



CCC AFU Report Number 860

Late Medieval/Early Post-Medieval Remains at The Grand, Great Whyte, Ramsey

Archaeological Evaluation

Steve Hickling

February 2006

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Medieval Remains at The
Grand, Great Whyte, Ramsey**

Archaeological Evaluation

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Summary

Between the 30th of January and the 1st of February 2006, the Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Field Unit conducted an archaeological evaluation on the site of The Grand cinema at the Great Whyte, Ramsey, in advance of the site's redevelopment for housing and a library.

Evidence of late medieval or early post-medieval occupation was found fronting onto the Great Whyte (Trench 1) in the form of masonry. Post-medieval dumping of material in Trench 2 was probably connected with land reclamation, while in Trench 3 evidence suggests that that area (Newtown Green) remained wet until the modern period.

It is likely that any archaeological evidence relating to medieval occupation will be confined to the western portion of the site, fronting onto the Great Whyte.

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Drawing Conventions

Sections	Plans
Limit of Excavation -----	Limit of Excavation _____
Cut _____	Deposit - Conjectured -----
Cut-Conjectured -----	Natural Features Intrusion/Truncation -----
Soil Horizon	Sondages/Machine Strip -----
Soil Horizon - Conjectured	Illustrated Section S.14
Intrusion/Truncation -----	Archaeological Deposit
Top of Natural _____	Cut Number 118
Top Surface _____	
Break in Section -----	
Cut Number 118	
Deposit Number 117	
Ordnence Datum 18.45m ODN $\overline{\wedge}$	
Stone 	
Brick 	
Wall 	

1 Introduction

This archaeological evaluation was undertaken in accordance with a Brief issued by Kasia Gdaniec of the Cambridgeshire Archaeology, Planning and Countryside Advice team (CAPCA; Planning Application), supplemented by a Specification prepared by Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Field Unit (CCC AFU).

The work was designed to assist in defining the character and extent of any archaeological remains within the proposed redevelopment area, in accordance with the guidelines set out in *Planning and Policy Guidance 16 - Archaeology and Planning* (Department of the Environment 1990). The results will enable decisions to be made by CAPCA, on behalf of the Local Planning Authority, with regard to the treatment of any archaeological remains found.

The site archive is currently held by CCC AFU and will be deposited with the appropriate county stores in due course under the site code RAS RLI 05.

2 Geology and Topography

The site overlies the interface between Nordelph Peat to the north and mixed boulder clay till to the south (British Geological Survey 1995). Natural geology was not encountered in any of the trenches.

The site lay on flat land in the centre of the modern town, at a height of 4m OD.

3 Archaeological and Historical Background

3.1 Ramsey Abbey (Scheduled Ancient Monument 141)

The site is located on the edge of the historic town of Ramsey, which owes its existence to Ramsey Abbey. The Abbey was founded as a regular Benedictine monastery in AD 969 by Ailwyn (foster brother to King Edgar), and by 974 a wooden church was recorded and dedicated (Page *et al*, 1932). Substantial land grants led to the church becoming one of the richest not only in the fens, but in the whole country, and was to earn it the name of 'Ramsey the Golden'. The abbey continued to flourish throughout the 11th century, surviving both the Danish invasion and Norman Conquest. In the 12th century the monastic buildings and the church were rebuilt using stone from Barnack (near Peterborough). It was also in the 12th century that the monastery was seized by the Essex Baron Geoffrey de Mandeville, in the period known as the 'Anarchy' (1140-4). In 1998 an archaeological

excavation was undertaken on the early monastic buildings (Macaulay 1999). Investigation uncovered remains from the late 10th to 11th century and a 12th-century (probable Anarchy) fortification ditch. In addition evidence of metalworking was uncovered by the 1998 excavation.

3.2 The Medieval Town

The early history of Ramsey is obscure and the town is not mentioned in the Domesday Survey. The town was recorded in the mid-12th century and by the 13th century had been granted a weekly market and annual fair. Ramsey was a small market town serving the Abbey and north-east Huntingdonshire (Page *et al* 1932). Situated on the edge of the fens, the town was not on a main traffic route and as a result never rose above the position of a small market town.

The Fenland Survey noted that by the medieval period fen deposits were encroaching into the area of the town from the north and east (Hall 1992).

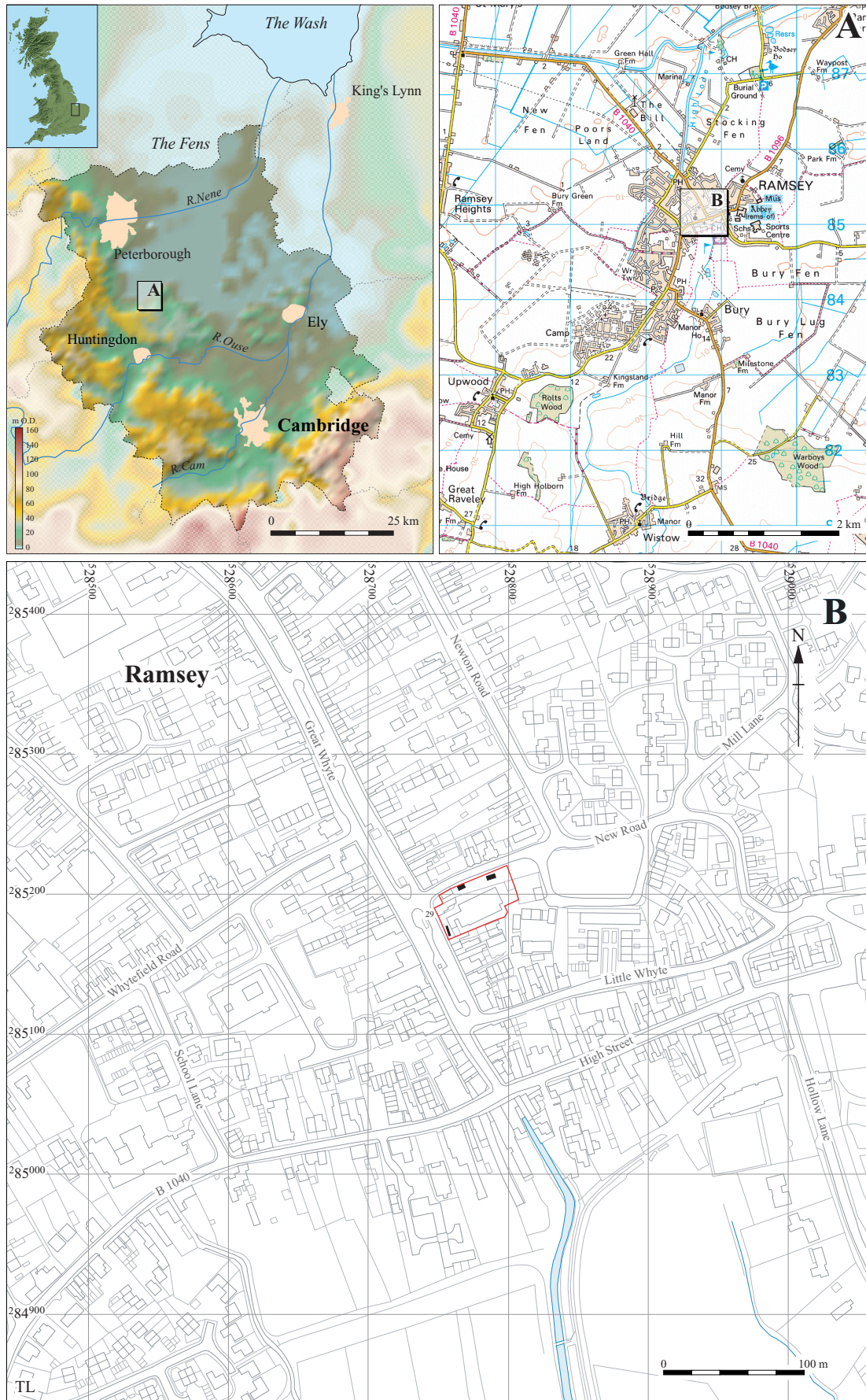
Jonas Moore's 1860's map of Ramsey is the first map showing the whole town. Within the subject site it depicts houses that front onto the Great Whyte and shows the Stokin Fen to the north.

A building at No.88 Great Whyte, demolished in 1980, is recorded as having been a 15th-century structure with deeply stratified earlier medieval deposits.

An archaeological evaluation undertaken on land at Ramsey Garden Centre, Great Whyte, revealed a sequence of medieval and post-medieval deposits containing sparse quantities of shell, metalwork, animal bone and late medieval tile. The layers probably represent attempts at land reclamation in the early and later post-medieval period. The only archaeological feature present was an early post-medieval ditch (Last 2002).

There have been further archaeological investigations at Nos. 50-52 High Street (Gdaniec pers. comm.) and south of the site at Nos. 46-48 High Street (Atkins 2004). These evaluations have shown that there is good survival of evidence for Saxo-Norman and medieval Ramsey. They also demonstrate attempts during the medieval period to reclaim wet, low-lying areas that may indicate a period of expansion and high land prices.

At Nos. 50-52 High Street Saxo-Norman and medieval occupation was uncovered including a stone structure. Organic remains within the layers (and presumably feature fills) encountered show there is a strong possibility that food waste/processing waste, industrial/craft debris may be recovered that could hint at activities undertaken in the



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Figure 1: Site location showing position of trenches (black) and development area (red)

vicinity (Kasia Gdaniec, pers. comm.). The evaluation of Nos. 46-48 High Street showed that horizontally stratified deposits dating to the 13th or

14th century overlaid natural waterlogged organic remains and an early post-medieval structure dating to the 15th or 16th centuries was built on these deposits. The author characterised the activity there as medieval reclamation on marginal land (Atkins 2004a).

3.3 The Great Whyte

The Great Whyte was known as *la wihte* in the 13th century. Its present width is due to the former presence of an artificial watercourse running within it discharging into the High Lode and then the Nene to the north. Dating back to at least the 13th century, it was culverted in the 19th century and still exists under the present road. The burgage units laid out at right angles to the Great Whyte represent secondary development of the settlement.

3.4 Recent Archaeological Work

3.4.1 No. 30 Great Whyte 2003

The evaluation revealed a medieval ditch aligned east to west which contained bone and pottery dated to 1350-1500 (Cooper 2003).

3.4.2 Nos. 96-98 Great Whyte 2005

The evaluation demonstrated the presence of medieval and post-medieval activity relating to land reclamation of the fen edge. In addition a small number of late medieval features were uncovered in Trench 1. Of particular interest was the presence of metal working on the site. A group of medieval fishing lead weights can be viewed within a wider context that stresses the importance of fishing in this part of the fens (Cooper 2005).

3.4.3 Nos. 46-48 High Street 2004

The work demonstrated that this site was on marginal land, which had been reclaimed during the medieval period. The medieval features and layers found in the trenches behind the High Street frontage were dated by pottery to the 13th or 14th centuries. These represent activity in the backyards of medieval structures along the road frontage (which were destroyed by subsequent post-medieval activity). The levelling layers contained domestic refuse including pottery and floor tile as well as evidence for lead working. Above the medieval levelling layers in Trench 1 was a layer which contained a large amount of roof tile and sherds of 15th- to 16th-century pottery. An early post-medieval structure was built on top of this layer (Atkins 2004a).

3.4.4 No. 42 High Street 2004

The work demonstrated that this site was on marginal land which had been reclaimed during the medieval period. The lack of medieval features, apart from a possible cobbled surface, showed that the site was little used in this period and was presumably gardens of houses backing on to the High Street (Atkins 2004b).

3.4.5 Ailwyn Community School 2004

The only definable feature in the evaluation was a large undated ditch uncovered in Trench 4. Due to lack of dating it was difficult to ascertain the exact function of the ditch but it may have been a boundary ditch or for drainage (Cooper 2004).

3.4.6 Newton Green 2000

A recent evaluation at Newton Green revealed medieval strata cut by a pit of medieval date (12th to 14th century) covered by over a metre of modern overburden. Layers directly overlying the peat contained 12th- to 14th-century pottery (Pearson and McDonald 2000).

3.4.7 Marriots Yard 1996

A Recording Brief found no archaeological remains (Membury and Hatton 1996, CHER11975).

3.4.8 Ramsey Abbey 1996

A series of ten small test pits within the grounds of the Ramsey Abbey School identified extensive Late Anglo-Saxon and medieval remains, including two walls (Macaulay 1996).

4 Methodology

The objective of this evaluation was to determine as far as reasonably possible the presence/absence, location, nature, extent, date, quality, condition and significance of any surviving archaeological deposits within the development area.

The Brief required that three trenches be opened, totalling 38m².

Machine excavation was carried out under constant archaeological supervision with a 3 tonne minidigger using a toothless ditching bucket.

Spoil, exposed surfaces and features were scanned with a metal detector. All metal-detected and hand-collected finds were retained for inspection, other than those which were obviously modern.

All archaeological features and deposits were recorded using CCC AFU's *pro-forma* sheets. Trench locations, plans and sections were recorded at appropriate scales and colour and monochrome photographs were taken of all relevant features and deposits.

Environmental samples were taken from layers 6 and 12.

Flooding was a problem in the lowest parts of Trenches 2 and 3. Trench 3 suffered from petroleum contamination.

5 Results

For further context details, see Appendix 1.

5.1 Trench 1

(See Figs. 2 and 3)

This trench was 7m long, 1.2m wide and 1.05m deep, aligned north to south. Layer 1 was the modern tarmac surface. Layers 2, 3 and 7 were modern levelling or demolition deposits containing a large amount of masonry rubble. Layer 7 was sealing an unmortared limestone wall (14), which ran north to south at the southern end of the trench. It seems likely that this may have been a dwarf wall of a building fronting onto the Great Whyte. The stratigraphy either side of the wall was quite different. To its west was Layer 17, rich in masonry rubble. To its east were layers 4, 5 and 6, clays and peaty clays, probably deposited by the watercourse of the Great Whyte. Layer 6 was sampled producing small amounts of pottery (Appendix 2), animal bone, fish scales and mussel shells (Appendix 3).

5.2 Trench 2

(See Figs. 2 and 3)

This trench was 5m long, 6m wide, aligned east to west and stepped down to a depth of 1.75m. Below the modern tarmac surface, a brick wall was encountered (18), aligned north to south, probably the outer wall of a Victorian building fronting onto New Road. The interior floor surface (10 and 11) was found to the east. To the west was a layer of demolition rubble (9). Beneath these deposits was a thick layer (1.2m) of rich garden type soil (deposits 12, 20 and 21), probably a result of



Figure 2: Trench plan

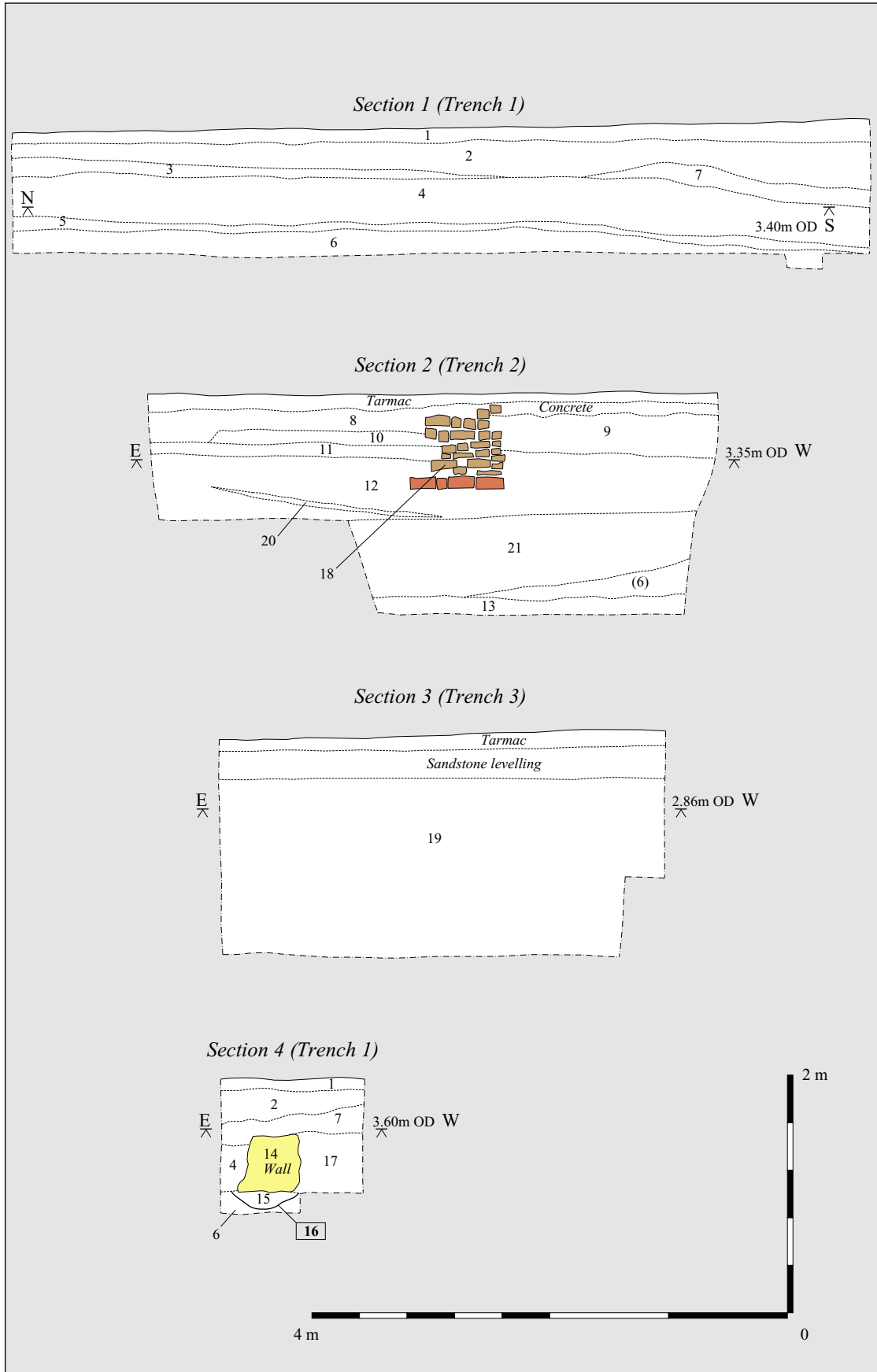


Figure 3: Section drawings

Pre-Victorian land consolidation. Beneath this was a layer of silty peat (similar to 6, Trench 1) resting on top of a very organic peat (13), which due to flooding was not sampled. An environmental sample taken from Deposit 12 produced a large amount of animal bone, marine molluscs and fish scales, but few cereal grains (Appendix 3).

5.3 Trench 3

(See Figs. 2 and 3)

This trench was 6.25m long, 3m wide and stepped down to a depth of 1.85m. Below the modern tarmac and its levelling layer was layer 19, a black, organic silt with rare brick and shell fragments and considerable petroleum contamination. No samples were taken due to the contamination.

6 Discussion

Although no conclusively dated medieval features were found in this evaluation, it may be inferred that medieval activity was taking place on this site. Wall 14 (Trench 1) was of a type common on medieval sites, a low, unmortared wall of undressed stone, acting as a dwarf wall supporting a timber box-frame constructed building. The wall would serve to keep the woodwork above the ground, so lessening rot and extending the life of the structure. Layer 6 (Trench 1) probably dates to the late medieval or early post-medieval period and another medieval pottery sherd was found in Trench 2, suggesting possible medieval occupation in this area.

The lowest, peaty deposits found in Trenches 1 and 2 differed considerably in character. That in Trench 1 was predominantly clay, while that in Trench 2 was more organic in nature and found at a much lower level. This may suggest that the Great Whyte was originally a natural channel running along a roddon, the clay in Trench 1 being within the infilled, and now comparatively elevated, channel. The dark organic material in Trench 3 suggests that this area may have been marsh until modern times. The 1891 Ordnance Survey shows this area as a recreation ground, suggesting that it may have been too boggy to build on.

The environmental samples taken from contexts 6 (Trench 1, dated to the 16th century) and 12 (Trench 2 dated to the late 17th century) suggest scatters of rubbish, possibly been dumped into unused boggy areas. They also suggest full exploitation of the wetland resources.

7 Conclusions

Evidence of late medieval or early post-medieval occupation was found fronting onto the Great Whyte (Trench 1) in the form of masonry and a

datable deposit (6). Post-medieval dumping of material in Trench 2 was probably connected with land reclamation, while in Trench 3 evidence suggests that that area (Newtown Green) remained wet until the modern period.

It is likely that any archaeological evidence relating to medieval occupation will be confined to the western portion of the site, fronting onto the Great Whyte.

Recommendations for any future work based upon this report will be made by the County Archaeology Office.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Plowman Brown Architects who commissioned and funded the archaeological work. The project was managed by James Drummond-Murray. Thanks must go to Spencer Cooper and Louise Bush for assisting with the fieldwork and to the Community Support Officers at Ramsey Police Station for helping to clear the car park in order that Trenches 2 and 3 could be excavated. Carole Fletcher commented on the finds, Carlos Silva completed the illustrations and this report was edited by Liz Popescu.

The brief for archaeological works was written by Kasia Gdaniec, who visited the site and monitored the evaluation.

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Appendix 1: Context Data

Context	Feature	Trench	Description	Date
1	Layer	1	Tarmac and make-up	Modern
2	Layer	1	Pale brown silty clay with frequent demolition rubble	Post-Med
3	Layer	1	Brownish grey silty clay	
4	Layer	1	Dark grey peaty clay with occasional tile fragments	
5	Layer	1	Orangey brown clay	
6	Layer	1	Dark greyish brown peaty clay	Post-Med
7	Layer	1	Pale brown silty clay with demolition rubble	
8	Layer	2	Demolition rubble (Brick etc.)	Modern
9	Layer	2	Demolition rubble (Brick etc.)	Modern
10	Surface	2	Concrete	Modern
11	Layer	2	Course orange sand Levelling for surface 11	Modern
12	Layer	2	Dark greyish brown silty clay. Rare gravel, occasional oyster shell, bone and brick/tile fragments	Post-Med
13	Layer	2	Peat. Underwater when recorded	
14	Wall	1	Unmortared limestone blocks	
15	16	1	Orange clay	
16	Foundation	1	Foundation cut for wall 14	
17	Layer	1	Dark grey silty clay with demolition rubble	
18	Wall	2	Victorian (?) wall	1850+
19	Layer	3	Black silt, very organic, with rare brick and shell. Considerable petrol contamination	
20	Layer	2	Lens of sand, gravel, mortar fragments and brick/tile fragments	
21	Layer	2	Same as 12	

Appendix 2: Finds Data by Carole Fletcher

Context	Feature	Description	Date
6	Layer	One sherd of medieval reduced sandy ware One fragment of pegtile One stone roof tile fragment	1200-1600 1450-1600 ?
12	Layer	One sherd of late Bourne B or early Bourne D ware One sherd of a Staffordshire tig One fragment of clay pipe stem One fragment of pegtile	1350-1500 1650-1700 1600+ ?

Appendix 3: Environmental Appraisal by Rachel Fosberry

1 Introduction and Methods

Two bulk samples were taken from features within the excavated areas of the site in order to assess the quality of preservation of plant remains and their potential to provide useful data as part of further archaeological investigations. Sample 1 was taken from deposit 12 which had been sealed by a demolition layer in Trench 2 and Sample 2 was taken from a clay layer in Trench 1.

Ten litres of each sample were processed by bucket flotation for the recovery of charred plant remains, dating evidence and any other artefactual evidence that might be present. The flot was collected in a 0.5mm nylon mesh and the residue was washed through a 1mm sieve. Both flot and residue were allowed to air dry. The dried residue was passed through 5mm and 2mm sieves and a magnet was dragged through each resulting fraction prior to sorting for artefacts. The flot was examined under a binocular microscope at x16 magnification.

2 Results

Sample 1 produced a large volume of residue (3000ml) containing animal bone fragments, sherd of green-glazed pottery, shell including cockles, mussels, whelks and oyster shell, fish scale and a copper alloy 'button'.

Sample 2 produced a smaller volume of residue and contains small amounts of pottery and animal bone, a piece of shelly limestone, fish scale and mussel shells. Charcoal fragments and small quantities charred plant remains were recovered from both samples. Sample 1 contains three wheat grains. Both samples contain a few common weed seeds such as *Rumex* sp. (dock) but not in any significant quantity.

3 Conclusions and Recommendations

The artefacts present in these samples suggest the dumping of domestic refuse. It is unusual that the plant remains recovered are so poor as it would have been expected that greater quantities of burnt food debris in the form of cereals and/or pulses with associated weed seeds would also have been discarded. This suggests that the samples represent general scatters of debris rather than discrete purposeful deposits.

It is not considered that full analysis would add significantly to this interpretation and further work is not recommended.



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