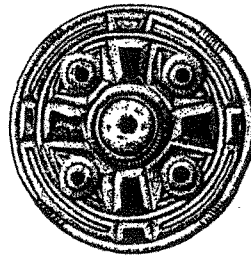


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Archaeological Field Unit

**St. Margaret and All Saints Church, Houghton and Wyton:
a basic archaeological investigation**

Judith Roberts

1998

Cambridgeshire County Council

Report No. B42

Commissioned by Optima (Cambridge) Ltd

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(TL 277 722)

Judith Roberts

November 1998

Editor William Wall

Illustrator Jon Cane

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Cambridgeshire County Council
Fulbourn Community Centre
Haggis Gap, Fulbourn
Cambridgeshire CB1 5HD
Tel (01223) 881614
Fax (01223) 880946

SUMMARY

In October 1998 the Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Field Unit conducted a basic archaeological investigation in the burial ground of St. Margaret and All Saints Church, Houghton and Wyton. The investigation was designed to examine the potential disturbance to underlying archaeological remains caused by the construction of an extension during conversion of the redundant church into a dwelling. The extension footings revealed only modern disturbance, tree roots and the foundation of the existing building. Disarticulated human bone was recovered from the topsoil and returned to the parish for reburial.

**St. Margaret and All Saints Church, Houghton and Wyton:
a basic archaeological investigation
(TL 277 722)**

INTRODUCTION

In October 1998 staff from the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council carried out an archaeological investigation on the site of the proposed conversion of St. Margaret's and All Saints Church Wyton to a single dwelling, with associated services. The work was commissioned by Optima (Cambridge) Ltd. in response to a brief for basic archaeological investigation (written by Simon Kaner, Development Control Officer, Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeology Office, date 8th June 1998) and following approval of a specification for the archaeological work written by Steve Kemp (CCCAFU).

The site lies close to the medieval centre of Wyton, and to the south of the Huntingdon to St. Ives road, at a height of approximately 10mOD. Four foundation pits were dug to provide plinths for joists supporting a conservatory.

The foundation pits revealed 0.3m of nineteenth and twentieth century overburden and topsoil and 0.2m of subsoil.

No remains or features other than nineteenth century foundations were noted in the pits.

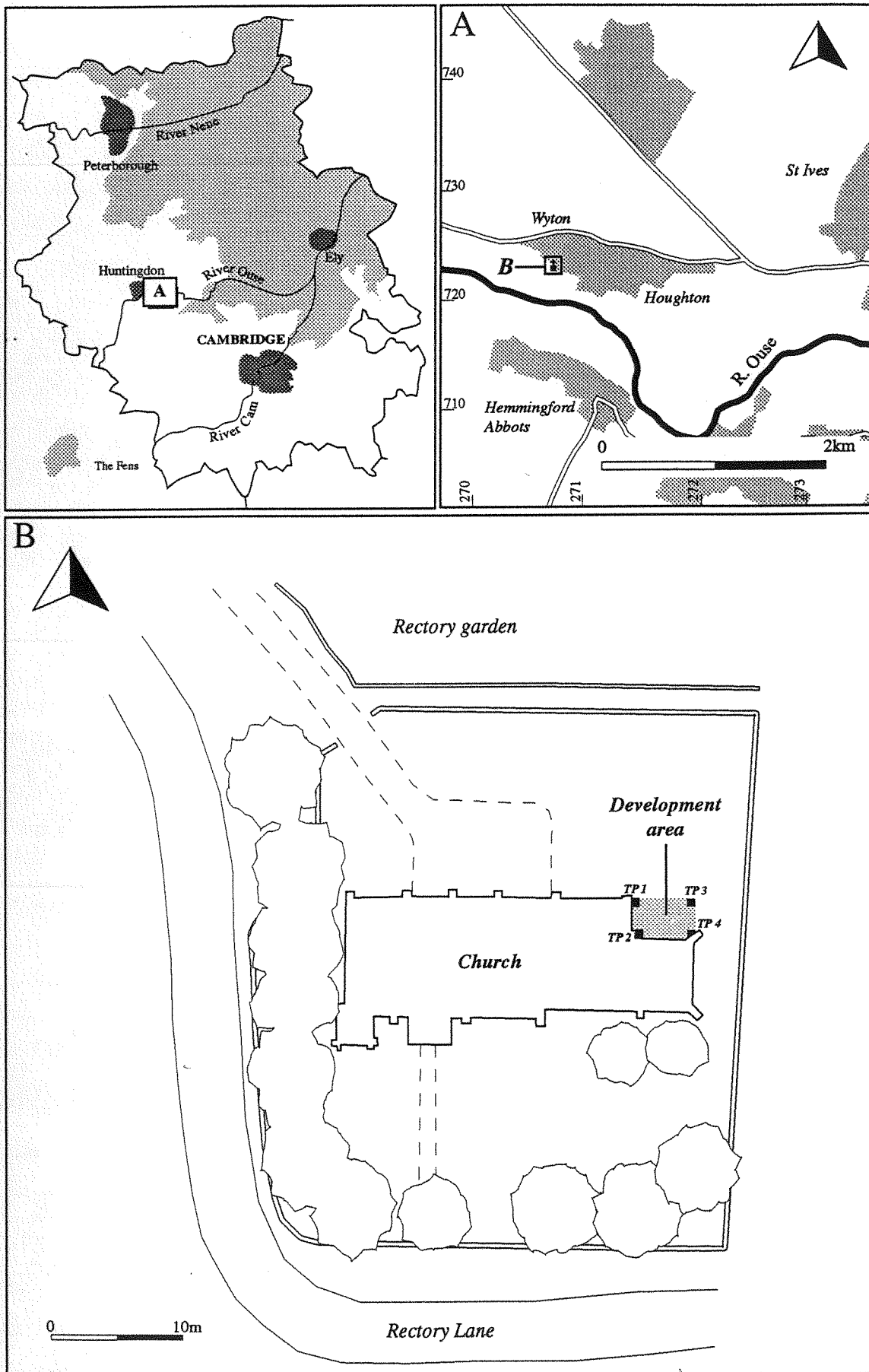
GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

The underlying geology is 1st/2nd terrace gravels over grey mudstones (BGS 1975). The land in Wyton slopes from approximately 30m at Houghton Hill to approximately 9m along the river Great Ouse to the south. The site is almost level, sloping slightly to the south, but has been rendered uneven by burials and more recently dumping of rubble and rubbish.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The manor of Wyton was given to Ramsey Abbey by Earl Alfwold before AD900 and the gift was confirmed by King Edgar in 974. In 1086 Ramsey Abbey's holding in Wyton was assessed at 7 hides (VCH 1932).

A church is recorded at Wyton in the Domesday survey but the present church is thought to date to the twelfth century. The nave is believed to be a thirteenth century construction with a fourteenth century extension to the chancel.



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Figure 1 Site location

During the late nineteenth century the incumbent at Wyton was father of the remarkable woman traveller, Isabella Bird who doubtless worshipped at the church (Burn-Murdoch 1996).

The church was made redundant in 1968. The surrounding burial ground is rough and uneven with the headstones removed (these line the area). A modern burial ground has been opened to the north.

The presence of prehistoric and Roman material recorded in the Cambridgeshire County Council Sites and Monuments Record highlights the potential of the site for the preservation of remains below the current church and burial ground.

METHODOLOGY

A brief for basic archaeological investigation was issued by the Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeology Office in June 1998. This required the monitoring of groundwork and initial stages of construction.

Staff from the Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Field Unit monitored soil stripping and hand excavation of the foundations for the proposed conservatory on the north side of the chancel. Spoil was scanned for human remains and artefactual evidence. The work was recorded using the standard forms of the AFU and photographs were taken of the church and the foundations.

The paper archive will be held at the offices of the AFU under the site code HOUSM98, the material archive will be held in the short term at the AFU offices at Fulbourn and in the long term at the Cambridgeshire County Council archaeological store at Landbeach (access can be arranged through the Cambridgeshire County Council Sites and Monuments Officer). The human remains will be returned to the parish for reburial.

RESULTS

Footing 1

The first foundation pit (0.6m x 0.5m and 0.5m deep) on the north-eastern corner of the north aisle (Fig 1.) revealed a glazed ceramic drain approximately 0.10m below the present ground surface. This ran north-south, parallel to the wall. Below the disturbance caused by the laying of this drain was a modern (nineteenth/twentieth century) footing, for the north aisle. The soil next to the footing contained large flint nodules and fragments of limestone similar to that incorporated into the adjacent church wall. A small fragment of ceramic roof tile was recovered from the spoil, together with a fragment of modern window glass.

Footing 2

The second foundation pit (0.6m x 0.6m and 0.5m deep) was dug in the corner of the chancel and north aisle and again revealed a glazed ceramic drain just below the modern ground surface. The modern foundations (underpinning) of the north aisle were visible but on the southern side of the pit the foundations appear to be part the fourteenth century chancel. The spoil contained fragments of human skull and disarticulated long bone, flint nodules and large fragments of limestone.

Footing 3

The third foundation pit (0.7m x 0.6m and 0.6m deep) was located in the north-eastern corner of the proposed extension. The topsoil was a very dark, loose, organic clay silt which contained a considerable root system from nearby trees. The subsoil was a brown clay silt with very few stones. Between the topsoil and the subsoil was a thin (less than 20mm) layer of gravel and small stones. Two fragments of skull were recovered from the topsoil. Nothing was noted in the subsoil.

Footing 4

The final foundation pit (approximately triangular in shape – 1m x 0.7m and 0.5m deep) was located next to north wall of chancel and north-eastern buttress. A considerable amount of rubble associated with the chancel foundations and buttress were noted in the spoil and part of the stem of a 'church warden' pipe was found but no human remains were recovered.

No excavation connected with the proposed drainage works was carried out during the site visit. A further monitoring visit will be made once the AFU are notified that further work is to be carried out on the site.

CONCLUSIONS

Following removal of modern overburden, topsoil and dumped rubble, excavation revealed nineteenth century structural elements relating to the restoration and rebuilding of parts of the church. These elements include drains, foundations and underpinning for the north nave. No such recent work was found along the chancel wall and the foundations appear to relate to the extant building with no subsequent alteration.

No structural elements were found in the north-eastern foundation pit and the excavated area barely exposed the subsoil. Fragments of disarticulated human bone were found in all holes. It is likely that the disarticulated bone is the result of burials disturbing earlier burials and also resulting from disturbance relating to work on the north aisle and insertion of the drain. No pre-nineteenth century features (other than the church foundations) were noted in the exposed areas but the holes did not extend beyond 0.6m deep and only just reached the subsoil. It is possible that earlier features exist but that these will not be affected by the development of the church.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank Optima (Cambridge) Ltd. who commissioned the work and their staff who carried out the work on site. Thanks also to Jon Cane who produced the illustration and William Wall, the Project Manager.

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Cambridgeshire
County Council

Archaeology

The Archaeological Field Unit
Fulbourn Community Centre
Haggis Gap
Fulbourn
Cambridge CB1 5HD
Tel (01223) 881614
Fax (01223) 880946