Cambridgeshire County Council

The Historic Towns of Cambridgeshire
An Extensive Urban Survey

ELY

EAST CAMBRIDGESHIRE

Draft Report

Text Last Modified: 17 January 2001

This document is an unfinished draft report compiled as a part of the Cambridgeshire Extensive Urban Survey.

All archaeological sites reported on since the date of last modification given above are not included in this text.

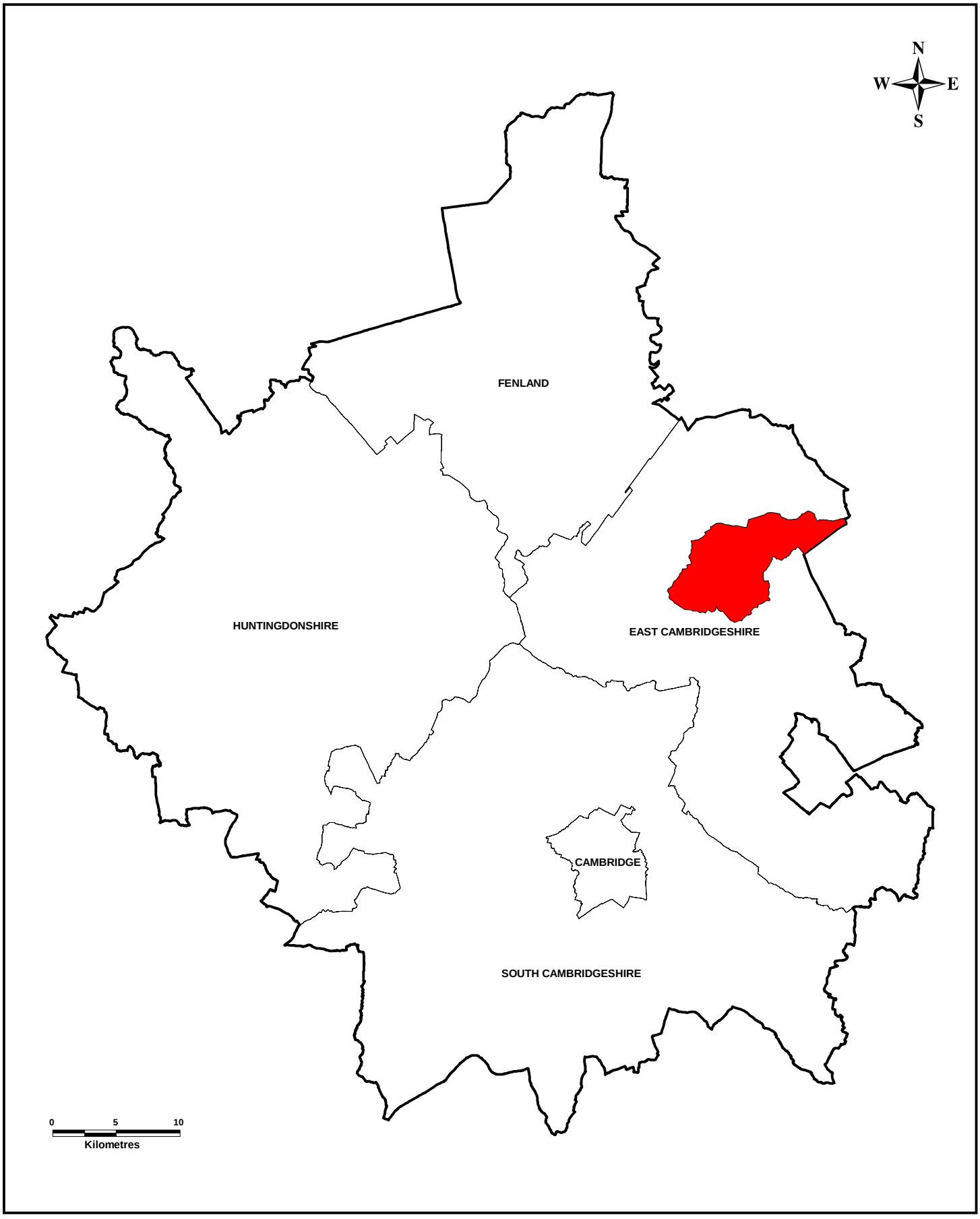
Throughout the text reference is made to Historic Environment Record (HER) numbers, Listed Building (LB) numbers and Scheduled Monument (SM) numbers. For further information on any of these sites the reader is referred to the Cambridgeshire Historic Environment Record.

This report should be cited as:

***Cambridgeshire Extensive Urban Survey: Ely*. Draft Report 17/01/2001.**

Ely: Parish Location

Cambridgeshire County Council



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Date: 31/08/2007

By: Rik Hoggett

DRAFT

Introduction

"Britain's historic towns and cities, particularly those which occupy sites first settled within the Roman period, are some of the largest and most archaeologically complex sites in the country. They have experienced continuity of occupation over a very substantial period of time. The buried archaeological deposits which have formed through time, and the buildings and structures (e.g. castles, town walls, mediaeval houses) which survive today, form a nationally important resource for the study of the past and for the understanding of the development and growth of urban centres as a whole in the country. Equally, we value these towns for the link we provide to our history, not only through their individual monuments and buildings but because of the way past occupation has influenced the modern townscape, through street plans, major monuments (e.g. cathedrals) and collections of buildings."

Managing the Urban Archaeological Resource, English Heritage (1992)

The idea of Cambridgeshire as an urban environment is perhaps a surprising one, and does not fit with the image of small villages with thatched cottages clustered around mediaeval churches, or the rolling fields of black soil stretching beyond the horizon. Yet the landscape we see today is a product of centuries of interaction between mankind and nature, and urbanism can be seen in many forms.

The archaeological resource is precious to us all, yet is immensely fragile, and is both finite and non-renewable. Every time a historic building is altered or demolished, or a development takes place on cleared ground, the potential exists for damage to be inflicted upon the archaeological record. The archaeologists of the County Archaeology Office work in partnership with developers, local, regional and national organisations, and local planning authorities to manage planning guidelines and protect, record and promote the archaeology of the County to the highest standard.

The care of the historic environment depends on the support and interest of the general public. Archaeology is a tool used to comprehend and explain the physical remains of the past and makes a significant contribution to the quality of life, character and distinctiveness of local communities. The County Archaeology Office is dedicated to disseminating information about the historic environment through improving access to its findings.

Today, Cambridgeshire is one of the most dynamic and expanding counties in England in terms of development and archaeology. Much of the pressure for housing is being met by building on vacant plots of land within our existing settlement centres, and the character of our historic landscapes is continually being updated and irrevocably altered. This environment needs to be recorded and assessed, so the County's archaeologists, planners and researchers can better understand the area in which we live and work.

Recent initiatives undertaken by the County Archaeology Office have recognised the interest in the past demonstrated by the people of Cambridgeshire, and it is through such partnerships and collaborations that we aim to improve the quality of life for the County by increasing access to the past.

English Heritage are promoting Extensive Urban Survey as an effective way to ensure the appropriate conservation and management of the urban archaeological resource in England based upon careful assessment of existing knowledge. Surveys undertaken by other local authorities have greatly enhanced the integrity and quality of the urban archaeological resource, and it is our intention to bring to Cambridgeshire the benefits of such an endeavour.

This report is a draft archaeological and historical assessment of Ely and forms part of the Cambridgeshire Extensive Urban Survey of 31 historic settlements in Cambridgeshire. This project, funded by English Heritage, forms part of a nation-wide reassessment of the management of the urban archaeological resource. The project is being carried out by the County Archaeology Office of Cambridgeshire County Council.

This report has been compiled using a number of sources, including the Cambridgeshire Sites and Monuments Record, the Database of Listed Buildings held by the County Planning Department, and various cartographic and documentary records, in particular the Victoria County History (Pugh 1967). The maps and tables were prepared using the computerised mapping system and database of the Cambridgeshire Sites and Monuments Record.

Location and Topography

Ely is the administrative centre of East Cambridgeshire, and lies on the raised area of terrain known as the Isle of Ely. The river Great Ouse and River Lark form the two main watercourses, and the town lies on the main A10 road between Cambridge and Kings Lynn.

For the purposes of this survey, Ely is considered as a town, but it is technically a city. This status was confirmed in 1974 by Royal Warrant, and gives the city the honour of being the second smallest city in the country after Ripon.

This unusual status is a reflection on the city throughout history, as will be seen. The Liberty of the Isle of Ely was a separate County in all but name until its abolition by King William IV in 1836. Secular and administrative authority rested with the bishop and diocese until a similar time.

The civil parish itself covers a considerable area at 5903 ha, being the second largest in the district after Littleport. As well as the town of Ely itself, the parish incorporates the settlements of Stuntney, Queen Adelaide, Chettisham and Prickwillow. These four will be considered as separate entities.

The topography of the area is dominated by the Isle rising out of the surrounding fen. The parish covers the southern and eastern side of the Isle, which rises to a height of 28m OD at the Tower Hospital. Ely Cathedral lies at 21m OD. Stuntney lies on another island rising steeply out of the fen at 12m OD. Queen Adelaide (named after a public house) lies between 1 and 3m OD. Chettisham lies at around 13m OD, and Prickwillow at around 1.5 m OD; the main B1382 road through the village runs above the landscape at 3m OD. The fen in the area lies around 0m OD.

Geology

The underlying geology is Kimmeridge Clay. The area under the city itself has a capping of Lower Greensand, but elsewhere the overlying deposit is Boulder Clay, also known as till. The edges of the fen islands tend to be marked by sandy clay deposits.

The fen areas of the parish are marked by peat deposits intercut by roddons. The Fenland Survey[1] dated the peat formation as 2400 BC onwards, thus overlying the palaeo-channels that have formed the roddons. However, shrinkage of the peat as a result of desiccation arising from fenland drainage schemes has exposed several of these. Roddons tend to comprise deposits of marine silts, with clay at the edge and coarser yellow silts in the centre. The roddon of the Great Ouse at Stuntney island is estimated to be in the region of 68m wide, and still contained water up to the Mediaeval period. Recent excavations across this roddon have located two main channels in the region of 20m wide[2].

Unlike other fenland regions, there is no specific aspect of the drainage programmes that were intended to alleviate the Ely region. The Great Ouse was canalised at some point during the Mediaeval period, probably by the monks of the abbey during the 13th century, when wharves first appear in the town[3]. The flow through the Ouse was lessened and the risk of flooding reduced by the creation of the Old & New Bedford Rivers in the 17th century. A systematic and controlled increase in water flow in cut channels would lower levels in the area, and coupled with linear drains would provide areas of fen that, in common with other regions of the district, would be seasonally drained[4].

The fen edge was estimated by the Fenland Survey at being along the 3.5m contour during the mediaeval period[5]. Interestingly, the area must have been subject to drainage works fairly early on as a monastic grange site is recorded at Shippea Hill island. This was allocated to the convent as part of the division of the ecclesiastical estates upon the creation of the diocese in 1109[6]. The highest point of Shippea Hill island lies at 5.9m, which would have meant that most of the island comprised marginal land pre drainage. Structures dating to the 15th century were recorded on the island until demolished 30 years ago, perhaps indicative of a period when water levels were sufficiently stable to permit a permanent masonry structure.

The potential of the problems of flooding can be demonstrated by a simple comparison: the main control for waters into the Bedford South Level (which contains Ely) is the Denver Sluice; tides here reach a height of 4-5 m ASL (above sea level); the peat beds around Ely are at about 0-1.5m ASL; the

[1] Hall 1996, p.30
[2] Gdaniec 1994, p.7
[3] Pugh 1967, p.36
[4] For further information see Darby 1974
[5] Hall 1996, p.8
[6] Clements 1868, p.60

banks of the Ouse upstream of the sluice are at 3.5-4m ASL. The Denver Sluice collapsed in 1713 and the resulting floods were catastrophic to the region.

It is useful to consider a brief overview of the development of the Fenland region for the purposes of this survey.

Date Range	Archaeological Period	Description
>20000 BC	Upper Palaeolithic	Ice sheets at Humber, with some penetrating to Hunstanton
7500 BC	Mesolithic	Fen area stretched to Dogger Bank in North Sea. Now areas of taiga woodland intercut with river valleys. Clays deposited.
5500 BC		Deciduous forests grow as climate gets warmer and wetter. Formation of the high forest. Rise in Atlantic levels created North Sea and moved coastline towards wash.
2500 BC	Neolithic	Creation of fresh water sedge fen leads to formation of peat deposits.
2000 BC		Increasing water levels in area lead to creation of lagoons that deposit clays over peat. East Anglia cut off from Europe
1400 BC	Bronze Age	Dryer and warmer climate increases activity and re-establishes fresh water sedge fen. Heavy peat formations as far as Nordelph. Woodland clearances increase.
1000 BC		Extensive occupation, but rise in water levels lead to increased use of trackways and causeways
500 BC	Iron Age	Colder and wetter. Water levels rise and silt lands deposited in north of County, leading to egress blockages that create the freshwater meres.
100 AD	Roman	Initially fairly dry, fenland became heavily waterlogged, with islands and roddons as focus of activity. First drainage channels
500 AD	Early Saxon	Water levels retreat slightly
900 AD	Middle/Late Saxon	Rise in water levels lead to major artificial drains and defences
1100 AD	Early Mediaeval	Large scale defences and cuts created
1600 AD	Post Mediaeval	Large scale systematic drainage and pumping begun

1850 AD	Industrial	Use of technology (steam pumps) provides a stable and drained, fertile landscape

(after Darby 1974 & Godwin 1978)

Brief History of the Town

The Isle of Ely shows evidence of settlement and activity from most periods of human history. It has been traditionally thought that the heavy clay soils that from most of the area would have been unattractive to prehistoric farmers, but recent discoveries as part of the Fenland Survey have challenged that assumption[7].

The earliest activity is dated to the Mesolithic, and comprises a series of flint scatters in the eastern areas of the parish where sandy deposits are present. One such site is on Shippea Hill, and this with others in the area most likely form outliers to the major Mesolithic complex at Peacocks Farm, Littleport. Scatters around Nornea are outliers of sites at Soham.

Little Neolithic activity is recorded in the parish, with possible exceptions at Nornea and Stuntney. In contrast, archaeological evidence for activity in the Bronze Age is more extensive, including sites on the main island of Ely itself, suggesting that the Isle was settled for the first time in this period. In addition, there is evidence of a major flint working site at Stuntney.

It was initially thought that there was little Iron Age activity in the area, until the Fenland Survey identified several sites on the island clays. Of the seven identified, two were used in the Bronze Age and five continued into the Roman period, with only one displaying exclusively Iron Age occupation. All appear to have been agricultural settlement sites, and the fen edge appears to have roughly coincided with the modern peat deposits.

Roman activity in the area was extensive, although curiously not in the location of the current town. Settlements and farmsteads are known from numerous places, and a dock existed on Stuntney island where it was reached by the River Ouse, now represented by a roddon. Amongst the numerous finds in the area are objects of votive or high status. A site interpreted as a possible villa has been identified in the area of Braham Farm.

Ely rose to prominence during the 7th century when Aethelthryth, widow of the Kings of the Gyrwas and the Northumbrians, built her ecclesiastical site in the vicinity of the village of Cratendun. This church grew to be a sizeable and wealthy institution, that would have formed a focus for settlement in the vicinity. Settlement from the 8th century onwards appears to have been focussed along the fen edge at West Fen Road, and gradually retreated up the slope towards the current cathedral site. Later Saxon activity is known from around the cathedral.

The church was destroyed by the Danes in 870, refounded soon after and reformed in 970 by Bishop Aethelwold of Winchester with the support of King Edgar. Aethelwold gave substantial endowments to the abbey, and Edgar's refoundation charter in effect formed the basis of the 'liberty' of the Isle of Ely.

[7] Hall 1996, p.35

By the time of Domesday Book[8], Ely was a thriving, albeit dispersed, settlement focussed around a Benedictine monastery, that had outliers in several places on the island and in surrounding areas. The diocese of Ely was created in 1109, the ecclesiastical estates divided, but the bishop retained the secular authority over the area. A port was constructed in the earlier mediaeval period, and the town (and monastery/diocese) prospered.

The Dissolution of Ely in 1539 was probably responsible for a major downturn in the fortunes of the town. Wharf activity was reduced, and although the diocese and cathedral were maintained, the removal of a very wealthy high status consumer in the form of the abbey had a knock-on effect as the town readjusted itself to being the centre of an agricultural community, a purpose which it fulfils to this day.

Population figures are:

Year	**Population**
1086	110 households
1251	345 households
1563	800 households
1753	3000
1801	3948
1851	8148
1901	7743
1931	8370
1981	10880
1991	11730
1999	13390

(all figures include the parish not the town)

Of the other villages, Chettisham is first mentioned in 1170[9], Stuntney was an outlier (berewic) in 1086, Queen Adelaide and Prickwillow are both within the fen and as such were not in existence as settlements until the post-mediaeval period.

[8] Rumble 1981
[9] Place Names of Cambridgeshire p.217

Evidence

Documentary

The origins of the name 'Ely' are still debated. The traditional view is that it is derived from the Anglo-Saxon 'Elge'[10], translated as 'eel district/island' (a reference to the staple harvest in Anglo-Saxon times) or perhaps 'willow place', as willows are commonly found overhanging water, so would have been a familiar sight on this fen island. Either would be appropriate.

Given the status of the Isle during the Anglo-Saxon period, it is not surprising that Ely is well represented in Anglo-Saxon charters, the legal documents of land holding that formed the basis of the Saxon chancery. However all these refer to the church post-Danish invasion, and not Aethelthryth's foundation. This is referred to by Bede in the *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* [11](AD 731), when he states that monks from Ely visited the ruins of Roman Cambridge to recovered a marble coffin to bury their founder in an appropriate fashion – presumably evicting the previous occupant first – but reliable knowledge of this early institution is scarce.

The major documentary source for Anglo-Saxon and mediaeval periods remains the *Liber Eliensis*[12], a compilation of chronicles, land grants and other documentation relating to the abbey and town. Created in the 12th century from earlier material, it provides a valuable source, although one that should be treated with caution when referring to earlier periods. This relates the story of the founding of the original abbey, and that of Aethelthryth its founder. In essence, the first church was supposed to have been built at the village of Cratendun by King Aethelberht of Kent soon after the arrival of Augustine, but this was destroyed by the ravaging King Penda of Mercia. Aethelthryth was the daughter of Anna, King of East Anglia, who had been married to Tonberht of the Gyrwas (Fenland) in AD 652 and had received the Isle as a dowry. Upon Tonberht's death (AD 655), she was forcibly married to Ecgfrith of Northumbria in AD 660. She fled her marriage in AD 672, returned to Ely and founded the church one mile north of Cratendune in AD 673, being consecrated as abbess by Bishop Wilfrid. She died of the plague in AD 679 and was succeeded as abbess by her sister Seaxburgha, widow of the king of Kent, who in turn was succeeded by her daughter Ermenhild (widow of Wulfhere of Mercia) and her grand-daughter Werburgh. After this the records fall silent for two centuries.

This story is unusual and largely unsubstantiated. Whilst the connection between Ely and Aethelthryth is incontrovertible, some of the details are unlikely. It would be a reasonable assumption that a hagiography existed at some point after her death, for Bede records her life in distinct hagiographic terminology. It should be pointed out that he does refer to Bishop Wilfrid as a source of information, although Wilfrid died in AD 709[13], and the Historia

[10] Pugh 1967 p.28
[11] Colgrave & Mynors 1969
[12] Blake 1962
[13] A.S.C. MS A, s.a.709

Ecclesiastica was not written for another decade or so. Either this hagiography or Bede's own work was later incorporated into the *Liber Eliensis*.

The whole question of church foundation and nature in the decades after the conversion by Augustine is a confused and misleading one. For example, it is unlikely that Aethelberht of Kent founded a monastery or church within the territory of his direct competitors within England. However, the other ecclesiastical presence in East Anglia was from the Burgundian (Felix) and Irish (Fursa) churches, both of which, especially the Irish, were seen by Rome as challengers to the authority of the Papacy[14]. Hence, claiming a spiritual descent from the founder of the Roman church could be seen as a shrewd move. Alternatively, another church site at nearby Soham was founded by Felix of Burgundy, Bishop of East Anglia after c.AD 630[15]. In order to claim pre-eminence over this site, again a more prestigious foundation is called for. However, the presence of Felix at Soham is only attested by the 12th century sources of the *Liber Eliensis* with circumstantial material in William of Malmesbury's Gesta Pontificum[16]; certainly Bede makes no mention of this foundation. The situation is indeed complex.

It is assumed that Ely was destroyed along with other East Anglian religious sites by the Vikings towards the end of the 9th century; 870AD is the traditional date. The *Liber Eliensis* states that eight people returned to the site and continued to live as secular canons, a distinction that is unknown today. This situation continued until the expulsion of the canons by King Edgar in AD 970 at the instigation of Bishop Aethelwold of Winchester, and the site refounded under the Benedictine rule as part of the monastic reform in England.

The refoundation of Ely as a Benedictine house is well documented. Charters referring to it are extant, both as documents and as inclusions within the *Liber Eliensis*. In addition, the Liber contains a text known as Libellus Aethelwoldi Episcopi[17], a series of accounts of land disputes arising during the foundation and subsequent establishment of monastic estates.

The monastic reform movement is a fascinating phenomenon arising from the concern by certain members of the church of the condition of piety and spirituality in the country. The disruptions caused by the Viking attacks and subsequent reconquest of the country had left a legacy of abandoned houses and religious duties. Those that were being refounded were being done so under secular auspices, leading to a conflict of interest that in the eyes of certain churchmen was unacceptable, in particular Oswald, Aethelwold and Dunstan. Once these three were prelates in positions of sufficient authority (York, Winchester and Canterbury) the movement began. The impact of the reform can be overestimated. Only a small percentage of houses were reformed, and the focus was mainly on older, royal houses that had been heavily disrupted or destroyed, such as Ely. Any extant tenants were

[14] Carroll 1997, p.32
[15] *Liber Eliensis* Book I, cap.6
[16] *Gesta Pontificum* cap.74
[17] *Liber Eliensis* Book II

summarily evicted, often at sword point by soldiers provided by the king's authority.

One of the main aims of the reform was to create houses that were outside secular control; patronage of religious centres was a popular activity amongst the aristocracy. To be independent, these centres needed land to provide food and trading commodities. The Libellus Aethelwoldi Episcopi is a record of such acquisitions, many of which appear to have been settled by recourse to the law courts. Naturally, anything not decided in favour of the Abbey is 'unjust'. Given the conditions prevalent at the time, it is reasonable to suppose that the main basis for land acquisition was the supposed holdings of the abbey prior to the Viking invasions, and that many of the abbey's actions were aimed at recovering those lands – forged charters claiming to prove pre-existing land ownership are common from this period. Unfortunately, many of these lands were distributed amongst the Viking settlers, and had been with their new owners for several generations, hence the resort to law courts.

From its refoundation as a Benedictine house to the Domesday Survey, Ely acquired vast estates through legal challenges, purchase, land grants and bequests. Most of its lands were in the fens and fen edge, and indeed the abbey owned the entirety of the Isle of Ely.

Several of the surviving Late Saxon charters refer to the rights and privileges of the abbey. One document (S776) claims to be the actual foundation charter, but it is probably a forgery[18]. The Liberty of the Isle of Ely enjoyed an unusual status until the abolition of its privileges by William IV in the 19th century. The details of this status are too complex to relate, but in essence the Isle of Ely (which included most of the Fenland up to Wisbech) was not subject to any secular jurisdiction below that of royalty and royal representatives; it had its own courts and could collect its own revenues[19]. After the creation of the diocese in 1109, secular authority was wielded by the bishop although not to the extent of the bishop princes of the palatinate of Durham.

It has been assumed that this unique status arose from the granting of the abbey estates in the Saxon period, and that the Liberty boundary was roughly derived from the monastic land holdings at the time[20]. This is an interesting theory, and probably one with some degree of accuracy. There is an interesting possible parallel within Late Saxon England that could help illuminate the situation. It is known that during the tenth century there existed a rank of secular aristocracy immediately below royalty: ealdormen. These were individuals who possessed tremendous wealth and lands, and exercised 'lordship' to a great degree, and mainly came from two families based in Mercia and East Anglia. The Libellus Aethelwoldi Episcopi records the influence of the local ealdorman in the creation of the Ely estates, often in none too complimentary terms. Edgar himself was a strong king who had followed a succession of weak ones, in whose reigns ealdormen exercised

[18] Blake 1962, p.415
[19] Pugh 1967, p.2
[20] Ibid, p.2

authority beyond their station. Edgar had to deal with this, and there is speculation that he pursued a deliberate policy of maintaining a balance between the two families with himself at the top.

The relevance of this lies in the creation of the Liberty of Oswaldslow in Worcestershire by Edgar during the 960s[21]. This was a semi-autonomous, large estate that was answerable only to the King and was beyond the jurisdiction of the ealdorman of Mercia[22]. Several charters and other documents relating to this Liberty are extant, and confirm the unique status that it held at the period. It is of course speculation to compare this to Ely, but could be a fruitful line of further research.

Prior to Domesday Book, Ely is featured in the story of Hereward the Wake, the disaffected Saxon nobleman who led revolt against the Norman conquerors in 1069, using the island as a base. Strategically it is a good choice, and one that would be made again on several occasions. The approach is difficult, as only three causeways existed across the fens to the island, being at Earith, Aldreth and Stuntney[23]. The island was self-sufficient, and small groups could slip away over water. It is unclear exactly what role the abbey played in this, but William punished them by stripping it of lands and imposing a fine of 1000 marks. Its lands were returned after the Council of Kentford in 1080[24], but the *Liber Eliensis* records that the monks had to melt down many precious objects to pay the fine. Although these were returned, the reduction in value is reflected in Domesday.

[21] John 1960, pp.90-112
[22] Carroll 1991, p32
[23] Pugh 1967, p.33 n.71
[24] Salzman 1967, p.202

The Domesday entries for Ely read as follows:

5.48 In Stuntney the Abbot holds 1½ hides. Land for 3 ploughs.
In lordship 1 hide and 1 plough.
6 villagers, 5 cottagers and 3 slaves with 2 ploughs
Meadow for three ploughs; pasture for the village livestock;
From fisheries 24,000 eels; from presentations 18s.
The total value is and was £10 14s; before 1066 £12
This land is an outlier of Ely Manor

5.57 Ely answers for 10 hides. Land for 20 ploughs. In lordship 5 hides; 5 ploughs there; a sixth possible.
40 villagers, 15 acres each, with 14 ploughs.
28 cottagers; 20 slaves.
From fisheries 3,750 eels; from presentations 2s 3d; meadow for 20 ploughs; pasture for the village livestock. 3 arpents of vines.
Total value £30; when acquired £20; before 1066 £33.
The whole of this manor always was and is in lordship.

There are a few points of interest here. This is the first mention of the village of Stuntney, and the volume of fishing on the island may suggest something of the water courses in the area. The Ely manor itself was large and wealthy by this time, and already possessed vineyards; these were a feature of the mediaeval town. The total value of the abbey estate made it one of the wealthiest in the country.

The division between abbey and diocese took place in 1109 as a solution to a problem that had existed for over 100 years. Initially part of the diocese of Dorchester, the abbey was transferred to the jurisdiction of the bishop of Lincoln. However the monks would not permit the bishop to carry out the investiture of the new abbots, believing that their privileges as granted by Edgar allowed them exemption from diocesan control. To get round this unusual institutional crisis, the diocese of Ely was created in 1109, the estates of the abbey were split and the bishop of Lincoln given Spaldwick (Huntingdonshire) in a conciliatory gesture[25].

The division of the Ely estates was deemed by some to be biased against the abbey – William of Malmesbury records that in 1125 diocesan lands were valued at £1100, whereas the abbey possessed only £300 of land[26]. This may be an exaggeration, but in the 16th century, the abbey had less than half the value of land as the diocese, at £1084 and £2314 respectively[27].

From this time on, the history of Ely is fairly well documented by both diocesan and monastic authorities, and the range of literature is too vast to document here. Indeed, the number of records surviving for the monastery is

[25] Ibid p.203
[26] *Gesta Pontificum* cap.324
[27] Salzman 1967, p.204

unusually high, probably because documentation was preserved by the diocese after the Dissolution. As a result, the development, history and politics of the Isle of Ely can be more easily accessed than, for example, Wisbech.

The abbey continued as a large and wealthy institution through to its Dissolution in 1539, and was one of the longest surviving in the County. It had a full range of monastic buildings, many of which survive today (see below for descriptions of the architectural resource)[28]. It had many estates in the area, and pursued a vigorous programme of purchase and acquisition in the 13th century.

Manor	Date	Location
Brayes	By 1320	Ely Porta
Ely Barton	1109	Barton Road/Back Hill
Brame	?1109. again by 14th century	Braham Farm
Turbutsey	1109	Thistle Corner (Little Turbutsey)
Shepey	1109	Shippea Hill Farm
Thorney	1206	Thorney Hill
Norney	1279	Nornea
Quaney	1279	Quanea
Beald Farm	1109	West side
Bedwell	1302	Bedwell Hay Farm
Almonry Grange	1327	? The Almonry is the North Range
Ketons	?	Silver Street (was Walpole Lane)
New Barns	?	North side
Stuntney	1109	Stuntney
Chettisham	1170	Wooded assart of New Barns

(Holdings of Ely Abbey within the study area)[29]

Apart from the prior himself, only the Sacrist held lands personally, and by the 15th century this post had quite a sizeable holding, including the estates of Quanea and Stuntney[30]. After the Dissolution, the majority of the abbey estates were granted to the Dean and Chapter.

In terms of numbers, at the time of Abbot Simeon (the instigator of the new cathedral buildings in 1081), the abbey had 72 monks. Its maximum capacity appears to have been 70, but it rarely got that high, with numbers usually in the 40-50 range. The Black Death was particularly vicious, with only 28 of the 53 monks recorded before its arrival still on the rolls in the aftermath, although of course some may have fled rather than died. At its Dissolution, 37 monks were recorded, of which 24 were paid off. No doubt several others joined their

[28] Below p.
[29] From Pugh 1967, Salzman 1967
[30] Pugh 1967, p.49

erstwhile prior in the new Dean and Chapter as prebendaries, minor canons or schoolmasters (the Kings School was established at this time.

The relationship between the abbey and the bishop was probably fairly close. A bishops palace was constructed next to the abbey church, the latter also served as the cathedral and parish church (see below for the parochial situation within the town[31]). Given the level of authority held by the bishop, it is unsurprising that the position was occasionally left vacant due to the lack of a suitable candidate. The building known as the Bishops Palace is mainly 15th and 16th century, but does contain 12th century fragments, although one reference also has the bishop residing at Barton Manor. It is known that the bishop also possessed a personal vineyard off Brayes Lane, and in 1457 owned 262 out of 457 occupied premises in the city (the prior owned the other 195).

The diocese and the monastery formed the main focus for the town throughout the mediaeval period. After the Dissolution: the diocese took over most of the monastic lands and properties, and a Dean and Chapter was formed to administer the whole – the first Dean, Robert Steward, had been the last Prior of the monastery.

We are very fortunate in that the involvement of the church in the town has resulted in the survival of a large number of records and surveys that allow us to trace the development of Ely. Quite apart from Domesday, surveys of the city were undertaken in 1251[32] and 1416[33], with several assessments and other documentation in between. These document the transition of the area from a primarily rural settlement, to the beginnings of urbanism in 1251 to the urban settlement of 1416, although the rate of urbanism in the latter does not appear to have fulfilled the expectations of the 1251 survey, as will be demonstrated.

In 1251, the survey records 1524 acres of agricultural land in manorial or demesne control, much of which had been reclaimed from waste, the marshy fenlands surrounding the island. Large areas of marsh still survived (and would do for several centuries), and there still existed vineyards and two windmills, including the one on Cherry Hill. Freemen (often monastic/episcopal servants) held 200 holdings, but 20 of these were only booths, and only 16 freemen actually had any substantial amounts of land. The main industries were agriculture, fishing and water carriage, although some references to trade are made. More then half the population of 345 households were involved in farming.

The 1251 survey contains a ‘mercator’, as well as a spice merchant and 16 butchers. The presence of the church site is also attested by a glazier and 3 stone masons. A study of the various names of tenants reveals a wide variety of crafts and trades, and also a large amount of immigrants to the Isle, presumably as a result of pilgrimages to the shrine of St Aethelthryth. The

[31] Below p.
[32] B.M. Cotton MS Claudius C.XI, ff.24-33
[33] 4 Henry V (B.M. Harley MS 329)

whole impression of the town is one of large scale organisation intended to serve the needs of a large group of consumers (church) and overseen by a powerful lord (bishop). For example, the entire population had to service the Aldreth Causeway, and other dues and services were heavily organised. Some interesting points can be noted: there was great awareness and usage of coinage for a rural population, as wages for labour were paid in cash; also, welfare was not unknown, as up to one month's sick leave was permitted, although a scale of fines was introduced for men who married their daughters.

The survey of 1416 contains data street by street, thus permitting a reconstruction of the town at this time. Although it was still dominated by the monastery and cathedral church, the focus of the settlement had shifted from that recorded in 1251. In that survey, the monastic precinct and market place dominated, with all settlement and commercial activity being clustered around these landmarks and boundaries. In 1416, the focus of the settlement was around streets that ran at right angles away from Broad Street; these new streets were called Castle Hythe, Monks Hythe, Broad Hythe and Stock Hythe, whilst the causeway still ran down Back Hill then out to Stuntney

Traditionally the monastic precinct appears to have run along the line of Fore Hill, Steeple Hill (High Street), Highrow Street, Walpole lane (Silver Street), Back Hill, Broad Street and back to Fore Hill. Broad Street appears to have been the edge of the fen marshes. However there are certain queries about these boundaries. Firstly, Speeds Map of Ely from 1610 shows the castle mound at Cherry Hill. The identification of this site as the castle is not certain but it is a reasonable assessment. This hill lies inside the precinct and raises the question of the reason for a castle inside a holy precinct. Speed also shows a feature running due east from Silver Street (Ely Porta) to Broad Street, which is a continuos boundary that excludes Cherry Hill. In addition, Palace Green also lies inside the traditional boundary. Fronting Palace Green are the Bishop's Palace, the west door to the cathedral (the parish church of St Peter) the access to the lay cemetery and the parochial church of St Mary. In addition public executions took place here. All this suggests that the area was outside the precinct boundary, which may have run along the south of the Green.

These new areas of settlement mark the emergence of the town as a port. We have seen how the Romans possessed a dock across the marsh at Stuntney, where the roddon of the Ouse ran closest to the higher ground, but at some point between 970 and 1416 the Ouse was diverted and canalised to roughly its present course. The exact date of this is unknown, but three events may have initiated the programme. These are the construction of the original abbey church (Ramsey Abbey built a canal at the same time to ease movement of construction materials[34]), the massive rebuilding initiated by Abbot Simeon in the 11th and 12th centuries, and the recognition of the need for a stable watercourse to facilitate trade, presumably at some point after the 12th century.

[34] Cnut's Dyke, Hall 1992, p.42

Whatever the cause of the stabilisation of the watercourse, it was followed by the construction of hythes running perpendicular to the bank across the marsh to the river. Infilling between these would be a logical progression. Hence the area to the east of Broad Street is probably mediaeval made-up land, something that is likely to be confirmed by the current programme of excavation.

The value of trade by the 15th century is reflected by the presence of storehouses on Broad Street and Sedgewick Street. In addition, the market place stretched down to Palace Green, and formed a very large commercial focus to the town (controlled, naturally, by the bishop). Goods traded varied, but many consisted of imports, which may have enhanced the need for currency rather than barter. Such imports were mainly building materials and luxury goods, products appropriate a wealthy ecclesiastical centre. Also, one of Ely's oldest secular buildings, the Three Blackbirds on Broad Street, can trace its origins back to the late 13th century as a merchant's house.

The continuing cosmopolitan nature of the population continued, with 333 different surnames recorded, including several Welsh. A wide spread of rural and craft activities is also recorded, including precious metal workers and specifically monastic crafts, such as 'ortreyser', being the maker of gold embroidered clothing.

Quite apart from the surveys specific to the town, the usual documentation for the period also survives, and adds to the overall picture. These include the 1327 Lay Subsidy[35], which reveals that although the numbers of people who actually paid it was remarkably low for a town of its size, but of those, more paid the higher rate than, for example, the town of Wisbech, reflecting the greater overall wealth of the cathedral settlement. The 1377 Poll Tax return shows 1722 tax payers, which compares favourably to Cambridge, which had 1902 tax payers.

Politically, Ely continued the legacy of Hereward by providing the focus for rebellion on several occasions. During the wars of Steven and Matilda, a turbulent period that lead to one chronicler lamenting 'they said openly that Christ slept, and all his saints'[36], Bishop Niel (called Nigel in the modern form) declared for Matilda, which in 1137 lead to the occupation of the Isle by troops loyal to Stephen. In 1143, Geoffrey of Mandeville raised a rebellion here. During the unrest of the Barons Wars in the 13th century, Simon de Montfort resided here. After the defeat of the rebels at Evesham, the victors seized the lands of the vanquished, many of whom were from the region. This lead to the seizure of the town by the group known as the Disinherited, who used it as a base for plundering the region from 1265/7, until the island was recaptured in or around 1270. The peasants uprising in 1381 was particularly savage, with the local magistrate being murdered and much destruction carried out. The revolt was finally suppressed at Ramsey.

[35] E 179/81/6
[36] ASC MS A, s.a.1137

The parochial system within the town reflects the presence of a major monastery and cathedral. The original parish dedication was Holy Cross, and part of the abbey church was used for worship. In 1109, construction was ordered of the current church of St Mary, which was owned by the convent of Ely and served as the parish church until 1315. At this date, an enquiry into the size of Holy Cross parish recommended the division of the area into two, being St Peter and St Mary[37]. St Peter was regarded as the greater, and it was obvious that a new church was needed. One was commenced in 1341, consecrated in 1362/7 but not completed until 1459/60. This was a structure against the north wall of the cathedral, which bore the dedication of Holy Trinity, although it was still referred to as Holy Cross. In effect, it was a lean to with no light or ventilation, and wholly unsuited to parochial use. It was demolished in 1566, and the Lady Chapel was used as a parish church until 1938. Both churches were granted to the Dean and Chapter after the Dissolution, and in 1929 became united under one incumbent.

Holy Cross, Stuntney was a chapel of Ely, originally served by an archpriest, and later a curate. Chettisham was a chaplaincy until it became an ecclesiastical parish in 1876. St Peter's on Broad Street was a chapel of ease to Holy Trinity, Ely, as was St Aetheldreda's, Queen Adelaide and St Peter's, Prickwillow. The latter gained parochial status in 1878.

As befits a town of ecclesiastical importance, Ely had several guilds during the mediaeval period. Little is known about these, as none rose to the status enjoyed by guilds such as the Holy Trinity in Wisbech. The oldest was the Guild of St Aethelthryth, founded in the 13th century, but by 1389, 11 are listed:

Parish	**Guild**
St Mary	The Assumption
	All Saints
	St John
Holy Trinity	Holy Trinity
	Holy Cross
	St Peter
	St Aethelthryth
	St Catherine
St Aethelthryth / St Peter (Cathedral)	All Saints
	Corpus Christi
	St John the Baptist

(Sourced from VCH)

Three others are known, being St Anne (by 1458), St Withburga and St Sexburga (both by 1516). The parish affiliations of these are unknown. Most of the Ely guilds accepted women as members, and presumably all

[37] Pugh 1967, p.83

succumbed to the Dissolution. At that time, only the guild of St Aethelthryth owned property, but not of any significant value.

The Dissolution of the monastery in 1539 had a serious impact on the town. The cathedral handed over to the king, but after a brief interregnum, the diocese, dean and chapter was recreated, apparently using personnel from the abbey and taking over many abbey lands. The full impact on the town of the removal of the abbey, its consumption and wealth needs to be assessed, but it is clear that Ely did not undergo the massive changes in the post-mediaeval period that other Fenland towns experienced.

During the Civil War, the town remained staunchly Parliamentarian, despite the royalist Bishop Wren, whose attempts to raise troops for the King's cause lead to the instalment of a Parliamentarian garrison in 1645. A survey of ecclesiastical holdings in 1649[38] saw the sale of the palace and other buildings to secular individuals, and the ensuing neglect of the cathedral during the Commonwealth lead to much unemployment within the town.

The period after the Restoration through to the final surrender of secular authority by the bishop under William IV is marked mainly by initiatives by the church to improve living conditions, the economy and wealth on the Isle, perhaps indicative of the impact of the Dissolution upon what may have been a monastic service town.

Fenland drainage of the South Level commenced on a major scale in the 17th century. Prior to this, there had been much drainage on a small scale, usually with an accompanying enclosure of the new land. A particularly common occurrence was for a land holding that backed onto waste land to be drained and absorbed into the original plot. The creation of the docks off Broad Street involved the reclamation of marsh and waste. Originally, the diocese opposed Vermuyden's schemes on the grounds that it would impact upon the fishing industry; this is interesting, as most other towns objected on trading grounds, suggesting that perhaps Ely's trade was already diminishing. However, the creation of the Ouse cuts drained most of the area, and by the 18th century the advantages were evident. In 1663, 12,000 acres of the South level were granted to Ely[39], of which 600 acres were to be used for the relief of the poor. By 1794, a survey by the Enclosure Commission shows that the fen edge was now 1 mile east of the town[40].

The church undertook a social role with great responsibility, although it must be emphasised that clergy, especially church wardens, administered all arrangements; there was no attempt at any municipal development. The first workhouse was constructed in 1729, and an associated work programme was instigated. However poverty was endemic within the Isle, which was particularly vulnerable to fluctuations in agricultural phenomenon. Writings of the time reveal a town that was the centre of a fertile area, with a rich agricultural resource, but also one that had a poor population. Camden in

[38] Atkinson 1933, App. ix
[39] Pugh 1967, p.43
[40] Vancouver 1794

1586[41], and Celia Fiennes (1695)[42] both referred to the town as not possessing beauty. Fiennes was critical of civic rule by a bishop, which in her view had resulted in a town that was filthy and poorly drained, with a population that was suffering from disease to such an extent that the bishop himself stayed away for fear of his health.

Although Celia Fiennes has been regarded as a hypochondriac, with an obsession for disease, it is possible that in Ely she may not have too excessive in her criticism. The town suffered outbreaks of plague in the 17th century, and also small pox in 1720 and 1780. Infant mortality was always high, so much so that in the 17th century half of those buried were infants[43]. Increased sanitation and awareness after c.1730 eased the situation, but a peculiarly Fenland disease that was a variant of malaria was endemic though to the early 20th century.

One thing that most observers agreed on was the richness of the agriculture. Even Celia Fiennes remarked that it took six or seven bad harvests to counteract the advantage of one good one. Daniel Defoe wrote in 1724 of excellent market gardens and overflowing wells. Edmund Carter, writing in 1753 referred to the growth in fruit and vegetable farming, but noted that vineyards had not be feasible since the 17th century.

As an agricultural town, Ely suffered heavily from the farming crisis instigated by the French Wars of 1793 – 1815. The causes of the agricultural depression of this time are too complex to cover here, but the end result was spiralling grain costs and static wages, which lead to hardship and unrest. A doubling of wheat prices in 1816 was the catalyst for the Littleport riots, which spilled over into Ely, and although there were few casualties caused much destruction of properties[44]. The riots were suppressed by troops at Ely, five perceived ringleaders were executed, 11 jailed and 19 transported; other punishments included a fine of one shilling levied on 13 year old boy.

The depression lasted until around 1830, but unlike elsewhere in the country, the area was quiet during the unrest of that year. Conditions within the parish are reflected however in the construction of a workhouse that had a capacity of 340 in 1838, one of five that existed at that time. In 1848 the Board of Health again investigated mortality rates, and their conclusions are quite horrifying: the death rate rose from 24.1 per 1000 in 1841 to 32.6 per 1000 in 1848[45]; 61% of these were children under the age of five, and 44% under age one; the main cause of death was narcotics, and 68% of deaths were deemed preventable. The mortality rate was comparable to an urban industrial slum, not an agricultural centre, so in 1850 the Board of health took over many parochial responsibilities that had lapsed since the abolition of the bishop's secular authority in 1836. These resulted in the granting of allotments on

[41] *Britannia*
[42] *Through England on a Side Saddle*
[43] Ely Parish Registers
[44] Pugh 1967, p.45 for sources
[45] *Report to the General Board of Health* 1850

reclaimed fen for 400 people, and a water reservoir was built in 1854. Almshouses were also constructed.

A comparison of the 1416 survey with Speed's Map of 1610[46] and the 1st Edition Ordnance Survey of 1886 shows that town had developed little over the 500 years separating them. The street plans were more or less identical, the landmarks the same and many buildings remained standing. The main changes are in settlement density; there was much infilling with smaller houses in the post-mediaeval and industrial periods, which no doubt contributed to the creation of the appalling living conditions seen in the 19th centuries. New development was restricted to the post-mediaeval areas of Babylon (river area) and Little London (Lynn Road), whereas other settlement continued to creep along the main thoroughfares. The large scale development at High Barns was a post-war initiative, and it only in the second half of the 20th century that numerous housing developments have been undertaken.

The parish was enclosed in 1848, with the final areas of Grunty Fen in 1857/61. Before this, very little enclosure had been undertaken, and the survey of 1794 still records the use of five arable fields in a strip system with a five course rotation, probably one of the last areas in the country to be so. 2100 acres were under agriculture in this system, with the remainder being reclaimed fen that was subject to seasonal flooding. The Local Government Act of 1894 created what is now the urban district of Ely. The parishes of Holy Trinity and St Mary merged in 1933, and last aberration of the church's authority, the Civil Parish of Ely College (area 33 acres, population 95) was abolished after World War II, thus creating the agricultural city of Ely that we see today.

Chettisham

The first reference to this village is in a document dated 1170, and in the 1251 survey it is recorded as a wooded assart of the abbey. By the 15th century it was held as part of the New Barns manor, and subject to enclosure in 1515, when a dispute rose over 180 acres[47].

Prickwillow

This is first mentioned in the survey of 1251, and only became a place of any significance in the past 150 years with the drainage networks and the canalisation of the Lark. It is extremely low topographically; graves cannot be dug due to the water table. Peat shrinkage can be recorded here at 2 inches per annum, and all construction has to be on firm, deep foundations to avoid subsidence - the church rests on wooden piles.

Queen Adelaide

[46] *The Counties of England: a Tudor Atlas* 1988
[47] *Cambs & Hunts Archaeological Society Transactions* v, pp.369-84

This is a post-mediaeval settlement that gained its name from a public house here in the 19th century. Its main prosperity arose from the railways, the presence of which is still highly visible today.

Stuntney

Stuntney is referred to in Domesday Book as a berewic (outlying manorial settlement) of Ely Manor. It was always a place of importance due to its position on the causeway into Ely. King Cnut is supposed to have passed this way from Soham to the Isle, and Celia Fiennes recounts how she passed through Chippenham, then down a steep hill to a bridge that joined a gravel trackway to the city[48]. Given the topography of the area it is reasonable to assume she was referring to Stuntney. The fishing industry, especially eels was of importance also. Held by the Sacrist of the abbey, it passed to the Crown in 1540, which sold it on. Oliver Cromwell inherited the manor in 1636, and the family passed it on in 1723.

[48] Fiennes 1695 (1888), pp.127-131

Archaeological

The archaeological heritage of Ely is rich and varied, and the continued expansion of the town can only furnish more opportunities for elucidation. The purpose of this report id not to offer a definitive interpretation, but to look critically at the evidence to provide a context for past, present and future discoveries to be considered against. Given the presence of major ecclesiastical remains in Ely, it is hardly surprising that the town has been subjected to major antiquarian involvement, although this has been mainly centred around the cathedral and monastery.

The archaeology of Ely is can be divided into two distinct areas, being that related to the current town (mainly Anglo-Saxon and later), and that which predates the historical periods, with the Roman material forming a transition or boundary between the two[49].

To begin with the earlier period, archaeological features and remains are known from the earliest times of human activity, with Palaeolithic activity known from one site along the Ouse river gravel terraces being at Shippea Hill. The potential of the Ouse Valley gravels for Palaeolithic activity has been amply demonstrated elsewhere on the river[50], but it ought to be emphasised that the main medium for discovery of such remains has been the gravel extraction quarries. However, the only gravel deposits of any scale are at Shippea, so it remains unlikely that Palaeolithic activity will be widespread or readily discovered beyond occasional stray finds. Mesolithic activity is also to be found on Shippea Hill, suggesting that once again well-drained sites associated with the Ouse valley were favourable for occupation from this date.

The association between the Ouse and human activity continued into the Neolithic. Flint scatters are known from the Stuntney bypass, Nornea Farm and also the Prickwillow area. However, finds are also known from the area around West Fen Road, on the opposite side of the island, where it backs onto the West Fen. This perhaps suggests a shift away from the river as a transit flow towards a settlement on the flatter, more habitable lands to the west of the Isle.

By the Bronze Age, human activity on the Isle appears to have firmly entrenched. Environmental evidence has demonstrated that the climate gradually became wetter and warmer, and that woodland clearances had commenced. Occupation was widespread, but again followed the pattern of focussing on the River Ouse and its tributaries, such as the Lark at Prickwillow. Finds have included metalwork, in particular the hoard of 80 objects in a wooden container found near Stuntney, where a large flint scatter was also located. Stone and bronze axe heads have been discovered, suggesting a settlement of some wealth and status. One find was from the roddon of the Lark, implying water transport to some degree. On the main Isle, the sandy soils of the higher ground were evidently attractive to settlers.

[49] Individual sites are not identified within the main text; a full list of archaeological events is in Appendix II

[50] *The English Rivers Palaeolithic Project No.2* 1995

Burials from the beaker period are known from Springhead Lane, and a barrow with associated Beaker cremation of a child lies to the north. This lay on a hill top, suggestive of a cemetery located on the high ground of the Isle, but was destroyed in 1986. Flint scatters are known from various locations in the area, but especially from sites along the bypass, where field walking has added much to our knowledge., although it should be noted that this may have skewed the archaeological record somewhat.

Our knowledge of Iron Age Ely is almost entirely as a result of discoveries made during and since the Fenland Survey of the 1980s. The nature of the transition from Bronze Age to Iron Age is a complex one, and it is not realistic to attempt an interpretation here, given that such an approach would be both simplistic and misleading. Environmentally, it has been demonstrated that around 1000 BC water levels continued to rise, and by 500 BC, the rise in water levels and rainfall had succeeded in creating the extensive silt deposits further north towards Wisbech, thus causing a blockage in the water egress routes, which in turn led to the formation of the freshwater meres[51]. Interestingly, the wooden causeway at Barway in Soham parish, discovered in the inter-war years, has been radio-carbon dated to 610 BC +/-110 years, placing it contemporary with the rising water levels, suggesting a construction born out of necessity.

Field survey has identified Iron Age settlements in several places on the Isle, both on the higher ground in the centre and on the fen edge. Stuntney continued to be an attractive place to live, with a settlement site revealing both Bronze Age and Iron Age material. Most of these sites have been interpreted as agricultural settlements based on the paucity of remains beyond locally produced pottery and animal bone.

An extensive excavation on land between Downham Road and West Fen Road revealed a substantial Iron Age settlement, possibly related to the large number of houses on the other side of the bypass in Downham parish, demonstrating the potential for archaeological remains from this period. Interestingly, this again demonstrated the attraction of the western slopes of the Isle, a counterpoint to the attraction of Stuntney to the east.

The appeal of Stuntney island as a settlement is probably elucidated by the Roman remains in the area, in particular the dock supposed to be located here. This was identified in 1901 by the presence of timbers and building debris in a field at the bottom of Stuntney Hill along the line of the old Ouse roddon. The distance between Stuntney and Ely is approximately one mile, and it is through this flat flood plain that the Ouse flows. Its natural course appears to have been towards Stuntney island, along what is now Rollers Lode, and it is here that the Romans built their dock for river access to this part of the fens.

Roman settlement is fairly prevalent, both on the main Isle and also on the surrounding sites. Stuntney, as ever, was occupied, with the probable Roman

[51] Godwin 1978, pp.91-101

dock site still visible through the number of pottery and tile shards on the surface, as well as slight contours within the field along the roddon. Roman settlement is known from the higher points on the island, and also at nearby Nornea. Thorney island to the north also possessed settlement, and in addition appears to have been the site of a cemetery: one stone coffin was discovered here in 1981, and a second has been reported.

Roman pottery shards occur on many places within the Isle, and it appears that settlement was fairly extensive. The western slopes to the north of Downham Road, and also further north towards Chettisham have revealed settlement, some of which have occupied sites continuous with Iron Age predecessors. Again, the majority of sites appear to be domestic agricultural settlements, but there is some evidence that Ely in Roman times was more than an agricultural area.

To begin there is the presence of a dock, which although is in itself not unusual for a Fenland setting, is indicative of some extensive water activity. Also, it should be pointed out that if there was a dock at Stuntney, then there must have been a causeway or other crossing to Ely as the access to the area was across marsh and river. Secondly, some of the stray Roman finds form the parish are wealthier than would be expected from a simple agricultural settlement. These have included bronze statuettes of deities and animals, bronze dishes, pewter table ware such as jugs and plates, and also a pewter bowl with a 'chi-rho' mark. This is extremely suggestive of Christianity in the area, a religion that in the later Roman Empire is usually associated with wealth and status.[52]

One possible reason for higher status material could be a site to the south of the current town near Braham Farm. Stray finds in this area have included painted wall plaster, late Roman coins and also Samian ware pottery. The site lies near a Deserted Mediaeval Village, and the Fenland Survey commented that the extant field systems associated with the DMV show a field system that is more irregular than would be expected. The survey believed that this irregularity could be explained by the readoption of existing boundaries, possibly Roman given their nature[53]. This is of course speculative, but what circumstantial evidence there is suggests the presence of a high status, possible villa type, site in the vicinity of Braham Farm.

The nature of the Fenlands in Roman times, the full extent of communications over road and river, the character of settlement and so forth, is in need of reassessment. It is likely that the focus of Roman activity in the region was Stonea Grange in Wimblington parish, and the other islands around were primarily agricultural, although it is quite likely that given the fertile nature of the land then on the larger islands, more higher status settlement would be expected, particularly during the later Empire when Britain as a whole experienced an increase in wealth and rural construction.

[52] Thomas 1981
[53] Hall 1996, p.38

One speculative approach in interpretation would be to utilise the Roman practice of placing villas and high status buildings along or with easy access to roads. Hence, if a villa type building existed in the vicinity of Braham Farm, it would be reasonable to place the road (Akeman Street) in this area. Other roads within the parish probably included a road north to Littleport, a crossing to Stuntney, and causeways across the neck of Grunty Fen to Witchford and again towards Coveney and Wardy Hill. Water communications were, as has been demonstrated, dealt with via the Ouse.

As ever, the question of the transition from Roman Britain to Anglo-Saxon England is a vexed one, and cannot be answered based upon the evidence from Ely. Two Roman sites have also Early Saxon pottery shards associated with them, being an agricultural settlement at Chettisham, and another at Bedwell Hey Farm to the south. The former may be ambiguous, as this site also has Iron Age antecedents, and the given that discovery was as a result of field walking not excavation, dating was determined by pottery, and late Iron Age and Early Saxon pottery is notoriously difficult to differentiate. The latter is what has attracted the most interest, mainly as a result of the activities of Aethelthryth. It should be pointed out that this site is actually in Little Thetford parish, but its potential importance to the development of Ely is such that it requires further reference.

According to the *Liber Eliensis*, Aethelthryth built her church one mile to the north of the village of Cratendun[54]. To be fair, Bedwell Hey is somewhat more than one mile south of the current cathedral, but such matters are uncertain anyway. The Roman settlement at Bedwell Hey may have been associated with the believed villa type residence in this area, and early Saxon settlement adjacent to high status Roman sites (probably abandoned) is a relatively common phenomenon. The site itself lies on a hilltop, and is most likely to be associated with the inhumation cemetery of this period located under Witchford aerodrome in 1947. Whether this settlement and cemetery is indeed Cratendun is speculation, but it is a viable candidate.

Another early cemetery was discovered under High Barns housing estate in 1959. This was at the same location as enclosure ditches identified from aerial photography and as such undated. Unfortunately this area was levelled as part of housing development in the 1960s. This indicates the possible presence of another Early Saxon settlement site to the north of the current town centre, as the cemetery is a reasonable distance from Chettisham settlement, the identification of which is uncertain anyway.

None of the early Saxon sites in Ely show any continuity into the Middle Saxon period. The Witchford cemetery contains grave goods dating from the 5th to 7th centuries, and although an 8th century crystal pendant was discovered nearby, this was probably a chance loss. It is likely that settlement on the Isle experienced the phenomenon of shift at some point during the 7th and 8th centuries, most likely as a result of the presence of a high status site elsewhere on the island in the form of Aethelthryth's religious foundation.

[54] Blake 1962, pp.2-5

Archaeologically, the results of such a relocation can be seen by the presence of extensive Middle Saxon settlement (identified by the presence of Ipswich ware pottery) along West Fen Road and on the edge of West Fen itself.

The West Fen settlement appears to have been the continuation of a long tradition on the Isle of settlement along its western slopes. The full analysis and interpretation of this valuable site is still forthcoming, but in essence it appears that the settlement commenced at the lower part of the slopes and gradually moved uphill throughout the Saxon into the Mediaeval period. The earliest periods of the site are marked by hall buildings and boundaries, and as time moved on, the area became gradually more rural, until in the mid-13th century, the area experienced a massive decline and abandonment, and reverted to plough land. This abandonment is probably connected to the expansion experienced by the town elsewhere, in particular the move to the east and down to the river.

The nature and causes of settlement shift in the Saxon period are uncertain, and within Ely there are three distinct phases from the 7th to the 13th centuries. Initially, there is the move from the area around Bedwell Hey to West Fen. This is puzzling, as Bedwell Hey on an initial assessment would be a preferable place, given its height above flooding potential, the site is on an outcrop of sand which would be drained and it commands the approaches to the Isle. In contrast, West Fen lies on clays, suffers from poor drainage, and given its proximity to the Fen edge is prone to flooding.

Such a move could take place for many reasons; one possible is the need for fresh water, but current hydrological maps do not show any bias towards either site. Another possibility is the intervention of an outside authority, in this case Aethelthryth and her successors at the foundation of Ely. This is an option, although the purpose behind such an insistence are likely to remain a mystery, and Aethelthryth herself, when founding the institution, appears to have deliberately chosen a site away from the existing settlement. Alternatively, the presence of a high status consumer may have been attractive, thus leading to a voluntary relocation by the local inhabitants

That the religious site destroyed by the Vikings was not located on the current cathedral site, is a valid although possibly misleading assumption, then the origins of the current town most likely lie in the refoundation of the monastery as a Benedictine house in 970, or even later. It ought to be noted that there is no real evidence for the presence of the 970 monastery on this site. However, looking at what evidence, albeit circumstantial, survives then it is probably a safe guess. The current cathedral and monastic buildings owe their origins to the rebuilding works initiated by Abbot Simeon in the late 11th century, by which time Ely was an established house. There is no evidence elsewhere that a large (70+ monks), established and wealthy house would have been relocated, so one would expect the new buildings to be in the vicinity of the old, if not directly overlaying them. Taking this line of deduction further, the *Liber Eliensis* states that the site was reoccupied by secular priests after its sacking by the Vikings, and that these were evicted upon the reform. The authority of the post-reform institution would be best emphasised by its

location with the old one, hence it is feasible that the 970 monastery overlay the house of secular priests, who in turn may have occupied part of the original house. This is of course, speculative.

Saxon activity from the current town is not commonly discovered. The Paddock, east of the cathedral, contained ditches dating from the late Saxon period. These were filled with domestic refuse, suggesting a use as property boundaries at a time before the area fell into the abbey precinct. Further excavations along the line of the north range revealed that the precinct boundary in this area was initially marked by a dit4ch, then a wall, with building in the area commencing in the 14th century. The initial phase of the ditch contained limited late Saxon activity.

Admittedly the evidence for Saxon activity in the heart of what was to become the mediaeval town may have been limited and truncated by later activity, but given the amount of archaeological interventions that have taken place in the town, one would expect there to be some evidence located. For example, the Market Square has been subject to a major piece of archaeological work as part of ongoing redevelopment, and excavations around Bray's Lane, Nutholt Lane and Newnham Street on various sites have revealed considerable amounts of information. In addition to evidence of a possible prehistoric site at some point in the vicinity – to be expected given the barrow remains at nearby High Barns – this demonstrated that when the market place was laid out at some point in the 12th or 13th centuries, property boundaries were also drawn out creating tenements running back from the streets. Speeds map of 1610 shows this area as houses on the street front, with field/allotments behind. Construction in the area prior to the current buildings was primarily post-mediaeval.

Given the location of this area close to both the monastery and the commercial core of the town, one would expect some form of occupation, but again Anglo-Saxon activity was conspicuous by its absence. This suggests an occupation sequence by which the monastery was away from the residential core of the emerging town until the application of direct lordship required to create a laid out town after the Norman Conquest created what we see today.

As the current site of Ely derived as a monastic town, it is reasonable to consider the nature of the relationship between church and settlement throughout the later Saxon and Mediaeval periods. Church foundation during the 10th and 11th centuries appears to have been somewhat haphazard, with secular lordship being the driving force behind the emergence of the local churches that formed the basis of the parochial system. Canon Law, that regulated the rights, income and dues of such churches, was enforced with increasing vigour after the Norman conquest, and church foundation tailed off. It has been suggested that the antiquity of a town can be gauged somewhat by the number of churches it contained[55]; over half of Saxon burhs, had multiple churches by 1086. Norwich, for example, had 47 churches and chapels. Another example in neighbouring Lincolnshire shows that Stamford

[55] Morris 1989, pp.168ff.

(a Saxon burh founded in 925) had 14 churches, whereas Boston, a settlement that gained urban status due to its port around 1100, had just one.

Parochial provision within Ely has been discussed above, but the conclusion is that Ely had just the one parish until 1315. This is another piece of circumstantial evidence supporting the notion that the mediaeval town of Ely does not have its antecedents in the Anglo-Saxon period, but that Saxon Ely was a different type of settlement elsewhere on the Isle; an agricultural landscape with a settlement core on the west side of the current parish, and an additional focus around the religious site on or near the current cathedral.

We are fortunate to have the surveys of 1251 and 1416, for the information that they provide interacts considerably with the archaeological record. In essence, the street plan seen today corresponds fairly accurately with that of the mediaeval period; this is hardly surprising given the domination of the townscape by the abbey and cathedral church. The original market place was much larger, stretching down to and probably including what is now Palace Green. Both housing and commercial properties clustered around these landmarks. The creation of the dock area off Broad Street created a further focus in the later mediaeval period.

A basic model for the mediaeval town has been developed as part of the central redevelopment[56]. This was based on the 1416 survey, and postulated tenements with a narrow street front, but a long rearwards boundary. This area is 'zoned' being a structure facing the street, domestic / industrial to the immediate rear, with allotment / agricultural behind that., With variations derived from the available space for settlement, it would be reasonable to assume that this pattern was followed throughout the mediaeval tenements of Ely. Another feature of such mediaeval towns are the numerous small manors, a term probably more technical and administrative than representative of a type of archaeological record. For example, manorial lands known as Brayes lay almost exactly where Waitrose now is, in a position that was surrounded by tenements. Excavations here have shown that this area was under occupation by the 12th century.

Recent and indeed ongoing excavations along Forehill and Broad Street will greatly illuminate the development of this part of Ely. Unfortunately the full results of this work will not be available for some time, but initial work has confirmed the artificial nature of the ground east of Broad Street, over which lie some considerable (1.5m+) depths of archaeological deposits. In addition, this area has shown tremendous potential for the survival of organic remains within waterlogged deposits. For example, timbers from Forehill have already given felling dates of early 12th century to early 13th century[57].

In common with many towns in the area, Ely possessed a castle at some point in its evolution. Traditionally believed to have been located at what is now Cherry Hill, no above ground remains survive of any structure. Cherry Hill

[56] Robinson 1994, p.11
[57] Naylor 1999

is around 12m high, with a four-sided enclosure measuring 90m by 75m to the south-east. According to English Heritage, the mound is largely natural[58].

The *Liber Eliensis* records that William the Conqueror left two garrisons in Ely after the rebellion of Hereward the Wake, but says nothing about a castle, although presumably they would have had some fortified base. Interestingly, the authors draw a distinction between the 'castellum' at Aldreth and the 'praesidium' (literally 'detachment or garrison') left in the grounds of the abbey. During the Wars of Stephen and Matilda, Bishop Niel is recorded as trying to build a stone castle in Ely before giving up and reusing the castle at Aldreth. However in 1143, Geoffrey of Mandeville is recorded as taking possession of castles at both Ely and Aldreth[59].

Excavations in the 1970s on the site uncovered the base of a windmill, and such is known as being on Cherry Hill by 1229. Incidentally, the name Cherry Hill was applied after 1821; it was known as Mount Hill in 1610 when a windmill is pictured here, and does not appear on earlier surveys. The 1251 survey records that a messuage stood where the castle once was.

Certainly Cherry Hill would be a good location for a castle. It overlooks the Stuntney causeway, lies close to the dock area of the town , and is also positioned to maintain a watch on the potentially cantankerous clergy. At the foot of the hill lies Castel Hythe, excavations at which located a 3m length of substantial stone wall. Such a location would dominate the Stuntney crossing, as well as the diverted/canalised River Ouse, but would be poorly placed to monitor activities at the religious complex. Bishop Niel, after his failure to construct a stone castle, is recorded as having constructed a defence work to overlook the foreshore instead. However, the site would be better placed to be overlaid by a messuage, whereas Cherry Hill lies within the monastic precinct.

In summary, the exact location and nature of Ely Castle or castles is unknown. Cherry Hill is a distinct possibility based upon its location and topography, but neither subsequent land use nor limited archaeology can support this. Some form of defence or control on the Ouse and Stuntney causeway (i.e. Castel Hythe) would be logical, but this is not the prime site for a castle.

The cathedral and abbey have naturally provided an attraction to archaeologists and antiquarians over the centuries, but the continued use of the monastic buildings by both the diocese and the Kings School have restricted the extent to which areas are available for excavation. Excavations at the North Range and the Paddock have already been mentioned, but other works at the Kings School and Bishops Palace have confirmed much of the perceived structure of the Benedictine institution. In addition, it has been confirmed that the cemetery of the cathedral church stretched beyond the current boundaries, as human remains were discovered near the Old Bishops Palace that predate the current structure. A limited excavation between the

[58] Scheduled Monument No.39
[59] Salzman 1967, p387

north choir and Lady Chapel of the cathedral has yet to be written up, but located the processional walk that ran between the two, possibly cutting through earlier remains. This walk was constructed as part of the original Lady Chapel plan in 1321, and demolished when the chapel became parochial in 1566. The walk lies at diagonal, because the collapse of the crossing tower shortly after commencement of the Lady Chapel forced a redesign of the buttressing along the chancel and choir, thus diverting the walkway from its intended route. A fuller description of the development of the cathedral and monastery is provided below.

Beyond the town itself, mediaeval and post-mediaeval remains are known that are, in general associated with the monastery and its estates. There are the well preserved earthworks of a deserted mediaeval village at Braham Farm, together with a water course known alternately as Braham Dock and Grunty Fen Catchwater. Another earthwork enclosure nearby, shown on 1st Edition Ordnance Survey Maps as 'Roman Camp' has now been ploughed out, but there were fairly firm suggestions that it overlay the surrounding ridge and furrow, so a post-mediaeval date is most likely.

Modern agriculture appears to have been the cause of much archaeological destruction in the areas surrounding the town. The monastic grange site at Shippea Hill farm is reported to have had a stone barn with a 14th century arch, surrounded by a moat / ditch, The barn was demolished about 30 years ago, and all that remains of the ditch is a poorly preserved corner section. The manor of Turbutsey is recorded in the 16th century as having a dairy, fishing rights, a quay, kilns and a chapel, and other accoutrements of a established manorial site. Kilns and other features were also known at Little Turbutsey (Thistle Corner). In 1925, the manor house and a surviving tile kiln were demolished to make way for the Queen Adelaide beet factory.

English Heritage have identified four monuments scheduled under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act of 1979, being the St John's Chapel (no. 27), Monastic building at St John's Farm (no. 30), Cherry Hill (no. 39) and the cathedral cloistral buildings (no. 68).

Listed Buildings

It is said that Ely has the largest collection of mediaeval buildings still in use in the country[60]. Whilst this could be argued in the case of places like York, there is no doubt that for its size, the town possesses a truly unique collection.

District Council records have 193 listed buildings for the area. A full listing is provided in Appendix III, but a breakdown is as follows:

Grade	Number
I	25
II*	5
II	161
BLI	2

Dividing the list into the earliest known origins of the fabric:

Century	Number
Mediaeval	8
11	2
12	8
13	9
14	7
15	5
16	12
17	21
18	45
19	75
20	1

There are certain caveats to be applied to such a breakdown. Primarily, the interpretation is usually based upon visible architectural features. For example, 41 Broad Street (The Three Blackbirds) is listed as 16th century; but the detailed investigation undertaken at the site has demonstrated that the nature of the timber roof trusses suggests a date of c.1280, and other architectural features have been discovered of a 14th century date.

Many monastic and religious buildings have been subject to reconstruction throughout the lifespan of the abbey and diocese. As a result, one may find a 15th century building on top of a 12th century undercroft., such as the Prior's House.

Caveats notwithstanding, 39 buildings with mediaeval origins survive within the city, representing almost 20% of the total of listed buildings within the parish. The impact of the religious nature of the area on this total is considerable:

[60] Blakeman 1994 p.5

Century	Religious	Secular
Mediaeval	6	2
11	2	0
12	8	0
13	8	1
14	7	0
15	2	3
16	0	12

The pre-16th century secular constructions are 47 Forehill (13th century), the White Hart Hotel, no. 5 Silver Street and nos. 7-13 Silver Street (15th century), a wall at Castel Hythe and a barn at Cromwell Road (Mediaeval).

The listings are unusual in that they include a building now demolished, This is the Sextry Barn within the abbey precinct, that was pulled down in 1842. Fortunately, the structure was recorded and published in PCAS in 1843, providing a valuable record of this mediaeval structure[61].

In addition, one must also take into consideration the practice in post-mediaeval times of reskinning earlier buildings. This has been attested to in other towns, such as Wisbech, and there is no reason to doubt that Ely would not have followed suit, thus creating a facade of say, an 18th century building over a Mediaeval timber frame.

Two of the Grade I listed buildings have been classified by English Heritage as ‘at risk’. These are a dovecote and barn, both at St John’s Farm.

[61] Publications of the CAS no.VII, 1843

Particular Buildings and Constructions

1) Ely Cathedral and Precincts

There is little point here in reproducing a full account of the architectural development of Ely Cathedral and Abbey. Plentiful information is available within the VCH, Pevsner or the numerous accounts of the buildings, such as those by Bentham (1756), Stewart (1868) and Atkinson (1933). The chronological coverage afforded by just these three volumes affords an opportunity to see how the institution evolved into the Industrial period in far more details than allowed here.

The current cathedral has four main phases in its construction, being the post-conquest structure, 1340-80, 1440-80 and again around 1500. The building was reordered in 1770 to remove the mediaeval ritual arrangement, and restored from 1845. The layout of the building is not dissimilar to Winchester, which is unsurprising given that Abbot Simeon had been prior of Winchester before coming to Ely, so presumably the same master mason was employed at both. The east end of Ely is currently square, but work in 1850 revealed apsidal foundations more in keeping with 11th century architecture, but these were apparently hurriedly replaced. The recent excavations by the Lady Chapel also uncovered apsidal features[62].

The crossing tower collapsed in February 1322, and that records state that the Quire had already been abandoned shows that the collapse was expected. The Abbot at the time, Alan of Walsingham, was the driving force behind the Octagon, making use of continental parallels in the use of polygons as a design feature. The north-west transept collapsed during the 15th century.

The Lady Chapel was constructed between 1321 and 1349. The prime mover behind this was John of Wisbech, and it is traditionally said that much of the funding for the work came from a hoard of coins that John found during the initial stages of construction. The location of structure is similar to that of Peterborough, suggesting an overlap in design and construction personnel.

Monastic buildings lie on three sides of the cathedral. In summary these comprise:

1. Cloisters — mainly Norman, some 13th & 15th century
2. Chapter House — 12th century; demolished 1649
3. Frater — 13th century
4. Kitchen — Norman
5. Guest Hall — 14th century; now Bishop's House
6. Priors House — 12th & 14th century; contains Crauden's Chapel
7. Priors Kitchen — 13th century; fragments only
8. Queens Hall — built 1330; now Headmaster's House, King's School
9. Granaries/stores — 12th to 14th centuries; used as school buildings

[62] R Mortimer pers. comm.

10. Infirmary Canonries — Norman, with 13th and 14th century additions. Now
11. Black Hostelry — 13th century; now a Canonry
12. Almonry — 12th century
13. Sacristy — 14th century
14. Steeple gate — 14th century
15. Ely Porta — 1397
16. Sextry Barn — mid 13th century; demolished 1842
17. Walsingham House — 1335
18. Bishops Palace — Built by Alcock 1486-1501; rebuilt 1667-1675

Other lost buildings include the bone house and chapel to St Peter near the Steeple gate lay cemetery and the Outer Hostelry lay to the east of the cathedral. The monks cemetery lay to the south of the chancel.

2) Other Church of England

Other ecclesiastical construction in the city includes the demolished church of the Holy Trinity (see above), the Hospitals of St John and St Mary Magdalene, the Parish Church of St Mary, the Chantry on the Green and the church of St Peter, Broad Street, as well as the chapels and churches in the surrounding villages.

Religious hospitals are a common component of a mediaeval town, particularly one that already has a strong ecclesiastical presence[63]. Ely possessed two by the 12th century, being the Hospitals of John and Mary. These were amalgamated in 1240, and suppressed in 1561. Several buildings survive, including the nave of the chapel of St Mary (now a house), the Chapel of St John and another building of unknown purpose. The chapel of St John has a re-sited carving believed to be mid-Saxon, probably from the earliest phase of the abbey[64]. The location of this establishment at the western side of the current town is logical given the location of settlement down to West Fen Road.

The current parish church of St Mary dates from the 13th century, but lies on the site of a previous one, as the church is recorded as being granted to the abbey in 1109. The tower was added c.1300 and the church was restored in 1877. St Peter's on Broad Street dates from 1890, and was initially a chapel of ease to Holy Trinity, which at this point was still using the Lady Chapel as a parish church.

In the villages, the Holy Cross in Stuntney was rebuilt twice, in the 19th and 20th century. Nevertheless, Norman fabric survives in the form of Romanesque archways. St Michael and All Angels in Chettisham dates from the late 12th century, and also suffered an over-enthusiastic restoration in the 19th century. St Aetheldreda's in Queen Adelaide was built in 1883 as a chapel of ease to Holy Trinity, and St Peter's Prickwillow was constructed in

[63] Schofield & Vince 1994, pp.174
[64] PCAS 36

1868. The last church suffers from its geographical location: it had to be built on wooden piles driven deep into the ground, and it is not possible to bury in the churchyard, as any hole dug immediately fills with water due the low lying nature of the land. Finally, a chapel to St James was constructed at Shippea Hill, but this is now closed.

The abbey and cathedral possessed numerous chapels, and there is little point in listing them as full details can be found n the various histories of the abbey. However one in particulars deserves singing out, being the Chantry on the Green. This is referred to in the 1251 survey of the town, and again in 1416. The location is uncertain, but probably under the old Library site on Palace Green is likely. An 18th century house called the Chantry lies in the vicinity.

3) Other denominations

As one would expect from a cathedral town, non-conformity was somewhat limited. Fenland regions traditionally were heavily radical in their religion, as can be seen in somewhere like Wisbech. However, the 1676 register lists only one Catholic and 33 other protestant non-conformists, and by 1753 there were still no dissenting chapels in the town.

The other chapels and churches can be presented in tabular form:

Address	Denomination	Date Built	Current Status	Notes
St Aethedreda Egremont Street	Roman Catholic	1891	Active	
Chapel Street	Countess Of Huntingdon	1793	Active	
Salem Chapel, Chequer Lane	Baptists / Independents	1840	Closed	
Butcher Row	Zion Baptist	1853	Closed	
Chapel Street	Wesleyan Methodist	1818	Active	Restored 1891
Victoria Street	Primitive Methodists	1847	Closed	
Railway Mission, Silver Street	Salvation Army	1892	Closed	Excavation 1998 – medieval occupation
Victoria Street	Salvation Army	?	Closed	
Chapel Street	Congregationalist	?	Active	
Prickwillow	Baptists	1816	Active	Rebuilt 1875
Prickwillow	Wesleyan Methodist	1826	Closed	Now St Peters Hall
Prickwillow	Primitive Methodist	1846	Active	Rebuilt 1894

The Roman Catholic church of St Aetheldreda on Egremont Street was constructed in 1891, and as a claim to fame possesses the withered left hand of the Saint as a relic; the shrine of St Aethelthryth within the cathedral had been destroyed during the Dissolution.

4) Cemeteries

The main burial ground of the cathedral lay to the north of the building, and a bone house existed here adjoining the north range. The monks cemetery lay to the south east. Burials no longer take place in the cathedral grounds, but it should be emphasised that the true extent of the cathedral cemeteries is unknown – certainly human remains were located under the Bishops Palace, so any intrusion below ground within reasonable proximity of the main church should anticipate burials. Inhumations were also located during the works between the Quire and the Lady Chapel.

St Mary's possesses a cemetery, although since the opening of the civic cemetery on High Barns this is not used. High Barns was opened in 1854, and is still in current use. This is used for the surrounding area as well,

although Stuntney possesses a closed graveyard at the church, the current size of which suggests it has contracted in recent years. St Michael's, Chettisham also possesses a cemetery. There is no evidence that any of the non-conformist chapels possessed a cemetery, but this should not be ruled out, particularly in the case of the Baptists. Finally, it would be reasonable to expect there to be a cemetery in the vicinity of the two hospitals, although no evidence of one is known.

5) Schools

The Kings School was formed in 1541 after the Dissolution, but was descended from the Almoner's School, the date of which is unknown. The Kings School occupies many of the old abbey buildings, thus contributing to the preservation seen within the town. Other schools within the town are:

Address	Type	Date	Status	Notes
Kings School	Boys	1541	Extant	
Needhams School, Back Hill	?	1741	Closed	
National School, Ely College	Boys	1813	Replaced	Closed 1859
Shire Hall	Girls	1814	Replaced	Closed 1820
Market Street	Girls	1820	Closed	Rebuilt 1868
Silver Street	Mixed	1859	Active	
Broad Street	Girls	1859	Closed	
Prickwillow	Mixed?	1862	Closed	
St James, Shippea Hill	Mixed	1870	Closed	
Stuntney	Mixed	1864	Closed	
Chettisham	Mixed	1880	Closed	
Queen Adelaide	Mixed	1872	Closed	

(This list does not include post World War One schools, most of which are extant)

6) Public Spaces

The market owes its origins to the mediaeval planning of the town, and is undated. Originally it stretched down to the Palace Green being overlaid initially by a shambles and later by the current street pattern to the west. It formed the focus for post-mediaeval commercial activity, including the Cattle Market and a Butter Market to the north, under the current Waitrose site. A Corn Exchange was built in the marketplace near the current HSBC Bank in 1847. The Shire Hall was built in 1820.

Ely has possessed five workhouses, which were:

i. St Mary's – built 1725? On site of current St Mary's Court
ii. Holy Trinity – built 1738, demolished 1956. On Forehill
iii. Ely Union - built 1837, became Tower Hospital
iv. The Haven Quayside. For unmarried mothers only, acted as diocesan laundry
v. Silver Street Site of Hereward Hall

The Princess of Wales Memorial Hospital, formerly the RAF Hospital, was constructed during the Second World War to serve the surrounding airfields.

7) Communications

Until recent centuries, the access to the Isle was via causeway or river. Celia Fiennes recorded in the late 17th century the approach to Ely via Stuntney, and also how the road to Sutton was raised above the surrounding fields that were inundated with water. Causeways like that at Stuntney tended to be

located where the crossing was the most advantageous, so one can expect to find evidence of multi-period routes in such places.

Current excavations at Broad Street have gone some way to understanding the dock area of the town, but further analysis of this must wait for the final report of this work. Before the forced deviation of the river by the monks in the mediaeval period, the river flowed elsewhere, hence the Roman docks lay at Stuntney. Other mediaeval docks existed at Quanea, Braham and probably Turbutsey. The current Ely High Bridge over the Ouse dates from 1910.

The railway arrived in Ely in 1845, and the current station opened in 1847. The advantages offered by the transport of agricultural produce by rail led to the opening of Shippea Hill station later in the century. Its tremendously long platform was to facilitate the rapid loading of produce onto wagons. The village of Queen Adelaide probably owes its development of the railways, acting as it does as a centre of the Isle rail network. The multiplicity of level crossings here is due partly to the presence of the Adelaide Loop, a track constructed in the 1890s to enable Norwich trains to bypass Ely Station without having to reverse, and also to its position after the division of the tracks from Cambridge into routes to the east (Norwich), north (King's Lynn) and west (Peterborough).

The Turnpike to Cambridge was constructed during the latter half of the 18th century –the Lamb Hotel began as a coaching inn built in 1753. The Board of Health, initiated a programme of road improvements in the 19th century in order to ameliorate the problems with communications, for although he turnpikes were excellent, the same could not be said for lesser routes. The Ely Bypass was built in 1986.

8) Miscellaneous

The town gibbet was in St John's Road.

During the Second World War, a prisoner of war camp was built at Barton Farm. This site now lies under the golf course on Cambridge Road.

Other Projects

The Fenland Survey covered the Isle fairly thoroughly, in particular the lowland areas, and the conclusions of this work have been taken into consideration for this report.

Ely has an active local studies group, who have undertaken a wide variety of survey, fieldwalking, building recording and excavation projects within the town and its boundaries. Where possible, these too have been incorporated into this work.

The English Rivers Palaeolithic Project (1996) did not cover the Ouse as far as Ely, as it was assumed that the lack of gravel terrace in the region precluded settlement of this date. As has been seen, this may be erroneous.

The Defence of Britain project has 19 entries for Ely, excluding airfields. These are thirteen pillboxes, five weapons emplacements and one Home Guard shelter.

Synthesis

This section is based upon a compilation of the knowledge above to present an overview of the development of the town. For ease of reference, this has been produced chronologically.

Prehistoric

Ely displays evidence for activity throughout all periods of prehistory. The occasional area of well-drained land was an attraction to Palaeolithic, Mesolithic and Neolithic inhabitants, suggesting that the area was both accessible and possessed of natural resources. Settlement on the clay islands is not exhibited until the Bronze Age and later. Known occupation suggests a settled agricultural landscape making use of both water and land resources, with a pattern f farmsteads centred around the higher ground. The highest points were also utilised for ritual purposes, with burials taking place and a barrow constructed. Communication was by water and causeway, and the nature of finds suggest a settlement of some wealth and status.

This rural agricultural landscape continued through into the Iron Age, with a wide distribution of farms and settlements, making full use of the dry ground in the area. Again, communication would have been by causeway and water, with the passage across to Stuntney being popular, and settlement also is found on this island.

Settlement in the prehistoric period is spread over the island, although the slopes leading down to West Fen appear to have attracted a high density. This suggests that communications existed to the west of here, and that the area around West Fen and Grunty Fen may have provided a focus for the inhabitants of the time. The higher ground around which the modern town lies has revealed little evidence for activity from this period except the Beaker burials from Springhead Lane, although this could be due to later destruction and disturbance.

Of the other villages within the parish, Shippea is one of the well drained areas that has revealed Palaeolithic activity. Stuntney is an area of high ground on a main communications route and as such has much evidence of occupation. Chettisham lay within the agricultural area favoured during the Bronze and Iron Ages. Queen Adelaide and Prickwillow are too modern for prehistoric activity, although archaeological deposits may exist under the peat deposits that formed during the Neolithic, particularly Prickwillow, as it lies on the Ouse roddon.

Roman

The Roman landscape of Ely was probably not dissimilar to that of the later Iron Age, being predominately agricultural. There is no evidence for industries such as salt extraction this far south, and most known settlement lies in a similar area to Iron Age, being on the western slopes and along the main communications routes, i.e. Stuntney and elsewhere.

The success of agriculture on the Isle can be seen by the finds of higher status materials such as bronze and pewter, the use of stone coffins and with the distinct probability of a villa type residence due to the finds of painted wall plaster. Such a residence would be consistent with the nature of Roman rural settlement, especially during the later Empire. Again, settlement from the current town is virtually unknown. A cemetery probably exists on Thorney Hill.

Communications were also important, and Ely lay on the lines of roads running in all directions. This is a normal use of available high ground by Roman engineers. In addition, the value of water transport is demonstrated by the presence of a dock on the Ouse. Although the centre of Roman Fenland lay at Stonea, Ely appears to have prospered as an agricultural settlement well placed to make best use of the communications system that existed.

As with prehistoric periods, it is only the higher ground that display activity from this period, so Queen Adelaide and Prickwillow have not revealed any information, although again the proximity of the roddon is a factor here. Again, little activity has been found under the current town.

Anglo-Saxon

Saxon Ely demonstrates various phases that illustrated the creation of a large ecclesiastical settlement, Initial occupation was to the south of the Isle, thus breaking the tradition of occupation along the western slopes. The high, sandy ground around Bedwell Hey would be the main candidate for the earliest settlement, given the location of the cemetery at Witchford airfield. However it should be stressed that one would expect to find other settlement elsewhere on the island.

The catalyst that took the Isle from being an agricultural, rural settlement to something more was the foundation of the religious institution by Aethelthryth. The placement of religious houses on isolated and bounded sites was a common phenomenon in the 7th and 8th centuries; it is questionable whether these 'minsters' were founded for the common good. In this case, Aethelthryth owned the land, and founded her high status site on the high ground away from the current settlement. Nevertheless, she was an important and presumably wealthy personage, and the presence of this site would have been sufficient to generate new factors in the settlement that changed the face of the area.

At some point during the mid to late 7th century, the settlement moved to the traditional site of the western slopes. The reason for this is uncertain, but the new site was certainly closer to the supposed site of the religious centre. The settlement once here remained fairly static, although it did creep up the slopes throughout the remainder of the Saxon and into the Mediaeval period. Settlement was extensive along the western slopes, and although a large area has been excavated along West Fen Road, it is to be expected that further remains will be encountered elsewhere along the slope. This settlement shifted towards the cathedral site at a time when Ely was probably being 'organised' by a central authority into the later (and current town).

The sheer density of artefact and ceramic remains, especially Ipswich ware, suggests that the site was something more than a simple rural settlement, but the presence of a high status centre such as a church site with royal connections would reasonably explain this. The full interpretation of the Saxon remains of this side of Ely is still awaiting dissemination, so accurate conclusions cannot be drawn at this stage.

In addition, the recent works at Broad Street have uncovered features containing Ipswich ware pottery beneath 50 cm of alluvium[65]. This is needs to be interpreted, but it is plausible that water communications were still using the Ouse and therefore needed an access to the Isle.

[65] A Dickens pers. comm.

Mediaeval

Mediaeval Ely was dominated by the church, both as a cathedral and abbey. Administrative, legal, social and pastoral obligations were carried out by the bishop, prior or their representatives, religious buildings dominated the skyline and the needs of a large group of high status consumers dictated the economy of the Isle.

The street pattern of modern Ely was in place by the 15th century, with the core elements that dominated it (the abbey, cathedral and market) probably by the end of the 12th. At what stage the town was laid out is uncertain however, although a fairly early date would be reasonable. The nature of settlement at this time is still being ascertained, although a string of tenements clustered along the main routes with narrow plots of land behind would be a fair assessment. Given that the bishop and prior between them owned the freehold on the vast majority of he area, a system of central authority and organisation is to be expected.

At what stage the construction of the docks off Broad Street and the canalisation of the Ouse took place is also uncertain, although it is hoped that these will be answered by ongoing archaeological works. It is probable that the work took place over some time, with the river being diverted to facilitate access for raw materials used in the construction of the abbey, and the docks being constructed to take advantage of this at a later date. This is of course speculative.

The presence of docks means that trade and commerce must have been present in sufficient volume to justify the resources committed in their construction. Certainly the church would have been heavy consumers of food, raw materials and luxury goods, and crafts such as goldsmiths and weavers were present in the town. Saffron, for example, was imported in the 14th century. Coinage was also present and used in a larger quantity than would be expected in an agricultural environment, suggesting a stable and developed local economy.

As to what was exported, then this is less clear. Ely was the centre of a pottery industry from the mediaeval period onwards, with the so-called Babylon kilns the main producer. These kilns have been located in the expected area by the river. Agricultural surplus would have been another possible export; the fertility of the Isle is well attested. Ely was also producer of wine, although whether this was for personal use by the church is uncertain. Domesday Book also has eels as a major industry, which probably continued into the mediaeval period although it should be pointed out that eel farming is a seasonal trade. Whilst eels are freshwater fish, they spawn in salt water, and the hatchlings return to the freshwater lakes at time which they reach 5-6 cm in length. The modern eel farming industry often traps them in their thousands at this stage and matures them in large tanks.

The presence of the church and the attraction of this to the outside meant that Ely was a wealthy town in the mediaeval period; based on tax returns it was in

the top thirty in terms of income[66]. This prosperity impacted on its development, encouraging the growth of commerce and immigration from elsewhere in the country, aided no doubt by the attraction of the site as a place of pilgrimage.

The town was never particularly large, and beyond the built up areas a stable agricultural environment evolved. The villages of Stuntney and Chettisham evolved from monastic land holdings, with lesser granges in various areas. The stability this provided was emphasised by the continuity of lordship and landholding by the church, and Ely was still operating a five course rotation in open fields in the 19th century.

[66] Pugh 1967, p.38

Post-Mediaeval

It has often been claimed that Ely never recovered from the Dissolution of the monastery in 1539, and although this is an oversimplification, the ramifications can be seen today, as the town had to adjust from a centre of commerce and ritual to a rural market town.

Although the monastery was closed, its buildings and holdings were transferred to the bishop and diocese, which in any case was the main authority in the area. However, the role of the church as consumer and thus economic catalyst would have been reduced for the Abbey may have been the main influence. The status of the diocese varied – for example Elizabeth I deliberately left the see vacant for 20 years – and without the stability of the abbey population (most of whom had been paid off in 1539) the area declined. It has been seen how unemployment was directly related to the amount of maintenance work required by the church.

The town in the 17th century appears to have been in a sorry state. The see had been vacant for 20 years, thus removing both authority and economy, the Fenlands had been subjected to devastating floods in the 16th century, and the Civil War resulted in further disruption and collapse of the ecclesiastical institutions that so effectively dominated the town. Celia Fiennes reported no shops or drains in 1695, and the mortality rate was horrific, aided no doubt by outbreaks of small pox and plague. The area known as Little London (roughly Lynn Road north of Deacons Lane) had been singled out as particularly unpleasant by 1638[67].

The state of the town apparently did not improve much until the 18th century. The first workhouse was constructed in 1729, and the death rate improved during the middle of the century. Ely's prosperity was based on agriculture, and whilst conditions for this were stable, then all was well, but the upheaval caused by increased mechanisation and the Napoleonic Wars had a disastrous effect.

In effect, the administration of Ely was a relic from the feudal era. It had a high status individual as a central authority who had jurisdiction over most aspects of life, it farmed an open field system based mainly on tenant farmers and whilst in times of stability and prosperity this system functioned, by the 19th century it was evident that reform had to be initiated. Unemployment was up, as was the mortality rate and food prices; the social unrest of the 1816 riots was an indicator of conditions at the time. Hence the diocese lost all secular authority in 1836.

A new workhouse was built in 1838 (the Tower Hospital) that could hold up to 340 people[68], which was around 5% of the total population at the time. The first half of the 19th century saw a huge increase in population as the rural areas were abandoned and destitute farmers moved into the city, thus

[67] Ibid. p.44
[68] Ibid. p.46

encouraging the growth in slum conditions and poverty. The Board of Health in 1848[69] estimated that 68% of all deaths were preventable, and that half of the town's 1500+ houses were 'poor' (i.e. valued at under £5). Little London and the area around Potters Lane were again singled out. The river was polluted and there were few drains.

The area of the docks had been given over to industry and poor housing by this point, and the pottery industry had all but ceased, being replaced by brick and pipe factories.

The Market Place was passed to the control of a Corn Exchange Company to develop the commercial activity in the area. A Board of Health was set up in 1850 to assume many parochial roles previously carried out by the diocese, and Enclosure Act was passed in 1848. A new water reservoir was built in 1854, and a new cemetery laid out (High Barns). Almshouses and allotments were created and granted. Despite these measures, the population suffered a decline in the second half of the 19th century as many people resorted to emigration in search of a better life.

The impact of post-mediaeval development upon the archaeological record is difficult to quantify. Up on the high ground, work in the Market Place and also along Cambridge Road near the Tower Hospital has shown that later development had truncated archaeological deposits to such an extent that little remained. However, down near the flood plain, such as Broad Street and Lisle Lane, the amount of overburden (probably from flooding deposits) was such that even cellars had a minimal impact on underlying deposits. At the junction of Forehill and Lisle Lane, this overburden measured around 1.5m deep. The natural conclusion is that areas that were subject to flooding have more overburden that those that were not.

Outside the town, the landscape displays remains of ridge and furrow agriculture, which has been shown to mask earlier deposits. This was especially evident off West Fen road, where earlier analyses wrote the area off apart from the ridge and furrow.

[69] *Report to the General Board of Health* 1850

Industrial

Ely's industries have been varied over the centuries, although it should be stressed that its main products and employers have been agricultural. Ely ware pottery from the Babylon kilns is a mediaeval phenomenon, and the discovery of extensive kilns dating from the later mediaeval period is an indicator of the scale of production. Incidentally, the name Babylon is probably not contemporary with the pottery production; the area of Ely by the old docks was called (probably unflatteringly) Babylon in the 19th century, and the discovery of kiln wasters in the area lead to the term 'Babylon kilns'. It should be stressed that smaller kilns existed elsewhere on the Isle, such as Quanea and Turbutsey., mainly monastic sites suggesting that the industry was dominated by the church, and that it may not have survived the Dissolution.

Why the pottery industry declined in uncertain, and perhaps the current excavations may sheds some light upon this issue. The area was used for tanning afterwards, a particularly unpleasant industry the presence of which indicates the extent that the area had declined. Bricks and pipes were manufactured elsewhere in the parish, making use of the excellent clay resources in the area. Coprolite extraction enjoyed a brief surge in popularity at the end of the 19th century, and rope was manufactured, making use of available crops.

The remaining industries are agricultural. Woad and hemp were grown and exported up to the 20th century, and market gardening is still a common activity. Sugar beet is a recent introduction, and a factory for its refining was constructed on the remains of the old manorial site at Turbutsey in 1925.

Summary

Ely is a peculiar town in the context of the rest of the County. As a site it is ideally situated for agriculture, and the appeal of an isolated, fertile site was strong from the period of earliest settlement onwards. It was probably this attraction that gave the land the value to be the dowry in an aristocratic marriage that resulted in the introduction of Christianity into the area by Aethelthryth.

It was the establishment of a high status site by Aethelthryth in the Saxon period that provided the catalyst that allowed the expansion of the settlement into the town we see today. Yet this development was so entwine with the church that once this had been diminished by the Dissolution, the town suffered a decline that was still being felt in the 19th century. The town today is still subject to a programme of regeneration.

The parish of Ely, with its town and four villages is a massively rich archaeological resource, with remains dating from all periods scattered over the entire parish. This, coupled with the regeneration of the town under current planning guidelines has provided an arena in recent years for an unprecedented number of archaeological interventions, the most important of which are still ongoing.

Research Directions

The wealth of archaeological information, mediaeval buildings and documentary sources mean that it is possible to set specific research questions to an extent greater than most other places within the County. The wide nature and continuity of settlement on the Isle presents an opportunity to assess the area as a whole, and address many of the outstanding archaeological issues raised in the Research Frameworks for the Eastern Counties[70].

The opportunity to study a Bronze Age and Iron Age landscape is one that should not be overlooked. Work on this period suffers from being site specific, yet with the Isle we have an area of land attractive to settlement that because of water levels is also a defined area of landscape that can be assessed. The opportunities for phasing, artefact studies and the emergence of agricultural landscapes are huge.

Given the similarities between Iron Age and Roman Ely in terms of settlement and land use, issues of continuity and development can be addressed. Ely was a component of Roman Fenland and given that it probably acted as a communications hub for both water and land travel, then it needs to be considered as a part of a Roman whole. Again, there is also the potential for type series and artefact studies.

The Isle presents the opportunity to study both rural and urban Anglo-Saxon and Mediaeval archaeology. The results of Saxon settlement shift are vividly illustrated, and the potential for study of these sites has been seen at West Fen Road. The early Saxon settlement still has to be located however.

The mediaeval period is dominated by the church and development of the town. Again, we have an opportunity to ascertain the processes and driving forces behind the development of an urban site in a rural isolated environment. That Ely was also the centre for local pottery production, there is also the chance to develop type series for ceramics in the County.

The presence of a church from the earliest origins of English Christianity through to the present day is a tremendous opportunity to develop church archaeology in a social context, to see how the presence and nature of such a church impacted on the area surrounding it.

[70] Brown & Glazebrook 2000

APPENDIX 1

Anglo-Saxon Charters relating to Ely Abbey

Sawyer No.	Date	Type	Grantor	Estate	Status
572	956	Charter	King Eadred	Stapleford	Forged
776	970	Charter	Edgar	Abbey and land	Doubtful
779	970	Charter	Edgar	Melbourne, Armingford	Doubtful
780	970	Charter	Edgar	Linden End	Genuine
781	970	Charter	Edgar	Stoke (Ipswich)	Genuine
907	1004	Charter	Aethelred (Unready)	Littlebury (Essex)	Forgery
919	1008	Charter	Aethelred (Unready)	Hadstock, Linton	Genuine
1051	1042/66	Charter	Edward (Confessor)	Lakenheath	Genuine
1081	1042/66	Writ	Edward (Confessor)	?	?
1486	1000/2	Will	Aelfflaed	Soham, Ditton, Cheveley	Genuine
1487	975/1016	Will	Aelfhelm	Wratting	Genuine
1490	1042/3	Will	Aelfric Modercope	‘Fuglholm’	Genuine
1494	975/91	Will	Aethelflaed	Fen Ditton	Genuine
1516	mid C11	Will	Eadwine	?	Genuine
1520	1017/35	Will	Leofflaed	Balsham, Stetchworth	Genuine
1531	1043/5	Will	Thurstan	?	Genuine
1844	970	Fragment	Edgar	Worcestershire ?	Genuine

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