

Great Saint Mary's Church, Cambridge

Observations during internal alterations

July - September 2013



Alison Dickens MifA

Great Saint Mary's Church, Cambridge
Observations during internal alterations
July - September 2013

Alison Dickens BA, MfA

© **Cambridge Archaeological Unit**
University of Cambridge
Department of Archaeology

August 2014

Report No. 1256
HER No: ECB4154

Introduction

Between March 2013 and February 2014 a significant phase of internal alteration work was carried out at Great Saint Mary's Church, Cambridge. This included improvement of office space, changes to the arrangement of the reception and shop area, repairs and improvements in the Verger's Vestry and boiler room, improvements to services and the addition of a new entrance screen at the west end.

Archaeological monitoring was conducted of the below ground works, which were limited to the northwest corner of the church and in the Narthex, under the instruction of the Diocesan Archaeologist Dr Tim Reynolds; additional observation and photographic recording of panelling and wall mounted monuments were made at the request of the Project Architect, Shona Mckay of Archimage.

Brief Historic Background

Great Saint Mary's, the University Church (figure 1), is first recorded in 1205 with the present building constructed between 1478 and 1519 (RCHME 1959: 275-280). The tower, begun in 1491 and standing incomplete for many years, was finally completed in 1608. The north and south aisle galleries, enabled by a bequest from William Worts and intended to accommodate undergraduates and bachelors, were built in 1736 by James Gibbs, adding some 400 seats. There was a major phase of reconstruction, by James Essex, in 1766 with further work by Scott in the early 1850s and Salvin later in that decade. The south porch was rebuilt in the 1880s.

Layout of Report

The report is divided into two sections. The first section deals with the archaeological monitoring of below ground works in the northwest corner office. The second section consists largely of a selection of the photographic record made of specific features being either moved or removed during the works. This includes panelling on the rear walls of the north and south aisle galleries and the stone work revealed behind the north gallery by its removal; four wall mounted monuments by the north door, panelling in an office in the northwest corner of the partitioned off north aisle (the former Consistory Court) and some 20th century panelling on the west wall of the south aisle.

Archaeological Observations in the Narthex and northwest corner

Narthex Test Pit

On 19th April 2012 a stone was lifted in the Narthex on the line of the proposed door guide (see figure 2). The hole measured 0.60m west to east and 0.49m north to south.

The stone itself was 0.13m thick sitting on c. 0.10m of loose brown earth. Beneath the earth deposit was 0.12m – 0.24m of a loose mortar, chalk and limestone dump,

this overlying a compact mortarly trample layer. This layer proved to be between 0.05m – 0.10m thick sitting on a darker brown 'soil' with stones, tile fragments and flint within it. The total depth of the test pit was 0.45m.

There was no evidence of any structural or burial remains within the test pit, which was dug to a depth greater than that required to accommodate the screen guide. No further observations were subsequently required in this area.

Northwest Corner Area

Several visits were made between the 10th and 23rd of September 2013 whilst the raised wooden floor of what had been an office in the northwest corner (effectively the west end of the partitioned north aisle) was lifted and the ground beneath reduced to accommodate new heating pipes and for the floor to be reset at a lower level to match that in the Narthex.

During the works two brick lined graves were revealed together with what remained of a much earlier burial cut by the later ones. The decision was made, in association with the DAC archaeologist, that the human remains should be left *in situ*. All recording was subsequently made from ground level and without entering either of the brick graves, which would have compromised the burials observed within them. The removal of the barrelled roof of the larger of the two lined graves allowed the new floor supports to be inserted without further interference.

Results

Grave 1

Human remains were encountered by the workmen at 0.80m below the floor whilst exploring a 'soft spot' within an otherwise compact deposit beneath the wooden floor. On examination it became clear that this loose material was not the original grave fill and that the burial had been disturbed at least once previously. The soft material was the backfilling of that earlier disturbance.

The skeleton, as observed, consisted of the two tibia of a single individual. The patella of the right leg was present, but not the left, nor apparently either of the fibula or any bones of the feet. Cleaning at the west end revealed the lower ends of both femurs indicating that the bones of the skeleton were in the correct anatomical position (and therefore this was a west to east burial as would be expected) but that the lower legs had been previously disturbed.

The subsequent exposure of the two brick lined graves immediately to the west (see below and figures 2 and 3) showed that very little more of the skeleton could have survived having been truncated toward the top of the femurs.

There was no material present in the grave to enable a date to be suggested, but give its stratigraphic relationship with the two later graves to the west it would certainly predate the 18th century and may be older still.

Grave 2

Grave 2 was a large brick lined grave or tomb in the extreme northwest corner of the narthex.

It was constructed from orange/pink unfrosted handmade bricks measuring 230 x 100 x 45mm (9 x 4 x 1¾ inches) set in a cream mortar. Internally the void measured 1.22m north to south, 2.07m west to east and 1.30m from the floor to the internal apex of the slightly arched roof.

Within the grave were two coffins; Coffin I on the north side, Coffin II on the south. Coffin I was of wooden construction with fragments of a fabric covering surviving in places although the overall condition was poor. Broad headed pins, which would have fastened the fabric in place, were visible as was an iron 'handle' on the southern side (figure 5). No human remains were visible in the coffin, but the shape indicated that this was, as might be expected, a west to east orientated burial.

Significantly there was a badly corroded coffin plate still in place in roughly the pelvic area of the coffin. It was not possible to make anything out on this *in situ*, but detailed photographs were taken and it subsequently proved possible to make out some of the painted lettering (figure 6).

MAR(Y?) (illegible)
died
Apl (?)0 178(?)
Ag(ed) 52 y(ear)s

Although it is not possible to identify the individual precisely, it does confirm the date of the burial as being late 18th century.

Coffin II was more elaborate. A badly decayed wooden outer shell was visible around a lead inner. It is possible that there was a further wooden coffin inside this, but it was not observable. It was not clear whether this coffin also had a fabric covering, but from what was visible it seems likely that it did not. No plaque or plate was observed and again the remains within were not visible. Given the form of the grave, most likely to be a family vault, it is reasonable to presume that the second occupant is a close relative of Mary's, most probably her husband.

Grave 3

Grave 3 was a single brick lined grave immediately to the south of Grave 2, constructed from very similar bricks. Internally the void measured 0.72m north to south and 2.12m west to east. The original height is unknown as if it had a roof in the past this had subsequently been removed and the grave itself was backfilled with loose rubble soil. The brickwork of the existing heating duct ran immediately over the top and the insertion of this had presumably led to the disturbance and back filling of the grave.

The backfill, and damage to the upper courses of the grave, meant that on initial exposure it was not immediately apparent that it actually was a grave. Removal of some of the fill, however, exposed the top of a skull at a depth of approximately 1.60m below the upper level of brick. Having established that it was indeed a grave no further excavation was carried out. The exposure of the remains was not sufficient to establish whether a coffin was present, however there was certainly no lead coffin in the grave. It is most likely that a wooden coffin had been present but had not survived the passage of time and the earlier disturbance.

Discussion

The presence of graves in the interior of the church of this age and status is very much to be expected. Burials within churches were comparatively rare prior to the 14th century, but became relatively common from around the late 15th century onwards (Peters 1996, 73-4). During this period the practice was especially prevalent in monastic contexts, such as hospital chapels (Gilchrist & Sloane 2005, 57). Subsequently, after c. 1600, the provision of brick-lined burial vaults became almost ubiquitous, particularly in urban contexts (Gilchrist & Morris 1996, 119; Gilchrist 2003, 402).

Across England four main types of intramural burial vault have been identified: large dynastic vaults, typically located beneath aisles or in side chapels; extensive private and parochial vaults, which often contained a large number of individuals; family vaults, which were usually brick-lined graves with a barrelled roof, and single-width brick-lined graves capped by a ledger stone identifying the occupant(s) (Litten 1991, 211-2). The two brick lined graves revealed in this work represent examples of the last two of these categories. From the form and the date indicated by the plate in Grave 2 they are late 18th century in date.

The earlier grave, Grave 1, is rather different. It may simply represent an earlier intramural burial in a much simpler form than the more elaborate ones that later cut through it. It is possible, however, that it actually predates the construction of this part of the church (begun in 1478) and is a remnant of a graveyard accompanying an earlier version of the church, which was rather smaller in extent. Given the limited survival and exposure of the burial itself and the lack of any dating evidence this cannot be demonstrated, but it remains an intriguing possibility.

The PARISH CHURCH of ST. MARY the GREAT

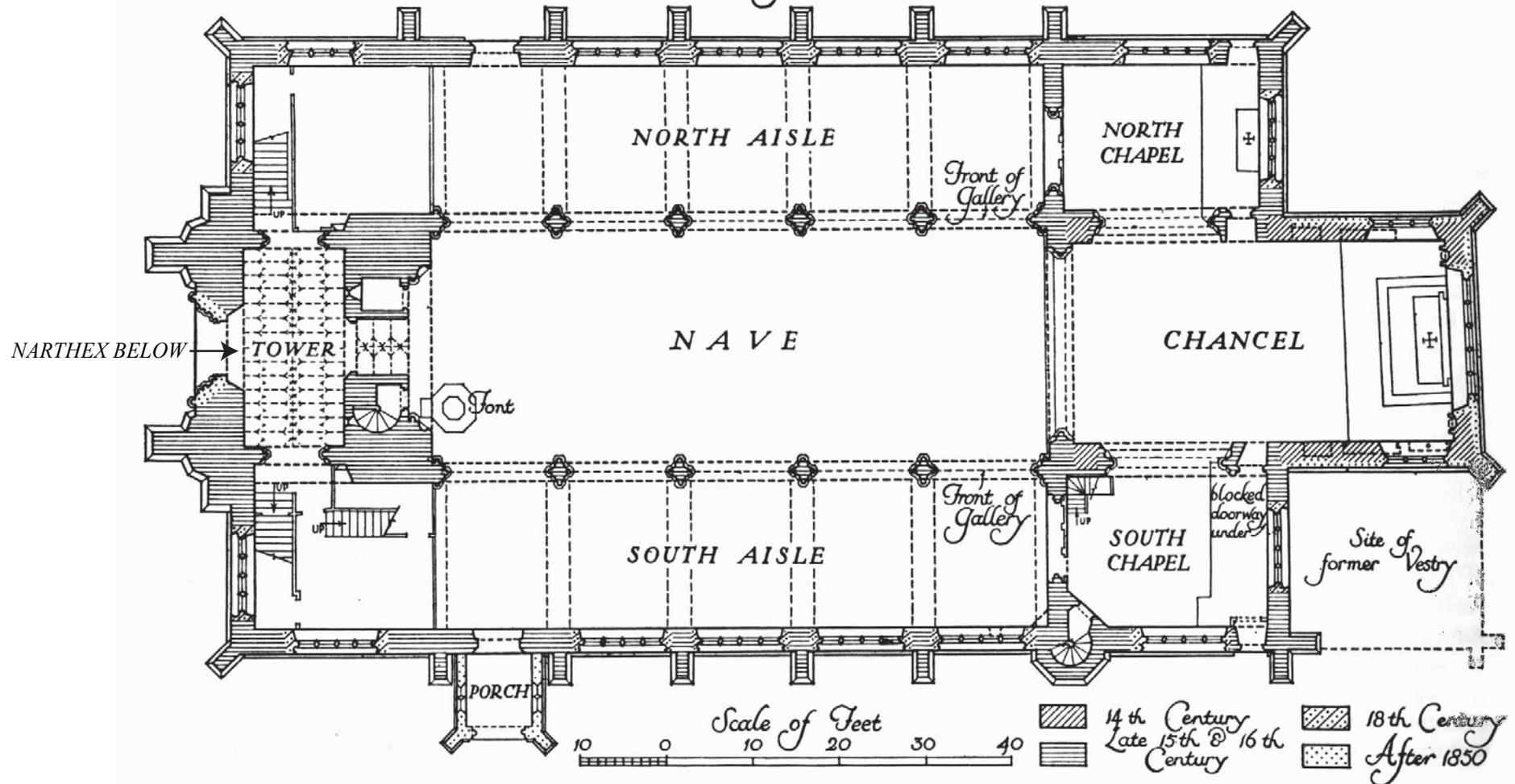


Figure 1: Church Plan (after RCHME 1959)

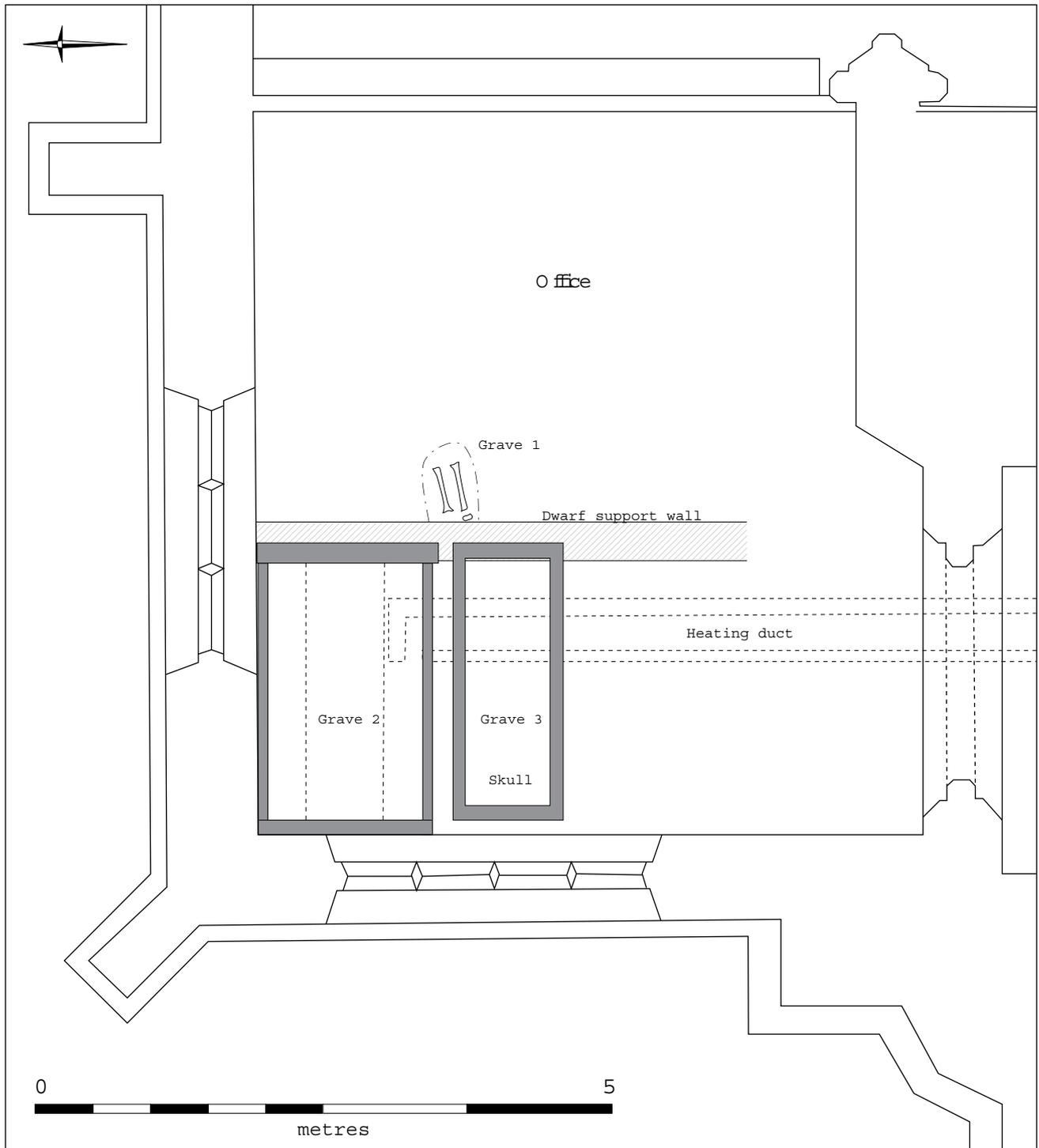
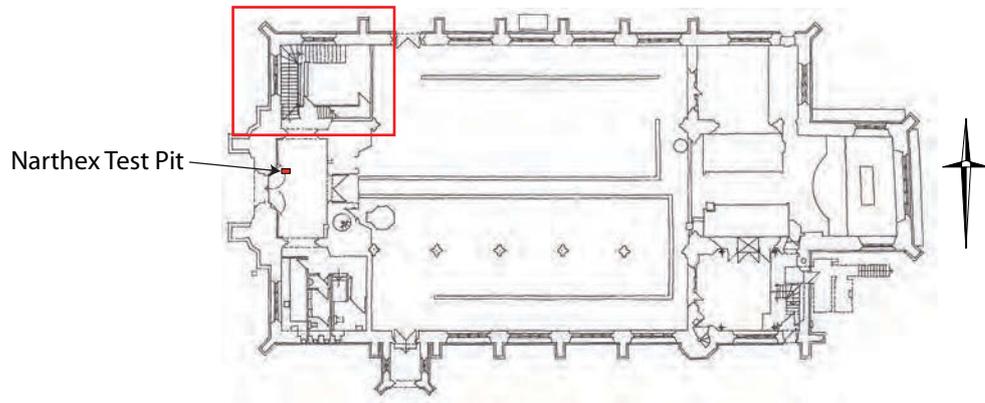


Figure 2: Location of Graves in the Office



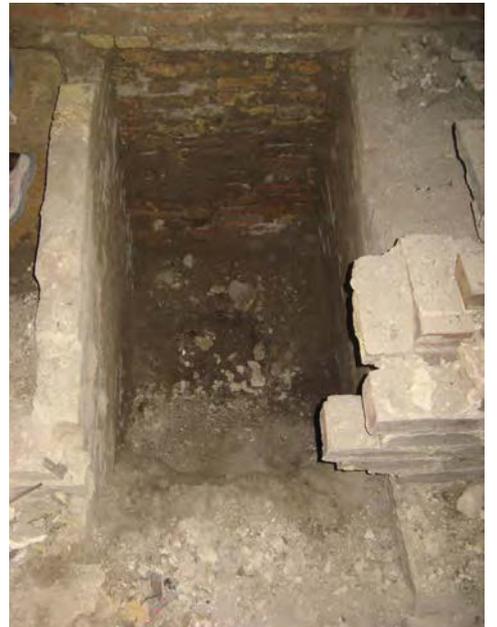
Grave 1 from the East



Grave 1 from the North



Grave 3 from the Southeast



Grave 3 from the East

Figure 3: Graves 1 and 3

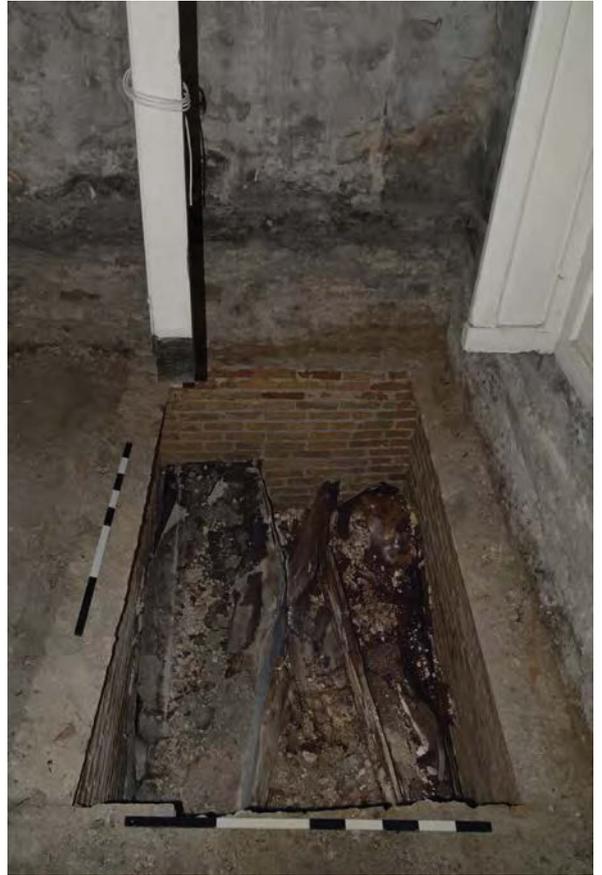


Grave 2 from the Southeast



Grave 2 Interior from the East

Figure 4: Grave 2 (1)



Grave 2 Interior from the East Showing Coffin Grave 2 from the East after Removal of Roof



Grave 2 Interior from the North

Figure 5: Grave 2 (2)



Figure 6: Cor Plate from Grave 2

Photographic Record of Internal Features

Panelling in the Northwest Office (figures 7-10)

The office area in the northwest corner of the church had been formed within the turret area adjacent to the tower inside the curve of the Gibbs staircase obscuring both it and two windows from view. Panelling was present on the north and east walls, but was different in appearance on each wall.

On the north wall the panelling extended to 1.25m high and consisted of six raised panels each 0.60m wide with 0.10m wide stiles set into upper and lower rails 0.10m deep. That the panelling is a secondary addition to the room is confirmed by the awkward cut partway through the fourth panel to fit around an RSJ support to the first floor office.

On the east wall the panelling extended from floor to ceiling, forming the partition dividing this space from the rest of the north aisle. The lower panels were 1.40m high with lower and middle rails 0.25m deep. The stiles alternated at 0.25m and 0.10m wide. The panel surface was flush with the rails and stiles. This panelling probably predates the later conversion to an office and may have been *in situ*, however, as figure 9 shows it is an awkward fit in the space and may equally have been a later insertion.

North and South Aisle Gallery Panelling (figures 11 and 12)

At the rear of the 1736 aisle galleries wainscot panelling extended along the full length on both sides. This remained *in situ* throughout on the south side, but was removed and reset on the north. The panelling was virtually identical on both sides with a typical panel measuring 0.68m wide with stiles 0.13m wide, the lower rail 0.12m deep and the upper rail 0.10m deep. Narrower panels were used at each end to fit. The panelling fits awkwardly across the windows reflecting its later addition to the structure, but there was not sufficient information visible to determine whether or not the panelling was contemporary with the construction of the galleries themselves.

Panelling at West End of South Aisle (figure 13)

Removal of cupboards at the west end of the south aisle revealed floor to ceiling panelling in dark brown stained wood. The panels were 0.68m wide with the lower section 0.92m high and the upper section 1.32m high. Stiles measured 0.14m wide, the lower, middle and upper rails all 0.21m deep.

The framework on which the panelling was set made it clear that the construction dated to the mid 20th century.

Wall Set Memorials by the North Door (figure 14)

Four wall-mounted memorials by the north door were photographed in their then positions as the new shop area would largely obscure them. The memorials appear to have been designed as outdoor gravestones, but the lack of weathering would indicate that they were never used as such.

Stonework Revealed on the Upper North Wall (figures 15-17)

Following removal of the north gallery aisle panelling the plaster was removed from the wall surface revealing the block clunch facing of the wall below. Most of the stonework was cut into rectangular blocks of varying sizes infilled with smaller rubble. Only two pieces of reused stone were observed which may relate to the earlier church building, but which may equally derive from the masons yard and be unrelated.

Evidence of earlier (20th century) remedial and alteration work was clearly visible at the top of the wall in the form of inset concrete corbels to support the ceiling.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to Shona McKay of Archimage, architects, and to the Reverend John Binns, Stewart Hall (Verger), Simon Pratten and Paul Hammans of Great Saint Mary's. Most of the internal works were carried out by F. A. Valiant and Sons Ltd., many thanks to Site Foreman Clive Richardson and his men for their assistance and forbearance.

Site work was conducted by the author and Richard Newman. Graphics by Vicki Herring and the author, photographs are by Dave Webb and the author. The works were monitored for the DAC by Dr Tim Reynolds, DAC Archaeologist.

References

- Bushell, W. D. 1948 *The Church of St. Mary the Great, the University Church at Cambridge* Cambridge, Bowes & Bowes
- Gilchrist, R. 2003. 'Dust to Dust: revealing the Reformation dead', in Gaimster, D. & Gilchrist, R. (ed's) *The Archaeology of Reformation, 1480-1580*. Leeds: Society for Post-Medieval Archaeology Monograph No. 1, 399-414.
- Gilchrist, R. & Morris, R. 1996. 'Continuity, reaction and revival: church archaeology in England c. 1600-1880', in Blair, J. & Pyrah, C. (ed's) *Church Archaeology: Research Directions for the Future*. York: Council for British Archaeology Research Report No. 104, 112-26.
- Gilchrist, R. & Sloane, B. 2005. *Requiem: the Medieval Monastic Cemetery in Britain*. London: Museum of London Archaeology Service.
- Litten, J. 1991. *The English Way of Death: the Common Funeral since 1450*. London: Robert Hale.
- Peters, C. 1996. 'The Late Medieval English church: interior and furnishings', in Blair, J. & Pyrah, C. (ed's) *Church Archaeology: Research Directions for the Future*. York: Council for British Archaeology Research Report No. 104, 68-75.
- RCHME 1959 *An Inventory of the Historical Monuments in the City of Cambridge* London HMSO
- Rodwell, W. 2012 *The Archaeology of Churches* Stroud, Amberley Publishing
- Sanders, S. 1896 *Historical and Architectural Notes on Great Saint Mary's Church, Cambridge* Cambridge Antiquarian Society (Reprinted from the Journal of the Archaeological Institute)

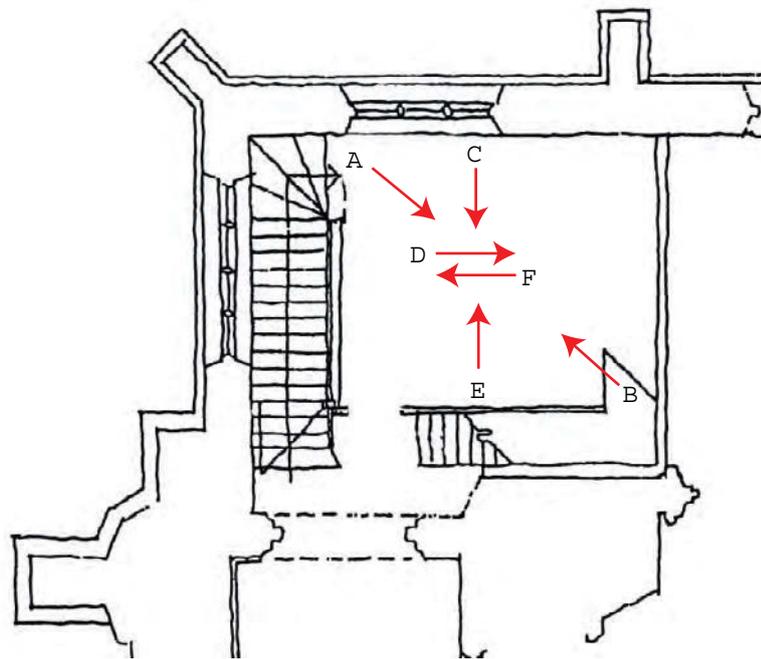
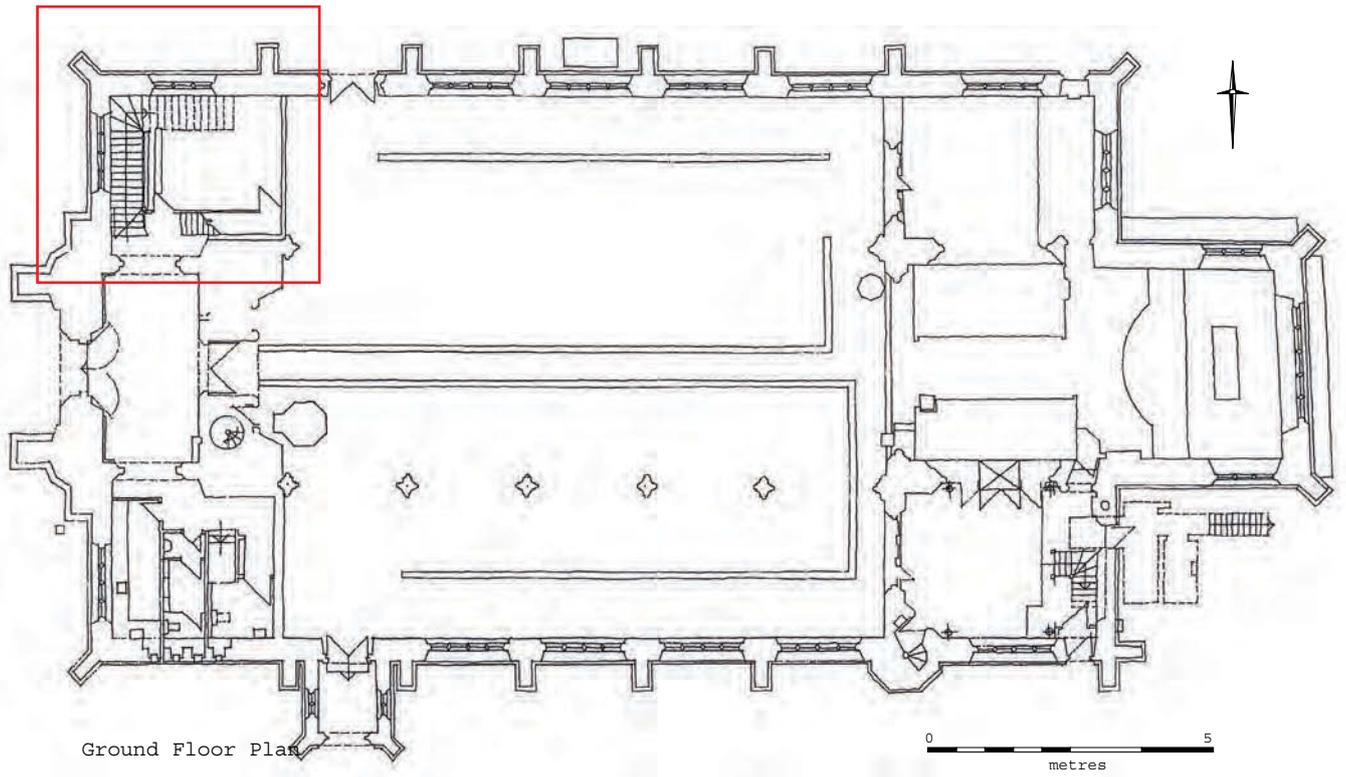
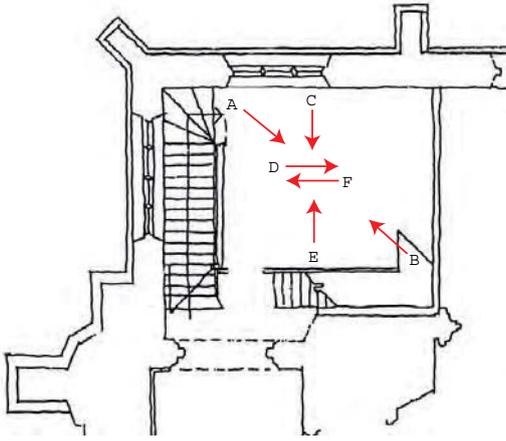


Figure 7: Panelling in Northwest Corner of

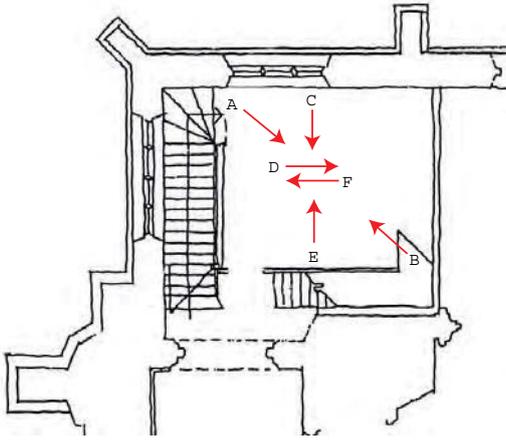


A



B

Figure 8: Panelling in Northwest corner of

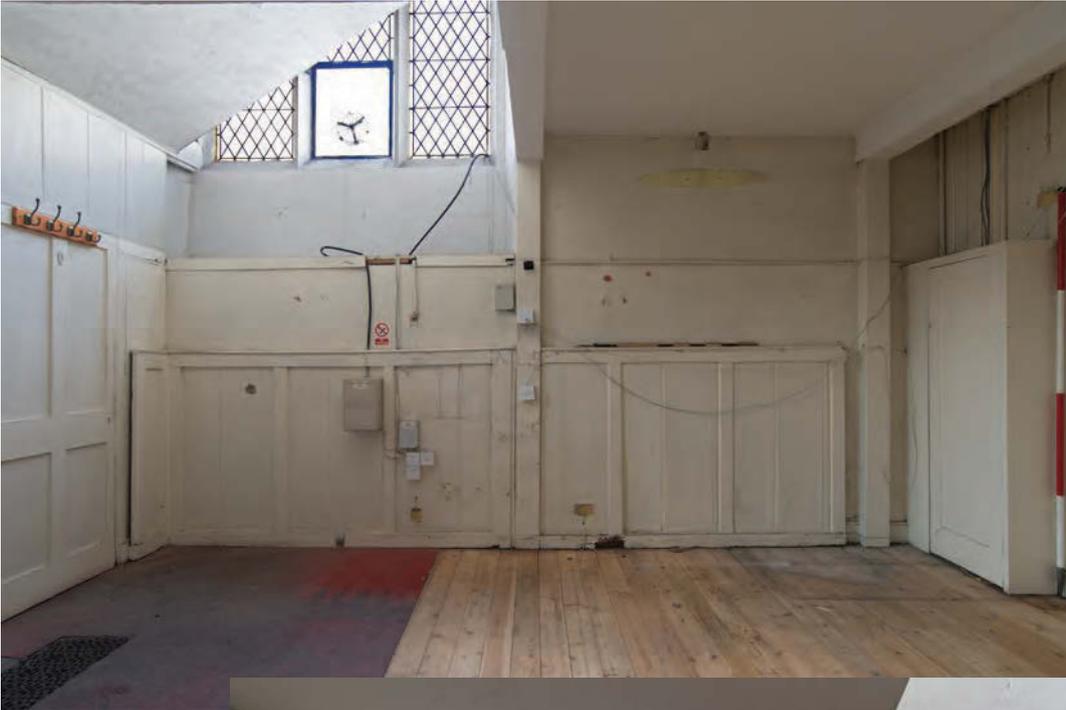
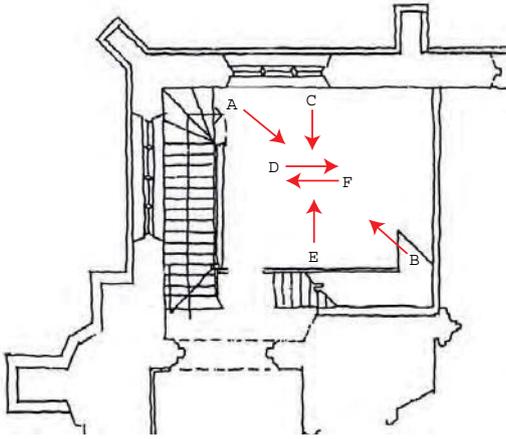


C



D

Figure 9: Panelling in Northwest Corner(s) Of

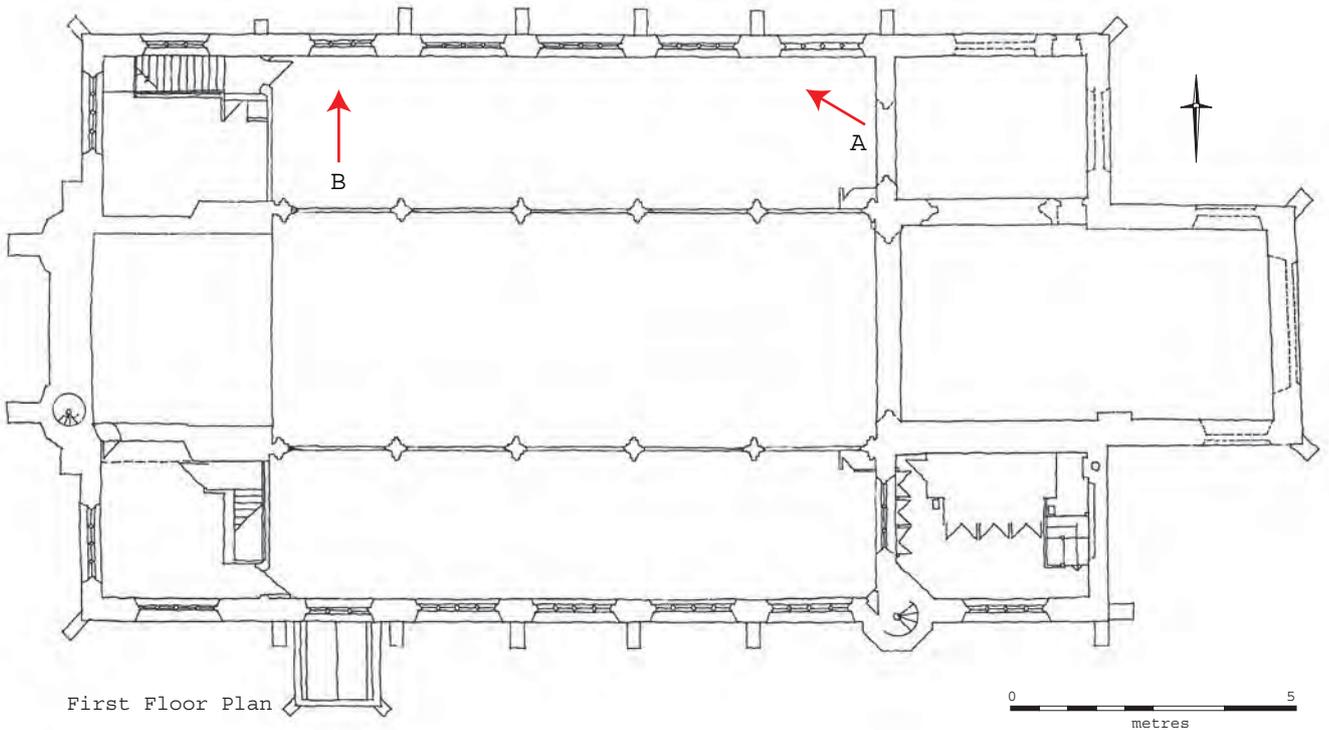


E



F

Figure 10: Panelling in Northwest Corner (a) Of

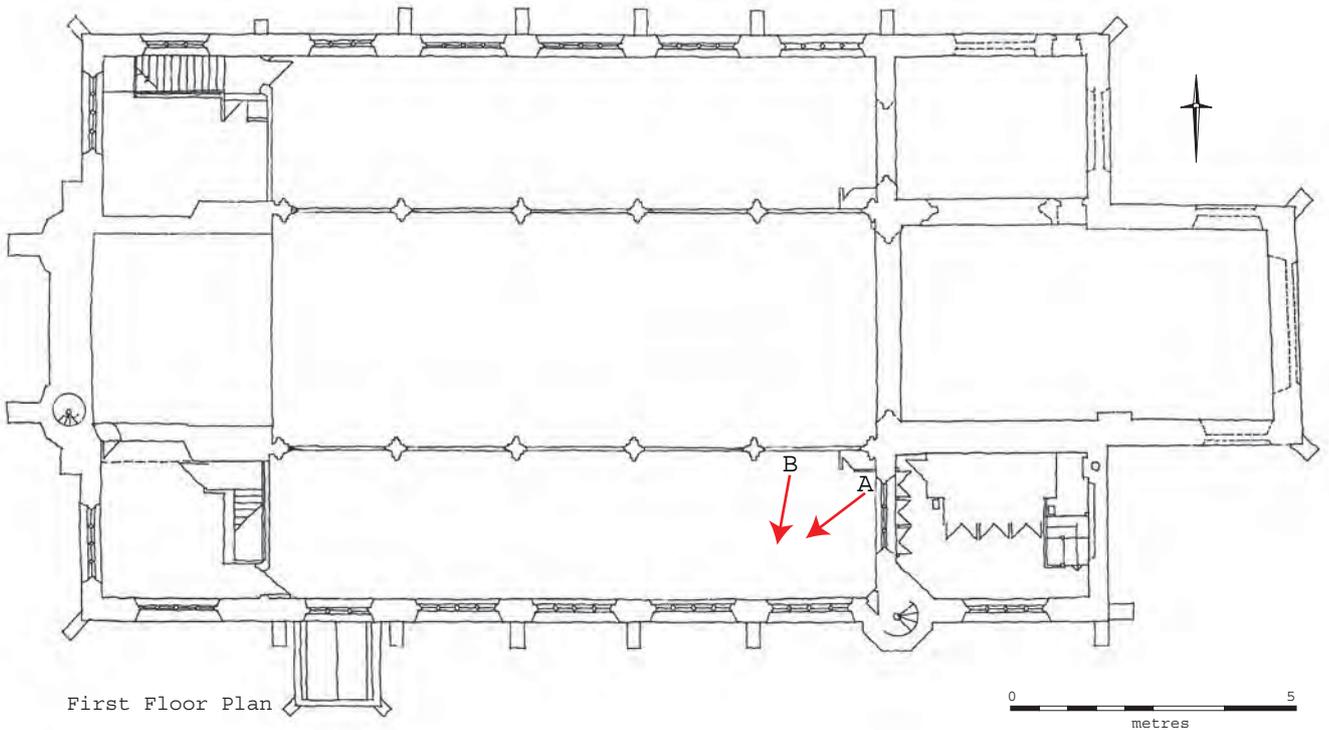


A



B

Figure 11 North aisle Gallery Panelling

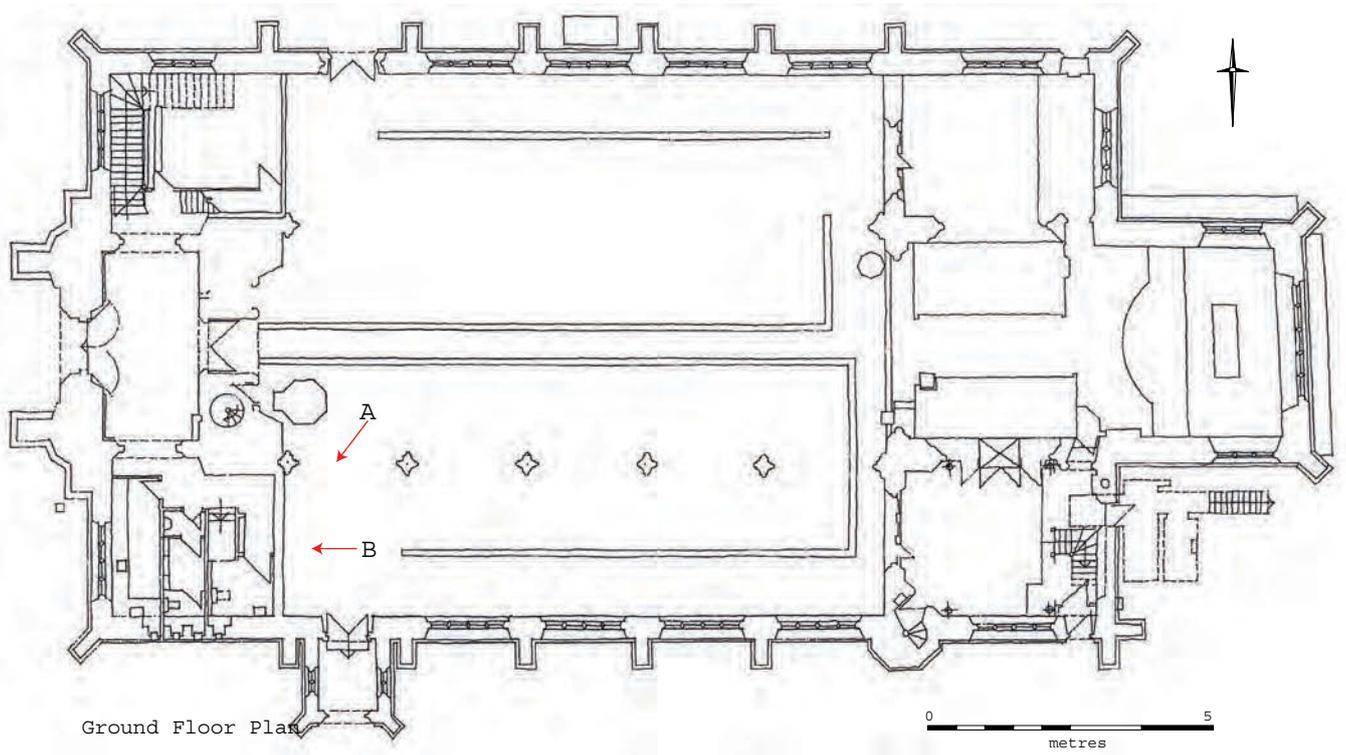


A



B

Figure 12: South Gallery Pews

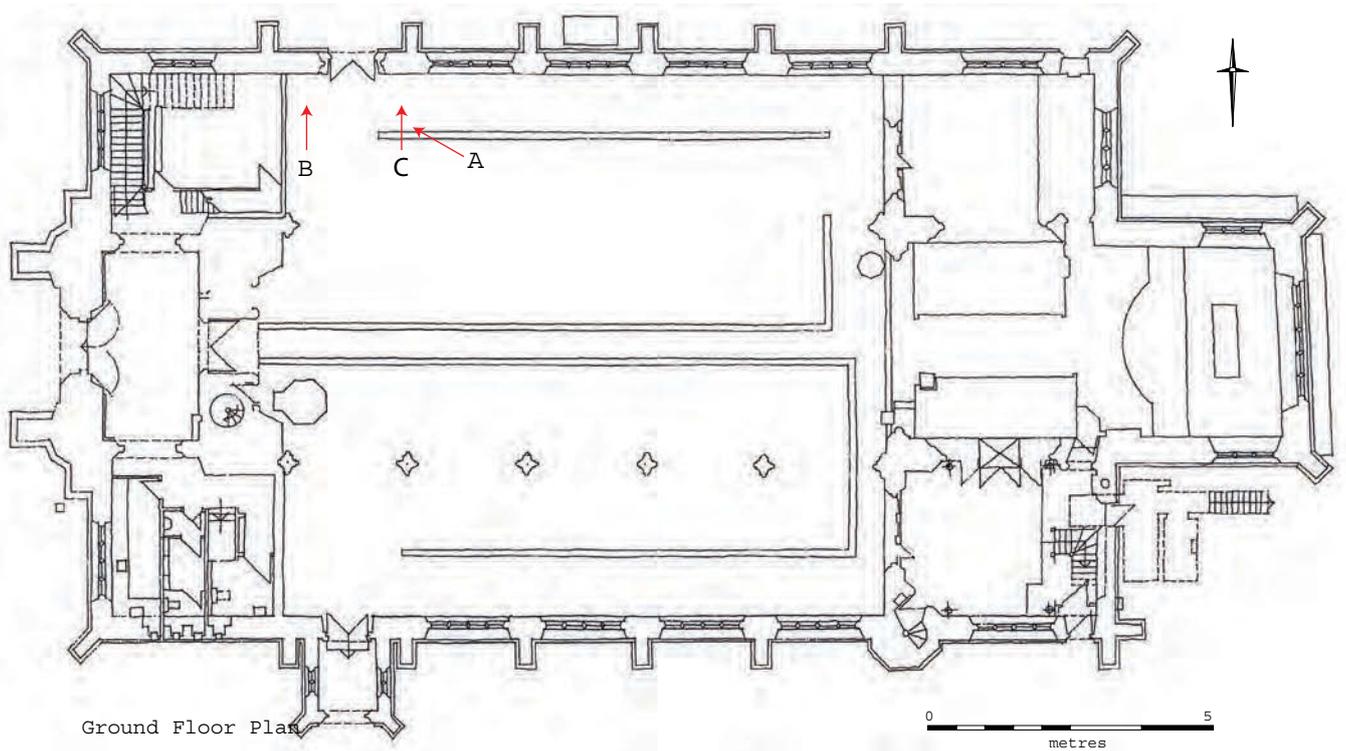


A



B

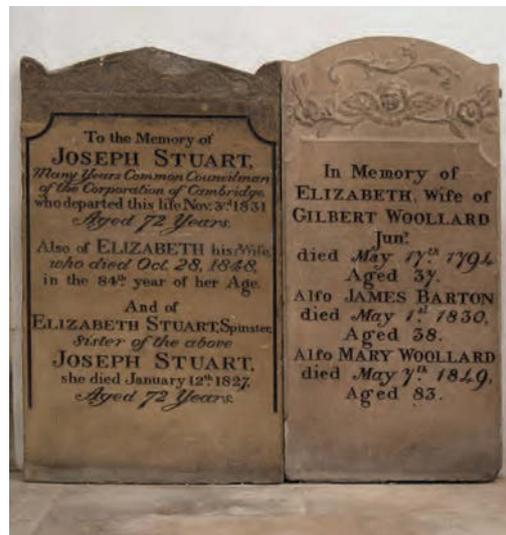
Figure 13: 20th Century Paneling and of Suite



A

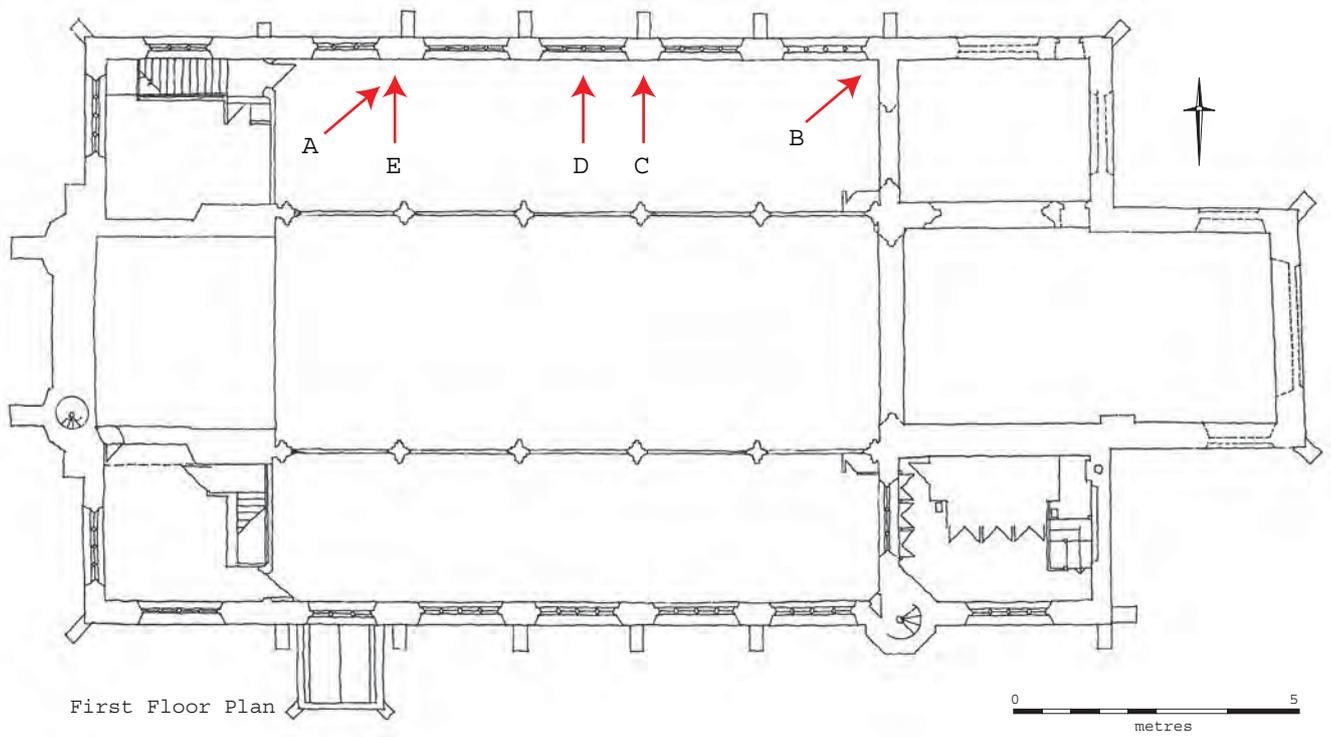


B



C

Figure 14: Memorials at the North Door



A

Figure 15: North Gallery

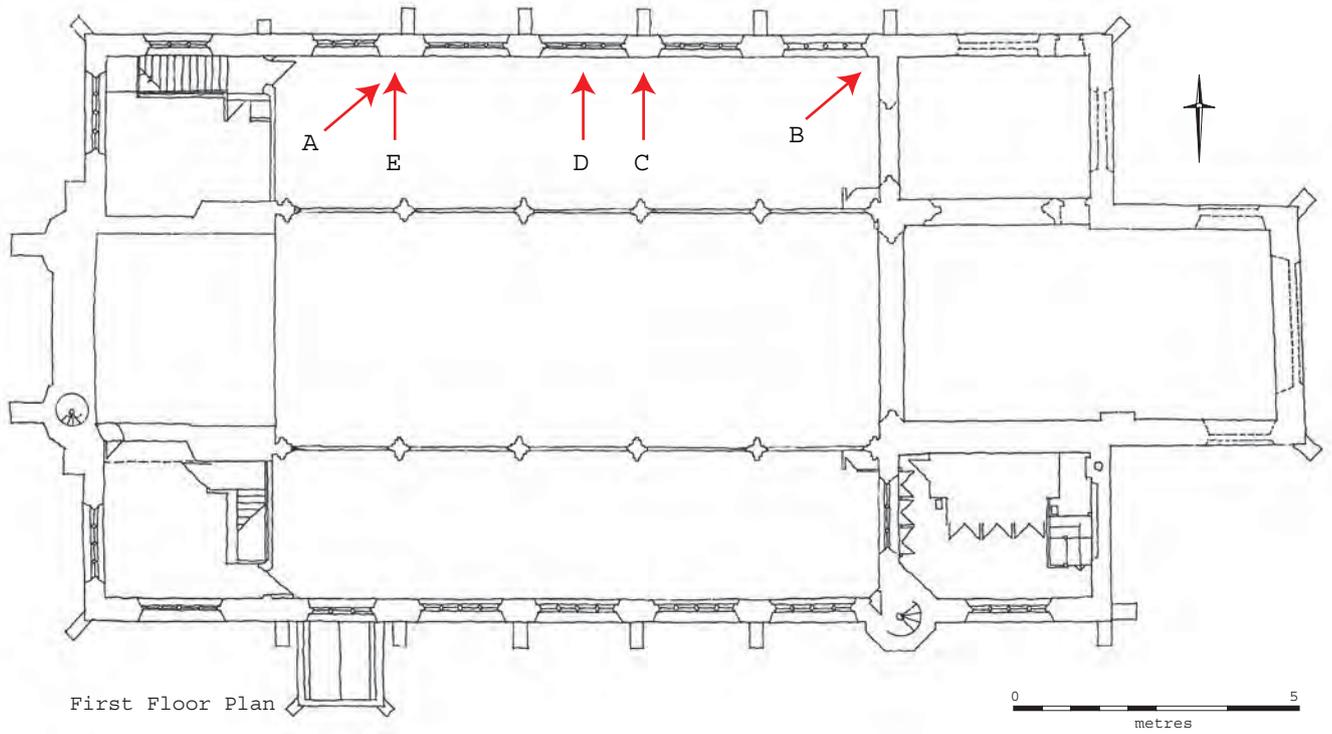
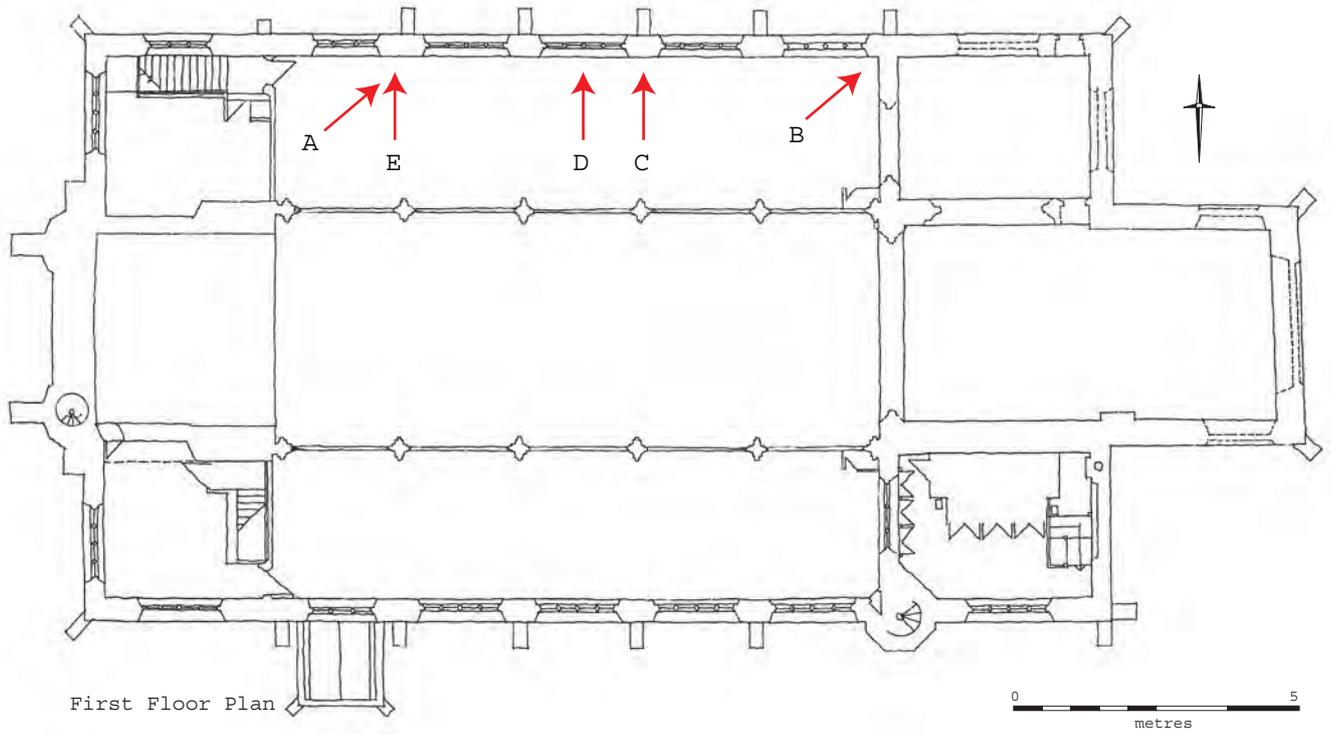


Figure 16: North Gallery (2)



D



E

Figure 17: North Gallery NW (3)



New Glass Entranceway eastWDoor



Mezzanine Office



The Gibbs Staircase Exposed



New ShopArea

Figure 1 After Completion

OASIS DATA COLLECTION FORM: England

[List of Projects](#) | [Manage Projects](#) | [Search Projects](#) | [New project](#) | [Change your details](#) | [HER coverage](#) | [Change country](#) | [Log out](#)

Printable version

OASIS ID: cambridg3-188276

Project details

Project name	Great Saint Mary's Church, Cambridge
Short description of the project	Between March 2013 and February 2014 a significant phase of internal alteration work was carried out at Great Saint Mary's Church, Cambridge. This included improvement of office space, changes to the arrangement of the reception and shop area, repairs and improvements in the Verger's Vestry and boiler room, improvements to services and the addition of a new entrance screen at the west end. Archaeological monitoring was conducted of the below ground works, which were limited to the northwest corner of the church and in the Narthex. In addition a photographic record made of specific church features being either moved or removed during the works.
Project dates	Start: 01-03-2013 End: 28-02-2014
Previous/future work	No / No
Any associated project reference codes	GSM13 - Sitecode
Any associated project reference codes	ECB4154 - HER event no.
Type of project	Recording project
Site status	Listed Building
Current Land use	Other 2 - In use as a building
Monument type	GRAVE Post Medieval
Significant Finds	NONE Uncertain
Investigation type	"Recorded Observation", "Watching Brief"
Prompt	Faculty jurisdiction

Project location

Country	England
Site location	CAMBRIDGESHIRE CAMBRIDGE CAMBRIDGE Great Saint Mary's Church
Postcode	CB2 3PQ

Study area 0 Square metres
 Site coordinates TL 44848 58460 52.2048787753 0.119948089277 52 12 17 N 000 07 11 E Point
 Height OD / Depth Min: 17.28m Max: 17.95m

Project creators

Name of Organisation Cambridge Archaeological Unit
 Project brief originator Diocesan Archaeologist
 Project design originator Alison Dickens
 Project director/manager Alison Dickens
 Project supervisor Alison Dickens
 Type of sponsor/funding body Diocese
 Name of sponsor/funding body Great St Mary's Church, Cambridge

Project archives

Physical Archive Exists? No
 Digital Archive ID GSM13
 Digital Media available "Images raster / digital photography"
 Paper Archive ID GSM13
 Paper Media available "Notebook - Excavation,' Research',' General Notes"

Project bibliography 1

Publication type Grey literature (unpublished document/manuscript)
 Title Great Saint Mary's Church, Cambridge Observations during internal alterations July - September 2013
 Author(s)/Editor(s) Dickens, A
 Other bibliographic details CAU Report 1256
 Date 2014
 Issuer or publisher Cambridge Archaeological Unit
 Place of issue or publication Cambridge
 Description A4 wire bound report 28 pages inc figures and photographs

URL <http://www.oasis.ac.uk>

Entered by Alison Dickens (ad10000@cam.ac.uk)

Entered on 26 August 2014

OASIS:

Please e-mail [English Heritage](#) for OASIS help and advice

© ADS 1996-2012 Created by [Jo Gilham and Jen Mitcham](#), email Last modified Wednesday 9 May 2012

Cite only: <http://www.oasis.ac.uk/form/print.cfm> for this page