

Chapel Court, Jesus College, Cambridge: An Archaeological Watching brief. CAU Report 630

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Summary

A two-day archaeological watching brief was conducted by the Cambridge Archaeological Unit in Chapel Court, Jesus College, Cambridge during the excavation of a cable trench. No significant archaeological deposits were encountered in the shallow trenching. The only horizons exposed relate to 18th and 19th century episodes of surface preparation and levelling activity.

Methodology

The single L-shaped trench 0.4m wide, 0.45m deep, and 74m long was excavated across the western Chapel Court path and partially through the Cloister Court passage on 31st June 2004 (Figure 1). Under archaeological supervision the majority of the cable trench was cut using a small mechanical excavator with a 0.3m wide toothed bucket. The short section of trench within the passage between Chapel Court and Cloister Court was excavated by hand. The standard CAU excavation and recording system based upon the Museum of London single context recording system (Spence 1990) was employed.

Results

Two distinct horizons were observed in section below the build-up of the western court path, both relating to levelling activity and/or garden surface preparation. The first of these deposits consisted of a dark grey silty loam with brick, tile and nineteenth century pottery, glass and clay pipes. The second lower deposit was a mid grey silty loam containing numerous small fragments of clunch together with pieces of animal bone, oyster shell, and pottery dating from the sixteenth to eighteenth century. Towards the southern end of the trench, the lower horizon rested upon a rammed clunch and mortar surface. The surface was a least 7.25m wide, being heavily truncated in the south by modern service trenches. Although only visible in plan at the base of the trench, this surface is presumably a yard floor, possibly created as a working area for the construction/maintenance of the college buildings.

The section of trench between the western court path and the doorway of the Cloister Court passage was completely disturbed by modern service trenches. The fills of the service trenches included numerous modern brick and tile fragments, together with a single large piece of dressed stone, possibly from a window. Two other pieces of dressed stone were found incorporated into a rubble hardcore horizon within the Cloister Court passage. In this small section of trench, the two horizons revealed beneath the thick paved concrete floor were both associated with levelling and surface preparation, and did not predate the nineteenth century.

E: 545191.62
N:258963.22

E: 545314.06
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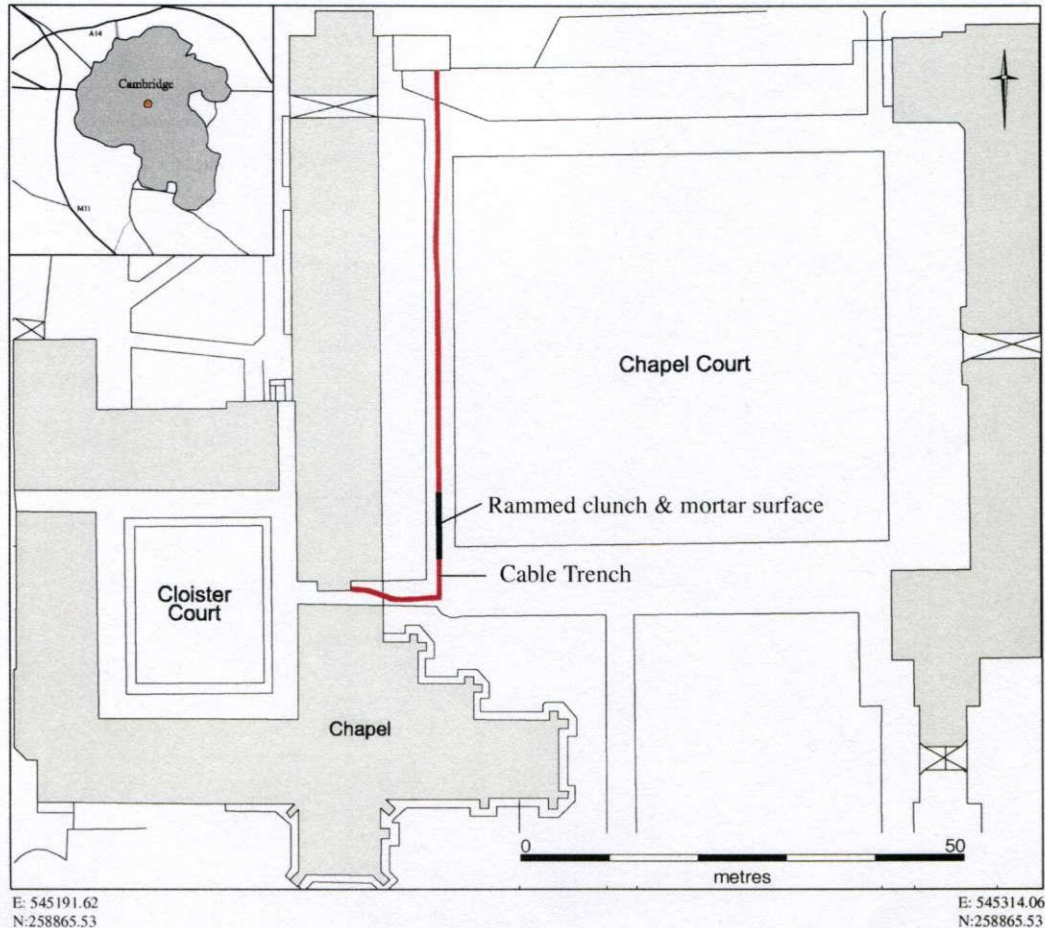


Figure 1. Location

Discussion

No significant archaeological deposits were encountered during the cutting of the cable trench. Although a section of trench within the Cloister Court passage crossed the known northern wall line of the thirteenth century Chapterhouse (Evans et al. 1997), the trench was not sufficiently deep to expose any deposits of this date. With the exception of the clunch and mortar surface found beneath the western path of Chapel Court, all horizons encountered relate to late post-medieval levelling and ground surface preparation, be it for the path, garden or passageway. The clunch and mortar surface (revealed but not disturbed by the cable trench) remains undated, but possibly relates to a temporary yard floor constructed during building works on the college.

References

Evans, C., Dickens, A., & D.A.H Richmond. 1997. Cloistered Communities: Archaeological and Architectural Investigations in Jesus College, Cambridge, 1988-97. *Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society* Vol 86. pp. 91-114

Spence, C. 1990. *Archaeological Site Manual*. Department of Urban Archaeology. Museum of London