

Archaeological Field Unit

Cambridge Riverside Flood Alleviation Scheme: An Archaeological Watching Brief

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October 2002

Cambridgeshire County Council

Report No. B110

Commissioned by Environment Agency

**Cambridge Riverside Flood Alleviation Scheme:
An Archaeological Watching Brief
(TL 463 591)**

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2002

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SUMMARY

Between July and September 2002 the Environment Agency excavated trenches along the front of numbers 24 to 11 Riverside, Cambridge. The work was carried out as part of the a flood alleviation scheme along the southern bank of the river Cam. Monitoring of the trenches by staff of the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council revealed made ground to a depth of 1m below the present ground level. The made ground comprises sandy silts containing nineteenth and twentieth century rubbish.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY	1
3. ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND	1
4. METHODOLOGY	3
5. RESULTS	4
6. CONCLUSIONS	4
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	4
BIBLIOGRAPHY	4

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 Site location	2
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1 INTRODUCTION

Between July and September 2002 the Environment Agency excavated trenches along the front of numbers 24 to 11 Riverside, Cambridge. The work was carried out as part of the flood alleviation scheme along the southern bank of the river Cam. Monitoring of the trenches by staff of the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council revealed made ground to a depth of 1m below the present ground level. The made ground comprises sandy silts containing nineteenth and twentieth century rubbish.

2 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

Trenches were excavated along the northern property boundaries of 24-11 Riverside. The underlying geology is alluvium overlying First Terrace Gravels, close to the boundary with Gault clay (BGS 1978). The modern ground surface rises relatively steeply (for Cambridgeshire) from 4.9m along Riverside to over 12m on Newmarket Road.

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

No archaeological remains have been reported from the immediate vicinity but stray finds from the area are reported on the Cambridgeshire Sites and Monuments Record. The Newmarket Road quarries near the river produced flint hand axes, bones of elephant, rhinoceros and hippopotamus. Mesolithic remains are recorded from Ditton Meadows (to the east of Barnwell). Bronze Age hoards were found in Chesterton north of and close to the river and Bronze Age/Beaker pottery was retrieved from what was thought to be a barrow under Elizabeth Way.

Iron Age settlement remains have been found on the gravels close to the river and it is clear that the main roads into Cambridge were already in use as routes at this time. Iron Age remains are recorded from Stourbridge Common, Chesterton Road and Newmarket Road.

Saxon settlement is known from both Barnwell and Chesterton, on opposite sides of the river, and there may have been crossings between the two although their precise nature and location is not known.

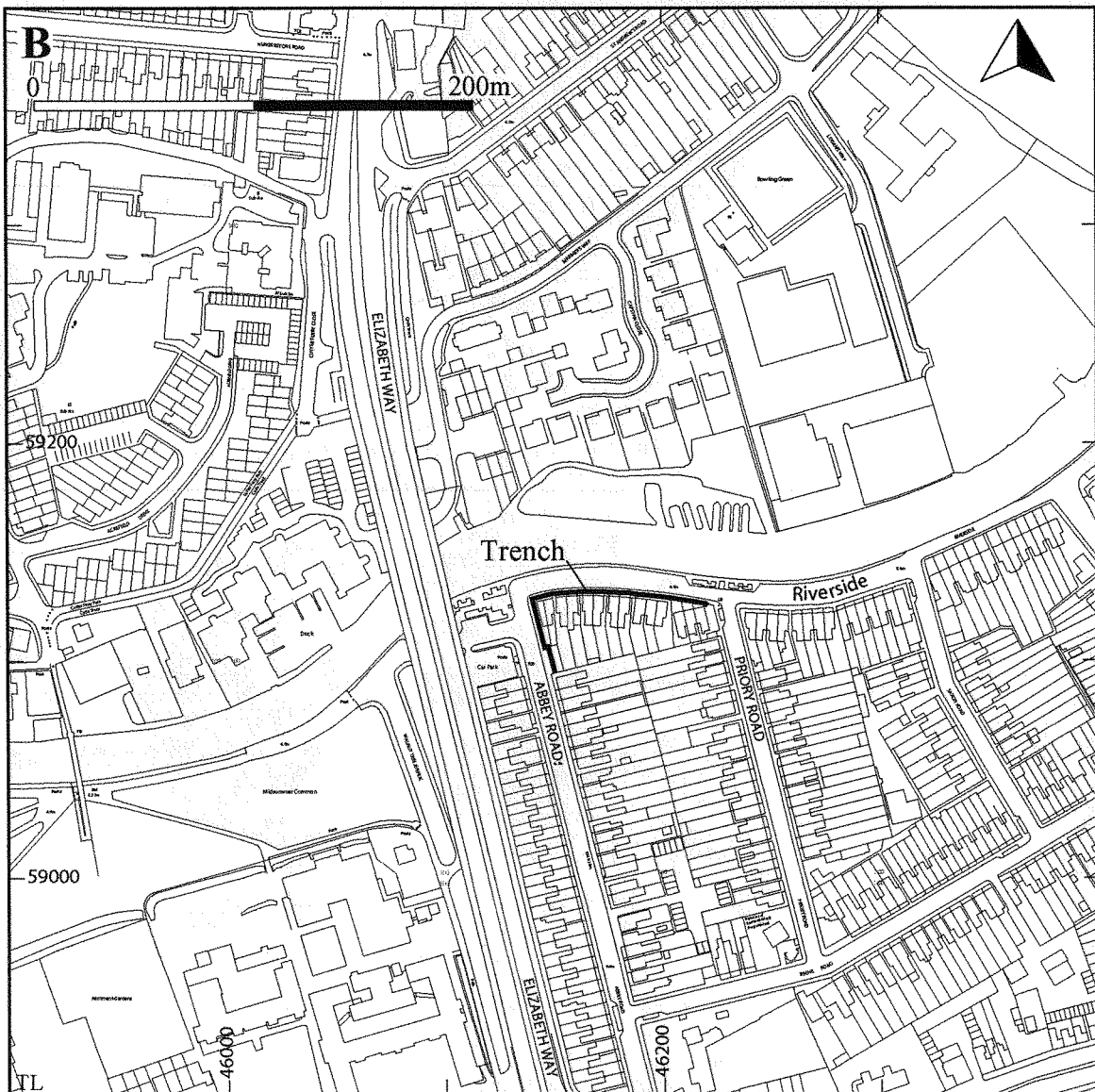
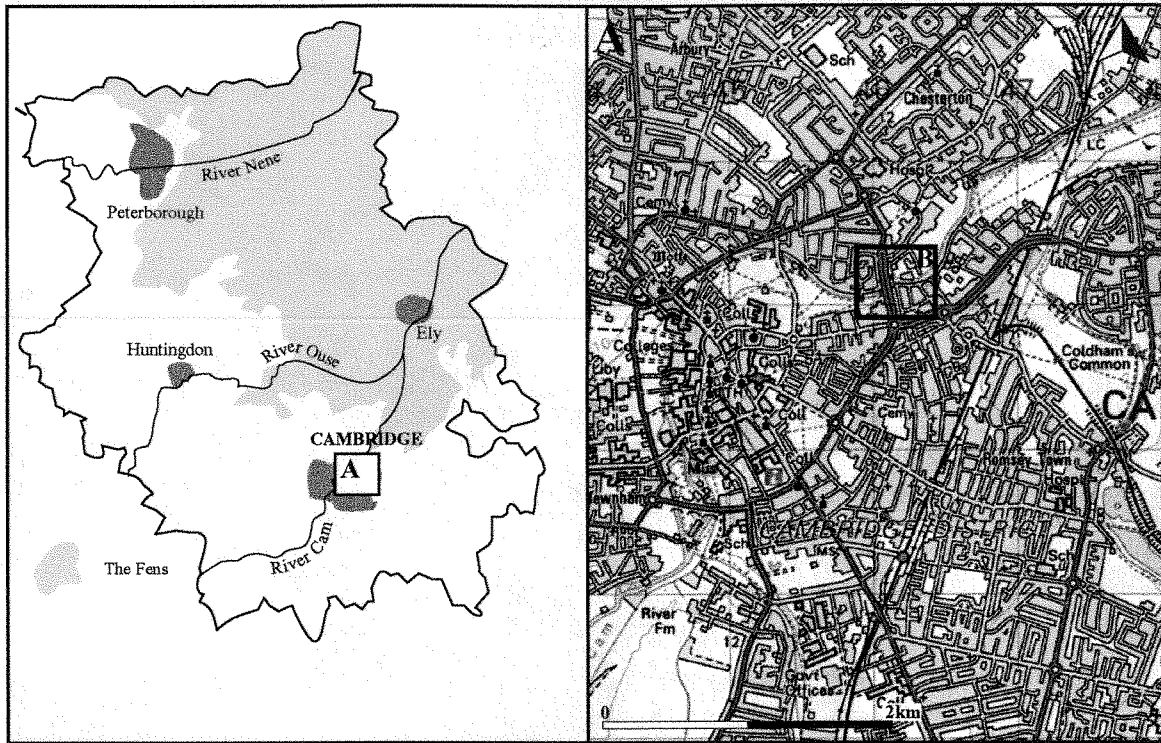


Figure 1 Site Location Plan

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Barnwell Priory was the first and largest of the religious houses in Cambridge (Haigh 1988). It was an Augustinian House of Regular Canons with six priests supporting local churches and working in the community. The initial foundation was by sheriff Picot in 1092 and was situated near the castle (RCHME 1988). This site was deserted and the priory refounded on common land within the royal manor of Chesterton, close to a holy well (pre-Christian/Saxon) and a hermitage. The priory was supported by parish tithes.

The priory was built on a lavish scale and the new church was dedicated in 1170 and in the thirteenth century a refectory, guest hall, infirmary, granary, stables, bakehouse, gatehouse and two chapels were added to the complex (VCH 1967). The common land which the priory occupied included a droveway to the river which was controlled by the priory.

The land by the river was agriculturally rich with access along the road and river. Barnwell occupied common land that was much in demand as local grazing for the town. Barnwell asserted private property rights over the land and restricted movement of people and animals between Sturbridge (Stourbridge) and Grenecroft (Midsummer) commons. There were also disputes over the control of the ferries that crossed the river and the right to cross the land was asserted by the townspeople in 1275 and 1381. During the Peasants Revolt in 1381 walls were broken down, trees felled and stores stolen.

The priory was dissolved in 1538 and the buildings became a quarry for building stone. Some of the ruins stood into the nineteenth century but were dug away soon after. The most substantial remains now are the 'Cellarers Chequer' in Abbey Road. This is a single vaulted chamber built between 1213 and 1265 and probably used as a kitchen. Abbey House (on Newmarket Road/Abbey Road) contains fragments of the priory in its walls and garden. The Abbey Church (also along Newmarket Road) was built away from the monk's area of worship and was used by parishioners.

The population of Barnwell grew rapidly in the nineteenth century from 250 to 28,000. Overcrowding led to reclamation and stabilisation of the river bank allowing occupation of the south side of the river.

4 METHODOLOGY

Trenches were excavated in sections using a mini-digger and were hand cleaned as necessary. Numerous services crossing from the road to individual properties meant that certain sections were hand excavated. Trenches were approximately 0.8m deep and 0.5m wide. The trenches were recorded and sketch sections drawn at intervals. Spoil was scanned for artefacts.

5 RESULTS

All trench sections showed mixed sandy silts with considerable gravel inclusions. Post-medieval glass, brick and pottery was found throughout these deposits and it would appear that they are derived from material dredged from the river when the bank was stabilised. Overlying this material was a mixed topsoil, heavily disturbed by modern service trenches. The base of the trench filled with water and was not visible at the time of monitoring but a single square wooden post was noted in the base of the trench. This coincided with the property boundary and may be a former fence post. The post had been truncated by a service trench.

6 CONCLUSION

None of the trenches extended below modern made ground and many of them were disturbed by nineteenth and twentieth century services. It is known that the river bank along this section of the Cam has been built up and stabilised in the past century. It is clear that below the made ground material is waterlogged, but the present trenches did not disturb any earlier remains.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank the Environment Agency who commissioned and funded the archaeological investigation. The illustrations were produced by Crane Begg. The report was edited by Aileen Connor.

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