide. They were located along the western and northern perimeter of the site respectively, in order to provide maximum coverage of the proposed development area and overcome the obstacle represented by a line of trees across the site. The trenches were cleaned by hand to allow feature and deposit recognition. Each feature and deposit was allocated a unique reference number (single context recording). Relevant vertical sections were drawn at 1:200 scale. A general scale plan of the site was also produced to show the location of the excavated trenches within the development site. Finally a photographic record was compiled which consisted of colour slides, colour and monochrome prints.

The recording system and the post-excavation procedures followed the standard AFU practice.

#### 4. RESULTS

Trench 1 (20m x 2.5m) was located along the west side of the development site, parallel to Newark Road. It was excavated to a minimum depth of 0.65m (northern portion), and to a maximum depth of 0.85m (southern portion).

The removal of imported grassed clay topsoil (0.05m to 0.15m thick) in the northern portion of Trench 1 revealed an earlier phase of levelling (tarmac and later gravel) which had obliterated the silty clay subsoil still visible in the southern portion of the trench, at a depth of some 0.35m. Underneath both the tarmac surface and the subsoil was a deposit of light brown sandy silt (0.40m thick) which overlay natural gravel and sand.

Trench 1 produced no evidence of archaeological remains.

Trench 2 (30m x 2.5m) (**Fig. 2**) was located along the north side of the development site, almost perpendicular to Trench 1. It consisted of two contiguous segments of 25m x 2.5m and 5m x 2.5m respectively, separated by 2.5m of unexcavated topsoil in correspondence of a modern ditch on a north-south alignment.

The depth of Trench 2 ranged between 0.45m maximum towards the west end and 0.80m minimum towards the east end. A layer of topsoil was found to overlie a thick deposit of alluvial silt. The thickness of this latter was some 0.10m in the western portion of the trench, increasing suddenly to 0.40+m in the eastern portion. No evidence emerged for a subsoil, its absence being probably due to ploughing and discrete modern disturbance.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank the following people for their valued assistance in respect of this evaluation report: Gotch Pearson Architects and Surveyors for ST. Piercy RSB Ltd. who commissioned the project and co-operated during the work; Mr Ben Robinson of PCCAS, Peterborough Museum and Art Gallery, who monitored the project.

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