

St. Bene't's Churchyard, Cambridge

Archaeological Monitoring



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St. Bene't's Churchyard, Cambridge Archaeological Monitoring

Commissioned by the Parochial Church Council of St. Bene't's Church, Cambridge

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SUMMARY

Archaeological monitoring of groundworks in St. Bene't's churchyard, Cambridge, north of the church revealed that the area had been heavily modified in the mid/late 19th century, when the ground height was lowered, and had also been altered on several occasions during the 20th century. A number of 17th to mid-19th-century features associated with the churchyard and church were revealed including brick-lined burial vaults and grave slabs. Portions of the interior chancel wall were revealed, exposing some 12th-century fabric.

INTRODUCTION

Archaeological monitoring was carried out in St. Bene't's church and churchyard, Cambridge, (TL 44852 58295) by the Cambridge Archaeological Unit (CAU) intermittently between 16th May and 15th August 2019 (Figures 1–2). The work in the churchyard comprised recording and monitoring of excavations undertaken by the contractors FA Valiant and Son Ltd. and recording of grave slabs, headstones etc. that were to be moved or that might potentially be damaged in advance of a proposed access ramp and associated alterations. The work inside the church comprised photographic recording of areas where plaster had been stripped from walls. The scope of the archaeological works was agreed in advance with Kasia Gdaniec of the Cambridgeshire County Council Historic Environment Team and under the terms of a Faculty, issued by the Consistory Court of the Diocese of Ely. An archaeological desk based assessment and deposit model relating to the church had been produced by the CAU (Newman 2017) and an earlier phase of monitoring was undertaken by the CAU in December 2019 (Cessford 2019). The results of the monitoring covered by this report should be interpreted in the overall context provided by those documents.

The CAU site code is CSB19 and the HER number is ECB5905. As the Cambridgeshire County Records Office is currently closed thorough background documentary research could not be undertaken. All work was carried out in strict accordance with statutory Health and Safety legislation, the recommendations of FAME (Allen & Holt 2010) and in accordance with a site specific risk assessment and the general CAU health and safety policy.

Given the varied nature of the work a mixture of recording systems was employed. All features were either already located on existing plans or were tied in to extant features and manually planned at a scale of 1:20 where appropriate. Where appropriate features and layers were recorded using the CAU system. Context numbers are indicated within the text in square brackets (e.g. [300]). Photographic recording was digital. Artefacts from burial vaults that were disturbed by the works were recorded on site and reburied in the vault. The other excavations produced no artefacts apart from disarticulated human bone, which was reburied on site. No deposits suitable for environmental sampling were encountered.

The works occurred in four areas: (1) north of the church; (2) the small area adjacent to the chancel and organ; (3) inside the chancel; (4) inside the north porch (Figure 2). In addition the work north of the church is divided into two sections: (A) grave slabs and headstones that were already exposed were recorded; (B) features revealed by excavation (Figure 3).

NORTH OF THE CHURCH, ALREADY EXPOSED MONUMENTS

Although some grave slabs and headstones had been recorded by Newman (2017, table 6.1) alterations to the scope of the works means that additional monuments were impacted by the works. The lettering sequence employed by Newman has been retained and extended.

Stone A: this stone was lifted by the contractor, there were no associated underlying features (Figure 4). The stone had previously been partially obscured and is 1.64m by 0.62m with the lower 0.24m unfaced and only crudely shaped. There was no discernible inscription on either face.

Stone F: this stone was lifted by the contractor, there were no associated underlying features (Figure 4). The stone was largely plain, although there were a few faint traces of decoration near the top of the stone.

Stone G: this stone was lifted by the contractor, there were no associated underlying features (Figure 4).

Stone I: this stone was lifted by the contractor, there were no associated underlying features (Figure 4). Inscription: JOHN COODE ^{SEN.} / OBIT JAN 11 1831 / ÆTAT 76 / WILLIAM COODE / OBIT July 11 1831 / ÆTAT 52 / ALSO OF / CAROLINE / HIS BELOVED WIFE / OBIT MARCH 31 1852 / ÆTAT 64

Stone J: this stone which must have previous been standing upright in the open area was moved by the contractor, its precise position was not recorded but there were apparently no associated underlying features. It must have been moved in the mid/late 19th century, although it is possible it was replaced close to its original location (Figure 4). The stone was small, 0.64m by 0.25m, and largely plain with the inscription S • C / 1842.

Stone K: this stone which had previous been standing upright in the open area was moved by the contractor, there were no associated underlying features and it must have been moved in the mid/late 19th century although it is possible it was replaced close to its original location (Figure 4). The stone proved to be broken and was 0.81m+ by 0.66m. The inscription reads: SACRED / TO THE MEMORY OF / M^{RS} MARY WHITE / WIFE OF ROB. WHITE ESQ / TOWN CLERK OF CAMBRIDGE / WHO DIED / ?? SEPT 1813 / AGED ?? YEARS. Robert White became town clerk in 1788 and held the post until he died. A Robert White married Mary Missen at St. Vigor's, Fulbourn, on 13 Mar 1793.

Stone L: this stone was placed upright against the eastern wall of the graveyard (Figure 5). 0.94m by 0.68m, inscription illegible.

Stone M: this stone was placed upright against the eastern wall of the graveyard. 1.14m+ by 0.65m (Figure 5). It has ornate decoration and the inscription reads: IN MEMORY OF / SARAH SUDBURY/ who dies Feb 19 1799 / Aged 89 Years / Also of / WILLIAM GRAVES / Who died Sep^r. 19 1800 / Aged 48 Years / Also of / ??

Stone N: this stone was placed upright against the eastern wall of the graveyard (Figure 5). 1.12m+ by 0.68. The inscription reads: ?? / ??DLA ELIZA. Their daughter / who died March 9th 183? / In the 28th Year of her Age.

Stone O: this stone was placed upright against the eastern wall of the graveyard (Figure 5). 1.16m+ by 0.76m. The inscription reads: In Memory of / JOHN CHALLIS / WHO DIED JAN^y 22nd 1838 / Whoe'er thou art, to this sad spot drawn by / And pay to Worth the tribute of a tear: / Pause one short moment o'er this humble stone [continues for 10 more lines]

Stone P: this stone was placed upright against the eastern wall of the graveyard (Figure 5). 1.21m+ 0.75m. The inscription reads: SACRED / TO THE MEMORY / OF / JOHN HASLOP / ... DIED / ?? ER 22 1824 / AGED 73 YEARS / ALSO OF / MARTHA his wife / WHO DIED / JULY 25th 1829 / AGED 69 YEARS / MARTHA the wide / OF THEIR ELDEST SON / JOHN HASLOP / WHO DIED / JULY 15th ?? / AGED 37 YEARS / AND TWO OF THEIR / INFANTS

Stone Q: this stone was placed upright against the eastern wall of the graveyard (Figure 5). 1.28m+ by 0.66m. The inscription reads: SACRED / to the Memory of / MARTH the Wife of / WILLIAM CROWE Builder / who departed this life April 9th / Anno Domini 1813: / AGED 33 YEARS

Stone R: this stone was placed upright against the eastern wall of the graveyard (Figure 6). 1.37m+ by 0.84m. The inscription reads: IN MEMORY OF / ELEANOR THODEY / who died in Mar 1799 / Aged 73 YEARS / Jane THODEY / who died in Jny 1799 / Aged 71 YEARS / ANN LEES / Wife of / GILBERT LEES / who died Feb 2 1808 / Aged 60 YEARS / GILBERT LEES / Husband of the above / who died June 16 1826 / Aged 72 years / MARGARET LEES wife of G. Lees / Who died June 2 1797 Aged 7 years / GILBERT LEES ?? / ??

Stone T: this stone was lifted by the contractor, there were no associated underlying features. No trace of an inscription survived but the underside was roughly faced/pecked confirming that the correct face had been uppermost. The stone was 1.80m long, maximum 0.68m wide and 0.09m thick.

Stone U: this stone which was already broken was partly lifted by the contractor, there were no associated underlying features. No trace of an inscription survived but the well faced underside was clearly the original underside confirming that the correct face had been uppermost. The stone was 0.90m wide, and 0.09m thick.

NORTH OF THE CHURCH, FEATURES REVEALED BY EXCAVATION

The area investigated had been significantly impacted in the mid/late 19th century, probably at the same time as building works in either 1852–3 or 1872–74. It appears that the ground height of the churchyard was lowered by at least 1.0m. All the features revealed were either truncated or re-deposited at this point in time. The general area was lowered by the contractor by between c. 0.1 and 0.3m creating a level and stable surface. The only deeper excavations were two soakaways and associated trenches plus areas where tree roots etc. were removed. Features revealed included three brick burial vaults, a wall foundation, an unidentified structure and two grave slabs. The stratigraphic sequences revealed in the soakaways appear to largely comprise layers of 19th–20th century date and fills of 19th-century graves.

Soakaway 1

Soakaway 1 was located between Vault 1 and Buried Slab 1 and was 1.1m by 1.1m in extent and excavated to a depth of 0.8m. The sequence comprised a loose black sandy silt topsoil [400] that was up to 0.10m thick and a lower deposit [401] of a loose root disturbed gravelly mid greyish brown sandy silt, which continued below the limit of excavation. This contained disarticulated human bone and a plastic Stegosaurus. Given the homogeneity and looseness of [401] it is probable that this is a grave fill.

Soakaway 2

Soakaway 2 was located to the west of the existing pathway between Bene't Street and the churchyard (Figure 7). It was 1.32m by 1.27m in extent and dug to a depth of 1.1m. The uppermost deposit was a loose black sandy silt topsoil [400] that was up to 0.10m thick. Beneath this, there was a square or rectangular foundation Structure 1 [406] cut [407] constructed from three courses of mortared sandstone blocks, which was 0.71m by 0.31m+ in extent and 0.30m deep (Figure 7). Structure 1 presumably represents some form of minor 19th or 20th-century footing for a churchyard feature of some kind. Beneath this was [404] a loose and friable coarse brown sandy silt, which was 0.60m thick and contained disarticulated human bone. Under this was [405] a loose and friable dark grey sandy silt with frequent gravel that contained disarticulated human bone, tile fragments and charcoal.

Trenches 1 and 2

Associated with Soakaways 1 and 2 were service Trenches 1 and 2. These were shallower than the soakaways and although observed they revealed no features or deposits necessitating additional recording.

Wall 1

Located to the northeast of the northeastern buttress of the church porch was an L-shaped wall foundation Wall 1 (Figure 8). Although truncated at both ends this wall survived for a length of 1.3m west–east and 1.0m north–south and was over 0.4m deep. The bricks and mortar indicate a 17th or 18th century date for this feature, which was truncated by the construction of the current north porch in 1853. Wall 1 probably represents an earlier north porch depicted on plans of 1688 and 1798.

Structure 1

See Soakaway 2.

Structures 2 and 3

These two structures were located beside each other in a drainage trench leading into Soakaway 1. Structure 2 [418] was a truncated linear brick structure over 1.1m long and 0.36m wide made from yellow unfrogged bricks indicating an 18th or 19th century date. It is unclear if this is a wall foundation, vault or footing for a small feature. Structure 3 [419] was a brick structure 0.57m by 0.56m in extent made from yellow unfrogged bricks indicating an 18th or 19th century date. It is unclear if this is a wall foundation, vault or footing for a small feature. The stratigraphic relationship between Structures 2 and 3 was unclear.

Vault 1

A 19th-century brick-built rectangular arched burial vault was identified to the east of Wall 1 (Figure 9). This vault comprised an arched roof [414], which appeared to have been removed and reinstated several times, and walls [415]. The vault was 2.05m long by 0.95m wide, with the uppermost 0.8m of the walls exposed. Four 0.04–0.05m wide iron cross beams [416] for supporting a coffin were visible and some collapsed human bone and coffin furniture was also discernible. The bricks of the vault were in a red fabric 220mm by 105mm in size and 70mm thick with a shallow frog. They were not machine made and the fabric was not levigated (reduced to a fine powder or smooth paste).

There were remnants of a decayed wooden coffin [408] c. 3.2m long by 0.7m wide with a considerable quantity of disarticulated human bone to either side of it [409], representing the remains of at least two adults. These deposits were cleaned and recorded but left in situ as they would not be disturbed. A fragmentary iron coffin plate with no legible surviving inscription

visible. A copper alloy disc and some ironwork that were present may be coffin fittings. These items were photographed but not removed from site. Disarticulated human bone from the two soakaways was bagged, labelled and reburied in Vault 1.

Vault 2

A short distance south of Vault 1 there was another brick structure of similar character, although only a short 0.6m length of wall was visible this probably represents another 19th-century burial vault.

Vault 3

Located beside the existing access steps to the churchyard was Vault 2 (Figure 10). The earliest part of this comprised yellow unfrogged bricks [402] set in a lime mortar and incorporating a partially revealed gravestone or gravestone fragment, this may be a separate earlier vault or structure but this is unclear. The vault comprised a flat roof [403] and side walls [413] and was 1.94+m long by 1.05m wide and of unknown depth. The structure was built from 18th or 19th-century yellow unfrogged brick set in a white lime mortar. There was a loose rubbly upper fill [410] over what is probably a coffin [412] and a loose fill around it [411]. [412] included four in situ iron coffin handles, 75 small circular iron rivets that were probably on the upper surface of the coffin, fragments of a thin iron plate with no distinguishable decoration or inscription, several iron nails and one copper alloy pin (Figure 10).

Buried Slab 1

Buried at a depth of *c.* 0.3m was a broken north–south aligned grave slab (Figure 11). Clearly not *in situ* it was 0.76m+ high by 0.58m wide and 70mm thick. Part of the slab was covered in mortar suggesting that it had been reused as a base for some later feature in the cemetery. The slab was undecorated and had the inscription:

ANN GO[ODE]
Died
June 4th 180[?3]
Aged 55.
EDWARD GOODE
Died October 22 1822
Aged [?3]6.

Ann Bridges was baptised on 24 Jul 1757 at All Saints, Cambridge, and married John Goode on 6 Sep 1778 at All Saints. Their son Edward Goode was baptised on 14 May 1786 at St. Bene't's and was buried on 27 Oct 1822

Buried Slab 2

Buried at a depth of *c.* 0.4m was a west–east aligned slab that was 2.05m long, 1.075m wide and 0.10m thick (Figure 12). The slab was undecorated and had the inscription:

In Memory of
ANN HARRIET THOMPSON
WHO DEPARTED THIS LIFE
AUG : 14th 1843
AGED 30 YEARS

DAUGHTER OF

PETER THOMPSON
MERCHANT, WISBECH
CAMBS.

Ann Harriett Thompson was baptised at Wisbech on 25 Nov 1812 and buried at St. Bene't's Cambridge on 18 Aug 1843. Her parents Peter Thompson and Charlotte Wardale married at St Peter's Wisbech on 1 Oct 1811. Her mother Charlotte was buried on 2 Apr 1839 at St Peter's Wisbech aged 53, while her father was buried at the same church on 31 Jul 1850, aged 71.

Stairs

The removal of treads on the steps leading to Bene't' Street was monitored, no significant features were observed and this only revealed the foundations of the current steps, a large air gap and a homogenous general deposit

ADJACENT TO THE CHANCEL AND ORGAN

The small triangular open area bounded by the chancel, organ and Free School Lane was generally lowered by *c.* 0.3m. This revealed no features, apart from 20th-century drains. A square area 1.35m by 1.35m in extent in the centre of the area was lowered by a further *c.* 0.5m to create a soakaway. This area proved to have been already entirely disturbed by a 19th or 20th-century soakaway pit.

CHANCEL

Inside the chancel wall plaster was removed from the lower portion of the walls as it was failing due to damp. The exposed stonework was examined and a photographic record made (Figure 13). No blocked features, reused architectural mouldings etc. were revealed.

Northern chancel wall: this wall was stripped to a height of 1.18m above floor level (to the west of the organ entrance) and between 1.18 and 0.84m (to the east of the organ entrance). This revealed that the wall was largely composed of clunch, this was quite mixed in character with a mixture of squared and faced blocks and smaller fragments set in a pale brownish grey sandy mortar. The overall impression of the character is that at least some of the clunch was reused. There was also some limestone blocks and handmade red bricks, which were *c.* 55mm thick. The entrance to the organ had been rebuilt in 19th-century yellow brick.

Eastern chancel wall: this wall was only stripped to a height of *c.* 0.42m above floor level. The wall was of similar construction to the northern chancel wall.

Southern chancel wall: this wall consisted of two distinct sections. To the west of the entrance to the vestry it was stripped to a height of *c.* 1.20m above floor level. The wall was of similar character to the northern and eastern chancel walls, although the clunch was more uniformly of larger blocks and no red brick was present. To the east of the entrance to the vestry the plaster was stripped to a height of *c.* 0.76 above floor level, although limited areas above this were also stripped. This wall contained no clunch or brick and the limestone used was narrower than elsewhere and was not squared or faced. The limestone was set in a less firm orangey brown sandy mortar.

The northern and eastern chancel walls are believed to date to after 1830 and the observations support this. The southern chancel wall is supposedly of 12th century date, the observations

suggest that this is probably true of the section to the east of the vestry entrance but indicate that the section to the west of the vestry entrance is of different later construction and may even be 19th century.

NORTH PORCH

In the north porch the slab was lifted and *c.* 100mm of deposits removed, additionally plaster was stripped from the lower parts of the internal walls. Nothing significant was revealed and all the deposits and walls exposed were clearly 19th century.

Stone S: this stone, which is lying flat in the northern porch of the church, was lifted by the contractor (Figure 6). This revealed no associated features, the stone is 2.14m by 1.12m.

DISCUSSION

The area of St. Bene't's churchyard north of the church had been heavily modified in the mid/late 19th century when the ground height was lowered and had also been altered on several occasions during the 20th century. The archaeological monitoring revealed a number of 17th to mid-19th-century features associated with the cemetery and church. Although limited the exposed 12th-century wall of the chancel is of some interest.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The project was commissioned by the Parochial Church Council of St. Bene't's Church, Cambridge. It was initially managed for the Cambridge Archaeological Unit by Alison Dickens and subsequently by Ricky Patten, and was monitored by Kasia Gdaniec of Cambridgeshire's Historic Environment Team. Fieldwork was undertaken by Craig Cessford and Charlotte de Bruxelles. We gratefully acknowledge the assistance of Anna Matthews the vicar of St. Bene't's, Jerry Lander and Sarah Dani of Freeland Rees Roberts, Nigel Wilson of the Andrew Firebrace Partnership and the on-site contractors FA Valiant and Son. The graphics for the report were prepared by Andrew Hall.

REFERENCES

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- Cessford, C. 2019. *St. Bene't's Churchyard, Cambridge: archaeological monitoring*. Cambridge Archaeological Unit Report No. 1414.
- Newman, R. 2017. *St. Bene't's Church, Cambridge: an archaeological desk based assessment and deposit model*. Cambridge Archaeological Unit Report No. 1369.

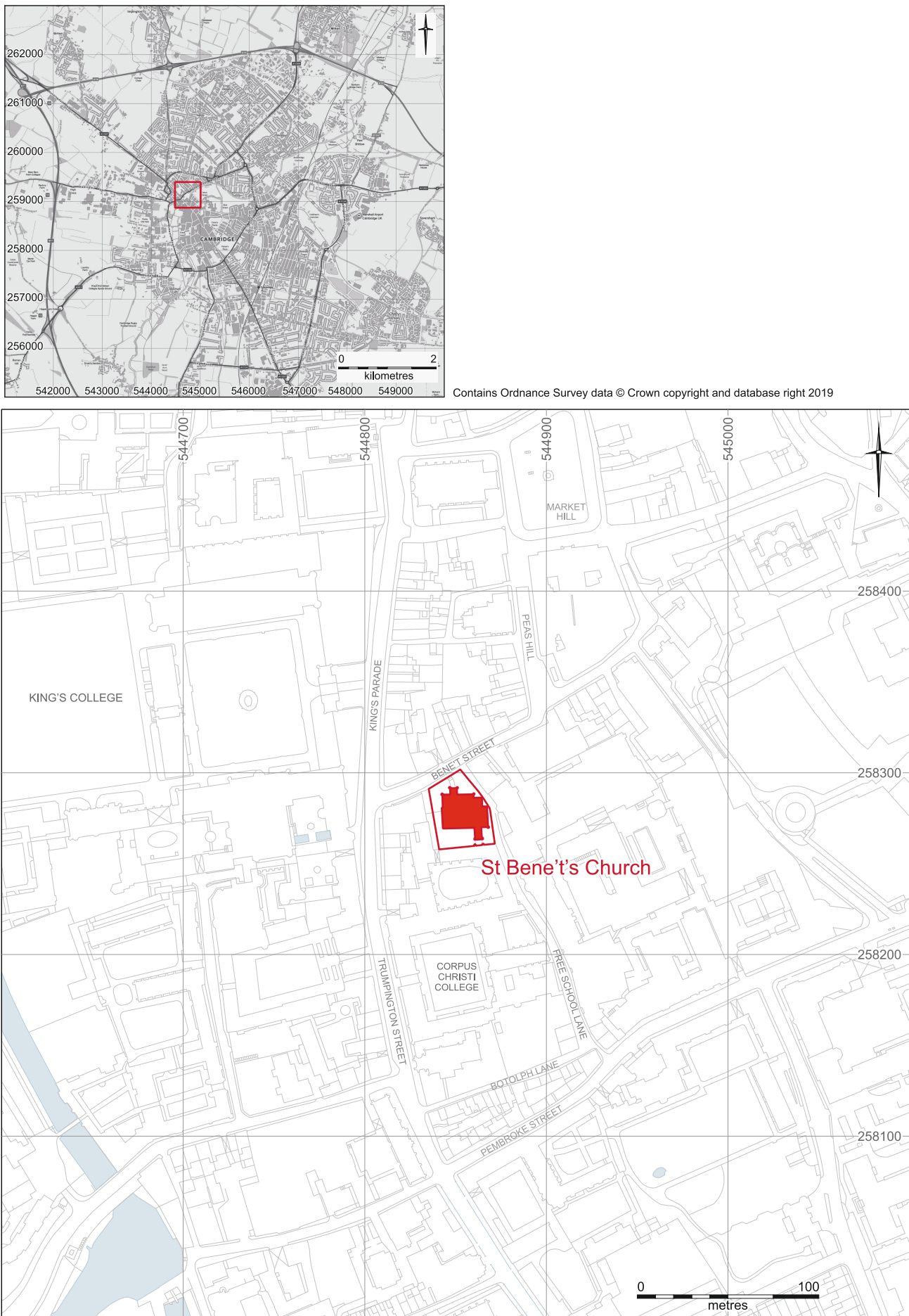


Figure 1. Site location

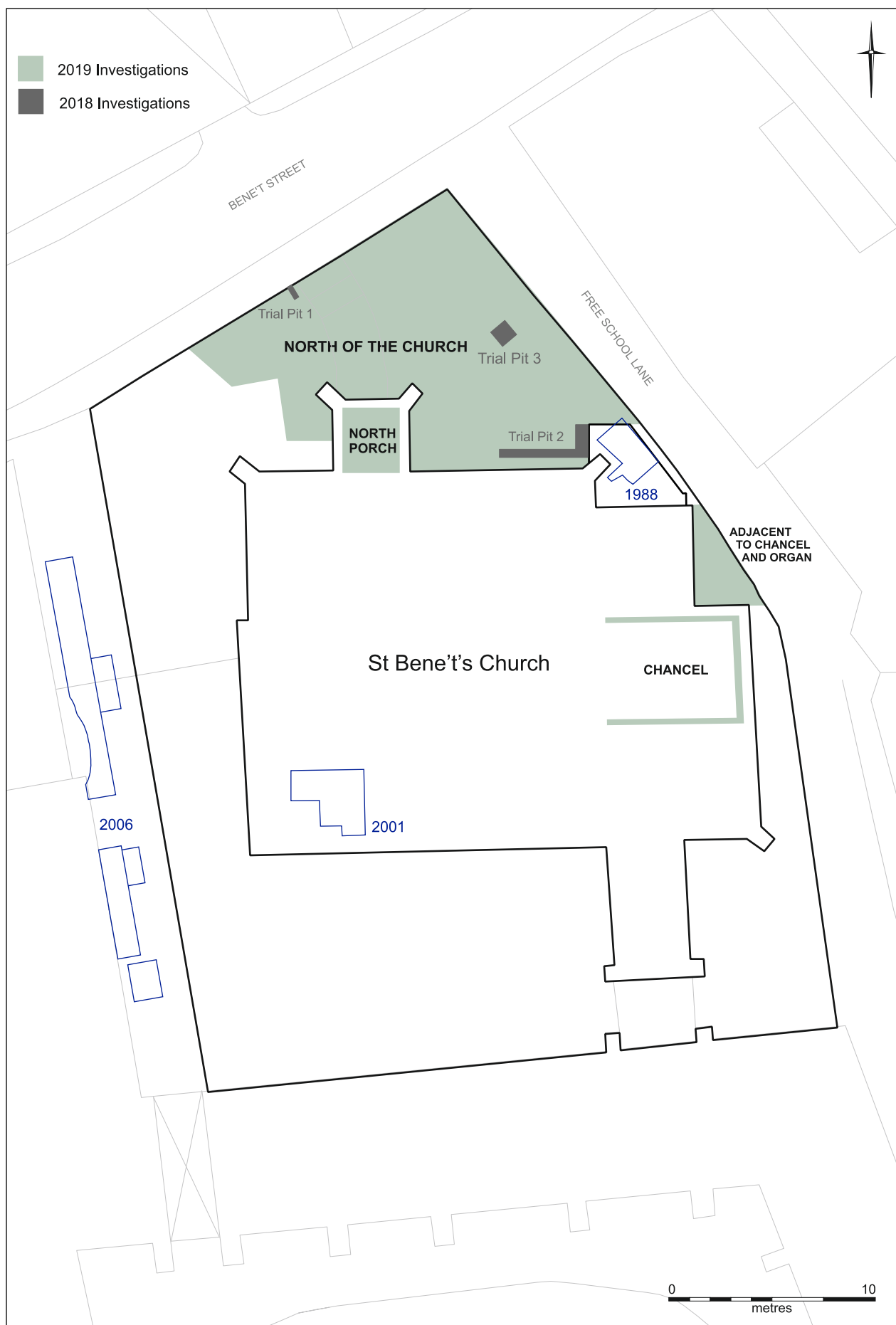


Figure 2. Location plan of current and previous archaeological investigations

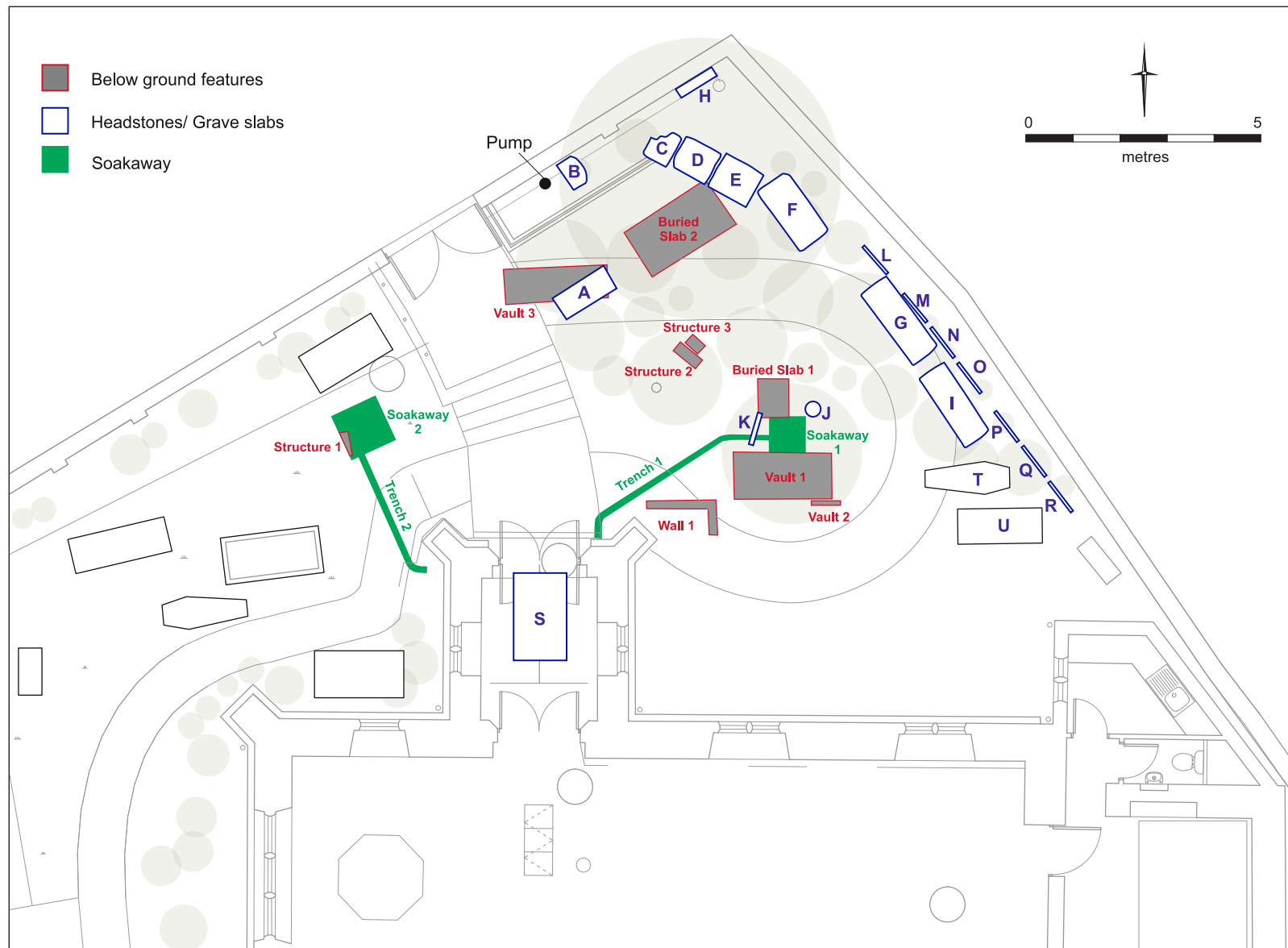


Figure 3. Location of exposed grave slabs and headstones recorded and below ground features, as revealed by excavation



Figure 4. Exposed grave slabs and headstones: Stones A, F, G, I, J and K



L



M



N



O



P



Q

Figure 5. Exposed grave slabs and headstones: Stones L, M, N, O, P and Q



Figure 6. Exposed grave slabs and headstones: Stones R and S



Figure 7. Soakaway 2 with Structure 1, facing east



Figure 8. Wall 1, facing west.



Figure 9. Vault 1 after removal of roof and clearance of debris, facing west



Figure 10. Vault 3 with roof in situ and after its removal and clearance of debris, facing west. Plus ironwork from vault



Figure 11. Buried Slab 1, facing north



Figure 12. Buried Slab 2 plus detail of inscription, facing west-southwest



1



2

Figure 13. Exposed interior walls of chancel; 1, northern wall, western and eastern portions. 2, southern wall, eastern and western portions

OASIS FORM

OASIS ID: cambridg3-375855

Project details

Project name	St. Bene't's churchyard, Cambridge
Short description of the project	Archaeological monitoring of groundworks in St. Bene't's churchyard, Cambridge, north of the church revealed that the area had been heavily modified in the mid/late 19th century, when the ground height was lowered, and had also been altered on several occasions during the 20th century. A number of 17th to mid-19th-century features associated with the churchyard and church were revealed including brick-lined burial vaults and greave slabs. Portions of the interior chancel wall were revealed, exposing some 12th century fabric.
Project dates	Start: 16-05-2019 End: 15-08-2019
Previous/future work	Yes / Not known
Any associated project reference codes	ECB5905 - HER event no.
Any associated project reference codes	CSB19 - Sitecode
Type of project	Recording project
Site status	Listed Building
Current Land use	Other 6 - Land boundary
Monument type	BURIAL Post Medieval
Monument type	GRAVESTONE Post Medieval
Significant Finds	N/A None
Investigation type	"Watching Brief"
Prompt	Faculty jurisdiction

Project location

Country	England
Site location	CAMBRIDGESHIRE CAMBRIDGE CAMBRIDGE St. Bene't's churchyard
Postcode	CB2 3PT

Study area	70 Square metres
Site coordinates	TL 44852 58295 52.203395155863 0.11993600396 52 12 12 N 000 07 11 E Point
Lat/Long Datum	Unknown
Height OD / Depth	Min: 8.5m 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

Project archives

Physical Archive Exists?	No
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Digital Archive recipient	ENF125358
Digital Archive ID	CSB19
Digital Contents	"none"
Digital Media available	"Text","Images raster / digital photography"

Paper Archive recipient	Cambridgeshire County Archaeology Store
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Paper Archive ID	CSB19
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Paper Contents	"none"
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1

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