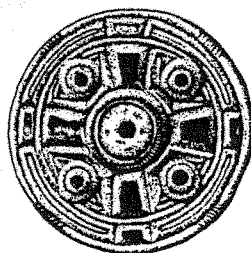


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Church Extension at All Saints Church, Little Shelford: An Archaeological Evaluation

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Cambridgeshire County Council

Report No. B66

Commissioned by The Building Task Force for All Saints Church, Little Shelford

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An Archaeological Evaluation**

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SUMMARY

An archaeological evaluation of part of the churchyard to the north of All Saints Church, Little Shelford, was undertaken by the Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Field Unit in December 1999. Trenches revealed the edge of a modern brick structure and in situ burials.

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**Church Extension at All Saints Church, Little Shelford:
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(TL 4535 5168)**

INTRODUCTION

In December 1999 the Archaeological Field Unit (AFU) of Cambridgeshire County Council undertook an evaluation to reveal archaeological remains in the burial ground to the north of All Saints Church, Little Shelford (TL 4535 5168) (Fig. 1). The work was carried out on behalf of Charles Kingdon, Chairman of the Building Task Force, All Saints Church, Little Shelford. The evaluation was requested by the County Archaeology Office before construction of a single storey extension on the north side of the church.

GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

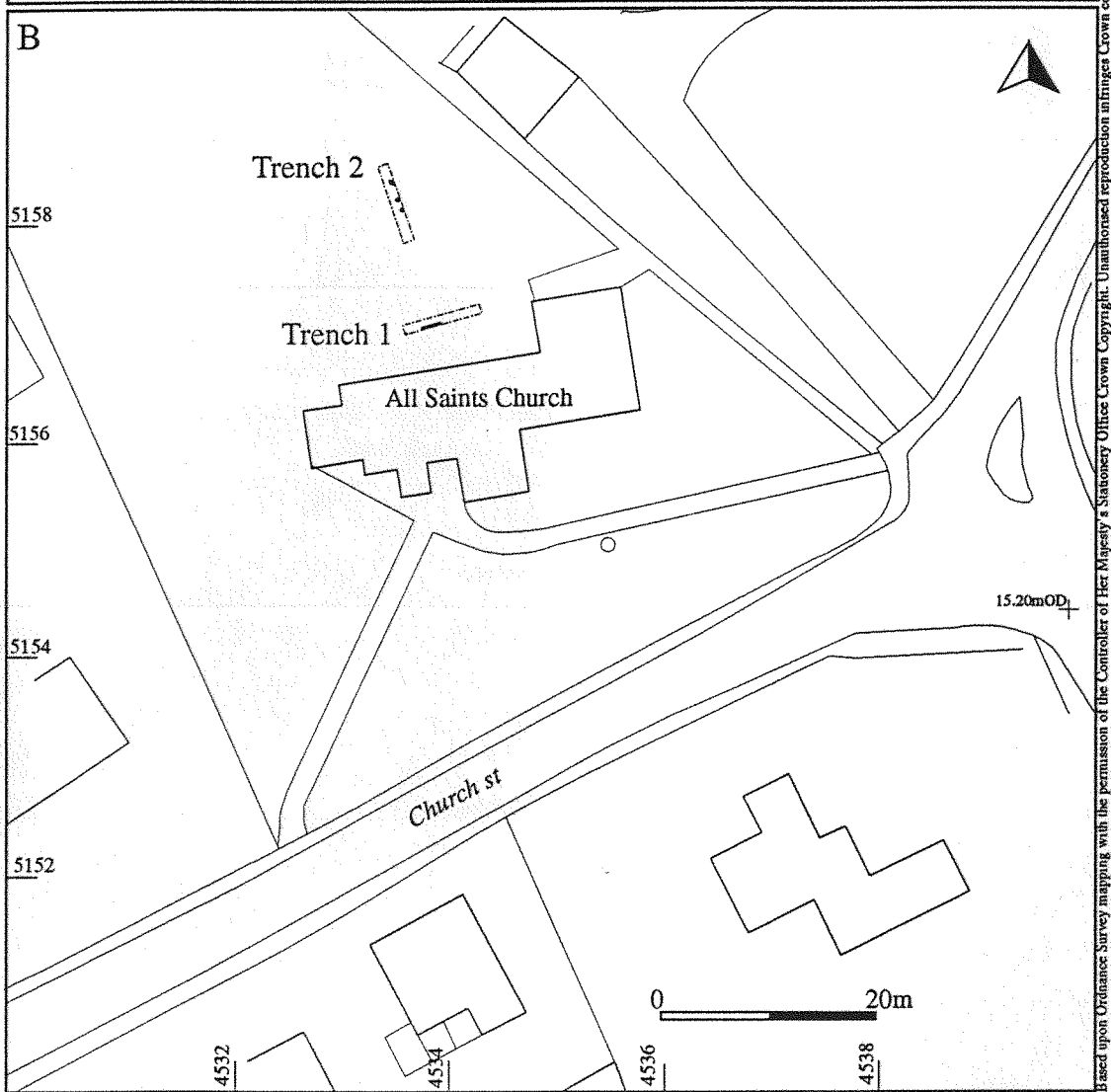
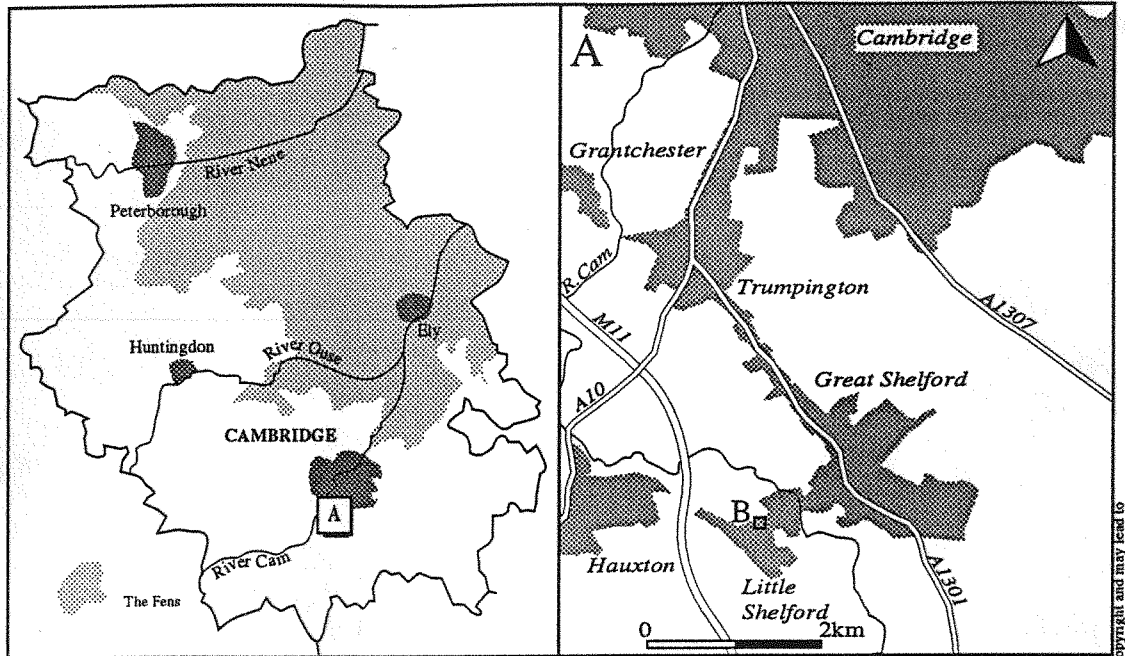
The site lies on lowest and intermediate terrace gravels overlying Melbourn Rock (BGS 1970) at approximately 15mOD. The site overlooks the valley of the River Cam, sloping down to the north towards the river and a crossing place. The churchyard is relatively flat with a raised area close to the church.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Little Shelford lies approximately 5km south of Cambridge on the southern bank of the Cam and forms part of a paired settlement (with Great Shelford) with churches and early occupation areas on either side of a river crossing.

The alluvium and gravel terraces along river Cam have been settled since prehistoric times. A Bronze Age axe was found near the river (SMR no. 4864), north-west of the church. Extensive cropmarks have been recorded around the village and it is likely that the area was occupied in the Iron Age and Roman period.

The paired settlements of Great and Little Shelford were located on either side of an early crossing place of the river Cam which coincided with adjacent areas of dry gravel land (Great Shelford Local History Class 1999). The river cuts through a gap in the gravel terraces, in contrast to the marshy land upstream and downstream. This crossing place was the 'shallow ford' which gave its name to the two villages (Reaney 1943). The Saxon settlement probably extended along the route on either side of the ford. During the eleventh century the population of Little Shelford was between 45 and 70 people probably occupying between 12 and 18 houses along the street. The population appears to have grown slowly and the Little Shelford has remained considerably smaller than neighbouring Great Shelford.



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Figure 1 Site location showing position of archaeological trenches. Burials are shown in black.

Artefacts from a pagan Anglo-Saxon burial are recorded on the Sites and Monuments Record (SMR no. 4803) for the parish. These were found during the 1920s and no further evidence for an Anglo-Saxon burial ground has been found in the parish. In the late Saxon period Little Shelford was a place of some importance. All Saints Church is recorded in the Domesday Book as one of three minsters in Cambridgeshire (Taylor 1997). Fragments of late Saxon stonework (including grave covers) have been incorporated into the existing structure and it seems likely that these were built in to the church during one of its many phases of repair and reconstruction (SMR no. 4732). The present church is medieval; a late eleventh century fabric with additions and repairs throughout the medieval period and major extension and reconstruction in the nineteenth century (around 1878).

At the end of the fourteenth century the bridge between Great and Little Shelford was in existence and a hermitage was situated at the bridge by 1398. By 1730 the Turnpike Trust had taken over the road between Great and Little Shelford leading to improvements in the road and bridge. A stone bridge crossed the river in the seventeenth century and was rebuilt in 1782. During the medieval and post-medieval period the settlement spread west along Church Street and south along High Street from the meeting place of the roads near the church. The houses along the road down to the river may have been moved as part of the expansion of the park surrounding the manor. The common medieval field system of Little Shelford was divided and enclosed in 1814. With enclosure came public drains leading to improved drainage around the area. It is reported that the land to the north of the church was, at times, unfavourable for burials because of the high water table (Kingdon, pers. comm.) but the land currently appears to be well drained.

METHODOLOGY AND CONSTRAINTS

The evaluation was carried out in accordance with a specification approved by the Cambridgeshire County Council County Archaeology Office. Two trenches were dug, one parallel to the nave and one perpendicular to the church (Fig. 1), in spaces between visible graves. The topsoil was removed using a mini-digger (with a 1.2m wide bucket) until archaeologically sensitive levels were reached. Remains were noted between 1m and 1.1m below the present ground surface. The base of the trenches were trowelled clean in order to define the archaeological deposits.

Trenches were planned at 1:50, photographed and sample excavated in order to establish their character, date and state of preservation. Features were recorded using the standard techniques of the AFU. In this report fill/deposit numbers are shown in plan text and cut numbers in bold text. Heights were surveyed from a 15.2mOD spot height on the road outside the churchyard (there being no bench mark on the church or in the vicinity). Finds were returned to the AFU offices for cleaning and analysis and the written and material archive will be kept at the AFU offices in Fulbourn in the short and medium term.

RESULTS

Trench 1

Trench 1, 8.5m long, ran approximately north-south, to the east of two yew trees and a line of nineteenth century head stones. The trench was approximately 1.2m deep with tree roots throughout the topsoil and subsoil. The topsoil was approximately 0.6m deep over a slightly sandy gravel silt. Four graves could be seen in the west facing section of the trench (but did not extend across the trench) and could be seen cutting into the gravel natural in the base of the trench. The graves were investigated but not fully excavated (in accordance with the Design Brief and Specification). No dating evidence was recovered from this trench and there was no sign of a grave marker for any of the graves. The graves were unevenly spaced (varying between 1.6m and 0.4m between them) and the degree of sorting in the fills suggests were dug at different times. The two northernmost grave fills contained considerably more gravel and had sharply defined cuts. Those to the south were less clearly defined.

No other features were noted in this trench.

Trench 2

Trench 2 (approximately 9m long) ran east-west, parallel with the north wall of the church and 3.3m to the north. At the eastern end of the trench modern service pipes were encountered. The trench (just over 1m deep) revealed a modern brick structure, in its southern section. This brick structure was cut into the sandy gravel natural and was poorly finished suggesting it was not meant to be seen and it was not impermeable. It would appear that the raised area between the trench and church wall was a vault relating to the memorial stone on the mound.

At the western end of the trench, close to the surface, was an ash pit. The ash probably came from the Victorian boiler and was deposited close to the path from the nearby north door. To the east of this ash pit was a burial, 1.1m deep, cut into the natural. The cut was barely visible in the section and the grave cut in the base of the trench and the position of the bones indicates the body was buried in a shroud rather than a coffin. No metalwork was found associated with this burial and no dating evidence. A penny (dated 1799) was found during machining but cannot be ascribed to any particular feature in the trench.

CONCLUSIONS

The trenches within the footprint of the proposed extension to the church did not reveal the presence of archaeological remains (other than the expected burials). The absence of Anglo-Saxon remains suggests that if the minster lay to the north, beyond the present church, it did not extend into the area that is likely to be affected by the proposed new building. The absence of Anglo-Saxon or later finds discovered during the work suggests this area, to the north of the church, was open and used solely as a burial ground. Further work in this part of the churchyard is unlikely to reveal complex archaeological remains.

The impact of the proposal on the historic structure of the church is likely to be minimal as the extension has been sited away from the building with just a covered walk-way between the church and the extension (Kingdon, pers. comm.). The precise impact should be assessed once final architectural plans are agreed.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank the Building Task Force for All Saints Church which commissioned the work and Charles Kingdon (Chairman of the Task Force) who liaised with the AFU and visited the site. Phil Church worked on site with the author and Jon Cane prepared the illustrations. The project was managed by Paul Spoerry. The brief for archaeological evaluation was written by Andy Thomas, Development Control Officer, and the site was monitored by Quentin Carroll.

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