

A Test Pit Evaluation at St Catharine's College, Cambridge

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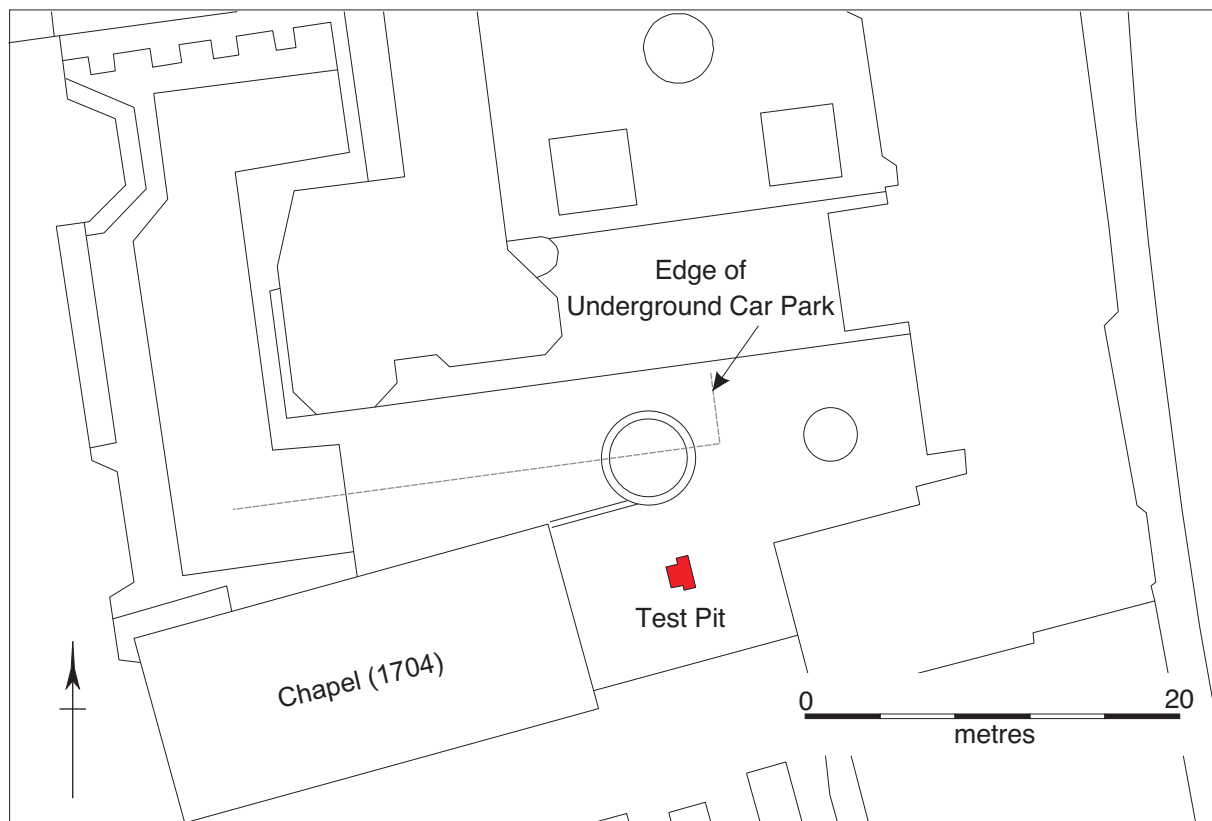
Introduction

A test pit evaluation was conducted by the Cambridge Archaeological Unit (CAU) at St Catharine's College, Cambridge, on the 13th of December 2011. This comprised a single test pit, measuring 1.0m by 1.0m in extent and 1.2m in depth, which was situated a short distance to the east of the college chapel (see plan, below). It was positioned here so as to target the location of a proposed tree-planting pit, with the intention of determining the presence/extent of any extant archaeological deposits prior to the commencement of additional works. In the first instance, a number of flagstones were lifted by the principal contractor and the concrete foundation layer beneath them broken out and removed. Within this space the test pit was then hand-dug to a depth of 1.2m below the present ground surface (see photograph, below). Excavation was halted at 8.29m OD due to the instability of the surrounding trench edges.

Results

Beneath the modern flagstones and concrete, a minimum of three – and probably four – services were present. The first of these comprised a north-south aligned storm drain that was situated directly beneath the flagstone surface. The second consisted of a bitumen-covered electricity cable that was oriented on a similar alignment, and appears most likely to have been associated with the circular planting bed situated a short distance to the north (see plan). This cable lay almost immediately beneath the base of the concrete foundation layer, and was not marked in any way. The third service comprised a large cast iron pipe that measured 0.12m in diameter. This was aligned northeast-southwest, and appears most likely to be associated with the buildings situated on the northern side of Chapel Court. The top of this pipe lay 0.58m below the present ground surface, at 8.91m OD. Its cut had been backfilled with [02], a relatively loose deposit of very dark brown sandy silt with occasional brick, gravel and chalk fleck inclusions. Finally, the fourth potential service was not itself encountered. A vertically sided northeast-southwest aligned cut was present, however, which continued below the limit of excavation. This contained [01], a relatively firm mid greyish brown clay silt deposit with occasional to frequent ceramic sewer pipe, brick and chalk fragment inclusions, along with occasional gravel and charcoal flecks. Given the nature of this fill – especially when taken in conjunction with the cut's orientation, which directly mirrors that of the adjacent cast-iron water pipe – this feature appears most likely to represent an unbottomed service trench.

As a result of the density of these modern intrusions, only a small pinnacle of surviving archaeological material remained. Situated beneath [02], and truncated by [01], the uppermost surviving horizon of deposit [03] lay at 8.79m OD. This layer consisted of a relatively sterile deposit of friable pale yellowish brown sandy clay silt with frequent stone and gravel inclusions that demonstrated some limited evidence of



Test Pit Location



View of Test Pit Facing West

horizontal banding. It measured 0.42m+ thick. Although this deposit did not appear to have been compacted enough to represent a series of metalled surfaces, it is possible that it was instead related to a more general episode of ground-raising activity. Unfortunately, no datable material culture was recovered and the precise origin of this layer is therefore unclear.

Material Culture

A small finds assemblage was recovered during the evaluation, which entirely consisted of residual material that had been redeposited within probable pipe trench backfill [01]. Small quantities of pottery, clay tobacco pipe and worked stone were recovered, and these materials are discussed further below.

Pottery

A total of 10 sherds of pottery, weighing 133g, were recovered. Eight of these sherds, weighing 93g, consisted of Essex Redware with a fine red coarseware fabric, indicating that they are most probably 15th or early 16th century in date. The two remaining sherds, which weighed 40g, consisted of generic Glazed Red Earthenware and are 16th to 19th century in date.

Clay tobacco Pipe

A single clay tobacco pipe bowl was 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 (1975). In this particular instance, the bowl conforms to Oswald's type 5, which dates to 1640-60. Although undecorated, this example has an unusual 'shield-shaped' heel, which indicates that it was not of local manufacture but was most probably imported from London.

Worked Stone

Two fragments of worked stone were recovered. The first of these consisted of an architectural fragment composed of oolitic limestone. It has a dressed face with a slight decorative rebate, although its precise form and date are unclear due to its extremely fragmentary nature. It measures 119mm by 101mm by 39mm, and weighs 556g. The second fragment is somewhat different in nature. It comprises part of a well-worked block of fine-grained, quartz-rich sandstone. This has been shaped into a circular, drum-like object with a dished upper surface that has been heavily rubbed and abraded. The fragment measures 100mm by 72mm by 43mm, and weighs 391g. It was most probably derived from a fine grindstone or palette, which was perhaps used as a more delicate alternative to a mortar.

Discussion

The history of St Catharine's College has been covered in depth in a number of published sources (e.g. Willis & Clark 1886 II, 69-114; Browne 1902; Jones 1936; Jones 1951; Rich 1973; Edis & Baker 1997) and will not therefore be reiterated in detail here. Initially one of the smallest colleges in the University, St Catharine's was founded in 1473 by Robert Woodlarke, Provost of King's College (Willis & Clark 1886 II, 70-72). Little of the original fabric of the medieval college survives, however, as the present buildings primarily date from a major rebuilding campaign that was undertaken in 1673-1704. The three principal ranges surrounding Main Court, including the college chapel, were completed at this time; a fourth and final range was also conjectured, but never completed (*ibid.*, 100). Subsequently, in 1743, the main frontage of the College was rotated by 180°, transferring from Queen's Lane

to Trumpington Street. Small-scale modifications and additions then continued to be made throughout the 18th and 19th centuries (*ibid.*, 107-8). Perhaps the most significant addition occurred in 1966, however, when Chapel Court was established immediately to the north, on land which had previously belonged to King's College.

The present area of investigation lies outside the historic core of the College. Prior to its incorporation into Chapel Court in the 1960s, the land located to the north of Main Court comprised an intensively occupied domestic zone. One of the most significant properties that is known to have been situated in this area was the Bull Inn. This hostelry originally occupied a considerable space, extending from Milne Street to Trumpington Street, and was bequeathed to the college in 1636 (Willis & Clark 1886 II, 76-7). Historic maps – including those of Hammond in 1592, Loggan in 1688 and Custance in 1798 (see Baggs & Bryan 2002) – indicate that numerous other buildings were also once present in the vicinity. Indeed, previous archaeological investigations undertaken nearby in the southern part of the town (*e.g.* Addyman & Biddle 1965; Whittaker 2001; Cessford 2005) indicate that continuous domestic occupation most probably began here at some time during the 11th century. In addition, the results of earlier works undertaken a little way to the north, in the vicinity of King's Lane, suggest that up to three metres of deposits overly the natural gravels in this area (see Hughes 1908; Anon. 1964), although it should be noted that the natural at Hostel Yard, Corpus Christi College – situated on the opposite side of Trumpington Street – lay significantly higher, at *c.* 7.15m to 8.2m OD (Cessford 2005). The probability that a relatively deep archaeological sequence is present in the proposed tree-planting pit location therefore appears high. The results of the current evaluation, however, have demonstrated that much of the upper metre of stratigraphy at the site has been very heavily disturbed. Furthermore, numerous services were encountered that would need to be diverted should the proposed work take place. Nevertheless, it seems probable that beneath this disturbed horizon a sequence of archaeological deposits remain extant. This interpretation is supported by the nature of the late medieval/early post-medieval finds that were recovered from probable pipe trench [01]. As the deepest feature to be investigated, this was also the most likely to have disturbed material from the underlying stratified deposits. The date of these finds also suggests that the sequence may have been effectively 'capped' by the completion of the adjacent chapel in 1704.

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