

The Music Room, Peterhouse College, Cambridge: An Archaeological Watching Brief Craig Cessford

The current boundary of Peterhouse College was established in the 13th century with the acquisition of property and land from the Friars of the Sack and through bequests. The boundary has remained essentially the same since. Silver Street, Mill Lane, Little St Mary's Lane and Trumpington Street are recorded on 13th century documents and later maps of the city and, as with Peterhouse, their position and orientation has remained virtually unchanged.

An archaeological watching brief was conducted by the Cambridge Archaeological Unit (CAU) between the 24th and 29th of June 2010 (with monitoring days occurring before) at the Music Room, Peterhouse College, Cambridge, during its conversion into student accommodation. A series of typically 0.55m wide trenches were excavated inside the building to depths of up to 1.2m by the contractors, the resulting sections were cleaned and recorded by the CAU. Additionally, some trenches located to the south of the Music Room were dug to a depth of 1.3m, these were heavily disturbed by 19th-20th century services and revealed no significant archaeological deposits. Examination of cartographic evidence has proved useful in helping our understanding of the development of the area following the construction of Old Court in the 15th century. Where definition is lacking is in the precise nature of the building configuration west of Old Court. Hammond's, Loggan's and Custance's maps all record the presence of buildings in this area, especially an angled building immediately to the west of the Old Library and kitchen. This structure may be part of the building programme that included the construction of the Old Library and college rooms in the 15th century referred to by Willis and Clark (1886), but it has not been possible to ascertain with certainty whether they are contemporaneous. It is clear, however, from later maps that this building had been demolished prior to the construction of Gisborne Court in 1825-1826 (fig. 13). Due to the lack of precision in the maps referred above, it is also possible that this building may have extended into the area of the Birdwood building and Fen Court.

The Music Room was constructed in the early 19th century. This appears to have involved lowering the area by over 0.5m as the general surrounding ground level lies at c.10.20m OD, while the upper surface of the floor of the Music Room lies at 9.73m OD.

The lowest deposits encountered were natural orange coloured First Terrace river gravels lying at c. 8.50-8.55m OD. These were sealed by an orangey brown fine sandy subsoil 0.20m thick. This was in turn sealed by a 0.6m thick mixed mid greyish brown sandy silty deposit. This is interpreted as an agricultural soil horizon and, based upon parallels elsewhere in Cambridge, the thickness of this deposit indicates that it probably continued to build up into the Late Medieval period (13th-15th centuries), as areas with Saxo-Norman (10th-12th century) occupation have much thinner soil horizons. Other similar agricultural soils have been revealed in the area south of Medieval Cambridge at the McDonald Institute (Gdaniec 1992) and Pembroke College (Robinson 1995). Relatively little material culture was present in this deposit, consisting of low quantities of animal bone and charcoal, and no direct dating evidence

was recovered. This suggests that the area lay at some distance from contemporary areas of occupation. The lack of any *in situ* burials, evidence of disturbance or disarticulated human bone indicates that the site lay outside the boundaries of the church of St Peter without Trumpington Gate (now St. Mary the Less; see Appleby 2009) probably founded in the early to mid 12th century.

The Medieval agricultural soil was then sealed by a substantial building with stone foundations, which had unfortunately been heavily truncated by the construction of the Music Room. The main feature of this structure was a 8.0m+ long west-southwest to east-southeast aligned foundation. This was 0.5m wide and survived to a depth of 0.35m and was constructed of large roughly squared blocks of mortared clunch. Clunch (aka Burwell stone and Totternhoe Stone) is a greyish white chalk, often with a greenish tinge, which was quarried at Cherry Hinton, Reach, Burwell, Isleham, Eversden, Haslingfield and Barrington, it was referred to locally as 'white stone' and was used in most stone buildings at Cambridge prior to 1400 (Purcell 1967, 24-28). Similar clunch foundations have been identified in 13th to 16th century buildings in Cambridge, with a close early 14th century wall revealed during nearby investigations at the Fitzwilliam Museum (Whittaker 2000). It is possible this wall represents the boundary wall recorded on Lyne's map of 1574, Willis and Clark's (1886) and Stoke's (1908) projection of earlier and extant boundaries (figs. 4 & 5), although this must remain speculative. Associated with these footings were a number of thin mortar, sand and chalk spreads, which probably relate to the general levelling of the area and building activities in the area prior to the construction of the building. There was also a thin layer of finely crushed and processed Clunch to which water had been added to create a 'paste'. Based upon local parallels, this is probably a make-up deposit for a relatively high quality floor. Although no actual floors or occupation related deposits survived based upon the location of the various deposits it can be postulated that the interior of the building lay to the north of the wall foundations, with an external area to the south. The floor make-up deposits indicates that the building was at least 4.0m wide; if, as seems likely, the boundary with the churchyard has remained relatively stable, then the building was probably 4.5-5.0m wide. A change in the quality of the make-up deposits also suggests that the building was divided into at least two rooms. A test pit excavated in 2004 on the southern external wall also revealed a 0.6m homogenous layer of dark brown silty loam with occasional charcoal flecks (Appleby & Dickens 2004: 32).

Peterhouse College founded in 1280 moved to its present site in 1284 with the purchase of two houses just outside the then Trumpington Gate to accommodate a Master and fourteen 'worthy but impoverished Fellows'. The building was located in an area purchased with Hugh de Balsham's bequest in 1286, but there is no documentary evidence for any buildings that can be convincingly linked to this location (cf. Stokes 1908; Willis & Clark 1886). Despite this, the distance of the site from Trumpington Street, the thickness of the Medieval agricultural soil and the nature of the foundations all suggest that the building is unlikely to predate the acquisition of the site by Peterhouse.

Acknowledgements

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Figures

Figure 1 Location map

Figure 2 Plan of investigations

Figure 3 Sections

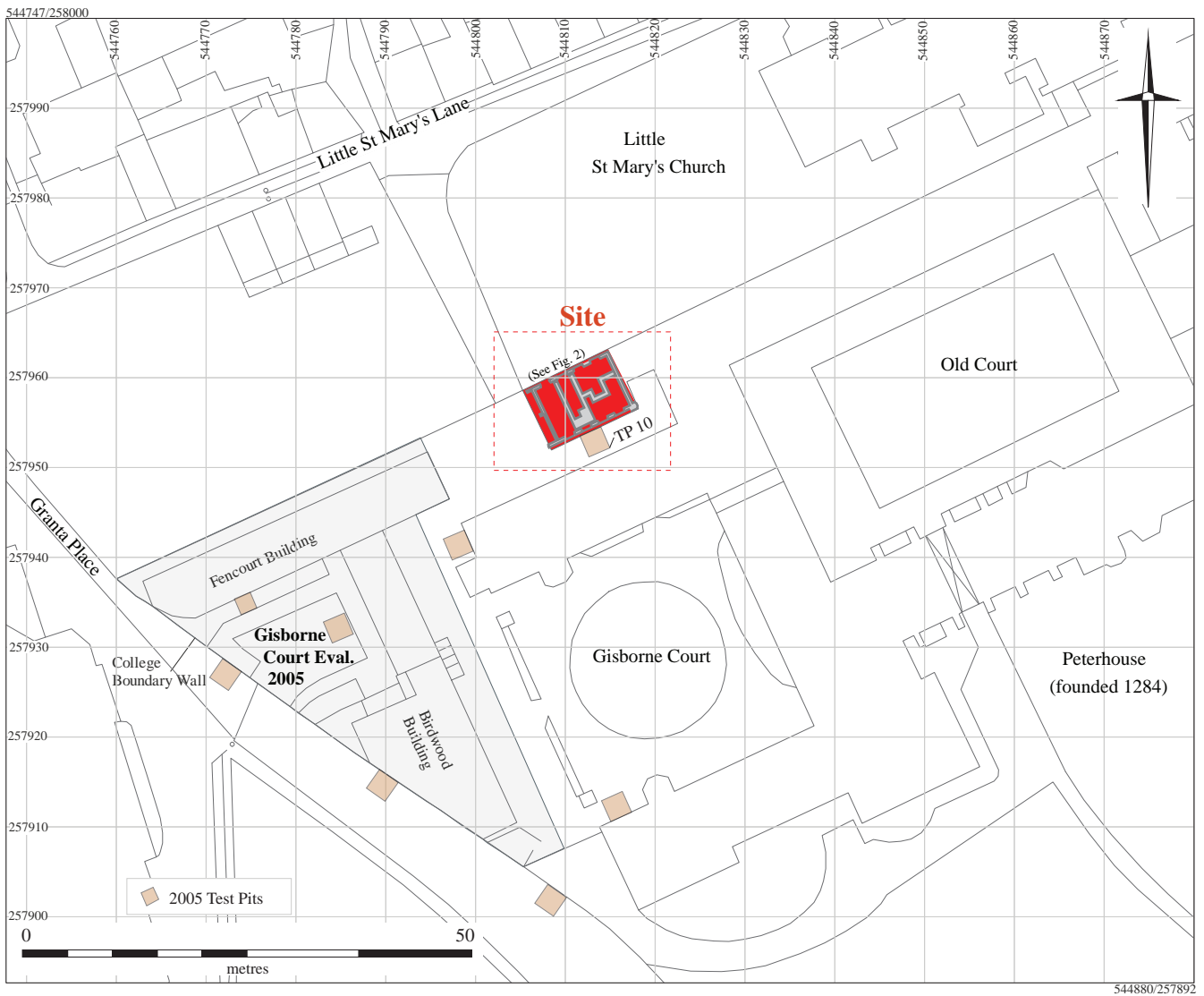
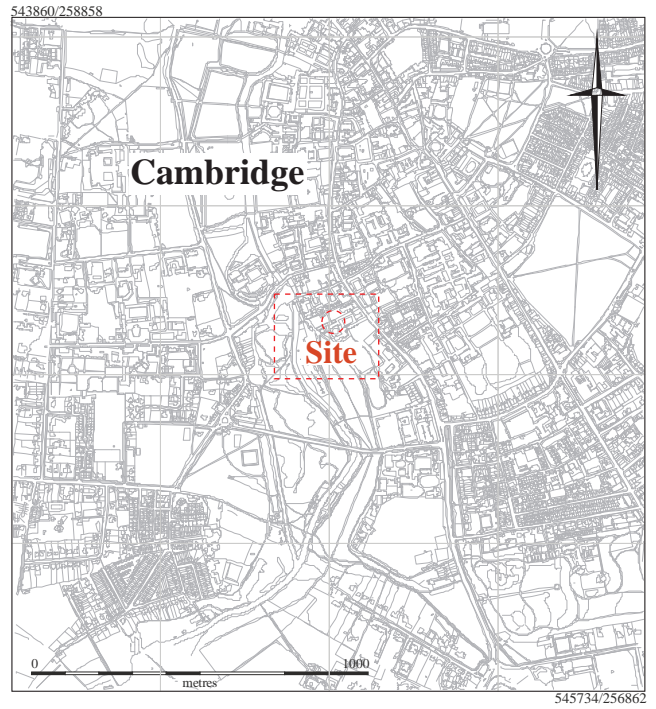


Figure 1. Location Plan

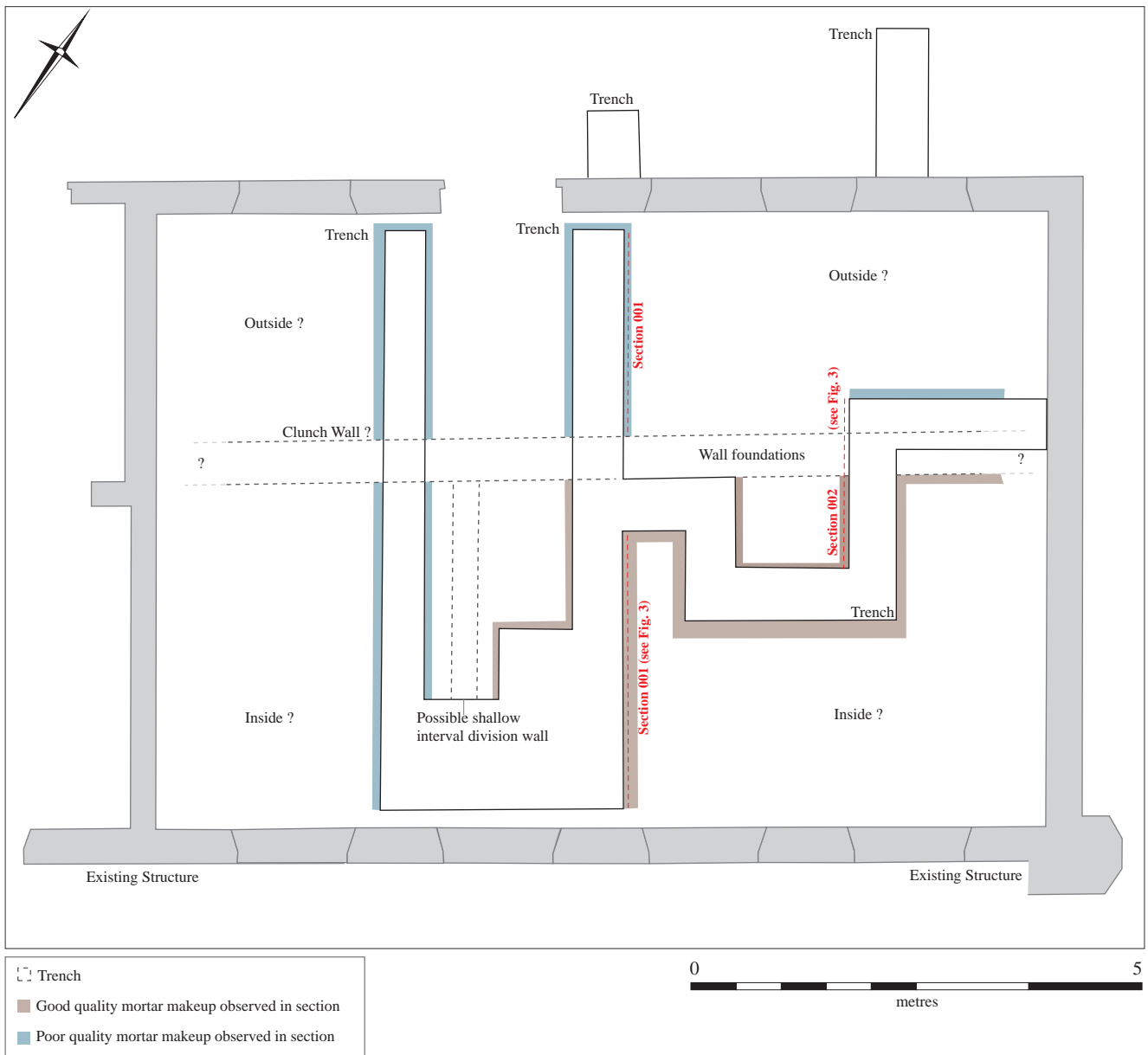


Figure 2. Schematic plan of Peterhouse Music Room

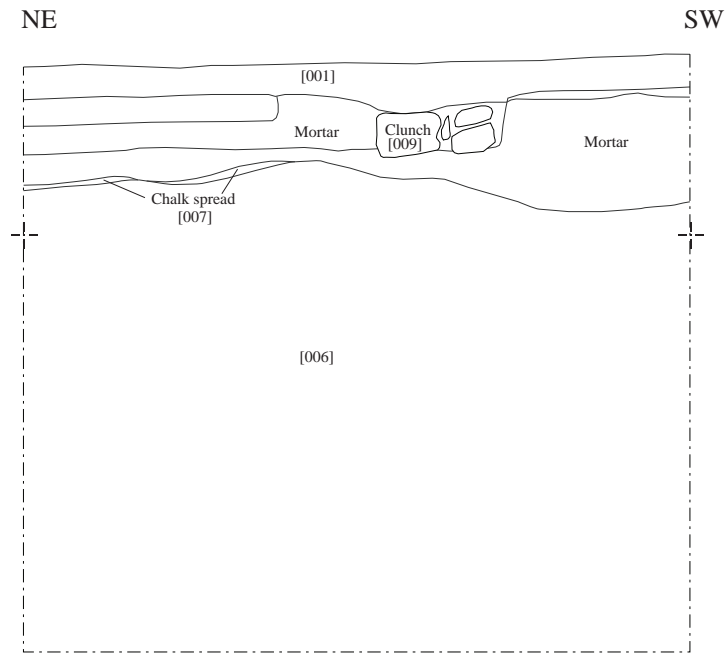
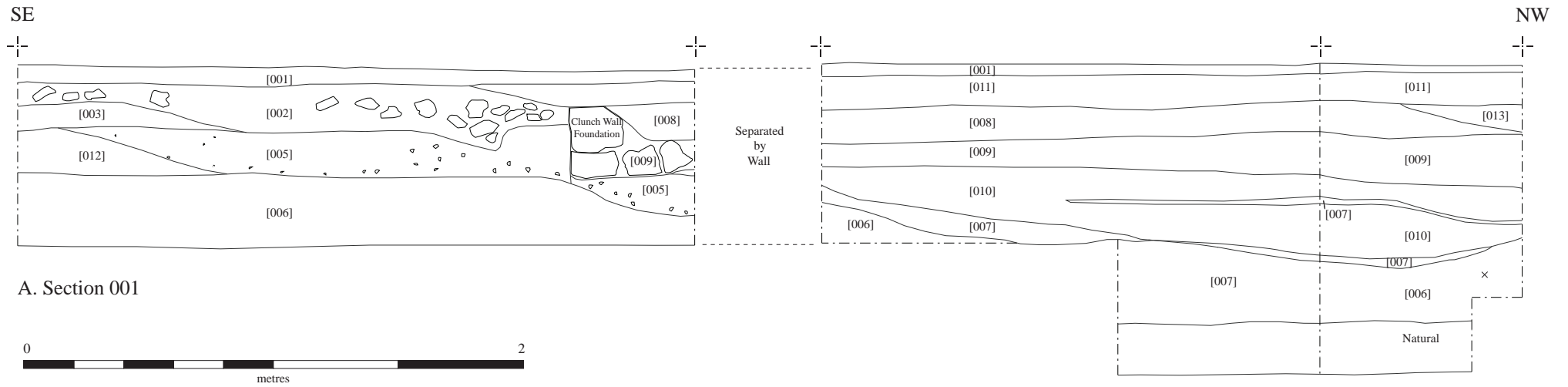


Figure 3. Section of trench excavations

