

**Romano-British Features at 71 Castle Street, Cambridge:
An Archaeological Evaluation**

R Heawood

1997

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Report No B10

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Introduction

Cambridgeshire County Council's Archaeological Field Unit conducted an archaeological evaluation at 71 Castle Street on 17th September 1997. The evaluation was commissioned by Mr Miah of the Star of India Restaurant in advance of the proposed construction of a restaurant extension. The work was designed to fulfil the requirements of a brief produced by the County Archaeology Office (Kaner 1997). It took the form of a single hand dug test pit excavated in a yard to the rear of the present Star of India restaurant, at TL 44415/59265. The main objective was to ascertain the depth below the modern ground surface at which undisturbed archaeological deposits survived.

Geology and Topography

The site lies on Lower Chalk and Marl beds, but excavations in the vicinity have revealed the survival of a capping of Pleistocene sands and gravels above the chalk (Alexander 1996). It occupies a low promontory of higher ground overlooking a crossing point of the river Cam to the south-east. Today the investigation area lies close to the centre of Cambridge, opposite Shire Hall, in an area of mixed residential and business properties. The precise area examined lies in a yard behind the present day street frontage of Castle Street.

Archaeological Background

The archaeological background of the area has recently been comprehensively reviewed in a desktop report commissioned during the redevelopment of a nearby property (Alexander 1996). Extensive background research lies beyond the scope of the present project. However, it should be noted that the evaluation site probably lies within an area of settlement dating to the first century BC, and subsequently lay within the defences of the Roman town. In the medieval period, the castle's inner Bailey ditch lay very close to the site: It has been recorded just to the north-west at 75 Castle Street, and it seems that the present site lay just beyond the inner bailey, in an area probably kept clear of buildings (Roberts 1996, 7 and Fig 3; Alexander 1996, 9). There have been a number of archaeological excavations in the area: investigation of the property immediately to the north, 73-75 Castle Street, revealed prehistoric and Roman deposits as well as medieval burials. A further watching brief here in 1995 exposed the presence of dark organic fill to a depth of at least 3m. Similarly, excavation at 75, 83, and 85 Castle Street revealed over 0.80m of archaeological stratigraphy, including evidence for Roman structures, as well as the evidence for the medieval inner bailey ditch at No 75 (Alexander 1996).

Methods

A hand dug test pit measuring 1.5m x 1.5m was excavated to a maximum depth of 1m. Where probable natural deposits were present, excavation stopped at a higher level. All archaeological features encountered were excavated and recorded using standard single context recording sheets. Single context plans were drawn at 1:20, and two sections of the test pit were recorded at 1:10.

Results

A garden soil was intermittently present over the surface of the test pit, which lay at between 20.62m and 20.67m OD. Below, modern rubble and make-up was present to a depth nowhere less than 0.45m. Two modern intrusions were much deeper and these were removed before excavation of archaeological features began.

Layer (4): This was a deposit of dark grey clay silt with green mottles. It was present over most of the area of the test pit, at depths varying between 0.45m and 0.50m, and was 0.19m thick. Similar in composition to a pit fill, this may have been a dump of occupation debris. All pottery recovered was Roman in date, and in unabraded condition.

Cuts 6 and 8: These two cuts were identified at two corners of the test pit. They both extended beyond the limit of excavation and it was not possible to determine their function. Both contained fills very similar to Layer (4); this, together with their locations at the very edge of the test pit made it impossible to determine if they cut or were sealed by Layer (4). The edge of Cut 6 was slightly curved in plan, with a slightly concave profile and gradient of c 1:1. The feature contained a sherd of fourth century Roman pottery and a nineteenth century clay pipe stem.

Cut 3: This cut was clearly sealed below Layer (4). Its fill, (2), was a dark greyish brown clay silt with sandy mottles and green cassy mottles, and was encountered at a depth of 0.60m. It contained small fragments of charcoal, whole oyster shells, and large fragments of animal bone and well as several sherds of relatively unabraded Roman pottery. The cut measured >1.4m x >0.85m x >0.5m deep, and appeared to lie mostly beyond the limit of excavation. Its edges were curved in plan, and the sides were vertical. The function of the cut was not known. It seems to have had final usage as a rubbish pit, but could have been cut as a quarry pit or well. The vertical sides and shape of the edges suggest that it was not part of a ditch. Excavation was stopped when the depth of the test pit reached 1m.

Layer (9): This deposit was truncated to the south-west by Cut 3. It was encountered at a depth of c 0.59m, and consisted of yellowish brown clayey sand with moderate small and medium angular gravel fragments. The deposit appeared 'clean', and no evidence of metalling was observed on its surface. It varied between 0.07 and >0.36m thick, and overlaid chalk marl. A 'free' section through (9) and the chalk below was available in the

side of Cut 3. It was thought probable that Layer (9) and the chalk below it were natural deposits, (9) possibly being a remnant of the sands and gravels that cap the chalk in this area. The possibility that these deposits had been redeposited to form a man-made surface was considered improbable because of their appearance. Layer (9) was not excavated.

Conclusion

The test pit has provided evidence for the presence of archaeological features at depths of between 0.45m and 0.60m below present ground level. Cut 3 appears to be part of a pit which extended beyond the limit of excavation. It was used for rubbish disposal and contained assemblages of pottery and animal bone as well as oyster shell, but may have originally been cut for another purpose. It appears very probable that this feature was of fourth century Roman date: the pottery was exclusively Roman, and in relatively unabraded conditions. Layer (4) also seems to be Roman in date. It again contained unabraded Roman pottery, with slight uncertainty over date resulting from the layer's uncertain stratigraphic relationship with a cut containing a nineteenth century pipe stem.

Given the location of the site and date of the pottery, it seems that the features discovered relate to occupation within the fourth century Roman town of Cambridge. It is evident that the castle ditch did not cross the rear yard at 71 Castle Street: the Civil War ditch and Norman inner bailey ditch may lie immediately to the north-east. The evaluation reiterates the high archaeological potential of the Castle Street area.

Acknowledgements

The Archaeological Field Unit would like to thank Mr Miah for commissioning this project, and Cecille Jassim and David Curry for their assistance on site. The pottery was processed and spot dated by Philip Copleston.

References

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Cambridgeshire Sites and Monuments Record (SMR)

Kaner, S, 1997 *71 Castle Street, Cambridge - Design Brief for Archaeological Evaluation*

Roberts, J, 1996 *The Castle Inn, Castle Street, Cambridge: An Archaeological Assessment*, Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Report A78

Appendix A Finds list incorporating pottery spot dating Philip Copleston

Context	Context pot date	Details (Numbers refer to sherd count not vessels)	Weight (g)	Condition
1	c 1850	1 x NVCC (small beaker)	6	SI abr
		1 x HORN	67	Abr
		19 x GW	326	Abr
		1 x SAMIAN (Dr.37 bowl base)	13	Abr
		6 x ?SAX	69	Abr
		2 x M	138	Abr
		5 x PM red ware	402	Un abr
		2 x PM tile	62	Abr
		1 x C19 clay pipe stem	2	Un abr
		3 x C19 Cream ware	26	Un abr
2	C4th AD	2 x NVGW (inc jar base)	61	Un abr
		28 x GW (jars/bowls, some with lattice decoration)	462	SI abr
		1 x GW (lid)	33	Un abr
		4 x Redu	124	SI abr
		1 x SHEL	17	Abr
		1 x Buff (flagon)	15	Un abr
		1 x Samian (bowl/cup)	1	Abr
		1 x NVCC (small jar/beaker)	4	Un abr
		3 x Fe obj (?nails)	33	
		6 x freshwater oyster shell	122	
42 x small/med/large frags animal bone inc cow/sheep/pig	980			
4	C4th AD	2 x NVGW (small and large jars)	48	Un abr
		1 x NVCC (jar pedestal base)	9	Burnt
		9 x GW including sherds with burnishing and lattice decoration	56	Un abr
		2 x Redu	25	Un abr
		1 x SHEL	31	Un abr
		3 x Buff oxid (narrow necked jar)	54	Un abr
		1 x Cockle shell	3	
14 frags animal bone, inc cow/sheep	98			
5	C19	1 x C19 clay pipe stem	12	
		1 x SHEL (rim with lid seating)	19	Abr
		2 frags animal bone	5	

List of terms and abbreviations

Buff Buff coloured wares; GW Grey wares, where not otherwise differentiated; HORN Horningsea Ware; M medieval; PM post-medieval; NVGW Nene Valley grey ware; NVCC Nene Valley colour coat ware; Oxid Oxidised ware of uncertain origin; Redu reduced wares; SHEL Shell tempered wares

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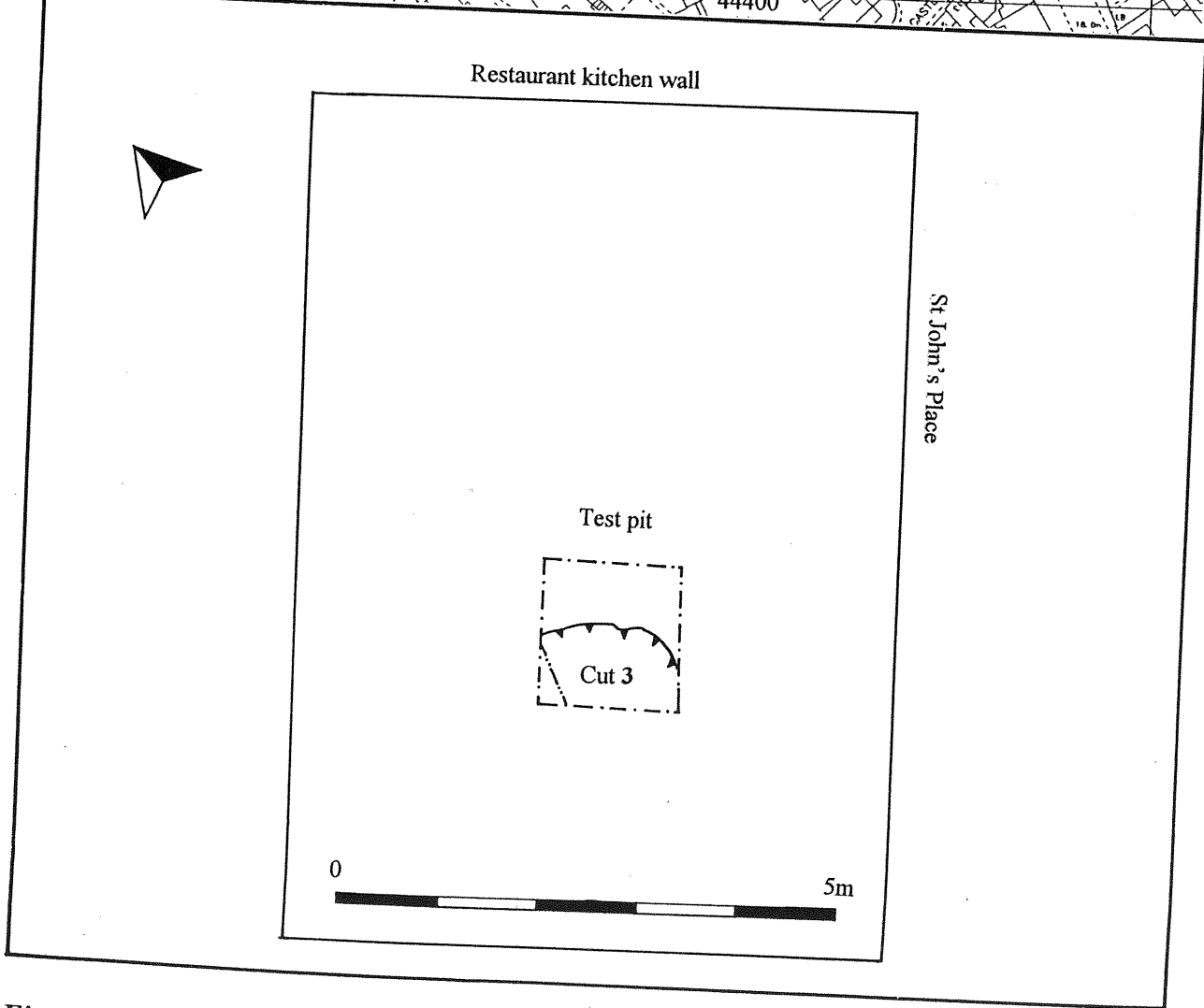
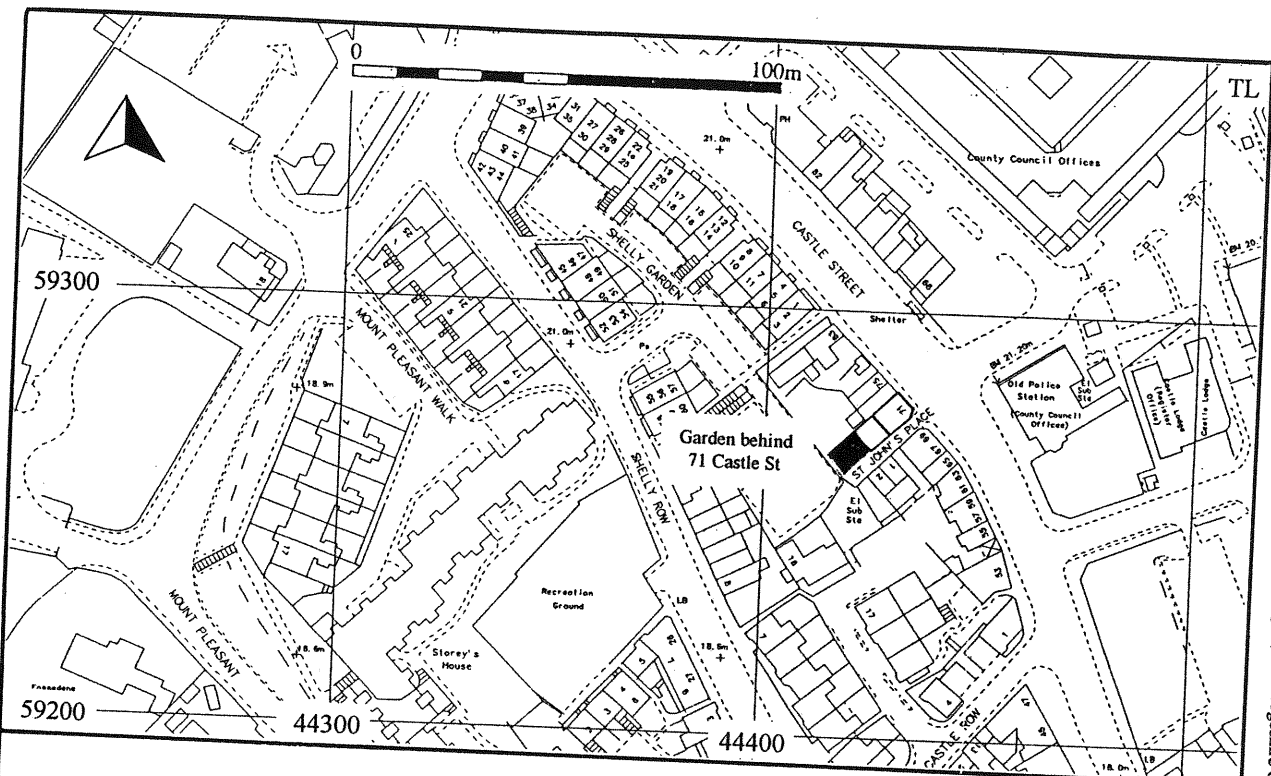


Figure 1 Site location plans showing position of test pit in garden to rear of 71 Castle Street

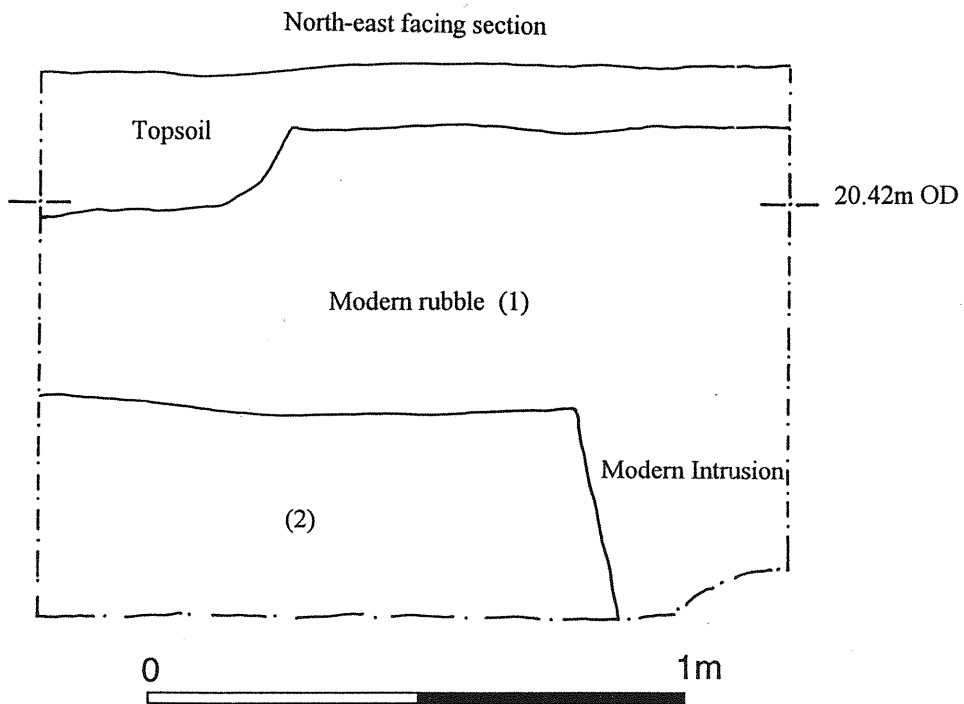
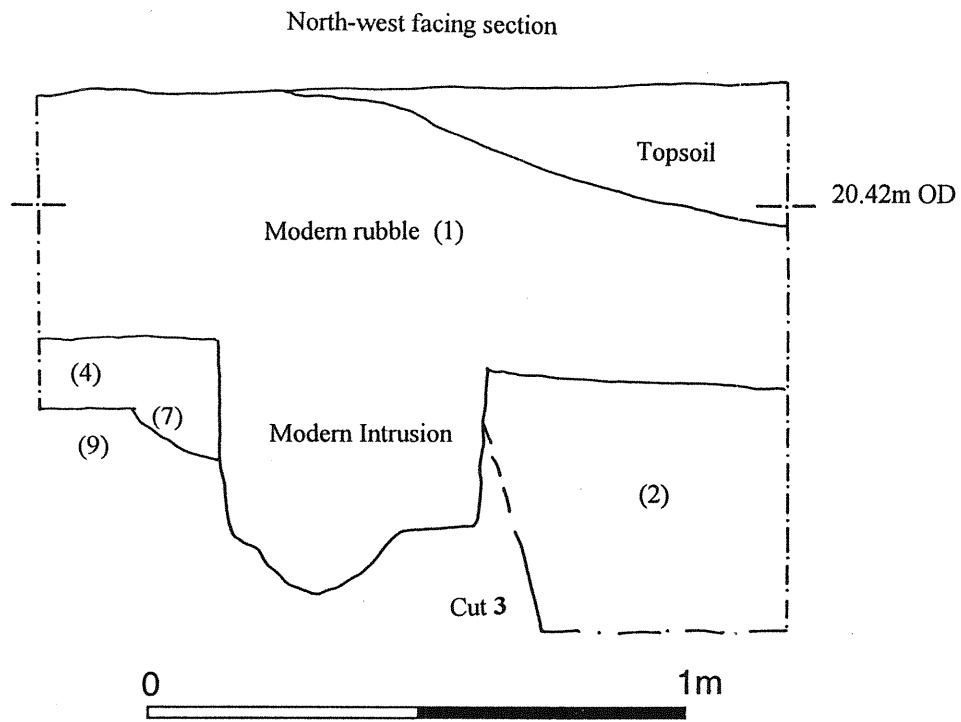


Figure 2 Test pit sections