

Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge

An Archaeological Watching Brief



Richard Newman

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With contributions from Craig Cessford, David Hall and Vicki Herring

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University of Cambridge
Division of Archaeology
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Report No. 1204
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Summary

An archaeological watching brief was conducted at Gonville & Caius College, Cambridge, during the instillation of a replacement gas supply. Investigations were undertaken within Caius Court and the southwestern portion of Tree Court. Although the trench was limited in depth, a number of results were obtained. Firstly, the footing of the College's 16th century eastern boundary wall was encountered. Originally constructed in 1565, this wall remained extant until 1854. In addition, part of the footing of the contemporary Gate of Virtue was also identified. Finally, within Caius Court a small finds assemblage was recovered from the 16th century and later made-ground deposits. This included pottery, glass, worked bone and clay tobacco pipe fragments.

Introduction

A watching brief was undertaken at Gonville & Caius College, Cambridge, during the installation of a new gas main located in Caius Court and the southwestern portion of Tree Court (Figure 1). The resultant trench extended for a total of 106m in length; it covered an area of 64sqm. Archaeological monitoring occurred on an episodic basis during the course of this work – as and when a discrete section of trench was completed, prior to its backfilling – between the 4th of July and the 28th of August 2013. Topographically, Gonville & Caius College is bounded to the north by Trinity Lane (formerly St. Michael's Lane), to the south by Senate House Passage, to the east by Trinity Street (formerly the High Street) and to the west by Trinity Hall Lane (formerly Milne Street). It is centred upon grid reference TL 447 585. Geologically, the site is situated upon second terrace river gravels overlying Gault clay (British Geological Survey, sheet 188). Given the limited depth of the new service trench, however, the underlying geology was not encountered during the present investigation. The current ground surface within the two courts lay at c. 9.0m OD.

Methodologically, once an individual segment of trench had been hand-excavated by the principal contractor, typically for a length of around 10m, it was investigated archaeologically prior to the installation of the service. All archaeological deposits that were thus identified were recorded using the CAU-modified version of the MoLAS single context recording system (Spence 1994); base plans were drawn at a scale of 1:20, whilst sections were drawn at a scale of 1:10. Throughout the following text, context numbers are indicated by square brackets (*e.g.* [001]) and feature numbers are denoted by the prefix F. (*e.g.* F.01). The photographic archive consists of a series of digital images. All work was carried out with strict adherence to Health and Safety legislation and within the recommendations of FAME (Allen & Holt 2010). The project followed the specification issued by the CAU (Dickens 2013) and approved by Dan McConnell, Development Control Archaeologist at Cambridgeshire's Historic Environment Team. The work was commissioned by Robert Ward-Booth on behalf of Gonville & Caius College, Cambridge. The sitecode for this project is **GCC 13**; the event number is **ECB 4013**.

Historical and Archaeological Background

The historical and archaeological background of Cambridge has been covered in depth in several publications (*e.g.* Cam 1959; Lobel 1975; Bryan 1999; Taylor 1999). Consequently, only a brief summary of this information is presented here. In the first instance, limited evidence of Prehistoric activity has been identified in the vicinity. This pattern is primarily indicative of transhumant usage of the gravel terraces flanking the river Cam. Similarly, limited evidence of Roman occupation is known from the immediate area. Previously, the accepted picture of Cambridge during this period has been one of a settlement centred almost exclusively upon the Castle Hill area (*e.g.* Alexander & Pullinger 2000; Evans & Ten Harkel 2010). Recent fieldwork, however, is demonstrating that this interpretation is somewhat limited, with significant settlements having been detected to the west of the presumed centre (*e.g.* Evans 1996; Lucas & Whittaker 2001; Evans & Cessford *in prep.*). Finds from this period have also been made to the southeast and there is evidence of Roman activity on the riverfront (Dickens 1996) and the Park Street/Jesus Lane area (Alexander *et al.* 2004). Indeed, it is likely that a small suburb existed in the Bridge Street area, close to the junction with Jesus Lane and St John's Road, during the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD

(Newman 2008, 61-9; Cessford 2012, 6-9). The present site most probably lay within the agricultural hinterland of this secondary settlement.

Subsequent evidence for Early Saxon (c. 410-700) activity in and around Cambridge primarily comprises material recovered during the 19th century from pagan cemeteries situated on the outskirts of the city (see Dodwell *et al.* 2004; Cessford with Dickens 2005). Very little occupational evidence from this period has yet been identified. Middle to Late Saxon (c. 700-900) activity, in contrast, appears to have been primarily refocused upon the Castle Hill area, where a 7th to 9th century execution cemetery has been identified (Cessford *et al.* 2007). By the mid 9th century it is clear that some form of settlement had been re-established in the area, as this was occupied by the Viking Great Army in 875, and the region was incorporated into the Danelaw from c. 886 until its conquest by Edward the Elder in c. 917 (Cam 1934, 39; Lobel 1975, 3). But, up until the mid 10th century, this settlement remained only an “economically viable backwater” (Hines 1999, 136). Following this date, however, it emerged as a significant urban centre. By the late 10th century a mint had been established (Lobel 1975, 3) and the town was being linked to a group of important trading centres including Norwich, Thetford and Ipswich (Fairweather 2005), thereby emphasising the central role played by river trade in its rapid economic growth. Indeed by the beginning of the 13th century Cambridge acted as the leading inland port in the county, through which goods and services were disseminated to many of the surrounding regional towns (Cam 1934, 43).

By this time the town was fully established on the eastern side of the river, and was probably already enclosed by an extensive boundary work that later became known as the King’s Ditch. Although the eponymous ‘king’ is usually interpreted as being either John (1167-1216), who repaid the bailiffs of Cambridge the costs of enclosing of the city in 1215, or Henry III (1207-72), who paid for its refortification in 1267 (Cooper 1842-53), a recent radio-carbon determination derived from the basal fill of the ditch at the Grand Arcade site indicates that the boundary was at least partially extant by the mid 12th century (Cessford & Dickens *in prep.*). By the early 17th century, however, the ditch had largely silted up beyond practical use (Atkinson 1907) – despite numerous edicts having been passed for its cleaning and maintenance – and Cambridge’s role as a dominant port was similarly long since concluded (Bryan 1999, 97). At this stage the economic wealth of the town was no longer based upon river-borne trade, as it had been throughout the medieval period, but was instead largely centred around the University (first founded in 1209). The expansion of this institution had greatly benefited from royal investment, especially from the 15th century onwards (*ibid.*, 94-6), and its growth was also given significant impetus by the Dissolution of the Monasteries in 1536-40 since many of the disbanded religious houses were subsequently converted into Colleges (see Willis & Clark 1886). Indeed the influence of these Colleges has been one of the primary factors in shaping the landscape of Cambridge ever since.

Gonville & Caius itself represents the fourth oldest surviving College in the University (see further Willis & Clark 1886 I, 157-208; Venn 1901; Brooke 1996). It was first founded as Gonville Hall by Edmund Gonville, Rector of Terrington St. Clement, Norfolk, in 1348. At this time it was a small institution that supported only 20 scholars. It was transferred to its present site, occupying the area of present-day Gonville Court, in 1351. Subsequently, in 1557 – after a period of some decline – the

College was refounded and extended by John Caius; at this time, it was renamed Gonville & Caius. The most visible legacy of this period in the College's history comprises Caius Court itself, along with the contemporary gates of Humility, Virtue and Honour. Following its refoundation, the institution expanded markedly, so that – by 1630 – it supported around 25 Fellows and 150 students. Nevertheless, during the English Civil War and the unsettled times that followed, its numbers declined; they did not recover until 1840. After this date, however, its expansion was rapid. A larger Hall and a new Library were constructed in 1853-4, and major new residential buildings were appended to the site in 1868-70, 1901-4, 1934, 1962 and 2006. In 1981, during the instillation of hot water ducts within the southern portion of Tree Court, remnants of the 16th century boundary wall of the College were identified (Richmond *et al.* 1982). The results of this investigation will be discussed in greater detail below.

In addition, further archaeological investigations have previously been undertaken in relatively close proximity to the present site. In particular, two excavations – undertaken at Gonville & Caius's Bateman Building and the University's Old Schools respectively (Figure 1) – have revealed detailed sequences that pertain to a long-lived occupational history in the vicinity. The first of these investigations took place in 1995 during works undertaken within the Bateman Building's cellar (Alexander 1995). Here, at the base of the sequence a number of quarry pits, of probable 11th or 12th century date, were encountered. Subsequently, during the 12th century, domestic occupation was established at the site. Several floor surfaces, along with a contemporary ditch and cess pit, were associated with this phase. By the 13th century, however, the area appears to have been converted into a garden. It remained in horticultural use upon its acquisition by the college in 1353 and was later to comprise part of the garden of the Master's Lodge following this building's construction in 1441. Indeed, the area remained in use as a garden until it became sealed beneath a stable block in the mid 18th century; the footings of this latter structure were also encountered. Amongst the most significant discoveries to be made during the course of the excavation were several 16th century pits that had been cut into the garden soil layer located in the Master's garden. Notably, these contained a number of complete and near-complete ceramic vessels.

The second significant excavation to have been conducted in the immediate vicinity of the present site took place in 2009. At this time, a lift-shaft was introduced into the north range of the Old Schools of the University of Cambridge (Newman & Evans 2011). Here, four distinct phases of activity were identified, the first of which was agricultural in nature and appears to date to the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD. Following this, however, the site remained unoccupied until a timber-framed building was constructed during the 11th century. Associated with this structure were a number of refuse pits, along with a probable timber-lined well or cesspit. Domestic occupation then continued until the late 14th century, when the site was cleared in order to allow the construction of University's School of Theology (or Divinity School). Work commenced on this structure in *c.* 1370, and at least two phases of construction were identified; the building was completed in *c.* 1400. Finally, later additions and modifications to the structure were also examined, including the foundation of Stephen Wright's Old Schools façade of 1755-58. When taken in conjunction, the results of these two investigations reveal that an intensive, long-lived sequence of medieval occupation is represented in close proximity to Gonville & Caius College.

Results

The gas pipe replacement trench was limited in scale, measuring a maximum of 0.6m wide by 0.6m deep; consequently, it did not penetrate to the depth of the underlying medieval deposits. Nevertheless, Post-Medieval layers associated with the landscaping and maintenance of Caius Court were encountered. These deposits contained small quantities of refuse of 16th to 19th century date, alongside residual medieval material. In addition, two substantial footings were encountered in Tree Court. The first was associated with the extant eastern range of Caius Court, the second with a contemporary 16th century garden wall.

Caius Court

A relatively consistent sequence of made-ground/levelling deposits was encountered all across Caius Court. At surface level, this sequence commenced with a well-worked humic topsoil deposit – measuring 0.17m thick – that overlay a relatively firm mid brown sandy clay silt layer with occasional gravel and charcoal fleck inclusions ([001]); this was 0.25m thick. The latter then overlay in turn a relatively firm mid orangey brown deposit of clay silt with occasional to frequent small stone, gravel and charcoal inclusions that measured 0.37m thick ([003]). This material was most probably associated with the initial establishment of Caius Court in the 1560s, although it appears to have been repeatedly disturbed and homogenised over the succeeding centuries. The majority of the material culture assemblage was recovered from this layer.

Localised variations in the made-ground sequence primarily consisted of mixed and banded pale yellow sandy mortar and mid brown sandy clay silt deposit [002], which contained frequent clunch and mortar fragment inclusions. Measuring in excess of 0.30m thick, this deposit was principally constrained to the northwest portion of Caius Court. It may well have been associated with the widespread programme of construction that was associated with the establishment of Caius Court itself during the mid 16th century.

Tree Court

In general, the work conducted in Tree Court encountered a similar – albeit rather more recent – sequence of made-ground deposits as that conducted in Caius Court. Within the central open area itself, the most significant discovery comprised masonry wall footing **F.1** (Figures 1 to 3). Most probably 16th century in origin, this footing was both substantial and well-built.

Wall footing **F.1** was predominately composed of rough, unworked Barnack limestone and clunch fragments that measured between 0.12m and 0.44m in length. These were bonded with coarse yellow sandy lime mortar. In addition, the fragmentary remnant of a moulded clunch block was also present. This had a simple unfilleted roll and hollow, suggesting that it may have originally comprised part of a door or window frame. The block could not be recovered, however, as it only partially projected into the area of the trench. Overall, the exposed portion of the footing measured 0.98m in width and its uppermost surviving projection lay 0.56m below the present ground surface (at c. 8.44m OD). No trace of upstanding dressed facing material was present, implying that this had been thoroughly robbed at the time of the wall's demolition.

Overlying the robbed-out remnant of footing **F.1** were layers [007] and [008]. Although similar in nature to made-ground deposits [001] and [003] in Caius Court, the former deposits pertain instead to the mid 19th century establishment of Tree Court (Richmond *et al.* 1982, 100).

Layer [007] comprised a relatively loose deposit of mid to dark brown humic clay silt with rare gravel and charcoal inclusions. It measured 0.27m thick. Adjacent to and partially overlapping this layer – to the north of **F.1** – was [008]. This deposit consisted of relatively firm mid brown intermixed clay silt with occasional gravel and chalk fleck inclusions. It measured 0.34m thick.

A second footing (**F.2**) was also encountered during the course of the watching brief in this area. In contrast to **F.1**, however – which lay beneath the open lawn of Tree Court – this latter example was situated within the passageway that connected the Gates of Wisdom and Virtue. Constructed in 1567, these gates form part of the eastern range of Caius Court; they now provide access between the latter area and Tree Court itself. **F.2** was directly associated with the construction of the Gate of Virtue.

Footing **F.2** had been heavily truncated by the instillation of earlier services. The surviving remnant – which measured 1.36m in length by 0.24m+ in width and 0.33m+ deep – was composed of rough unworked clunch fragments bonded with coarse yellow sandy lime mortar. Also present were a number of roughly squared Barnack limestone slabs. Situated along the outer edge of the footing, these fragments appear to have been used to reinforce the clunch-rubble core. Notably, the materials employed in the construction of **F.2** were very similar to those previously encountered in **F.1**.

Material Culture

A small finds assemblage was recovered during the course of the project. This material – which included pottery, clay tobacco pipe, glass and worked bone – was entirely recovered from the made-ground/landscaping layers that were encountered in Caius Court. It can be broken down as follows:

Pottery (with David Hall)

In total 33 sherds of pottery, weighing 824g, were recovered during this investigation (Table 1). The assemblage included material of medieval (36.4% by count and 17.8% by weight), Post-Medieval (33.3% by count and 66.4% by weight) and modern (30.3% by count and 15.8% by weight) date. Although the medieval sherds were residual in nature, the remainder of the group – dating to the 16th to 19th centuries – appears to have been contemporary with the layer's deposition. The only individually significant vessel comprised the lower portion of a German Stoneware tankard from Frechen. This has moulded decoration in the form of a panel depicting the Garden of Eden. Such scenes were not uncommon during the first half of the 16th century, although they were primarily restricted to finer, non-utilitarian vessels (see further Gaimster 1997). Notably, however, no examples of this type of decoration have previously been encountered in Cambridge.

Period	Fabric	Count	Weight (g)	MSW	Date
<i>Medieval</i>	Coarse Buff	5	54	10.8	13 th -15 th century
	Coarse Grey	6	85	14.2	13 th -15 th century
	Medieval Ely	1	8	8	13 th -15 th century
<i>Post-Medieval</i>	Glazed Red Earthenware	6	174	29	16 th -17 th century
	Frechen Stoneware	5	373	74.6	16 th -17 th century
<i>Modern</i>	Creamware	1	3	3	18 th century
	English Utilitarian Stoneware	2	83	41.5	19 th century
	Refined White Earthenware	7	44	6.3	19 th century

Table 1: Ceramic assemblage by fabric (MSW = mean sherd weight)

Clay Tobacco Pipe (with Craig Cessford)

A single clay tobacco pipe bowl was recovered from a made-ground deposit in Caius Court. 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, the bowl conformed to Oswald's General Type 6, which dates to c. 1660-80. Aside from a rouletted rim, no additional evidence of decoration or a diagnostic maker's mark was present.

Glass (with Vicki Herring)

A small glass assemblage, consisting of three shards weighing 213g, was recovered from the made-ground deposits in Caius Court. This material included a fragment of window glass and the necks of two onion/utility bottles; all of these items are Post-Medieval in date.

<006>, [005]. A single, very badly degraded fragment of Late Medieval or early Post-Medieval window glass, which is naturally blue/green in colour. Possibly produced using the 'crown' method of manufacture.

<009>, [006]. Two top/neck shards of olive green glass that represent portions of utility bottles of unknown form. The applied collar and the thick patina suggest an 18th century or earlier date of manufacture.

Worked Bone

Two worked bone artefacts, weighing 17g, were recovered from the made-ground deposits in Caius Court. These comprised a knife handle and a button. Both items are of probable 18th or 19th century date.

<003>, [004]. A circular worked bone button. It is concave in profile, and measures 17mm in diameter, with four centrally drilled attachment holes. It was probably cut from a scapula blade, and weighs 1g.

<007>, [005]. Three conjoining fragments derived from a worked and polished cutlery knife handle. It is trapezoidal in form, gradually tapering along its length; it also has a central drilled and plugged tang hole. The surviving remnant measures 73mm in length by a maximum of 24mm in width; it is composed of a heavily-worked cattle- or horse-sized metapodial, and weighs 16g.

Discussion

The most significant result obtained during the course of this project comprised the identification of substantial wall footing **F.1** within present-day Tree Court (Figures 1 to 3). This footing represents part of a boundary wall that was originally established in 1565 as part of the College's refoundation by John Caius (Willis & Clark 1886 I, 163). It then comprised the perimeter of the President's Garden, an open area lying immediately to the east of the contemporary College buildings, and remained the boundary between the collegiate precinct and adjacent domestic properties until the latter's expansion in 1782. Significantly, elements of this same boundary wall were previously encountered during service works undertaken in 1981. At this time, a well-preserved section of the structure lying a short distance to the south of the present investigation was examined (Richmond *et al.* 1982). Much better preserved than the recent exposure, the most interesting aspect of the 1981 discovery comprised the number and quality of reused medieval moulded stone fragments that had been employed within its build. Based upon an examination of the fragments themselves, allied with associated documentary research, it was concluded that many of the blocks had been derived from the dissolution of Ramsey Abbey (*ibid.*, 101-4). Given the similarity of alignment and materials between the recently exposed footing and that of 1981, there can be little doubt that they formed part of the same contemporaneous build. The wall was finally demolished in 1854, whilst the buildings that comprise present-day Tree Court were constructed between 1860 and 1875.

The small finds group recovered from Caius Court, although limited in scale, was also of some interest. As is typical of collegiate sites located in both Cambridge and

Oxford, the assemblage was dominated by material associated with dining and the consumption of alcohol. Most commonly represented were fragments of stoneware vessels from Germany, including part of a fine early 16th century tankard. This material was most probably related to the importation/consumption of beer (as were contemporary stoneware jugs previously recovered during the Bateman Building excavation). It most probably dates to the mid 16th century, when Caius Court was established, although deposition may have continued after this date. The predominance of German stoneware at collegiate sites represents a widespread pattern, previously identified in both Cambridge (Newman 2011, 66-7) and Oxford (Chadwick *et al.* 2012, 112-37), where the density of such material has been found to be several times greater than in contemporary domestic contexts. Also recovered was a small quantity of later 18th and 19th century material including clay tobacco pipe fragments, shards derived from glass wine bottles and a worked bone knife handle. Small-scale deposition of this nature was most probably associated with episodes of maintenance and/or ground-raising activity that were periodically undertaken. The presence of residual earlier material indicates the extent of the medieval deposits that remain undisturbed beneath both courts.

Acknowledgments

This evaluation was commissioned by Robert Ward-Booth on behalf of Gonville & Caius College, Cambridge, and was monitored by Dan McConnell of Cambridgeshire County Council's Historic Environment Team. It was managed for the CAU by Alison Dickens and the fieldwork was undertaken by Richard Newman. The graphics for this report were produced by Bryan Crossan.

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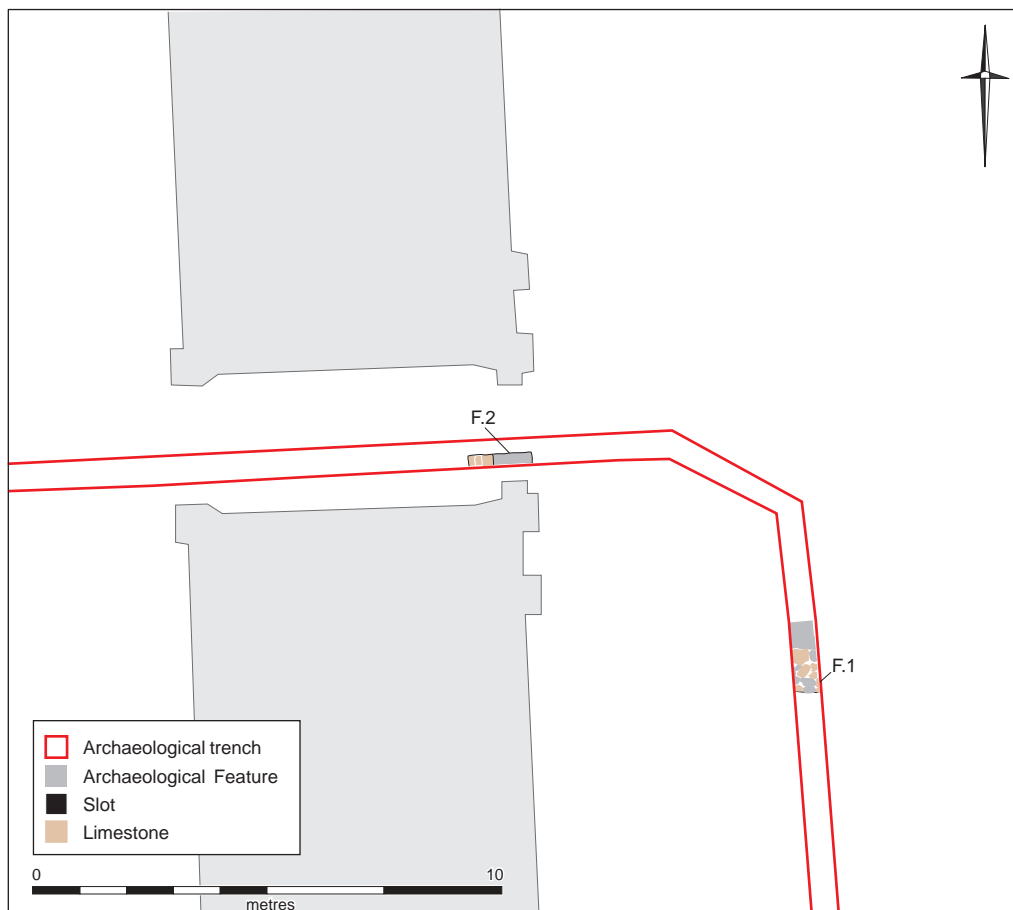
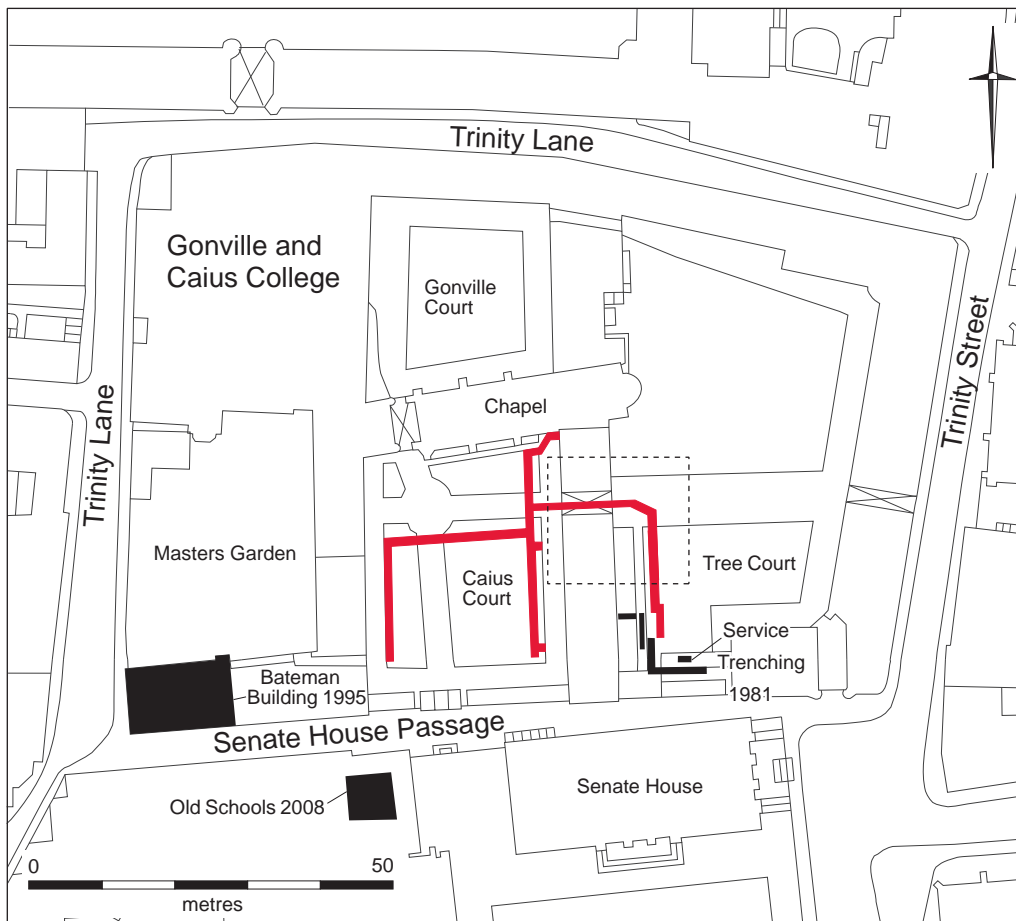


Figure 1. Location of investigation, showing previous excavations discussed in the text, and with inset of F.1 and F.2.



Figure 2. Footing F.1, facing west.

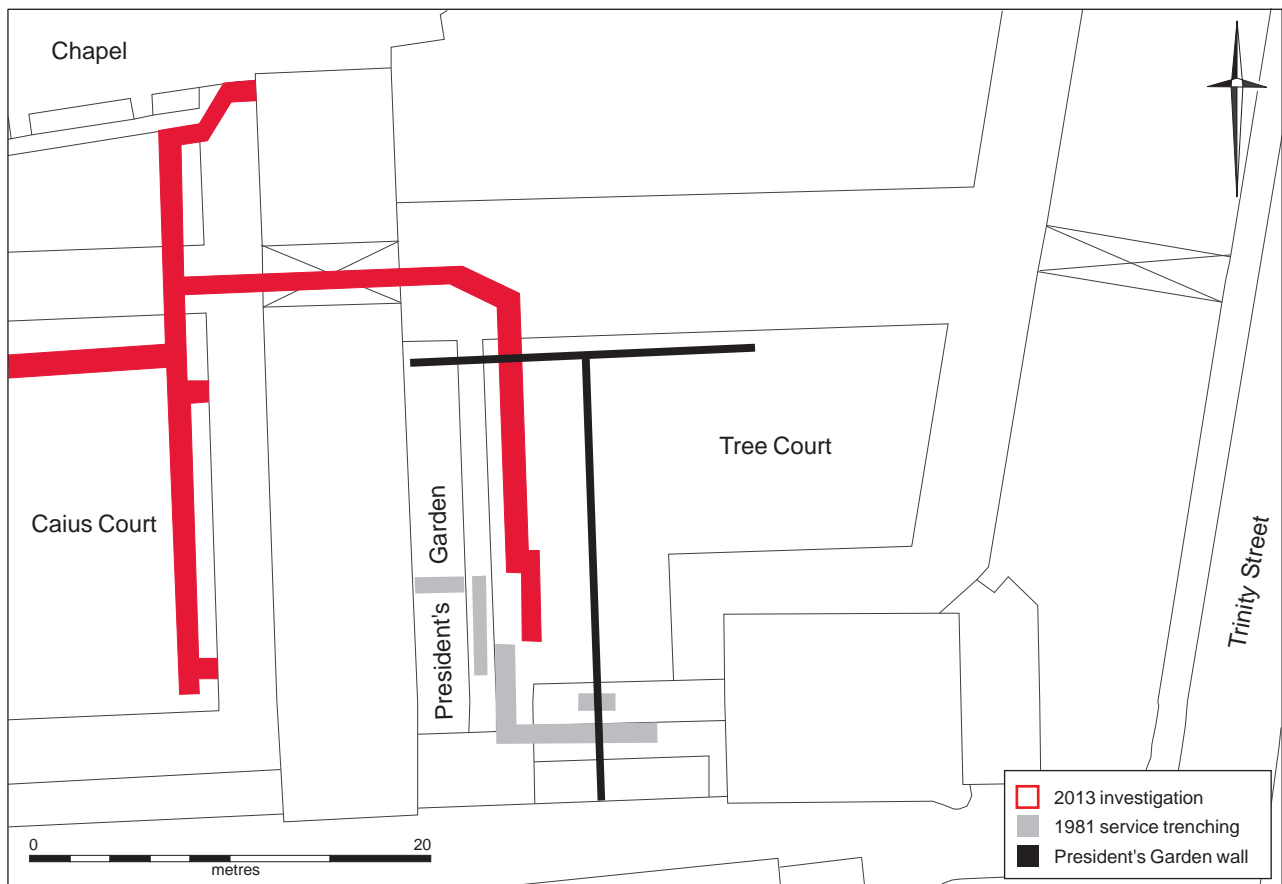


Figure 3. Location of President's Garden wall (from Willis & Clark, 1886) in relation to 1981 and 2013 service trenches.

Oasis Form

OASIS ID: cambridg3-169186	
Project Details	
Project name	Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge
Short description of the project	An archaeological watching brief was conducted at Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, during the instillation of a replacement gas supply. Investigations were undertaken within Caius Court and the southwestern portion of Tree Court. Although the trench was limited in depth, a number of results were obtained. Firstly, the footing of the College's 16th century eastern boundary wall was encountered. Originally constructed in 1565, this wall remained extant until 1854. In addition, part of the footing of the contemporary Gate of Virtue was also identified. Finally, within Caius Court a small finds assemblage was recovered from the 16th century and later made-ground deposits. This included pottery, glass, worked bone and clay tobacco pipe fragments.
Project dates	Start: 04-07-2013 End: 28-08-2013
Previous/future work	Yes / Not known
Any associated project reference codes	ECB 4013 - HER event no.
Any associated project reference codes	GCC 13 - Sitecode
Type of project	Field evaluation
Site status	Listed Building
Current Land use	Residential 2 - Institutional and communal accommodation
Monument type	FOUNDATION Post Medieval
Significant Finds	POTTERY Post Medieval
Significant Finds	TOBACCO PIPE Post Medieval
Significant Finds	WORKED BONE Post Medieval
Methods & techniques	"Visual Inspection"
Development type	Service infrastructure (e.g. sewage works, reservoir, pumping station, etc.)
Prompt	Direction from Local Planning Authority - PPS
Position in the planning process	After full determination (eg. As a condition)
Project Location	
Country	England
Site location	CAMBRIDGESHIRE CAMBRIDGE CAMBRIDGE Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge
Postcode	CB2 1TA
Study area	1400.00 Square metres
Site coordinates	TL 447 585 52.205277164 0.117800706439 52 12 19 N 000 07 04 E Point
Height OD / Depth	Min: 0m Max: 0m

Project Creators	
Name of Organisation	Cambridge Archaeological Unit
Project brief originator	Local Authority Archaeologist and/or Planning Authority/advisory body
Project design originator	Alison Dickens
Project director/manager	Alison Dickens
Project supervisor	Richard Newman
Type of sponsor/funding body	Developer
Name of sponsor/funding body	Gonville & Caius College, Cambridge
Project Archives	
Physical Archive recipient	Cambridgeshire County Archaeology Store
Physical Archive ID	GCC 13
Physical Contents	"Ceramics","Glass","Worked bone"
Digital Archive recipient	Cambridgeshire County Archaeology Store
Digital Archive ID	GCC 13
Digital Contents	"Ceramics","Glass","Worked bone","other"
Digital Media available	"Images raster / digital photography","Spreadsheets","Text"
Paper Archive recipient	Cambridgeshire County Archaeology Store
Paper Archive ID	GCC 13
Paper Contents	"Ceramics","Glass","Worked bone","other"
Paper Media available	"Context sheet","Photograph","Plan","Section"
Project Bibliography	
Publication type	Grey literature (unpublished document/manuscript)
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