

Archaeological Monitoring In The Chapel of Peterhouse College, Cambridge



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ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING IN THE CHAPEL OF PETERHOUSE COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE

Commissioned by Peterhouse College, Cambridge

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SUMMARY

Archaeological monitoring was conducted during a recent phase of redevelopment undertaken within the 17th-century chapel of Peterhouse College, Cambridge (constructed 1628-32). Within a small cupboard situated between the nave and the antechapel part of a brick-built burial vault and a later brick foundation wall were encountered. The latter was probably associated with the introduction of an organ loft into the chapel in the late 17th century. No human remains were exposed or disturbed during the course of this work.

INTRODUCTION

This report presents the results of a programme of archaeological monitoring that was conducted by the Cambridge Archaeological Unit (CAU) on the 5th and 6th of September 2018 within the chapel of Peterhouse College, Cambridge. The chapel, which is located at TL 4488 5797, is situated towards the eastern side of the college precinct close to the Trumpington Street frontage (Figure 1). During the course of ongoing redevelopment works a foundation trench measuring 1.2sqm in area was excavated within a store cupboard situated between the antechapel and the nave, its purpose being to introduce additional support for the overlying organ loft. Once the existing tiled floor surface and associated mortar bedding deposit had been removed by the principal contractor, a brick-built wall with a relieving arch was partially exposed. These remains were then cleaned and recorded by the CAU (Figures 2 and 3).

Landscape and Geology

Peterhouse College is situated on the southern periphery of the historic core of Cambridge, a short distance outside the medieval town boundary formed by the King's Ditch. Prior to the commencement of the present works, internal floor level of the chapel lay at 9.88m AOD. Geologically, the site lies on second terrace river gravels overlying Gault clay (British Geological Survey 1976). Due to the limited depth of the monitored works, however, natural substrata was not exposed during the course of the investigation.

Methodology

Initial excavation of the foundation trench was undertaken by the principal contractor prior to an archaeological presence being established at the site. All archaeological features and deposits that were exposed by this work were then cleaned and recorded using the CAU-modified version of the MoLAS system (Spence 1994). Base plans were drawn at a scale of 1:20, whilst sections were drawn at a scale of 1:10. A digital photographic archive was also compiled. Throughout the following text, context numbers are indicated by square brackets (e.g. **[001]**) and feature numbers by the prefix F (e.g. **F.01**). All work was carried out with strict adherence to Health and Safety legislation and within the recommendations of FAME (Allen and Holt 2010). No human remains were exposed or disturbed during the course of the excavation. The sitecode for the investigation was PCC18 and the event number was ECB5559.

Historical and archaeological background

The history and development of Peterhouse College has been reviewed in several published sources (e.g. Willis and Clark 1886 vol. I, 1-76; Butterfield 1959; RCHM(E) 1959 vol. I, 156-66; Hall and Lovatt 1989), whilst the wider background of Cambridge itself is reviewed in a number of published sources (e.g. Cam 1959; Lobel 1975; Bryan 1999; Taylor 1999). Consequently, only an outline summary is presented here.

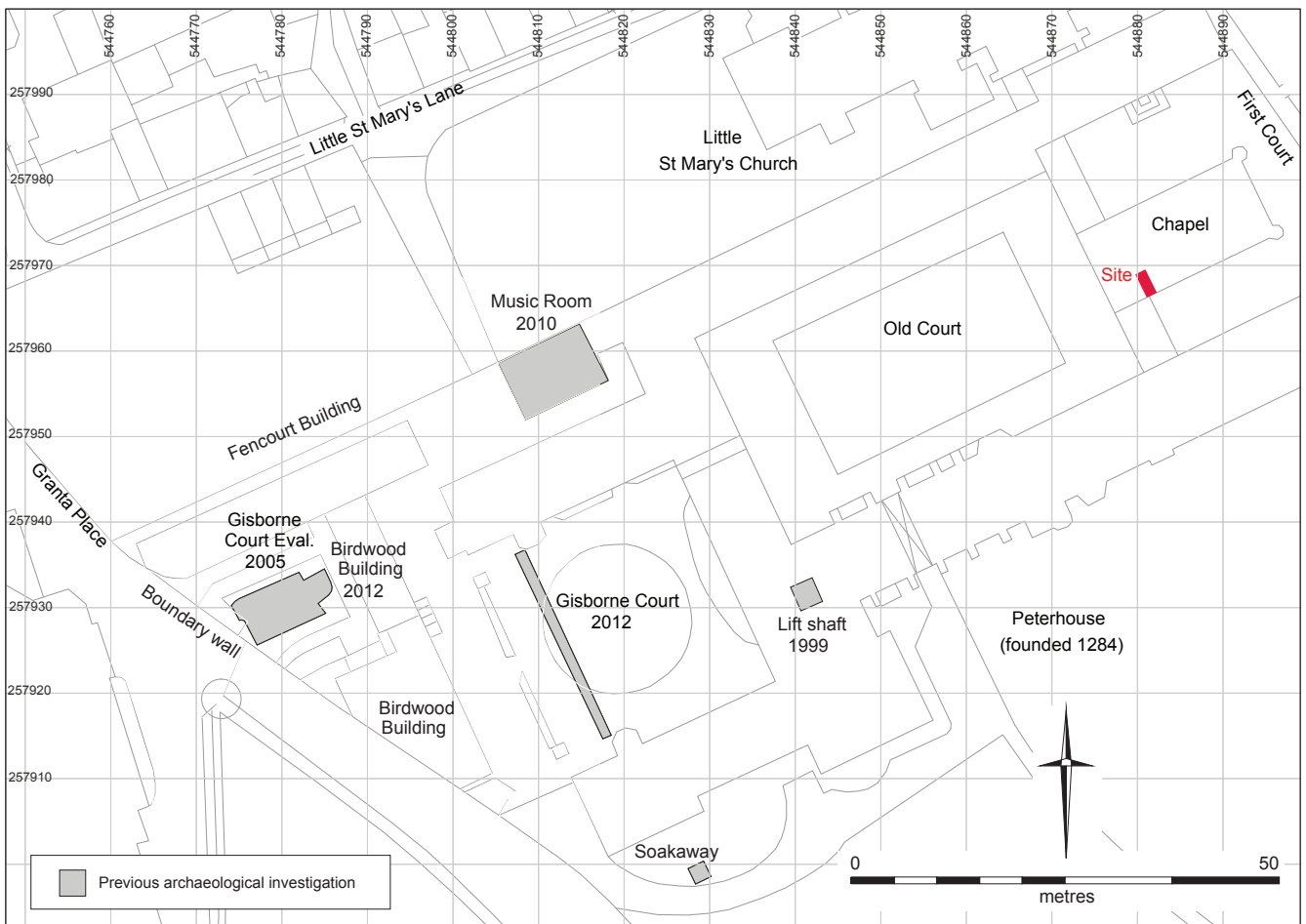
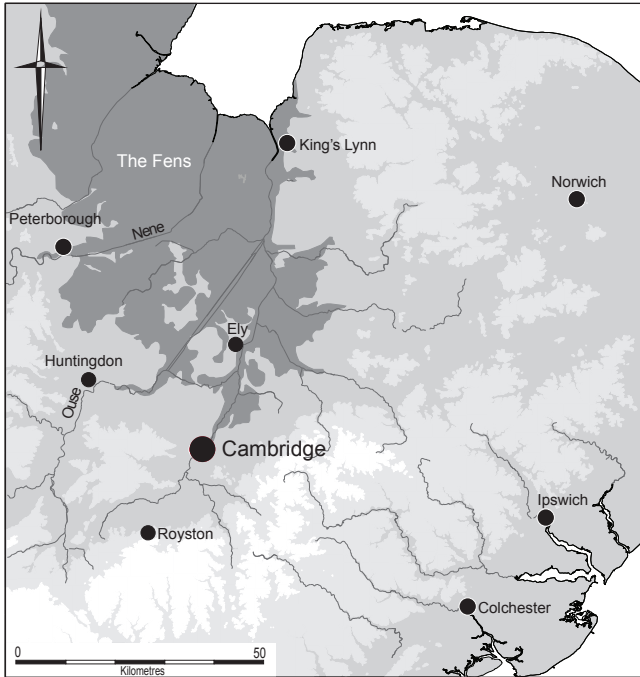


Figure 1. Location of monitoring, also showing nearby Sites of previous investigation

In the first instance, only limited evidence of Prehistoric activity has been identified in the vicinity. This is primarily indicative of transhumant usage of the gravel terraces flanking the River Cam. Similarly, only limited evidence of Roman occupation is known from this part of Cambridge. Although it is probable that the site lay within the southern agricultural hinterland of the principal settlement on Castle Hill at this time, the scale and extent of this area, and any associated suburban development, is as yet relatively poorly understood (c.f. Alexander and Pullinger 2000; Evans and Ten Harkel 2010; Cessford 2017). Subsequent evidence for Early Saxon (c. 410-700) activity in and around Cambridge primarily comprises material recovered during the 19th century from pagan cemeteries on the outskirts of the city (c.f. Dodwell *et al.* 2004; Cessford with Dickens 2005). Very little occupational evidence from this period has yet been identified. Middle to Late Saxon activity (c. 700-900), in contrast, appears to have been primarily refocused upon the Castle Hill area, where a 7th to 9th-century execution cemetery has been investigated (Cessford *et al.* 2007).

By the mid-9th century it is clear that some form of settlement had been re-established, as this was occupied by the Viking Great Army in 875 and the region was subsequently incorporated into the Danelaw from c. 886 until its conquest by Edward the Elder in c. 917 (Cam 1934, 39; Lobel 1975, 3). Nevertheless, 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 radiocarbon 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 early 12th century (Cessford and Dickens in prep.); it is thus most likely to have been created during the Anarchy of King Stephen, when many towns are known to have been at least partially fortified (Creighton and Wright 2017). By the early 17th century, 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 over (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 (founded c. 1209). The expansion of this institution had greatly benefited from royal

investment, especially from the 15th century onwards (Bryan 1999, 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 (Willis and Clark 1886). Indeed, the influence of these colleges has been one of the primary factors in shaping the landscape of Cambridge ever since, with the central riverside area – once the heartland of medieval river trade activity – having been increasingly encroached upon from the 14th century onwards (Bryan 1999, 95).

Peterhouse College itself was founded in 1284. Housing the society of ‘the Scholars of the Bishop of Ely’, who had first resided at the Hospital of St John (later refounded as St John’s College), Peterhouse comprised the first college to be established in the nascent university at Cambridge (Butterfield 1959, 334-35). The new foundation occupied the site of two earlier hostels, which were themselves associated with the adjacent church of St Peter – now Little St Mary’s – both of which were retained to provide chambers for the new society. An additional free-standing hall and buttery were completed c. 1290 but the college’s eventual quadrangular layout, enshrined in present-day Old Court, emerged on a piecemeal basis and was only completely realised in the 1460s (RCHM(E) 1959 vol. I, 156-66). Subsequently, in the 17th century a phase of wide-ranging redevelopment and construction was undertaken under the aegis of Master Matthew Wren (1625-35). Most significantly in the present instance, the area adjoining Trumpington Street – which formerly housed the ‘little Ostle’ and ‘the wall between the M^{rs} lodging and Dr Derham his chamb^r’ (Willis and Clark 1886 vol. I, 41) – was cleared at this time ready for the construction of a new, dedicated college chapel. Work commenced upon the new structure in 1628 and it was consecrated, but not completed, in 1632 (RCHM(E) 1959 vol. I, 157). Additional details pertaining to the design and development of the chapel will be presented in the discussion section, below.

A small number of archaeological investigations have previously been conducted within the grounds of Peterhouse College (see Figure 1 for locations). In the first instance, monitoring was undertaken in 1999 during the construction of a liftshaft within the kitchens located in the west range of Old Court (Hall 1999). Here, the remnants of a medieval building with associated floor surfaces was identified; this had later been succeeded by a sequence of pits that had then in turn been sealed by the construction of Old Court itself in the 1450s. A second investigation conducted in the college’s Music Room in 2010 revealed a medieval agricultural soil that had again been sealed by a later building (Cessford 2010). Finally, an evaluation trench, a pipe trench and a soakaway were excavated in advance of the construction of the new Birdwood Building in 2012 (Rees 2012), following on from the initial monitoring of a series of geotechnical test pits and boreholes at the site in 2004 (Swaysland 2005). Two phases of pit digging were identified here, one medieval and one post-medieval in date. The latter was succeeded by a horizon of 18th-century ground raising activity along with evidence for the demolition of at least one contemporary structure.

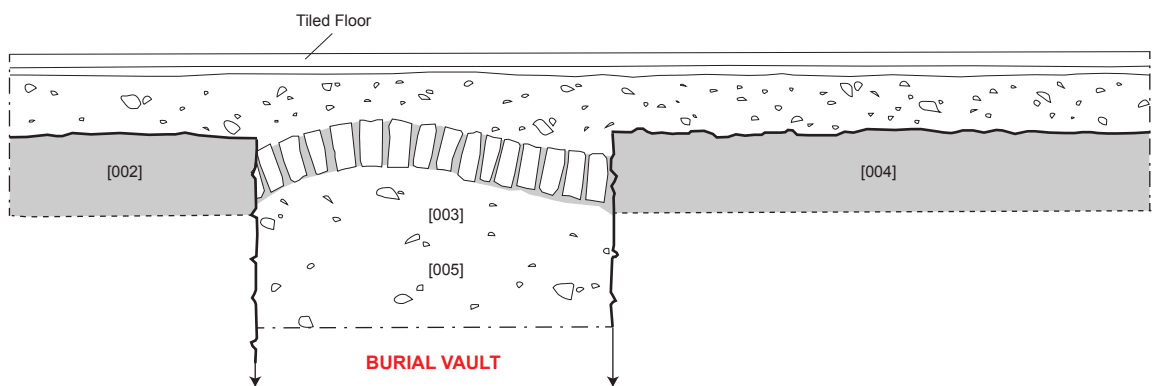
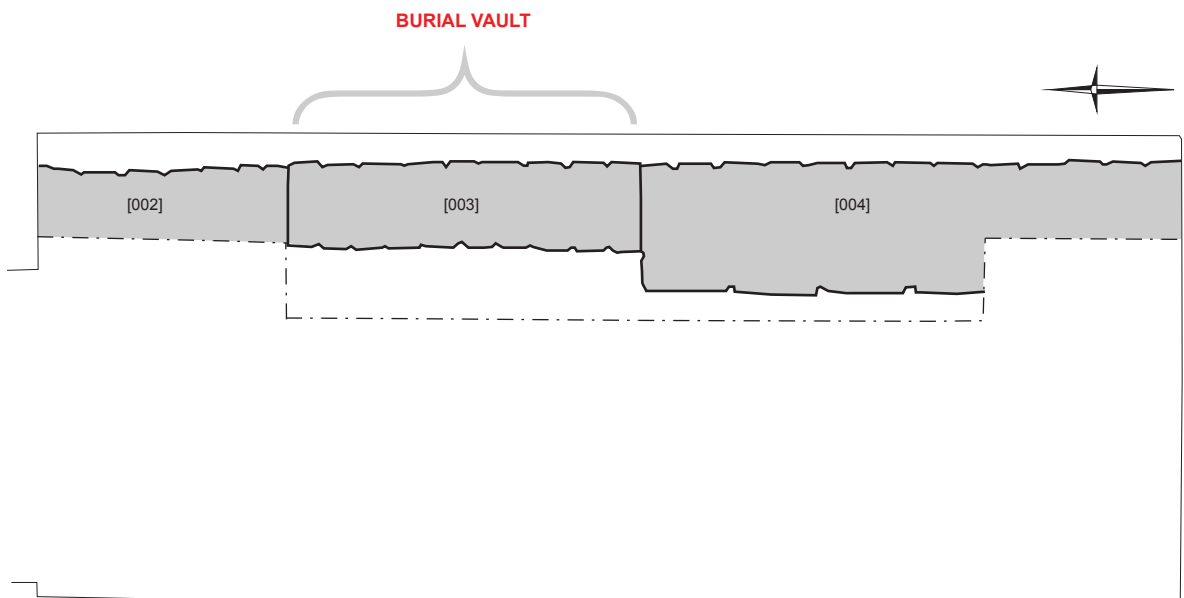
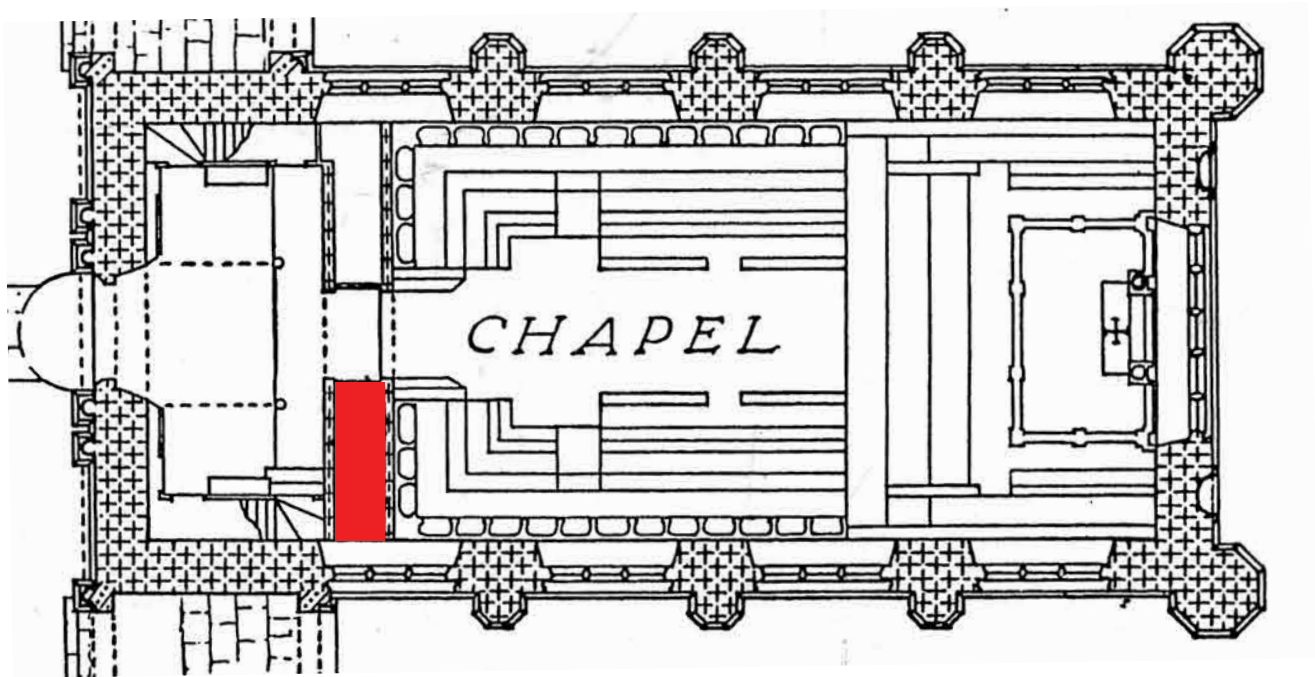


Figure 2. Plan and section of exposed deposits, with location plotted within chapel RCHM (E) 1959



Figure 3. View of area of investigation, facing southeast

RESULTS

The area of investigation lay within a small cupboard situated beneath the chapel's organ loft (Figure 2). This cupboard did not form part of the original early 17th-century layout; instead, its western wall comprised a portion of the original timber antechapel screen while its eastern wall was formed by the rear panels of the reset pews within the chapel's nave (see Figure 3). Within the resultant space, a single trench measuring 3.02m in length by a maximum of 0.50m in width was excavated (Figures 2 and 3). When the existing tiled floor was lifted, the presence of north-south aligned brick-built wall footing **[002]**, **[004] F.01** was revealed. Partway along this footing's length, a brick-built supporting arch (**[003] F.02**) was also identified. This appears to have been constructed at the same time as **F.01**, being positioned so as to span over the loosely backfilled remnant of an earlier feature (**F.03**). The latter was not fully investigated, due to the limited depth of new footing, but based upon its size, location, east-west orientation and loose backfill (**[005]**) it almost certainly comprised a burial vault that was inserted into the nave between 1632 and c. 1670. No material culture was recovered from the site.

The extant floor surface, lying at 9.88m AOD, was composed of eight-inch square green-glazed ceramic pammets (see Figure 3). These are likely to have comprised part of the original early 17th-century chapel floor, the constituent tiles for which were manufactured at Ely (Willis and Clark 1886 vol. I, 41). These particular tiles had been relaid upon a bed of coarse yellowish-brown sandy mortar that overlay loosely compacted dark brownish grey sandy silt deposit **[001]**, which contained frequent gravel, pea grit and mortar fleck inclusions (Figure 2). This deposit had in turn sealed structural remnants **[002]**, **[003]** and **[004]**. In the first instance, **[002]** and **[004]** comprised part of a linear north-south aligned brick-built foundation (**F.01**). This foundation was constructed from pinkish-red unfrogged handmade bricks, measuring 220mm by 110mm by 60mm, which were bonded with tenacious off-white lime mortar. **F.01** measured 0.34m wide and a minimum of 0.22m deep; its upper surface lay at 9.66m AOD. The foundation wall was not contiguous; partway along its length it was interrupted by crudely constructed single-skin brick arch **[004] F.02** (Figure 2). This arch was constructed from identical materials to **F.01** and is very likely to have been built contemporaneously with it.

The change in construction technique between **F.01** and **F.02** was associated with the presence of an earlier underlying feature (**F.03**). This also appears to have been brick-built, using materials that were near-identical to those employed in **F.01** and **F.02**. Unfortunately, however, few details of **F.03**'s form or construction could be determined due to the limited size of the trench. It measured 0.94m wide internally, but its length could not be determined and its depth exceeded 0.50m (where excavation halted). Overall – given its size, location and east-west orientation – it appears most likely to have comprised a brick-lined shaft or burial vault. Originally, it is likely that the vault would have been capped by an inscribed ledger stone that sealed the shaft whilst at the same time memorialising its occupant. When the subsequent foundation wall was constructed (potentially quite soon after the vault's construction, given the close similarity in their constituent materials) the ledger stone was removed and the shaft loosely backfilled with deposit **[005]**; a mid-grey friable sandy silt with occasional gravel and clunch fragment inclusions. Brick arch **F.02** was then added to distribute the load over the partial void beneath. No human remains, either articulated or disarticulated, were encountered during the course of the investigation and the remainder of the vault was not disturbed by the present works.

DISCUSSION

The appearance of Peterhouse College Chapel in its initial, early 17th-century form was somewhat different to that which it presents today. In the first instance, the exterior of the chapel was originally faced in brick. Only later in the 17th century was the present ashlar facing applied to the structure under the aegis of Master John Cosin (RCHM(E) 1959 vol. II, 157). The west front was refaced first, followed by the east end in 1665; finally, in his will of 1671 Cosin bequeathed money for the 'reedifying of the north and south sides of St Peter's Colledge Chappell in Cambridge, with hewn stone-worke answerable to the east and west ends of the sayd Chappell already by mee sett up and finished' (as quoted in Willis and Clark 1886 vol. I, 43). The north and south cloister arcades were also originally of different appearance than those extant today (see Loggan's print of 1688, shown on the cover of this report, for a contemporary depiction of their original design); the south gallery provided private access from the Master's Lodge to the chapel. By the early 18th century, however, both arcades were ruinous. That to the north was demolished and rebuilt in 1709, with its southern counterpart following suit two years later (Willis and Clark 1886 vol. I, 48-9). Finally, the original west porch was demolished in 1755 and not replaced.

Internally, a similar pattern of episodic modernisation and development occurred contemporaneously with the external alterations. Perhaps most pertinently for the present investigation, it appears that an organ was not installed into the chapel until the later 17th century. The date of its eventual addition is not precisely recorded, but is most likely to have taken place c. 1670 (Willis and Clark 1886 vol. I, 47). It is also unclear whether an organ loft was originally incorporated into the chapel's interior or again comprised a later addition. In either eventuality, foundation **F.01** and relieving arch **F.02** appear most likely to have been associated with structural works related to the organ's installation. That the foundation did not comprise part of the chapel's original early 17th-century layout is demonstrated by the presence of an earlier burial vault (**F.03**). Subsequent episodes of updating and alteration of the chapel's interior were undertaken during the 18th and early 19th centuries, including the repair and partial remodelling of the organ gallery in 1821-22 (Willis and Clark 1886 vol. I, 48). It may well have been at this time that the present appearance of the cupboard within which the works took place was established.

Although the introduction of burials into the interior of collegiate chapels is by no means unusual in Cambridge, given the ecclesiastical nature of such contexts very few of these interments have been investigated archaeologically. The principal exception to this pattern comprises Trinity College Chapel (constructed 1555-67), where three burials were identified during refurbishment works undertaken in 2011 and one was partially investigated (Newman 2012). It was determined that this latter individual had been interred close to the altar within a single-break timber coffin in an earth-fast grave. The burial could be dated to 1660-80 based upon refuse material incorporated into its backfilling. At Peterhouse Chapel, in contrast, a brick-built burial vault appears to have been introduced at the west end of the nave between 1632 and c. 1670. Notably, after c. 1600 the provision of intramural brick-lined burial vaults of

this kind became almost ubiquitous in English ecclesiastical contexts, particularly those situated in urban locales (Gilchrist and Morris 1996, 119; Gilchrist 2003, 402). Several types of vault were used, of which single width brick-lined graves capped by a ledger stones were the most common (Litten 2002, 211-12). Based upon this evidence, it appears likely that additional unrecorded vaults are also present to the north and east of the present example, their ledger stones either removed or obscured by later alterations.

Acknowledgements

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OASIS FORM

OASIS ID: cambridg3-336418	
Project details	
Project name	Peterhouse chapel, Peterhouse College, Cambridge
Short description of the project	Archaeological monitoring was conducted during a recent phase of redevelopment undertaken within the 17th-century chapel of Peterhouse College, Cambridge (constructed 1628-32). Within a small cupboard situated between the nave and the antechapel part of a brick-built burial vault and a later brick foundation wall were encountered. The latter was probably associated with the introduction of an organ loft into the chapel in the late 17th century. No human remains were exposed or disturbed during the course of this work.
Project dates	Start: 05-09-2018 End: 06-09-2018
Previous/future work	Yes / Not known
Any associated project reference codes	ECB 5559 - HER event no.
Any associated project reference codes	PCC18 - Sitecode
Type of project	Recording project
Site status	Listed Building
Current Land use	Other 2 - In use as a building
Monument type	FOUNDATION Post Medieval
Monument type	BURIAL VAULT Post Medieval
Significant Finds	N/A None
Investigation type	"Recorded Observation", "Watching Brief"
Prompt	Direction from Local Planning Authority - PPS
Project location	
Country	England
Site location	CAMBRIDGESHIRE CAMBRIDGE CAMBRIDGE Peterhouse College Chapel, Cambridge
Postcode	CB2 1RD
Study area	1.2 Square metres
Site coordinates	TL 4488 5797 52.200467572168 0.120206446213 52 12 01 N 000 07 12 E Point
Project creators	
Name of Organisation	Cambridge Archaeological Unit
Project brief originator	Local Planning Authority (with/without advice from County/District Archaeologist)
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	Peterhouse College, Cambridge
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Physical Archive Exists?	No
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Digital Archive ID	PCC18
Digital Contents	"none"
Digital Media available	"Images raster / digital photography"
Paper Archive recipient	Cambridgeshire County Archaeology Store
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Paper Contents	"none"
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