

Archaeological Field Unit

Medieval and Later Deposits at The Views, Huntingdon.
An Archaeological Evaluation.

S. Cooper & P. Spoerry

1998

Cambridgeshire County Council

Report No. A134

Commissioned By D.H. Barford & Co

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SUMMARY

On June 22nd and 23rd 1998 the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council carried out an archaeological evaluation at the Views, Huntingdon (TL236717). The work was commissioned by D.H. Barford before the construction of a two storey office block.

The results from the evaluation revealed minimal archaeological activity with one feature containing pottery dateable from 1230-1350 AD.

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Figure 1 Location of site and trenches.

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1** On June 22nd and 23rd 1998 the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council carried out an archaeological evaluation at the Views, Huntingdon (TL236717). The work was commissioned by D.H. Barford before the construction of a two storey office block with associated car parking areas, services and landscaping. The evaluation was undertaken in accordance with Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Field Unit Specification PS/98/11 and agreed by the County Archaeology Office.
- 1.2** It was hoped that this evaluation would establish evidence for pre-conquest and post-conquest medieval activity in this area and aid us in understanding the development of medieval Huntingdon.

2 TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

- 2.1** The site lies to the west of the historic core of Huntingdon and to the south of George St at a height of 17.72 OD. To the east of the site is Mill Common and 500m to the south is the River Ouse.
- 2.2** The British Geological Survey map (1:50,000) shows the site to be on first terrace gravels. The site lies on the land which gently slopes eastwards towards the High Street and the historic core of the town.

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

3.1 Historical Background for Huntingdon

- 3.1.1** Ermine Street, a major Roman Road, passes through Huntingdon on the south side of the High Street. During the Roman Period, however the main Roman settlement was at Godmanchester.
- 3.1.2** The first documentary reference to Huntingdon occurs in Manuscript A of the Anglo Saxon Chronicle, which states that in 917 Edward the Elder captured the burgh of Huntingdon from the Danes and repaired and restored it (Oakey and Spoerry, 1997). A mint was located in the town at least as early as the mid 10th century, the earliest known issues being from the reign of Eadwig 955-59 AD.
- 3.1.3** According to the Domesday Book, Huntingdon had 256 burgesses, three moneyers, two churches and a mill at this time. The following two centuries saw a period of increased prosperity for the town.

3.2 Historical Background for the Site

- 3.2.1 The site is known to have been open land for most of the post-medieval period. In the 1572 Survey (Dickinson 1972) the plots here are described as
 "295 ITEM next yt west one loft with a close in the tenure of Joan Ventris
 "296 ITEM next it one close in the tenure of Joan Ventris
- 3.2.2 On the Speed's map 1610 the area is part of the common land although the pictorial nature of this map makes its use subject to caution. The subject site is shown as a large field described as enclosed land in the 1752 Plan of Hospital Lands (HRO). This large field is shown as three separate plots by the time of Jeffrey's map (1768, HRO) but again no structures are present. In both cases it seems that enclosure of pieces of common land was taking place during the 18th century.
- 3.2.3 The 1886 O/S 25 " Map shows the area as gardens, whilst the current house existed by the time of the revised edition of this map in 1926 by which time most of the site was a garden of this house. Also by this time glasshouses existed to the north of the proposed building footprint, whilst the area of proposed car parking was an allotment. More recent O/S maps chart the construction of large houses on adjacent properties but do not show construction within the area to be developed.

3.3 Archaeological Potential in Areas Studied

- 3.3.1 The nearest SMR point to the subject site (Cambs SMR 8660) records the discovery of human skeletal material in the garden of the house immediately to the south in 1988. This material was thought to have been re-deposited from an unknown location, but probably within the same property.

Human remains, probably the burial ground of one of Huntingdon's lost churches, are also recorded from a point 120m south east of the site (SMR2805).

The possibility that human remains may be discovered on the site was thus identified.

- 3.3.2 A recent survey of the historic topography of the town (Spoerry 1997) provides us with model for the development of the Huntingdon from which we can attempt to predict the archaeology within the study area.
- 3.3.3 The archaeological potential of the site is derived from its position in relation to the expected location of the late Saxon settlement. Spoerry puts forward the idea that the pre-conquest Saxon settlement may have lain under Mill Common and extended from there to the current High Street. Therefore if this assertion is correct there is a strong likelihood that archaeology relating to the pre-conquest Saxon settlement may be encountered within the subject site.
- 3.3.4 Huntingdon was a major late Saxon town and it continued as a thriving town until the mid 14th century when it had 16 churches. The fact that only four of these survived by the late 16th centuries implies settlement contraction.

- 3.3.5 We must therefore take into account the possibility that land units within the subject site described as closes in the post medieval period may represent areas formerly built upon.

4 METHODOLOGY

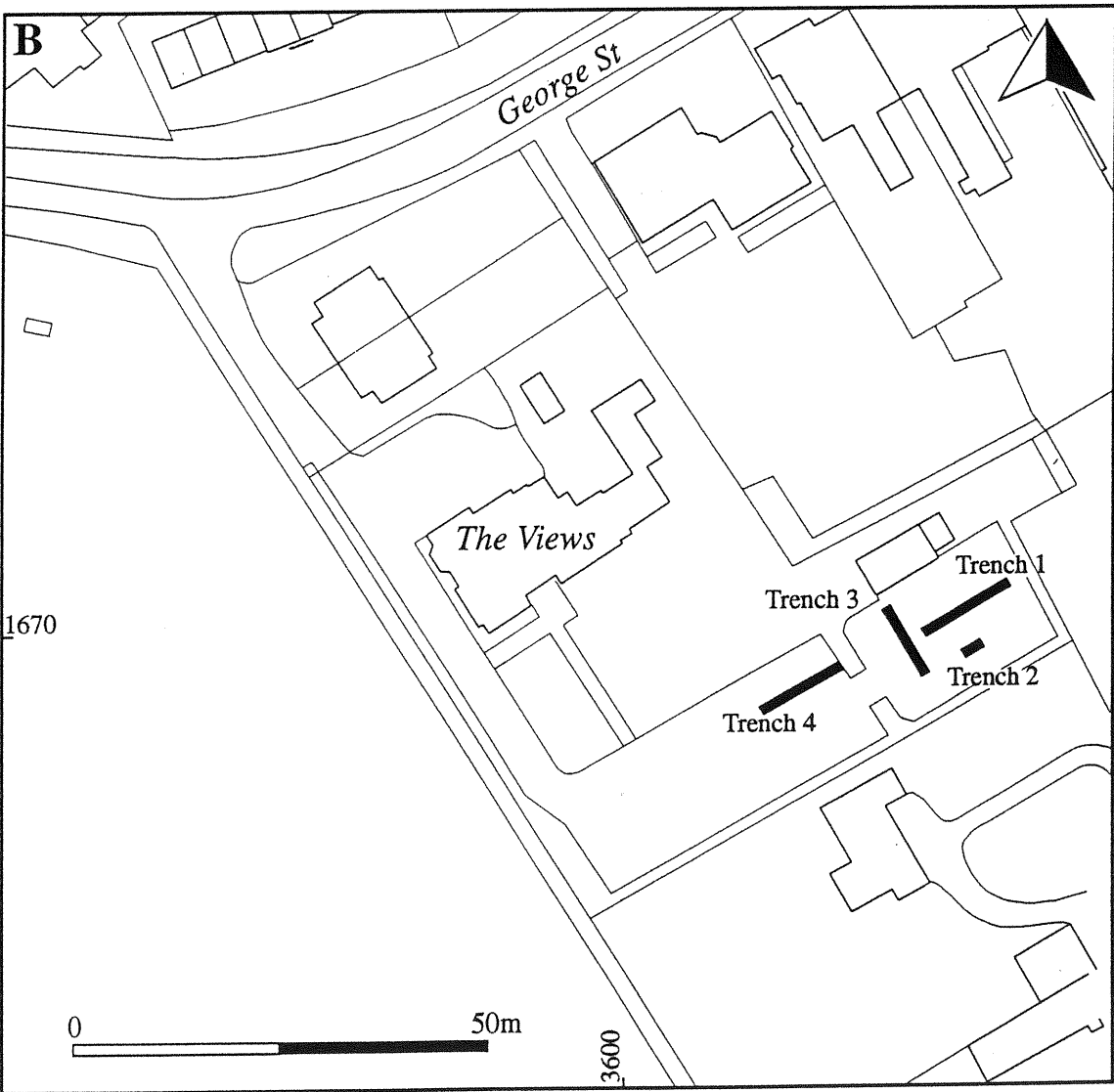
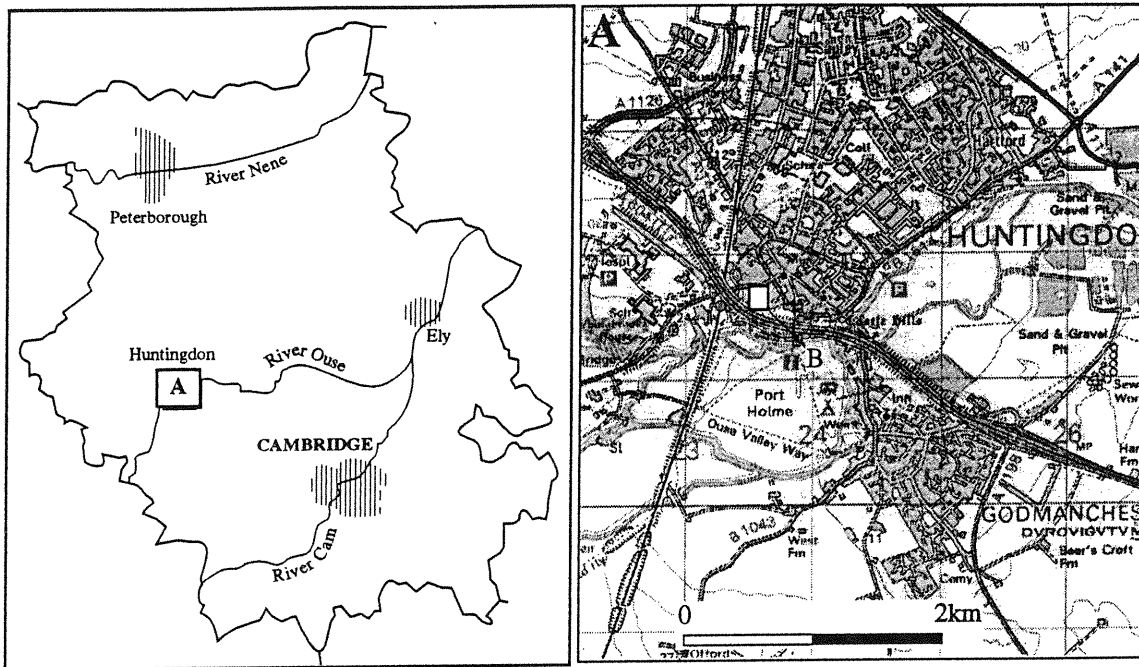
- 4.1 A series of four trenches totalling 35m in length and 1.6m in width were excavated using a JCB with a toothless ditching bucket. Trenches 1-3 were located within the gravel car park in the eastern part of the site. Trench 4 was wholly located within the new building footprint. A total of 10% of the development area was evaluated. All trenches were machined to the First terraced gravels. The locations of the trenches are shown in Figure 1.
- 4.2 After machining was completed each trench was cleaned by hand and photographed and recorded using the AFU standard archaeological recording system.
- 4.3 In addition all of the spoil heaps from the trenches were scanned for artefact retrieval.
- 4.4 Environmental samples were taken from Layers 2 and 3 in Trench 1. These have not been floated as these layers on consideration are not likely to be significant enough to warrant it.

5 RESULTS

Common layers were found in each of the excavated trenches which probably represent garden and cultivation soils. One feature was encountered in Trench 4 which produced a number of medieval sherds dating between 1230-1350 AD.

5.1 Trench 1

Trench 1 was 12m long and 1.1m deep and positioned on a east-west alignment. It was located in order to investigate the area of the new building footprint and the car park. Layer 1 was composed of hard core material for the gravel car park. Directly below layer 1 was topsoil (layer 2) which was a dark grey brown sandy silty clay. This layer was 0.30m deep and contained a number of post medieval artefacts. This layer sealed a sandy silty clay which was 0.35m deep and contained medieval pottery. This layer was cut by a pit which contained ash and several sherds of 19th century pottery. Below layer 3 was a sandy silt layer which was 0.20m deep.



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Figure 1 Site and Trench locations

5.2 Trench 2

Trench 2 was 2.7 m long and was located in the southern part of the development area. The stratigraphic sequence observed in this trench was very similar to Trench 1. No archaeological features were observed in this trench.

5.3 Trench 3

Trench 3 was 9.5 m long and located on a north-south alignment. The sequence and depth of deposits were very similar to the other trenches. No archaeological features were observed in this trench.

5.4 Trench 4

Trench 4 was 11m long and was located on a east-west axis in the western part of the development area. A pit was encountered in the western part of the trench.

Pit 15 was 0.18m deep and 0.80 wide with slightly irregular sides. It contained one fill a sandy silty clay and produced a number sherds dating between 1230-1350 AD.

6 INTERPRETATION

A similar stratigraphic sequence was observed in all trenches. The sequence is composed of a modern hard-core for the car park of the present buildings sealing a topsoil of post-medieval origin, a late medieval cultivation deposit and a subsoil.

One shallow, probably truncated, feature may be the base of a former refuse pit, however, the limited information recoverable does not allow a certain function to be attributed to it. Its presence is consistent with evidence for dispersed activity around the fringe of a known medieval town.

7 CONCLUSION

This evaluation has produced a minimal amount of archaeological activity which is surprising considering the proximity of the site to the historic core of Huntingdon. The results of the evaluation seem to indicate that the subject site was not intensively occupied in the medieval period. Furthermore there is no evidence for Saxon occupation and as a result the developing model for the location of the Saxon town may need revision.

The deposits encountered probably represent post-medieval garden soil and medieval agricultural soil, which fits into the documentary evidence for the site. No evidence for burials was identified.

8 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors wish to thank the Clients' Agent, D.H Barford & son for their co-operation, Dr Tim Reynolds for monitoring on behalf of the CAO, P.Mallet for machine excavation, Bob Hatton for his work on site and Jon Cane for his illustration work.

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Jeffrey's map of Huntingdon 1768 consulted at Fulbourn

S.M.R Cambridgeshire 8660

S.M.R Cambridgeshire 2805

8 APPENDIX A

Pottery Spot dating

| Context list | Material | Date |
|--------------|---|--------------|
| 02 | Tile, refractory | 19th cent |
| 02 | 1 sherd of early modern earthenware | 1780-1900 |
| 03 | Medieval roof tile | 1200+ |
| 03 | 1 sherd of St Neots ware, cooking pot | 1000-1150 AD |
| 03 | 8 sherds of Shelly ware (Northants) | 1150-1400 AD |
| 03 | 3 sherds hard sandy ware, (Northants) | 1350-1500 AD |
| | Context date 1350-1500 | |
| 05 | 1 sherd of early modern red earthenware | 1780-1900 |
| 05 | 1 sherd of Bone China | 1820-1900 |
| 13 | 4 sherds of transfer printed Bone China | 1850-1950 |
| 14 | 1 sherd of Lyveden-Stanion glazed ware | 1230-1350 |
| 14 | 3 sherds various med shelly wares | 1150-1450 |
| 14 | 1 sherd of coarse sandy ware | ?Roman |
| | Context date 1230-1350 | |



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