

# The Old Vicarage, Thompson's Lane, Cambridge

An Archaeological Watching Brief



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# **THE OLD VICARAGE, THOMPSON'S LANE, CAMBRIDGE**

**An Archaeological Watching Brief**

**Richard Newman**

With contributions by

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## Summary

*An archaeological watching brief was undertaken at the Old Vicarage – situated on Thompson's Lane, to the rear of St Clement's Church, Cambridge – on the 7<sup>th</sup> of March 2011. Remains dating from the medieval to modern periods were identified at the site. In the first instance, a sequence of yard surfaces was present, interspersed with periods of backyard horticultural activity. These layers dated from the 13<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. Subsequently, a made-ground deposit was introduced. This may have been associated with building work undertaken at the nearby church during the 16<sup>th</sup> century, or the construction of the Old Vicarage itself in the late 16<sup>th</sup>/early 17<sup>th</sup> century. Most significantly of all, however, a minimum of three mid to late 18<sup>th</sup> century burials were present. One of these individuals had been encoffined, and a second had been interred within a coffin-shaped grave. Notably, these burials were all oriented north-south. Furthermore, they do not appear to have been situated within the bounds of the medieval churchyard, as no earlier burials were present. Therefore, they most probably relate to a brief period of cemetery expansion, perhaps precipitated by the construction of a new chancel at St Clement's Church. The churchyard appears to have rapidly returned to its former size, however, as no additional phase of burial was undertaken within the investigated area.*

## Contents

|                          |           |
|--------------------------|-----------|
| <b>Introduction</b>      | <b>01</b> |
| <b>Results</b>           | <b>01</b> |
| <b>Material Culture</b>  | <b>06</b> |
| <i>Pottery</i>           | 06        |
| <i>Clay Tobacco Pipe</i> | 07        |
| <i>Human Remains</i>     | 07        |
| <b>Discussion</b>        | <b>07</b> |
| Acknowledgements         | 10        |
| <b>Bibliography</b>      | <b>11</b> |
| <b>Oasis Form</b>        | <b>12</b> |

## Introduction

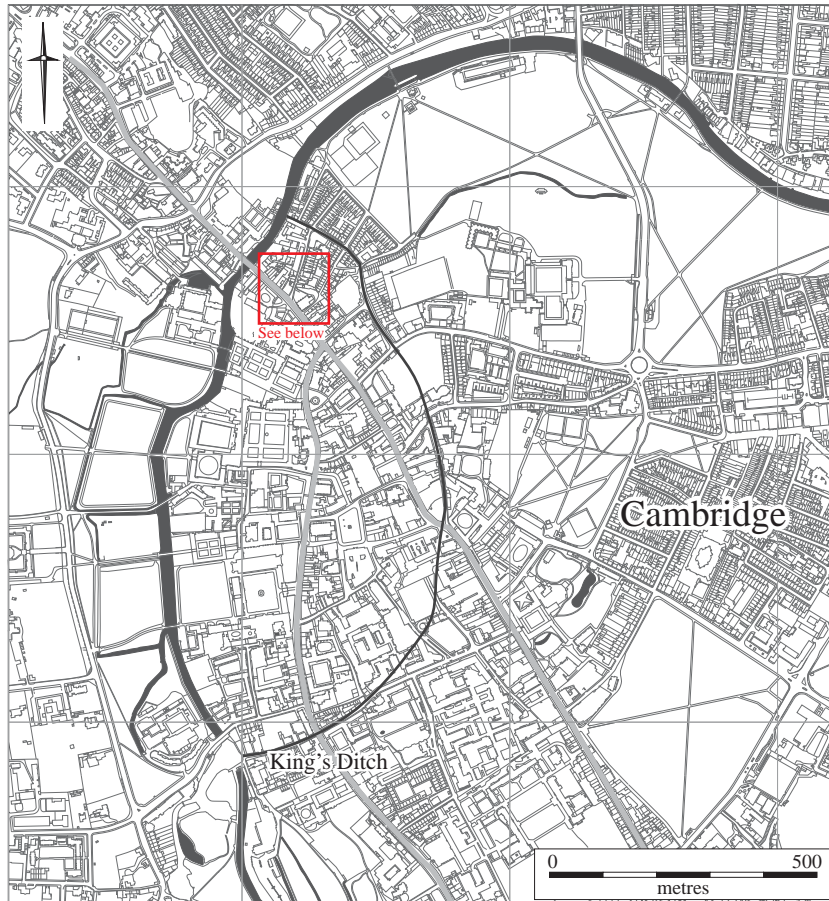
The Cambridge Archaeological Unit (CAU) undertook an archaeological watching brief during service and refurbishment works conducted within the garden of the Old Vicarage – a Grade II listed structure which is situated on Thompson’s Lane, to the rear of St Clement’s Church, Cambridge (see Figure 1) – on the 7<sup>th</sup> of March 2011. The site, which is centred on TL 4480 5891, is located towards eastern edge of the medieval town. It lies a short distance to the west of the King’s Ditch, which formed the boundary of the medieval urban core of Cambridge. Furthermore, it is also located on the periphery of the eastern floodplain of the River Cam. In geological terms, the site is situated at the upper end of a gentle slope of 1<sup>st</sup> terrace river gravels that leads down northwards towards the river from the ridge occupied by the main Bridge Street thoroughfare (British Geological Survey, sheet 188). Its present surface height ranges between 8.6m and 8.8m OD, which is significantly higher than the level of the adjacent road and the interior of the St Clement’s Church.

Prior to the commencement of archaeological monitoring at the site, a trench had been inserted by the principal contractor along the southern side of the Old Vicarage (see Figure 3). This measured a maximum of 8.6m by 2.2m in extent and was stepped in profile. At its deepest, western end – in an area measuring 2.2m by 1.9m in extent – the trench extended down to 6.16m OD. To the east, the adjacent section – measuring 2.45m by 2.1m in extent – extended to 7.13m OD, whilst the remainder extended to 7.93m OD. This trench had been excavated in order to allow the construction of a new lightwell for the building. During this process, however, the presence of human remains had been observed and a programme of archaeological monitoring was therefore instituted. The exposed remains were recorded using the CAU-modified version of the MoLAS system (Spence 1994). Base plans were drawn at a scale of 1:50 – with the exception of articulated human remains, which were planned at 1:10 – whilst sections were drawn at a scale of 1:10. Context numbers are indicated within the text by square brackets (*e.g.* [001]), and the photographic archive consists of a series of digital images.

## Results

Due to the nature of the archaeological investigation that was conducted at this site – which was primarily restricted to the observation of the pre-excavated trench, with little scope for the excavation of individual features – only a limited quantity of dating material was recovered. Nevertheless, a sequence of activity stretching back into the medieval period was identified. The earliest remains were encountered at the deepest, western end of the trench (see Figure 2). Here, lying above an unknown depth of undisturbed earlier deposits, was compacted gravel surface [020]. This layer, the upper surface of which lay at 6.16m OD, represents a well-laid external yard. It was partially cobbled, and its matrix consisted of a mixture of orange sandy gravels and pale grey marly clay. Above this surface, a series of trampled deposits had accrued. The earliest of these, [019], consisted of a band of pale grey ash and charcoal that was 0.03m thick. Above this lay a 0.01m thick band of black charcoal – [018] – which was in turn overlain by [017], a further band of pale grey ash and charcoal that was 0.03m thick. These deposits appear to represent waste material that was generated during backyard activities conducted to the rear of a medieval property; their precise date is unclear, however, as no associated finds were recovered.

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Based on the Ordnance Survey 1:2500 map  
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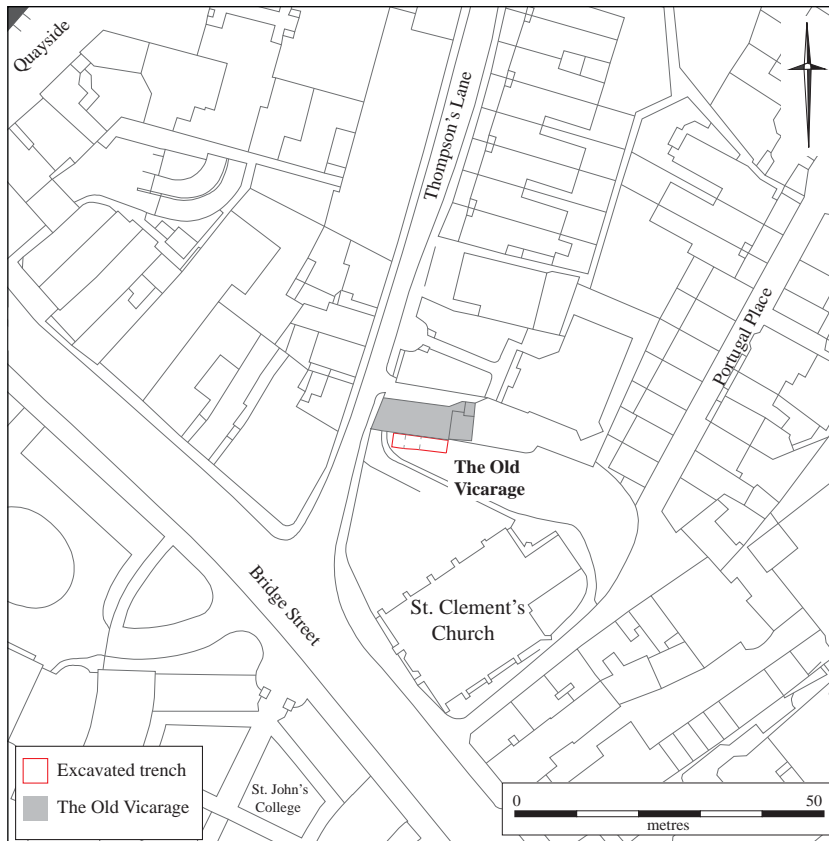


Figure 1. Location Plan

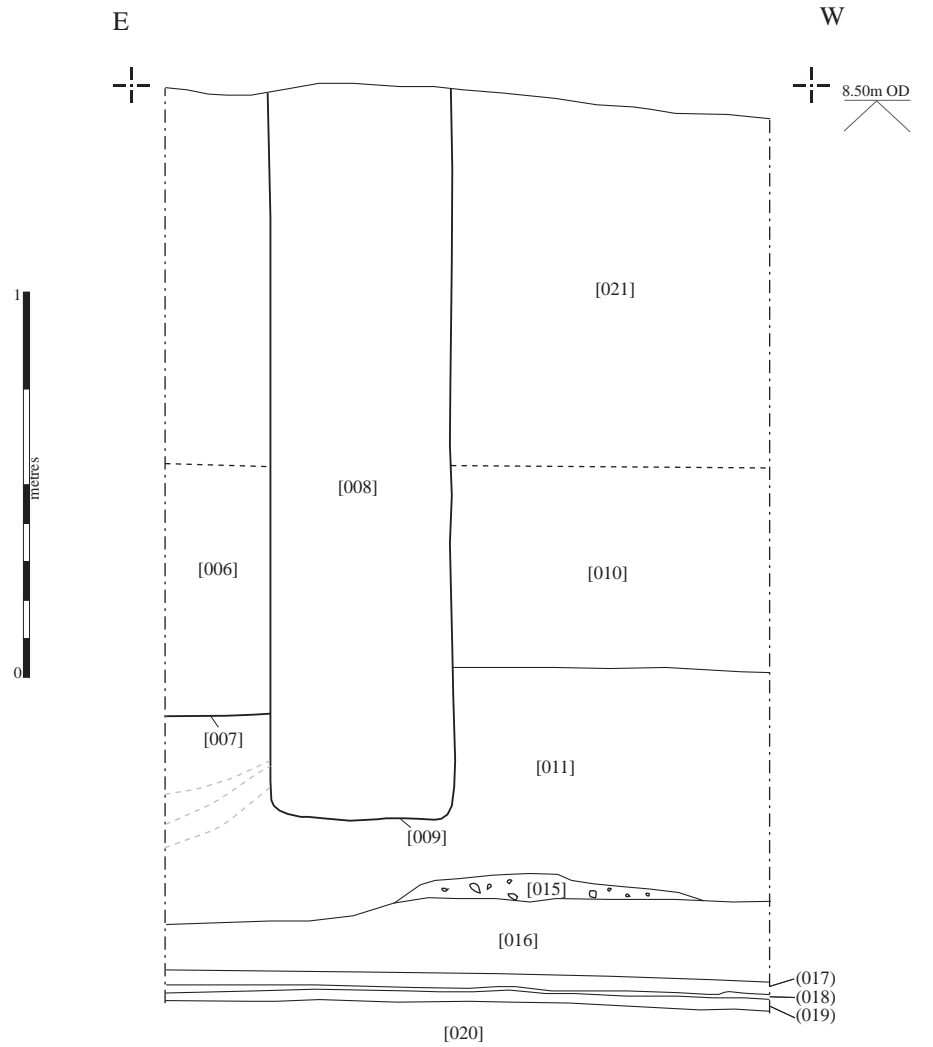
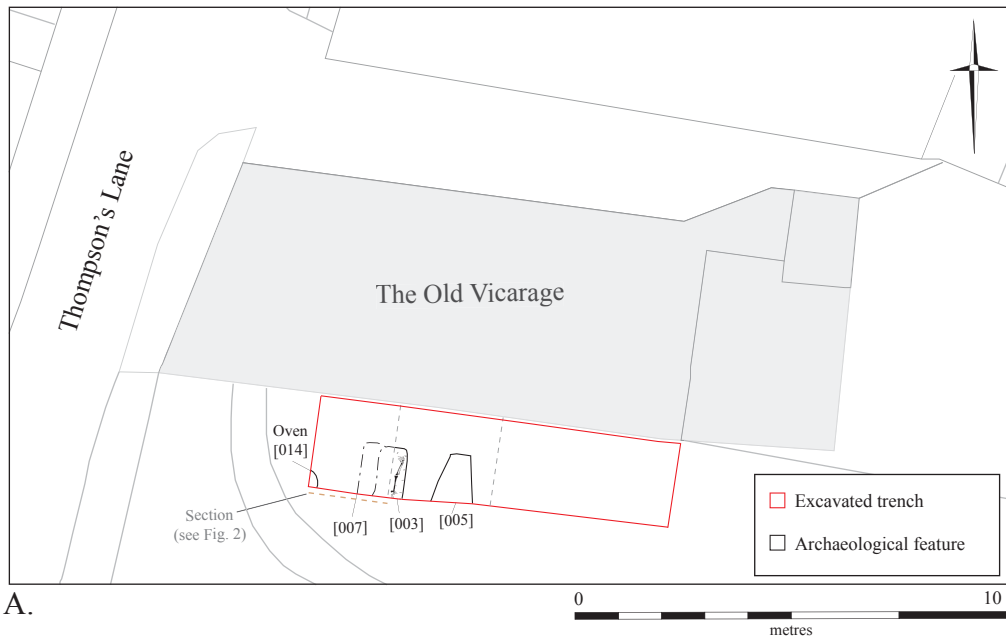


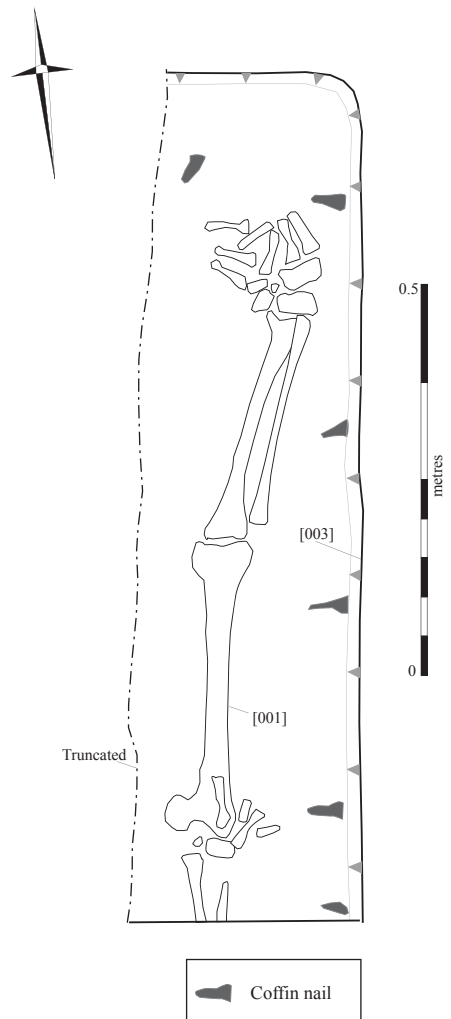
Figure 2. Photograph (left) and drawing (right) of deepest section of trench



A.



B.



C.

Figure 3. Location of burials (A), plus photograph and plan of skeleton [001] (B and C)



Subsequently, the usage of this area appears to have changed. A layer of moderately compacted dark brown clay silt, with occasional gravel inclusions, was deposited above the former yard. This material – [016], which measured 0.20m thick – most probably represents the residues of small-scale horticultural activity. Nevertheless, a second, though much more poorly constructed, gravel surface was later re-established. This layer – [015] – was much patchier than its predecessor, and may only have been temporary in nature. It measured up to 0.13m thick, and its upper surface lay at 6.50m OD. Following the disuse of this second yard area, the preceding sequence of horticultural or garden-related activity resumed and a substantial deposit of moderately compacted dark brown clay silt, measuring 0.52m thick, accrued across the area. The formation of this material, [011], clearly comprised part of a gradual process, as a number of discrete features occurred at horizons within the otherwise homogenous deposit. The most significant of these features was clay-lined oven [013]. This consisted of a dense off-white clay structure measuring 0.06m thick, the upper surface of which was intensively scorched. The lining was overlain by [012], a 0.06m thick layer of ash and charcoal, and the oven itself appears to have sat within shallow bowl-shaped cut [014]. Its scorched surface lay at 6.72m OD. Ceramic material recovered from layer [011] indicates that the upper garden soil deposit formed during the 13<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> centuries (see further below). Subsequently, however, the usage of the area changed once again. At a height of 7.03m OD, a relatively sterile deposit of dense pale brownish-grey silty clay – [010] – was introduced. This material – which is most probably 16<sup>th</sup> or 17<sup>th</sup> century in date, but contained only a single residual sherd of 12<sup>th</sup> century pottery – appears to represent an attempt to artificially raise the surrounding ground level. The deposit measured approximately 0.50m thick, although it may well have been truncated by later activity.

Cut into this made-ground deposit were a minimum of three mid to late 18<sup>th</sup> century burials. Within the deepest portion of the lightwell, one of these burials had already been entirely removed, and a second had been partially removed, prior to the commencement of the watching brief. Nevertheless, a number of details regarding their original layout could be reconstructed. All three graves were oriented broadly north-south. In the case of the individual whose remains were partially exposed – [001] – the feet were to the north and the extended, supine inhumation had been interred within a rectangular grave measuring 1.13m+ by 0.28m+ in extent (see Figure 3). The skeleton, the highest portion of which lay at 7.04m OD, was also encoffined; a total of six coffin nails were identified. A second, coffin-shaped grave – [005], which measured 1.1m+ by 0.95m in extent – was also present to the east, although in this instance the skeleton itself was not exposed. The backfill of this grave, [004], contained an assemblage of mid to late 18<sup>th</sup> century ceramics, along with a number of disarticulated human bones and an 18<sup>th</sup> century clay tobacco pipe (see further below). Towards the western end of the trench, the left-hand side of burial [001], along with the entire lower portion of burial [006], had been removed by the contractors (see Figure 3). All three of these graves – cuts [003], [005] and [007] respectively – had been backfilled with uniform deposits of loose dark brown clay silt with occasional to frequent inclusions of domestic refuse. It therefore appears likely that they formed part of a relatively brief episode of burial activity; that this did not simply comprise a single, one-off event is demonstrated by the intercutting of [003] and [007].

In addition to the above, a fourth, near contemporary burial may also have been present. To the west of [007] a deep, vertically-sided cut, measuring 0.46m in width, was identified. This cut, [009], was only visible in section (see Figure 2). No human remains were exposed within its fill, however, and it is possible that it comprised part of a modern service trench (although, conversely, no service appeared to be present either). Overall, it is clear that the exposed row of graves did not continue to the west, beyond [006]/[009]. Interments may potentially have continued further to the east, beyond [005], but this area was not sufficiently reduced during the present works to allow any additional grave cuts to be identified. Furthermore, no evidence of a preceding or succeeding horizon of burials was present, implying that these interments were most probably situated in an ‘overflow’ area located outside the bounds of the main cemetery itself. Finally, the height from which the graves were cut is also somewhat unclear. This is because the upper portion of the sequence – [021], which measured 0.98m deep – had been heavily disturbed and bioturbated. Such disturbance may have resulted from garden-based horticultural activities, in which case the graves were potentially cut from close to the modern ground surface and were thus *c.* 1.5m+ deep. Alternatively, however, this material may represent a further deposit of made-ground, which was introduced after burial activity had ceased. In that case, the graves would only have been approximately 0.5m+ deep.

## Material Culture

Only a small quantity of material culture was recovered during the watching brief conducted at the Old Vicarage site. The assemblage included both pottery and clay tobacco pipe, and these categories are discussed in detail below. In addition, a quantity of human remains was also encountered. Although the majority of this material was disarticulated, one articulated skeleton was recorded. The human remains were not removed from the site, however, and the remaining portion of the articulated burial was preserved *in situ*. A summary of the degree of preservation of these remains is also included below.

### Pottery (with Craig Cessford & Andrew Hall)

A total of 25 sherds of pottery, weighing 617g, were recovered during the watching brief conducted at the Old Vicarage site. The earliest stratified material was derived from garden soil layer <004>, [011]. This contained four sherds of brown coarseware (weighing 41g) and one sherd of grey coarseware (weighing 18g) that are 13<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> century in date. Three additional sherds of 10<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> century Thetford-type ware (weighing 39g) also occurred residually within this deposit. A further sherd of Thetford-type ware (weighing 29g) was recovered as residual material from made-ground layer <003>, [010]. The largest group of material, however, was mid to late 18<sup>th</sup> century in date and was recovered from grave fill <001>, [004]. This deposit contained three sherds of late glazed red earthenware (weighing 127g), six sherds of simply decorated late tin-glazed earthenware (representing a minimum of three vessels, weighing 58g), two sherds derived from separate Staffordshire-type slipware bowls (weighing 168g), a fragment of a buff earthenware tankard with brown ‘treacle-like’ lead glaze (weighing 104g), a sherd of Staffordshire white salt-glazed stoneware (weighing 4g) and two sherds of creamware (one with a mottled ‘Wheildon-type’ glaze, weighing together 22g). One further fragment (weighing 7g) was also recovered from this deposit, but this had been too badly burnt to be identified. Overall, this group is most likely to date from the third quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Andrew Hall *pers. comm.*).

### **Clay Tobacco Pipe** (with Craig Cessford)

Two clay tobacco pipe bowls were recovered from the site, although both were in a fragmentary condition and could not therefore be precisely typologised (see further Oswald 1975). The first was recovered from grave fill <002>, [004]. It is 18<sup>th</sup> century in date, and carried the initials P W on the sides of its heel; the maker of this pipe is unknown. The second bowl was recovered from deposit <006>, [021]. This is again 18<sup>th</sup> century in date, and carried the initials W P on the sides of its heel; this pipe was manufactured by William Pawson, who flourished in Cambridge around 1740 (Cessford 2001).

### **Human Remains**

The human remains encountered at the Old Vicarage site were in a very good state of preservation. This is consistent with their relatively recent date, and the humic nature of the soil in which the burials were interred. Unfortunately, however, articulated inhumation [001] could not be aged or sexed as the most diagnostic skeletal elements – such as the pelvis and the skull – were not present to be examined. These remains were reburied and preserved *in situ*, whilst the disarticulated material was reinterred at the base of the lightwell.

## **Discussion**

During the medieval period, the forerunner of Thompson's Lane was known as *Aungerslane* or *Aungers Lane*. Documentary evidence indicates that this street was well-established by c. 1280, when a "tenement next to St Clement's Churchyard" was recorded as being present 'at the head of Aungers Lane' (Faber 2006, 759). This property was owned by the Hospital of St John the Evangelist, the institution that formerly occupied the site now held by St John's College, and was leased by them to a variety of tenants (*ibid.*, 755-59). Initially, occupation in this area appears to have occurred only on the eastern side of the street. Immediately to the west lay the *alta ripa*, the 'great bank' of the river (*ibid.*, 34-5). This served to separate the properties from an area known as 'St Clement's Holm', a holm being a piece of flat low-lying ground by a river that is submerged or surrounded by water in a time of flood. Archaeological evidence recovered during an excavation conducted further to the north, at 24 Thompson's Lane, indicates that this latter area was subject to seasonal inundation until around the 14<sup>th</sup> century, when the land began to be reclaimed (see Newman 2008a). Prior to this, however, a number of channels or barge-pulls had been created (Firman & Pullinger 1987, 85; Newman 2008a, 10) and it is likely that several hythes or wharves were present. Subsequently, this area was to emerge as a bustling centre of river-based trade (Cam 1934, 43; Bryan 1999, 32-3). Nevertheless, despite the presence of the great bank, the area situated a little way to the north of the Old Vicarage also appears to have remained prone to at least occasional flooding until the 14<sup>th</sup> century. In 2003 an excavation conducted at 5 Thompson's Lane, to the rear of the Spiritualist Church, encountered a pale brownish grey alluvial horizon with numerous mollusc inclusions at around 6m OD (Baker & Kenny 2004, 3-4). This was overlain by a made-ground deposit that contained over 100 large sherds of pottery of 12<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> century date (*ibid.*, 5). Because of the limited depth of the excavation, however, it is not clear whether this latter deposit marked the initial stage of general land reclamation in the area or simply comprised a discrete midden-type deposit situated above a more temporary inundation horizon.



John Hammond, 1592



David Logan, 1688



William Custance, 1798

Figure 4. Historic map sequence, showing approximate location of the Old Vicarage (NB: Building shown in 1592 may predate this structure)

By the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Aungers Lane was commonly referred to as *Harleston Lane* after a late 14<sup>th</sup> century mayor of Cambridge, Roger de Harleston, who had once resided there (see Reaney 1943). The area was relatively prosperous and a student hostel, 'Harleston Place', had been established a little way to the north (Faber 2006, 141). Within the medieval plot that is now occupied by the Old Vicarage, occupation continued, although the archaeological evidence discussed above indicates that the level of activity that was undertaken at this time was of relatively low intensity. This is in direct contrast to sites such as St John's Triangle (Newman 2008b) and the Old Divinity School (Cessford *in prep.*), which are situated a little way to the south in the town's urban core. Here, intensive horizons of intercutting features were created during this period. At the present site, however, the degree of activity appears to have gradually diminished until, in 1589, the plot was described as an "orchard yard garden [and] dovehouse" (Faber 2006, 758). By 1627, the first known lease of the Old Vicarage described this structure as "newly builded" at the site (*ibid.*, 4), although the surviving architectural evidence indicates that it was probably constructed towards the close of the 16<sup>th</sup> century (RCHM(E) 1959 II, 340). Archaeologically, made-ground deposit [010] may have been deposited as part of the work associated with the building's construction (Faber 2006, 93). Alternatively, it may relate to upcast generated by the addition of aisles to St Clements Church during the 16<sup>th</sup> century (RCHM(E) 1959 II, 269). In its initial form, the Old Vicarage consisted of a timber-framed, jettied structure that was sub-divided into two separate residences (*ibid.*, 340). The property was owned by St John's College, who had inherited it from the Hospital of St John upon the latter's dissolution, and was again leased to various tenants (Faber 2006, 755-59).

Cartographic evidence indicates that between 1592 and 1688, the adjacent churchyard of St Clement's was gradually encroached upon by a number of ancillary structures (see Figure 4). Although it has been suggested that Loggan's depiction of this area is mistaken (Faber 2006, 92), his plan is generally regarded as a highly accurate survey (Baggs & Bryan 2002, 6-7). Furthermore, it is by no means unprecedented for a churchyard to have been encroached upon in this way. By 1798, however, when William Custance mapped the town (Figure 4), these various buildings had been demolished and a new chancel constructed. Therefore the brief episode of burial activity at the site, which can be dated on ceramic grounds to the mid to late 18<sup>th</sup> century, appears very likely to have been associated with this episode of widespread reorganisation. It seems that, following on from the construction of the new chancel in *c.* 1726 (RCHM(E) 1959 II, 269), the ground level of the surrounding area was raised once again (Faber 2006, 93). Subsequently, the cemetery appears to have briefly expanded into this new space, perhaps in tandem with an 18<sup>th</sup> century episode of rebuilding that is known to have been conducted at the Old Vicarage itself (RCHM(E) 1959 II, 340). The thresholds of the doorways that were inserted into the building at this time are certainly consistent with the raised surface height. That the burials were aligned north-south, as opposed to east-west, also implies that they derived their dominant axis from the house instead of from the nearby church. Nevertheless, the cemetery appears to have rapidly contracted back to its former size (perhaps when the building was retenanted). Burial activity finally ceased at St Clement's in *c.* 1850 (Faber 2006, 93).

Having been sold by St John's College in 1790, the Old Vicarage remained in use as two separate residences until 1881, when the building was united in order to provide a church mission room and schoolroom. By 1891, it had become the vicarage for St Clement's Church (Faber 2006, 85). It was sold off into private hands in 1931. Subsequently, the top storey was rented out as a flat and during the 1950s this portion of the building was used by Francis Crick and James Watson, the discoverers of DNA (*ibid.*, 87). The property was purchased by Thomas Faber in 1964.

#### **Acknowledgments**

The work was commissioned on behalf of the owner by Oriol Prizeman, the project architect. Archaeological recording was undertaken in the field by Richard Newman with the assistance of Craig Cessford. Thanks are due to Craig Cessford and Andrew Hall for assessing the ceramic assemblage; in addition, Craig Cessford also examined the clay tobacco pipe assemblage and kindly read and commented upon a draft of this text. The project was managed for the CAU by Emma Beadsmoore and Alison Dickens, and the graphics were produced by Bryan Crossan.

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## Oasis Form

| <b>Project details</b>                        |   |
|---|---|
| <i>Project name</i>                           | The Old Vicarage, Thompson's Lane, Cambridge  |
| <i>Short description of the project</i>       | An archaeological watching brief was undertaken at the Old Vicarage - situated on Thompson's Lane, to the rear of St Clement's Church, Cambridge - on the 7th of March 2011. Remains dating from the medieval to modern periods were identified at the site. In the first instance, a sequence of yard surfaces was present, interspersed with periods of backyard horticultural activity. These layers dated from the 13th to 15th centuries. Subsequently, a made-ground deposit was introduced. This may have been associated with building work undertaken at the nearby church during the 16th century, or the construction of the Old Vicarage itself in the late 16th/early 17th century. Most significantly of all, however, a minimum of three mid to late 18th century burials were present. One of these individuals had been encased, and a second had been interred within a coffin-shaped grave. Notably, these burials were all oriented north-south. Furthermore, they do not appear to have been situated within the bounds of the medieval churchyard, as no earlier burials were present. Therefore, they most probably relate to a brief period of cemetery expansion, perhaps precipitated by the construction of a new chancel at St Clement's Church. The churchyard appears to have rapidly returned to its former size, however, as no additional phase of burial was undertaken within the investigated area. |
| <i>Project dates</i>                          | Start: 07-03-2011 End: 07-03-2011   |
| <i>Previous/future work</i>                   | No / Not known  |
| <i>Any associated project reference codes</i> | SCV 11 - Sitecode   |
| <i>Any associated project reference codes</i> | ECB3558 - HER event no.   |
| <i>Type of project</i>                        | Recording project   |
| <i>Site status</i>                            | None  |
| <i>Current Land use</i>                       | Residential 1 - General Residential   |
| <i>Monument type</i>                          | BURIAL Post Medieval  |
| <i>Significant Finds</i>                      | POTTERY Post Medieval   |
| <i>Significant Finds</i>                      | CLAY TOBACCO PIPE Post Medieval   |
| <i>Investigation type</i>                     | 'Watching Brief'  |
| <i>Prompt</i>                                 | Observation of human remains  |
| <b>Project location</b>                       |   |
| <i>Country</i>                                | England   |
| <i>Site location</i>                          | CAMBRIDGESHIRE CAMBRIDGE CAMBRIDGE The Old Vicarage, Thompson's Lane, Cambridge   |
| <i>Postcode</i>                               | CB2 1UJ   |
| <i>Study area</i>                             | 18.00 Square metres   |
| <i>Site coordinates</i>                       | TL 4480 5891 52.2089347813 0.119438562875 52 12 32 N 000 07 09 E Point  |



| <b>Project creators</b>              |   |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| <i>Name of Organisation</i>          | Cambridge Archaeological Unit   |
| <i>Project brief originator</i>      | Self (i.e. landowner, developer, etc.)  |
| <i>Project design originator</i>     | Emma Beadsmoore   |
| <i>Project director/manager</i>      | Alison Dickens  |
| <i>Project supervisor</i>            | Richard Newman  |
| <i>Type of sponsor/funding body</i>  | Developer   |
| <b>Project archives</b>              |   |
| <i>Physical Archive recipient</i>    | Cambridge Archaeological Unit   |
| <i>Physical Archive ID</i>           | SCV 11  |
| <i>Physical Contents</i>             | 'Ceramics','other'  |
| <i>Digital Archive recipient</i>     | Cambridge Archaeological Unit   |
| <i>Digital Archive ID</i>            | SCV 11  |
| <i>Digital Contents</i>              | 'Ceramics'  |
| <i>Digital Media available</i>       | 'Images raster / digital photography','Text'  |
| <i>Paper Archive recipient</i>       | Cambridge Archaeological Unit   |
| <i>Paper Archive ID</i>              | SCV 11  |
| <i>Paper Contents</i>                | 'Stratigraphic'   |
| <i>Paper Media available</i>         | 'Context sheet','Photograph','Plan','Report','Section'  |
| <b>Project bibliography 1</b>        |   |
| <i>Publication type</i>              | Grey literature (unpublished document/manuscript)   |
| <i>Title</i>                         | The Old Vicarage, Thompson's Lane, Cambridge  |
| <i>Author(s)/Editor(s)</i>           | Newman, R.  |
| <i>Other bibliographic details</i>   | CAU Report No. 997  |
| <i>Date</i>                          | 2011  |
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| <i>Place of issue or publication</i> | Cambridge   |
| <i>Description</i>                   | A4 wire bound report, with plastic laminate covers. It is 18 pages long, and has 4 illustrations. |

|                   |   |
|-------------------|---|
| <i>URL</i>        | <a href="http://www.oasis.ac.uk">http://www.oasis.ac.uk</a> |
| <i>Entered by</i> | Richard Newman (rn276@cam.ac.uk)                            |
| <i>Entered on</i> | 23 March 2011   |