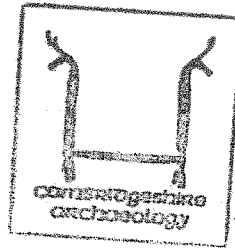
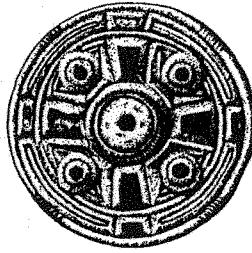


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Archaeological Field Unit

Post-medieval Features at Highfield School, Tower Road, Ely: An Archaeological Evaluation

S Kenney

1999

Cambridgeshire County Council

Report No. B63

Commissioned by Cambridgeshire County Council

**Post-medieval Features at Highfield School, Tower Road, Ely:
An Archaeological Evaluation**

Scott Kenney

1999

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SUMMARY

Between the 4th and 6th of October 1999, the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council conducted an archaeological evaluation on land at Highfield School, Tower Road, Ely, Cambridgeshire (TL5333/7984). The work was commissioned by Cambridgeshire County Council.

No securely dated medieval archaeology was found in the five trenches excavated, although several of the features contained a few abraded fragments of Ely ware roof tile. No remains of earlier features were located.

Highfield School, Tower Road, Ely: An Archaeological Evaluation

1 INTRODUCTION

Between the 4th and 6th October 1999, the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council (AFU) carried out an archaeological evaluation on land at Highfield School, Tower Road, Ely (TL5333/7984). The work was carried out at the request of Cambridgeshire County Council and was in response to a brief set by the County Archaeology Office (CAO); it was supervised on-site by the author.

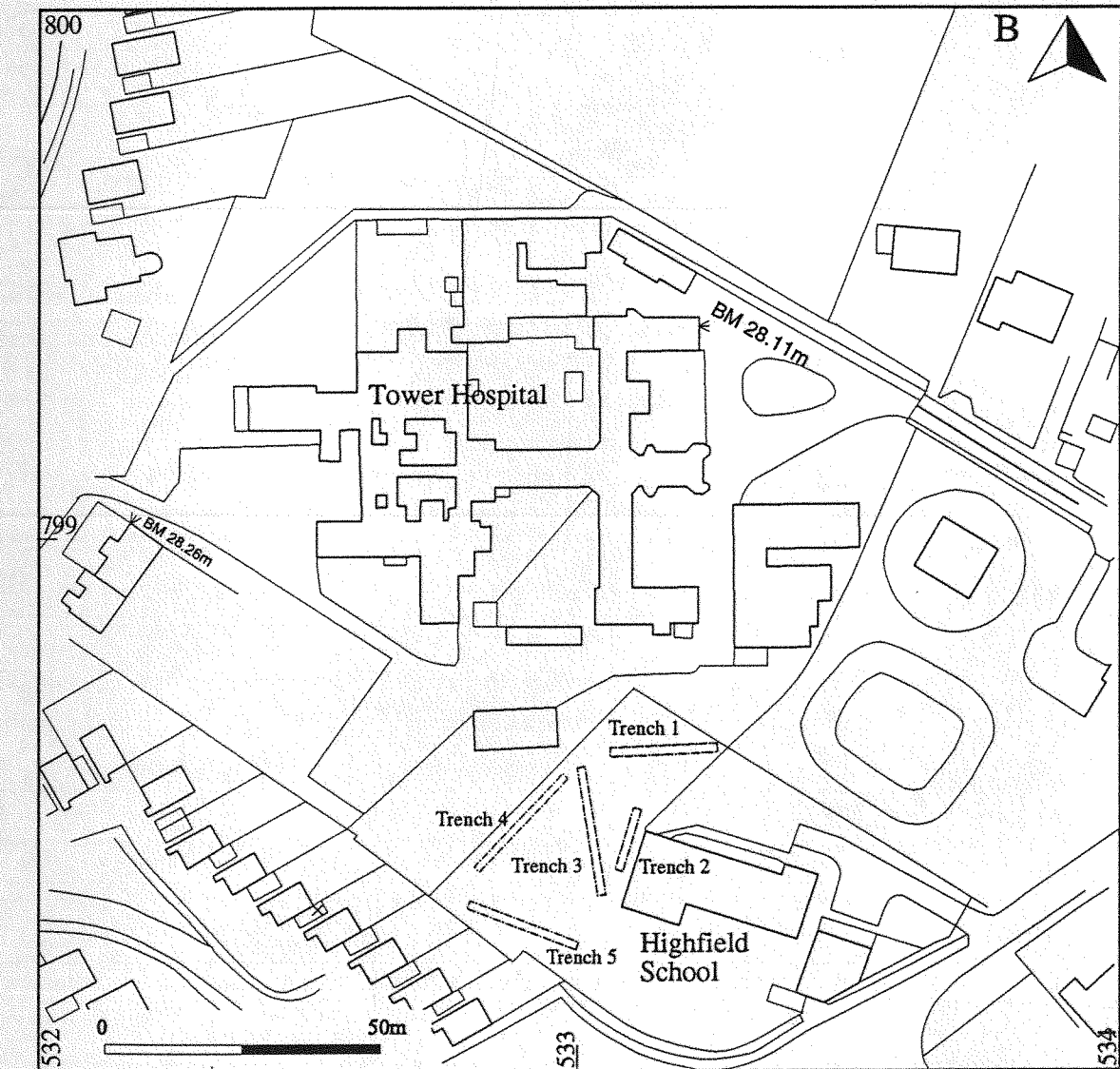
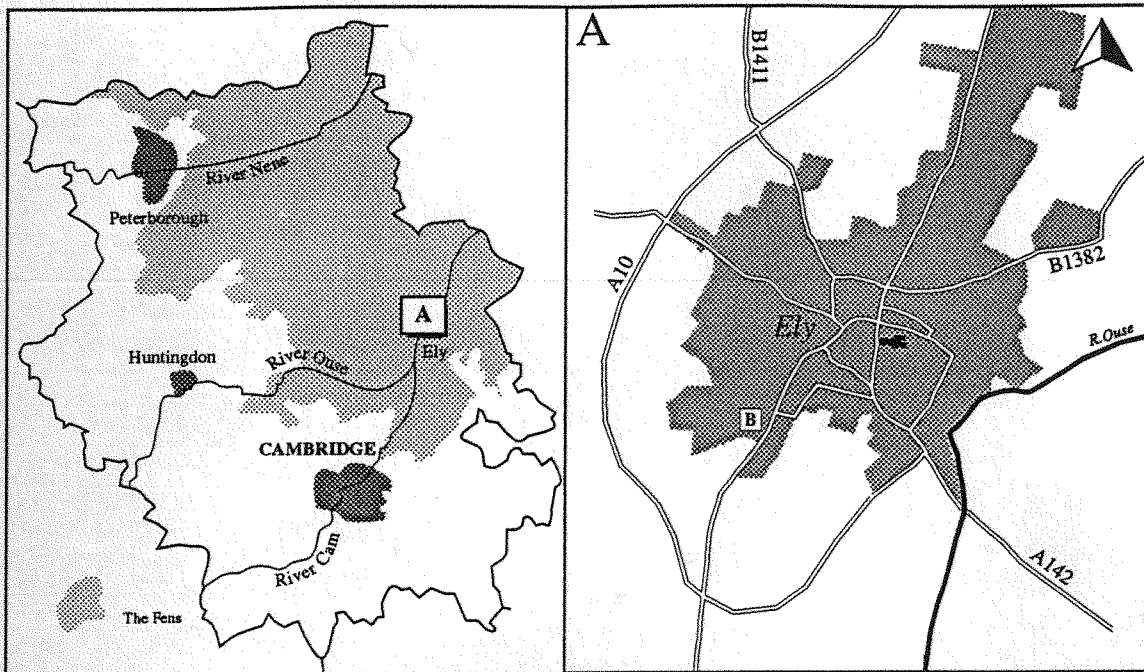
The site lies on the southwestern side of Ely. It is irregular, approximately 0.37ha in area. The main school buildings were still standing during the excavation, although the "portakabin" type schoolrooms had been removed. Hard standing, tree preservation orders, and an explicit request to excavate only in grassed areas further limited the placement of trenches.

The presence of archaeological remains was considered likely by the CAO on the basis of information contained in the County Sites and Monuments Record (SMR). It records the twin medieval hospitals of St John the Baptist and St Mary Magdelene 300m north of the site, and ridge and furrow 400m to the east. Just to the southeast is Cambridge Road, the origins of which may be Roman.

Five trenches with a total length of 102m were opened by machine, and subsequently hand cleaned where appropriate, photographed, and base planned by hand.

The trenches proved to contain little in the way of features of any date, which was something of a surprise. Abraded medieval tile and a single worn sherd of Ely ware pottery were the only early finds. A simple brick drain in trench 5, field drain in trench 1, and narrow ditch in trenches 2 and 3 were all post-medieval in date.

Weather conditions during the fieldwork were fine, and there were no factors which are likely to have had an adverse effect upon context recognition. Accordingly, the confidence rating to be applied to the results is judged to be high.



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Figure 1 Site Location Map

2 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

2.1 Geology

The site lies on Quaternary Boulder Clay, overlying the Cretaceous Lower Greensand.

2.2 Topography

The site is located on the highest ground on the island of Ely at around 27m AOD, next door to the water tower and covered reservoir on Tower Road. It lies on the western edge of the built-up area of the city of Ely.

3 HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

3.1 Historical Background

Lying 23km north-northeast of Cambridge on the river Great Ouse, Ely was mentioned in Domesday as a small agricultural settlement. Its development as an important medieval town began after the construction of the cathedral, built on the site of an earlier monastery, and the canalisation of the river provided important trade links.

Although the shape and extent of the medieval town is becoming clearer, following recent archaeological work in the city, the same cannot presently be said for the Middle and Late Saxon periods. Recent excavations may have revealed clues to the origin of the fabled *Cratendune*, supposedly the precursor settlement to Ely. This was always thought to have been located to the south of the present city, but the latest findings may point to a site to the west.

3.2 Archaeological Background

3.2.1 Medieval

The remains of the hospitals of St Mary Magdelene and St John the Baptist now form parts of St John's Farm to the north of the site (SMR 07342, a, b, c). Ridge and furrow can be seen 300m to the east at Barton Farm (SMR11881).

3.2.2 Post-Medieval

Post-Medieval pottery was found during an archaeological evaluation between Witchford Road and St John's Road in 1994 (SMR 11701).

4 METHODOLOGY

Five trenches were opened using a mechanical excavator with a 1.5m toothless ditching bucket, under the supervision of an archaeologist (see Fig. 1).

The trenches were cleaned by hand where appropriate, photographed, and base planned by hand at a scale of 1:50.

5 RESULTS

5.1 Trench 1

Trench 1 was 20m long, and contained a single ceramic field drain and a shallow ditch running NE-SW filled with clinker, window glass, and modern pottery. In this trench, 0.3m of topsoil overlay 0.6m of subsoil containing a calcareous component increasing with depth.

5.2 Trench 2

Trench 2 was 12m long, and revealed a narrow linear, 2, running NE-SW, the fill of which, 1, contained post-medieval brick and abraded Ely ware roof tile. This linear cut through a stiff, dark greyish brown silty sandy clay deposit, 3, which filled a very shallow and gently sloping cut, 4. This cut was somewhat irregular in plan, 0.1m deep, and at least 1.5m wide by 3.2m long. The fill contained very abraded sherds of Ely ware tile, dated 1200-1500. In this trench, 0.2m of topsoil overlay 0.3m of subsoil.

5.3 Trench 3

Trench 3 was 24m long, and revealed the continuation of linear 2, here recorded as 8, the fill of which, 7, contained almost identical finds to fill 1. Like 2, it cut a deposit to the SE, a stiff, dark greyish brown silty sandy clay, 9, which in turn filled another irregular shallow cut, 10. This feature was 0.15m deep, at least 1.5m wide and over 7.5m long. The fill contained abraded sherds of Ely ware tile dated 1200-1500. To the north of 8 was the butt end of a modern linear, and beyond this was another broad, shallow feature, 6, the fill of which, 5, was a stiff, dark greyish brown silty sandy clay. This fill contained abraded Ely ware tile dated 1200-1500. In this trench, 0.2m of topsoil overlay 0.4m of subsoil.

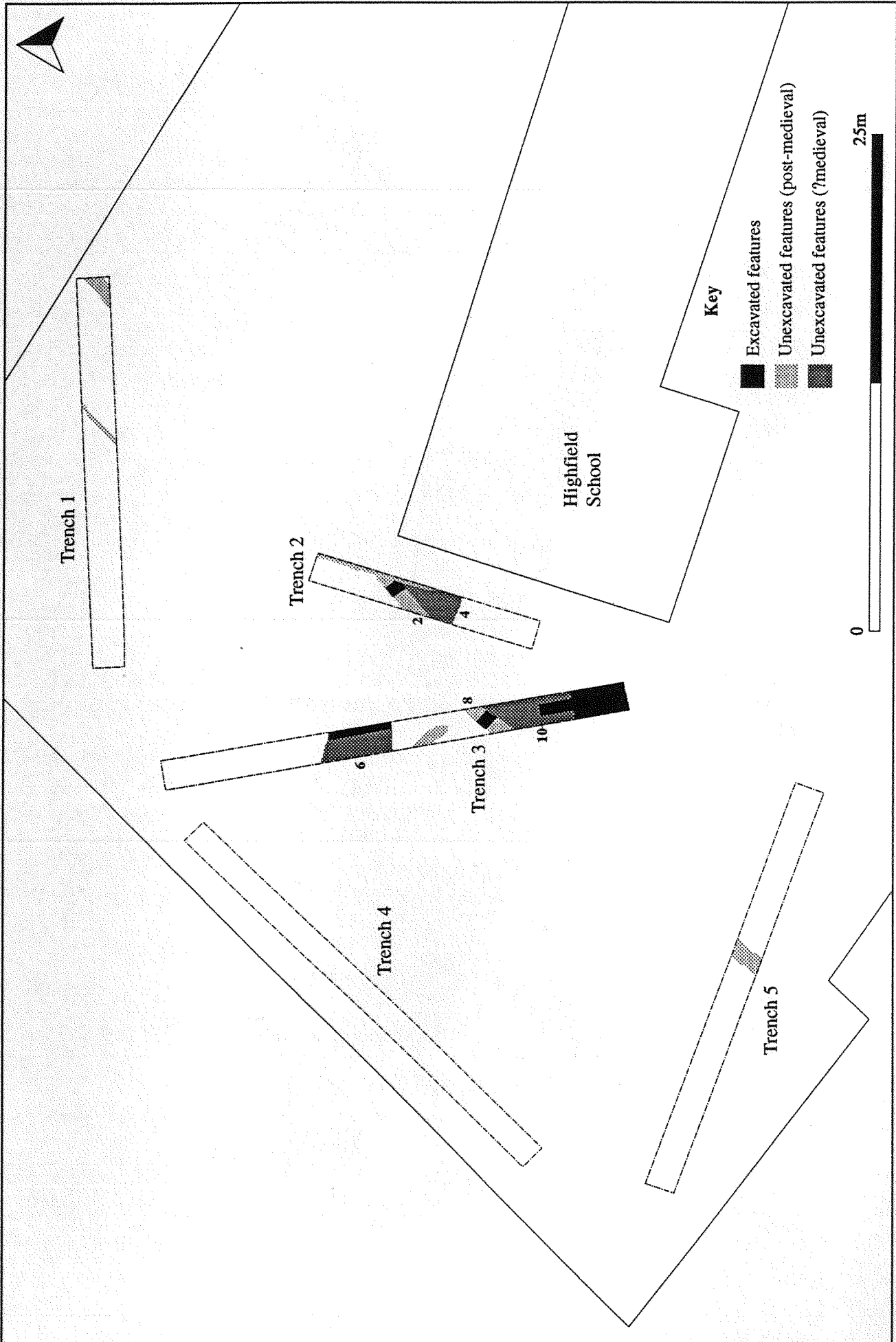


Figure 2 Trench plan showing archaeological features

5.4 Trench 4

Trench 4 was 24m long and contained no archaeology. In this trench, 0.2m of topsoil overlay 0.4m of subsoil.

5.5 Trench 5

Trench 5 was 22m long and contained a single eighteenth or nineteenth century simple brick-built culvert running NE-SW. A maximum of 0.4m of modern topsoil overlay 0.3m of buried topsoil, which in turn overlay 0.5m of subsoil.

6 DISCUSSION

The aim of the project was to establish the character, date, state of preservation, and extent of any archaeological remains within the site.

Despite the SMR entries indicating medieval buildings to the north and ridge and furrow to the east, very little direct evidence for occupation during this period was found. Indeed, the finds tend to indicate an area on the very periphery of settlement. Even if the site had once been under ridge and furrow, no trace of this remains. The locally-made Ely ware tile found in the stratigraphically early shallow features in trenches 2 and 3 is in a condition typical of that recovered from ploughsoils, but may itself be residual, since it is in an identical condition to the other fragments recovered from the later features. Although the information extracted from this site is largely negative, it is adding to the picture of the limits of medieval Ely.

7 RECOMMENDATIONS

No further archaeological works are recommended before construction takes place.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author wishes to thank Cambridgeshire County Council Property and Contract Services for funding the project, in particular Stephen Conrad, and William Wall, the Project Manager. This project was carried out in response to a brief drawn up by the County Archaeology Office.

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