

The New Meeting Room, St Andrew's Church, Oakington, Cambs



Archaeological Watching Brief Report



September 2009

**Client: Oakington Parochial
Church Council**

OA East Report No: 1124
OASIS No: oxfordar3-64460
NGR: TL 414 648

The New Meeting Room, St Andrew's Church, Oakington, Cambs.

Watching and Recording Brief

Site Code: OAK CMR 09

CHER No. ECB3244

Date of Works: April/May & September 2009

Report No: 1124

Excavator: Richard Mortimer

Client: Oakington Parochial Church Council

Report Date: September 2009

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Summary

Between the 29th April and the 7th May 2009, OA East carried out an archaeological watching and recording brief at St Andrew's Church, High St, Oakington (TL 414 648). The monitoring was carried out during machine stripping of the graveyard burial soil in the area of the meeting room and the excavation of the main service trench. The final part of the watching brief took place in September as the service trench was excavated across the High St.

The excavations for the meeting room and much of the service trench (eastern half) did not penetrate through the graveyard soils and therefore no archaeological features other than burials were seen. In the western part of the service trench, where it became deeper, three early ditches were recorded, oriented approximately northeast to southwest. The latest of these ditches is dated to the late 12th/early 13th centuries.

1 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

- 1.1.1 The development area lies on the Lower Greensand, which is overlain with sands, 2nd and 3rd terrace gravels and alluvium in places, themselves overlying the Gault clay (British Geological Survey 1975). Previous investigations in the area have recorded the geology contorted by periglacial activity. The church sits at c. 13.00m OD on a high point overlooking the valley of a small stream, part of the Beck brook, to the southeast at c. 8.00m OD. The clay plateau rises to a maximum of 16.00m OD to the northwest.

2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Archaeological and historical background

Prehistoric

- 2.1.1 Very few earlier prehistoric finds are known from Oakington, though palaeolithic hand axes have been found less than a kilometre to both the east and west of the excavation (MCB16267 and HER11065). A small assemblage of, primarily Earlier Neolithic struck flint was recovered from the evaluation stage at the Recreation Ground site. The subsequent excavation phase produced an assemblage of 200 struck flints spanning the Mesolithic to at least the Early Bronze Age.
- 2.1.2 In a pasture field due east of the site are the cropmarks of one, possibly two potential Bronze Age ring ditches as part of a larger, mostly Medieval cropmark and earthwork complex (HER08958). A line of three or four barrows lie over the Histon parish boundary to the east, on the north bank of the Beck Brook (HER05180) and another barrow may lie to the immediate south of the excavation (not on the HER but visible from aerial photography).

Roman

- 2.1.3 Roman occupation has been recognised from occasional pot sherds found in gardens and fields both within and close to the village. Sherds were found in the vicarage immediately to the east (HER05175) and in the area around the Manor to the west (HER05176), the latter suggesting steady occupation from the middle of the 2nd century into the 4th (see Phillips 1970).
- 2.1.4 At Coles Lane to the southwest Roman pits, ditches and enclosures were recorded during an excavation in advance of housing development (MCB16820) and further enclosures may lie within the cropmark complex to the north of the site at HER08958. Potentially Roman ditches were recorded at both the 1994 Saxon cemetery excavation to the southeast (HER10912) and the 2006 recreation ground evaluation (MCB17253).
- 2.1.5 The main Roman road, known as the Via Devana, passes along the parish boundary just over a mile south of the village. A route from this road via Oakington and Cottenham to the Fens, passing by the Anglo-Saxon cemetery, was in use by the 11th century at least (Taylor *et al* 1997) and can be seen both on the 1833 tithe map, departing north-eastwards from Water Lane to the north of the school, and as an earthwork in the pasture field here. There is potential for a route along this line in the

Roman period, a large Roman ditch, following the alignment of the road, was recorded in the excavation for the new pavilion.

Saxon

- 2.1.6 Saxon activity has been recognised through the presence of a 6th-century cemetery for many years. The cemetery is of unknown size and located on the recreation ground to the southeast of the current development. The existence of the cemetery was first officially noted in 1928 when three skeletons, with a spear, knives and a shield boss were dug up in what was then Blooms nursery (HER05270). These were located near the southern side of Queens Way where it enters the Recreation ground (TL 4157 6460).
- 2.1.7 During 1993 excavation work on the children's playground, adjacent to Queens Way, human bones and Early Anglo-Saxon grave goods were uncovered. A rescue excavation was undertaken by the CCCAFU and during machine trenching three more disturbed skeletons were discovered. Remains collected from spoil heaps indicate the destruction of at least three other burials.
- 2.1.8 Following these discoveries a larger part of the cemetery was investigated before further earth disturbance in 1994 (HER10912). There were 24 burials (including those found in 1993), of which nine were children, eight female, five male, and two too fragmentary for identification. An large number of the females and children were accompanied by grave goods including beads, brooches, knives, an ivory bag ring, a spear, shield bosses, buckles, pins, a spindle whorl, pairs of wrist clasps and keys.
- 2.1.9 The area immediately to the southeast of the playground was evaluated prior to further development in 2006, and further graves were recorded along with ditches dating to the Early, Middle and Later Saxon periods.
- 2.1.10 Through 2008 and 2009 three series of test pits have been excavated by volunteers under the aegis of the Oakington and Westwick Historical Society and OA East (Mortimer & Harrison forthcoming). These have mainly been located in the areas immediately surrounding the current site, centred on the church, vicarage and High St. The first results show that the well preserved and artefact-rich subsoil identified in the 2006 evaluation at the recreation ground extends under much of the north-western part of the village and contains relatively large quantities of 6th to 7th century Saxon pottery representing an extensive Early Saxon settlement contemporary to the known cemetery. The Middle and Late Saxon extents of the settlement have also been relatively well defined.
- 2.1.11 An evaluation test pit excavated within the churchyard by Dr Tim Reynolds, the Diocesan Archaeologist, in 2006 showed that parts of this buried soil had survived at the base of the Medieval to Modern burial soils. Single sherds of Early and middle Saxon pottery were recovered.

Medieval

- 2.1.12 In 1086, at the time of the Domesday survey, there was a relatively substantial population in Oakington, about 275 people in all, and a priest was recorded. Most land was held by the Abbot of Crowland, who had the manor house close to the church.
- 2.1.13 St Andrew's Church (HER05557) is built primarily of pebble and stone rubble. Its tower dates to c. 1300 and the chancel is earlier still, of the 13th century. Both appear to cut through a pre-existing, potentially Norman wall.

- 2.1.14 The large pasture fields to the east and southeast of the church, beyond Water Lane, both contain well preserved earthworks. To the southeast (HER09202) is ridge and furrow in 10m wide strips, and up to 0.60m high and there is a hollow way, banks, ponds and possible house platforms. The eastern field (HER08958) contains a possible moat and other water management features, enclosures and trackways. These have been partially levelled by the farmer but are still relatively well preserved.
- 2.1.15 In the village to the south of the site, substantial quantities of late medieval pottery were found in a garden in Coles Lane (HER05193).
- 2.1.16 The only other sizeable excavation to have taken place in the village was at Coles Lane in 2004 (MCB16820). A Roman enclosure was thought to have been extant in the late 11th - early 12th century when a possible drove road and a metalled road were constructed. The site was more intensively used in the 12th and 13th centuries with an enclosure created with two broad openings, possibly associated with stock control. A second drove road was constructed, and a hearth and other ditches were recorded. Two further enclosures were dated to this period, one containing a possible temporary structure surrounding a small heath. The 13th and 14th centuries saw little change in land use, with their boundaries recut on similar alignments.

3 METHODOLOGY

- 3.1.1 The objective of this watching brief was to determine as far as reasonably possible the presence/absence, location, nature, extent, date, quality, condition and significance of any surviving archaeological deposits within the development area that lay beneath the Medieval and Modern burial soil.
- 3.1.2 The Brief from the Diocesan Archaeologist did not require that any *in situ* burials uncovered should be archaeologically excavated, only that human bone should be retrieved and kept for reburial.
- 3.1.3 The area of investigation was located in the southeastern corner of the churchyard, with the service trench running off to the northwest to meet the High St.
- 3.1.4 All archaeological features and deposits were recorded using OA East's *pro-forma* sheets. Trench locations, plans and sections were recorded at appropriate scales digital photographs were taken of all relevant features and deposits.
- 3.1.5 Site conditions were good, with no access problems.

4 RESULTS

4.1 The Meeting Room

- 4.1.1 The meeting room was positioned quite tightly in the southeast corner of the churchyard with a brick churchyard wall to its east and an overgrown hedgeline to the south. The building footprint was approximately 14.00m x 6.5m, with a porch at the northeast 4.5m square. The long axis ran northwest/southeast.
- 4.1.2 The burial soil here was removed by mechanical digger to a depth of approximately 0.80m at which point piles were driven to support ground beams. A quantity of loose

bone from disturbed burials was recovered for reburial and the upper levels of in situ burials were uncovered in part, though without further disturbance. The base of the trench lay completely within the burial soil and no earlier deposits or features were recorded.

4.2 The Service Trench

- 4.2.1 The service trench ran for approximately 50m from the northwestern corner of the meeting room to the High St, roughly parallel with the southern boundary of the churchyard.
- 4.2.2 For the first 22m of its length the trench was excavated using a 0.45m wide toothed bucket, and it was impossible to either clean or properly record the trench sides. The depth of this section fell gradually from c. 0.90m at the east to c. 1.15m at the west and as far as could be ascertained was excavated solely through burial soils, no features or deposits other than grave cuts and their fill were recorded. Human bone was recovered for reburial
- 4.2.3 The width of the trench was increased to c. 0.80m along the western section of the trench as it became gradually deeper, enabling the trench sides to be properly investigated. At c. 1.20m deep the base of the trench extended below the burial soil and into the underlying natural clay where negative archaeological features of any depth would be recognised. The trench deepened, gradually, to 1.50m where it met the High St. Archaeological features and deposits were encountered at around 40m from the eastern end of the trench.
- 4.2.4 The final length of the trench, connecting to the main sewer in the middle of the High Street, ran for approximately 12 metres east to west and reached a depth of nearly 3.00m. The area was crossed by a minimum of 12 separate services and was heavily disturbed to variable depth; no archaeological features were seen cutting the undisturbed natural sands beneath these service runs.
- 4.2.5 In a shallow extension to the west of the main service trench (for attachment to the gas main) the southern butt end of a narrow brick wall or plinth was recorded in section, alongside a medium-sized block of (Barnack?) Limestone. These relate to the northwestern boundary wall and the gateway at the southwestern corner of the churchyard. Both are visible on photographs of the area taken in the early part of the 20th century but have since been removed.

4.3 Archaeological Features and deposits

Natural Subsoils

- 4.3.1 The underlying natural subsoil consisted of a mid orange-brown sandy clay with moderate gravel inclusions in parts, sandier and with fewer inclusions with depth.
- 4.3.2 Above the natural sandy clay (and beneath the grave soil - see below) was an intermittent level of *in situ* buried soil (002), cut by all archaeological features (graves and ditches). This early soil measured between 0.10 and 0.15m in depth and consisted of a compact, dark orangey grey-brown sandy silt with occasional charcoal flecks and small gravel inclusions. No artefacts were recorded within the limited areas seen in section.

Ditches

- 4.3.3 Three ditches were recorded crossing the trench, broadly northeast to southwest, though in such a narrow trench their exact alignment was difficult to ascertain. They appeared to represent an original boundary ditch with two subsequent recuts that shifted the boundary approximately 2.00m further to the west each time.
- 4.3.4 **Ditch 003**
- A cleanly cut V-shaped ditch, surviving to c. 1.60m wide and 0.80m deep. Cut through layer 002 to the east, probably cut by ditch 006 at the west, and truncated by base of grave soils (014). The main central and lower fill (004) was a slightly greenish grey-brown, very compact gritty clay silt with rare charcoal flecks and small gravel. The upper fill (005) was similar, slightly darker and siltier. No finds were recovered from either fill.
- 4.3.5 **Ditch 006**
- A broader, more bowl-shaped ditch, surviving to c. 2.00m wide and 0.70m deep. Probably cut ditch 004 to the east, cut by ditch 009 at the west, and truncated by base of grave soils (014). The main central and lower fill (007) was a grey-brown, compact clay silt with occasional charcoal flecks and a few scraps of bone. Two pieces of bone were retrieved, both are animal but neither is identifiable to species. The upper fill (008) was again similar, slightly darker and siltier.
- 4.3.6 **Ditch 009**
- An even broader, wider bowl-shaped ditch, surviving to c. 2.50m across and 0.70m deep. Cut ditch 006 to the east and truncated by base of grave soils (014). The ditch contained three distinct fills. The basal fill (010) was a grey-brown, compact clay silt with occasional charcoal flecks; above this, the central fill (011) appeared to mark the dumping of waste from a nearby episode of fairly intense burning, consisting of charcoal fragments and fired clay. The upper fill (012) was a dark grey-brown silty clay, the lower part containing charcoal fragments and flecks from below, the upper blending with layer 013 that extended to the west (see below).
- 4.3.7 Two pottery sherds were retrieved from the upper fill 012, a small grey-ware sherd probably of middle Saxon (hand-made) manufacture (7th or 8th century) and a larger, fresher, wheel-made pinky buff sherd that may be developed St Neots ware dating to the late 12th or 13th centuries. The two pieces of bone both are animal, part of a sheep's jaw and part of a heavily burnt cattle rib.

Later soils

- 4.3.8 The relationship between layer 013 and the upper fill of ditch 009 was not clear though it is likely that the ditch truncated the layer. Layer 013 was a dark brown silty clay with charcoal flecks and frags, occasional bone fragments and gravel. One large piece of well preserved slag, a large Smithing Hearth Bottom measuring 11cm across and 5cm deep, was recovered, along with two sherds (inc. a rim sherd) of a fine shelly ware medieval jug dating to around the 14th century.
- 4.3.9 The upper 0.90m - 1.00m of the section consisted of the grave soil within the cemetery (001), a fairly homogeneous mid brown silty loam with bone fragments. This soil became deeper to the east of the drawn section and shallower to the west where it overlay layer 013. Human bones from the grave soils were collected for reburial.

5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1

- 5.1.1 The most significant archaeological result of the watching brief has been the recording of the three aligned ditches, a long-standing boundary line, recut perhaps over centuries and moved a couple of metres further to the west each time. If this represented the boundary between the High Street (the northern, straight section) and the churchyard then each successive ditch recut would have increased the burial land available while decreasing the width of the road outside, a pattern commonly seen, at least within secular land plots.
- 5.1.2 These ditches are not easy to date, though if we accept the limited pottery evidence then the latest ditch would have been infilled by the 13th century, perhaps dug in the 12th century and dating to the time of the construction of the Norman Church. This could suggest that the earlier ditches were of Late Saxon origin, and the lack of any obvious finds material could certainly suggest an early date.
- 5.1.3 The original ditch was a deep, relatively narrow, well-cut V-shape, the second and third broader, shallower, and perhaps more utilitarian in form. The earliest ditch may represent part of the initial layout of this area - one of the earliest enclosures in the formation of the Late Saxon and Medieval village.
- 5.1.4 Two very similar early ditches have been recorded within this area in the past year, both within test pits excavated by volunteers: 130m to the northeast, along the south side of Mill Rd, and 30m to the northwest, on the far side of the High St. The former lay perpendicular to the ditches in the service trench and would form a large, square enclosure with Water Lane and the southern boundary of the Vicarage and Churchyard as its other two sides. The latter ran parallel to the three ditches and could represent the other side of the broad trackway or drove that became the High St. Both these ditches have been tentatively dated to the middle Saxon period, the 8th or 9th centuries, and the large square enclosure may represent the initial layout of the first ecclesiastical enclosure within the village.

6 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- 6.1.1 The author would like to thank Tim Reynolds, the Diocesan archaeologist and Roger Goodden of the Oakington Parochial Church Council who respectively commissioned and funded the archaeological work. The main contractors were Coulson Building Group and many thanks are due to David Watson and David Teeboon for their help throughout. The subcontractors were from Durman Stearn who provided access with civility throughout. The project was managed by the author.

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APPENDIX A. OASIS REPORT FORM

All fields are required unless they are not applicable.

Project Details

OASIS Number	oxfordar3-64460			
Project Name	The New Meeting Room, St Andrew's Church, Oakington, Cambs: Watching and Recording Brief			
Project Dates (fieldwork)	Start	01-04-2009	Finish	15-09-2009
Previous Work (by OA East)	No		Future Work	No

Project Reference Codes

Site Code	OAK CMR 09	Planning App. No.	n/a
HER No.	ECB 3244	Related HER/OASIS No.	

Type of Project/Techniques Used

Prompt

Please select all techniques used:

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Field Observation (periodic visits)	<input type="checkbox"/> Part Excavation	<input type="checkbox"/> Salvage Record
<input type="checkbox"/> Full Excavation (100%)	<input type="checkbox"/> Part Survey	<input type="checkbox"/> Systematic Field Walking
<input type="checkbox"/> Full Survey	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Recorded Observation	<input type="checkbox"/> Systematic Metal Detector Survey
<input type="checkbox"/> Geophysical Survey	<input type="checkbox"/> Remote Operated Vehicle Survey	<input type="checkbox"/> Test Pit Survey
<input type="checkbox"/> Open-Area Excavation	<input type="checkbox"/> Salvage Excavation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Watching Brief

Monument Types/Significant Finds & Their Periods

List feature types using the [NMR Monument Type Thesaurus](#) and significant finds using the [MDA Object type Thesaurus](#) together with their respective periods. If no features/finds were found, please state "none".

Monument	Period	Object	Period
Ditches	Early Medieval 410 to 1066	pottery	Early Medieval 410 to 1066
Ditches	Medieval 1066 to 1540	pottery	Medieval 1066 to 1540
	Select period...	slag	Medieval 1066 to 1540

Project Location

County	Cambridgeshire	Site Address (including postcode if possible)	
District	South Cambs	St Andrews Church High St Oakington	
Parish	Oakington & Westwick		
HER	Cambridgeshire		
Study Area	500 sq m	National Grid Reference	TL 414 648

Project Originators

Organisation	OA EAST
Project Brief Originator	Dr Tim Reynolds
Project Design Originator	Richard Mortimer
Project Manager	Richard Mortimer
Supervisor	Richard Mortimer

Project Archives

Physical Archive	Digital Archive	Paper Archive
CCC Stores Landbeach	OA East Bar Hill	CCC Stores Landbeach
Accession ID ...	Accession ID ...	Accession ID ...

Archive Contents/Media

	Physical Contents	Digital Contents	Paper Contents
Animal Bones	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ceramics	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Environmental	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Survey	<input type="checkbox"/> Matrices
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	<input type="checkbox"/> Photos
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Plans
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	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Survey

Notes:

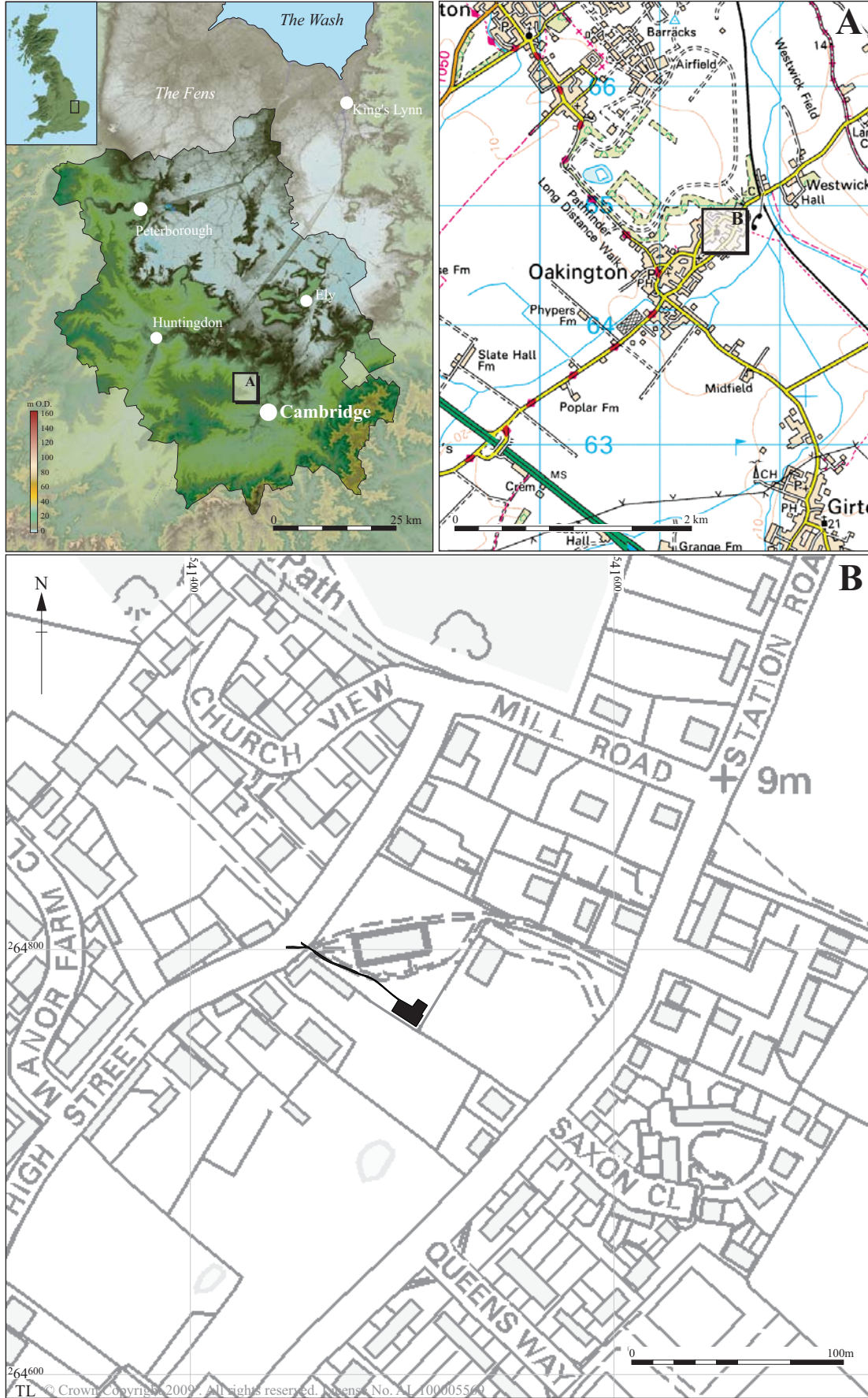


Figure 1: Location of trench (black)

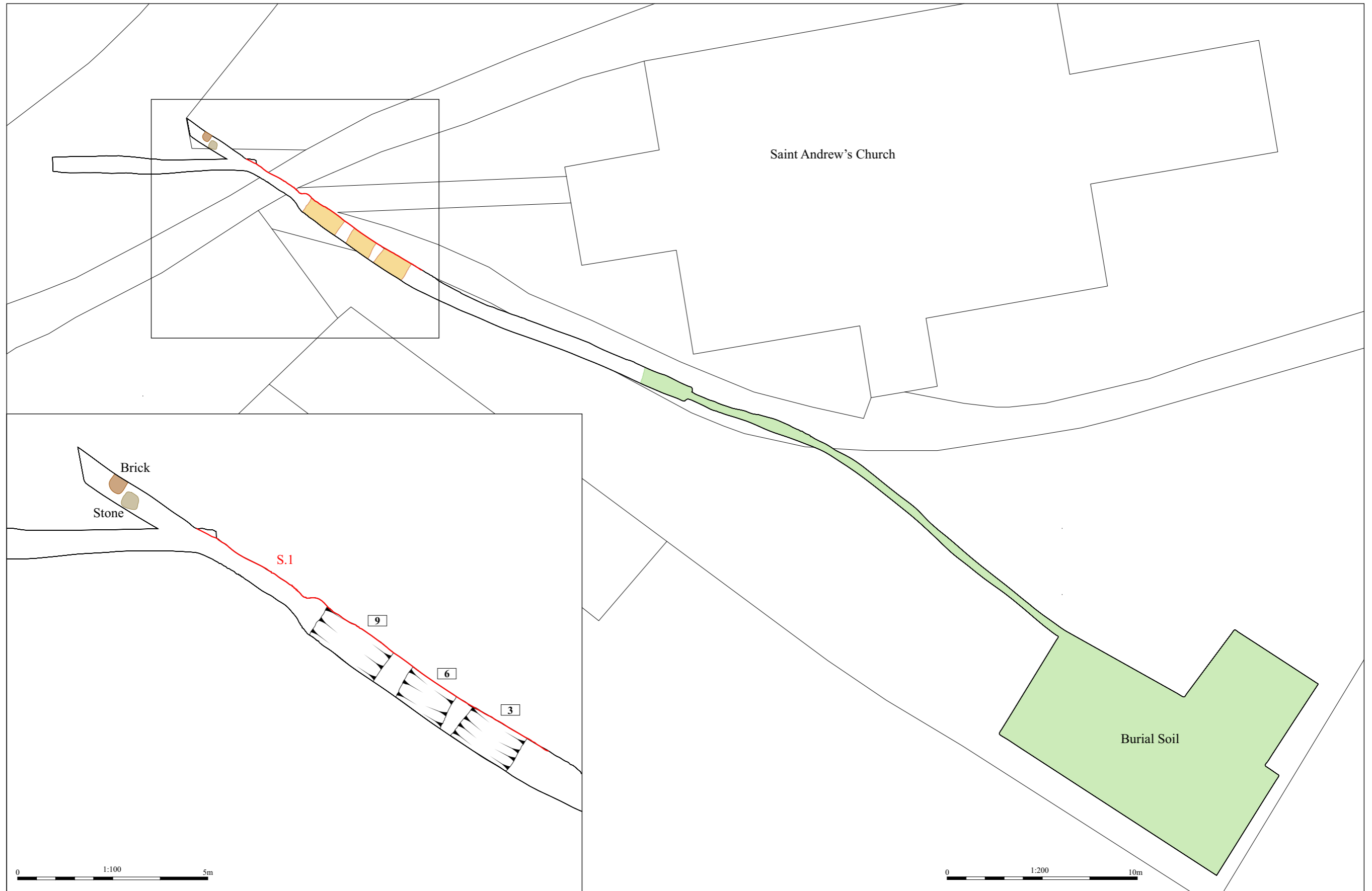


Figure 2: Plan of excavated area

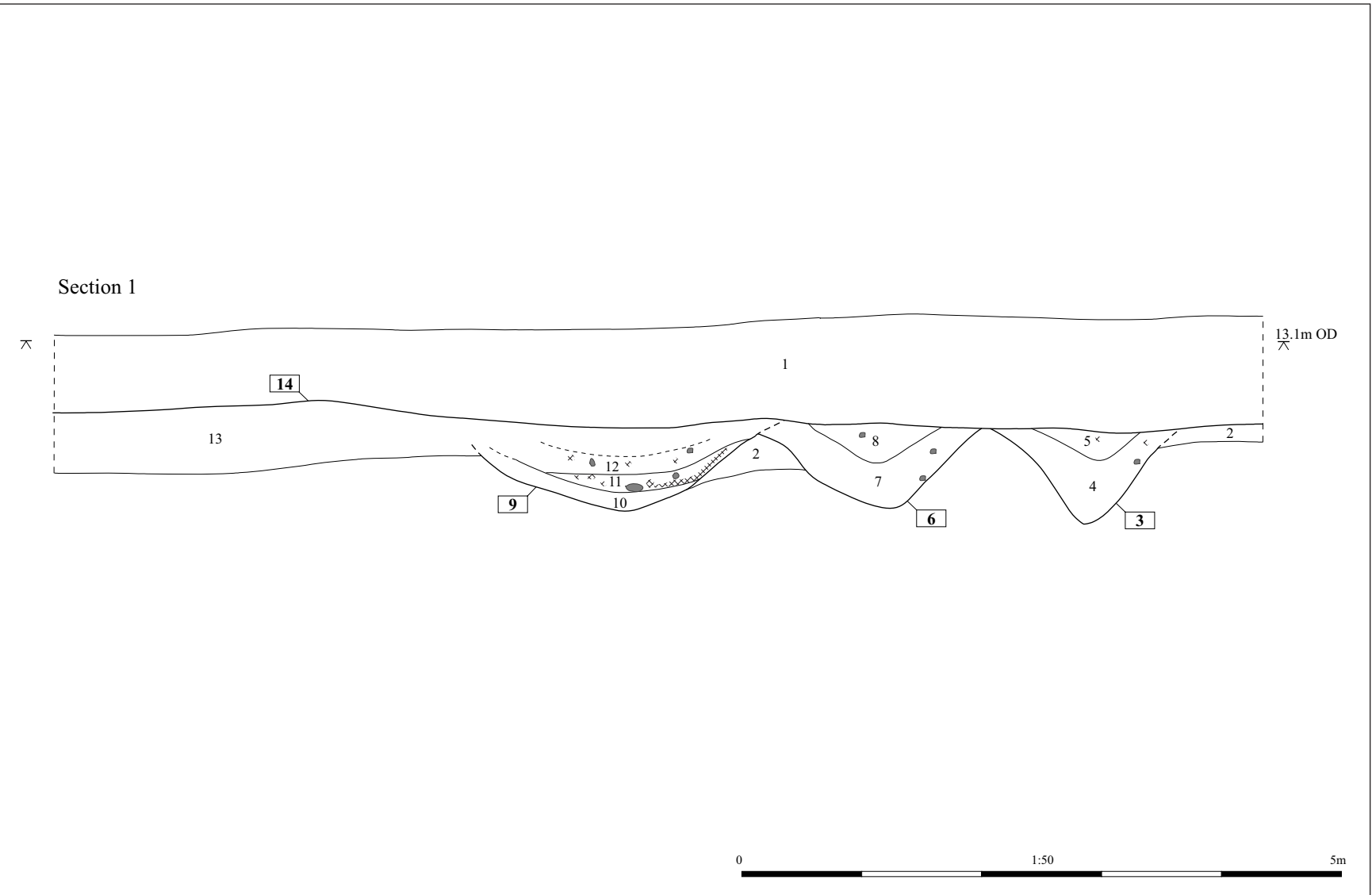


Figure 3: Section



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