The Community Hub, St. John's College, Cambridge

Archaeological monitoring

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CAMBRIDGE ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

THE COMMUNITY HUB, ST JOHN'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE

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Summary

The Cambridge Archaeological Unit undertook archaeological monitoring at St John's College, Cambridge. The trench monitored was located in the western part of the southern range of Second Court and was associated with the Community Hub Development. The monitoring revealed two small Post-Medieval cellars associated with the Buttery and several foundations associated with the original building (1599–1602). The architectural recording of part of the southern wall of the Buttery showed that part of the Post-Medieval fabric had been preserved, if heavily modified during the 19th–20th centuries.

INTRODUCTION

The Cambridge Archaeological Unit (CAU) undertook archaeological monitoring at St John's College, Cambridge, on the 4th of November 2021. The area of investigation was located in the western part of the southern range of Second Court, an area immediately to the south between Second Court and the boundary with Trinity College. The groundworks were associated with the Community Hub Development.

Topography and Geology

St John's College is situated in the historic core of the town. Second Court is located to the south of the College, at the west of First Court (Figs. 1–2).

Geologically, the site is situated upon the eastern former floodplain of the river Cam. Here, Alluvium and First Terrace river gravels overlay Gault clay (BGS, accessed November 2021). The top of the gravels was reached at 6.54m AOD in First Court through augering (Newman 2011, 1) and at 4.80m AOD in the southwest corner of Chapel Court (Evans 1991, 5).

Before reduction, floor level in the Buttery was at *c.* 8.46m AOD. After the general reduction, it was at *c.* 7.80m AOD. The base of the trench lay at *c.* 7.15m AOD. The natural gravels were not reached.

Historical and Archaeological Background

The history of Cambridge has been extensively covered in a number of publications (e.g. Bryan 1999; Cam 1959; Lobel 1975; Taylor 1999), therefore, only a very brief summary will be presented here.

There is scarce evidence of Prehistoric activity in the area: residual flints were discovered at the St John's Triangle and Divinity School sites (Newman 2008, 61; Cessford 2012, 5) and it is possible that the area was part of an agricultural hinterland, while the immediate vicinity of the site was a marshland liable to flooding. Previous work in St John's College and on the riverside (e.g. Alexander 1997; Evans 2001) indicate that the area was part of the river Cam or in its active floodplain at that period.

During the Roman period, the main centre of occupation was located on Castle Hill with secondary settlements established around. Roman activity was recorded in Chapel Court and the Master's Garden (Dickens 1996, 4–8) and consisted of quarry pits associated with a metalled surface, while a large number of Roman pottery sherds were discovered in 1938 during work in Chapel Court (Daniel 1939, 146). Investigations at St John's Triangle and Divinity School revealed the presence of more quarrying and of occupation on Bridge Street, which follows the line of the Roman road linking Colchester to Godmanchester (Cessford 2012, 6–10; Newman 2008, 61–2). After a dry period, the area closer to the Cam seemed to have reverted to an active floodplain and little Early and Middle Saxon activity was observed (Dickens 1996, 16). Small scale quarrying and potential agricultural use of the land were recorded at St John's Triangle (Newman 2008, 69). The town of Cambridge developed at that time, and its historic core was well established on the south and east sides of the river by the mid/late 11th century. Drainage of the marshlands closer to the river started: a large ditch was excavated perpendicular to the river and might have accommodated small vessels (Evans 1991, 7). A network of ditches perpendicular and parallel to the river were then excavated and recorded in Chapel Court and the Master's Garden (Dickens 1996, 16–22). This reclamation of the land seemed to have been completed by the 13th century in the area, an enterprise that lasted until the Post-Medieval period in some parts to the south of St John's College (Alexander 1997).

Between 1190 and 1200, the Hospital of St John the Evangelist, an ecclesiastical institution dedicated to the relief of the poor, was founded on the land. It occupied what is now First, Second and Third Court but most of its building seemed to have been concentrated in the First

Court area. There might have been buildings or activity associated with the Hospital in the investigated area. Excavations in First Court revealed structural remains associated with the Hospital, such as the Chapel and the Infirmary (Miller 1991, Newman 2010 and 2011), while in Chapel Court there was domestic occupation located just outside the Hospital grounds (Dickens 1996, Miller 1993). Human remains were discovered in a pit at the west of the Chapel in 1938 and were probably associated with the Hospital Chapel before being disturbed by the construction of Second Court (Cessford 2015, 62; Daniel 1939), while the lay cemetery of the Hospital was excavated at the Old Divinity School and St John's Triangle (Cessford 2012; Cessford 2015; Newman 2008). The Hospital was converted into St John's College in 1511 and most of the existing buildings, apart from the Chapel and potential Infirmary, were demolished. First Court was started in 1511 and contained the Hall, a library, kitchen and rooms (Fig. 3a). A small court was erected to the south-west in 1528 and was demolished a few decades later to provide space for Second Court (RCHM(E) 1959, 187; Fig. 3a). Second Court was built to the west between 1598 and 1602 in red brick, with an architecture similar to First Court (Willis & Clark 1886 II, 260). A new Library was constructed to west in 1624 and Third Court followed between 1669 and 1672 (Fig. 3b). The growing number of students led to the construction of New Court, on the western side of the river in 1831.

The original Chapel and Infirmary were demolished in the 1860s to make place for the new College Chapel (Fig. 3c). The Buttery Dining Room and College Bar, on the ground floor of the southern range, underwent several phases of refurbishment. The ongoing Community Hub project intends to completely demolish and redevelop the 1970s refurbishment.

Methodology

Prior to the beginning of the archaeological monitoring, the modern floor was broken and the area generally reduced by the contractor. The new foundation trenches were mechanically excavated prior archaeological presence on site, as agreed with Barnes, the main contractor. The trench was *c.* 39.65m long, between 1.0 and 1.15m wide and between 0.65 and 0.80m deep (Fig. 2). It ran mostly along the northern and southern walls of the Buttery. Structural remains were left *in situ* by the contractor and were demolished once the archaeological recording was completed. The interior faces of the southern walls had also been stripped of plaster and render, which allowed the recording of the southern wall of the Buttery. In the patio to the south (Fig. 1) modern floor slabs had been removed prior arrival on site and a make-up layer of sand and rubble, as well as a few brick and concrete services, was visible across the area. As this area was only going to be reduced by 60mm, no archaeological remains were revealed.

Features and layers were recorded using the CAU recording system. Context numbers are indicated in the text in square brackets (e.g. **[100]**) and feature numbers are denoted by the prefix **F.** (e.g. **F.1**). A base plan was drawn at 1:50, whilst a representative section was drawn at 1:20. Photographic recording was digital. No finds were retrieved from the site.

The architectural recording of the southern wall used a slightly different methodology: the elevation was not drawn, and the different elements were described without using context or feature numbers. Photographic recording of the elevation was also digital.

Work was carried out in adherence to statutory Health and Safety legislation, the recommendations of FAME (Allen and Holt 2010) and in accordance with a site-specific risk assessment and the general CAU Health and Safety policy. The site code for the project was JCM21 and the event number was ECB 6821. No archaeological condition was imposed as part of the planning permission and the work was undertaken at the behest of the College, so there was no formal Brief or Written Scheme of Investigation.

RESULTS

Trench recording

The earliest element of the revealed sequence were substantial thick grey silty deposits. The sequence started at *c.* 7.15m AOD and its maximum height of *c.* 7.7m AOD (Fig. 4). These deposits are truncated in the south-west of the building by clunch foundation **F.16** and pad **F.17**, linked to a staircase still in use today (Figs. 2 and 5). These foundations might be original to the building, which was erected in 1598-1602. The trench also exposed part of the northern, southern, and western original foundations of this part of the southern range of Second Court (**F. 18, 19, 20**), as well as the foundation of a modern internal wall (**F.23**) to the east (Fig. 2). A small 19th-century vaulted brick cellar **F.21** and earlier small brick storage space **F.15** were located to the north-east of the building and were part of different phases of use of the Buttery and kitchen (Figs. 6–7).

The uppermost deposit across the trench was the base of modern floor **F.22**, which comprised concrete and sand make-up **[31]** in flat cut **[32]**. This modern floor had been reduced prior to archaeological monitoring and was only preserved on a depth of *c.* 0.1m. At the eastern extremity of the northern segment of the trench, the excavation had exposed modern foundation **F.23**. This foundation was composed of brick and concrete rubble **[29]** and vertical cut **[30]**. It was observed for 1m and measured at least 0.4m wide and 0.3m deep.

Toward the middle of the northern part of the trench lay small brick cellar **F.21**. This structure measured 1.8m in length, 1.35m in width and was at least 0.93m deep. Its eastern and western walls **[23]** and **[24]** were made of yellow unfrogged bricks laid flat in a single line roughly bonded with off-white lime mortar. Southern wall **[25]** was made of the same bricks laid in a double row. No fourth wall was present as **[23]** and **[24]** abutted the foundations of the building. Vaulted arch **[26]** spanned the space between **[25]** and the building foundation: it was made of the same bricks laid on edge and was a single course thick or 0.11m. This arch was only preserved on a length of 0.75m on the western part of the structure and had been built partway down wall **[25]**. The start of **[26]** lay 0.48m down the preserved top of **[25]**. This small cellar was backfilled with rubble in a matrix of greyish yellow sand and silt **[27]**. Cut **[28]** was not observed and the base of **F.21** was not visible. Brick structure **F.15** was located to the east of **F.21** and also lay directly underneath modern floor **F.22**. Its eastern and western walls **[1]** and **[2]** were made of a single line of red unfrogged bricks laid flat roughly bonded with off-white lime mortar. Wall **[1]** was preserved to a depth of five courses, while wall **[2]** was preserved for eight courses. Southern wall **[3]** was of the same built and was preserved on at least eight courses. Similar to **F.21**, **F.15** abutted the building foundation, using it as its fourth wall. No signs of a cover or a vault was observed. **F.15** was backfilled with mix of yellow sand, grey sandy silt and mortar **[4]**. That the cut of **F.15 [5]** was not visible probably means the structure was trench-built: it measured 1.15m long, 0.8m wide and was around 0.62m deep. Its internal base was not visible.

The excavation of the trench exposed segments of the original northern, southern and western foundations of the building, which had been erected between 1598 and 1602. They are all similarly made of roughly hewn medium and large sized clunch blocks, roughly coursed and bonded with pale yellow mortar. Their internal edges were vertical, but not perfectly regular. Northern foundation **F.18** was composed of **[6]**, stepped out by 0.25m from the upper wall and exposed to a depth of 0.8m. Cut **[7]** had a vertical edge and was aligned east-west. **F.18** was also used as wall and support by Post-Medieval structures **F.15** and **F.21**. Southern foundation **F.19** was composed of **[8]**, similar to **[6]**, but only visible on 0.55m. Cut **[9]** was similar to **[7]**, with a similar orientation. Western foundation **F.20** was composed of **[10]**, similar to **[6]** and **[8]** but was stepped out by 0.38m for a visible depth of 0.55m. Cut **[11]** was aligned south-west to north-east.

Internal foundation **F.16** was located in the eastern part of the southern segment of the trench. It had been demolished prior to recording, but was still visible in section. This foundation consisted of roughly hewn clunch fragments in yellow to beige sandy mortar **[12]**. Linear cut **[13]** had vertical edges and was aligned south-west to north-east. It had been exposed for a 1m width and was 0.35m wide and at least 0.65m deep. It abutted southern foundation **F.19** and was the southern extremity of the foundation supporting the staircase located further north. This was probably original to the building as well, even if the staircase itself was not. Pad or foundation **F 17** was also linked to the construction of this staircase. Abutting **F.16** on its western side, it was composed of **[15]**, a mix of roughly hewn clunch blocks and fragments barely mortared with pale yellow sandy mortar. Its western extremity, which was visible in section, did not contain any mortar. Cut **[16]** had vertical to gradual sides, a flat base, and a potentially rectangular shape. It measured at least 2.8m in length and was 0.25m deep. It is not known if **F.17**, as **F.16**, abutted building foundation **F.19** as the excavation of the trench had removed this relationship. **F.17** would have constituted a dry and solid base for the stairs, in an area close to the Cam and therefore prone to become damp quickly.

No cut features were observed in the trench and a representative section was recorded toward the western extremity of the northern segment of the trench (Fig. 4). It showed that in that area, modern floor **F.22** lay directly on moderately loose and friable pale to mid grey sandy silt **[18]**, containing grit, chalk, charcoal, clunch and ceramic building material (CBM) inclusions. **[18]** was 0.28m deep. It overlay 0.24m deep **[19]**, a moderately compact dark brownish grey sandy silt with chalk, grit and gravel. Underneath lay 0.03m deep off-white mortar **[20]**, which in turn overlay 0.1m deep dark grey sandy silt **[21]** at the base of the trench. These layers were distinct in that area and were grouped under general layer **[22]**, which was recorded as a mixed grey sandy silt deposit present across the area. At the base of the exposed sequence loose and friable pale grey silt, sand and mortar mixed with CBM and chalk inclusions **[14]**. It abutted the eastern side of **F.16** and was only seen in section on a length of 0.9m. Deposit **[17]**, of a similar composition to **[14]** was observed in section abutting building foundation **F.18**. It was 1m long for at least 0.4m deep.

Architectural Recording

While the trench was being recorded a significant portion of the southern wall of the building had been stripped. A rapid record was made and photographs taken (Figs. 8–11). The bulk of the wall was constructed from red brick (typically *c*. 235mm long, 50mm thick), these and the mortar they were set in can be broadly dated to the 16th–early 18th centuries and are compatible with a date of 1598–1602. There were also some roughly faced stone blocks in the wall, principally clunch (typically ranging between *c*. 250–350mm long by 100–200mm high). The rather irregular size and nature of these suggests that they may be reused, but no architecturally diagnostic fragments were noted. There were two area where clunch blocks were more extensively used, (**F**–**G**, on plan). Five blocked arched recesses that can be related to the RCHM(E) plan were identified (**A**–**E**).

A: only partly revealed (*c.* 0.35m). Around 1.6m high above previous floor level. Blocked with yellow/white brick (c. 220mm long by 65mm thick) that is broadly 19th–early 20th century in character. (Figs. 8–9).
B: *c.* 2.7m high above previous floor level by 1.6m wide internally. Blocked with 20th-century red bricks. Within this blocking there was a smaller door like structure blocked with breeze blocks. Very similar to **C**. (Figs. 8–9).
C: *c.* 2.7m high above previous floor level by 1.6m wide internally. Blocked with 20th-century red bricks. Within this blocking there was a small hole blocked with breeze blocks. Very similar to **B**. (Fig. 8–9).
D: *c.* 1.8m high above previous floor level by 1.4m wide internally. The uppermost 0.55m was blocked with bricks and mortar indistinguishable from those of the main build of the wall, plus a wooden lintel, creating a flat upper surface. This either relates to the initial construction of the wall or occurred soon after during the 17th century. There was then further partial infilling in the 19th century, using yellow/white brick. This left an opening 1.1m wide and 1.2m high. This was later itself infilled in the 20th century, using red brick. (Figs. 8 and 10).
E: this was similar to D, but was not recorded in detail. This was infilled at some stage, probably in the 19th century using a mixture of original and later bricks leaving a smaller arched opening that is still open. (Figs. 8 and 11).

DISCUSSION

The relative shallowness and small size of the intervention mean that the archaeological sequence could only be partially observed and understood. The natural gravels were not reached: the base of the trench lay at *c.* 7.15m AOD and excavations in First Court and Chapel Court reached the natural gravels at 6.54 and 4.80m AOD respectively (Evans 1991, 5; Newman 2011,1). Such a difference of level can be explained by the presence of deep features, but also by the sloping of the natural gravels toward the river: previous work in the College and further south showed that the area was likely to have been part of the river Cam or its active floodplain. Such a slope toward the west was observed on riverside excavations and watching brief at Trinity Hall and Clare College (Alexander 1997; de Bruxelles, *in prep.*). It is therefore likely that at least 2m of stratigraphy are present below the base of the trench and that any early College or pre-College activity is too deeply buried to have been recorded in the trench.

The deposits observed in the trench (**[14]**, **[17]–[22]**) were probably part of a general levelling of the area, before or just after the construction of Second Court in 1598–1602 (Fig. 4). As an area that was part of the river or in its floodplain, reclamation and drainage became an important enterprise that started during the Middle Ages. A wide ditch, that could have been

used as a channel for small vessel, was discovered in Chapel Court, to the north of Second Court (Evans 1991) and a network of smaller ditches, dug perpendicular and parallel to the Cam, were part of that process. Despite these works, it is very probable that the area became damp quickly, and that further levelling was needed. Similar enterprises were recorded on the riverside at Trinity Hall and Clare College, and in the case of Trinity Hall, happened as late as the 17th century (Alexander 1997). The main structures pertaining to the College were the exposed foundations of the northern, southern, and western wall of that part of the southern range. Similarly built in clunch, they were constructed in 1598 – 1602, when Second Court was built. They support red brick walls, and the southern internal face still present remains of original arches (Figs. 9–11). The potentially reused clunch blocks in the elevation (**F**–**G**, on plan) could come from stocks of materials remaining after the demolition of the buildings of the Hospital of St John the Evangelist in 1511 or of the small court built in 1528. Original, or early, internal structures could also be observed: **F.17**, situated at the south-west of the building and made of clunch blocks, would have provided a dry and stable base for a structure as important as a staircase in an area close to the river and with such a history of flooding. **F.16** was part of that same staircase foundation, linking the structure to the building foundation itself (Fig. 5). This base still supports a staircase, made of bricks and wood, to this day.

The use of this space as a buttery or kitchen is highlighted by two structures that were discovered at the north of the room. **F.15**, a small red brick structure that might date from the 18th century (Fig. 7), and 19th century vaulted cellar **F.21** (Fig. 6) were probably used as underground storage space. The addition of different structures through time is a reminder that this space went through several refurbishment phases. The southern wall showed traces of heavy modifications in the 19th and 20th centuries with the arches being infilled (Fig. 8 – 11). The fact that different materials are used could also point to various phases of reorganisation in the modern era. So is the presence at the east of the room of modern internal foundation **F.23**: the space available was being adapted to the need of the period. The Community Hub project is in the continuity of this century long process.

Acknowledgments

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The project was managed by Ricky Patten and the recording was undertaken by Craig Cessford (architectural recording and photography) and Charlotte de Bruxelles (trench recording). The graphics were produced by Ellie Winter.

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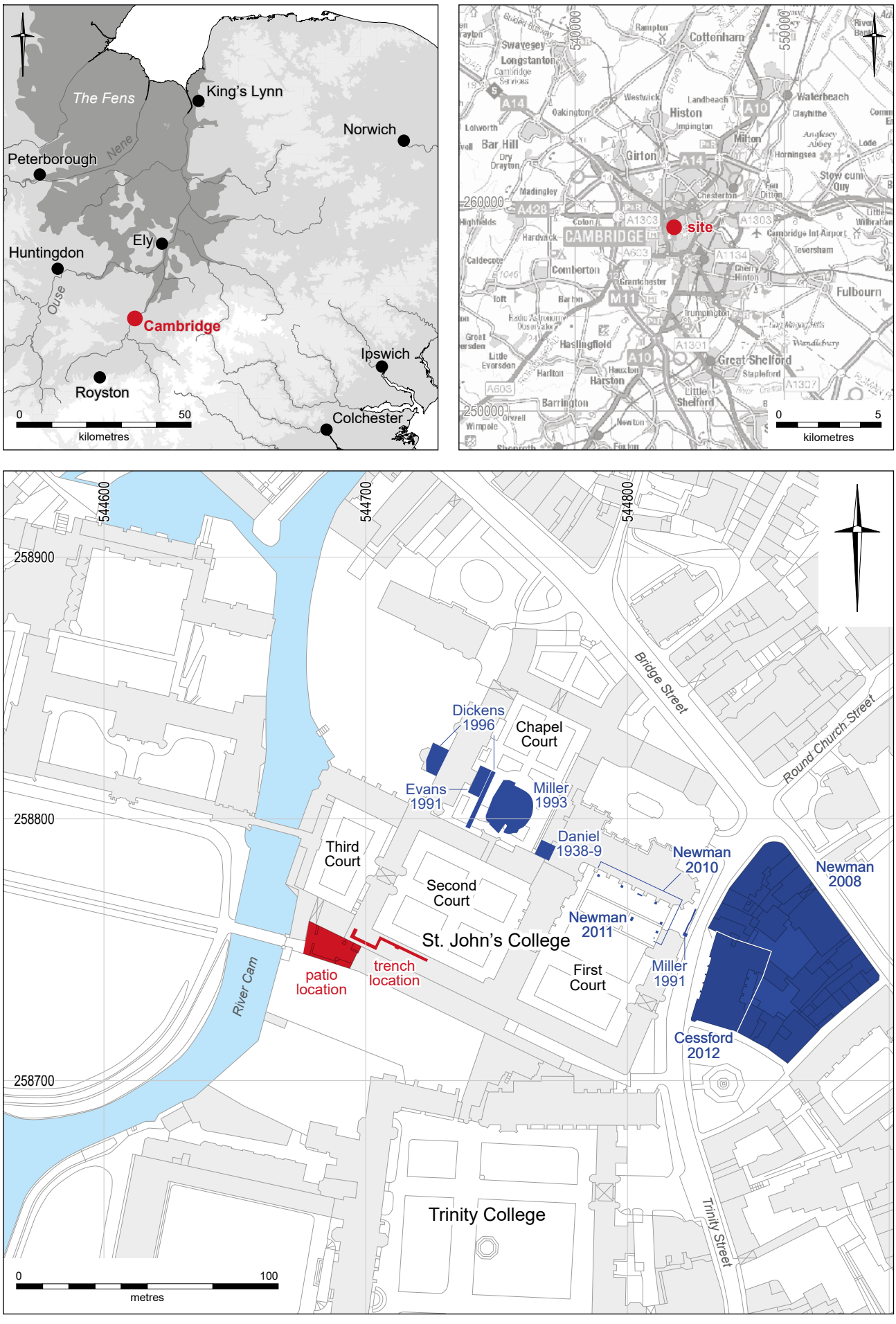

Figure 1. Site location

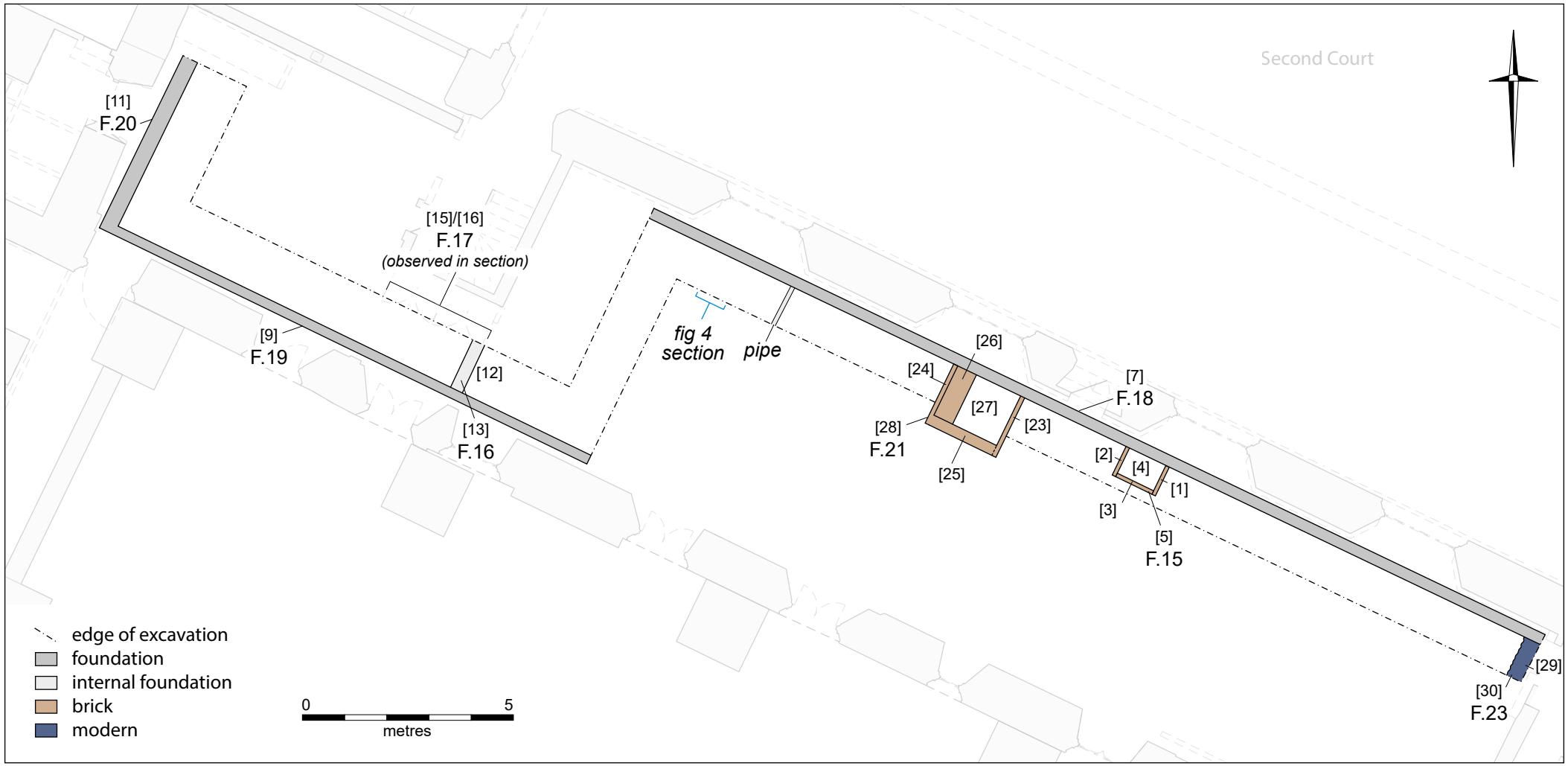

Figure 2. Trench plan

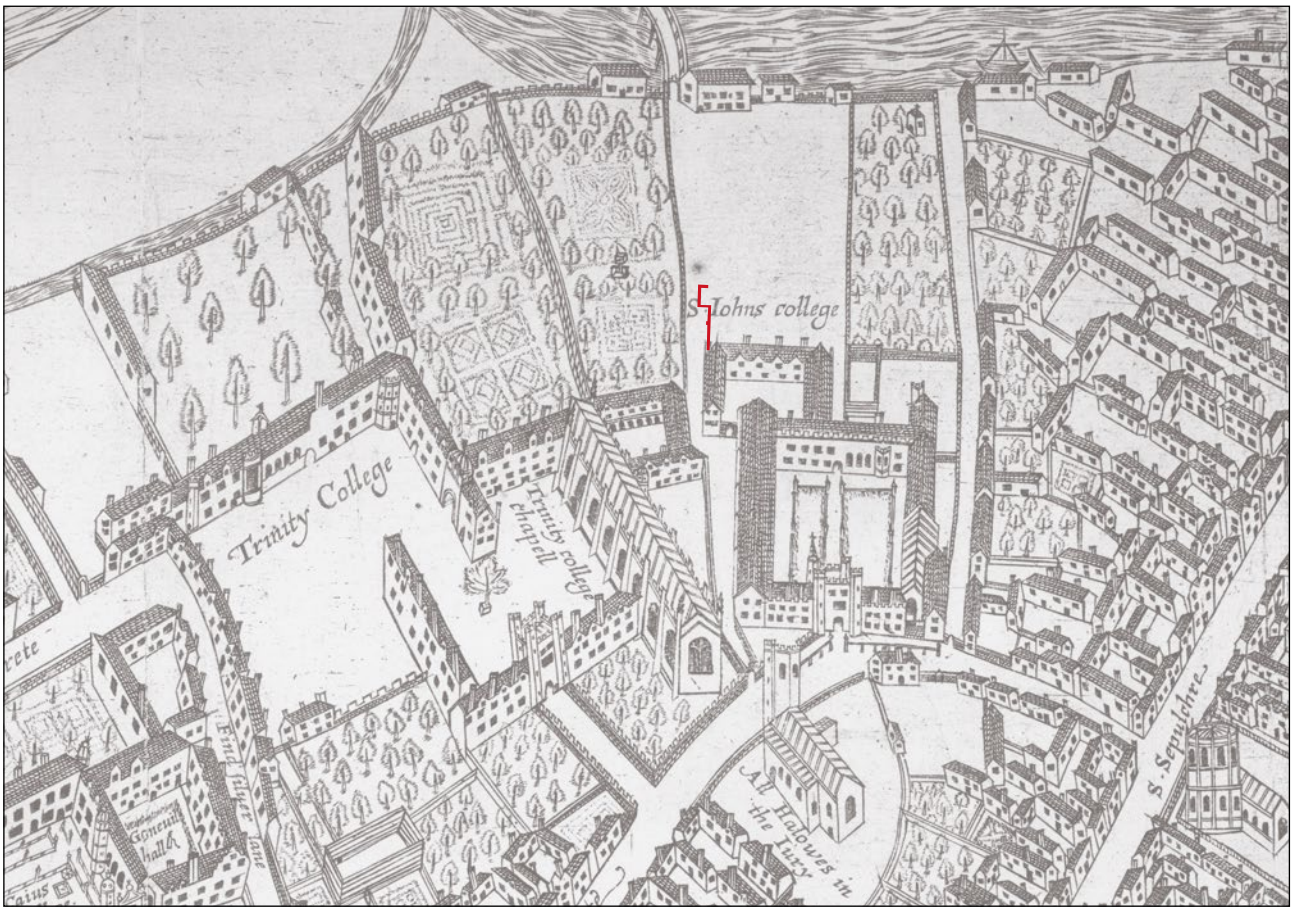

Figure 3a. Hammond, 1592

Figure 3b. David Loggan, 1688

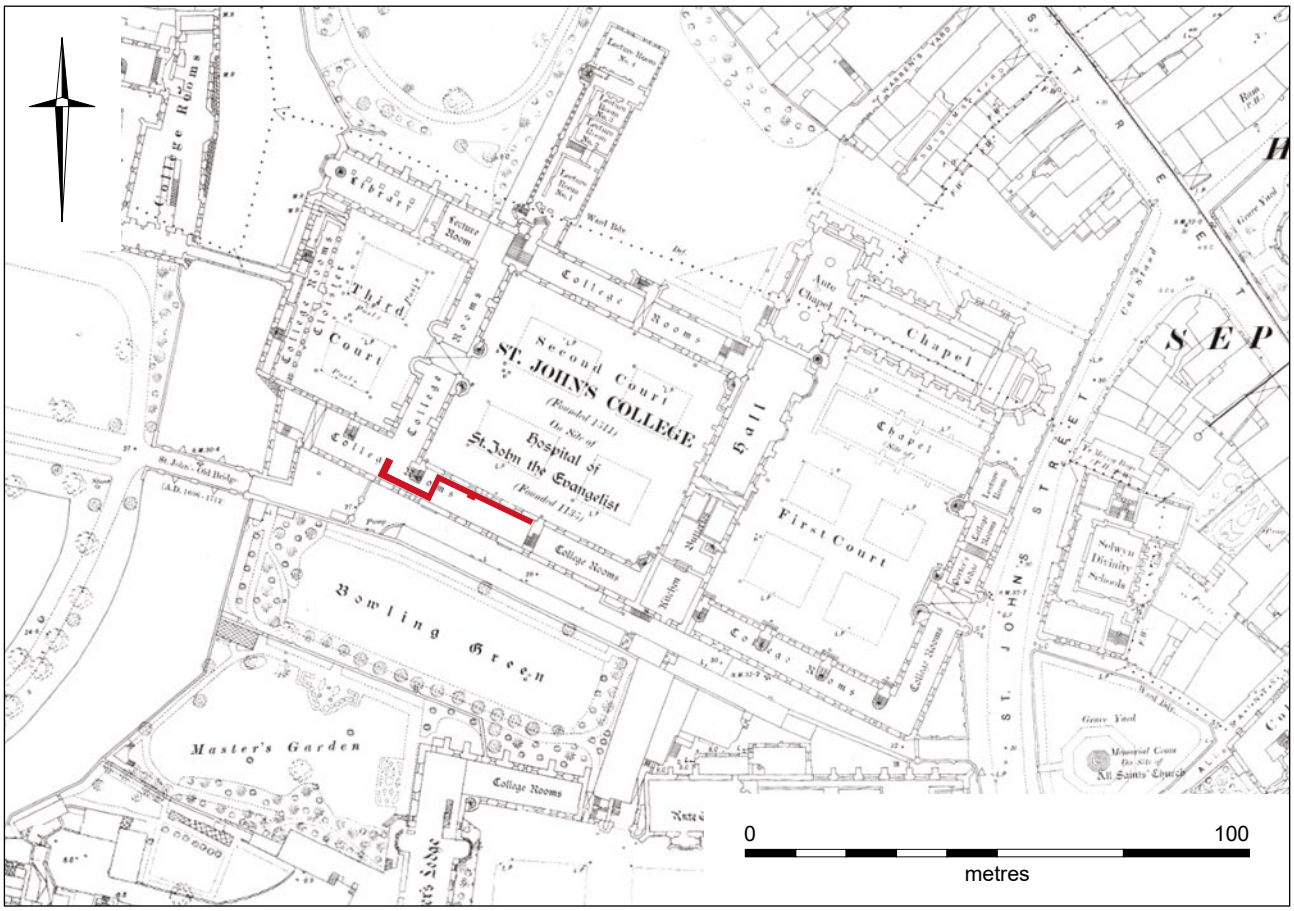

Figure 3c. Ordnance Survey 1886

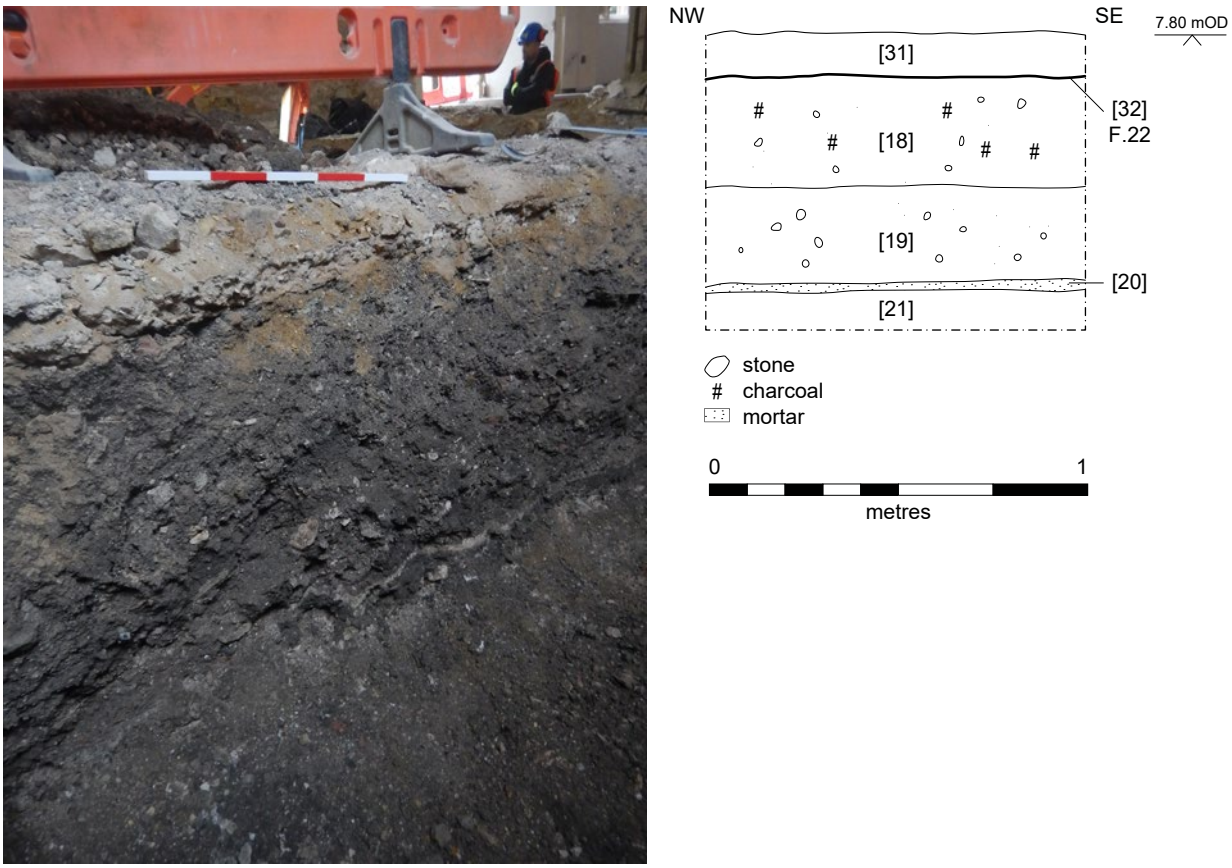

Figure 4. Representative section and photograph, facing north-east

Figure 5. Wall foundation F.16, facing north-east

Figure 6. 19th-century cellar F.21, facing north-west

Figure 7. 18th-century potential storage structure F.15, facing south-east

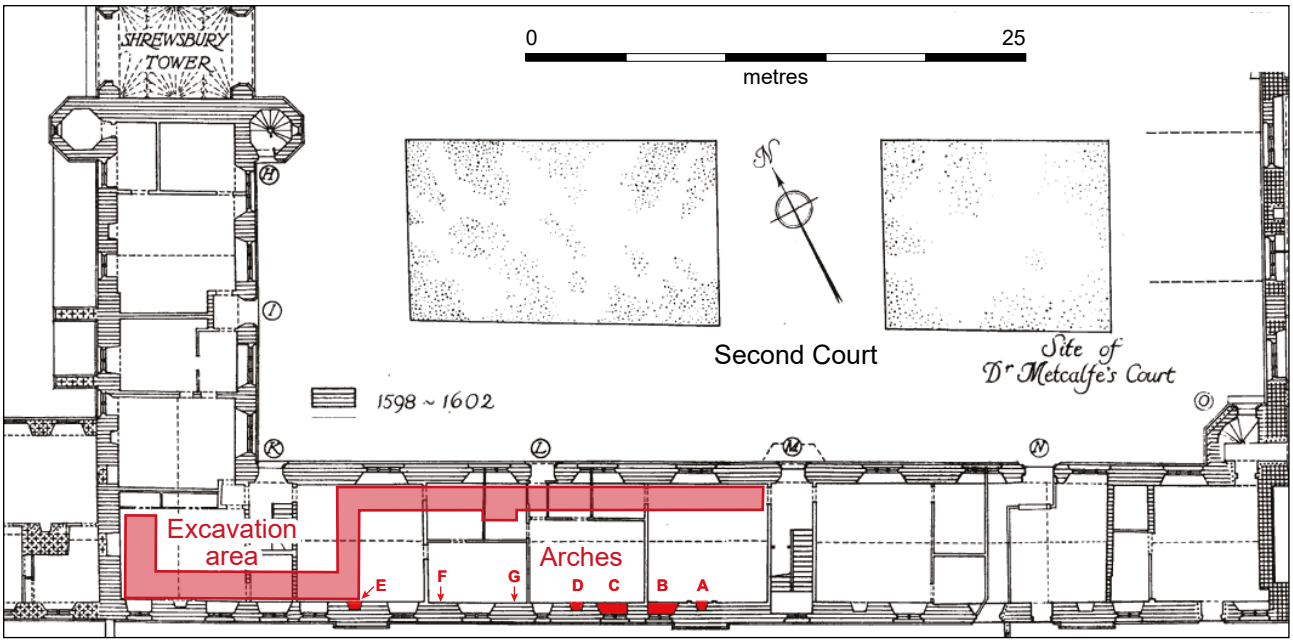

Figure 8. Location of the recorded arches (after RCHM(E) 1959)

Figure 9. Arches A to C, facing south-west

Figure 10. Arch D, facing south-west

Figure 11. Arch E, facing south-west

Appendix: Context List

Context	Feature	Type	F. Type	L (m)	W(m)	D (m)	Description
1	15	Other	Cellar	1.15	0.8	0.62	Red brick wall with off-white lime mortar
2	15	Other	Cellar	1.15	0.8	0.62	Red brick wall with off-white lime mortar
3	15	Other	Cellar	1.15	0.8	0.62	Red brick wall with off-white lime mortar
4	15	Fill	Cellar	1.15	0.8	0.62	Mix of yellow sand, grey sandy silt and mortar
5	15	Cut	Cellar	1.15	0.8	0.62	Rectangular, vertical sides, flat base?
6	18	Other	Wall foundation	22.5+	0.25+	0.8+	Roughly hewn medium and big clunch blocks roughly bonded with pale yellow mortar
7	18	Cut	Wall foundation	22.5+	0.25+	0.8+	Vertical sides, SE-NW
8	19	Other	Wall foundation	11.25+	0.25+	0.55+	Roughly hewn medium and big clunch blocks roughly bonded with pale yellow mortar
9	19	Cut	Wall foundation	11.25+	0.25+	0.55+	Vertical sides, SE-NW
10	20	Other	Wall foundation	4.5+	0.38+	0.55+	Roughly hewn medium and big clunch blocks roughly bonded with pale yellow mortar
11	20	Cut	Wall foundation	4.5+	0.38+	0.55+	Vertical sides, SW-NE
12	16	Other	Wall foundation	1+	0.35	0.65+	Roughly hewn clunch fragments in yellow to beige mortar
13	16	Cut	Wall foundation	1+	0.35	0.65+	Vertical sides, SW-NE
14		Layer	Layer	0.9	Unk.	0.4	Loose and friable pale grey silt, sand and mortar mixed with CBM and chalk inclusions
15	17	Other	Pad/Foundation	2.8	0.1+	0.25	Mix of roughly hewn clunch blocks and fragments barely mortared with pale Yellow mortar
16	17	Cut	Pad/Foundation	2.8	0.1+	0.25	Vertical to gradual sides, flat base, rectangular?
17		Layer	Layer	1	0.1+	0.4+	Loose and friable pale grey silt, sand and mortar
18		Layer	Layer	1+	Unk.	0.28	Moderately loose and friable pale to mid grey sandy silt
19		Layer	Layer	1+	Unk.	0.22	Moderately compact dark brownish grey sandy silt
20		Layer	Layer	1+	Unk.	0.03	Off-white mortar
21		Layer	Layer	1+	Unk.	0.1	Dark grey sandy silt
22		Layer	Layer	15+	Unk.	0.55+	Dark grey sandy silt with mixed inclusions
23	21	Other	Vaulted Cellar	1.8	1.35	0.93+	Wall. Yellow bricks bonded with off-white lime mortar
24	21	Other	Vaulted Cellar	1.8	1.35	0.93+	Wall. Yellow bricks bonded with off-white lime mortar
25	21	Other	Vaulted Cellar	1.8	1.35	0.93+	Wall. Yellow bricks bonded with off-white lime mortar

26	21	Other	Vaulted Cellar	1.8	1.35	0.93+	Arch. Yellow bricks bonded with off-white lime mortar
27	21	Fill	Vaulted Cellar	1.8	1.35	0.93+	Greyish yellow sand and silt
28	21	Cut	Vaulted Cellar	1.8	1.35	0.93+	Vertical sides, rectangular
29	23	Other	Wall foundation	1+	0.4 +	0.3 +	Brick and concrete rubble
30	23	Cut	Wall foundation	1+	0.4 +	0.3 +	Vertical sides, SW-NE
31	22	Layer	Modern Floor	15+	1.2+	0.1+	Concrete and sand make-up
32	22	Cut	Modern Floor	15+	1.2+	0.1+	Flat base

Summary for cambridg3-504058

OASIS ID (UID)	cambridg3-504058
Project Name	The Community Hub, St John's College, Cambridge. Archaeological Monitoring.
Activity type	Watching Brief
Project Identifier(s)	JCM21
Planning Id	
Reason For Investigation	Heritage management
Organisation Responsible for work	Cambridge Archaeological Unit
Project Dates	04-Nov-2021 - 04-Nov-2021
Location	St John's College, Cambridge NGR : TL 44710 58752 LL : 52.2079962374221, 0.116389871178317 12 Fig : 544710,258752
Administrative Areas	Country : England County : Cambridgeshire District : Cambridge Parish : Cambridge, unparished area
Project Methodology	A foundation trench was mechanically excavated by the contractor within the western part of the southern range of Second Court, St John's College. Recording of the archaeological sequence and structures exposed was carried out on 4 November 2021.
Project Results	Big grey silty deposits start the sequence in the trench at c. 7.15m AOD. They are truncated in the southwest of the building by a clunch foundation and pad linked to a staircase still in use today. These foundations might be original to the building, which was erected in 1598-1602. The trench also exposed part of the northern, southern, and western original foundations of this part of the southern range of Second Court, as well as the foundation of a modern internal wall to the east. A small 19th century vaulted brick cellar and an earlier small brick storage space were located to the north of the building and were part of different phases of use of the Buttery and kitchen.
Keywords	Cellar - POST MEDIEVAL - FISH Thesaurus of Monument Types Building - POST MEDIEVAL - FISH Thesaurus of Monument Types Wall - POST MEDIEVAL - FISH Thesaurus of Monument Types
HER	Cambridgeshire Historic Environment Record - unRev - STANDARD
HER Identifiers	HER Event No - ECB6821
Archives	Documentary Archive, Digital Archive - to be deposited with Cambridgeshire County Council County Archaeological Store