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Post-Medieval Boundary Ditches, St Ives: An Archaeological Evaluation

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Post Medieval Boundary Ditches, St Ives: An Archaeological Evaluation

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2000

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SUMMARY

An archaeological evaluation was carried out at New Road, St Ives to inform the planning process in advance of the construction of a proposed housing development. The work was carried out by the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council between 20th November to 22nd November.

A total of 4 trenches were excavated three of these contained archaeological features from which animal bone was recovered. A significant post-medieval ditch feature on a northeast-southwest alignment was recorded in three of the trenches. This feature has been related to one shown on Pettis 1728 map and aerial photographic evidence also identifies the boundary.

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Post Medieval Boundary Ditches, St Ives: An Archaeological Evaluation NGR TL (3164 7103)

1 INTRODUCTION

An archaeological evaluation was carried out at New Road, St Ives to inform the planning process in advance of the construction of a proposed housing development. The work was carried out by the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council between 20th November to 22nd November.

2 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

The subject site is located south of New Road. The subject site is reasonably level and the temporary bench mark on the subject site is 6.88m above Ordnance Datum. Where as the spot height in Market Street to the west of the site and in the centre of the historic core of St Ives is 7.00m OD. The subject site is on a general slope towards the floodplain east of the town.

The site was bordered on its northern edge by New Road, to the east by a new housing development, to the south by a bowling green and pasture land and to the west by industrial works.

According to the British Geological Survey map (sheet 187), St Ives is based on alluviated gravels of the River Ouse. The natural geological layer encountered in all four trenches was a mixture dark orange coarse sand medium gravel and medium pebbles.

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Prehistoric (Before AD 43)

The gravel terraces of the Great Ouse in the locality of St Ives have provided evidence of significant prehistoric activity in the area. Stray finds spanning the paleolithic to neolithic periods are well documented (Cambridgeshire Sites and Monuments Record). They include numerous finds from the gravel pits c500m to the east of the subject site. These finds span the paleolithic to the Iron Age (SMR 2029, 1916, 1961, 1425, 1489, 1669 and 3595). Recent

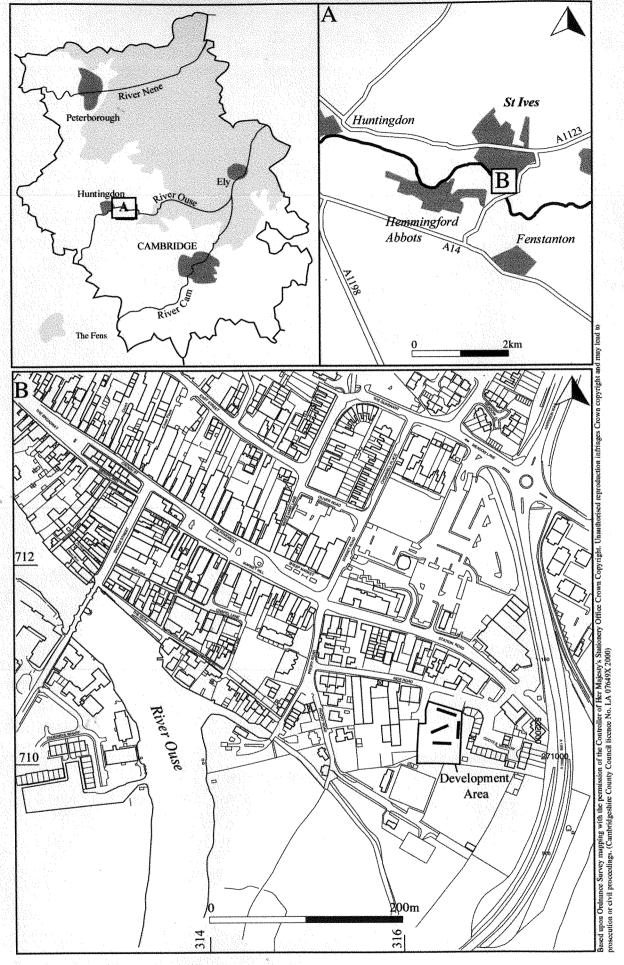


Figure 1 Site Location Plan showing development area and trenches

excavations also in advance of gravel extraction to the east of the town have revealed funerary monuments, field systems, boundaries and settlement of later prehistoric date (Cambs. SMR; Evans, Lucas, Malim, Reynolds & Way; 1997; 171-188).

Romano-British (AD 43-410)

The Great Ouse valley also provided attractive settlement locations for this period. St Ives lies c 0.7km from the significant Roman town of Durovigutum (Godmanchester), and villas were located along the river valley.

Within St Ives excavations adjacent to Priory Road at 'The Priory' (a nineteenth century house thought to be located on the site of the medieval Priory - see below), have provided evidence of Romano-British settlement within the historic medieval core of St Ives. An excavation in the 1940s focussed on the Priory barn walls revealed earlier foundations and a pottery sequence dating to the Romano-British period (1st-4th centuries AD), suggestive of settlement activity (Green 1958). More recent excavations at the Priory, have provided further evidence of settlement in the form of a ditched enclosure encompassing several pits and a posthole structure. Romano-British pottery of local and imported wares were recovered, as well as more high status finds such as mosaic tile (Murray 1997).

To the north-east of St Ives excavations on the Needingworth bypass (Schlee 1995), provided evidence of industrial and domestic activity associated with the 3rd and 4th century AD.

The most well known find which is likely to be of this period is the stone coffin and skeletal remains which were attributed to the fabled St Ive (or Ivo), a bishop of Persia, from which the town derives its current name (see below-Medieval). It is far more likely that the remains discovered by Saxon ploughmen were of a Romano-Britain. The recent excavations discussed above would appear to add further evidence that this is the case.

The subject site lies c150m from the Priory excavations, and is therefore in an area of high potential for finds of the Romano-British period.

Anglo-Saxon (AD 410-1066)

It is likely that the Anglo-Saxon settlement of Slepe, (as St Ives was originally known), derives its name from its location, Slepe means 'muddy low lying ground by the river' in Old English (Mawer & Stenton 1969, 222). It was probably located around the parish church, which lies c700m north-west of the subject site. This was already present by the time of the Domesday Book (Page, Proby & Ladds 1932). The district of the town called the 'Green' extends north of the church along the road to Ramsey and has a sinuous shape reminiscent of organically derived settlement. This was probably the main part of the pre-conquest village (Spoerry – unpublished). The focus of settlement activity was to move in the early medieval period to the part of the town known as the 'Street', which runs east west from the parish church

parallel to the river. The street layout and property boundaries here have a more structured appearance, and it has been suggested that this part of the town was medieval in origin (Page, Proby & Ladds 1932). However, recent work off Priory Road (Murray 1997), recorded the presence of a grubenhauser (sunken building) containing pottery sherds dateable to AD 400-900. Work at Wellington Street (Cooper 1999) also recorded evidence of Anglo-Saxon activity in this area, in the form of sealed deposits containing pottery sherds dating from AD 900-1150. Both projects challenge the current ideas concerning the development of the pre-conquest settlement of St Ives, suggesting this may need revision. The subject site lies c150m south east of the above excavations, and is therefore also in an area of high potential for finds of this period.

Medieval (AD 1066-1520)

Slepe (Later St Ives) was a holding of Ramsey Abbey since the late tenth century. It had been raised to fame following the discovery of a stone coffin and skeletal remains, which had been attributed to St Ive (or St Ivo), by Abbot Ednoth (992-1008). He established a cell of the abbey with its own church dedicated to the honour of St Ive, this was located near to the site of the 'saints grave', from which a health giving spring was said to have arisen. It is thought that this may have been located on or close to 'The Priory' excavations discussed above, it was later replaced after a fire in 1207 destroyed it. The medieval Priory was built on the same site and consecrated in 1238, the building continued in use until the Dissolution in 1539. Its exact location is unknown although the Cambridgeshire SMR records that it is likely to have been located on the site where a nineteenth century house 'The Priory' preserves its name. The grounds of this property have been subject to excavations, which have revealed the presence of medieval features, notably a huge ditch likely to be a demarcation of the Priory estate (Murray 1997). Also, medieval masonry has been noted in the garden of the Priory (Cambs SMR 03594), and in surrounding properties. Pettis survey of 1728 (Huntingdon County Record Office, SM 16/189) depicts Priory Road and a substantial house on the approximate site of the above excavations (see Fig. 2). The subject site lies within the area referred to as 'Priory Clos', at the time of the Pettis survey, and appears to have been arable land. It is also located just north of Priory Dike. It has been suggested that the subject site was within land owned and used by the medieval Priory (Spoerry pers comm), and for this reason remains relating to activity associated with the medieval Priory were considered to be a possibility.

The Priory and the activities of its sponsors at Ramsey Abbey are fundamental to the formation of the historic medieval core of St Ives, which gives great significance to any remains relating to it. The main reasons for establishing a Priory on the site are less likely to be connected with the unlikely tale of St Ive, and the associated tales of healing springs, and more likely to be economical. The story of St Ive was used to raise the profile of this profitable smallholding, which grew to be an important medieval market of international renown in the cloth trade. French merchants in Douai recorded it as being in their list of five major English markets in 1258 (Hudson 1989).

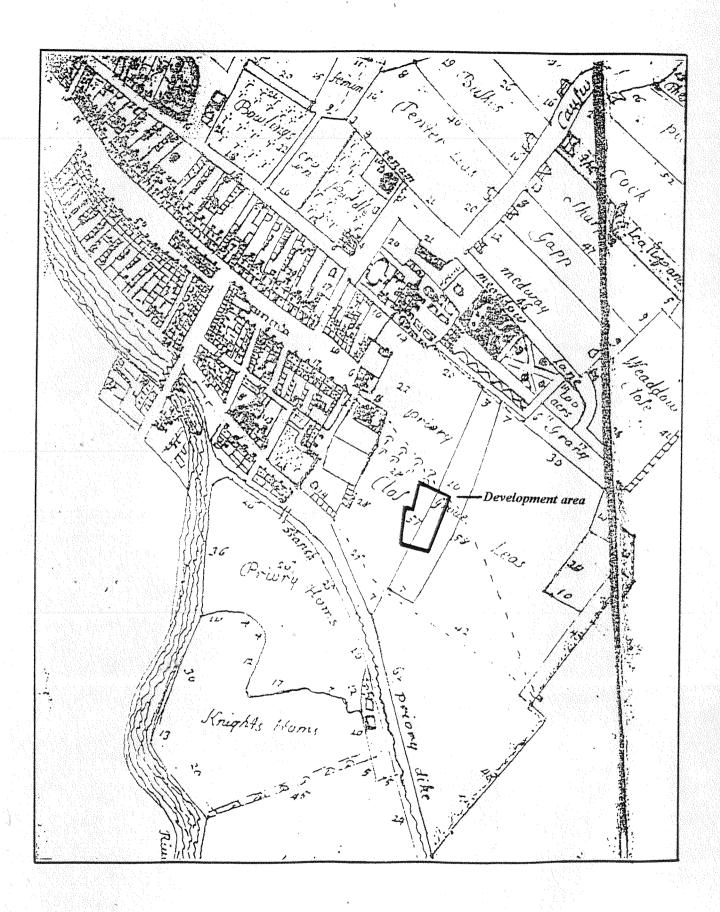


Figure 2 Detail from Pettis' Survey of St Ives, 1728, with development area outlined in black.

This had been made possible by the granting of an annual eight day Easter Fair in 1110 AD and the establishment of a 600m long market area running parallel to the river from the parish church in the northeast to the Priory in the southwest. Traffic on the Ramsey to Potton Road was compelled to pass through the market and the Ouse River meant that national and international trade links could be encouraged (Page Proby & Ladds 1932). The economic success of St Ives led to the economic eclipse of Huntingdon further downstream, a process that was encouraged by the construction of mill weirs on the Ouse between the two settlements. It appears that these impeded the traffic of goods to Huntingdon, the protests of the authorities are documented from the period, (Spoerry – unpublished), however, the owners of these mills (at Ramsey Abbey) were unmoved by their plight. Instead it is suggested this was part of plan to increase the success of their investment in St Ives to the detriment of surrounding competitors such as Huntingdon. Therefore the very existence of the historic core of St Ives is intrinsically linked to the towns medieval Priory. The location of the subject site only c150m east its suspected location meant that finds from the period of its existence were considered a high possibility.

Post-Medieval (AD 1520-present)

The medieval fair declined in significance, and was abandoned in 1511. This was largely due to the decline in trade with French merchants due to the Hundred Years War (Spoerry - unpublished). The town continued as a market centre of local importance, but it never regained its former significance as a centre for the international cloth trade. A fire devastated the town in 1689, after which rebuilding took place. A weekly cattle market then grew in importance, by 1800 it was regarded as second only to Smithfield (Hudson 1989). Much of the trade was with Ireland. This important trade was developed further with the coming of the railway in the 19th century. However, a new cattle market twelve miles away in Cambridge opened in 1886, and this triggered a decline in the significance of trade in St Ives. Eventually the railway was closed, a branch line had run directly along the southern border of the subject site. Remains associated with works for the railway, or activities associated with it were expected on the subject site.

It was clear that the site is located within an area of high archaeological potential, and may have contained remains from any of the periods discussed above.

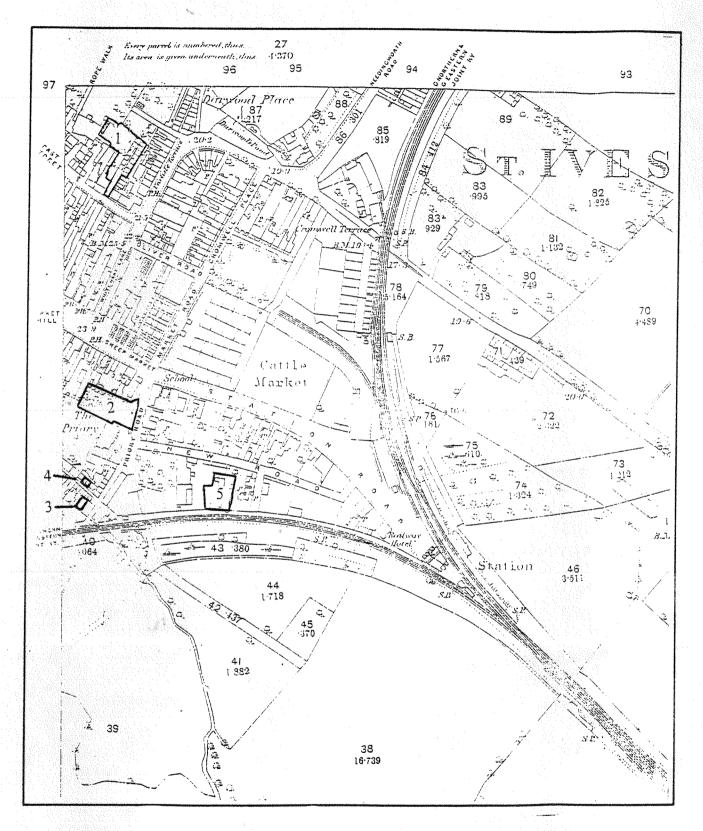


Figure 3 Detail from 1887 OS map, showing locations of Archaeological projects in the vicinity

- 1) AFU (Oakey 1995)
- 3) AFU (Robinson 1998)
- 5) AFU (Abrams 2000)

- 2) HAT (Murray 1997)
- 4) AFU (Cooper 1999)

4 METHODOLOGY

Four trenches (1, 2, 3 and 4) totalling 76m in length, were located within the area of a proposed housing development. This gave slightly over a 5% sample of the affected area. Topsoil and modern overburden were removed in the trenches using a mechanical excavator with a 1.5m flat bladed ditching bucket. This was carried out under the full time supervision of an archaeologist. Trenches were located to give a representative sample of the available area, and also to avoid electricity cables in the southern part of the site.

After machining each trench was photographed. A sample of every archaeological feature was excavated by hand in order to determine date and character. The AFU's single context based recording system was used to record all the archaeological features and deposits, sections were hand drawn at a scale of 1:10 for features, and 1:50 in the case of entire evaluation trench sections. Plans were hand drawn at a scale of 1:50. In addition all the spoil heaps from the trenches were scanned for artefacts by eye.

In this report deposit numbers are shown in plain text and cut numbers are in **bold** text.

5 RESULTS

Trench 1

Trench 1 was 18.0m long 1.50m wide and 1.35m to 1.50m deep and aligned east-west (see Fig.2).

The topsoil, 1, was a dark brown fine sand layer 0.10m deep, it contained frequent brick, concrete and mortar fragments. Topsoil 1 was of recent origin and formed a thin layer over 2, a modern demolition layer of light yellow coarse sand containing frequent concrete rubble and large lenses of contaminated black sand. Layer 2 varied in depth from 0.25m to 0.50m deep. Below this was 3, a dark orange layer of coarse sand containing frequent small pebbles, this was 0.25m deep. Layer 3 is likely to be the make up/foundation layer for the post-medieval industrial buildings, which existed on the subject site before demolition. Sealed by 3 was subsoil layer 4 a mid brown fine sand layer containing moderate amounts of medium pebbles, this was 0.50m to 0.60m deep. Layer 4 is likely to be the levelled remains of the medieval plough soil, which is still visible as ridge and furrow in the fields directly south of the subject site. The natural geological layer 5, was a dark orange alluvial gravel layer made up of coarse sand and frequent medium pebbles. This was encountered at a depth of 1.20m to 1.25m in Trench 1.

Trench 1 located two ditches 102 and 104. Feature 102 was at the extreme western end of the Trench and appeared to be part of a ditch on a northeast-southwest alignment. Feature 104 was recorded at the western end of Trench 1 and ran on a west-north-west to east-south-east alignment for 11 metres. These features share apparently contemporary fills, although they may have been in use at different times, later becoming backfilled by natural silting processes. The alignment of ditch features 301 (Trench 3) and 401 (Trench 4) with 102 in Trench 1 suggests they may all be contemporary (see Fig. 4). Feature 104 was excavated and appears to be a drainage channel likely to be associated with medieval or post-medieval agriculture on the subject site. The surrounding land to the southeast still contains visible medieval ridge and furrow earthworks (see Fig. 6), and these may well have extended on to the subject site during the medieval period.

Ditch 102, 0.80m wide, 1.50m long, linear in plan, one fill visible, aligned northeast - southwest:

Fill 101, a mid brown fine sand with no inclusions. No finds recovered.

Note - Feature **102** was visible at a depth of 1.50m and was not excavated for health and safety reasons as it was adjacent to the vertical baulk of the trench and was below the water table.

Ditch 104, 1.50m wide 0.60m deep, linear in plan, steep sided and with a slightly convex base, contained one fill, aligned west-north-west to east-south-east.

Fill 103, a mid brown fine sand. The fill contained a band of rounded medium pebbles at the interface with the natural geology. No finds recovered.

Trench 2

Trench 2 was 20.0m long 1.50m wide and 1.05m to 1.30m deep and aligned north-south (see Fig.2).

The surface layer 2 in Trench 2 was a modern demolition deposit of light yellow coarse sand containing frequent concrete rubble and large lenses of contaminated black sand. Layer 2 varied in depth from 0.30m to 0.35m deep. Below this was 3, a dark orange layer of coarse sand containing frequent small pebbles, this was 0.25m to 0.35m deep. Layer 3 is likely to be the make up/foundation layer for the post-medieval industrial buildings, which existed on the subject site prior to demolition. Sealed by 3 was subsoil layer 4, a mid brown fine sand layer containing moderate amounts of medium pebbles, this was 0.50m to 0.60m deep. Layer 4 is likely to be the levelled remains of the medieval plough soil, which is still visible as ridge and furrow earthworks in the fields directly south of the site. The natural geological layer 5, was a dark orange alluvial gravel layer made up of coarse sand and frequent medium pebbles. This was encountered at a depth of 1.00m to 1.15m in Trench 2.

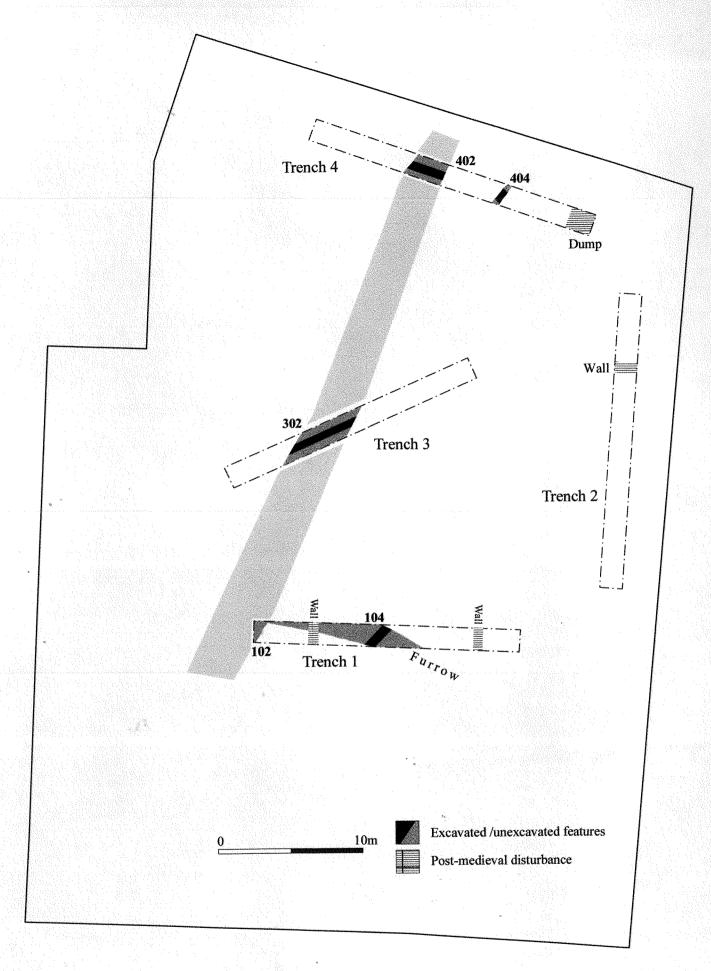


Figure 4 Detail of Trenches 1, 2, 3 and 4 showing possible alignment of Ditches 402, 302 and 102

Trench 2 contained one post medieval feature, 203 cut into the natural geology. This consisted of foundation material and a 'regular' coursing of *insitu* post-medieval brickwork. This feature is the remains of one of several industrial buildings, which were built on the subject site in the post-medieval period.

Wall 203, 1.05m wide, 1.15m deep, linear in plan, vertical sides, base not excavated, contained two fills, aligned east-west.

Fill 201, Mid red and mid yellow bricks with light red and light yellow inclusions giving mottled effect. Bricks dimensions are 0.23m x 0.10m x 0.07m. Bonded with mid grey sandy mortar with charcoal flecks.

Fill 202, Mid red and mid yellow brick fragments with slate fragments. Bonded with mid grey sandy mortar. No finds recovered.

Trench 3

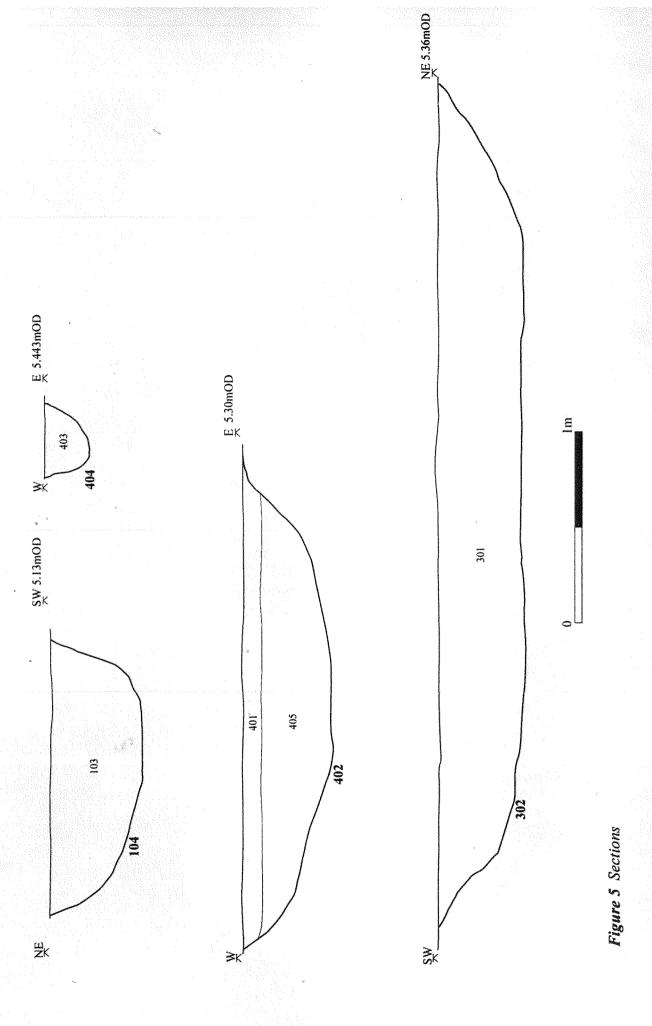
Trench 3 was 18.0m long 1.50m wide and 1.00m deep, and aligned northeast-southwest (see Fig.2).

The surface layer 2 in Trench 3 was a modern demolition layer of light yellow coarse sand containing frequent concrete rubble and large lenses of contaminated black sand. Layer 2 varied in depth from 0.10m to 0.35m. Sealed by 2 was subsoil layer 4 a mid brown fine sand layer containing moderate amounts of medium pebbles, this was 0.50m to 0.60m deep. Layer 4 is likely to be the levelled remains of the medieval plough soil, which is still visible as ridge and furrow in the fields directly south of the subject site. The natural geological layer 5, was a dark orange alluvial gravel layer made up of coarse sand and frequent medium pebbles. This was encountered at a depth of 0.95m in Trench 3.

Trench 3 contained one archaeological feature cutting into the natural geology. Ditch 302 was 3.60m from the southwest end of trench 3, on a northeast-southwest alignment. Ditch 302 also cut through the subsoil 4, suggesting it was a relatively late feature, likely to be post-medieval, unfortunately it produced no finds. However, this feature appears to be aligned with ditch feature 401 in Trench 4, and feature 102 in Trench 1 (see Fig. 4). Feature 302 also shares a very similar fill (301), with feature 402 (401). The difference in width between the two excavated features is due to the alignment of Trench 3, which is not at a right angle to this large feature. There is further cartographic and aerial photographic evidence to support the interpretation (see Discussion section below). The upper part of fill 301 was very similar to subsoil 4, there is likely to have been some mixing here, possibly due to the levelling of medieval ridge and furrow ploughsoil on the site, and the subsequent backfilling of ditch 302.

Ditch 302, 4.60m wide, 0.45m deep, linear in plan, steep sided with a flat base, contained one fill, aligned northeast-southwest:

Fill 301, a dark brown sandy silt. The fill contained frequent small pebbles. No finds recovered



Trench 4

Trench 4 was 20.00m long 1.50m wide and 1.20m to 1.25m deep, and aligned west-north-west (see Fig.2).

The topsoil 1 was a dark brown fine sand layer 0.10m deep, it contained frequent brick, concrete and mortar fragments.

The surface layer 2 in Trench 3 was a modern demolition layer of light yellow coarse sand containing frequent concrete rubble and large lenses of contaminated black sand. Layer 2 varied in depth from 0.15m to 0.50m deep. Below this was 3 a dark orange layer of coarse sand containing frequent small pebbles, this was 0.10m deep. Layer 3 is likely to be the make up/ foundation layer for the post medieval industrial buildings, which existed on the site before demolition. Sealed by 3 was subsoil layer 4 a mid brown fine sand layer containing moderate amounts of medium pebbles, this was 0.50m to 0.60m deep. Layer 4 is likely to be the levelled remains of the medieval plough soil, which is still visible as ridge and furrow in the fields directly south of the site. In Trench 4 alone was a second layer of subsoil 6, this was an orange brown medium sand layer. This had much in common with layer 4, and appears to represent a zone of mixing at the interface between the orange natural and the subsoil 4 it was 0.15 to 0.20m deep. The natural geological layer 5, was a dark orange alluvial gravel layer made up of coarse sand and frequent medium pebbles. This was encountered at a depth of 1m to 1.10m in Trench 4.

Trench 4 contained two features observed cutting into the natural geology. Ditch 402 was located 7.3m from the western end of Trench 4, on a northeast-southwest alignment. Feature 402 also cut through subsoil 4 suggesting it was a relatively late feature, likely to be post-medieval, unfortunately it produced no dateable finds. However, this feature appears to be aligned with ditch 301 in Trench 3, and 102 in Trench 1 (see Fig. 4). Feature 402 also shares a very similar fill (401), with feature 302 (301). The difference in width between the two excavated features is due to the alignment of Trench 3. There is further cartographic and aerial photographic evidence to back up such an alignment (see Discussion section below). As with feature 302 the upper part of fill 401 was very similar to subsoil 4, there is likely to have been some mixing here, possibly due to the levelling of medieval ridge and furrow ploughsoil on the site, and the subsequent backfilling of ditch 402.

Feature **409** was located at the extreme eastern end of Trench 4, and contained three fills, all 20th century industrial rubbish deposits. Feature **409** did not cut the natural geology and is therefore not shown on plan for Trench 4.

Ditch 402, 2.60m wide, 0.49m deep, linear in plan, steep slightly convex sides, slightly convex base, contained two fills, aligned northeast-southwest: Fill 401, a dark mid brown sandy silt, frequent small stones and occasional bone fragments, 0.09m deep.

Fill 405, mid brown sandy silt, frequent medium gravel and moderate amounts of shells, 0.40m deep.

Ditch **404**, 0.40m wide, 0.35m deep, linear in plan, near vertical sides, slightly convex base, contained one fill, aligned northeast-southwest: Fill 403, mid brown sandy silt, frequent small and medium flint pebbles,

moderate amounts of medium pebbles, occasional small bone pieces.

Pit 409, 2.75m wide, 0.75m deep, oval, circular shape in plan, sloping slightly convex sides, flat base, contained three fills:

Fill 406, very dark black fine gravel

Fill 407, red brick and yellow mortar fragments

Fill 408, dark black fine gravel layer

Modern glass and metal artefacts recovered from all three contexts.

6 DISCUSSION

The most significant features on this site are ditches 402, 302 and 102, which appear to form a northeast-southwest alignment (see Fig 4). Both 402 and 302 were excavated, they share the same stratigraphic relationships and are similar in morphology and character. Neither produced dateable finds but their stratigraphic position truncating the likely medieval ploughsoil suggests a late, likely post-medieval date. It is the author's opinion that these represent a postmedieval land boundary, which has subsequently been backfilled to create a level surface on which to construct nineteenth century buildings associated with the railway. This idea is backed up by cartographic sources, which show the subject site in 1728 and 1887. In the earlier example (see Fig.2) the subject site is shown straddling two pieces of land 'Priory Clos' and 'Groue' split by a broadly northeast-southwest boundary. It is this boundary which is most likely to be that represented by archaeological features 402, 302 and 102. On the later nineteenth century map (see Fig. 3) the subject site is covered in buildings and a new road (called New Road) borders the northern part of the site, on the southern border is the railway line. Significantly no development has taken place south of the railway line. The railway line split the subject site from the fields to the south, and the subject site was subsequently developed for industrial purposes. This phase of activity still effects the topography and appearance of the area today, the land to the south and southeast of the site still has visible ridge and furrow earthworks and is also c1.0m lower than the built up industrial zone north of the railway. Therefore it is likely that layers 1,2 and 3, in particular, represent the phase of activity which saw the subject site buried, raised in height and levelled in the nineteenth century.

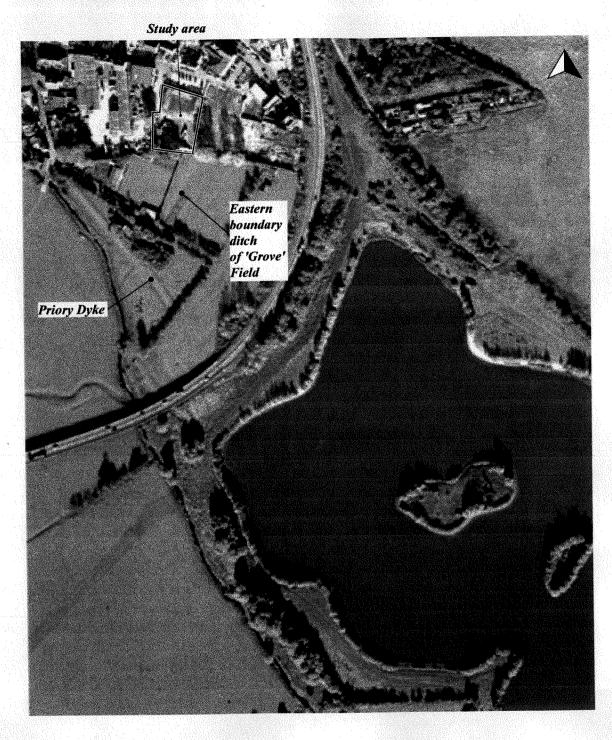


Figure 6 Aerial photograph of the study area

Further evidence for this can be found from aerial photographs of the area (see Fig. 6), which clearly show two lines of interest to this discussion. One on a northwest-southeast alignment is likely to be the 'Priory Dike', and the other on a northeast-southwest alignment is likely to be the other land boundary shown on Pettis 1728 survey (see Fig.2), which separates the strip of land 'Groue' from that referred to as 'Leas'. This earthwork is still visible in the adjacent field as a ditch of comparable size to that found on the subject site.

Other sources of evidence on the area can provide no explanations for the more minor features, 104 and 404, which are likely to be late medieval or post medieval drainage channels.

7 CONCLUSION

The subject site was located outside the historic medieval settlement core, apparently on land close to the Priory, but not used for settlement or industrial purposes. Instead the site appears to straddle a land boundary between two post-medieval agricultural plots, one of which preserves the Medieval Priory's name 'Priory Clos' (see Fig.2). This evaluation suggests that it was not until the coming of the railway in the nineteenth century that any significant building activity took place on this site.

8 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank T.W.Lumley Limited (Tom Lumley) who commissioned and funded the archaeological work, and in particular Ian Parish and Mark Beaby who provided on-site support on behalf of the developer. Thanks also to Diane Walls for her work on the site, to Caroline Malim for the illustrations, and to Judith Roberts who managed the project. The author also worked on the site.

The project was carried out and the report prepared in response to a brief written by Andy Thomas from the County Archaeology Office (Development Control) who visited and monitored the site.

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Maps references.

1728 Pettis map of the parish closes and town of St Ives consulted at Fulbourn

Ordnance Survey map 1885 25 inch St Ives consulted at Fulbourn

Appendix 1 Context List

Trench No	Context No	Fill of	Filled by	Context type
1	1	-	-	Topsoil layer
All	2	-	-	Modern demolition layer
All	3	-	-	Post Medieval make-up layer
All	4	-	-	Subsoil
All	5	-	-	Natural
1	101	102	-	Fill of ditch
1	102	-	101	Ditch cut
1	103	104	.	Fill of ditch
1	104		103	Ditch cut
2	201	203	-	Cut for wall
2	202	203	-	Foundation material
2	203	_	201, 202	Brickwork
3	301	302	-	Ditch fill
3	302	_	301	Ditch cut
4	401	402	-	Ditch fill
4	402	-	401, 405	Ditch cut
4	403	404	-	Ditch fill
4	404	_	403	Ditch cut
4	405	402	**	Ditch fill
4	406	409	-	Fill of pit
4	407	409	-	Fill of pit
4	408	409	-	Fill of pit
4	409	-	406, 407, 408	Cut of post medieval pit





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