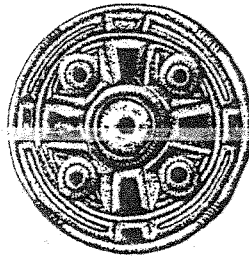


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Archaeological Field Unit

**Land Off Black Horse Lane, Chatteris:
An Archaeological Evaluation**

Spencer Cooper

March 2002

Cambridgeshire County Council

Report No. B97

Commissioned by Robert Powell, Surveyor on behalf of Mr. R. Harvey

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An Archaeological Evaluation**

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SUMMARY

Between the 14th February 2002 and 19th February 2002, an archaeological evaluation was undertaken on 0.9 hectares of land off Black Horse Lane, Chatteris, Cambridgeshire (TL3921 8674) by staff of the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council.

An undated ditch was uncovered in Trench 4 which may have been a drainage ditch or a field boundary. Differences in depth of deposits between trenches in the western and eastern part of the site may be explained in terms of deliberate make-up prior to construction of the bus depot.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY	1
ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND	1
METHODOLOGY	3
RESULTS	4
DISCUSSION	6
CONCLUSIONS	6
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	7
BIBLIOGRAPHY	7
LIST OF FIGURES	
Figure 1 Location map	2
Figure 2 Plan of trench 4 and schematic sections of trenches 1 and 4	5

Land off Black Horse Lane, Chatteris: An Archaeological Evaluation.

(NGR TL 3921 8674)

1 INTRODUCTION

Between the 14th February 2002 and 19th February 2002, an archaeological evaluation was undertaken on 0.9 hectares of land off Black Horse Lane, Chatteris (TL3921 8674) by staff of the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council. The project was commissioned by Robert Powell on behalf of Mr. R. Harvey in advance of the construction of dwellings and associated services in the evaluation area (Planning Application No. F/YR00/0484/0). The work was carried out in accordance with a brief for archaeological evaluation issued by Andrew Thomas of the County Archaeology Office. The project was managed by Judith Roberts (AFU).

The site lies to the north of the medieval core of the town close to the medieval lode and hythe. In addition traces of ridge and furrow were identified close to the development area.

2 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

Chatteris is situated on an island of Ampthill clay with patches of March and terrace gravels. The island is surrounded with fen deposits, including peats sealed by marine clays laid down during the early Bronze Age. During the Bronze Age peat fen crept up the gentle slopes of Chatteris island and by the Iron Age peat covered an area approaching that of the medieval period (Hall 1992). Colluvium occurs at the medieval fen edge. Since the seventeenth century drainage most of the peat has wasted leaving tracts of gravelly soils.

Current land use of development area consisted of a 20th century derelict Bus depot in the western part of the site and pasture land in the eastern part.

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Prehistoric

Chatteris lies nine miles south of March and twelve miles north-west of Ely, on the main road between them. The road is known as Ireton's Way after the Civil War general who caused it to be constructed to convey troops from Chatteris to Ely (VCH 1953). The main industry of Chatteris was, until recently, related to agriculture.

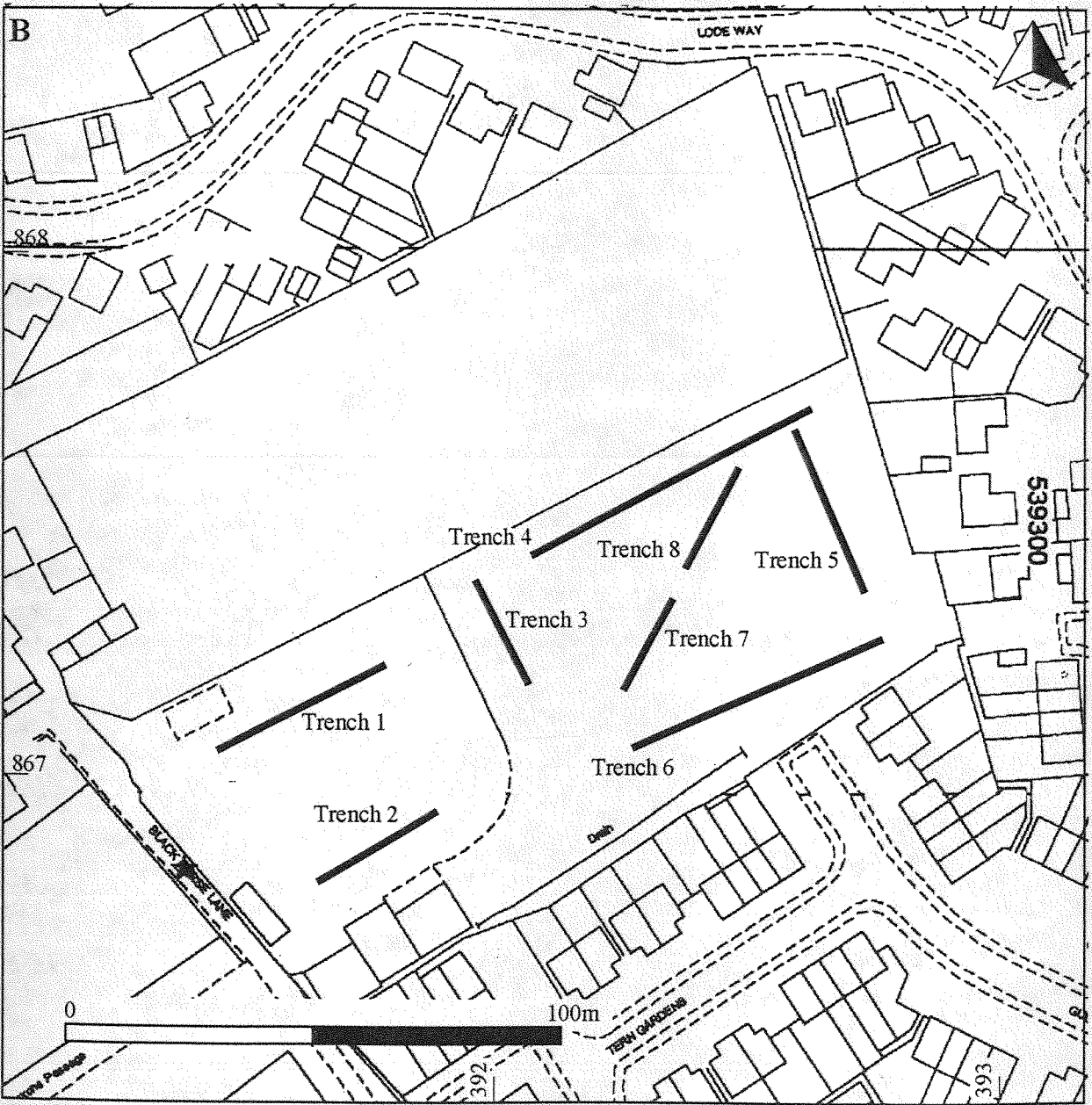
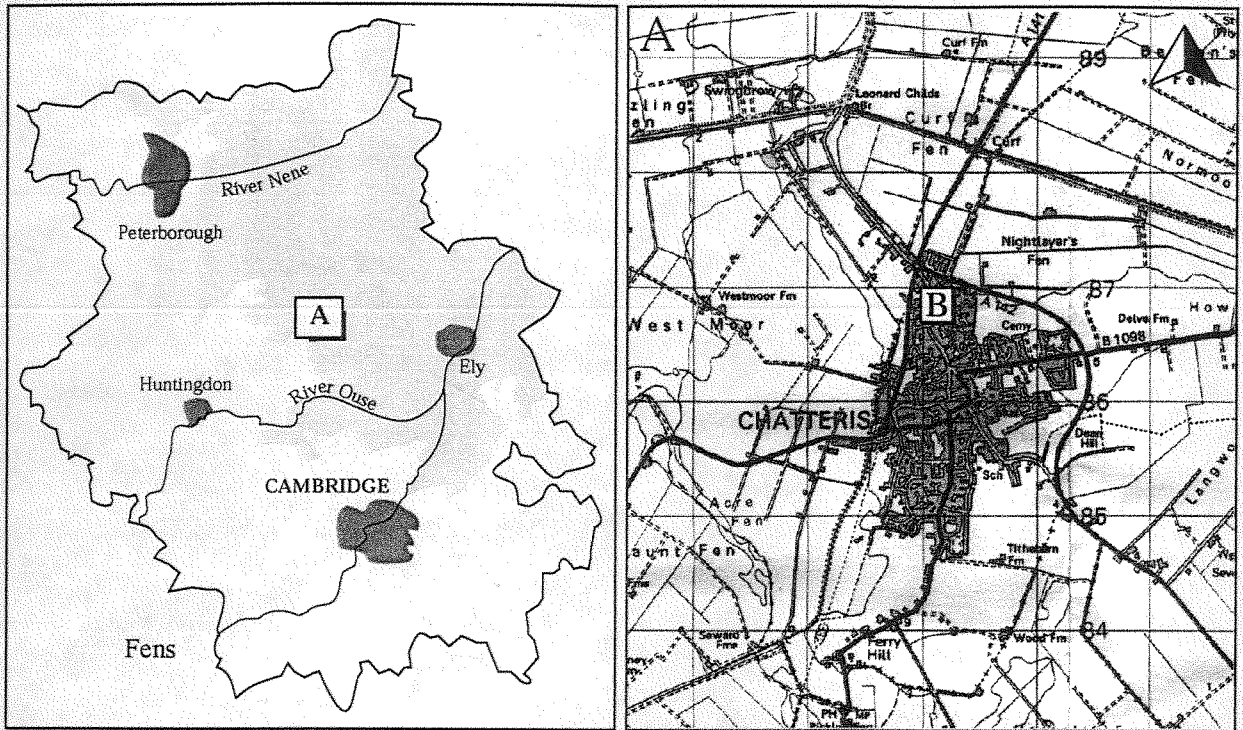


Figure 1 Trench location plan

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During the neolithic period a major river channel with associated tributaries ran close to the northern edge of the island with tidal or intertidal marsh between the tributaries. Much of the island was dry land but the soils were too heavy to attract settlement (Hall 1992). Apart from a flint scatter and a neolithic axe to the west of the modern settlement and a polished axe from Delve Terrace (SMR no. 12004) the majority of finds (polished green-stone axes, flint scatters and pottery) and settlement evidence comes from the southern and eastern part of the island.

During the Bronze Age the peat fen encroached, covering the marine sediments. A considerable amount of Bronze Age metal work has been reported from Chatteris, possibly as a result of cemeteries being disturbed by agriculture. Much of the land at this time was relatively dry. A dispersed barrow-field is the chief monument, occupying the eastern half of the island (towards the fen edge), and comprises at least 15 barrows. Fewer settlement sites have been identified but these appear to be closer to the modern settlement, on the slightly higher ground (Hall 1992).

Intensive Iron Age occupation has been found close to the church (Roberts, 2000, and Cooper, forthcoming). Chatteris appears to have been an important area in the Roman period with occupation of the island and at several large sites in the surrounding fen the local economy being based on stock rearing.

Saxon and early medieval remains have been found during excavation close to the church and it is possible that the present town is built over the Saxon settlement. The main island was subjected to Midland type strip cultivation forming ridge and furrow earthworks, but much of this has been ploughed out in recent years. Water communication to March and Elm was via Fenton Lode and Slade Lode during the thirteenth century. The medieval landing place (*hithe*) was probably on Chatteris island north of, or at, Slade Lode. It is thought likely that the medieval hythe is located close to the subject site.

4 METHODOLOGY

Following background documentary study a series of eight trenches, totalling 257m in length and 1.6m wide, were excavated using a JCB with a toothless ditching bucket. The positions of the trenches are shown in Figure 1. After machining was completed each trench was cleaned by hand and photographed and recorded using the AFU standard archaeological recording system. In addition all of the spoil heaps from the trenches were scanned visually for artefacts.

5 RESULTS (Fig. 1)

Common layers – 1, a hardcore surface and a black silty clay 2, were present in trenches 1 and 2. Layer 1 was composed of reinforced concrete, bricks and glass and varied from 0.50m-0.60m deep. Layer 2 consisted of a black silty clay with brick inclusions. Deposits encountered in trenches 1 and 2 were contaminated with diesel. The overburden in trenches 3-8 consisted of a topsoil, 4, which varied from 0.40m-0.60m deep. The topsoil 4 consisted of a dark grey silty clay. All trenches were machined down to the Ampthill clay.

Trench 1

Trench 1 was 30m long and 1.50m deep and was aligned on a northeast-southwest alignment. No archaeological features were identified in this trench.

Trench 2

Trench 2 was 20m long and 1.50m deep and was aligned on a northeast-southwest alignment. No archaeological features were uncovered in this trench.

Trench 3

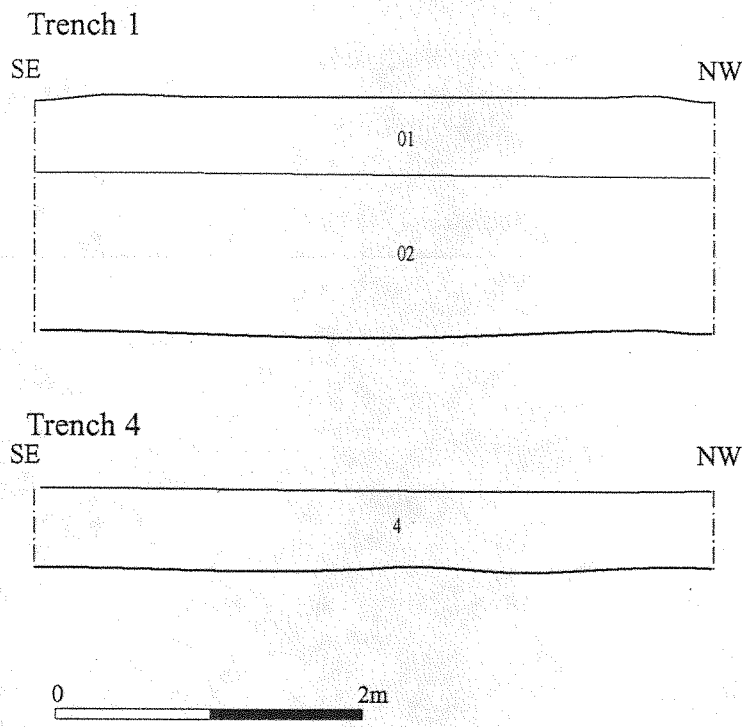
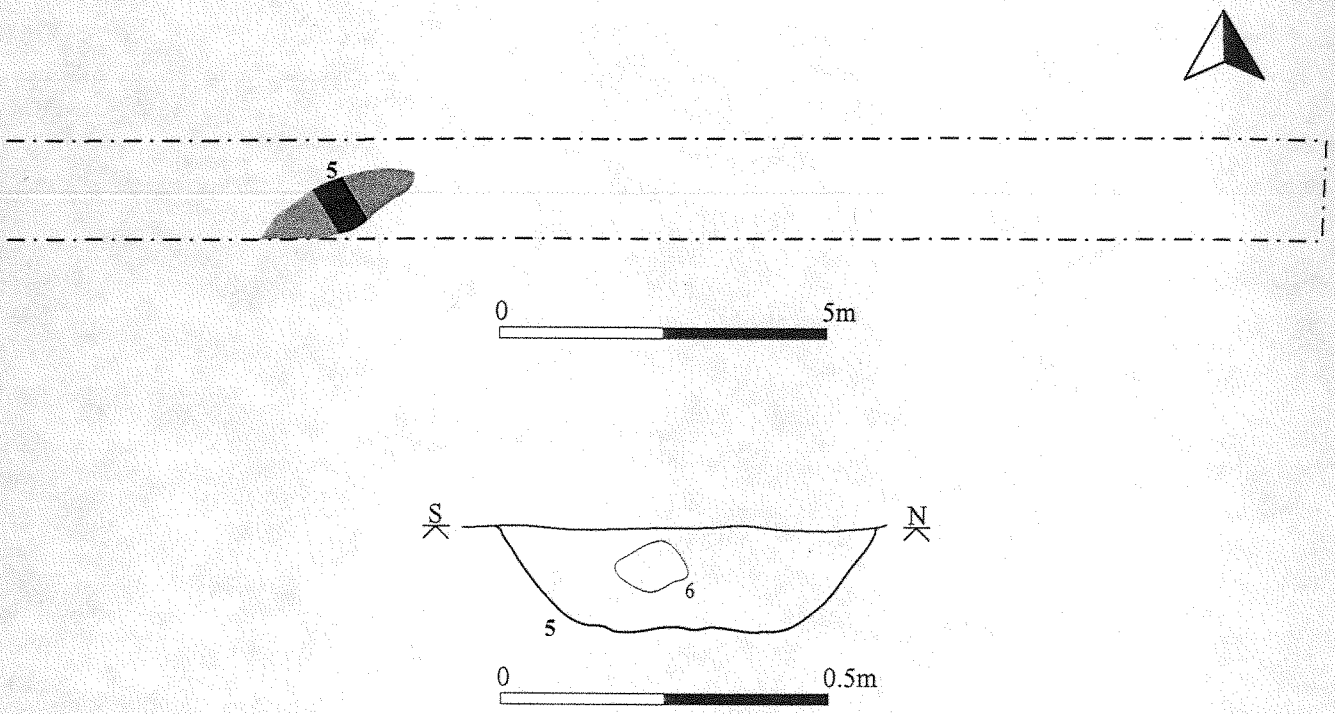
Trench 3 was located in the eastern part of the development area. It was 18m long and 0.60m deep and ran on a northwest-southeast development. No archaeological features were uncovered in this trench.

Trench 4

Trench 4 was in the eastern part of the development area. It was 60.5m long and 0.57m deep and ran on a north east-south west alignment. A ditch was identified in the eastern part of the trench. Ditch 5 ran on a north-west-south east alignment and was 0.53m wide and 0.12m deep. It contained one fill, 6, which was a dark grey silty clay and contained no artefacts. This ditch may represent a drainage ditch or a field boundary.

Trench 5

Trench 5 was in the eastern part of the development area. It was 33.7m long and 0.40m deep and ran on a northwest-southeast alignment. No archaeological features were encountered.



*Figure 2 Detail of eastern end of Trench 4 and section of Ditch 5 (above)
Schematic sections of trenches 1 and 4 (below)*

Trench 6

Trench 6 was 53.2. m long and 0.40 m deep and ran on an east-west alignment. No archaeological features were encountered in this trench.

Trench 7

Trench 7 was 21m long and 0.40 m deep and ran on a northeast-southwest alignment. No archaeological features were encountered in this trench

Trench 8

Trench 8 was 20.1m long and 0.60 m deep and ran on a northeast-southwest alignment. No archaeological features were encountered in this trench.

6 DISCUSSION

The evaluation revealed a single undated ditch in trench 4. This ditch was heavily truncated and may have been a field boundary or a drainage ditch.

Of particular interest is the difference between the depth of deposits of trenches 1-2 in the western part of the site and trenches 3-8 in the eastern part of the site. The greater depth of deposits encountered in trenches 1 and 2 maybe due to the area being deliberately built up before the construction of the bus depot which formerly stood on the site.

7 CONCLUSION

The primary aim of the evaluation was to identify medieval remains relating to the lode and hythe. The evaluation revealed no traces of the medieval lode and hythe.

The excavations undertaken at the High St (Cooper forthcoming) revealed prehistoric, Roman and medieval remains. It was hoped that this level of occupation may have extended to the development area.

The absence of archaeological remains within the development area is linked to the fact that the subject area is off the better drained gravels of the island and on the Amphill clay. This evaluation has contributed to mapping the archaeological remain of Chatteris. It has demonstrated that archaeological remains are sparse, away from the gravel island and the town of Chatteris.

8 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank Robert Powell who commissioned the archaeological work on behalf of Mr. R. Harvey. Spencer Cooper was the site supervisor. The illustrations were produced by Leomie Willoughby Ellis and the project was managed by Judith Roberts.

The brief for archaeological evaluation was written by Andy Thomas of the County Archaeology Office, and site work was monitored by Jeremy Parsons, Archaeology Information Officer.

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