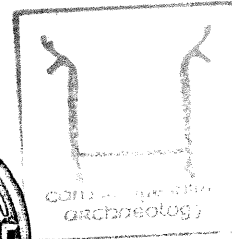
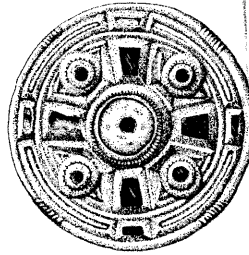


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Archaeological Field Unit

## Human Remains at St Mary Magdalene Churchyard, Ickleton

Twigs Way

1998

**Cambridgeshire County Council**

Report No. B27

*Commissioned By Purcell Miller and Tritton & Partners*

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T. Way PhD, MA, BSc

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## **SUMMARY**

*Archaeological recording was carried out during the excavation of a service trench associated with development at St Mary Magdalene Church, Ickleton. The trench was located along the south side of the present chancel, extending from the east wall of the south transept to the gate on the eastern boundary of the churchyard.*

*Disarticulated human remains were found to be concentrated within the western half of the trench within disturbed top and subsoil. In addition, four in-situ burials were recorded along the length of the trench, at depths varying between 0.60m and 0.80m below present day ground surface. Juveniles and infants formed a high proportion of all recovered human material. All in-situ burials were left undisturbed whilst disarticulated remains were recovered and then re-buried on site.*

*In addition a single fragment of St Neots Ware was recovered from close to the base of the foundations of the east wall of the south chancel.*

# **HUMAN REMAINS AT ST MARY MAGDALENE CHURCHYARD, ICKLETON**

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Field Unit undertook archaeological recording during groundworks associated with development at St Mary Magdalene Church, Ickleton, from April 27th to May 1st. Archaeological recording took place throughout the duration of groundworks associated with the provision of a new water supply and foul drain, running through a narrow easement. The easement ran from the south corner of the south transept for a distance of some 33m to the gate at the north east corner on the eastern boundary of the curtilage on Butchers' Hill.

The primary aim of the archaeological recording was to identify and recover all human remains disturbed, or liable to be disturbed, by the groundworks. A further aim was the identification and recording of any non-inhumation archaeological remains including remains or indications of earlier buildings, activity or settlement related artefacts.

## **2. BACKGROUND RESEARCH**

The earliest fabric of St Mary Magdalene dates to the early post-conquest period (circa. 1100). A church is not recorded for the village within the Domesday Book and it would therefore appear to be an early post-conquest foundation. This accords with dating on architectural style and building fabric both of which indicate an earliest date of early post-Conquest 11th century. The fabric includes some re-used Roman material, believed to have come from either the villa site to the south of the village, or the Roman Town of Great Chesterford across the River Cam. It has been suggested in the past that the re-used material might come from an earlier Roman building on the site, and the current archaeological recording and observation was an opportunity to test this hypothesis.

Re-modelling of the church has taken place at several times within the medieval and post-medieval period and the archaeological recording and observation was an opportunity to establish whether ancillary building or activities had ever taken place in the south east area of the churchyard. The area affected by the groundworks commenced at the east wall of the south transept, containing fabric dating from c.1100, late 14th-mid 15th century, and the 18th century, and continuing along the south side of the 19th century chancel; thus the area disturbed included the area which had adjoined the original east end of the church.

The current area of churchyard lies within a sub-oval of land bounded by Church Street and Butcher's Hill that probably originally formed a larger early ecclesiastical enclosure for the church. The surviving churchyard would have formed the south east corner of this parcel.

## **3. METHODOLOGY**

The service trench for the water supply and foul drain was approximately 33m long, aligned west-east, 0.50m wide, narrowing to 0.35m, and was originally scheduled to be

0.85m deep, although this was later modified. Preliminary excavation of the trench at the east end recovered a considerable amount of disarticulated human bone, and it was thus agreed that the entire trench would be hand-dug with constant archaeological observation.

Disarticulated human remains (found from all contexts) were recovered by hand and held on-site for later reburial.

Where articulated remains were encountered these were partially exposed sufficiently to identify their *in-situ* nature, written and photographic records were made of approximate location, position, and nature of the remains, prior to burials being again covered with a layer of soil.

In all cases where *in-situ* inhumations were recovered it was possible, after consultation between the contractors and archaeologist, for the groundworks to be adapted to enable the remains to be left *in-situ*. Constant on-site consultation combined with flexibility on the part of the contractors enabled groundworks to be carried out with minimum disturbance to the archaeology, whilst the archaeological works in turn caused minimal inconvenience to the development.

#### 4. RESULTS (Figure 1)

The trench lay along a path which was topped with a thin layer of gravel. A layer of mixed topsoil and subsoil underlay this gravel path to a depth of c.0.50m - 0.40m (**Context 001**). This layer contained evidence of disturbance, pitting, material relating to deposition of previous paths, and possible dumping of flint building material. Much of this activity could probably be related to Victorian and 19th century restoration and reconstruction activities.

Disarticulated human remains were found throughout this layer along the length of the trench, although these were concentrated particularly in the area closer to the original east end of the church (the west end of the trench). This concentration of disarticulated material might suggest that burial had been concentrated in this area in the past. There was considerably less material recovered in the easternmost 5m of the trench.

A total of c. 30 litres of disarticulated human remains were recovered (3x 10 litre bags).

Below this very mixed layer was a layer of soft, loose, homogenous dark brown sandy silt with few inclusions (**Context 003**). This deposit, which had a diffuse horizon with the deposit above, contained all of the *in-situ* burials which were encountered. This deposit must be interpreted as build up resulting from long-term continuing input of organic material into the area. It is to be noted that the churchyard is presently substantially raised above the surrounding roads beyond the churchyard wall. The base of this deposit was not encountered.

The first *in-situ* burial (**Burial 002**) was encountered c.3.25 m to the east of the east wall of the south transept. The burial was 0.80m down from present day ground surface, and comprised an east-west extended, supine, inhumation with the skull facing to the north. Although the trench was extended very slightly to the south the right arm was not recovered from within the trench area, however the skeleton was otherwise complete. Brief examination suggested that the inhumation was of a sub-adult, with erupted adult teeth but unfused long bones. The measurement from top of skull to ankle bones was 1.24m. A further sub-adult mandible was recovered from the area of the skull.

The second inhumation (**Burial 001**) may have been disturbed previously and only the skull, mandible, cervical vertebrae and upper ribs were recovered. The inhumation was of a young infant/child with the primary molars only partially erupted. This inhumation lay at 0.60m below present ground surface, 5.60m east of the south chancel wall. As the inhumation appeared to have been previously disturbed (probably during the installation of an electric service directly above it) this burial was lifted and subsequently re-buried.

A further inhumation (**Burial 003**) was recorded further to the east, 2.70m beyond the east end of the present chancel, approximately in a line with other headstones located to the east of this wall. This burial was again located approximately 0.60m below present day ground surface. Discussion with the contractors established that the original design of the trench could be adapted to allow for a maximum trench depth of 0.60m at this point, so that the burial was left undisturbed. However prior to reburial the inhumation was partially cleaned within the trench area to allow for limited identification and recording. Only part of the lower body survived within the trench, comprising the pelvis, two femur, single tibia, ankle and foot bones. These had obviously been disturbed at some time in the past, probably not long after initial burial as the femurs were still approximately aligned with the pelvis. The pelvis had sunk slightly and one femur lay at an angle. The inhumation appears to have been adult with fully fused bones and a maximum femur length of 435mm.

**Burial 004**, a further infant/child inhumation, was recorded along the line of the service trench at 8.20m east from the east end wall of the current chancel. Only the skull, mandible and upper cervical vertebrae were exposed of this burial. It again appears to have been an east-west supine inhumation, placed at approximately 0.55m depth from present day ground surface. The position and preservation, combined with a 'hollow' sound in that area of the trench, suggested that the rest of the burial was *in-situ*. It was decided not to fully expose the burial due to the fragility of the bone.

Archaeological recording also took place of the foundations of the east wall of the south transept which were exposed where the services went through to the inside of the church. The foundations were composed of compacted flint and chalk where they extended from the wall, but the material directly under the wall had a higher percentage of sand and loose flint rubble material (**Context 002**).

In addition to the human remains, a single small pin (probably a shroud pin) was recovered, and two iron nails were found in association with **Burial 003**. At least one of these was a coffin construction nail.

The only animal bone identified was a single pig tooth (canine) recovered from the east end of the trench, in addition a single mussel shell was recovered. It is interesting that this area of the churchyard appears to be largely devoid of evidence of any of the other activities which might have been expected to be associated with the curtilage of a church during the medieval period.

No other archaeological features were recorded, and there was no evidence for earlier settlement or non-settlement related activity on the site.

## 5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Archaeological recording at St Mary Magdalene, Ickleton, confirmed the presence of both disarticulated and *in-situ* human remains along the length of the service trench. On the basis of the current works it can be suggested that *in-situ* burials are located at an upper depth of 0.60-0.80m from the present ground surface in this south east corner -

with burials becoming more shallow with the considerable slope of the present ground surface to the east.

Disarticulated remains were concentrated in the area to the immediate east of the south transept wall; and from the 'hollow' sound of the base of the trench in this area it is suspected that several more *in-situ* burials are located in this area, in addition to those recovered during the excavations. This concentration of burials closer to the original east end of the medieval church is to be expected.

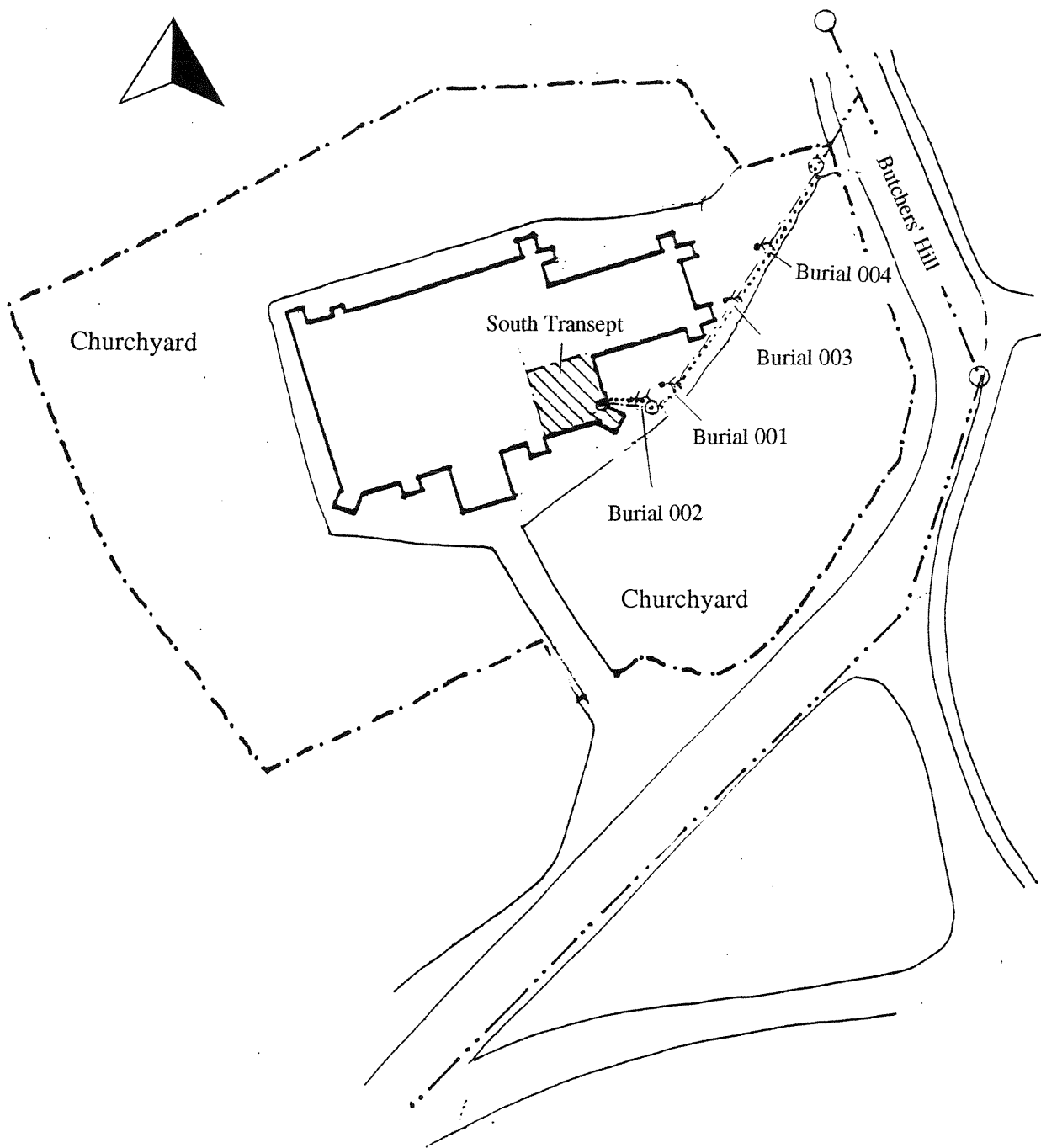
In addition to the high concentration of sub-adult and infant inhumations (comprising 3 of the 4 recovered burials); much of the disarticulated material was of sub-adults. This may either reflect the 'death/burial population' of the churchyard, or may perhaps be a result of sub-adult/infant inhumations being made closer to the surface than adult burials. It is interesting that the burial located furthest away from the church was an infant/child.

No palaeopathological examination of the remains was carried out, and none of the remains were taken off-site at any stage. Although this resulted in a lack of detailed information on the burials given the opportunities presented for leaving the inhumations *in-situ* it was considered the best course of action by both the vicar and on-site archaeologist.

A single sherd of pottery was recovered from **Context 003** next to the base of the foundations of the south transept wall. This sherd has been identified as St Neots Ware, dating to the late Saxon/Early Medieval period, and is thus in keeping with the suggested construction date of the church. The lack of any other animal remains, pottery, or any other activity related artefacts within the churchyard area is interesting, given the traditional use of churchyard areas for community based activities during the medieval period. It may be that any such activities were located within a different area of the curtilage, perhaps in the area now outside the churchyard boundary.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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**Figure 1:** Location of Inhumations along line of Service Trench





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