

Archaeological Field Unit

**Saint Mary's and All Saints Church, Willingham.
An Archaeological Investigation**

Andrew Hatton

1999

Cambridgeshire County Council

Report No. B43

Commissioned by All Saints Parochial Church Council Willingham

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Summary

An archaeological watching brief was carried out on behalf of St Mary's and All Saints Parochial Church Council Willingham during 1998. The objective of the watching brief was to record and investigate any archaeological features observed during the groundworks for the construction of a new church hall immediately to the north of the church and within the graveyard at TL405 708. No in situ articulated human remains were found which development would disturb. Disarticulated, disturbed human remains were found throughout the groundworks. No archaeological features were present within the observed groundworks. Observations were carried out as necessary by archaeologists employed by the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council in response to a Brief prepared by the Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeology Office Development Control Section (Austin 1996).

SAINT MARY'S and ALL SAINTS CHURCH, WILLINGHAM (WILNCH98)
An Archaeological Investigation

By Andrew Hatton

1. INTRODUCTION

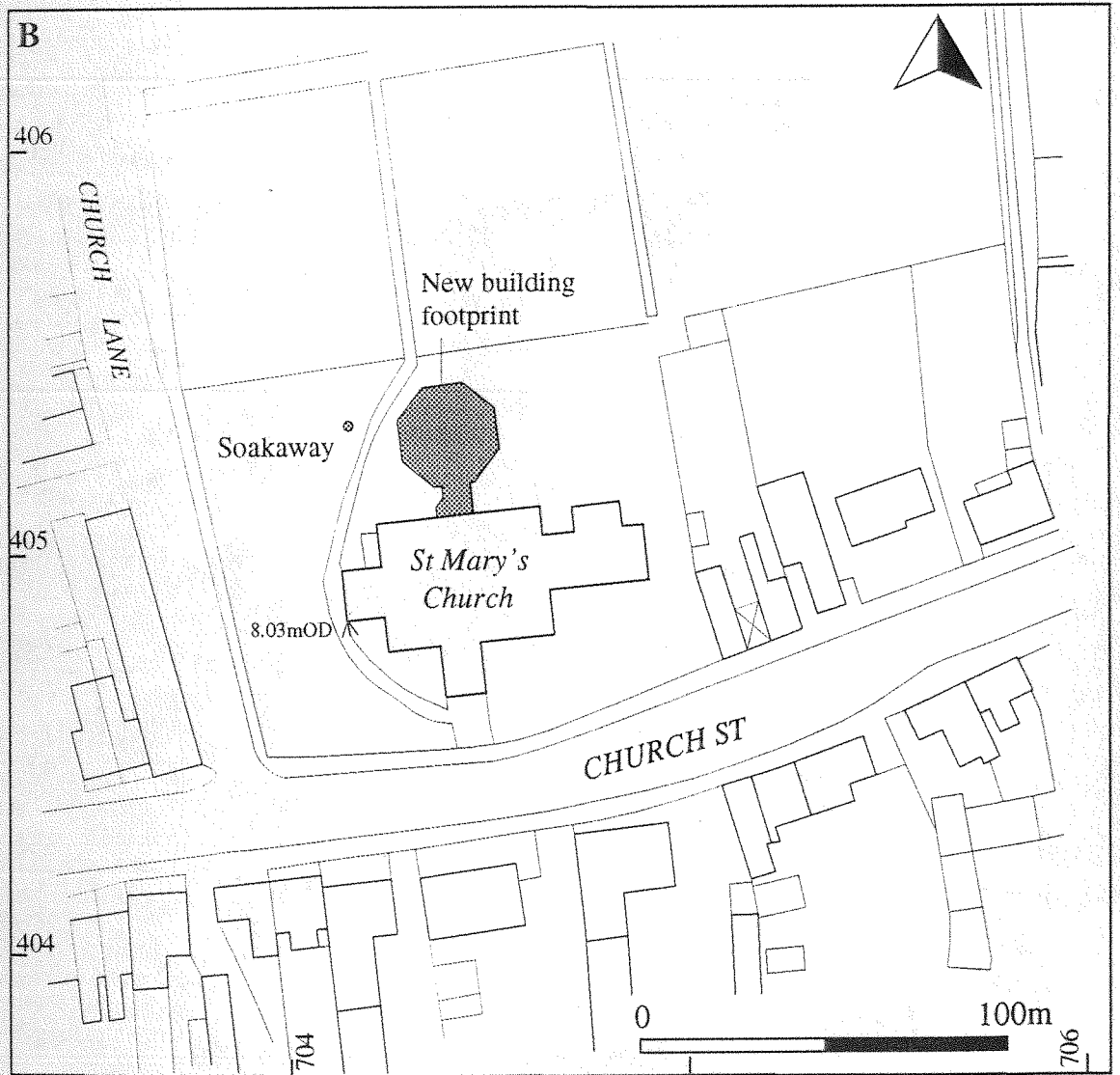
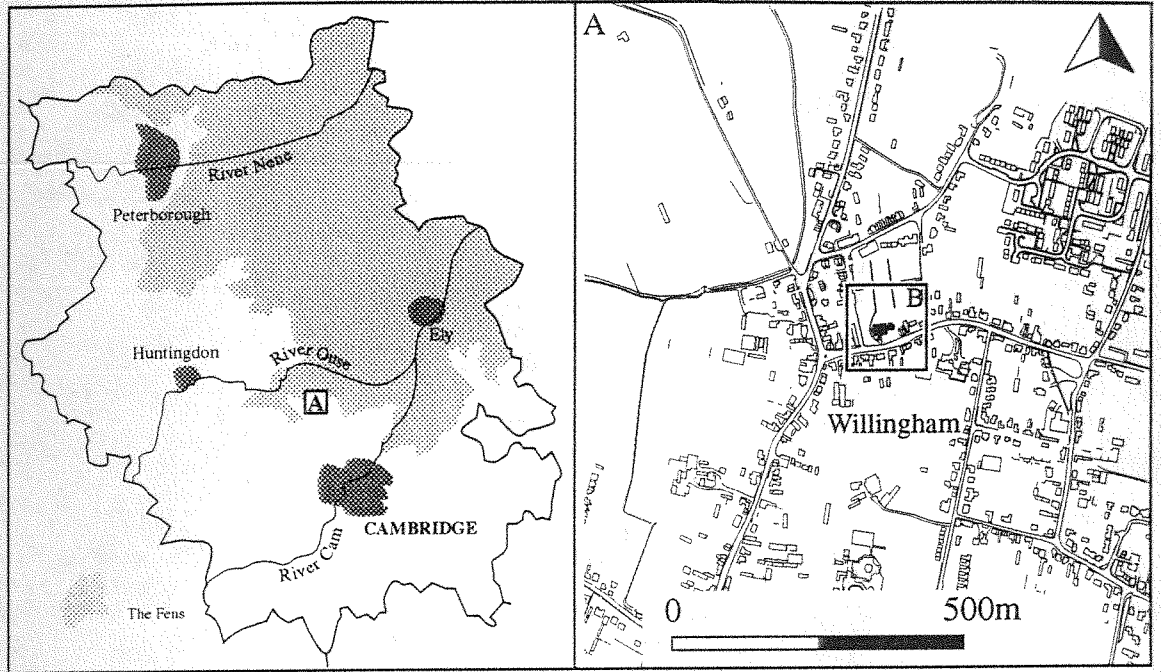
- 1.1 An archaeological watching brief was carried out on behalf of St Mary's and All Saints Parochial Church Council Willingham during 1998. The objective of the watching brief was to record and investigate any archaeological features observed during the groundworks for the construction of a new church hall immediately to the north of the church and within the graveyard at TL405 708 (*Figure 1*). No in situ articulated human remains were found which development would disturb. Disarticulated, disturbed human remains were found throughout the groundworks, these were collected for immediate reburial within the churchyard. Observations were carried out as necessary by archaeologists employed by the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council in response to a Brief prepared by the Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeology Office Development Control Section (Austin 1996).

2 GEOLOGY

- 2.1 The underlying geology of the site consists of Alluvium on 2nd Terrace River Gravels (British Geological Survey Sheet Number 188).

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Architectural features at the church of St Mary's and All Saints date to the Anglo-Saxon period (SMR 5794a). The architectural features suggest that an earlier Saxon church and cemetery may have been present on this site. Some of these Saxon features appear to have Norman and late Norman modifications. Excavations to the south of the church (Connor, Forthcoming) demonstrate the presence of a middle Saxon settlement.
- 3.2 The antiquity of the church suggests that there may have been a series of buildings, features of which have been incorporated into later builds, at the site for possibly a thousand years or more. The layout of the buildings, grounds and cemeteries associated with any earlier building(s) is unknown. The site has probably been used as a graveyard for at least the last thousand years and the digging of graves within the churchyard especially in more recent times, was thought likely to have disturbed or destroyed any earlier remains. Nevertheless, the possibility remained that pockets of undisturbed archaeological remains may have survived.



TL

4 METHODOLOGY

The foundation trenches for the new church hall and soak-away were dug using a combination of mini-digger and hand excavation observed by archaeologists of the AFU. Recording followed the AFU's pro-forma recording system. Spoil was scanned for artefacts and human remains. Artefacts were collected and processed in line with AFU standard practice, disarticulated and disturbed human remains were collected and returned to the Vicar immediately for reburial.

5 RESULTS (Figure 1)

5.1 Foundation trench

The building foundation trench was excavated using a combination of mini-digger and hand excavation to a depth of 1m. The trench was 0.50m wide and followed the outline of the new building footprint shown in figure 1. No archaeological features were encountered during the excavation of the foundation trench. The soil removed was a well turned homogeneous dark greyish brown sandy clay. Disarticulated human bone, animal bone, and post-medieval brick, tile, glass and a few pottery sherds were recovered from the deposit. The majority of the finds were recovered from the trench closest to the church and may have been deposited when steps and a path were constructed to the north door.

5.2 Service trenches

The excavation of two service trenches was observed: each trench was excavated to a depth of 0.30m and displayed the same characteristic deposit as the foundation trench, that is a well turned homogeneous dark greyish brown sandy clay with no archaeological features. Small amounts of disarticulated human bone and animal bone was recovered from these trenches.

5.3 Soak-away pit

Observation of the excavation of a soak-away pit demonstrated similar deposits to those found in the foundation and service trenches. The 1m square soak-away pit was dug with a mini-digger to a depth of 1.8m. At this depth it became apparent that *in-situ* articulated human remains would be disturbed and the depth of the soak-away was decreased to 1.5m but increased to 1.2m square to compensate for the shallower depth. No further *in-situ* human remains were observed and no archaeological features were present within the area of the soak-away.

6 CONCLUSION

The area of the observed ground disturbances in connection with the construction of a new church hall showed that there is a deep deposit of mixed homogeneous soils to the north of the church which have been turned over to such an extent that any archaeological remains or in-situ human remains have been removed. It is, therefore, impossible from these observations to make any comments on the ancient history of the church.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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REFERENCES

SMR Cambridgeshire Sites and Monuments Record
Connor, Forthcoming. Anglo-Saxon settlement at the Berrycroft Site, Willingham.



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