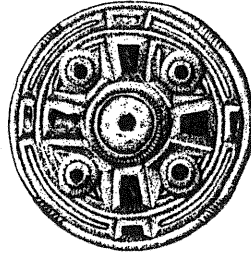


OFFICE COPY.



Archaeological Field Unit

Archaeological desk-based assessment for March Library.
(TL4159/9668)

S.N. Kemp

1998

Cambridgeshire County Council

Report No. A138

Commissioned By Cambridgeshire County Council.

**Archaeological desk-based assessment for March Library.
(TL4159/9668)**

S.N. Kemp BA MSc

1998

Editor: P. Spoerry Phd
Illustrator : J. Cane BA

Report No A138

©Archaeological Field Unit
Cambridgeshire County Council
Fulbourn Community Centre
Haggis Gap, Fulbourn
Cambridgeshire CB1 5HD
Tel (01223) 881614
Fax (01223) 880946

SUMMARY

The archaeological desk-based assessment for the proposed March Library was undertaken by the Archaeological Field Unit for Cambridgeshire County Council. This study of the archaeological and historic records for March has highlighted the development area as a site of archaeological potential. The site is expected to contain early prehistoric sites with the potential for palaeo-landsurfaces, artefacts and environmental remains. The site could also contain important Medieval remains associated with the bridge and port side activities.

Given our existing knowledge of the settlement patterns of the March Island, Iron Age and Roman remains will probably not be encountered, although Iron Age remains from Field Baulk Farm and Roman finds from within the town indicate that activity of this date was far more extensive than originally suspected. Much of this former knowledge is based on research strategies restricted to areas outside of the townscape which has placed a bias on presumed settlement patterns.

The report suggests that any future archaeological response should be targeted at areas of high impact and areas of specific archaeological potential i.e. the medieval waterfront. Due to the low visibility of prehistoric remains and the commonly sparse nature of many early sites it is recommended that archaeological inspection and deposit mapping of the machine cut service trenches is also undertaken.

CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION	1
2. NATURE OF THE DEVELOPMENT	1
3. METHODOLOGY	3
4. TOPOGRAPHICAL AND GEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND	3
5. ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND	5
6. ARCHAEOLOGICAL IMPACT	9
7. RECOMMENDATIONS	10
8. CONCLUSIONS	11
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	11
BIBLIOGRAPHY	11

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1	Location Plan	2
Figure 2	Development Plan	4
Figure 3	Archaeological Sites on March Island	7

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BP Before Present
BUFAU Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit
CAU Cambridge Archaeological Unit, Cambridge University.
CRO Cambridge Record Office
OD Ordnance Datum
SMR Sites and Monuments Record

**Archaeological desk-based assessment for March Library
(TL4159/9668).**

1. INTRODUCTION

The Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council was commissioned to complete a desk-based assessment and field evaluation of the land proposed for the new Library in March (TL4159/9668). In accordance with the first part of the Brief supplied by the County Archaeology Office of Cambridgeshire County Council this document reports on the findings of the desk based archaeological research. On the basis of this information the report makes informed predictions about the types of archaeological remains which may survive within the development area or on land adjacent to the site. This assessment was commissioned by Cambridgeshire County Council.

The Brief describes the desk-based assessment as:

“Phase 1: Desktop assessment of aerial photographic evidence and documentary evidence. This should include a suitable level of documentary research to set the results in their geographical, topographical, archaeological and historical context”. Para 2.4 Brief 11/8/98.

The Brief implies that this phase of investigation will be followed by a field evaluation targeted on any archaeological remains identified during the course of this research.

2. NATURE OF THE DEVELOPMENT

The proposed development includes the erection of a public library including a new access road, parking and environmental/art/landscaping works within a development area of 7115m².

The site (TL 4159/9668) is located to the southwest of March Bridge on the southern side of the River Nene (Old Course) within an area of March known as Little London and formerly called the Sumpes (CRO March) (Figure 1, for general location). The site therefore lies close to the existing centre of the town and in proximity to the town hall and the High Street. The development area is bounded by the River Nene to the north, the swimming pool to the west and housing along Acre Road to the east. Carparking associated with the proposed library lies to the south of the swimming pool. The development outline suggests that improvements will be made to the existing City Road access to the site. A footpath along the Nene will link the site to the High Street at March Bridge (Figure 2).

Due to the rapid response required by the client a site visit has not yet been undertaken. However, this will occur prior to the submission of any detailed archaeological evaluation proposals if further work is recommended by the County Archaeology Office.

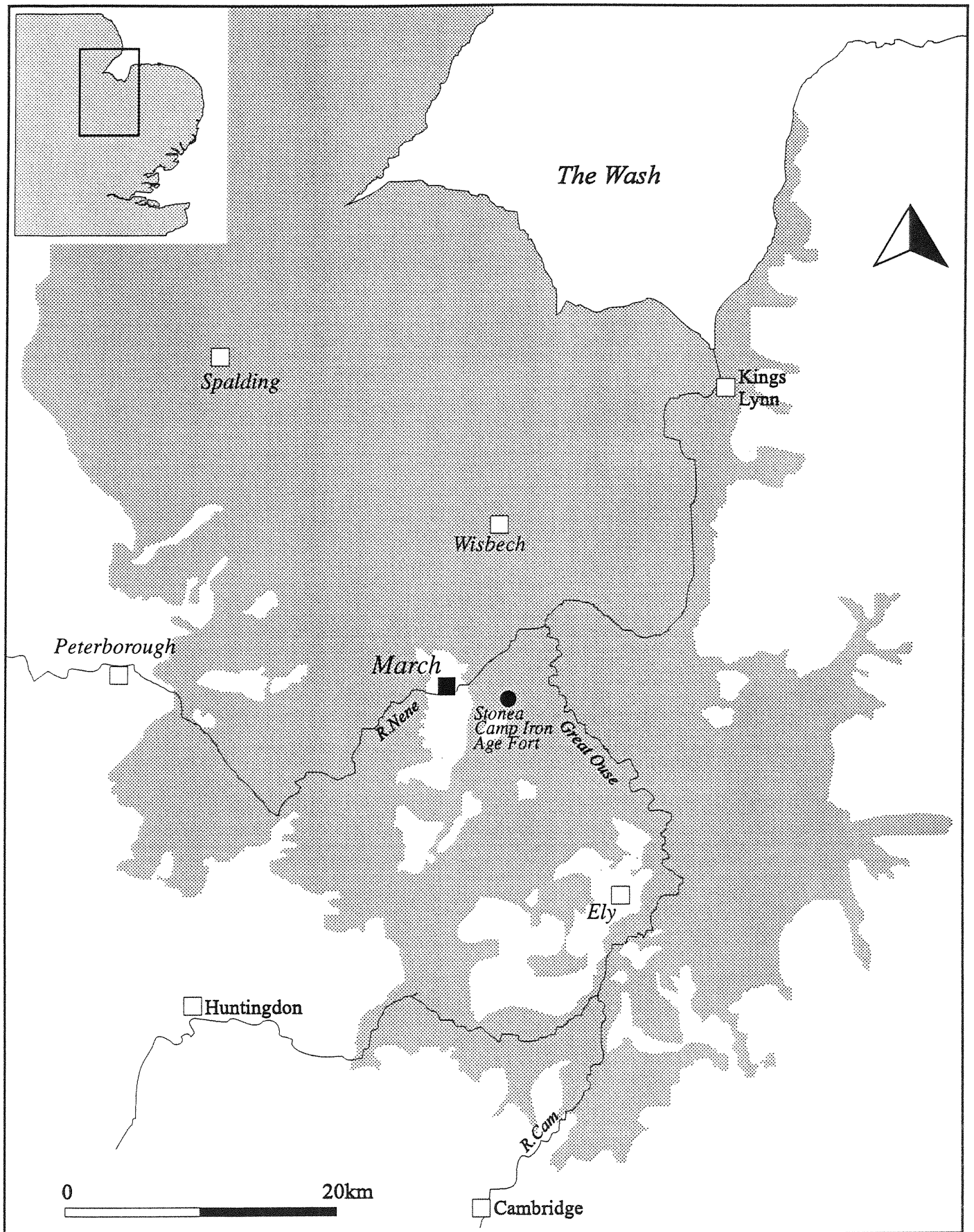


Figure 1 Location plan showing the Fens and the Fen islands

3. METHODOLOGY

In order to map the archaeological remains in and surrounding the development area during this first phase, investigations centred on accessible archaeological and historical resources held by Cambridgeshire County Council.

Following discussions with specialists geophysical and aerial photographic survey research were discounted from the investigations due to the sites proximity to the urban environment and the high likelihood of disturbance to the existing ground surface by the construction of the river defences along the Nene. In addition due to the proximity of the site to the River Nene successive alluvial events are likely to have disguised earlier archaeology. Because of the sites proximity to the town if more recent archaeological remains, such as earthenworks, had once been visible within the development area they would presumably have been recorded either within the historic documents, by the Ordnance Survey, local archaeologists and historians and therefore a record would have occurred on the Sites and Monuments Record (SMR).

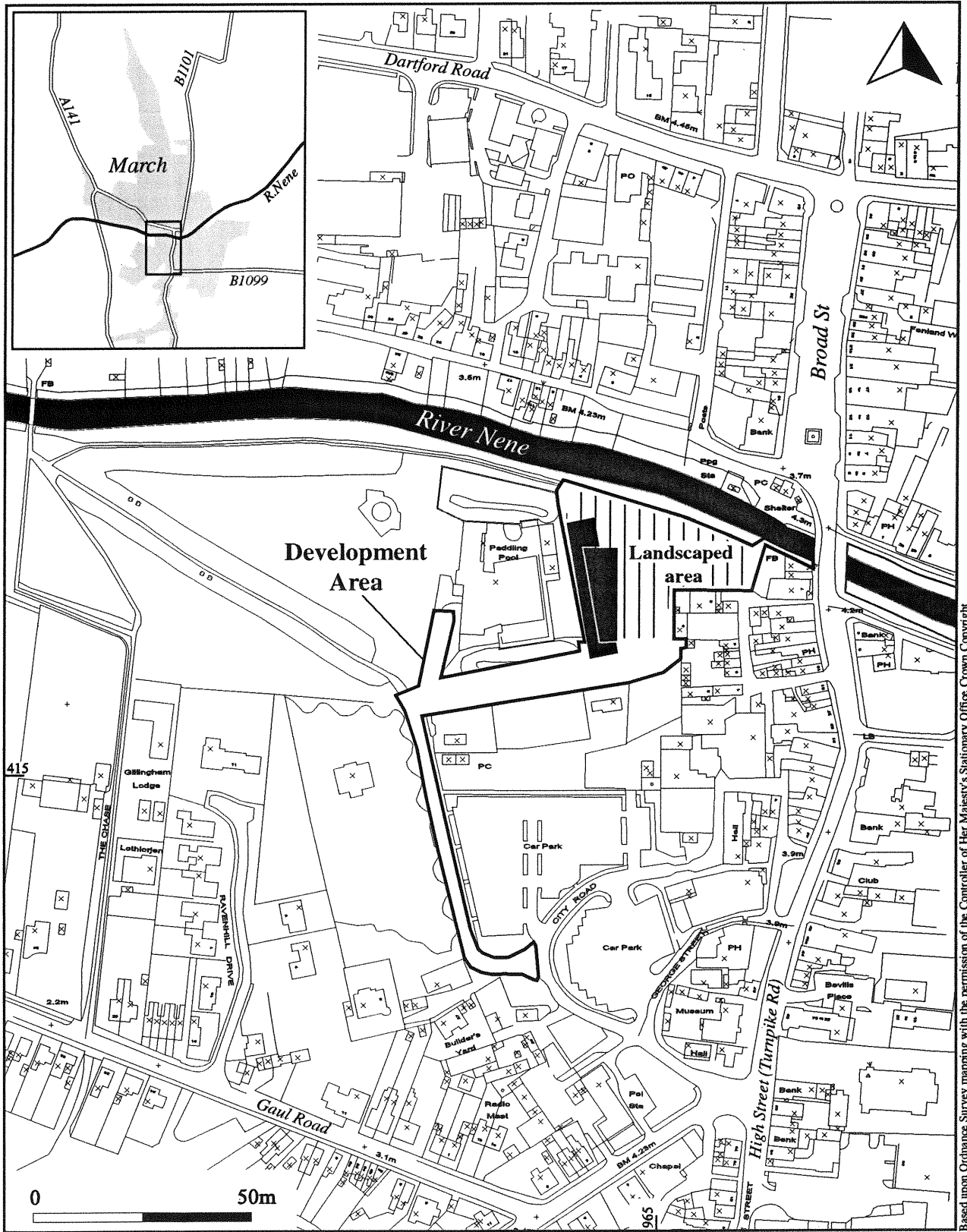
The known archaeological resource was investigated through the County's Sites and Monuments Record held by Cambridgeshire County Council. Additional published resources such as the Victoria and County Histories, Royal Commission inventories and the Fenland Research Volumes were also interrogated. Site investigation reports prepared by Birmingham University (BUFAU) and the Cambridge Archaeology Unit of Cambridge University (CAU) provide additional detail regarding the types of archaeology and environmental deposits likely to be encountered within the development area.

The historical record was investigated at the County Council's County Record Office in Cambridge which holds copies of the pre-enclosure plan of March dating to about 1680 (CRO R51/23/3), the 1794 Inclosure map (CRO March), the 1824 plan of the Estates in March; Property of Mr Nathan Gray (CRO515/p) and the Tithe apportionment maps for the township with its associated terrier dated to 1840 (CRO R51/28/1). This work was supplemented by the use of the subsequent Ordnance Survey maps of the area which in appropriate detail for this research date back to the 1 inch map published in 1886.

Additional documentary and cartographic sources not accessed as part of this study are held by the Cambridge University Library, British Museum, Wisbech Museum and the Bury, Huntingdon and Public Record Offices. These documents include fifteenth century enclosure grants and many late eighteenth and nineteenth century sale plans. Much of the information regarding historic landuse contained in these documents and appropriate for this report could equally be gathered from the records held by the County Record Office.

4 TOPOGRAPHICAL AND GEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The geology of March is composed of Kimmeridge Clay overlain by Anglian Boulder Clays and Hoxnian interglacial Gravels generally known as the 'March Gravels' which run north-south under much of the town. These deposits form the core to March Island which rises to about 4m OD. Fen deposits surround much of the island on which March town lies. These deposits are complex due to the migration of the Ouse and Nene Rivers which cut across the region.



Based upon Ordnance Survey mapping with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationary Office. Crown Copyright. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. (Cambridgeshire County Council licence No. LA 07649X 1998)

Figure 2 Location plan showing site and development proposals

The palaeogeographic history presented by Shennan suggests that this part of the March Island has always lain above the Fen boundary during the Holocene, whilst, marine/brackish waters lay close to the northern boundary of the island between 3700 BP and 2900 BP with another transgression about 1800 BP (Shennan 1994). Prior to drainage the island was surrounded by fen within which peat formed.

This history indicates that March town has occupied an area which would appear to have been dry land since at least the early Neolithic. The environment around the island has seen major changes in the landscape resulting from sea level rise/fall, peat growth and degradation, and alterations in the riverine system. As a result of this dynamic environment throughout prehistoric and historic times this landscape would have provided a wide variety of resources for its occupants which included salt from marine waters during Roman times.

During the Iron Age, medieval periods and at earlier times peat growth could have occurred along the course of a former small stream or creek which may have once ran through the area known as the Sumps which the development site occupies (Hall 1987). The existing course of the Nene through the March Island follows this area of low lying land and may be 10th Century in date.

Two recent episodes of archaeological work have been undertaken within March. Both have identified surviving peat deposits at about 1m in depth at Grays lane and along Creek Road on the northern side of the River Nene. Due to the limited scope of the earlier work no assessment of the date of this deposit or its environmental potential has yet been made. If the peat is of Medieval date the deposit is of great interest due to its rarity. One of the aims of the evaluation should therefore be assess the date of the peat deposit and its potential for analysis (Martyn Waller pers. comms.).

5 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The SMR maps and records show few archaeological remains within and immediately adjacent to the town of March. Those that do exist show a long period of dispersed activity around the Island until the medieval and post-medieval development of the existing town. Records of Iron Age, Roman and medieval activity are most common on the island, whilst, earlier prehistoric activity appears to lie close to the margins of March Island and adjacent to former rivers. For convenient reference within this report Figure 3 has used the Fenland Survey site numbering system and the SMR references are included in the text. Single finds have not been included in Figure 3, however, they are discussed throughout the text.

Past investigations into the prehistoric activity on the March Island have been restricted by the historic expansion of March town. Areas of light soils (March Gravels) commonly favoured by early farming populations are entirely contained within the modern town and therefore not accessible to the extensive survey work undertaken by the Fenland Project.

Palaeolithic, Mesolithic and Neolithic

Palaeolithic and Mesolithic flint artefacts have been identified within the parish. Mesolithic flint scatters have been identified on the gravels adjacent to Gaul Road and to the west of the development area (Fenland Research MCH 39/SMR 08455 and 05210 and MCH 40/SMR 08455) within this area of low

land which the River Nene occupies. Both sites lie along the Barroway Drove roddon suggesting a preference for riverside location and in addition good environmental preservation potential in such locations.

Known Neolithic finds from the island are few. In addition to artefacts found at the sites along Gaul Road mentioned above and the general stray finds found on the gravels, 1 lithic site (MCH 13/SMR 05162) has been discovered at Stonea which lies about 4 km to the southeast of the development area.

Bronze Age

The majority of the lithic material discovered at March is of Bronze Age date (Hall 1987). Sites include MCH 36/SMR 04548, MCH 37/SMR 05007 and MCH 38/SMR 08459 which lie on the Bronze Age margins of the Island. Sites MCH36 and 37 lay within 2 km west of the development area and overlooked a zone of active roddons prone to marine flooding (Hall 1987), whilst, site MCH 38 lies adjacent to fen and marshland which might indicate the opportunity for different resourcing strategies.

A small barrow-field lies at some distance to the east within Stonea and Wimblington and are again located close to the edge of the Bronze Age dryland.

Iron Age

During this period fen peats developed around most of the island, whilst, the Nene lay to the west. The Fenland Research Project has shown that there are many sites of this period on the central fen islands and the islands are considered to be slightly larger in area than in the medieval period. Stonea camp lies to the west of March and is an Iron Age fort which is believed to have figured prominently in the Boudican revolt.

On the March Island there are two known Iron Age settlement sites which lie over 2 km to the north of the development area, these sites are believed to have had a riverine connection with Stonea Camp. Occupation continued into the Late Iron Age as indicated by the occurrence of Icenic coins at these sites and March island may have been an area into which the Celtic tribes retreated in advance of the Roman conquest (Hall 1987). About 1 km to the south of the development area lies the important Icenian coin hoard of Field Baulk Farm (Potter 1996).

Roman

During the Roman period the occupiable land increased to the northeast of the island as marine flooding ceased. Much of the rest of the Island remained surrounded by peat. In the middle of the 3rd century AD flood deposits reached 2m OD and led to the temporary abandonment of many sites in the Fenlands including MCH 19/SMR 10575 at Grandford.

Extensive areas of Roman cropmarks have been recognised in the northeast corner of March and also on Stonea Island. These ditch systems appear to represent field systems and enclosures associated with occupation sites of Roman date which lay on or adjacent to the newly exposed landsurface.

The three main settlement sites at March are at Grandford (MCH 19/SMR 10575), Flaggrass Hill Road (MCH 32/SMR 08448) and Stonea Grange (Wimb 18) and appear to have developed adjacent to the late Iron Age settlements mentioned above. The two major sites on the March Island lie on the Fen Causeway. The Fen Causeway runs across the northern part of March

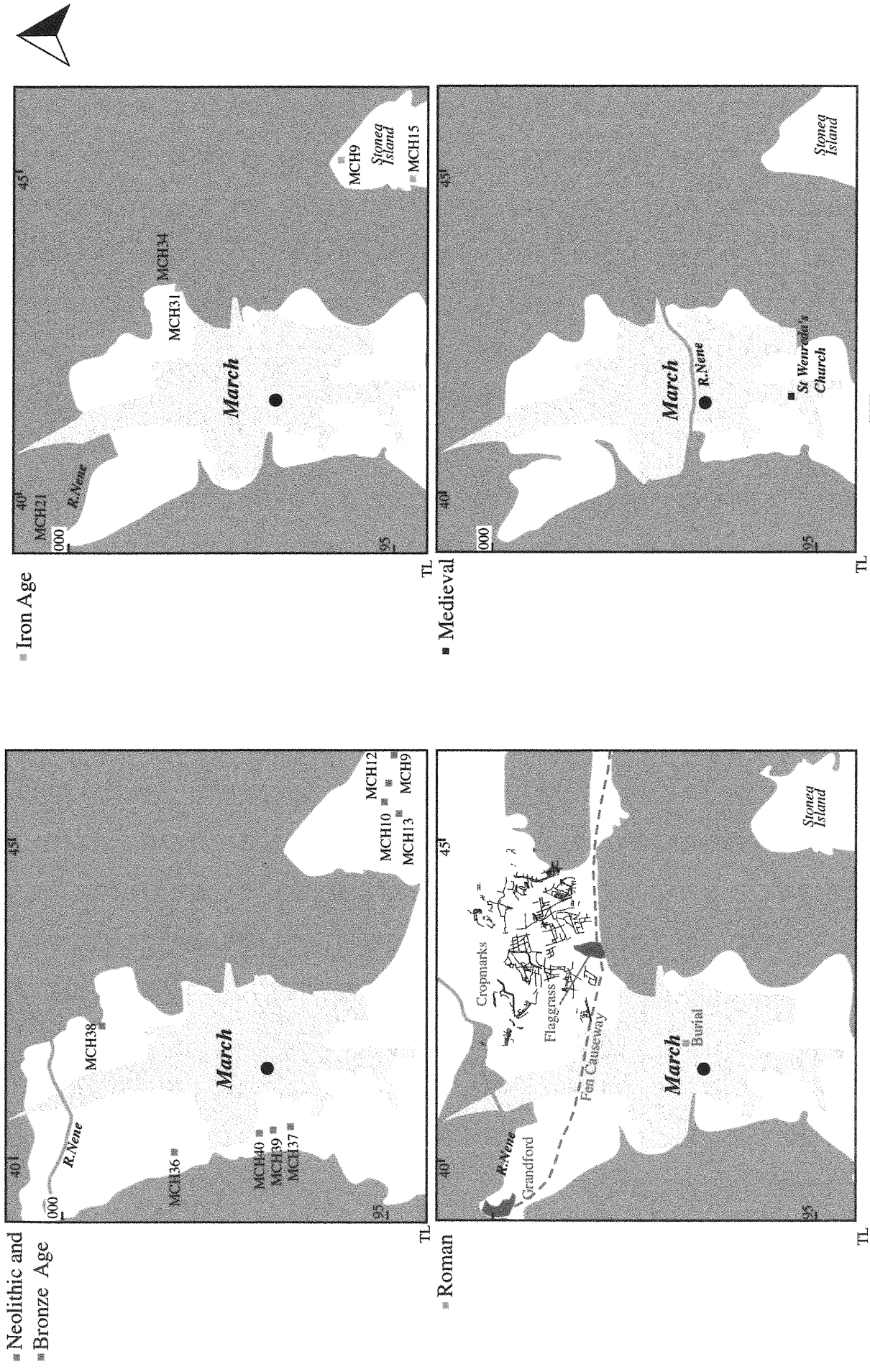


Figure 3 Archaeological sites on March Island

Island connecting Peterborough with the eastern edge of the Fens. Canals were also constructed for transportation and communication across the Fens.

Most of the other Roman sites on the Island are small and have been interpreted as farmsteads. These tend to date between the second and fourth centuries and are located on the clays and silts on the northeast of the island.

A number of sites lie on the silt roddons (former Roman canals) to the North of March and are associated with salt production. Peat would have been the main fuel for this activity and as with the other raw materials required for salt production, its availability restricted processing to the fen edge and tidal water courses. Large turbaries of up to 60 ha. in size lie in the parish of Upwell to the east of March, whilst canals, during their construction or subsequent widening would also have formed a source of peat for the furnaces.

During the Roman period March was an important cross fen staging post with its major industry based on salt production. The island population appears to be expanding into newly acquired and reclaimed land, whilst few remains are known from the rest of the Island. Where occupation does occur it appears to lie as close as possible to the edge of the silt bed to the north of March. Where Roman finds have been reported, in part, these have tended to be the occasional stray find of pottery which may suggest that the gravel uplands of the island continued as an area of low intensity activity, possibly, associated with arable cultivation. However, a Roman Skeleton was found on Robin Goodfellows Lane in the early nineteenth century (Whittaker 1998) which may indicate that important Roman remains have gone undetected within the town.

Saxon, Medieval and Post-Medieval

It is likely that the existing course of the Nene was constructed during the late Saxon period, possibly in the tenth century, in response to peat shrinkage and subsequent drainage problems (Hall 1987).

The exact whereabouts of the Saxon and Medieval settlements of March is unknown although the cross stump and church of St Wendreda which is commonly thought to be the early centre, lies about 1.5 km south of the development area and in the centre of the Medieval fields. In 1328, March is described as a manor at Hatchwood lying to the east of St Wendreda's church. However, there was probably also a port or hythe at the river crossing which later acted as a focus for occupation. By the late sixteenth century a minor port was recorded at March this may have lain adjacent to the bridge which has existed in its present location since at least 1544 (Bevis 1976).

The land to the north of the river in March seems to have been meadow land or shallow fen on the basis of place names (Hall 1987). This was probably also the case for the development area which in the terrier associated with the Inclosure award drawn up in 1794 described the area owned by Mary Guy and others as *'9 acres and 36 perches of which allotment (No. 29) we deem highland and 3 acres, 1 rood and 36 perches lowland lying within and liable to be taxed and drained with the fifth district'* (CRO March). All of the land surrounding the development area was similarly described.

Historic maps indicate a similar pattern of low lying land which may have been used for pasture or small scale arable cultivation dating back to at least the 1680's. The pre-Inclosure plan drawn up in about 1680 (CRO R51/23/3) lists the proposed development area as part of the Sumpes or common fields which extended eastwards to the existing High Street; formerly known as the Turnpike

Road. By this time buildings already extended alongside the Turnpike Road as far as March Bridge.

Inclosure occurred in 1794 and a number of buildings are depicted as lying around Acre Road which lies immediately to the west of the Turnpike Road (Figure 2). The award (CRO March) shows the land between the Acre Road and The Chase as in multiple ownership with the majority of the development site owned by a Mr R.H Lewin. This award, whilst, describing the condition of the land as quoted, outlines the division between high and low land and areas which required drainage. The map indicates that by this time riverine defences had been erected along the course of the Nene within the town.

In 1824 Mr Nathan Gray had a plan of his estates in March drawn (CRO 515/P) which includes the land formerly owned by Mary Guy etc. Mr Lewin appears to have retained ownership of much of the proposed development area. The former boundaries seem to be largely intact with buildings lying around Acre Road, City Road and at Red Bridge. Apart from a few changes in the buildings this information is replicated on the Tithe map of 1840 (CRO R51/28/1 and subsequent Ordnance Survey Maps.

Modern developments have seen the expansion of settlement eastwards along Gaul Road. Gradual infilling of the area includes the swimming pool which will mark the western boundary to the proposed new Library.

Evaluations undertaken at Grays Lane by the Cambridge Archaeological Unit would appear to support the late development of the land adjacent to the crossing over the River Nene. Here much of the archaeology is post seventeenth century and the sequence of deposits has been interpreted as the intentional raising of the ground level to mitigate against flooding or ground saturation. The presence of 2 sherds of Medieval pottery from this site and a sherd from Creek Road by BUFAU may indicate the proximity a former settlement which may prove to be the focus for much of the Post-Medieval development.

6 ARCHAEOLOGICAL IMPACT

Evaluations along the river frontage have shown that much of this area has been wet and prone to flooding and it is therefore likely that any archaeological remains will be sealed either beneath alluvium or where adjacent to buildings the ground surfaces will have been built up to mitigate against the effects of flooding. As a result of this build-up, if archaeology survives, it may lie at considerable depth. At Grays Lane there appears to have been over 1m of build-up since the seventeenth century. Therefore it is likely given the build-up of sediment and our existing knowledge regarding the medieval and post-medieval development of March that only where ground works involve significant penetration will the archaeology be affected.

Ground works which may penetrate to a depth which might disturb any surviving archaeology would include foundation trenches, service trenches and possibly works associated with road construction. Dependent on the types of landscaping undertaken it is possible that they will have no affect on the archaeological record.

Given the presence of Palaeolithic, Mesolithic and Neolithic sites in the Gaul Road area it is quite likely that such early prehistoric remains survive within the development area. The data presented above suggests that these populations

showed a preference for activity sites adjacent to water courses, it is possible the peat layers along the existing course of the Cam represent the margins of such a former stream or river. If this is the case significant environmental and economic remains may be preserved within these prehistoric sites.

Bronze Age remains lie at a greater distance from the development area and would appear to be located on dry land adjacent to areas of peat formation and marine flooding. As the development site lies in an area of lower land it is possible that these zones encroached into the island at this point. In which case there is the possibility of Bronze Age remains being discovered.

The majority of the Iron Age and Roman evidence suggest that settlements were focused on the northern side of the Island adjacent to the main river courses of this period, the newly reclaimed silt beds and important lines of communication. These results suggest that the discovery of such remains are remote, however, Roman burials have been found along Robin Goodfellows Lane, the Iron Age hoard at Field Baulk Farm and the occasional artefacts found within March are suggestive of more extensive activity during these periods.

Saxon and Medieval March is believed to have been focused on St Wendreda's church which lies at some distance to the south of the development area. Cartographic materials suggest that much of the housing development around the Bridge has been a recent development, however, this bridging point has been a long standing feature in March. In the reign of Queen Elizabeth (1558-1603) March was a minor port, the site of which is likely to have resulted in the present day focus to the town. If a port was present within or adjacent to the development area it is surprising that no traces have been recorded within these fields or on the river frontage. If present many of these remains are likely to have existed in area of the proposed zone of landscaping. If they had occupied this space these medieval remains would have been disturbed by the construction of the riverine defences in the post-medieval period.

Much of the light soils commonly associated with early settlement lies within the townscape. It is therefore likely that prehistoric element of the archaeological resource is under represented within the period histories, as shown by the Iron Age remains discovered at Field Baulk Farm, this issue needs to be thoroughly considered when making any planning decision.

7 RECOMMENDATIONS

The desk-top assessment suggests that significant archaeological remains may exist at depth and offer the potential for good preservation of environmental and artefactual remains. Specific dating evidence for the peat is at present lacking, however, it would seem to suggest that there is a good opportunity for the preservation of Palaeolithic and Mesolithic landsurfaces, alternatively, these peat deposits could provide important information on the development of the River Nene landscape during the Medieval period. Any investigation of the site should consider the importance of these deposits.

Without any specific period-based information for the development area a targeting strategy based on research agendas is not at present appropriate, although, consideration should be given to the paucity of our existing knowledge of early settlement patterns on March Island. It is therefore suggested that until further information becomes available that any targeting should focus on the

nature of the impact until the importance of the archaeological deposits are clarified.

Machining, either by linear or test pit trenches is recommended as a means of evaluating the location of new buildings and roadways. At a future date service trenches should be monitored in order to map the extent of any peat deposits and recover any archaeological and faunal material disturbed as a result of these excavations. Dependant on the nature of the landscaping it may be possible to limit the depth of archaeological trenching, where it is necessary, to the depth of landscape disturbance. Footpaths which occur within the proposed landscaped area are located adjacent to the bridge and run along the Nene these may need to be evaluated if they involve significant earth movement as they lie adjacent to the areas of potential medieval and post-medieval activity.

8 CONCLUSIONS

The desk-based assessment has highlighted the area as a site of archaeological potential, particularly for the survival of early prehistoric site with the potential for landsurfaces, artefacts and environmental remains. The site may also contain important Medieval remains associated with the Bridge and port side activities. However, cartographic evidence suggests that during the later Medieval period the development site required drainage and therefore may not have been appropriate for Medieval settlement.

Given our existing knowledge of the settlement patterns of the March Island the likelihood of encountering Iron Age and Roman remains are low, however, much of this knowledge is based on research strategies which have so far been restricted to areas outside of the townscape.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author wishes to thank Cambridgeshire County Council for funding this research document. I also wish to thank the staff of the County Record Office for their assistance and maintaining these important documents.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bevis, T.A. 1976 *A journey back in Time: March 1260-1660*. March
- Hall, D.N. 1987 *The Fenland Project No. 2: Cambridgeshire Survey, Peterborough to March*. EAA 35.
- Shennan, I. 1994 Depositional Environments. in *The Fenland Project, No. 9. Flandrian Environmental Change in Fenland*. EAA 70.
- Jones, L. 1996 *An Archaeological Watching Brief at Creek Road, March, Cambridgeshire*. Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit. Report No. 428.
- Potter, T.W. 1996 *The Field Baulk (March). Icenian Coin Hoard: in Jackson and Potter 1996 Excavations at Stonea Cambridgeshire 1980-85*.
- Pugh, R.B (ed) 1967 *The Victoria History of the Counties of England. Cambridge and the Isle of Ely*. Vol. IV. University of London. London.
- Whittaker, P. 1998 *An Archaeological Evaluation at Land North of 2, Grays Lane, March, Cambridgeshire*. Cambridge Archaeological Unit Report No. 263



Cambridgeshire
County Council

Archaeology

The Archaeological Field Unit
Fulbourn Community Centre
Haggis Gap
Fulbourn
Cambridge CB1 5HD
Tel (01223) 881614
Fax (01223) 880946