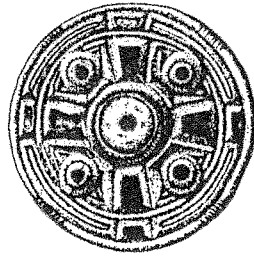


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*Archaeological Field Unit*

**Modern Activity at Land to the South-West  
of 99 Stonald Road, Whittlesey:  
An Archaeological Evaluation**

Spencer Cooper

2002

*Cambridgeshire County Council*

*Report No. B104*

*Commissioned by Robert Powell on behalf of Messrs T. P. Snitch Brickworks Ltd.*

**Modern Activity at Land to the South-West  
of 99 Stonald Road, Whittlesey:  
An Archaeological Evaluation**

(TL 2632 9756)

Spencer Cooper

September 2002

Editor : Aileen Connor  
Illustrator : Sue Holden



*Report No. B104*

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## **SUMMARY**

*Between the 28th and 30th August 2002 an archaeological evaluation was undertaken on land to the west of 99 Stonald Road, Whittlesey (TL 2632 9756) by staff of the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council. The project was commissioned by Mr. Robert Powell on behalf of Messrs. T. P. Snitch Brickworks Ltd in advance of construction of five houses with associated services. The work was carried out in accordance with a Brief issued by Andy Thomas of the Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeology Office.*

*The evaluation revealed twentieth century deposits only. No remains relating to the nearby Roman road were detected.*

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**Post-Medieval Activity at Land to the South-West  
of 99 Stonald Road, Whittlesey:  
An Archaeological Evaluation  
(TL 2632 9756)**

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

Between the 28th and 30th August 2002 an archaeological evaluation was undertaken on land to the west of 99 Stonald Road, Whittlesey (TL2632 9756) by staff of the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council. The project was commissioned by Mr. Robert Powell on behalf of Messrs T. P. Snitch Brickworks Ltd in advance of construction of five houses with associated services. The work was carried out in accordance with a Brief issued by Andy Thomas of the Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeology Office.

The evaluation revealed nineteenth century deposits only. No remains relating to the nearby Roman Fen Causeway were detected.

## **2 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY**

The underlying geology of the fen basin at Whittlesey consists of Jurassic Oxford Clay that crops out around the later (Pleistocene) March Gravels. The March Gravels consist of sand and gravel of marine/estuarine origin which form the first terrace deposits of the River Nene. The two gravel islands of Whittlesey (west island) and Eastrea with Coates and Eldernell (east island) are surrounded by Flandrian Lower peat. Later marine transgression caused the deposition of silty clay Barroway Drove Beds. Barroway Drove clay is clearly exposed between Whittlesey and Eastrea (Horton 1989).

The parish of Whittlesey extends over 9010 hectares. The town is *c* ten kilometres east of Peterborough and fifteen kilometres west of March. The proposed development site lies to the south of Stonald Road, to the north-west of the historic centre of Whittlesey (Fig 1.) and is 0.37ha, lying at approximately 7m OD.

## **3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

In the mesolithic period the area around Whittlesey was dry. During the neolithic small areas along deep channels and low-lying zones became waterlogged leading to the formation of Lower Peat. During the Bronze Age there was rapid peat growth over most of the Barroway Drove Beds. By the Iron Age the development of peat

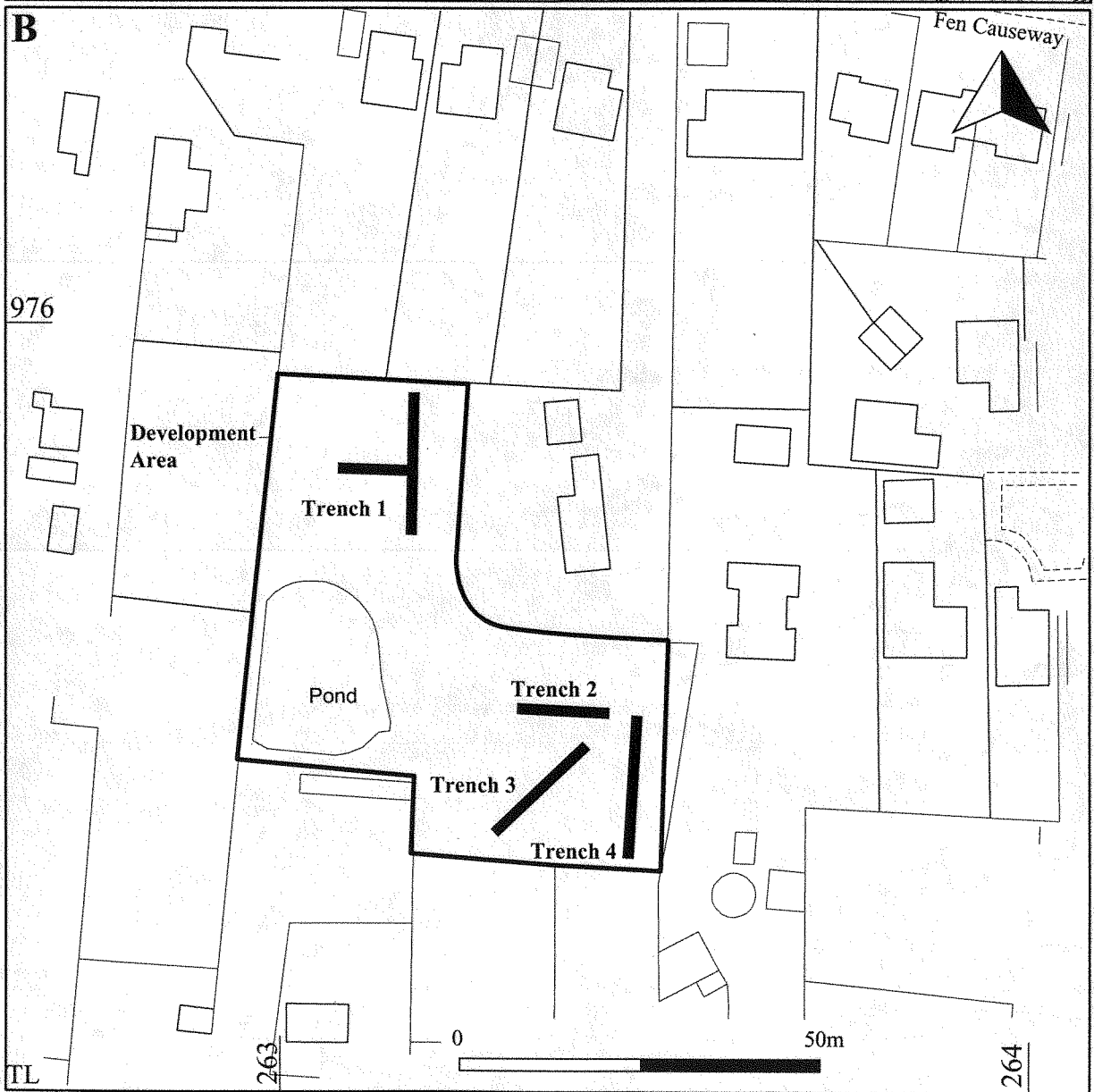
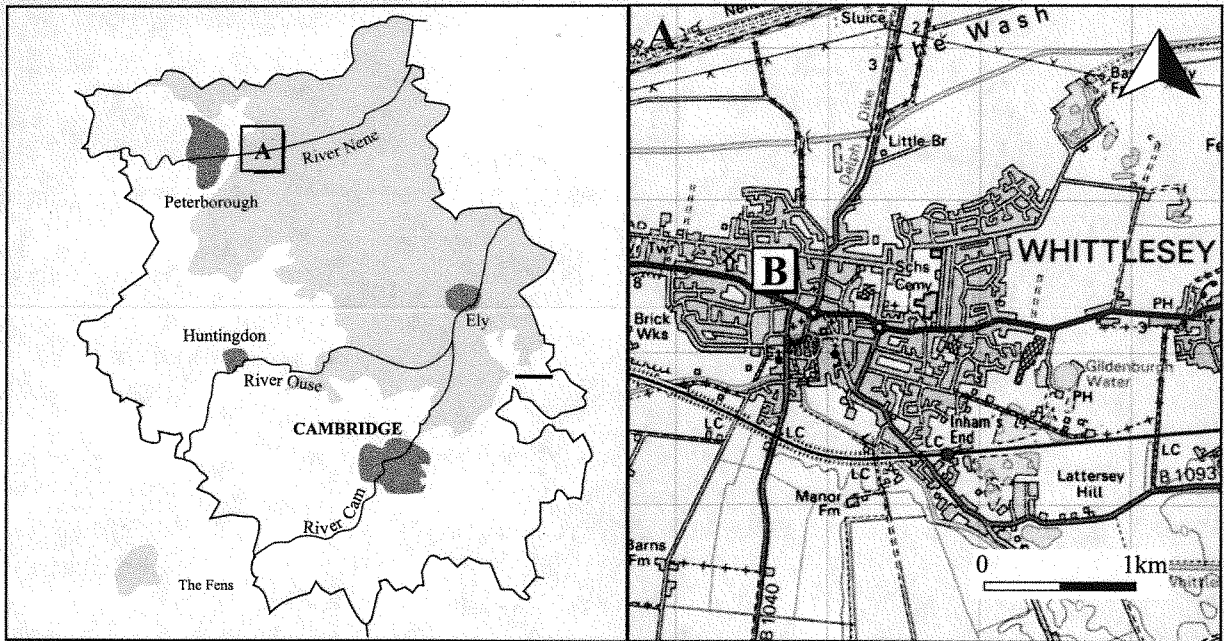


Figure 1 Site location

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over the fen was complete (Hall 1987). Subsequently, in the post-Roman period, water levels rose and there was flooding across the fen. Changing climate, intensified land use and deterioration in drainage systems greatly affected the fen environment. At this time there was marine silting which may have been responsible for blocking the Thorney channel (one of the main outlets of the river Nene) causing the Nene to cross the southern fenlands of Whittlesey.

Prehistoric finds along the fen edge around Whittlesey indicates the importance of the valuable resources of the fen and fen islands. Most of the evidence dating to this period is lithic scatters and stray finds. Bronze Age barrows have been identified to the south of Whittlesey.

Recent excavations between Whittlesey and Fengate (to the west) have provided evidence for settlement and ritual activity. At King's Dyke West excavations revealed the presence of a short-lived late Bronze Age open settlement consisting of five round houses, four-post structures and pits. A cluster of pits in one of the structures contained remains of butchered lambs. Outside the structures pits contained pottery sherds and pig bones. Similar pottery had been incorporated into the floors of buildings. The upland limit to the settlement distribution was around the 4m contour (Knight 1999). Further work at Bradley Fen revealed early and late Bronze Age occupation. The late Bronze Age settlement was concentrated between 1.5 and 4m OD – closer to the fen edge than the present development site.

Iron Age settlement around Whittlesey is represented by two occupation areas with dark soil and sherds of pottery (Hall 1987). Iron Age finds have been reported from the brick clay quarry c 2km to the west of the development site (Hall 1987).

The projected course of the Roman Fen Causeway from Peterborough to Grandford (near March) crosses the north of Whittlesey (SMR11048). It comes onto the island from Flag Fen and Northey, where parts of the road have been identified. Further parts have been exposed at Eldernell and Eastrea (Hall 1987). Recent excavations at Stonald Field (east of the present development site) have confirmed the route of the Roman road. Dating evidence indicates it was built in the first century AD and subsequently attracted occupation such as paddocks, enclosures, industrial activities and some settlement (Mortimer 1996 and Knight 2000). A large number of rural sites have been identified through cropmarks (Hall 1987) and recent reassessment shows the presence of a possible marching camp (Palmer in Heawood 1997). Excavations at Bradley Fen (above) revealed the course of a secondary route, parallel to Fen Causeway, at Stonald Field (Knight 2000).

The name Whittlesey is first recorded c. 972 in an Anglo-Saxon Charter, as '(W)itlesig', meaning 'Wittel's Island' (Reaney 1943, after Robertson 1939). *Witil* is the name of a moneyer, and is a diminutive of *Witta*. Saxon settlement has been identified to the north (SMR 04281) and a Saxon cemetery was found to the west (SMR 10594).

Two manors at Whittlesey belonged to the Saxon monasteries of Thorney and Ely, with the land roughly divided into east and west, with the Ely manor largely on the west. These manors became parishes that were united in 1850 for civil purposes, but

continued as separate entities for ecclesiastical matters. Later medieval finds have been discovered from the centre of Whittlesey. There are no visible remains of early ridge and furrow systems but the boundaries of medieval fields survive as banks of the Midland type (Hall 1987). Three main areas of open fields retain their original names: Stonald Field, Bassenhally and Lattersey Field. Bassenhally is the name of the continuation of Stonald Road, east towards the town.

The population of Whittlesey has grown from around 1500 in 1563 to almost 14000 in 1991. Brickmaking began in the late nineteenth century and has continued ever since, permanently altering the skyline of the town with its tall chimneys.

#### **4 METHODOLOGY**

The aim of the evaluation was to establish the presence or absence of archaeological remains within the area affected by the development.

Four trenches totalling 60m in length and 1.60m wide were excavated using a mini-digger with a flat bladed bucket. The position of the trenches was determined by a pond, hedges and garden features (Fig. 1). After machining the trenches were cleaned, photographed and recorded using the AFU standard contextual recording system. The spoil heap was scanned visually for artefacts.

#### **5 RESULTS**

There was a variation in the overburden across the development area. In Trench 1 the topsoil was composed of a dark greyish brown sandy silt and was 0.36m thick. This sealed subsoil, 0.84m deep. The subsoil consisted a dark grey silty clay which contained a large amount of modern rubble. In Trenches 2, 3 and 4 the overburden consisted of modern hardcore bricks and was 0.35m deep.

##### **Trench 1**

Trench 1 was a T-shaped trench in the northern part of the development area. On the north-south axis it was 15m long and 1.20m deep and on the east-west axis it was 8m long and 1.1m deep. No archaeological features were encountered in this trench.

##### **Trench 2**

Trench 2 was 5m long and 1.13 m deep and was on an east-west alignment. No archaeological features were encountered in this trench.

### **Trench 3**

Trench 3 was 10.40m long and 1.10m deep and was on an east-west alignment. Pit 2 in the western part of the trench was 0.80m wide and 0.10m deep. It contained one fill, which was a dark grey silty clay and produced modern brick. Ditch 5 ran on a north-south alignment and was 0.40m wide and 0.15m deep. It contained one fill that was dark grey silty clay and produced modern brick. Pit 7 was located in the centre of the trench and was 0.75m wide and 0.08m deep. It contained one fill which was a greyish brown silty clay and produced modern artefacts. Ditch 9 ran on a north-south alignment and was 0.30m wide and 0.15m deep. It contained one fill which was a dark grey silty clay and produced modern brick.

### **Trench 4**

Trench 4 was 11.40m long and 0.82m deep on an east-west alignment. No archaeological features were encountered in this trench.

## **6 DISCUSSION**

Deposits encountered in the evaluation represent twentieth century domestic debris from the surrounding properties. The lack of archaeological deposits suggests the area has been agricultural or garden during most of its history. The depth of the overburden from Trench 1 would suggest that there has been a considerable build up of garden soil and rubbish.

## **7 CONCLUSION**

In spite of the proximity of the trenches to the Fen Causeway no Roman remains were found. The absence of archaeological evidence is probably due to the position of the development site away from the fen edge and the core of the medieval settlement.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The author would like to thank Robert Powell who commissioned the work on behalf of Messrs T. P. Snitch Brickworks Ltd. The illustration was prepared by Sue Holden. The brief for archaeological works was written by Andy Thomas, County Archaeology Office, and the site was monitored by Jeremy Parsons (CAO).



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