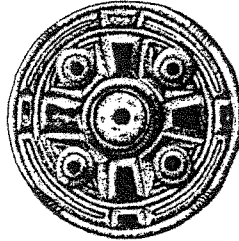


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Archaeological Field Unit

**Fen Edge deposits at Wisbech Road, Thorney:
An Archaeological Evaluation**

G.D. Bailey

September 2002

Cambridgeshire County Council

Report No. B108

Commissioned by Floorspan Contracts

Fen Edge Deposits at Wisbech Road, Thorney: An Archaeological Evaluation

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SUMMARY

On the 10th and 11th of September 2002, the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council conducted an archaeological evaluation on land at 18-28 Wisbech Road, Thorney, Cambridgeshire (TF 2828 0443). Mr. N. Dighton of Floorspan Contracts commissioned the work.

One trench with three spurs, total length of 68.5m was opened. No Archaeological features were found. A few fragments of unidentified medieval pottery was recovered amongst mixed unstratified deposits.

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**Fen Edge Deposits at Wisbech Road, Thorney:
An Archaeological Evaluation. (TF 2828 0443)**

1 INTRODUCTION

On the 10th and 11th of September 2002, the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council conducted an archaeological evaluation on land at 18-28 Wisbech Road, Thorney, Cambridgeshire (TF 2828 0443). Mr. N. Dighton of Floorspan Contracts commissioned the work in advance of construction of three houses. The work was carried out in accordance with a brief for an archaeological evaluation issued by Ben Robinson of the Peterborough City Council Archaeological Service (Planning Application No. MAR 106/02)

Thorney is located 8km WNW of Peterborough. The site is currently an area of scrub and demolished buildings.

2 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

The site lies immediately to the north of an outcrop of Oxford Clay on the Flandrian Barrowway Drove Beds

The topography of the site shows a significant drop from the south (4.09mOD) to the north (2.32mOD) over 60m.

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The village lies on the raised gravel peninsula or fen island of Thorney. Finds of Prehistoric and Roman archaeology have been reported in and around the village and a small Roman settlement is known to be located on the fen edge towards the south of the village, taking advantage of the raised land. These finds and the location of the site (higher dry land) make this a likely area for human occupation.

Prehistoric remains have been recovered on the Thorney peninsula during the Fenland Survey (Hall 1987) including Neolithic lithic scatters and cropmarks identifying ring-ditches (perhaps Bronze Age barrows). Later Iron Age and Roman settlements were also identified during this survey, again from cropmarks, to the west of the modern village (Hall 1987).

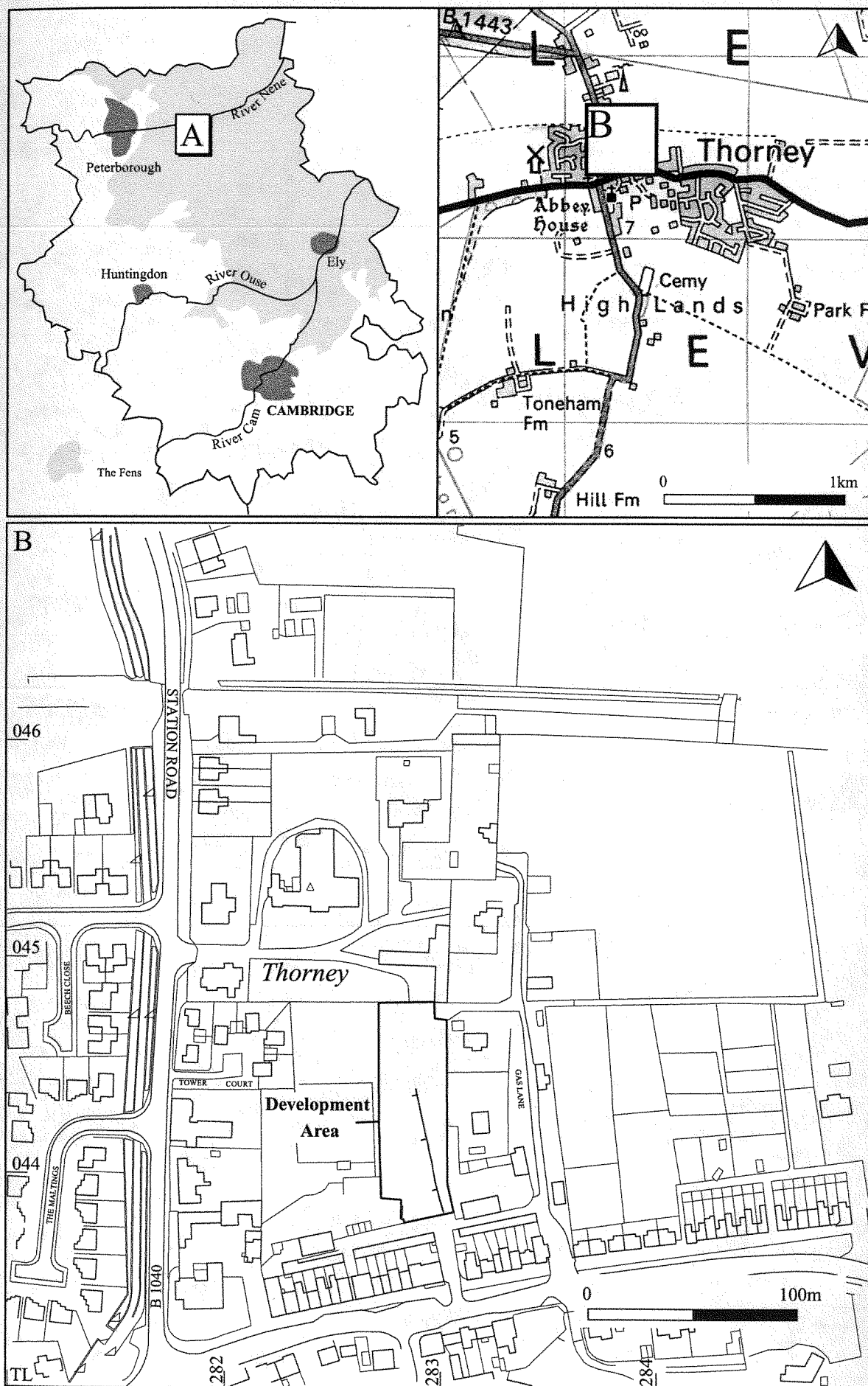


Figure 1 Location map

The island of Thorney was the location of a Saxon hermitage that was recorded in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle from the middle of the 7th century AD. Tradition has it that site became deserted from this time. A later Benedictine monastery was founded in the 10th century (Aethelwold, Bishop of Winchester) and this grew in importance to rank alongside the 'Fen Five of Ramsey, Ely, Peterborough and Croylands. The site, along with the other fenland monasteries abandoned after the dissolution in 1539.

Recent investigations by Leicester University Archaeological Services in 2000 and 2001, around the Church Street (Thomas 2001), have revealed late Saxon and medieval remains. The proximity of this site to the proposed development site (c60m to the south) is of interest. The investigation revealed well preserved and stratified deposits, located on the gravely clay peninsula, close to the fen edge, however on the higher and dry land. Although predominately ditches and pits, a number of robbed walls (and postholes) and the general artefact assemblage suggested that these remains may be linked to the abbey precinct (outer?).

The name 'Thorney' is derived from 'thorn-bush' infested and perhaps the result of this abandonment.

4 METHODOLOGY

One Trench with three spurs, total length of 68.5m was machine-cut using a mechanical excavator with a 0.6m toothed bucket, under the supervision of an archaeologist. The west-facing trench section was cleaned with a shovel and trowel. The Trench section was drawn and photographed after cleaning.

The positioning of the trench was restricted to the area designated as a service trench.

5 RESULTS

No Archaeological features were encountered in this trench.

The section revealed some stratification of the Oxford Clay, with several successive layers of very fine sand and clay observable. The upper portion of the clay also showed a distinct colour change to blue-grey (2) over base brown (1). Overlying this was a blackish peaty layer (3) that was silty in the north transforming to a woody peat towards the south. Some contrast could be made of a browner more silty peat (4) observed between 14m-23m from the S end of the trench. This deposit may represent remnants of a buried soil (unlikely), which has otherwise been disturbed by modern building work. Above this the stratigraphy was heavily disturbed (5-14), especially in the southernmost 14m of the trench. This increased disturbance can be linked to the higher elevation of this part of the site. Several layers were discernable: rubble,

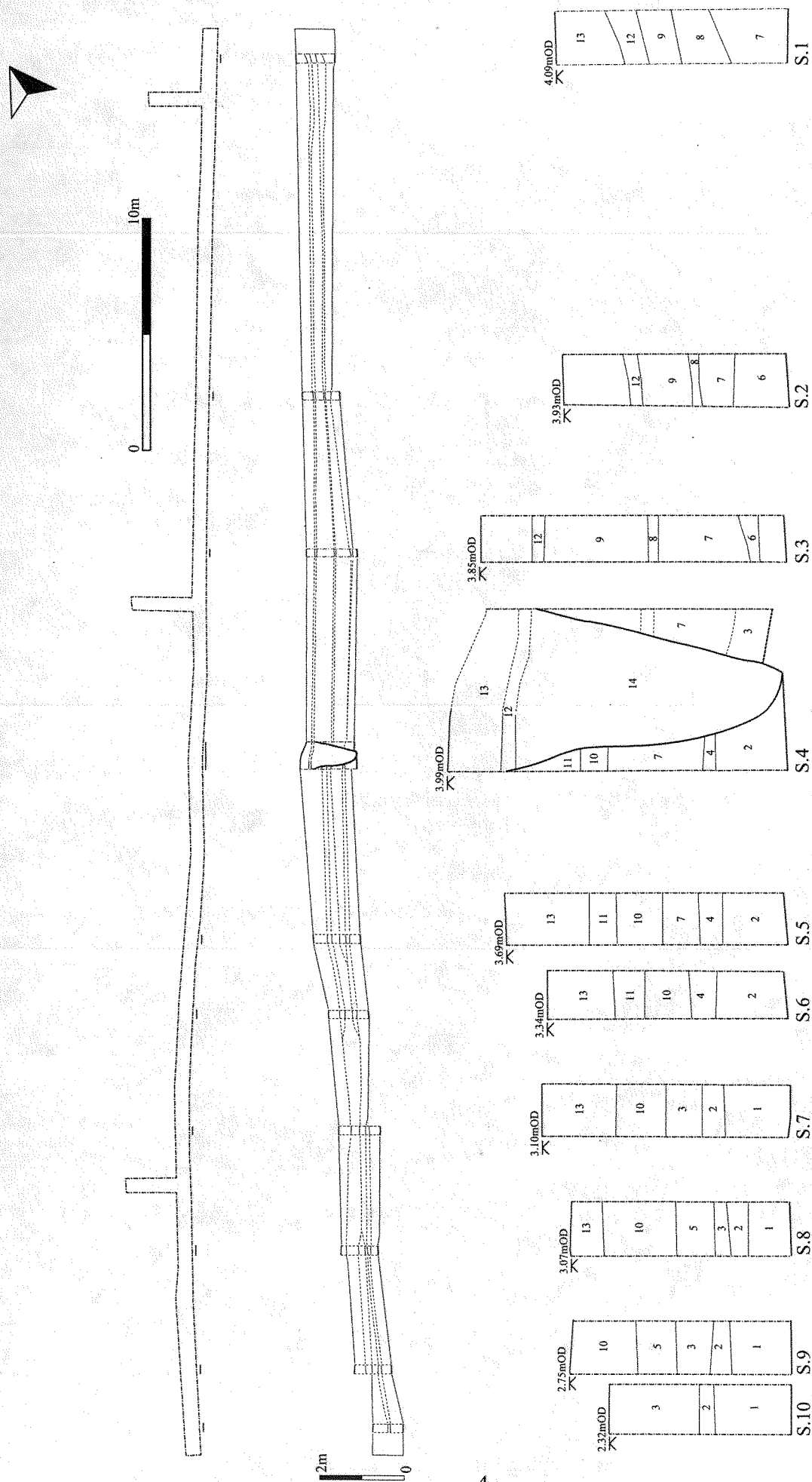


Figure 2 (Top) Trench Plan, (middle) Trench section with exaggerated vertical scale and (bottom) recorded segments of trench section.

redeposited clay, ash, gravel and silty clay. Most of these layers contained modern china (usually willow pattern). One (7) had a clay pipe fragment close to the upper horizon. The only recognizable cut feature (14), a large pit, contained a mixture of soil, clay and rubble. Within this deposit the artefacts recovered were of modern china, modern glass and a few fragments of (unidentified) medieval pottery.

6 DISCUSSION

Deposits encountered within this evaluation represent naturally accumulated clay and peat as well as debris related to the presence of destroyed modern buildings. The lack of archaeological deposits, coupled with the building materials suggests the area under evaluation has been subject to considerable disturbance and perhaps was waterlogged or prone to inundation. Given these marginal conditions the area would also have most probably been marginal in the medieval period and not the focus of intensive occupation. Information supplied personally by local people indicates the site was used as a pig farm c.1950's and before that was a swampy area.

7 CONCLUSION

The aim of the watching brief was to identify any archaeological remains related to the occupation and use of the fen islands. Although remain of several periods have been identified on and around the village none of archaeological interest were found in this watching brief. To the south of the site (c 60m) Late Saxon and medieval remains were discovered in 2002 (Thomas 2002) during archaeological evaluation work. These remains were located on the gravel peninsula. The investigation at Wisbech Road has indicated that the fen edge lies less than 50m from Church Street. Indeed the investigation on Church Street suggested that towards the north of the site there was increased refuse dumping (Thomas 2002, 12-13), perhaps supporting the proximity of the fen edge (and marginal land).

The results of recording the site indicate that any archaeological remains present have probably been destroyed as a result of 20th Century construction. The nature of the site suggests however that the site was considered marginal land from at least the medieval period onwards.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank Mr. Nick Dighton who commissioned and funded the archaeological work. The project was managed by Stephen Macaulay. Thanks also to the (illustrator).

The brief for archaeological works was written by Ben Robinson of the Peterborough City Council Archaeological Service, who visited the site and monitored the evaluation.

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