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CCC AFU Report Number 845

A multi-period site at the former Huntingdon Model Laundry, Ouse Walk, Huntingdon

Evaluation Report: Interim Summary

Rachel Clarke BA AIFA

December 2005

Cambridgeshire County Council
Environment & Community Services

Commissioned by Campbell Buchanan on behalf of the Luminus Group

Cover Images

Machine stripping, Soham	On-site surveying
Roman corn dryer, Duxford	Guided walk along Devil's Dyke
Bronze Age shaft, Fordham Bypass	Medieval well, Soham
Human burial, Barrington Anglo-Saxon Cemetery	Timbers from a medieval well, Soham
Blue enamelled bead, Barrington	Bed burial reconstruction, Barrington Anglo-Saxon Cemetery
Aethusa cynapium 'Fool's parsley'	Medieval tanning pits, Huntington Town Centre
Digging in the snow, Huntingdon Town Centre	Beaker vessel
Face painting at Hinchingbrooke Iron Age Farm	Environmental analysis
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Archaeological Evaluation: Interim Summary

Rachel Clarke BA AIFA

With contributions by Barry John Bishop MA, Dr Steve Boreham BSc PhD, Natasha Dodwell MA, Chris Faine MA MSc BABAO, Rachel Fosberry HNC AEA, Paul Spoerry BTech (Hons) PhD MIFA

Site Code: HUN MOL 05
CHER Event Number: 1878
Date of works: 14/09/05 – 21/10/05
Grid Ref: TL 24324 71768

Editor: Paul Spoerry BTech (Hons) PhD MIFA
Illustrator: Crane Begg BA

1 Introduction

This report is designed to be an interim statement on the results of an archaeological evaluation at the former Huntingdon Model Laundry, Ouse Walk, Huntingdon in advance of a proposed residential development. The evaluation was undertaken in accordance with a Brief issued by Kasia Gdaniec of the Cambridgeshire Archaeology, Planning and Countryside Advice team (CAPCA; Planning Application Number 0200106OUT), supplemented by a Specification prepared by Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Field Unit (CCC AFU).

The work was designed to assist in defining the character and extent of any archaeological remains within the proposed redevelopment area, in accordance with the guidelines set out in *Planning and Policy Guidance 16 - Archaeology and Planning* (Department of the Environment 1990). The results will enable decisions to be made by CAPCA, on behalf of the Local Planning Authority, with regard to the treatment of any archaeological remains found.

The site archive is currently held by CCC AFU and will be deposited with the appropriate county stores in due course.

The site (TL 24324 71768) is located on the northern side of Huntingdon town centre, the River Great Ouse lies *c.* 150m to the east and a small tributary (Barracks Brook) runs *c.* 80m to the north. An area of *c.* 0.43ha will be affected by the proposed development which is the site of a former Victorian Model Laundry but has more recently housed a number of small industrial units in addition to a 20th century laundry building. All the buildings were demolished prior to the evaluation; a car park close to the frontage with the ring road (and river) was also to be subject to evaluation to investigate alluvial deposits and any earlier archaeology buried beneath.

The geology of the site is First and Second Terrace Pleistocene River Gravels, overlying Oxford Clay (BGS 1975, sheet 187).

A desk-based assessment (Kenney 2005) commissioned prior to the evaluation, identified that: *The site lies in an area of somewhat uncertain archaeological potential, within the medieval town and probably just outside the Saxon/Danish burh. Roman and medieval remains have been recorded in the vicinity, although historic maps indicate no development in the area until the construction of the Model Laundry itself in 1896. The evidence of past activity to the north, south and west, together with the lack of development until the late 19th century, imply a high potential for preservation of any archaeological remains on the site that have not been disturbed by foundations.*

2 Methodology

The objective of this evaluation was to determine as far as reasonably possible the presence/absence, location, nature, extent, date, quality, condition and significance of any surviving archaeological deposits within the development area.

The Brief required that a minimum 5% sample of the area affected by the proposed re-development be archaeologically evaluated via trial trenching. This translated into five trenches comprising four 6m x 6m trenches and one 12m x 6m trench (Trench 3); an additional trench (Trench 6) was also excavated, planned but not investigated further.

Following the initial trenching and a meeting on site with Kasia Gdaniec of CAPCA and Andy Girvan of Campbell Buchanan, it was agreed to further evaluate the site. Three additional trenches (7 - 9) were excavated along the southern edge of the site, Trench 4 was enlarged to 12m x 12m, and a further trench (4a) was excavated along the Ouse Walk frontage. The additional trenches were designed to further define the extent and nature of features and deposits identified in Trench 4 in particular.

Machine excavation was carried out under constant archaeological supervision by a tracked 360° mechanical excavator using a 1.8m wide toothless ditching bucket

Excavation was hampered by constant groundwater ingress in the trenches; this was particularly severe in Trench 2 close to the river. Petrochemical contamination was also encountered in the base of Trench 4, which combined with the water and depth of trenching meant full excavation of the lower deposits was not possible.

3 Preliminary Results

Medieval and earlier deposits were encountered at various depths below the modern ground surface (see Appendix 1). In Trenches 1, 2 and 5 alluvial deposits were revealed at *c*.1m below modern make-up and demolition layers, whilst in the remaining trenches (3 to 9), medieval deposits were reached at a depth of *c*.0.4-0.7m.

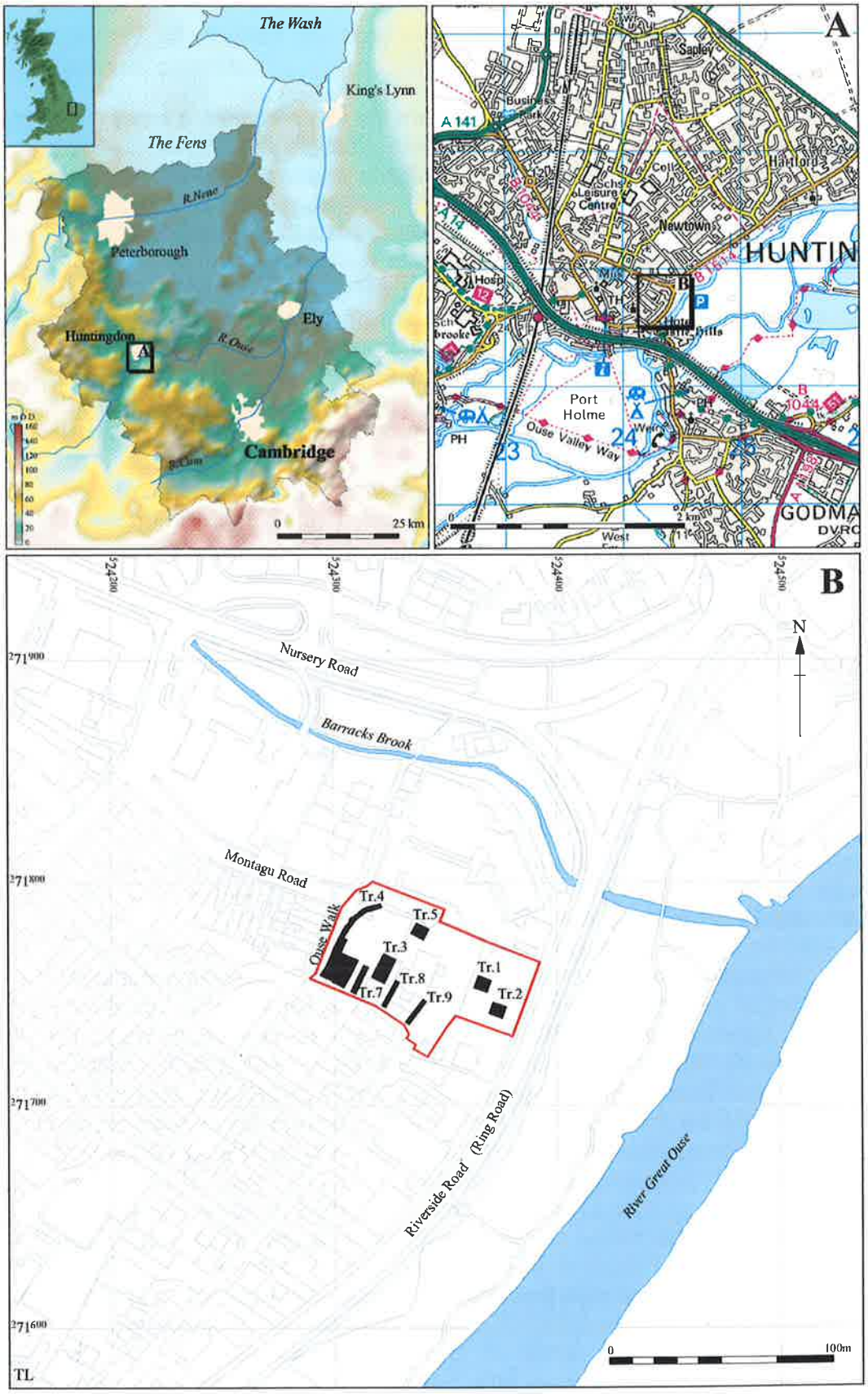


Figure 1: Location of trenches (black) with the development area outlined (red)

3.1 Prehistoric

The earliest remains recovered from the site comprise a small group of residual struck flints recovered from ditches and alluvial deposits in Trench 4 and 4a. The assemblage is characteristic of Mesolithic or early Neolithic (10,000BC-3000BC) technology, and is indicative of an extraction and primary reduction site, rather than of true settlement or domestic-type activities.

3.2 Roman (AD 43-AD 410) Figs 2 and 3

Approximately one third of the pottery assemblage from the site dates to the Roman period, although a proportion appears to be residual in post-Roman deposits.

A probable linear feature (**277**), aligned north-west to south-east along the southern limit of excavation, was investigated in Trench 4. The full extent of this feature, which was probably a large ditch, is not known but it appears to have extended for at least 20m across the site. Although the full profile was not revealed within the trench, and a later feature (**124**) significantly truncated the northern edge, it appears that the ditch was *c.*1.2m deep and perhaps in excess of 4m wide. The alignment appears to be slightly different to that of the later channels/ditches (**114/124** etc – see below). Pottery and other finds (including tile, shell and animal bone) from the silty clay fills of the ditch indicate a Roman date; further analysis of the pottery will be undertaken for the main report.

3.3 Saxon (AD 450-AD 850) Figs 2 and 3

Although relatively little pottery from the site has been dated to the Saxon period, approximately 20% of the assemblage is late Saxon. It is possible that a sequence of massive features (**114**, **124** *etc*; Figs 2 and 3) excavated in Trench 4, were either late Roman or Saxon in origin. These features seem to align approximately west-to-east across the site, as the distinctive sequence of dumped fills was also recorded (largely in plan) continuing towards the river in Trenches 3, 7, 8 and 9 (Fig. 2).

Dating of this series of possible channels is not conclusive. From the evidence in Trench 4, the channels appear to have been infilled with dumped deposits and then recut in a progressively northwards direction (Fig. 3). Roman ditch **277** was truncated on its northern side by ditch/channel **124,** which in turn was cut/truncated to the north by ditch/channel **114**. Very little pottery and other finds were present in the fills of these channels, although a number of sherds of Roman

pottery, all of which are fairly small and abraded, were recovered from several contexts.

Two contexts (105 and 116, not illustrated) located in the upper part of channel **124** did, however, produce later pottery (AD 450-700 and 875-1150 respectively). Both (adjacent) contexts were identified during cleaning over the surface deposits of the infilled channel. Both were also found to contain small amounts of human bone, possibly from a disturbed burial. The pottery in these contexts could be intrusive, although its presence suggests that a Saxon date for the channels is feasible. This interpretation is reiterated by the presence of a number of Saxo-Norman and medieval pits which cut the surface deposits of the infilled channels (see below). These provide a broad *terminus ante quem* for the channels in the range of AD 875-1150.

A sequence of thin gravely and silty deposits (139-142) identified in section 29 (Fig. 3) could be the remnant of a truncated bank overlying the infilled channel **114.** If this was a bank, it may have been associated with one of the later channels to the north, and/or may have been constructed to further control water flow in this area. It seems to have either been truncated by a later channel, and/or material may have been dumped up against it (see 144 below) to level it off at a later date.

3.4 Saxo-Norman (AD 850-AD 1250) Figs 2 and 3

The construction/use of the channels clearly spanned a long time-period, possibly from the Roman period through to the Saxon, and perhaps the Saxo-Norman period. However, the process of channel-cutting/dumping/landscaping on this scale appears to have ceased in this area some time in the Saxo-Norman period.

A number of features and deposits containing Saxo-Norman pottery were recorded across the site, several of which truncated or overlay the infilled channels 114/124 *etc.* These include ditches (**7** and **155**) in Trenches 1 and 5, in addition to two pits (**251** and **263**) a possible cultivation/make-up layer (147/282/307) and alluvial deposits (e.g. 285) recorded in Trench 4/4a. One of the two later channels (**300** and **314**) in the sequence identified in Trench 4 and 4a also produced pottery dating to this period.

The features probably relate to drainage/water management in this period, as well as some small-scale industrial and/or domestic activity.

Figure 2: Trench plan showing excavated features (features mentioned in text are annotated)

3.5 Medieval (*c.* AD 1150-1350) Figs 2 and 3

Several rubbish pits, ditches, probable cess pits, a large quarry pit, cultivation/levelling layers and flood deposits identified across the site appear to date to the medieval period.

The pits were mostly located in the trenches positioned in the southern part of the site, namely Trenches 3, 4 and 8. The environmental evidence from some of the features, particularly the animal bone, suggests both nearby domestic occupation (e.g. pit **257**) as well as more industrial-type activities such as butchery and tanning (e.g. ditches **151** and **155**). Environmental samples have also revealed some interesting evidence including fish bones from a number of contexts and apple pips from a probable cess pit (**73**) in Trench 3. The presence of hammerscale in some of the samples may also suggest small-scale metalworking in the vicinity.

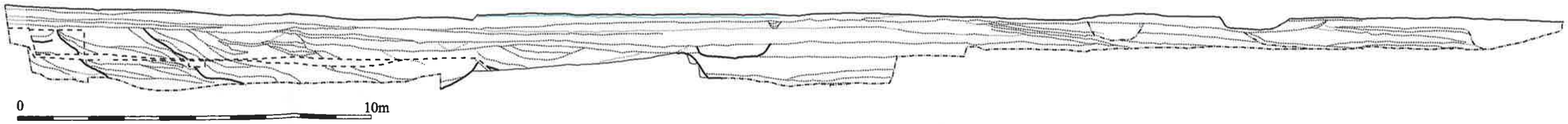
The stratigraphic sequence revealed in Trench 4 and 4a suggests that this area of higher ground, which had clearly been a damp meadow/floodplain environment in the Roman and possibly Saxon periods, may have been taken into cultivation during the medieval period. The presence of extensive layers (137 and 144 in particular, Fig. 3) overlying the infilled channels suggests that material may have been introduced/dumped on the site perhaps to level it up and facilitate cultivation. Layer 144 in particular was relatively finds-rich and produced interesting environmental remains (see below).

Alluvial deposits were also recorded in the upper levels of most trenches. Black silty layers were present in Trenches 1, 4 and 5, which contained pottery datable to the medieval period (*c.*1150 – 1350 in Trenches 1 and 5, *c.*875-1250 in Trench 5). This may suggest episodes of extensive flooding in these periods (although the pottery could be residual/reworked) over the northern and eastern parts of the site in particular. Areas of gravel identified in some of the trenches (Trench 5 in particular) could be the remains of gravel paths or lanes, possibly to facilitate access across the floodplain down to the river.

3.6 Post-medieval (c. AD 1500-present)

Very little activity appears to have taken place on the site in the post-medieval period until the latter part of the 19th century, when the Model Laundry was built. Foundations, drains and a brick well were encountered, which are likely to be associated with the laundry and later industrial buildings, although damage to earlier deposits was on the whole fairly localised.

Section 29 - simplified



Section 29

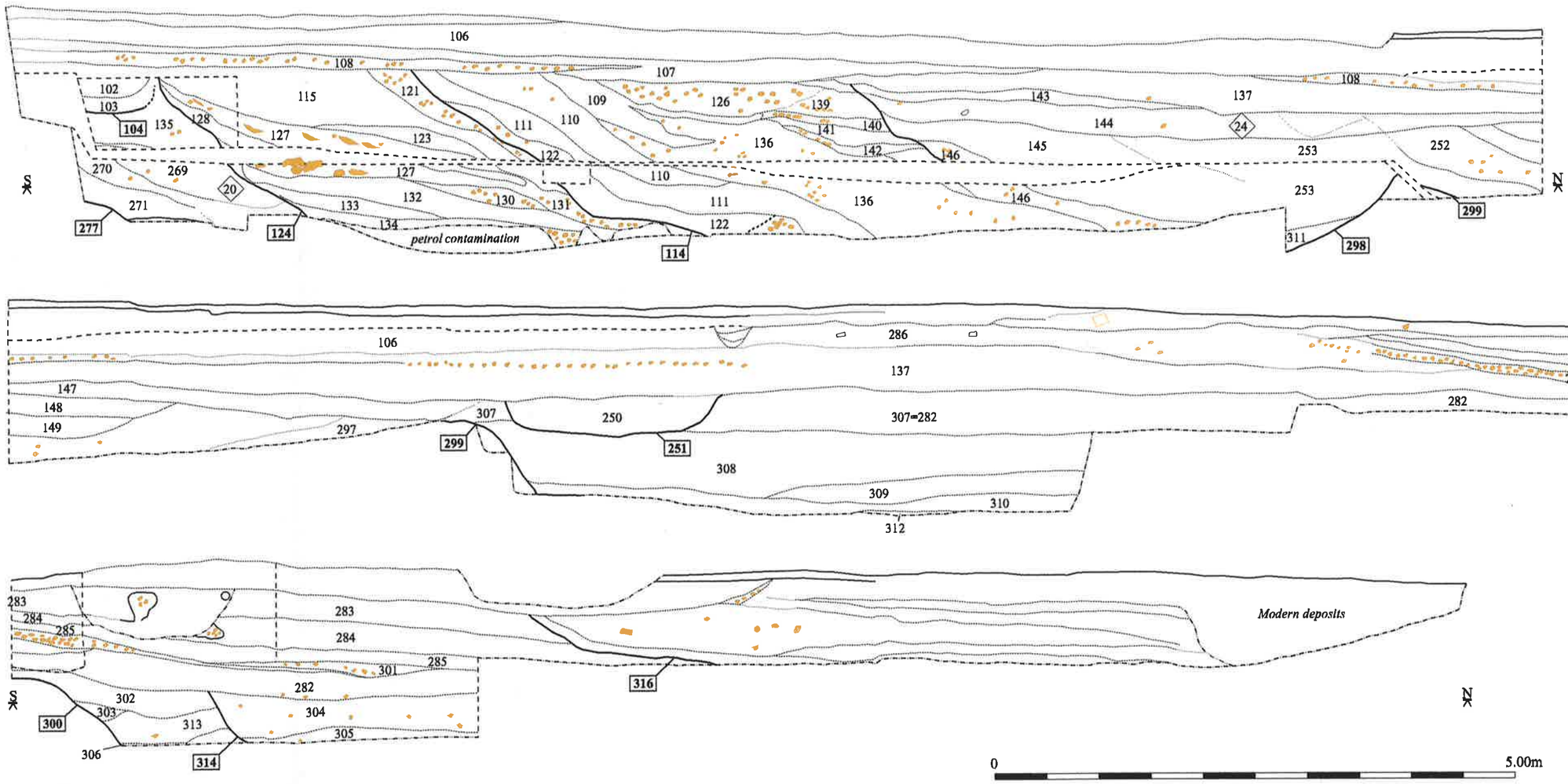


Figure 3: Section 29 (Trench 414a) showing sequence of large channels

6 Finds and Environmental Assessment Summaries

6.1 Pottery

by Dr Paul Spoerry

A small assemblage of 517 sherds, weighing 8.09kg, was recovered. Of the *c.* 250 contexts recorded, 55 contained pottery. The material from the topsoil and any unstratified material are included in these totals.

The Saxon pottery is primarily late Saxon and Saxo-Norman, and although most of the common types from this period are long-lived some sherds do suggest a pre-1000 AD date, but with many more probably being 11th-12th century in date. One sherd of middle Saxon Ipswich ware was recovered from Context 2 and one sherd of early-middle Saxon chaff-tempered ware was recovered from Context 105.

The medieval pottery is mostly 12th to 14th century in date, with some post-1250 types within this group. Late medieval (post-1350) pottery is surprisingly rare, only two sherds being identified (from Contexts 137 and 256). No post-medieval pottery is present.

Roman pottery appears in 28 contexts in total, but is present alongside later material in only seven of these (243, 254, 255, 256, 260, 262, 302). Thus it seems that for the most part, even if much Roman pottery appears quite abraded, it was often reworked earlier in its depositional history.

Although the assemblage is small, it is nonetheless important as it shows the Saxon to medieval crossover in ceramic terms, and contains some of the few well-excavated late Saxon groups recovered from Huntingdon to date.

6.2 Lithics

by Barry Bishop

The assemblage, although small (25 struck flints), is of significance in that it represents evidence for Mesolithic or Early Neolithic lithic procurement activities, which could complement that from the prolific sites known from along the Great Ouse valley and the Fen edge.

6.3 Animal Bone

by Chris Faine

The assemblage is well preserved and shows a wide range of species and elements, as might be expected in an urban assemblage. A basic breakdown of body part distribution implies a variety of domestic/industrial use, for example tanning or butchery. The interpretation of this assemblage as domestic /industrial waste is borne out by the fact that around 70% of identifiable bones showed evidence of butchery.

6.4 Human Bone

by Natasha Dodwell

Disarticulated human bone was recovered from three contexts (105; 115, 256) during evaluation of land on the northern edge of Huntingdon in the floodplain of the River Great Ouse.

The single tooth could have been lost prior to death or it could derive from a disturbed grave. The two disarticulated metatarsals are more likely to derive from a disturbed grave or graves.

6.5 Pollen

by Dr Steve Boreham

Seven samples of sediment (P1-P7) exposed in Trenches 4 and 9 were prepared using the standard hydrofluoric acid technique, and counted for pollen using a high-power stereo microscope.

Taken together, pollen samples P2 and P3 from Trench 4 tell a story of bank-side and emergent vegetation in a damp meadow (floodplain) environment with arable activity close by. It seems clear that samples P2 and P3 represent the situation in Roman times surrounding an inlet, basin or channel connected in some way to the River Great Ouse. It is curious that much later, following the infilling of the channel or depression, sample P4 records almost the same environment. However, samples P5 and P6 seem to indicate a change towards deepening water, more wet woodland, increased disturbance and a reduction in nearby arable activity.

Intriguingly, sample P7 from the neighbouring channel-fill fits this pattern rather well, and it is tempting to correlate context 149 broadly with the channel fills of contexts 110 and 109 (samples P5 and P6). It is

not clear whether these later fills represent the late Roman or Saxon period. Finally, the pollen sample P1 from Trench 9 appears to correlate favourably with sample P3 (context 115). It appears that the channel(s) or depression(s) was (were) being in-filled with dumped material from several directions at once during the Roman period.

6.6 Environmental Remains

by Rachel Fosberry

Thirty-one samples were taken from across the excavated area and twenty-eight were submitted for an initial appraisal. Preservation is predominantly by charring and is generally good, however the majority of the samples produced less than 5ml of charred material. Only one sample (number 24, context 144) produced a sufficient density of material that could be considered for further quantitative analysis. This sample came from one of the earlier features dating to the Roman period. A number of features reflect late Saxon and medieval activity on the site and their contents provide some insight into urban activity and economic evidence from this period.

Cereals are common throughout all phases of activity with spelt wheat being replaced by free-threshing wheat after the Roman period. Other crop plants present include barley, oats, rye and flax along with the remains of legumes including peas. This range of other food plants present suggests that the charred plant debris derive from domestic, culinary activities.

Spelt glume bases indicate some cereal processing was taking place on site during the Roman period. Samples from later features do not contain any chaff, which implies that grain was by then being imported onto the site.

Other categories of artefacts present in the samples included mammal bone fragments, small mammal and amphibian/fish bones. Identification of these, in particular the fish bone would enhance the information provided by hand recovered material. Mineralised apple pips were recovered from a sample from one of the cess pits. Pottery was recovered from context 130, sample 27 one of the previously undated feature and should be examined to see if it is possible to provide a date for this context.

7 Preliminary Discussion and Conclusions

The preliminary results suggest that this site will significantly add to the existing, and ever-growing, body of data for the early development of Huntingdon.

The lithics, although residual, have provided further evidence for exploitation of the river gravels during the Mesolithic or early Neolithic along the valley of the Great Ouse. Of particular significance, perhaps, is the identification of the series of large dump-filled ditches or channels, the earliest of which dates to the Roman period. Relatively few Roman features, certainly on this scale, have been recorded in the town on this side of the river from the Roman settlement at Godmanchester.

The purpose of these channels, which probably date to somewhere between the Roman and late Saxon period, is not known. It is likely that there was an existing natural channel here, flowing down to the river to the east, which at some point (probably in the Roman period initially) was deliberately cut/managed. The channel appears to have moved progressively northwards, with episodes of natural and deliberate infilling of existing channels and recutting of new channels, possibly as a means of land-reclamation. A possible truncated bank overlying one of the main infilled channels (114) has also been identified in the section of Trench 4. Too little of this was exposed to be certain of its interpretation.

These features may collectively represent a significant boundary between habitable land on the higher ground to the south (where a natural bank of gravel is located) and more marginal floodplain to the north. The nature of the distinctive fills seems to suggest episodes of infilling/dumping, stagnation/stabilisation and flooding. The deliberate infilling of the channels could have been to increase the area of dry/high ground in this marginal location, as pressure on land increased, perhaps as a result of population growth in the Danish settlement/Saxon town to the south.

The pollen evidence indicates a damp-meadowland environment, with some arable activity in the vicinity in the Roman period, with perhaps deeper water and more wet woodland in the later Roman or Saxon periods.

The main channels appear to have been largely infilled by the Saxon-Norman period, when there seems to have been some encroachment of occupation northwards, represented by pits and ditches. This type of activity appears to have continued into the medieval period, as evidence for butchery and tanning as well as domestic waste was found in a variety of features and deposits, including cess and rubbish pits. Flooding also seems to have occurred during the medieval period, represented by alluvial deposits, although small-scale cultivation may

also have been undertaken along the northern part of the site, close to Ouse Walk. Possible gravel lanes have also been identified in some of the trenches, which may have provided access across the floodplain down to the river.

During the later medieval and post-medieval period this area of the town seems to have reverted to pasture, which reiterates the evidence from cartographic and documentary sources, until the late 19th century, when the Model Laundry was constructed.

Recommendations for any future work based upon this report will be made by the County Archaeology Office.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Campbell Buchanan (in particular Andrew Girvan) who commissioned the evaluation on behalf of the Luminus Group, who funded the archaeological work. The project was managed by Dr Paul Spoerry. Thanks are also due to the site staff: Daniel Hounsell, Adam Lodoen, Rob Wardill, Tom Lyons and Ian Hogg

The brief for archaeological works was written by Kasia Gdaniec, who visited the site and monitored the evaluation.

Bibliography

Kenney, S. 2005 *The Model Laundry, Ouse Walk, Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire: An Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment*

Appendix 1: Trench/deposit levels (averages)

Trench No.	Current Ground Level (OD)	Base of modern overburden/top of alluvium (OD)	Top of archaeological deposits/features (OD)	Level of natural geology as revealed in base of deepest feature (OD)
1	10.04m	8.85m	9.14m	8.20m
2	9.95m	8.73m	8.73m (alluvium)	8.01m
3	10.02m	9.40m	9.34m	8.67m
4	10.72m	10.30m	10.30m	8.42m
4a	10.72m	9.92m	8.97m	>8.52m
5	10.07m	9.17m	8.83m	8.79m
6	10.14m	9.45m	9.45m	-
7	10.28	9.95m	9.95	-
8	10.31m	9.69m	9.69m	9.41m
9	10.32m	9.41m	9.41m	8.54m

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