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Archaeological Field Unit

Medieval Remains at 9/10 George St, Huntingdon

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August 2000

Cambridgeshire County Council

Report No. A161

Commissioned by Elphicks of Huntingdon

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SUMMARY

Between 12th and 19th June 2000 the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council carried out an archaeological evaluation at the land adjacent to the car park at the rear of 9/10 George St (TL2365 7171) Huntingdon. The work was commissioned by Elphicks of Huntingdon before the construction of a new retail car park.

The results from the evaluation revealed extensive 13th and 14th century medieval quarrying. In addition ditches, post holes and pits were uncovered in the western part of the development which also produced 13th and 14th century pottery.

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Medieval Remains at 9/10 George St, Huntingdon.

1 INTRODUCTION

Between the 12th and 19th June 2000 the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council carried out an archaeological evaluation on the land adjacent to the car park at rear of 9/10 George St Huntingdon. (TL2365 7177). The work was commissioned by Elphicks of Huntingdon before the construction of a new retail car park. The evaluation was undertaken in accordance with a brief produced by Andy Thomas of the County Archaeology Office and to a specification approved by that office (CCC AFU Specification May 131).

The site is located to the rear of 9-10 George St and is very close the medieval core Huntingdon which was centred on Market Hill 150m to the north east. It is likely that the site also lies within the core of the pre-Conquest Saxon town that may have extended from Alconbury Brook through Mill Common and up to the High St and Market Hill. It has also been suggested that the area between Mill Common and Market Hill represents the site of the late 9th century Danish burgh of Huntingdon. Therefore remains dating from the 9th to the 15th centuries could be identified.

In 1998 an evaluation on the plot immediately to the south west of the site failed to determine any dateable remains except for one shallow medieval pit (Cooper and Spoerry 1998).

The route of the major Roman road of Ermine Street is believed to lie on the south western edge of Market Hill and therefore Roman remains relating to occupation along the road line may also be identified.

The proposed development is for a car park extension covering 1068 square metres.

2 TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

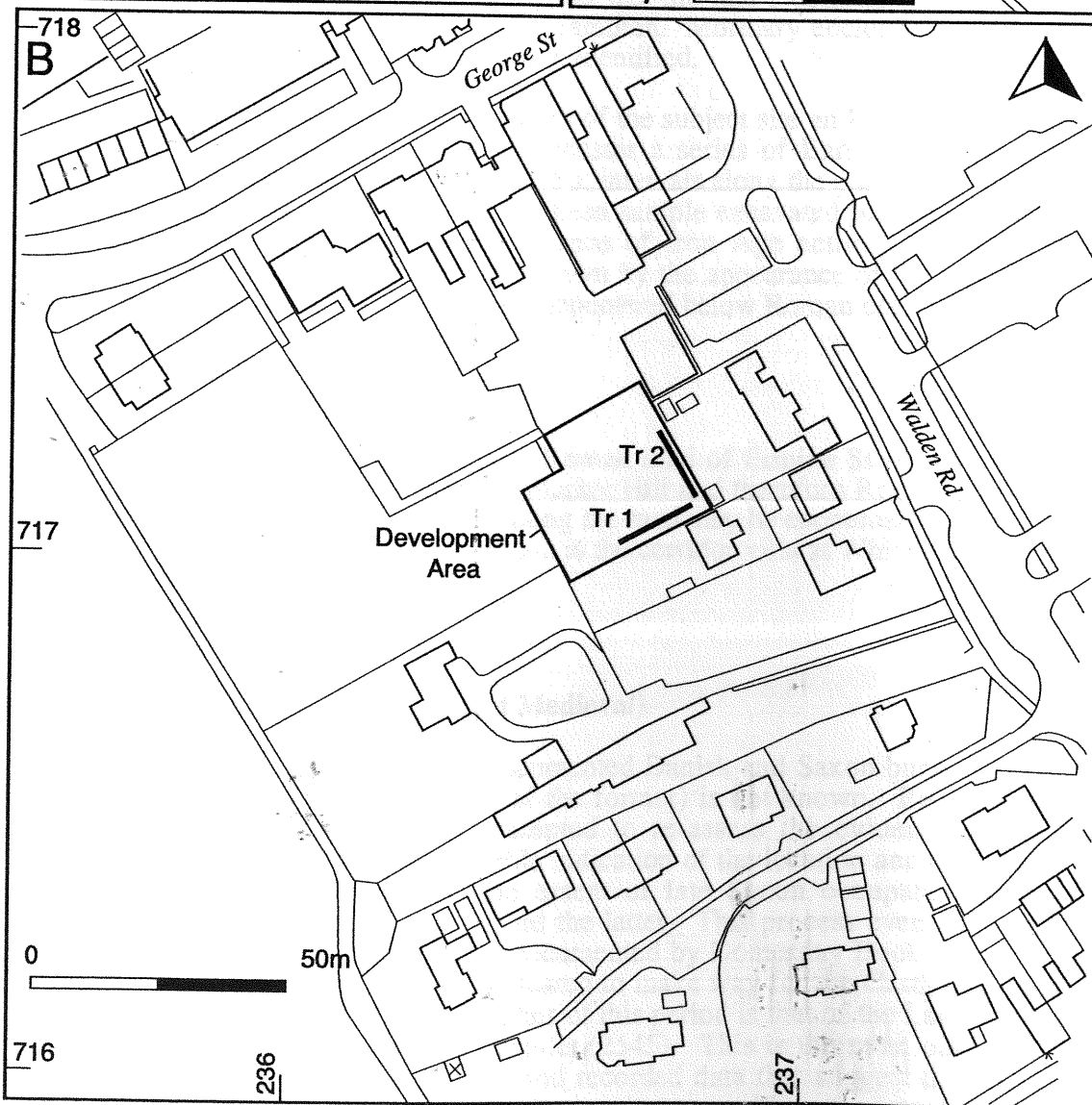
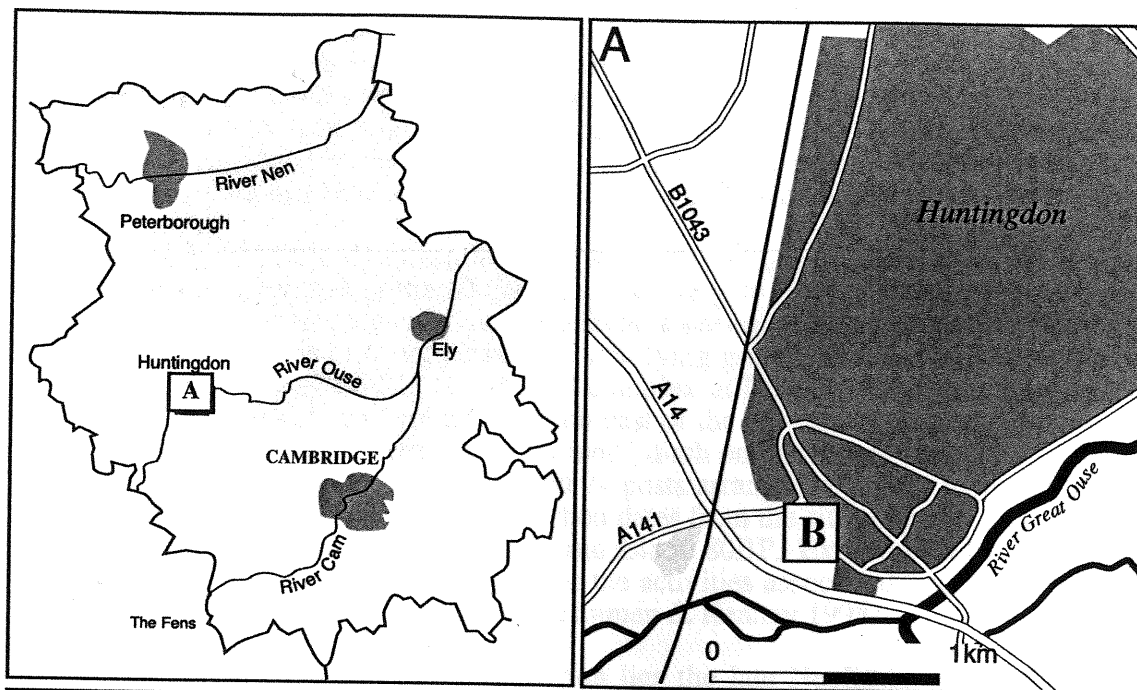
The site lies to the west of the historic core of Huntingdon and to the rear of George St at a height of 16.89m. To the east of the site is Mill Common and 600m to the south is the River Ouse.

The geology of the site is composed of 1st and 2nd terrace River gravels overlying Oxford clay.

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

3.1 Prehistoric Background

The subject site is situated within the Ouse Valley which is rich in prehistoric remains. During the late Neolithic and Bronze Age, major ritual complexes sprang up and evolved along the course of the Ouse and although much of the material culture does not survive these monuments are highly



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Figure 1 Site location and trenches

visible from the air as crop marks. These ceremonial complexes cover extensive territories and are distributed evenly across the landscape. Late Neolithic and Bronze Age ceremonial complexes are commonly respected by Iron Age settlement activity which appears to occupy lands away from the river system. This is probably as a result of the episodic alluviation along the Ouse during the Iron Age and Roman periods.

Within Huntingdon artefacts of prehistoric date have been found and reported to the SMR. These are largely of Neolithic and Bronze Age date. The presence of such artefacts is unsurprising given the preference of early prehistoric populations to low lying gravels and the proximity of the major late Neolithic ceremonial complex at Rectory Farm Godmanchester which lies about 1km to the south-east of the development area. The site consisted of a huge rectilinear "horned" ditch enclosure approximately 6.3ha in area, with an internal bank and 24 posts arranged regularly along the perimeter of the enclosure. Radio-carbon dates from the site suggests a late Neolithic date of between $5050 \pm 80\text{BP}$ and $\pm 4850 \text{ 80BP}$. Excavations by the AFU south of the enclosure indicate that the activities associated with the monument were of a wide spread nature (Hinman & Kenney 1998).

To the west of Huntingdon lies the late Neolithic and Early Bronze Age ceremonial complex of Brampton. Mortuary enclosures, cursus monuments and ring ditches have been identified.

Within the general vicinity of the subject site an Iron Age presence has been identified. At Godmanchester a series of Early Iron Age farmsteads or hamlets have been located at intervals along the gravel terrace (Green 1977). One such farmstead has been sample excavated just east of the town (Wait 1992) whilst other evidence of Iron Age activity is known from under modern Godmanchester town by the appearance of the typical roundhouses and ditched enclosures encountered below Roman occupation (Green 1977).

3.2 Roman

The route of the major Roman road of Ermine St is believed to lie on the south western edge of Market Hill and therefore Roman remains relating to occupation or burials along the road may be encountered. The closest known Roman period occupation is the corridor villa at Whitehills on Mill Common (Davison unpub).

3.3 Saxon (Pre-Conquest Medieval)

The location of the documented Danish and Saxon burhs (the latter being a re-build or extension of the former) is not known. Recent work (Spoerry forthcoming) has attempted to re-assess the evidence now available to provide the best possible indication of the location and extent of Danish and Saxon burhs, and the extent of late Saxon occupation that presumably developed in and around the latter. This process eventually resulted in the very substantial town documented by Domesday Book, which also refers to the twenty properties cleared to make way for the Castle; The SMR entry of most significance in terms of this period is that of the Late Saxon church and burial ground at Whitehills (2545). This is the most obvious element in a range of documentary and recorded data that suggest that the main area of pre-Conquest Saxon settlement was a zone from the later High Street in the

east, to the end of Mill Common in the west, where an earthwork known as the bar dyke probably represent part of the Saxon burh defences.

3.4 Post-Conquest Medieval remains

Huntingdon thrived in the post conquest period until the mid 14th century when it had 16 churches. The fact that only four of these survived by the late 17th century implies settlement contraction.

It is unclear whether the entry on Speed's map refers to St George's Street or church. In the VCH Ladds suggested that St George's Street was the site of a church of that same name, but provided no other information regarding its history. It is not named in any surviving medieval document.

The site is very close to the medieval core of Huntingdon centred on Market Hill 150m to the north east.

There is strong possibility of encountering medieval remains because of the proximity of the Walden's road frontage.

3.5 Historic Maps

On Speed's map of 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. This large field is shown as three separate plots by the time of Jefferey's map (1768) but again no structures are present.

The 1886 O/S 25 " map shows the subject site as an allotment.

4 METHODOLOGY

Prior to the commencement of fieldwork the AFU conducted a desktop and cartographic review of the development area including a review of historical data, previous archaeological work and an examination of all available SMR entries, a summary of which has been presented in the previous sections.

Two trenches totalling 31m in length were excavated using a JCB excavator with a toothless ditching bucket. A total of 4.2% of the development area was evaluated trenching being located as in figure 2.

After machining was completed each trench was cleaned by hand and photographed and recorded using the AFU standard archaeological recording system.

In addition all of the spoil heaps from the trenches were scanned for artefact retrieval.

5 RESULTS

Common layers were found in both excavated trenches which probably represent redundant cultivation soils. Trench 1 revealed postholes, ditches and a beamslot in the western part while quarry pits were revealed in the eastern part. Trench 2 revealed quarry pits, a pit and a ditch.

5.1 Trench 1 (Figure 2)

Trench 1 was 16m long, 1.8m wide and was positioned on an NNW-SSE alignment. Layer 1, topsoil, was 0.70m deep and composed of a dark grey silty clay which contained modern brick. Layer 2 a redundant cultivation soil was 0.40 deep and composed of a dark grey silty clay.

In the centre of the trench a number of features were identified including post holes, ditches and pits. Ditch 4 (deemed probably a ditch butt end rather than a pit) was 1.4m wide and 0.15m deep and contained a single fill 3. This was 0.15m deep and composed of a dark grey silty clay. Finds recovered from Fill 3 included 13th and 14th century pottery. To the east of this feature was posthole 27, which was 0.4m wide and 0.08m deep. It contained one fill 28 which was composed of a greyish brown silty clay with occasional small stones. In the centre of the trench Pit 6 was identified which was 0.40m wide and 0.08m deep. It contained a single fill 5 which was composed of dark grey silty clay. Finds from this context include pottery dating from 1100-1350AD.

Beamslot 8, running on an approximate north south alignment, was 0.40m wide and 0.09m deep. It contained a single fill 9 a dark grey silty clay with occasional small stones. To the east of beamslot 8 was posthole, 10 which was 0.10m wide and 0.50m deep. It contained a single fill 9 which was composed of a dark grey silty clay. Ditch 12 was 0.50m wide and 0.12m deep and ran on an NE-SW alignment. It contained a single fill 26 a dark grey silty clay with occasional small stones.

In the eastern part of the trench a large quarry pit was identified, Pit 14 was 0.60m deep and was steep sided. This pit contained two fills 13 and 23. Fill 13 produced pottery which dates from 1100-1350AD and was composed of a dark grey silty clay with occasional small stones. Fill 23 was composed of a dark grey silty clay with occasional charcoal.

5.3 Trench 2 (Figure 2)

Trench 2 was 14m long and 1.1m deep (upper layers as in trench 1) and was positioned on a NNW-SSE alignment. In the southern part of the site a quarry pit 15 was identified. This feature was not excavated.

Pit 18 was 1.1m wide and 0.45m deep. It contained one fill 19 which was composed of a brown sandy silty clay with occasional small angular stones. Finds from this context include animal bone and pottery dating from 1250-1350 AD. Pit 18 cut Ditch 21 which was 0.40m deep and 1.1m wide. This ditch contained one fill which composed of a dark grey silty clay. To the north of these features was an area of pitting or quarrying. Pit 17 was 0.6m deep, steep sided and contained one fill 16. Fill 16 was composed of dark grey silty clay and produced pottery dating from 1250-1350 AD.

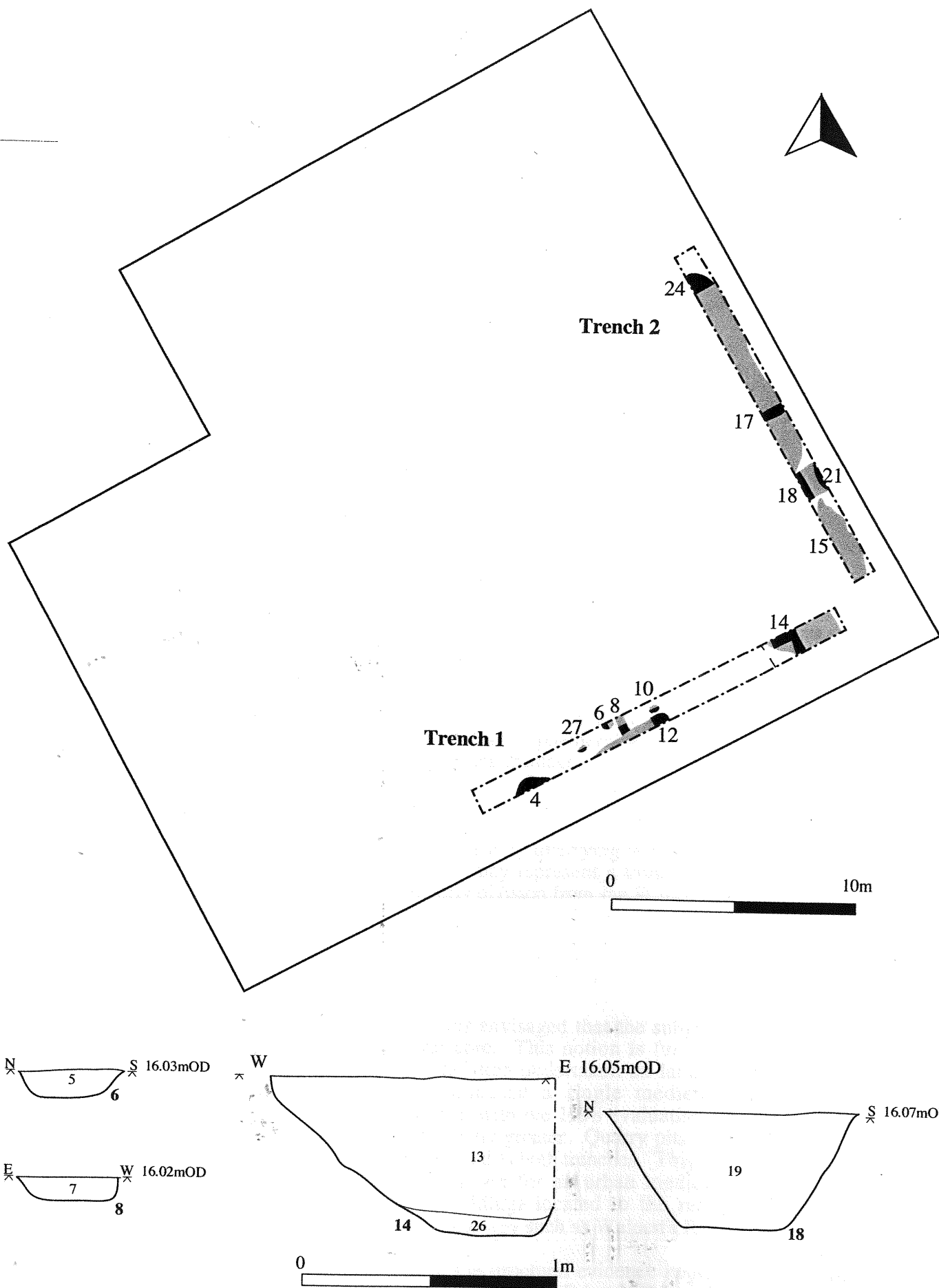


Figure 2 (Above) Trench plans within the development area showing excavated features in black.
(Below) Sections

This area of pitting or quarrying continued into the northern part of the trench where quarry pit 24 was identified. This quarry pit was 0.50m deep, steep-sided and contained a single fill. This fill 25 was composed of a dark grey silty clay and produced no artefacts.

6 DISCUSSION

Trench 1

Thirteenth and fourteenth century quarrying was revealed in the eastern part of trench 1. The small number of artefacts recovered from pit 14 tends to lend weight to the quarrying interpretations. Furthermore the sands and gravels into which the quarry pits were cut suggest these deposits were being intentionally extracted.

The group of features identified in the western part of the trench may be structural or relate to property boundaries.

Beamslot 8 probably represents a truncated property boundary or part of a building dating to the period 1250-1350 AD. Pit 6, located to the west of Beamslot 8 produced material culture dating to 1200-1400AD. Ditch 12 may represent part of a boundary ditch or a foundation trench for a timber structure. Likewise posthole 10 may relate to some form of timber structure perhaps temporary in nature.

This interpretation would provide us with a fairly typical pattern for an urban medieval landscape, whereby fairly ephemeral structures and quarrying are located at some distance from the frontage.

Trench 2

Trench 2 revealed 13th-14th century quarrying in the southern and northern part of the trench. Ditch 19 may represent a truncated property boundary which may relate to a property division from the Walden Rd frontage.

7 CONCLUSION

- 7.1 Prior to this evaluation it was envisaged that the subject site was possibly peripheral to the medieval core. This notion is further supported by the results from a previous evaluation undertaken on land immediately to the west of the site which produced a single medieval pit (Cooper & Sperry 1998). In comparison with the 1998 evaluation the feature density encountered at George St was far greater. Quarry pits dating from the 13th and 14th centuries were observed in both trenches. This interpretation would provide us with a typical pattern for an urban medieval landscape with quarrying and secondary buildings located to the rear of the plots and fronting onto a secondary route way such as Walden's Rd.

Alternatively the location of the structural evidence implies that there was a back lane running parallel to Walden's Rd, which possessed a secondary frontage.

Common layers were found in each of the excavated trenches which represent redundant cultivation soils. The depth of overburden which was over a metre in both trenches can be accounted for by the use of the site as allotments in the last century.

8 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author wishes to thank the Client Elphicks, of Huntingdon, Andrew Thomas from the CAO for monitoring the site, Michelle Bullivant for her work on site and Jon Cane for his illustration work. I would also like to thank Dr Paul Spoerry for project management, pottery dating and editing.

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- Plan of Hospital Lands 1752, reprinted in Dickinson 1972.

Also consulted

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Pottery Assessment

Dr. Paul Spoerry, PhD BTech.

This is a very standard medieval group from Huntingdon representing a single phase of usage/deposition in the 13th and 14th centuries. This fits with the expected period of greatest expansion.

Pottery spot dates, HUNGS 00

Context list	Material	Date
2	1 sherd of Metropolitan Slipware	1600-1700
3	1 sherd of Brill Glazed Jug	1250-1500
3	1 sherd of Lyveden Stanion	1200-1350
3	1 sherd of Shelly ware	1100-1350
3	1 sherd of Grey ware	Roman
5	1 sherd of Ely ware	1200-1400
5	1 sherd of St Neots ware	900-1200
7	2 sherds of Shelly Ware	1100-1350
9	1 sherd of hard Sandy ware	1100-1350
11	3 sherds of Shelly ware	1100-1350
11	1 sherd of Ely ware	1200-1400
11	1 sherd of Lyveden Stanion	1200-1400
11	1 sherd of Lyveden Stanion fineware	1200-1400
13	10 sherds of Shelly ware	1100-1350
13	6 sherds of hard Sandy Ware	1200-1400
13	1 sherd of late Med Colne	1200-1350
13	1 roof tile	late 13th
13	2 sherds of Grimston decorated	1250-1350
13	1 sherd of Glazed Brill	1250-1350
16	1 roof tile, unusual	late 13th
16	2 roof tiles	late 13th
16	5 sherds of Shelly ware	1200-1350
16	3 sherds of Lyveden Stanion	1200-1350
16	4 sherds of Grimston	1250-1350
16	2 sherds of Colne	1200-1400
16	1 sherd of large Ely ware	1200-1350



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