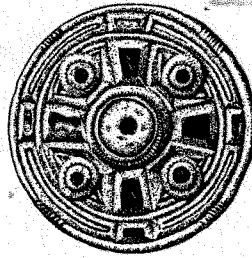


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# Excavation of a 15th Century Village Cross in Tilbrook, Cambridgeshire

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1993

**Cambridgeshire Archaeology**

Report No A11

*Commissioned By Tilbrook Parish Council*

## ABSTRACT

In June 1993, Cambridgeshire Archaeology completed an excavation in the village of Tilbrook (Figure 1). A single hand-excavated trench was opened on the site of the remains of the village cross in an attempt to locate the base and cross.

A single hand-excavated trench was opened on the site of a stone stump protruding from the grass verge which was believed to be the remains of the village cross. The purpose of the excavation was to confirm that this was in fact the site of the village cross and to locate any fragmented remains that might be present in the immediate vicinity.

A stone pedestal for the cross was found, as well as a 20th century roadside ditch. The cross itself was not found in the area examined.

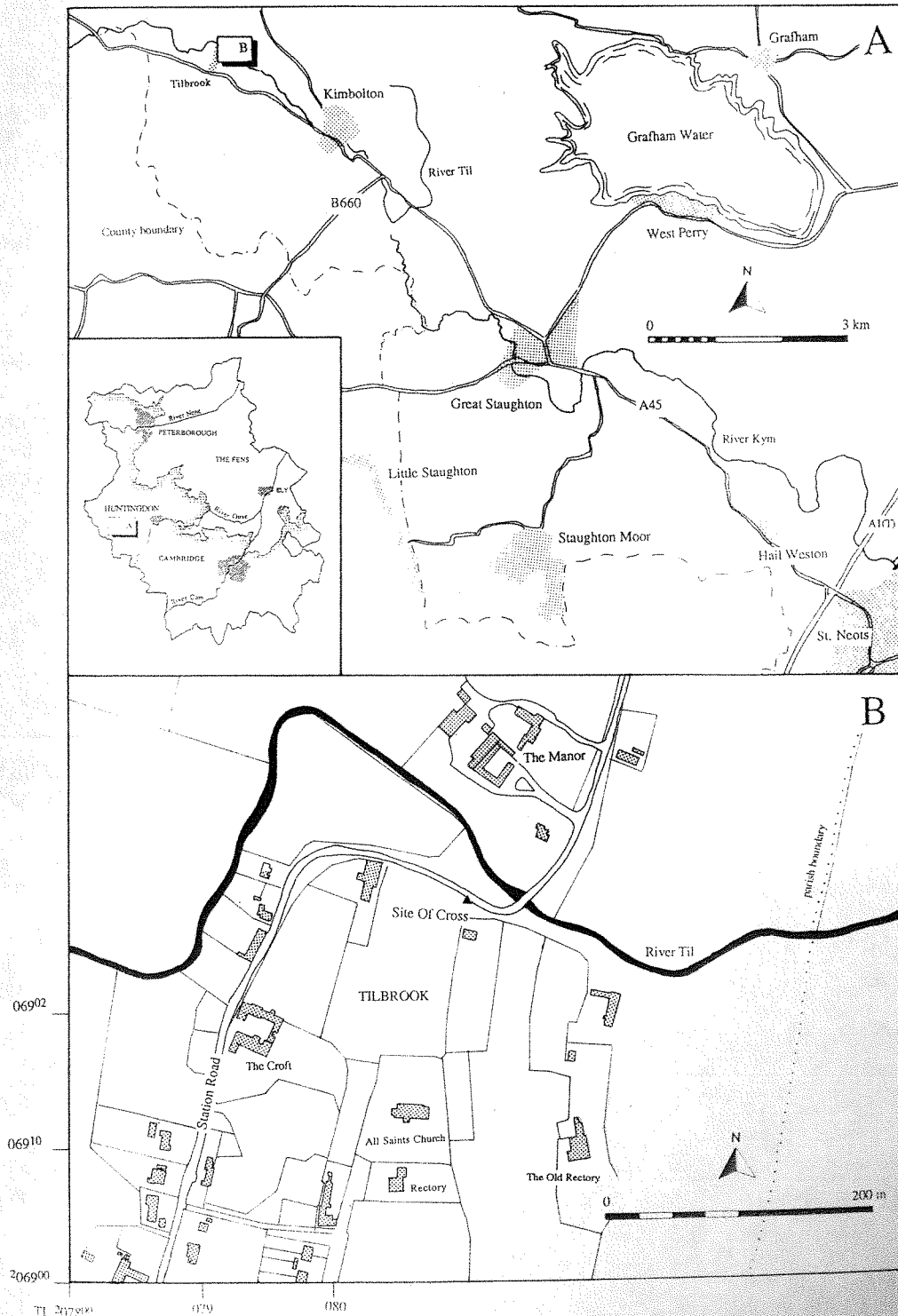


Figure 1 - Location of Site

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

On the 16th June 1993, an archaeological excavation was completed in the village of Tilbrook to locate and recover the remains of the roadside 15th century village cross (*Figure 1* (TL080/694)). The work was commissioned by Tilbrook Parish Council following repeated damage to the monument by cars; specifically, a recent incident where the remains of the shaft had been knocked from position. The parish council intend to restore the cross and re-erect it further back from the road along with an interpretation board..

## **2 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY**

The site is at the northern end of the village of Tilbrook, 12 miles to the north-west of St. Neots and situated on the floodplains of the river Til, 35.7m OD. The remnants of the cross are positioned beside the present road, immediately to the north of the parish church.

The underlying geology of the site and surrounding area consists of first terrace river gravels.

## **3 BACKGROUND**

There is little evidence of prehistoric or Roman activity in Tilbrook parish. The county's Sites and Monument Record (SMR) shows an area of medieval ridge and furrow to the north-west of the village.

The village name of "Tilbrook" comes from a early 13th century derivation of "Tilebroc", meaning Tila's stream (Ekwall, 1991). This early medieval date for the settlement is reinforced by the 12th century origins of the parish church. The village cross to the north of the church (*Figure 1*) appears to date to the 15th century (RCHM, 1926). By the early 20th century there appears to be little visible remaining of the cross apart from the broken shaft. Local memory of the monument during this period also indicates that all that was visible was the stone shaft. Occasional excavation around the base of the shaft by the then Rector revealed "descending stone steps" suggesting that slightly more of the cross survived.

## **4 METHODOLOGY OF EXCAVATION**

A single trench, measuring 1.5 x 1.5 metres, was positioned on the site of the remains of the village cross. The area was excavated by hand; layers and features were recorded using Cambridgeshire Archaeology's single context recording system.

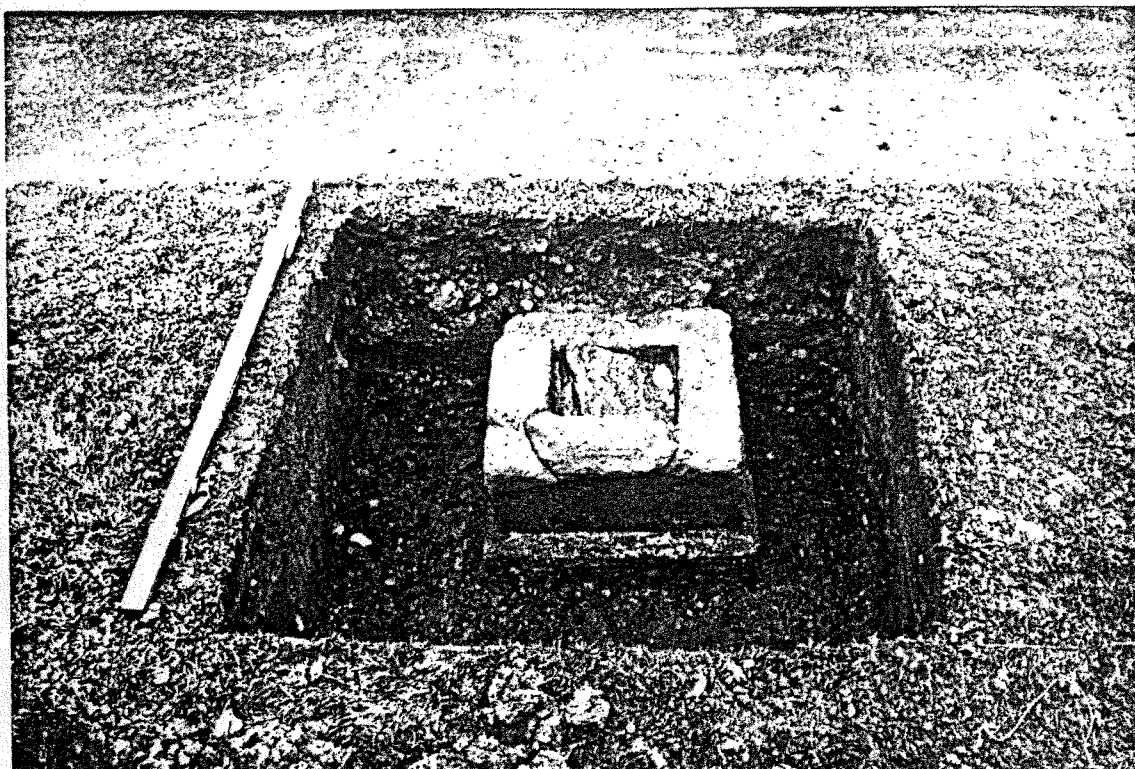
The pedestal was planned and photographed in situ before being removed with a fork lift truck. The area beneath the base was then examined for any further features.

## 5 RESULTS

The pedestal for the cross was found within the area examined. It measured 0.67 m square and 0.50 m deep; it had a pronounced rim with hollowed chamfered corners (*Plate I*). A square-cut hole in the top of the block, serving as a receptacle for the cross shaft was found to be lined with lead.

The base was surrounded by compact river silts, deposited by recent periodic flooding of the river Til since the 19th century.

A disused roadside ditch was found, orientated in an east/west direction alongside the modern road. Fragments of modern china recovered from the basal fill of the ditch indicate that the ditch ceased to be maintained sometime in the late 19th or early 20th century causing it to silt up.



*Plate I* - *Excavated Pedestal Showing Decorated Rim*

## 6 DISCUSSION OF RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 The excavation revealed the base of the cross which had been covered in river silts during periodic flooding of the river Til. Local knowledge of the site over the last 70 years indicates that over this period of time only the stump of the cross was visible. It seems probable that the remainder of the cross was damaged and lost sometime in or before the 19th century, and the stonework deposited, perhaps in some local construction project. In the absence of the cross it is impossible to determine the decoration or shape of the upper portion of the shaft and any attempts to restore this part must be treated with caution. Nothing was found to support or question the 15th century date of construction for the cross.

6.2 Restoration of the monument could be successfully limited to fixing the broken shaft back into place in the pedestal and re-siting it further back from the road. An interpretation board could be provided detailing the history of the cross, its original position and pictures of complete contemporary examples of similar crosses. If the monument is moved it is strongly suggested that the original site of the cross is marked in some way.

## 7 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*The author would like to thank Tilbrook Parish Council and Rural Action for their financial support; the enthusiasm and interest shown by the villagers during the excavation, in particular Mr. S. Lowing. Dr. Tim Reynolds, the Project Manager and Chris Montague for his hard work in torrential rain.*

## 8 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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### Unpublished References

Archaeology Office, 1993, *Cambridgeshire's Sites and Monuments Record*, Cambridgeshire County Council

**APPENDIX A**

**LIST OF EXCAVATED CONTEXTS**

Ctx. No.	Description	Nature	Above	Below
1	Topsoil	Dark brown, firm silt	6,4	turf
2	River silts	Mid orange/brown silty/clay	3,8	1
3	River gravels	Mid yellow, sandy gravel	8	2
4	Road makeup	Mid-dark brown silty gravel, freq. large angular stones & iron lumps	2	9
5	Clay natural	Mid-dark grey compact clay		8
6	Ditch fill	Mid brown, loose, crumbly silt	2,8	1
[7]	Cut of Ditch		2	1
8	Interface between 2,3 & 5	Mid-dark grey, compact clay	5	2,3,6
9	Tarmac road surface	Black, compact tarmac	4	



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