

**79, HIGH STREET, FLETON,  
PETERBOROUGH**  
An Archaeological Evaluation

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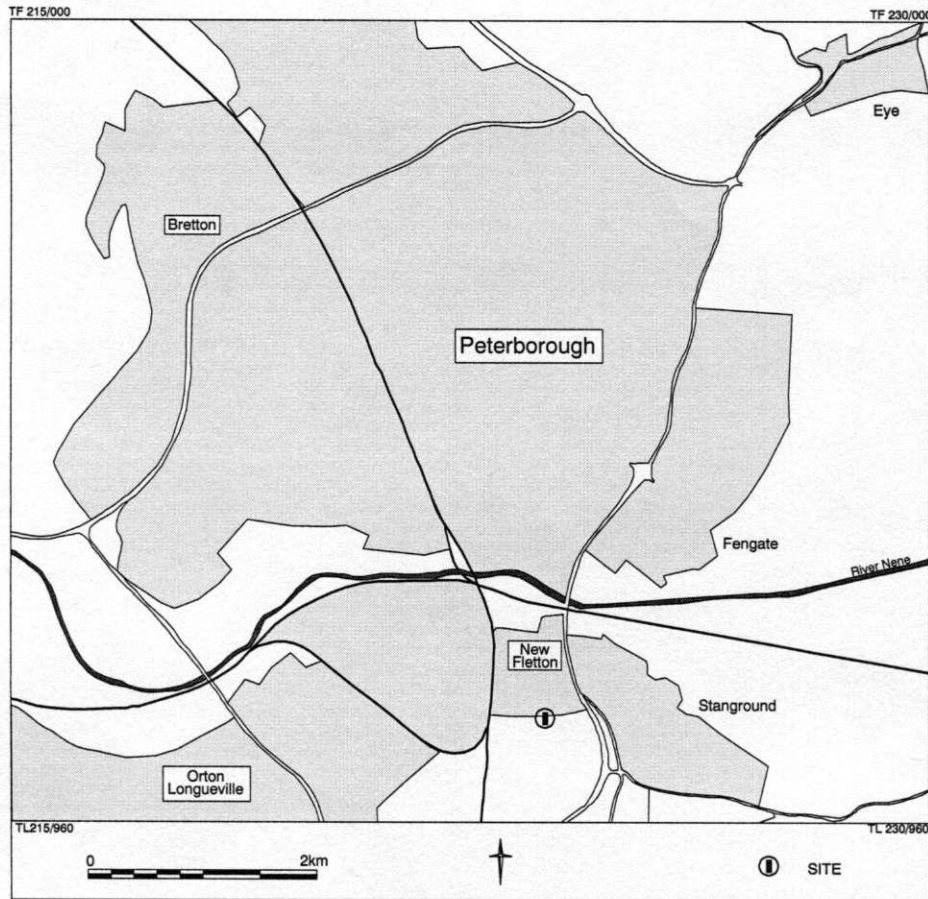


Figure 1: Site Location

This report concerns an evaluation of the archaeology at 79 High Street, Fletton undertaken by the Cambridge Archaeological Unit between the 9th and the 15th of June, 1998. The Cambridge Archaeological Unit were commissioned by B. M. Design Consultancy (formerly Bower Mattin), chartered architects and surveyors, on behalf of their client Axiom Housing Association in anticipation of the construction of seven sheltered bungalows for the elderly. The programme of work was designed in accordance with the brief issued by the CAO (Kaner, 1997).

The site lies approximately 1km south of the river Nene on Oxford Clay in the centre of the village of (Old) Fletton, in close proximity to the parish church of St. Margaret (TL 1695 9697), (Figure 1).

## Background

Finds of Palaeolithic tools found to the north and south of the development site, suggest early prehistoric activity within the area. Later prehistoric evidence is well documented in the Peterborough region, with

settlement sites located on the first river terrace gravels and fen edge e.g. Fengate (Lucas 1997), Flag Fen (Pryor 1991). The majority of archaeological finds within the immediate environs of the site were retrieved from the Fletton Brick yards to the south, but lack precise locational information. These finds include collared urn pottery and an Iron Age occupation site. A Bronze Age palstave was found on the north side of the village (SMR 01645).

Extensive Roman activity is known throughout the Nene valley, with *Durobrivae* serving as an administrative and commercial centre and numerous Roman Villa sites and kilns noted along the banks of the Nene (Wild 1978, RCHME, 1969). Within the city of Peterborough, Roman occupation has been noted in the vicinity of the cathedral and railway station. Building work in the late nineteenth century uncovered evidence which suggested the presence of a large Roman settlement (White 1998). Evidence of Roman activity close to the development area has come from the brick workings, 0.4km to the south. A well, levelled floors, pits and inhumations were noted with finds of pottery of La Marne, Samian and Belgic Wares (SMR 01627, VCH 1974:249).

Following the founding of a monastery and cathedral in the 7th century Peterborough became a prosperous settlement (SMR record 01518), attracting the Danes to sack both town and monastery in 870. The monastery was not re-established until the tenth century (SMR record 01518). To date, there is no evidence of Anglo-Saxon activity in the immediate vicinity of the site, the nearest being the settlement evidence recorded in New Fletton in the form of a "considerable" village excavated in 1923 with seven sunken floored buildings, settlement features and artefacts dating to c. 550-700 AD (SMR 01631A). A cemetery, probably serving the village, was recorded a short distance to the north (SMR 01666).

The manor of Fletton and its church are listed in the Domesday Book and may have pre-conquest origins. The manor was in the possession of Peterborough Abbey up to the dissolution, apart from a short hiatus in the twelfth century when it returned to crown ownership (Morris 1975). The Fletton family are first mentioned in about 1278 as leaseholders of the manor from the Abbey (VCH 1974).

The parish church of St. Margaret, situated immediately north east of the development area may occupy the site of the Domesday church, and has structural remains dating to the twelfth, thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the earliest dating from c.1150 (SMR 01411, RCHME 1926). A number of unusual stone carvings are thought to be of early pre-conquest date, and the graveyard contains both thirteenth century grave slabs and the Fletton cross, a Scheduled Ancient Monument thought to date from c.1180 (SAM 143). A possible Medieval rectangular moat was also noted 150m ENE of the Church (RCHME 1926:95), subsequently destroyed by building work (SMR 01707).

Following the Dissolution, the manor of Fletton was sold by Edward VI in 1552 to Edward Fynes, Lord Clinton of Saye, and changed hands many times over the following centuries until the manorial rights were ceased in 1926 (VCH 1974:170). "Floten" and St. Margarets church are featured on Ogilby's 1675 map of the London-Lincoln Road. In terms of later village development, the maps of 1888 and 1925 indicate the gradual encroachment of the Peterborough urban area into Fletton parish, and the change of land use from agriculture to industry and clay extraction (a process hastened by the sale of manorial land post 1926). In 1874 the northern spread of Fletton was incorporated into the borough of Peterborough as New Fletton, and the remainder of the parish became Old Fletton.

## Methodology

Two 15 metre trenches (Trenches 1 & 2) were excavated by JCB with a toothless ditching bucket to below the level of the modern demolition and overburden (Figure 2). In Trench 1 a 3m wide cellar associated with the recently demolished building was encountered and was left unexcavated. The south end of the trench was correspondingly lengthened. The deposits revealed below were cleaned, photographed and recorded using the Unit-modified Museum of London system (Spence 1990). The archaeological features were sample excavated and pottery retrieved from the deposits were spot dated by David Hall (Appendix 1).

## Results

### *Trench 1*

The earliest dateable features on the site were revealed on the north side of the modern cellar (Figure 3), truncated by recent demolition activity and covered by only a few centimetres of demolition rubble. The earliest feature was an east-west ditch approximately 0.50m wide and 0.20m deep (Figure 4). Filling this ditch and sealing it was a dark greyish green clay ([006]), containing occasional domestic debris including pottery dating to the 12th and 13th century, bone, shell and charcoal. This layer covered an area 2.60m wide, continued east and west beyond the limit of the trench, petering out towards the north. To the south the layer depth increased to 0.70m and was truncated by the cellar.

Several features cut into, and therefore post-dated [006]. Clay predominated in the fills of all these features apart from [015]. Some

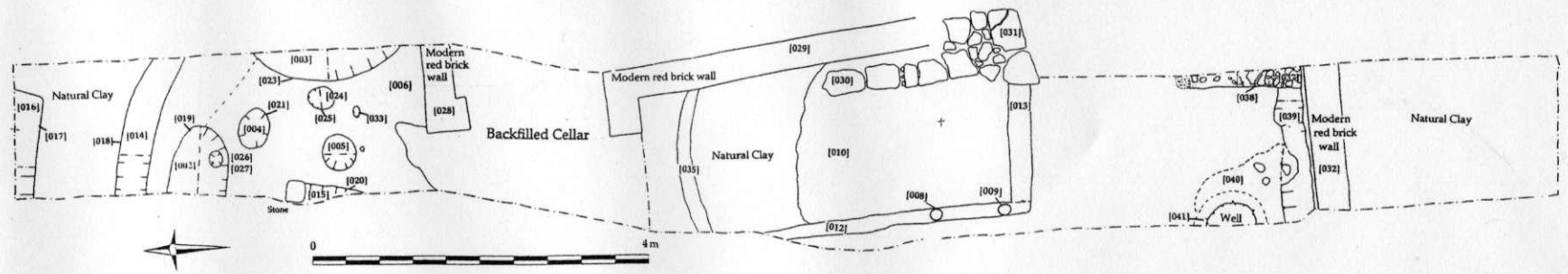


Figure 3: Plan, Trench 1

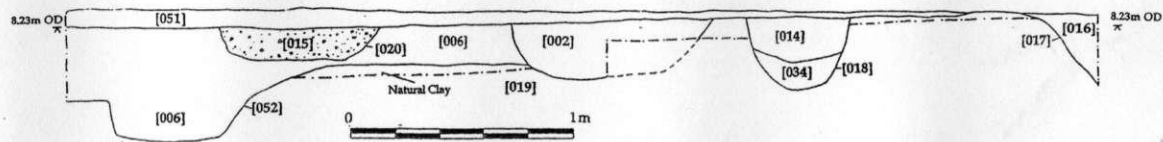


Figure 4: East facing Section, Northern end, Trench 1

features appeared constructional, although the confines of the trench precluded any structural interpretations. Beamslot [015] on the west edge of the trench was filled with gravel with a stone post pad at the north end. This linear feature was possibly associated with two flanking post holes to the east ([022], [023]). The pottery from all three features was 12th century

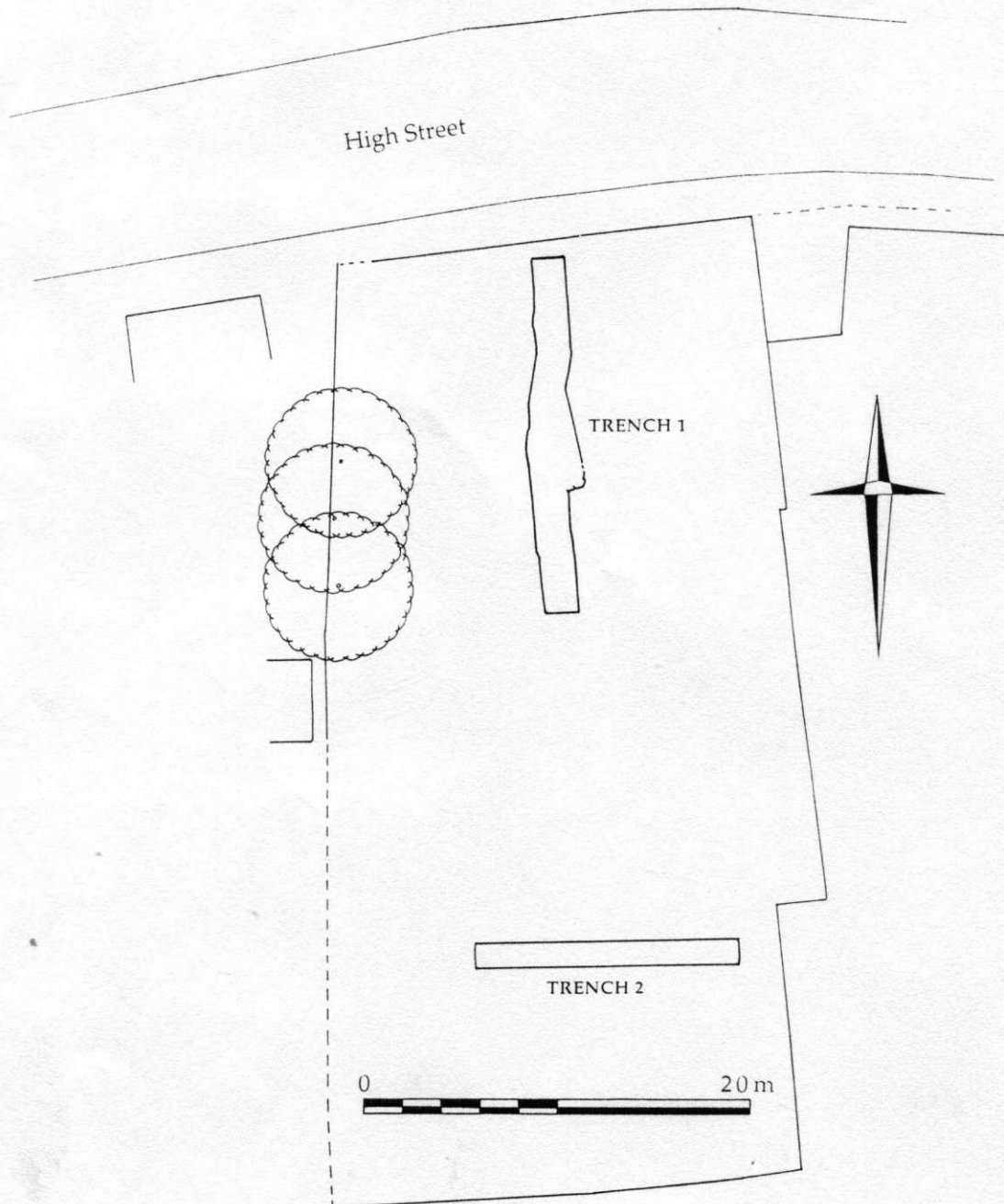


Figure 2: Trench Location

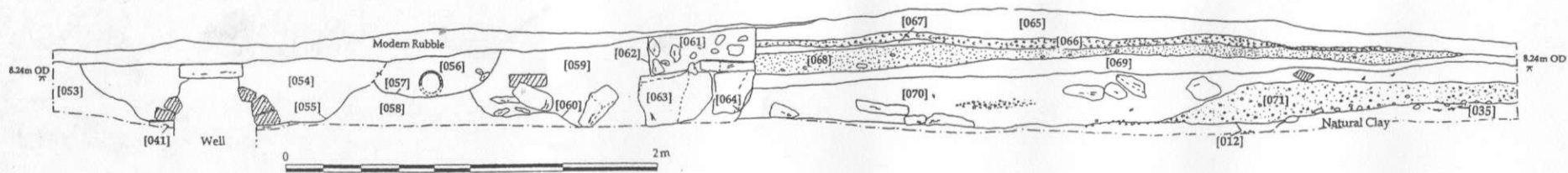


Figure 5: East facing Section, Southern end, Trench 1

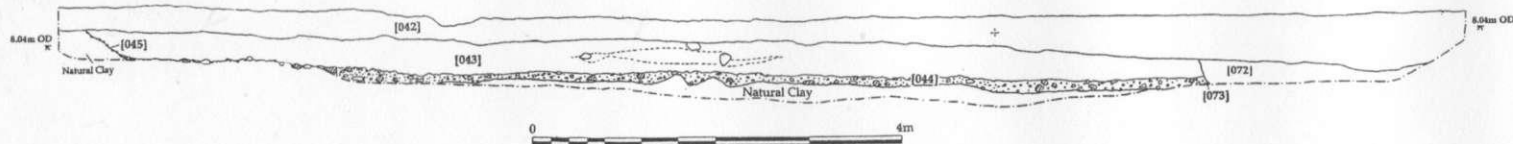


Figure 6: North facing Section, Trench 2

in date, but may have been derived from the underlying deposit ([006]). In addition to these features there was another post-hole ([025]) and a series of stake holes ([027], [033], [036]), forming no coherent pattern. [025] and [036] were undated, [027] was sealed by [019] containing 12th century pottery and [033] contained a sherd of 17th century pottery.

[019] sealing post hole [027] was the butt end of a ditch, or part of an oval pit, extending east beyond the limit of the trench. Bone, charcoal and pottery within the fill of this feature suggests the proximity of domestic activity. Another domestic pit [023] clipped by the east edge of the trench also contained charcoal, bone and a mix of pottery from the 12th, 13th and 14th century.

To the north of [006] was a curving linear ditch or gully, 0.50m wide and 0.35m deep. The curve of the gully and the U-shaped profile suggests a drainage gully or boundary ditch rather than a beam slot. At the far north end of the trench was the corner and southern edge of a rectangular, or square feature [017] with a steeply sloping edge. The fills of both features contained 12th century pottery. An insubstantial curvilinear ditch 0.20 wide and 0.06m deep with no dateable inclusions was recorded to the south of the cellar.

Beyond the cellar to the south a sequence of wall foundations and spreads denote three phases of buildings, the latest represented by the red brick wall on the south side of the cellar with a return on the east side of the trench [029]. The earliest building phase was a beamslot [012] aligned NNW, with a return to the east [013]. These clay filled slots enclosed a spread of dark grey clay with stones [010], possibly a preparation for flooring, truncated by later activity. Two large pot bases set 0.40m apart in [012] appear to have served as post pads. These pots ([008], [009]) were both 17th century in date; the southern slot [013], contained fragments of residual 14th century pottery.

Beamslots [012] and [013] were superseded by substantial stone foundations: [031] ran east-west across the width of the trench and continued west beyond the limit of excavation, on the east edge of the trench [031]/[063] formed a corner with [030] which was aligned north-south and truncated towards the north by the latest red brick wall. [030] was set on a base of gravels and rubble. A series of layers of silty clay and rubble ([069], [070], [071]) bounded by the stone walls, represent levelling and preparation for a crushed chalk floor [066], laid on a base of iron stained red sand [068]. A wide construction cut [060] on the south side of [031]/[063] was truncated by a later cut for a ceramic drain [057]. The upper part of wall [031]/[063] was subsequently robbed [062].

Approximately 3m further south was another shallow east-west slot [039] parallel to [013], undated but possibly contemporary. The east end of this slot or gully was crossed by a later beam slot filled with packed stones on a bed of sand [038]. This slot could delineate the wall of an outhouse

attached to the later stone construction. The south end of the beamslot was cut by wall [032] of the latest brick building.

Just to the north of gully [039] was a stone lined well of solid construction with an estimated diameter of 1.22m. This well [041] probably served several phases of house construction and continues to hold water, but was made obsolete by a stone slab and brick capping [040], built of the same bricks as the most recent red brick building ([028], [029], [032]). The well had not been backfilled, and was at least 3m deep.

No features were encountered in the trench to the south of wall [032] where natural clay lay at a depth of 7.83m OD, overlaid by 0.60m of garden soil.

### *Trench 2*

Only two features were revealed in Trench 2. The earliest was a large feature [045], cutting into natural clay approximately 0.40m from the east end of the trench and extending north, south and west beyond the trench limits. The cut was 0.50m deep with an uneven base, the basal deposit [044] varied in depth from 0.06 -0.14m and was composed of yellow brown sandy gravels with large lenses of brick fragments, vitrified bricks, crushed brick, slag, gravel and a small quantity of 18th century pottery. [044] was sealed by [043], composed of grey-blue and yellow-grey mottled clay derived from the underlying natural clay, with lenses of silty brown clay and pea gravels.

A later cut [073] at the west end of the trench, seen in the north-facing section, was filled with an homogenous sandy silt with gravels. The modern soils and demolition rubble [042] increased in depth from 0.20m to 0.50m from east to west. The natural clay was encountered at 8.18m OD at the east end of the trench.

### **Discussion**

A surprising density of features were revealed in Trench 1. The earliest activity concentrated on the north end of the trench, nearest to the road. Although 12th century pottery was recovered from over half the features in this area, the stratigraphic sequence suggests a degree of residuality: four out of six contexts with 12th century pottery cut a deposit with 12th and 13th century pottery ([006]). Several post holes and a beamslot were excavated, but are not necessarily contemporary, and no building plan could be discerned within the confines of the evaluation trench. The Medieval buildings were expected to flank the High Street, and yet many of the features in the northern part of the trench, such as rubbish pits and

drainage gullies, are characteristic of backyard activity rather than internal features.

A more coherent and substantial building sequence was situated in the central part of the trench. Here the building plan was re-established three times between the 17th and the 20th century, with a shift of alignment between the earliest and second build. The well to the south was undated but may have served all the early building phases.

In Trench 2 a large feature associated with brick manufacture, with 18th century pottery had truncated the sequence to below the horizon of the natural clays.

## **Conclusion**

The evidence from the evaluation suggests intense activity dating from the 12th century can be anticipated along the street frontage, with only minimal damage from later construction. Post-Medieval activity was found further away from the street frontage, in the form of a substantial building, first established in the 17th century. Structural, as well as external features were present at the northern (street) end of Trench 1, but the presence of residual pottery makes the sequence difficult to interpret. It appears that at some, if not all, stages during the early Medieval period the area lies in close proximity to, but not within, a domestic dwelling. It is possible that the associated structures lie on either side of the trenched area, or to the north. If the latter is true it could suggest a widening of the High Street in the later Medieval period or that the original High Street was routed closer to the church, possibly along the line of Church Lane.

The evidence from Trench 2 implies extensive disturbance from brickworks in the back half of the property.

## **Acknowledgements**

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## Appendix 1

### *Pottery Spot-dates*

D. Hall

Context No.

[001] (cleaning)

[003]

[002]

[004]

[005]

[006]

[007]

[008]

[009]

[010]

[011]

[012]

[013]

[014]

[015]

[040]

[044]

13th, 15th, 17thc.

12thc. & 13thc. Lyvedon

14thc. St.Neots type

12thc. Stamford & St.Neots

12thc. Stamford

12thc. Stamford

Early 13thc. Stamford & late

St.Neots

16th/17thc.

17thc.

17thc.

14th & 15thc.

14thc.

17thc.

14thc.

12thc. Stamford & St.Neots

Late 12thc. Stamford & late

St.Neots

17thc.

mixed 18thc.