

St. George's Church, Thriplow, Cambridgeshire

Archaeological Monitoring



Dave Webb

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Summary

The Cambridge Archaeological Unit undertook two phases of archaeological monitoring at St. George's Church, Thriplow, Royston, Cambridgeshire. The first phase, which occurred between the 27th of May and the 2nd of June 2014, was associated with a pipe trench that crossed the churchyard from southwest to northeast. Sixteen unmarked and undated graves were encountered during the course of this work, along with a charnel pit and a general background presence of disarticulated human remains. A robbed-out wall probably marks the perimeter of an earlier iteration of the churchyard. The second phase of monitoring, which occurred on the 20th of May 2015, was associated with the construction of a small single-storey extension to the north of the nave. Here, a single interment was identified alongside a spread of trampled mortar and building debris that was potentially associated with either the construction or later repair of the adjacent nave.

Introduction

The Cambridge Archaeological Unit (CAU) undertook two phases of archaeological monitoring of works at St. George's Church, Thriplow, Royston, Cambridgeshire. The first phase, which occurred between the 27th of May and the 2nd of June 2014, was undertaken at the request of the church's architects, Archimage, on behalf of the church. The work involved laying utility service pipelines out to the road to enable a small future extension to the nave (Figure 2). This phase was covered under a Faculty issued by the diocese.

The second phase of monitoring, which occurred on the 20th of May 2015, was associated with the construction of the extension itself. Situated on the northern side of the nave (Figure 2), this single-storey extension will house additional toilet facilities. The second phase of work was undertaken in response to a condition placed on planning consent by South Cambridgeshire District Council and a brief issued by the Cambridgeshire Historic Environment Team (Gdaniec 2015). Methodologically, it followed the written scheme of investigation produced by the CAU (Dickens 2015).

Location and Topography

The church of Saint George's, Thriplow, is centred at TL44205 46956 and located on a high point of land on the north-east side of the village of Thriplow (a benchmark on the church's west face is 32.55m above sea level). The underlying geology is middle chalk. Layers of harder chalk (clunch) exist within the main layers and have been exploited as building material locally.

The village lies on a gentle north west facing slope of the Cam Valley, with the centre of the village located to the south west of the church. The main areas of the settlement are located on the higher ground surrounding the spring line.

Archaeological background

The Church is a Grade II* building. The main body of the church is 13th and 14th century in date, constructed of field-stone, Barnack stone, clunch and flint. Parts of the building (south transept, chancel and vestry) were substantially rebuilt in the 19th century.

Twelve sites and findspots predating the medieval period are noted in the Cambridgeshire Historic Environment Record within 500m of the church. These include a Palaeolithic (Acheulean/Middle Palaeolithic) hand-axe (HER10985) and a Neolithic ground and polished (? dolerite) axe (HER04220). Several cropmarks and earthworks are recorded, including a large tumulus in a field immediately southeast of the churchyard (HER04226). It was levelled in the early 19th century but partially excavated in the 1950s. A ploughed out barrow situated 201 metres southeast of the Church (which appeared as a prominent cropmark in barley in 1953), was also excavated by Cambridge Archaeological Field Club in the early 1950s (HER04286).

A further Bronze Age barrow (HER04226a) to the southeast of the church, with abutting rectangular enclosure to the west, has been identified from cropmarks and geophysical survey. Likely Roman period finds include a rectilinear enclosure partially (MCB17710) excavated in the 1950s with further geophysics, test pits and trenches in 2005-2008; a layer containing Roman pottery (HER04286c, dated C1 and C2 AD), including a Samian sherd, and a bronze fibula (dated 80-120 AD) were found during the excavations of the barrow at 04286 in 1953-4, with four Roman coins in further work in 2002.

MCB16724 was a pottery scatter including Iron Age, Roman, Saxon, medieval and Post-Medieval wares while MCB19833 was medieval (c. 850-1150) pottery sherds picked up whilst walking, including small sherds of St Neots and Developed St Neots (shell tempered/shelly ware).

Methodology

The objective of the monitoring was to determine the presence or absence and character of any surviving archaeological remains within the area of investigation, identify the location of any *in situ* human remains and recover any disarticulated human remains for immediate reburial in accordance with existing guidelines (Mays 2005; Brickley and McKinley 2004).

During the first phase of monitoring, the service trench was excavated by a mini-digger with a 0.3m-wide toothed bucket that was operated by the principal contractor under archaeological supervision. All potential archaeological features were then investigated and recorded. In total, an area of approximately 22 square metres was monitored. During the second phase of work, an identical methodology was followed. In this instance, an area of 18.9 square metres was monitored. During both phases, on-site recording was carried out using the CAU-modified version of the MoLAS system of archaeological recording (Spence 1994). All work was carried out in accordance with statutory Health and Safety legislation and within the recommendations of FAME (Allen and Holt 2010).

Results

Phase I: 2014

The pipe trench cut started at a point adjacent to a standpipe situated by the west wall of north transept and proceeded in a westerly direction (Figure 2). Occasional disarticulated human remains were encountered as the pipe trench was cut along the north facing side of the church, however no graves cuts were observed at this point. In addition to the human remains large animal bones were recovered including horse or cattle teeth and jaw fragments. The animal bones were only observed in the area of the graveyard to the north side of church.

At the northwest corner of main body of church the pipe trench continued in a south westerly direction across the west facade of the church and across the graveyard. At this point numerous unmarked graves were observed at fairly regular intervals, increasing in density towards the southern edge of the graveyard. A large quantity of disarticulated human remains was also observed, the result of disturbance from the cutting of new graves through older ones. At least sixteen in situ graves were observed within this area, however disturbance due to extensive tree rooting in the vicinity of the west façade and the presence of partially articulated remains suggests that the total number of graves in the area was higher. The graves are described below in Table 1.

Table 1: *In situ* grave descriptions

Grave	Depth	Age	Notes	Orientation
A	0.60m	Adult	Top of skull exposed in situ. Fill similar to sub-soil [002]	E-W
B	0.70m	Adult?	Ribs, vertebrae, radius and ulna exposed <i>in situ</i> . Fill similar to sub-soil	E-W
C	0.70m	Adult?	Various disarticulated leg bones, disturbed by extensive rooting. Fill similar to sub-soil	E-W
D	1.20m	Adult?	Lower legs and feet, including tibia, fibula, calcaneus and tarsals <i>in-situ</i> , some root disturbance. Fill a grey clayey silt distinct from adjacent sub-soil	E-W
E	1.20m	Adult and Juvenile	Charnel pit: various bones from several individuals. Fill a grey clayey silt with traces of yellowish grey chalky material (? lime) in fill, distinct from adjacent sub-soil	-
F	1.00m	Adult ?	Lower legs and feet including Tibia, Fibula, Calcaneus and Tarsals in-situ, removed by machine. Fill similar to sub soil	E-W
G	1.00m	Adult ?	Ribs, vertebrae, radius, ulna and top of pelvis exposed <i>in situ</i> . Grave cut on slightly different alignment. Fill similar to sub soil	SW-NE
H	0.80m	Adult	Top of skull exposed in situ. Fill similar to sub soil	E-W
I	1.20m	Adult	Skull and vertebrae, scapula, ribs and clavicle <i>in situ</i> . A pelvic bone was also present; either multiple burials in grave or disturbed and re-deposited material. Fill similar to sub soil, with yellowish sandy gravel and a chalky marl present in base of cut	E-W
J	1.10m	Juvenile	Skull and vertebrae of juvenile exposed <i>in situ</i> . Fill similar to sub soil chalky marl present in base of cut	E-W
K	1.10m	Adult	Adult skull exposed <i>in situ</i> . Fill similar to sub-soil present in base of cut	E-W
L	1.10m	Adult	Skull and vertebrae, scapula and clavicle <i>in situ</i> . Fill similar to sub soil present in base of cut	E-W
M	1.10m	Juvenile	Skull and vertebrae, scapula , ribs and clavicle <i>in situ</i> . Fill similar to sub-soil	E-W
N	1.10m	Adult	Skull and vertebrae <i>in-situ</i> . Fill similar to sub soil. Area disturbed by service trench	E-W
O	1.10m	Adult ?	Pelvis, left and right femur <i>in situ</i> . Fill similar to sub soil. Area disturbed by service trench	E-W
P	0.90m	Adult ?	Adult left and right femur <i>in situ</i> . Slight change in alignment. Fill similar to sub-soil	SW-NE
Q	1.10m	?	Fibula, calcaneus, tarsals, metatarsals and phalanges <i>in-situ</i> . Fill similar to sub-soil	E-W

To the southwest of the church the pipeline trench cut through the compacted gravel path leading from the church to Brook road. At this point a grave (Q) was discovered butting up against the remnants of a robbed out wall footing. No further burials were discovered south of this point as the trench continued towards the road. The stratigraphy at this point is described below in Table 2.

Table 2: Stratigraphy

Feature No.	Context No.	Depth	Notes
Churchyard stratigraphy			
1	001	0.00-0.20m	Top-soil: A greyish brown silty loam with a moderate frequency of well-sorted small to medium sub-rounded gravel inclusions
1	002	0.20-1.30m	Sub-soil: A reddish-brown silt with a moderate frequency of Moderately-sorted small to medium sub-angular gravel inclusions
1	003	1.30m+	Natural: A brownish grey silty clay
Church path			
2	004	0.00-0.30m	Path surface: Compacted stone cobbles with yellowish-brown sandy gravel
2	005	0.00-0.30m	Construction cut: Moderately steep-sided shallow cut with flat base
Robber Trench			
3	006	0.30-0.70m	Fill of robber trench: A greyish brown silt with a moderate frequency of moderately-sorted small to medium sub-angular gravel inclusions
3	007	0.30-0.70m	Cut of robber trench: An east to west aligned moderately steep-sided cut with a flat base. Width 0.70m
Construction Trench			
4	008	0.30-1.10m	Fill of construction trench: A grey sandy silt with a frequent poorly sorted small sub angular chalk inclusions and occasional poorly sorted large angular flint nodules.
4	009	0.70-1.10m+	Dump of construction material: A pale yellowish brown sandy mortar with frequent large angular flint nodules
4	010	0.30-1.10m+	Cut of construction trench: An east to west aligned near vertical sided cut extending beyond the limits of excavation truncated on north side by grave cut (Q). Width 0.90m

Phase II: 2015

In May 2015 the Cambridge Archaeological Unit returned to the site in order to monitor the excavation of a rectangular trench, measuring a maximum of 5.0m by 3.9m in extent and covering an area of 18.9 square metres. Situated on the northern side of the nave (Figure 2), this trench was dug as part of the groundworks associated with the construction of a small single-storey extension to the church (Dickens 2015).

Different portions of the trench were excavated to different depths. Across the majority of the area the limit of excavation lay at 31.65m OD. Around its periphery,

however, a deeper foundation trench measuring on average 0.75m in width was excavated to a depth of 31.35m OD. At no point during the excavation was natural geology observed; instead, the sequence primarily consisted of a homogenous mid brown clay silt cemetery soil with occasional gravel and disarticulated human bone fragment inclusions. A thin, discontinuous lens of trampled mortar, chalk and flint fragments was also observed. This probably represents the remnants of a working surface associated with either the initial construction of, or else a later alteration/addition to, the nave's fabric.

In addition, a single burial – Grave R – was identified (Figure 2). Oriented west-east, this extended, supine interment closely mirrored those previously identified further to the southwest; there was no evidence of a coffin, indicating that the body was probably shrouded. The grave-cut itself was difficult to distinguish – a common occurrence in intensively-occupied burial grounds, where the cemetery soil was repeatedly disturbed and consequently homogenised. Although no dating evidence was recovered, the apparent dearth of 18th/19th century burials to the north of the church suggests that it is most likely to be Medieval/Post-Medieval in origin.

Discussion

The main objective of the monitoring was to identify and locate any in situ burials that lay on the line the works, and recover any disarticulated human remains disturbed during the construction of the pipeline.

The in situ remains observed were mainly in unmarked graves in the main body of the graveyard to the west of the church, occurring at depths between 0.80m and 1.10m below ground level. The presence of a large quantity of disarticulated bone indicates that the churchyard has been subject to intense use in the past with episodes of re-use of the same ground for burials with the subsequent disturbance of earlier graves. The presence of a charnel pit (E) further supports the notion of reuse and clearance of earlier burials over time. Although a small number of coffin nails were recovered from the pipe trench, only a few of these were noted as being *in situ*.

Coffin stains, furniture and nails were also largely absent from the observed unmarked graves, which might suggest that local burial practise was for interment without coffins at that time. The unmarked graves probably date from a period prior to the majority of marked graves now visible within the churchyard, however without detailed excavation and study of the remains an 18th to early 19th century date can only be putative. Although disarticulated bones were recovered from within the subsoil in the area where the pipe cut ran as it traversed the northern side of the church, the absence of *in situ* burials encountered here suggests a less intensive use of this side of the churchyard with other areas to the south and west of the church being favoured for burial.

The remnants of a robbed-out wall (feature no. 4) revealed to the southwest of the church occur at a point close to the division between the more recent expansion of

the graveyard to the west and the earlier graveyard surrounding the church. The expanded graveyard occupies an area of land that is depicted as tree covered (possibly an orchard) on the 1886 OS map. The plot of land was to the rear of the farmhouse and buildings fronting on to Brook Road. The property division at the edge of the plot follows a NNW-SSE alignment whereas the wall appears to follow an east to west alignment at a point approximately three metres from the established east - west boundary. The alignment of the robbed out wall does not match the boundaries or structures shown on the Victorian maps, which may indicate that the structure dates from an earlier boundary around a smaller churchyard.

Acknowledgements

The project was commissioned by Archimage on behalf of St. George's Church, Thriplow, and was monitored by Kasia Gdaniec of Cambridgeshire County Council's Historic Environment Team; it was managed for the CAU by Alison Dickens. The fieldwork was undertaken by Dave Webb; Natasha Dodwell commented upon the human remains. A photographic archive was compiled by Dave Webb and the graphics for the report were produced by Bryan Crossan.

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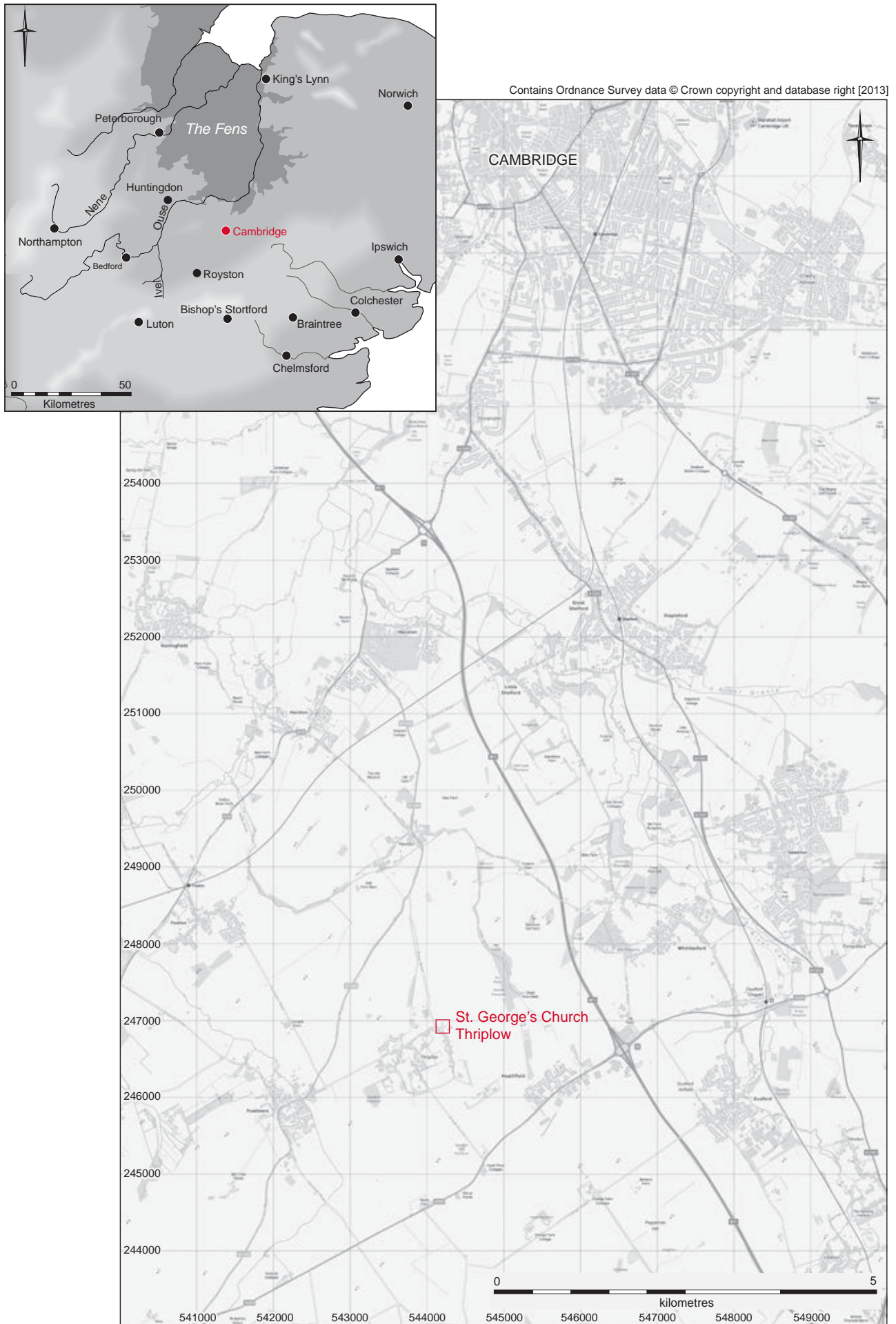


Figure 1. Site location

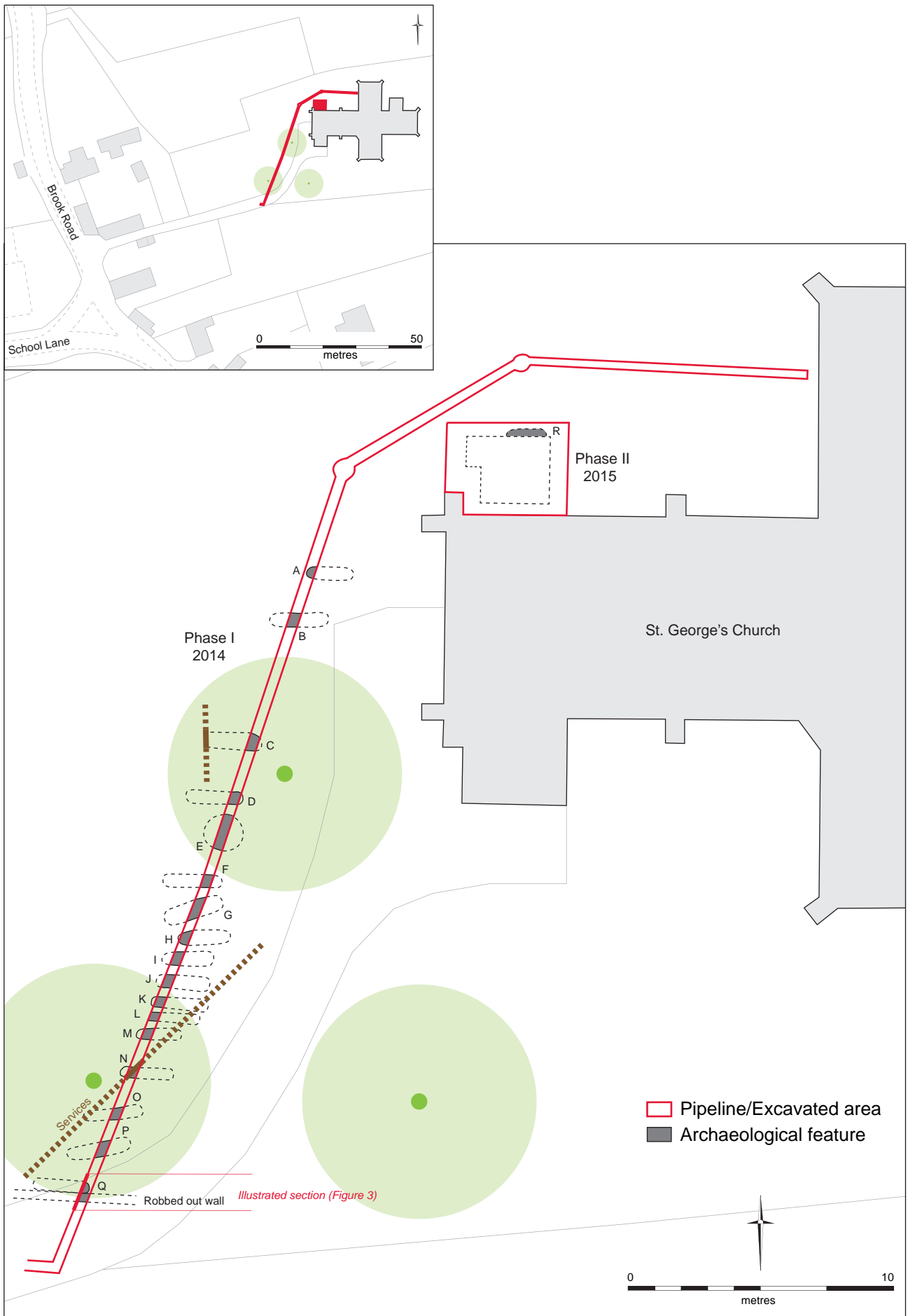


Figure 2. Plan of archaeological features

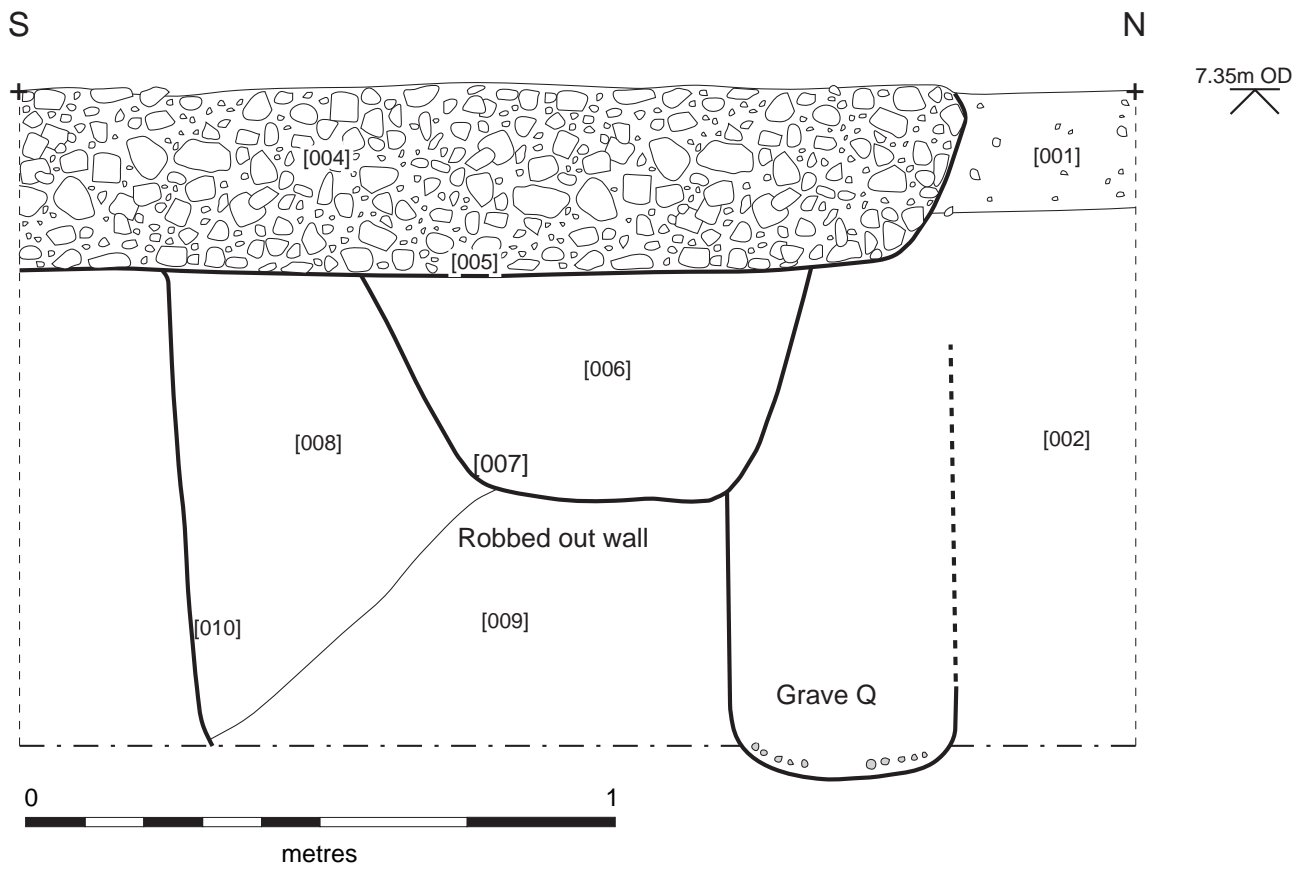


Figure 3. East Facing Section at Q Showing Robbed Out Wall Footing

Oasis Form

OASIS ID: cambridg3-194130	
Project details	
Project name:	St. George's Church, Thriplow
Short description of the project:	The Cambridge Archaeological Unit (CAU) undertook archaeological monitoring of pipelaying work at St George's Church, Thriplow, Cambridgeshire in June 2014. The works uncovered several unmarked graves a charnel pit and a background of disarticulated human remains within the confines of the churchyard. The material most likely originates from the late post-medieval period. A robbed out wall probably marks the extent of the graveyard at an earlier point in its development
Project dates:	Start: 27-05-2014 End: 02-06-2014
Previous/future work:	No / Not known
Any associated project reference codes:	TSG14 - Sitecode
Any associated project reference codes:	ECB4161 - HER event no.
Any associated project reference codes:	1598961 - NMR No.
Type of project:	Recording project
Site status:	None
Current Land use:	Other 4 - Churchyard
Monument type:	GRAVE Post Medieval
Monument type:	WALL Post Medieval
Significant Finds:	NONE None
Investigation type:	""Watching Brief""
Prompt:	Faculty jurisdiction
Project location	
Country:	England
Site location:	CAMBRIDGESHIRE SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE THRIPLow St. George's Church, Thriplow
Postcode:	SG8 7RF
Study area:	22 Square metres
Site coordinates:	TL 44205 46956 52.1016798851 0.105659501255 52 06 06 N 000 06 20 E Point
Height OD / Depth:	Min: 31.35m Max: 31.72m
Project creators	
Name of Organisation:	Cambridge Archaeological Unit
Project brief originator:	Parochial Church Council
Project design originator:	Alison Dickens
Project director/manager:	Alison Dickens
Project supervisor:	David Webb
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