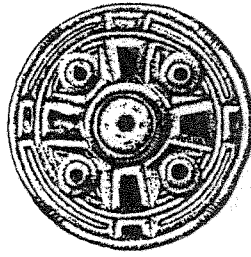


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Archaeological Field Unit

**St. Mary's Church Extension,
Orton Waterville:
An Archaeological Evaluation**

Andrew Hatton

2001

Cambridgeshire County Council

Report No. B92

Commissioned by The Vicar and Parish of St. Mary, the Virgin, Orton Waterville

**St. Mary's Church Extension,
Orton Waterville
An Archaeological Evaluation
(NGR TL 1563 9609)**

Andrew Hatton, BSc

August 2001

Editor : Judith Roberts, MA
Illustrator : Jon Cane BA

Report No. B92

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

Arch.Field.Unit@libraries.camcnty.gov.uk
<http://www.camcnty.gov.uk/library/afu/index.htm>
<http://www.archaeology.freewire.co.uk>

SUMMARY

On the 3rd and 6th of August 2001 the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council conducted an archaeological evaluation on land adjoining the north aisle of St. Mary's Church, Orton Waterville in advance of the construction of a new meeting hall and associated ground works. The aim of the intervention was to record and assess the nature of any archaeological evidence encountered before construction and hence to assess the potential for surviving remains.

Given the presence of prehistoric features and artefacts, Roman settlement evidence together with Anglo-Saxon, medieval and post medieval occupation around the development area, particular attention was paid to the identification and interpretation of deposits and features in the context of what is a rich archaeological landscape.

During the archaeological evaluation, evidence of fairly recent burials was observed, no positive evidence was recovered of early land use.

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**St. Mary's Church, Orton Waterville Extension.
An Archaeological Evaluation
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1 INTRODUCTION

On the 3rd and 6th of August 2001 the Archaeological Field Unit (AFU) of Cambridgeshire County Council undertook an archaeological evaluation on behalf of The Vicar and Parish of St. Mary the Virgin, Orton Waterville (TL 1563 9609). in the area of the churchyard allocated for the construction of an extension. The work was carried out in response to a Brief prepared by the Peterborough City Council Archaeological Service.

2 SITE BACKGROUND

Planning Background

The development entails the construction of a new meeting room, covering an area of c 10m x 10m (Planning Application No. 97/00730/FUL), adjoining the north aisle of the church, with the possibility of a new service trench being excavated to exit the churchyard to the north.

The work was carried out by staff of the AFU for The Vicar and Parish of St. Mary the Virgin, Orton Waterville, in accordance with the Brief produced by Ben Robinson, Peterborough City Council Archaeological Service (PCCAS), (Brief for Archaeological Evaluation, 05/05/01).

Geology

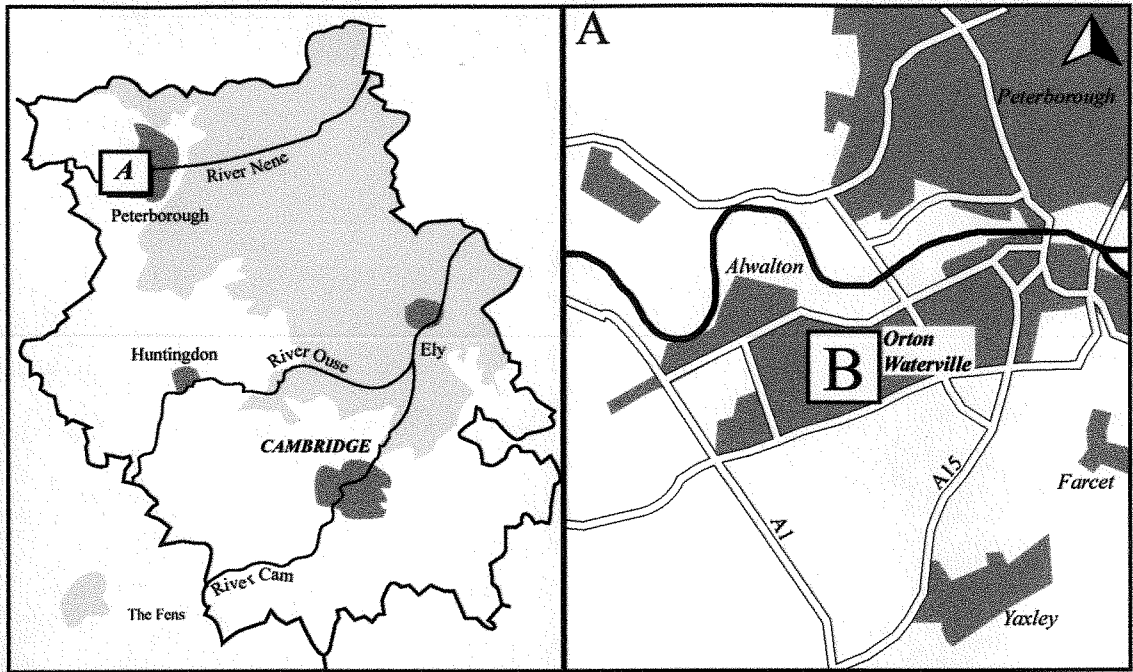
The local geology consists of Cornbrash and Kellaway Clay (BGS Sheet 158).

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The likelihood of finding archaeology belonging to the prehistoric period was considered poor given the location of the development within the churchyard. Although evidence for sites dating to this period has been recovered within the vicinity of the proposed development site.

Prehistoric

Evidence of Neolithic occupation in the form of storage pits with Peterborough Ware was uncovered during gravel extraction to the north-east of the development site (PCCSMR 01807b).



TL

Figure 1 Site Location Map

Based upon Ordnance Survey mapping with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office Crown Copyright. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. (Cambridgeshire County Council licence No. LA 07649X 2001)

Bronze Age activity is mainly represented by barrows from which a number of burials were recovered together with Beaker pottery and flint implements. These were uncovered during gravel extraction to the east of the development site (PCCSMR 01807c).

The Iron Age settlement is represented through the discovery of settlement evidence, including a storage pit from which Iron Age pottery was recovered in association with Roman finds (see below). The Iron Age evidence was discovered during gravel extraction to the east of the development site (PCCSMR 01807d)

It would appear that the focus of settlement concentrates on the higher, well drained, third terrace river gravels, whereas monuments associated with ritual were located further down slope, closer to the river.

Roman

The earliest elements in the Roman landscape were Ermine Street which crosses the River Nene at Water Newton, the Vexillation fortress at Longthorpe and the auxiliary fort also at Water Newton. Military activity has also been found at Lynch Farm, Orton Longueville. The military presence in the region brought about the development of the 'vici' of *Durobrivae* (Water Newton) and Chesterton in a landscape progressively dominated by villa-estates and farmsteads, together with pottery and metalworking industries.

Closer to the development site, Roman activity is represented by the discovery of settlement evidence, including the tile, crude pottery and also human burials (PCCSMR 01807e). Slightly further to the north-west, in the parish of Orton Longueville, Roman remains were identified in the southern portion of the school recreation ground during an excavation conducted in 1959/60. Evidence emerged for three furnaces with stoke pits. The features were dated to the first half of the second century and had already fallen into disuse by the mid-third century when they were partly destroyed by the construction of a rectangular building (Daking 1961). Roman stray finds include mainly pottery (PCCSMR 07863).

Saxon

At least two *grubenhäuser* with sunken floors were found to the north-west of the development site during gravel extraction (PCCSMR 02016). To the east a possible early Anglo-Saxon settlement was identified consisting of 'houses', sixth/seventh century pottery, combs and spindle whorls, all discovered during gravel extraction (PCCSMR 01807f).

Medieval

Orton is known as Ofertune (tenth-eleventh century) and later Ovretune and Ortun. During the eleventh century, Ansered or Ansgered a military sub-tenant was the first of the branch of the Waterville family granted land at Orton.

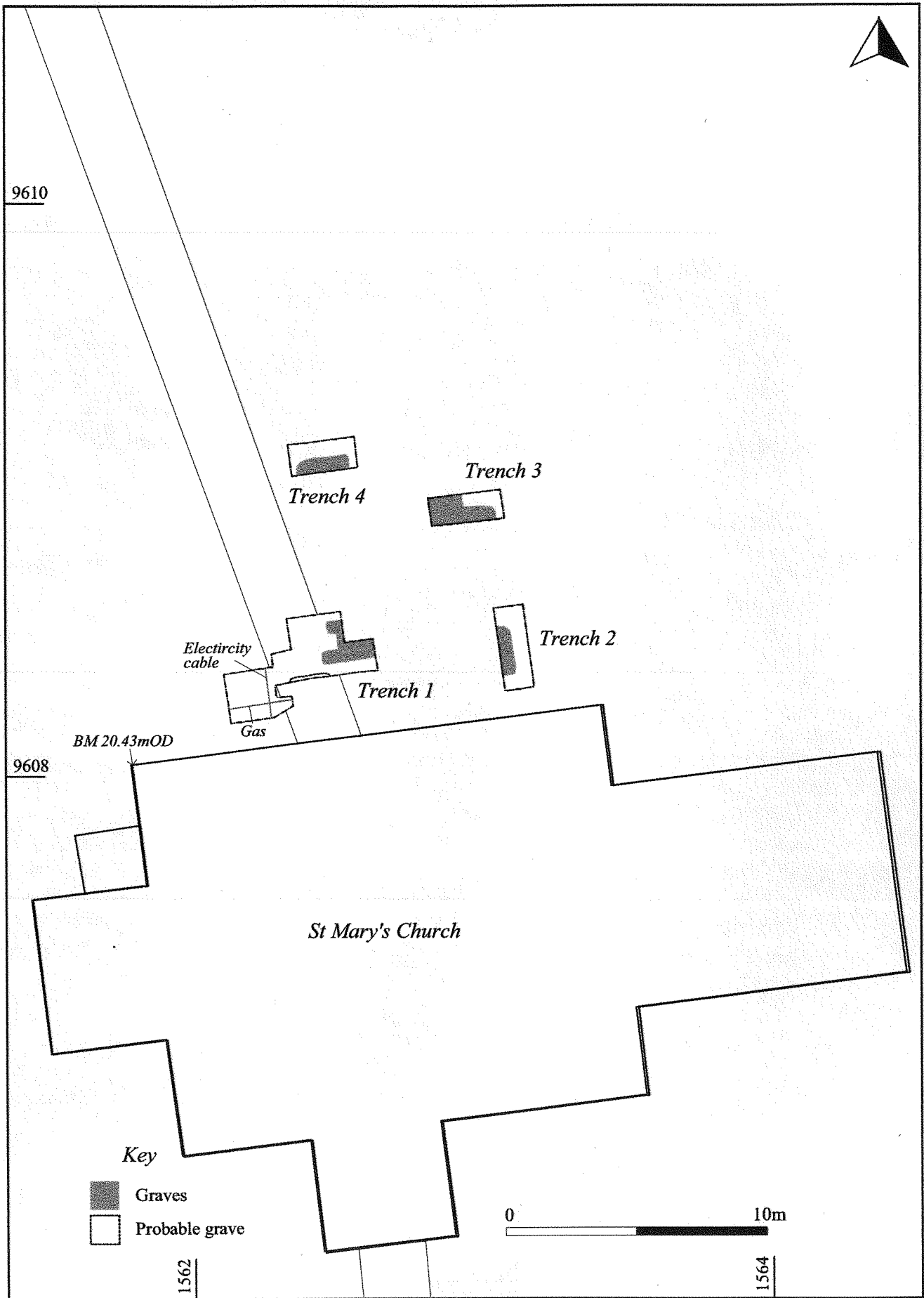


Figure 2 Details of Trenches 1 - 4

The parish churches of St. Mary's at Orton Waterville and Holy Trinity at Orton Longueville have a medieval origin. Both churches were later rebuilt (Page 1974).

Post-Medieval

Numerous post-medieval buildings and barns survive in the parish of Orton Waterville. Their distribution along (and off) Cherry Orton Road seems to suggest continuity of settlement from the Norman period onwards, with the St. Mary's Church being the focus for later settlement growth.

4 METHODOLOGY

A 'mini' mechanical excavator was used to excavate four evaluation trenches. All the trenches avoided visible graves. Trench 1 had a complex shape in plan, due to the discovery of previously unknown services necessitating relocation of the trench (Fig. 2). The remaining trenches ranged in length between 2.8m and 2.3m with a constant width of 1m. At the point where grave cuts were encountered, machine excavation ceased and a hand-excavated test pit was dug avoiding burials where possible.

The trenches were cleaned, where necessary, photographed and planned, using the AFU's standard recording system. Sections were drawn at a scale of 1:10 and photographed.

Any human bone disturbed as a result of the excavation of the trial trenches were given to the Vicar for re-burial.

5 RESULTS (Fig. 2)

Trench 1

Trench 1 (maximum length of 3.5m and maximum width 2m) was located on the route of the path. The first burial cut was encountered at a depth of 0.55m. This was not identified immediately and a degree of over machining took place exposing human skeletal remains. A location was then chosen within the trench for a test-pit, avoiding further disturbance of the *in situ* burials. The depositional sequence, is as follows: turf, 0.06m thick, sealed a pea-grit layer, 0.08m thick (path make-up), below the pea-grit was a layer of imported topsoil, possibly used to infill the depression created by constant use of the path. Below the imported topsoil the original greyish brown sandy silty topsoil 0.30m thick, which in turn sealed mid-brown sandy silty subsoil removal of which exposed the Cornbrash natural geology.

A total of four inter-cutting graves were identified in the trench, none of which produced any coffin furniture.

Trench 2

Trench 2 was 2.8m long x 1m wide and machine excavated to a depth of 0.57m before a large burial cut (probably a double burial) was identified, at which point machining stopped and a hand-excavated test pit was dug. The depositional sequence shown in section 3, is as follows: turf 0.10m thick sealed a heavily disturbed a greyish brown sandy silty topsoil 0.95m thick, which on removal exposed the mid-brown sandy silty subsoil 0.25m thick, which in turn sealed the Cornbrash natural geology.

Because no excavation of the burial took place it was not possible to say if the individuals had been buried in coffins.

Trench 3

Trench 3 was 2.5m long x 1m wide and machine excavated to a depth of 0.56m before two inter-cutting burials was identified, at which point a machining stopped and a hand excavated test pit was dug. The depositional sequence shown in section 4, is as follows: turf, 0.10m thick, sealed a heavily disturbed greyish brown sandy silty topsoil 1.4m thick, which on removal exposed the Cornbrash natural geology. The absence of a subsoil may be explained by the continual re-excavation of the soil for burial.

Because no excavation of the burial took place it was not possible to say if the individuals had been buried in coffins.

Trench 4

Trench 4 was 2.3m long x 1m wide and machine excavated to a depth of 0.60m before a single burial was identified, at which point a machining stopped and a hand-excavated test pit was dug. The depositional sequence is as follows: turf 0.08m thick sealed a heavily disturbed a greyish brown sandy silty topsoil 1.4m thick, which on removal exposed the Cornbrash natural geology. The absence of a subsoil is probably caused by the continual re-excavation of the soil for burials.

Because no excavation of the burial took place it was not possible to say if the individuals had been buried in coffins.

6 DISCUSSION

The aims of the study were to highlight the potential for the preservation of archaeological remains on the subject site and to identify the stratigraphic sequence of burials and how that may be affected by the proposed development as well as the identification of any pre-church deposits. The development involves the removal of all the topsoil and subsoil together with some of the natural Cornbrash geology.

The key research issues specific to the site relate to location St. Mary's Church. Evaluation trenches revealed nine burials; not considered to be of a great age.

7 CONCLUSION

The evaluation identified a stratigraphic sequence in Trench 1 which has the potential for being applied to the rest of the area to be developed. The deposition sequence on site has also been identified, with the two trenches nearest the church showing Cornbrash sealed by sandy silty subsoil which in turn is sealed by topsoil. The two trenches furthest from the church showed no subsoil, which may be due to greater use of the land for burial and re-burial.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank the following people for their valued assistance in respect of this evaluation report: The Vicar and Parish of St. Mary the Virgin who commissioned the project and co-operated during the work; Mr Ben Robinson of PCCAS, Peterborough Museum and Art Gallery, who monitored the project.

Thanks are also due to the staff of the AFU and, in particular Ron Mckenna for invaluable work on-site, Steve Critchley (Mr Geology) for providing a metal detecting service and valuable information concerning the local geology, and Jon Cane for providing the reports illustrations.

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SMR. Peterborough City Council, Sites and Monuments Record



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