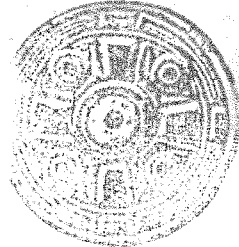
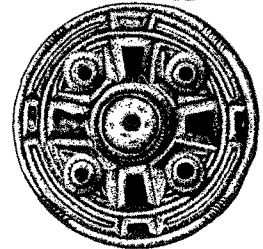


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# **18a Cambridge Road, Ely: An Archaeological Evaluation**

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June 2002

**Cambridgeshire County Council**

Report No. B100  
Commissioned by Freshwater Estates (U.K.) LTD

**18a Cambridge Road, Ely:  
An Archaeological Evaluation**

TL 5350 8009

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June 2002

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Report No. B100

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## **SUMMARY**

*On the 12<sup>th</sup> June 2002 Rob Atkins and Mark Hinman of the Archaeological Field Unit (AFU) of Cambridgeshire County Council conducted an archaeological evaluation on land at 18a Cambridge Road, Ely, Cambridgeshire (TL 5350 8009) in advance of residential housing development.*

*A total of seven test pits totalling 44.75m<sup>2</sup> were mechanically excavated within the c.0.11 hectare site. This was a c.6% sample of the affected area. Directly below a modern disturbed layer, there was a 16th/17<sup>th</sup> century levelling or terrace deposit c.0.35m thick across the site. This layer sealed a sterile layer up to 0.45m thick which may represent the former medieval plough soil. Below this layer was natural sub-soil. No significant archaeological remains were encountered.*

## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>HISTORICAL BACKGROUND</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>METHODOLOGY</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>RESULTS</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>LIST OF FIGURES</b>	
<b>Figure 1</b> Site Location Plans	<b>2</b>
<b>LIST OF TABLES</b>	
<b>Table 1</b> Test Pits	<b>6</b>

**18a Cambridge Road, Ely:  
An Archaeological Evaluation**

**NGR (TL 5350 8009)**

**1 INTRODUCTION**

An archaeological evaluation was carried out at 18a Cambridge Road, Ely, Cambridgeshire (TL 5350 8009) to inform the planning process in advance of the construction of residential housing. The work was carried out by the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council on 12<sup>th</sup> June 2002.

**2 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY**

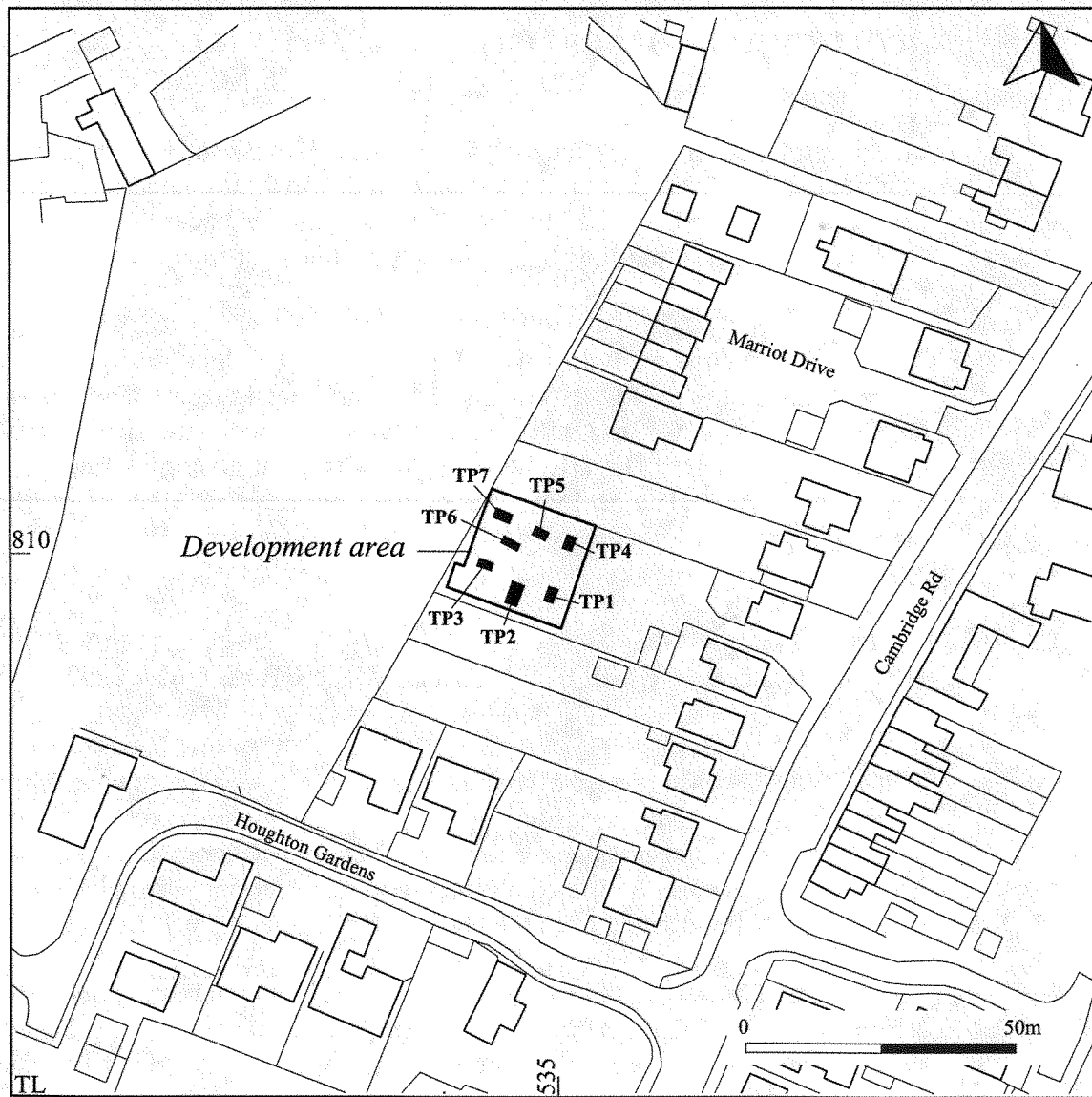
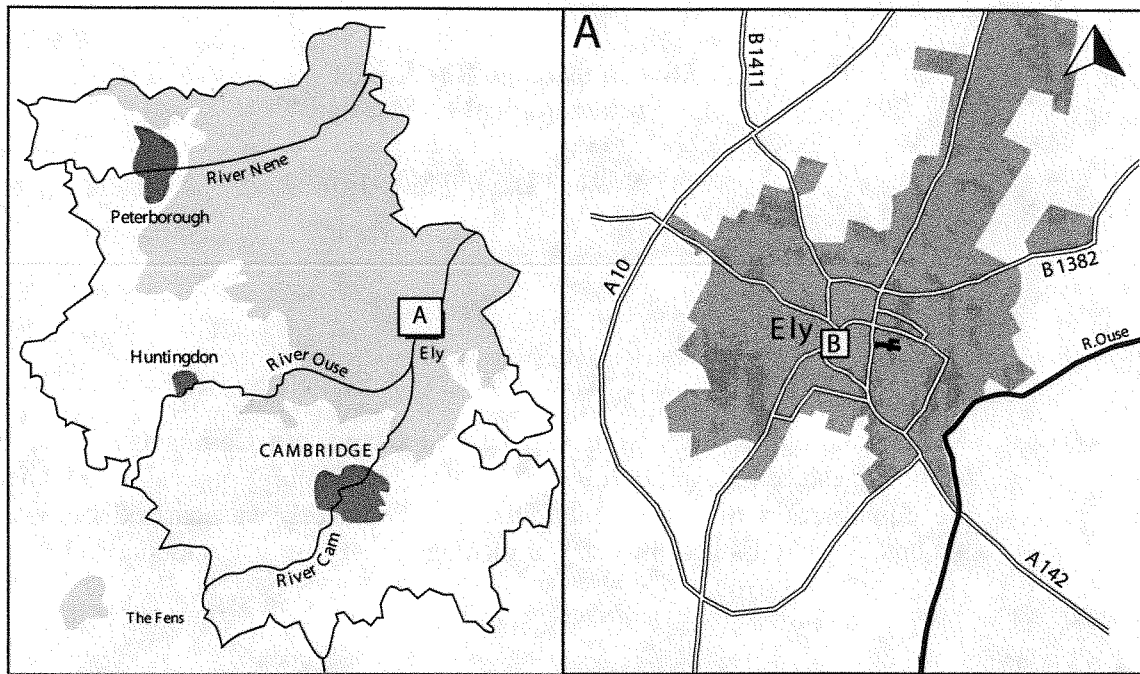
The development area lies on the western side of the centre of Ely, c.500m southwest of the Cathedral on level ground at c.21m OD. The subject site was located to the north of Cambridge Road within the backplot of two 20<sup>th</sup> Century houses fronting the road. Directly to the west of the site is an open field.

The natural comprised initially of drift geology, c.1.1m thick, and was a mixed yellow orange brown silty sand with sub angular gravel pieces. The top of this layer sloped from 20.13m OD in the northwestern part of the site, to 19.76m OD to the southeast. Directly beneath this was solid geology comprising of Lower Greensand. The geology of the area changes to boulder clay c.30m to the north of the site.

**3 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND (from SMR, VCH, & Owen 1992)**

Lying 23km north-northeast of Cambridge on the river Great Ouse, Ely was mentioned in Domesday as a small agricultural settlement, however, its origins are much earlier and archaeological work has shown that occupation on the island begins as early as the Neolithic. The name means very much what it sounds like, being derived from the Old English *ael-ge*, or "eel-district".

Ethelbert I, (who reigned from 560-616) founded a church to the honour of the Virgin Mary in a village named Cratendune. Later that church was destroyed in the war between Anna, King of E. Anglia, and Penda, King of Mercia. When Anna's daughter, Etheldreda, adopted a religious life, she chose a more attractive site a mile further N and built a monastery there in 673. This site



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Figure 1 Site Location Map showing position of Test Pits 1-7



later became the town of Ely, because the people of Cratendune abandoned their village and rebuilt it around the monastery. The site of Cratendune has not been established, although several candidate sites have been proposed over the decades. The most recent being a site adjacent to West Fen Road (Mortimer 1999).

The religious house founded by Etheldreda was laid waste by the Danes in 870, refounded by Ethelwold, Bishop of Winchester, as a Benedictine abbey in 970, and dedicated to St Peter and the Blessed Virgin by Dunstan in 974. Nothing now remains of the church and conventual buildings of Etheldreda's foundations and even their site in relation to the present Cathedral is uncertain.

Ely's development as an important medieval town began after the construction of the cathedral, which began in 1081 and the canalisation and diversion of the river, which probably occurred between 974 and 1035. This new transport route provided important trade links with Cambridge and Littleport, and by extension, to the seaport at Lynn when that was established some time before 1180. The status of the town was further enhanced when the Bishopric was created in 1108/9, which brought the Episcopal establishment and its attendant bureaucracy.

In the later twelfth century, a castle was constructed on the orders of King Stephen during the chaotic civil wars known as the "Anarchy", and traces of it survive at Cherry Hill, to the south of the Cathedral.

The medieval hospitals of St John the Baptist and St Mary Magdelene, parts of which still survive in buildings at the top of St John's Road, (directly opposite the site), and were both probably constructed in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. The earliest mention of an "ancient" hospital is in 1169, but no name is mentioned, however by 1228, the Hospital of St Mary Magdelene had been given the rectory of Littleport, and around 1240 the two hospitals were amalgamated under the name St John the Baptist. They probably lay outside the medieval town, being most likely leper hospitals, but their use would have changed with the decline of leprosy in the later medieval period. The hospitals persisted in some form until the Dissolution caught up with them eventually in 1561, when they were given to Clare Hall, Cambridge.

The town continued to thrive throughout the medieval period and beyond, with even the dissolution of the priory in the 1530's having little effect upon the burgeoning commercial trade which continued to dominate its financial fortunes.

Cambridge Road is recorded as *Stanweye* in 1319, and a section of it is part of the probable course of a Roman road. West Fen Road was formerly known as "Cow Lane" and St John's Road was not named on John Speed's map in 1610. He shows what appears to be a walled enclosure around major buildings on the eastern side at the junction of St John's Road and West End, with some smaller domestic buildings on the western corner opposite. The approximate area of the site is shown as open land.

#### 4 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The earliest evidence for occupation on the summit of the Ely island is in the form of Neolithic flint artefacts from the Bray's Lane excavation (SMR 10475a). Bronze Age features were also found on the same site (SMR 10475b). Later occupation from the Iron Age was uncovered just southeast of the Cathedral (Hunter 1991). The Iron Age features consisted of substantial enclosure ditches and probable eaves drainage/ house gullies, with few other features. The material recovered from these features consisted of pottery with 'early' and 'late' characteristics, two phases of Iron Age occupation were identified stratigraphically (Mudd 2000). Further extensive Iron Age, Roman and Saxon occupation has been revealed by excavations at West Fen Road during 1999-2000 (Evans & Knight, 2000, Masser & Evans, 1999, Mortimer, 2000, Regan, 2000 and Regan forthcoming). Middle and late Saxon pottery was found at 2 West End, just to the southwest of the present site (Kenney 1999). A very similar assemblage was recovered from the excavation at the former Red, White and Blue public house, Chief's Street (Kenney, forthcoming). A middle Saxon presence has recently been identified during excavations at Broad Street (Alexander, forthcoming). Late Saxon pottery was found in the earliest features during investigations at Upherds Lane (Taylor-Wilson 1992). A single sherd of middle Saxon pottery along with late Saxon pottery was found at St Mary's Lodge in St Mary's Street (Robinson 2000). Late Saxon pottery was also found at Chapel Street (Hinman 1996). What is not known is the exact extent and form of middle and late Saxon Ely. Recent work within the city at West End and Chief's Street has revealed a middle Saxon presence in this area. Excavations at the Lady Chapel produced an important assemblage of mid-late Saxon ceramic (Regan forthcoming). Excavations at West Fen Road have also produced evidence of this period, suggesting that the area around Etheldreda's monastic foundation was not the only focus of settlement at this time. Numerous excavations in Ely have produced medieval finds, and evidence has been found in several locations of surviving fragments of medieval structures. Some standing buildings have medieval fabric within them, including the farm buildings at the northern end of St John's road, formerly the hospitals of St John the Baptist and St Mary Magdelene (SMR 07342, a, b, c, SMR 08435). Ely is well known as a pottery production centre in the medieval and post-medieval periods, and quantities of the local wares have been recovered from sites all over the city. Over the past few years, several production sites have been examined and the local wares are currently the subject of detailed analysis, (Sperry, forthcoming).

#### 5 METHODOLOGY

Seven test pits totalling 44.75m<sup>2</sup> were located within the site giving a c.6% sample of the affected area. They were positioned to give a representative sample of the site. Layers (8 and 9/10), present in all the test pits, were removed by mechanical excavator with a flat bladed ditching bucket under

archaeological supervision. Test pit 2 was abandoned after a gas and water pipe were uncovered. In the remaining pits natural drift deposits were encountered between 0.80m and 1.00m below the present ground surface. In test pit 2, the client excavated through the drift geology (1.1m thick) into the solid Greensand to find the water table after the archaeological evaluation work had been completed.

A general location plan at a scale of 1: 100 was produced to show the position of the test pits within the development site. In addition, a photographic record was compiled which consisted of colour slides, and colour and monochrome prints.

The recording system and the post-excavation procedures followed the standard AFU practice in compliance with IFA guidance policy.

## 6 RESULTS

All seven test pits within the development area had the same two deposits (8 and 9/10; Table 1). Layer (8) was a disturbed topsoil layer between 0.15m to 0.45m thick. It comprised a dark grey brown sand loam with modern inclusions including frogged bricks. Directly below layer (8) were two similar buried horizons (9/10) collectively between 0.50m and 0.80m thick comprising a friable mid dark orange brown silty sand though there was some variety in the quantity of finds recovered.

In the upper 0.35m there were finds whereas below was fairly sterile. The majority of finds were recovered from the northern three test pits (Tp 4, 5 and 7). In these test pits, c.0.10m below the top of the layer there was a 0.15m thick horizon which contained a moderate amount of animal bone and occasional brick, pottery and tile pieces, whereas in the other test pits there was at the most only the occasional animal bone.

The ceramic finds were spot dated by Dr Paul Spoerry. There were five abraded pottery sherds including a single Roman grey ware sherd possibly roughly shaped into a counter, one Roman or medieval sherd, and three Ely ware pieces dated between 1150 and 1500 AD. There were five abraded tile pieces consisting of a medieval or Roman abraded fragment, a medieval peg tile and three 16<sup>th</sup>/17<sup>th</sup> century pieces. There was also a late medieval or early post medieval brick fragment. All the bone recovered was disarticulated and consisted of fragmentary "rolled" pieces.



Test Pit No	Size of test pit	Depth of layer 8	Depth of layer 9/10
1	3.0m by 2.0m	0.20m	0.80m
2	4.4m by 2.50m	0.15m	0.25m*
3	3.0m by 1.50m	0.23m	0.65m
4	3.0m by 2.0m	0.30m	0.50m
5	3.0m by 2.0m	0.20m	0.60m
6	3.50m by 1.50m	0.32m	0.58m
7	3.0m by 2.0m	0.45m	0.54m

Table 1: Test pits \*not excavated to natural by AFU

The field adjacent to the west of the site was inspected. There are noticeable earthworks within it possibly representing a field headland. Abutting the western boundary of the development area c.5m from the southern baulk is a linear terrace running east to west.

## 7 CONCLUSION

The evaluation found no archaeological features. There was a mixed abraded deposit including Roman, medieval and early post medieval finds probably dating to the 16<sup>th</sup>/17<sup>th</sup> centuries. It could represent a levelling of ground nearby such as a headland, terracing or other earthwork. There was a sterile layer below this disturbed deposit which may represent the former medieval topsoil/plough soil. There is the remains of an earthwork feature, possibly a headland, abutting the site in the open field to the west. The survey of the field is beyond this remit.

## 8 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank Freshwater Estates (U.K.) LTD who commissioned and funded the archaeological work. Thanks also to Jon Cane for the illustrations, to Scott Kenney who provided the Archaeological and Historical background. Mark Hinman managed the project and worked on the site. The author also worked on the site.

The project was carried out in response to a brief written by Andy Thomas, former Development Control Officer, from the County Archaeology Office (CAO). Jeremy Parsons, Development Control Officer, from the CAO monitored the site.

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