

# Basement of No. 5, Castle Street, Cambridge

An Archaeological Evaluation



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UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE**  
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## *Summary*

*A single evaluation trench, excavated between the 31<sup>st</sup> August and 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2010 in the basement of no. 5 Castle Street, Cambridge demonstrated a high level of truncation of earlier archaeological features associated with the construction of the present buildings in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the construction for the capping of a well/spring head immediately beneath the original floor of the cellar.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken in the basement of No. 5 Castle Street, Cambridge between 31<sup>st</sup> August and 3<sup>rd</sup> September in order to ascertain whether remnant archaeological features had survived the effects of previous construction within the current building footprint. The work was undertaken on behalf of the University of Cambridge Estates Management and Building Service in advance of proposals for the expansion of the Kettle's Yard Art Gallery.

### **Location, Topography and Geology**

The geology of the base of Castle Hill, Cambridge comprises of a promontory of Gault clay overlain by lower chalk marl and capped by Pleistocene sands and gravels. The evaluated area lies at the mid point of the raised topography forming Castle Hill at an elevation of 8.13m OD (basement level) and 10.13m (street level); 45m to the north of the junction of Castle Street and Northampton Street/ Chesterton Lane (TL 446 591). The Castle Hill area lies at the junction of three main geological zones, namely the fenlands to the north, the Gog Magog hills to the south-east and the Huntingdonshire plateau to the west. The River Cam lies to the south at the base of the hill, which has been shown to have been navigable to the sea during the Romano-British and Early Medieval periods (Dickens 2002; Hickling 2004).

### **Methodology**

A single test-pit, 1.5m square was excavated by hand within the basement of the property. The uppermost layer of concrete was removed with a band-saw and underlying deposits excavated stratigraphically. Due to advice from the structural engineer, the trench could not be placed closer than 1m to pre-existing walls. All exposed deposits were recorded prior to removal and the spoil of each was hand sorted and metal detected in concordance with the requirements of the written scheme of investigation (Standring 2010).

The excavation of all archaeological features was carried out by hand. Sections at a scale of 1:10 were recorded for each side of the test pit. The recording followed a CAU modified MoLAS system (Spence 1990) whereby numbers (fill) and [cut] were assigned to individual contexts and feature numbers, F., to stratigraphic events. All work was carried out in strict accordance with statutory health and safety legislation and with recommendations of SCAUM (Allen & Holt 2002). The site code is KYE10.

### **Archaeological and Historical Background**

The area of Castle Hill has been the focus for much archaeological investigation; with large excavations focussed on the location of the Roman administrative centre at Shire Hall and associated defences (Alexander and Pullinger 2000; Ten Harkel 2006), as well as numerous smaller archaeological evaluations, test-pitting exercises and desktop assessments within the region of Castle Hill (eg. Alexander 1996, Butler 1994, Dickens & Armour 2002, Cessford 2003). Only a brief outline of the Archaeological background of the area needs therefore to be repeated here. Three

archaeological exercises, at Kettles Yard (Evans 2004) to the north of the current area of investigation, and at the County Folk Museum (Dickens & Armour 2002, Cessford 2003) immediately to the south, and therefore closest to the current investigations will be discussed in more depth.

The earliest indication of settlement within the environs of Castle Hill appears to be represented by a Late Bronze Age Ditch with postholes and flint scatter identified within the area of New Hall and Fitzwilliam College (Evans 1996, Slater 2008) with a probable contemporary domestic structure (Slater 2008). A larger quantity of Middle and Later Iron Age occupation was identified with the presence of a ditch system within New Hall (Evans 1996), although a focus of Iron Age settlement appears to be centred on the crest of the hill, overlooking the river (Dickens and Armour 2002), where enclosures, pits and ditches of both Middle and Late Iron Age date were encountered (Alexander and Pullinger 2000), the latest of these ditches were still in existence when the *Via Devana*, the Roman Road to Godmanchester was constructed (Dickens 2002).

The Roman and Romano-British presence also appears focussed at the crown of Castle Hill with a notable reorganisation of the Late Iron Age settlement prior to construction of a possible small fort to guard the crossroads of the *Via Devana* and Akeman Street. The former road has been shown to follow the current alignment of Castle Street (Mortimer & Regan 2001) before crossing the river. First century activity was identified at Albion Row (Dickens & Armour 2002) and contemporary iron furnaces were located at the Pound Hill dairy site, approximately 40m to the south-east of the evaluated area (Pullinger 1983/ 1984). The earliest dated activity identified during the 2003 excavations at the Folk Museum, to the immediate south-west of the current evaluation was identified as a beam slot for a 1<sup>st</sup> century building (Cessford 2003) which showed evidence of occupation into the 2<sup>nd</sup> century.

Romano-British use of the hilltop area expanded significantly during the second century; with the first century fort being replaced by a better defined set of gravelled streets aligned with the *Via Devana* laid out with evidence of a sizable, albeit initially poor, settlement extending along the hilltop towards Chesterton. A centre of higher status buildings developed on Castle Hill, with the status and size of the flourishing settlement being shown by the identification of Romano-British cemeteries along Fen Road and Madingley Road (Dickens and Armour 2002).

Following a notable decline in size and possibly population of the Castle Hill Romano-British occupation during the third century, the fourth century saw a large reorganisation of the settlement and a rapidly constructed defensive perimeter surrounding an area of approximately 15 hectares. The reason for this relatively sudden fortification has been heavily debated and may be related to increased Germanic incursions from the Wash along the Cam. The defences formed an irregular polygon with a gate at each side, three of which have been located: The north-west gate at the junction of Shelly Row and Huntingdon Road, the western gate at the junction of Albion Row and Mount Pleasant Row. The north-eastern entrance was identified by the round bastion tower adjacent to where Akeman Street passed through the defences.

The southernmost gateway, where the current Castle Street or the *Via Devana* passed through the defences, has not been identified; although it has been suggested that the defensive ditches ran east-west immediately to the north of the current evaluation (Alexander & Pullinger 2000). Industrial activity has been encountered within the defensive perimeter at Akeman Street (Dickens 2002) a processing tank, possibly for flax production was identified at the Kettles Yard excavation (Evans 1994) along with what was described as a 'working terrace'. Similarly evidence of industrial processes was found outside the ditches, e.g. New Hall (now Murray Edwards College) showed evidence of tanning (Evans 1996). Interestingly, no later Romano-British activity was identified within the 2003 excavation at the Folk Museum, with a notable 2<sup>nd</sup> century presence being sealed by 9-11<sup>th</sup> century activity.

Post-Roman occupation of the environs of Castle Hill is shown to be very low during the Early Saxon period, with a notable 'dark-earth' being identified over the latest Romano-British settlement (Alexander & Pullinger 2000). Middle Saxon activity was similarly scarce, with historical records referring to a large ditch, the *Cambridge Waterway*, located between the southernmost Romano-British town walls and the Saxon Bridge and which appears to represent the moving of the focus of the town to the south side of the Cam. Drainage ditches, postholes and a floor possibly contemporary with this were identified between the ditch and the river (Alexander *et al.* 1980). At Chesterton Lane corner part of a cemetery including decapitated inhumations and dating to the late 8<sup>th</sup> century was identified (Mortimer & Regan 2001). A pit, thought to be the base of a sunken or semi-sunken building was identified within the folk Museum excavation (Cessford 2003) with a suggested date of 9-11<sup>th</sup> century.

Historically, the Danish Army is recorded as being stationed on the north side of the bridge in the late 9<sup>th</sup> to early 10<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Cam being at this time the border of the East Anglian and Mercian kingdoms. Very little archaeology associated with this occupation has been identified; small parts of two enclosures and several pits containing Danish coins of the early 10<sup>th</sup> century were identified at Ridgeons Gardens (Dickens & Armour 2002). Later Saxon activity is not strongly represented in the archaeological record in the Castle Hill area either, with features and ceramic being identified at Ridgeons Garden, Gloucester Terrace and Peters Street (*ibid.*), suggesting the alignment of the Romano-British road guided the settlement development to the northern side off the river. The foundation of three churches, St. Peters, St. Giles and All-Saints by the Castle, as recorded in the Domesday Survey, suggests a population sufficiently large to warrant their presence.

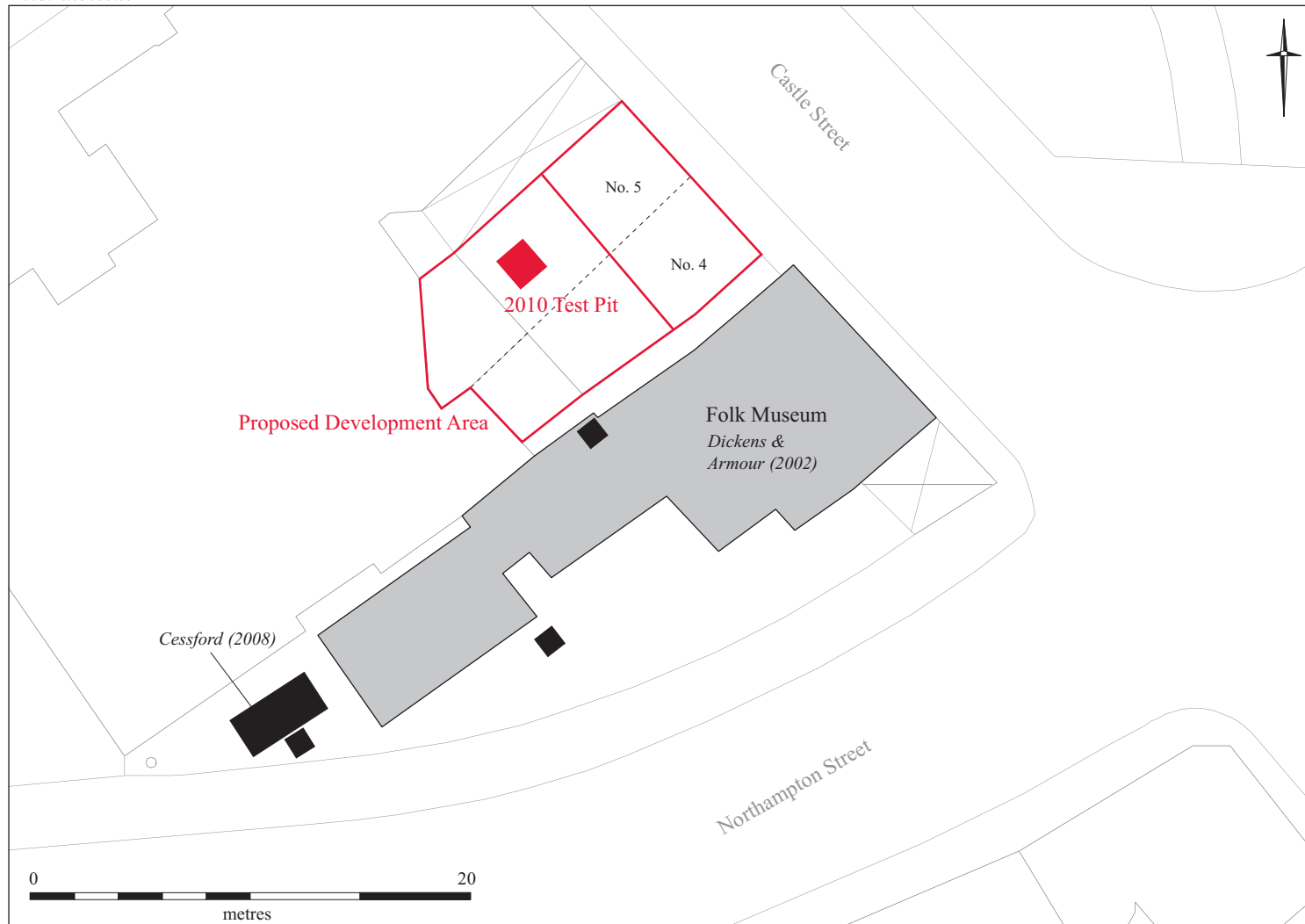
Conquest, Medieval and early Post-Medieval activity within the Castle Hill area is focussed on the construction of the administrative centre there; beginning with a timber motte and bailey (1068) with a 12<sup>th</sup> century stone remodelling and 13<sup>th</sup> century extension, utilising masonry from the still partially standing Romano-British walls. Hollow ways demonstrate that the Romano-British entrances are still being utilised at this time. Industrial, occupation and burial activity have been recorded around the periphery of the civil centre. Medieval burials associated with St Peters Church, 60m to the north of the area of evaluation (Evans 1994) attest to the continued use of the church. Higher quantities of Medieval and post-Medieval activity, through a near complete 12-19<sup>th</sup> century ceramic sequence with no identified structures apart from



Figure 1. Location map



44553.18/59077.67



44611.79/59035.58

Figure 2. Proposed development area with location of Test Pit and other sites mentioned in the text

the possibility of multiple yard surfaces was identified approximately 15m to the south-east of the current area of investigation (Dickens and Armour 2002). Excavation approximately 25m to the south-west (Cessford 2003) showed more medieval activity with pits large containing 11<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> century wares as well as evidence of threshing and food production. No structural components were exposed although a fragment of window glass suggested a high status property was in the vicinity.

The earliest reliable cartographic record of the evaluated area, Lyne's 1574 map shows a row of buildings along the west side of Castle Street, with open ground behind, where the test pit was excavated. This is replicated on the 1634 Fuller's map. By the 1688 Loggan Survey, the PDA comprises of a longer building extending west from Castle Street and enclosing the test pit. The 1885 Ordnance survey shows a similar footprint of the property, but shows the rear of the property to be as a walled yard with the first indication of the steps that currently lead to the basements.

## **RESULTS** (Fig. 3 & 4)

The evaluation test-pit within the cellar floor was excavated through mostly 19<sup>th</sup> century deposits associated with the construction of the basement and property of 5 Castle Street. The two lowest deposits within the test-pit were representative of the underlying geological sequence at the base of Castle Hill: [1010] was sterile bluey-grey Gault clay (identified by auger). This was overlain by a series of sterile, well laminated sand and gravel bands with a thick band of sandy marly clay [1006].

The earliest identified archaeology within the test-pit was a shallow, vertically sided linear feature, **F.1001**, likely to represent the foundations of a wall cut, truncating sand [1005]. The cut [1012] was filled with redeposited gravels [1013] suggesting it to be robbed out and no material culture was recovered from it. Later truncation made the alignment of F. 1001 unclear.

F. 1001 was truncated by a large, deep pit [1008], **F.1000**, dug through gravel [1006]. The full extent and depth of F.1000 was not identified although it is likely that it was not excavated to the upper horizon of the underlying Gault clay (see below). A notable moistening of the sands at the base of the cut was noted during excavation.

In the base of [1008] was located a circular brick structure 1.2m in diameter and 0.4m in exposed height [1005]. Constructed of un-frogged straight bricks in uneven courses forming a dome, the bricks of [1005] were sealed and covered with thick, compacted lime mortar. Two lead pipes, 60mm in diameter protruded from approximately half way up [1005] and extended beyond the limit of excavation to the south and east.

The base of cut [1008] was filled by a thin deposit of compacted grey-blue clay [1011] which probably originated from the underlying Gault clay, and partially covered the lower excavated part of the brick dome. The primary fill of [1008] overlying the clay was a compacted sandy clay [1007] with occasional brick, tile and other building fragments (mortar and slate). The compacted nature of the deposit suggests it was deliberately compacted, possibly to further stabilize the base of brick structure [1005].

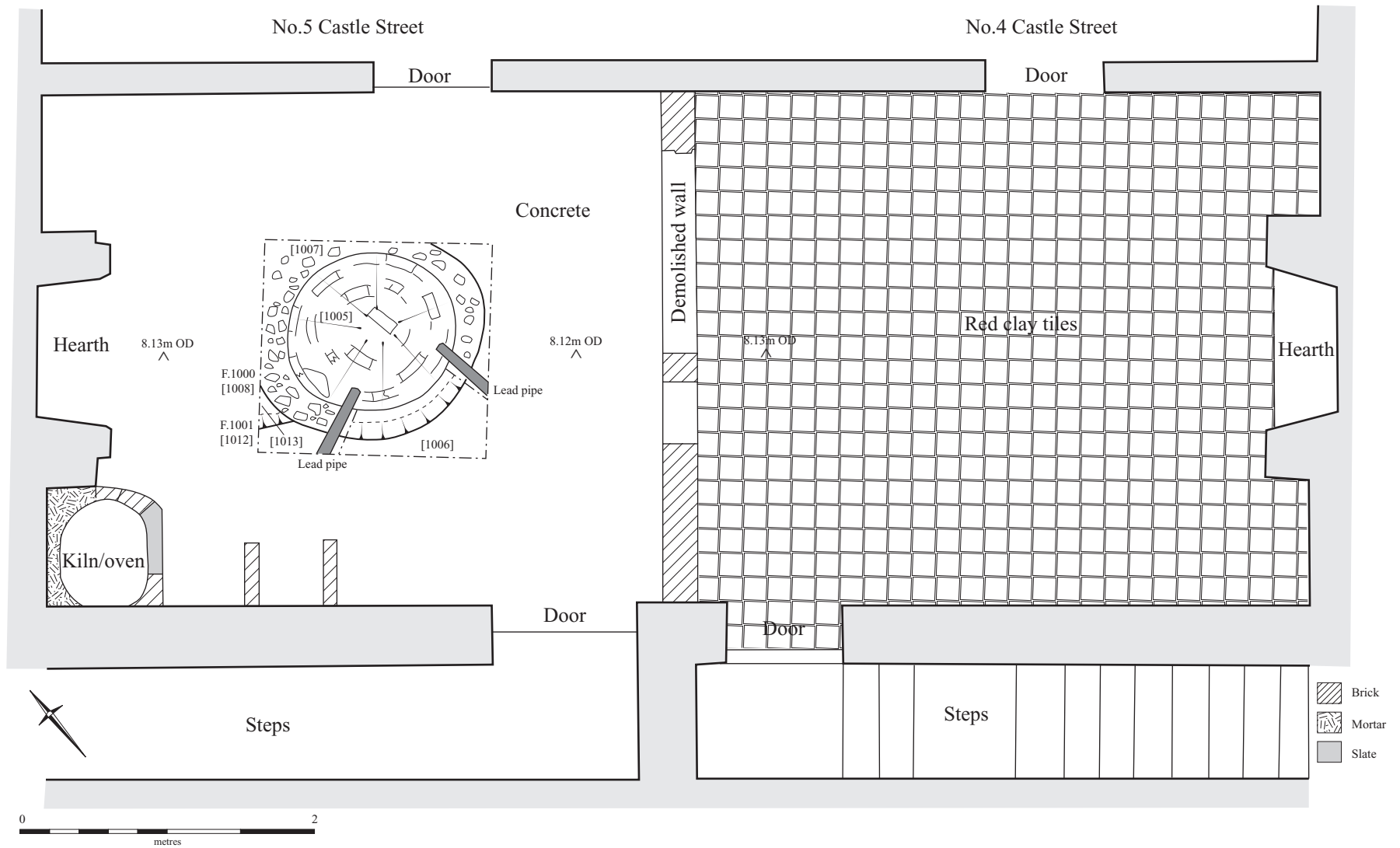


Figure 3. Basement plan with Test Pit

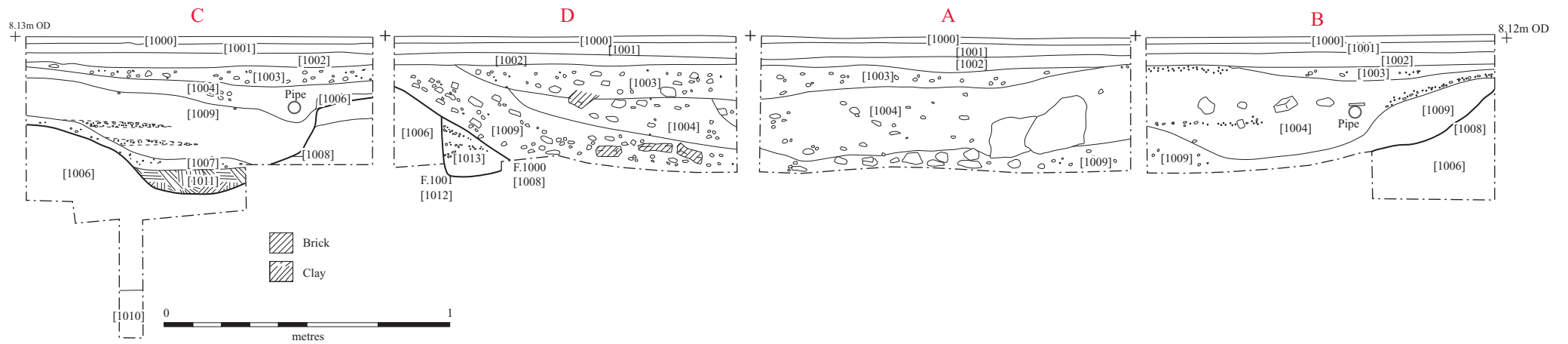
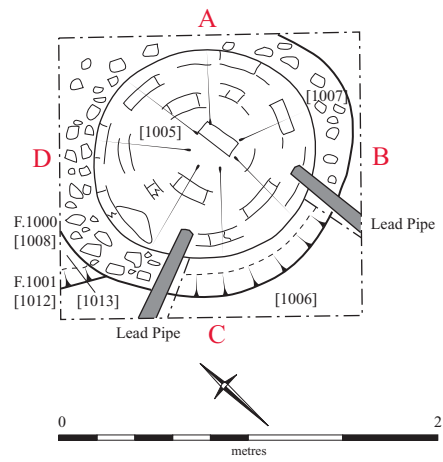


Figure 4. Plan of F.1000 with sections

Overlying [1007] were two thick deposits of loose sandy clay [1009] and [1004]. Both contained high quantities of brick, tile, mortar and slate as well as frequent charcoal and plaster. A quantity of ceramic was recovered from [1009] which dated from the 17<sup>th</sup> to mid 19<sup>th</sup> centuries and tobacco pipe stems with a likely similar date were recovered from both (Slater *below*).

Overlying both [1004] and [1009] was a thin deposit of compacted sandy clay [1003] containing occasional charcoal and mortar flecking but a notable absence of building material. The compaction, like that of [1007] suggested a deliberate working of the deposit once laid; in this case to consolidate the lower fills of hole [1008] and level the ground.

Ground consolidation by [1003] was followed by a thin deposit of gravelly sand [1002] laid presumably as a foundation for overlying floor [1002]. [1002] was comprised of bricks, set in a herringbone pattern and probably forming the floor associated with the primary construction of the basement. (Fig 5) The bricks were 110mm in length by 230mm in width and only 70mm in thickness. They were unfroged and appeared to be specifically manufactured as flooring bricks.

The recorded final part of the test pit sequence was a thin spread of loose, cracked and ill made concrete/screed [1001] spread over the surface of the bricks [1002] and representing a 20th century floor levelling. The height of the surface of the concrete corresponded with a terracotta tiled floor in the adjacent room, and it is likely that these tiles were themselves laid on top of a similar floor to [1002].

C.	F.	Description	Interpretation	Max OD	Min OD
1000		Thin deposit of badly laid concrete.	20 <sup>th</sup> Century Concrete floor	8.12	8.08
1001		Brick floor: well laid in herringbone pattern. No bonding material. Bricks 70mm x 230mm x 110mm set into underlying deposit (1002).	19 <sup>th</sup> century basement floor.	8.08	8.00
1002		Mid to light yellowy-brown fine to medium grained moderate to firmly compacted sand. High frequency of small gravel and mortar fragments with infrequent charcoal flecking.	Bedding deposit for [1001]	8.00	7.95
1003		Mid to dark grey-brown, moderately compacted sandy clay. Frequent angular and sub-angular gravels and occasional charcoal flecking	Final ground consolidation deposit prior to laying of floor [1001]	7.95	7.85
1004	1000	Mid to light grey-brown, moderate to loosely compacted silty, sandy clay. Frequent charcoal, angular and sub-angular stones (including large clunch fragments) with occasional bone/ceramic.	Final backfilling of F1000.	8.02	7.57
1005	1000	Sub-circular domed brick structure. Constructed of straight bricks in uneven courses bonded with thick light grey lime mortar. Two lead pipes 60mm diameter extend from W and S sides beyond limit of excavation.	Masonry capping set within the base of cut [1008]. High probability this represents a cap placed over a spring.	7.82	Unknown
1006		Light to mid brown, laminated deposit of fine, medium and coarse grained sand. No inclusions. Thick band of light grey/ white marly clay.	Natural Gravels	7.89	7.02

1007	1000	Mid to dark grey brown, moderate to loosely compacted sandy clay. Frequent brick fragments with occasional lime mortar and charcoal flecking.	Primary backfill of F.1000 following construction of cap [1005] and sealing clay [1011].	7.53	7.4
1008	1000	CUT; Not exposed fully. Sub circular in plan with moderate to steeply sloping concaved sides to unclear concaved base.	Large irregular cut into natural sandy gravel [1006] prior to construction of cap [1005]. Probably dug to raise 'spring line' to crown of [1005].	7.89	Unknown
1009		Mid to dark grey-brown moderate to firmly compacted sandy clay. Frequent angular and sub angular stones, brick, mortar and tile fragments	Primary main backfilling deposit of F.1000	8.01	7.59
1010		Light bluey grey, compacted, plastic grey clay. Sterile.	Natural Gault Clay	7.02	N/A
1011	1000	Light bluey grey compacted grey clay, generally sterile with infrequent charcoal mottling.	Clay forming seal at base of [1005]. Probably originally [1010].	7.53	7.35
1012	1001	CUT; Not exposed fully. Linear cut with straight, near vertical sides to irregular, flat base.	Cut of probable 'robbed out' wall.	7.23	7.5
1013	1001	Mid to light grey, moderately compacted silty clay. Occasional angular and sub-angular stones and gravels.	Fill of 'robbed out' wall cut.	7.23	7.5

**Table 1:** Context descriptions and interpretations

## Discussion

The location of the test pit at 5 Castle Street corresponds cartographically with an area that until the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century represented open yards behind properties on the west side of the road, and no clear suggestion of a dug basement was evident on the maps until the ordnance survey of 1885 which showed the ground plan of the structures to correspond with the presently standing architecture, with steps descending to basements on both sides of the property. This corresponds well with the ceramic recovered from the backfill over the capped well or spring-head under the current floor of the basement itself, making it entirely likely that the 17<sup>th</sup> century buildings were largely if not entirely re-built in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the addition of deep basements. The presence of the only pre-19<sup>th</sup> century feature, that of a probable robbed out wall cut (F.1001) may well be related to the earlier phase of building.

The location of the domed brick capping, whilst dated to be contemporary with the construction of the 19<sup>th</sup> century basement, may well be related to an earlier well or utilised spring. No suggestions of such wells are marked on the 16<sup>th</sup> or 17<sup>th</sup> century maps however. If a spring line, it is possible that it was utilised at an earlier date such as during the Roman settlement, although no direct evidence was found.

The depth of the 19<sup>th</sup> century basement, with a floor level of 8.12m OD with underlying gravel deposits at 7.89m OD corresponds well with the level of the very basal Romano-British deposits encountered nearby, including features truncating into the geological natural identified to the south-west during the 2003 excavation at The Folk Museum (Cessford 2003). It is possible therefore that (allowing for no further



Figure 5. Photographs showing the capped well/spring-head [1005] (top) and 19th century floor [1001] (bottom).

wells etc.) the remainder of the basement could show a presence of the bases of early cut features, whilst the area of relatively undisturbed ground in the yard to the rear of 4/5 Castle Street (between 10.13 and 10.62m OD) is likely to contain stratified archaeological deposits of between 2 and 2.5m deep, similar to that exposed within the adjacent test pit in the Folk museum (Dickens & Armour 2002).

## **Conclusion**

The single test-pit within the basement of 5 Castle Street demonstrated the extent of truncation caused by the construction of the basement in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The proximity of geological gravels below the 19<sup>th</sup> century floor surface at 7.89m OD corresponds well with previous excavations to the immediate south, suggesting that only the deepest and earliest of archaeological deposits will have survived elsewhere within the basement of 4/5 Castle Street. The yard area to the rear of 4/5 Castle Street is likely to have a considerable depth of stratified archaeological deposits spanning the post-Medieval to Roman periods. The well or spring-head capped at the same time as the construction whilst not having any earlier archaeological deposits immediately associated with it may well have been a focus for earlier activity; however, no evidence of the Romano-British defensive walls/ ditches were found and it could not be confirmed whether these lay to the north or the south of the area of investigation.

## **Acknowledgements**

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## **APPENDIX**

### **Post Medieval Ceramic - Adam Slater**

A total of 9 sherds of ceramic and 6 fragments of clay tobacco-pipe stem were recovered from deposits [1004] [1009].

#### *Ceramic*

Nine sherds of ceramic were recovered from [1009]. Representing four separate vessels: A single sherd of Staffordshire saltglazed stoneware with a late 18th to late 19th century date was the only sherd of fine ware. Five sherds of glazed red earthenware (GRE) represent a courseware vessel, likely an open mouthed domestic container dating from the 18th-9th century. Two sherds of course GRE with a yellow slip trailed decoration potentially representing a wide rimmed plate or platter of likely late seventeenth to mid nineteenth century date.

A single fragment of course, unglazed ceramic with a burned inner showing slight vitrification.

#### *Tobacco pipe*

Tobacco pipe stems, have, to some degree been utilised as a dating agent on large post-medieval excavations; the diameter of the stem bore-hole being diagnostic with accuracy increasing with a larger sample. The 6 stem fragments recovered from [1004] and [1009] did not form a large enough sample for accurate diagnosis to be made. The form of the stems suggested a mix of late 18th to mid 19th century date, no decoration which could assist in more accurate dating was present.

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### Project details

Project name	Basement of Number 5 Castle Street, Cambridge An Archaeological Evaluation
Short description of the project	A single evaluation trench, excavated between the 31st August and 3rd September 2010 in the basement of no. 5 Castle Street, Cambridge demonstrated a high level of truncation of earlier archaeological features associated with the construction of the present buildings in the 19th century and the construction for the capping of a well/spring head immediately beneath the original floor of the cellar.
Previous/future work	Yes / Not known
Any associated project reference codes	ECB3442 - HER event no.
Type of project	Field evaluation
Site status	None
Current Land use	Community Service 2 - Leisure and recreational buildings
Monument type	WELL Post Medieval
Significant Finds	POTTERY Post Medieval
Significant Finds	TOBACCO PIPE Post Medieval

### Project location

Country	England
Site location	CAMBRIDGESHIRE CAMBRIDGE CAMBRIDGE Basement, No. 5 Castle Street, Cambridge
Postcode	CB3 0AQ
Study area	1.50 Square metres
Site coordinates	TL 446 591 52.2106946342 0.116594490083 52 12 38 N 000 06 59 E Point
Height OD / Depth	Min: 18.00m Max: 18.00m

### Project creators

Name of Organisation	Cambridge Archaeological Unit
Project brief originator	Contractor (design and execute)
Project design originator	Christopher Evans

Project director/manager	Christopher Evans
Project supervisor	Adam Slater
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Name of sponsor/funding body	University of Cambridge Estate Management

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Digital Contents	'Ceramics','other'
Digital Media available	'Images raster / digital photography','Spreadsheets','Text'
Paper Archive recipient	Cambridge Archaeological Unit
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