

Excavations at 68-70 Castle Street, Cambridge

Steve Hickling

August 2004



**Archaeological Field Unit
Cambridgeshire County Council**

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Editor: Aileen Connor
Illustrator: Sam Whitehead

With a contribution by
Stephen Macaulay



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©Archaeological Field Unit
Cambridgeshire County Council
Fulbourn Community Centre
Haggis Gap, Fulbourn
Cambridgeshire CB1 5HD
Tel (01223) 576201
Fax (01223) 880946
arch.field.unit@cambridgeshire.gov.uk
<http://edweb.camcnty.gov.uk/afu>

SUMMARY

In August 2003, archaeological material was spotted in the spoil during renovation works at 68-70 Castle Street, Cambridge. The Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Field Unit was called in to do rescue excavation and recording of the archaeological deposits beneath the floors of the cellars. Two Roman features were observed, a ditch, roughly on the same alignment as the modern street falling out of use in the mid 2nd century and a pit which was cutting it dated to the later 3rd century. The ditch is possibly a roadside ditch of the Roman road to Godmanchester, while the pit may represent the encroachment of the Roman roadside settlement already known in this area from previous excavation.

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Excavations at 68-70 Castle Street, Cambridge
Grid Ref. 544434,259308

1 INTRODUCTION

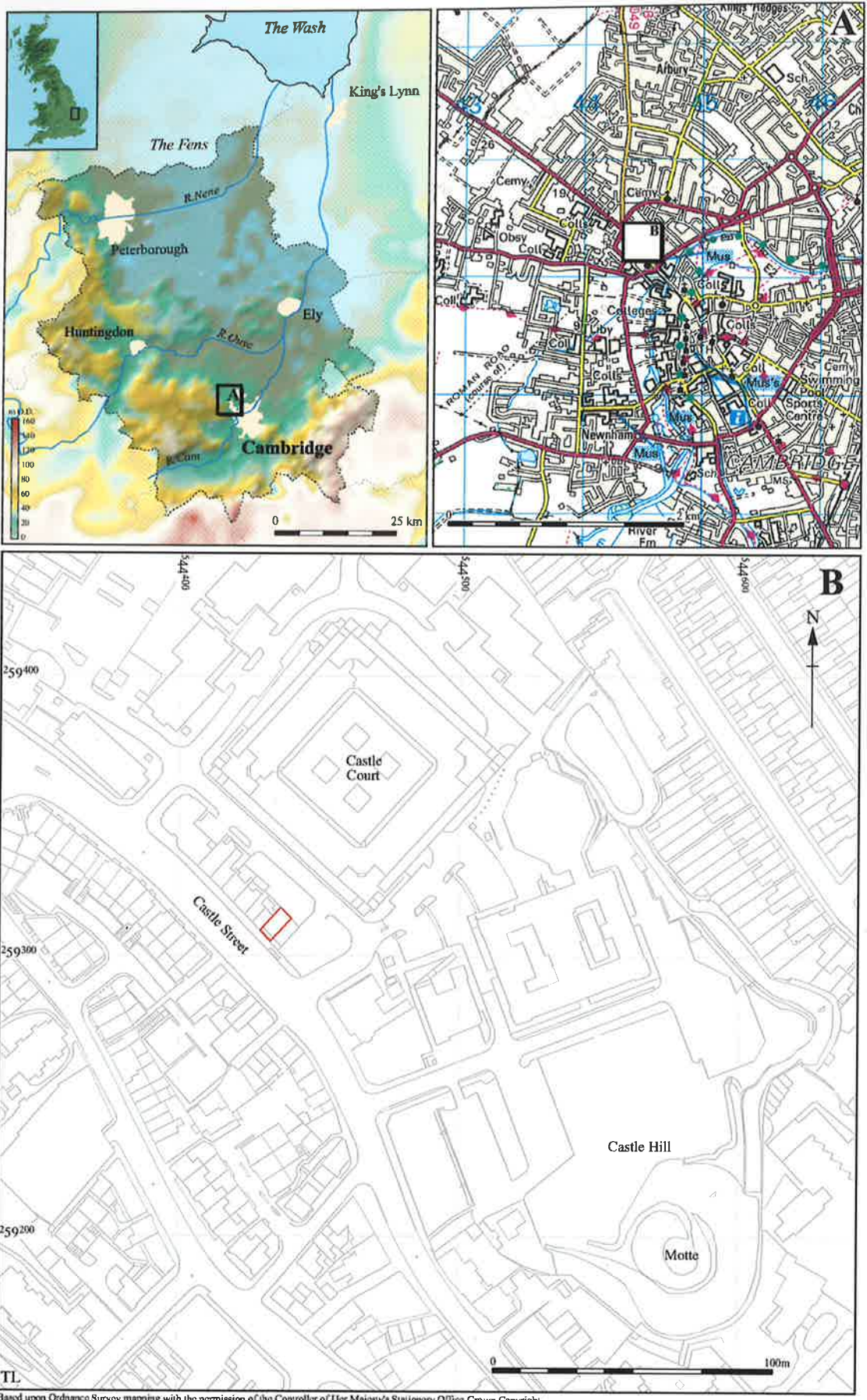
On the 14th and 15th of August, the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council carried out a programme of recording and excavation at Castle Street, Cambridge, during the renovation of 68-70 Castle Street. The work was carried out on a rescue basis, following the observation of archaeological material being disturbed by members of the County Archaeology Office.

2 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

The present development is situated on Castle Hill, a strategic point with wide views over the surrounding countryside and over the important river crossing at the base of the hill. The natural geology encountered was solid chalk. Elsewhere in this area a layer of sands and gravels covers this chalk. The site lies at a height of c.20m above sea level. The excavations took place beneath the floor of the cellars, c.2m below modern ground level.

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Excavations in the area have revealed Iron Age and Roman occupation of the hill. The line of Castle Street roughly follows the Roman road from Cambridge to Godmanchester. Records show that 27 houses were destroyed during the construction of the 1.6ha motte and bailey castle in the late 11th century. The motte was a huge mound of earth at the south of the site (still in existence), while the bailey was a large enclosure surrounded by a bank and ditch under the present County Hall. The castle was rebuilt in stone in the 13th century and the ditches re-dug. The earthworks were brought into military service and heavily modified in the mid 17th century, during the Civil War. 15 houses were cleared away and 4 angular bastions added, 2 of which still survive. During the 19th century, the moat was infilled and a jail constructed. In 1842 the last remaining masonry, the gatehouse, was pulled down and a courthouse built on the site. The remains of the Norman castle and the Civil War earthworks are now Scheduled Ancient Monuments (SAM Nos. 14 and 48).



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Figure 1 Location of archaeological investigation outlined (red)

The present development site lies to the northwest of the castle, with the area of Romano-British settlement activity. Roman deposits have been found at 77-85 Castle Street (Roberts, 1996) and in the grounds of Kettles Yard (Evans, 1994, referenced in Roberts, 1996).

Excavations to the southwest of the castle mound in 1989 exposed ditches at least 4m deep (Malim and Taylor, 1992), but with no firm dating evidence, suggesting that they were cleaned out in the 17th century. During construction of the Granta Housing block on Magrath Avenue, it was discovered that the 17th century ditch was 5m deep (Malim and Taylor, 1992). Other ditches, undated, have been observed behind 10-20 Castle Hill, behind 73 Castle Street and under a housing development to the west of Castle Street (Roberts, 1996).

4 **METHODOLOGY**

Observation and excavation took place during the lowering of the floors in the cellars of nos. 68 and 70 Castle Street.

5 **RESULTS**

One ditch and one pit were discovered. The ditch (feature 6) was on a similar alignment to the modern route of Castle Street, and present in the cellars of both No.70 and No.68. One pit (feature 13) was found cutting the ditch in the cellar of No. 68.

Ditch 6 was the earliest feature observed, being filled (in chronological order) by fills 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1. The basal fill, 5, was a pale grey, clayey-chalky silt with frequent chalk fragments and rare stones. Fill 4 was a pale brown chalky silt with frequent chalk fragments and rare charcoal. Fill 3 was a brownish grey silt with occasional stones and chalk fragments and rare charcoal. Fill 2 was a dark grey ashy silt with rare chalk fragments and stones and moderate charcoal flecks. Fill 1, the upper most deposit, was a pale yellowish brown silt with moderate chalk fragments, rare stones and occasional charcoal. The ditch was steep sided and had a V shaped profile, 2.3m wide and 1.2m deep. The ditch was dated by pottery to the early-mid 2nd century.

Pit 13 was cut into the top of ditch 6 (fill 1). It was 1.45m long and 0.5m deep, with near vertical sides and a flat base. It was filled by deposits (in chronological order) 12, 11, 10, 9, 8 and 7. The basal deposit, fill 12, was a pale grey chalky silt with moderate chalk fragments and occasional stones. Fill 11 was a yellowish brown silty sand with frequent gravel. Fill 10 was a mid grey brown chalky silt, with ashy lenses, rare stones and occasional charcoal

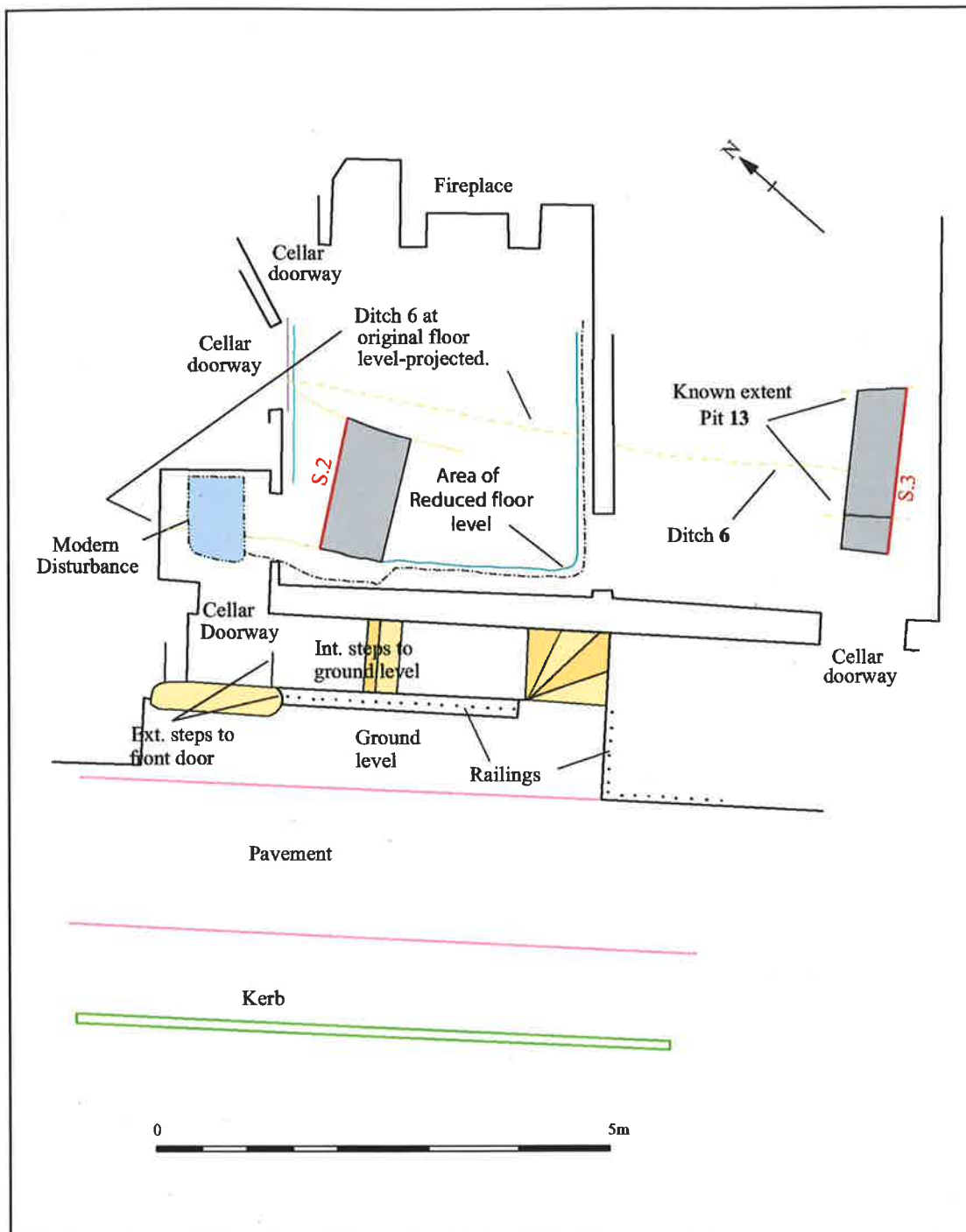


Figure 2 Site plan

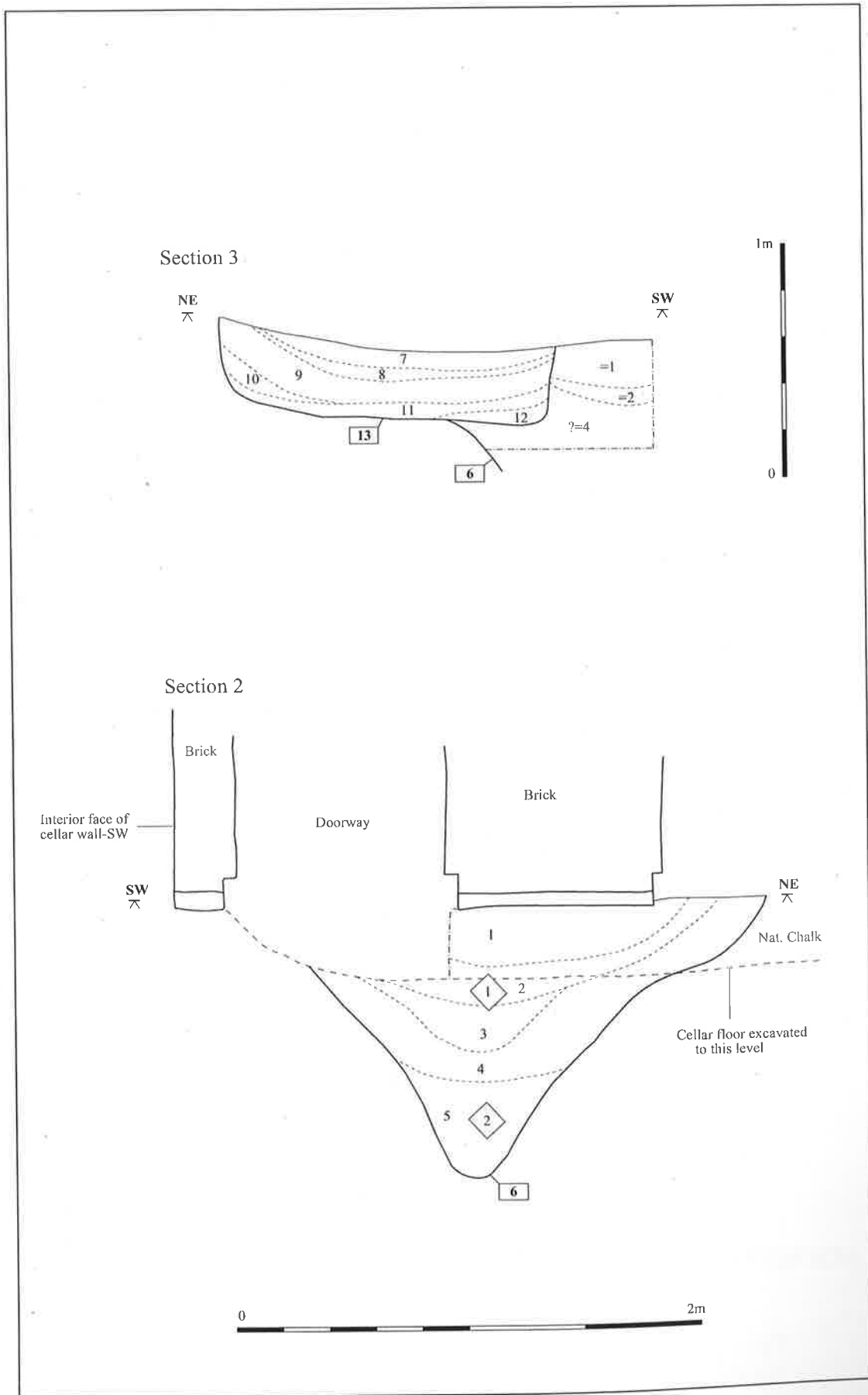


Figure 3 Section drawings

flecks. Fill 9 was a mixed deposit, composed of tips of pale to dark grey silty chalks and ashy silts with occasional charcoal flecks. Fill 8 was a black silty ash with occasional stones and chalk, but moderate charcoal flecks. Fill 7 was a pale grey ashy silt with occasional chalk fragments and rare gravel and charcoal. this fill was dated by pottery to the later 3rd century.

6 DISCUSSION

This site was dug and recorded under extreme rescue conditions. Despite this the record is of a very high quality. The archaeology discovered is potentially important as the ditch (feature 6) may be the roadside ditch of the Roman road to Godmanchester. The presence of so much cultural material in its fills suggests occupation in the area. Pit 13 may represent this occupation spilling over the edges of the road in the later 3rd century, suggesting roadside settlement. The survival of these features may be due to their depth. The floor of the cellar was c.2m below present ground level. Few, if any post medieval features would have penetrated that deep. Also its location, situated just outside the grounds of the castle may have had an impact. In the medieval and post medieval period, an open space outside the defences would have been maintained in order to deprive any attackers of cover and to give the defenders a clear field of fire. In periods of peace this ground would undoubtedly be encroached upon, in fact we have seen that when the defences were upgraded in the 1640s, 15 houses had to be removed. The present development site was located very close to the possible line of the castle ditch (which was also probably full of very smelly refuse) and possibly one of the last areas to be encroached upon.

7 CONCLUSIONS

The features uncovered are all thought to be late Roman and probably represent the roadside ditch for the road to Godmanchester, any possible late Roman encroachment upon that road by settlement. This reinforces the picture we already have of Roman settlement in this area.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Baker ably carried out the fieldwork and the illustrations were completed by Sam Whitehead

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APPENDIX 1. POTTERY ASSEMBLAGE SUMMARY (Stephen Macaulay)

- Location-** At building site on Castle Street, Cambridge. This site is located in the core of the Roman Town, in an known area of rich, stratified archaeology from the Iron Age and Roman periods. The artefacts were recovered from a ditch and pit revealed during the excavation of cellars in 2003. The finds were recovered during rapid excavation of these features during the development.
- Material:-** Pottery (no tile)
- Condition:-** The pottery is fresh, in a good condition and not abraded. The contexts these were recovered from were sealed..
- Description:-** All the pottery dominated by fine coarse ware greywares, with some Black burnished copies (BB2) and oxidised sandy wares. Fine wares were few but there were three Samian sherds present and a single (large) sherd of Oxford ware Mortaria.
- Forms-** The assemblage is comprised of jars and bowls, with several sherds from large storage vessels (Horningsea jars). There were fragments of dishes and drinking vessels (flagons) The assemblage has a number of rim sherds, decorated body sherds and identifiable Samian forms (Dr 18/31 & Dr 30, CGS lezoux), including a decorated body sherd. The darker BB2 sherds are from smaller jars (in general).
- Source:-** The assemblage is derived from a domestic source, most probably a kitchen with jars, bowls and large storage vessels, in addition a few table wares were present. The pottery is predominately 'Horningsea', although recent research into the industry, with excavations at Milton and Waterbeach (Evans & Macaulay forthcoming) has revealed that the pottery kilns are not solely located in Horningsea (Eye Hall Farm) itself but with as many kilns on both banks of the River Cam stretching in a linear settlement of proto-industrial activity north from Cambridge from Milton to Waterbeach and across to Clayhithe and Horningsea.
- Spot date:-** The rapid assessment of this material indicates a most probable early-mid 2nd century date for the majority of the wares derived from the ditch, the presence of Oxford ware mortaria in the upper pit, would perhaps indicate a later 3rd Century date for this feature. The absence of (identifiable) Nene Valley wares, particularly Colour Coat, may suggest an earlier date for these assemblages, i.e. not mid-3rd-4th century when this industry becomes dominate in Cambridgeshire.



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The Archaeological Field Unit
Fulbourn Community Centre
Haggis Gap
Fulbourn
Cambridge CB1 5HD
Tel (01223) 576201
Fax (01223) 880946