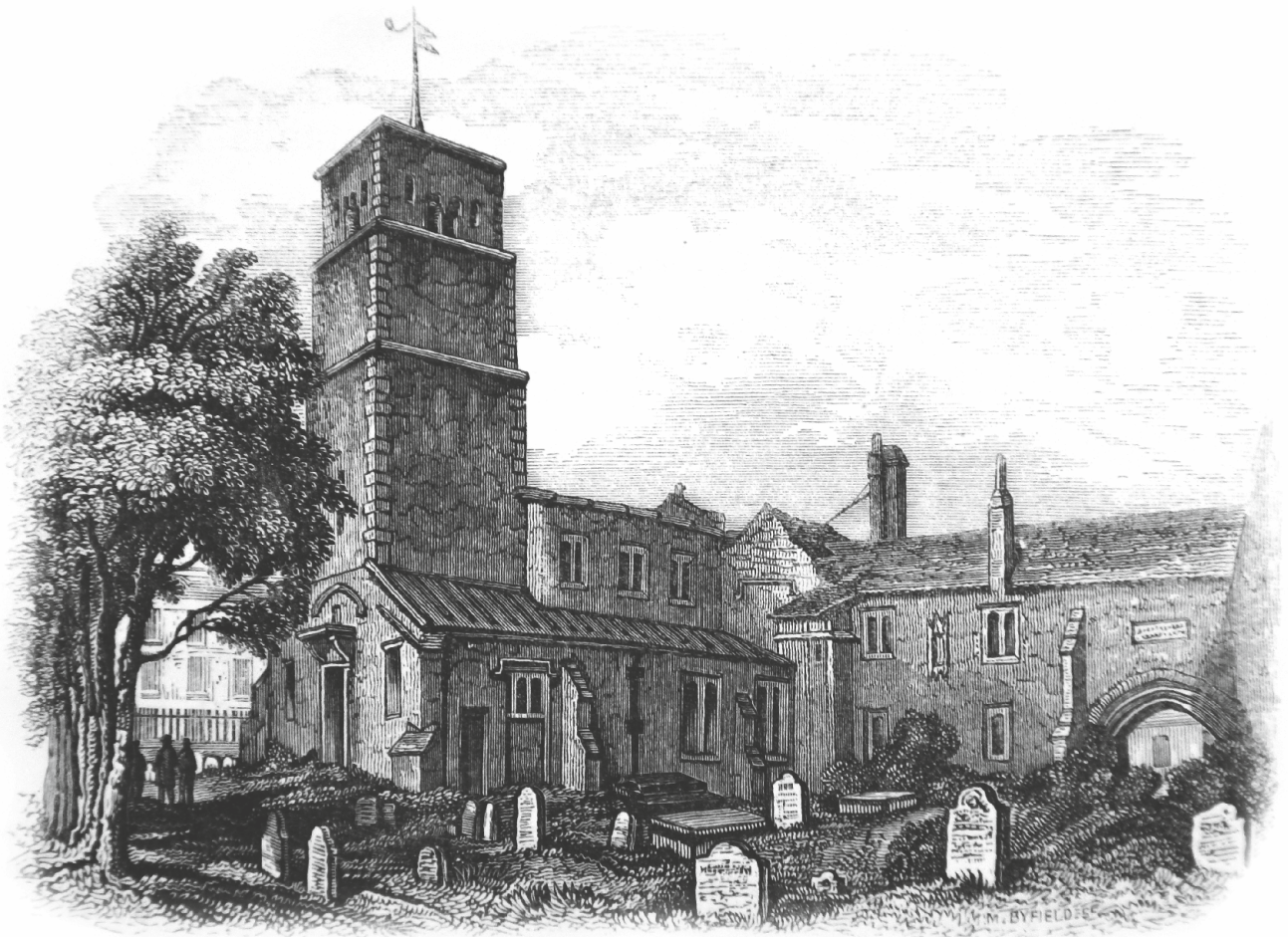


St. Bene't's Churchyard, Cambridge

Archaeological Monitoring



Craig Cessford

ST. BENE'T'S CHURCHYARD CAMBRIDGE

Archaeological Monitoring

commissioned by *St. Bene't's Church, Cambridge*

January 2019

Project Team:

Author **Craig Cessford** / Project Manager **Alison Dickens**
Graphics **Jane Matthews** / Photography **Craig Cessford**

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Report No. **1414**
Event No. **ECB5783**

Approved by: **Alison Dickens**



SUMMARY

Archaeological monitoring of three trial pits was carried out in St. Bene't's churchyard, Cambridge. Two of the trial pits revealed little of archaeological interest; the third was probably dug largely through a deep 19th century grave fill and produced disarticulated human bone and coffin elements but the *in situ* skeleton was not reached.

INTRODUCTION

Archaeological monitoring of three trial pits was carried out in St. Bene't's churchyard, Cambridge, to the north of the church (TL 44852 58295) by the Cambridge Archaeological Unit on the 5th of December 2018 (Figure 1–2). The work comprised monitoring of exploratory excavations being carried out by the Andrew Firebrace Partnership Ltd. on behalf of the parochial church council of St. Bene't's Church, Cambridge, in advance of a proposed access ramp and associated alterations. The scope of the archaeological works was agreed in advance with Kasia Gdaniec of the Cambridgeshire County Council Historic Environment Team and followed a method statement produced by the Cambridge Archaeological Unit (Dickens 2018). The work was covered by a Faculty issued by the Consistory Court of the Diocese of Ely (Ref.: 2018-021569). An archaeological desk based assessment and deposit model relating to the church had previously been produced by the Cambridge Archaeological Unit (Newman 2017), the results of the monitoring reported on here should be interpreted in the overall context provided by that document.

Context numbers are indicated by square brackets (e.g. [101]). All work was carried out with strict adherence to Health and Safety legislation and within the recommendations of FAME (Allen and Holt 2010). The site code for the investigation was CSB18 and the event number was ECB5783. The surface heights of the trial pits were not independently surveyed, however the Ordnance Survey benchmark on the northeast angle of the porch of St. Bene't's church is at 10.13m AOD and is 0.60m above the current ground height, which is therefore located at *c.* 9.5m AOD. The surface of the churchyard is relatively flat and the current ground surface at all three test pits is likely to lie at 9.5m AOD \pm 0.2m.

RESULTS

Trial Pit 1

Trial Pit 1 was located at the junction of the churchyard boundary wall on St. Bene't's' Street and the current entrance steps, its principal function was to investigate the nature of the footings for the wall and steps (Figures 2–3). The location was heavily constrained by modern features that could not be moved, such as grave slabs, and it was only possible to excavate a hole 0.70m by 0.25m in extent. The maximum depth that could be hand excavated was *c.* 0.8m. The only deposits and features encountered during hand excavation related to modern topsoil [100], the current boundary wall [101], the current entrance steps [102] and some form of 19th or 20th century service on the southeastern side of the trial pit [103].

Augering beneath this by the contractor revealed a sequence of mixed loose grey silty clay deposits with gravel and other inclusions. No stratigraphy was observed and this appears to be a loose uncompacted fill of a feature of some kind. At a depth of *c.* 2.2m (*c.* 7.3m AOD) brownish orange/red gravelly sand was encountered. This probably represent undisturbed river terrace gravels, although certainty is impossible. This accords well with the predicted height of between *c.* 7.4m and 7.8m AOD from the deposit model (Newman 2017, 23).

Trial Pit 2

Trial Pit 2 comprised a series of small hand dug holes located immediately outside the north aisle of St. Bene't's Church, their principal function was to investigate the route of a known modern service (Figures 2 and 4). These holes were typically no more than 0.4m wide and 0.2m deep and were excavated over a modern service to determine its route, as a result no deposits other than the modern topsoil [200] and the modern service [201] were revealed.

Trial Pit 3

Trial Pit 3 was hand excavated in an area of shrubs to the north of the church, in the area where the access ramp will be installed. Its precise location was determined by the necessity of avoiding shrubs, grave slabs etc. (Figures 2 and 5). The principal function of Trial Pit 3 was to determine how close to the current ground surface significant archaeological deposits, particularly articulated human remains, brick vaults etc., survive. Trial Pit 3 was 0.9m by 0.9m in extent and the uppermost 0.30m consisted of a homogenous dark humic topsoil of consistent thickness [300]. Only a very few small fragments of bone were present in this deposit, none of the fragments could be visually identified as definitely human.

On the northeastern side of the test pit there was a cut feature whose lower fill ([301], cut [302]) at *c.* 0.5m below the current ground surface was a roughly constructed pale cream coloured firm cemented gravel. This appeared to have been poured into a trench, probably around a service of some kind. Given the alignment of the feature this could be a water pipe leading to the 19th century hand pump situated just inside the Bene't Street churchyard boundary wall (see Newman 2017, fig. 11).

The rest of the trial pit apart from the feature already described comprised a loose uncompacted pale brownish grey clayey sandy silt [303]. Although minor differences, principally in terms of inclusions and a rather firmer upper surface, were identifiable this appeared to be a single deposit. The deposit contained occasional gravel, pottery, vessel glass and clay tobacco pipe, with dates spanning the 16th–17th to 19th–20th centuries. Also present was a large quantity of disarticulated human bone, with a number of distinct clusters or groups identifiable within the general deposit. Based on a rapid assessment of skull and long bone fragments these represent a minimum of, but probably significantly more than, four individuals with both adults and younger individuals present. There were also six badly corroded 18th/19th centuries iron coffin handles and a large quantity of extremely degraded wood, probably from coffin boards. Roots and voids, which probably relate to animal burrows, were present throughout the deposit, but were noticeably more frequent at the base of the excavated sequence. Excavation was halted at a depth of *c.* 1.1m below the current ground surface (*c.* 8.4m AOD), due to health and safety constraints. At this depth the deposit was extremely loose with large voids appearing. The quantities of disarticulated human bone and loose uncompacted nature of the deposit suggest that this deposit is the fill of a grave, with the skeleton potentially a considerable depth beneath the point reached. Given the interpretation of the feature it was decided that augering would be inappropriate, as this might damage an *in situ* skeleton. The disturbed human remains were placed in a grey plastic sack and reburied at the base of the trial pit.

FINDS

The only finds recovered were from the putative grave fill [303] in Trial Pit 3, clay tobacco pipe stem fragments were also noted in context [100] and [200]. The disarticulated human bone was immediately reburied on site as were the badly corroded iron coffin handles, apart from a representative sample that was retained.

Pottery

17 sherds of pottery weighing 230g were recovered, this material spans the 16th–17th to 19th–20th centuries (Table 1).

Fabric	No.	Weight (g)	Date	Comment
Green glazed grey bodied earthenware	1	8	16th–17th century	
Glazed red earthenware	3	63	16th–19th century	Three separate vessels
German stoneware	1	22	16th–17th century	
Tin-glazed earthenware	1	24	17th–18th century	Large hollowware vessel
Chinese export porcelain	1	3	18th century	Tea bowl or cup
Staffordshire-type white salt glazed earthenware	5	14	18th century	Patty pan plus flatware vessel
Nottinghamshire/Derbyshire-type stoneware	1	25	18th century	Handle, probably from jug
Creamware	1	45	Late 18th–early 19th century	Flat rimmed vessel, probably a chamber pot
Whiteware	2	13	19th–20th century	
Utilitarian English stoneware	1	13	19th century	Narrow necked bottle
Total	17	230		

Table 1: Pottery recovered.

Glass

Two dark green body fragments from bottles of 19th–20th century date weighing 16g were recovered.

Iron

Two coffin handles of different form, one straight the other curved, were retained. They weigh 222g and are of 18th–19th century date.

Clay tobacco pipe

14 fragments of clay tobacco pipe weighing 90g were recovered. These comprise 11 stems, one heel/spur and two bowls. Both bowls are both Oswald general type 06, dating to *c.* 1660–80.

DISCUSSION

Trial Pits 1 and 2, which were dug for non-archaeological purposes, produced little information of archaeological value, apart from the potential identification of natural in Trial Pit 1. Trial Pit 3 revealed a relatively simple archaeological sequence, which suggests that articulated skeletons and other significant features although present are located at a considerable depth beneath the current ground surface. Caution must be exercised in extrapolating these results over the wider churchyard area, in particular it is possible that much shallower burials of young individuals may have taken place and may survive in close proximity to the base of the topsoil. A 3m by 2m trench excavated nearby in 1988 in advance of the construction of a new kitchen and lavatory, revealed three articulated inhumations, with the uppermost only *c.* 0.5m below the ground surface, plus a brick-built burial vault and a redeposited 12th–13th century grave slab (Malim 1988). This indicates that significant remains survive at a shallower depth than in Trial Pit 3. Disarticulated human remains are present in considerable quantity immediately beneath the base of the current topsoil, so even relatively shallow works will have to allow for this.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The project was commissioned by the Parochial Church Council of St. Bene't's Church, Cambridge. The project was managed for the Cambridge Archaeological Unit by Alison Dickens and was monitored by Kasia Gdaniec of Cambridgeshire's Historic Environment Team. We gratefully acknowledge the on-site assistance of the Andrew Firebrace Partnership Ltd. The graphics were prepared by Jane Matthews.

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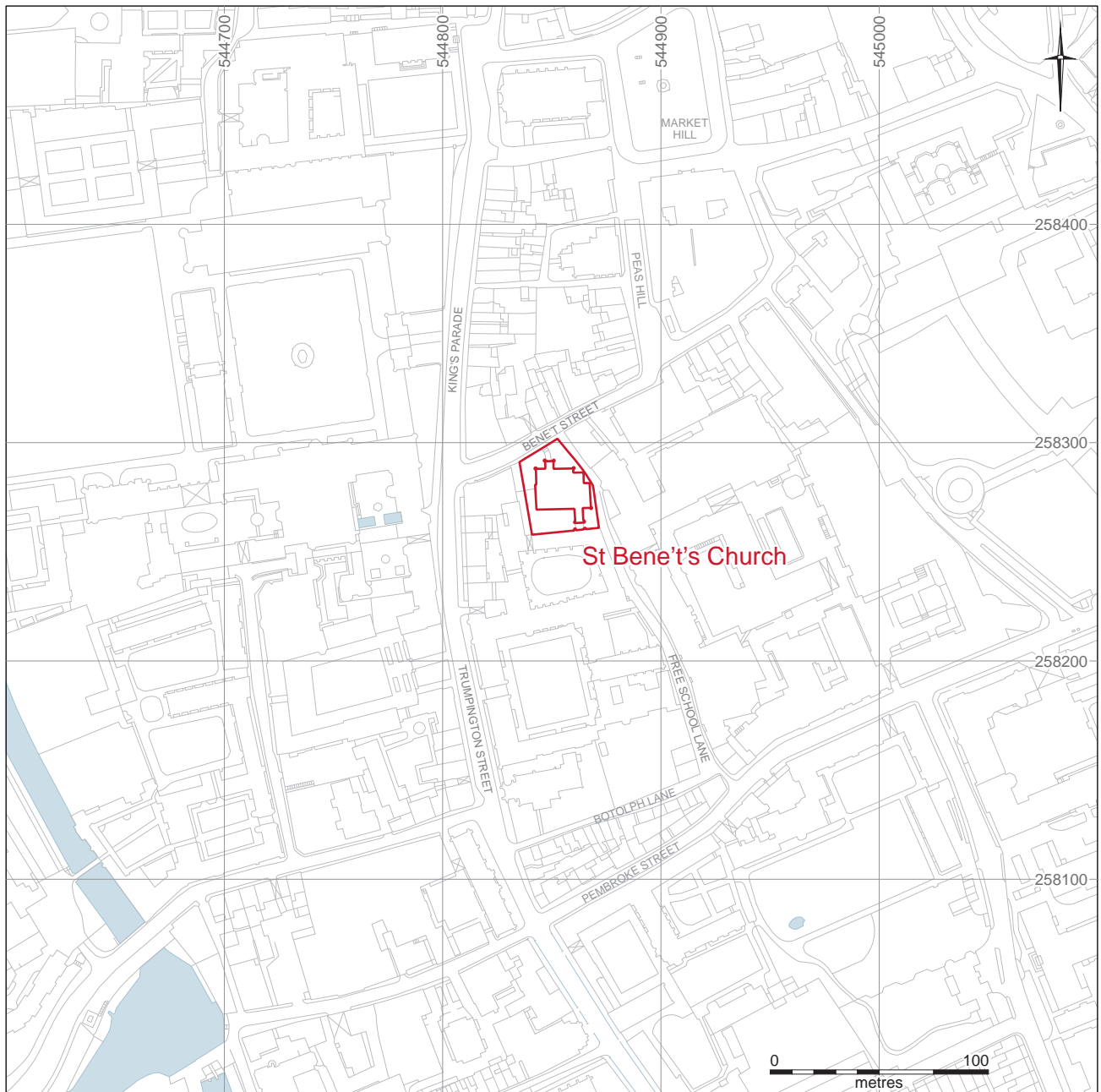


Figure 1. Site location

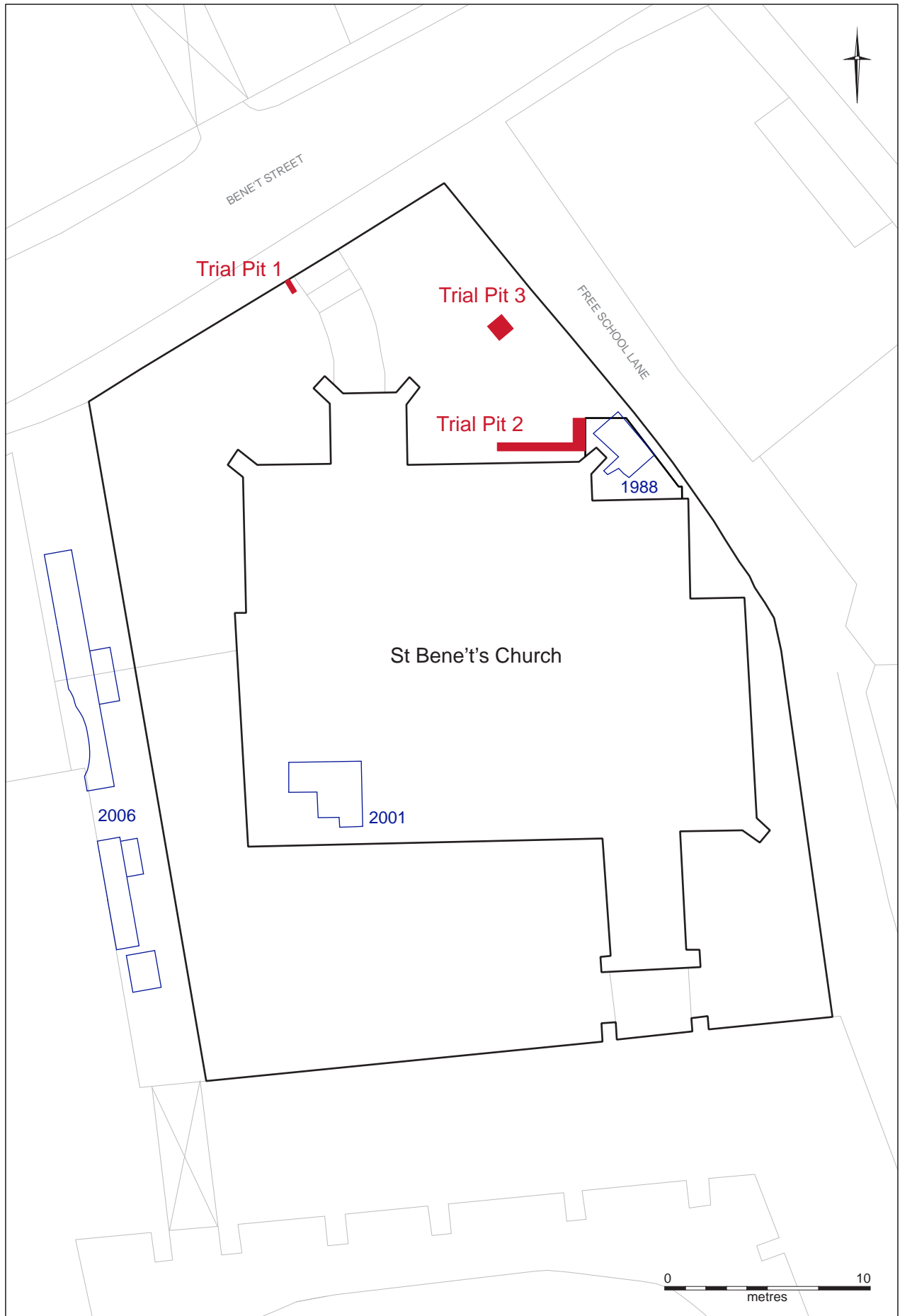


Figure 2. Location plan of trial pits and previous archaeological investigations



Figure 3. View of Trial Pit 1, facing northwest



Figure 4. View of Trial Pit 2, facing east



Figure 5. View of Trial Pit 3, facing southeast

OASIS FORM

OASIS ID: cambridg3-337805	
Project details	
Project name	St. Bene't's churchyard, Cambridge
Short description of the project	Archaeological monitoring of three trial pits related to the potential installation of an access ramp. These revealed mainly modern features and indicate that burials etc. are located at some depth from the current ground surface.
Project dates	Start: 05-12-2018 End: 05-12-2018
Previous/future work	Yes / Not known
Any associated project reference codes	ECB5783 - HER event no.
Any associated project reference codes	CSB18 - Sitecode
Type of project	Recording project
Site status	Listed Building
Current Land use	Other 4 - Churchyard
Monument type	BURIAL Post Medieval
Significant Finds	HUMAN BONE Post Medieval
Investigation type	"Watching Brief"
Prompt	Direction from Local Planning Authority - PPS
Project location	
Country	England
Site location	CAMBRIDGESHIRE CAMBRIDGE CAMBRIDGE St. Bene't's churchyard
Postcode	CB2 3PT
Study area	1.2 Square metres
Site coordinates	TL 44852 58295 52.203395155863 0.11993600396 52 12 12 N 000 07 11 E Point
Height OD / Depth	Min: 7.3m Max: 9.5m
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	Craig Cessford
Type of sponsor/funding body	Landowner
Name of sponsor/funding body	St Bene't's Church parochial church council
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Physical Contents	"Ceramics","Glass","Metal","other"
Digital Archive recipient	Cambridgeshire County Archaeology Store
Digital Archive ID	CSB18
Digital Contents	"other"
Digital Media available	"Images raster / digital photography","Text"
Paper Archive recipient	Cambridgeshire County Archaeology Store
Paper Archive ID	CSB18
Paper Contents	"other"
Paper Media available	"Notebook - Excavation',' Research',' General Notes"
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