

# St. George's Church, Thriplow, Cambridgeshire

Archaeological Monitoring



Dave Webb

# **StGeorge'sChurch ,Thriplow Cambridgeshire**

**ArchaeologicalMonitoring**

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## **Summary**

*The Cambridge Archaeological Unit (CAU) undertook archaeological monitoring of pipelaying work at St. George's Church, Thriplow, Royston, Cambridgeshire between the 27<sup>th</sup> May and 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2014. The works uncovered several unmarked graves, a charnel pit and a background of disarticulated human remains within the confines of the churchyard, the material most likely originates from the late post-medieval period. A robbed out wall probably marks the extent of the graveyard at an earlier point in its development.*

## Introduction

The Cambridge Archaeological Unit (CAU) undertook archaeological monitoring of works at Saint George's Church, Thriplow, Royston, Cambridgeshire between the 27<sup>th</sup> of May and 2<sup>nd</sup> of June 2014. This was at the request of the Church architects, Archimage, on behalf of the church. The work involved laying utility service pipelines out to the road to enable a small future extension to the church, which will house toilet facilities. The utility services were required to cross the established graveyard.

The work was covered under a Faculty issued by the Diocese.

## Location and Topography

The church of Saint George's, Thriplow, is centred at TL44205 46956 and located on a high point of land on the north-east side of the village of Thriplow (a benchmark on the church's west face is 32.5m above sea level). The underlying geology is middle chalk. Layers of harder chalk (Clunch) exist within the main layers and have been exploited as building material locally.

The village lies on a gentle north-west facing slope of the Cam Valley, with the centre of the village located to the south west of the church. The main areas of the settlement are located on the higher grounds surrounding the spring line.

## Archaeological background

The Church is a Grade II\* building. The main body of the church is 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> century in date, constructed of field-stone, Barnack stone, clunch and flint. Parts of the building (south transept, chancel and vestry) were substantially rebuilt in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Twelve sites and findspots predating the medieval period are noted in the Cambridgeshire Historic Environment Record within 500m of the church. These include a Palaeolithic (Acheulean/Middle Palaeolithic) hand-axe (HER10985) and a Neolithic ground and polished (?dolerite) axe (HER04220).

Several cropmarks and earthworks are recorded, including a large tumulus in a field immediately southeast of the churchyard (HER04226). It was levelled in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century but partially excavated in the 1950s. A ploughed out barrow situated 201 metres southeast of the Church (which appeared as a prominent cropmark in barley in 1953), was also excavated by Cambridge Archaeological Field Club in the early 1950s (HER04286). A further Bronze Age barrow (HER04226a) to the southeast of the church, with an abutting rectangular enclosure to the west, has been identified from cropmarks and geophysical survey.

Likely Roman period finds include a rectilinear enclosure partially (MCB17710) excavated in the 1950s with further geophysics, test pits and trenches in 2005-2008; a layer containing Roman pottery (HER04286c, dated C1 and C2 AD), including a Samian sherd, and a bronze fibula (dated 80 - 120 AD) were found during the

excavations of the barrow at 04286 in 1953 -4, with four Roman coins in further work in 2002.

MCB16724 was a pottery scatter including Iron Age, Roman, Saxon, medieval and Post-Medieval wares while MCB19833 was medieval (c. 850 -1150) pottery sherds picked up whilst walking, including small sherds of St Neots and Developed St Neots (shell tempered/shelly ware).

## Methodology

The objective of the monitoring was to determine the presence or absence and character of any surviving archaeological remains within the area of investigation, identify the location of any in situ human remains and recover any disarticulated human remains for immediate reburial in accordance with existing guidelines (Mays 2005, Brickley and McKinley 2004).

The service trench was excavated by a mini digger with a 0.30m toothed bucket operated by the contractors under archaeological supervision. All potential archaeological features were investigated and recorded. The recording was carried out following the CAU modified MoLAS system of archaeological site recording (Spence 1994). All work was carried out in accordance with statutory Health and Safety legislation and with the recommendations of FAME (Allen & Holt 2010).

In total an area of approximately 22 square metres was monitored.

## Results

The pipe trench cut started at a point adjacent to a stand pipe situated by the west wall of north transept and proceeded in a westerly direction (Figure 2). Occasional disarticulated human remains were encountered as the pipe trench was cut along the north facing side of the church, however no graves cuts were observed at this point. In addition to the human remains large animal bones were recovered including horse or cattle teeth and jaw fragments. The animal bones were only observed in the area of the graveyard to the north side of church.

At the northwest corner of main body of church the pipe trench continued in a south westerly direction across the west facade of the church and across the graveyard.

At this point numerous unmarked graves were observed at fairly regular intervals, increasing in density towards the southern edge of the graveyard. A large quantity of disarticulated human remains was also observed, the result of disturbance from the cutting of new graves through older ones. At least sixteen in situ graves were observed within this area, however disturbance due to extensive tree rooting in the vicinity of the west facade and the presence of partially articulated remains suggests that the total number of graves in the area was higher.

The graves are described in the following table;

Grave Ref.	Depth	Age	Notes	Orientation
A	0.60m	Adult	Top of skull exposed in situ. Fill similar to subsoil [002].	E-W
B	0.70m	Adult ?	Ribs vertebrae Radius and ulna exposed in situ. Fill similar to subsoil [002].	E-W
C	0.70m	Adult?	Various disarticulated leg bones, disturbed by extensive rooting. Fill similar to subsoil [002].	E-W
D	1.20m	Adult?	Lower legs and feet including Tibia, Fibula, Calcaneus and Tarsals in-situ, some root disturbance. Fill grey clayey silt distinct from adjacent subsoil.	E-W
E	1.20m	Adult and Juvenile	Charnel pit various bones from several individuals. Fill grey clayey silt with traces of yellowish grey chalk material ( ?lime ) in fill, distinct from adjacent subsoil.	Charnel pit
F	1.00m	Adult?	Lower legs and feet including Tibia, Fibula, Calcaneus and Tarsals in-situ, removed by machine. Fill similar to subsoil [002].	E-W
G	1.00m	Adult?	Ribs vertebrae Radius ulna and top of pelvis exposed in situ. Grave cut on slightly different alignment. Fill similar to subsoil [002].	SW-NE
H	0.80m	Adult	Top of skull exposed in situ. Fill similar to subsoil [002].	E-W
I	1.20m	Adult	Skull and vertebrae scapular ribs and clavicle in situ. A pelvic bone was also present either multiple burials in grave or disturbed and re-deposited material. Fill similar to subsoil, with yellowish sandy gravel and a chalky marl present in base of cut.	E-W
J	1.10m	Juvenile	Skull and Vertebrae of Juvenile exposed in situ. Fill similar to subsoil chalky marl present in base of cut.	E-W
K	1.10m	Adult	Adult Skull exposed in situ. Fill similar to subsoil chalky marl present in base of cut.	E-W
L	1.10m	Adult	Skull and vertebrae scapula and clavicle in situ. Fill similar to subsoil chalky marl present in base of cut.	E-W
M	1.10m	Juvenile	Skull and vertebrae scapular ribs and clavicle in situ. Fill similar to subsoil [002].	E-W
N	1.10m	Adult	Skull and vertebrae in-situ. Fill similar to subsoil [002]. Area disturbed by service trench.	E-W
O	1.10m	Adult?	Pelvis left and right femur in situ. Fill similar to subsoil [002]. Area disturbed by service trench.	E-W
P	0.90m	Adult?	Adult Upper legs ; Left and right femur in situ. Slight change in alignment to SW -NE direction. Fill similar to subsoil [002].	SW-NE
Q	1.10m	?	Lower leg and feet; Fibula, Calcaneus, Tarsals, metatarsals and phalanges in-situ. Fill similar to subsoil [002].	E-W

**Table 1:** In situ Grave Descriptions

To the southwest of the church the pipeline trench cut through the compacted gravel path leading from the church to Brook road. At this point a grave (Q) was discovered butting up against the remnants of a robbed out wall footing. No further burials were discovered south of this point as the trench continued toward the road.

The stratigraphy at this point is described in the following table.

F. No	Context No.	Depth	Notes
Graveyard Stratigraphy			
1	001	0.00-0.20m	Top soil . A greyish brown silty loam with a moderate frequency of well sorted small to medium sub rounded gravel inclusions.
1	002	0.20-1.30m	Sub soil. A reddish brown silt with a moderate frequency of moderately sorted small to medium sub angular gravel inclusions.
1	003	1.30m+	Natural. A brownish grey silty clay.
Church Path			
2	004	0.00-0.30m	Path surface. Compacted stone cobbles with yellowish brown sandy gravel.
2	005	0.00-0.30m	Construction cut. Moderately steep sided shallow cut with flat base.
Robber Trench			
3	006	0.30-0.70m	Fill of robber trench. A greyish brown silt with a moderate frequency of moderately sorted small to medium sub angular gravel inclusions
3	007	0.30-0.70m	Cut of robber trench. An east to west aligned moderately steep sided cut with a flat base. Width 0.70m.
Construction Trench			
4	008	0.30-1.10m	Fill of construction trench. A grey sandy silt with a frequent poorly sorted small sub angular chalk inclusions and occasional poorly sorted large angular flint nodules.
4	009	0.70-1.10m+	Dump of construction material. A pale yellowish brown sandy mortar with frequent large angular flint nodules.
4	010	0.30-1.10m+	Cut of construction trench. An east to west aligned near vertical sided cut extending beyond the limits of excavation truncated on north side by grave cut (Q). Width 0.90m.

**Table 2: Stratigraphy**

## Discussion

The main objective of the monitoring was to identify and locate any in situ burials that lay on the line of the works, and recover any disarticulated human remains disturbed during the construction of the pipeline.

The in situ remains observed were mainly in unmarked graves in the main body of the graveyard to the west of the church, occurring at depths between 0.80m and 1.10m below ground level. The presence of a large quantity of disarticulated bone indicates that the churchyard has been subject to intense use in the past with episodes of re-use of the same ground for burials with the subsequent disturbance of earlier graves. The presence of a chalk nodule (E) further supports the notion of re-use and clearance of earlier burials over time. Although a small number of coffin nails were recovered from the pipe trench, only a few of these were noted as being in situ. Coffin stains, furniture and nails were also largely absent from the observed

unmarked graves which might suggest that local burial practise was for interment without coffins at that time. The unmarked graves probably date from a period prior to the majority of marked graves now visible within the churchyard, however without detailed excavation and study of the remains an 18<sup>th</sup> to early 19<sup>th</sup> century date can only be putative.

Although disarticulated bones were recovered from within the subsoil in the area where the pipe cut ran as it traversed the northern side of the church, the absence of in situ burials encountered here suggests a less intensive use of this side of the churchyard with other areas to the south and west of the church being favoured for burial.

The remnants of a robbed-out wall (feature no. 4) revealed to the southwest of the church occur at a point close to the division between the more recent expansion of the graveyard to the west and the earlier graveyard surrounding the church. The expanded graveyard occupies an area of land that is depicted as tree covered (possibly an orchard) on the 1886 OS map. The plot of land was to the rear of the farmhouse and buildings fronting on to Brook Road. The property division at the edge of the plot follows a NNW-SSE alignment whereas the wall appears to follow an east-west alignment at a point approximately three metres from the established east - west boundary. The alignment of the robbed out wall does not match the boundaries or structures shown on the Victorian maps, which may indicate that the structure dates from an earlier boundary around a smaller churchyard.

## References

Allen, J.L. and Holt, A. 2010 *Health and Safety in Field Archaeology* FAME

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Brickley, M. and J. McKinley 2004, *Guidelines to the Standards for Recording Human Remains*. Institute of Field Archaeologists Professional Practice Papers No 7

Mays, S. 2005 *Guidance for best practice for treatment of human remains excavated from Christian burial grounds in England*. English Heritage & The Church of England

Spence, C. 1994 *Archaeological Site Manual* London: Museum of London.



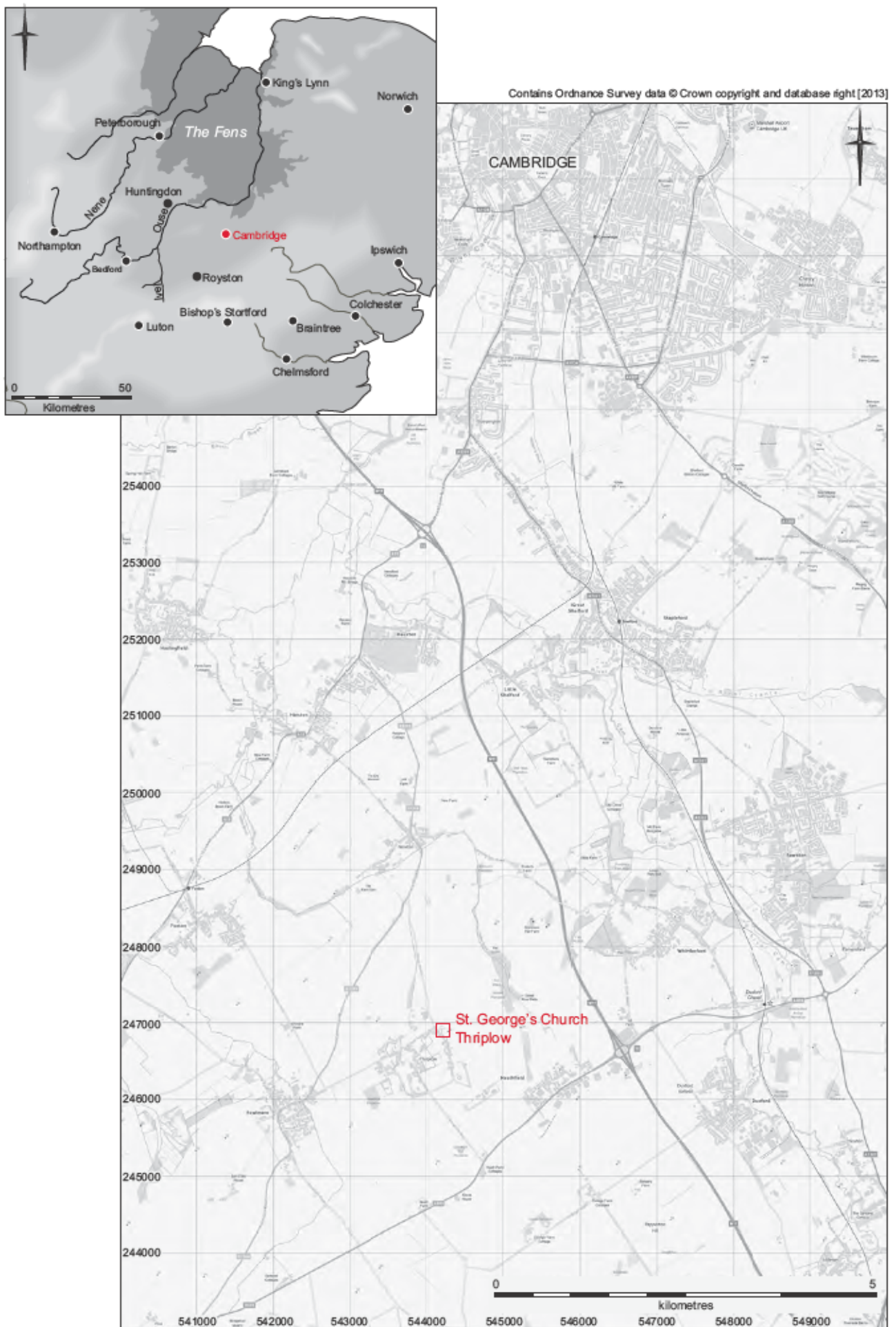


Figure 1. Site location

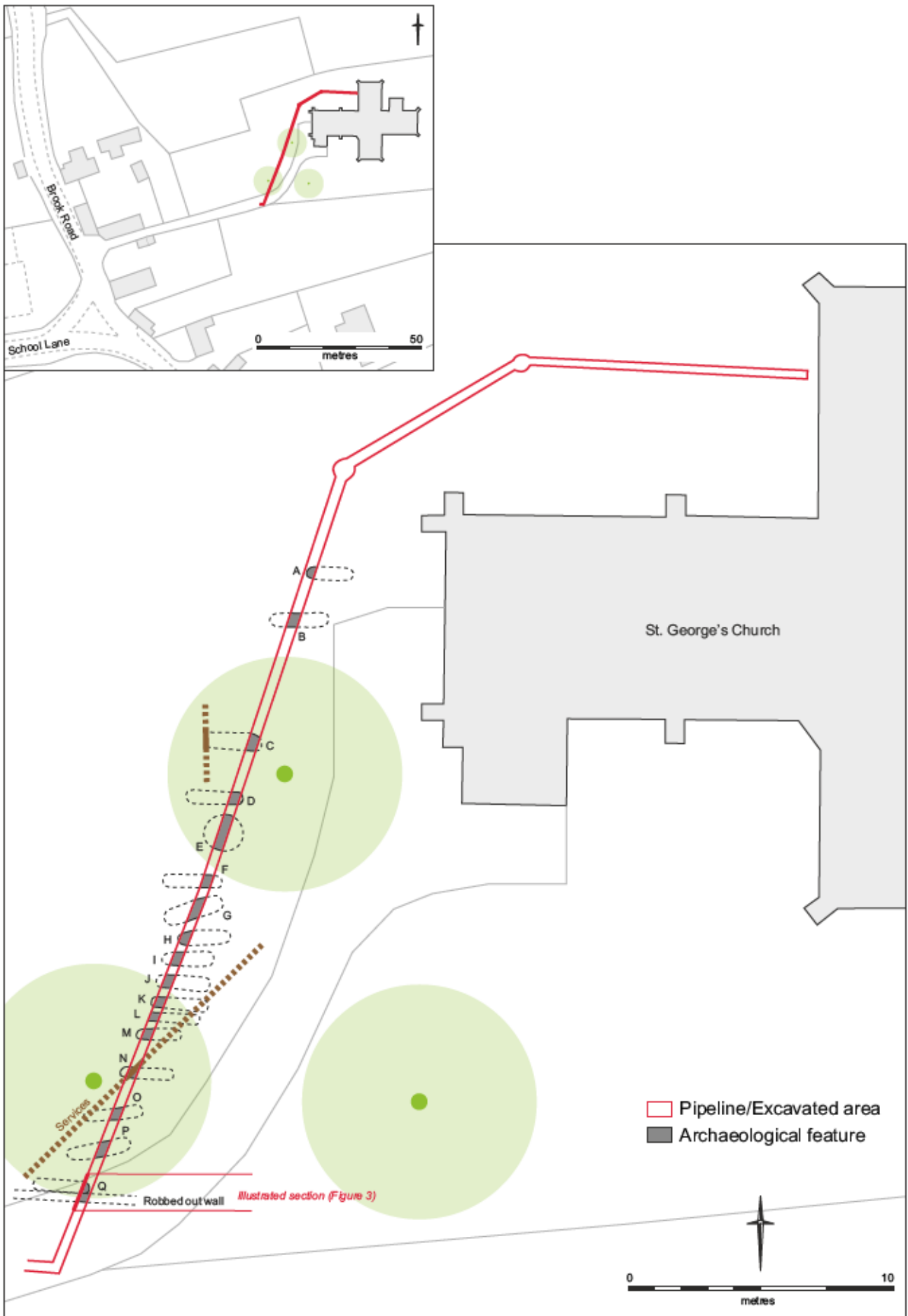


Figure 2. Plan of archaeological features

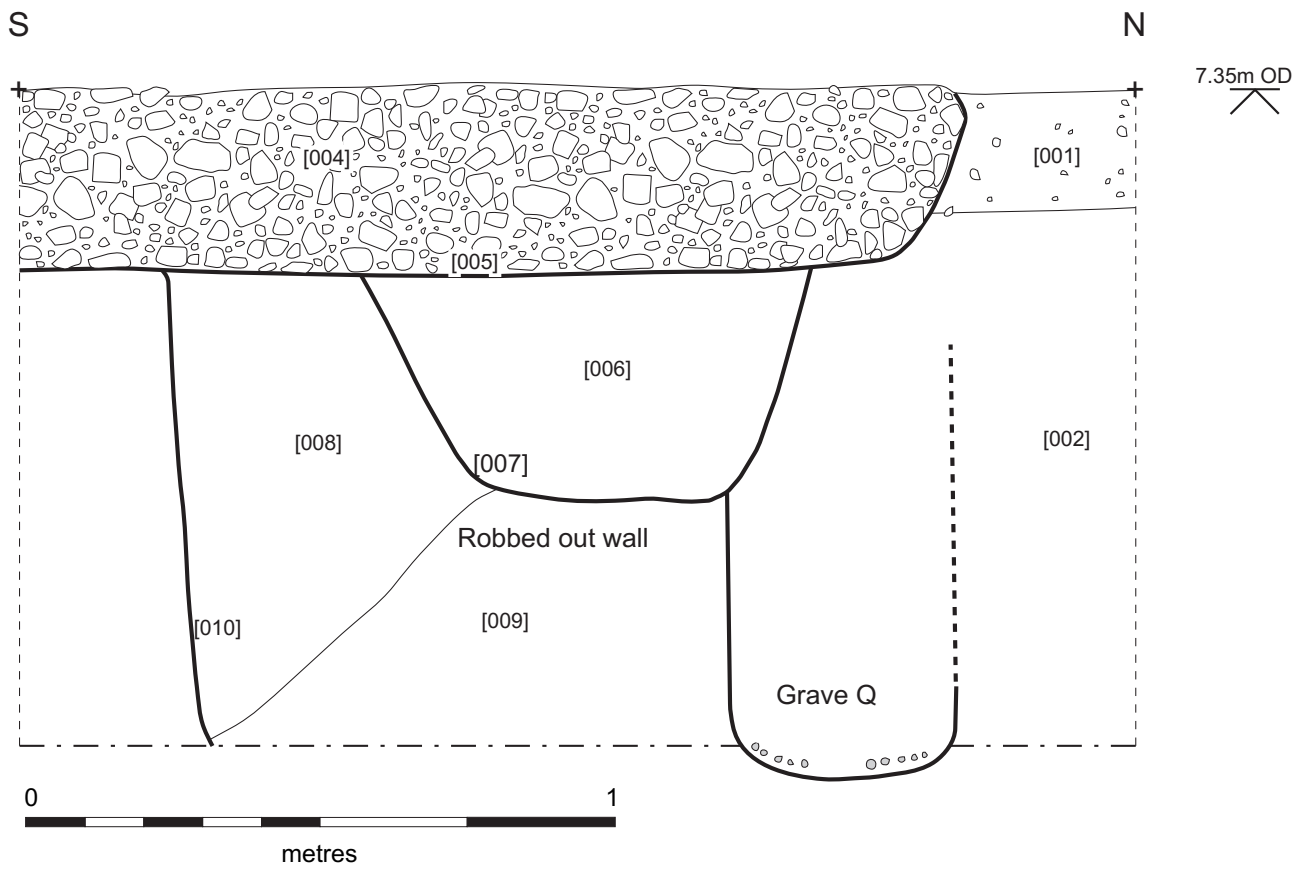


Figure 3. East Facing Section at Q Showing Robbed Out Wall Footing

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**OASIS ID: cambridg3-194130**

### Project details

Project name	St. George's Church, Thriplow
Short description of the project	The Cambridge Archaeological Unit (CAU) undertook archaeological monitoring of pipelaying work at St George's Church, Thriplow, Cambridgeshire in June 2014. The works uncovered several unmarked graves a charnel pit and a background of disarticulated human remains within the confines of the churchyard. The material most likely originates from the late post-medieval period. A robbed out wall probably marks the extent of the graveyard at an earlier point in its development.
Project dates	Start: 27-05-2014 End: 02-06-2014
Previous/future work	No / Not known
Any associated project reference codes	TSG14 - Sitecode
Any associated project reference codes	ECB4161 - HER event no.
Type of project	Recording project
Site status	None
Current Land use	Other 4 - Churchyard
Monument type	GRAVE Post Medieval
Monument type	WALL Post Medieval
Significant Finds	NONE None
Investigation type	"Watching Brief"
Prompt	Faculty jurisdiction

### Project location

Country	England
Site location	CAMBRIDGESHIRE SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE THRIPLOW St. George's Church, Thriplow
Postcode	SG8 7RF

Study area 22.00 Square metres  
 Site coordinates TL 44205 46956 52.1016798851 0.105659501255 52 06 06 N 000 06 20 E Point  
 Height OD / Depth Min: 31.35m Max: 31.72m

### Project creators

Name of Organisation Cambridge Archaeological Unit  
 Project brief originator Parochial Church Council  
 Project director/manager Alison Dickens  
 Project supervisor David Webb  
 Type of sponsor/funding body Parochial Church Council  
 Name of sponsor/funding body St. George's Church, Thriplow

### Project archives

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 Digital Archive Exists? No  
 Paper Archive recipient Cambridge Archaeological Unit  
 Paper Media available "Notebook - Excavation',' Research',' General Notes","Plan","Report","Section","Photograph"

### Project bibliography 1

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