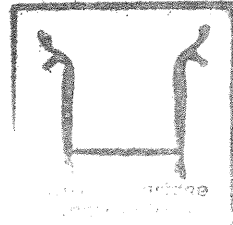
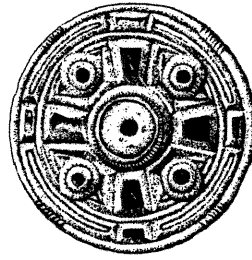


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Archaeological Field Unit

124-126 St John's Road, Ely:  
An Archaeological Evaluation

Scott Kenney

1998

**Cambridgeshire County Council**

Report No. B30

*Commissioned By Windmill Lodge Ltd.*

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Editor Will Wall B.A.  
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*Report No.B30*

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## **SUMMARY**

*Between the 23rd and 26th of March 1998, the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council conducted an archaeological evaluation on land at 124-126 St John's Road, Ely, Cambridgeshire (TL5272/7989). The work was commissioned by Windmill Lodge Ltd.*

*No pre-19th century archaeology was found in the six trenches excavated, and all the features located were related to drainage associated with the heavy, clay-derived soils. Some evidence was observed of the former presence of an orchard over part of the property, but no remains of earlier features were located.*

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# 124-126 St John's Road, Ely: An Archaeological Evaluation

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Between 23rd and 26th March 1998, the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council (AFU) carried out an archaeological evaluation on land at 124-126 St John's Road, Ely (TL5272/7989). The work was carried out at the request of Windmill Lodge Ltd, in advance of a proposed Residential Nursing Home development, and was in response to a brief set by the County Archaeology Office (CAO).

The site lies on the southwestern side of Ely. It is irregular, approximately 2.5 ha in area, and consists of land on two adjacent properties. The area affected by the development proposals covers approximately 1.67 ha. The majority of the site is at present unused, and has a single prefabricated shed standing upon it. Part of the site was under crop during the evaluation.

The presence of archaeological remains was considered likely by the CAO on the basis of information contained in the County Sites and Monuments Record (SMR). It records Roman activity, cropmarks and earthworks north of the site, and fieldwalking for the Ely Bypass produced worked flints, medieval pottery and post-medieval pottery from within 150m of the site.

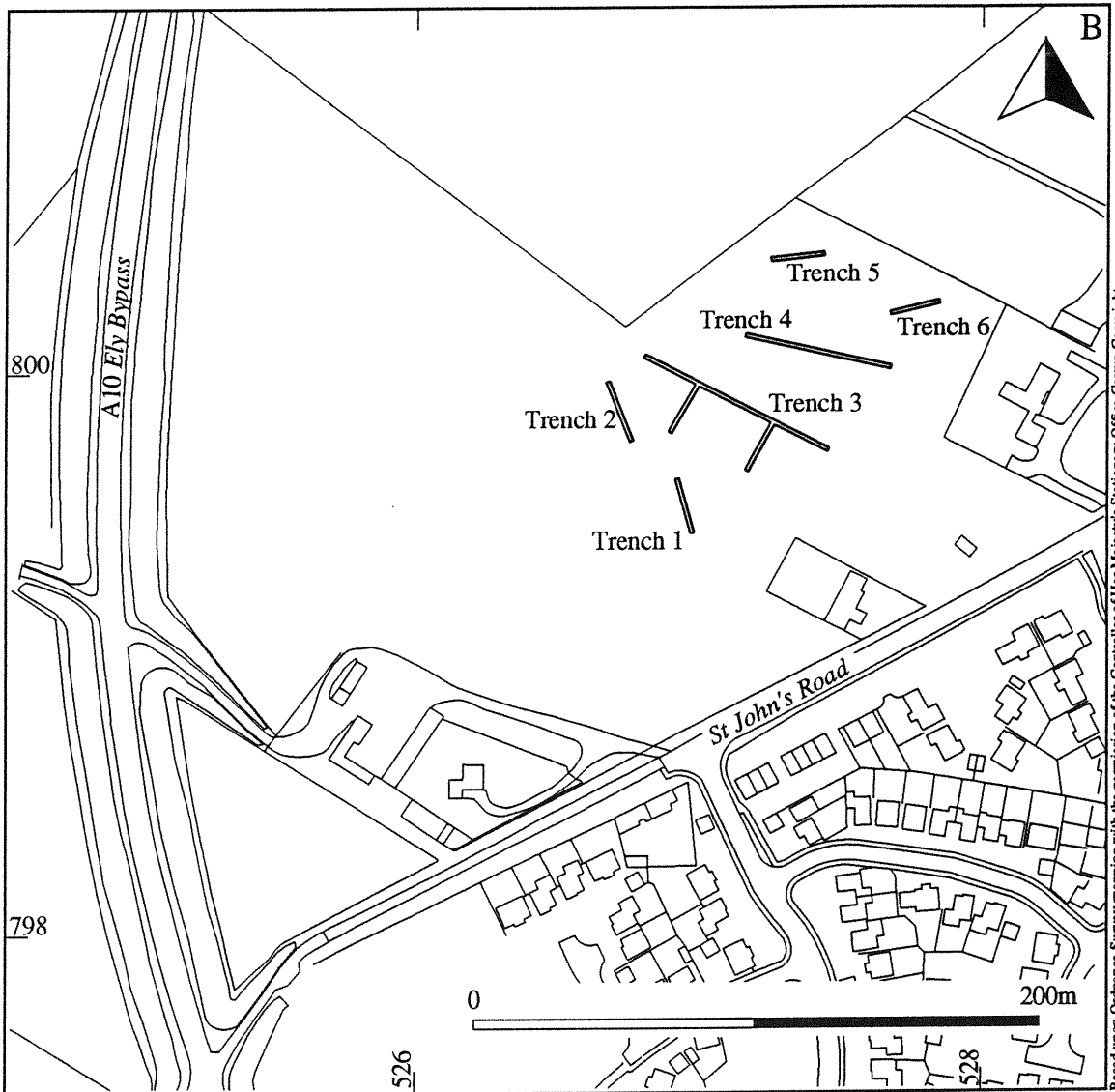
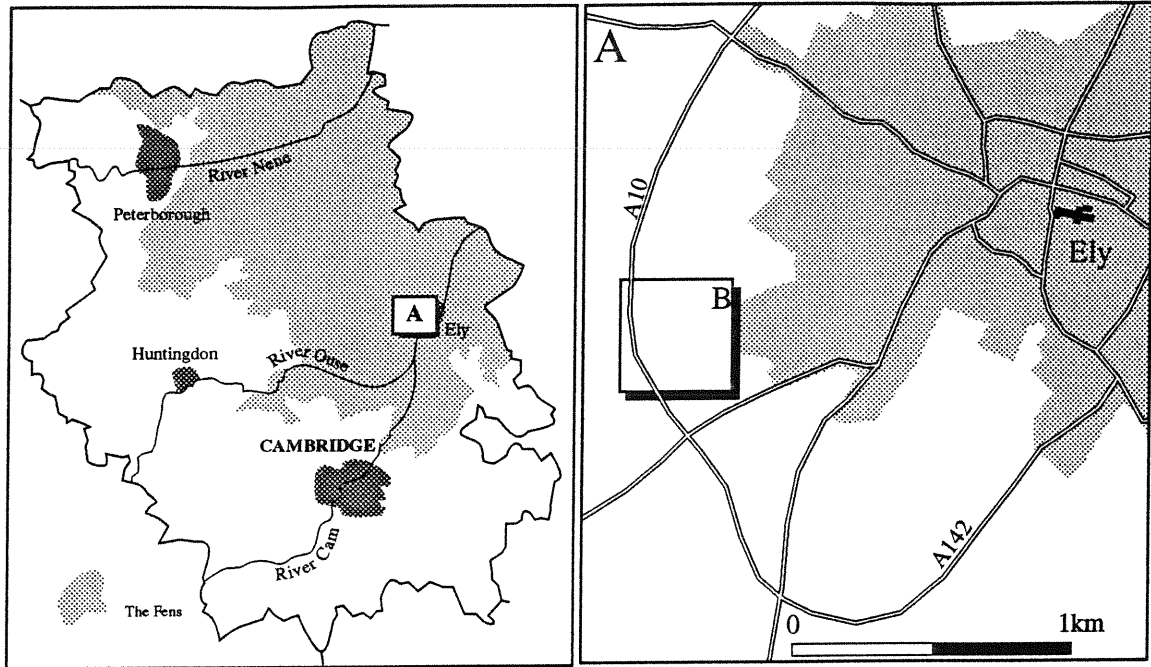
Six trenches with a total length of *c* 240m were opened by machine, and subsequently hand cleaned where appropriate, photographed, and base planned using a Zeiss RecElta 15 Total Station Theodolite.

Apart from features associated with drainage, no archaeology was observed in any of the trenches, and no artefacts earlier than 19th century date were recovered.

## 2 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

### 2.1 Geology

The site lies on the complex interface where Boulder Clay overlies the Lower Greensand, which in this area overlies Kimmeridge Clay.



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Figure 1 Site Location Map

## **2.2 Topography**

The site is located on some of the highest ground on the "island" of Ely, a broad plateau at 15-20m OD. The ground falls away rapidly to the west. The site itself is at 21-22.5m OD

## **3 HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND**

### **3.1 Historical Background**

Lying 23km north-northeast of Cambridge on the river Great Ouse, Ely was mentioned in Domesday as a small agricultural settlement. Its development as an important medieval town began after the construction of the cathedral, built on the site of an earlier monastery, and the canalisation of the river provided important trade links. Later, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, sheep farming became more profitable, and took over from grain as the primary agricultural practice.

Enclosure had been carried out since the fourteenth century, and the formal enclosures in the nineteenth century were only the culmination of a long process. The enclosure map of 1844 shows field boundaries very similar to those still extant today.

### **3.2 Archaeological Background**

#### **3.2.1 Palaeolithic and Mesolithic**

No definitively Palaeolithic or Mesolithic finds have been attributed to the area around the site.

#### **3.2.2 Neolithic and Bronze Age**

No definitively Neolithic finds have been attributed to the area around the site, however, worked flint was recovered during fieldwalking along the proposed route of the Ely bypass (SMR 07148), within 150m of the study area.

#### **3.2.3 Iron Age**

No definitively Iron Age finds have been attributed to the area around the site, but to the north, at West Fen Road, Late Iron Age settlement was discovered during evaluation in 1995 (SMR 11859).

#### **3.2.4 Roman**

No definitively Roman finds have been attributed to the area around the site, however, to the north, and close to the Iron Age settlement mentioned above, evidence of settlement was found during the fieldwork of the Fenland Survey (SMR 6144).

### **3.2.5 Anglo-Saxon**

No definitively Saxon finds have been attributed to the area around the site.

### **3.2.6 Medieval**

Medieval finds have been found at SMR 07148a, west of the site on the Ely bypass, and the remains of the hospitals of St Mary Magdelene and St John the Baptist now form parts of St John's Farm to the northeast of the site (SMR 07342, a,b,c). Ridge and furrow can be seen west of the Ely bypass near West Fen Road (SMR 07172a).

### **3.2.7 Post-Medieval**

Post-Medieval pottery was found at SMR 07148a mentioned above, and also during evaluation between Witchford Road and St John's Road in 1994 (SMR 11701)

### **3.2.8 Undated**

Undated cropmarks were observed at SMR 07172, west of the Ely bypass near West Fen Road.

## **4 METHODOLOGY**

Prior to the commencement of work on site, a desktop study was undertaken to ascertain the full extent of known archaeological data for the site. A geophysical survey, as outlined in the brief, was considered unlikely to be effective, due to the local geology (Noel, pers. comm.). An aerial photographic survey and replotting was considered unlikely to yield further results than the previous occasion that the area was studied (Palmer, pers. comm.). The desktop study revealed limited information about the historical and archaeological background of the site, the results of which are detailed elsewhere in this report.

Six trenches were opened using a mechanical excavator with a 1.5m toothless ditching bucket, under the supervision of an archaeologist (see fig. 1).

The trenches were cleaned by hand where appropriate, photographed, and base planned using a Zeiss RecElta 15 Total Station Theodolite with an internal data logger. The survey data was downloaded to, and manipulated in AIC's ProSurveyor v3.35, and the resulting drawings plotted.

## **5 RESULTS**

### **5.1 Trench 1**

Trench 1 was 20m long and contained no archaeology. The single dark feature observed was determined to be of natural vegetational origin. 0.25m of topsoil overlay 0.25m of subsoil; below this was natural silty clay.



## **5.2 Trench 2**

Trench 2 was 24m long and contained no archaeology. 0.25m of topsoil overlay 0.25m of subsoil; below this was natural silty clay.

## **5.3 Trench 3**

Trench 3 was 74m long, with two 20m long perpendicular arms coming off on the southwestern side. It contained only 19th century archaeology in the form of field drains leading to a brick-lined sump. 0.3m of topsoil overlay 0.3m of subsoil; below this was natural silty clay.

## **5.4 Trench 4**

Trench 4 was 52m long and contained no archaeology. 0.30m of topsoil overlay 0.30m of subsoil; below this was natural silty clay.

## **5.5 Trench 5**

Trench 5 was 18m long and contained no archaeology. 0.25m of topsoil overlay 0.25m of subsoil; below this was natural silty clay.

## **5.6 Trench 6**

Trench 6 was 19m long and contained no archaeology. 0.25m of topsoil overlay 0.25m of subsoil; below this was natural silty clay.

## **6 DISCUSSION**

Despite the SMR entries indicating artefacts and cropmarks of various periods found in the surrounding area, the site shows no indication of occupation before the 19th century. There were no indications of ridge and furrow, and it is likely that the area was outside the cultivated fields of the medieval town. The lack of finds even in the ploughsoil would seem to indicate that there had not been any earlier occupation on the site either. This evidence, although negative, is still important in further building the picture of settlement and land use in the Ely area.

## **7 RECOMMENDATIONS**

No further archaeological works are recommended before construction takes place.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author wishes to thank Windmill Lodge Ltd for funding the project; William Wall, the Project Manager; the site staff- Carole Fletcher. Thanks are also due to Sue Holden at the SMR and Lesley Akeroyd at the County Records Office. Dr Mark Noel provided advice on the potential success of geophysical survey; Rog Palmer provided advice on aerial photographic replotting. This project was carried out in response to a brief drawn up by the County Archaeology Office.

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