

Archaeological Field Unit

Post-medieval Ditches and Pits at the former Chapter House
Gorefield Road, Leverington:
An Archaeological Evaluation

S Kenney

2000

Cambridgeshire County Council

Report No. B69

Commissioned by GE Salter Ltd

**Post-medieval Ditches and Pits at the former Chapter House
Gorefield Road, Leverington:
An Archaeological Evaluation**

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SUMMARY

Between the 13th and 16th of March 2000, the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council conducted an archaeological evaluation on land at the former Chapter House, Gorefield Road, Leverington, Cambridgeshire (TL 4438/1135). The work was commissioned by GE Salter Ltd.

Post-medieval archaeology was found in two of the four trenches excavated, while the remaining two were devoid of features. No remains of earlier features were located, and it is thought that the majority of the activity on the site relates to the construction of the Chapter House itself.

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**The former Chapter House, Gorefield Road, Leverington:
An Archaeological Evaluation
TF 4438/1135**

1 INTRODUCTION

Between the 13th and 16th March 2000, the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council (AFU) carried out an archaeological evaluation on land at The former Chapter House, Gorefield Road, Leverington, Cambridgeshire (TF 4438/1135). The work was carried out at the request of GE Salter 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 near the centre of Leverington, approximately opposite the church on the road to Gorefield. It is slightly irregular in plan and approximately 0.73ha in area. The Chapter House had been demolished and the rubble removed before the evaluation took place, although the foundations remained below ground level.

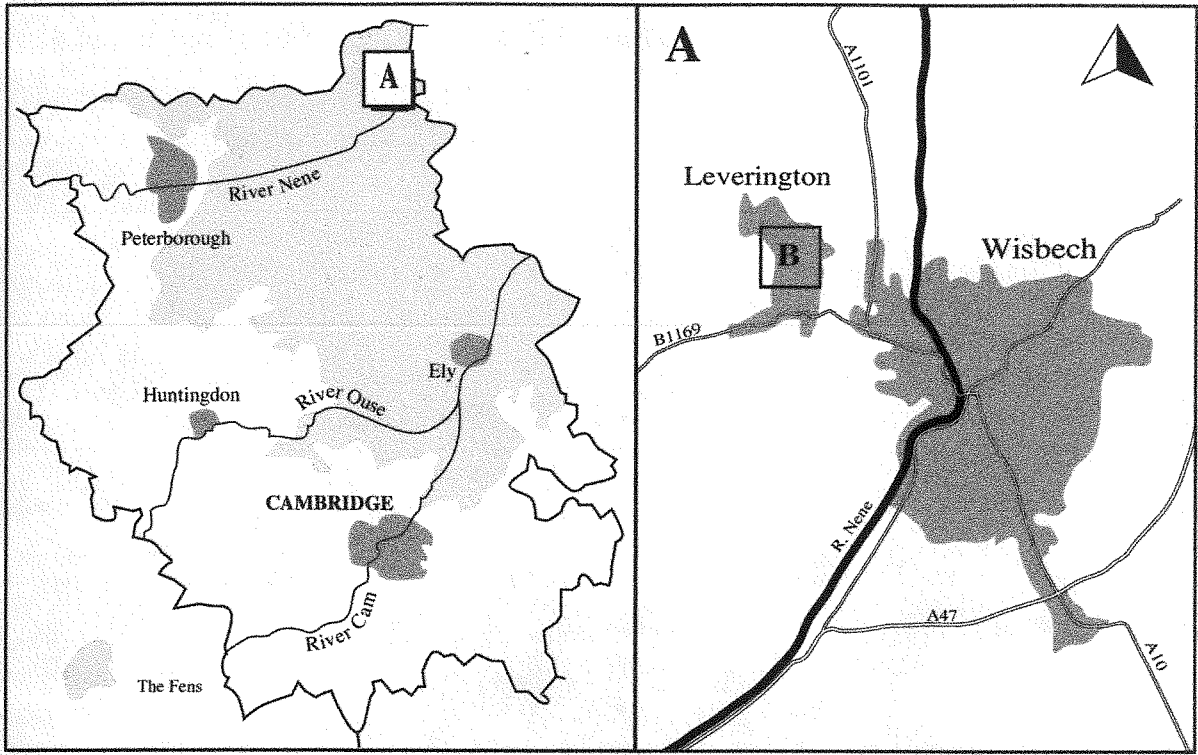
The presence of archaeological remains was considered likely by the CAO on the basis of information contained in the County Sites and Monuments Record (SMR). It records Roman and medieval finds and monuments in the general area of the village. The church of St Leonard was built around 1250.

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.

2 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

2.1 Geology

The site lies on the Flandrian Terrington Beds, an Iron Age/early Roman marine inundation deposit, overlying the Jurassic Ampthill Clay. The Terrington Beds are characterised as younger saltmarsh and tidal creek deposits (silty clay and sandy silt) by the British Geological Survey (Gallois 1995).



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Figure 1 Site Location Plan

2.2 Topography

The site is located on some of the higher ground in the parish at around 4m AOD, adjacent to the graveyard and almost directly opposite the church on Gorefield Road. On all sides, the land is slightly lower and the site shows evidence of having been raised by landscaping.

3 HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

3.1 Historical Background

Lying 1km north-west of Wisbech, Leverington was not mentioned in Domesday, and the first reference to it is c.1130, with the current spelling. The name is derived from a personal name '*Leofhere*', with the common suffix -ington meaning 'farm of'. However, the "ington" name is itself an early Saxon form even if its not recorded until 1130. It is a very attenuated village with development along several roads, as well as along the original Nene frontage. Most of the northern part is relatively modern and it appears that the church was once quite isolated. The hamlet of Gorefield meaning 'fen field' arose along a track west from Leverington church and is part of the same civil parish. The route of this track may have originally been more direct than that of the modern road. The present parish of Parson Drove was originally part of Leverington.

The earthwork known as The Roman Bank within the parish and The Sea Bank elsewhere, is misnamed in the former label, as it is now thought to be a medieval construction (Hall 1977). Waterlogged timbers removed from beneath the bank have been radiocarbon dated to AD 1250±40 years, which may indicate a response to documented flooding in 1251 (Hall 1996). One of the modern fields retains the name Sea Field, which may refer to "the field next to the sea".

3.2 Archaeological Background

Roman

Rabbit Hill, a scheduled monument to the south of the Wisbech Road, is a Roman Barrow (SMR 04104, SAM 264). Another tumulus to the north, previously thought to be Bronze Age, is now considered more likely also to be Roman in date, because the area would have been too wet during the Prehistoric period (SMR 04003, SAM 265).

Medieval

Aside from the Sea Bank mentioned above (SMR 04448), medieval pottery and a saltern were found just to the north-east of the site at Church End during the construction of a new bungalow (SMR 03960). To the north-west of Little

Dowgate, the Hospital of St John the Baptist was built in 1487, the name of which survives, as in so many places, in the name Spitalfields.

Post-Medieval

A medieval or Post-medieval windmill was marked on the 1843 Inclosure Map, to the north-west but no other references to it exist (SMR 03974).

4 METHODOLOGY

Placement of the trenches was restricted by numerous trees and a pond, and by the need to evaluate only those areas affected by the proposed development. This strategy resulted in the total length of trenching being reduced below the figure mentioned in the specification for this project.

Four trenches, with a total length of 112m, 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 1:100.

5 RESULTS

5.1 Trench 1

Trench 1 was 60m long, comprising two 30m arms at obtuse angle to one another of 166°. A depth of between 0.2-0.3m of topsoil overlay several features which were cut into layer 3. This deposit, a dark yellowish brown clay silt, was up to 0.45m thick and contained brick and tile fragments, clay pipe and glass and has been interpreted as a 'make up' or dumping layer. It was removed by machine when it became evident that it was also Post-medieval in date. Several features were cut through 3 in this trench, and it was shown to seal a number of other deposits.

From the east, those features cutting layer 3 were:

Ditch 9, oriented NE-SW, was 0.65m wide and 0.45m deep. It contained a single fill, 8, a dark greyish brown clay silt. Brick and sherds of Bone China were recovered from the fill.

Ditch 11, oriented NE-SW, was 1.7m wide and 0.8m deep. It contained a single fill, 10, a very dark greyish brown clay silt. Brick and sherds of Bone China were recovered from the fill.

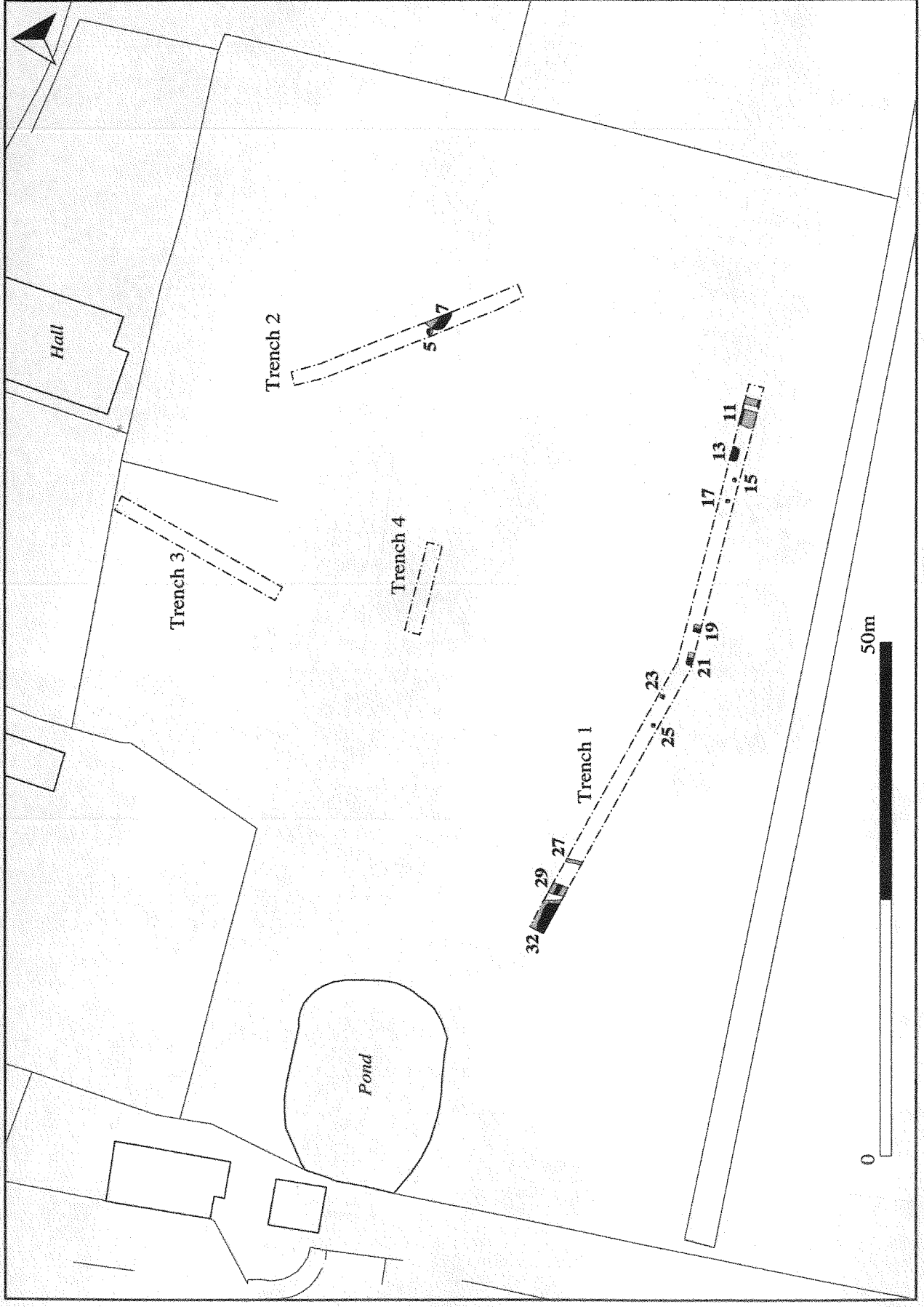


Figure 2 Detailed trench plans (excavated features shown in black, unexcavated in tone).

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Sub-rectangular pit **13** was at least 1.4 m long, 0.7m wide and 0.8m deep. It contained a single fill, **12**, a very dark grey clay silt. Numerous glass bottles were recovered from the fill, along with salt-glazed stoneware jars.

Foundation trench **27** was 0.3m wide and at least 0.6m deep. It contained brick wall **26**.

Ditch **29**, oriented NE-SW, was 1.7m wide and 0.8m deep. It contained a single fill, **28**, a very dark greyish brown clay silt. Brick, bottle glass and sherds of a Post-medieval Redware Pancheon were recovered from the fill.

Sub-rectangular pit **32** was at least 1.4 m long, 0.7m wide and 0.8m deep. It contained two fills. The upper fill, **30**, was a very dark grey clay silt with frequent charcoal lenses. The lower fill, **31**, was a light olive brown clay silt. Brick, tile, bone and shell were recovered from fill **31**.

From the east, those features sealed beneath **3** were:-

Square posthole **15** was 0.3m across and 0.05m deep. It contained a single fill, **14**, a very dark greyish brown clay silt. No finds were recovered from the fill.

Square posthole **17** was 0.3m across and 0.30m deep. It contained a single fill, **16**, a very dark greyish brown clay silt. No finds were recovered from the fill.

Rectangular pit **19** was 0.4m deep, 0.75m wide and at least 0.9m long. It contained a single fill, **18**, a firm dark greyish brown silty clay with occasional strong brown patches. Window glass was recovered from the fill.

Rectangular pit **21** was 0.4m deep, 1.2m long and at least 0.6m wide. It contained a single fill, **20**, a firm dark greyish brown silty clay with occasional strong brown patches. Window glass was recovered from the fill.

Square posthole **23** was 0.3m across and 0.05m deep. It contained a single fill, **22**, a very dark greyish brown clay silt. No finds were recovered from the fill.

Square posthole **25** was 0.3m across and 0.05m deep. It contained a single fill, **24**, a very dark greyish brown clay silt. No finds were recovered from the fill.

5.2 Trench 2

Trench **2** was 25m long. In this trench, 0.2m of topsoil overlay 0.8m of make-up layer **3**. This sealed two features:

Posthole **5** was 0.6m long, 0.5m wide and 0.38m deep. It contained a single fill, **4**, a firm dark greyish brown silty clay with occasional strong brown patches. No finds were recovered from this fill.

Pit 7 was 0.4m deep, at least 2.5m long and over 1.9m wide. It contained a single fill, 6, a firm dark greyish brown silty clay with occasional strong brown patches. Small fragments of brick and animal bone were recovered from this fill.

5.3 Trench 3

Trench 3 was 20m long and contained no archaeology. In this trench, 0.1m of topsoil overlay 0.2m of modern hardcore and rubble, which in turn overlay 0.75m of make-up layer 3.

5.4 Trench 4

Trench 4 was 10m long and contained no archaeology. In this trench, 0.3m of topsoil overlay 1.0m of make-up layer 3.

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 proximity of the site to the thirteenth century church, no medieval finds were recovered except for a single stray and residual sherd in trench 2. None of the undated postholes are likely to be medieval, their very square shape and the nature of their fill being reminiscent of much more recent features. The other pits and postholes sealed beneath makeup layer 3 obviously represent a phase of occupation prior to the construction of the Chapter House and its attendant landscaping. What form this previous activity took is difficult to surmise, since so little material culture was recovered from these features, but this in itself tells us that it is unlikely to have been the same kind of occupation as later phases of the site, which produce so much domestic debris (layer 3).

It is possible that the earliest features are associated with the construction of the brick wall which forms part of the northern boundary, and which has been dated as sixteenth or seventeenth century. The later features are almost certainly associated with the Chapter House, and the extensive make-up layer 3 probably represents wholesale landscaping of the site before the house was built.

7 RECOMMENDATIONS

All of the features located during this evaluation was Post-medieval in date, and no further archaeological works are recommended before construction takes place.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author wishes to thank GE Salter Ltd for funding the work, in particular Kevin Salter for his interest, and Stephen Macaulay for managing the project. This project was carried out in response to a brief drawn up by the County Archaeology Office.

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