

A Watching Brief at New Court, Trinity College, Cambridge (CAU Report 1069)

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Introduction

A watching brief was undertaken at New Court, Trinity College, Cambridge, between the 14th of December 2011 and the 12th of January 2012 (Figure 1). At this time a series of seven investigative trenches were excavated around the perimeter of the court (Figure 1). These were positioned in order to determine the layout and extent of the pre-existing services in advance of the proposed instillation of new sewerage and drainage works at the site. During the course of this work, a number of archaeological deposits and features were encountered and these are reported upon below.

Topographically, the present ground surface of New Court varies between 7.42m OD and 7.64m OD. This variation is the result of surface undulations as opposed to an overall distinctive slope and the height averages around 7.50m OD. The underlying geology, in contrast, appears to slope downwards quite markedly to the west. The closest previous excavation, for example, which was undertaken within the southeast corner of the east range of New Hall in 2009, identified natural gravels lying at 6.15m OD (Newman 2011, 60-65). But, to the south, natural gravels have been identified at 3.03m at the Trinity Hall Library site, in close proximity to the River Cam (Alexander 1997, 5). In addition, in a similar location further to the north, at the Trinity College Library Bookstore site, natural gravels were identified at 3.30m OD (Cessford *in prep.*). Finally, a short distance to the southwest, an inspection pit that was monitored in 1994 in Garret Hostel Lane identified natural gravels at 2.95m OD (Evans 1994, 4); however, this trench may well have been situated within a former channel or canal as opposed to untruncated ground. Overall, therefore, this pattern indicates that a significantly deeper quotient of made-ground (*c.* 3m+) is potentially present on the western side of New Court in contrast to a relatively shallow depth (*c.* 1.3m+) to the east.

Results

All seven trenches were hand-excavated by the contractors to a depth of between 0.8m and 1.0m. In each instance, the uppermost 0.2 to 0.4m of the sequence consisted of modern tarmac and make-up deposits that were associated with the current car park surface. Beneath these layers, numerous intercutting services – comprising all of the major utilities, plus waste water pipes and ceramic storm drains – were encountered in every trench. Although these services were predominately clustered towards the outer margins of the area, where they occurred in very dense profusion, outlying examples were also identified in the majority of the areas investigated. Nevertheless, encountered sporadically between and/or beneath the later truncations were a number of archaeological deposits. These remains, which consisted of both structural foundations and layers/spreads, will be discussed below on a trench-by-trench basis.

ST01

This trench, which measured 13.1m by 0.4m in extent and 0.8m deep, was situated in the northwest corner of New Court. Here, two foundation remnants and a possible ‘pinnacle’ of surviving archaeological material were identified. The first of the two foundations, [100], was situated at the extreme southeast end of the trench. It consisted of a heavily truncated handmade red brick foundation that was bonded with pale cream lime mortar. Unfortunately, due to the extent of damage by later services – allied with the feature’s location at the very limit of the trench – no further details of its orientation or form could be discerned. Less than a metre to the northeast, however, was situated foundation [101]. This feature, which was situated 0.5m below the present ground surface (at 7.17m OD), had been much less heavily disturbed. It comprised an east-west oriented footing that was again composed of handmade red bricks bonded with pale cream lime mortar. It measured 0.4m wide and had an off-set, stepped brick foundation on the southern side. Given its form and constituent materials, it appears most likely to be 17th or 18th century in date. Finally, the potential ‘pinnacle’ of surviving archaeological material, which measured less than 1.0m in width, was situated approximately 6.0m from the southeast end of the trench. It consisted of a minimum of three successive layers. The first of these – [102], which lay 0.4m below the present ground surface, at 7.18m OD – comprised a pale brown sandy silt deposit 0.2m thick. This overlay a thin band of dark brown silt trample that in turn sat above [103], a mid orangey brown sandy gravel deposit 0.2m thick. Finally, towards the base of the trench, dark brown clay silt deposit [104] was identified. Although heavily truncated by the cuts for modern services to both the northeast and southwest, this pinnacle appears most likely to represent the survival of earlier layers – including at least one potential surface – within the interior of New Court. Unfortunately, no datable material culture was recovered.

TP01

This trench, which measured 1.7m by 1.35m in extent and 1.0m deep, was situated on the northern side of New Court. Here, a substantial foundation and a footing/culvert were identified, along with an *in situ* archaeological layer (Figure 2). The first of these features, foundation [200], consisted of an inverted brick-built relieving arch (Figure 2A). This was composed of shallowly frogged pink and yellow bricks, measuring 220mm by 110mm by 60mm, which were bonded with coarse sandy pale brown mortar. The uppermost surviving element of the foundation lay at 7.24m OD, while the base of the arch lay at 6.84m OD. The foundation was aligned east-west, but its precise measurements could not be determined as it was visible only in section. It is most probably early 19th century in date, based upon the nature of the materials that were employed in its construction. On the northern side of the trench, a second east-west aligned footing, or possible culvert – [201] – was also identified (Figure 2B). This was constructed from handmade red bricks, measuring 220mm by 110mm by 50mm, which were bonded pale brown lime mortar. Five courses of brickwork were visible, the uppermost and lowermost of which were inset – thereby implying this may represent the southern edge of an arched culvert or drain. The top of this feature lay at 6.92m OD. Given its form and constituent materials, it appears most likely to be 17th century in date. Adjacent to this, and extending across the base of the trench (except where it has been truncated by [200]), was layer [202]. This consisted of dark brown to black clay silt with frequent charcoal inclusions. Five mid to late 17th century clay tobacco pipe bowls, along with two sherds of 16th-17th century German stoneware, were recovered from this deposit. Its uppermost surviving extent lay at 6.68m OD.

ST02

This trench, which measured 4.85m by 0.4m in extent and 0.95m deep, was situated on the northern side of New Court. Here, a substantial foundation remnant was identified (Figures 3A and 4A). This comprised a continuation of east-west aligned foundation [200] in TP01, immediately to the west. A minimum of two identical brick-built inverted relieving arches were present in this location, although these had both been very heavily truncated by later services (Figure 4A). This portion of the foundation, [300], was also constructed from the same materials as had been employed in [200]. It is thus clear that a substantial early 19th century wall – containing a number of openings, which the relieving arches were designed to support – was once present on the

northern side of New Court. This most probably comprised part of the original build of the court itself.

ST03

This trench, which measured 14.3m by 0.4m in extent and 0.8m deep, was situated in the northeast corner of New Court. Here, a potential ‘pinnacle’ of surviving archaeological material was identified. Situated approximately 3.0m from the southeast end of the trench, this consisted of a 1.8m length of dark brown to black clay silt that extended to 0.45m below the present ground surface (or 7.13m OD). This material, [400], was notably similar to [104] in ST01 and [202] in TP01, although it may of course have been redeposited within a later service trench. To both the northeast and southwest, this pinnacle had been heavily truncated. No datable material culture was recovered.

ST04

This trench, which measured 5.6m by 0.4m in extent and 0.95m deep, was situated on the eastern side of New Court. Here, two foundation remnants were identified (Figure 4B). The first of these, [500], measured 0.5m in width and was aligned east-west. It was composed of irregular masonry fragments (predominately clunch) that had been bonded with pale cream lime mortar. Its uppermost surviving extent lay at 6.93m OD. In general, the use of masonry within a footing indicates that it was constructed during the 18th century or earlier. Situated 0.9m further to the south of [500] was additional foundation remnant [501]. In contrast to its neighbour, this footing – which was also aligned east-west – was brick-built in nature (Figure 4B). It consisted of red and yellow unfrogged bricks, measuring 220mm by 110mm by 55mm, which were bonded with pale brown lime mortar. Given its form and constituent materials, it appears most likely to be 18th or early 19th century in date.

ST05

This trench, which measured 6.3m by 0.4m in extent and 0.94m deep, was situated in the southeast corner of New Court. Here, a greater density of services was encountered than in any other trench, and no definite archaeological deposits were identified.

ST06

This trench, which measured 14.0m by 0.4m in extent and 0.97m deep, was situated in the southwest corner of New Court. Here, a layer was identified towards the base at the northeastern end of the trench (Figure 3B). This deposit, [700], consisted of dark brown to black clay silt that was very similar in composition to [104] in ST01, [202] in TP01 and [400] in ST03. Its uppermost surviving extent lay at 6.74m OD. Further to the southwest, it appeared to have been entirely truncated by services. No datable material culture was recovered.

Material Culture

A small finds assemblage was recovered during the course of the watching brief. This was entirely recovered from layer [202] in TP01. It consisted of small quantities of pottery and clay tobacco pipe, and these materials are discussed further below.

Pottery

Two sherds of pottery, weighing 44g, were recovered. Both of these fragments consisted of Frechen stoneware from Germany, which is of 16th to 17th date. As they were recovered in association with the 17th century clay tobacco pipe assemblage, however (discussed below), they are most probably 17th century in date.

Clay Tobacco Pipe

Five clay tobacco pipe bowls were recovered. In general, the presence of clay tobacco pipe fragments in a context indicates a date between late 16th to early 20th centuries (c. 1580-1910). Bowls, however, can often be more closely dated via comparison to Oswald's simplified general typology (Oswald 1975). In this particular instance, one bowl conformed to Oswald's Type 5, which dates to c. 1640-60, three bowls to Oswald's Type 6, which dates to c. 1660-80, and one bowl to Oswald's Type 9, which dates to c. 1680-1710. Aside from rouletted rims, none of these examples demonstrated any additional evidence of decoration or diagnostic maker's marks. Their relatively crude manufacture indicates that they are most probably of local origin.

Discussion

In prehistoric times, the proposed development area most probably comprised a marginal, wetland environment. Aside from a small number of Roman features that have previously been identified in the general vicinity, relatively little archaeological activity appears to have taken place here prior to the medieval period. By the late 13th century, however, a landing stage called Flaxhythe is known to have been established within the southeastern quadrant of the site (Willis & Clark 1886 II, 402-03; Figure 5). The hythe itself was most probably centred around one or more flat-bottomed channels that extended back at right angles from the King's Ditch. Similar channels, suitable for drawing up shallow-drafted vessels, have previously been encountered in Cambridge at Trinity Library Bookstore (Cessford *in prep.*), St John's College Chapel Court and Master's Garden (Dickens 1996, 18) and at two separate sites on Thompson's Lane (Firman & Pullinger 1987, 85; Newman 2007, 10-11). Notably, the remnants of a "wooden platform laid upon piles" were also observed in the late 19th century during the construction of a library annexe attached to the north cloister walk of Nevile's Court (White 1894, 294-95). These remains were interpreted as comprising part of "an old landing stage belonging to one of the hythes" (*ibid.*). This evidence suggests that a substantial timber component may have been involved in the landing stage's construction (see also Gardiner 2007). Furthermore, the results of a borehole survey conducted on the western side of the lawn in the centre of New Court in 2011 indicates that a high degree of waterlogged, anerobic preservation is also likely at depth in the present area (Appleby & Newman 2011, 14-15). The southeastern portion of New Court is therefore considered to be of high archaeological potential.

The landing stage at Flaxhythe is most likely to have been established during the 12th or early 13th century. It is known to have been approached at this time via Flaxhythe Lane, the western end of which also lay within the present area of investigation (Figure 5). In addition, excavations conducted beneath the southeastern range of New Court in 2009 encountered a series of timber-framed structures of 13th century date. These appear most likely to have comprised warehouses associated with the nearby landing stage (Newman 2011, 60-65). As these structures were encountered at 6.50m OD, or approximately a metre below the present ground surface on the eastern side of New Court, it is probable that any additional such remains in this area would be heavily affected by the proposed instillation works. The hythe, along with any potential associated structures, appears to have gone out of use in c. 1317-29 when two student hostels were established a short distance to the east (Willis & Clark 1886 II, 402-03). These structures, Garret Hostel and Ovyng's Inn, stood in very close proximity to one another at the head of a single property. The remainder of the area, stretching back to the King's Ditch – and thus encompassing the present area of

investigation – most probably comprised Garret Hostel’s garden (Willis & Clark 1886 II, 403-4). Archaeological evidence indicates that this area may well have been relatively little used during the later medieval period (Newman 2011, 65). In 1546, however, both hostels passed into the ownership of the newly established Trinity College.

In 1592, the area was depicted in a plan of Cambridge that was drawn by John Hammond (Figure 6A). This map reveals that the King’s Ditch remained open at this time and that a solitary structure was present within the proposed development area. Subsequently, however, in 1611-12 a number of ‘out-buildings’ are known to have been constructed at the site (Willis & Clark 1886 II, 633-34). These structures were situated adjacent to the newly completed Nevile’s Court, which had been begun in 1605. It is probable that the King’s Ditch was backfilled, and the development area itself substantially levelled, as part of this widespread episode of construction. The layout of the new buildings has been interpreted as follows:

“the Stable was on the south side, and the Brewhouse on the west side, of a yard which occupied part of the site of the ancient Garret Hostel. The Bakehouse was on the north side of the same yard, in continuation of the south side of the Great Court. They remained in this position until the New Court was built; when the Stables were curtailed in extent, and the Brewhouse was transferred to its present position on the opposite side of the river. The Bakehouse was then pulled down, and was not rebuilt. We do not know the position of the Fish-house” (Willis & Clark 1886 II, 634).

Additional ancillary buildings were also referenced in the college’s 17th century accounts. These included a Poundred meat house, Capon house, Hen-house, Malt-chamber, Limehouse, Storehouse, Spice-house, Horsekeeper’s chamber, Barber’s shop and Swan-house as well as a Stangate-hole, Wood-yard and Slaughter-house yard (*ibid.*). Although their precise locations were not recorded, the majority of these structures are similarly presumed to have lain in the general vicinity of New Court. The largest and most significant of the college’s ancillary buildings were planned by David Loggan in 1688 (Figure 6B). Furthermore, additional details of their architectural form were also depicted by him in a contemporary print (Figure 7). It is therefore apparent that many of these structures were between two and three storeys in height, implying that their foundations are likely to have been relatively substantial. As a result, these buildings comprise much the most probable source for the structural remains that were encountered in ST01 and ST04. Their relatively high degree of survival, allied with the large number of ancillary buildings that are known to have once been present, suggests that additional foundations are likely to be encountered during the main phase of instillation works.

A further plan of the area was compiled by William Custance in 1798 (Figure 6C). At this time the majority of the pre-existing 17th century buildings appear to have remained extant, although at least one additional building had been constructed. When the construction of New Court itself began, in 1823, the area was recorded as being occupied by “the old Brewhouse, a Stable and Coach-house assigned to the Master, part of the College Stables, part of the offices of the kitchen and a Lecture Room” (Willis & Clark 1886 II, 659). This suggests that the functions of several of the structures may have changed over time, and/or that further buildings may have been constructed in the early 19th century. Finally, the inverted arch foundations that were identified in TP01 and ST02 were associated with the original layout of New Court as it was completed in 1825. They comprised the footings for a single-story arcade with

six arches that connected the new quadrangle to Nevile's Court (Figure 8). This feature was most probably demolished at some time during the 20th century.

Conclusion

Four principal conclusions may be drawn from the results of this watching brief. These comprise:

- I. The uppermost metre of the sequence has been very heavily truncated by 20th century services, although occasional pinnacles of archaeology appear to survive in places. In addition, substantial foundations relating to a number of 17th-18th century ancillary structures also remain at least partially *in situ*. The majority of services are likely to have avoided these footings.
- II. Beneath the disturbed horizon, it appears likely that the remainder of the sequence is moderately to well preserved. To the east, however, the lesser depth of made-ground is likely to have led to a higher incidence of truncation.
- III. Within the southeastern quadrant of area, the potential for significant archaeological remains – allied with the possibility of anerobic, waterlogged preservation – appears moderate to high. This area should therefore comprise a priority during any subsequent archaeological investigation.
- IV. Taking into account the modern services, the potential depth of the surviving archaeological deposits at the site is likely to vary from *c.* 0.5m+ to the east (where natural lies at 6.15m OD) to *c.* 3.0m+ to the west (where natural lies at *c.* 3.3m OD). Towards the centre of the area, the King's Ditch – a substantial water-filled channel – is likely to have been somewhat deeper again (perhaps extending to *c.* 2.0m OD).

Bibliography

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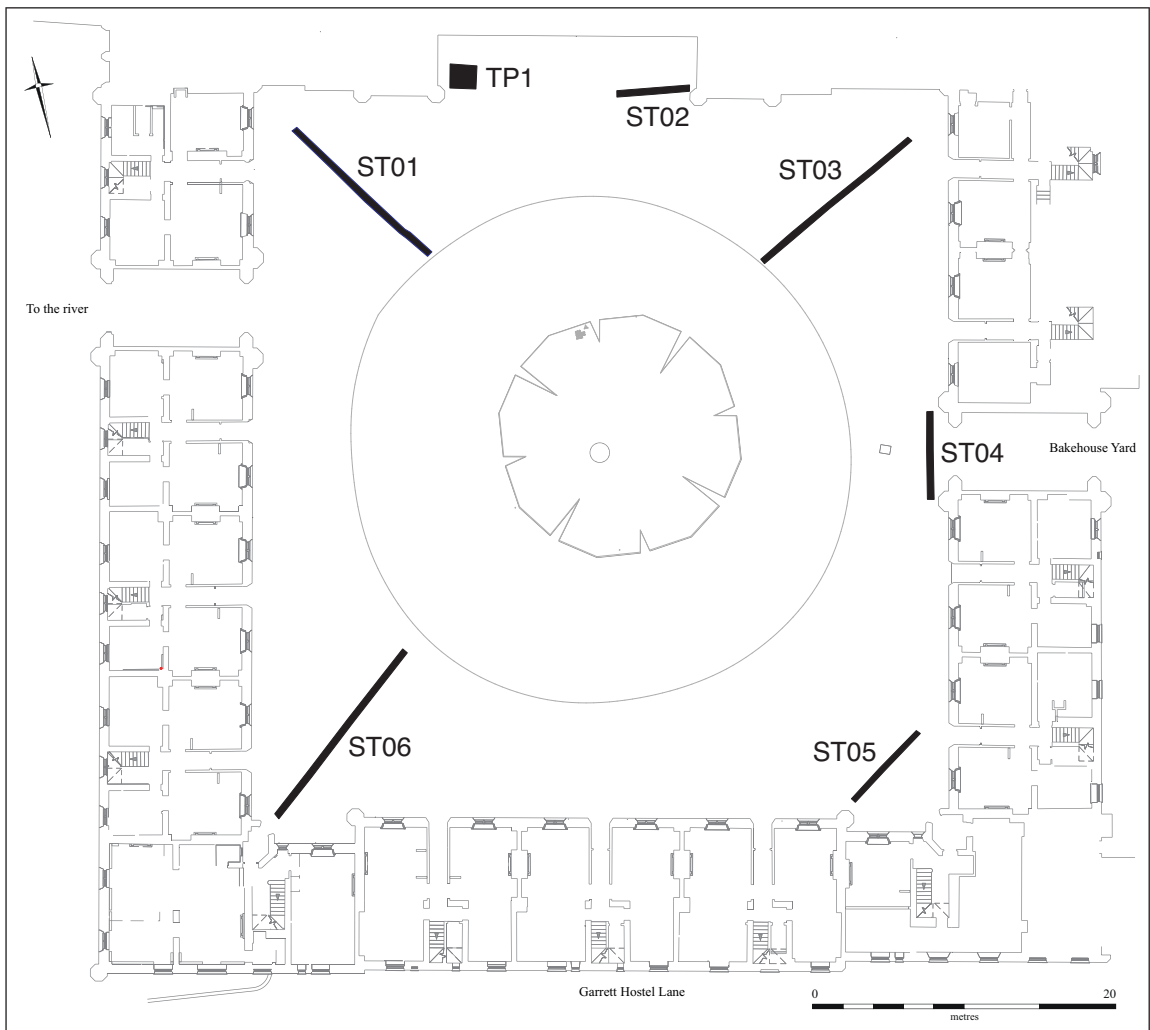
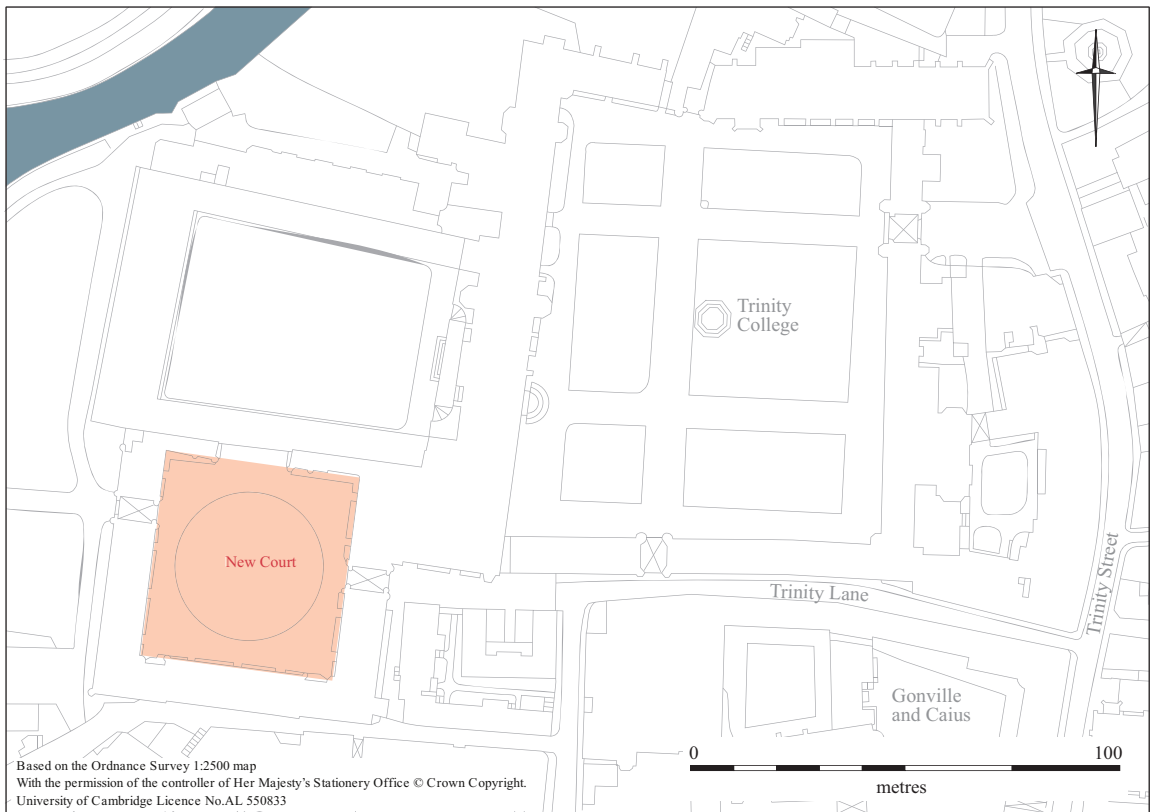


Figure 1: Location of New Court and Slit Trenches



A



B

Figure 2: Test Pit 1 (A) Facing South; (B) Facing North



A



B

Figure 3: A Slit Trench 3 Facing North; B Northeast End of Slit Trench 6 Facing Southeast



A



B

Figure 4: (A) Slit Trench 2 Facing East; (B) Slit Trench 4 Facing East

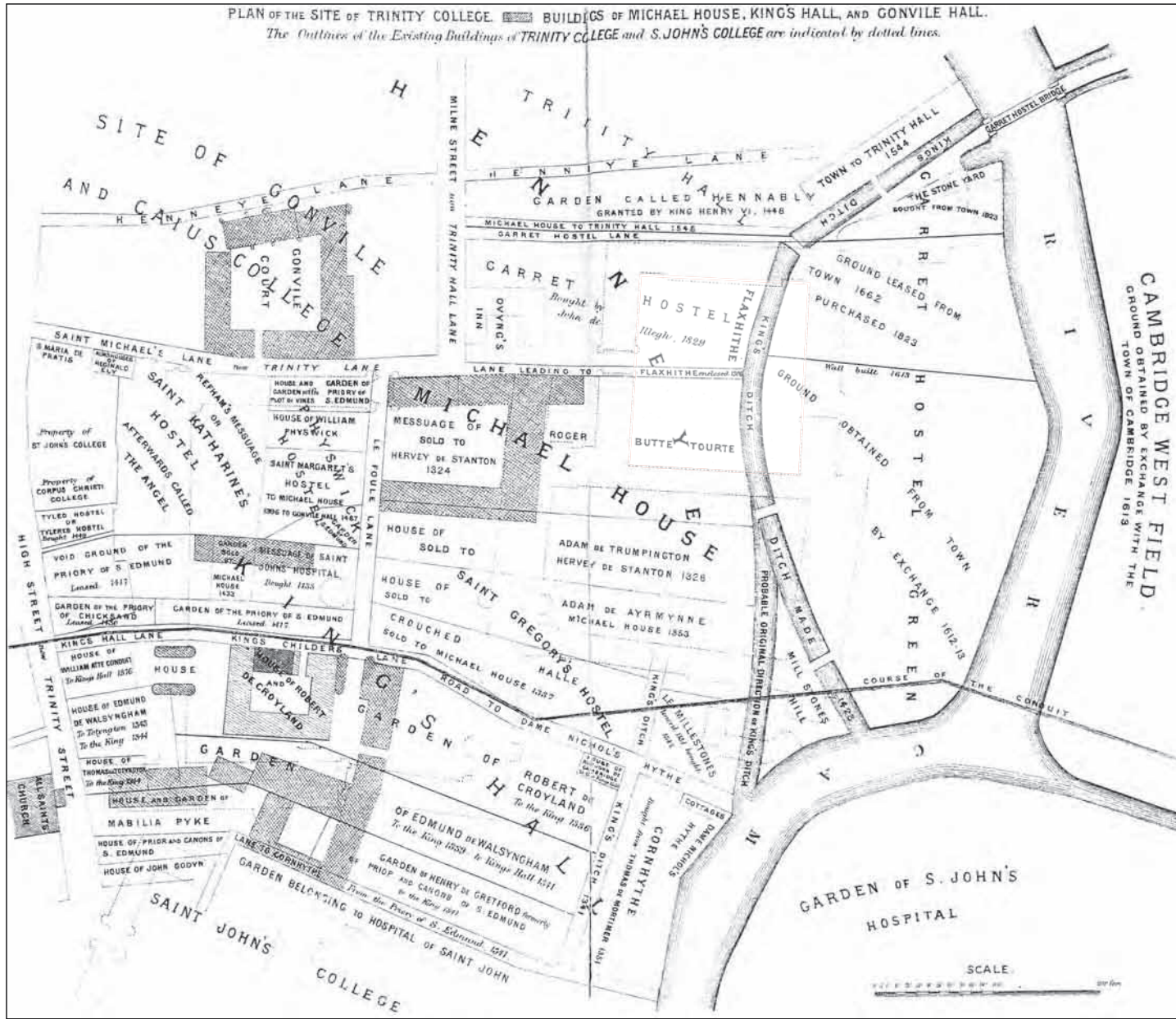
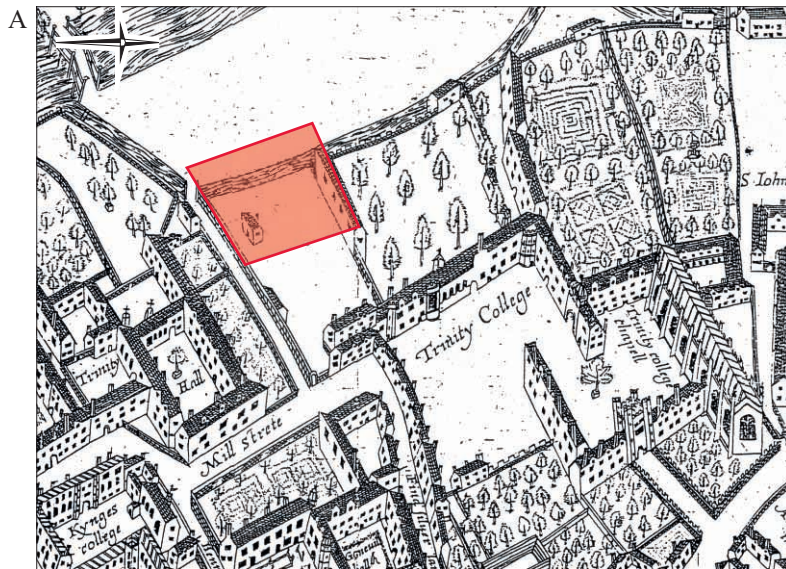
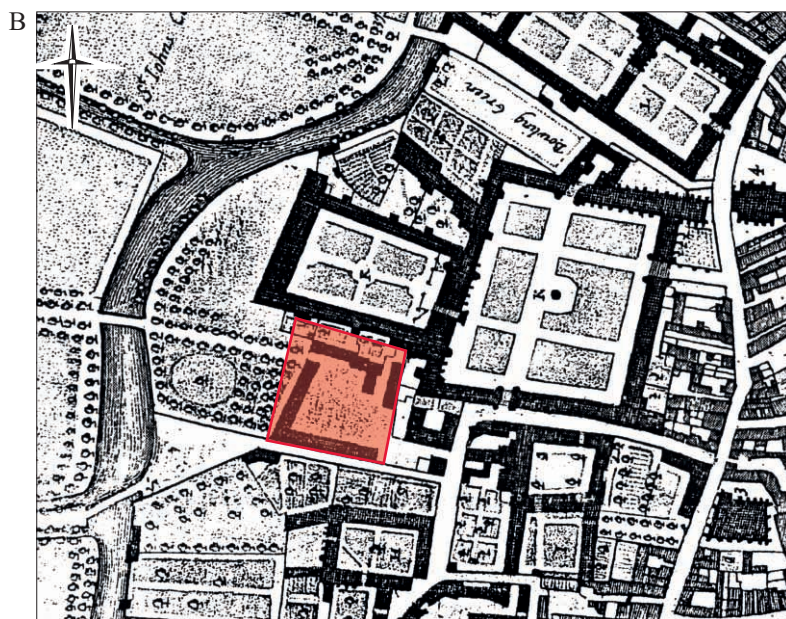


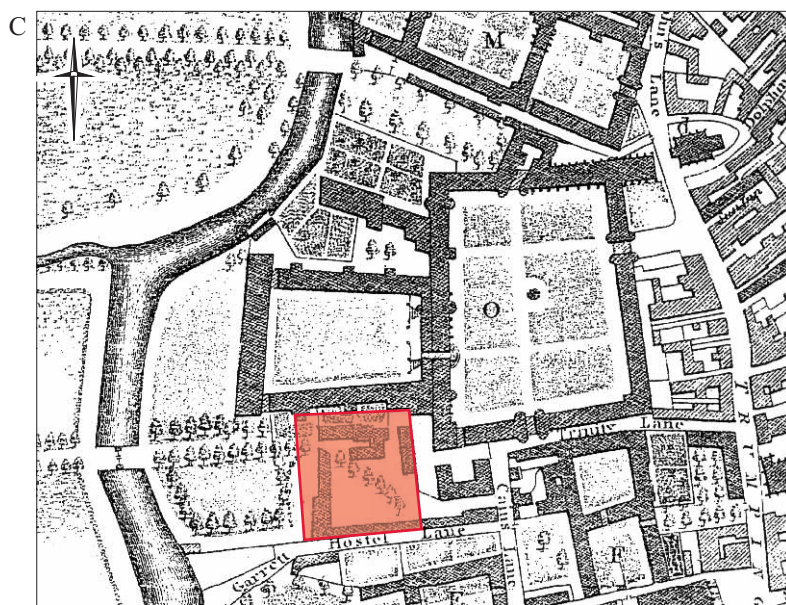
Figure 5: Pre-collegiate buildings and boundaries, including the King's Ditch (north at bottom)



Hammond 1592



Loggan 1688



Custance 1798

Figure 6: Historic map sequence (Approx. Area of New Court inRed).

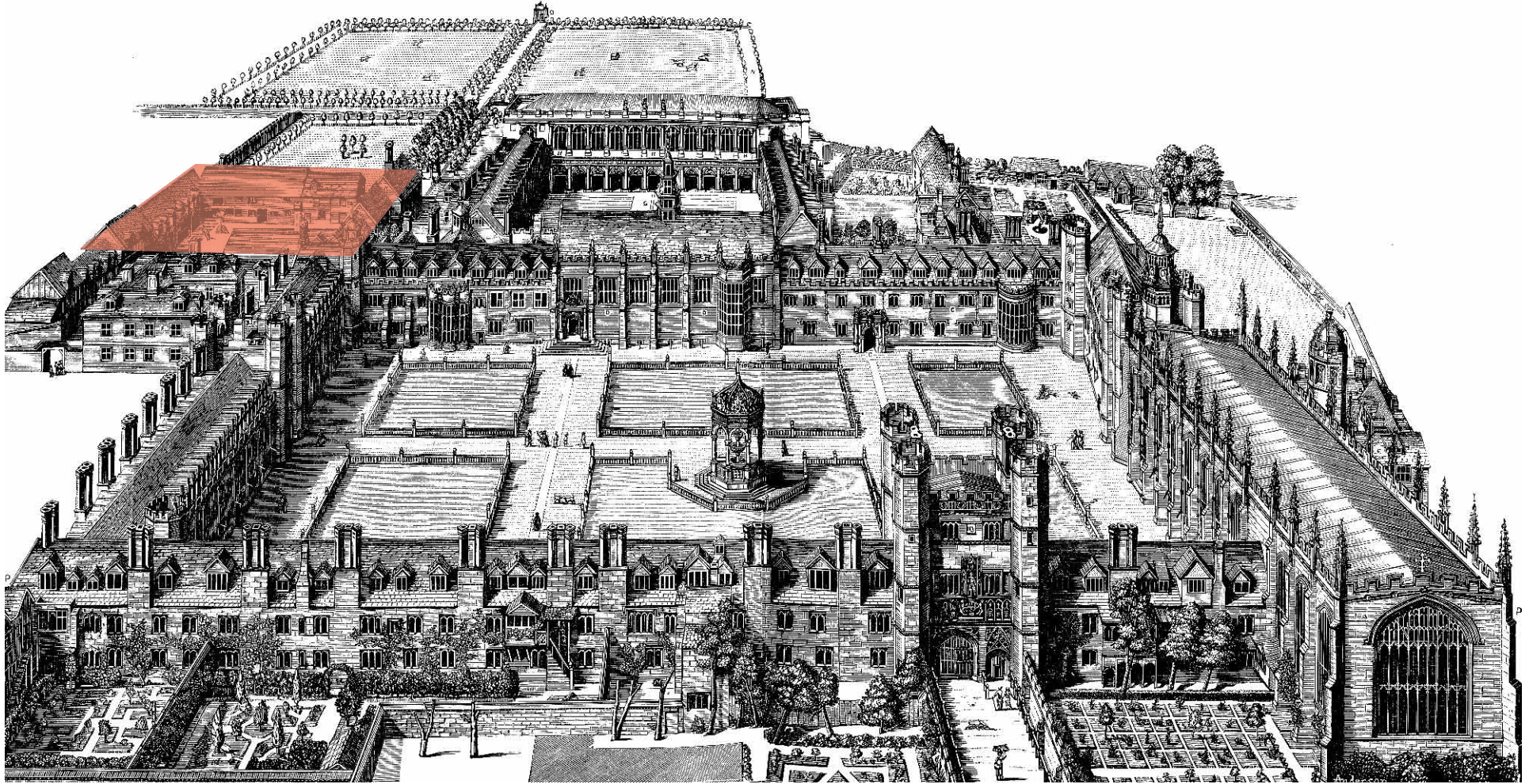


Figure 7: David Loggan's Print of 1688 with New Court in Red



Figure 8: Interior of the King's Court, or New Court, Trinity College, looking north-west (from Le Keux's Memorials of Cambridge)