

**19th Century Burials At
St. Mary's Churchyard, Buckden**

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SUMMARY

In December 1994 an archaeological evaluation was carried out by the Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeology Field Unit on behalf of Marshall Sisson, Architect, at St. Mary's churchyard, Buckden (TL1920/6765). The church is situated to the south of Buckden Palace, former palace of the Bishops of Lincoln. The churchyard was extended in 1852 to include part of the palace gardens. Nineteenth century graves were revealed but no other archaeological features were recorded.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Between 28th November and 30th November 1994 a team from the Archaeology Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council carried out an archaeological evaluation in the churchyard to the west of St. Mary's Church, Buckden. The work was commissioned by Marshall Sisson, Architect, as part of a planning application for construction of a 10m² stand-alone church hall in the churchyard. The area lies within a few metres of the in-filled moat of Buckden Palace (a Scheduled Ancient Monument) and was formerly an area of the pleasure gardens of the palace, taken into the churchyard after 1838 when part of the palace was redeveloped.

2 BACKGROUND

The churchyard is located in the heart of the medieval village of Buckden, approximately 6km south-west of Huntingdon, to the east of the A1 (formerly the Great North Road), on a slight rise (just over 25m above sea level) on 3rd terrace river gravels.

The parish church of St. Mary, Buckden, is constructed of rubble, pebbles and ironstone walls with dressings of Barnack and other freestone. The earliest part of the current church is the 13th century doorway which is not *in situ* and there is evidence for the re-use of building material elsewhere in the church. The chancel was rebuilt at the end of the 14th century and the south aisle built in the 15th century but abandoned, soon after the north arcade, north aisle and chancel arch were built. The western tower was carried upwards during the same period and a clerestory added. Later chancel walls were rebuilt and a south porch added. Further repairs were carried out in 1649 and 1665 and in the 18th century buttresses were added to the north aisle to counteract settlement caused by the adjoining moat. Restoration work was continued in the 19th century and early 20th century (Victoria County History of Huntingdonshire, 266-269).

Scattered prehistoric, Roman and Saxon finds are recorded in and around the village on the County Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) and the A1 (Great North Road), Buckden High Street, follows the line of a former Roman road. Buckden is mentioned in the Domesday Survey as having a manor owned by the Bishops of Lincoln. A house is recorded on the site of the subsequent palace, from the 11th century. There were various episodes of building and rebuilding throughout the history of the Buckden Palace and in 1838 about half of the main buildings were demolished. From the early 19th century the moat was being filled and this was completed by 1871 (Langley, 1932). The parish records (an epitome of which is held by the Huntingdon Record Office) mention a 'Memorandum of Consecration' concerning a new portion of the churchyard, dated 9th June 1852. The headstones in the western extent of the present churchyard date to the latter half of the 19th century suggesting that this was the piece of land referred to in the 'Memorandum of Consecration' (no maps or plans relevant to this event were available in the Huntingdon Record Office).

The area to the south of Buckden Palace and west of the church of St. Mary was identified as potentially of archaeological interest as it lies close to the old Great North Road (originally a Roman road) and within the historic heart of the village. Excavation in this area might have revealed traces of Roman settlement, buildings associated with the early church or the nearby Bishop's Palace or with medieval occupation in the vicinity of the ecclesiastical buildings. The work was carried out in

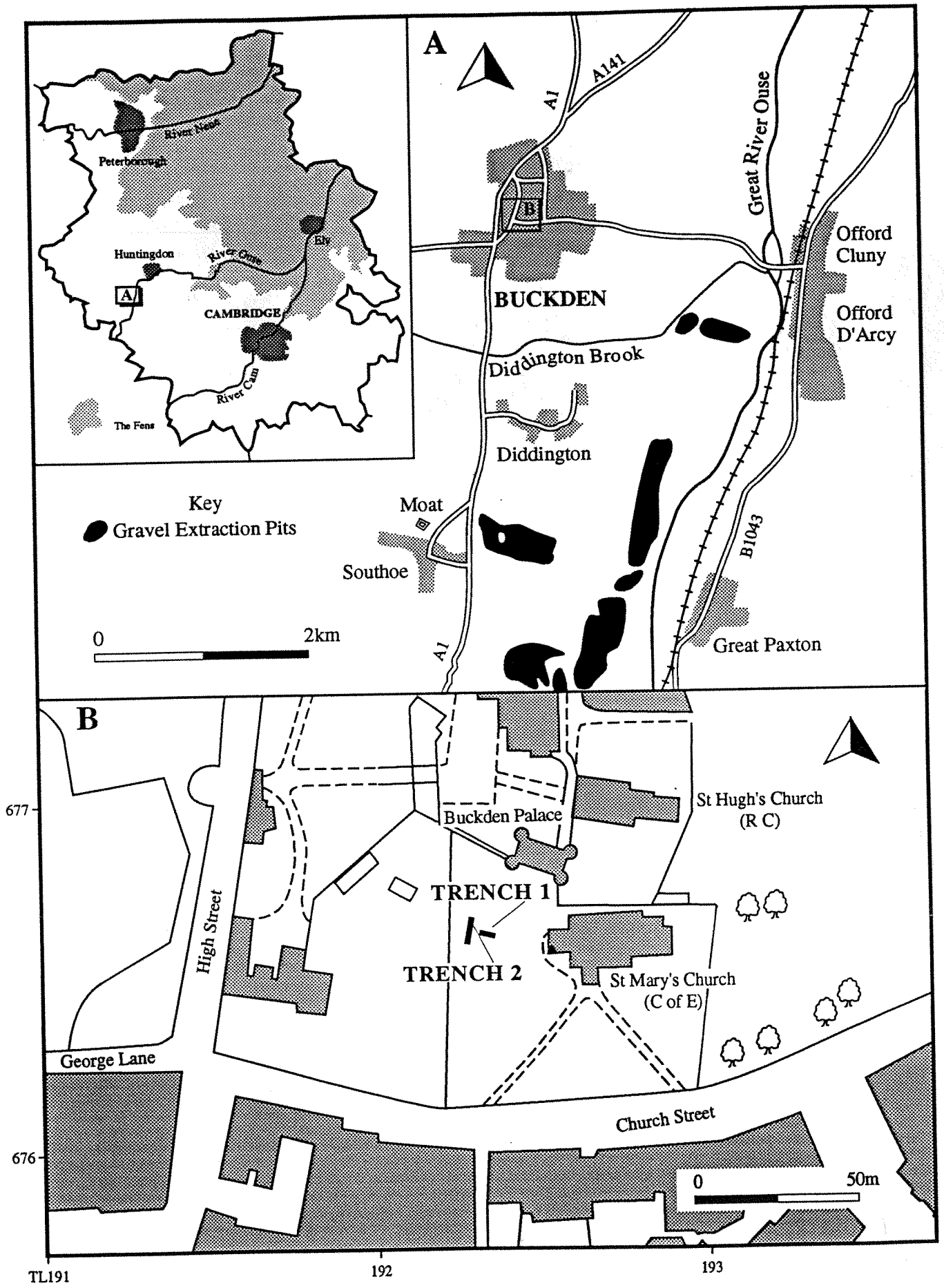


Figure 1 Location map and site plan of trenches

accordance with the evaluation brief supplied by the County Archaeology Office, although the trenching strategy was modified slightly.

3 METHODS AND CONSTRAINTS

The proximity of head stones limited the location and extent of the trenches. It was decided to dig two trenches at right angles to each other, one of approximately 6 metres and one of approximately 4 metres. It was hoped that the smaller trench, Trench 1, might reveal the location of the former western boundary of the churchyard. Both trenches were dug with a mini digger with a 1.3m toothless ditching bucket to a depth at which either *in situ* burials were encountered (in Trench 1, which ran east-west) or to a depth at which archaeological features could be recognised (Trench 2, which ran approximately north-east to south-west).

Turves were removed from the areas to be trenched and once opened the trenches were cleaned (by trowel), features were sample excavated, photographed, planned and recorded using the standard techniques of the Archaeological Field Unit.

4 RESULTS

The topsoil (approximately 20-25cm) overlying the trenched area was a fine, dark, silty 'garden' soil. The subsoil (approximately 20-30cms) was a silty clay with a relatively high density of post-medieval refuse and in Trench 1 with a few fragments of disarticulated human bone.

Trench 1 contained a burial (the skull only was revealed) at approximately 0.7m below the present ground surface. The corner of the east-west orientated grave was revealed and the skull exposed, the rest of the skeleton extended eastwards under the baulk. Cleaning of the sections and base of the trench revealed three further graves cut into the subsoil. These appeared to respect each other, were oriented east-west, and were observed in very small areas in the corners of the trench. None of the burials appeared to be related to the nearby headstones. The present location of the headstones (closely spaced and aligned) may indicate that the headstones have been moved since they were originally erected and possibly placed against a boundary. The upcast spoil contained fragments of human bone, fragments of brick, coal/coke, iron nails and modern pottery. At the centre of the trench, at a depth of 70-80cms, undisturbed natural strata, an orange clay, was encountered. Once recording was completed the trench was partially backfilled to cover the exposed human remains.

Trench 2 was machine dug to a depth of approximately 0.75m where a natural strata with orange sandy clay (with patches of sand and gravel) was revealed with features cut into it. These features were excavated by hand. A grave cut (approximately 0.4m by 0.8m) was noted at the northern end of the trench, oriented east-west. This was excavated to a depth of 1.4m below ground level, at which depth iron coffin nails were encountered, these contained a substantial amount of uncorroded metal. It was decided not to excavate the burial further as it can be fairly firmly dated, by the coffin fittings and fill, to the latter part of the 19th century and is below a level likely to be disturbed by the proposed development. A further burial, on the same alignment, was dug to a depth of 1.35m below ground level but the human remains were not exposed as this also appeared to be a late 19th century burial and again extends below the level likely to be disturbed by the development. A narrow linear feature (approximately 0.2m wide) was noted immediately above this burial and may be

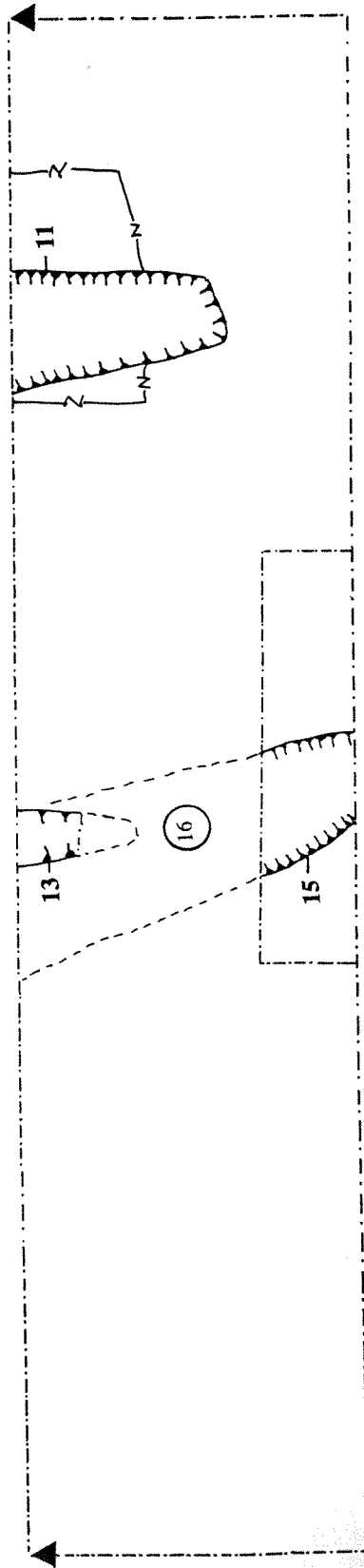
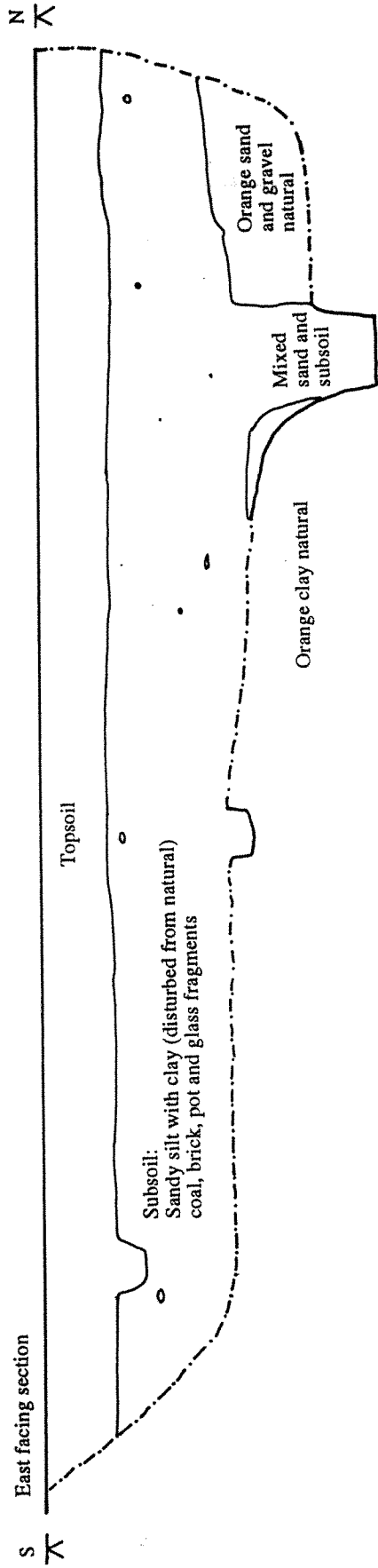


Figure 2 Section and plan of Trench 2

related to the backfilling of the grave. No other features were apparent in the trench.

The fills from the two graves contained building material (mainly red brick and mortar similar to that of the outer wall of Buckden Palace), clay tobacco pipe, post-medieval glazed pottery and window glass, iron nails, fragments of bottle glass and other domestic refuse much of which appears to date to the 19th century. The topsoil and subsoil contained no disarticulated human bone and was reminiscent of a garden soil rather than a churchyard soil.

5 CONCLUSION

The presence of human remains at a depth of 0.7m at the eastern end of Trench 1 and grave cuts relatively close to each other is consistent with the use of this part of the churchyard during the 18th and early 19th century, as attested by headstones in the vicinity. No evidence for a boundary wall was apparent in the trench although substantial pieces of brick and mortar were found in the topsoil and subsoil. These most likely came from the demolition of part of the palace and filling of the moat in the late 19th century. The alignment of headstones may be indicative of a previous boundary. The burials in Trench 2 are at a much greater depth than those in Trench 1, are more widely spaced. The grave fill are less compacted and contained 19th century material. All this evidence is consistent with this piece of land being taken into use as a churchyard from the middle of the 19th century.

It was not possible to attribute individual burials to headstones in either trench. The burials in Trench 1 are relatively shallow and it is likely that some of the graves in the older part of the churchyard, i.e. east of Trench 2, are close to the current ground surface. Those burials encountered in Trench 2 were at a depth greater than 1.4m (23.48m OD) below current ground level and this should be borne in mind when considering depth of disturbance likely to occur during development. No other archaeological features were apparent.

All human remains were re-interred. The site archive and finds are stored with the archive of the Cambridgeshire County Council Field Unit.

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