

St Nicholas' Church, Dersingham, Norfolk:

Archaeological Monitoring



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**Archaeological Monitoring of a Gas Pipeline Installation at
St Nicholas Church, Dersingham, Norfolk**

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Summary

The Cambridge Archaeological Unit (CAU) undertook the archaeological monitoring of the preparatory works for the installation of a new gas pipeline at St Nicholas Church, Dersingham. During the monitoring material was recovered from the medieval and post-medieval periods, no archaeological features or structures were encountered.

1.1 Introduction

The Cambridge Archaeological Unit (CAU) undertook the archaeological monitoring of the cutting of a trench for the installation of a new gas pipeline at St Nicholas Church, Dersingham (TF 6932 3038) (28th June 2010). The evaluation was commissioned by Dersingham Parochial Church Council with the aim of establishing and recording the presence, date, condition and significance of any archaeological remains. The evaluation was carried out in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) produced by the CAU (Beadsmoore 2010). The WSI was approved and work monitored by Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service.

1.2 Location and Topography

The village of Dersingham occupies a position now inland from the Wash, below a chalk scarp to the east on the west Norfolk coast between Kings Lynn to the south and Hunstanton to the north. The village is located on Snettisham Clay and is adjacent to the scarp consisting of Middle and Lower Chalk overlying Carstone (British Geological Survey). The Church of St Nicholas is located in the centre of the village at grid reference TF 6933 3039. A bench mark on the North West corner of the Church tower is 3.18 ft (0.969 m) above the surface and was levelled with a height of 56.8180 ft (17.3181m) above mean sea level.

1.3 Archaeological and Historical Background

The Church of St Nicholas and its accompanying churchyard has been central to the village of Dersingham since the Norman period and possibly the Saxon period. The earliest material recovered in the parish indicating human activity is a group of Palaeolithic flints (NHER 1564) recovered in 1907; further Paleolithic artefacts have been recovered during more recent investigations to the east of the Church (NHER 14353). The field walking and metal detecting at the site recovered material from the Mesolithic through to the post-medieval period. Aerial photographic survey of this site has identified undated but probable late Iron Age and Roman features including an enclosure, linear features, ring ditches and pits (NHER 38276). Other sites within the parish have also produced material from the prehistoric period including two Neolithic axe heads (NHER 1566 and 17919) and a late Neolithic barbed and tanged arrowhead (NHER 1565). Bronze Age pottery and two flint scrapers were recovered during field walking between 1986 and 1987 (NHER 24261).

In addition to the Roman material recovered to the east of the Church (NHER 14353) a possible Roman salt works has been noted (NHER 3263) to the west of Dersingham along with other finds of pottery (NHER 1567, 23736 and 28262) and coins (NHER 16497 and 31246) across the parish. Early Saxon pottery has been recovered (NHER 1569) along with several scatters of Late Saxon Pottery (NHER 1577, 10831, 14354). Saxon metalwork has also been recovered within the parish (NHER 29986 and 24507). The entry for Dersingham (Dersincham) in the Domesday Book mentions a salt house and fishery. For the medieval period there is further evidence of occupation and exploitation of the landscape. Four possible moated sites are listed (NHER 1576,

1577, 1578 and 1579); other features include a deer park (NHER 33896) and a watermill (NHER 20341).

The current church was built on the site of a Norman church, initially a rectory given as a gift by Peter De Valognes who came over with William the Conqueror. It is suggested that the Norman church was preceded by a Saxon church as Saint Felix introduced Christianity to the region in the 7th century. However at present there is no archaeological evidence to confirm this notion. The current church was built in the early 14th century. with additions including the west tower being added in the late 15th century. Restoration work was undertaken in 1877 and 1911.

1.4 Methodology

The pipe trench was excavated by a team of three workman monitored by a member of the CAU. The trench was hand dug to a width of 0.30m and maximum depth of 0.65m, the trench extended for approximately 30m. The cut for the pipe trench commenced at a point adjacent to the exterior of the northeast corner of the north aisle turning northwards after a few meters to join the gravelled pathway that extends in an east to west direction on the north side of the church. The cut followed the pathway for approximately 25m before terminating at the gateway leading to Church Lane on the east side of the churchyard. The gravel pathway has been previously exploited as a “safe” route for service pipe trenches avoiding the obvious hazards of excavating in a graveyard. Any potential archaeological features and material were investigated and treated in accordance with the WSI drawn up by the CAU (Beadsmoore 2010) and the Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service (Gurney 2003). The recording was carried out following the CAU modified MoLAS system of archaeological site recording (Spence 1990). All work was carried out in accordance with statutory Health and Safety legislation and with the recommendations of SCAUM (Allen & Holt 2005).

2.1 Results

The trench commenced adjacent to the buttress at the north east corner of the north aisle and continued for 3m in an easterly direction before following the course of a North-South aligned gravel path leading from the north side of the church. The trench followed the path for 3m before turning in an easterly direction following the course of an east-west gravel path aligned parallel with the north side of the church.

The initial cut across the grassed area adjacent to the church revealed a dark grey humic sandy loam top soil (depth 0.00m – 0.15m); beneath this was a reddish brown sandy subsoil. As the cut continued and followed the gravel path the upper strata comprised a layer of compacted gravel (depth 0.00 – 0.05m) overlying a layer of made up ground (depth 0.05 – 0.30m) consisting of building rubble. The made up ground beneath the gravel path included some material (glass, slate and stone) that could have originated from the later restoration work of the Church; however, some of the material (eg; red brick, grey pantiles) could not be matched with the fabric of the Church or adjacent structures.

Due to the method of excavation most material was recovered from upcast or the spoil heap, a few items were recovered from 'in situ', but the context for most items is not precise. No material of archaeological significance was recovered in the initial cut of the pipe trench until the course of the cut reached the east to west gravel path. Between 5 to 6m from the point of joining the east to west path several fragments of disarticulated human bones were recovered from the subsoil at a depth of approximately 0.40 – 0.50m (Fig 2; A). Two vertebrae were articulated but overall the remains do not appear to be a primary burial and it is more likely that they result from disturbance of graves in the Churchyard due to the cutting of other services or graves in the vicinity. The material recovered was located between gravestones for Edward Henry Thorton (1908) to the south and George Kiddell (1895) to the north.

Between 15 to 20 meters along the gravel path a quantity of animal bones (Fig 2; B) were recovered from the layer of made up ground (depth 0.05 – 0.30m). Other material included slate tiles, glass, stone (similar to material used for the church), red brick and grey pantiles. The animal bone recovered included cow, sheep/goat and red deer. Many of the bones exhibited marks typical of de-fleshing for meat, in particular some of the vertebrae had been chopped in a manner typical of 16th century butchery. The recovery of large quantities of butchered animal bone and building fabric that could not be matched to any buildings in close proximity to the church yard suggests that the made up ground originated from elsewhere, possibly a local farmyard. A fragment of dressed stone, semi-circular in profile, was also recovered and may have been a mullion from the church discarded during alterations to the church. A dark greyish brown sherd from a jar lid probably originates from the Roman period.

Between 24 to 25m along the gravel path a quantity of animal bones were recovered (Fig 2; C) from the layer of made up ground (depth 0.05 – 0.30m), from the lower sub soil fragments of disarticulated human bones were recovered along with fragments of possible medieval pottery.

3.1 Conclusions

No intact burials were disturbed during the laying of the pipeline although human remains were recovered. The origin of the bones recovered is most likely the general background of disturbed material that accumulates in a longstanding graveyard where earlier graves have been disturbed by cuts for newer graves over the centuries. The material recovered from the layer of made up ground as previously suggested is likely to have originated from outside of the graveyard.

Acknowledgments

The work was commissioned by Dersingham Parochial Church Council and the site was monitored by Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service. Emma Beadsmoore was the project manager. Bryan Crossan digitized the plans and prepared the graphics. Co-ordination with IG Jacksons was provided by Aubery Smith.

References

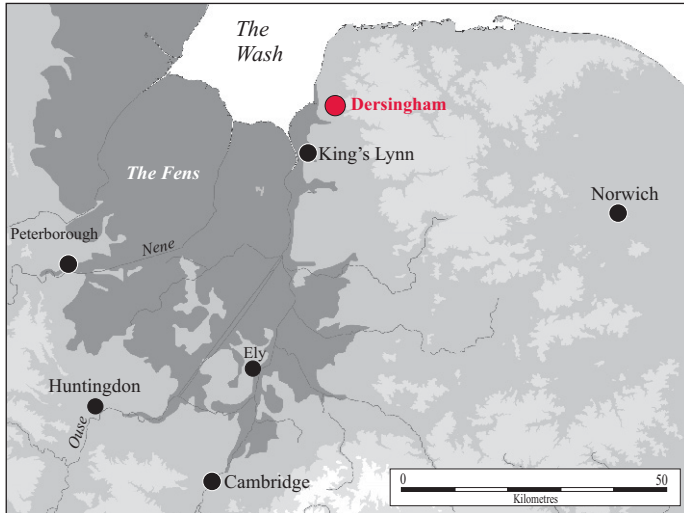
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Figure 1. Site location

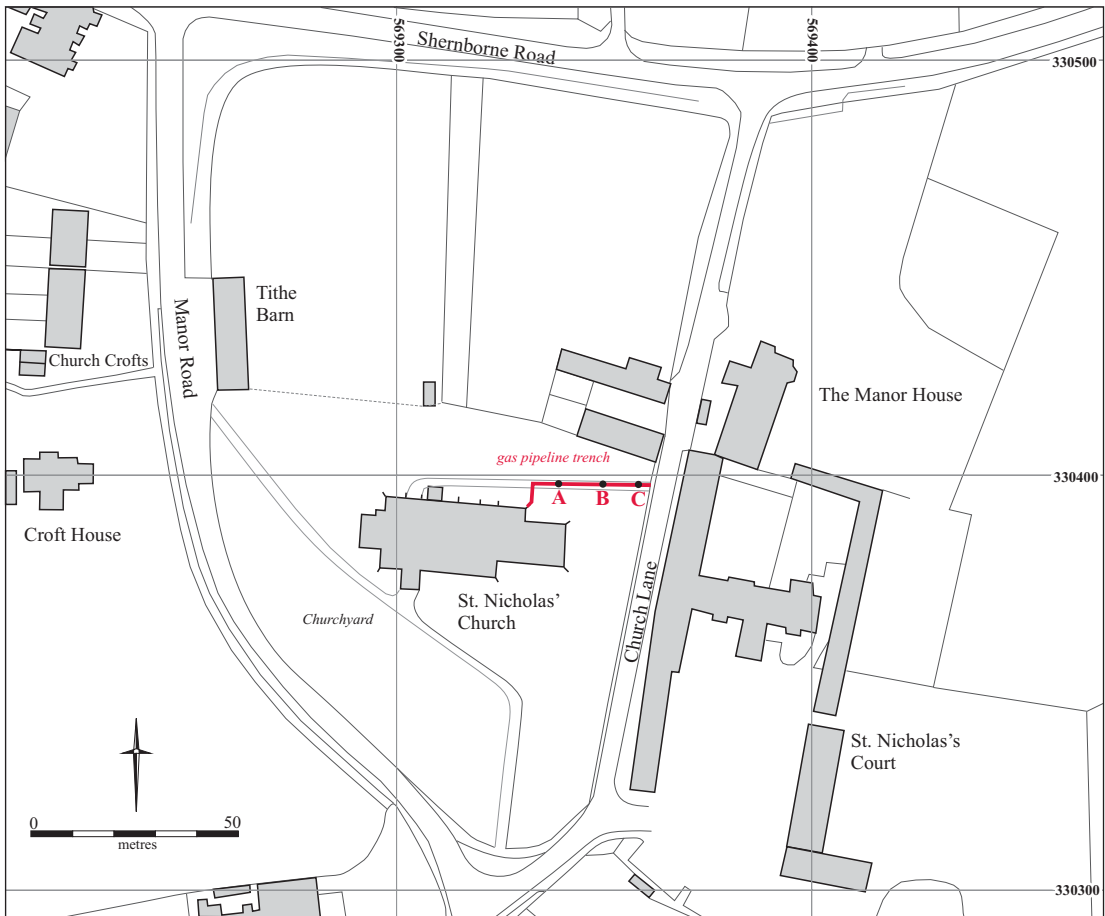


Figure 2. Location of gas pipeline trench (above) and photograph looking east along the trench (below)

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Project details

Project name	Archaeological Monitoring of a Gas Pipeline Installation at St Nicholas Church, Dersingham, Norfolk
Short description of the project	The Cambridge Archaeological Unit (CAU) undertook the archaeological monitoring of the preparatory works for the installation of a new gas pipeline at St Nicholas Church, Dersingham. During the monitoring material was recovered from the medieval and post-medieval periods, no archaeological features or structures were encountered.
Project dates	Start: 28-06-2010 End: 28-06-2010
Previous/future work	Not known / No
Any associated project reference codes	ENF 124571 - HER event no.
Type of project	Field evaluation
Site status	Listed Building
Site status (other)	Church graveyard
Monument type	CHURCHYARD Early Medieval
Monument type	CHURCHYARD Post Medieval
Significant Finds	ANIMAL BONE Uncertain
Significant Finds	HUMAN BONE Uncertain

Project location

Country	England
Site location	NORFOLK KINGS LYNN AND WEST NORFOLK DERSINGHAM St Nicholas Church, Dersingham, Norfolk
Postcode	PE31 6GZ
Study area	0.03 Kilometres
Site coordinates	TF 6932 3038 52.8438948651 0.514413923234 52 50 38 N 000 30 51 E Line
Height OD / Depth	Min: 17.30m Max: 17.30m

Project creators

Name of Organisation	Cambridge Archaeological Unit
Project brief originator	Parochial Church Council

Project design originator	Emma Beadsmoore
Project director/manager	Emma Beadsmoore
Project supervisor	David Webb
Type of sponsor/funding body	Parochial Church Council
Name of sponsor/funding body	Church of England (St Nicholas' Parochial Church Council)

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Digital Archive recipient	Cambridge Archaeological Unit
Digital Archive ID	ENF 124571
Digital Contents	'Animal Bones', 'Human Bones'
Digital Media available	'Images raster / digital photography'
Paper Archive recipient	Cambridge Archaeological Unit
Paper Archive ID	ENF 124571
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Paper Media available	'Drawing', 'Plan', 'Report', 'Section'

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