

Archaeological Field Unit

**A Medieval Ditch at 30 Great Whyte, Ramsey,
Cambridgeshire**

Spencer Cooper

January 2003

Cambridgeshire County Council

Report No. A213

Commissioned by Hunts Construction Ltd

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SUMMARY

On the 9th January 2003, an archaeological evaluation was undertaken on land to the rear of 30 Great Whyte, Ramsey (TL2867 8517) by staff of the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council. The proposed development involves the construction of five town houses with parking and associated services. The project was commissioned by Hunts Construction Ltd. The work was carried out in accordance with a Brief for an archaeological evaluation issued by Andy Thomas of the Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Service (Planning Application No H/002807FUL).

The evaluation revealed a medieval ditch, heading in the direction of the Great Whyte, which contained pottery and bone.

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**A Medieval Ditch at 30 Great Whyte, Ramsey, Cambridgeshire
(TL2867 8517)**

1 INTRODUCTION

On the 9th January 2003, an archaeological evaluation was undertaken on land to the rear of 30 Great Whyte, Ramsey (TL2867 8517) by staff of the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council. The proposed development involves the construction of five town houses with parking and associated services. The project was commissioned by Hunts Construction Ltd. The work was carried out in accordance with a Brief for an archaeological evaluation issued by Andy Thomas of the Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Service (Planning Application No H/002807FUL).

From the outset it was hoped that this project would aid us in refining our understanding the development of medieval Ramsey.

2 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

Ramsey lies on a slightly elevated peninsula of boulder clay till overlying Oxford Clay which projects 4km from the south western fen edge. Areas of gravel are present around the margins of the peninsula.

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The site is located in the core of the historic town of Ramsey. The town of Ramsey owes its entire existence to Ramsey Abbey.

Ramsey Abbey

Ramsey Abbey was founded as a regular Benedictine monastery in AD 969 by Ailwyn (foster brother to King Edgar), and by AD 974 (Page *et al*, 1932) a wooden church was recorded and dedicated. Substantial land grants led to the church becoming one of the richest not only in the fens, but in the whole country, and was to earn it the name of "Ramsey the Golden". The abbey continued to flourish throughout the eleventh century, surviving both the Danish invasion and Norman Conquest. In the twelfth century the monastic buildings and the church were rebuilt using stone from Barnack (near Peterborough). It was also in the twelfth century that the monastery was seized by the Essex Baron Geoffrey de Mandeville, in the period known as the 'Anarchy' (1140-4).

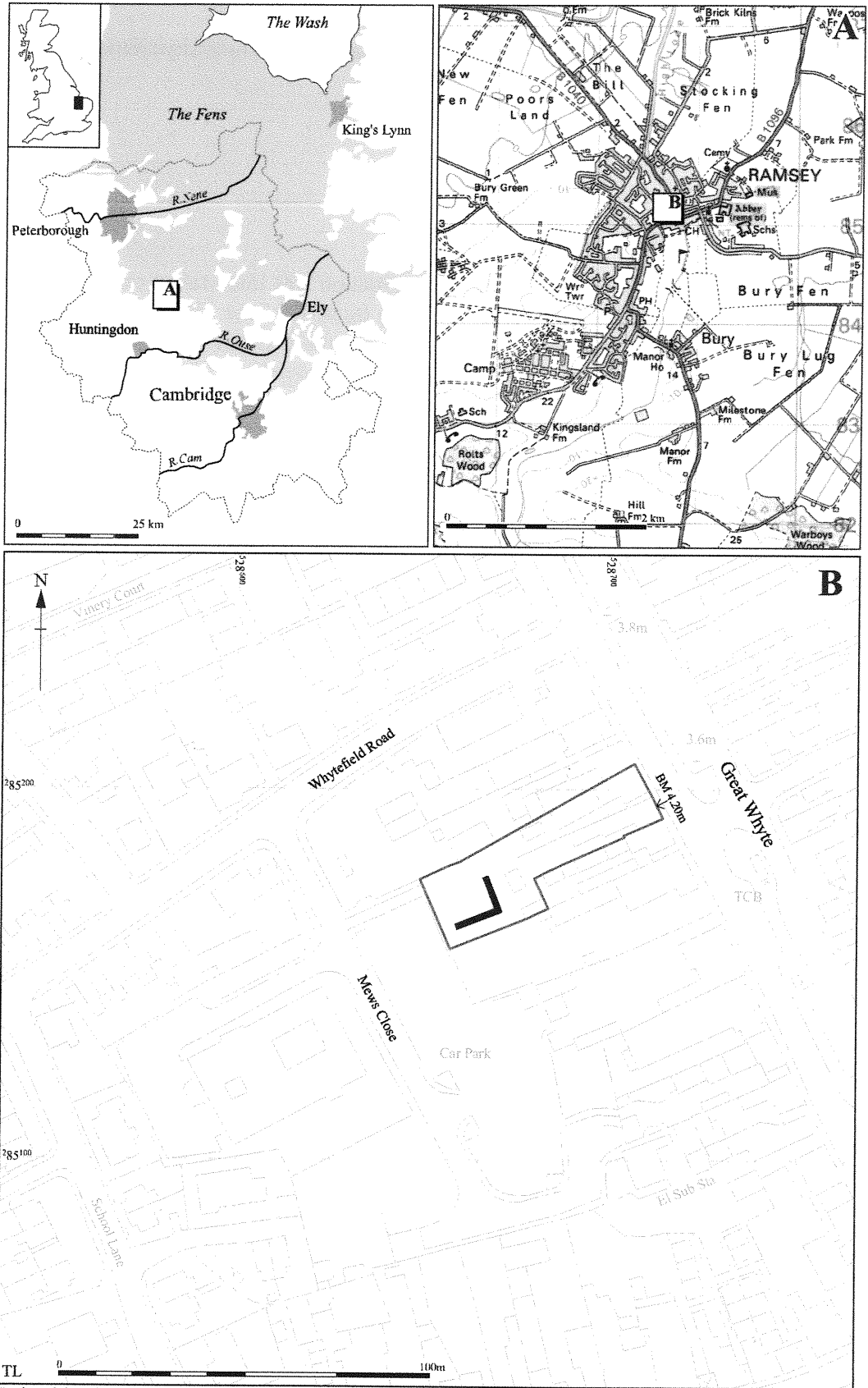


Figure 1 Location of Trench (black) with Development Area outlined (red).

In 1998 an archaeological excavation was undertaken on the early monastic buildings (Macaulay, 1999). Investigation uncovered remains from the late Saxo-Norman period (tenth-eleventh century AD) and a twelfth century (probable Anarchy) fortification ditch.

The Medieval Town

The early history of Ramsey is obscure and the town is not mentioned in the Domesday Survey. The town was recorded in the mid-twelfth century and by the thirteenth century had been granted a weekly market and annual fair. Ramsey was a small market town serving the Abbey and north-east Huntingdonshire (Page and Proby 1932).

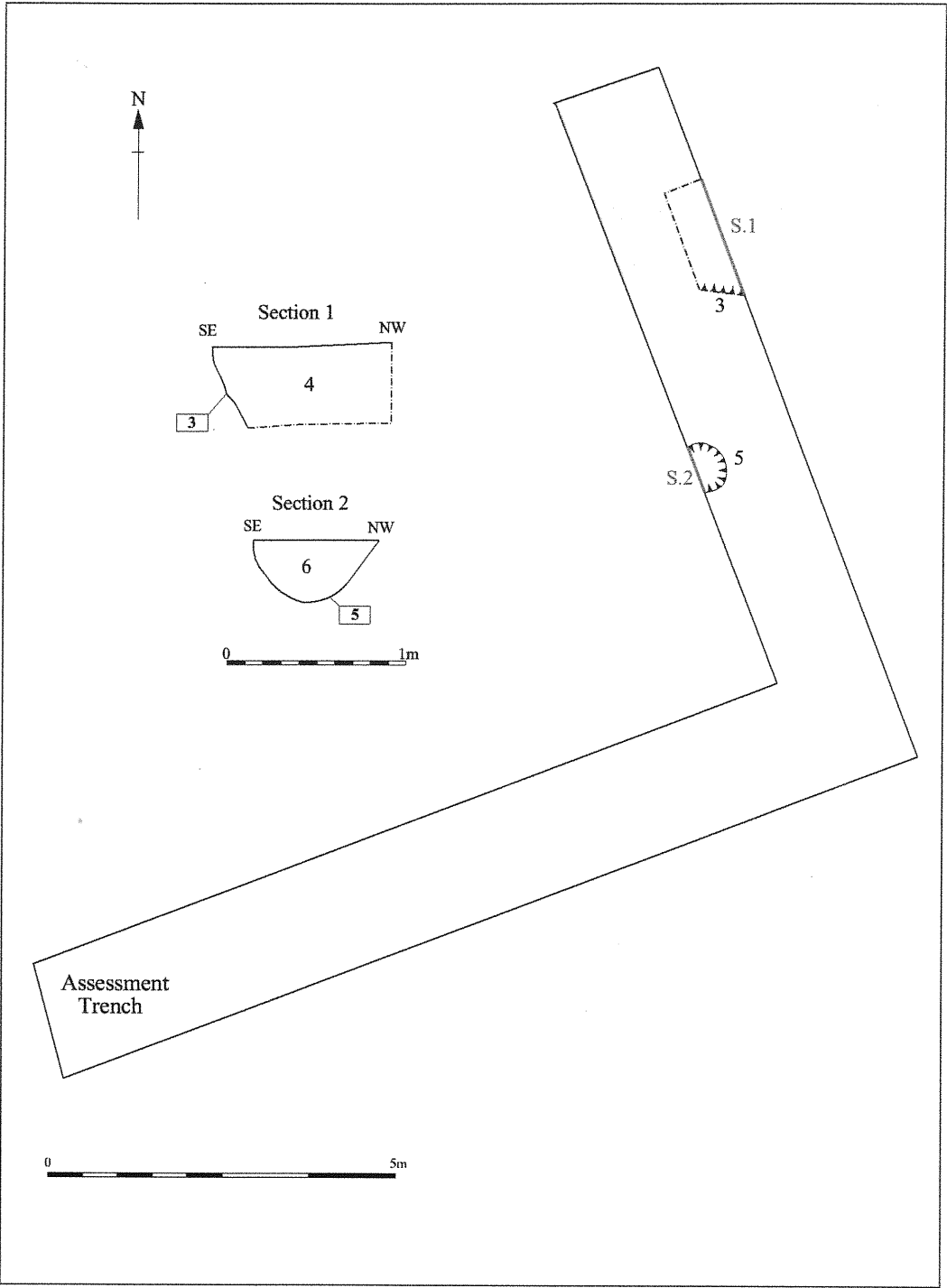
Very little archaeological work has been carried out within the town of Ramsey. A recent evaluation at Newton Green revealed medieval strata cut by a pit of high medieval date (twelfth–fourteenth century) covered by over a metre of modern overburden (Pearson and McDonald 2000). A Recording Brief at Marriots Yard found no archaeological remains (Membery and Hatton 1996, SMR 11975). A building at 88 Great Whyte, demolished in 1980, is recorded as having been a fifteenth century structure with deeply stratified earlier medieval deposits. An archaeological evaluation undertaken on land at Ramsey Garden Centre, Great Whyte, revealed a sequence of medieval and post-medieval deposits containing sparse quantities of shell, animal bone and late medieval tile. The only archaeological feature present was an early post-medieval ditch (Last, 2002).

Great Whyte

The Great Whyte was known as *la wihite* in the thirteenth century. Its present width is due to the former presence of an artificial watercourse running within it discharging into the High Lode and then the Nene to the north. Dating back to at least the thirteenth century, it was a culvert in the nineteenth century. The burgage units laid out at right angles to the Great Whyte represent secondary development of the settlement.

4 METHODOLOGY

An 'L-shaped' trench (12.40m long on an east-west alignment and 8.70m long on a north-south alignment) was excavated using a mechanical excavator with a toothless ditching bucket. Total trenching was 6% of the total development area. The position of the trench is shown in Figure 1. After machining was completed each trench was cleaned by hand, photographed and recorded using the A.F.U. standard archaeological system. In addition the spoil heap from the trench was scanned visually for artefacts. From the outset observations of the trench were severely hampered by the presence of large quantities of ground water.



5 RESULTS

A ditch and a pit were observed in the north-south arm of the trench. The ditch produced medieval pottery and animal bone. Clay pipe was recovered from the pit. The overburden was 0.90m and consisted of two layers. Layer 1 was overlying layer 2. Layer 1 was 0.45m deep and consisted of dark grey clay silt. Layer 2 was 0.45m deep and consisted of dark brown silty clay.

Trench 1

Trench 1 was 12.40m long and 0.90m deep on an east-west alignment and 8.70m on a north-south alignment. In the northern part of the trench a medieval ditch was identified. This ditch, 3, ran on an east-west alignment and contained a single fill which produced medieval pottery and animal bone. The fill, 4, consisted of dark grey silty clay. To the south of ditch 3 was a pit. This pit was 0.70m wide and 0.30m deep and contained a single fill, 6. Fill 6 was light grey silty clay and contained a clay pipe stem. Both features were cut into the glacial till.

6 DISCUSSION

The evaluation has revealed medieval and post-medieval activity within the site. The medieval ditch may represent a boundary for a medieval burgage plot which ran off the Great Whyte channel. The Grimston ware pottery recovered from this ditch dates from 1350-1500AD. The pit contained a post-medieval clay pipe fragment. The overburden consisted of recent garden soil.

7 CONCLUSION

The presence of medieval activity within the development area confirms that burgage plots developed alongside the Great Whyte canal in the thirteenth or fourteenth century. The nature of the evidence from this evaluation is comparable with the results of a recent evaluation undertaken to the north of development area at the Ramsey Garden Centre (Last, 2002).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Drawing Conventions

Sections	Plans
Limit of Excavation -----	Limit of Excavation _____
Cut _____	Deposit - Conjectured -----
Cut - Conjectured -----	Natural Features Intrusion/Truncation -----
Soil Horizon -----	Sondages/Machine Strip -----
Soil Horizon - Conjectured	Illustrated Section _____ S.14
Intrusion/Truncation -----	
Top of Natural _____	Deposit
Top Surface _____	Cut Number 118
Break in Section -----	
Cut Number 118	
Deposit Number 117	
Ordnance Datum $\frac{18.45m}{\wedge}$ ODN	



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