

St Andrew's Church, Witchford, Cambridgeshire

An Archaeological Watching Brief



Benjamin J Neil

**ST ANDREW'S CHURCH
Witchford, Cambridgeshire.**

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<i>Summary</i>	1
INTRODUCTION	1
Location, Topography and Geology	1
Archaeological Background	1
Methodology	2
Figure 1. Location Plan	3
Figure 2. 1887 Ordnance Survey map showing St Andrew's Church and Vicarage	4
RESULTS	5
DISCUSSION	5
Plate 1. North -South trench within vicarage grounds	6
Plate 2. Trench turning east towards St Andrew's	6
REFERENCES	7

Summary

A watching brief was undertaken by Cambridge Archaeological Unit (CAU) at St Andrew's Church off Main Street, Witchford (TL 50377 78790) in January 2016. No archaeological features were recorded. A bone assessed as a proximal third shaft fragment of a human humerus was found at approximately 0.30m beneath the path around the church tower, likely to be a result of graveyard reworking.

INTRODUCTION

A watching brief was undertaken by Cambridge Archaeological Unit (CAU) at St Andrew's Church off Main Street in Witchford Village (TL 50377 78790) approximately 2.4 miles west south-west of Ely between 12-01-2016 to 13-01-2016. A single dog-legged 38m by 600mm trench was located in order to place a foul water drain from the west facing wall of the church bell tower into the existing system within the vicarage grounds, just prior to the highway boundary (see Figure 01). Due to the sale of the vicarage, the project was undertaken within faculty jurisdiction as a pre-emptive measure to facilitate future infrastructure improvements within the church grounds. The work was commissioned by Archimage.

LOCATION, TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

The site is located in Witchford village off Main Street, opposite Church View. The site is flat, and is tarmacked, treed and grassed. The trench crosses a tree and shrub boundary between the vicarage to the west and St Andrew's Church graveyard to the east.

The British Geological Survey indicates that the underlying geology comprises mudstones in the Kimmeridge Clay Formation, overlain by alluvium.

A benchmark on the NW corner of St Andrew's Church is known to be 9.013m AOD (<http://tinyurl.com/h5jdyom>).

ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The site lies within an area of known archaeological potential and whilst no material culture has been reported from the site itself and no prior archaeological investigations have taken place within its boundaries, there are sites and spot finds in a 2km vicinity dating from prehistory to the present day.

Three Middle Bronze Age palstaves and a gold torc were found in 1844 whilst digging for turf in a portion of Grunty Fen (Von Hugel 1908). Excavations ahead of the Stirling Way Recycling Centre development 0.72 miles east of the site revealed two Early Bronze Age beaker pits, a Late Iron Age boundary ditch and a possible Early Roman mortuary enclosure, which contained a cremation and two inhumations with unusual grave goods (Atkins 2011).

Investigations at Witchford Airfield, approximately 0.95 miles to the east, revealed Iron Age and Early Roman boundary and enclosure ditches and a few discrete

settlement features such as pits (Holmes 2008). A Further evaluation uncovered additional settlement activity to the north, including a series of ditches, gullies and pits, dating from the Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age to Late Iron Age as well as extensive medieval ridge and furrow cultivation (Simmonds and Mason 2008).

Further afield to the north-east at Westfield Farm, Ely, fifteen plough-damaged graves were uncovered, dating from the Anglo-Saxon period. The cemetery is contemporary with the foundation of the first monastery at Ely, and appears to contain at least one elite female individual (Newnham, 2007).

A small post medieval boundary ditch was found approximately 145m north of the site and seen on the first edition Ordnance Survey map to enclose a small building (Phillips, 2012).

METHODOLOGY

A 38m by 600mm trench was located to run approximately 32m from the existing foul water system in the north towards the south, running parallel to the tree and shrub lined boundary of the vicarage to the east (see Plate 1); it then turned eastwards to run approximately 6m, crossing the vicarage boundary and through the graveyard to meet with the west face of the church tower (see Plate 2).

The trench was excavated using a 1.5 tonne rubber tracked 360° excavator fitted with a toothless bucket and operating under direct archaeological supervision at all times. Spoil was monitored for finds. A digital photographic record of the programme was also maintained.

An Ordnance Survey map from 1887 (see Figure 2) shows the eastern boundary of the vicarage apparently encroaching on St Andrew's churchyard, which suggests that the cemetery may have at one point been larger. A pre-emptive consideration submits to the possibility of inhumations being present in this area.

In general, an excavation within a churchyard has high potential for revealing human remains with the cemetery soil generally producing significant quantities of disturbed, disarticulated skeletal material (English Heritage 2005). Human remains are thus expected particularly within the trench segment running through the churchyard ground.

The work was carried out in full accordance with the CIfA's *Standard Guidance for Watching Briefs*.

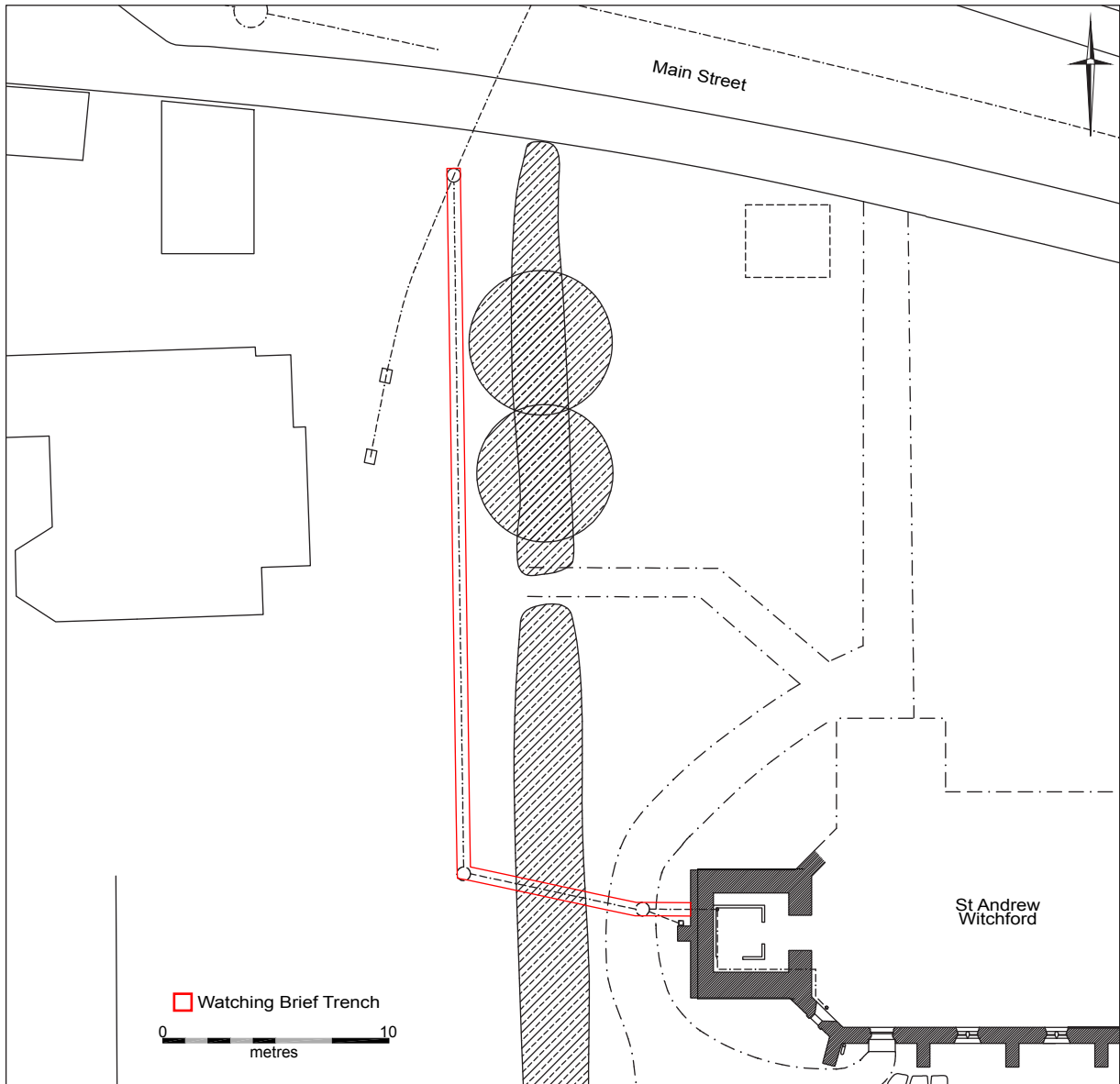
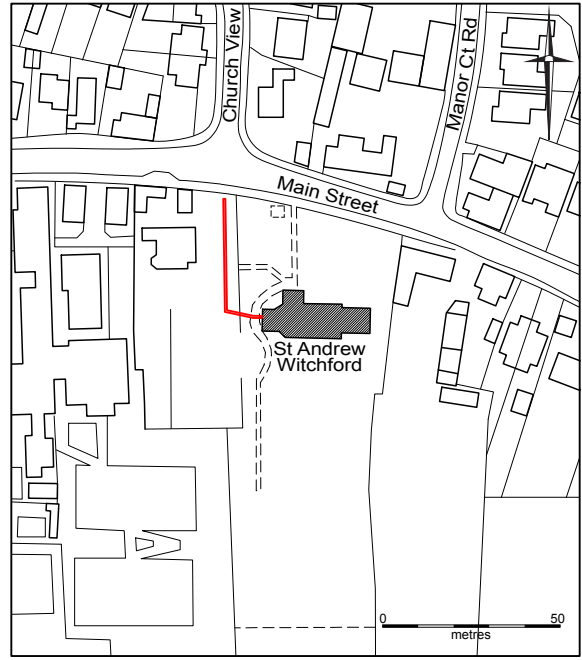
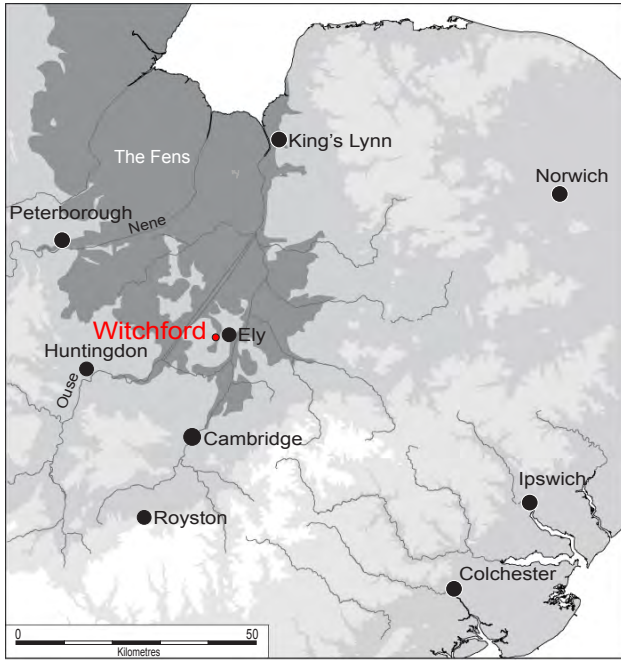


Figure 1. Location Plan

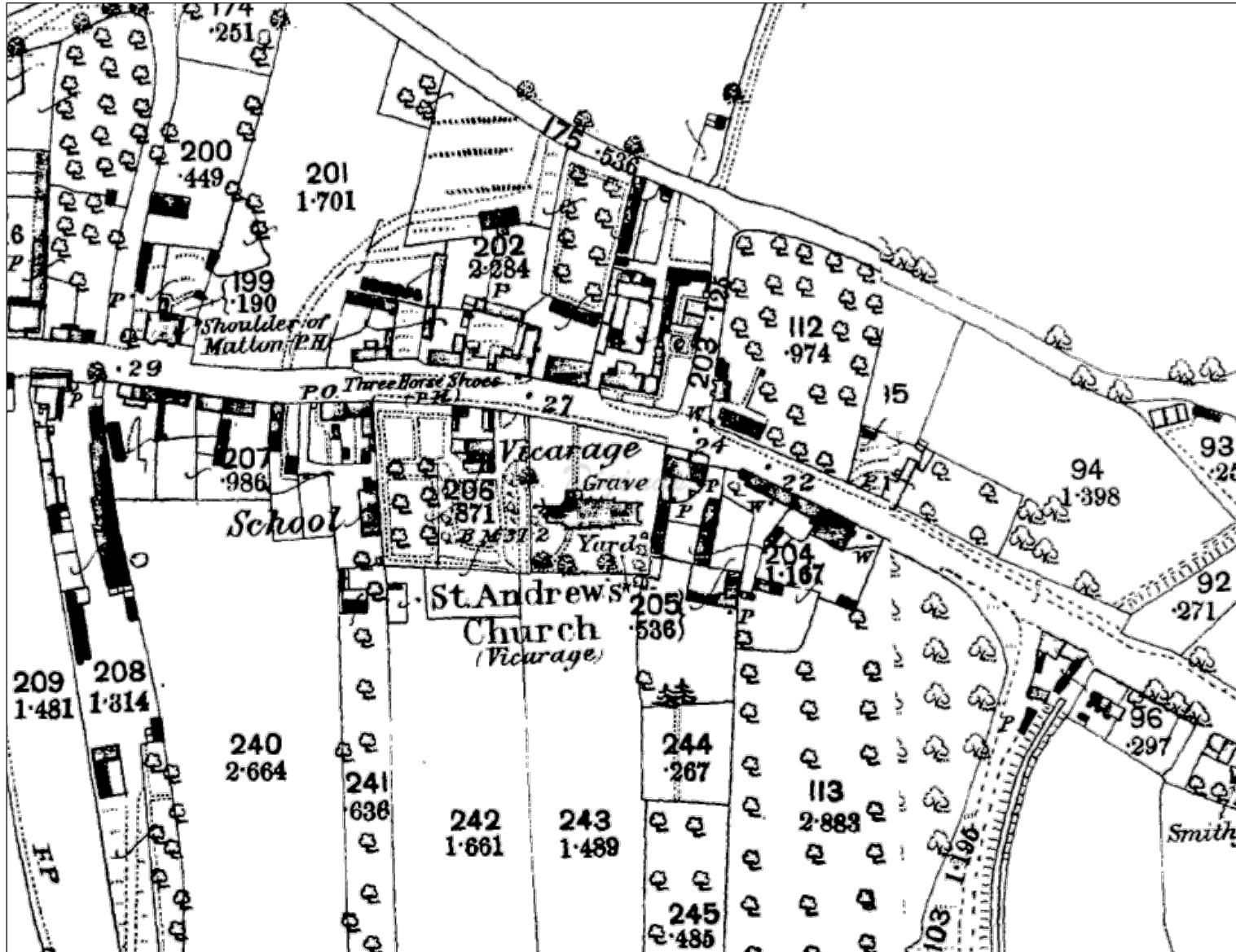


Figure 2. 1887 Ordnance Survey map, showing St Andrew's Church and Vicarage

RESULTS

From the existing foul water service for approximately 22m, the N-S trench comprised between 0.32-0.40m of made ground comprising tarmac, crushed brick and gravels that truncated the topsoil at varying depths; this overlies a firm mid yellow silt approximately 0.35m thick with very rare red brick fragments. The underlying natural geology comprised a mottled deposit of mid orangey brown and blue grey silty clay with occasional small stones. Within the grassed areas, turf 0.15-0.25m thick was additionally seen in the soil sequence.

The trench was deliberately cut to drop from approximately 0.30m depth at the west face of the church tower to approximately 1.0m depth at the existing foul water system just prior the highway boundary in the north of the site. The depth of the trench cut within the churchyard had a direct consequence on the potential of human remains and material culture, significantly reducing the likelihood of finding any evidence.

No archaeological features were found across the entire trench. An animal shaft fragment was found at the interface of the made ground and top soil, approximately 6m south of the existing foul water service. A bone assessed as a proximal third shaft fragment of a human humerus was found at approximately 0.30m depth and roughly 1.3m west of the church tower wall beneath the pathway; its isolated nature is likely to be a result of graveyard reworking.

DISCUSSION

Due to the trench within the graveyard being shallow at an approximate depth of 0.30-0.35m depth, the potential for finding human remains and material culture was significantly reduced. The lack of archaeological features and significant material culture in the trench within the vicarage grounds suggests the site has low archaeological potential.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The work was commissioned by Archimage and the CAU are grateful for the cooperation of St Andrew's church. Mechanical excavation was carried out by Mac Construction. Graphics were prepared by Bryan Crossan. The project was managed by Alison Dickens.



Plate 1. North-South trench within vicarage grounds



Plate 2. Trench turning east towards St Andrew's

REFERENCES

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Project details

Project name	ST Andrews Church, Witchford, Cambridgeshire. An Archaeological Watching Brief
Short description of the project	A watching brief was undertaken by Cambridge Archaeological Unit (CAU) at St Andrews Church off Main Street, Witchford (TL 50377 78790) in January 2016. No archaeological features were recorded. A bone assessed as a proximal third shaft fragment of a human humerus was found at approximately 0.30m beneath the path around the church tower, likely to be a result of graveyard reworking.
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Previous/future work	Not known / Not known
Any associated project reference codes	ECB4682 - HER event no.
Any associated project reference codes	WSA16 - Sitecode
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Site status	None
Current Land use	Other 4 - Churchyard
Current Land use	Other 6 - Land boundary
Current Land use	Residential 1 - General Residential
Monument type	NONE None
Significant Finds	HUMAN BONE Uncertain
Methods & techniques	""Visual Inspection""
Development type	Pipelines/cables (e.g. gas, electric, telephone, TV cable, water, sewage, drainage etc.)
Prompt	Faculty jurisdiction
Position in the planning process	After full determination (eg. As a condition)

Project location

Country England

Site location	CAMBRIDGESHIRE EAST CAMBRIDGESHIRE WITCHFORD St Andrews Church
Postcode	CB6 2HH
Study area	0 Square metres
Site coordinates	TL 550377 278790 51.927340982391 0.25507036354 51 55 38 N 000 15 18 E Point

Project creators

Name of Organisation	Cambridge Archaeological Unit
Project brief originator	Contractor (design and execute)
Project design originator	Alison Dickens
Project director/manager	Alison Dickens
Project supervisor	Benjamin Neil
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