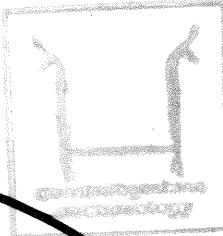


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The Chequers Public House Stretham November 1990



Cambridgeshire
County Council

Rural Strategy

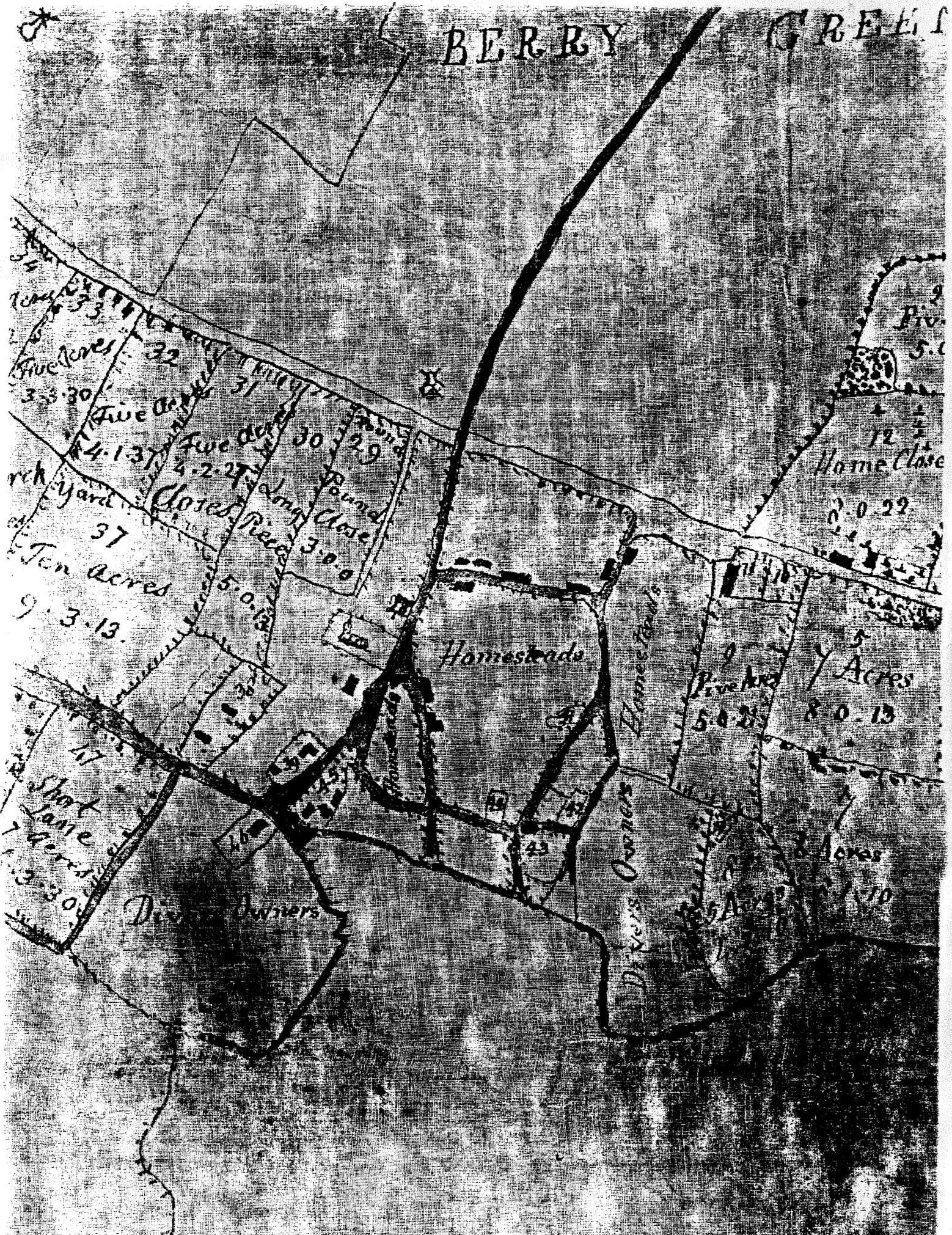


Figure 2: Extract from an early nineteenth century map, showing the smaller extent of the churchyard of Saint James's.

THE CHEQUERS PUBLIC HOUSE STRETHAM

TL51197465

An Archaeological Assessment

November 1990

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Archaeology Office
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Department of Property
Cambridgeshire County Council



INTRODUCTION

An evaluation of the archaeological potential of the land to the rear of The Chequers Public House, High Street, Stretham was carried out by the Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Unit in November 1990. The work was funded by Greene King plc and was undertaken as a precursor to the residential development of the site.

BACKGROUND

The village of Stretham is located at the southern extremity of the Isle of Ely, an elevated outcrop of Kimmeridge clay in the Fens, capped by a band of lower greensand. The village is approximately five miles south of Ely itself and is dominated by the parish church of Saint James. The church occupies a high, central position in the village, immediately to the south of the present site (figure 1). The site itself straddles the 10.00mOD contour.

The earliest documentary reference to the village, "Straetham", appears in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle for the year 975. It is also recorded in the Domesday Book of 1086 as "Stradham". The church was in existence by at least the beginning of the thirteenth century. An excavation carried out by the County Unit in the garden of Stretham Rectory in February and March 1990 suggested that an early medieval parsonage may have been associated with the church.

The size of the graveyard surrounding Saint James's Church appears to have altered through time. The Ordnance Survey map of 1886 shows it to be similar in extent to the present day. However, an enclosure map of 1835 indicates the existence of an east-west running track, separating the southern end of the site from the churchyard. Another, albeit undated, early nineteenth century map (figure 2) also represents the churchyard as smaller than the present day. This suggests that the church burial ground was only extended to the north during the nineteenth century. A 1605 map of the village simply shows open land around the church with no clearly defined graveyard.

STRATEGY OF FIELDWORK

This site occupies an important central position in the village, immediately to the west of the main street and close to the parish church. It could potentially contain the remains of medieval tenements, fronting onto the High Street. The varying extent of the burial ground around Saint James's also raises the possibility that this area might at one time have lain within the bounds of the churchyard.

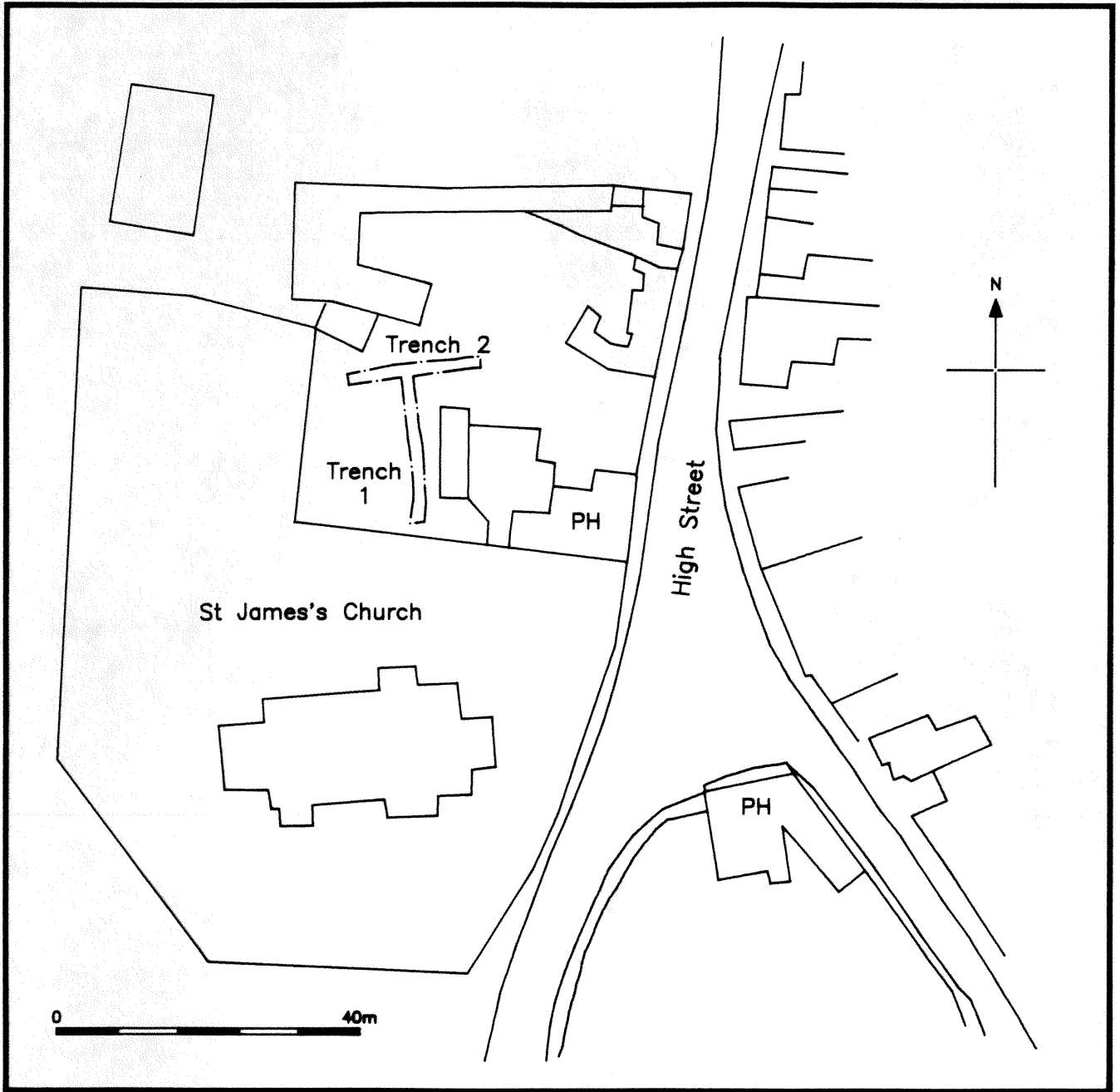


Figure 1: The Chequers Public House, Stretham, trial trench location plan.

In order to assess these possibilities two trial trenches were excavated (figure 1). Trench 1 was located along the north-south axis of the site and intersected at right angles with Trench 2, close to the site's northern entrance. The topsoil was removed by machine. All potential archaeological features were then investigated by hand and recorded, with the aim of locating and dating any undisturbed remains.

RESULTS

A naturally formed soil profile [1, 5], approximately 0.60m deep, covered the whole site. The subsoil [15] consisted of mid-orange brown silty sand, much disturbed by worm and root activity.

Very few archaeological features were present. A number of sub-rectangular pits, [8,9] at the southern end of Trench 1 and [13,14] at the western end of Trench 2, were similarly backfilled with relatively sterile, redeposited subsoil. A number of small, abraded sherds of Saint Neots Ware, a pottery fabric dating to the tenth or eleventh century AD, were recovered. Feature [8] also produced an abraded fragment of human cranium. Like the pottery, the latter is almost certainly residual. Thus, the precise date and function of these pits remain uncertain. A shallow, north-south running ditch [12] in Trench 2 may be associated with these features.

The remaining evidence on site dates almost entirely to the modern period. The upper levels of the topsoil [1] contained the skeletal remains of several small mammals and birds, including two immature pigs and two ducks. A number of probable garden features [2,4,10,11,17], including bedding trenches and tree holes, were located close to the intersection of the two trial trenches. A number of rubbish pits [3,6,7,19], containing late nineteenth and early twentieth century pottery and glassware were recorded. The remains of a modern boundary wall [16], shown on the current 1:2500 Ordnance Survey map but no longer extant above ground, were uncovered close to the site entrance. An adjacent posthole [18] may have been associated with this wall. The southern end of Trench 1 was crossed by a modern sewer leading to a brick-lined cesspit in the south-west corner of the site.

CONCLUSIONS

The assessment work carried out on this site suggests that it has low archaeological potential. A very limited number of possible archaeological features were recorded. These, however, did not produce any notable assemblages of finds and their real significance remains unknown. The majority of

features on site were modern in date. Perhaps most importantly, no undisturbed human burials or significant structural remains, such as building foundations, were uncovered.

The available evidence suggests that the site has not been built on in the past and has never formed part of the churchyard of Saint James's.