

Report 3036



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Archaeological Watching Brief at 3, The Crescent, Wisbech, Cambridgeshire

ECB3855



Prepared for
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Location:	3 The Crescent, Wisbech
District:	Fenland
Grid Ref.:	546213 309523
Planning Ref.:	F/YR11/0881/F
HER No.:	ECB3855
OASIS Ref.:	136574
Client:	Mr J. Leigh
Dates of Fieldwork:	20 September 2012

Summary

An archaeological watching brief was commissioned by Swann Edwards Architecture on behalf of Mr J. Leigh during groundworks associated with the construction of an extension to the rear of 3 The Crescent, Wisbech.

The earliest deposits encountered were the clayey silts of the local superficial geology. The only feature encountered was a masonry structure thought to be an old water cistern. This coincided nicely with the location of a pump shown on the 1887 Ordnance Survey map of the area.

The lack of any medieval features or finds, in an area thought to be within the medieval castle, suggest that there may have been a large amount of truncation caused by the development of The Crescent in the early 19th century.

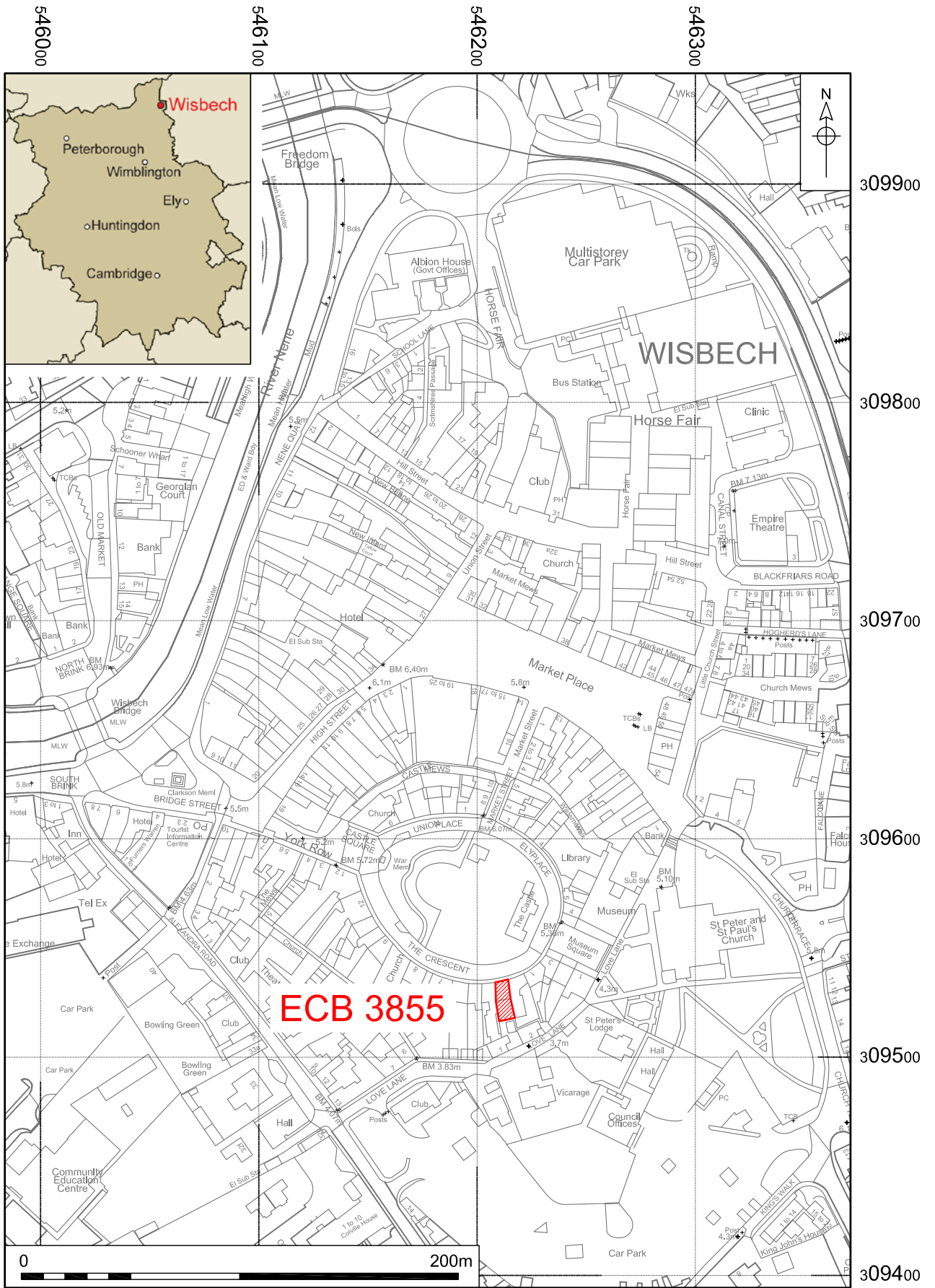
1.0 INTRODUCTION

The excavation of ringbeams around four previously driven piles was archaeologically monitored. These made up the foundations of an extension to the rear of 3 The Crescent, Wisbech.

This work was undertaken to fulfil planning requirements set by Fenland District Council (Ref. F/YR11/0881/F) and a Brief issued by Cambridgeshire Archaeology Planning and Countryside Advice (McConnell 2012). The work was conducted in accordance with a Project Design and Method Statement prepared by NPS Archaeology (Ref. NAU/BAU3036/NP). This work was commissioned and funded by Swann Edwards Architecture on behalf of Mr J. Leigh.

This programme of work was designed to assist in defining the character and extent of any archaeological remains within the proposed redevelopment area, following the guidelines set out in *National Planning Policy Framework* (Department for Communities and Local Government 2012). The results will enable decisions to be made by the Local Planning Authority about the treatment of any archaeological remains found.

The site archive is currently held by NPS Archaeology and on completion of the project will be deposited with the Cambridgeshire Historic Environment Team, following the relevant policies on archiving standards.



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Figure 1. Site location. Scale 1:2500

2.0 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

The underlying geology consists of Quaternary tidal flat deposits of clays and silts above Jurassic mudstone of the Ampthill Clay Formation (<http://mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain/home.html>).

The development site was located in the centre of the town of Wisbech, just to the south of the medieval market place and in the backyard of a property on the Georgian development of The Crescent (Fig. 1). The site lies at a height of c.3.7m OD, but the centre of The Crescent is considerably higher, perhaps due to the presence here of the motte of Wisbech Castle. This site at the rear of 3, The Crescent is probably located in the bailey of the former castle.

3.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Cambridgeshire Historic Environment Record (CHER) and historic mapping sources have been consulted during the preparation of this section and the relevant information is presented below in broad period order.

Medieval

Wisbech Castle (CHER 01926) is thought to have originally occupied land that became the central garden within The Crescent. It was built of stone after 1086 on the orders of William I and may have utilised the site of an earlier fortification. Although little now remains, the pattern of the town centre clearly indicates the shape and extent of the original castle. On the town side of the Castle wall a deep ditch or moat was located, said to be '40ft wide'. Excavations on the site of Tesco's on the Market Place gave proof of the existence of the castle wall and the extensive moat, the gradual filling in of which seems to have extended into the 16th century.

The keep of the Norman castle was circular and was probably used over a very long period as a jail. Accounts exist of some early prisoners e.g. Richard Lambert of Lynn, illegally imprisoned in 1315, who '...was so inhumanly gnawed by toads and other venomous vermin that his life was despaired of'. The castle was still standing at the time of the English Civil War, when it was refortified and a total of £11.2s.6d was spent of repairing the drawbridge. A redoubt was built at Horseshoe Sluice.

After the war the defences were slighted, and in 1658 John Thurloe (Secretary to the Commonwealth Government) built a fine mansion on the site. This was demolished in the early 19th century to make way for the building of The Crescent.

The posited early date for the building of Wisbech Castle is reinforced by the finding of an Anglo-Saxon "Urnes-style" openwork brooch in the castle ditch in 1846 (CHER 01926a).

Finds made during building alterations to the Market Place included a carved bone, pottery, including the base of a medieval jug, carved architectural fragments and broken gravestones (CHER 10489).

There is a medieval crypt or undercroft (CHER 10493) located at 29 Market Street, lying beneath post-medieval shop. Its purpose is unknown but it may be connected with a guildhall.

The building which is now The Conservative Club (CHER 11575) in Hill Street, housed the Grammar School until the end of 1897. It seems likely that this was originally the medieval Guildhall, the headquarters of the Guild of the Holy Trinity, which was certainly in existence by 1379. The school was probably set up at the same time.

Excavation at Market Mews (CHER CB14619) revealed a sequence of deeply stratified medieval and post-medieval deposits, including evidence for industrial metalworking as well as at least eight distinct building phases, the earliest of which has been provisionally dated to the 13th century.

The church of Saints Peter and Paul (CHER CB14828) is the main parish church of Wisbech and dates originally from the 12th century, with further additions in the 15th and 16th centuries. The original tower lay to the west. The floor plan of two south aisles, north aisle, chapels, nave and chancel is extremely unusual.

Medieval remains have been revealed at Church Terrace (CHER MCB16870). This area had been peripheral to the medieval settlement in Wisbech. Numerous silt layers suggest the site had been very prone to flooding, and may have resulted in the river changing its course. Midden deposits and other evidence of human activity dating to the 13th-15th centuries were seen to the south-west of the site.

Excavations carried out within the cellar of 4, Ely Place (CHER MCB19264) produced evidence of a large, infilled, ditch-like feature, believed to represent a defensive ditch associated with the castle. One layer of deposition contained seeds suitable for radio-carbon dating which returned a date range of 1020-1160. The pottery that was found is of 11th- to 12th-century date.

Post-medieval

Three test pits were excavated in the Market Place in December 1991 (CHER 10312) in advance of the planned development and pedestrianisation of the area. Post holes probably represent the remains of market stalls from the period before 1811. The pottery recovered was post-medieval in date.

An early post-medieval pot (CHER 11911) was found during renovation of wall to a back alley in town centre. This Babylon ware costrel- water/ale jug is considered by Paul Spoerry to be of a rare type dating between 1550 and 1650.

The church next to the theatre on The Mews (CHER CB14962) was the first Non-conformist place of worship in Wisbech and was built by the Particular Baptists in 1692.

A watching brief undertaken during development work at 27, Hill Street (CHER MCB16507) revealed the remains of post-medieval floor surfaces, a hearth and a curved brick wall. Artefacts of medieval and post-medieval date were recovered.

Wisbech Castle gardens (CHER MCB19349) lie at the centre of The Crescent. They were probably originally laid out as part of Thurloe's 1658 mansion which was pulled down in 1815 as The Crescent was being developed. Elements of the 17th-century garden walls and gate piers remain. In 1792/3 the gardens were entirely walled and appear to have been largely compartmentalised with a Pleasure Garden and a theatre covering four acres. The Castle was given to the Local Education Authority in 1969.

19th-20th century

The former Methodist church on The Crescent (CHER CB14961) was built 1803 and enlarged in 1835, part of the planned circus of the Castle Estate built by Joseph Medworth (1752-1827).

Nene Quay warehouses on North Street (CHER MCB16629) is a 19th-century five-storey block with an advertisement for 'metal, fur & [skin] merchant' painted on the side.

The Wisbech and Fenland Museum (MCB16630) was built as a museum in 1840.

The churchyard (CHER MCB17113) belonging to the church of Saints Peter and St Paul was closed in 1855. It originally stretched beyond its current boundaries, as human remains have been located in Church Terrace

The Kings Walk Cholera Cemetery and Churchyard (CHER MCB17116) was established in 1832 as an overflow to the main church graveyard. It was closed in 1855.

On the High Street, the Clarkson Monument (CHER MCB17825), designed by Sir George Gilbert Scott, was erected in 1881 to commemorate the work of the anti-slavery campaigner Thomas Clarkson (1760-1846) who was born in Wisbech.

A single trench was excavated within the footprint of the new library foundations (CHER MCB18485). The excavations revealed evidence of a cellar, which may relate to the Georgian houses previously located on this part of The Crescent.

A Baptist Chapel (CHER MCB18486) is depicted on the 1853 Board of Health Map. A photograph taken prior to the construction of Wisbech Library shows a Methodist Chapel on the site in 1976. Excavations during the development of the new library recovered rubble and architectural fragments from the backfill of a Georgian cellar, with a backfill date of approximately 1830.

The 1887 Ordnance Survey 1:500 town plan of Wisbech shows a pump present against the northern part of the western wall of the garden, and the Castle Almshouses at the rear of the plot (<http://www.old-maps.co.uk/maps.html>). According to the Ordnance Survey, the almshouses were demolished between 1968 and 1974 (<http://www.old-maps.co.uk/maps.html>).

4.0 METHODOLOGY

The objective of this watching brief was to ensure that any archaeological features exposed during groundworks were recorded and interpreted to an acceptable standard and any significant discoveries of artefact evidence were recorded and analysed to an acceptable standard.

Should significant remains be found, this was to be communicated to CAPCA and the Client as soon as possible in order to allow a review and agreement on the methods and resources for analysis and reporting (McConnell 2012).

The Brief required that all groundworks be monitored.

Machine excavation was carried out with a one tonne hydraulic 360° excavator operated under constant archaeological supervision.

Spoil, exposed surfaces and features were scanned with a metal-detector. All metal-detected and hand-collected finds other than those which were obviously modern, were retained for inspection.

Due to the absence of suitable deposits, environmental samples were not taken.

All archaeological features and deposits were recorded using NPS Archaeology pro forma. Trench locations, plans and sections were recorded at appropriate scales. Digital photographs were taken of all relevant features and deposits where appropriate.

Site conditions were good, with the work taking place in fine weather.

5.0 RESULTS

The project consisted of the monitoring of the excavation of ringbeams after four piles had been driven in. The ring beams were 0.5m wide and 0.9m deep (Fig. 2).

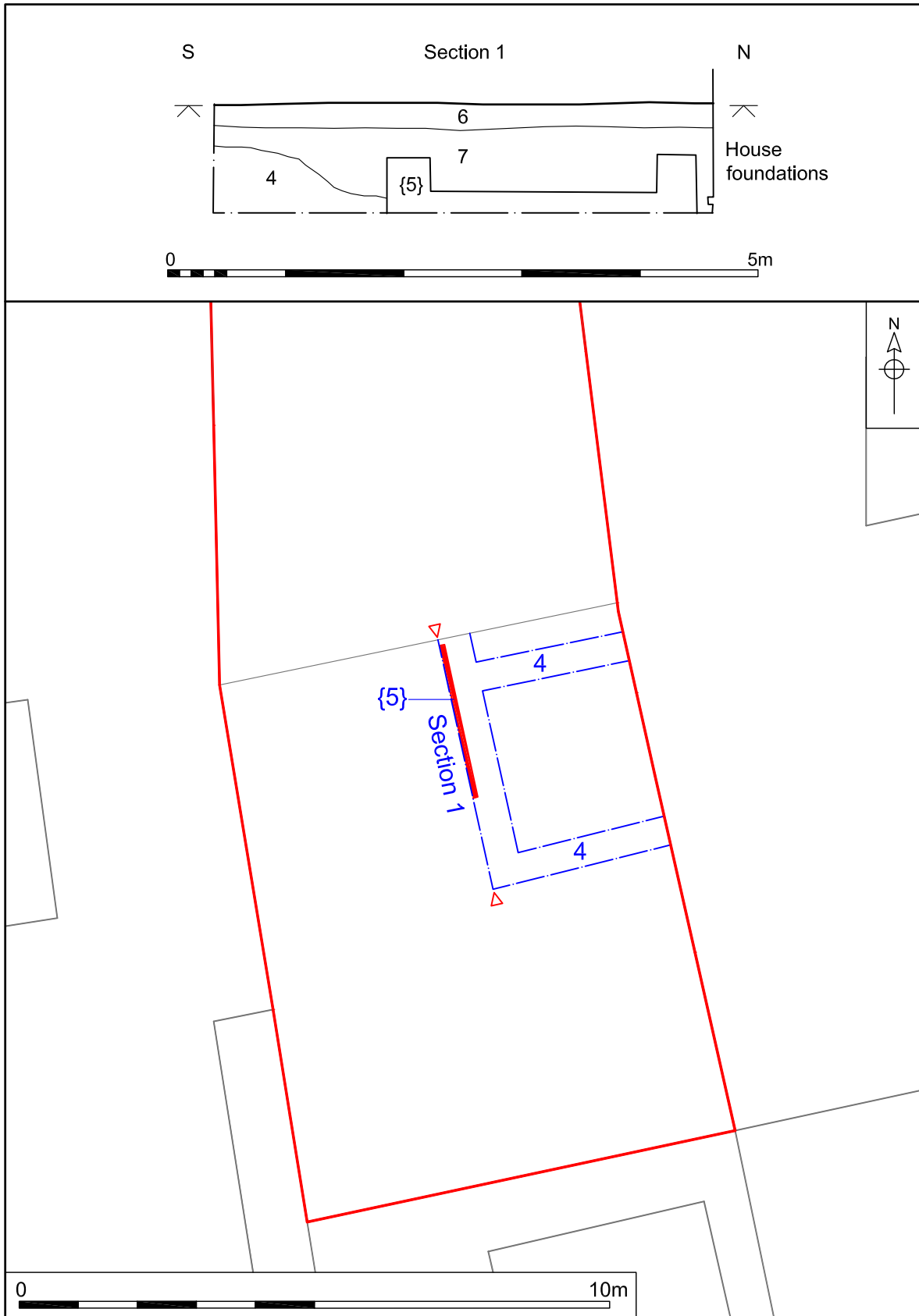


Plate 1. The north-western end of the ring beam showing structure {5} and the foundations of 3, The Crescent.

The earliest deposit encountered was layer (4), a clean reddish brown silt with no inclusions (Fig. 2 section 1). This was thought to be a marine inundation deposit, predating settlement in this area.

The foundations of 3, The Crescent were exposed at the northern end of the ring beam (Plate 1). The building dates to the early 19th century and the foundations stopped at a depth of 0.80m below ground level (bgl), reputedly above the level of the internal basement floor (John Fitt pers comm).

Present at the western edge of the ring beam was masonry structure {5} (Fig. 2), constructed of soft red brick (2½" thick) bonded with hard grey mortar (Plate 1). This was thought to be a two-chambered water cistern (John Fitt pers comm), an



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Figure 2. Site plan and section. Scale 1:100 and 1:50

interpretation strengthened by the presence of a pump indicated on the 1887 Ordnance Survey map.

Above structure {5} and elsewhere above silt (4) was layer (2/7), a 0.32-0.50m thick reddish brown silt containing occasional pieces of ceramic building material, mortar and charcoal fragments (Fig. 2 section 1, Plate 1).

Above deposit (2/7) was topsoil (6), a dark brown gritty silt. Close to the northern edge of the monitored area, adjacent to the south wall of 3, The Crescent, topsoil (6) was replaced by layer (1), a mixed brown clayey silt with frequent inclusions of brick and mortar rubble. This deposit was probably the upper fill of the foundation trench for 3, The Crescent.

6.0 THE FINDS

by Rebecca Sillwood

A single artefact was encountered and collected. This object was processed and recorded by count and weight, and data entered onto an Excel spreadsheet. A description is presented below and can also be found in Appendix 2a.

6.1 The Ceramic Building Material

A single fragment of modern brick, with mortar adhering, was recovered from 'cistern' (5). The brick is a sandy and orange, with occasional grog and quartz inclusions. The only measurable dimension is the thickness, which is 71mm, suggesting that this fragment was from a rather large brick. The mortar which covers three surfaces of the brick is grey, with frequent chalk and charcoal/ashy inclusions.

The brick is likely to be early 20th-century in date.

7.0 CONCLUSIONS

This project produced no evidence of the medieval castle believed to be located on this site; The Crescent is thought to be the location of the keep and topographically this area is located within the bailey.

The earliest deposits encountered were the clayey silts of the local superficial geology. The only feature encountered was a masonry structure thought to be an old water cistern. This coincided nicely with the presence of a pump shown on the 1887 Ordnance Survey map of the area.

The absence of any medieval features or finds suggests that there may have been significant local truncation of deposits caused by the development of The Crescent in the early 19th century.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank John Fitt and the staff of Fitt Ltd (Construction) for assistance during the fieldwork and Swann Edwards Architecture for commissioning this project on behalf of their client Mr J. Leigh who funded the work.

Dan McConnell of Cambridgeshire Archaeology Planning and Countryside Advice (CAPCA) stipulated the archaeological work to be undertaken, produced the archaeological brief and scrutinised the project on behalf of the Local Planning Authority.

The finds were processed and reported on by Rebecca Sillwood.

This report was illustrated and produced by David Dobson and edited by Jayne Bown.

Bibliography and Sources

Department for Communities and Local Government 2012 *National Planning Policy Framework*, TSO

McConnell, D. 2012 *Brief for Archaeological Monitoring and Recording (3 The Crescent, Wisbech)*

http://maps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyviewer_google/googleviewer.html Accessed 01.10.2012

<http://www.old-maps.co.uk/maps.html> Accessed 27.09.2012

Appendix 1a: Context Summary

Context	Category	Cut Type	Fill Of	Description	Period
1	Deposit			Mixed brown clayey silt with frequent brick and mortar fragments (topsoil)	Modern
2	Deposit			Reddish brown clayey silt with occasional CBM, mortar and charcoal fragments	Uncertain
3	-	-	-	VOID	-
4	Deposit			Clean reddish brown clayey silt - natural	-
5	Masonry			Brick cistern	Modern
6	Deposit			Topsoil	Modern
7	Deposit			Same as (2)	Uncertain

Appendix 1b: OASIS Feature Summary

Period	Category	Total
Modern	Cistern	1

Appendix 2a: Finds by Context

Context	Material	Qty	Wt	Period	Notes
5	Ceramic Building Material	1	645g	Modern	Brick (T71) and mortar

Appendix 2b: Oasis Finds Summary

Period	Material	Total
Modern	Ceramic Building Material	1

Appendix 3: OASIS Report Summary