

Mill Road Cemetery Mortuary Chapel; an Archaeological Observation



Archaeological Watching Brief Report



November 2016

Client: Cambridge City Council

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Mill Road Cemetery Mortuary Chapel; an Archaeological Observation

By James Fairbairn

Editor: Stephen Macaulay BA MPhil MIFA

Illustrator: Severine Bezie MA

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Date of Works: September 2016
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Prepared by: James Fairbairn
Position: Supervisor
Date: 3/11/2016
Checked by: Stephen Macaulay
Position: Project Manager
Date: 3/11/2016
Signed:

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Oxford Archaeology East,

15 Trafalgar Way,
Bar Hill,
Cambridge,
CB23 8SQ

t: 01223 850500
f: 01223 850599
e: oaeast@thehumanjourney.net
w: <http://thehumanjourney.net/oeast>

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Summary

Oxford Archaeology East carried out monitoring work in September 2016 of the former mortuary chapel at Mill Road Cemetery, Cambridge. This work follows on from a Your Heritage Lottery Funded project to restore and regenerate The Grade II listed Mill Road Cemetery in 2009.

These observations coincided with the revealing of the complete outer foundation plan of the building by Messenger Conservation Ltd. This work showed that the foundations of the chapel were in good condition and that part of the building had originally had a lower floor level, resulting in the preservation of a part of the internal fabric of the building in this area.

It was also noted during the observation that a tower, larger and heavier than that shown in the original designs had caused the building possibly to become unstable.

This latest stage of work at the site aims to safeguard the fabric of the Grade II Victorian cemetery, using appropriate materials cap the foundations of the Chapel giving the general public a better idea of the original ground plan.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work

- 1.1.1 An archaeological observation was conducted in Mill Road Cemetery, Cambridge. This archaeological test pit evaluation was undertaken in accordance with a Specification prepared by OA East.
- 1.1.2 The archaeological observation followed on from a Your Heritage, Heritage Lottery Funded project to regenerate and restore Mill Road Cemetery which was undertaken in 2009. The results from this test pit excavation are the subject of a separate report (Gilmour.N. 2010).
- 1.1.3 The latest part of the project aims to safeguard the fabric of the Grade II Victorian cemetery, using appropriate materials and methods, and increase the understanding of the sites history and value.
- 1.1.4 A conservation and management plan has been written for the site by Cambridge City Council (Mill Road cemetery Conservation Plan 2004) and this had identified the key issue for the sites future protection. An element of the project involves the investigation of the foundations of the demolished Gilbert Scott mortuary chapel (a building which once formed the focal point of the cemetery), with a view to potentially displaying the remains.
- 1.1.5 The site archive is currently held by OA East and will be deposited with the appropriate county stores in due course.

1.2 Geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The site sits on 4th terrace gravels, overlaying the lower chalk (BSG 188).
- 1.2.2 Mill Road Cemetery lies in the south-east quarter of the city of Cambridge. The c 3.5ha site is bounded to the north, east, and south by the gardens of private houses, and to the west by the grounds of Anglia Polytechnic University. The ground is level and entirely enclosed by a low brick wall, with limited views into the site from the surrounding gardens and houses.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 Mill Road Cemetery is a city cemetery, established by the parochial clergy and opened by the Bishop of Ely in 1848, in response to the creation of a burial ground at Histon Road, Cambridge opened to Nonconformists in 1843.
- 1.3.2 The Cambridgeshire Historic Environment Record records the rapid growth of Cambridge in the early C19 put the city's churchyards under severe pressure. Following calls for new burial grounds by the Cambridgeshire Chronicle in 1832, the Cambridge Cemetery Company, a private, non-profit-making body, opened the Histon Road Cemetery (qv) in 1843 for 'persons of all religious persuasions'. In response to this, the established church began to take action the following year and set up the Parish Burial Ground Committee (PBGC). This body was charged with the responsibility of raising funds by voluntary contributions to purchase a site for a burial ground. In 1847 c 3.5ha of land, used as the University cricket ground, were conveyed to the Church Building Commissioners, having been purchased from the estate of the Rev Dr Geldart (PBGC Minutes, 23 November 1847), for the use of thirteen parishes.

- 1.3.3 Each of the parishes was allocated its own area within the cemetery and the boundaries were marked by small stones, some set into the boundary wall. A central area was set aside for the erection of a chapel when funds permitted. Once the land had been drained, boundary walls, gravel drives, railings, gates, and a lodge were laid out and the grounds were consecrated at the official opening by the Bishop of Ely on 7 November 1848. This event was reported in detail in the *Cambridgeshire Chronicle* the following day.
- 1.3.4 By 1850 over 700 burials had taken place, and the committee noted that 'a very general and increased desire prevails that the erection of a chapel should no longer be deferred' (PBGC Minutes). The committee already had £400, so an appeal was launched to raise £600, making a total budget of £1000 for the building. The architect George Gilbert Scott (1811-78) was approached and asked to prepare a design for the chapel. His subsequent plans, dated 22 April 1851, show that his building would cost £1800 to erect, so amendments were requested. There followed protracted discussions and alterations, which went hand in hand with the fund-raising efforts and finally contracts were signed in 1856, following the gift of £250 from the Rev Professor Whewell, Master of Trinity College. Professor Whewell showed an interest in the design of the chapel and may have had a hand in asking for further alterations to Scott's plans (Proc Cambs Antiq Soc 1995).
- 1.3.5 Problems with the interior meant that the chapel did not open until May 1858, ten years after the cemetery was established and in the intervening years, the lodge had been used as a mortuary chapel. Following the completion of the chapel the cemetery continued in use until some of the parish areas were filled and closed in 1904, with the remainder closing in 1949.
- 1.3.6 In 1954 the chapel was demolished, following significant damage caused by a fire. In 1999 the Friends of Mill Road Cemetery were formed to raise awareness of the cemetery as a place of remembrance, and of historic and ecological interest. The site remains in the ownership of the Church of England, apart from the lodge which is privately owned. It is administered by trustees (the incumbents of the parishes) and is managed by the City Council.
- 1.3.7 In addition to the known mortuary chapel, graves and monuments known to be a part of the cemetery, a pagan Anglo Saxon burial was discovered on the site (HER 0622). This was recovered in 1847 and was reported to be an inhumation with a spear and shield. It is probable that this was found in close proximity to the mortuary chapel.

1.4 Acknowledgements

- 1.4.1 The author would like to thank Cambridge City Council who commissioned and funded the work. The contractors Messenger Conservation Ltd who uncovered the foundations. Stephen Macaulay managed the project and visited the site. The on site archaeological monitoring was carried out by James Fairbairn.

2 AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

- 2.1.1 The primary aim of this archaeological observation was to monitor, observe and give relevant guidance if necessary to the contractors uncovering the foundations of the former mortuary chapel.
- 2.1.2 In the event that other archaeological remains were present the evaluation sought to establish the character, date, state of preservation and extent of these deposits.

2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 Two visits were made to the site of the former mortuary chapel. These were carried out on the 26th September and the 30th September 2016.
- 2.2.2 On both visits observations were made to assess the condition and structure of the chapel foundations. Photographs were taken with a high quality digital camera (Nikon D90) and saved in a jpeg format.
- 2.2.3 The foundations were systematically uncovered to reveal the ground plan of the building. These works were carried out by the contractors, Messenger Conservation Ltd
- 2.2.4 All excavation was carried out by hand, using spades, shovels and trowels. Exposed surfaces were cleaned by trowel and brush in order to clarify located features. Trench spoil was scanned visually increase the recovery of artefacts.
- 2.2.5 Weather conditions on site were sunny and cold.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 Details of the visual structural elements identified are discussed below. Descriptions of the topsoil and building materials identified are given in separate sections.

3.2 Topsoil Description

3.2.1 The topsoil covering the site was a dark greyish brown loam with frequent organic and occasional gravel inclusions.

3.3 North Side (Plates 6, 7 and 8).

3.3.1 The foundations of the northern end of the chapel north end of the chapel were linear in plan with a width of 0.95m and were uncovered at approximately 0.20m below the turf line. These were in good condition and consisted of a rubble and brick foundation.

3.3.2 Truncation had been caused to the foundations in the north-west corner by a later foul water drain and post (Plate 7).

3.3.3 A projected area to the north was also uncovered (plate 6). This was first discovered in the test pit evaluation of 2009 (TP1) and was thought to be a separate room located on the north wall of the chapel..

3.4 Eastern End (Plates 3 and 5).

3.4.1 The uncovering of the foundation was positioned over the foundation of the apsidal eastern end of the chapel. It revealed a wall foundation 0.10m below the present ground surface. This wall was 0.98m wide, with an internal brick facing, a core of mortar with flints and an exterior of flints with mortar.

3.5 South Side (Plates 4 and 9).

3.5.1 This excavation here revealed the southern wall of the church and associated buttress, which was located 0.19m below the present ground surface. The buttress was just over 1m wide and extended 1.22m from the outside surface of the wall. The exterior of this buttress was faced with brick, and had a mortar core. It was noted by the contractors that the buttress had become separated from the wall, most probably due to the weight of the tower.

3.6 Western End (Plates 4 and 8).

3.6.1 This revealed the western wall of the chapel 0.12m below the ground surface. Again a rubble and brick foundation was encountered. This foundation had an average width of 0.95m

3.7 Building Material Descriptions and Finds Summary

3.7.1 Some of the original fabric of the building was recovered within the topsoil. This was fragmentary in nature and was not retained, it did however confirm that the basic appearance of the building was similar to The Lodge, which still stands in the south west corner of the cemetery. Amongst the material recovered was red brick and knapped flint,

- 3.7.2 All of the bricks visible within the foundations were of similar manufacture. These were yellow or buff, with dimensions of 224mm in length, 105mm wide and 73mm thick, they were not frogged. A common name for these bricks are Cambridge Whites.
- 3.7.3 Several sherds 19th-20th century pottery were also found within the topsoil, along with two keys linked by a chain. Based on the size of the keys these are thought to belong to an internal door and a possible cupboard or casket. Given the find location it is entirely possible that the door or the cupboard were located within the chapel.

Key 1 (Plate 10)

- 3.7.4 Iron cast rotary key with an oval bow, circular section stem and a rectangular bit with a cleft to front and back; a hole once existed at the end of the stem. From its size, probably for a door. Length: 65mm, Height (at bit): 20mm, Thickness: 7mm, Weight: 24.2gms.

Key 2 (Plate 10)

- 3.7.5 Iron cast rotary key with an oval bow, circular section stem and a rectangular bit with a cleft to front and back; a hole once existed at the end of the stem. From its size, probably for a casket or cupboard. Length: 40mm, Height (at bit): 7mm, Thickness: 4.3mm, Weight: 15.4gms.

4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

4.1 The Chapel Foundations

- 4.1.1 The foundations of the chapel survived in extremely good condition, which would be expected as there have only been fifty years since its' demolition. The presence of wall foundations in all of the test pits excavated across them would suggest that the complete floor plan of the chapel survives. They were all internally faced with brick, while the main structure of the footing was mortar with flint inclusions. The outside of the footing had more frequent inclusions of flint. Brick impressions in the mortar would suggest that the upper structure had been of brick, while a small amount of knapped flint facing survived on top of the footing in test pit 1. The foundations were buried beneath between 0.10m and 0.22m of topsoil.
- 4.1.2 The internal floor of the chapel survived as a mortar layer, which presumably provided a base for either a flagstone or tile surface. No trace of this original floor covering was found.

4.2 The Sunken Floored Room

- 4.2.1 On the north side of the chapel a protruding room was shown to have a lower floor level than the rest of the chapel. This had resulted in the survival of at least 0.96m of wall which had been faced internally with brick and flint. Set into this was a window, the base of which, as well as part of the architrave survived. The floor surface of this area may have survived.

4.3 Buttresses

- 4.3.1 During the uncovering of the southern wall foundations it was noted by Messenger Conservation Ltd that the buttresses that once existed to the north and south of the chapel showed signs of movement at foundation level.
- 4.3.2 The wall foundations and buttresses had splayed slightly at this point. There is a possibility that this movement could have been caused by the extra weight of the larger and more extravagant tower that was erected.
- 4.3.3 The original Scot plans showed a smaller less ornate tower. The added weight of a larger redesigned structure probably necessitated the buttresses to be added soon after the tower had been erected.
- 4.3.4 This could also be a contributing factor to why the life span of the building was so short lived. The addition of the much heavier tower could have caused the foundations to move causing the chapel to become unsafe relatively quickly.

4.4 Significance

- 4.4.1 This archaeological monitoring following on from the 2009 test pitting has shown the foundations of the mortuary chapel in Mill Road Cemetery have survived well. The survival of a deeper area was unexpected and this has ensured the survival of faced walls as well as architectural element of the original chapel.
- 4.4.2 The revealing and capping of the foundation of the building gives a much clearer idea to the general public of the ground plan of the chapel and its prominent position within Mill Road cemetery.

APPENDIX A. OASIS REPORT FORM

All fields are required unless they are not applicable.

Project Details

OASIS Number	oxfordar3-267037			
Project Name	Mill Road Cemetery Mortuary Chapel; an Archaeological Observation			
Project Dates (fieldwork)	Start	26-09-2016	Finish	30-09-2016
Previous Work (by OA East)	Yes		Future Work	No

Project Reference Codes

Site Code	CAMMRC16	Planning App. No.	n/a
HER No.	ECB5125	Related HER/OASIS No.	ECB3294

Type of Project/Techniques Used

Prompt	Voluntary/self-interest
Development Type	Other

Please select all techniques used:

<input type="checkbox"/> Aerial Photography - interpretation	<input type="checkbox"/> Grab-Sampling	<input type="checkbox"/> Remote Operated Vehicle Survey
<input type="checkbox"/> Aerial Photography - new	<input type="checkbox"/> Gravity-Core	<input type="checkbox"/> Sample Trenches
<input type="checkbox"/> Annotated Sketch	<input type="checkbox"/> Laser Scanning	<input type="checkbox"/> Survey/Recording Of Fabric/Structure
<input type="checkbox"/> Augering	<input type="checkbox"/> Measured Survey	<input type="checkbox"/> Targeted Trenches
<input type="checkbox"/> Dendrochronological Survey	<input type="checkbox"/> Metal Detectors	<input type="checkbox"/> Test Pits
<input type="checkbox"/> Documentary Search	<input type="checkbox"/> Phosphate Survey	<input type="checkbox"/> Topographic Survey
<input type="checkbox"/> Environmental Sampling	<input type="checkbox"/> Photogrammetric Survey	<input type="checkbox"/> Vibro-core
<input type="checkbox"/> Fieldwalking	<input type="checkbox"/> Photographic Survey	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Visual Inspection (Initial Site Visit)
<input type="checkbox"/> Geophysical Survey	<input type="checkbox"/> Rectified Photography	

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
mortuary chapel	Post Medieval 1540 to 1901	key	Post Medieval 1540 to 1901
	Select period...		Select period...
	Select period...		Select period...

Project Location

County	Cambridgeshire	Site Address (including postcode if possible)
District	Cambridge City	Mill Road Cemetery, Mill Road, Cambridge, CB1 2AW
Parish	Cambridge	
HER	Cambridgeshire	
Study Area	500sqm	National Grid Reference TL 46169 58397

Project Originators

Organisation	OA EAST
Project Brief Originator	n/a
Project Design Originator	Stephen Macaulay
Project Manager	Stephen Macaulay
Supervisor	James Fairbairn

Project Archives

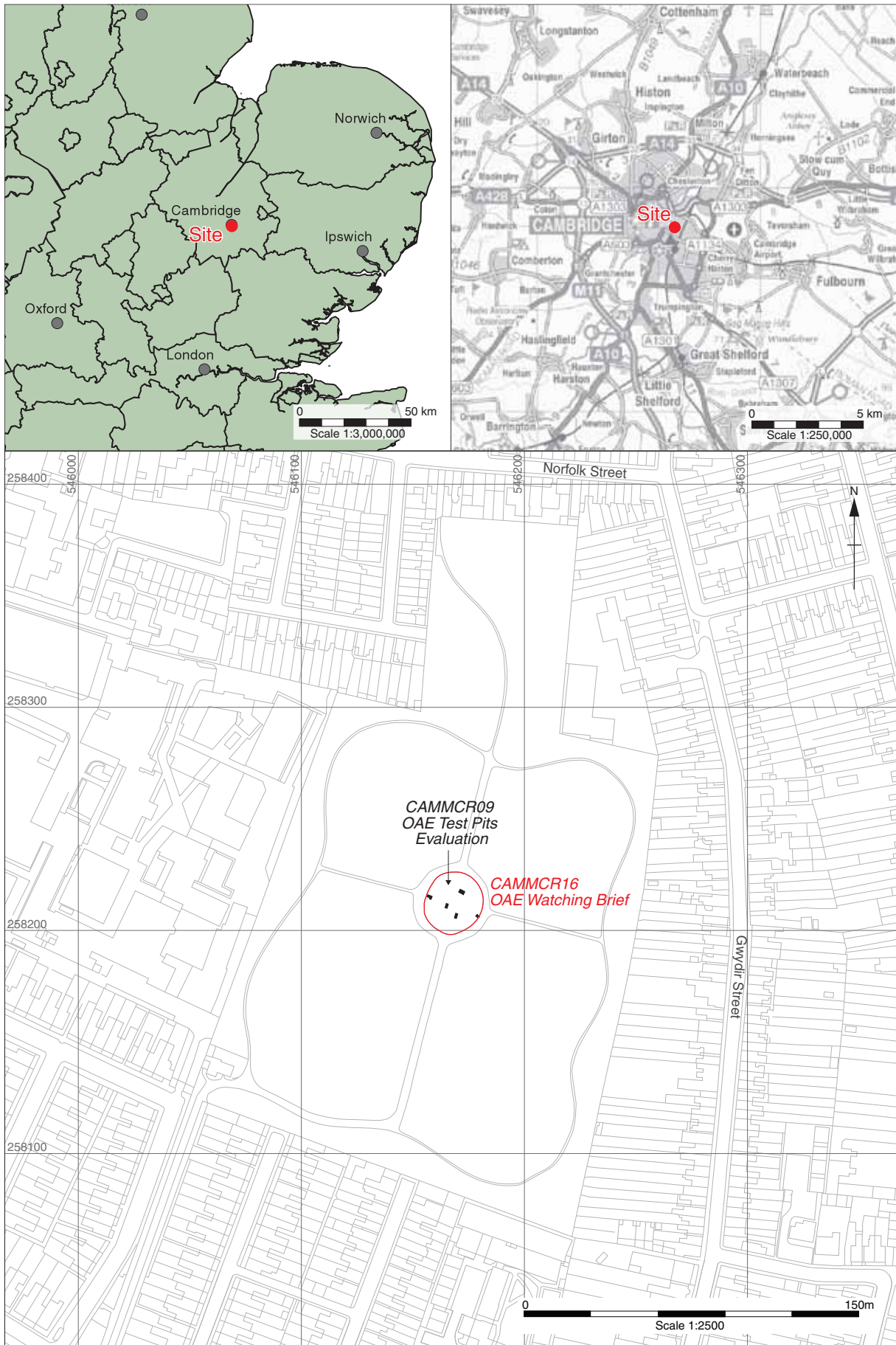
Physical Archive	Digital Archive	Paper Archive
CCC Stores	OA East	CCC Stores
ECB5125	CAMMRC16	ECB5125

Archive Contents/Media

	Physical Contents	Digital Contents	Paper Contents
Animal Bones	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ceramics	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Environmental	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Glass	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Human Bones	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Industrial	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Leather	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Metal	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Stratigraphic		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Survey		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Textiles	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Wood	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Worked Bone	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Worked Stone/Lithic	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
None	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Digital Media	Paper Media
<input type="checkbox"/> Database	<input type="checkbox"/> Aerial Photos
<input type="checkbox"/> GIS	<input type="checkbox"/> Context Sheet
<input type="checkbox"/> Geophysics	<input type="checkbox"/> Correspondence
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Images	<input type="checkbox"/> Diary
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Illustrations	<input type="checkbox"/> Drawing
<input type="checkbox"/> Moving Image	<input type="checkbox"/> Manuscript
<input type="checkbox"/> Spreadsheets	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Map
<input type="checkbox"/> Survey	<input type="checkbox"/> Matrices
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Text	<input type="checkbox"/> Microfilm
<input type="checkbox"/> Virtual Reality	<input type="checkbox"/> Misc.
	<input type="checkbox"/> Research/Notes
	<input type="checkbox"/> Photos
	<input type="checkbox"/> Plans
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Report
	<input type="checkbox"/> Sections
	<input type="checkbox"/> Survey

Notes:



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Figure 1: Site location map

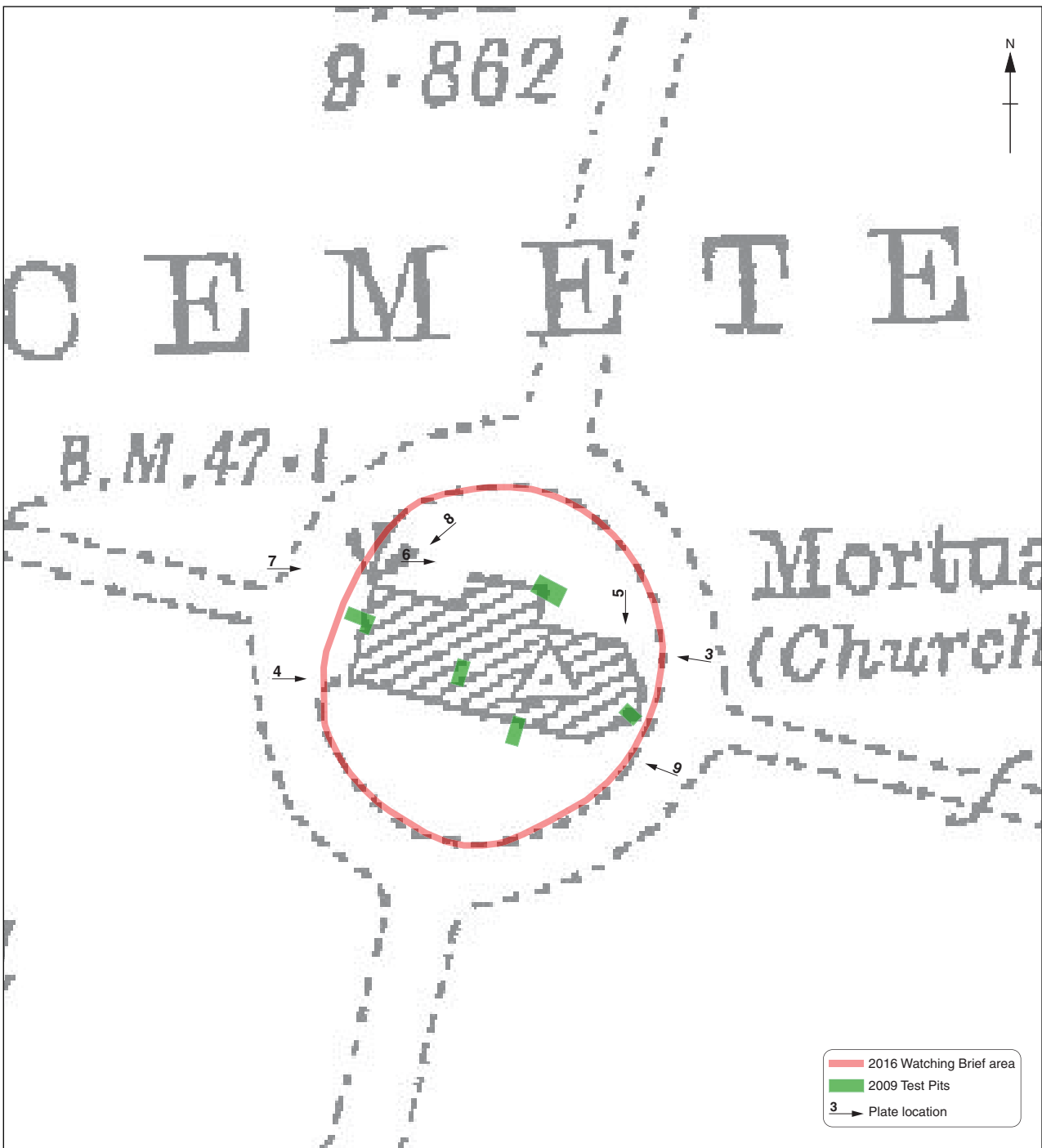


Figure 2: 1925 Ordnance Survey map of Mill Road Cemetery showing chapel, 2009 test pits and plate locations



Plate 1: The Mortuary Chapel during demolition, viewed from the west. Courtesy of the Cambridge Collection



Plate 2: The Mortuary Chapel during demolition, viewed from the south



Plate 3: Overview of the chapel foundation trenched. Viewed from the east



Plate 4: Southern wall foundation. Viewed from the west



Plate 5: The eastern apsidal end of the chapel. Viewed from the north



Plate 6: Chapel foundations uncovered. Viewed from the west



Plate 7: The northern wall foundation. Viewed from the west



Plate 8: Excavation of the north-western corner of the chapel building



Plate 9: Cleaning the southern wall foundation trench



Plate 10: Keys to an internal door of the Mortuary church



Head Office/Registered Office/ OA South

Janus House
Osney Mead
Oxford OX2 0ES

t: +44 (0) 1865 263 800
f: +44 (0) 1865 793 496
e: info@oxfordarchaeology.com
w: <http://oxfordarchaeology.com>

OA North

Mill 3
Moor Lane
Lancaster LA1 1QD

t: +44 (0) 1524 541 000
f: +44 (0) 1524 848 606
e: [oanorth@oxfordarchaeology.com](mailto: oanorth@oxfordarchaeology.com)
w: <http://oxfordarchaeology.com>

OA East

15 Trafalgar Way
Bar Hill
Cambridgeshire
CB23 8SQ

t: +44 (0) 1223 850500
e: [oaeast@oxfordarchaeology.com](mailto: oaeast@oxfordarchaeology.com)
w: <http://oxfordarchaeology.com>



Director: Gill Hey, BA PhD FSA MCIFA
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